

## **Dubbing And Subtitling – *The Tailor of Panama***

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*The Tailor of Panama* is a film premiered in early 2001. Its script was the outcome of a collaborative effort involving John Boorman, who was also the director of the film, Andrew Davies, and John le Carré, who was the author of the 1996 novel of the same title on which the film was based. John le Carré is the pen-name of David John Moore Cornwell, an English author born in 1931, who for a while was a member of the British Secret Service, but was “blown”, like many others, by Kim Philby in the 1960s. His writings are almost entirely in the spy-thriller genre. The novel was published by Hodder and Stoughton with the I.S.B.N. 0-340-68478-X; the film was distributed by Columbia Pictures Incorporated, having been produced by Merlin Productions and shot on location in Panama (reportedly the first full-length feature so filmed) and at the Ardmore Studios in Wicklow, Ireland. There are some divergences in the content, in part because of the different dates at which the book and the script were written, before and after the return of the Canal to Panamanian control, in part for other, cinematographic, reasons. A Columbia/Tristar D.V.D. version of the film was issued in late 2001. It has both sound-track and subtitles in the two languages English and Spanish, which makes it of some interest for translation studies, since such double dual-mode presentation is not particularly common, if perhaps more so in these days of videodisks than in the past.

This paper is by way of a preliminary report on a larger project intended to study in close detail the whole of the sound and subtitle versions of several films which offer such multiple versions of their dialogues. It will thus “cherry-pick” those items of particular note that

emerge from consideration of the four forms of the script. In so doing, the paper will make use of the disk's division of the film into twenty-eight sections (plus a twenty-ninth for the cast list and end-titles) to identify the point from which examples are taken.

### **The Two English Versions**

There are a fair number of differences between the (largely British) English soundtrack and the (definitely American) English subtitling. Many of these are trivial, referring to the removal from the written form of conversational “fillers” present in the spoken dialogue. To give examples from just one section [§3], these include vocatives such as *Marta, sir, Mr. Osnard, Harry*, channel-holding pseudo-words like *mmm* or *ah*, and low-content expressions like *well, now, of course*. Omission of items of this sort would be an almost automatic choice in striving to keep the number of symbols on screen as small as possible, a constant preoccupation in subtitling. A similar ploy is the reduction of repetitions, for instance, *no, no, no* becoming simply *no* [§4]. There are also rephrasings which seem certain to have had the same intention of reducing the number of letters needed in the subtitle. So, *end of the day, a good few of, if you'd care to, a different gentleman* [also all in §3] become *day's end, many of, please, and another man*. Occasionally, it may be surmised that there is an additional reasoning, relating to the release status of the film. An instance would be *sick and tired of your fucking bullshit* [§20], reduced to *tired of your bullshit*, which reduces the presence of vocabulary objectionable to censors, though not perhaps completely.

Others relate to real differences in spelling and vocabulary between the two standards of English: *offence* [§3], *anaesthetic* [§4], *wardrobe* [§5], *mummy* [§18], *honour* [§18], *arse* [§20], *malt whisky* [§24] becoming *offense, anesthetic, closet, mommy, honor, ass, whiskey*. There is not a complete transformation into American English, even so, as testified to by the presence of items such as *chap* [§4 and elsewhere]. Sometimes, once again, two reasons seem to be operating, one being brevity, the other avoidance of wordings that could be seen

as regionally marked. Examples would be: *come barging into my shop* [§4], which is changed into *come here*, or *You've got the debts, I've got the money* [§4], which is transformed into *You have debts, I have money*, and *surveillance kit* [§15] which becomes *surveillance*.

More striking are a small number of cases where an idiomatic expression is abandoned or misunderstood. One example of each would be *getting in on the ground floor with these chaps* [§23], which becomes *getting in with these chaps*, and *They went over like ninepins* [§23], which becomes *It went over like ninepins*. In the first case the outcome is due to the fact that in the United States, as in Russia, the floor of a building at street level is deemed to be the first floor, while in European and, more generally, in Commonwealth Englishes, as, for example, in French and Spanish, this has its own special name (*ground floor*, *rez-de-chaussée*, *planta baja*), and the first storey above it is the first floor (*premier étage*, *primer piso*). Hence, the idiom, relating to the idea of being present in some enterprise from the very start, has been truncated. In the second case, Americans gave up the traditional form of bowling with nine pins, or skittles, and moved to their own ten-pin bowling, apparently in order to circumvent regulations banning certain sports in some states during the early nineteenth century. Thus, the image of people falling over, as do the pins hit by a bowling ball, is lost. Here, the Spanish subtitles hit the nail on the head: *Cayeron como unos bolos*. The Spanish soundtrack is not quite so close to the original: *Han caído los muy estúpidos*.

It is noteworthy that the relatively substantial amounts of dialogue in Spanish that occur in the film are not given any form of English translation either in the English subtitled version or in the spoken-only format. This may be because many of these sections represent lyrics of songs, conventional greetings, or interactions comprehensible from the context, without any real need for the speech to be elucidated. Particular instances of songs would be in §6, where the character Mickie Abraxas sings the words of the song *Todavía cantamos*, written in 1983 by the Argentinian Víctor Heredia, and in §14, where a genuine Panamanian group sings two numbers while the characters Andrew Osnard and Francesca Deane have lunch, dance and later make love, this last scene being intercut with flashbacks to

the musicians. A good example of the conventional greetings type would be found at the end of §6, where Andrew Osnard arrives at the gate of the British Embassy and waits while his credentials are checked by the security guard; none of the Spanish dialogue between the guard and the characters Francesca Deane or Andy Osnard is translated into subtitles in English.

### **The Spanish Versions**

The spoken Spanish version is South American, as is immediately apparent by the accents. The subtitled version is also of this origin, but this becomes clear only from a limited number of features. These include vocabulary items such as *pendejos* [§1], translating the American character Louisa's *assholes*, although such a colloquial use to mean "stupid person" is not completely unknown in Peninsular Spanish, or *sacos deportivos* [§5] to represent *blazers*, which in Spain would be *chaquetas* or perhaps *americanas*. The dubbed dialogue has a geographically neutral *idiotas* for the first word, but agrees in using *sacos* in the second. Further instances of this American nature of the Spanish vocabulary in the subtitling would be *agárralos* for *go on* (implying "take some money") in §4 or *para que agarre forma* for *to get its shape back* [§5], since *agarrar* is used in preference to *coger* in many varieties of South American Spanish, or *rentan los cuartos por hora* in [§13], since in Peninsular Spanish *rentar* means "produce an income", not "rent, hire, let". The dubbed version has no corresponding phrase to the first use of *agarrar*, and a neutral *para que recupere su forma* for the second. It uses *alquilar la habitación por hora* for the last expression, thus choosing the verb *alquilar*, which would also be normal Peninsular Spanish for letting out accommodation. Two more vocabulary pointers that might be cited from the subtitles would be *she stood up* translated as *ella se paró* [§11] and *I stand upright* rendered *Me paro derecho* [§12], or *Too many of my gentlemen report a serious discomfort*, which becomes *Muchos de mis caballeros reportan una molestia* [§]. *Pararse* in Peninsular Spanish means "to stop", but in South America can have the sense of "to stand" that it

bears in the first two quotations, while *reportar* is frequently used in South America, but not normally in Spain for “to report”. The dubbed version has *se mantuvo firme* and *estando de pie* for the two instances of *stand*, neither regionally marked, but concurs with the subtitling in rendering the last statement by *Hay muchos caballeros que reportan una gran incomodidad*, thus using *reportar*.

Among further pointers to the South American origin of the subtitles, there is the use of preterite (simple past) for the present perfect, with *¿No oíste?* [§10] translating *Haven't you heard?*, a grammatical difference affecting choice of verb tenses which, coincidentally, would often apply in American versus European English in the same way that it does in American versus European Spanish. The dubbing has a present perfect here: *¿No has oído?* Another indicator would be the *loísmo* present in expressions like *¿Y si lo traes a la casa?* [§4] for *Why not just bring him home?* or *¿Lo podemos comprar?* [§6] for *Can we buy him?*, where Peninsular Spanish would mostly prefer *le* as the equivalent of “him”. The dubbing has *¿Y por qué no lo invitas?*, concurring in *loísmo*, but for the second instance uses *¿Se vendería?* (“Would he sell himself?”). There is additionally the use in the subtitles of *ustedes* as a plural of *tú*, rather than the Peninsular *vosotros/vosotras*, for instance in §23, where “Scotty” Luxmore tells the Americans that the amount needed to finance an insurrection is *The sort of money you boys leave under the plate, Elliott*, translated in the subtitles with *una cantidad de dinero que ustedes dejan de propina, Elliott*, even though the familiar form of address *tú* has been in use between the participants in the gathering in which this remark is made.

On the whole, the subtitled text manages to convey the original more completely and more precisely than the dubbed sound, despite the constraints and servitudes of keeping the number of letters on screen as small as possible. The dubbed version faces the considerable difficulty of trying to retain lip synchronization in a film in which many of the conversations are shot in close-up or at least with the mouth of the person speaking visible. This limitation accounts for many of the problems, but in addition there are errors or infelicities not present in the subtitling. There are, nevertheless, occasions where the subtitling is not as acceptable as the dubbing.

Examples of the three situations are to be found in §1. Subtitles and dubbing are both equally acceptable there in dealing with *for God's sake*, the subtitles reading *por el amor de Dios*, while the dubbing gives *por Dios santo*. The dubbing is more precise than the subtitling in the way it handles *There are only two hundred resident Brits in Panama*, offering *Hay sólo doscientos residentes británicos en Panamá* ["There are only two hundred British residents in Panama"]. The subtitle *En Panamá residen 200 británicos* back-translates literally as "In Panama there reside two hundred British". In contrast, the subtitles are better than the dubbing in handling the expression *M.I.6 H.Q., LONDON*, which appears as a subtitle at the start of the film. They read: *CUARTEL GENERAL M.I.6, LONDRES*, which does not completely explain that this is a reference to the sixth department of Military Intelligence, leaving the original's abbreviation unchanged, but is a good equivalent for the rest. The dubbing offers the voice-over: *Sección seis, cuarteles militares de inteligencia, Londres* ["Section Six, military intelligence barracks, London"].

The increasingly common use in Commonwealth English of the American sense of *billion* as "one thousand million" is correctly picked up and handled by the subtitles in §15, where *They've got billions in surveillance kit out there* becomes *Gastan miles de millones en vigilancia* ["They spend thousands of millions on surveillance"]. The dubbing offers *Tienen millones de dólares invertidos en vigilancia* ["They have millions of dollars invested in surveillance"], which is inaccurate, perhaps because of a mishearing of the original sound-track.

### **Problems - Terms of Address**

English, unlike all its geographically close neighbour languages, has lost any distinction between second-person pronouns, having merged the former nominative/vocative singular *thou* and plural *ye*, with their oblique forms *thee* and *you*, into a single form *you* in the standard language. In the absence of any verb morphology, this means that with the exception of survivals (such as *thou/thee* in the north and southwest of England) or innovations (*yez* and *youse* in Ireland, *you-*

*all* in America) in dialects, there is no differentiation of singular or plural, polite or familiar. This requires translators into languages with a more complex system to make choices, with an obligatory marking not present in the original English, often only deducible from unrelated speech items or merely the logic of the situation.

In the film under consideration here, this question of terms of address is less well handled by the dubbing than by the subtitles. The latter pick up the change of style in the sequence §3 and §4, where Andrew Osnard stops speaking formally to Harold Pendel and begins to put pressure on him. Up to this point the two men have used *usteteo*, representing the use in English of “title plus surname” address. The subtitles change to *tuteo*, representing the change to first name terms in English, and even to shortenings of them (*Andy*, *Harry*). So, in the *I know who you are* sequence, Andy’s *Go on* is rendered *Continúe*, but at the time he says *Come and sit down*, *Harry* there is the appropriate adjustment to *Ven y siéntate*, *Harry*. The dubbing acceptably offers *Siga* for the first, but fails to change the mode of address in a suitable way in the second, having *Venga a sentarse*, *Harry*. The dubbed version consistently retains this less acceptable, formal, use throughout, between these two men, with a few lapses. Similarly, the dubbing reflects the changed relationship between Francesca and Osnard rather later than the subtitling. In these Francesca says *sírvete* to him when offering coffee in §7, and he says to her *ven* in §8, the dubbing has *sírvase* and *la invito* at the equivalent points, changing to *tuteo* only in §14, during which they actually have sexual intercourse. A third point where the dubbing retains *usteteo*, while the subtitles have a more probable *tuteo*, is §23, where the British and Americans discuss subsidizing the supposed revolutionary movement led by Mickie Abraxas. They are on first-name terms, which would suggest *tuteo*. A final case is constituted by the conversations between Louise Pendel and Andy Osnard. He is invited to share a family picnic on Sarah Pendel’s birthday, and is supposed to be Harry Pendel’s new good friend. This would be likely to lead to *tuteo*, but Andy does not shift to this until §25, when he attempts to rape her. She does not use *tuteo* with him ever, even when screaming with rage at him, a circumstance rather likely to reduce the level of respect

shown in speech! In the subtitles, both these characters consistently use *tuteo* throughout, which does seem more realistic.

As a similar matter relating to terms of address, it can be noted that the phrase *Mr Cool* which Mickie Abraxas uses to Andy Osnard [§] is rendered *don Británico* [roughly “Mister Englishman”] in the subtitles, but *señor Andy* [“Mister Andy”] in the dubbing. This latter is less satisfactory, especially in view of the fact that Spanish would normally use *don* with forenames, *señor* with family names.

### **Cultural Items**

Several of the cultural references posing a problem for the translators are literary. In §2, Harry’s young daughter Sarah is supposed to have learned William Blake’s 1794 poem *The Tyger* as homework from school. The first verse is recited by her to her father in a couple of sections intercalated among other conversation. In the original this verse reads:

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

However, Sarah, uncertain of the final word, quotes it as *cemetery*. In general, when well-known works of literature are quoted, it is good practice to use an established translation if one exists. The problem here is that there are several competing versions in Spanish. A fairly superficial Internet trawl revealed at least three. Antonio Restrepo offers:

Tigre, tigre, que te enciendes en luz  
por los bosques de la noche  
¿qué mano inmortal, qué ojo  
pudo idear tu terrible simetría?



An anonymous version is available from the University of Chile, reading:

¡Tigre! ¡Tigre! luz llameante  
En los bosques de la noche,  
¿Qué ojo o mano inmortal  
Pudo idear tu terrible simetría?

A third translation, also anonymous, is offered by the Biblioteca Virtual BEAT 57, running:

¡Tigre! ¡Tigre! ardiendo brillante  
En los bosques de la noche,  
¿Qué ojo o mano inmortal  
Pudo idear tu terrible simetría?

In the light of this plethora of alternatives, it is not very surprising that both the subtitles and the dubbed version start from scratch in making their own translations. The subtitles provide:

Tigre, tigre, ardiente antorcha  
En el bosque de la noche  
Oh, qué inmortal mano u ojo  
Forjaría tu cimientto tenebroso.

Sarah's error, corrected by her father, puts *cimiento* ["foundation, base"] for *simetría* here. In a variety of Spanish that is *seseante*, in other words which replaces the interdental voiceless fricative of the *Pronunciación Peninsular Normativa* with the corresponding dento-alveolar sound, these words are relatively close and could conceivably be confused. The dubbing offers:

Tigre, tigre, extranjero escurre  
Por el bosque muy veloz  
Oh, qué mano inmortal podía  
Algún día eliminar tal cementerio.

This has moved rather farther away from the original in a number of aspects, but has kept to the meaning, using *cementerio* [“cemetery”] for Sarah’s mistake. Again, a *seseante* pronunciation would render the “C” as an “S”, but the overlap of sounds with *simetría* would nevertheless be smaller than that achieved by the subtitled version.

There is another literary cultural reference in §23 to the 1903 play written by Baroness Orczy (in collaboration with her husband), later rewritten as a novel in 1905, *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, in which an English nobleman who rescues people from Revolutionary France uses the scarlet pimpernel flower as his pseudonym and signature. This authoress produced about a dozen further tales sharing characters with this first novel. “Scotty” Luxmore, when giving a briefing to the Americans, compares Mickie Abraxas to this character in the book, describing him as *the elusive pimpernel*. The translations into Spanish of Baroness Orczy’s adventure stories involving the hero in question have generally used the Spanish word *pimpinela*, which in fact refers to several plants, the great burnet, *Sanguisorba officinalis*, and the salad burnet, *Poterium sanguisorba* / *Sanguisorba minor*. The orange, red or bright blue five-petalled pimpernel is actually *Anagallis arvensis* (*Anagallis foemina* for the blue form), in Spanish known as *murajes*. Hence, the dubbed version with its *el elusivo murajes* is scientifically correct. However, it misses the culturally-established equivalence that is picked up correctly by the subtitles, which use *la pimpinela esquiva*. Even then, the dubbing is slightly strange, in that *murajes* is a word having only a plural form, but is treated as a singular.

A further interesting case of a cultural item, in this instance not a literary reference, occurs in the very last part of the film, §28, where Harry is preparing breakfast for his family. He cooks standard, thin, English-style *pancakes*, tossing them into the air in the traditional way so as to ensure they are cooked on both sides. The subtitles recognize this as a problem word, and render it “*panequeques*”, using quotation marks. The dubbing uses the English word too, but transforms it into *panqués*. This is a problem area, since there is no exact equivalent dish in the traditional cuisine of Spanish-speaking countries. There was in the past a vague descriptive phrase, *frutos de sartén*, that was sometimes used to describe this food, but is a generic term also

covering such Spanish products as *churros*, *buñuelos* or *porras*, essentially anything made of dough, cooked in oil, and normally sweetened. More recently, in Spain at least, the French loan-word *crepes* has been in favour, variably pronounced and gendered: *el/la crepe/crêpe*, *el crep*. Potential other equivalents might be *tortas* or *tortitas*. The consumer advice web-page of the Spanish supermarket chain Eroski actually had a definition running as follows: *Las crepes son unas tortitas muy finas cuya composición básica es una masa de leche, harina (de trigo o de maíz), huevos y margarina, que una vez reposada, se cuaja en una sartén antiadherente*. However, the subtitlers and dubbers were South American, thus not necessarily sharing the exact values assigned to words in Spain, and in any case their solutions are reasonable enough.

### Fixed Expressions

For *fair's fair* [§3] the dubbed version's *sé justo* ["be fair"] is not an idiom in the way that the English expression is. However, it does convey the essential meaning. The subtitled *al César lo que es del César* ["render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's"] is an quotation from the Gospel according to Saint Matthew, 22:21, but is perhaps a case of trying too hard to suggest the mildly idiomatic nature of the original.

Although the phrase in question is not exactly a fixed idiom, it is noteworthy that the two versions' handling of *The Club Room* [§3] vary: the subtitles read *El Salón de Club*, the dubbing gives *La Sala de Club*. Both are rather pedestrianly literal, and one wonders if an expression like *El Ateneo* might not have worked better, playing on the frequent use of this name for literary and social gentlemen's clubs in Spain and other Spanish-speaking countries. When talking of this space, Harry Pendel says that it is visited by *a good few of our gentlemen*. This in the subtitling is rendered *algunos compatriotas*, which distorts the meaning, as the only compatriot of Harry's who we know to have been there is Andy Osnard, while those shown visiting are Panamanians or Americans. The dubbing plumps for *muy selectos*

*caballeros*, which adds to the sense, making them “highly distinguished” gentlemen, so can be seen as padding.

In §11 there is a rather better example of a fixed idiom. Harry uses the English expression *Speak of the devil*, which is the first half of the various longer forms: *Speak/talk of the devil and he appears / shall/will appear / is sure/bound to appear / is presently at your elbow*, with the general sense in most cases that somebody mentioned in a conversation has unexpectedly arrived. The subtitles have *hablando del rey de Roma* [“speaking of the King of Rome”], the first half of the similar-sensed Spanish idiom most often quoted as *Hablando del rey de Roma, por la puerta asoma*, whose last half means “he appears through the door”. The dubbed version, perhaps trying to pick up the reference made by Marta just before to Andy Osnard as a *devil*, perhaps once again constrained by lip-synchronization, sticks to a literal *hablando del diablo*, not normal in Spanish as an expression.

### Colloquialisms

The word *fluence* used several times in the film by the character Uncle Benny, the first being in §1, has four senses. It is a technical term in physics, equivalent to “integrated flux” and defined as the number of particles intersecting a unit area. In archaic English, it can mean “a flow, a stream”. Thirdly, it is an archaic alternative for *fluency*. Both the subtitlers and the dubbers have taken this third sense of “fluency” to be what is meant, translating with *fluidéz*. However, here it is surely the fourth use, *'fluence*, occasionally spelt *floence*, the aphaeretic form of *influence*, meaning “power, particularly mystical, magical or hypnotic power”, which the Concise Oxford English Dictionary states is an early twentieth century formation, primarily in British colloquial use. Other sources claim this originated as an Australian or New Zealand idiom, but informal responses from speakers of those varieties of English suggest that this is unlikely.

Andy, enquiring about Harry Pendel’s supposed erstwhile partner, Arthur Braithwaite, says [§3] *Good old boy, Arthur, was he?* The phrase *good old boy* means no more than something on the lines

of “pleasant person”. The dubbed version here offers *Buen hombre, Arthur, ¿no?*, which is a fully acceptable equivalent, but the subtitles veer off course with their *¿Era de la alta sociedad?* [“Was he from high society?”], which is not only inaccurate, but inherently improbable of a professional tailor owning a single, apparently small, shop.

In §4, Andy assures Harry *I’m bonus*, a colloquial use of a term used in finance, here reduced to meaning “some unexpected extra benefit”. In the subtitles, this becomes *Yo soy un premio* [“I am a prize/premium”], which is quite a good translation. The dubbing gives *Soy bueno* [“I’m good”]. This is so far from the sense of the original that it almost certainly is an erroneous version forced by the requirements of lip synchronization: there are only two syllables, and a very visible bilabial sound is incorporated.

In the same section, Andy uses the vulgar word *cunt* in its sense of “stupid person” when encouraging Harry to become his collaborator. The subtitles keep the vulgarity, using *maricón* [narrowly “homosexual”, but often more generally “wimp”], the dubbing keeps the sense, having *tonto* [“stupid”].

In §5 Andy Osnard comments to Harry Pendel, as they enter the latter’s club, that entry must have *cost you an arm and a leg*. This is an idiom, particularly frequent in British use, meaning “cost a very large amount”. The subtitles offer *costó una fortuna* [“cost a fortune”], which, though not a colourful idiom, is accurate. The dubbing uses *costar un brazo* [“cost an arm”], not a normal Spanish idiom, since that language prefers to say that expensive things cost *un ojo de la cara* [“an eye from one’s face”] or *un riñón* [“a kidney”], and in vulgar phrasing *un huevo* [literally “an egg”, but in slang “a testicle”]. The use of a slang term occurring in *The handful that Noriega hadn’t banged up already* [§9] poses some problems. The subtitling provides *Los pocos contra que Noriega no se había ensañado* [“The few against whom Noriega had not acted cruelly/furiously”]. In the dubbing, this is rendered *Un grupo que Noriega no había podido eliminar aún* [“A group that Noriega had not yet been able to eliminate”]. *To bang somebody up* has various senses, but here it must hold its commonest meaning of “to throw somebody in jail”, “to put somebody in prison”.

*We bombed in Washington* [§15] makes use of an English theatrical slang expression meaning “to fail”, “to be a flop”. The subtitles correctly recognize this and offer *fuimos un fracaso en Washington* [“we were a failure in Washington]. The dubbed version, however, provides a “howler” of a mistranslation: *bombardeamos Washington* [“we bombed/ bombarded Washington”].

### **Word Plays**

It is interesting to see how the two Spanish versions handle the pun on *denial / the Nile* in §11. The dubbed version attempts to keep the word *Nile*, perhaps influenced by lip-synch considerations, but does not really manage any felicitous solution. The subtitled version tries to achieve an acceptable word play by using *archivado* (“filed away”), a word that a girl aged six or seven might reasonably be expected not to know, and then re-interpreting it as meaning “eaten by a young female goat” on the basis that it can be seen as containing the word *chiva* (“female kid”). The full texts of the four versions are as given below.

#### *English Spoken*

MARK –What happened to your diet, Mum?

LOUISE –I’m in denial.

SARAH –What’s denial?

HARRY –A very big river in Africa

MARK –Boom, boom!

HARRY –Thank you.

#### *English Subtitled*

MARK –What happened to your diet, Mom?

LOUISE –I’m in denial.

SARAH –What’s denial?

HARRY –A very big river in Africa

MARK –Ba-boom!

HARRY –Thank you.

*Spanish Spoken*

MARK –¿Qué haces, Mamá?

LOUISE –Leo en hilo.

SARAH –¿Qué es el Nilo?

HARRY –Un río muy grande que está en África.

MARK –¡Ajá!

HARRY –Gracias.

*Spanish Subtitled*

MARK –¿Qué pasó con tu dieta, Mamá?

LOUISE –Está archivada.

SARAH –¿Cómo que archivada?

HARRY –Se la comió la chiva.

MARK –Buen chiste.

HARRY –Gracias.

### **Technicisms – Financial**

*Overdraft* [§2] in English means an arrangement whereby a bank account can continue to be used to make payments even though there is no money in it. Its most precise equivalent in Spanish would probably be *saldo negativo* [“negative balance”] or *saldo deudor* [“owing balance”], with *préstamo* [“loan”] or *deuda* [“debt”] as rather vaguer possibilities. The subtitled *sobregiro* is a technicism, with the sense “*giro o libranza que excede de los créditos o fondos disponibles*”, and so means something on the lines of a bill of exchange issued for an amount greater than is available to pay it. In general, the dubbed *préstamo* is probably better because of its wider-ranging and less narrowly precise sense than the highly technical *sobregiro* of the subtitles, which is in any case not quite the correct translation.

When speaking of Harry’s debts, Andy comments that he has used his shop and house as *collateral* [§3]. The subtitles offer *colateral*, but in the Spanish Academy dictionary this is defined as being only an adjective, with the senses “on both sides” or, of family members, “not in the direct line of descent”. The most usual Spanish

here would probably be *fianza*, with *prenda*, *garantía*, and *garantía prendaria* also viable contenders. Thus, the dubbed version with *garantía* is preferable here, with the subtitles being lured into error by a sort of false friend.

In this same section, Harry speaks of how Arthur Braithwaite offered him a full partnership. This type of company organization, despite harmonization attempts, has no exact equivalent in Spanish, and might be rendered generally with *sociedad* or *asociación*, or with near equivalents such as *sociedad de responsabilidad limitada* or *sociedad regular colectiva* (probably the closest term, as it suggests unlimited responsibility for the firm's debts, a feature of many partnerships). The subtitles offer *una sociedad completa*, the dubbed version *una sociedad compartida*. In both cases, the translators have probably been wise to accept a vaguer equivalence, rather than trying to get the exact value of the original. All the same, an expression on the lines of *hacerte mi socio* might have worked even better.

### **Technicisms – Tailoring**

*Lounge suits* [§3] seems to pose a problem, as the subtitling proposes *trajes deportivos* [“sports suits”] and the dubbing *trajes casuales* [“casual suits”]. The adjectival addition in both cases could simply be omitted, since in English the word *lounge* is used to distinguish these from dinner suits or other more formal wear, or, in the past, from suits for outdoor activities such as mountaineering or hunting, but is not actually required. In modern English, unless otherwise specified, a suit is a lounge suit. Immediately after this, the further potential order of clothing is called *the full monty* by Andy Osnard, who comments that this expression, originally a tailoring slang term with the sense of a complete set of something, has acquired the meaning of “completely nude”. The subtitles’ *el monty completo* is probably less satisfactory than the dubbed *todo el montaje*, since this last at least is completely Spanish and has a sense of “the whole set-up”, which is not too distant from the original concept.



When Harry Pendel is about to proceed with measuring Andy just after this initial conversation, he speaks jokingly of *vital statistics*, reserved in English almost entirely for referring to the triple breast, waist and hip measurements of female participants in beauty contests. The most appropriate Spanish would be *medidas*, but the subtitles translate over-literally *estadísticas vitales*, while the dubbing has (*¡El Sol!*) *vital para todos*, making this a continuing reference to the sun, which Harry has just commented upon as it emerges after the previous heavy rainstorm, clearly an error of meaning, but perhaps forced on the translators because of the requirements of lip synchronization.

Harry enquires of Andy [§3] *Do we dress right or left, sir?*, which is a somewhat euphemistic request for information as to requirements for space for the penis within the trousers. The dubbed *¿Lo lleva a la derecha o a la izquierda?* [“Do you carry it to the right or too the left?”] is a reasonable equivalent in its vagueness. The subtitles’ *¿De qué lado se abrocha?* [“On which side do you button up?”], however, has drifted too far away, since there is no reference to which side buttons are to be used in the original.

Shortly after this, in the same section, Harry talks of *a nice muted check hacking jacket*, whose cloth he describes as *finest mohair, dash of cashmere*. The subtitles capture the type of garment well, offering *un saco de montar a cuadros*, but have difficulty with the cloth mixture, saying it is *de la mayor tela de angora, con cachemir*. The dubbed version provides only *un saco* for the garment, but gives the cloth a double description *una finísima tela* and *un fino mojer, con algo de casimir*. In fact, though not accepted by the Spanish Academy, *mohair* is used in Spanish as a foreign loanword. The *mojer* of the dubbing is a representation of the actor’s pronunciation, the alternative based on the sound, not the spelling. Its *casimir* is a valid Academy-accepted alternative to *cachemir*. The *angora* of the subtitles is word accepted by the Academy, but its sense is “cloth made of rabbit fur”, not the “cloth made of goat hair” that is the meaning of *mohair*.

In §10, *a lovely silk and mohair herringbone* becomes in the dubbing *un hermoso y muy elegante traje nuevo* [“a beautiful and very elegant new suit“], which has almost totally parted company with the original. The subtitles describe the suit as *de punto de espina, usando*

*seda y tela de angora* [“herringbone, using silk and cloth made of angora”]. This is closer, but still does not quite hit the nail on the head, retaining the confusion mentioned above between *mohair* and *angora*.

Another tailoring term that is less well handled by the dubbing than by the subtitles is *that double-breasted mohair* [§12]. This rendered *un traje con doble forro* [“suit with double lining”] in the dubbed version, not just inaccurate, but also failing to use common sense: this is clothing to be worn in a tropical climate! The subtitles have *tu saco cruzado*, a standard South American Spanish equivalent for the English *double-breasted jacket*, and thus more acceptable.

## **Conclusion**

This paper is no more than an initial discussion of specific individual points of difficulty for translators and of the solutions proposed by the two versions of the film being studied. It is not really appropriate to draw any general conclusions from this discussion. However, two points may be made. One is that certain types of item are inherently more difficult to translate than others, examples of these types being the categories picked out here. Another, relating to dubbing, is that there will frequently be times when the ideal expression from a translation point of view will be precluded by the constraints of attempting to achieve reasonable lip synchronization. Further investigations of transcriptions of films is thus an interesting area for translation studies in general.