



## Vulgarization or non-vulgarization in dubbing from English into Italian? Insights from Netflix TV series

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the representation and translation of swearwords in a corpus of English *Netflix* series dubbed into Italian. The TV series selected for this study encompass the most popular genres on the platform, including teen, dramedy, action, and mystery, making them representative of widely consumed content. The analysis begins with a comprehensive examination of the occurrence, extent, and function of swearwords in the original soundtracks, by considering variations across genres and semantic domains. The second part of the analysis offers a detailed exploration of the translation strategies employed to convey swearwords in the Italian dubbing of *Netflix* series, emphasizing genre-specific differences and the influence of language pair and cultural context on strategy selection. The results distinctly reveal that Italian dubbed dialogues often mitigate the offensiveness of swearwords, in contrast to the vulgarization tendency detected in previous studies for dialogues dubbed in Spanish. This divergence may be attributed to cultural factors and lower tolerance among Italian audiences.

**Keywords:** TV series; Italian dubbing; swearwords; vulgarization.

### 1. Introduction

The objective of this paper is to examine the use of swearwords in a representative selection of contemporary English-speaking *Netflix* TV series, as well as the strategies adopted for their translation in the Italian dubbed versions. The interest to carry out this research arose after reading Azzaro's (2018) essay on the representation of taboo language in a wide range of English fictional products, including TV series. Noteworthy in the author's findings is the rarity of swearwords like *shit* or *fuck* in the extensive corpus of pre-digital age TV series under analysis, with the latter profanity never making an appearance. This clashed with our perception, as frequent TV series consumers, of the more and more flexible approach to using swearwords in the shows we watch,



be they in their English original or Italian dubbed versions. That is the reason why we decided to conduct the present study and empirically observe whether an analysis of contemporary platform-produced TV series would yield different results.

It is indisputable that, in recent years, the Internet has profoundly revolutionized how people consume audiovisual content by allowing instant access to a vast array of materials. This often includes the possibility to access both original and dubbed versions, thus catering to diverse audience preferences and habits. Such a large-scale level of accessibility was previously unavailable to many people worldwide. Nowadays, the international players in the online streaming entertainment industry are numerous (e.g. *Amazon Prime Video*, *Disney+*, *Netflix*, *Apple+*, to mention just a few). The digital platform *Netflix* stands out for the number of its paying subscribers worldwide (as of June 2023, more than 230 million spread across 190 countries), making it the highest-grossing video streaming platform in the world. A significant contributing factor to this remarkable achievement can be attributed to the prolific production and instant distribution of original programming by the American entertainment conglomerate each year, rendering these shows readily accessible in numerous languages, often with both a subtitled and a dubbed version. In fact, as the company has pushed to expand internationally, dubbing has played a significant role in making more shows and films accessible, and palatable, to viewers who do not choose or are not accustomed to reading subtitles while watching a show in a foreign language. This is particularly evident in the case of Italy, which along with “Austria, France, Germany and Spain, has adopted a tradition of dubbing rather than subtitling” (Antonini & Chiaro, 2009, p. 97). Such a strong preference for dubbing in Italy is further confirmed by a recent report from *The Hollywood Reporter*, which revealed a 120% increase in the consumption of dubbed *Netflix* content in Italy from 2018 to 2019 (Roxborough, 2019).

As far as *Netflix* original productions are concerned, a fundamental principle guiding their scriptwriters has always been its unwavering commitment to a no-censorship policy, as outlined in the company’s *Quality Control statement* (Netflix, 2024). This policy promotes creative freedom, enabling producers and filmmakers to explore mature themes, explicit language, and sensitive topics in their content. The commitment to creative freedom is likewise evident in the dubbing guidelines available on the *Netflix* website. In the guidelines for Italian professionals<sup>1</sup>, the section dedicated to censorship states:

Our mission in dubbing is to respect the original creative intent as much as possible. Dialogues (including profanities) should be rendered as faithfully as possible, without using dialectal expressions or terms that would introduce a level of obscenity not implicit in the content. We recommend to adaptors not to soften or censor profanities or vulgar expressions used in the original version (always in accordance with local laws) (Netflix, 2024, our translation)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The same text is available in all the other languages into which Netflix products are commonly dubbed.

<sup>2</sup> “La nostra missione a livello di doppiaggio è quella di rispettare il più possibile l’intento creativo originale. I dialoghi (comprese le imprecazioni) devono essere resi nel modo più fedele possibile, senza utilizzare espressioni dialettali o termini che finirebbero per introdurre un livello di oscenità non implicito nel contenuto. Raccomandiamo agli adattatori di non attenuare o censurare le imprecazioni o le espressioni volgari usate nella versione originale (sempre nel rispetto delle leggi locali)”.

Hence, the company clearly encourages those involved in the dubbing process to be as faithful as possible to the source text, even when it comes to the translation of profanities, swearwords or, more generally, taboo topics.

Given this inclination towards authenticity in the use of strong language in both original and dubbed content, in the present study we aim to assess to what extent swearwords permeate *Netflix* produced content and what happens when they are rendered in Italian through dubbing, i.e. the most widespread and appreciated modality of translation in the country. In particular, in what follows we envisage testing whether Valdeón's (2020, p. 261) *vulgarization* hypothesis, according to which in pre-digital TV series there is a recurrent "tendency to intensify the vulgarity of the lexical items found in the English source texts when translated into Spanish", also applies to *Netflix*-produced TV series dubbed into Italian.

## 2. Swearing in English and AVT

As contended in Love's (2021) recent study, swearing (leaving the terminological issue aside for a moment) is an entrenched area of linguistic enquiry that has attracted much interest from different perspectives, ranging from linguistics (Andersson & Trudgill, 1992; McEnery, 2006; Love, 2021) to psycholinguistics (Jay, 2009) mainly because it can trigger either positive or undesirable reactions. In particular, in the field of corpus linguistics, a growing interest emerged at the beginning of the new century, with studies such as Stenström (2006), Stenström *et al.* (2002), McEnery (2006), McEnery and Xiao (2004), Bednarek (2019a, 2019b, 2020) and Love (2021), to mention just a few.

In audiovisual translation studies, swearing is also a very prolific subject because of its function in sketching out characters and for the challenges it represents in translation. As highlighted by Perego and Taylor (2012, p. 59), "through talking [...] characters are introduced and their identity revealed, [...] emotions are expressed, and relationships are shown". Hence, the frequent presence of swearing may be a signal of age, social class, psychological state, etc. From the viewpoint of translation, it is paramount to correctly fathom all the nuances of the meaning of swearing, their socio-cultural components, and their discursive functions, i.e. why the fictional characters use swearing, whether it is cathartic, abusive or social, to adopt the classification put forward by Cavaliere (2019).

Academic research on the translation of swearing and taboo expressions in audiovisual texts is devoted to the two principal modalities: dubbing and subtitling. In the field of audiovisual translation, plenty of studies have underlined that strong language tends to be attenuated and standardized in different language combinations (Chaume, 2004; Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007; Valdeón, 2020). Studies on dubbing from English into Italian, which began to thrive at the beginning of the 21st century, have ascertained an evident tendency to temper strong language (Azzaro, 2005, 2018; Beseghi, 2016; Bucaria, 2007, 2009, 2018; Chiaro, 2007, 2016; Pavesi & Malinverno, 2000) because of a stricter censorship control and of the audience's lesser tolerance of strongly connoted language.

In subtitling, a modality that adds to the original soundtrack a written translation in the target language, so that it is interlingual and intermedial at the same time, other issues come to the fore.



Apart from censoring authorities, in this case for quite some time, the diamesic transformation into a written form imposed the toning down, if not the elimination, of swear words (Ávila-Cabrera, 2020), which was also desirable for reasons of conciseness (Hatim & Mason, 1997; Guillot, 2017). More recently, given the broad reach of streaming platforms such as *Netflix*, *Amazon Prime*, and the like, where both the subject matter and the language chosen are particularly crude and graphic, even subtitling seems to have caught up with the *vulgarization* hypothesis (Valdeón, 2020; Barrea-Rioja, 2023).

## 2.1 A terminological clarification on swearing

The area of investigation is complex to define because different scholars have used partially overlapping labels to outline more or less the same phenomenon: apart from swearing, which is the overarching term, labels such as taboo words (Ávila-Cabrera, 2020; Christie, 2013), vulgarisms (Santamaría Ciordia, 2016), foul language or bad language, have also been employed.

Part of the elusiveness of swearing also resides in the fact that it is a phenomenon that changes dramatically from individual to individual and from one society to another. Furthermore, the functions of swearing are numerous and change depending on contextual variables so that a potentially offensive term becomes a source of humour and fun among intimate friends (Jay, 2009). So, the association with offensiveness and impoliteness is far from simple and immediate. What seems instead more viable is the connection with “strong emotions or attitudes” and “something taboo or stigmatised” (Andersson & Trudgill, 2007, p. 195). That is why, the label “strong language” has also been applied (Beseghi, 2016).

As Love (2021, p. 3-4) rightly argues, one of the cruxes is that there is no consensus on what counts as swearing because there are swearwords that can be used literally, which can also be substituted with non-taboo alternatives. Love provides the example of *he fucked him*, which, when literal, can be replaced by *he bonked him*. However, when *fuck* is used non-literally (*fuck you*), the replacement no longer works (*\*bonk you*). Love (2021) contends that some authors do not consider the literal use of taboo words as a form of swearing: Anderson and Trudgill (2007), for example, claim that they do not express emotions. Most scholars, McEney (2006) and Singleton (2009) among them, share the opposite view believing that even literal usage is to be considered as a form of swearing, as *bad language* (McEney, 2006) or *vulgar language* (Dynel, 2012). In other words, such expressions, regardless of the literal or non-literal usage, always tap into an emotional response of some sort, as they are connected with taboo topics, intended as “proscriptions of behavior arising out of social constraints on the individual’s behavior where [they are] perceived to be a potential cause of discomfort, harm or injury” (Allan, 2018, p. 2). Typical examples in western cultures, as contended by Allan and Burrige (2006, p. 250), are “sexual and scatological obscenities, ethnic-racial slurs, insults, name-calling, profanity, blasphemy, slang, jargon and vulgarities of all kinds, including the forbidden words of non-standard grammar”.

Our understanding of swearing for the purpose of this research aligns with McEney (2006), who frames it within the context of bad language and understands swearwords as words or phrases that have the potential to cause offense in polite conversation, and with Andersson and Trudgill (2007), who link swearing to the violation of taboos imposed by society.



### 3. Data and methods

The current research is centered around a micro-parallel corpus of English<sup>3</sup> TV series that were produced by the American streaming service *Netflix* and originally broadcast on its platform. The sampled series represent contemporary productions, with the original language being a native variety of English. With the aim of collecting a representative sample of the most consumed products and building on insights from a recent survey that identified global preferences for TV series genres on *Netflix* (Moore, 2021), our focus was directed towards the four most consumed TV series genres proposed by the platform: dramedy (a blend of comedy and drama), action, teen, and mystery.

To ensure a fair and comprehensive representation of our samples, we deliberately chose the first five TV series suggested by the platform for each genre. Specifically, we refined our selection to encompass two episodes per TV series, which were chosen randomly from those available on the platform. For each of these selected episodes, we meticulously transcribed the initial ten minutes of dialogue in its English original and Italian dubbed versions. These transcriptions were thoughtfully organized into aligned tables, further supplemented with information about the speakers' identities, including their names, genders, and age groups. The breakdown of the dataset, featuring the sixty episodes considered in our analysis, is provided in Table I below.

Table I: The TV series dataset

	<b>TV series</b>	<b>Episodes</b>
Dramedy	<i>Afterlife</i> (UK, Gervais, 2019-2022)	S1 E1; S1 E4
Dramedy	<i>Dead to Me</i> (US, Feldman, 2019-2022)	S1 E1; S2 E1
Dramedy	<i>Grace and Frankie</i> (US, Kauffman, Morris, 2015-2022)	S1 E1; S7 E1
Dramedy	<i>The Good Place</i> (US, Schur, 2016-2020)	S1 E1; S1 E2
Dramedy	<i>The Kominsky Method</i> (US, Lorre, 2018-2021)	S1 E4; S2 E1
Teen	<i>Boo Bitch</i> (US, Schauer et al. 2022)	S1 E1; S1 E8
Teen	<i>Heartbreak High</i> (AU, Chapman, 2022)	S1 E1; S1 E8
Teen	<i>Never Have I Ever</i> (US, Kailing, Fischer, 2020-present)	S1 E1; S4 E1
Teen	<i>Sex Education</i> (UK, Nunn, 2019-2023)	S1 E4; S2 E1
Teen	<i>The End of the F***ing World</i> (UK, Entwistle, 2017-2019)	S1 E1; S2 E1
Action	<i>Fubar</i> (US, Santora, 2023-present)	S1 E2; S1 E8
Action	<i>Kaleidoscope</i> (US, Garcia, 2023-present)	S1 E2; S1 E8
Action	<i>Outer Banks</i> (US, Pate et al., 2020-2023)	S1 E2; S1 E4
Action	<i>The Night Agent</i> (US, Ryam, 2023-present)	S1 E1; S1 E10
Action	<i>The Umbrella Academy</i> (US, Blackman, 2019- present)	S1 E1; S1 E8
Mystery	<i>One of Us is Lying</i> (US, Saleh, 2021-22)	S1 E1; S1 E8
Mystery	<i>Red Rose</i> (UK, Clarkson, 2022)	S1 E1; S1 E8
Mystery	<i>The Stranger</i> (UK, Coben, 2022)	S1 E1; S1 E8
Mystery	<i>The Watcher</i> (US, Murphy, 2022-present)	S1 E1; S1 E8
Mystery	<i>The Woman in the House across the Street from the Girl in the Window</i> (US, Ramras et al. 2022)	S1 E1; S1 E2

Source: Authors

All instances of swearing uttered in the first ten minutes of dialogue were subsequently identified, categorized and quantified manually in line with McEnery's (2006) semantic classification,

<sup>3</sup> By saying English TV series, we mean shows that were originally produced in a native variety of English, e.g. British, American or Australian.

which differentiates between words associated with: i) sexuality (e.g. *fuck*, *screw*), ii) religion (e.g. *God*, *Hell*), iii) scatology (e.g. *shit*, *ass*), iv) sexist or racial slurs (e.g. *bitch*), and v) physical and mental handicaps (e.g. *weirdo*). Therefore, our criterion for recognizing swearwords was quite broad as it encompassed all uttered occurrences of taboo words, be they used with a literal or non-literal meaning<sup>4</sup>.

Concerning the aspect of translation, our categorization of the various strategies used to render swearwords in the Italian dubbing was inspired by the framework proposed by Valdeón (2020). In particular, we distinguished between cases of:

- I. omission, involving the elimination of swearwords in the dubbed text (e.g. *Are you **fucking** kidding me?* > dubbed as “Stai scherzando?” [Are you kidding me?]);
- II. toning down, aimed at diminishing the meaning and vulgarity of the taboo word, (e.g. *What the **hell**?* > dubbed as “Che **cavolo** fai?”, in which “hell” is replaced by “cavolo”, an Italian euphemism);
- III. equivalence/literal translation, denoting cases where the same ideological value as the source text is retained (e.g. *Oh my **God*** > dubbed as “O mio **Dio**”);
- IV. intensification, encompassing situations where a stronger or coarser word is employed in the translated text (e.g. *Hit the **freaking** hay?* > dubbed as “**Cazzo**, andrai a nanna?”<sup>5</sup> [Fuck, will you go to bed?]).

The analysis, then, proceeded relying on what Toury (2012, p. 116) termed “coupled pair analysis”, wherein instances of a swearword or phrase in the English source text were paired and critically assessed in comparison with their Italian dubbed counterparts.

#### 4. The representation of swearwords in TV series

Before delving into the translation via dubbing of swearwords, we meticulously categorized all their occurrences in the source texts according to McEnery’s (2006) taxonomy that, as explained in Section 3, distinguishes between the different taboo domains, taboo words or expressions touched on. Table 2 presents the quantitative results of this preliminary investigation, differentiating between the four TV series genres taken into account (Teen, Dramedy, Action, Mystery). The quantitative data are expressed in terms of both the range of different swearwords (types) and the total number of their occurrences (tokens).

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<sup>4</sup> The only exception was for the words ‘God’ and ‘Hell’ that when used with a literal meaning do not represent a taboo.

<sup>5</sup> All translations between square brackets are our backtranslations from Italian into English.

Table 2: Swearwords in *Netflix* TV series across genres

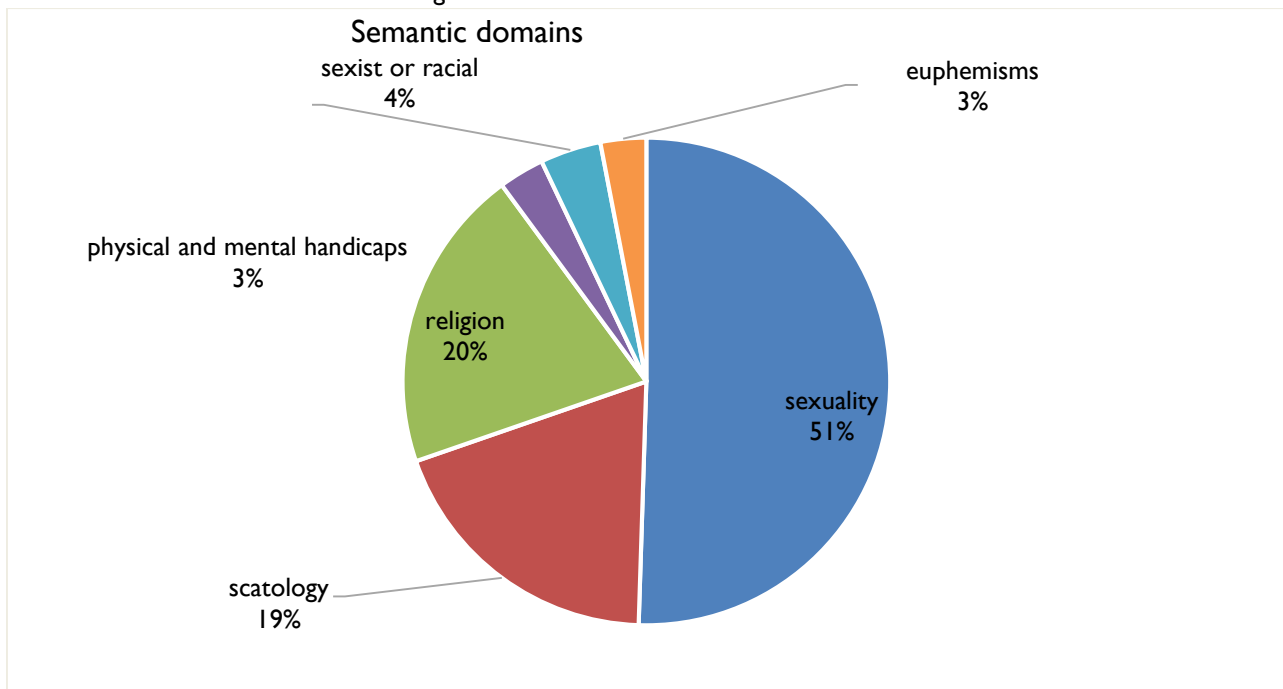
Semantic domain	TV series genre							
	Teen		Dramedy		Action		Mystery	
	types	token	types	token	types	token	types	token
Sexuality	32	70	22	62	9	38	16	49
	62 types				219 tokens			
Scatology	11	38	5	12	10	31	6	20
	22 types				87 tokens			
Religion	7	22	5	28	7	27	5	20
	12 types				97 tokens			
Physical and mental handicaps	1	2	2	2	3	5	2	4
	10 types				13 tokens			
Sexist or racial slurs	4	12	2	2	1	4	1	2
	6 types				20 tokens			
Euphemisms	4	4	5	5	2	2	4	6
	11 types				17 tokens			
Total counts per genre	59	158	30	108	32	69	34	101
Overall counts	types 123				tokens 436			

Source: Authors

On a surface level, the overall counts show that 123 different swearwords (types) could be identified in the transcriptions of the original soundtracks, totaling 436 individual occurrences (tokens). The ratio between these two figures, known as type/token ratio, is 28%, which attests to the significant diversity (and potential creativity) of the swearwords used in the TV series under scrutiny. Looking at the results across the four genres, it becomes evident that ‘teen’ exhibits the highest numbers in both types (59) and tokens (158), followed by ‘dramedy’ and ‘mystery’ with 40 types for 108 tokens and 34 types for 101 tokens, respectively. Finally, ‘action’ features 32 different swearwords for 69 occurrences. The slightly higher occurrence of swearwords in teen dramas could be attributed to their strong characterizing potential. In fact, their frequent use is a well-known distinctive trait of teenage talk (Love & Stenstrom, 2023), which is the predominant register found in teen dramas. The divide with the other genres is particularly pronounced when assessing word types, which are almost twice as numerous in ‘teen’ than in the other genres (59 vs 30, 32, and 34). This figure clearly reflects the broader range of topics and contexts that are covered by teenage swearing. While ‘dramedy’ and ‘mystery’ display similar quantitative results, ‘action’ appears to have the lowest results especially in terms of tokens. Upon reviewing the selected transcripts, this could be attributed to the dialogues playing a more marginal role in character development, in favour of longer scenes depicting violence and physical feats.

Moving on to the scrutiny of the semantic domains, as illustrated in Figure 1, more than half of the total number of swearwords revolve around sex and sexuality (51%), followed by religion (20%) and scatology (19%). To a lesser extent, there are instances of sexist or racist slurs (4%), offensive references to physical and mental handicaps (3%) and the use of euphemisms (3%).

Figure 1: Semantic domains of swearwords



Source: Authors

As far as sexuality is concerned, among the 62 different swearwords that could be classified, corresponding to 219 tokens, the forms *fuck* and *fucking* are by far the most used forms across the four genres. Of particular note, in ‘teen’, where taboo words related to sexuality are the largest category, *fuck* appears only 6 times, whereas in ‘dramedy’, ‘action’ and ‘mystery’, 15, 23, and 14, respectively. If we look at its usage in teen dramas, we may observe that it occurs 4 times as an untargeted exclamation, as in the idiomatized phrase *what the fuck*, or simply *fuck!*, 2 times as *fuck off*, an aggravating formulaic dismissal targeted from one teenager to another and 1 time literally, as a verb with the meaning of having sex with someone. In dramedies, the same form occurs 15 times, none of which in aggravating targeted sentences. It is mostly used as an expletive in exclamations (9 occurrences e.g. *fuck me!*, *fuck!*, *what the fuck*), but it also repeatedly occurs (5 occurrences) with a purely intensifying function, as in (1):

1) Jen: Oh, come **the fuck** on! (*Dead to Me*, S2E1)

and occasionally with its literal meaning in a verb phrase (1 time).

In action TV series, the genre with the lowest number of sex-related swearwords, *fuck* is more resorted to than in the other genres, meaning that here the range of swearwords referring to sexuality is particularly low. When we analyze its uses, we can note that its most common use (12 occurrences) is as a strong intensifier (2). However, it is also used as an expletive (6 occurrences), and 5 times as a form of aggravation, meaning an abusive expression clearly directed towards an interlocutor, as in example (3), where it contributes to emphasize the violence of the scene being depicted.



2) Who **the fuck** are these guys? (*Fubar*, SIE1)

3) I'll **fuck you up**. (*Outer Banks*, SIE2)

In mystery dramas, the most recurrent use of *fuck* is in exclamations, e.g. *What the fuck!* (8 instances), especially when youngsters are involved in the conversation (7 out of 8 cases), but it also occurs as an intensifier (5 occurrences), e.g. *I don't give the tiniest fuck*, and twice with the literal meaning, e.g. *getting fucked*.

For what concerns the form *fucking*, it occurs 53 times: 23 in teen dramas, 15 in dramedies, 6 in action series and 9 in mystery series. Its most widespread function, regardless of the genre, is as an intensifying particle (49 out of 53 cases). In teen dramas, where it is particularly recurrent, in some contexts (4 instances), it is used in combination with another swearword, thus boosting its offensiveness and creating a hyperbolic and emphatic effect (example 4):

4) Alyssa: See if Marvin can make a banana split for me, you **fucking cunt!** (*The End of the F\*\*\*ing World*, SIE1)

Another interesting aspect to highlight is that, in some cases, especially when uttered by teenagers (as observed in our dataset, 4 times in teen dramas and 3 in mystery dramas in scenes featuring dialogues between teenagers), the swearword takes on a positive connotation and is paired with words such as *amazing*, *good*, *fantastic*. In these contexts, it is particularly evident how the swearword is (partially) losing its negative and derogatory meaning, often becoming a kind of social swearing, aimed at strengthening group affinity, particularly among young people. This is a trend currently occurring in contemporary spoken English, where forms derived from *fuck* are undergoing semantic bleaching and losing their taboo value (Love & Stenstrom, 2023).

Turning to the second most frequently mentioned taboo domains, namely religion (20%), and scatology (19%), the most common words in these categories are *God* (46.46% of all religious swearing) and *shit* (52.47% of all scatological swearing). The distribution of taboo words related to religion among the four genres is relatively uniform, with 22 occurrences in teen dramas, 30 in dramedies, 20 in mystery series and 27 in action series. This distribution attests to the pervasiveness of the so-called *G-words* in English (cf. Tagliamonte & Jankowski, 2019), such as *oh my God* or the interjection *God*, both used to express surprise or strong emotions, be they positive or negative. As Tagliamonte & Jankowski (2019) have found, these words, once considered strong profanities and prohibited, are becoming increasingly milder and more socially accepted in public discourse. Hence, scriptwriters make ample use of them to mirror contemporary authentic conversations. The stronger cursing *goddamn* only occurs 3 times in action series and is always used by male characters towards another male with an intensifying function (example 5).

5) Keep his name out of your **goddamn** mouth. (*The Night Agent*, SIE1)



As for scatological words, the word *shit* accounts for more than half of the total occurrences. Given its versatility, Table 3 summarizes the occurrences and the various uses of *shit* across the genres in our micro-corpus.

Table 3: Occurrences and uses of the word *shit*

Shit	Teen	Dramedy	Action	Mystery
Interjection	10 e.g. Oh shit, there's Ben, hide me.	4 e.g. Oh shit, what's his name?	8 e.g. Oh my God. Holy shit, your shirt.	5 e.g. Oh shit, uh, shoot.
General meaning of 'stuff' (negative)	8 e.g. I don't wanna see alerts about shit I don't wanna do.	-	4 e.g. That shit can't stand.	2 e.g. And I thought we were done with all this Scooby-Doo shit.
General meaning of 'stuff' (positive)	4 e.g. This is close to some VIP shit.	-	2 e.g. Now you're the big shit people are here to see.	-
General meaning of 'something bad'	3 e.g. You're pretty shit	3 e.g. Yeah, again, shit attitude, mate.	4 e.g. In case shit went sideways for you, you could use me as a fall guy.	2 e.g. You are full of shit.
Literal	1 e.g. She did a massive shit in the toilet.	-	-	1 e.g. Watch out for sheep shit.
	26	7	16	10

Source: Authors

As can be noticed, the majority of instances originate from teen dramas, where *shit* appears 26 times, followed by action series (16 occurrences), mystery series (10 occurrences), and dramedies (7 occurrences). The most common usage across all genres is as an interjection, typically conveying shock, surprise, or a sense of worry. Another prevalent use is as a versatile term (8 occurrences in teen dramas, 4 in action series, 2 in mystery series) to convey the concept of 'stuff' with a negative connotation. Interestingly, in 4 cases within teen dramas and 2 in action series, it is employed with a positive connotation, denoting something as exceptionally good. In other contexts, *shit* takes on a more general meaning of anything (also an attitude) bad and undesirable (3 occurrences in teen dramas, 3 in dramedies, 4 in action series, and 2 in mystery series). Lastly, as observed for other swearwords, literal usages are infrequent, with only one occurrence each in teen dramas and mystery series.

To conclude, the three least common semantic categories of swearwords are euphemisms (4%), sexist or racial slurs (4%), and physical and mental handicaps. Among the euphemisms, the only forms used more than once across the corpus components are *Gosh*, which stands for *God* (3 occurrences in dramedies), and *freaking*, substituting *fucking* (2 occurrences in teen dramas). The corpus component with the highest number of euphemisms is that of dramedies with 6 items.



Concerning sexist and racial terms of abuse, no ethnic slurs could be detected, whereas the term *bitch* is repeatedly used in teen dramas (8 occurrences), and in mystery series (4 occurrences), where it is uttered by teen characters. *Bitch* is another interesting case of a swearword whose insulting potential is bleaching, especially among young people, becoming a sort of in-group marker (Baker, 2017).

In conclusion, the three least common semantic categories of swearwords are euphemisms (4%), sexist or racial slurs (4%), and terms related to physical and mental handicaps. Within the category of euphemisms, the only forms used more than once across the corpus components are *Gosh*, which is a substitute for *God* (3 occurrences in dramedies), and *freaking*, which replaces *fucking* (2 occurrences in teen dramas). Dramedies emerged as the corpus component with the highest number of euphemisms, totaling 6 instances. This observation might suggest a higher level of restraint in the use of swearwords among adults.

Regarding sexist and racial terms of abuse, no ethnic slurs were detected. Conversely, for what concerns sexist terms, the vulgar word *bitch* is frequently used in teen dramas (8 occurrences) and in mystery series (4 occurrences), predominantly by teenage characters. *Bitch* presents another interesting case of a swearword whose insulting potential has been diluted, particularly among young people, and it has become a vocative used as an in-group marker.

Terms related to physical and mental handicaps appear only once in teen dramas and twice in mystery series, while they occur 5 times in dramedies, and 4 times each in action and mystery series. All the identified terms fall under the category of mild swearwords, such as *crazy* (4 occurrences), *weirdo* (2 occurrences), *boneheaded* (1 occurrence), and *idiot* (1 occurrence). These terms, even when directed at someone, have limited offensive potential.

## 5. Swearwords and translation strategies

Overall, the most widely used translation strategy in our *Netflix* corpus is that of equivalence, with a solid percentage (69.86%). Mitigation strategies, both in the sense of altogether omission (17.68%) and toning down (9.38%), amount to 27.06%. Intensification of swearwords occurs less frequently, with an overall percentage of 3.05%.

The results, however, show relevant differences across genres: if equivalence is almost homogeneous in dramedies, mysteries, and action shows, it is instead less represented in teen dramas, where, as a consequence, all the other strategies are used more. What might at first glance appear as an increase in vulgarization, that is, intensification amounting to 6.36%, is counterbalanced by both omission and toning down (respectively 23.62% and 16.36%). What can safely be said is that, in teen dramas, extreme tendencies seem more widespread in the direction of either reduction or intensification. The genre that ranks second, although with lower values than teen dramas, is action shows, where characters belong to all walks of life, but the lower strata of society are the most represented. Hence, abusive language might be not only an instrument to assert one's personality, as in teen shows, but a typical accompaniment to physically violent action.

The results are not in line with those found by Valdeón (2020), who analyzed the translation of swearwords in the Spanish dub of British and American programmes. Valdeón considered



different genres, i.e. a sitcom, a police drama, a family drama and a thriller, none of which was a *Netflix* production. In addition, the sample selected involved four shows that were produced and released in the period between 2006 and 2016, which, in terms of translation strategies and viewing habits, is already quite distant from the present. The language pair under consideration certainly plays a role, too: Valdeón (2020, p. 262) remarked that, despite several studies that singled out mitigation as the primary strategy, in 2010, he had already ascertained, in the Spanish dubbing of *Will & Grace*, “a tendency to increase the frequency and intensity of swearwords when translating contemporary Anglophone material into Spanish”. The remarkable result of 53.14% of vulgarization strategies in the 2020 study depends on the widespread presence of swearwords in Spanish (in non-translated tele-cinematic products as well as spontaneous interactions) and thus on an evident domesticating strategy in the dubbed dialogues of the Anglophone series. Narrative functions do not seem to play a relevant role in associating swearwords with specific characters (with an exception in *Brothers & Sisters*, where the youngest sibling is the one who employs taboo expressions more freely) nor in determining the translation strategy. Thus, apart from the family drama genre that depicts upper-class characters, the tendency towards intensification is pervasive.

However, the average trends in the translation strategies employed result from very different local strategies used in different TV series. The emerging picture suggests not so much a company strategy, that is, *Netflix* favouring the retention of forms of swearing, but a different strategy in different shows.

In what follows, some examples are offered concerning the translation of *fuck* forms. In *Never Have I Ever*, *fucking* (used as a strengthening element) is lost in the dub and in *Heartbreak High*, another teen drama, is almost always omitted, apart from when it is used literally.

Source text	Target text
Are you <b>fucking</b> kidding me?	Mamma, stai $\emptyset$ scherzando? [Mum, are you kidding?]

*Never Have I Ever*, SIE10

Source text	Target text
Are you <b>fucking</b> kidding me?	Mi stai $\emptyset$ prendendo in giro, Ben? [Are you kidding me, Ben?]

*Never Have I Ever*, SIE10

Source text	Target text
If you touch her again I'll <b>fuckin'</b> smash ya, ya cheatin' dog.	Se la tocchi ancora una volta ti $\emptyset$ spacco la faccia brutto, brutto cane. [If you touch her again, I'll smash your face, ugly, ugly dog]

*Heartbreak High*, SIE1

Source text	Target text
No, babe, I'm <b>fuckin'</b> ...	No, tesoro, cavolo <sup>6</sup> ... [No, honey, fudge...]

*Heartbreak High*, SIE1

Source text	Target text
What the <b>fuck!</b>	$\emptyset$

<sup>6</sup> In Italian *cavolo* is a euphemistic form for *cazzo* ([dick]).

<b>Fuck!</b>	Ø
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Heartbreak High, SIEI

Source text	Target text
Everyone who's <b>fucked</b> everyone.	Tutti vogliono <b>scopare</b> tutti. [Everybody wants to fuck everybody]

Heartbreak High, SIEI

Source text	Target text
-Yeah, I'm <b>fucking</b> good. - <b>Bloody</b> love you.	-Sto Ø favolosamente bene. -Sei Ø importante per me. [-I am fabulously well. -You are important to me]

Heartbreak High, SIE8

Source text	Target text
What's <b>fucking</b> good, bro?	Era Ø proprio buona, fratello! [It was really good, brother!]

Heartbreak High, SIE8

In *The End of the F\*\*\*ing World*, on the contrary, the strategy seems the opposite, that is *fuck* and its derivatives are almost always translated, sometimes with choices that are even more vulgar and offensive than in the original (cf. the last but one example).

Source text	Target text
<b>Fuck off.</b>	<b>Fanculo.</b> [Fuck off]
-What the <b>fuck</b> ? -What?	Che <b>cazzo</b> fai? [What the fuck are you doing?] Che c'è? [What is it?]
<b>Fuck off.</b>	<b>Fanculo.</b> [Fuck off]
And an extra <b>fucking</b> spoon.	E anche un <b>cazzo</b> di cucchiaino in più. [And an extra fucking spoon too]
I will have... a great big banana shit with extra <b>fucking</b> cherries all on top of it.	Allora prendo... una banana <b>minchia</b> ma bella grossa con tante <b>cazzo</b> di ciliegine sopra. [Well, I'll have a banana dick, a huge one, with lots of fucking cherries on top of it]
See if Marvin can make a banana split for me, you <b>fucking cunt</b> !	Ma si chiamiamo Marvin, forse Marvin riuscirà a farmi avere una banana split, <b>troia sfondata</b> ! [Yes, let's call Marvin, maybe Marvin will be able to get me a banana split, you screwed slut]
Everyone's so <b>fucking</b> square.	Qui non c'è nessuno che non sia Ø inquadrato. [Here there isn't anybody who is not conventional]

The End of the F\*\*\*ing World, SIEI

The following examples are drawn from two dramedies, *After Life* and *Dead to Me*, both revolving around the grievances that follow the death of a loved one. In the former, the character of Tony is so saddened by his wife's premature death that he cannot refrain from being scathing and aggressive when interacting with people. Quite similarly, Jen in *Dead to Me* cannot get over her husband's departure and often gives vent to her anger, by being antagonistic and controversial. However, while Tony's swearing is often tempered down, Jen's is not, apart from a long turn in which the term *fuck* is used many times. This might also have to do with the fact that the translation option *fottuta/o* [>screwed] does not sound very natural in Italian.



Source text	Target text
There is no bright future in journalism. By the time you're a features writer, there won't be newspapers as we know them because it'll just be a <b>shit storm</b> on the Internet. People posting nasty, <b>fucking</b> hateful opinions that aren't even theirs 'cause their editor told them to, to get clickbait for <b>fucking</b> advertisers because the world is full of <b>fuckin'</b> morons...	Non c'è futuro nel giornalismo. Quando diventerai articolista, non ci saranno neanche più i giornali, perché ci sarà solo un <b>sacco di merda</b> su internet. Persone che postano <b>Ø</b> opinioni al vetriolo che non sono neanche le loro, solo perché l'editore gli ha detto di trovare un modo per attirare i click <b>Ø</b> , dato che viviamo in un mondo pieno di <b>Ø</b> idioti. [There is no future in journalism. When you become a feature writer, there won't be newspapers any longer, because there will be a sack of shit on the Internet. People that post vitriolic opinions that are not even theirs, only because the editor told them to find a way to attract clicks, as we live in world full of idiots]

After Life, SIE4

Source text	Target text
What the <b>fuck</b> am I doing? <b>Fuck, fuck, fuck.</b> Oh <b>God!</b>	Che <b>cazzo</b> sto facendo? <b>Cazzo, cazzo, cazzo.</b> <b>Oddio!</b> [What the fuck am I doing? Fuck, fuck, fuck. Oh God]
<b>Fuck! Fuck!</b> I <b>fucking</b> hate doing this.	<b>Cazzo, cazzo, cazzo.</b> Come si fa? Non lo so fare. Non ce la faccio. [Fuck, fuck, fuck. How can I do this? I don't know how to do it. I can't manage]
Come the <b>fuck</b> on.	Andiamo, <b>cazzo.</b> [Come on, what the fuck]
Now <b>fucking</b> drop it and go to school. Thank you.	Ora smettila, <b>cazzo</b> , e vai a scuola. Grazie. [Now drop it, for fuck's sake, and go to school. Thanks]
It's too <b>fucking</b> late, Judy. I am in a lot of <b>fucking</b> danger now.	È troppo tardi, <b>cazzo</b> , Judy. Sono davvero in <b>fottuto</b> pericolo adesso. [It's too late, for fuck's sake, Judy. I'm in fucking danger now]
And you're the one who <b>fucking</b> told me that his family's so <b>fucking</b> connected to the police. [...] Not to mention my <b>fucking</b> house would be a crime scene, and I'd be opening my boys up to an investigation. [...] Ok, you know what? I don't need your <b>fucking</b> pity right now.	E sei stata tu <b>Ø</b> a dirmi che la sua famiglia è <b>fottutamente</b> connessa con la polizia. [...] Oltre al fatto che la <b>Ø</b> casa diventerebbe una scena del crimine e sottoporrei i miei ragazzi a un'indagine. [...] Non ho bisogno della tua <b>fottuta</b> pietà. [And it was you who told me that her family is fucking connected to the police. Not to mention that my fucking house would become a crime scene and I would submit my children to an investigation. I don't need your fucking pity]

Dead to Me, SIE1

Although a deeper investigation into translation strategies across genres should be conducted, it can safely be said that Netflix does not have a general policy for transposing swearing as opposed to other platforms or TV channels. Choices are instead related to individual strategies adopted by the translator (or team of translators) involved in the task.

In the mystery genre, again, differences in treatment emerge across the different shows considered. For example, in *Red Rose* the tokens of *fuck* and derivatives seem to be translated in the majority of cases, but in *The Watcher* toning down and omission prevail over equivalent rendition.



Source text	Target text
Oh, <b>fuck off</b> .	No, <b>vaffanculo!</b> [Fuck off]
This summer's gonna be about <b>getting fucked</b> every single night. It's gonna be sick.	Quest'estate dobbiamo <b>scopare</b> ogni sera. Sarà indimenticabile. [This summer we must fuck every night. It will be unforgettable]
<b>What the actual fuck?</b> Since when?	<b>Ma che cazzo dici</b> , da quando? [What the fuck are you saying? Since when?]
Oh, <b>you little fucker!</b>	<b>Coglioni!</b> [You assholes]
Also, <b>fucking fit</b> .	... <b>Ø</b> Quello che ci interessa è bere, no? [What we are interested in is drinking]
<b>Fucking hell!</b>	<b>Cazzo!</b> [Fuck]

Red Rose, SIEI

You are <b>fucking</b> doing it. 'Cause look at me. Not me... I'm like, " <b>Fuck painting</b> ." Yeah, I'm just going to marry rich. Just easier that way.	<b>Porca troia</b> ce l'hai fatta. E guarda me, ho fallito... insomma... <b>Ø</b> niente pittura... sì mi sposerò un riccone, è più facile così. [Holy cow, you made it. Look at me, I failed... well... no painting... yes, I'll marry into riches, it's easier this way]
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The Watcher, SIEI

Source text	Target text
It was so <b>fucked up</b> .	C'era un vero e proprio <b>Ø</b> delirio. [There was a real madhouse]
This <b>fucking city</b> .	<b>Città del cazzo</b> . [Fucking city]
We never had the first <b>fucking clue!</b>	Non avevamo idea di chi <b>Ø</b> potesse essere. [We didn't have a clue who he might be]
I don't give <b>the tiniest fuck</b> .	Non me ne frega <b>assolutamente un cazzo</b> . [I don't give the tiniest fuck]
<b>What the fuck</b> are you talking about?	Di che cosa <b>Ø</b> stai parlando? [What are you talking about?]

The Watcher, SIE3

The shows included in the category of 'action' change dramatically for the frequency and the translation of *fuck*: in *The Umbrella Academy*, at least as far as the random sample is concerned, there are no tokens of *fuck*, whereas in *The Night Agent* omissions and toning down are used in a genre where the themes and contents of the narrative would allow for verbal aggression and violence.

Source text	Target text
<b>Fuck off</b> .	<b>Fanculo</b> [Fuck off]

Night Agent, SIEI

Source text	Target text
<b>Fuck no</b> .	<b>Fanculo no</b> . [Fuck, no]
If the public knew about every <b>fuck</b> or scandal, society would collapse on itself. Don't think for a second this isn't happening in every office, every branch of government, <b>every single fucking day</b> .	Se tutti sapessero di ogni <b>Ø</b> errore o scandalo, la società crollerebbe su se stessa. Non crederai che questo non accada in ogni ufficio, in ogni ramo del governo <b>ogni cazzo di giorno</b> .



	[If everyone knew about every mistake or scandal, society would collapse on itself. You won't believe this doesn't happen in every office, every branch of government every single fucking day]
System's <b>fucked up</b> beyond repair. Why try? I was just doing my job. Any other bullshit justifications.	Il sistema è <b>Ø</b> irrimediabilmente marcio. [...] Qualche altra giustificazione di merda da darvi. [The system is irreparably rotten. ... Some other shitty justification to give you]
But you've convinced yourself that this " <b>Sun Tzu fuck Machiavelli</b> " philosophy was the way to go.	Convincersi che questa filosofia tra Sun Tzu e <b>Ø</b> Machiavelli sia l'unico modo possibile. [Convince yourself that this philosophy between Sun Tzu and Machiavelli is the only possible way]
So save the <b>ass-covering bullshit</b> and just be grateful I'm not the one holding the <b>fucking gun</b> .	Basta con le <b>cazzate</b> per coprirvi il culo e ringrazi che non sia io ad avere una <b>Ø</b> pistola. [Enough bullshit to cover your asses and be thankful that I'm not the one who has a gun]
<b>Fuck no.</b>	<b>Fanculo no.</b> [Fuck no]

*The Night Agent*, S1E10

## 6. Final remarks

Although we are aware of this study's limitations, using a small corpus also had some advantages. The most conspicuous one is that the corpus was also manually searchable, making qualitative investigation feasible.

Despite its size, however, the corpus was representative and balanced because of the selection of four genres and dialogues from random episodes. The emerging picture is a relatively faithful snapshot of the use of swearing in the *Netflix* series. Overall, we could observe that, contrary to expectations and findings by other scholars, both *fuck* and *shit* are well-represented, possibly because both are flexible elements that have developed various functions and meanings over time.

Regardless of the freedom granted to *Netflix* translators and the looser censorship control for digital platforms compared to national television channels, the Italian dubbed dialogues display a remarkable tendency towards attenuating the potential offensive meaning conveyed by swearwords. This result, which contrasts with Valdeón's (2020) findings for dubbed Spanish, probably depends on Italian audiences' lower tolerance for strong, abusive language. More in-depth analyses across contemporary genres and different broadcasting platforms and channels could shed more light on the apparent diverging translation trends of two countries, Spain and Italy, whose consumption of translated media products heavily relies on dubbing.

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The authors discussed and conceived the article together. Silvia Bruti is responsible for sections 2, 5 and 6, Gianmarco Vignozzi for sections 1, 3 and 4.

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