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## Translation of Turkish Swear Words in Subtitling: GORA

[PP: 19-26]

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### ABSTRACT

This research examines the translation of the swear words of a Turkish film (GORA, 2004) into English subtitles. So far, the most closely related research on translation of swearing in the Turkish language is Gökduman's (2017). In addition to the English language, many research papers analyzing other languages are available (Ameri & Ghazizadeh, 2014; Bilby, 1997; Fernandez, 2009; Fernandez Dobao, 2006; Maher, 2012; Soler-Pardo, 2015). The main reason for this paper is the current research gap in translating the Turkish swear words into another language (English). Throughout this research, the English subtitle translation of Cem Yılmaz's GORA (2004) was picked on Netflix and parts which contained swear words were documented on a .txt file, were marked and analyzed using swear words categories of Pinker (2007). Ameri & Ghazizadeh's (2014) swear word translation model, as well as Harvey's (2000) technique of 'functional equivalence' (2000, pp. 2-6) presented by the four main culture-based concepts of translation technique was used for the analysis. This article aims to explore and answer the following questions; (i) How have the Turkish swear words in GORA (2004) been translated into English? (ii) How and for what reason did changes in translation occur? The hypothesis of this research is as follows; (a) there will be a loss of meaning and function due to smoothing during the translation of swear words; (b) cultural contraction will be observed during the translation of swear words. The findings confirm the hypotheses and support that the words of curses are either completely omitted from the frame or changed in meaning by being softened. This shows that the translations also adopted a target language-oriented strategy during translation.

**Keywords:** Subtitle Translation, Turkish Swearing, Movie, Target Oriented Translation

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## 1. Introduction

It has always been a question of whether translators or words in the target language are inadequate in terms of meaning. One of the biggest beliefs related to this is that Turkish has a rich lexicon of swear words compared to English, and therefore a great loss of meaning occurs (or might occur) when it comes to translation.

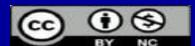
Gökduman (2017) conducted a study on swear words in the Turkish translation area. The study examined the French-Turkish translation of swear words within the framework of Toury's (1995) translation theory norms. In addition to swear words, the study also focused on proximity-distance, and examined the places where the relationship of proximity-distance (eg vous-siz) was not paid attention under swear words. The most striking finding of the study is that, as Gökduman (2017, p. 226) mentioned, "the strategies developed by translators in textual-linguistic dimension in subtitle and dubbing translations are shaped by many factors that develop outside the

translator in the country and culture. The resulting products are reflected in "

The swear words and their studies are quite complex and need to be researched since they are quite rare and rare in the field of linguistics and translation studies. It is unfortunately the rarity of these studies, which aims to investigate the translation of swear words in the subtitle and bridge the research gap, which is the subject of this study, and from this starting point, the subtitle of GORA (2004) on Netflix, a popular online video streaming from Turkish to English were analyzed throughout this paper

## 2. Literature Review

In translation, there are two areas that are frequently researched in the interlingual translations of swearing (also referred to as slang / taboo language). These areas are; subtitling and dubbing (also known as Audio-Visual Techniques). However, since subtitles were generally produced by amateurs and/or viewers, they were seen as non-professional and dubbed a larger part of



the translation work (Diaz-Cintas, 2009). Much research has been seen in the field of cursing in the field of translation from English and / or other source languages to target languages (eg Spanish) (Ameri & Ghazizadeh, 2014; Bilby, 1997; Fernandez, 2009; Fernandez Dobao, 2006; Maher, 2012; Soler -Pardo, 2015).

Some researchers (Chen, 2004; Fernandez Fernandez 2009) argue that the content of curses should be kept in the source language and that it is unnecessary to translate them. Han & Wang (2014) reveals that this is because audiences cannot access culture in a realistic and original way. Manchon (2013) states that swear words can determine the course of the film (s) and the overall color of the film (s). In addition, researchers such as Khoshsaligheh & Mardani (2014) and Sedighi & Tabrizi (2012) also mention that the culture of the target language and / or moral patterns may not be very suitable for the translation of cursive words, and they are likely to undergo some changes during translation.

In the field of linguistics, many researchers approach swear words differently and try to analyze this phenomenon. Ljung (2011) states that the words of curses are top secret, disgusting or sacred semantic references. In addition to semantic studies, some researchers have done research on finding the functional features of the swear words. Cintas and Remael (2007) describe that cursing has a particularly functional feature in social and emotional fields:

... such words fulfill certain functions in dialogue interaction ... Emotionally charged language has a fiqh or stimulating effect instead of a promotional function ... words of cursing are used as expressions of anger, despair, satisfaction ... ( Cintas and Remael 2007, p.196).

Other researchers, such as Čekuolytė, suggest that swear words are used to belirlı specify specific social identities (2014, p. 4). This definition of Čekuolytė was verified by Formentelli and Monti under the name slanguage::

... the search for slang vocabulary ... should be extended to dirty words, and should include other similar expressions falling under the term blasphemy ... (2014, p. 171).

Fritz (2006, p. 13) argues that cursing and cursing go hand in hand with historical development:

The story of cursing is also part of the story of the way verbal abuse is

communicated. The history of cursing is basically a direct social history, since the use of cursing often refers to social conflicts and social patterns (2006, p. 13). In addition, Dewaele (2004, p. 205) analyzes the poignant and useful functional properties of curses in his research. In addition to the expression of emotional attitudes, vowel words are multifunctional, pragmatic units that assume various discourse functions. For example, they contribute to the coordination of the interlocutors, the organization of the interaction and the structuring of the oral exchange.... (2004, p. 205).

The comprehensive definition presented by Acke, Hornscheidt and Jana (2011) is as follows:

Under oral abuse, we accept language actions that may have traditionally been offensive, humiliating, or punishing, and in which these concepts are reproduced in human grammar applications (2011, p. 9).

Gedik & Islamoğlu (2019, p. 24) expanded the definition as a result of their research based on the previous definition and added the elements of mocking and appeasing into the definition of swearing. Given all these definitions, this study bases its understanding of swear words on the most comprehensive version of the definitions previously provided by Acke, Hornscheidt and Jana (2011) and readjusted by Gedik & Islamoğlu (2019).

In addition to all this defining competition, some researchers have also studied how to categorize the phenomenon of swear words. According to Anderson & Trudgill (1999), it is possible to use the following three criteria to categorize swear words; (a) words that refer to something taboo in that culture, (b) words that cannot be translated into words, and (c) words used to represent emotional attitudes and expressions. Pinker (2007) defined the expression of cursing in 5 categories; (i)descriptive swearing (*Let's fuck*); (ii) idiomatic swearing (*It's fucked up*); (iii) abusive swearing (*Fuck you motherfucker!*); (iv) emphatic swearing (*It's fucking amazing*); (v) cathartic swearing (*Fuck!*). For this research, Pinker's (2007) 5-point cursive category system was used.

There are three possible outcomes in the translation of swear words. These are; 1) a word has a taboo perception in the source language but not in the target language; 2) a word has a taboo perception in both languages; 3) a word does not have a taboo

perception in the source language but has it in the target language (Marbry, 1998).

Based on this argument put forward by Marbry (1998), Sedighi & Tabrizi (2012) examined five films dubbed from English to Persian and found that the people who dubbed the movies used three main strategies. These strategies; smoothing (*you motherfucking whore*—> *you fucking bitch!*), censoring (*she fucking died*—> *she's dead, damn*), changing (*motherfucking bitch*—> *stupid*). Mattson (2006) found that in American films translated into Swedish, the words of cursing were not translated in many parts of the subtitles.

In addition to translating mainstream English films/series, it was found that during the translation of the Danish television series "Killing" into English, 70% of the swear words and / or slang words in the Danish version were not translated (Midjord, 2013). In addition to the mainstream languages, Ghassempur (2009) suggested that in the translation of the novel *The Commitments*, written in Irish, when translated into German, there were very few swear words compared to the original language.

In his thesis, Manchon (2013) investigated 'to what extent the words of cursing are neutralized due to translation problems' (p. 2). In his thesis, he analyzed how media content containing swear words were used in subtitle translations in professional and amateur forms, and argued that the internet could contain more swear words than professional translations thanks to the anonymous environment provided to amateur (audience-based) translators. In addition, at the end of his thesis, Manchon (2013) found that the subtitle translations provided by the audience remained more loyal to the original (more likely to contain the word cursed in the target language).

Although there are studies on the translation of swear words between languages (English ← → Persian, etc.), the literature review clearly shows readers the lack of swear word studies in the field of translation between Turkish and English languages. It is however very salient to include such studies in the literature to cover many layers of society. Gedik & Islamoğlu's (2019) study clearly demonstrates that the use of swear words in the Turkish language - albeit more among men - has gained a fundamental place in the lives of speakers. In the light of this knowledge (and swear words being such a concept in Turkish language), the works produced in the

Turkish language should be translated into English (without a supervisory mechanism) in order to provide the most realistic and realistic language learning process to the people who learn Turkish as a foreign language. In addition, translating Turkish swear words can open a new door for researchers working in sociolinguistics and provide data for new research. Based on these reasons, the place of translations of swear words in Turkish language translation studies is of great importance.

### 3. Methodology

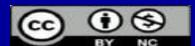
This study was carried out in October 2019. The criteria sought in the selected film were; the number of swear words should be high and it must be translated by a professional person/company. Since translations made by Netflix were made by a professional company (which was not audited by RTÜK because it was translated into English) and were not explicitly translated by the audience, English translations were considered to be consistent and realistic. Based on these criteria, the selected film was first watched by the researchers and the minutes of the scenes containing swear words were marked on QuickTime and noted. After all the timestamps were collected, the swear words were categorized and categorized using the model of Pinker (2007) presented in the literature.

The taken notes were then were documented on Microsoft NotePad and then converted to Microsoft Word files. These files were used for statistical analysis of the swear words. The data obtained after the data cleaning process are Pinker's (2007) categories, direct translation with Ameri & Ghazizadeh's (2014) model ([a] effect, direct translation (*smoothing*) as lost effect); [c] deletion, [d] alienation) and Harvey's (2000) 'functional equivalence' were examined, documented and interpreted.

### 4. Data Analysis

The following analyzes done on swear words, Pinker (2007) by category ((i) *descriptive swearing (now I'll stop this damn fireball)*; (ii) *idiomatic swearing and (you have turned this place into a shithole)*; (iii) *abusive swearing (Fuck you, asshole)*; (iv) *emphatic swearing (fake ulan fake)*; (v) *cathartic swearing and (Fuck!)*) In the table, the number of swear words in the same category was added, and the total number in the categories changed by the target language was calculated and compared.

*Table 1: Number of swear words in the same category*



Swearing Words	Category 1 (descriptive swearing)	Category 2 (idiomatic swearing)	Category 3 (abusive swearing)	Category 4 (emphatic swearing)	Category 5 (cathartic swearing)
Turkish	5	16	7	13	9
English	8	5	16	3	7
Non-translated	0	3	0	0	0

The data are considered to be the most frequently used areas in the Turkish language (when the GORA movie is considered to be the representative of the Turkish language) using category 2 and 4 swear words. However, despite this frequency, Category 2 and 4 witnessed a significant decrease in translation into English, while Category 3 witnessed a significant increase. In other categories, no significant change was observed. It should not be surprising that non-translated swear words are of Category 2 origin as translation of idiomatic swear words are of a great challenge. The followings are some example analyses of the translation cases (tr (category number) -> eng- subtitle (category number));

**Category 1: descriptive swearing**  
*Ulan bana bak (1) —> Dude, listen! (-)*  
 In this translation, the source and translation categories did not remain consistent and the word (u)lan was replaced by dude to draw attention in the English language.

*Şimdi şu lanet topu durduruyorum...(1)—> Now I'll stop this damn fireball...(1)*  
 During this translation, the swear word in the target and source texts remained the same. This may be because the word damn is widely used in the English language and has entered into colloquial Turkish.

**Category 2: idiomatic swearing**

*Tahta yok, götünüzden element uydurmayın. (2) --> It's not wood. Don't make up elements. (-)*

The idiom “götünden uydurma”, which is used in Turkish in the form of a mold, has been completely eliminated during translation into the target language and caused the idiomatic expression to change and the subject category to change.

*Babamı bulup bu lanet yerden beraber kaçacağız... (2) --> we'll find my father and flee from this damned place. (2)*

The word *lanet*, as mentioned above, has entered the Turkish language through (mostly) American movies. And thus, in this case, because there is a one-to-one equivalent of the word *lanet*, the translation categories remained the same.

**Category 3: abusive swearing**

*Amına koyayım, büyüteçle bakıyor (3) —> Asshole, using a magnifier (3)*

In this translation, although the cursing in the target text is semantically distant from its Turkish equivalent, functionally, the translated version does convey the same function as the Turkish swear word.. *Onun ben, amına koyayım (3) —> I'm going to fuck his shit up (2)*

In this translation, the swear word used in the Turkish language for an abusive purpose had a shift in its function as the translated version was changed and tried to focus on the meaning.

**Category 4: emphatic swearing**

*Fake ulan fake! (4) —> Fake, man, fake! (4)*

The interesting part of this translation is the fact that the same function and meaning are preserved when the translation of the word *fake* from the Turkish language to the target language is maintained. This is due to the fact that this string has an English word in it already.

*Ne içirdiniz ulan bana? (4) —> What did you give me to drink? (-)*

The most remarkable word during the translations of Category 4 was (u)lan from the source language to the target language. This word was used mostly in Turkish for attention/emphasizing something, but it was preferred not to be replaced by something else in the target language.

**Category 5: cathartic swearing**

*İsyanım var ulan! (5) -> Rebellion! (-)*

The word (u)lan, added to the end of the sentence in order to strengthen the expression, was not only deleted in the translation, but the sentence itself underwent a translation erosion. Indeed, it can be observed in any way that the expression (u)lan loses its function completely.

*Sen söyle, siktir et. (5) -> Fuck it, order anyway. (5)*

Siktir et has a direct equivalent in the English language in this context, with this function in mind. So there was no category change in this case.

After the analysis, (u)lan was determined as the most frequently ignored word from Turkish to English swear word translations. To execute these determinations, the context within the film was utilized. The numerical findings of (u)lan are as follows:

*Table 2: Numerical findings of (u)lan*

(u)lan	Category 1 (explanatory ravings)	Category 2 (idiomatic curses)	Category 3 (damaging curses)	Category 4 (curses used to attract attention)	Category 5 (cathartic curses)
Turkish	1	1	0	11	3
The English	2	1	5	1	1
Non-translated	0	0	0	8	1

Category 1, while only one in the total sum doubled in number in English translations. In category 2, *u (lan)*, which was observed to be only one, was found to be equivalent in translation. When Category 3 was considered, there was no use of (u)lan in this function, however it was found that the amount of translation of this word in the target language increased considerably. Category 4 is the category that attracts attention by far the most untranslated. Category 5 was determined that there were three tokens of (u)lan, one in the target language and one in the untranslated. The following are some examples of (u)lan is (tr (category number) -> eng -subtitle (category number)); *Mahkûmsun ulan sen burada (4) —> You're a prisoner here (-)*

The word u(lan), which is used to emphasize that the other person is a prisoner and to draw attention to it, was not translated into target language, so its category has been changed.

*Nasıl geçti ulan? (4) —> How did it go? (-)*

This translation is another example where (u)lan is left untranslated. It was used to draw attention to the sentence, in a more masculine way, and/or to enforce one's masculinity. The category was changed in the target language by deletion.

*Ulan gezegeni ahıra çevirmişsiniz be! (2) —> You've turned the planet into a shithole (1)*

The word ahır (barn) is a word that is commonly used in idiomatic discourse in Turkish. 'Dingo's barn', 'do you live in the barn', 'is it a barn here' are a few examples of these situations. While translating into the target language, the function has been changed and evolved to a more descriptive environment.

*Ulan? (5) -> "Jackass"? (3)*

To understand this translation, it is necessary to take a look at the whole conversation, which we can call 'the arrival of the sentence'. "*Ulan?*" Is the character's reaction to the phrase *don't play with me, ulan!* ". That sentence, given that there is no direct translation of the word (u)lan from Turkish to English, it is

normal for translators to choose a new word to solve the issue. It was translated from a cathartic format into an abusive one.

*Sen kimsin ulan? (4) -> Who the hell are you? (2)*

Again, it is seen that the word (u)lan is used to draw attention. On the other hand, because there is no such word as (u)lan in English, the translated version aimed at conveying the underlying aggressive behavior by adding additional lexical items.

From Table 1.1, it is not surprising that there has been an increase in Category 3 at most when translating (u)lan into English. Table 1.1 clearly shows that the swear words of the English language (when the subtitle translation of the GORA film is considered to be the representative of the English language) tends to accumulate in Category 3. Therefore, translators may have tried to compensate for non-translationality of words with 'abusive' functions. Translators ignored (u)lan's function of drawing attention. The reason for this may have been the lack of words in the English language that could function close to that word.

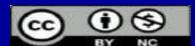
All the data used in this study, the categorization in accordance with Pinker (2007) and the timestamps of the movie are included in the appendix.

At the end of this review and when Tables 1.1 and 1.2 were examined, it was observed that Harvey's (2000) concept of 'functional equivalence' was neglected and misused by translators. Accordingly, Harvey (2000) argues that with this concept, the most important factor to be considered in translating to target language is the consistency of functional equivalence between target and source language.

In addition, when examined in the Ameri & Gazizadeh (2014) model, the findings are as follows: *Table 3: Findings based on Ameri & Gazizadeh (2014) model*

	[a] Direct translation with effect (function).	[b] direct translation (smoothing) with loss of effect (function)	[c] deletion	[d] alienation
Percent	62%	37%	20%	0%

Category [a] represents the proportion of translations from the source language to the target language used in this study that remained in the same function (category) (eg: *Amına koyayım, büyüteçle bakıyor (3) —> Asshole, using a magnifier (3)*); [b] is the numerical ratio of the change of functions in swear words experienced during



the translation (eg: *Kimsin sen ulan?* (4) -> *Who the hell are you?* (2)); [c] reveals the numerical ratio of all abusive words omitted during translation (*Nasıl geçti ulan?* (4) -> *How did it go?* (-)). The category [d] was not found during this film translation analysis.

## 5. Discussion

Considering these analyses, the non-translation rate of swear words in the film corresponds to 20%. This is a much better ratio than most of the rates given in the literature review of this paper. For example, according to Midjord's (2013) research, 70% of swear words of a Danish television series were not translated. Pinker's (2007) swear word categories were used throughout this research, and category 2 and 4 were seen as the most intensively used areas in the Turkish language, while there was a significant decrease in Category 2 and 4 in the translation into English. Category 3 witnessed a significant increase. In the rest of the categories, no significant change was observed. The reason for this change may be that the target and source languages have concentrated their use of swear words over these methods (categories) over the years. As an example, while the number of swear words used in the Turkish language to express idioms and attention is higher, it is seen that there is a higher number in abusive swear words in the English language. It should not be surprising that the non-translated curses are of Category 2 origin, since the translation of idioms and/or linguistic elements that contain idioms to the target language without loss during translation is a very difficult process.

### 5.1 (*u*)lan

(*u*)lan is a word used in a wide range of functions in the Turkish language, but it is one of the most difficult swear words to explain. However, it can be said with confidence that it will not be easy to translate it completely and clearly into English. As a matter of fact, when the Netflix translation of GORA (2004) is examined, it is seen that the subtitle (*u*)lan word is almost always completely ignored. According to Ameri & Ghazizadeh's (2014) model, the word in the source language is translated into the target language without being softened, but completely removed from the environment in which it is used. The most powerful reason for this is that the word (*u*)lan does not directly fall into any of the categories of nouns, adjectives, predicates or adverbs, but it is a unique expression of Turkish culture

(or could be categorized as a vocative) and has no equivalent in English. However, a very significant loss of meaning is documented when it is removed from the sentence. As a result, the word (*u*)lan was completely lost in the translation into the target language by completely losing its function, which is not enough to reflect Turkish culture, given that the translation version of Netflix was chosen for reliability.

In addition to eliminating the word completely, the second most preferred method is to translate the word (*u*)lan into the target language even though it was never used as an abusive swear word. This, according to Ameri & Ghazizadeh's (2014) model, has lost its effect (function) and falls into the direct translation with loss category. As mentioned under Table 1.2, translators may have used this method to compensate for the loss of meaning because they did not find a fully corresponding word in English.

While the word (*u*)lan occupies such a big number in Category 4, there has been a tremendous loss in its translation into the target language. Given the objective of drawing attention, the opportunity was not taken into consideration while it would be expected to evolve into another substitute function, even if it could not be fully turned. Since the function is to draw attention, translators may have aimed to convey meaning by putting an exclamation mark at the end, perhaps because direct translation is difficult.

When the whole table is evaluated, it can be said that there was a great disappointment in the translation of the word (*u*)lan. As mentioned before, Netflix, which was chosen for the name and reliability of the platform instead of any fan-based translations, can be said that (when this interesting word specific to Turkish language and culture is examined) does not meet the expectations.

### 5.2 Swear Word Translations

The greatest imbalance in the translation of swear words is the numerical changes according to Pinker's (2007) model, which has a statistically significant place. In particular, the decline in Category 2 and 4 translations, as well as the numerical increase in the translation of Category 3, proves that translators are more focused on the target language in the translation of Turkish ← → English languages, rather than focusing on the source language and conveying its culture. Of course, when Category 2 (idiomatic swear words) are

examined, the decreases seen in this case may be justified, as it will be difficult to find one-to-one correspondants. However, Category 4 (emphatic swear words) could be translated more elaborately during the translation into English, since there are many swear words in the English language as well. By doing this, perhaps, it would have been possible to open up the Turkish swear words to the outside world.

When the translations of the swear words are examined, the basic swear word translation model of Ameri & Gazizadeh (2014) reveals the existence of category [b] by far the most frequently evident category in this study. This makes two inferences for people whose native language is not Turkish but who want to watch Turkish movies with the help of subtitles; (i) one will not be able to consume the swear words in the Turkish language, as well as their plaits, in a fully functional manner in the English language; (ii) the subtitle translations will have a target-language orientation and thus will not give the watcher the "Turkish" feeling.

These findings also confirm the hypotheses put forward by the researcher. These hypotheses are: (a) loss of meaning and function due to smoothing during the translation of swear words; (b) cultural contraction will be observed during the translation of swear words. The hypothesis (a) is confirmed by the tables, and (b) is confirmed by (ii) in the previous paragraph. Due to cultural constrictions, Turkish swearing culture, as well as the historical development of a people (Fritz, 2006, p. 13), will not be successfully transferred to the outside world, and will cause the Turkish culture(s) to remain introverted.

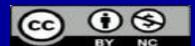
In some parts, although there are curses in the target language that are possible to translate directly, it has been found that for unknown reasons, translators either translate them in such a way that they change the complete meaning or completely omit them. The most common pattern in swear word translation has been translating the words literally, either transferring them to their closest meaning in the target language, or simply omitting them. Trying to translate with the function does not mean that it will always lead to the same function in the target language.

Although this study has been necessary and has been done in this field, there is a need for more subtitle and / or dubbing translations of cross-lingual swear

words (especially in Turkish but many). One of the limiting features of this study is that it only examines a limited set of data and one movie. However, in order to prove more strongly the findings discovered here, at the same time, in order to find a solution for the subtitle translations of Turkish swear words to target language influences, future research studies may examine and/or examine more films/series or have interviews with the translators.

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