

# The presence of Spanish in American movies and television shows. Dubbing and subtitling strategies

---

Nieves Jiménez Carra  
Universidad Pablo de Olavide, Sevilla  
njimcar@upo.es

## Abstract

The existence of a large Latin American community living and working in the United States has been the main cause for the Spanish language to have gradually found its way into the North-American society. Those belonging to this community use both Spanish and English on a daily basis, although not usually to the same degree: Spanish is normally spoken in colloquial situations, whereas English is the language used in work or academic contexts. The code-switching between the two languages emerges as a tool of identification with both cultures. Over the past few years, the cultural reality of all those people who are able to alternate English and Spanish in the same conversation has emerged in the United States as a new theme for movies and television shows. In this paper, I shall analyze the presence of code-switching in several American audiovisual products. I will also examine the translation, dubbing and subtitling strategies used by the American screenwriters and the Spanish translators when this bilingual situation occurs in a script.

**Keywords:** code-switching, audiovisual translation, Spanish-English/English-Spanish translation, dubbing, subtitling.

## Resumen

La numerosa y creciente comunidad latinoamericana que vive y trabaja en Estados Unidos es la principal causa de la paulatina introducción de la lengua española en la sociedad norteamericana. Los individuos que pertenecen a dicha comunidad generalmente utilizan el español y el inglés muy frecuentemente, aunque, por regla general, el primero es usado en situaciones familiares y coloquiales y el segundo, en contextos laborales o académicos. El cambio de código entre estos idiomas surge como un modo de identificación con ambas culturas. En los últimos años, la realidad cultural de todos aquellos capaces de alternar inglés y español en un mismo discurso se ha convertido en participante o incluso protagonista de películas y series de televisión. En este artículo, analizo la presencia del cambio de código en varios productos audiovisuales estadounidenses, y examino las estrate-

gias de traducción, doblaje y subtítulo que los guionistas norteamericanos y los traductores españoles emplean cuando esta situación de bilingüismo aparece en un guión.

**Palabras clave:** cambio de código, traducción audiovisual, traducción español-inglés/inglés-español, doblaje, subtítulo.

*'If people want to succeed in the United States, they gotta learn English; but if I want to speak to the Latino voters in my state, I'm damn well gonna [use bilingual campaign ads].'*

*(Senator Robert McCallister, Republican presidential candidate. Brothers & Sisters (ABC). Season 2, episode 5: 'Domestic Issues')*

## 1. Introduction

According to the US Census Bureau (<http://www.census.gov>), more than 38 million people living and working in the United States in 2007 were foreign-born (only less than a half of them were American citizens). One of the most obvious consequences of this situation is reflected on the use of language. Spanish is the most spoken foreign language in the United States and this fact does not come as a surprise if we take into account that, according to the same source, 53.6% of the immigrant population in that country comes from Latin America.

Fishman (2004) points out that “the USA is a country largely established and built by voluntary and involuntary immigrants and its social dynamics have been such that to this very day any multilingualism among its inhabitants generally marks fairly recent immigrant status” (2004: 116). This translates into the fact that the mother tongue of those immigrants is hardly ever or never spoken among their descendants, mostly because English always becomes their first language. In this respect, Ana Celia Zentella (2004) describes the loss of language fluency in the children and grandchildren of those immigrants.

As Finegan and Rickford (2004) state in their introduction to Fishman's article, it is extremely difficult for a language different than English to survive in the USA, since it naturally tends to be used by the first generations of immigrants only in colloquial environments, and, subsequently, it eventually falls into disuse.

However, Spanish has a relatively high presence in the American society and seems to be stronger there than other foreign languages. Fishman (2004) asserts that those living in rural communities in the state of Texas, for example, have been successful in maintaining the language for at least six or eight generations,

“in contrast with newcomers to secondary settlement areas in the mid-west” (2004: 118). This would prove that keeping the language is not an impossible task. In fact, the previously mentioned US Census Bureau reports that 84.4% of the foreign-born population aged 5 and over speaks another language different than English at home, as against only 15.6%, who speaks just English. The wish to remain close to their cultural origins also plays an essential role, as we shall observe, in the maintenance of a language.

This bilingual situation is a very noticeable reality. Spanish is present in education as one of the most chosen foreign languages in secondary schools and college; publishing companies publish editions in Spanish of some of their books, and the “2007 Analysis of Library Demographics, Services and Programs”, of the American Library Association (<http://www.ala.org>), states that “about 21 million people in the United States speak limited or no English”, and that Spanish is the “most supported non-English language in USA public libraries”.

Advertising in Spanish is also being used to reach the vast amount of population for whom it is the mother tongue. One example of this is the security campaign carried out since 2002 by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority in New York (variations of this campaign have been used in other cities as distant from New York as London and Tokyo, besides other towns within the United States). It is composed of several television commercials, as well as advertising in the subway, buses and newspapers, and it is promoted both in English and in Spanish. Its aim is the prevention of possible terrorist attacks. It is hoped that the campaign will draw New Yorkers and visitors’ attention to objects, bags, etc. left unattended in public places. The slogan of the campaign in English is “If you see something, say something” and in Spanish, “¡Si ves algo, di algo!”. Both versions have a subtitle too: “Tell us [the MTA], a cop or call 1-888-NYC-SAFE” and “Habla con un policia o con un empleado de la MTA. O llama al 1-888-NYC-SAFE”. The lack of accent in the word *policia* only occurs in the written advertisements, whereas it is correctly spelled in the television commercials. The aspect to emphasize here is the fact that Spanish is the only foreign language into which this campaign has been translated. This alone could be a good indicator of the ‘status’ that Spanish has in the American society and it clearly shows to which extent authorities are aware of the need to include the Spanish-speaking population among the target audience of local advertisements and warnings.

The mother tongue, essential as it is for communication, emerges as a tool that immigrants use, both consciously and unconsciously, as a way of claiming their belonging to a certain community. However, they also need to speak the language that is mainly spoken where they live, even though, sometimes, just for communication purposes. As a general rule, the mother tongue or the language used by

parents or grandparents (in case it is not the individual's mother tongue) is usually spoken at home, the several levels of register being very colloquial. The language of the receiving community, however, is used, for instance, in work or academic contexts. As a result of this language mixing, some degrees of proficiency can be observed, which vary depending on various factors. The people that are born to Spanish-speaking parents and raised in the United States generally speak and understand Spanish; some of them will even achieve a proper competence, but for most of them, English will remain their mother tongue, since they are educated in that language and it is the one that they use on a daily basis. Their reluctance to let go of that essential part of their origin, however, "speaks eloquently for the tenacity and vigor of Spanish tradition and culture" (Espinosa, 1975: 101).

## 2. English/Spanish code-switching in the United States

The term 'code-switching' is generally employed to describe the alternation of two languages in discourse. From a strictly linguistic point of view, it refers to the change from one language to another within the same conversation. The term 'code-mixing', on the other hand, defines those speeches in which isolated elements from a different language than that of the main discourse are added in the middle of the conversation. However, most researchers seem to prefer the first one, since it holds a broader meaning. Code-switching, after all, can also include code-mixing at a certain point of the discourse. León Jiménez (2003: 34-35) explains that

*En muchas ocasiones, el paso de una variedad a otra se produce dentro del turno conversacional de un único hablante, mientras que en otras ocasiones el cambio se produce dentro de los límites de una misma oración, prescindiendo de cualquier pausa sintáctica para separar los códigos empleados [On many occasions, the switch from one variety to another occurs within the conversational turn of a single speaker, whereas in other occasions the switch occurs within the same sentence, without any syntactic pause separating both codes.]*

Code-switching should not, however, be confused with the term 'Spanglish', since the latter basically consists in introducing English words or expressions that have been incorrectly translated into the Spanish discourse. One of the most common examples of Spanglish is the 'translation' of the expression 'to vacuum the carpet' as *vacunar la carpeeta*, which literally translates into Spanish as 'to vaccinate the folder'. I will not, however, explain this aspect in more detail, since it is not the aim of this work.

In 2005 I analysed the code-switching and translation strategies used by Sandra Cisneros and Liliana Valenzuela, respectively, in Cisneros' novel *Caramelo or Puro*

*Cuento*. I mentioned the diverse opinions regarding the nature of code-switching, code-mixing and Spanglish. That is, whether they were the result of a high level of proficiency in English and Spanish or, on the contrary, of a poor competence in both languages (Jiménez Carra, 2005: 40-41). Those critical of this phenomenon, no matter in which of its forms, argue that it is indeed a sign of ignorance and relate it to social marginality (González Echeverría, 1997; Castro, 2001); they affirm that it is because of the individuals' lack of knowledge of certain words or expressions in one language that they need to fill the 'void' with equivalences in the other language. Others, however, state that phenomena like code-switching or Spanglish are the result of a high level of proficiency in both languages. Pieter Muysken (1995: 177), for example:

In the last fifteen years, a large number of studies have appeared in which specific cases of intra-sentential code-switching were analysed from a grammatical perspective, involving a variety of language pairs, social settings and speaker types. It was found out that code-switching is a quite normal and widespread form of bilingual interaction requiring a great deal of bilingual competence.

Köppe and Meisel (1995: 277) explain that “the term ‘code-switching’ [...] is used in the almost commonly accepted sense to describe a certain skill of the bilingual speaker that requires pragmatic and grammatical competence in both languages”.

Code-switching arises, then, not only from the wish of the individual to remain close to his/her cultural tradition, but also from the need to integrate into the receiving society. This cultural reality has already been shown in literature by authors such as Sandra Cisneros, Rudolfo Anaya or Ricardo Sánchez, who have used code-switching in their books as a way of claiming the recognition of its presence in their culture.

One of the most recent examples of the influence of this phenomenon in literature or, also, of how literature uses it for its own purposes, is the novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, written by Junot Díaz, which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2008, as well as the National Books Critics Award 2008. It is significant that a novel telling the story of a family of Dominican immigrants in the United States, in which the English writing is riddled with Spanish words, has won these prestigious awards. Spanish words are not even italicized to distinguish them from English, as is common in other similar cases, and a page is hardly to be found where at least a couple of Spanish words and/or expressions do not appear. The website of the Penguin Reading Guides dedicated to this book opens up several discussing questions, among which the following, very illustrative of the bilingual nature of the story, can be found:

Throughout the novel, Spanish words and phrases appear unaccompanied by their English translations. What is the effect of this seamless blending of Spanish and English? How would the novel have been different if Díaz had stopped to provide English translations at every turn? Why does Díaz not italicize the Spanish words (the way foreign words are usually italicized in English-language text)? ([http://us.penguin.com/static/rguides/us/brief\\_and\\_wondrous\\_life\\_of\\_oscar\\_wao.html](http://us.penguin.com/static/rguides/us/brief_and_wondrous_life_of_oscar_wao.html))

Some of these authors also experience a certain lack of competence in Spanish at some levels. Sandra Cisneros, for example, explains that “*me hacen falta las palabras en español* (to write a novel in this language). *Tengo carencias de determinados aspectos del español porque lo aprendí de niña*” (Cisneros, as quoted in Lucio, 2003). That is, her Spanish is mainly colloquial and lacking the vocabulary that applies to certain topics because she learned it as a child and has mostly spoken English ever since, especially in more formal contexts. Other authors, however, turn to Spanish when they want to emphasize particular aspects of the Hispanic culture that they think cannot be fully conveyed in English. This is the case of, for example, Rudolfo Anaya (Eguiluz Ortiz de Latio, 2000: 103).

As for the television channels that broadcast in Spanish, two big networks stand out: *Univision* and *Telemundo*, the latter owned by NBC. They usually broadcast old programs produced by Latin American (mostly Mexican) television stations. Other channels are V-Me (read as *Ve-Me* or “Watch-Me”) or HITN (Hispanic Information and Telecommunications Network). Several American television channels have also started broadcasting some of their most popular shows in Spanish via the SAP—Secondary Audio Programming—option. One of the last ones to be included in this group has been *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, which is available in Spanish (either subtitled or dubbed) since October 20, 2008.

BBC Worldwide Channels have recently announced the launch of its first Spanish-language channel in the United States, dedicated to pre-schoolers. Darren Childs, managing director, has recognized the importance and the need of this launch:

The introduction of a Spanish version of CBeebies into the U.S. Hispanic market is a momentous achievement for BBC Worldwide Channels in this hugely competitive territory. As well as complementing BBC AMERICA, which recently celebrated its tenth anniversary, it means that we’re able to reach out to millions of Americans for whom Spanish is their first language (PR Newswire). (<http://news.prnewswire.com/ViewContent.aspx?ACCT=109&STORY=/www/story/11-19-2008/0004928901&EDATE>)

As we can deduce from all the previously asserted facts, the growing presence of Spanish in American daily life, which includes advertising, literature, authority

warnings, etc., can also be noticed in audiovisual products. The movies including Spanish in their scripts on a regular basis are not as numerous as the television shows that do so, however, and when they include it, their story usually involves immigration (in fact, this is the case of the two movies analyzed below). One of the reasons for this may be the closeness of television to the viewer, which makes it more necessary to add these features in order to cover a wider range of audience groups, who will probably be more faithful to a program if their reality is shown and recognized in it.

In the next two sections I will analyze the presence of Spanish (as spoken by Hispanics) in several American audiovisual products. My aim will be to examine not only the code-switching phenomenon but also the different strategies used by American screenwriters to integrate Spanish words, sentences or conversations into the English discourse and to clarify their meaning (by adding subtitles, by explaining the sense of the word, etc.), as well as the solutions provided in the corresponding translations into European Spanish. After the analysis, I will try to determine if there is a translation pattern used in the United States and in Spain whenever this bilingual situation occurs in a script, and how it affects the dubbing and/or the subtitling.

### **3. The use of Spanish in American movies**

Among the movies that have been produced in the last years and that have included Spanish in their scripts, *Spanglish* certainly stands out. Its title brings back the confusion mentioned above as for the terminology employed to describe this phenomenon. It should be pointed out here that it is not Spanglish but code-switching that is being used by the characters in the movie.

The strategy to deal with this phenomenon is the same in the United States and in Spain. The English version includes subtitles when Spanish is being spoken and the Spanish version includes them when English is being used. It has not been dubbed into Spanish, except for one of the characters' voice-over in the introduction and conclusion to the movie. Special attention should be drawn to the role that the little girl plays as the interpreter between her mother and the American family she works for. One scene of this movie is particularly memorable, namely a fight between two of the characters, one speaking in English and the other one in Spanish, the girl acting as the interpreter for (and the impersonator of) both of them. In this scene, and since the kid is 'translating' the script for both audiences, no subtitles are used.

Showing the original film rather than a dubbed version for the benefit of Spanish viewers was probably the best strategy to carry out here, if the essence of

the film was to be maintained, as it depends on the constant change from one language into another. This is not, however, the choice made for Woody Allen's 2008 movie, *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*, in which the dubbing eliminates its most characteristic feature: the code-switching employed by two of the main characters.

Let us now examine the different strategies employed in two other movies, whose plots include a clear reference to Hispanic immigrants in the United States and in which Spanish is constantly used.

### 3.1. *Quinceañera*

All actors starring in this movie are of Hispanic origin, and they continually switch from Spanish into English, the youngest one of them being the one who employs English the most. In the Spanish dubbing, several words have been changed from the original, in an attempt to create a consistent final script, in which only expressions used in the Spanish spoken used in Spain appear:

(1)

Source Text: *Qué bueno que estás despierta todavía. Casi no te vi en todo el día. ¿Te divertiste?* [It's good you're still awake. I barely saw you today. Did you have fun?]

Target Text: *Qué bien que estás despierta todavía. Casi no te he visto en todo el día. ¿Te divertiste?* [It's good you're still awake. I have barely seen you today. Did you have fun?]

In the previous example changes have been made in the adverb and in the verb tense, since the present perfect tense is the one used in Spain when the speaker refers to events within the prevailing time span. A similar strategy is used in the sentences *¿Cómo pudo pasar esto?* [How could this happen?] and *¿Cómo pudiste dejar que pasara esto?* [How could you let this happen?], where the verb tenses are also changed: *pudo* becomes *ha podido* and *pudiste*, *has podido* (both would translate as 'could').

The next example shows the adding of a pronoun to the verb:

(2)

ST: *Prométeme* [Promise me.]

TT: *Prométemelo* [Promise it to me.]

Other changes include the elimination of euphemisms, as in *¿Cuándo fue la última vez que tuviste tu visita mensual?* [When was the last time you had your monthly visit?] in which *visita mensual* 'monthly visit' is replaced by *menstruación* 'men-



struation’, or the inclusion of lexical modifications: *Yo creo que (el vestido) necesita aumento*, rendered as *Yo creo que necesita ensancharlo un poco*, both would translate as ‘I think (the dress) needs to be let out’.

### 3.2. Real Women Have Curves

The main way of translating Spanish in this movie is by means of subtitles. However, advertisements, signs, posters and billboards appear only in Spanish, as do songs and television programs. All these features create a background that contributes to locate the story, both culturally and linguistically. An example of this is the following television audio that can be heard in the background, most likely from a reality show: *Hoy tenemos con nosotros a (...) que no sabe que su esposo (...) le va a pedir el divorcio para casarse con la prima hermana menor de su tía (...)*, [(...) is with us today; she doesn’t know that her husband (...) wants a divorce so he can marry her/his aunt’s younger first cousin.] Expressions such as *buenos días, cómo está*, etc., are usually not relayed in the subtitles.

The choice of one language or the other is made as a way of showing the integration of immigrants into the receiving society. Also, as Rosenwald (2008: 138) states, for some immigrants (he mentions Puerto Ricans), “English is the language of the social advancement, the prestige language (...)”. For example, when the teacher of the main character introduces himself to her parents, he does so in Spanish, since he assumes that her parents cannot speak English: *Soy el maestro de inglés de Ana* [I am Ana’s English teacher]. Ana’s father, visibly upset, answers “I speak English”, which causes the teacher to apologize.

Some minor mistakes are made in the original script, such as the use of *colegio* [school], instead of ‘college’ in the sentence *Esas cosas no le van a enseñar ahí en el colegio* [They are not going to teach her those things at school.] The term is rendered correctly in the English subtitles: “They can’t teach her these things in college”.

Finally, some of the choices in the subtitles might point to the fact that more attention is devoted to the English sections of the script than to the Spanish ones, such as *Su maestro está bien contento con ella* [Her teacher is well content with her] ‘Her teacher is really happy with her’ subtitled in the original version as “Her teacher really believes in her”.

## 4. The use of Spanish in American television shows

The excellence of American television shows is recognized worldwide and one of the reasons for this lies in the vast sums of money generated by (and, consequently, invested in) these programs. The proximity of television programs to the

audience makes it more necessary to include elements which more viewers can feel close to. Thus, considering the Spanish-speaking population living in the US, the use of Spanish in a series (or even of a Spanish-speaking recurring or main character) seems to be a carefully considered decision by television producers and/or writers. This does not mean, however, that certain shows that might be expected to include Spanish, will incorporate it in the end. For example, in *Ugly Betty*, the ABC adaptation of the Colombian television serial melodrama *Betty La Fea*, the use of Spanish words is limited to interjections.

I will now examine the presence of this language in several television shows. It will be clear that the use of Spanish words or Spanish-speaking characters occurs more often the more recent the product is.

#### 4.1. *Spanish in politics: The West Wing*

In 2001, the episode “Ways and Means” of the political television show *The West Wing* (NBC, 1999-2006) featured Victor Campos, an influential Hispanic Democrat (the head of the American Federation of Service Employees). In the episode he meets Sam Seaborn, the White House Deputy Communications Director, who asks him to explain his recent and unexpected political decisions against several bills promoted by the government.

During the meeting, in English, Sam Seaborn and Victor Campos exchange several sentences in Spanish (the switch from one language to another being started by Campos). The subtitles for this scene only specify “Speaking Spanish”, not giving any further information about the content of the conversation, even though it is far from banal:

(3)

S. Seaborn: No one has worked harder (referring to President Bartlet) to raise minimum wage.

V. Campos: *Mi gente gana más que el mínimo sueldo* [My people earn more than minimum wage.]

S. Seaborn: *¡Te subió al podio en la maldita convención!* [He invited you up to the podium at the damn convention!]

V. Campos: *Porque necesitaban una cara morena* [Because they needed a brown face.]

S. Seaborn: *Estás equivocado* [You’re wrong.]

V. Campos: *No lo estoy* [I’m not.]

After this short exchange, they continue the conversation in English. The Spanish dubbing of this episode changes some of the structures and expressions

when the code-switching occurs, such as the translation of “minimum wage”, *salario mínimo*, more usual in European Spanish (although the expression used in the script, *mínimo sueldo*, can also be used in some varieties of American Spanish):

ST: *Mi gente gana más que el mínimo sueldo.*

TT: *Mi gente está por encima del salario mínimo.* [My people are above the minimum wage]

The grammatical structure is also different in the next clause:

ST: *¡Te subió al podio en la maldita convención!*

TT: *¡Te hizo subir al podio en la maldita convención!* [He made you come up on the podium at the fucking convention]

And finally, the verb in the last sentence is changed from the plural to the singular. In my opinion, this modification entails a change in the subject of the sentence, from a group of people (possibly the Democratic Party) to a single person (President Bartlet):

ST: *Porque necesitaban una cara morena.*

TT: *Porque necesitaba una cara morena* [Because he needed a brown face.]

As an incidental note, in the seventh and last season of this acclaimed television show, the audience followed a presidential campaign and witnessed the victory of a Hispanic candidate, played by actor Jimmy Smits, of Puerto Rican origin.

## **4.2. Spanish in New York: Friends**

In 2002, the episode called “The One With The Baby Shower” of the cult situation comedy *Friends*, included the following conversation between one of the main characters, Rachel, and her mother (ST):

(4)

Rachel: Mrs. Kay! Oh, yeah, she was sweet! She taught me Spanish. I actually think I remember some of it: “*Tu madre es loca*” [Your mother is crazy.]

Rachel’s mother: Such a sweet woman!

This joke works for the audience, even though most of them are unlikely to speak Spanish (and, thus, they will not notice the mistake in the use of the verb *ser* instead of *estar*). The joke resides in the unawareness of Rachel’s mother (and of Rachel) of the insult contained in that sentence. In the Spanish dubbing, it is translated into Portuguese. The meaning is the same, but the similarity between these last two languages helps the Spanish-speaking viewer understand the line:

Rachel: ¡La Sra. Kay! Ah sí, era un encanto. Me enseñó portugués. Aún recuerdo algunas palabras: *sua mãe é louca*. [Mrs Kay! Oh, yes, she was lovely. She taught me Portuguese. I still remember some words: *sua mãe é louca* [your mother is crazy]].

Rachel's mother: *Un encanto de mujer* [A lovely woman].

The responses from the English-speaking and the Spanish-speaking viewers could be similar, although for a different reason. On the one hand, the former laugh simply because Rachel speaks in Spanish and her mother, not understanding her daughter, pretends that she does. On the other, Spanish-speaking viewers also realize that Rachel's mother is being insulted without her or her daughter realizing.

### 4.3. Spanish in the FBI: Without a Trace

One of the main characters of the CBS show *Without a Trace* (from 2002 until the present) is the Hispanic FBI special agent Danny Taylor (played by Enrique Murciano, an American actor of Cuban origin). In a scene of the second episode of the first season (2002), entitled "Birthday Boy", Taylor character tries to convince the young witness of a kidnapping to talk to him. Since the witness is Hispanic too, Taylor adds several sentences in Spanish in the middle of their English conversation:

(5)

Danny Taylor: Look, man, I'm not a cop. I don't give a damn about what you're into. I just wanna do my job and find your friend. *¿Me entiendes? Lo que tú me digas a mí es en confianza. En confianza* [Do you understand me? What you tell me remains between you and me. Between you and me].

In the original version they opt for including "Speaks in Spanish" for the Anglophone audience. Neither this nor any other reference to the language spoken appears in the Spanish subtitles, since the viewer is expected to be able to understand it (although this, however, does not apply to the subtitles for the hard of hearing). A lexical and perhaps pragmatic change occurs in the dubbed version, where Taylor's Spanish lines are rendered as *Lo que tú me digas quedará entre nosotros. Confía en mí*. The phrase *es en confianza* becomes *quedará entre nosotros*, for which the back translation is also "will remain between you and me", whereas the second sentence, *En confianza* (rare in European Spanish), is translated as *Confía en mí* [Trust me].

In the episode "Legacy" of the same show (Season 2, broadcast in 2004) the same character visits his older brother in prison. The anglicized name of the FBI agent is derided by his brother Rafi (played by Álex Fernández), who seems to think

that Taylor has changed it to hide his origin: “Danny Taylor? [laughs] When the guards told me I almost didn’t know who it was”.

During their two-minute conversation, Rafi, who speaks English with a Cuban accent (faked by the actor, who is a Florida native), introduces several words and sentences in Spanish, some of them interjections:

(6)

Rafi: *Pero no te preocupes* [But don’t worry], I got a good record and I’m gonna get out of here and I won’t need your help.

(7)

Rafi: That’s a lie! *Eso fue una mentira* [That was a lie.] It was mom’s story!

(8)

Rafi: *Mira* [Look], he’s dead, she’s dead, it doesn’t matter what you believe. *Pero* [But] papi was a bastard [...].

Let us now consider the dubbed version:

(6)

Rafi: *Pero tranquilo, tengo un buen historial. Saldré de aquí, no necesito tu ayuda* [But take it easy, I’ve got a good record. I’ll get out of here, I don’t need your help.]

(7)

Rafi: ¡*Mentira! ¡Es mentira! ¡Te lo dijo mamá!* [A lie! That’s a lie! Mom told you that!]

(8)

Rafi: *Él está muerto, y mamá. No me importa lo que creas. Pero nuestro padre era un cabrón* [He’s dead, and mom. I don’t care what you believe. But our father was a bastard.]

As can be observed, every Spanish occurrence is altered in the TT, except for the conjunction *pero*. Sometimes, as has already been pointed out and as shall be examined later, a similar change is carried out in order to make a certain turn of phrase sound natural to European Spanish speakers. That is the case of *Eso fue una mentira*. The problem here lies in the use of the past tense (*fue*) instead of the present (*es*), which is the one finally chosen in the target version.

However, regional variation is not always the reason for the change. An example of this is the sentence *Pero no te preocupes* [But don’t worry], which sounds perfectly normal for any Spanish speaker and which is nonetheless replaced by *Pero tranquilo* [But take it easy]. Here the change may be due to synchronization problems. *Mira* is also omitted without any apparent reasons.

In 2005, the incorporation of Elena Delgado, a second Hispanic character, played by Puerto-Rican actress Roselyn Sánchez, led to a more frequent use of Spanish in the show than before. This new tendency could already be noticed in her first appearance, in the episode called “From The Ashes” (2005), where the two Hispanic characters exchanged these sentences:

(9)

Danny: Elena.

Elena: Danny.

Danny: *¿Cómo te ha ido?* [How have you been?]

Elena: I’ve been super.

The Spanish version only alters the last sentence, reduced in this case to *súper*, a not very common choice for the European Spanish audience.

At the end of this episode, Elena tells Danny *Danny, ven acá, por favor* [Danny, come here, please], which is dubbed as *Danny, ven, por favor* [Danny, come please]. *Acá* [Here] is omitted because it is not very frequently used in European Spanish, although it could have been replaced by *aquí*. This sentence does not have a subtitle in the original version.

In “Candy” (2006), the second episode of the fifth season, another exchange in Spanish takes place between the same characters:

(10)

Danny: *Te echaste perfume* [You put on perfume]

Elena: *Sí. ¿Está fuerte?* [Yes. Is it too strong?]

Danny: *No, me encanta* [No, I love it]

Elena: *¿Seguro?* [Sure?]

In the Spanish dubbed version, the tense of the first verb is changed from the past to the present perfect, used in European standard Spanish (*¿Te has echado perfume?* [Have you put on some perfume?]). There is also a minor modification in the second sentence: *¿Un poquito fuerte?* [Is it a little too strong?].

Finally, in the episode “Eating Away” (2007), the thirteenth of the fifth season, we find an example of a strategy that will be examined in more detail below: the addition of a translation in the discourse.

(11)

Elena: *Y a mí me quitan a Sophie y yo me muero, Danny, yo me muero* [And if they take Sophie away from me, I will die, Danny, I will die.]

Danny: Listen, nobody is gonna take Sophie away from you.

In the Spanish version, the first pronoun *me* is omitted, not so the second one: *Si me quitan a Sofía yo muero, Danny, yo me muero* [I will die if they take Sofía away from me, Danny, I will die]. The translation of Danny's line is more succinct since it omits the marker "Listen".

#### **4.4. It runs in the family: *Cane***

One of the latest television shows to include Spanish in the original script on a regular basis is *Cane* (2007), which ran only one series. In the original version, most of the Spanish words and expressions are subtitled for the Anglophone audience, although there are still several interjections or expressions that remain untranslated.

The main role in the show is played by Jimmy Smits, a New York native with a Puerto Rican mother, who also played the Hispanic presidential candidate in the last season of *The West Wing*. Another well-known actor in this show is Héctor Elizondo, born in New York to a Spanish father and a Puerto Rican mother. Elizondo's first lines in the pilot episode of *Cane* include: *Un mojito ahí* (subtitled as 'Give me a mojito, please') and "Did you try the *pastelitos* [cakes]?" He speaks English with a very strong accent to indicate that he is not a native speaker of English. His children, however, speak perfect English and almost perfect Spanish. All of them use Spanish interjections and words in their discourse, which, as I mentioned before, are generally not subtitled. The children's names are Spanish, but they all have English nicknames: Alejandro becomes Alex, Francisco becomes Frankie and Enrique is sometimes called Henry.

Other characters also use some Spanish expressions that are not subtitled, such as *Gracias* [thank you], *por favor* [please], *espérate* [wait], *¡ave maría!* and *oye* [listen] (employed as a vocative, before first names).

Since the Spanish dubbed version of *Cane* was not available at the time of writing (shown on AXN since April 2009 as *La plantación*), I can only examine here the strategies used by the American writers to subtitle many of the occurrences of this language in the script. Sometimes they merely carry out a literal translation, such as in: *Yo te conozco* (subtitled as 'I know you'), *No, estás equivocado* (rendered as 'No. You made a mistake'), *Jaime, no seas cochino. Cuidala* (which becomes 'Don't be a pig. Take care of her') or *Hijo, tenemos que hablar* (translated as 'Son, we have to talk'). Some other times, the English translation does not exactly show the real meaning of the sentence, as in *Está buenísima* [She's very hot] subtitled as "She's beautiful", a much more restrained option if we consider the sexual innuendo of the Spanish expression *estar bueno/a*.

There are examples of a reformulation of the script, such as in the last sentence of this instance: *¡Papi! ¡Se llevaron a Lucía! ¡Se llevaron a Lucía!* [Papi, they took Lucia! They want money for her!], or in the much shorter translation of *No, no, todo lo que usted ve por aquí son regalitos que me han hecho* [No, no, everything you see over here are little gifts I've been given], subtitled as 'These were all gifts to me'.

Finally, I would like to point out another example of a strategy mentioned before, by means of which a character translates into English a line that another character has previously said in Spanish:

(12)

Santos: *Me agarraron caminando por en medio de la calle* [They caught me crossing the street.]

Alex: Jaywalking.

#### 4.5. *Spanish in Miami: Dexter*

Among the shows in which Spanish is present on a regular basis, *Dexter* certainly stands out. One of the central characters is Ángel Batista, a Hispanic officer who uses Spanish interjections, words or even complete sentences. The difference from other similar shows, such as *Cane*, lies in the fact that the lines of this character almost always include the English translation for those words. The show has another character of Hispanic origin, Lieutenant LaGuerta, who, on the contrary, does not use Spanish as regularly as Batista.

Some examples of the original dialogue are "Yeah, but he didn't finish. *No terminó*" (dubbed as *Sí, pero incompleto. No terminó* [Yes, but incomplete. He didn't finish]) or "Dex! *¡Dónde vas?* Where are you going?" [*¡Dex! Espera, ¿A dónde vas?*], where *espera*, 'wait', has been added to avoid the repetition). Some other times, Batista even acts as a translator for other characters' lines, such as in the following:

(13)

Dexter: *Muy bien* [Very well.]

Batista: Yeah, nice.

"Very nice" would be closer here to the intended meaning, as reflected in Batista's response. On other occasions, he introduces Spanish in his speech, no matter whether he is talking to people who understand him (as in the first conversation, with his wife) or who speak little Spanish (such as Dexter):

(14)

Batista (on the phone with his wife): *Bueno* [well], a man can't call his wife three times in one day? *Sí, claro. Bueno*, [Yes, sure. Well,] kiss my baby and



tell her Daddy'll be home *para la cena* [for dinner]. I'm getting another call. *Te amo* [I love you] (Hangs up and takes the other call) Batista. *¿De veras?* [Really?] I'll be there in two minutes.

The Spanish words in this paragraph have been kept in the dubbed version except for the translation of *Te amo* as '*Te quiero*' and that of *¿De veras?*, as '*¿En serio?*'

Another example is:

(15)

Batista: I'm talking about this *hijo de puta* [son of a bitch], this asshole killer, this *maricón* [bastard (in this context)] savage who makes us work on a Friday night.

Dexter: Only Mondays to Thursdays, that's what I would say.

Batista: Of course, *coño*, [damnit] be reasonable, who wants to work on a Friday night? [...] So, *¿cómo estás?* [how are you?] What are you doing here?

The dubbing, in this case, does not change any of the Spanish words.

On the other hand, gestures help the American viewer understand the meaning of the lines when there is no translation or when only Spanish—and not English—is used. This strategy occurs in the next two examples:

(16)

Batista (as he points at a dead body): No blood again. *Pero mira esto* [But look at this.]

(17)

Lieutenant LaGuerta: *¿Encontraste algo?* [Did you find something?]

Batista: *No, nada todavía* [No, nothing yet.]

Lieutenant LaGuerta (as she points at his hat): *Hazme un favor y quítate la gorra* [Do me a favor and take off your hat.]

Batista (as he takes his hat off): *Disculpa* [Sorry.]

And finally, in some scenes certain expressions, such as salutations or expletives, remain untranslated in the original version:

(18)

Batista: *Buenas* [Hi.]

Lieutenant LaGuerta: *Buenas* [Hi.]

Batista: *Dios mío* [Oh my God.]

## 5. Conclusions

In this paper, I have analyzed the phenomenon of code-switching between English and Spanish in the United States and, more specifically, its presence in American audiovisual products. A television program or series usually aims at showing the culture and values of the country where it has been created. This is why the use of Spanish reflects the importance of this language in American culture.

One of the main objectives of this article was to point out the strategies used by American screenwriters to integrate Spanish into English discourse, as well as to study those used in Spain when that same discourse is translated into European Spanish.

I have observed that the actors who take part in these shows portraying Hispanic characters speak almost perfect or perfect Spanish; however, supporting actors or, especially, those who play sporadic characters, usually have an accent, even though they are of Hispanic origin. This is obviously unlikely to be noticed by most of the American audience, but it is certainly something to point out, since it clearly shows the different levels of language proficiency that I mentioned at the beginning of this paper and that are to be found among the descendants of Spanish-speaking immigrants.

After analyzing several movies and television shows where Spanish is present, various strategies can be pointed out as a conclusion. I will divide them into two groups, those carried out in the original English text and those in the target text (i. e. in European Spanish dubbing and/or subtitling).

### 5.1. *Original text*

When Spanish appears in an English script, several approaches can be adopted: (1) if Spanish interjections are used, they are usually not translated in any form (nor are they subtitled for the benefit of the Anglophone audience); (2) English conversations with parts in Spanish or even a complete exchange in this language are not translated, but only accompanied by a subtitle that reads as “[The character] Speaks Spanish”. This is probably one of the most commonly used strategies.

On the other hand, when a Hispanic character is part of the main cast, a different approach is adopted, since Spanish is likely to be heard more regularly. In these cases, two main strategies can be mentioned: (1) subtitling, as in *Cane*, or (2) interpreting within the original script, either by the same character who uses Spanish (as in *Dexter*) or by another character (as in *Without a Trace*). A third strategy is used occasionally, although to a lesser extent: the use of explanatory gestures to compensate for the non-translated Spanish expressions (as in some of the examples from *Dexter*).

## 5.2. Target text

Spanish words in an English script are problematic to translate into Spanish. The subtitling is much easier, since the viewer will obviously notice which language is being used at every point. As for the dubbing, however, there is little that the translator can do to portray the linguistic features of the original text in the target language. If dubbing for a European Spanish audience, the actor may be asked to fake a Latin American accent. This only works in the case of sporadic Hispanic characters, but not in products such as *Quinceañera* or *Real Women Have Curves*, with a cast full (and sometimes composed only) of Hispanics. This strategy, however, has its detractors, among which I include myself, especially because this fake accent usually draws the attention of the viewer to the fact that it is clearly not a real accent.

The most common strategy when translating for dubbing or subtitling is the adaptation of the Spanish expressions to those used in European Spanish (i.e., words that are not used in Spain are replaced in order to provide the final script with a certain coherence). This results in a text that might not express the same meaning as the ST. In some cases, a change of language might be the option, as in the extract from *Friends*, in which an isolated sentence was translated into Portuguese, which helped maintain the effect. This, however, will not apply to scripts constantly riddled with Spanish, which will need a different approach. This usually consists in not using any strategy whatsoever to indicate at which point of the discourse Spanish was being used, thus not letting the target audience know that the original character was speaking in Spanish. Is this the best way to solve this problem? It is certainly not an ideal solution, but, as long as dubbing remains the most usual and popular way in which movies and television are shown in Spain, translators will be faced with this type of challenges.

### Audiovisual material

*Spanglish*. 2005. Directed by J. L. Brooks, Sony Pictures.

*Brothers & Sisters*. Season 2. 2007-. ABC Studios.

*Cane*. 2007-2008. Season 1. ABC Studios.

*Dexter*. 2006-. Season 1. Showtime Entertainment/Paramount.

*Friends*. 1994-2004. Season 8. NBC Studios.

*The West Wing*. 1999-2006. Season 3. Warner Home Video.

*Quinceañera*. 2007. Directed by W. Westmoreland and R. Glatzer, Sony Pictures.

*Without a Trace*. 2002-. Seasons 1, 4 and 5. Warner Home Video.

## References

- American Library Association: <http://www.ala.org> (consulted in April 2008).
- Castro Roig, X. 2001. "El ciberespañol, el español comercial y el español neutro en la Red": <http://www.elcastellano.org/span2.html> (consulted in September 2007).
- Díaz, J. 2008. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Eguíluz Ortiz de Latioero, F. 2000. "Algunas reflexiones para entender la literatura chicana". In R. Morillas Sánchez and M. Villar Raso (eds) 2000 *Literatura chicana: Reflexiones y ensayos críticos*. Granada: Comares, 99-107.
- El Mundo*. "La BBC lanzará en Estados Unidos un canal infantil en castellano". November 21 2008: <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2008/09/19/television/1221823399.html> (consulted in November, 2008).
- Espinosa, A.M. 1975. "Speech Mixture in New Mexico: The Influence of the English Language on New Mexican Spanish". In E. Hernández Chavez, A. D. Cohen and A. F. Beltramo (eds) 1975 *El lenguaje de los chicanos: Regional and Social Characteristics of Language used by Mexican-American*. Arlington: Center for Applied Linguistics, 99-114.
- Finegan, E. and J. Rickford. 2004. "Editors' Introduction to J. A. Fishman's article 'Multilingualism and non-English mother tongues'". In E. Finegan and J. Rickford (eds) 2004 *Language in the U.S.A.: themes for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 115.
- Fishman, J. A. 2004. "Multilingualism and non-English mother tongues". In E. Finegan and J. Rickford (eds) 2004 *Language in the U.S.A.: themes for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 116-132.
- González-Echeverría, R. 1997. "Hablar spanglish es devaluar el español": <http://www.elcastellano.org/clarin.html> (consulted in September 2007).
- Jiménez Carra, N. 2005. "Estrategias de cambio de código y su traducción en la novela de Sandra Cisneros *Caramelo or Puro Cuento*". *Trans. Revista de Traductología*, 9: 37-59.
- Köppe, R. and J. M. Meisel. 1995. "Code-switching in bilingual first language acquisition". In L. Milroy and P. Muysken (eds) 1995 *One speaker, two languages. Cross-disciplinary perspectives on code-switching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 276-301.
- La opinión. "La BBC llega en español". November 21, 2008: <http://www.impre.com/laopinion/entretenimiento/tv-radio/2008/11/21/la-bbc-llega-en-espantilde;ol-94159-1.html> (consulted in November 2008).

León Jiménez, R. 2003. *Identidad multilingüe. El cambio de código como símbolo de la identidad en la literatura chicana*. La Rioja: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de La Rioja.

Lucio, C. 2003. "El último crack americano. Sandra Cisneros: 'Antes sólo podía publicar en editoriales feministas'": <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundolibro/2003/05/23/protagonistas/1053714008.html> (consulted in April 2008).

Metropolitan Transportation Authority: <http://www.mta.info> (consulted in September 2008).

Muysken, P. 1995. "Code-switching and grammatical theory". In L. Milroy and P. Muysken (eds) 1995 *One speaker, two languages. Cross-disciplinary perspectives on code-switching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 177-198.

Penguin Reading Guides (*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, by Junot Díaz): [http://us.penguin.com/static/rguides/us/brief\\_and\\_wondrous\\_life\\_of\\_oscar\\_wao.html](http://us.penguin.com/static/rguides/us/brief_and_wondrous_life_of_oscar_wao.html) (consulted in October 2008).

PR Newswire. "BBC Worldwide Channels Launches Its First Spanish-Language Channel in the U.S. on DISH Network®". November 19, 2008: <http://news.prnewswire.com/ViewContent.aspx?ACCT=109&STORY=/www/story/11-19-2008/0004928901&EDATE> (consulted in November 2008).

Rosenwald, L. 2008. *Multilingual America. Language and the Making of American Literature*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

*The Oprah Winfrey Show* en español: [http://www.oprah.com/subpackage/oprahshow/reservations/pkgsap/20080929\\_tows\\_sap\\_espanol](http://www.oprah.com/subpackage/oprahshow/reservations/pkgsap/20080929_tows_sap_espanol) (consulted in November 2008).

TV Week. "BBC's Spanish-Language CBeebies Bows in U.S." November 19 2008: [http://www.tvweek.com/news/2008/11/bbcs\\_spanishlanguage\\_cbeebies.php](http://www.tvweek.com/news/2008/11/bbcs_spanishlanguage_cbeebies.php) (consulted in November 2008).

US Census Bureau: <http://www.census.gov> (consulted in September 2008).

Zentella, A. C. 2004. "Spanish in the Northeast". In E. Finegan and J. Rickford (eds) 2004 *Language in the U.S.A.: themes for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 182-204.

