Exploring the translation of animated films : quantifying audiences' perception of characters that speak in different varieties of English, Spanish and Catalan

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Article

Exploring the translation of animated films: quantifying audiences' perception of characters that speak in different varieties of English, Spanish and Catalan

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Abstract

The visibility of language variation in films has become a challenge to translation for dubbing, and the need arises to understand how the process of translating variation can influence the product in significant ways. By carrying out a quantitative study, we answered questions such as whether the practice is acceptable amongst audiences, or whether some language choices alter the perception of certain characters. We measured the perception of ten opposed personality traits amongst native audiences in English, Spanish and Catalan using a Semantic Differential Scale, and assessed the global impression of characters that had been translated with and without the use of varieties. The results show that characters overall are perceived the same way across languages regardless of whether they use varieties in or outside the mainstream, and conclude that this tool can be used to quantify and compare the same characters across languages.

KEYWORDS: AUDIENCES; AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION; QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN; RECEPTION

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1. Introduction

The visibility of language variation in original animated films in English has become a new challenge for distributors and translators alike when dubbing into a 'standard'[1] variety no longer suffices in an increasingly diverse world that is also reflected in film. Translations of films that include a range of characters that speak in different varieties have started to appear in Catalan and Spanish, where products are distributed following a dubbing process that substitutes the voices in the original versions for voices in the target language. In the case of *Shark Tale* (2004), *Madagascar* (2005) and *Cars* (2005), language variation is present for some characters which have subsequently been dubbed into varieties (or near-varieties) in the target texts. In this article we propose a method to measure personality traits of characters as a way to explore quantitatively the reception of these films amongst English, Catalan and Spanish native speakers. This way, we can access the global perception of characters and see whether the use of varieties in the original and the translated versions has an impact that results in different characteristics being attributed to the same characters. Measuring the impact of an original filmic text on English-speaking audiences and the subsequent translations on the target audiences increases the knowledge of the potential acceptability of these dubbed products, and of the new techniques implemented when approaching translation, especially the translation of variation. The right analysis could reveal whether the decisions taken in translating a corpus of films affect the product when it is presented in different versions, and whether it is accepted by audiences across languages in similar ways.

The implications of translating varieties from one language to another are significant, in terms of potential changes in language use and perception, but also commercialization, ethics and even political impact. This is particularly true if the text at stake is a film that may be seen by millions. Despite this, studies into the reception of translated audiovisual products are scarce, as '[a]lthough many theories and studies talk about the reader as the key factor, very few focus on reception, and there are hardly any empirical studies on the reception of translated texts' (Fuentes Luque 2003: 294), an opinion shared by Denton (2007: 27). Furthermore, Gambier asserts that '[v]ery few studies have dealt with the issue of reception in [audiovisual translation], and even fewer have looked at it empirically, even though we continually make reference to readers, viewers, consumers, users, etc.' (Gambier 2009: 52). In response to Gambier's views, this study seeks to add to the empirical evidence into the reception of audiovisual translation (AVT) through analysing the perception of individual characters in three languages by native audiences.

This article is introduced by an overview of the process of data collection and analysis. The following sections cover the design of questionnaires, and a description of the methodology of this trial. This includes the experimental

aims and the subject profile, along with an outline of the process of reception. The results are presented in the relevant figures, where results for individual adjectives will be introduced. Finally, the data collected are used to draw conclusions about the acceptability of this form of stylistic translation as perceived by the target audience.

2. Methodology

The methodology used for the present study describes the design of the Semantic Differential Scale (SDS), including the selection of appropriate adjectives. In the next section we outline the subjects' profile, followed by their demographics and the description of the process that was performed. A subsequent section is dedicated to further explaining the selection of clips for the study, and background information on the way audiovisual messages are decoded. The final section comprises the statistical analyses applied to the results. This study was performed with ethical clearance from the University of Sheffield according to relevant guidelines.

2.1. Experimentation

The purpose of this study is to gather information on the reception of dubbed products amongst native audiences by examining the perception of characters in films with language variation. This involves using the SDS to elicit responses from native speakers of English, Catalan and Spanish who viewed film clips featuring characters who used variation in their native language.

For this work the following questions are addressed:

- What is the perception of each selected character in each language?
- To what extent does the translation of variation affect the perception of characters?

Answering these questions will provide an important insight to determine whether the acceptability of stylistic renditions of original material exists amongst Spanish and Catalan audiences in relation to the impact of the original material on native English speakers.

2.2. Semantic Differential Scale

This article builds on work by Palencia (2002), whose results point towards the suitability of the SDS in testing different text formats, allowing an exploration of the influence of the dubbing process on the perception of characters. Palencia solely explores the impact of four scenes in order to determine the way in which the dubbing process influences viewers. To that end, she isolates both original and dubbed audiovisual versions, but also the soundtrack without image, and the images without the soundtrack.

In Palencia's work, data collection is performed using Osgood's Differential Scale and, in doing so, builds upon other studies that utilize the same method for related topics within audiovisual media. The original scale was designed by Osgood *et al.* (1957), and subsequently has become widely known as the Semantic Differential, or Semantic Differential Scale. The SDS is used here, as in the referenced works, to measure the meaning of items, in this case the affective meaning of the selected characters as perceived by audiences. By requiring subjects to define their perceptions of different aspects of a character, a subjective response can be quantified and analysed using statistical methods. Generally, a Likert scale is used, which allows respondents to grade their perception between two opposing adjectives (Likert 1932), hence getting a more sensitive distinction than a simple positive or negative response.

The SDS was chosen not only with reference to Palencia's experience, but also for its reliability in eliciting viewers' responses, and for its widespread applicability across disciplines. Also, '[t]he SDS has been used extensively in language attitude studies as a means of measuring subjects' attitudes towards various languages, dialects, accents, as well as the speakers of different varieties' (Al-Hindawe 1996: 1). Whilst other techniques to measure audiences' affective responses exist (Gunter 2000), the SDS has also previously been validated in areas such as the audiovisual media and variational research. In combination with its previous use by Palencia (2002) in the specific area of dubbing, a valid precedent therefore exists for its use in this setting. In all, the SDS allows for a relatively robust approach to data collection and quantitative analysis. Additionally, '[o]ne advantage of this technique is that it forces subjects to focus on the expected dimensions since the categories are already provided' (Agheyisi and Fishman 1970: 148), which was considered an obvious advantage.

The SDS has also been used to elicit speakers' attitudes towards dialects. In previous variational studies utterances may have been heard in isolation. In this case, due to the aim of the study and the nature of the original and translated texts, as well as the technical constraints (background music and sound effects), the voices are not dissociated from their context. Although it would be possible to dissociate the visual text from the soundtrack, this was not considered relevant to this study given that the primary aim is to provide an overview of the global perception of individual characters to compare the outcome of the translation process with the original.

2.3. Construction of the differential: Selection of adjectives

Previous quantitative works using the SDS guided the choice of adjectives. Figures 1, 2 and 3 show the adjectives and layout that were chosen to carry out this study in English, Catalan and Spanish respectively.

Balanced								Unbalanced
Humble								Arrogant
Calm								Nervous
Confident								Insecure
Intelligent								Stupid
Extravert								Introvert
Strong								Weak
Sincere								Hypocrite
Close								Distant
Credible								Non-credible

Figure 1: Questionnaire in English

Equilibrat								Desequilibrat
Humil								Orgullós
Tranquil								Nerviós
Segur								Insegur
Intel·ligent								Estúpid
Extravertit								Introvertit
Fort								Feble
Sincer								Hipòcrita
Proper								Distant
Creïble								No credible

Figure 2: Questionnaire in Catalan

Equilibrado								Desequilibrado
Humilde								Orgulloso
Tranquilo								Nervioso
Seguro								Inseguro
Inteligente								Estúpido
Extrovertido								Introvertido
Fuerte								Débil
Sincero								Hipócrita
Cercano								Distante
Creíble								No credible

Figure 3: Questionnaire in Spanish

Palencia (2002) performed a pilot study prior to the design of her definitive tool for data collection from which she short-listed eight adjectives. The purpose of that survey is to determine which pairs of adjectives appear most useful to a group of subjects, from a longer list of seemingly redundant or unnecessary adjectives. In the final selection, Palencia includes the semantic duality of 'credible', which has also been incorporated here. The importance of this adjective will be highlighted at a later stage in this article, as it offers direct access to the viewers' opinions on the character as a whole. For the present study it was considered that Palencia's work would be an ideal starting point, given the similar aims of both studies in determining the reception of dubbed films on given audiences by focusing on the perception of individual characters. In the final version of the SDS, ten pairs of opposing adjectives are chosen, with the addition of 'close-distant'. This is used to account for the level of familiarity with the utterances.

Al-Hyndawe (1996) raises awareness about the implications of using pairs of adjectives that may not be complementary antonyms or that may lead to ambiguity. Given that this study would involve three linguistic groups, precision of language was a priority in translating adjectives from the original Spanish, as used by Palencia, into English and Catalan.

2.4. Construction of the differential: Layout design

The main objective in designing the layout was to obtain a grid that was neat and easy to understand. For the SDS, a seven-point scale was used to determine the grade within a pair of opposed adjectives. Although the scale is often annotated with numbers 1–7, written between two adjectives, in this case the resulting layout was busy; it was therefore decided to simplify the scale by using seven clear boxes. If a mark was placed in the middle of the grid (fourth box), it meant that the subject did not feel strongly on that category, whereas a mark positioned towards one or other adjective indicated a preference whose magnitude increased with proximity to the end of the scale. All subjects were asked to complete all categories for all characters.

2.5. Subject profile

As per the languages of the original and translated versions of the films, English, Catalan and Spanish, three groups of adult native speaker subjects were devised. For the present study, a minimum of 20 subjects per language was considered adequate. All subjects were approached via email and invited to take part in this anonymized study. They were informed that the only information collected would be age, gender and their questionnaire responses according to the language they were recruited for.

Although all native English speakers originated from the British Isles, a salient request of the Spanish native speakers was that they were all from Spain.

This meant that they were familiar with the Spanish dubbing style of the films we presented to them. Dubbing in Spain differs from that of other Spanish-speaking countries where the concept of vernacular and mainstream variety is different. This way, the subjects' diegetic experience would be complete and effortless. Also, it was intended in the recruitment process that all subjects forming the Spanish group were not bilingual in any other languages of Spain, so they would be accustomed to watching films dubbed only into Spanish. However, this was not possible for the Catalan speakers, as all Catalan speakers are bilingual and accustomed to watching productions in Spanish.

The selection of participants was performed regardless of whether the subjects had previously seen the films. Given the worldwide popularity of all three films, limiting the study to subjects that had not seen any in the corpus would have seriously compromised the chances of finding sufficient participants. Although it was not possible to control for this aspect in the study, an attempt to limit its impact was made in the way the clips were presented. Clips were treated as a text that has a beginning and an end in the form of a scene, and no other information was given on the film. Subjects were therefore encouraged to base their views on the selected scenes, and not to consciously recollect their memories of the film. We recognize that this is a limitation of this form of audience perception research.

The composition and demographics of the three groups are shown in Table 1, along with the results of statistical tests for between-group differences. The groups did not differ in their age or gender demographics although there was a trend for Catalan participants to be older, which did not reach statistical significance.

Additionally, we intended to include speakers of different varieties within their languages, so as to represent as wide an audience as possible. Although this aspect is not analysed in detail within this study, this could be taken into account for future research. Another feature that was not part of the study criteria but that was noted is that all participants were either graduates or in higher education, due to the nature of the recruitment process.

Table 1: Demographics of participants.

	English	Catalan	Spanish	p, Statistical test[2]
Total participants	28	20	20	
Female: Male (%)	57.1:42.9	50.0:50.0	50.0:50.0	p = 0.23 (ns), Chi-square test
Age range (years)	20 – 34	18 – 65	20 – 34	
Mean age (St Dev)	25.7 (4.5)	31.2 (11.2)	25.9 (5.3)	p = 0.05 (ns), Kruskal- Wallis test

2.6. Description of process

The process started by inviting native speakers of the relevant languages to participate in this study. For logistical reasons, the viewings were divided into several groups. The groups contained unequal numbers of participants, given the varied availability of the subjects. All viewers were requested to follow exactly the same process: viewing all clips in the same order, supervised by the same researcher. Although it was not possible to standardize the equipment or viewing room for all groups, it was ensured that the sound was optimal for all subjects, and that the screen orientation was satisfactory. All films were shown from four original DVDs of the Spanish edition of each film, which contained all three language versions.

At the start of the viewing session participants were given precise instructions about the correct process for answering the questionnaires, as follows. Upon arriving at the session, subjects were requested to take a seat and examine the questionnaires. These were a collection of stapled pages with two grids per page. At the top of each grid there was the name of a character and a brief description to aid their recognition. This limited description was as neutral as possible, so as not to influence the viewers. The subjects were then invited to ask questions about any adjectives that were unclear. Emphasis was placed on ensuring that the quality of 'credible' was understood, i.e. whether they thought the character was well constructed and that it fitted in the scene. There were a total of sixteen grids, one for each character to be assessed. To allow a full discussion of the methodology, the focus of this article is on a subset of four characters.

After clarification of the adjectives, the participants were requested to follow instructions to answer the questionnaires appropriately. They were shown each clip twice. During the first viewing they were asked to listen and look at the screen, to try to form their opinions of each character. They were required not to take any notes at this stage to aid a global perception of the characters in the text. They were requested to complete the questionnaires during the second viewing of the clips. It was reiterated that all categories should be filled in, and that if they did not feel strongly about a particular adjective pair, they had the chance to select the middle column, which served as the neutral perception. It was not possible to separate subjects physically such that they could not see other participants' answers, but sincerity was encouraged, and they were informed that there were no right or wrong answers.

After the viewing of the films was concluded, an informal discussion was held to comment on the clips and each person's perceptions, motivated by the divergent opinions of the different participants. The motive of the

research was revealed at this stage, once subjects could not be influenced by the purpose of the study on stylistic features. The information exchanged at this stage was sometimes very valuable, but it was not analysed for this study; this could be considered for future research as a source of qualitative perceptions.

2.7. Characteristics of clips

A prerequisite for each clip was a sequence where the four main characters intervened in a conversation within the selected films, in a segment lasting around five minutes. These scenes are considered to constitute macro-signs that can be evaluated in their own right. In each original film at least two characters used vernaculars, some of which had been carried to the dubbed versions. Four characters were selected from each film, which in its entirety consisted of *Madagascar, Shark Tale, Cars* and *Shrek 2,* the latter not having been included in this article.

Only four characters have been chosen for this article from the 16 that the participants assessed. The selection criteria for these characters depended on their variety in the original and the subsequent versions, as they present a unique combination. The selected characters were Lightning McQueen from *Cars,* who speaks in a mainstream variety in all three versions of the films; Mater, also from *Cars,* who uses a vernacular in English and Catalan, but not in Spanish; Marty from *Madagascar,* who uses a vernacular in English and Spanish, but not in Catalan; Ernie and Bernie, who use a vernacular in all three versions.

Table 2: Summary of varieties used by each character.

	English	Spanish	Catalan
Lightning McQueen	Mainstream US English	Central Castilian	Central Catalan
Mater	Southern US English	Central Castilian	North-Eastern Catalan
Marty	Near-African American Vernacular English	Cuban Spanish	Central Catalan
Ernie and Bernie	Jamaican English	Cuban Spanish	Western Catalan

2.8. Combined cues in audiovisual texts

When exposed to an oral text, listeners undergo different stages of comprehension, in which they perceive different features of the content and the form of the message. Rodríguez (1998) proposes a model to describe listening mechanisms, by which listeners, 'after identifying the voices in relation to their own memories, surroundings and experience, decode the meaning of

these voices through their previous knowledge of the language in which these are expressed' (Palencia 2002: 89, my translation). This process explains how listeners can also learn arbitrary languages that aid the diegetic experience when viewing dubbed films. And, most importantly, they attribute meanings locally depending on their previous experience and the current context, as noted by Coupland (2007: 45).

In this study the soundtrack was not isolated from the images, so the images, music and accompanying sounds would have exerted an influence on the audience. The weight of these animated images could be considered very significant, as the gesticulation is constant, the physical appearance of the characters is caricaturized and music and sounds work together with the dialogue to transfer meaning. As was concluded by Palencia (2002: 335), who studied the narrative capacity of images and sound separately, attributes are transmitted via both channels. Therefore, the visual aspect plays an important part in the global perception, as an audiovisual text has 'two main features: (1) it is received through two channels, acoustic and visual and (2) the synchrony between verbal and non-verbal messages is essential' (Bartrina and Espasa 2005: 84). Hence the notion of audiovisual text must be understood as a unit of meaning: '[t]hanks especially to semiotics, the notion of "text" has expanded well beyond written genres. The film is an obvious case of a unit of meaning, which communicates through more than one channel' (Denton 2007: 25). Delabastita (1989: 199) describes how the oral and the visual channels simultaneously contain verbal and non-verbal signs, 'and should not be confused with the *codes* that are used to produce the film's actual meaning' (Delabastita 1989: 196). Therefore, audiovisual texts use two channels, but are capable of using numerous codes to communicate meaning. For example, sets of gestures can convey different messages across cultures, so it is important that the audience can interpret them as part of the entire text. Given that the majority of films that reach Spanish and Catalan audiences originate in the US, the decoding of body language or non-verbal messages is attained due to the long-standing tradition in which exposure to these products has been constant. As Palencia points out, if the receiver is familiarized with the body language of a given culture, especially US American, they will decode images correctly and jointly; hence visual messages complement the oral messages (Palencia, 2002: 50). That is to say that kinetic movements containing instances of body language will not appear as alien to the foreign viewers and will aid in the transfer of meaning. This is true both for Spanish and Catalan viewers, because they have similar traditions and exposure to dubbed products through a virtually exclusive consumption of US films (Palencia 1998: 152).

Palencia's previous research allows the assumption that body language does not interfere with the process of decoding speech. In this case, we could assume that any differences that arise can be attributable to dialogue. For each language version, images act as an invariable text, together with sound effects and music. This could lead us to consider that the distinctive features, if they appear, will derive almost exclusively from the translation or dubbing decisions, be it what is said or how it is said.

2.9. Statistical analysis

The answers for each questionnaire were converted to a numerical scale, with each adjective for each character assigned a value from 1 to 7. As will be seen in the figures, for each character and language analysed, the values were summarized by calculating the mean and standard deviation. Additionally, the mean and standard deviation were calculated for all selected characters combined, shown in the first column for each adjective. The overall effect of both language and characters were examined using two-way ANOVA, while differences between languages for each character were tested using one-way ANOVA, and post-hoc Tukey-Scheffe correction for multiple comparisons. Statistical significance was accepted at $p < 0.05$.

Statistical analysis and data representation were performed using Microsoft Excel 2007 and SPSS 20.0.

3. Results

The following section is introduced by a summary table and thereafter ten figures that emerged from analysing the ten opposed adjectives presented in the grid, accompanied by a brief explanation. The section that follows (3.2) will seek to account for the differences that emerge from looking at ethically sensitive attributes, namely intelligence, confidence and credibility, and discuss general findings.

3.1. Audience perception of character traits across different languages

For closeness, Figure 4 shows that Marty and Mater are perceived differently in Spanish and Catalan compared to the original. This affects the overall perception for the group as a whole. The relatively low score given to Mater and Marty in English might be attributed to the fact that the group of native English speakers were all from the British Isles, assessing characters with American varieties. This aspect was not controlled in the study, and should be considered for further research in which a dialectal profile of the participants may be created.

Table 3: Summary statistics for all characters and languages. *Values expressed as mean +/- standard deviation. Statistical testing: 2 way ANOVA using Character and Language as dependent variables. For each parameter, there is a highly significant effect of character indicating that audiences distinguish between personality traits, but in general the effect of language is non-significant. Several exceptions are noticed, where characteristics are perceived differently across languages; these are discussed further in the text.*

Parameter	Language	Lightning	Ernie & Bernie	Marty	Mater	p (character)	p (language)
Balanced	*English*	3.6 +/- 1.4	2.2 +/- 1.7	2.6 +/- 1.2	2.0 +/- 1.4	<0.001	0.579
	Spanish	4.2 +/- 1.0	2.4 +/- 1.4	1.5 +/- 1.0	1.5 +/- 1.2		
	Catalan	3.3 +/- 1.4	1.8 +/- 1.4	2.7 +/- 1.6	2.2 +/- 1.5		
Humble	*English*	1.0 +/- 1.3	2.8 +/- 1.4	2.3 +/- 1.2	5.0 +/- 1.1	<0.001	0.171
	Spanish	0.9 +/- 0.7	2.4 +/- 1.3	2.8 +/- 1.4	5.3 +/- 0.9		
	Catalan	1.4 +/- 1.7	2.5 +/- 1.5	3.2 +/- 1.5	5.4 +/- 1.0		
Calm	*English*	3.3 +/- 1.4	3.8 +/- 1.6	3.7 +/- 1.4	4.5 +/- 1.3	<0.001	<0.001 *Catalan and Spanish both p<0.001 compared with English*
	Spanish	2.4 +/- 1.2	1.7 +/- 1.3	3.2 +/- 1.9	3.5 +/- 2.2		
	Catalan	2.1 +/- 1.4	3.2 +/- 1.8	2.3 +/- 1.5	3.3 +/- 2.1		
Confident	*English*	5.0 +/- 1.5	3.8 +/- 1.4	4.8 +/- 1.3	3.8 +/- 1.2	<0.001	<0.001 *English and Spanish both p<0.001 compared with Catalan*
	Spanish	4.6 +/- 1.3	3.6 +/- 1.4	3.6 +/- 1.1	3.4 +/- 1.6		
	Catalan	4.2 +/- 1.6	3.0 +/- 1.6	3.0 +/- 1.7	1.9 +/- 1.8		
Intelligent	*English*	4.0 +/- 1.2	1.9 +/- 1.1	3.1 +/- 1.3	1.3 +/- 1.3	<0.001	0.985
	Spanish	4.2 +/- 1.0	3.3 +/- 1.5	1.6 +/- 1.0	1.2 +/- 1.3		
	Catalan	4.1 +/- 1.4	1.6 +/- 1.4	3.1 +/- 1.3	1.5 +/- 1.8		
Extravert	*English*	5.5 +/- 0.9	4.2 +/- 1.0	4.9 +/- 1.1	4.1 +/- 1.2	<0.001	0.451
	Spanish	4.2 +/- 1.5	5.2 +/- 0.8	3.9 +/- 1.4	4.4 +/- 1.5		
	Catalan	5.3 +/- 0.8	3.9 +/- 1.3	4.7 +/- 1.3	4.5 +/- 1.6		
Strong	*English*	3.7 +/- 1.2	3.1 +/- 1.3	3.7 +/- 1.2	3.9 +/- 1.3	<0.001	0.011 *Catalan p=0.003 compared with English*
	Spanish	3.9 +/- 1.3	3.3 +/- 1.3	3.0 +/- 0.9	3.2 +/- 1.2		
	Catalan	4.0 +/- 1.3	2.8 +/- 1.6	2.9 +/- 1.7	1.9 +/- 1.6		
Sincere	*English*	2.8 +/- 1.1	2.5 +/- 1.3	3.5 +/- 1.3	5.0 +/- 1.2	<0.001	0.527
	Spanish	2.1 +/- 1.3	3.7 +/- 1.5	2.5 +/- 1.3	5.2 +/- 0.8		
	Catalan	3.1 +/- 1.4	2.2 +/- 1.6	3.9 +/- 1.3	5.2 +/- 1.2		
Sincere	*English*	2.8 +/- 1.1	2.5 +/- 1.3	3.5 +/- 1.3	5.0 +/- 1.2	<0.001	0.527
	Spanish	2.1 +/- 1.3	3.7 +/- 1.5	2.5 +/- 1.3	5.2 +/- 0.8		
	Catalan	3.1 +/- 1.4	2.2 +/- 1.6	3.9 +/- 1.3	5.2 +/- 1.2		
Close	*English*	3.0 +/- 1.5	2.3 +/- 1.3	3.7 +/- 1.4	3.8 +/- 1.9	<0.001	<0.001 *Catalan and Spanish both p<0.001 compared with English*
	Spanish	3.3 +/- 1.4	4.7 +/- 1.0	2.8 +/- 1.4	5.2 +/- 0.6		
	Catalan	4.1 +/- 1.3	2.7 +/- 1.8	4.6 +/- 1.1	5.5 +/- 1.0		
Credible	*English*	4.3 +/- 1.4	3.7 +/- 1.5	3.9 +/- 1.3	3.7 +/- 1.7	<0.001	0.624
	Spanish	4.1 +/- 1.5	3.5 +/- 1.5	3.1 +/- 1.4	3.8 +/- 1.3		
	Catalan	4.1 +/- 1.1	2.4 +/- 1.4	4.6 +/- 0.9	4.3 +/- 1.7		

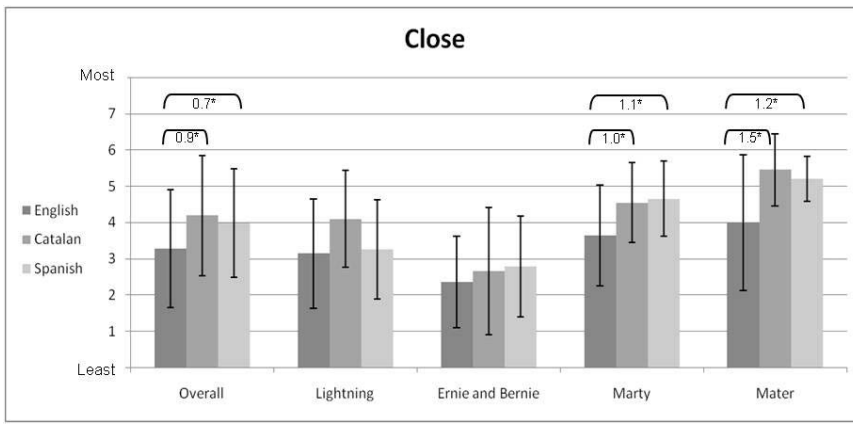

Figure 4: Audience perception of closeness. *Where marked with an asterisk (*), between-group difference is significant (*p < 0.05) and the associated value is the difference between means. This convention is repeated in subsequent figures.*

There are no significant differences on the perception of sincerity across languages, as seen in Figure 5. Regarding the strength of the characters, the only statistically significant difference in Figure 6 characters can be seen between English and Catalan in the case of Mater, with a difference of 1.6 points, which in turn affects the overall result.

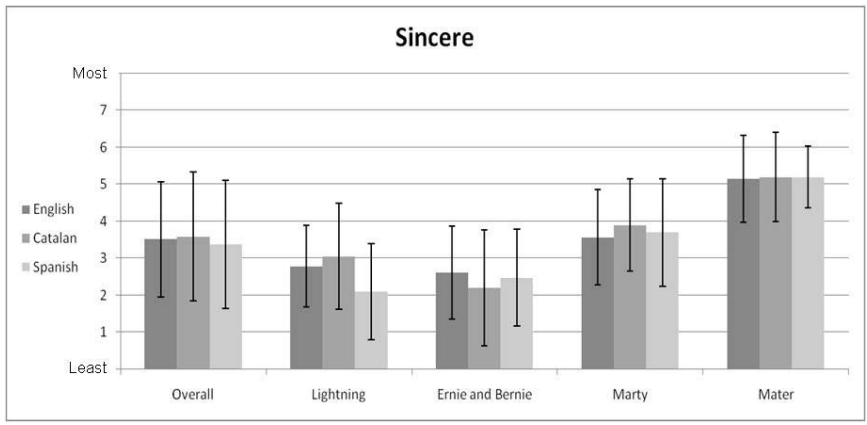

Figure 5: Audience perception for sincerity.

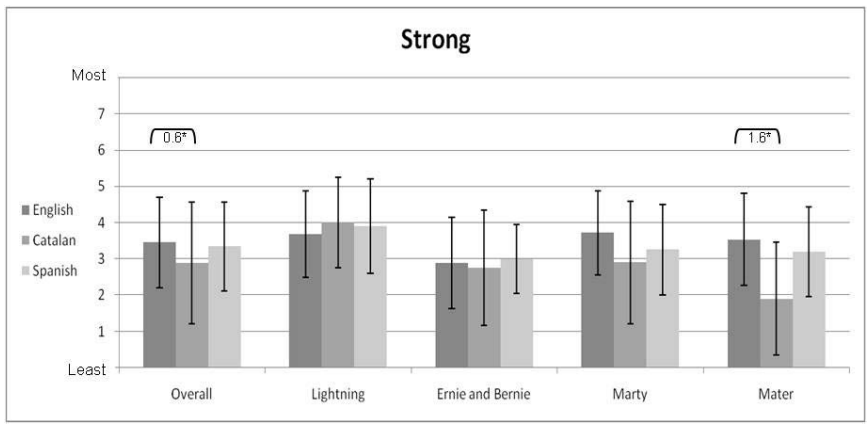

Figure 6: Audience perception for strength.

There are no statistical differences between the language versions of each character except Lightning, who was perceived as less extravert in Spanish compared to English and Catalan (Figure 7). The values for intelligence are uniform across versions (Figure 8).

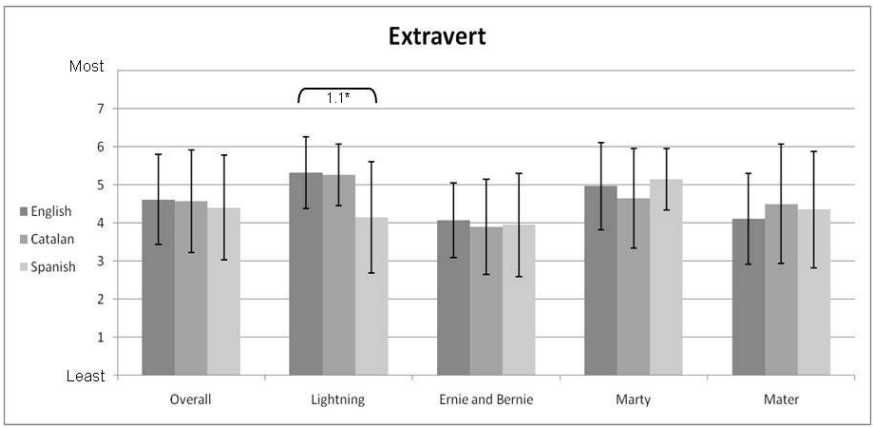

Figure 7: Audience perception for extraversion.

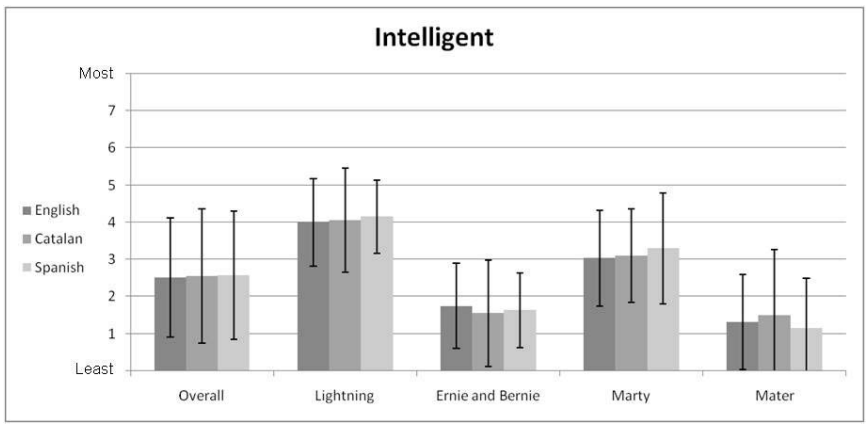

Figure 8: Audience perception for intelligence.

When compared with the English version, characters are perceived as less confident in Spanish, and even less so in Catalan, as seen in Figure 9. It is noticeable that, statistically, these differences are highly significant ($p < 0.001$ overall and individually for two of the characters). Further comments will be offered in the following section.

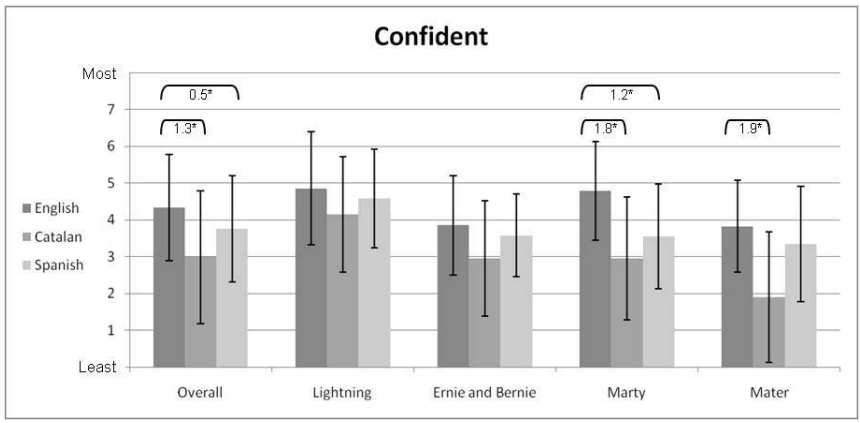

Figure 9: Audience perception for confidence.

Overall, as demonstrated by Figure 10, characters are perceived as less calm in Spanish and Catalan compared to English, although for individual characters a statistically significant difference was only observed for Marty. It is noteworthy that Palencia (2002: 330) also identified higher perceptions of nervousness in the dubbed version into Spanish in comparison with the original in English; there may therefore be a systematic bias in the perception of calmness in these languages.

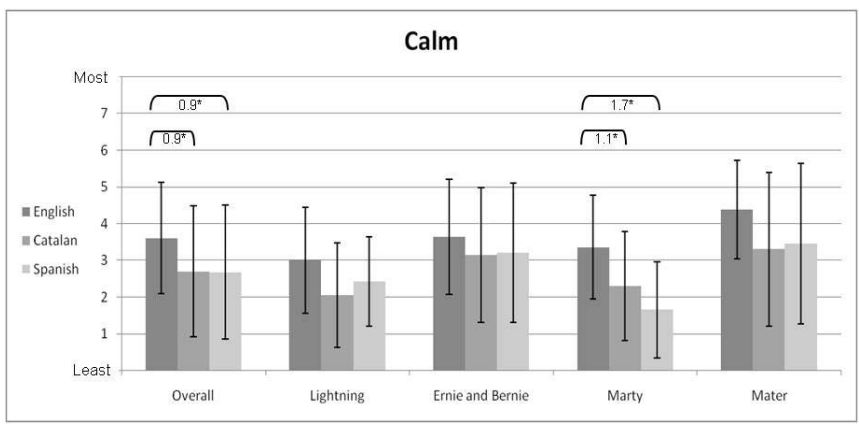

Figure 10: Audience perception for calmness.

As shown in Figure 11, Lightning is perceived as more balanced in the Spanish version.

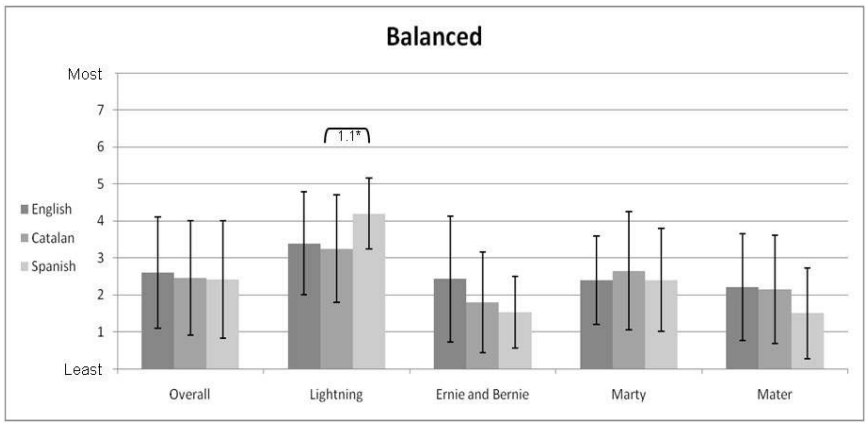

Figure 11: Audience perception for balance.

In Figure 12 we can see that the Catalan Marty, the only Marty who does not use a vernacular, is perceived as marginally more humble; the rest do not show any significant differences. Finally, credibility (Figure 13) does not show any general difference across languages, although Ernie and Bernie are marginally less credible in Catalan than in English. The findings of Prado *et al* (1997: 2–3) concluded that formal texts are perceived as more credible than informal texts, which may account for the relatively low marks for credibility in a text where formality is not sought.

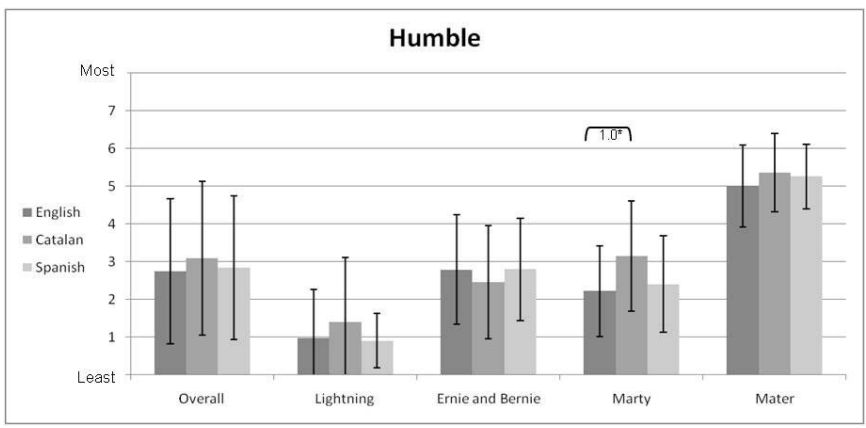

Figure 12: Audience perception for humbleness.

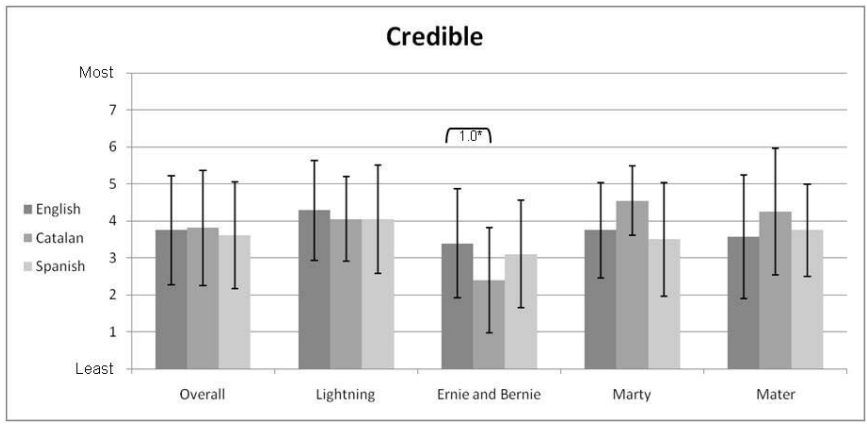

Figure 13: Audience perception for credibility.

3.2. Discussion of the results

In general, there is evidence of statistically significant differences in several measurements and characters. However, it may be that discrepancies in one or two character traits have limited impact on the overall perception of characters when other features are maintained. When differences do occur, they happen both for characters who use mainstream and vernacular varieties, be it in a case like Lightning, who uses a mainstream variety throughout, or characters such as Marty and Mater who use a vernacular in two out of the three versions. It therefore appears that the choice of a mainstream or vernacular language does not have a general effect on the translation of characters within these scenes, but this requires validation in a larger selection of characters. There are, however, some discrepancies that might be attributed to other factors, which range from voice frequency to hesitation, or decoding of other aspects of the whole audiovisual text, which would warrant further investigation. This would be the case of Mater's low levels of strength or Lightning's perceived lower extraversion.

The emphasis will now move to the discussion of the results for intelligence, confidence and credibility. Consideration of the perception of intelligence has particular relevance to matters of ethics, and notably regarding the question posed by Baker regarding the translation process: 'Do our choices make the character appear more or less intelligent than we might reasonably assume they are or than they appear to their own communities?' (Baker 2011: 289). Even though this question could be taken as an illustrative example, the analysis of this specific aspect may reveal particular prejudice towards vernaculars amongst audiences. Although there was no initial intention to comment on the perception of confidence, the finding of highly significant differences between

the English and Catalan versions requires further examination. Finally, credibility can be shown to be useful to access the global perception of a character: if credibility is impaired, it might be considered that the translation as a whole suffers.

In this study, no significant impact of the translation process on perceived intelligence was demonstrated. However, it is striking that all characters were rated mostly below 4, indicating that they were not perceived as particularly intelligent. This could be a reflection of the animation genre, where this trait may not be prominent or sought; further research would be necessary to determine a cause conclusively. Nevertheless, considering the specific cases of Mater and Marty, it is notable that perceived intelligence is not affected even when they speak in vernacular. These characters use a vernacular variety only in two of the three versions so, to answer Baker's question, the use of vernacular in these translations for dubbing does not affect the perception of intelligence based on these data. In this aspect, other features might be more important to the global perception, such as imagery, gesticulation and soundtrack.

With regards to the perceived confidence, the values are significantly lower for the translated versions, especially in the case of Mater.[3] These differences are especially pronounced for Mater and Marty in Catalan. Overall results show that, whilst there is a statistically significant difference in confidence between Spanish and English, there is a further difference between Spanish and Catalan; characters in Catalan are perceived as less confident than either English or Spanish, regardless of whether vernaculars are used. It could be speculated that the low perception of confidence is a projection of the minority language status of Catalan. Further research into the perception of confidence in other minoritized languages that use dubbing, such as Galician and Basque, could be crucial to understand whether this link exists. It would be enlightening, both for the field of audiovisual translation and sociolinguistics, to establish how the speakers of these languages feel when consuming products in their own language. This raises a further issue: viewers in Catalan, although native to the language, may not be as accustomed to viewing films in Catalan as most exposure is to films dubbed into Spanish. Dubbing is still the most widely used form of AVT in Spain, and Spanish and Catalan speakers still prefer it over subtitling. As concluded by a survey released in July 2011, 64% of Catalans prefer to view dubbed films over subtitled films ('Baròmetre de la comunicació i la cultura' 2011: graph 49). If the preferences of viewers in Catalonia are representative, a similar percentage could be expected in the rest of Spain. The same source reveals that, of these, only 18% would prefer to see films dubbed into Catalan, against 46% of inhabitants of Catalonia who would prefer dubbing into Spanish. Whilst this may relate to the language status, it

also reflects the lesser availability of films shown in Catalan in cinemas (in 2010 only three,1% of films offered in cinemas, were in Catalan),[4] and a sense of normality in viewing US films dubbed into Spanish due to the overwhelmingly larger presence of such versions.

Finally, as with Palencia's analysis (2002), credibility is an important feature in assessing the global perception of the character, and hence it is interesting to analyse this in depth. Figure 13 reveals that credibility is similarly perceived across languages for these characters, with the only significant difference being the case of Ernie and Bernie. This is of particular interest when considering characters which are portrayed with different prejudice or stereotypes in the original and translated versions. For example, given that Mater is based on a specific demographic of Southern USA, his portrayal in Catalan has less visible prejudice than in English, but this did not affect the credibility score. However, Ernie and Bernie were described as demonstrating negative prejudices in English (Darder 2012), given that they are unscrupulous assassins, and in the dubbed versions they use a contrived use of variation; this appears to be accompanied by low levels of credibility in all three languages. Hence, low levels of credibility could be due to the portrayal of the characters: in the informal discussions held after the questionnaires, many viewers thought these characters were not very likeable, considering them to be poorly developed, which affected their credibility.

4. Conclusion

This empirical research into character perception has demonstrated that overall audience perception of characters does not show a generalized pattern of differences across languages, even when variation is a factor. The SDS has proven to be a useful method for collecting data to determine character perception, most applicable in determining the reception of the text at a global scale, which includes the complete soundtrack and visual cues that are undeniably transferring additional information. Although there are some isolated cases where differences might be attributed to vernacular use, the general trend is for the characters to show similar attributes.

There are apparent areas in which methodology could be modified, particularly in improving the isolation of variables to reveal more definite results, such as native dialect, but also the nature of media that subjects are used to. If adequately controlled, groups divided by geographical varieties, or by contrasting groups of mainstream versus vernacular speakers, could give significant information on the language variation in these products. This could determine whether different speech communities respond to vernaculars in a similar way, although this would concern mostly the sociolinguistic aspect.

As per the effects of style and its translation, there are no indications that variation affects the perception of characters in general. The study has revealed its usefulness in gathering information on how originals and translations are regarded in general terms, highlighting relevant trends and differences. At this stage, there is no clear evidence that preserving vernaculars in the translated product has a globally detrimental effect. Varieties are shown to be just one part of the message when there are multiple codes such as body language and personality, values, soundtrack, and even the colours used on the scene or voice frequency. Therefore, a larger study involving more characters would give more information about the way this new product is perceived amongst audiences, and the acceptability that variation has in an increasingly accepting diverse world.

From the test results, it can be inferred that in the cases where a character has been translated using varieties, it has a comparable match in most of the traits. The exception to this is the confidence perceived by the Catalan audience. Due to the lack of previous studies, it is not possible to determine a definite cause for this general reduction. There is a clear need for further research into this aspect, which would gain particular relevance if it could be compared to the translations in other minoritized languages.

Notes

1. Throughout this article we will refer to 'standard' or mainstream variety as the one that has been promoted in the media and perhaps institutionally, and at least until recently was perceived to be more prestigious. This refers to Southern English (UK) or North-American general English (USA), Castillian Spanish in Spain and Central Catalan. We refer to varieties outside the mainstream as vernaculars, and we use the term 'varieties' or 'language variation' to depict the broad range of diversity within a language. The concept of vernacular and mainstream varieties work in opposition: mainstream variety refers to the variety that is favoured amongst prestigious or privileged backgrounds, such as Central Spanish in Spain's media.
2. Unless otherwise stated, statistical significance is accepted where $p < 0.05$.
3. In the results presented by Palencia (2002: 330), where only the original and Spanish versions were assessed, confidence was not affected, although the genre of the film for Palencia's corpus, *Peter's Friends* (1992) was very different.
4. Information released by the Generalitat de Catalunya, http://tinyurl.com/pmm2meb [Last accessed October 2014]

About the author

Dr Laia Darder holds a Licenciature in Catalan Philology from the Universitat de les Illes Balears (Spain) and a BA in Hispanic Studies with Catalan Philology from the University of Sheffield (UK). She obtained her PhD from the University of Sheffield in 2013, where she was employed as a part-time tutor, both for undergraduate and postgraduate teaching. Dr Laia Darder has also taught at Brown University (USA) and has regularly held workshops and lectures at the University

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