(Main)streaming English Dubs: A Snapshot of Netflix's Playbook on Strategies for English Dubbing

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Abstract

With 'original' content from a growing diversity of languages, Netflix has become a playground for audiovisual translation. Given that Netflix outsources its localisation, it has been able to rely on practitioners in consolidated industries to create revoiced and subtitled versions that adhere to industry conventions. Although subtitling has long been the consolidated mode for localising mainstream audiovisual products (films and series) into English, Netflix has initiated new trends in an Anglophone dubbing industry traditionally reserved for niche products, by bringing the dubbing of foreign-language mainstream products into the distribution mainstream. The illusory novelty of English dubs, debuted at the turn of 2017 on Netflix, has facilitated experimentation in dubbing strategies. In the burgeoning English-dubbing industries, located mainly in Los Angeles and London, standardisation, domestication and foreignisation strategies are being used (Hayes 2021; 2022). In order to elucidate emerging norms in English-dubbing strategies, in this article we present a corpus of Netflix's English dubs of 82 Castilian-Spanish films and TV series and analyse the main dubbing strategies adopted by the studios involved.

Key words: audiovisual translation, dubbing strategies, English dubbing, mainstream audiovisual products, video-on-demand streaming, translation norms.

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1. Introduction

Subscription video-on-demand services (aka SVoDs, streaming platforms or streamers) and over-the-top (OTT) media services have introduced major changes in viewing habits in recent years (Grandinetti, 2017). Their usage rates have accelerated steadily over the last 10 years and consumer revenues in the EU rose from €919 million in 2010 to €2.5 billion in 2014 (Croce and Grece, 2015). The popularisation of streaming platforms has reinforced the ubiquity of translation, which is more prominent on our screens than ever before (Díaz-Cintas and Massidda, 2019). And whereas audiovisual translation (AVT) is often viewed through an Anglocentric lens in which English is the source language, the distribution of sizeable portfolios of non-English-language content via streaming has given rise to a burgeoning English-language localisation industry over the past half decade, thereby shifting English in the translation paradigm into the position of target language.

At present, the rise of non-English-language content is particularly fuelled in Europe by legislation such as the European Union's quota on non-European audiovisual products and more specifically, the revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) which has been in effect since 2018. In 2020, Spain passed a new General Law on Audiovisual Media, establishing that SVoDs must invest 5% of their revenue collected in Spain into producing European cinema or TV series or, alternatively, into a direct contribution to Spain's Cinematography Protection Fund (Muñoz, 2020). SVoDs, and their preferred localisation partners, have experimented with AVT modes to localise the growing number of foreign-language programmes in order to reach a wider viewership, including but not limited to English speakers viewing the likes of new Spanish content. While English subtitles are still provided for foreign-language content, English dubbed versions have grown exponentially on Netflix since 2017, with many other companies, such as HBO, following suit. Whereas 2017 was the year English dubbing became a trend on Netflix, the company had one isolated—or pilot—case before then: *3%* (Charlone *et al.*, 2016–2020), a TV series dubbed from Brazilian Portuguese.

In this paper, we acknowledge the evolution of English-language dubbing of "foreign" (hereinafter understood as non-English-language) content and pay particular attention to Spanish feature films and series, examining the overall treatment of accents by dubbing studios. SVoD content, as we posit herein, is becoming an AVT playground, especially inasmuch as the English dubbing of foreign content is concerned.

2. English Dubbing in the Audiovisual-Translation Mediascape

Prior to 2017, English dubbing had mainly been reserved for localising animation for children, ads (Chaume, 2012, p. 6–10) and videogames. That said, dubbing was also the chosen AVT mode for foreign live-action fiction at different moments in the past, for popular genres such as Spaghetti Westerns. Some historical dubs are being redistributed on streaming platforms, e.g. films by Vittorio De Sica starring Sophia Loren (who dubbed herself in English) are currently available with their original 1960s dubs on Amazon Prime Video.

Streaming services have been able to look to the existing English-dubbing industry when embarking on the creation of mainstream English dubs. Whereas some historical dubs opted for neutralising dialogues (understood as the supposed elimination of any speech-related geographical traits), some even attempting a mid-Atlantic standard (Magnan-Park, 2018, p. 232), others experimented with domesticating techniques, such as the different British accents used in some 1950s London dubs of Italian films (Mereu Keating, 2021). Modern-day English dubs, such as of cartoons, have tended to opt for standardisation strategies alone, which conflate linguistic variation present in original versions into a single variety of the target language. The extent of this standardisation can be heard in the dubbese particular to videogames, which is a hypercorrection of speech spontaneity arising from the "prefabricated orality" (Baños and Chaume, 2009) inherent in dubbed and other studio-performed dialogues.

Since 2017, Netflix has experimented with different macro-strategies when localising content into English (Hayes, 2021, p. 18–20), though this experimentation did not begin immediately. Rather, two years into English dubbing, i.e. in 2019, the company began to explore new strategies. Despite the shortcomings in the company's first English dubs, discussed further on, foreign titles might well owe their initial success to these very dubs. In fact, in 2018 (Stone, 2018, online), Netflix revealed from its research into viewing habits that, although native Anglophones would rather watch an English-language original, when they did watch foreign content, their preference was to watch it dubbed rather than subtitled. Furthermore, those who opted for the dubbed version were significantly more likely to watch the product to the end, as evidenced with the German series *Dark* (Berg *et al.*, 2017–2020). Consequently, the company put the dub on default (Nguyen, 2018). An additional factor encouraging the consumption of foreign content is that these programmes are somewhat camouflaged in the sea of series, films and other products on Netflix, because their titles are generally translated into English. The quality of the dubbed versions, then, is one reason viewers may continue watching English dubs. Netflix has demonstrated its commitment to enhancing its dubbed versions, with the company's vice-president of international originals saying they wanted to "treat the language [of the dubbed version] as if it [were] its own production and make sure that [they] get good at that" (Stone, *ibid.*).

Whereas in practice dubbing seems to have increased viewership, it is often poorly received on mainstream media and disliked by audiences unaccustomed to dubbing and its inherent traits, and they complain of such things as imperfect lip synchrony. Another main criticism has been in relation to the use of standardised accents. The distinction between standard and standardised accents is that the former reflect authentic linguistic repertoires that are recognised as the most common in a given geographic area. For instance, a Standard British English accent (SBE)—often heard in and around London, the Home Counties, and in the speech of the British upper class—is considered the British standard. By contrast, standardised accents have undergone an artificial process of levelling with their features tailored to form a standard that is inauthentic and unlike spontaneous speech, as evidenced in the enunciation and pronunciation of videogame speak. Due to vowel and dental-plosive realisations, the resulting accent can be confused with Canadian or mid-Atlantic English, or, more accurately, recognised as belonging to videogame speak (e.g. the announcer's voice in cult

fantasy videogame *League of Legends*). Standard Canadian and American accents differ subtly yet most notably in vowel articulation. Canadian Shift and the tense-monophthongal realisation of long vowels (Boberg, 2008, p. 130) are the phonetic characteristics that are noticeable in the English dubs that feature standardised English.

The standardised accent was used in some early Netflix English dubs, such as in *Las chicas del cable* (*Cable Girls*) (Díaz *et al.*, 2017–2020) and the early seasons of *La casa de papel* (*Money Heist*) (Pina *et al.*, 2017–present). As dubbing was usually used for cartoons and videogames prior to Netflix's "dubbing revolution" (Ranzato and Zanotti, 2019, p. 3, drawing on Moore 2018), videogame accents filtered into many voice actors' performances in Netflix's early English dubs (Hayes, 2021, p. 19). The voice talents chosen to dub the protagonists were those most seasoned in videogame dubbing, e.g. Kyla Garcia in *Cable Girls*, thereby placing the standardised accent centre stage and exacerbating invective on tabloids and Twitter (see, for example, Fredette, 2017). Conversely, broadsheet reviews have been more measured and optimistic about Netflix's English-dubbing endeavours, granted their commentary came later, and one notable article being by a journalist who is also a translator from dubbing-language Italian (see Goldsmith, 2019). By 2019, Netflix had distanced itself from this incidental strategy and used other accents instead. In the case of *Money Heist*, the company even replaced the dubs for the first two seasons with dubs that used standard American English and they continued with these accents from the third season onwards (Goldsmith, 2019; Sánchez-Mompeán, 2021).

The redub of *Money Heist*, which has been discussed by Sánchez-Mompeán (2021) and Spiteri-Miggiani (2021), constitutes an anomaly, insofar as other Spanish series were not redubbed. The special treatment of this title is a reflection of its large-scale success. Netflix (2018, p. 2–3) acknowledged the series in an earnings report, sent to shareholders on 16 April 2018, for the March financial quarter of that year, saying that the series had become their most ever watched non-English-language title to that date, and that investment in non-English productions had been increased. This investment likely refers to the productions themselves as well as their AVT postproduction. Netflix's chief product officer, Greg Peters, credited the remarkable scale of viewership for European-language series to the fact that they had been dubbed—into English among other languages—and to the quality of the dubbed versions (Bylykbashi, 2019). In 2019, Netflix upped the ante on its dubbing initiative by hiring creative dubbing supervisors across the globe, capable of recognising "regional cultural differences" (Netflix, 2019), with the company's international dubbing director, Debra Chinn, stating Netflix was "taking this new [dubbing] initiative very seriously" (Bylykbashi, 2019).

The redub of *Money Heist* can be viewed as pivotal in steering the direction of Netflix's dubs, as it is plausible that it spurred the need for creative dubbing supervisors and gave impetus to more English dubbing of Spanish originals in particular. The creative dubbing of foreign originals was a turning point for dubbing macro-strategies. Beyond the use of standard accents in the place of standardised ones, the dubbing studios to which Netflix outsources its English-dubbing activities began experimenting with domesticating strategies in 2019. Such an example is the Spanish series *Hache* (Cimadevilla *et al.*, 2019–present), dubbed into British English at VSI London, which used a variation

of accents to dub different registers of standard Spanish (i.e. Central Peninsular Spanish, henceforth CPS) and conveyed foreign accents too. Other creative approaches already being practised prior to 2019 in the US were foreignisation strategies, as in the English dub of Galician-Spanish series *Fariña* (*Cocaine Coast*) (Campos *et al.*, 2018) by Post Haste Digital, in which an indiscriminate medley of Hispanic accents in English were used to dub Galician-Spanish, Colombian and Panamanian accents (Hayes, 2022). This foreignisation strategy is popularly used in the English dubs of Netflix's Scandinavian originals as well, in which the original actors dub themselves rather than being dubbed by voice actors, e.g. *Ragnarok* (Hagedorn and Johansen, 2020–present), dubbed into Norwegian-accented English. Prior to Netflix's experimentation in English-dubbing strategies, foreignisation was a technique more often heard in non-fiction voiceovers, e.g. used for foreign news reporters or interviewees on the BBC (Filmer 2019) and in documentaries, as well as for original versions in English set abroad and performed in the foreign accents native to the setting, e.g. Colombian-accented English in *Loving Pablo* (León de Aranoa, 2017).

Despite the higher standard of dubbing brought about since 2019, the aforementioned invective in popular debate on English dubs has not been altogether quelled. For instance, in relation to *Squid Game*, Netflix's most ever watched non-English title at the time of writing, see Lee (2021) on complaints about *Squid Game*'s English dub and Orrego-Carmona (2021) explaining the role of subs and dubs to allay audiences' dissatisfaction in an attempt to extinguish some fires ignited by the same series' subtitles. Nevertheless, the reality is that dubs *are* the preferred mode of AVT consumption for many Anglophone viewers of non-English originals. With both dubs (defaulted) and subs (optional) being offered to a—generally—novice audience of AVT consumers, a unique situation has arisen among Anglophone viewers insofar as they do not seem to have a preference for, nor aversion to, one mode over the other. Furthermore, viewers of English dubs are likely to be more amenable to different dubbing strategies given the minimal or marginalised precedents in English-language localisation and/or viewers' lack of familiarity with these. Anglophone perceptions on English AVT will nevertheless require habituation before criticism tapers off.

3. Case Study: Building a Corpus of Netflix's English Dubs from Castilian Spanish

The aim of the following sections is to provide a snapshot of the dubbing macro-strategies used in Netflix's English dubs, which can be used in future research to illustrate developments in mainstream English dubbing, as the industry matures. We have previously established that Netflix started large-scale English-language dubbing for films and series in 2017 and that 2019 marked a turning point in their translational approach, by introducing re-dubs and further experimentation with strategies.

3.1. Methodology for Building the Corpus

We have created a corpus of 82 Castilian-Spanish series and films streamed on Netflix. Given our language combinations of specialisation and the sheer size of Netflix's Castilian-Spanish portfolio, we

decided upon a corpus from this language variety exclusively. Furthermore, in the aim of drawing accurate conclusions, we narrowed the scope to this variety, as the inclusion of Latin American titles would have entailed reducing the Castilian-Spanish titles under study so that different Hispanophone regions were represented equally in quantitative terms. When identifying all Castilian-Spanish titles, we ensured Catalan, Galician and Basque titles were not included—the cover of these are ambiguously described as Spanish under 'genre' used in adjectival form to denote provenance from Spain rather than nominal form to describe the language of the text.

In light of Netflix first launching its English dubs of Spanish originals in 2017, the 82 titles chosen (see Annex 1) are all the Peninsular Spanish titles that were released on the platform between January 2017 and June 2021 and available for streaming during our analysis period of June 2021. The exclusion of titles released on the platform prior to 2017 owes to their not being dubbed into English retrospectively since the company incorporated English dubbing into its postproduction processes. The caveat should be stated that content on the platform varies across territories and the authors of this article have accessed content from Ireland and the UK respectively. Furthermore, the start and final dates of access to the corpus are important as content on the platform is subject to change, and some titles in our corpus might become unavailable. Finally, it is important to highlight that all texts under scrutiny fall under fictional live-action films and series, whereas there are also some non-fiction live-action products on the platform (e.g. stand-up comedy and documentaries) as well as cartoons, which have not been included. The line was drawn at the inclusion of a 'mockumentary' in the corpus, since this text type is fundamentally fiction, albeit purporting to be non-fiction and thereby creating the satirical humour characteristic of the genre.

In this article, we discuss four macro dubbing strategies (hereinafter macro-strategies), which refer to the treatment of the original version's dominant variety (often termed L1). To clarify the meaning(s) of *standard* and *standardisation*, the following points have been established:

- In Sociolinguistics, a **standard** is immutable insofar as an SBE accent will be considered standard anywhere in the UK, despite the reality that it usually emanates from the South of England (the upper class from elsewhere in the UK tends to speak this way too which can be seen as adhering to a standard of 'high English');

- Within Translation Studies, the concept of **standard** is taken to be that which is most prevalent throughout a given text. In other words, it is the dominant variety and therefore standard in its context. Chaume (2012, p. 137–138) has observed this understanding, whereby a film in French of France and another in Quebec French, for example, will both be dubbed into standard German, even if Germans would ordinarily consider Québécois French non-standard;

- We have postulated that **standardisation** is the process of removing as many regional specificities from an accent as possible (Chaume, 2012), which can also be thought of as neutralisation as with artificially 'neutral' versions of languages such as Neutral Spanish

(Scandura, 2021), which is more Mexican or standard than neutral (Fuentes-Luque, 2019, p. 826). The final result of this process is an inauthentic variety of a language that is likely—though not strictly—closest in resemblance to the standard of that language, where standard is understood in its Sociolinguistic sense (i.e. meaning the most widespread variety which is naturally occurring);

- For simplicity's sake, we use the term **standardisation** to refer to both the use of (authentic) **standard** accents, e.g. SBE, and (artificially) **standardised** ones, e.g. videogame.

To describe the different strategies at play, we have availed of the terms *domestication* and *foreignisation* (see Table 1 below) as used, often dichotomously, by Translation Studies scholars in relation to translation strategies, as opposed to their original meaning as translation ideologies that give rise to the identity of a translation (Venuti, 1995). Since domestication and foreignisation are not mutually exclusive binaries but exist in a continuum, we saw it fit to include *standardisation* as a third point in the continuum and hybrid as an intersectional point therein too.

Table 1.

Dubbing Macro-Strategies in the English Dubs of Castilian Spanish Programmes

Dubbing Macro-strategy	Sociolinguistic Dimension	Examples in English Dubbing
Domestication	Regional and/or social accents in the original version are reflected through regional accents of the target language.	CPS replaced with SBE for most characters, while lower-class CPS is replaced by an Estuary-English or Cockney accent.
Foreignisation	The standard accent in the original is replaced with a foreign accent in English belonging to the language of the original.	Spanish dialogue standard in the original replaced with generically Hispanic-accented English as new standard in the dubbed version.
Standardisation	The original accents are transferred in a neutral fashion to eliminate a plurality of geographic, social or other particularities. When relevant, qualities conveyed by regional varieties in the ST may be echoed by register in the dub.	Basque Spanish as standard and Andalusian Spanish as Other in the original, both dubbed into standard US English.
Hybrid	This involves a crossover of strategies.	CPS dubbed into standard US English for young characters and Hispanic-accented English for older characters.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

As previously outlined, the primary focus of our analysis is the treatment of the L1 variety standard in the source text and whether it has been standardised, domesticated, foreignised or hybridised on the whole. We also offer secondary discussion on the portrayal of foreign accents but this study does not focus on the treatment of L3 instances or multilingualism in AVT. Furthermore, the study does not aspire to comprehensiveness on a micro level, insofar as we consider dubbing macro-strategies from an overarching standpoint rather than categorising all dialogues individually.

The criteria chosen to establish some correlations and attain broadly representative conclusions from our analysis are the following: the dubbed version's year of release, type of programme (film or series), nature of Netflix's relationship with the programme (producer, co-producer, and/or distributor), dubbing industry (US, Canada, or UK), dubbing studio, dubbing director, and dubbing macro-strategy. The strategies are analysed in relation to each criterion to discern whether any of the same are variables that impact the dubbing strategy employed in an English dub on Netflix. Other

possible variables are discussed further on, and these open up many more research strands that we could not contemplate in a single research article.

3.2. Results and Discussion of the Corpus

Once the data had been collected and arranged into the corresponding criteria previously described, we analysed the relationship between the data found and the possible implications therein in the corpus (Annex 1).

3.2.1. Relationship between year of release and English dubbing

The corpus of TV series and feature films, which were released on Netflix between January 2017 and June 2021, encompasses a total of 82 programmes: 54 films (66%) and 28 series (34%). Time-wise, they were distributed as follows:

Table 2.

English-Dubbed Films and TV Series by Year of Release

	Films	%	TV Series	%	Combined Programmes	%
2017	11	20%	4[1]	14%	15	18%
2018	18[2]	33%	7[3]	25%	25	30%
2019	13	24%	8[4]	29%	21	26%
2020	11[5]	21%	6	21%	17	21%
2021	1	2%	3[6]	11%	4	5%
Total	54		28		82	

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The absence of pre-2017 titles is integral to the corpus since dubbed audio options were unavailable, thus exposing by implication the genesis of Netflix's English dubs in 2017. Examples of titles undubbed in English, yet dubbed in other languages with consolidated dubbing industries, before this date are the films *Contratiempo* (*The Invisible Guest*) (Paulo, 2016) and *Secuestro* (*Boy Missing*) (Targarona, 2016). It is important to note that the years of release included in the corpus correspond

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[1] Including a TV series released in 2015 and distributed by Netflix in 2017.
[2] Including a feature film released in 2016 and distributed by Netflix in 2018.
[3] Including two TV series released in 2016 and 2017 respectively, and distributed by Netflix in 2018.
[4] Including a TV series released in 2018 and distributed by Netflix in 2019.
[5] Including a feature film released in 2019 and distributed by Netflix in 2020.
[6] Including a TV series released in 2020 and distributed by Netflix in 2021.

to those indicated on Netflix, whereas some titles may have been distributed elsewhere beforehand (as indicated in the appendage footnotes of Table 2). A case in point is *Salir del ropero* (*So, My Grandma's a Lesbian!*) (Reiné, 2019/2020), which came out in 2019 in Spanish cinemas and in 2020 on Netflix. The same applies for *La víctima número 8* (*Victim Number 8*) (Bazzano, 2018/2019) and *Los favoritos de Midas* (*The Minions of Midas*) (Barros and Gil, 2020/2021). For the purposes of analysing Netflix's approach to dubbing, we deemed it necessary to adopt Netflix's release dates.

In terms of series, for which seasons may be released in different years, our focus has remained on Netflix's release dates and, more specifically, on the release date of the first season of a series. The reason for this is that a trend can be observed according to which the SVoD is consistent in its localisation of a series. For instance, *Velvet* (Sedes *et al.*, 2016) was first released on Netflix in 2016 and, therefore, does not have an English dub. Furthermore, the series rebranded as *Velvet Colección* (*Velvet Collection*) (Ron *et al.*, 2017–2019) in 2017 with new seasons and these were not dubbed into English either. Another two examples of undubbed material released before 2017 are *Mar de plástico* (Blázquez, Manzano, Ocaña and Tébar, 2015–2016) and *Paquita Salas* (Ambrossi and Calvo, 2016–present). Ultimately, series whose seasons crossed the 2017 threshold were not dubbed from that point onwards nor retrospectively. However*,* as mentioned previously, *Money Heist* had its first two seasons redubbed in 2019, having been released onto the platform in 2017 and 2018 respectively. Nevertheless, this was a special case driven by popular dissatisfaction with the standardisation strategy, and is exemplary of the growing emphasis SVoDs place on the reception of the products they stream. Netflix is well known for its capacity to listen to viewers and, as highlighted by a former executive during an interview, "one of the superpowers that Netflix has always had is its incredible insight into their viewer consumption model" (Slator, 2020, online). To the best of our knowledge, neither new dubs nor redubs have been created for any other titles beyond their release dates.

As mentioned, titles available on Netflix are subject to change. Some such titles pulled from the platform prior to our analysis are *Gran Hotel* (Grand Hotel) (Sedes, 2011–2013), *El ministerio del tiempo* (*The Ministry of Time*) (Vigil *et al.*, 2015–present) and *Vis a vis* (*Locked up*) (Colmenar *et al.* 2015–2019). These series were not dubbed into English, which could further support the idea that dubbed programmes are effective when it comes to retaining viewers and improving reception. However, it is also true that distribution rights can be limited when shows are ongoing and the streamer is not involved in their production, which means that they cannot offer those titles beyond a certain date, and this might discourage investment in postproduction such as dubbing.

3.2.2. Relationship between Netflix and the product

In this corpus, we established a difference between Netflix originals and non-originals. For simplicity's sake, we have adopted Robinson's (2018, online) criteria for what can be broadly understood as "Netflix originals": titles commissioned and produced by Netflix; titles co-produced by Netflix and other networks; titles previously cancelled by a network for which Netflix has acquired distribution and production rights; and titles for which Netflix has exclusive international streaming rights. As

Robinson (*ibid*.) points out, most shows defined as Netflix originals are those exclusively available on Netflix in any given country. Furthermore, these titles are marked with a red, capital 'N' on their cover and introduced in the opening credits with "Netflix presents" or similar.

Among the corpus's 54 films, 36 (67%) were Netflix originals and 24 (44%) were dubbed. No examples exist of pre-2018 films that have been dubbed into English, with the core number of dubbed products dating from 2018 (6), 2019 (10) and 2020 (7). There is an observable tendency to dub Netflix originals, particularly when compared with non-originals, of which only two (4%) out of 17 (31%) were dubbed, namely *Animales sin collar (Unbridled)* (Linares, 2018) and *El guardián invisible* (*The Invisible Guardian*) (González Molina, 2017). When it comes to the series, among the 28 that were analysed, 26 (93%) were Netflix originals, of which 23 (82%) were dubbed. Unlike with films, three pre-2018 series were dubbed into English, namely *Money Heist*, *Cable Girls* and *Tiempos de guerra* (*Morocco: Love in Times of War*) (Pinillos *et al.*, 2017). Based on the evidence of these results, the focus on dubbing Netflix originals can be considered part of Netflix's expansion plan and "local-for-global" (post)production strategy (Brennan, 2018).

Although it is not a criterion under study in this article, we wish to note the impact genre may have on a product's (English) dubbing or lack thereof. Titles such as *Ni de coña* (Ayllón, 2021), *Paquita Salas* and *Fe de etarras* (*Bomb Scared*) (Cobeaga, 2017) may have been deemed too entrenched in Spanish culture to warrant English dubbing, as their messages would likely be lost on an Anglo-Saxon or non-Spanish audience. On Netflix, the synopses of these titles are described as "absurd", "offbeat", and "quirky", which exposes the difficulty the Anglophone writer(s) of the descriptions experienced in trying to understand and categorise Spanish humour. These titles have been subtitled only, which can be interpreted as a decision to reserve them for a niche market of non-Hispanophones identified as the most likely viewing group. With a large-scale, general audience not anticipated for these titles, Netflix saved on the cost of dubbing, a much pricier and more time-consuming postproduction process than subtitling. However, a trend favouring British dubbing can be observed for many period dramas, e.g. in *Alta Mar* (*High Seas*) (Campos *et al.*, 2019–2020) and *Hache*, which may be in a bidirectional effort to reflect English-original period dramas which are almost invariably characterised by British English.

3.2.3. Dubbing industry and studio

In terms of dubbing industry or territory, most films dubbed into English were dubbed in the US (77%, i.e. 20/26). The US dubbing studios in question are Dubbing Brothers USA (6 titles), Post Haste Digital (4), Roundabout Entertainment (3) and VSI Los Angeles (3). Those movies not dubbed in the US were dubbed in Canadian studios Difuze (2) and Cinelume Post-Production Inc. (1). Unfortunately, no information was available on the dubbing studios or talents involved in three of the films (see corpus annexed), given that dubbing cards are not included in the credits and further research did not elicit answers.

As with films, the vast majority of series' dubs were made in the US (83%, i.e. 19/23), whereas only three were commissioned to VSI London in the UK and one to Canadian studio Difuze. In the US, the dubbing studios were again Post Haste Digital (6 titles), Dubbing Brothers (4), Roundabout Entertainment (2) and VSI Los Angeles (2) as well as Deluxe 103 (1), Igloo Music (1), International Digital Center (1), MGE Studios (1) and Studiopolis (1).

3.2.4. Dubbing directors and strategy

In total, 35 different dubbing directors were mentioned in the credits of the 54 dubs, some of whom were involved in the revoicing of several films or series, usually within the same studio. Typically, one dubbing director was credited for each dub. However, coming-of-age series *Élite* (*Elite*) (Montero and Madrona, 2020) had three dubbing directors, and drama series *Toy Boy* (Benítez *et al.*, 2019) and mystery thriller *Orígenes secretos* (*Secret Origins*) (Galán Galindo, 2020), each had dubbing directors.

Three dubs done by two different dubbing directors followed the same domesticating strategy when working for the same studio (VSI London). It could be argued that dubbing studios rather than directors are responsible for determining the product's main dubbing strategy. For instance, two series released since the close of our analysis and also dubbed at VSI London, *La cocinera de Castamar* (*The Cook of Castamar*) (Peñafiel and López Amado, 2021) from Castilian Spanish as well as *How to Sell Drugs Online (Fast)* (Feldhusen and Montag, 2019–2021) from German, also employed the domesticating strategy of using British varieties of English. That studios may be driving macro-strategies is echoed by trends in foreignisation strategy: it has been used as a macro-strategy by Post Haste Digital exclusively, and by Post Haste Digital as well as Dubbing Brothers USA within a hybrid strategy (though it should be noted that one director worked at both studios). For the most part, dubbing directors tend to work in one studio and so it is difficult to say whether consistency in strategy is due to the director or the studio. That dubbing director Miguel Cruz used different strategies (both macro and micro) at the same studio (Post Haste Digital) can be interpreted as directors having creative licence or imposition from the studio and/or Netflix. Nevertheless, this datum is anomalous in our corpus.

Broadening horizons beyond English dubs does suggest studios may contract a director because of their experience or willingness to use an alternative strategy, if one considers the case of German, Dutch and Danish series, all dubbed into foreign-accented English under the direction of Torsten Voges at different dubbing studios (Hayes, 2021). Fluency in English of available (voice) actors may hold sway over the feasibility of implementing foreignisation strategies as the original actors dubbed themselves into German-/Dutch-/Danish-accented English and Hispanic voice actors based in LA dubbed themselves into Hispanic-accented English. However, Spanish actors may not be as qualified as their Scandinavian and Hispanic counterparts to record in English, and British dubbing studios might not have a pool of Hispanic voice actors nor a cultural reality to tap into as easily as US studios. Moreover, cloud-based dubbing, which has gained traction over the course of the pandemic, may give rise to more foreignisation in the future.

There are many dubbing directors, but there is a significantly lower number of studios working with Netflix. This means that practices can be more easily linked to studios rather than directors. In any case, creative licence should be taken into account as a production might be localised differently in any given studio by any given director, owing to its duration (e.g. the time invested into dubbing a series vs. a film), narrative, or other factors. These factors could be used as variables for further research into English-dubbing macro-strategies. Furthermore, it can be argued that the creative licence granted to Netflix's dubbed versions (Netflix, 2015, 2019) means that no studio or director is necessarily tied to normative practice.

To our knowledge, the dubbing studios are tasked with both script translation and adaptation for dubbing (aka dialogue writing) and while some studios carry out this work in-house, others outsource it, and some do a hybrid workflow. Changes tend to be made to dub scripts in dubbing studios and even during recording sessions, so further research on this would help to paint a clearer picture of this professional practice. In future research studies, it might be worthwhile to carry out a study similar to that conducted on the Spanish dubbing industry by Cerezo-Merchán *et al.* (2016).

3.2.5. Dubbing macro-strategies in relation to product and dubbing industry

As mentioned in the previous section, the dubbing macro-strategies that have been identified were analysed in an overarching manner. As illustrated in Table 3 below, a clear tendency is evident for English dubbing to adopt standardising strategies (i.e. 38 out of 47), with only a few examples of domestication (3) foreignisation (2), and hybrid (3) strategies.

Table 3.

*English-Dubbing Macro-Strategies for CS Films and TV Series*

Dubbing Macro-strategy	Films	%	TV Series	%	Combined Programmes	%
Domestication	0	0%	3 (UK)	13%	3	6.5%
Standardisation	18 (US)	75%	15 (US)	65%		
	3 (Canada)	13%	1 (Canada)	4%	39	83%
	2 (no info)	8%				
Foreignisation	0	0%	2 (US)	9%	2	4%
Hybrid	1	4%	2	9%	3	6.5%
Total	24	100%	23	100%	47	100%

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

As illustrated by Figure 1 below, the proportion of CS films that were standardised in English dubbing is strikingly high: a total of 23 films, mainly using US standard accents, with only three done using subtly Canadian-English accents. An example of a programme dubbed into standard Canadian English is *Diecisiete* (*Seventeen*) (Sánchez Arévalo, 2019), while *A pesar de todo* (*Despite Everything*) (Tagliavini, 2019) illustrates the use of standard American.

Figure 1.

Dubbing Macro-Strategies for CS Films Released Between 2017 and 2021 by Netflix
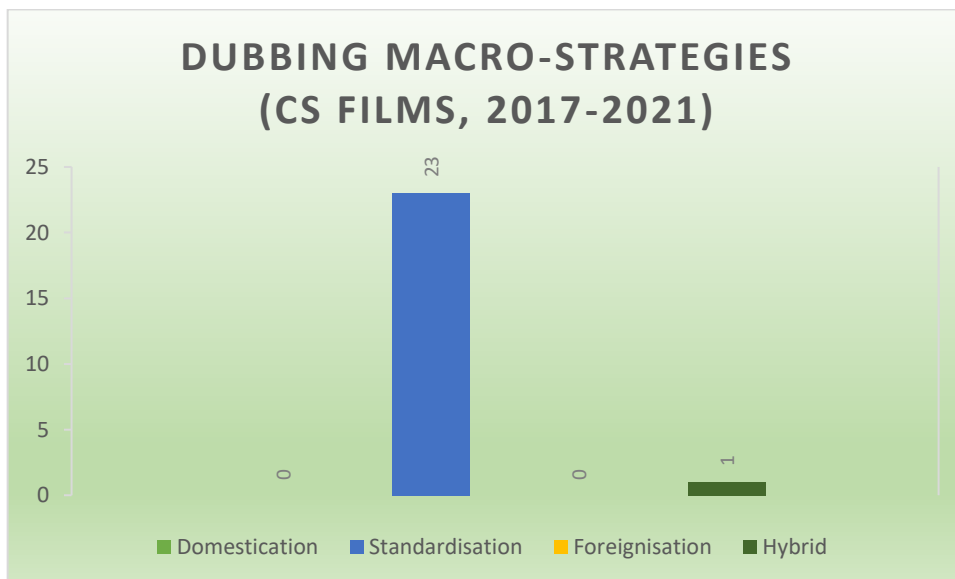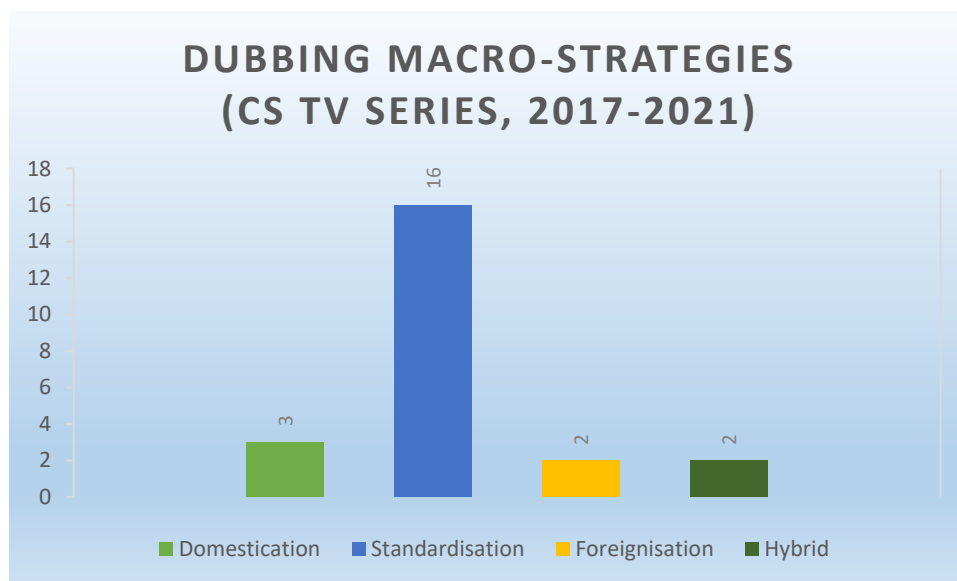

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

In the series landscape, a richer mediascape can be observed, as displayed in Figure 2 below. Three series released in 2019 (all of them localised by VSI London, UK) adopted a domesticating approach: *High Seas*, *Hache,* and *Criminal: Spain* (Escolar *et al.*, 2019–present). Two series dubbed by US studio Post Haste Digital, *Cocaine Coast* and *La catedral del mar* (*Cathedral of the Sea*), followed a foreignising approach, in which Hispanic accents were employed in an attempt to convey the original characters' linguistic background (Hayes, 2022). Two other series, *La valla* (*The Barrier*) (Molina Encinas *et al.*, 2020) and *Alguien tiene que morir* (*Someone Has to Die*) (Caro, 2020–), used a hybrid strategy availing of all three approaches for characterisation, such as older characters speaking in Hispanic-accented English, while American-English dominates younger characters' speech and therefore the majority of dialogues (the third strategy is discussed in the next section below). A third example of a hybrid approach is *Black Beach* (Crespo, 2020), in which non-Spanish characters are foreignised on many occasions, whether their accent in Spanish is foreign (African) or not in the original version. Where a foreign accent is not present in the original but is added in the dub, we consider this practice to fall within the parameters of a hybrid strategy. As discussed in the next section, where foreign accents are already present in an original, this can be considered part of a micro-strategy.

Figure 2.

Dubbing Strategies for CS Series Released Between 2017 and 2021 by Netflix

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

3.2.6. Micro-strategies: Strategies within Strategies

Although our focus has been on elucidating dubbing macro-strategies, alternative micro-strategies occur within the former. This can be illustrated by Arabic-accented Spanish conveyed by a more

generically foreign accent in English in *Victim Number 8*, which used standardisation for all native linguistic variation in Castilian Spanish. Another micro-strategy involved the Otherness of an Argentine accent in *The Barrier*'s Castilian-Spanish setting conveyed by a British-English accent against the backdrop of American English in the dub. Most other shows practised the neutralisation of all variation, such as foreign and native accents in Spanish becoming American standard in *Morocco: Love in Times of War*. The original English dialogues used in multilingual originals (i.e. English exchanges in Castilian-Spanish originals) were re-used verbatim in the English dubs (i.e. the dialogue track was not revoiced). The only exception was observed in the case of Spanish-accented English lines, e.g. British accent in *Boi* (Fontana, 2019) preserved vis-à-vis Spanish (L3) and Spanish-accented English dubbed into standard American accents. Maintaining the English dialogues is a complex case as L2-L3 coincidence occurs as well as domestic variation: British English utterances in the ST vs. American English as standard throughout the dub.

At this point, it is worth providing a disambiguation regarding our understanding of micro-strategies and hybrid strategies: the former relate to the emulation in a dub of accent variation present in an original, whether the accent(s) be native or foreign in the source text, whereas the latter refers to the diversification of an original's uniform accent in a dubbed version in order to index social values (e.g. older generation speaking with foreign accents in English even though the characters in question spoke in the same accents as young characters in the original version). In short, the distinction is elective (hybrid) vs. inevitable (micro-strategy) manipulation. We acknowledge, however, that the nuances between hybrid and micro-strategies can be blurred and call for further investigation and clarification in future studies.

3.2.7. Limitations and Opportunities

Apart from the limitations already mentioned in terms of corpus selection and categories for analysis (see Section 3.1), we acknowledge that other variables, beyond genre as previously suggested, would help to shed more light on English-dubbing macro-strategies, such as the translation of titles or lack thereof, and the relationship between Netflix and the dubbing studios to which they outsource dubbing work. Multilingualism in originals and the coproduction with other countries, where the original is set outside Spain, are also significant factors. Furthermore, we are aware that the UK dubs represent a minority, although thus far they are consistent in the way they favour a domesticating macro-strategy.

4. Conclusions

Some conclusions can be drawn from the analysis on dubbing tendencies, with a special emphasis on dubbing macro-strategies, in the English-language dubs of Castilian-Spanish originals. After examining the 82 titles and 54 dubbed versions the following observations can be made:

1. Disregarding the pilot English dub of the Brazilian series *3%*, products released on Netflix prior to 2017 were not dubbed into English, and it seems unlikely that they will be dubbed retrospectively. Certain products released in 2017 were dubbed into English and since then a steady increase in English dubbing of releases can be observed.

2. Netflix has dubbed more series than films, but this gap is narrowing. Whereas a significantly higher percentage of series was dubbed in 2017 and 2018, by 2019 films were almost as likely to be dubbed.

3. "Netflix originals" were more likely to be dubbed than products for which Netflix does not have exclusive distribution rights. Similarly, genre seemed to have a bearing on whether a product was dubbed or not, with the ilk of thrillers likely to be dubbed and comedies deeply entrenched in cultural context less likely so.

4. Dubbing studios and dubbing directors have generally been consistent in their use of strategies but have demonstrated flexibility and sometimes vary their approach.

5. Standardisation is significantly more prevalent as a dubbing macro-strategy for both films and TV series in both US and Canadian dubs, and the strategy has been refined since 2019 (using standard accents as opposed to 'neutral', aka standardised, ones).

6. Domestication is the strategy preferred in British dubbing. It is limited to one studio, and these titles represent a small minority of English dubs vis-à-vis American predominance.

7. Foreignisation is practised in the US, where the titles to undergo this strategy represent a small minority vis-à-vis standardisation predominance. Fluency in English of available voice actors and cultural realities in different English-speaking regions may influence the feasibility of this strategy. However, cloud-based dubbing may give rise to more foreignisation in the future.

8. Hybrid strategies that combine two or all three dubbing macro-strategies have been employed in US dubbing studios. In these series, standardisation is the macro-strategy and foreignisation has been used to dub older characters and domestication to dub international linguistic variation in Spanish.

9. Micro-strategies are sometimes used within an overarching macro-strategy, such as the emulation of foreign accents belonging to an L3, while native L1 dialogue has been standardised.

Over half the Castilian-Spanish programmes in our corpus were dubbed into English. This scale of postproduction at Netflix is blurring the lines between originals and localised versions and the latter are being treated with the creativity typically reserved for originals. Given the parallel growth of non-

English content, it is conceivable that English dubbing will increase even further. Netflix's mode (dubbing) and macro-strategy (overall approach to accents) disruptions hitherto discussed have far-reaching implications for English-language AVT in the 2020s. Standardisation is trending in North America while domestication is trending in the UK, and foreignisation and hybrid strategies remain minority practices. What is certain is that the English-language dubbing industry is undergoing significant experimentation on the road to consolidating strategies, and an exploration of Netflix's extensive catalogue of Castilian-Spanish originals serves to illustrate these norms in the making.

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