

**THE DUTCH TRANSLATION OF
HUMOUR AND TABOO LANGUAGE IN
SUBTITLES**
A CASE STUDY OF THE BRITISH SERIES
'FLEABAG'

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Hanne Roels

Student number: 01604917

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Lieve Jooken

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to analyse the linguistic rendering of the humour and taboo language in the Dutch subtitles of the British television series *Fleabag* (2016). Furthermore, it investigates the taboo language associated with individual characters and how their speech style is usually translated. For this purpose, a quantitative analysis of 128 humorous fragments and 218 taboo utterances was conducted, as well as a qualitative description of a selection of the most relevant instances of humour and taboo language in the television series. The results show that 72.7% of all humorous instances were rendered either fully or partially into the target text. Moreover, it was found that 45.0% of the taboo utterances were preserved in the Dutch subtitles, many of which paralleled the original taboo utterances in terms of intensity. However, it should be noted that a considerable amount of taboo dialogue was deleted in the subtitles as well (37.6%). In addition, the comparative analysis of the individual characters' taboo language use demonstrates no substantial difference in the way the characters' taboo dialogue was translated.

(174 words)

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1 INTRODUCTION

Television series are often seen as a common medium of entertainment within popular culture (Corner, 1991). Popular culture, including mass media, has evolved over the years, adapting to ever-changing societal and cultural norms. It is therefore only reasonable to assume that, in contemporary society, mass media should cover topics that are considered sensitive or taboo. In fact, Bucaria and Barra (2016) suggest that subjects such as taboo humour, sex, death and homosexuality have become more pervasive in television programming in the last few years. Nevertheless, using dark humour and displaying taboos on television often results in public indignation (Shafer & Kaye, 2015).

Fleabag (2016) is a British dark comedy television series written by and starring Phoebe Waller-Bridge. It follows the life of a young, promiscuous and unfiltered woman who tries to find meaning in life through trial and error. The series unconventionally depicts the reality of life through feminism, dark humour, grief, vulgarity and taboos. A typical characteristic of *Fleabag* is the protagonist's tendency to break the fourth wall. The main character repeatedly makes eye contact with the camera and directly talks to the audience, which contributes to a feeling of intimacy. Moreover, she uses the fourth wall to distract herself and the viewers from her troubles (Wright, 2019), which often creates a humorous effect.

The television series was launched in Britain on BBC Three in 2016. The first season was an immense success in Britain and was followed by a second season in 2019, co-produced by the BBC and Amazon. *Fleabag* has been generally well-received by fans in both the United Kingdom and the United States, obtaining a score of 8.7 out of 10 on the Internet Movie Database (IMDb). The second season of *Fleabag* received several Primetime Emmy Awards and a Golden Globe Award for Best Television Series.

The series has been acclaimed by both British and American television critics. Yeates (2019), a critic with *Metro UK*, praised *Fleabag* for its dark comedy as well as its discussions on sex and raw narratives surrounding grief. *The Conversation* described the series as unconventional and realistic because it challenges the perception of the so-called 'proper woman'. In fact, Waller-Bridge succeeds in portraying an imperfect and unhappy female character who is not ashamed of being raw and realistic (Bassil-Morozow, 2017). Contrastively, a critic with *The Guardian* said that, despite its attempts, *Fleabag* is not universally relatable because it only represents the life and emotions of an upper-class, posh woman (Jones, 2019).

The number of Dutch reviews about *Fleabag* does not match the English review output. This might be due to the lower accessibility of the series in Belgium and the Netherlands, since it was not broadcast on Dutch or Belgian television and is only available to Amazon Prime subscribers. Nevertheless, critics from both *De Standaard* and *Humo* praised the television series, describing it as well-written and unique

while still being relatable to its viewers. *Humo* even declared *Fleabag* the best television series of 2019 (Gozin, 2020; Heremans, 2019).

Fleabag is characterised by British humour, including common themes such as sarcasm, wit, self-deprecation and taboo subjects (Laineste, 2014). According to *The Conversation*, *Fleabag* is groundbreaking in the sense that it “offers true naturalism” (Bassil-Morozow, 2017, alin. 10). It is realistic through its use of humour and taboo language, which are inherent to the series. Additionally, the series often uses taboo language as a tool to create humorous effect.

This thesis aims to contribute to existing research on the Dutch translation and subtitling of humour and taboo language in English television series. The motivation for the study is twofold: translation and subtitling into Dutch remains a fairly unexplored topic, and research on the topic of taboo language is rather scarce, especially when translated into Dutch. As *Fleabag* is typically characterised by the use of dark humour and offensive language, it appeared to be a suitable subject of analysis for this study.

Specifically, this study aims to provide an answer to the following general research questions: Is the humour in the source text linguistically rendered into the target text? Is the taboo language in the source text successfully transferred into the target text? In order to answer these research questions, the humorous language and taboo language in the first season of *Fleabag* is compared to its translation into Dutch.

This paper is structured as follows. In part 2, a theoretical background on subtitling and translation will be given, including a section on humour and taboo language. Part 3 and 4 will describe the methodology and data used in this study, as well as further refine the research questions. In part 5, the translation of the humour and taboo language in *Fleabag* will be interpreted and analysed. Part 6 includes a discussion of the findings that puts the research questions into a broader theoretical perspective. Lastly, the conclusion of this study can be found in part 7.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Subtitling

2.1.1. Definition

Subtitling is a discipline within the field of Translation Studies that has become prevalent since the 1990s, thanks to the proliferation of audiovisual materials (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007). The widespread distribution of films and television programmes in particular often requires a translation from the medium's original language into the audience's language (Bartholomäus & Weibel, 2012), which can be achieved through three main transfer techniques: dubbing, subtitling and voice-over (Kilborn, 1993). This paper will solely focus on subtitling as a form of audiovisual translation.

Díaz Cintas & Remael (2007) define subtitling as a form of translation that converts an original, spoken dialogue into a written text, usually presented at the bottom of the screen. Apart from dialogue, subtitles can also include discursive elements such as letters and inscriptions, and elements that appear on the soundtrack, such as songs and voices off. Additionally, Gottlieb (2012) makes a distinction between interlingual and intralingual subtitling. Interlingual subtitling refers to the written translation of a spoken source text in a foreign language, whereas intralingual subtitling produces a written rendering of a spoken source text in the same language. The latter is often used for deaf or hard-of-hearing viewers, and is therefore less relevant for this study. In that context, Van Waes et al. (2013) point out that people who hear normally also regularly use subtitles, for example because of loud background noise or because the speech goes too fast. In other words, subtitling can be understood as a shift in mode, from oral to written, which can function as a guide for viewers who are unable to hear or understand the dialogue in audiovisual materials.

Even though subtitles are commonly used in various countries, a significantly high number of people criticise subtitles (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007). As subtitles appear on screen at the same time as the original soundtrack, viewers are able to immediately compare the source text with the target text. As a consequence, they might notice inconsistencies, errors and discrepancies between speech and text (Ivarsson & Carroll, 1998), which is not the case when dubbing a television programme, for example. Additionally, Kilborn (1993) points out that viewers do not always appreciate subtitles because it diverts their attention from the visual action that is happening on screen. However, Kilborn contradicts these negative attitudes by suggesting that subtitles allow for a more authentic experience because the original speech and soundtrack remain entirely intact.

2.1.2. Limitations

As subtitling consists of a transition from an oral to a written mode, it is nearly impossible to remain fully faithful to the source text. According to Kilborn (1993), translators have to determine how much information should be kept and left out in order for a translation to look as similar to the original dialogue as possible. That is not an easy task, considering the various limitations that subtitling imposes on translators.

A first limitation described by Díaz Cintas & Remael (2007) are spatial restraints, which concerns the available space on a television screen. Generally, one frame can fit two subtitle lines, which means a translator has to condense the spoken information into two lines of around 37 characters per line. Secondly, translators are also limited by temporal restraints, in the sense that subtitles can only appear on screen for a certain amount of time, depending on the audience's assumed reading speed. Díaz Cintas & Remael mention the 'six-second rule', which implies that an average viewer can comfortably read two subtitle lines of around 37 characters each in six seconds. Furthermore, the subtitles should synchronise with what is being said. Synchronisation can be difficult, however, for instance when multiple people are speaking at the same time and dialogue overlaps. Apart from spatial and temporal restraints, Díaz Cintas & Remael suggest that translators keep in mind potential cultural differences between source language and target language, as well as the audience's knowledge and expectations. Lastly, Zabalbeascoa (1996) adds that translators themselves can constitute a limitation as well, due to differences in, inter alia, background knowledge of the audiences or differences in moral and cultural values. These limitations can curb a translator's ability to provide a satisfactory translation of the source dialogue, which might result in viewers disapproving of subtitles.

2.2. Humour

2.2.1. Defining humour

Although everyone has an intuitive understanding of what humour is, many researchers agree that humour as a concept is rather difficult to define (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007). The Oxford English Dictionary defines humour as “the quality of being amusing, the capacity to elicit laughter or amusement” (“Humour”, n.d.). In addition, several researchers associate humour with laughter: Veatch (1998, p. 162) describes it as “a psychological state which tends to produce laughter”. Similarly, Attardo (1994) states that humour encompasses anything that evokes laughter. These definitions all put emphasis on the effect that humour has on its recipients. In that sense, humour could be perceived as anything that elicits laughter or a feeling of amusement. However, as Díaz Cintas & Remael point out, it is quite subjective to define humour according to its intended effect, since humour perception and appreciation differs depending on the recipient. For instance, some people might find certain utterances humorous even when it was not the intention of the speaker to elicit laughter, and vice versa.

In order to further determine what humour is, Chiaro (2014) proposes four elements that are essential to humour: a cognitive, emotional, social and expressive element. Firstly, humour occurs within a cognitive frame that involves a non-serious incongruity. Incongruity occurs when there is a contradiction between what is expected and what is actually said or happening, which often causes humorous effect (Vandaele, 2002). Chiaro adds that said incongruity must take place in a non-serious, playful context for it to be funny. In his thesis, Seghers (2017, p. 15) offers an example of a non-humorous incongruity that illustrates this:

For instance, encountering a clown armed with a sharp knife in a corridor at night is quite incongruous (you do not expect to see a clown, let alone armed, outside of a circus or party, but you encounter one in a dark corridor anyway), but it would not at all be perceived as humorous.

Secondly, Chiaro (2014) distinguishes an emotional element, in the sense that humour triggers a positive affective response. In other words, perceiving humour will often go accompanied by a feeling of happiness or excitement. Thirdly, she states that humour is a social phenomenon because it primarily occurs in spontaneous interaction between people. The fourth element of humour is expressive, which implies that humour is usually followed by a physical response, namely laughter.

With regard to the present study, the four elements suggested by Chiaro (2014) were used as a guideline to distinguish the humorous fragments in *Fleabag* from the non-humorous ones.

2.2.2. Classifying humour

2.2.2.1. Verbal humour vs. non-verbal humour

Due to the polysemiotic nature of films and television programmes, a translator or subtitler of media text will be confronted with both verbal and non-verbal information such as images, music and sound effects (Gottlieb, 1997). Applied to humour, a distinction can be made between verbal and non-verbal humour. According to Ritchie (2000, p. 3), verbal humour refers to “verbally expressed humour”, which is any humour that is conveyed in language. Non-verbal humour, on the other hand, is manifested through visual elements on screen. Sometimes, verbal and non-verbal humour appear on screen simultaneously, which might influence a subtitler’s translation choices. For instance, a translator or subtitler would not need to fully render an instance of verbal humour in the subtitles if there are non-verbal cues that adequately display the humour on screen.

Fleabag contains several examples of non-verbal humour, in the form of images, gestures and facial expressions. Subtitling is deemed unnecessary in conveying these types of non-verbal humour because the humorous effect is already visible on screen. The following scene demonstrates a case of non-verbal humour in *Fleabag*:

In episode 3, Fleabag and Martin are at a shoe shop to find a birthday present for Claire. The scene depicts Martin putting on a pair of women’s heels, saying “Oh my God, look at my elegant feet”. In the following scene, Fleabag is reminded of a traumatic memory and runs out of the shop, clearly upset. Martin then clumsily runs after her on the street, still wearing the women’s heels.

This scene generates humorous effect, particularly because the image of a man running in women’s heels is incongruous and totally absurd. The scene can be labelled as non-verbal humour because there is no dialogue; subtitles therefore do not accompany the images on screen.

Nevertheless, the series did include some instances of visual humour which could have been subtitled, but which the translator chose not to. The following fragment illustrates an example of translatable visual humour:

In episode 4, Fleabag and various other women are at a centre for silent retreat, where the head of the centre prompts them to remain silent at all times. Visitors are only allowed to communicate by writing a message on a blackboard in the main hall. In one scene, the women are doing chores in silence in the garden. Suddenly, there is a buzzing noise, and in the background, a woman is struggling to fight off a wasp. The head of the centre scolds her for causing commotion. Later in the episode, we see a message written on the blackboard: “I’ve been stung by a wasp”.

The writing on the chalkboard is presented on screen for merely a few minutes and is also not subtitled. As a consequence, some viewers might overlook the message, which weakens the intended humorous effect.

Since this study focuses on the translation of humour and taboo language in the Dutch subtitles, instances of non-verbal humour in the series were not taken into consideration. It is, however, worth mentioning that a large part of the humour in *Fleabag* is of the non-verbal kind, particularly created by the main character's glances at the camera, facial expressions and imitations.

2.2.2.2. Classifying verbal humour

Numerous authors have developed classifications of verbal humour. In order to identify and categorise the humour used in *Fleabag*, this study will draw on a classification based on Dynel's (2009) semantic types of conversational humour and Attardo's (2014) *Encyclopedia of Humour Studies*. Dynel's classification is primarily based on stylistic figures, whereas Attardo follows a sociological approach, by describing various humour styles that individuals can implement in their interpersonal interactions. These classifications were chosen because both authors mainly describe types of humour that occur spontaneously, which is the sort of humour that is prevalent in *Fleabag*. This is in contrast with "canned jokes", that typically consist of a build-up and punchline to the joke (Dynel, p. 1285), examples of which are one-liners, riddles and knock-knock jokes (Chiaro, 1992).

Listed below are the types of conversational humour described by Dynel (2009) that recur frequently in *Fleabag*. Definitions will be extended with references to other studies where relevant, as well as with examples proposed by Dynel:

- Humorous lexeme, also referred to as a neologism: this is a newly created word that is used to induce humorous effect. An example of this is the combination of the words 'alcohol' and 'holiday', which results in the neologism 'alcoholiday' (p. 1287).
- Witticism: a clever and humorous remark that occurs spontaneously in conversational exchange. Wit often has a mocking quality, and is therefore closely interwoven with irony or sarcasm. Witticisms are not exclusively used for humorous purposes, however. The following utterance is an example of a witty remark (p. 1288): "It takes 42 muscles to frown and only 4 to pull the trigger of a decent sniper rifle. (said to somebody frowning)".

- Register clash: occurs when elements from a higher register are used in an informal context and vice versa. In his definition, Attardo (1994) adds that a clash in registers might become humorous when there is a discrepancy between what is expected of certain registers and the actual context in which they are used. For example, saying “I’d like to file charges against your improper birthday behaviour” in an informal context might induce humorous effect (p. 1291).
- Retort: an unexpected, quick and witty response to an earlier utterance, often produced to amuse other listeners. Most commonly, retorts involve a speaker who pretends to have misunderstood the preceding utterance and distorts the meaning to create humorous effect (Norrick, 1984). An example of a retort is the following dialogue (p. 1292):

A: Wow! You’ve got a tattoo on your shoulder!
 B: Oh my Gosh! How did it appear there? I never noticed it!

- Teasing: producing utterances that might mock, threaten or imitate another person in a playful, non-serious manner, which might seem offensive to the listener. The speaker will often indicate that the teasing should be taken light-heartedly, however. The following dialogue demonstrates an example of teasing (p. 1293):

Female: You’re a thief and a liar.
 Male: I only lied about being a thief, I don’t do that anymore. (teasing)
 Female: Steal?
 Male: Lie. (teasing)

- Banter: as described by Norrick (1993, p. 29), banter is “a rapid exchange of humorous lines oriented toward a common theme, though aimed primarily at mutual entertainment rather than topical talk”. In other words, banter can be seen as a long exchange of teasing remarks that are added very rapidly, with the intent to produce humorous effect. According to Culpeper (1996, p. 352), banter can be conceptualised as “mock impoliteness”, since all speakers understand that the impoliteness is not meant to be offensive.
- Putdown, also referred to as mockery: a putdown is a comment that is inherently abusive and derogatory, usually meant to ridicule or mock another person and simultaneously entertain other listeners. Additionally, scriptwriters often mock characters in a film or television programme to induce amusement in the target audience. In contrast to teasing and banter, putdowns are meant to insult another person, who will also perceive it as such. As putdowns tend to be both hostile and humorous, they could be covered by Attardo’s (2014, p. 16) umbrella term “aggressive humour”. Consider the following example offered by Attardo (p. 385):

Person A: Do you have a match?

Person B (in an insulting manner): My ass and your face.

- Self-deprecating humour: humour that occurs when a speaker directs a denigrating comment at him/herself. Self-deprecating remarks should be seen as a form of self-teasing rather than an expression of real aggression. Dynel (p. 1295) offers an example of self-deprecating humour: “In today’s performance, the role of the idiot will be played by myself”.
- Anecdote: a humorous narrative in which a speaker tells an audience about their own personal experience or someone else’s, specifically with the intent to amuse. Anecdotes in audiovisual materials are typically accompanied by non-verbal expressions such as intonation, gestures and facial expressions, which add to the overall comic effect.
- Hyperbole: also known as an exaggeration, a hyperbole is a stylistic figure which represents something as greater than it actually is (Attardo, 2014). Hyperboles often occur in ironic statements, which is demonstrated in the following example: “This is the loveliest weather I have ever seen in my life! (said on a rainy day)” (Attardo, p. 223).
- Paradox: a statement or proposition that is apparently self-contradictory and therefore seems absurd (Wales, 2014). It is this absurdity that creates humorous effect. For example, the utterance “I don’t believe in astrology. I’m a Sagittarius and I’m sceptical” is clearly paradoxical (p. 1288).
- Irony: a stylistic figure in which there is a contrast between what is said and what can be deduced from the context (Pelsmaekers & Van Besien, 2012), which might be perceived as humorous. According to Burgers & van Mulken (2017), typical indicators of irony are hyperboles, understatements and rhetorical questions. Apart from verbal indicators, Pelsmaekers & Van Besien identify various non-verbal signs of irony, such as slowed, emphatic speech and marked intonation. These are all cues that aim to alert the listener that the utterance should not be taken literally. Saying “this speaker is *really* fascinating” about someone who is apparently very boring is a typical example of irony (Pelsmaekers & Van Besien, p. 243).
- Sarcasm: a form of verbal irony that is characterised by a negativity expression (Colston, 2017). Sarcasm often consists of bitter, cutting remarks and might thus fail to produce the same humorous effect as irony does. However, it is a stylistic device that is frequently associated with humour, and is therefore suitable to include in this study. An example of a sarcastic remark

would be: “Nice perfume. How long did you marinate in it?”, said to a person who is wearing an excessive amount of perfume.

In addition to Dynel’s (2009) classification, Attardo (2014) defines two styles of humour that are frequently employed by the characters in *Fleabag*, namely absurdist humour and sexual humour.

- Absurdist humour: humour that is materialised through illogical and ridiculous situations that contradict the conventional norms. As stated by Attardo, absurdist humour is closely related to incongruity (see 2.2.1).
- Sexual humour: humour that refers to sex or sexual activities. This style of humour might be perceived by some people as offensive, and could thus also be labelled taboo humour.

Lastly, it is relevant to look into taboo as a component of humour as well, particularly because taboo words are frequently used to create humorous effect in *Fleabag*.

- Taboo humour: all types of humour which some audiences might find uncomfortable because of its controversial and shocking nature (Bucaria & Barra, 2016). These include, for example, humorous references to death, disability, sexual practices, race and blasphemy. In addition, Andersson & Trudgill (1990, p. 61) distinguish the term “humorous swearing”, which refers to using taboo language in a non-insulting way, often to enforce social relationships. For example, the exhortation “Get your ass in gear!” involves taboo language and might also generate humorous effect (Stapleton, 2010, p. 295).

2.2.3. Translating humour

Humour translation is a complex field within the area of Translation Studies that has received ample attention over recent decades (Chiaro, 2010). When it comes to translating humour, Vandaele (2002) and Ordudari (2007) suggest that the original text and its translation should generate a similar effect on the audience. That is, if a humorous fragment in the source text entices laughter, the translated target text should serve an identical purpose. However, humour translation has its own difficulties: Vandaele argues that the translation of humour differs significantly from other types of translation, in the sense that it imposes substantial challenges on translators. In his study, he posits four elements as to why humour is difficult to translate. Firstly, humour requires an “exteriorized manifestation” (p. 150), namely smiling or laughter, whereas other texts are less compelling in terms of perception. Secondly, a translator

might find a humorous utterance funny, but be unable to reproduce its comic effect in the target text. In fact, recognising and understanding the humour in a text does not necessarily render a satisfactory translation. A third element concerns the appreciation of humour, which might vary depending on the translator or recipient's character, world view, mood or other factors. As a consequence, the translation will most likely depend on the translator's individual sense of humour. Lastly, the effect of humour itself might hinder a translator's critical thinking or blur the core of the message, therefore preventing them from successfully translating the joke.

In addition, Popa (2005) mentions that cultural differences add to the complexity of humour translation. She argues that a translator should always take into account the situational, cultural and linguistic content of a joke. In the case of *Fleabag*, it is thus necessary to have a general understanding of contemporary British society, gender roles and culture-specific and language-specific conventions in order to capture the humorous intent of the writer. Another factor to keep in mind is the target audience. As Zabalbeascoa (2005) suggests, some viewers do not appreciate or are not familiar with certain subject-matters, themes, or genres of humour, and might even denounce certain types of humour as taboo. Regardless, it is impossible for a translator to have full control over the recipients' appreciation of the translated humour. As a consequence, as Popa points out, a translator should accept that a translation can never be as effective as the source text itself.

There are various techniques to facilitate the translation of a source text. Gottlieb (1997) describes nine translation techniques that translators can use to reproduce a text from source language to target language. Gottlieb's classification was chosen because the techniques are specifically relevant for subtitling audiovisual materials. In view of the present study, the techniques offer a useful framework to categorise the translation of instances of humour in *Fleabag*.

1. *Expansion* consists of adding an explanation to the subtitles in order to adequately convey the meaning of the source text. This technique is often used to translate culture-specific terms.
2. *Paraphrase* means that the translator will phrase the source text differently in the subtitles. This occurs when the original syntactic structure cannot be retained in the target text.
3. *Transfer* refers to a complete and accurate rendering of the source text.
4. *Imitation* occurs when the target text retains the same form as the source text. An example of this is identically transferring proper nouns into the subtitles.
5. *Dislocation* occurs when the subtitles and their content differ from the source text because they have been adapted to the target language.
6. *Condensation* renders the source text more briefly in the subtitles, while still conveying the meaning and most of the stylistic content of the original dialogue. Gottlieb considers *condensation* the prototypical technique for subtitling.

7. *Decimation* is a variant on the *condensation* technique, in which the original content is reduced significantly. A potential reason for applying this technique is fast speech in the original dialogue.
8. *Deletion* consists of completely omitting parts of the source text, often because of space-time limitations. According to Díaz Cintas & Remael (2007), translators might also choose to delete a word or phrase because there is no equivalent in the target language, or because it is irrelevant to the comprehension of the text, for instance when its meaning can be easily deduced from the context.
9. *Resignation* occurs when the translation differs completely from the source text because there is no equivalent in the target language. As a consequence, part of the original meaning might be lost.

In addition to Gottlieb's (1997) translation techniques, Díaz Cintas & Remael (2007) present another technique that they consider especially relevant for the translation of humour:

10. *Compensation* is used to make up for any translational loss that occurs when subtitling. A translator can then opt to add extra information to the target text. According to Díaz Cintas & Remael, the *compensation* technique is often applied for translating humour.

Similar to Gottlieb's (1997) translation techniques, Chiaro (2010) defines four strategies to assist with translating humour in audiovisual products. The first option is to leave the source text humour unchanged. This means that a translator will translate the joke literally without adjusting it to the target language, possibly diminishing its comic effect in doing so. Secondly, a translator can opt to replace the source text humour with a formally different type of humour in the target language that is equivalent to the source text humour. According to Chiaro, this translation strategy is the most satisfactory for recipients who do not understand the humour in the source text. In fact, she suggests that humour will be appreciated the most when recipients perceive its funniness, despite it being formally different from the source text. A third option is to replace the source text humour with an idiomatic expression in the target language in order to retain a similar form in source and target text. However, this strategy might reduce the comic effect of the source text joke, as an idiomatic expression does not necessarily entail humour. Lastly, a translator can choose to omit the humour in the target text altogether, which appears to be the easiest option when encountering translation difficulties.

2.2.4. Previous studies on humour translation

In the past few years, various studies have been conducted on the translation of humour in films and television programmes. This part will briefly discuss three Dutch studies, as well as their most relevant results and patterns in view of the present study. The two master's theses (Baeyens, 2020; Raes, 2009) were chosen specifically in light of their similarity and relevance to the present study.

Firstly, Baeyens (2020) investigated how well the verbally expressed humour in the drama series *Killing Eve* is preserved in the Dutch subtitles. 188 humorous fragments were categorised according to Martínez Sierra's (2004) classification of humour and subsequently analysed to see whether the humour was transferred fully, partially or not at all. The results show that at least some of the humour was kept in 83% of the fragments, which accounts for a large part of the humour in the source text. Baeyens attributes the partial and non-transfer of the humour in the Dutch subtitles mainly to space-time limitations imposed on subtitlers.

In his thesis, Raes (2009) analysed 327 humorous sequences in four episodes of the British comedy *Little Britain*. Therefore, he combined Martínez Sierra's (2004) taxonomy of humour and Asimakoulas's (2004) translation model. Raes found that the humour had been largely preserved in the Dutch subtitles: in general, the humorous effect was successfully transferred in 81% of the humorous sequences analysed. In 19% of the sequences, the humour had not been transferred, which Raes attributes mainly to space-time limitations and the complexity of translating language- and culture-specific expressions.

In contrast to Baeyens (2020) and Raes (2009), who both analysed humour in general, Pelsmaekers & Van Besien (2002) focused their research on the Dutch translation of humorous irony in the British series *Blackadder*. The findings demonstrate that a large majority of the ironic instances had been retained in the Dutch subtitles, as the ironic effect was to some degree maintained in 209 out of all 211 instances identified. However, the ironic cues had been altered significantly in subtitles, which reduced the ironic effect. As Pelsmaekers & Van Besien point out, the irony might thus come across as a form of criticism or sarcasm instead of humorous irony. Nevertheless, they argue that ironic cues are often made explicit through image and sound, which might compensate for the loss of ironic effect in the target text.

2.3. Taboo language

2.3.1. Defining taboo and taboo language

As this paper also aims to analyse the taboo language and its Dutch translation in *Fleabag*, it is important to provide a clear image of what taboo and taboo language entails. Linguistically, the Oxford English Dictionary defines taboo as “a total or partial prohibition of the use of certain words, expressions, topics, etc., especially in social intercourse” (“Taboo”, n.d.). In their definition, Allan & Burridge (2006) add that taboo is a proscription of certain behaviour because it might cause harm or uneasiness. Accordingly, subjects or utterances that are believed to be too explicit or offensive will often be socially avoided. Examples of such subjects include, among others, references to sex and excretion, illness and death, blasphemy, age, salary (Gao, 2013) and, in some cultures, menstruation (Allan & Burridge). It should be noted, however, that the offensiveness of taboos highly depends on the culture, context and time in which they are used (Allan & Burridge). In respect of taboo language, Allan & Burridge (p. 40) regard it as “language that is a breach of etiquette because it contains so-called ‘dirty words’”, which often refer to the above-mentioned subjects. Other labels to describe the use of taboo terms are, among others, offensive or rude language (Ávila-Cabrera, 2015), cursing (Jay, 1999) and swearing (Andersson & Trudgill, 1990), which are often used interchangeably. For the purpose of this study, the term ‘taboo language’ will be used as an overarching concept to allude to any language use that is generally considered to be shocking or offensive.

People add taboo words to their speech for various reasons. As Stapleton (2010) and Bednarek (2019) argue, taboo language is particularly multifunctional. In fact, taboo words have a highly expressive function, and can be employed to emphasise or intensify certain verbal expressions, as well as to add contempt. Additionally, swearing has the potential to create humorous effect (see ‘taboo humour’, 2.2.2.2), and to strengthen social bonds between people. Furthermore, a speaker’s usage and avoidance of taboo language can reveal a lot about their identity, as well as their sense of belonging or detachment from certain social groups. However, it is important to realise that the use of taboo language depends on many variables, such as social and cultural context, the relationship between interlocutors and their social expectations, along with individual characteristics, including upbringing, class, race and religion (Stapleton). As an example, in formal contexts, individuals from a higher socio-economic class are expected to avoid offensive language in order to uphold their social image (Andersson & Trudgill, 1990). Hence, individuals who want to keep up the appearance of being wealthy might avoid implementing taboo words in their speech. Likewise, individuals with strong religious and conservative beliefs tend to be appalled by blasphemous taboos, and might therefore refrain from using them altogether.

2.3.2. Taboo language in the mass media

As stated previously, the appreciation and use of taboo language is highly culture-dependent, which is also reflected in mass media products. Even though taboos on television have increased significantly in contemporary Western societies (Bucaria & Barra, 2016), some communities still condemn taboo words and are sensitive to their intrusive presence in films and television programmes (Shafer & Kaye, 2015). Subsequently, taboo language on screen might be subject to restrictions or censorship in some cultures (Jay, 2009), with the aim to protect viewers from moral harm (Scandura, 2004). However, taboo language might constitute a useful tool to improve quality and foster realism in films and television programmes. For instance, as Bednarek (2018) points out, taboo words can be employed as a plot device, a catch-phrase and to convey character identity. Furthermore, Bednarek (2019) suggests that swearing on television contributes to a sense of naturalism, since characters who use taboo words come across as more spontaneous and relatable.

Taboo language can serve to portray character personalities in audiovisual products. Díaz Cintas & Remael (2007, p. 185) state that “linguistic choices are never random in film: the way characters speak tells us something about their personality and background”. It is, for instance, a widespread idea to associate the use of taboo words with lower-class individuals rather than higher-class individuals (Gray, 2000), partly because they are expected to distance themselves from societal norms. Accordingly, it is reasonable to assume that translators or subtitlers will render the taboo words in the speech of lower-class characters more explicitly in comparison to higher-class characters.

2.3.3. Classifying taboo language

Though it might seem simple to come up with prototypical examples of taboo words, it is still difficult to establish an exhaustive classification of taboo language, partly because its borders are too vaguely defined (Jay, 2009). Moreover, there is no universal standard to determine what can be perceived as offensive (Jay, 2009a), as some words might be inappropriate to some individuals, but not to others. For instance, the exclamation ‘oh my God!’ might be taboo for religious people, but not necessarily for other parts of society. Therefore, Bednarek (2019, p. 2) claims that taboo words belong to a “fuzzy category”.

With regard to the present study, a classification based on Jay (2009) and Gao (2013) will be used to categorise and analyse the taboo expressions uttered in *Fleabag*. It should be noted that there might be some overlap between the different categories:

- Sexual allusion: words or phrases associated with sexual activities or genitalia. Typical examples are ‘fuck (including its derivations), dick, cunt, twat, and ass’. Gao does mention, however, that sex-related topics are increasingly being tolerated in English-speaking countries.
- Bodily excretions: taboo words that refer to bodily functions and excretions, for instance ‘shit’ or ‘crap’.
- Blasphemy or profanity: words or expressions that are insulting to God or people’s religious beliefs, examples of which are ‘God damn’, ‘Jesus’, and ‘oh my God’. Although the offensiveness of blasphemy has decreased significantly in Western countries over the past decades (Hughes, 2006), some individuals still perceive it as such.
- Death and disease: expressions concerning death and illness. As some people or cultures fear death, they will avoid uttering words associated with death out loud.
- Sexist language: expressions used to discriminate other genders, with a typical prejudice against women. A prototypical derogatory term for women is, for example, ‘bitch’ or ‘slut’.
- Racist language: discriminatory language used to degrade certain racial or ethnic groups. A common example of such taboo words is ‘nigger’, a disrespectful term to refer to black people.
- References to the physically or mentally disabled: language that is meant to disparage people with physical or mental deviations. Some examples are ‘retard’ and ‘wimp’.

2.3.4. Translating taboo language

Given its offensive nature, taboo language might pose difficulties when it comes to translating and subtitling it in audiovisual materials. As mentioned in section 2.1.2, translators are frequently faced with spatial and temporal restraints when subtitling. Translators often consider taboo words redundant to a film or television programme’s storyline, and will therefore choose to leave them out, even more so when the space on screen is limited (Mattsson, 2006). Similarly, when the audience is able to hear and understand the taboo words in the original dialogue, a translation is not required in order to comprehend the message. Furthermore, Díaz Cintas & Remael (2007) state that taboo words tend to be neutralised in audiovisual products, particularly because they are considered more offensive when written down than verbalised. In that context, Van Steenlandt (2015, p. 7) mentions that preserving swearwords in

subtitles “might unintentionally accentuate their presence”, which might result in audience disapproval. The approval of taboos varies in different cultures, however, and therefore translators should handle taboo words with caution (Bednarek, 2019). Their challenge is to find a middle ground between respecting culture-bound norms and retaining the taboo words in order to capture the general theme of the film or television programme.

At the same time, several researchers support retaining the taboo language in the target text, in particular because taboo words are of considerable value to portray certain characters on screen. However, accurately conveying character identity through taboo language might present some difficulties in terms of translation. Translators are often faced with the dilemma of either remaining faithful to the original character’s speech or deleting the taboo words in order to comply with the social customs of a culture. Nevertheless, as Díaz Cintas & Remael (2007) observe, not all taboo words should be rendered in order to realistically portray a character’s personality: it is sufficient to add them occasionally. Apart from character representation, Díaz Cintas & Remael point out that swearwords are specifically important in dialogic interaction, as well as for the plot of the film or television programme in general. In conclusion, Greenall (2011) remarks that deleting taboo language in subtitles is not always the best solution, as it might result in “a loss in communicative effect and social implicature” (cited in Ávila-Cabrera, 2015, p. 42).

The following paragraph will give an overview of the translation techniques that can be applied when subtitling taboo language. Davoodi (2009) suggests four possibilities:

1. *Censorship* or *omission* implies that the taboo word is left out of the target text. According to Davies (2007), omission is justified when the taboo word is seen as redundant or too offensive to the target audience, when a translation is impossible, or when there is no equivalent available in the target language.
2. *Substitution* occurs when a translator replaces a taboo term from the source language with a non-taboo term in the target language. As expected, this might lead to a loss of meaning in the target text.
3. *Taboo for taboo* consists of translating a taboo expression into another taboo expression that is known in the target language.
4. *Euphemism* refers to replacing a taboo term with a less direct and harsh term, and attenuating its shocking effect in doing so. Examples of euphemisms are replacing the blasphemous terms ‘Jesus’ or ‘God damn’, by ‘Gee’ and ‘Gosh darn’ (Gao, 2013), or using ‘to sleep with’ or ‘to make love’ instead of the explicit verb ‘to have sex’.

In addition, translators can opt to retain certain taboo terms in the target text. In that regard, Díaz Cintas & Remael (2007) define the following translation technique:

5. *Loan* implies that a word or phrase from the source text is used in the target text. This technique is applied when the source and target language use the same word.

2.3.5. Previous studies on taboo language translation

In light of the present study, it is interesting to look at a few previous studies on the translation of taboo language in films or television programmes. This section discusses the results of four recent studies: three unpublished Dutch master's theses (Bollaert, 2015; De Bruyne, 2019; Van Steenlandt, 2015) and one published Spanish study (Ávila-Cabrera, 2016).

In her master's thesis, Bollaert (2015) analysed and compared the translation of swearwords in the French dubbing and the Dutch subtitling of the film *The Wolf of Wall Street*. In addition, she investigated which translation techniques were used the most frequently to render the taboo words. In terms of results, the Dutch subtitles demonstrated a significant use of the omission technique: 63.18% of the detected swearwords in the film were deleted. Bollaert attributes this to the fact that taboo language appears to be more concrete when written down than when spoken, as stated by Díaz Cintas & Remael (2007). The rest of the swearwords were generally translated by a Dutch equivalent (19.9%), a euphemism (10.7%) or by a different expression in the target language (4.7%), which distorted the meaning of the original taboo word. With regard to the French dubbed version of the film, the translation techniques largely corresponded to the techniques used in the Dutch subtitled version. However, the dubbed version demonstrated a significantly lower use of omissions and euphemisms.

A case study by Van Steenlandt (2015) investigated and compared the occurrence of taboo words and their translation techniques in two films: *Jarhead* (2005) and *30 Minutes or Less* (2011). As the author hypothesised, the most common translation technique for taboo words was omission. In both films, around 50% of the taboo language was left out in the target text. Van Steenlandt links these results to low subtitle space, the context in which the films are viewed and the fact that taboo words were considered unnecessary to comprehend the storyline.

A Spanish study conducted by Ávila-Cabrera (2016) also demonstrated that most taboo words were deleted in the Spanish subtitles of the film *Reservoir Dogs*. Furthermore, the author investigated whether the omission of such terms could be technically justified by space-time restraints, which is a limitation

that many translators encounter when subtitling. Ávila-Cabrera found that 77.6% of the omissions could not be justified by space-time restraints, meaning that the subtitler decided to delete the taboo terms for other reasons not specified in the study. The subtitler might have opted for omission on the grounds that such words are too offensive for the Spanish target audience. Ávila-Cabrera does point out that “the softening or omission of these terms risk jeopardizing the intended function that they have in a given dialogue or on a given speaker” (p. 38).

Contrastively, De Bruyne’s (2019) research revealed that, despite the fact that taboo words are often deleted in films and television programmes, the number of omissions in the subtitles of the film *Deadpool* (2016) was lower than expected. In fact, only 37% of the taboo words had been left out in the Dutch subtitles. Instead, *taboo for taboo* was the most frequently used translation technique, which accounted for 39%. De Bruyne postulates that the subtitler retained a large part of the taboo words in the target text because viewers have recently grown more tolerant of offensive language in films and television programmes. Nevertheless, the discrepancy in results between De Bruyne’s study and the three previous studies could also be attributed to, inter alia, a difference in the films’ general theme, a difference in the characters and their dialogue, and the subtitler’s personal preferences in terms of translation.

2.4. Conclusion

The theoretical part has revealed the vast complexity of humour and taboo language as concepts, particularly in view of their translation. In fact, translators might encounter some difficulties when subtitling humour and taboo language in audiovisual materials. Not only are translators limited by space-time conventions, they should also bear in mind the intended target culture and audience for which they are translating. On the other hand, translators can never completely abide by the recipients’ preferences, as every individual differs in terms of appreciating certain types of humour or taboo language.

With regard to translating humour, a translator’s main priority is to preserve the intended comic effect in the target text. As Chiaro (2010) suggests, this can be best achieved by finding an equivalent joke in the target language. In addition, Gottlieb (1997) describes nine techniques to assist translators in making adequate translation choices. Furthermore, Díaz Cintas & Remael (2007) believe that translators will often add extra information to the target text when subtitling humour. However, there are many factors that influence an accurate transfer of humour. For instance, Vandaele (2002) points out that the rendering of humour highly depends on the translator’s awareness and perception of the humour in the source text.

A translator that fails to detect the intended humour might not translate it accordingly, which results in a loss of meaning in the target text. Additionally, the target humour might be affected by the translator's personal sense of humour, which might not be universally appreciated. A successful transfer thus requires ample awareness of the intended humour and its humorous equivalents in the target language.

Taboo language, as Bednarek (2019) points out, should be dealt with carefully. Rather than generating a similar effect in the target text, a translator should take into account the target audience and their acceptance of certain taboo words before transferring them. Once again, this means that a translator should have knowledge of both source and target culture, as well as which expressions are used and tolerated in those cultures. It seems to be the safest option to omit the taboo words in the target text altogether, which was also a frequently adopted translation technique found in previous studies (Bollaert, 2015; Van Steenlandt, 2015; Ávila-Cabrera, 2016). However, as stated by Díaz Cintas & Remael (2007), taboo language can be employed efficiently to portray character identity, as well as the general theme of a film or television programme. In that case, deleting the taboo words might result in a loss of meaning and realism in the target text. Hence, the translation might be more satisfactory if a translator occasionally adds taboo words that are considered appropriate by the target culture.

3 METHODOLOGY

This part covers the methodology and data used in the present study. Firstly, a few of the characters of the first season of *Fleabag* are described. This provides the reader with a general image of the characters' personalities, their speech styles, their character traits, and their mutual relationships. Secondly, an outline of the data collection and data analysis will be given. Lastly, the research questions and hypotheses are formulated.

3.1. Main characters

The first season of *Fleabag* revolves around the life of a young woman and her interactions with various people. Some of the characters are never officially named in the script or the series, and are instead identified by their connection to the protagonist. For example, two side characters are referred to in the script as 'Bus Rodent' or 'Bank Manager'. All of these characters help shape the protagonist's identity and her speech style.

The characters that will be discussed are the following:

- The main character, whose name is never officially mentioned in the series, will be referred to in the present study as 'Fleabag'. Fleabag is a self-destructive and sex-obsessed café-owner who tries to cope with the death of her best friend, Boo. She often uses sex and humour as a coping mechanism to deflect her inner struggles. A typical characteristic of the protagonist is her tendency to break the fourth wall: Fleabag continuously addresses the audience through glances, facial expressions and direct comments at the camera. The use of the fourth wall adds to the overall comic effect of the television series, particularly because Fleabag's comments are so unexpected and, at times, inappropriate.
- Claire is Fleabag's sister. Her character is the complete opposite to Fleabag: she is uptight, successful, married, and seems to have the perfect life. Claire is often disapproving of Fleabag's loose and inappropriate behaviour, at times criticising her for lacking maturity and sense of responsibility. They are still sisters, however, and they do show mutual solidarity whenever they encounter difficulties. For example, Claire often supports Fleabag in defying their evil stepmother.
- Harry is one of Fleabag's regular boyfriends. They split up and get back together again multiple times throughout the series. For Fleabag, Harry is an easy option to return to, as he is considerate and sensitive. Moreover, he tends to behave in ways that are considered too feminine and emotional for what is expected from male gender roles, which often results in a comic effect.

- Fleabag's dad is a rather passive and emotionally distant figure to Fleabag and Claire. While he loves his daughters, he clearly has difficulties communicating with them. Despite the fact that he has remarried, their father is still grieving the loss of his first wife, Fleabag and Claire's mother.
- Fleabag's stepmother is a narcissistic artist who could be seen as the antagonist of the television series. As the stepmother, she presents herself as caring and sweet towards Fleabag and Claire, but in reality she continuously mocks and criticises Fleabag through sarcastic comments. Fleabag and the stepmother's mutual hatred and hostility often results in a cruel but humorous dynamic between the two characters.
- Martin is Claire's husband, who is described in the series as a sexually inappropriate alcoholic. He often belittles Fleabag, who despises him for his vulgar behaviour.
- Bus Rodent is a recurring side character that Fleabag meets on the bus. His most apparent feature is his very large front teeth, which causes humorous effect whenever he speaks. He is rather idiotic and ignorant of what is happening around him, which is also reflected in his speech style. His behaviour impacts Fleabag's dialogue as well. For example, since Bus Rodent is so oblivious at times, Fleabag often uses irony or witticism in her interactions with him.
- Arsehole Guy is one of Fleabag's love interests throughout the first season. He is extremely narcissistic, self-confident and vacuous and has an infatuation with anal intercourse. His relationship with Fleabag is purely sexual, which to a great extent determines the topic of their conversations.

3.2. Data collection and analysis

The scope of the present study is limited to the first season of *Fleabag*, which consists of six episodes of about twenty five minutes each. The corpus (see Appendix II) is a transcription of both the original English soundtrack and the Dutch subtitles, which were obtained through the official DVD of *Fleabag*. The dialogue and subtitles were transcribed manually and put into an Excel spreadsheet.

The corpus in the Excel spreadsheet is organised in eleven columns: the first five columns contain the episode number, the number of the humorous fragment, the number of the taboo utterance, the time stamp and the abbreviated name of the character who speaks in a certain fragment. The original dialogue and its corresponding Dutch subtitles can be found in the sixth and seventh column. A forward slash in the sixth column indicates an overlap in speech between two different characters. It should be noted that the source text sometimes includes relevant non-verbal information, which was added in between brackets. These descriptions of non-verbal cues provide information that is relevant for the reader to

fully comprehend the humour in some of the fragments. In addition, a forward slash was added to the target text column whenever the translator did not provide a subtitle for the original dialogue. The eighth column gives the type of humour that was identified in the original dialogue, with next to it the translation technique that was used to transfer the humour into Dutch. Similarly, the last two columns contain the type of taboo and the translation technique used to translate the taboo language into Dutch. The following figure illustrates an example of the corpus:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Ep.	HF n°	TU n°	Time stamp	Character	Source text (English)	Target text (Dutch)	Humour type	TT H	Type of taboo	TT taboo
1	2	1	0:01:00	F	[to the camera] After some pretty standard bouncing, you realise... he's edging towards your arsehole. But, you're drunk and he made the effort to come all the way here, so you let him. He's thrilled.	Na het gebruikelijke gestuiter, besef je: hij gaat richting je kontgat... maar je bent dronken en hij heeft een eind gereisd, dus het moet maar. Hij vindt het fantastisch.	sexual humour	transfer	sexual allusion	taboo for taboo
				AG	I'm so thrilled.	Dit is fantastisch.				

Figure 1: Organisation and labelling of the corpus data (Appendix II)

After the transcriptions had been organised, the humorous fragments in *Fleabag* were selected and labelled. To extract the humorous instances from the television series, Chiaro's (2014) four elements of humour were taken into account: the selected humorous fragments involved either an incongruity, a positive affective response, a social setting or laughter (see section 2.2.1). The instances that were perceived as humorous were selected and marked in blue. This resulted in a total of 128 humorous fragments. It is worth mentioning that the corpus mainly consists of instances of verbally expressed humour, since non-verbal humour scarcely requires subtitling. In order to reduce subjectivity to a minimum in the selection of the humorous fragments, a second person was asked to watch the television series and select the fragments that they found humorous. The input of a second viewer to some degree influenced the number of humorous fragments that were eventually included in the corpus. It should be noted, however, that humour is linguistically very complex and that identifying humour highly depends on the recipient's perception (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007). Therefore, it is difficult to measure exactly how many humorous instances the television series contains. Some instances of humour might have been overlooked, such as British culture-specific humour that non-native speakers are not always familiar with. Furthermore, some instances of humour might belong to more than one category of humour depending on the perception of the viewer. As a consequence, identifying the types of humour and translation techniques might have been influenced by the author's subjective interpretation as well. In brief, it is fair to say that the corpus of humorous fragments might not be entirely exhaustive, even

though the study has aimed for an objective selection based on the criteria outlined in the theoretical introduction.

After the humorous fragments had been identified, they were labelled according to Dynel (2009) and Attardo's (2014) classifications of humour (see 2.2.2.2). Then, they were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. In the qualitative analysis, a subsection discusses each type of humour identified, in which a few relevant examples will be thoroughly described and the reader will be directed to comparable cases in the corpus. The qualitative description specifically aims to analyse the linguistic rendering of the humour into the Dutch subtitles.

With regard to the analysis of the taboo language in *Fleabag*, the English taboo utterances and their corresponding translation were underlined in the Excel spreadsheet. The concept of taboo was taken in its broadest sense: all utterances referring to taboo subjects were underlined in the corpus, which resulted in a total of 218 taboo words. It should be noted that each taboo word was counted separately, implying that a single dialogue sentence containing two different taboo terms was counted as two taboo utterances. Next, the type of taboo was added for each taboo word identified, based on Jay (2009) and Gao's (2013) classifications of taboo language (see 2.3.3). Furthermore, the translation technique was identified for each taboo utterance. The qualitative analysis parallels that of the humorous fragments: each taboo utterance was analysed, of which a selection of relevant examples and their translation will be discussed in the analysis. The reader is referred to similar cases in the corpus. Additionally, the analysis investigates the typical use of taboo language associated with individual characters and the translation of individual speech styles.

4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The general aim of this study is to qualitatively analyse how the humour and taboo language in *Fleabag* is transferred into Dutch, and whether the translator managed to retain the original humour and taboo language in the subtitles. The general research question that the study aims to answer is therefore:

- Do the Dutch subtitles retain the linguistic rendering of the humour and taboo language present in the original dialogue?

Apart from a qualitative description, the present study also focuses on analysing humour and taboo language quantitatively. For the quantitative analysis, the following sub-questions will be considered:

- Which types of humour and taboo language are most frequent in *Fleabag*?
- Which translation techniques are used the most frequently to transfer the humour and the taboo language into Dutch?

Furthermore, since taboo language is often implemented in television series to portray character personalities, it is interesting to examine the link between character speech and the occurrence of taboo language, as well as explore the way in which the translator depicts these characters and their speech style in the subtitles. Since the characters of Fleabag and Claire are so contrastive, the present study will specifically compare the taboo language use of the two sisters and compare the techniques used in subtitling their lines. This prompts the following sub-question:

- How is Fleabag's taboo language use translated in comparison to Claire's?

The hypothesis for the general research question is based on the findings of several studies that also researched the humour and taboo language in audiovisual materials. With regard to humour, Baeyens (2020), Pelsmaekers & Van Besien (2002) and Raes (2009) found that a large part of the verbally expressed humour had been successfully translated into Dutch. Therefore, the hypothesis is that the humour will be mostly preserved in the Dutch subtitles of *Fleabag*. As regards the taboo language in *Fleabag*, it is hypothesised that most of the taboo effect will be lost in translation, based on the studies of Ávila-Cabrera (2016), Bollaert (2015) and Van Steenlandt (2015), who all found that a majority of taboo words had been omitted.

As for the first sub-question, the hypothesis is that the types of humour relating to absurdism and taboos occur most often, on the grounds that *Fleabag* is a British dark comedy series that unconventionally

explores taboo subjects. Furthermore, considering the sex-related topics that the series broaches, it is hypothesised that sexual allusion is the most common type of taboo language.

With regard to the second sub-question, the hypothesis is based on several studies mentioned in the introductory theoretical part. As Díaz-Cintas & Remael (2007) state, humour is often translated based on the *compensation* technique, in which extra information is added to the subtitle. Accordingly, the hypothesis is that the humour in *Fleabag* will be mainly rendered by means of *compensation*. Concerning the translation of taboo language in the series, it is hypothesised that most of the taboo terms will be omitted in the Dutch subtitles. This hypothesis is based on the results of three studies (Ávila-Cabrera, 2016; Bollaert, 2015; Van Steenlandt, 2015), in which *omission* was the prevalent translation technique.

Lastly, the third hypothesis is based on Bednarek's (2018) idea that taboo language contributes to creating character personalities. Specifically, it is assumed that translators will render taboo words more explicitly for lower-class characters in comparison to higher-class characters. In the television series, Fleabag is portrayed as a lower middle class character who struggles to make ends meet. In contrast, Claire belongs to the upper middle class, as she is wealthy and successful. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is formulated: the taboo language use of Fleabag will be subtitled more explicitly than Claire's.

5 ANALYSIS

This part will provide an analysis of the humour and taboo language in *Fleabag*. First, the quantitative results are presented, including an overview of the types of humour and taboo that are prevalent in the series, as well as the frequency of the translation techniques used. Then, a selection of the most relevant humorous fragments will be analysed per category of humour, with the aim to see whether the humour is linguistically rendered in the Dutch subtitles. Lastly, a few relevant taboo utterances and their translations will be discussed per category, followed by a section on the contrast between *Fleabag* and Claire's taboo language use in translation. It should be noted that not all categories described in section 2.2.2.2 and section 2.3.3 will be included in the qualitative analysis, as only the most relevant examples will be discussed.

5.1. Quantitative analysis

5.1.1. Quantitative results humour

In total, 128 humorous fragments were identified and labelled according to their type of humour. Table 1 below presents an overview of the most frequent types of humour and their corresponding percentages. The most frequent type of humour in *Fleabag* is absurdist humour, which accounts for 23.4% of the total number of humorous instances, followed by sexual and taboo humour (18.0%). The high frequency of these categories could be attributed to the general theme of the television series, as it is a British dark comedy series that typically broaches topics related to taboos. Other categories of humour that occurred often are hyperbole (10.1%), paradox (9.4%), and putdown or mockery (7.8%).

Type of humour	Frequency	Percentage
Humorous lexeme	1	0.8
Witticism	6	4.7
Register clash	2	1.6
Retort	1	0.8
Teasing	3	2.3
Banter	6	4.7
Putdown / mockery	10	7.8
Self-deprecating humour	1	0.8
Anecdote	2	1.6
Hyperbole	13	10.1
Paradox	12	9.4
Irony	9	7.0

Sarcasm	9	7.0
Absurdist humour	30	23.4
Sexual / taboo humour	23	18.0
Total	128	100

Table 1: Frequency of types of humour

Additionally, table 2 below shows the frequency of the translation techniques that were used to render the humour into Dutch. It should be noted that the *resignation* technique, as described in section 2.2.3, was not included in the table because the technique was not applied to transfer the humour. The results reveal that more than half of the humorous fragments were translated by means of the *transfer* technique (55.5%), followed by *condensation* (17.2%) and *paraphrase* (10.9%).

Translation technique humour	Frequency	Percentage
Expansion	3	2.3
Paraphrase	14	10.9
Transfer	71	55.5
Imitation	2	1.6
Dislocation	2	1.6
Condensation	22	17.2
Decimation	9	7.0
Deletion	3	2.3
Compensation	2	1.6
Total	128	100

Table 2: Frequency of translation techniques for humour

5.1.2. Quantitative results taboo language

With regard to the frequency of types of taboo language, nearly all categories outlined in the theoretical introduction occurred in the television series, with the exception of the category ‘racist language’. As the following table reveals, the two most frequent types of taboo language in *Fleabag* are sexual allusion, which equals 58.7% of all taboo utterances analysed, and blasphemy, which accounts for 24.8%. The third most frequent category of taboo language is bodily excretions (8.3%).

Type of taboo	Frequency	Percentage
Sexual allusion	128	58.7
Bodily excretions	18	8.3
Blasphemy	54	24.8
Death and disease	7	3.2
Sexist language	10	4.6
References to the disabled (PMD)	1	0.4
Total	218	100

Table 3: Frequency of types of taboo

The frequency of the translation techniques for rendering the taboo language into Dutch can be found in table 4 below. The translation technique that prevails is *taboo for taboo*, which was used to render 45.0% of the total number of taboo utterances. The second most common technique is *omission*, as 37.6% of all taboo utterances were deleted in the subtitles.

Translation technique taboo	Frequency	Percentage
Omission	82	37.6
Substitution	24	11.0
Taboo for taboo	98	45.0
Euphemism	11	5.0
Loan	3	1.4
Total	218	100

Table 4: Frequency of translation techniques for taboo language

5.2. Qualitative analysis

5.2.1 Analysis per category of humour

5.2.1.1 Humorous lexeme

Fleabag included one instance of a humorous lexeme, in which a new word was created:

Humorous fragment	Character	Source text	Target text
107	Fleabag	What exhibition?	Waar?
	Stepmother	Thank you so much for asking, we have actually-	Wat aardig dat je het vraagt. We hebben iets gevonden.
	Dad	There's some elements of the work that I wanted to talk to you about.	Ik wou bepaalde elementen eerst met jullie bespreken.
	Stepmother	It's a sexhibition. But don't panic, it's nothing scary, it's simply a journey through my physical and sexual life, climaxing in a few pieces inspired by, and moulded on your father.	Het is een sexpositie. Niet schrikken. Een reis door m'n fysieke en seksuele ervaringen met als klapstuk een paar werken met je vader als inspiratie.

This fragment induces humorous effect because of the lexeme 'sexhibition', which combines the words 'sex' and 'exhibition'. The term refers to the stepmother's exhibition, which displays artworks purely based on sexual subjects. The translator opted to use a similar humorous lexeme in the target language, by translating it as 'sexpositie'. The Dutch equivalent engenders humorous effect, not only because it refers to the exhibition itself, but also because it resembles the Dutch word 'sekspositie'. As this reference translates literally as 'sex position', its sexual connotation is even more profound than the original English term used. In other words, the double meaning of the Dutch translation enhances the comic effect in the subtitles. Furthermore, the ambiguous English verb 'to climax' contains sexual innuendo, which enhances the comic effect in the original dialogue. The ambiguity of the word is not preserved in the target text, however, since the translation 'met als klapstuk' does not convey the sexual connotation of the original term.

5.2.1.2 Witticism

Humorous fragment	Character	Source text	Target text
100	Claire	Just do it. I don't want it in my house. I'm doing you a massive favour, she could really go to town on you for this.	Doe het. Ik wil het thuis niet hebben. Wees blij, ze kan je helemaal afmaken.
	Fleabag	Come on, what's she gonna do, draw me?	Wat kan ze doen? Een portret van me maken?

In this fragment, Fleabag has stolen one of her stepmother's sculptures and Claire demands that she put it back in place. Fleabag resists at first, but Claire insists by saying that not returning it could have severe consequences. Claire uses the verb 'to go to town' to suggest that Stepmother could react very angrily, which is also rendered in the subtitles, if not in an exaggerated form. The humour in Fleabag's witty comment is based on the fact that her stepmother is only an artist who cannot inflict any damage on her; drawing her sounds like the only 'threat'. The witticism in her comment was transferred into the subtitles as well, particularly because of the first sentence 'wat kan ze doen?'. Another example can be found in fragments 37, 55 and 86 (see Appendix II), in which the witticism was transferred successfully into the

target text. Generally speaking, instances of witticism should be fairly easy to detect through tone of voice as well, which makes up for any loss of humorous effect in the subtitles.

5.2.1.3 Register clash

Humorous fragment	Character	Source text	Target text
82	Woman from the centre	The first major consideration is: why are you here? Can anyone here answer that question?	Het belangrijkste is allereerst de vraag: waarom zijn jullie gekomen? Kan iemand die vraag beantwoorden?
	Fleabag	I want to shut the noise out, and reconnect to my inner thoughts on the road to feeling more at one with myself.	Ik wil af zijn van de ruis rond m'n eigen gedachten, en mezelf zo terugvinden.

This example is humorous because of the clash between Fleabag's usual informal register and the formal and earnest way in which she answers the question. The effect of her utterance is partially transferred into Dutch: the English original soundtrack is slightly more exaggerated, which adds to the comic effect of the scene, whereas the subtitles are less hyperbolic in terms of formality. For instance, the second part of her answer is reduced to 'mezelf zo terugvinden', which lacks the exaggerated effect of the original dialogue. Still, her earnest and ironic tone does suggest that the utterance is meant to be humorous, so the subtitle should be sufficient to grasp the overall comic effect of the scene.

A few other fragments also revealed a pattern in terms of reducing exaggerated effect in the subtitles, especially the fragments that were classified as hyperboles. Examples of this are fragments 5, 18, 29, 39 and 122, which can be found in Appendix II. The lack of expletives in the Dutch subtitles of fragments 5, 18 and 39 might result in the Dutch audience perceiving the subtitles as more serious than they were intended to be. Logically, it is impossible for a translator to bring across all of the original information in the subtitles, for instance due to space-time limitations, but it still weakens the humorous effect of the fragments altogether.

5.2.1.4 Teasing and banter

Humorous fragment	Character	Source text	Target text	Humour type
14	Claire	Gosh, just don't get drunk and scream through his letterbox again.	Ga niet weer stomdronken door z'n brievenbus gillen.	Banter
	Fleabag	Thanks for the vote of confidence. Don't get drunk and shit in your sink again.	En bedankt. Als jij maar niet weer in de wasbak kakt.	
	Claire	When are you gonna <i>stop</i> bringing that up?	Wanneer hou je daarover op?	
	Fleabag	When you do something better.	Als je iets leukers doet.	

	Claire	I have two degrees, a husband and a Burberry coat.	Ik ben afgestudeerd, heb een man en een Burberry-jas.	
	Fleabag	You <i>shat</i> in a <i>sink</i> . Nothing is ever going to be better.	Je hebt in een wasbak zitten kakken. Dat overtreft je nooit meer.	

This fragment clearly displays the difference between the two sisters and the way they interact with each other. It is humorous because Fleabag confronts Claire with past behaviour that she is clearly ashamed of, as ‘shitting in a sink’ does not fit her character at all. Claire then attempts to counter the teasing remark by insinuating that she is a successful woman. As regards the Dutch translation, the irony in Fleabag’s remark ‘thanks for the vote of confidence’ was not entirely preserved in the subtitles. Nevertheless, the rest of the subtitles do reflect the same humorous effect that was intended, particularly because the taboo utterance ‘you shat in a sink’ is translated as an utterance that is equally as informal and inappropriate. A similar example of teasing between the two sisters is presented in fragment 79, in which the humorous effect is fully transferred into Dutch as well.

In the following fragment, the humour in Fleabag’s teasing remark is only partially transferred:

Humorous fragment	Character	Source text	Target text	Humour type
43	Claire	It’s really inappropriate to jog around a graveyard.	Je hoort niet op een kerkhof te joggen.	
	Fleabag	Why?	Waarom niet?	
	Claire	Flaunting your life. God, I can’t wait to be old.	Dan loop je zo te koop met je leven. Het lijkt me heerlijk om oud te zijn.	
	Fleabag	If it’s any consolation, you look older than you are.	Je ziet er ouder uit dan je bent.	Teasing

In this scene, Fleabag indicates that she is merely teasing Claire about her appearance by adding ‘If it’s any consolation’, suggesting that she should take her comment light-heartedly. Since the Dutch translation did not render that part of the original dialogue, it might come across as a serious statement rather than a teasing remark. Although the core of the message has been transferred adequately, omitting the mitigation reduces the comic effect to some extent. Another example in which the humour of the original teasing remark is less noticeable in the subtitles is humorous fragment 126.

5.2.1.5 Putdown and mockery

Putdowns, also known as mockery, are generally manifested through insulting or ridiculing remarks that aim to create humorous effect. In the following fragment, it was the scriptwriter’s intention to mock Bus Rodent’s character to induce comic effect in the audience:

Humorous fragment	Character	Source text	Target text	Humour type
8	Bus Rodent	I'll be sure to treat you like a nasty little bitch.	Dan zal ik je als een akelige trut behandelen.	Sexual humour
	Bus Rodent	Uhm, that was a joke.	Dat was een grapje.	
	Fleabag	Oh, I know.	Ja, dat snap ik.	
	Bus Rodent	Ok. Great, wow! I'll buzz you then. I can't stop smiling! Sorry, I-	Prima. Dan zie ik je wel als ik je zie. Die grijns krijg ik niet meer weg.	Mockery

The humour in this scene is largely based on a visual element, namely Bus Rodent's very large front teeth and Fleabag's facial expressions at the camera whenever he speaks. The comic effect is enhanced by the fact that Bus Rodent very confidently tells Fleabag that he will 'treat her like a nasty little bitch', which contrasts his ridiculous appearance. The Dutch translation 'als een akelige trut behandelen' does not really correspond to the level of sexual suggestiveness that was intended in the original dialogue. In fact, the taboo word 'nasty little bitch' carries a strong sexual meaning, which was reduced in the subtitles: the translator interpreted the term 'nasty' as 'being unpleasant' instead of perceiving it as a sexual term. Additionally, the fact that Bus Rodent says that he cannot stop smiling generates comic effect: it was clearly the intention of the scriptwriters to mock his appearance by giving him that line. This effect was transferred into the subtitles by means of a literal translation, and is heightened by Fleabag's funny glances at the camera.

5.2.1.6 Irony and sarcasm

The category of irony and sarcasm will be discussed simultaneously, specifically because they are not always easy to distinguish. In addition, since sarcasm can be seen as a form of verbal irony, the two are often used interchangeably.

Humorous fragment	Character	Source text	Target text	Humour type
61	Everyone	Surprise!	Verrassing!	
	Claire	Oh my God, thank you so much, I'm <i>so</i> surprised!	Mijn god, dank jullie wel. Dit had ik niet verwacht.	Irony
	Fleabag	[to the camera] She's very good.	Dat doet ze goed.	

The context of the scene is the following: it is Claire's birthday, for which she has organised her own surprise party. Since the guests at the party cannot know that she organised the party herself, she has to act surprised. The irony in her utterance is marked by various ironic cues, such as the expression 'oh my God', the stress on the word 'so' and her overall exaggerated tone of voice. Through these cues, the audience is clearly able to interpret and recognise the ironic effect of the scene. Moreover, the translator

chose to render the word ‘oh my God’ in the Dutch subtitles particularly to emphasise the irony of the original dialogue. In fact, of all 39 instances of the exclamation ‘oh my God’ and its derivations, only six were transferred into Dutch, all of which function to exaggerate a certain utterance or exclamation. Furthermore, in the majority of the ironic instances identified, the ironic effect was retained in some way in the subtitles, as can be seen in fragments 13, 65 and 92 in the corpus.

A similar pattern was found for the translation of sarcasm: in the example below, the sarcasm is rendered by using similar hyperbolic expressions in the target text. Other examples of this are fragments 21, 66, 97 and 124.

Humorous fragment	Character	Source text	Target text	Humour type
63	Stepmother	I was so pleased that you found someone else so fast! I just can't stop conjuring an image of you sitting around that café. Just all alone, feeling so terribly lonely. Just can't stop picturing it.	En fijn dat je nu al een ander hebt. Ik zag je de hele tijd maar zitten in je café. Helemaal alleen en hartverscheurend eenzaam. Dat krijg ik maar niet uit m'n hoofd.	Sarcasm

5.2.1.7 Absurdist humour

Humorous fragment	Character	Source text	Target text
19	Bus Rodent	My sister blows glass. She has done for a long time. Honestly, I've never been in a fight. Well, I've been in a fight, I've never been punched in the face. I've been punched in the leg, and someone once threw some punch in my face. So, my colours this season are sort of brown, mainly. But like, you know, I wouldn't say no to a maroon. [...] So. I'm gonna go for a wazz.	Ik heb gevochten, maar ben nooit in m'n gezicht gestompt. Weleens op m'n been en vlak voor m'n gezicht. Ik draag dit seizoen bruinnuances. Kastanjebruin is zelfs een mogelijkheid. [...] Ik ga even aftappen.

In this scene, Fleabag and Bus Rodent are on a date. The humour is based on the absurdity of Bus Rodent rattling on about himself and telling random facts that are seemingly unrelated. Additionally, the humour is created through the wordplay of the ambiguous word ‘punch’. This effect was not transferred in the subtitles, however, probably because there is no Dutch equivalent of the pun. The translator did add ‘en vlak voor m'n gezicht’, which might signify they wanted to transfer some of the meaning of the original utterance ‘someone once threw some punch in my face’. However, some of the original meaning is lost in the subtitles, which reduces the effect of the wordplay. Additionally, Bus Rodent's way of speaking has not been transferred as adequately in the subtitles: in the original dialogue, he uses the slang verb ‘to go for a wazz’, which he probably assumes will make him sound edgy. By contrast, the subtitles do not reflect this to the same extent, as ‘aftappen’ does not carry the same meaning as the verb ‘to urinate’. It does, however, parallel the colloquial style of the English taboo term ‘wazz’.

Instances of absurdist humour that were transferred successfully into the target text are humorous fragments 28, 40, 50, 75, 83 and 84, which can be found in Appendix II.

5.2.1.8 Sexual and taboo humour

The categories sexual and taboo humour will be discussed as one category, as taboo humour could be seen as an overarching category that includes references to sexual humour as well.

Humorous fragment	Character	Source text	Target text	Humour type
76	Voice	Sluts!	Sletten.	Taboo humour
	Fleabag	Yes?	/	
	Claire	We're gonna die here. We're gonna be raped and die.	We komen hier om. We worden verkracht en dan gaan we dood.	
	Fleabag	Every cloud-	Achter elke wolk...	

The humour in this fragment is created through Claire's exaggerated comment after hearing a man yell 'sluts', as well as Fleabag's inappropriate reactions. Firstly, Fleabag's answer to the exclamation implies that she sees herself as a slut. Her reaction was not subtitled into Dutch, but since a Dutch audience most likely knows the meaning of the word 'yes', the comic effect of the scene is still preserved. Claire's comment is humorous in the sense that it is very exaggerated, which is typical of her character. The hyperbolic effect was transferred into Dutch as well, as the taboo references were kept in the subtitles. Fleabag's last comment refers to the idiom 'every cloud has a silver lining', with which she insinuates that being raped before dying should be perceived as something positive rather than as something negative. The comic effect of her remark was rendered in the subtitles as well, as it was translated as 'achter elke wolk', which alludes to the Dutch idiom 'achter elke wolk schijnt de zon'. Although this is a literal translation, the Dutch idiom does fit the context because it conveys the same message. Evidently, the audience must be familiar with the Dutch idiom in order to apprehend the underlying meaning of Fleabag's comment.

Humorous fragment	Character	Source text	Target text	Humour type
10	Fleabag	I had to do a flash poo in Pret.	Ik moest opeens kakken in Pret.	Taboo humour
	Claire	Christ, did you wash your hands?	Heb je je handen gewassen?	
	Fleabag	Of course not.	Welnee.	
	Claire	Oh my God, you are disgusting. Fucking hell.	Wat ben jij een smeerlap.	
	Fleabag	Of course I washed my hands, it's not like I grew up without a mother.	Natuurlijk wel. Alsof ik geen moeder heb gehad.	

This fragment is categorised as taboo humour because of its reference to excrements. The humour in this scene is based on the contrast between Claire and Fleabag’s characters and their speech style. The slang utterance ‘to do a flash poo in Pret’ refers to making a quick visit to the bathroom in a Pret A Manger restaurant. The cultural reference ‘Pret’ was retained in the subtitles, but might not be understood by a Dutch audience since it is a culture-specific term. Nevertheless, the humorous effect of the original taboo utterance was still transferred into Dutch, particularly because the translator described it equally as informally as the original utterance. The rest of the swearwords have been reduced or deleted in the target text, however, which takes away some of the humorous effect of the scene. However, this should not affect a Dutch audience too much, since it is clear from Claire’s expression and the soundtrack that she is disgusted by Fleabag’s behaviour.

Humorous fragment	Character	Source text	Target text	Humour type
108	Stepmother	I mean, I don’t need to tell you, but your father is a deeply sexual man.	Ik hoef jullie dit niet te vertellen, maar jullie vader is erg seksueel ingesteld.	Sexual humour
	Claire	No, you don’t.	Dat hoeft niet, nee.	
	Fleabag	She just did.	Ze deed het toch.	
	Fleabag	[to the camera] Knew it.	Typerend.	

The humour in this fragment is partially based on absurdity, since Stepmother tells Fleabag and Claire that their dad is a ‘deeply sexual man’, which is rather inappropriate considering the context of the scene. Fleabag and Claire are clearly repulsed by hearing such information about their father, which adds to the comic effect. Additionally, Fleabag’s remark to the camera implies that she knows her dad is a deeply sexual man, which is rather absurd and disturbing. By contrast, the translator interpreted her utterance differently: the Dutch translation ‘typerend’ suggests that Fleabag expected her stepmother to mention something like that because it is typical of her character. In other words, the subtitles do not reflect Fleabag’s character and absurd thoughts in the same way as the original dialogue does.

As described in the theoretical introduction, taboo language can be used in a non-insulting way to induce humorous effect (see 2.2.2.2). The fragment below presents an example of such humorous swearing:

Humorous fragment	Character	Source text	Target text	Humour type
18	Claire	Oh fuck!	/	Hyperbole
	Fleabag	What was that? Jesus!	Wat deed je?	
	Claire	What? It was a fucking <i>hug</i> .	Ik wou je omhelzen.	
	Fleabag	Well it was terrifying! Never do that again. Fuck.	Ik schrik me dood, wil je dat nooit meer doen?	

The context of the scene is as follows: Claire unexpectedly attempts to give Fleabag a hug, but Fleabag is startled and ends up hitting Claire's head. The humour in this fragment is partly based on the fact that Fleabag fears a hug from her sister, as she instinctively rejects the hug by hitting her. In addition, Fleabag expresses her unease through exclamatory taboo utterances, which adds to the humorous and hyperbolic effect of the scene. The taboo utterances of either characters were omitted in the subtitles, however, which reduces the taboo effect of the original dialogue, and thus also the intended humour. Other examples in which the lack of taboo language in the subtitles reduces comic effect are fragments 5 and 10.

Nevertheless, some instances in which the humour was based on taboo language were adequately transferred into the target text, as can be seen in fragments 3, 9, 22, 32 and 42 (see Appendix II). The translation of the taboo language in *Fleabag* will be further discussed in section 5.2.2.

5.2.1.9 Canned joke

Apart from conversational humour, which is largely present in the television series, there was one humorous fragment based on a canned joke:

Humorous fragment	Character	Source text	Target text
	Claire	Just use your phone, you have a sat-nav on your phone.	Je kunt op je telefoon zien waar we zijn.
	Fleabag	Oh my God, there, Mindful -oh God- Farm. There it is. We're going the right way. I was right.	Daar, Mindful Farm. Daar is het. We rijden goed. Ik had gelijk.
72	Fleabag	Do you know what the lesbian app for Grindr is called? [pause] Twatnav.	Weet je hoe de lesbische versie van Grindr heet? Twatnav.

In this fragment, the translation fails to generate the same humorous effect as the English soundtrack. The canned joke in the original dialogue is clearly connected to Claire's previous comment about the satellite navigation on her mobile phone, as 'sat-nav' and 'twatnav' are similar in sound. This connection is lost in the subtitles, as the Dutch version does not refer to the sat-nav system, probably because it is irrelevant to understand the core of the message. The joke itself is based on the fact that Grindr is a location-based online dating application that searches for gay men. The lesbian equivalent would be called 'Twatnav' because it refers both to 'twat', which is a synonym for the female genitals ("Twat", n.d.), and to the satellite navigation system. The translator opted to keep the joke in its original form in the subtitles, and thus not adapt it to the Dutch-speaking audience. As a result, a Dutch audience might fail to understand the canned joke, especially since it alludes to specific English terms they might not

be familiar with. In brief, it is fair to say that the humorous effect of the joke is not present in the Dutch subtitles.

5.2.2 Analysis per category of taboo language

5.2.2.1 Sexual allusion

As the quantitative results for taboo language reveal, sexual allusion accounts for more than half of the categories of taboo language in the original dialogue of *Fleabag* (see section 5.1.2). Given its high frequency, this category calls for an extensive analysis.

Taboo utterance	Character	Source text	Target text
1	Fleabag	[to the camera] <u>After some pretty standard bouncing, you realise... he's edging towards your arsehole.</u> But, you're drunk and he made the effort to come all the way here, so you let him. He's thrilled.	<u>Na het gebruikelijke gestuiter, beseft je: hij gaat richting je kontgat...</u> maar je bent dronken en hij heeft een eind gereisd, dus het moet maar. Hij vindt het fantastisch.

In this scene, Fleabag and Arsehole Guy are engaging in sexual intercourse. Fleabag's taboo comment 'after some pretty standard bouncing', which describes the sexual act, was rendered into Dutch as 'na het gebruikelijke gestuiter'. The literal translation of the verb 'to bounce' reduces the sexual connotation of the original dialogue to some extent, as 'stuiteren' does not necessarily allude to sexual intercourse. Nevertheless, the visuals of the scene and the rest of the Dutch translation do compensate for the lack of sexual connotation in the first part of the subtitles. In fact, the subtitle 'hij gaat richting je kontgat' parallels the vulgarity of the taboo expression 'he's edging towards your arsehole'. All things considered, it can be concluded that the subtitles accurately convey the meaning of the source text, particularly because the term 'kontgat' is considered an obscene word in the Dutch language.

Another example in which the sexual allusion is translated into a taboo term that is equally as offensive in the target language is the following:

Taboo utterance	Character	Source text	Target text
108	Fleabag	Jesus. <u>Just fuck her, please, for the love of a good woman. Just wrap your willy up in a bow and screw her.</u> She's going insane. What is it. Are you having an affair?	<u>Je moet haar gewoon neuken, bij alles wat me lief is. Doe een strik om je lul en neuk haar.</u> Ze wordt er gek van. Wat is er? Heb je een vriendin?

The taboo words ‘to fuck’, ‘to screw’ and ‘willy’, which is an informal term for penis (“Willy”, n.d.), are all translated into Dutch terms that equal the intensity of the original taboo terms, namely ‘neuken’ and ‘lul’. Other instances in which the sexual connotation was entirely preserved in the subtitles are taboo utterances 39, 56, 78, 92 and 168 (see Appendix II). Presumably, the sexual references in those utterances were retained in the target text because they all form a substantial part of the dialogue, and thus are essential for understanding the storyline.

By contrast, many sexual allusions were not rendered in the subtitles, possibly because a translation is not required for the comprehension of the story. The following example illustrates this:

Taboo utterance	Character	Source text	Target text
130	Claire	<u>It’s okay, I’m fucking okay.</u> I’m excellent. I know I seem mental, but I’m fine. I just- I just sometimes need you not to...	<u>Rustig maar. Er is niets aan de hand.</u> Het lijkt alsof ik doordraai, maar dat is niet zo. Ik wil alleen soms dat je niet...

The intensifier ‘fucking’ in utterance 130 essentially functions to enhance Claire’s statement. The translator omitted the word in the subtitles, presumably because it is redundant for the comprehension of the scene and primarily serves to express character emotions. Moreover, an equivalent adjective with the same intensity as ‘fucking’ does not exist in the Dutch language. Therefore, intensifiers such as ‘fucking’ and ‘the fuck’ were scarcely rendered in the subtitles, as demonstrated by utterances 65, 111, 128, 155 and 206 (see Appendix II). Nevertheless, some instances of ‘fucking’ were transferred in the subtitles, as can be seen in utterance 136 below, as well as in utterances 143, 146, 162 and 180.

Taboo utterance	Character	Source text	Target text
136	Claire	<u>Just open the fucking door, it’s been fucking forev-</u>	Kunnen ze <u>verdomme</u> niet opendoen? We staan hier te...
	Man	Welcome.	Welkom.

In this example, the translator might have added ‘verdomme’ to the subtitles to adequately convey Claire’s irritation, which is illustrated by the frequency of the word ‘fucking’ in the English dialogue. A similar pattern was found for utterance 143, in which the taboo utterance ‘Slut. You fucking stupid slut!’ was translated as ‘Slet. Stomme, smerige slet.’ (see Appendix II). In this case, the translator might have preserved the taboo in the subtitles because the original utterance contains a high number of taboo references as well.

In some instances, the original taboo language was reduced in terms of intensity in the subtitles. The following example demonstrates this:

Taboo utterance	Character	Source text	Target text
12	Fleabag	<u>No, I'm not trying to shag you, look at yourself!</u>	<u>Ik wil niet met je naar bed.</u> Kijk hoe je eruitziet.
	Bank Manager	Ok. Please leave.	U kunt gaan.

In this scene, Fleabag uses the British slang term ‘to shag’ to allude to sexual intercourse. The inappropriateness of the verb is not reflected in the subtitles, however. The Dutch equivalent ‘naar bed gaan met iemand’ essentially carries the same meaning, but it does not convey the same strength as the original taboo term does. This diminishes some of the taboo effect, as well as the authenticity of Fleabag’s character. By using euphemisms in the subtitles, Fleabag’s character and her typical colloquial discourse is not portrayed as accurately as was originally intended. Other examples in which the sexual connotation is reduced in the target text are taboo utterances 3, 11, 54, 122 and 126 in the corpus.

Furthermore, some taboo instances were substituted by a Dutch non-taboo word, which again weakens the effect of the original taboo dialogue in the television series. A typical example is utterance 7:

Taboo utterance	Character	Source text	Target text
5	Bus Rodent	Fuuuck me, you’ve got a boyfriend	Je hebt een vriend.
	Fleabag	No, we broke up quite recently.	We zijn net uit elkaar.
6 + 7	Bus Rodent	Oh my God, I’m so sorry slash really pleased. Uhm, <u>how the hell did he manage to fuck that up?</u>	Wat jammer, ofwel wat geweldig. <u>Hoe heeft hij dat kunnen verpesten?</u>

In this fragment, the verb ‘to fuck up’ was translated into the Dutch verb ‘verpesten’. According to the Online English Dictionary, the English term is defined as ‘to damage, ruin, or mess up’ (‘To fuck up’, n.d.). The Dutch verb ‘verpesten’ essentially conveys the same meaning, but it lacks the taboo connotation of the original term. A paralleling expression is taboo utterance 184 (see Appendix II), in which the sentence ‘everything is fucked’ was rendered as ‘het gaat helemaal naar de kloten’. In this case, the taboo effect was adequately transferred into Dutch. In comparison, taboo utterance 7 was translated into a neutral expression, while the translator could have easily opted for the Dutch verb ‘verkloten’, which would convey the taboo content and connotation of the English verb ‘to fuck up’ more effectively. All things considered, it is not clear why the translator decided to render the taboo language in utterance 184 and contrastively substitute it by a non-taboo term in utterance 7.

Other instances in which the original taboo language was replaced by a Dutch neutral term are utterances 38, 71, 127, 170 and 212 (see Appendix II).

5.2.2.2 Bodily excretions

Taboo utterance	Character	Source text	Target text
62	Arsehole Guy	I knew I was different when I was about nine. <u>But shit got real around eleven.</u>	Ik wist het toen ik negen was, <u>maar op m'n elfde werd het menens.</u>
	Fleabag	Shit got real?	Werd het menens?
	Arsehole Guy	You know, aunts got weird.	Je snapt me wel. Tantes gingen zich raar gedragen.

This example includes a reference to excrements through the utterance ‘shit got real’, which is an expression used to say that a situation has escalated. Although the Dutch expression ‘het werd menens’ conveys a similar hyperbolic effect, the taboo language is lost in translation. This pattern also occurs in utterances 198 and 199, in which the expression ‘to not give a shit’ was translated as ‘niet geven om’. The meaning of the original utterance, namely ‘to not care in the slightest’ (‘To give a shit’, n.d.), was rendered accurately in the subtitles, but without the taboo reference.

By contrast, some expletives relating to bodily excretions were translated as Dutch terms that are equally as offensive, as demonstrated by utterances 15, 23, 79 and 164, the latter of which is presented below:

Taboo utterance	Character	Source text	Target text
	Claire	What?	Wat?
164	Fleabag	<u>I'm doing a wee on this cushion.</u>	<u>Ik zit te pissen op dit kussen.</u>
	Claire	What?! Sort of wish you were.	Was leuk geweest.

In this dialogue, the British informal word ‘wee’, which refers to urination (‘Wee’, n.d.), was translated as ‘pissen’ which is an equivalent informal term in the target language. The term was transferred into the subtitles because it contains essential information to comprehend the rest of the scene. Contrastively, the taboo term ‘shit’ was not transferred when it served as an exclamation or as an adjective to intensify other words, as can be seen in utterances 20, 60, 74, 90 and 152 (see Appendix II). As mentioned earlier, this pattern was also found for the intensifier ‘fucking’.

5.2.2.3. Blasphemy

As stated in the quantitative analysis, a large percentage of the taboo references in *Fleabag* consists of blasphemous terms. Of all 54 profane utterances identified, only seven were transferred into the subtitles by means of a Dutch blasphemous term, an example of which is the following dialogue:

Taboo utterance	Character	Source text	Target text
	Fleabag	Oh, give it a minute.	Wacht nog even.
140	Claire	<u>Oh God, seriously.</u> What is wrong with your insides?	<u>Mijn god, dat meen je niet.</u> Wat is er mis met je darmen?

In this fragment, Claire is visibly agitated with her sister, hence the exclamation ‘oh God, seriously’. The taboo expression was fully preserved in the target text, presumably with the aim to emphasise Claire’s irritation in the subtitles as well. The other six blasphemous terms that were translated in a similar manner are utterances 28, 99, 106, 150 and 191 (see Appendix II). For instance, the exclamation ‘dammit’ in utterance 191 was rendered as ‘verdomme’, which adequately conveys the speaker’s emotions in the subtitles.

By comparison, some exclamatory blasphemous terms were deleted in the target text, as can be seen in the following example:

Taboo utterance	Character	Source text	Target text
75	Harry	<u>Oh my God, my heart. I’m shaking so much, oh my God.</u> It’s okay, are you okay? Did you have a good day?	M’n hart. Ik sta te trillen op m’n benen. Het gaat wel. Is alles in orde? Heb je een leuke dag gehad?

In this case, the deletion of ‘oh my God’ can be justified by spatial and temporal restraints, as there is insufficient space on screen to render all of the information in the original dialogue. Interestingly, some instances of omission cannot not be justified by space-time restraints, examples of which are utterances 27, 61, 66, 73 and 112 in the corpus. Although the Dutch audience can most likely hear and understand the blasphemous expressions in the English soundtrack, the subtitles still lack the hyperbolic effect of the original dialogue.

In one instance, the translator introduced another way to transfer the hyperbolic effect of the original taboo term:

Taboo utterance	Character	Source text	Target text
119	Bus Rodent	<u>Oh my God, I love surprise parties.</u> I love them, I love them, I love them. Will your parents be there?	<u>Ik ben stapeldol op verrassingsfeesten.</u> Ik ben er dol dol dol op. Komen je ouders?

As utterance 119 demonstrates, the expression ‘oh my God’ has been replaced by the neutral Dutch term ‘stapeldol’, which enhances Bus Rodent’s remark. While it is not a taboo word, it still produces the exaggerated effect that the original taboo term conveys.

5.2.2.4. Death and disease

Taboo utterance	Character	Source text	Target text
	Customer	Why do I recognise her? Is she famous?	Ik herken haar. Is ze beroemd?
53	Fleabag	<u>Boo's death hit the papers</u> : local café girl gets hit by a bike, and a car, and another bike.	<u>Boo stond in de krant</u> . Cafémeisje geschept door fiets, een auto en nog een fiets.

With regard to the category of death and disease, there was a tendency of attenuating words relating to death in the television series. For example, utterance 53 above reveals that the reference to death is completely omitted in the subtitles. This pattern was also visible in the translation of taboo utterances 43 and 134 (see Appendix II). In the latter, the remark ‘we’re gonna die here’ was rendered as ‘we komen hier om’, which weakens the taboo effect of the original phrase.

Nevertheless, some allusions to death were translated by a similar expression in the target language, as can be seen in taboo utterances 100, 175 and 178 in the corpus, as well as in the following dialogue:

Taboo utterance	Character	Source text	Target text
	Fleabag	What would you do if someone stole all of those?	En als ze gestolen worden?
137	Claire	<u>I'd kill myself</u> . Why are there no plug sockets in here?	<u>Dan maak ik mezelf van kant</u> . Waar zijn de stopcontacten?

Claire’s hyperbolic remark ‘I would kill myself’ was translated as ‘zichzelf van kant maken’, which is a paralleling taboo expression to refer to suicide. The taboo content of the English discourse is transferred adequately, and is enhanced by the accurate rendering of Claire’s question about the plug sockets. The sentence ‘waar zijn de stopcontacten?’ is even more direct and suggestive than its English equivalent, which increasingly brings across the taboo and irony in Claire’s discourse.

5.2.2.5. Sexist language

With regard to the sexist language in *Fleabag*, nine out of ten instances were translated with an equally as derogatory term in the target text, as illustrated by the following example:

Taboo utterance	Character	Source text	Target text
143 + 144	Man 1	<u>Fucking bitch, fucking piece of shit.</u>	<u>Vuile trut.</u>

The insult ‘bitch’ in utterances 11, 143 and 171 was rendered as ‘trut’ in the target text. The term ‘piece of shit’ was not transferred into the subtitles, which might be due to the fast discourse speed or the fact that the literal translation ‘stuk stront’ is a less common Dutch taboo word than ‘trut’ is. In addition, the term ‘slut’ was generally translated as ‘slet’ in the subtitles, which can be seen in utterances 14, 133, 146, 148 and 156 in the corpus. In one instance, namely utterance 141, ‘fucking sluts’ was not accompanied by a subtitle in the target text:

Taboo utterance	Character	Source text	Target text
	Man	I’m sorry, I think I’m meant to be at, uhm-	Het spijt me. Ik denk dat ik eigenlijk...
141 + 142	Voice	<u>Fucking sluts!</u>	/
	Man	That one.	daar moet zijn.

The omission of the derogatory term in the subtitles could be attributed to limited time on screen, or the fact that the utterance was merely heard from afar, as it was exclaimed by a voice in the distance. Therefore, the translator might have deemed a translation less important. Nevertheless, generally speaking, a Dutch audience should be able to hear and understand the taboo reference in this scene, particularly because the word ‘slut’ parallels the Dutch word ‘slet’ in sound. In other words, a translation of taboo terms is sometimes deemed irrelevant because the Dutch audience is most likely able to grasp the effect of the taboo language through the original English soundtrack.

5.2.3. Comparison of the characters’ taboo language use

This subsection will compare the taboo language use of Fleabag and Claire, with the aim to find out if the characters’ individual speech styles were translated differently. In order to do this, the frequency of the categories of taboo used by each character will be given, as well as the prevalent translation techniques that were used to render their lines. In addition, a few relevant utterances and their translations will be briefly compared and discussed.

5.2.3.1. Frequency categories of taboo and translation techniques

Before analysing the taboo language use of the characters, it is important to mention that Fleabag has a significantly higher number of lines in comparison to Claire, as she is the protagonist of the television series. It is therefore logical that Fleabag's dialogue should contain more taboo language as opposed to Claire's dialogue.

The following two tables show the frequency of the categories of taboo language used by each character, as well as the frequency of the translation techniques applied to render their taboo dialogue:

Fleabag: types of taboo	Frequency	%	Translation techniques	Frequency	%
Sexual allusion	70	67.3	Omission	28	26.9
Bodily excretions	12	11.5	Substitution	16	15.4
Blasphemy	19	18.3	Taboo for taboo	52	50.0
Death and disease	2	1.9	Euphemism	7	6.7
Sexist language	1	1.0	Loan	1	1.0
Total	104	100		104	100

Table 5: Frequency of taboo language use and translation techniques for Fleabag

Claire: types of taboo	Frequency	%	Translation techniques	Frequency	%
Sexual allusion	16	50.0	Omission	16	50.0
Bodily excretions	1	3.1	Taboo for taboo	12	37.5
Blasphemy	14	43.8	Substitution	1	3.1
Death and disease	1	3.1	Euphemism	1	3.1
			Loan	2	6.3
Total	32	100		32	100

Table 6: Frequency of taboo language use and translation techniques for Claire

As can be inferred from table 5, the category of taboo that prevails in Fleabag's discourse is sexual allusion, which represents 67.3% of all of her taboo utterances. This might be related to her character identity, as she is portrayed as a sex-obsessed woman who is straightforward in voicing her inappropriate and sexual thoughts. Secondly, 18.3% of her taboo language involves blasphemy. In comparison, Claire's taboo language primarily consists of sexual allusions (50.0%) and blasphemous terms (43.8%) (see table 6).

With regard to the translation techniques that were used to render the characters' taboo language, table 5 demonstrates that 26.9% of Fleabag's taboo utterances were omitted in the Dutch subtitles. Notably, the technique *omission* was significantly more common for translating Claire's taboo dialogue, as 50.0% of her taboo utterances were left out of the target text (see table 6). Moreover, only 37.5% of Claire's

original taboo utterances were translated by means of the *taboo for taboo* technique, whereas 50.0% of Fleabag’s taboo utterances were rendered as similar Dutch taboo terms in the subtitles. In brief, the quantitative results demonstrate a slight difference in the subtitling of both characters’ taboo language, but it is not clear whether this is linked to their contrasting character identities.

5.2.3.2. Differences in translation of the characters’ taboo language

In order to analyse whether Fleabag and Claire’s taboo language was rendered differently, the Dutch translation of a few paralleling taboo expressions uttered by either character will be compared. It should be noted that only instances of sexual allusion and blasphemy will be discussed, as those categories occurred most frequently in the speech of both characters.

5.2.3.2.1. *Instances of ‘fuck’ and its derivations*

Taboo utterance	Character	Source text	Target text
205	Fleabag	Oh, fuck off.	<u>Hou toch op.</u>

Taboo utterance	Character	Source text	Target text
22	Claire	Fuck off.	<u>Rot toch op.</u>

These paralleling taboo utterances were rendered slightly differently into Dutch. The translation of utterance 205, ‘hou toch op’, does not correspond to the intensity of the original taboo word ‘fuck off’. By contrast, the subtitle for utterance 22 conveys the original taboo effect more adequately, as ‘rot toch op’ is considered to be more informal and offensive than ‘hou toch op’. Nevertheless, Fleabag’s taboo expression ‘fuck off’ in utterance 121 (see Appendix II) was translated in the same manner as Claire’s utterance above, namely as ‘rot op’. Since the taboo utterance ‘fuck off’ was translated similarly for either characters, there seems to be no correlation between Fleabag’s character and the reduction of taboo effect in the subtitles of utterance 205. Presumably, the translator substituted the term in utterance 205 because the translation ‘hou toch op’ fits the context of the scene more adequately.

Furthermore, Fleabag commonly employed the verb ‘to fuck’ in her dialogue, which was usually translated as ‘neuken’ (see utterances 55, 67 and 108 in Appendix II). Contrastively, Claire used the word ‘fuck’ solely as an exclamation or as an adjective to intensify other words. For example, Claire’s instances of ‘fucking’ were translated as ‘verdomme’ in utterances 136, 162 and 180. By contrast, Fleabag’s utterances of the adjective ‘fucking’ were not rendered in the subtitles.

5.2.3.2.2. *Instances of 'oh my God' and its derivations*

Taboo utterance	Character	Source text	Target text
28	Fleabag	<u>Oh my God, why didn't you tell me?</u> I've got to get a whole new outfit now!	<u>Mijn god, hoe kun je?</u> Nu moet ik iets kopen.

Taboo utterance	Character	Source text	Target text
120	Claire	<u>Oh my God,</u> thank you so much, I'm so surprised!	<u>Mijn god, dank jullie wel. Dit had ik niet verwacht.</u>

As utterances 28 and 120 show, the blasphemous term 'oh my God' was transferred identically into the target text for either characters. A few other blasphemous terms were rendered similarly in the subtitles as well, as can be seen in utterances 140 and 150 (see Appendix II). However, most instances of blasphemy were not preserved in the target text, even though there was sufficient space to add expletives to the subtitles. Examples of this are the utterances 73 and 103 below, as well as utterances 151 and 165 in the corpus. As the deletions occurred in the taboo lines of either characters, it can be assumed that there is no correlation between certain omissions and the character who uttered the taboo term. Moreover, the blasphemous terms analysed were not translated differently for either character.

Taboo utterance	Character	Source text	Target text
73	Claire	<u>Oh God, I can't keep up.</u>	<u>Ik kan het niet bijhouden.</u>

Taboo utterance	Character	Source text	Target text
103	Fleabag	<u>No, God.</u>	<u>Welnee.</u>

6 DISCUSSION

In order to formulate an answer to the research questions presented in part 4, the results of this study will be discussed and compared to the findings of previous studies. Furthermore, the limitations of the present study will be outlined.

As can be inferred from the quantitative analysis, 55.5% of all humorous fragments identified were translated by means of the *transfer* technique, with which the humour was completely rendered in the target text. Moreover, 17.2% of the fragments were transferred by means of *condensation*, which retained the meaning and essential content of the original fragments in the target text, if not in a more concise form. Taking into account these numbers, it can be said that 72.7% of all humorous fragments were transferred either completely or partially into the Dutch subtitles. This result accords with the findings of Baeyens (2020), Pelsmaekers & Van Besien (2002) and Raes' (2009) studies, in which the majority of the humour was rendered fully or partially into the Dutch subtitles. However, it should be noted that the three previous studies differ in methodology as opposed to the present study. For instance, they used different classifications of humour, and they did not employ translation techniques to determine whether the humour had been transferred or not. Additionally, Pelsmaekers & Van Besien's study focusses specifically on the translation of irony, which differs from the present study's aim. Therefore, the results cannot be fully equated. All things considered, the quantitative results demonstrate that the humour in *Fleabag* was to a large extent transferred into Dutch, which corroborates the hypothesis to the first general research question ('Do the Dutch subtitles retain the linguistic rendering of the humour and taboo language present in the original dialogue?').

In addition, a few patterns were found regarding the translation of the humour in *Fleabag*. The qualitative analysis showed that some of the humour was either not translated or reduced in terms of humorous effect (see fragments 19 and 72, as discussed in section 5.2.1). For instance, some of the hyperbolic effect in the humorous instances was lost in translation due to limited space on screen or fast speech in the original dialogue (see fragment 82, subsection 5.2.1.3). This is not surprising, as it is nearly impossible for translators to completely render all of the original information into the target text. Additionally, some ironic remarks were rendered more neutral in the subtitles, which can be seen in fragments 14 and 43 (see subsection 5.2.1.4). This might result in viewers perceiving the remarks as criticism rather than as humour, which was also indicated by Pelsmaekers & Van Besien (2002). However, most instances of irony and sarcasm were rendered by using similar hyperbolic expressions in the target text (see fragment 61 and 63, subsection 5.2.1.6), which effectively conveyed the intended humorous effect. Lastly, some of the comic effect was diminished due to a lack of taboo language in the subtitles, for example in fragments 10 and 18 (see subsection 5.2.1.8). While this reduces the comic effect in the subtitles, the taboo terms are still audible in the English soundtrack. Accordingly, the

humorous effect in these fragments was not completely lost. Moreover, a full rendering of the original humour is not always necessary in order to grasp the intended comic effect; the visual elements in the television series might compensate for an inaccurate linguistic rendering of the humour in the subtitles as well.

Furthermore, it can be concluded that a considerable amount of the taboo language was linguistically rendered into the Dutch subtitles, as *taboo for taboo* was the predominant translation technique (45.0%). The results contradict the hypothesis that the majority of the taboo words would be deleted in the subtitles. However, it is important to consider that 37.6% of the taboo language was not transferred into Dutch, which is still a significant percentage. As Díaz Cintas & Remael (2007) point out, this might be due to, among other reasons, the fact that taboo words are perceived to be more offensive when they are written down than when verbalised.

Additionally, a few patterns were found for the translation of the taboo language in *Fleabag*. As the qualitative analysis revealed, most taboo references that were rendered as Dutch taboo words paralleled the original taboo words in terms of vulgarity (see utterances 1, 108 and 164 in section 5.2.2). These taboo utterances were retained in the subtitles because they form a substantial part of the dialogue, and are thus required for comprehending the storyline. Contrastively, taboo terms that function as an exclamation or as an intensifier to express character emotions were translated less frequently (see utterance 130 in subsection 5.2.2.1). This was especially the case for the sexual allusions ‘the fuck’ and ‘fucking’, possibly because an equivalent with the same intensity does not exist in the Dutch language. Additionally, the translator might have omitted these words in the subtitles because they are considered less important for understanding the storyline. However, as stated by Bednarek (2018), taboo language is important in conveying character identity and emotions. Deleting them in the subtitles might reduce the authenticity of the television series. This is particularly true for *Fleabag*, since the taboo language is of significant value in shaping the characters and the television series as a whole. Furthermore, it is relevant to mention that many deletions of taboo words could not be justified by spatial and temporal restraints (as discussed in subsection 5.2.2.3), which is a pattern that also occurred in Ávila-Cabrera’s (2016) research. Nevertheless, the omissions do not necessarily imply that all of the intended taboo effect was erased, since a Dutch audience should generally be able to hear and understand some of the taboo language in the English soundtrack.

With regard to the first subquestion (‘Which types of humour and taboo language are most frequent in *Fleabag*?’), the types of humour that occurred the most are absurdist humour (23.4%) and sexual and taboo humour (18.0%). The occurrences of taboo language are in line with those of the humorous fragments, as sexual allusion was the most frequent category of taboo in the English dialogue (58.7%).

This is not surprising, given the fact that *Fleabag* voices her sexual thoughts to the camera so often, and the fact that the television series unconventionally broaches taboo subjects. Moreover, as Gao (2013) points out, English-speaking countries have recently grown more accepting of sex-related topics, which might be another reason for their increased occurrence in films and television programmes. The second most frequent category was blasphemy (24.8%). This might be due to the fact that blasphemous terms generally have been considered less offensive over the past decades (Hughes, 2006), which would explain their higher frequency on screen. All things considered, these results support the second hypothesis, which claimed that the categories of absurdist and taboo humour, as well as the category of sexual allusion, would predominate in the television series.

For the second subquestion ('Which translation techniques are used the most frequently to transfer the humour and the taboo language into Dutch?'), the expectation was that the *compensation* technique would prevail for translating the humour, as Díaz Cintas & Remael (2007) assert that it is often used for subtitling humour. Contrary to what was hypothesised, the humour in *Fleabag* was most commonly translated by means of the *transfer* technique (54.7%), which implies a complete and accurate rendering of the source text. The *compensation* technique was scarcely applied during the translation process, presumably because adding extra information to the subtitles is often impossible due to space-time restraints and fast discourse speed. As regards the techniques for translating the taboo language in *Fleabag*, it was hypothesised that the majority of the taboo words would be omitted in the subtitles, relating to the findings of three previous studies (Ávila-Cabrera, 2016; Bollaert, 2015; Van Steenlandt, 2015). The quantitative results indicated that the taboo language was most commonly translated by means of the *taboo for taboo* technique (45.0%), similarly to the findings in De Bruyne's (2019) study. Therefore, the hypothesis for the second subquestion is to be rejected. The frequency of taboo language in the subtitles of *Fleabag* might be attributed to the fact that taboos on screen have increased in the past years (Bucaria & Barra, 2016), and have recently become more accepted in films and television programmes (De Bruyne). Nevertheless, it is important to consider that nearly equally as many taboo words were omitted in the subtitles (37.6%). Still, this is a rather small percentage in comparison to the results of previous studies conducted (Bollaert; Van Steenlandt), in which more than half of the taboo language was left out of the target text. Some reasons for the discrepancy in results of the present study and the two previous studies might be, for example, the contrasting themes of the television series or films investigated, the subtitler's personal translation preferences, or a difference in frequency and intensity of the taboo language used in the films or series. In brief, it can be concluded that the lower number of omissions in the present study are significant, in the sense that it contradicts previous studies and general expectations about taboo language translation.

With regard to the third and last subquestion ('How is Fleabag's taboo language use translated in comparison to Claire's?'), the comparative analysis of the characters' taboo dialogue revealed that Claire's taboo utterances were omitted in the subtitles more frequently than those of Fleabag (50.0% as opposed to 26.9%). This might be attributed to Claire's character personality and the fact that she is generally expected to use less taboo words, given her high social background. However, this is merely an assumption: Fleabag's taboo utterances were also often deleted, even when there was sufficient space and time on screen to add the taboo utterances to the subtitles. For instance, as discussed in subsection 5.2.3.2, the taboo term 'fucking' was translated as 'verdomme' in Claire's dialogue, whereas Fleabag's utterances of 'fucking' were never rendered into Dutch. This might suggest that the translator decided to arbitrarily omit certain taboo words, regardless of the character who uttered the words. In addition, the results indicated that the translator rendered the taboo words in a similar manner for either characters. For example, the taboo expression 'fuck off' was rendered as 'rot op' in both Fleabag and Claire's lines. Since Fleabag's taboo lines were not translated differently or more explicitly than Claire's lines, the last hypothesis is to be rejected. Still, it is remarkable that Fleabag's utterances were transferred more often as opposed to Claire's. It is not clear, however, whether the translator consciously took into account the difference in characters when transferring their taboo lines into Dutch. This notion could be further investigated by looking into the choices translators make when subtitling the taboo language of different characters in audiovisual materials.

Lastly, it is necessary to discuss the limitations of the present study, since they might influence the results to some extent. As was already mentioned in the methodology, the selection and labelling of the humorous fragments and the taboo utterances is largely based on the subjective interpretation of the author. For instance, it is plausible that some viewers perceive certain scenes as humorous while they were not marked as humorous in the present study. Similarly, the author might have labelled a humorous instance as irony, whereas another person would describe it rather as sarcasm, or vice versa. The same applies for identifying the translation techniques used to render the humour and taboo language. For example, the present study concluded that 55.5% of the humorous instances were rendered by means of the *transfer* technique, whereas another person might identify fewer occurrences of said technique. As a consequence, their interpretation might lead to different results. Furthermore, the qualitative analysis included some assumptions about the effect of the translation on a Dutch audience. It should be noted that these are merely assumptions, as it is hard to predict what effect the translation of humour and taboo language has on the recipients. For example, it is possible that the author considered the taboo effect weakened due to a lack of taboo utterances in the subtitles, whereas the audience might not perceive it as such because the utterances are still audible in the English soundtrack. It might be valuable for future studies to incorporate the opinions of the viewers into the analysis, to investigate how they experience the effect of the humour and taboo language in the subtitles.

7 CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to analyse whether the humour and the taboo language in the first season of the British television series *Fleabag* (2016) was linguistically rendered into the Dutch subtitles. A quantitative analysis of 128 humorous fragments and 218 taboo utterances was conducted, for which the humour classifications of Dynel (2009) and Attardo (2014) were used, as well as the classifications of Jay (2009) and Gao (2013) for taboo language. Furthermore, a qualitative description was made of a selection of the most relevant instances of humour and taboo language.

In general, the results revealed that 72.7% of all humorous fragments were transferred either completely or partially into Dutch, which is in line with the findings of previous studies on humour translation (Baeyens, 2020; Pelsmaekers & Van Besien, 2002; Raes, 2009). While most of the humour was rendered into the subtitles, the qualitative analysis demonstrated that some of the humour was lost in translation, which might be attributed to space-time limitations and fast dialogue speed. Moreover, the omission of taboo language in the subtitles reduced the intended humorous effect to some extent. However, the English soundtrack and visual elements on screen might compensate for a loss of humorous effect in the target text. With regard to the linguistic rendering of the taboo language in the subtitles of *Fleabag*, a considerable number of taboo utterances were translated into Dutch taboo terms that paralleled the obscenity of the original utterances (45.0%), many of which were substantial for comprehending the storyline. The significant amount of taboo language in the Dutch subtitles contradicts the results of previous studies on taboo language translation (Ávila-Cabrera, 2016; Bollaert, 2015; Van Steenlandt, 2015). It should be noted, however, that nearly an equal number of taboo words were omitted in the target text as well (37.6%). The taboo words that were deleted usually served to intensify other words or to express character emotions, and were thus presumably considered redundant for understanding the storyline. Furthermore, while the comparative character analysis showed that the taboo occurrences in Claire's dialogue were omitted more frequently as opposed to Fleabag's, no substantial difference was found in the way their speech was translated. Moreover, it was not clear whether the translator consciously took into account the contrast in character identities when rendering their taboo dialogue into Dutch.

As was already mentioned, the present study contains various limitations. One considerable restriction was the partially subjective selection and labelling of the humorous fragments and taboo utterances. The subjectivism was to some extent balanced by taking into account a second person's interpretation for the selection of the humorous fragments. Still, since the identification is primarily based on the author's personal interpretation, the results of the present study are not entirely conclusive. Therefore, future

studies could incorporate the opinions of several researchers in the field, in order to obtain a more exhaustive and reliable selection and identification of the humour and taboo language.

With regard to future research on the topic of humour and taboo language translation, it might be interesting to further investigate the choices translators make when translating humour and taboos in television series, as well as the limitations they encounter during the subtitling process. In addition, the present study analysed a television series that is inherently characterised by British humour and taboo subjects. Contrastively, it would be valuable for future studies to explore the subtitling of humour and taboo language in other genres of television series as well.

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APPENDIX I: List of abbreviated character names

AG	Arsehole Guy
B	Boo
BM	Bank Manager
BR	Bus Rodent
C	Claire
Cu	Customer
D	Dad
DG	Drunk Girl
Doc	Doctor
E	Elaine
F	Fleabag
G1	Girl 1
G2	Girl 2
H	Harry
K	Keith
L	Lecturer
M	Martin
M1	Man 1
M2	Man 2
M3	Man 3
MC	Man from the Centre
N	Neighbour
R	Receptionist
S	Stepmother
SA	Shop Assistant
SO	Store owner
TD	Taxi Driver
V	Voice in the distance
WC	Woman from the Centre

APPENDIX II: Corpus