

## Accessibility of Taboo and Offensive Language for the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing. The Case of *Torrente 4*

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### Abstract

This study examines the treatment of taboo topics and offensive language in the subtitles for the deaf and hard-of-hearing (SDH) of *Torrente 4: Lethal Crisis* (Segura, 2011), a Spanish comedy known for its provocative humour on sex, race, politics, and disability (Juan-Navarro, 2018). Using quantitative and qualitative content analysis, the types and frequency of taboo elements in the source text (ST) and their treatment in the target text (TT) are identified. The analysis reveals a high retention rate (94.29%) of taboo language in the SDH, demonstrating a strong commitment to preserving the film's satirical tone and humour. In the remaining 5.71% of non-transferred taboo language, minor omissions (1.90%) and partial transfers (2.86%) result mainly from time and space constraints, while compensation strategies (0.95%) occasionally introduce additional taboo elements to enhance the impact of the SDH. Despite these efforts, reproducing the unique speech patterns and humour of the characters poses challenges, sometimes leading to inaccuracies, including some reversals of meaning. The findings underline the delicate balance required to ensure accessibility while maintaining narrative and stylistic fidelity in SDH. The study concludes by advocating for reception studies to assess how effectively SDH conveys the taboo elements, the humorous aspects, and the provocative essence of the original content.

**Key words:** audiovisual translation, media accessibility, inclusion, sensory disabilities and impairments, subtitling for the deaf and hard-of-hearing, taboo, offensive language, humour, Spanish cinema, *Torrente* comedy film saga.

## Introduction

Taboo plays a key role in various forms of communication (Crespo-Fernández, 2018), including the creation of audiovisual products (Xavier, 2024) and their translation (Parini, 2013). From humour and satire to dramatic tension, taboo language adds depth and authenticity to dialogues, providing the public with insights into cultural and social values. This role is particularly prominent in contemporary audiovisual products, where taboo language often serves to shape characters, create humour, and even challenge social norms. Preserving these elements to maintain their impact is therefore crucial to achieving an equivalent experience for all different viewers.

The importance of taboo language in audiovisual contexts has spurred numerous studies on how such language is adapted in different modes of audiovisual translation (AVT), particularly in dubbing, conventional subtitling, and audio description (see, for example, Yuan, 2016; Sanz-Moreno, 2018; Magazzù, 2018; Briechle & Eppler, 2019; Alsharhan, 2020; Brescia Zapata & Matamala, 2020; and Cândido Moura, 2022). Despite this growing body of research, the topic of taboo language in SDH remains insufficiently studied.

As a form of media accessibility (MA), SDH requires translators to convey not only dialogue, but also crucial auditory elements that are necessary for understanding audiovisual products. When dealing with taboo elements that are present in the soundtrack, the task is even more complex, as subtitlers may need to strike a balance between preserving the impact of the ST and being mindful of the public's sensitivities and the constraints inherent in the SDH format. Since SDH recipients usually rely on subtitles to capture both the literal meaning and the tonal characteristics of a film, dealing with taboo content could pose particular challenges for SDH professionals, such as deciding whether to tone down or retain provocative language and expressions while still meeting the technical requirements of the SDH practice. These considerations suggest that the handling of taboo content in SDH is a crucial aspect of MA that remains underexplored.

To fill this gap, our study focuses on SDH in *Torrente 4: Lethal Crisis* (Segura, 2011), a film known for its provocative humour and an unfiltered portrayal of taboo subjects. By examining the adaptation of taboo and offensive language in SDH for this film, we aim to shed light on the strategies used, the challenges encountered, and the possible implications for the product's reception. Through this analysis, we aim to contribute to the wider discourse on accessibility in AVT and explore the ways in which taboo elements can be effectively retained or adapted to achieve a similar impact for people with auditory disabilities and impairments.

The present study is descriptive in scope, although it is considered a crucial preliminary step for future research on the reception of the SDH of works containing elements of taboo language in their original versions, particularly among participants with auditory disability and impairment. The study is both conceptual and empirical. Sections 1 and 2 describe the theoretical elements that allow us to conceptualise and contextualise the topic under study. In Section 3, the methodology used to carry out this research is detailed. Section 4 presents the analysis of the selected corpus and the results

obtained. Finally, sections 5 and 6 present the discussion and conclusions of our research, as well as the suggested research directions for the future that emerge from our study.

## 1. The Notion of “Taboo” in AVT

Taboo language is a complex topic involving linguistic, cultural, and ethical considerations. This type of language can include offensive expressions, sexual slang, or terms deemed inappropriate, which can vary significantly across different cultures and contexts.

According to Fuentes-Luque (2015, p. 6), taboo language can be classified into several categories, as follows:

- **Sex:** terms related to sexuality and sexual behaviour;
- **Scatology:** words related to bodily functions and excretions;
- **Religion:** blasphemies and terms offensive to certain religious beliefs;
- **Family:** insults and derogatory terms related to family members;
- **Derogatory denominations:** terms that denigrate individuals or groups based on their race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.

As stated by Ávila-Cabrera (2023, p. 116), the notion of “taboo” is usually linked to offensive language, and these categories often overlap. For practical purposes, we decided to use the term “taboo” in this paper to refer to taboo elements in general and also to taboo elements containing offensive language. In this regard, Ávila-Cabrera (2023, p. 120) distinguishes between the categories of “taboo language” and “offensive language”, relating each to different subcategories, which we outline below:

- **Taboo language**
  - Drugs/excessive alcohol consumption
  - Filth/urination/scatology
  - Profanity/blasphemy
  - Sex
- **Offensive language**
  - Curse/threat/violence
  - Expletive
  - Invective
  - Swearing
  - Swear words/phrases

The notion of “taboo” has been explored by numerous scholars in various fields including Linguistics and Sociolinguistics (Hughes, 1991; Wachal, 2002; Allan & Burridge, 2006; Ljung, 2011) and Psychology (Foote & Woodward, 1973; Jay, 2000, 2009), among others.

In the field of AVT, a number of authors have addressed the issue of taboo language from various perspectives. The works by Scandura (2004), Azzaro (2005, 2018), Díaz Cintas (2005, 2012), Pujol (2006), Soler Pardo (2013), Ávila-Cabrera (2015, 2016, 2023), Fuentes-Luque (2015), Valdeón (2015), Beseghi (2016), Bucaria and Barra (2016), Chiaro (2016), Zabalbeascoa (2016), Pérez Rodríguez et al. (2017), Parra López (2019), Pavesi and Formentelli (2019, 2023), Cândido Moura (2022), Xavier (2022a, 2022c, 2024), Guillot (2023), Martínez Sierra (2023), De Rosa (2024), and Villanueva-Jordán (2024) are particularly noteworthy in this field of study. Also, it is worth mentioning that the topic of taboo in AVT has also been explored in regions where offensive language is a sensitive issue that tends to be censored, such as certain countries in the Arab world (see in particular the works by Al-Adwan, 2015; and Izwaini, 2017).

This literature review shows that the topic of taboo language is attracting increasing critical attention. However, as mentioned before, one aspect that still needs to be studied in depth is the presence of taboo language in accessibility-focused AVT modes, such as the aforementioned audio description for people with visual disability and impairment, as well as in sign language translation and interpreting and in SDH, which is the focus of our study and the subject of this article.

## **2. Taboo Language in SDH**

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that more than 430 million people worldwide have some form of hearing loss (2024, online). It is therefore imperative that audiovisual content be accessible for all. SDH is a fundamental tool for promoting inclusion and ensuring that people with auditory disabilities and impairments have access to culture, entertainment, and information regardless of their degree of hearing loss.

The topic of taboo language in subtitling has been addressed mainly in the context of conventional subtitling (see, for example, the works by Baines, 2015; Ávila-Cabrera, 2016, 2023; Yuan, 2016; Alsharhan, 2020; and Xavier, 2022a, 2022c), but mentions of the SDH of taboo language can also be encountered in other recent publications, such as the special issue on taboo in AVT edited by De Rosa (2024) and in the book by Ávila-Cabrera (2023) on taboo and subtitling. However, there is currently no empirical research that explicitly focuses on SDH and taboo. Consequently, numerous research questions remain unanswered, some of which are specific to the challenges presented by MA modes<sup>1</sup>, as categorised by Greco and Jankowska (2020). These include not only SDH and AD, but also

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Greco and Jankowska (2020), MA can be defined as a field focused on ensuring inclusive access to media from a human rights perspective.

a wider range of access services<sup>2</sup> comprising “not only the modalities specific for persons with sensory disabilities but all AVT modalities” (2020, p. 5), which demonstrates the complexity and diversity of accessibility requirements.

Recently, research carried out by authors such as Xavier (2022a, 2022c, 2024) is attempting to answer these questions. In recent years, Xavier’s work has concentrated on the subject of taboo in accessibility, with a particular focus on SDH and audio description. Her current project, entitled *How Accessible is Taboo? A Multi-Method Comparative Study of Taboo Accessibility in Audio Description and Subtitling for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing* (2022b) explores this area in depth.

Based on what has already been published about the translation of taboo elements in conventional subtitling, we will attempt to infer the possible implications of taboo in the MA mode we are examining in this paper. If we combine the results of Xavier’s (2022a, 2022c, 2024) and Ávila-Cabrera’s (2014, 2015, 2016, 2023) research on the subtitling of taboo, we can draw some important conclusions that could be specifically relevant to SDH:

- **Fidelity to the Source Text (ST):** Both researchers emphasise the importance of maintaining cultural and emotional integrity when translating taboo language. For SDH, this could mean ensuring that subtitles accurately reflect the tone and impact of the original dialogue, which is crucial to conveying the full experience to viewers who rely on subtitles to understand audiovisual products.
- **Taking pragmatic considerations into account:** Both researchers stress the importance of pragmatic considerations in subtitling. For SDH, this could mean considering how taboo words function in different contexts and ensuring that subtitles are understandable and effective for people with auditory disability and impairment.
- **Considering technical constraints:** Addressing technical limitations, such as space and time constraints, is crucial in SDH. Both authors’ research highlights the need to adapt subtitles to fit within these constraints, while still conveying the necessary information and emotional tone.
- **Avoiding censorship:** Ávila-Cabrera’s exploration of ideological manipulation and censorship in subtitling (2023) is particularly relevant to SDH. This highlights the need for transparency and accuracy in subtitling to ensure that people with auditory disabilities and

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<sup>2</sup> Greco and Jankowska (2020) categorise MA modes (or “modalities”, which is the term used by the authors) based on translation type and the type of translation involved. The authors (2020) identify the following MA modalities: AD, audio narration, dubbing, enriched subtitles, extended AD, live AD, live subtitles, sign language interpreting, subtitling, transcripts, and voice-over. The authors (2020) propose a universalist, proactive, and user-centred approach that transcends traditional audiovisual translation. This means adapting to the diverse needs and contexts of users. It is therefore reasonable to interpret this as meaning that they consider the list of MA modalities to be open and evolving, and subject to change as new technologies are developed and new accessibility needs are identified, as stated by authors like Reverter Oliver (2019) and López Rubio (2024a).

impairments receive an unaltered and authentic version of the content, despite space and time constraints.

The combined findings of Xavier's and Ávila-Cabrera's research provide an initial framework for addressing the complexities of subtitling taboo language in SDH. Overall, this framework advocates for an SDH that is accurate, technically feasible and sensitive to the needs of deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers, demonstrating the critical role of SDH in promoting inclusivity and accessibility without compromising the integrity of the ST.

In the next section, the methods and materials used for carrying out the present study are described.

### 3. Methodology

Our research employs a mixed-method approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative analysis strategies. On the one hand, there has been a collection of numerical data on the transmission of taboo elements in SDH. On the other hand, the types of taboo elements transferred or omitted in the target text (TT) were analysed. The combination of these methods allows us to triangulate the data.

In regard to the methodology employed for the analysis of the film *Torrente 4: Lethal Crisis*, a comprehensive approach was undertaken to examine the SDH and to ascertain how the elements pertaining to taboo language from the ST were transferred, or not, and to what extent. The steps followed are described in detail below:

#### 3.1. Selection of the Film

The selection of *Torrente 4: Lethal Crisis* (Segura, 2011), was made on the basis of several key criteria. Firstly, the film is known for its strong presence of taboo elements, making it an ideal subject for studying the subtitling of offensive and sensitive language. Secondly, the year of production was significant because it followed the implementation of the UNE 153010 standard<sup>3</sup> (AENOR, 2003), which provides guidelines for SDH in Spain.

In addition, the genre of *Torrente 4: Lethal Crisis*, which is a comedy, often involves the use of explicit language and humour, elements that can be difficult to transfer. Its director, Santiago Segura, is known for his distinctive style (Juan-Navarro, 2018), which includes many culturally specific references and slang, adding another layer of complexity to the subtitling process. Finally, the language of the film, Spanish, was a crucial factor, as it allowed an in-depth analysis of how taboo language is handled in a specific linguistic and cultural context.

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<sup>3</sup> Please note that the standard was later updated, with the most recent version published in 2012.

### 3.2. Creation of the Analysis Model

To create the analysis model for our corpus study, we followed Ávila-Cabrera's<sup>4</sup> (2023) framework for analysing conventional subtitling and adapted it to assess the transfer of taboo elements in the SDH version. The author (2023) develops a taxonomy of translation techniques related to taboo, using a "traffic light" system to classify the transfer of taboo content:

- **Green light:** It indicates that the taboo content has been transferred. Transferred taboo content can appear in three forms:
  1. The subtitle becomes harsher or stronger;
  2. The content remains the same;
  3. The content is softened.
- **Red light:** It indicates that the taboo content has not been transferred. This can occur in two cases:
  1. When the content is neutralised and loses its original effect;
  2. When the content is completely omitted, and no offensive term is found. Research on subtitling taboo language carried out by authors such as Díaz Cintas (2001) illustrates strategies involving complete omission, especially due to time and space constraints, which is particularly applicable to the SDH practice.

Based on Ávila-Cabrera's proposal (2023), we developed an analysis table using an Excel file, which includes columns detailing the presence of taboo elements in the ST, the text of the SDH displayed, and additional annotations. The key parameters included in the columns of the table are described below:

- **Taboo elements in the ST:** This column contains the dialogue from the ST that includes elements which are considered taboo;
- **SDH content (compared to the ST):** This column indicates whether the content of the SDH is the same as or different from the ST;
- **Taboo elements to be transferred:** This column indicates the taboo elements to be transferred to the SDH;
- **Taboo elements transferred (or not) to the SDH (and to what extent):** This column shows whether or not taboo elements have been transferred to the SDH, as well as the degree of transfer.

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<sup>4</sup> Ávila-Cabrera's work (2023) addresses the complexities of translating offensive and taboo language in audiovisual media. The author's research is highly relevant in this field and his suggested framework for analysing offensive and taboo language (2023) inspired us to develop our own analysis model based on his proposal.

### 3.3. Detection of Subtitles With Taboo Elements

To select the subtitles for analysis from our corpus, we manually identified those that contained taboo elements throughout the film, using the category classifications provided by Fuentes-Luque (2015) and Ávila-Cabrera (2023) (see Section 1). This process involved a detailed review of the entire film to ensure that all instances of taboo language were captured. In addition, we included information from the original dialogue to compare how these taboo elements were or were not transferred from the ST to the TT. This comparison was carried out following the framework established by Ávila-Cabrera (2023), which allowed us to systematically analyse the subtitling strategies used and their effectiveness in conveying the intended meaning and impact of the original dialogue.

### 3.4. Data Collection and Analysis of the Subtitles

As explained above, we systematically collected and organised the analysis data in an Excel file, focusing on the translation of taboo language into SDH. Using Ávila-Cabrera's (2023) framework, we examined whether taboo elements were transferred from the ST, documenting how they were handled and to what extent they were preserved or altered. This structured approach allowed us to assess the fidelity and potential effectiveness<sup>5</sup> of subtitles in conveying taboo content.

In this step, we also identified specific features of certain subtitles. In order to decide which subtitles to analyse in more detail, we focused on those containing taboo language in either the ST or the TT, particularly when these instances revealed significant changes in tone, register, or meaning. We then evaluated whether the taboo content had been preserved, summarised, expanded, or altered in the SDH. We also considered whether the SDH included information not present in the ST and whether there were any specific issues, such as inaccuracies, idiolectal features, or intralingual translation problems.

This thorough examination allowed us to identify several key patterns and trends. These insights were crucial in shaping our understanding and led us to formulate the main findings of this paper, which are detailed in the following sections.

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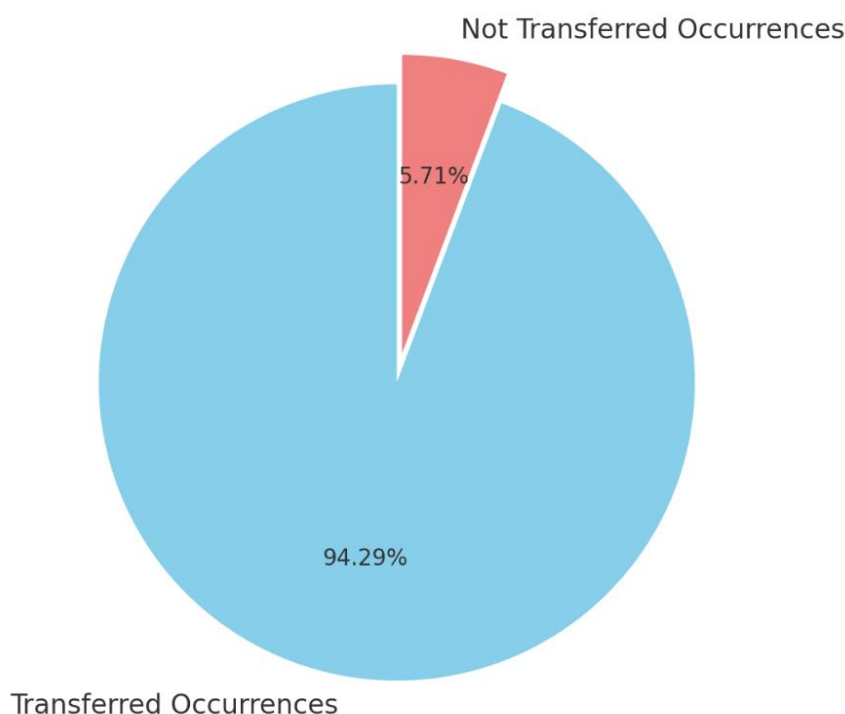
<sup>5</sup> Reception studies are necessary for this purpose. However, it seems likely that subtitles may be more effective the more that the SDH reflects taboo language. This means that the accessibility aligns with the function or "skopos" (Reiss & Vermeer, 1984) of the original work. Our doctoral dissertation (2024a) on the audio description of comedies suggested this observation, but further reception studies with participants consuming SDH are needed to confirm the hypothesis.

#### 4. Results

The analysis showed that taboo language was transferred from the dialogues to the SDH in 94.29% of cases, as can be found in Figure 1. This means that out of the 210 instances of taboo language identified in the ST, 198 were retained in the subtitles, with only 12 occurrences not transferred into the TT. The high percentage indicates a strong commitment to maintaining the authenticity of the original content. This is to ensure that the TT fulfils the source product's purpose, or "skopos" (Reiss & Vermeer, 1984), which is to produce humour through the exaggerated representation of certain beliefs and attitudes it seeks to criticise.

**Figure 1**

*Proportion of Transferred and Non-Transferred Taboo Language in SDH Based on Corpus Analysis*



The percentage of non-transferred taboo language (5.71%) comprises instances of taboo content that were not transferred in the SDH (4 instances), elements that were only partially transferred (6 instances), and two cases in which compensation (Hurtado, 2001, p. 308) was employed by adding a taboo element in the SDH when it was not present in the ST.

In terms of the types of taboo elements present, the most common were as follows:

- **Bad language<sup>6</sup> and swearing** (64 occurrences):
  - “Me cago en toda tu puta madre. Te voy a asesinar.”  
(My translation: “I shit on your whole fucking mother. I’m gonna kill you.”)
  - “Vaya mierda de boda es esta, hombre.”  
(My translation: “Man, what a shit wedding this is.”)
- **Insults** (44 occurrences):
  - “¡Cabrón, malparido, desgraciado!”  
(My translation: “Bastard, motherfucker, scumbag!”)
  - “¡Golfo, que eres un golfo!”  
(My translation: “Asshole, you’re such an asshole!”)
- **Sexuality** (33 occurrences: 18 explicit, 15 mild):
  - “Oye, que me has *pillao* el frenillo con los dientes, coño”  
(My translation: “Hey, you’ve caught my frenulum with your teeth, damn it!”)
  - “¿Nos hacemos unas pajillas?”  
(My translation: “How about a little mutual wank?”)
- **Racism** (14 occurrences):
  - “Estos *sudacas*...”  
(My translation: “These dirty South Americans...”)
  - “No me jodas, hombre, si eso es un negro.”  
(My translation: “Don’t fuck with me, man, that’s a black guy.”)
- **Prostitution** (13 occurrences):
  - “Las mejores putas, champán...”  
(My translation: “The best whores, champagne...”)
  - “Vamos, que me lo gastaría todo en putas.”  
(My translation: “Honestly, I’d blow it all on whores.”)
- **Scatological references** (13 occurrences):
  - “Que me he *cagao*, Torrente, que me he *cagao*.”  
(My translation: “I’ve *shat* myself, Torrente, I’ve *shat* myself.”)
  - “Coño, parece que me ha entrado un apretoncillo, Fary.”  
(My translation: “Shit, feels like I’ve got a bit of a tight squeeze coming on, Fary.”)
- **Homophobia** (11 occurrences):
  - “¿Somos hombres o somos *hormosexuales*? Venga.”

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<sup>6</sup> Although *bad language* was not one of the categories defined in the theoretical framework of this study, it has been included in the analysis to account for vulgar or colloquial expressions that, while not strictly *swearing* (i.e. profanities or blasphemous language), share a similar emotional impact and function, such as “¡Joder!” (“Fuck!”) or “Vaya mierda...” (“What a shitty [thing/situation]”), expressing frustration, annoyance, or disbelief. Due to the overlap in tone and communicative purpose between the two categories, they have been grouped together in the analysis to more accurately reflect the use of taboo language in the corpus.

(My translation: “Are we men or are we *hormosexuals*? Come on.”)

- “¡Serás maricón!”

(My translation: “You’re such a fag!”)

Additionally, other minor themes included references to religion (6 occurrences), fatphobia (5 occurrences), misogyny (4 occurrences), and violence (3 occurrences).

In addition to the quantitative data previously collected, the qualitative analysis of the work revealed key aspects regarding the manner in which taboo elements are addressed during the process of intralingual translation and adaptation of the original work into the accessible product. The qualitative reflections complement the quantitative data and can be listed in three main categories:

- **Errors in speech patterns:** The analysis points to the reproduction of ST language errors in SDH, as in the sentence “Lo que pasa es que el cerebro de la operación no debe nunca *de* ensuciarse las manos” (TCR 00:24:00) (“What happens is that the brains of the operation must never *to* get<sup>7</sup> their hands dirty”<sup>8</sup>). In this instance, the subtitlers of this film retained grammatical errors or awkward phrasing, which reflects the informal or colloquial tone of the original dialogue. Another example can be found in TCR 00:37:29: “a las tías les gustan los hombres *con estilo vistiendo*” (“Chicks like men *dressing styling*”), and in TCR 01:13:49: “No es que su marido sea *hormosexual*” (“It is not that your husband is *hormosexual*”). While these errors may be intentional, they could sometimes impede clarity or contribute to misunderstandings.
- **Idiolect and colloquialism:** The effort to preserve the idiolect and colloquial traits of certain characters is also noteworthy. For example, in TCR 00:18:53, the sentence “Traiga usted *p’acá*” (“Bring it over ‘ere’”) shows both colloquialisms and grammatical errors that are essential to the character’s way of speaking. Another example of this can be found in TCR 01:15:55: “¡Si no les he *dao*, una mierda *pa’* mí!” (“I didn’t *fuckin’* shot ‘em, you *gotta* be *shitting* me!”). However, the results of the analysis indicate that time constraints sometimes prevent a complete representation of these characteristics.
- **Reversal of meaning due to fast speech:** One of the most striking cases is the occurrence of a reversal error in the SDH. In TCR 00:38:30, Torrente says, “esa gente *no solo* eran homosexuales, además son asesinos” (“Those people were *not only* homosexuals, they are also murderers”). However, the subtitles incorrectly render “esa gente *solo* eran homosexuales, además son asesinos” (“Those people were *only* homosexuals, they are also murderers”), completely changing the meaning. This error is due to the speed of the

<sup>7</sup> Please note that the translation reproduces the original error present in the ST.

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that all translations of the ST into English have been carried out by the author of this paper, rather than using the expressions contained in the translated English versions of the film. The rationale for this approach is to ensure that the references cited from the original Spanish text are conveyed as accurately and faithfully as possible. This is intended to facilitate an understanding of the original content and meaning that is as close as possible to that intended in the ST.

character's speech, which probably made it difficult for the subtitlers to catch the nuance. Additionally, Torrente's idiolect is characterised by the use of grammatically incorrect language, which may have contributed to the confusion.

After analysing the results of the study on the transfer of taboo elements in the process of SDH of the selected Spanish comedy, the following section presents the discussion of our research.

## 5. Discussion

The study highlights that, despite the challenges inherent in SDH, the transfer of taboo language from the ST to the TT is largely achieved, preserving its impact and function within the narrative context. In particular, the translation of taboo elements such as insults, vulgarities and sexual references is maintained at a high percentage (94.29%), underlining the effort to convey the provocative and humorous tone of the ST. However, this preservation of taboo language is not without complications, as factors such as characters' idiolect, colloquialisms, and speaking speed test the flexibility of SDH, as illustrated by the examples of meaning inversion presented in the previous section.

One of the greatest challenges in translating taboo language into SDH is the impact of spatio-temporal constraints on the faithful transmission of meaning and expressiveness. In most cases (94.29% of subtitles containing taboo language), SDH not only retains the vulgar and offensive load of the terms despite the spatio-temporal limitations presented, but also the aggressive and emotionally charged tone that characterises the characters, as seen in examples such as “¿Somos hombres o somos *hormosexuales*? Venga.” (“Are we men or are we *hormosexuals*? Come on.”) and “¡Serás maricón!” (“You’re such a fag!”), showing how homophobia is maintained in the translation, which is essential to avoid distorting the dynamic between the characters. In these cases, the introduction of taboo terms in SDH not only reflects fidelity to the original tone, but also ensures that the emotional and humorous impact is adequately conveyed to people with auditory disability and impairment. Nevertheless, the limitations of space and time sometimes force the loss of all or part of the essence of taboo language in TT, which explains why 1.90% of taboo elements are omitted (4 instances) and 2.86% are partially transferred (6 instances), as seen in examples such as “¡Maricón!” (TCR 38:21) (“Fag!”), which was not subtitled, and “Oye, que me has *pillao* el frenillo con los dientes, coño” (TCR 03:45) (“Hey, you’ve caught my frenulum with your teeth, damn it!”), which was subtitled without the offensive term “coño”. Additionally, 0.95% of cases (2 instances) were compensated by adding new taboo elements in the TT, helping to preserve the humorous effect.

In Spanish, the use of the term “coño” in this context serves as an expletive that intensifies the speaker's reaction to pain or discomfort. It does not carry its literal anatomical meaning, but rather functions as an emphatic interjection, similar to expressions like “damn it” or “for fuck's sake” in English. Its presence adds a strong emotional charge, reinforcing the abruptness and severity of the speaker's reaction. However, in the context of SDH, the omission of the term “coño” not only

weakens this emotional intensity, but also alters the representation of how taboo language is used to construct character identity and social dynamics.

Because taboo language serves multiple pragmatic functions, from insult and provocation to camaraderie and humour, its omission in SDH may contribute to a form of sanitisation that upsets the balance between accessibility and fidelity to the ST. As people with auditory disability and impairment rely solely on captioning to access both explicit content and its intended expressiveness, such omissions may result in a loss of equivalence and a diluted reception of the tone and intent of the ST. However, as discussed, such omissions only occur in a small number of examples in this film.

From a translation studies perspective, the use of compensation as a strategy (Hurtado, 2001, p. 308) also plays a crucial role in the adaptation of these taboo elements. Sometimes, taboo language is introduced in the SDH where it was not present in the ST in order to create an equivalent impact on the recipients of the TT, as seen in TCR 54:13, where cheers were conveyed in the SDH with different content from the original, adding taboo elements to the TT: “Me cago en la puta” (“I shit on your fucking mother”). Another example is at TCR 54:38, where the doorman character sings in the original version, but the first part of his intervention is not heard, perhaps due to a sound editing error. In the SDH it was subtitled and the offensive content of the swear word was transferred: “joder”, not present in the dialogue itself (“Es que me dejáis solo”) (“You leave me alone”), but perceived through the image by reading the character’s lips (“Joder, es que me dejáis solo”) (“Damn it, you leave me alone”).

The process of transferring taboo language is, therefore, a constant negotiation between fidelity to the ST and the demands of the accessible format. Although 94.29% of taboo occurrences are retained, this process requires decisions that go beyond the purely linguistic. For example, in subtitles such as “Coño, parece que me ha entrado un apretoncillo, Fary” (“Shit, feels like I’ve got a bit of a tight squeeze coming on, Fary.”), the scatological language of the ST is preserved, despite the challenges of space and time that could have affected the intensity of the comic effect. This preservation entails an effort to maintain the authenticity of the characters, particularly in preserving their style and personality through explicit language.

In this sense, the results suggest that the translation of taboo language into SDH depends not only on the ability to preserve the meaning, but also on preserving the narrative and emotional functions of the original content. The humour, satire and social criticism of ST depend on the strength of the taboo elements, which function as tools to depict the characters and their interactions. Expressions of racism and homophobia such as “Estos *sudacas*...” (“These dirty South Americans...”), “No me jodas, hombre, si eso es un negro.” (“Don’t fuck with me, man, that’s a black guy.”) and “esa gente *no solo* eran homosexuales, además son asesinos” (“Those people were *not only* homosexuals, they are also murderers”) reflect not only the characters’ vulgar language, but also their worldview and power dynamics. The challenge for SDH is not to dilute these elements for the sake of accessibility, in order to ensure that the social criticism and provocative tone of the ST is effectively conveyed.

One of the main contributions of this study is to emphasise that despite the inherent limitations of SDH, such as screen time and the need to compress content, taboo language can be transferred with a high degree of fidelity, while largely retaining its original purpose or “skopos” (Reiss & Vermeer, 1984). The fact that only 12 out of 210 instances of taboo language are lost highlights the ability of SDH to preserve the essence of the ST despite the constraints encountered by MA professionals. This reinforces the idea that accessible subtitling should not be seen as a mere transcription of content, but as a re-creation service that preserves both content and form as much as possible, thus making the product accessible not only for a certain group of people, but for everyone.

Following the discussion, the next section outlines the main avenues for future research and the conclusions that have emerged from our study.

## 6. Further Research and Conclusions

This study has highlighted the complexities and specificities of the SDH of taboo language in the fourth part of the *Torrente* saga. Building on these findings, several avenues for future research emerge. These potential directions of inquiry aim to deepen our understanding of the challenges and opportunities in providing accessible and engaging experiences for people with auditory disabilities and impairments.

- **Conducting reception studies with participants with auditory disabilities and impairments to ascertain the extent to which the SDH of taboo content meets their needs and expectations**

This proposal should be developed not only in terms of comprehension (in the sense of enhancing people’s understanding of what is happening on screen) and accessibility, but also in terms of enjoyment and entertainment (see López Rubio, 2024a). It would be valuable to investigate whether decisions made when translating and adapting taboo language remain faithful to the essence of the original dialogue while remaining accessible to the intended audience. Although SDH was originally designed to meet the needs of a specific group (namely, people with auditory disabilities and impairments) to ensure their right to access audiovisual content, this does not limit its relevance to that group. Following the perspectives of Greco (2016, 2018, 2019) and Greco and Jankowska (2020), previously discussed in this article, MA should be understood as a set of practices and modalities that aim to be available to all, particularly those facing temporary or permanent communication barriers. This inclusive approach recognises that accessibility measures such as SDH benefit a broader audience and are part of a wider commitment to inclusive design. From this perspective, the proposed research could use a mix of qualitative methods (e.g. interviews and focus groups) and quantitative approaches (e.g. surveys) to more comprehensively explore the impact of translation strategies on users’ experiences.

- **Expanding the corpus to other *Torrente* films to assess the consistency of taboo language treatment in SDH within the saga**

In order to gain a more in-depth understanding, it would be beneficial to expand the corpus to encompass multiple films in the *Torrente* series. This approach would likely facilitate a clearer understanding of the potential evolution and variation of subtitling conventions for taboo language in response to evolving subtitling regulations. It could also help explain the impact of the development of the *Torrente* saga on translation decision-making, particularly in terms of changes in tone and thematic focus across the different films<sup>9</sup> in the saga. Expanding the study to several excerpts from the different films in the saga would allow us to understand how taboo language is treated in each one and whether there are consistent patterns in SDH across the saga.

A comparative analysis of several films from different points in the saga would enable us to observe whether subtitlers employ consistent strategies across films or adapt their methods in response to factors such as the evolution of perceptions of taboo, regulatory changes, or the development of characters and plots. This comparison would be valuable for studying consistency in the adaptation of taboo language and observing the impact of character and plot development on translation.

- **Exploring the use of creative SDH in the case of audiovisual texts containing taboo elements**

Given the humorous and provocative style of the *Torrente* saga, an interesting research idea for the future would be to examine whether creative SDH could effectively convey the saga's taboo content in an accessible yet faithful manner. In order to define the concept of creative SDH, we can build on the idea of creative subtitling provided by Romero-Fresco on his Accessible Filmmaking website (n.d.):

Creative subtitles respond to the specific qualities of every film, giving the subtitlers and filmmakers more freedom to create an aesthetic that suits that of the original film. They are part of the image and contribute to the typographic and aesthetic identity of the film.

This is clearly illustrated in productions such as the BBC's *Sherlock* (2010) and Netflix's *House of Cards* (2013), where on-screen text is integrated into the storytelling. See these and other examples discussed in the *I Heart Subtitles* blog (n.d.). Similarly, Rocío Varela's portfolio (n.d.) showcases a variety of creative subtitling techniques, featuring excerpts from films and TV shows such as *Newsnight* (1980), *When Harry Met Sally* (1989), *Night Watch* (2004), *Sherlock Holmes* (2010), *Notes*

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<sup>9</sup> No specific information has been found on who created the SDH for the different films in the *Torrente* saga. However, film production companies typically collaborate with accessibility service providers for this purpose. The SDH analysed here is the version available on Netflix Spain, and any comparative analysis would also rely on Netflix Spain's versions. While these subtitles may have been produced at different times and by different accessibility providers, similar to what has been observed with the audio description of some films in this saga (see López Rubio, 2024b), all content on Netflix Spain must comply with the platform's guidelines (Netflix, 2022).

on *Blindness* (2016), and *The Conjuring 2* (2016), where subtitles are incorporated thoughtfully to complement the visual narrative.

Research shows that creative MA, including creative SDH, can significantly enhance the experience for all viewers, thereby promoting inclusion and making media more accessible and enjoyable (see, for example, the works by Fox, 2016, Romero-Fresco, 2021, 2022; and Romero-Fresco & Chaume, 2022). This idea is consistent with Greco's (2016, 2018, 2019) theoretical framework, previously discussed in this article, and his proposal of three shifts in MA. These shifts advocate moving away from a particularist view of accessibility, which focuses on specific user groups, towards a universalist perspective that considers accessibility a resource from which everyone can benefit. In this context, creative strategies in SDH address the needs of various user profiles and foster a more inclusive and engaging media environment for all.

For creative SDH, this means that subtitles go beyond the mere transcription of spoken dialogue to include important non-verbal sounds such as music, sound effects, and ambient noise. These auditory elements are presented in a manner that is both functional and visually consistent with the overall aesthetic and visual style of the film. According to these assumptions, creative SDH is meant to ensure that all essential sound information is conveyed without compromising the emotional and artistic integrity of the film. Hence, creative SDH goes beyond straightforward translation to interpretively transfer certain elements of the film into the TT, allowing people with auditory disabilities and impairments to capture the humour, irony, or other traits of the saga's taboo language. Investigating the feasibility of creative SDH in this context could help develop new accessibility techniques for subtitling in genres that often contain taboo elements and sometimes push conventional boundaries, such as dark humour or satire.

In order to address the challenges of creating accessible works with distinctive features such as the one analysed in this paper, further research is essential, especially when conducted in conjunction with SDH practice. While significant progress remains to be made in this area, this study aims to contribute to a better understanding of an under-explored subject of study. Also, it paves the way for future research that could improve our understanding of AVT strategies and their reception by the public, thereby advancing both theory and practice in the field of MA.

Although the scope of this study is limited to a single case and does not yet include reception data, it addresses an aspect of MA that requires academic attention, and that is the representation of taboo language in SDH and its relation to the communicative function of the ST. Through a systematic methodology adapted from Ávila-Cabrera (2023), this paper offers an original contribution to the field of MA by assessing not only the fidelity in transferring taboo elements but also its potential effectiveness when stylistic and affective markers, which are consistent with the nature of the ST, are preserved in SDH. Thus, this work challenges the idea that accessibility should privilege neutrality, as stated in standards like AENOR (2003, 2012), highlighting that the use of taboo language also in the TT could possibly enrich users' experience, should this hypothesis be confirmed through reception studies.

In doing so, the study highlights the importance of considering pragmatics and reception in MA processes. It proposes a more inclusive vision that strengthens the experiential nature of accessibility. This approach is consistent with the perspectives suggested in the aforementioned works by Greco (2016, 2018, 2019) and Greco and Jankowska (2020), as it considers MA to be an open practice from which we can all benefit.

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