

Dubbing into Catalan

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- *Dubbing into Catalan started with Televisió de Catalunya and with the distinctive feature of introducing a recruitment process for some of the professionals involved in dubbing. Since its creation, this chain has gradually developed tools to help with translation. The article reviews each of the tasks associated with the dubbing process and focuses on the subordination of translated scripts to the original language. In the case of Catalan, it is also necessary to overcome subordination to Spanish dubbing, both in linguistic and cultural terms.*

Keywords

Translation for dubbing, dubbing process, subordinate translation, linguistic subordination, cultural subordination.

1. The process of dubbing into Catalan

When discussing dubbing, we must refer to the whole chain of professionals involved in the dubbing process and, as with any other group activity, the closer the relationship between these professionals, the better the outcome. This assertion can be applied to dubbing into any language in the world but, in the case of Catalan, we must also mention the model of the dubbing process chosen by Televisió de Catalunya.

The new aspect was the direct recruitment of a large number of the people involved in dubbing and supervising the translations offered to the public. Over the years, in-house tools have been created of great help to all professionals involved in dubbing, tools that are now also available to the general public as they are now freely available on the Internet.¹ This whole structure of Televisió de Catalunya has also been transferred to dubbing for the big screen. It is therefore sometimes surprising to see a difference between the dubbing for TV3 and that for feature films, when both have been carried out from start to finish by the same professionals.

The results have shown the success of choosing an innovative dubbing process for the reasons we shall present below. Let us therefore start by explaining the role of the translator in the dubbing translation process.

To be able to translate, audiovisual translators inevitably need the script and the image of the product to be translated. Several years ago translators worked with videotapes (first Betamax and then VHS) but they now receive the images on digital video files, sent by the studio or downloaded by the translator from an FTP site. The studio used to pro-

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¹ These can be consulted on the website <<http://esadir.cat>>.

vide printed scripts but now it's no longer necessary to work on paper and Word or PDF files are much more convenient and efficient. Consequently, we translators save time in travelling but are increasingly more isolated from the studios and the rest of the professionals involved.

Another novelty are the functions of the translators. Although translators used to just translate the text and didn't adapt it,² people now realise that getting the same person to do both tasks improves the final product and it seems that the profession in Catalan is tending towards this approach.³ The reason why the final quality of the dubbing is increased is evident: while the translator-adaptor knows the original language and the translated language, the training for adaptors does not ensure knowledge of either the final language or specific knowledge of translation.⁴

Once the translator has translated the original text or has translated and adapted it, it is sent on to the dubbing studio where it is formatted and sent to the linguist.

Formatting is when the dialogues are divided into takes, i.e. into units of a certain number of lines (no more than ten). Takes are used to call together the dubbing actors and are the segments used to organise the studio dubbing. Films or series are not dubbed correlatively: takes are grouped to facilitate the work of the actors. In other words, if an actor appears at the beginning and end of a film, their takes are grouped together so that they only have to come to the studio once. This means that the actors involved in the dubbing, and particularly supporting actors, don't usually know the plot of the film they're dubbing and the director is responsible for explaining the role they have to act and their character's features.

Introducing a linguist⁵ into this process is really the great novelty established by dubbing into Catalan. The linguist doesn't only act as a corrector of the text but also unifies general criteria for Catalan dubbing, makes sure the style and

tone of the translation are the most appropriate for the product being dubbed and, finally, advises and supervises the actors throughout the dubbing process. Their role is particularly important in series as, given their duration and broadcast dates, they require more than one translator. It is evident that linguists thereby improve dubbing quality, as they are responsible for making sure there are no incoherencies in the formal and informal modes of address ("tu" and "vostè" in Catalan) among the different characters, in the names of characters, locations where the action takes place, cultural elements that may be referred to in the series, etc. For example, in a cartoon series, if a group of children often need to repeat a certain joke, such as doing a "wedgie" (translated into Catalan as a "tibada de calçotets") to their friends, the linguist will be responsible for making sure no-one says "tibada" in one episode and "estirada" in another.

Once corrected, the script is sent to the director, who is in charge of sorting out the cast of actors for the dubbing. He or she is responsible for finding not only good actors for the roles they have to take on but also actors with a good level of Catalan. Televisió de Catalunya does not do voice tests but many are carried out by feature film production companies. In this case, the director proposes four or five actors for the role and the producers choose the most appropriate actors. It should be noted, however, that as the representatives from the production company do not speak Catalan, this choice is based on artistic criteria rather than language skills, making the director's role even more important.

In the Catalan dubbing world, we can find professionals who carry out more than one function: translators who are also adaptors, adaptors who are also linguists and directors who are also adaptors. There are even translators who, in addition to adaptors, are linguists. In any case, TV3 recommends that at least two people should be involved in

2 Adapting is the process of lip-synching or altering the translated text so that it coincides as far as possible with the lip movement of the original actors, always taking pace, duration and gesture into account.

3 This is also the system adopted by the Balearic channel IB3 for the series it dubs into Catalan.

4 I even think that, at some point, TV3 has considered carrying out tests on adaptors' skills, as already carried out for translators.

5 The linguist's task is not limited to a linguistic correction of the text and is very similar to that of studio supervisor, a job we shall define later on.

translating a text; i.e. if a translator is also an adaptor and linguist, he or she can only take on two of these jobs and the third will have to be given to another professional. Normally, if someone has translated and adapted the original text, another linguist revises it.

The actors' language skill is another factor than can affect the final text. For example, if, in a film such as *Shrek*, an actor does not know how to pronounce correctly the translation of the Kingdom of Far Far Away as "Lluny Lluny Enllà" in Catalan, instead of changing an actor who has already been approved by the production company, the translation might have to be changed. Of course, it goes without saying that this was not the case here.

Finally, especially in big budget feature films, supervisors from the production company and sound studio supervisors can also be involved. The former, if they don't know Catalan, which is more than likely, might require a back translation, literal and annotated, from the Catalan version into the original language, to make sure the translation of the script matches the original version.⁶

In short, the ultimate responsibility of a non-adaptor translator concerning a text that is heard once the film has been edited is very small, and he or she is merely the first link in a long chain. In fact, from a legal point of view, the translator earns about one third of the broadcasting rights for an audiovisual product, while the adaptor earns two thirds.

2. Subordination in dubbing

Dubbing is translation characterised by being subordinate to the image. The translation must be coherent with what is seen on the screen or what the characters are doing, and there may be series or episodes that cannot be translated, because what is seen is too far removed from the target for the translation. For example, if we have an English children's series where children are told how to resolve pro-

blems of arithmetic and elementary mathematics, using a point for decimals instead of a comma (as is the case in Catalan), this series would not be of much educational use for Catalan children.

Below, we would also like to mention the subordination of Catalan dubbing to linguistic and cultural elements of the original language (English in most cases) and of Spanish.

2.1. Subordination to the original language

Original scripts contain various kinds of formality. Not all characters are the same age, nor do they live in the same towns or cities or in the same neighbourhoods, nor are they all from the present day. Let's look at a few examples.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien makes each group of characters speak in a different way. While the Elves are refined, the Hobbits have a more folksy language and the Dwarves are a little rougher. A good translation must therefore distinguish linguistically between these groups.

Similarly, in *Shrek III* there are words reminiscent of Shakespeare's English. So although it is a children's film, we have to look for words with a similar meaning for our viewers.

In a children's product such as *Rugrats* (*Quatre grapes*, in the Catalan TV series),⁷ the children's language in the programme was totally standard to ensure that young viewers would have no problems in understanding. It's evident that, if they had been real children, there would have been grammatical and phonetic errors. A good translation must therefore respect the standard of the original.

In general, the original characters do not speak like ordinary people, nor like the models they represent. A seven-year-old does not speak like a seven-year-old and even less so in cartoons, where they often have adult conversations using adult vocabulary, to such a degree that a dubbing actor aged seven does not understand the sentences he or she has to perform because they do not come from his or her age group.

6 For example, if we have put "això és bufar i fer ampolles" for the Catalan translation, in the back translation we would say "this is to blow and make bottles", explaining, in English, that the translation uses a Catalan expression that means something is very easy.

7 I would just like to say here that translators never decide the title of a film for the big screen. The decision is always taken by the production company and is based on commercial criteria rather than linguistic. With regard to programmes commissioned by TV3, it is the channel that decides the titles, which normally coincide with the titles in the Spanish version.

In other series, even children can use educated registers. An example can be seen in the children's series *Jacob Two-Two*, where two children aged between seven and ten talk about their school and everything going on there. One comments that the school is improving and the other agrees but insists that strange things are going on there. Then the first says:

"I hope they stay strange then, because I'm really enjoying the cottony soft bathroom tissue. Those old phone book pages were too abrasive and that can lead to redness, swelling and walking funny. I think the medical term is baboon bottom."

It's obvious that no Catalan child would talk like that if we translate it literally, but neither would an English child. Concessions must be made in the dubbing. In addition to reproducing the language level of the original, the audience's expectations must also be respected.

There are also films that we might originally feel are aimed at children but which we then realise are not as child-oriented as we thought. I'm referring to feature films, such as those from the Disney factory, where the studio is not only interested in satisfying children but also tries to catch the attention of the parents who are, ultimately, the ones who take their children to the cinema. To this end they include certain idioms, expressions and puns that only adults can understand.

Without forgetting cartoons, the TV series *Hoobs* created its own language, similar to the expressions invented in the *Smurfs* comic (*Schtroumpfs* in the original French and *Barrufets* in Catalan). A few years ago, the Catalan translator of the *Smurfs* decided to make the name sound more Catalan and created the corresponding verb. In other words, if in French the *Schtroumpfs* usually "*schtroumpfen*", in Catalan the *Barrufets* "*barrufen*". A few years later, the translation of the *Hoobs* went only half the way. The name of this group of characters was kept in English and the verb

caught on, although it was conjugated in Catalan as a regular verb. In short, the *Hoobs* "*hubiegen*" in Catalan.

This example, which has linguistic consequences, is the result of a financial imposition. The merchandising associated with feature films in the Anglo-Saxon world conditions the subsequent translations into various languages. Selling all kinds of children's products and dolls is as important as ensuring the cartoons are seen the world over.

This is not a unique example. The character of Mumble Happy Feet from *Happy Feet*, the characters in *Robots*, etc. have all kept their English names in the dubbed versions, although these had a very specific meaning in the original scripts, a meaning that was sometimes even used for word play in the films.

At one point in the film *Robots*, the main character, Rodney Copperbottom (Copperbottom can be translated into Catalan as 'Cul d'aram') is introduced to Aunt Fanny, a woman with an enormous bottom. Surprised by what he sees, when she asks him his name, Rodney replies: "*I'm Rodney Bigbottom. No, I'm n-- I'm Rodney Copperbottom. Copperbottom*". In other words, if in Catalan we have to keep the name Rodney Copperbottom and cannot use *Culdaram*, it's clear that the joke is lost.

In the past, characters' names in children's stories and literature used to be translated into other languages. Hence Cinderella became "Ventafocs", Sleeping Beauty became "Bella Dorment", Little Red Riding Hood "Caputxeta Vermella", etc. However, now the situation is quite different and we accept characters names from such stories and literature in the original language, especially English, as our own.

On the other hand, the fact that films are dubbed into increasingly more languages⁸ has led to North American studios controlling the dubbing translation even more strictly.⁹ This interventionism has become yet another pitfall for translators.

In an extreme case, a translator might even be asked to change the translation because the word in the target language sounds offensive in the original language, as in the

8 It's true that there are countries where subtitles are used a lot, but not as often as people suggest. Films such as *Shrek* have been dubbed into more than thirty different languages, among these Finnish, Swedish, Danish, Icelandic, Slovene, Greek, Portuguese, etc. and these countries are dubbing more and more, especially for children's productions.

9 And the other dubbing processes as well, such as mixing, voice tests, etc.

following case. In a children's production, it was suggested the word "secs" (dry), referring to some trees, should be changed due to its resemblance to the English word "sex". In another production, the translator was asked about the meaning of "foc" (fire) because it sounded too much like the English word "fuck",¹⁰ or the film *Meet the Robinsons*, when the translators were forced to keep the 's' on the surname of the protagonists in the title, although surnames have no plural form in Catalan or Spanish.¹¹

Songs don't escape such interventionism either. As they generate royalties, sometimes they are translated in the original country. This was the case of the film *Madagascar* and the song "Happy Birthday". Although in Catalan the best-known version is "Moltes felicitats" and also "Per molts anys, per molts anys", the approved version, sent directly from the United States, said "Aniversari feliç", a direct translation of the best-known version in Spanish. Heaven and earth had to be moved to change it.

2.2. Subordination to Spanish

This type of subordination is inevitably experienced by all languages that share territory with another dominant language. We shall see some examples of this that reflect a situation not so very different to the subordination suffered by Catalan with regard to Anglo-Saxon productions.

Let's analyse what Spanish dubbing is like:

1. It's a flat language, everyone speaks the same and a kind of "dubbing Spanish" has been created, which contains expressions that are not used in any other context, for example insults such as "majadero", "hijo de perra", or even some products such as "zarparrilla", which would be very difficult to find in a Spanish market.
2. An intonation has been created that is not repeated in

any other context. The very same dubbing actors speak differently when they act in the theatre.

This language in Spanish is not only fictitious but often also implausible. A selection of expressions that can be heard in Spanish dubbing but would be highly unlikely in real life would include phrases such as "tengo que ausentarme tres horas" (literally "I have to be absent for three hours") on the lips of a construction worker.¹²

These examples show us that our reference cannot be Spanish but must be the original language. This, which seems evident, is often not so clear when there are still a quite a few people who tend to compare the Catalan and Spanish versions and to consider Spanish as a quasi-original language.¹³ We can still find an audience that is loyal to Spanish dubbing, that has assimilated these linguistic transgressions and considers them normal and that even believes that this kind of language is less artificial than what can be heard in Catalan dubbing.

It is nonetheless dangerous for Catalan dubbing to listen to these voices and to include these features.

This linguistic subordination to the majority language has resulted in complaints, for example the refined way in which the Elves speak in Catalan in *The Lord of the Rings* compared with the Spanish version (some people have said that "the Elves are easier to understand in Spanish"), although the Catalan version was more faithful to the original English. There have also been complaints because dubbing includes expressions that are not heard everyday on the streets of Barcelona, although these phrases are perfectly current in other parts of the Catalan-speaking region (the use of "xic" instead of "una mica"), as well as complaints because linguistic reductionism has not been carried out in children's

¹⁰ These first two cases are extreme and could be considered anecdotal, but they do show what levels intervention can reach on the part of the studio supervisor.

¹¹ Notwithstanding this, in no way do I wish to criticise the role of supervisors in the dubbing process. In ninety percent of the cases, they are highly trained, expert professionals who clearly improve the final result.

¹² For more examples, consult <<http://www.network54.com/Forum/184486/message/1182872710/Argot+i+renecs>>.

¹³ It's curious to note that, in series or feature films that have been dubbed into Catalan before they were dubbed into Spanish, the opposite happens and the audience usually believes that the Catalan version is better than the Spanish. Good examples of this are *Shin Chan* and *Doraemon*.

productions, although the original includes standard language (translating “a guy who gives evil a bad name” with “un malo muy malo” (a very, very bad man), instead of “un home que era un descàredit per als dolents”), and complaints because a word closer to the Spanish has been considered as preferable and more easily understandable when a choice can be made between two synonyms, which perhaps are not actually quite so synonymous: *parlar/enraonar*, *pensar/rumiar*, *mirar/badar*, *perseguir/empaitar*, *tapar/acotxar*, *guardar/ desar*, etc.

There is also cultural subordination with regard to Spanish. Present-day dubbing tends to choose *star talents*¹⁴ as dubbing actors. Lately we have seen famous people dub fictional characters, especially in cartoon films, and not just comedians such as Cruz y Raya in *Shrek* or Carlos Latre in *Garfield* who, although not dubbing actors, do have some connection with the world of theatre, but also celebrities who have no such connection at all, such as Fernando Alonso (a racing driver) in *Cars* or Ferran Adrià (a chef) in *Ratatouille*. In these cases, the studio believes that these celebrities can become an added value, an added value that, in principle, is not applied in the Catalan versions.¹⁵ I must add, however, that there are also discordant voices that question this practice in dubbing.

3. Conclusions

Catalan dubbing started out with the desire to create its own style but is conditioned by the supposed expectations of an audience used to Spanish dubbing. Within this context, the work of dubbing professionals must please both the viewers and the studios that have generated the originals.

We need to call for an independent path for Catalan dubbing, as audiences will get increasingly used to these products the more these products can reach them (I particularly mean the number of cinemas we can get to show films in Catalan).

For some time now, the supervisors sent by film studios from the United States say that Catalan dubbing is of a very high quality, often better than the Spanish. Now we only need to believe this and be brave enough to continue with an approach that has allowed us to achieve very good dubbing. If the different people that are responsible for protecting and encouraging this dubbing, and also those who are responsible for making dubbing in Catalan more dignified and popular among audiences in Catalonia, know how to carry out such an undertaking and are firmly committed to doing so, then this might help us in our task.

¹⁴ Star talents are characters who appear everyday on the media and who the studio believes can add a commercial edge to the dubbing.

¹⁵ There are "honourable exceptions" to this and, recently, Ferran Adrià also dubbed the Catalan version of *Ratatouille*.