

**Revoicing vernaculars? Racialised and stereotyped characters in dubbing into Spanish and Catalan**

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# Revoicing Vernaculars? Racialised and Stereotyped Characters in Dubbing into Spanish and Catalan

ARTICLES –  
LINGUISTICS

LAIA DARDER



## ABSTRACT

This article is concerned with vernacularisation in the original versions of animated films in English, and their dubbing into Spanish and Catalan, with a focus on the sociolinguistic significance of these transpositions. Taking into account the positioning of vernaculars in the media spaces in these three languages, as well as the social and semiotic constraints entangled with non-mainstream varieties in audiovisual media, we explore how different productions have resolved the culturally anchored inclusion of vernaculars across audiovisual media spaces. Understanding the impact of these decisions can only be a positive move in the context of the inclusion of varieties and vernaculars, whilst observing the cultural differences when it comes to their visibilisation across cultures. Our analysis covers four characters in the films *Cars* and *Shark Tale*, whose linguistic characterisation is achieved through distinction. We conclude that vernacularisation in dubbing can be successfully achieved from the perspective of non-stigmatisation, but that essentialist views on vernaculars tend to persist in the dubbing process. We identify three strategies that have been utilised in solving this “impossibility of translation”, to replicate, dissipate or erase linguistic stereotype, and propose that an active assessment of these choices is essential to fair and balanced language representation.

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This article explores vernacularisation in the original versions of animated films in English, and their dubbing into Spanish and Catalan, with a focus on the sociolinguistic significance of these transpositions. Taking into account the positioning of vernaculars in the media spaces in these three languages, as well as the social and semiotic constraints entangled with vernaculars<sup>1</sup> in audiovisual media, we explore how different productions have resolved the culturally anchored inclusion of vernaculars across audiovisual media spaces. Understanding the impact of these decisions can only be a positive move in the context of the inclusion of varieties and vernaculars, whilst observing the cultural differences when it comes to their visibilisation across cultures.

We begin by introducing the theme of the vernacularisation of cinema in English, and giving an overview of the media spaces in Spanish and Catalan in terms of standard ideology, traditions, and audiences. The following sections introduce the intricacies of dubbing into Spanish and Catalan, and offer a brief look into the issue of translation of vernaculars. Finally, to analyse vernacularisation in dubbing, we take four original characters, namely Mater from *Cars* and Oscar, Ernie, and Bernie from *Shark Tale*, and compare them with their corresponding translations into Spanish and Catalan. The aim is to explore the changes in implications and possible effects of the positioning of vernaculars in the respective target language. The analysis will address problematic uses and translation solutions of non-mainstream variation in these films, as well as solutions that dispel problematic depictions.

Our analyses cover how stereotype- or prejudice-dependent characters are construed through language in English, and how these views on language have been maintained or dissipated when dubbing into other languages with different realities, indexals, hierarchies and stereotypes, aiming to uncover whether these signifiers have been replicated in the target versions. We conclude that vernacularisation in dubbing has been successfully achieved from the perspective of non-stigmatisation, but that essentialist views on vernaculars tend to persist in the dubbing process.

## THE CHANGING VOICES IN CINEMA, FROM SOURCE TO TARGET CULTURES

The inclusion of non-mainstream varieties in cinema has been gradual since the beginning of the “talkies” in 1927, as a result of method acting (Kozloff), and also owing to different ideologies over the years (Taylor). Moving away from the aspirational Transatlantic English characteristic of the initial era of the audiovisual film, a shift towards a visibilisation of real speech or vernacularisation has been pursued (Coupland “Sociolinguistic Change”).

Non-mainstream varieties may be used to respond to a genuine need for authenticity and realism, to recreate realistic social representations with their realistic reference points, but also as a character-building shortcut. However, representation of real speech communities has often been done with stereotypes and prejudices in mind, following existing essentialist narratives. Scholars have given increasing attention to this understudied field, which has a great deal of impact amongst speakers through popular media products (Androtsopoulos “Introduction” and Mediatization; Coupland “Sociolinguistic Change”; Stamou “Literature Review” and “Sociolinguistics”). Studies have also looked at the way vernaculars have appeared in audiovisual media in English, and the light in which they are portrayed (Fennell; Bucholtz; Bucholtz and Lopez; Lippi-Green; Hodson; Androtsopoulos “Introduction” and Mediatization). Recently, the intersection of relevant disciplines has also been gaining traction in the field of audiovisual translation. Recent works have highlighted the need for a greater understanding of the layers of implications that exist in audiovisual translation (AVT), and the need to use multidisciplinary approaches (Zanotti and Ranzato), from the power of AVT and globalisation (Di Giovanni) to the implications of AVT for minority languages and language planning (De Rider and O’Connell). It is precisely at the intersection of sociolinguistics and representation, and media-cultural-linguistic norms in Spanish and Catalan that this article makes its greatest contribution.

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1 Noting the difficulty in branding varieties of language that have traditionally been sidelined in audiovisual media, we shall use the terms “non-mainstream varieties” or “vernaculars” (Coupland “Sociolinguistic Change” and “Labov”).

In contrast to these predictable uses of vernaculars, other cases exist where non-mainstream varieties are recontextualised and positioned in ways that can be interpreted locally rather than structurally and hence afford greater tolerance for a translation using vernaculars. The films selected in this article belong to the fantasy genre, whose dimension provides an ontological rupture that allows some distance between voice and image (Fowkes 4). It allows non-mainstream varieties to be decontextualised and recontextualised in mediated relocations of speech communities. Although our selection of original characters does not fall within this category, it is relevant for some solutions for dubbing into Spanish and Catalan, which we will therefore explore in detail.

The choice of vernaculars has implications regarding character portrayal in the original text, but also the ways in which certain varieties are to be dubbed into the target language. In this article, we shall focus on the possible sociolinguistic ramifications of these choices, of characters who use a variety that relies on its social position and meaning to fill an intertextual gap in the original, and observe its behaviour through the process of dubbing.

In the context of the vernacularisation of media, increasing our social awareness to include diverse voices can only be beneficial. Including vernaculars fairly can create a positive outcome for the speech communities behind them, when clichéd narratives around poverty or unsophistication are interrupted. Representing real varieties that do not emerge solely as part of stereotyped character-building shortcuts can offer visibility and increase linguistic knowledge as part of a concerted effort. This is especially pertinent as Stamou points out that linguistic inclusion, where “sociolinguistic diversity is ‘celebrated’ and nonstandard language forms become empowered” (“Sociolinguistics of Fiction” 2), is still not a feature of recent productions. Furthermore, Androutsopoulos points out that the “media stylization of vernaculars can also lead to increased social awareness of stigmatized [...] speech styles” (Mediatization 27). This is precisely why we shift our attention to the potential effect of translation choices on the target audience in a scenario where persistent stigmatisation may take place. Emanating from American productions and passing via dubbing studios, films are a media format that can reach millions. It seems fitting to raise our collective awareness of this aspect, when even the annual Hollywood Diversity Report (Hunt and Ramón) does not include language representation as a category.

Pertinently, when he hosted the Animated Film category at the 2012 Oscars, Chris Rock hinted that his authentic voice could only surface if it was in the form of an animated zebra in the *Madagascar* franchise. This alluded to a lack of normalcy around vernaculars, in a context of persistent standard ideology, potentially affecting their capital and positioning in society, and their acceptability in media products. To echo Stamou’s words, increasing the visibility of vernaculars is not enough if it is to occupy spaces where they are portrayed in a denigrating way, or where they fulfil an essentialist social view. Not only may this not reflect reality, but it disables the possibility of presenting non-mainstream varieties in a different light.

The vernacular voices that are heard in the media are often not authentic in either the original or dubbed version, due to being performed. The medium facilitates the erasure of some lesser-known authentic traits of the variety in favour of recognisable stereotypical depictions, something that Bucholtz and Lopez noted for African American English (AAE). Coupland (Style 15) views authenticity as a secondary consideration, prioritising the sense of entertainment, rendering accuracy irrelevant in the context of mass-mediated vernacular speech (“Mediated Performance” 298), a position that we tend to agree with even though it denies audiences the opportunity to hear authentic speech. However, it is worth considering the purpose of stereotyped vernaculars in aiding the diegetic experience and ensuring comprehension amongst the general public, whose experience of certain varieties may be limited. In genres where children are the main target audience, inexperience with diversity in their own language is among the reasons why realistic speech is not featured, from a commercial point of view. However, a change of culture to include realistic instances of speech in mass media would certainly solve this problem by increasing viewers’ exposure to varieties of their own language, something that has been highlighted for Catalan (Bibiloni; Marzà et al.; Marzà and Prats), noting the potential of mass media to circulate diverse linguistic forms within the already fragmented language. This is especially pertinent when language policies are already in operation, either overtly for Catalan, or covertly for Spanish, as we shall explore below.

Stereotyped language is a persistent feature of cinema (Kozloff; Hodson), and also of dubbing, where “dubbese” emerges. Not unlike the stereotyped language used in original productions, dubbese arose as a stereotyped language used for dubbing, and is characterised by the use of little variation in terms of diversity and repertoires (Antonini; Chaume). Conversely, dubbese aids the diegetic experience, and it has come to be expected by audiences. This also includes the expectation of the same dubbing actor being used for famous Hollywood voices in Spanish, a feature that Chion recognises is no longer the case in French dubbing, but exists in Spain, and in Italy (Chiaro). It therefore seems likely that stereotyped, or mediated, language is an inescapable trait of cinematic language, while authenticity takes a subordinate role to that of the diegetic experience, where simplified markers allude to given varieties in the minds of audiences when repeatedly presented as mediated vernaculars (Kozloff; Coupland “Mediated Performance”).

## INTRICACIES OF THE DUBBING PROCESS

Much has been written about the process of dubbing, where a new voice soundtrack replaces the original verbal text, while sounds and music remain (Whitman-Linsen; Chaume). Dubbing tends to abide by two intersecting traditions; on the one hand respecting target cultural norms to ensure the product is acceptable to the target audience, but simultaneously having its own tradition and established patterns that the audience have come to expect. The translated product will seldom seek to transgress the media culture to aid the diegetic experience, minimising disruption and maximising the acceptability of the dubbed product.

Furthermore, dubbing is intriguing given its dual function; although on the surface it is a form of translation, it also serves as a way of controlling the original message for target audiences. It is precisely this potential for language planning that makes it relevant for vernacular representation. Dubbing emerged to make foreign language films available to given speech communities after cinema became verbal. It was chosen over subtitling for the Spanish audiences for several reasons, amongst which was high rates of illiteracy. Crucially, with the start of the Franco dictatorship in 1939, dubbing would be instrumentalised as a tool for cultural planning, a pattern that was replicated in other European countries. The possibilities afforded by dubbing played a major role given the intention of the governing class to apply cultural and language planning through cinema, and to prevent American customs and views from colonising the social sphere (Danan; Ballester Casado; Díaz Cintas). Dubbing has been the object of study, often including audiences as a major point of focus recently (Chaume; Gambier and DiGiovanni). The dubbing tradition is now well established for audiences in Spain and the Catalan-speaking regions. Furthermore, after decades of exposure to dubbed American products, despite initial efforts to limit foreign influence, audiences have been found to decode dubbed products optimally despite the visual and cultural interferences that are still visible (Palencia).

## DUBBING INTO CATALAN AND SPANISH: POLICIES AND AUDIENCE EXPECTATIONS

In an eminently prescriptive context, audiovisual media in Spanish and Catalan has been used to circulate a standard oral variety that does not include geographical or social variation, as has largely been the case for Italian (Chiaro). Unlike the changes that have taken place in British media with regard to the inclusion of different accents (Fennell; Coupland “Sociolinguistic Change”), such change has been slower in Spain, where the long tradition of the Central Castilian model is still prevalent (Ballester Casado; Aguilar; Pérez; Vilches). Nevertheless, vernacularisation of the media in Spain has given visibility to voices outside the media mainstream by including members of the general public in reality, game, and quiz shows, and more recently the ability to self-produce content on the internet. This has had an influence on increasing the acceptability of diverse voices, as is evident by the way they are gradually incorporated in media channels. Therefore, even though translation into vernaculars was not the norm at the time of release of the present film corpus, it was not unheard of in audiovisual entertainment, and it had been used sporadically in productions such as *La Vuelta al Mundo de Willy Fogg* (1983).

Vernacularisation of the media is certainly different for Catalan, where intralanguage diversity is often encouraged in the media, especially by the Balearic channel IB3 ([Bibiloni](#)). The maintenance of a mainstream Central Catalan standard is often seen as detrimental to the unity of the already minoritised and divided language, by invisibilising other varieties. Although Spanish and Catalan are very different in size and in legal and mediatic stature, both show moves towards greater visibilisation and inclusion of real speech in traditional audiovisual channels. For Catalan, this includes the highly formal news bulletins; this is not the case for Spanish, which still limits vernaculars to entertainment formats. As for the emergence of dubbing into Catalan, it was chosen for its potential to serve as a tool for language planning ([Izard](#); [O'Connell](#)). Audiovisual media became crucial when the ban was lifted on the Catalan language after the Franco dictatorship, and with the passing of the law to reinstate a sense of language normalcy in 1983.

One of the factors affecting dubbing outputs is the power of the language in terms of market potential and governmental support. Dubbing into Spanish in Spain, in a different market to that of Latin America, is funded by private capital, with a vested interest in their product reaching an audience of tens of millions in Spain. However, dubbing into Catalan is not such a profitable venture, and the Catalan government may contribute to the costs of dubbing. Public funds imply a limited repertoire of resources and voices in general, unlike the case of Antonio Banderas, who dubbed himself in Spanish as *Shrek's Puss in Boots*. Studios viewing the Spanish market as crucial, rather than peripheral and perhaps superfluous like the Catalan one, is relevant to the transposition of personas and their intertextuality in the case of specific actors, such as Will Smith and Fernando Tejero, as will be explained in our analysis.

In an industry that has the power to marginalise voices, or to surface them and award them a sense of normalcy on screens, audiovisual texts operate as cultural texts that reflect and transport prevalent ideologies. It is vital, therefore, that the dubbing team is regarded as an agent in the positioning of certain varieties in the target language, even when they may not have an awareness of the impact and implications of their choices on the receiving culture. Importantly, though, both original and translation studios are potential agents for change. The choices and portrayals that emerge from studios' decisions, materialised through language characterisation, can reach a large audience, and maintain or introduce views that reinforce or challenge the social essentialism that is attached to the use of mediated vernaculars, often in a dichotomy of standard versus vernacular. Therefore, we aim to discuss the implications of the choices made for dubbing into Spanish and Catalan, motivated by depictions in the original, when they arrive, influence, and, arguably, colonise practices in the target language and culture.

To close the loop regarding the malleability of dubbing back to the origin, we argue that audiovisual media in English also acts as a vehicle for culture or language planning. That is, audiovisual media are implicitly making ideological language choices that can be circulated easily in mass-media productions. Despite a tradition existing in each language and for dubbese to be an established stereotyped language for dubbing, external agents can still operate. Studios seek to exert hermeneutic control over dubbed products ([Richart](#)), usually by annotating the original dialogue with suggestions to be distributed amongst dubbing teams to achieve a particular output. This control over both the source and the target texts is key to deciphering how much agency lies beyond the norms of a given speech community when it comes to circulating the models that they have been operating under, and accepting others that overwhelmingly originate in Hollywood. It is worth considering the underlying ideologies included in such briefs, and the demands or impositions made on the target culture. Unfortunately, the industrial secrecy surrounding these briefs makes this task difficult. Nevertheless, the picture that emerges from the process of dubbing is of a collaborative task where the control the studios have over the end product is combined with solutions found in the studio at the time of recording, and the personas that are brought in by actors.

## THE APPROACH TO TRANSLATING VERNACULARS

The constraints imposed on the audiovisual message by the dubbing process become evident when attempting to replace voices in speech acts that take place in specific contexts. As the images remain the same, it is relevant to consider what [Chion](#), and later [Bucholtz](#), define as a voice matching a face. In translating a character from one language to the next, inevitably the

original voice departs from the original face, to be supplanted by a new one from a different culture where different connotations exist. An existing tradition aids the normalcy of this exercise by meeting audiences' expectations and supporting their diegetic experience.

Translation studies has proposed different approaches to the translation of variation. Initially branded an impossibility, there has been a gradual move towards accepting the role of ethics (Pym), and audiences (Gambier), as well as acknowledging the layers of information entangled in messages, from an ideological point of view (Hatim and Mason). In audiovisual translation, there have also been calls to include alternatives to a complete erasure of vernaculars (Agost; Chiaro; Yau).

In terms of framework, the focus has shifted towards the Polysystem Theory, which "integrates translation into the study of culture and which holds that texts and translations are conditioned by the cultural systems that they are immersed in" (Agost 66). In this sense, it is indispensable to account for the attitudes towards and representation of vernaculars that are exhibited in the audiovisual media of the receiving cultures or structures.

Solutions to the visibility of non-mainstream varieties of the original language have included avoiding translation into vernaculars, that is, resorting to a mainstream variety of Spanish or Catalan, even when a change in variety is crucial to the plot. The limitations of this approach to the target text are severe, exempting the language of any markers across characters in order to privilege mainstream forms. What is so significant about the corpus that we shall discuss below is that homogenising strategies have given way to the inclusion of vernaculars. Characters are attributed features via socially maintained stereotypes or prejudices that are attached to certain varieties in structural ways; furthermore, they may also appear visually racialised or profiled. Our focus here is to explore how these characterisations have been handled in dubbing, in products to be consumed by users of a different language and culture than those of the original, and to consider the potential or tacit impact of these choices on the target cultures.

## THE CHARACTERS' JOURNEY FROM ENGLISH TO SPANISH AND CATALAN

The corpus of four characters used for the present analysis has been selected based on the following criteria: a vernacular is used in the original, and a vernacular has been chosen for dubbing in at least one of the target languages, Spanish or Catalan. This excludes several other characters for whom vernaculars are utilised in the original version but not in either translated version. With the resulting selection of Ernie, Bernie, and Oscar from *Shark Tale*, and Mater from *Cars*, we are able to systematically assess different treatments of vernaculars.

The analysis seeks to discover how each character is constructed, the role of vernaculars in this, and whether or how stereotypes and prejudices have resurfaced in the translated versions. We consider contextual information, the placement of the character within the story, and the choice of variety for its cultural positioning. The analysis will point out speech traits and salient vocabulary and grammar. The aim is to disentangle the levels of meaning that are behind the original choice of vernacular for each character, to assess whether there is a continuation between the visual and the verbal cues in relation to structural meanings as a form of character building. That is, to establish whether an essentialist approach to language is applied to the characters in the original film and dubbed versions.

As well as assessing the internal factors influencing the original characterisation and subsequent dubbing, we look at how this correlates with external factors, such as the studio that commissioned the work or the language used. By analysing characters that use vernaculars in the original, and who may deploy them in either the Spanish or the Catalan version, it is possible to evaluate what has been gained or lost in terms of vernacular representation and inclusion, especially when stereotypes are a component.

The overall aim is to uncover whether the translation solutions for the four selected characters present similar use of a stereotypical or prejudiced indexing of a given vernacular of the original language, or whether other resources have been used, even if a vernacular is used in the target language. The latter could imply that some vernaculars in the target text have been deployed in a way that is aesthetically and visually decontextualised, not relying on stereotypes and hence changing the construction of the original character whilst still visibilising vernaculars.

*Cars* (2005) tells the story of Lightning McQueen, a young racing car who dreams of winning the Piston Cup and becoming a star. In his literal and figurative journey, he discovers that the small things in life are more valuable than prizes, and that they require an effort. The story begins with a three-way tie in a racing competition between McQueen and two other cars, and the need arises to travel to the other side of the country for a tiebreak race. McQueen wants to rush through the journey and, when his driver falls asleep through exhaustion, McQueen gets lost and ends up in Radiator Springs, on the old Route 66. Due to his confusion and the darkness, he causes damage to the village that he is then sentenced to repair. This delays his journey to California but forces him to develop friendships that teach him humility and make him develop positive values. Booker noted that all the characters in *Cars* are culturally stereotyped and represent different communities, Hispanic, African American, older, Italian, etc., which is perceivable at the visual but also at the verbal and behavioural levels (94). The focus of this analysis is Mater, the main driver of the protagonist's personal development with whom McQueen develops a special, if perhaps uneven, friendship.

### Mater

Characterised by low intelligence and high loyalty, Mater is a problematic character when it comes to the variety that was chosen for him. He appears in the film as a representation of the white working-class American South, and is unobtrusively represented by a rusty tow truck. This direct association illustrates “the way in which prejudice against rednecks might actually be a transposed form of contempt for the working class” (Booker 96), which also operates at a linguistic level. Mater was created by comedian Larry the Cable Guy, using a persona that has featured in subsequent instalments regardless of the criticism it drew in the press due to its portrayal of southerners as uneducated. However loving and loyal Mater may be, he is naïve and less intelligent than the rest of the cast, and perceived as such by audiences (Darder 14). This is reinforced through the intentional use of a particular stereotype that is activated in this context.

When it came to the dubbing of *Cars* into Spanish, Disney reportedly took a conservative decision with regard to the varieties to be used in the dubbing, making all characters speak in mainstream Central Spanish (MCS). This dissipates the original linguistic prejudice for all characters, but it also results in a reduced visibility of variation in the target language, in favour of a text that is homogeneous when compared to the original.

Mater's character in Spanish relies entirely on behaviour, voice, and visual cues to convey its personality traits in Spanish, rather than linguistic stereotypes. It could be argued that a certain degree of distinctiveness is achieved through the greater use of colloquial expressions by this character compared to the others. Verbs like *currar* and *pillar*, instead of *trabajar* [to work] and *coger* [to catch], are examples of informal vocabulary markers that distinguish Mater. The approach to the Spanish version contrasts with both the original and the Catalan versions, as these word choices do not evoke a rural provenance that would elicit such stereotypes, but it does to a limited extent visibilise a colloquial register.

Disney was reportedly less involved in the development of the Catalan version, which gave the translating team some latitude to create a dubbed version that incorporated solutions outside of the tradition. They reportedly took the initiative to adapt some of the diversity into Catalan, one example of which is Mater.

Mater's speech in Catalan is not traceable to an identifiable region, so the stereotypes attached to the original character have dissipated in favour of a less marked representation of a vernacular that still evokes a non-urban provenance. However, it is obvious enough to exploit the old stereotype pointing at inhabitants of rural areas as less sophisticated than those of urban areas. Furthermore, Mater's voice is modulated to sound “simple” and his vocabulary contains lexis associated with rural areas of Catalonia, such as *xalar* [to enjoy] or *formós* [beautiful, metathesised as /fumos/]. Mater also uses full weak pronouns (*me, te, se, nos, vos, se*). Overall, the effect is achieved by changing features of mainstream Central Catalan (MCC), which works to effect an opposition to the other characters' varieties. Despite the exploitation of a rural variety, Mater's character in Catalan was attributed a variety that does not exist, based in strategically placing diverse dialectal traits, seemingly to avoid reproducing an actual variety.



Overall, Mater's original language features rely heavily on the existing stereotypes around Southern US working-class white males. The dubbed versions into Catalan and Spanish do not rely on similar stereotypes attached to given speech communities (especially the Spanish version, which presents a character that is not distinct linguistically). However, the Catalan version relies on the stereotype of rural-sounding language to profile Mater. It could also be argued that the specific allusion to the "rust belt" and the admiration for car races is an American stereotype that is not carried into either the Spanish or the Catalan version.

## SHARK TALE

*Shark Tale* takes place in an underwater city reminiscent of New York, where all characters are marine beings. The story follows the life of Oscar, a fish at the bottom of the social hierarchy of the reef, who quickly climbs to the top after some chance encounters and events that will change his destiny. The film focuses on the friendship between fish Oscar and shark Lenny, who meet accidentally at a time when each needs the other even though they come from opposed backgrounds. In this unlikely relationship, they will transform themselves, and the world around them to a limited extent. Oscar's desires to be rich and famous, and to earn easy money through business ideas that never bear fruit, have left him in debt with his boss, Sykes, who owns a whale wash but who also has dealings with the shark mob, headed by Don Lino. After offending Don Lino, Sykes demands back the money he lent to Oscar, which Oscar is unable to pay. Sykes orders the jellyfish Ernie and Bernie to kill him in retribution. While Oscar is being tortured by the jellyfish, a chain of events leads the population of the reef to believe that Oscar has killed a shark, Don Lino's son Frankie. This earns him money and respect in the community, as well as the friendship of Don Lino's estranged son Lenny, now disguised as a dolphin and presumed dead by his family. When Don Lino discovers that Lenny is still alive, he reconciles with him and appreciates the fish community that accepted him. The film culminates in a display of friendship amongst all the underwater creatures. Prior extortionate or violent behaviours are left undiscussed in the hope of a better tomorrow. Henceforth Oscar comes to appreciate his social position at the bottom of the reef, ultimately not subverting the essentialist social order that had been initially established in linguistic, visual, and narrative terms.

*Shark Tale* makes use of vernaculars for purposes of essentialist characterisation based on stereotypes or prejudices towards particular speech communities. Characters with undervalued or underserved backgrounds speak in vernaculars. It is evident that the film exploits intertextuality with gangster films and with series such as *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air* (1990–6), and that it resorts to stereotypes for its social stratification. The mob is "ethnicized as Italian by way of very specific signifiers" (King et al. 41), including language. Significantly, Don Lino's son Lenny does not use overt features of Italian-American English, unless he is trying to fit in with his mobster family. Lenny is a likeable character, as opposed to his unscrupulous family, opposing mainstream US English and Italian-American speech in a good/bad dichotomy. As mentioned by Della Piana, various communities organised campaigns to prevent the film's release and subsequently arranged boycotts, citing concerns about the influence on young audiences of a film that they felt masqueraded as entertainment while embedding, reproducing, and maintaining prejudicial social norms in absolute terms.

### Oscar

Oscar is played by Will Smith, famous for his role as the Fresh Prince of Bel Air, which is the most recognisable persona behind the character in *Shark Tale*, through shared mannerisms and social background. Oscar is at the bottom of the social and biological chain, and his job as a tongue scrubber exemplifies this. His boss Sykes is very clear about the reef hierarchy which, in summary, is topped by sharks, then puffer fish like himself, then other fish, then plankton, and even whale excrement, and Oscar at the very bottom. Oscar's allusions to a specific lifestyle and imagery of his dreams constantly signal a specific segment of the African-American community as a reference, and "His blackness is found not only in his accent and place of residence, but also in his mannerisms, behavior, and jewelry (that is, 'bling'), which are highly racialized signifiers" (King et al. 40). Furthermore, linguistically he is characterised by a broad use of slang words and a constant code-switching with near-AAE, mostly felt through prosody and vocabulary after certain triggers. The changes are inconsistent, but can be noted at the grammatical level, as with the omission of the copulative verb in "he just playing", "we

good to go” and “we in the money”. *Shark Tale* relies on tired media and real-life stereotypes and prejudices around AAE speakers. Even though at the end of the film all species blend into one harmonious society and Oscar gains an appreciation of his roots, characters maintain their socioeconomic position and there is no redemptive debate to address certain characters’ previous negative intentions. Therefore, we may conclude that there is no justification for the use of variation other than to effect a stereotypical portrayal of a specific social order in the reef, linked to essentialist sociolinguistic views. Although this is done with an aesthetic and intertextual motive in mind, the film fails to create local meanings.

*Shark Tale* in Spanish is not exempt from a problematic interpretation of the varieties used for Oscar. The Spanish Oscar is dubbed by the famous Andalusian actor Fernando Tejero, known for his character in a popular Spanish series that made him a household name, *Aquí no hay quien viva* (2003–6). The Spanish Oscar activates a similar intertextuality in the mind of the audience to that of the original Oscar which, incidentally, could be seen as an effective way of domesticating and localising the product. Fernando Tejero is originally a speaker of Andalusian Spanish, although his speech could be described as a contrived MCS variety, one in which he tries to conceal his native variety. Andalusian linguistic features are especially felt in the pronunciation of final segment <s>, which Oscar aspirates, assimilates, or drops, dependent on the speed of the dialogue. Numerous examples can be found throughout, such as *espera* [wait], *refrescos* [soft drinks], or *ves* [you see], respectively. The Andalusian accent also features the loss of some approximants, such as the <d> in *empanado* [distracted], and the velarisation of <n> in final position, as in *también* [as well]. The vocabulary can nevertheless be considered to conform to MCS, with colloquial expressions such as *largarse*. One of the expressions Oscar uses, *un poquito de por favor* [literally, “a little bit of please”], was coined by Tejero in his most famous role, allowing for an intertextual joke.

Rather than a studied replication of social prejudice, the choice of Spanish actor seems to be the driver of the activation of similar stereotypes to the original film. Nevertheless, both actors hail from underserved communities, and they have come to prominence without concealing their origins (linguistically or otherwise). The use of these actors’ varieties to characterise Oscar certainly responds to an essentialist view of these particular vernaculars, and not to an intentional transgression of the established pattern of language representation.

In the Catalan version, Oscar is dubbed using MCC, thus dissipating the prejudice attached to a particular variety spoken by an underserved community. However, his speech features words that appear to sound young and urban, usually borrowed from Spanish, as is often the case in recent years when it comes to reproducing slang in audiovisual media in Catalan. This has more to do with the appropriation of Spanish lexical models in the absence of urban or modern references in Catalan, and arguably the promotion of those that exist in Barcelona while overlooking Catalan slang from other regions. Therefore, beyond the use of this generalised slang, there are no distinctive traits attached to the Catalan Oscar.

## Ernie and Bernie

These two jellyfish are unlikeable characters whose main occupation is to intimidate or even kill those who fall foul of their boss, Sykes. In a film that is as problematic as *Shark Tale* in terms of social representation, Ernie and Bernie are no exception. These hitmen are characterised with a Rastafarian aesthetic and Jamaican English voices, marked by low intelligence, and decoded as such by audiences (Darder 14), changing their loyalties depending on where the power is. It is easy to conclude that the Jamaican accent was chosen for these jellyfish for stereotypical reasons, considering Jamaica’s very real problem with gun, drug, and gang violence, generally symptoms of an underserved society.

These two jellyfish are played by musician Ziggy Marley and comedian Doug E. Doug, who are Jamaican and US citizens, respectively. Ernie and Bernie are characterised by Jamaican English, with hints of Jamaican Creole. Given the difficulty of precisely distinguishing them in the scene dialogues, and the fact that their variety occupies the same semiotic space, they are treated together here, even if the variety is genuine for the Jamaican musician but contrived and fluctuating for the American actor-comedian.

The variety has markers in all three levels of language. The vocabulary used is scattered with Jamaican slang and expressions, such as the term of address “mon”. Phonetically, there are

suprasegmental features like the intonation, stress, and rhythm of Jamaican English, and even some pronunciations of Jamaican Creole as in the word “race”. The accent is typically non-rhotic, with reduction of consonant clusters in words such as “effect”, where the final t is dropped. Grammatically, sentences lacking the copulative verb can be heard in expressions like “Oscar, you cute”. Another example of a Jamaican English mesolect is the absence of the third person verbal marker, as in “he like you, mon” or “I like the funny face he make”. This trait is combined with the absence of tense markers in sentences like “Him say take it easy on you”, together with the accusative used as a subject.

In the Spanish version, Ernie and Bernie are characterised with a near-Cuban variety. The inclusion of a vernacular has been maintained from the original, although the allusions to Jamaican gang violence that can be elicited from the original version do not re-emerge in Spanish, given the imperceptible levels of gun violence and drug abuse in Cuba. Ernie and Bernie’s variety is inconsistent in features, as it is audibly recreated by speakers of Peninsular Spanish who do not maintain them consistently. Despite the variety being overtly inauthentic, the overall effect of a Cuban accent is achieved. The pronunciation of <s> presents similar phonetic processes to Andalusian Spanish, with examples of aspirated, assimilated, and dropped, in *está* [is], *Oscar*, and *los demás* [the rest], respectively. In Cuban Spanish, the Peninsular // is pronounced as an /s/, but there are slips throughout as in *hacen* [they do], which nevertheless has a velarised /n/, another feature of Cuban Spanish. Other features include the aspiration of //, as in *jefe* [boss] and *ojo* [eye], and the assimilation of /r/ to /l/, as in *pedirlo* [ask for it] or “Ernie”. These two characters, like the rest, use MCS at the grammatical level, and not Cuban grammar. An example of this is the use of the perfect preterite *ha dicho* [has said], and the use of the second person plural *vosotros*, not in use in Cuban Spanish. The vocabulary used by Ernie and Bernie can be considered mostly Peninsular, including colloquial and slang expressions, which further mark the Cuban variety as artificial and mediated. The jellyfish can be heard using slang expressions like *careto* [face], *tronco* [pal], emerging from the urban “cheli” slang, and the diminutive *-illa* in *dudilla*, which is not as prominent in the Caribbean as it is in Peninsular Spanish, and especially Andalusian.

In Catalan, Ernie and Bernie are characterised by an invented Eastern Catalan variety that is uttered by speakers of the Western Catalan variety, revealed by their fluctuating pronunciation. As with the Spanish version, the social referential frame is notably different to the original. The translation into Catalan follows MCC for most of the characters, but it includes a few differentiations such as features that belong to the regions of Valencia, Lleida, and Tarragona, i.e. southern and north-western traits. Overall, the amalgamation of features makes this an untraceable variety. At the lexical level, Ernie and Bernie present dialectal vocabulary such as the vocative *xeic*, meaning “mate”, used to replace the original “mon”. However, their scenes also present an intense use of Spanish words, to recreate an urban and colloquial level with slang. Examples of this are *careto* [face, mug], *pirem* [blow out], *colegui* [mate]. However, Ernie and Bernie also use Spanish words unnecessarily to replace common vocabulary, such as *palillo* [toothpick]. The phonetic level of Ernie and Bernie sounds typical of Western Catalan, mostly recognisable for its five, as opposed to eight, tonal vowels. Another feature is the pronunciation of /r/ in final position, as in *arreglar* [to fix]. Also at the final position, /a/ becomes /e/, as in the north-western region, both for verb endings, as in *importa* [it matters] or words such as demonstratives, as in *aquesta* [this one]. Another feature of the western dialects is the use of the possessive *meues*. As for other features that characterise their variety, another trait is the western third person of the verb *ser*, which is uttered as /e/. Amongst other elements of the grammar used by Ernie and Bernie is the geographically specific masculine article *lo* and *los*, constant throughout, in contrast the fluctuation between full and reduced forms of pronouns, such as the third person reflexive pronoun *se/es*, respectively. The accent is contrived, its features not constant, which is perhaps exacerbated by the invented nature of the variety. However, a contrast is created when all other characters fall within MCC, and the jellyfish stand out linguistically.

Both the Spanish and Catalan versions dissipate the prejudiced use of language in the original film, given that the choice of variety in the target language is not associated with the prejudiced values textually attributed to the Jamaican variety in the original. Overall, it could be concluded that the Spanish and Catalan versions of *Shark Tale* introduce non-mainstream variation in a contrived and mediated performance. Significantly, in the transposition of the characters’ voices from English, Ernie and Bernie lose a prejudiced attribution of personality traits that are not activated in the subsequent versions. The varieties used in the target languages do not exploit stereotypical meanings, which are created locally instead.

In *Shark Tale* there is an active intention to include language variation for certain characters. Whereas the Spanish version of *Oscar* exploits similar stereotypes to the original, it could be argued that the choice of variety for Ernie and Bernie does not activate the stereotypes that are present in the original, as they allude to a particular issue with violence in Jamaica that is alien to Cuba. As with the Catalan version, the chosen variety in Spanish is not linked to violent crime, and the modern history and society of Cuba are substantially different to those of Jamaica, despite the fact that they are both Caribbean. Nevertheless, the fantasy dimension confers a level of tolerance where this kind of anomaly might find acceptability amongst the audience and not disrupt the diegetic experience and the tradition that viewers are accustomed to. However, because the film is in itself recreating stereotypes and using characters that are not very likeable, the resource risks becoming problematic. Audiences have attributed a low level of intelligence to Ernie and Bernie across languages (Darder 14); it is evident that such a trait might come across and therefore be attached to the vernacular chosen to represent them.

## STRATEGIES DEPLOYED TO TRANSLATE STEREOTYPED OR PREJUDICED VERNACULARS

This analysis has explored the language profile of four characters in English whose indexing of language variation is established socially and structurally rather than locally. The variety used for each character relies on the audience's knowledge of its social stereotypical significance to index its meaning, as stereotypes and prejudices are activated.

Further to the traditional route of dubbing a vernacular into a mainstream variety, our data show that translation attempts into vernaculars have been carried out using three different strategies, still relying on the use of vernaculars in the target text, but deploying different approaches. Firstly, there is a continuation of the stereotype as portrayed in the original; secondly, a dissipation of the stereotype; thirdly, the erasure of linguistic stereotyping.

The first instance is present in the case of *Oscar*, where stereotypes activated in the original are sought in the Spanish translation, and attached to a specific vernacular. This is achieved in both cases through intertextuality afforded by the actors themselves, who rely on their existing media personas, including their linguistic profiling with their characteristic use of a vernacular.

The second instance is visible in the case of *Mater* in the Catalan version. Stereotypes attached to a specific speech community are not sought, but instead the exploitation of stereotypes attached to a higher archetype, in this case the rural communities in the target language and culture, are activated. The translation draws from non-urban communities, reinforcing the old stereotype that rural inhabitants are not as sophisticated as urban populations.

The third instance can be found in the case of Ernie and Bernie, where both translated versions dissipate the stereotypes in the varieties chosen. In opting for vernaculars that are not known for the characteristics that are highlighted in the use of the Jamaican variety, the voice ends up not matching the face in either Spanish or Catalan, and the varieties used do not elicit the same prejudiced association.

Interestingly, these translation choices do not alter the way audiences perceive these characters across languages, as their overarching defining traits endure the process of translation (Darder).

## STRATEGIES IN TRANSLATING PREJUDICE: CLOSING REMARKS

Given the increasing visibility of minoritised realities in media, careful consideration needs to drive an ethical representation of different social groups, away from limiting stereotypes and prejudices. In both original versions and translations, conscious decisions must be made as to how choices are to be portrayed and perceived when exposed to the social fabric. As the dubbing industry ventures into the translation of non-mainstream variation, an approach that was not the norm until the turn of the twenty-first century, an awareness of the linguistic implications existing in the original is more important than ever.

As has been demonstrated, the translation of vernaculars can be achieved without resorting to a prejudiced use of language. It is noteworthy that these translation strategies have not continued in a meaningful way since the release of these films. The *Cars* franchise persevered with its initial characterisation in the sequels *Cars 2* (2011) and *Cars 3* (2017). *Shark Tale* did not

have any sequels, but characterisations based on stereotyped representations and essentialist views on language have continued in the realm of animation. AAE has appeared in recent productions, such as *The Secret Life of Pets* (2016) and *Toy Story 4* (2019), continuing to index a streetwise, urban male. Just as in the case of *Cars*, the diversity of voices in Disney's *Zootropolis* (2016) is not recreated in Spanish, which could signal a particularly cautious approach by the Spanish studio, even when the Italian version includes vernaculars (Dore). This lack of continuation in Spain could be attributed to conservative approaches, or perhaps merely economic factors after 2008 with regard to access to resources such as star talent.

## CONCLUSIONS


This article uncovers how two original animated films exploit stereotypes to build four characters, and how the translated versions in Spanish and Catalan deal with the socially and culturally constructed meanings through the process of translation and dubbing. One of the main objectives was to determine whether these signifiers were replicated in the target versions. The analysis reveals that both mainstream and vernacular varieties are used in the corpus, and suggests a framework by which these can be systematically described. We have noted that some dubbing solutions are not desirable as they may exacerbate prejudices against given speech communities in the target culture. Ultimately, if studios produce films that are problematic, by exploiting prejudices and stereotypes, it is possible that these will resurface in dubbed productions, so it is incumbent upon decision makers to be mindful of this. Therefore, an active assessment of the impact of choices not only in the original but also in the receiving culture seems to be the rational approach going forward.

The present findings seem to indicate that a balanced approach to language representation is not a central consideration in these audiovisual products, to the extent that stereotypes and prejudices are used deliberately to scaffold the narrative. At a time when society is increasingly connecting horizontally, and when previously invisible realities are surfacing, language and its representation should also be considered essential components of the social fabric. When the impact of mishandling language representations can be deeply felt in domestic as well as dubbed versions, a fair approach to language representation cannot be overlooked in the name of entertainment.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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