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Swearing and the vulgarization hypothesis in Spanish audiovisual translation

Roberto A. Valdeón ^{a, b, c, *}

^a Huazhong University of Science and Technology, School of Foreign Languages, 1037 Luoyu Road, Hongshan District, Wuhan, 430074, China

^b University of Oviedo, Department of English, French and German Studies, Campus El Milán, 33011, Oviedo, Spain

^c University of the Free State, Department of Linguistics and Language Practice, PO Box 339, Bloemfontein, 9300, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on the insights of pragmatics and translation studies, this article aims to probe the so-called vulgarization hypothesis in audiovisual translation (AVT) of Anglophone products into Spanish for the period 2006–2016. The hypothesis posits that contemporary American and British programs dubbed into European Spanish tend to increase the use of swearwords. To test this hypothesis I selected four series, a sitcom (*The IT Crowd*), a police drama (*Chicago PD*), a family drama (*Brothers & Sisters*) and a thriller (*Eyewitness*). After identifying a total of 412 coupled pairs in which swearwords were used in English, Spanish or both, I analysed the translation strategies. The analysis shows that the number of swearwords is increased by means of three strategies (namely addition, replacement of neutral words/expressions by swearwords, and intensification) in 53.14% of the cases. In contrast, toning down and omission strategies occur in 13.88% of the coupled pairs, thus supporting the hypothesis that contemporary AVT in Spain tends to vulgarize the original version.

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1. Introduction

Over the past three decades swearing has received considerable attention in various disciplines, ranging from media studies (Sheidlower, 1999), discourse and pragmatics (Allan and Burridge, 2006; Culpeper et al., 2003; Culpeper, 2011) and translation studies (Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2007: 95–96; Pavesi, 2005, Valdeón, 2010, 2015; Santamaría Ciordia, 2016). This paper focuses on the translation of swearwords from English into Spanish, drawing mainly on pragmatics and translation studies in order to test the so-called “vulgarization hypothesis”. This can be defined as the tendency to intensify the vulgarity of the lexical items found in the English source texts when translated into Spanish.

The very definition of swearwords entails a high degree of subjectivity, as their nature and impact tend to vary across languages and cultures. Most researchers find it difficult to provide straightforward definitions. Montague argues that “swearing is the act of verbally expressing the feeling of aggressiveness that follows upon frustration in words possessing strong emotional associations” (1967: 105) and relates it to cursing, profanity, blasphemy and obscenity. In addition, he defines “vulgarity” as a “form of swearing that makes use of crude words, such as *bloody*”. Montague classifies swearing into

* Huazhong University of Science and Technology, School of Foreign Languages, 1037 Luoyu Road, Hongshan District, Wuhan, 430074, China
E-mail address: valdeon@uniovi.es.

nine different categories, depending on their function and form. For his part, Hughes (1991: 5) associates swearing to the violation of societal taboos, which may vary from culture to culture. In English, like in Spanish, these tend to be related to sex, bodily functions and religion.

More recently, McEnery has defined swearwords as part of the more general concept of bad language, which refers to any word or phrase that can cause offence when used in polite conversation (2006: 2), while Allan and Burridge (2006) use the term “dysphemism” to refer to words that are likely to cause offence to some listeners. In line with this, Andersson and Trudgill (2007: 195) link swearing to words or expressions that refer to something taboo, although these lexical items are not to be taken literally since speakers use them to express strong emotions. For his part, Ljung (2011: 4) suggests that there is considerable agreement concerning the four criteria to be met by swearing: 1) it contains taboo words, 2) these words are not used with literal meaning, 3) swearing tends to be formulaic language, and 4) its main function is to reflect the speaker's feelings and attitudes.

Drawing on some of the most recent approaches to swearing (Allan and Burridge, 2006; Hughes, 2006; McEnery, 2006; Andersson and Trudgill, 2007), I will use the term “swearwords” to refer to words or expressions that are considered taboo, carry some kind of social stigma (e.g. sexual, religious) and may be used to convey strong emotions. Consequently, swearwords may cause offence to (some of) the participants involved in a communicative situation such as a conversation, the reading a book or a newspaper article, or watching a movie or a television program. As regards Spanish, “tacos” and “palabras” (literally “big words”) are used to refer to swearwords (Laguna, 1988; Montes de Oca Sicilia, 2016), while the verb “jurar” (“swear”) can also refer to the action of uttering taboo words, even though Ljung mistakenly points out that English, French and Swedish are the only European languages using the verb “swear” for both oath-taking and in the profane sense (2011: 1). In fact, Spanish also uses “juramento” (“oath”) as an equivalent to “swearwords”.

In pragmatics the use of swearwords has been related to acts of (im)politeness. However, evaluation of (im)politeness is also problematic, as studies into the impact of swearwords within the same language (Christie, 2013) and in intercultural contexts have shown. It has been suggested that intention is crucial to understand swearwords, and that it might be responsible for the offence caused among listeners (Culpeper et al., 2003). Culpeper has stressed that the strength of these words depends on their conventionalized (and hence shared) semantic value (2011: 124). Moreover, in some very specific contexts the interlocutors of a given communicative event might use swearwords as a marker of solidarity (Culpeper, 2011; Christie, 2013).

In Translation Studies, some theorists have suggested the existence of laws (Toury, 2012) or universals (Chesterman, 2017: 260–261). The latter term has been considered particularly problematic, as it is based on the assumption that certain translation tendencies or regularities can be considered universal (Chesterman, 2017: 301). In the study of translation in general and AVT in particular, considerable attention has been paid to swearwords as a type of lexis that tends to be standardized in the target language. Thus, a number of studies have shown that translators often omit or tone down swearwords when translating English into languages such as French (Vandaele, 2001), Swedish (Karjalainen, 2002), Italian (Bucaria, 2010) and Spanish (Santaemilia, 2008: 225–226; García Aguiar and García Jiménez, 2013). In addition, AVT scholars and practitioners posit that swearwords are expendable, as the norm is to eliminate them or tone them down (Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2007: 95–96; Soler Pardo, 2015: 202; Chaume, 2004: 81). This is often the result of a quest for brevity, a characteristic of AVT (Hatim and Mason, 1997: 88; Guillot, 2017: 406).

Conversely, other authors have stressed that the translation of swearwords is more complex than it may seem (Pavesi, 2005; Valdeón, 2015). For instance, in a study of the Polish and English versions of Almodóvar's film *¡Átame!*, Santamaria Ciordia shows that while the former maintains the vulgarity of the source script (and even intensifies it), the latter prefers to replace the vulgar parts of the dialogues by expressions that remain colloquial in tone but are not offensive (2016: 298). This seems to indicate that there might not be a translation universal regarding the translation of swearwords.

2. Hypothesis, objectives, data and methodology

In line with the studies abovementioned, in previous publications I identified what seemed to be a tendency to increase the frequency and intensity of swearwords when translating contemporary Anglophone audiovisual material into Spanish (Valdeón, 2008, 2010, 2015). This would run counter to the findings of authors such as García Aguiar and García Jiménez (2013), Ávila-Cabrera (2015, 2016) and Soler Pardo (2015), who have focused on case studies. For instance, in my study of the eight seasons of the US sitcom *Will & Grace*, I showed that translators¹ had replaced a relevant number of neutral words (such as “homosexual”) or positivized items (such as “gay”) by dysphemic ones such as “marica” and “maricón” [fag] (Valdeón, 2010), while a class exercise using the British sitcom *The I. T. Crowd* showed that the students' choices were closer to the original source script than those made by professional translators, who increased the number of swearwords exponentially (Valdeón, 2015). The tendency observed in those studies has led to the proposal of what can be termed a “vulgarization hypothesis” according to which the trend in contemporary AVT in Spain is to increase the number of swearwords, in contrast to what seemed to be the norm in the past, both in translation in general and AVT in particular (Vandaele,

¹ In this paper, “translators” will be used to refer to “translators”, “adaptors” on any other agents that participate in the interlinguistic mediation processes involved in the dubbing of a series/film.

2001; Karjalainen, 2002; Santaemilia, 2008). This is significant as it can have implications for translator training programs and can provide insights into the evolution of AVT practices and the use of swearwords in mass media.

To test the hypothesis, a large and representative set of data was necessary, comprising not just one or more films by the same director but rather a selection of television series. These have been the backbone of television programming in the twenty-first century, and are claimed to have a considerable influence on viewers' habits (McEnery, 2006: 7–8). The selection of the four series was based on the following premises:

- 1) Although Spanish television channels show foreign series from Britain, France and Germany, among other countries, US series are among the most popular. As the present study focuses on English-speaking series, three US and one British series were selected.
- 2) As previous research tends to be based on case studies (typically action films or single episodes of a television series), the selection aimed to cover complete seasons as well as different genres in order to provide a more comprehensive view of the translation strategies.
- 3) The series had to be produced in the twenty-first century in order to test whether there were variations concerning the findings of previous studies, and the recommendations of AVT practitioners and researchers (Agost, 2004: 67; Chaume, 2004: 81).

In addition to testing the hypothesis, the study had two objectives. First, it aimed to find out whether vulgarization occurs in all the genres. Second, it aimed to gather information on the various strategies used in the target texts in order to assess whether these strategies were consistent inter and intratextually.

The following series were selected:

The IT Crowd (2006), season 1 with a total of 6 episodes. Circa 15,644 words.

Brothers and Sisters (2007–2008), season 2, 16 episodes. Circa 98,402 words.

Chicago P.D. (2014), season 1, 15 episodes. Circa 63,274 words.

Eyewitness (2016), season 1, 10 episodes. Circa 36,012 words.

Once the corpus was gathered, translation units including swearwords and expressions in one or the two languages were extracted. The extraction of the source and target language units was carried out by using the available versions of the series as shown by Spanish television networks, which were recorded and watched in the two languages. The word count of the source texts is based on the scripts available on the Internet, which were checked and adjusted to make sure that the transcriptions were accurate. As the study relies on coupled pair analysis (Tourey, 2012: 116–117), and the units of analysis are the exchanges including a swearword or phrase in English, Spanish or both, no full transcripts were deemed necessary. The working assumption, though, was that, given the constrained nature of AVT, and the fact that Spanish is a Latinate language, the word count in the Spanish texts would be slightly lower, as the audiovisual corpora used by Romero-Fresco for English-Spanish (2006) and Pavesi for English-Italian (2014: 33, 53–54) demonstrate. The Pavia Corpus used by Pavesi is particularly interesting in this respect. Of the twenty-four films it comprises, only one dubbed film has more words than the original. Even then the number is minimal, namely only forty words (2014: 54). Overall the English versions in the Pavia Corpus have 261,229 words, whereas the Italian dubbed movies 238,681.

For the present study, only the English and Spanish conversational exchanges including swearwords were registered electronically. This had to be done bidirectionally. In other words, whenever an English taboo word was used in the source text, the target version was annotated next to it. On the other hand, when a Spanish taboo item occurred, the English original version was retrieved even if there was no taboo word in the original. This provided the basis for the comparison between the source and target texts.

As regards the initial selection of the units, I relied on McEnery's categorization of swearwords (2006: 36):

Table 1
McEnery's categorization of English swear words.

	Examples of words in the category
Very mild	bloody, crap, damn, god, hell, sod, son-of-a-bitch, tart...
Mild	arse, balls, bitch, bugger, Christ, cow, Jesus, moron, pissed off, screw, shit, slut, sod, tit, tits, tosser...
Moderate	arsehole, bastard, bollocks, piss, poofter, prick, shag, wanker, whore...
Strong	fuck...
Very strong	cunt, motherfucker...

The items included in Table 1, and also in Table 2 below, are merely examples of swearwords in the various categories. As in the early stages of the study it was not possible to ascertain what swearwords might or might not have been used by the script-writers and translators. Therefore, I had to take into account that the scripts might feature words not included in Table 1. In addition, it should be pointed out that this classification cannot be considered definite, as the strength of the words will depend on the context and the speaker's perception. In other words, what some speakers may consider mild, others may

regard as moderate, what for some may be moderate it may be strong for others, and so on. The last two categories can be conflated as one labelled “(Very) Strong”. In addition, it should be pointed out that most taboo words in the English texts make reference to sex, bodily fluids and religion. In this sense, and unlike languages such as German and Swedish (Ljung, 2011: 35), whose speakers tend to use religious and scatological terms to express strong emotions, Spanish and English use swearwords related to similar semantic fields, although their function and strength may vary.

As I was unable to locate a similar categorization for Spanish swearwords, I designed the following, drawing on a number of sources, including the dictionary of the Real Academia as well as the findings and discussions of various publications on swearing in AVT (Santaemilia, 2008; Bucaria, 2010; García Aguiar and García Jiménez, 2013; Santaemilia, 2011). The classification is tentative and, therefore, a certain degree of overlapping might inevitably occur:

Table 2

Tentative categorization of Spanish swear words and expressions.

Examples of words in the category	
Very mild	<i>imbécil, maldito, cabrear, culo, Jesús, la Virgen...</i>
Mild	<i>furcia, mear, zorra, Dios, por Dios...</i>
Moderate	<i>coña, mierda...</i>
(Very) Strong	<i>cabrón, coño, joder, jodido, hostia, cojones, cojonudo, acojonar, puta, putos, puta, putear, putada, hijo de puta, de puta madre, me la suda, cagar...</i>

Once the swearwords and taboo expressions used in the English and Spanish texts and their corresponding versions in the other language were transcribed, I classified the translation strategies, as suggested by previous studies on AVT (e.g. Baños, 2013; Ávila-Cabrera, 2016; Valdeón, 2010, 2015), but adapted them to the specificity of the study. The initial categorization of the strategies was as follows: literal translation (e.g. the translation of “fuck” as “joder”) which here is labelled “preservation”; omission (e.g. the word “fuck” is deleted); toning down (e.g. the word “fuck” is replaced by “tirarse a”). In addition to this, and as the study aimed to determine whether the target texts were vulgarized, three more strategies were considered: addition (e.g. the word “joder” was added even though there was no equivalent in the source text), intensification (e.g. a mild word like “dammed” was replaced by “jodido”, that is “fucked”) and replacement by swearwords (e.g. a swearword like “jodido” translated a neutral/informal word). These strategies will be exemplified by means of contextualized excerpts as well as shorter units. The use of the latter has proved to provide valuable insights in translation studies (Toury, 2012: 116–117) as well as pragmatics (Rühlemann, 2019: 28, 42–43, 52–53).

3. Results

The results reveal that, the Spanish versions use a higher number of swearwords than the English originals, albeit to various extents, thus partly confirming the working hypothesis that contemporary AVT in Spain tends to vulgarize the source texts. The following table summarizes the translation strategies identified in the programs, in total numbers and percentages:

Table 3

Translation strategies.

Series	Addition	Replaced by swearword	Intensification	Preservation	Toning down	Omission	Euphemism replaced by swearword	Total
<i>The IT Crowd</i>	19 (33.9%)	12 (21.42%)	9 (16.07%)	11 (19.644%)	2 (3.57%)	0 (0%)	3 (5.35%)	56
<i>Brothers & Sisters</i>	0 (0%)	9 (7.5%)	16 (13.33%)	69 (57.5%)	5 (4.16%)	21 (17.5%)	0 (0%)	120
<i>Chicago P.D.</i>	6 (6%)	40 (40%)	35 (35%)	14 (14%)	5 (5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	100
<i>Eyewitness</i>	7 (5.14%)	26 (19.11%)	40 (29.41%)	40 (29.41%)	5 (3.67%)	18 (13.23%)	0 (0%)	136
TOTAL	32 (7.76%)	87 (21.11%)	100 (24.27%)	134 (32.52%)	17 (4.12%)	39 (9.46%)	3 (0.72%)	412 (100%)

As can be seen, although the vulgarization process may be less noticeable in *Brothers & Sisters*, it is obvious in the other three series. In *Brothers & Sisters*, vulgarization by intensification, or replacement by a swearword, takes place in 25 cases, whereas swearwords are toned down or omitted in 26 cases. Swearwords and offensive expressions are preserved in as many as 69 cases, which suggests that standardization in this series does not occur. This may be related to the genre (an upper class family drama), the practices of the translation/dubbing company or other factors. However, as will be noted below, the strength of the swearwords added and the units affected by an intensification process is greater than the number of words omitted. That is, omissions tend to affect mild or very mild expressions, such as “God!”, whereas additions include strong swearwords such as “joder” [fuck].

In contrast, vulgarization strategies clearly affect the dubbed versions of the other three series. If we group the strategies taking into account the effect, the results are as follows:

Table 4
Strategies grouped according to effect per series

Series	Vulgarization strategies	Preservation	Toning down/omission
<i>The IT Crowd</i>	40 (71.39%)	11 (19.64%)	2 (3.57%)
<i>Brothers & Sisters</i>	25 (20.83%)	69 (57.5%)	26 (21.16%)
<i>Chicago P.D.</i>	81 (81%)	14 (14%)	5 (5%)
<i>Eyewitness</i>	73 (53.66%)	40 (29.41%)	23 (16.9%)
Total percentages per strategy (for a total of 412 coupled pairs)	219 (42.35%)	134 (43.63%)	56 (13.91%)

In addition, Table 3 includes a seventh category that was not initially considered, i.e. the replacement of a euphemism by a dysphemism. This only occurs in *The IT Crowd*, where one of the protagonists is portrayed as humorously courteous. Therefore, although he never swears, when he attempts to do so he resorts to euphemisms such as “Sugar!” Thus, in episode 6 of the series he uses the euphemism “flip” three times, which is replaced by “puto” (an adjective with a similar function to “fucking”) and “joder” [fuck]. Needless to say, the intended humorous effect of the euphemisms used in the original is lost. The number of examples of this strategy is, in any case, negligible, as the three occurrences identified can be found in *The IT Crowd*, accounting for only 0.6% of the total number of coupled pairs. They do add up to the total percentage of vulgarization strategies in Table 4.

Table 4 also shows that swearwords were omitted or toned down in just 13.91% of the cases, whereas swearwords replaced neutral words, were added or were replaced by stronger taboo words in 42.35% instances. Overall vulgarization strategies clearly outnumber the toning down/omission of swearwords and equals the number of cases where the swearwords found in English are preserved in Spanish. On the whole, the vulgarization hypothesis is confirmed, even if in *Brothers & Sisters* toning down and omission rank higher than in the other three series, and preservation is the most common translation solution.

4. Discussion of the strategies

Before considering the strategies in detail, it is worth noting that the original texts attempt to reproduce the colloquial features of English to various degrees. We may be tempted to interpret that the addition of swearwords responds to the need to compensate losses concerning colloquial language in the target text. Analysts of fictional language (Quaglio, 2009; Bednarek, 2010) have stressed that in contemporary audiovisual fiction the tendency is to attempt to reproduce some of the features of conversational English. The four series studied here achieved their conversational texture in a variety of ways without necessarily resorting to swearwords. As regards the original programs, while in *Chicago P.D.* and *Eyewitness* the scriptwriters have recourse to informal vocabulary and some grammatical features (such as the omissions of subjects), in *Brothers and Sisters* the informal tone is achieved by using a considerable number of discourse markers and other peripheral elements (Biber et al., 1999: 1082–1095) as well as repeats and reformulations (Biber et al., 1999: 1055–1064).

On the other hand, the translators can and do reproduce the colloquial tone of the original dialogues by means of lexical items rather than grammatical ones, as Spanish and English vary in the way informality is marked. For example, the omission of personal subjects characterizes conversational English. In contrast, in European Spanish the omission of personal subjects is standard. In other words, it is not a marker of informality. Consequently, lexical choices can contribute to providing the target version with an informal texture. Let us consider two examples:

(1)
James: Everyone thinks I'm **cool** because I don't talk.
James: La gente cree que **molo** porque no hablo.
(*Eyewitness* 1.3)

(2)
D. Erin: All right, so where d'you grow up? What neighborhood?
Nadia: Lake Forest. I was homecoming queen, and Michael Jordan was our neighbor.
D. Erin: Really? You know, I grew up there too. I was the valedictorian. Seriously, how old are you? You know I can find out in two minutes.
Nadia: Eighteen in a month. I used a fake I. D., so don't hassle 'em. I need the **work**.

Erin: Vale. Y ¿dónde creciste? ¿en qué barrio?
Nadia: En Lake Forest. Fui reina del baile del insti. Michael Jordan fue mi vecino.
Erin: ¿De verdad? Yo también crecí allí. Fui la primera de mi promoción. En serio, ¿cuántos años tienes? Lo puedo encontrar en dos minutos.
Nadia: Dieciocho el mes que viene, pero usé un carnet falso. No digas nada. Necesito el **curro**.
(*Chicago P.D.* 1.4)

The two original extracts portray a relaxed conversation between the speakers, albeit not too informal. This is achieved by combining informal and more formal lexis, the omission of subjects and verbs, the use of discourse markers and other non-clausal units. For instance, in Extract 1 James uses colloquial “I'm cool”, aptly rendered as “molo” in the Spanish version: both

share the same degree of informality. In contrast, in extract 2 the translators opted for the colloquial “curro” (meaning “work” or “job”) to translate the more neutral “work”, but this serves to compensate the loss of informality, as it is not possible to render the aphaeresis in “em” into Spanish. In other words, some of the translational losses (usually grammatical) can be compensated by using more informal lexical choices without necessarily opting for swearwords.

One final issue worth considering before moving on to discuss the strategies is the claim that the use of certain words (say, swearwords) at one specific point could be considered a compensation strategy for losses at some other point in the script (Delabastita, 1993: 225). That is, the translator may have attempted to add something to the text in order to achieve the same effect of another element or item that had to be previously omitted (Delabastita, 1993: 226). However, although compensation may indeed come at a different point in the text or script, we would expect the translator to respect the portrayal of the characters in the story. In other words, if a certain character uses informal language in the source text, compensation strategies should apply to *that* specific character. I will return to this issue in the final section.

Let us now move to discuss the translational strategies in Table 3, paying particular attention to those that contribute to the vulgarization of the target text.

4.1. Addition, intensification and replacement by swearwords

These three strategies are essential to explain the vulgarization hypothesis. As shown in Table 3, the addition of swearwords is not restricted to a specific genre: the police drama, the thriller and the sitcom provide numerous examples of additions, and so does the family drama, albeit to a lesser extent. The following table provides examples of the most common swearwords used in the three categories:

Table 5
Examples of vulgarization strategies.

Series	Swearword added when no swearword in original	Swearword used to replace non swearword	Stronger swearword used to replace moderate or mild swearword
<i>The IT Crowd</i>	Dios, putos, zorra, estar de coña/qué coño, mierda, joder	coña (joking), pedo (drunk), Dios (aha), cojonuda (brilliant) zorra (woman), joder (wow, oh), de puta madre (great), jodido (broken), puta (lying)	Acojonados (half-cocked), puto (bloody), putada (bloody), joder (screw), gilipollas (idiot), cabronazo (bastard)...
<i>Brothers & Sisters</i>	Joder, mierda	Joder (oh, wow, okay, suck), mierda (stuff), de coña (didn't mean)	Mierda (hell), joder (screw)...
<i>Chicago P.D.</i>	Puto, putos, a hostias, joder	Joder (Wow, Gee, Shhh, bro, damn, come on, man), cojonudo (cool), coña (joking, kidding, no way), la cagué (I was wrong), mierda (damned, aaah), putear (give you grief), cagar (mess up, blow), me la suda (don't care), de puta madre (right-o, super cool)	Cojones (hell, balls), jodidos (screwed), de puta madre (damned good), mierda (damned)...
<i>Eyewitness</i>	Joder, coño, hijo de puta	coña (kidding), mierda (stuff), coñazo (boring), jodida (messed up), cabrón (bully, guy), follar (have sex), la hostia (genial), joder (no way, upset, sucks, yeah, ruin, oh boy, Whoa), cagar (blow), acojonar (freak out)	Joder (screw, damn, shit, God), coño (hell), mierda (damn it), cojones (hell), puta (damned) ...

In the first column, no English word/expression is added in brackets, as there was none in the original. In the second and third columns, the swearwords are followed by the words they replace in brackets, not by their equivalent meanings.

These items are added randomly, that is to say, they are not associated with any specific characters in the various series and, therefore, cannot be explained as a compensation strategy. *The I.T. Crowd* is the series with the highest number of additions, both in absolute and relative terms. Some of these additions are particularly noteworthy as they deviate ostensibly from the likely intention of the source text. In the following extract of *The I.T. Crowd*, for instance, the original scriptwriters attempted to create a humorous effect by having recourse to the traditional beep sound that used to expurgate taboo words:

(3)
Interpreter: Yes. He feels like Godzilla!
Denholm: Does he? Godzilla! Go on! Stamp your feet! Clap him man! Good! Oh yeah! The Jap loves it! Go on! Break something! Put your weight into it!
Jen: **You Beep idiot! Stupid old Beep Beep Beep Beep You're nothing but a Beep (...)**
Interpreter: [Inaudible]
Jen: I am so sorry, Denholm.
Denholm: That was quite a tarring Jen. It would have been even worse if Paul hadn't been so quick on the profanity buzzer.
(*The IT Crowd*, 1.2)

¡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!

[You are a bastard, you idiot (...)] Damned Japanese bastard! I shit on your mother and all of your family, big bastard (...) You are a dick and shitty faggot]

In this scene, Denholm gives his Japanese business partner a pair of Dr Martens boots by mistake. After putting them on, the latter accidentally treads on Jen, who reacts aggressively by uttering a string of swearwords. In the source text, this is bleeped out to create the humorous effect as the audience will guess the words even though they cannot be heard. Conversely, the Spanish version uses eight swearwords, thus obviating the intention of the source text, i.e. Jen uses so many swearwords that practically no part of her utterance can be heard once it is bleeped out. As the current media conventions of the source culture allow the use of swearwords on television (in fact, we can trace 22 instances in the whole season), it is not clear what motivated the translators to make the change. Worst of all, the Spanish version concludes with a clear racist (¡Maldito hijo de puta japonés!) and homophobic (¡maricón de mierda!) undertone, which renders the purportedly humorous translation of the source script into an extremely aggressive and offensive utterance.

On the other hand, the third and fourth columns in Table 5 provide, in brackets, examples of words or expressions replaced by swearwords in the target text. For example, in episode 4 of *Brothers & Sisters*, “this stuff” is translated as “esta mierda” [that shit], and in episode 7 “Stop shouting, okay” becomes “Para de gritar, joder” [Stop shouting, fuck]. In fact, “joder” (in its various forms) and “coño” (or “coña”) are the most common swearwords added in the dubbed versions. The former, which is used in eleven cases in the Spanish version of *Brothers & Sisters*, replaces non swearwords such as the interjection “Wow!” or the milder verb “screw”. As for “coño”, it occurs only once in *Brothers & Sisters*. In episode 9, “I didn’t mean it” becomes “Estaba de coña”.

In addition, it is worth noting that intensification and replacement by swearwords can be observed in the different series without being specific to a character or context. The translators do not seem to consider the effect of their choices upon the portrayal of the main characters. For example, intensification occurs in 1.7 of *Chicago P.D.* “damned good insurance” becomes “un seguro de puta madre” [fucking good insurance], and in 1.9 of the same series “Damn!” is translated as “¡Joder!” [fuck]. Examples of non swearwords replaced by swearwords include “Are you kidding/joking?”, ordinarily rendered as “¿Estás de coña?”, where the feminine of “coño” [cunt] is used in Spanish. Even though, the Spanish swearword does not carry the emotional force of its English equivalent, the choice clearly deviates from the stylistic variety and strength of the source script. The following table provides the total number of times in which “joder” and “coño” in their various forms are used, followed by some examples from each series. Although other choices also contribute to the vulgarization of the dubbed script, for space limitations I will focus on “joder” and “coño”, as these are the most frequently used. A word of caution applies to the use and examples of “coño” in its various forms. As mentioned, the English equivalent “cunt” is among the most offensive words in the source language and is never used in any of the original scripts. The various Spanish forms found in the dubbed programs are widely used in the target culture, but their effect may range from vulgar to offensive and cannot be back-translated literally. For this reason, the back-translations in brackets include “taking the piss” for “estar de coña” (which translates “to be kidding/joking”) and “fuck” as an intensifier in questions or exclamations such as “¿Qué coño!”, which translates “What the hell!”. As the strength and offensive nature of swearwords may vary depending on the speakers and the listeners, the translations in brackets should be taken as tentative:

Table 6

Vulgarization strategies: “Joder” and “coño”.

Series	Joder, jodido (fuck, fucked)	Coño, coña, coñazo (various forms of “coño”: “cunt”)
<i>The IT Crowd</i>	<p>Computer is broken Se me ha jodido el ordenador [Computer is fucked]</p> <p>Screw them! ¿Qué se jodan! [Fuck them!]</p> <p>Oh, oh, oh! ¡Joder, tía! [Fuck, sis!]</p> <p>Total number of times used: 10</p>	<p>He's joking Está de coña [He's taking the piss]</p> <p>What Ø did you say? ¿Qué coño le has contado? [What the fuck have you told him?]</p> <p>What Ø was all that about? ¿Qué coño le pasa a la jefa? [What the fuck is wrong with her?]</p> <p>Total number of times used: 9</p>
<i>Brothers & Sisters</i>	<p>Oh! ¡Joder! [Fuck!]</p> <p>Oh, wow! ¡Joder! [Fuck!]</p> <p>That sucks! ¡Me jode! [Fucks me up!]</p> <p>Total number of times used: 11</p>	<p>I didn't mean it Estaba de coña [I was taking the piss]</p> <p>Total number of times used: 1</p>

(continued on next page)

Table 6 (continued)

Series	Joder, jodido (fuck, fucked)	Coño, coña, coñazo (various forms of “coño”: “cunt”)
Chicago P.D.	Man! ¡Joder! [Fuck!] Gee, man! ¡Joder, tío! [Fuck, man!] We're screwed Estamos jodidos [We're fucked!] Total number of times used: 23	What the hell! ¡Qué coño! [Fuck!] I'm not joking No estoy de coña [I am not taking the piss] Are you kidding? ¿Estás de coña? [Are you taking the piss?] Total number of times used: 23
Eyewitness	Damn Joder [Fuck!] Oh, my God! ¡Joder! [Fuck!] Everyone is upset Todos están jodidos [Everyone is fucked!] Total number of times used: 38	Why the hell...? ¿Por qué coño...? [What the fuck...] Are you kidding me? ¿Estás de coña? [Are you taking the piss?] Why Ø would I help you? ¿Por qué coño iba a hacerlo? [Why the fuck should I do it?] Total number of times used: 12

Indeed a comparison between Tables 3 and 6 shows that these are the most common changes. The selection of coupled pairs in Table 6 demonstrates that the vulgarization process applies to all word categories, including adjectives, nouns and verbs. This process affects most characters and, once again, does not respond to any compensation strategies.

As regards the English swearword “fuck”, similar in use and strength to the Spanish “joder”, it is only uttered once in *The I.T. Crowd* and never in the other three. Now let us consider a few examples in context:

(4)

A: Will you just get a cd off my dresser, please?

B: Okay, fine.

A: But you're ruining my vibe. Kevin, I said turn it off!

B: What? Okay, okay!

A: Oh, no.

B: I... I didn't see anything.

A: Ooh.

B: Okay.

A: Umare those bubbles? No.

B: Okay, you have a ch oh, **wow**.

(*Brothers and Sisters*, 2.3)

(5)

A: I was in the military.

B: You see any action?

A: I did. Yeah.

B: Ever see anything like you did today? I'm sorry. I... forget I asked that. That was a stupid question.

A: All right. Let's do this again.

B: All right. 200 bucks? **Wow!**

A: You realize if you split the money at the door, we would have made five times as much? Yep.

(*Chicago PD*, 1.1)

(6)

A: What's in the bag?

B: Well, at first, I thought it was some kind of Star Wars spaceship. It's actually a camera. A: Yeah, it's a Polaroid. **Whoa!**

B: You like taking pictures, right?

A: Yeah, I do.

B: You think it works?

A: Yeah, it works.

(Eyewitness, 1.5)

In all three cases the exclamations in italics were rendered as “¡Joder!” [Fuck!]. As can be seen, the replacement of neutral or informal items affects particularly peripheral elements such as interjections and discourse markers, which, as mentioned above, have become a commonplace feature of scriptwriting in order to provide fictional dialogue with a certain feeling of authenticity (Quaglio, 2009: 94). In the original scripts, interjections are used to indicate that the speaker is surprised, “impressed – perhaps even delighted” (Biber et al., 1999: 1084). While it may be argued that the Spanish stronger versions partly reproduce this function, it is obvious that there is a substantial shift in tone and style: shall we, therefore, assume that this translational choice indicates that Spanish speakers always use “¡Joder!” in such contexts? This is hardly likely, as Spanish has a number of alternative linguistic devices, ranging from neutral items to euphemisms. However, the dubbed versions of these series homogenize the contexts and the speech of most characters. For example, in *Chicago P.D.*, “¡Joder!” is used to translate “Wow” in episode 1, “Man!” in episode 2, “Gee” in episode 4 and so on. The only exception to the extensive use of “joder” is *Brothers and Sisters*, where the vulgarization process tends to affect only the characterization of Justin, the youngest son of the upper class Walker family. Thus, in 2.3 “Oh, Wow!” becomes “¡Joder!”, in 2.4 “Nice to meet you” is rendered as “un poco jodido” [a little fucked up], in 2.7 “Stop shouting, okay!” is translated as “¡Para de gritar, joder!” [Stop shouting, fuck!]. Let us now consider a contextualized coupled pair:

(7)

Fernández: Yo, yo, yo!

Nurse: Hey, my man.

Fernández: Hey, what's up?

Nurse: You two met yet?

Fernández: No.

Nurse: Justin Walker, Garrett Fernandez.

Fernández: What's up, man?

Justin: **Nice to meet you, bro.**

(Brothers & Sisters 2.4)

Fernández: ¡Hey!

Nurse: Hola, colega

Fernandez: ¿Qué hay?

Nurse: ¿Os conocéis?

Fernandez: No.

Nurse: Justin Walker, Garrett Fernandez.

Fernandez: ¿Qué tal tío?

Justin: **Un poco jodido.**

[What's up, man?

A little fucked up]

Here Justin Walker, who has just returned from Iraq, is going through physical therapy at a clinic. At that moment, another soldier in a similar situation enters the room in a wheel chair. After the nurse introduces the pair to each other, the scriptwriters provide the exchange with an informal tone by a combining informal salutations and forms of address, i.e. “hey”, “what's up?”, “man” in English, “colega”, “Hey” and “tío” in Spanish. However, the symmetrical pair salutation formula plus the informal way of address of the English original script (“What's up, man? Nice to meet you, bro”) is replaced in Spanish by a question-answer exchange with a swearword.

On the other hand, it should be pointed out that “screw” and its derivatives (screwed, screwed up) are also translated as “joder”. In American English, “screw up” is widely used in informal contexts to mean “mess up”, or, as the *Merriam Webster Dictionary* puts it, “to botch up an activity or undertaking”. It features in fictional dialogues to imitate authentic American speech. Although “screw” can also refer to “have sex” in a vulgar way, in most cases “screw up” means “mess up”. In this sense, it is a polysemic verb akin to Spanish “tirarse”, which may refer to, for instance, “lie down”, but also to “have sex”. “Screw” can hardly be considered to have the pragmatic force of “joder” [fuck], although it is indeed a “crude” slang term for “copulate” when used with this meaning (Hughes, 2006: 103–104, 142, 217). Despite this, “screw up” is rendered as “joder” in eleven out of twenty-four cases in the four series: “screw” is used once in *The I.T. Crowd*, rendered as “joder”; three times in *Chicago P.D.* (twice rendered as “joder”); thirteen times in *Eyewitness* (six as “joder”) and seven in *Brothers & Sisters* (two as “joder”). In all these cases the word means “mess up”. Paradoxically, when “screw” refers to “have sex”, the translators opt for “tirarse a” or “cepillarse a”, both polysemic verbs similar to the English original, while in one occurrence in *Eyewitness* the word is translated as vulgar “follar” [shag].

Finally, it should also be noted that the replacement of neutral/informal words by swearwords is much higher in *Chicago P.D.* than in the other series. I have identified a total of 45 instances where this occurs (see Table 3). Thus, “Cool, cool, cool” becomes “Vale, cojonudo” [Ok, fucking good], “Man” is rendered as “joder”, interjections such as “Whoa” and “Wow” also become “joder”, “Come on, you gotta be kidding me” becomes “Joder, no me jodas” [Fuck!, Don’t fuck me!] and so on. It is also worth noting that these changes affect the speech of all the characters, whereas in the original series it is the criminals rather than the police officers who use stronger swearwords, and, even in this case, it is the exception rather than the rule. In other words, the idiolect of all the characters is homogenized throughout the whole season.

4.2. Toning down and omission

An extensive use of these two strategies would have provided strong evidence to support a tendency to standardize the source language in translation. However, in the analysis of the four series toning down and omission only represent 13.58% of the coupled pairs, as opposed to 53.14% occurrences of what has been referred to as vulgarization strategies. Although both toning down and omission feature in the four series, they are far less common, except for *Brothers & Sisters*. For example, in episode 5 “Damn well” is translated as “Lo hare” [I will do it], in episode 7 “Damn it!” is rendered as “Por favor” [Please], in episode 8 “Oh my God” becomes “Oh, vaya” (an interjection expressing mild surprise) and in episode 12 “God, I’m old” is rendered as “¡Qué viejo soy!” [I’m so old!]. In some of these cases, the omission may be related to the fact that AVT is considered a constrained translation, that is, the target version may need to fit into the time available. In addition, unlike *Chicago P.D.* and *Eyewitness*, the plot of *Brothers & Sisters* relies primarily on dialogues rather than action, and, consequently, the actors’ faces and lips are clearly visible, so factors such as a certain degree of lip synchrony need to be considered.

However, leaving aside the technical peculiarities of AVT, it should be underlined that these two strategies do not have a marked stylistic impact upon *Brothers & Sisters*, as they only affect mild or very mild swearwords. Besides the scriptwriters of the series provide the dialogues with an informal tone by resorting to repeats and a high number of non-clausal units with a pragmatic function rather than denotative meaning (Biber et al., 1999: 1082), such as “Whoa, whoa, whoa” in episode 2 and “Oh, well, you know...” in episode 6. As mentioned, as a family drama, dialogues rather than action contribute to the development of the plot, and, therefore, inserts such as “Wow” or “Oh” aim to portray a close relationship between the speakers. This is important as it serves to imitate the naturalness and collaborative nature of conversation (Quaglio, 2009: 95) and to construe character identity (Bednarek, 2010: 118). Thus, the scriptwriters attempt to replicate authentic conversations by using inserts as well as a small number of very mild swearwords (see Table 1). The omission of 21 of those does not have much of an impact on the informal nature of the dubbed series, which does retain the casual tone by using informal lexis and a smaller number of interjections. In addition, as discussed in the previous section, the translators preserve most of the swearwords (mild and strong) and replace neutral words and inserts by strong swearwords, even in the case of *Brothers & Sisters*.

4.3. Preservation

To conclude the discussion of the strategies, I will briefly mention preservation, which occurs in 32.52% of the cases. Preservation involves the use of literal translations of swearwords with similar semantic denotations and/or pragmatic implications. In other words, mild swearwords are rendered by means of mild swearwords, moderate swearwords translate moderate ones and so on. Let us consider the following extract as an example:

(8)
A: I told her about you.
B: She... she won't say anything.
A: She's... There's nothing to say.
B: Okay.
A: I can't go to this stupid overnight with counselors, talking about my feelings and...
B: Yeah, I know. It's... it's so dumb. So what do you want to do instead?
A: I don't know. Something to make me forget this **shit**.
B: I got an idea. Let's go to the city.
(*Eyewitness* 1.3)

In this scene, the two protagonists recall the moment when they witnessed a murder and are figuring out how to cope with those memories. “Shit” refers to those memories and, therefore, carries a strong emotional force. The Spanish literal translation reproduces the same effect by literally translating “Something to make me forget this **shit**” as “Algo que me haga olvidar esta **mierda**”.

Brothers & Sisters needs to be mentioned in this section again. Although the preservation of swearwords occurs in all four series, it is particularly noteworthy in *Brothers & Sisters*, where the vast majority of the occurrences are very mild swearwords, such as “Oh, God!” and “Oh, my God!”, which are rendered as “¡Dios!” and “¡Dios mío!” in 35 out of 41 occurrences.

5. Final discussion and conclusions

This article has reported on the translation of swearwords in AVT in Spain. Unlike previous publications, which have focused on case studies of a film, an episode or a small number of films by the same director, this study has analyzed four seasons of four different series, a total of 47 episodes or around 2000 min. The main conclusion of the study is that contemporary AVT in Spanish does not only preserve the emotional force of the original texts, but the data reveal that the frequency of swearwords has been increased. Vulgarization occurs in 53.14% of the coupled pairs involving a swearword/ expression in English, in Spanish or in both. The findings run counter to the results of previous research into literary (Santaemilia, 2008) and audiovisual translation (Ávila-Cabrera, 2015, 2016; Soler Pardo, 2015) into Spanish.

In contrast, toning down and omission strategies occur in 13.88% of the coupled pairs. That is to say, vulgarization versus standardization occurs in an almost 4:1 proportion. Even though the tendency is less marked in *Brothers & Sisters*, the vulgarization strategies in the series may be perceived as more noticeable, since the dubbed version introduces words like “joder”, which cannot be interpreted as a compensation strategy as no denotative or functional equivalent can be traced in the source text. Conversely, the omission of “God”, the most frequent among those omitted or toned down in this series, has little impact on the target text, as its Spanish equivalent “Dios” remains widely used.

The results also show that the increased use of swearwords in the Spanish dubbed versions occurs in the four series and across genres, even if it is lower in the upper class family drama *Brothers & Sisters*. In addition, there is no evidence to suggest that the translators considered factors such as the relationship between the speakers (Locher and Watts, 2005), or that they took into account the participants' identity, social norms, intentions or motivations (Jay and Janschewitz, 2008: 269) for swearing. More importantly, I found no examples where the use of swearwords in Spanish served to compensate the omission of English swearwords at another point in the script. Consequently, if we accept that the effects of swearing are context-dependent (Christie, 2013), and context is the set of assumptions “assigned by the hearer in the process of interpreting an utterance” (Christie, 2013: 160), it follows that contemporary AVT in Spain does not show awareness of the context in which swearwords are used or added, and, therefore, translator training may be deficient as regards the relationship between language, context and pragmatics. In addition, translators may have made assumptions about what target culture viewers might expect in contemporary Spanish television. In this sense, it might be interesting to complement research into AVT practices with analyses of Spanish audiovisual products to ascertain whether translators may be affected by the choices made in autochthonous audiovisual fiction.

In line with this, it may be argued that the results support the view that the offensiveness and frequency of swearwords vary across languages and cultures (Sheidlower, 1999; Stenström, 2017). In fact, in connection with native speakers of Spanish vis-à-vis other Western languages, it has been claimed that speakers of European Spanish swear much more than other Europeans (Allinson, 2001, 43; Rox Barasoain, 2008: 360). Thus, we might argue that the series analyzed here provide evidence of two different sets of values, i.e. European Spanish speakers being more tolerant of swearing than Anglophone speakers. However, the results may also indicate that translators may have assumed that their own set of values, as mediators of audiovisual cultural artefacts, should prevail over any other considerations (such as, for example, fidelity to the original text). The consequence of this approach is a process of domestication of the target text which might be based on the assumption that the target language is part of a new cultural environment where swearwords are more widely accepted (Pinto, 2010; Stenström, 2017).

Overall this article has shown that contemporary AVT in Spain does not seem to abide by AVT recommendations (Agost, 2004; Chaume, 2004) as regards offensive language. In fact, the analysis indicates that all four series undergo a process of vulgarization, albeit to different degrees. Future research could complement this study by exploring the translation of swearwords in a complete series (rather than a season), or comparing the translational approaches in other genres; it could also compare Spanish original series with dubbed programs in order to have a better understanding of the reasons for the increased use of swearing in AVT; it could carry out diachronic studies of dubbed series to study the evolution of Spanish AVT over the past few decades; and it could investigate the dubbing practices in different languages in order to establish whether this tendency is similar in other cultures or is specific to European Spanish.

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Roberto A. VALDEON is Full Professor in English Studies at the University of Oviedo, Spain, and a member of the Academia Europaea. He is a Research Fellow at the University of the Free State (2014–2020), and a Guest Professor at Huazhong University of Science and Technology, Wuhan, China. He is the author of over a hundred publications, including contributions to journals such as *Intercultural Pragmatics*, *Terminology*, *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *Philological Quarterly*, and *Translating and Interpreting Studies*. He is Editor-in-Chief of *Perspectives Studies in Translation Theory and Practice* and General Editor of the Benjamins Translation Library.