

## SUBTITLING TARANTINO'S OFFENSIVE AND TABOO DIALOGUE EXCHANGES INTO EUROPEAN SPANISH: THE CASE OF *PULP FICTION*

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**Resumen:** La manera en la que el lenguaje ofensivo y tabú se subtitula representa una práctica delicada y polémica pues este lenguaje funciona como vehículo léxico que aporta información sobre la personalidad, clase social y entorno de los personajes, pudiendo provocar una reacción fuerte en la audiencia (Díaz Cintas, 2001). Se podría decir que la omisión de términos ofensivos y tabú implica la pérdida de la función comunicativa de los mismos. Partiendo de un enfoque basado en los Estudios Descriptivos de Traducción, los objetivos de este artículo se centran en arrojar luz sobre la forma en la que el filme *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994) se subtituló a español europeo, explorando así pues: (1) las estrategias traductológicas empleadas por el subtitulador; (2) la manera en la que los diálogos ofensivos/tabú fueron transferidos a la pantalla; (3) la posible influencia técnica de aquellos casos en los que la carga ofensiva y tabú queda neutralizada u omitida.

**Palabras clave:** Lenguaje ofensivo y tabú, subtitulación interlingüística, estrategias traductológicas, Estudios Descriptivos de Traducción, manipulación (ideológica).

**Abstract:** *The manner offensive and taboo language is subtitled becomes a delicate and controversial practice given that this type of language functions as a lexical vehicle that provides information on the characters' personality, social class, and setting and can provoke a strong reaction on viewers (Díaz Cintas, 2001). The omission of offensive/taboo words can therefore be said to entail a loss in their communicative function. From a Descriptive Translation Studies approach, the goals of this paper attempt to shed some light on the way the film Pulp Fiction (Quentin Tarantino, 1994) was subtitled into European Spanish by delving into diverse matters such as: (1) the translation strategies utilised by the subtitler; (2) the way offensive/taboo dialogue exchanges were transferred on the screen; and (3) proving whether the cases of neutralisation and omission of the load of these terms might have been justified by the technical constraints of subtitling.*

**Keywords:** *Offensive and taboo language, interlingual subtitling, translation strategies, Descriptive Translation Studies, (ideological) manipulation.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The manner in which offensive and taboo language is currently dealt with in cinema and on television differs considerably from the past, when censorship tended to be more stringent and euphemisms were more commonly used. The present paper has been conducted using a corpus that has been translated reasonably recently and can theoretically be considered relatively free of censorial forces. Indeed, this case study examines the way offensive and taboo language (Ávila-Cabrera, 2014) has been dealt with in the field of Audiovisual Translation (AVT) by exploring the subtitling of the DVD version of *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994), which concerns the transfer from a source language (SL) – in this case American English – into a target language (TL), i.e. European Spanish.

The premises proposed by Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) are crucial for the analysis of the present study as they revolved around the descriptive paradigm (Toury, 1980). The main goal of the present article is to observe and describe the different elements in subtitling not only by delving into the translation strategies utilised by the subtitler, but also considering the technical limitations of this mode of translation exhaustively, thereby aiming to establish certain patterns of behaviour pertaining to subtitling, avoiding in the process any qualitative criticism of the subtitlers' performance.

## 2. SUBTITLING CONSIDERATIONS


Subtitling is a mode of AVT that shows very specific media features and, as such, is subject to a number of technical (and linguistic) limitations, some of which are shared with other audiovisual modes. As a field within Translation Studies (TS), AVT concerns the transfer of multimedia and multimodal texts from one language into another language and/or culture. The audiovisual text is presented within the audio and visual channel where a series of relevant codes of information need to be considered (Chaume, 2004). Accordingly, from a linguistic point of view, the features contributing to the make-up of the audiovisual text are going to be explained and strategies proposed in order to provide the analytical part of the study with various heuristic tools capable of describing the translational operations carried out throughout the subtitling process.

### 2.1. Technical restrictions

A series of restrictions in the form of the spatio-temporal constraints ruling current professional practice must be regarded by subtitlers, making this practice a challenging process. Accordingly, subtitles can be shown on screen for a minimum of one second and a maximum of six seconds (d'Ydewalle *et al.*, 1987; Brondeel, 1994), making commonly use of one or two lines (one-liners and two-liners respectively). Their exposure on screen will be determined by three main factors, including the assumed reading speed of the audience, the time available and the lexical volume of the original dialogue, entailing, more often than not, text reduction.

Needless to say temporal and spatial constraints constitute parameters of paramount importance that need to be fully considered in order to ensure ease of reading (Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2007). To this end, some studios make use of what is known in the industry as the 'six-second rule', which is based on the speed that the average viewer is able to comfortably reading and assimilating in a two-line subtitle (some 70 characters in total) in six seconds. For the purposes of the analysis of data, professional subtitling package WinCAPS has been used in order to assess those instances in which the load of the offensive/taboo terms has varied possibly because of the aforementioned technical limitations. Table 1 shows the calculations used for a speed of 180 words per minute, commonly used for DVD.

**Table 1.** Equivalence between time/space for 180 wpm (Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2007: 97).

180 words per minute		Seconds : frames	Spaces	Seconds : frames	Spaces
		01:00	17	02:00	35
		01:04	20	02:04	37
		01:08	23	02:08	39
		01:12	26	02:12	43
		01:16	28	02:16	45
		01:20	30	02:20	49
Seconds : frames	Spaces	Seconds : frames	Spaces	Seconds : frames	Spaces
03:00	53	04:00	70	05:00	78
03:04	55	04:04	73	05:04	78
03:08	57	04:08	76	05:08	78
03:12	62	04:12	78	05:12	78
03:16	65	04:16	77	05:16	78
03:20	68	04:20	77	05:20	78
				06:00	78

WinCAPS has therefore permitted us to analyse all the subtitles from a technical perspective and highlight the instances in which the translation on screen does not abide by the calculations shown above.

### 2.2. Translation strategies

Considering the audiovisual nature of the corpus used in this research, the taxonomies for the subtitling strategies chosen herein are based on the proposals by Vinay and Darbelnet (2000: 86-88) in the case of strategy one and, more particularly, on the ones by Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007: 202-207), for the other seven. These include: (1) literal translation, (2) calque, (3) explicitation, (4) substitution, (5) transposition, (6) compensation, (7) omission, and (8) reformulation, whose examples have been taken from the audiovisual corpus.

1. A literal translation (LT) or *word for word* translation corresponds to the direct transfer of a term/utterance from a SL into a TL. For example, Jules Winnfield says *I don't wanna kill you*, which is subtitled as *no quiero mataros*, a solution which adheres to the original without employing any special stylistic procedures or causing any difficult challenges.
2. A calque (CAL) is a verbatim translation of a term or expression from the source text (ST) into the target text (TT) in such a way that it does not sound idiomatic in the target culture and/or language. To cite an example, Vincent uses the term *damn shame*, literally translated as *maldita vergüenza*.

3. Explication (EXP) brings the audience closer to the subtitled text through the use of specification, resorting to a hyponym (a word with a more specific meaning), or by making use of a hypernym (a word with a more widespread meaning). An example of explication can be observed when Mr Wolf uses the phrase *blew off somebody's head* subtitled as *han matado* [have killed], a more general expression than the ST expression, that is, a hypernym.
4. Substitution (SUBS) is a type of explication, which can be said to be very recurrent as far as offensive and taboo language is concerned, given the diverse swearing systems among languages (Fernández Dobao, 2006). When there is not room for the insertion of a rather long term in the subtitle, substitution is usually employed. Jules calls Honey Bunny *fucking bitch*, which is substituted in the TT by the substantive *puta* [whore], maintaining the register of the phrase.
5. Transposition (TRAN) is used in cases where the item from one culture is substituted for another from a different culture, that is, a strategy that entails some clarification. The phrase *live like hogs in the fat house* has been translated by transposition since the TT reads *tirar la casa por la ventana* [throw the house through the window/our money away], which can be said to be an equivalent expression that keeps to the same idea, though it neutralises the register.
6. (6) Compensation (COM) is utilised for making up a translational loss at a specific point in the programme by reconsidering the rendering at another point in the TT. Lance tells Vincent the inoffensive phrase *stop bothering me*, which is dealt with by compensation, visible in the expression *deja de joderme* [stop fucking me]. The ST expression does not contain any offensive element, but the subtitler has, nonetheless, subtitled it by resorting to a derogatory one, presumably because of the way these characters speak and the context of the scene.
7. Omission (OMS) is a must in subtitling, taking into account the spatio-temporal limitations of this AVT mode. Subtitlers must know which information is essential to the plot and should be retained, and which is superfluous and may thus be omitted. Some instances of deletion correspond to the omission of words, clauses and sentences. Prizefighter Butch says *What the fuck do you think I'm doing?* translated as *¿Qué crees que hago?* [What do you think that I do?]. As can be observed, the derogatory element *fucking* has been deleted in the subtitle.
8. Reformulations (REF) are also commonly used in subtitling inasmuch as they express a word/cluster of words differently. This strategy may entail condensation or text reduction since its main function is to transfer the ST terms in an idiomatic manner. In the present study, reformulation has been regarded for instances of rephrasing and condensation. For example, a character says *shut the fuck up*, which has been reformulated as *cierra el pico* [shut the beak up/shut up!]. The animal's body part gives account of the original ST structure, although it results in the TT being toned down.

### 3. OFFENSIVE AND TABOO LANGUAGE

The use of offensive and taboo language is not new and it can be traced back to the primitive cultures that associated these prohibited terms with magical words and often also with superstition. Nowadays, with the passing of time, many of these prohibited or taboo words have somehow been concealed by the use of euphemistic formulas, whose function, as disguise mechanisms, is to diminish the strength of such terms that must be avoided when used as a social indiscretion. Some examples are the use of *coloured* instead of *black*, the formulas *go to bed* and *sleep with* when concerning *sex and sexual activity*, and more recent euphemistic expressions are *differently abled* for *disabled*, *vertically challenged* for *short*, or *sex worker* for *prostitute* (Hughes, 2006).

Languages are spoken using a specific register and in a particular context. When talking about register, we refer to "a particular choice of diction or vocabulary regarded as appropriate for a certain topic or social situation" (Hughes, 2006: 386). English usage is characterised by two markedly different registers, that is, a higher register (formal utterances, professional and literary language) and a lower register (ordinary conversation, situation comedy or sitcom, dirty story, etc.). The object of this study is centred on the lower register, and more particularly on *offensive language* (Hughes, 2006; Díaz Cintas, 2012; Filmer, 2014) and *taboo language* (Allan and BurrIDGE, 2006; Jay, 2009), although there are other terms coined by other authors such as *bad language* (Azzaro, 2005; McEnery, 2006), *dirty language* (Jay, 1980), *emotionally charged language* (Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2007), *foul language* (Wajnryb, 2005), *rude language* (Hughes, 2006), *strong language* (Lung, 1998; Scandura, 2004), to cite some of them. Various studies have shed light on these less explored linguistic fields, usually from a sociological or psychological perspective (Montagu 1973); dealing with dirty language, sex roles and punishment for curses (Jay, 1980; 1992; 2009); and examining euphemisms, dysphemisms and forbidden words (Allan and BurrIDGE, 1996). Although these studies are not primarily concerned with AVT, they have provided relevant insights into this linguistic register. Some of the more seminal scholarly studies on the subject are those by Díaz Cintas (2001) on

sexually-related language; Bucaria (2009) who dealt with swearwords and sexual referents; the analysis of racial slurs and swearwords by Filmer (2014); and some others delving into Tarantino's dubbing into Spanish such as Fernández Dobao (2006) and Soler Pardo (2011), among others.

Whilst, offensive language can be said to refer to those linguistic terms or expressions containing swearwords, expletives, etc. and which can be considered derogatory and/or insulting, taboo language is related to terms that are not considered appropriate or acceptable with regard to the context, culture, language, and/or medium where they are uttered. A taxonomy of offensive and taboo language, based on Wajnryb (2005), Hughes (2006), and Jay (2009), has been outlined as a tool for the research purposes of this paper, which includes samples taken from *Pulp Fiction*.

**Table 2.** Taxonomy of offensive/taboo language.

TAXONOMY OF OFFENSIVE AND TABOO TERMS			
Category	Subcategory	Types	Examples
Offensive	Abusive swearing	Cursing	Goddamn it!
		Derogatory tone	Get the fuck out my face!
		Insult	The motherfucker's tip-top
		Oath	I swear on my mother's grave
	Expletives	Exclamatory swearword / phrase	Shit!
	Invectives	Subtle insult	Check out the big brain on Brett
Taboo	Animal name terms		Tell that bitch to be cool
	Death / killing		Dead as fucking fried chicken
	Drugs / excessive alcohol consumption		I'm gonna go to [...] and powder my nose
	Ethnic / racial / gender slurs		Am I a nigger?
	Filth		He wore this watch up his ass
	Profane / blasphemous		Jesus fucking Christ
	Psychological / physical condition		That guy was a drunken maniac
	Sexual / body part references		Why you trying to fuck him like a bitch?
	Urination / scatology		If that favor means I gotta take shit
Violence		And I will strike down upon thee	

1. Informal swearing represents an infringement of social codes moving from the purely impolite to the criminal, whereas formal swearing is a ritual of social obligation and/or compliance. Nowadays swearing has particular distinctions in terms of mode and content, which must be made. In terms of mode, "we swear by some higher force or somebody; we swear that something is so; we swear to do something; we swear at something or somebody" (Hughes, 2006: xv), swearing also takes place in moments of disappointment, frustration or rage. Regarding modes, we can refer to asseveration, imprecation, malediction, and the like. Accordingly, abusive swearing encompasses the use of curses, invoking a higher being's help, as in *Goddamn you!* In addition, many swearwords can be uttered with a derogatory tone such as *I'm in big fucking trouble*, or with the combination of insults as can be the case with *what a fucking bitch!* As for oaths, Wajnryb (2005) distinguishes between the formal promise, swearing by the Bible or by whatever/ whoever you want, for example *I swear on my mother's eternal soul*, which could be considered a loose metaphoric curse.
2. Expletives are exclamatory swearwords or phrases, which are not targeted at anyone in particular, given that they are used in situations of frustration, stress, surprise, etc. (Wajnryb, 2005). To cite a few of them, *fuck, shit, what the hell*.
3. An invective can be defined as a refined version of an insult. It can have numerous degrees of subtlety, which can entail irony, puns, wit, and wordplay (Wajnryb, 2005). In *Pulp Fiction*, Mia says *you're worse than a sewing circle*, a message whose hidden meaning can be easily interpreted.
4. As far as taboo words are concerned, they can be used to address people by using *animal names*. The imbalance between sexes in language use seems particularly striking and can lead to instances of linguistic sexism. A number of terms related to men is characterised by the use of neutral terms such as: "guy, bloke, chap, fellow, dude", etc.; the terms used for women are, nonetheless, negative or sexually-related, for example "bird, broad, bitch, chick, whore, slut, [...] vamp" (Wajnryb, 2005: 133).

The US cinema and more particularly Tarantino's language contains a great number of taboo topics related to "gratuitous violence, gangsterism, drug culture, sexual promiscuity, sodomy, and racism" (Hughes, 2006: 231), for this reason the subcategories *death/killing*, *drugs/excessive alcohol consumption*, as well as *violence* have been included in the above taxonomy. *Ethnic/racial/gender slurs* is another subcategory which is in fact very recurrent in Tarantino's dialogues, the word *nigger* appears in most of his films and it can sometimes be considered "highly offensive [...] when used by white speakers" to black people (Dalzell and Victor, 2008: 457), but not in conversations among the black community, since this term can be used in an informal and friendly way. In addition, *psychological/physical condition* references are included under the umbrella of the taboo category, for example *shut up*, *fatso*. According to Wajnryb (2005), terms related to *filth* can be considered taboo words, for example *dog eats its own feces*. Hughes (2006: 31) refers to blasphemy as "the contemptuous use of religious symbols or names, either by swearing or abuse". Whilst blasphemy is intentional, profanity is more common. Accordingly, the subcategory *profane/blasphemous* has also been considered herein, examples of which include *God*, *Jesus Christ*, etc. When these religious referents include the derogatory element *fucking*, some viewers may feel strongly offended (see Table 2). Other subcategories which concern foul words can include sexual matters tagged as *sexual and body part references*, as in *let's not start sucking each other's dicks*; bodily functions and body products, within the subcategories of *urination and scatology*, as in *I'm gonna take a piss*.

#### 4. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design of this study is articulated around a series of research questions and the method employed is based on the DTS paradigm, having chosen a multi-strategy design or mixed method, which combines quantitative and qualitative data making use of triangulation (Robson, 2011).

The quantitative data has been collected from the DVD version of the film, and the qualitative data relies on an interview granted by Fernanda Leboreiro via google forms – the marketing director of *Bandaparte subtítulos*, the subtitling studio where the subtitling of *Pulp Fiction* was commissioned, given that it was not possible to contact the actual subtitler in an attempt to have more direct information regarding the subtitling process.

The core of this research design appears in the form of a number of research questions, which are shown below:

1. What strategies has the subtitler used when rendering the offensive and taboo exchanges into the Spanish subtitles? What were the most recurrent offensive/taboo categories encountered? These questions will be addressed through the quantitative analysis of the subtitles.
2. What were the translation patterns followed when transferring the ST to the TT? To this goal, we propose to observe whether the load of the offensive/taboo terms has been toned up (the offensive/taboo load is strengthened), maintained (the offensive/taboo load is kept), toned down (the offensive/taboo load is softened), neutralised (the offensive/taboo load disappears in the TT), or omitted (the offensive/taboo load is missing). This question will also be answered quantitatively.
3. Can the implementation of omission, reformulation, and/or substitution be technically justified by the spatio-temporal constraints present in subtitling? We will verify whether the cases in which the offensive load has been lost may have been influenced by the technical restrictions imposed by subtitling through the use of WinCAPS.

#### 5. DATA ANALYSIS

Directed by Tarantino, and premiered in 1994, *Pulp Fiction* was rated *R* (it contains some adult material) by the MPAA ([www.filmratings.com](http://www.filmratings.com)) for its strong, graphic violence, drug use, and pervasively offensive language and sexuality. It was premiered in Spain on 12 January 1995 and rated *Not Recommended* for under age viewing (both in the cinema and DVD versions). The overall number of Spanish subtitles included in the DVD version is 2,004 – of which there are 623 instances analysed that appear in 508 subtitles. The subtitles under study thus account for 25.3% of all subtitles.

Only some of the most representative cases of offensive and taboo language under analysis are presented in the samples to come, whose offensive/taboo terms are shown in bold type. The subtitle numbers and their in and out cues have been included in the examples, along with the offensive/taboo subcategories and translation strategies abbreviations.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The strategies employed are shortened as follows: literal translation (LT), calque (CAL), explication (EXP), substitution (SUBS), transposition (TRAN), compensation (COM), omission (OMS) and reformulation (REF).



**Example 1**

Context: Vincent is in his dealer's house to buy some heroin for him.

Jody: Helps **fellatio**.Lance: [...] but this one is **a fucking madman**... Am I a **nigger**? Are we in Inglewood? No.

0413	Para el <b>sexo oral</b> .	[For the <b>oral sex</b> .]
00:25:58:17		
00:25:59:23		
0427	pero ésta es verdaderamente una pasada.	[but this one is truly an awesome thing/awesome.]
00:26:36:13		
00:26:39:02		
0429	¿Soy negro? ¿Estamos en Inglewood? No, ¿verdad?	[Am I black? Are we in Inglewood? No, really?]
00:26:42:23		
00:26:45:11		
0413. Taboo (sexual) > EXP (maintained)		
0427. Taboo (drugs) > SUBS (neutralised) (NOT technically justified) 02:20-38(49)		
0429. Taboo (racial) > SUBS (neutralised) (technically justified) 02:19-46(48)		

In subtitle (0413), the term *fellatio* has been translated using explicitation, by the hypernym *sexo oral* [oral sex]. In the next subtitle (0427), the phrase *fucking madman*, which refers to a type of heroin (as the visual channel clarifies), has been substituted by *una pasada* [an awesome thing/awesome], a solution which can be said to relate to drugs but which is more neutral. As this subtitle lasts 2:20 and has 38 characters out of a potential 49, the neutralisation in this instance may not have been technically conditioned. In subtitle (0429), *nigger* is ironically uttered by Lance, a white drug dealer, to Vincent, also white. Its translation as *negro* [black] can therefore be said to have neutralised the TT as the latter term does not reflect the ST nuance. The duration of the subtitle is 2:19 and occupies 46 characters, out of a possible 48, meaning that this neutralisation may have been technically determined.

**Example 2**

Context: Mia, thinking she is going to inhale cocaine, takes an overdose from Vince's heroin powder. Vincent tries to save her life with Lance's help, his drug dealer.

Vincent: Oh, **Jesus fucking Christ** [...] Oh, **fuck me! Fuck me! ... Don't fucking die** on me, Mia!

0717	¡Me cago en la puta!	[I shit on the whore/fucking hell!]
00:52:18:04		
00:52:20:06		
0719	¡Estoy <b>jodido!</b> ¡Estoy <b>jodido!</b>	[I am <b>fucked!</b> I am <b>fucked!</b> ]
00:52:24:13		
00:52:26:20		
0721	¡ <b>No te mueras</b>	[ <b>Do not die</b> ]
00:52:41:04		
00:52:41:21		
0717. Taboo (blasphemous) > REF at clause level (toned down) (NOT technically justified) 02:02-20(36)		
0719. Abusive swearing (derogatory) / (derogatory) > REF at clause level (maintained) / REF at clause level (maintained)		
0721. Taboo (death) > REF at word level (toned down) (technically justified) 00:21-13(16)		

In subtitle (0717), the adjective *fucking* preceding *Christ* makes this phrase an instance of blasphemy that could sound extremely offensive in the TT. It has been reformulated as *me cago en la puta* [I shit on the whore/fucking hell], slightly toning down the Spanish text in a domesticating manner (Venuti, 2008). As a literal translation would have been shorter than the reformulation carried out, and considering the degree of offensiveness of the ST expression, this might be a case of (ideological) manipulation. Whatever the reason, this subtitle lasts 2:02 and occupies 20 characters. As there is room for some 36, this toning down was probably not carried out for technical

reasons. In subtitle (0719), the verb *fuck* has been reformulated as *jodido* [fucked] in both utterances, maintaining the derogatory tone of the ST. In the next subtitle (0721), the utterance *don't fucking die* has been reformulated as *no te mueras* [do not die], toning down the TT. This subtitle lasts 21 frames and uses 13 characters. As it might have had 16, this toned down translation might be justified on technical grounds.

### Example 3

Context: By chance, Butch comes across Marsellus in the street. After Butch runs him over, Marsellus goes after him and they enter a shop, but then both of them are kidnapped in an attempt to be raped.

Marsellus: I'm gonna call a couple of hard, **pipe-hitting niggers** to go to **work** on the homes here with a pair of **pliers** and a **blowtorch**. You hear me talking, **hillbilly boy**? I ain't through with you by a **damn** sight! **I'm gonna get medieval on your ass**.

1283 01:42:38:22 01:42:43:10	Llamaré a un par de negros <b>colgados</b> para que se <b>trabajen</b> a este tío	[I will call a couple of <b>stoned</b> blacks to <b>work</b> on this guy]
1284 01:42:44:06 01:42:46:13	con un par de <b>tenacillas</b> y un <b>soplete</b> .	[with a pair of <b>little pliers</b> and a <b>blowtorch</b> .]
1285 01:42:49:02 01:42:51:14	¿Me estás oyendo, <b>cateto</b> ?	[Are you hearing me, <b>peasant</b> ?]
1283. Taboo (drugs) / (violence) > REF at word level (maintained) / LT (maintained)		
1284. Taboo (violence) > LT (maintained)		
1285. Taboo (ethnic) > LT (maintained)		

In subtitle (1283), the phrase *pipe-hitting niggers* refers to drugged black drug addicts who do whatever they are told in return for a small amount of drugs. As the word *nigger* has been uttered by Marsellus, who is black, then it is not considered to be offensive and the phrase has been reformulated as the domesticated *negros colgados* [stoned blacks]. In addition, the term *work*, which in this instance implies torture, has been rendered literally in the TT as *trabajen*. In the next subtitle (1284), it can be inferred that both the *pliers* and *blowtorch* will be used for the purposes of torture and, as violence-related elements, they have been translated faithfully. In (1285), the US term *hillbilly* is an ethnic slur used to refer to white men who live in the countryside. It has been translated with the negative *cateto* [peasant], which represents an instance of domestication.

## 6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the analysis of the subtitling of *Pulp Fiction*, both quantitative and qualitative data is to be considered, taken from the analysis itself and from the interview with Fernanda Leboeiro. The research questions (see section 4) are addressed as follows.

- Figure 1 shows the various translation strategies resorted to by the subtitler in order to deal with the expressions heard on screen:

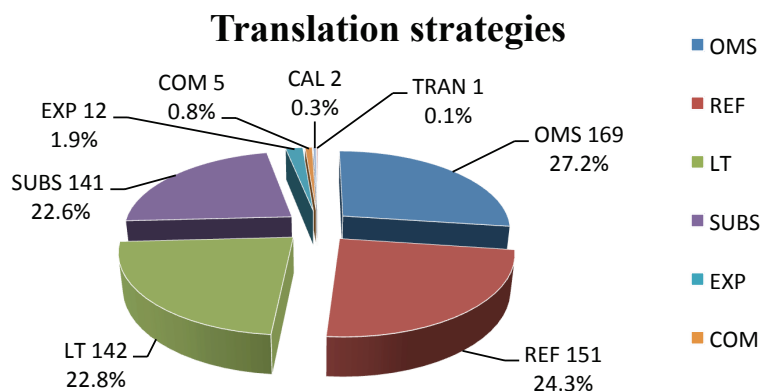


Figure 1. Translation strategies used in the subtitles.

The most widely used strategy is omission (27.2%), which implies the eradication of the offensive and taboo words, closely followed by reformulation (24.3%), and then literal translation (22.8%) in the third place.

The bar chart shown in Figure 2 offers a more visual distribution of the myriad of the offensive and taboo subcategories found in the original film:

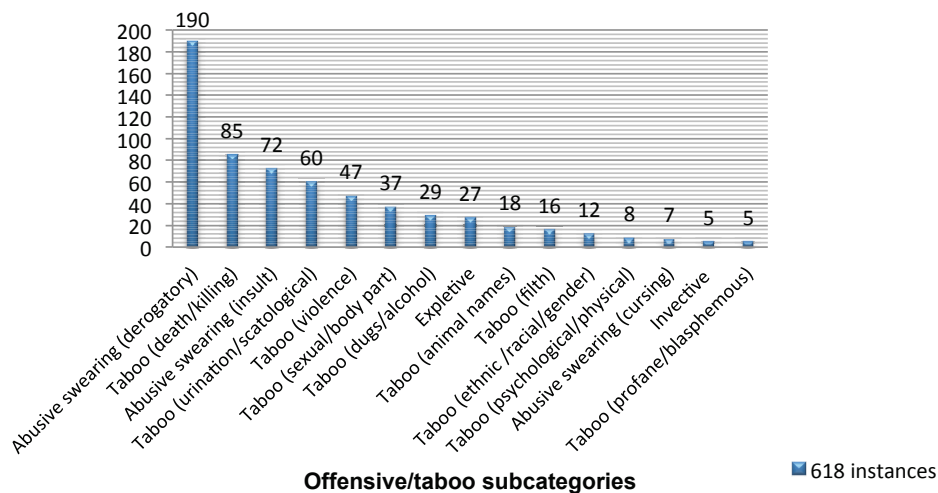


Figure 2. Offensive/taboo subcategories in the original.

As can be seen, there is a total of 618 instances of offensive (48.7%) and taboo (51.3%) language in the original dialogue that have been addressed by using the aforementioned strategies. There have been five cases of offensive/taboo elements found in the subtitles that cannot be said to be directly triggered by the original dialogue, since on these occasions the actors are not uttering such expressions. These can be considered instances of compensation, which contribute to the resulting subtitle adding to the overall offensive/taboo load of the whole film.

- To examine the way the offensive/taboo tone of the original has been transferred, attention has been paid to those cases where the offensive/taboo load has been strengthened, maintained, toned down, neutralised and/or omitted. In addition, possible cases of censorship/(self-)censorship have also been considered:

Table 3. Offensive/taboo load in the subtitles.

Offensive/taboo load	Instances	Percentage
Toned up	11	1.7%
Maintained	309	49.8%
Toned down	42	6.7%
<b>Transferred – Total</b>	<b>362</b>	<b>58.2%</b>
Neutralised	88	14.1%
Omitted	173	27.7%
<b>Non-transferred – Total</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>41.8%</b>
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>623</b>	<b>100%</b>

As can be seen in Table 3, the number of instances which are maintained (49.8%) predominate, with a small percentage of cases where the expression has been toned up (1.7%) in the subtitles, and a slightly higher percentage in which the language has been toned down (6.7%). All in all, in 58.2% of the cases, an attempt can be detected to transfer the offensive/taboo load from the original to the Spanish subtitles. By contrast, the cases in which the load has not been transferred because it has been neutralised (14.1%) or omitted (27.7%) in the subtitles represent 41.8%, a seemingly high number. To get a better appreciation of the reasons behind these choices of strategies, we will proceed to verify whether the neutralisations and omissions have been determined by the technical constraints specific to subtitling (see Table 4).

Based on the interview conducted with Fernanda Leboeiro, there is uncertainty with regards to which cases may have been affected by (self-)censorship. Although her opinion is that such impositions are



not very usual, the reality is that many translations seem to have dispensed with the taboo/offensive expressions without an apparent technical reason.

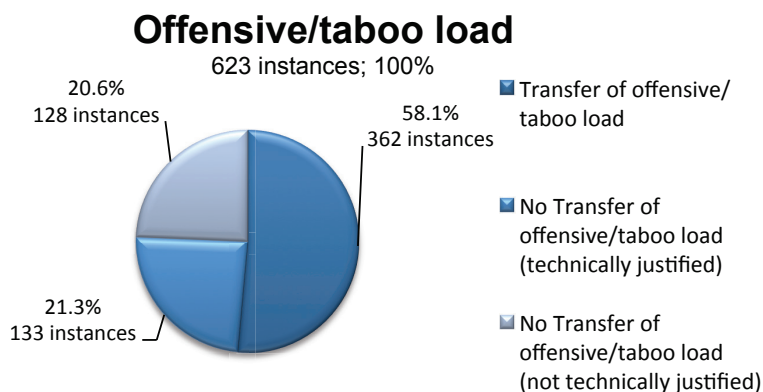
3. This question looks into whether the instances of neutralisation and omission stem from the technical limitations of subtitling and, as such, are necessary or whether, by contrast, these instances could be said to represent cases of manipulation. Table 4 accounts for all the cases that are either technically justified or otherwise:

**Table 4.** Technical considerations in the subtitles.

		Technical considerations			
		Technically justified		NOT technically justified	
Neutralisation	88 (100%)	46	52.3%	42	47.7%
Omission	173 (100%)	87	50.3%	86	49.7%
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>261 (100%)</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>50.9%</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>49.1%</b>

According to the figures above, the number of technically justified occurrences can be said to be more or less the same as that of those not technically justified.

To complete the analysis, the pie chart contained in Figure 3 includes a summary of the results, enabling us to draw final conclusions on the way the offensive and taboo language has been approached in the subtitles of the film under analysis:



**Figure 3.** Offensive/taboo language in the subtitles.

On consideration of these data, we might note that to the total of 618 instances spoken in the original dialogue, five cases of compensation found in the subtitles have been added, making a total of 623 instances under study. It is of note that 261 instances (41.9%) have been ignored in the subtitles and 362 (58.1%) have made it to the subtitles, of which 357 have been transferred directly from the dialogue exchanges, and 5 have been added in the subtitles when the original was not making use of this type of expressions. In 21.3% of cases, the failure to transfer the offensive and taboo elements seems to have been determined by the spatio-temporal constraints characteristic of subtitling, which means that such decisions are technically justifiable. This echoes Fernanda Leboreiro's view when she asserted that subtitlers may dispense with offensive exchanges in order to comply with technical considerations. In a virtually identical number of cases (20.6%), the offensive and/or taboo terms have been either omitted or neutralised without being technically necessary. Arguably, these occurrences could be said to have been subject to some type of (ideological) manipulation, although the catalysts of these changes are hard to ascertain.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The constant swearing and use of offensive and taboo expressions by the characters in this film, makes its subtitling into Spanish a rather challenging task, since the SL and TL inevitably resort to different systems for swearing that can be differently perceived by different audiences. This may well have led the subtitler/adaptor to decide in favour of the deletion, neutralisation and/or toning down of some of the expressions found in the original language.

There is not enough qualitative evidence to prove if (self-)censorship has taken place in this film, whether exerted by the subtitler, the studio, the client or the distributor. As suggested by the marketing manager of the subtitling studio where this subtitling was done, this practice was rarely carried out at the time. The quantitative results can arguably suggest that some of the cases of offensive/taboo loss may have been due to (ideological) manipulation. Lastly, from a quantitative point of view, the subtitling of offensive and taboo language into Spanish in *Pulp Fiction* can be said not to be especially faithful to the ST.

It is hoped that this research might serve as a basis for future studies concerning the subtitling of offensive and/or taboo language, either with the same or different language combinations, thereby contributing to the literature within this scholarly context.

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