Where have all the swearwords gone?

An analysis of the loss of swearwords in two Swedish translations of
J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*

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Hammar Birgitta Hammar's translation of *Catcher* (1960) [1953]
Östergren Klas Östergren's translation of *Catcher* (1998) [1987]

ST Source text
TT Target text
SL Source language
TL Target language
SC Source culture
TC Target culture

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1. INTRODUCTION AND AIM

1.1.   INTRODUCTION

Swearwords are fascinating. Society condemns them, few admit to using them, and still, everybody swears, at least occasionally. And why not? Swearwords are a natural part of our language, and they are undoubtedly one of the most efficient ways to do away with extra frustration or anger in difficult situations. It has even been suggested that swearwords may be a factor in reducing stress (Crystal 1995: 172).

Practically all languages in the world exhibit swearwords (Ljung 1984a: 11). Some languages more than others, but on the whole, swearwords can be said to be a universal phenomenon. However, the use of swearwords in different languages and different cultures is not homogeneous – on the contrary, practices can be very varying. Different cultures may take their swearwords from different sources, and as I will argue in this paper, there are differences in swearing behavior between cultures.

This is a potential problem for translators of literature. As mediators between cultures, translators have a tremendous amount of power to decide what is imported into the target culture, and in which form. While they should be very aware of the linguistic and cultural conventions of the ST, these cultural mediators should also be extremely aware of their own cultural identity, and need to understand how their own culture influences perception (Katan 1999: 14). Each different culture has its own preferred way of doing things, its own conventions and norms, whether it be regarding which side of the road to drive on or the use of

swearwords; and as much as translators must be at home in the language and culture they are translating from, they simply cannot ignore the preferred ways, conventions and norms of their own culture.

Sometimes, a clash between different cultural conventions or norms is unavoidable, forcing the translator to make a decision regarding whether he or she should conform to the source culture (SC) and source language (SL) norms and conventions, thereby running the risk of violating norms in the target culture (TC), or conform to the norms prevailing in the TC and target language (TL), thereby arguably dethroning the original from its position of power.

The first time I read the Swedish translation of J. D. Salinger's novel *Catcher in the Rye*, I felt I had witnessed such a clash between cultures. I was quite surprised at how different the translation was from the original, and I was very frustrated at how mild and toothless the protagonist had become during the process of translation. This poor novel seemed to have lost almost half of its baggage (in the form of swearwords) while traveling across linguistic and cultural borders. This reading experience made me think more closely about swearing, the translation of swearwords and cultural differences in swearing. Now, a number of years later, it motivates this Pro Gradu thesis.

Some might feel that swearing and swearwords as objects of study do not belong in academia. This attitude is reflected in the fact that relatively little has been said and written about the use of swearwords so far, although a number of scholars have dared to venture into these murky waters and contributed to the discussion with research and publications. However, they all seem very apologetic in their

introductions to their studies, going to great lengths to explain why they have chosen to study such a naughty subject. In this thesis, I will give no such apologies. I will discuss dirty words and dirty concepts, and several of my examples might come across as quite graphic. At this point, I wish to point out to the reader a fact I will soon discuss in more detail: the "dirtiness" associated with swearwords and foul language in general resides in our minds – not in the language or in the words themselves. Thus, theoretically speaking, the study of swearwords and dirty language is as motivated as any other linguistic studies. As Timothy Jay puts it, "[this] common and extensive phenomenon […] deserves the attention of psychologists, linguists and others interested in language and communication" (1992: 244).

1.2. AIM

This thesis focuses on the translation of swearwords in two Swedish translations of J. D. Salinger's famous novel *Catcher in the Rye* (1991)*.* The two translations, by Birgitta Hammar in 1953 and by Klas Östergren in 1987, differ significantly from the original in that they have omitted a statistically significant amount of the swearwords in the original novel. This interesting discrepancy can be studied from a number of angles, and it can also yield interesting information about the target culture that hosts the translations. As Katan (1996: 15) notes, the idea of a translator deliberately making changes to a text or manipulating the words to aid further understanding across cultures is still viewed with suspicion.

My primary aim in this thesis is to try and find reasons and explanations for this discrepancy in the number of swearwords. The hypothesis underlying my research

is that the Swedish language and culture are less prone to swearing than the English language and culture. From an introductory discussion about dirty language, taboo, swearwords and euphemisms in chapter 3, I will move on to present both quantitative and qualitative results of a contrastive empirical study of the swearwords in *Catcher* and its translations, and based on these results, I will claim that there seems to exist a cultural norm in Sweden that prescribes a certain approach to swearing and swearwords. I hope to back this claim with the discussion of Swedish mentality in chapter 4. Chapter 5 is a brief overview of the concept of norms and their relevance to Translation Studies, but instead of theorizing about norms at length in this chapter, I will focus on their consequences in light of the results of the empirical part of the study.

The discussion on "dirty language" in this study focuses on swearwords. As swearwords always refer to a taboo subject, the concept of taboo will be discussed in more detail. Euphemisms, which can practically be seen as swearwords from a pragmatic viewpoint, will also be touched upon. This study does *not*, however, discuss other aspects of "bad language" such as profanity, blasphemy, obscenity, vulgarity, insults, racial slurs, etc., as they would simply take up too much space. These issues have been covered extensively by several of the scholars mentioned in section 2.1, most notably Timothy Jay in *Cursing in America* (1992).

In this study, I have adopted a target-oriented, descriptive approach. I strive to uncover the underlying reasons for the changes that have been made to the original in the process of translation. By analyzing two translations of the same novel, set apart by more than 30 years and a number of other factors, I have tried to eliminate the risk of making too bold generalizations on inadequate sampling.

For the very same reason, I have extracted all swearwords in the three novels, thus trying to maximize the size of the corpus used in the empirical part of the study.

On the seeming lack of a theoretical framework and the prioritizing of expressions like "everyone knows" and anecdotal evidence, I quote Douglas Robinson in *Translation & Taboo*: "This example illustrates the importance of staying in touch with the anecdote, the casually remembered and related personal experience, which remembers what theory all too often forgets: the peripheral confusions, the emotional charges and connotations and associations, the half-conscious situatedness and directedness of an idea or a plan, the inchoate or semi-choate feeling that all this matters for some specific reason… I'm sticking with the anecdotal, the experiential, the excursional, the centrifugal" (1996: xvi-xvii).

2. DIRTY LANGUAGE

2.1. PREVIOUS STUDIES ON SWEARWORDS

Relatively little has been said and written about the use of swearwords in academia so far. In this section, I will comment briefly on some of the major studies and resources in the field.

Scholars like Montagu (1967), Ljung (1983, 1984a, 1984b), Andersson (1985), Andersson & Hirsch (1985a, 1985b), Andersson & Trudgill (1990), Hughes (1991) and Jay (1992) have all contributed to the study and discussion of swearwords with research and publications. In all these works, the writers are very quick to state that practically nothing or relatively little has been written about swearwords so far. However, there does, as Kiuru & Montin (1991: 12) point out, seem to be a growing interest in the subject. If we look hard enough, we will find bits and pieces written about swearwords that complement each other, giving us quite a good overview of the subject. However, a comprehensive, all encompassing study of swearing, which takes more than a handful of aspects into account, has yet to see the light of day.

One of the first major studies in the field was Ashley Montagu's *The Anatomy of Swearing*, first published in 1967. Montagu's approach is mainly historical as he traces the origins of swearing from the ancient civilizations and takes the reader on a tour of swearing during different eras, ending in the early 20th century. Montagu, although he occasionally comments on swearing in other languages and cultures, focuses on swearwords and swearing behavio in the English language. He also discusses the psychology of swearing and motives for swearing, but in

this discussion he all but ignores the social and linguistic dimensions of swearing. Cultural issues, as well, are left undisturbed, while several chapters have been devoted to the extensive discussion of individual swearwords and their etymologies. However, although Montagu's work ignores many interesting aspects of swearing, as one of the first attempts at a comprehensive treatment of swearing and swearwords, it very likely stimulated further research into the subject.

Hughes' work *Swearing: A short history of foul language, oaths and profanity in English*, first published in 1991, follows in the direction set by Montagu. Swearing and swearwords are traced through English social and linguistic history, starting from the Germanic heritage, covering Middle English, the Reformation and Renaissance, the Victorian period etc. As in *The Anatomy of Swearing*, the etymologies of swearwords are covered in detail, but ontological questions about what swearwords really are and how they function in languages (or in different cultures) are left undiscussed.

Magnus Ljung, a Swedish professor of linguistics at the university of Stockholm, has contributed to the study of swearwords with a number of articles and the book *Om svordomar i svenskan, engelskan och arton andra språk*, first published in 1984. Whereas Montagu and Hughes ignored contrastive aspects, Ljung focuses on them, instead leaving out historical and etymological issues. Ljung also presents a general discussion of what swearing is, why we swear, the grammar of swearing, and most importantly, how different languages and cultures swear. English and Swedish swearing dominates the discussion, but Ljung also discusses swearing in languages like Russian, Polish, Serbo-Croatian, Arabic and even

Chinese, giving a variety of examples of swearwords in these languages. In the article "Fuck you, shithead! Om översättningen av amerikanska svordomar till svenska" (1983), Ljung analyzes the translation of swearwords from American English to Swedish, using three novels as case studies. While Ljung focuses on giving examples and analyzing them in detail, the discussion about swearing in general, i.e. psychological, social, linguistic and sociolinguistic issues, remains quite brief.

One of the most comprehensive works on swearwords is Lars-Gunnar Andersson's *Fult språk. Svordomar, dialekter och annat ont*, first published in 1985. Andersson takes up the discussion of bad language and taboo in general, creating a framework for a discussion of the ontology of swearwords and swearing as linguistic phenomena. Andersson examines anthropological and sociolinguistic aspects and presents a comprehensive discussion of different motives that underlie swearing. He also discusses cultural issues, gives examples of swearing in Sweden and also presents data from questionnaire surveys charting attitudes towards swearwords. In 1985, Andersson worked together with Richard Hirsch, the result being a journal called *Swearing*. In the first volume, swearing in American English was compared to swearing in Swedish, the focus being on sociolinguistic aspects and taboo. A large part of the first report discussed syntactic and morphological patterns of swearwords. In the second report, Andersson & Hirsch moved towards a general model of swearing, taxonomies of swearing and also highlighted the emotive functions of swearing. However, it would appear that Andersson & Hirsch's joint efforts in producing a journal on swearing came to a premature end, as only two volumes were published. Later, in

1990, Andersson collaborated with the sociolinguist Peter Trudgill on *Bad Language*, practically a streamlined English version of Andersson's earlier book.

Timothy Jay, with *Cursing in America. A psycholinguistic study of dirty language in courts, in the movies, in the schoolyards, and on the streets*, published in 1992, focuses on American swearing and its psycholinguistic and pragmatic aspects. A large proportion of Jay's work discusses and analyzes the results of a number of empirical studies carried out, as the title tells us, in a number of different surroundings, and thus presents statistical information on swearing behavior in America. *Cursing in America* also presents a very good discussion, on a larger scale than in many other works on swearing, on dirty language in general, dealing with profanity, blasphemy, taboo, obscenity, vulgarity, insults and slurs etc. Like Montagu, Jay is interested in the psychological motives for swearing, and devotes a whole chapter to the relation between anger and swearing. The discussion around the results of the empirical studies has a pragmatic focus, and Jay seems to be more interested in how swearwords function in real life, as opposed to in theory. Like Montagu, Hughes and partly Andersson, Jay does not contrast swearwords in different languages and cultures – the discussion is purely descriptive of swearwords and swearing in America. Finally, Jay takes up the question about how swearing and free speech in the media relate to each other, which might be interesting reading for anyone who has ever been annoyed at the censoring of swearwords in popular music, radio, films, TV and other public forums.

Finally, one of the probably most amusing journals in academia, namely *Maledicta – The international journal of verbal aggression*, has to be mentioned.

Maledicta is published semi-annually in 160-page volumes and claims to be neither vulgar nor boringly academic. The journal, published by the International Maledicta Society with more than 6000 members, specializes in offensive and negatively-valued words and expressions from all languages and cultures, past and present. However, *Maledicta* seems to consist mostly of small amusing bits and pieces from all over the world, only rarely presenting comprehensive studies on swearing. The journal, which prides itself on being "cacademic" rather than strictly academic, is still a good resource for anyone interested in swearing and swearwords.

2.2.   WHEN IS LANGUAGE DIRTY?

Is there any such thing as 'dirty', 'bad' or 'foul' language? Certainly, there is bad *use* of language in a variety of forms and situations, but as such, language is a neutral system of semiotic signs that enables us humans to communicate. From a purely linguistic standpoint, the word 'spade' is as good and usable a word as, for instance, 'shit' – nothing in the words themselves characterize them as "good" or "bad". The dirtiness of the word 'shit', and so called 'foul language' in general, exists only in people's associations, values and attitudes towards non-linguistic issues (Andersson 1985: 9).

In his very influential work *Course in General Linguistics*, Ferdinand Saussure, the Swiss pioneer of modern linguistics, argued that there is no necessary or natural connection between a word (signifier) and the object or concept it refers to (signified) – the connection is purely arbitrary. In other words, there is no rational reason for us to attach the word 'spade' to the object intended and most

often used for digging. The relationship between signifier and signified is purely conventional and agreed upon beforehand. Saussure argued that words have no real reference to material things in the world, only to sound-images (psychological imprints of the sound of certain words) and mental concepts. The signified is not necessarily an object in the world as we know it, bur rather a mental concept of it, which lies in relation to other mental concepts, and thereby derives its final meaning (1988: 65-70). Take the following example (Fig. 1):
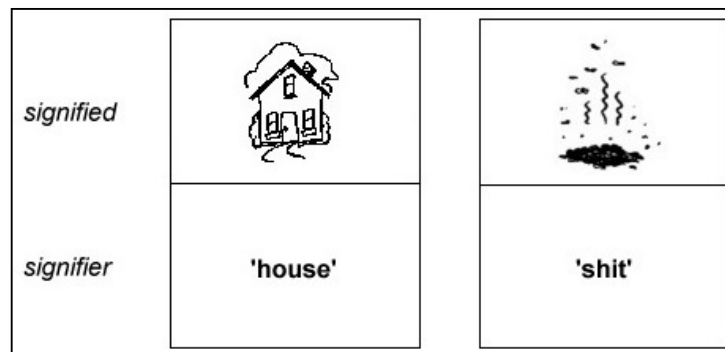
Fig. 1   The relation between 'signifier' and 'signified'.

When we see or hear the word 'house', we automatically think of a building made for people to live in. This, we have agreed on in the English language. Equally, when we see or hear the word 'shit', we think of human or animal excrement. However, even before we think of waste material from human or animal bodies, we react – it is a 'dirty' word. Something has altered or skewed the mental concept associated with this word, and accordingly, the primary function of the word 'shit' is no longer to refer to actual human or animal excrement – the word, referring to a concept our culture sees as taboo, has gained a widened denotative meaning and become a dirty word, a swearword.

What, then, has altered the mental concept corresponding to the word 'shit', but not to the word 'house'? What forms the mental concepts, associations, attitudes and values in the users of language? A slightly banal, but not necessarily incorrect, answer is: The world we live in. Just as much as we shape our own surroundings and cultures, they shape us. What is accepted in our social system tends to be accepted in language, and accordingly, things proscribed in our culture are most often banned in language. Unaccepted behavioral patterns, forbidden subjects and "loaded" concepts will reflect on language, thus creating mental concepts of "bad" or "dirty" words – taboo words. In the following section, I will try to answer some of the questions posed above in the discussion about the concept of taboo in society and language, and then move on to swearwords.

2.3.   TABOO

The word 'taboo' has its etymological roots in the Polynesian societies, especially the Tongan islands (*Oxford Concise Dictionary of English Etymology*, s.v. taboo, tabu), and it generally refers to something that is socially, culturally or religiously proscribed. We know that the word 'taboo' dates back to the 18th century, when Captain James Cook allegedly introduced the word into English.

Collins English Dictionary gives the following definition of 'taboo': something that is forbidden or disapproved of, placed under a social prohibition or ban resulting from social or other conventions. Also, a ritual restriction or prohibition of something that is considered holy or unclean. According to Andersson (1985: 24), taboos are surrounded by feelings of guilt, repulsion, uncleanness or belief in

supernatural forces. In his book *Totem and Taboo*, the Austrian physician and founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, writes that taboo prohibitions have no rational grounds and that they are of unknown origin, signifying things that are, for some reason, unapproachable, uncommon or not generally accessible in our lives. In a slightly circular way, Freud defines the concept of taboo in the following way: "The word 'taboo' denotes everything, whether a person or a place or a thing or a transitory condition, which is the vehicle or source of this mysterious attribute. It also denotes the prohibitions arising from the same attribute. And, finally, it has a connotation which includes alike 'sacred' and 'above the ordinary', as well as 'dangerous', 'unclean' and 'uncanny'" (1983: 20).

Taboos are not universal, but are created by each culture and each language, although they often overlap. As there are many intercultural taboos, so are there culture-specific taboos. Take, for example, meat intended for human consumption. For the average Finn, meat is meat. For the average Jew, meat is either Kosher or taboo. Accordingly, it should be safe to say that each culture has its very own taboos. From a Nordic point of view, the murder of Olof Palme was a taboo subject in conversation for many Swedes; and to continue with political examples, the Finnish president Kekkonen's policy with regard to the Soviet Union was for a long time, and perhaps still is to some extent, something of a no-no for many Finns.

We have a tendency to hide or deny things we are afraid or ashamed of. Take, for example, death, which is a natural and utterly unavoidable thing as such. In most cultures, death is something to be feared, something that causes pain and sorrow

among relatives. We avoid talking about death, and when we have to, we shroud the subject in euphemistic terms. We do not always call a spade a spade – *Encarta Dictionary Thesaurus* gives 43 synonyms for the noun and the verb 'spade', but for 'death' and 'dying' the figure is 164.

Bodily functions and the consequent products of these functions are also heavily tabooed in many cultures. As Andersson puts it: "[As children] we eat, shit, burp and fart, sleep and cry. As we are raised we acquire certain cultural patterns, making us better citizens … and learn that these things are dirty and should not be talked about" (1985: 15; my translation). We lock ourselves in rooms called bathrooms (this, too, partly a euphemism), where we dispose of our bodily waste material. Should there be an unpleasant smell, we light a match to conceal the unwanted aroma. God forbid that a toilet should smell like shit – we prefer the acrid stench of sulfur. To avoid talking about the subject in blunt terms we come up with euphemisms like 'poopoo' and 'weewee' and expressions like "going to powder one's nose" or "going to the little boys' room". The 'original' words become tabooed and forbidden, replaced in every-day language by euphemisms. We could also call this word-magic: our superstitions and prohibitions do have an undisputed effect on our vocabulary.

There are both behavioral taboos, for instance the prohibition against incestuous relations, and linguistic taboos, for instance the use of swearwords. Our behavioral taboos will reflect on our language, and with time, the actual words that are used to talk about the subject that is considered taboo will themselves become taboo. These taboo words tend to become swearwords, and in turn the terms we invent to circumvent taboo swearwords become euphemisms.

2.3.1. Sources of taboo

Although taboos are not universal and all cultures are likely to have a number of culture-specific taboos, there are certain subjects and concepts that are taboo in almost all cultures. According to Andersson, western cultures generally take their taboo words, and thus swearwords, from one or more of the following categories:

> (a) Sexual organs, sexual relations
> (b) Religion, church
> (c) Excrement
> (d) Death
> (e) The physically or mentally disabled
> (f) Prostitution
> (g) Narcotics, crime
>
> (1985: 79)

The first three categories seem pretty straightforward – I think it is safe to assume that every reader can think of a taboo word from each category. But what about the remaining four categories? Death certainly is a taboo subject if we think of all the different euphemistic ways of talking about death. The physically and mentally disabled, then? Surely, it would be nice if this was not a taboo subject, but for some reason, it is. We look away when we see a handicapped person, and when having a discussion with a mentally disabled person, we try to remain open-minded and natural to the degree that we actually achieve the exact opposite. It should also be noted that words used when talking about the physically or mentally disadvantaged soon become loaded and offensive – take the words like 'retard' or 'cretin', which were originally neutral words – and are replaced by euphemisms.

The two last categories, prostitution and narcotics and crime, are not perhaps the first things we think of when trying to find sources of taboo words. However, Andersson (1985: 81) gives a good example: A mother might be proud of her son who is a banker in New York and of her daughter who is an accountant in London, but it is very unlikely to hear a mother proudly tell about her son who is a pimp in Harlem or of her daughter who is a hooker in Soho. This is Andersson's way of motivating his choice of including prostitution, narcotics and crime in his list of sources for taboo words, but similar examples could be thought of for almost any subject. Indeed, Andersson's list of sources for taboos and swearwords is by no means exhaustive – it disregards many areas of society that are seen as taboo today, for instance the homeless, the unemployed etc., and on the other hand, it includes categories that some might feel could have been left out. However, Andersson's list will do for my purposes, as it includes the central sources for swearwords in the western cultures, namely the first three categories.

2.3.2. From taboo to swearwords

Of all taboo usage of language, I would argue that swearwords are by far the most interesting. Everybody knows what a swearword is, and equally everybody knows how, when and when not to swear. As Ljung (1983: 278) points out, it seems easy to point at several instances that might be called swearing, but it is difficult to define exactly the concept of swearing. A layperson might think that all use of taboo words or words that refer to taboo is swearing, and although all swearwords are taboo, not all taboo words are swearwords. For instance, cannibalism is certainly taboo in most cultures, yet we do not have any swearwords stemming from this particular taboo. Furthermore, it is quite possible to talk about taboo

subjects without swearing, even when words we generally associate with swearing are involved.

The concepts of swearing and taboo are by no means new and recent ones. In *The Anatomy of Swearing*, Ashley Montagu argues that swearing and taboo are "as old as man and coeval with language" (1967: 5). He writes about the antiquity of swearing and taboo, describing the use of taboo words among the ancient Egyptians, the ancient Greeks and the Romans. Ljung writes about swearwords in ancient hieroglyphic inscriptions dating back to 1000 BC, and suggests that swearwords and taboo are as old as language itself (1984a: 13). The Bible, in several places, touches upon the use of taboo words and swearwords. The second commandment comes readily to mind: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." So, obviously, we are dealing with something that seems to have been present in language for a very long time, and as Hughes puts it, "virtually all societies, even the most modern, retain some taboos against swearing" (1991: 8). But what are swearwords, and how do they become swearwords?

When defining a swearword it is important to keep in mind that not all foul language is swearing. Most people would agree that the use of swearwords is an instance of foul or poor use of language. However, the reverse is not true – foul language does not always automatically mean that swearing is involved. For instance, the sentence "They were fucking like rabbits" may be regarded as poor or foul use of language, since there are, according to our linguistic and sociolinguistic conventions, less loaded and more accepted words that could be used instead, e.g. 'making love'. The word 'fuck' in this example is not, however,

an instance of swearing, since it is used in a technical sense, or in other words, used to signify the actual act of having intercourse. And this, argues Ljung (1984a: 23), is the first important point in defining a swearword – it should be used in a non-technical sense. This explains why the word 'bitch' is appropriate at a dog show, but not when used to disparage a woman. In line with this requirement of non-technicality, the word 'Jesus' in the sentence "The life and teachings of Jesus forms the basis of Christianity" is not a swearword, but becomes one when used in an exclamation like "Jesus fucking Christ!".

Apart from being used in a non-technical sense, a word must also be taboo to classify as a swearword, or at least refer to a taboo subject or word (Ljung 1984a: 22). The word 'motherfucker' is, as anything connected with incest, taboo in most cultures and languages. The expression "He's a real mother" does not contain any taboo words as such, but refers to a taboo subject and can thereby be classified as an instance of swearing, although employing a euphemistic term.

A word or an expression should also be used in an emotive way to classify as a swearword, according to Ljung, who makes a difference between 'emotive' and 'emotional'. The key to the difference between emotive and emotional is the degree of control a speaker has over a situation: if a person accidentally drops a hammer on his or her foot, he or she probably feels a certain amount of pain, but not enough to lose control – this may result in an emotive expression to vent frustration and anger, e.g. "Damn!". However, if the same person drops a largish anvil on his or her foot, this very likely leads to a highly emotional, inarticulate groan or cry of pain (Ljung 1984a: 12).

Thus, according to Ljung, a swearword is a *taboo* word, used in a *non-technical*, *emotive* way (1984b: 95ff). In his book *Om svordomar i svenskan, engelskan och arton andra språk*, he puts this in the following way: "[Swearwords are] expressions that are seen as signals of certain emotions and attitudes in a speaker, using taboo words in a non-technical way" (1984a: 24; my translation).

In a work by Andersson & Richard Hirsch (1985a: 5), three conditions are given for a word or an expression to classify as a swearword: it refers to taboo and/or stigma (sign of social unacceptability) in a culture; it is not presumed to be interpreted literally; it can be used to manifest strong emotions and attitudes.

Ljung, Andersson and Hirsch have all stated that it is difficult to find a definition for a swearword, and that there seems to be no consensus of opinion among those who study swearwords. However, it would seem that they in fact *do* agree, and that they are simply talking about the same things with different terminology. Whether they talk about taboo, stigma, non-technicality or the principle of non-literal meaning, they have all outlined the same basic conditions.

Note that Andersson and Hirsch feel that a swearword *may* manifest emotion and/or attitude, whereas Ljung argues that this is a requirement. It may in fact be true that swearwords are often used in an emotive way, but they may equally well be used *without* this emotive function, as we will see in section 3.3.2. The use of swearwords *can* be a controlled, deliberate and linguistic vent for emotion, but just as well it may be used just for the hell of it, to use a relevant expression. I am relatively sure anyone who has happened to overhear a conversation between teenagers in downtown Helsinki on a Friday night would agree – it can make you

wonder if the word 'vittu' is actually a swearword or a preposition. We will also see how swearwords may be used without a direct emotive function in the analysis of the swearwords in *Catcher*.

2.3.3. From swearwords to euphemisms

Because swearwords are seen as instances of too direct, harsh, unpleasant or offensive language, we come up with less offensive synonyms, i.e. euphemisms. In their work *Euphemism and Dysphemism: Language used as a shield and weapon* (1991), Allan & Burridge state that euphemisms are used as alternatives to unwanted expressions in order to avoid possible loss of face, either one's own or that of the hearer.

Sooner or later, all swearwords generate euphemisms, and the stronger the taboo, the larger the number of avoidance forms (Hughes 1991: 12). We can avoid the use of taboo terms by resorting to more childish or technical variants, which still refer to the same thing. C. S. Lewis put it in the following way: "As soon as you deal with it [sex] explicitly, you are forced to choose between the language of the nursery, the gutter and the anatomy class" (in Hughes 1991: 1), while Clifford Landers writes that "English is surprisingly deficient in words midway between clinical terms … and [their] street equivalents" (Landers 2001: 153).

For example, physicians on a daily basis have to discuss subjects that are considered taboo in our society. Then, the clinical terms are the only way of avoiding the more loaded variants for certain concepts. A physician is likely to ask a parent with a sick child if the child's "bowel movements are normal" to stay

on a neutral level in language ("Is he shitting ok?" would certainly be unacceptable). A certain degree of consistency in the use of technical terms instead of taboo terms is needed, however, to avoid embarrassing situations, exemplified in the following anecdote of a situation a friend of mine found herself in. During a medical checkup during pregnancy, my friend was asked to relax her "vaginal muscles". This sounded like normal medical terminology, but unfortunately it was followed by the request "relax your asshole muscles, too", which led to a rather embarrassing situation.

Euphemisms allow us to start a word as if we are going to say a prohibited word, but instead of going all the way, we can turn off into more "innocent" channels. Some people consider euphemisms to be instances of swearing, some find them slightly more acceptable than the crude words they replace. Yet pragmatically, euphemisms function in a way identical to swearwords. Another alternative for avoiding the original swearwords is the use of dysphemisms (Allan & Burridge 1991), or the deliberate substitution of a neutral expression with a potentially more offensive one. While dysphemisms may sound coarse, they may actually work towards the same goal as euphemisms – avoiding the use of loaded, tabooed terms. Dysphemisms for the state of being dead, for instance expressions like "pushing up daisies", "cashing in one's chips", "going west" etc., are all slightly more humorous ways of talking about death in non-taboo terms.

2.4. WHY DO WE SWEAR?

Swearing is generally considered to be bad use of language, an unnecessary linguistic feature that corrupts our language, sounds unpleasant and uneducated, and could well be disposed of. At the same time, however, most people seem to have difficulties living up to their high linguistic ideals regarding swearwords, and consequently, swearing lives on (Andersson 1985: 110, Montagu 1967: 2, Andersson & Trudgill 1990: 8). So the question arises – why do we swear? Andersson lists three different motives for swearing: psychological motives, social motives and linguistic motives.

2.4.1. Psychological motives

According to Murphy's Law, if something can go wrong, it will, most often at the worst possible moment. Our morning toast has a curious tendency of always landing on the buttered side, should we drop it. We never seem to come just in time for the bus – most often, it is just pulling away from the stop. Aunt Edna calls on the phone to reiterate the events of the past week just as we are sitting down for dinner, and while we are getting up to answer the phone, we hit our knee on the corner of the table, etc. Every day in our lives, we get angry or frustrated when unpleasant, unexpected events occur or things in general do not go according to plans. In these situations, the normal reaction is to release or express these strong feelings in one way or another – we may stamp our feet, gnash our teeth, hit a nearby object or simply let out a more or less forceful "argh". However, following upon frustration or anger, arising from an unexpected event or shock, most people resort to swearing for an immediate vent of emotion (Montagu: 63, 72, Andersson: 110, Andersson & Trudgill: 53, Ljung

1984a: 11ff). These swearwords are not deliberate, but come more as a reflex. As Andersson points out, it does not matter if one gets one's finger stuck in the door to the pub or to the church – the swearword will come all the same.

In *The Anatomy of Swearing* (1967), Ashley Montagu devotes a whole chapter to the discussion of psychological motives for swearing. He compares swearing as a vent for emotion to the crying of a small child, and suggests that crying develops into swearing as the child acquires language. He quotes Robert Graves, who puts it in the following way: "There is no doubt that swearing has a definite physiological function; for after childhood relief in tears and wailing is rightly discouraged […] The nervous system demands some expression that does not affect towards cowardice and feebleness and, as a nervous stimulant in a crisis, swearing is unequalled" (1967: 67).

Montagu argues that the capacity to respond to frustration is already present in the infant, but he does not, contrary to what Andersson (1985: 112) claims, suggest that swearing is innate. According to Montagu, swearing is "a learned form of human behavior in cultures and under conditions in which it is encouraged" (1967: 71). It constitutes a culturally conditioned form of behavior, which serves two purposes: on the one hand, it permits expressing excess energy or frustration in a relatively harmless, verbal form, and on the other hand, it restores emotional stability (1967: 78). Just as we can have a "good cry" or a "good laugh", prompted by sorrow or joy, Montagu argues that we can have "a good swear" to bring relief to a stressed mind. Thus, the relief-purifying-pacifying function of swearing is "a rather more civilized form of behavior that replaces physical violence" as a vent for frustration or aggression (1967: 76).

In an article called "On the Physiology and Psychology of Swearing" in the journal *Psychiatry*, Ashley Montagu enunciates the Law of Swearing: "The Law of Swearing may thus be formulated. Swearing is the verbal expression, or venting, of the aggressiveness which follows upon frustration. Hence the desire to swear will always be experienced under conditions which give rise to the frustration-aggression syndrome" (in Andersson 1985: 111). While this is a rather good "law of swearing" when it comes to psychological motives, it disregards, as does Montagu in general in *The Anatomy of Swearing*, the other two main motives for swearing: the social and the linguistic.

2.4.2. Social & linguistic motives

Not all swearing is prompted by frustration or aggression, nor is swearing always unintentional. As any sociolinguist would agree, there are a number of social and linguistic motives for swearing, which might be quite deliberate and complex. For instance, we may swear to assert our identity in a group, to shock, to amuse, to insult, to indicate friendship, to mark social distance or social solidarity etc. When swearwords are used for these purposes, there is not necessarily any frustration or anger present. Social swearing, according to David Crystal, is the most common swearing pattern (1995: 173).

Social motives for swearing differ from psychological motives in that they involve more than one person, as social swearing depends on an audience to have any real function. Swearing in solitude has hardly any social significance, but when in company, swearing can be used for a number of reasons, as suggested above. In these cases, swearing is highly deliberate – we are using swearwords as

rhetoric tools to achieve a certain reaction in the hearer. The following anecdote is a nice example of the social function of swearing:

Not too long ago, a friend of mine was on the 3T tram in downtown Helsinki, on her way to work. Two teenage girls were sitting in the back of the tram, talking loudly to each other in a very vulgar manner. The swearword "vittu" (roughly equivalent to English 'fuck' in terms of offensiveness) was used excessively, which led to a pained silence in the tram. The girls, however, seemed oblivious to the embarrassment they were causing among their fellow travelers. Next to the girls sat an elderly, sweet-looking lady, who was getting ready to get off the tram. After a while she stood up and said, very calmly: "Anteeks, mun pitäis nyt vittu jäädä pois", which translates roughly to "Excuse me, I need to get off the fucking tram". The tram roared with laughter as the little old lady made her exit, leaving the girls dumbfounded.

In this case, the motive for swearing was hardly psychological in terms of venting frustration or anger, but clearly a deliberate way of commenting on the girls' vulgar language in a sarcastic way. The effect of the utterance was deepened by the fact that the person who uttered the swearword was not a stereotypical swearer – not a young, perhaps less educated person, but a sweet old lady. Swearwords are indeed most effective and shocking when they are uttered in situations and places where they are least expected (for instance, in church, in a public speech, etc.) (Andersson 1985: 114), and the same is true for the person who utters the swearword. We are more likely to accept swearwords in the speech of a construction worker than, for instance, a child, or as in this case, an old lady.

As in society in general, flouting norms or deviating from expected social stereotypes, in this case sociolinguistic ones, tends to evoke strong reactions.

Not only can swearwords be used to shock or evoke reactions, but they can also be used in situations that completely or almost completely lack negativity (which is not to say that the *reaction* might not be negative). Swearwords may be used to assert and strengthen group identity, to show that one is "part of the gang".[1] When we join a new social group, we are very much influenced by the prevailing swearing norms within the group, and swearing has even been said to be contagious (Crystal 1995: 173). Swearwords may be used as markers of friendliness in bantering remarks between friends, and they may even be used as terms of endearment. However, when swearwords are used in their social function without any attached negativity, it is clear that there has to be a certain understanding between the speaker and his/her audience. Often body language can signal that an utterance is in fact friendly, but from time to time, we interpret these signals incorrectly, or fail to give out the correct signals indicating that our message is of a non-negative nature. This happened to the late prime minister of Sweden, Olof Palme, during election night in 1976, when it became clear that the social democrats were looking at a change of government after 44 years in power. Palme, probably trying to jolt his audience and appeal to the man on the street, hissed a quite menacing "We'll give the bourgeoisie hell!" to the TV-cameras.

The incident created quite a stir in the media, and Palme later "must have cursed the TV stations for not being smart enough to go off the air three seconds earlier"

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[1] Studied by Helen E. Ross among a group of zoologists on an expedition to Arctic Norway (Montagu: 87, Crystal: 173).

(Alopaeus: 96f). The prime minister was trying to show solidarity towards many disappointed social democratic voters, but instead came off as an angry, bitter loser with poor judgement.[2]

Most likely, Palme did not intend to insult the TV audience with his use of swearwords, but he did. Swearwords are often (quite deliberately) used in abusive language, as they can add a significant amount of punch to almost any invective. When swearwords are used in invectives, there are both psychological and social motives involved (Andersson 1985: 115f). If we feel the need to use abusive language towards another person, there is very likely some frustration present as well as a certain amount of emotion which needs to be expressed in one way or another. What makes swearing in invectives a social form of swearing is the fact that it depends on an audience, as does all other socially motivated swearing. Andersson claims that using swearwords in invectives is mainly practiced by children (1985: 116), as adults can employ more sophisticated methods for abusing other people – the British statesman Winston Churchill was a veritable master at forming particularly malicious insults without using a single swearword. However, one can question if Andersson is correct in claiming that swearwords are used in insults mainly by children, as it would seem that invectives with swearwords involved are getting more and more common, which can be seen, for instance, in many movies and on TV, which seem to rely heavily on insults along the lines of "you goddamned motherfucker" etc.

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[2] This was not the only time Palme broke sociolinguistic norms by swearing in a public forum: He once described the regime of Franco with the words "satans mördare", roughly "goddamned murderers" (Andersson: 124).

Although many people dislike socially motivated swearing (more so than psychologically motivated), it should be noted that socially motivated swearing may have a positive value, or what sociolinguists call *covert prestige* (Andersson 1985: 113, Hudson 1996: 240, Crystal 1995: 173, 365). Certain types of language, certain educations and jobs, certain types of cars etc., are associated with power, wealth and high education. In other words, they have *prestige*, a respect associated with high quality. The educated pronunciation of southern Britain, RP, is a good example of prestigious use of language, a standard that many Britons look up to and respect. So called bad language, on the other hand, is often associated with a certain aggressiveness, courage, strength and protest or resistance. While these properties might not be appreciated or sought after in, for instance, the BBC newsroom, they may be highly valued in other areas of society in a number of situations. For instance, a new recruit in the army, no matter what his opinions on swearing in general, might swear to indicate to his peers that he is not a sissy, thus aiming for covert prestige.

To discuss the linguistic motives for swearing, we have to take a very theoretical and detached approach to language. In theory, as we saw in section 3.1, swearwords are just as good and usable words as any others. We have a variety of ways of expressing ourselves, using different words, different grammatical structures etc. According to Andersson, we are free to use any of the tens of thousands of words in our vocabulary, as long as they convey the message we wish to communicate. So, from a purely theoretical and linguistic standpoint, we could say "What a very nice rocking chair" just as well as "What a fucking nice rocking chair" – both would be just as acceptable (1985: 122). This is justifiable in theory, but if we take a more pragmatic view, the question arises – are there

really any linguistic motives for using swearwords, or are they all either psychological, social, or a mixture of both? We choose what we want to say from a vast range of possibilities our language allows us, and these choices will always have an effect on the person we are communicating with. It is quite obvious that aunt Edna will react differently to "What a very nice rocking chair" and "What a fucking nice rocking chair".

Still, there are motives for swearing that could be called linguistic. We all have different opinions about language, different idiolects and different stylistic norms that we follow. Some prefer to say "Those individuals do not possess any" while others opt for "Those guys ain't got none". We have different opinions about swearwords, and accordingly, we use them with differing frequency. We might feel that swearwords are totally unacceptable and should be banned from language, we might feel that swearwords are acceptable in certain situations, or some might even argue that swearwords are acceptable in all situations. However, most often, we swear with psychological or social motives – linguistic motives may play into these kinds of swearing, but purely linguistically motivated swearing would appear to be quite rare indeed.

3. ANALYSIS

3.1. MATERIAL AND METHODS

3.1.1. The source text

Jerome David Salinger is an American author born in New York in 1919. His most important work, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), established him as a leading author: "No writer since the 1920's – the era of Fitzgerald and Hemingway – has aroused so much public and critical interest" (Miller 1965: 5). The hero of the book, Holden Caulfield, became a prototype of the rebellious and confused adolescent searching for truth and innocence outside the "phony" adult world, and the book itself came to be seen as "a kind of 'Bible' for a generation that wanted to revolt and didn't quite know how" (Brashers 1964: 212). Other works by Salinger are the short story collection *Nine Stories* (1953) and the novels *Franny and Zooey* (1961), *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters* and *Seymour: An Introduction* (both 1963).

Catcher was first published in America on July 16, 1951. The first reviews of *Catcher* were far from unanimous, and although the novel was praised by many as a literary piece of work, the language in *Catcher* shocked many. "[Critics] have often remarked – uneasily – the 'daring,' 'obscene,' 'blasphemous' features of Holden's language" (Costello 1959: 173). However daring, obscene or blasphemous it might have been regarded as, the language in *Catcher* was a true and authentic rendering of New York teenage colloquial speech (Costello 1959: 172). The *New York Times*, on July 16, 1951, rolled out the red carpet: "Holden's story is told in Holden's own strange, wonderful language by J. D. Salinger in an unusually brilliant first novel…" (in Burger). *The Christian Science Monitor* on

July 19, 1951, was less enthusiastic: "Holden's dead-pan narrative is quick-moving, absurd, and wholly repellent in its mingled vulgarity, naïveté, and sly perversion" (in Longstreth). But however much the reviewers disagreed over the merits of the novel, it was chosen as the midsummer selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club and made the best-seller list in the *New York Times*. Suddenly, *Catcher* had become "*the* most popular book of the 50's" (Brashers 1964: 212).

3.1.2. The Swedish translations of *Catcher*

Catcher has been translated into Swedish twice – in 1953 by Birgitta Hammar and in 1987 by Klas Östergren, both novels called *Räddaren i nöden*. *Räddaren* has been described as a prototype for the youth novel in Sweden (Lönnroth & Göransson 1997: 230).

A search in the archives of the Swedish Royal Library returned some 270 works translated by Birgitta Hammar since the late 1930's. She has translated works by authors such as Potter, Dahl, Remarque, Saroyan, Salinger and an impressive number of works by P. G. Wodehouse and C. S. Lewis. In 1993, Hammar received the Elsa Thulin award for translators, awarded by the Swedish Writers' Union (Swedish Writers' Union).

Östergren, a translator and an author of such works as *Attila* (1975) and *Ankare* (1988), tends to write about existential problems, often seen through the eyes of adolescents searching for their identity. Clear parallels to *Catcher* can be found in *Attila*, the story about a teenage boy in his final year of school, unsure of his identity, afraid to give up the safe reality of school and hesitating to enter the adult

world (Stiller 1994: 154ff). In addition to *Catcher,* Östergren has translated only a handful of literary works or theatrical plays.

Hammar's translation of *Catcher* got good reviews in the Swedish press in 1953. In the daily newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet*, the critic had the following to say: "Can a story like this, presented in first person narrative and employing the extremely limited vocabulary of college slang, be at all interesting? Unbelievable but true, the answer is yes. […] The translator's Swedish transcription [of Holden's language] instills admiration in the reader" (28.9.1953; my translation, as in all quotes from reviews below).

More than anything, the adolescent Holden despised the phony world of adults – he did not want to grow up, mature or age. Nor did Hammar's translation get a chance to grow very old: it was in its seventh edition when the publisher, Bonniers, apparently felt that the translation was getting somewhat dated: a new version, translated by Östergren, was published some 30 years after Hammar's translation was published. Östergren's translation was praised by most critics: In *Göteborgs-Posten*, the critic felt that Östergren had done more than well in his interpretation of Salinger's novel, producing a new and dynamic text in Swedish: "Östergren has cut and reorganized sentences, picked up on the tone, the setting and the atmosphere" (16.11.1987). *Svenska Dagbladet* called Östergren's translation "new, fresh and modernized": "[Östergren's] witty translation lives up excellently to Salinger's original" (30.10.1987). However, some critics disagreed: in *Aftonbladet*, the critic was of the opinion that Hammar's translation was in fact better and, in some places, even more idiomatic, than Östergren's. "One is hard pressed to find any *faults* in Hammar's translation, except for its age, of course.

The problem with [Östergren's translation] is that it is so extremely inconsistent. At times, it is so 'fresh' that it distorts the message in order to accommodate a trendy expression. The worst problem, however, are the recurring errors [in the translation]. Östergren's text stumbles all over itself in its complexity" (9.12.1987).

3.1.3.   Method

In the empirical part of the study, I have extracted all swearwords and euphemisms from *Catcher* and its two Swedish translations, a total of 1576 swearwords, in accordance with the definition of swearwords in subsection 2.3.2 and the discussion about euphemisms in subsection 2.3.3. The reason I chose to extract all swearwords in all three novels, instead of, for instance, the swearwords in the first x chapters, is that I wanted to have an as broad and representative sample as possible of the swearwords in *Catcher* and its translations. This amount of data, I think, is a reasonably solid basis for both a quantitative and qualitative analysis, and it should also narrow down the margin of error and the risk for too bold generalizations and claims.

By studying the swearwords in the original novel and contrasting them with *two* Swedish translations I have tried to further broaden my sample. The Swedish translations are set apart by more than 30 years and a number of other factors, e.g. the gender of the translators, and as such, they represent more than just one individual translator's work in a certain historical and social context.

In section 3.2 the swearwords in *Catcher* and its translations are analyzed from a quantitative perspective. The number of swearwords in the three works will be compared and presented in several graphical charts, which will then be discussed in more detail. I have also analyzed how the two Swedish translations compare to each other regarding omissions, additions and translated swearwords.

My analysis of the swearwords in *Catcher* and its two translations leans towards the quantitative, as I feel a quantitative approach is better suited to support my claims about Swedish swearing frequencies and patterns. However, to substantiate my claim that there do not exist any major linguistic constraints that would explain the loss of swearwords in the translations, I have also analyzed a selection of swearwords from a qualitative point of view. In section 3.3 I will look more closely at how certain swearwords have been translated, or omitted, and I will also briefly discuss the distribution of each swearword in the original and compare this to the two translations.

3.2.   QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

To recap, a word is a swearword when it refers to a taboo subject, is not meant to be interpreted literally and possibly manifests emotion and/or attitude. A euphemism is a less offensive synonym for a swearword, but the connotative reference and the function of a euphemism is often identical to that of a bona fide swearword. As suggested in subsection 2.3.2, a word must not necessarily be taboo in itself to be classified as a swearword – the reference is enough. Consider the word "farao", which comes up a few times in Hammar's translation and refers to the taboo swearword 'fan'. It is certainly not used in a technical sense, and is

usually used in an emotive way in Hammar's text. The same applies to the word 'förbaskad', which Hammar is very fond of, which is a euphemism for the word 'förbannad'. Pragmatically, 'farao' and 'förbaskad' are read as 'fan' and 'förbannad'. Accordingly, I have included euphemisms like this in my count of swearwords.

Using eleven different swearwords and one euphemism, *Catcher* exhibits a total of 778 swearwords or euphemisms. The total distribution of different swearwords in *Catcher* and the two versions of *Räddaren*, discussed in more detail in section 3.3, is illustrated in figure 2 on the following page. Tables showing the total amount and distribution of different swearwords in *Catcher* and its two Swedish translations are presented in figures 3, 4 and 5 below.
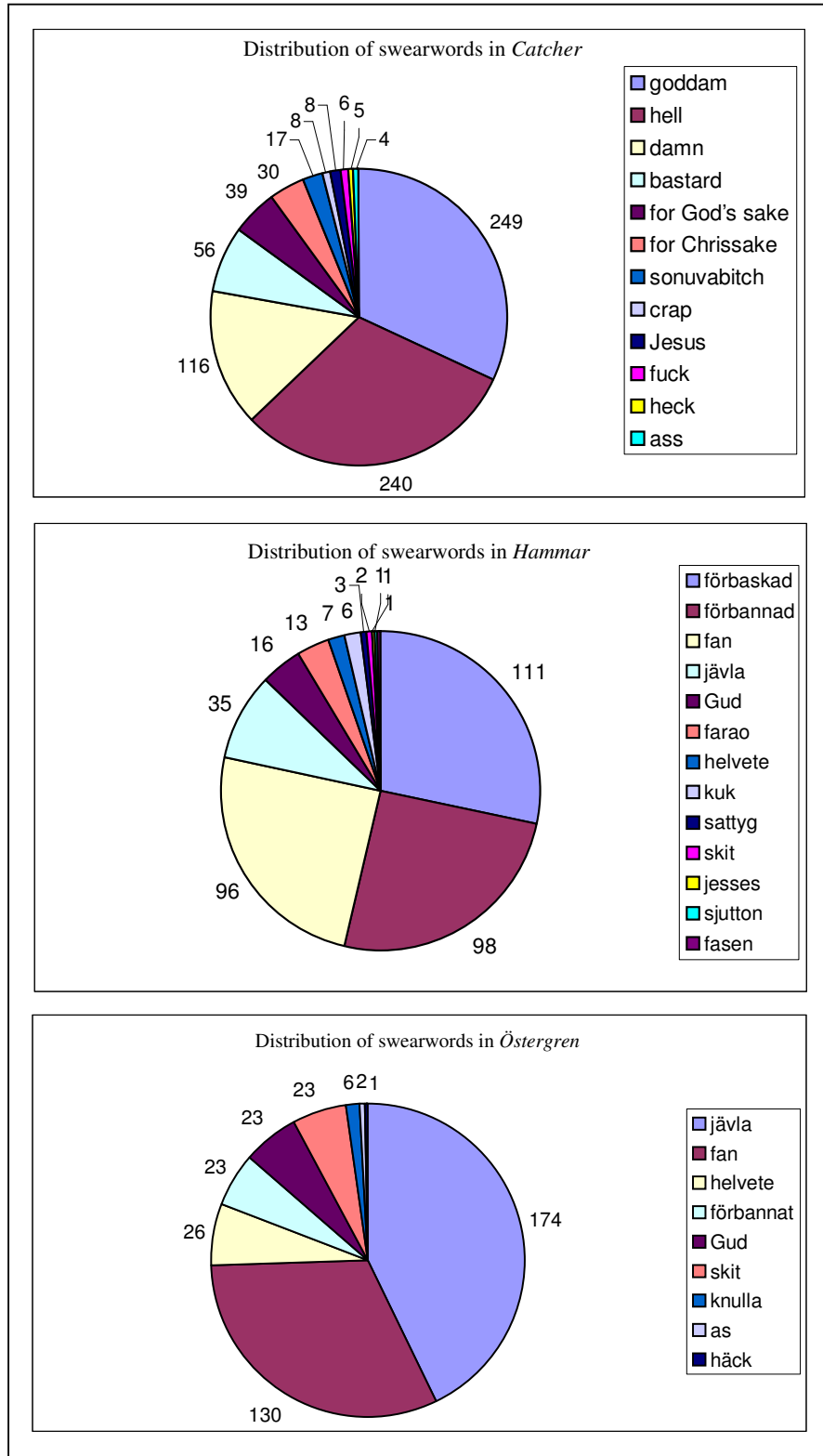
Fig. 2   Distribution of different swearwords in *Catcher*, *Hammar* and *Östergren*.

Catcher	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	Total
goddam	4	3	19	17	5	27	15	6	4	8	7	10	16	4	7	5	21	10	5	18	6	11	2	7	11	1	249
damn	4	2	9	4	0	6	10	2	3	1	2	6	5	7	5	7	9	0	0	8	0	2	8	8	8	0	116
the hell	2	1	6	4	2	12	13	0	3	6	3	4	3	3	2	3	6	3	2	1	4	7	2	5	10	2	109
as hell	2	5	2	4	1	2	1	2	3	3	0	1	6	1	3	4	12	2	2	5	6	0	2	1	7	0	77
bastard(s)	0	0	1	6	1	5	4	2	1	0	1	3	1	2	3	0	3	6	1	6	1	1	1	2	5	0	56
hell	0	3	4	1	0	1	1	2	0	1	3	1	2	3	5	5	1	0	3	4	0	1	6	5	2	0	54
for God's sake (+God)	0	0	1	1	0	2	0	0	1	1	0	3	1	4	0	1	0	1	8	0	6	3	2	0	4	0	39
for Chrissake	0	0	4	6	0	2	6	0	0	2	0	5	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	30
sonuvabitch	0	0	5	1	1	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	17
crap	1	3	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
Jesus (Christ)	0	0	0	3	0	0	1	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
fuck	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	6
heck	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	5
ass	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	4
Swearwords total	13	19	51	49	12	61	51	15	16	24	16	33	37	25	25	26	56	23	23	44	23	25	23	30	55	3	**778**

Fig. 3   The total number and distribution per chapter of swearwords in *Catcher*.

Hammar	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	Total
förbaskad	4	2	14	5	3	3	5	2	3	4	3	3	1	0	1	10	13	3	2	9	3	5	3	6	4	0	111
förbannad	2	2	3	4	1	14	5	2	3	1	1	2	4	7	4	4	7	1	2	9	3	4	3	4	6	0	98
fan	0	1	6	3	1	4	4	0	1	3	0	9	2	0	1	1	2	0	2	0	1	1	2	2	2	1	49
jävla	1	0	5	4	1	4	3	0	1	2	0	2	4	2	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	1	0	0	35
vad/var fan	0	0	2	2	0	6	4	0	0	0	1	0	4	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2	1	1	1	0	26
som fan	2	1	2	1	0	2	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	2	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	21
Gud, herregud	0	0	0	4	0	2	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	16
farao	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	2	0	13
helvete	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	7
kuk	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	6
sattyg	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	3
skit	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
jesses	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
sjutton	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
fasen	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Swearwords total	10	7	32	23	7	38	24	5	11	12	6	17	18	15	8	17	29	5	8	23	12	14	9	15	23	2	**390**
Translated	6	7	24	18	5	30	19	1	9	6	5	14	13	9	7	15	28	5	8	20	10	11	8	10	20	1	309
Omissions	7	12	27	31	7	31	32	14	7	18	11	19	24	16	18	11	28	18	15	24	13	14	15	20	35	2	469
Additions	4	0	8	5	2	8	5	4	2	6	1	3	5	6	1	2	1	0	0	3	2	3	1	5	3	1	81

Fig. 4   The total number and distribution per chapter of swearwords in *Hammar*.

Östergren	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	Total
jävla	2	11	12	9	8	10	7	5	4	4	2	6	8	5	3	6	15	2	10	14	5	9	3	6	7	1	174
fan	1	3	8	7	1	7	2	1	4	4	2	5	3	1	1	0	5	1	4	4	4	2	3	3	5	0	81
vad/var fan	0	0	3	0	0	6	6	0	0	0	0	1	5	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	1	2	5	1	35
helvete	2	1	1	3	0	4	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	2	0	1	5	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	26
förbannat	2	0	1	2	0	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	3	1	2	1	0	1	0	0	2	0	1	0	23
Gud, herregud	0	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	1	3	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	5	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	23
skit	2	2	4	2	1	1	2	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	0	23
som fan	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	3	0	14
knulla	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	6
as	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
häck	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Swearwords total	10	18	32	25	10	32	22	8	10	14	4	15	19	9	9	9	32	7	21	21	10	17	10	11	30	3	**408**
Translated	6	8	26	22	8	30	18	5	6	12	3	11	11	5	8	8	30	7	12	14	8	9	9	7	22	2	307
Omissions	7	11	25	27	4	31	33	10	10	12	13	22	26	20	17	18	26	16	11	30	15	16	14	23	33	1	471
Additions	4	10	6	3	2	2	4	3	4	2	1	4	8	4	1	1	2	0	9	7	2	8	1	4	8	1	101

Fig. 5   The total number and distribution per chapter of swearwords in *Östergren*.

The first Swedish translation, by Birgitta Hammar in 1953, contains a total of 390 swearwords or euphemisms, which means that as many as 40.1 percent of the swearwords from the original novel have been lost. Hammar uses eight different swearwords and five euphemisms. Whereas the use of euphemisms in *Catcher* is very sparse (five occurrences of the euphemism 'heck' contrasted with 773 'bona fide' swearwords), the opposite can be said for the translation by Hammar. Hammar's translation uses euphemisms in 128 instances, reducing the number of 'real' swearwords to a mere 262. Östergren's translation exhibits nine different swearwords, adding up to a total of 408, meaning a loss of 47.4 percent of the swearwords in the original. Östergren does not use euphemisms in his translation, and it is my opinion, which I will try to substantiate below, that Östergren's translation on the whole shows a less creative and varied use of swearwords compared to the original novel and Hammar's translation.

Both translators have omitted a number of swearwords in their translations, and likewise they have added swearwords in places where the original novel did not make use of swearwords. Hammar has chosen to omit 469 swearwords that were present in the original and has added 81 swearwords in places where the original did not make use of a swearword. The number of swearwords translated is thus 309. Östergren has omitted 471 swearwords, added 101 and thus translated 307 swearwords. Furthermore, there is a quite interesting discrepancy in the way in which the two translators have omitted or added swearwords. Hammar has omitted 131 swearwords while Östergren has had no problem rendering the very same words with equivalent swearwords in his translation. Likewise, Östergren has omitted 139 swearwords which Hammar in turn has translated.

A presentation in a graphical form, side by side, shows how strikingly similar the two Swedish translations are from a quantitative point of view:
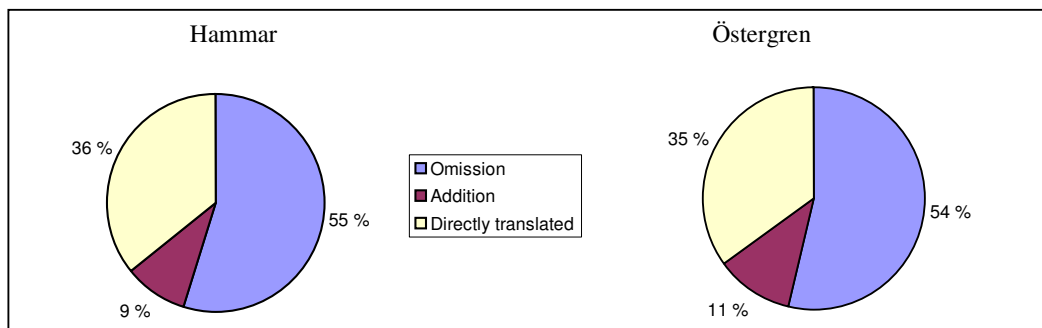

Fig. 6   Omissions, additions and translated swearwords in *Hammar* and *Östergren.*

This could mean two things: there might be some central, linguistic problem in the translation of swearwords from English to Swedish that leads to translation loss, or then, the reasons for the loss of swearwords are not linguistic but perhaps personal or cultural. However, as I will suggest in section 3.4, there seem to be no major structural obstacles in the translation of swearwords from English to Swedish, nor does it seem plausible, in light of the figure presented above, that the loss of swearwords is explained by strictly individual choices of both translators to ignore such a number of swearwords. It would indeed seem that both translators operate under a certain cultural norm that prescribes a certain approach to swearing and swearwords.

In Bassnett-McGuire (1980: 26) the following claim is made: "[If] a dozen translators tackle the same poem, they will produce a dozen different versions." Not only for poems, but one would imagine this would be the case in any kind of literary translation. Still, from a quantitative point of view, the two Swedish translations of *Catcher* show a strikingly similar structure with regard to the

frequency of swearwords. From the starting point of 778 swearwords in the original, both translators have arrived at approximately 400 swearwords, give or take a few. The general use of swearwords in the translations follows that of the original, but on a much lower level. This can be presented graphically with the use of a trendline:
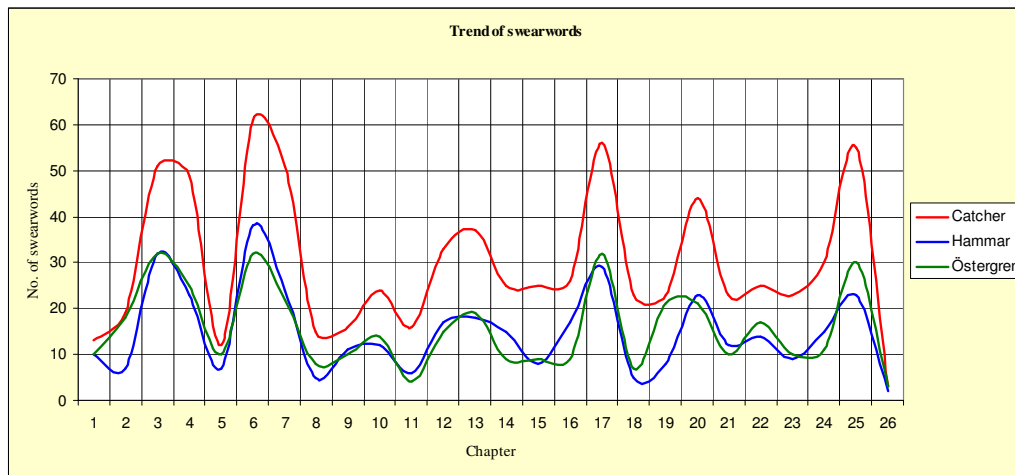

Fig. 7   Trendline showing distribution of swearwords in *Catcher*, *Hammar* and *Östergren.*

What these quantitative diagrams show us, on the one hand, is a remarkable difference in the number of swearwords in the original and the two translations, and on the other hand, a just as remarkable overall similarity with regard to the number of swearwords in the two translations. Both translators have translated the same novel, but they are set apart by more than 30 years. One of the translators is a man, the other a woman. One translator has made use of 13 swearwords or euphemisms, the other of only 9. And yet, they both produce an almost identical result from a quantitative point of view. The discrepancies in the number of swearwords between the original novel and the translations do indeed seem to be a result of cultural differences in swearing and attitudes towards swearing, rather than purely linguistic constraints.

In the book *Hur skall jag tala och skriva*, Lilie (1928: 154) makes the following claim: "I bruket av sådana kraftuttryck (svordomar) är svenskarna verkliga mästare. Och fastän det finns gott om svordomar även i andra språk, så lär vi med största lätthet klara världsrekordet i denna sport." (My translation: In the use of such powerful expressions (swearwords), the Swedes are veritable masters. And even though there are plenty of swearwords in other languages as well, we should be able to achieve the title of world champion in this particular sport with ease.) I strongly disagree with this claim, and I hope the results of this analysis speak against it. The following diagram, which gives us an overview of the total amount of swearwords in the original novel and the two translations, certainly does:
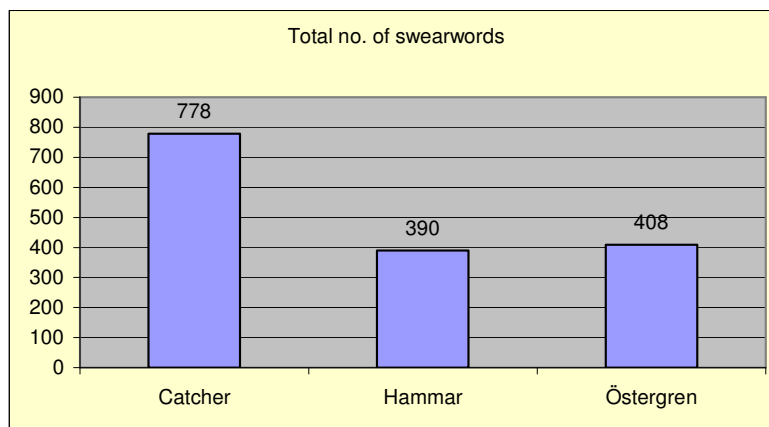

Fig. 8   Total number of swearwords in *Catcher*, *Hammar* and *Östergren.*

All these figures imply that there exist cultural norms that restrict swearing in Sweden and the Swedish language, a claim I will return to in chapters 4 and 5.

3.3.   QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF CERTAIN SWEARWORDS

The main focus in my analysis of the swearwords in *Catcher* and its translations leans towards the quantitative. However, not only have Hammar and Östergren

omitted nearly half of the swearwords in the original novel, but it would seem that they have also moved towards the less offensive end of the spectrum of swearwords in their translations. I back this claim with nothing but my personal opinion, as a detailed study on the offensiveness of swearwords in different cultures and translations would simply require more time and take up too much space. However, perhaps it would be interesting at this point to take a brief look at some of the most frequent swearwords in *Catcher* and how they have been translated. The data used in this qualitative analysis can be found in appendix I.

As mentioned earlier in the discussion about motives for swearing, swearwords do not necessarily have to be used in an emotive way to qualify as swearwords. This is very much the case in *Catcher* – had all of Holden's swearwords been of an emotive nature, the poor boy would have been drained of emotion long before the end of the novel. Costello describes Holden as a "sensitive youth who avoids the most strongly forbidden terms" (1959: 175), and this might indeed be one of the reasons for the lack of swearwords from Andersson's categories (a) and (c), sexual organs/relations and excrement, in *Catcher*.

Both Hammar and Östergren have taken Holden's sensitivity into account and kept to relatively mild swearwords in their translations. In this context it should also be said that Hammar seems to have spent more time analyzing Holden's register shifts when it comes to swearwords – how he only rarely swears in dialogue with certain characters. Östergren has been less sensitive to this, and even put a swearword in Phoebe's, Holden's 10 year old sister's, mouth:

"'None of your business,' she said." (Catcher 167)

"'Det angår dej inte', sa hon." (Hammar 154)

"'Det ska väl du ge fan i', sa hon." (Östergren 159)

As illustrated in the figure on page 38, *Catcher* uses 12 different swearwords or euphemisms, *Hammar* 13 and *Östergren* 9. The three most common swearwords in *Catcher* were 'goddam', 'damn' and 'hell', all in a number of different constructions. The top three in Hammar's translation were 'förbaskad', 'förbannad' and 'fan', and in *Östergren* 'jävla', 'fan' and 'helvete', all thus from category (b), religion. Categories (a) and (c) are represented in six different swearwords or euphemisms in *Catcher*, two in *Hammar* and four in *Östergren*. Hammar especially has made use of several euphemisms in her translation.

3.3.1. 'Goddam' and 'damn'

Holden's favorite word, 'goddam', appears 249 times in *Catcher*, and its close relative 'damn' 116 times. No significant differentiation can be found in the use of the two words. In Holden's speech, the words 'goddam' and 'damn' usually precede a noun, adjective or adverb, thereby functioning as intensifiers. In Hammar's translation, 'goddam' and 'damn' often become 'förbaskad' or 'förbannad', while Östergren invariably chooses 'jävla' or 'jävligt'.

'Goddam' and 'damn' were the two swearwords most commonly left out of the translations. However, the translation of these two swearwords as intensifiers should be quite unproblematic – constructions with 'förbannad/förbaskad' and 'jävla/jävligt' work excellently as intensifiers of most nouns, adjectives and adverbs. True, they grow wearisome quite quickly, but on the other hand, so do

'goddam' and 'damn' in the original. As far as I can see, there are no linguistic constraints that would render correspondence in frequency impossible.

One of the functions of 'goddam' and 'damn' is to give the utterance a certain tone, not necessarily always to emphasize a noun. It should be noted that 'goddam' or 'damn' can be used both a) negatively, b) neutrally and c) positively:

(a) *"You don't even know if her first name is Jane or* Jean*, ya goddam moron!"* (Catcher 44)

(b) *"I pictured myself coming out of the goddam bathroom, dressed and all, with my automatic in my pocket, and staggering around a little bit."* (Catcher 109)

(c) *"It was just that she looked so damn* nice*, the way she kept going around and around…"* (Catcher 213)

Hammar and Östergren have both regularly omitted the words 'goddamn' and 'damn' when they occur in 'neutral' positions as in b) above:

(a)   *"Jag såg mig komma ut ur badrummet, fullt påklädd och allt, med pistolen i fickan och ragla omkring lite." (Hammar 97)*

(b)   *"Jag föreställde mig själv komma ut ur badrummet, fullt påklädd och med en pistol i fickan och så skulle jag ragla omkring lite grann." (Östergren 102)*

3.3.2.   'Hell'

"'Hell' is perhaps the most versatile word in Holden's entire vocabulary…" (Costello 1959: 175). At first glance, the translation of 'hell' appears to be quite unproblematic. Most constructions with 'hell' translate well into Swedish, for instance "What the hell?" is rendered as "Vad i helvete?" and constructions with adjective + 'as hell' often become adjective + 'som fan' or 'förbannat/förbaskat/jävla' + adjective. Constructions like in (a) below, where the word 'hell' is preceded by a verb, can be more tricky:

(a) *"He put my goddam paper down then and looked at me like he'd just beaten hell out of me in ping-pong or something."* (Catcher 12)

(b) *"Han la ner den förbannade boken igen och såg på mej precis som om han just hade klått mig i ping-pong eller nånting i den stilen."* (Hammar 15)

(c) *"Han lade ifrån sig det där jävla pappret och började titta på mig som om han sopat golvet med mig i ping-pong, ungefär."* (Östergren 15)

In this particular case, neither translator has had any problems with translating the first swearword, 'goddam', but both have omitted the second one, 'hell'. That the word 'helvete' cannot be used in this way in Swedish does not, however, mean that an alternative swearword could not be used. An alternative translation could be: "Han lade ifrån sig min jävla uppsats och såg på mig som om han klått skiten ur mig i ping-pong eller nåt" (my translation). Both Hammar and Östergren have occasionally replaced problematic occurrences of verb + 'hell' with alternative constructions and swearwords, but most often they have omitted them completely. In general, though, 'hell' should not pose any major difficulties for the translator.

3.3.3.   'Bastard' and 'sonuvabitch'

The translation of the word 'bastard', which appears 56 times in *Catcher*, depends on in which sense the swearword is being used. According to Ljung (1983: 283f), when 'bastard' is preceded by an "empty" adjective, simply used for added intensity, for instance 'damn' or 'goddam', the stress is on the word 'bastard', and an expression like "He's a goddam bastard" pragmatically reads "He's a bastard". On the other hand, when the word is preceded by a regular adjective, for instance 'normal' as in a) below, the stress shifts to the adjective and an expression like "He's a normal bastard" pragmatically reads "He's normal". Hammar and Östergren have usually omitted the word 'bastard' in their translations when it is

used with a regular adjective, as seen in b) and c) below. When 'bastard' is used with an intensifying adjective, Hammar and Östergren use 'jävla' + abusive term, 'jävel' or 'fan'.

(a) *"I was probably the only normal bastard in the whole place–and that isn't saying much."* (Catcher 62)

(b) *"Jag var antagligen den enda normala i hela huset – och det vill inte säga säja så mycket."* (Hammar 60)

(c) *"Jag var antagligen den minst rubbade individen på hela stället – och det säger inte mycket."* (Östergren 62)

Constructions with 'bastard' should not pose any problems for the translator, although from a pragmatic viewpoint, omission can perhaps be defended in constructions as shown above. However, the translations could just as well read "Jag var antagligen den enda normala fan i hela huset…"

The word 'sonuvabitch', very similar in its function as a swearword to 'bastard', appears only 17 times in *Catcher*. Costello explains the very sparse use of the word: "'Sonuvabitch' has an even stronger meaning to Holden; he uses it only in the deepest anger" (1959: 175f). 'Sonuvabitch' has been omitted by both Hammar and Östergren a number of times, but when it is translated it often comes out as 'jävla' + abusive term or simply 'jävel':

(a) *"I still say he's a sonuvabitch. He's a conceited sonuvabitch."* (Catcher 24)

(b) *"Han är i alla fall en mallstropp. En jävla mallig mallstropp."* (Hammar 26)

(c) *"Han är en jävla stropp ändå. Han är en stor jävla stropp."* (Östergren 27)

3.3.4. 'For Chrissake', 'For God's sake' and 'Jesus Christ'

Costello (1959: 175f) argues that Holden uses these swearwords only when in need of a strong expression. In *Catcher*, 'For Chrissake' appears 30 times, 'For God's sake' (or just 'God') 39 times and 'Jesus' alone or in combination with 'Christ' 8 times. These swearwords should not pose any major problems for the translators as there are very straightforward equivalents in Swedish. However, it should be noted that 'for Chrissake' lacks a precise equivalent in Swedish, and tends to be generalized into 'för Guds skull' or 'Herregud'. Occasionally, when these swearwords occur at the end of a sentence in an intensifying function, the outcome in the translations of Hammar and Östergren is 'för fan'.

3.3.5. 'Fuck'

The most common and versatile swearword in the English language today, and undoubtedly in the 50's, 'fuck' is not used once as a swearword by Holden, but appears six times in the novel as a swearword written on a wall.

(a) *"Somebody'd written 'Fuck you' on the wall."* (Catcher 201)

(b) *"Nån hade skrivit 'Kuk' på väggen."* (Hammar 184)

(c) *"Någon hade skrivit 'knulla' på väggen."* (Östergren 190)

This 'fuck' has been difficult for both Hammar and Östergren to translate. The 'fuck you' in the original is clearly an invective with the swearword 'fuck' involved, but both translators seem to have ignored the word 'you'. Quite naturally, translating the swearword 'fuck' without any context is difficult, but here we *do* have context – why have both translators ignored it? Hammar's 'kuk' comes across as a bit toothless, and Östergren's 'knulla' is no better. The word

'knulla' is not used in a non-technical sense or as a swearword in Swedish, and it still very much refers back to the actual act of having sex – it does not have the same widened denotative meaning as 'fuck'. 'Knulla' in Swedish simply can not be used in the myriad of ways that 'fuck' can in English. Personally, I think almost any Swedish invective with a swearword involved would have been a better translation than 'kuk' and 'knulla'. I have, however, included both words it in my count as they cannot be regarded as omissions.

3.4.   POSSIBLE LINGUISTIC CONSTRAINTS

In the chapter on swearwords in his book *The American Language,* Mencken humorously notes that "*son of a bitch* seems as ineffectual to a Slav or a Latin as *fudge* does to us. The dumbest policeman in Palermo thinks up a dozen better ones between breakfast and the noon whistle" (1963: 399f). As mentioned in the discussion about sources for taboo and swearwords in section 2.3, different cultures and languages may take their swearwords from different sources. When translating swearwords from English to Swedish, a problem might be that the English language has a tendency to rely heavily on categories (a) (sexual organs/relations) and (c) (excrement) for its swearwords, whereas Swedish mostly relies on (b) (religion, church) (Ljung 1983: 277).

In the case of *Catcher* and its translations, this was not the case. The three most frequent swearwords in *Catcher* were 'goddam', 'hell' and 'damn', i.e. all from category (b). One would imagine that this correspondence would facilitate the work of the translator with regard to swearwords.

A second potential problem for the translator is that languages are structurally different. In his work on swearwords, Ljung points out that there exist swearwords and combinations of words incorporating swearwords that are practically untranslatable. Take, for instance, the expression 'absogoddamlutely', where a swearword has been seamlessly incorporated into a normal word. The neologism is, according to Ljung, untranslatable into Swedish in a form corresponding to that of the original (1983: 278). Also, certain other constructions have proven difficult to transfer from English to Swedish, for instance the use of the word 'hell' when it is preceded by a verb, as discussed in the previous section. How should these problematic instances of swearwords be translated, if the target language in question is less dynamic, its grammar not allowing the use of a swearword in a particular place?

Ljung argues that the stylistic effect created by a swearword in the SL can often be achieved with different methods in the TL. This is probably true, but unless the reason for omitting a swearword in the translation is a linguistic one, I see no reason to do so. Obviously, the ST author has chosen to create a certain effect by using a swearword, even though he or she might have had several other alternatives to achieve the same effect. Why should the translator not mirror this, and why, in fact, have Hammar and Östergren failed to do so strikingly often in their translations of *Catcher*? Take the following example:

> *"I mean I'm not going to be a goddam surgeon or a violinist or anything* anyway."
> (Catcher 39)

> *"Jag tänker i alla fall inte bli nån gammal kirurg eller violinist eller så."* (Hammar 39)

> "*Jag tänker inte bli vare sig kirurg eller violinist så det spelar ingen roll."*
> (Östergren 40)

Both Hammar and Östergren have omitted the swearword, although there are several possible translations available in the same category of taboo words, for instance 'nån jävla kirurg', 'nån sabla kirurg', 'nån förbannad kirurg' etc. For this particular swearword used in this particular way in a sentence, there are no linguistic constraints that would force the translator to omit the swearword. As I hope to have shown the reader in sections 3.3 and 3.4, in the case of *Catcher*, there seem to be no major linguistic constraints in the translation of swearwords from English to Swedish. How, then, do we explain the very different distributional patterns of swearwords in the translations compared to the original novel?

As the German-American linguist Edward Sapir puts it, "No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached" (quoted in Bassnet-McGuire 1980: 13). Apparently, Sweden is indeed a different world.

4. SWEDISH CULTURE AND MENTALITY

Many concepts in this study are hard to define. Both swearwords and culture are concepts that are very familiar to all of us on the surface level, but when it comes to defining them, we have to stop and think. The concept of culture is vague, yet we freely talk about intercultural communication, cultural baggage, etc. But perhaps it is not necessary or even desirable to come up with a watertight definition of culture, as it would seem safe to say that we all know what is meant by the concept? Ned Seeleye has said that he "know[s] of no way to better ensure having nothing productive happen than for a language department to begin its approach to culture by a theoretical concern for defining the term" (quoted in Katan 1999: 16).

When we talk about culture, we most often refer to shared systems of values and behavior in a certain society. Behind all cultures, there are different social conditions, different norms and values that operate as guides to behavior. Our shared social norms govern our actions, and by acting in accordance with these norms, we make our actions intelligible and predictable to others. Just as games have rules, so do cultures, and if we are not familiar with the rules of a certain game (or a culture), the activities of the participants seem to make no sense (Downes 1984: 233f).

From a micro-perspective, we are all different, individuals. We are shaped in part by our genetic makeup and in part by our interaction with our environment, and accordingly we all have different personalities, which in turn are shaped by our experiences, our values and our attitudes. When looking at things from a macro-perspective, however, we start to see certain patterns – people living in a

particular more or less well-defined area will have similar experiences, values and attitudes that differ from those of people living in other areas. By studying these experiences, values and attitudes and the way in which they shape our behavior, we are in fact studying culture. However, as Åke Daun writes in the introduction to his book *Svensk mentalitet – Ett jämförande perspektiv* (1998), culture or national character as a well-defined concept is a myth: "More than anything, the reader should keep in mind that this book describes *patterns and distinguishing traits*. An all-encompassing Swedish national character *does not exist*" (Daun 1998: 21; my translation, emphasis added). Perhaps, then, culture exists only in our definitions, in our attempts to make sense out of the immense and utterly disordered mix of behavioral patterns that constitutes our daily lives?

In the following sections, I will briefly discuss some of the most common stereotypes about Swedish culture and some of the norms that seem to prevail in the Swedish society. It is my aim to single out those cultural patterns that might explain or help us better analyze the results of the empirical study presented in chapter 4. Much of this section is based on my personal observations and opinions, but I also draw on the writings of the Swedish professor of ethnology, Åke Daun, who has written extensively on the topic of Sweden and its population. While his work (1998) may not perhaps classify as a purely empirical study, it is a good step away from anecdotal evidence towards a more scientific approach, employing, among other things, questionnaire surveys for data.

## 4.1.	SOME SWEDISH STEREOTYPES

There is a famous – or perhaps infamous – EU postcard which runs along the following lines: The perfect European should: cook like a Brit, be as talkative as a Finn, be as humorous as a German, be as flexible as a Swede, be as discreet as a Dane, be as organized as a Greek, and so on, highlighting common stereotypes about the people in each European Union member country in an ironical way. We find the postcard funny and witty because we recognize ourselves and others, and find the implied characterizations justified, at least to some degree. But is it possible to study, in a more scientific way, the cultural traits or patterns in a specific country without always having to resort to anecdotal evidence? Is it possible to study and extract information from a culture that we are not ourselves part of, and on the other hand, is it possible to study one's own culture in an objective manner?

In her book *Svenskarna som andra ser dem* (1981), the British writer Jean Phillips-Martinsson describes the Swedes in the following way: "There are about 8 million Swedes, all of whom are tall, blonde, have blue eyes and are socialists. In sin, they spend their days making love, regularly taking breaks to consume liquors. After that, they work efficiently and honestly in order to be able to collect enormous salaries, which in turn makes them such bores that they have to commit suicide!" (1981: 36). This description, obviously offered tongue in cheek, comes across as perhaps too subjective, although it must be admitted that there is truth embedded in it as well. So, where do we turn for more objective descriptions?

There are no "hard facts" to draw on when discussing an abstract topic like Swedish mentality. If we are interested in Sweden, we go to an encyclopedia for

information, where we learn about the geographical location of Sweden, about its area and population, its political system, its economy and its currency, as well as other confirmed facts. But what if we were interested in, say, Swedish culture and its norms, in its population or in the Swedish national character in general – where would we go for information then? As Thomas Hylland Eriksen says in his article on national stereotypes in Scandinavia, national identity is a very elusive topic to investigate empirically. Eriksen states that the importance of national identity in the lives of persons in a society can be measured only with unreliable methods, e.g. questionnaire surveys, which are often formulated in a very subjective way. He notes that the interpretations of the results of the surveys are inevitably politicized and controversial, and he goes on to point out that evidence for substantial properties of national identities is often presented anecdotally (Eriksen).

As a citizen of Sweden living abroad, I am in the perhaps privileged position of observing this particular country and its people from the outside. Subjective as my opinions about Sweden in all its aspects might be, they seem to coincide with many of the stereotypes presented in works discussing Sweden and the mentality of its people (e.g. Daun 1998, Phillips-Martinsson 1981, Alopaeus 1983). As it is probably impossible to delineate Swedish mentality in an all-encompassing way, I will in this thesis only highlight some of the most typical characteristics of Swedish society and its people from my personal point of view, in search for an explanation of Swedish mentality.

When I think of Sweden and its people, the first word that comes to mind is 'lagom' (roughly: just right, moderate). There are no good translations into

English of the word and the concept 'lagom', but it is quite a versatile word in Swedish. Almost anything can be 'lagom' – not too big or small, not too quiet or loud, not too complaisant or radical, etc. That Swedish society and the mentality of its people seem to be so 'lagom' can be a positive thing, but it can also lead to an apparent superficiality on many levels. Not saying what one really means; suppressing emotional language; highlighting the collective at the expense of the individual; thinking of public debates as forums for agreement rather than for discussing differences of opinion; going to great lengths to avoid contrast and conflict: these are all ways of preserving the 'lagom' equilibrium that seems to reign in Sweden. For most 'Medelsvenssons' (roughly: John Doe), moderation is a virtue and extremes in either direction should be avoided.

Apart from being a very 'lagom' people, and perhaps *because* Swedes are so very 'lagom', they sometimes come across as perhaps a bit naive and complacent: when everything is 'lagom', or is thought to be so, how could anything possibly be wrong in the 'Folkhemmet', the post-war social-democratic ideology that emphasizes agreement and harmony, embodying all levels of society in the Swedish welfare state? The very notion of 'Folkhemmet' or 'The people's home' proscribes conflicts, antagonism and violence in society. Billy Ehn writes about the Swedish avoidance of conflict, and calls it a "symbolic construction of one's own cultural identity, in contrast to the evil in the rest of the world" (1983: 145). Swedish news broadcasts cover all sorts of atrocities that are committed in the world on, it would seem, a daily basis, but when murders or other cruel acts take place in their own country, the Swedes reel and display what would seem to be a genuinely guileless reaction – how can this happen to us? Part of the explanation to why the recent murder of Fadime Sahindal, a second generation immigrant to

Sweden, shocked the country so very deeply was that it violated all values and norms that the Swedes cherish in their own 'lagom' society – mutual friendliness, agreement, avoidance of conflict and aversion towards violence.

4.2.   AVOIDANCE OF CONFLICT

It would be unreasonable to claim that *all* Swedes avoid conflict and suppress their aggression at all times – anger and aggression are normal emotions, and conflicts arise from time to time in a number of situations and relations. Claiming that all Spaniards or Italians are temperamental and accustomed to conflict is just as absurd. However, when a significant proportion of a certain population displays a set of characteristics that is less marked in other populations, it allows us to make reasonable generalizations.

According to Daun, most Swedes have a tendency to avoid conflict, i.e. open confrontations with people that do not share the same opinions, values, etc. as themselves. Emotionally loaded subjects that might reveal differences of opinion are often avoided in speech, arguments tend to be put out before they have a chance to flare up, criticism is veiled or avoided, etc. This avoidance of conflict and the way in which it manifests itself have been studied in some detail in a number of national and international questionnaire surveys and studies charting national identities and attitudes, which all confirm the fact that many, but naturally not all, Swedes go to great lengths to steer clear of aggressiveness, conflict and antagonism (Daun 1998: 92-112).

In her book *A Letter from Sweden*, the American essayist and novelist Susan Sontag writes that the Swedish custom of avoiding conflict and antagonism borders on the pathological. "Perhaps the most remarkable taboo in this taboo-ridden country […] concerns open displays of aggressiveness. […] From time to time, the avoidance of antagonism takes on quite fabulously extreme proportions" (quoted in Daun 1998: 100; my translation). Marianne Alopaeus, a Finland-Swedish writer, touches upon the Swedish conformism and avoidance of conflict a number of times in her book in *Drabbad av Sverige*: "The presupposition is that everyone agrees and gets along. […] They keep their differing opinions to themselves, until we are out of earshot. Different opinions are voiced in private, among people that are on the same wavelength. […] This is very Swedish" (1983: 109; my translation). The Indian anthropologist S. Dhillon notes that Swedes put a peculiarly strong emphasis on the need for people to agree and get along (in Daun 1998: 97). Pasi Rautiainen, in his newspaper column a few months ago, put it in the following way:

'Ruotsalaisten homma on sitä, että alla tycker om alla, och det är jätte kiva att diskutera keskenään. Ruotsissa kaikki tykkää toisista, ja kaikki keskustelee. Siellä ei kukaan ikinä hermostu, kukaan ei saa raivareita, ja aina keskustellaan. Det är så satans jätte kiva att diskutera!' (Ilta-Sanomat 14.6.2002)

This translates roughly to:

'The thing with Swedes is that everybody likes everybody else, and the best thing of all is to have a discussion. In Sweden, everybody likes each other and everybody has discussions. They never get irritated, they never blow their tops, and they're always discussing things. It's so bloody fucking nice to discuss things!' (My translation)

There does indeed seem to exist a cultural norm in Sweden that prescribes harmony and non-aggressive behavior (Daun 1998, Phillips-Martinsson 1981). The observations of private persons in the previous paragraph can be seen as

descriptions of a norm in action, but there have also been a number of international surveys that point in the same direction (presented in detail in Daun 1998). For example, a study measuring "masculinity" (and partly aggressiveness) among employees at IBM in 40 different countries, carried out by Geert Hofstede in the 1980's, found that Swedish IBM-employees were by far the most "feminine" of all participants, in other words, they emphasized a socially functioning and friendly atmosphere at work significantly more than employees in other countries. A survey of traffic safety in nine different countries, carried out in the 1970's, also yielded interesting results about Swedish attitudes towards aggressiveness. The participants were asked which of four human errors, "negligence", "aggressiveness", "fatigue" and "inexperience", they thought were most likely to lead to road traffic accidents. Sweden was alone to place "aggressiveness" in fourth and last place, while the remaining eight countries all placed "aggressiveness" in second place. A mere 7,7 percent of Swedes were of the opinion that aggressiveness is a risk factor in traffic, while the corresponding figure among Brits was 26,4. Also, a personality-profile study (CMPS) carried out in Sweden and Finland asked participants if they had ever said things, tongue in cheek, just to annoy people. Only 24 percent of Swedish males aged 26-65 answered in the positive, while the corresponding figure for Finnish males of the same age was 41 (Daun 1998: 98). Another CPMS-study among university students in USA and Sweden put the following question: "Do you seize and enjoy the opportunity to ridicule your opponents?". Of the American students, 53 percent answered yes, compared to 11 percent among the Swedish students (Daun 1998: 99).

The tendency to avoid conflict is also manifested in Swedish politics and public debates. Members of parliament in Russia and Italy, just to name a few examples, have been seen to resort to less democratic and accepted methods to get their points across, and even in Finland, members of parliament have been thrown out, kicking and screaming, of plenary sessions. Perhaps this can be expected from time to time – after all, the purpose of political and public debates is often to bring out differences of opinion, leading to meaningful discussions and possibly actions. On very controversial issues, it is quite reasonable to expect that debates may occasionally get very heated. However, in Sweden, "there are conventions, unwritten rules and attitudes regarding political interaction which mirror general cultural norms" (Daun: 1998: 105). As Herbert Tingsten writes in his essay on parliamentary procedures in the Nordic countries, radical and unconventional actions in parliament are unheard of in Sweden (in Daun 1998: 105). The same is true for public debates in different forums in Sweden – they are often characterized by harmony. No wonder, then, that controversial talk shows like Ricki Lake's and Jerry Springer's, which thrive on conflict, have not established themselves in Sweden.

The ultimate and most harmful consequence of aggression and conflict is physical violence. As there seems to exist a norm in Swedish society that proscribes aggression and conflict, it should be safe to assume that Swedes consequently have an aversion towards violence. Naturally, this does not mean that Swedes do not resort to violence from time to time – norms can be flouted just as well as they can be conformed to. However, the *attitude* in the Swedish society condemns violence. As Daun writes, the norm that proscribes physical violence has been sanctioned in Swedish law – corporal punishment of one's own

children has been a punishable offence in Sweden since 1979, unlike in many other countries (Daun 1998: 109).

If it is in fact true that the 'lagom' Swedes avoid conflict, aggression and antagonism and have an aversion towards violence, this should be reflected in language. It would seem natural to assume that suppressed aggression and frustration leads to suppressed emotional language and, for example, that the wish to maintain harmony and friendliness in relations with other people leads to less offensive language, both in speech and in writing. This can clearly be seen in the two Swedish translations of *Catcher.*

4.3. EMOTIONAL LANGUAGE & ATTITUDES TOWARDS SWEARING

Not only do many Swedes avoid conflict and antipathy, but it would seem that they are relatively more prone to suppress all kinds of strong emotions than people in many other countries. "Silence, quietness, unobtrusiveness and stillness prevail in Sweden more notably than in many other parts of the world. This gives rise to norms, expectations, prescriptions and prohibitions" (Daun 1998: 140). Simply put, it would seem that Swedes do not "feel as strongly" as certain other people, something which has been studied by Richard Lynn in *Personality and National Character* (1971).

Lynn studied anxiety, signifying emotional intensity of reactions to certain stimuli, among people in 13 different countries. Lynn found that the Swedes were a low-anxiety people, as were for instance the people in Great Britain and the Netherlands. Finns were found to be a medium-anxiety people, while the people

of for example Belgium, France and Italy were found to be characterized by high anxiety levels. Low-anxiety people showed significantly lower levels of emotional intensity in their reactions than people characterized by high anxiety.

That many Swedes avoid open displays of emotion is reflected in language: they express things in a suppressed, less emotional way, which could even be seen as a trivialization of the actual message that is being communicated. For many Swedes, the phrase "Jag älskar dig" (I love you) sounds too soppy and overly romantic – instead, they opt for "Jag tycker om dig" (I like you) (Daun 1998: 147). Similar examples are easy to find – the Finland-Swedish writer Kjell Westö notes the following in his novel *Fallet Bruus* (1992):

> *"Finland var ett land där man sa saker som: 'Voi vittu että mua kyrpii!'. Sverige var ett land där man sa saker som: 'Oj, det är lite jobbit nu asså, jag tror jag måste ta hand om den emotionella biten ett tag.'* (Westö 94)

> *"Finland was a country where people said things like 'I'm so fucking pissed off!' Sweden was a country where people said things like 'Gosh, things aren't going too well, I think I'll have to work on controlling my anger now."* (My translation)

The Swedish used in many translations often lends support to the claim that Swedes put things more mildly. Consider an example from the novel *A Rumor of War* by Philip Caputo:

> *"Friggin'? Friggin'. Wooah, they're gonna drive a friggin' regiment into us. Allen, you're a baaaad motherfucker."* (237)

When translated into the Swedish language and culture (*Ett rykte om krig*, 1978*)*, the same passage looks like this:

> *"De båda utväxlade en del otidigheter som goda kamrater gör."* (258)

> *"As good friends might do, the two of them exchanged some offensive remarks*." (My translation)

The same thing happens in the two translations of *Catcher*, as suggested in chapter 4: emotionally strong language, most notably, of course, swearwords, is watered down considerably. One could even argue that there seems to be a kind of self-imposed Big Brother mentality at work in these examples, as in the following one. The English title of a certain episode of the popular TV program South Park a few years ago was "Cartman's mom is a dirty slut". When translated into Swedish, this had become "Mamma är en smutsig kossa" (Cartman's mom is a dirty cow) (*Hufvudstadsbladet* 30.12.1999), where "kossa" simply is slang, a mildly offensive term for 'girl'. Several other, more accurate options would have been available, for instance 'slyna', 'slampa' or 'slubba'.

In his book on swearwords and bad language in general, Lars-Gunnar Andersson (1985) devotes a whole chapter to discussing Swedes' attitudes towards swearing, based on a questionnaire survey carried out in 1977. While this study is getting slightly dated and employed a relatively small sample, it is very likely to give us a general overview of Swedish attitudes towards swearing in the latter half of the previous century, as swearwords and attitudes towards swearing take time to change.

Daun (1998: 133) notes that many Swedes tend to look down on strong, spontaneous displays of emotion, and this does indeed seem to be the case when it comes to swearing. Of the 95 participants in Andersson's survey, 60 percent said that they disliked swearing, 25 percent held the opposite view and 15 percent were undecided. A bit paradoxically, 20 percent of the participants said they never swear, 70 percent said they swear occasionally, while 10 percent said they swear on a regular basis. There is a discrepancy in the fact that 60 percent of the

participants said they dislike swearing while, on the other hand, 70 percent of the participants said that they swear occasionally. Partly this is explained by the fact that swearing is not always intentional, as discussed in chapter 3, partly because of the desire to maintain the capacity of swearwords to shock – swearwords are practically useless if they do not evoke certain reactions. Perhaps somewhat self-deceivingly, we keep up a negative attitude towards the use of swearwords in order to retain their power.

The participants explained their negative attitudes towards swearing with a number of aesthetic, social and linguistic arguments. According to some, swearing simply sounds unpleasant, others felt that swearing belongs in uneducated language and shows a lack of style. Some thought that swearing is a tell-tale sign of poor vocabulary, while others were ready to dispense with swearwords completely as they are not an integral part of language. The linguistic arguments against swearing were the most common, but so was the most common argument in favor of swearing: swearwords are needed to spice up our language. Swearing by children was frowned upon by many – small children are not "supposed to know swearwords" and certainly not supposed to use them.[3] The majority of the participants were more ready to accept psychologically motivated swearing than swearing motivated by social or linguistic factors (Andersson 1985: 184ff).

Finally, to return to the anecdotal evidence that has been emphasized in this thesis, I find the Swedish attitude towards swearing nicely and humorously, albeit

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[3] Some parents punish their children for swearing by washing out their mouths with soap, which illustrates our way of seeing swearwords as "dirty" or "bad" language. As a child in kindergarten, I was subjected to this pedagogically dubious cleaning ritual, but the effect is still lacking. I now abhor Sunlight soap, while I quite enjoy swearing.

subjectively, condensed in the title of a Pro Gradu thesis by Leena Kiuru and Riitta Montin at the university of Oulu in 1991. The title of their thesis, "Mä en kiroile ellei mua pahasti vituta – Själv svär jag inte utan anledning" contrasts Finnish and Swedish attitudes towards swearing. The first part of the title, in Finnish, translates roughly to "I don't swear unless I'm really pissed off", while the second part, in Swedish, translates to "I do not swear without good reason".

5. NORMS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES IN TRANSLATION

In some of the previous chapters, I have relied on anecdotes and a general discussion of swearing behavior and cultural differences in trying to explain and find reasons for the lack of swearwords in the two Swedish translations of *Catcher*. While I think it is very important to stay in touch with anecdotes and personal experiences, I realize that a more theoretical approach can be fruitful as well in the search for explanations to certain textual and translational phenomena. As Chesterman (1997: 3) puts it: "[Norm] theory provides powerful tools for thinking about both translation theory and translation practice."

5.1. RULES, NORMS AND IDIOSYNCRASIES

In the previous chapters, I have mentioned norms now and then, and especially in chapter 4, I have tried to describe some of the regularities of behavior of a people in a certain culture, implying that such regularities are governed by norms. But theoretically speaking, what are norms? For a layperson, a norm might mean a standard pattern of behavior, something considered normal in a particular society. This is a good starting point, but it should be emphasized that it is not the regularity itself which is the norm – regular patterns of behavior are *consequences* of existing norms. Norms exist, but on an abstract level – scholars like to call them *explanatory hypotheses* (Toury 1999: 16; Chesterman 1999: 90). Thus, they can only be 'studied' or discussed through the medium of human behavior in its different forms. Simply put: We can study and observe patterns of regularity in a group (large or small) of people, but we can never really study the norms themselves – we can only state that certain norms *seem* to exist, based on

our subjective observations and generalizations (Toury 1995: 65, 1999: 15; Chesterman 1999: 91; Bartsch 1987: 166ff).

Norms are "the translation of general values or ideas shared by a group" (Toury 1999: 14) – they tell us what is accepted, appropriate and adequate in certain situations, and vice versa. Failure to comply with norms will lead to disapproval or sanctions. Quite naturally, then, norms govern our behavior. By acting in accordance with the norms that prevail in our society, we make our actions intelligible and predictable to others, and more than anything, acceptable to others. "In each community there is a knowledge of what counts as correct or appropriate behaviour… In a society, this knowledge exists in the form of norms" (Schäffner 1999: 1).

Norms, as argued by Toury (1995: 54) and suggested by Bartsch (1987: 166ff) and Chesterman (1997: 55) in slightly different terms, can be said to occupy the middle ground on a scale anchored between two extremes, illustrated in figure 9 below. On one end, there are *rules*, which are relatively absolute and imply sanctions, while on the other end are *idiosyncrasies*, which are our individual ways to behave, our tendencies or quirks. Theo Hermans' concept of norms is similar, but on his scale idiosyncrasies are replaced by conventions, a term which suggests more regularity of behavior in a larger group of people (1999: 52).

As Toury notes (1995: 62), norms are characterized in part by their instability. With time, the potency of norms may fluctuate – the value of a certain norm might increase or decrease, thereby moving the norm closer to a rule or to an

idiosyncrasy. This is true for rules and idiosyncrasies, as well: they, too, may move on the scale.
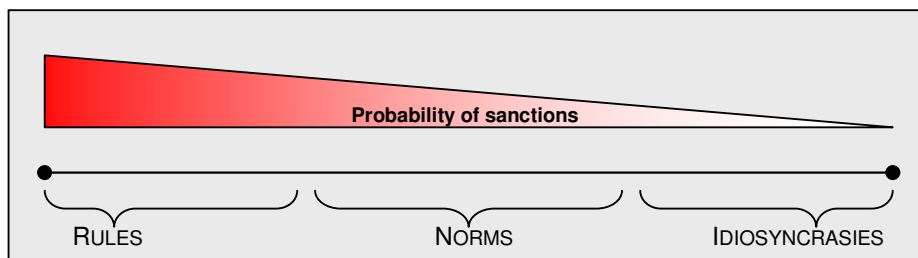
Fig. 9   Norms on a scale between rules and idiosyncrasies.

Norms differ from rules in that they are agreed on by practically all members in a group of people. For relatively absolute rules, e.g. laws, there is an authority that makes the laws and an authority that controls the way in which the law is complied with. Failure to comply results in sanctions. Some scholars like to make a similar division regarding norms: there are said to be norm authorities, norm enforcers, norm codifiers and norm subjects (Schäffner 1999: 2). However, with norms, this categorization seems unnecessary, as we are *all* playing a multiple role: we are all norm authorities, norm enforcers, norm codifiers and norm subjects. We all have the power to maintain or change norms by adhering to or deviating from them and we may correct and criticize the behavior of others if it deviates from a norm. As Bartsch (1987: 166) notes, this is possible because we have internalized the norm and made it our guideline of action.

Norms operate in all areas of human behavior, and it would seem that the concept of norms can be fruitfully applied to almost any field within the humanities. During the last decades, there has been an ongoing discussion, sometimes heated, in Translation Studies around the concept of norms. In Translation Studies, the

concept of norms may provide tentative answers to a variety of questions regarding *why* translations turn out the way they do.

5.2.   NORMS IN TRANSLATION STUDIES

The concept of norms was introduced to Translation Studies by Gideon Toury's influential work in the 1980's, in a process of moving away from an earlier prescriptive and source-oriented approach to Translation Studies and emphasizing a target-oriented, descriptive-explanatory, rather than prescriptive, approach to translation. Toury first explored the idea of norms in translation in his book *In Search of a Theory of Translation* (1980), and the discussion continued in *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* (1995). In what he calls Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS), Toury focuses on the impact of social norms on translation. Gideon Toury himself has modestly refused to take the credit for introducing the concept of norms to Translation Studies (Toury 1999: 10), but he is generally agreed to be, as Douglas Robinson puts it, the "prime mover" in the discussion of norms in Translation Studies (Robinson 1999: 113). Other influential scholars in the field of descriptive studies and norms are Theo Hermans and Itamar Even-Zohar.

Chesterman (1999: 90) argues that the introduction of norms as a way of understanding culture-related aspects of translation solved two theoretical problems. First of all, translation scholars were able to move away from the confines of prescriptive studies: by not drawing any conclusions in the form of recommendations for correct behavior, scholars were able to take a step back and relinquish some of their responsibilities as the authorities on what constitutes a

good translation, or even a translation in general. Secondly, scholars in Translation Studies now had a tentative answer for *why* translations have the form they do, as they argued that norms were the primary influence on a translator's decisions and on the form of the final product. The concept of norms thus increased the understanding of translation as a phenomenon, but also it helped tie culture and translation closer together. Norms widened the object of study within Translation Studies, and as Chesterman puts it, "[the] move from an essentialist position […] to a relativist one […] has been enormously beneficial […] in freeing research from unnecessary constraints (1999: 90).

As Toury (1995: 56) states, translation inevitably involves two different languages and cultural realities, and thereby two potentially different sets of norms. The process of translating and the translator him/herself is governed by a set of norms, relevant in the target culture. As languages, cultures and systems of norms are never identical, the translator will always, before tackling a translational task, have to make a decision: whether to adopt a source-oriented or target-oriented approach, whether to subscribe to the norms of the source culture or the target culture. This, according to Toury, constitutes an *initial* norm in translation. An orientation towards the source text and culture will determine the *adequacy* of the translation, while a decision to follow the norms of the target culture will be reflected in the *acceptability* of the translation (Toury 1995: 56f). Invariably and purely theoretically speaking, the final result will be a compromise, a combination of the two, but the translator's initial orientation can usually be reconstructed from the translation itself.

While initial norms are very much concerned with the individual translator, *preliminary* norms pertain to the process that precedes the actual translation of a text. Preliminary norms relate to a general translation policy in that they govern the actual decisions about what kind of texts should be translated and thus introduced into a certain language and culture (Toury 1995: 58) . These decisions are, of course, up to the individual publishing houses to make. In the case of *Catcher* and its translation into Swedish, it would be interesting to know what factors influenced the publishing house Bonniers' decision in the early 1980's to come out with a new translation of *Catcher* to exist side by side with Hammar's earlier version. Despite several inquiries about this to Bonniers, I have not received any information, nor have the translators themselves answered my letters inquiring into the matter.

Operational norms put the individual translator and the cognitive process of translating in the spotlight. These norms govern the actual decisions and strategies the translator chooses to adopt during the process of translating a text, and as such, they clearly mirror the initial norms, or the translator's bias towards either source or target. Operational norms thus govern the distribution of linguistic material and the actual form of the text. Bartsch (1987) discusses the same norms under the name *production norms*.

The discussion of operational norms as guides for the translator's individual decisions during the translation process gives rise to an interesting question: are translators "mere rule-following robots", as Chesterman (1999: 91) puts it, or norm-following robots, to use a relevant expression? Toury and Hermans dismiss the notion, claiming that all translators have the freedom of choice; that all

decisions in the translation process are made by the translator him or herself, as an autonomous individual (Toury 1999: 19, Hermans 1999: 57). However, in the discussion about norms, it has been said that norms govern *all* human behavior. Is there a paradox here? Translation always involves two sets of norms, which are likely to differ. Can a translator step away from norms completely, or would it be realistic to claim that a translator always adheres to *some* norms? Toury and Hermans argue that the translator is free to decide which strategies to use in the translation process, and that the price for this freedom are potential negative sanctions for deviant behavior. Does this, then, imply complete freedom from the constraints of norms? Could one perhaps suggest that there exists a norm that prescribes adherence to prevailing norms, or would that be taking the concept of norms to an unrealistically theoretical level?

Be that as it may, at the 'receiving' end, or among readers of translated texts, there are *expectancy* norms, a term used by Chesterman (1997: 64ff). As readers, we have certain expectations regarding what translated texts should look like (style, distribution of linguistic elements and text features etc.). Expectancy norms relate to the acceptability of a translated text in its target environment, and as such, they are very likely to play a role in the process of translation, presuming of course that the translator in question wishes to meet reader expectations. Toury, as well as Hermans (1999), takes up reader expectations, but has not formulated this into a norm in itself: "[People-in-the-culture] can […] tell when a translator has failed to adhere to sanctioned practices" (Toury 1999:21). Expectancy norms are also discussed by Bartsch (1987), using the term *product* norms.

According to Toury, all these norms, initial, preliminary and operational, reflect social norms and thus "determine the type and extent of equivalence manifested by actual translations" (1995: 61). Schäffner (1999: 5) concurs: "All decisions in the translation process are thus primarily governed by such norms, and not (dominantly or exclusively) by the two language systems involved".

5.3.   TRANSLATION EXPLAINING NORMS, NORMS EXPLAINING TRANSLATIONS

In this section I wish to move away from the discussion of the theoretical role of norms in translation, turn the whole thing upside down and instead discuss how translations further the study of norms. I do not find it particularly astonishing that norms affect the work of translators and the final product – based on the discussion in the previous section, this should expected, as norms govern *all* our actions. However, what I do find interesting is the fact that we can study norms in action by using translations of texts from other languages and cultures as a medium. As Toury puts it, "[texts] are *primary* products of norm-regulated behavior, and can therefore be taken as immediate representations thereof" (1995: 65). Hermans is on the same lines, stating that the normative systems that govern translation "[present] us with a privileged index of cultural self-reference" (1999: 59). Thus, by contrasting two texts, an original and a translation, representing different social realities, we can observe certain regularities and irregularities, and argue that these are the consequences of norms in action. In this way, argues Hermans, translations offer us a way of studying cultural norms, in a process in which cultural material from the outside world is imported to a new culture and

modified in accordance with its needs. "[Translations] perhaps tell us more about those who translate than about the source text underlying the translation" (ibid.).

But is it possible to reconstruct norms from a translation? Can we trust that a translation is in fact a good representation of the target culture's social reality? Are we aware of the risks involved in making generalizations based on inadequate sampling? As Jean-Pierre Mailhac points out, extracting norms from observed regularities should be carried out with the use of extensive corpora to avoid certain pitfalls, such as subjective opinions (in Schäffner 1999: 47). This is the very reason I chose, in my analysis of *Catcher* and its translations, to extract *all* swearwords in the novel; partly to get a workable amount of data for a quantitative analysis, partly to get a large enough sample that allows a qualitative analysis in order to rule out, for instance, linguistic constraints in the translation of swearwords as reasons for the significant loss of swearwords in the translations. By contrasting the original novel with *two* separate translations, set apart by more than 30 years and a number of other factors, such as the gender of the translator, I tried further to eliminate the risk of making too bold generalizations about differences in norms with regard to swearing.

As suggested by several scholars, a translator, as a norm subject, is very likely to behave in a way that minimizes the risk of criticism and sanctions as consequences of deviations from certain norms (Toury 1999: 20). In the Swedish translations of *Catcher*, both Hammar and Östergren have obviously done just that – leaned heavily towards a target-oriented approach in their translation, thus producing, in Toury's terms, highly acceptable, but not perhaps very adequate translations. Reflecting initial norms with a target-oriented approach, they have

both been sensitive and careful to conform to the requirements of their own linguistic milieu and culture in their translations. They have employed translational strategies which have resulted in a significant loss of a particular linguistic element, namely swearwords. As translators that have opted for a target-oriented translation, they operate primarily in the interest of the culture into which they are translating.

Language and the use of language reveal norms and values in the culture in which the language is spoken (Daun 1998: 138). In the translations of *Catcher*, the interesting issue was the language that was *not* used, and although it sounds paradoxical at first, studying what is *not* present in a text can be just as rewarding as studying what is, at least if we are interested in the norms of the culture that produced the text. Hermans (1999: 57) points out that the choices a translator makes during the process of translation highlight the choices the translator does *not* make. A translator's motives for leaving something out may be just as interesting as his or her motives for including something else: "Assessing the exclusions makes us appreciate the significance of the inclusions" (ibid.). I hope the analysis in chapter 3 and the discussion in chapter 4 have demonstrated the significance of the exclusions in the Swedish translations of *Catcher*.

6. CONCLUSION

The English word "theory", with its roots in the Greek word "theōros", has come to mean scholarly speculation to explain certain phenomena. However, the original meaning of the word "theōros" was quite plainly "to see". In this Pro Gradu thesis I have adopted a descriptive-explanatory approach, and I have tried to *see through* two Swedish translations of J. D. Salinger's classic novel *Catcher in the Rye* in order to explain why the translations have turned out the way they have. My primary aim when I started writing this thesis was to come closer to an understanding of why two translators, set apart by more than 30 years, have translated a novel in such a similar way, both leaving out close to 50 percent of a certain linguistic element from their translations, namely swearwords, rendering their translations very tame compared to the original. I have analyzed *how* and *why* the Swedish culture has influenced these translations, and thereby I hope to have provided a more interesting and thought-provoking explanation to the question than the worn-out cliché "No translator works in a vacuum".

My hypothesis was that the Swedish language and culture are less prone to swearing than, for instance, the American English and culture. I have suggested that the explanation lies in the fact that cultures differ in many ways, especially in that there are culture-specific norms that govern behavior. I hope to have touched upon a number of relevant norms that seem to prevail in Swedish society and language, but I emphasize the word "hope", as we can never be certain of whether we have indeed reconstructed actual norms, or just managed to disguise our subjective opinions as norms. However, the results of the quantitative and qualitative analysis seem to go hand in hand with the discussion of culture and

norms in chapters 4 and 5. Personally, I think I have found and presented support for my hypothesis.

Translation in itself is a complex subject with a myriad different approaches to it, and when we link together translation and culture we suddenly have a very intimidating subject to tackle. The role of a translator as a mediator between cultures is not easy, and as the saying goes, "You can please some of the people some of the time, but you can't please all of the people all of the time." Translation is an ongoing battle between on the one hand, loyalty to the original text and its agenda or purpose, and on the other hand, loyalty to the target language, culture, society and their norms. In this thesis, I hope to have shown that in the particular case of the translation of *Catcher* into Swedish by two different translators, the translators have chosen loyalty to their own cultural norms at the expense of loyalty towards the original, its author and its message. It is open for discussion whether this is acceptable when it happens on such a scale as in the translations of *Catcher*, where close to 50 percent of the swearwords have been omitted.

Finally, I hope I have contributed to the general discussion about swearwords and swearing as a cultural phenomenon. I am aware of the fact that I have occasionally used unconventional, perhaps unacademic, language and provided, in certain parts of this study, some examples and anecdotes which may raise some eyebrows, but frankly, I prefer calling a spade a spade. I hope I have not offended anyone with this approach; on the contrary, I hope I have been able to bring a smile or a grin to the face of the reader at least occasionally. For after all, swearwords are quite fun to play with.

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