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CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN SWEARING: TRANSLATION OF POLISH CURSE WORDS INTO ENGLISH AND CHINESE BASED ON EXAMPLES FROM THE VIDEO GAME *THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT*

ABSTRACT

This study analyses cultural differences in Polish, English, and Chinese swearing and their impact on the translation of vulgarisms. The corpus comprises 102 swear words from *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (CD Projekt Red 2015): Polish and English dubbing and Chinese subtitles. The items were classified using four parameters, enabling the identification of correlations between swear word properties and translation strategies.

KEYWORDS: swear words, culture of swearing, *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, translation strategies, vulgarisms

STRESZCZENIE

Badanie analizuje różnice między polską, angielską i chińską kulturą przeklinania oraz ich wpływ na tłumaczenie wulgaryzmów. Korpus obejmuje 102 przekleństwa z gry *Wiedźmin 3: Dziki Gon* (CD Projekt Red 2015): polski i angielski dubbing oraz chińskie napisy. Jednostki sklasyfikowano według czterech parametrów, co umożliwiło identyfikację zależności między cechami przekleństw a strategiami tłumaczeniowymi.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: przekleństwa, kultura przeklinania, *Wiedźmin 3: Dziki Gon*, strategie tłumaczeniowe, wulgaryzmy



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INTRODUCTION

Research on Polish literature shows that swear words and vulgarity can be considered an added value for many texts, making them more unique and bringing the authors success (Fiedlerowa 2003), which is confirmed by the fame of *The Witcher* series by Andrzej Sapkowski. For many literary works, vulgarisms and swear words are unavoidable to convey their message. Their prevalence in everyday speech leads Poles to appreciate them in works of art. As a natural linguistic phenomenon, this type of expression is constantly renewed and evolving, demonstrating its continued usefulness and popularity. This seemingly contradicts the fact that swear words are considered taboo, but it is a natural contradiction in language and culture (Olszewska 2012). Swear words are perceived as customary – and in some contexts even necessary – for participation in banter, friendly interactions, humorous utterances, and sarcasm. They expand what one can express in ways unachievable for other words and phrases.

However, this stand on vulgarisms does not translate well into other cultures, as each one understands politeness differently and has other means of achieving it (Chen *et al.* 2025). Although the bad language employed in *The Witcher's* dialogues is socially acceptable and desirable in both Polish and English, the Chinese audience's reception would be different, as they pay closer attention to swearing. This poses a serious challenge for translation – whether to maintain the original vulgarity of the source text or to diminish it in the target text.

THE NOTION OF A SWEAR WORD

Maciej Grochowski argued that there are differences between the terms swear word and vulgarity (Zarzeczny, Mazurek 2009: 175). Swear words are lexical units used by speakers to spontaneously express their emotions towards something or someone without conveying any other information. However, the vulgarity would be an expression through which the speaker transfers their emotions while breaking a linguistic taboo. This study does not follow this distinction, analysing any terms considered a linguistic taboo, bad, offensive or highly charged language, which are an unavoidable part of everyday, informal communication (Abdelaal, Al Sarhani 2021). Therefore, hereafter, the terms *curse*, *swear word*, and *vulgarity* will be used interchangeably.

Swear words are a very active part of language, which constantly changes. Moreover, each language has its own individual manner of swearing. These properties hinder the translation process. For example, in Chinese, there are fewer swear words, and they are often written in disguised forms due to their taboo nature, which limits them primarily to semantic expression. In Polish, vulgarisms have more grammatical forms and syntactic roles, representing nearly any lexical category.

A significant number of its verbs, adjectives, nouns and adverbs have their more vulgar counterparts (Zarzeczny, Mazurek 2009), but in English and Chinese, this applies to a much narrower range. According to the study by Wu (2021), de-swea-ring, omission, and softening are more frequent than pragmatic equivalence while translating curses from English into Chinese. Therefore, there are cultural differences in expectations regarding their use and how the audience perceives them.

TYPES OF SWEAR WORDS

Swear words can be analysed from many angles, depending on the aim of the research. For this research paper, four classifications have been chosen: based on the strength, function, formal or semantic nature, and conflict level. Those classifications were employed to establish relationships between the nature of a swear word and the translation technique applied.

a) According to strength:

This classification draws on a piece of research by Koponen (2018) on swear word translation. Based on the British Board of Film Classification, and an original survey, they established a framework for classifying British and American swear words into five categories: very mild, mild, moderate, strong and very strong. Following their method, the author conducted similar surveys to classify vulgarisms found in the corpus. For the English examples, which were not included in the work by Koponen, the adequate label was assigned based on the research conducted by Ipsos MORI (2021) for Ofcom, which classified words as mild, moderate, or strong. As for Polish swear words, the strength classification was taken from the research by Szpyra-Kozłowska (2025: 59) and another survey The author conducted to complement it.

b) According to its function/purpose:

Table 1. Classifications of swear words according to their function.

Zhang, Mo (2025)	Chen <i>et al.</i> (2025)
Expulsive	Insulting/attacking
Abusive	
Derogatory	
Bantering	Group solidarity/identity marking
Expletive	Expressing emotion
	Emphasis/intensification
	Humor/sarcasm

The next division is based on research by Zhang and Mo (2025) and Chen *et al.* (2025), which classifies examples according to their purpose. Table 1 represents how their ideas could be correlated by similarities to create a joint classification. Additionally, the “admiration” category was introduced. As pointed out by Zarzeczny and Mazurek (2009), swear words are not only negative or neutral, but also positive, and they can be classified as such only based on the context. Finally, clear boundaries were defined between the non-mutually exclusive categories to ensure that each example received a single label, resulting in the following classification:

- expulsive – with-addressee swear words aimed at pushing away, silencing, or excluding the addressee. They express hostility or frustration, e.g. *fuck off*, *piss off*, *or get lost*, but this classification is very tone- and context-dependent; therefore, the same examples could be labelled as social or humorous;
- abusive – swear words produced to offend, scold, threaten, insult, psychologically harm or humiliate the addressee. For this study, it was decided that all the swear words included in threats would be classified as abusive, even if their function is to intensify another word. It is the same for swear words that are predicates in a sentence aimed to insult someone. Some examples from the corpus are: *chuju zlamany* (you broken dick) and 你這混蛋 (you bastard);
- derogatory – swearing to demean the addressee, reducing them to an animal, or an object, such as: *pijana świania* (drunken swine), or *zamknij pysk* (shut your hole);
- social – swearing customary for bantering, jesting, and ridicule, which is non-offensive and oftentimes reciprocal, e.g. *damn you* or *Gentlemen, you out of your fuckin' minds?*;
- expletive – a form of emotional expression, non-addressee, standalone exclamations, like *Oh fuck me...* or *damit*;
- emphatic – their function is “to amplify the force of a message or emphasise a point” ((Chen *et al.* 2025: 16), e.g. 他媽的什麼...? (The fuck you’ve just said?) and *brought fuck all*. The author decided to employ it only if the example cannot be classified as any of the other possible options. It also encompasses examples of using swear words as the predicate of the sentence (e.g., *zjebalem* [I fucked up]). This choice is motivated by the very nature of the swear words to intensify the utterance (e.g. to make an order firmer) and to be an outlet for emotions (to highlight the speaker’s anger, frustration, etc.), which is hardly a stand-alone category;
- humorous – swearing that aims to make the utterance humorous or sarcastic, meant to amuse the hearers or to make a joke, like *First ever barney with my prick hangin' out*;
- admiration – any swear words that are non-offensive and aim to express happiness, admiration, praise, or to applaud something, e.g., *the shit*, *zajebiście* (fucking great) or taken from the corpus: *Pięknie żeś ich rozpieldolił* (You’ve fucked them up nicely).

c) Formal vs. semantic classification:

The third classification included in this study as a potential variable influencing the translators' decision-making process was originally proposed by Maciej Grochowski (2008[2002]) (see Olszewska 2012: 128; Pycia 2012: 140). He decided to divide the swear words into "systemic" (*systemowe*) – words that are vulgar regardless of the context, solely because of their formal properties (e.g. *whore*, *bugger*, *arse*, *bloody*); and "referential-customary vulgarisms" (*wulgaryzm referencyjno-obyczajowy*), which are lexical units that are tabooed because of their semantic features (e.g. *fuck*, *prick*, *twat*, *shit*). They will later be referred to as respectively formal and semantic swear words.

d) Referential classification:

The last classification was also proposed by Zhang and Mo (2025). It was formulated on the presumption that swear words can be divided into two types: non-addressee (e.g., self-directed expletives) and with-addressee, based on whether the swear word has an explicit target. This classification marks the level of conflict those words can create. The levels go as follows:

- high-conflict – swear words that show intense aggression, targeting the addressee to harm or humiliate them (e.g. abusive or derogatory terms);
- low-conflict – terms creating milder tension, often playful or reciprocal (e.g. bantering);
- zero-conflict – denotes non-addressee swear words.

TRANSLATING SWEAR WORDS

Many researchers treated the classification of translation techniques as a universal division for all aspects of the translation process (Molina, Hurtado Albir 2002; Newmark 1988; Vinay, Darbelnet 1958/1995). However, a more functional approach is to tailor such classifications to specific areas of translation research. This is particularly relevant in the case of video game localisation, where translation is constrained by limitations of length and the range of available techniques. This method seems to prevail in swear words translation research, e.g. Abdelaal and Al Sarhani (2021), for their study, proposed the following translation techniques: retention (transfer of the swear word in its original or slightly naturalised form into the target text), specification, direct translation, generalisation, substitution, omission, rendering informal language into formal language, and rendering the ST items euphemistically. In contrast, Zhang and Mo (2025), in their study, used a much simpler classification: equivalence, euphemism, omission and substitution. Moreover, they further subdivided the last two into contextual and semantic variants.

For this study, it was decided to retain only six of the aforementioned techniques and slightly alter their definitions to match examples from the corpus. Although most

of them were developed for swear word translation, some classical strategies, such as generalisation and omission, were also included. They are as follows:

- specification – refers to cases where the translation is rendered more specific and where additional content is introduced. It differs from its original definition because it often lacks the function of clarifying or explaining. Example: *Pieprzony wid* (fucking spectre) → *a poloughin' drunken nightmare*;
- direct translation – word-for-word translation, either through a calque or a shift (in terms of grammar). Example: (...) *shit on your table* → 然後在你桌上拉屎;
- substitution – rendering a lexical item into a culturally equivalent one. This technique results in TT phrases of the same usage as the ST, but usually of different strength. Moreover, some examples were paraphrased to achieve a better experience for the target audience. To justify such a change, The author assumed that the translators made this choice to naturalise the utterance in the TT. Example: *Ze co kurwa?* → *You'll fucking what?*;
- generalisation – this strategy occurs when a term is translated into TT by a more general, broader one (a hypernym). Example: *Whorvire* → 妓院來的 (coming from the brothel);
- omission – instead of being translated, an ST term is omitted in the translation. Example: *What the fuck do you mean* → 你說什麼 (What did you say?);
- euphemism – replacement or rephrasing of impolite expressions that creates a milder translation, not necessarily to maintain politeness, as in the piece of research by Zhang and Mo (2025). Example: *Ja pierdolę* → *What the bloody hell?*

The opposite of euphemism – a paraphrase that strengthens the sentence – is not commonly recognised as a translation technique. In some cases, swear words from the ST were strengthened, or new ones were added in the TT. As this is not considered a distinct technique, such examples are classified here as specification (addition) or substitution. This approach assumes that increased vulgarity in the TT results from how native speakers perceive swear words in their language rather than from the translator's deliberate intention to intensify them. Translation techniques are typically classified according to the form of the TT, as the translator's intent can only be presumed. Nevertheless, the vulgarity of the ST may encourage translators to use stronger swear words to maintain a comparable level of vulgarity. In such cases, the aim is not lexical equivalence but equivalence in perceived offensiveness.

As found by Wu (2021), the techniques used for the translation of swear words may be dictated by the part of speech the swear words represent. For instance, although in English the word *fucking* could function as an adverb, Chinese lacks a direct equivalent. Wu also determined that omission was most often used for the translation of swear words, which were adjectives and de-swearing for those which were used as verbs, interjections or adverbs. In light of these findings, this issue is not examined further in the present study.

Although Newmark's (1988) translation techniques, such as compensation, paraphrase, and transposition, could be applied to address the above gaps, the corpus

suggests that they are not indispensable. Their use might facilitate classification and reveal additional correlations, but it could also obscure others, given that they were not developed specifically for the analysis of swear words.

Koponen (2018: 3) proposed a different classification consisting of five swear-word translation techniques: leaving them out, translating them as words of the same strength, omitting the entire sentence containing the swear word(s), strengthening them, and toning them down. A similar approach was adopted by Jiang and Doherty (2024) (Omission, De-swearing, Softening, and Pragmatic correspondence), who also argued that omission and softening lead to loss of meaning and function, while de-swearing and pragmatic correspondence contribute to their retention.

The classification used for this study is a blend of both proposed above:

- omission – when the sentence from the ST was directly translated with the omission of the swear word;
- toned down – this term refers to cases where a stronger swear word in the ST is translated into a milder expression in the TT. In some instances, the strength is reduced by only one level, while in others it is softened considerably, for example, from very strong to very mild, as in *Ożesz kurwa*, translated as *Bloody hell*. In certain cases, this may resemble de-swearing, although the reduction in vulgarity often results from cultural differences in perception rather than the translator's deliberate intention to soften the utterance;
- same strength – when ST and TT swear words maintain the same level of strength. Example: *Podrapię się po życi* (very mild) → *Scratch my arse* (very mild);
- strengthened – the opposite of toning down. Example: *trollop* (mild) → 蕩婦 (very strong);
- de-swearing – when the ST is paraphrased so that it no longer contains the swear word. It is important to note that the de-swearing technique differs from omission. The former is when, in place of a swear word, a non-vulgar term is used. The omission technique offers nothing in its place, erasing the vulgarism from the TT. Example: *Bloody understatement* → 豈止不高興! (More than unhappy).

METHODOLOGY

Previous studies on the translation of swear words have examined various strategies used to transfer vulgar language across cultures, as well as the cultural implications of such translations (Zhang, Mo 2025; Jiang, Dewaele 2024; Wu 2021). However, relatively little attention has been paid to the comparative analysis of the perceived level of vulgarity across different language versions of the same audiovisual work. Moreover, the relationship between the types of swear words and the translation techniques used for their transfer remains insufficiently explored, particularly in the context of multilingual game localisation. Therefore, this study

aims to answer three research questions: 1) What is the level of vulgarity of *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*'s Polish version, as well as its Chinese and English translations? 2) What do the swear words from each version say about all three cultures? 3) What correlations appear between the types of swear words and the translation techniques employed for their cultural transfer? To address these questions, two survey studies were conducted, along with an analysis of examples from the corpus based on the classifications described above.

The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt is a game developed by CD Projekt Red, released in 2015. It concludes the trilogy of games following the plot of books by Andrzej Sapkowski. Both books and games are well known for their dialogues rich in curses. They are a great value of the production, creating many jokes and materialising how the characters sound.

The corpus for this study consists of cutscene dialogues from one walkthrough of the main plot (excluding side quests), taken from the original 2015 Polish dubbing, its English dubbing, and the Chinese subtitles in Traditional Mandarin. Cutscenes were chosen over active gameplay dialogues or the so-called “barks” by the NPCs, as they are experienced by a larger portion of players and are therefore typically more polished and widely recognised, while barks – being more loosely tied to animation – are easier to translate and do not present the same level of difficulty. The total duration of the material is 16.5 hours of dialogues in each language. Although later simplified Mandarin subtitles and even Chinese dubbing were added to the production, this study focused on the primary version created alongside other translations and initially introduced to the public. The corpus encompasses conversations that take place in different locations, situations and between various social groups and races. This research sample was investigated in search of Polish curses and their translations. 102 Polish swear words were found in the corpus, 84 English ones (some added through specification), and 69 Chinese ones. Those 102 words and their translations constitute the research sample investigated in this study.

The study design combines qualitative and quantitative corpus analysis with a questionnaire study to assess the level of vulgarity and examine how swearword types and translation techniques reflect cultural influence, as well as the relationships between these categories.

The questionnaire, designed to determine the strength of Chinese swear words, contained 51 questions and was distributed to 50 randomly selected Chinese students majoring in English translation. This group was chosen to ensure that participants were native speakers of Chinese with a wide knowledge of English. Of the 38 respondents, 92% were aged 18–24, and over 90% were female, as established in the first two questions. When asked to rate their exposure to English-language media on a scale from 1 (none) to 5 (very frequent), the average score was 2.4. Two subsequent questions involved comparing Chinese and English swearing cultures. The results indicated that participants perceived the level of swearing in both cultures as similar, although they agreed that Chinese media contains relatively few curses. In the final question inviting additional comments, respondents noted that although

swearing can serve as an emotional outlet, it is still generally considered rude and therefore uncomfortable. Out of 69 examples of Chinese swear words found in the corpus described above, there were 45 different ones. They were classified by the participants on the scale from 0 (not a swear word) to 5 (very strong swear word) and arranged in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Classification of Chinese swear words according to strength

Not a swear word	$0 < 0.6$	天
Very mild	$0.6 \leq 1.6$	爛醉如泥, 你的嘴, 破銅爛鐵, 痛苦
Mild	$1.6 \leq 2.6$	拉屎, 笨蛋, 地獄, 癢, 尿出來, 撒泡尿, 鬼話, 可惡, 屁股, 罪大惡極, 瘋話, 酒鬼,
Moderate	$2.6 \leq 3.6$	把馬子, 蠢蛋, 鳥事, 去你的, 智障, 怪胎, 快滾, 鄉巴佬, 老糊塗, 屁眼, 妓院, 狗屁, 混蛋, 該死, 尿
Strong	$3.6 \leq 4.5$	去死吧, 操, 混帳東西, 王八蛋, 嫖, 流氓, 他媽總, 他媽的,
Very strong	$4.5 \leq$	賤貨, 婊子, 上(女子), 蕩婦, 狗娘養,

A similar study has been conducted for Polish swear words that were not included in the study by Szpyra-Kozłowska (2025). Participants were recruited using convenience sampling. The survey was distributed online through a public post containing a link to the questionnaire on a social media platform (Facebook). Participation was voluntary, and respondents self-selected to take part in the study. The study included 45 participants, all of whom were native speakers of Polish. The majority of respondents were female (67%). Most participants (78%) were between 18 and 24 years old, while the remaining respondents were older. The results of the questionnaire were compiled in Table 3.

There were no additional surveys conducted for English native speakers, as the literature review proved sufficient and encompassed all the necessary examples. Table 4 summarises how all the examples analysed in the study were classified (Koponen 2018: 27, 45; Impos MORI 2021). It represents 84 instances of curses found in the corpus of this study, but it includes only 22 distinct items, as many of them occur repeatedly.

Table 3. Classification of Polish swear words according to strength (results of the supplementary survey)

Very mild	$0.6 \leq 1.6$	<i>świnia, rzyć, dupa, łajza, łajdaczyć się, wywłoka, parszywy, trędowaty, cham, baran, cymbał, tłuk, staruch, wychędożyć</i>
Mild	$1.6 \leq 2.6$	<i>spieprzyć, pysk</i>
Moderate	$2.6 \leq 3.6$	<i>ścierwo</i>
Strong	$3.6 \leq 4.5$	<i>skurwiel, zjeb</i>

Table 4. A scale of offence of English swear words found in the corpus

Very mild	<i>arse, ass, bloody, damit, damn, hell, piss off, piss</i>
Mild	<i>cock, cocksuckin', bullshit, prick, shit, sod, trollop,</i>
Moderate	<i>bastard, twat, whore, whoreson</i>
Strong	<i>fuck, goatfucker,</i>
Very strong	<i>cunt</i>

All the examples were classified according to their strength by assigning them a value ranging from very mild (1) to very strong (5). The overall strength of the Polish source text scored 362 (~ 3.5 average), the English translation 223 (2.6), and the Chinese version 229 (3.3). This demonstrates that, according to the surveys mentioned above, curses in the English version are significantly less vulgar than those in the other two versions. Those differences can be attributed to the fact that in the English TT, significantly fewer words are classified as strong or very strong; there are just 3 of them: *fuck*, *cunt* and *goatfucker*, while in Polish, there are 5 very strong swear words and 7 strong ones. Similarly, in Chinese, there are 5 very strong swear words and 8 strong ones. Moreover, English has only abusive strong swear words, which further narrows their usage. Therefore, English-speaking audiences may not perceive swear words as being as strong as they are in Chinese and Polish cultures.

In all versions, approximately one-third of the swear words were classified as strong (Table 5). Polish stands out for having the highest proportion of very strong swear words, whereas Chinese shows a higher concentration of moderately strong ones. This primarily constitutes their strength, whereas English loses it by employing mild and very mild taboo terms for nearly half of its examples.

The majority of the swear words identified in the corpus were abusive or emphatic. As shown in Table 5, the Polish and English curses were classified almost identically. In the Chinese corpus, abusive swear words predominated, emphatic and humorous items occurred in comparable proportions, while derogatory terms were largely absent or not perceived as swear words by the audience. However, this translation contained the highest number of expulsive swear words (5), compared with only 3 in both Polish and English. An admiration swear word appeared only in the ST and was a subject of deswearing in the TTs. The humorous category was the best preserved, remaining at a similar level across all three languages.

Table 5 illustrates discrepancies in the translation process; ideally, equal values would indicate a one-to-one translation, while deviations suggest intercultural differences in swearing. It shows that in the Chinese version, many emphatic and all derogatory and admiration swear words were omitted or rendered emphatically. While the English version was closer to the original, it offered more expletive curses and fewer abusive and emphatic ones, preferring less vulgar terms of offence.

The perceived strength of a swear word is determined by native speakers within a given culture. Consequently, its equivalents in other languages may be judged as

Table 5. Types of swear words by language

	English – 84	%	Polish – 102	%	Chinese – 69	%
Very mild	22	26.19	14	13.73	2	2.90
Mild	19	22.62	18	17.65	13	18.84
Strong	30	35.71	26	25.49	23	33.33
Very strong	2	2.38	38	37.25	8	11.59
Abusive	28	33.33	36	35.29	35	50.72
Expulsive	3	3.57	3	2.94	5	7.25
Expletive	12	14.29	10	9.80	7	10.14
Humorous	9	10.71	12	11.76	8	11.59
Emphatic	27	32.14	34	33.33	13	18.84
Derogatory	1	1.19	2	1.96	0	0
Social	4	4.76	4	3.92	1	1.45
Admiration	0	0	1	0.98	0	0.00
Formal	46	54.76	54	52.94	0	0
Semantic	38	45.24	48	47.06	69	100
Non-addressee	41	48.81	48	47.06	27	39.13
With-addressee	43	51.19	54	52.94	42	60.87
High-conflict	31	36.90	42	41.18	39	56.52
Low-conflict	12	14.29	12	11.76	3	4.35
Zero-conflic	41	48.81	48	47.06	27	39.13

stronger or weaker. In Chinese culture (as indicated by the questionnaire), swearing is considered highly vulgar; therefore, Chinese equivalents of curses from other languages are often perceived as stronger. The opposite occurs when the Polish term *kurwa* is translated into English as *fuck*, which is perceived as milder and suggests a higher tolerance for expulsive swear words in English-speaking cultures.

In the Chinese language, there were only semantic swear words, whereas in Polish and English, the ratio between semantic and formal swear words was nearly identical (Table 5). A similar pattern was observed for with-addressee and non-addressee swearing. However, in Chinese, the ratio was not around 50-50, but 61% with-addressee to 39% non-addressee category. This is because most instances

of omission and de-swearing (Fig. 1) involved non-abusive items (abusive forms account for 65% of with-addressee examples); as a result, the proportion of with-addressee swearing remained relatively stable while non-addressee forms declined. This also results in a similar distribution for the classification by level of conflict,

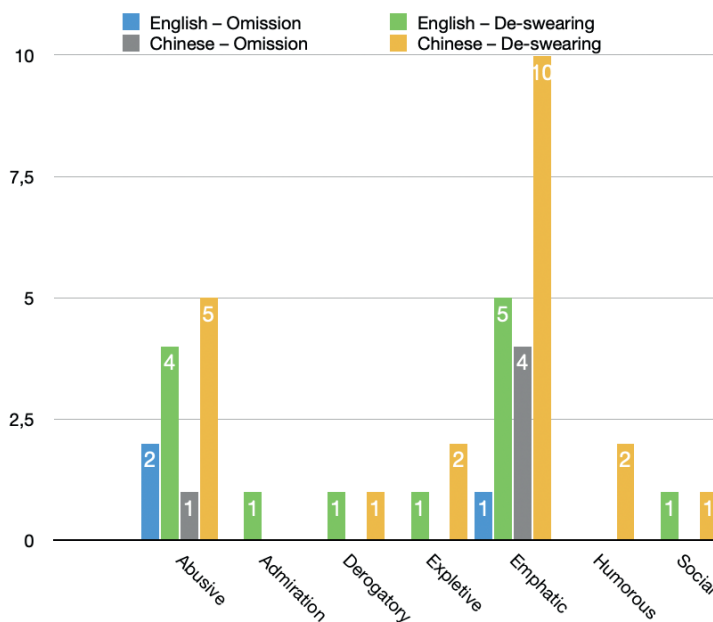


Figure 1. Omission and de-swearing by swear word's function and language

Table 6. Translation techniques by direction

	Pl → Eng (102)	%	Eng → Cn (84)	%
Specification	6	5.88	2	2.38
Direct translation	16	15.69	12	14.29
Generalisation	0	0	2	2.38
Substitution	59	57.84	36	42.86
Omission	3	2.94	5	5.95
Euphemism	18	17.65	27	32.14
Omission	3	2.94	5	5.95
Toned down	59	57.84	13	15.48
Same strength	24	23.53	18	21.43
Strengthened	3	2.94	27	32.14
De-swearing	13	12.75	21	25

as the two divisions are closely linked together. However, some examples were stylised to reflect medieval language, e.g. in the source text, *ploughing* is used as a synonym for *fucking* (9 times). Up to the twentieth century, the word was indeed used as slang for sexual intercourse. Although it aligns with the game's style, it was never a swear word, and it cannot be ranked as such, as there are no contemporary native speakers who would assign it a position on a strength scale. Therefore, this translation was marked as a case of de-swearing and may constitute the majority of its examples.

Analysing English translations of the original 102 examples into Chinese would only obscure the findings, as the English version contains only 84 swear-word instances. The classification by function revealed that, for both translations, the majority of employed techniques were substitution, euphemism, and direct translation (Table 6), all of which help maintain a comparable level of vulgarity. Polish to English translation did not require any generalisation, and only 3% of examples were omitted, compared to English to Chinese translation: 6% omitted, 2% specified, and 2% generalised. The similar average strength of Polish and Chinese swear words is reflected in the strength-related techniques employed. In the English translation, 58% of the examples were toned down, 24% retained the same strength, and 13% involved de-swearing. Whereas, in the Chinese version, 32% of the examples were strengthened (compared with 3% in the opposite direction), while 21% retained the same strength, 15% were toned down, and 25% involved de-swearing.

For the analysis of correlations between categories of vulgarisms and translation techniques, it is important to remember that some of them will be directly linked, e.g. de-swearing, rendering emphatically, and omission techniques cannot go with the same strength and strengthening techniques, omission can be used only with omission, and abusive terms will always be with-addressee and of high-conflict.

Firstly, as presented in Table 6, the most frequent translation techniques for English to Chinese direction were substitution and strengthening. Secondly, de-swearing was usually applied for very mild and some mild swear words, whereas omission was preferred for strong and very strong ones. Those two techniques were also mainly used for derogatory, emphatic and humorous terms. Other humorous swears, some expletive and all expulsive ones, were subject to substitution. There is also a similarity between derogatory and emphatic swear words, which were the most frequently rendered emphatically. Finally, there were no cases of low-conflict swear words being toned down.

In the translation from Polish to English, there were fewer strong correlations. The toned-down technique was the most frequently used throughout the corpus, mainly for expletive (70% of its examples) and emphatic (67%) swear words. When juxtaposed with the strength classification, it was the most prominent for very mild (57%) or very strong swear words (81%). Admiration and derogatory ones were subject to either de-swearing or toning down. Similarly, humorous and expulsive ones were usually left at the same level of strength, less often toned down.

Expulsive ones were always subject to substitution, which was also popular for admiration, empathic, expletive, expulsive and social swear words. For derogatory and humorous ones, it was employed for less than half the examples, and for abusive ones, for less than the average. Derogatory terms were always directly translated. Strong swear words were subject to substitution in around 85% of cases (other than that, the stronger the vulgarism, the higher the ratio of substitutions). Direct translations seem to be used more frequently for mild and very mild examples (accounting for one-third of them) and for abusive, derogatory and humorous ones (30% of cases).

DISCUSSION

Chinese swearing culture (as reflected by the corpus) operates within a restricted taboo scale, because high-intensity vulgarity is culturally unacceptable in many Chinese contexts, especially in public or mass-media discourse. However, there prevails a preference for domestication of the swear words rather than erasing them, by using cultural equivalents, even though it elevates the level of profanity.

The lack of formal swear words means the culture does not prohibit the act of swearing, but lacks certain linguistic forms, forcing speakers to achieve the same effect by other means. Mandarin swear words consist of characters that have different, neutral meanings, and only when combined do they form swear words, purely depending on the context. The near absence of very mild swearing suggests that weak, casual profanity is not frequent in Chinese.

In Polish, swearing is very strong, flexible, and multifunctional. It allows a broader range of possibilities, which English often cannot mirror directly. Many Polish vulgarisms function as emotional intensifiers rather than insults. The frequent substitution of Polish vulgarisms leads to a visible decrease in the TT's strength, as it uses very strong language for everyday situations, unlike English culture. Polish swearing is often stronger than what English norms comfortably allow. English equivalents can match the function but rarely the intensity. This language is more tolerant of swearing than Chinese, but less tolerant of high-intensity vulgarity than Polish. English culture allows swearing but expects pragmatic control: it should be motivated, situational, and not excessive. However, for some categories, there were not enough examples (e.g. admiration) to draw strong conclusions.

LIMITATIONS

Many researchers, for example, Shek and Lin (2017) or Jiang and Dewaele (2024), conducted a study on differences in the usage of curse words. They discovered that Chinese women and older generations are less likely to swear. Therefore,

discrepancies in cursing depend on the gender, age, and cultural background of the speaker. Moreover, they proved that swearing intensifies over the years, which produces further limitations to this piece of research, as any previous studies on the topic could be outdated by the time of writing this article.

Further limitations of this study involve classifications based on questionnaires, which did not have equal numbers of representatives of various ages, genders, and dialects among the responders, nor were they conducted at the same time. Nor did some of the surveys have a sufficient number of participants to be representative of the whole culture. Finally, as noted by Wu (2021), swear words are used differently in written and oral language, which places dialogues performed from a written script as a complex translation source text. Moreover, although the sample encompasses swear words from different settings and situations, they were written by the same team of writers, which limits their diversity.

CONCLUSION

Translation techniques are not neutral: some are structurally tied to certain swear-word types. Substitution and strengthening were the most frequent overall in English-to-Chinese translation. In this direction, very mild/mild swears were usually de-swearing and strong/very strong swears were often omitted, especially when they were derogatory, emphatic, or humorous. The function of the vulgarism also proved relevant, as humorous swears, some expletives, and all expulsive ones were derogatory. Emphatic swears behaved very similarly, but were most often rendered emphatically, and low-conflict swears were never toned down.

The Polish to English direction showed weaker correlations, largely driven by the culture's approach to swearing, which resulted in a tendency to tone down the examples. However, some types of swear words were toned down more often (expletive and emphatic ones), while others had a higher percentage of de-swearing (admiration and derogatory categories). Moreover, humorous and expulsive swears were usually kept at the same strength. It showed avoidance for both extremes by toning down mainly very mild and very strong swear words. Expulsive swears were always substituted, but this technique was less common for derogatory, humorous and abusive vulgarisms. Substitution was mainly used for strong swears, while direct translation was used for milder examples. This shows the proximity between the two cultures in terms of the mannerism of swearing and differences in the perception of their strength.

In conclusion, translators respond differently to pragmatic function (abusive, emphatic, humorous, expulsive) and cultural tolerance for profanity. The strength translation techniques depended more on cultural differences in allowing swearing.

Also, the analysis reveals correlations between types of swear words and the translation techniques employed, shaped by cultural differences between the source

and target languages. However, no fixed rules can be established that would apply universally to all translations. Nevertheless, examining the relationship between source- and target-text vulgarisms provides valuable insights into the norms and values of both cultures.

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