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SEX, (SUB)TITLES AND VIDEOTAPES

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1. Introduction

Although the core of this paper deals primarily with the subtitling of sexual terms and expressions from Spanish into English, I shall start by taking a look at the translation of the title of a contemporary French/Belgian film that is worthy of comment.

When the French actress Nathalie Baye was asked what was the first thing to strike her attention when offered the starring role in her latest film at the time, her answer was clear and direct: "Un día recibí un guión con un curioso título que hizo que me interesara conocer más acerca de él: «Une liaison pornographique»" (Alphaville, 2000). The director himself, the Belgian Frédéric Fonteyne, also remembers these embryonic stages along the same lines: "Un día, mientras estaba paseando con Philippe Blasband, me habló de una idea que tenía para una novela titulada "Une liaison pornographique". Intrigado por el título le pedí que me contara la historia y en aquel mismo momento le dije que me gustaría muchísimo filmarla" (Cinemes Verdi, 2000). He is on record (ibid.) as saying that what most interests him in relationships are the little silences, and what lies hidden behind the words. He likes filming the faces of people speaking and remembering and that is precisely how romance becomes pornographic, when it is shown. It is obscene at this stage because it is no longer intimate. It is not a question of sex, but words, and this is why the film is in fact a deftly edited conversation piece rather than a compendium of graphically explicit sexual fantasies. One might argue that this is a somewhat idiosyncratic way of understanding pornography, but as creators of artistic products, film directors can and should have their very personal interpretations and conceptions. This seems to be one of the ways in which art progresses and evolves.

The title of a work is, arguably, among one of the most important devices that can entice or put audiences off a particular film. It is the first contact point between spectator and film and therefore plays a very important role in the marketing campaign. In most cases, the final decision on which target language title to adopt will rest in the hands of the production or distribution company. In this process, the translator may be asked to offer some alternatives that eventually might, or might not, be used for the distribution of the film. According to Shochat and Stam (1985: 43):

> *the title, as that sequence of signs which circulates in the world in the form of advertisement or announcement prior even to the film's screening, constitutes an especially privileged locus in the discursive chain of film. As hermeneutic pointers, titles promise, prefigure, orient. Titles are generally assumed to bear an indexical relation to the signified of the narrative events. Even when they are reflexive —A Movie— or perversely non-indexical —Un Chien Andalou— titles still point to some feature of the text in question.*

Thus, all the emphasis on the individual epithet "pornographique" seems a sufficiently valid reason for it to be kept in any translation. Moreover, the Greek root of the term makes it extremely easy to transfer into other languages that have also adopted it into their vocabulary, such as Spanish (pornográfica) or English (pornographic). Nonetheless, as the reader might have guessed by now, the title of this film in Spanish, for Spain, does not follow its French counterpart and has been rendered as *Una relación privada*. What is most surprising here is not the deliberate deletion and manipulation of the adjective in question but the film critics' acquiescence that has greeted such a travesty. The Spanish critic Fernández-Santos (2000: 3) starts his review by pointing out "[e]l nuevo y *correcto* título" (my emphasis) and tries his utmost to foreground the lack of pornographic elements in the film. The leading Spanish newspaper *El País* feels the need to insert a whole paragraph about the issue, in which Blázquez (2000: 3) also outlines that "[l]a estrategia de mercado para atraer al mayor público posible ha dado con *un título más certero* que el original" (my emphasis). The final decision on the choice of title seems to rest, in this particular case, in the hands of the distribution company, Golem, which argues that the exchange of the adjective "pornográfica" for "privada", despite the source title, is due to the fact that the film is a love story in which the pornographic element is part of what is said and not what is seen in the images. However, although this argument respects Fonteyne's own cinematic conception and underlines the subjective meaning attributed to the term, it clearly fails to explain why it has been kept in the French original but eliminated in the Spanish translation.

This irresistible compulsion to change the title is by no means unique to Spain. Indeed, the title in Spain is a literal translation of the one used for the release of the film in Italy. For its launch in Latin America the distributors have preferred *Una relación íntima*, and, in a sort of moral crescendo, the USA will remember this feature film as *An Affair of Love*. This urge to avoid the taboo word can be also

observed in the United Kingdom where Vincendeau (2000), somewhat hesitantly, states that "the film's observational tone is perhaps better evoked by the English subtitle *An Intimate Affair*".

This sort of pressure on a low budget film in need of marketing and on a very young director —he was born in 1968— was visible in the rather contrived acknowledgment by Fonteyne in the launch of his film in Spain, when in a sort of forced surrendering act he confessed that "[u]na relación privada o íntima es el título exacto" (Blázquez 2000: 3). Quite radically different in France, though. But the ironic situation is that in the poster, below the Spanish title, one can see the French original, and needless to say that the cinemagoer does not need to be fluent in French to spot the obvious discrepancy between both titles. It might be a trick to also attract those who, not being truly cinephiles, could feel inclined to watch this film expecting some other visual images.

The surprising fact here is that the change of title has not sparked any polemic and everybody seems to be very happy with the alterations. I wonder if a few years back, under the moralist Franco dictatorship, critics would have come out so vehemently in favour of such a change. One can hardly refrain from remembering the hackneyed Shakespearean rhetorical question of *What's in a name?* or rather in this case, *What's in this adjective?* It is incredible that just a single word can have such disturbing power: moral, economic, cultural; and simply because of its explicit sexual nature. As Redmond (1991: 46) shrewdly points out "[s]ex and violence is the stuff of all media, but it is the use of language that seems to excite people to apoplexy".

2. The film

Taboo terms and expressions can relate to many different areas such as religion, race, sex, nationality or bodily functions. The present paper aims to discuss some general problems that arise when subtitling terms and expressions that have sexual connotations, some of which, because they come encased in strong language, are considered obscene and in bad taste by the majority of viewers. Swear words may be used for different reasons such as release of frustration, description, a safety valve or insult, etc. but I will concentrate in these pages on their value to convey their denotative sexual meaning. I shall be taking a look at the various translation solutions that have been reached in the subtitling into English from Spanish, focusing mainly on the similarities and discrepancies found in two different subtitled versions of the same film, *The Flower of My Secret*, shot by the internationally acclaimed director Pedro Almodóvar in 1995.

The video copy of the film was released in the UK as suitable only for persons of 15 years and over and it was made clear on the cover that "this film will have a fairly adult theme. It may have some scenes of sex or violence or some bad language". The rating of the film seems a bit excessive, however. Since there is no violence whatsoever and neither explicit nudity or sexual activity, one can only assume that the rating must have been granted on the grounds of the very few instances where bad language is used. The other version to be analyzed here is the one broadcast by Channel 4.

As is very often the case, if not the norm, with Spanish films, the subtitles for the cinema print of the film (that on this occasion coincide with the ones used for the video) were done in Spain. In a marketing drive to promote our cinema overseas, the Instituto de la Cinematografía y de las Artes Visuales, part of the Spanish Department for Education and Culture, grants some financial help to subtitle films that are going to be presented at international festivals. The director and/or producer decides on the language the film is to be translated into and most of the time this language is English. The problem arises when deciding which variation of English to choose. In this particular case, it is clear that American English has been favoured. There are several attempts at naturalising the spelling to accommodate it to the British variation (i.e. neighbour and favour instead of neighbor and favor) but, overall, the syntactical structures and the choice of vocabulary remain clearly American English. The reasons for using virtually the same translation are manifold. From an economic point of view, perhaps the most important in the present case, it is undoubtedly cheaper for the distribution company to use the same translation and spotting in the two formats. From a psycho and socio-linguistic perspective, and judging from the vast amount of products that we encounter on TV and in cinemas in the UK, British people do not seem to be too bothered about watching and hearing programmes in American English, be it films, TV series, chat shows or documentaries. The film distributors seem to have decided that the British audience will not show any reticence in reading the American subtitles so long as the spelling has been adapted to the new needs[1]. Thus, it is assumed in this paper that the video version of the film is, on its own merits, aimed clearly at the British audience since it is the only one that can be bought on the

[1] This situation would be unthinkable in Spain. All audiovisual products are dubbed or subtitled solely for the Spanish market, using the intonation, accent, grammar, syntax, vocabulary and spelling of the Peninsula. Attempts at introducing versions in *neuter Spanish* that would be valid for most of the Spanish speaking world have so far failed in the realm of screen translation. In some extreme cases, films that had been originally shot in another Spanish variation are dubbed intra-linguistically into the peninsular Spanish, as happened with the animated Argentine film *Manuelita* (Manuel García Ferré, 1999).

market. Besides, the changes that have taken place point in this direction and it is quite unlikely that this revised-spelling version will ever be sold in the USA. On the other hand, the English spelling and expressions used in the Channel 4 version belong clearly to the British variation.

3. Some *a priori* premises

Dealing with taboo language is undoubtedly one of the most delicate issues in the subtitling praxis. My main objective in this section is to take a quick look at the several factors that in one way or another can have an impact in the subtitling of this kind of linguistic register. This information will enable me to put forward some hypotheses, whose validity I will try to verify or refute with some concrete examples.

If, normally, the translator has to bear in mind the receiver of the product, in the case of taboo expressions this is really inescapable. Johnson (1987: 23) points to the difficulty of subtitling swear words by asking "[h]ow should you approach expletives which explode with some naturalness from the voice, but which sit starkly and aggressively as text?"[2]. Mayoral (1993: 57) considers that it is precisely because of this imbalance in perception of what is written and what is said orally that one ought to be very careful and discreet when using effing and blinding in subtitling. We are faced here with a *quasi a priori* limitation that is closely linked to the medium dissimilarity. But this notion needs some clarification and I would argue that the mere fact of the graphic and material representation is not a sufficient enough reason to justify this discrepancy in value and that a crucial element has been missed in this debate. Reading a novel plagued with swear words or sexual terms does not seem to produce the same strong rejection from the audience or the same feeling of being offended. The context where reading takes place must also be taken into consideration then. Although reading is ultimately an individual act, it is not the same to read a book on your own, in private, as to read (and watch) a film as part of a gregarious group. Indeed, according to a survey carried out in 1991 by the Broadcasting Standards Council (BSC) many British people said they watched television in the company of others and particularly with their family, and they disliked the embarrassment caused by swearing in programmes. Thus, the use of very and fairly strong words:

[2] Luyken et al. (1991:57) also consider that «[e]xpletives are often more offensive when starkly reproduced in text than when they are spoken». Reid (1978:425), for her part, expands the power of the written text when she states that «[t]he impact of the written word on people is quite different from that of the spoken word —it is much, much stronger».

> *was most acceptable in a cinema film (which included not only films seen at the cinema, but also films that were bought or rented on video) [...] Moreover, adults could use the film categories to judge how strong the language was likely to be and so knew what to expect.* 'If you go and rent a film ... you know what you are choosing -you expect different levels of language' (Millwood Hargrave, 1991: 15-16).

However, we have to be careful when accepting these findings at face value, since the survey mainly analyses British attitudes towards the inclusion of bad language in programmes originally produced in English and of an oral nature, without any mention whatsoever to subtitled or dubbed programmes. Extrapolating from these findings, then, we can embark on our analysis of the hypothesis that the cinema and video versions, which in our case coincide, could be more daring in their solutions than the TV version because of the audience composition and perception. To go to the cinema, or to buy or hire a video involves an act of will and choice. Customers have a preconditioned expectation about the nature of the film and if they are offended they only have themselves to blame for having made a mistake in their choice. Therefore, I think it is safe to state that TV channels in having to cater for a much wider audience would have to take many more variables into account when dealing with the transfer of taboo and sexual words. Hence, the resort to watershed timings or the bleeping of some four letter words, for instance.

Another point that must be taken into consideration is the degree of social acceptance or rejection that the usage of expletives and imprecations has depending on the society. Running the risk of national stereotyping, one could argue that British people seem to be less open to sex and swearing than other nationalities, notably the Mediterranean ones. This hang up with sex has been mentioned by authors such as Bernard Shaw when he stated that "when the English talk of morality, they mean only sexual morality" (quoted in Shaw, 1991: 1). Curteis (1991: 55), for his part, is of the opinion that "to ordinary people, sex remains a private, almost secret thing, verging on the miraculous. They do not talk much about it because the British are not much given to discussing their inmost, private feelings". A more contemporary reserved attitude could be seen when the advertising posters of two Spanish films, highly sexually charged, were banned on the tube network in London as they were considered to be in bad taste. The first of them, *Golden Balls* (*Huevos de oro*, José Juan Bigas Luna, 1993), depicted an archetypal Latin macho man in the figure of Javier Bardem holding his crotch in a provocative and aggressive manner. The other

one was *Kika* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1993), in which Victoria Abril wears a rather scandalous dress designed by the notorious French couturier Jean Paul Gautier. To the best of my knowledge, the same problem did not arise anywhere else in Europe.

Reid (1987: 30) argues that in subtitling a USA film, the subtitles made for the Dutch public will have to be different to the ones done for a French audience because the general knowledge about the United States is considered to be greater in the first country than in the second one and, therefore, institutions or concepts that needed to be described for the French viewer could be left untranslated for the Dutch audience. Likewise, one could put forward the idea that the latitude to reflect in the subtitles the same degree of sexual explicitness as in the original will vary greatly according to the profile of the target society and their openness to this topic. Ultimately, age, cultural background and social class will be determinant factors in the choice of any given solution. The hypothesis here is that a Spanish film containing sexually explicit terms might be pruned of (some of) them in order to make it more palatable to British moral sensibilities.

However, this does not mean that British people do not swear or refer to sex. In fact, according to the mentioned BSC survey, few viewers find bad language unacceptable in all cases. They seem to take into account several variables when judging, such as the audience of which they form part, the programme's genre and timing of broadcast and the expectations that had been shaped by the programme's pre-publicity campaign. Most seem to agree, for example, that swearing *in extremis* is understandable and more justifiable than in other situations. Thus, people will accept controversy and even swearing so long as it conforms to their expectations.

The actual nature of the terms and the number of their occurrences are also two important variables in the equation. The BSC found that many viewers felt it unnecessary to include either a large number of swear words or words of a particular strength. Many people felt that most of the swear words used could be replaced with weaker alternatives that often would do as well. Curiously enough, their attitude towards the word "fuck" was very paradoxical and although it was considered very strong (43 respondents out of 56), it was acceptable in use (30 out of 56), and many viewers felt it less offensive than other very strong four letter words, a distinction that could be due to the term's more frequent usage in our daily lives as a swear word. In line with this perception, another hypothesis that can be made is that subtitlers might opt to replace strong bad language in the original for weaker terms in the target language, although in some instances they might feel less inhibited and resort to the most frequent "fuck" or derivative forms.

Another point raised by the BSC research is that it was considered largely acceptable for males to swear when together socially, but not for women to do so. In our present case this finding might prove very important since Almodóvar's films rely heavily on women characters and quite particularly on their linguistic freedom and creativity. One obvious way of liberating themselves from social conventions is through the use and abuse of swear words, traditionally masculine, and the explicit references to their sexual activities, their likes and their dislikes. In fact, all the examples but one, arguably the most euphemistic, that appear in the following pages are uttered by women. One can posit here that the translator may, consciously or unconsciously, accommodate the traditional view and eliminate or mitigate any swearing that comes from a woman in the film.

4. The translations

As mentioned in previous pages, the examples for this analysis come from the Spanish film *The Flower of My Secret*, probably one of the most visually, linguistically and thematically serene of Almodóvar's films. Leo (Marisa Paredes) is a very successful author of romantic fiction going through a bad patch. Her creative inspiration has abandoned her as, it seems, has her husband Paco (Imanol Arias), a lieutenant colonel working on a mission overseas. She has not been with him for a long time and is desperate, both psychologically and physically, to see him soon to have sex and try to sort out their problems.

In this first example, Leo is in her study room and rings Paco late at night to give him some very good news about her latest work projects. Despite her initial enthusiastic tone of voice, Paco does not seem to appreciate a call this late at night and, after some disapproving remarks on his part, she finally hangs up without having actually told him her piece of news. Her tone of voice is now more subdued, in sharp contrast with the onset of the scene, and she ends the phone conversation in the following manner:

EXAMPLE 1

ORIGINAL (saying goodbye to her husband on the phone)

Leo: Te como la boca.

VIDEO

Kisses.

TV

I love you

In this first instance, Leo's linguistic expression is a rather idiosyncratic one not used in common language in Spanish, although fairly transparent in its denotative dimension. After all, she is a writer, a creator, and words are her field of expertise. In fact, one could argue that given the emotional setbacks she has to undergo this is the only area in which she is truly successful. Throughout the whole film she seems to be using a very particular register peppered with unique expressions and terms that belong to her most personal inner self: she uses two different pseudonyms for her books and newspaper literary reviews; in an attempt to prevent anybody else from understanding what she means she equates, in a very cryptic way later explained to the spectator, the word "rocks" with "love" when talking to her husband in public, and so on. The literal translation for the ending of this phone conversation would be a very emphatic "I eat your mouth" or "I eat your lips" that contains a sexual, sensual dimension lacking in the two English versions, which are a lot more conventional and fit better within the contextual dimension as a linguistic mechanism to say goodbye on the phone. Her anxiety and lust to see him soon seem to have disappeared, unnecessarily in my opinion, in the translation.

Moreover, the contradiction established between image (she appears sad and subdued) and dialogue (but still sensual) could be read in the film as the female submission to the male dominance. He behaves unnecessarily harshly towards her and her reaction is, nevertheless, conciliatory rather than confrontational. An attitude that characterises her behaviour throughout the film and is to a large extent responsible for her misfortunes. She is a very insecure woman, unable to fight her own corner, and this is transparent in her actions and her use and choice of vocabulary.

In this second example, Leo confides to her gypsy maid, Blanca, that the phosphorous pills she is taking rather than helping her with her memory loss are actually increasing her sexual appetite, a rather unfortunate side effect since, as we spectators know, her husband has been an absent figure throughout the film. Both characters are discussing the issue in the kitchen.

EXAMPLE 2

ORIGINAL

Leo: Blanca, tenía que decirte algo, pero no me acuerdo...

Blanca: Tome usted la pastilla del fósforo...

Leo: Ah, sí... Memoria no recuperaré, pero esto me pone cachonda como una perra...

VIDEO

Blanca, I had to tell you something, /// but I forgot what.

Take your phosphorous pill.
It doesn't help my memory, /// but God, it makes me horny.

TV

I forgot what I wanted /// to tell you, Blanca
Why don't you take your tablets?
Ah, yes. They don't help my memory /// but they make me randy like a bitch[3]

The TV solution sticks literally to the coarse original expression without omitting a single element of the comparison whilst the video version tones down the whole expression by eliminating the reference to bitch. It seems here that such a deletion is not necessary and cannot be justified in terms of space and/or time constraints, since the Channel 4 version can easily accommodate exactly the same amount of information as the video does plus the controversial second part of the comparison. By adding information, the spotting carried out for the TV version would marginally accelerate the reading speed of the subtitles. Point that would seem to defy a commonly sustained belief in screen translation that, because of the vast heterogeneity of the audience the product has to cater for and the impossibility of backtracking, subtitle speed should be lower for television than for video or cinema (Ivarsson and Carrol, 1998: 68).

In the following instance, Blanca is about to leave the house before the imminent and much anticipated arrival of the missing husband. Judging only from what we can see on the screen, both characters, just outside the kitchen, are simply saying goodbye to each other. After the exchange, Blanca goes to open the door and Leo leaves the scene laughing loudly:

EXAMPLE 3

ORIGINAL

Leo: Ah, pues ven pasado mañana... Es que quiero estar un día entero a solas con mi marido...
Blanca: No faltaría más... ¡Y hártese de follá!

VIDEO

Then the next day I want /// to be alone with my husband
Of course! Enjoy yourself!

[3] The three forward slashes </// /> indicate that the subtitle appears on the screen as a two liner and that is the way it has been segmented.

Watching this scene on video and reading the subtitles, one cannot help being puzzled and refrain from pondering what the reason might be for Leo to laugh so overtly. The contrast between the anodyne situation and physical setting of the scene and the rude explicitness of Blanca's comment is the factor that triggers the comic effect in the original but that has been totally missed in the astonishingly sanitised translation. Besides, Blanca is a character of secondary importance in the film, appearing in very few scenes. To avoid portraying a very superficial and shallow character, to compensate for this lack of exposure in front of the camera Almodóvar brings the best of the character through her few but incisive, hilarious comments, as he so wittingly does with so many other secondary characters in his films. If the subtitles, then, do not do justice to these specific linguistic peculiarities, the credibility and diegetic function of the character is at stake. As target language spectators, and in clear opposition to the viewers' appreciation of the original product, we might find this type of character somewhat irrelevant and superfluous, not fulfilling any particular function in the film. A risk that Almodóvar has not taken originally in his film, because as Arnáiz (1998: 93) very rightly points out "Almodóvar, en sus escenas cómicas, demuestra un extenso conocimiento no sólo del castellano coloquial de nuestros días sino también un conocimiento profundo de sus diferentes registros". His use and manipulation of the Spanish language clearly fulfils a function in his films.

As Sokoli (2000: 94) has discovered in her interviews with several Greek subtitlers, the general impression is that if subtitles influence the success of a product it is only in a negative way. That is, they are seen as obtrusive ancillary elements when obvious "mistakes" pop up or certain solutions are felt not to be adequate. The solution reached in our video version is probably the most telling of all the examples quoted here and one that risks ruining the whole film. Many people with a knowledge of both languages might get a negative impression on the quality of the subtitles of the film just because of this particular unfortunate and rather striking example. It is difficult to know the reasons for this extreme change in register. One can only hypothesise. Perhaps it has been felt that the social gap between servant and boss makes this comment too obtrusive and inadequate. The interaction between image and dialogue could have been thought to work in favour of this solution. The scene does not imply any sexual innuendo and the way in which the gypsy servant speaks is very vernacular and it would be difficult for anyone not highly conversant with the Spanish language to appreciate the toning down of the original. Or maybe the fact that it was considered to be too offensive when uttered by a woman. It could also be argued that the subtitler felt, consciously or not, that such an imprecation could clash with the visual context of this particular scene (two women, a kitchen) and, therefore, with the target audience expectations.

However, this type of solution could also respond to more pragmatic and commercial pressures, certainly when this translation policy of toning down seems to be a consistent and recurrent trend throughout the whole video/cinema translation. In more than one occasion Almodóvar has publicly shown his unhappiness with the apparently extreme rating given to some of his films abroad, specially in the USA. This is yet another burden making it very difficult for foreign films to break into the already hermetic American market. As an example, there was an attempt by a US court to ban the controversial film *Tie Me Up, Tie Me Down!* (*¡Átame!*, 1989) and the Motion Picture Association of America decided to give it an X rating (normally reserved for hard-core pornographic films) restricting considerably the outlets for its commercial distribution, and reducing, therefore, its potential for box office revenue[4]. *Kika* also met serious obstacles and was eventually released unclassified, which mitigated against a possibly healthier generation of revenue. *The Flower of My Secret* was shot after these two polemical films and it would be safe to argue that Almodóvar opts in this latter film for, what has been perceived by some scholars, a quite radical change of direction (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas, 1998: 117), in order to expand the commercial possibilities of his films. We are here in the interstices where commercial considerations and linguistic policy become closely entangled. The sanitising of risky vocabulary and expressions could then be seen as a way of placating the board of censors and a means to be granted a more commercially profitable rating. Almodóvar's yearning for an Oscar had been rather public since the narrowly missed opportunity of *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (*Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios*, 1988). By shifting down one gear in photographic (in both original and target) and linguistic explicitness (in the translated film) the product should be more palatable to US censors, audiences and critics and be in a better position to generate more revenue and, arguably, to compete for the coveted Hollywood prize.

Whatever the reason behind this very prudish solution, it seems to me an unnecessary mutilation of a crucial element that is quintessentially Almodovarian. *Las chicas Almodóvar* inhabit a traditionally male chauvinist society that they fight against and, as Arnáiz states (1998: 93-94):

> *[s]u lucha no es sólo social, es también lingüística, y su uso de la lengua muestra características específicas de esa libreración [...] Almodóvar, a través de "sus chicas", entra en el universo machista de la lengua castellana para romper con sus usos culturales y específicos; las chicas de Almodóvar se apoderan de esa lengua en su lucha contra el hombre y se ponen a su misma altura.*

[4] See Smith (1994: 116-119) for a detailed commentary on the distribution problems encountered by *Átame* in the USA.

By playing on taboo they create a new level of verbal explicitness in contemporary Spanish cinema. Almodóvar's desire to provoke is evident in most of his films and he achieves his goal not only through the story he tells us but mainly through the use that his female characters make of the Spanish language. Thus, all these linguistic features are essential in the building of his female characters and in portraying their social dimension and even the so much talked about *New Spain*. *Las chicas Almodóvar* stand out precisely because they tend to be free from any social conventions; they live in their own world as independently as they can, and all this is reflected not only in their behaviour, their professional careers or their interaction with men, but also in their particular use of the Spanish language.

In this sense, the solution reached in the TV version undoubtedly does greater justice to the original by being more daring and following more faithfully the wording of the original.

TV

> The day after, then, I want to /// be alone with my husband
> Of course, and make sure /// you screw

However, the subtitler has opted for the use of the verb "screw" that is milder in its impact than the more literal "fuck", complying with one of the hypotheses I mentioned in previous pages. Indeed, in the BSC survey, screw was felt very strong by only 12 out of 56 as oppose to 43 to 56 with the word "fuck".

Leo's husband eventually arrives in the flat and, in the following example, Paco has just had a shower. He is now standing wet and semi-naked in the bathroom. However, viewers cannot see any real nudity because Leo is helping him to get dry with a towel:

EXAMPLE 4

ORIGINAL

> Paco: ...¡Huy!... Tranquila, enseguida nos vamos a la cama.
> Leo: Sí. Tienes que ponerme al día, eh? (sic) Si no voy a acabar

tirándome al primero que pase. Es por culpa del fósforo, sabes? (sic)

VIDEO

Calm down...
...we'll get to bed soon enough.
We have to catch up. If not, /// I'll jump the first man I see!
It's the phosphorous, you know/

TV

Take it easy. We'll get /// into bed soon
Yes, I need to catch up. Or I'll /// end up fucking the first man I see
It's those phosphorus tablets.

Once more we are confronted with a video solution in which the sexual innuendo is phrased in a much more sanitised way than the TV one. The latter makes use of a bold "fucking" that does not run parallel to the original, but that helps in an overall strategy to define linguistically the female characters, and especially the character of Leo —what we could call compensation. But it is not only the use of the overt taboo verb which contributes to the moulding of the protagonist. The video solution splits the need to catch up between both characters ("we have to catch up"), whereas in the Channel 4 version, more in tune with the original dialogue, the instigation comes solely from the female character ("I need to catch up"). This is all the more important since, as we later find out, he has been cheating on her for some time with her best friend and is, therefore, hardly in need of having to do any sexual catching up. As Johnston (1998: 295) points out:

> *[r]arely has Almodóvar focused so closely on a single character, and the challenge of developing an individual portrait has reconnected him with the emotional realities of an everyday damaged life, where loneliness, professional frustration and the irritation and commitment that permeate family relationships are observed with perceptiveness, honesty and the usual incisive humour.*

Leo is the main protagonist of this very intimist film and, as such, she centres all the action and attention around her. She is lonely, insecure and it is in little linguistic details like this one that her identity problems come to the surface. The character becomes defined both by her kinesic performance and communication as well as by her linguistic divergence and particular register. What Carbonell i Cortés (1999: 214) mentions in regard to postcolonial translation seems to hold true in this case:

> *no es extraño encontrar textos en los que toda una problemática de la identidad cultural se refleja por medio de la divergencia lingüística. Las más de las veces lo que en principio puede aparecer como meros detalles al traductor, a menudo obviados por no concedérseles importancia suficiente o porque plantean problemas de intraducibilidad que exigen un esfuerzo que acaso el traductor considera «adicional» al «contenido esencial» del texto, pueden ser no obstante fundamentales para el planteamiento de la obra traducida.*

Unfortunately, the video format does not appear to have received this kind of attention to detail.

The other point that can be mentioned in this same scene has to do with one of the defining strategies that operates in subtitling, namely reduction. This can be total (deletion of information) or partial (message is condensed). In any case, the subtitler has to try hard at keeping the relevant information for the understanding of the plot/scene and at being faithful at recreating the style and register of the original. The following is the only example in the film in which a male character makes a straight forward and very euphemistic comment pregnant with sexual connotations:

EXAMPLE 5

ORIGINAL

Leo: Paco, ¿qué pasa?
Paco: Nada.
Leo: Desde que has llegado tengo la sensación de que huyes de mí.
Paco: No te huyo, pero antes de acostarnos tengo que decirte algo.

VIDEO

Paco, what's wrong?
Nothing.
I have the feeling /// you're avoiding me.
I'm not. But I have /// to tell you something.

TV

What is it, Paco?
Nothing
I feel you're avoiding me
I'm not. But we need to talk /// before we get into bed

The need to accommodate the information within the limitations imposed by the medium has been dealt with in a very different way in each format. The video subtitler resorts to deletion of part of the information, crucially the sexual reference of "getting into bed", whereas the TV subtitler has decided to condense the message without having to sacrifice any information. By using shorter expressions in other instances "I feel" instead of "I have the feeling" or "We need to talk" instead of "I have to tell you something", s/he allows for all the original information to be transferred into English. According to the director himself, these scenes in which husband and wife appear together are the ones that he thought of first, before embarking on the making of the film and have therefore that extra symbolic importance. "You could say I filmed '*The Flower*' because I wanted to film the husband's visit, and his farewell" (Almodóvar, 1996: 134). The obsessive and repeated references to having carnal congress set the tone of this longed-for marital encounter and make it all the more dramatic and frustrating when we later witness Leo's desolation and despair in the face of Paco's sudden departure. As for the translation, the subtitles follow a pattern that by now seems fairly consistent. The omnipresent linguistic references to having sexual intercourse are deleted or toned down once more in the video version but kept in the TV one. The result is a video copy in which the sexual tension is lost to a certain degree.

In the last of my examples, probably the one responsible for the granting of the over- 15 rating, both characters are in the couple's bedroom and Leo is rushing, rather than helping, her husband to get undressed:

EXAMPLE 6

ORIGINAL

Leo: No puedes imaginarte la cantidad de novedades que tengo que contarte.
Paco: Ah, sí? (sic)
Leo: Sí, pero pueden esperar. Primero te duchas, ya que tienes tanto interés, después follamos... luego descansamos, después volvemos a follar... y después ¡Dios dirá!

VIDEO

I have lots of news to tell you. /// But it can wait
First shower, since you /// want to so much...
...then we'll fuck...
...then we'll rest...
...then fuck again...
...and then, who knows?

TV

I have so many things to tell you
But they can wait. /// Have your shower first
Then we'll fuck
Then we'll have a rest... /// and fuck again
And then... who knows?

In this particular instance the semiotic value of the image and what is going on in front of our eyes is of capital importance, together with the very slow delivery of the dialogue. We are here witnesses to a form of obvious prolonged foreplay where sexual references would be expected by the audience, and they will therefore be more accepting of a rude and explicit register. Big alterations in this scene would have been a lot more evident than in the case of the maid's comment in example 3 and would have clearly risked being noticed by the audience; thus, the close adherence to the original in both formats. This example seems to fall in line with the generally held view that swearing *in extremis* or in a context where the audience expects it is more acceptable and justifiable than in other situations and both translators seem to comply with this view.

This is, perhaps, one of the most obvious trends in the subtitling of sexual taboo words in this film. When the word or expression is closely related to and supported by what is happening in the image the subtitler, for video and TV alike, seems to adhere more literally to the original and to resort to a more daring solution (examples 4 and 6). When the image does not show such a close, or at least evident, link with the dialogue exchanges, the solution tends to be toned down in both formats and can seriously risk being a bit naive in the case of the video (examples 2, 3 and 5). The general belief, then, that viewers will accept swearing and sexual language so long as it conforms to their expectations seems to be one of the overriding factors in subtitling, at least in the video version. Thus, if the image is of a general or non obviously sexual nature, the translator will avoid sticking to the original text. However, if the image is rather explicit, allowing the viewers to create their own expectations, the translator will opt for a fairly literal solution in English. Needless to say such a strategy on the part of the translator is likely to be at odds with the director's original intention. If at any point in this film Almodóvar wants to shock or to provoke the audience, it is by means of what is said rather than what is shown. He confounds our expectations by using unconventional expressions at times when we would not expect them, by putting them in the mouth of women, and making them speak with a freedom rare in Spanish cinema. And in this sense, it has to be said that only the film broadcast on television does justice to the original.

5. Some final remarks

I have always been very interested in this translation issue, and when I first decided on this topic my initial hypothesis was that the need for having to condense the original would be the most likely reason for the deletion and neutralisation of taboo terms and expressions impregnated with sexual innuendos. Indeed, other scholars have reached similar conclusions (Lung,1998). As a film viewer, rather than a researcher, my personal impression was that subtitles hardly ever do justice to terms which ooze sexual connotations, and with the choice of my title, I was deliberately intending to be able to end these pages by making a play on words based on the successful film by Steven Soderbergh (1989) *sex, lies and videotape*, which, incidentally, despite its provocative title is almost devoid of graphic sex, as is *Une liaison pornographique*, but whose title was translated literally into Spanish, unlike the Belgian/French film. My original intention was to conclude that rather than "sex, (sub)titles and videotapes", we are actually confronted with "sex, lies and subtitles" because subtitles hardly ever reflect accurately the original content.

However, and somewhat to my surprise, this is not totally true in the case of the film in contention, or maybe only partially true for the video version. It is certainly difficult and too adventurous to reach any firm conclusions from the analysis of just one film and more research ought to be carried out in this field to confirm or refute my findings. Sexual references are never omitted, apart from the euphemistic one in example 5, and the need for reduction is not systematically advocated as the grounds for not tackling certain thorny exchanges, although some examples of deletion exist in the video version (examples 2 and 5). There is always a reasonable attempt, however successful, to give an account of the Spanish original, and the film format does have a significant bearing in the solution reached. The reality is rather more complex that I ventured and my research can only be considered as inconclusive.

One of the usually accepted truisms in subtitling, namely, that the cinema/video version can be more audacious in the reflection of swear words and sexual connotations than the TV one, does not hold water in the case of *The Flower of My Secret*. It seems clear from this analysis that the video version resorts to a rather systematic and excessive sanitizing of the sexual expressions, whereas the TV version, that in principle should be more cautious because it must cater for a more heterogeneous audience, follows the original a lot closer. To achieve this goal, it employs strategies such as the use of other swear words of lesser strength (example 3), or compensates by resorting to the use of some key words in a particular scene (example 4) both of which contribute to foreground essential details of the character's linguistic behaviour. In this case, the TV version can be said to be more faithful to the

content and the spirit of the original product. If translations should embrace the democratic right to respect and reflect the plurality of choice, cultural expression and linguistic transgression of the original, the video version, unfortunately, does not. In the video, Blanca's character is completely stripped of her linguistic power to shock and be humorous and Leo looses her linguistic freshness, her lack of prejudices in the use of expressions that have traditionally belonged to men in the Spanish patriarchal order and that could shock "decent" ears (or eyes in our case). After all, she is a writer and words are her speciality and expertise. To lose creativity in this field, to flatten her Spanish linguistic excesses and directness when transferred to the English subtitles is the same as to lose a great part of her essence as a fictional character.

There are certainly differences between the levels of acceptance of bad language and sexual references in audiences that belong to different countries and to different social and ethnic groups within the same country. After having observed that the general attitude in subtitling is the sanitising of swear words and sexual innuendos from the original, Shochat and Stam (1985: 47) accused the translators themselves when they state that this "tendency to shy away from sexually connoted words reflects, perhaps, a higher coefficient of puritanism within a society, or at least among its translators".

Be it one way or the other, or a bit of both, British audiences are certainly short-changed when watching the video/cinema subtitled version that is a lot more sanitised and shy than its TV counterpart. The fact that the video was originally intended for the USA market, a society considered very conservative in its sexual morality, does not help matters either. Issues relating to power and cultural imperialism spring quickly to the mind of the researcher. The international commercialisation of the same film with only one English translation for all the countries that speak English entails serious questions about the hegemony and imposition of some patterns and attitudes from the dominant culture upon the other societies. From the analysis of *The Flower of My Secret* one of the issues that rises to the fore is that maybe more changes, apart from the spelling, ought to have taken place to accommodate a different audience and society. When British, and certainly other English speaking countries, watch a foreign film on video, or go to the cinema to watch the 35mm print, one could seriously posit the question: are they really watching Almodóvar the raunchy Spaniard or Almodóvar the prudish American?

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