Agency and Censorship in Arabic Cybersubtitling: Are they correlated?

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Abstract: This study explores the intersection of agency and censorship in the Arabic cybersubtitling medium. Focusing on cybersubtitling practices and drawing on commercial subtitling, the research employs a qualitative analysis of selected cybersubtitling examples of problematic AV content that is typically censored in Arabic commercial subtitling practices. The main research question investigates (Q1) whether there is a correlation between agency and censorship in cybersubtitling. The question is based on the hypothesis that (H1) the more the AV content typically needs to be censored, the more translator agency is obvious in the translation. The study identifies cases in which cybersubtitlers deviate from commercial standards while upholding societal norms. The most significant outcome of this research is the confirmation of the initial hypothesis by the limited number of subtitling examples reviewed, indicating a relationship between agency and censorship. By examining cybersubtitling text examples, this study contributes to a nuanced understanding of how cybersubtitlers navigate the interplay between cultural sensitivities, individual expression, and societal/commercial norms in the evolving landscape of Arabic cybersubtitling.

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التدخل الترجمي والرقابة على المحتوى في سطرجة الهواة على الانترنت: هل هناك علاقة بينهما؟

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مستخلص البحث: تستكشف هذه الدراسة التقاطع المحتمل بين ما يسمى بالتدخل الترجمي والرقابة في سطرجة الهواة على الانترنت. تعتمد الدراسة على تحليل سطرجة الهواة ومقارنة بعض أجزاءها بالسطرجة التجارية المتواجدة على الشاشات التلفزيونية وبرامج البث على الانترنت. لتحقيق ذلك يستخدم البحث تحليلًا نوعيًا لأمثلة مختارة من سطرجة الهواة لمحتوى سمعي/بصري يصنف عادةً أنه مسيء أو منافي للأعراف المجتمعية العربية وبالتالي يخضع لعوامل الرقابة في أوساط السطرجة التجارية العربية. يهدف سؤال البحث الرئيس (س1) إلى اكتشاف إذا ما كانت هناك علاقة بين التدخل الترجمي والرقابة على المحتوى، ويستند السؤال إلى الفرضية القائلة بأنه (ف1) كلما زادت الحاجة إلى الرقابة على المحتوى السمع/بصري، زادت حدة التدخل الترجمي في السطرجة العربية للهواة. نتيجة الدراسة توصلت إلى حالات يبتعد فيها المسطرجون الهواة عن معايير السطرجة التجارية المعمول بها على الشاشات وبرامج البث لكنهم في الوقت ذاته التزموا الأعراف المجتمعية العربية أو الإسلامية. أهم ثمرة لهذا البحث هي تأكيد الفرضية الأولية المذكورة آنفاً- من خلال أمثلة السطرجة التي تم تحليلها ومراجعتها، مما يشير إلى وجود علاقة بين التدخل الترجمي والرقابة على المحتوى. من خلال هذه الدراسة وتحديداً دراسة أمثلة نصوص سطرجة الهواة، فيمكن للباحثين والمهتمين بالسطرجة العربية اكتشاف طريقة تعامل المسطرجين الهواة مع النصوص التي تحوي حساسيات أو محاذير ثقافية للفرد والمجتمع، ويمكن أيضاً فهم طريقة المسطرجين الهواة في التعبير الفردي من خلال الترجمة مع الإخلال أو الحفاظ على الأعراف المجتمعية ومعايير السطرجة التجارية..

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1. Introduction

The widespread growth of digital media has significantly influenced the distribution and consumption of cultural products, especially within the audiovisual (AV) content domain. Cybersubtitling (more on the term in 2.1 below), the fan-driven practice of translating and subtitling AV content on the internet has emerged as a substantial force in this landscape, nurturing cross-cultural exchange and enabling access to global narratives (Díaz-Cintas, 2018). Cybersubtitling, once associated with amateur collaboration, has become a complex system with varied participants, motivations, and power dynamics (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2021). This article investigates the intricate relationship between agency and censorship within the Arabic cybersubtitling community, exploring how cybersubtitlers navigate the socio-political and cultural sensitivities of the Arab world while concurrently asserting their agency. Existing research has examined censorship and subtitling taboo language (Alsharhan, 2020), subtitling's role in language learning (Vulchanova & Lervåg, 2021), and interventionalist practices and their challenge to censorship (Aljammaz, 2023). Nonetheless, the specific context of Arabic cybersubtitling, marked by unique linguistic, cultural, and political considerations, remains relatively under-explored, especially concerning matters of agency and censorship. This study aims to address this gap by investigating a possible connection between the two matters. Specifically, the aim is to answer the main research question and test a related hypothesis. The main research question investigates (Q1) whether there is a correlation between agency and censorship in cybersubtitling. The question is based on the hypothesis that (H1) the more the AV content typically needs to be censored, the more translator agency is obvious in the translation. By analyzing the textual output of cybersubtitled content and the discourse surrounding these practices, this article offers insights into the intricate interchange between individual agency and the cultural and religious norms as they manifest in the intricacies of cybersubtitling.

2. Literature review
2.1 Cybersubtitling

Many studies have investigated cybersubtitles either directly or indirectly (cf. Ameri & Khoshsaligheh, 2019; Eldalees et al., 2017; Khalaf & Rashid, 2016, 2019; Pedersen, 2019; Wongseree, 2016), but not many addressed the discrepancies in terminology, except a few (Aljammaz, 2022; Baños & Díaz-Cintas, 2024; Díaz-Cintas, 2018). It is therefore necessary to address such a vital issue. Cybersubtitling, as a practice, belongs to the wider AVT family that includes many forms of AVTs such as dubbing, subtitling, scripting, and closed captioning (Díaz-Cintas, 2018). Cybersubtitling as a term is by no means agreed upon by AVT scholars; however, it is adopted in our study because it best utilizes reference to the web as opposed to, for instance, presumptions about the skill of the subtitlers. As a term, cybersubtitling is gaining traction in the field and is used by more scholars (cf. Aljammaz, 2022; Baños & Díaz-Cintas, 2024; Díaz-Cintas, 2018; Izwaini, 2014; Zwischenberger & Cukur, 2024). Jorge Díaz-Cintas, one of the leading scholars in the field of AVT and the person who coined the term, identifies cybersubtitling as "…subtitling on the web…" (Díaz-Cintas, 2018, p. 129), which explains the inclusion of the word "cyber" to refer to the digital space of the internet. Díaz-Cintas (2018, p. 132) claims that the term cybersubtitles "…subsumes the many varieties of subtitles encountered on the net more transparently" and these cybersubtitles "…can be purposely requested by some collectives, i.e., crowdsourced, or generated voluntarily, and the individuals behind their production can be either amateurs or professionals". The reference to the internet by using the word "cyber" thus relates the subtitles to the location in which they are stored, produced, consumed, and circulated, as opposed to terminology that presumes the intentions behind production (e.g., volunteer subtitling or fansubbing) or terms that denote non-professionalism (e.g., amateur subtitling or non-professional subtitling).

Linked to the term of cybersubtitling is the term commercial subtitling. Commercial subtitling (the practice) and commercial subtitles (the product) are used to refer to the practice or the subtitles that are produced by a subtitling agency, TV network, or media streaming service (e.g., Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney+, etc.). They are meant for commercial use via cinema, TV networks, streaming services, etc. It is important to note, however, that the commercial aspect here refers to the location and intention for which these types of subtitles are produced and not exclusively to the fact that those who produced them were paid to do

so. Previous research has demonstrated that certain cybersubtitlers receive payment for their work (e.g., Sajna, 2013; Orrego-Carmona, 2015).

2.2 Agency and censorship

Unfortunately, not many studies have addressed the notions of agency and censorship within the cybersubtitling context, and those that have limited their scope to one of the notions (Abdolmaleki et al., 2018; Aljammaz, 2023; Alsharhan, 2020; Kaun et al., 2016) and not a possible relationship between them. Before finding a possible link between the two, each notion should be defined from the perspective of AVT. According to Pérez-González (2017, p. 18), agency is the "increased engagement of ordinary people in mediated self-expression practices". Self-expression in AVT scholarship refers to using translation strategies and choices to convey the translator's beliefs, attitudes, and motivations (Baker, 2016; Pérez-González, 2016). Baker (2016), Pérez-González (2016), and others have suggested that self-expression is a motive behind cybersubtitling. Their research indicates that self-expression can be a reason for engaging in cybersubtitling. Pérez-González understands the involvement of cybersubtitlers in creating and distributing subtitled media content as a method for network members to reflect their identity traits onto translations, thereby achieving strategic objectives. When a viewer becomes a prosumer, the concept of 'target audience' shifts. The translator no longer creates a target-oriented translation for an audience; instead, the target audience produces their own "self-representation" (Cronin, 2012). Self-representation is achieved by adopting a different view of agency and the empowering potential of translation as a mode of "personal expression" (Dwyer, 2012). Pérez-González (2017, p. 20) notes that cybersubtitlers "…are often driven by a desire to collaborate with individuals who share similar views to question mediated public narratives," such as social norms or commercial subtitling norms.

Previous research into the notions of agency and censorship led us to formulate a hypothesis that they are intertwined, and one may be a result of the other. This hypothesis has been founded to particularly address the unique socio-political context of Arabic cybersubtitling, where censorship and ideology influence subtitling norms, and to build on similar research on cybersubtitling (cf. Baker, 2016). Izwaini's (2014) examination of

Arabic cybersubtitling, for instance, indicates that Arabic cybersubtitlers are driven to subtitle "…mainly because they like the material, they wish to publicize it, or they have an agenda to inform people who have no access to the ST or the SL [source language]." (p. 101). In this regard Pérez-González (2017, p. 23) states that "…the social aspects of media practices undertaken by one-person agencies therefore deserve as much scholarly attention…". One of our study's aims is to provide such scholarly attention.

3. Methodology

To answer the research question and hypothesis, this study adopts a qualitative textual analysis. The analysis includes investigating cybersubtitlers' opinions to scale the textual analysis, which is the main research procedure. Such opinions are retrieved from surveys made with several Arabic-oriented cybersubtitlers (e.g., Aljammaz, 2023; Alonayq, 2021; Khalaf & Rashid, 2019). Informed by cybersubtitlers' opinions on issues of censorship and how to deal with provocative AV content, the textual analysis employs cybersubtitling examples with possible evidence of agency. Specifically, the textual analysis involves an examination of a select corpus of texts translated from English (ST) into Arabic (TT). The focus will be on cybersubtitling examples that trigger forms of censorship and, possibly, agency. Arabic cybersubtitlers' input and survey responses serve as a benchmark for analysis and a means of testing the research hypothesis by identifying a possible link between censorship and agency through the inclusion of the cybersubtitles themselves.

As a theoretical framework, the analysis includes a ST/TT comparison of cybersubtitlers' work using descriptive translation studies (DTS) (Toury, 1995) approach. The analysis compares translation and subtitling strategies and approaches employed by Arabic cybersubtitlers and Arabic commercial subtitlers, drawing on Toury's notion of norms (1980, 1995) to illustrate how different strategies/approaches may impact norms and/or censorship issues. Remarks made by certain cybersubtitlers are then used to find possible connections between cybersubtitlers' views on censorship and forms of agency in their translation. Instead of relying on textual or survey data alone, the analysis incorporates input from cybersubtitlers themselves to test the hypothesis through the translated work.

Cybersubtitlers' responses to provocative AV content are analyzed against a sociological framework (Toury, 1980, 1995) to garner attention on the cybersubtitler, but analyzing the translation product of Arabic cybersubtitlers brings the act of translation to the fore, which addresses one of the criticisms of past AVT research (cf. O'Sullivan & Cornu, 2019). Díaz-Cintas indicates that some studies adopt a descriptive approach to AVT and fall into overwhelmingness as they try to analyze corpora of texts that are too massive (2004) and this is why this contribution focuses on a select corpus of texts as representative of Arabic cybersubtitles and the issues of censorship and agency.

4. Analysis and discussion
4.1 Cybersubtitlers' opinions
Several investigations into Arabic cybersubtitling have conducted comprehensive surveys on cybersubtitlers' opinions on subtitling sensitive AV content. We draw upon the perspectives gathered from these datasets to establish a benchmark for the current investigation and evaluate our proposed hypothesis, with particular emphasis on responses concerning cybersubtitlers' attitudes towards censorship in both commercial subtitling within mainstream media and within the field of cybersubtitling.

Table 1

Ranking	Cybersubtitling procedure
1	Follow commercial subtitling norms
2	Translate sensitive AV content as is
3	Skip translating such content
4	Warn the viewer through the subtitles

Most reported cybersubtitling procedures when dealing with sensitive AV content

Table 1 presents a hierarchy of strategies that cybersubtitlers may use when dealing with sensitive or explicit AV content. The ranking lists four main procedures. These procedures reflect the range of choices available to cybersubtitlers and highlight the balance between adhering to social norms and exercising individual agency in translation practices. The first point is that cybersubtitlers might follow commercial subtitling and social norms for explicit

AV content, such as reducing or euphemizing taboo language. In other words, some cybersubtitlers practice a form of censorship, like mainstream media subtitlers, as previous studies have reported.

This approach underscores the influence of broader cultural and institutional expectations on cybersubtitlers, who may feel compelled to align their translations with prevailing standards of appropriateness. By choosing to soften or omit explicit language, these subtitlers mirror the strategies commonly seen in commercially produced subtitles, thereby conforming to audience sensitivities and societal values. Such decisions are often informed by a desire to avoid controversy or backlash, ensuring that the translated content remains accessible and acceptable to a broader viewership. This form of self-imposed censorship highlights the complex balance cybersubtitlers must maintain between accurately conveying the source material and respecting the cultural norms of their target audience.

The second most reported procedure is translating explicit AV content and explicit language as is, without censoring or reducing its intensity (e.g., Abdelaal, 2019; Al-Adwan, 2015; Alharthi, 2016; Alsharhan, 2020; Furgani, 2016; Khalaf & Rashid, 2016, 2019). For this procedure, it was reported that cybersubtitlers favored not censoring their translations and defying the norm that is followed on screens in the Arab World.

Therefore, it can be established through previous inquiries into cybersubtitlers' opinions and survey responses (e.g., Al-Yasin & Rabab'ah, 2019; Alsharhan, 2020; Khalaf & Rashid, 2016) that Arabic cybersubtitlers mainly adopt two translational norms: 1) they admit to applying forms of censorship when translating explicit AV content, or 2) they practice a form of agency by not following the norm through translating such content.

The following subtitling samples illustrate how cybersubtitlers navigate issues of censorship and agency in their work, offering tangible evidence of the norms and practices discussed above.

4.2 Subtitling examples
The following subtitling samples were individually collected from cybersubtitling websites, forums, and online articles that discuss Arabic cybersubtitling in general and issues around

censorship. The actual AV content (movie, TV show, etc.) that these examples were taken from is not provided, as this information is irrelevant as per the study's aims.

Table 2

Arabic subtitles	English Translation
تحذير الكثير من المشاهد الغير لائقة قادمة ومتنوووووعة من الدقيقة ٣٤:٠٤، تبدأ الأشياء المهمة	Warning Many inappropriate scenes are coming and are extended. From minute 34:04, the important things start.

In Table 2, the Arabic cybersubtitles serve as a warning about graphic content, a not-so-common feature for commercial subtitling agencies and AV content distributors (e.g., Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney+). The cybersubtitler interjects in the translation and makes themselves as a translator visible to the viewership by addressing them through the subtitles. This example illustrates a translator's intervention, considered a type of agency, since the subtitler describes the need to censor audiovisual content. Going back to Table 1, even though most cybersubtitlers reported that they follow commercial subtitling norms, this cybersubtitler prefers to defy the commercial subtitling norm by interjecting in the subtitles. Interestingly, although their own censorship guidelines seem to motivate them to do this practice, they would rather keep the presumably obscene content and warn the viewer instead. This type of content advisory in the subtitles enables viewers to make informed decisions about whether to skip the potentially offensive content.

In this instance, the cybersubtitler takes an active role by interjecting directly in the translation, making themselves visible to the audience through the subtitles. This form of address is noteworthy because it disrupts the conventional expectation of subtitler invisibility, i.e., 'translator invisibility' (Venuti, 1995), where translators are expected to remain neutral and refrain from inserting personal perspectives or commentary into the subtitles (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2021; Pedersen, 2011). Such visible intervention by the cybersubtitler can be seen as an indicator of translator agency, particularly within the context of AVT, where issues of censorship frequently emerge. The subtitler's choice to directly address the viewership and provide a warning about the content emphasizes

their dynamic decision-making process, reflecting not only their personal or cultural ethics but also the pressures and constraints imposed by local norms and regulatory standards (Abdallah, 2011; Dwyer, 2017). By choosing to warn viewers rather than completely censor content, the subtitler asserts their own authority and acknowledges the complexities resulting from this cross-cultural communication.

Table 3

Arabic subtitles	English Translation
كلام كفر لا يُمكن ترجمته استغفر الله العظيم	Blasphemous dialogue that cannot [should not] be translated. I seek forgiveness from Allah [God] Almighty

In Table 3, once more, the cybersubtitler makes themselves visible as they directly address the viewership and express their own views on the AV content. The cybersubtitler not only defies subtitling norms usually observed in commercial subtitling by addressing the audience, but they also make their opinions clear about the reasons why they chose not to translate the content, thereby exposing their own ethical considerations. Translating such 'blasphemous' content may be a problem for an Arabic-speaker, especially when it is noted that 'Arabs are mostly Muslims' (Khalil, 2013). The cybersubtitler's decision to address the viewership directly and provide an explicit justification for omitting the translation of blasphemous discourse reveals a conscious decision-making process based on personal, cultural, and religious values, as well as the broader regulatory and social norms that shape subtitling practices in Arabic-speaking contexts (Abdallah, 2011; Dwyer, 2017)

The cybersubtitler's comment serves as both a warning and a justification, reflecting their awareness of the potential offense such content may cause to a predominantly Muslim audience. Therefore, the cybersubtitler is aware that the inclusion or omission of certain content in translation may have broader implications for societal norms and viewer reception. This practice highlights the dynamic and multifaceted role of the cybersubtitler as an agent who must balance commercial subtitling norms, personal beliefs, and societal norms, especially when confronted with content deemed blasphemous or otherwise inappropriate in specific cultural contexts.

Table 4

Arabic subtitles	English Translation
(مقطع غير لائق بعد) (قليل ارجو التخطي) "تذكر بأن الله يراك"	(Inappropriate clip upcoming please skip) "Remember that Allah is watching you."

As is the case with Table 2 and Table 3, Table 4 is yet another example of a cybersubtitler agency, where the subtitler actively makes themselves visible in the subtitles. In this example, the cybersubtitler warns the viewer of an upcoming 'inappropriate' scene and goes further by adding a note that reminds the viewer to self-censor by skipping the scene. This act of direct communication with the audience demonstrates a conscious intervention in the translation process. Such obvious warnings to viewers are noteworthy because they reflect the cybersubtitler's awareness of the sociocultural context in which the content is being consumed. The cybersubtitler's decision to flag potentially blasphemous or inappropriate scenes aligns with broader societal norms of Arabic-speaking viewership. This is not merely a technical choice, but a deliberate translational action shaped by personal values and societal norms, as explained earlier.

By making themselves visible and addressing the viewers directly, the cybersubtitler assumes an active role in guiding audience reception and interpretation of the AV content. This approach goes beyond traditional commercial subtitling practices, which typically emphasize invisibility and neutrality. Instead, the cybersubtitler's intervention acts as both a warning and a justification for removing or reshaping content, showing an agency that is strongly connected to censorship issues and the cybersubtitler's personal beliefs and ethical concerns.

Table 5

Arabic subtitles	English Translation
كلام لا يمكن ترجمته لقباحته	A dialogue that cannot be translated due to its vulgarity

As is the case with Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4, in Table 5, the cybersubtitler explicitly states that they have an issue with the dialogue and refuse to translate it. This example is a form of agency by the cybersubtitler that is clearly linked to their stance on censorship, as is the case with the previous examples. This deliberate refusal to translate is not a neutral act; rather, it signifies the subtitler's active engagement and agency in the translation process, reflecting a conscious decision to withhold content based on ethical or cultural considerations.

When compared to the previous examples, this intervention shares key characteristics with those found in Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4, where the cybersubtitler's agency is similarly reinforced. This approach demonstrates an explicit awareness of the sociocultural context and the expectations of the target audience, particularly within Arabic-speaking communities. Both Table 4 and Table 5 reveal a pattern where the cybersubtitler's visibility is enhanced through direct communication with viewers, diverging from the traditional norms of commercial subtitling, which typically prioritize invisibility and neutrality. This intervention can be interpreted as an act of agency. This is consistent with the actions observed in earlier examples, where the subtitler's choices are shaped by ethical concerns and a sense of responsibility toward the audience. This level of agency underscores the unique role that cybersubtitlers play in cybersubtitling contexts where individual values and cultural sensitivities can significantly influence translational decisions.

Table 6

Arabic subtitles	English Translation
الراجل دا بيتكلم أسباني وأنا بترجم إنجليزي بس	This guy speaks Spanish, and I only translate in English [in colloquial Arabic]

Table 6 shows another instance where the subtitler interjects in the subtitles, making themselves visible to the viewers. What makes this example different from the previous examples is that the subtitler seems to interject jokingly by stating that they do not translate languages other than English. This example differs from previous examples in that the subtitler uses colloquial Arabic instead of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), which is a variety of Arabic that is favored in commercial subtitling. This constitutes another form of defiance to commercial subtitling norms, which contradict reported translation procedures when dealing with sensitive AV content (as illustrated in Table 1).

Table 7

Arabic subtitles	English Translation
هذا الفيلم رائع ولكن للأسف البطل هيطلع مجنون في الاخر وبيتخيل كل ده وبيحاولوا يعالجوه 🙁	This movie is great, but unfortunately, the central character turns out to be crazy in the end, and is imagining all of this, and they are trying to treat him 🙁.

Similar to Table 6, Table 7 depicts another example of a subtitler's intervention by addressing the viewers using colloquial Arabic. Furthermore, the subtitler also summarized and effectively spoiled the movie's main plot, which completely defies commercial and cybersubtitling norms. In this instance, the subtitler does not limit their role to a neutral translator but instead takes an active stance, choosing to break the "invisibility" norm traditionally adhered to in commercial subtitling. By using colloquial language rather than MSA— the variety typically preferred in commercial subtitling—the subtitler makes their presence unmistakably felt and creates an informal tone with the audience.

Furthermore, the subtitler's agency is further demonstrated by their decision to summarize and disclose the movie's main plot twist, revealing that the central character is crazy and that all events are imagined, thereby removing the suspense for viewers. This act of spoiling the film's ending is a significant departure from both commercial and cybersubtitling conventions, which generally discourage excessive commentary, especially ones that reveal major plot points. When a subtitler intervenes in this way, they influence the viewing experience by introducing their own interpretation into the subtitles. Such actions demonstrate the role that subtitlers play in affecting how viewers engage with the content and indicate the significance of subtitler agency.

Table 8

Arabic subtitles	English Translation
هذا الفيلم جيد جداً لكن للأسف البطل سيموت في النهاية	This movie is very good, but unfortunately, the central character dies in the end.

Table 8 is another case of a subtitler's intervention in the subtitles that ultimately spoils the movie-watching experience for viewers. In this

instance, the subtitler not only chooses to address the viewers directly using colloquial Arabic but also reveals a crucial plot point by stating that the central character dies in the end. Such a revelation not only summarizes the film's outcome but also spoils the suspense and emotional engagement for viewers who have not yet watched the movie. This type of intervention defies established commercial and, interestingly, cybersubtitling norms, which typically discourage revealing major plot details or altering the viewer's experience through needless commentary.

Table 9

Arabic subtitles	English Translation
هل تتحدثين الإنجليزية السؤال موجه لكم يا مشاهدين مني أنا المترجم تعلموا الإنجليزي وريّحونا	Do you speak English[?] This question is directed to you, viewers, from me, the translator. Learn English and make it easier for us

As is the case with the previous examples, Table 9 is an example of a subtitler agency, but interestingly, this example shows a slightly different type of intervention. In this example, the subtitler is not interjecting to remark on the content or to remind the viewer to practice self-censorship; instead, the subtitler is conveying frustration at having to subtitle. It seems that the cybersubtitler is dissatisfied with their role as a subtitler, which has led them to express their frustration through the subtitles by making their presence as a translator apparent.

4.3   Discussion

The study set out to answer a main research question and test a related hypothesis. The main research question investigates (Q1) whether there is a correlation between agency and censorship in cybersubtitling. The question is based on the hypothesis that (H1) the more the AV content typically needs to be censored, the more translator agency is obvious in the translation.

After analyzing several subtitling examples and considering how cybersubtitlers deal with profanities, sexual content, and other provocative content, the following figure (Table 10) summarizes our findings.

Table 10

Type of intervention	Effect on the TT
Censorship and warning	• The subtitler(s) are visible • AV content is not translated • Defies commercial subtitling norms
Attempt at humor	• The subtitler(s) are visible • Slightly modifies the viewing experience • Defies commercial subtitling norms
General comments and spoilers	• The subtitler(s) are visible • Considerably modifies the viewing experience • Defies commercial subtitling norms

Cybersubtitlers' types of intervention and their effect on the TT

In an answer to our research question (Q1), there seems to be an evident link between agency and censorship in Arabic cybersubtitling. Agency here refers to forms of intervention in the subtitles and/or translation by having one of the effects illustrated in Table 10. The relationship between agency and censorship has been addressed previously in academic discourse. Tymoczko (2010), for example, identifies translation as a principal activist endeavor, particularly within the framework of censorship, as further emphasized by Baker (2019).

As for our hypothesis (H1), our investigation supports it, as subtitling examples demonstrate that more censoring leads to greater agency. This hypothesis has been explicitly developed to address the unique socio-political landscape of Arabic cybersubtitling, where factors such as censorship and ideology significantly shape subtitling conventions. It also aims to extend existing scholarship on cybersubtitling and audiovisual translation (cf. Baker, 2016). For instance, Izwaini's (2014) study of Arabic cybersubtitling found that practitioners are primarily driven by an appreciation for the material, a desire to give it wider exposure, or an intention to inform audiences who lack access to the source text or language (p. 101).

Although most cybersubtitlers reported that they follow commercial subtitling norms when it comes to translating sensitive AV content (as seen in Table 1), the subtitling examples show a different story. The analyzed subtitling examples illustrate in varying degrees a form of defiance to commercial subtitling norms followed in the Arab World. Despite the case of heavy censorship that is apparent in most mainstream media in that region, the analysis shows that cybersubtitlers practice an even stricter form of censorship. For example, it is unusual for commercial subtitles to have a warning message in the subtitles; however, the above examples show that. Therefore, categorizing agencies in translation highlights the need to account for translation practices and norms beyond those typically identified using traditional approaches, such as surveys and interviews. In this context, individual motivational factors may not be identified solely by surveying cybersubtitlers. The participation or withdrawal of activist translators in specific translational tasks, as well as their selection of techniques and strategies, may more effectively reveal their underlying motivations. This is particularly relevant when such motivations have previously been intentionally concealed in an interview or survey setting. As Kaun et al. (2016, p. 1) claim, "[t]he personalization of digital media and the rise of user-generated content have led to an increased interest in personal self-expression of citizens as a political act" or as a means of agency to fortify or defy censorship or other norms.

Some of the analyzed cybersubtitling examples illustrate the cybersubtitlers' exercise of agency through explicit refusal to translate certain content, a practice that both mirrors and reinforces the patterns established in Table 2, Table 3, Table 4 and Table 5. Each of these cases demonstrates how the cybersubtitler's interventions are not merely technical choices but deliberate actions informed by personal beliefs, ethical considerations, and an acute awareness of the sociocultural environment in which the subtitles are consumed.

One of the most important and unexpected findings of this study is the fact that all the analyzed subtitling examples demonstrate a form of translator visibility. As indicated in Table 10, all the reported forms of subtitler agency in the form of intervening in the subtitles constitute an example of making the translator visible. This finding contradicts Arabic commercial subtitling norms, as the subtitlers often

remain invisible throughout the AV content and may be mentioned in the credits after the conclusion of the content. The act of making the translator visible through subtitling interventions challenges the traditional paradigm of translation as an invisible, mechanical process and instead highlights the subtitler's role as an active mediator. This aligns with broader scholarly debates about translator agency, visibility, and the ethics of translation, especially in cases involving sensitive or controversial content (Baker, 2006; Venuti, 1995).

Lawrence Venuti (1995) presented the concept of 'the translator's invisibility' in which he contends that the translator is usually an invisible figure. Venuti (1995, p. 81) claims that a translator could choose either a domestication method, "…an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to dominant cultural values in English" or "a foreignizing method, an ethnodeviant pressure on those values to register the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text". Traditionally, both in Audiovisual Translation (AVT) broadly and Arabic commercial subtitling specifically, translators have been expected to maintain invisibility and refrain from interventions that draw attention to themselves within the translation. Nevertheless, research in cybersubtitling (e.g., Díaz-Cintas & Sánchez, 2006; Massidda, 2015; Pérez-González, 2006), as well as evidence presented by the current analysis, indicates that this convention has not always been strictly adhered to, and this demonstrates one of the

In conclusion, it was found that Arabic cybersubtitlers employ translation strategies and approaches that exhibit varying forms of translator agency when it comes to AV content that often triggers censorship. As previously shown in Table 10 Arabic cybersubtitlers' agency can be as obvious as an intervention in the text with a comment addressing the viewers or as a simple note in the subtitles advising viewer discretion. Interestingly, the analysis of the subtitling samples proves this study's initial hypothesis, which suggests a link between censorship and agency. Looking back at the analyzed subtitling samples collectively, it is claimed that the more the AV content usually requires censorship (according to Arabic commercial subtitling norms), the more cybersubtitlers display forms of agency. This finding establishes that some Arabic cybersubtitlers are indeed challenging the negotiated public narrative by defying commercial

subtitling norms. This practice constitutes a form of 'social agency.' (Pérez-González, 2017), a translation approach that could be related to frustration with commercial subtitling's handling of AV content that is usually heavily censored on mainstream Arabic viewing platforms. Although the analyzed samples do show forms of agency, they also demonstrate that Arabic cybersubtitlers practice kinds of self-censorship even though they are not required to do so.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of the current study was to answer the main research question about a possible link between agency and censorship and test a related hypothesis. The main research question examines whether there is a correlation between agency and censorship in cybersubtitling. The question is based on the hypothesis that the more the AV content typically needs to be censored, the more translator agency is noticeable in the translation. Although there is a clear lack of research on Arabic language subtitling, earlier studies (e.g., Abdelaal, 2019; Al Sammarraie et al., 2023; Alharthi, 2016; Aljammaz, 2023; Furgani, 2016; Khalaf & Rashid, 2016) indicate that AV content, which often needs censorship, is typically moderated by Arabic cybersubtitlers using flattened language or other translation methods that soften the provocative material.

The findings of the current study align with earlier research but reveal an additional layer of intervention, namely a discernible agency associated with censorship. Notably, this study identifies cases in which cybersubtitlers deviate from commercial standards while upholding societal norms. The most significant outcome of this research is the confirmation of the initial hypothesis by the limited number of subtitling examples reviewed, indicating a relationship between agency and censorship.

This study acknowledges a few limitations. Primarily, its focus on the English/Arabic language pair restricts the scope of findings. Additionally, the absence of input from commercial subtitlers may have limited insights related to the subtitling process. The sample size of analyzed text examples could also be expanded to enhance robustness. However, based on similar studies with similar research aims, it is considered that the selected sample provides sufficient data for meaningful interpretation.

Despite limitations, these findings contribute to translation theory, especially regarding agency and censorship. Furthermore, the study provides valuable insights into the challenges encountered and strategies utilized by cybersubtitlers when mediating complex AV content, as well as meeting viewer expectations and conforming to societal and commercial norms. Such investigations can inform the development of more effective translation methodologies and guidelines for Arabic AVT. The research methodology can be adapted for application in larger-scale studies with similar objectives or across other AVT mediums, such as cyberdubbing, and may facilitate further exploration of the relationship between agency and censorship in other language pairs.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Authenticity

This manuscript is an original work.

Artificial Intelligence Statement

AI and AI-assisted technologies were not used in the writing of this manuscript.

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