

# The "Third language" in Dubbing

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**RESUM**

Si tenim en compte que el procés de traducció és un procés complex, el procés de traducció d'un text audiovisual encara ho és més. A part dels problemes tècnics com per exemple la sincronització labial i temporal hi ha altres factors a tenir en compte com és l'ús d'estructures lingüístiques i textuales específiques d'aquest canal de comunicació.

Moltes de les pel·lícules que sovint podem veure a la pantalla estan produïdes als Estats Units, i per tant estan en anglès, i hi ha una necessitat imperiosa de traduir-les al català i castellà. A part d'això, en algunes ocasions el text audiovisual original conté més d'una llengua; aquest és el cas de *Raid on Rommel* i *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, entre d'altres. En aquests casos, ens trobem amb una nova dificultat: el traductor ha de traduir aquesta tercera llengua (o dialecte) a la corresponent cultura d'arribada.

Aquest article vol presentar i exposar alguns exemples d'aquest tipus de dificultats així com també les diferents solucions que s'han aportat davant una "tercera" llengua.

**ABSTRACT**

If the process of translating is not easy and simple at all, the process of translating an audiovisual text is still more complex. Apart from technical problems such as lip synchronisation, there are other factors to be considered such as the use of the language and textual structures deemed appropriate to the channel of communication.

Bearing in mind that most of the films we all keep on watching were and are produced in the United States, there is an increasing need to translate them into the different languages in the world. However, sometimes the source audiovisual text contains more than one language, for example *Raid on Rommel* and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, etc. In this case, a new problem arises: the translators have some added difficulties in translating this "third" language (or sometimes dialect) into the corresponding target culture.

This paper is, thus, aimed at presenting some examples of different solutions when we come across a "third" language.

**RESUMEN**

Considerando que el proceso de traducción es un proceso complejo, el proceso de traducción de un texto audiovisual presenta dificultades añadidas. A parte de los problemas técnicos como por ejemplo la sincronización labial y temporal hay otros factores a tener en cuenta como el uso de estructuras lingüísticas y textuales específicas de este canal de comunicación.

Muchas de la películas que a menudo vemos en pantalla estan producidas en Estados Unidos y por consiguiente estan en inglés. Hay una necesidad imperiosa de traducirlas al español o catalán. En algunas ocasiones el texto audiovisual original contiene más de una lengua; éste es el caso de *Raid on Rommel* y *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, entre otras. En estos casos, tenemos una restricción más: los traductores tienen que traducir esta tercera lengua (o dialecto) a la correspondiente cultura de llegada.

Este artículo pretende presentar algunos ejemplos de este tipo de dificultades así como las posibles soluciones aportadas a la traducción de esta "tercera" lengua.

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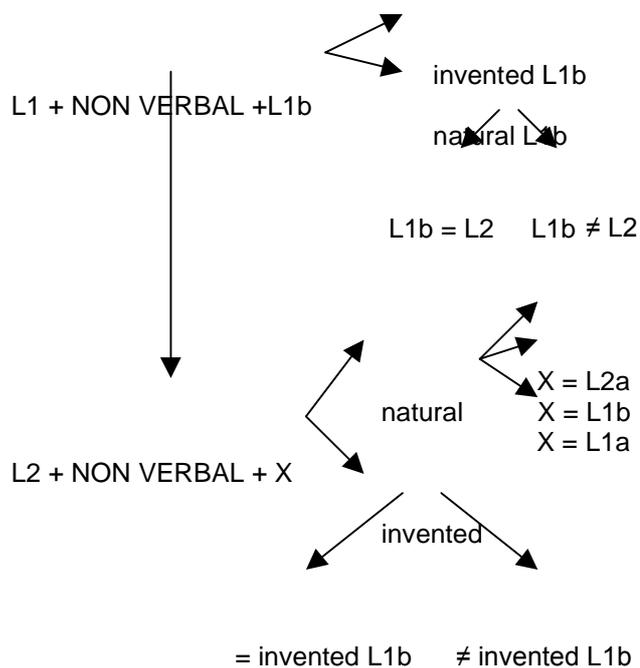
## INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to show that the “third language” used in audiovisual translation is a recurrent problem that may be resolved in a number of ways. It is widely acknowledged that audiovisual translation is one of the most commonly used types of translation. However, most of the existing models cannot be applied to dubbing or subtitling, and do not take into account the problem of a “third language”. By “third language” I mean any language that may exist in an audiovisual source text (ST) and that is not the main language of this ST. In this paper I will refer to it as L1b, or L1c if there are more than two in the source text.

## THE THIRD LANGUAGE

Up to now most theorists have dealt with models based on translating a source text in one language into a target text in another language (L1 translated into L2, an interlinguistic process), but sometimes the text is not translated to be read but to be seen and/or heard, ([L1 + Non verbal] translated into [L2 + Non verbal]). This is the case of films, cartoons, etc., what we call *audiovisual translation*. In this case, apart from the language or languages existing in the ST, we also have images, which help us to understand what is being said, but which, in many cases, operate as restrictions when translating. I have taken the term “restrictions” from the *P-R Model* by Patrick Zabalbeascoa. “Restrictions” are difficulties that are in or surround the text and that translators come across when they have to translate them (for example, omissions, ambiguity, sociohistorical factors, lack of time, lack of means, etc.). Images speak for themselves and sometimes it is difficult to change the content of the text if the translator thinks it necessary.

On other occasions, there are two languages in the source text and images as well [L1a + Non verbal + L1b]. L1b, which I have called the “third language”, stands for the second language of the original audiovisual text. This third language can be an invented language as we find, for example in *Blade Runner* where the invented language is called “Cityspeak”, which is a mixture of words and expressions from Spanish, French, Chinese, Hungarian and Japanese; or it can simply be a natural language. In this latter case it may or may not coincide with the language of the target text,  $L1b = L2$  or  $L1b \neq L2$ .



An example of this first case, L1b coinciding with L2 ( $L1b = L2$ ), is the film *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* whose source languages are: English, as a main language (L1a), and Spanish, as a secondary language (L1b), because part of the film is set in Bolivia. The film was translated into Spanish as *Dos hombres y un destino* and this secondary language of the source text is the same as the main language of the target text. That is to say, either the secondary language of the original version or the main language of the dubbed version is Spanish.

On the other hand, in the film *Raid on Rommel* translated into Spanish as *Comando en el desierto* we find an example of the second case, L1b not coinciding with L2 ( $L1b \neq L2$ ). The third language (L1b), German, is not the language of the target audience and therefore it does not coincide with L2.

In fact, this film has three languages in the original version: English (L1a), German (L1b) and Italian (L1c). The film is set in North Africa during World War II. Several British commandos set out to destroy the heavy German artillery at Tobruk. In order to carry out this mission they are assigned the job of becoming prisoners of war and they are led by Captain Foster, an English Officer posing as a Nazi Officer. The mistress of an Italian general is also a prisoner who travels with them to Tobruk. English is spoken by the prisoners, German is spoken by the German soldiers, and Italian is spoken by the female prisoner. In fact, this latter language is only heard a few times.

***Raid on Rommel***

**L1a**  
**English** (spoken by the English prisoners)

**L1b**  
**German** (spoken by the German soldiers)

**L1c**  
**Italian** (spoken by the Italian woman)

***Comando en el desierto***

**L2a**  
**Spanish** (spoken by the English prisoners)

**L2b**  
**Spanish** (spoken by the German soldiers)

**L2c**  
**Italian\*** (spoken by the Italian woman)

\*Italian with Spanish words

The translators responsible for the Spanish version did not provide the same solution for L1b and L1c. We said that in the original version L1b is German and L1c is Italian; however, in the Spanish version L1b was translated into Spanish, the same as L1a, so there is no language difference between the German and the British commandos; in contrast, Italian is partially kept in the dubbed version; “partially” kept because, to a Spanish viewer, the dialogues sound Italian although there are some Spanish words mixed in to help people understand the message. Below is the script from a scene where “Signorina” (the Italian mistress) asks a German captain why she is not leaving on a plane to Tobruk.

**(English version)**

Signorina: Porco Cretino. E' l'ultima volta che mi fa questo gioco. Il generale sentira' per questo.

Captain: Italienische Huren beeindruckt mich nicht!

Signorina: Why don't you speak English?

Captain: What seems to be the problem, signorina?

Signorina: Why I'm not leaving on that plane to Tobruk? Why?

Captain: Signorina Galliaro, especially air transportation calls for special authority.

Signorina: I got! Ecco

“Courtesy shown the bearer will greatly oblige General Giordano Banducci”

Commando Officer. Head of the Division

Captain: Yes, I know of your position with the General.

Signorina: Position?

Captain: You are very attached to his staff. Extremely attached.

Signorina: He's molto grande, il Generale! You only piccolo Captain.

Captain: Italians are very stylish warriors but I wish they'd keep their women on a leash.

Signorina: Any other jokes?

Captain: Yes, you will travel like the rest of us.

Signorina: How is that?

Captain: In a truck. Continue packing.

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**(Spanish version)**

Signorina: Porco cretino. Un mentiroso é l'ultima volta que m'engaña. El general l'arrestará per questo.

Capitán: Cuando hayamos ganado la guerra, su general volverá a ser un camarero

Signorina: ¡No le permito que me hable a gritos!

Capitán: ¿Cuál es su problema?

Signorina: ¿Por qué no voy yo quello avión a Tobruk? ¿Perche?

Capitán: Signorina Galliardo, para ir en este avión se necesita una autorización especial.

Signorina: Yo la tengo

“Le ruego traten con cortesía la portadora de este documento”

General Giordano Fanducci. Oficial en mando.

Capitán: Conozco muy bien su relación con el general.

Signorina: ¿Mi relación?

Capitán: Está usted muy vinculada a él. Mucho

Signorina: Es muy importante il general y usted es un vulgar capitán.

Capitán: Los italianos son unos soldados muy elegantes, pero no puedo decir lo mismo de sus amantes.

Signorina: ¿Algún otro chiste?

Capitán: Sí, viajará usted como todos nosotros

Signorina: ¿Y cómo lo harán?

Capitán: ¡En un camión! Siga preparando sus cosas.

At the beginning of this scene the woman is very angry and speaks Italian. Just afterwards, the German soldier goes on speaking in German and we can see subtitles in English. The “signorina” gets still angrier and asks the soldier why he does not speak English. Then they both talk to each other in English, although we hear some Italian words from the “signorina” and a German accent from the soldier. In the Spanish version the “signorina” is supposed to speak Italian, but in fact she speaks a mixture of Italian and Spanish. The soldier goes on in Spanish. Remember, in the dubbed version both L1a and L1b were translated into Spanish. At this stage, part of the content is changed since there is no point in asking the German soldier to speak English because English is not used at all in the dubbed version and the audience is supposed to be Spanish. Therefore, instead of saying “Why don't you speak English?”, she says “No le permito que me hable a gritos!” which means “I will not be shouted at”.

There is a remarkable difference in the translations depending on whether they retain parts of the source language or not. Why did the translators keep part of the Italian and not the German? On the one hand, Italian is a Romance language and similar to Spanish; besides there are only a few Italian dialogues in the film and these are very short, so it does not prevent the audience from following and understanding the film; finally, Italian was only kept partially, with the use of some Spanish words to help viewers. On the other hand, German is a very difficult language for Spanish people to understand if they have not studied it; and there are numerous dialogues in German in the original version. Without translation, most Spanish viewers would have no clue about what is going on. A possible solution to differentiate the two commandos with regard to language might have been subtitling the German dialogues, but subtitling is not very widespread practice in Spain, although it is used occasionally.

Let us turn now to an example of a German dialogue. There is another scene in which the English comando is travelling to Tobruk but they arrive at a forbidden area where they are stopped by German soldiers and they are not allowed to continue. They finally manage to get through by pretending to have two prisoners with typhus. Below is the script of the English version, in which all German dialogues have been subtitled in English.

**(English version)**

*(At the roadblock)*

Captain Foster: Na, wie geht's?

Soldier: Mein Gott, furchtbar!

Captain Foster: Gut.

Captain Foster: Ich bringe die Gefangenen nach Tobruk, es ist eine Infektionskrankheit.

Soldier: (on the phone) Das Lazarett, bitte!

Wir haben zwei Gefangene hier, mit Typhus. Sie sind sehr krank.

Ya. Er will dem Arzt sprechen.

Captain Foster: Der spricht kein Deutsch.

Der englische Arzt sagt, es ist eine Infektionskrankheit, und wir müssen zum Krankenhaus.

*(in the hospital)*

doctor: Hauptmann Schröder, der Arzt, soll den Abstrich untersuchen.

Captain Foster: Hier haben Sie die Probe.

Captain Foster: Rommel

Rommel: Doktor

Rommel: Hallo

Rommel: Wie sind die Schmerzen?

Patient 1: Besser, Herr General.

Rommel: Geht's gut?

Patient 2: Danke.

Soldier 1: Das ist der gefangene englische Doktor mit seinen kranken Männern.

Soldier 2: Darf ich für Sie übersetzen, Herr General?

Rommel: It is not necessary. It is good of you to help us. Do you really believe they might have Typhus?

Doctor: We are making tests now General, but let's hope for all concern it's something less serious.

Rommel: You're being well-treated?

Doctor: Very well. Thank you.

Rommel: Good.

Doctor: Despite the circumstances, I'm particularly pleased to meet you.

Foster is the only person travelling to Tobruk who speaks German, so he is the one who talks with the German soldiers. It is quite clear to the English-speaking audience that the two enemies speak different languages, and the dialogue itself accentuates this fact. In this scene, for example, someone on the phone asks to speak with the English doctor and Foster says that he does not speak German. Another example is when Rommel arrives at the hospital and starts talking to the English doctor. Foster asks him if he needs a translator. At this point, he says that will not be necessary and begins speaking in English. In the Spanish version Foster does not speak to the German soldier in German but in Spanish. Apparently, there is no communication problem. The two references to language have disappeared in the Spanish version, so when the German soldier tells Foster that the person on the phone wants to speak with the doctor, he simply replies that he will take the phone ("No, deme! Les hablaré yo"), and he says nothing about speaking German or any other language. Later, when Rommel starts talking to the doctor in the hospital, nobody asks if he needs a translator because everybody speaks in Spanish and there is no reference whatsoever to the German language except for the sign posted by the German soldiers, which reads "HALT".

Thus, the third language (L1b) can be a written text, any sign that can be read on the screen by the viewer, as in the example we have just mentioned: “HALT”, or an audiovisual text, that is, a language spoken by speakers whom the viewer sees and listens to.

Moreover, in some films there is a further difficulty: a translation within the audiovisual source text. This may happen when two groups of people of different nationalities speak clearly different languages. In this case, communication problems, for one reason or another, are brought to the fore. Then, one character typically plays the role of interpreter.

Let us take an example to illustrate this point. In the film *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* there is a scene where Paul Newman (Butch) acts as interpreter. In this scene there are some Bolivian bandits (speaking Spanish) and Butch and Sundance (who speak English) approach them. Butch speaks some Spanish and Sundance none, but he wants to say something to the bandits. Since he speaks no Spanish, he needs Butch to translate for him:

Sundance: “Tell him we were hired to take it back – it’s our job – tell him the money is ours”

Butch: “El dinero ... no es nuestro...”

In the Spanish version the interpreting done by Butch has disappeared. The translators did not solve the problem by using a translation within the translation, which in my view would have been an interesting solution, they simply omitted this communication problem.

## CONCLUSIONS

So far, we have just seen various ways of translating this “third language”, so it means that there is no single way of translating because there are many variables that can influence the translators’ decisions. Several solutions are plausible, depending on the aims of the translation. The *P-R Model* by Patrick Zabalbeascoa provides insight into the translators’ decisions and it also works to justify a translation no matter what its format or language(s) is/are.

I use the term “translators” (in plural) instead of the “translator” (in singular) because to my mind the term “translator” is a concept rather than a concrete person. An audiovisual translation is a task that includes the process of translating plus the act of adjusting for timing and lip movement. Obviously audiovisual translators are not entirely responsible for the final version of the translation because there are other people who work in the process, such as technicians and the dubbing actors and the dubbing director, all of whom have something to say about the translation.

Finally, nowadays there are many films which contain more than one language in the original version and there is a need to translate them into many languages throughout the world. The “third language” is a recurrent problem that translators need to resolve when doing their job. Most existing models cannot be applied to dubbing or subtitling since most are based on literary translation and none of them regards the “third language” as a problem.

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## MATERIAL AUDIOVISUAL

*Blade Runner*, dir. Ridley Scott, Warner Bros Pictures, 1982. (Videocassette - English Version)

*Blade Runner*, dir. Ridley Scott, Warner Home Video, 1982 (Videocassette - Spanish Version)

*Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, dir. George Roy Hill, Twenty Century Fox, 1969. (Videocassette – English version)

*Dos hombres y un destino*, dir. George Roy Hill, Twenty Century Fox, 1969. (Videocassette – Spanish version)

*Raid on Rommel*, dir. Henry Hathaway, Universal Studios, 1999. (DVD – English version)

*Comando en el desierto*, dir. Henry Hathaway, Universal Studios, 1999. (DVD – Spanish version)