

Borrowed Narratives, Altered Values: Audiovisual Translation of Western Cartoons and Their Potential Implications for Arab Children's Socio-cultural Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

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Western cartoons dominate Arab children's entertainment via satellite channels and streaming platforms, carrying Western values, humour, and family dynamics that often diverge from Arab collectivist, faith-based traditions. Using a descriptive qualitative methodology, this study examines audiovisual translators as cultural mediators, analysing dubbed scenes depicting non-traditional family and gender roles, non-heteronormative relationships and identity disclosure, and normalised slapstick violence. Despite significant investment in translation, ideological content largely persists unchanged, raising questions about media institutions' responsibility toward cultural values. The study explores why Arabic media continues to adopt such content and the challenges translators face balancing fidelity with local relevance.

سرديات مستعارة، قيم متغيرة: الترجمة السمعية البصرية للرسوم المتحركة الغربية وتداعياتها المحتملة على التصورات الثقافية-الاجتماعية للأطفال العرب.

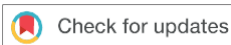
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الملخص

تهيمن الرسوم المتحركة الغربية على ترفيه الأطفال في العالم العربي عبر القنوات الفضائية ومنصات البث، حاملة معها قيماً وروح دعابة وديناميكيات أسرية غربية كثيراً ما تتعارض مع القيم الجماعية والدينية السائدة في المجتمعات العربية. باعتماد منهجية نوعية وصفية، تبحث هذه الدراسة دور مترجمي الأعمال السمعية البصرية بوصفهم وسطاء ثقافيين، من خلال تحليل مشاهد مدبلجة تتناول أدواراً أسرية وجندرية غير تقليدية، وعلاقات ومكاشفات هوية غير متغيرة الميول، وتطبيقاً للعنف الهزلي. ورغم الاستثمار الكبير في الترجمة، يبقى المحتوى الأيديولوجي إلى حد كبير دون تغيير، مما يثير تساؤلات حول مسؤولية المؤسسات الإعلامية تجاه القيم الثقافية. وتستكشف الدراسة أسباب استمرار الإعلام العربي في تبني مثل هذا المحتوى، والتحديات التي يواجهها المترجمون في الموازنة بين الأمانة للنص الأصلي والملاءمة الثقافية.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

نظرية السرد.
الترجمة السمعية البصرية،
الأطفال العرب،
التكييف الثقافي،
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Introduction

The landscape of children's media consumption in the Arab world has undergone a rapid transformation. Dubbed and subtitled versions of Western cartoon shows are now widely broadcast on prominent Arabic channels, including Spacetoon, MBC3, Cartoon Network Arabic, and Nickelodeon Arabia. The rise of streaming services, such as YouTube Kids, Netflix, and Shahid, has further accelerated this trend, making Western entertainment more accessible to Arab children than ever before. The appeal of these cartoons is undeniable; they are prized for high-quality animation, engaging storylines, humour, and global branding. Popular franchises such as *SpongeBob SquarePants*, *Tom and Jerry*, *Frozen*, *Peppa Pig*, *The Amazing World of Gumball*, and *Adventure Time* are staples in many Arab households. However, as these programs are transported from their original cultural contexts into the Arab world, they retain significant ideological baggage. They are not neutral linguistic products; rather, they function as "public narratives" (Baker, 2006; Somers & Gibson, 1994) that carry specific Western socio-cultural values, humour, family dynamics, and gender roles.

When these narratives are imported without critical mediation, they can often conflict with the moral, religious, and social frameworks of Arab societies. For instance, cartoons may present behaviours such as disobedience to parental authority and sarcasm directed at elders, which Parvin and Islam (2020, p.32) associate with declines in behavioural and communicative development, as well as non-traditional gender roles that conflict with established societal archetypes in some regional media contexts (Al-Mahadin, 2003, p. 144). These imported narrative patterns may challenge the principles of respect, collectivism, and modesty that remain central to the moral and cultural frameworks of many Arab communities. The educational consideration is compounded by the passive and immersive nature of audiovisual media, which can make it difficult for young, impressionable viewers to critically engage with the content they consume.

Despite the substantial financial and technical resources invested by Arab media institutions into high-quality dubbing and localization, the core ideological content of many Western cartoons often remains largely intact. This study contends that the AVT of these cartoons is not merely a linguistic transfer but a form of ideological negotiation. By analysing selected dubbed scenes, this research maps these ideological tensions and addresses the gap

between high economic investment in localized content and the lack of corresponding cultural adaptation.

The study poses the following research questions: (1) How does the AVT of Western cartoons handle points of potential divergence between source narrative content and the value frameworks commonly associated with Arab audiences? (2) Through which specific translational mechanisms do Arabic dubbing practices manage, or fail to manage, this divergence across verbal and visual channels?

A note on scope: this study analyses dubbed scenes, i.e., translated texts, not audiences. It does not measure how Arab children actually perceive or are affected by this content. That is an empirical question for future reception research, discussed in the Limitations section.

Literature Review

The Theoretical Foundation of Narrative Transfer

Narrative theory provides the essential lens for understanding how media products are not merely entertainment but active instruments of reality construction. As defined by Fisher (1987), narratives are not simply passive reflections of reality; they are the stories through which human beings organize their experiences, perceive the world, and construct their own identities. Bruner (1991) supports this, arguing that the human mind is predisposed to interpret the world through narrative forms. When children engage with cartoons, they are participating in a “public narrative” (Baker, 2006), a process that shapes their developing socio-cultural perceptions.

This study adopts Baker’s (2006) conceptualization of narratives as active tools that participate in the shaping of public discourse. In the context of global media consumption, when individuals or institutions translate these narratives, they are essentially engaging in reframing, a process that can either accentuate or compete with the original narrative intent (Baker, 2006, p. 114). For Arab children, the importation of Western animated content creates a unique intersection of narratives: the imported (accentuated) Western worldview versus the localized (competed) Arab-Islamic cultural and moral framework.

Audiovisual Translation (AVT) as Ideological Negotiation

Audiovisual translation (AVT) acts as the bridge, or the barrier, between colliding narratives. Moving beyond the traditional view of AVT as a simple linguistic transfer, this study positions AVT as an act of ideological negotiation. To understand the stakes of this negotiation, one must view

translation as a central mechanism in how social meanings are produced, managed, and contested. As Baker (2006) observes: “In all these elaborate cycles of dominance and contestation of dominance and the complex interplay between power and resistance, some form of translation is almost always present” (p. 25) .

In the context of the Arab media landscape, this suggests that the translation of cartoons is not merely an ancillary task; it is a critical instrument through which conflicting cultural narratives compete for legitimacy. The translator does not simply convert words but manages the transfer of cultural concepts, effectively navigating the tension between imported Western narratives and the target culture’s indigenous moral framework. This requires the translator to function as an active mediator who must decide which elements of the source narrative are “appropriated” or “labelled” to ensure they resonate within the moral and social parameters of the Arab audience. Consequently, AVT becomes a site where globalized media content is either reinforced or mitigated, directly impacting the narrative trajectory available to the child viewer.

Díaz-Cintas (2012) provides a critical distinction between technical manipulation (necessitated by spatial or temporal constraints) and ideological manipulation (imposed by the cultural or political agendas of the patron). In the Arab animation landscape, this distinction is frequently blurred. Translators are often placed in a position where they must navigate the gap between the Western individualism depicted in the source material and the collectivist values of the target audience. Consequently, the translator’s choice to domesticate (adapting content to fit target norms) or foreignize (retaining the source’s cultural markers) (Venuti, 2018) is never a neutral linguistic decision. It is an act of ideological positioning that determines how much of the source narrative’s worldview is transmitted to young Arab audiences.

Narrative Reframing Strategies

To operationalize the narrative paradigm, this study draws upon specific mechanisms of narrative intervention as defined by Baker (2006). These strategies allow the translator to exert narrative control, effectively reframing the ST to suit or contest the target culture. Two primary strategies are central to this research: Selective Appropriation and Framing by Labelling. As defined by Baker (2006), selective appropriation involves the translator’s “patterns of omission and addition” to “suppress, accentuate, or elaborate particular aspects of a narrative encoded in the source text” (p. 114). In the

context of this study, this strategy is operationalized to determine how specific thematic elements of Western narratives, such as non-traditional gender roles or challenges to parental authority, are handled during the localization process, effectively acting as a mechanism for sanitizing the narrative trajectory.

Furthermore, Baker (2006) defines framing by labelling as the intentional application of different “labels, nouns, pronouns, and ways of addressing” for mentioning the same referents in the target text (p. 118). In this research, this strategy is utilized to analyse how characters, roles, and concepts are culturally redefined to anchor them within an Arab-Islamic moral framework, thereby influencing the viewer’s perception of the character’s moral standing and the legitimacy of their actions. By employing these mechanisms, the translator does not merely convert language; they actively curate the narrative environment in which the Arab child viewer operates.

Cultural Contestation and Identity Formation

The central problem investigated in this study is the resulting cultural narrative contestation, the conflict experienced by children when the values presented in imported media are detached from their indigenous cultural and moral codes. When cartoons depicting non-traditional gender roles, sarcasm toward parental figures, or individualistic moral choices are dubbed or subtitled without critical filtering, the child is essentially navigating two conflicting narratives simultaneously. Research indicates that the persistence of this cultural mismatch may weaken the child’s connection to their traditional values (Al-Yasin & Rabab'ah, 2019, p. 306). Despite the substantial financial investments by Arab media institutions into high-quality dubbing and localization, the persistence of these Western ideological markers suggests a lack of alignment between media output and the needs of the Arab child. As the presentation established, the translator’s role as a mediator carries an ethical responsibility; their interventions, whether through omission, euphemizing, or substitution, directly impact the formation of the young viewer’s identity and their perception of what is socially acceptable.

While existing literature has examined the technical strategies of dubbing and subtitling in various contexts (Gottlieb, 1992; Baker, 2006; Díaz-Cintas, 2012; Chaume, 2012; Boukhaffa, 2018), there remains a paucity of research that directly analyses the ideological negotiation in children’s programming from a narrative theory perspective. This study attempts to contribute to this niche topic, which has a significant societal impact, by applying Baker’s (2006) narrative paradigm to children’s media, specifically analysing how

translators mediate the tensions between globalized Western content and the conservative, faith-oriented values of Arab societies. By focusing on the translator as a cultural agent, this review justifies the move toward the subsequent analysis of case studies where these ideological negotiations become visible.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive research design centred on narrative analysis. Unlike studies that seek to uncover power structures through discourse analysis (Statham, 2021; Ethelb, 2023; Unger, et al., 2025), this research aims to investigate the narrative logic of AVT. By treating translation as a site of *narrative intervention*, the study examines how the translators of Western cartoons act as re-narrators who potentially reframe the original source material to suit or contest the socio-cultural expectations of the Arab world. A qualitative approach is necessitated by the need to interpret the nuances of narrative coherence, character motivation, and cultural alignment, which require the researcher's interpretive engagement with both the source and target texts.

Corpus and Sampling

The data corpus consists of purposively selected dubbed animations commonly broadcast on satellite channels (such as MBC3 and Cartoon Network Arabic) and streaming platforms (such as Netflix) in the Arab region. The selection is based on the identification of *narrative intervention*, scenes where Western socio-cultural depictions (e.g., non-traditional gender roles, sarcasm toward authority, or Westernized humour) are fundamentally at odds with traditional Arab values. The corpus includes dubbed sequences from representative series of *SpongeBob SquarePants*, *Dead End: Paranormal Park*, *Tom and Jerry*, and *Teen Titans Go!* These selections are analysed to determine how narrative elements are maintained, adapted, or suppressed during the translation process. This sample size follows conventions in qualitative AVT research that prioritise thematic depth over statistical representativeness (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Pérez-González, 2014). An important note on sourcing is that several of the series analysed are distributed on subscription platforms (e.g., Netflix) rather than freely accessible channels. Direct hyperlinks to the scenes themselves are deliberately not provided in this paper. Linking to unauthorised copies of subscription would raise copyright and research-ethics concerns. Each scene

is therefore documented in the footnotes accompanying Section 4 using the bibliographic elements needed for independent verification by a researcher with legitimate access to the relevant platform.

Analytical Framework: Narrative Reframing

To operationalize Narrative Theory, the analysis follows a framework focused on how translation (re)frames the original narrative (Baker, 2006). The analysis identifies how translators, as agents of the narrative, exercise reframing, which ultimately leads to narrative contestation. The study categorizes the translator's interventions into two narrative dimensions:

Selective Appropriation, which involves an analysis of which elements of the Western narrative are retained, omitted, or highlighted in the Arabic version. The study investigates whether the omission of certain plot points or character traits (e.g., specific romantic interactions or challenging of parental roles) serves to sanitize the narrative for the target audience.

Narrative Labelling, in which the study analyses how characters, roles, and concepts are renamed or culturally redefined. This includes the use of honorifics, the neutralization of Western idioms, and the application of terms that anchor characters within an Arab-Islamic moral framework.

The study evaluates whether the translational choices maintain the original narrative coherence or construct a new narrative trajectory. This involves analysing whether the dubbed dialogue shifts the audience's perception of the characters' moral standing. Rather than seeking to reveal ideological power dynamics, this methodology seeks to map the narrative trajectory of the translation. By comparing the source text (ST) against the target text (TT), we can ascertain whether the translation functions as a faithful continuation of the original narrative or as an act of narrative reframing that seeks to align the cartoon's logic with the target culture's values.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection took place between September and December 2025. For each selected scene, the research team recorded a description of the visual content (character action, framing, setting), a full transcription of the original English dialogue, a full transcription of the corresponding Arabic dub or subtitle, and notes on relevant auditory elements (music, sound effects, tone). Analysis combined thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with Baker's (2006) renarration model: initial codes identified points of correspondence and divergence between source and target across verbal and visual channels, and these codes were iteratively clustered into the three themes reported as case studies in the Results and Discussion Section. Both authors independently

reviewed the coding of each scene and discussed and reconciled differences in interpretation; this provides some check against individual interpretive bias, though it does not constitute a formal inter-rater reliability procedure involving an independent third coder, a point addressed further in the Limitations Section.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings derived from the narrative analysis of the selected corpus, presented as three case studies below. Following the methodological framework of narrative reframing, this discussion maps the public narrative trajectories of these animations as they transition from English ST into Arabic TT. By comparing the ST and TT, the study assesses whether the translational choices domesticate the original narrative coherence or foreignise it by constructing a site of narrative contestation for the Arab child viewer.

Case Study 1: *SpongeBob SquarePants* – Subverting Family Structures

The episode of *SpongeBob SquarePants* depicting the protagonists SpongeBob and Patrick as a parental unit raising a clam serves as a primary example of *narrative intervention* through retention (Figure 1). In this instance, the dubbing strategy chosen was one of faithfulness to the original narrative labels rather than domesticating them for the target audience.



Figure 1.¹ SpongeBob and Patrick in parental roles (“Rock-a-Bye Bivalve”): A scene from *SpongeBob SquarePants* where the protagonists assume parental roles. This visual confirms the context in which the retained parental labels are used, highlighting the narrative conflict for the Arab viewer.

¹ MBC3 (Arabic dub). *SpongeBob SquarePants*, Season 3, Episode 9b, “Rock-a-Bye Bivalve” (Arabic broadcast title: “رعاية الصغار”).

The translation retained specific parental labels, with same-sex characters (using terms such as "سأكون الأم" (I will be the mother) and "فقط نادني أبي" (Just call me dad). Through framing by labelling, the Arabic dubbing maintained the narrative coherence of the original Western script. However, within the context of the Arab viewer's narrative world, traditional family terms referring to SpongeBob and Patrick as a mother and a father in the ST introduce a significant conflict. By retaining the original parental labels (i.e., mother and dad), the translator allows the narrative to clash with the traditional Arab understanding of family dynamics, effectively forcing a narrative reframing where non-traditional gender roles are introduced into a conservative socio-cultural context.

The decision to retain these labels, rather than using more ambiguous, familial-neutral terms indicates that the translator, acting as a narrative agent, prioritizes the continuity of the original global narrative over the moral frameworks of the Arab household. This choice is significant because dubbing, which enables a total replacement of the source utterance, affords the translator full autonomy to reframe content for the target audience. By failing to do so, the translator facilitates a narrative contestation, whereby the values embedded in the ST are imported into the target culture without the mitigating reframing strategies essential to ensure narrative compatibility.

Case Study 2: Dead End: Paranormal Park – Non-heteronormative Partnership and Identity- LGBTQ+²

In the analysis of *Dead End: Paranormal Park*, a series broadcast on streaming platforms like Netflix, the narrative negotiation becomes more pronounced. This series presents progressive, non-heteronormative romantic relationships (Figure 2). The Arabic dubbing does not shy away from these themes but rather sustains the original narrative trajectory through selective appropriation.

² LGBTQ+ = Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (or Questioning), plus others



Figure 2.³ Same-sex wedding-themed sequence (“Just Some Guy”): A scene of a dialogue between two male children regarding their own marriage plans.

Specifically, the retention of dialogue such as "ليس كأنني خططتُ لزواجنا" (It is not like I planned our marriage) acts as an explicit narrative device that reinforces the progressive narrative of the original ST. This translational choice challenges traditional Arab and Islamic norms by presenting a same-sex romantic fantasy unchanged. From the perspective of narrative theory, the translator has chosen selective appropriation to sustain the inclusive narrative, thereby creating ideological tension, or contestation, between global media narratives and local conservative values.

The following figures (3 & 4) under the same case study (2) centre on scenes from *Dead End: Paranormal Park* that deal explicitly with bisexual identity and non-heteronormative self-expression. The Arabic dubbing retains key terms, such as "إنني ثنائية الميول، أقولها بصوت عالٍ لأول مرة. ثنائية" (I am bisexual, I'm saying out loud for the first time. Bisexual), "أحب الفتيات" (I love girls), and "أحسنت يا نورما! تهانينا لك" (Well done Norma! Congratulations).

³ (Wedding Scene): Netflix Arabic (Arabic dub). *Dead End: Paranormal Park*, Season 1, Episode 9, "The Phantom of the Theme Park" (2022).



Figure 3. Norma's identity disclosure, scene 1



Figure 4. Norma's identity disclosure, scene 2

Figures 3 & 4.⁴ Composite frame showing characters discussing bisexuality alongside visual cues, such as the Hijab, highlighting the juxtaposition of Islamic modesty with non-heteronormative identity.

Through framing by labelling (i.e., Bisexual), these scenes confront Arab and Islamic norms by openly discussing bisexuality alongside symbols of Islamic modesty, specifically, the Hijab. By retaining this confessional and supportive dialogue, the translator sustains the inclusive narrative trajectory. This creates an intense narrative contestation where symbols of religious identity (the Hijab) are juxtaposed with narratives of non-heteronormative identity, directly challenging traditional values and raising concerns about cultural and religious conformity in the target environment.

Case Study 3: Violence Normalisation

Two scenes, a classic *Tom and Jerry* gag (MBC3) and a *Teen Titans Go!* physical confrontation (Cartoon Network Arabic). Both scenes show slapstick violence framed comedically, with no meaningful appropriation at either the verbal or visual level (Figures 5–6).

⁴ (Norma's disclosure): Netflix Arabic (Arabic dub). *Dead End: Paranormal Park*, Season 2, Episode 7, "All Dolled Up" (2022).



Figure 5.⁵ Tom and Jerry anvil gag. Figure 6.⁶ Teen Titans Go! physical confrontation.

Figures 5 & 6. Figures 5 & 6: Composite frame showing Jerry positioned beneath a falling anvil and the Teen Titans engaged in exaggerated physical combat, highlighting the retention of slapstick violence as comedic spectacle. Unlike Case Studies 1 and 2, where translational choices operate primarily on dialogue, this case study was selected specifically to test the limits of that assumption: both scenes are carried almost entirely by non-verbal channels, which makes them a deliberate boundary case for the study's mechanism typology rather than an inconsistent inclusion. It also reveals a distinction that the mechanism typology otherwise obscures: when a translator has no dialogue to adapt or relabel, responsibility for cultural mediation shifts to the institutional level — to the broadcaster's or platform's decision to air, cut, or license the visual content as is, rather than to the translator alone.

This case clarifies the limits of the mechanism typology itself; see the Introduction Section above. Selective appropriation and framing by labelling are lexical operations; they act on dialogue. Because slapstick gags of this kind are largely or entirely non-verbal, carried by timing, sound effects, and physical action rather than speech, there is minimal dialogue available for a translator to appropriate, omit, or relabel in the first place. Retention is therefore close to the only option the medium makes available. This has a direct implication for where accountability for cultural mediation should be

⁵ MBC3 (Arabic dub). *Tom and Jerry*, classic-era short (anvil gag).

⁶ **(Teen Titans Go!):** Cartoon Network Arabic (Arabic dub). *Teen Titans Go!*, Season 1, Episode 26, "The Left Leg" (2013).

located: if translators structurally cannot act on this content, then the persistence of unmediated violence in this corpus is better read as an institutional broadcasting and licensing decision than as a translational one. This case study shows what happens when the verbal channel is largely absent to begin with, leaving the visual and auditory channels to carry the full weight of the narrative unmediated by translation.

This is consistent with a broader point in the translation-for-children literature that translating for young audiences carries a protective as well as an enriching function (Oittinen, 2000; Van Coillie & Verschueren, 2006; Douglas & Cabaret, 2014), and the corpus suggests that function is being applied selectively across content types rather than as a consistent standard.

General Discussion

The three case studies address the study's two research questions directly. On research question 1 (how AVT mediates the divergence between source content and elements of Arab audience value frameworks): the corpus shows that mediation is neither absent nor consistent. Case Study 1 shows retention of family labels that sit against collectivist, kinship-based family norms; Case Study 2 shows almost no mediation of content that sits against norms of heterosexual marriage and religious identity; and Case Study 3 shows no mediation at all of content that sits against the protective function translation-for-children scholarship assigns to depictions of violence. This variability is itself a finding: it suggests that Arabic AVT practice, at least within this corpus, does not apply a single cultural-filtering logic across content types, but treats different categories of content- family-structural, identity-related, violent- with visibly different thresholds for intervention.

On research question 2 (which specific mechanisms manage or fail to manage this divergence): selective appropriation (Baker, 2006) was the dominant strategy where any appropriation occurred, and it was applied at the verbal level only no scene in this corpus showed the visual track itself substantively altered. Framing by labelling, meanwhile, was the dominant mechanism in Case Studies 1 and 2, where the specific names given to relationships and identities carried much of the scene's ideological weight, and where the Arabic versions consistently retained rather than reframed those labels. Case Study 3 falls outside this typology altogether: as discussed above, its content is carried almost entirely through timing, sound, and physical action rather than dialogue, leaving minimal verbal material for either mechanism to act on in the first place. Retention there is not a translator's strategic choice among options but close to the only outcome the medium allows.

Taken together, these findings point to a broader pattern that extends beyond any single case study. Across the corpus, the Arabic translation of Western cartoons is neither wholly passive nor consistently mediated. In some instances, translation preserves original narrative markers even when they conflict with local norms; in others, as Case Study 3 demonstrates, mediation is displaced from the translator to the institutional level, where decisions about licensing, broadcasting, or cutting determine what is ultimately presented to the audience. This inconsistency suggests a broader pattern worth naming: continued reliance on imported, high-budget Western content, translated but not substantially re-narrated for its new audience, reflects what might be called a "borrowed narrative" model. A model in which the underlying narrative material remains externally sourced, even when filtered through translation, and is not substantially re-narrated for its new audience. Bruner's (1991) understanding of narrative as a fundamental means through which individuals organise experience provides a useful conceptual frame for this discussion. If the cartoons available to Arab children are largely constructed from source narratives whose values were not shaped with that audience in mind, then the pattern identified in this corpus may form part of a larger question concerning whose narratives furnish that experience. However, this study can only describe that pattern; it cannot determine its effects on viewers, which would require the reception research outlined in the Limitations section.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the AVT of Western cartoons for Arab audiences is rarely a neutral linguistic exercise. Rather, it functions as a site of active *narrative intervention*. Through a narrative analysis of *SpongeBob SquarePants*, *Dead End: Paranormal Park*, *Tom and Jerry*, and *Teen Titans Go!*, this research has shown that the choices made by translators, whether to retain, omit, or substitute specific Western cultural markers, directly dictate the narrative trajectory of the content. These choices determine whether the imported cartoons act as a bridge, allowing for a coherent narrative experience, or as a source of cultural narrative contestation, where the values depicted on screen fundamentally clash with the indigenous socio-cultural and moral framework of the child.

The study concludes that Arab media institutions, while investing significantly in the technical production of dubbing and subtitling, often exhibit a disconnect between their high-budget translation efforts and the cultural needs of the target audience. By persistently importing and translating

content that retains Western individualistic narratives without rigorous cultural filtration, these institutions inadvertently normalize the disruption of collectivist and faith-oriented identity formation in young viewers.

Limitations

As with any qualitative study of this design, several boundaries define how these findings should be read. The corpus of six purposively selected scenes supports close multimodal analysis but not claims about prevalence across Arabic-dubbed children's programming generally; a larger, systematically sampled corpus would be needed for that. Coding was conducted jointly by both authors, who reconciled their interpretations through discussion, a reasonable check on individual bias, though distinct from formal inter-rater reliability with an independent third coder.

Most importantly, this study is a textual analysis, not a reception study: it identifies translational patterns and their potential implications and makes no claim to have measured actual effects on children's perceptions or identity formation. Nor does it include practitioner-side data; thus, it can describe *what* choices were made without establishing *why*. Both are natural next steps rather than gaps in the current design.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, this study proposes the following recommendations:

Implement Narrative-Aware Translation Policies: Media institutions and production companies should move beyond simple linguistic fidelity. Translation guidelines must incorporate an assessment of the “narrative impact” of content, requiring translators to evaluate how specific thematic elements (e.g., non-traditional gender roles, sarcasm toward parental figures) function within the Arab moral framework.

Establish Cultural Mediation Protocols: Translators should be recognized as active “cultural mediators” rather than mere linguistic technicians. Training programs for AVT should focus on narrative theory and the ethical responsibility of the translator in mediating globalized content, encouraging them to utilize strategies such as cultural substitution or target-oriented narrative reframing to ensure the stories told align more closely with local values.

Shift Toward Indigenous Narrative Production: The most sustainable solution to narrative contestation is the development of a robust, locally rooted animation industry. Arab media institutions must prioritize the funding

and creation of original children's content. By shifting resources from the acquisition and translation of *borrowed narratives* to the production of indigenous storytelling, Arab societies can provide children with media that reflects and reinforces their own cultural, religious, and social identity. Future research should expand this narrative-based analysis to include a broader range of genres and examine the role of paratextual elements, such as promotional material and social media campaigns, in shaping how these narratives are received by Arab families.

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