Insights into audiovisual and comic translation.

Changing perspectives on films, comics and videogames

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Insights into audiovisual and comic translation.
Changing perspectives on films, comics and videogames

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1. Introduction[1]

The concept of retranslation has been defined as the second or subsequent translation of a given text into the same target language (Chaume 2007: 50; Chaume 2018: 12; Gambier 1994: 413; Zaro 2007: 21-34). While in the past the term applied almost exclusively to literary texts the last decades of the twentieth century witnessed a new wave of audiovisual texts in need of retranslation for a variety of reasons. When referring to audiovisual texts, the phenomenon is labelled *redubbing*, an area that to date remains largely under-researched (Chaume 2012: 148; Zanotti 2015: 110) but which has been attracting growing attention over the last few years.

In their seminal work dating back to the late seventies Gregory and Carroll (1978: 42) described the linguistic code present in audiovisual texts as "written to be spoken as if not written". This notion subsequently gave rise to the derived concept of *prefabricated orality* (Chaume 2004: 168; Baños 2009), which refers to the oral nature of audiovisual texts, which pretend to be spontaneous but are actually planned. But how do scriptwriters –and audiovisual translators, for that matter– attain the required degree of orality or dialogue naturalness? They are bound to mirror the specific features of spontaneous oral discourse (Gaviño 2008; Pavesi 2008; Payrató 1996).

Recent technological breakthroughs like the DVD, the Blue-ray Disc, the VoD platforms and the wide range of existing digital channels have produced an ever-changing audiovisual landscape in which redubs are in constant demand to cater for this emerging market. But why are texts and/or films retranslated at all? Gambier believes that linguistic updating is one of the driving forces behind retranslation and suggests that second and subsequent translations are often seen as an improvement on previous versions (Gambier 1994: 413). Chaume also

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addresses the topic in an attempt to account for the phenomenon of retranslating/redubbing within the realm of the audiovisual industry in Spain and the elements fostering it. He lists the eight most frequent reasons why a film may get retranslated. These range from a change in the broadcasting media to budgetary considerations or author's copyright issues (Chaume 2018: 18-23). Zanotti, in turn, points at economic and commercial factors. Even when the existence of an already dubbed version is acknowledged, getting hold of it may become an expensive endeavour fraught with difficulties, and provided films are marketable products the search for cost-effectiveness will be of paramount importance in driving the demand for redubs (Zanotti 2015: 112).

The representation of identity in translation is another aspect that has gained increased attention among scholars. Researchers have concerned themselves with a number of pervasive themes such as the commissioner's ideology (Giovanni 2016), the translation of identity in multilingual settings (Díaz-Pérez 2014), the dubbing of dialects and accents (Dore 2016; Ranzato 2010), the presence of non-native language varieties (Minutella 2018), the transfer of cultural references and their associated meaning (Fruttaldo 2018), the representation of sexual and gender identity (Díaz-Pérez 2018; Zottola 2018) or the translation of oral features (Cabanillas 2018). Redubs offer a unique opportunity to study these issues in correlation with the disparities detected between two independent translations of a single audiovisual source text.

This study presents the results of the analysis carried out on an audiovisual corpus consisting of the original version or source text (ST), the first dubbing (FD) and the redub (RD) of the western *White Feather* (Robert Webb 1955). We will be looking at how ethnic identity and sociolect have been dealt with in translation; more precisely, whether they have been reproduced in the dubbed texts and, if so, to what extent. The first dubbing of the film into Spanish dates back to 1991, when it was recorded at a voice studio in Madrid. The redubbed version, on the other hand, was commissioned nearly a decade later, in 1999, and then recorded at a studio in Bilbao that used to work for the regional Basque TV corporation on a regular basis. The name of the translators is unknown for both versions, which is a commonplace of the audiovisual industry in Spain (Cabanillas 2016: 221). The findings are expected to provide new insights into the complex field of audiovisual translation.

The film tells the story of a peace mission from the US cavalry to the Cheyenne Indians in Wyoming in the late nineteenth century. The mission is threatened when a white surveyor meets the Indian chief's son and falls in love with the chief's daughter. The relationships among members of such different communities will eventually lead to conflict.

2. Ethnic identity

Film dialogue invariably involves "issues of power and dominance, of empathy and intimacy, of class, ethnicity, and gender" (Kozloff 2000: 26). In the film under analysis two discrete ethnic groups coexist and interact: the white and the Indian communities. In this section we shall look at how ethnic identity is represented in the ST and whether it is replicated in the translated texts.

Insofar as speech is loaded with connotative meaning it is one of the most powerful tools to portray identity, be it social, ethnic or cultural identity. Indeed, in audiovisual texts "characters' identities are represented, among other means, by the type of language they speak" (Díaz-Pérez 2018: 97). The particular features might be found at lexical, syntactic or prosodic level but, at any rate, dialogue in films is on no account a neutral communicative act:

> Linguistic choices are never random in film. The way characters speak tells us something about their personality and background through idiosyncrasies and through the socio-cultural and geographic markers in their speech, which affect grammar, syntax, lexicon, pronunciation, and intonation. Since linguistic variants are rooted in the communities that produce them, they are often used as a kind of typology in film, carrying a connotative meaning over and above their denotative functions (Díaz-Cintas & Remael 2007: 185).

Although some westerns feature a few lines or the odd utterance in various Native American languages (Kozloff 2000: 150-151) this is not the case with *White Feather*, where the only language spoken is English. Notwithstanding this, and even in the absence of linguistic code-switching, ST viewers clearly identify two distinct ethnic groups in terms of their discourse. This perception is the result of the non-standard speech Indian characters display throughout the film. The lack of naturalness in their linguistic performance portrays this group to the English-speaking audience as exogenous and coming from a separate ethnic and linguistic background. The "out-group membership and cultural otherness" (Zabalbeascoa & Corrius 2012: 2) of the Indian collective is thereby constructed. As regards non-standard language, it incorporates "features that are not *neutral*, even though they do belong to the standard language, and may therefore have more or less specific connotations" (Díaz-Cintas & Remael 2007: 187). In other words, the language variety of Indians points to an intended connotative meaning.

In this section we shall look at to what extent, if so, the marked speech of Indian characters in the ST has been conveyed to the TTs. To this end, we will analyse the strategies, discourse markers and linguistic devices employed by scriptwriters to shape the speech of these characters in order to represent their ethnic identity and whether those elements have been transferred to the Spanish versions. The presence (or otherwise) of the features making up a specific

discourse type will eventually have a bearing on the effect of the resulting text on the target audience.

2.1. Contractions in oral discourse

The use of contractions is inherent to spontaneous speech in English and it is one of the resources employed by scriptwriters to mirror real spoken language in films. In the ST white characters present a standard use of contractions in their utterances whereas Indian characters do not, thus displaying a marked speech. This absolute absence of contractions amounts to a distinctive use of spoken language. The following line is pronounced by the white male protagonist:

Example 1 TCR: 58:44		
ST	FD	RD
Tanner: But you *didn't* tell me you were promised to American Horse. *There's* been much trouble.	Tanner: Pero no me contaste que estabas prometida. Ahora hay un grave problema. [But you didn't tell me you were engaged. Now there is a serious problem.]	Tanner: No me dijiste que estabas prometida a Caballo Americano. No puedes quedarte. [You didn't tell me you were engaged to American Horse. You can't stay.]

The regular contractions in his oral discourse portray this character as having full linguistic competence, and their presence endows the ST with a high degree of orality and naturalness. In stark contrast to the previous line, in her reply the female Indian character does not use any contractions, as illustrated by example 2:

Example 2 TCR: 58:48		
ST	FD	RD
Appearing Day: I *did not* tell you of American Horse because what was in his heart *was not* in mine.	Amanecer: Yo no te hablé de Caballo Americano porque lo que hay en su corazón no existe en el mío. [I didn't tell you about American Horse because what is in his heart doesn't exist in mine.]	Amanecer: Josh, no te hablé de Caballo Americano porque mi corazón no siente lo que el suyo. [Josh, I didn't tell you about American Horse because my heart doesn't feel what his does.]

The total absence of contractions provides the speech with an outstanding unidiomatic flavour. Yet, the rewording in both FD and RD are perfectly standard sentences in Spanish. Curiously enough, the redub includes an additional vocative

with no counterpart in the ST. Provided vocatives operate as conversational cohesive devices (Baños 2009: 313) it is interesting to see how the segment presents an increased degree of orality in the RD. This phenomenon seems to point towards an effort to bring the text in line with mainstream speech conventions.

In order to illustrate the unequal use of contractions by both ethnic groups below we find the transcription of an utterance by a female white character, who – unlike the Indian woman– does make use of the customary contractions in her speech:

Example 3 TCR: 59:32		
ST	FD	RD
Anne: Josh, *she's* left her people. You *can't* turn her out.	Anne: Josh, ha abandonado a los suyos. No puedes rechazarla. [Josh, she's left her people. You can't turn her out.]	Anne: Ha abandonado a su pueblo. No puedes echarla. [She's left her people. You can't throw her out.]

TTs are, once more, instances of perfectly standard language. Accordingly, in the Spanish versions no disparity in terms of naturalness is detected between the speeches of the two female characters. Hence, as opposed to the ST, TTs present a total lack of contrast between the linguistic styles of members of the two communities.

In the example below, the male Indian protagonist addresses the white male leading character:

Example 4 TCR: 25:19		
ST	FD	RD
Little Dog: What I wish *he will* wish. *Do not* come if you *do not* want, or if *you are* afraid.	Perro Pequeño: Lo que yo deseo él lo desea. No vengas si no te gusta o si tienes miedo. [What I wish he´ll wish. Don't come if you don't like it or if you're scared.]	Cachorro: Mis deseos son los suyos. No vayas si no quieres o si tienes miedo. [My wishes are his wishes. Don't go if you don't want to or if you're scared.]

In this line several contractions would be expected in standard spoken discourse, however, there are none. This divergence in the degree of orality contributes to setting up two groups in the original version, whereby Indian characters are portrayed as lacking linguistic competence and thereby emphasizing their ethnic ascription. In both TTs, on the other hand, this marked use of

language has been levelled out, the result being completely neutral renderings of the segment.

Example 5 TCR: 34:30		
ST	FD	RD
Appearing Day: Indian boys *do not* kiss Indian girls. I *do not* know why not. *It is* very nice in feeling.	Amanecer: Aquí los muchachos indios no besan a las chicas indias. Lo que no sé es por qué no. Es una sensación agradable. [Here Indian boys don't kiss Indian girls. What I don't know is why not. It's a nice feeling.]	Amanecer: Los chicos indios no besan a las chicas indias. No entiendo por qué no. Es una sensación muy agradable. [Indian boys don't kiss Indian girls. I don't understand why not. It's a very nice feeling.]

The rewording of this line exemplifies how the multicultural shades of the ST undergo a standardization process. The non-standard features present in the original version have not been transferred to the TTs –nor compensated for–, which brings about the deletion of linguistic variety. The way characters speak ultimately influence how they are perceived by target viewers, who are deprived of a whole set of meaningful nuances. As shown in the examples in this section, the ethnic diversity of the ST is dramatically diminished in translation as both TTs are rephrased into standard language. It may be concluded that translators have failed to convey the connotative load of non-standard speech.

2.2. Use of third person to address an interlocutor

As already stated, audiovisual texts rely heavily on conversational exchange to depict characters. Kozloff (2000: 150-151) hints at the fact that Indian characters in westerns are frequently given lines in substandard language varieties. In the film under analysis they show a strong tendency to use the third person when addressing their interlocutor. This resource endows the Indian speech with an obviously exotic overtone, as illustrated by the following example:

Example 6 TCR: 31:10		
ST	FD	RD
Little Dog: I see Tanner was not afraid.	Perro Pequeño: Ya veo que Tanner no se ha asustado. [I can see Tanner hasn't got scared.]	Cachorro: Veo que Tanner no tiene miedo. [I can see Tanner isn't scared.]

This stylistic device makes the Indian ethnic group stand out in linguistic terms. The unnatural speech use portrays the speaker as lacking adequate command of the language. This feature has been transferred to the TTs by keeping the third person in both first dubbing and redub. Accordingly, both translated texts keep the non-standard style along with its associated ethnic connotations.

In the following example we find a new case of third person to address an interlocutor:

Example 7 TCR: 35:33		
ST	FD	RD
Appearing Day: Josh wishes more?	Amanecer: ¿Josh desea más? [Does Josh wish more?]	Amanecer: ¿Quieres más, Josh? [Do you want more, Josh?]

Interestingly, in this line the translator of the redubbed text shifts to the second person, which complies with mainstream conversational conventions. The redubbed version's predilection for current language use may signal to an attempt to bring the new text in line with prevailing cultural habits. This example leads to the conclusion that, although on a number of aspects it is possible to identify general trends, "redubbing includes a variety of practices and situations so that generalizations cannot be made" (Zanotti 2015: 131).

A similar case is found in example 8:

Example 8 TCR: 01:05:07		
ST	FD	RD
Appearing Day: Josh is going away?	Amanecer: ¿Es que Josh se marcha? [Is Josh going away?]	Amanecer: ¿Te marchas, Josh? [Are you going away, Josh?]

While the earlier translation mirrors the marked speech of the ST by keeping the third person, the latter rendering resorts to standardization by recasting the line in the more natural second person. In the two examples above, redubs feature greater linguistic realism than previous dubbings. The same is true with regard to the line below:

Example 9 TCR: 36:46		
ST	FD	RD

Little Dog: Tanner will hear from us.	Perro Pequeño: Tanner sabrá de nosotros. [Tanner will hear from us.]	Cachorro: Tendrás noticias nuestras. [You'll hear from us.]

The redub, once again, abandons the third person in favour of the second. Concerns with linguistic naturalness may account for this change (Zanotti 2015: 120). As pointed out by Chaume, one of the functions fulfilled by retranslation in general and by redubbing in particular is to help refresh dated TTs and in this way "make a film more appealing by using more modern language that meets the current audience's expectations" (Chaume 2018: 24). However, the marked speech signalling ethnic identity has been lost along the way in the last three instances. This in turn brings about a substantial weakening of the disparity between groups represented in the ST (Goris 1993: 175).

3. Sociolect

Sociolect is "a linguistic variety (or lect) defined on social (as opposed to regional) grounds, e.g. correlating with a particular social class or occupational group" (Crystal 2008). It represents a type of "intralingual language variation" (Zabalbeascoa & Corrius 2012: 2) whose presence in a text will inevitably imply connotative meaning, as it is inextricably linked to social stratification and socioeconomic status (Ranzato 2010: 110; Wales 1989: 119-120; Wells 1982: 13). Consequently, its presence invariably poses a major challenge to translators (Bucaria 2008: 150).

Group membership may be rooted in various factors, such as education, income, cultural background or social group, and sociolect relates to issues of identity and quite often of power relations. As pointed out by Federici (2011: 8) "sociolects contribute to the characterization of emblematic characters from a specific background" and so they "are made recognizable through the language that portrays some features of their identity" (Ibid.).

Lippi-Green also tackles the correlation between language and social identity:

> We use variation in language to construct ourselves as social beings […]. Speakers choose among the sociolinguistic variants available; their choices group together in ways which are obvious and interpretable to other speakers in the community. This process is a functional and necessary part of the way we communicate. It is not an optional feature of the spoken language (Lippi-Green 1997: 63).

Some of the linguistic resources that may serve to depict sociolect are colloquial markers such as "g-dropping in gerunds (*watchin'*), assimilations (*gonna*, *gimme*), the weakening of certain unstressed vowels (*gotta*) and the elision of intervocalic consonants (*to 'em*), among others" (Chaume 2004: 173; my translation). In the

sections below we shall look at the way translators deal with these markers in terms of social language variety in the film.

3.1. G-dropping and relaxed pronunciation

The phenomena of g-dropping in *–ing* unstressed endings and relaxed pronunciation are both indicative of low socioeconomic status. They are indeed two of the most salient features of substandard spoken English (Baños 2009; Weinstein 1982; Wells 1982), as well as tools employed to portray one of the characters in the film, the owner of the food store at the fort, an ill-tempered rough man.

Example 10 TCR: 23:00		
ST	FD	RD
Magruder: Did you try *som'in*? Tanner: No, I didn't try anything.	Magruder: ¿Ha intentado algo? Tanner: No, no he intentado nada. [Magruder: Have you tried anything? Tanner: No, I haven't tried anything.]	Magruder: ¿Acaso ha intentado algo? Tanner: No, no he intentado nada. [Magruder: Have you by chance tried anything? Tanner: No, I haven't tried anything.]

The rendering of this dialogue exchange exemplifies the trend towards standardization in the transfer of marked speech. The presence of g-dropping in his speech helps outline the first character's social affiliation (Wells 1982: 17, 262). Additionally, this segment illustrates the significant difference between the linguistic styles of two white characters on the grounds of social status. Interestingly enough, none of the TTs incorporates any linguistic or prosodic features indicative of social origin. Thus, part of the connotative load is not transferred. In this example, along with g-dropping, we find an instance of relaxed pronunciation (*som'in'*). A similar linguistic device is available in the target language –in order to portray the marked speech of this character translators might have resorted to the elision of the intervocalic /d/ in the Spanish verb (**intentao* as opposed to standard *intentado*), which conveys the same notion of substandard language variety and low social background. It would have created a similar effect on the TT audience; however the sociolectal features have been completely omitted in the Spanish versions. As a consequence, the array of nuances providing texture to this character's personality in the original film is overlooked in translation.

Example 11 TCR: 23:42		
ST	FD	RD
Magruder: She *don't* have *nothin' a* do with men.	Magruder: Mi hija no está hecha para salir con hombres. [My daughter isn't made to go out with men.]	Magruder: No quiere saber absolutamente nada de los hombres. [She doesn't want to know absolutely anything about men.]

In example 11 we have a new instance of g-dropping (*nothin'*) plus relaxed pronunciation (*to* > *a*). Also, the auxiliary verb (*don't*) is ungrammatical in its context, as the subject of the sentence requires *doesn't*. Lastly, the presence of two negative terms in the same clause amounts to a flawed syntactic structure. Yet, none of the translations display any features of substandard oral discourse. Hence, the connotative meaning in terms of social identity is missing in both rewordings. It may be concluded that TTs generally contain fewer linguistic and stylistic devices than their corresponding ST. Curiously enough, the redub includes the modal adverb *absolutamente* (*absolutely*), which endows the speech segment with increased formality, in sharp contrast with the ST slang tone.

3.2. Phoneme elision

The elision of phonemes is typical of oral colloquial language (Briz 1998: 95) and it is also linked to low socioeconomic background (Wales 1989: 119). In the following example this trait of marked discourse is found in the ST:

Example 12 TCR: 11:08		
ST	FD	RD
Magruder: Run *'em* off the land is what I say.	Magruder: Había que echarlos a todos a patadas. [They should all be kicked out.]	Magruder: Echarlos de aquí, eso es lo que hay que hacer. [Kick them out of here, that's what must be done.]

This segment features the elision of the intervocalic consonant *(them* > *'em*), an instance of substandard language which is not mirrored in the translated texts. Indeed, the rewording of the line in Spanish are examples of standard language. That is, the loaded speech in the ST is completely levelled out in translation. Provided sociolect represents a particular "language variety that is characteristic for a socially defined group" (Bussmann 1996: 439) it may concluded that the information on the social affiliation of this character is missing in both TTs.

Example 13 TCR: 23:38		
ST	FD	RD
Magruder: I tell everybody *'u* starts *gettin'* ideas.	Magruder: Sólo se lo cuento a los que veo que empiezan a hacerse ilusiones. [I only tell those who I see start getting hopeful.]	Magruder: Se lo digo a todos los que se hacen ilusiones. [I tell all those who start getting hopeful.]

Concerning this example, while the original version contains an instance of phoneme elision *(who > 'u)* the lines in Spanish fully adhere to canonical linguistic conventions. The standardization of these sociolectal features involves a significant loss in terms of connotations (Ranzato 2010: 116) and, accordingly, the target audience will have a different perception of the character. This will eventually, to a greater or lesser extent, affect the message of the film as a whole.

The analysis has demonstrated that "the nuances in terms of social belonging and identity that [linguistic variety] can convey are usually lost in dubbing" (Dore 2016: 132). The cases examined in this section prove that, indeed, as far as marked speech is concerned, it is often neglected in translation, be it first dubbing or redub.

4. Conclusions

Film dialogue is one of the main resources used by scriptwriters to depict ethnic and social identity. Language variety is used as a means to construct identities and provide characterisation (Díaz-Pérez 2018: 96; Minutella 2018: 144). Nevertheless, translated texts seem to invariably undergo a standardization process, which "consists in reducing a multiplicity of distinctive features characterizing the original oral language use" (Goris 1993: 173).

As regards the representation of ethnic identity, the examples analysed indicate that the elements making up the distinctive discourse of Indian characters are frequently not transferred to TTs. The striking absence of contractions in their speech as well as the unnatural conversational behaviour when addressing their interlocutor are stylistic resources that portray these characters as members of a distinct ethnic group. Yet, in both dubbed texts these elements have been either significantly diminished or completely omitted, thereby "reshaping their entire identity" (Fruttaldo 2018: 144). The absence of contractions is not compensated for in any way. As for the use of the third person to address an interlocutor, the first dubbing sticks to the same strategy while the redub tends to shift to the second person, probably in an attempt to update the film discourse and bring it closer to the audience (Zanotti 2015: 132-135).

Concerning sociolect, those linguistic markers linked to the substandard variety, such as g-dropping and relaxed pronunciation or the phoneme elision phenomenon, are completely neutralised in dubbing. Therefore, the specific features of a particular social variety present in the ST are levelled out in the translation process (Fruttaldo 2018: 156; Martí Ferriol 2013: 71; Ranzato 2010: 117-118), the result being canonical language TTs. This in turn will affect the way the character is perceived by target viewers. No compensation whatsoever is detected for this loss of connotative meaning.

On the whole, film dialogue employs a wide array of conversational and linguistic devices that are, more often than not, missing in the corresponding translated texts (Díaz-Pérez 2018: 118; Minutella 2018: 146; Pavesi 2008: 81). It has been shown that numerous instances of marked speech are consistently rephrased into standard language. Some scholars argue that standardization is inevitable in such a context, since no particular language variety may be used in the TT "without producing a comical or strange effect" (Herbst 1997: 295). However, it will surely entail a loss of meaning as well as a lack of contrast between different speech styles, as shown in this study.

Hence, we conclude that there seems to be a general tendency in audiovisual translation to neglect marked instances of language as well as the connotative load of the text (Cabanillas 2018: 52), maybe because ultimately translators' choices are driven by linguistic, cultural and social conventions that underpin "the notions of correctness outlined by standard language" (Erkazanci-Durmuş 2011: 23). Further research is needed in this domain in order to gain a better understanding of the wide range of elements and factors affecting the complex activity of audiovisual translation.

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