Subtitling Accounts of Conflict-Related Gender-Based Violence in Documentaries: Voices from Syria

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ABSTRACT

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a global issue that has received much media attention aimed at tackling the problem itself and listening to the voices of those who experienced it. Those who speak up want their voices heard, so the English translations of their first-hand experiences are crucial in making these accounts widely known. The translation of such accounts is largely overlooked in translation studies research. This paper sheds light on the current subtitling behaviour in documentaries featuring Arabic first-hand accounts of GBV associated with the conflict in Syria, focusing on the subtitling of emotional expressions as an integral dimension of recounting first-hand experiences in documentaries. The English subtitles of six documentaries were extracted to compile a parallel corpus of emotional expressions and analyzed qualitatively and quantitively. The analysis of 199 Arabic emotional expressions shows that subtitlers use various strategies to render them into English, with 'Transfer' and 'Condensation' being the most common. The results indicate that some nuances of trauma in the original GBV narratives are not captured in the translated subtitles.

KEYWORDS: Audiovisual translation, emotional expressions, gender-based violence documentaries, subtitling strategies

Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a broad term for harmful acts perpetrated against a person's will on the basis of socially ascribed gender differences (Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2018). While the term is inclusive of all genders, it is often equated to violence against women, even though men are also sometimes victims of such violence (UN Women n.d.). During periods of armed conflict, women are more vulnerable to GBV, particularly sexual violence. The World Health Organization (2021) reported that GBV is "endemic in every country and culture", as one in three women worldwide experiences sexual or physical violence in their lifetime. According to UN Women (n.d.), GBV against women includes domestic violence, femicide, sexual violence, human trafficking, and child marriage.

Crises often separate families and communities, weaken institutions that provide support, and make basic necessities inaccessible, increasing vulnerability to GBV (Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2018). The media are widely believed to help prevent GBV in conflict zones by raising awareness and moving the issue from the private to the public sphere, making the media a stakeholder in mitigating GBV risks (Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2015). In this context, translation poses additional challenges in international projects that aim to combat GBV, as the dominance of English may shape, simplify, or even limit how GBV experiences are represented (Guizzo et al. 2018). In documentaries, first-hand accounts of GBV aim to "tell the story of the self, a story of abuse from which someone has survived, with a view to breaking the silence … and raising awareness of the multifaceted nature of GBV" (Bosseaux 2020:90). Bosseaux identified a research gap in the translation of GBV documentaries (2023:22), calling for more research to identify common practices and challenges. My research places itself within this background and aims to reveal current practices in the subtitling of conflict-related GBV documentaries and the possible impact of such practices on the survivors' voices. This article is part of a broader PhD project on translating emotions and culture in GBV documentaries. The article focuses specifically on subtitling emotional expressions from Arabic into English. It highlights the strategies used and the resulting shifts in emotional intensity.

In documentaries, narrators' explicit emotional disclosures through terms denoting emotions are key strategies for constructing relationships with the audience (Shvanyukova 2021:181). Trauma narrative research identifies linguistic emotional expressions as narrative content features (Jaeger et al. 2014; Truong et al. 2014; Wardecker et al. 2017). Translating emotionally loaded content, particularly abuse narratives, poses challenges for subtitlers (Perdikaki and Georgiou 2020), who often use coping mechanisms to distance themselves from affecting emotions in the source text (ST). Bosseaux's (2023) practice-based research on translating GBV yielded guidelines for emotional content in documentaries, validated in English, French, and Chinese translations but not in Arabic, which is a UN official language. Given these gaps, it is significant to examine how Arabic emotional expressions in conflict-related GBV documentaries are subtitled, considering the limitations of subtitling as a translation mode and the sensitivity of the STs.

The aim of my work was to identify common practices in subtitling conflict-related GBV documentaries by investigating the strategies used in subtitling emotional expressions in Arabic GBV narratives into English. It focuses on subtitled first-hand GBV accounts within the Syrian conflict, which began in 2011 and saw significant shifts in power, with the fall of the Assad regime on 8 December 2024 marking a crucial turning point.

The UN's 2024 report highlights conflict-related sexual violence in Syria, noting that child marriage and forced marriage are used as coping mechanisms during financial hardship. The Syrian crisis escalated into the world's largest refugee crisis (UNHCR 2024), as emphasized by international media coverage of the 2015 "refugee crisis" in Europe. That year marked a significant movement of refugees, many escaping Syria (Georgiou and Zaborowski 2017:4). Media coverage brought GBV issues into the global spotlight, and translation into English shaped how these conflict-related GBV accounts travelled across languages and cultures. The following sections will review relevant literature, outline the data, introduce the analytical framework and methods, and present the results, followed by a discussion of the main findings.

Trauma Narratives: Characteristics and Translation Challenges

Trauma can be a result of witnessing death, suffering serious injury or sexual violence (American Psychiatric Association 2013:271). While studies on trauma have particularly focused on the impact of wars (Van der Kolk 2014:11), some consider that traumatic events can include an attack on one's identity or security, not necessarily a physical one (Gordon and Szymanski 2014:250-252). Others extend the concept to include any emotionally overwhelming experience, including disappointment (Busch and McNamara 2020:325). The present article deals with traumatic experiences involving exposure to GBV in the context of war, with a specific focus on the recounting of personal experiences of trauma (GBV) within conflict.

Exposure to traumatic experiences can disrupt the brain's ability to process events, leading to psychological symptoms such as emotional numbing, shame, or even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), with women – particularly rape survivors – being at higher risk for PTSD (American Psychiatric Association 2013: 272; Alvarez-Conrad et al. 2001; Reyes et al. 2008). Trauma often involves experiences that are outside the realm of the ordinary. As such, language can be inadequate in conveying traumatic experiences, and recalling these experiences in order to relay them has the potential to create a sense of discontinuity and silence, also known as the 'discourse of the unsayable' (Rogers 2006; Stroińska et al. 2014). Given the emotionally charged state associated with conveying trauma narratives, such narratives also often contain speech fillers, repetition and incomplete sentences (Foa 1997:414). Furthermore, linguistic markers, such as words conveying emotions and references to death, are key content features (Alvarez-Conrad et al. 2001; Jaeger et al. 2014). Speech disfluencies, i.e. interruptions in the normal flow of spoken language, (e.g. 'uh', 'um', 'er') and fillers (e.g. 'you know', 'I mean', 'I don't know', 'like') are structural indicators of disorganization and fragmentation in trauma narratives (Jones et al. 2007:1; Jaeger et al. 2014:5).

Translating trauma narratives demands fidelity to both the survivors' emotional expression and factual accuracy (d'Ardenne et al. 2007:307-308). Concerns with the authenticity of trauma survivors' voices, particularly when the narrative is part of a historical event, have been acknowledged in the translation of Holocaust testimonies. For instance, in 1946 Boder recorded and translated interviews with Holocaust survivors using a literal method. Boder

also indicated: "[W]ords describing the emotional range in the voices of the narrators, and their gestures at the time of speaking, have been italicized and enclosed in brackets" (Boder 1949:xiv). Müller (2014) claimed that Boder's desire to trace linguistic markers of trauma led to his translation sounding eccentric and ungrammatical. However, Bosseaux (2023:11) recommends maintaining the emotional tone when subtitling GBV documentaries to help the target audience access the original experience.

Documentaries portray real-life issues in order to persuade the viewer of a particular viewpoint or raise awareness (Kuhn and Westwell 2020:13), and the use of storytelling in such documentaries enhances emotional engagement (Chattoo 2020:208). Audiovisual texts convey meaning through audio-verbal, audio-nonverbal, visual-verbal and visual-nonverbal elements (Delabastita 1989; Baños 2017). Subtitling involves translating and recounting spoken dialogue, as well as verbal information that is transmitted visually (e.g. inserts) and aurally (e.g. songs) (Díaz-Cintas and Remael 2021:9). However, it can be particularly challenging in GBV documentaries, where speakers may conceal their identities, limiting access to some visual meaning-making codes such as facial expressions.

GBV narration often involves references to personal emotions and the social stigma associated with such violence. However, temporal and spatial constraints on subtitling can impact how these emotions are rendered. Subtitles must fit within a limited space and time, allowing 37–42 characters per line (Díaz-Cintas and Remael 2021:97-8). Traditionally, the six-second rule states that 70–74 characters can be read in six seconds, or approximately 12 characters per second (Martí Ferriol 2013:203). Platforms such as Netflix use subtitles with up to 20 characters per second (Szarkowska et al. 2020:663-4), suggesting that traditional subtitling constraints have evolved. However, faster subtitles reduce comprehension (Kruger et al. 2022:18). As a result, emotions expressed in the ST may be compromised to maintain other details in the narrative. The change from speech to text in subtitling may also affect how the emotions expressed in the ST are conveyed. Bosseaux's (2023) guidelines address this challenge by recommending techniques such as segmenting subtitles in synchrony with speech, using varied fonts and including orality features such as pauses and hesitations within the subtitles. These guidelines align with Boder's (1949) method of reproducing speech errors to reflect the speaker's emotional state.

Some subtitlers found the translation of emotionally loaded content, particularly that recounting abuse, the most challenging (Perdikaki and Georgiou 2020). Documentaries can heighten the emotional burden on some subtitlers, who reported using coping mechanisms such as lowering the audio or relying on written templates, taking breaks (e.g. crying) and speeding up the subtitling process (Georgiou and Perdikaki 2020:195). While most participants in Perdikaki and Georgiou's (2020) study reported that they did not think emotions affect their subtitling performance, the authors indicated that one way in which "emotional impact manifests itself in subtitling performance lies in the linguistic treatment of sensitive content" (2020:170). Alexandra (2015) observed that, when documentaries deal with harrowing stories, translators tend to either over- or underplay the emotion in the speaker's words. Moreover, translated works could contain the emotions of both the ST author and the translator (Hubscher-Davidson 2021). In this respect, Hermans (2014) observed that, while translation makes the author of the ST heard in another language, the translator's voice can also be heard in the target text (TT). This is apparent in the translation decisions. Translators inevitably adopt a particular position in how they approach a text – the way in which they choose to be loyal to the ST, to be critical of it or indifferent to it (Hermans 2014:299). Thus, I argue that examining the strategies used by subtitlers when translating speakers' emotional expressions can deepen our understanding of how these strategies affect the way in which GBV narratives are represented.

There has been limited research on the audiovisual translation (AVT) of GBV accounts, particularly from Arabic to English. While AVT research has focused on feature films, documentaries require distinct subtitling practices (Díaz-Cintas 2013). Bosseaux's (2023) work helped bridge this gap by providing guidelines for translating from multiple source languages: Kurdish, French, Spanish and English. However, there is a need for more research to identify practices applied in subtitling Arabic testimonies on conflict-related GBV.

Initial attempts to scrutinize this field include building a descriptive profile of the common strategies used in the English subtitling of Arabic emotional expressions in GBV documentaries. Baker (2011:190-91) indicated that the best method of revealing the norms of translation behaviour is to research a corpus of authentic translations and identify the regular

patterns of translation, including the types of strategies typically chosen by the translators of that corpus. Using this advice as a starting point, the present study was established to investigate how emotional expressions in first-hand accounts of conflict-related GBV documentaries are subtitled from Arabic into English in terms of strategies and intensity shifts. Specifically, the study addresses the following questions: What are the most frequently used subtitling strategies for the verbal expressions of emotions in these accounts, and do the emotional expressions undergo shifts in the subtitled version that result in either intensifying or toning down the speaker's original expressions?

Considering these questions should reveal the current practices in subtitling strategies in this context and the possible impact of such strategies on how GBV survivors' voices are conveyed. My work is thus intended to act as a foundation for further studies on GBV documentaries by presenting descriptive observations of the subtitling strategies most commonly used when translating Arabic GBV narratives into English and reflecting on the impact of such strategies on how such narratives are represented in translated English versions.

Data, Analytical Framework and Procedures

I collected 20 subtitled documentaries on GBV in Syria and selected six of them that have been critically acclaimed or screened on well-respected TV channels. All were collected between 2018 and 2019 from platforms such as Netflix, Hulu, YouTube, and Aljazeera Documentaries. The documentaries present various first-hand accounts of GBV faced during the Syrian Conflict (2011-19). Table 1 describes and classifies the films.

Table 1: List of the films used in the study

Documentary	Documentary Mode (Nichols 2017)	Form of GBV	Producer/ Filmmaker/ Publisher	Release	Subtitler
Syria Documentary	Expository[1]	Rape in detention	Al Arabiya	2015	-
The Price of Refuge	Participatory[2]	Sexual harassment	Special Broadcasting Service (SBS)	2013	Credited
Jalila	Expository	Rape and discrimination	Adnan Jetto	2014	-
Not Who We Are	Expository	Child marriage in displacement	Heinrich Boell Foundation	2013	-
Silent War	Observational[3]	Rape in detention or by armed groups	Magneto Presse	2017	Credited
Syria: Brides for Sale	Expository	Sexual exploitation in displacement	Sharron Ward	2013	-

Syria Documentary was released on the *Special Mission* program for Al Arabiya Channel. The documentary was republished on YouTube by HydraSlayer as "Syria Documentary: A Young Girl's Heart-Wrenching Story of her Time in a Syrian Prison" (HydraSlayer n.d.). The documentary was narrated in Modern Standard Arabic by journalist *Rima Maktabi* with English subtitles. Interviews were in Syrian and Lebanese Arabic.

The Price of Refuge was produced by SBS Australia, and Journeyman Pictures rereleased it online in 2016. Journeyman Pictures retitled the documentary *Aid Workers Are Sexually*

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[1] Expository: uses an authoritative voice to present arguments, which narrates over corresponding footage. The narration of a documentary can be shared between a number of speakers ('talking heads').
[2] Participatory: involves direct interaction between the filmmaker and subjects through interviews.
[3] Observational: captures subjects without interruption, allowing viewers to draw their own conclusions.

Abusing Syrian Refugees on YouTube (Journeyman Pictures 2016). Its mode features English narration and subtitled Syrian Arabic testimonies.

Silent War was directed by journalist *Manon Loizeau* and screened on France 2, the British Film Institute, and the International Film Festival and Forum on Human Rights (FIFDH). The documentary, which features Syrian Arabic narration with English and French subtitles, won awards at DOK Leipzig.

Jalila, by Syrian filmmaker *Jetto*, is in Modern Standard Arabic narration with English subtitles. It was screened at The Middle East Institute in Washington, cine|lokal in Dresden, Université Paris-Est Créteil in Paris, and the University of Sussex in London (Jetto n.d.; Middle East Institute n.d.).

Syria: Brides for Sale was released by Channel 4 News in its 'Syria's Descent' series. The documentary won an International Emmy in 2014 (Katalyst Productions n.d.). It features an English narration and interviews in Syrian Arabic.

Not Who We Are by Lebanese Palestinian filmmaker *Mansour* won awards at the SR Socially Relevant Film Festival in New York and FIFOG Geneva (Global Thinkers Forum n.d.). The documentary portrayed the refugee experiences of five Syrian women. It features English narration and Syrian-Arabic interviews.

The films are rich in emotional expressions related to experiences of GBV, mainly shame, sadness and fear. For instance, speakers disclose the social stigma of rape: "Until now, we didn't dare to say the word rape. It's very difficult, very... We cannot even express it" and "now I'm ashamed to take the bus" (two speakers). Survivors of rape in detention recalled fear, e.g. "I screamed, screamed, screamed. But who heard me? Who could hear me?"

The analytical framework applied on the above-mentioned documentaries incorporates Shaver et al.'s (2001) list of emotion concepts to identify emotional expressions in the corpus. Gottlieb's (1992) taxonomy is used to determine how emotional expressions were rendered in the subtitles, while Coromines i Calders' (2010) categories of emotional intensity are adapted

to investigate further <u>what</u> shifts in emotional intensity were produced in the subtitled versions (see Figure 3).

While identifying emotional expressions might seem straightforward, accurately and consistently detecting them through rigorous methods is complex. As Fehr and Russell (1984:464) put it, "Everyone knows what an emotion is until asked to give a definition. Then, it seems no one knows". There are two main approaches to emotion identification: the classical and the constructionist. The classical view treats each emotion as a biologically distinct entity. For example, basic emotion theories assert that a limited set of emotions is universally recognizable across all cultures, especially through facial expressions. Meanwhile, the constructionist approach argues that emotions are constructed experiences, with no fixed relationships between behaviour, physiology and emotion words (Barrett 2016).

The constructionist approach views emotions as perceiver-dependent phenomena, best studied through self-reports (Barrett 2016:47-49). In terms of identifying emotions, Shaver et al. (2001) employed a prototype approach to study people's knowledge of emotions. Their method relies on individuals' self-reported understanding and experiences of emotions rather than assuming pre-existing, biologically distinct emotional categories. They categorized emotions hierarchically, as shown in Figure 1. These hierarchies are:
- Superordinate level: Positive (love, joy) and negative (anger, sadness, fear) emotions
  - Basic level: Love, joy, anger, sadness, fear, and surprise (in blue)
    - Subordinate level: Variations in intensity or context (in yellow)
      - The subordinate level designates a generic, core or nonspecialized form of the emotion in question (in white)

Although this categorization was based on English-speaking participants, it has been tested on Arabic speakers (Elasri 2018). Considering the view of emotions as fuzzy categories that are difficult to define, the list of emotions in Figure 1 serves as the basis on which the expressions of emotions in the corpus analyzed in this study were identified or extracted. It was useful to determine what is an emotional expression (i.e. referring to emotions) and what is not. The following will explain further how this figure was incorporated.

Figure 1: The list of emotions of Shaver et al. (2001)

Basic emotions

Love
- **Affection**
  - adoration
  - adoration
  - fondness
  - liking
  - attraction
  - caring
  - tenderness
  - compassion
  - sentimentality
- **Lust**
  - arousal
  - desire
  - lust
  - passion
  - infatuation
- **Longing**

Joy
- **Cheerfulness**
  - amusement
  - bliss
  - gaiety
  - glee
  - jolliness
  - joviality
  - delight
  - enjoyment
  - gladness
  - happiness
  - jubilation
  - elation
  - satisfaction
  - ecstasy
  - euphoria
- **Zest**
  - enthusiasm
  - zeal
  - excitement
  - thrill
  - exhilaration
- **Contentment**
  - pleasure
- **Pride**
  - triumph
- **Optimism**
  - eagerness
  - hope
- **Enthrallment**
  - rapture
- **Relief**

Surprise
- amazement
- astonishment

Anger
- **Irritation**
  - aggravation
  - agitation
  - annoyance
  - grouchiness
  - grumpiness
- **Exasperation**
  - frustration
- **Rage**
  - outrage
  - fury
  - wrath
  - hostility
  - ferocity
  - bitterness
  - hate
  - loathing
  - scorn
  - spite
  - vengefulness
  - dislike
  - resentment
- **Disgust**
  - revulsion
  - contempt
- **Envy**
  - jealousy
- **Torment**

Sadness
- **Suffering**
  - agony
  - hurt
  - anguish
- **Sadness**
  - depression
  - despair
  - hopelessness
  - gloom
  - glumness
  - unhappiness
  - grief
  - sorrow
  - woe
  - misery
  - melancholy
- **Disappointment**
  - dismay
  - displeasure
- **Shame**
  - guilt
  - regret
  - remorse
- **Neglect**
  - alienation
  - isolation
  - loneliness
  - rejection
  - homesickness
  - defeat
  - dejection
  - insecurity
  - embarrassment
  - humiliation
  - insult
- **Sympathy**
  - pity

Fear
- **Horror**
  - alarm
  - shock
  - fright
  - terror
  - panic
  - hysteria
  - mortification
- **Nervousness**
  - anxiety
  - tenseness
  - uneasiness
  - apprehension
  - worry
  - distress
  - dread

Emotional expressions in language can be explicit, using direct, emotive lexicon, or implicit, employing figurative language (Schwarz-Friesel 2015:164). This study analyses both types of emotional expressions in GBV documentaries, considering multimodal context and following Torrent-Lenzen's (2005 as cited in Coromines i Calders 2010:6-8) categories:

- Explicit expressions use direct emotion words, as defined by dictionaries, and align with the list of emotions provided by Shaver et al. (2001). For instance, "I am happy" explicitly references the emotion of "happiness" listed in Figure 1.

- Implicit expressions convey emotions through context-dependent linguistic devices such as repetitions, interjections, emotion-related metaphors and figurative language. For example, in Table 13, "I mean, mmm you would just want to leave because mmm…" in the context of sexual harassment was categorized as an implicit expression of annoyance, which is an emotion concept in Figure 1.

Figure 2: Categories of emotional expression
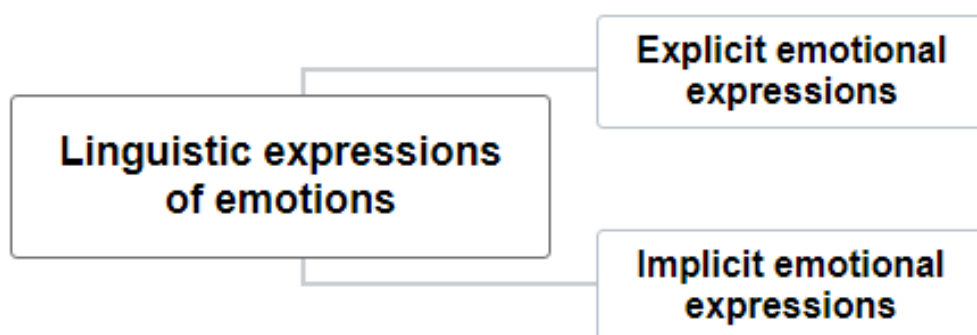
The analysis presented in this manuscript uses Gottlieb's (1992) subtitling taxonomy to examine how emotional expressions in accounts of GBV from the conflict in Syria were subtitled, as this taxonomy allows a consideration of semantic and stylistic aspects of subtitling. The semantic content of emotional utterances is an important aspect of emotional expressions since studies on emotion identification use semantics to identify abstract concepts of emotions (Lindquist 2021:92). Analyzing the rendering of the semantic and stylistic loads of the emotional expressions in subtitles can thus be a good indicator of how subtitlers have rendered the emotional expressions in GBV narratives. Gottlieb's taxonomy, albeit not recent, analyses the rendering strategy broadly in terms of adequacy, reduction and omission, which are typical subtitling features. These are broken down further into more specific strategies, as

explained below. While the strategies were elicited from corpora of English and Danish subtitles, they have been tested in other language pairs, including Arabic/English (Kendenan 2019; Kuo 2020). The following section provides a brief overview of all the strategies, along with detailed descriptions of those identified in the corpus.

Gottlieb's (1992) taxonomy

- *Expansion* adequately renders special references using expanded expressions. Expansion, often employed to clarify cultural nuances absent in the target culture (Gottlieb 1992:166), resembles Pedersen's (2011) Specification Strategy, as it also involves adding information in subtitles.

- *Paraphrase* adequately alters the phraseology of the ST to convey the same meaning in subtitles (Gottlieb, 1992). It is often employed when the ST contains culture- or language-specific content that cannot be translated literally. Pedersen (2011) classifies Paraphrase as a type of Generalization.

- *Transfer* involves adequately rendering the entire expression (Gottlieb 1992:166-67). It captures as much of the original message as possible (Taylor 2003).

- *Imitation* refers to the use of an identical expression in the subtitles.

- *Transcription* involves transliterating the ST utterance in the subtitles.

- *Dislocation*, although the term carries a negative connotation, involves adjusting the ST expression to maintain its effect in subtitles using a different expression (Gottlieb 1992:166-7). For example, a metaphor in the ST might be replaced with a similar metaphor in the subtitles, denoting a similar effect to that of the ST expression.

- *Condensation* involves quantitatively reducing characters in the subtitle while retaining the semantic content and most stylistic elements (Gottlieb 1992). This involves creatively reducing the space occupied by the ST segments in the subtitles.

- *Decimation*, although not a common term in translation strategies, involves subtitling ST segments with abridged expressions, which leads to partial content loss as described by Gottlieb (1992). Placed between Condensation and Deletion, Decimation handles rapid speech or redundancy by reducing semantic content, though not as drastically as Deletion, which removes entire lines.

- *Deletion* refers to the complete omission of verbal content.

- *Resignation* involves producing distorted content for untranslatable elements.

Ghadah Kadi, Subtitling Accounts of Conflict-Related Gender-Based Violence in Documentaries: Voices from Syria, 31–71

The analysis identified six strategies in the documentaries: Expansion, Paraphrase, Transfer, Dislocation, Condensation, and Decimation. While not all are subtitling-specific, Gottlieb (1992:166) suggests they generally produce adequate subtitles, with Decimation being an exception due to content reduction. Examples of each strategy are provided in the results section.

Gottlieb's subtitling strategies provide a framework to analyze the subtitling of emotional expressions in GBV accounts. This study expands on Coromines i Calders' categories to investigate intensity shifts in translated emotional expressions. Coromines i Calders' categories were based on the work of van Leuven-Zwart (1990) on shifts in the translation of narratives. They were extended in this study to include grammatical shifts, considering the psychological features of trauma narratives such as pronoun use that reflect the speaker's psychological state (Campbell and Pennebaker 2003; Kaplow et al. 2018). Van Leuven-Zwart's (1990:78-81) definition of "syntactic-semantic shift" was applied to classify grammatical shifts (see Table 2). This expansion allows for a more comprehensive analysis of how subtitlers navigate the complexities of conveying emotional content in GBV documentaries, identifying strategies and potential shifts in emotional tone.

Table 2: Expanded categories of linguistic emotional intensity based on Coromines i Calders (2010)

Intensity shift	Explanation
Lexical shifts	The translation of a lexical item produces stronger or weaker feelings than the original lexical item.
Register shifts	A change in the register in the translation (e.g. from vulgar to familiar) causes an emotional intensity shift.
Orality shifts	Features of oral speech produce a shift in emotional intensity.
Grammatical shifts	When a shift in grammatical feature of a person, verb tenses, classes or functions causes a shift in meaning.

As the present study does not include audience reception as part of its focus, the observation of intensity shifts is applied from an analytical perspective. Three shifts (lexical, orality and grammatical) were identified in the subtitled version of the GBV documentaries, which affected the emotional intensity of the STs' expressions. These shifts were identified as follows: lexical (+/-), orality (+/-), grammatical (+/-), and absence of shifts (=). For instance, orality in unscripted speech, such as documentary interviews, refers to spoken language features such as hesitations and speech fillers (Jucker 2021:342-3). Orality shifts involve changes in these spoken markers, which can also affect emotional intensity (Coromines i Calders 2010). When a subtitled emotional expression reduced the emotional tone of the original by condensing orality features, it was identified as orality (-).

Figure 3: The analytical framework
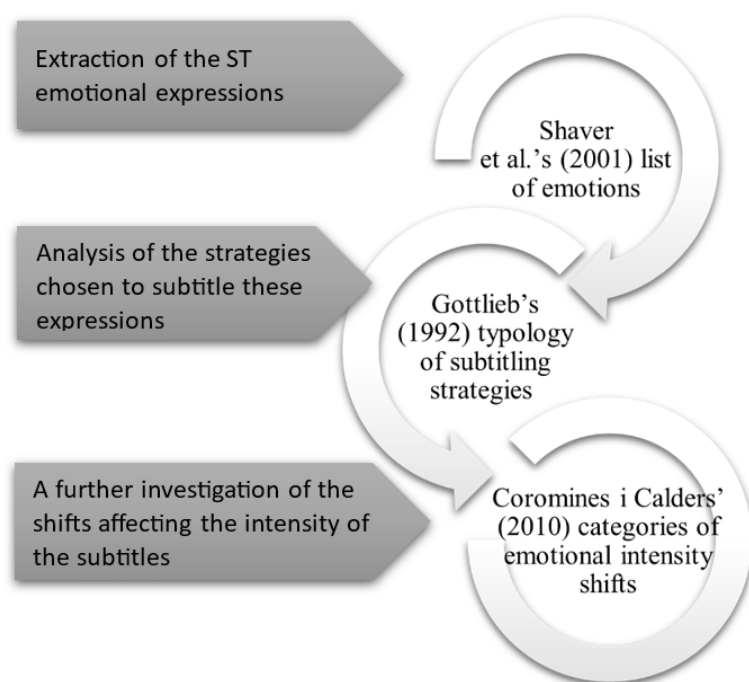
Alongside the framework adopted in this work, which incorporates models from the literature of psychology, subtitling, and translation studies (Figure 3), external sources were also used to reduce the subjectivity of the analysis. These external sources included Stowasser's (2004) *Dictionary of Syrian Arabic: English-Arabic* and Omar's (2008) *Modern Standard Arabic Dictionary*. In addition, Bosseaux's (2023) guidelines for ethically subtitling emotional content in GBV documentaries were used to reflect on the impact of the strategies identified

in the analysis. Furthermore, the documentaries were classified based on Nichols' documentary modes (as shown in Table 1), which analyze the film's structure and the filmmaker's voice (Nichols 2017:104-32).

Procedure

This study is situated within the product-oriented branch of Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS), which focuses on the analysis of translated texts with the aim of identifying translation norms through recurring patterns in the TTs. It follows Toury's (2012:33) three-stage system for research within DTS, as applied in Pedersen's (2011:27) study on subtitling norms:

1. The TTs (the subtitled GBV documentaries) are presented.
2. Coupled pairs (emotional expressions) are extracted, and the relationship between the individual pairs is analyzed.
3. Cautious observations are formulated.

The analysis method aligns with the transformational approach (Saldanha and O'Brien 2013). This approach involves the transformation of one type of data – qualitative – into another type – quantitative. In this approach, it is more common to transform qualitative data into quantitative data by producing a numerical presentation of some aspects of the qualitative data in order to illustrate the frequency of, for example, a particular subtitling strategy identified in the qualitative analysis. The term 'quantitative' as used here indicates patterns and does not involve statistical analysis. The following steps were undertaken:

1. Given the lack of accurate transcription tools for Syrian Arabic dialects, I transcribed the Arabic audio manually.
2. Open subtitles that cannot be downloaded or removed were extracted manually, except in the case of *Silent War* (English subtitles, not available online, were offered to me in a Word document by the producer).
3. Emotional expressions (as defined in the Analytical Framework section) were extracted manually to ensure that figurative or implicit expressions referring to emotions were not overlooked.

4. ELAN (2024) software was used for annotation, aligning the original Arabic utterances (STs) with the subtitles (TTs).

5. A literal English translation of the ST was added, including orality features, using a similar approach to back translation, which aims at, as indicated by Taylor (2020: 414), "helping us see the footprints that translators leave behind". Arabic interjections were transliterated using the DIN 31635 standard.

6. The subtitling strategy as per Gottlieb's taxonomy was recorded and reviewed by my native English- and Arabic-speaking PhD supervisors.

7. Emotional intensity shifts were recorded as follows: + (intensified), − (toned down) or = (unchanged).

8. The number of subtitling strategies used in all the films was calculated. Emotional expressions were grouped by type (implicit and explicit), with the results displayed visually for implicit, explicit and total (both) expressions. Quantitative results of the intensity shifts, and basic emotions were not presented visually. Instead, the work presented in this article focused on *identifying* intensity shifts, which were qualitatively analyzed.

Results and Discussion

As shown in Figure 4, the 199 emotional expressions in the corpus were expressed almost equally, with 90 explicit (45%) and 109 implicit expressions (55%). The relatively high proportion of implicit expressions likely stems from the nature of trauma, as some emotions were conveyed through metaphors and repetitions. The 199 emotional expressions from the six GBV documentaries included all basic emotions identified by Shaver et al. (2001), with negative emotions (sadness and fear) outnumbering positive ones.

Figure 4: Occurrence of implicit and explicit expressions
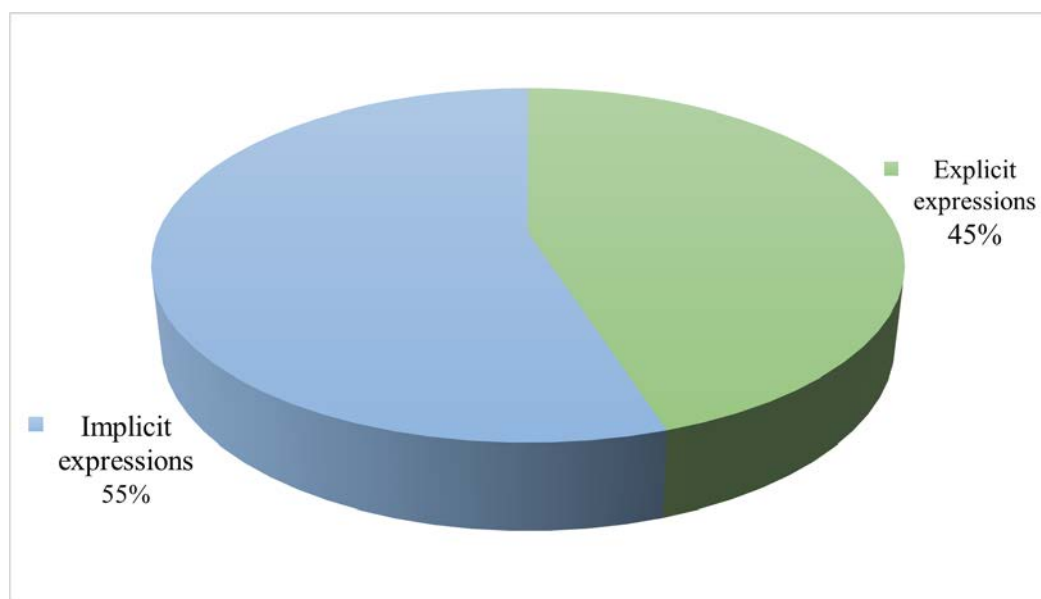
Six subtitling strategies were identified. Figure 5 illustrates the frequency of each strategy among the total 199 expressions, while Figures 6 and 7 show the percentages for explicit and implicit expressions.

Figure 5: Subtitling strategies used for the overall emotional expressions
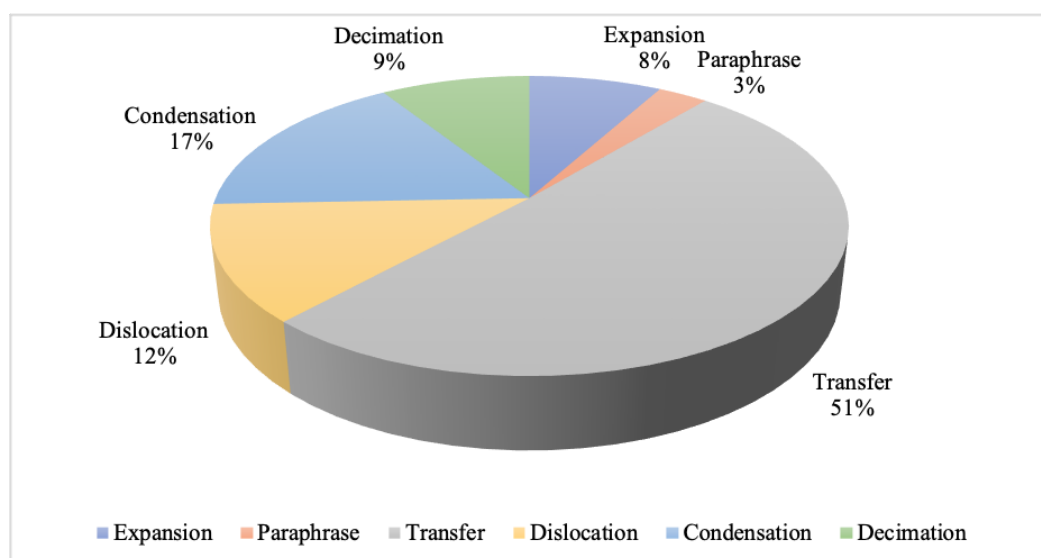
Overall, it was found that subtitlers used different strategies to convey emotional expressions without compromising the emotional dimension of the narrative. This is evident in the high frequency of the Transfer strategy, which was used in more than half (101) of the 199 emotional expressions. The Transfer was common for explicitly expressed emotions (Figure 6), with almost 59% of 90 Arabic explicit expressions transferred into English, compared with 44% of 109 implicit expressions. The Paraphrase strategy was not used for explicit emotions, but 6% of implicit expressions, particularly Arabic interjections, were paraphrased in English (Figures 6 and 7).

Figure 6: Subtitling strategies used for explicit emotional expressions
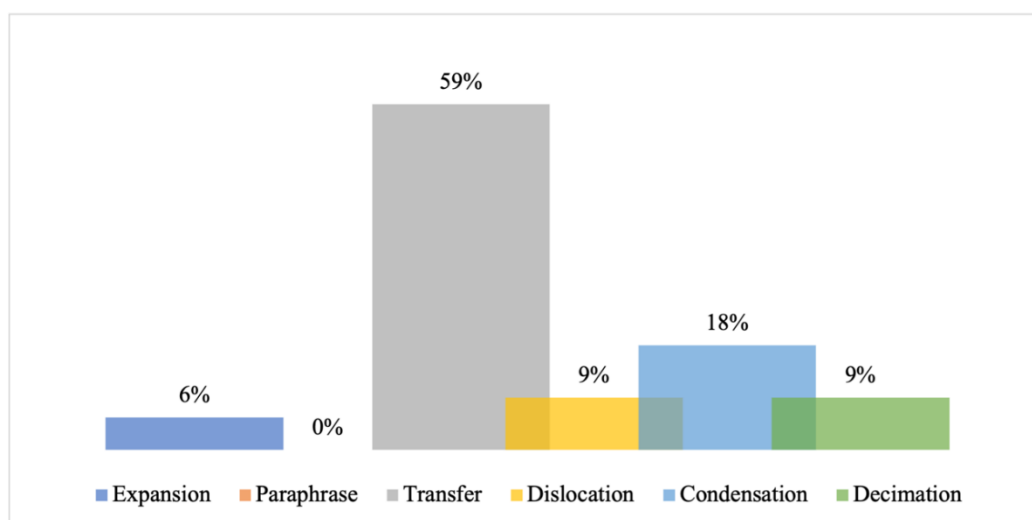
Figure 7: Subtitling strategies used for implicit emotional expressions
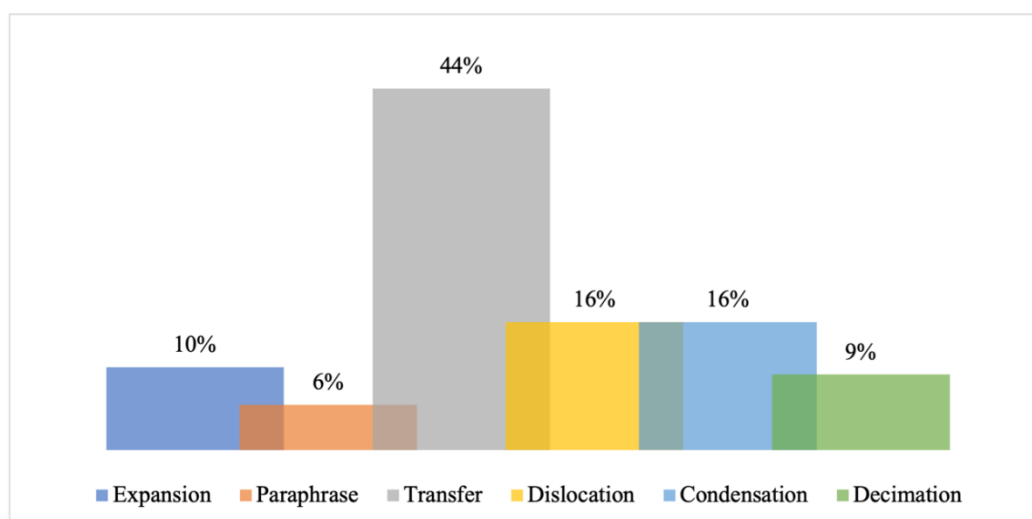
The following section discusses the frequency of each strategy with examples (in bold) from the corpus.

Expansion

Expansion, a strategy used to add content to the ST utterance, was used for both implicit and explicit expressions. Expansion occurred in 10% and 6% of the Arabic implicit and explicit emotional expressions, respectively (Figures 6 and 7). Although typically providing cultural nuances, Expansion was used to emphasize the speaker's emotional expression or to enhance their message in the subtitles.

The subtitled version sometimes intensified fear at the lexical level using Expansion. For instance, in Table 3, the 17-year-old rape survivor, *Amal*, sounded in control of her emotions in the ST, although she was in silhouette.

Table 3: Expansion (Al Arabiya 2015: 00:13:41:392-00:13:43:544)

Visual	Soundtrack		ST (Literal translation)	English subtitles
	Tone of Voice	ST		
so I shouted, screamed out loud, I was very scared.	Calm and collected	**فصرت صرخ، زعق، خفت**	**So, I started to shout, scream; I was scared.**	**So I shouted, screamed out loud, I was very scared.**

Table 4: Expansion (Al Arabiya 2015: 00:18:03.564-00:18:06.837)

Visual	Soundtrack		ST (Literal translation)	English subtitles
	Tone of Voice	ST		

	Calm and collected	وصرت صرخ وابكي.	and **I started to scream and cry.**	I **collapsed and started screaming and crying**.

As demonstrated in Tables 3 and 4, *Amal*'s emotions were intensified in the subtitles with the addition of "collapsed" and "very" to "scared".

Table 5: Expansion – (Al Arabiya 2015: 00:17:50:614-00:17:55:657)

Visual	Soundtrack		ST (Literal translation)	English subtitles
	Tone of Voice	ST		
	Calm and collected	هون أنا كنت... وقت هذا الشاب، وقتها كانت المرة الوحيدة اللي أنا **ببكي**	At this moment… in the incident of this young guy, it was the only time **I cried**	At this moment, in this incident, **I couldn't hold myself more**. **I burst into tears** for the first time.

Similarly, Table 5 shows the intensifying shift in bold from "cried" in the ST to "burst into tears" in the subtitle and the addition of "I couldn't hold myself more". The two-line subtitle was followed by the subtitle "It was the only time I cried".

Expansion was used to subtitle implicit emotional expressions nearly twice as often as it was used to render emotions expressed explicitly. In some cases, as in Table 6 (2), it altered an implicit expression into an explicit one by adding "exhausted" and an intensifier "totally" to

"I could not move at all." However, less than 10% of the 199 emotional expressions were expanded (Figure 5).

Table 6: Expansion (Al-Arabiya 2015: 00:20:01.958-00:20:05.049, 00:20:01:958-00:20:05:049)

Visual	Soundtrack		ST (Literal translation)	English subtitles
	Tone of Voice	ST		
	Calm and collected	كانت المقاومة أقل ما كان في عندي هالحيل نفسه	The resistance was less; I did not have the same power.	My resistance was less. I lost my power **(because of resisting the first one)**. (1)
	Calm and collected	ثالث واحد **مافيني تحركت نهائيا**... يعني ظليتني مرمية بالأرض	[With] the third one, **I could not move at all** … I mean, I remained thrown [lying] on the floor.	When the third one came **I was totally exhausted. I couldn't move at all.** I was lying on the floor. (2)

In Table 6 (1), *Amal* described losing strength during multiple rapes, in synchrony with a verbal-visual Arabic text on screen, which translates as "Al Arabiya was not able to verify Amal's account from other sources as it was not possible." The subtitler expanded on why she lost strength in brackets while leaving the channel's statement untranslated. Forced narratives as such, text on screen that is not part of the language dialogue, are critical, particularly in conflict-related GBV narratives, as GBV accounts can be used by the media to provoke a

political reaction in conflicts. This intensification of emotional content aligns with the republished version of the documentary on YouTube, which was renamed "… A Young Girl's Heart-Wrenching Story…" and flagged for distressing content (HydraSlayer n.d.).

Paraphrase

Paraphrase was the strategy least used in the corpus when subtitling Arabic emotional expressions into English. This could be largely explained by the fact that this strategy was not used at all for explicit emotional expressions, as such terms often have English corresponding terms (Kayyal and Russell 2013), rendering the Paraphrase strategy unnecessary. As shown in Figure 5, only 3% of the emotional expressions in the corpus were paraphrased, all of which were implicit. Specifically, 6% of the 109 implicit emotional expressions were subtitled using Paraphrase to address the challenge of translating Arabic interjections.

Paraphrase was used mainly for Arabic emotional interjections, which convey emotion implicitly (Bühler, 1990, as cited in Goddard 2014:54). These interjections lack clear emotional words, and their interpretation depends on context (Goddard 2014:54). Two examples from the corpus show how the Arabic interjection *āḫ*, a vocal expression of grief and pain (Omar 2008:68), was paraphrased differently (pain/cry) in two contexts within the same documentary. In Table 7, the speaker used *āḫ* to symbolize her fear of self-expression, conveying that even vocalizing pain and suffering was impossible.

Table 7: Paraphrase (Jetto 2014: 00:02:11.36 -00:02:14.150)

Visual	Soundtrack		ST (Literal translation)	English subtitles
	Tone of Voice	ST		
	Resentful angry tone	...ما بنفتح تمنا نحكي... **نقول آخ.**	We do not open our mouths... to speak… **to say āḫ**	To open our mouths... to speak... **to express our pain!**

		[eyebrows raised]	!	

The subtitle rendered *āẖ* as "our pain!" as suggested by the context and the speaker's hand and facial expressions. These visual codes illustrate how even a word expressing a feeling cannot leave the mouth as in being muffled.

In the same documentary, another speaker expressed pride in not vocalizing suffering in detention using the same Arabic interjection, which was subtitled as "cry" (Table 8).

Table 8: Paraphrase (Jetto 2014: 00:12:10.270-00:12:14.639)

Visual	Soundtrack		ST (Literal translation)	English subtitles
	Tone of Voice	ST		
	Calm	حتى هن تجاكروا أنه قديه عم يضربوني **ما قول آخ** يعني ولا قلن أنو وقفوا ضرب.	They were even upset that no matter how much they beat me, **I did not say 'āẖ'**, I mean, or ask them to stop beating.	While being beaten, **I didn't cry** nor did ask them to stop.

Paraphrase was helpful in solving the problem of translating Arabic interjections. As shown above, Arabic emotional interjections, which lack direct equivalents in the target language, are subject to the subtitler's own interpretation (e.g. cry/pain). This interpretation was supported by the context and the available multimodal cues. However, in GBV documentaries, many speakers avoid showing their faces. Thus, subtitlers and viewers rely on tone of voice and

verbal cues to interpret their emotions, which is why linguistic expressions of emotion were the primary focus of this study. This situation makes the viewers even more dependent on how subtitlers capture and paraphrase such expressions in the subtitles.

Transfer

Over half of the 199 emotional expressions were fully transferred without content reduction (Figure 5). Explicit expressions were transferred at 59%, whereas implicit ones were transferred at 44%, which suggests that explicit emotions were more likely to be fully transferred. However, the sample sizes differ (90 explicit and 109 implicit).

Transfer was used to subtitle a survivor's implicit expression of the ongoing suffering of recalling her perpetrators' voices manifested in repetition (Table 9).

Table 9: Transfer (Loizeau 2017: 00:42:38.765-00:42:41.030)

Visual	Soundtrack		ST (Literal translation)	English subtitles
	Tone of Voice	ST		
	Choked	ما بنسى. ما بنسى أصواتن.	**I do not forget. I do not forget their voices.**	**I don't forget. I don't forget their voices.**

The transferred repetition "I do not forget" maintained the original emotional intensity. Bosseaux (2023) recommends transferring repetitions to preserve the same narration style when subtitling emotional content in GBV documentaries.

Some transferred expressions exhibit shifts in emotional intensity, often involving personal pronoun changes, which are crucial in trauma narratives (Dunnack and Park 2009). While

altering pronouns may still convey the overall meaning, the speaker's original choice of pronouns is essential for maintaining their voice and perspective in the subtitled version.

Table 10 illustrates a grammatical shift in the narrative of a displaced mother who had to marry off her daughter at 14 years old for financial reasons, expressing guilt over not explaining physical marital relations to her child.

Table 10: Transfer (Mansour 2013: 00:40:04.048-00:40:06.760)

Visual	Soundtrack		ST (Literal translation)	English subtitles
	Tone of Voice	ST		
	Confused	برجع بقول لأ بيجوز أعملها صدمة نفسية للبنت.	**Then I tell myself, no, I might cause the girl a psychological shock.**	**But then I think to myself that it might give her an emotional shock.**

The snapshot in Figure 8 shows an unidentified child bride trying to follow the speaker as she walks away.

Figure 8 Snapshot from Mansour (2013: 00:38:23.021-00:38:26.498)

The example in Table 10 shows how the self-referential pronoun "I", associated with an implicit acknowledgement of guilt, was altered to the impersonal "it", making the subtitle more abstract and less direct. This inaccurately conveyed the mother's emotions, though the film footage highlights the mother's guilt and confusion over leaving her child to navigate marriage alone.

Dislocation

A Dislocation strategy was commonly used, with 16% implicit emotional expressions (Figure 7) and 9% explicit expressions (Figure 6). Dislocation frequently occurred with metaphorical expressions referring to emotions. The basic emotion of sadness in the corpus and its subordinate and related emotions (Figure 1) were figuratively associated with death and darkness, while anger was compared with wars and erupting volcanoes. Intense happiness was sometimes linked to rainbows and flowers, and fear was represented as a wall or barrier. Dislocation of such ST implicit emotional expressions generally created a similar effect in the subtitles, preserving or altering the metaphorical vehicle.

For instance, in Table 11 a rape survivor describes herself as a rock. This metaphor reflects her sense of losing her soul, leaving only a "mere body". Emotional numbing is a common defence mechanism against trauma. Van der Kolk (2014:235) notes that expressions such as

"I feel dead inside" and "I feel like an object, not a person" indicate PTSD. Similar expressions in Arabic GBV accounts, such as "Even my soul had disappeared" (00:43:10-00:43:12) and "My heart is dead. My soul is dead" (Loizeau 2017) appeared in the analyzed films.

Table 11: Dislocation (Loizeau 2017: 01:06:52.206-01:06:55.874*)*

Visual	Soundtrack		ST (Literal translation)	English subtitles
	Tone of Voice	ST		
	Broken	صخر، صرت صخر. أبدا بس جسد قدامك أنا.	**A rock, I have become a rock.** Here, I am nothing but a mere body.	**A ghost, I've become a ghost.** Only my body is left.

The post-traumatic feeling of lifelessness, originally expressed as being a rock, was changed in the subtitles to "being a ghost" to evoke a similar effect. This ST metaphor draws from the ancient comparison of a heart's loss of feeling to a stone, as in the Qur'anic verse translated by Khan and al-Hilali: "Then, after that, your hearts were hardened and became as stones or even worse in hardness" (Qur'an 2:74). Both ST and TT metaphor vehicles share the characteristic of lifelessness.

Condensation

Condensation was the second most common strategy used in subtitling: 16% of both implicit and explicit emotional expressions (Figure 5). Condensation often coincided with intensity shifts, likely due to the reduction of stylistic features such as repetition in ST utterances. This sometimes affected the emotional tone, particularly in terms of orality, where repetitions and disfluencies emphasized emotions or conveyed shame. Table 12 presents an example of Condensation that affects orality, where repetition of "very" to express strong emotions was reduced in the subtitle.

*Table 12: Condensation (*Mansour 2013: 00:40:31.559-00:40:33.504)

Visual	Soundtrack		ST (Literal translation)	English subtitles
	Tone of Voice	ST		
	Confused	بس كتير، كتير أنا متضايقة أنه ...	But **I am very very disturbed that…**	But **I'm very disturbed**..

Bosseaux's (2023) guidelines recommend retaining repeated words when subtitling GBV emotional content because they reflect the speaker's vulnerability and emotions.

Condensation also affected speech with disfluencies such as hesitation, often linked to shame. In *The Price of Refuge*, abused women speak to the camera, showing their real identities to explain their experiences with aid distributors. One woman struggled to recall on screen the obscene language and behaviour she encountered while seeking aid from the International Red Cross, explicitly stating, "We find it difficult" (Parish and Strobl 2013:10:52:469). Another speaker recalls sexual harassment inside the aid distributor office, saying "Touching you", pausing while making a facial expression that suggests recalling an uncomfortable memory, and then continuing with "your thighs, your shoulder," followed by a sigh and concluding with "or grabs your shoulder". This statement is complemented by the implicit expression of annoyance 'I mean, mmm…'. Table 13 illustrates this context.

Table 13: Condensation (Parish and Strobl 2013: 00:12:21:920-00:12:24:510)

Visual	Soundtrack		ST (Literal translation)	English subtitles
	Tone of Voice	ST		

	Soft and heavy	بيلحمسلك	He touches	Touching your thighs, your shoulder… (1) (00:12:13:500 - 00:12:16:910)
[eyes closed and eyebrows raised] Visual codes per frame:		00:12:14:700 - 00:12:15:095 [pause]		
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				

9.				
10.				
			على فخادك.. على كتفك	your thighs… your shoulder	
			(تنهيدة)	(sigh)	[subtitle gap]
			يعني ممم بس بدك تطلعي مشان ممم …	**I mean, mmm you would just want to leave because mmm…**	**I mean, you'd just want to get out of there.** (3) (00:12:21:920 - 00:12:24:510)

The visual codes in Table 13 (1) show the facial expressions coinciding with a pause, which was not reflected in the subtitle. Bosseaux's (2023) recommendation to convey similar pauses by segmentation effectively addresses the challenge of maintaining the speaker's rhythm in subtitles. The speaker continued to express implicit annoyance during the visit, with the Arabic speech filler "yaʿnī" (I mean) subtitled. "Yaʿnī" can indicate elaboration when placed at the start of a phrase (Al-Khalil 2005, as cited in Kurdi 2008:94). In this example of Condensation of stylistic features (hesitation and pauses), following "yaʿnī" were omitted in the subtitle (3). Bosseaux's (2023) guidelines advise finding equivalents for non-lexical sounds as "ummm" in the target language because this reflects the speakers' emotions and helps viewers access the original pace. It is worth noting that the subtitler maintained the

speaker's use of the second-person pronoun (you) while narrating a personal experience, as this can indicate the distancing of oneself from a traumatic event while recollecting it (Castiglioni et al. 2023).

Decimation

Finally, Decimation was the only content-reduction strategy in subtitling emotional expressions, with a frequency of 9%, while no instances of Deletion were identified (Figure 5). Table 14 shows an example of Decimation when a survivor described her life before the Syrian crisis: "I looked at the world around me, and I saw it budding ... Everywhere I went, I only saw rainbows" (Loizeau 2017: 00:06:46).

Table 14: Decimation: (Loizeau 2017: 00:06:33.520 - 00:06:36.315)

Visual	Soundtrack		ST (Literal translation)	English subtitles
	Tone of Voice	ST		
des bouquets de fleurs tombant du ciel.	Passionate	السما اشوفها مزهرة السما عم تنزل قطوف قطوف زهر	**I saw the sky blooming. The sky was dropping bunches bunches of flowers.**	**Bouquets of flowers falling from the sky.**

The speaker's metaphorical depiction of happiness above in "I saw the sky blooming" in the subsequent utterance and the emphasis "bunches bunches" were partially reduced in the subtitle. However, this reduction did not show a significant shift in the emotional tone of the subtitle because the subtitle maintained the speaker's metaphorical expression of a happy worldview.

Conclusion

This article examined common subtitling strategies used to translate Arabic emotional expressions in GBV narratives into English in the context of documentaries on GBV in the Syrian conflict. The investigation showed that nearly half of the emotional expressions were subtitled using the Transfer strategy, closely adhering to the original. However, some aspects of trauma narratives, such as pronoun use and orality features, were altered or compromised. Moreover, Condensation was used to reduce stylistic features such as repetition and speech disfluencies, which are key to emotional content in trauma narratives.

As shown in Table 10, in some instances, emotional expressions originally narrated from a personal perspective (first person) were sometimes generalized, affecting the speaker's emotional ownership. Conversely, emotional expressions in the corpus originally narrated from a less personal perspective (second person or general) were sometimes shifted to a more personal one in the subtitles. This suggests that subtitling in the documentary context may overlook crucial aspects of trauma narratives, highlighting the need to pay attention to their nuances.

My analysis also demonstrates that orality features such as repetition and speech disfluencies were sometimes deemed redundant despite their role in conveying emotions. This shift in orality is significant given the specific nature of documentary films and the impact of the translation mode (subtitling) on the GBV narrative. The features mentioned above are essential in GBV documentaries, reflecting the essence of the trauma narratives – the 'unspeakable discourse'. Silent pauses, hesitations and repetitions are markers of an unspeakable traumatic experience and are vital to understand survivors' accounts fully. The loss of these features in subtitles may detract from the original expression of emotions, aligning with previous studies on trauma narratives (Cordella 2006; Batchelor 2015), subtitling (Yang 2022) and Bosseaux's (2023) recent experimental guidelines on subtitling emotional content in GBV narratives.

The loss of some orality features may be interpreted as a disadvantage to the original voices owing to the constraints of subtitling as a mode. However, Guillot (2012:483) argues that subtitling is a discrete form of expression whose peculiarities can be an asset rather than a

constraint; for example, a few cues of orality can create the experience of speech. Indeed, Bosseaux's (2023) guidelines offer creative ways to maintain these elements in English subtitles. Orality nuances in unscripted texts, such as documentary interviews, reflect the speaker's state of mind when recounting a personal experience. However, excluding these oral cues in subtitles adversely affects the representation of the ST's emotional expressions.

Analysis of 90 explicit emotional expressions revealed that subtitlers predominantly used the Transfer strategy (59%), notably avoiding Paraphrase entirely. For the 109 implicit emotional expressions, subtitlers favoured the Expansion strategy. This preference suggests a conscious effort to preserve and sometimes intensify speakers' emotional voices. These findings echo Perdikaki and Georgiou's (2020:171) research, which found that subtitlers handling sensitive content felt a heightened responsibility as the speaker's voice to the target audience, often prioritizing authenticity in their translations.

Overall, this research has shed light on strategies for subtitling Arabic GBV documentaries, underscoring the need for further investigation. The findings offer a foundation for refining subtitling practices and understanding the subtitling of emotional expressions from Arabic into English. However, the study generated more questions than answers, partly because of the absence of interviews with the subtitlers, constrained by their invisibility and the time limitations of this study. Furthermore, the analysis of the subtitling of the emotional expressions was based on a qualitative method, which could have involved potentially distracting subjectivity. Future research could extend this work by examining a larger sample and surveying subtitlers' awareness of the characteristics of war-related trauma narratives and their perspectives on how dealing with such narratives impacts their work to understand better and address the associated translation challenges.

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