

# An Account of the Subtitling of Offensive and Taboo Language in Tarantino's Screenplays

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## Abstract

Offensive and taboo language presents a challenge for subtitlers, given the impact that it can have on an audience, particularly in its written form (Díaz Cintas 2001b). The present paper contains a descriptive analysis of the subtitling of offensive and taboo language, mainly from English into Spanish, from a translational, linguistic and technical point of view. Based on three of Quentin Tarantino's films – *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) –, particular attention is paid to the way in which these terms and expressions were subtitled for the benefit of a Spanish audience. By using a multi-strategy design in which mostly quantitative and some qualitative data are combined, the main goal of the paper is to look into the way this type of language was subtitled in these films, thereby enabling other scholars to use this same methodology when undertaking research on similar projects, in the same or in different language combinations.

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Keywords: Offensive and taboo language, Descriptive Translation Studies, interlingual subtitling, technical constraints, (ideological) manipulation.

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## Resumen

### *Estudio sobre la subtitulación del lenguaje ofensivo y tabú en los guiones de Tarantino*

El lenguaje ofensivo y tabú representa todo un reto para los subtituladores dado el impacto que estos términos pueden ocasionar en la audiencia, en especial cuando se muestran en su forma escrita (Díaz Cintas 2001b). El presente artículo ahonda en el análisis descriptivo de la subtitulación del lenguaje ofensivo y tabú, mediante el trasvase del inglés al español partiendo de un enfoque traductológico, lingüístico y técnico. A través de tres películas dirigidas por Quentin Tarantino, *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), *Pulp Fiction* (1994) y *Malditos Bastardos* (2009), el objetivo principal de este estudio se centra en la manera en la que estos términos y/o expresiones se subtitularon para la audiencia española. Por medio de un diseño multiestratégico que combina principalmente datos cuantitativos con algunos cualitativos, el objetivo principal es investigar la forma en la que este tipo de lenguaje se subtituló, permitiendo así a otros académicos, centrados en estudios similares con las mismas o diferentes combinaciones lingüísticas, hacer uso de esta metodología.

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Palabras clave: Lenguaje ofensivo y tabú, Estudios Descriptivos de Traducción, subtitulación interlingüística, restricciones técnicas, manipulación (ideológica).

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## 1. Introduction

The way in which offensive and taboo language is translated into subtitles represents the theme of the present paper, since these linguistic elements within this low form of register function as vehicles providing the audience with information about a given character's personality, mood and/or social status. To that end, a corpus composed of three films, in which the characters swear and make use of an array of offensive and taboo utterances, is presented here.

This study, which is based on the Descriptive Translation Studies (henceforth, DTS) paradigm (Toury 1980), is devoted to the subtitles of the DVD versions of three of Quentin Tarantino's films – *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) – which were used as case studies. It is expected to shed some light on the way English offensive and taboo language was dealt with in its transfer into Spanish.

As the films included in the corpus belong to various periods representative of different stages in Tarantino's career and were also subtitled at different times, this study enables us to observe the most significant differences between them as far as subtitling offensive and taboo language into Spanish is concerned. In addition, some of the results from the quantitative analysis were corroborated by interviews, held with Fernanda Leboeiro, the marketing director of *Bandaparte subtítulos*, the studio responsible for the subtitling of *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction* into Spanish. Arturo Enríquez García, the subtitler of *Inglourious Basterds* into Spanish, also helped to corroborate the quantitative data found in the analysis in another interview.

## 2. Subtitling

Subtitling, as the Audiovisual Translation (henceforth, AVT) mode, which deals with the transfer of multimedia and multimodal texts into other languages and cultures, is subject to technical limitations in the form of spatio-temporal constraints – explained later on – ruling current professional practice. These restrictions were therefore taken into consideration in order to assess whether the offensive/taboo terms included in the source text (henceforth, ST) were toned down, neutralised and/or omitted when they were transferred to the target text (henceforth, TT). From a linguistic point of view, a taxonomy of subtitling strategies was created and employed as a tool with which to describe every translation operation.

### 2.1. Technical restrictions

In the case of subtitling, the challenge is compounded by the need to abide by certain spatio-temporal restrictions imposed by the medium and the interconnectedness of the various semiotic layers of information that make up a film. When addressing the subtitling of offensive and taboo expressions, the subtitler may choose to tone up,

maintain, soften, neutralise or completely omit their offensive/taboo load in the TT (Ávila Cabrera 2014). The professional software, WinCAPS, was, therefore, used in order to verify the duration of every single subtitle analysed in an attempt to observe the possible technical influences that could have taken place during the subtitling process.

Some AVT companies make use of what is known in the industry as the ‘six-second rule’, which is based on the speed taken by the average viewer to read and assimilate the information shown in a two-line subtitle (two-liner) in six seconds (some 70 characters in total). In accordance with the subtitling principles laid down by Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007: 97), Table 1 shows the calculations used for a speed of 180 words per minute, which were used for the analysis of the DVD versions of the films in question:

Table 1. Equivalence between time/space for 180 wpm

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

Thanks to WinCAPS, an exhaustive analysis of all the subtitles was possible from a technical perspective, highlighting those instances in which the on screen translation did not abide by the six-second rule on the basis of the above calculations. Subtitlers might not necessarily adhere to these calculations, but they could jeopardise the comfortable reading of subtitles or retain them on screen longer than necessary.

## 2.2. Subtitling strategies

Offensive and taboo terms can have a strong impact on the reader/audience when shown in their written form (Díaz Cintas 2001b). When subtitling, certain strategies should therefore be utilised with regard to the target culture and language involved.

The ensuing ten strategies were used for the purposes of analysis. Most of them are borrowed from Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007: 202-207), with the exception of the former, which is taken from Vinay and Darbelnet (1958/1995):

1. A literal translation (LT), also known as word for word translation (*ibid.*), directly transfers a word and/or phrase from a source language (henceforth, SL) into a target language (henceforth, TL) in keeping with the idiom and grammar of the ST. To cite an example from *Reservoir Dogs*, Mr Orange uses the phrase 'big dicks', subtitled literally as *grandes pollas*, a solution that adheres to the original without employing any stylistic or challenging procedures.

2. A loan (LN) is used when the same word and/or phrase in the ST is also used in the TT. In *Inglourious Basterds*, Lt. Raine refers to a German patrol as 'Kraut' and this is subtitled as *boche* [rascal], a French loan which might be more easily understood by the target audience.

3. A calque (CAL) is a verbatim translation of a word and/or expression in a way that it is unusual or does not sound idiomatic in the TL. To cite an example, in *Reservoir Dogs*, Eddie utters the term 'wetback', "an illegal immigrant to the US from Mexico. An offensive and figurative term deriving from the crossing of the Rio Grande River between Mexico and the US" (Dalzell and Victor 2008: 692). This term is subtitled as *espalda mojada*, a calque that keeps the racist tone in the TT.

4. Explicitation (EXP) aims to bring the target audience closer to the subtitled text with the use of specification, using a hyponym (a term with a more precise meaning), or by making use of a hypernym or superordinate (a term with a broader meaning). Depending on the space available in the subtitle and the length of the TT term, subtitlers may decide to choose a hyponym or hypernym. In one of the exchanges taken from *Pulp Fiction*, a woman in the street uses the phrase 'he hit you', transferred through explicitation in the subtitle as *le atropelló* [he ran him over], since the audience is aware of the fact that Marsellus has been previously run over by Butch, as it had previously been shown on the visual channel (Chaume 2004a).

5. Substitution (SUBS) is a variety of explicitation and a typical subtitling strategy. It is particularly useful for transferring offensive and taboo terms given the differences of the swearing systems among languages. It tends to be used when the spatial restrictions prevent subtitlers from inserting a long term from the SL in the subtitle, even though such a term might exist in the TL and a hypernym or hyponym is not required. An example of substitution can be seen in *Pulp Fiction*, the insult 'fucking asshole' is subtitled as *cabrón* [cuckold]; thus by resorting to a shorter noun, the subtitler manages to condense the subtitle, using fewer characters, while transmitting a rather similar insult.

6. Transposition (TRAN) is carried out when the element from one culture is substituted for another from a different culture, a strategy that tends to imply some sort of elucidation. To cite an instance of transposition taken from *Reservoir Dogs*, Eddie describes a robbery with an allusion to a 'Wild West show', which might remind the viewer of standoffs. It is dealt with via transposition, which can be seen in the render-

ing *carnicería* [slaughter]. Thus, the subtitler seems to have opted for a well-known expression in the target culture, so that the subtitle achieves domestication, that is, it fits in with the expectations of the target culture.

7. Lexical recreation (LR) can be useful in the TL, particularly if the character has made up a word in the SL as well. In *Inglourious Basterds*, Lt. Raine uses the lexical recreation ‘doggy doc’, shown on the screen as *curachuchos* [mongrel doc], a colloquial noun understood in the TL in informal contexts, even though it is not a word included in the *DRAE* (Dictionary of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language).

8. Compensation (COM) is another strategy, which consists in overtranslating a term or adding equivalent information at a later stage in the TT. In certain cases, it may be impossible to employ this strategy because of the restrictions imposed by the images and the soundtrack. To cite an example, in *Reservoir Dogs*, Joe says that his son is ‘flushing everything down the toilet’. This exchange could be dealt with in the translation by using the strategy of compensation, since a taboo expression is introduced instead: *no para de cagarla* [he does not stop shitting it/screwing it up]. The end result can, thus, be said to have been toned up.

9. Omission (OMS) is a recurrent method used in subtitling since reformulation is usually needed due to technical limitations and it is sometimes advisable to omit certain elements from the ST. Subtitlers must know which information is crucial to the plot and should be retained, and which is unnecessary and may thus be omitted. Some omissions include words, clauses and sentences, which can contain proper nouns, vocatives, adverbs, conjunctions, etc. In *Inglourious Basterds*, Lt. Raine utters the word ‘shit’ before a myriad of insults addressed to a group of Nazis. This expletive is omitted, perhaps because, when Lt. Raine is pushed to the floor, his voice is hardly audible and because this subtitle shows other offensive and taboo elements reflecting the obscene nature of the original.

10. Reformulations (REF) are used for paraphrasing linguistic structures, that is, to express the ST differently in the TT. This strategy was used particularly in cases of rephrasing and condensation since they can be said to go hand in hand. The manner in which the subtitler rephrases and/or condenses structures depends on the reading speed s/he is working with. An example of reformulation from *Inglourious Basterds* is the derogatory expression ‘fuck you!’, which is reformulated as *tu puta madre* [your fucking mother] in such a way that the degree of rudeness is maintained through domestication.

Needless to say, subtitlers find it essential to resort to a number of translation strategies and this inventiveness is crucial for the present study. It is also of paramount importance that subtitlers should already be familiar with the make-up of the audiovisual text in order to maximise this knowledge when subtitling. The audiovisual text is presented in two channels (Chaume 2004a) – the audio and the visual – and there is a series of codes of signification that contribute to the make-up of the text. All in all, these considerations must be taken into account during the subtitling process so that the most appropriate translational operations may be chosen.

### 3. Offensive and taboo language

'Offensive words' refer to terms that are considered derogatory, abusive and/or insulting, whereas 'taboo words' may be regarded as unwelcome terms depending on the context, culture and language in which they are uttered, "[t]his is why taboo words are often described as unpleasant or ugly-sounding and why they are miscalled *dirty words*" (Allan and Burrige 2006: 242). There are diverse expressions used to refer to those terms that authors define as dirty language (Jay 1980), strong language (Lung 1998; Scandura 2004), bad language (Azzaro 2005; McEnery 2006), foul language (Azzaro 2005; Wajnryb 2005), rude language (Hughes 2006), taboo language (Allan and Burrige 2006; Jay 2009), emotionally charged language (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007) and offensive language (Hughes 2006; Díaz Cintas 2012; Filmer 2013), among others. Thus, given this terminological disparity, the phrase offensive and taboo language (Ávila Cabrera 2014) has been chosen in order to describe those terms which might be considered derogatory, insulting, taboo, and the like.

In subtitling, offensive and taboo words are normally toned down or even omitted owing to space and/or time constraints. This type of language has, nonetheless, an exclamatory function, one that contributes to the audience's understanding of a speaker's personality and idiosyncrasies, and can also be used gratuitously with the aim of insulting (Allan 2014). This is the reason why the deletion of such linguistic elements may not, in some instances, be the best solution. Taboo words are linked to local traditions and communities and are used differently depending on a particular social and religious environment, meaning that they require a different translation depending on the context and the way in which they are interpreted (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007: 199). Taking into consideration the fact that swearwords provide information about the characters and settings and contribute to the audience's knowledge of what is going on in a specific part of the discourse, the deletion of swearwords entails "a loss in communicative effect and social implicature" (Greenall 2011: 60) as well as the suppression of the 'other', i.e. the man/woman who does not adhere to standard speech (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007).

Swearwords and taboo words clearly contribute to the characterisation of personalities and the fulfilment of a thematic function in a film (*ibid.*: 197), but their translation tends to vary according to the medium. Films released for cinema distribution tend to be more daring when rendering swearwords or taboo language on screen than films broadcast on television, where such terms are usually toned down (Díaz Cintas 2001a).

In Chaume's words (2004b: 1), "the main function of audiovisual translation is to produce a similar effect on the target culture audience as the source text produced on the source culture audience", from which it might be asserted that offensive and/or taboo language should be rendered into the TT in order to produce the same effect that the ST has in the source culture. Santaemilia (2008: 227) suggests that "eliminating sexual terms [...] in translation does usually betray the translator's personal attitude

towards human sexual behaviour(s) and their verbalization”. By contrast, Ivarsson and Carroll (1998: 127) note that the excessive use of obscenities should be toned down and consider that their censorship is not a decision for the subtitler; rather “if the producer or director has chosen this particular level of expression, the subtitler should not try to raise it”.

To sum up, Díaz Cintas (2001b: 65) argues that “there are certainly differences between the levels of acceptance of bad language and sexual references in audiences that belong to different countries and to different social and ethnic groups within the same country”. In short, in order to subtitle offensive/taboo language, it must firstly be analysed within a certain context, taking into account addressee, target culture and medium. The function that this type of language has in the ST should also be visible in the TT, thereby demonstrating fidelity both towards the screenwriter and the characters portrayed in the films themselves. For the purposes of the present study, a taxonomy of offensive and taboo language, based on Wajnryb (2005), Hughes (2006), and Jay (2009), was created as a tool for the analysis of data, which includes instances taken from the audiovisual corpus, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Taxonomy of offensive and taboo language (Ávila Cabrera 2014)

TAXONOMY OF OFFENSIVE AND TABOO LANGUAGE			
Category	Subcategory	Types	Examples
Offensive	Abusive swearing	Cursing	Goddamn you!
		Derogatory tone	Just keep your fucking mouth shut
		Insult	Bunch of shithead
		Oath	I swear on my mother’s eternal soul
	Expletive	Exclamatory swearword / phrase	<i>Merde!</i> [Shit!]
Invective	Subtle insult	luminaries of the Nazi propaganda	
Taboo		Animal name	fuck him like a bitch?
		Death / killing	attempt to poison and destroy my brothers!
		Drugs / excessive alcohol consumption	Coke is fucking dead
		Ethnic / racial / gender slur	Toby the Jap
		Filth	You shit in your pants and dive in and swim
		Profane / blasphemous	Jesus (fucking) Christ!
		Psychological / physical condition	any trigger-happy madman
		Sexual reference / body part	The entire song is a metaphor for big dicks
		Urination / scatology	I’d be shitting my pants if I was you
		Violence	I tagged a couple of cops

It is worthy of mention here that the same offensive and/or taboo term may be included in different categories owing to the fact that English and Spanish have differ-

ent swearing systems and codes of behaviour as regards this type of language. This is one of the reasons why subtitlers need to look for a strategy that retains the offensive/taboo load in the TL in the best possible way. In order to do this, strategies such as reformulation, compensation and substitution may prove to be useful. Some examples to illustrate this idea can be seen in the use of the word 'Goddamn', which can constitute an expletive when uttered in a situation of surprise: 'Goddamn!'; a curse, as in 'Goddamn you!'; or a derogatory adjective in American English: 'this goddamned car'. By contrast, two different offensive terms in English tend to be rendered into Spanish similarly, i.e. 'motherfucker' and 'son of a whore' which are both usually translated as *hijo de puta* [son of a whore].<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, although the subcategory of this Spanish term is abusive swearing (insult), the former translation is carried out by substitution and the latter literally. This discussion is a good illustration of the conclusion reached by Wajnryb (2005: 15) when she asserts that there are more swearing functions than swearwords: in her own words, "lots of targets but a scarcity of ammunition". Whatever the case, one of the important goals for subtitlers should be the attempt to project the offensive and/or taboo load of the original terms in their subtitles.

#### 4. Research methodology

A descriptive analysis was carried out into the subtitling of offensive and taboo language into Spanish, using Tarantino's three films as a corpus. One of the goals of this paper is to foreground the main differences in the way in which the offensive and taboo subcategories used in the various films were subtitled, as well as in the manner in which the offensive and taboo load of every term was subtitled into Spanish.

The methodology of this paper is primarily descriptive, based on the DTS paradigm formulated by Toury (1980), with an emphasis on the operations carried out during the subtitling process. The case study method (Robson 2011), used to deal with the three films directed by Tarantino, aims to shed some light on the manner offensive and taboo language was subtitled into Spanish for a Spanish audience with regard to this particular corpus. This study additionally makes use of a multi-strategy design with triangulation, which can be defined as "a valuable and widely used strategy involving the use of multiple resources to enhance the rigour of the research" (*ibid.*: 195), given that it analyses quantitative data (screenplay and subtitles of the DVD films) and some qualitative data (the interviews conducted with one of the professionals involved in the subtitling of the two first films and the subtitler of the third one).

The core of the research design appears in the form of the research questions outlined below:

1. What were the most recurrent offensive/taboo subcategories found in the corpus under analysis? What were the translation strategies used by the subtitlers when rendering the offensive and taboo exchanges from the SLs into the Spanish subtitles? In this sense, the study takes the prominently descriptive approach that has characterised



Translation Studies over the past few decades, but excluding the prescriptive branch of this discipline.

2. Did the subtitling of the three films follow a similar pattern? In order to answer this question, attention was paid to the number of instances where the offensive and taboo terms were toned up, maintained (the offensive/taboo load is kept), toned down (the offensive/taboo load is softened), neutralised (the offensive/taboo load disappears in the TT as it is rendered in more neutral terms) or omitted (the offensive/taboo load is null). Whether any type of censorship or self-censorship had occurred in connection with the subtitler's ideology.

3. Could the implementation of omission, reformulation and/or substitution be justified because of the potential spatio-temporal constraints in subtitling? The intention of this analysis was thoroughly to explore the technical features of the subtitles since the toning down, neutralisation and/or omission of the offensive/taboo elements of the original dialogue exchanges could be considered strategies to conceal the load of those terms.

The conclusive goal of the questions outlined above is to provide some insights into matters relating to offensive/taboo language, subtitling strategies, technical limitations and fidelity to the original versus (ideological) manipulation (Díaz Cintas 2012). Each film was analysed and contrasted with the two others in order to ascertain whether temporal distance could have had any pronounced impact on the way the dialogue exchanges were subtitled. The results were therefore examined as a whole, so that general conclusions could be made based on the information provided by the three case studies.

## 5. Data analysis

To analyse how the offensive and taboo language present in the films was subtitled into Spanish, special attention was paid to the linguistic difficulties as well as the technical constraints facing the subtitlers – particularly spatio-temporal restrictions – in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the reasons behind the translational operations carried out. In addition, both the audio and visual channel (Chaume 2004a) were present during the analysis of every single instance, since they might have acted as an influence on the selection of certain strategies adopted by the subtitlers. Depending on the constraints encountered, some decisions are taken as to whether some of the characters' dialogue exchanges must be included or deleted.

In this section, the subtitling of Tarantino's three films is analysed, focusing on their features over the course of time. The goal is an examination of their similarities and differences in an attempt to provide some insights into how these three films were subtitled into Spanish.

Table 3 shows the layout used to present all the information dealt with during the process of data analysis.

Table 3. Layout used for the analysis of examples

Example number		
Context		
Source text		
Subtitle number & TCR*	Spanish subtitle	[Back translation]
Subtitle number. Offensive/taboo subcategory > Translation strategy (see section 2.2)		
Duration (seconds:frames) - characters used (characters recommended)		
* “Time Code Reader. A clock recorded alongside each frame and containing 8 digits that reads hours: minutes: seconds: frames” (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007: 253).		

This research focuses on the subtitling of English into Spanish in the films *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction* and also takes a look at a case of subtitling using a pivot language (Ávila Cabrera 2013) in the multilingual film *Inglourious Basterds*, in which English, German and French are spoken, excluding Italian as no offensive/taboo instances were found. In this latter film, the language transfer was explored in two directions – from the English dialogue into the Spanish text, and from the German/French utterances into the English pivot text and then from the latter into the Spanish subtitles – in order to ascertain whether English had any negative interference in the resulting subtitles as far as the use of offensive/taboo terms is concerned. Accordingly, Table 4 shows the layout used for the analysis of the German/French exchanges taken from *Inglourious Basterds*.

Table 4. *Inglourious Basterds*, German/French dialogue layout

Example number		
Context		
German/French dialogue		[Back translation]
Pivot English text		
Subtitle number & TCR	Spanish subtitle	[Back translation]
Subtitle number. Offensive/taboo subcategory > Translation strategy		
Duration (seconds:frames) - characters used (characters recommended)		

The analysis of some of the most significant instances is included in the ensuing sections, with the offensive/taboo terms shown in bold type.

### 5.1. *Reservoir Dogs*

*Reservoir Dogs* was rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America (henceforth, MPAA) – “contains some adult material” because of its extreme violence and threatening language.<sup>2</sup> Regarding offensive and taboo terms, the DVD version ana-

lysed contains 645 instances, which are shown in 501 subtitles. Given that the DVD version contains a total of 1,231 Spanish subtitles, the number of cases analysed in the subtitles represents 40.7% of all subtitles.

The following example shows the manner in which every single offensive/taboo instance is analysed.

Example 1		
Context: The film starts with eight men in black having breakfast at a café, Mr White, Mr Pink, Mr Blue, Mr Blonde, Mr Orange, Mr Brown, the big boss Joe Cabot and his son Nice Guy Eddie Cabot.		
Mr White: Give me that <b>fucking</b> thing.		
Joe: What <b>the hell</b> do you think you're doing? Give me my book back!		
Mr White: I'm sick of <b>fucking</b> hearing it Joe, I'll give it back when we leave... Toby Chung? <b>Fucking</b> Charlie Chan! I got Madonna's <b>big dick</b> outta my left ear, and Toby the <b>Jap</b> I-don't- know-what coming out of my right.		
Mr Blonde: What's special? Take you in the back and suck your dick?		
0038 00:02:07:05 00:02:11:01	- Dame esa <b>puta mierda</b> . - ¿Qué haces? Devuélvemela.	[-Give me that <b>fucking shit</b> . -What do you do? Give it back to me.]
0039 00:02:11:06 00:02:13:21	Estoy <b>hasta los huevos</b> . Te la daré al salir.	[I am <b>up to the balls/fucking sick of it</b> . I will give it back to you when getting out.]
0082 00:04:47:16 00:04:49:23	¿Querías que <b>te la chupara</b> ?	[Did you want <b>her to suck it to you</b> ?]
0038. Abusive swearing (derogatory) / (derogatory) > SUBS (toned up) / OMS at word level (NOT technically justified) 03:22-50(69)		
0039. Abusive swearing (derogatory) > REF at clause level (maintained)		
0082. Taboo (sexual) > REF at word level (toned down) (NOT technically justified) 02:07-27(38)		

(0038) The phrase ‘fucking thing’ is dealt with by using substitution in the form of *puta mierda* [fucking shit] and thereby toned up. This instance of domestication shows that the preference on the part of the translator for the use of a more common phrase in the TL. The intensifier ‘the hell’ is, however, omitted in the TT. As this subtitle lasts 3:22 seconds:frames and makes use of 50 characters out of a possible 69, this omission may not be justified on technical grounds. (0039) The swearword ‘fucking’ is translated by means of reformulation, i.e. *hasta los huevos* [up to the balls/fucking sick of it], so this instance of swearing is addressed by rephrasing, using a term that is more common in the TT (domestication), but maintains the offensive load. (0082) The taboo expression ‘suck your dick’ is reformulated. The TT reads *te la chupara* [her to suck it to you], thereby being toned down, as the term ‘dick’ is not used in the Spanish subtitle, although it is elliptically referred to by the pronoun *la* [it, feminine], which means that the function of this taboo expression remains to a certain extent

the same. This subtitle lasts for 2:07 seconds:frames and makes use of 27 characters although there is, in fact, space for up to 38 characters, so that this instance of toning down may not be technically justified.

## 5.2. Pulp Fiction

The second Tarantino blockbuster was rated R (it contains some adult material) by the MPAA for its strong, graphic violence, drug use, and pervasively offensive language and sexuality.<sup>3</sup> The total number of Spanish subtitles included in the DVD version is 2,004, of which 623 samples visible in 508 subtitles are scrutinised. The subtitles under analysis therefore account for 25.3% of all the subtitles, considerably less than in *Reservoir Dogs*, where the percentage is 40.7%.

Example 2 deals with some other instances examined.

Example 2		
Context: Jules and Vincent enter the club to give Marsellus Wallace his suitcase back.		
Butch: You looking at something, friend?		
Vincent: You ain't my friend, <b>palooka</b> ... I think you heard me just fine, <b>punchy</b> .		
Marsellus: My nigger, get your <b>ass</b> over here.		
0393 00:24:35:24 00:24:39:19	-¿Miras algo, amigo?  -Tú no eres amigo mío, <b>zoquete</b> .	[-Do you look at something, pal?  -You are not a pal of mine, <b>dim</b> .]
0394 00:24:41:19 00:24:44:21	-¿Qué has dicho?  -Me has oído perfectamente, <b>sonado</b> .	[-What have you said? -You have heard me perfectly, <b>punch-drunk</b> .]
0396 00:24:47:21 00:24:50:22	¡Amigo mío!  Mueve el <b>culo</b> y acércate.	[Friend of mine!  Move the <b>ass</b> and get closer.]
0393. Abusive swearing (insult) > LT (maintained)		
0394. Abusive swearing (insult) > LT (maintained)		
0396. Taboo (body part) > LT (maintained)		

(0393) Vincent calls Butch 'palooka', which can mean "a stupid person" or "an unskilled prize-fighter" (Spears 2000: 300). The subtitler seems to opt for the former definition and the term is translated by the domesticating *zoquete* [dim]. (0394) The term 'punchy' is translated literally by *sonado* [punch-drunk], taking advantage of the fact that it is used to allude to prize-fighter Butch. (0396) We should mention here that 'nigger' in American English varies "from extreme offensiveness when used of blacks by whites, to affectionate expressions of solidarity when used in black English" (Hughes 2006: 326). The derogatory word 'nigger' is uttered here by Marsellus, a black character, to Vincent, a white character, as is evident from the visual channel

(Chaume 2004a), so that this term is not therefore considered to be offensive, but is merely used to show comradeship (Allan 2014). ‘Ass’ has been translated literally into Spanish, maintaining the tone of the original dialogue.

### 5.3. *Inglourious Basterds*

The multilingual film *Inglourious Basterds* was assigned an R, “contains some adult material”, by the MPAA for its use of strong graphic violence, bad language and brief scenes of sexual activity.<sup>4</sup> From a grand total of 206 Spanish subtitles, out of the 1,800 subtitles found on the DVD, 236 instances are used in our analysis. The number of subtitles examined therefore represents 11.4% of the total, the lowest percentage of all three films analysed.

Example 3 deals with exchanges taken from the French dialogue, the analysis therefore includes all the languages involved in the subtitling process.

Example 3		
Context: Emmanuelle talks to Marcel who, violently, pushes a cinema collaborator against the table in order to force him to re-edit the fourth reel of the Nazi propaganda film A Nation's Pride.		
Emmanuelle: <i>Ramène-moi cet enfoiré! Mets-lui la tête sur la table! ... soit je t'enfonce cette hache dans ton crâne de collabo!</i>		[Emmanuelle: Bring me that <b>fuckhead</b> ! Put the head on the table! ... or <b>I drive this axe into your skull</b> of collaborator!]
Emmanuelle: Bring that <b>fucker</b> over here! Put his head down on that table... or <b>I'll bury this axe in your collaborating skull</b> .		
1412 01:43:21:01 01:43:22:21	¡Trae a ese <b>cabrón</b> a la mesa! Ponle ahí.	[Bring that <b>cuckold</b> on the table!  Put him there.]
1414 01:43:25:09 01:43:27:06	...o <b>te abro tu cabeza</b> colaboracionista.	[...or <b>I open your collaborating head</b> .]
1412. (French) Abusive swearing (insult) > (English) SUBS 1412. (English) Abusive swearing (insult) > (Spanish) > SUBS (maintained)		
1414. (French) Taboo (killing) > (English) REF at clause level 1414. (English) Taboo (killing) > (Spanish) REF at clause level (maintained)		

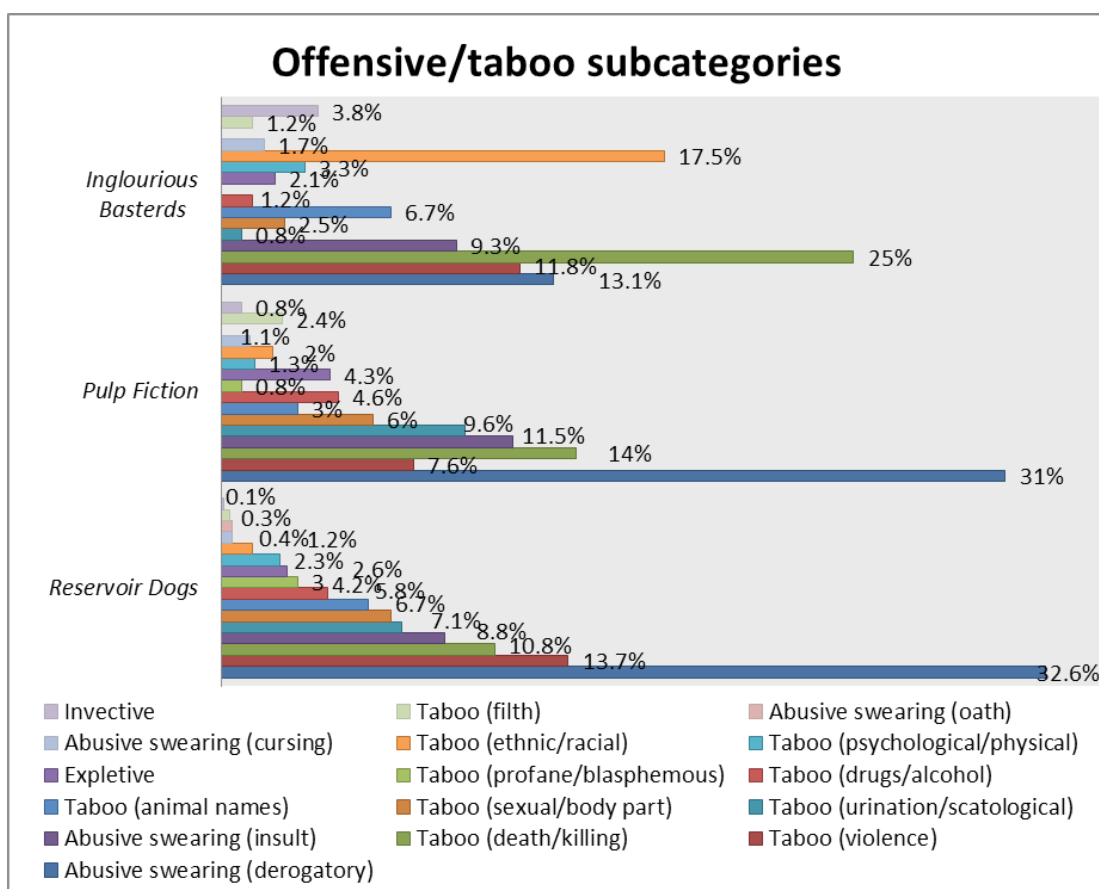
(1412) The word *enfoiré* [fuckhead] is substituted by ‘fucker’ in the pivot English text. Although these terms are not quite the same, they could be said to function in the same pejorative way. The latter term is rendered in the TT as *cabrón* [cuckold]. (1414) The French clause *je t'enfonce cette hache dans ton crâne* [I drive this axe into your skull], which can be said to be a killing-related taboo expression, is reformulated in the pivot text very closely and, in the Spanish TT, it is rephrased and condensed as *te abro tu cabeza* [I open your head]. This solution constitutes domestication at the same time as conveying the same tense atmosphere in which the characters are submerged.

## 6. Results and discussion

The findings to emerge from this study, obtained through the comparison of the three films, and addressing the research questions are summarised as follows.

Although taboo as opposed to offensive language is the most recurrent category encountered in the three films, the expressions used by the characters belong to a number of diverse offensive and taboo subcategories, with some degree of overlap. Figure 1 allows us to gauge the similarities and disparities in the various subcategories of offensive/taboo language used in each of the three films under analysis:

Figure 1. Offensive/taboo subcategories in the corpus

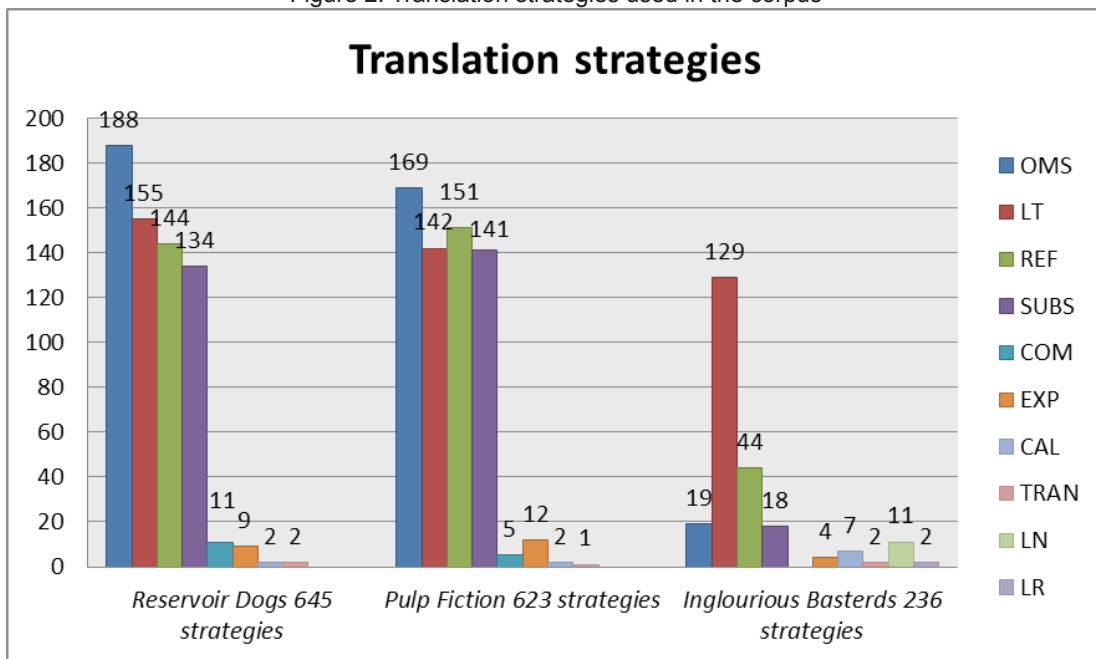


From the illustration above, it can be seen that *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction* have some features in common, whereas *Inglourious Basterds* can be said to be different from the other two. In *Reservoir Dogs*, the most recurrent subcategories are abusive swearing (derogatory), taboo (violence), and taboo (death/killing); and in *Pulp Fiction*, abusive swearing (derogatory), taboo (death/killing), and abusive swearing (insult) are the most recurrent subcategories. The use of this type of register fits in well with the expected linguistic behavioural conduct of gangsters. By contrast, in the case of *Inglourious Basterds*, taboo (death/killing), taboo (ethnic/racial/gender), and abusive swearing (derogatory) predominate, all of these defining the interconnected multicultural reality of the characters during World War II. Indeed, the recurrences

of taboo-related language are more frequent than the offensive utterances in the three films under study. What is interesting with regard to these data is that abusive swearing (derogatory) and taboo (death/killing) are some of the most recurrent subcategories in all three films, and this in itself defines the world that Tarantino’s characters inhabit.

Regarding the translation strategies used in order to tackle the offensive/taboo expressions of each of these films, Figure 2 illustrates the frequency with which each strategy is employed in the transfer of offensive/taboo language from the oral utterances to the written subtitles:

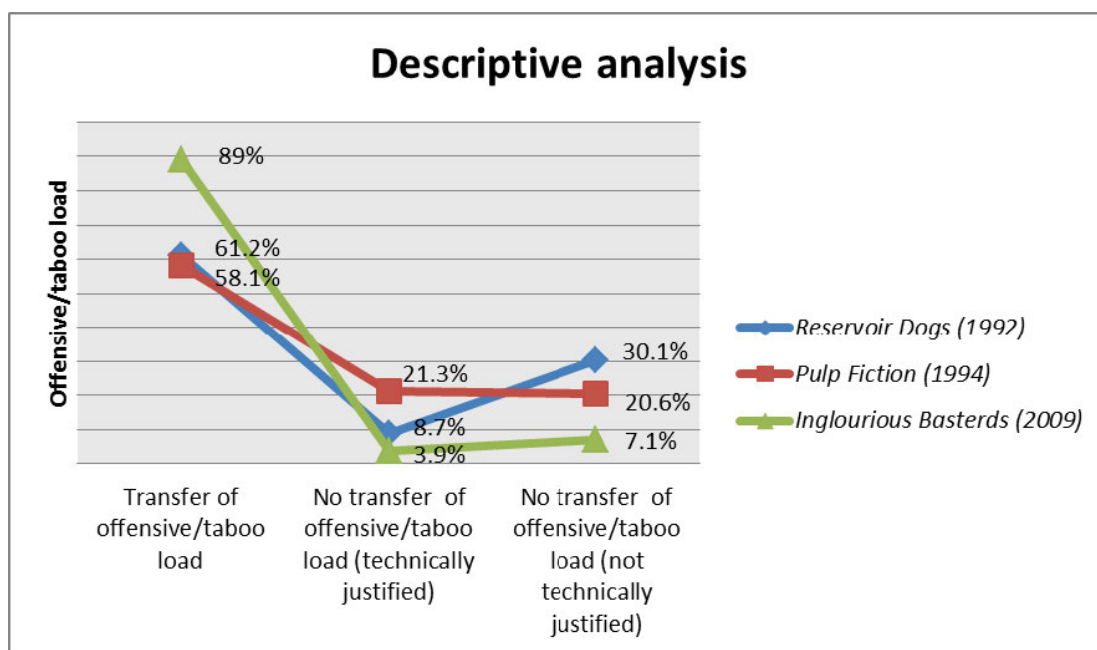
Figure 2. Translation strategies used in the corpus



While in *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction*, the most widely used strategy is omission, literal translation is the most frequently used in *Inglourious Basterds*, which demonstrates the intrinsic fidelity of the Spanish subtitles to the original dialogue. The other strategies, in decreasing order, are: literal translation, reformulation, and substitution in *Reservoir Dogs*; reformulation, literal translation, and substitution in *Pulp Fiction*; and reformulation, omission, and substitution in *Inglourious Basterds*. Noteworthy is the fact that the number of cases of compensation decreased with the passage of time (eleven in *Reservoir Dogs*; five in *Pulp Fiction*; and none in *Inglourious Basterds*), as if the subtitlers of the first two films had become afraid or were too conscious of straying too far away from the original text, which seems to reinforce the idea that the subtitler of the third film preferred to stick more closely to the original in the more recent film.

From a descriptive perspective, the manner in which the offensive and taboo utterances was approached over the course of time in the three films under study has enabled us to see significant differences in the use of subtitling strategies, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Comparison of results between the three films



Based on the evidence given above, it is possible to glean some information as to the way in which offensive/taboo language was treated over the course of time in these three films. With regard to the percentage of the offensive/taboo load maintained in the Spanish subtitles, the results relating to *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction* – Tarantino's first two films – are not strikingly different. Whilst *Reservoir Dogs* (61.2%) has a higher percentage of instances in which the offensive/taboo load was retained in the TT than *Pulp Fiction* (58.1%), the number of cases of no-transfer of offensive/taboo language not justified on technical grounds is higher in the former (30.1%) than in the latter (20.6%). These instances could be considered to represent a type of (ideological) manipulation, whose final motive cannot be ascertained here because of the impossibility of contacting the subtitlers of either film. Finally, the number of instances of no-transfer of offensive/taboo language determined by technical constraints is higher in *Pulp Fiction* (21.3%) than in *Reservoir Dogs* (8.7%); it might thus be concluded that there is a slight tendency to be more cautious with the cases of offensive/taboo loss in *Pulp Fiction* than in *Reservoir Dogs*. By contrast, in *Inglourious Basterds* (89%), we can see that the tendency to retain offensive and taboo language in the Spanish subtitles is increased by 27.8% with regard to *Reservoir Dogs*, and by 30.9% with regard to *Pulp Fiction*. Furthermore, the instances of no-transfer not justified on technical grounds are much higher in *Reservoir Dogs* (30.1%), and they decrease substantially with time, with 20.6% in *Pulp Fiction* and 7.1% in *Inglourious Basterds*.

On the basis of the qualitative data, there is no definitive qualitative proof as to whether (self-)censorship and/or (ideological) manipulation was used by the subtitler, client or multinational regarding the subtitling of both *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction*, as it was not possible to locate the subtitlers for the purposes of an interview. According to Fernanda Leboeiro, from the subtitling studio, censorship was not a usual practice at the time. Accordingly, given the quantitative results of both films,



some sort of (ideological) manipulation might have, indeed, played a role. As far as the subtitling of *Inglourious Basterds* is concerned, Arturo Enríquez, the subtitler into Spanish, asserted in the interview that he had not received any particular guidelines for dealing with the translation of offensive/taboo language and he aimed to transfer offensive/taboo terms as faithfully as possible. In principle, then, it can be assumed that the subtitling of this multilingual film was not influenced by any type of censorship. Thus, here the qualitative data seem to corroborate the quantitative findings obtained from the analysis of *Inglourious Basterds*.

All in all, one of the most significant findings from this corpus, composed of the three films analysed, is the fact that the offensive/taboo loss not justified on technical grounds diminishes with the passage of time. The knock-on effect is that, as the years pass by, the number of instances in which the offensive and taboo load of the original exchanges is preserved in the subtitles becomes closer to the number found in the original dialogue itself. In this respect, it can be said that there is a quantitative rapprochement between the original and the subtitled version, especially in the most recent film under analysis.

## 7. Conclusions

The use of offensive and taboo expressions is an area of language worthy of analysis in itself and a thorny challenge for translators in general, and subtitlers in particular, owing to the fact that this type of language is deemed to have a stronger impact on the target audience when written down than when uttered orally. Furthermore, as each language has its own system of swearing and different approaches to expressing taboo terms, the process of translating from one language into another may lead to changes as far as the offensive/taboo load of words is concerned.

These three films have provided an opportunity for a descriptive analysis of Tarantino's subtitled versions into Spanish, accounting for the possible differences that might have taken place over time. Apart from the fact that these three films are among Tarantino's most popular, they all have a particular feature in common, namely that most of the characters make considerable use of offensive and taboo language in the form of sexual, violent, drug-oriented and politically incorrect words.

The results obtained from this study suggest that, in general, the subtitling of offensive and taboo language becomes quantitatively closer to the original dialogue with the passage of time. In this respect, a closer adherence to the original seems to have developed and the offensive/taboo load of the original is only replicated in the same exchanges as in the original and never compensated for elsewhere in the subtitles. The way of approaching the subtitling of offensive/taboo language has moved, slowly but surely, away from the initial distinct lack of quantitative fidelity to the original, as is the case with *Reservoir Dogs* in 1992 and *Pulp Fiction* in 1994, to an approach in which a closer rendition of the offensive load has been sought, as is the case with *Inglourious Basterds* in 2009. If we consider the evidence from these case studies,

as far as the subtitling of offensive and taboo language into Spanish is concerned, it can be concluded that the tendency, in this particular corpus, seems to aim for a closer quantitative transfer of the offensive/taboo load, so that the target viewers are exposed to the same or very similar emotions, feelings and linguistic features found in the original dialogues and representative of a vital part of the characters' personal and cultural idiosyncrasies. More potential avenues should, nonetheless, be put forward in order to explore this under-researched linguistic field within AVT through the analysis of larger corpora with films pertaining to various different periods in an attempt to draw more general conclusions concerning the treatment of offensive and taboo language in subtitles.

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### 8.1. Online resources

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## 8.2. Filmography

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## Notes

1. “Whoreson, dating from the fourteenth century, was originally a strong insult [...] Being a loan translation of Anglo-Norman *fitz a putain*, ‘son of a whore,’ it is first recorded in a literal and highly provocative sense” (Hughes 2006: 495).
2. The MPAA categories are as follows: G “nothing that would offend parents”, PG “parents are urged to use parental guidance”, PG-13 “parents are urged to be cautious”, R “contains some adult material”, and NC-17 “patently adult. Children are not admitted”. <<http://www.filmratings.com>> [Accessed 29 September 2012].
3. <<http://www.filmratings.com/>> [Accessed 29 September 2012].
4. <<http://www.filmratings.com/>> [Accessed 29 September 2012].