

## Censoring or Queering? TV-Subtitling of *South Park* in Türkiye\*

### Sansür mü, yoksa Kuirleştirme mi? Türkiye’de *South Park*’ın TV Altyazı Çevirisi

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#### ABSTRACT

TV subtitles are mostly euphemized and ideologically recontextualized with individual and/or institutional motivations for the target viewer in Türkiye due to varying socio-cultural and political factors. Accordingly, subtitlers are faced with challenges in providing adequate translations for source taboo language, including sexually explicit swearwords and vulgar slang. However, censorship policies in AVT may conversely urge translators to be involved in a more creative process, which may, in turn, result in the subversion of the very censorious discourse. The aim of this study is to investigate censorship as an ideological and translation constraint in TV subtitling, as well as a factor laying the grounds for creating possible meanings in subtitling. To this end, a descriptive analysis was conducted based on the TV subtitles of *South Park*, an American sitcom animation show. The analysis shows that institutional norms force translators to be creative in transferring the taboo language to preserve humorous and obscene narrative content, which appears as a *queer* effort whereby the taboo meaning is destabilized, particularly in the case of references to sexual organs and homosexuality. The qualitative and quantitative analyses provide an overview of the translation strategies employed and the pragmatic effect created by freelance subtitlers translating for private media institutions from English into Turkish in the case of the taboo language. The case presented in this study can also give an insight into the translator’s performativity in AVT through which meanings are created in the target culture under repressive circumstances.

**Keywords:** Lubunca, queering translation, self-censorship, subtitling, taboo language

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## ÖZ

Türkiye’de TV altyazıları, çeşitli sosyo-kültürel ve politik etmenler temelinde, bireysel ve/veya kurumsal motivasyonlarla, hedef izleyici için ideolojik olarak örtmeceli ve yeniden bağlamsallaştırılmış şekilde sunulmaktadır. Buna bağlı olarak, altyazı çevirmenleri, cinsel içerikli küfürler ve kaba argo ifadeler de dahil, kaynak tabu dilin çevirisinde yeterliliği sağlamakta zorluklarla karşılaşmaktadır. Ancak, görsel-işitsel çeviride sansür politikaları, aksi yönde çevirmenleri daha yaratıcı bir sürece dahil edebilir ve bu da sansürcü söylemin altüst edilmesiyle sonuçlanabilir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, TV altyazılamada bir ideolojik ve çeviri kısıtı olarak, yanı sıra altyazıda olası anlamların yaratılmasına zemin hazırlayan bir etmen olarak sansür olgusunu incelemektir. Bu amaçla, Amerikan yapımı bir durum komedisi animasyonu olan *South Park*’ın Türkçe TV altyazıları üzerinden betimleyici bir çözümleme gerçekleştirilmiştir. Çözümlemenin sonuçları, kurumsal normlara bağlı çevirmenlerin tabu dili aktarırken mizahi ve müstehcen anlatıyı korumak amacıyla yaratıcı çözümler bulmaya zorladığını; bunun durumun da, özellikle cinsel organlara ya da eşcinselliğe gönderme içeren anlamların istikrarsızlaştırıldığı, kuir bir çaba olarak kendini gösterdiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu nitel ve nicel çözümleme, özel medya kuruluşları için İngilizce’den Türkçe’ye çeviri yapan serbest altyazı çevirmenlerinin tabu dil söz konusu olduğunda kullandıkları çeviri stratejilerine ve yarattıkları pragmatik etkiye genel bir bakış sunmaktadır. Çalışma olgusu aynı zamanda baskıcı koşullar altında çevirmenin performatifliği yoluyla erek kültürde anlamların nasıl yaratıldığına ilişkin bir fikir de verebilir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** altyazı çevirisi, çevirin kuirleştirilmesi, Lubunca, otosansür, tabu dil

## 1. Introduction

In Türkiye, the purification of language from what is considered to be taboo or offensive, be it an ideological effort in the form of (self)censorship or a habitual conformity to the standard language use, has always been a case in audiovisual translation (AVT) processes. The present study is aimed at investigating the TV subtitles of *South Park*, which provide a special case of recontextualization in AVT. The translational specificity of the animated sitcom in the Turkish context is based on its satirical humoristic language, which includes American slang, swearwords, interjections, bluntness, and derogation, along with a myriad of local and global topics that are regarded as taboo for the Turkish culture. As indicated by many authors of the book *South Park and Philosophy: You know, I learned something today* edited by Robert Arp (2007), the producers of the show do it in the name of ‘freedom of expression’, a quite problematic notion in Türkiye for more than two decades under the repressive rule of the Justice and Development Party. Therefore, in the audiovisual translation of the show, and of many other products including taboo elements, the degree of distinction between cultures about freedom of expression becomes prominent. What makes *South Park* specific as a research material for this study is the lexical choices resorted to by the Turkish TV subtitles of the show. The study sets out from the assumption that, when taboo and offensive language is concerned, the TV subtitling of *South Park* is a case of meaning creation rather than a mere effort of censoring unacceptable linguistic units for the Turkish audience.

The study focuses on the translator’s choices in rendering the taboo linguistic units, including expletives, swearwords and lexemes referring to bodily parts and same-sex relationship into Turkish. Taboo and offensive language fulfills specific dialogic as well as idiosyncratic functions that are closely related to the social-cultural background of linguistic communities (Diaz Cintas and Remael 2014, p. 196). Therefore, any change in this pragmatic impact on the translation process should be dealt with meticulously within the sociological boundaries of the receiving culture. Such an endeavor requires the researcher to describe the translation phenomenon within its multi-faceted conditions. Methodologically, this study is carried out in line with the principles of descriptive translation studies (DTS) developed by Gideon Toury (1995), also embracing a queer translation approach. From this point of view, the translator choices for the above-mentioned linguistic units will quantitatively and qualitatively be analyzed on the basis of the discursive conditions of the translation process. The qualitative analysis is based on the notion of translation as a deconstructive process that denies the transfer of fixed and stable meanings across languages (Arrojo, 2010), rather holds it as a framework for analyzing how sexuality travels across linguistic boundaries (Bauer 2015, p. 8).

Strategy-based descriptive studies on taboo and offensive language<sup>1</sup> in AVT (e.g. Ávila-Cabrera, 2015, 2016a, 2016b, 2020, Valdeón 2020, Wilkinson 2021) provide insightful methodologies and findings about translating taboo elements under various circumstances and within the constrained nature of subtitling. However, the present study, building on the previous literature, attaches its focus to the possible pragmatic effects produced by the subtitlers who are translating under repressive institutional conditions, apart from their toning down, neutralizing and toning up strategies. One of the motivations to conduct the present study is to show that translators who are subtitling for TV in line with a censorship policy can be so creative in rendering taboo and offensive language with sexual references that their so-called toned-down or censored translations may quite gain a concealed queer effect in the target culture. With this aspect, this study is expected to foreground the potential of subtitling as a mode of AVT to create meanings in receiving cultures besides its strategy-based translational dimension.

The following sections will deal with the concept of taboo and its relation to discourse, the socio-political situation in Türkiye, South Park as a problematic audiovisual product in Türkiye, taboo and offensive language as a translation issue in AVT, and subtitling strategies.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

To understand whether something is taboo for a specific community, a set of questions must be answered: In what cases or to what extent or for whom something is embarrassing and offensive? Who are the actors agreeing that something is a taboo, and under what historical conditions do these actors agree on it? What is the extent of the prohibitions and measures against a taboo, and who is the authority to impose them? In what ways and manners is this prohibition employed? How are these prohibitions or measures responded by others? All these aspects of taboo are encapsulated concisely in Allan and Burrige's (2006) definition: It is a "proscription of behavior for a specifiable community of people, for a specified context, at a given place and time" (p. 27). In short, the construction and perception of a taboo, as also stressed by Allan and Burrige, is always context dependent.

Translation has the role of creating such representations in target cultures through recontextualization. Sexuality, obscenity, blasphemy, and many other topics can gain different forms of construction in the translation process. Translator, thus, has the power to decide whether something is extravagant or tolerable for a specific community regardless of the effect of the concept in its source setting. Jose Santaemilia (2008) mentions the role of the translation of sexual language as an indicator of morality. For him, an analysis of the translations of sexual language can give insights about the imaginary limits of the translator's morality as well as the moral fabric of a community at a certain point in time (pp. 227-8). This point of view can be expanded into the translation of offensive and taboo language in this study. In this regard, analyzing translation of taboo and offensive language in TV subtitling can enable one to understand the translator's moral limits and intentions as an individual under certain socio-political conditions at a specific historical moment, which is also a representation of moral possibilities in the given community.

### 2.1. *Taboo as a notion residing between censorship and queering in translation*

In any translation modality, taboo or offensive language can be problematic because of its potential censorship due to various factors in the target culture. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between censorship and self-censorship for the translational phenomena. The former often denotes a prohibition by an authority who sanctions it for political correctness (Scandura 2004, p. 125), such as public institutions, governments, administrators, and the like. The latter, however, is more related to the translator's intentional or unintentional decision-making process. According to Santaemilia (2008), self-censorship may include many forms such as elimination, distortion, downgrading, misadjustment, infidelity, etc. as well as less obvious forms such as partial translation, minimization, and omission (p. 224). For him, contrary to institutional censorship, it is "an individual moral/ethical struggle between the individual and society. . . in order to produce rewritings that are 'acceptable' from both a social and a personal perspective" (2018, p. 16). Although self-censorship is not often welcome in the translational sense, it provides invaluable information about the social-psychological processes of a translator. It also offers data about the discursive limitations of the receiving culture about the topic in question (e.g. sexuality and desire, violence, death or killing, etc.), and further possibilities of the pragmatic effect that may not be unveiled through a strategy-based translation analysis. This is the point where a queer perspective answers the purpose.

The notions of translating the queer and queering translation refer to a mutually complementary position to translation, which takes its roots from the queer theory. Sedgwick (1993, p. 8) defines 'queer' as "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning where the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically". In other words, queer resists the notions of gender and sexuality as stable and categorical frameworks and leaves the floor to an infinite signification process where categories of gender and sexuality are destabilized. This aspect of queer is based on the post-structural theory. As Spurlin (2017) reminds us, according to the Derridean theory of signification, a "signifier continually replaces . . . another through an endless play of signification in the absence or deferral of a final meaning" (p. 3). Thus, by rejecting the notion of fixed linguistic signs, along with the performative effect of stylized reiterative acts that enable gender to appear as a natural sort of being (Butler 1990, p. 17), the queer gains a deconstructive nature. Even though queer theory emerged from philosophical investigations on gender and same-sex sexuality dating back to the late twentieth century, it does not limit itself to the politics of gender and marginalized sexualities; rather, it "challenges the status of dominant regimes of knowledge/power as natural and universal by focusing on the constructedness of those models, on their historical contingency, and on the politics of those models" (Baer and Kaindl 2018, p. 3). This opens

the gates for interrogating not only the target regimes that lead to translations reconstructing the hegemonic discourses, but also the mainstream or dominant translation theories, models, and practices. When it comes to the transfer of taboos across cultures, a queer perspective to translation questions the taboos that are stabilized by dominant discourses in specific communities and seeks for any possible meanings resisting the existing ones in the target regimes. Epstein's (2017) notion of 'acqueering' is useful for understanding some of the translator choices in the present study. According to this mode of translation, translators may opt for 'hijacking' the reader's attention by foregrounding sexuality and gender issues (p. 121). Such a queer effect in a recontextualized audiovisual product can compensate for the losses due to censorship procedures over the ST.

Having put the interplay of taboo, translation and queer into perspective, it can be said that a queer approach to subtitling may divert the attention from the constrained nature of the praxis into its potential of constructing discourses. Since this study aims at an investigation of the way sexually related offensive and taboo language is rendered in the Turkish TV subtitles, the theoretical stance of queer(ing) translation is envisaged to avoid an essentialist and sterile interpretation of the translator's choices. In the context of the present study, this queer approach will enable, on the one hand, (1) to see how domestic taboos are reproduced by the dominant repressive regimes of knowledge/power, and (2) to unearth hidden meanings that can change the dominant understandings about taboos in the Turkish culture.

## **2.2. Taboo language and subtitling**

Subtitling is a doubly constrained modality among the sub-types of the AVT in the case of translating taboo and offensive language. The first constraint concerns the temporospatial aspect of the praxis. Subtitlers tend to omit taboo words, swearwords, and interjections if the space or time is limited (Diaz Cintas & Remael, 2014, p. 195), which leads to losses from the narrative content and characterization. The second constraint is related to the involvement of ideologies in the subtitling process, which ends up either with an institutional censorship or the subtitler's self-censorship. Whichever the case is, the product is a recontextualized one that can reflect the ideological dynamics of the target culture.

Data-driven analysis in this study has unearthed a set of strategies for translating taboo words. Parallel to the descriptive studies by Ávila-Cabrera (2015, 2016a, 2016b & 2020), taboo and offensive language can be toned down, maintained, or toned up in various cases. Also, there might be cases when the taboo words are neutralized with the use of orthophemisms. The most radical procedure is to omit the taboo content from the target text. In very rare occasions, translators may opt for compensating the loss of taboo content by simply adding new taboo words, expletives, or swearwords into the target subtitle. The translation strategies employed for rendering taboo language, swearwords, and expletives referring to sexual bodily organs and homosexuality can be seen in Table 1. The strategies have mostly been adapted from Diaz Cintas and Remael's (2007) strategies for the translation of culture-bound terms and Ávila-Cabrera's (2016a) strategies for translating offensive and taboo language.

Table 1.

No.	Strategies	Definition	Example
1	Loan	A taboo word or phrase in the ST is transferred into the TT in its original form or via an additional naturalization procedure.	ST: ...to give me <i>oral sex</i> right now TT: ...bana <i>oral seks</i> yapması için BT: ...to give me <i>oral sex</i>
2	Literal translation	Taboo language is rendered very closely, keeping the same semantic load and function.	ST: I was going to <i>gay</i> movie and bath houses. TT: <i>Eşcinsel</i> filmlerine ve hamamlara gidiyordum. BT: I was going to <i>gay</i> movie and bath houses.
3	Conceptual substitution	Taboo words or expressions are substituted with a completely different one in the TT regardless of the change in meaning and functionality.	ST: I don't need you <i>assholes!</i> TT: Sizin gibi <i>labuşlara</i> ihtiyacım yok! BT: I don't need you <i>gays!</i>
4	Euphemistic substitution	Taboo words or expressions are substituted with a milder alternative in the TT, toning down the vulgar effect.	ST: There's these two people who have <i>asses</i> where their heads should be. TT: Kafalarının yerinde <i>popo</i> olan iki kişi var. BT: There are two people who have <i>buttocks</i> where their heads should be.
5	Reformulation	A type of substitution by which a taboo word or phrase is expressed idiomatically for functional equivalence.	ST: <i>Up your ass</i> , jew. TT: <i>Canın cehenneme</i> , yahudi. BT: <i>Go to hell</i> , jew.
6	Lexical recreation	The invention of words or phrases to conceal the taboo or vulgar content of the ST.	ST: You're the one talking about killer <i>titties</i> . TT: Katil <i>ciciklerden</i> bahseden sensin. [ <i>cicik</i> : neologism]
7	Omission	Complete or partial dropping of the original taboo word or expression.	ST: Ha, ha, what a stupid <i>asshole!</i> TT: Ne gerzek ama! BT: What a fool!

### 3. Context

#### 3.1. The socio-political situation in Türkiye: Media and discourse

A considerable rise of authoritarianism can be observed in the policies of the ruling party, the Justice and Development Party, particularly since the Gezi Protests<sup>2</sup> with an accompanying escalation of conservatism in the Turkish society (Coşar, 2015). This ideological structuration, which was embodied with some radical transformations in the legal and executive bodies of the state, also has reflections in the media order in Türkiye. According to Binark (2015, p. 31), media and TV programs in Turkey, just like other ideological tools such as family, education, and work life, have become more conservative through repetitive productions that do not lead the viewer or reader to critical thinking. To maintain the social and political stability around its conservative and standardizing Sunni Islamic ideologies, the Ak Party has adopted the strategy of taking control of the media order through pressing so-called autonomous state institutions into service and, as Ayan (2019) accounts, constructing organic bonds with mainstream private media companies.

In Türkiye, all radio and television channels are under the strict supervision of The Radio and Television Supreme Council. As indicated on its website, the Supreme Council is administratively and financially autonomous and impartial (RTÜK, n.d. para. 1). It is composed of nine members who are elected by the Turkish Grand National Assembly from among the nominees on the basis of the number of MPs of each political party (RTÜK, n.d. para. 4). Today, the majority of the Supreme Council is composed of representatives from the ruling party and its partner Nationalist Movement Party.

Censorship and legal sanctions have been very useful tools for the ruling party to employ its conservative policies over the media institutions, and the Supreme Council has been the primary instrument to achieve this goal. Article 8

is one of the most frequently referred articles of the By-Law on The Procedures and Principles of Media Services for censoring the broadcast of particular content on TV:

1/f [Media service providers] shall not be contrary to the national and moral values of the society, general morality, and the principle of protection of family. (By-law, Article no.8-f)

1/m shall ensure that the Turkish language is used in a proper, favourable and intelligible way without undermining its characteristics and rules; shall not display coarse, slang and poor quality use of the language. (By-law, Article no.8-m)

1/n shall not be obscene. (By-law, Article no.8-n)

A case in 2022 exemplifies how the Supreme Council takes decisions and justify censorship. In the show titled *Jurassic World Evolution 2*, aired by Netflix, two female characters are portrayed as kissing each other. The Supreme Council fined Netflix for labeling the animation as “Family Watch Together TV” even if it was listed with a +18 symbol. The Council referred to Article 8 of the By-law on the Procedures and Principles of Media Services as a reason for this sanction and justified that the show was contrary to the national and moral values of the society, and it ruined the principle of the protection of the family. The Council also plays role in molding public opinion about critical issues. On September 18, 2022, some Islamist and nationalist groups organized an anti-LGBTI parade called “The Big Family Gathering”. The parade was officially permitted by the Istanbul Governorship, while Pride marches and many other gatherings have been prohibited for several years. Moreover, The Radio and Television Supreme Council declared this parade on its website as a “public service announcement”, which was called by many liberal fractions and LGBT+ organizations a crime against human rights (Tanış 2022, para. 8).

Translation practices of pro-government TV channels, by the middle of the first decade of the new millennium, serve as a strategic component of this discursive construction in Türkiye. Subtitling of *South Park* by Doğuş Media proves to be an example of the practices of mainstream TV channels under the domination of state institutions and the government.

### 3.2. Subtitling *South Park*: A problematic audiovisual product in Türkiye

Jack Lynch (2009) describes, in his book titled *The Lexicographers Dilemma: The Evolution of Proper English from Shakespeare to South Park*, the show as an endpoint in the historical evolution of standard English. The American animated sitcom, produced by Matt Stone and Trey Parker, has a rich repertoire of discursive linguistic tools. This discourse includes a crude and profane language lampooning any social, political, ethical, and religious view (Arp, 2007, p. 1). According to Cantor (2007), what distinguishes *South Park* from other similar productions is its satire on all forms of political correctness in the name of freedom of speech (p. 100). Although *South Park* includes American local color and handle mostly US politics and social behavior of American society, its witty way of handling topics, political satire against liberals and above all the obscene and vulgar language made the show one of the most popular series in Türkiye (Alan, 2011, p. 53). Nevertheless, its language and most of the topics in the show are considered taboo for broadcasting on Turkish television channels.

*South Park* was aired by the broadcast company Doğuş Group on three TV channels, namely CNBC-e (former Kanal E) and e2, for about 15 years at intervals. Between 2002 and 2015, it was shown by the latter two, and all subtitles were produced by two women freelance translators, Rüyam Olunçay and Zeynep Akkuş. Since CNBC-e and e2 were closed in 2015, the show has never been broadcast on Turkish TV channels again. A considerable number of episodes shown between 2007 and 2011 were banned by Doğuş Group in accordance with the rules and regulations of the Radio and Television Supreme Council. The reasons for banning the episodes, shown in Table 2, give a general clue about the taboo topics on TV in the given period. Moreover, Aziz Acar, the dubbing and translations department manager, indicated in a personal communication that the channel frequently received official warnings from the Supreme Council about the content of the *South Park* episodes. Consequently, the broadcast time of *South Park* was moved to midnights as of August 2009 to protect children from vulgar language and inappropriate content (personal communication, June 8, 2011).

Table 2.

Season/Episode	Title of the episode	Reason for the broadcast ban*
03/15	Cartman joined NAMBLA	Pedophilia, child abuse
03/16	Are You There God, It' Me Jesus	Personification of God
04/10	Probably	Personification of God; Sensitive political issue
04/11	4th Grade	Personification of God; Sensitive political issue
05/04	Scott Tenorman Must Die	Violence
05/09	Osama Bin Laden Has Farty Pants	Anti-Muslim views
06/19	The Red Sleigh Down	Portraying the Iraqis killing Jesus
07/05	Fat Butt and Pancake Head	Vulgarity
09/04	Best Friends Ever	Blasphemy
10/01	The Return of the Chef!	Vulgarity
10/03	Cartoon Wars 1	The Portrayal of Prophet Mohammed
10/04	Cartoon Wars 2	The Portrayal of Prophet Mohammed
11/02	Cartman Sucks	Homosexuality
11/02	The Snuke	Anti-Muslim views
11/06	D-Yikes!	Homosexuality
11/10	Imaginationland	Anti-Muslim views
11/11	Imaginationland: Episode II	Anti-Muslim views
11/12	Imaginationland: Episode II	Anti-Muslim views
12/05	Eek, A Penis!	Obscenity

\*Data were obtained from the NTV CNBC-e Dubbing and Translations Department in 2011.

The contents of the banned episodes have parallels with the self-censored textual content in the subtitling process. In this respect, sexuality, especially homosexuality, blasphemy, child abuse, and threat to national politics, accompanied by obscene and vulgar language, are among the most critical topics that are subject to censorship on TV in Türkiye.

#### 4. Materials and Methods

The motivation of this study is to investigate the ways in which the TV subtitling of taboo elements is carried out in the case of *South Park* between the years 2007 and 2011. To this end, a descriptive analysis of 48 episodes of Turkish TV subtitles was conducted. The number of episodes is based on the total number of subtitle files that the CNBC-e TV channel administration permitted to provide for the research. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches have been adopted in the analysis of the data as part of the “concurrent triangulation strategy” (Creswell, 2009, p. 213). Since this study is oriented at uncovering the sexual discourse in the target regime through subtitling, the corpus consists of taboo words, expletives, swearwords, and slurs referring to (1) sexual bodily organs and (2) homosexuality.

First, the translation of taboo words in these two categories have been quantitatively analyzed in a data-driven way. The categorization has been carried out on the basis of the above-mentioned translation strategies mostly adapted from Diaz Cintas and Remael’s (2007) and Ávila-Cabrera’s (2016a). Also, Ávila-Cabrera’s (2016a) taxonomy of toning down, maintaining, neutralizing, omitting or toning up the load of taboo and offensive language has been used to understand the subtitlers’ tendencies. The data is compiled into an excel sheet including the categories ST, TT, translation method, and further lexical categories (i.e. *Lubunca*, archaism and local usage, which will be dealt with in detail in the next section). A total of 220 subtitles with reference to sexual bodily organs and homosexuality were detected and categorized in terms of translation strategies and the load of taboo language in the TT. The quantitative value for the two parameters was calculated in unity since some target renderings were commonly used to refer to both bodily parts and homosexuality. Second, purposively selected Turkish renderings in the dataset, quantitatively categorized in the first step, have been analyzed with queer analytic approach to translation adopting Epstein’s (2017) notion of ‘acqueering’ and Baer and Kaindl’s (2018) notion of queering translation. Quantitative and qualitative research methods have been mixed in this study, on the one hand, to have an overview of imaginary limits and an overall moral perception of subtitles, which is closely related to the ideological and social political circumstances of the community they are living in; on the other hand, to verify or refute some of the findings from the quantitative analysis (Creswell 2009).

As signaled earlier, the research questions at the core of this research design are as follows:

1. What are the strategies employed by subtitles in the case of translating linguistic units referring to sexual bodily organs and homosexuality? What is the tendency of subtitlers: to tone down, maintain, neutralize, omit, or tone up the taboo content in the TT?
2. What further meanings can be drawn from the subtitlers' translation choices? How can the choices be interpreted from a queer perspective? Do the qualitative findings from the queer-oriented analysis verify or refute the quantitative results?

## 5. Data Analysis and Findings

220 instances of taboo and offensive language with references to bodily parts and homosexuality were found in the analyzed 49 episodes aired on CNBC-e and e2 between 2007 and 2011. The translation strategies resorted to by subtitles are shown in Figure 1.

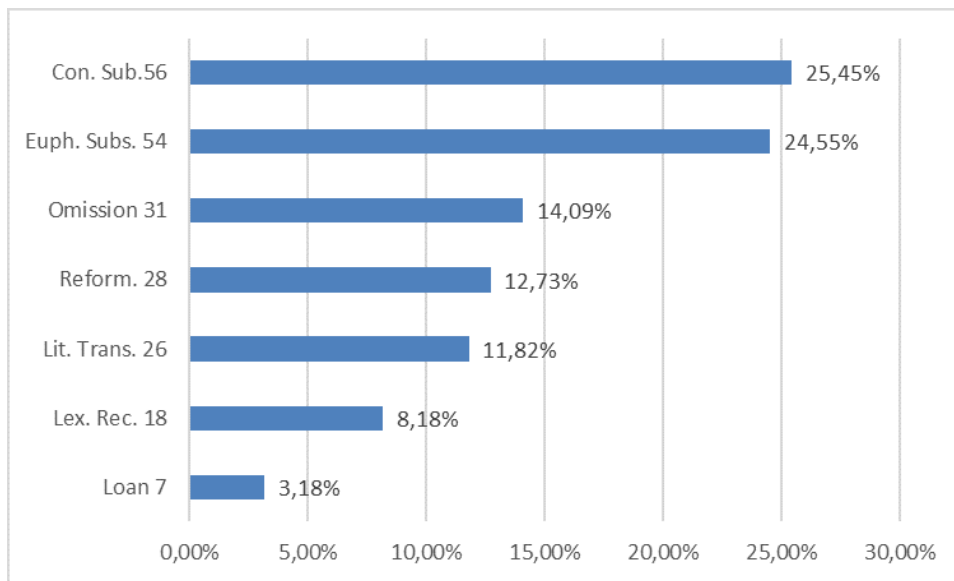


Figure 1.

Substitution (50%) constitutes half of the total number of translation strategies in the data. In 56 instances, out of 110, subtitles resorted to using conceptual substitution (25,45%), while euphemistic substitution (24,55%) was the second most recurrent strategy employed in 54 instances. The overwhelming percentage of the strategy shows that subtitles tend to change the taboo and vulgar linguistic units with milder alternatives. Words referring to bodily organs such as *anus*, *ass*, *asshole*, *balls*, *butthole*, *penis-butt*, *pussy*, *scrotum*, *testicle*, and *vagina* are among the most frequently substituted terms with conceptually differing ones in the TT. Similarly, euphemisms are often used by subtitles for the bodily organs such as *ass*, *bulge*, *cooze*, *dick*, *dumb-ass*, *knockers*, *nipple*, *penis*, and *tits*, as well as for the vulgar expletive *fag*.

Being a form of substitution, reformulation (12,73%) is also sometimes opted for by the subtitles in the target transactions to tone down or neutralize the expletives and vulgar expressions. For instance, the swearword *suck my balls* is rendered with the idiomatic expression *elinin körü* which is used in Turkish to express a dislike with some frustration. The third most recurrent strategy is omission (14,09%), which is mostly used for spatial concerns. When the original subtitles were too lengthy, subtitles did not hesitate to exclude swearwords, expletives, and interjections from the TT.

(1) ST: She's all drunk and spreading her legs. And showing her "poonaner" to everybody!

TT: Çok sarhoş ve bacaklarını açıp herkese gösteriyor.

BT: She is very drunk and spreads her legs, showing to everybody.

It should also be noted that subtitles have not paid much attention to the length of the subtitles when they tended to tone down the taboo and offensive language using substitution strategies. In this sense, it can be said that toning down a particular taboo content is much more important than considering audiovisual constraints in the case of subtitling



*South Park*. Literal translation (11,82%) has been resorted to by the subtitlers when the related term has more than one connotation in TL (e.g. *nuts*, *balls* rendered with *top* [*lit.* ball] instead of the vulgar word *taşak*); when milder child language is used in the dialogs; or when words referring to homosexuality are rendered with words literal but non-standard lexemes in the TL. The last case will be handled more elaborately in the following paragraphs. The least recurrent strategy was the use of loan words (3,18%). This strategy could be used for a limited number of terms such as *clitoris*, *scrotum*, *oral sex*, and *lesbian*, most probably on the grounds that, even if they appeared on the TV screen, children would be unfamiliar with their meanings.

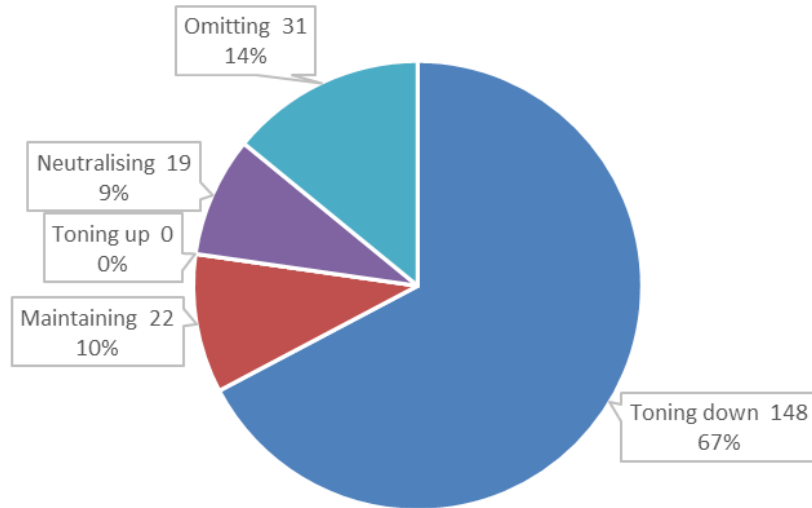


Figure 2.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of tones down, maintained, toned up, neutralized, and omitted taboo and offensive content of the original subtitles. As expected from the most preferred strategies, namely conceptual substitution and euphemistic substitution, the original taboo content was predominantly toned down in 148 instances (67%). In only 22 instances (10%), references to sexually related bodily organs and homosexuality were maintained in the subtitling process using literal translations and loans. When it comes to the non-transferred taboo language, as mentioned earlier, 14% percent of the swearwords, expletives and taboo words have been omitted from the TT. In 19 instances (9%), the taboo and offensive language has been neutralized via substitutions and reformulations. No toning-up case was observed in the total corpus.

Table 3.

<i>Lubunca</i>		Archaism		Local language use		Total
Instance	Percentage	Instance	Percentage	Instance	Percentage	
33	15,00%	3	1,36%	6	2,73%	19,09%
Out of 220		Out of 220		Out of 220		

Although the quantitative findings give the general idea that the taboo content in the TV subtitles of *South Park* were predominantly euphemized, neutralized, and even omitted, a considerable amount of translation choices by subtitlers (19,09%) deserve further attention. As shown in Table 3, the subtitlers used a non-standard slang variety, called *Lubunca* (15%), local language use (2,7%), and archaism (1,36%). Besides their considerable total percentage within the whole corpus, these preferences create a particular idiosyncratic effect and discourse for the target audience. As part of the concurrent triangulation principle of the research design, these subtitle choices will be analyzed qualitatively with a queer perspective.

In his extensive study about the historical evolution and social-functional aspects of *Lubunca*, Kontovas (2012) described the linguistic variety as a queer slang spoken among the gay male and trans female population in Türkiye, mostly in İstanbul. According to Kontovas, the overall use of *Lubunca* has declined over the past 60 years (p. 1); however, its use, especially among young LGBT+ people, has been increasing. Most of the lexemes are derived from a number of languages, including Turkish, Romani, French, Greek, Ladino, Armenian, among others. Today, *Lubunca* lexemes are used in many modes of translation to compensate for the probable loss of the queer semantic load of source texts. For instance, in his investigation of the Turkish translation of Rita Mae Brown's *Rubyfruit Jungle* in terms of its recreated queerness, Abdal (2023) highlights the use of *Lubunca* lexemes as an opportunity to represent queerness in the target culture alongside the misrecognizing strategies of the translator. The present study, however, focuses on the use of *Lubunca* as a way to escape the tension of censorship in rendering homophobic discourse of the source text, which subverts the interlingual TV-subtitling conventions in Turkey the practice of translation.

Many words used in the TV subtitles of *South Park* come from Romani, the largest non-Turkish contributor of lexemes to *Lubunca*. The following examples correspond to the use of *Lubunca* lexemes in the subtitles in various dialogs:

(2) ST: You asshole.  
TT: Seni *labuş* oğlan.  
BT: You gay boy.

The word *labuş* is a recreated word that may have been derived from the lexemes *lubunya* or *lapuş*. The former is derived from the Romani word *lubni* which refers to “gay, queer, fairy” (Kontovas, 2012, p. 1), while the latter is another *Lubunca* lexeme derived from the French word *la bouche*, referring to ‘the mouth’ (p. 8). The word *labuş* was frequently used by the subtitles for the protagonist Eric Cartman's cues when he curses on the people he dislikes. It is rendered for the word *asshole*, *butthole*, *asswipe*, *assface*, and *dumbass*. Therefore, the subtitlers preferred to substitute the words denoting the taboo bodily organs with another recreated lexeme that is used among homosexual and trans people in Türkiye.

(3) ST: ...when you catch your father jacking off in a gay men's bath house.  
TT: ...babanı *şorolo* hamamında çavuşu tokatlarken yakaladığımda.  
BT: . . . when you catch your father jerking off in a gay bath house.

The word *şorolo* is another *Lubunca* word referring to “passive homosexual male” (Aktunç, 2010, p. 273). The word derived from the Romani lexeme *şorolo* denotes “having a head/leader” (Kontovas, 2012, p. 7). Rather than using the loan *gay* or the literal rendering *eşcinsel* [lit. homosexual], the subtitlers resorted to the lexeme *şorolo* for the words *fag*, *gay*, *gay-ass*, *gaywad*, *queer*, and *queen*. Considering its denotation, it can be said that the use of *şorolo* is a literal rendering, except for resorting to it for the much more vulgar word *fag*. As with the word *labuş*, the toning down effect of *şorolo*, even if it is a literal rendering, comes from its unconventionality and non-standard usage.

(4) ST: Dude, girls are such fags.  
TT: Ahbap, kızlar feci *nonoş* oluyor ya.  
BT: Dude, girls are being terribly gay.

Another term used for rendering the insulting word *fag* is *nonoş*. The word is one of the Greek-derived *Lubunca* words, and it denotes “bottom, transvestite, effeminate gay man” (p. 8). Different from the two above-mentioned *Lubunca* words, *nonoş* is also used in standard Turkish as a derogatory term. Nevertheless, in terms of vulgarity level *ibne*, which is functionally the equivalent of the English words *fag* and *faggot*, is far more derogatory. Therefore, despite its derogation, *nonoş* was preferred as a euphemism by the subtitlers.

(5) ST: No, i'm teaching it how to bite someone's penis off.  
TT: Hayır, birinin *tingiş*ini koparmayı öğretiyorum.  
BT: No, I am teaching it how to bite off someone's penis.

(6) ST: Get off my ass, dickhole!  
TT: Çekil popomdan *bibiş* kafalı.  
BT: Get off my bottom, your penis head.

*Tingiş* and *bibiş*, exemplified in (5) and (6), are locally used words that are phonetically similar to some Greek-derived *Lubunca* words. The former is a lexeme used in the vicinity of the Antalya region that signifies “tiny, small” (Türk Dil Kurumu, n.d.a), while the latter means ‘penis’ in child language used in the Manisa region (Türk Dil Kurumu, n.d.b). According to Kontovas (2012, p. 15), the use of the morpheme *-oş/-uş* in *Lubunca* words, such as *nonoş* [gay], *homoş* [homosexual], *ibnoş* [fag], *malbuş* [Marlborro cigarette], etc., is an imitation of the Greek masculine singular nominative *-oç*. It can be said that the subtitlers have preferred to use the words *tingiş* and *bibiş*, ending with the

spread short vowel *i* and palato-alveolar fricative *-ş*, intentionally to maintain the phonetic effect of *Lubunca*. The effect is similar to *Lubunca* words; that is, with their non-standard characteristics in Turkish, the taboo content of literal renderings for the words *penis* and *wiener*, such as *sik* [dick], *çük* [penis], and *pipi* [penis], are toned down with the non-standard words *tingiş* and *bibiş*.

(7) ST: Huffing cat urine apparently causes a euphoric state and is also referred to as... cheesing.

TT: Kedi çışı koklamak öforiye neden oluyor. Diğer deyişle, "matizleştiriyor."

BT: Smelling cat urine causes euphoria. In other words, it makes you drunk.

(8) ST: You pieces of shit!

TT: Sizi *fışkı* parçaları!

BT: You pieces of shit!

*Lubunca* words and loanwords from other languages are not only used in the context of sexual insults. Another Romani-derived lexeme *matiz*, referring to 'drunk' (Kontovas, 2012, p. 7), was also preferred by the subtitlers in several cases. Even if using the standard Turkish adjective *sarhoş* [drunk] may not be taboo in TV subtitling, the subtitlers preferred to use the *Lubunca* word *matiz* as part of their intention to dispose a language variant that gives the impression that the characters in the show speak a different kind of language. Similarly, the Greek-derived lexeme *fışkı*, denoting feces, is substituted as a euphemism of the literal rendering *bok* [shit], another taboo word in Turkish TV subtitling. Both word choices by the subtitlers contribute to the eccentric use of language.

(9) ST: You wanna hold hands with a girl? Gaywad!

TT: Bir kızla mı el ele tutuşmak istiyorsun? *Hötöröf* müsün nesin!

BT: Do you want to hold hands with a girl? Are you gay?

(10) ST: I'm not just gay, I'm also a catamite.

TT: Ben sadece şorolo değilim, ayrıca bir de *kulamparayım*.

BT: I am not only gay, but also pederast.

Two other unconventional words referring to homosexuality are *hötöröf* and *kulampara*. The former, preferred for the ST word *gaywad*, is a coinage which was popularly used by Turkish magazines and newspapers as a homophobic insult in the 1970s and 1980s. Having a similar meaning to the ST vulgar word *catamite*, *kulampara* is an archaic word descending from Arabic and Persian, a blend of the lexemes *ğulām* [pederast in Arabic] and *bāre* [addict or hooked in Persian] (Nişanyan Sözlük n.d.).

The use of *Lubunca*, along with archaic and local lexemes, in the TV subtitles of *South Park* exemplifies an intralingual mode of translation, concealing on the one hand the vulgar and explicit language of the source text, and hijacking the viewers' attention, on the other hand, with the insertion of a queer language variety that is non-existent in the original script. It should also be noted that embedding the local queer slang variety into the overall homophobic discourse of the original text is a form of queering translation, in Baer and Kaindl's (2018) terms, whereby the praxis is transformed, intentionally or unintentionally, by disposing the role of circulating the queer in the receiving culture as a resistance both to the ST and target knowledge/power regimes.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusion

Considering the quantitative findings that concretely reveal the general tendency of TV subtitlers to conceal and tone down the taboo and offensive language of *South Park* stemming from its politically correct discursive-linguistic repertoire, one cannot deny the role of institutional policies in the target culture. Media companies and supervisory state institutions monitoring them in Türkiye have the Sword of Damocles in regulating the translation activities in the sense of what could appear on TV screens. Türkiye has a long tradition of euphemization of language on TVs. However, in the case of *South Park*, where any issue is handled with crudeness, profanity and vulgarity; media institutions and audiovisual translators as well become more alert about the taboo loads of subtitles. The TV subtitling activity handled in this study dates to the second half of the first decade in the new millennium when there were many signs of social transformation with the escalation of authoritarianism in the rule of the country. However, as the present study has attempted to reveal, translation activity under such repressive contexts may conversely be open to producing disruptive meanings due to the translator's high problem-solving creative effort. The translators' creativity resides in opting for using non-standard lexemes from a queer slang variety with an effort, on the one hand, to conceal the taboo content of the ST, and on the other hand to compensate for the loss of humor effect in TT.

Epstein's (2017) notion of 'acqueering' involves the translator's capability to "add in queer sexualities, sexual practices or gender identities or change straight/cis identities or situations to queer ones" (Epstein, 2017, p. 121). The point in

the present case is not that the original product has an inherent queer force transferred into the TL; on the contrary, the dialogic interactions, rendered by the TV subtitles with *Lubunca* lexemes, mostly exemplify quite a homophobic discourse which fulfills a phatic function in the characterization. This does not mean that the homophobic tone is excluded from the subtitles by using lexemes of a queer slang variety. However, the subtitles have recontextualized the ST discourse in such a way that sometimes the dialogic content gives the impression that the interlocutors belong to a queer community. From a queer perspective, this translational case points to producing a special “translation language”, based on a local queer slang variety, and foregrounding it in the TL as a standard style of speaking among teenagers. In this sense, this subtitling case is an intentional or unintentional production of a non-existent queer effect within the TL as a way of escaping the tensions of the source taboo language, rather than preserving the queer meaning potential of the ST.

Whether or not the ST has a subversive queer content, the catchy and eccentric texture of the subtitlers’ choices can be said to have generated a disruptive queer force in the TL. Toning down the source taboo and offensive language in subtitling, self-censorship suppresses and restricts any possible disruptive meanings of the ST, be it the force of freedom of speech or a queer effect. Nevertheless, the loss of the vulgar effect has been compensated for using *Lubunca* lexemes, which brought a novel subversive effect to the TT. This subversion does not necessarily derive from the transfer of same-sex sexual desire into the TT. Such a translation phenomenon would certainly have a deconstructive impact on the TV subtitling conventions, and on the conceptualisations of LGBT+ identities in Türkiye. What makes this subtitling case a disruptive attempt is that it contributed to the circulation of a special queer slang variety spoken by many sexually marginalized people in Türkiye through a popular TV show. Furthermore, along with the effect of toned-down language whereby the viewers have been protected from homophobic and vulgar expressions, the reproduction of this language variety can be said to have increased the visibility of queer identities among the viewers of *South Park* in Türkiye.

In the quantitative analysis, the effect of *Lubunca* lexemes such as *labuş*, *nonoş*, *şorolo*, etc. has been coded as ‘toning down’ since their commonly used counterparts in the standard Turkish are considered taboo in TV subtitling. It should be noted that the pragmatic effect of a linguistic variety depends on the community in which it is spoken. With the use of *Lubunca* lexemes in the subtitles, varied humoristic or social effects can ensue among viewers from different communities. Therefore, the humorous euphemistic language targeted at the general viewers can have a liberating effect for LGBT+ people, which can in turn trigger some social transformation. Leaving open such disruptive meaning possibilities, the TV subtitling of *South Park* in Türkiye is a case of queering translation. Whatever their motivation, either to censor a particular vulgarity on TV or to insert some queerness intentionally into the language of the show, the subtitlers created a queer effect that challenged the dominant understanding of non-normative sexualities in the target culture.

This study is notable in that it incorporates a queer perspective into equivalence-based descriptive research in AVT. Such a mixed research design can help unearth hidden meanings, particularly of sexuality, which might be overlooked in quantitative analyses based on categorization of translation choices according to conventional strategies. The critical standpoint of the queer translation perspective in this study has enabled us to unveil subversive meaning possibilities, stressing the moral fabric of the target culture at a specific point in time and on the disruptive practice of subtitlers under repressive conditions. In this sense, the strategy-based approaches to AVT built on the essential duality of ST and TT has also been queered in this study.

Further studies can explore *Lubunca*’s reception and the role of translated audiovisual products on this. With such a field study, we can gain a better insight into the effect of audiovisual translation on the changeability of viewers’ perceptions about non-normative sexuality. This study is based on a small corpus. More extensive research, with a larger dataset, that would investigate audiovisual translators’ perceptions about sexually related taboos in a specific period can reveal the general attitudes of translators in a more holistic way. The study did not focus on the effect of the gender or sexual identities of subtitlers. An analysis on this aspect of subtitling may also give further clues about translators’ moral limits regarding the involvement of this parameter in the translation process.

## Notes

1. I follow the taxonomy proposed by Ávila-Cabrera (2016a) since the subtitle samples extracted for the purposes of the study include swearwords, expletives, and invectives, which can be classified under offensive language; as well as sexual references based on bodily parts and homosexuality, which are considered taboo in the Turkish culture.
2. Gezi Park is situated in Taksim Square, İstanbul. It was built in 1940 as the first park of the city in the Republican Era by the initiative of the governor Lütfi Kırdar, after the Topcu Kışlası (Artillery Barracks of Taksim), a symbol

of the Period of Autocracy, was demolished. It was called “İnönü Gezisi” (İnönü’s Parade), making reference to İsmet İnönü -second president of the Turkish Republic, for a long time.

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