

Romero Fresco, P. (2006). The Spanish Dubbese: A Case of (Un)idiomatic Friends. *The Journal of Specialised Translation*, 6, 134-151. <https://doi.org/10.26034/cm.jostrans.2006.744>

This article is published under a *Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International* (CC BY):  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>



© Pablo Romero Fresco, 2006

## **The Spanish Dubbese: A Case of (Un)idiomatic *Friends***

**Pablo Romero Fresco**  
**Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, UK**

### ABSTRACT

The language used in dubbing has often been described as contrived, stilted and, in general, unidiomatic. This paper sets out to study phraseological translation as a parameter to assess the idiomaticity of the Spanish dubbing language. The corpus analysed consists of a number of transcripts of the aired episodes of the American TV series *Friends* and their dubbed versions in Spanish. The article offers both a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the corpus under study. Finally, it provides a description of the unidiomatic features detected in the dubbed text as well as a tentative explanation of their origin.

### KEYWORDS

Dubbing, dubbese, idiomaticity, phraseological idiomaticity, phraseological unit, audiovisual translation

### BIOGRAPHY

Pablo Romero Fresco is currently a second-year PhD student at Heriot Watt University (Edinburgh), where he teaches Spanish Literature and Written Composition, Business and Society in Spain and Liaison Interpreting. His PhD thesis deals with the idiomaticity of the Spanish dubbing language and is partly funded by the Galician research institute Fundación Pedro Barrié de la Maza.

E-mail: [pr27@hw.ac.uk](mailto:pr27@hw.ac.uk)

## **1. Introduction**

Over the past ten years, there have been several publications on the peculiarity of the Spanish language used in dubbing, especially with English as a source language (Castro Roig, 1997; Fontcubierta i Gel, 2001). Most authors working on this subject agree that there is such thing as a Spanish dubbing language and that it sometimes sounds stilted and contrived. Different terms such as fiction register (Dolç and Santamaria, 1998: 102), dubbing genre (Palencia Villa, 2002: 66), and even audiovisual translationese (Chaume, 2004: 175) have been used to describe this phenomenon, but it seems that the term dubbese, applied among others by Chiaro (2005) to the Italian dubbing language, is gradually consolidating itself, even though the features of dubbese may differ across languages.

In spite of the importance of dubbing in Spain and recent scholarly calls for the need to carry out research on Spanish dubbese (Díaz Cintas, 2004: 24; Chaume, 2004:151), literature on this subject is still scarce. Besides, most authors seem to adopt the same approach: if the Spanish used in dubbing sounds contrived, it must be due to the influence of the source text and the source language (Duro, 2001; Gómez Capuz, 2001), thus limiting their scope to the analysis of calques and Anglicisms.

Spanish dubbese is approached in this article from a broader perspective. Given that it is often described as unnatural or unidiomatic, this study focuses precisely on its idiomaticity (or lack of it), which is not necessarily restricted to the analysis of calques and Anglicisms.

The term idiomaticity, or rather the adjective idiomatic, is usually included in dictionaries with at least the following two meanings, both of which will be used throughout this article:

- a) “[use of language that] sounds natural to native speakers of that language” (Sinclair, 1995: 833), hereafter idiomatic / idiomaticity.
- b) “given to or marked by the use of idioms” (Onions, 1964: 952), hereafter phraseologically idiomatic / phraseological idiomaticity.

The objective of this study is to use phraseological idiomaticity as a parameter to assess the idiomaticity of the Spanish language used in dubbing; in other words, to see how the translation of phraseology affects the overall idiomaticity of the Spanish dubbing language.

Considering that the presence of this Spanish dubbese is a hypothesis, as it may or may not exist in a given text/film, this article attempts to answer the following questions: Can any dubbese be found in the corpus under study? What does it consist of? Can it be accounted for from the point of view of phraseological translation?

## **2. The phraseological unit**

In order to analyse the phraseology used in a given text, some basic aspects regarding terminology and definition must be addressed, namely what are the units to be analysed and how can they be best defined. Different terms, such as idiom (Cowie, 1983), set phrase (Winter, 1992) or phraseme (Mel’cuk *et al.* 1995) are often used to refer to the object of study in this field. Each of them is defined according to specific criteria, thus leading to broader (Makkai, 1972; Moon, 1998) or narrower (Fernando and Flavell, 1981) definitions and views.

The approach chosen for this study is that of Gläser (1998: 125), who defines the term phraseological unit (PU) in the following manner:

a more or less lexicalized, reproducible billexemic or polylexemic word group in common use, which has syntactic and semantic stability, may be idiomatized, may carry connotations, and may have an emphatic or intensifying function in a text.

In Gläser’s view, phraseological idiomaticity is not only characterised by multiple criteria but also by the extent to which these criteria are present in PUs. For example, idiomaticity (the meaning of the parts is different

from that of the whole unit) may or may not be present. Although idioms are “the prototype of a set expression or phrase” (Gläser, 1988: 272), they are only one group within the whole phraseological system, which also contains non-idiomatised units. This definition certainly allows for the inclusion of phrasal verbs too, but they have been excluded from this study for the lack of space.

Gläser’s approach is especially appropriate for this study given its similarity to that of Corpas Pastor (2000: 484), a Spanish phraseologist who describes *unidades fraseológicas* as:

Combinaciones estables formadas por al menos dos palabras y cuyo límite superior se sitúa en la oración compuesta. Se caracterizan por la alta frecuencia de aparición en la lengua y de coaparición de sus elementos integrantes, así como la institucionalización, la estabilidad, la idiomatización y la variación potencial que dichas unidades presentan en diverso grado.

[Stable word groups formed by at least two words and whose upper limit is the complex sentence. They are characterised by their high occurrence in language and by the co-occurrence of their constituents, as well as by institutionalisation, stability, idiomatization and potential variation to a different extent.] (my translation)

However, it must be said that even adopting Gläser’s and Corpas Pastor’s approaches to identify PUs in English and Spanish (along with their phraseological models), the distinction between these units and certain non-phraseological elements is by no means a clear-cut one. Therefore, although each and every PU found in this corpus has been carefully considered, the pertinence of the inclusion of some of them has been, and still is, open to discussion.

After having established both the name and the definition of the units to be analysed, it may be interesting to take up the initial distinction between the two meanings of the adjective *idiomatic*. Indeed, given that PUs are characteristically lexicalised (Gläser, 1998) and institutionalised (Moon, 1998) – i.e. recognised and accepted as lexical items of a particular language (Bauer, 1983: 48) – they may also be regarded as idiomatic in the first sense mentioned above: natural and peculiar to a given language. It is for this reason that the translation of phraseology has been chosen as a parameter to assess the idiomatization of the Spanish language used in dubbing. Despite being different concepts, phraseological idiomatization and idiomatization are very much related, although whether this is a cause-effect relationship still needs to be assessed. In the case under study, for example, does the use of PUs necessarily make the source text (ST) or the target text (TT) more idiomatic? The quantitative and qualitative analysis of this corpus will hopefully throw some light on these complex questions.

### 3. The corpus under study

The parallel corpus chosen for this study consists of a number of transcripts of the aired episodes of the American TV series *Friends* and their dubbed versions in Spanish. One of the most successful sitcoms of all time, *Friends* focuses on the relationship of six twenty-something friends (Rachel, Ross, Monica, Phoebe, Joey, and Chandler) and their lives in New York, told over a period of 10 seasons between 1994 and 2004.

In this case, two different corpora, or rather two variations of the same corpus, have been used. Corpus 1 consists of episodes one, two and three of season four of the series (15,571 running words) and has been used to identify all PUs occurring in both the ST and the TT, thus involving a word-by-word analysis with little help from corpus software. Corpus 2 is considerably larger (329,440 words), as it is made up of the 48 episodes included in seasons one and four, and has been compiled to perform specific searches, as shown below in the findings about the ST.

### 4. Quantitative results

Table 1 presents the data obtained in the quantitative analysis of corpus 1. It shows, first of all, the total number of running words in every episode (E1, E2, and E3) both in the ST and the TT, including words that are not part of the dialogue, such as proper names (those of the characters) and titles (indications like commercial break, opening credits or the title of every episode).

The next figures correspond to the number of words in the actual dialogue, followed by the number of PUs (tokens) found in the corpus and its percentage with regard to the 'words in dialogue' in every episode. Finally, the types (each different PU) and the type-token ratio are also included.

Note that although the PUs in the corpus may contain more or fewer words, they are regarded as single items, i.e. tokens. Therefore, the percentage of tokens in one episode is only illustrative if it is compared to the percentages in other episodes, but no conclusions on the number of words contained in each PU can be drawn from these data.

**Table 1** General quantitative results

	E1		E2		E3	
	ST	TT	ST	TT	ST	TT
Number of words	2,595	2,573	2,595	2,435	2,771	2,602
Proper names	254	254	230	230	292	278
Titles	13	13	13	12	13	13
Words in dialogue	2,328	2,306	2,352	2,193	2,466	2,311
PUs (tokens)	77	92	70	74	70	84
PUs (tokens) %	3.31%	3.99%	2.98%	3.36%	2.84%	3.63%

PUs (types)	42	54	34	57	46	65
PUs (type-token ratio)	54.54	58.69	48.58	77.03	65.70	77.38

**Table 2** Most recurrent PUs in the different episodes.

	PU	E1	E2	E3	TOTAL
<b>ST</b>	you know	7	10	2	19
	oh my god	4	8	5	17
	I mean	9	4	2	15
	all right	8	4	3	15
	come on	1	5	5	11
	you know what	4	3	1	8
<b>TT</b>	de acuerdo	3	2	6	11
	(en) un momento	3	1	6	10
	de hecho	4	2	3	9
	sabes qué	4	3	1	8
	dios mío	3	4	1	8
	tener razón	3	5	0	8

At first glance, the most salient features of the results shown in tables 1 and 2 are that:

- There are more occurrences of PUs in the TT than in the ST (in every episode and overall).
- The type-token ratio is consistently higher in the TT than in the ST. In other words, not only does the TT feature more PUs but also more phraseological variation.

However, any rapid conclusion drawn from a mere look at these quantitative results is bound to be simplistic and flawed. The fact that, for example, 'anyway' (a non-PU) may be translated as *en fin* (a PU in Spanish) in a given constraint-free instance does not necessarily yield any interesting insight as far as translation is concerned. The TT features in this case one more PU than the ST, but this could well be due to the language system rather than to the translation process – in fact, *en fin* is probably the most common translation for 'anyway'.

The quantitative results presented above must therefore be taken with a pinch of salt, which does not mean that they are to be disregarded. On the contrary, they act as a reminder of the need to carry out a qualitative analysis in order to ascertain to what extent the above-mentioned increase in PUs in the TT is due to language systemic conventions, audiovisual constraints or other reasons. Most importantly, this qualitative analysis is essential to determine whether the increase in phraseological idiomaticity makes the TT more idiomatic than the ST.

## 5. The audiovisual text

One of the main factors that has been taken into account in the qualitative analysis of the corpus under study is its audiovisual nature. Like any other parallel corpus, it entails translation, but in this case it is a rather particular type of translation that deals with a very particular type of text, one in which communication takes place through two different channels – the visual and the acoustic channels (Delabastita, 1989: 196).

For this study, I have adopted Chaume's model (2004a) for the analysis of audiovisual texts from a translational viewpoint, as it is very comprehensive and takes into account the many different factors at play in such a complex type of translation. According to Chaume (2004b: 16), a model that attempts to account for all the elements that produce the meaning of an audiovisual text must include both "external factors (i.e. professional, historical, reception, communication, means of exhibition, etc.)" and other "general translation problems" that are usually mentioned in translation studies and therefore shared by all types of translation, namely "linguistic, contextual, pragmatic, cultural, etc., problems".

Chaume places special emphasis on those factors that are particular to the audiovisual text and to audiovisual translation. Like Delabastita, he regards the audiovisual text as a semiotic construct whose meaning, transmitted through the acoustic and the visual channels, is produced by the interaction of different codes. Every code is in turn made up of a number of signs that have a direct impact on the translator's task. Although Chaume (2004a: 305) distinguishes ten different codes for the analysis of an audiovisual text, only six of them have been applied in this study, and always, it must be noted, from the point of view of dubbing:

Transmitted through the acoustic channel:

- The linguistic code: it is different to that of other types of translation, since most audiovisual texts have been "written to be spoken as if not written" (Gregory and Carroll, 1978: 42). Although it may seem that these texts feature an oral discourse, they are actually a written discourse imitating the oral, and so this orality is not spontaneous, but planned, elaborated or, as Chaume puts it, "prefabricated" (2004: 170). The relationship between the written origin of the audiovisual text and its need to sound like speech is paramount when it comes to assessing the idiomaticity of both, the ST and the TT in this study.
- Paralinguistic codes: they include gestures, laughter, pauses, and primary qualities of the voice such as pitch and intonation.
- The music and special effects code: it includes soundtrack, songs, and special effects.
- The sound arrangement code: the sound can be diegetic (coming from the story space and made by, for example, characters or

objects in the film) or non-diegetic (coming from outside the story space, i.e. mood music or an off-screen narrator, if s/he is not a character in the film). It is important to note that diegetic sound can in turn be produced on- or off-screen, depending on whether the character who is speaking is visible or not. The voice of a character who is part of a scene but not visible at the time of speaking is known as voice out (Carmona, 1996: 107-109).

Transmitted through the visual channel:

- The planning code: there are different types of shots. In close-ups and extreme close-ups, the dubbing translator (usually the dialogue writer) must maintain the so-called lip synchrony, paying special attention to bilabial consonants and open vowels.
- Mobility codes: they include proxemic and kinetic signs as well as the screen characters' mouth articulation. Proxemics has to do both with the distance among the different characters and the distance between the characters and the camera. Kinesics refers to the characters' movements (nodding, for example), which require synchronisation with the linguistic code. Finally, mouth movements are important in order to maintain isochrony, that is, in attempting to reach an equivalent duration of ST and TT lines uttered by the characters on screen.

With his model, Chaume steers clear of the traditional consideration of dubbing as a matter of synchronising sounds, gestures, and meaning – what Fodor (1976) knows as phonetic synchrony, character synchrony, and content synchrony – and opts for what he himself describes as a cinematographic approach (2004c: 40), also adopted by Chaves (2000) and Bartrina (2001). In an attempt to bridge the gap between Translation Studies and Cinema Studies, these authors put the stress on the specificity of the audiovisual text, which lies in the fact that its overall meaning is provided by the sum of every code plus the extra meaning resulting from the interaction of all the codes (Chaume, 2004: 310). Dubbing is thus not only a matter of (achieving) synchronisation, nor is it about (overcoming) constraints, but about (achieving) the satisfactory interaction of the different audiovisual codes.

## **6. Qualitative analysis**

Since the limited length of this paper does not allow a detailed explanation of the qualitative analysis carried out in this study, I will offer here the main findings illustrated with relevant examples. Only scenes featuring occurrences of PUs are included, but the analysis spans other elements that may influence the translation of a given PU. As for the indications between brackets included in the dialogue, they are not part of the scripts but additions by the person who transcribed the episodes. I have decided

to maintain them because they can be helpful to understand the context of the scenes but they have not been taken into account in the quantitative or qualitative analysis.

I would also like to note that any reference to the translator is not actually a reference to one person, but to anybody involved in the dubbing of the ST, including the translator, the dialogue writer (in charge of the synchronisation and adaptation of the text provided by the translator), the dubbing director, and the dubbing actors. The TT that has been used is a transcript of the actual Spanish dialogue and therefore post-synchronised. In other words, it is the result of a number of decisions made by any of the above-mentioned professionals.

### 6.1. Findings about the ST

The overriding purpose of the ST (in more than 90% of the scenes) is comical, achieved by the interaction among the different codes of meaning. The three episodes under study are divided into several scenes, most of which finish with a punch line stressed by the sound of canned laughter. Some scenes have a build-up of canned laughter leading to a comic climax.

As far as the linguistic code is concerned, it is characterised first of all by the absence of strong swear words. There is, for example, not a single occurrence of common vulgar terms such as 'fuck', 'fucking', 'motherfucker', 'bastard', 'asshole' or 'shit' in the ST (not even in the ST of corpus 2, featuring 164,487 words). In spite of this 'restriction', the dialogue sounds fresh, natural, and idiomatic. This idiomaticity seems to be provided mainly by two factors: the swift and informal qualities of the language register, both of which apply to the PUs analysed in corpus 1.

The analysis of the ST shows that PUs are characteristically used in punch lines, after a build-up of canned laughter and before changes of scene and even commercial breaks. Out of 217 PUs found in the ST, 113 occur in punch lines (i.e. preceding canned laughter) and 59 constitute the actual punch line.

#### Example 1

Episode 1	TC: 20:29
Context: Rachel breaks up with Ross in front of their friends	
Rachel: <b>Y'know</b> , I can't believe I even thought of getting back together with you! We are so over!	
Ross: (starts to cry) <b>Fine by me!</b> ( <i>laughter 1</i> ) (he opens the door and traps Chandler behind it)	
Rachel: Oh, oh, and hey-hey-hey, those little spelling tips will come in handy when you're at home on Saturday nights playing <i>Scrabble</i> with Monica!	
Monica: Hey!	
Rachel: (to Monica) Sorry! ( <i>laughter 2</i> ) (to Ross) I just feel bad about all that sleep you're gonna miss wishing you were with me!	

Ross: Oh, no-no-no, don't you worry about me falling asleep. I still have your letter!  
*(laughter 3)*

Rachel: And hey! Just so you know, it's not that common! It doesn't happen to every guy! And it is a **big deal!**  
*(laughter 4)*

Chandler: I knew it!  
*(laughter 5)*  
*(closing credits)*

The PUs analysed in this scene (in bold) illustrate the features described in the above findings. 'Fine by me', for example, constitutes the first punch line of a scene that ends up on a comic climax after five instances of canned laughter, the fourth of which is caused by 'big deal', another PU. Besides, this is the last scene before the closing credits, of paramount importance as it is often intended to cause laughter and end the episode on a funny note. A number of non-linguistic signs also contribute to the creation of the comic effect: Ross wiping his eyes as if he was crying when uttering 'fine by me' (kinetic sign) or Rachel stressing her anger by screaming 'it is a big deal' with high-pitched intonation (paralinguistic sign). Thus, the different codes interact to create the comic effect, including, of course, the linguistic code, with the use of informal ('y'know', 'big deal') and snappy (the subject-less 'fine by me') PUs that make the dialogue very idiomatic.

## 6.2. Findings about audiovisual translation constraints

Canned laughter, part of the music and special effects code, and produced in 59 cases by the use of PUs in the ST, can be considered as another kind of audiovisual constraint for the translator. Although it is technically possible to edit it out, this does not seem to be a very common practice (Zabalbeascoa, 1996: 255). In the corpus under study, it has been maintained (with slightly lower volume) in the TT, thus conditioning the translator's choices if s/he is to fulfil the viewers' expectations of some kind of comic effect at that particular point in the programme. Díaz Cintas (2003: 44) describes subtitling as a case of "vulnerable translation", i.e. one that is subject to criticism on the part of the audience, as the co-existence of subtitle and original soundtrack enables the comparison between the ST and the TT. In this sense, an instance of canned laughter could also be considered as a case of vulnerable translation, as it is subject to criticism on the part of TT viewers: they may not have access to the ST, but they do expect a comic effect, regardless of whether the ST is actually funny or not. This situation shows that the constraints faced by the audiovisual translator surpass those included in the traditional classification of phonetic, character and content synchrony.

## 6.3. Findings about the translator's aim

The translator seems to intentionally add PUs that are not present in the ST, presumably in an attempt to make the TT more phraseologically idiomatic. S/he takes advantage of the different codes, whether visual (changes of shot) or acoustic (overlapping dialogues or cases of voice out), to introduce PUs. This addition strategy has been found in at least 11 scenes involving 15 PUs in the TT. In 12 of those 15 cases, it does not seem to have been motivated by language reasons or audiovisual constraints. Let us take a look at example 2:

### Example 2

Episode 3		TC: 19:21	
Context: Chandler walks into the coffee house to see his friends			
Chandler: Hello!		Chandler: ¡Hola!	
All: Hey!		All: ¡Hola!	
		Ross: ¡Hola! <b>¿Qué hay?</b>	

Chandler is greeted by his friends as he walks into the coffee house. The ST viewers can see all the characters except for Ross, who is not on screen but who also says 'Hey!' In the TT, everyone says *¡Hola!* but we can also hear Ross adding the PU *¿Qué hay?* [What's up?]. This seems to be a personal choice of the translator, who makes the most of the leeway provided by Ross' voice out to add phraseological idiomaticity and, given the register and meaning of *¿Qué hay?*, also makes the TT very idiomatic.

In at least 15 scenes involving 20 ST PUs, the translator introduces informal terms, mostly PUs, in the TT as in the following cases: the translation of 'to have sex with' as *tirarse a* [to shag] (episode 2); 'pretty much alone' as *yo solito* [on my tod] (episode 3); etc.

One of the recurrent features in the Spanish text is that the translator seems to strive for variation when dealing with frequent ST PUs in spite of possible audiovisual constraints. Here is an example of the second most used PU in the ST and its translations:

(episode 1)	oh my God	madre mía
	oh my God	dios mío
	my God	dios mío
	oh my God	dios mío
(episode 2)	oh my God	dios mío
	oh my God	por el amor de dios
	oh my God	dios mío
	oh my God	madre de dios
	oh my God	dios mío
	oh my God	dios mío
	oh my God	pero bueno, ¿y esto? (change of shot)
	oh my God	madre mía
(episode 3)	oh my God	qué alucine
	oh my God	dios mío
	oh my God	madre mía
	oh my God	qué desastre

oh my word

por el amor de dios

**Example 3**

Episode 3	TC: 05:49
Context: Monica realises that she has lost her fake nails while making a quiche for her mother	
Monica: <b>Oh my God.</b> Wait a minute, I had them when I put... <b>Oh my God!</b> It's in the quiche! <b>Oh My God!</b>	Monica: <b>Dios mío.</b> Un momento, la tenía cuando he puest... Oh <b>imadre mía!</b> ¡Está dentro de alguna quiche! ¡Qué desastre!

In a scene with no apparent medium constraints, the translator seems to avoid the repetition of the recurrent ST PU 'oh my God', which would not sound natural in Spanish, a language less incline to this type of repetition. It could then be argued that his/her purpose is not only to make the text more phraseologically idiomatic, as shown in example 2, but also (both in examples 2 and 3) more natural, more idiomatic and less repetitive.

**6.4. Findings about the TT**

The swiftness of the ST is occasionally lost in the TT, which appears to be more elaborated.

**Example 4**

Episode 1	TC: 19:43
Context: After hearing Ross yelling at Rachel in her bedroom, Chandler, Joey and Monica quickly decide to go to the coffee house	
Ross: (yelling from the bedroom) We were on a break! ( <i>laughter 1</i> ) [cut to Monica cleaning the floor in the kitchen] Chandler: (entering with Joey) (to Monica) Coffee house? Monica: <b>You bet.</b> ( <i>laughter 2</i> )	Ross: ¡Estábamos tomándonos un descanso! ( <i>laughter 1</i> )  Chandler: ¿Bajamos al café?  Monica: <b>Desde luego.</b> ( <i>laughter 2</i> )

In this scene, the ST has a clear comic purpose, partly achieved by an idiomatic use of the language, as shown by an informal and nimble PU that constitutes a punch line in an example of build-up canned laughter. The TT, however, turns a clipped question ('coffee house?') into an ordinary one (*¿Bajamos al café?* [Shall we go down to the coffee house?]) and a quick and informal PU ('you bet') into a more formal one (*desde luego* [Of course!]). The swiftness of the ST is lost, although it could have been maintained with other solutions, not necessarily PUs: *venga* [off we go], *vamos* [let's go] or *pitando* [chop-chop].

There is ample evidence of a shift in register: in at least 12 scenes involving 17 TT PUs, the TT seems to be more formal than the ST.

**Example 5**

Episode 2		TC: 20:34	
Context: Joey's furniture has been stolen, and so Ross is offering him one of his sofas			
Ross: Oh! Y'know, I've got an extra futon.		Ross: Oh! Por cierto, tengo un futón <b>de sobra</b> .	
Joey: Dude, you don't have to brag! We got nothing here! (laughter) (closing credits)		Joey: Tío, ino <b>hace falta</b> que te jactes! ¡Nosotros no tenemos nada! (laughter) (closing credits)	

Laughter in this key scene, right before the closing credits, is triggered by Joey's failure to understand that Ross is offering him a sofa. Joey's characteristic lack of wit is conveyed by paralinguistic (intonation) and kinetic signs (shaking his hands), as well as by an informal register, evidenced both by the verbs ('brag', 'we got nothing') and the marker used ('dude'). It is thus an example of idiomatic language used for character portrayal.

In example 5, the TT features two more PUs than the ST: *de sobra* [spare], added for linguistic reasons to account for 'extra', and *no hace falta* [there's no need to], that seems to have been added without any apparent need for it. The TT is more phraseologically idiomatic, but Joey's line strikes a jarring note: although *no hace falta* can be considered as appropriate in this use, the translation of the verb 'to brag' as *jactes* considerably raises the register. Indeed, *jactarse* seems too formal a verb to be used by any of the characters in a friendly situation, let alone by Joey in a scene that depicts his simple-mindedness. Therefore, although the TT viewers can still see (same kinetic signs) and hear (same content and intonation) Joey's lack of wit, the language used to convey it sounds unidiomatic, and all the more so given the contrast created by the use of the informal marker *tío* [dude] in the same line as *jactarse*.

This translation strategy that combines a shift in register and the occasional use of informal lexical choices causes an awkward inconsistency in register, and has been spotted in at least 10 scenes involving 16 TT PUs. Let us take a look at example 6:

**Example 6**

Episode 2		TC: 06:46	
Context: Monica asks Rachel for permission to go out with Chip Matthews, Rachel's former boyfriend			

<p>Monica: Is it okay if I go out with Chip Matthews?</p> <p>Rachel: No! It's not okay! <b>I can't believe</b> you would want to after what he did to me!</p> <p>Monica: What, that little thing at the prom?</p> <p>Rachel: Monica! I couldn't find him for two hours! He was <b>having sex with</b> Amy Welch!</p>	<p>Monica: ¿Te parece bien que salga con Chip?</p> <p>Rachel: ¡No! ¡No me parece bien! ¡Es inconcebible que salgas con él después de lo que me hizo!</p> <p>Monica: Qué, ¿aquella tontería del baile?</p> <p>Rachel: ¡Mónica! ¡Estuve buscándole durante dos horas mientras se tiraba a Amy Welch!</p>
--	--

Rachel's lines in the TT show a clear inconsistency in register. Whereas the ST PU 'having sex with' is translated as *tirarse a* ([to shag] a colloquial verb with negative connotations and therefore very appropriate in this case), 'I can't believe' is translated as *es inconcebible* [it's unacceptable], featuring a very formal adjective that sounds unnatural, unidiomatic in this exchange. Indeed, what are the chances of hearing a Spanish-speaking person using these two expressions in a matter of seconds? A search in the Spanish corpus CREA (150,778,934 words) contains no co-occurrences of *se tiraba a* and *es inconcebible*, whereas the web search engine Google shows only one document featuring these two phrases – the transcript of this dialogue.

## 7. Further considerations

The findings and, in general, the qualitative analysis of this corpus are not to be understood as a spot-the-error exercise, which does not seem to be a very productive approach to translation research. As a matter of fact, no obvious mistakes have been found in the TT and the analysis of the translation of the three episodes in corpus 1 (and even that of the 48 episodes included in corpus 2) shows what a remarkable job the translator has done given the difficulty of the task undertaken.

Instead, this paper attempts to describe certain aspects that became evident after a careful analysis of both the ST and the TT, such as the key role played by ST PUs in the achievement of the comic purpose that prevails in most scenes, and the importance of a very interesting but often neglected audiovisual constraint: canned laughter. Although only occasionally tackled by certain scholars (Zabalbeascoa, 1996: 255; Chiaro, 1992: 85), it is actually an important issue to take into account in the translation of TV series, possibly as a further example of "vulnerable translation" (Díaz Cintas, 2003: 43).

As for the questions posed in the introduction, some answers can now be provided. The analysis of phraseological translation has shown certain features of what may be described as Spanish dubbese in the TT. However, this dubbese is not reflected in flawed phraseological translations or anomalous collocations, as could be expected. Instead, it can be found in certain aspects that occasionally make these PUs and the

TT in general less natural than the ST, namely a shift and inconsistency in register, and, probably as a result of this, the loss of swiftness in TT PUs.

Thus, whereas Duro (2001) characterised dubbese by the use of calques and Anglicisms, the dubbese detected in the corpus under study constitutes a different phenomenon and requires a different explanation. It is not motivated by the source language and certainly not by the ST, which does not contain any of these features. It cannot be explained on the basis of the audiovisual translation constraints either, dubbing in this case, as the different synchronies and the coherent interaction of all the meaningful codes have been taken into account in the qualitative analysis. Yet, every single scene included as example of these patterns allowed a more natural and idiomatic solution.

External constraints may also be ruled out as an explanation. In his study on the prefabricated orality of the Spanish language used in dubbing, Chaume (2001) points out that the audiovisual translator has to abide by certain style guidelines provided by the different TV channels, which advise the translator to avoid some features of spontaneous language that may distract or annoy the film viewers. These restrictions belong mainly to the prosodic, morphological and syntactic level of the language, but not to the lexical one, where the translator enjoys almost complete freedom. Given that the shifts and inconsistency in register affect mainly the lexis and are first and foremost a lexical matter, these external constraints cannot account for the above-mentioned features either.

I would like to argue that these features are not motivated by the source language and have a very specific effect on the TT, and it is the analysis of this effect that can provide answers to some of the questions posed in this paper. The quantitative results show that there is a higher number of PUs in the TT than in the ST; in other words, the TT is more phraseologically idiomatic than the ST. This difference is not always caused by language systemic conventions, but very often by the translator's personal choices. Indeed, the translator seems to strive for idiomaticity, not only by adding PUs when allowed by the audiovisual codes, but also by introducing certain informal terms and a great deal of variation in the translation of recurrent ST PUs. However, TT PUs are all too often *infected* by the features mentioned above. Whereas the informal register and swiftness of ST PUs make them very idiomatic, the shift and inconsistency in register and the loss of that swiftness make TT PUs sound less natural. Thus, dubbese causes idiomaticity to fall by the wayside: although more phraseologically idiomatic, the TT is less idiomatic than the ST. Furthermore, given that the idiomaticity of the language is a key aspect to achieve the comic purpose of the ST, this dubbese detected in the TT may end up undermining its comic purpose.

Needless to say, the conclusions drawn from this study can only be applied to the three episodes that have been analysed. In order to make generalisations about the Spanish dubbese, it would be necessary to carry out an analysis – perhaps not restricted to PUs – of more episodes or films, and even a comparison between films originally in Spanish and films dubbed into Spanish. These studies could show whether the three features of dubbese detected in the TT are actually recurrent in other corpora. They could perhaps also provide answers to other questions, such as what is the origin of these patterns? Do TT viewers not notice that the Spanish language they are hearing on the screen is different from the one they use everyday?

So far, only tentative answers can be put forward. As described earlier, it seems that none of these patterns finds its origin in the ST or the source language. A promising line of research may lie in the so-called *español neutro*, a particular variation of the Spanish language that was initially used in dubbing between 1960 and 1975 (Gómez Capuz, 2001: 62; Castro Roig, 1996). Most films were dubbed in Mexico, Puerto Rico and Florida and the Spanish used for dubbing was standardised and devoid of dialectal features so that it could be understood by both the Spanish and the Spanish American audiences. This resulted in a somewhat stilted and, according to some scholars (Petrella, 2001: 9), formal variation of the language. Since 1975, films and TV series are mainly dubbed in Spain, thus providing specific versions for the Spanish audience. Nowadays, it looks like the Spanish language used for dubbing in Spain has remarkably modernised itself, getting rid of old-fashioned terms and introducing more and more colloquial ones (Agost, 1999: 120).

Although it is only a possibility, perhaps the formal register found in some instances of this corpus is actually a vestige of that old *español neutro*. Moreover, the inconsistency in register also detected here might be the result of the combination between remaining traces of *español neutro* and the more modern and informal lexical choices.

As for the second question – i.e. the reason why the audience does not seem to notice dubbese – it might be useful to resort to the traditional view of dubbing as “an illusion of an illusion” (Caillé, 1960: 108; my translation). Indeed, if we agree that cinema is a big lie that attempts to tell truths, dubbing could then be defined as a manipulation of that big lie that usually attempts to tell the same truths. To enter the first illusion (or believe the lie), we suspend disbelief in order to see the characters on screen as real, although we know better. To enter the second illusion (and give in to the manipulation), we accept, for example, that everyone speaks Spanish in New York. If we accept these rules to play the game and enjoy the film, why should we not accept one more, that is, one to do with the kind of Spanish used in dubbing? In other words, although we know that it is not real, we believe and accept that Rachel exists, that she

speaks Spanish in New York and, finally, that what she says is not exactly what is more natural or what we would say in a given situation. As Chion (1993: 106) argues, there is no reason why the viewers should compare what they hear on the screen with what they hear on the street:

When the viewer hears a sound that is regarded as realist in a film, s/he is not in a position to compare it with the real sound that would be heard in that situation; instead, s/he refers to his/her memory of that kind of sound, a memory that has been resynthesized from several data, not only acoustic, and that is influenced by the viewing of the films. (my translation)

Indeed, the presence of this dubbese in other TV series or films would paradoxically explain why TT viewers do not seem to find it off-putting. Perhaps by now they are used to suspending linguistic disbelief as part and parcel of the dubbing experience. At any rate, this 'perhaps' and many other scattered around this paper point to the need for future research on this subject if we are to continue the search for idiomaticity in audiovisual translation.

## References

- Agost, R. 1999. *Traducción y doblaje: palabras, voces e imágenes*. Barcelona: Ariel.
- Bartrina, F. 2001. "La investigación en traducción audiovisual: interdisciplinariedad y especificidad", in Sanderson, J.D. (ed.) *Doble o nada. Actas de las I y II Jornadas de doblaje y subtitulación*. Alicante: Universidad de Alicante, 28-38.
- Bauer, L. 1983. *English Word-formation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Caillé, P.-F. 1960. "Cinéma et traduction: le traducteur devant l'écran." *Babel* 6(3): 103-109.
- Carmona, R. 1996. *Como se comenta un texto fílmico*. Madrid: Cátedra.
- Castro Roig, X. 1996. "El español neutro". Paper presented at the *Annual ATA Conference, Colorado Springs, USA*.  
<http://xcastro.com/neutro.html>
- Castro Roig, X. 1997. "Sobre la traducción de guiones para televisión en España".  
<http://xcastro.com/peliculas.html>
- Chaume Varela, F. 2001. "La pretendida oralidad de los textos audiovisuales y sus implicaciones en traducción", in Chaume, F. and R. Agost (eds.) *La traducción en los medios audiovisuales*. Castellón: Universitat Jaume I, 77-88.
- Chaume Varela, F. 2004a. *Cine y traducción*. Madrid: Cátedra.
- Chaume Varela, F. 2004b. "Film Studies and Translation Studies: Two disciplines at stake in Audiovisual Translation". *Meta* 49(1): 12-24.

- Chaume Varela, F. 2004c. "Synchronization in dubbing: A translational approach", in Orero, P. (ed.) *Topics in Audiovisual Translation*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 35-53.
- Chaves García, M. J. 2000. *La traducción cinematográfica. El doblaje*. Huelva: Universidad de Huelva.
- Chiaro D. (1992). *The Language of Jokes. Analysing Verbal Play*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Chiaro, D. 2005. "Suspension of disbelief or mediatic diglossia? How Italians perceive dubbese". Paper presented at the International Conference *Challenges of Multidimensional Translation*. Saarbrücken. Manuscript.
- Chion, M. 1993. *La audiovisión. Introducción a un análisis conjunto de la imagen y el sonido*. Barcelona: Paidós (Transl. by Antonio López Ruiz).
- Corpas Pastor, G. 2000. "Acerca de la (in)traducibilidad de la fraseología", in Corpas Pastor, G. (ed.) *Las lenguas de Europa: estudios de fraseología, fraseografía y traducción*. Granada: Comares, 483-522.
- Cowie et al. 1983. *Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English. Vol. 2: Phrase, Clause and Sentence Idioms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Delabastita, D. 1989. "Translation and mass-communication: film and T.V. translation as evidence of cultural dynamics." *Babel* 35(4): 193-218.
- Díaz Cintas, J. 2003. *Teoría y práctica de la subtitulación: inglés – español*. Barcelona: Ariel.
- Díaz Cintas, J. 2004. "In search of a theoretical framework for the study of audiovisual translation", in Orero, P. (ed.) *Topics in Audiovisual Translation*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 21-34.
- Dolç, M. and L. Santamaria. 1998. "La traducció de l'oralitat en el doblatge." *Quaderns. Revista de traducció* 2: 97-105.
- Duro Moreno, M. 2001. "«Eres patético»: el español traducido del cine y de la televisión", in Duro Moreno, M. (ed.) *La traducción para el doblaje y la subtitulación*. Madrid: Cátedra, 161-185.
- Fernando, C. and R. Flavell. 1981. *On Idiom. Critical Views and Perspectives. Exeter Linguistic Studies* 5. Exeter: University of Exeter.
- Fodor, I. 1976. *Film Dubbing: Phonetic, Semiotic, Aesthetic and Psychological Aspects*. Hamburgo: Buske.
- Fontcubierta i Gel, J. 2001. "La traducción en el doblaje o el eslabón perdido", in Duro Moreno, M. (ed.) *La traducción para el doblaje y la subtitulación*. Madrid: Cátedra, 299-313.
- Gläser, R. 1988. "The Grading of Idiomaticity as a Presupposition for a Taxonomy of Idioms", in Hullen, W. and R. Schulze (eds.) *Understanding the Lexicon: Meaning, Sense and World Knowledge in Lexical Semantics*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 264-79.
- Gläser, R. 1998. "The Stylistic Potential of Phraseological Units in the Light of Genre Analysis", in Cowie, A. (ed.) *Phraseology: Theory, Analysis, and Applications*. Oxford: Clarendon, 125-143.
- Gómez Capuz, J. 2001. "Diseño de análisis de la interferencia pragmática en la traducción audiovisual del inglés al español", in Sanderson, J.D. (ed.)

- Doble o nada. Actas de las I y II Jornadas de doblaje y subtitulación.* Alicante: Universidad de Alicante, 59-84.
- Gregory, M. and S. Carroll. 1978. *Language and Situation: Language Varieties and Their Social Contexts.* London: Routledge.
- Makkai, A. 1972. *Idiom Structure in English.* The Hague: Mouton.
- Mel'cuk I. A. et al. 1995. *Introduction á la lexicologie explicative et combinatoire.* Louvain-la-Neuve: Editions Duculot.
- Moon, R. 1998. *Fixed Expressions and Idioms in English.* Oxford: Clarendon Express.
- Onions C. T. (ed.) 1964. *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary.* Oxford: Clarendon.
- Palencia Villa, R. M. 2002. *La influencia del doblaje audiovisual en la percepción de los personajes.* PhD Thesis. Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona.
- Petrella, L. 2001. "El español «neutro» de los doblajes: intenciones y realidades." *Centro Virtual Cervantes, Congreso de Zacatecas.*  
<http://cvc.cervantes.es/actcult/congreso/television/comunicaciones/petre.htm>
- Sinclair, J. (ed.) 1995. *Collins Cobuild English Dictionary.* Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Winter, C. 1992. "Bilingual Dictionaries: Between Language and Speech", in Arnaud, P. and H. Béjoint (eds.) *Vocabulary and Applied Linguistics,* London: MacMillan, 41-51.
- Zabalbeascoa, P. 1996. "Translating jokes for dubbed television situation comedies." *The Translator* 2(2): 235-257.

### **Other sources**

- Spanish corpus CREA: Real Academia Española: Banco de datos (CORDE).  
*Corpus diacrónico del español.*  
<http://www.rae.es>