

BOOK REVIEW: *THE CHALLENGE OF SUBTITLING OFFENSIVE AND TABOO LANGUAGE INTO SPANISH. A THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL GUIDE*

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Title: *The Challenge of Subtitling Offensive and Taboo Language into Spanish. A Theoretical and Practical Guide*

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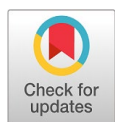
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In general terms, *taboo language* refers to words or expressions that are considered socially unacceptable or inappropriate in a given context or culture. Examples of taboo language include swear words, slurs, and expressions related to sexuality, violence, or bodily functions. Research on taboo language has explored its social and psychological functions, such as its role in establishing and reinforcing social norms, expressing emotions and identities, and coping with stress and anxiety (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2021). Studies have also examined the impact of taboo language on communication, cognition, and behavior, as well as its potential benefits and drawbacks in different contexts and settings (Jay, 2000).

In the field of translation studies in general and in audiovisual translation (AVT) in particular, the study of how this type of language is and can be translated has been attracting the interest of researchers for some time now (for example, Ávila-Cabrera, 2015; Fuentes-Luque, 2015; Valdeón, 2020), due to the impact its transfer can have on the target addressee and culture. Research on taboo language and its translation is a complex and multidisciplinary field, as multiple disciplines play a role in it, such as Translation Studies, Pragmatics, Semiotics, Cross-Cultural Studies, and Film Studies (Allan & Burrige, 1991; Guillot & Pavesi, 2019). It also requires careful consideration of ethical and cultural issues that can lead to cases of (self-)censorship (Al-Adwan, 2015; Izwaini, 2017), according to the target language and culture and their level of permissiveness.

It is in this context that *The Challenge of Subtitling Offensive and Taboo Language into Spanish. A Theoretical and Practical Guide* by José Javier Ávila-Cabrera is published, providing a rigorous and systematic work that undoubtedly fills an existing gap and will become a clear reference in this field.

It is a thought-provoking and insightful book that explores the difficulties involved in translating *offensive* and *taboo* language —as differentiated



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by the author— from English into Spanish. The book is primarily directed to those involved in subtitling and translation, but it is also an excellent read for anyone interested in language, cultural differences, and how these factors affect translation. In it, Ávila-Cabrera uses a variety of real examples throughout the book, including films and television shows, to illustrate his points while at the same time highlighting the complex nature of these words and phrases. One certainly interesting aspect of this book is that Ávila-Cabrera provides numerous exercises – together with some answer keys– borrowed from professional subtitles broadcast in popular TV shows and movies to help readers master the material.

The book is divided into four chapters, the first one being the introduction. All chapters provide valuable insight into the topics mentioned above. The second chapter focuses on AVT, specifically on subtitling types and conventions, as well as on related issues such as punctuation and orthotypography, the semiotic dimension of subtitling, and subtitled products. The author does an excellent job of explaining the different types of subtitling and the conventions that must be followed to ensure that subtitles are effective and easy to understand. The chapter also covers the topic of manipulation in subtitling, addressing topics such as patronage, ideology, and censorship. This chapter can be considered basic for readers who specialize in the area of subtitling because some of its considerations are the first step to understanding this AVT mode. However, for readers unfamiliar with subtitling, it is an initial reading to put the theory of translation into practice and get acquainted with subtitling conventions and the concepts of manipulation in the forms of patronage, ideological manipulation, and censorship. The exercises here are aimed at readers' abilities to subtitle exercises focusing on text reduction, including samples of what the author considers offensive and taboo language.

The third chapter of the book deals with offensive and taboo language. The author starts by exploring the history of offensive language and clarifying terminology, which is paramount to

understanding his approach to this type of language, considering that other authors resort to other phrases such as dirty language (Jay, 1980), taboo language (Allan & Burridge, 2006), or swear words and taboo words (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2021), for example. Then, he delves into the taxonomy of taboo and offensive terms and aspects such as euphemisms, orthophemisms, and dysphemisms. The notion of *(im)politeness* is also approached, and research on the topic is presented. Again, Ávila-Cabrera provides exercises that allow readers to practice what they have perused. This could be considered one of the most relevant chapters in the book because it is the core of the type of language discussed and developed.

In its exercises, readers have to complete charts by using dysphemism, orthophemism, and euphemism formulas after being given these terms, both in English and Spanish. In addition, readers are given the opportunity to not only subtitle samples of offensive and taboo language, but also discuss the category and subcategory of offensive and taboo language in a broader context to deal with many issues.

The book's final section presents an analysis model for offensive and taboo language. This section is especially interesting because the author uses the model to analyze several examples of offensive and taboo language in different contexts and suggests some strategies and techniques for subtitling this type of language. In order to understand translation operations, readers need insight into the linguistic tools that translators can use to transfer audiovisual texts. The chapter also establishes a research design to help readers, especially scholars and students, conduct descriptive research in this language area, considering key elements such as purpose, conceptual framework, research questions, methods, and sampling procedures. The chapter also addresses important research examining this field.

Finally, the exercises in this section allow readers to practice using the model to gain a deeper

understanding of the nuances of offensive and taboo language. Apart from having to deal with the tasks proposed in the previous chapter exercises, the reader needs to reflect on the translation strategy and technique to observe whether or not the offensive and taboo load was transferred onto the target text.

Ávila-Cabrera's book has many strengths. The first one is how he navigates the difficult terrain of offensive and taboo language. He manages to analyze how language can be used to perpetuate power imbalances and social inequalities while simultaneously acknowledging the complexities involved in translating this language. Another strength of the book is the practical advice that the author provides for subtitlers by stating several recommendations when dealing with offensive and taboo language.

Overall, Ávila-Cabrera's *The Challenge of Subtitling Offensive and Taboo Language into Spanish. A Theoretical and Practical Guide* is an engaging and informative book that will be of interest to anyone working in the field of translation, be they researchers, teachers, students, or practitioners. The book's thoughtful analysis and practical advice make it an invaluable resource for subtitlers grappling with the complexities of translating offensive and taboo language. Combining theoretical and practical approaches certainly adds value to this well-organized, well-researched, and easy-to-understand book. The exercises provided throughout the book are particularly useful because they allow readers to apply what they have learned and practice the skills they need to become proficient in subtitling and offensive language analysis. I highly recommend this book to anyone looking to deepen their knowledge in these areas.

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