

## **Translation of Taboos: A Case Study on Translating the F-Word Into Arabic**

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### **Abstract**

In this descriptive case study, I aim to explore the translations and translation strategies of taboo words into Arabic and the strategies used in the translation process. Particularly, my focus is on the translation of the *F*-word and the possible translations of this word into Arabic to present an acceptable product or translation to the target culture. For this purpose, I adapt Chesterman's (2000) comparative model and applied Baker's (1992) strategies of translation for classifying the collected data. The corpus of this study are two versions of *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F\*ck*: the source text (ST) is in English and the target text (TT) is translated into Arabic. I examine the source text to list all the *F*-words mentioned and detected the word 179 times. Then I compare the listed words or phrases to the target text, to examine the translation and strategies used by the translator of the target text. This is the first study, to my knowledge, focusing on the translation of the *F*-word into Arabic and exploring the possibility of translating taboo words into acceptable equivalents in the TT.

*Keywords:* translating the F-word, taboo translation, swear words

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Society's culture, norms, and religion influence language, which is a primary mode of communication. Any language is a mirror of the culture, and the speakers and writers' ways of practicing or dealing with taboo words and expressions are cultural reflections of a specific language. In this study, I focused on the *strategies* that translators employ to translate taboos, mainly from English into Arabic. Specifically, my focus is on a particular taboo word—the F-word—in Manson's (2016) book *The Subtle Art of Not Giving A F\*ck* and this word's translation into Arabic throughout the book. My aim for this study is to shed light on (a) the strategies the translator used to create an acceptable translation for the target culture and (b) the translation of the F-word and all its derivations and expressions mentioned in the book. My reason for choosing the translation of taboo words, in particular, is the noticeably growing use of taboo words—written or spoken (in TV shows, movies, social media, and books)—and the incapability of controlling the spread of these resources, particularly in the Internet and information era.

### Taboos

As defined in Cambridge Dictionary, a *taboo* is a subject, word, or action avoided for religious or social reasons (Cambridge University Press, 2020). According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, a taboo is

the prohibition of an action based on the belief that such behaviour is either too sacred and consecrated or too dangerous and accursed for ordinary individuals to undertake . . . they have proven to be present in virtually all societies past and present. (Britannica, 2020)

Taboos are governed by nations' cultural and societal guides, which are based on agreed-upon expectations and rules. Such taboos considerably affect people's lives, behaviour, clothes, food, and choices (Fershtman et al., 2011).

Taboos are associated with cultures and societies; thus, they vary by country. Hence, many scholars have confirmed the differences and classifications of taboos by country, culture, and even religion. For example, Gobert (2014) explored how taboo topics, such as drugs, alcohol, sex, religion, and death, are discussed in Gulf Arab classrooms. In Muslim Gulf Arab classrooms, which tend to be traditional and conservative, other topics that are considered taboo for religious and cultural reasons include boyfriends and girlfriends, nudity, dating, and superstitions (Gobert, 2014). Another study about taboos in the Iranian Arab community revealed that taboo topics include sex-related issues, death, health, disease, politics, religion, possessions, talent, abilities, and family relations (Sa'd, 2017).

Fershtman et al. (2011) classified taboos into several categories. The first category includes the restrictions on *sexual* behaviours, such as incest, animal and human sex, adult-child sex, and necrophilia. The second category includes *dietary*-related restrictions, like nonhalal and nonkosher foods for Muslims and Jews, beef for Hindus, and cannibalism for many people and societies. The third category included *offensive and appalling* actions, including some bodily functions. Most of these taboos are not universal; incest might be the only universal taboo.

Gao's (2013) classifications, on the other hand, include sexual issues and bodily excretions, in addition to *death and disease*, two concepts that are replaced by alternative words or expressions when discussed because of the fear of these words. For example, the word *die* may be substituted with *pass away*, *answer the call of God*, or, in Arabic, *departure to Allah's mercy* [انتقل الى رحمة الله]. *Terminally ill* replaces diseases, especially serious diseases such as *cancer*, or *the Big C*. In Arabic, *malignant* [الخبيث] replaces the word *cancer* to avoid the term. The other category is *discriminatory language*, including *sexist* and *racist language*.

Sexist language refers to prejudiced language against females in favour of males, such as referring to an unknown baby as *he* rather than *she*, using the word *chairman* even if this position is occupied by a woman, and distinguishing between male and female titles that only show the marital status of the latter (e.g., *Mrs.* and *Miss* in English, Chinese, and Arabic [السيدة، [الآنسة]). Racist language signifies a prejudice against racial or ethnic groups, such as the discrimination against *black* in English—be it Black people or the colour black—such as when *black* refers to wickedness and filth, such as in *blacklist* and *blackguard*, whereas the colour white is associated with purity and innocence. Privacy is another variety of taboo. For English speakers, it is inappropriate to ask personal questions related to age, weight, salary, marital status, politics, and religion. However, according to Gao (2013), salary and age issues are not taboo for Chinese. The next category is swear words. Several linguistic words, including religious and legal expressions, are considered swearing in Britain and Australia and cursing in the United States (Wajnryb, 2004). These taboo expressions reflect the individual's emotions such as hatred, annoyance, or disapproval. Some of these words and expressions are associated with body parts and functions; others refer to gods and devils, such as *God*, and *Holy Sacrament*. The last variety of taboos includes four-letter words, such as *damn* and the F-word. Gao (2013) concurred that these words are still considered unacceptable in conversation and writing.

### **The Translation of Taboos in the Arab World**

Translating taboos is regularly a challenging task during the translation process because of their different usages and their contextual dependence (Almijrab, 2020). However, translating taboos into Arabic could be more challenging because of the nature of Arab societies. Arab culture, according to Al-Yasin and Rabab'ah (2019), is conservative due to the influence of religion on society. Hence, translating taboos into Arabic limits translators' options so that they either "act in accordance with the norms of the source language and find an adequate equivalent to the tabooed term, or they can act according to the norms of the target language and find a euphemistic equivalent" (Al-Yasin & Rabab'ah, 2019, p. 4).

The target language, ideology, and audience play significant roles in determining the appropriate strategies for translating taboos and other cultural constraints. For example, Debbas and Haider (2020) found that euphemistic expression and word omission are the dominant strategies used in translating taboos from TV series into Arabic. This includes translating *rough sex* as *inappropriate position* and deleting bad words, such as by translating the phrase *serve it up, bit\** as *yes, serve it up*. Scene deletion, word omission, and word omission with justification are used in translating religious remarks. Debbas and Haider (2020) stated that the latter strategies are used when dealing with religious topics due to the sensitivity of religion in Islamic societies and the significant respect given to God in Arab culture.

In addition to euphemism, omission, and censorship, Almijrab (2020) suggested two more strategies that translators can adopt to translate taboo words into Arabic: substitution and rendering taboo for taboo. In the omission strategy, the translator can simply omit the taboo word or phrase from the source text (ST) while translating it into the target text (TT). However, omission would be inapplicable when the taboo word is a main word or phrase in the ST; therefore, the translator must adopt euphemism or substitution.

### **The F-Word**

The first written appearance of the F-word was in the 1400s, although O'Connor (2000) argued this word might have existed before when without documentation because it was always

considered a vulgar word that became unprintable after the invention of printing. Although it first appeared in a dictionary in 1671, this word—along with other vulgar words—was omitted from Samuel Johnson’s dictionary in 1755 but was included in John Ash’s 1775 dictionary, *New and Complete Dictionary of the English Language*. It then disappeared from dictionaries for approximately 170 years, before reappearing in the 1965 *Penguin Dictionary*. However, Gao (2013) declared that the F-word was contained in Eric Partridge’s 1963 *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, which faced huge objections from schools and libraries. The word was not written fully—Partridge used an asterisk for the vowel *u*. Currently, Partridge’s dictionary is often unavailable on the open shelves of libraries.

The definition of the F-word varies by source. Contrary to its potential meaning of love and romance, the word denotes an act of pure animal self-indulgence: “In commonly used terms of contempt such as *I really got f\*cked over* and *f\*ck him*, it borders on having the same brutal, humiliating and demanding connotation of rape, an act of violence other than sex” (O’Connor, 2000, p. 134). The ambiguous usage and meaning of the word occasionally evolve from the context, but not always. For instance, O’Connor argued the F-word sometimes has a happy meaning and sometimes is completely meaningless, which confuses the reader or listener as to whether to interpret the intended meaning as good, bad, happy, or sad. As an example, O’Connor argued that a message from a friend saying “I got f\*cked up last Friday” could confuse the reader, who would not be able to recognise if he or she should congratulate the friend or recommend a lawyer.

Taboos are prohibited in any society to avoid hurting or embarrassing people or causing them anxiety or shame. However, according to O’Connor (2000), the use of the F-word is increasing as an exclamation; a stand-alone expression of anger, surprise, or frustration; a meaningless modifier; and an adjective for emphasis. Thus, O’Connor called for eliminating this word from one’s vocabulary for several reasons: (a) it is a bad word and by offending someone, one ruins the speaker’s self-image, (b) it is not a necessary word, and (c) there is no benefit to using the F-word. “The evolution of the language might someday make the word F\*\*\* as acceptable as the word flower, but we’re not there yet” (O’Connor, 2000, p. 140).

O’Connor’s (2000) call to eliminate the F-word obviously was not applied; rather, his expectation of the word’s acceptance has become factual. Although the F-word is still classified as a taboo word and is prohibited by the majority of middle-class people, it is one of the 3,000 most frequently spoken words, while the word *f\*cking* is among the 1,000 most frequently spoken words (Hughes, 2006). Furthermore, the F-word, according to an Internet study, is more frequently used than *mom*, *baseball*, and *hot dogs* (Howe, 2012). Some scholars associate the cumulative use of this word to music, films, and television, in which a word once considered so taboo is now considered commonplace (Murphy, 2009).

However, the increasing use of taboo words in Modern English has upset many people. For instance, Barbara Holland called for protesting the increasing use of offensive language in movies, radio, and television (as cited in Howe, 2012). The use of such words is not limited to movies and television; it also invades books, and the F-word explicitly has started to attack book titles. The corpus of this paper, *The Subtle Art of Not-Giving a F\*ck*, is not the only book with the word on the title and cover page. Several other books contain the F-word on the cover page, including *Everything is F\*cked* by Manson in 2019; *Unf\*ckology* by Amy Alkon in 2018; *F\*ck Feelings* by Michael Bennett and Sarah Bennett in 2015; *F You Very Much* by Danny Wallace in 2018; *Unfu\*k Yourself* by Gary John Bishop in 2017; *What I Mean When I Say Miss You, Love You and F\*ck You* by Robert Drake in 2019; and *F\*ck I’m Bored!* by Tamara Adams in 2018, just to mention few.

## The F-Word's Usage

There are two classification schemes of taboo words and expressions based on their usages. Andersson and Trudgill (1990; as cited in Habibovic, 2011) referred to *swearing* in their study as (a) expletive, (b) abusive, (c) humorous, or (d) auxiliary. According to Andersson and Trudgill (1990), the expletive category expresses feelings that are not directed towards a particular person or people (e.g., *damn it*). Contrastingly, the abusive category, which is directed towards a person or people, involves insulting and name-calling (e.g., *go to hell*). The humorous category is directed towards a person or people as well, but the function here is playfulness, instead of offensiveness. The last category, *auxiliary*, is not directed towards anyone or anything (e.g., *bloody* and *f\*cking*; Habibovic, 2011).

On the other hand, McEnergy and Xiao (2004; as cited in Santaemilia, 2019) referred to classifying the fundamental usage of the F-word. In addition to the expletive category, they added categories for personal insult (abusive), cursing expletive, emphatic intensifier, declinational usage, literal usage denoting taboo referent, idiomatic set phrase, and unclassified usage. Figure 1 shows these categories with examples.

**Figure 1**

*McEnergy and Xiao's (2004) fundamental usage of the F-word. Adapted from "The Translation of Sex-Related Language: The Danger(s) of Self-Censorship(s)," by J. Santaemilia, 2008, TTR: traduction, terminologie, rédaction, 21(2), p. 231.*

Description	Examples
GENERAL EXPLETIVE	(Oh) <i>fuck!</i>
PERSONAL INSULT REFERRING TO DEFINED ENTITY	<i>You fuck!</i> / <i>that fuck</i>
CURSING EXPLETIVE	<i>Fuck you!</i> / <i>me!</i> / <i>him!</i> / <i>it!</i>
DESTINATIONAL USAGE	<i>Fuck off!</i> / <i>he fucked off</i>
LITERAL USAGE DENOTING TABOO REFERENT	<i>He fucked her</i>
EMPHATIC INTENSIFIER	<i>Fucking marvellous!</i> / <i>in the fucking car</i>
'PRONOMINAL' FORM	<i>Like fuck!</i> / <i>fat as fuck</i>
IDIOMATIC 'SET PHRASE'	<i>Fuck all!</i> / <i>give a fuck!</i> / <i>thank fuck</i>
METALINGUISTIC OR UNCLASSIFIABLE DUE TO INSUFFICIENT CONTEXT	<i>The use of the word "fuck" / you never fucking</i>

## Translation of the F-Word

Several scholars have examined the translation of taboos from English into other languages, such as Indonesian (Pratama, 2016); Turkish (Isbuga-Erel, 2007); Chinese (Gao, 2013); Arabic (Abbas, 2015); Italian (Varney, 2007); IsiXhosa, an African language (Mfazwe, 2003); Persian (Pishkar & Pishkar, 2015; Vossoughi & Hosseini, 2013); and Spanish (Ávila-Cabrera, 2015). Although few studies have focused on the translation of the F-word, Pujol (2006) studied the translation of the F-word into Catalan, including its compounds and derivations. According to Pujol (2006), the F-word is used in many forms (e.g., *f\*cking*, *f\*cked*, *f\*cker*) and many parts of speech (e.g., verb, noun, adverb, adjective, and interjection). Pujol's (2006) analysis for using this word in a movie indicated that it was used to convey emotions such as extreme anger, emphasis, disgust, contempt, surprise, and happiness; however, he

claimed these categories are not ultimate and occasionally overlap. In another study, Santaemilia (2009) focused on the translation of the F-word as a sex-related term into Spanish and Catalan. Santaemilia (2009) presented options for dealing with sensitive and taboo language other than public censorship, including self-censorship; individual ethics; and one's attitudes towards religion, sex, impoliteness, and indecency.

Although some studies have focused on translating taboos into Arabic, such as Almijrab (2020), Al-Yasin and Rabab'ah (2019), and Debbas and Haider (2020), no study has focused mainly on the F-word's translation into Arabic and on the strategies used to translate it. In this paper, my focus is mainly on how a selected taboo word is translated and the strategies used to present this word in the target text.

## Methodology

I adopted Chesterman's (2000) comparative model in this paper. A product-oriented model centred on a relation of equivalence According to Williams and Chesterman (2002), the comparative model is useful "for studying shifts; differences, resulting from translation studies that involve changing something" (p. 51). In translation studies, this relation between two entities is presented as follows:

$$\text{Source text (ST)} = \text{Target text (TT)}$$

However, Williams and Chesterman (2002) argued about the relationship between the ST and TT. Instead of  $ST = TT$  (meaning they are equivalent), they proposed another equation because it is difficult to find a perfect equivalent in translation. Thus, the comparative model they used is  $ST \approx TT$  (approximately equal) or  $ST \neq TT$ , to indicate the difference between both entities. In 2019, Hendl proposed another equation to represent the absence of a TT when using the omission or deletion strategy:  $ST = \emptyset$  (null or does not exist).

In this paper, I employed the comparative model to examine both the ST and TT and, accordingly, to classify the appropriate representation of the relationship between the two entities according to Nida's (1964) dynamic and formal equivalence and Nida's techniques. Next, I explored the translator's strategies further, based on Baker's (1992) strategies for translation.

## Corpus

The corpus of this study is two versions of *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F\*ck: A Counterintuitive Approach to Living a Good Life*, The ST is in English, and the TT is the ST translated into Arabic (by Al-Hareth Al-Nabhan). Although the book contains several taboo words, my focus was primarily on the F-word and the derivations and phrases related to this word, such as *f\*ck-worthy* and *what the f\*ck*. I excluded all other curses that did not contain this word.

## About the Book

*The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F\*ck: A Counterintuitive Approach to Living a Good Life* is a 2016 self-help book by the American blogger and author Mark Manson. In the first year, 2,000,000 copies were sold, and, more than 6,000,000 copies had been sold by July 2019 (Manson, 2019). This book has been translated into 30 languages and was on the *New York Times* Best Seller List (Manson, 2019). Within the book's 224 pages, the F-word is mentioned 179 times. On a single page (Manson, 2019, p. 19), the word is mentioned 12 times. The F-

word was not the only taboo word used in this book, other taboos such as sh\*t, b\*llsh\*t, and cr\*p were used as well, however, the focus of this paper is on the F-word only.

## Results

I identified the F-word 179 times in words and phrase throughout the book (as shown in Table 1). The word is written clearly and completely throughout the book's chapters, except on the cover page, where an asterisk is used for the letter *u* in the F-word (*f\*ck*).

### Translation Strategies

After carefully reading the ST and comparing it to the TT, I determined that the translator mainly used Baker's (1992) strategies: (a) translating using a less expressive or neutral word, (b) translating using cultural substitution, (c) translating by paraphrasing using related words, (d) translating by paraphrasing using unrelated words, and (e) omission. Although Baker's strategies included more categories, my focus was on the strategies the translator employed and the literal translation strategy, which was also employed in the TT.

According to Baker (1992), translating using a more neutral or less expressive word occurs when the term in the ST implies confusion or embarrassment. Translating using a cultural substitution is a strategy in which a culture-specific word or expression is replaced with a term relating to the target culture because the target language does not have the propositional meaning but the related term will have a similar effect on the target readers. Translating by paraphrasing using related words is when the concept expressed in the ST is lexicalised into the target language but in a different form. Translators employing this strategy tend to use words in the target language with the same interpretation as those in the ST do. Translating by paraphrasing using an unrelated word occurs when the concept expressed in the original language is not lexicalized in the target language. This strategy is based on modifying a superordinate concept or unpacking the meaning of the source concept and presenting another concept in the target language with the same propositional meaning. Another strategy used in the corpus is the omission strategy. Baker (1992) claimed that omitting a word or a concept does no harm:

If the meaning conveyed by a particular item or expression is not vital enough to the development of the text to justify distracting the reader with lengthy explanations, translators can and often do simply omit translating the word or expression in question. (p. 42)

The last strategy is literal translation. As previously declared, the reason for including this strategy is that the *F*-word in the ST was translated literally twice. Literal, pure, or faithful translation refers to a translation that does not manipulate, delete, or modify the ST's meaning (Hendal, 2019).

### Results Representation

Table 1 displays the results according to the phrases and expressions containing the F-word in the original text. Expressions with different pronouns but similar structure (e.g., *the f\*ck he gives* or *the f\*ck they give*) or different tenses (e.g., *give a f\*ck*, *giving a f\*ck*) were classified and considered together. Thus, the table contains a sample of each phrase or expression used in the book along with the total number of times each phrase was used.

The results in table 1 also include the ST, TT, and back-translation (BT; if available) and the strategies employed. The rephrasing of the *F*-word in translation for the TT and in the BT are in bold. Because my focus mainly was on the *F*-word, I examined only the translation of this word, without referring to the strategies used for other words in the ST or TT.

**Table 1**

*Taxonomy of the F-Word's Usage in the Book The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F\*ck*

Example (ST)	Phrase	Times	TT	Back Translation	Translation Strategy
<i>Verb (give) + F-Word (noun)</i>					
1. Bukowski didn't give a f*ck.	Give a f*ck	49	لم يكن بوكوفسكي مباليا	Bukowski wasn't concerned.	
2. Giving a f*ck about more stuff	Giving a f*ck	25	الاهتمام أكثر	More <b>concern or care</b>	Paraphrasing using related words
3. Who gives a f*ck?	Gives a f*ck	2	ما أهمية ذلك؟	What's the <b>importance</b> of this?	
4. Then I gave a f*ck about	Gave a f*ck	1	صرت الآن مهتما	Then I <b>cared</b> about	
5. I have given a f*ck about many things.	Given a f*ck	2	اهتممت اهتمام زائد	I <b>cared</b> too much.	
6. We are essentially giving f*cks.	Giving f*cks	1	نهتم اهتماما زائدا	We <b>care</b> too much.	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>			
<i>Verb (give or hand out) + Adjective+ F-Word (noun)</i>					
7. To give too many f*cks is bad.	Give too many f*cks	5	المبالغة في الاهتمام	<b>Caring</b> too much	
8. By giving too many f*cks	Giving too many f*cks	3	المبالغة في الاهتمام	<b>Caring</b> too much	
9. They give way too many f*cks.	Give way too many f*cks	2	يهتمون اهتماما زائد أكثر مما يجب بكثير	They <b>care</b> much more than they should.	
10. Not to give a single f*ck is to	Give a single f*ck	1	عدم الاهتمام على الإطلاق	Not <b>caring</b> at all	
11. There is nothing as not giving a single f*ck.	Giving a single f*ck	1	لا وجود في الواقع الحقيقي لشيء اسمه عدم الاهتمام	Not <b>caring</b> doesn't really exist in the real world.	Paraphrasing using related words
12. Giving no f*cks whatsoever	Giving no f*cks	1	حالة اللامبالاة وعدم الاهتمام	<b>Careless</b> and lack of concern	
13. When you give better f*cks	Give better f*cks	1	تركز اهتمامك على أشياء أفضل	Concentrate your <b>concerns</b> on better things.	
14. I will teach you to give fewer f*cks.	Give fewer f*cks	1	الاهتمام بعدد أقل من الأشياء	<b>Caring</b> about fewer things	
15. We give tones of f*cks.	Give tones of f*cks	1	نهتم كثيرا جدا بأشياء كثيرة جدا	We <b>care</b> too much about many things.	
16. People who hand out f*cks	Hand out f*cks	1	يبالون بأشياء متعددة أكثر مما يجب	They <b>care</b> about many things more than they should.	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>			
<i>F-Word (noun) + Verb (give)</i>					
17. No f*cks given	F*cks given	3	لست مهتما بهذا	I don't <b>care</b> about this.	

18. Magic <i>f*ck-giving</i> fairy dust	<i>F*ck-giving</i>	1	مسحوق اللامبالاة السحري	The magical <b>careless</b> dust	Paraphrasing using related words
19. You have a limited amount of <i>f*cks</i> to give.	<i>F*cks to give</i>	1	مقدارا محددا من الاهتمام	Limited amount of <b>caring</b>	
20. It was the <i>f*cks</i> not given	<i>F*cks not given</i>	1	اللامبالاة التي أبديتها	The <b>careless</b> was shown	
21. Where <i>f*cks</i> do not deserve to be given	<i>F*cks do not deserve to be given</i>	1	لا تستحق اهتماما منا	Do not deserve our <b>concern</b>	
22. Changing the <i>f*cks</i> you're giving	<i>F*cks you're giving</i>	1	تغيير ما تهتم به	Change what we <b>care</b> about	Paraphrasing using related words
23. About the <i>f*cks</i> we're willing to give	<i>F*cks we're willing to give</i>	1	فيما يتعلق بالأشياء التي نحن على استعداد لإيلائها اهتماما	About things we're willing to <b>care</b> about	
24. Regardless of the <i>f*cks</i> he or she gives	<i>F*cks he or she gives</i>	1	بصرف النظر عما يهتم او ما لا يهتم به	Regardless of he <b>cares</b> or doesn't care about	
<b>Total</b>		<b>10</b>			
<i>F-Word (Verb)+ pronoun</i>					
25. a. <i>F*ck</i> you.	<i>F*ck</i> you	2	١. اللعنة عليك	a. <i>Damn</i> you.	a. Cultural substitution
b. which ( <i>f*ck</i> you) I still downloaded it			٢. لا أزال أشاهد هذا المسلسل	b. $\theta$	b. Omission
26. They say <i>f*ck</i> it.	<i>F*ck</i> it	6	١. إلى الجحيم بهذا	a. To <b>hell</b> with this.	a. Translating using less expressive word
b. but <i>f*ck</i> it			٢. فليكن ما يكون	b. <b>whatever</b>	b. Paraphrasing using unrelated words
27. <i>F*ck</i> that kid.	<i>F*ck</i> that kid	1	هل هناك أغبي من هذا؟	Is there a stupider kid than this?	Paraphrasing using unrelated words
<b>Total</b>		<b>9</b>			
<i>Possessive Pronoun +F-Word (noun)</i>					
28. They reserve their <i>f*cks</i> .	<i>Their f*cks</i>	3	يحتفظون باهتمامهم للأشياء	They reserve their <b>concerns</b> .	Paraphrasing using related words
29. Your <i>f*cks</i> will be given.	<i>Your f*cks</i>	2	اهتمامك سوف يتجه	Your <b>concern</b> will go to	
30. We are able to divert our <i>f*cks</i> .	<i>Our f*cks</i>	2	توجيه اهتمامنا	Guide our <b>concerns</b> .	
<b>Total</b>		<b>7</b>			
<i>F-Word+ -ed (adjective)</i>					
31. You're going to get <i>f*cked</i> .	<i>Get f*cked</i>	1	ستخسر من كل الجهات	You'll <b>lose</b> from all directions.	

32. <i>F*cked-up values</i>	<i>F*cked-up</i>	2	قيمه السيئة	<b>Bad values</b>	<i>Paraphrasing using unrelated words</i>
33. <i>The world is totally f*cked.</i>	<i>Totally f*cked</i>	1	العالم مكان سيء	<i>The world is a <b>bad</b> place.</i>	
34. <i>Her values are so f*cked.</i>	<i>So f*cked</i>	1	قيمها سيئة	<i>Her <b>bad</b> values</i>	
35. <i>It's the belief that everything is f*cked.</i>	<i>Everything is f*cked</i>	2	*this chapter was not included in the target text, only in the original electronic source text		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>			
<i>F-Word+ -ing (adverb)</i>					
36. a. <i>Everybody there is having a f*cking grand old time.</i> b. <i>I'm so f*cking pissed off.</i>	<i>F*cking+ noun/adjective</i>	18	١. كل شخص في العالم يعيش وقتنا رائعا ٢. ما يجعلني منز عجا حقا بل غاضبا	a. <i>Everyone in the world is having a great time.</i> b. <i>which makes me really pissed off and <b>angry</b></i>	a. <i>Omission</i> b. <i>Paraphrasing using unrelated words</i>
37. a. <i>Problems never f*cking go away.</i> b. <i>Are you f*cking kidding me?</i>	<i>F*cking+ verb</i>	2	١. المشاكل لا تزول أبدا ٢. هل تمزحون؟	a. <i>Problems never go away.</i> b. <i>Are you kidding me?</i>	a. <i>Omission</i> b. <i>Omission</i>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>			
<i>F-Word+ -ing (noun)</i>					
38. <i>indiscriminate f*cking</i>	<i>Adjective + f*cking</i>	1	الجنس المنفلت	<i>Indiscriminate <b>sex</b></i>	<i>Literal translation</i>
39. <i>Unravelling the logistics of f*cking</i>	<i>Noun + f*cking</i>	1	الأساليب العملية لممارسة الجنس	<i>The practical ways of <b>having sex</b></i>	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>			
<i>F-Word+ suffix (adjective)</i>					
40. <i>They don't have anything more f*ck-worthy</i>	<i>F*ckworthy</i>	2	ليس لديهم شيء أكثر جدارة وقيمة	<i>They don't have anything more <b>valuable</b>.</i>	<i>Paraphrasing using unrelated words</i>
41. <i>These moments of non-f*ckery</i>	<i>Non-f*ckery</i>	1	بماذا كنت أبالي؟	<i>What did I <b>care</b> about?</i>	<i>Paraphrasing using related words</i>

42. We're totally neurotic f*ckwads	F*ckwads	1	إننا عصايبون فاشلون	We're neurotic <b>losers</b> .	Translating using less expressive word
	<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>			
<i>Prefix+ F-Word (adjective)</i>					
43. This is a total mind-f*ck.	Mind-f*ck	1	يتعب العقل حقا	This really <b>exhausts</b> the mind.	Translating using less expressive word
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>			
<i>Adjective+ F-Word (noun)</i>					
44. To give a legitimate f*ck	Legitimate f*ck	1	ما يستحق اهتماما حقيقيا	What deserves a real <b>concern</b>	Paraphrasing using related words
45. We reserve our ever-dwindling f*cks.	Ever-dwindling f*cks	1	القبول بقدرتنا المتناقضة على الاهتمام بالأشياء	Accepting our supposed ability to <b>care</b> about things	Paraphrasing using related words
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>			
<i>F-Word (verb)</i>					
46. F*ck more.	F*ck more	1	ضاجع أكثر	<b>Make love</b> more.	Literal translation
47. Who f*cked whom?	F*cked	1	تبادل الاتهامات	<b>Exchanging accusations</b>	Paraphrasing using unrelated words
48. a. We're going to lawyer the f*ck up and go after this a**hole b. if you f*ck up	F*ck up	3	نذهب للمحامي ونلاحق هذه الحقيرة ٢. إذا أسأت	a. We will go to the lawyer and go after this despicable person. b. if you <b>misbehave</b>	a. Omission b. Paraphrasing using related words
49. Brilliant businesspeople are often f*ckups in their personal lives.	F*ckups	1	رجال الأعمال اللامعون فاشلين تماما في حياتهم الشخصية	Brilliant businesspeople are totally <b>losers</b> in their personal lives.	Paraphrasing using related words(form)
50. Taking our f*cks out on everyone	F*cks out	1	نضايق الجميع	We disturb everyone.	Paraphrasing using related words

51. They are f*cking things up.	F*ck things up	1	يفسدون الأمر كله	They <b>devastate</b> the whole thing.	Paraphrasing using related words
52. It teaches us to not f*ck around near hot stoves.	F*ck around	1	ألا نعبث بالقرب من المدفأة الحرارية	Not to <b>mess around</b> near the stove	Paraphrasing using related words
53. The way ... or Jenna Jameson f*cks	F*cks	1	بمهارة جينا جاميسون في ممارسة الجنس	Jenna Jameson's talent in <b>sex</b>	Literal translation
	<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>			
F-Word (adverb)					
54. Always working an angle, whatever the f*ck that means	Whatever the f*ck	1	كان يبدو شخصا يسعى إلى هدفه حقا	He looked like a person who really seeks his goal.	Omission
55. Come the f*ck on	Come the f*ck on	1		θ	Omission
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>			
F-Word (interjection)					
56. Ah, f*ck!	F*ck!	1	اوه، اللعنة على كل شيء	Oh, <b>damn</b> everything!	Cultural substitution
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>			
F-Word (noun)					
57. Don't question the values and f*cks given b.	Values and f*cks	2	القيم التي لدى الشريك و عما يهتم به حقا	The partner's values and what he really <b>cares</b> about	Translating using related word
58. Eighty years of f*cks will rain	Years of f*cks	1	سوف تمطره بما تجمع لديها من خيبات	She will rain on him with all her accumulated <b>disappointments</b> .	Paraphrasing using unrelated words
59. a. What the f*ck is the point of the book? b. What the f*ck you're doing	What the f*ck?	3	ما الغاية من هذا الكتاب؟  لا تعرف ما الذي تفعله	a. What's the point of this book?  b. You don't know what you're doing.	a. Omission  b. Omission
60. Where the f*ck did the talking panda came from?	Where the f*ck?	1	أتساءل فيها عن المكان الذي جاء هذا الباندا منه	I wonder where this panda came from.	Omission
	<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>			

## Discussion

The results of the strategies used to translate taboo items were similar to those of Ávila-Cabrera (2016), who examined the translation of swear and taboo words from English to Spanish. He observed several strategies, but the most frequently used were omission, literal translation, and reformulation (rephrasing the ST). Moreover, the present results also correspond to those of Vossoughi and Hosseini (2013), who examined the norms of translating taboo words from English to Persian. Their results showed that the dominant strategies were euphemism, omission, and complete translation of the taboo words, with the latter being the literal translation of the ST items.

### Translating by Paraphrasing Using Related Words

In Table 1, I grouped examples under the translating by paraphrasing using related words strategy when the items in the target language were different in form from those concepts in the original text but conveyed the same meaning.

According to the results, if the F-word comes after or before the verb *give*, *gives*, or *given*, it connotes the meaning of concern, importance, or caring about something [اهتمام، أهمية أو يهتم], as in Examples 1–6, 7–16, and 17–24. The translation of this vulgar idiom—to *give a f\*ck*—is equivalent to the meaning given by some online slang dictionaries (*The Online Slang Dictionary* and *Urban Dictionary*), which is *to care*. Moreover, the same meaning applies to this word if it comes after a possessive pronoun (their, your, and our), as in Examples 28–30. For instance, in Example 1, the expression consists of a verb and a noun in the ST, which was translated into an adjective, but both have the same meaning:

Bukowski didn't give a f\*ck (ST) = Bukowski wasn't concerned (BT)

### Omission

I found 10 examples using the omission strategy. In most of the cases in which the words were deleted, doing so did not affect the meaning of the original text because the omitted words were originally used as accidental clauses or meaningless modifiers in the ST. Similar to Baker (1992), who believed omission does no harm if the meaning expressed by a particular item is not vital to the text, Gottlieb (1992; as cited in Tuhkanen, 2017) also believed that omission is acceptable if the deleted items are supplementary. In all of the omission examples in Table 1, the deletion did not affect the meaning of the original text, yet it affected the author's attitude and feelings being conveyed. According to Krouglov (2018), taboo words are used to emphasize the writer or speaker's idea and to reveal the author's feelings and attitudes. Pratama (2016) claimed that the function of taboo words—swearing—is to convey strong feelings about something and add emotional emphasis. Thus, the omission strategy may not affect the meaning in the original text, but it takes away the author's feelings. However, the taboo word or phrase was deleted (partial omission) in some examples, and whole sentences that contained the F-word were deleted (full omission) in other instances, such as Example 37:

Problems never f\*cking go away (ST) = Problems never go away (BT)

However, in Example 55, the whole phrase was completely deleted:

Come the f\*ck on (ST) =  $\emptyset$  (no TT)

### Paraphrasing Using Unrelated Words

Paraphrasing using related or unrelated words enables translators to choose the proper words for the TT. Translators apply paraphrasing using unrelated words when the ST's literal meaning is presented with another concept in the TT but conveys the same propositional meaning. In all the items in which this strategy was applied, the ST does not have the same literal meaning as the TT but has the same propositional meaning in Arabic:

but f\*ck it (ST) = whatever (BT)

F\*ck that kid (ST) = Is there a stupider kid than this? (BT)

You're going to get f\*cked (ST) = You'll lose from all directions (BT)

F\*cked up values (ST) = Bad values (BT)

The world is totally f\*cked (ST) = The world is a bad place (BT)

Her values are so f\*cked (ST) = Her bad values (BT)

I'm so f\*cking pissed off (ST) = which makes me really pissed off and angry (BT)

They don't have anything more f\*ck-worthy (ST) = They don't have anything more valuable (BT)

Who f\*cked whom (ST) = Exchanging accusations (BT)

Eighty years of f\*cks will rain (ST) = She will rain on him with all her accumulated disappointments (BT)

### Literal Translation

The literal meaning of the F-word related to sex appeared only when the literal translation strategy was applied (four times). Ávila-Cabrera (2016) declared that literal translation, or word-for-word translation, entails transferring a word or words from the ST to the TT by obtaining the ST's grammar and idioms. Newmark (2004) believed that this strategy is the basic translation procedure, that it is the first step in translation, and that "literal translation is acceptable and not be avoided, if it secures referential and pragmatic equivalence to the original" (pp. 68–69).

In the four items in which the translator used this strategy, the *F*-word was translated into *sex* (noun), *having sex* (verb + noun), and *make love* (verb). As mentioned earlier, *sex* as a topic is taboo, especially in Arabic and Islamic societies, but the translator chose to translate these taboo words, instead of deleting or paraphrasing these items:

Indiscriminate f\*cking (ST) = Indiscriminate sex (BT)

Unravelling the logistics of f\*cking (ST) = The practical ways of having sex (BT)

F\*ck more (ST) = Make love more (BT)

The way ... or Jenna Jameson f\*cks (ST) = Jenna Jameson's talent in sex (BT)

### Translating Using Less Expressive or Neutral Words

According to Khongbumpen (2007), the strategy of translating using less expressive or neutral words is used when the TT lacks an equivalent phrase; thus, the ST is replaced by a close equivalent in the TT that is less expressive and more formal. Table 1 shows the three times when this strategy was applied, none of which has an exact meaning in Arabic:

F\*ck-wads (ST) = losers (BT)

Mindf\*ck (ST) = exhausts the mind (BT)

F\*ck it (ST) = to hell with this (BT)

### Translating using cultural substitution

When translators want their readers to understand the ST clearly, they will replace a phrase with a related expression in the target language by introducing expressions with which the recipients in the target culture are familiar (Khongbumpen, 2007). This strategy was applied twice in the corpus—the ST was translated to *damn* in both TTs. This translation may still be considered offensive, but it is acceptable and understandable in the target culture, especially in formal Arabic.

F\*ck you (ST) = Damn you (BT)

Ah, f\*ck! (ST) = Oh, damn everything (BT)

According to Almiḡrab (2020), most instances of the English F-word are substituted when translated into Arabic because Arab culture is religiously oriented, and taboo and swear words are prohibited due to Islamic teachings. Thus, such taboos are usually translated into *curse be upon you* [عليك اللعنة], or as Al-Yasin and Rabab'ah (2019) stated, it can be translated as [سحقا], which means a curse on the person to go to dreadful depths, which maintains Arab norms and the connotative function of the taboo word to express frustration.

The overall results are parallel to Debbas and Haider (2020) who found that euphemistic expression and word omission are the dominant strategies used in translating taboos into Arabic. The results are also corresponding to Almiḡrab's study (2020), that translators can adopt omission-censorship-, euphemism, substitution, and rendering taboo for taboo when translating into Arabic.

### Conclusion

Some translators face significant challenges in filtering taboo words from an ST in any culture, especially during the Internet and technology age, when most censored items—books, movies, TV shows, and so on—can be found and accessed online. Arabic translators, in particular, have a complicated role because they are “bound to a number of authoritative, religious, cultural, and ideological factors that limit their handling of foreign taboo texts” (Abbas, 2015, p. 7). Their role is to present these materials in a way that is acceptable for the culture and for all ages, unless the materials are children's books. Ratings declaring the suitable age range for each book are rare; thus, any book is accessible by anyone.

The results of this paper show that the *F*-word is used in the ST 179 times in different forms (*f\*cking*, *f\*cked*, etc.) and in different parts of speech (noun, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs). Regarding the different meanings of the *F*-word, the translation of each ST item depended on the strategy used by the translator in different contexts. The translator used six main strategies to tackle the taboo items or expressions: the most commonly used strategy was translation by paraphrasing using related words, followed by omission, paraphrasing using related words, literal translation, translation using less expressive or neutral words, and translation using cultural substitution. There was no definitive evidence as to whether the translator was adhering to the publisher's censorship guidelines or if the translator used these strategies in self-censorship. Although the translator was expertly capable of presenting the ST's functional meaning in most of the translated items, Ávila-Cabrera (2016) argued that softening or deleting the taboo terms may jeopardize their intended function in the ST.

For future studies, it would be interesting to compare the strategies and translations of the *F*-word in this study to those adopted by another translator, whether in a translated book or

a translated movie. Finally, I must clarify that I did not intend for this paper to encourage the use of taboo words but rather to examine the translator's efforts and challenges in presenting these items to the audience in an acceptable and respectful way.

## Bio

Batool A. Hendl works as a teaching Assistant at Kuwait University, in the Information Studies Department, College of Social Sciences. She obtained her masters degree in Translation Studies from the University of Birmingham, UK in 2017, and her other masters in Library and Information Sciences from Kuwait University in 2010.

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