OSTENTATIOUSLY EMOTIVE_LOADED LANGUAGE BY BBC IN THE COVERAGE OF TŪFĀN AL-AQSA[1]

Abstract: *An attack on Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) on October 7th, 2023 drastically changed the 24-hour news cycle. Palestinian militant groups orchestrated a blitzkrieg on IOF headquarters in the Gaza Strip borders in such an organized military precision, earning an appellation Tūfān al-Aqsa (literally, 'Al-Aqsa Flood'). To soothe its fury, IOF declared an all-out war on Gaza targeting resistance groups, and immediately embarked on a military operation against Hamas's authority and its ability to wage any military actions against IOF in future. Concomitant with the war has been an increasingly bitter war of words by many pro-Israel media outlets world-wide. The present paper examines the media coverage of the war in the aftermath of the assault as can be illustrated in the finely-employed emotive-loaded language by the BBC. The paper reveals that the language has been rich in emotive overtones and clearly pictured that the IOF as being victimized by the groups' brutality, and envisaged the groups as cowardly thugs which should be liquidated with no mercy. The paper shows that the power of the language aims to deflect international condemnation of the military operation inflicting heavy casualties on innocent Gazans and attempts to show full solidarity with Israel.*

Key words: *Tūfān al-Aqsa, emotive language, emotive-free language, the BBC, Hamas, IOF*

LE LANGAGE OSTENSIBLEMENT CHARGÉ D'ÉMOTION DE LA BBC DANS LA COUVERTURE DE TŪFĀN AL-AQSA

Résumé : *Une attaque contre les Forces d'occupation israéliennes (FOI) le 7 octobre 2023 a radicalement changé le cycle de l'information de 24 heures. Des groupes militants palestiniens ont orchestré une guerre éclair contre le quartier général des FOI aux frontières de la bande de Gaza avec une telle précision militaire organisée, ce qui leur a valu l'appellation Tūfān al-Aqsa (littéralement « l'inondation d'Al-Aqsa »). Pour apaiser sa fureur, les FOI ont déclaré une guerre totale contre Gaza, ciblant les groupes de résistance, et se sont immédiatement lancées dans une opération militaire contre l'autorité du Hamas et sa capacité à mener des actions militaires contre les FOI à l'avenir. Parallèlement à la guerre, de nombreux médias pro-israéliens du monde entier se livrent à une guerre des mots de plus en plus acharnée. Le présent article examine la couverture médiatique de la guerre au lendemain de l'assaut, comme le montre le langage finement employé et chargé d'émotion par la BBC. Le journal révèle que le langage était riche en connotations émotives et décrivait clairement que les FOI étaient victimes de la brutalité des groupes, et considérait les groupes comme des voyous lâches qui devraient être liquidés sans pitié. Le journal montre que le pouvoir du langage vise à détourner la condamnation internationale de l'opération militaire qui a infligé de lourdes pertes à des Gazaouis innocents et les tentatives de montrer une pleine solidarité avec Israël.*

Mots clés : *Tūfān al-Aqsa, langage émotif, langage sans émotion, la BBC, le Hamas, FOI*

1. **Introduction**

It is perhaps perfectly reasonable to argue that the opposite of widely circulated English proverb 'actions speak louder than words', i.e., 'words speak louder than actions' could

[1] Mohammad Ahmad **Thawabteh**, Al-Quds University/United Arab Emirates University, mathawab@uaeu.ac.ae

especially be true and plausible for not only for the complexity of communication in various intercultural transaction, but also for imposing ideology and discourse on the recounting of events during times of war as can be seen in the war on Gaza which broke out in 2023. The emphasis is apparently laid on "the association of words (verbs) with the types of actions they perform, and consequently the types of speakers who perform these actions" (Mouakket 1988: 203). The words employed by either the resistance groups or Israeli Occupying Forces (IOF) relay illocutionary force that "has to do with the speaker's intentions rather than his or her actual words" (Baker 2018: 276). They have undoubtedly a miraculous nature and so does a text (usually comprising of a minimum of a word or a host of words) as it "can be transferred beyond its initial elasticity and assume a new performative status" (Pym 1992: 114). The communicative thrust in such transactions largely resides in the very purpose of denotative and connotative meanings utilised by text producer. By 'text producer', we mean the BBC, with customarily given features well-described by Versteegh (1997: 475): "The producer is the one who creates the meaning (semantic structure), and the meaning determines the form. His view that the act of creating meaning is a complex mental process implies that text producers formulate structures congruous with their intentions." Teasing out layers of meanings which accrue from language use turns out to be crucial in various language exchanges. The underlying structure of a text is mostly rich in emotiveness and reverberates for the future to come. More to the point is what Aziz (1995: 85) points out:

> The expressive units of a system are predetermined by the system itself, while the emotive elements of a message are selected by the speaker/writer and determined by the context. Virtually every expression can be endowed with emotive meaning if it is used in an appropriate context, whether verbal or social. Thus most neutral words may acquire a pejorative or favourable sense if the speaker intends to use them in an emotive way.

Here, we offer a detailed componential analysis of emotiveness in the language used by BBC news coverage of the ongoing acts of war on Palestinians in Gaza Strip. For the operation, the resistance groups used an appellation Tūfān al-Aqsa (literally, 'Al-Aqsa Flood') to describe the all-out attack launched by the Palestinian resistance on October 7, 2023. A language which is replete with a host of positive and negative overtones has come to the fore, in conjunction with war acts. Although styling itself as an objective media outlet, the BBC purposefully established one-of-a-kind lexical variations, the occurrence of which seems not to be in a vacuum ever, but obviously occurs on the periphery of emotive-loaded ideology born of a remorseless conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

It is probably a truism that language users breathe life into an utterance (be it spoken or written) for an unequivocal communicative purpose whereby the subtleties of words in the utterance are felicitously utilised in an interesting and insightful manner. They decidedly have strong tendency to use words to maintain the feeling of love, hate, sadness, happiness, etc. Numbed with the enormity of linguistic responsibility, text producers are meticulous enough in the careful phraseology for which strenuous effort have to be done on the part of the text receivers to grasp various intended meaning(s). True, a word is considered to be so significant in the making of meaning to perform acts ferociously and/or mildly.

To this end, on October 15, 2023, activist group Palestine Action has set off a cacophony of criticism over BBC coverage of the war on Gaza and daubed blood red paint on its headquarters in London "symbolising [its] complicity in Israel's genocide of the Palestinian people through biased reporting" (BBC 2023, Pro-Palestinian march).

It goes without saying that language users seek to capture two inextricable layers of meanings of a given utterance, namely denotative and connotative meanings (Farghal & Shunnaq 1999: 2; see also Shunnaq 1993: 38; Shehab et al. 2014: 165; Thawabteh 2014). The former is employed by text producer (i.e., BBC) to refer to the referential meaning shared by separating sender and receiver. The latter, however, is utilised to show the particularities of beguiling meanings going beyond the basic denotative meaning. People react feelingly to

utterances with informative connotation and affective connotation (see for example Larson 1984: 131).

Socio-linguistic practices comprise language and media as important factors in relaying emotiveness. In fact, they are two sides of the same coin, as it were. Thawabteh (2014: 245) believes that language "aptly serves as a bowl of underpinning ideological linings with highly emotive overtones." As for the media, Barkho (1987: 141) points out that "in a world that depends so heavily on mass communication, the media in every form are playing an increasing role in shaping the political beliefs, behaviour and habits of listeners and readers." That is quite true as to the BBC in which it obviously attempts to shape the readers' behaviour, narratives and opinions. Insofar as the media is concerned, Thawabteh (2014: 245) argues that "Israel's media companies bestride the globe, thanks to the most powerful countries-backed media to Israel. Thus, the media has made voyeurs of all Palestinians for decades." It ensues, therefore, that the media most likely offers Israel avowed support. The BBC seems to be no exception.

In what follows, we shall discuss that deviation from scruples by the BBC is ideologically-motivated -adopting a perpetually involuted stance, the ultimate goal of which is seemingly to invite solidarity for Israelis as much as possible at the expense of the other side, i.e., Palestinians. The effects on public perception or policy is then noticeable.

Insofar as ideology and emotiveness are concerned, we believed that a definition for both is highly needed. Ideology, in the words of Thompson (1990: 56), is "the ways in which meaning serves to establish and sustain relations of domination." By the same token, Malmkjaer (2005: 182) points out that ideology refers to:

> systematically asymmetrical relations of power such as those which obtain or have obtained between, for example, men and women, adults and children, masters and slaves, colonisers and colonised, masters and servants, mangers and secretaries, rich and poor, rich countries and poor countries, different classes and races and so on.

Needless to say, Ullmann (1983: 128) offers a more understanding of emotiveness: "language is not merely a vehicle of communication: It is also a means of expressing emotions and arousing them in others" in which, according to Stevenson (1963: 21-2),

> The emotive meaning of a word is a tendency of a word, arising from the history of its usage, to produce (result from) affective responses in people. It is the immediate aura of feeling which hovers about a word… Because of the persistence of such affective tendencies (among other reasons) it becomes feasible to classify them as 'meanings'.

At this juncture of discussion, it may be useful to highlight what Hatim and Mason (1997) state as to interpersonal meaning which displays two basic types of relationship: power and solidarity. For Hatim and Mason (1997: 193-4), "[p]ower emanates from the text producer's ability to impose his or her plans at the expense of the text receiver's plans. Solidarity, on the other hand, is the willingness of the text producer genuinely to relinquish power and work with his or her interlocutors as members of a team" (see also Assaiqeli 2013: 176).

2. Historical Background

It is of paramount importance to examine the historical, political, and social contexts that are essential for understanding the media coverage on the war on Gaza. Israel's conflict with Palestinians dragged on for more than 75 years— 1948. It was considered as a notorious year for the Palestinians when an internationally-backed Jewish state was founded, in what has then become to be known as 'Israel'. Since then, it has become infamous for ethnic cleansing worldwide, perpetrating indiscriminate massacres and atrocities against indigenous Palestinians, perhaps in one of the most painful 'holocaust' ever known in history.

Palestinians were driven out of their homeland and became refugees world-wide. In fact, basic human rights for Palestinians have been long flagrantly abused by Israel, glaringly obvious against international law. Thawabteh (2012: 2016) argues that "The date [1948] has been deemed as unbearable poignancy for Palestinians as they lost their homeland, but a happy occasion for the Israelis as they establish their long-awaited state." It ensues, therefore, that the Palestinian resistance groups forcefully and unyieldingly resist Israel— the aspiration of gaining the upper hand in the long-standing deteriorating political situation since 1948. The occupation of Palestine has drawn fierce resistance that has lasted for 75 years, the last and rapture of which was on October 7, 2023, which is believed to have given a new lease of life for Palestinians under the bitter of oppression with seething anger fuelled by the occupation.

3. **Methodology**

The present paper explores the nature and proper (and improper) use of emotiveness in the language of written media, based on a detailed componential analysis of seven unobtrusive ideologically-motivated texts taken from BBC, published between October 7 and November 7, 2023. The criteria used for selecting the texts were relevance to the ongoing war and adequacy for approriate analysis. By componential analysis, we adopted Newmark's (1988: 114) view that "in linguistics it means analysing or splitting up the various senses of a word into sense-components which may or may not be universals". In such a case, the analysis of the socio-linguistic situation (particularly thematic and information structures) will be made for a greater need for understanding of the structural configurations of attitudinal meanings and ideologies employed throughout the news published extracts. The texts deal with the aggression on Gaza in the aftermath of the worryingly high land assault on IOF (namely Gaza Division which has caused many casualties), and the abduction of over 240 civilians and soldiers.

4. **Data Analysis and Discussion**

In what follows, we shall go over the manipulated lexical items under study with a fine-tooth comb to make our argument more diversified and corroborated. Consider Text 1 below:

> Text (1)
> (1) The death toll continues to rise in Israel since Saturday's surprise attack by Hamas fighters with 900 killed, including 260 people massacred by gunmen at a music festival (BBC News (2023), Israel hostage crisis).

The first study lexical item is 'Hamas', a native acronym for *Ḥarakat Al Muqāwama Al Islāmiyyah* (literally, Islamic Resistance Movement) which was founded in 1987. Hamas is considered one of the several resistance groups in Palestine that is affiliated with Islamic Brotherhood. To this effect, the Arabic acronym can still associate with a key denotative meaning of 'resistance', well-advocated by International Law and Geneva Conventions. However, the English acronym 'Hamas' deprives text recipients of the basic inherent denotative meaning (i.e., 'resistance') and, in the absence of such meaning, it can simply imply sheer 'terrorism' in the context of situation, viz. employing 'massacred'. Perhaps it requires strenuous efforts to be exerted by the recipients to come up with such meaning.

    Text 1 above also reveals unbiased and biased usage of 'killed' and 'massacred' respectively. A point to bear in mind is that the former seems objective usage at first glance. Not at all: that was partiality per se. The ostensible unbiased 'killed' can be deemed as an initiation phase to take a stance. That is, the BBC is likely to be conscientious about the unbiased use of the item in the first analysis. It does not continue to be so, however, having closely examined higher-order contextual and textural information, e.g., 'The death toll continues to rise in Israel…' and 'including 260 people massacred'. The former exaggerates

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the death toll rise in order to evoke foe images (i.e., Hamas fighters) and to indefatigably impress the devout Israelis and further unify the audience in its indignation at that disgraceful of state of affairs. Similarly, the latter is of ideologically-motivated nature. Astounding layers upon layers of emotive connotations manifest themselves in the propositional and expressive meanings of the word 'massacre', referring to "killing of a large number of people at the same time in a violent and cruel way" (Collins Cobuild, 2003). The emotive overtones the item 'massacred' would bear are meant for stimulating the world to take actions to commiserate with 'Israel' and to justify any retaliatory action Israel would possibly take or, in the words of Shunnaq (1993: 40), these emotive overtones have actually involved "value judgments for the meanings of certain lexical items as 'negative', 'positive', or 'neutral'".

The expository argumentative text above initiated by "The death toll continues to rise in 'Israel' since Saturday's surprise attack by Hamas fighters" is substantiated by employing a very emotive-loaded item, i.e., 'massacre' to give the text receivers a far more sympathetic ear and/or to assemble a remarkable sympathetic cast. The "inclusion of argumentative features in an expository form would be an instance of a departure from the norm" (Hatim & Mason 1997: 107-08), the aim of which is to steer text receivers in a way to become integrated active participants and to relay an attitude of greater sympathy and solidarity with the Israeli bereaved families (see Ullmann 1983: 128). The emotions the text producer intends to arouse in its interlocutors aims at bringing about 'solidarity' by means of 'relinquishing power' (see Hatim & Mason 1997: 193-4).

In contrast, the emotive overtones the text producer undertakes to display exercise of power, i.e., "i.e. encode the non-reciprocal relationship" (Hatim and Mason 1997: 63) with Hamas fighters as people who have committed atrocious crimes against innocent Israeli civilians. More to the point can be seen in Text 2 below:

Text (2)
(2) When Hamas began its rampage through southern Israel last Saturday, Zaka volunteer Baroch Frankel, 28, was observing the Sabbath as usual at his apartment in Bnei Brak, an orthodox city near Tel Aviv where many of the volunteers live. About mid-morning, he heard over his Zaka walkie-talkie that there was some kind of emergency under way (BBC News, 2023, Zaka).

From later epistemological standpoint which shows more detailed accounts of what had happened, with such "sequential progressions which involve a series of adjacent sentence with different topic" (Fakhri 1995b, as cited in Versteegh 1997: 651) the next vaguely worded lexical item 'rampage', subtle though it might be, demands a more exact and thorough investigation. The item bears witness to intricate connotations (e.g., rushing about in a wild or violent way and causing damage), also propagating that the resistance groups went on the rampage through southern Israel, murdering scores of civilians, pillaging houses, shooting and simply destroying everything in their way. The ultimate goal is to adduce evidence to support the previous claim, i.e., that Hamas began its rampage, desecrating the picture of observing the Sabbath.

The text producer seems to have a backdrop against which the operation was carried out by the resistance groups and initiates a more static narrative accounts for which potential "receivers will activate a narrative frame, in which events will continue to be related until some conclusion is reached" (Hatim & Mason 1997: 60). A more illustrative example of this can be seen in the co-text and context of the extract: "Zaka volunteer Baroch Frankel, 28, was observing the Sabbath… he heard over his Zaka walkie-talkie that…."

For more illustration, consider the following extract in which the resistance group Hamas was accused of inexcusably sheltering in a mosque, Islam's most revered religious institution, thus absolutely justifying any possible actions to be taken by IOF.

Text (3)
(3) The Israeli military says it has struck a Hamas cell sheltering in a mosque in the occupied West Bank (BBC, Inside Jenin Mosque 2023).

The deceptively worded texture of "a Hamas cell sheltering in a mosque" unfolds nightmarish scene of a sacred site. Palestinian civilians with all political persuasions and social standings gather for dawn prayer. Indeed, it is not only a particular group performing dawn prayer, but as would, presumably, Muslims around the world do every day. Other than showing behaviour of naked and repressed aggression by the IOF, the text, however, entails justification for missile hit by Israeli warplanes. The apparently intentional covering of the time of the airstrike is dubious- at the time of dawn prayer when Palestinian civilians gathered to perform the prayer. The mosque does not shelter Hamas militants, staying in and being hunted by IOF as the BBC has landed the readership with such daffy storyline. The inextricably interwoven narrative frame by the BBC would relay a pragmatic meaning that the idea that a mosque where Muslims packed into to worship Allah is undermined by the textual practice, that is, 'Hamas cell'.

In Text 4 below, the phraseology patterning and the thematic organization of the text would throw doubt on a reader. It is well-known that the mission of a 'health ministry' inevitably has to do with urgent public health issues, make sure that the community is in fine fettle and the care and safety of people are ensured.

Text (4)
 (4) The Hamas-run health ministry in Gaza said the death toll is now more than 6,500 since 7 October. In the past 24 hours, it says 756 Palestinians including 344 children were killed in Israeli strikes (BBC, (2023) What's the latest?)

The ministry cannot by afford to be complacent about people's health. In Gaza, the 'health ministry' is likely to shoulder health-related responsibility to respond to Israeli ruthless airstrikes inflicting heavy casualties on weak and defenceless civilian Gazans. Highlighting that 'health ministry' (in lowercase) is run by Hamas seems to purposefully divert potential text recipients from the real issue- to soften the impact of horrendous toll death of Gazans, and perhaps to evoke no solidarity with Gazans. Clearly, 'health ministry', though refers to specific entity, shows less high status and less internationally-recognised institution as it is assumed to have enjoyed in normal situations.

One of the predominantly vague items is 'self-defence' which has given IOF the Sword of Damocles hanging over Palestinians civilians.

Text (5)
 (5) Israel argues that it's response to the massacres of 7 October meets all its legal obligations: it's acting in self-defence and with the required level of proportionality. (BBC 2023, Israel's self-defence)

Ensuring a very high degree of protection against an attack by someone is legitimate. In this regard, Guglielmo Verdirame on 16 May 2021 writes:

[T]he facts underlying self-defence are often in dispute. Parties to a conflict seldom agree on who is the attacker and who is the defender - and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts are no exception. In this case, critics of the Israeli position also advance two legal arguments. First, they argue that the right of self-defence is available only against another state, but not against a non-state entity like Gaza. State practice, especially since the attacks of 11 September 2001, militates against this interpretation of self-defence, but the jurisprudence of the International Court of Justice has not settled this question. Secondly, the International Committee of the Red Cross, among others, considers Gaza is still subject to Israeli occupation because of the degree to which Israel exerts control over and around that territory. Israel maintains that it has not occupied Gaza since its withdrawal in 2005 and that a territory cannot be occupied without "boots on the ground". The right of self-defence is no blank cheque. International law allows states to defend themselves in the right circumstances, but only with force that is necessary and

proportionate. A common misperception is that proportionality in self-defence means an eye for an eye, a rocket for a rocket, or a casualty for a casualty. This is not so: there is no place in international law for using force in revenge. (Verdirame 2021, Israel-Gaza).

'Israel' has been consistently and callously ill-treating Palestinians and glaringly breached international law for decades. Acting in such callous disregard of Palestinian life undeniably necessitates legitimate right of self-defence by "the defender" as can be seen by right-minded people across the world, but this right is unfortunately denied by most world political circles. Instead, the right of self-defence for "the attacker" is indubitably encouraged by these circles. In a speech, Irish Sinn Féin politician, Matt Carthy (Facebook 2023), argues:

The words 'Israel has the right to defend itself'' means in practice that Israel takes that right as license to bombard civilians, to bomb schools, hospitals and other civilian infrastructure and it has now been taken as licence to enforce the displacement of 1 million people from one end of an open-air prison to another. To deny food, energy, medical supplies to a besieged civilian population. To actually deny them water, to ensure that children, the sick, the disabled, the elderly will literally die of thirst.

The apprehension of Irish Sinn Féin politician has come true as Text 6 below reveals the extent of serious consequences due to the vagueness of the language.

Text (6)
(6) More than 1,400 people have been killed in Gaza since Israel launched retaliatory air strikes, with 338,000 people displaced. (BBC 2023, What's happening now?)

It is perhaps noteworthy that the emotive socio-political overtones likely to be observed in 'retaliatory' rekindles an unpleasant feeling. If 'Israel' takes retaliatory action, it then tries to harm whoever has harmed or annoyed 'Israel', including militant groups and civilians. All Israeli atrocities such as killing civilians, displacing people and a retaliatory siege to prevent supplies of food, water, electricity, etc., getting through seem to be justified action as it comes in retaliation for equal very cruel and shocking actions by militant groups, something that is utterly ridiculous.

Text (7)
(7) The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) confirmed that it had carried out an attack targeting Hamas in the area where members of Al-Dahdouh's family were killed. When questioned by the BBC about the loss of civilian life in Israeli airstrikes in Gaza, including that of journalists and their families, IDF spokesperson Lt Col Peter Lerner said "any loss of life is a tragedy" (BBC 2023, Wael Al-Dahdouh).

In Text 7 above, 'The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF)' merits examination. The acronym essentially bears two points of view. One for the aboriginal people of Palestine in which it constitutes a legal offence. It shows unassailable proof of dispossessing millions of original Palestinians of their lands in 1948, so it is horribly 'offensive' rather than 'defensive' for them. The BBC adopts the other view, i.e., IDF showing palpable bias for 'Israel'.

The other item is "an attack targeting Hamas". It is worth noting that rhetorically elevated language is hijacked and utilised outside its natural environment to the attainment of a goal: to eliminate Hamas and not to target civilians. Alas. Otherwise is the case. For example, Al Jazeera reporter Wael Al-Dahdouh has lost four members of his family in an Israeli strike to his house. As can be seen in the above text, the 'IDF' statement: "an attack targeting Hamas in the area where members of Al-Dahdouh's family were killed." is clearly and uncontroversially to efface 'Israel' for responsibility as much as possible. The relativized

statement contributes to arouse our feelings that the military action is apt to do more harm to Hamas than is to other civilians.

5. Conclusion

Tūfān al-Aqsa is stiff, thought to be most electrifying of stiff-necked Israeli occupation in a protracted conflict in the Middle East. It has been the epitome of the resistance against IOF for post-occupation deprivations for over seven decades. It is clear from reading texts published on BBC webpage that the news media carefully structured its argument and has been meticulously selective in their choice of wording for showing inherent emotiveness, believed to be quintessential for any given communicative purpose in various intercultural transaction, with a view to advocating pro-Israeli narrative. The producers of language and discourse utilise a wide range of emotive meanings to serve communication in hand, namely to appeal to the emotions of the audience to establish solidarity with Israelis, but to relinquish such solidarity whatsoever with Palestinians. Emotive language seems to help the reader to read off a given ideology, and consequently advocate a particular course of action in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a concluding statement that meshes with a study by Thawabteh and Abu Radwan (2020).

It is then perfectly reasonable to argue that the power of word (realised in the use of emotiveness) is on a par with the power of war as can be shown in the coverage of the BBC of the war on Gaza. Words offer a cover up for crimes perpetrated by the IOF.

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Mohammad Ahmad **Thawabteh** earned his PhD in Translation and Intercultural Studies from Universidad de Granada, Spain. He is currently teaching Translation at United Arab Emirates University, UAE. He taught translation at undergraduate and graduate levels at Al-Quds University, Jerusalem, Occupied Palestine (1999-2024) where he was Chair of Department of English Language and Literature (2011-2012) and Coordinator of MA Translation and Interpreting Programme (2010-2013). He also taught translation at undergraduate and graduate levels at Sultan Qaboos University, Oman from 2017 until 2019. His research interests include Audio-visual Translation; Translator Training, Translation Studies, Pragmatics, Cultural Studies and Discourse analysis, Translation and Conflict, Translation Technology and Localisation.