

Cultural Transfer in Film Subtitles: A Translational Study of *Adaminte Makan Abu*

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Subtitles and their translation entail linguistic, cultural and technical issues both in theory and practice of Audiovisual Translation. Subtitled films reach heterogeneous audience in different languages and hence raise questions of their reception in terms of the culture specific references, regionally connoting words and verbal humor which are substantial in the source language. The communication of these elements through subtitles plays a crucial role in the meaning making process of a film. This paper is an attempt to analyze the subtitles of the Malayalam film 'Adaminta Makan Abu' (Abu, Son of Adam) to understand the possibilities of cultural transfer taking place in the translation and reception of its subtitles.

Keywords: audiovisual translation, subtitling, culture-specific references.

Introduction

Subtitling is one of the popular methods in Audiovisual Translation which is an emerging discipline within Translation Studies. In a world where communication crosses all barriers of linguistic, cultural and geographical specificities translation of films and other audiovisual materials demand their translation to multiple languages in order to address multilingual communities worldwide. Film, as a powerful medium that reaches heterogeneous people, plays a significant role in enriching cross-cultural understanding of the mass. Subtitles of films always come to help the audience watching a film in foreign language and hence the text of subtitle is to be subjected to critical study in terms of both the linguistic components and cultural factors that influence its translation. It is the interface between language and culture that constitutes the problematic premise of subtitling.

Subtitles are a peculiar kind of text for its writer and reader because subtitling entails technical constraints apart from the linguistic and cultural issues that determine its translation. Subtitles make a fleeting appearance on the screen in a fraction of seconds, that too in fragmented sentences, along with other visuals and auditory elements like background music and songs. The readability of subtitles and their segmentation into different parts often determine the length of a sentence which altogether influence the choice over words and nature of translation. The time span allotted for each segment of subtitle, the number of words, typographical features such as the size and color of font and the visuals on which they are superimposed are all factors

that govern subtitling directly or indirectly. Subtitles are a hybrid kind of text in that it follows the original sound track and appear as a readable text on the screen shifting from the spoken to the written variety of language. Henrik Gottlieb (1994), therefore, terms translation of subtitles as ‘diagonal’ translation. Unlike other modes of translation, subtitles does not replace the source language, but runs as a parallel text to the original and hence it is labeled as ‘vulnerable’ translation as it leaves an opportunity to the reader to compare the SL with the subtitles. It is in such a lingua-tech context that subtitles survive as a text on the screen to make sense of the entire audiovisual material.

A film produces meaning through the intersemiotic signification of its diverse parts like verbal dialogues, costume, visuals, music, light, camera angles, cinematographic techniques and subtitles. When subtitle is located within such a multisemiotic system it posits questions not only of faithfully translating the original sound track for the target language audience, but also of the complexity of the process of transferring the paralinguistic features of verbal expressions and cultural references that makes its meaning complete. Unlike other translation, subtitles are condensed form of ideal sentences and there is only limited room for explication in the form of paraphrasing or bracketing. The study of subtitles assumes greater significance in Audiovisual Translation Studies in analyzing the strategies and methods adopted for transferring the meaning of culture-specific references like names of festivals and social customs, connotative meaning of specific words, songs and verbal humor. These elements in the subtitle pose challenge to subtitlers who have to translate them strategically either compromising their sense in the source language or making a naïve translation. Such attempts invariably result in translational loss and render the subtitle and film empty of their intended meaning. This paper analyzes the subtitles of *Adaminte Makan Abu* (Abu, Son of Adam) to explore the theoretical and practical issues in translating the culture-specific references in Malayalam.

The Film

Adaminte Makan Abu is a Malayalam feature film released in 2011 and written, directed and co-produced by Salim Ahmad. The story of the film revolves around sanctity of faith and purity of life in the backdrop of the harmonious life of rural Kerala. Abu and Ayshu, an elderly traditional Muslim couple in Malabar region of Kerala, are leading an impoverished life, totally neglected by their only son who migrated to Gulf country. When the film starts they are preparing to make their life-long dream of going on a Hajj pilgrimage come true. To equip themselves financially, they have to sell the jackfruit tree in the courtyard of their house and their cow, a means of their livelihood apart from the scanty saving from his *attar* (perfume) sales for several years. As arrangements are being made in terms of acquiring a passport, guidance classes for Hajj and purchasing materials for the travel kit, Johnson, the timber business man to whom he sold the jackfruit tree informs

that the wood was hollow and not worth its price and Abu gets upset and plans to withdraw the deal. Johnson, a benevolent Christian insists that Abu should take the money for his noble cause of Hajj, but Abu refuses it. A helping hand was extended by Govindan master, a Hindu well-wisher of Abu and offered him the balance amount, but as an ardent believer and a stainless devotee Abu kindly rejects this offer too on the ground that the money spent for Hajj must be purely his own earning. The couple’s life-long dream gets shattered and the dawn of Bakrid turns to be a mourning one for them. Reflecting on the reasons of this misfortune, Abu finds that the sacred path to pilgrimage is impeded by human greed and the unfriendly approach to nature: cutting the jackfruit tree. Before the sun rise of Bakrid, he plants a fresh sapling of jackfruit before his prayer and determines to fulfill his dream next year. The film was received with wide acclaim and serious post-screening debates. It has secured four National Film Awards for best film, best actor, best cinematography and best background score apart from several Kerala State Film Awards.

The film is set in the interior village of Malabar where people belonging to different religion, cast and political orientation lead a harmonious life. What unites them is the sense of humanity and precious values like love, kindness, mercy and a feeling of belonging to each other. The film is rich in its diverse aspects of social life, spirituality and complex human relations which are communicated not only through the setting, costume, music and dialogue, but also through the peculiar cultural atmosphere pivotal to read the film in its original. Such a culturally loaded film with its regional variety of language and colloquial expressions requires an analysis in terms of its translation in subtitles. The language used in the film is the dialect of Malayalam spoken in Kozhikode – Nadapuram – kutyadi region, the north-west side of Kerala. It is slightly different from the standard spoken Malayalam. Spoken in an interior village of the region, the dialect is again community specific and culturally loaded. This variant of language is unique in pronunciation and rich with connotative meaning which is often difficult to be reproduced in the translation and subtitle.

Analysis of the Subtitles

Sl No	Malayalam Sound Track	English Translation	Subtitle
1	യതീം ഖാനേഖല കുട്ടികളെന്ന് പറഞ്ഞാ... അവർക്കു തിന്റെ അടക്കവും ഒരുക്കവും ഒക്കെ വേണം. <i>(yatheem khanele</i>	The inmates of orphanage... ...must behave in a modest way expected from them.	Children of the ‘yatheemkana’ (orphanage) should know their status.

	<i>kuttikal ennu paranjaal... avarkkathinte adakkavum othukkavum okke venam.)</i>		
2	<p>നിസ്കാരം നടക്കുന്ന നേരത്ത് പള്ളി കെടുന്നു ഒച്ചയുണ്ടാക്കാതെ പഠിക്കാൻ...</p> <p><i>(niskaaram nadakkunna nerathu palliyil kidannu ochayundakka ennokke paranjaal...)</i></p>	How can we tolerate their disturbance during the namaz?	They cannot disturb the prayers.

These words of Maliyekkal Hassanar Haji, the rich, popular, but pseudo-religious noble man of the locality, are part of an ongoing discussion lead by himself when returning from mosque after Subhi namaz. It reflects the tussles and even gossiping that usually take place between the students of *dars* (a Kerala system of mosque-centred religious education in which the students hailing from different places and the teacher, who is also the supreme religious authority of the locality, reside in the local mosque and are offered food and other perks by the natives) or any other religious institutions nearby and members of the committee that runs the mosque. Students, very often in their teenage, turn naughty and disturb the mosque’s otherwise calm atmosphere which is strictly maintained by the so called senior citizens of the locality. Being a member of the committee, Hassanar Haji takes dominance in the discussion on this issue and even become arrogant. His tone and style are suggestive of the asserting nature of his dominating personality. He is emphasizing that the inmates of the orphanage should be disciplined enough to keep silence when *namaz* is going on. The subtitle anticipates the presumed knowledge of Kerala Muslim culture and the monologue of Hassanar Haji is listened by the Malayali viewers in such a backdrop while the audience alien to this culture has to take it as a part of a casual talk, without understanding the culture / community specific narration which is a co-text to the subtitle. Though an orphanage or any other institution run on charity is set up and funded by the native people, they normally do not tolerate the playful way of children who run around and play when the *namaz* is going on in the mosque. Hence, most of the elders of the locality develop a sense to police them and to ‘discipline’ them as they expect. Thus the inmates of the orphanage are looked down by the people and the comment (അവർക്കു തിന്റെ അടക്കവും ഒതുക്കവും ഒക്കെ വേണം *avarkkathinte adakkavum othukkavum okke venam*) in the tone of Hassanar Haji reflects the arrogance and dominance over them. But the English subtitle ‘should know their status’

fails to communicate this political implication of his voice and derogatory status of the inmates dictated and determined by the local leaders of the community.

Yatheemkana translated as ‘orphanage’ in the subtitle is the institution that provides free residential education to Muslim orphans and is run on charity. The word ‘yatheemkana’, though of Arabic origin, is commonly used as a Malayalam word among Muslims and non-Muslims of Kerala. Despite its Malayalam equivalent *anaathaalayam*, such institutions have acquired a cultural label and hence translating it into ‘orphanage’ would lose its connotative meaning. The strategy of specification in translation is carried out here by juxtaposing both the words in order to retain the cultural and religious flavor of the word considering that translation as ‘orphanage’ only will mean a secular institution dissociated from the religious circle. But its explicitation by bracketing the word to explain the meaning in the subtitle compensates the intended sense to a great extent, though it affects the readability of as the sentence become wordy and longer.

Sl No	Malayalam Sound Track	English Translation	Subtitle
1	<p>ഒരുപാട് കിടന്നു വേദന തീറ്റിക്കാതെ ആ പാവത്തിനെ പടച്ചോനങ് നേരത്തെ വിളിച്ചാ മതിയായിരുന്നു.</p> <p><i>(orupaadu kidannu vedana theetikkathe aa paavathine padachon angu nerathe vilichaal mathiyaayirunnu)</i></p>	<p>I wish if he were dead before being pathetically bedridden for long.</p>	<p>Hope the good lord calls him instead of making him suffer.</p>
2	<p>ഹസൻ മൊയ്ല്യാർക്ക ഈടെ ചെത്തിബായിരുന്നെ കാലത്ത് സുബ്ഹിക്ക് പത്ത് സ്വപ്നമുണ്ടായിരുന്നു പള്ളിയില്.</p> <p><i>(hasan moilyarkka eede khatheebayirunna kaalathu subhikku pathu swaffundayirunnu pallelu)</i></p>	<p>When Hasan Musliyar was the chief mullah here, there were ten rows in the mosque for Subhi namaz.</p>	<p>When Aslamoideen was head of mullah here... ...the prayer hall was always full.</p>

In subtitle 1, Hasan Musliyar is mentioned as a dying patient. The original dialogue says that he is terribly bedridden and carries the intensity of the speaker’s emotion, but the condensed subtitle does not communicate that he is bedridden, not even that he is a patient. Moreover, the essence of the

dialogue is partially misrepresented by the word ‘lord’ as it may confuse the audience. ‘Almighty’ would have been more appropriate in the context.

In subtitle 2, the continuity of dialogue and the pace of talk leaves fraction of seconds for subtitles to appear on the screen. This has led the subtitler to resort to the most condensed form of the subtitle, omitting the dispensable elements that explain the main point of the sentence. The subtitle is condensed to ‘the prayer hall was always full’ eliminating ‘ten rows in the mosque for *Subhi namaz*’. Though the subtitle communicates the idea that the mosque was crowded for prayer, the attendance of local people for the specific prayer of *Subhi* is a criterion in religious terms to assess the piety of the people in entire locality. Again, the attendance in the mosque is usually communicated in terms of *swaffs* (rows) by the believers and the least number of *swaffs* indicates the deteriorated religious spirit of the people whereas the most number of *swaffs* indicates a higher level of enthusiasm in their prayer. This comment underlines that Hasan Musliyar was a popular mullah of the mosque whose words and deeds were admired by the common people and hence they were attracted to him, to the mosque and consequently to the prayers.

‘Head of mullah’ is the translation of *katheeb* (the chief Musliyar who deliver the sermon in Friday prayer). The Arabic loan word *katheeb* is popularly used in Malayalam to refer to the chief Musliyar who is, in most cases, a senior religious scholar and teacher of *Dars* and one who solemnizes the religious ceremonies and rituals in the locality. Besides, *katheeb* is also responsible for inculcating religious spirit among the natives and taking theological decisions in matters of dispute. This cultural load of meaning could not be transferred to the phrase ‘head of mullah’ due to the condensed nature of subtitle and the impossibility of adding a footnote unlike other modes of translation, even if *katheeb* is retained. In the film, Hyder mentions *katheeb*, *usthad* and *mukri* which are terms used in the religious circle and always in a hierarchical order. *Usthad* is the Arabic word meaning ‘teacher’ but in the film it is used to mean a seer, the supreme spiritual authority of the village, a *sufi* living a secluded and mysterious life. Next to him is *katheeb* and the lowest in the order is *mukri* whose main duty is to call out *adan* in the mosque and assist the *katheeb* in Friday prayer and other ceremonies. The recurrent use of these words by Hyder connotes this entire spiritual sense, but their specification in the subtitle cannot impart the same sense.

Sl No	Malayalam Sound Track	English Translation	Subtitle
1	<p>പള്ളീലെ വത്തിബ് അങ്ങാടിലെറങ്ങി ചെറുപ്പക്കാരുടെ തോളിൽ കയ്യിട്ട് നടക്കാൻ പറഞ്ഞാ...</p> <p>(<i>palleele khatheeb angadeelirangi cheruppakkarude tholil kayyittu nadakkaannu paranjaa...</i>)</p>	<p>We can't tolerate a <i>katheeb</i> walking around town and befriending youngsters.</p>	<p>It is not right for him to walk around town with his arm over shoulders of youngsters</p>
2	<p>പിന്നല്ലാ... കോയെർചിം ബിരിയാണിയും പൊറോട്ടിം തിന്നു പള്ളീല് അടയിരിക്കലല്ലേ വത്തിബിന്റെ പണി!</p> <p>(<i>Pinnalla... koyercheem biriyanim porotteem thinnu palleelu adayirikkalalle khatheebinte pani!</i>)</p>	<p>You mean that he should confine to mosque having chicken and biryani, squatting like a brooding hen?</p>	<p>Neither does he have to be confined to the mosque eating chicken, biriyani squatting like a brooding hen.</p>
3	<p>അബോ...ധാനേന്ത്രം ഗുളികണ്ടോ നിന്റെ കയ്യില്?</p> <p>(<i>abo.. Dhanedram gulikando ninte kayyil?</i>)</p>	<p>Do you have any digestive tablets?</p>	<p>Do you have some of those digestive tablets?</p>

Hyder makes the humorous remark to criticize the traditional notions of *katheeb* who is expected to be confined in his room in the mosque living on the privileged food provided by the natives. According to him he should come down to people and mingle with them as closely as possible to give them Islamic guidance. Hyder's tit-for-tat reply to Hasainar Haji's accusation against the former *katheeb* sends waves of humour, but it is not completely captured in the subtitle as the same cannot be retained in English sentence structure and subtitle lines are too long for the screen to accommodate. This debate between Hyder and Hasainar Haji is again rooted in the cultural domain of Malabar Muslims and indicative of the power relations between the committee members of the mosque and the *katheeb*.

In subtitle 3, the tablet wanted by Hasainar Haji is *dhanvantharam gulika*, an Ayurvedic tablet used for gastrointestinal problems. . The pronunciation of the word *dhaanenthram* is more of a sociolect than an idiolect and indicates the vocabulary of the traditional community of old people who mostly take Ayurvedic medicine along with indigenous way of treatment. An alternative way to convey the sense would be to transliterate it in the subtitle as *dhanvantharam*, but that will risk the viewers to read a long and totally unfamiliar word. The transposition to ‘Digestive tablets’ is only a strategy of explicitation using a hypernym. What Hasainar Haji needs is not any other tablets for digestive problems, but *dhanvantharam* itself and when it is replaced with ‘those digestive tablets’ in the subtitle what is lost is not only the Ayurvedic flavor of the community’s life style but also their sense of language.

Malayalam Sound Track	English Translation	Subtitle
<p>എട്യായ്ഞെന്താ കാര്യാം? അബുക്കാക്കും ഐസുതാക്കും അയിനെക്കൊണ്ട് ഒരു പൂച്ചേന്റേ ഉപകാരം കൂടില്ല.</p> <p>(<i>edeytantha kaaryam?</i> <i>Abookkakkum</i> <i>Aysuthaakkum ayinekond</i> <i>oru poochente</i> <i>upakaaram koodilla</i>)</p>	<p>It doesn't matter where he is. He does not care them even as a cat does at home.</p>	<p>Wherever after all? There was no benefit for Abu and Isu from their son in their life time.</p>

In the above subtitle Hyder responds to the speaker’s comment about Sathar, the only son of Abu and Ayshu. Hyder always fits an element of humor in his own style and this reply is not an exception. Hyder’s reply is that it doesn’t matter he is in Gulf country or wherever he is, but he takes care of his parents in the least. The Malayalam usage ‘they don’t get any benefit from him, even that of a cat’ is typical of Hyder’s humor-tinged criticism. This idiomatic expression is untranslatable into English and hence is totally omitted in the translation. The metaphor of cat used here to refer to Sathar who abandoned his parents in their old age is a main thread on which the story develops. It reveals the intensity of the deprived life of Abu and Ayshu and underlines the fact that Sathar never had taken care of them. The usage comes from the homely experience of the common people where a cat is a very docile domestic animal, helping human beings by at least eating up leftovers. This metaphorical expression is, however, difficult to reproduce in the subtitle and hence is not carried across culture.

Sl No	Malayalam Sound Track	English Translation	Subtitle
1	<p>ഉസ്താദ് മുകളിൽ ഇല്ലാണ്ടായാൽ ഹൈദറിന്റെ കച്ചോടം പൂട്ടേണ്ടി വരോ?</p> <p>(<i>usthad mukalil illandaayaal haidarinte kachodam poottendi varo?</i>)</p>	<p>If <i>ustad</i> is not living upstairs, will you wind up the business?</p>	<p>If <i>ustad</i> did not live up there, Will your tea shop close down?</p>
2	<p>എന്റെ കച്ചോടം മാത്രോ? ഉസ്താദ് മുകളിൽ ഇല്ലാണ്ടായാൽ ഈ നാടിന്റെ തന്നെ കച്ചോടം പൂട്ടൂലേ?</p> <p>(<i>ente kachodam mathro? Usthad mukalil illandaayal ee naadinte thanne kachodam poottoole?</i>)</p>	<p>Not only my business, this entire village will be dead.</p>	<p>Not only the tea shop, this entire village will wind up business.</p>

Apart from the local people, those who come from far away places to meet *usthad* are also customers to the tea shop of Hyder who is an ardent, pious follower of *usthad* whose presence and blessings, according to Hyder, are the spiritual backbone of the entire village. When Moideen amusingly asks whether he will have to close down his shop if *usthad* disappears, Hyder plays with words and gives an equivocal reply that it is not only his shop, rather the entire village will have to wind up business. It simultaneously means that if *usthad* is gone, the tea shop of Hyder and the spiritual ambience of the entire village will come to an end. The Malayalam phrase ‘കച്ചോടം പൂട്ടുക’ (*kachodam poottuka*) is here a pun of antanaclasis, meaning ‘to end an engagement or pursuit’ and ‘to be dead / pauper / inactive / deteriorate’. This duality of meaning cannot be reproduced in English subtitle and it badly affects the characterization of Hyder whose keen observation, critical comments packed in humor and ironical observations are significant in the plot.

Wordplays and the resultant humor are substantial in communicating the meaning, especially in the case of characters who are developed on their sense of humor. What happens in most cases is sacrificing the either of them due the difference in the sound and meaning in two different languages. Accordingly,

formal equivalence is sacrificed for dynamic equivalence. According to Delia Chiaro,

When dealing with an example of wordplay which pivots around a pun, an interlingual translation may well involve some kind of radical compromise due to the fact that...the chances of being able to pun on the same item in two different languages is extremely remote. Further more,VEH may also play on socio cultural peculiarities of a particular locale which, when coupled with linguistic manipulation, will complicate matters further. Thus, as far the translation of VEH is concerned, formal equivalence, namely the similarity of lexis and syntax in source and target versions, is frequently sacrificed for the sake of dynamic equivalence (2008: 8).

SI No	Malayalam Sound Track	English Translation	Subtitle
1	<p>മയിത്ത് സ്വർഗത്തിൽ പോയാലെന്തു നരകത്തിൽ പോയാലെന്ത് മുക്രിക്കാക്കു പൈസ കിട്ടണമെന്ന് പറഞ്ഞ പോലെയാ</p> <p><i>(mayyith swargathil poyalenthu naragathil poyalenthu mukrikkakku paisa kittanam ennu paranja poleya)</i></p>	<p>It is like the undertaker who doesn't mind whether the dead go to heaven or hell, but concerned with money only.</p>	<p>It doesn't matter whether you go to hell or heaven after you die... ...undertaker should get money.</p>
2	<p>പാസ്പോർട്ടിന്റേ എൻക്വയറി വന്നാ പോലീസുകാരന് പൈസ കൊടുക്കാൻ പറയുന്നത് ഫർളാ.</p> <p><i>(paasportinte enkoyari vannaa poleesukaaranu paisa kodukkaannu parayunnathu farlaa)</i></p>	<p>It has become custom to bribe the police for a passport enquiry.</p>	<p>It is quite normal to bribe the police for a passport enquiry</p>

Hyder is a keen observer of all social and religious practices and makes his own critical comments at his tea shop against any injustice that prevails in the community. This part of his dialogue with Abu takes place at his tea shop which is a center of all kinds of social, political and religious discussions. Subtitle 1 and 2 appears one by one at the start of the tea shop scene and the

audience most probably may go blank as the context of the comment is not communicated. He has tongue in cheek while he makes the comment comparing the practices of *mukri* and the police officer in charge of the local enquiry for issuing a passport. The undertaker mentioned here is the *mukri* who leads the funeral ceremony and is paid an amount of charity by the family of the deceased person after the funeral function is over. This practice is common among Muslims, especially among Sunni sect in Kerala and it is a popular joke that *mukri* receives the tip irrespective of the financial condition of the family and the destiny of the soul of the deceased person: the hell or heaven. Moreover, *mukri* is also made fun of being economically motivated for performing funeral rituals. It is in the same vein that Hyder makes fun of the police officer who has to be tipped to speed up the verification process for passport. During 1970s and 80s, when Malayali emigration to Gulf countries for employment was at its peak, passport was in high demand and the official procedure to issue a passport was quite complex. In those days tipping or bribing the police officer and even the postman who delivers the passport were a common trend. These religious and official ‘malpractices’ are pointed at in the comment are familiar to Malayali audience whereas the ‘discourse of tips to *mukri* and police’ may seem totally strange for non-Malayali audience. This regional and ethnic connotation that forms the substance of Hyder’s comment gets lost in the subtitle and ultimately the element of humor is lost in translation.

Farlu translated in the subtitle as ‘normal’ is a popularly used word among Kerala Muslims in their da-to-day life. It is an Arabic loan word meaning ‘obligatory / must’ and connotes the obligatory religious practices like *namaz* performed five times a day. Hyder’ typical usage of the word satirically assimilates the practice of tipping the *mukri* and the police officer as an ‘obligatory’ custom in the local social circle. Translation of this sociolect as ‘normal’ or even ‘obligatory’ could only suggest the sense of the statement without extending its intention to a wider socio-economic range.

Sl No	Malayalam Sound Track	English translation	Subtitle
1	ഇങ്ങൊന്നു സഫൂറാക്ക് <i>(ingalonna safooraakku)</i>	Be patient / calm yourself.	Calm yourself
2	സഫൂറാക്കല്ല, വദീജാക്ക് <i>(safoorakkalla, kadejaakku)</i>	Not to Safoora, but to Kadeeja.	No subtitle

The context of this wordplay again is when Abu who was eagerly waiting for his passport reaches the post office well before the office time and becomes impatient when he learns that he has to wait for the postman for a long time. The peeved Abu exchanges harsh words with Ayshu and she tries to appease him saying *safooraakku*, translated as ‘calm yourself’. Again, the word has its roots in Arabic and is a blend of Arabic word *swabr* meaning ‘patience’ and Malayalam word *aakku* meaning ‘be’, together meaning ‘be patient’. This phrase which is commonly used among Malayalam speaking Muslims presents the audience a pun in which the Arabic word *Safoora* denotes a feminine proper noun and its Malayalam suffix *kku* means ‘to’ resulting in the verbal humor of the word play *safooraakku* simultaneously meaning ‘calm yourself’ and ‘to Safoora’. The irritated Abu takes the latter meaning of the phrase, though out of context, and retorts to Ayshu: ‘it is not to Safoora, but to Kadeeja’ (Kadeeja is another feminine proper noun), trying to tease his wife just by mentioning the name of another woman. But Abu’s complex word play on this homonym which is both language specific and culture bound cannot be subtitled as a corresponding structure of lexical – semantic – acoustic combination does not exist in English.

The verbal humor, as Sherzer points out, is ‘... a projection of the syntagmatic onto the paradigmatic ...’ (1978: 341). This verbal humor here is to be placed on the syntagmatic axis of language and paradigmatic axis of culture, but it is possible only at the cost of its essence. The omission of this part of the dialogue in subtitle does not apparently affect the audience in understanding the film story and is not crucial to the development of the plot or any character. But the composite nature of the Malayalam phrase and the cultural nuance in the oral communication of a society are sacrificed in the process of translation.

SI No	Malayalam Sound Track	English Translation	Subtitle
1	ഞാൻ ഇത് വരെ ഹജ്ജ് കമ്മിറ്റി വഴി ഹജ്ജിനു പോയിട്ടില്ല. (<i>Njan ithu vare hajju kammati vazhi hajjinu poyittilla</i>)	I have not gone on Hajj in government package.	I have not gone on Hajj through the committee
2	നാല് തവണ പോയതും കോഴിക്കോട് അക്ബർ ട്രാവൽസ് മുഖേനയാ. (<i>naalu thavana</i>)	All four times I went by the Akbar Travels of Kozhikode.	All 4 times I have gone only through Akbar Travels of Kozhikode

	<i>poyathum kozhikode akbar travels mukhenaya)</i>		
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Abu plans to go on Hajj by the Hajj Committee, an exclusive Government body for Hajj service which is economic and hence resorted by majority of the pilgrims in contrast to the private travel agencies that provide a more comfortable service at a higher rate. Haji plans to go by Akbar Travels, one of the leading private travel agencies in Kerala with its branches spread across India. Abu’s pilgrimage, for which he was preparing for the last 12 years, is to be contrasted with that of Hasainar Haji who plans to set out just a few days before Hajj starts. Hence the ‘Hajj committee’ referred to in the film is synonymous with economic pilgrimage of the common people like Abu and ‘Akbar Travels’ appears as a symbol luxurious pilgrimage of prestigious wealthy people like Hasainar Haji. Subtitle 1 does not carry this connotation and presents ‘hajj committee’ as an ambiguous term to the audience who are not quite aware of such a system. The two modes of service are presented and contrasted in the film to emphasize the socio-economic disparity among Hajj pilgrims and is an indispensable part of subtitle. Favorably, ‘Akbar Travels’, a hyponym for private travel agencies, is retained in the subtitle as a mode of specification, but the concept may not be clear to the audience until the camera is turned, after a few scenes, to the name board of the office Akbar Travels. It is difficult for the common viewers to understand the concept from the verbal expression alone and the visual functions here as a co-text that supplement the subtitle. Translation of the name board ‘Akbar Travels’ is saved here because the average audience is expected to read it on the screen.

Sl No	Malayalam sound track	English Translation	English subtitle
1	കാത്തോളുണേ റബ്ബേ... പാപങ്ങളെല്ലാം പൊരുത്തപ്പെടണേ... <i>(kaatholane rabbe... paapangalellaam poruthappedane...)</i>	Oh Lord, save me... Forgive me all my sins...	No subtitle
2	പടച്ച റബ്ബൽ ആലമീനായ തമ്പുരാനേ... കാത്തോളുണേ റബ്ബേ... <i>(padacha rabbul alameenaaya thampuraane... katholane rabbe...)</i>	Oh Lord Almighty of this universe... Save him...	No subtitle

The visual of Ayshu's prayer in her typical Kerala Muslim prayer dress clearly communicates *namaz* and the subtitle 'prayer' appears on the screen. Though *namaz* is a physical prayer, it is to be distinguished from other types of prayers. What Ayshu does immediately after *namaz* is 'verbal prayer' which is a secondary prayer said after *namaz* and it is more personal and intimate plea to God. Abu and Ayshu being pious Muslim couple leading a simple and spotless life, as we understand from the film, this prayer carries the essence of their personal life and the spiritual energy to go ahead in their lonely life. The words used in the prayer of the aged woman always contribute to the characterization of the heroine and fuels her in the family life. Though the English translation condensed to 'prayer' appears in just one subtitle and is retained for the *namaz* and the prayer afterwards, the target audience cannot grasp the actual words uttered in the prayer that reflects her intimacy to God and deep religious conviction. The film presents this prayer as the mantra of the couple's life and hence the nuances of prayer words were to be subtitled. As it is understood from the future scenes, this sincere prayer of Ayshu and innocent life of Abu are what make them heroes in their life and film. The complete omission of the subtitle, however, is not due to any technical constraints of time and space. The second sound track in the above table also is a prayer of Ayshu in favour of Abu when he goes to the police station for passport verification. Upset with the description of Ayshu about police enquiry, Abu adventurously sets out to his friend Govindan Master to follow it up. The prayer words reflect the mutual care and spiritual support the couple maintain throughout their life, but they are not subtitled. What is lost in skipping these prayers in the subtitle is a significant cause in the characterization of the heroine and an opportunity for the viewers to empathize with the couple and to identify themselves with Abu and Ayshu in the local ambience of the rustic language.

Subtitling the Songs

The title song of the film creates the cultural ambience for the film and develops the appropriate mood for the plot, but it is not subtitled. The song carries dominant metaphors like '*the dove settled on minaret*' and imparts a sense of sanctity both in the character of the protagonists and the pristine village life. It is a prologue to the film and has a bearing on the interpretation of the film. It may be that the subtitle of the song is omitted either because the credits overlap with the song or the subtitler is not given the lyrics for translation and hence considered less important. Though this song is not one of the most essential parts of the film, the lyrics and rhythm compose a beautiful world that touches the emotional string of the spectators' heart. Many lines of the lyrics become literally meaningful in later parts of the film and thus contribute to the reception of the film more comprehensively. The unsubtitled song definitely creates a cultural gap for the non-Malayali audience.

Malayalam lyrics	English Translation	Subtitle
<p>മക്കാ മദീനത്തിൽ എത്തുവാനല്ലാതെ തുച്ഛമീ ജന്മത്തിൻ അർത്ഥമെന്തോ? (<i>makkaa madeenthil ethuvaanallaathe Thuchamee janmathin arthamentho?</i>)</p>	<p>If one cannot land in Makka and Madeena, What is the meaning of this trivial life?</p>	<p>No subtitle</p>

This song is an integral element of the film. But it is left unsubtitled. The song, in terms of its lyrics, music and visuals, sums up the film’s story and plays a major role in heightening the mood of an emotional waiting for the long cherished wish for Hajj, both in the mind of the heroine and spectators. The couple holds the strong principle that apart from being financially qualified, one has to be destined and blessed by Almighty to reach the holy land and perform Hajj. When Abu is running from pillar to post to meet the financial expenses, Ayshu is contributing to the spiritual support through her persistent prayers. She is overwhelmed to see the singers and notice the coincidence of her own prayer and that of the singers in their song: *otthidatte... vidhiyaayidatte* (May it happen to you... May you be destined for it). These lines of the song are presented as a supernatural endorsement of their Hajj dream and the close-up of Ayshu’s face shows that the dream has come half true. The scene assumes greater significance in the development of the story exclusively through the well composed lyrics exactly relevant in the context and the absence of its translation in the subtitle not only renders it a piece of meaningless visual, but also denies the audience one of the basic ingredients of the film in its most emotional vein.

At the same time, the song hummed by the police officer is subtitled. In fact, the song is relevant only in portraying this minor character’s joyful mood reflecting his money-motivated approach. Ironically speaking, his relatively less important couplets are subtitled when other elementary parts are completely omitted in the subtitle. The subtitler’s policy as to the selection and rejection of the parts of the film refers to the invisibility of the integral parts bound in source language and culture.

Another unsubtitled part in the film is Ayshu’s recitation of *Muhyidheen Maala* (ode of praise to Sheik Muhyidheen Abdul Kadir Al- Jeelani) which is one of her routine religious practices. *Muhyidheen Mala* is a sacred text for the orthodox Sunni sect in Kerala and is recited regularly at home as a religious practice and as a cultural item in other congregations. It is a highly venerated text among Sunnis and it is believed to cure serious diseases, make women’s delivery easy and to fulfill one’s strong wishes, if recited with devotion. It is evident in the film that Ayshu and Abu belong to the traditional Sunni sect and reciting *mala* is a vital means of spiritual support in the miseries of their life and in fulfilling their dream of Hajj. The scene in which

she recites shows the interior room of her small house, in the dim light, contributing to the sacred ambience and slowly shifts to Abu looking at the photograph of Sathar, their only one but lost son. These emotionally packed scenes underline the couple's strong devotion to *maala* and are therefore an indispensable part in the translation. The recitation becomes insignificant without subtitles and an essential element in the film is ultimately lost. As *mala* is an Arabi-malayalam text, a faithful subtitling of all the lines in the limited time is a technical challenge. Still, it could have been compensated by an addition like 'reciting *Muhyidheen Maala*' just like reading of Ramayana at Govindan Master's house is subtitled, though highly condensed, as 'Hindu chant'. Complete omission of subtitles in such crucial parts of the film poses a major threat in terms of its cultural transfer. If the English subtitles, which are usually taken as the template for translation into other languages, are missing they will not be translated to any other language further and, in the course of several interlingual translations, will eventually disappear from the film itself. The consequence will be a translation devoid of such culture specific narratives.

Conclusion

Translation of cultural references and extra linguistic features of a text always question the faithfulness in any mode of translation especially in subtitles which are a vulnerable kind of text and appears in a condensed and fragmented form. The drainage of meaning of such semantically loaded parts in the dialogues of a film heavily affects its reception as a cultural artifact to the target language audience. Subtitles as a co-text in the film can only suggest the meaning of linguistic elements as they are metonymic manifestation of a larger complex text. Hence the reception of any such film through subtitles provides an incomplete reading in its wider socio-cultural-linguistic context.

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