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UNVEILING TABOO TRANSLATIONS INTO VIETNAMESE: SUBTITLING STRATEGIES IN “THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION”

Nguyen Viet Khoa*

*Faculty of Foreign Languages, Hanoi University of Science and Technology,
No.1 Dai Co Viet, Hai Ba Trung District, Hanoi, Viet Nam*

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Abstract: This study explores subtitling strategies employed in translating taboo words within the film *The Shawshank Redemption* into Vietnamese. Employing a mixed-methods approach involving both quantitative and qualitative analyses, the research systematically collects and categorizes taboo words in the film and evaluates the corresponding translation strategies employed in Vietnamese subtitles. Six strategies, including Taboo for Taboo, Omission, Euphemism, Direct translation, Substitution, and Translation by more general words, are identified. The predominant use of the Taboo for Taboo strategy is highlighted, allowing the translator to preserve the original expressive impact while ensuring comprehension in the target language. Despite its efficacy, the Taboo for Taboo strategy encounters cultural constraints. The research advocates prioritizing this approach to maintain fidelity, acknowledging challenges related to censorship and adherence to target language norms. The study underscores the sophisticated nature of translating taboo expressions, considering contextual factors, translation purpose, and intended message. Emphasizing the underexplored nature of offensive language in Audiovisual Translation, particularly in subtitling, the study underscores the pivotal role of taboo words in character portrayal and emotional expression. The call for further research in Vietnamese subtitled translations aims to provide valuable insights for navigating the challenges posed by low register expressions. The study concludes by advocating for a well-adjusted approach that upholds fidelity while addressing the intricacies of language and cultural sensitivity in subtitling, contributing to a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in translating taboo words in audiovisual content.

Keywords: taboo word, subtitling, translation strategies, source language, target language, *The Shawshank Redemption*

* Corresponding author.

Email address: khoa.nguyenviet@hust.edu.vn

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TÌM HIỂU VIỆC DỊCH TỪ NGỮ THÔ TỤC SANG TIẾNG VIỆT THÔNG QUA CHIẾN LƯỢC DỊCH PHỤ ĐỀ TRONG BỘ PHIM “NHÀ TÙ SHAWSHANK”

Nguyễn Việt Khoa

Khoa Ngoại ngữ, Đại học Bách khoa Hà Nội, Số 1 Đại Cồ Việt, Quận Hai Bà Trưng, Hà Nội, Việt Nam

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Tóm tắt: Bài viết tìm hiểu các chiến lược dịch phụ đề được sử dụng để dịch các từ ngữ thô tục trong bộ phim “The Shawshank Redemption”. Sử dụng cả phương pháp nghiên cứu định lượng và định tính, nghiên cứu thu thập và phân loại các từ ngữ thô tục trong bộ phim để tìm hiểu và đánh giá chiến lược dịch các biểu ngữ này thông qua phân phụ đề tiếng Việt. Sáu chiến lược dịch được xác định, đó là: Dịch bằng cách sử dụng từ thô tục tương đương; Bỏ qua (không dịch); Sử dụng uyển ngữ; Dịch trực tiếp theo nghĩa đen; Thay thế bằng từ ngữ khác; và Dịch bằng các từ ngữ phổ quát hơn. Phát hiện của nghiên cứu cho thấy việc Dịch bằng cách sử dụng từ thô tục tương đương ở ngôn ngữ đích là chiến lược được sử dụng chủ yếu vì nó giúp người dịch vừa giữ được các sắc thái của biểu cảm gốc trong khi vẫn đảm bảo sản phẩm dịch được hiểu rõ ở ngôn ngữ đích. Mặc dù hiệu quả, song chiến lược dịch này cũng vấp phải các khó khăn do các rào cản văn hóa gây ra. Nghiên cứu đề xuất ưu tiên sử dụng chiến lược này để duy trì tính trung thực mặc dù phải đối mặt với các thách thức liên quan đến kiểm duyệt và tuân thủ các quy tắc trong ngôn ngữ mục tiêu. Nghiên cứu cũng chỉ ra tính phức tạp của việc dịch các từ ngữ thô tục khi phải tính tới các yếu tố ngữ cảnh, mục đích và thông điệp cần truyền tải. Nhấn mạnh tình trạng từ ngữ thô tục ít được nghiên cứu trong Dịch thuật nghe nhìn, đặc biệt là trong dịch phụ đề, bài viết làm nổi bật vai trò quan trọng của loại từ ngữ này trong miêu tả và thể hiện cảm xúc nhân vật. Cần tiếp tục nghiên cứu dịch thuật phụ đề sang tiếng Việt nhằm tìm hiểu thấu đáo vấn đề để xử lý hiệu quả các thách thức mà các từ ngữ thuộc ngữ vực phi chuẩn này đặt ra. Kết luận rút ra là cần có cách tiếp cận linh hoạt, vừa duy trì tính trung thực vừa giải quyết được những vấn đề phức tạp ngôn ngữ và nhạy cảm văn hóa trong dịch thuật phụ đề, qua đó làm dày thêm nền tảng kiến thức chuyên môn để xử lý hiệu quả những khía cạnh phức tạp của việc dịch các từ ngữ thô tục trong các nội dung nghe nhìn.

Từ khóa: từ thô tục, dịch phụ đề, chiến lược dịch, ngôn ngữ nguồn, ngôn ngữ đích, bộ phim “Nhà tù Shawshank”

1. Introduction

Language, as a communicative tool, is intricately interwoven with culture, defined as “a system of linguistic communication particular to a group” (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015, p. 2), serving as a fundamental element within any linguistic system. Human beings employ language to articulate their thoughts, disseminate information, and express emotions in the process of communication. It plays a pivotal role in daily life, facilitating various interpersonal interactions. The existence of language is imperative for both oral and written communication, influencing individuals’ mobility and advancement within specific domains. Proficiency in language equips individuals to effectively communicate their desires, needs, and sentiments to others within society, thereby contributing significantly to personal and societal development.

Translation constitutes an integral part in language, involving the transfer of meaning from the source language (SL) to the receptor (target) language (TL). This process involves moving from the linguistic form of the first language to that of the second language through

semantic structures, with the emphasis on maintaining the constancy of meaning while allowing for changes in form (Larson, 1998; Munday, 2009). In the realm of cinema, there are two primary methods for translating dialogs: dubbing and subtitling. This study focuses on the subtitling method, a process wherein speech from the film's soundtrack is translated into written language. The translation appears as text on the lower portion of the film screen.

Newmark (1988, p. 94) characterizes culture as “the distinctive way of life and its manifestations inherent to a community utilizing a specific language as its vehicle for expression.” Bourdieu's “habitus” conceptualization perceives culture as a collection of enduring and transferrable principles that furnish individuals with a collective identity, encompassing shared beliefs, representations, rules, taboos, symbols, rituals, and practices (Bourdieu, 1980). Similarly, Hofstede (1991) underscores culture's pivotal role in shaping group identity, portraying it as the collective mental programming that distinguishes one group from another. Tran Ngoc Them (2001, p. 27) situates culture within the domain of values, defining it as “an organic system of material and spiritual values created and accumulated by people through practical operations in the interaction between humans and their natural and social environment” (see also Nguyen Viet Khoa, 2023, p. 234-5).

A taboo can be defined as “a proscription of behavior” applicable to a specific community, within a designated context, at a particular location and temporal setting (Allan & Burrige, 2006, p. 27). The incorporation of taboo language as a mode of expression is an enduring aspect within the fabric of language and culture. In contemporary cinema, a prevalent trend involves the utilization of taboo words, irrespective of their contextual relevance. Taboo words represent a distinctive linguistic phenomenon, marked by their prohibition in ordinary discourse, particularly formal settings, due to their potential to evoke repulsion, embarrassment, and contravention of social norms within the respective society. However, these expressions are indispensable in linguistic performance, particularly in instances of strong emotional expression such as anger or swearing aiming at releasing an abnormal psychological state in response to a certain phenomenon, mainly in verbal communication (Phạm Văn Tình, 2013). Indeed, taboo words have become an integral facet of our daily communicative interactions.

This paper centers on the translation of offensive and taboo language in subtitles, particularly emphasizing their function as linguistic elements within a low register (nonstandard). In this role, they function as vehicles for conveying information about a character's personality, mood, and/or social status to the audience. The study extensively analyzes the usage of taboo words in the film *The Shawshank Redemption* to discern the prevailing strategies adopted by translators in subtitling taboo language. Additionally, the article provides recommendations for translators regarding the subtitled rendering of taboo language.

2. Theoretical Framework and Background

2.1. Offensive and Taboo Language

Offensive and taboo language is pervasive across diverse cultures, with the acceptability of such linguistic registers varying based on factors such as societal norms, cultural nuances, belief systems, and related perspectives.

The etymology of the English term “taboo” can be traced back to the Tongan word “tabu” in the late 18th century, as noted in the Encyclopedia Britannica (2016). Captain James Cook introduced this term into European languages after encountering it during his exploration

of Polynesia (Holden, 2001). In the Tongan language, “taboo” translates to “forbidden” (Fromkin et al., 2017, p. 321). Fromkin et al. (2017) assert that taboos serve as reflections of specific customs and societal perspectives. They further contend that taboos predominantly encompass expressions related to sex, sex organs, and bodily functions, constituting a significant aspect of cultural norms in various societies. Allan and Burridge (2006, p. 1) posit that taboos are grounded in social restrictions on behaviors, which, if breached, can lead to discomfort or harm.

In a contemporary context, Suha and Sudarwati (2021) associate taboos with slang used by the youth on platforms like TikTok. They assert that these expressions, largely constituted by swear words, are avoided due to religious, politeness, and behavioral considerations. This perspective highlights the evolving nature of taboos and their connection to societal norms and language use in contemporary contexts.

The relativity of taboos across cultures underscores the dynamic nature of societal norms and values. What is deemed taboo in one culture may not necessarily hold the same status in another, despite the presence of shared cultural elements. This phenomenon reflects the intricate interplay of historical, religious, and socio-cultural factors that shape the perception of certain behaviors, practices, or expressions as forbidden or unacceptable within a given society (Bouchara, 2021). For example, in European cultures, consuming certain animals, such as dogs or insects, may be considered taboo, while other societies like those of Viet Nam and many East Asian countries may have no qualms about including these in their diets.

Cultures, even those sharing commonalities, possess distinct perspectives and value systems that influence their understanding of taboo subjects. Factors such as religious beliefs, historical experiences, and social structures contribute to the divergence in what is considered acceptable or forbidden (Douglas, 1966). Additionally, evolving societal attitudes and globalization can impact the boundaries of taboos as cultures interact and influence each other (McEnery, 2004).

Jay (1992) categorizes ten types of taboo words, each embodying distinct linguistic and societal distinction (p. 4-9). Firstly, cursing involves the deliberate invocation of harm upon others through specific words or phrases, serving as expressions of diverse emotions such as happiness, shock, or anger. Profanity, the second type, derives from a religious distinction, signifying a secular or uninformed comportment towards religious beliefs without necessarily denigrating God, religion, or sacred matters. Thirdly, blasphemy constitutes an explicit attack on religious doctrines. Taboo, the fourth category, functions to suppress or inhibit certain behaviors, thoughts, or speech, aiming to preserve social cohesion by restricting the speaker’s conduct. Distinguished from direct offensiveness, obscenity, the fifth taboo word, encompasses highly offensive expressions, particularly those of a sexual nature, rarely utilized in public discourse. Vulgarity, the sixth type, denotes the language of common individuals, lacking sophistication or social refinement and serving no specific communicative purpose beyond common human interaction. Slang, the seventh category, denotes vocabulary developed within specific sub-groups, facilitating communication within those groups with terms such as “pimp” “dweeb” or “cupcakes”. Epithets, the subsequent taboo word type, represent brief yet forceful bursts of emotional language, characterized by their intensity and offensiveness. Insults and slurs, constituting the eighth type, involve derogatory terms targeting individuals based on their social deviations or characteristics, exemplified by words like “pig”, “dog”, “son of a bitch”, “whore”, “bastard”, “homo”, “fag”, and “queer”. Lastly, scatology, the tenth category, encompasses terms related to human waste products or processes, often introduced to children

during toilet training.

Jay's taxonomy provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of taboo words, encompassing a range of linguistic forms and social functions within various contexts. Derogatory, abusive, or insulting language falls under the category of offensive words, whereas the acceptability of taboo words hinges on contextual, cultural, and linguistic considerations. These terms are subject to diverse labels, including dirty language, strong language, bad language, foul language, rude language, taboo language, emotionally charged language, and offensive language. To mitigate terminological ambiguity, this study adopts the phrase "taboo language" or "taboo word" as an encompassing descriptor for terms that possess derogatory, insulting, or taboo connotations.

Baker's (1992) and Newmark's (1988) translation procedures serve as a prominent analytical framework for scrutinizing the translation of taboo words. The researchers assert that the translation of "culture words" poses a challenge unless there is a cultural congruence between the SL, TL and their respective readerships. Taboo words, deeply ingrained in socio-cultural contexts, present a formidable task for translators. Among the myriad translation strategies, Newmark (1988) highlights several procedures—functional equivalent, descriptive equivalent, cultural equivalent, paraphrase, literal translation, reduction, and through translation - as particularly pertinent for translating taboo words when compared to alternative strategies.

In the domain of subtitling, Ávila-Cabrera (2015) observes a prevalent practice of tempering or omitting offensive and taboo words, driven by constraints in space and time (p. 42). Despite this curtailment, such language serves an exclamatory function, contributing significantly to the audience's comprehension of a speaker's personality, idiosyncrasies, and can, at times, be employed gratuitously for the purpose of insult (Allan, 2015). The removal of these linguistic elements may not always be the optimal solution, considering that taboo words are intricately tied to local traditions and communities, exhibiting diverse contextual interpretations within distinct social and religious environments (Díaz-Cintas, 2018). Recognizing that swearwords play a crucial role in character and setting depiction, contributing to the audience's understanding of specific discourse segments, their omission results in a "loss in communicative effect and social implicature" (Greenall, 2011, p. 60), along with the suppression of linguistic diversity, specifically individuals deviating from standard speech (Díaz-Cintas, 2018).

Swearwords and taboo language substantially contribute to character portrayal and thematic expression in films (Ávila-Cabrera, 2015). However, their translation tends to exhibit variability across mediums, with films intended for cinematic release often adopting a more audacious approach in presenting swearwords or taboo language compared to television broadcasts, where such terms are typically toned down (Díaz-Cintas, 2018).

2.2. Subtitling Strategies

Subtitling, as a mode of Audiovisual Translation (Multimedia Translation), involves the translation of multimedia and multimodal texts into different languages and cultures. Offensive and taboo expressions, when presented in written form, possess the potential to exert a substantial influence on the reader or audience (Fin, 2017). Consequently, when engaged in subtitling, it becomes imperative to employ specific strategies that align with the cultural and linguistic nuances of the target audience.

Linguistically, a systematic taxonomy of subtitling strategies has been formulated and applied as a methodological framework for addressing taboo language. This taxonomy serves

as a synthesis of subtitling strategies posited by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007), Davoodi (2007), and Lovihandrie et al. (2018).

(1) Omission/Censorship: This strategy involves the removal of specific segments from the source text (ST) during the translation process into the TL. However, it is deemed inappropriate and unacceptable, as in some instances, the taboo term plays a crucial role in the ST, and its omission may distort the intended meaning. In the translation of taboo expressions, omissions serve as a strategy wherein translators may opt to eliminate the taboo elements from the ST, aiming to maintain a similar impact on the readers in the TL. This choice may arise from the translator's attempt to uphold consistent expectations in the TL or due to the excessively vulgar nature of the words in the TL context.

(2) Substitution: Another approach to translating a taboo term or culture-specific expression involves substituting the term with an alternative in the TL (L2). This substitution entails replacing a word, phrase, or larger lexical units in the ST with another term in the TL. While the substituted term may not convey the exact propositional meaning, it is chosen to elicit a similar impact on the target reader. Frequently substituted words encompass those with swearing, insulting, and slurring content, such as the "F-word" and its derivatives, along with expressions like "damn", "bullshit" or terms containing religious cursing like "Jesus Christ," all of which convey strong emotional tones from the speaker. The substitution strategy is often employed when dealing with religious concepts (Abdel-Hafix, 2021, p. 69).

(3) Taboo for taboo: The taboo-for-taboo translation strategy involves substituting a taboo expression in the SL with an equivalent taboo expression in the TL, aiming to maintain both expressive and propositional meanings. This approach, akin to literal translation according to Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), is viable only in languages with high cultural affinity. It requires strict adherence to the ST's syntax, meaning, and style. Translators employing taboo-for-taboo knowingly choose to convey culturally or socially unacceptable expressions in the TL, seeking equivalence in meaning rather than linguistic form. In cases of extreme offensiveness in the ST, non-literal translation may be chosen to preserve the offensiveness using culturally appropriate terms like Crisafulli (1997). Taboo-for-taboo is the predominant strategy, being the closest to the ST, as noted by scholar Davoodi (2007).

(4) Borrowing: Borrowing, within the context of translation, denotes the incorporation of a word from the SL into the TL with minimal alterations, primarily involving adjustments to pronunciation rules. Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) characterize borrowing as a translation procedure wherein the identical word or expression from the ST is retained in the target text (TT). This strategy manifests in two discernible categories, namely pure and naturalized borrowing. While other scholars (Newmark, 1988; Baker, 1992) have discussed borrowing in translation, the specific categorization into pure and naturalized borrowing is closely associated with Vinay and Darbelnet's model.

(5) Translation by more general words:

The translator replaces taboo expressions with TL equivalents that convey the intended meaning. This involves using a superordinate term to overcome the TL's lack of specificity, requiring the identification of a more general term aligned with the propositional meaning of the SL word. This strategy addresses cultural and linguistic disparities by employing a broader term to convey the essence of the SL expression. According to Baker (1992), translation using a more general word, specifically a superordinate, stands as one of the prevalent strategies employed to address instances of non-equivalence, particularly within the domain of propositional meaning (p. 26). This strategy reflects the translator's imperative to navigate the

challenges posed by diverse linguistic and cultural contexts, seeking a balance between fidelity to the ST and the communicative tones of the TL. For example, “damn” in English is translated into “chết tiệt” in Vietnamese. Instead of translating the English expletive directly, a more general expression like “chết tiệt” might be used, conveying a sense of frustration without reproducing the specific taboo word.

(6) Euphemism: Euphemism involves substituting a more agreeable or inoffensive expression for one that may cause discomfort or convey unpleasant connotations (Larson, 1998). Its purpose extends to shielding readers or audiences from potential offense by moderating strong language, offensive expressions, and vulgar descriptions. Euphemistic language serves to avoid “possible loss of face” and enhance politeness and acceptability in communication, particularly when addressing sensitive topics or avoiding impolite and insulting words (Allan & Burridge, 1991, p. 14). The translation of euphemisms frequently requires employing an equivalent euphemism in the TL. The key lies in the translator’s ability to identify the euphemistic quality of the SL expression and subsequently choose a suitable and acceptable expression in the TL, whether it be euphemistic or direct. For example, instead of saying “he died”, Vietnamese people may euphemistically refer to it as “he has been away to meet his ancestors”.

(7) Literal translation (Direct translation):

Literal Translation, abbreviated as LT, involves the direct transfer of words or clusters of words from an SL into a TL. This method adheres strictly to the grammar and idioms of the original language. In other words, the translator attempts to render the text in the TL without embellishment or interpretation, maintaining a one-to-one correspondence between words in the SL and TL (Vinay et al., 1995). For example, “son of a bitch” is translated into “thằng chó” in Vietnamese. While it ensures a certain level of accuracy, this strategy may not always be the most effective approach for conveying the full meaning and nuances of the ST.

In the realm of audiovisual translation, subtitlers navigate the intricacies of employing multiple strategies, extending beyond linguistic challenges to encompass synchronization with visuals and the efficient conveyance of meaning within constrained space. Proficiency demands a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between audio and visual elements, emphasizing the need to capture subtle details for contextually relevant subtitles. Recognizing audiovisual content as dual in nature, presented through both auditory and visual channels, subtitlers decode diverse signification codes, including spoken language, facial expressions, and contextual cues. The overarching objective is to maximize subtitlers’ knowledge, ensuring accurate, culturally sensitive, and contextually fitting subtitles within the dynamic landscape of the audiovisual medium.

2.3. Subtitling Challenges

2.3.1. Social Challenges

The connection between translation and the target culture/society is robust, yet diverse cultural groups operate under distinct cultural and social norms shaping their linguistic conduct. Taboo words are inherently tied to culture and specific to particular languages, susceptible to prohibition in their native context and censorship in public and media domains, especially when crossing linguistic boundaries. In subtitling, the transfer of taboo words may vary. When not transferred, and depending on the chosen strategy, these words can be inaccurately translated, omitted, adjusted, or replaced inappropriately, leading to a shift in meaning and the introduction of errors in the TL. Consequently, delving into translation strategies helps elucidate the

decisions made by subtitlers and clarifies discrepancies in the use of taboo words between the ST and TT.

Koolstra et al. (2002) have noted criticisms directed at subtitling, citing concerns about subpar translations of original foreign language texts that could potentially impact viewers' perceptions of films. In alignment with this, Nornes (2004) concurs, asserting that individuals are unlikely to leave a foreign film with admiration for the subtitles. Viewers consistently express dissatisfaction and confusion, attributing these sentiments to issues such as inadequate subtitles, non-equivalence, mistranslations, and challenges associated with literal translation.

Ben-Slamia (2020) discusses Ballester's (1995) assertion regarding the foreign character of American films when viewed by the target audience. Ballester contends that the shift from universality to nationality alters the dynamic between the spectator and the film, leading to the perception of American cinema as foreign. The act of adapting or domesticating the original text to the TL's culture can evoke a sense of foreignness, strangeness, and incongruity. This arises because the translated content is often tailored for a culture different from the source, catering to an audience with its unique convictions, values, and social behaviors.

In essence, each audiovisual creation inherently introduces a set of challenges to comprehension (Diaz-Cintas, 2003). Subtitled films, falling within the realm of audiovisual products, present unique hurdles, with subtitling itself being distinctive by nature. This process is considered polysemiotic par excellence, given the simultaneous presence of various channels - visual, auditory, and written (Gottlieb, 2001). A subtitled film comprises dialogues, sounds, subtitle images, and additional non-linguistic codes, necessitating the condensation of speech due to limitations on the number of characters displayed on-screen (see also Ben-Slamia, 2020).

2.3.2. Technical Restrictions

Subtitling encounters a spectrum of technical restrictions that significantly impact the translation process. Foremost among these constraints are limitations on character count per line and overall on-screen duration, compelling subtitlers to condense translations while upholding readability. Additionally, the synchronization of subtitles with the audio's pace and the audience's natural reading speed poses a challenge, particularly for languages with differing temporal demands. The polysemiotic nature of subtitling, encompassing visual, auditory, and written channels simultaneously, demands careful coordination to maintain coherence (Bogucki, 2004). The recommendation in the field of subtitling suggests that subtitles should be displayed on the screen for a duration ranging from a minimum of one second to a maximum of six seconds, as outlined by Brondeel (1994). Furthermore, the conventional practice involves presenting subtitles in concise formats, either as one-liners or two-liners, ensuring optimal readability and viewer engagement. This guideline acknowledges the need for a balanced temporal presentation and visual layout to enhance the overall effectiveness of subtitling in audiovisual content.

In multilingual scenarios, subtitlers must navigate challenges to ensure seamless comprehension across various languages without interference between subtitles. Considerations such as subtitle positioning, font selection, and size become critical for legibility, adapting to diverse screen sizes and resolutions. The complex interplay of cultural nuances, idiomatic expressions, and linguistic differences further adds layers of intricacy to the subtitling process. Moreover, subtitlers contend with audio quality issues, technical format requirements, and the need to strike a delicate balance between preserving cultural authenticity

and ensuring comprehension for the target audience. Navigating these multifaceted technical challenges necessitates the expertise of subtitlers well-versed in the nuances of language, culture, and audiovisual dynamics.

In the world of digital transformation, several subtitling software tools are available to make life easier for subtitlers and translators, with WinCAPS standing out as a professional subtitling preparation software package developed by Screen. This software integration plays a pivotal role in upholding precision and compliance with industry standards when determining suitable duration and character limits for subtitles in audiovisual content.

3. Methodology

3.1. The Film

The Shawshank Redemption, directed by Frank Darabont and released in 1994, stands as a critically acclaimed American drama film. Based on Stephen King's novella "Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption," the narrative follows Andy Dufresne, a banker sentenced to 19 years in Shawshank State Prison for a crime he claims innocence in - the murder of his wife and her lover. Throughout his incarceration, Andy (Tim Robbins) forms a lasting friendship with fellow inmate and smuggler Ellis Boyd "Red" Redding (Morgan Freeman), who aids him in navigating the harsh realities of prison life. Andy, leveraging his financial acumen, becomes integral to the prison community, assisting both guards and the warden with financial matters.

The film explores themes of hope, friendship, and the potential for redemption, unraveling the journeys of Andy and Red as they grapple with their pasts and search for meaning within the prison's confines. Despite its modest box office reception and the absence of any Oscar awards, the film garnered acclaim from both critics and audiences alike for its exceptional acting and realistic portrayal. Over the years, it has achieved enduring popularity through cable television, DVD, and Blu-ray, streaming service, solidifying its status as a classic of American cinema and one of the greatest films ever made with an IMDb rating of 9.3/10 stars.

The Shawshank Redemption presents an opportunity for a descriptive analysis of its English subtitled version into Vietnamese, considering potential differences. Notably, the film stands out for a unique feature where a significant portion of the characters, being inmates, frequently employ offensive and taboo language.

3.2. The Objectives

The study aims to clarify the subtitling translation strategies applied to offensive and taboo language in *The Shawshank Redemption*. A set of research questions constitutes the foundation of the research design, with the overarching objective of providing insights into the handling of offensive/taboo language and the employed subtitling translation strategies. The research methodology employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, utilizing triangulation to enhance the robustness of the findings. The ensuing research questions, which are at the core of the research design, are summarized as follows:

1. What strategies has the subtitler primarily employed in translating taboo words into Vietnamese subtitles?
2. What recommendations can be offered for the translation of taboo words in subtitles into Vietnamese?

3.3. Research Instruments

To address the objectives of this research, a dual approach involving both quantitative analyses, utilizing descriptive statistics, and qualitative analysis, employing translation analysis, will be employed. Quantitative analysis, incorporating figures and frequencies, is applied to address the first research question. Meanwhile, qualitative analysis is employed to answer the second research question, involving the random selection of samples of English-Vietnamese pairs. This analysis delves into various strategies used in subtitling translations of taboo words, offering insights and recommendations for subtitlers and translators.

3.4. Data Collection

Quantitative data for the study has been sourced from the DVD release of the film, while the Vietnamese subtitles were extracted from the Netflix version. To ensure accuracy and consistency, both datasets are cross-validated with their respective versions available on OpenSubtitles, an open-access online repository of subtitles for films and television shows. This approach to data collection and verification enhances the reliability and comprehensiveness of the study's findings.

The data collection and analysis followed a systematic procedure. Initially, a thorough examination of the original films allowed for the extraction and recording of taboo elements. Each English taboo word or expression was systematically compared with its Vietnamese dubbed equivalent. Following a comprehensive review of recorded pairs, the strategies employed for rendering taboo language were identified and categorized into four fundamental types. Subsequently, descriptive statistics, encompassing frequency, percentage, and sum, were calculated for each strategy. To consistently identify words or expressions perceived as taboos within the Vietnamese cultural context in this American movie, the categorizations of taboo language in Vietnamese as proposed by Nguyễn Thị Tuyết Ngân (1993), and Lê Minh Thiện and Trần Thị Phương Thảo (2009), was utilized.

This study has been enriched with qualitative data, capable of validating or challenging some of the findings obtained from the quantitative analysis, employing a sequential explanatory design (Creswell, 2014).

Figure 1

Collected Datasets of English Subtitles and Their Vietnamese Versions

1	Row	English text	Numbe	Vietnamese text	Start time	End time
1055	1054	Randall Stevens.	1053	Randall Stevens.	1:22:13.886	1:22:15.513
1056	1055	Who?	1054	Ai cơ?	1:22:16.013	1:22:17.014
1057	1056	The silent" silent partner."	1055	Một đối tác câm lặng".	1:22:17.181	1:22:19.183
1058	1057	He's the guilty one, the man with the bank account	1056	Anh ta mới là kẻ có tội, là người có tài khoản	1:22:19.392	1:22:22.478
1059	1058	It's where the filtering process starts.	1057	Đó là điểm bắt đầu của quá trình rửa tiền.	1:22:22.687	1:22:24.856
1060	1059	They trace anything, it'll just lead to him.	1058	Họ theo bất kì dấu vết nào, cũng chỉ dẫn tới	1:22:25.022	1:22:27.900
1061	1060	But who is he?	1059	Nhưng anh ta là ai?	1:22:28.526	1:22:29.735
1062	1061	He's a phantom, an apparition. Second cousin to H:	1060	Anh ta là một bóng ma, một con quỷ. Người	1:22:29.944	1:22:33.906
1063	1062	I conjured him...	1061	Tôi tạo ra anh ta...	1:22:35.032	1:22:36.200
1064	1063	out of thin air.	1062	... từ trong hư không.	1:22:36.367	1:22:37.743
1065	1064	He doesn't exist, except on paper.	1063	Anh ta không tồn tại, chỉ trên giấy tờ.	1:22:38.536	1:22:41.289
1066	1065	You can't just make a person up.	1064	Anh không thể tạo ra một con người.	1:22:44.375	1:22:46.711
1067	1066	Sure you can, if you know how the system works.	1065	Chắc chắn được, nếu anh hiểu cách hệ thống	1:22:46.919	1:22:50.047
1068	1067	It's amazing what you can accomplish by mail.	1066	Thật kỳ diệu khi anh có thể làm mọi thứ qua	1:22:50.548	1:22:53.384
1069	1068	Mr. Stevens has a birth certificate...	1067	Ông Stevens với giấy khai sinh...	1:22:53.718	1:22:56.345
1070	1069	driver's license, Social Security.	1068	...bằng lái xe, bảo hiểm xã hội.	1:22:56.554	1:22:58.681
1071	1070	You're shitting me.	1069	Anh đùa tôi đấy à.	1:22:58.931	1:22:59.932
1072	1071	If they trace any accounts, they'll wind up chasing..	1070	Nếu truy tìm bất kỳ tài khoản nào thì họ cứn	1:23:00.099	1:23:03.519
1073	1072	a figment of my imagination.	1071	...thấy điều tôi tưởng tượng ra mà thôi.	1:23:03.728	1:23:05.438
1074	1073	Well, I'll be damned!	1072	Ồ, Khỉ thật!	1:23:05.646	1:23:07.648
1075	1074	Did I say you were good?	1073	Tôi đã bảo là anh giỏi chưa?	1:23:08.983	1:23:10.735
1076	1075	Shit, you are Rembrandt.	1074	Chết tiệt, anh đúng là Rembrandt đấy.	1:23:11.068	1:23:12.737
1077	1076	The funny thing is...	1075	Điều nực cười là ở chỗ...	1:23:13.446	1:23:15.198
1078	1077	on the outside, I was an honest man, straight as an	1076	...ở ngoài kia thì tôi là người trung thực và n	1:23:15.406	1:23:19.494
1079	1078	I had to come to prison to be a crook.	1077	Tôi vào tù rồi mới trở thành tội phạm.	1:23:19.911	1:23:22.246
1080	1079	Ever bother you?	1078	Có lúc nào anh phiền không?	1:23:31.088	1:23:32.423
1081	1080	I don't run the scams. I just process the profits.	1079	Tôi không chơi gian lận. Tôi chỉ xử lý nguồn l	1:23:33.841	1:23:36.928

In that way, two datasets are gathered into CSV file (en_vi_taboo.csv). They are in fact two subtitle text files with the structures as shown in Figure 1 with a total of 1690 lines of subtitles (23,929 words). Then the dataset of English profanities provided by Surge AI (2023) is employed to categorize all the found taboo words into the following groups:

Table 1

Profanity Categories and Examples Provided by Surg AI (2023)

Group	No.	Example
sexual anatomy / sexual acts	1	ass kisser, dick, pigfucker
bodily fluids / excrement	2	shit, cum
sexual orientation / gender	3	faggot, tranny, bitch, whore
racial / ethnic	4	chink, negro
mental disability	5	retard, dumbass
physical disability	6	quadriplegic bitch
physical attributes	7	fatass, ugly whore
animal references	8	pigfucker, jackass
religious offense	9	goddamn
political	10	China virus

We then use a piece of Python code to first read the words from the Surge AI dataset file into a list. Then, the Python code works as follows: It reads the text from the English subtitle file into a string, then loops through each word in the list and counts its frequency. The code stores the profane words and their frequencies in a dictionary. Next, it writes the results to a new CSV file. For each profane word, it looks up its category and severity information in the original “profanity_en.csv” file and writes that information along with the frequency to a row in another new CSV file.

By this way we manage to compile the data to create two CSV files. The first file holds a bilingual binary corpus (Figure 3), which includes 74 dialogue (subtitle) rows containing pairs of taboo words in English and Vietnamese (profanity_results.csv). The second file contains a list of taboo words and their frequency (Figure 2), which is made up of 108 instances of taboo language in English (frequency.csv).

Figure 2

List of Extracted Taboo Words and Their Frequency

1	word	frequency	category_1	category_2	category_3	severity	severity_de
9	bitching	1	sexual orientation / gender			1	Mild
10	bullshit	1	bodily fluids / excrement	animal references		1.2	Mild
11	cocks	1	sexual anatomy / sexual acts			1.6	Strong
12	crow	3	animal references			1	Mild
13	Fuck	10	sexual anatomy / sexual acts			2	Strong
14	fucked	2	sexual anatomy / sexual acts	other / general insult		1.8	Strong
15	fucking	1	sexual anatomy / sexual acts			2.2	Strong
16	goddamn	11	religious offense			1.6	Strong
17	hoe	1	sexual orientation / gender			2	Strong
18	jigger	10	racial / ethnic slurs			3	Severe
19	motherfucker	1	sexual anatomy / sexual acts	other / general insult		3	Severe
20	peter	2	sexual anatomy / sexual acts			1	Mild
21	prick	3	sexual anatomy / sexual acts			1	Mild
22	pricks	1	sexual anatomy / sexual acts			1	Mild
23	queers	2	sexual orientation / gender			1.8	Strong
24	sack	1	sexual anatomy / sexual acts			1	Mild
25	shat	1	bodily fluids / excrement			1.2	Mild
26	shit	20	bodily fluids / excrement			1.2	Mild
27	shithead	1	bodily fluids / excrement			1.8	Strong
28	shitty	2	bodily fluids / excrement			1	Mild
29	slit	2	sexual orientation / gender			1.6	Strong

Figure 3

Bilingual Binary Corpus of Found Taboo Words

	English text	Numb	Vietnamese text	Translation strategy
1	I'll see you in hell before i see you in Reno.	7	Tôi sẽ gặp cô ở địa ngục trước khi gặp ở Reno.	Direct translation
3	Damn near anything within reason.	100	Mọi thứ, miễn là hợp lý.	Censorship
4	I never seen such a sorry-looking heap of maggot shi	114	Tao chưa từng thấy đống tù nào trông lại thiếu r	Censorship
5	that little sack of shit .	120	Thằng bé con bản thù kia.	Substitution
6	You shit when we say you shit , and piss when we sa	155	Mày ia khi bọn tao nói ia, và mày đái khi bọn t	Direct translation
7	Your ass belongs to me.	162	Các anh thuộc sự cai quản của tôi.	Substitution
8	Poke your ass out , give me a first look! - Keep it do	197	Thòi cái mông mày ra để tao coi. Đè nó xuống.	Direct translation
9	I know a couple of big old bull queers that'd just...	208	Tao biết ở đây có những thằng to lớn và đồng t	Direct translation
10	Especially that big, white, mushy butt of yours.	210	Đặc biệt là thằng béo, trắng và ỳ ỳ như mày.	Substitution
11	And it's fat ass by a nose!	214	Chính là thằng béo phệ này!	Substitution
12	What is your malfunction, you fat barrel of monkey !	223	Có chuyện gì với mày thể hả thằng béo ngu ng	Euphemism
13	Me neither! They run this place like a fucking prison	231	Tao cũng không, cái nhà tù này khôn nạn kinh.	Taboo for taboo
14	Every last motherfucker in here.	236	Từng thằng khôn khiếp ở đây.	Taboo for taboo
15	Call the trustees. Take that tub of shit down to the in	237	Gọi bác sĩ, mang đồng phân này xuống bệnh xá	Direct translation
16	Poor bastard lay there till this morning.	274	Thằng khôn đáng thương nằm đó tới sáng.	Taboo for taboo
17	What the fuck do you care, new fish?	279	Mày quan tâm làm quái gì hả, thằng lính mới?	Taboo for taboo
18	Doesn't fucking matter what his name was. He's dea	280	Tên là cái quái gì đi nữa thì nó cũng toi rồi.	Taboo for taboo
19	What you in here for? - Didn't do it. Lawyer fucked	300	Này, sao cậu vào đây? - Tôi vô tội, thằng luật	Euphemism
20	You think your shit smells sweeter than most. Is that	302	Thế cậu nghĩ cậu hơn tất cả bọn tôi à?	Substitution
21	Bull queers take by force. That's all they want or unc	331	Bọn chó đày chỉ dùng bạo lực. Chúng chỉ muốn	Taboo for taboo
22	Incredible how lucky some assholes get. - You going	429	Thằng khôn đó may mắn đến không tưởng. - 1	Taboo for taboo

4. Findings and Discussions

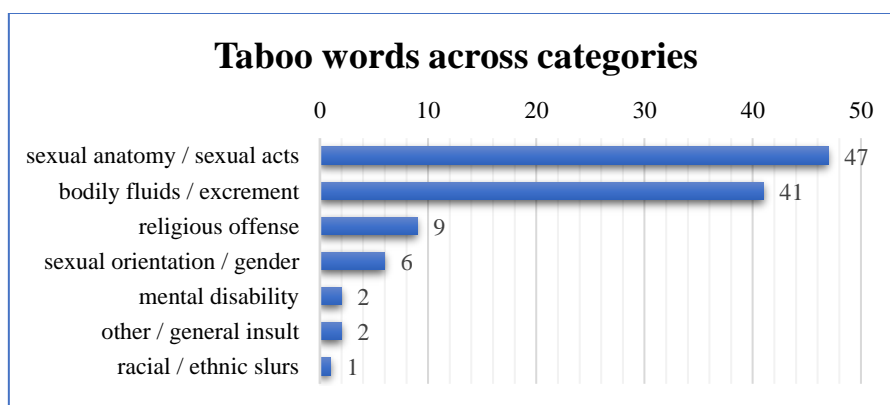
The results of the study are presented in this section. Sub-section 4.1 focuses on the presence of taboo words in the English sub-corpus, indicating their categories and the frequency of the different cases. The next section 4.2. deals with the translation solutions adopted in the whole corpus.

4.1. Statistical Findings and Discussions

The examination of 108 instances of taboo words within the film *The Shawshank Redemption* based on the Surge AI dataset on English profanities, reveals a subtle and diverse distribution across distinct thematic categories.

Figure 4

Counts of Taboo Words Across Profanity Categories



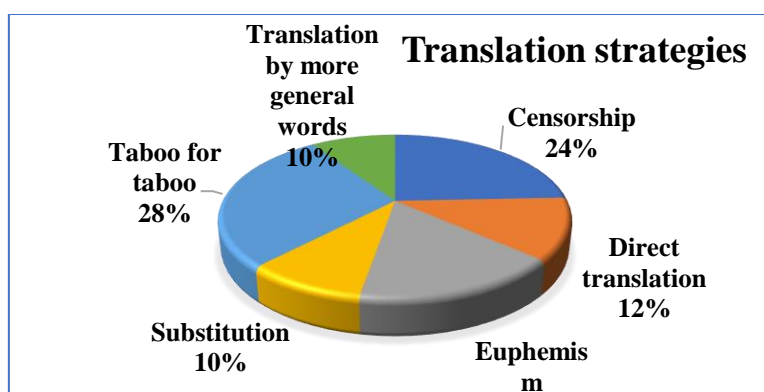
Notably, the most prevalent category encompasses expressions related to sexual anatomy and acts, accounting for 44% of the total instances. This suggests a significant emphasis on content pertaining to sexual themes within the profanity-laden dialogue of the film.

Following closely, bodily fluids and excrement-related profanities constitute 38% of the dataset, indicating a substantial focus on crude and explicit language related to physical functions. The category of religious offense contributes 8% of instances, underlining the presence of profanities associated with religious themes. Additionally, expressions related to sexual orientation and gender account for 6% of instances, reflecting a notable but comparatively smaller proportion in the overall profanity distribution. Mental disability-related profanities constitute a minimal yet discernible 2% of instances, suggesting a limited but existent usage within the film's dialogue. Furthermore, both the categories of other/general insults and racial/ethnic slurs each represent 2% and 1%, respectively, highlighting the relatively infrequent occurrence of these specific forms of offensive language. This comprehensive analysis not only delineates the prevalence of profanities within the film but also provides insights into the thematic dimensions and proportional distribution of such language, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the film's linguistic content.

In the examination of the translation strategies employed in rendering taboo words from the film into Vietnamese, a careful analysis revealed a subtle array of approaches. The translation strategies under consideration encompassed omission/censorship, substitution, euphemism, taboo for taboo, translation by more general words, and direct translation, with the notable absence of the borrowing strategy.

Figure 5

Strategies Employed in Translating Taboo Words



Among the 74 instances of taboo expressions identified, the most prevalent strategy was taboo for taboo, constituting 28% of cases, wherein translators chose to retain the explicit nature of the offensive terms in the TL. Omission/censorship emerged as the second most frequently employed strategy, accounting for 24% of instances, indicating a deliberate decision to exclude or mute offensive content. Euphemistic strategies were observed in 16% of cases, reflecting a preference for softer or less explicit language choices. Substitution, involving the replacement of taboo words with culturally acceptable alternatives, constituted 10% of instances. Similarly, translation by more general words, where a broader and less explicit vocabulary was chosen, also accounted for 10% of cases. Direct translation, without modification, was employed in 12% of instances. Remarkably, the borrowing strategy was entirely absent in the translation of taboo expressions. This comprehensive statistical analysis sheds light on the diverse and context-dependent decision-making processes undertaken by translators when faced with the challenge of rendering taboo content, providing valuable insights into the intricate balance between fidelity to the source material and cultural sensitivity in making the film accessible to a Vietnamese audience.

4.2. Specific Subtitling Strategies

The dialogues with taboo words uttered by the speakers and its Vietnamese subtitling translation are analyzed by using the theories proposed by the translation researchers aforementioned in Section 2.2.

Translators often cope with a dilemma when attempting to accurately convey the meaning of taboo words. This challenge arises due to various factors, including cultural, religious, and belief-based considerations. The strategies employed in navigating these challenges are revealed in the figures below.

Taboo for Taboo

The research findings indicate that the “taboo for taboo” strategy is predominantly utilized, accounting for 28% with 21 instances. In this approach, the translator alters the taboo expression in the SL, rendering it into taboo language in the TL while maintaining both the same expressive and propositional meanings. For example, the word “queers” is translated into “bọn chó” in the Vietnamese language. Those words are taboo both in English and Vietnamese.

Table 2

Examples of Taboo for Taboo translation

No.	ST	TT	Start time	End time
331	Bull queers take by force.	Bọn chó đẩy chi dùng bạo lực.	0:26:59.158	0:27:03.538
1268	That son of a bitch mailed it.	Thằng khốn nào đó đã gửi nó.	1:34:40.007	1:34:41.550

The prevalence of the “taboo for taboo” strategy in translating offensive words from source to TL can be attributed to a commitment to fidelity, preservation of authenticity, and cultural sensitivity. This translation involves directly translating taboo expressions from English into equivalent taboo expressions in Vietnamese, thereby maintaining the original’s cultural and emotional impact. The significant use of this strategy highlights the subtitlers’ commitment to preserving the authenticity and intensity of the original content, ensuring that the translated material resonates with the Vietnamese audience in a manner similar to the original English context. With this translation approach, the subtitlers of this film show their crucial role in ensuring cultural sensitivity and fidelity, as they must balance linguistic accuracy with retaining the source material’s intended effect.

Omission

The different scenes sampled where sexual connotations were made primarily left out of the Vietnamese rendition. The findings revealed that the Omission strategy is second most used with 18 instances (accounting for 24%). For instance:

Table 3

Examples of Omission translation

No.	ST	TT	Start time	End time
754	Calm the fuck down.	Bình tĩnh nào.	0:57:31.364	0:57:33.240
1126	I ain’t no goddamn loser.	Tôi không phải là kẻ thua cuộc.	1:26:25.262	1:26:27.765

The translation was euphemized in Vietnamese so that it turned to “*Bình tĩnh nào*” this not only takes away the meaning but is also difficult for the audience to read the tone of the

speaker. This may be a bit compensated for when viewers follow the scenes' actions.

The F-words were omitted or euphemized with terms like “cái quái” or “khốn nạn” that were deemed less impolite. This decision can be justified by considering the cultural norms and sensibilities of the target audience. Vietnamese culture tends to be more conservative regarding explicit sexual content, and preserving such elements could risk alienating viewers or causing discomfort. Additionally, omitting these connotations helps the subtitler maintain appropriateness and accessibility for a wider audience, including younger viewers or those who may find such content objectionable. By prioritizing cultural sensitivity and audience reception, the subtitler ensures that the material remains engaging and respectful of the Vietnamese culture's values.

Euphemism

The use of euphemism in the translation is vital in the Vietnamese language because the nature of Vietnamese cultural and societal aspects makes it hard to translate some ST words into Vietnamese. When translating from any SL to a TL, translators usually adhere to the conventions of the TT cultures as well as the social aspects (Almijrab, 2020). The different scenes sampled where sexual connotations were made primarily left out of the Vietnamese rendition. For instance (see Table 3):

*Jigger: (to Brooks): Calm **the fuck** down.*

By employing this strategy, the subtitlers translate some taboos into euphemistic terms in Vietnamese. In other words, they are translated into their Vietnamese inoffensive taboos. The findings indicated that the Euphemism strategy with a frequency of 12 and a percentage of 16% was the third used strategy by the subtitlers.

Table 4

Examples of Euphemism Translation

No.	ST	TT	Start time	End time
1161	A lawyer fucked me.	Thằng luật sư nó chơi tôi.	0:25:14.554	0:25:17.765
1216	She's fucking this prick.	Con chó cái này đang ngủ với hắn.	1:31:47.835	1:31:50.295

Direct translation

The findings revealed that the Direct translation strategy with a frequency of 8 and a percentage of 12 % was not quite favored by the translator for subtitling taboo words in the film. Take a look at these examples:

Table 5

Examples of Direct Translation

No.	ST	TT	Start time	End time
447	Him and this tasty bitch he was with.	Hắn đi cùng con chó cái của hắn.	1:31:40.661	1:31:43.497
1461	You shit when we say you shit, and piss when we say you piss.	Mày ỉa khi bọn tao nói ỉa, và mày đái khi bọn tao bảo đái.	0:13:47.159	0:13:50.412

In this film subtitling, the reluctance to carry out direct translation can be justified by several factors. Firstly, the cultural differences between English-speaking and Vietnamese-speaking audiences mean that direct translations of taboo words might not carry the same

weight or connotations in Vietnamese. Such direct translations could be perceived as overly harsh or inappropriate, disrupting the viewing experience. Secondly, Vietnamese culture generally values indirect and respectful forms of communication, especially in public and media contexts. Direct translations of taboo words could clash with these norms, potentially offending or alienating the audience. Lastly, subtitlers aim to maintain the movie's tone and intent while ensuring it is culturally acceptable. By avoiding direct translations of taboo words, they can use alternative strategies, such as euphemisms or contextually appropriate substitutions, to convey the intended meaning without compromising cultural sensitivity. Obviously, this approach helps in delivering a more nuanced and culturally resonant translation.

Substitution

One way to translate a taboo word is to substitute the term with another term in Vietnamese. In the subtitling of the film, Substitution and Translation by more general words are least used with 7 instances each accounting for 10%. Substituting taboo words with less offensive terms cannot always aid in preserving the intended tone and context of the dialogue. The exact shock value of the original language may be toned down, and the essence of the character's emotion or the scene's impact may be less effectively conveyed. For example:

Table 6

Examples of Substitution Translation

No.	ST	TT	Start time	End time
162	Your ass belongs to me.	Các anh thuộc sự cai quản của tôi.	0:14:07.429	0:14:09.681
1207	So, I could case all these big rich pricks that come in.	...ở đó tao có thể quan sát được những kẻ giàu có vào quán.	1:31:18.472	1:31:22.393

Translation by more general words

The translation of taboo words by using more general words is least used in this film subtitling, with only 7 instances, accounting for 10%. For example:

Table 7

Examples of Substitution translation

No.	ST	TT	Start time	End time
162	You're shitting me.	Anh đùa tôi đấy à.	1:22:58.931	1:22:59.932
1461	You'd better be sick or dead in there. I shit you not!	Mày tốt nhất nên chết trong đó đi. Không thì tao sẽ làm đấy.	1:51:36.105	1:51:39.400

This low frequency of choice may come from the following reasons. First, more general words tend to dilute the specific emotional and cultural impact of the original taboo words. The subtitlers aim to preserve the intensity and nuance of the original dialogue, which can be lost with overly general translations. Also, while direct translations of taboo words can be too harsh or inappropriate for Vietnamese audiences, using more general words may fail to convey the seriousness or the intended effect of the original terms. The subtitlers need to strike a balance between maintaining the original meaning and ensuring cultural appropriateness. Therefore, the subtitlers have employed other strategies that better match the original tone and context.

5. Some Recommendations for Subtitling Taboo Words Into Vietnamese

The taboo words serve multiple functions including expressing sympathy, surprise, disappointment, disbelief, fear, annoyance, metaphorical interpretation, reactions to mishaps, emphasis on associated items, intensification as adjectives, name-calling, anaphoric use of epithets, oaths, curses, unfriendly suggestions, and in four instances, employing non-swearing or dysphemistic terms. Despite being typically discouraged in academic, business, or legal contexts, these words constitute an indispensable component of everyday language and communication. They are ubiquitous in literature, film dialogues, and various forms of media as featured in *The Shawshank Redemption*.

Translating taboo words in subtitling, particularly into Vietnamese, presents significant challenges due to cultural norms where most Vietnamese individuals are not accustomed to publicly uttering taboo or offensive words. Moreover, watching films is often a social activity, unlike reading, which can amplify the discomfort of encountering taboo expressions in subtitles or spoken dialogue. Based on the aforementioned analysis and discussion, the following strategies for translating taboo expressions can be drawn:

- **Taboo for Taboo:** Using taboo expressions in the TL that have equivalent meanings to the SL taboo expressions.
- **Omission/Censorship:** Removing or censoring taboo expressions to avoid conveying inappropriate content or causing offense in the TL.
- **Direct Translation:** Converting directly from the SL to the TL without altering or softening the original content.
- **Euphemism:** Using softer and more polite language to replace taboo expressions in a gentle and respectful manner.
- **Substitution:** Replacing taboo words or phrases with similar expressions that are less offensive or do not carry as much negative meaning.
- **Translation by more general words:** Using more generalized language to translate taboo expressions, reducing the intensity and negativity of the original language.

The choice of strategy or procedure depends on the context, the purpose of the translation, and the desire to effectively convey the message in the TL. The Taboo for Taboo strategy can be understood as finding the equivalent of that word in the TL. This is the most effective method but cannot be used frequently because swear words often derive from culture and may not have a completely accurate translation. Euphemism, Substitution and Translation by more general words are basically about paraphrasing taboo expressions. This essentially means avoiding taboo words and expressing the meaning of the words around them. However, this method is often not highly effective if the translator wants to preserve the original shades of meaning. Literal translation is another popular option. However, this is the worst way and should be avoided as much as possible. For example, the literal translation of the word “bitch” would be “female dog.” This translation is not entirely accurate and does not truly stay faithful to the original.

It is advisable, whenever feasible, to employ the Taboo for Taboo strategy, as it helps maintain fidelity to the original text during translation. However, there are other issues that can complicate the translation process and make translating swear words more challenging. Translators must contend with censorship, and at times, they must choose between translating the text as it is written or adjusting it to reflect the speech patterns in the TL.

Omitting specific words for ethical reasons is not generally appropriate in translation.

Providing a faithful translation is the most important task. However, when the use of taboo words affects the smooth flow of the translation, or when a text or dialogue originally written in English - a language that often employs swear/taboo words to express emotions - is translated into Vietnamese, a language less prone to using such language, it may sometimes be better to omit those words to preserve the purpose and impact of the original text.

It is certain that this does not happen unilaterally. When translating Vietnamese film dialogue into English, there may be a need to add taboo words that were not present in the original to convey the exact sophistication intended by the original Vietnamese text (see the second example in the previous paragraph on Euphemism).

One can conclude that translating taboo words is a challenging task, but not impossible, especially when the translator is proficient in both the source and TLs. When dealing with this group of vocabulary, it is recommended to retain them in the complete translation, either as equivalent words or phrases or by rephrasing to convey the intended meaning, as the ultimate purpose of translation is to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps to enable communication and comprehension across different languages and cultures (Venuti, 1995).

6. Conclusion

The study aims at highlighting subtitling strategies used to translate taboo words in the film *The Shawshank Redemption*. Two conclusions can be drawn in this study.

Firstly, the translator applied six strategies to translate the taboo words, which are Taboo for Taboo, Omission, Euphemism, Direct translation, Substitution and Translation by more general words. Among these strategies, Taboo for Taboo is most used by the translator to maintain the taboo expression contained in the SL, thus the reader in TL not only understands the meaning of what is read, but also gets the expressive impression of the word.

Secondly, the translation of taboo expressions demands a delicate approach, with careful consideration of context, translation purpose, and the intended message in the TL. The Taboo for Taboo strategy emerges as the most effective, yet its applicability is constrained by cultural distinctions. Despite this, the writer advocates for prioritizing this strategy to maintain fidelity to the original, while recognizing challenges posed by censorship and the necessity of adapting to the language norms of the target audience. The emphasis remains on providing a faithful translation, even when incorporating swear words, and the writer cautions against omitting specific words solely for ethical reasons unless it hinders the smooth flow of translation. Acknowledging the inherent complexity of translating swear words, the conclusion underscores the translator's pivotal role in conveying information without personal offense, thereby navigating the intricacies of language and cultural sensitivity.

In conclusion, the use of offensive and taboo language, encompassing abusive swearing, expletives, invectives, and taboo words, is a sensitive and underexplored topic in Audiovisual Translation, particularly in subtitling. Despite its social unacceptability in certain contexts, such language serves as a tool to depict characters' linguistic nuances, emotions, and feelings. Further research on the subtitled translation of this language into Vietnamese is crucial to offer academic and professional circles insights into effectively handling the subtitling of low register expressions.

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