

PRACTICAL APPROACHES TO ENGLISH/ARABIC AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION¹

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ABSTRACT: *This article aims to establish the factors that the translator needs to be aware of in audiovisual translation (AVT) and to show when, how and in what context to mediate in this domain. The article is divided into two parts: The first part discusses what AVT is and shows the fundamental difference between two of its main components: voice-overs and subtitles along with similar aspects particularly in voice-over target text to those in simultaneous interpreting. This difference is either overlooked or misunderstood by theorists in the audiovisual field. The second part of the article shows what the translator might do when presented with audiovisual source text (ST) material that has some factual or logical errors which would inevitably reflect badly on the producer/translator of the target text (TT), and who might be blamed for such obvious errors by the target audience, even though it is not a fault of his/hers but rather a flaw of the ST. Finally, it must be noted here that this article is written from the point of view of an academic as well as a practitioner in the field for almost two decades.*

KEYWORDS: Arabic Audiovisual Translation, Voice-over, Mediation, Techniques of AVT.

Audiovisual Translation (AVT) and its restrictions

AVT is a translation that takes into account various restrictions, as though the translator does not have enough problems to overcome when translating from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL). It is commonly known that translation requires from the translator linguistic and cognitive skills – in that the translator needs to analyze the ST linguistically before attempting to translate, and also cognitively in that the translator should have the processing capacity to comprehend the ST and produce the target text (TT), by mastering two languages at least, and not just as a lay translator as in the case of bilingual children who attempt to translate for their families, but rather be a professional translator who mediates only when the ST signals a lack of understanding, as it were, in the TT. This technique of mediation at times used in memes of simultaneous interpreting (see Franz Pöchhacker, 2004: 59). The audiovisual translator needs to be bilingual, native or near-native in both the SL and the TL more or less like the interpreter. Now the audiovisual translator should also have some technical skills to operate certain subtitling software programmes such as Wincaps, Win2020, Swift and Spot. Also it is advisable that the translator knows something about how to record or voice over a script. This technique helps in the timing of the TT to match the audiovisual material. So the task of the audiovisual translator becomes even more demanding, in that the

¹ Part of this paper is presented in the Bologna Conference in October 2010.

text produced needs to meet the minimum requirements – to be easily subtitled and/or voiced-over and dubbed. This is the hardest job of them all, as dubbing may require at times lip-synching. This task requires choosing as much as possible the target words that are closer to the source words that match the movement of the lips in the TT when reading such words – at times lip-reading the ST. There is, of course, the element of timing the TT that is essential in the TT, whether the latter is to be used as a subtitling file which requires time-cueing or as an audio file to be recorded orally in the booth. In the latter scenario the translator has the extra job of timing the TT using a stopwatch and making sure that each paragraph or sentence in the TT, alongside its short and long pauses, matches the video or the audiovisual material. These pauses are also a strategy similar to that in simultaneous interpreting (See Pöchhacker, 2004: 116) and are in fact a breather to both the audiovisual translator and the simultaneous interpreter. There is another strategy that needs to be adopted in AVT which is similar to the ‘chunking’ strategy in simultaneous interpreting. (Pöchhacker, 2004: 117) Here are few examples with the short and long pauses that the voice-over translator needs to be aware of (the sign / for a short pause after a verbal or nominal phrase, and the // sign for a long pause either at the end of a clause or sentence), as well as word emphasis in order to convey across the same message:

- This kid should enjoy life,/ **the stones** thrown at him/ as well as **the roses**.///
لا بد أن يستمتع هذا الطفل بالحياة بخلوها ومرها.
*This child should enjoy life, with all its **sweetness** and **bitterness**.* [back translation]
- The name of the game is / to live our lives as full as we can.///
المهم أن نستمتع بحياتنا إلى أبعد حد.
*The important thing is to enjoy our lives to the **fullest**.* [back translation]
- He has got a **five o'clock shadow**, /I don't think he **can fit in**.///
طالت لحيته، ولا أظنه مناسباً للدور.
*His beard has **grown**, I don't think he **can fit the role**.* [back translation]
- The train missed me **by inches**, /I thought **my number was up**.///
بقيت سنتمترات والقطار يدهسني، ظننت ورقتي سقطت".
***Few centimetres** left/ before the train were to **hit me**,/ I thought **my leave has fallen**./*
[back translation]
- My sat-nav **almost** killed me.///
كاد جهاز التوجيه بالساتل يقتلني.
*The sat-nav **almost** killed me.* [back translation]
- A driver **cheated** death.
نجا سائق من الموت بأعجوبة.
*A driver was **miraculously** saved from death.* [back translation]
- (Tony) Blair (ex-prime minister of Britain) saying of his **ten years** in power: / **Hand on heart**, / I did what I thought was **right**.///
علق (توني) بلير على العشر سنوات في السلطة بقوله: أقسم أنني فعلت ما ظننته الصواب.
*(Tony) Blair commented on his **ten years** in power saying:/ **I swear**/ I did what I thought was **right**./* [back translation]

These examples show which words to emphasize in your dubbed TT, they also show where the pauses need to be in order to break the subtitling lines. The line-breaks need to be carefully done. It is commonly known that each subtitling page takes usually two lines, lines that could stand on their own, and need not to be linked to the following subtitling page, with words like

‘which’ or ‘who’ in a subordinate clause, as the viewer could not go back to the previous subtitling page to see what is being said, and then link the two pages together, unless he/she is watching a DVD, then he/she can pause the DVD and read them in his/her own time.

Also there are other elements, mainly in dubbing, that the audiovisual translator needs to be aware of, and they include *script-changing* and *breath control* when the voice-over artist reads the TL scripts, as the choice of phraseology to facilitate the easy reading of the translated script in the studio is vital.² Other main factors are *command of language*, *choice of words*, *timing*, *emphasis*, *audience*, *tempo*, *fluency*, *tongue twisters* and *intonation* in addition to *types of pauses* in the script. In order to help with voice-over delivery the translator needs to be confident also to convey the source script’s *various dispositions* (like dramatic, funny, happy or sad, worried or excited) by using certain expressions and vocabulary that portray these moods in audiovisual environment.³ These moods can be seen and felt by the translator when watching the audiovisual material, which helps in comprehending the extra-linguistic elements displayed audio-visually and seen in the character’s facial expression and attitude as well as other contextual features that help understand the ST fully. Also the emphasis of certain words in the sentence and breaking up the sentence into units as in the case of subtitling as seen earlier in the above examples, are all important elements that the translator needs to take care of.

Common modes in AVT (audio/audio, audio/written)

Another significant element that needs to be taken into account is the common variations or various forms in the audiovisual domain. The **first** variation is when translating from *audio to audio*. This is when the client provides the audiovisual translator with an audio file in the SL and expects the product to be an audio file in the TL. Here the task of the audiovisual translator is particularly hard, as the translator has the extra task of carefully listening to the SL audio, (which is sometimes of poor quality) and then translating immediately into the TL as the written transcript or ST is not provided here. As the final product is printed but rather recorded. The translator needs to produce a TT that is recordable – i.e. producing a target audio file, as in the case of translating a source voice-over/dubbing material in its audio form into a target script that is appropriate for recording in a booth. The **second** variation, following the *audio-to-audio* variation is the visual-to-visual one. This variant form is when the translator is presented with a written source text (a subtitled file) which is usually a transcript, and he/she is asked to produce a written TT, either in the form of a subtitled file or as captions or still shots that appear on screen. Here the client provides a transcript along with its relevant video or DVD and expects to get back a subtitled file in the TL.⁴ That is when there are SL subtitles or captions like road signs and names of shops appearing on the screen and need to be translated in the TT in such a way that they will fit on the screen, and be *short* and *meaningful*. Here the number of TL characters (like letters, spaces and punctuations) on the television screen needs to be counted in order to fit. The yardstick currently used by various subtitling companies in the UK with regard to European languages is about 38 to 39 characters per line of a subtitle (this is confirmed by Jorge Diaz-Cintas who has indicated in Durham Conference papers presented in

² It is advisable to rehearse reading the voice-over/sound-bite translations before handing them over to the client.

³ Daniel Pageon, *The World Of the Voice-Over* (London: Actors World Production, 2007). This book is a good guide as to how one can train one’s voice.

⁴ For a brief discussion on types of subtitles, see Ahmad Khuddro, “Subtitling in Arabic”, *Turjuman*, vol.9, April 2000, pp.31-37. For a practical approach to Arabic translation for television, see A.Khuddro, “Media Translation, particularly for Television”, (in Arabic) *Turjuman*, vol.6, October 1997, pp. 115-130.

September 2007 in the beautiful historical city of Durham) whilst it is 42 characters per line with regard to Arabic and Hebrew.

The **third** variation in audio-visual environment is either an *audio-to-visual* or a *visual-to-audio* form. That is either the text is verbal and need to be produced in the TT in the written form as in translating an audio in the SL into a subtitled file in the TL, or it is the other way round, a subtitled file that needs to be produced as an audio TT file, a file to be recorded, i.e. a dubbed script in the TL.

Audiovisual theorists' misconception of voice-overs and sound-bites

In fact there is another type of scripting in the audiovisual field, in addition to voice-overs or narration, it is 'sound-bites'. It is mainly the speech of a foreign speaker, a talking head, while he/she is in vision or even off-camera. This material needs to be voiced-over differently. Here the original audio source of this speaker is heard at the beginning and end of his/her talk, but most of the talk is dimmed. Now here is some misunderstanding by theorists in AVT. They do not differentiate between the two: voice-overs and sound-bites.

Eithne O'Connell says, 'voice-over is often used to translate monologues or interviews.'⁵ But that is not exactly true. In interviews the talking head or actor is mostly in vision and therefore the target script would be done as 'sound-bites', where certain acting is required when doing the recording, hence the title voice-over artist. Here is a good example that illustrates what a sound-bite is. The interviewee says, 'He was born in USA but lived all his life in Canada, he studied American literature and graduated from university in 1986 and the rest is history.' Here the audience or viewer would hear the first four or five words of the ST 'He was born in USA' and then the source audio is dimmed to allow for the target audio (or the voice of the sound-bite artist) to be heard, emphasizing certain words and implicitly inserting the short and long pauses where necessary. Also the last few words of the ST 'and the rest is history' need to be heard by the target audience. That means the target audio would finish well before the source audio:

He was born in USA/ [but lived all his life in Canada, // he studied American literature/ and graduated from university in 1986 //] and the rest is history //.

This technique as mentioned earlier is to give *credibility* to this AVT. So voice-over is an audio blanket that covers fully any original audio/audiovisual material, but when certain talking heads or actors appear on screen their dialogue would become a sound-bite and not all the source audio is covered. Certainly, this is not what O'Connell loosely called 'free commentary'.⁶

To support Eithne O'Connell's argument, she has quoted Luyken that 'revoicing is the super-ordinate term used to describe the various means of rendering a translated voice track, namely lip-synch dubbing, voice-over, narration and free commentary, while subtitling and surtitling (and intertitling as well) describe the main means used to render the voice track in written form.'⁷ Here the concept of voice-over, narration and free commentary gets more confusing. O'Connell adds, 'It is usual for voice-over to retain the original voice, allowing viewer a few

⁵ Eithne O'Connell, 'Screen Translation' *A Companion to Translation Studies*, ed. Piotr Kuhiwczak and Karin Littau, (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd, 2007), 120-33.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 123.

seconds at the beginning to record it before the sound level is reduced so that the original merely provides a backdrop to the translated version.⁸ Inadvertently, O'Connell is referring here to 'sound-bites' and not to 'voice-overs' as voice-overs are the narration and commentary. Narration is 'basically an extended voice-over'.⁹ Luyken observes that the only difference between a voice-over and narration is likely to be linguistic: the original narrative will probably have been prepared in advance and be more formal in tone and grammatical structure than the typical conversational language of the voice-over.

Here Luyken is certainly talking about what is called 'sound-bite' in television industry and not 'voice-over or narration,' as sound-bites have that 'conversational' element, as opposed to voice-over, due to the fact that almost all the time the actor appears on screen and needs his/her dialogue to be re-voiced using the TT. With the voice-over/narration, the standard process is to remove the original audio commentary completely¹⁰ and replace it with the TL and no speaker or actor is heard.

O'Connell points out, following De Linde and Kay,¹¹ that the narrated message may be summarized, whereas the voice-over message tends to be of a similar duration to the original. Again the same error is repeated by these theorists in AVT. Here the audiovisual terms – narration and voice-over – are used rather inaccurately and even confusing to say the least. What Luyken thinks is a voice-over, is actually called in television 'sound-bite', when one hears few words at the beginning and end of the audiovisual piece; whereas narration is synonymous with re-voicing a commentary as in a documentary, here the original audiovisual piece is not heard at all.

Factors in audiovisual translation (AVT)

Now having established what AVT is with all its variations, it is time to know the factors that shackle the mind of the translator in this domain. First and foremost, the translator needs to be aware of the audiovisual environment and have some knowledge about it. It is commonly known that this field is still relatively young, due to the fact that its production relies heavily on technology; and its technology has only been introduced about a century ago with the introduction of silent movies. A limited amount of research is done in the field of AVT, particularly in the Arab world. (see Muhammad Y. Gamal, May 2008; Tammam Al-Kadi, September 2007) The cinema industry itself was not introduced to the Arab world till mid-forties of the last century and the BBC television was established in mid-thirties of the last century as well; but television reached the Arab world only in late sixties. The subtitling industry – particularly in the Arab world – was not established till late sixties. Incidentally, I remember a colleague in Tangiers conference on Globalisation and Translation in 1996 who gave me an article written in 1971-72 by a Swedish subtitler, (unfortunately, I lost that published article) which guided me then as a new practitioner in the field. It is worth noting that at that time (1996) there were only a handful of Arabic satellite channels, Middle

⁸ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁹ *Ibid.*, cited Luyken on 124.

¹⁰ However, I have noticed one Polish satellite channel using often a male voice-over artist which is apparently very popular there, according to two Polish colleagues I met at the Bologna conference in October 2010 who confirmed that fact. Now the voice-over covers both the narration and sound-bites, with the original audio though dimmed but still heard throughout the audiovisual material. When, conventionally speaking, the original or SL audio needs to be dimmed completely for the voice-over and slightly so for the sound-bite. Now the reason for using one male voice-over for all the characters is obvious, to save money.

¹¹ E. O'Connell, *Op cit.*

Broadcasting Centre (MBC) being the first pan-Arab satellite channel which was established in 1991 (and I was the first subtitler working there). But now these Arabic-speaking channels are in hundreds transmitted in the Arab world – maybe about 600 Arabic-speaking channels. But one can still say that captions which were used in silent movies like Charlie Chaplin's movies can be considered subtitles or rather inter-titles.¹²

The *reading speed* is another factor and is usually set on the subtitling softwares as 140 words per minutes for children audiovisual material and 180 words per minute for adults. There is still a window for research on the *eye movement* of the target viewer – particularly the Arab viewer, as there is a high percentage of illiteracy among Arab audience – mainly female viewers. This lack of research is really vital in subtitling.

One of the daunting tasks the audiovisual translator encounters is handling a television dubbing or voice-over script which is conventionally divided into three sections: One for time-codes, the second is for visual description (describing what happens on the screen exactly) and the third for transcription which is the ST. Though it is daunting, it still has its own benefit in that it provides the translator with an extra-lingual element in the form of signs, body language and action on the screen. This visual element helps eliminate certain ambiguities that may arise in other forms of translation apart from interpreting, ambiguities relating to anaphoric (backward) and cataphoric (forward) references and co-references such as 'it', 'this', 'that', 'these' and 'those'; and these are called Pro-forms in text linguistics, this is clear in de Beaugrande's Cohesion in his *Introduction to Text Linguistics* (1981). Mona Baker refers to these ambiguities in her discussion of the textual equivalence and cohesion specifically relating to reference. (Mona Baker, 1992: 181-86) The use of 'this' and 'it' is often problematic, particularly more so in the following excellent example about a speech by the pop singer Michael Jackson earlier in 2009, 'This is it. When I say this is it, I really mean this is it.'¹³ On 4 March 2009, Michael Jackson announced in a press conference that he would play then ten gigs entitled "This Is It" at the London O2 Arena in July 2009 and hinted he would retire from performing.

For such problematic words like "this" and "it" here, one may think of using Nida's 'dynamic equivalence' using a word that clarifies any ambiguity like "the concert" or "the gig" to make the translation cross-cultural and more of what Newmark calls *communicative* than *semantic* equivalence. These ambiguous words need certain mediation from the audiovisual translator, in an attempt to convey the message across. At times the actor in a film may say the word 'this' to mean 'this car' or 'this lighter', for instance; here the subtitler needs to rely on clarity and not compactness, in order to avoid any confusion or ambiguity.

Problematic words like 'this' and pronouns such as 'you', 'it' and 'they' could refer to a male or female animate or inanimate in the TT, in Arabic, or even be neutral as in the case of the German language. This distinction may not be found in the SL, in English. There is also the diversity of grammatical categories in languages; Mona Baker talks about categories of number, person and gender in the grammatical equivalence. (Mona Baker, 1992: 85-92) Here the idea is that whether the 'you' is referring to duality or plurality or whether it is gender related. In Arabic there is a clear distinction between the male 'you' and the female 'you'. The audiovisual material – a DVD or video - is helpful in that the translator has the privilege of

¹² See Eithne O'Connell's "Screen Translation", *A Companion to Translation Studies*, ed. Piotr Kuhiwczak and Karin Littau, (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd, 2007), pp. 121-22.

¹³ Michael Jackson's TV interview on Sky and other satellite television stations, 4 March 2009.

seeing it and deciding which ‘you’ the ST is referring to - the universal ‘you’, the courteous you (that is, the second person pronoun in plural), particularly when addressing a dignitary like a prince or a VIP as the case in French – *tu* and *vous*.

Another major factor more related to AVT than to mediation is timing the TT which is mentioned earlier here. Based on my experience as a practitioner for about two decades, a standard duration of a subtitle is about 3-5 seconds but could be up 7 seconds; whereas reading one line of TT (about 12 words) for a voice-over recording would take roughly 5 seconds. This means that the translator has the job of cutting down all the unnecessary words like ‘also’, ‘and’ and ‘very’ so that the TT fits the video perfectly just as the ST has done. This means for the audiovisual translator an extra task of counting the actual target words to see if they can fit on the screen – when doing subtitling – or of reading the whole target voice-over text within the duration of the video to see if the text produced is readable within its real-time duration on the audiovisual material. So the audiovisual translator needs to have a stopwatch after he/she finishes their first draft of the translation in order to make sure that the TT does fit beautifully. Having a beautifully translated script may not necessarily mean that the TT is *recordable* as a target voice-over text or *subtitle-able* – due to having perhaps too many characters in one line in a subtitle that could go outside the safety area on the television screen.

Another element the translator needs to take into account when dealing with audiovisual characters, particularly in voice-over translation, is the pronunciation of the names of actual people and places in feature films. Such pronunciation is essential for voice-over translation as this translation is eventually to be read and not to be printed on screen as in the case of subtitling, and therefore they become problematic as to how to say them, when these names are in a third language if we are to consider the SL as the first and the target one as the second. That is to have a foreign name in the ST, which needs to be transferred to the TT. For instance, the first name of the prime minister of Turkey is spelt ‘Recep’ but reads in Turkish and Arabic as ‘Radjab’. The same can be said about names of countries or places like Germany or Almania, Poland or Polonia, not to confuse that with the Italian city of Bologna as it reads ‘Bolonia’.¹⁴ Unlike literary written translation where footnotes can be used in AVT whether voice-overs or subtitles, there is no such luxury and the translator here should think of how to compensate that. Here is a good example of how to overcome the lack of footnotes in a media script in general. Here the number of SL words (the yardstick the subtitler and dubbing translator will use) and that of the TL words are vital, as another golden rule in AVT is to focus on brevity,¹⁵

In New Zealand, contestants rushed to be the fastest to peel and eat three kiwis - fruits, that is.¹ (18 ST words)

تبارى النيوزيلنديون، الكيوي، على السرعة في تقشير وأكل ثلاثة كيوي – الفاكهة طبعاً! (13 TT words)

New Zealanders, the kiwis, competed/ how fast the can peel and eat three kiwis / – fruits of course.// [back translation]

Differentiation between voice-overs and soundbites in translation:

A final significant factor for the audiovisual translator to be aware of is to differentiate between ‘voice-overs’ or ‘narration’ and ‘sound-bites’ in audiovisual environment; the former is a

¹⁴ Also there is no difference in Arabic between the letters p and b, as the letter p is non-existent.

¹⁵ For further discussion, see Ahmad Khuddro, “The Subtitling Triangle: Subtitling for Television, Practice and Technique”, *Translating Regionalised Voices in Audiovisuals*, Federico M. Federici ed. (Rome, 2009).

running commentary with the source audio unheard by the target audience, whereas the latter the initial segment of the person's speech and the last one are partially heard as demonstrated in the example above about being born in USA and lived in Canada. But first it is vital to know the definition of voice-over. According to Webster's Dictionary, a voice-over is 'the voice commenting or narrating off camera, as for a television commercial.' James Alburger in *The Art of Voice Acting* defines voice-over as "any recording or performance of one or more *unseen* voices for the purpose of communicating a message [my emphasis]."¹⁶ The main union and guild covering voice-over artists, AFTRA, 'defines a voice-over performer as someone who reads copy and is not seen on-camera.'¹⁷

Even though the television script being conventionally divided into these three parts (timecodes, visual and audio sections – the last of which is where the ST is) and even though it is helpful in providing extra-lingual information that facilitates the translator's comprehension of the ST, this type of script still restricts the translator in its time-codes - its in-cues where the TT starts to appear on screen and its out-cues where the TT disappears from the screen (as they are called in television and film industry). Here time-codes constitute a real worry for the audiovisual translator – as though the translator does not have enough problems to worry about during the process of translation – such as 'decoding' that is 'de-verbalising' the verbal/written ST, and then 're-encoding', that is 're-verbalising',¹⁸ as the interpreter does that either verbally when voicing the target product or in written form as in subtitling. However, audio-visually and technically speaking of course, not to confuse that with the linguistic process of translation, and unlike other forms of translation, time-codes are omnipresent and the same can be said about the spatial factor – i.e. the limited space on the television screen which restricts the amount of TL characters the translator can use, as indicated earlier when speaking about the variations of AVT. So editing down the TT is a must, more so with voice-overs and sound-bites - the latter being the transcript of a talking head or presenter appearing on screen as in tv interviews – than with subtitling. This is due to the fact that recording the target voice-over script would take longer to do on the real-time video – up to 4/6 ratio of English to Arabic and perhaps more so in other Asian languages like Chinese. The golden rule in AVT is 'less is better' or 'the lesser, the better' in the target product. This rule is applicable more so in voice-over scripts than in subtitles. This main purpose is to give the voice-over artist more time to record the TT – the reason being not only the complexity of the SL but the complexity of the source culture which needs to be transferred into the target culture – especially when 'decoding' the verbal or written text from an Asian culture and then 're-encoding' it in a European one or 'decoding' a European one and then 're-encoding' it in a Middle Eastern. (Pöchhacker, 2004: 97-98) However, one might say that this process is true of any written form of translation. That is quite true, but unlike other forms, AVT requires in a way similar skills to those in interpreting – skills such as being aware of what is called 'time-lag' (Pöchhacker: 2004, 117), and that is a delay of three to four words before recording the TT over the source audiovisual text, and also to make sure to finish recording the TT before the ST is finished audio-visually. The audiovisual translator needs to pay attention to the audio

¹⁶ See James Alburger in http://www.voiceacting.com/Resources_Links/Articles_NAV/0011/0012/0013/0014/0014.html.

¹⁷ AFTRA is an acronym which stands for the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. Its official website is www.aftra.com. See also the definition in <http://www.actorschecklist.com/resources/voice.html>.

¹⁸ Here the terms in voice-overing or dubbing 'decoding' which means 'de-verbalising', and 're-encoding' which means 're-verbalising' the TT, are similar to 'trans-coding' in simultaneous interpreting. See these terms used in Danica Seleskovitch's and Kirchhoff's models, discussed in Pöchhacker's, 97-98.

ST and to the audio TT, the same way as in simultaneous interpreting. Here is an example where the words heard by the target audience are italicised,

He was born in USA/ [but lived all his life in Canada, // he studied American literature/ and graduated from university in 1986 //] and the rest is history //.

The technique of time-lagging is used to give *credibility* to the TT as the audience would hear first a couple of words of the talking head before they hear the translated version and they also need to hear the last couple of words of the ST for the same reason. This technique is characterised by long and short pauses in the speech, as mentioned earlier here. Admittedly this technique is extremely useful to adopt when proofreading the AVT, as it would indicate whether the TT is audio-visually user-friendly. These pauses and synchrony are in a way similar to those in simultaneous interpreting, (see Pöchhacker: 2004, 116-17) for these pauses are a good breather for the simultaneous interpreter and can be so for the audiovisual translator. Now having established what the nature of restraints and factors in AVT is that the audiovisual translator faces, it is time to see the issues encountered when the content of AV texts has *marginal factual* errors or ethically unsound mistakes – unless these errors are clearly intentional, in this case no mediation is required, here it must be stressed that it is not intervention but mediation only for the purpose of *clarity*.

Mediation in audiovisual translation (AVT)

Mediation can be applied to the audiovisual TT – in the form of an addition or omission on a limited scale as well with Nida's 'dynamic equivalence' in mind – that is to give the same impact on the target audience as that of the ST. Dynamic equivalence is derived from Nida's 'principle of equivalent effect' and deals mainly with the relationship between target reader and message, in that they both 'should be substantially the same as that which existed between the original receptors and the message.' (Nida, 1964a: 159) Here I also agree with Jeremy Munday about how similar Newmark's 'communicative' equivalence to Nida's dynamic and Koller's 'pragmatic' equivalence, which is also concerned with the receiver of the TT and message. (Munday, 2001:47) There is also the concept of either being closer to the source text-producer or target text-receiver. Domestication is used to give the target audience the same intended message, though domestication is not favoured by Lawrence Venuti and before him the German theologian and philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher. In an 1813 lecture on the different methods of translation, Schleiermacher argued that "there are only two. Either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him." (Lefevere 1977: 74) Schleiermacher analyzes two methods of translation, either bringing the text closer to the producer/author or bringing it closer to the receiver/viewer to understand the message fully. This concept is later developed by Lawrence Venuti in his discussion of 'domestication' and 'foreignising'. Now my proposed rule is that if the translation (TT) is *ambiguous* in the eyes of the viewer/receiver, then the translator has failed miserably in conveying the message to his/her audience, because texts can only be activated when received and understood and not when dealt with as text *per se*, particularly in audiovisual environment. It is not enough to foreignise the TT on the expense of 'truthfulness' to the text, and not caring if the viewer understood what is being said or recorded.

So should the translator be closer to the text-producer or the text-receiver, to avoid producing an ambiguous TT? A controversial and contentious example here is, the Israeli political acronym IDF, meaning the Israeli Defence Forces. Such a term is not commonly used in the

Arab world, therefore Newmark's 'communicative' equivalence or Nida's 'dynamic' one is used, i.e. "the Israeli army" as this equivalence is more common and known in the TT, thus bring the ST closer to the text-receiver. However, it is clear that there is a hidden political agenda or certain ideology behind the ST which the Arabic-speaking world – mainly the Palestinians being themselves the victim as their territories were taken from them by force - is quick to condemn as the Arab community see that force to be 'offensive' rather than 'defensive' in its mentality and action. No Arabic television would broadcast this item of news saying the IDF bombarded Gaza, but rather the Israeli Army did that. Now here the dilemma arises from the fact the target audience can at any moment in time spot-check the subtitles against the original video and that the translator needs to prove constantly his/her neutrality on the spot. It is bad enough to be accused of treason (the famously quoted charge against the translator, *Traduttore, traditore*), because of translation loss and the translator's intention to avoid ambiguity in the TT, unless ambiguity is intentional by the text-producer. The aim of the translator is constantly to be truthful and produce a neutral TT without being blamed for something that may go against one's own belief – accepting the ST ideology blindly and trying not 'to be a nanny'. This is dissimilar to Newmark's concept of being a nanny and intervening extra-textually or intra-textually to correct deficiencies. (Peter Newmark, 1997) So the equivalence is in this instance 'the Israeli army' or 'the Israeli forces', since these two are the most common terms in the TL and are used with no hidden agenda. This could be considered a kind of domestication, but it is necessary to help the target reader understand the meaning without being 'offended' – it would be an acceptability issue as text linguistics calls it. But how would the translator know what is more common as a term for *clarity*, we now have the advance of technology which can check for us the concordance of such words in the ST and in the TT, and this is via a quick search on the worldwide web.

Another controversial element that requires mediation is related to certain geographical locations in the ST like 'the Persian Gulf' or rather 'the Arabian Gulf'. Now the former name is well-known in European textbooks – English ones - but the latter, 'the Arabian Gulf', is only known in the Arab world. So the target audience would be confused if the translator uses Nida's 'formal equivalence' – that is leaning more towards 'the message itself, in both form and content' and 'as closely as possible [to] the different elements in the SL'. (Nida, 1964a:159) Here the target audience – Arabic-speaking one – would not know where the Persian gulf is, so domestication or mediation here is rather necessary, not least that the target audience are listening or watching the original and are constantly comparing between the ST and TT – particularly in subtitling.

Cultural sensitive issues in AVT

In 2003 Martin Weston maintains that 'Peter Newmark is... a step away from censorship, and that notoriously serves to *conceal* truth.'¹⁹ Point taken, it is true that Newmark's model or strategy involves somehow the need for the translator to be a chaperon, when there is no need for that. The audiovisual translator is just to reveal the truth and not to conceal it, as per the Persian Gulf example where the name is used only to clarify to the target audience, the place that is being referred to, and carries no political agenda. Ironically only recently the Arab Gulf

¹⁹ Weston, *op.cit.*

states and Iran have started a dispute in the media, mainly Arabic newspapers,²⁰ about this particular name for the Gulf – Arabian or Persian one. (see Al-Jazeera Blog)

In fact the two controversial terms - the ‘Persian Gulf’ and ‘Arabian Gulf’ – have become a highly sensitive issue in the Gulf region but has even created certain tension at one time between the two sides of the Gulf waters. Here is an example written by the Associated Press writer Robert H. Reid on 3rd October 2008,

A relatively stable Iraq would have all the cards necessary to emerge as a major player in the Persian Gulf, where Saudi Arabia and Iran are competing for leadership.

فالعراق المستقر نسبياً ستكون لديه جميع الأوراق الضرورية للظهور كلاعب رئيسي في الخليج العربي حيث...

A relatively stable Iraq would have all the necessary cards to emerge as a major player in the Arabian Gulf.... [back translation]

Here the phrase ‘Persian Gulf’ is culturally unacceptable in the Arab world – an acceptability issue by the text-receiver/viewer - not as an expression but it is well known in the Arab world as ‘Arabian Gulf’, and if the translator says in the TL ‘Persian Gulf’ then no Arabic-speaking person there would understand where that location is; unless the discussion in the SL is relating to the topic of naming that gulf, then the translator needs not to mediate as here it is intentional by the audiovisual text-producer, and therefore the translator is to translate truthfully as the ST shows. Ideally, it is best to show that both the Persian and Arabian Gulf are the same place in the TT (in Arabic), but there is no space on the screen or time to explain that in a footnote the way the translator do in written translation, as AVT does not have that luxury.

Another interesting example of a witty diplomatic talk is what Sir Richard Dalton, a former British ambassador to Tehran, did when he said about the Secretary of State Mrs. Hilary Clinton: ‘she’s implying that, if Iran became a nuclear weapon state, then the US would develop their existing defence commitments and that the US would contemplate nuclear deterrence to protect Persian Gulf states.’²¹ Of course what is meant here is to protect the Arab Gulf states against the nuclear threat from Iran, an obvious mistake to make but it has a grave impact on meaning, possibly unintentional. But here mediation is required, as the ST says “Persian”, and it was an obvious error by the speaker in this last example.

Here is another example of mediation, though the example here is mentioned in a newspaper and not in an audiovisual environment, yet still applicable to audiovisual, ‘Iran now produces brilliant clerics who argue in favor [*sic*] of the separation of church and state as a means of saving the faith from corrupting power...’.²² Here it is clear that the ST writer may have perhaps inadvertently used the word ‘church’ intentionally. It is mentioned twice in his article. When we know that the ‘church’ has no say in Iran’s political affairs, it is understood to mean ‘religion’ and not the ‘mosque’ as the latter is hardly used in the same sense in the TL (Arabic) as the word ‘religion’.

²⁰ <http://blogs.aljazeera.net/middle-east/2010/12/12/persian-gulf-or-arabian-gulf>

²¹ ‘US Ready to Upgrade Defences of Gulf Allies If Iran Builds Nuclear Arms,’ *Guardian*, 22 July 2009.

²² Reuel Marc Gerecht, ‘The Koran and the Ballot Box’, *Herald Tribune* 22 June 2009, 6.

The same scenario of finding a ‘communicative equivalence’ can be seen with the name Channel Tunnel and Le Manche Tunnel. It is the same location that one uses to cross from France to England or from England to France.

As we have seen earlier, Venuti and Schleiermacher who both believe that foreignizing is best in order to know about the foreign source culture, leaving all the ambiguities in the ST as they are in the TT to indicate that this is a foreign text. It is in fact foreignness in their view to the extent that it will possibly confuse the target audience who are exposed to a totally foreign culture. But this surely will backfire at the audiovisual translator when the TT is dubbed and no original audio is heard. Therefore the TT, due to its ambiguities, may even be refused by the target audience – thus, ignoring acceptability, one of the seven standards of textuality.²³ The translator therefore as Nida says about ‘dynamic equivalence’ needs to create the same impact on the target reader or receptor. Other examples for names of places that need to be domesticated and not foreignized are Jericho whose equivalence in Arabic Areeha, and Hebron whose equivalence is al-Khalil. Not only names of places but also names of people like the Arab scientist Avicenna (spelt in European language) but known in the Arab world and history as Ibn Sina. Another example of foreign geographical location is Gibraltar whose ‘dynamic’ equivalence is Jabal Tariq, but the Arabic term has been developed in English to facilitate its pronunciation by a European; would the translator say Saville or Ishbiliya (the Arabic name), Malga or Malaqa.

So ‘foreignizing’ here could be problematic to the target audience’s untrained eyes as some of them might not be bilingual and cannot spot what they might consider discrepancies, but when the target audience have trained eyes then they would straightaway blame the subtitler for a seemingly incorrect translation; as the subtitler is constantly exposed to such censure for using a ‘communicative’ or ‘dynamic’ equivalence, when the target reader/viewer mistakenly assumes that that equivalence is incorrect. The target audience would immediately describe that particular target product cruelly and derogatorily as ‘mere translation’.

Another element of ‘domestication’ that is acceptable as one’s target audience might not grasp the concept and message, is to convert imperial measurements to metric ones for the target audience (Arab audience). This mediation or this ‘domestication’ is just to give the audience an idea of the distance covered or the height of a building or bridge for example. Another example of this type of mediation which can be considered ‘domestication’, is widely used in subtitles and voice-over scripting, as in the case of children programmes, when the client or service user asks to domesticate or localise names of characters. Few voice-over companies go as far as changing the names of famous characters in a children programme like *In the Night Garden*.²⁴ Here names like Igglepiggle and Upsy Daisy are converted in Arabic to Jo-Jo and Rihana respectively (the latter name being a direct translation of a sweet-smell daisy). These voice-over companies are successful in doing so, understandably because such new ‘domesticated’ names of cartoon characters are more fun in the TL for the children of the target culture. The ‘foreignizing’ technique – transliterating names – here would have been less popular to the target children – i.e. keeping the SL names of characters as they are in the original. This can be considered ‘supervised’ mediation. This technique of keeping the names

²³ The other standards are Cohesion, Coherence, Intentionality, Informativity, Situationality, intertextuality; see de Beaugrande’s *Introduction to Text Linguistics*.

²⁴ This children television programme is broadcasted on Al-Jazeera Children Satellite Channel in Arabic and on CBeebies Channel on Sky Network in English.

as the ST would have made such names extremely difficult for the TL children to pronounce. However, transliterating SL names is the norm in the TL.

Therefore, certain mediation is sometimes necessary in AVT. To quote Susan Bassnett, the translator like the travel writer operates in a hybrid space, space in-between cultures and between two languages; it is a “dangerous transgressive space” that is often referred to as ‘no-man’s land’;²⁵ and as this space is a minefield, i.e. full of pitfalls, and needs to be addressed very carefully. It must be noted here that it is more so particularly in AVT, due to the existence of body language and visual action as in the case of ‘sound-bites’ as actors or speakers are in vision, in addition to the audiovisual factors like the disposition or mood which needs to be reflected in the TT. This is highlighted when an ambiguous SL word is used like the word ‘this’, which could refer to endless objects; and it needs to be specific to the object in question, like a car or a lighter. This mediation is for clarity and not to be considered an intervention. Mediation is only to *clarify* what an otherwise be misinterpreted message by the target audience on certain occasions due to certain political or religious conflicts or social inappropriateness.²⁶

Mediation required

Martin Weston²⁷ disagrees with Peter Newmark that the translator’s duty is to ‘intervene’ extra-textually or intra-textually to correct (presumably in the translation) not only deficiencies in four areas (*prima facie* logical, factually accurate, ethically sound and elegantly written,) where they are likely ‘to provoke or mislead’ the reader but also breaches of political correctness and expressions that the translator considers ethically sound. But it must be noted that this rule is only agreeable *before* taking on the translation job. Obviously the translator should not be blamed or stigmatized by the target audience for translating something against his/her own fundamental belief. One can see what Newmark proposes about a factual error. The translator here will have either to take on the task or refuse it. A good example is when the producer of a documentary programme presented me in 1992 with a source script about 1956 aggression on Egypt after the nationalization of Suez Canal and the television programme was initially produced to be broadcasted on the Middle East broadcasting Centre (a pan-Arab Satellite television). The producer of the programme was adamant at the time that it was a bilateral aggression (British and French) and not a tri-aggression on Egypt. I therefore intervened before doing the translation and pointed out a historical factual error, but obviously if I did accept to do that job I should not have intervened in the text, as this touches upon the integrity of the source material. The translator is just to convey the message across truthfully and with integrity, otherwise the translator could reach uncharted territories, and be considered as bordering on misrepresentation, as Martin Weston calls it (see quotation below). So this above example is highly politicized and is pregnant with its hidden agenda. Venuti observes that

²⁵ Susan Bassnett, ‘Culture and Translation’, *A Companion to Translation Studies*, *op.cit.*, 22.

²⁶ Christina Schäffner, ‘Politics and Translation’, *A Companion to Translation Studies*, *op.cit.*, 134-47. For instance, Jamal Abdel Naser, a famous Egyptian leader, was considered by many Arabs as patriotic and national hero, but by some western countries saw him as ‘rebel’. If presented with an Arabic script as hero would the translator describe him as rebel, domesticating his description; this is rather unacceptable. (For further discussion about the style of Naser’s speeches, Shunnaq in 2000 noticed that ‘repetition’ and ‘emotiveness’ are of ‘paramount significance in translating Arabic political discourse’ into English, cited in *A Companion to Translation Studies*, *op.cit.*, 143).

²⁷ Martin Weston, ‘Meaning, Truth and Morality in Translation’, *Translation Today: Trends and Perspectives*, ed. Gunilla Anderman and Margaret Rogers (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd, 2003), 140-49.

‘Linguistics-oriented approaches... seem to block the ethical and political agenda’;²⁸ and Newmark notes that for political texts, ‘the translator’s neutrality is a myth’.²⁹

Here is another example of similar nature, heavily pregnant with political implications, the term “Israeli Defence Force” (**IDF**), which is discussed above where the SL term serves a political agenda but much less known a term in the TL (Arabic) and often used in the TL as ‘Israeli Army’, which is the ‘domestic norm’.³⁰ A further proof to support domestication here is the interpretation of Resolution 242 which does not mention the word ‘defence’. Resolution 242 of the UN Security Council, adopted in 1967, is a case in point. The English version of the text speaks of ‘withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict’, whereas the other language versions have more specific references to territories, e.g. the French text says ‘*retrait des forces armées israéliennes des territoires occupés lors du récent conflit*’.³¹

Admittedly, the choice of words used in the TL is highly critical, and could reflect on the viewers’ opinion of the audiovisual translator, since such translated text is to be broadcasted live in a news bulletin, and viewers would straightway think that the translator must be ‘insensitive’ to the target (Arabic-speaking) audience or even a traitor, for giving ‘foreignized’ version of the text. So rejecting such a translation job might be a better option to avoid such charge.

In 2003 Martin Weston believes,

translating is morally neutral, the translator’s job being to translate *what is there*. Any duty to the truth that there may be is to the truth of translating what is in the text – for otherwise one is guilty of misrepresentation... It is no part of the translator’s function to expurgate his or her translations of language or propositions that would be regarded as offensive.³²

That is absolutely true. One important question needs to be addressed here as to whether the audiovisual translator should interfere in certain ethical/unethical issues in a text, or any linguistic or factual weakness, as we have seen with the example of tri-aggression on Egypt. It is not the duty of the translator to manipulate the script for a certain hidden political, religious or sexual or even ethnic agenda; but rather to pass the message across truthfully, avoiding any ambiguity that may arise from the ST, unless the ST is intentionally ambiguous.

Another example culturally sensitive and requires mediation is the sound ‘shhh’ in the TL (Arabic). This English sound which means ‘to be quite’ is rather rude in Arabic, indicating that those addressed are ‘animals’; and this is certainly not intended in the SL, in English. The close equivalence of that sound is translated as ‘sss’ or ‘quiet’. Semiotic signs are also at times ‘offensive’ in the TL. The body language is certainly important in audiovisual, like raising two

²⁸ Venuti, 1998:22.

²⁹ *A Companion to Translation Studies*, *op.cit.*, cited 142.

³⁰ Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an ethics of difference* (London & New York: Routledge, 1998, ed.1999), 84.

³¹ Also the (non-)use of a definite article allows for two different readings, i.e. withdrawal from some of the territories or withdrawal from all the territories. In other words, a language-specific phenomenon produced considerable controversy, and moreover, resulted in different, politically-motivated interpretations of this multilingual resolution.

³² Weston, *op.cit.*

fingers to indicate a sign of victory and then turning the back of one's hand towards the SL audience. In fact, raising two fingers with the back of the hand towards the TL (Arabic-speaking) audience indicates that one is just counting two things, but in an English-speaking country it is rather a rude sign. This needs to be conveyed linguistically in AVT. These cultural differences need to be elaborated so as to mirror that specific message to the TL audience.

Another example culturally related but could create an unnecessary conflict and the audiovisual translator needs to be aware of, is the word 'dog'. This word has a certain implication in English, as a loving and friendly creature, but in Arabic it means an aggressive vicious animal which can only be used to guard one's property. So the TL audience here would instinctively fear the dog, as it could attack them; whereas a western society perceives a different cultural image of the dog.³³ Here is an example about the word 'dog' which requires a tentatively 'useful' and perhaps 'unharmful' mediation. In a joint press conference attended by former US president Mr. George W. Bush and Iraqi premier Mr. Al-Maliki in mid December 2008, Mr. Muntazer Al-Zaidi an Iraqi journalist³⁴ stood up in the live conference and threw his shoes at ex-president Mr. Bush in protest and said, 'This is a farewell kiss from the people of Iraq, you dog...'. Problematic words are 'this' and 'dog'. Here Nida's 'dynamic equivalence' (1964) would have been perfect – i.e. using a word like 'animal' instead of 'dog'. This way the AVT becomes cross-cultural and more *communicative* than semantic. Hence the TL audience's cool response, Mr. Bush's, when he commented jokingly that the shoes were size ten.

Choice of dubbing or subtitling politicised

Indeed as Danan points out that subtitling by virtue of its preservation of the SL soundtrack, is a quintessentially foreignizing type of translation (Danan,1992); but voice-over translation is less so as the translator needs to summarise more. Also, some screen translation writing, which addresses agendas (political or commercial) at work within the audiovisual industry has contributed to intercultural and media studies by highlighting the inappropriateness of (non-native speaker) audiences' traditional acceptance of dubbed and subtitled dialogues as verbatim renderings of the SL script.³⁵ To an extent that is true more of subtitling than of dubbing, as dubbing needs more sentence manipulation, turning sentences inside out, also for brevity and not for changing the original message in any way.

So, the type of AVT adopted could be a political decision, for instance, dubbing prevents audience from hearing the original text. For instance, in early January 2009, British bishop Richard Williamson from Pius X Society talked about the holocaust, in an interview with Swedish television SVT, he said:

I believe that the historical evidence, the historical evidence is strongly against... is, is hugely against 6 million Jews having been deliberately gassed in gas chambers.... those conclude, the "revisionists" as they are called, I think the most serious conclude that

³³ An interesting discussion by Gunilla Anderman when referring, though in a different context, to the cultural associations or mental concept of dog in Spanish and English, *A Companion to Translation Studies*, *op.cit.*, 46-7.

³⁴ It is worth noting how significant such an incident is to the 'foreignized' (Iraqi) culture; but has this incident been received in the same way in the 'domesticated' (English) culture. The 'foreignized' (Iraqi) effect is demonstrated by erecting a huge bronze shoe sculpture on 30 January 2009 in tribute to the Iraqi journalist in an Iraqi town. Interestingly the Daily Telegraph reported on 6 February 2009 that a Cambridge University protester threw a shoe at the Chinese prime minister in Cambridge.

³⁵ O'Connell, *op.cit.*, cited Ganz-blättler (1994) on 120-21.

between two and three hundred thousand Jews perished in Nazi concentration camps, but not one of them by gassing in a gas chamber.³⁶

Here the audiovisual translator has the option to opt out and not do the job and therefore lose financially, proving that financial ‘might is right’, or do the task but under no circumstances, intervene to ‘domesticate’ or completely ‘foreignize’, hence upsetting the target audience, which in turn made that bishop even resign. So choosing subtitling to dubbing is possibly done on ethical/unethical, racial/religious grounds, subtitling would reveal the entire source material and therefore can never be manipulated; and therefore it is an excellent choice, in dubbing the translation would have been summarised and might be considered manipulated, even though it would not have been, but it could be manipulated by a certain group of people for religious/ethical reasons.

CONCLUSION

The output in AVT needs to reflect not only the translator’s linguistic and cognitive knowledge, but also show that the translator is definitely aware of the common variations in AVT (audio-to-audio, visual-to-visual, visual-to-audio, visual-to-audio). The output should also show that the translator has the technical skills, not only how to operate subtitling softwares and/or do voice-over recordings, but also to identify factors in AV that affect and sometimes restrict the translator during the production of AVT. These factors are related to how the conventional AV script (voice-over script) in the source text is split into three parts: Time-codes, visual description and audio script (which is the source language text). For a start, it is vital for the translator to know whether the TT is to be voiced over (or dubbed) as narration and commentary, or be recorded as sound-bites (a well-known term in film and television industry).

Unlike other forms of translation, AVT is still relatively young in translation studies, and more so in Arabic translation studies. In fact it is still in its infancy in the Arab world in particular. AVT for television into Arabic/English has started to develop seriously in the past two decades, due to the mushrooming of Arabic-speaking satellite television channels – starting with the first pan-Arab satellite television station broadcasting from London, Middle East Broadcasting Centre (MBC) established in September 1991. So the development of AVT in Arabic has only become popular due to the advance in communication technology.

Another main finding of this paper is that AVT is similar to at least one meme in simultaneous interpreting. In addition to ‘time-lag’ element which is similar only in nature, there is the meme of mediation and not intervention when a major factual error is called into question. But this mediation needs to be done only with the permission of the client who has provided the source material or the input (the audiovisual material). Also it is worth noting that even the choice of subtitling or dubbing the TT could be a decision by the client which might be politically motivated. Unlike voice-overing or dubbing and even sound-biting, the subtitling option means the constant exposure of the ST to the target audience who are likely to have a number of bilingual viewers. This exposure is considered, as we have seen earlier in this article, to be an element of ‘foreignizing’. Also there is an oscillation from domestication to foreignizing during the production of AVT – and that is when it comes to the conversion of imperial measurements to imperial ones. This particular domestication is, I feel, a must for the target

³⁶ This is available on the audiovisual website *YouTube*, just search under the name of the aforementioned bishop.

audience, converting to whichever measurement they are familiar. The same can be applied to geographical terms, the aim is to bring the concept in AVT closer to the target reader. Admittedly, it is a kind of mediation here but on a limited scale and is intended for *clarity* and not intervention, the one that the lay interpreter or translator might do and therefore becomes a third party in the output. The task of the AV translator is to transfer *what is there in the AV text truthfully* as Martin Weston maintains, yet needs also to mediate only for the correction of factual errors and/or raise any ethical issues *before* doing the translation, as Peter Newmark appears to be concerned about. All this is done in order for the AV translator *not* to be accused of treason due to any translation loss.

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