



UNIVERSIDAD DE SALAMANCA

FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA

GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES

Trabajo de Fin de Grado

Identity Traces in the Subtitling of Films

A Qualitative Study of Children Movies

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Signature

ABSTRACT:

This research deals with identity and interculturality in the subtitling of children films (English to Spanish and vice-versa). The hypothesis is that although there will be no major changes between the original and the subtitled version, some differences can be perceived, for example in the case of idioms. The methodology used is a qualitative approach: thematic analysis. The results sections is subdivided into idiomatic expressions and intercultural/identity ones. In both the conclusion is that although there are very similar translations, others show little to no connection. The research is concluded stating that there is more work that can be done when translating correctly. These errors or differences when translating are most often due to the identity and interculturality of each country.

KEYWORDS:

Subtitling, children films, idiomatic expressions, identity, interculturality

RESUMEN:

Esta investigación aborda el tema de los problemas de identidad e interculturalidad al subtitular películas infantiles (de inglés a español y viceversa). La hipótesis es que, si bien no habrá grandes cambios, se pueden percibir algunas diferencias, por ejemplo, en el caso de las expresiones idiomáticas. La metodología utilizada es un enfoque cualitativo: análisis temático. La sección de resultados se subdivide en expresiones idiomáticas e interculturales/identitarias. En ambos casos, la conclusión es que, aunque hay traducciones muy parecidas, otras tienen poca o ninguna conexión. La investigación se concluye afirmando que hay más trabajo que se puede hacer a la hora de traducir correctamente.

PALABRAS CLAVE:

Subtitular, películas infantiles, expresiones idiomáticas, identidad, interculturalidad

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1. Introduction: aim, justification and methodology

1.1. Introduction

This project deals with identity and interculturality when it comes to subtitling movies from English to Spanish and vice-versa. It focuses mainly on children Pixar films. The study aims to analyse in what ways differences, marked by identity and/or intercultural factors, occur in the subtitles. The first part comprises the literature review and the methodology used in the research (qualitative). The next part centers on the results of the analysis which are subdivided into idiomatic expressions and identity and intercultural expressions. The last part, discusses the results and compares them with other studies examined in the literature review.

1.2. Literature Review

1.2.1. Identity and Subtitling

The subtitling and dubbing of films may not seem important to many and this is nothing to blame since, in principle, badly translated sentences may look as much less important than many other issues that worry us nowadays. However, behind the seeming innocence of badly translated sentences, language does affect our understanding of cultural identity. In connection to the above, Nedergaard-Larsen (2010) states in her research that language and culture are closely interrelated and that in subtitling this may cause problems in rendering culture-specific or language-specific elements. The author focuses on strategies to confront this “problem” such as verbatim transfer via culturally neutral explicitation and paraphrasing, among others. In the same line, Kapsaskis (2008) argued that subtitles have a defamiliarizing effect on all audiences, even those who are accustomed to them, but they are necessary to naturalize the foreign.

On a similar token, Hamaida (2007) focuses on the treatment of slang and dialects in films subtitling to conclude that subtitling all the films into standard language could lead to the loss of meaning and a decrease in the audience’s level of comprehension: “the use of dialect can provide specific clues to the identity and personality of a person” (Hamaida, 2007, pp.1). The author affirms that one of the most important aspects of a film is the characterization and the character’s use of dialect and slang since it contributes to consolidating his/her identity. Thus, the character’s linguistic repertoire and behaviour significantly contributes to one of the most important aims of films: the identification (or hereby lack of it) of the audience with a given character. Consequently, “emptying out”

film characters of their linguistic identities will lead to a significant loss in the identification function of films. In the same line with Hamaida (2007), Wurm (2007) affirms that while the spoken form reveals character and identity through dialect, the written one is standardized.

On this note, Yau (2013) suggests that subtitles should be read as practice that provides possibilities for the shaping of identity and also, signals that the subtitler is an active agent in altering the power relations inscribed in cultural representations (*traduttore, traditore*). Therefore, it is suggested that the subtitler is the one that shapes identity and interculturality in films. However, it is common knowledge that this is a highly problematic issue.

Taken to our context, one of the problems that frequently arises is if one word or sentence that makes sense in English has not got an equivalent translation in Spanish, for example as Zojer (2011) shows in his study. There are problems of (un)translatability due to technical restrictions such as cultural references for which no similar items exist in the target culture (Zojer, 2011). The problematic becomes very acute in the case of idioms, for example.

All the above-mentioned studies focus on subtitling and dubbing of films in relation to identity and multiculturalism, both in reference to the characters of these films and to the audience. Similarly, they tackle the problems in the subtitling and dubbing practice, mostly related to the rendering of culture-specific or language specific-elements, which scholars tried to solve through different strategies.

In the following section, we will focus on the issue of subtitling in relation to a particular genre: children films, with the aim to shed light on how cultural identities are maintained, adapted, or neglected in subtitling from English to Spanish and vice-versa.

1.2.2. Identity and Subtitling in Children Films

Identity in subtitling is often associated with 'adult' films. That is, films that are more cultured or classic. But as demonstrated in Liang's (2019) study, problems of identity in subtitling can also be seen in children films. This phenomenon has not been sufficiently studied in relation to this age range.

In her study, Liang (2019) uses Harry Potter films to illustrate that the translation from the book to the film differs considerably due to its childish-like use of languages. Also, the author affirms that in children films language must vary because literal information that appears in the books could be of difficult understanding at a certain age (Liang, 2019).

Moreover, the identity of the characters should change so that children feel represented by them.

In a similar vein, Al-Jabri (2010) makes a distinction between the strategy of dubbing, which is mainly target-oriented language (a language into which another language is to be translated) and the subtitling one, which is source-language oriented (a language other than one's native language that is being learnt). He supported this by data derived from three Disney cartoons dubbed and subtitled from English into Arabic. It is well known that Walt Disney Cartoons are famous all over the world and are translated and shown either in dubbed or subtitled versions in different languages (Al-Jabri, 2010). In his research, the author analyses subtitling in cartoons and in children films as Liang (2010) but with the difference that Al-Jabri (2010) seeks to also examine the translation strategies adopted by Arabic translators in rendering culture-specific items, particularly proper names: "personal-names represent a real challenge for professional translators and interpreters and require particular attention from researchers working in the field of translation studies, as personal names represent a stumbling block to translation in their different text types" (Al-Jabri, 2010: 3).

Moreover, other studies have demonstrated that learning languages through subtitles from TV series is a way of teaching informal language besides the academic one (Frumuselu et al., 2015). The authors discussed the reason why English subtitles are, for example, more effective than Spanish subtitles for vocabulary learning. Furthermore, this can be related to Hamaida's (2007) research since both approach slang and dialects are mainly concerned with informal language. This is related to children language since when they are young, they acquire languages in an informal way in the sense that they do it through dialogue with family and friends and through films and in both cases slang and dialect are used. Not only that, but it also helps with the understanding of interculturality and the different identities of the characters.

From all the above, we can conclude that identity and subtitling in films is a topic that has been thoroughly studied. However, regarding children films, more research is needed. The present study aims to fill this gap. In particular, it explores the subtitling practice of selected children films from English to Spanish and from Spanish to English. Therefore, the following research question is raised: How subtitles of children films, (from English to Spanish and vice-versa) deal with questions of identity and interculturality?

1.3. Research Methodology

This section is concerned with the methodology used in the data collection and analysis. It includes relevant information in relation to the research design, the data collection method, and its management and analysis.

Qualitative methods

The films were analysed in a qualitative way (exploratory research and subjective nature) and in particular through thematic analysis. This involved coding all the data before identifying broad themes and patterns and also, connecting them to their social context. Regarding thematic analysis, the research is both deductive and inductive since it goes from a general reasoning to a concrete fact, in this case to concrete examples and a theory is obtained through observation. The same methodology was followed in other similar studies such as the one by Hsieh & Shannon (2005) about three approaches to qualitative content analysis and the research by Al-Jabri (2010).

Research design

The research design employed in the present study is descriptive research. It is defined as a research method that describes the differences between a film in a given language and its subtitles in another language (in our case – English films and their subtitles in Spanish and vice-versa). The primary data were collected by the researcher (a native speaker of Spanish and a highly-proficient speaker of English) by means of visualizing the films and a subsequent analysis of the subtitles.

Research Approach/ Strategy

The study of subtitling as a culturally and politically significant mode of translation involves a pluri-disciplinary approach drawing from film and translation studies, as well as from aesthetic, political, and social theory (Kapsaskis, 2008). In this research project, a qualitative approach is used for its flexible and subjective nature. This is such due to the fact that the findings and results need long explanations and answers.

Data collection

This study relies on data that comes from 5 children films. In particular, it is focused on the Spanish and English subtitles of each of the five movies. However, due to the contrastive nature of the project, the original version of the films will be used in order to be able to tackle both parallelisms and differences related to identity issues in the translation.

Films for Children

The five children films selected as data for the analysis are: *Coco* (2017), *Luca* (2021), *Red* (2022), *Toy Story 3* (2010) and *Klaus* (2019). These movies were chosen with the rationale that they depict multiculturalism and identity in a clear way while raising curiosity about the border between countries in subtitling practice (Liang, 2019).

2. Results

This chapter sets out the results of the analysis. The chapter is subdivided into two sections which correspond to: 1) idiomatic expressions and 2) identity and intercultural expressions. As the present study has adopted an interpretive approach, numbers are used only for quantifying broad themes that have been identified.

2.1. Idiomatic Expressions in Children Films

The expressions that stand out the most are idioms. Firstly, in films with Spanish subtitles, well-known idioms are used. In the case of *Coco*, there are two idioms. The first one “Through and through” refers to a shoemaker, whose translation is “Hasta la médula”. Although they have slightly different connotations, both end up meaning the same: “to the depths of being”. The other idiom in this film, as seen in Table I in Spanish is “Estás en boca de todos” which in English is “You are all anyone has been talking about”. They end up meaning the same as well, but by using this well-known idiom, interculturality and identity appeared since it is an expression typically used in Spain, and the subtitler needed an important amount of intercultural and identity-related knowledge in order to convey the desired meaning in the translation.

| FILM | English (original) | Spanish (subtitles) |
|-------------|---|---------------------------|
| <i>Coco</i> | You are all anyone has been talking about | Estás en boca de todos |
| <i>Luca</i> | Take that Bruno | Chúpate esa |
| <i>Red</i> | You throw us under the bus | Nos hiciste pagar el pato |

Table I: Contrastive table of idiomatic expressions (Spanish subtitles)

Comparing *Coco* with the film *Luca*, it can be noticed that in the latter, there are less idioms. In fact, the only one that appears is the one in Table I and in Caption I: “Take that Bruno” whose translation is “Chúpate esa”. The meaning may be similar but the translation into Spanish is more colloquial.



Caption I: Translation of the idiomatic expression “chúpate esa”

Red is the example with the highest number of idioms that are also more frequently used in everyday life in a colloquial way. The first one is one of the best known: “This would be a piece of cake” meaning “Será facilísimo”. In relation to the second idiom: “I’ve done you a favour keeping my mouth shut” whose translation is “Te he hecho un favor cerrando el pico”, despite the fact that the meaning is the same, this expression in Spanish is popular and it is used when someone does not stop talking and, in some way, “pico” instead of “mouth” implies negative connotations in this case. Instead of this expression,

the translation could have been “Te he hecho un favor cerrando la boca” or “Te he hecho un favor manteniéndome callado”. Finally, as it can be seen in Table I, there is one relevant idiom in both Spanish and English that is “You throw us under the bus” whose translation is “Nos hiciste pagar el pato”. The meaning is “to do something harmful to someone else in order to gain an advantage for yourself” and in Spanish it is “to indicate that you are taking the blame and punishment for something you have not done or did not deserve”. In this case, there is a slight difference since in English you gain an advantage for yourself and in Spanish this is not intended. Moreover, despite the two expressions having a similar meaning, in English the word “bus” is used while in Spanish the word “pato” was chosen.

Comparing these three films with *Toy Story 3* and *Klaus*, in Spanish and with subtitles in English, there are striking similarities with the three English films. In the case of *Toy Story 3*, three relevant idioms are used. The first one is “Era muy arriesgada” whose subtitles are “Was a long shot” and the second one is “No es el gallo más listo (cómo se llama) lo de las gallinas” whose translation in English is “He ain’t the sharper knife in the place where they keep the knives”. Both of them refer to lack of intelligence. The difference lies simply in the expressions themselves, as they are both totally different but the translation job in this case is accurate. The third idiomatic expression can be seen in Table II: “Un fiasco anunciado” whose translation is “More like a misfire”. Here, a slight difference in meaning can be noticed, since “fiasco” and “misfire” do not mean exactly the same in that particular situation. In this case, the translation should be: “An announced fiasco”.

| FILM | Spanish (original) | English (subtitles) |
|--------------------|---------------------------|--|
| <i>Toy Story 3</i> | Un fiasco anunciado | More like a misfire |
| <i>Klaus</i> | Más lento que un caracol | Oh, I guess that’s why they call it “snail mail” |

Table II: Contrastive table of idiomatic expressions (English subtitles)

In *Klaus* the first idiom is “Qué mala pata”, “Darn, oh, darn” in the English subtitles. This expression in Spanish is used when something is done really bad and the translation of the English expression could be “maldición”. The second one is “Más lento que un caracol” whose translation is “Oh, I guess that’s why they call it ‘snail mail’”. Here there is a clear difference. While in the Spanish expression the comparison with the “caracol”

is used, in English the comparison is made with the “snail mail”. That is the ordinary postal system as opposed to email.

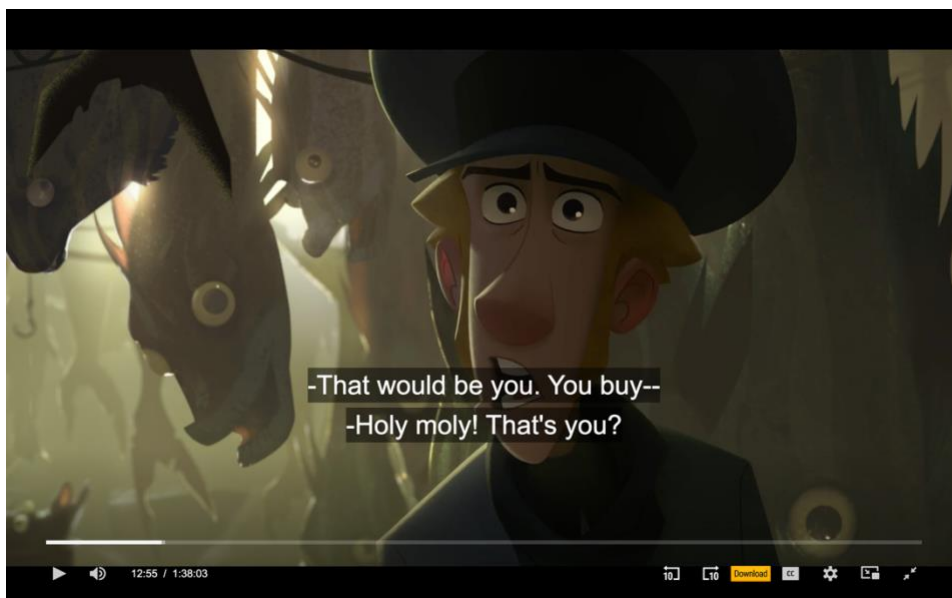
2.2. Identity and Intercultural Expressions in Children Films

The other element to highlight in relation to identity are intercultural expressions. There are more examples of these since they are more frequent than idioms. In *Coco* there is one example: “Like you just did” whose translation is “Como usted”. In Spanish, “usted” is almost never used in informal situations, the pronoun “you” is used instead. In this case, therefore, it must be taken into account that this film is from the Mexican culture since it is very common there to use the “usted” as default treatment towards other people. Apart from this, there are other slight differences. For example “I must follow my heart” whose translation is “Yo sigo mi corazón”. It is curious that when this expression is translated into Spanish, it loses the “must” obligation. The suggestion for the translation would be “Yo debo seguir mi corazón”. In *Luca*, the examples are mainly related to morning greetings. In English, instead of saying “Buenísimos días”, they say “Great sunshine”. In both cases these expressions are used in a metaphorical way in the film since they are in a bad mood, with the purpose of showing that they are not well. The other one is “Good morning” whose translation is “Buenas”. In Spanish the expression is completely colloquial. Therefore, with this film, it can be seen how these expressions of greeting changed a lot depending on the country. While in English, the expression is in some way “normal”, in Spanish the expression is more colloquial, to the point that you would not use it but within your social circle. In the third film, *Red*, an intercultural expression is “Sleep time” whose translation is “Duerme bien”. The Spanish expression includes an affectionate connotation. The other one is more related to vocabulary, that is the difference lies almost exclusively in the most important noun of the sentence/expression, as seen in Caption II: “You are your own girl” whose translation is “Eres nuestra colegui”. It also includes, as in the previous one, a connotation of affection and trust and also more colloquial than only saying “girl”. What can be intuited from here is that the Spanish translation is done more closely, since it is a word used within your social circle, and colloquially.



Caption II: Translation of the intercultural expression “colegui”

Comparing the English films with *Klaus* and *Toy Story 3*, similarities can be found. In *Klaus* there are three expressions to highlight. The first one can be seen in Caption III: “Toma ya” whose translation is “Holy moly!” This expression means “Santo Dios”. In English it is normally “Holy shit”, but it is less offensive this way. What can be said is that maybe they translated it into a less offensive way because it is a children film and for that young audience it is better to hedge the expression.



Caption III: Translation of the intercultural expression “Holy moly”

The second one is related to vocabulary. This means that the relevant difference between one translation and another is mostly related to the most important noun in the sentence. The difference with other types of translations is for example that in the previous ones there are changes practically in the entire sentence. An example can be seen in Caption IV: “Cielito”, in English subtitles “Pumpkin”. These are two different ways of affectionately referring to someone. “Cielito” is a typical one in Spanish while “Pumpkin” is typical in English. The difference is that the English one uses a vegetable name. The last one is “Pequeños granujas”, “You rotten vermin!”. The difference lies in the word “vermin” (people who are unpleasant and harmful for society) which is much more offensive than “granujas”. The most suitable translation here is the Spanish one since it is less offensive, thinking of the audience that are children. So, from this, it can be elicited that when translating into English the vocabulary is slightly more aggressive than in Spanish, at least in the case of these movies.



Caption IV: Translation of the intercultural expression “pumpkin”

In *Toy Story*, two expressions stand out. The first one is, “Chicos” which is translated into “Fellas”, a much more colloquial way of calling a group. The other one is “A que es d́iver” whose translation is “It changes every time”. This is the expression that changes the most since it seems that they have no relationship with each other. The expression in Spanish is in accordance with what is happening since an action scene was taking place. A translation in English could have been “We are having fun” even if there are slight differences. In this film, one of the most interesting moments is when they restart one of

the main toys, Buzz, and he starts to imitate 'el andaluz'. Subtitles are not used; he only speaks with that accent and in the subtitles appears "speaking in Spanish". From this, it can be seen that Andalusian is understood as a variety of Spanish and for this reason it is not subtitled. As a suggestion, it should be subtitled like the rest of the film and to point it out, they could have added that it is Andalusian Spanish.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter aims to summarize the key findings and link them to the initial research question. As a reminder to the reader, the research question that this project attempted to answer is how subtitles of children films, from English to Spanish and vice-versa deal with questions of identity and interculturality?

As seen in the literature review, Hamaida (2007) focuses on the treatment of slang and dialects in films subtitling: "the use of dialect can provide specific clues to the identity and personality of a person" (Hamaida, 2007, pp.1). The results corroborate the presence of this identity and personality. For example, in the expression "Take that Bruno" whose translation is "Chúpate esa". Moreover, this colloquial translation in *Luca* brings the character closer to the audience and makes it more likeable.

Yau (2013) suggested that the subtitler is the one that shapes identity and interculturality in films. However, it is common knowledge that this is a highly problematic issue. The results support Yau's (2003) suggestion, such as in the case of *Toy Story* "A que es dÍver" whose translation is "It changes every time". The suggestion proposed in the results is "We are having fun". Here is a clear example of the problematic of the subtitler being the shaper of identity since he/she is the one who has to take intercultural issues into account.

Another problem that arises in this research, as in Zojer's (2011) study, is if one word or sentence that makes sense in English has not got an equivalent translation in Spanish. These problems are due to technical restrictions such as cultural references for which no similar items exist in the target culture (Zojer, 2011), mostly in the case of idioms. The results prove the case of the idiom: "You throw us under the bus" in the film *Red* whose translation is "Nos hiciste pagar el pato".

In relation to authors whose research is focused on the subtitling of children films, Liang (2019) shows that problems of identity in subtitling are only related with 'adult' films but this project proves that it is present in children films, too. In addition to the above examples, another difference is related to vocabulary such as in *Red* and *Klaus*. In the

first one it is exemplified in the expression, “You are your own girl” whose translation is “Eres nuestra colegui”. It also includes, as in the previous one, a connotation of affection and trust and it is also more colloquial than only saying “girl”. What can be intuited from here is that when translating into Spanish, it is done more closely (the word is more used in social circles) and colloquially. In the second one, “Pequeños granujas”, “You rotten vermin!”, the difference lies in the word “vermin” (people who are unpleasant and harmful for society) which is much more offensive than “granujas”. The most suitable translation here is the Spanish one since it is less offensive thinking of the audience that are children. So, from this it can be understood that when translating from Spanish to English the vocabulary is slightly more aggressive than in Spanish, at least in the case of these movies.

Thus, results of this study corroborate that problems with subtitling appear in children films and not only in “adult” ones.

In this sense, this research project could be applied to the didactics of languages (concerns about the differences between one language and another, for example in relation to vocabulary), didactics of identity (concerns about interculturality and identity for example in places such as high schools), didactics of how to subtitle, etc. These results shed light on the difficulty to subtitle films whether being children or ‘adult’ ones. Further research will be needed not only by analysing children films from English to Spanish and vice-versa but also by examining other languages and other film genres.

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5. Appendices

5.1. Appendix 1 – Research Instrument

Name:

Year:

Original language:

Summary of the movie:

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| Context/minute | | | |
| Cultural (identity-related) expression in English | | | |
| Translation in Spanish | | | |
| Difference (1 to 5) | | | |
| Interpretation | | | |
| Suggestions for translation | | | |
| Is the translation related to the same intercultural/identity related aspect or to a different one? SAME /DIFFERENT | | | |
| Is it an idiomatic expression? | | | |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| Cultural issues that interfered with the translation | | | |
|--|--|--|--|

