

Balancing between Netflix Translation Guidelines and Cultural Sensitivities: An Analysis of English Swearword Translation in the Thai Subtitles of Paradise P.D. (Season 1)

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Abstract

As Netflix expands globally, subtitle translation (ST) has become essential for cultural localization, particularly when navigating sensitive content such as swearwords. In Thailand, where face-saving and politeness are valued, translators must strike a balance between Netflix translation guidelines and cultural sensitivities. To explore specific strategies employed in the translation of English swearwords in Thai subtitles and the norms that govern such translation, this study analyzed the English-to-Thai translation of 494 moderate-to-strong swearwords from 5,105 Thai subtitles in the series Paradise P.D. (Season 1) using Diaz-Pérez's (2020) framework and Chesterman's (1993) translation norms. The findings show that while the majority of swearwords were sanitized via de-swearing (31.17%), softening (30.16%), and omission (9.5%), pragmatic correspondence, which retained the offensiveness, occurred at 29.15%, almost at the same rate as de-swearing and softening. These results suggest a "middle ground" negotiation: Translators avoided total sanitization in favor of "substitution" to preserve the offensive humor of the show. However, cultural boundaries remained firm, evidenced by the de-swearing and omission of some instances of the graphic Thai term *khi* (Thai: ชี๋ IPA: /kʰiː/ 'shit'), the most common swearword in the corpus.

Keywords: audiovisual translation (AVT), subtitle translation (ST), swearword translation, translation norms, cultural sensitivities

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Introduction

Among live streaming platforms around the world, Netflix is one of the most prominent. Originating in 1997 as a video rental store, Netflix is now available in 190 countries (as of January 2026), with over 300 million paid memberships (Netflix, n.d.). Netflix arrived in Thailand on January 2, 2016 (Bangkok Post, 2016). However, its Thai user interfaces, Thai subtitles, and Thai dubbing were not available until April 27, 2017 (Netflix, 2017). With Thailand boasting the highest rate of online video consumption in Southeast Asia in 2020 (Ramasoota & Kitikamdhorn, 2021), the platform quickly accommodated Thai users' demand by adding Thai translation to its multimedia content (e.g., movies, series, and documentaries).

Translation of multimedia, or audiovisual translation (AVT), has become a key mediator in this very process. It plays a crucial role in keeping the audience engaged, as quality AVT contributes to the audience's decision to subscribe (Kuscu-Ozbudak, 2021). According to the analysis of Netflix Thailand's overall content library in Ramasoota and Kitikamdhorn (2021), the majority of content is from the US. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that most translations are produced from English into Thai, with the most popular form of AVT being dubbing and subtitling/subtitle translation (Abu-Rayyash et al., 2023). In this paper, the focus is on subtitle translation (ST), the dominant mode of AVT.

Despite English being a highly influential language in Thailand, and quality resources for English language learning becoming increasingly available (Vathanalaotha, 2022), English ST remains a task that cannot be easily mastered by anyone simply by virtue of knowing English. This is because ST involves "not only the conversion of languages, but also the bridging of cultural differences and the optimization of audience understanding" (Su et al., 2024, p. 145). Moreover, subtitle translators often encounter technical challenges, such as time and space limits on the display of subtitles.

Beyond these technical demands, certain content may require even greater consideration, as it may be associated with sensitive topics and taboo concepts that may conflict with those of the audience, as demonstrated in Abu-Rayyash et al. (2023) and Al-School (2025). This is particularly evident in swearwords that carry strong emotional or interpersonal implications in the source language but may be considered harsh in the target language.

However, it is clearly stated in Netflix translation guidelines that "when translating swearing and profanity, always opt for a translation of the same/equivalent severity and intent. Avoid literal or direct translations, which may result in a stronger or softer translation" (Netflix,

2025). In other words, profanity is not optional but required, and modifying the impact of profanity is discouraged by Netflix. This reflects the platform's priority on preserving the original meaning and emotional weight of the dialogue over the sanitized translation.

This raises an important question: How would translators comply with Netflix's rule of profanity translation while also respecting the audience's cultural sensitivities? This question is even more compelling in the context of Thailand, where politeness and face-saving are highly valued (Cornwel-Smith, 2025; Ukosakul, 2005). To answer this question, the present study draws its data from Season 1 of Netflix's original animated series *Paradise P.D.*, which is known for its offensive humor (Floyd, 2018). The objective is to examine the translation strategies of English swearwords in the Thai subtitles and how they reflect a possible negotiation between Netflix's profanity-intensity requirements and Thai cultural sensitivities.

Literature Review

Definition, Categories, and Severity of Swearwords

Guillot (2023) defines swearwords as the use of taboo language to offend across various contexts, whether for expressing emotions or serving certain social functions. Thus, swearwords are not simply “bad words” but a series of words that may play an important role linguistically, socially, and psychologically, as discussed and demonstrated in numerous studies (see Anderson & Trudgill, 1992; Burns, 2008; Johnson, 1995; Stapleton et al., 2022).

However, Guillot (2023) does not claim there is a universal mapping of swearwords, as what is considered taboo varies across cultures. Consequently, swearword categories may shift or emerge depending on the cultural values of a particular social group, especially over time.

Another important consideration is the perceived severity of swearwords across cultures and speakers. In Millwood-Hargrave's sociolinguistic study of English swearwords (2000), *cunt*, *motherfucker*, *fuck*, *wanker*, and *nigger* are listed as the top-five profanities with the most severe impacts among young and adult participants. McEnery (2006) also categorized swearwords into three broad levels: mild (e.g., *hell*, *idiot*), moderate (e.g., *shit*, *piss*), and strong (e.g., *fuck*, *cunt*, *cock*).

More recently, Drummond's (2020) research on profanity usage amongst British teenagers, *bloody*, *cunt*, *prick*, and *wank* are the least frequently used words, possibly due to their severity. Moreover, in their classification of offensive terms, the UK communications regulator Ofcom (2021, pp. 18–19) has identified the following three tiers of offensiveness:

- **Mild** – Unlikely to cause concern in most circumstances; requiring limited context, for example, *piss*, *ass*, *damn*, and *balls*.
- **Moderate** – Greater potential for offence than mild words; a higher level of context should be considered, for example, *bastard*, *shit*, *pussy*.
- **Strong** – Perceived as highly offensive; requiring clear and strong contextual justification, for example, *fuck*, *motherfucker*, *cunt*, *slut*.

Fuck, which is one of the most severe swearwords reported in previous literature, appeared the most frequently in Drummond (2020). Similarly, the word *cock*, which would be classified as “strong” according to McEnery’s (2006) criteria, is perceived as “moderate” in Ofcom’s (2021) recent report. This may suggest a shift in profanity usage trends (Guillot, 2023). What is strong for some may be perceived as harmless by others. This further supports the idea that profanity is dynamic and varies across time and cultures and thus deserves to be studied across contexts.

Translation, Profanity, and Cultural Sensitivities: The Difficult Crossroads

ST, as defined in Díaz Cintas (2013, p. 274), is “a translation practice that consists of rendering in writing, usually at the bottom of the screen, the translation into a target language of the original dialogue exchanges uttered by different speakers.” This also includes other verbal and non-verbal information.

The challenges in ST extend beyond the issues of faithfulness and accuracy in translation. Other than written texts, translators must also consider source dialogue, visual/audio inputs, and technical rules specified in the guidelines of each client (Nitzke et al., 2022). This includes: display time restriction, number of characters per line, transliteration conventions, and levels of profanity intensity. The latter represents one of the most significant challenges in ST, as the effect of profanity is often amplified when it appears in written form (Munday, 2016; Tveit, 2009).

Moreover, swearwords may strongly conflict with the cultural and moral norms of the target language, especially in conservative societies. Alabbasi (2009) and Abu-Rayyash et al. (2023) have demonstrated how Arab countries’ conservative religious ideologies can take precedence over matching the intensity of profanity. Consistently, Jiang and Doherty’s (2024) research on English-to-Chinese subtitling highlights the role of cultural factors in translating culturally sensitive content. This phenomenon can even be observed in progressive

Scandinavian countries such as Norway. Due to its Puritan background, swearwords are not always translated directly, although the translation norms have become more flexible with time (Tveit, 2009).

The same conflict is also present in Thai culture, where politeness is greatly valued. Thai politeness emphasizes face protection and social harmony (Intachakra, 2012; Jory, 2015; Ukosakul, 2005). It centers on the concept of *kreng jai* (Thai: เกรงใจ IPA: /kre:ŋ tɕaj/), which refers to one's consideration and desire not to inconvenience or embarrass others (Adair, 2025; Maiklad & Numthong, 2025). This means that respectful, non-confrontational communication is preferred (Chanseawrassamee & Shin, 2009; Maiklad & Numthong, 2025).

Swearwords, however, directly contradict Thai politeness. They are considered an attack on another person's face that could lead to embarrassment and confrontation (Angkunsinthana & Letlertyuttitham, 2019). This tension between swearing and Thai politeness norms has become a difficult crossroads for translators, as they are pressured to choose between maintaining cultural appropriateness and preserving the impact of profanity.

This problem is exacerbated by unclear criteria for profanity in Thai media. Generally, profanity and culturally sensitive content in Thai media are monitored by the National Broadcasting and Telecommunication Commission (NBTC) and Thailand's censorship board to ensure their alignment with legal regulations, cultural appropriateness, and public morality. TV shows, for example, are classified into six categories: Preschool, Children, General, PG-13, PG-18, and Adult. According to the 2013 NBTC regulations (2013), swearwords are permitted from the General rating upward, provided they are not excessive.

However, a clear definition of "excessive use" has not been officially provided, nor is there any official distinction between levels of profanity intensity. Such ambiguity creates a gray area in which individuals must rely on their own judgment to determine what is acceptable. Using profanity that is deemed too strong could result in violating regulatory expectations and social backlash, as was the case when the word *ai hia* (Thai: ไอ้เหี้ย IPA: /Pai hîa/ 'fucker') was used in the Thai sitcom *Bangrak Soi 9/1*, along with another 92 swearwords within five minutes, despite the show being rated as "General" (Thairath Online, 2018).

This gray area is even more pronounced in the context of Netflix, largely because Netflix is currently not directly subject to NBTC regulation and because it requires profanity to be translated with the same level of severity. As a result, unfiltered translations of swearwords can be observed in Thai subtitles on Netflix. For example, in the Netflix series *Beauty in Black*

(Season 1, Episode 7 “*Even Playing Field*”), *i dok* (Thai: อีตอก IPA: /ʔiː dɔ̀k/ ‘*bitch/slut*’), a strong Thai swearword, is used:

Delinda [to one of her strippers]: ***Bitch***, you can’t speak?

Thai ST: เป็นไปไรเงี**อีตอก**

Transliteration: *pen bai rue ngai i dok*

Back translation: *You can’t speak, **bitch**?*

Similarly, in Netflix’s stand-up comedy *Joe Koy: Live in Brooklyn*, *pussy* is translated as *hi* (Thai: หี IPA: /hīː/ ‘*pussy/cunt*’, an extremely vulgar term for female genitalia:

Joe Koy: *Keep that **pussy** wet, baby girl.*

Thai ST: ตัว**หี**ร้อไปก่อนนะจ๊ะ ยายหี

Transliteration: *tiu **hi** ro pai kon na cha yayi*

Back translation: *Keep playing with that **pussy**, baby girl.*

How swearwords in particular are translated in Thai subtitles is an underexplored research area. Most of the existing research focuses on other aspects of ST, such as translation techniques in general (Kosumpan, 2023; Pengpanich & Whisenand, 2020; Sontisawang et al., 2020) and cultural concepts (Chanthong & Kaowiwattanakul, 2024; Somsin, 2024). Only a few studies are centered on swearwords, such as Thanonthip’s (2014) analysis of profanity translation strategies in Thai subtitles of *The Wolf of Wall Street*, Worakitwattana’s (2024) analysis of swearword translation in Thai subtitles of the video game *Far Cry 6*, and most recently, Kosolwatthana’s (2026) study of taboo words translation in the Thai subtitles of the series *The Boys*. This highlights the research gap that needs to be addressed, as it further demonstrates profanity translation strategies in Thai subtitles within the rapidly evolving practices of AVT.

The Frameworks

This study first draws upon Díaz-Pérez’s (2020) four solutions for profanity translation in ST to identify specific profanity translation strategies, followed by Chesterman’s (1993) translation norms, which serve as a macro-level theoretical lens for the overall translation norms.

Díaz-Pérez's (2020) Four Solutions for Swearword Translation in ST

In Díaz-Pérez's (2020) study on how the two most common English swearwords, *fuck* and *shit*, are translated into Galician (the native language of Galicia in northern Spain), he suggested that most swearwords were treated with the following four solutions:

- **Pragmatic correspondence:** An equivalent swearword is used, both in tone and pragmatic function, e.g., *shit* > *merda* (*shit*).
- **Softening:** A swearword with a milder tone and similar pragmatic function is used, e.g., *bullshit* > *mamonadas* (*bloody stupidities*).
- **De-swearing:** A non-swearing expression, or a word that is not considered a swearword at all, is used, e.g., *fuck around* > *comezar a facer moitas parvadas* (*to begin to do many silly things*).
- **Omission:** An English swear word is completely omitted, e.g., *I'll fucking kill him* > ¡Vouno matar! (*I'm going to kill him!*).

Omission was the most frequently adopted solution (44.2%) in Díaz-Pérez's (2020) study, followed by pragmatic correspondence (39.3%). Similar results were reported in Abu-Rayyash et al.'s (2023) study of translation techniques of swearwords in Arabic subtitles across four movie genres (drama, action, biography, sci-fi), with omission being adopted most frequently, followed by softening. This contrasts with Jiang and Doherty's (2024) study of profanity translation in Chinese subtitles, in which pragmatic correspondence was the most commonly used, followed by omission, de-swearing, and softening. These different findings suggest that Díaz-Pérez's (2020) four solutions may not universally provide sufficient insight into the data across cultural contexts. Thus, they should be studied contextually to understand the underlying sociolinguistic norms and cultural sensitivities that dictate the boundaries of profanity translation in subtitles.

Chesterman's (1993) Translation Norms

Chesterman (1993) views translation as a social behavior within a cultural group. Translation behavior, much like other social behaviors, is guided by norms that determine its appropriateness and acceptability. The norms can be divided into two categories:

- **The expectancy norms** dictate what the target audience expects to see/read based on their cultural and social conventions, including style, register, and

grammaticality (Chesterman, 1993). A “good” translation fulfills the audience’s expectations (Men & Ganapathy, 2023).

- **The professional norms** dictate the strategies a translator uses to navigate cultural expectations during the translation process, which must be balanced between:
 - **The accountability norms:** A translator should maintain balanced loyalty to the source text, the client, and the audience.
 - **The communication norms:** A translator should optimize communication to prevent misunderstandings or cultural frictions, and
 - **The relation norms:** A translator should be able to judge how similar the translation needs to be to the original text.

While Chesterman’s (1993) translation norms were initially conceived within traditional translation studies, they have increasingly been applied to contemporary multimedia and AVT analysis to establish overarching social, ethical, and communicative boundaries guiding translation. This is demonstrated in Marčetić’s (2016) study of the Croatian audience’s expectancy norms towards television ST. The Croatian audience favored source-oriented translation. Therefore, it is expected that English-to-Croatian translation would be as faithful to the original as possible, and that unnecessary translation of culturally specific terms and proper nouns such as characters’ names and movie titles would be avoided. Similarly, the present study applies Chesterman’s framework to explain the possible norms underlying the translation of English swearwords in Thai subtitles, a topic that remains largely unexplored.

Framed through Chesterman’s (1993) translation norms and Díaz-Pérez’s (2020) four solutions, this study centers on the following research questions:

- 1) What specific strategies were employed in the translation of English swearwords in Thai subtitles?
- 2) What is the overarching norm that guided the translation of English swearwords in Thai subtitles?

Methodology

The Corpus: Paradise P.D. (Season 1)

Paradise P.D. (2018 – 2022) is an American animated sitcom created by Roger Black and Waco O’Guin for Netflix (Milligan, 2021). The series follows an inept police department in the fictional town of Paradise. At the center of the story is Kevin, an eager but incompetent rookie who wants to prove himself to the force led by his father, Chief Randall Crawford. Other police officers include: Bullet – a drug-addicted German Shepherd, Fitz – a black officer with PTSD, Dusty – an obese officer, Gina – an aggressive and hyper-sexualized female officer, and Hobson – a senile officer. The entire department is profoundly dysfunctional and often fails to solve crimes. The show is known for its extremely offensive adult humor and language, as demonstrated here:

Scenario #1: [EP1] Young Kevin is pretending to be a police officer.

Kevin: [...] *I am gonna shove my boot so far up your **ass** you'll be shittin' shoelaces for a **cock-suckin'** month, you green, **shit-sniffin' asshole!***

In fact, the humor and language use in the show are so vulgar that the six Gulf states requested that the show be removed from Netflix within their region in 2022, as it strongly contrasts with Middle Eastern cultural and religious values (Khalil & Zayani, 2023). The use of extreme profanity, such as that shown above, also severely violates Thai politeness and face-saving culture, which in turn may complicate Thai ST. Moreover, frequent swearwords in the series mean that data saturation was rapidly achieved within the first season. In other words, Season 1 of Paradise P.D. alone provides a sufficiently rich corpus for the analysis. Due to these reasons, Paradise P.D. is considered an ideal database for the present study.

Data Collection and Coding

The corpus was compiled by first extracting both the original English subtitles and Thai subtitles from Season 1 of Paradise P.D., which consists of ten episodes amounting to approximately 250 minutes of runtime, using a Google Chrome extension Subtitle Downloader. This procedure does not constitute copyright infringement, as it aligns with the statutory exemptions under Section 32 of the Thai Copyright Act [1994] (Thailand’s Department of Intellectual Property, n.d.), and also conforms to ST research standards (Diaz Cintas & Remael,

2020) and the fair use doctrine (Hobbs, 2018). These frameworks allow the extraction of texts exclusively for non-commercial, non-profit analysis for educational purposes.

The English subtitles were then manually compiled into Excel ($n = 5,105$). The extracted English subtitles were tabulated and aligned with their respective Thai counterparts. The subtitles containing English swearwords were highlighted, and then the swearwords and their Thai translations were distinguished with boldface, as demonstrated in Figure 1:

Figure 1

The Alignment of the English Subtitles with their Thai Counterparts

00:13:32,895	00:13:35,106	I'm just the good cop. I didn't even need the bad cop.	ฉันเป็นแค่ตำรวจดี ฉันไม่ต้องอาศัยตำรวจเลวด้วยซ้ำ
00:13:36,190	00:13:38,359	Eat scrapbook, you hillbilly asshole !	กินสแครปบุ๊กซะ ไอ้เปรดบ้านนอก
00:13:39,402	00:13:42,905	When I'm done with you you're gonna be shitting blood and pissing teeth!	พอฉันจบเรื่องกับแก แกจะฉี่เป็นเลือด แล้วก็ฉีออกมาเป็นฟัน
00:13:42,989	00:13:45,116	Who knows, maybe I'll shit teeth!	ใครจะรู้ บางทีฉันอาจฉี่เป็นฟันก็ได้

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods, with the focus on the latter. First, to emphasize the offensive elements of the series and their potential for social and cultural friction, only the English swearwords under the “moderate” and “strong” categories in Ofcom (2021) were included in the analysis, except for *ass* and *bitch*. Although considered relatively mild, the two expletives were included in the analysis as they frequently served as a base for much more vulgar compounds such as *asshole*, *fat ass*, *sumbitch*, and *son of a bitch*. After that, the translation strategies were identified using Díaz-Pérez’s (2020) framework. The instances of each translation strategy were consequently counted and calculated into percentages. These quantitative patterns were then interpreted through Chesterman’s (1993) framework to identify the governing translation norms that shaped the translators’ choices.

While double-coding was not employed in this study, coding reliability was maintained through a collaborative peer review (see Cornish et al., 2013), in which the authors cross-examined coded items to verify coding reliability. The categorization of English swearwords and translation solutions was also constantly checked against the criteria and framework throughout the study to avoid subjective judgment.

Data Exclusion

Four swearwords that were transliterated or mistranslated were excluded from the analysis, as they do not represent swearword translations. For example,

Transliteration: *Pussyland* was transliterated as *Pussyland* (Thai: พุสซี่แลนด์ (IPA: /pʰút.sǐ.lɛ̌.n/ Back translation: *Pussyland*)

Mistranslation: *Squirter*, which actually means ‘a woman who releases urethral fluid during sexual arousal’ was mistranslated as *khon chop khong plaek* (Thai: คนชอบของแปลก (IPA: /kʰon tɕɔ̌:p kʰɔ̌:ŋ plɛ̌:k/ Back translation: *a person who likes weird things*).

Results and Analysis

Frequency of Swearwords

Within approximately 250 minutes of runtime and 5,105 English subtitles extracted from Season 1 of *Paradise P.D.*, there are a total of 494 instances of swearwords (note that the term “instance” here represents individual occurrences of swearwords, and not types of swearwords). This means that moderate and strong swearwords, as well as *ass* and *bitch*, occur every second on average. Note that the density of swearwords would be even higher if mild expletives such as *damn*, *crap*, and *balls* were included in the analysis. This represents the show's overall offensive nature.

Table 1 shows that the top-five most frequent swearword forms in the English subtitles are *shit* (25.90%), *ass* (23.70%), *fuck* (18.88%), *dick* (7.83%), and *bitch* (5.62%), along with their variants. Other swearwords include: *pussy*, *cock*, *tit*, *screw*, *bastard*, *butt/pee/glory hole*, *jerk/crank off*, *cunt*, *twat*, *whore*, *jizz*, *queef*, *cum/splodge*, *prick*, *cripple*, and *slut*.

Table 1

Forms and Frequencies of Top-five Swearwords in the Corpus

Form	Variants	N	%
1) Shit	shitty, shitting, piece of shit, holy shit, bullshit, shitmouth, shitload, shitlicker, dipshit, shitburger	129	25.90
2) Ass	asshole, ass-backwards, loose-ass, stupid ass, fat ass, punk ass, dumbass, crazy ass, ass-to-ass, bitch ass, assbat, ass crack	118	23.70
3) Fuck	fucking, fucker, fucked, fuck you, fuck-up, fuck off, motherfucker, motherfucking, fuck nut, fuck bag, buttfucked, fuck face, fuck blub	94	18.88

Form	Variants	N	%
4) Dick	pickle-dicked, double-dickey-donged, dick kisser, dickless	39	7.83
5) Bitch	son of a bitch, bitching, bitches, sumbitch	28	5.62
6) Pussy	Pussyland	14	2.81
7) Cock	cocksucking, cocksucker, limpcock, cocktease, cocking, cock-chugging, shitcock	14	2.81
8) Tits	bitch tits, titties, sugar tits	11	2.21
9) Screw	screwing, screw up, screw you	10	2.01
10) Bastard	-	6	1.21
11) -hole	B hole, butthole, peephole, dickhole, gloryhole	6	1.21
12) Jerk/crank off	-	5	1.00
13) Cunt	-	4	0.80
14) Twat	twatwaffle	4	0.80
15) Jizz/cum/splooge	-	4	0.80
16) Whore	-	3	0.60
17) Queef	-	2	0.40
18) Prick	-	1	0.20
19) Cripple	-	1	0.20
20) Slut	-	1	0.20
TOTAL		494	100

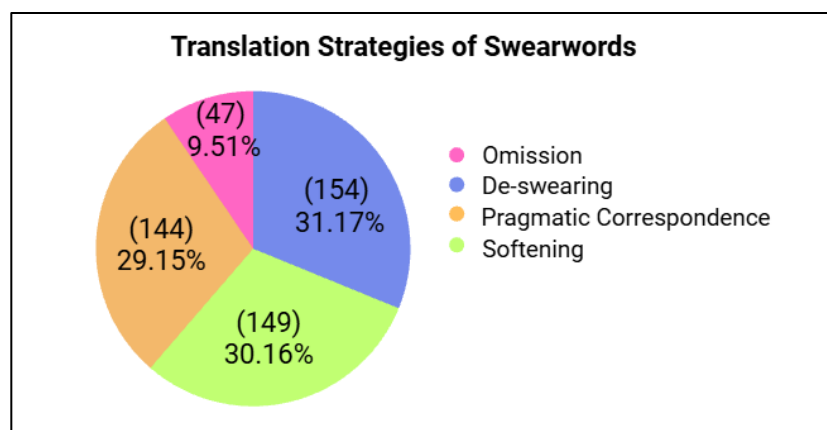
In Abu-Rayyash et al. (2023) and Guillot (2023), *fuck* and its variants are reported to occur the most frequently. The results in this study are contradictory, as *shit* and its variants are the most frequent swearwords. A contributing factor to this variation may be differences in genres. The corpus in Abu-Rayyash et al. (2023) drew from drama, biography, Sci-Fi, and action movies, and from a drama movie in Guillot (2023). Paradise P.D.’s genre, on the other hand, is adult comedy. The high frequency of *shit* in this study, with many instances referring to literal feces, may reflect the crass humor of the show and its attempt to create graphic, “gross-out”, comedic shock values.

Translation Solutions of Swearwords in Season 1 of Paradise P.D.

The analysis shows that all four types of solutions suggested in Díaz-Pérez (2020) were all employed in the translation of the English subtitles in Paradise P.D. De-swearing was the most frequently used solution in swearword translation (154 instances; 31.17%), followed by softening (149 instances; 30.16%), pragmatic correspondence (144 instances; 29.15%), and omission (47 instances; 9.51%), respectively. However, a crucial observation is that de-swearing, softening, and pragmatic correspondence occurred in almost equivalent distributions. This is illustrated in Figure 2. Each solution and how it was adopted in the Thai subtitles translation of Paradise P.D.'s will be discussed in detail in the next sections, along with some examples from the corpus.

Figure 2

Translation Strategies of Swearwords



De-swearing

In the corpus of the present study, de-swearing was adopted the most frequently (154 out of 494 instances; 31.17%). An English swearword was translated with neutral, everyday terms and expressions of the same or very similar meaning. How the English swearwords were translated without involving any type of swearing is shown in Examples 1 and 2.

In Example 1, *whore* in *whorehouse* was translated as *sopheni* (Thai: โสเภณี IPA: /sǒ:pʰe: ni:/), a formal term for *prostitute*. Consequently, it lost its offensiveness, which would have been retained with the equivalent Thai profanity *kari* (Thai: กะหรี IPA: /kà ri:/ 'whore').

Example 1 [EP6] Hobson thought he was stopping a robbery.

Hobson: You *ain't gonna rob this **whorehouse***!

พวกนายจะไม่ได้ปล้นช่องโสเภณีแห่งนี้หรอก!

Transliteration: *phuak nai cha mai dai plon song **sopheni***

haeng ni rok!

Back translation: You *ain't gonna rob this house of **prostitutes***!

In Example 2, *dick* ('to maliciously trick someone') was translated as *lok* (Thai: หลอก IPA: /lò:k/ 'to fool someone'). Thus, its offensive tone was removed.

Example 2 [EP5] Chief Randall is angry after Kevin betrayed him.

Chief Randall: You ***dicked** your daddy raw*.

แกหลอกพ่อหน้าตาเฉย

Transliteration: *kae **lok** pho na ta choei*

Back translation: You ***tricked** me like it was nothing*.

Moreover, the attempt to maintain the comedic and shock values during the process of de-swearing can be observed in informal slang and "cheeky" euphemisms in the Thai ST. While these expressions are not always considered polite, they are not necessarily swearwords as they often appear in everyday, informal conversations. Some of which can even be used by children. In Example 3, *dick* (meaning *penis* literally) was translated as *khao lam* (Thai: ข้าวหลาม IPA: /kʰā:w.lǎ:m/ 'sticky rice-stuffed bamboo stem'), which is a suggestive euphemism for *penis*.

Example 3 [EP4] The police car that Kevin used to have sex with badmouths Kevin to her new robot boyfriend.

The car: Your ***dick** is so much bigger than Kevin's*.

ข้าวหลามของคุณใหญ่กว่าของเควินมาก

Transliteration: ***khaolam** khong khun yai kwa khong Kevin mak*

Back translation: Your ***sticky rice-stuffed bamboo stem** is much bigger than Kevin's*.

Similarly, in Example 4, *Pussyland* was translated as *Donhoilot* (Thai: ดอนหอยหลอด IPA: /dɔ̃ːn.hɔ̃ːj.lòːt/ “razor clam mudflat”, which is the name of an actual area known for this type of clam in Samutsongkram province, Thailand. The translator also made a clever pun using the word *hoi* (Thai: หอย IPA: /hɔ̃ːj/ ‘clam’), which is also slang for *pussy*.

Example 4 [EP8] Fitz tries to talk Kevin out of celebrating prematurely.

Fitz: [...] *it's too early to book a blimp to **Pussyland**.*

[...] มันยังเร็วไปที่จะตีตั๋วเที่ยวดอนหอยหลอด

Transliteration: [...] *man yang rew pai thi cha ti tua thiao **donhoilot***

Back translation: [...] *it's too early to book a ticket for **Donhoilot/Razor clam mudflat**.*

The word *krapu* (Thai: กระป๋อง IPA: /krà.pǔː/ ‘peepee’ and *chu* (Thai: จู IPA: /tɕʰuː/ ‘peepee’), both euphemisms and children's slang for *penis*, were also used in place of the extremely offensive Thai profanity *khuay* (Thai: ควย IPA: /kʰuaj/), whose severity is on par with *dick* and *cock*.

Example 5 [EP3] Fitz thought he had been shot in his penis.

Fitz: *Oh, thank God it wasn't my **dick**.*

ขอบคุณพระเจ้าที่ไม่โดนกระป๋อง

Transliteration: *khop khun phrachao thi mai don **krapu***

Back translation: *Oh, thank God it wasn't my **peepee**.*

Example 6 [EP7] Handicop, a quadriplegic police officer, insults Chief Randall.

Handicop: *Shut your **cock**-chugging mouth!*

หุบปากไว้มจุหะ

Transliteration: *hup pak wai om **chu** hoe!*

Back translation: *Save your mouth for **peepee**-sucking!*

The same strategy was sometimes applied with the words *shit* and *ass* when it refers to literal feces and buttocks. They were translated using the Thai words *ue* (Thai: อี IPA: /u/

‘poop’) and *kon* (Thai: ก้น IPA: /kôn/ ‘butt’), which are frequently used by Thais in informal situations, for example:

Example 7 [EP9] The leader of Flipper People talks to Kevin.

Staff: *And that, Kevin, is where we **shit**.*

และนี่คือที่ที่เราอึ

Transliteration: *lae ni khue thi thi rao **ue***

Back translation: And this is where we **poop**.

Example 8 [EP9] Gina comments on Dusty’s clothes.

Gina: *Dusty, that loincloth only covers ten percent of your **ass crack**.*

ดัสตี้ ผ้านั้นปิดร่องก้นนายยังไม่มิดเลย

Transliteration: *Dusty, pha nan pit **rong kon** nai yang mai mit loei*

Back translation: *Dusty, that loincloth barely covers up your **butt crack**.*

To summarize this section, the process of de-swearing in the Thai subtitles of *Paradise P.D.* includes not only replacing swearwords with neutral, non-taboo words but also exploiting everyday slang and playful euphemisms to maintain the graphic and comedic spirit of the original dialogue. The next section will discuss and exemplify the second most frequently used solution, softening.

Softening

The softening solution (149 out of 494 instances; 30.16%) refers to the translation of English swearwords using Thai swearwords that are softer in tone and meaning. The offensive and insulting intentions remain (which makes it different from de-swearing), but at a milder level. This is shown in Example 9, where the English swearword *fuck nut* is translated as *ai bueak* (Thai: ไอ้เปือก IPA: /ʔâj bûak/), a mild-to-moderate Thai swearword meaning *dummy/silly fellow*. The Thai swearword at the equivalent level to *fuck nut* would be *ai hia* (Thai: ไอ้เหี้ย IPA: /ʔâj hîa/ ‘fucker’).

Example 9 [EP1] Chief Randall argues with his ex-wife about her new boyfriend.

Chief Randall: *Where’d you dig up this four-eyed, fluoride-pushing **fuck nut**?*

คุณไปเจอไอ้เปือกสี่ตาบ้าฟลูออไรด์นี่ที่ไหน

Transliteration: *khun pai choe ai bueak si ta ba fluorai ni thi nai*

Back translation: “Where’d you dig up this four-eyed, fluoride-pushing **dummy**?”

Below are some similar examples involving the word *fuck* and its other variants. In Example 10, *motherfucker* was translated as *ai wentalai* (Thai: ไอ้เวรตะไล IPA: /ʔāj we:n tà.laj/ ‘damned bastard/damned bringer of chaos’). While the word has a strong negative meaning, its severity is still moderate compared to the Thai equivalent of *motherfucker*: *ai yed mae/ai mae yet* (Thai: ไอ้เย็ดแม่/ไอ้แม่เย็ด IPA: /ʔāj jét mē:/ /ʔāj mē: jét / “motherfucker”). Similarly, in Example 11, *fuck bag* was translated using the Thai insult *chao ngo* (Thai: เจ้าโง่ IPA: /tɕâw ŋô:/ ‘dummy/stupid head’), which is much milder both in tone and meaning. The equivalent Thai swearword would be *ai hia* (Thai: ไอ้เหี้ย IPA: /ʔāj hîa/ ‘fucker’).

Example 10 [EP3] Fitz yells at someone to drop their weapon.

Fitz: *Drop the gun, motherfucker!*

ทิ้งปืนซะ ไอ้เวรตะไล!

Transliteration: *thing puen sa ai wentalai!*

Back translation: *Drop the gun, you damned bastard!*

Example 11 [EP4] Kevin threatens a criminal he just arrested.

Kevin: *They all say that, you fuck bag.*

ก็เห็นพูดแบบนี้กันทุกคน เจ้าโง่

Transliteration: *ko hen put baep ni kan thuk khon chao ngo*

Back translation: *They all say that, you dummy.*

One unique finding of this study is how creative wordplay acted as a tool to soften the impact of English swearwords while maintaining the vulgar connotation. This is exemplified in Example 12, where variations of *fuck* were not directly translated as *yet* (Thai: เย็ด IPA: /jét/ ‘fuck’), which is extremely vulgar. Instead, a rhyming word *chet* (Thai: เช็ด IPA: /tɕʰét/ ‘to wipe’) was used.

Example 12 [EP8] Robbie, a drug dealer, talks to Kevin.

Robbie: *Hey, car-fucker.*

ไง ไอ้เช็ดรถ

Transliteration: *ngai ai chet rot*

Back translation: ‘*Hey, car-wiper.*’ (= *car-fucker*)

Moreover, to translate *dick* and its variants, the translator avoided using the equivalent Thai profanity, such as *hua khuay* (Thai: หัวควย IPA: /hǔa kʰuaj/ ‘*dickhead*’) due to its severity. Instead, it was translated using the phonetically similar word *hua khuat* (Thai: หัวขวด IPA: /hǔa kʰuat/ ‘*bottle-head*’), which also preserves the show’s adult humor.

Example 13 [EP7] Fitz talks to Kevin about Chief Randall.

Fitz: *Your dad is a big bag of dicks.*

พ่อนายนะเป็นไอ้หัวขวด

Transliteration: *pho nai na pen ai hua khuat*

Back translation: *Your dad is a bottle-head.* (= *dickhead*)

The key finding here is that while *chet* (‘to wipe’) and *hua khuat* (‘bottle-head’) are not inherently profane, they function as euphemisms that retain a vulgar connotation through their context and phonetic proximity to the original English swearwords. This may indicate a dual-purpose strategy: reducing linguistic severity while preserving the original comedic intent.

Pragmatic Correspondence

Pragmatic correspondence (144 out of 494 instances; 29.15%) occurred when an English swearword was translated into a Thai swearword of equivalent meaning and impact. In Examples 14 and 15, *shit* and *butthole* were literally translated into Thai as *khi* (Thai: ขี้ IPA: /kʰi:/ ‘*shit*’) and *ru tut* (Thai: รูตูด IPA: /ruː tʰut/ ‘*butthole/asshole*’). Both are graphic terms.

Example 14 [EP5] Bullet talks to his girlfriend.

Bullet: *I have to take a shit.*

ขอไปขี้ก่อน

Transliteration: *kho pai khi kon*

Back translation: *I have to take a shit.*

Example 15 [EP1] Chief Randall defends the police force’s logo that he designed.

Chief Randall: “Puckering **butthole**?” *That happens to be a sunset!*

“รูตูดห่อๆ” นั้นมันมันรูปดวงอาทิตย์ตกที่ฉันออกแบบเอง!

Transliteration: “**ru tut** ho ho” *nan man rup duang athit tok thi chan okbaep eng!*

Back translation: “Puckering **butthole**?” *That’s a sunset that I designed!*

Moreover, according to Díaz-Pérez (2020), pragmatic correspondence does not necessarily have to be a literal translation of the English swearword but may be conveyed through other words that carry the same tone and pragmatic function. In Example 16, *son of a cunt* was not literally translated into Thai because it would not make sense. Instead, it was translated as *luk kari* (Thai: ลูกกะหรี IPA: /kà ri:/ ‘son of a whore’), which is as offensive.

Example 16 [EP10] Dusty is throwing a tantrum

Dusty: *Die, you son of a cunt.*

ตายๆ ไอ้ลูกกะหรี

Transliteration: *tai tai ai luk kari*

Back translation: *Die, die, you son of a whore.*

Furthermore, some English swearwords went through the process of de-swearing, followed by adding Thai swearing emphasis markers *maeng* (Thai: แม่่ง IPA: mɛ̌ːŋ/) and *khot* (Thai: โคตร IPA: kʰòːt/), both of which mean ‘fricking’ as an expletive intensifier, to retain the swearing intention. Example 17 demonstrates how *sumbitch* had its offensiveness neutralized by the de-swearing solution and translated using the Thai word *kha hot* (Thai: ขาโหด IPA: kʰăː hòːt/ ‘savage’), before being combined with the Thai impolite emphasis marker *maeng* (Thai: แม่่ง IPA: /mɛ̌ːŋ/ ‘fricking’).

Example 17 [EP7] The drug lord’s mother warns the drug dealer about her son.

Mother: *He’s a mean sumbitch.*

เขาแม่่งขาโหดเลยละ

Transliteration: *khao maeng kha hot loei la*

Back translation: *He's a **fricking** savage.*

Example 18 demonstrates how *dick* was sanitized by de-swearing and then translated using a mild slang *krian* (Thai: เกเรียน IPA: /krian/ 'troll'), with the expletive intensifier *khot* (Thai: โครต IPA: kʰò:t/ 'fricking') added.

Example 18 [EP7] Jesus just pranked Hobson.

Jesus: *Oh, I'm such a **dick**.*

ผมโครตเกเรียนเลย

Transliteration: *phom **khot krian** loei*

Back translation: *Oh, I'm such a **fricking** troll.*

Notably, many instances of *dick*, *cock*, *pussy*, *cunt*, and *fuck* in the corpus were never matched with their Thai literal translation or equivalent lexical item, for example, *khuay* (Thai: ควย IPA: /hǔa kʰuaj/ 'dick/cock'), *hua khuay* (Thai: หัวควย IPA: /hǔa kʰuaj/ 'dickhead'), *hi* (Thai: หี IPA: /hǐ:/ 'pussy/cunt'), and *yet* (Thai: เย็ด IPA: /jét/ 'to fuck'). Instead, they were translated with either the softening or the de-swearing strategy as demonstrated above. One possible explanation is that these words are deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness of Thai society as extremely vulgar and capable of severely threatening one's face, as stated in Angkunsinthana and Lerlertyuttitham (2019).

Omission

This is the least frequently employed solution (47 instances; 9.5%) in which an English swearword was omitted. In other words, it was completely removed from the Thai translation without any corresponding lexical item, as shown in Examples 19 and 20. In both examples, the English swearwords *fuck blub*, and *shit*, respectively, were omitted.

Example 19 [EP9] Gina talks to Dusty.

Gina: *You're more than just a **sexy fuck blub** to me.*

ฉันไม่ได้เห็นว่านายแค่เซ็กซี่นะ

Transliteration: *chan mai dai hen wa nai khae **seksi** na*

Back translation: *I didn't just see you as a **sexy** guy.*

Example 20 [EP8] Bullet talks about his drug habit.

Bullet: *But it's sure as **shit** ain't heroin.*

แต่ที่แน่ ๆ มันไม่เหมือนเฮโรอีน

Transliteration: *tae thi nae nae man mai muean heroin*

Back translation: *But it sure ain't heroine.*

The fact that omission was adopted the least frequently in the corpus of this study sharply contrasts with that in Díaz-Pérez (2020) and Abu-Rayyash et al. (2023), in which omission was the most frequently adopted solution. One possible explanation may be that Díaz-Pérez explored the translation techniques of only *fuck* and *shit*, which are highly offensive. Therefore, they naturally called for a stronger level of sanitization, i.e., complete removal. Abu-Rayyash et al.'s study, on the other hand, was conducted in the context of Arabic sociolinguistics, which often exhibits greater cultural conservatism regarding profanity. Thus, English swearwords in their corpus were possibly more likely to be omitted from ST.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study explored English swearwords in Season 1 of *Paradise P.D.* to examine the translation strategies adopted by the translators and whether they reflect negotiation between Netflix translation guidelines and Thai cultural sensitivities. Díaz-Pérez's (2020) four solutions for swearword translation and Chesterman's (1993) translation norms were adopted as the guiding framework. The English swearword translation strategies were first categorized into four categories: de-swearing, softening, pragmatic correspondence, and omission, allowing the governing translation norms to be systematically identified.

The high rate of profanity sanitization in this study (70.83%) supports Wu (2021) and Abu-Rayyash et al. (2023) that swearwords in ST tend to be sanitized regardless of cultures. This clearly contradicts Netflix translation guidelines regarding the preservation of the original severity of swearwords. However, Netflix continues to accept subtitles that deviate from its own guidelines. This may suggest that there is an unspoken rule that local cultural sensitivities should take precedence over the platform's standardized guidelines. That is, the guidelines are aspirational rather than strictly mandatory. Therefore, translators must learn how to exercise their judgement using their knowledge of local cultural sensitivities instead of relying solely on the guidelines. Similarly, Streaming platforms should move away from fixed

guidelines and instead prioritize context-based guidelines that accommodate the stylistic flavor across different types of content.

The findings in this study may also serve as evidence that Díaz-Pérez's (2020) framework is not a "one size fits all" or "ready-made" solution for translating profanity in subtitles. Rather, it functions best as a foundation guide that allows researchers to further explore profanity translation strategies in ST. Each main strategy may be further broken down into specific sub-strategies that may vary across languages. One example is how the English swearword *sumbitch* underwent de-swearing to become *kha hot* (Thai: ขาโหด IPA: /kʰǎː hòːt/ 'savage'), before being combined with the impolite emphasis marker *maeng* (Thai: แม่ง IPA: /mɛ̌ːŋ/ 'fucking') to function as a pragmatic correspondence (Example 17), which has not been reported in any previous studies involving other language pairs.

Another key finding that emerged for discussion is how pragmatic correspondence occurred almost as frequently as de-swearing and softening (29.15%, 31.17%, and 30.16%, respectively). This pattern is of great importance because it shows how the translators were unwilling to sacrifice the offensive tone inherent to the show's genre, even though it contradicts Thai values of politeness. In other words, they reduced the offensiveness through sanitization while also simultaneously preserving the key "crass" nature of the language of the series. This is also further substantiated by the fact that omission was used the least frequently in the corpus, suggesting that the translators' priority is grounded in 'substitution' rather than 'removal', so that the underlying semantic content of that particular swearword remains preserved (See Examples 1 – 8).

By prioritizing substitution, the translators have successfully negotiated between Netflix translation guidelines and local cultural sensitivities. They did not make a simple choice between the two extremes (strictly adhering to the guidelines and maintaining offensive equivalence rather than sanitizing the Thai subtitles by erasing all swearwords and their underlying semantic content to align with Thai politeness norms). Instead, they employed a range of substitution strategies that helped preserve the show's offensive sense of humor while minimizing the face-threatening potential that may violate Thai sensitivities. This is evident in how extremely vulgar Thai swearwords such as *khuay* (Thai: ควย IPA: /kʰuaj/ 'dick/cock'), *hi* (Thai: หี IPA: /hǐː/ 'pussy/cunt'), and *yet* (Thai: เย็ด IPA: /jét/ 'to fuck') were never used, as doing so may shift the audience's viewing experience from amusement to offense (Angkunsinthana and Lerlertyuttitham, 2019).

Between the Guidelines and Cultural Sensitivities: A Middle Ground

Through the lens of Chesterman's (1993) translation norms, the balance that the translators have created for English swearword translation in Thai subtitles can be viewed as the 'middle ground' between the Thai audience's *expectancy norms*, which are deeply rooted in polite communication and face-saving culture, and the *professional norms* dictated by Netflix translation guidelines. The tension between these two competing norms creates a distinct communicative challenge for the translators. They cannot simply fulfill the *accountability norm* that demands a faithful translation of a swearword in both severity and impact, as it would contradict the *expectancy norms*. Therefore, to resolve this friction, the translators deployed the *communication norm*, or the professional duty of the translators, to maximize communicative success using various strategies, namely de-swearing, softening, pragmatic correspondence, and omission. By doing so, they have created a middle ground where the Thai subtitles remain both culturally acceptable (i.e., respectful of the *expectancy norms*) and pragmatically faithful to the original show (i.e., respectful of the *professional norms*).

The concept of middle ground highlights the intricate and advanced skills required of a subtitle translator, as he/she is not just a "translator", but a "mediator" who actively negotiates the tension between the requirements of the streaming platforms and local sensitivities. This requires advanced linguistic proficiency in both the source and target languages and also cross-cultural knowledge that a translator has acquired through extensive experience. This suggests that translators, or the training of translators, should prioritize socio-pragmatic competence as much as the technical aspects of ST, especially when translating profanity.

Additionally, the middle ground may indicate shifting media sanitization norms. As opposed to the traditional strict sanitization of sensitive content in public media, today's sanitization has become more dynamic and negotiated, suggesting that the thresholds of acceptability for both corporate clients and audiences have expanded. In other words, the middle ground represents the evolution of expectancy norms regarding swearword translation in subtitles. Consequently, subtitle translators must learn to actively and effectively cater to modern-day clients and audiences by ensuring the preservation of the stylistic flavor of the media alongside the protection of local cultural sensitivities.

Limitations and Recommendations

Because this study focused exclusively on moderate and strong English swearwords, the findings may reflect a higher frequency of de-swearing and softening. This may not reflect how milder swearwords are translated and sanitized. Future research on adult comedy shows may analyze all English swearwords to explore the overall vulgarity and broader solutions for offensive terms.

Another limitation of this study lies in generalization. The findings here may be genre-specific and may not be generalizable to data from other genres, such as drama, action, and Sci-Fi, as swearwords in other genres may carry different pragmatic functions. Moreover, since the primary focus in this study is on the solution and lexical choice of swearword translation, an in-depth analysis of the grammatical functions of swearwords is not provided. Consequently, how certain translation solutions are specifically tailored to the grammatical function of each swearword and its variants remains unexplored. These limitations leave room for future studies to further investigate.

To conclude, translating English swearwords is a multifaceted process that demands strategic expertise. To identify the best and most appropriate strategies when translating English swearwords in the context of ST, research of this nature should be replicated and expanded across different time frames. This is to maintain up-to-date knowledge of the severity of swearwords and shifting audience expectations, as the socio-pragmatic weight of profanity is not static but fluctuates alongside broader cultural and linguistic trends.

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Ethical Approval

This paper does not contain any studies with human informants by any of the authors.

Declaration of AI Assistance

During the preparation of this work, the authors used Google Gemini and Grammarly in order to check grammaticality and refine the language. After using these tools, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

Additional Information

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