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Dubbed to Absurdity: Michael Scott's Change of Personality  
in *The Office's* Spanish Translation

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation aims to analyze the Spanish translation of *The Office* (US) in order to demonstrate how it manipulates the portrayal of Michael Scott's personality. The analysis is based on Zabalbeascoa's classification of jokes and Molina and Hurtado's classification of translation techniques. The use of a two-layered comedy and a large amount of wordplay makes this show particularly difficult to translate. Thus, this paper will follow Castro's steps to explain how he translated it. The analysis reveals that by gradually losing Michael's charm and wittiness in the target text, the final product that reaches the target audience is slightly changed and they will never get to know the original Michael Scott.

## **Resumen**

Este trabajo tiene como objetivo analizar la traducción al español de la versión americana de *The Office* para demostrar cómo esta manipula la personalidad de Michael Scott. El análisis está basado en la clasificación de chistes de Zabalbeascoa y en la clasificación de técnicas de traducción de Molina y Hurtado, y este trabajo sigue los pasos que tomó Castro al traducir la serie. La traducción de esta serie es particularmente compleja, ya que la versión original cuenta con muchos juegos de palabras y con una comedia bastante peculiar, llena de dobles sentidos. El análisis muestra que en la versión traducida se va perdiendo la carisma y el ingenio de Michael Scott hasta el punto de que el producto que llega a la audiencia española está ligeramente cambiado y esta audiencia nunca podrá conocer al verdadero Michael Scott.

## Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Audiovisual Translation .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3. Translation of Humor .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3.1. Classification of Jokes .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>3.2. Classification of Translation Techniques .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>4. Corpus .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>5. Analysis .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>6. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>7. References .....</b>	<b>26</b>

## 1. Introduction

This dissertation aims to discuss the way in which a translated text may vary to the point that the target audience is not able to meet the original characters, but a manipulated version of them, even if this is not the translator's intention. The analysis will focus on the translation for dubbing concerning the character Michael Scott from the American TV show *The Office*.

By using Zabalbeascoa's classification of jokes and Molina and Hurtado's classification of translation techniques this dissertation will analyze Xosé Castro's translation for Spanish dubbing of *The Office* (US) in order to show how the original Michael Scott is much smarter and wittier than the Michael Scott the Spanish audience meets. The use of a two-layered comedy and a large amount of wordplay make humor, and specifically this show, particularly difficult to translate. Thus, this paper will follow Castro's steps to explain how he translated it.

I have chosen this topic because I am really interested in the world of audiovisual translation and I noticed that the Michael Scott I had met in the original version of this show is not the same I met in the dubbed version of it. As it is a sitcom, I knew the translator had to face a lot of problems when translating it, so I wanted to link the idea of Michael losing his "touch" with the fact that the translation of humor can be deeply complex.

By the end of this dissertation I expect to have been able to make the reader understand how a character's personality may vary from the original version to the target version and also to make the reader understand how the translator approached the translation of this sitcom.

## **2. Audiovisual Translation**

Delia Chiaro defines audiovisual translation as the term used to refer to the transfer from one language to another of the verbal components contained in audiovisual works and products (2012). As Chiaro also explains, audiovisual translation can be applied to many fields. Films, television shows, musicals, theatrical plays or video games are some examples of the multiple audiovisual products that require translation.

Audiovisual translation is characterized for containing not only visual, but also aural codes. While the translation of a written text focuses exclusively on visually transmitted codes (words), audiovisual translation goes one step further and also focuses on aurally transmitted codes. The translator's duty is to translate both the dialogue present in the audiovisual product and any kind of written message that appears on the screen. Inside this kind of translation we find different modes such as subtitling, voice-over, interpreting and dubbing among others, but this paper will focus on the latter, as it is one of the most notable ones.

According to the Collins dictionary, dubbing is the replacement of a soundtrack in one language by one in another language. In this case, this paper will focus on the dubbing in Spain, which started in 1930 with the release of the dubbed version of the Broadway musical "Río Rita" (Luther Reed, 1929). At first, every film with Spanish dubbing was dubbed at Studios Des Réservoirs near Paris, France but in 1932, Adolfo de la Riva and Pedro Trilla founded the first Spanish dubbing studio in Barcelona. The number of dubbing studios in Spain has increased since this first project and now our country has over thirty studios where professional dubbing actors and directors strive to grant us the best dubbed performances they can create.

For these audiovisual products to be dubbed into Spanish, they first have to be translated from the original language, which is often English. Translating an audiovisual product is a challenging task and the translator has to take a wide number of elements into account so that the target audience to fully get the meaning of the source text (ST).

After the source text is translated into the target language, the adapter has to make sure that the three synchronies are present, as they are some of the several requirements that have to be met for a dubbed product to be of quality; content synchrony, character synchrony and visual synchrony.

Content synchrony states that the dialogue and meaning in the target product have to match those of the original version. The translator should make sure that the final translation or target text (TT) is as accurate as possible. Character synchrony requires that in the dubbed audiovisual product there is harmony between the physical appearance and voice of the original actor, and the voice of the dubbing actor. For instance, a wise and good looking gentleman should have a deep and captivating voice and a kind woman should have a sweet and tender voice. The dubbing director selects the dubbing actors depending on their vocal ranges and type of voice. Visual synchrony is usually the most difficult one to achieve because it requires the perfect harmony between the lip movement of the original actor and the sounds the dubbing actor performs. The adapter's duty is to create the illusion that the actor who is on screen is actually speaking in the dubbed language. These synchronies' aim is to create a quality dubbed product by adjusting the new translated sounds into the visuals of the original audiovisual product.

A proper dubbed product is the combination of an accurate translation, where the target language sounds both credible and not artificial, the three synchronies and a correct and convincing performance by the dubbing actors.

### 3. Translation of Humor

The linguists Hatim and Mason discuss in their book *Discourse and the Translator* (1990) three different dimensions of context: communicative, pragmatic and semiotic; and how translations are affected by them. For them, 'translating is a communicative process that takes place within a social context' (Beeby-Lonsdale, 1996). The communicative dimension is an aspect of context that includes all the linguistic variables related to register (field, tenor and mode). As Beeby-Lonsdale also points out, 'dialectal variations as temporal, geographical, social or the presence of an idiolect are also taken into account in this dimension'. The pragmatic dimension is connected to aspects related to ambiguity, irony, polysemy and wordplay. Translating these elements in a successful manner is one of the hardest challenges translators have to face, as they have to render the same meaning of the source text in a completely new language while making sure that no part of the original meaning is lost. This paper is going to focus on the semiotic dimension, which is the one related to all the signs present in a society; the ideological and cultural aspects.

Hatim and Mason's semiotic dimension deals with culture-specific items. These elements are very complex to translate because after all, the essential aim of translation is to communicate a meaning, and there are some elements present in the source product that the target audience may not be familiar with. Some examples of these culture-specific items would be specific places, historical and artistic aspects, customs, gastronomical references, institutions, units of measurement, etc.

Intertextuality refers to the allusion of a text inside another text and it is also present in this dimension. The translator's duty is to identify these intertextual references (an allusion, a famous quote, the title of a book, etc.) and translate them in a way in which the target audience also understands the reference. However, if an impersonation of a distinguished person appears in the source text, it would be the dubbing actor's task to adapt his or her voice to accomplish the impersonation, following the character synchrony aforementioned.

The translation of humor is particularly complex. The translator not only should have to be bilingual, but also has to be deeply immersed in both cultures to identify all the jokes, references and wordplay present in the source text. Only after identifying those references can the translator successfully convey that humorous message in the target text.

### **3. 1. Classification of Jokes**

According to Zabalbeascoa (1996), we could classify different jokes according to the way they lend themselves to translation and the sorts of translation solution-types associated with each of them.

**Binational joke.** It is usually a funny story or one-liner in which the comic effect does not rely on a language-specific wordplay or familiarity with certain aspects of the source culture.

**National-culture-and-institutions joke.** In this case the translator has to replace the cultural reference of the original text with one which is familiar to the target audience, to maintain the humorous effect. The target audience needs to be familiar to the connotations of the cultural reference, otherwise the meaning would be completely lost.

**National-sense-of-humor joke.** Zabalbeascoa states in his paper *The Translator* (1996) that this particular category of jokes needs more research and it is probably one of the most controversial ones. He also states that this category consists of the jokes that are ‘‘apparently more popular in some countries or communities than in others’’. In this category we could find national jokes based on geography, e.g., a person from the south of England laughing at a person from the north because of his/her strong accent could be translated into a person from Madrid laughing at someone from Seville because of his/her strong Andalusian accent.

**Language-dependent joke.** This category is characterized by the linguistic ambiguity of the jokes or, as Zabalbeascoa calls it, ‘‘features of natural language for their effect’’ (1996). Zabalbeascoa also states that we can find many concepts within this category, such as polysemy (a word or phrase with more than one meaning) or homophony (various words or phrases that sound



alike). Translators often have to find creative ways to replace the original pun or wordplay with a different one that is coherent within the context of the target language. We have two options when translating a language-dependent joke; either adapting the pun to the target language and finding an equivalent pun, or completely removing the pun and then create a different one in another point of the audiovisual text.

**Visual jokes.** Zabalbeascoa divides this category in two; the jokes which derive solely from what one sees on screen and the jokes that also rely on a visually coded version of a linguistic joke, thus being language-dependent. An example of a visual joke would be the following: two people are arguing because one of them is not brave enough, and suddenly a small chicken waddles on screen. Even though we have no verbal code here, this joke is language-dependent because of the polysemy present in the context. The word *chicken* is used both as a way to name the animal and to refer to a person who is not brave. This visual joke would easily translate into Spanish, as we have the same expression to refer to a coward person, but the joke would be completely lost in the target languages which do not use this expression.

**Complex joke.** This last category combines two or more of the aforementioned types of joke.

Zabalbeascoa presents us with a way of classifying jokes depending on their nature. Now that the translator has fully understood the meaning of the joke, he still has to translate it by using a series of translation techniques.

### **3.2. Classification of Translation Techniques**

Translators Molina and Hurtado (2002) offer us a classification of the translation techniques based on different criteria: isolating the concept of technique from other related notions, including only procedures that are characteristic of the translation of texts, to reaffirm that the translation

techniques are functional, to maintain the most commonly used terms and to formulate new techniques to explain mechanisms that have not yet been described.

Their proposal of translation techniques and the definition of said techniques is the following:

“**Adaptation.** To replace a ST cultural element with one from the target culture.” *Baseball* in the US would be changed into *football* or *cycling* in Spain.

“**Amplification.** To introduce details that are not formulated in the ST. This is a way of explicative paraphrasing.” *The JFK* would be translated into *El aeropuerto JFK* in Spanish because the target audience may not know that JFK is an airport in New York.

“**Borrowing.** To take a word or expression straight from another language.” It can be pure (VIP -> VIP) or naturalized to fit in the rules of the TL (whisky -> güisqui).

“**Calque.** Literal translation of a foreign word or phrase.” *Football* would become *balompié*.

“**Compensation.** To introduce a ST element of information in a different place of the TT because it cannot be added in the same place as in the ST.” This technique is mostly used when a wordplay is present and that humorous element of the ST is moved to a different moment in the TT.

“**Description.** To replace a term or expression with a description in order for the target audience to understand the term.” *Scone* becomes *bollo con crema*.

“**Discursive creation.** To establish a temporary equivalence that is completely unpredictable out of context.” *Rumble fish* becomes *La ley de la calle*.

“**Established equivalent.** To use a term or expression recognized as an equivalent in the TL.” *It's raining cats and dogs* becomes *llueve a cántaros*.

“**Generalization.** To use a more general or neutral term.” *Crud* becomes *nieve* in Spanish.

“**Linguistic amplification.** To add linguistic elements in the TT.” This is typically used in dubbing and interpreting. *I don't know* becomes *yo no estaría tan seguro*, even though in Spanish we have the expression *no lo sé*.

“**Linguistic compression.** To synthesize linguistic elements in the TT.” This is typically used in subtitling. *I have been thinking* would become *he pensado*.

“**Literal translation.** To translate a word or an expression word for word.” This is one of the less used techniques when translating wordplays or idioms. *It’s raining cats and dogs* would become *están lloviendo perros y gatos*. The audience would understand the meaning but they may find the translation odd or artificial.

“**Modulation.** To change the point of view in relation to the ST.” *We can use him* becomes *nos sera útil*.

“**Particularization.** To use a more concrete or precise term.” *Steak* could be translated into *un solomillo al roquefort* in Spanish.

“**Reduction.** To suppress a ST information item in the TT.” *El aeropuerto JFK* would be translated as *the JFK* in English.

“**Substitution.** To change linguistic elements for paralinguistic elements as intonation or gestures.” This is mostly used in interpreting, e.g., the Arab gesture of putting your hand on your heart would be translated as *thank you*.

“**Transposition.** To change a grammatical category.” *After she left* becomes *tras su partida*.

“**Variation.** To change linguistic or paralinguistic elements that affect aspects of linguistic variation as changes of textual tone, style, social or geographical dialect, etc.” An example of this would be a change in tone when adapting novels for children.

#### 4. Corpus

This paper will analyze and discuss the way in which the translator Xosé Castro translated the American tv show *The Office* (2005-2013) into Spanish, based on the two aforementioned taxonomies: Zabalbeascoa's classification of jokes and Molina and Hurtado's classification of translation techniques. *The Office* (2005) is an American remake of the British tv show with the same name that premiered on July 9, 2001 on BBC Two. This British show consists of two seasons and its international success led to a series of adaptations in different parts of the globe, one of them being *The Office* (US). The original British show, created by Ricky Gervais, is a mockumentary sitcom that follows the day-to-day life of office employees of a paper company based in Slough, a small town near London.

Four years later, in March 24, 2005, producer Greg Daniels premiered his own version of *The Office* on NBC, and this new American version had such an enormous success that it has nine seasons and it is the most streamed show on Netflix to this day. This new version is also a mockumentary sitcom that follows the life of office employees of a paper company, but this time the branch is based in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and the fictional company name is Dunder Mifflin Paper Company. The American show introduced the audience to actors and actresses who are now globally acclaimed, but that were not so well known back in 2005. Some of these names are Steve Carell, John Krasinski, Jenna Fischer, Rainn Wilson, B.J. Novak, Ed Helms, and Ellie Kemper, among others. After the extraordinary success of the show, some of these actors became globally known and were asked to take part in bigger projects, as was the case of B.J. Novak and his appearance in Tarantino's *Inglorious Basterds* (2009) or Ed Helms, who was chosen to play the main role in Todd Phillips' *The Hangover* (2009).

This American version is internationally acclaimed for its unique comedy, the result of combining witty and unpredictable writing with the mockumentary style, in which the characters look and talk directly to the camera. Writer and producer Michael Schur did a magnificent job constructing the comedy present in the show by creating likable and witty characters with whom the audience connects and empathizes. The show's comedy is characteristic for having a two-layered humor, in which the first layer is the straightforward one but the second layer is only noticeable if the audience truly knows and understands the characters' personalities.

The Regional Manager of this Scranton branch is called Michael Scott, an oblivious white man in his forties. Michael is characterized by his extroverted, enthusiastic but also immature personality. He is constantly seeking the approval of the people he works with and he is overall a charming idiot with whom the audience empathizes. The fact that Michael is constantly depicted as not being the smartest tool in the shed helps the writers build a two-layered comedy shield around him; each of his jokes has two or more connotations, and therefore double meanings, even though in the majority of cases, Michael is not aware of it.

Michael is always trying to make his co-workers laugh, which gives the writers the opportunity to include a lot of jokes in his dialogue, and these jokes help the audience to know him better. He is always pretending to be smarter and cooler than he is, specially in front of his two younger co-workers, the couple Jim and Pam, which often leads to comic situations. His constant need for attention and need to be funny all the time is one of the main pillars for the comedy in the series and it also is a way to show his flaws to the audience so that we empathize with him. As the Internet user "Milkwasabadchoice" perfectly explained in Urban Dictionary, Michael Scott "means well (most of the time) but comes off as a narcissistic jerk, especially to his employees" (2006). The writers wanted to create a character that was the "fun uncle type", a middle aged man that laughs at

everything and everyone without thinking about the consequences of his actions or jokes. The writing team of the show managed to create this doomed, charming and offensive yet witty character that makes the audience laugh and cringe at the same time.

## 5. Analysis

This dissertation will now proceed to analyze different examples from *The Office* (US), indicating the episode and TCR (Time Code Recording), which is the time the dubbing actor has to add his dialogue to a scene so that isochrony is met. Isochrony refers to the synchronization of utterances and pauses, i.e. the length of utterances (Whitman-Linsen, 1992). As Miggiani explains in her book *Dialogue Writing for Dubbing: An Insider's Perspective* (2019), “the disregard of isochrony would lead to mouths moving on screen when no words can be heard or speech being heard after the mouths on screen have stopped moving.”

This two-layered comedy is a dangerous water to swim in, because as it will be discussed below, if the joke is not translated correctly, the character would be portrayed in a very different way in the target version, which sometimes happens with the portrayal of Michael Scott.

### EXAMPLE 1

Season 5, Episode 14. ‘Stress Relief, Pt 1’	
TCR (08:51 - 09:01)	
Original Version (OV)	Target Text (TT)
Woman: A, b, c. That stands for airway, breathing and circulation.	Mujer: V, r c, ¿vale? Que son las siglas de ventilación, respiración y circulación.
Michael Scott: Okay, you know what? That could be a little confusing because in sales, ‘a, b, c’ means always be closing.	Michael Scott: Vale, aunque es algo confuso porque eso aquí significa validar recibos de cliente.

In this scene, a woman is teaching the office employees CPR training on a dummy. In the original version, Michael makes a reference to a speech delivered by Alec Baldwin in *Glengarry Glen Ross*

(1992) when he says “always be closing”. This quote belongs to an inspirational speech made by Baldwin’s character, Blake, who is a salesman that tries to make other salesmen get the clients to close the deals, to sign on the line and buy the product they sell, in their case, real estate.

This expression became widely used since this movie was released in 1992 and it has become a motto for salesmen in the United States, which is why this is a **national-culture-and-institutions** **joke**. Michael is not sure if his crew would internalize that “a, b, c” in healthcare stands for “airway, breathing and circulation”, because they all think about the expression “always be closing” every time they listen to these three letters.

*Glengarry Glen Ross* was also released in 1992 in Spain, but “always be closing” was translated into “siempre estar vendiendo” and this expression did not impact the Spanish society as much as it did the North American one, so the expression is not used in Spain . As the translator could not use a literal translation for this reference, he decided to use an **adaptation** and change the entire reference, by changing “a, b, c” into “v, r, c”, that stands for “validar recibos de clientes”. Castro created a new expression that started with “v, r, c”, maybe because he could not find a meaning for “s, e, v” like “siempre estar validando” or maybe because he simply did not get the reference, as that expression did not reach Spain.

In this scene we get a little sneak peek of how Michael Scott’s mind works. He may not be the brightest person in the office but he is always thinking about his job; sales. The fact that whenever he hears ‘a, b, c’, even in a CPR context, he thinks about an Alec Baldwin movie also shows the audience how immature he is. This second layer of the joke got completely lost in the target version, as we do not have the same expression in Spain and the translator decided to erase the reference to Baldwin’s movie.

“Some jokes and types of humor are challenging for the translator due to specific difficulties that have to do with the text users’ linguistic or encyclopedic



knowledge” (Zabalbeascoa, 2005). This example perfectly demonstrates Zabalbeascoa's statement, as the reference present in the original text is so subtle that the translator did not even realize it existed. *The Office* is full of small references and jokes like this, so the translator Xosé Castro had to do a lot of research in order to translate every single one of them as accurately as possible. In cases like the latter, where he could not translate the joke or reference, he just omitted it.

## EXAMPLE 2

Season 5, Episode 14. ‘Stress Relief, Pt 1’	
TCR (13:07 - 13:11)	
Original Version (OV)	Target Text (TT)
David Wallace: We had to pay for it. Cost us thirty-five hundred dollars.	David Wallace: Hemos tenido que pagarlo, costó tres mil novecientos dólares.
Michael Scott: Five thousand three hundred dollars for a dummy?	Michael Scott: ¿Trescientos mil novecientos dólares por un muñeco?

Later in the same episode, a character named Dwight shatters the dummy and Michael’s boss gives him a hard time for it. Here we have an example of Zabalbeascoa’s **language-dependent joke**, which this time has been adapted into Spanish in an extremely exaggerated way. This joke, as almost every single joke concerning him, relies on Michael’s ignorance.

Since medieval England, English speakers have been counting in hundreds due to their lack of education, or simply because it is easier and shorter. Saying “twelve hundred dollars” is so much easier and faster than saying “one thousand two hundred dollars”. In this case, David Wallace uses this option and says “thirty-five hundred dollars”, that has seven syllables and three words, rather than saying “three thousand five hundred dollars”, that has eight syllables and five words. Michael, in his infinite wisdom, understands the number in the wrong way and instead of understanding

“\$3.500” he thinks Wallace said “\$5.300”. In Spanish we do not have this way of contracting numbers, so the translator decided to use an **adaptation** and make Michael understand the wrong number, but this time in a much less real and authentic way than in the original version, as he understands “\$300.900” instead of “\$3.900”.

In my opinion, this translation choice is a clear example of how, in the target version, Michael Scott is sometimes portrayed as a less smart person than he actually is. The original Michael might not understand the right amount of money, but he does not think that a dummy costs almost three hundred thousand dollars. This is an example of how the two-layered comedy present in the original version can portray characters in a wildly exaggerated way if poorly translated into another language.

### EXAMPLE 3

Season 2, Episode 15. “Boys and Girls”	
TCR (05:53 - 06:04)	
Original Version (OV)	Target Text (TT)
Michael Scott: You may see two groups here. White-collar and blue-collar. But I don’t see it that way. You know why not? Because I am collar-blind.	Michael Scott: Tal vez veáis dos grupos. Unos van trajeados y otros con mono, pero yo no me fijo en eso, ¿sabéis por qué? Porque la moda me la trae floja.

Homophony is one of the most used tools by writers when creating comedy. In this scene, Michael Scott is talking to his employees, both from the office and the warehouse. To show his lack of favoritism he says that he does not differentiate between the colors blue and white, between the two ranges at the office.

In the original version we are presented with a **language-dependent** joke, where Michael uses the homophony between "color" and "collar" and interchanges both terms while using the

expression “collar-blind”, which originally was “color-blind”. Michael does this to convey that he is not driven by favoritisms and that he does not see a difference between office workers and warehouse workers. The terms “white and blue collars” appeared in the early 20th century, as the office workers typically wore white-collared shirts and the employees from warehouses and more physical jobs wore less expensive clothes, usually made of denim.

In the Spanish translation we find an **adaptation**, where the overall message is the same but the witty homophonic connection and joke Michael originally delivered is somewhat lost. As this is a language-dependent joke, literal translation would have made no sense, because the expression “white and blue-collar workers” does not exist in Spanish. As we do not have this color-distinction, the translator was not able to follow through with the joke and he decided to use another translation technique apart from adaptation and he chose the expression “me la trae floja” as a **compensation**. This expression is not formal at all and it matches perfectly with Michael Scott’s personality, even though the joke is omitted. He also mentions “la moda”, fashion, keeping the main idea of the joke which was comparing two different pieces of clothing, but it was collars in English and the full outfit in Spanish.

By losing Michael’s clever joke the target audience is once again deprived of the character’s distinctive wit, making him less intelligent in the target version of the show.

#### EXAMPLE 4

Season 2, Episode 10. “Christmas Party”	
TCR (03:07 - 03:09)	
Original Version (OV)	Target Text (TT)
Michael Scott: Merry Christmas! Ho, ho, ho, pimp!	Michael Scott: ¡Feliz navidad! Ho, ho, ho y su chulo.

Even though in most of the cases Xosé Castro managed to deliver a creative and accurate translation, there were times when the translator's job was not as precise. Thus, the meaning got completely lost in translation. This scene is one of these cases, a clear example where **literal translation** of an homophonic word cannot work, but sadly it was the strategy that Castro chose.

This scene opens with Michael entering a room in which three girls and a man are sitting. Michael enters dressed as Santa Claus and he starts laughing and pointing to each girl sitting in the table as he says "ho". Then he points at Ryan, the only man sitting in the room, and says "pimp". The comic element of the scene is that, at first glance, Michael was just laughing as Santa Claus until he says "pimp" and we realize that he was calling the three women in the room "hoes" as a joke. This **language-dependent** joke resides in the homophony between the onomatopoeia "ho", which is often used to portray Santa Claus' laugh, and the word "hoe", which is slang for "prostitute".

It is impossible to literally translate this joke into Spanish, because in our language the word "ho" does not have more than one meaning, it is just an onomatopoeia, therefore when Michael says "ho, ho, ho y su chulo" in Spanish it makes no sense. This questionable translation may make the viewer cross the tolerance threshold that Chaume explains in his work *Audiovisual Translation: Dubbing* (2012). Here, he explains the term *suspension of disbelief*, "the willingness of the audience to overlook the limitations of the medium". When an audience is watching a dubbed sitcom and there is a sentence or joke that makes no sense, they suddenly become aware that it is not the original product, that they are watching a translated version. By having this sudden realization they cross the tolerance threshold and jeopardize the main aim of dubbing, that is to "create a believable final product that seems real, that tricks the viewers into thinking we are witnessing a credible story" (Chaume, 2012). This suspension of disbelief highly depends on isochrony, on the synchronization of utterances and pauses.

Apart from missing Michael’s joke, the target audience once again watches an altered version of Michael. In the eyes of the person watching this scene with the Spanish dubbing, Michael just calls Ryan “pimp” without reason, it is not presented as a joke. It just portrays Michael in an offensive way without the comic relief of the joke present in the original version, once again presenting the target audience with a different version of the original Michael Scott.

EXAMPLE 5

Season 6, Episode 16. “Manager and Salesman”	
TCR (08:46 - 08:50)	
Original Version (OV)	Target Text (TT)
Michael Scott: Where did you get that information?	Michael Scott: ¿De dónde has sacado esa información?
Oscar Martínez: Manual.	Óscar Martínez: Del “manuael”
Michael Scott: Manuel who?	Michael Scott: ¿Qué Manuel?

I think this is a clear example of how **literal translation** may look good in paper, but it does not work so well in reality. The joke relies on the fact that “manual” and “Manuel” are slightly homophonic. The fact that the Mexican actor portraying Óscar Martínez (Óscar Núñez) somewhat mumbled the word “manual” in the original version also helped emphasize the misleading tone of the situation. A good performance by the actor that portrays Oscar, the fact that we know Michael is not the sharpest tool in the shed and a good and witty writing result in a comic situation between Oscar and his boss Michael, but I do not think this is the result we get in the dubbed version.

The theory to translate this **language-dependent** joke was good in paper; a literal translation of the joke, as both words come from Latin (*manus*). It was meant to be an assured victory but I do not think this was the case.

In my opinion, the way in which the dubbing actor approached the situation was not the most subtle one, because Oscar says ‘‘manual’’ in his regular accent in English but the dubbing actor in Spanish clearly says /manwael/ and it is strange. I think that a mumble by the Spanish dubbing actor Antonio Villar would have been more subtle, as his forced and exaggerated pronunciation may make the target audience cross Chaume’s tolerance threshold aforementioned; they may realize that this is a dubbed product, not an original one. ‘‘Good dubbing today looks like the story was recorded in the language you hear’’ (Wright & Lallo, 2009). If the audience notices a mistake, the whole aim of dubbing would fail.

This is one of the few examples where Michael is portrayed as a less stupid character in the target version, and in this case, as less racist, too. In the original version he misunderstood the word ‘‘manual’’ because he thought Oscar was referring to one of his friends whose name is ‘‘Manuel’’. This second layer of Michael being subtly racist is also erased in the target version as he understood ‘‘Manuel’’ because it was what Oscar’s dubbing actor said. This example may be more subtle than the previous ones, but the target audience still meets a manipulated version of the character.

EXAMPLE 6

Season 4, Episode 13. ‘Dinner Party’	
TCR (06:44 - 06:57)	
Original Version (OV)	Target Text (TT)
Jan Levinson: The osso buco needs to braise for about three hours.	Jan Levinson: He hecho osobuco y tiene que hornearse tres horas.
Pam Beesley: Three hours from now or three hours from earlier, like 4:00?	Pam Beesley: ¿Tres horas desde ahora o tres horas desde antes de que llegáramos?
Jan Levinson: You know, Pam, in Spain they often don’t even start eating until midnight.	Jan Levinson: Bueno, Pam, en España no empiezan a cenar hasta medianoche.
Michael Scott: When in Rome...	Michael Scott: Donde fueres...

In this scene, Jim and Pam go to Michael and Jan’s house to have dinner. After sitting in the living room for what seems to be forever, Pam mentions that they should start having dinner. Jan says that the dinner has to braise for about three hours and Pam gets shocked. Jan mentions that in Spain they do not start eating until midnight and following this comment, Michael says “when in Rome”.

This is an example of how even though **international jokes** are not the most difficult ones to translate, they can get completely lost in translation.

The expression “when in Rome” means that people should follow the customs of the people they are visiting or living with, a proverb attributed to Saint Ambrose in the 4th century that comes from the Latin ‘Cum Romae fueritis, Romano vivite more’.

This joke has two layers. The first one is Jan being ignorant and making a comment based on the stereotypes she has heard from Spain and Spanish people, to which Michael responds using the expression ‘when in Rome’, but I would dare say that the second layer of this joke is the one the writer was intending for the audience to understand.

I would say that Michael said ‘when in Rome’ because, as this dissertation is showing, he is constantly being portrayed as a very ignorant character, so he probably thought Rome was in Spain. The translated version lacks this second layer of humor, as the **established equivalent** Castro used for this expression is ‘cuando a Roma fueres, haz lo que vieres’, often shortened to ‘donde fueres, haz lo que vieres’. In the dubbed version, Michael just says ‘donde fueres’, which completely erases the second layer of the original joke when he mentions Rome.

This also is one of the few times when Michael is not portrayed as a dumber version of himself in the target text, rather the opposite actually. In the target version he does not look so ignorant, as the audience does not understand he thinks Rome is in Spain.

This is a clear example of how our prejudices against Michael make us laugh at him even when he might not be wrong or making a joke. This kind of subtle layered jokes is what in my opinion makes *The Office* a masterpiece, and almost all of them are lost when we translate the show into a different language.



## 6. Conclusion

As this dissertation has shown, translating an audiovisual product, specially when it is a humorous one, is deeply complex. By using different translation strategies the translator has to create a new text that conveys the same meaning as the original one, but sometimes this task is not achieved. When a text is translated from one language to another, there can be a change in the portrayal of a character's personality, as we have seen in Michael Scott's case.

Choosing the right translation technique is also imperative in order to create an accurate and quality translation. This dissertation aims to guide the reader through the translator's translation process, which culminates in the final audiovisual product presented to the target audience.

There are a lot of examples of Michael being extremely dumb throughout the series in the target version, and the target audience could eventually get the wrong impression about this character. Even though the video is the same, when an audiovisual product is dubbed into another language it completely loses its original audio, so the target audience will never get to know the real Michael Scott, just the not so smart version of him.

The analysis present in this dissertation aims to demonstrate how the Spanish translation of *The Office* manipulated the portrayal of Michael Scott's personality. By gradually losing Michael's charm and wittiness in the target text, the final product that reaches the target audience is slightly changed and they will never get to know the original Michael Scott.

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