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The (ab)use of taboo lexis in audiovisual translation: Raising awareness of pragmatic variation in English-Spanish

DOI 10.1515/ip-2015-0018

Abstract: This paper proposes the use of translation as an exercise capable of raising students' awareness of pragmatic differences between English and Spanish, with particular emphasis on taboo words, rarely studied in a formal environment. This difficult area of the L2 has been brought to the fore after the publication of two corpus-driven grammars (Biber et al. 1999; Carter and McCarthy 2006). The translation exercise was carried out with two groups of advanced students, who had to render two episodes of the British sitcom *The I. T. Crowd* into Spanish. Then the results were compared with the choices in the dubbed versions. Two hypotheses were put to the test: (1) that students would tone down the swearwords used in the original text, (2) that translators might remain closer to the colloquial tone of the English scripts and, thus, maintain taboo items. For the second hypothesis all six episodes of series 1 were used. The results showed that while students were indeed cautious in the treatment of offensive language, translators increased the use of swearwords exponentially.

Keywords: taboo words, expletives, English-Spanish, audiovisual translation, L2 classroom

You've *ruined* my act (*The Mentalist*, 4.19)
Me has *jodido* la actuación (*El Mentalista*, 4.19)
[You've *fucked* my act]

1 Introduction

This paper proposes the use of audiovisual translation to explore differences in language use in the pair English-Spanish, focusing on strong and moderate swearwords. In recent years translation has made a comeback as an L2 learning

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strategy (Hummel 2010; Liao 2006). On the other hand, researchers and practitioners have studied expletives (Allan and Burridge 2006; Biber et al. 1999; Carter and McCarthy 2006) and many have stressed the need to introduce them in the language syllabus in order to raise students' awareness of the different effect and implications of offensive language in the L2 (Carter and McCarthy 2006; Jay and Janschewitz 2008). This paper suggests that audiovisual translation can make Spanish students of English aware of those differences through intensive language practice and group interaction.

We will start with an overview of recent approaches to translation in language teaching and learning, with particular attention to audiovisual translation as an exercise in the L2 classroom. We will then review publications that defend the need to introduce the study of colloquial English in language syllabuses, especially swearwords in both Spanish and English. For the latter, corpus-informed research (especially Biber et al. 1999; Carter and McCarthy 2006) has provided us with insights into actual use and frequency. Then we will present the exercise, the choices made by the students and the translators before discussing the differences between them and the implications of using offensive language in the wrong contexts.

2 Translation in the post-communicative approach scenario

The advent of the communicative approach meant the disappearance of translation from English course books. The bad name of this learning strategy can be traced back to the appearance of the audiolingual and the direct methods. In the area of influence of the British and American publishing houses, translation has remained taboo (Edwards and Willis 2005; Gass and Selinker 2008; Leaver and Willis 2004: 4), although there are no specific pedagogic reasons to ban it from teaching programs other than its association with the traditional grammar-translation method (Widdowson 2003: 160).

The spread of the communicative approach was somehow slower in other parts of the globe. In Asia, for example, the grammar-translation method has remained embedded within the educational system of many countries, i.e. in Thailand (Hayes 2008: 477). Even in Europe the grammar-translation method was never completely displaced in countries like Hungary (Djigunovic et al. 2008: 446). Additionally, recent studies have also shown that the learners' perceptions of translation tasks in formal education tend to be positive (cf. Liao 2006 for college students in Taiwan) and some have incorporated translation within a

communicative approach (Nation 2001; Webb 2007). Translation has also been used in testing pragmatic competence, e. g. for the pair English and Japanese (LoCastro 1997).

This paper proposes audiovisual translation as a pedagogical tool in the L2 classroom, particularly in the exploration of pragmatic differences between the L1 and the L2. Neves has stressed the usefulness of the exercise, since learners feel attracted to audiovisual material, either dubbed or subtitled (2004: 129), although it will be necessary to take into account specific variables before a video clip can be considered acceptable for L2 classroom use. The coherence of the story, a linear sequence of events, contextualized dialogues, clear articulation and so on are undoubtedly key elements. (Pavesi and Perego 2008: 222).

3 Taboo words and the L2

This paper proposes the use of audiovisual texts to present and discuss the informal/colloquial variety of the L2 and its relationship to the L1. Although this is not the place to enter the controversy concerning the dichotomy written/spoken language, a few points need to be addressed before we proceed. Historically, the written word has been prioritized in the design of textbooks and grammars. The significance given to written English, however, has been challenged over the last decade (Richards 2008; Timmis 2005). Spoken English has gradually gained some independence from its written more formal counterpart. The advent of corpus-based linguistics (with the publication of Biber et al. 1999; Carter and McCarthy 2006) has set the foundations for a much-needed renovation of ESL materials.

However, changes in coursebooks remain slow (Fernández Gavela 2015). In the early years of the twenty-first century, Romero Trillo (2002) stressed that non-native learners still acquired language through the traditional channels, i.e. via the teaching of grammatical and semantic rules with little or no reference to the pragmatic use of the language in formal or informal environments. In other words, L2 speakers "fail to acquire the appropriate markers that scaffold adults' speech" (783). As Chambers et al. have pointed out, although advances have been made "we are a long way from a situation where corpus data are commonly consulted by language teachers and learners" (2011: 86), conversational English is still missing from the classroom.

If this is true of informal English in general, it is even more obvious in the case of taboo language, which has traditionally fallen out of the scope of textbooks and syllabuses. Taboo words are not to be confused with slang, although

the borderline between the two is certainly blurred. Landau makes the following distinction between taboo and slang:

> Most slang is colorful, irreverent, or facetious, but it is not to be confused with taboo words. Although slang is often meat to shock the staid or discomfort the pretentious, it is not intended essentially to violate the properties of common decency, although it may (...) Many taboo words are not slang, and most slang expressions do not deal with sexually or scatologically offensive concepts. (Landau 2001: 38)

Here we focus on swearwords rather than slang words. The latter date quickly; they are subject to great regional variations and are far more numerous. Taboo words, on the other hand, tend to be more stable. Like slang, swearwords signal group belonging (Burridge 2010; Carter and McCarthy 2006: 225), and can be threatening and hostile (Carter and McCarthy 2006: 225). In fact, in the past most dictionaries omitted entries to vulgar and taboo words (Hughes 2006: xxiii; Landau 2001: 72). It was not until the second half of the twentieth century that swearwords made their way into English lexicons, including the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Wachal 2002: 197).

Cursing, taboo words, dirty words, offensive language or swearwords are some of the terms used in connection with expressions that can cause offence to certain listeners in certain contexts. Swearing is taken for granted both in Spanish and English, but, as Hughes points out, it is not universal and, in some religions, a direct reference to God, for example, is forbidden (Hughes 2006: xxi). In English, like in Spanish, taboo words, which typically refer to parts of the body, bodily functions and religion (Carter and McCarthy 2006: 225), are rarely used with their literal meaning. It has been argued that Spanish in general and conversational Spanish in particular is more tolerant of the use of taboo words in most social contexts (Scheu-Lottgen and Hernández 1998: 391).

The research carried out by Allan and Burridge (2006) has provided us with an abundance of information on the number of English swearwords and expressions, as well as their semantic and pragmatic value. Burridge has stressed that "like tabooing behaviour generally, linguistic purism seeks to constrain the conduct of individuals by identifying certain elements in a language as 'bad'" (2010: 4). While it may be true that speakers of certain dialects of any language can be unjustly viewed as uneducated or rough, it is naïve to claim that a word is only proscribed from certain contexts as a result of the power that a minority tries to exert over a majority. Nor can it be claimed that the free use of taboo words would contribute to a new world of linguistic egalitarianism, as they seem to imply. As Burridge herself experienced through the reaction of Australian listeners to some of her radio talks on language, taboo expressions are used to express strong emotions (Burridge 2010: 5).

In contrast, recent corpus-based and even older pedagogical reference grammars have devoted sections to swearwords with explicit references to their effects when used out of context. Swan's first edition of his *Practical English Usage*, for instance, included a list of taboo terms as well as some recommendations for learners (1980). In their grammar, Biber et al. divide expletives into two: taboo expletives which "make reference to one of the taboo domains of religion, sex, or bodily excretion" (1999: 1094) and moderated (or euphemistic) expletives, "which camouflage their taboo origin by various phonetic modifications (e.g. gosh for God) or by substitution of different but related words (e.g. goodness for God)" (1999: 1094). Biber et al. discuss taboo words when they have a peripheral function (that is, they are not part of the sentence), but the classification can apply to swearwords performing grammatical functions within the sentence as well.

While in other languages such as Dutch, speakers often use names of diseases (*cholera* or *cancer*) as swearwords and insults (Fletcher 1996), in English, like in Spanish, taboo words often deal "with devil, hell, God, Jesus Christ, saints, heaven, salvation and damnation" (Napoli and Hoeksema 2009: 614). On the other hand, "sex, reproductive organs, bodily functions, and sexual acts provide strong linguistic taboos, even today" (Napoli and Hoeksema 2009: 616). When compared with English, religious swearwords are more frequent in European Spanish, where the traditional influence of the Catholic Church did not prevent the use of a plethora of expressions that violated religious taboos. Words related to sex and bodily functions are used as swearwords in both languages.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the societal changes of the 1960s brought about a different attitude towards many taboo words (Landau 2001: 232; Hughes 2006: xxiii). From the 1980s these lexical items have been present not only in film but, more significantly, on television. As Landau indicates, the "few sexually taboo words that are still taboo, such as cunt, remain so largely because they are terms of insult, not because they offend decorum" (2001: 232). Taboo words or formerly taboo words are indeed becoming more common in most contexts (Allan and Burridge 2006; Wachal 2002). However, this is not tantamount to saying that they are acceptable in all situations and circumstances, or that the knowledge of an L1 can safely allow the learner to predict the conventions regarding dysphemisms in the L2. To further complicate matters, there are no criteria to establish what can be offensive, when and where, or who might find a certain word or expression offensive (Landau 2001: 233). For these reasons, caution is recommended. As Burridge herself writes, "humans can ill afford to violate social conventions without suffering adverse sanctions" (2010: 4).

Therefore, we believe that to leave L2 learners to their own devices is not an option: students can hardly rely on their intuition of the L2 or their experience of their L1 if they want to achieve successful communication in the former. Pinto has shown that Anglophone speakers often find Spanish more impolite or even rude when watching subtitled films from Spain (2010). This clearly implies different speaker use and perception of politeness strategies, including the use of taboo terms. Dewaele, who has extensively studied the use of swearing, has found that multilinguals tend to swear in their dominant language (Dewaele 2004a) and that they perceive taboo words as having a stronger emotional force in their mother tongue than in languages learnt later in life (Dewaele 2004b, 2010). In a study into multilinguals' perceptions of swearwords, Dewaele concluded that "the superior emotional force of swearing in the L1 correspond to more emotional weight for L1 swearwords" (2010: 165), and the same affected the expression of anger. In some cases, for example for speakers of Asian and Arabic origin, swearing in English even became an outlet for the strong restrictions imposed in their L1 (Dewaele 2010: 130).

This paper contends that the use of an old-fashioned exercise, i.e. translation, can be beneficial for the introduction of this controversial area of the L2. Translation exercises based on audiovisual material can help introduce a number of conversational features of the L2, including taboo words, which are not part of the lexical contents of contemporary textbooks (Fernández Gavela 2015). This does not mean that students should memorize lists of slang and taboo words, as students are often expected to do with phrasal verbs and idioms. However, we believe that learners need to be made aware of the contexts in which swearwords are used and their implications.

In the next two sections we propose two hypotheses, describe the methodological approach and present the study before moving to a final discussion section.

4 Hypotheses and methodology

4.1 Swearwords in translation and working hypotheses

Dewaele defines swearwords as "multifunctional, pragmatic units that assume, in addition to the expression of emotional attitudes, various discourse functions" (2004b: 205; 2010: 105). At this point, it is worth pointing out that the translation of these lexical items may be related to the existence of a claim made by some translation scholars, the so-called translation universal, i.e. the

standardization process of the informal features of a source text in its translated version (Toury 1995: 267–274). Some authors have indeed pointed out that translators tend to neutralize colloquialisms when translating the features of informal English into languages like French (Vandaele 2001), Swedish (Karjalainen 2002) and Finnish (Jääskeläinen 2003). For his part, Chaume mentions that when translating audiovisual material translators are recommended to avoid the use of offensive words, which should be replaced by euphemisms (2004: 181).

Other researchers have found out that this is not always the case. Jacob has shown that some English translators of French erotic narrative, such as the 1966 version of Sade's *Les cents vingts journées de Sodome* and the 1977 version of Bataille's *Histoire de l'oeil*, actually use "coarser" words (2006: 105) than the original, while Pavesi has pointed out that the Italian dubbed version of *E. R.* replaced the more neutral language by "elementi di forte colloquilità" (2005: 46). We have previously pointed out that the Spanish version of the American sitcom *Will & Grace* replaced a number of neutral to moderate expressions by swearwords (for example, the recurrent interjection *Wow!* in the original was often replaced by *¡Joder!* [Fuck]; Valdeón 2008: 210).

Bearing all this in mind, this paper will test two hypotheses:

(1) Our first hypothesis draws on previous findings that learners might find offensive words in the L1 more emotionally charged than L2 swearwords. Thus, as regards the students' approach to the presence of moderated and strong expletives in the original, the working hypothesis was that learners might tone down the original, as a result of the perceived strength of swearwords and non-standard language in the L1 as opposed to their L2.

(2) Concurrently, according to one of the so-called translation universals, the dubbed (or L1 for language learners) version of the audiovisual text is likely to neutralize non-standard grammatical and lexical features of the source language (L2 for language learners). However, our working hypothesis moved in the opposite direction: we believe that contemporary Spanish *dubbese* (the term used for the discourse of dubbed audiovisual fiction) may maintain the swearwords of the original.

These hypotheses were tested by (1) setting a translation task in the L2 classroom in which learners had to translate the original script of an episode of series one of the British sitcom *The I. T. Crowd* (Group 1 translated episode 1 while Group 2 translated episode 3), and compare it with the dubbed versions, and (2) by analyzing the *official* translations of the whole first series. The total number of words for the six English episodes was 15,672 (2,668 corresponded to episode 1, and 2,940 to episode 3).

4.2 The learners

To explore pragmatic differences concerning the use of taboo words in English and Spanish, we set a translation task to two groups of students. Group 1 had started their university program in English Studies (or English Philology, using the terminology of the university at the time) at least three years before. The total number of students was twenty-four, aged between 21 and 24. Students were supposed to have achieved a B.2 level before enrolling for English Language IV, the official name of the subject. In other words, they were assumed to have achieved an advanced level. Two of them had spent the previous year in a British university. The rest had lived between two and six months in the UK or Ireland. Thus, all of them had had the chance to experience conversational English in a natural environment. Group 2 had started their degrees in the new English Studies program at least two years before, and were also expected to have achieved a B.2 level before enrolling in English Language IV. As with the previous group, all had spent at least two months in an English-speaking country and one of them had lived in the UK for a year. Therefore, none of them were English-Spanish bilinguals.

Both groups had *Advanced Learners' Grammar* as their reference grammar, which puts a special emphasis on the more formal and standard variety of the language and, occasionally, touches upon strategies characteristic of spoken English. For instance, "Emphatic structures and inversion" introduces fronting as a device used by speakers for emphasis (Foley and Hall 2003: 322). However, students can barely infer that some elements are more informal than others, as no references to use and context are made.

4.3 The translation task

Before working on their translation task, students had had the chance to become familiar with many colloquial features of conversational English, including its lexical characteristics. During three sessions, the main peculiarities of colloquial speech were presented. Thus, students became familiar with grammatical features such as ellipsis (Biber et al. 1999; Carter and McCarthy 2006: 181–188), right and left dislocation (Biber et al. 1999; Carter and McCarthy 2006: 192–196) and double negation (Biber et al. 1999; Carter and McCarthy 2006: 735–736), as well as lexical ones, including the use of slang and taboo words (Biber et al. 1999; Carter and McCarthy 2006; Swan 2005: 564–569). These points were also practiced through the accompanying exercises (Carter et al. 2000: 147–174). In other words, the learners had had the chance to discuss offensive language, but

they were not expected to make connections between taboo language and the exercise that would follow four weeks later.

To further practice the features of informal English in general, and explore differences in the use of colloquial and offensive in the English/Spanish pair, we set a translation activity in order to provide the contextualization necessary (Gambier 2007; Pavesi and Perego 2008: 222). We also took into account that "the degree of difficulty of the source text should bear some relation to the learner's level of competence" (Nord 2005: 188). For the task we selected the first two episodes of *The I. T. Crowd*, a popular English sitcom, also shown on Spanish digital television, where viewers can choose between a dubbed version and the original program with(out) subtitles. Group 1 translated episode 1 and Group 2 rendered episode 3 into Spanish. The translation task attempted to meet the requirements of instrumental language courses, that is, they should promote language practice and group interaction. The syllabus for English Language IV specifically mentions that work will be done on "complex written texts and spoken language from a wide variety of sources and topics, as well as different accents and registers" and "active student involvement is encouraged and needed, both in class and projects, and homework".

5 The results of the study

5.1 Swearwords in the students' versions

Before we present the results of the study, we need to clarify why two different episodes were used. The script of episode 1 has recourse to multiple features of colloquial English, but hardly any taboo words. The script provided the students with the opportunity to work on a number of features of conversational English they were already familiar with (e.g. ellipsis, slang, interjections, discourse markers, etc.). However, the text does not include any taboo words except for the item *bollocks* in the sentence "I make up a lot of bollocks about computers and we'll see if she picks up on it". Conversely, episode 3 presents four items that can be deemed as offensive or mildly offensive (*shit*, *idiot*, *bastards*, *bloody*). We assumed that the number of offensive words in the two episodes would have an effect on the choices made by the students. This, in turn, might allow us to discuss the different conventions concerning taboo words in the two languages, as we compare the students' versions with the parallel dubbed episodes. As the students had become familiar with English taboo words in a classroom environment four weeks in advance, we believed there was a certain degree of freedom vis-à-vis English swearwords.

Students were provided with the written English script and were requested to produce a Spanish version of the episode. Since the course was not part of a translation training program, technical constraints were not prioritized. On the contrary, students were advised to concentrate on the linguistic and pragmatic aspects of these multimodal texts, paying also attention to the context, an extremely important element in intercultural communication (Kecskes 2014: 148–149). Students watched the program in its original version before carrying out the translation. Thus, they familiarized themselves not only with the linguistic choices but also with contextual factors (e.g. two of the protagonists are work colleagues and friends, humor is an important element of the script, etc.). Then, learners in both groups were divided into three smaller groups and were instructed to render a third of the text into Spanish for class presentation, although the whole text had to be translated. Teamwork was essential in order to discuss choices and reach a compromise before making final decisions. Another hour of classroom time was devoted to this, although the translation needed to be completed outside normal tuition time. In the next two classes, the three subgroups had to provide their translations and to justify their choices. Finally, the Spanish dubbed version was played for students to make comparisons. Before engaging in the final discussion as a class, students were instructed to take notes of relevant utterances, either because they were similar to their own or because they differed considerably.

In the presentation of their texts, the learners mentioned the difficulties when translating colloquial expressions. They had expected the task to be relatively stress-free: they had assumed that informal conversational exchanges would be easier to translate than other more formal or technical texts. However, phrasal verbs like *to size someone up* and idiomatic expressions like *to get to grips with* became particularly challenging.

Table 1 provides some of the conversational features of the text.

Table 1: Examples of conversational features of episode 1.1 and some translations.

Feature	Original text	Example of student translation	Dubbed version
Ellipsis	Nurse said I didn't do any serious damage	La enfermera dijo… [The nurse said…]	La enfermera dijo… [The nurse said…]
Idioms	She is quite the oddball.	Es muy extraña. [She's very strange]	Está completamente pirada [She's completely loopy]
Discourse markers	But I can learn. You know, I mean.	Pero puedo aprender, sabes, de verdad [But I can learn, you know, really]	Puedo aprender. Por ejemplo, a ver. [I can learn. For example, let's see]

Identifying these features allowed us to discuss differences between Standard English, as presented in the course books, and actual use in conversation. Some of them did not pose any difficulties, such as the omission of subjects, which characterizes both formal and informal Spanish. On the whole, learners provided an informal version throughout, very much along the lines of the source text. However, some points are worth mentioning. On the one hand, the Spanish dubbed program opts for the form *Usted* to indicate the formality of the exchange between Denholm and Jen. It clearly aims to maintain the power relationship of a first meeting between the employer and a prospective employee. On the other, students pointed out that the Spanish version is far more colloquial than the English one as regards the vocabulary, and, in fact, the most difficult parts to translate involved, for the most part, colloquial lexis. Students added that the dubbed versions use slang more profusely than the original (as, for example, in the rendering of the neutral verb *work* as slang *currar* rather than standard *trabajar*). Most remarkable is the number of swearwords, which grows exponentially, as Tables 2 and 3 show.

Table 2: English to Spanish Episode 1.

Original sentence	Example of student version	Spanish version
They have no respect for us up there Ø. No respect whatsoever. We're all just drudgeons to them.	No nos tienen ningún respeto ahí arriba Ø. Ninguno. Nos tratan como a esclavos. [They have no respect for us up there. None. They treat us like slaves]	No nos respeta ni **Dios** ahí arriba. Absolutamente nadie. Nos tratan como a **putos** esclavos.
We do not want to go in there half-cocked.	No debemos entrar sin estar preparados. [We must not go if we are not ready]	No es bueno que entremos ahí **acojonados**.
You don't know Ø anything about computers.	No tienes ni Ø idea de ordenadores. [You have no idea about computers]	No tiene ni **zorra** de ordenadores.
He's joking	Está bromeando. [He's joking]	Está de **coña**
When we were so drunk	Cuando estábamos borrachos. [When we were drunk]	Cuando nos cogimos un buen **pedo**
Oh It's brilliant, this is a great story	Es una historia buenísima, estupenda. [It is a very good story, really great]	Es una anécdota **cojonuda**. Vais a flipar.
Haha	Ajá	¡**Dios**!
What did you say? What Ø did you say?	¿Qué les has dicho? ¿Qué Ø les ha dicho? [What did you say to them? What did you say to them?]	¿Qué les has contado? ¿Qué **coño** les has dicho?

Table 3: English to Spanish Episode 3.

Original sentence	Example of student version	Spanish version
You've got **shit**	Tienes **mierda**	Tienes **caca**
I don't know how Ø it got on my hands…	No sé cómo Ø llegó a mis manos [I don't know how it got on my hands]	No sé cómo **coño** llegó a mis dedos…
The referee is an **idiot**	El árbrito es **idiota** [The referee is an idiot]	El árbitro es un **gilipollas**
All women just like **bastards**	A las mujeres les gustan los capullos [Women like idiots]	A las mujeres les gustan los **cabrones**
You **bloody** woman	**Maldita** mujer [Damn woman]	Eres una **maldita zorra**
Wow, the rules of this show have really changed	Vaya, las normas del concurso han cambiado de verdad [Wow, therules of the show have really changed]	**Joder**, cómo han cambiado las reglas de ese concurso

To highlight the differences, we have identified offensive (or mildly offensive) words in bold, while the Ø symbol denotes the absence of swearwords in the English script in order to mark a contrast with the words in bold in the Spanish dubbed version. As mentioned, the original script of episode 1 includes only one swearword, *bollocks*, which students toned down to *estupideces* or maintained as *gilipolleces*. The remaining swearwords in the Spanish dubbed version were, in fact, neutral to informal in the English program. In the tables above, the second column includes examples of choices made by the students. Thus, we can see that learners rendered "he's joking" in a straightforward manner as "está bromeando". In this column back translations are provided to allow comparisons between the students' versions and the dubbed ones. The final column reproduces the Spanish script as aired on television. To draw comparisons swearwords are also in bold, while in the source texts the equivalent neutral expressions are underlined.

As can be seen, neutral words were replaced by taboo or more colloquial items. In other instances, the translators inserted a swearword as an intensifier when there was none in the original. Thus, for example, *brilliant* becomes *cojonuda* [fucking good] from the taboo word *cojones* [bollocks], *Aha* is rendered as *Dios* [God] and the word *coño* [cunt] is inserted in the translation of "What did you say?" Although the impact of the latter is stronger in English (Wachal 2002: 197), it remains vulgar in Spanish. Hughes argues that it has been "the most seriously taboo word in English for centuries" (2006: 110), while Allan and Burridge remind us that it is "the most tabooed word in English" (2006: 52). Indeed, the strength of *coño* varies in the two languages: while it is a moderate swearword in Spanish, it is the strongest taboo word in English, as pedagogical reference grammars also

point out (Swan 2005: 565–566). In fact, in the section devoted to swearing, Carter and McCarthy do not even mention it (2006: 225–227). This is important for Spanish speakers of English as the use of this taboo word in the wrong situation (if used at all) could have a serious impact on their image within the target speaker community. In this sense, a translation task of this type will contribute to help L2 learners understand the different implications of tabooed lexical items in the two languages.

In fact, during the discussion of the translation choices, the students were surprised to find this intensifying strategy on twelve occasions. Although the learners had been encouraged to be as inventive and spontaneous as possible in order to sound natural in Spanish, they created Spanish texts that reproduced the informal tone of the original, but tended to avoid taboo words. This clearly runs counter to the choices made by professional translators, who favored a higher frequency of swearwords in both the dubbed and subtitled versions. Students commented on the fact that they had expected Spanish versions of the English series to be rendered more literally. The learners acknowledged that they were familiar with all the English equivalents of the Spanish swearwords, but also realized that it would not be acceptable to use many of them in the same contexts. On the whole, they pointed out that, apparently, English mainstream television seemed to be less likely to use offensive language than its Spanish counterpart. Students were warned that this was only a hypothesis as they had only translated an episode of one specific program. It was agreed that this could be an interesting area of research.

5.2 Swearwords in the dubbed series

The second part of the study aimed to compare L2 use of swearwords in their translation exercise with *dubbese*, that is, the discourse of professionally dubbed series. Although some authors have argued against the efficacy of using parallel corpora (see Olohan 2004: 26–28), many researchers have defended them as reliable sources of information. Kenny stresses that parallel corpora have been extensively used, particularly in contrastive lexical and grammatical studies. Johansson, the director of The English-Norwegian Parallel Corpus, supported the use of parallel (or translation) corpora for contrastive analysis: "most linguists working in the field have either explicitly or implicitly made use of translation as a means of establishing cross-linguistic relationships" (2007: 3). The usefulness of parallel corpora is also acknowledged in other areas such as translation training (Kenny 2004: 154) and language learning and teaching (Frankerberg-Garcia 2004). For the purpose of this study, the use of parallel texts (those

produced by the students plus the official version) also allowed the students to reflect on the higher frequency of swearwords in the dubbed version of the whole first series.

As mentioned, the second aim of the study was to ascertain whether the Spanish dubbed version was more likely to retain the swearwords of the original. Tables 4 and 5 include the total number of swearwords in the English originals and the corresponding Spanish programs.

Table 4: Episode 1.

English original	Spanish version
Ø They've no respect for us up there, no respect whatsoever.	No nos respeta ni **Dios** ahí arriba, absolutamente nadie.
Oh, my God, oh my God, oh God	Por **Dios, esto es la leche**. Lo siento
We do not want to go in there half-cocked	No queremos que nos pille **acojonados**
He's joking	Está de **coña**
It is a great story	Es una historia **cojonuda**
What Ø did you say?	¿Qué **coño** les has dicho?

Table 5: Episode 2.

English original	Spanish version
Why Ø…?	¿Por qué **coño**…?
What am I declaring war on? My **bollocks**?	¿A qué voy a declararle la guerra? ¿A mis **pelotas**?
What Ø was all that about?	¿Qué **coño** le pasa a la jefa?
You Beep idiot! (…) Stupid old Beep Beep Beep Beep You're nothing but a Beep	¡Serás **cabrón**, idiota! (…) ¡**Maldito hijo de puta japonés**! ¡Me **cago en la madre que te parió** y en toda tu familia, **cabronazo**! (…) ¡Sólo eres un capullo y un **maricón de mierda**!
As for you, you're **fucked**	En cuanto a ti, la has **jodido** bien
Oh, ohh, ohh!	¡**Joder** tía!
I feel great	Me siento de **puta madre**

Tables 1 and 2 show informal features of conversational English, but taboo words are relatively infrequent, ranging from the mild ("Oh my God") to the strong ("you're fucked"). Conversely, the Spanish version increases them exponentially. This contradicts the standardization universal that some authors have claimed to characterize translations (Toury 1995: 267–274) and the guidelines

mentioned by some translation scholars concerning the replacement of offensive words by euphemisms (Chaume 2004: 181). In fact, the translators of *The I. T. Crowd* have opted for choices that altered the pragmatic implications of the source text. For instance, in the second episode, the use of the interjection *Oh* to express pain is replaced by the aggressive expletive *Joder* [Fuck] addressed at one of the characters. One interesting feature is the frequent addition of *coño* (literally *cunt*, even though it is milder in Spanish) as an intensifier. And finally, it is noteworthy the decision to *translate* all the beeps of the original (example 4 of episode 2) as strong taboo expressions, giving way to an extremely aggressive outpour of insults addressed at a Japanese character: while the original aimed at showing the extent of the rage of the protagonist by beeping the insulting swearwords, the Spanish version opted for spelling out five highly offensive expressions, ranging from the most racist ("Maldito hijo de puta japonés") to the most homophobic ("Maricón de mierda").

Let us move to the next two episodes, shown in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6: Episode 3.

English	Spanish
You've got **shit**	Tienes caca
I don't know how Ø it got on my hands…	No sé cómo **coño** llegó a mis dedos…
The referee is an **idiot**	El árbitro es un **gilipollas**
All women just like **bastards**	A las mujeres les gustan los **cabrones**
You **bloody** woman	Eres una **maldita zorra**
Wow, the rules of this show have really changed	**Joder**, cómo han cambiado las reglas de ese concurso

Table 7: Episode 4.

English	Spanish
Right, clean we'll try	Así estamos de **puta** madre
What's going on there? Ø I don't know	¿Qué pasa ahí dentro? Y yo qué **coño** sé.

Once again, the English script uses few offensive words, notably as insults, while the Spanish version intensifies them by replacing neutral words (*woman*) by insults (*zorra*, that is, *bitch*), and by adding the intensifier *coño* in a couple of utterances. The former is relevant inasmuch it affects Moss, one of the

protagonists, who is characterized as naive and soft-spoken throughout the whole series. As part of his humorous characterization, Moss uses expressions like "bloody woman" when he attempts to be most offensive. We will further elaborate on this below, as episode 6 exploits this personality trait for greater comical effects.

Also noteworthy is the transformation of the interjection *Wow* into the strong expletive *Joder* [Fuck] that we had commented upon in the previous section. This has also been pointed out in other studies of Spanish dubbed discourse (Valdeón 2008: 210). Thus, the tendency is to increase the strength of the original. In episode 3 *gilipollas* and *cabrones* are arguably stronger than *idiot* and *bastards* respectively, whereas the Spanish version of episode 4 adds two swearwords with no equivalent in the original. *Coño* as an intensifier seems to have become the norm in Spanish, although "I don't know" does not have the pragmatic implications of "Y yo que coño sé" [How the hell should I know!]. Although it could be argued that no linguistic act is inherently impolite, but rather that this is context-dependent (Kecskes 2014: 213), the fact is that both the choice of syntax ("Y yo que…") and lexis (*coño*) mark the pragmatic value of the utterance as clearly aggressive and, therefore, cannot be considered as nongenuine impoliteness (Kecskes 2014: 217).

Let us move now to the final two episodes, demonstrated in Tables 8 and 9.

Table 8: Episode 5.

English	Spanish
I'm very good at lying.	A mí sí se me da de **puta** madre.
It's **bloody** awful	Es una **putada** terrible
She was some piece of **ass**	Tenía un buen **culo**
Computer is broken (…) Broken down.	Se me ha **jodido** el ordenador (…) pues que se ha **jodido**.
Bill, you, dog	Bill, **cabroncete**
You lying **cow**	**Puta foca asquerosa**
Bastard! Stop telling everyone I slept with you! You **bastard**!	Hijo de **puta**! ¡Deja de decir a todos que te acostaste conmigo, **cabronazo**!
Don't break down! Don't break down, you **bitch**!	No, no te pares ahora, no te pares. ¡**Joder**!
(Mumbling)	¡**Joder**! ¡Qué **putada**! ¿Y ahora qué hago?
You **bastard**! You **bastard**! You **bastard**!	¡Eres un **cabrón**! ¡Eres un **cabrón**! ¡Eres un **cabronazo**!

Table 9: Episode 6.

English	Spanish
Have you tried sticking it up your **arse**?	¿Has probado a metértelo por el **culo**?
Oh, **bloody** door!	¡**Mierda** de cajón!
I'm at the end of my flipping tether Flip off!	Le aseguro que estoy al borde del **puto** abismo. ¡Pues, **jódase**!
Ø (Mumbling)	¡**Mierda! ¡Joder**!
I've been swearing like a flipping docker	Me ha dado por maldecir como un **puto** obrero
She's so silly! Sugar!	Es más tonta… Azúcar
You've got big **balls**, Roy!	Tienes un par de **huevos**, Roy
I can never find a **bloody** pen in here!	¡Nunca consigo encontrar un **puto** boli por aquí!
No, it was heart-warming	No, era un **puto** pastelazo
Yeah, screw them!	¡Sí, que se **jodan**!

Once again the underlined words and the Ø symbols in the original show that the last two episodes are characterized by a low frequency of taboo words, as the scriptwriters preferred neutral items or euphemisms. As mentioned, the latter play a key role in the characterization of one of the protagonists, Moss, who never swears. In fact, when he attempts to sound aggressive, he only manages to use euphemisms (*flipping*, *flip off*), which contributes to portray him as naïve. The translators have clearly missed the implications and, consequently, the Spanish version does not seem to make much sense as *flipping* becomes *puto* (which, as a premodifier, could be the pragmatic equivalent of *fucking*) and *Flip off!* is rendered into Spanish as *jódase* (literally *Fuck yourself*, a much stronger version for *mala suerte* or *tough luck*). The scriptwriters have infused a touch of sarcasm in Moss's line when he says that he is "swearing like a *flipping* docker". The Spanish text misses the effect of the original altogether. Additionally, the euphemism *Sugar* (as a replacement for *Shit*) is translated literally as *Azúcar* in Spanish, which does not make any sense in the target language.

6 Final discussion

The results of the study are somehow surprising. First of all, taboo words are among the first lexical items (some) students learn. This might be linked to a certain feeling of transgression that breaking a taboo, however mild, involves. This small but highly relevant section of the English lexis might not be taught in a

formal environment, but learners soon learn it (Dewaele 2004b: 205) and might use it in the wrong contexts (Pavlenko 2009: 137). Perhaps for this reason students need to become familiar with the situations in which swearwords are likely to be used. In this sense a translation task like the one presented in this paper does not only provide a well-situated context (Gambier 2007; Pavesi and Perego 2008), i.e. colleagues and friends in a workplace, where a relaxed and friendly atmosphere is made explicit visually, it also allows the learners to draw comparisons between the L1 and the L2. Taboo words may be more common in Spanish (Scheu-Lottgen and Hernández 1998: 391; Stenström 2014: 21), but the L2 students in the two groups opted for choices that remained close to the original. For the translation task, we did not choose the programs with the highest frequency of taboo words in English, or with the strongest ones. The students attempted to reproduce the conversational features of English, and yet they were cautious as regards the few swearwords: out of the five tabooed items, only three were maintained in their versions. The results of the study are certainly limited, but their value becomes more apparent as we turn to the dubbed programs.

In the Spanish versions, swearwords increased exponentially, not only in the first and third episodes, used with Group 1 and Group 2 respectively, but also in the whole series. In episodes 1 and 3, the number of swearwords rose from five in the English versions to eleven in the Spanish versions. If we consider the whole series, the increase went from 18 in the English programs to 46 in the Spanish dubbed versions. These numbers clearly contradict the so-called standardization universal, at least as regards the use of offensive language in contemporary series dubbed into Spanish. It also contradicts the recommendations to avoid taboo words in the Spanish translations of popular Anglophone television programs (Chaume 2004: 181). And, last but not least, it undermines the view that speakers consider swearing much stronger in their own language than in the L2 (Dewaele 2004; Pavlenko 2009: 136), at least in the case of translators. It is true, however, that the context examined here differs considerably from the social situations where "the inappropriate use of swearwords or taboo words might have devastating social consequences" (Dewaele 2004: 204). For one thing, translators do not use the words themselves, but rather through the characters in a sitcom. Consequently, their social life will not be affected by, for instance, the outpour of homophobic and sexist swearwords in episode 2. Thus, it could be interpreted that, according to the translators, (1) the English do not swear enough, and (2) the Spanish version of the program requires stronger and more frequent swearing. The use of swearwords in dubbed and subtitled programs would certainly require further investigation, as it seems to contradict research into the perception of the emotional force of swearwords in L1 and L2 among learners (Dewaele 2004; Pavlenko 2009: 185), including the different physical reactions to them (Harris 2004; Pavlenko

2014: 283–292). Translators do not seem to corroborate these findings when rendering taboo words from English (their L2) into Spanish (their L1).

In any case, the choices in the dubbed series were relevant for the discussion in the L2 classroom. The task served to introduce and situate one of the most controversial linguistic areas in the teaching of a foreign language, its taboo lexis. The translation exercise and the comparison with the *official* version contributed to raise the learners' awareness of the pitfalls of swearing in the foreign language. Swearing differs between languages, even between those relatively close, both linguistically and culturally. The translators may have preferred to adapt the original discourse to what they consider normative in the target language and culture, but L2 learners were more cautious. We have seen that taboo words can have very different implications in the two languages, even if there is a greater tolerance of swearwords in both contemporary English and Spanish. As Wachal writes, "we have come a long way since 1960" (2002: 197) and "profanity and obscenity are encountered so frequently in the street (and with increasingly monotonous regularity on television and at the movies)" (Hughes 2006: xxv). Attitudes towards the use of taboo items may have become more relaxed, but languages and cultures have different conventions. As Fernández Gavela has recently pointed out, media regulations are reflective of the social and linguistic conventions of Spain on the one hand, and the US and the UK on the other:

> Examples of the strength taboo words can have are constantly present in most American programs where taboo language is systematically beeped out or written f*ck. Recently, in Britain, a BBC news item published on 5th March, 2012 highlighted the fact that an expletive had not been beeped out from the popular ITV1 show, X-Factor. The consequences were headlines in most newspapers and a formal apology which "was broadcasted approximately 44 minutes after the offensive language occurred". The f*** word was not only criticized but the teenage wannabe responsible "was later axed from the show because of his behaviour" (whatsonTV.co.uk). It is difficult to imagine this turmoil in an Iberian society. (Fernández-Gavela 2015: 135–136)

In fact, European Spanish is certainly more tolerant of taboo words than British and American English in most contexts, including the media. For example, the rather strict television regulations that characterize the US and the UK mark a sharp contrast with the Spanish situation, where some conventions are supposed to be observed but, in reality, swearwords are used all the time at any time of the day or night.

To conclude, let us stress a few final points. First, the inadequate treatment of swearwords in the L2 classroom can only cause awkward situations in social contexts. Learners do not normally receive formal training on it, even though they will almost inevitably encounter the less neutral and standard forms of the L2 in real-life contexts. In informal conversations, formal neutral language

would be "situationally inappropriate and unconventional language is instead privileged" (Mattiello 2005: 36). For this reason, Mattiello believes, learners should be encouraged to acquire an active knowledge of slang terms "to socialize and create intimacy with their peers" (2005: 36). In the case of taboo words, it might be more appropriate to say that we should make L2 students aware of the implications of using offensive language in the wrong contexts.

Second, in a world that is increasingly multicultural and multilingual, translation tasks like the one presented in this paper can contribute to draw our students' attention to the important differences between formal and informal English, including the use of taboo words, and between informal English and informal Spanish (or between English and other languages). This, in turn, will allow Spanish learners to be cautious of this type of lexis, as recommended by grammarians (Carter and McCarthy 2006) and pedagogical writers (Swan 2005: 565), because the use of taboo expressions in English can vary enormously, being "very dense in particular conversations, and completely absent from others" (Biber et al. 1999: 1094). Through this task students managed to familiarize themselves with areas of the language that they had taken for granted, as well as with their pragmatic force.

Finally, future studies might further explore language differences between English originals and Spanish dubbed products. In this sense, we find that translation studies, and audiovisual translation research in particular, could engage with other disciplines to gain more insights into the features of *dubbese*. As translation studies moved towards a descriptive approach, many publications have failed to analyze language choices from a critical perspective. In this sense, models such as the socio-cognitive approach (Kecskes 2014) can contribute to enhance translation studies as a discipline. For example, research into the three types of salience (Kecskes 2014: 184–187) in these particular intercultural products can inform us of how the conventions of the two languages differ synchronically and how they have evolved diachronically. After all, dubbing and subtitling are intercultural exchanges where linguistic transformation can affect the interpretation of the original multimodal text.

Acknowledgements: I would like to express my gratitude to the two anonymous reviewers and to the editor-in-chief of the journal for their valuable comments on a previous version of this paper.

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Bionote

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