

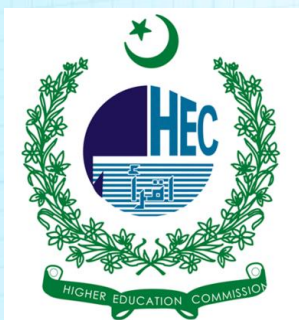
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**Subtitling Tauntive Expressions in Pakistani Drama: A
Pragmatic Analysis**



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Abstract

This study explores the translation of sarcastic speech acts in the English subtitles of the Pakistani Urdu drama *Chaudhary and Sons*, with a focus on tauntive expressions. Sarcasm, mockery, and verbal irony are essential components of character interaction and humor in Urdu dialogues. They often present significant challenges in subtitle translation due to cultural specificity and pragmatic complexity. Drawing on Speech Act Theory, particularly the concepts of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, this research examines how tauntive expressions function in the source text and how their tone and communicative intent are preserved, altered, or lost in translation. The analysis reveals a consistent pattern of pragmatic dilution, where sarcasm is often transformed into neutral or factual statements. This article advocates for increased sensitivity to illocutionary force and cultural context in subtitle translation, particularly when addressing tauntive and performative language in audiovisual media. **Keywords:** Subtitle Translation, Sarcastic Speech Acts, Tauntive Expressions, Speech Act Theory, Urdu Drama.

Introduction

Sarcasm, mockery, and irony are essential components of everyday spoken discourse and are particularly prominent in dramatic and comedic performances. These expressions serve not only as stylistic features but also as powerful communicative acts that shape interpersonal relationships, reveal character dynamics, and engage audiences emotionally. In Pakistani television dramas, tauntive expressions often rich in metaphor, idiom, and cultural reference are widely used to entertain, criticize, provoke, or ridicule within social and familial settings. Such utterances are not direct most of the time; they depend heavily on tone, social circumstances, and shared social knowledge. But, when such tauntive words are transcribed into English subtitles to be read by listeners or readers who are non-Urdu language speakers, then much of the practical purpose they were designed to create would be lost, as would be the sarcasm and the intimations that these words were intended to convey. This paper addresses the subtitling of such expressions, with special emphasis on the drama *Chaudhary and Sons*, which features witty, sarcastic, and culturally loaded dialogues.

The audiovisual media is a complex area where translation does not merely involve deciding on words from one language to another; it is a comprehensive process that entails a nuanced interplay between form, meaning, and purpose. Subtitlers have to contend with space and time constraints, as well as reading time and audience diversity. In such constraints, interpreting sarcastic remarks and taunts is even more challenging since they are often based on indirectness, exaggeration, and cultural insights and contexts that may lack equivalent meaning in the intended language. *Tipsy on a Well-Worn Path* provides a good example, as in Urdu, a taunt may be couched in poetic idiom or a religious metaphor. In contrast, in English, it can be reduced to a pure, plain statement of fact, when that is what it is, reversing all effect of humor, irony, and interpersonal tone.

Despite the significant role of taunts and sarcasm in shaping drama narratives and character interactions, there has been limited scholarly focus on how these speech acts are treated in subtitle translation. This article attempts to fill that gap by analyzing how sarcastic and taunting expressions are translated, adapted, or reduced in English subtitles.

This study applies Speech Act Theory as a theoretical lens to examine the nature and function of tauntive expressions in the source text and to evaluate their translated forms. By focusing on illocutionary acts— what speakers do with their words, such as mocking, blaming, ridiculing, or shaming—the study investigates whether the pragmatic force of these utterances is retained in subtitles. The data consist of selected sarcastic and taunting lines from *Chaudhary and Sons* along with their official English subtitles. Each example is analyzed for its locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary aspects to determine the impact of translation choices on meaning, tone, and function. This approach enables the research to transcend surface-level semantics and explore how meaning is constructed and perceived across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

The article aims to address two primary research questions: (1) How are tauntive expressions rendered in the English subtitles? and (2) To what extent is the original tone of mockery, irony, or sarcasm preserved in translation? Accordingly, the objectives are: (1) To analyze how tauntive expressions are translated in the English subtitles of the drama, and (2) To examine whether and how the tone of sarcasm is

preserved, altered, or lost in the translated version. The findings reveal frequent cases of pragmatic reduction, where the sarcastic illocutionary force is flattened into direct or neutral statements. Through this analysis, the article highlights the broader implications for subtitling practices, particularly the importance of preserving illocutionary equivalence when dealing with culturally embedded sarcastic speech acts in drama subtitles.

Problem Statement

In audiovisual media, tauntive expressions such as sarcasm, mockery, and verbal irony play a significant role in character development, humor, and emotional tone. These expressions are often deeply rooted in the linguistic and cultural context of the source language, making them particularly challenging to translate in subtitles. In Pakistani Urdu dramas, taunts are frequently delivered through culturally loaded phrases, idiomatic humor, and region-specific references. However, when these expressions are translated into English subtitles, much of the original tone, intent, and cultural flavor may be lost, softened, or misrepresented due to time constraints, spatial limitations, or lack of equivalence.

The challenge lies in preserving the sting of a taunt or the bite of sarcasm without distorting meaning or cultural relevance. This problem is more evident in cases where the translator must choose between retaining the harshness of the expression, adapting it to a broader audience, or generalizing it completely. Despite the frequency and importance of such expressions in drama dialogues, taunts have not been widely studied as a separate category in subtitle translation research. Thus, the current study aims to investigate the treatment of tauntive expressions in the Urdu drama *Chaudhary and Sons* in the context of English subtitles, evaluating how successfully the tone and intended meaning of such tauntive expressions are reproduced.

Literature Review

Audiovisual translation (AVT), particularly subtitling, has been extensively studied academically over the last few decades. Other researchers, such as Diaz-Cintas and Remael (2007), stress the particular limitations of subtitling that require both adaptation of space and time, along with creativity and condensation. (Remael, 2007). Such restrictions make it challenging to translate cultural and pragmatically rich

expressions, and even more so, humor, sarcasm, and irony.

Subtitling of sarcastic and taunting terms is especially challenging, as those phrases are not strictly linguistic phenomena; they are pragmatic acts that are highly context- and tonal-dependent, as well as grounded in cultural propriety. As Chiaro (2006) notes, despite recognizing the complexity of humor in AVT, which is often based on word plays, irony, and references to artistic works, humor is considered a notorious challenge in the context of AVT (Chiaro, 2006). This challenge is even greater in situations like Pakistani dramas, where the use of tauntive expressions is often combined with spatial idioms, local metaphors, and socio-religious allusions. These phrases are interpersonally complex, and they are not easy to translate on the tight subtitle screen.

Taunts and sarcasm are not aesthetic devices, but communicative actions that serve a specific social purpose. Brown and Levinson (1987) extend this insight by considering sarcasm as a face-threatening act (FTA), which is softened by irony or obliqueness (Levinson, 1987). Kussmaul (1995) notes that to convey the communicative intent of the speaker accurately, translators must expand their literal senses (Kussmaul, 1995). In subtitling, this implies not only preserving what is said, but what is meant and how this impression is relayed to the viewer. This commitment to pragmatic faithfulness is corroborated by Hatim and Mason (1997), who also advocate the maintenance of textual and interpersonal meaning in text conversations (Mason, 1997).

To this end, the Speech Act Theory, first formulated by Austin (1962) and refined by Searle (1969), comes to the rescue. This theory categorizes utterances into three types: locutionary (the literal meaning of the speech act), illocutionary (the speaker's intended meaning), and perlocutionary (the impact on the audience). In subtitle translation, the illocutionary act, e.g., mockery, blame, or ridicule, is sometimes the most challenging to convey accurately.

A very convenient framework that does this is Speech Act Theory, first developed by Austin (1962) and later amended and expanded upon by Searle (1969). The theory classifies utterances into three types: locutionary (what is literally said), illocutionary (the speaker's intended meaning), and perlocutionary (the effect that is achieved). The illocutionary act, used in the subtitle translation, like mockery, blame,

or ridicule, is the most complicated to dupe (Austin, 1962) (Searle, 1969). Delabastita (1994) and Attardo (2002) stress that translation must account for pragmatic and functional equivalence, not just semantic transfer, especially when dealing with humor and irony (Delabastita, 1994) (Attardo, 2002).

In the context of subtitling, Pedersen (2011) observes that subtitlers frequently simplify or omit complex pragmatic features due to technical constraints (Pedersen, 2011). This often results in the loss of illocutionary force and cultural flavor. Although much has been written about humor and idiomatic expressions in the context of subtitling, there is relatively little written about taunts and sarcastic speech acts in subtitling. The linguistic construction of sarcasm and mock politeness is discussed in works by Veisbergs (1997) and Dynel (2014), yet the article does not discuss the implications of this view to AVT (Veisbergs, 1997) (Dynel, 2014). Moreover, it is noteworthy that studying the South Asian media material is not actively studied, when the sarcasm and cultural metaphor density is high in Pakistani drama dialogue.

This paper seeks to fill such a gap by adopting Speech Act Theory to examine tauntive terms in the play Chaudhary and Sons, written in the Urdu language. This is also in line with the understanding highlighted by Ranzato (2016) that subtitles can either emphasize or skew existing interpersonal relations, particularly in settings with a specific culture and heightened emotions (Ranzato, 2016). This study has specialized in sarcastic speech acts; therefore, it can contribute to the theory of pragmatic translation and the art of subtitling in particular, as the illocutionary force should be retained to achieve consistency of intent and plot.

To sum up, it can be emphasized that the literature highlights that translating sarcastic speech acts presents a challenge in terms of linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic choices. Subtitles transparent to the speaker in illocution may give the wrong impression of interpersonal relationships and tone of character. The application of the Speech Act Theory enables one to study such expressions systematically, finding out how they function in the original language and how well they are translated in the target language.

In further attempts to prove that subtitling is a unique and limited type of translation, Gottlieb (2005) points out the semiotic aspect of AVT and notes that subtitlers concern themselves not only with language meaning but also with

paralinguistic phenomena, which include tone, body language, and timing, as they both influence the interpretation of sarcasm and taunts (Gottlieb, 2005). Perez-Gonzalez (2014) also admits that the intersemiotic tension in subtitling may result in dilution or omission of any pragmatic aspect of expression, such as irony and face-threatening acts. (Pérez-González, 2014)

Yus (2012) discusses irony from a relevance-theoretic perspective, revealing the importance of the everyday cognitive context shared by speaker and hearer, which ideally remains highly unstable in cross-cultural subtitling (Yus, 2012). Thus, irony or sarcasm, which is explicit in Urdu, may become vague or misunderstood when translated into English without sufficient contextualization.

Another evidence in support of this viewpoint is revealed in a recurrence of the issue presented by Zabalbeascoa (1996), who emphasizes, in the context of the present discussion, that irony, satire, and humor are culturally grounded and, as such, are inevitably hard to replicate without desiring to forego specific interpersonal and emotional roles (Zabalbeascoa, 1996).

Reconciling such issues of translating audiovisual humor, Chiaro (2008) alerts us to the fact that, unlike direct insults, sarcasm works essentially on delivery, speaker intention, and the knowledge of a given cultural and contextual background of the audience, which cannot always be conveyed through subtitling (Chiaro, 2008). Díaz-Cintas and Anderman (2009) also note that the invisibility of the translator has an even greater impact when it comes to subtitle translation, as the restrictions that must be taken into account can lead to a shift in pragmatics (Anderman, 2009). The same is repeated by Nornes (1999), who coins the term “ abusive subtitling, subtitle translation that excessively domesticates the content and drains it of essential cultural or emotional edge, including sarcasm (Nornes, 1999).

Using a more practical approach, House (2015) demands that interpersonal trans-inferential meaning and pragmatic impact, rather than propositional content, be preserved in translation. She claims that the preservation of illocutionary power of speech acts is essential in drama and film, where the dynamics of characters are based on tone, irony, and subtext (House, 2015).

Furthermore, concerning the primary target, taunts and mockery, Leech (1983) has stated that a rhetorical effect can be gained by flouting the principles of politeness,

which is often achieved in the form of sarcasm, teasing, or ironic insults, i.e., speech acts that frequently occur in dramatic dialogues. These rhetorical measures are easily lost when they are subtitled, unless they are well rebuilt in the target language (Leech, 1983).

Another similarity is that, in Mey's (2001) opinion, speech acts are part of a relativist tool, implying that we cannot separate the use of speech acts from the context in which they are used. This supplements the argument that subtitlers are required to interpret and re-enact the pragmatic purpose of the speaker, in addition to translating the speaker's sentence (Mey, 2001). Furthermore, Hickey (1993) speaks about such a phenomenon as the sense of mock politeness (sarcasm), such a speech act, which is polite in structure and aggressive in content. Thus, it is easily subject to mistranslation when translated to AVT (Hickey, 1993).

Lastly, Ranzato and Zanotti (2019) note the low internalization of non-Western media such as Indian or Pakistani drama in the study of AVT, as culturally specific forms of sarcasm, humor, or face work are usually ignored or mistranslated due to unfamiliarity with the culture on the translator level, or the space and processing time constraints of subtitles (Zanotti, 2018).

Research Methodology

The given research is qualitative and descriptive in terms of Speech Act Theory, through which the performance of sarcastic and taunting dialogues by characters in the Pakistani-language drama Chaudhary and Sons is translated into English subtitles. It is concerned with where the illocutionary force the speaker is behind, sarcastic uttering, is maintained, changed, or lost in translation.

Austin (1962), and later Searle (1969) developed a formal version of the language as action, a kind of analysis known as the Speech Act Theory. It makes a distinction between what is said (locutionary act), what is intended (use of speech - illocutional act), and what happens in reception (use of speech - perlocutionary act). The model is especially applicable when it comes to the references (Austin, 1962) (Searle, 1969).

Baker (1992) prioritized and wrote about the matter of pragmatic equivalence (Baker, 1992). Hatim and Mason (1997) have also highlighted the significance of maintaining the sense of pragmatic force in translation (Mason, 1997).

These reviews demonstrate that considerable progress has been made in applying Speech Act Theory to analyze how translators have addressed the implicit and performative meanings of language in both the audiovisual and literary domains.

The research will be based on a purposeful sample of 10 tau observant expressions of Chaudhary and Sons. Every example is discussed on three levels: source text, intended meaning, and subtitle rendering with the help of elements of Speech Act Theory. This will enable a comparative analysis of the survival and/or displacement of the communicative intention of the speaker in a translation process, as this will form part of the knowledge of pragmatic loss or adaptation in audiovisual translation.

Data Analysis and Discussion:

No.	ST	TT
1	قربان جاؤں تمہارے تلفظ پہ۔	Your pronunciation is wrong. [Epi.07 (00:06:29)]

In Episode 7 of Chaudhary and Sons, a character utters the sarcastic line: “قربان جاؤں تمہارے تلفظ پہ۔” (Timestamp: 00:06:29), which is subtitled in English as: “Your pronunciation is wrong.” This subtitle, while seemingly accurate in conveying the speaker's intent, misses the sarcastic tone and ironic praise embedded in the original utterance.

The original Urdu line employs the expression “قربان جاؤں”, which translates to “I sacrifice myself for...”, a phrase commonly used in South Asian languages to express admiration, affection, or reverence. However, in this context, it is used ironically, not to praise but to mock the speaker's incorrect or ridiculous pronunciation. The full expression, “قربان جاؤں تمہارے تلفظ پہ”, is a classic form of sarcastic compliment, where the speaker pretends to admire something while ridiculing it. The mismatch between surface praise and actual criticism is what gives this speech act its sarcastic illocutionary force.

According to Speech Act Theory, the locutionary act in this sentence appears to be a compliment. However, the illocutionary act is starkly different; it is a mocking insult, veiled in exaggerated admiration. This kind of ironic speech act serves a performative function: to expose, correct, and ridicule the other person's mistake (in this case, pronunciation) while maintaining a humorous or playful tone. The perlocutionary effect on the listener is likely to be embarrassment, self-awareness, or

defensive humor, while the audience perceives it as witty banter or gentle teasing.

The English subtitle “Your pronunciation is wrong” accurately conveys the intended meaning, but not the way it is expressed. The subtitle strips away the layer of ironic politeness and figurative exaggeration, transforming a sarcastic compliment into a blunt, factual correction. The illocutionary act changes from ironic mockery to direct criticism, which not only flattens the speaker’s personality but also alters the dynamics of the interaction. The subtitle sounds more confrontational than humorous, stripping away the playful sarcasm that characterizes the original line.

This example clearly illustrates the consequences of losing the illocutionary force in subtitle translation. The sarcastic act of pretending to praise while criticizing is replaced by a direct judgment, thereby shifting the emotional tone and weakening the dramatic and relational nuance of the moment. It is not simply a case of semantic loss, but a shift in pragmatic function—a transformation in how the speech act operates within the dialogue.

In light of Speech Act Theory, this example supports the argument that subtitle translation must go beyond conveying what is said and strive to capture what is done with language. Expressions like “قربان جاؤں” carry heavy cultural and pragmatic weight, and their ironic deployment requires special attention to tone, intent, and audience expectations. Without this, much of the speaker’s wit, sarcasm, and character development is lost in translation.

No.	ST	TT
2	یہ حیدرآبادی پری کے ساتھ لان میں کونسا چلا کاٹ رہے تھے	What were you doing with Pari in the lawn? [Epi.08 (00:02:21)]

In Episode 8 of Chaudhary and Sons, a character delivers the taunt: “یہ حیدرآبادی پری کے ساتھ لان میں کونسا چلا کاٹ رہے تھے؟” (Timestamp: 00:02:21). The English subtitle simplifies it to: “What were you doing with Pari in the lawn?” While this translation accurately reflects the literal meaning of the question, it fails to capture the sarcastic illocutionary force that is central to the original utterance.

The phrase is a classic example of a sarcastic interrogation, loaded with mockery and suspicion, rather than a neutral request for information. The speaker is not innocently asking about someone’s location or activity; instead, they are mocking the listener for being caught in an embarrassing or suspicious situation, particularly

with someone referred to sarcastically as “حیدرآبادی پری” (“Hyderabadi fairy”). This nickname itself carries a mocking tone, reducing the woman to a romantic or idealized figure in an ironic way. The phrase “چلا کائٹا” is also not a simple idiom; it refers to performing mystical rituals or spells, and in this context, it is used metaphorically to ridicule the character's secretive or flirtatious behavior, suggesting that he was doing something shady, romantic, or overly dramatic.

From the perspective of Speech Act Theory, the locutionary act is a question. However, the illocutionary act is not a genuine request for information; it is a mocking and accusatory speech act, intended to shame, tease, or confront the listener. The perlocutionary effect may involve the listener becoming defensive or embarrassed, while also entertaining onlookers through the use of a sarcastic tone. This line contributes to character dynamics by establishing one character's authority or wit over another, revealing a playful yet confrontational relationship.

The subtitle, “What were you doing with Pari on the lawn?” strips the line of its sarcasm, cultural metaphor, and mocking edge. It removes the nickname “Hyderabadi fairy” and the loaded idiom “چلا کائٹا”, replacing them with a basic structure. As a result, the subtitle changes the illocutionary act from a sarcastic accusation to a neutral inquiry. It also removes the performative function of ridicule, reducing the dramatic tension of the moment and potentially confusing or disengaging the target audience, who are not made aware of the social undertone or teasing intention.

This case highlights how tauntive expressions lose much of their impact when illocutionary force is not preserved in subtitle translation. The translated line communicates what was said (the locutionary level) but not what was meant (the illocutionary act of ridicule). The subtitle thereby reduces the speaker's personality and the social implication of the utterance, diminishing the role of sarcasm in character portrayal.

Overall, this example reinforces the argument that Speech Act Theory offers a valuable framework for analyzing subtitled tauntive expressions. It helps reveal how subtitlers' choices, often driven by constraints of time, space, or audience accessibility, can unintentionally neutralize sarcastic tones and alter interpersonal dynamics, thereby affecting viewers' interpretations of both character and narrative.

No.	ST	TT
3	آ جاتا ہے جالا کبھی کبھی اسکی آنکھوں کے سامنے	At times he is not able to see. [Epi.20 (00:19:12)]

One of the representative examples of sarcastic speech acts in Chaudhary and Sons appears in Episode 20, when a character remarks, “آ جاتا ہے جالا کبھی کبھی اس کی آنکھوں کے سامنے” (Timestamp: 00:19:12). In the English subtitle, this line is translated as, “At times he is not able to see.” Although this subtitle conveys the literal sense of the original, it fails to preserve the underlying illocutionary act that gives the original line its pragmatic force.

In the original Urdu utterance, the speaker is performing a sarcastic illocutionary act, which, on the surface, appears to be a casual observation about someone’s vision. However, this surface form masks a deeper communicative intention: the speaker is indirectly mocking the person for deliberately ignoring something obvious. This is a mocking or blaming speech act, disguised as a factual statement. The use of the idiomatic expression “جالا آ جانا” (literally, “a film appears over the eyes”) enhances the sarcasm, implying that the listener conveniently becomes blind when it suits them. This type of taunt is culturally familiar in Urdu discourse, where irony and indirectness are often employed to criticize others without confrontation.

From the perspective of Speech Act Theory, the locutionary act (what is said) is a neutral description of vision. However, the illocutionary act (what is done) is much sharper: the speaker is accusing or ridiculing the person for being willfully blind. The perlocutionary act (effect on the listener) is expected to provoke embarrassment or a defensive reaction, perhaps accompanied by laughter from other characters or the audience.

In the English subtitle, however, the utterance is rendered as a straightforward statement: “At times he is not able to see.” This translation retains the locutionary content but eliminates the illocutionary intent. The sarcastic tone, implied criticism, and performative function of mocking are all lost. It now reads as a sincere or factual observation, possibly suggesting a health issue rather than a sarcastic insult. This shift results in a loss of interpersonal tension, character expression, and comic tone.

This example illustrates how the subtitling process can result in a reduction or loss of

illocutionary force, particularly when sarcastic speech acts are involved. The translator's choice to prioritize clarity and simplicity removes the performative aspect of the utterance, which is crucial for understanding the speaker's tone and the dramatic function of the dialogue. As a result, the subtitle may appear accurate in meaning but falls short in pragmatic equivalence, weakening the emotional and relational impact for the target audience.

No.	ST	TT
4	ماشاء اللہ گھر کو آگ لگ گئی گھر کے بی دیوے سے	Everything was ruined by the one assigned to do the job. [Epi.20 (00:13:01)]

In Episode 20 of Chaudhary and Sons, a character delivers a deeply sarcastic comment cloaked in poetic idiom: “ماشاء اللہ گھر کو آگ لگ گئی گھر کے بی دیوے سے” (Timestamp: 00:13:01). The English subtitle translates this line as: “Everything was ruined by the one assigned to do the job.” While the translation conveys the general idea of betrayal or internal failure, it significantly alters the tone, intensity, and pragmatic function of the original utterance.

The source expression is highly idiomatic and culturally rich. Literally, it means “The house was set on fire by its own lamp”. The phrase is metaphorical and functions as a sarcastic lament or taunt, expressing that harm has been caused by someone who was supposed to protect, support, or uplift. The speaker uses this metaphor not just to report a situation, but to perform a blaming and mocking speech act, highlighting betrayal or ironic failure from within. The insertion of “ماشاء اللہ” at the beginning adds a layer of ironic politeness, making the statement even more biting. This religious phrase typically signals praise or gratitude, but is used here ironically to express the opposite disappointment, shock, or even passive aggression.

According to Speech Act Theory, this utterance operates on multiple levels. The locutionary act of the literal metaphor seems poetic and neutral. However, the illocutionary act is sharply sarcastic: the speaker accuses someone of sabotage, but does so through irony and figurative language. The perlocutionary effect is to shame or expose the guilty party indirectly while also entertaining or provoking others who hear it. This type of indirect ridicule is common in Urdu drama discourse, where speakers often employ irony and poetic idioms to enhance their verbal attacks without

appearing openly hostile.

The English subtitle, “Everything was ruined by the one assigned to do the job,” simplifies the metaphor and removes both the religious phrase and the poetic structure. In doing so, it converts a performative taunt into a straightforward complaint or report. The translation eliminates the ironic twist of “ماشاءالله”, which contributes heavily to the sarcastic tone. As a result, the subtitle retains the basic meaning (that someone from within caused damage) but loses the illocutionary impact of the sting, the irony, the mockery.

This shift results in a significant pragmatic loss. The speaker’s attitude is flattened, and the social dynamics at play are underrepresented. What was a cleverly phrased, culturally loaded attack becomes a plain sentence with little emotional charge. From a speech act perspective, the illocutionary force of sarcasm and blame is neutralized, and the target viewer may not grasp the emotional or dramatic weight of the moment.

This example underscores the core concern of this study: the challenge of preserving sarcastic illocutionary acts in subtitle translation. While the translation is not incorrect in a semantic sense, it fails to mirror the speaker’s rhetorical strategy and intent. The result is a diminished perlocutionary effect, where the audience misses out on the sharp wit and complex character interaction that the original line conveyed. Speech Act Theory enables us to recognize that such losses are not merely stylistic but also functional, influencing how viewers across languages perceive characters’ motives and relationships.

No.	ST	TT
5	جب گلاب جامن پڑا ہو تو میسو کو باتھ کس نے ڈالنا ہے	When there’s Billu, then who cares about Taashi? [Epi.04 (00:07:32)]

In Episode 4 of Chaudhary and Sons, the line “جب گلاب جامن پڑا ہو تو میسو کو باتھ کس نے ڈالنا ہے” (Timestamp: 00:07:32) presents a classic example of sarcastic comparison used as a taunt or insult. The English subtitle renders it as: “When there is Billu, then who cares about Taashi?” While the translation reflects the basic structure of comparison, it misses the underlying sarcasm, social implication, and metaphorical weight embedded in the original Urdu expression.

In the source text, the speaker draws a mocking contrast between two people using culturally loaded metaphors “گلاب جامن” (a decadent, sweet dessert) and “میسو” (a thin or less desirable dish, colloquially seen as plain or unappealing). Here, “گلاب جامن” refers to someone considered attractive, desirable, or superior (likely Billu), while “میسو” signifies someone ordinary or undesirable (Taashi). The line is a sarcastic speech act functioning as a veiled insult or derogatory comparison. It indirectly mocks Taashi by implying that no one would choose her over someone more attractive or appealing. The use of food metaphors softens the harshness of the insult while still making it stinging clear to Urdu-speaking audiences. The rhetorical question “کس نے ہاتھ ڈالنا ہے؟” (Who would even touch her?) adds to the taunt’s performative edge.

According to Speech Act Theory, the locutionary act is a rhetorical question and a metaphorical observation. However, the illocutionary act is a sarcastic insult, mocking one character by exaggerating the appeal of another. The speaker is not just expressing preference but actively ridiculing the second person through contrast, wrapped in humor and irony. This line functions as both a face-threatening act (FTA) and a comedic tool, serving to amuse the audience while embarrassing or belittling the character in question. The perlocutionary effect is multifaceted, as it can provoke laughter, highlight rivalry, and foster character dynamics through implied judgment.

In the English subtitle “When there is Billu, then who cares about Taashi?” the metaphor of food is removed, and with it, much of the cultural tone and sarcasm. The line becomes a plain statement of preference, lacking the playful insult and metaphorical creativity of the original. The rhetorical sharpness is flattened, and the performative aspect of the utterance is diluted. The subtitle communicates the basic idea of neglect or disregard but misses the figurative and mocking illocutionary force, which was central to the speaker’s intent.

This example illustrates a typical pragmatic loss in subtitle translation, particularly in conveying sarcastic comparisons that rely on culture-specific metaphors. By removing the metaphor of گلاب جامن and میسو, the subtitle eliminates not only the humor but also the cultural anchoring of the insult. From a speech act perspective, the illocutionary act of mockery is rendered more neutral, affecting both character portrayal and audience engagement.

Such examples underscore the importance of maintaining illocutionary equivalence in

subtitle translation, particularly when dealing with tauntive expressions that rely on metaphor, irony, and sarcasm. The failure to retain these layers may lead to a surface-level translation that is linguistically correct but pragmatically impoverished. By applying Speech Act Theory, this analysis helps reveal how such transformations shift meaning and tone in subtitled drama dialogues.

No.	ST	TT
6	ہاں بت، پیاسا ہی جائے گا نا کنویں کے پاس	Yes child, obviously you will have to go. [Epi.19 (00:22:17)]

In Episode 19 of Chaudhary and Sons, the line “پیاسا ہی جائے گا نا کنویں کے پاس” (literally, “Of course, the thirsty one will go to the well”) is used by the speaker to comment on another character’s actions sarcastically. On the surface, the sentence appears to be a general proverb stating that a person in need will naturally seek out a solution. However, in this context, it is not meant as a neutral observation. Instead, the line is used ironically, with the speaker ridiculing the listener for acting in a way that appears desperate, predictable, or self-serving. Rather than directly accusing or confronting the listener, the speaker disguises the criticism within a well-known cultural phrase, which makes the line sound casual, but with a sharp undertone.

This expression functions as a sarcastic speech act, where the speaker implies that the listener's behavior, whatever it may be, was so driven by personal desire that it required no explanation. The line serves as a mocking remark, indirectly blaming the listener for their predictable choices, while presenting the situation as so obvious that it does not even need to be discussed. By relying on this metaphorical proverb, the speaker avoids open confrontation but still manages to undermine and belittle the listener's actions in front of others.

From the viewpoint of Speech Act Theory, this line performs several layered functions. The locutionary act is simply a proverb. However, the illocutionary act that the speaker intends to do is ridicule. Through irony and cultural reference, the speaker performs a sarcastic judgment disguised as a wise saying. The perlocutionary effect on the listener is likely to be embarrassment, guilt, or, at the very least, a sense of being subtly mocked. For the audience, it contributes to the humorous and dramatic tone of the interaction, especially when paired with facial expressions, timing, and delivery.

The English translation “Obviously you will have to go” conveys the surface meaning of the line but loses the cultural richness and sarcastic tone. The metaphor of the thirsty going to the well is dropped, and with it, the embedded irony and social sting. The translated version becomes a straightforward statement of necessity, rather than a humorous and indirect taunt. As a result, the pragmatic function of the line is altered, changing it from a sarcastic act into a neutral comment.

This example illustrates how lines rooted in cultural idioms often carry a hidden illocutionary force that is not visible in literal translation. Sarcastic expressions like this one perform an indirect yet consequential social function, allowing characters to criticize, mock, or tease without being overly aggressive. When these expressions are translated without preserving their figurative or ironic nature, the emotional and dramatic impact is weakened. Through the lens of Speech Act Theory, this change becomes clear: the action done through the utterance in the original is not replicated in the translated version, and as such, the interpersonal dynamics and tone of the scene are affected.

No.	ST	TT
7	لو جی، ہم تو بسوں کے اڈے پہ بیٹھ کر گاجریں چھیلے ہیں۔	We just sit idle. [Epi.07 (00:07:01)]

In Episode 7 of Chaudhary and Sons, a character uses sarcasm to defend themselves while subtly mocking the listener:

”لو جی، ہم تو بسوں کے اڈے پہ بیٹھ کر گاجریں چھیلے ہیں۔“

(Timestamp: 00:07:01)

The English subtitle reduces the line to:

“We just sit idle.”

This example is a clear case of sarcastic denial. The speaker, likely responding to an accusation or suspicion, sarcastically implies that they were doing something completely innocent or pointless, “peeling carrots at the bus station,” when, in fact, the expression means the opposite. It is a dismissive, humorous way to reject an accusation while mocking the idea that they would be involved in anything meaningful or dramatic. The rhetorical exaggeration of peeling carrots in a public space serves to undermine the seriousness of whatever they are being accused of, and to mock the accuser's assumption.

From a Speech Act Theory perspective, the locutionary act refers to the statement that the speaker supposedly made. However, the illocutionary act is a sarcastic denial and indirect reproach; the speaker rejects the claim while ridiculing the logic or suspicion behind it. By exaggerating their innocence to an absurd degree, the speaker shifts the blame back toward the accuser, implying that the accusation is ridiculous and not worth addressing seriously. The perlocutionary effect may include laughter, deflection, or a break in tension, depending on how the listener and audience interpret the irony.

The English subtitle “We just sit idle” removes the humorous metaphor and the sarcastic imagery. It presents a flat, literal meaning that fails to capture the speaker's performative intent. A plain statement replaces the creative use of exaggeration and irony, and the illocutionary act of mocking denial is downgraded to a dry admission of inactivity. This shift not only weakens the speaker's tone but also undermines the dynamic and layered nature of the original exchange.

In cultural terms, the metaphor of “peeling carrots at a bus stand” is contextually loaded in Urdu. It signifies doing something useless, passive, or absurdly irrelevant, and it is often used sarcastically to downplay a situation. By removing that imagery, the subtitle not only loses the pragmatic force but also the cultural humor and emotional tone of the original.

This example reinforces the key argument that subtitled translations of sarcastic speech acts must attend to more than literal content. If a subtitle sacrifices metaphor, tone, or exaggeration for brevity or surface clarity, it risks losing the speaker's attitude and the interpersonal nuances of the scene. As demonstrated in this case, the illocutionary intent of sarcasm, which serves a specific social function, can be significantly altered or erased when subtitling fails to convey its full communicative force.

Using Speech Act Theory, this analysis reveals how even simple, everyday lines carry layered meanings, particularly in sarcastic exchanges. Translating them without this awareness results in a diluted version of character interaction, tone, and cultural flavor in audiovisual storytelling.

No.	ST	TT
8	اک تے مارو سبھی تے تیری کھبی گل پھڑکنے لگ جاندی اے۔	Talk to you straight and you always give me a twisted response.

In Episode 5 of Chaudhary and Sons, a character delivers a sharply worded line:

”اک تے مارو سجھی تے تیری کھبی گل پھڑکنے لگ جاندی اے۔“

(Timestamp:00:35:25)

The English subtitle simplifies this to:

“Talk to you straight, and you always give me a twisted response.”

This line, in its original Punjabi-inflected Urdu, carries a strong tone of sarcastic frustration and indirect mockery. Literally, the phrase “اک تے مارو سجھی” means “hit you from the right,” and “تیری کھبی گل پھڑکنے لگ جاندی اے” implies “your left side starts acting up.” It is a metaphorical and idiomatic way of saying that even when spoken to directly or reasonably, the listener finds a way to misunderstand, twist, or retaliate irrationally. This taunt functions as a sarcastic observation of the listener’s behavior, portraying them as someone who cannot handle directness and always responds with defensiveness or unnecessary drama.

From a Speech Act Theory perspective, the locutionary act here is a metaphorical complaint. However, the illocutionary act is more complex: it is a sarcastic reproach; the speaker indirectly criticizes the other person’s inability to engage in straightforward communication. It is a blame disguised as humor, using figurative speech to soften the harshness of the accusation while still making it clear. This speech act is also performative; it entertains the audience through its creative phrasing while simultaneously serving as a face-threatening act (FTA) toward the listener. The speaker does not merely comment; they accuse, mock, and display dominance or exasperation.

The English subtitle, “Talk to you straight and you always give me a twisted response,” conveys a simplified version of the intended meaning, but lacks the cultural metaphor and idiomatic color of the original. The metaphor of hitting from the right and the left side, which is a vivid and physical way of describing the situation, is entirely removed. As a result, the line loses its poetic sarcasm and figurative humor, becoming a more neutral expression of frustration. While the translated line retains the locutionary meaning, it significantly reduces the illocutionary strength of sarcasm and wit.

The perlocutionary effect also changes: where the original may provoke laughter,

recognition, or amusement due to its metaphorical cleverness, the subtitle merely conveys complaint or dissatisfaction. It no longer teases; it simply tells. This shift affects both the character's perceived tone and the viewer's engagement, especially for those unfamiliar with the cultural and linguistic texture of the original dialogue.

This example illustrates how figurative sarcasm, particularly in regional dialects, poses challenges for subtitle translation. A speech act that combines criticism, humor, and metaphor may be flattened into a literal or bland remark if not carefully adapted. Here, the illocutionary act is weakened, and with it, the speaker's personality and the dramatic tension of the interaction.

Through the lens of Speech Act Theory, it becomes clear that such tauntive expressions are not simply linguistic but social acts carrying relational meanings that must be preserved in translation. The analysis shows that subtitling must attend not only to what is being said, but to how it is being said and what it is meant to do. Without that, the subtitles risk losing the dramatic richness and character interplay that give Urdu dramas their unique flavor.

No.	ST	TT
9	کتنے نفلوں کا ثواب ملا ہے میری بے عزتی کرا کہ	What did you get by getting me scolded? [Epi.27 (00:18:15)]

In Episode 27 of Chaudhary and Sons, the speaker delivers a deeply sarcastic and emotionally charged line:

”کتنے نفلوں کا ثواب ملا ہے میری بے عزتی کرا کہ؟“

(Timestamp: 00:18:15)

In English subtitles, it appears as:

“What did you get by getting me scolded?”

This line in the original Urdu is not a genuine question but a sarcastic jab directed at someone responsible for the speaker's public embarrassment. The phrase “کتنے نفلوں کا” literally means “how much reward in the form of voluntary prayers did you earn?” a reference to Islamic teachings where performing extra nafl prayers earns spiritual merit or reward. The speaker sarcastically equates their humiliation with a noble act done in pursuit of religious virtue, thereby mocking the other person's behavior as self-righteous or unnecessarily damaging.

Here, the illocutionary act is clearly a sarcastic form of blame disguised as a question.

On the locutionary level, it sounds like a curious inquiry into someone's reward. However, the actual illocutionary function is to criticize and shame the person for deliberately causing public embarrassment. The use of religious terminology adds an ironic tone, as the speaker implies that the act of humiliating someone has been falsely justified or even enjoyed by the other person. This is a classic taunt, achieved through rhetorical sarcasm, where the speaker questions the moral motivation behind the action in a bitter, mocking manner. The perlocutionary effect is intended to evoke guilt, discomfort, or defensiveness, while also eliciting amusement in the audience through the clever framing of the insult.

In contrast, the English subtitle "What did you get by getting me scolded?" flattens the sarcasm entirely. It turns the ironic rhetorical question into a straightforward inquiry. The religious metaphor, essential for the sarcastic tone, is missing, as is the subtlety. The emotional impact is weakened, and the character's wit, indignation, and dramatic voice are lost. This shows an apparent loss of illocutionary force in the subtitle translation. The cultural idiom, irony, and tone of biting mockery are reduced to plain words that fail to reflect the original communicative intent.

This example powerfully demonstrates how sarcastic speech acts, particularly those couched in religious or culturally rich idioms, pose a translation challenge in subtitles. Literal or simplified translations often fail to preserve the pragmatic strength of the speech act. The speaker's intent, not just to express grievance but to perform it dramatically and sarcastically, gets lost in the target language. As a result, the interpersonal tension, humor, and social commentary embedded in the original line are no longer available to the subtitle audience.

By applying Speech Act Theory, this analysis reveals that such lines do more than deliver meaning; they perform actions, such as blaming, ridiculing, and emotionally confronting. Ignoring these layers leads to a serious pragmatic disconnect in subtitle translation, weakening the narrative depth and relational dynamics portrayed in Pakistani dramas.

No.	ST	TT
10	دادی ہیں کہ ملک الموت کسی بھی وقت کسی بھی جگہ آجاتی ہیں	Your grandmother comes anywhere, at anytime [Epi.26 (00:28:46)]

In Episode 26 of Chaudhary and Sons, the speaker sarcastically compares a character's grandmother to the angel of death, saying:

”دادی ہیں کہ ملک الموت، کسی بھی وقت کسی بھی جگہ آجاتی ہیں۔“

(Timestamp: 00:28:46)

The English subtitle reduces this line to:

“Your grandmother comes anywhere, at any time.”

The original utterance is a sarcastic metaphor, comparing the grandmother's sudden and unannounced appearances to “ملک الموت” (Malak al-Maut), the angel of death in Islamic belief, who is believed to arrive unannounced to take souls. This is not a literal religious statement, but a culturally embedded taunt: the speaker is exaggerating the grandmother's intrusive or unpredictable behavior by likening it to something feared and inevitable. The line is sarcastic, delivered in a tone that blends complaint with dark humor.

According to Speech Act Theory, the locutionary act is a statement about someone's behavior. However, the illocutionary act is far more pointed: it is a mocking and critical speech act, where the speaker insults the grandmother under the guise of a humorous metaphor. The speaker performs a face-threatening act (FTA) by portraying her presence as oppressive or disruptive, cloaked in cultural wit. The perlocutionary effect on the listener is meant to be discomfort, amusement, or awkward acknowledgment. To the audience, it reveals the speaker's frustration while maintaining a comedic tone.

The subtitle “Your grandmother comes anywhere, at any time” removes the central metaphor and with it, the illocutionary force of sarcasm. Without the comparison to the angel of death, the line becomes a bland observation of someone's unpredictable movement. It fails to demonstrate that the speaker is not only informing but also ridiculing. The subtitle communicates the surface meaning but strips away the sarcastic intent and emotive tone, which are crucial to the scene's impact and the speaker's personality.

This translation shift results in a pragmatic loss. By omitting the metaphor, the pragmatic act of mockery is erased. The character's creative insult, one that uses religious imagery humorously, is reduced to a neutral fact. As a result, the target

audience misses the complete performative act of speech that the source dialogue delivers. The speaker's frustration, dark humor, and relational tension with the grandmother are all understated in the translated version.

This example highlights how culturally embedded sarcasm, particularly when it involves religious or symbolic metaphors, presents a challenge for subtitle translation. Through the lens of Speech Act Theory, it becomes evident that what is said is only part of the message; the real force lies in what the speaker is doing with those words. In this case, the speaker criticizes through exaggeration, performing an insult in a humorous, culturally resonant manner. Losing this in translation weakens the viewer's grasp of the character's voice, emotional tone, and the social nuance of the interaction.

Conclusion

This study examines how sarcastic and taunting expressions in the Urdu drama Chaudhary and Sons are translated into English subtitles, utilizing the framework of Speech Act Theory. The analysis of ten selected expressions revealed significant shifts in illocutionary force, demonstrating how the pragmatic intent behind sarcasm, irony, or mockery is often diluted or altered during the subtitling process. These findings highlight the inherent challenges in rendering culturally embedded and context-sensitive speech acts, especially within the time and space constraints of audiovisual translation. This study establishes that the literal significations may be maintained. However, nuances of tone, intention, and socio-pragmatism are often prone to loss, which can have a latent effect on how the viewer and the character representation perceive such meaning.

In future research, the scope can be extended to a broader range, such as comparing subtitles of other drama genres or languages, or even different versions of subtitles (e.g., fan-made and official subtitles) to examine how consistency is established in representing pragmatic force. The researchers may also include the audience reception surveys to evaluate the reception of the subtitle viewers of sarcasm and taunting. Besides, the use of other theories, such as the Relevance Theory or the Politeness Theory, may contribute to a deeper understanding of the matter of face-game and indirectness in subtitles discourse. A corpus-based method can also be helpful in determining general trends and approaches to subtitling sarcastic speech

acts across multiple productions.

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