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Article abstract

This study seeks to understand the origins and reasons behind the grammar and style guidelines elaborated by Brazilian broadcasters and video producers and applied to the translated subtitles of cable television shows. The language of the translation is often controlled, and coarse or scatological vocabulary tends to be curbed or avoided, among other restrictions. Brazil was under a military regime from 1964 to 1985, when the media was subjected to strict censorship. Could it be that this heritage still casts a shadow over current policies applied to audiovisual translation (AVT)? To approach this issue, this study outlines the history of censorship applied to content and language during the Brazilian military regime, describes the evolution of the AVT industry in the context of cable television in Brazil, and finally conveys first-hand insights and experiences on language control by quality control professionals. The ultimate goal is to bring these rulemaking processes to light, in an attempt to help improve the dialogue between end clients and service providers, for the benefit of the viewers.

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Quality Standards or Censorship? Language Control Policies in Cable TV Subtitles in Brazil

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RÉSUMÉ

La présente étude cherche à comprendre les origines et les raisons qui sous-tendent les guides de grammaire et de style mis au point par les chaînes de télévision et les studios de vidéo brésiliens et appliqués aux sous-titres traduits pour les émissions de télévision par câble. Entre autres contraintes, la traduction est souvent contrôlée et le vocabulaire vulgaire ou scatologique tend à être édulcoré ou évité. Le Brésil a vécu sous un régime militaire de 1964 à 1985, période pendant laquelle les médias ont fait l'objet d'une censure sévère. Cet héritage se reflète-t-il encore dans les orientations actuelles appliquées à la traduction audiovisuelle (TAV) ? Afin d'aborder cette question, l'étude retrace l'histoire de la censure appliquée au contenu et au langage durant la dictature militaire brésilienne, elle décrit l'évolution du secteur de la TAV dans le contexte de la télévision par câble au Brésil, pour présenter ensuite des réflexions et des expériences de première main sur le contrôle de la langue par les spécialistes du contrôle de la qualité. L'objectif est de révéler les processus sous-tendant l'élaboration de règles et d'aider à l'amélioration du dialogue entre les clients finals et les prestataires de services au profit des spectateurs.

ABSTRACT

This study seeks to understand the origins and reasons behind the grammar and style guidelines elaborated by Brazilian broadcasters and video producers and applied to the translated subtitles of cable television shows. The language of the translation is often controlled, and coarse or scatological vocabulary tends to be curbed or avoided, among other restrictions. Brazil was under a military regime from 1964 to 1985, when the media was subjected to strict censorship. Could it be that this heritage still casts a shadow over current policies applied to audiovisual translation (AVT)? To approach this issue, this study outlines the history of censorship applied to content and language during the Brazilian military regime, describes the evolution of the AVT industry in the context of cable television in Brazil, and finally conveys first-hand insights and experiences on language control by quality control professionals. The ultimate goal is to bring these rule-making processes to light, in an attempt to help improve the dialogue between end clients and service providers, for the benefit of the viewers.

MOTS-CLÉS/KEYWORDS

traduction audiovisuelle, sous-titrage, politiques linguistiques, contrôle de qualité, histoire
audiovisual translation, subtitling, language policies, quality control, history

1. Introduction

Television viewers in Brazil, especially those who subscribe to cable channels, watch a great deal of foreign programming which is often subtitled in Portuguese. Many of these viewers notice that the language used in the translated captions is restricted in many aspects, and not just due to space or time constraints. The language tends to

be toned down, to use higher register than informal oral dialogue, and to avoid or curb coarse or scatological language. Subtitlers who work with these materials have to follow detailed guidelines and style manuals. They are aware that their clients who are more concerned with quality also tend to be very strict about the linguistic and stylistic policies adopted.

Such language control often frustrates both translators and viewers who sometimes complain in informal circles such as internet blogs or forums. While viewers may consider the translations too conservative, patronising or simply wrong, translators usually justify the final results by claiming that the channels or broadcasters *censor* their translations. In practice, however, not much is done to change this situation or even to understand the reasons behind these policies. The quality of the subtitles broadcast by the leading cable TV channels in Brazil is arguably very good; translators go on translating and viewers go on watching. And, to the best of my knowledge, there are no academic attempts to investigate how grammar and style guidelines are elaborated.

I have been interested for quite a while in examining where this originates and how the decision-making process works. For instance, why does one channel strictly prohibit the use of scatological language (*shit*, for instance) in a reality show where this type of language is used clearly offensively in the original (other characters in the show look shocked, but the Brazilian viewers need to be spared), while the same channel allows scatological language to be used in a reality show with educational purposes – granted this show is preceded by a disclaimer warning about the use of explicit language? Questions like this, based on issues I have faced in my work, fuelled my motivation for this research.

I play a double role in this niche of AVT and experience language control policies in different ways: as a service provider for video producers for over a decade, and more recently as an educator, teaching subtitling and preparing specialised translators to work in this field. Thus, I both am subject to these policies and enforce them. Cable television is my object of study here partly because since 2001 it has been one of my principal fields of work as a translator, through which I have had contact with the leading players in the market and where a good portion of my students begin their careers as audiovisual translators. One of my regular end clients in the past decade is one of those large broadcasters, besides many video producers. For this paper, I have spoken directly with the quality control professionals involved in rule-making in order to bring these processes to light and hopefully help improve the dialogue between end clients and service providers, ultimately benefiting the viewers.

This subject will be approached from two perspectives. One is more historical and political, outlining the evolution of the official control over content and language enforced by the censorship during the Brazilian military regime (1964-1985). This perspective intends to assess whether this heritage could somehow still cast a shadow over current policies applied to AVT. The other is more closely related to the AVT industry in the context of cable television in Brazil. It includes its organizational structure, content and programming, target audiences, grammar and style guidelines, and the professional relationship among translators, video producers and broadcasters,[1] as well as feedback from the target audience. This perspective highlights the role of quality control professionals and draws on their first-hand insights and experiences.

My main goal is to discern whether these two perspectives can influence the language control policies behind the subtitles broadcast by cable television channels in Brazil today. Can it be that we still adhere to an authoritarian censorship heritage and still reproduce some form of (self)censorship? My position is that quality control guidelines, however strict, cannot be equated to censorship, and at the onset of this investigation I set off to dispel this association once and for all. My conclusion, however, differs slightly from my expectations.

First a brief historical context about the military regime and censorship in Brazil is provided. In section 3 I outline the history of cable television in Brazil and describe the evolution of the quality standards adopted for subtitling. In section 4 I summarise answers received from quality control professionals to questions about linguistic guidelines for subtitles, and in the last section I attempt to integrate all this information.[2]

2. A Bit of Modern Brazilian History

In 1960, Brazilians elected Jânio Quadros as President of the country in the last direct election for almost 30 years. Facing strong opposition in the congress, Quadros resigned only seven months after his inauguration, in 1961. His vice-president, João Goulart, was too leftist for the comfort of the congress and armed forces. The compromise solution adopted was a temporary parliamentary system in which Goulart had more limited executive power. The following years saw increasing social mobilisation, including union movements and demands for rural reform. Left-wing parties grew larger and stronger, and party antagonism was exacerbated. A plebiscite held in 1963 restored the presidential form of government and Goulart took office as President, with increasing opposition.

In the midst of growing political, economic and social turmoil heightened by controversial measures taken by Goulart, in April 1964 the military seized power. From 1964 to 1968, a number of decrees were issued to strengthen and secure executive power. Political rights were suspended, strikes became illegal, political parties ceased to exist, and any opposition was repressed with increasing violence. Subsequent presidents were appointed by the congress through indirect vote. A new constitution was approved in 1967, emphasising measures for national security. In the critical year of 1968, as social opposition became more violent, another decree closed the congress and, among other highly authoritarian measures, put the media under strict censorship. This measure marks the beginning of the harshest period of the military regime, the so-called *plumb years*, which lasted until around 1976. The two last military presidents, Gals. Ernesto Geisel and João Baptista Figueiredo, slowly restored democratic rights and freedoms, culminating with the indirect election of the first civilian president in 21 years – Tancredo Neves – in 1985 (Fausto 1999).

Given the secretive nature of the Censorship Division, it is difficult to discover exactly how it operated. Soares (1988)[3] offers a detailed account of its impact on the media. Until 1968, influential media organisations were the target of unofficial coercive measures but when censorship became official and widespread, the military began by occupying a number of pressrooms and media facilities, and arresting opposing individuals. Within a few weeks, most newspapers, magazines, radio and television broadcasters either sided with resident censors in their teams to approve

the content to be published or agreed to self-censorship policies. In 1970, a decree stipulated that any institutions not complying with self-censorship policies had to submit to *previous censorship* procedures and send their content for approval by the Censorship Division at Brasilia, the national capital. Throughout the years, many organisations were closed, succumbing either to political pressure or lack of funds to comply with all the required measures.

As for content, according to Soares (1988, see note 3) most of the prohibitions sought to protect the state and focussed on information on internal affairs, repressive measures, opposition activities, and social and economical problems. However, throughout the 1970s, a larger proportion of other, more general topics was restricted as well. The censors, estimated at about 400 individuals in the mid-1970s, were usually civilians with degrees in Law, Philosophy, Sociology, Social Communication or Psychology further trained by the Federal Police, and their role was considered to be a moral rather than merely political one. However, the military publicly associated the right-wing order with good, traditional morals against leftist moral decay.

In the case of TV, entertainment content was not heavily affected so long as not political in nature. The most popular channels adopted self-censorship to be allowed to continue with their regular activities. To avoid the hassle and cost of the previous censorship procedures or having shows cancelled, many organisations adopted an excessively cautious approach, applying strict self-censorship. According to Soares (1988, see note 3), people felt a general sense of fear during those years – of being subjected to expensive and bureaucratic approval procedures, of having their business shut down, of being considered subversive and facing serious consequences – which led many professionals and media organisations to multiply the effects of censorship through self-regulation. This would have long-lasting effects on mass media as a whole in Brazil.

Foreign content broadcast on television had been dubbed since before the coup. In 1962, a decree (Brazil, 1962)[4] had established, among other regulations regarding films and commercials on TV, that all foreign films broadcast by television channels must be dubbed into Portuguese. In 1978, President Geisel passed a law that was amended by President Figueiredo (Brazil, 1981)[5] and updated in 1983, whereby TV channels were obliged to broadcast at least one foreign film per week with the original audio and translated subtitles. The subtitled films had to be sent to Brasilia 45 days before the broadcast date, and the Culture Ministry would then approve or reject them. The law stated that subtitles must be clear and legible, use language that could be easily understood, be correct in terms of spelling and grammar rules, and avoid the *abusive* use of slang.

The Amnesty Law, whereby political prisoners and those in exile were pardoned along with officers involved in the dictatorship apparatus, including torturers, was approved in 1979, but the law amended by Figueiredo in 1983 explicitly refers to censorship. It appears that the Censorship Division became more tolerant, and its activities were gradually reduced prior to the approval of a new constitution in 1988, which textually grants full freedom of intellectual and artistic expression and prohibits any type of censorship. Since then, the term *censorship* has become almost taboo in Brazil, as well as other words and practices reminiscent of the *plumb years*.

3. Subtitling in Cable Television in Brazil

3.1. Background

Brazil has always been an extensive importer of foreign culture, especially in the 20th century in the form of translated books and films. Subtitling arrived in Brazil with the dissemination of cinema, evolving technically and formally along with the new technologies – television, home video, cable television, DVD, and now digital and on-demand services.

Subtitling has always shared air time with dubbing and is the predominant form of translation in movie theatres while dubbing has been prevalent in television (Araújo 2000; Carvalho 2005). Theatrical cinema has been commonly associated with the financial and intellectual elite, whereas TV became a popular medium, broadcasting for the general population and being considered an educational resource to some extent. In addition, there is a well-known relationship between subtitles and literacy (Díaz Cintas 2008), which probably is a strong reason behind the 1962 decree mentioned in the previous section.

The scenario of cinema and open TV has not changed significantly in Brazil in the last few decades. On the one hand, cinema circuits target the upper classes that can afford it and show a large majority of foreign titles. According to Brazil's National Cinema Agency, Ancine (2010a),[6] in 2009 a higher number of Brazilian titles were released and attracted more viewers than in previous years, comprising around 40% of the total titles released throughout the year. Nonetheless, US titles accounted for over 80% of the number of copies, theatres, public and revenue. On the other hand, open television channels occupy over 90% of their air time with shows other than films; of these films, only 14% of the feature titles broadcast in 2009 were Brazilian, with an overwhelming majority of foreign titles (Ancine 2010b).[7] Television is a major cultural force in Brazil, reaching virtually every household and promoting national identity through a variety of national content, notably news, sports, soap operas, and variety shows. Neither open television nor the cinema circuit has seen a significant rise in the number of titles shown; they have not increased the average demand for translation services or specialized translators, or promoted major changes in technologies or methodologies regarding AVT.

Cable television, however, has been increasing and evolving rapidly since its inception. According to Nascimento (2007),[8] subscription services began in 1988 through state-owned broadcasting organisations, being the object of successive regulations in the following years, as the range and scope of the services offered and the number of market players increased. In 1995, authorised private companies were allowed to explore the services. In the 2000s, the share of foreign capital participation in the sector was increased to up to 30%. It is worth mentioning that most of the regulation on cable television deals with a range of technical and commercial issues rather than content and its translation, which is not mandatory. Evidently, this is left to the discretion of each broadcaster.

Regarding the number of viewers, research methodologies vary and it is difficult to estimate figures, but there were roughly 3.5 million subscribers in 2000 (Nascimento 2007, see note 8) and six million in 2009 (Ancine 2010c;[9] Ancine 2010d[10]), which accounts for roughly 3% of the Brazilian population. *Subscriber* does not necessarily mean *viewer*, since it usually refers to a household. Although a proportionally small

percentage of the population subscribes to cable services, the cable TV sector was responsible for almost 29% of the revenue for the Brazilian audiovisual market in 2008, over twice as much as that of cinema and home video combined and almost half the revenue generated by open TV (Ancine 2010e[11]). Therefore, it plays a significant role in the Brazilian audiovisual market.

Most broadcasters control groups of cable channels dedicated to different genres and a small number of large broadcasters competes for most of the viewers. There are currently close to 90 foreign and 30 Brazilian cable television channels in Brazil (Ancine 2010c; Ancine 2010d, see notes 9 and 10). Cable channels tend to be more specialised than open TV channels regarding genres and topics. Some are exclusively dedicated to either news, sports, feature films or television series, for instance. The majority of the content is foreign, especially in the case of channels dedicated to series and films, which can broadcast up to 100% of foreign programming (Ancine 2010e, see note 11). Ancine (2010f)[12] monitored the programming of 12 channels dedicated primarily to feature films during 2009, six of them foreign and six Brazilian, including one specialised in Brazilian cinema. They broadcast over 93,000 hours of programming, 90% of those with foreign content. It is a thriving industry, with huge demand for specialised translation services, and constantly evolving to improve productivity and quality and to absorb new technologies.

Dubbing and subtitling are the types of AVT most commonly used in cable TV; closed captions or teletext for the hearing impaired, voiceover, narration, and the interpretation of live shows are also used depending on the genres and the interactive technologies available.[13] With the exception of children's programming, which is always dubbed, the choice of translation type varies. Some channels dub all or most of their shows, some prefer subtitles, and some combine these and other forms of translation according to the genre or schedule. It is not uncommon to come across the same feature film on different channels, subtitled in one and dubbed in another, or even translated and subtitled by different companies. Since each channel or broadcaster acquires the translation rights for their own use, a same title will most likely be translated multiple times if broadcast in multiple channels.

It is important to note that not all cable channels are translated and some broadcast their programming in the original language. Also, not all channels are translated in Brazil. Some are broadcast directly from other countries and are translated abroad. I have provided services to and am familiar with the quality standards and controls of the leading producers, broadcasters and channels based in Brazil. As I will describe in more detail, they have been constantly increasing their quality standards at many levels. However, some foreign channels that do their translation abroad, despite their high audience ratings, are often the object of complaints from critics and viewers in formal and informal media due to technical and linguistic issues that range from missing or poorly synchronized subtitles to inadequate translations.

3.2. Standardization

The booming cable TV industry in Brazil has led to the fast development of specialised translation services and processes. Most broadcasters started with an in-house team of translators, usually without any previous or systematic experience with subtitling. Language specialists often would work together with video editors, joining

their skills to produce acceptable subtitles and, little by little, elaborate their stylistic and technical standards as necessary. In a relatively small team working together inside a company, extensive and formalised standards were not required.

However, as more companies entered the market and broadcasters offered more channels and increased their programming, they started to outsource translation services. Over time, in-house teams tended to be dissolved, with only a quality control sector being maintained, and a few of these professionals went on to open their own companies dedicated to AVT and production, while others became freelancers.

This extension of the translation pipeline, now including intermediate companies, combined with ever-increasing hours of programming to be translated and greater numbers of translators, usually freelance, joining the market led to the elaboration and constant review and update of style guides and normalised procedures. A wide range of linguistic aspects needed to be standardised in order to avoid common errors, reduce idiosyncratic variations and streamline quality control processes, from the preferred reference sources to be used, the grammatical and stylistic norms to be applied (such as those regarding spelling, capitalization, transliteration, punctuation, numbers, measures, currencies, and so forth) to the degree of tolerance to different registers (including colloquial forms, coarse and offensive language, scatological and sexual references, etc.).

While implicit norms tend to be dynamically constructed and negotiated among a group of colleagues with a fair degree of flexibility, the formalisation of explicit guidelines for quality control teams and translation service providers leads to greater strictness. Many solutions are no longer a matter of preference, becoming either right or wrong. Instructions have to be clear and objective to discourage idiosyncrasy and subjectivity. There is also a tendency to be conservative, as it seems more effective to be overly cautious from the early stages of the translation process – particularly regarding informal and taboo language – than to make corrections later based on negative feedback. Sanction and reinforcement mechanisms have also become more explicit, helping to establish the guidelines as models. Here we can highlight the role of quality control professionals, as well as those involved in recruiting translators, and instructors.[14]

Personally, I play all these roles in distinct but related contexts: as a service provider, I receive feedback from quality control teams and often inquire about or even discuss the established rules; sometimes I am asked by video producers to evaluate tests performed by candidates or to recommend colleagues or students; and I teach subtitling techniques to translation students who want to join this industry. While, as a professional with many years of good relationship with some of the leading video producers in Brazil, I may occasionally attempt to make the rules more flexible or argue for exceptions to be made to accommodate specific translation problems, as an evaluator and instructor I am perfectly aware that I take the client's side, teaching and enforcing strict guidelines for the sake of the candidates themselves. This, in turn, reinforces the rules and passes them on as the *status quo* to new subtitlers.

As quality control procedures became more standardised, with experienced teams fully dedicated to updating and expanding the existing style guides and instructions, and reflecting feedback received both from viewers and service providers, a more recent development has been the elaboration of more specialised or

additional guidelines. If just a few years ago a broadcaster had one general style guide for all its different cable TV channels, now each channel has developed its own stylistic identity. Thus, some channels have become much more conservative in their linguistic preferences, usually in response to feedback from their typical target audience, while others have adopted a more liberal approach to reflect their programming, being more tolerant to coarse or scatological language, for instance.

This changing scenario is largely driven by the fast pace of technological advances, as described by Gambier and Gottlieb (2001) and Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007). Relationships are changing between major players in the globalised multimedia industry and between distribution channels and viewers. Cable television, while still keeping its family-oriented nature, has become increasingly specialised, targeting more specific audiences. The programming can be as globalised as it gets, but it can be accessed more and more by individuals in very particular contexts and with specific interests, who are also more vocal. In other words, in cable TV there can be an interesting combination of broadcasting and narrowcasting.

Translators working regularly for the video producers in charge of translating cable television receive frequent updated versions of the guidelines and appendices. There are even subdivisions within the same channel, referring to types of shows, film rating and parental guidance criteria, or individual shows that are given specialised linguistic treatment. Because service providers have to deal with more and more rules and a number of different guides, often they are assigned translations from the same channel and with a similar profile, so they get to know a given set of guides and become more efficient. This also streamlines quality control, and viewers receive more standardised, coherent, and high-quality subtitles.

This long and structured pipeline developed to cope with the large volume of shows to be subtitled also entails a higher number of stages and agents between the service provider and the end client. The translator may interact directly with a project manager from a video producer, who interacts with the producer's quality control team, which deals with the quality control team from each of the channels. There is a wide gap between the translator and the rule makers, which makes it harder to question or discuss the guidelines received. Rulemaking is clearly a top-down process, and rule makers are largely inaccessible to translators.

While the reasons for this are understandable in face of the massive amount of work and the large number of professionals involved in subtitling, one consequence is that certain translation challenges that require changes in the rules have to make it through the whole hierarchy and sometimes bureaucratic procedures. This means that, in the frantic turnaround rhythm of cable TV translation, these challenges may remain unanswered, often being solved internally by the video producers or broadcasters through a conservative, better-safe-than-sorry approach. As a translator, at times I feel the need to discuss the rules and put their flexibility to the test. Usually I have easy and friendly access to quality control professionals among the video producers, but they are also service providers who need to follow the rules set by the end clients. Frequently what begins as an apparently promising discussion on possible solutions to a translation puzzle that may push the rules a little further ends up with a frustrating: "because the client said so."

To investigate these issues thoroughly, a first-hand account by professionals in cable channels and video producers directly involved in policymaking and quality

control was imperative. So some companies were contacted with the purpose of bringing these processes to light.

4. Interactions with Quality Control Professionals

In December 2010, I sent a few questions by e-mail to professionals involved in quality control working for the largest cable TV broadcasters and video producers dedicated to AVT in Brazil. My approach was targeted at organisations known for their dedication to quality in translation, including those with specialised quality control teams and involved in translator training. My goal was not to obtain a large amount of replies, but to hear from professionals who might have meaningful information to share. Besides their length of experience, title and role in quality control, I asked all of them the same questions:

1) Which was the degree of control over the language used in subtitles when you started to work in this field? Was it more centralised, stricter, with more explicit rules or more intuitive and relying on common sense?
2) In recent years, have you noticed a trend in cable TV channels toward making their preferences more explicit and exerting more control over them or do you see a greater degree of flexibility according to the context of each particular translation?
3) Is there a two-way dialogue among the translator, the quality control department in video producers and the channels which will broadcast the programs to discuss guidelines and possible exceptions, or are the decisions taken in a top-down manner?
4) How do you see the dilemma between the need to use correct language and the *educational* role of TV versus the content of programs which would require the use of incorrect, vulgar or scatological language? Which side has priority? Have you noticed any shifts in this relationship recently?
5) To what extent does feedback from viewers affect the language policies used as guidelines for translators? Can you mention any examples of feedback that resulted in stricter policies and others that led to more flexibility? Can you identify which is the position of most viewers about the style of the language used in subtitles?

They were also invited to make any comments on related issues. I heard back from Marcelo Leite, partner of the video producer Drei Marc responsible for the quality control of all original content and translations created by the company since 1996; Sabrina Martinez, partner of the video producer Gemini Media and AVT director, with around ten years of experience in quality control; Carla Tessaro, who has worked with subtitling for the past five years and is currently a freelance service provider after being quality control manager in a large cable TV broadcaster and language supervisor in a video producer; and Leilane Papa, AVT manager for a video producer with about four years of experience in quality control. Tessaro and Papa preferred to give me their personal opinions without mentioning the companies they work (or worked) for. Only one video producer did not reply, and I received negative feedback from a large cable broadcaster, as will be discussed in more detail below.

Overall, their answers and opinions confirm some clear trends. They also offered interesting insights and shared relevant experiences. All of them agreed that there are more explicit and detailed rules now than when they began working in the field.

Leite had worked in television channels before starting Drei Marc, and he said that in 1996 guidelines and quality control virtually did not exist. Feeling the need to share best practices and to have a space to discuss standards, they organised meetings with translators, proofreaders, language teachers and other professionals and started to elaborate the company's style guide and translation procedures. He claims that they were pioneers in specialised quality control. Martinez noted that the style of the subtitles used to be stricter in the sense that more formal grammatical rules had to be observed, but the guidelines were less explicit, channels did not have standardised preferences, and translators had more freedom to adapt cultural references. Papa added that, with the increasing quantity and diversity of programs broadcast, each channel started to develop particular rules, preferences and exceptions, and, as it was simply impossible to keep track of all these details, the quality control teams started to create guidelines for individual channels and shows.

The answers to the second question diverged more. While all respondents confirmed that the channels now exert more control over a wider range and more detailed aspects of the translation, Martinez and Tessaro believe that the rules are more flexible in the sense of allowing the use of more colloquial language to better reflect the style of the original material, tending to prioritise the content over the form. Leite noticed that the downside of more detailed guidelines is that they can restrict the translation creativity to the point that, depending on what is being shown and said in the original film, the translation may seem ridiculous. Papa also thinks that too many rules can intimidate translators, who end up being less creative and relying less on common sense than they would usually do, but she noticed that clients are flexible and willing to make exceptions on a case-by-case basis. Moreover, Tessaro emphasised that each channel has a brand and an identity which are carefully developed and need to be reflected in all of its products, including the translations. She argued that a generally informal linguistic style does not necessarily entail using coarse language – there are clients who want the translation to be natural and modern but without any use of obscenities or slang. This is similar to Martinez's observation that the channels are less flexible when it comes to merchandising – no use of commercial brands in the subtitles – and to deal with scatological vocabulary and cultural adaptations.

All of this seems to indicate that while the general style has become more informal, the channels exert stricter control over the vocabulary employed and the individual translation strategies. The end clients want to be in charge of allowing any exceptions according to the context or translation issue presented. This scenario was reinforced by the answers to the third question. The partners of Drei Marc and Gemini Media emphasised the importance of the dialogue between their quality control teams and the translators, and between their teams and the end clients. This is done on a daily basis with positive results when each situation and possible solutions are discussed based on reasonable arguments and among competent professionals, but clearly the channels have the final word. Tessaro was more categorical in saying that the clients elaborate their standards and, since consistency is critical, translators are expected to follow those rules without questioning them.

Nonetheless, the language used in subtitles in cable TV has become more open to colloquial forms, including some that would be considered grammatical errors, as well as to more contemporary slang. All four professionals see a tendency toward

translations that are more faithful to the original dialogue. Interestingly, Leite and Papa noted that language is also changing in original Brazilian shows and films broadcast on open television. Both used examples of slang and coarse language heard in Brazilian soap operas, which are watched nationwide and have tremendous impact on the population. Since the leading open television channels tend to be more conservative in their language policies than cable TV, it is likely that this trend toward more flexibility will continue. Papa also mentioned Brazilian films shown in cinemas, recalling an occasion when she heard spectators commenting that hearing four-letter words in their native language felt different from hearing them in foreign films. This seems to suggest that these changes do not go unnoticed and, albeit very cautious and gradual, they can still surprise viewers. According to Papa, a common reply from end clients when they deny a request to use coarse language is that they do not want to shock viewers.

A point raised by Tessaro is the role of subtitling, which must be kept in mind. The purpose is to allow viewers to understand dialogues in a foreign language, clearly and succinctly. She believes the language has to be, above all, correct and coherent, and that informality does not mean incorrectness or incoherence. A competent writer should be able to produce a text that conveys the whole meaning of the original dialogue without errors and without breaking any *decency* rules or policies.

Finally, viewer feedback seems to be taken very seriously by the channels and the impetus for their translation policies. Leite was the only one to mention examples of complaints by viewers both against the excessive or unnecessary use of coarse language and against extremely conservative language used in the translation of adult content. Papa was unable to remember cases that generated more flexibility, but she recalled a complaint from a viewer who saw the name of an illegal drug correctly translated in the subtitles of a song. The viewer claimed that the translation could promote drug use, prompting the channel to recall that show and edit the translation, removing the explicit reference to the drug. Martinez and Tessaro said that the producers rarely receive feedback regarding language style since viewers tend to focus on grammatical errors, translation problems or technical issues. Therefore, although translators and critics often complain among themselves or on the Internet about the conservative approach to language in cable TV subtitles, the channels apparently respect the preferences of their viewers – at least the most vocal ones. It seems that the channels would rather be criticised for being patronising than for being unnecessarily rude or obscene, and only adopt a more liberal approach when they feel safe to do so.

Many of these questions could have been answered by a cable TV broadcaster, which is the missing piece of this puzzle, but despite having approached one of the leading broadcasters in the country, I was finally informed by the person responsible for quality control that the legal department did not allow her to answer these questions. My arguments that I intended to shed positive light on their work, to show that they have good reasons and serious procedures behind their language policies and to dispel the notion that they simply censor translations did not stand a chance against the legal department's claims that these measures seek to protect their intellectual property and corporate strategies from competitors.

5. What to Make of All This?

Cable television began to be marketed in Brazil in 1988, the same year that the new democratic national constitution prohibited any form of censorship. Indeed, language control through stylistic guidelines should not be associated with the notion of ideological censorship or any other similar form of repression. Standards are important and necessary, and most large organisations dedicated to any form of translation have their own policies. In the case of cable TV channels, for the most part they are respecting the preferences of their viewers when they adopt a more conservative approach to the language used in subtitles.

Nevertheless, among colleagues the word *censorship* is often used informally in reference to client policies, and critical viewers sometimes use the term to refer to the subtitles of specific channels or shows. I set out to study this topic in more detail aiming to prove this association unfounded – and I reaffirm that strict language policies are very different from authoritarian political censorship – but it is understandable why some cable broadcasters can come across that way. Ironically, this impression is often made by the channels that are more concerned with quality in their translations, employing dedicated professionals to elaborate and enforce their policies.

Firstly, while the channels may have the best intentions to *protect* their viewers from offensive language, this attitude may seem patronising. Why should viewers need to be protected? The channels are subscribed and could be blocked through parental control if children are deemed to be at risk. And programmes with more explicit language usually contain disclaimers, or the channels could add them if necessary. Especially now, with more on-demand options, it is difficult to understand why all viewers should submit to translations that sometimes are far more conservative than necessary, even considering the need for clarity and conciseness and the fact that the translation must work nationwide and must remain valid for a number of years.

Secondly, the quality control procedures enforced by video producers and the instructions to be followed by translators to ensure the end client's standards are met seem to bear some resemblance to the practice of self-censorship. Often translators avoid pushing the limits of what might be acceptable for fear of having their translations edited, and frequently proofreaders and quality control sectors in video producers adopt even more conservative solutions to avoid the hassle and cost of having the end client disapprove of or recall their work. There are power relationships, of course. There is a small number of large broadcasters who own the rights over the programming and also buy the rights over the translation; they pay the subtitlers' salary and, if they want to continue working for them, they must observe their standards. That makes perfect sense, but there is at times a certain underlying fear of the consequences of going one four-letter word too far. Could something like that really make translators and proofreaders lose their jobs? Maybe. Maybe not. But after becoming one of their regular service providers, would anyone risk it?

Thirdly, the end clients are largely inaccessible. The producers' quality control teams communicate frequently with the teams in the channels, but nowadays they do not take part in the decision-making process and most of them have to follow their clients' orders and make sure the service providers do the same. For translators,

the end clients are out of bounds. Viewers may be able to contact the channels through client support structures, but they are unaware of all internal procedures and policies regarding the vocabulary and style used in the translations. However, this sense of inaccessibility, the lack of transparency about why or how they adopt certain policies and their refusal to simply communicate their point of view – even for study purposes – can tend to make people suspicious about their real intentions. And the fact that one of the justifications is *protecting corporate strategies from competitors*, when they could be using opportunities like this to promote themselves, does not improve the picture.

Quality control professionals perform a very important, complex and often uncredited work. Among cable television broadcasters, they are also involved in policymaking, elaborating and enforcing standards for the language used in their programmes, including translations, that ultimately shape the identity they project onto their target audience. Nobody wants to be perceived as authoritarian or likes to raise suspicion about the reasons behind their policies, but unfortunately one cannot refrain from thinking that some of the lasting effects of many years of official censorship in our recent history might still linger, especially in some self-protective and patronising attitudes.

I am not the only one who would like to study and discuss language control policies in more detail; some of the professionals I interviewed expressed that it is about time this subject was approached maturely. I hope that this work is a first step in this direction and helps to promote a sound dialogue among broadcasters, producers, service providers and academics, for the benefit of the target audiences. Above all, I hope that any resemblances between the two perspectives investigated here – censorship during the military regime in Brazil and translation services in the context of cable television – are soon proven to be completely absurd.

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NOTES

1. In this article I refer to *television channels* as the end clients; *broadcasters* as the companies responsible for distributing sets of cable television channels for the customers, which may include their own channels and third party content; and *video producers* as the companies hired by channels or broadcasters to provide video editing and production services, often including translation.
2. A brief disclaimer: I signed confidentiality agreements with my clients and was not authorized to use examples from specific shows translated by me, being asked not to mention the channels where the shows are broadcast. Therefore, I will refrain from making any explicit reference to any of the broadcasters and channels, even those I do not provide services to. For this reason, sometimes I will have to be intentionally vague, but I hope this restriction will not affect the quality of the information and arguments presented here.
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13. For an overview of different AVT modes, see Gambier (2002).
14. For more on norms, the socialisation of translators, and the notion of correctness, see Hermans (1991) and Toury (1995; 1998).

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