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Ávila-Cabrera, José Javier. *The Challenge of Subtitling Offensive and Taboo Language into Spanish: A Theoretical and Practical Guide*. Multilingual Matters, 2023, ISBN 9781800414877. 156+xiv pp.

Audiovisual translation (AVT) is a well-established field of study in academia and is ripe with research opportunities for scholars (Pérez-González 2020; García-Escribano 2025). A dynamic and multifaceted area of study within AVT is the translation of taboo and offensive language, which has been of rising interest in the last two decades. The vitality and richness of this research area are evident in a burgeoning body of research on the topic (see Valdeón 2024). In this context, the book *The Challenge of Subtitling Offensive and Taboo Language into Spanish: A Theoretical and Practical Guide* makes a valuable contribution to current scholarship and offers a reliable reference for subtitling training and research. The present literature on the translation of taboo and offensive language is grounded on two main strands of research: how AVT translators handle taboo and offensive language (i.e., translation strategies) and how the socio-cultural environment of the receiving culture governs translators' renderings. Given that the translation of taboo and offensive items is highly culture-dependent, it has been studied in various European (Guillot 2023; Ávila-Cabrera 2016; Xavier 2022), Asian (Khoshsaligheh, Ameri, and Mehdizadkhani 2018; Al-Zgoul and Al-Salman 2022; Jin and Ye 2023) and Latin American countries (Cândido Moura and Iost Vinas 2023). Recent studies have ignited a burst of new investigations in the field by incorporating audience and reception studies (Pavesi and Zamora 2022; Chen 2022; Moura 2024), cross-cultural studies (Guillot 2023) and English-language AVT (Barrera-Rioja 2023), among other things.

Inspired by a wealth of empirical evidence and theoretical insights from the literature, José Javier Ávila-Cabrera's book offers an in-depth discussion and a detailed image of the treatment of taboo and offensive language in Spanish subtitling. Although the book revolves around the English-Spanish language pair, I, as a researcher, practitioner and trainer of Persian subtitling, have found the discussions in the book meaningful and informative. The book will be of interest to both students and novice researchers of AVT. It has four chapters, that cover relevant theories and latest empirical investigations and present a research model and method for researching taboo and offensive language in subtitling. Each chapter also includes authentic exercises chosen from numerous English films that allow the readers to check their understanding and practice their skills. The book also provides an answer key to all the exercises at the end.

The brief introductory chapter begins with the aim and scope of the publication and offers an overview of how each chapter contributes to the ultimate goal of

the volume. It is Chapter 2 that presents a sweeping review of AVT in general and subtitling in particular. Ávila-Cabrera first introduces different forms of subtitling and then guides the readers toward spatial and temporal considerations in subtitling, where text reduction is a necessity in certain cases. This is followed by a discussion of manipulation through the perspectives of Lefevere (1992), who long ago introduced the concept of ‘patronage’. Essentially, the author explores various forms of censorship in subtitling: altering the title, changing the plot and softening the strong language of the original. Afterwards, he demonstrates censorship in the US, the UK and Spain. Ávila-Cabrera rightly argues that censorship is not just a phenomenon of the past dictatorship regimes (such as Franco in Spain), but also a present reality, which can sometimes be requested by clients.

Chapter 3 delineates and discusses taboo and offensive language in detail. It begins with a historical sketch of the concept of taboo and clears up confusion around many overlapping concepts, such as fool language – interested readers can refer to Bednarek (2019) for a solid discussion of terminological inconsistency. Ávila-Cabrera then details his taxonomy of taboo, which comprises two core categories of ‘offensive language’ and ‘taboo language’, along with examples. Each category consists of different subcategories that capture diverse forms of linguistic offensiveness and taboo. Concerning translating offensive language, Ávila-Cabrera points out that most translation solutions do not prioritize literalness; therefore, “the subtitler must pay special attention to remain faithful to the ST, but also make use of idiomatic words” (p. 52). He also aptly mentions how cultural differences affect what is considered socially acceptable or offensive. Therefore, translating offensive language requires careful consideration of cultural differences. Highlighting the complexities of subtitling offensive and taboo language into another language, Ávila-Cabrera reviews the existing proposals for subtitling taboo items and argues that numerous challenging scenarios in films invite more than a single solution. He emphasizes the need for nuanced translation strategies tailored to the specific context. This chapter ends with a review of relevant studies on offensive and taboo language in subtitling. The strength of this review lies in its breadth; it is not limited to Spanish studies but includes a wide range of research from diverse cultures and settings.

Chapter 4 introduces the author’s interesting and practical taxonomy of techniques for subtitling offensive and taboo language. Within this taxonomy, there are two overarching techniques, whereby the load of taboo is either materialized or not in the translation (i.e., *transfer of the load* or *non-transfer of the load*). In the first case, the subtitler has the option to tone up the load, maintain the load or tone down it. In the second case, the subtitler may opt for neutralizing the load or entirely removing it. The author demonstrates these techniques with real-life examples from a corpus of English films with Spanish subtitles, serving as practical illustrations of how the techniques are employed by subtitlers. Ávila-Cabrera also offered a back translation of the Spanish subtitles, helping non-Spanish readers to understand the subtitler’s work. Subsequently, the chapter directs our focus toward creating a research design for empirically examining taboo language in subtitling. This is achieved through the elaboration of the

research goals, the theoretical framework, the research questions, the research methodology and sampling. The theoretical framework, as the author notes, considers governmental, professional, personal and technical restrictions that impact the subtitler's translation strategies.

The answer key is the last section of the book, wherein the author provides the answers to all the exercises. As noted earlier, the exercises are based on authentic examples from English films and TV series with professional Spanish subtitles on DVDs or digital platforms. This section of the answer key does not solely provide a straightforward answer or a ready-made subtitling solution. As a matter of fact, Ávila-Cabrera expounds upon the subtitlers' techniques in rendering the offensive and taboo language and discusses how the subtitlers occasionally compensate for the loss of offensive and taboo terms by strategically incorporating them at a later point in the translation. He further offers insights into segmentation and condensation techniques for the examples. The Spanish translations are accompanied by back-translations into English for the ease of understanding of non-Spanish users. Therefore, I believe that in this section, subtitling trainees can learn a great deal from the author's detailed explanation.

A noteworthy feature of this book is its plain and accessible language, making it ideal for self-study by early researchers or students of AVT. The book's other significant contribution is the numerous real-life examples and exercises, which help learners put into practice what they learned in each chapter. It is also a perfect practical guidebook for subtitling trainers, who can use the examples and exercises of the book in their AVT classrooms or as home assignments for students. In addition, novice researchers who are interested in this area can greatly benefit from the theoretical bedrock of the book.

Notwithstanding all these merits, a couple of suggestions are offered here. These recommendations do not undermine the value of the book; they only serve as suggestions for improvement. The second edition of the book should present a Time Code Reference (TCR) for all the examples as it makes it easy for readers to locate specific scenes and dialogues in the original product. If this book is designed for practical classes or intended for use in training subtitlers, Section 4.2 (Research Design), which primarily focuses on those interested in carrying out research or writing a thesis, may not be relevant for students who wish to join the industry as translators rather than becoming researchers. Finally, Chapter 3, which introduces different types of taboo items or the author's taxonomy, should include contextualized examples from films and TV shows, similar to the exercises at the end of each chapter, to illustrate each taboo item more effectively. This aids readers in understanding them within the context.

In conclusion, this insightful volume provides a balanced combination of theoretical analysis and practical examination of subtitling taboo and offensive language; therefore, it is an ideal resource and informative account for AVT students, researchers as well as practicing subtitlers.

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