Translating Fairy Tales: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Disney Fairy Tales in Spanish and Arabic Audiovisual Platforms

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Abstract: *This study explores the cultural translation of Disney's fairy tales for Arabic- and Spanish-speaking audiences, focusing on linguistic localization and cultural adaptation in audiovisual translation (AVT). A cross-cultural approach is adopted to analyze how regional cultural norms and expectations are reflected in Disney adaptations, including The Lion King, Aladdin, and Frozen. The study examines key challenges in AVT, such as narrative adaptations, cultural sensitivities, and constraints on dubbing and subtitling. Findings reveal that Arabic adaptations prioritize cultural acceptability, blending Islamic values with themes of adventure and self-discovery, while Spanish adaptations emphasize humor and familial connections through local dialects and colloquialisms. Strategies such as localization, neutralization, and cultural substitution are identified as crucial in meeting audience preferences. Arabic viewers prefer formal, culturally appropriate translations, while Spanish audiences favor lighter, familiar language. The findings highlight the importance of cultural sensitivity in Disney's regional storytelling to maintain audience engagement. The study concludes by encouraging further research on the integration of advanced technology in AVT to better navigate the complexities of translating culturally diverse content for global markets.*

Keywords: *Disney Adaptations, Audiovisual Translation, Cultural Localization, Arabic Audiences, Spanish Audiences, Linguistic Strategies, Dubbing and Subtitling.*

I. Introduction

Disney's contribution to global popular culture is remarkable, with its fairy tales and animated stories widely celebrated for their entertainment and inspiration across diverse audiences. These stories go beyond simple entertainment; they bridge the gap between global and localized cultural values. When Disney's works are adapted for regions where language could either pose a challenge or serve as an aid, several factors must be considered, particularly in the Hispanic and Arabic worlds. These adaptations require not only linguistic proficiency but also sensitivity to cultural nuances, etiquette, and audience expectations. Disney fairy tales have become integral to global entertainment, transcending language and cultural barriers. However, when these stories are translated, they are significantly localized to resonate with new audiences. This paper examines how Disney's popular fairy tales are adapted into Spanish and Arabic, focusing on audiovisual translation approaches and the issues that arise. The study aims to assess how these translations affect narrative comprehension, cultural representation, and audience response. Specifically, it explores the impact of linguistic adaptation on readership, character perception, and thematic interpretation, as well as the implications of cultural shifts. Through a comparative analysis, the research seeks to answer key questions about how Disney fairy tales are adapted for Spanish and Arabic-speaking audiences, the strategies used in translating dialogue, music, and cultural references, and how these adaptations shape the emotional engagement of these audiences. While Disney's fairy tales share universal themes such as love, courage, and resilience, their adaptations for Spanish and Arabic audiovisual platforms highlight the crucial role of cultural adaptation in preserving the essence of these stories. The study suggests that successful translation and adaptation strike a balance between staying true to the original material and ensuring cultural relevance.

2. Literature Review

It has scarcely shifted that one of the deeply challenging questions in today's Arabs culture, thoughts, and advancement is still translation. Individuals, organisations and government programs have made many efforts towards achieving the goal, but the results are still limited and below the intended goal. The principle of digital technology in the context of translating the laws of the game has varied the laws of the game altogether, along with the familiar issues that are responsible for the translation crisis in the Arab world. Asynchronous communication is even mostly done over the internet, increased use of screens instead of the traditional paper and books. As pointed out by Gamal (2014), this is the area of audiovisual translation. These narratives are situate within the Western topical complex inherited from European folklore and more often than not, require changes in order to be understood by the people of different linguistic and cultural background. Dubbing, subtitling and cultural adaptation are among the strategic approaches of translating content for different audiences as underlined by Audiovisual Translation (AVT) scholars. Said research show that there is necessity of cultural sensitivity in areas such as Middle East and Latin America given that moral, religious and cultures are highly authoritative.

2.1. Fairy Tales

Fairy tales have captivated audiences across centuries, evolving from oral traditions shared around fires and in communal spaces into a central aspect of cultural heritage (Tatar, 2004). Originally intended for adults, these stories encompassed multifaceted discourses, blending humor, wit, and local culture with the poetic literacy of the nobility. Over time, fairy tales transitioned into a global phenomenon, adapting to diverse cultural values and preferences while maintaining their essence through retellings and reinterpretations. In the 21st century, fairy tales have been revitalized by mainstream cinema, incorporating postmodern hybridity and innovative twists to appeal to global audiences. This dynamic genre demonstrates a feedback loop, balancing innovation and tradition, as narratives continually reflect and shape cultural values and beliefs, showcasing both similarities and regional distinctions in storytelling traditions across the world.

2.2. Audiovisual Translation

Disney's global storytelling influence lies in its ability to adapt narratives for diverse cultures, blending Western values such as individualism and hedonism with international elements. While the company successfully reinterprets folktales in films like The Lion King, Aladdin, and Frozen, it faces challenges in localizing concepts, language, and imagery for universal appeal. According to Bryman (2004), Disney acts as a cultural mediator, balancing Western motifs with local cultures. Audiovisual Translation (AVT), a key aspect of this process, involves multi-semiotic transfer, including dubbing, subtitling, and voiceover . However, AVT presents difficulties such as lip synchronization and cultural adaptation, particularly in the Arab region, where political and technological factors complicate translation (Gamal, 2014). Scholars like Khalaf and Rashid (2012) highlight AVT's potential in fostering intercultural understanding, but critics argue that Disney's portrayals of non-Western cultures can reinforce stereotypes and oversimplify diversity, raising concerns about the educational value of such representations. These issues underscore the need for culturally sensitive and creative approaches to translation in the global dissemination of Disney films.

2.3. Audiovisual Translation Challenges

Audiovisual translation (AVT) for Spanish and Arabic adaptations of Disney films faces various challenges, especially time constraints in subtitling, which often require significant cuts to dialogues—up to 47%—potentially leading to the loss of nuance, particularly in humor-driven content like *The Lion King* and *Toy Story 4*. Despite advancements in AI and machine translation, human expertise remains crucial for capturing idiomatic expressions and cultural subtleties (Baker, 2018). In Spanish-speaking regions, colloquial expressions, humor, and regional dialects are embraced, with localized dubbing strategies tailored for diverse audiences in Spain and Latin America. In contrast, Arabic adaptations prioritize a formal language to align with cultural and religious norms, often leading to more significant changes in narrative, character behavior, and plot to respect Islamic values and family structures.

Notably, characters like Jasmine in *Aladdin* are portrayed with greater modesty to reflect cultural expectations (Darwish, 2018). Disney's use of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) ensures broad accessibility but may feel formal and detached from everyday speech . highlighting the delicate balance between cultural adaptation and maintaining the original essence of Disney fairy tales.

2.4. Comparative Analysis: Spanish vs. Arabic Translation

Disney movies in Arabic and Spanish adopt distinct cultural adaptation strategies, reflecting the linguistic and societal norms of their target audiences. Arabic translations prioritize social and religious conventions, often omitting or altering content that clashes with these values, such as romantic themes in *The Little Mermaid*, which are redirected to focus on familial loyalty and inner struggles (Mustafa, 2019). In contrast, Spanish adaptations embrace comedy, colloquial language, and Western values, preserving much of the humor and informal tone in films like *The Lion King* to align with the cultural norms of Spanish-speaking audiences (Rey, 2021). While Spanish translations often highlight themes of autonomy and community to appeal to contemporary sensibilities, Arabic versions ensure content remains suitable for diverse, often conservative, audiences. Both languages face technical challenges in dubbing, but the flexibility of regional dialects in Spanish contrasts with the need for a balance between Modern Standard Arabic and regional Arabic dialects to achieve cultural and cross-border relevance.

3. Methodology

This research analyzes three popular Disney films—*The Lion King*, *Aladdin*, and *Frozen*—to explore how cultural and linguistic adaptations are made in Spanish and Arabic versions. Each film represents distinct themes: *The Lion King* explores family and heroism, *Aladdin* blends Western perceptions with Middle Eastern folklore, and *Frozen* addresses individuality and empowerment. Data is collected by examining translated dialogues, song lyrics, and visual elements, focusing on linguistic adjustments, cultural substitutions, and visual changes to align the films with local customs. The analysis is structured around three translation strategies: localization, cultural substitution, and neutralization, highlighting how these adaptations respect cultural values while maintaining Disney's core themes. Audience reception studies will provide insight into emotional engagement, nostalgia, and preferences for dubbed vs. subtitled versions. In both Spanish and Arabic adaptations, language is tailored for cultural relatability, with Spanish versions incorporating regional dialects and colloquial humor, while Arabic versions prioritize Modern Standard Arabic and adapt religious and moral elements to align with Islamic values, such as modifying character portrayals in *Aladdin* to conform to modesty norms.

4. Results and Discussion

Case Study 1: *The Lion King*

In the Spanish adaptation of The Lion King, translators tailored the dialogue to resonate with both Spanish and Latin American audiences by preserving core themes of family and duty while incorporating regional dialects and colloquial expressions. Timon and Pumbaa, for example, speak in slang and idioms unique to Mexican and Argentine Spanish, enhancing relatability for Latin American audiences, especially younger viewers. In contrast, the Spanish version for Spain uses more neutral Castilian Spanish, catering to regional preferences for standard language in children's media. This linguistic adaptation follows Venuti's domestication principle, which adjusts language to better fit the cultural context of the target audience, thus strengthening audience connection through humor and dialectal differences. On the other hand, the Arabic adaptation uses Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), which, while ensuring accessibility across Arabic-speaking regions, reduces regional distinctiveness and alters the characters' humorous tone. This formal language choice prioritizes linguistic consistency and broad comprehension, although it may diminish the comedic impact for some younger viewers. Despite the loss of some regional humor, the universal themes of duty and family resonate with Arabic cultural values, showcasing a neutralizing strategy in the Arabic translation.

In the Spanish (Latin American) and Arabic adaptations of The Lion King, the phrase "Hakuna Matata! It means no worries" retains its original Swahili expression in both versions. In Spanish, it is followed

by "No te preocupes" ("Don't worry"), and in Arabic, "يعني لا تقلق" ("It means don't worry"), both clarifying the meaning of "Hakuna Matata" for audiences unfamiliar with the Swahili term. These translations maintain the carefree spirit of the original while ensuring cultural accessibility. The line "Slimy, yet satisfying" is translated into Latin American Spanish as "¡Baboso, pero rico!" ("Slimy, but tasty"), where "baboso" conveys a playful, child-friendly description of texture, while the Arabic version, " لكن ،مقرف اللذيذ" ("Disgusting, but delicious"), similarly captures the humorous contrast between the unpleasant and the enjoyable. Both translations preserve the humor of the original. For "You gotta put your behind in your past," the wordplay involving "behind" is omitted in both the Spanish and Arabic versions, with "Tienes que dejar el pasado atrás" ("You have to leave the past behind") in Spanish and " عليك أن تترك الماضي خلفك" ("You must leave the past behind") in Arabic, focusing on the moral lesson instead. This adaptation ensures the message is clear and relatable, avoiding any confusion from the original pun.

Case Study 2: *Aladdin*

In the Spanish adaptation of Aladdin, the use of regional humor and colloquial expressions, such as Genie's lively "¡Échale ganas!" ("Give it your all!"), helps make the character more relatable and familiar to both Latin American and Spanish audiences, particularly younger viewers. These linguistic choices enhance the emotional connection with the character. In contrast, the Arabic version of Aladdin makes significant cultural adjustments to better resonate with Arabic-speaking audiences, especially by addressing the orientalist stereotypes in the original. For instance, Aladdin is portrayed with more dignity and formality, replacing the "street rat" image with one that reflects Arab cultural values of respect. Genie's humor, originally filled with Western cultural references, is transformed by incorporating Arabic proverbs and sayings, such as modifying a joke about being "all-powerful" into one about luck. This exemplifies cultural substitution, adapting humor to local sensibilities. Meanwhile, the Spanish version maintains Genie's playfulness through Castilian vocabulary, while the Arabic adaptation shifts to a more formal tone with Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), aligning the dialogue with local religious and cultural norms, including modifying Jasmine's attire to meet modesty standards. These changes involve both cultural substitution and neutralization, balancing cultural sensitivity with the preservation of the film's core themes, although some humor and informality are lost in the process. Despite these alterations, the Arabic adaptation was well received by audiences, who appreciated the culturally respectful and appropriate portrayal of characters.

In the Spanish adaptation of Aladdin, the line "A whole new world, a new fantastic point of view" is translated as "Un mundo ideal, un mundo en el que tú y yo" ("An ideal world, a world where you and I"), which shifts the focus from a "whole new world" to a dreamlike, aspirational "ideal world," resonating with Latin American audiences' ideals of hope and possibility. The Arabic version, " عالم جديد، مناظر رائعة" ("A new world, magnificent views"), conveys the sense of wonder and discovery with a more straightforward expression. The line "You ain't never had a friend like me!" is adapted in Spanish as "¡Nunca has tenido un amigo como yo!" ("You've never had a friend like me!"), which maintains Genie's lively tone, while the Arabic version, "لم يكن لديك صديق مثلي من قبل" ("You've never had a friend like me before!"), preserves the same enthusiasm but uses a slightly more formal construction. Similarly, "Make way for Prince Ali!" is translated as "¡Dejen paso al príncipe Alí!" ("Make way for Prince Ali!") in Spanish, and "افسحوا الطريق للأمير علي!" ("Clear the way for Prince Ali!") in Arabic, with both versions reflecting respect for royalty, but the Arabic version uses a more formal tone to align with cultural norms of dignity. The line "Not bad, for a street rat" is translated as "No está mal para un rata callejera" ("Not bad for a street rat") in Spanish, keeping the derogatory term "street rat," which aligns with a more direct tone in Latin American culture. In contrast, the Arabic version, "ليس سيئاً لشخص يعيش في الشارع" ("Not bad for a person living on the street"), softens the expression, reflecting a cultural sensitivity to homelessness and a preference for more neutral language. These adaptations demonstrate how both the Spanish and Arabic versions tailor the dialogue to cultural norms while preserving the essence of the characters and their interactions.

Case Study 3: *Frozen*

In the Spanish adaptation of Frozen, Elsa's iconic song "Let It Go" was reinterpreted as "Libre Soy" ("I Am Free"), shifting the focus from personal liberation to a broader theme of self-reliance and freedom, resonating with cultural values in Latin America where freedom from social constraints is

highly valued. The line "The cold never bothered me anyway" was changed to "El frío es parte también" ("The cold is also part of me"), subtly reframing Elsa's journey from personal rebellion to an introspective integration of her powers with her identity, reflecting the collectivist and family-oriented values prevalent in many Spanish-speaking regions. This localization, while maintaining the theme of empowerment, has been well-received, particularly by younger audiences, who find Elsa's character more relatable and inspiring. In the Arabic adaptation, Elsa's song is translated as "Abi An Atlak" ("I Want to Be Free"), emphasizing humility and personal growth while aligning with local values of modesty and self-discovery. Elsa's attire was also adjusted for modesty, which aligns with cultural expectations. This translation choice blends neutralization and localization, preserving the emotional depth of Elsa's journey while adapting it to Arabic cultural norms, with the modesty adjustments generally appreciated by parents, though some viewers desire a stronger tone.

In the Spanish adaptation of Frozen, the iconic line "Let it go! Let it go!" is translated as "¡Libre soy, libre soy!" ("I am free"), emphasizing Elsa's empowerment and independence, resonating with Latin American values of self-expression and liberation. The Arabic version, "أبي أن أطلق! أبي أن أطلق!" ("I want to be free"), softens the tone, reflecting a more modest desire for freedom in line with cultural values of humility while preserving Elsa's journey of empowerment. Similarly, the phrase "The cold never bothered me anyway" becomes "El frío es parte también" ("The cold is also part of me") in Spanish, shifting focus to Elsa's acceptance of her powers, aligning with introspective values in Spanish-speaking cultures. The Arabic translation, "لم يزعجني البرد أبداً" ("The cold never bothered me anyway"), remains closer to the original, maintaining Elsa's resilience in a more formal tone suited to Arabic cultural norms. The playful line "Do you want to build a snowman?" is translated as "¿Quieres hacer un muñeco de nieve?" in Spanish and "هل تريد بناء رجل ثلج؟" in Arabic, with both adaptations retaining the innocence of the question, though the Arabic version uses a more formal structure. Finally, Olaf's line "Some people are worth melting for" is rendered as "Algunas personas valen la pena derretirse" in Spanish and "بعض الناس يستحقون أن تذوب من أجلهم" in Arabic. Both translations preserve the affectionate tone, with the Arabic version slightly formalized to reflect cultural expressions of selflessness. These adaptations demonstrate how the Spanish and Arabic versions skillfully balance cultural expectations while maintaining the original tone and meaning of the dialogue.

4. Summary of Findings

The cross-cultural analysis reveals that Spanish adaptations of Disney films enhance relatability by using regional dialects and colloquial language, which fosters stronger emotional connections and viewer identification. In contrast, Arabic adaptations rely on Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) for broader accessibility, though this approach limits the specific humor of characters like Genie and Timon. Both adaptations demonstrate cultural sensitivity by aligning with regional values, with Arabic versions adjusting attire, language, and supernatural themes to ensure cultural appropriateness for young audiences. Ultimately, Spanish-speaking audiences tend to prefer lively, colloquial adaptations that mirror local humor, while Arabic-speaking viewers favor formal language and culturally respectful modifications, particularly for younger audiences.

5. Conclusion

Disney's fairy tales have been translated into Spanish and Arabic audiovisual platforms, highlighting the challenges and opportunities in the process. Translators play a crucial role in preserving the universal appeal of Disney's stories while respecting regional cultural values. They create localized versions of the tales through dynamic equivalence, cultural adaptation, and audiovisual synchronization. However, the industry is evolving, with the introduction of AI translation tools and the growing demand for regional dialects. The translation of Disney fairy tales is more than just a linguistic exercise; it's a cross-cultural exchange reflecting the global power of storytelling. The success of these translations depends on linguistic accuracy and a deep understanding of the target culture and its values. As Disney expands its global reach, the demand for culturally sensitive and accurate translations will grow. Future research should explore the nuances of audiovisual translation, particularly in emerging markets, and consider the role of technology in facilitating more accurate and culturally aware translations.

6. Acknowledgements

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