

## LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IN ENTERTAINMENT: NOTES FROM AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Entertainment audiovisual products play a predominant role in our everyday life and are so closely linked to our culture that, in fact, the audiovisual industry falls under the umbrella of cultural industries. This article considers the extent to which, especially within our context, we can choose the language in which we consume these products. Specifically, different aspects related to linguistic diversity in entertainment will be addressed, such as the language models available to us, the main production languages today and the way that audiovisual translation modalities have an impact on the issue of language diversity. Finally, a section will be devoted to presenting the case of multilingual audiovisual products as objects of particular interest given that they represent linguistic diversity since their inception. Within the framework of entertainment, the article focuses on audiovisual products such as films, series and other clips that are shown on television and at the cinema, but we will concentrate specifically on VOD (video on demand) platforms and content shared online, through websites such as YouTube (which have also turned into mobile apps), since we know that a large part of time spent on mobile devices is dedicated to consuming this kind of product (CAC 2018, p. 160), especially in the case of young people.

### 2. THE LANGUAGE OF ENTERTAINMENT AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTS

Bakhtin (2004/1981, p. 416) expressed the impossibility of describing a single language model for the novel, since it simply does not

exist. Similarly, we cannot speak of a language model that can be applied to all entertainment audiovisual products. Nevertheless, this section introduces a basic concept to understand the language of TV fiction, fictional orality, and briefly presents three interesting issues related to potential linguistic colonisations in the audiovisual world: the presence of interferences from a language in audiovisual products filmed in another language, taking the case of Spanish forms in recent series by Televisió de Catalunya as an example; (supposedly) standardised American English that perpetuates prejudices against those who do not speak this variant; and neutral Spanish, a language created for dubbing in Latin America.

The first idea worth highlighting in this article is that the language models that we consume as spectators of films and series are rather artificial. The process of writing a script or translating a film involves producing dialogues distinguished by their fictional orality in all cases, except for in the case of experimental products where, for example, a real conversation is recorded directly. Brumme (2008) explains that fictional orality aims to evoke real communication in fiction. Scriptwriters and audiovisual translators use this tool to create more believable characters and stories: therefore, they create the “illusion of authenticity” (Brumme 2012, p. 13) through a discourse that, although not spontaneous, seeks to seem so, by using linguistic elements such as discourse markers, interjections or vocabulary that fits the communication situation represented (more or less informal, depending on the product), among other factors (Arias-Badia 2020). As a means

to illustrate this, consider the following snippet from episode 15 of the series *Cites* (Televisió de Catalunya, 2015), where two characters make up after a row<sup>1</sup>.

GINA: *Ho sento. [Sorry.]*

ÀLEX: *El què? [What about?]*

GINA: *Bueno, haver-me enfadat amb tu. Bueno, en realitat no m'he enfadat amb tu. Bueno, sí m'he enfadat, però no des de l'enfado... [Well, I got cross with you. Well, I didn't actually. Or, rather, yes, I did, but not anymore.]*

ÀLEX: *Vale, jo sento molt haver-me portat com un imbècil, que en realitat no m'he portat com un imbècil, eh? [And I am sorry for my stupid behaviour. Well, not really...]*

Without going into details, there are several signs of fictional orality in this snippet, such as markers typical of spontaneous speech (and, in this case, loan words) (*bueno*), Spanish vocabulary (*enfado*, *vale*) and syntax (*sí m'he enfadat*) an interruption that imitates spontaneously taking the floor (in Àlex's last sentence), subordination typical of orality (*que en realitat no m'he portat com un imbècil*), a final interjection to express irony (*eh?*). The combination of all these linguistic elements contributes to creating a believable dialogue; in fact, from both a professional and an academic standpoint, dialogues that do not work on authenticity may lead to the audience having severe difficulties understanding (Wolff and Cox 1988, p. 56; Forchini 2012, p. 35). Audiovisual translations, in turn, should preserve these elements to try to make target texts seem natural in different languages (Zabalbeascoa 2012, p. 75).

## 2.1. Spanish interferences in Catalan audiovisual products

The above example, including loan words from Spanish, may be used to introduce an issue that has been widely debated recently in the media and online regarding Televisió de Catalunya's language model: the quest for authenticity by Catalan audiovisual creators has led to recent TV series such as *Merlí* (Veranda TV, 2015) or *Drama* (Radiotelevisió Espanyola and El Terrat, 2020) featuring teenage characters speaking Catalan with many linguistic interferences from Spanish. In these productions, the scriptwriters seek a "language that's familiar to the audience"<sup>2</sup> and let the young actors "make it their own and adapt it using a vocabulary that they are comfortable with"<sup>3,4</sup>.

According to sociolinguistics, these kinds of Catalan-Spanish interferences, as well as alternating codes between both languages, are documented in the real speech of bilingual people (Payrató 1985), that is, current scriptwriters have not invented them. Some public and academic sectors, though, often perceive them as negative transfers, like a linguistic colonisation of Catalan audiovisual products: this is probably due to the fact that Televisió de Catalunya's translation and language model in the 1990s included very few of these kinds of interferences, under the premise that "all languages have a rich and authentic repertoire [of informal structures] that decisively contribute to providing dialogues with flow and authenticity"<sup>5</sup> (Televisió de Catalunya 1997, p. 12)<sup>6</sup>. Thus, for example, Bibiloni (2016, par. 2) condemns the fact

1.- Translator's note (TN): English translation taken from the episode's subtitles on TV3 a la carta.

2.- TN: original quote: "llenguatge proper amb l'espectador".

3.- TN: original quote: "el fa[cin] seu i l'adapt[en] a un vocabulari propi en el qual se sent[en] còmodes".

4.- <<https://www.naciodigital.cat/noticia/128607/aixi/sera/darrera/temporada/serie/merli/segons/seu/creador>> [27.08.2020].

5.- TN: original quote: "[t]otes les llengües disposen d'un repertori ric i genuí [d'estructures col·loquials] que contribueixen decisivament a donar fluïdesa i naturalitat als diàlegs".

6.- The same idea is currently defended by the portal *ésAdir*: <<https://esadir.cat/traduccion/lallengua>> [27.08.2020].

that on current television, given the choice “between two words accepted by [Catalan] rules, one of which is a Spanish form, the latter is systematically favoured”<sup>7</sup>.

## 2.2. American English and British

### English: languages used by goodies and baddies?

Several authors have addressed the topic of the Americanisation of British English due to the exposure of British speakers to North-American products (Murphy 2017) and the “myth of a standard English” (Lippi-Green 1997, p. 53) present in the North-American products discussed in section 3. We will not go into the notion of standard language here, but we do want to leave proof of a fact studied in specialised literature: the English variant presented to us in audiovisual products as neutral or standard perpetuates unequal structures in society and power relationships.

Lippi-Green (1997) dives into how linguistic stereotypes have been promoted by the main North-American producers. Even in children’s films such as *Aladdin* (Disney, 1992) or *The Lion King* (Disney, 1994) we find ‘good’ characters who speak in the North-American variant, considered standard, and the ‘baddies’ speak British English<sup>8</sup>. This also happens with other English variants: in an older version of the short film *Three Little Pigs* (Disney, 1933) that’s no longer available, we encounter, for example, a wolf that speaks Yiddish.

Recent North-American crime series are also a good example of the use of ‘foreign’ accents (that is, that do not follow the rules imposed by the media) with an intention of negatively representing migrant people: it is quite common for the suspects of a crime to be people that, despite speaking in English, have ‘an accent’. The series *Castle* (ABC Studios, 2009) was widely criticised for the case of a suspect played by a North-American actor who failed (according to the audience) to imitate the Geordie accent typical of the north-east of England<sup>9</sup>.

## 2.3. Neutral Spanish in audiovisual translation in Latin America

From the point of view of audiovisual translation, the case of neutral Spanish is particularly noteworthy. This Spanish variant is used for dubbing in Latin America, for the entire region to understand it; a goal that experts consider remarkably “commercial” and “slightly ambitious” (Scandura 2019, p. 30). This neutral Spanish dubbing makes decisions about what should be considered ‘neutral’ by a population of close to 450 million Spanish speakers from 22 different countries (Instituto Cervantes 2018, in Scandura 2019, p. 30). The result is translations that use an artificial vocabulary that avoids regionalisms as much as possible—that is, that does not promote more local lexical richness—or that abuses regionalisms from areas with a larger number of speakers, such as Mexico, as well as anglicisms like ‘smoothie’<sup>10</sup>, at the expense of regional forms. Apart from vocab-

7.- TN: original quote: “entre dues paraules acceptades per la normativa, una de les quals és un hispanisme, s’us[un] sistemàticament aquesta i no l’alternativa genuïna”.

8.- To delve deeper into these issues and listen to a commentary of examples, cf. Santilli et al. (2020a).

9.- It was widely discussed in the British press. Cf. for example: <<https://www.thesun.co.uk/archives/tv-old/1074092/is-this-geordie-accent-on-us-tv-show-castle-the-worst-ever-listen-and-be-amazed/>>, <<https://www.standard.co.uk/showbiz/celebrity-news/us-actor-slammed-for-terrible-geordie-accent-on-castle-a3196056.html>> o <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/howaboutthat/12183759/US-TV-show-features-the-worst-attempt-at-a-Geordie-accent-you-will-ever-hear.html>> [27.08.2020]

10.- For an up-to-date explanation of the situation of neutral Spanish and a commentary of many examples, cf. Santilli et al. (2020b).

ulary, neutral Spanish also affects more authentic syntactical structures, which are often replaced by simpler formulas, even if they do not sound 100% natural. Nevertheless, the audience is already used to this Spanish variant that is consumed on a daily basis.

The three cases succinctly presented here help us to see that linguistic colonisation not only takes place between languages, but that the influence that language models from audiovisual products can have within a single language is particularly noteworthy. Although this requires further detailed analysis, it is easy to think that frequently consuming dialogues that contain formal influences from other languages could modify our linguistic attitudes towards our own language and towards the more influential languages or variants. Likewise, using certain language models can lead to general linguistic changes in consumption languages, in the case that speakers adopt formal influences that they are exposed to in common speech.

### 3. DOMINANCE OF NORTH-AMERICAN AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTS PRODUCED IN ENGLISH

A quick glance at the list of the 57 most-seen films in history, published on IMDb (2018), leaves no room for doubt regarding the dominance of US audiovisual products in our context: all the films included have been produced or co-produced in the United States and the dialogues on the original soundtrack are in English. The list features, for example, many Disney titles, which were well received by the public in different countries from the Second World War on (Wasko et al. 2001). This trend does not change much if we take

a look at the list of the top ten most-watched productions on Netflix in Spain<sup>11</sup>, which only includes two local productions versus eight from North America. On HBO Spain, only two of the top 50 most-watched series are locally produced; the rest are also North-American<sup>12</sup>. In the case of YouTube, the list of the top 30 most-watched videos worldwide<sup>13</sup> are all music videos in English (25) and Spanish (5).

These data are unsurprising taking into account that during the 20th century the United States had the financial power to record and distribute entertainment products (Murphy 2017, par. 5). Regarding the specific case of more recent North-American TV series, it is also predictable that they have sparked interest, since it is been pointed out that the productions from the end of the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century have given rise to a “third golden age of television” (cf. Benchichà López 2015). The dominance of these products has been relevant from a linguistic point of view: the English language has produced “fascination over minds” together with broadcasting cultural property—this is partly where reactions against the abusive use of English on TV come from—(Guyot 2010, p. 51) and has led to the progressive marginalisation of linguistic (ibid. p. 48) and, thus, cultural idiosyncrasies. In the long term, the disproportionate influx of mainstream North-American products around the world could compromise the principle that everyone has the right to audiovisual communication being presented through a variety of media that reflect the ideological, political and cultural diversity of society included, for example, in the law that regulates audiovisual media in Catalonia, from 2010.

11.- <<https://www.elcorreo.com/culturas/tv/lo-mas-visto-netflix-series-peliculas-20200226101609-nt.html?ref=https:%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F>> [25.08.2020].

12.- <<https://es.hboespana.com/lists/most-popular-series/ca2ec8f8-99ef-456d-8473-44f42bc4c567>> [25.08.2020].

13.- <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_most-viewed\\_YouTube\\_videos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_most-viewed_YouTube_videos)> [25.08.2020].

The impact of VOD platforms is remarkable in distributing North-American content to countries such as India, a strong contender when it comes to film production —films are mainly shot in Hindi, but their variety reaches around 20 languages—, where less than 15 years ago the presence of North-American films was “marginal” and represented “less than 4% of the market” (Cruz Bárcenas, 2007). Both Amazon and Netflix have aimed to reach more consumers in this country, especially by promoting local productions, which has been possible because there is been a considerable increase in population with an Internet connection (Such 2018).

#### **4. AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION MODALITIES: REFLECTIONS REGARDING LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY**

However, how do we consume these products initially recorded in English (or other languages, if this is the case)? It goes without saying that audiovisual translation allows audiovisual products to transcend borders and reach wider audiences. This section considers aspects related to linguistic diversity regarding the three main audiovisual translation modalities: dubbing, subtitling and voice-over.

Within the framework of audiovisual translation, we will also take a look at how the linguistic supply of accessibility services such as audio description or sign language interpreting can entail limitations when accessing content in certain languages for persons with disabilities, first and foremost, and all users, in general.

##### **4.1. Dubbing and subtitling**

The two most famous audiovisual translation modalities are dubbing and subtitling. Dubbing consists of a recorded audiovisual trans-

lation modality with prior planning where the translated version replaces the original voices in keeping with different types of synchronies (Matamala 2019, p. 83), whereas subtitling is a modality where written text is added to the original audiovisual content, reproducing linguistic elements and, in some cases, non-linguistic sound elements, in keeping with the synchrony and image (*ibid.* p. 127). We know that, historically, the choice of one translation modality or another has been driven by different reasons, which Chaume (2003, pp. 28-29) summarises in the following terms:

- the status of the language of the country where the film is shown: according to Gambier and Suomela-Salmi (1994, p. 243) countries with a non-dominant “minor language” usually lean towards subtitling;
- tradition: the financial burden of changing the consumption habits of the population of a country could be very high;
- the cultural level of each country: in countries where the population generally does not have a good command of English, it is unlikely that subtitling will be the preferred option;
- potential political demands, aimed, for example, at protecting the country’s own language by choosing dubbing for imported productions.

Regarding the second and third points, it is worth adding that in countries with a strong subtitling tradition, such as the Netherlands, Sweden, Portugal or Romania, dubbing is usually present in the case of children’s fiction. That is, the age of the target audience, beyond their cultural level, is also a factor that is traditionally taken into account when choosing one mode or another.

Regarding the last point, it is fair to say that during the last century, dubbing grew stronger in countries with dictatorships that imitated Third Reich policy towards foreign pro-

ductions, a foreign influence that threatened the totalitarianism of Hitler's politics (Chaume 2003, p. 47). In Spain, the Francoist dictatorship legally imposed dubbing on April 23, 1943 (Gómez Castro 2016, p. 45). Around this date, the magazine *Primer plano* made the following statements regarding dubbing into Spanish (Galán, 1981):

Entre los objetivos concretos de la gran misión hispánica reservados al cine, ninguno más trascendental, ninguno de necesidad más inmediata y apremiante que el de conservar la pureza del idioma castellano en todos los ámbitos del imperio hispánico.<sup>14</sup>

The fact that, as stated above, the dubbing mode replaces the source text with the audiovisual translation, led—and can still lead—to several forms of censorship and “ideological manipulation” (Gómez Castro 2016) which aimed to communicate certain values to the country where imported products were broadcast, at the expense of North-American manners or values. A well-known case is the change in the plot of the film *Mogambo* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1953) in the Spanish version, where a married couple became a couple of siblings to avoid introducing the idea of adultery into the film. Censorship was not limited to the dialogues, but was also applied to other components of the audiovisual text: Gómez Castro (2016) provides examples of manipulated images and texts in several film adaptations of novels during the Francoist period.

China is a good example of change in a country's audiovisual consumption trends.

As Jin and Gambier (2018, p. 33) explain, from 1949 to the 1990s, dubbing was the dominant audiovisual translation modality in the country, given that a large part of the population was uneducated or had no knowledge of English. Now that, since the end of the 1960s, English is a mandatory subject in Chinese education, however, most films are translated using both modalities and each cinema chooses which version of the film they want to show, according to the customers' preferences. Generally, the dubbed version is chosen by uneducated people and children. In the case of audiovisual products available on VOD platforms, the preferred option is subtitles, which is unsurprising keeping in mind that, in general, platform users are young people and, therefore, have probably learnt English.

It is precisely on these platforms that a range of options to consume content in different languages becomes available. We know that in many cases, these platforms have an international scope with headquarters in different countries. Users are able to customise their experience with the content. Netflix Spain offers audio content in 14 languages (Arabic, Basque, Bulgarian, Cantonese, Catalan, English, French, Galician, German, Italian, Mandarin, Portuguese, Romanian, and Spanish)<sup>15</sup>, although the offer varies greatly from one language to another: for example, there are three films in Bulgarian (all children's animations), and only one product in Galician, compared to a vast majority of products available in Spanish. Regarding subtitling, there is content with subtitles in 12 languages (Arabic, Basque, Bulgarian, Catalan, Eng-

14.- TN: The official translation is unavailable. This is the translator's own attempt: “Among the specific objectives of the grand Hispanic mission reserved to film, none more significant, none of more urgent and pressing need than preserving the purity of the Spanish language in all corners of the Hispanic empire.”

15.- I do not know why the standard audio and subtitles list does not include languages such as Danish or Hindi, despite products being available in these languages. That is, it is possible that the language list the platform offers customers is wrong or out-of-date.

Netflix site	Versions available	
	Audio	Subtitles
Argentina	Danish, German, English, Spanish, Italian, Danish (with audio description)	English, English [CC], Arabic, Danish [CC], Spanish, Italian
Spain	Danish, German, English, Spanish, French, Danish (with audio description)	English, English [CC], Arabic, Danish [CC], Spanish, Romanian
United States	Danish, German, English, Spanish, French, Danish (with audio description)	English, English [CC], Danish [CC], Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, Spanish
Italy	Danish, German, English, French, Italian, Danish (with audio description)	German, English, English [CC], Danish [CC], French, Italian

Table 1. Dubbing and subtitling versions available on different Netflix sites for the same series: *The Rain* (Miso Film, 2018).

lish, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian, Simplified Chinese and Spanish). Again, the differences from one language to another are significant: while there is only one product with Basque subtitles, there are 144 with Simplified Chinese subtitles. It is fair to say that, in many cases, the Spanish sites of platforms such as Netflix or HBO only offer North-American products in the original English version and dubbed in Spanish, with subtitles in these same languages. Equally, for entertainment on digital TV channels, users from each country tend to find the audio in the original version and dubbing and/or subtitles (according to the country's tradition) in the local language.

The fact that a version in a certain language exists does not mean that it is available on all platforms, given that audiovisual translations are subject to copyright and this depends on agreements between producers and distributors. Likewise, even if a platform has the translation rights and the translated version into a certain language available, this does not mean that the version in this language is offered in all the countries where the platform is active. As an example, Table 1 shows a comparison among the current translation languages available for the Danish series *The Rain* (Miso Film, 2018), distributed by the Netflix platform, in Argentina, Spain, the United States and Italy. If we take a closer look, certain aspects seem odd, such as the fact

that Chinese is not offered in Spain, where there are more than 225,000 people from China (data from 2020 from the National Statistics Institute, INE, in Spain), or that Arabic subtitles are not offered in the United States where, according to the Arab American Institute, 3,700,000 potential Arabic users live (data from 2016).

As we can see in the table, some subtitles are followed by the acronym [CC] (closed captions). These are subtitle versions for people that are deaf or hard of hearing, which, as well as the subtitled text following parameters that can differ slightly from general interlinguistic subtitles, also include indications to correctly identify the characters, sound effects that are useful for those who cannot hear the audio, et cetera (Matamala 2019, pp. 171-198). Although this article we will not treat closed captioning as an independent audiovisual translation canviar per: modality, it is worth noting the extremely limited number of closed captions available both in the example and generally on VOD platforms, compared to general interlinguistic subtitles. This fact, likewise with audio description, restricts the options available to disabled people to access products in different languages.

Finally, i would like to briefly mention two phenomena that are expanding among networks. They are directly linked to dubbing and

subtitling and contribute to the distribution of current audiovisual content among countries that speak different languages: fandubbing and fansubbing. These are audiovisual translations developed by people and, oftentimes, organised communities (Zhang and Cassany 2019), who are not necessarily trained in translation, made on a non-profit basis. According to Jin and Gambier (2018, p. 30), in China, one of the countries where the quality of the texts produced by these communities is particularly noteworthy, fansubbing arises in response to the dissatisfaction of users and followers of audiovisual products given the slow content translation and importing processes (keeping in mind that, in China, most audiovisual products are translated by four state-owned companies that split the work more or less equally among themselves), the limited amount of audiovisual products available and the censorship to which official channels are submitted. Despite fandubbing and fansubbing usually taking place outside of the legal framework that protects the copyright of audiovisual products and, thus, being heavily criticised, countries like China see these followers-translators as true “heroes of cross-cultural communication” (Jin and Gambier 2018, p. 30). Indeed, the specialised literature considers this activity a clear example of “cyberculture” and “participative culture” of our times (see the contributions of several authors in Zhang and Cassany 2019, p. 622).

#### 4.2. Voice-over

Another interesting audiovisual translation modality from the point of view of linguistic diversity is the voice-over, where the translation can be heard over the original voice,

except for at the beginning (and often at the end) of each unit, where only the original voice is heard (Matamala 2019, p. 110). Since the original soundtrack is not removed, but a voice recording with the translation is added, this modality draws attention to the language used by the speaker.

This mode is often used in Western countries to translate documentaries or other non-fiction content. Recently, we’ve even found platforms that offer experimental content, products from hybrid genres, using this translation mode: this is the case of *Couples Therapy* (Showtime, 2019), a documentary series featuring a therapist and four real couples. In Eastern European countries, however, the audience is used to seeing films with Voice-over in the cinema; far from being used for languages with a small number of speakers, Voice-over are common even for languages such as Russian, with more than 270 million speakers today.

#### 4.3. Audio description

Audio description is an audiovisual translation modality consisting of translating images into words, that is, transferring visual elements—and also certain sound elements that are difficult to understand without images—into sound linguistic elements (Matamala 2019, p. 199). Therefore, it is an intersemiotic translation mode, traditionally addressed to persons with visual disabilities who do not have access to the images in the audiovisual text. It is becoming more and more common to find audio described audiovisual products both on television and VOD platforms. At the time of writing this article, Netflix Spain offers around 150 titles with audio description<sup>16</sup> and

16.- The list includes a total of 162 titles. Nevertheless, an analysis of each of the titles on the list reveals that not all titles labelled as audio described in fact include an audio description available. Also, in many cases, we find audio descriptions in English, or other languages, but not in Spanish; the example in Table 1 includes audio description in Danish.



Movistar+ offers 40<sup>17</sup>. It is likely that the number of audio descriptions in Spanish will increase in the near future, given that last June 26 Spain's Ministry of Culture and Sports approved Order CUD/582/2020, according to which the concession of public subsidies to Spanish films will entail the necessary inclusion of universal accessibility measures, including audio description<sup>18</sup>.

Audio description is included in this article because this translation modality also has an impact on persons with visual disabilities accessing products in different languages. Most commonly, audio description of foreign products is based on the dubbed version and added to it, so that the final product is a monolingual film or series in the target language. Equally, for copyright reasons, it is common that VOD platforms only offer the audio described version in the language of the country the film is released in —this is the case, for example, of Movistar+ in Spain. So, it is not possible for a blind user of this platform to watch a North-American series in English with audio description that provides them with access to the content: they must choose if they prefer to listen to the original soundtrack (without audio description) or have access to the visual content of the audiovisual text (consuming the entire product, including the audio description, in Spanish).

Another relevant aspect regarding linguistic diversity and audio description is that, usually, this translation mode includes audio subtitles that translate possible third languages present in the audiovisual products (see section 5). There is a recent case in the series *Les de l'hoquei* [*The Hockey Girls*] (Brutal Media, 2019), in which Florencia, a character played by actor Asia Ortega speaks Argentinian Spanish and *Pela*, a character played by actor Xúlio Abonjo, speaks Spanish, in contrast with the rest of the characters in the series, who, except in some cases when they address these two characters, speak Catalan. In the original soundtrack this contrast in languages is easily perceived: no Spanish variant is marked, while when other languages are introduced in the series, such as Portuguese, these languages are subtitled (see Figure 1, where, in the version without subtitles, a chat conversation in Portuguese has Catalan subtitles). In the audio description in Catalan published on Televisió de Catalunya and Netflix, however, audio subtitles have been used to translate the interventions of the Spanish-speaking characters (for example, the sentence *No ho sap ni la meva mare* [Not even my mum knows] in episode 6, has the following audio subtitles: *No ho sap ni la meva mare*), in a voice over the original actors' voices, which means that the audio description user does not have the same access to language diversity as users of the original Catalan version.

Finally, we want to mention that in countries with a large amount of dialects, such as China, audio description is essentially offered in Standard Chinese and most audio describers are volunteers with no specific training (Tor-Carroggio and Casas-Tost 2020). Thus, they are countries where understanding and access to audiovisual products may be compromised for sections of the population without a good command of this language variant.

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#### 4.4. Sign language interpreting

As Matamala (2019, pp. 155-156) explains, interpreting audiovisual content can take

17.- It is important to emphasise that users of this platform can only consume audio described products through the TV, and not through mobile devices, a situation that involves a clear restriction to access.

18.- <<https://www.boe.es/eli/es/o/2020/06/26/cud582/dof/spa/pdf>> [25.08.2020].

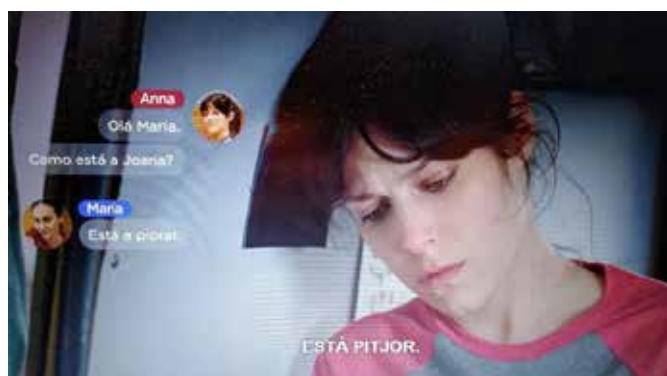


Figure 1. Catalan subtitles of a sequence in Portuguese from a series shot in Catalan, on the Netflix platform.

place in several ways, mainly between two oral languages (for example, simultaneous interpreting of an interview on TV from English into Catalan) or between an oral language and a sign language. Here we want to briefly focus on this second kind of interpreting, particularly on the cases of Spanish and Catalan sign language and their presence on current platforms.

Spanish sign language is used by around 100,000 sign language users and Catalan sign language, by 25,000. They are co-official languages in Spain and, in accordance with current legislation, it is common to find content with sign language interpreting on TV, such as the news. In the case of entertainment products, however, film productions shot entirely in sign language are very rare — abroad, the Ukrainian drama *The Tribe* (Slaboshpytskiy, 2014), featuring a young deaf man, is an exception—; sign language users often have to resort to interpreting services if they want to consume entertainment products in their mother tongue or language of learning.

For now, large platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime or HBO do not offer this interpreting service. Movistar+ currently offers 242 titles in Spanish sign language: although a reception study with users should be carried out

to validate this intuition, a positive aspect of this platform is that the interpreter takes up a large part of the screen in proportion to the product interpreted and without a specific window, so that they do not seem like a completely independent element but are well integrated into the product and have a predominant role —see Figure 2 for an example taken from the series *Merlí: Sapere Aude* (Movistar+, 2019)—. In previous reception studies, users have expressed that the size of the interpreter is the parameter they consider most important to ensure the product's accessibility (Bosch-Baliarda et al. 2020, p. 114).

Matamala (2019, p. 158) points out the rather reduced amount of entertainment products available with Catalan sign language interpreting: for now, we have the specific WebVisual TV portal. The author mentions the Whatscine accessibility application, which offers the possibility of including sign language interpreting, as a potential solution to increase the number of products available in Catalan sign language. However, specific portals promoted in Catalonia that want to spread the Catalan language, such as Filmin, do not offer any Catalan sign language interpreting.

## 5. MULTILINGUAL AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTS

In section 4.3 we spoke of Florencia's case, a fictional Argentinian Spanish-speaking character that appears in a series shot in Catalan. In a context where, as we've already mentioned, audiovisual creators seek to make the actions they narrate authentic, the representation of immigrants who speak different languages to the series or film's main language is common. In our global world, indeed, people are constantly on the move, and scriptwriters have expressed that they

resort to linguistic diversity intentionally, for social engagement and to create stories that the audience experiences as authentic (de Higes Andino 2014). Thus, we are in a complex situation: while most original audiovisual products use two or three production languages, we continue to believe that linguistic diversity is attractive to the audience and, after all, a reflection of our reality.

Research projects Trafilm and MUFITAVI<sup>19</sup>, led by the Pompeu Fabra University (Barcelona), have delved into the presence of so-called third languages in audiovisual products and the solutions adopted by audiovisual translation to reflect them (or not) in the translated texts. This research is based on previous contributions on the representation of “the other” in televised fiction, such as those by Bleichenbacher (2008, 2012), who analysed the functions of foreign languages in Hollywood films and revealed how, oftentimes, characters representing third-language speakers were highly stereotyped with negative connotations, similar to those observed when commenting on accents that deviate from standard American English in section 2.2—in fact, foreign accents can easily be studied from the perspective of third languages—.

More recent studies have established the main functions of third languages in the products we consume: they are used to portray characters, to underline stereotypes, to reinforce arguments, to make some scenes more dramatic (for example if a character does not understand what’s being said in an emergency) and with comical purposes, among others (Corrius et al. 2020). If we take the series *Dexter* (Showtime, 2006), set in Miami, as an example, where some characters resort to alternating between Spanish and English,



Figure 2. Spanish sign language interpreting on the Movistar+ platform.

the use of Spanish fulfils several of these purposes: some of the characters that speak it are portrayed as more eccentric through other elements beyond language, such as the way they dress. See, in Figure 3, an image of police officers Maria LaGuerta and Angel Battista (who are Spanish-speaking in the series), who wear animal and floral prints, in contrast with the image of two police officers who speak North-American English, wearing a dark shirt and a blazer.

Despite the idea that third languages seem to open the door to the presence of lesser-known languages, the Trafilm project database, which currently includes a corpus with 129 titles—116 of which have English as their main language—, shows us again that the most spoken European languages and the Latin American variant of Spanish are the ones that tend to appear most often in audiovisual products. Table 2 shows a summary of the languages present in the films in this database. Although Trafilm also analyses made up languages, such as *par-seltongue* in the *Harry Potter* saga, those have not been included here. Sign languages have been clustered together because the database does not provide the specific name in all cases.

19.- See the following website for information on these two projects: <<http://trafilm.net/>> [27.08.2020].



Figure 3. Clichéd characters in the series *Dexter* (Showtime, 2016). On the left, two Spanish-speaking characters; on the right, two characters who speak North-American English.

French	75	Russian	3
Spanish	63	Turkish	2
English	32	Portuguese	2
Italian	24	Polish	2
German	18	Urdu	1
Sign language	13	Gujarati	1
Japanese	11	Ukrainian	1
Arabic	6	Latin	1
Hmong	6	Catalan	1
Chinese	5	Hebrew	1
Hindi	4	Greek	1
Hungarian	3	Czech	1
Swedish	3		

Table 2. Presence of third languages in titles included in the *Trafilm* database (the result summary is the author's own).

From the point of view of translation, the last aspect worth mentioning is that English is usually used as a bridge language when an audiovisual product contains minority languages (Santamaria 2020, p. 180). This again reveals the ubiquity of the English language in the audiovisual world and how it can shape the messages that are transferred in languages from around the world.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This article has offered a panoramic view of issues connected to the linguistic diversity of the entertainment products that we consume, with a particular focus on audiovisual translation as a mediator of these products. We've seen that the TV suggests artificial language models that may, in the long run, put an end to each language's own linguistic variants, that we are facing a clear cultural colonisation through North-American products and the options available, especially on VOD platforms, to enjoy content in different languages.

It is true that the current situation of English and North-American products dominating the market may not seem very thrilling for linguistic diversity, but, as argued by linguist Murphy (2017), it is the best time to customise our experience of content as much as possible and, more importantly, create new content. Current technology allows us to experience an exchange and not just receive content. This article has reported about fansubbing communities, which China now sees as the "heroes" of communication. There are exciting initiatives creating content for minority languages —personal

initiatives, like the one promoted by Hugo Ruiz, with entertainment content in Guarani<sup>20</sup> and institutional initiatives, like in the case of China, where for the last 60 years audiovisual translation projects are developed in languages such as Uyghur or Kazakh to satisfy the entertainment needs of ethnic minorities (Jin and Gambier 2018, p. 28)—. Catalan users are active on social media to get emerging platforms to offer dubbing in Catalan<sup>21</sup> and even create specific, socially-committed platforms.<sup>22</sup> The trend for audiovisual creators to offer content in third languages can largely help raise awareness about marginalised languages. Outside of mainstream circuits, we find film festivals featuring productions from around the world. Given the demand, platforms offer more and more accessibility services, and we are starting to see entertainment in sign language. It is definitely a key moment that empowers us to make decisions as users: what do we want to see? And in which language?

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