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TRANSLATION OF SWEARWORDS FROM ENGLISH INTO SPANISH AND ITALIAN

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction

Language is a complex phenomenon. Contrary to what it might seem, a language is more than just grammar, syntax, lexis and phonetics; it also embodies culture and the expression of manners and identity. For this reason, it is essential to distinguish between the semantic and the pragmatic meaning of expressions—that is, the difference between what an utterance explicitly states and what it implicitly conveys (Kroeger, 2022). In this regard, within the field of pragmatics, we encounter expressions that go beyond literal meaning, carrying emotions and attitudes, often intended to offend or provoke. A clear instance of this tendency is what we commonly refer to as “bad language”, or more specifically, “swearwords”.

The phenomenon of “bad language” is universal and includes vulgar words, colloquial expressions, incorrect usages, slang, jargon, and swearing, among others (Fernández Dobao, 2006, p. 222). Such language is generally avoided in conversations, as it is “considered discourteous, bad-mannered or just improper”, as well as “offensive, rude, vulgar and just unnecessary”, and it may potentially cause offence to the listener (p. 222). Nevertheless, these usages of language, especially swearing, remain frequent in everyday speech across cultures, precisely due to their offensive, provocative, and shocking potential. Indeed, these features are what make swearing an intriguing subject of study for scholars.

This study will examine the use of swearwords in an English TV series, and their translation into two different languages, Spanish and Italian, considering the translation strategies. Firstly, it is necessary to define the concept of “swearword”. As expected, the notion of “swearing” is controversial; being a subjective and open-ended concept, it is challenging to reach a single, universal definition. Yet, a definition of “swearword” needs to be provided as a starting point for this study.

First of all, terminology poses a challenge. Terms such as “swearwords”, “taboo words”, “obscene language”, and “offensive language” are often used indistinctly, but they are not necessarily synonymous (Valdeón, 2024a, p. 77). O’Driscoll defines offensive language as “any words or string of words which has or can have a negative impact on the sense of self and/or wellbeing of those who encounter it”, which may include swearwords but also other potentially offensive

words depending on the context (2020, p. 16, as cited in Valdeón, 2024a, p. 77). In contrast, “taboo” refers more broadly to language and topics deemed inappropriate in polite society, extending beyond swearwords to various cultural subjects (O’Driscoll, 2020, pp. 42-43, as cited in Valdeón, 2024a, p. 77).

Swearing, however, has distinct characteristics. Generally, “swearwords are strong words, emotion-loaded language which has the power to express anger, annoyance, contempt and a great range of strong emotions” (Fernández Dobao, 2006, p. 222). Andersson and Trudgill (1990, as cited in Fernández Dobao, 2006, p. 224) further described swearwords as desemanticized taboo expressions used emotively rather than literally, given that they do not have a referential meaning but an expressive one. Moreover, swearing is context-dependent and typically associated with informal registers (Pavesi and Formentelli, 2023, p. 126).

Taking this into account, over the decades, numerous definitions have been proposed to describe “swearwords”. Early definitions regarded swearing as “the act of verbally expressing the feeling of aggressiveness that follows upon frustration in words possessing strong emotional associations”, linking it to cursing, profanity, blasphemy, and obscenity (Montague, 1967, p. 105, as cited in Valdeón, 2020, p. 261). Similarly, swearing can also be associated with the transgression of societal taboos, which are culturally specific and often related to topics such as sex, religion, or bodily functions (Hughes, 1991, p. 5, as cited in Valdeón, 2020, p. 262). Other approaches define swearing as a form of bad language which includes any word or expression capable of causing offence in a polite conversation (McEnery, 2006, p. 2, as cited in Valdeón, 2020, p. 262).

Thus, following Andersson and Trudgill’s definition, swearing is “a type of language use in which the expression (a) refers to something that is taboo and/or stigmatised in the culture; (b) should not be interpreted literally; (c) can be used to express strong emotions and attitudes” (1990, p. 53, as cited in Fernández Dobao, 2006, p. 223). Similarly, Valdeón defines “swearwords” as “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” (2020, p. 262). For the purpose of this study, Valdeón’s (2020) definition will be adopted.

Therefore, this study will explore the translation of swearwords across languages, a relevant aspect within pragmatics. Firstly, a general overview of the translation of swearwords will be provided, considering different languages and various scholar perspectives. Next, the methodology and data used in this study will be presented. Finally, the Spanish and Italian translations of the swearwords of a TV series will be analysed, comparing them to the original English version and to each other, to reveal trends and predominant translation strategies.

2. The translation of swearwords. A general overview

Swearing has been extensively studied by scholars. Despite being a universal phenomenon present in all cultures, significant differences exist in how each language expresses swearing. For this reason, the translation of swearwords across languages is a complex task, requiring consideration of multiple factors.

Over the past few decades, researchers have increasingly focused on the translation of swearwords. Very soon, scholars recognized that swearwords constituted a distinct category inside a language's lexis. Indeed, swearwords are relevant in both semantics and pragmatics, since they are desemanticized words, characterized by possessing an implicit meaning aimed at expressing emotions and attitudes (Pavesi and Zamora, 2022). For this reason, the function, meaning and cross-linguistic translation of swearwords have become a compelling subject of study in pragmatics and translation studies. Moreover, as Valdeón (2024a, p. 75) has noticed, this interest has grown in the last decade with the increased presence and impact of swearwords in the public discourse.

As previously mentioned, swearwords are difficult to define and often lack direct equivalents in target languages. One of the earliest scholars to analyse this was Maria Sidiropoulou, who examined the translation of swearwords into Greek and found a tendency towards neutralization (1998, as cited in Valdeón, 2024a, p. 75). Similarly, Han (2008) observed that in some languages, such as Chinese, swearwords are often deleted or euphemized, aligning with Baker's (1993) "translation universal" principle, which suggests that translations tend to use more

conventional expressions (as cited in Valdeón, 2024a, p. 75). Nevertheless, it was soon proposed that one key consideration when translating swearwords is their original function. Julie Adam (1996, as cited in Valdeón, 2024a, p. 75) demonstrated that the translation of swearwords from English to French also depended on their function, as force and style could not always be transferred.

All this initial research focused though exclusively on written literary texts. Nonetheless, the rapid expansion of audiovisual media since the late 20th century, and especially in the early 21st century, has shifted the attention of scholars to the translation of swearwords in the media (Valdeón, 2024a, p. 76). The increasing prevalence of swearing in audiovisual contents and the relaxation of censorship norms concerning media language have greatly contributed to the increase of swearwords in public discourse (Valdeón, 2024a, p. 76). Beers Fägersten and Stapleton have highlighted that this shift is largely due to the rise of cable television and streaming services, which allow greater freedom in language use (2023, p. 94). Unlike traditional broadcast television, streaming platforms enable a higher frequency of swearwords, altering their distribution in cultural products.

Yet, when examining the translation of swearwords in audiovisual contexts, several factors must be considered. Whether dealing with dubbing or subtitling, audiovisual translation has unique characteristics. Indeed, there exist some constraints which limit the way a media product is translated or dubbed into the target language. On the one hand, technical (time and space) and linguistic constraints of subtitles need to be considered. The limitations of subtitling require synchronization between spoken dialogue, written text, and images, often involving condensation or omission of swearwords (Han and Wang, 2014, p. 2). Additionally, translators rely on the audience's shared knowledge and the context provided by the images of the media product to make subtitles more accessible, minimizing assumptions viewers need to make (Han and Wang, 2014, p. 4). Dubbing, on the other hand, must align with lip movements and overall audiovisual coherence, further influencing translation choices, like swearwords.

Besides, swearwords in audiovisual productions serve to "create realism, humor, consistency; to convey ideologies and control viewer emotion; and to

contribute to establishing settings, happening and characters" (Bednarek, 2019, p. 48, as cited in Beers Fägersten and Stapleton, 2023, p. 95). Swearwords also serve to indicate social identity, reinforcing stereotypes and sociolinguistic trends (Pavesi and Formentelli, 2023, p. 128). Thus, swearing can characterize individuals, enhance dialogue authenticity, and express emotions more realistically. Translators must therefore balance retaining the pragmatic functions of the original text with maintaining appropriate levels of formality, emotional intensity, and stylistic choices when translating swearwords across languages.

In this regard, recent research has noted a relaxation of restrictions on swearwords in audiovisual media. However, this tendency to loosen constraints may be counterproductive, as studies suggest that this higher frequency of swearwords on cable television does not align with standard broadcast patterns nor real-life usage. Beers Fägersten and Stapleton (2023) have analysed the interpersonal functions of swearing in the TV series *Only Murders in the Building* and have noted that the rise of streaming services has contributed to an increase in both the prevalence and the acceptability of swearing in U.S. television series. While swearwords are typically used to characterize specific types of speakers, this series features swearing among all characters, even in contexts where it might not be expected. This challenges the idea that swearing serves solely as a marker of identity. Instead, it is used for various purposes, including aggression, stylistic expression, and social affiliation (Beers Fägersten and Stapleton, 2023). Swearing is a distinctive feature of the series, and it is used for characterization and for stylistic and affiliative purposes. Ultimately, while the use of swearwords has increased over recent decades, this trend does not necessarily reflect reality. Rather than being driven by characterization, it is largely a product of the freedom from traditional content restrictions (Beers Fägersten and Stapleton, 2023, p. 94).

Otherwise, research indicates a universal trend towards reduction. This results in the standardization of swearing across languages, leading to either their toning down or complete omission (Chesterman, 2017, p. 301, as cited in Valdeón, 2020, p. 262). This phenomenon occurs in subtitling and dubbing, often causing pragmatic and stylistic impoverishment, and affecting character portrayal (Pavesi and Formentelli, 2023, p. 128). This aligns with the broader tendency

towards universalization and the replacement of unconventional words with more conventional ones, as argued by Toury's (1995) law of increasing standardization and Baker's (1996) normalization universal (as cited in Valdeón, 2024a, p. 76).

Yet, the omission of swearwords in translations appears to be culture-specific. Indeed, cross-linguistic differences and cultural norms of the target audience may explain the reduction of taboo words in translations (Pavesi and Formentelli, 2023, p. 128). In this sense, Han and Wang (2014, pp. 1-2) outline several reasons why swearwords are often toned down in subtitles: (a) they may not have a direct equivalent in the target language, (b) filler swearing is often omitted in subtitles, (c) certain words may not be considered taboo in the target language, and (d) the shift from oral to written form can amplify the perceived offensiveness of swearwords. While studies have confirmed this tendency in languages such as French, Swedish, Italian and Spanish, the phenomenon remains complex and dependent on multiple factors, making it difficult to generalize across all linguistic and cultural contexts (Valdeón, 2020, p. 262).

In fact, this universalization process is not entirely clear, as variations may exist across languages. In one of his studies, Valdeón (2020) introduced the "vulgarization hypothesis", which suggests a trend towards the intensification and increased frequency of swearwords in audiovisual translations into Spanish. Analysing the translation of four different TV series from English to Spanish, he found that swearwords were often added arbitrarily rather than being linked to the characterization of specific characters. Consequently, in some cases, translation strategies involve not only intensification but also an increase in the frequency of swearwords in the target text, even when these do not appear in the original one.

Next, as it can be deduced from above, culture plays a crucial role in the translation of swearwords, as swearing is inherently a cultural phenomenon. What is considered taboo varies across cultures, as swearwords directly reflect the values and beliefs of a given society (Andersson and Trudgill, 1990, p. 57, as cited in Fernández Dobao, 2006, p. 223). Consequently, the usage, frequency, intensity, and meaning of swearwords depend on cultural norms and on what each society considers taboo (Fernández Dobao, 2006, p. 223). In general,

Western societies have “taboos related to subjects such as sex, religion, intimate bodily functions and concealed parts of the body” (Fernández Dobao, 2006, p. 223). However, these semantic fields can vary across languages; for instance, Chinese has a wider range of swearwords, including those related to waste, animals, death, etc. (Han and Wang, 2014, p. 6). Additionally, tolerance of taboo differs among cultures, since Pavesi and Zamora (2022) have noted that Spanish generally tends to tolerate swearwords more than Italian. Thus, the acceptance of swearing varies not only between languages but also among speakers.

Cultural constraints also influence the translation of swearwords. In the case of Chinese, there is a notable tendency to tone down or significantly reduce the number of swearwords in subtitles when translating them from English (Han and Wang, 2014). As Han and Wang (2014) have noted, several factors contribute to this trend. In addition to the spatial and temporal limitations of subtitles—forcing translators to condense text, often omitting swearwords—linguistic differences between Chinese and English pose a challenge. Chinese has stricter syntactic rules regarding the placement of swearwords: in some cases, a direct equivalent may not exist, because English expressions may not be considered swearwords in Chinese. Furthermore, cultural and social constraints within Chinese society often lead translators, consciously or unconsciously, to omit certain taboo terms.

Similarly, the translation of swearwords into Arabic is highly culture specific. Abdelaal and Al Sarhani (2021) conducted a study on the subtitling of the film *Training Day* from English to Arabic and found that omission and euphemistic translation were the most common strategies. This is due to cultural restrictions in the Arabic language and society, where certain taboo terms are considered offensive or highly pejorative (p. 9). Additionally, differences in collocation between Arabic and English make, in many cases, literal translation difficult, if not impossible (p. 9). As a result, omission and euphemistic strategies are prioritized in the translation, despite not always maintaining the original meaning.

Fernández Dobao (2006) has also examined the translation of swearwords into Spanish, specifically in Tarantino’s film *Pulp Fiction*. Her study demonstrates that, in most cases, swearwords must be adapted when translated to preserve

their original stylistic effect. Since swearing is clearly a culture-specific feature, translators must carefully select words that maintain the emotion and attitude expressed in the original text. Thus, cultural differences influence the semantics, intensity, and intention of swearwords, significantly shaping translation choices.

Nonetheless, research on the translation of swearwords has primarily focused on linguistic aspects, often neglecting the pragmatic perspective, crucial in translation. Valdeón (2024a) addresses this gap by compiling and reviewing several studies that have analysed swearing from a pragmatic point of view, emphasising their functions rather than the translation strategies themselves. For instance, Marie-Noëlle Guillot (2023, as cited in Valdeón 2024a) has proved that subtitling follows its own pragmatic rules and that cultural differences significantly influence the translation of swearwords from English into German, French, Italian, and Spanish. Her findings indicate that German subtitles often resort to reduction, whereas domestication strategies are more common in the other three languages. Regarding Spanish, José J. Ávila-Cabrera (2023, as cited in Valdeón 2024a) highlights the challenges of rendering insults into another language due to differences in pragmatic force between English and Spanish. As a result, insults which cannot be translated literally tend to be domesticated. Similarly, Valdeón (2024b) has noted gender differences in translators concerning the use of swearwords, though these disparities seem to be gradually diminishing. In literary translation, Annjo K. Greenall (2024, as cited in Valdeón 2024a) notes that "borrowed" swearwords in Norwegian, when retranslated, often undergo shifts in pragmatic force. Additionally, Karavelos and Sidiropoulou (2024, as cited in Valdeón 2024a) have found that modern Greek translations tend to be more tolerant of offensive language, even more than modern English.

Likewise, Pavesi and Formentelli (2023) have examined the translation of swearing in dubbing into Italian. Their study shows that pragmatic force is a key factor in translation, as emotions and stylistic elements need to be considered. However, this force is often weakened due to structural differences between languages, which frequently leads to omissions. Their research indicates that only a portion of the original swearing is transferred into Italian, as both structural-functional categories and pragmatic meanings must be considered. Furthermore,

spatial constraints of dubbing often affect translation choices, forcing translators to tone down or omit swearwords. For them, these tendencies can be explained by the pragmatic implications of swearing, the impossibility of direct translation, and the limitations of the dubbing process. Thus, both structural-functional and pragmatic information need to be considered for the translation of swearwords.

Along similar lines, Beers Fägersten and Stapleton (2023) have analysed the interpersonal pragmatic functions of swearing in the TV series *Only Murders in the Building*. Swearing is used in this series with a full range of interpersonal and stylistic functions, such as expressing emotion, fostering affiliation, causing offence, displaying aggression, reinforcing social bonds, and contributing to characterization and narrative development. Swearing is often associated with specific speaker profiles—men, working-class individuals, younger speakers, and those using vernacular speech—and it typically occurs among speakers of similar social status and in contexts where there is minimal social distance. However, their study reveals that swearing is a distinctive feature of this series rather than a reflection of real-life speech patterns, as it appears in unexpected contexts and with an unusual frequency (Beers Fägersten and Stapleton, 2023).

Considering all the above, the translation of swearwords is a complex task that requires careful consideration of multiple factors. Despite having a similar meaning, translating swearwords can be challenging in specific contexts (Fernández Dobao, 2006, p. 224). This is due to the fact that swearwords do not always share the same pragmatic and grammatical functions across languages, and there may be differences in register, emphasis, frequency and meaning (Chiclana, 1988, p. 91, as cited in Fernández Dobao, 2006, p. 224). Additionally, swearwords are culture-specific, which affects what is considered taboo and their intensity across different cultures (Fernández Dobao, 2006, p. 223).

Indeed, Valdeón (2024a), in his pragmatic analysis of swearing translation over time and across various languages, concludes that cultural differences and specificities must be considered when translating swearwords. Consequently, the translator's role is to find an equivalent in the target language that preserves both the intensity and meaning of the original. Nevertheless, this is not always

possible, requiring translators to employ various strategies to compensate for the loss of the original expression. As Pavesi and Formentelli (2023) explain, “the lack of cross-linguistic equivalence for the syntactic functions that English taboo expressions perform causes translational problems that need to be solved creatively” (p. 128). As a result, translators need to find the most suitable equivalents between languages in order to preserve the force of the original.

Swearing is a complex phenomenon that requires translational, semantical and pragmatic considerations. As Pavesi and Formentelli observe, “swearing involves semantic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and cross-cultural dimensions. […] Grammatical, textual, and pragmatic functions of swearing need to be scrutinized to uncover coherence in translational choices” (2023, pp. 126-127). Therefore, cultural specificities, pragmatic aspects, and semantic meanings must be analysed to achieve an effective translation of swearwords across languages.

3. Hypothesis and objectives

The studies mentioned above suggest that swearing is a culture-specific phenomenon which involves both grammatical and pragmatic functions. Swearing is deeply influenced by cultural norms, reflecting attitudes, emotions, and social taboos. What is considered to be offensive or taboo varies significantly across languages, as do the social and moral implications of specific words.

Moreover, as previously discussed, the liberalization of swearword usage in the media is another key factor shaping translation tendencies. The loosening of restrictions regarding explicit language in the public sphere—alongside with the rise of streaming services—has contributed to an increase in both the frequency and intensity of swearing in media productions (Beers Fägersten and Stapleton, 2023; Valdeón, 2024a). Yet, research indicates a general tendency towards universalization when translating swearwords into another language (Fernández Dobao, 2006; Pavesi and Formentelli, 2023; Valdeón, 2020). Fernández Dobao (2006) argues that swearwords are retained whenever grammatical and functional constraints allow for it. Conversely, Valdeón (2020) has proved the

“vulgarization hypothesis”, which suggests a tendency to increase both the frequency and intensity of swearwords in Spanish translations.

Besides, as scholars have noted, English has a relatively limited range of swearwords but offers greater syntactic flexibility and established formulas for swearing. In contrast, Spanish and Italian employ more creative and varied swearwords, yet their syntactic placement is more restricted (Fernández Dobao, 2006). While English swearing is relatively constrained in terms of vocabulary, it allows for greater syntactic mobility, whereas Spanish and Italian swearwords typically occur in specific syntactic positions, but they are more creative.

Given these considerations, the present study aims to analyse the translational tendencies of an American TV series into two European languages, Spanish and Italian. Specifically, it examines how translators handle the distribution of English swearwords, and the strategies employed to adapt them. The following research questions are considered regarding the translation of swearwords, with a focus on the function and the translation strategies:

1. Are there differences in the way English, Spanish and Italian render and use swearing expressions?
2. Is there a tendency towards intensification in the translation of swearwords into Spanish and Italian?
3. Is swearing more socially tolerated in Spanish than in Italian, leading to a higher frequency and intensity of swearwords in Spanish translations?

Thus, the objective of this study is to gather insights into the similarities and differences in the translation strategies of swearword between Spanish and Italian. By examining translational patterns in audiovisual media, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how cultural and linguistic factors shape the adaptation of taboo language in different languages.

3.1. Data and methodology

For this study, the American TV series *Chicago P.D.* has been selected as a case study, focusing on Season 9, which was released in 2021 on NBC. The analysis covers the English, Spanish, and Italian versions of the series, all of which were

retrieved from the streaming platform *Amazon Prime Video*. However, it is important to note that while the show is available via streaming in all three languages, it is also broadcast on cable television in at least English and Spanish.

As for the methodology, all episodes of *Chicago P.D.* Season 9 were first watched in their original English version, and all instances of swearwords were systematically identified and recorded. The series was then watched in Spanish and Italian, and each translated instance of the English swearwords was noted. Moreover, when a swearword was added in the target language despite not being present in the original English version, they were also noted, and the original English utterances were retrieved too. Only scenes containing swearwords were transcribed, so that there is no overall word count for the translations.

It is worth mentioning that, as Spanish and Italian are Latinate languages, their word count tends to be slightly lower than English due to the constraints of audiovisual translation (Valdeón, 2020, p. 263). However, in this case, the Italian version tended to be more extensive than the English original at some points, while the Spanish translation was generally more concise.

To classify English swearwords and assess their intensity, McEnery's (2006) categorization of swearwords (as cited in Valdeón, 2020, p. 263) was followed:

Table 1. Categorization of English Swearwords

	Examples of words in the category
Very mild	*bloody, crap, damn, God, hell, sod, 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 classification included in *Table 1* serves as a general guide, acknowledging that not all listed words necessarily appear in the dataset, and additional swearwords may also be encountered. Furthermore, the perceived intensity of swearwords may vary depending on the context and the audience interpretation.

As for the identification of Spanish swearwords and the assessment of their intensity, I relied on Valdeón's categorization (2020, p. 264):

Table 2. Categorization of Spanish Swearwords

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

Categorization in *Table 2* is not exhaustive, as these swearwords may or may not appear, and other different ones may be encountered. Intensity can also vary, depending on the context, the usage and the hearer's potential offensiveness.

Finally, regarding Italian swearwords, I propose a tentative categorization of swearwords, following some recommendations about the vulgarity and intensity of some of these words (Maggi, 2020; Rossi, 2011):

Table 3. Categorization of Italian Swearwords

	Examples of words in the category
Very mild	*cretino, accidenti, maledizzione, imbecille, culo, cavolo, inferno, diavolo...*
Mild	*Dio, oddio, santo cielo…*
Moderate	*merda, fregarsene, casino, stronzata, incasinato...*
(Very) strong	*cazzo, puttana, figlio di puttana, stronzo, fottere, coglione, bastardo, porca troia, porca puttana, vaffanculo, cazzone...*

This classification intends to reflect the most common Italian swearwords, but other examples can be found in the series as well. As with other languages, this is not a fixed classification, as the intensity of swearwords is context-dependent.

Next, all English swearwords were analysed and classified regarding their functional category. For this purpose, I have followed Pavesi and Formentelli's (2023, p. 129) classification, in combination with Han and Wang's (2014, p. 7) categorization, which have been adapted for this study. In *Table 4*, a tentative

summary of the functions of English swearwords is proposed: adverbial boosters, emphatic adverbs, emphatic adjectives, expletives, emphatic Wh-word patterns, set phrases emphasisers, insults or derogatory terms, and intensifier suffixes.

Table 4. Functional categories of swearwords

Structural-functional category	Examples
Adverbial booster	*Paco made that pretty **damn** clear.*
Emphatic adverb	***Damn** good police work.*
Emphatic adjective	*He wasn't at one **damn** robbery.*
Expletive	***Damn** it!*
Emphatic Wh-word pattern	*What the **hell** are you doing?*
Set phrase emphasisers	*Get the **hell** out of my bar.*
Insults or derogatory terms	*We're finding this **son of a bitch**.*
Intensifier suffix	*That was the wrong**-ass** call.*

Finally, translation strategies were considered for each language too. In this case, Valdeón's (2020) categorization was taken as a starting point, and it was adapted to the aims of the current study. Thus, *Table 5* contains the categorization of the translation strategies analysed in this study: preservation, omission, toning down, addition, intensification and replacement by a swearword. All these strategies were considered independently in both Spanish and Italian.

Table 5. Translation strategies for swearwords

Translation strategies	Examples
Preservation or literal translation	*"fuck" is translated as "joder"*
Omission	*"fuck" is deleted*
Toning down	*"fuck" is replaced by "tirarse a"*
Intensification	*"damn" is translated as "jodido"*
Addition	*"joder" is added even if there is not a swearword in the original*
Replacement by a swearword	*"jodido" translated a neutral/informal word*

At this point, it should be noted that the process of translating swearwords poses several challenges. Due to linguistic differences, translators employ

various strategies, regardless of whether the original swearword is preserved or intensified, aligning with those identified by Fernández Dobao (2006):

- According to Newmark's (1988, p. 90, as cited in Fernández Dobao, 2006, p. 228) "compensation strategy", when a fixed swearing expression lacks a semantic or stylistic equivalent, translators may introduce a swearword elsewhere in the sentence to maintain its pragmatic effect.
- When a literal translation is not possible, an alternative swearing formula is often used to preserve the swearword (Fernández Dobao, 2006, p. 227).
- Similarly, in line with Newmark's "transposition strategy" (1988, p. 85, as cited in Fernández Dobao, 2006, p. 229), translators sometimes need to change the grammatical category of a swearword by relocating it in another part of the sentence to retain its impact.
- Finally, when no direct equivalent exists, translators may opt for a colloquial expression with a similar meaning and effect, even if it does not necessarily include a swearword (Fernández Dobao, 2006, p. 228).

4. Results and discussion

A total of 379 swearwords were identified in the English series. The Spanish version contains 263 swearwords, while the Italian version includes only 200. The results reveal slight differences between Spanish and Italian regarding translation strategies. *Table 6* summarizes the strategies used in both languages.

Table 6. Translation strategies. Results

	Spanish	Italian
Preservation	71 (16.7%)	92 (21.4%)
Omission	161 (38%)	229 (53.4%)
Toning down	3 (0.7%)	5 (1.2%)
Intensification	144 (34%)	52 (12.1%)
Addition	13 (3.1%)	13 (3%)
Replacement by a swearword	32 (7.5%)	38 (8.4%)
Total	424 (100%)	429 (100%)

As shown, omission is by far the most frequent translation strategy in Italian (53.4%), accounting for more than half of the cases, followed by preservation (21.4%). In contrast, Spanish exhibits a more balanced distribution, with omission (38%) and intensification (34%) occurring at similar rates. Notably, intensification is significantly more common in Spanish (34%) than in Italian (12.1%), with the former more than doubling the latter. Additionally, 88 swearwords were added compared to the English version, reflecting the frequent use of addition or replacement by a swearword in both languages: 38 swearwords (43%) were added in Spanish, 43 (49%) in Italian, and 7 (8%) in both languages.

Therefore, while intensification, preservation, and omission are used in both languages, intensification emerges as a particularly frequent strategy. This supports the “vulgarization hypothesis”, as many swearwords are systematically intensified in the Spanish and Italian versions. However, as previously discussed, this tendency is more pronounced in the Spanish translation, further confirming the idea that Spanish speakers are generally more tolerant of strong swearwords.

The study also confirms that English uses a limited range of swearwords, which can be used in a wider variety of syntactic positions. In contrast, both Spanish and Italian offer a broader repertoire of swearwords and a more creative use of them. Yet, their grammatical placement is more restricted; for instance, emphatic adverbs in English are not directly translated into Spanish or Italian.

Furthermore, the choice of translation strategy does not follow a consistent pattern. There is no clear rationale behind the decision to intensify or omit a swearword, as all characters swear across all versions and contexts. While Italian favours omission, making its tendency more predictable, Spanish displays a more even distribution of strategies, making it difficult to identify a clear trend.

4.1. English original

Concerning the English version, all instances of swearwords have been analysed. It has been proved that no instance of the words “fuck” and “shit” have been used in the English original version of the season. “Hell” is by far the most common swearword in the series (160, 42.2%). Other frequent swearwords are

“damn” (50, 13.2%), “God” (48, 12.7%), and “ass” (40, 10.6%). The whole list of swearwords includes “hell”, “son of a bitch”, “God”, “damn”, “ass”, “bitch”, “Jesus”, “screw”, “bastard”, “prick”, “dick”, “shoot”, “goddamn”, “idiot”, “crappy”.

Following the classification on *Table 1*, it has been noted that most English swearwords used in this series are mild. The function of all swearwords has been identified, as shown in *Table 6*; emphatic Wh-word patterns (29.6%), expletives (25.9%) and set phrases emphasizers (17.1%) are the most common functions.

Table 7. Functional categories of English swearwords. Results

Functional categories	
Adverbial booster	2 (0.5%)
Emphatic adverb	14 (3.7%)
Emphatic adjective	30 (7.9%)
Expletive	98 (25.9%)
Emphatic Wh-word pattern	112 (29.6%)
Set phrase emphasisers	65 (17.1%)
Insults or derogatory terms	42 (11.1%)
Intensifier suffix	16 (4.2%)
Total	379 (100%)

Hereafter, translation strategies will be analysed in both Spanish and Italian. Firstly, particular cases in each language will be examined independently, and then, a comparative of both translations will be proposed.

4.2. Translation strategies into Spanish

In the Spanish version, it has been noted that a wide list of swearwords has been used. The most frequent Spanish swearword in the series is “cojones” (61, 23.2%), followed by “joder” and its derivatives (46, 17.5%), “Dios” (40, 15.2%), “puto/a” and their derivatives (30, 11.4%), and “coño/a” (23, 8.7%). The complete list of Spanish swearwords includes “cojones”, “acojonar”, “joder”, “jodido/a”, “coño”, “coña”, “coñazo”, “puto/a”, “hijo de puta”, “cabrón”, “capullo”, “imbécil”, “malnacido”, “gilipollas”, “zorra”, “mierda”, “cagarla”, “cagarse en la puta”, “culo”, “pollas”, “huevos”, “pelársela”, “infierno”, “Dios”, and “hostia”.

It has been proved that all translation strategies are used in the Spanish version. Nonetheless, intensification and addition are the most common ones. There seems to be a tendency towards intensification, especially in the translation of the word “hell”, but also in swearwords such as “damn” and “Jesus”. Below, a detailed analysis of the translation strategies will be proposed.

Firstly, concerning expletives, they are either translated or omitted. The expletive “hell” tends to be omitted, but when it is preserved, it is translated as “joder”, a clear case of intensification (see examples (1) and (2)). The expletive “God” is normally preserved as “Dios”, “por Dios” or “Dios mío” (see example (3)), but in some case, like in example (4), it can be intensified as “joder”.

(1)

Jay Halstead:	**Hell**, the shots could’ve come from any residence in the neighbourhood.	Los disparos podrían provenir de cualquier casa de este barrio.

(2)

Celeste Nichols:	You know, they got the police, they got the TV, **hell**, they got social media all showing them the angry Black woman, the scary Black man, a Black kid shooting another Black kid.	Y está la policía, está la tele. ¡**Joder**, tienen redes sociales! Todos les muestran a mujeres negras enfadadas, a hombres negros asustados, a niños negros disparando a otros niños negros.

(3)

Kim Burgess:	**Oh, my God**, what if they’re right though? What if I’m not good for Makayla?	**Dios**, ¿y si tienen razón? ¿Y si no soy buena para Makayla?

(4)

Anna Avalos:	**Oh my God. Jesus**, why did you come here? Oh, **God**. I don’t know what to do, I don’t know what to do, I think I need help.	**¡Joder, joder! ¡Joder!** ¿Por qué has venido aquí? **¡Dios mío!** ¡No sé qué hacer, no sé qué hacer! Creo que necesito ayuda.

Accordingly, “damn (it)” is normally preserved, but it is very frequently intensified with expressions such as “mierda”, “joder”, as it can be seen in example (5). Indeed, some expletives in English, like “damn!” or “goddamn!”, do not translate literally very frequently in Spanish, so we need to find other

expletives more commonly used in Spanish, like “mierda” or “joder”, to express this anger, surprise, frustration, etc. (Fernández Dobao, 2006). Intensification strategies also occur with the word “Jesus”, which is very frequently translated in Spanish as “joder”, as in example (6). We encounter other expletives, such as “screw”, which is also normally translated as “joder” (see example (7)).

(5)

Kevin Atwater:	**Damn**, Lewis, you didn’t know where you were driving?	¡**Joder**, Lewis! ¿Sabías a dónde ibais?

(6)

Alanah:	His name’s Theo Morris. He’s Makayla’s uncle on her paternal side.	Se llama Theo Morris. Es tío de Makayla por parte de padre.
Kim Burgess:	Oh, **Jesus.**	**¡Joder!**

(7)

Elliot Knox:	**Screw you**, man.	**¡Que te jodan**, tío!

Secondly, Wh-word patterns with intensifying swearwords are either omitted or translated. In English, the only swearword used in this structure is “hell”. When it is translated, in Spanish it is always rendered as “cojones” or “coño”, as shown in examples (8) and (9). This a systematic intensification strategy regarding this specific swearword in this specific grammatical context. There seems to be no reason for this tendency, neither for the choice of either omitting or including it.

(8)

Anna Avalos:	What the **hell** was that? Where were you guys?	¿Qué **cojones** ha pasado? ¿Dónde estabais?

(9)

Jay Halstead:	It’s clear.	Despejado.
Dante Torres:	Clear.	Despejado.
Jay Halstead:	Where the **hell** is this guy? Where the **hell** did he go?	¿Dónde **coño** se ha metido? ¿Dónde **cojones** ha ido?

Likewise, the word “hell” from emphatic Wh-word patterns can also be translated as “puto/a”, another case of intensification. This is included in example (10), which also involves a transposition strategy, since the swearword becomes

an adjective (Fernández Dobao, 2006, p. 229). Moreover, the replacement of a neutral word (“come on, no”) by a swearword (“joder”) can also be spotted here.

(10)

Hank Voight:	I got it. I got it. **Oh, God.** Come on, no. You’re not dying like this. Hang on! Where the **hell**’s that ambo?	Yo me encargo. Quita. **Dios mío. Joder**, venga, no-no te vas a morir así. ¡Aguanta! ¿Y la **puta** ambulancia? ¡Aguanta!

Furthermore, example (11) embodies an interesting case of intensification. The empathic Wh-word swearword “hell” is intensified as “pollas”. This choice might be because the character who utters it is a Latin gang member, and, in order to characterise him, translators may have used this strong word.

(11)

Dante Torres:	Foot soldier. Not anymore.	Hacías el trabajo sucio. Pero ya no.
Alex Sanchez:	What the **hell** you talking about?	¿De qué **pollas** estás hablando?

Then, as for insults, the tendency is to preserve them. “Son of a bitch” is normally translated as “hijo de puta”, like in example (12); it can be also rendered as “cabrón” (see example (13)) or even omitted. Similarly, “prick” is either preserved and translated as “gilipollas”, or intensified as “cabrón”, like in example (14). Preservation prevails for “bitch”, translated as “zorra” (see example (15)).

(12)

Jay Halstead:	That really just happen?	¿Acaba de pasar?
Hank Voight:	We’re gonna have this **son of a bitch.**	Vamos a pillar a ese **hijo de puta.**

(13)

Adam Ruzek:	Then we had to find the **son of a bitch** who shot her.	Teníamos que dar con el **cabrón** que le disparó.

(14)

Trudy Platt:	So, who knows? Maybe we got lucky and somebody shot this **prick.**	Así que, quien sabe. Lo mismo alguien ha disparado a ese **cabrón**.

(15)

Luis Cortes:	**Bitch**, you planted that! That’s not mine!	¡**Zorra**, tú has puesto esa **mierda** ahí! ¡Eso no es mío!

As for fixed expressions containing swearwords, several strategies can be found. In some cases, equivalent swearing expressions are provided in Spanish, as in example (16). Nonetheless, when there is not a similar swearing expression, and they cannot be translated literally, translators have to either omit them or to find equivalent expressions in Spanish (Fernandez Dobao, 2006, p. 228). Thus, it is frequent to add the swearword in another part of the sentence and with another grammatical function to compensate its effect (see example (17)).

(16)

Kevin Atwater:	I'm also the cat that wants to buy five kilos up off of you direct. I'm getting real with you I got the kind of clientele. Boy, they **don't even give a damn** that you cuttin' the dope.	Y también te quiero comprar cinco kilos del tirón. Voy muy en serio. Y, créeme, tengo los clientes apropiados, tío. A ellos **se la pela** que la cortes.

(17)

Tovar:	**Get the hell out of** my bar.	Vete de mi **puto** bar.

Similarly, the swearword "ass" poses problems for its translation. In some cases, the equivalent "culo" can be preserved. Yet, in other fixed expressions, literal translation is not possible; translators may omit them or find equivalent sentences, with or without swearwords, so that the original sense and force can be maintained (see examples (18) and (19)). Indeed, we find some instances of the expression "one's ass", meaning "one's self" in American English (Fernández Dobao, 2006, p. 235); the lack of an equivalent in Spanish complicates the translation, forcing the translator to find alternative formulas (see example (20)).

(18)

Kevin Atwater:	Because if I **whooped your ass**, I'd be wrong, wouldn't I?	Porque si te **meto una hostia**, me arrepentiré, ¿no?
Jimmy:	I warned you, man.	Ya te lo advertí.
Kevin Atwater:	'Cause I trusted you, man, and you just got me **ripped off**, dog.	Me he fiado de ti, y acabas de hacer que me timen, **joder.**
Jimmy:	I told you that Tovar is unpredictable **as hell**, right?	Ya te dije que Tovar es impredecible, ¿no?

(19)

Kim Burgess:	How is that possible?	¿Cómo es posible?

Kevin Atwater:	‘Cause my dumb **ass** never told her. I lied.	Soy un **imbécil**, y nunca se lo dije. Le mentí.

(20)

Hank Voight:	Well, get his **ass** down here. Now.	Vale, lo quiero aquí. Y ahora.

Regarding emphatic adjectives, the general tendency is to omit them. For instance, “damn” tends to be omitted, and, if translated, it is frequently rendered as “puto/a” (see example (21)). In the case of the “goddamn”, it is commonly translated as “puto/a”, as in example (22). Furthermore, two instances of “crappy” are found, which are translated as the prepositional phrase “de mierda” (see example (23)), since they cannot be translated as adjectives in that context.

(21)

Kevin Atwater:	You handed him your clients, then you handed them their access codes, and then you handed him your husband, right? Right? Cause that’s what the **hell** it looks like based off all these **damn** IDs. I mean, if I’m the one that’s looking at the facts, you about as good as gone unless you tell me otherwise. Who is he? Who’s the man doing all these **damn** robberies with you?	Le dijiste a quién robar. Le diste las claves de acceso y después le entregaste a tu marido, ¿verdad? ¿Verdad? Es lo que yo entiendo con todos estos **putos** carnés. Y viendo las cosas como están, estás acabada a menos que hables. ¿Quién es? ¿Quién está haciendo todos estos **putos** robos contigo?

(22)

Hailey Upton:	So since I’m very obviously not under arrest, I’m going back to work now. I’m a great cop. I’m in the middle of working a murder, and you’re wasting my **goddamn** time.	Así que, dado que no estoy detenida, voy a volver al trabajo ahora. Amo mi trabajo. Estoy resolviendo un asesinato, y tú me estás haciendo perder el **puto** tiempo.

(23)

Kim Burgess:	There’s Gus Thompson. He owned a couple of lending stores. He gave Micah a **crappy** loan at a **crappy** rate.	Gus Thomson. Dueño de unas casas de préstamo. Le dio a Micah un préstamo **de mierda** con unos intereses **de mierda.**

Similarly, emphatic adverbs are mainly omitted. This functional category of English swearwords cannot be used in Spanish; thus, swearwords need to be

adapted and placed in another part of the sentence (Fernández Dobao, 2006, p. 228). Examples (24) and (25) portrait this, as swearwords are either changed to another functional category or omitted. Furthermore, the few adverbial boosters we encounter are omitted, since they do not work in Spanish (see example (26)).

(24)

Walker North:	**Damn** good police work, which is either tragic or ironic. I'm not sure which.	Es un trabajo **cojonudo**, lo cual puede ser trágico o irónico. No estoy muy seguro.

(25)

Hank Voight:	Oh, really? 'Cause that is **damn** sure you working the door at his nightclub.	¿En serio? Porque resulta que este eres tú trabajando en la puerta de su club.

(26)

Kim Burgess:	I'm good at my job. I help people, and I'm proud that my kid sees me doing that. I am a mess, and I make mistakes. Makayla, that's something that I've done pretty **damn** right.	Soy buena en mi trabajo. Ayudo a la gente y estoy orgullosa de que mi niña lo sepa. Soy un desastre y cometo errores, pero con Makayla lo he hecho bastante bien.

Finally, the intensifier suffix "-ass" is very frequent in the English version, and it poses several problems for its translation, since this type of construction of swearwords is not possible in Spanish. Thus, these swearwords are normally omitted; if translated, they are generally intensified. To this end, translators need to use "transposition strategies", since the presence of the swearword needs to be compensated in another part of the sentence with a different syntactical function (Fernández Dobao, 2006, p. 229). Example (27) shows how two suffixes are translated following an intensification strategy as "de mierda" y "puta".

(27)

Kevin Atwater:	Yeah, but nobody else is looking at 15 years minimum in a cold-**ass** cell that we will pick especially for you unless you tell us who you ran your big-**ass** mouth to.	Sí… Pero los demás no se enfrentan a un mínimo de 15 años en una celda **de mierda** que elegiremos para ti. Así que dinos con quién te fuiste de la **puta** lengua.

Furthermore, swearwords are also added randomly at some points or used to replace neutral expressions in the Spanish translation. Some examples of

added swearwords are “cabrón”, “joder”, “mierda”, “coño”, “gilipollas”, “cojones”, “por dios”, etc. They can replace neutral expressions, serve as compensation strategies, or be added without an apparent reason (see examples (28), (29) and (30)). It is worth noting that when this occurs, the added swearwords are all strong and vulgar, which is itself an example of the vulgarization of the translation.

(28)

Hank Voight:	Got a live one here. Lobbed a few at me.	Aquí hay uno vivo. El **cabrón** me ha disparado.

(29)

Adam Ruzek:	Yo, let’s do this deal.	Tío, cerremos el trato.
Wade:	Not with this. Open your mouth.	**A la mierda**. Abre la **puta** boca.
Olivia:	Wade…	Wade…
Wade:	Open your **damn** mouth!	¡Que abras la **puta** boca!

(30)

Hank Voight:	Yeah, chances are, the FBI knows it’s not true. They’re just dropping it in our laps to see who flinches.	Ya, mi hipótesis es que el FBI sabe que no es verdad, pero nos lo han soltado para ver quien se **acojona**.

Eventually, all characters swear in the Spanish version, and intensification strategies can be found in all of them, suggesting that swearing does not serve a stylistic purpose. Notably, it has been noticed that there is a lack of consistency in the translation strategies for swearwords in the Spanish version. For example, the word “hell”, which primarily functions as an intensifier in Wh-questions, is either omitted or translated as “cojones” or “coño”. While “cojones” appears more frequently, “coño” is found only in isolated cases throughout different chapters. However, in Chapter 18, except for some instances of “cojones”, “hell” is consistently translated as “coño”. Although this chapter introduces a new character, a Latin rookie policeman, the use of “coño” is not limited to him, as many other characters use it too. This suggests that there is no consistency in the translation of “hell” and, more generally, of swearwords in the series, and that translation is not character-driven. Thus, translators do not seem to follow a fixed pattern concerning the translation of swearwords, accounting for choices of omission, intensification or preservation in the Spanish version of the series.

4.3. Translation strategies into Italian

As for the Italian version of the series, this study has proved that there is an extensive list of swearwords that are used across chapters. Indeed, “cazzo” (46, 23%) and “(od)Dio” (44, 22%) are by far the most frequent swearwords in the Italian series, followed by “fregare” (18, 9%), “(figlio di) puttana” (16, 8%), and “bastardo” (15, 7.5%). Yet, the whole list of Italian swearwords includes: “cazzo”, “puttana”, “figlio di puttana”, “stronzo/a”, “merda”, “cavolo”, “casino”, “sputtanarci”, “bastardo”, “maledizzione”, “accidenti”, “porca troia”, “inferno”, “culo”, “diavolo”, “oddio”, “Dio”, “incasinate”, “fregare”, “fottere”, “fregarsene”, “cretino”, “sfigato”, “spara cazzate”, “stronzata”, “santo cielo”, “porca puttana”, “imbecille”, “coglione”, “schifo”, “puttanelle”, “cazzone”, “vaffanculo”, and “palle”.

Regarding the Italian translation of the series, several translation strategies can also be identified. Clearly, there is a general tendency towards omission. Nevertheless, when translated, swearwords tend to be preserved or intensified. Next, a detailed analysis of these strategies in the Italian version will be provided.

In the first place, expletives are very frequently preserved in translation. Still, we encounter many instances of omission, but just a few cases of intensification. The expletive “(oh my) God” is preserved and translated most of the time as “(oh mio) Dio” or “oddio” (see example (31)). In the case of “damn”, several strategies are possible: omission (see example (32)); preservation, translating it as “malezicione” (see example (33)); and intensification, rendering it “merda” or “cazzo” (see example (34)). Nonetheless, the expletive “hell” tends to be omitted due to the difficulty posed for its translation into Italian, as in example (35).

(31)

Trudy Platt:	**Oh, God**. Okay, we got to get him up.	**Oh, Dio!** Forza! Dobbiamo sollevarlo.

(32)

Kevin Atwater:	**Damn**, Lewis, you didn’t know where you were driving?	Lewis, sapevi dove stavi andando?

(33)

Kevin Atwater:	Tovar has a bounty out on your **ass**, and I can protect you. You’re gonna be a lot	Tovar vuole il tuo cadavere. Con me sarai più al sicuro. Può proteggerti, Jimmy. Devi

	safer with me. Trust me, okay? Believe that. But, Jim… Jimmy? **Damn**.	credermi. Puoi fidarti di me, davvero. Jimmy? **Maledizione!**

(34)

Kevin Atwater:	**Damn**. It's like a month's worth of security footage.	**Cazzo!** Video di sicurezza di un mese almeno.

(35)

Jay Halstead:	**Hell,** the shots could've come from any residence in the neighbourhood.	Eh, può essere stato chiunque nel quartiere a sparare.

It is also worth noting the use of the expletive "accidenti!" several times. This is a widespread Italian expression, and it would be an equivalent for "hell", "jesus" or "damn", but without a negative or swearing connotation (Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2003a). It is introduced as a toning down strategy and even added in certain contexts where there is no swearword in the original version to give reality to the Italian speech. Similarly, we may encounter the addition of the swearword "cavolo!", a euphemism of "cazzo!" (Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2003b). Example (36) illustrates the use of "accidenti" and "cavolo".

(36)

Kim Burgess:	No Raptor.	Il Raptor non c'è.
Kevin Atwater:	No **damn** Raptor, no Ruzek. Still nothin' but static on the COH.	Già, e nemmeno Ruzek. E non c'è segnale dal microfono.
Kim Burgess:	Calling him on his undercover phone. Straight to voicemail, **damn** it. **Damn** it. **Damn** it.	Lo chiamo sul telefono di copertura. C'è la segretaria. Staccato. **Accidenti!**
Kevin Atwater:	Okay.	**Cavolo!**

As for emphatic Wh-word patterns, swearwords tend to be either omitted or intensified, since "English empathic Wh-word patterns find a direct formulaic equivalent in Italian […] which may favour the transfer" (Pavesi and Formetelli, 2023, p. 131), swearwords in these structures tend to be translated, even if omission can also be found. "Hell" is translated as "diavolo", its Italian equivalent, only a few times (see example (37)). By contrast, intensification strategies are far more frequent, being "cazzo", a stronger and more vulgar Italian swearword, the prevailing translation, like in example (38) (Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana,

2003c). There seems to be no clear explanation for this tendency, since neither characterization purposes nor stylistic choices account for the omission or intensification of these structures in each case.

(37)

Hank Voight:	Look, who the **hell** is the offender? He's gonna be in her life. In one of 'em.	Chi **diavolo** è quest'uomo? Farà parte della sua vita, di una delle tre.

(38)

Anna Avalos:	What the **hell** are we doing? If I didn't know you, I'd think you were luring me out here to put a bullet in my head.	Che **cazzo** succede? Se non ti conoscessi, penserei che mi hai attirata qui per uccidermi.

Next, concerning insults and derogatory terms, preservation strategies are favoured, since literal translation of these swearwords are possible in most cases. For instance, "son of a bitch" is commonly preserved and translated as "figlio di puttana" or "bastardo"; both are of equal intensity in Italian, and very close to the English swearword (see examples (39) and (40)). As for "bitch", it is translated as "puttana" or "stronza", another case of preservation (see examples (41) and (42)).

(39)

Adam Ruzek:	And what about **the son of a bitch** who shot her? That Roy? We grab him up?	E quel **figlio di puttana** che le ha sparato, Roy? Lo abbiamo presso?

(40)

Jimmy Chavez:	I spoke to my brother's girl. This **son of a bitch** shot him, right?	Ho sentito la donna di Nando. Questo **bastardo** gli ha sparato, vero?

(41)

Mark Irwin:	You come any closer, I'll shoot this **bitch**. I'll shoot you.	Avvicinati di un altro passo, e sparerò a questa **puttana**. E sparerò a voi.

(42)

Luis Cortes:	What are you waiting for, **bitch**, let's roll.	Che aspetti, **stronza**? Andiamo!

There is also a tendency towards intensification concerning the word "prick", which is usually translated as "bastardo" or "stronzo", stronger words closer to

“son of a bitch” (see example (43)). We also encounter instances of a change in the functional category of the swearword, so that an insult becomes an expletive. In example (44), the insult “son of a bitch”, becomes the expletive “poca puttanna” in Italian; it has a similar meaning, but it removes all the personal connotations towards the other. Still, we can also encounter instances of omission, but there is not a clear explanation for omission occurring in certain cases and not in others.

(43)

Hank Voight:	Matter of fact, the whole hard drive was destroyed, but if you find this **prick**, we need to search him for a cell phone and we need to bag it.	Tutto l’hard drive è stato distrutto. Ma, se trovate quel **bastardo**, dobbiamo fare il modo di prendere il suo cellulare e imbustarlo.

(44)

Adam Ruzek:	He said white car, Charlie. He mentioned a white car when he was trying to give me other suspects. **Son of a bitch.**	Charlie ha parlato di un Honda bianca quando provava a suggerirmi altri sospettati. **Ah, porca puttana!**

As regards swearing fixed expressions, the trend is to omit them in Italian. As Pavesi and Formentelli (2023, p. 132) have noted, the lack of correspondent structures in Italian causes the deletion of many of these swearing expressions. In examples (45) and (46), it can be noted that translators include equivalent non-swearing expressions. Nonetheless, some instances in which the swearword is preserved can also be encountered; in them, translators have opted for a similar expression aiming at retaining the original force and meaning (see example (47)). Similarly, expressions with the word “ass” are either translated or omitted, being the latter more common. It can be translated as “culo” if it fits the sentence, but normally translators need to find alternative formulas (see example (48)).

(45)

Tovar:	**Get the hell out of** my bar.	Vatene del mio bar.

(46)

Hank Voight:	All right. So knock-and-talk the **hell** out of them.	Allora, date, fateli parlare.

(47)

DeShawn Baker:	**Go to hell**.	**Va’ all’ inferno!**

(48)

Hank Voight:	All right, let's just do everything we can in 48. Dig into every aspect of his life. Do a trash pull. And press the **hell** out of him. Let's just **lie our asses off**. Let's go.	Impegnamoci al massimo per le prossime 48 ore. Indagate su ogni aspetto della sua vita. Rovistate nella spazzatura. E tenetelo sotto pressione. Non possiamo rilassarci. Mettetevi al lavoro!

When it comes to emphatic adjectives, they are mainly omitted in Italian (see example (49)). Nonetheless, preservation and intensification can also occur, as in example (50). It has been noted that, in line with Pavesi and Formentelli's (2023, p. 134) findings, the translation of these words occurs mainly in highly conflictual contexts, in order to maintain the aggressiveness of the utterance.

(49)

Kevin Atwater:	And all of Knox's alibis check out. He wasn't at one **damn** robbery.	Gli alibi sono confermati. Knox non era a nessuna delle rapine.

(50)

Wade:	See, but what I think is… I think you're a **goddamn** cop. What do ya say, Officer? Hmmm?	Ma ho il sospetto che tu sia un **fottuto** poliziotto. Che mi dici, agente? Hmm?

Similarly, emphatic adverbs and adverbial boosters are all omitted in Italian. Since these categories do not have a direct structural correspondence in the target language (Pavesi and Formentelli, 2023, pp. 135-136), they are completely omitted in the Italian translation (see examples (51) and (52)). Moreover, these categories are not compensated in the translation by adding other swearwords, but by introducing non-swearing expressions (Fernandez Dobao, 2006, p. 228).

(51)

Hank Voight:	Oh, really? 'Cause that is **damn** sure you working the door at his nightclub.	Ah, davvero? Perché so per certo che lavori alla porta del suo nightclub.

(52)

Kim Burgess:	I'm good at my job. I help people, and I'm proud that my kid sees me doing that. I am a mess, and I make	In quello che faccio sono brava. Aiuto alle persone e sono felice che mia figlia lo sappia. Sono un disastro e

	mistakes. Makayla, that's something that I've done pretty **damn** right.	commetto errore. Ma Makayla è l'unica cosa su cui non ho sbagliato.

Finally, the suffix "-ass" is added in English after several adjectives to modify their intensity and turn them into swearing expressions. In Italian, these instances are mainly omitted, since there are no equivalent words in most of the cases, like in example (53). Nonetheless, it is also common to find examples of transposition strategies (Fernández Dobao, 2006, p. 229), so that the swearword is added in another part of the sentence, with another function (see example (54)).

(53)

Kevin Atwater:	But I know he's had a hard**-ass** time holding down a job for longer than six months.	Ma ha avuto problemi nel tenersi un lavoro per più di sei mesi.

(54)

Kevin Atwater:	Yeah, but nobody else is looking at 15 years minimum in a cold-**ass** cell that we will pick especially for you unless you tell us who you ran your big-**ass** mouth to.	Sì, ma tu sei l'unico a rischiare minimo 15 anni in una cella scelta appositamente per te. A meno che non mi dici con chi hai aperto quella **cazzo** di bocca.

Additionally, we can spot utterances where swearwords are added despite not being in the original English version, and where neutral expressions are replaced by swearwords in Italian. Indeed, the word "fregare", which means "to rip off", "to fool", "to screw", and its derivative "fregarsene", meaning "to give a damn", "not to care", are used in Italian as colloquial expressions and even as swearwords in certain contexts (Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2003d).They are frequently added to replaced neutral expressions, or even added randomly, as in example (55). It is also frequent to encounter the addition of the following swearwords: the vulgar Italian word "casino", which would mean "mess"; "cazzo", meaning "fuck"; "merda", which means "shit"; "stronzata", meaning "bullshit" or "bollocks"; "sputtanare", meaning "to fuck up" (see examples (56) and (57)) (Maggi, 2020; Rossi, 2021). The addition of all these swearwords, like "fregare" and "casino", which are not particularly strong in certain contexts, may account for the aim of rendering the Italian version more colloquial.

(55)

Hailey Upton:	A young boy was kidnapped and held in that house. He was tortured and abused terribly. And he's not the only one. We found seven other bodies.	Un bambino è stato rapito e imprigionato proprio in quella casa. È stato torturato e seviziato orribilmente. E non è l'unico. Purtroppo abbiamo trovato anche i corpi di sette bambini.
Larkin:	What?	Cosa?
Hailey Upton:	So forgive me if I don't care that all you've had is a Coca-Cola.	Quindi, scusi, ma **non me ne frega un cazzo** se le hanno dato soltanto una Coca-Cola.

(56)

Hank Voight:	Anna? Anna? Oh, man. Anna, are you here? Anna?	Anna? Anna? **Cazzo!** Anna, sei qui? Anna!

(57)

Hank Voight:	Hailey, you gotta calm down.	Hailey, tu debbi calmarti. Chiaro?
Hailey Upton:	I'm just trying to understand what the plan is. I mean, maybe I'm missing it, but chasing Mark, the one person that can put us away, doesn't exactly seem like a genius strategy to me.	Voglio soltanto capire qual è il piano. Mi sarò persa qualcosa ma cercare Mark, l'unico che può **sputtanarci** non è una strategia geniale, secondo me.

Finally, as with the Spanish version, it must be noted that there is not an apparent reason that may account for the decision of preserving, omitting and intensifying swearwords. All characters swear too in the Italian version, and the distribution of translation strategies does not seem to follow a fixed pattern.

4. 4. Comparison between Spanish and Italian

After having analysed the strategies and tendencies in each language, it is necessary to draw a comparison between both translations. In general terms, preservation is common in both languages, but the Spanish version tends to intensify more swearwords, whereas in the Italian translation omission prevails.

Firstly, expletives are typically preserved in both languages. Even if intensification strategies may occur in both cases, they are far more common in

Spanish; in Italian, omission strategies are much more frequent. Thus, in general, expletives are stronger and more frequent in Spanish (see example (58)).

(58)

Alanah:	His name's Theo Morris. He's Makayla's uncle on her paternal side.	Se llama Theo Morris. Es tío de Makayla por parte de padre.	Si chiama Theo Morris. È lo zio di Makayla dal lato paterno.
Kim Burgess:	**Oh, Jesus.**	**¡Joder!**	**Oh, santo cielo!**

Next, regarding emphatic Wh-word patterns, omission and intensification are equally used in both languages. Indeed, like in example (59), these structures containing the word "hell" in English are usually omitted, but when they are translated, they are rendered as "cojones" or "coño" in Spanish and "cazzo" in Italian—we may encounter some instances of "diavolo" in Italian, but they are not the norm. Still, intensification is more common in the Spanish version.

(59)

Hank Voight:	5021, where the **hell** is my ambo?	5021, ¿dónde **cojones** está la ambulancia?	5021, dove **cazzo** è l'ambulanza?

Similarly, insults and derogatory terms are usually translated in both languages. In this case, preservation or literal translation is the most frequent strategy in both languages, like in example (60). This is due to the fact that the context normally allows for translation and strong insults are common in both cultures. Yet, omission strategies may also be found in both languages.

(60)

Hailey Upton:	No, **son of a bitch** kept him in the darkness or blinded him with a flashlight whenever he came to visit.	No, el **hijo de puta** lo cegaba con una linterna cuando iba a verle.	No, il **bastardo** lo teneva al buio o lo accecava con una torcia quando lo andava a trovare.

As for emphatic adjectives, the general tendency is towards omission. However, there are also instances of preservation, which are far more frequent in Spanish. In these cases, like in example (61), intensification usually occurs, being more common in conflictual situations.

(61)

Hailey Upton:	So since I'm very obviously not under arrest, I'm going back to work now. I'm a great cop. I'm in the middle of working a murder, and you're wasting my **goddamn** time.	Así que, dado que no estoy detenida, voy a volver al trabajo ahora. Amo mi trabajo. Estoy resolviendo un asesinato, y tú me estás haciendo perder el **puto** tiempo.	E visto che è chiaro che non sono in arresto, vorrei tornare al lavoro adesso. Sono un bravo agente. Sto indagando su un caso di omicidio. E Lei mi sta facendo perdere tempo.

Concerning emphatic adverbs, omission is the most common strategy in both languages, since, as discussed above, there are no structural equivalents for these functions. Nonetheless, in some cases in Spanish, these swearwords may be preserved, and even intensified, by adding them in another part of the sentence with another function, normally as adjectives. In example (62), the Spanish sentence is adapted so that "damn" becomes the adjective "puta"; by contrast, in Italian, it becomes "bravissimo", a non-swearing translation.

(62)

Dante Torres:	Before I beat my stepdad… I called the police… six times. And they didn't help. That's why I wanna be a cop. And I'd be **damn** good at this job.	Antes de pegar a mi padrastro, llamé a la policía… seis veces. Y no me ayudaron. Por eso quiero ser policía. Y haría **de puta madre** este trabajo.	Prima di picchiare il mio patrigno... ho chiamato la polizia... sei volte. Ed è stato inutile. Per questo voglio essere un poliziotto. E sarò bravissimo in questo lavoro.

As for set phrase emphasisers, omission is the most common strategy in both languages. Still, examples of preservation and intensification may be found, being the latter more common in Spanish (see example (63)).

(63)

Adam Ruzek:	Listen to me. You'll have it again. It's gonna be okay. But right now, you have to **shut the hell up**.	Escúchame. Los recuperarás. Va a ir todo bien. Y ahora cierra la **puta** boca.	Stami a sentire. Si risolverà tutto. Potrai ricuperare. Però, adesso chiude quella bocca.

Next, the intensifier suffix “-ass” is generally omitted both in Spanish and Italian, since literal equivalents are not always available. Nevertheless, transposition strategies are sometimes used, to translate them by changing their functional category. Indeed, Spanish tends to translate and intensify these swearwords more frequently, turning them into adjectives or prepositional phrases that complement a noun (see example (64)).

(64)

Kevin Atwater:	Yeah, but nobody else is looking at 15 years minimum in a cold-**ass** cell that we will pick especially for you unless you tell us who you ran your big-**ass** mouth to.	Sí… Pero los demás no se enfrentan a un mínimo de 15 años en una celda **de mierda** que elegiremos para ti. Así que dinos con quién te fuiste de la **puta** lengua.	Sì, ma tu sei l’unico a rischiare minimo 15 anni in una cella scelta appositamente per te. A meno che non mi dici con chi hai aperto quella **cazzo** di bocca.

Finally, concerning the addition of swearwords and the replacement of current expressions by swearwords, it happens both in Spanish and Italian. It is equally common in both languages, as shown in examples (65) and (66).

(65)

Hank Voight:	Anna? Anna? Oh, man. Anna, are you here? Anna?	¿¡Anna!? ¿¡Anna!? **Joder**. ¿Estás aquí? ¡Anna!	Anna? Anna? **Cazzo**! Anna, sei qui? Anna.

(66)

Ruzek:	Yo, let’s do this deal.	Tío, cerremos el trato.	Dai, chiudiamo gli affare.
Wade:	Not with this. Open your mouth.	**A la mierda**. Abre la **puta** boca.	**Vaffanculo!** Apri la bocca.
Olivia:	Wade…	Wade…	Wade...
Wade:	Open your **damn** mouth!	¡Que abras la **puta** boca!	Apri quella **cazzo** si bocca!

To sum up, even if we can observe general tendencies in the translation of swearwords into Spanish and Italian, there are significant differences between both languages. Each language tends to favour certain translation strategies, which mark the vulgarity of the resulting audiovisual product.

5. Conclusions

The translation of swearwords is a complex task that requires consideration of multiple factors. From the very definition of “swearword” to the semantic, pragmatic and cultural implications they may have, choosing their appropriate translation can be demanding. This study aimed to provide insight into the translation of swearing from English into two Latinate languages, Spanish and Italian. The objective was to identify translation tendencies and differences between the two languages and to examine contemporary swearing trends.

The findings have addressed the research questions proposed at the beginning of the study, leading to several conclusions about the translation of swearwords across languages. These conclusions align with previous research, including works by Pavesi and Zamora (2022) and Valdeón (2020), concerning the frequency and intensity of swearwords in Spanish and Italian translations.

As for the first research question, the study confirms the existence of cultural differences in swearing practices across languages. It has been proved that English has a more limited set of swearing expressions, but it allows for greater syntactic mobility. On the contrary, both Spanish and Italian possess a wider range of swearwords, yet their use and syntactic placement is more restricted.

The second research question focused on translation strategies, and the results have shown that intensification strategies are widely used in both Spanish and Italian. Still, omission is the most common strategy in Italian translations, accounting for more than half of the instances analysed, followed by preservation and intensification. In contrast, both omission and intensification emerge as the most frequent strategies in Spanish. Besides, the Spanish version includes a higher number of swearwords compared to the Italian one, regardless of the translation strategies. Nevertheless, it has been proved that the number of swearwords is considerably reduced in both cases compared to the English original. Thus, given that most English swearwords are mild, it can be inferred that the Spanish and Italian versions do not necessarily include a higher number of swearwords—in fact, the number is significantly lower—but they do tend to intensify the ones they retain, making them stronger and more vulgar.

Finally, regarding the third research question, the analysis reveals that intensification is notably more frequent in the Spanish version, occurring twice as often as in the Italian translation. These findings support the “vulgarization hypothesis”, which suggests that contemporary Spanish TV series are more inclined to include stronger and more vulgar and explicit swearwords (Valdeón, 2020). Consequently, the data suggests that Spanish-speaking audiences are more accustomed to strong swearwords and display greater tolerance towards them in comparison with Italian-speaking audiences (Pavesi and Zamora, 2022).

Despite these observable tendencies, no clear systematic patterns emerge in the translation of swearwords in either language. Translators do not appear to follow a consistent approach, as omission, preservation, and intensification—the three most prominent strategies—are applied in an inconsistent manner. It remains unclear why certain swearwords in the series are omitted in some contexts but intensified in others. This lack of a uniform approach emphasizes the complexity of translating taboo language, which requires a deep understanding of not only linguistic elements but also pragmatic ones.

Indeed, to effectively translate swearwords, it is crucial to maintain the force, intensity, and stylistic impact of the original text while ensuring that the translation resonates appropriately with the target audience. Audiovisual translators must find a balance between preserving the authenticity of the source material and adapting it to the sociocultural sensitivities of the other language. The inherent challenges in this process suggest that translating swearwords remains a highly complex process, which translators may continue to struggle to fully grasp.

Therefore, this study contributes to the understanding of how swearwords are translated across languages. Yet, its depth and scope are limited. Further research could explore the pragmatic implications of swearwords and their influence on translation strategies in greater detail, examining how factors such as context, interpersonal functions, audience expectations, and media regulations influence translation strategies. By deepening our understanding of the rationale behind translational choices, future studies could offer more concrete explanations for the observed patterns and inconsistencies.

To sum up, as previously discussed, the translation of swearwords is a demanding task that extends beyond purely linguistic and semantic considerations. It requires awareness of pragmatic and cultural factors to ensure that the translated expressions retain the force, style, and intention of the original as faithfully as possible. This complexity underlines the need for continued research and discussion in the field of audiovisual translation, as well as a specific training for translators, particularly as globalized media consumption continues to increase and shape linguistic norms and expectations.

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