

Taboo Words And Their Translation In Vietnamese Subtitling: A Case Study In “6 Underground”

Nhat Nam Luong¹, Thi Linh Giang Hoang²

¹University Of Foreign Languages And International Studies, Hue University, Vietnam

²University Of Foreign Languages And International Studies, Hue University, Vietnam

Abstract:

The research focuses on the types and functions of taboo words used by the characters in the movie 6 Underground as well as the subtitling strategies employed to translate these taboo words from English to Vietnamese. Adopting a descriptive qualitative research design, the data of this study come in the forms of words, phrases and utterances that contain taboo words found in the English and Vietnamese subtitles of the movie taken from the website Netflix. With a corpus 228 tokens of taboo words and phrases extracted from 6 Underground, the researchers employ Jay’s (1992) taxonomy to analyze the types of taboo words, Liedlich’s (1973) theory to analyze the functions of taboo words while Gottlieb’s (1992) subtitling strategies and Pedersen’s (2005) model of translation are adapted to analyze the translation strategies of taboo words. The results show that the dominant type of taboo words found in the movie is Obscenity and Provide Catharsis tops the list of functions played by these taboo words and phrases. The subtitler employed Euphemism most frequently to convey the taboo words in the target language.

Key Word: Taboo Words, Subtitling, Translation Strategies, 6 Underground movie

Date of Submission: 28-10-2024

Date of Acceptance: 08-11-2024

I. Introduction

Humans are inherently a social species. We communicate with each other through the medium of language – to express our emotions, our opinions and to understand each other. However, there are many ways to communicate depending on social contexts as “speech in almost any society can take many very different forms” (Wardhaugh, 2006, p. 1). Consequently, linguists started to study the connection between language and society, and a branch of linguistics, namely sociolinguistics, was born to accommodate this need.

Sociolinguistics is defined by Hudson (1996) to denominate “the study of language in relation to society” (p. 1). Furthermore, Holmes (2013) believes that studying the relationship between language and society is the aim of sociolinguists. Wardhaugh and Fuller (2014) enrich the definition of sociolinguistics by adding that sociolinguistics is the study of our everyday lives, of how language works in the daily conversations and the media that we are exposed to, and the use of societal norms, policies, and laws which address language.

A special aspect of languages is taboos. When communicating, speakers can engage in either formal or informal speech. Concerning informal speech, people often employ inappropriate and impolite language, such as taboo words. The term “taboo” originally comes from “tapu” in Polynesian which means “prohibited”, “forbidden” or “sacred”. Essentially, taboo refers to subjects or words that should not be mentioned or spoken. Yet, it is quite common nowadays for people to use taboo words in daily conversations and this phenomenon is also reflected in the mainstream media, for instance, movies.

On the other hand, a pivotal part of a movie that needs to be taken into consideration is the translation of the subtitles. Translation can be said to be a process in which information undergoes a transformation from the source language (SL) into the target language (TL) without its meaning or idea being altered. Moreover, Nida and Taber (2003) further comment that translating includes “reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style” (p. 12). Regarding movie subtitling, it has always been a controversial talk due to its translation quality, especially in interlingual movies. Koolstra et al. (2002) attribute this notion to the poor translations of the original foreign-language texts. Additionally, Gottlieb (1992) further argues there are many factors affecting a movie’s translation quality, such as the limitation on the number of characters appearing on screen, the reading speed of the average viewers, the position and time for the corresponding subtitles to be shown with the images and sounds, and the stylistic and semantic values which the subtitles need to adequately convey. It becomes even more problematic when involving the translation of taboo words, which are often offensive in nature. Vietnamese movies, unlike their Western counterparts, often undergo rigorous censorship; therefore, conducting

research on how taboo words are translated from English to Vietnamese would provide great insights into the translation strategies for translating taboo words.

II. Literature Review

Definition of taboos

Various scholars define this concept differently. Wardhaugh (2006) asserts that taboos are the acts of prohibiting or avoiding behaviors in a society which are believed to be detrimental to its members for the anxiety, embarrassment or shame they could cause. Likewise, Jay (2009) refers to taboo words as words that are "sanctioned or restricted on both institutional and individual levels under the assumption that some harm will occur if a taboo word is spoken" (p. 153).

Types of taboo words

To analyze the types of taboo words, the researcher employs Jay's (1992) taxonomy of taboo words consists of nine types:

- (a) Epithet: Jay (2009) defines epithets as "offensive emotional outbursts of single words or phrases used to express the speaker's frustration, anger, or surprise" (p. 155).
- (b) Profanity: Profanity is based on religious grounds, or as Jay (2009) states, profanity is "the secular irreverent speech" (p. 154). To profane is to debase what is holy but it is done out of ignorance, not of malicious intent.
- (c) Vulgarity: According to Sitohang et al. (2021), this type of taboo words occurs when the taboo words identify "the body parts, the body process, and the body products" (p. 12).
- (d) Obscenity: McIntosh (2020) argues that obscenity is associated with sex, excretion, and oral, anal, and genital functions. It is not used widely, especially in the public due to the stigma it carries. Batistella (2005) defines obscenity terms as words or expressions which involve sex-differentiating anatomy or sexual and excretory functions spoken in a rough way.
- (e) Blasphemy: Blasphemy is defined as "attacks on religion" (Jay, 2009, p. 154), specifically referring to the act of insulting religion, religious organizations or religious figures such as God. The main difference between Profanity and Blasphemy is that Profanity is done out of ignorance, not of malicious intent whereas Blasphemy is done deliberately and aims to attack a certain religious figure or organization.
- (f) Cursing: Jay (1992) believes that the intent of cursing is "to invoke harm on another person through the use of certain words or phrases" (p. 2).
- (g) Slang: Slang is a type of language that is informal and typically used by a certain groups or people, usually by the young.
- (h) Insult and slur are verbal attacks on other people that are uttered to inflict harm onto other people by the word alone (Jay, 1992). According to Jay (1992), "slurs may be racial, ethnic, or social in nature and may indicate the stereotyping or prejudice of the speaker. Insults may denote the physical, mental, or psychological qualities of the target" (p. 8)
- (i) Scatology: Scatology deals with human waste, which can cause a sense of disgust or detestation to the listeners when uttered.

Functions of Taboo Words

Regarding the functions of taboo words, the current research employs the list of six functions of taboo words proposed by Liedlich (1973, as cited in Indrayasa et al., 2018):

- (a) Create attention: When someone wants to attract the attention of others, he/she may use taboo words.
- (b) Discredit: This function of taboo words is employed when the speakers are not satisfied or disagree with others or how things are. Furthermore, it also can be used to criticize someone or something in a negative way.
- (c) Provoke violent confrontation: Taboo words can be used to provoke and agitate listeners for certain responses such as anger.
- (d) Endearment: Sometimes taboo words can be used in conversations between close friends or close people. It is used as a way to strengthen the bonds between speakers and listeners.
- (e) Interpersonal identification: According to Irawan (2019), Interpersonal identification is the function that "enacts social relationships, embodies all users of language to express social and personal relations" (p. 21).
- (f) Provide catharsis: This function is used when the speakers want to vent their frustration by uttering offensive taboo words.

Definition of audiovisual translation (AVT)

Baker and Saldanha (2009) denote AVT as a branch of translation studies involving "the transfer of multimodal and multimedia texts into another language and/or culture" (p. 13). According to Chiaro (2009),

screen products (e.g. films, TV series, documentaries, etc.) are polysemiotic, or to put it in another way, they are made up of various codes which interact to create a single effect. She illustrates this with the following figure:

Figure no 1: The polysemiotic nature of audiovisual products

	Visual	Acoustic
Non-Verbal	Scenery, Lighting, Costumes, Props, Etc. Also: Gesture, Facial Expression; Body, Movement, Etc.	Music, Background, Noise, Sound Effects, Etc. Also: Laughter; Crying; Humming; Body Sounds (Breathing, Coughing, Etc.)
Verbal	Street Signs, Shop Signs; Written Realia (Newspaper; Letters; Headlines; Notes; Etc.)	Dialogues; Song Lyrics; Poems; Etc.

Source: Adapted from *Issues in Audiovisual Translation*, by Chiaro, 2009, p. 143

Unlike literature and poetry, audiovisual programs employ two codes – sounds and images – “to actualize a particular reality based on specific images” and thus, subtitling is “constrained by synchrony in these new translational parameters of image and sound, ... , and time” (Cintas & Ramael, 2014, p. 9).

Subtitling

Definition of subtitling

Cintas (2012) refers to subtitling as a translation practice which involves rendering the translation in writing into a target language of the original dialogue exchanges, as well as all other verbal information that appears on screen in written form or is transmitted in the soundtrack aurally. Furthermore, as opposed to dubbing which deletes the original dialogues, subtitling retains “the original text, both aurally and visually, while adding an extra layer of information” (p. 274).

Subtitling strategies for taboo words

To render the culture-bound terms, Pedersen (2005) proposes a model consisting of six strategies which are divided into ‘Source Language oriented strategies’ (including Retention, Specification and Direct Translation) and ‘Target Language oriented strategies’ (including Generalization, Substitution and Omission). Based on Pedersen’s (2005) model, Abdelaal (2019) makes some modifications when applying to translate taboo words, specifically aside from Retention, Omission, Specification, Generalization and Direct Translation, he employs two other strategies which are Using euphemistic expressions and Using formal language to render informal language.

While euphemism is employed to soften the expressions, its counterpart dysphemism can also be adopted as a viable strategy to translate taboo words. Dysphemism can be understood as “the use of an offensive or disparaging expression instead of a neutral or pleasant one” (Crystal, 1992, p. 112).

With regard to subtitling, Gottlieb (1992) proposes ten strategies of subtitling translation, including:

- (1) Expansion: Expanded expression, adequate rendering (culture-specific references etc.). Expansion is employed when the original text requires additional explanation or information in the target language due to some cultural nuances not retrievable in the target language.
- (2) Paraphrase: Altered expression, adequate content (non-visualized language-specific phenomena). It is used when the original’s phraseology cannot be reconstructed in the same syntactic way in the target language.
- (3) Transfer: Full expression, adequate rendering (‘neutral’ discourse- slow tempo). Transfer refers to translating the source text precisely.
- (4) Imitation: Identical expression, equivalent rendering (proper nouns, international greetings etc.). Imitation shares the same forms, frequently employed to translate the name of a person or the name of a place or international greetings.
- (5) Transcription: Anomalous expression, adequate rendering (non-standard speech etc.). This strategy is done by rewriting the use of certain words in order to fulfill the textual function about how the language should be used.
- (6) Dislocation: Differing expression, adjusted content (musical or visualized language-specific phenomena). Dislocation is employed when the original uses some special effects, for example, a funny song in a cartoon.
- (7) Condensation: Condensed expression, concise rendering (normal speech). Condensation refers to the strategy of shortening the source text, which often removes unimportant utterances.
- (8) Decimation: Abridged expression, reduced content (fast speech of some importance). Decimation is an extreme form of Condensation strategy where important elements might be eliminated due to discourse speed, for example, when movie characters speak too fast and loudly.

- (9) Deletion: Omitted expression, no verbal content (fast speech of less importance). This strategy occurs when translator delete a whole part of the source text. While Condensation still retains key information, Deletion often deletes both important and unimportant parts of the text.
- (10) Resignation: Differing expression, distorted content ('untranslatable' elements). Resignation is employed when there is no translation solution and thus, the meaning of the source text cannot be transferred into the target language.

Concerning the subtitling strategies for translating taboo words from English into Vietnamese, this study adapts and synthesizes the subtitling strategies taxonomy suggested by Gottlieb (1992) and the Pedersen's (2005) model modified by Abdelaal (2019). The findings show that there were five strategies for translating taboo words from English into Vietnamese, which consist of Transfer, Paraphrase, Deletion, Euphemism and Dysphemism.

Previous studies on the subtitling strategies for taboo words

Different cultures have different sets of values on what is acceptable and what is not, which is even more prominent in how a word is considered taboo.

Regarding Arabic movies, there are a variety of studies aiming to identify the subtitling strategies for translating taboo words. Alharthi's (2023) findings show a total of nine subtitling strategies used to render taboo and offensive language, including transfer, euphemism, paraphrase, literal translation, omission, condensation, extension, dislocation, and generalization. Out of the nine strategies, transfer emerges as the most popular strategy used by the subtitler, followed closely by euphemism and omission. These finding are in line with those of Abdelaal (2019) which also found omission, euphemism and transfer to be frequently utilized. Furthermore, the two studies agree that due to the culture gap, euphemism is a common strategy to translate taboo words in Arabic movies. However, Slamia (2020) yields slightly different results as in her study, transfer and euphemism are employed the most whereas deletion (or omission) is the least utilized.

When it comes to Indonesian movies, based on Pratama's (2016) findings, three strategies consisting of omission, transfer and euphemism are utilized in the movie. On the contrary, Zahra and Sujana (2022) discover five out of ten strategies are employed to render the taboo words, including expansion, paraphrasing, transfer, condensation, and deletion, with transfer witnessing the highest usage.

On the other hand, Chen (2022) and Wu and Wan (2021) have contrasting results with regard to Chinese subtitles. Chen (2022) analyzes the subtitling strategies for taboo language by non-professional subtitlers on a streaming platform named *Bilibili* and her findings reveal that lexical recreation (23.4%) and substitution by euphemism (23.4%) are applied the most while omission and direct translation are on a lower spectrum of frequency (17.2% and 15.6%, respectively). The author believes that the social conventions, community guidelines and “unspoken rules” form certain constraints when it comes to rendering taboo language. Alternatively, in Wu and Wan's (2021), literal translation is found to be the most utilized subtitling strategy by a wide margin which accounts for 88.6% while omission and widening only constitute 11.4%

Overall, it can be seen that while there are no specific subtitling strategies for translating taboo words, the majority of subtitlers include transfer, euphemism and omission into their repertoire of subtitling strategies.

III. Methodology

Design of the study

The current study employs the descriptive qualitative research design. This study focuses on the language phenomena of taboo words as well as the subtitling strategies for translating taboo words in the movie *6 Underground* and the data are shown or represented in the form of words, phrases and utterances rather than numerical data forms.

6 Underground is an American action thriller movie released in 2019 which stars Ryan Reynolds as the lead actor and features Michael Bay as the director. It tells the story of a group of people who faked their death and works anonymously to bring down an evil dictatorship regime that the world could not confront. This group includes seven characters who are code-named from number One to Seven, each with their own past and story. Throughout the movie, along with chaotic action-filled missions are the backstories of the characters, which gives the audience a deeper look into their motives and life, and the almost non-stop swearing mixing with jokes uttered by everyone, creating a comedic and entertaining team that the audience cannot help but cheer for.

Data collection

In this study, the data were collected by observations and documents analysis. The data collection procedures in this study include three main steps:

First, the researcher used the chrome extension *Language Learning with Netflix & YouTube-AFL* to download the English and Vietnamese scripts of the movie *6 Underground* from the website Netflix. Second, the researcher watched the movie several times then matched the movie script with the conversations in the film.

Third, the researcher identified the English taboo words as well as their corresponding Vietnamese translation from the subtitles found in the movie *6 Underground*.

Data analysis

After the data were collected, the data were then analyzed using content analysis.

First, the researcher classified and categorized types of taboo words based on Jay’s taxonomy (1992), functions of taboo words based on Liedlich’s theory (1973), and subtitling strategies of taboo words based on the adaptation of Gottlieb’s (1992) subtitling strategies and Pederson’s (2005) model modified by Abdelaal (2019). Second, the researcher analyzed and interpreted the data. Third, the researcher quantified the frequency of every type of taboo words, function of taboo words and subtitling strategy. Fourth, conclusion is drawn from the findings of the study.

IV. Discussion

Overview of taboo words in “6 Underground”

Types of taboo words in “6 Underground”

Table no 1: The types of taboo words in the movie entitled *6 Underground*

Types of Taboo Words	Total of Taboo Words Tokens uttered	Percentage
Obscenity	80	35.1
Epithet	55	24.1
Profanity	24	10.5
Insult and Slur	21	9.2
Vulgarity	16	7.0
Slang	14	6.1
Scatology	9	3.9
Cursing	9	3.9
Total	228	100%

Table no 1 demonstrates that Obscenity is uttered the most with 80 tokens of taboo words (35.1%). In addition, Epithet and Profanity are ranked second and third which in total are 55 tokens (24.1%) and 24 tokens (10.5%), respectively. As for the remaining types, there are Insult and Slur with 21 instances of taboo words (9.2%), Vulgarity with 16 instances (7.0%), Slang with 14 instances (6.1%) and ranked the lowest, both Scatology and Cursing appear in the movie 9 times (3.9%).

Functions of taboo words in “6 Underground”

Table no 2: The functions of taboo words in the movie entitled *6 Underground*

Functions of Taboo Words	Total of Taboo Words Tokens uttered	Percentage
Provide Catharsis	58	25.4
Create Attention	50	21.9
Provoke Violent Confrontation	45	19.7
Discredit	37	16.2
Endearment	29	12.7
Interpersonal Identification	9	3.9
Total	228	100%

Table no 2 shows that the functions with the highest usage are Provide Catharsis, Create Attention and Provoke Violent Confrontation with 58 instances (25.4%), 50 instances (21.9%) and 45 instances (19.7%), respectively. Discredit function is utilized 37 times (16.2%) while 29 instances of taboo words are used for Endearment purposes (at 12.7%). The least utilized function is Interpersonal Identification, at 9 instances (3.9%).

Subtitling strategies of taboo words in “6 Underground”

Table no 3: The subtitling strategies of taboo words in the movie entitled *6 Underground*

Subtitling Strategies of Taboo Words	Frequency	Percentage
Euphemism	123	53.7
Deletion	64	27.9
Transfer	31	13.5
Paraphrase	10	4.4
Dysphemism	1	0.4
Total	229	100%

As can be seen from Table no 3, the most popular strategy is Euphemism which is utilized 123 times (53.7%), followed by Deletion which is used 64 times (27.9%). On the contrary, Transfer and Paraphrase are

employed 31 times (13.5%) and 10 times (4.4%) in that order. Ranking the lowest is Dysphemism which is only used once (0.4%).

Detailed analysis of the Taboo Words in “6 Underground”

Types of taboo words

Epithets

Example:

One: Tango-Tango, we have engine failure.

One: ***Shit, shit, shit!***

One: Mayday! Mayday! Mayday!

One: Going down!

In the example above, the character with the code-name “One” is talking to the operator to report that his airplane is facing an engine failure, in which he expresses his frustration with the situation by uttering the taboo words “***Shit, shit, shit!***”. Since the utterance “***Shit, shit, shit!***” is used to show frustration or anger, it is considered as the Epithet type.

Profanity

Example:

Six: This is so stressful.

Six: Whose eye is that?

One: It's the lawyer's.

Six: Did you just, like, scoop it out, or—

One: ***God***, no. I didn't scoop it out.

In this conversation, two characters, code-named “Six” and “One”, are talking to each other. Six asks if One is the one who gouges the eye out and One replies by uttering the taboo word “***God, no.***” In this case, One is using the name of God in vain to express and emphasize his disagreement but he does not do it with the purpose of insulting a religious figure (God). Instead, it is done out of ignorance, not of malicious intent. Thus, the utterance “***God, no.***” is classified as the Profanity type.

Vulgarity

Example:

One: This is how to stage a coup in three not-so-easy steps.

One: All right, you got a country, Turgistan, yeah?

One: These are the people, nice people, going about, doing their thing.

One: Then you got the four generals, cuatro ***cunts***, very bad guys.

The example depicts the character code-named “One” who is explaining the plan to stage an overthrow of a country. He describes the four generals in the country he intends to overthrow as “cuatro ***cunts***” (“cuatro” means “four” in Spain). The utterance “cuatro ***cunts***”, which refers to the genitals of the female body, is used by One to compare it with the generals as a form of insulting them through vulgar words. Therefore, it is categorized as the Vulgarity type.

Obscenity

Example:

One: If you could take out some truly evil people. Not people that the government tells you are evil, because based on, you know, policies or politics and bureaucracy or trade relations or any of that shit.

One: No, I'm talking truly world-class evil ***motherfuckers***. I can help you go after those guys.

The conversation takes place in desolated house where the character code-named “One” is talking to another character whose code-named is “Seven”. The utterance “world-class evil ***motherfuckers***” is spoken crudely by One to express his strong disdain towards the evil-doers. In this case, the utterance “world-class evil ***motherfuckers***” is included as the Obscenity type.

Cursing

Example:

Chinese crane operator: Crane, lose control. Very dangerous. Stay off the roof.

Daqeeq: What do you mean leave the roof?

Chinese crane operator: Because I will ***fuck you up***.
Daqeeq: You not fuck me up. Don't talk to me like this!

The conversation takes place over the phone between a Chinese crane operator and Daqeeq, an underling of an evil organization. The Chinese crane operator is currently being threatened with a gun by "One" so he has to intimidate and force Daqeeq to leave the roof by uttering "I will ***fuck you up***." Jay (1992) denotes Cursing as certain words or phrases with the intent to invoke harm on others, therefore, the utterance "***fuck you up***" in this example is considered as the Cursing type.

Slang

Example:

Six: We need you.
Four: 'Course you need me. I'm here.
Six: Remind me, where the fuck is "here"?
Four: "Here" here. Like, here?
One: Specificity.
Four: Here. ***Right effin' here!*** Top of the Duomo, like we talked about.

In the example above, three characters, code-named "Six", "Four" and "One", are the participants of the conversation. Due to the vague answer of Four's location, One and Six are annoyed in which Four once again confirms his location by saying "***Right effin' here***". The word "***effin***" is a slang for the word "fucking" in which Four utters in order to not sound aggressive or rude towards his teammates while also emphasizing his answer. Consequently, the utterance "***Right effin' here***" is included as the Slang type.

Insult and slur

Example:

One: I'm trying to help you here.
One: Anything beyond a simple "yes" is gonna just super suck for your face.
One: Look, your client is ***a half-wit, fuckstain war criminal***. Why are you protecting him?
Lawyer: My client has never ordered any gas attacks.
One: No, he's ordered the four generals that work for him to order the gas attacks.

In this example, the character code-named "One" is asking the lawyer, whose client is an evil dictator to disclose information of his client. One describes the lawyer's client by uttering "***a half-wit, fuckstain war criminal***", in which the term "***half-wit, fuckstain***" denotes the mental qualities of the target - stupid and worthless, as an insult instead of slurs. Because the utterance "***a half-wit, fuckstain war criminal***" is spoken by One to show his contempt and hatred towards the lawyer's client for the atrocities he committed, it is considered as the Insult and Slur type.

Scatology

Example:

Three: You know, guys, what sucks? If we were to crash, no one would ever know or care.
Three: We will have no impact on anything. Like we never existed.
One: I can hear you, and if you're gonna ***shit your pants***, there's a bathroom in the back.

In this example, the participants of the conversation are two characters, code-named "Three" and "One". Three is expressing his concern and nervousness. Consequently, One answers him in a sarcastic manner by saying "if you're gonna ***shit your pants***, there's a bathroom in the back" which also is a way of lighten up the mood among team members. The utterance "***shit your pants***" is associated with the defecation activity and therefore it is included as the Scatology type.

Functions of taboo words

Create attention

Example:

One: Go!
Three: ***Oh, shit!*** Two black Suburbans coming your way.
Four: Six, fake 'em out. I'm coming to you.
One: Go, go, go!

The dialogue above depicts two characters, code-named "One" and "Six", who are escaping from pursuers while their teammates, code-named "Three" and "Four", are providing them back-up. Three notices two black cars so he reports it to them by uttering "**Oh, shit!** Two black Suburbans coming your way". The utterance "**Oh, shit!**" is used by Three to draw attention to what he is about to say next, which is the warning about pursuers. Thus, the utterance "**Oh, shit!**" is classified as the Create Attention function.

Discredit

Example:

One: But I realized, my billions, that's not enough. Governments don't really help people in need.

One: So, I said, "**Fuck the government.** I'm gonna do this myself."

In this example, the character code-named "One" starts monologuing about his motivation. He realizes that the government does not wish to provide help to people in need which prompts him to utter "**Fuck the government**" as a form of expressing his disapproval of the government as well as his disappointment in it. Thus, the utterance "**Fuck the government**" is classified as the Discredit function.

Provoke violent confrontation

Example:

One: Good work. I said, undercover, not coked-up Borg and McEnroe.

One: I hate this town. I really do.

Three: No, no, it's Navratilova. She's a woman tennis player.

Three: Your costume's stupid, too. **Motorcycle dick.**

The conversation above involves two characters code-named "One" and "Three". Here, One displays his disapproval of the choice of disguises chosen by Three and his partner. This makes Three feel offended by One's remark for not understanding his disguise and retort by saying "Your costume's stupid, too. **Motorcycle dick.**" The utterance "**Motorcycle dick**" is used by Three to taunt and agitate One by criticizing his disguise looking like a stupid man who drives motorcycle. Therefore, the utterance "**Motorcycle dick**" is considered as the Provoke Violent Confrontation function.

Endearment

Example:

Arianna: But what makes you think that I want to see you again?

Arianna: You weren't that memorable. Besides, I'm moving to New York.

One: That's where I live. **Sucker.**

Arianna: So, now you're stalking me?

In the example above, the conversation takes place between a bartender named Arianna and a character code-named "One". Arianna announces that she is coming to New York in which One replies "That's where I live. **Sucker.**". The utterance "**Sucker**" is a slang word for a person who cannot resist the attraction of something, which in this case it is used not as an insult but as a joke. Since Arianna and One are in an intimate relationship, this utterance is a form of showing their closeness and thus the utterance "**Sucker**" is considered as the Endearment function.

Interpersonal identification

Example:

One: These are the people, nice people, going about, doing their thing.

One Then you got the four generals, cuatro cunts, very bad guys.

One: But there's one worse guy. That's the **piece-of-shit dictator.** Right there at the top.

The conversation takes place in a secret hideout where a character code-named "One" is explaining to his teammates the structure of the evil government they are going to overthrow. On top of the very bad generals is an even worse person, whom One refers to as "the **piece-of-shit dictator**". The utterance "the **piece-of-shit dictator**" is used by One as a form of describing the characteristics of the dictator to show how despicable the dictator truly is. Thus, the utterance "the **piece-of-shit dictator**" is included as the Interpersonal Identification function.

Provide catharsis

Example:

Three: *Jesus*, who raised you, the mob?

One: That's none of your fucking business, Three.

One: We sacrificed everything to be a part of this. Honor it, respect it. It's all we got.

The conversation takes place between two characters code-named "Three" and "One". Three just got back from his visit to his mother where he is met with One, who is pointing a gun to his head. Three's reaction to One's sudden appearance and action was "*Jesus*, who raised you, the mob?", in which the utterance "*Jesus*" is used to show his shock and disbelief. Therefore, the utterance "*Jesus*" is included as the Provide Catharsis function.

Subtitling strategies for translating taboo words

Transfer

Table no 4: Transfer subtitling strategy in the movie entitled 6 Underground

English subtitles	Vietnamese subtitles	Back Translation
<i>God</i> , that's so bad.	<i>Chúa ơ!</i> Tệ đây!	<i>God!</i> That's bad!
Surprised his <i>asshole</i> didn't come with it.	Mà lạ là không có <i>hậu môn</i> đi theo.	Strange that there is no <i>asshole</i> going along.
I can hear you, and if you're gonna <i>shit your pants</i> , there's a bathroom in the back.	Tôi nghe đây, và nếu anh định <i>đùn ra quần</i> , có nhà vệ sinh ở phía sau đây.	I hear that, and if you're about to <i>shit into your pants</i> , there's a bathroom in the back.

In the examples (1), (2) and (3), Transfer strategy is employed to translate the taboo words from English into Vietnamese. In all three examples above, the meanings of expressions such as "*God*", "*asshole*" and "*shit your pants*" are accurately rendered, regardless of the socio-cultural differences between the two languages. It is noticed that successful transfers of taboo words possess one of these traits:

- i. Parts of body that are referred to as physical body parts, not used as cursing (e.g. asshole, balls)
- ii. Words that refer to sexual intercourse, not used as cursing (e.g. fuck, make love, coochie-coochie)
- iii. Religious figures (e.g. God, Jesus)
- iv. Words that refer to excretion, not used as cursing (e.g. shit)
- v. Words used to insult (e.g. stupid, idiot, fool)

Euphemism

Table no 5: Euphemism subtitling strategy in the movie entitled 6 Underground

English subtitles	Vietnamese subtitles	Back Translation
And that was a glorious <i>clusterfuck</i> .	Và đó là một <i>thảm họa</i> rực rỡ!	And that was a glorious <i>disaster!</i>
I'm gonna smoke these <i>motherfuckers!</i>	Tôi sẽ cho <i>lũ khốn</i> này hít khói!	I'm going to let <i>these wretched</i> breathe smoke!
Oh, <i>shit!</i>	Ồi <i>chết tiệt!</i>	Oh <i>die all!</i>

In the example (4), (5) and (6), Euphemism strategy is employed to translate the taboo words from English into Vietnamese. In the example (4), the utterance "*clusterfuck*" was replaced by "*disaster*", which is not the equivalence in Vietnamese. Example (5) and (6) also resemble example (4) in which taboo words such as "*motherfuckers*" and "*oh shit*" in the English subtitles are rendered by turning them into more inoffensive, general words in the Vietnamese subtitles such as "*these wretched*" and "*die all*" respectively. In these examples, the subtitler avoids using taboo words in the Vietnamese texts and thus opts for Euphemism strategy to translate the taboo words into neutral expressions. After analyzing the data, it can be observed that euphemism occurs when taboo words show one of these characteristics:

- i. Words that are related to physical body parts, used as cursing (e.g. prick, dick, cunts, dumbass)
- ii. Words that are related to sexual intercourse, used as cursing (e.g. motherfucker, fuck, fucking)
- iii. Words that are related to the act of excretion, used as cursing (e.g. shit, bullshit, piece-of-shit, pissed)

Deletion

Table no 6: Deletion subtitling strategy in the movie entitled 6 Underground

English subtitles	Vietnamese subtitles	Back Translation
It didn't <i>fucking</i> work!	Không thành rồi!	Didn't work!
Keep your <i>goddamn</i> eye on the road!	Đề mắt đến đường đi!	Keep your eye on the road!
<i>Shit's</i> about to get crazy.	Sắp rối tung lên rồi.	About to get messy.
Smash you <i>like a bitch</i> .	Đập nát mày đi.	Smash you.

In the example (7), (8), (9) and (10), Deletion strategy is utilized to translate the taboo words from English into Vietnamese. Taboo words that are used for cursing such as "fucking", "fuck", "goddamn", "shit",

“damn” and “bitch” are often omitted by the subtitler. Deletion strategy tends to be employed if taboo words are used as an intensifier – to emphasize what the speaker is saying.

Paraphrase

Table no 7: Paraphrase subtitling strategy in the movie entitled 6 Underground

English subtitles	Vietnamese subtitles	Back Translation
You kill top generals, <i>you fuck a dictator's day</i> .	Giết hết tướng quân, <i>thằng độc tài sẽ điên lên</i> .	Kill all the generals, <i>the dictator will be mad</i> .
Your costume's stupid, too. <i>Motorcycle dick</i> .	Đồ của anh cũng ngố ngán, <i>đi xe máy nữa</i> .	Your costume's stupid too, <i>also (you) ride a motorcycle</i> .
<i>When the shit goes down</i> , president protocol is they take him to his yacht.	<i>Khi có nguy hiểm</i> , giao thức tổng thống là họ đưa hân tới thuyền.	<i>When there are dangers</i> , president protocol is they take him to the yacht.

In the example (11), (12) and (13), Paraphrase strategy is applied to translate the taboo words from English into Vietnamese. This strategy is used when the original's phrases cannot be reconstructed in the same syntactic way in the target language but the meaning is still maintained, which is done to ensure that the clarity of the information is carried across the languages.

Dysphemism

Table no 8: Dysphemism subtitling strategy in the movie entitled 6 Underground

English subtitles	Vietnamese subtitles	Back Translation
Up ahead	Cái <i>quái</i> gì thế?	What <i>the freak</i> is that?

In the movie, there is only one instance of dysphemism. The utterance takes place where a character, code-named “Four” utters “Up ahead” as a warning for his teammates. In the source text, the utterance “Up ahead” is inoffensive and does not contain a taboo word, however, the subtitler decided to dramatize the character's utterance to make the situation more thrilling by translating it into “Cái *quái* gì thế?”, which is not an equivalent translation in Vietnamese. Thus, it can be seen that subtitler may take the liberty in the process of translation in order to create a more suited atmosphere.

Discussion

Findings reveal that the four most utilized types of taboo words are Obscenity (35.1%), Epithet (24.1%), Profanity (10.5%) and Insult and Slur (9.2%). When it comes to subtitling strategies, Euphemism (53.7%) and Deletion (27.9%) are employed the most by the subtitler to render taboo words from English into Vietnamese while Transfer only accounts for 13.5%. Such findings suggest that the majority of taboo words in English in this movie are either removed or turned into a less offensive term. The factors which influence the Vietnamese subtitler's choice of subtitling strategies might lie in the differences in socio-cultural values as well as the censorship regulations imposed by the American and Vietnamese governments since each country has a distinct view and attitude towards the usage of taboo words.

According to the Decision 2455/1997 regarding the implementation of movie censorship procedures, one of the Vietnamese censorship policies on movies is the ban of images, actions and sounds that stimulate obscenity, nudity, incest or the description of sexual intercourse between two people or between a person and an animal or description of the action of masturbating or showing sexual organs or nude scenes (Chapter 1, Article 4, Clause 5). Furthermore, images, sounds and actions that depict violent assaults or torture and actions that violate human lives or dignity are strictly prohibited as well (Chapter 1, Article 4, Clause 6). Based on the research's results, the top four types of taboo words (Obscenity, Epithet, Profanity and Insult and Slur) uttered by movie characters all fall into the categories mentioned. Thus, the Vietnamese subtitler has no choice but to frequently use Euphemism and Deletion strategies since he/she needs to comply with the guidelines proposed by the government. On the contrary, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which is an independent American organization, is responsible for overseeing and regulating communications by programs broadcast or accessible by antenna. Similar to its Vietnamese counterpart, swearing and sex are also censored; however, the FCC has no jurisdiction over private medium such as streaming services (e.g., Netflix). Since the movie “6 Underground” is streamed on Netflix, it is able to bypass the taboo words restrictions set by the FCC, hence the “rampant” usage of taboo words found in the movie.

Another possible explanation for the Vietnamese subtitler's choice of subtitling strategies lies in how the movie is perceived by the target audience. In other words, the culture of each country and its local people's perceptions play a crucial part in the subtitler's translation decisions. America and Vietnam have vastly different cultural values, as the former leans towards individualism which tends to emphasize “promoting the individual's and his/her immediate family's self-interest (underlining individual rights, not responsibilities), personal autonomy, privacy ... and less concern about the needs and interests of others” (Darwish & Huber, 2003, p. 48).

On the contrary, similar to many Eastern countries, the latter aligns with collectivism where family's and community's interests are of higher priority since the collectivistic societies emphasize “an understanding of personal identity as knowing one's place within the group, and concern about the needs and interests of others” (Darwish & Huber, 2003, p. 49). It is reflected in how the people in each culture communicate, with the individualistic cultures advocating individual opinions and preferring direct and explicit communication whereas indirect communication is usually favored in collectivistic cultures (Gudykunst et al., 1966; Hall, 1989). Due to these distinctions, translators are bound to encounter problems. Pym (2004) mentions that cross-cultural communication, which includes translation, requires a special type of risk management to communicate successfully between cultures. Risks here refer to “the possibility of not fulfilling the translation's purpose” (Pym, 2005, p. 2) with the translation problems being high-risk, low-risk or anything in between and “a low-effort solution to high-risk problem is more advantageous than a high-effort solution to a low-risk problem” (Pym, 2005, p. 4). It follows that “the translator's efforts should ideally correlate with degree of risks” (Pym, 2005, p. 4). According to Pym (2004), for every source-text message, there are always two basic options available for translators: 1) the message may be omitted and 2) it can be reproduced in its source-text form. Thus, when translating, especially when translating sensitive elements such as taboo words, translators could opt for the low-risk, safer solution of using the two basic options of omitting or reproducing the message which seems to be the case for the movie *6 Underground*.

Alternatively, a different way to look at it is through the perspective of the postcolonial theories, specifically the resistance of the language of power. It is argued that “language is not a neutral tool – that translation can never be a purely technical activity” (Shamma, 2009, p. 191). When it comes to intercultural and interlingual transfer, a larger framework of power relations must always be considered. In the case of the movie entitled *6 Underground*, resistance takes place as the source language – the language of power (colonizer's language, e.g. American English) is portrayed differently by the “colonized” translator in the target language (the colonized's language, e.g. Vietnamese). This act is done to show resistance against the dominant culture and to prioritize the image of the colonized language by omitting/changing elements in the colonizer's language that are deemed as not fitting for the colonized culture. Since Vietnamese culture has a strict view on the usage of taboo words, especially in movies, the Vietnamese subtitler decided to mainly delete or rewrite the taboo words into terms that are less offensive.

To conclude, due to the high-risk nature of translating meaning from a culture into another, more so when it comes to taboo words, combining with the rigorous censorship requirement imposed by the target government on taboo words, the Vietnamese subtitler decided to mainly employ Euphemism and Deletion strategies to render the taboo words to fit the target culture's view of these lexical phenomena.

V. Conclusion

The study sets out to investigate types of taboo words, functions of taboo words and subtitling strategies used for translating taboo words from English into Vietnamese in the movie entitled *6 Underground*. Based on Jay's (1992) taxonomy, the researcher found that the movie utilized eight types of taboo words, namely Epithets, Profanity, Vulgarity, Obscenity, Cursing, Slang, Insult and Slur, and Scatology. Concerning the functions of taboo words, there are six functions found, including Create attention, Discredit, Provoke violent confrontation, Endearment, Interpersonal identification and Provide catharsis, according to Liedlich's (1973) theory. Lastly, by adapting Gottlieb's (1992) taxonomy and Pedersen's (2005) model modified by Abdelaal (2019), the researcher found five strategies for translating taboo words which are Euphemism, Deletion, Transfer, Paraphrase and Dysphemism.

From the findings, toning down the effect of taboo words from English into Vietnamese appears to be the preferred choice of subtitling strategy by the Vietnamese subtitler, as evidenced by the fact that Euphemism and Deletion account for 53.7% and 27.9% of the total usage of subtitling strategies utilized in the movie, respectively. It is also worth noting that Paraphrase strategy (4.4%) is used to also rewrite the taboo expressions into non-taboo ones. In another word, 86% of the total taboo word tokens in the movie are either omitted or softened into a more neutral term. On the contrary, only 13.5% of the taboo word tokens have their meaning translated precisely without the intended meaning nor connotation being altered. This shows the Vietnamese Censorship Board's attitude as well as the Vietnamese culture's viewpoint towards taboo words, specifically in the case of movies premiering in theaters.

It is also hypothesized that because of censorship requirements, the Vietnamese subtitles undoubtedly lose the “aggressiveness” that the original text has, which could be due to two reasons. Firstly, an important factor is that the subtitler has to comply with the restrictions of the community guidelines as well as the constraints on time and space of the subtitles. Secondly, by toning down the effect of taboo words in the TT, the translation is kept smooth and natural, making it easier for the target audience to follow. This resembles Nida's (1964) dynamic equivalence approach where the TL sacrifices a certain level of faithfulness by rendering a sentence (or thought) in the SL into a sentence in the TL that carries similar meaning but does not necessarily

use the same phrasing in order to improve the readability. Therefore, although some nuances are lost in translation, the subtitles still serve its purpose that help movie-goers get the main ideas of the movie.

It is also important to point out that cultures also have a significant impact on the choice of subtitling strategies as American and Vietnamese culture values are vastly different. Pym’s cross-cultural theory proposes that when translating messages from a culture to another, it carries a high risk and thus, the translator can always rely on two safe choices, namely omission and reproducing the message in its source-text form. On the other hand, under the scope of the postcolonial theories, translators from the colonized culture could express opposition against the colonizer culture by either deleting or changing aspects of the colonizer culture that are considered unsuitable. This act is done to give priority to and emphasize images of their culture. Thus, it could be understandable that the strategies of omitting or modifying the message of the source language are often employed by the Vietnamese subtitler to render the taboo words in the movie *6 Underground*.

References

- [1]. Abdelaal, N. M. (2019). Subtitling Of Culture-Bound Terms: Strategies And Quality Assessment. *Heliyon*, 5(4), E01411. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2019.E01411>
- [2]. Alharthi, A. A. (2023). The Subtitling Of Taboo And Offensive Language Into Arabic: A Case Study Of “White Chicks” And “Perfect Find.” *International Journal Of Language And Literary Studies*, 5(2), 305–323. <https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.V5i2.1354>
- [3]. Baker, M. & Saldanha, G. (2009). *Routledge Encyclopedia Of Translation Studies*. In Routledge Ebooks. <https://doi.org/10.4324/978020387206>
- [4]. Battistella, E. L. (2005). *Bad Language: Are Some Words Better Than Others?*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195172485.001.0001>
- [5]. Chen, X. (2022). *Taboo Language In Non-Professional Subtitling On Bilibili.Com: A Corpus-Based Study*. *Languages*, 7(2), 138. <https://doi.org/10.3390/Languages7020138>
- [6]. Chiaro, D. (2009). *Issues In Audiovisual Translation*. In Routledge Ebooks (Pp. 155–179). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203879450-16>
- [7]. Cintas, J. D. (2012). *Subtitling: Theory, Practice And Research*. *The Routledge Handbook Of Translation Studies*, 285–299. https://www.academia.edu/22506952/2012_Subtitling_Theory_Practice_And_Research
- [8]. Cintas, J. D., & Remael, A. (2014). *Audiovisual Translation: Subtitling*. In Routledge Ebooks. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315759678>
- [9]. Crystal, D. (1992). *An Encyclopedic Dictionary Of Language And Languages*. Oxford, UK; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell.
- [10]. Darwish, A. E., & Huber, G. L. (2003). *Individualism Vs Collectivism In Different Cultures: A Cross-Cultural Study*. *Intercultural Education*, 14(1), 47–56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1467598032000044647>
- [11]. Gottlieb, H. (1992). *Subtitling - A New University Discipline*. In John Benjamins Publishing Company Ebooks (P. 161). <https://doi.org/10.1075/Z.56.26got>
- [12]. Gudykunst, W. B., Matsumoto, Y., Ting-Toomey, S., Nishida, T., Kim, K., & Heyman, S. (1996). *The Influence Of Cultural Individualism-Collectivism, Self Construals, And Individual Values On Communication Styles Across Cultures*. *Human Communication Research*, 22(4), 510–543. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.1996.tb00377.x>
- [13]. Hall, E. T. (1989). *Beyond Culture*. Anchor.
- [14]. Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing Qualitative Research In Education Settings*. Suny Press.
- [15]. Holmes, J. (2013). *An Introduction To Sociolinguistics* (4th Ed.). In Routledge Ebooks. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315833057>
- [16]. Hudson, R. A. (1990). *Sociolinguistics* (2nd Ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- [17]. Irawan, B. (2019). *Interpersonal Functions Of Taboo Words Uttered By The Characters In Vacation Movie*. *Lexeme Journal Of Linguistics And Applied Linguistics*, 1(2). <https://doi.org/10.32493/ljll.V1i2.5123>
- [18]. Indrayasa, K. D., Rajeg, I. M., & Maharani, S. A. I. (2018). *The Use Of Taboo Words In The Film “Dirty Grandpa.”* *Humanis*, 1124. <https://doi.org/10.24843/Jh.2018.V22.I04.P40>
- [19]. Jay, T. (1992). *Cursing In America*. <https://doi.org/10.1075/Z.57>
- [20]. Jay, T. (2009). *The Utility And Ubiquity Of Taboo Words. Perspectives On Psychological Science*, 4(2), 153–161. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6924.2009.01115.x>
- [21]. Karamitroglou, Fotios. 1998. *A Proposed Set Of Subtitling Standard In Europe*. *Translation Journal Vol. 2 No. 2*. Retrieved August 27th, 2024, From <http://translationjournal.net/journal/04stndrd.htm>
- [22]. Koolstra, C. M., Peeters, A., & Spinhof, H. (2002). *The Pros And Cons Of Dubbing And Subtitling*. *European Journal Of Communication*, 17(3), 325–354. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323102017003694>
- [23]. Mcintosh, J. (2020). *Maledictive Language: Obscenity And Taboo Words*. *The International Encyclopedia Of Linguistic Anthropology*, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118786093.iela0248>
- [24]. Munday, J. (2022). *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories And Applications*. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/Ba8641396x>
- [25]. Newmark, P. (1988). *Approaches To Translation*.
- [26]. Nida, E. A. (1964). *Toward A Science Of Translating*. Leiden: E. J. Brill. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004495746>
- [27]. Nida, E. A., & Taber, C. R. (2003). *The Theory And Practice Of Translation*. Brill.
- [28]. Pedersen, J. (2005). *How Is Culture Rendered In Subtitles*. In H. Gerzymisch-Arbogast & S. Nauert (Eds.), *Challenges Of Multidimensional Translation, Proceedings Of The Mutra Conference In Saarbrücken, Germany, 2–6 May 2005*, Pp. 113–129.
- [29]. Pratama, A. D. Y. (2017). *The Functions Of Taboo Words And Their Translation In Subtitling: A Case Study In “The Help.”* *Retorika Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa*, 2(2), 350. <https://doi.org/10.22225/Jr.2.2.65.350-363>
- [30]. Pym, A. (2004). *Propositions On Cross-Cultural Communication And Translation*. *Target International Journal Of Translation Studies*, 16(1), 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1075/Target.16.1.02pym>
- [31]. Pym, A. (2005). *Text And Risk In Translation*. In K., Aijmer & Alvstad, C. (Eds.), *New Tendencies In Translation Studies* (Pp. 69–82). Göteborg: Göteborg University.
- [32]. Shamma, T. (2009). *Postcolonial Studies And Translation Theory*. *Monti Monografías De Traducción E Interpretación*, 1, 183–196. <https://doi.org/10.6035/Monti.2009.1.9>
- [33]. Sitohang, M., Cahayati, S., & Mansur, M. (2021). *An Analysis Of Taboo Words And Euphemism Found In The Characters’ Utterances In The Movie Entitled “The Purge: Election Year.”* *Jell (Journal Of English Language And Literature) Stiba-Iec Jakarta*, 6(2), 115–134. <https://doi.org/10.37110/Jell.V6i2.129>

- [34]. Slamia, F. B. (2020). Translation Strategies Of Taboo Words In Interlingual Film Subtitling. *International Journal Of Linguistics, Literature And Translation*, 3(6), 82–98. <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijlt.2020.3.6.9>
- [35]. Wardhaugh, R., & Fuller, J. M. (2014). *An Introduction To Sociolinguistics* (7th Ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- [36]. Wu, S., & Wan, Q. (2021). Euphemistic Strategies Used In Subtitling English Taboo Expressions Into Chinese: A Case Study Of *Big Little Lies*. *Open Journal Of Social Sciences*, 9, 397–406. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2021.96027>
- [37]. Zahra, R., & Sujana, S. (2022). Subtitling Strategies Of Taboo Words In “Sex Education Tv Series Season 2.” *Jedu Journal Of English Education*, 2(1), 55–64. <https://doi.org/10.30998/jedu.v2i1.6392>