



# The vulgarization hypothesis and the translation of swearwords by male and female translators in AVT in Spain



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## ABSTRACT

This article aims to test the vulgarization hypothesis in audiovisual translation (AVT) with regards to possible differences between male and female translators' practices. It starts with an overview of the most recent publications on swearing and AVT, and of studies that have analyzed the use of swearwords by male and female speakers. Two seasons of these police dramas were used for the study. Both were produced by the same team at approximately the same time. After some methodological and theoretical considerations, the article presents and analyzes the translational choices made by the female translators (F) of *Chicago PD* and the male translator (M) of *FBI*. The results confirm the vulgarization hypothesis in AVT in both series, although the tendency in (F) *Chicago PD* is to use a greater number of swearwords than in (M) *FBI*.

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## 1. Introduction

This article draws on the so-called 'vulgarization hypothesis' in audiovisual translation (AVT) into European Spanish (Valdeón, 2020) to compare and assess how swearwords are translated by male and female translators. The hypothesis, defined as 'the trend in contemporary AVT in Spain [...] to increase the number of swearwords, in contrast to what seemed to be the norm in the past' (2020: p. 262), was proposed after the analysis of the dubbing of four seasons of four different series representing different genres (a political drama, a police drama, a comedy and a thriller). The study found that the tendency in contemporary AVT in Spain is to increase the number and emotional force of swearwords in the target texts. The reasons for this were not clear, as neither the genre nor the characterization of the protagonists seemed to provide any explanation for the increase. In this article, I take up this line of work with two topical incentives: on the one hand the growing interest in the use of swearwords in pragmatics and applied linguistics, on the other the number of Translation Studies publications that have looked at the strategies used to render these words into a variety of target languages. More specifically, this article focuses on a strand of research that has produced a considerable number of publications in pragmatics, but has remained unexplored in Translation Studies, i.e. questions of gender as regards the use of swearwords.

The first section of the article reviews some definitions of swearwords and discusses the terminology used by recent authors, provides a literature review of the study of the translation of swearwords in AVT, and of the connection between swearing and gender. Section 2 presents the research question, the data and the methodology used to collect and analyze the

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findings, as well as the theoretical framework used for the study. Section 3 presents and analyzes the findings before the concluding discussion in section 4.

## 2. Swearwords and their many names

The definition of swearing and swearwords is problematic (McEney 2006; O'Driscoll 2020). In a recent and comprehensive survey of the terms used to refer to offensive language in academic publications, O'Driscoll (2020: pp. 32–33) found at least eleven lexemes (and a number of related forms), among which 'swear' was the most common. O'Driscoll's list does not include words such as 'slang' and 'blasphemy', pejorative words such as 'impolite' and 'rude', and the more technical 'dysphemism'. In his view, 'swearwords', 'expletives' and 'offensive language' are used synonymously (2020: p. 34), but that the emphases may vary.

Although O'Driscoll opts for 'offensive' for the title of his book (with a subtitle that includes 'taboo'), I will use the lexeme 'swear' in this article as it is probably the most common term in translation studies research. 'Taboo' has also been used, but not necessarily to refer to offensive language. In fact, 'taboo' is often related to ideological issues pertaining to censorship under dictatorial regimes (e.g. in fascist Italy, see Mereu, 2012) or even in democratic societies where certain subjects might be considered inappropriate for mainstream target audiences (see, for example, the discussion on the translation of words related to death, disability and sexuality in Italy: Bucaria, 2018). For this reason, I will use 'swearing' and 'swearwords', in line with the vulgarization hypothesis (Valdeón, 2020), and will draw on O'Driscoll's definition of 'taboo' language as 'any (string of) words whose production is transgressive of polite social norms' (2020: p. 40). Thus, in this article swearwords refer to 'words or expressions that are considered taboo, may carry some kind of social stigma (e.g. sexual, religious) and may be used to convey strong emotions. Consequently, they may cause offence among (some of) the actors involved in a communicative situation such as a conversation, reading a book or a newspaper article, or watching a movie or a television program' (Valdeón, 2020: p. 262).

To this definition, I would like to add the importance of context in order to assess the variable force of swearwords. In the case of AVT, I do not only refer to the situation in which the words are uttered, but also to the specific nature of audiovisual productions and of their target audiences.

### 2.1. Swearing in AVT

Translation scholars have become increasingly interested in the translation of swearwords. This section reviews the most relevant publications regarding the translation of swearwords from English as the international language of the movie industry. I will also consider some studies that have analyzed the translation of swearwords from Spanish into other languages.

Giampieri (2017) has studied the translation of swearwords and racial slurs (one of the terms mentioned by O'Driscoll in his survey, 2020: 33) in nine American films, focusing on words such as 'nigger', and found that there was a wide spectrum of choices accompanied by subtle linguistic manipulations, while Filmer (2012) studied the translation of racial slurs and swearwords in the dubbing of Clint Eastwood's 2008 movie *Grand Torino*. These two studies indicate that Italian translators tend to reduce or tone down the strength of the English swearwords to adapt the texts to the expectations of the target audiences or as an act of self-censorship on the part of the translators (Giampieri, 2017: p. 266).

In a similar vein, some studies have shown that the tendency for the translation of swearwords into Spanish is either omission or toning down. For instance, Ávila-Cabrera (2016)'s descriptive study of the subtitling of Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* into European Spanish showed that the tendency was the omission of some of the swearwords, while Soler Pardo (2013)'s analysis of the dubbing of swearwords in Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* indicated that the number of swearwords were greatly reduced. More recently, Díaz-Pérez (2020) has analyzed the subtitling of 'shit' and 'fuck' in the English-Galician Veiga Corpus, Galician being the regional language of Spain's northwestern region of Galicia. Díaz-Pérez found that the former tends to be maintained in the target text, while the latter is omitted more often. Díaz-Pérez argues that this might be due in part to the fact that 'fuck' does not translate easily into Galician. Conversely, as indicated, I proposed a vulgarization hypothesis for the translation of US television series into Spanish (Valdeón, 2020), which will partly be tested in this article.

Although most studies analyze the translation of swearwords from English (being the language of Hollywood's film industry) into other European languages, some authors have studied how Spanish swearwords have been rendered into other languages. Santamaría Cioridia (2016) has analyzed the translation of vulgarity in Pedro Almodóvar's *Átame* (1990) into English and Polish, and noted that solutions differed. The English version was more conservative in terms of swearwords but closer to the original as regards the translation of sexual references. In contrast, the Polish version was closer in all respects. For his part, Díaz-Pérez (2018) has delved into the subtitling of twelve films by Pedro Almodóvar into English, where the tendency is to sanitize the abundance of swearwords of the original: words such as 'coño' [cunt] and 'joder' [fuck] are omitted in 51 % and 42 % of the cases respectively.

### 2.2. Swearing and gender

In 2003, Robin Lakoff posited that, in English, until recently women were not expected to swear as much as men when expressing emotions such as sadness (2003: p. 163). However, Lakoff added, the *privilege* of swearing has been gradually

extended to women. Studies into gender differences in connection with swearing have provided evidence of social and language changes in the past decades. In a 1977 study that involved 466 high school and university US students, Chris Kramer found 36 ‘differentiating’ characteristics between male and female speech, including the use of swearwords, more common among male students. This situation seems to have evolved, as in the 1980s women began to exhibit features that had been previously associated with male speech, including swearing (Coates, 1986), pointing to the fact that speakers are contesting traditional forms of femininity (Stapleton, 2003: p. 23). However, other studies have suggested that even if at the turn of century women swore more than their counterparts of the mid-twentieth century, there might still be gender variations. For example, using data from the London–Lund spoken corpus Stenström (1991) stressed that women were more likely to use ‘heaven’-related words while men preferred ‘hell’-related words.

More recently, other authors have challenged the results of these publications, arguing that assertiveness training programmes focused on changing women’s language styles both in the private and public spheres have impacted impoliteness strategies and the use of swearing (Mills, 2003: pp. 168–189). Mills, for instance, has claimed that this is reflected in the way women swear, and that the use of swearing is a form of negotiating power positions for women with respect to men so that both can use the same language resources with the same purposes (2003: p. 193), although she does not provide any evidence to support this claim. In line with this, Aijmer studied intensifiers in the Spoken British National Corpora, focusing on ‘fucking’, and argued that it was used especially by young female speakers ‘to mark their linguistic independence’ (2018: p. 91).

On the other hand, in a recent survey of swearing among English speakers covering the period 1990s–2010s, Love (2021) has posited that men still swear more than women. For their part, in their corpus-based study of swearing in the social media network formerly known as Twitter, Gauthier and Guille (2017) have found that both men and women use swearwords, although there are differences with regards to the words used, e.g. ‘cunt’ and ‘fuck’ were more commonly used by men and in a greater variety of contexts. This supports the findings of studies by McEnery and Xiao (2004: p. 240), who have posited that male speakers use ‘fuck’ and its derivatives more than twice as frequently as women, and by Schweinberger (2018), who analyzed the Irish section of the International Corpus of English. Conversely, Gauthier and Guille’s findings contradict those by Thelwall (2008), who claimed that younger women are more likely to use ‘cunt’ than young men. Finally, an ethnographic study of swearing among US college students showed that both men and women swear, although they do it in different contexts (Murray, 2012).

As regards gender differences in Spanish, the number of studies is smaller. Domingo Lozano (2005: pp. 19–20) claims that men swear more and use stronger expressions, while Stenström (2006) has studied the speech of young speakers and posits that the difference between male and female is minimal, particularly when swearwords are used to signal in-group interaction rather than to offend their interlocutors (Stenström, 2006: p. 299, 2020).

### 3. Hypothesis, data and method

The objectives of the article are to test the vulgarization hypothesis using two similar series rather than series belonging to various genres, and to consider differences between male and females translators’ practices against the background of the studies that have looked at the use of swearwords by men and women in real rather than fictional contexts.

Bearing in mind the second objective, I selected two seasons of two series, *FBI* and *Chicago PD*. Both are police dramas produced and released at approximately the same time (2019–2020). *Chicago PD* follows the professional and personal lives of an Intelligence team in the Chicago Police Department. It was created by Dick Wolf (who is also responsible for the *Law & Order* franchise) and Matt Olmstead. For the study, I selected the seventh season, consisting of twenty episodes, which ran between September 2019 and April 2020 (the examples in the next sections will indicate the season plus the episode, e.g. 7.2 refers to the seventh season and episode 2). Its production was stopped as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The screenplays of *FBI*, also created by Dick Wolf, have a similar theme to the episodes of *Chicago PD*. For the study, I selected the second season, consisting of nineteen episodes, which ran during the same period as *Chicago PD* and was cancelled for the same reason (likewise the examples below indicate the season, 2, followed by the episode number).

As for the dubbing (F) *Chicago PD* was translated by BBO, an all-female translation agency (see <https://bbosubtitulado.com/quienes-somos/>), while the Spanish version of (M) *FBI* was the work of a sole male translator. The webpage of the former indicates that their products undergo a strict quality control process, although there are no specific details as to what this entails. This is not relevant for this research as I do not aim to assess the quality of the texts. It should also be pointed out that, in this article, ‘translators’ is used to refer to any of the agents involved in the linguistic part of the dubbing process, as the nature of AVT might lead to changes (Bosseaux 2019) by other agents in order to make it possible for actors to fit the words into the time slot available to them. However, changes are deemed adaptive, in line with research showing that they are normally made to improve lip synchronization for dubbing (Zanotti 2015: p. 116), but do not alter the content and nature of the language.

To analyze the use of swearing both in the source and target texts, I collected translation units consisting of utterances where swearwords were used in the English originals and/or in the Spanish target versions as well as their corresponding versions in the other language: a total of 305 were identified in (F) *Chicago PD* and 165 in (M) *FBI*. In line with the work mentioned above (Valdeón, 2020), the study was carried out on the basis of ‘coupled pair analysis’ (Toury, 2012: p. 116–117), that is, segments in the source texts that contained swearwords and their translation into Spanish, and swearwords in Spanish versions and the original texts in English. This means that no full transcripts of all the episodes were necessary.

However, the context in which the translation units were uttered was considered by looking at the whole exchange where the swearwords were uttered, both in the English source texts and in the target versions. This helped decide whether other factors may have intervened in the decision-making process, e.g. whether the omission of certain words could be related to the constraints of the dubbing process or whether a certain word could have been used as a compensation strategy if another word was omitted elsewhere. Finally, it should be mentioned that the number of coupled pairs differ in the two series (305 versus 165), highlighting the fact that no specific conventions are currently used by translators (as opposed to those existing at the turn of the twentieth century, see [Agost 2004](#); [Chaume 2004](#)).

For the selection and classification of the English swearwords I used McEnery's taxonomy (2006: p. 36), as in [Valdeón \(2020\)](#), which appears in [Table 1](#).

**Table 1**

McEnery's categorization of English swearwords.

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

As for the Spanish target version, I followed my own tentative list ([Valdeón, 2020](#): p. 263), below in [Table 2](#).

**Table 2**

Tentative categorization of Spanish swearwords 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, cagar ...</i>

McEnery's last two categories are conflated into one in the typology for Spanish, reflecting variability in perceptions of offensiveness in the case of 'strong' and 'very strong', as they are used by other authors, e.g. [Thelwall \(2008\)](#), who categorizes 'fuck' and 'cunt' as strong/very strong. Interestingly, the lexeme referring to the female genitalia in Spanish, 'coño', appears in two different categories: with a final -a, in Spanish typically but not exclusively used for the feminine, the word is milder than with an -o ending, again typically but not exclusively masculine. The former tends to be used in expressions such as '¿Estás de coña?' (vulgar for '¿Estás de broma?', that is, 'Are you kidding?') and 'Ni de coña' (again vulgar for 'Ni de broma', that is, 'No way'). Additionally, although 'coño' is listed in the (very) strong category, the force of this word is not comparable to that of its English counterpart, which remains probably the strongest in the language. Finally, in my analysis ([Valdeón, 2020](#): p. 264) I used seven different categories (i.e. addition, replaced by swearword, intensification, preservation, toning down, omission and euphemism replaced by swearword), which in this paper are reduced to three, namely preservation, intensification and omission/toning down. This is done for practical reasons (that is, to keep the word limit of the article), and also because the first three categories are essentially different forms of intensification.

Let us now turn to the results and analysis section.

#### 4. Results and analysis

The results show that none of the source scripts use items that can be considered strong or very strong ([McEnery 2006](#); [Thelwall 2008](#)). The fact that the two series were conceived for mainstream television programming may explain the milder choices. Thus, words such as 'fuck', 'cunt' and its derivatives do not feature in any of the 39 episodes. Mild items such as 'Jesus', 'pissed', 'bitch' and 'screwed', and the moderate 'whore' and 'prick' were used, but sparingly. Most of the swearwords used in both series, namely 'damn', 'hell' and 'son of a bitch', belong to the very mild category: in contemporary English, these words have lost most of their force, as shown by their use in media English for decades. Conversely, the Spanish version uses items from all four categories, including the (very) strong one. Thus, words like 'coño', 'joder', 'puta' and 'cojones' are used in both series, albeit not in all episodes.

As mentioned, the first step of the analysis was the classification of the translations using the three categories mentioned in the previous section. [Tables 3 and 4](#) summarize the strategies used by the translators. They indicate the number of instances of each strategy per episode and the total number of instances per series at the end (followed by the percentages for the total).

**Table 3**  
The translation of swearwords in *Chicago PD* (F).

Episode	Preservation	Intensification	Omission/Toning down
1	5	14	3
2	3	4	5
3	4	7	5
4	1	5	2
5	5	4	3
6	2	6	4
7	2	12	10
8	1	3	3
9	2	13	1
10	2	8	6
11	4	15	4
12	4	13	4
13	2	4	4
14	3	4	3
15	2	4	5
16	2	3	3
17	2	11	10
18	4	5	3
19	5	3	4
20	3	11	18
Total	56 (18.3 %)	149 (48.9 %)	100 (32.8 %)

**Table 4**  
The translation of swearwords in *FBI* (M).

Episode	Preservation	Intensification	Omission/Toning down
1	4	1	2
2	1	3	–
3	6	6	5
4	1	9	1
5	1	3	3
6	3	3	2
7	2	1	2
8	2	2	1
9	3	4	3
10	1	4	–
11	1	5	–
12	3	3	–
13	3	5	1
14	–	18	2
15	1	3	2
16	–	5	5
17	1	5	–
18	2	4	1
19	2	11	3
Total	37 (22.4 %)	95 (57.6 %)	33 (20 %)

The results confirm that the vulgarization hypothesis in the Spanish versions of the two seasons, that is, the tendency in both is to increase the number of swearwords (F) *Chicago PD* retains or increases the force of the swearwords in 67.2 % of the cases, whereas (M) *FBI* does so in 80 %. Quantitatively, this seems to indicate that the increase was more noticeable in the case of the male translator. Let us now analyze the results to assess whether this is supported qualitatively as well.

#### 4.1. Omissions

On the whole, the figures seem to indicate that the all-female team of (F) *Chicago PD* tend to omit a greater number of swearwords than the male translator of *FBI*: the former delete 32.8 % of these items, the latter omits only 20 % of them, thus indicating that female translators might be more conservative vis-à-vis the vulgarization hypothesis. However, the items omitted and their functions provide a more nuanced picture.

'Hell' makes up 42 % of the swearwords omitted in (F) *Chicago PD* and 50 % in (M) *FBI*, while 'damn' and its derivatives are omitted in 31 % and 20 % of the cases respectively. The omission of these and other words such as 'Jesus', 'Christ' and 'ass' applies to all the characters, both protagonists (that is, police officers of *FBI* agents) and secondary roles (mostly criminals, but also witnesses). This strategy seems to relate to the nature of AVT as a type of constrained translation, as dubbing may require translators to eliminate words in order to allow utterances to fit into the slot available. These words tend to be used as

exclamations or intensifiers. For example, ‘They damn sure knew his name’ (*Chicago PD*, 7.17) is rendered as ‘Todos sabían su nombre’ [They all knew his name]. These words seem to be more dispensable, possibly because words such as ‘damn’ (in the example, as it premodifies ‘sure’, both are omitted) and ‘hell’ have lost much of their pragmatic force over the past decades. While chapter discussions were once devoted to words such as ‘damn’ (Montagu, 1967: p. 281), thirty years later ‘hell’ and ‘damn’ were deemed unlikely to upset many (Swan, 1995: p. 574), and are now treated as interjections expressing irritation, with just a one asterisk rating for ‘damn’ on a one-to-five scale for offensiveness (Carter and McCarthy, 2006: p. 225). McEney (2006: p. 36) also includes ‘damn’ and ‘hell’ as examples of very mild swearwords, at the same level as ‘God’ and ‘bloody’.

Apart from these mild swearwords with limited denotational value, which makes them good candidates for deletion if necessary, other items omitted in the target texts include colloquial forms of address such as ‘man’ and ‘bro’ (typically translated as ‘tío’), which have a pragmatic value denoting closeness, but whose omission does not impact the essential content of the utterances in which they are inserted, thus pointing to the fact that the omission may be related to the nature of AVT as constrained translation. As these words are very mild nowadays, their pragmatic meaning can be conveyed by means of visual elements, such as gestures and facial expressions (as noted, for example, by Ying 2021). Thus, although the deletion of ‘hell’ and ‘damn’ in peripheral positions or as intensifiers cannot be considered especially representative of the transformations in the target texts, not all of the utterances including the lexemes ‘hell’ or ‘damn’ have undergone the same transformation, as we will see in the next section.

To conclude, the analysis of the items deleted in the target texts indicates that, although the female translators omit more swearwords than their male counterpart, they are mild or very mild and have peripheral functions within the utterances. Their pragmatic force can be expressed visually by the characters’ demeanours on screen (and other features such as utterance delivery).

The following subsection will consider various intensification strategies. Due to space limitations, the examples below are coupled pairs except when a context might be necessary to better illustrate the shifts.

#### 4.2. Intensification

Intensification occurs in 48.8 % of the cases in (F) *Chicago PD* and 57.5 % in (M) *FBI*. It indicates that the vulgarization hypothesis applies to both the male and the female translators, although the female translators seem to be less likely to replace the original words by swearwords. However, if we consider the total number of changes rather than the percentages, the (F) translators of *Chicago PD* did use a greater number of swearwords than the (M) translator of *FBI* and, most importantly, the pragmatic force on the target texts is not necessarily reduced in the (F) data, as we shall see below.

The previous section showed that ‘hell’ and ‘damn’ were the most often deleted. However, when they are not, their pragmatic force is intensified in the target texts. For instance, ‘hell’ as an intensifier or an exclamation becomes more prominently aggressive in questions such as ‘What the hell is happening?’ (*Chicago PD* 7.11) and ‘What the hell are they talking about?’ (*Chicago PD* 7.18), where ‘What the hell ...?’ is translated as ‘¿Qué cojones está pasando?’ [What the bollocks is happening] and ‘De qué coño están hablando?’ [What the cunt are you talking about, despite the lesser emotional force of the word in Spanish]. This occurs in seventeen cases in (M) *FBI* and in 57 instances in (F) *Chicago PD*, where ‘What the hell ...?’ tends to be rendered as ‘¿Qué cojones?’ This applies to all characters in all contexts and regardless of the emotional force of the utterance. In fact, when compared with the omission of ‘hell’, as discussed above, it is not possible to determine the existence of a pattern with regards to when ‘hell’ and ‘damn’ are omitted or replaced by stronger swearwords other than the constrained nature of AVT. In other words, it seems that it was not necessary to omit certain mild swearwords to fit the utterance in the slot, translators might have opted for a stronger word.

Intensification can also be traced in other utterances, even when no swearword is used in the source. This applies to all the characters, with no distinction between the speech of criminals and law enforcement officers. This is relevant because criminals in the source texts tend to use more colloquial English (double negations, slang, etc) as a speech marker. Although this is not the focus of this article, these features reflect the screen writers’ attempt to present the characters differently. In the Spanish versions this difference is neutralized as both criminals and agents use the same variety of the language. Thus, it cannot be argued that the intensification of swearwords has been used to characterize criminals differently. For instance, in (F) *Chicago PD*, ‘Not gonna happen’ is translated as ‘Ni de coña’ (where the translator has used the milder feminine version of ‘coño’) (7.7), ‘Move, get on’ is rendered as ‘Joder, sigue’ [‘Fuck, go on’] (7.11) and the exclamation ‘Whoa’ is translated as ‘Joder’ [‘Fuck’] (7.15). In (M) *FBI*, the agents’ utterances are also intensified, as in ‘Come on’, translated as ‘No jodas’ [‘Don’t fuck up’] (2.5), and ‘He got a text, that’s when everything went south’, rendered as ‘Ha recibido un mensaje y todo se ha jodido’ [‘He got a message and everything was fucked’] (2.11). Similar examples occur in the case of criminals. For instance, ‘Kiss my brown ass’ addressed at a female police officer is rendered by the translators of (F) *Chicago PD* as the much more offensive ‘Chúpame la polla’ [‘Suck my dick’] (7.9), while in the following example, intensification occurs even in the speech of a young boy.

- (1)  
 Jay: Don’t let them turn you into a Tigers fan.  
 Boy: I won’t.  
 Jay: Que no te conviertan en un hincha de los Tiger.  
 Boy: Ni de coña (*Chicago PD* 7.9).

This exchange, literally rendered except for the swearword, illustrates the pervasiveness of swearing in the target versions of (F) *Chicago PD*, regardless of characters or context or, as has been argued in Translation Studies research, to compensate for



omissions elsewhere (Delabastita, 1993: p. 226). In fact, as in the majority of the exchanges, there is no need for compensation, as the character in example 1 does not appear at a later time in the episode.

In examples 2 and 3, the informal language of two police officers is rendered by means of swearwords, making it much more aggressive than in the original.

(2)  
 Jay: I'm just helping out a family that got screwed.  
 Hailey: If she finds out who you are, we're all screwed.  
 Jay: Solo ayudo a una familia a la que jodieron.  
 Hailey: Si descubren quién eres, nos jodes a todos.  
 [Jay: I'm just helping out a family that got fucked  
 Hailey: If she finds out who you are, we're all fucked] (*Chicago PD* 7.9)

(3)  
 Hailey: What the **hell** are you doing?  
 Cam (Police informant): I've been hitting the courts. There's a couple of crash pads out there.  
 H: What?  
 C: It's sounding like Book was gunning for a regent there. Prick's name is Mackie.  
 H: Have you lost your mind?  
 C: I get an intro.  
 H: Stop, stop! The first rule of CI is to not walk into a **damn** police station.  
 C: Whoa, just relax.  
 H: You were just seen. **Jesus**, I don't even know how you got in. (7.6)  
 H: ¿Qué **cojones** [bollocks]haces?  
 C: He ido allí. Hay dos casas de seguridad.  
 H: ¿Qué?  
 C: Parece que Book buscaba a alguien allí. El tío se llama Mackie.  
 H: ¿Te has vuelto loco?  
 C: Me pondré en contacto.  
 H: Para, para. La primera regla del informador es no entrar en una **jodida** [fucked] comisaría.  
 C: ¡Eh! Tranquila  
 H: Te acaban de ver. **Joder!** [Fuck!] Ni siquiera sé cómo has entrado. (CPD 7.7)

These extracts are translated literally except for the swearwords. In example 2, the officers use 'screwed', a very informal word that refers to being in very bad trouble or difficulty. The word, commonly used in US media, can be translated in several ways with a similar semantic implication but different pragmatic force (for example, depending on the context, 'fastiado', 'liado' or even the more vulgar 'cagado'). In example 2, the translators opted for a strong swearword. It is worth stressing that 'screw' and its derivatives are considered very informal and, if categorized as swearwords, they are labelled 'mild' (see, for example, McEneaney 2006: p. 36), although typically only when used to mean 'copulate' (Hugues 2006: pp. 103–104). Some authors do not even discuss the word 'screw' as a swearword, except to make a passing mention of the fact that it referred to the sexual act (Montagu 1967: p. 314). In most other contexts, 'screwed' makes no reference to sex to the extent that it has been even used in children's movies.

Example 3 follows a similar trend, as Hailey, a female police officer, reprimands a male police informant for allowing a suspect to see him. Hailey vents her anger by using mild swearwords, all of them religious terms that have lost most of their original force. Even though 'damn' and 'hell' are the most likely swearwords to be omitted, here the translators have opted for stronger swearwords of a sexual nature. In this example, *female* translators replaced the milder swearwords used by the American *female* character by much stronger swearwords.

As for (M) *FBI*, as mentioned, the translator increased the number of swearwords in percentage terms (57.5 % as opposed to 48.8 %). However, the strength of the words used is much higher in (F) *Chicago PD* than in (M) *FBI*.

(4)  
 Omar: We would like you to cooperate.  
 Suspect: **Hell**, no, it's not gonna happen. It would ruin my brand.  
 Omar: Queremos que cooperes.  
 Suspect: Eso ni de **coña**. Me jodería la marca (FBI 2.14)  
 [Omar: We want you to cooperate.  
 Suspect: No cunt. It would fuck the brand]

Here the literal translation of 'ni de coña' makes it the target text much stronger, especially as a result of the combined use of 'coña' with 'jodería', which amplifies the offensiveness of the utterance by comparison with the source. As mentioned, there is also an important difference with regards to the strength of the intensification in the two series. To illustrate these points, let us focus on two of the strongest swearwords added in the Spanish version, 'joder' [fuck] and 'cojones' [bollocks] as well as their derivatives. The (F) translators of *Chicago PD* used 'joder' in 50 utterances and 'cojones' in 34, while the (M) translator of *FBI* used the former in 16 utterances and the latter in only 3. Table 5 includes examples from both series.

**Table 5**  
Intensification (joder, cojones).

	Joder	Cojones
<i>Chicago PD</i>	You gotta be <b>kidding</b> me No me <b>jodas</b> <b>Whoa</b> <b>Joder</b> The treatment is <b>crazy</b> expensive – El tratamiento es <b>jodidamente</b> caro It's gonna be <b>real hard</b> selling drugs with all that blue around Será <b>jodido</b> vender droga con esos polis por ahí <b>damn</b> book <b>jodido</b> libro <b>Damn</b> <b>Joder</b> I'll shut up and be your <b>damn</b> chauffeur Me callaré y seré tu <b>jodido</b> chófer <b>Freaking</b> cigarette <b>Jodido</b> cigarrillo <b>I mean</b> <b>Joder</b> ... <b>Total 50</b>	What the <b>hell</b> are you doing? ¿Qué <b>cojones</b> estás haciendo? What the <b>hell</b> is about? ¿De qué <b>cojones</b> va esto? Who the <b>hell</b> are you? ¿Quién <b>cojones</b> eres? <b>Hell</b> are you talking about? ¿Qué <b>cojones</b> estás diciendo? What the <b>hell</b> was that? ¿Qué <b>cojones</b> ha pasado? What the <b>hell</b> ? ¿Qué <b>cojones</b> ? Wondering how the <b>hell</b> they're gonna survive Preguntándose como <b>cojones</b> van a sobrevivir Are you out of your mind? ¿Quién <b>cojones</b> te crees que eres? You didn't have the <b>guts</b> No has tenido <b>cojones</b> ... <b>Total 34</b>
<i>FBI</i>	The blacks and the Mexicans and all the others are <b>ruining</b> this country Los negros, los mejicanos y todos lo que <b>joden</b> este país <b>Hell</b> , no <b>Joder</b> , no <b>Come on</b> <b>No jodas</b> He got a text, that's when everything <b>went south</b> . Ha recibido un mensaje y todo <b>se ha jodido</b> The world's economy will be <b>decimated</b> La economía mundial quedará <b>jodida</b> I don't know <b>man</b> No lo sé <b>joder</b> I'm not gonna help you <b>ruin</b> Lucas' life. No os ayudaré a <b>joderle</b> la vida a Lucas ... <b>Total 16</b>	What the <b>hell</b> ? Qué <b>cojones</b> ? <b>Magnificent</b> way – manera más <b>cojonuda</b> He was <b>scared</b> – Estaba <b>acojonado</b> ... <b>Total 3</b>

Tables 3–5 illustrate the greater tendency towards vulgarization by the female translators of *Chicago PD* as they opted for a larger number of stronger swearwords instead of mild words or where no swearwords were used. This does not respond to the absence of pragmatically equivalent words in Spanish and does not reflect a consistent strategy in the translated texts in either series, especially in (F) *Chicago PD*. It cannot be understood as a compensation strategy either. For example, 'kidding' in 'just kidding' is rendered as 'Es broma' [It is a joke] (*Chicago PD*, 7.1) and in 'You gotta be kidding' as 'No me jodas' (*Chicago PD*, 7.11). This type of substitution occurs in 23 coupled pairs in *Chicago PD* and in 29 in (M) *FBI*. Occasionally, a euphemism is replaced by the corresponding swearword, as in 'freaking cigarette' translated as 'jodido cigarrillo' (*Chicago PD*, 7.3). In addition, and although the aim of this article is not to examine the quality of the translations, it is worth pointing out that, as this example shows, it cannot be argued that these changes take into account the naturalness of the target language: 'cigarette' is translated as 'cigarrillo', but, in European Spanish, the word 'cigarro' is more commonly used. The target texts provide a great number of this type of examples, including literal translations such as 'tostadas francesas' for 'French toast' (7.13) and 'policía de asesinato' for 'murder police' (7.13). Thus, it cannot be contended that the translators are avoiding literalness to produce more natural-sounding utterances.

On the whole, both male and female teams are prone to intensify the pragmatic force of swearwords, in line with the vulgarization hypothesis. Furthermore, the distribution of the swearwords in (F) *Chicago PD* cuts across characters regardless of whether they are police officers, witnesses or criminals, and of gender. In contrast, in (M) *FBI* a greater number of swearwords is used by criminals than by the agents, who also use them occasionally. Therefore, the choices appear random rather than follow any specific conventions.

#### 4.3. Analysis of two examples

As a last step towards conclusions, I would like to discuss two extracts from two episodes, one of each series, namely episode 2.14 of (M) *FBI* and episode 7.20 of (F) *Chicago PD*, which provide additional information with regards to the use of swearwords in the final products, and illustrate the choices made by the translators in a larger context. If we consider Table 4



again, episode 2.14 stands out due to the greater number of translation units characterized by intensification. In addition to example 4, other translation units provide relevant information concerning the use of swearwords by the two distinct groups of characters, i.e. criminals on the one hand and FBI agents on the other. Examples of criminals' translated utterances include 'Es una pena, joder' [It's a shame, fuck] for 'It's a damn shame'; 'como un puto perro' ['puto' being the masculine of 'puta', the phrase could be rendered as 'like a fucking dog']; 'Iba a acabar en la cárcel o, joder, muerto', which translates the source utterance 'I was gonna end up in jail, or hell, dead', where 'hell' is replaced by 'fuck'; and 'Esto no es un puto videoclip' [This is not a fucking videoclip] for 'This is ain't no music video', amongst others.

As for the language used by the FBI agents, 'I'm not blowing the case over a few punches' is translated as 'No vamos a joder el caso por unos golpes', where 'blow' is rendered as 'fuck'; 'All the lives that we ruin' becomes 'Todas las vidas que jodemos', where 'ruin' is translated as 'jodemos' [fuck]; and 'burn the case' is rendered as 'joder el caso' [fuck the case]. There are no reasons why episode 2.14 should include a greater number of swearwords, which points to the fact that the only tendency in the translated version of the series is precisely the lack of a tendency: the translator does not seem to adhere to any norms concerning the use of swearwords. Therefore, he does not seem to have a specific ideological agenda either, as neither the themes of the episode nor the language used in English warrant a different translational approach.

As for (F) *Chicago PD*, Table 3 points in the same direction. Thus, while in episodes 2, 4 and 8 the characters do not use many swearwords, the number of them is tripled in episodes 1, 7, 11, 12 and 17. Here again, the plots of these episodes do not necessarily require a different approach to the use and translation of swearwords. Therefore, as the season was translated by the same company, it might be possible that different translators resorted to different approaches or, alternatively, it may be that, as in the case of (M) *FBI*, they do not adhere to any norms or apply any specific strategies. However, this does not necessarily mean that the choices are inconsequential. The following extract from episode 7.20, in which police officers Adam and Kevin are talking with the widow of a victim, illustrates how the use of swearwords, however mild, can impact the portrayal of a character.

- (5)
- Adam: Ma'am, I'm Officer Ruzek. This is Officer Atwater. We'd like to ask you a few questions.  
 Ms Page: Excuse me?  
 Adam: About your husband, ma'am.  
 Ms Page: My husband's dead 'cause y'all shot his **ass**. So I ain't gonna be answering any questions. We understand how difficult this has to be, Mrs. Page. Please.  
 Ms Page: Amir, go with Auntie. Mama has to talk to the police. That little boy's daddy is dead.  
 Adam: We're very sorry for that. But right now, we have to find the two men that your husband went to visit. We believe they shot and killed a Chicago police officer.  
 Ms Page: You acting like it's just another day at the **damn** office, like somehow my husband deserved what he got.  
 Kevin: No. We're not saying that.  
 Ms Page: The **hell** you not! You come over to my house the day after my husband got shot for no **damn** reason, and you want me to help you?  
 Kevin: Ma'am, believe me, this is the hardest part of the job.  
 Ms Page: Your **damn** job cost my husband his life. And for what? He was going to visit his cousin, just going to drop off a pair of Air Jordans for his birthday. I saw that press conference. That **bitch** acted like Shawn was a criminal. Just another young brother who got mixed up with drugs, right? Well, that's a **damn** lie. Shawn ... was a good man, a good father. And he wasn't no **damn** gangbanger, so please ... can you get the **hell** out? Let me and my family grieve in peace, please. (CPD 7.20)
- Ruzek: Señora, soy el agente Ruzek. Él es el agente Atwater. Queremos hacerle unas preguntas.  
 Ms Page: ¿Perdón?  
 Ruzek: Sobre su marido.  
 Ms Page: Mi marido está muerto porque vosotros le disparasteis. Así que no voy a responder a ninguna pregunta.  
 Kevin: Entendemos lo difícil que tiene que ser, Sra Page, por favor.  
 Ms Page: Amir, vete con tu tía. Mamá tiene que hablar con la policía. El padre de ese niño está muerto.  
 Ruzek: Y lo sentimos mucho, pero tenemos que encontrar a los dos hombres a los que su marido visitaba. Dispararon y mataron a un agente de la policía de Chicago.  
 Ms Page: Os comportáis como si fuera un día más de trabajo, como si marido se mereciera lo que le ha pasado.  
 Kevin: No, está equivocada.  
 Ms Page: ¡Y una **mierda** que no! Venís a mi casa al día siguiente de que hayan disparado a mi marido sin motivos. ¿Y queréis que os ayude yo?  
 Kevin: Señora, esto es lo más duro del trabajo.  
 Ms Page: Vuestro trabajo le ha costado la vida a mi marido ¿y para qué? Estaba viendo a su primo. Iba a darle un par de zapatillas por su cumpleaños. He escuchado la rueda de prensa. Esa **zorra** ha pintado a Shawn como un criminal. Otro chaval joven negro que acaba metido en la droga ¿verdad? Pero es mentira. Shawn era un buen hombre, un buen padre y no era ningún bandido, así que, por favor, ¿podéis iros de aquí y dejarnos llorar su muerte en paz, por favor. Por favor, marchaos, ¡fuera!

In this scene, two police officers pay a visit to Ms Page, the widow of a black man killed by another police officer, being this a controversial issue in the United States. The woman releases her anger at Kevin and Ruzek by means of two swearwords. This increases to nine as her anger becomes rage in the final part of the exchange. As discussed above, while 'hell' and 'damn' are the most often omitted swearwords, they are also typically intensified by means of stronger items such as 'cojones', 'coño' and 'jodido'. This episode is the only one where the omissions of 'hell' and 'damn' outnumber the combination of preservation and intensification in other episodes, including the episode with the greater number of omissions, 18. These choices, either conscious or unconscious, have an impact on Ms Page's characterization, as she appears to be more in control of herself vis-à-vis the police officers than she really is in the source text.

## 5. Concluding discussion

Ten years ago, Soler Pardo (2013: p. 131) claimed that translators appeared to resort to two approaches when translating swearwords, namely, to soften them or to render them as they were (by which we should understand reproducing the pragmatic implications of the original, even if the words could not be translated literally). Their choice was dependent on the specifics of the target culture and the ‘moral situation of the time’. A few years later, I suggested another option for the Spanish context, i.e. translators seem to increase the number and force of the (swear)words used in the source texts. I called this ‘vulgarization hypothesis’ (Valdeón, 2020). This article aimed to test the hypothesis in two series belonging to the same genre and to compare the choices made by male and female translators. For this purpose, I selected two seasons of two series that were produced by the same company and released at the same time, one dubbed by female translators and the other one by a male translator. Both are mainstream television police dramas.

The results show that the number of swearwords is increased and/or intensified in both sets of programmes, confirming the tendency towards vulgarization. More importantly, the two sets of texts analyzed in this article have shown that the vulgarization hypothesis holds true for both female and male translators. Targets texts show an increase in the number of swearwords, whether translated by a single (M) individual (*FBI*) or a (F) team (*Chicago PD*). The Spanish version of (M) *FBI*, while maintaining or increasing the mild swearwords of the original, exhibits a smaller number of strong swearwords than (F) *Chicago PD*, translated by one or more female translators. Overall, the results show a trend towards increasing the strength of the original texts in both cases, in line with the results in a previous article (Valdeón, 2020). The differences identified in the study do not support the existence of a clear distinction between the solutions adopted by the male and the female, which seem to point in the same direction as studies that have highlighted that differences by male and female speakers as regards the use of swearwords are now more blurred than in the past.

This leads to some of the limitations of the paper. On the one hand, the study used two seasons of two series. In terms of similarities, the series were created by the same producers at approximately the same time. The genres and topics were also similar. On the other, although 39 episodes provide a sizeable corpus to analyze trends, future research might analyze complete series in order to establish or discard the existence of genre differences. Research could also consider the existence of individual or editorial agendas by carrying out interviews with the translators. Diachronic studies into how swearing was used in original Spanish products and in foreign dubbed material may also throw light into how swearing has evolved in audiovisual material in Spain. For instance, diachronic studies could compare the translation strategies of audiovisual products such as films and television series in the 1980s, 1990s and the twenty-first century to assess differences. Analyzing the language of original audiovisual materials in Spanish and comparing them with translated material may also provide relevant insights to ascertain whether the vulgarization process in dubbed Spanish is related to the features of Spanish audiovisual productions and the extent to which they are similar or differ.

## Declaration of competing interest

No conflict of interest.

## Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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