Subtitling taboo language: cueing audience experience through register and genre?

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This paper uses a French-English/English-French corpus to investigate the practice of subtitling taboo language along three main interrelated axes: i) the value of treating subtitles as an entire system; ii) the relationship between the specific film genre of social realism (depicting low socio-economic groups) and audience perceptions of taboo language use; and iii) discourse representations through register and its effect on characterization. An overarching theme is that of cues, both linguistic and visual which subtitlers might be expected to use, to trigger audience experience of representations of taboo language within what is a necessarily efficiently composed and highly stylised text. These cues are embedded in genre. The functions of taboo language and their transfer to the subtitle text are analysed and the practice of cueing audience experience of taboo language is identified. This practice will be shown to contribute to the finding that, in the genre of social realism (depicting low socio-economic groups), there is neither evidence that the choices made in the oral to written mode shift are subject to politeness restrictions nor that the choices have a homogenising/levelling effect on characterisation.

References

Guillot, M-N. (forthcoming [a]) ‘Film subtitles and the conundrum of linguistic and cultural representation: a methodological blind spot’ in Hauser, S. and Luginbuehl, M. (eds.) Contrastive Media Analysis (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins)