

CULTURE-BOUND ASPECTS IN SUBTITLING OF ANIMATED FILMS. *TALES OF THE NIGHT OF M. OCELOT*

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1. Introduction

This paper is a preliminary work that comes from the interest aroused in subtitling as a conveying element and as cultural transfer content. As Katan (1999: 241) observes “The heart of the mediator’s task is not to translate texts, but to translate cultures”, this statement would fit to the filmic translation by means of subtitles. Nevertheless, the need to synthesize the message of the original text in the available space forces us, in turn, to accept a wide concept of what “translation cultures“ is, following the definition that Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007:200) support for culture-bound aspects in audiovisual translation:

“Culture-bound terms are extralinguistic references to items that are tied up with a country’s culture, history, or geography, and tend therefore to pose serious translation challenges [...] In short, cinema’s cultural diversity presents translators with a world of challenges”.

Subtitling involves attraction as field of investigation so much for the Sciences of Communication as also for Translation Studies. Its increasing social and economic importance¹ as well as the impulse received by means of different legislative initiatives² as well as the recommendations on the part of the European Union have created a frame for a powerful development of subtitling in a nearby future.

In our contribution, we will analyze translation strategies from French into Spanish in an animated film *Tales of the Night* of the well known French director and creator of *Kirikou*. We will focus particularly on the translation of culture-bound aspects that need for specific translation treatment in the case of subtitling. We will finally establish some hypotheses on the possible reception of culture-bound aspects in Spanish children audience.

2. Theoretical background: Defining cultural aspects in AVT

The cultural aspects have received different denominations throughout the time. This way, Nida already in 1945 speaks about *cultural foreign words*, term that Newmark (1988/1992) re-uses with a light modification: *cultural words*. In 1970, Vlachov and Florin coin the term *realia* to refer to realities strongly associated with a specific culture, term which has been used also by other authors like Coseriu. A wider concept, nevertheless, reflects the denomination *cultural references* that Foreman (1992) uses since it does not limit itself to the lexicon culturally marked, but it allows to include symbols, icons, gestures, etc. Leppihalme (1997) keeps on extending the diversity of denominations when introducing *culture bumps*. As well as Mayoral and Muñoz (1997) that they could even be labeled as *culturally marked segments*. Another labelling is *cultureme*, introduced already in the year 1958 by Oskaa, followed by Vermeer (1983), Nord (1997) and Hurtado Albir (2001). In her article dedicated to cultural references and subtitling, Nedergaard-Larsen (1993:211) refers to cultural references and proposes four main headings: references to geography, history, society, and culture. Ramière (2004) distinguishes among extralinguistical, historical and socio-cultural references. Finally, Vandeweghe (2005) states geographical, ethnographic and socio-political references. Within translation studies, many scholars have given classifications for culture-bound aspects that follow a common general progression from the most exoticising to the most domesticating following the Venuti's taxonomy (1995). However, as Ramière (2006: 153) points out these contributions have to be revisited because: "Most of the research work on culture-specific material has been carried out in the context of textual translation (Ivir, 1987; Florin, 1993; Newmark, 1995; Franco Aixelá, 1996; Mailhac, 1996; Kwiecinski, 2001; Olk, 2001) [...] Scholars themselves do not agree on the number of procedures available to translators, or on how to label them." This is the reason why the audiovisual approach is indispensable: Tomasziewicz (2001) and Santamaría Guinot (2001b), dedicate to cultural aspects in subtitling. More recently, the work of Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007) label *culture-bound terms* and provide with an operative classification of translation strategies that we will adopt in the present study.

After these comments made from a theoretical point of view, we will pose the question to whom such subtitles could serve.

3. Subtitling animated films for children or adults?

Animated films are generally created for children. However, we might think about two main target groups: a) those children whose linguistic skills in the second language their parents or teachers want to improve and b) the adults.

The subtitles should only offer the essential information, especially in the children programs, so that their length does not hinder the process of comprehension. All this just confirms that,

“As well as about children who must improve the mastery of the second language. In spite of being a complex communication - since different codes are implied (iconic, linguistic, paralinguistic, etc.), that is why it should be more complicated for children to process such information-, there exist, however, studies that consider subtitling to be positive for the learning of languages.”

According to Caimi (2006:89-90)

“The importance of the educational dimension is evident when we consider the function that subtitled multimedia products have in our societies. [...] people have an opportunity to improve their vocabulary and oral reading fluency. Children, who on average spend over thirty hours a week watching TV, can also improve their reading as well as their language and vocabulary skills significantly.”

This way, Karamitroglou refers to some works that defend subtitling as a way of support for the acquisition of the reading skill, although it is true that it requires a greater concentration and the diversification of the attention focusing it in the visual, acoustic and written level at the same time and, therefore, major effort (cf. Gottlieb 1994: 102 and Karamitroglou 1996: 35), which can result in a rejection on the part of the child. This is the main reason why dubbing is so widely spread in animated features. Gottlieb (2001: 201) remarks that it is the case of “productions like the “classic” Disney feature-length animated films (including later DVD versions) from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* back in 1937 to *Tarzan* in 1999”. Nevertheless, it has been stated that in the countries in which the public is used to subtitling instead of dubbing (as, for example, Greece, Portugal and the Scandinavian countries) this does not suppose an additional cognitive load, for what it is possible to presume that children would also adapt to diversify their attention (2001: 191).

On the other hand, Van de Poel and d'Ydewalle, resting on studies of recordings of the ocular movement, affirm that the reading of subtitles is an automatic process that the reader usually makes with enough skill with no influence of the level of knowledge of the language or the habit of reading subtitles (2001: 260) and they conclude: "Since both subtitles (in the native language) and sound-track (in the foreign language) are processed almost in parallel, there may be language acquisition in such a context" (ibid.). They also support that children from 8 years are capable of processing subtitles in a way comparable to that of adults, but the authors emphasize that the linguistic acquisition is limited to the lexical acquisition since grammar is too complex to be acquired this way (ibid.).

Nevertheless, there does not exist unanimity among researchers as far as if original version with subtitle in the language of the target public or version dubbed with subtitles in the foreign language (reversed subtitling) is the one that presents major advantages for the acquisition of the second language: whereas Karamitroglou defends the subtitles in the foreign language (2001: 191), Van de Poel and d'Ydewalle make a distinction according to the public (adults or children) based on their experiments:

“With adults, the reversed subtitling mode (with foreign language in the subtitles and the native language in the sound-track) results in more vocabulary acquisition than does the normal subtitling mode [...]: More new words are acquired when they are presented visually than auditorily, independently of the visual or auditory nature of the test. Consistent with former research showing that reading subtitles is automatic and mandatory [...], d'Ydewalle and Pavakanun (1997) stated that the processing of the subtitles is the major activity, explaining the better processing of the foreign language in the reversed subtitling mode. The present study with children gives another picture: When there is a significant difference between the experimental conditions, it is always to the advantage of the condition with the foreign language in the sound-track (i.e., the normal subtitling mode).” (Van de Poel and d'Ydewalle 2001: 260).

To sum up, we will conclude that the age, the education and the sociocultural level of the audience are very important factors. Luyken (1991) argues that, in Europe, it seems that there is a generalised tendency for the youngest audience to prefer subtitling, perhaps due to the extended plurilingualism. He also points out that with the translation modality of subtitling, one can best appreciate the original product and, obviously, the foreign language and culture.

Animated films are originally made for an audience of one culture and language community. Directors and writers of the original storyboard make certain assumptions about the audience that share a common background (Whitman, 2001: 147). The problem with animated series is that, as we have seen before, there are two groups of target public that probably share the same common background: children and adults but at a different level of understanding. The subtitling of animated series usually raises a special situation: in general, there are many colloquial texts that include slang, jokes, puns, interjections, pet phrases and culture-bound items shared by children and young people. The animated film that we have chosen *Tales of the Night* of the French director Michel Ocelot includes most of the issues mentioned.

4. A case study *Tales of the night*

In the present study, we will analyse the subtitled version from French into Spanish of one of the tales: *Ti Jean et la Belle sans connaître* (*John John and beauty Not Knowing*).

Now, we will focus on translation strategies for culture-bound terms in subtitling. As stated above, the analytical and theoretical framework of our analysis is based in Díaz Cintas and Remael classification (2007: 200-207).

4.1 Transposition

The most frequently used translation strategy found is transposition: “A cultural concept from one culture is replaced by a cultural concept from another” (ibid, 204) belonging to the target audience. For instance, “Grand hachoir/gran cuchilla”.

4.2. Calque or Literal translation

This is the second translation strategy in rendering culture-bound terms. As Diaz and Remael (2007:202) state “it is a literal translation” with minimum changes. For instance, For example, “petit costume simple et sympa” becomes “trajecillo sencillo y bonito”.

4.3. Explication

It is the third more frequent translation strategy: “the subtitler tries to make the source text more accessible by meeting the target audience” (ibid, 203)
Most culture-bound terms require an explicative translation of semantic or pragmatic meaning to make it accessible to the target audience. We have found a few examples, as follows: “Beaux madras/bonitos **vestidos** madras” and “Mancenilliers/manzanillas **de la muerte**”.

Sometimes, the culture-bound reference that is explained requires that the viewers have some previous knowledge: These two culture-bound terms make more sense if the audience knows the traditions of the Caribbean people and the plants that grow there.

Translating culture-bound terms clearly means more than understanding the source language and culture, the translator must have “the ability to contextualize the language within the cultural norms and expectations of the target language users” (Valverde Zambrana, 1997:250).

The culture-bound references to literature, art and cinema, or intertextual references, are frequent and often better solved with subtitling (Rodríguez Espinosa, 2001:234).

4.4. Cultural adaptation

According to Chaume (2004 based in B. Gutiérrez, 2005), there are 3 types:

4.4.1. Limited universalization, i.e., substitution of cultural reference for another one belonging to the same culture, but accessible for the target audience. For instance: “accent de chez nous, mon compère”/”acento caribeño, compadre”.

4.4.2. Absolute universalization i.e., substitution of cultural reference for another neutral one, not culture-bound, or for its meaning. For instance: “Biguine/canción”; “Doudou/novia”.

4.4.3. Cultural substitution or naturalization, i.e., substitution for a reference belonging to the target culture. For instance: “Va-nu-pieds/pilluelo descalzo”.

4.5. Generalisation

Here are a few but representative examples: “Les Antilles”/”caribeño”; “Féroce/ensalada” (with description: “préparé par ma mère avec de la morue, des avocats et beaucoup de piments”/”hecho por mi madre con bacalao, aguacate y mucho pimienta”).

4.6. Loan

As a translation strategy for culture-bound terms that appears in a lesser degree: loan is defined as, “the source text word or phrase is incorporated into the target language and text, because no translation is possible and both languages use the exact same word” (ibid:202). It is the case of proper names “Fleurs de Datura/flores de las Daturas”

5. Conclusions

In this study, we followed a descriptive study of an animated film subtitled from French into Spanish. The analysis illustrates, however, the challenge of translating culture-bound aspects in subtitling.

The results of this short study show that the translation strategies are target-oriented: the subtitles are made accessible through frequent transpositions,

explicitations and calques. Although the audience sometimes need previous knowledge of the culture-bound reference, in general, subtitles relay the target audience expectations, as regards culture-bound aspects. Inevitably, the results highlight that sociocultural representations and translation strategies are closely bound (Santamaria Guinot, 2001a:161).

Besides, the potential of subtitling for improving children's knowledge of foreign language and culture could be exploited to encourage tolerance and respect towards other cultures (cf. Díaz Cintas, 2001:48), as well as to make them be conscious from early ages how and why they are different from each other. Much more information could be acquired by children on the story they are watching and listening to animated series or films through subtitling, and a deeper understanding of the foreign language and culture could be achieved if the translation did not hide the cultural diversity.

8. Notes

1. In June, 2009 it was passed the Draft of the Audiovisual General Law that stipulates that "people with hearing impairment have the right by which the audiovisual television communication, open and through state or autonomic coverage, subtitles 75 % of the programs and provides at least with two hours a week of interpretation with language of signs" (General Law of the Audiovisual Communication of 2009, Art. 7.2). In public channels this percentage reaches up to 90%, and it is established that such percentages be reached by the year 2013. This new rule will have obviously a great repercussion on the demand of subtitling.

2. Among them it is necessary to name, apart from the mentioned General Law of the Audiovisual Communication of 2009, the 27/2007 Law, from October 23, by which the Spanish languages of signs are regulated as well as the means of support to the oral communication of deaf, impaired, and deafblind people, and in which subtitling is established as a fundamental right of people with hearing disabilities, the creation of the Spanish Center of Subtitling and Audiodescripción.

In addition there must be mentioned the following laws involved in the encouragement of subtitling as way of accessibility: Law 34/2002 on Services of the Society of Information and Electronic Commerce (July, 2002), Law 32/2003 General of Telecommunications (November, 2003), Law 51/2003 of Equality of Opportunities, Not discrimination and Universal Accessibility of People with Disability (December, 2003), Law 27/2007 by which the Spanish languages of signs are regulated as well as the means of support to the oral communication of deaf, impaired, and deaf blind people (October, 2007), Law 30/2007 of Contracts of the Public Sector (October, 2007), Royal decree 1494/2007 by which the Regulation is approved on the basic conditions for the access of people with disability to technologies, products and services related to the society of the information and media of social communication (November, 2007), Law 56/2007 of Encouragement Measures of the Society of the Information (December, 2007) and Law 49/2007 by that there is established the system of infractions and sanctions (December, 2007).

3. [http:// es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serie_animada_de_Batman](http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serie_animada_de_Batman)

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