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The Curse of Conflicting Norms in Subtitling: a Case Study of Grice in Action

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1. Introduction

This study presents the Spanish subtitles for a particular type of exchange between two characters in the film *The Curse of the Jade Scorpion*, by Woody Allen (ST). The point is not to criticise the translator’s work (TT), but to show the sort of problems that may arise from applying certain subtitling norms, namely omission, reduction and brevity, without paying sufficient attention to other factors that really need careful consideration as well. There is a short review of some the most relevant points of discourse analysis and Grice’s cooperative principle, especially the quantity maxim. An alternative version for the examples of the Spanish DVD subtitles, based on the discourse analysis of the subtitles, will be suggested as further illustration of the implications of the approach taken in this chapter.

It is widely accepted that subtitles need to be as unobtrusive as possible (Díaz-Cintas 2003, discusses the issue from nearly every conceivable angle). The obtrusiveness factor has implications for the relationship between the captions and the picture, the captions and the sound, and the ease and comfort, or otherwise, of reading them. One common requirement looms above all others, from almost every point of view and angle, such as the number of lines for the captions, the number of characters (or pixels), the amount of space, the amount of time, and so on. The requirement is, bluntly phrased, “the shorter the better”; the shorter in time, space and number of letters. A fascinating problem arises when we stop to consider how this pervasive requirement for brevity clashes with a stylistic, rhetorical, and deliberate use of excessive length, prolixity, verbosity, an apparent violation or flouting of the quantity maxim, as defined by Grice in 1975. This feature of speech (just like any other) is sometimes introduced to provide the viewers with a better understanding of a fictional character’s psychological profile, or the dynamics of the relationship between certain characters. Carefully selecting and rearranging what real people have said can also portray them at will, in the media for example. So, simply rendering the content in a shorter version for the subtitles may actually miss what is really at stake when such relationships or character portrayals matter the most, even more so when the contents of the utterance is merely a prop for the display of such prolixity. Compensatory strategies might provide a more satisfactory solution than straightforward reduction. If the rhetorical device involves a conspicuous presence of prolixity, or repetition, compensation may involve using a different rhetorical device. But before the problem can be solved it has to be recognised.

2. Theoretical framework

Film dialogue is an artifact. However, much of the time it purports to be a faithful rendering of real speech. Its credibility stems from the fact that the audience can believe, most of the time, that the characters are real, as real as fictional characters can be in a fictional world that, in the final analysis, is not so far removed from our own. Even though we must not forget the important differences between real-life speech and scripted dialogue, they still have enough in common for us to analyse scripted dialogues by using the tools of conversational analysis and pragmatics, just as we could analyse them from a grammatical point of view; or even more so since discourse analysis and text linguistics have more to do with bridging the divide between literary criticism and linguistic analysis of non-literary texts than with perpetuating it. John Austin (1962, as explained in Hatim and Mason 1990), for example, distinguished three kinds of actions, which are performed when a language user produces an utterance: the locutionary act, the illocutionary act, and the perlocutionary act. Together, these three actions make up a speech act. The point is, however, that there may be an important difference between the well formedness of an utterance (locutionary), its intended communicative effect along with the constraints of convention (illocutionary), and finally, the hearer or reader’s reaction, which tends to make the perlocutionary force rather unpredictable.

The complication of the model is that in audiovisual dialogue there are often two distinct types of hearer. There are the film viewers, on the one hand, and, on the other, the frequent presence of one or more characters (fictional or not) listening to the speaker. By the same token, we might say that there are potentially two distinct speakers, the authors of the film and the character who is made to speak (or a real person whose utterance has been recorded and edited). This is quite clear for fiction, but it is also true to a considerable extent in non-fiction productions. An example of this would be Michael Moore “making” George W. Bush say certain things at certain well-timed moments, just before, after, or in synch with, whatever other pictures or words Moore decides are to go with Bush’s quote (interestingly, regardless of whether it is in one of his books or in a film). Irony, from this point of view, is a rather complex phenomenon, where the potential for multiple relationships between the different actions (locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary) and the various speakers and listeners involved at any given moment is quite strong.

(ST1.1)

FITZGERALD *Be careful when you leave, don’t let the door hit you on the back and fracture your pelvis. (05’20’)*

(TT1.1 DUB)

FITZGERALD Cuidado al salir. No deje que la puerta le golpee el trasero y le fracture la pelvis.
[*Careful on leaving. Do not let the door hit your behind and fracture your pelvis.*]

(TT1.1 SUB)

FITZGERALD Cuidado al salir, que la puerta no le fracture la pelvis.
[*Careful on leaving, may the door not fracture your pelvis.*]

(ST1.2)

FITZGERALD

Watch out for the traffic. Don't get hit by a bus—your body mangled beyond all recognition. (27'03")

(TT1.2 DUB)

FITZGERALD

Cuidado con el tráfico. Que no le atropelle un autobús y su cuerpo triturado quede irreconocible.

[Careful with the traffic. May a bus not run you over and your shredded body become unrecognizable.]

(TT1.2 SUB)

FITZGERALD

Que no le aplaste un autobús y triture su fiambre.

[May a bus not squash you and shred your stiff (i.e. dead body).]

In examples 1.1 and 1.2, as for all of the related examples 1.1 through to 1.5, Woody Allen is communicating something to his audience through his script, by using one character, Betty Ann Fitzgerald, as speaker, and another, CW Briggs, as listener, and victim, as the case happens to be. In these examples, and other comparable situations, we need to ask whether author and character are performing the same illocutionary action, and whether the film's viewers (Allen's audience) and Briggs (Fitzgerald's hearer) can be expected to receive a similar perlocutionary effect. Presumably, the audience, unlike Briggs, will not feel that Fitzgerald is offending them. Authors often provide a character with beliefs and intentions that they do not share. In the presence of irony, a translator needs to know or assume what the author's real feelings are, and what kind of effects is meant for each type of hearer.

For the purpose of explaining translational phenomena, Hatim and Mason (1990:60) support Traugott and Pratt's (1980) classification of speech acts, following Searle (1976): representatives (such as stating, telling); expressives (e.g. deploring, admiring); verdictives (e.g. assessing, estimating); directives (e.g. ordering, requesting, daring); commissives (promising, vowing, pledging); declarations (e.g. blessing, baptizing, dismissing). I hope to show the relevance of this classification in the present case study, since the irony involved in it might be explained in the following terms. Within this theoretical framework, the speech acts in examples 1.1—1.5 seem like directives (formally, they seek to influence text receivers' behaviour), because Fitzgerald is apparently ordering Briggs to watch out, and then, depending on the case, mind the door (1.1) or look before crossing the road (1.2). In example 1.3, the order is to drive directly to the hospital. Later on, in 1.4, Briggs is told to calm down, and in 1.5, to chew carefully. Crucially, they are the kinds of orders people might give to senior citizens, or other people who are somehow in need of taking extra care in carrying out everyday activities.

(ST1.3)

FITZGERALD

Have a good evening. And if you find that you're going to have a sudden coronary thrombosis you should probably drive directly to the hospital. (28'30")

(TT1.3 DUB)

FITZGERALD

Sí. Buenas noches. Y si ve que le va a dar una trombosis coronaria repentina diríjase directamente al hospital.

[Yes. Good night. And if you see you're going to get a sudden coronary

thrombosis proceed directly to the hospital.]

(TT1.3 SUB)

FITZGERALD Buenas noches. Y si le da una trombosis coronaria vaya directo al hospital.

[Good night. And if you have a coronary thrombosis, go straight to the hospital.]

However, these utterances also fit the category of expressives, because they give expression to the speaker’s mental and emotional attitude toward a state of affairs. In other words, Betty Ann is not really telling Briggs what to do but what her feelings are towards him, i.e. she hates him, and would like to see him crippled, or paralysed, or dead. The sequence of these excerpts seems to show that Fitzgerald’s hatred grows the more she gets to know Briggs, as we move from fractured pelvis to mangled corpse, and from death by stroke to the idea that maybe paralysis is worse as it involves prolonged suffering. She is also insulting him by calling him old and frail, myopic and accident-prone. The narrative irony of this, of course, is that in the end she falls in love with him. The distinction between narrative and linguistic irony is based on whether the irony depends on how the plot unfolds or on the implicatures of a given utterance (Zabalbeascoa, 2003).

(ST1.4)

FITZGERALD *We should both calm down. I’ve just had lunch and you’re liable to overtax your heart and have a massive stroke, killing you instantly or paralysing half your body. Have a nice day. (38’52”)*

(TT1.4 DUB)

FITZGERALD Tranquilicémonos los dos. Yo acabo de almorzar y a Ud. se le podría acelerar el corazón y sufrir un infarto muriendo fulminado o quedando medio paralizado. Buenos días.

[Let’s calm down both of us. I have just had lunch and your heartbeat could get faster and suffer a heart attack, striking you dead or leaving you half-paralysed. Good day.]

(TT1.4 SUB)

FITZGERALD Calmémonos los dos. Ud. podría sufrir un infarto... muriendo fulminado o quedando medio paralizado.

[Let’s both calm down. You could have a heart attack, striking you dead or becoming half paralysed.]

In examples 1.1—1.4 we find four very similar beginnings: *be careful, watch out, have a good...*, and 1.5 is similar, too, because it involves an imperative: *don’t choke*. Example 1.4, can also be regarded a covert imperative: *calm down*. It is also parallel to 1.3, in *have a good/nice evening/day*. Example 1.5, appearing later in the film than the first four, skips the “niceties” of the first part of utterances 1.1—1.4 and goes straight to the negative imperative *don’t*, which also appears in examples 1.1 and 1.2. There is further parallel language regarding body and body parts: *pelvis* (1.1), *body* (1.2), *coronary* (i.e. heart, in 1.3), *heart* and *body* (1.4), throat is implied in *choke* (1.5). Then there are all the references to illnesses and health problems and accidents: *hit* and *fracture* (1.1), *hit by a bus and mangled* (1.2),

thrombosis and hospital (1.3), *overtax your heart and massive stroke, killing you instantly and paralysing* (1.4), *choke and die of asphyxiation*, and *cough* (1.5).

(ST1.5)

FITZGERALD *Don't choke on your breakfast 'n die of asphyxiation. You'll wind up unable to dislodge a large piece of toast no matter how hard you cough. (47'33")*

(TT1.5 DUB)

FITZGERALD Que no se le atragante el desayuno y se muera asfixiado. No podrá expulsar una tostada entera aunque tosa con todas sus fuerzas.
[May your breakfast not get stuck in your throat and you choke to death. You will not be able to get out a whole (piece of) toast even though you try with all your might.]

(TT1.5 SUB)

FITZGERALD No se atragante y se asfixie por tragarse una tostada y no podrá expulsarla.
[Do not get (food) stuck in your throat and choke for swallowing a (piece of) toast and you will not be able to get it out.]

For Grice (1975), conversation is based on a shared principle of cooperation, which can be broken down into a series of maxims. Quantity: make your contribution as informative as (but not more informative than) is required. Quality: do not say what you believe to be false, or that for which you lack adequate evidence. Relation: be relevant. Manner: be perspicuous, avoid obscurity of expression, avoid ambiguity, be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity), be orderly.

Cooperation, then, involves making one's conversational contribution such as is required by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which one is involved. The maxims (or, more precisely, their violation) form the basis for inferences that we draw in conversation, which Grice called implicatures (to distinguish them from formal logical implications). He asserted that different ways of violating these maxims give rise to different types of implicatures. Flouting a maxim involves exploiting its violation, often giving rise to irony, or to some other expression of the speaker's feelings or attitude, which is just as important, at least, as the semantic or referential value of the exchange. Unlike someone who is simply violating a maxim, someone who is flouting a maxim expects the listener to notice. If examples 1.1—1.5 are analysed as bidding farewell and well wishing, then they are too long, thus flouting the maxim of manner (be brief); and, probably more importantly, they go into too much detail, thus flouting the maxim of quantity, leading to the assumption that there is an implicature to be found. Fitzgerald is much more informative than required, showing her fondness for precision in using medical terminology; she does not say, “hurt your hip”, or “heart attack”, but “fracture your pelvis” and “coronary thrombosis”. But if the well wishing hypothesis is skipped, and they are regarded directly as a type of insult, then length and morbid detail are actually part and parcel of the structure of the insult.

Example 2.1

Baudelaire I love Wagner, but the music I prefer is that of a cat hung by its tail outside a window and trying to stick to the panes of glass with its claws.

Example 2.2

Edgar Wilson Nye Wagner's music is better than it sounds.

Notice the difference between the two quotes of examples 2.1 and 2.2. These offensive remarks, unlike all the other examples, are not from the film, but they do illustrate two different insulting techniques quite clearly. In 2.1 the whole point is to draw out a long complicated sentence, which is what provides the sting to the insult; whereas in 2.2 the effect is achieved by means of a short stab that shocks all the more in swiftness of its delivery. Length and detail make the insult stronger by implying that the speaker is willing to invest time and intellectual effort in it. There is probably no real contradiction between the two types of analysis (apparent well wishing or direct insult), merely a question of approach. For the purpose of the present study, which is to explore ways of dealing with excessively long fast speech in subtitles, a compensatory shift for translators to consider using, involving a move from the type of insult presented in 2.1 to the type of insult illustrated by 2.2, might be worth looking into.

3. The film and the characters involved in the examples

In this film, Briggs is an aging insurance investigator who meets his match in the form of Betty Ann Fitzgerald, an efficiency expert. Briggs has cracked many huge cases, receiving information from street contacts, and relying heavily on gut instinct and dumb luck. She is smarter and younger than him, posing a threat to his job. They clearly hate each other. During a dinner party, they are both hypnotized by the magician Zolton, who uses the powers of the ‘Jade Scorpion’ to make them fall deeply in love with one another. Zolton snaps them out of it, but he never releases them from the key word that can at any time send them deep into suggestive hypnosis. Later on, Zolton calls Briggs, hypnotizes him with the keyword, and uses him as a pawn to rob jewellery from rich estates, starting with Laura Kensington’s. Femme fatale, Laura Kensington actually wants to have sex with Briggs but only as an experiment (example 3.1), since she is used to handsome and muscular men, not old, ugly weaklings. So, far from flattering, her offer is rather offensive.

(ST3.1)

Laura K. *I love where you live. It's just what I thought it would be: a grimy little rat hole. ... (30'16") Somehow I find it strangely exciting standing here in a grungy hovel with a myopic insurance clerk. (29'50")*

Throughout the film, the female characters call Briggs grubby, an inchworm, and a cockroach, just to name a few. Briggs delivers his share of abuse, too. In example 3.2, Briggs is insulting a couple of rival detectives who are questioning him since he is a suspect. Examples 3.1 and 3.2 are included not only as further instances of insult, but because, interestingly, two key items, *rat hole* and *traps with the cheese* are translated by the same Spanish word in the subtitles: *ratonera*. In the following section I will argue in favour of including parallel structures and repetition in subtitles to facilitate reading them, despite time and space constraints, but the recurrent use of *ratoneras* is not a situation where repetition does any good, because of the important differences between *rathole* and *traps with the cheese*, including the fact that Briggs is the victim of one and the victimiser of the other. Thus, the repeated use of *ratoneras* could give the impression that he had interiorised the

insult from Kensington and then used it on the detectives as if his wit could offer nothing better. So, in this instance we might say that the Briggs character has been blurred in the translation, regarding his intellectual resources and his ability to produce subtle insult.

(ST3.2)

BRIGGS *Hey fellas! Sure you got the right apartment? The traps with the cheese are in the basement. (54’05’’)*

Briggs and Fitzgerald spend a lot of the time delivering wisecracks and witty comments, one after the other, mostly aimed at each other, although Briggs uses the same technique on other people as well (example 3.2). Jill is the sexy, naïve secretary, who Briggs uses to bring him coffee and snacks, and is the object of his lewd remarks. This kind of male chauvinism is precisely what Fitzgerald hates most about him, so she puts him down whenever she can. Examples 4 and 5 are included to show that Fitzgerald does not only resort to the apparently more indirect forms illustrated in examples 1.1—1.5. The irony of example 4 is that when Betty Ann finally gets around to direct insult it is an indirect form of defending him: she is actually saying that she cannot believe that he is the burglar. The double irony is that although she is right, in principle, he really is the burglar, but only because he was hypnotised.

(ST4)

FITZGERALD *While I think you’re a mealy-mouthed little reptile ...it’s too daring for you. You’re not romantic enough. It requires flair and imagination. My instincts tell me you’re not the one. You’re good at weasely-type things, at snooping and spying. You’re not man enough to be a cat-burglar. (51’56’’) ... (also to Briggs) Maybe he’s not the scummy little vermin he [Briggs] seems to be. (56’30’’)*

Examples 1.1—1.5 share the common feature that they are last words Betty Ann utters at the end of certain scenes as a sort of “farewell”, though the irony leaves little doubt as to lack of good will. The scenes always involve an acrimonious exchange of rapid-fire innuendo, and half-hidden accusations of all sorts, mostly to do with laying bare each other’s shortcomings in the human decency and sex appeal department. On closer inspection these farewells also reveal other common traits, enough for one to say quite safely that there is a pattern. They are all a sort of uncontrollable fantasy that Betty Ann has, growing more vivid as she develops each image in greater detail.

(ST5)

FITZGERALD *You couldn’t find your nose if I turned the lights out. 38’40’’*

(TT5 DUB)

FITZGERALD Ud. no encuentra ni su nariz si le apago la luz.
[*You couldn’t find your nose if I turn the light off.*]

(TT SUB)

FITZGERALD No encontraría ni su nariz.
[*You couldn’t even find your nose.*]

The insults of examples 4 and 5, follow part of the pattern of 1.1—1.5, but are different in some way. They are not part of the “farewell” routine. In all of the Fitzgerald examples there is some form of insult, and all of them display a certain indirectness. Betty Ann never uses the formula “you are a [blank]” or something like “I wish you would go [blank]” or “[blank] off!” where the blank is to be filled in with a direct form of verbal abuse. When she does (calling him a reptile, vermin, etc.) it is when her hate has actually mellowed, and, ironically, the direct insults are not entirely without tenderness. Her lines also show a confident command of (the English) language and a fondness for wit, in the knowledge that in some cases it can be sharper than a blade and much more crushing than blunt, blatant abuse. Her choice of expression is also meant to show her intellectual superiority, which indeed seems necessary in a context where she (feels she) has to prove her managerial skills to a bunch of male chauvinists who are not used to women doing anything in the office other than being bossed around and admired for their physical appearance (Jill). The other women in the office seem to spend most of their time either bringing in coffee to their male colleagues or standing around waiting for instructions to do so, and trying to look pretty. So, Miss Fitzgerald cannot afford to say things like “leave me alone”, or “get out of here”, because that would just put her in the same class as the other women. In that respect, her speech might be an attempt to sound like “the boys”, resorting to the male (or May West, in any case) kind of wisecrack.

4. Analysis of the subtitles

An explicit and implicit norm in subtitling, as most people are fully aware, is that each subtitle must be as brief as possible because of time and space restrictions. We can see that the subtitles (SUB) for this case study are indeed shorter, on the whole, than the English version, and the dubbed version (DUB). The subtitles also seem to be an abbreviated version of the source text, while retaining basically the same content.

In the light of Grice’s proposal, Fitzgerald can be said to be flouting at least the maxim of quantity, and in the process, we could argue, probably the maxim of manner, as well. This flouting of conversational maxims is meant for Briggs (and the viewers, of course) to pick up the irony. If this is indeed the case, if Fitzgerald is flouting the cooperative principle by spreading prolixity on quite thickly, what could happen in the subtitles if the utterance is portrayed in a much shorter wording? Quite clearly we are in danger of the exchange falling flat. I think this is actually what happens, at least to some degree in the subtitles of Fitzgerald’s lines. Example 1.1 is particularly telling of this.

Be careful when you leave, don’t let the door hit you on the back and fracture your pelvis. This “farewell” illustrates quite clearly what we have been dealing with regarding the character portrayal of Fitzgerald, and Grice’s cooperative principle. Betty Ann is being witty by using a scathing remark to insult Briggs without resorting to barefaced abuse, although she comes very close to that in examples 4 and 5. The way she does this is by using a certain kind of irony that involves flouting the quantity maxim, since she is providing much more information and going on for far longer than the occasion would normally require. What is the alternative, bona fide, expression? Well, simply something like, “Good-bye”. The difference between this alternative and what she actually says is quite shocking. It is also interesting to note that she could have stopped at almost any point during her utterance (indicated by the slashes) and it would still have been complete *Be careful / when you leave, / don’t let the door hit you / on the back / and fracture your pelvis*. This gives the impression that her sentence is developing as she is uttering it, showing both how quick she is and her reluctance to let go of something that she has hit upon and cannot seem to give up. Her remark implies (carries the implicature of) three main points. Briggs is short-sighted, he is old and frail, and her secret

desire is that some misfortune may happen to him. She is insulting the man, quite cruelly, especially any aspiration he might harbour as to being a he-man. This is made worse by the fact that he has practically no means of answering back since he is already half-way out of the door, or the conversation has come to an end (this is part of the routine), giving Betty Ann "the last word", always.

Another important feature is the naturalness of linguistic expression, although we might say that there are frequent parts of Allen's dialogues, in many of his films, that are simply too clever and inspirational for them ever to be a realistic portrayal of actual conversations. A two-minute exchange of a Woody Allen dialogue, often gives the impression of being the highlights of a regular two-hour conversation among very articulate people, a bit like the way a National Geographic documentary of five minutes condenses weeks of painstaking camera-work. It is not that it is not real, or realistic, it is just that we can never hope overhear someone talking like a Woody Allen character, just reeling off witticisms, with hardly a pause. Despite that, the language is quite convincing, from the point of view of idiom, situation and structure.

If we look at the Spanish subtitles for examples 1.1—1.5, we find very little of all the elements we have analysed for the English version. The subtitles have to be shorter, and indeed they are. But, precisely because they are shorter, they no longer constitute an effective flouting of Grice's cooperative principle, based on quantity, nor is the wording very idiomatic, which is essential for the utterance to be witty and not appear to be clumsily contrived.

This is also the case for 1.2, subtitled (*autobús* and *triture* simply do not collocate), and the 1.5 subtitle is not even grammatically correct. These examples are fascinating because of the demands they put on the subtitler. How can one express prolixity and be synthetic at the same time? Possibly, part of the answer lies in being able to adapt to the circumstances, which involves identifying what is really important in each case.

The real problem is often not so much linguistic as professional, since screen translators have to work very fast for little money, and fairly anonymously. So, there is no obvious or immediate reward for sweating for too long over particularly challenging problems, and it pays off to take the mini-max approach, i.e., to try to achieve maximum effect with the minimum effort. The minimum effort is related to applying norms across the board without stopping too long to think of the nature of idiosyncracies. In this particular case, however, it is a shame, because we are not dealing with just one scene, but a routine, a pattern that is repeated at a number of different points in the film. The ideal strategy, then, seems to lie in taking all of these instances of conversation tags (1.1—1.5) into account at the same time.

What is more important here than flouting the maxim of quantity is the pragmatic effect of insulting without being overtly uncouth, the wittiness, and the establishment of a routine, helping the viewer to get a better grasp of the character's portrayal and her relationship with the other character. There is a clear narrative pattern as well as the gag routine, since these characters evolve from hating each other to loving each other, and the viewer has to be able to accept that as a logical development of the events.

Reading subtitles is hard enough as it is, more so in Spain, where people do not get as much exposure as in so-called subtitling countries. So, the translator-subtitler should try to avoid making the reading even more difficult by failing to render some important features of the original sound-track. If one looks carefully at a lot of subtitles, one might say that frequently the subtitles do achieve their overall aim of giving a condensed version of the source text. But this may only be the case if the viewer/reader maintains undivided attention for about two hours, spending considerable energy in not missing a single detail of both the

captions and any other audiovisual items that the translator feels the viewer must pay attention to since they are complementary to the written words in producing meaning and effect. On the other hand, the viewer of the source text leaves the show with a feeling of enjoyment (or boredom, or whatever), but not nearly as much exhaustion. This is because there is probably often a lot more redundancy in the original version, and more clues and cues.

Now we have the criteria for translating these excerpts. We want to be insulting in a refined, witty way, without seeming openly offensive. Furthermore, we want to help the readers of the subtitles by offering parallel structures, and repetitions that will probably help reading and digesting the implications of what is read just as effectively as if we keep to strict letter-counting. Repeating words and patterns must surely be an aid to reading faster and making the right inferences, provided the repetitions are strategically placed.

Unlike the case of Germany, where subtitles are often based on the dubbed version (Schröter, 2005:196), Spanish subtitles often tend to show that there has been little or no contact between the translators of the dubbed version and the subtitled version, sometimes to such an absurd extent that the dubbed version and the subtitled version at certain points would actually be considerably improved if they were exchanged, when, for instance, the subtitled version is phonetically closer to the original (if read by a dubbing performer) than the dubbed version, and the dubbed version is much shorter and would be easier to read than the actual subtitled version. This is easy for any viewer to see, but it is almost as though the producers of DVDs and digital television had never thought that viewers would ever want to watch the dubbed version with the captions at the same time.

However, in the present case, the Spanish captions for *The Curse* do seem fairly closely related to the translation for the dubbed version. Actually, they seem to be a shortened version, with little consideration for differences involved in changing from oral to written mode other than making the latter shorter, and this seems to be done by cutting out some of the words from the dubbed version, or changing some of them, here and there, for shorter ones. Examples 1.1—1.5 all illustrate this quite clearly. For our particular study of flouting the maxim of quantity, it means that the translated version for the dubbing may be more satisfactory (by disregarding other possible causes for complaint, such as lack of naturalness and idiomatic speech) than the subtitled version simply because it is longer, lingering on detail in a maxim-flouting way. Example 5 provides further support for this hypothesis. This example is particularly revealing since the only change made in the subtitled version, apart from the deletion of certain words constitutes quite the opposite of an improvement, by changing the indicative to conditional (expressing the effect), where the condition (the cause) is precisely what has been deleted. Of the two conditional forms available in Spanish, the standard grammatical “*ía*” ending is different to the more colloquial indicative form, precisely because it is less colloquial, and most importantly, here, it has a stronger requirement of the presence of the condition, being as it is a more logical, standard expression of cause and effect.

The result is that the subtitles are not really funny, and some hardly make any sense: 1.1 is contrived and forced; in the dubbed version of 1.1, the euphemistic *trasero* is damaging, worse still, it is not even necessary since *back* and *behind* are different body parts. The subtitles for 1.3 have cut out part of the conditional of the dubbed counterpart, thus producing nonsense, by expecting somebody with a heart attack to be fit enough to go to hospital, unlike somebody who merely *feels* they might be in trouble. In 1.3, *dirijase* in the dubbing is defective, idiomatically, since it sounds more like *proceed* than *drive*. The subtitle for 1.4 does not make sense audiovisually, since *I* and *You* (1.4) and *Yo* and *Ud* (dubbed counterpart) are meant to be in synch with Fitzgerald pointing first at herself and then at Briggs, and there

is no mention of herself in this caption even though she is pointing to herself. The subtitle for 1.5 is syntactically suspect (verb tense concordance), and unidiomatic. All of these features in the captions make the reading experience hard, and possibly frustrating, thus cancelling out any benefit that might have come from them being short. It is easy to imagine the viewers struggling to make sense of them.

Bearing all of this in mind, I have ventured into proposing an alternative translation (AT) for the examples 1.1—1.5. Obviously, the maxim of quantity is not flouted so much, so the irony relies more on flouting the maxim of manner, by being deliberately ambiguous.

Alternative translations (AT) for examples 1.1—1.5

- (AT-1.1) Ojo, no tropiece y se rompa las gafas ... o la pelvis.
[Watch out, don't trip over and break your glasses...or your pelvis.]
- (AT-1.2) Ojo al cruzar, por si le aplasta un camión y le hace puré.
[Watch out when you're crossing, in case a lorry flattens you and you get all mashed up.]
- (AT-1.3) Muy buenas, pero vaya al hospital ya por si le da un infarto antes y no llega.
[Good day, but go to the hospital now, in case you have a heart attack before you can get there.]
- (AT-1.4) Tranquilos. Yo acabo de comer y... Ojo, Ud. podría tener un infarto y morir fulminado o quedar paralítico. Muy buenos días.
[Let's calm down. I've just had lunch and watch out, you could have a heart attack and die instantly or be left a paralytic. A very good day to you.]
- (AT-1.5) Ojo, coma despacito. O morirá de asfixia por atragantarse con una tostada que no podrá expulsar aunque tosa y resople.
[Watch out, go easy and don't rush your eating. Or you'll choke on a piece of toast stuck in your throat, which you won't be able to get out no matter how (hard) you cough and wheeze.]

Words and patterns are repeated to signal that a routine is going on, and to assist reading, besides the fact that the alternative is actually shorter in most instances, and never longer. Some key words from the source text are rendered to show that Briggs is being insulted for being frail and old, as in the case of the fractured pelvis, a common injury among senior citizens. The bus has been changed to a lorry because it is shorter in Spanish, and because the popular wisdom that says that destiny may call suddenly in the form getting hit by a (proverbial) bus, is more typically English than Spanish, unlike the pelvis, which is common to both. The glasses have been included to make the insult regarding Briggs's nearsightedness more explicit, and because they are Woody Allen's trademark corporate image. The alternative is more idiomatic and easier to digest, in the use of expressions like *hecho puré* rather than *trituro su fiambre* (grind your corpse), and verb modes like the indicative are usually easier to read and digest than the subjunctive (1.1, 1.2, 1.5). An alternative for example 5, might be *Ud no encontraría un pez en una pecera* (You couldn't find a fish in a fishbowl).

Finally, there is a case (examples 3.1 and 3.2) where the Spanish version repeats a word, but unfortunately in this case it does more harm than help, since the repeated word actually refers to two very different cases, and it does not seem right to lead the viewer into believing they are associated in any way. *Rat hole* and *the traps with the cheese* are both translated as

ratoneras. It does not seem coherent for Briggs to be insulted with the same word that he uses to insult his rival detectives, who he thinks are stupid.

5. Conclusion

In this case study, prolixity has proven to be an incidental instrument of irony and witty insult. It follows then, that a translator for subtitles might wish to explore other ways of flouting Grice’s cooperative principle than resorting to the maxim of quantity, maybe the maxim of relation, or manner. Of course, this can be done instinctively if one does not happen to be familiar with Grice’s theory. The purpose of theory and case studies like this one is to point out these phenomena, account for them and provide means of dealing with translation problems from a greater awareness of the nature of language and communication. Brevity is the stuff of wit, but wit cannot survive on brevity alone. Nor is brevity a guarantee that reading will be any faster or easier if coherence is seriously compromised. There is an important difference between repetition and redundancy. A certain amount of redundancy can be sacrificed in audiovisual translation, but rhetorically-driven repetition demands more creative solutions than mechanical omissions. And, finally, an underlying principle for subtitling and dubbing alike is that, in the case of feature films and entertainment they should be instrumental in procuring the entertainment, rather than being perceived as a hindrance.

6. References

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