

## Language and identity representation in the English subtitles of Almodóvar's films

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### *Abstract*

*Language in Almodóvar's films is very frequently used as an important characterization method and as an identity constructor. In this sense, the main objective of the present paper is to analyse language and identity representation in twelve films by the Manchego filmmaker and in the English subtitles for DVD. More specifically, the article focuses on aspects of language and identity representation both in ST and TT, such as dialectal features, characteristics of gayspeak and use of swearwords. It has been observed that in the English subtitles there is a tendency to standardization of dialectal features and of sanitization of swearwords. Moreover, certain features of gayspeak –such as the reversal of derogatory terms or the use of cross-gender reference or girl talk– tend to be omitted in the English TT as well. These observed tendencies have an obvious effect both on identity representation and on characterization, and consequently, on the way in which monolingual English viewers perceive certain characters in Almodóvar's films.*

**Keywords:** Pedro Almodóvar, subtitling, identity, dialectal features, gayspeak, swearwords

### 1. Introduction

The relevance of language in Almodóvar's films has been emphasized more than once (Díaz Cintas, 2001; Lakatos, 1999; Santamaría Ciorda, 2012; Strauss, 2001). The film-maker himself, on an official webpage which no longer exists, said the following:

For me, two good dialogue lines, coming from the mouth of a well-constructed character, fulfil the same function as special effects in *Terminator 2*, and they can achieve the same impact. (Almodóvar, 1991, quoted in Santamaría Ciorda 2012: 60; my translation)

In this sense, language in Almodóvar's films is emotionally-charged language, as described by Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2014: 195-198), and it is also employed as a

characterization device, as an identity constructor, which reflects not only geographical origin, but also social class, gender, or even sexual orientation.

The main purpose of this paper, in this connection, is to analyse language and identity representation in Almodóvar's films and in the English subtitles of their DVD versions.<sup>1</sup> In other words, in the present paper I aim to analyse the linguistic resources used both in source text (ST) and in target text (TT) to represent identity, as well as the devices used in the TT to represent certain features of the ST language. In order to reach this main purpose, the following specific objectives will be pursued:

- To analyse the representation of dialectal features in Almodóvar's films and their English subtitles.
- To study the defining features of gayspeak in Almodóvar's films and its representation in the TT.
- To focus on the use of swearwords, namely *joder* and *coño*, in Almodóvar's films and their translation in the English subtitles.

## 2. On language and identity representation

Film dialogues normally try to represent real-life language and, in that sense, language in films is one of the devices used to build and portray characters. Characters' identities are hence represented, among other means, by the type of language they speak. Among the identity traits represented in the language a character speaks, all those aspects related to gender play an essential role. As mentioned more than once (De Marco, 2012; Díaz-Cintas, 2012; Pérez-González, 2014), both subtitling and dubbing can perpetuate gender stereotypes. In Díaz Cintas's (2012: 281-282) words,

As a site of discursive practice, audiovisual media and its translation play a special role in the articulation of cultural concepts such as *femininity*, *masculinity*, *race*, and *Otherness*, among others. It can contribute greatly to perpetuating certain racial stereotypes, framing ethnic and gender prejudices [...].

De Marco (2012) shows how film dialogues represent women and men in same-sex and cross-gendered conversations. She focuses, for instance, on compliments, insults, and swearwords related to sex in women's and men's speech. Likewise, Díaz Cintas (2001) and Santamaría Ciorda (2016) concentrate on the translation of swearwords with sexual connotations uttered by female characters in two films by

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<sup>1</sup> The films which constitute the corpus of this study are *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* (1980), *Laberinto de pasiones* (1982), *Entre tinieblas* (1983), *La ley del deseo* (1987), *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* (1988), *¡Átame!* (1990), *Kika* (1993), *Todo sobre mi madre* (1999), *Hable con ella* (2002), *La mala educación* (2004), *Volver* (2006), and *Los amantes pasajeros* (2013).

Almodóvar: *La flor de mi secreto* in Díaz Cintas (2001) and *¡Átame!* in Santamaría Giorda (2016). As Díaz Cintas (2001) highlights, Almodóvar's female characters try to liberate themselves from social conventions and one way of achieving it is by means of language freedom. Thus, they freely use swearwords – traditionally considered acceptable in male speech – and refer to their sexual activity.

Other studies, such as Ranzato (2012) and Asimakoulas (2012), describe filmic representations of respectively gayspeak and transgenderism and how those representations are affected by translation. Ranzato concludes that the fact that Italian culture has opened up to homosexual themes much more slowly than Anglo-Saxon cultures has inevitably conditioned the rendering of gayspeak in Italian dubbed versions of TV series. The scarcity of homosexual terms of common usage in Italian has often resulted in the translation of specific gay terms as heterosexual lexicon. Similarly, Asimakoulas (2012) defends that transgender characters in *Strella* built their own identity by appropriating certain expressive resources from the dominant discourses around them and changing their semiotic functions. Subtitling, however, Asimakoulas states, produces changes in the semiotic load of those expressive resources.

Another essential aspect in any individual's identity is his/her geographical origin, which is normally reflected in the geographical variety of language spoken by that individual. As stated by Federici (2011: 8), characters “are made recognizable through the language that portrays some features of their identity”. Regarding the feasibility of transferring dialectal differences, Pérez-González (2014: 131) argues, scholars may be divided into two groups. The first group is formed by those scholars who believe that recreating dialectal variation in a different linguaculture is incompatible with the industry's emphasis on readability and standard language usage, whereas the second group consists of advocates of more creative approaches (e.g., a dialect-for-dialect strategy). Gambier (1994), within the first group, considers that readability explains why sociolinguistic variation and particular linguistic features which characterize film protagonists are often neutralized in subtitles, whereas Federici (2011), as a representative of the second group, maintains that it is advisable to undertake experimental approaches in translating dialectal features. In his opinion, “[t]he infinite combinatory possibilities of creatively rendering dialects with dialects, or sociolects with sociolects, allow translators to surprise and challenge readers and should be embraced not shied away from” (Federici 2011: 16).

Scholars' attention has also been addressed to identity representation in those communities which simultaneously belong to two different cultures and which, in this sense, are said to inhabit a *frontera*, using the Spanish term.<sup>2</sup> This sometimes conflicting identity is represented in the language used in texts written, for example, by Latino and Latina writers living in the United States. Their hybrid identity is

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<sup>2</sup> See in this respect, for instance, Joysmith (1996), Pascual Soler (1999), Godayol i Nogué (2000), López Ponz (2009), or Díaz-Pérez (2014).

reflected in a border tongue which is constantly changing from English to Spanish, in such a way that code-switching becomes one of their identity hallmarks. This identity forged between cultures, as argued in Díaz-Pérez (2014: 343), is mainly represented through language in the 'T' by means of code-switching, although other linguistic resources are also employed, such as the use of non-standard grammar and spelling, the presence of dialectalisms, or the resort to calques and other borrowings.

Among all the linguistic resources used in fictional orality, and particularly in filmic dialogue, to represent identity, I decided to focus on geographical dialects (section 3), gayspeak (section 4) and swearwords (section 5), because these are essential features of the language used in Almodóvar's films.

### 3. Geographical dialects

As stated by Alsina (2011: 138),

One of the features associated with spoken language which is typically found in fictive orality is linguistic variation, in other words, the use of sociolectal, dialectal and idiolectal – that is to say, non-standard – elements.

In a paper about social variation, Alsina (2011) recognizes that it is difficult to separate it from geographical dialects. Among the functions of non-standard elements (Alsina, 2011: 138; Cadera, 2011: 290) – both dialectal and sociolectal – in narrative dialogue, the following could be mentioned:

- to make dialogue sound real and spontaneous,
- to help to contextualize the narrative socially and geographically,
- to contribute to the depiction of characters,
- to help to support a given ideology.

Although both Alsina (2011) and Cadera (2011) refer to narrative dialogue in literary works, geographical and social dialects may be said to perform the same function in film dialogues. As mentioned above, one important function of geographical and social dialects is to help to depict and delineate the characters, but together with and related to this characterization function, these non-standard elements are also ideologically charged, as described by Alsina (2011: 138). In this sense, those characters who speak a non-standard and geographically-marked variety of Spanish in Almodóvar's films are normally common people who tend to be imbued with positive traits, such as solidarity or honesty. Agustina or La Agrado, the two characters illustrating the use of dialectal features below, may also serve to exemplify this ideology-supporting function.

*Volver*, as described by Almodóvar himself, is, among his films, that which is most characteristic of La Mancha, Almodóvar's homeland. In his own words,

To me, 'Volver' is a title that comprises so many ups and downs. I came back to comedy a bit more. I came back to the feminine universe, to La Mancha (there is no doubt that this is my more strict *manchega* movie, the language, the habits, the patios, the soberness of the façades, the paved streets). [...] And certainly I went back to my mother. Coming back to La Mancha is always coming back to my mother's womb.<sup>3</sup>

In *Volver* some of the characters' language presents certain features typical of the dialect of Spanish spoken in La Mancha. Among those dialectal features – some of which are shared by other geographical varieties of Spanish and some of which are difficult to separate from features of a social variety –, the following are represented in Agustina's speech in example 1:

- Use of the definite article before proper nouns (e.g. *la Paula*)
- Dialectal lexical terms (e.g. *mociquilla*)
- *-illa* diminutive suffix (e.g. *regularcilla*)
- Use of non-standard expressions (e.g. *No estoy buena; he venido a darle una vuelta*)

Example 1

Speaker	ST subtitles	TT subtitles
AGUSTINA	¿Esta es <b>la</b> Paula?/	Is this Paula?/
RAIMUNDA	¡Claro!/	Of course./
AGUSTINA	¡Pero si está hecha una	- She's all grown up!
RAIMUNDA	<b>mociquilla</b> !/ Dale un beso./	- Give her a kiss./
AGUSTINA	No lo puede ocultar, ha sacado	She's got your father's eyes./
RAIMUNDA	los mismos ojos de tu padre./	How are you?/
AGUSTINA	¿Cómo estás?/ Regular <b>cilla</b> ./	Not good./
SOLE	No <b>estoy buena</b> ./	Don't say that./
AGUSTINA	No digas eso./	I want to <b>give</b> my grave
	Que <b>he venido</b>	<b>the once-over</b> . /
	<b>a darle una vuelta</b> a mi tumba./	With this wind,
	Con este airazo	you can't keep it clean.
	no hay manera de tenerla limpia.	

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[http://www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/clubcineastas/almodovar/volverlapelicula/enpala bras02\\_eng.htm](http://www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/clubcineastas/almodovar/volverlapelicula/enpala bras02_eng.htm)

(*Volver* 00:01:54 --> 00:02:12)<sup>4</sup>

As regards the representation of these dialectal features, which are characteristic of a geographical variety that is so closely related to identity in the target language (TL) subtitles, the type of language is basically standard English with some occasional colloquialisms, such as *I want to give my grave the once-over*.

Another Almodovarian character that is depicted or characterized by the type of language she speaks, and particularly by dialectal features, is La Agrado, a transvestite from the Canary Islands in *Todo sobre mi madre*. The following two textual fragments may serve to illustrate La Agrado's speech:

#### Example 2

Speaker	ST subtitles	TT subtitles
AGRADO	Y una mañana, cuando volví del "Campo", <b>jarta'</b> de trabajar/ descubro que me había desvalij <b>ao'</b> toda la casa./ Relojes, joyas, revistas de los 70, donde yo me inspiro./ 300.000 pesetas./ Lo que más me duele es que se llevara/ una talla de la Virgen del Pino que mi madre me había regal <b>ao'</b> ./ ¡Que <b>pa'</b> qué coño la querrá, si no cree en <b>na'</b> !/ A no ser que esté met <b>ía'</b> en una secta satánica/ y la quiera <b>pa'</b> una ceremonia de ésas.	I came back from working the Field all night/ and she'd cleaned the place out./  Watches, jewels, '70s magazines that were my inspiration./ 300,000 pesetas./ What hurt most was/ she took a statue of the Virgin  that my mother gave me./ What for? She doesn't believe in anything./ Unless she's in a satanic sect  and wanted it for some ritual.

(*Todo sobre mi madre*: 00:24:21 --> 00:24:41)<sup>5</sup>

#### Example 3

Speaker	ST subtitles	TT subtitles
AGRADO	Si <b>os</b> quedáis/ yo prometo entretener <b>os</b> contando la historia de mi vida./	If you stay, I promise to entertain you with my life story./

<sup>4</sup> In all the examples the relevant elements appear in bold type. Emphasis is mine. Slashes (/) mark subtitle boundaries.

<sup>5</sup> All the dialectal features in this example are represented in the SL subtitles. The apostrophes also appear in the subtitles.

	<p>Adiós, lo siento, ¿eh?/  Si les aburro hagan  como que roncan. Así.../  Yo me cosco enseguida.  Y para nada herís mi sensibilidad,  ¿eh?/  De verdad/  [...]  ¡Miren qué cuerpo!/  ¡To' hecho a medida!/  Rasgao' de ojos, 80.000./  Nariz, 200.000.  Tiradas a la basura/  porque un año después  me la pusieron así de otro palizón./  Ya sé que me da  mucha personalidad,/  pero si llego a saberlo  no me la toco./  Continúo.  Tetas, dos,  porque no soy ningún monstruo./  70.000 cada una. Pero éstas  las tengo ya super-amortizadas.</p>	<p>Goodbye. I'm very sorry./  Well, if I bore you,  you can pretend to snore, like  this./ I'll get the idea, and you  certainly won't hurt my feelings./  Honestly.  [...]  Look at this body!  All made to measure./  Almond-shaped eyes, 80,000./  Nose, 200,000./  A waste of money. The next year  another   beating left it like this./   It gives me character,  but if I'd known/  I wouldn't have touched it./  I'll continue./  Tits, two, because I'm no  monster./   70,000 each, but I've more  than earned that back./</p>
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(*Todo sobre mi madre*: 01:13:37 --> 01:14:37)<sup>6</sup>

Among the phonetic dialectal features typical of the variety of Spanish spoken in the Canary Islands and represented in La Agrado's speech, the following can be highlighted:

- elision of intervocalic /d/: *desvalijao'*, *regalao'*, *metía'*, *to'* (as opposed to standard *desvalijado*, *regalado*, *metida*, *todo*);
- elision of intervocalic /r/: *pa'* (*para* in standard Spanish);
- aspiration of h: *jarta'* (*barta* in standard Spanish);
- aspiration of /s/ in implosive or syllable-final position: *amortisáh*; *si oh quedái***h** (*amortizadas*; *si os quedáis* in standard Spanish);
- seseo (pronunciation of /θ/ as /s/): *palisón*, *amortisáh*, *parese* (*palizón*, *amortizadas*, *parece* in standard Spanish);

<sup>6</sup> Aspiration of implosive *s*, *seseo*, and elision of final /θ/ and /ð/ are not represented in the SL subtitles. Therefore, although in the subtitles the viewer may read *os*, *quedáis*, *entreteneros*, *adiós*, *cosco*, *sensibilidad*, *verdad*, *nariz*, *tiradas*, *después*, *palizón*, *personalidad*, *tetas*, *dos*, *estas*, *las*, and *amortizadas*, what La Agrado actually pronounces is *oh*, *quedái***h**, *entreteneroh*, *adióh*, *cobco*, *sensibilidá*, *verdá*, *narí*, *tiráh*, *dehpueh*, *palisón*, *personalidá*, *tetab*, *doh*, *ebtab*, *lah*, and *amortisáh*.

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- elision of certain final consonants, such as /θ/ or /ð/: *narí*, *verdá* (*nariz*, *verdad* in standard Spanish).

Of these phonetic features, the first three are represented in the Spanish subtitles, whereas the other three are not. In the English subtitles, in turn, all the phonetic features represented in La Agrado's speech have been omitted, in such a way that the TL subtitles are written in standard spelling. The type of language spoken by La Agrado, which is used as a characterization device in the ST, has been standardized in the TT, which corresponds to the solution proposed by the first group of scholars which Pérez González (2014) referred to, as described above.

#### 4. The translation of gayspeak

As defined by Ranzato, *gayspeak* is the idiolect of a speech community, or “the modes and ways of homosexual communication” (Ranzato, 2012: 371). In spite of the fact that diversity within the homosexual community makes it a simplification to identify gayspeak with gays in general, some common characteristics of this idiolect in English are shared by gayspeak in Spanish as well and are reflected in Almodóvar's films, namely:

- Reversal of derogatory homosexual terms, such as *maricón* (Hayes, 1981/2006),
- Inversion of gender-specific terms, or girl talk (Harvey, 1998/2004, 2000a, 2002; Ranzato, 2012),
- Use of French (Harvey, 1998/2004, 2000a; Ranzato, 2012),
- Presence of specific lexical terms and expressions (Hayes, 1981/2006; Ranzato, 2012).

##### 4.1. *Reversal of derogatory terms*

According to Hayes (1981/2006: 72), “[a]s the feminist and black movements have worked out a new set of values for the terms *woman* and *black*, the task of value redefinition occupies a central position in gay liberation theory”. Thus, traditionally insulting terms used to address and to refer to gay men, such as *fag* or *faggot*, acquire new affirmative meanings within the gay community. In this connection, Stanley (1974/2006) states that after 1969, when the gays started marching, terms which had been pejorative became from that moment politically charged and began to be used to affirm the new identity of gays. This reversal of derogatory terms occurred not only in American (and British) English, but also in Peninsular Spanish, in which the term *maricón*, originally a derogatory term, is very



frequently used as a vocative indicating membership to the same in-group. As explained by Martín (2016),

When two gays call each other *maricón*, we are using what is called a “linguistic mark”: an expression that denotes a non-explicit reality, but which is understood by both speakers. It is, in this case, a mark of complicity: that which exists between two men who share the great lines of their biographies and who can understand each other much better than other men. It is also a word we use to place ourselves above its insulting use, to express we are no longer hurt by words, but by intentions. *Maricón* is a term we use frequently and with affection.

This trait is reflected in several Almodovarian films, such as *Los amantes pasajeros* and *La mala educación*, as illustrated by examples 4 to 6. Whereas in two of the cases it has been translated as *bitch* (in example 4) and as *fag* (in one of its occurrences in example 5), in the other two cases the term has been omitted in the TT.

#### Example 4

Speaker	ST subtitles	TT subtitles
JOSERRA FAJAS JOSERRA	Está hirviendo./ ¿Tanto? ¿Tú crees? ¡ <b>Maricón</b> , el Novio, no! ¡El agua!	Boiling over. Really? That much? <b>Bitch</b> , not the Groom! The water!

(*Los amantes pasajeros* 00:13:11 --> 00:13:17)

#### Example 5

Speaker	ST subtitles	TT subtitles
PACA/PAQUITO  ZAHARA/ÁNGEL PACA/PAQUITO	¡Ay, <b>maricón</b> ! Saca un poquito, venga./ ¿Aquí?/ Aquí, pues claro que sí./ Las calles no están ni puestas. Estamos solitas./ ¡Ay, <b>maricón</b> !/ Vamos.	C'mon, let's have some!/  -Here? -Of course!/ They haven't rolled out the streets yet./ Oh, <b>fag</b> !/ Come on.

(*La mala educación* 00:18:23 --> 00:18:33)

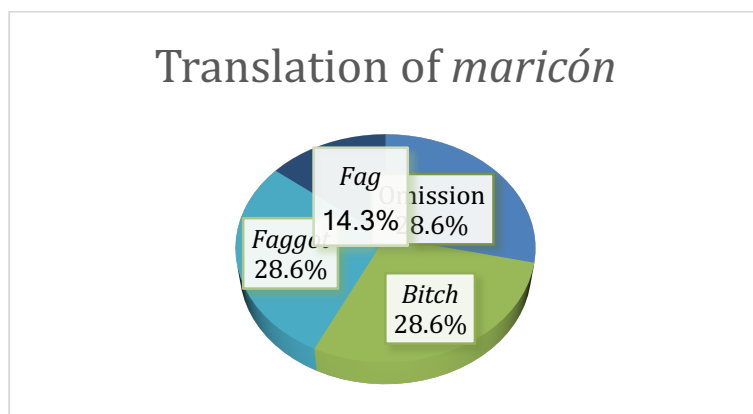
#### Example 6

Speaker	ST subtitles	TT subtitles
JOSERRA	Ha entrado una loca que dice que es vidente/	A crazy woman came in and said she's a psychic./

FAJAS JOSERRA	y se ha conectado al más allá a/ través de los paquetes de Alex y Benito/ y dice que durante este viaje va a ocurrir algo muy gordo/ que nos afectará a todos./ ¡Eso es lo mío!/ ¡ <b>Maricón</b> , algo muy gordo/ que nos afectará a todos!	Then she contacted the beyond through Alex and Benito's crotches/ and she says that something very big will happen on this trip/ - and affect all of us.  - She was talking about me./ Something very big that'll affect all of us.
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(*Los amantes pasajeros* 00:12:48 --> 00:13:04)

The term *maricón*, whose value has been reversed to express solidarity and a sense of belonging to the same group, has been translated in different ways, as illustrated by the previous examples (See Graph 1 below). Thus, in 28.6% of the cases it was rendered as *bitch*.<sup>7</sup> As David Toussaint says in his blog on *The Huffington Post*, *bitch* “is a word that gay men can use ad nauseam with their male friends and their close girlfriends, with no objection”. The same percentage is reached by *faggot* and by the omission of the term from the subtitles. Finally, *maricón* has been translated as *fag* in 14.3% of its occurrences.



Graph 1. Translation of *maricón* in Almodóvar's films.

<sup>7</sup>[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-toussaint/the-8-things-gay-men-need-to-say-less-often\\_b\\_5628296.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-toussaint/the-8-things-gay-men-need-to-say-less-often_b_5628296.html).

Apart from highlighting the high frequency of *bitch* as an in-group vocative, the author of this blog also criticises this use of this term, as it may be denigratory to women.

4.2. *Girl talk*

The inversion of gender-specific terms, also referred to as “girl-talk”, has been identified as one of the most characteristic traits of gayspeak (Legman, 1941/2006; Crew, 1978/2006; Harvey, 1998/2004; etc.). According to Crew (1978: 60), “[f]rom one gay male perspective, cross-gender identification is a gesture of defiance of the hetero culture which defines all males as feminine who do not want sexual intercourse with women”. Crew (1978: 60) also establishes that a “very recurrent use of cross-gender reference is the establishing of supportive bonds of non-genital friendship”, as happens with the use of *chicas* in example 7, term deleted from the English TT.

All the female-marked terms appearing in bold in the ST in examples 7 to 12 either have been deleted in the English subtitles or have been translated by means of terms which are not female-marked, with the only two exceptions of *marrana* and *ésta*, which have been respectively translated as *slut* and *madame*. *Slut* is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “[a] woman of dirty, slovenly, or untidy habits or appearance; a foul slattern”<sup>8</sup>, so in this case the use of a term, which is in general use reserved to women, has been maintained in the TT.

## Example 7

Speaker	ST subtitles	TT subtitles
JOSERRA	<b>Chicas</b> , hacemos un “escote” y se las pagamos./	- We’ll all chip in and pay him.
ULLOA	Esto no se paga con dinero.	- Money couldn’t pay for this./
JOSERRA	¡Pero se las pagamos, <b>mezquina</b> !	- But we’ll still pay him, <b>miser</b> !

(*Los amantes pasajeros* 00:44:26 --> 00:44:32)

## Example 8

Speaker	ST subtitles	TT subtitles
FAJAS	¡Estás hablando con un apóstata, que lo sepas!./	You’re talking to an heretic, so there./
JOSERRA	Pues a mí me gustaba tener <b>una creyente</b> en la tripulación.	I like having <b>a believer</b> in the crew.

(*Los amantes pasajeros* 01:03:38 --> 01:03:43)

<sup>8</sup> [www.oed.com/view/Entry/182346?rskey=pzOblr&result=1&isAdvanced=false#id](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/182346?rskey=pzOblr&result=1&isAdvanced=false#id)

## Example 9

Speaker	ST subtitles	TT subtitles
JOSEERRA	<b>Vosotras</b> , como sois amorales, no tenéis ningún problema.	Of course! <b>You</b> 're amoral, you've got no problem.

(*Los amantes pasajeros* 00:44:47 --> 00:44:50)

## Example 10

Speaker	ST subtitles	TT subtitles
FAJAS	Hazte así, que te chorrea algo./ ¡Lefa! ¡Ya sé lo que te ha pasado!/ <b>¡Cochina, marrana!</b>	- Do this./ Cum! I know what happened. <b>Pig! Slut!</b>

(*Los amantes pasajeros* 01:03:02 --> 01:03:11)

## Example 11

Speaker	ST subtitles	TT subtitles
JOSEERRA	¿Tú a mí no tienes que decir nada, Alex Acero?/	- Have you nothing to tell me?
ALEX	¿De qué?	- Me?/ - About what?
JOSEERRA	¡De <b>ésta</b> !/ A mí no me hables en femenino,	- About <b>madame</b> !/ - I'm not female.
BENITO	¿vale?	- Shut up, experimental <b>cock</b>
JOSEERRA	¡Tú cállate, <b>mamadora</b> experimental!	<b>sucker!</b>

(*Los amantes pasajeros* 00:17:51 --> 00:17:58)

## Example 12

Speaker	ST subtitles	TT subtitles
ZAHARA/ÁNGEL	Es el Padre Manolo./ ¡Uy, qué mayor está!	That's Fr. Manolo./ <b>-He</b> looks so old!
PACA/PAQUITO	Es que no es <b>una niña</b> ./	-Well, he's no chicken./
ZAHARA/ÁNGEL	Claro.	I guess.

(*La mala educación* 00:19:26 --> 00:19:31)

Girl talk, so frequent in the ST gayspeak, is much less frequent in the English subtitles. The fact that English practically has no grammatical gender partly accounts for this finding. In addition, there are examples in which a female-marked term is used to refer to a third person who is not involved in the conversation – as in example 12 – and whose TT version not only lacks a female-marked term, but,

on the contrary, it uses the masculine third person singular pronoun to refer to that person. Any cross-gender reference, therefore, completely disappears from the English subtitles in this case. The occasional use of *bitch* as an in-group vocative compensates for the very limited use of female-marked terms to translate those terms presenting gender inversion.

#### 4.3. Use of French

The frequent use of French has been highlighted more than once (Harvey, 1998/2004, 2000a, 2002; Ranzato, 2012) as one of the defining features of English gayspeak or camp talk. As Harvey (1998/2004: 407) points out, the use of French “accomplishes a humorous nod to sophistication and cosmopolitanism, French language and culture being saturated for the Anglo-Saxon world with the qualities of style and urbanity”. In the Spanish ST in example 13, a French sentence (*je suis désolé*) is also used as a feature of gayspeak, which is also reflected in the TT. In addition, the utterance of this French sentence is used as a humorous device and it is taken advantage of to introduce a pun on *francés*, which is also reproduced in the TT.

Regarding the use of French as a defining characteristic of English gayspeak, the use of *madame* in the English subtitles in example 11 above may be considered as an attempt at compensation for all those instances in which gayspeak features have disappeared from the TT.

#### Example 13

Speaker	ST subtitles	TT subtitles
JOSEERRA	Como dicen los franceses, “ <b>je suis désolé</b> ”./ ¿No sé si me...? ¿Eh? ¿Si me entiendes?/ Hablando de los de franceses. Mejor dicho, ¡del francés!	As the French say, <b>Je suis désolé</b> .  I don’t know.../ if you understand me./ Speaking of the French, or rather... “French culture”!

(*Los amantes pasajeros* 00:17:42 --> 00:17:51)

#### 4.4. Specific lexicon

According to Hayes (1981/2006: 71), “[a]s we would expect from the process of categorization, the richest features of social Gayspeak are found in the lexicon”. In examples 14 and 15, the ST contains a lexical term and a phrase which are specific to the gay community, namely *cuartos oscuros* and *sacar del armario*. These homosexuality-related terms correspond to terms also belonging to the English lexicon of homosexuality in the subtitles, namely *dark rooms* and *to be outed*.

## Example 14

Speaker	ST subtitles	TT subtitles
FAJAS	¿Yo? Yo no puedo. Yo tengo que rezar./	Me? I can't. I have to pray./
ULLOA	- Para lo que te ha servido...	- It hasn't helped you much.
FAJAS	- ¡A mí, de mucho!/ - ¡Y a ti también!	- It's helped me a lot, and you too./
ULLOA	- ¿A mí de qué?/	
FAJAS	Qué hubiera sido de tu vida si yo no hubiera pedido por ti.../	Me? How?/ Where would you be now without my prayers?/
ULLOA	¿Ah, sí? ¿Y qué pedías?/	What did you pray for?/
FAJAS	Pues que dejaras las drogas, el alcohol y los <b>cuartos oscuros</b> ./	That you'd give up drink, drugs and <b>dark rooms</b> . That's what./
ULLOA	¡Anda que las únicas alegrías que tiene la vida...!/ ¡Ya podías haber pedido que encontrara un buen marido!/ Si eso también, pero, hija mía, con tu carácter me lo pones muy difícil.	The only pleasures in life!/  Why not pray for a husband for me?/  I did, but with your temper it isn't easy.

(*Los amantes pasajeros* 00:07:42 --> 00:08:08)

## Example 15

Speaker	ST subtitles	TT subtitles
JOSEERRA	Es que el comandante Alex Acero está casado y tiene dos niños./ Uno de once y otro de trece y es una edad muy complicada,/ para que <b>le saquen</b> al padre <b>del</b> <b>armario</b> y... y... ¿Me entienden?	Captain Alex Acero is married with two children,/ aged 11 and 13. Very difficult ages,/ as you can understand, for their father <b>to be outed</b> .

(*Los amantes pasajeros* 00:15:53 --> 00:16:03)

## 5. The translation of swearwords

In an attempt to reflect the way people speak, the language used in Almodóvar's films stands out for containing a considerable amount of swearwords and taboo words. Apart from being used as a characterization method, the main function of these swearwords is to express emotions, as stated by Jay and Janschewitz (2008: 268). As Ghassempur (2011: 55) states, swearing may also be used to reinforce social bonds, a phenomenon referred to as "social swearing" by Crystal (1995: 173), who asserts that it is the commonest swearing pattern, which may mark social solidarity. According to Wajnryb (2005), swearing can be classified into three categories: catharsis, aggression and social connection.

The discourse phenomenon of swearing, Greenall (2011: 45) argues, provides important information about people, characters, and settings. In other words, as Greenall states following Mao (1996), swearing generates social implicature, which indicates that "it gives valuable hints regarding aspects of individuality and class membership, information which is crucial in understanding where someone comes from". As stated by Díaz Cintas (2001) and Santamaría Ciorda (2016), the use of swearing by female characters in Almodóvar's films responds to the film-maker's interest in challenging certain traditional male-chauvinistic conceptions related to women. Díaz Cintas (2001: 54) highlights in this sense that "Almodóvar's films rely heavily on women characters and quite particularly on their linguistic freedom and creativity". Thus, women's use of politically incorrect language is paramount to Almodóvar's characterizations and at the same time may be understood as a reflection of women's fight for liberation from the conventions and oppressions of a male-chauvinistic and puritan society.

As put forward more than once (Díaz Cintas, 2001; Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2014; Greenall, 2011; Han and Wang, 2014; Santamaría Ciorda, 2016), swearing and taboo words tend to be toned down in interlanguage subtitling due to several reasons. One of the hypothesis from which Díaz Cintas departs in his study on the translation of taboo terms and expressions in *La flor de mi secreto* is "that a Spanish film containing sexually explicit terms might be pruned of (some of) them in order to make it more palatable to British moral sensibilities" (Díaz Cintas, 2001: 53.) According to Díaz Cintas (2001: 51), the context where reading takes place might have an effect on the translation of swearwords, since even though it is always an individual act, reading on one's own, in private, is quite different from reading and watching a film within a gregarious group.

*Joder* and *coño* are two of the most frequent swearwords in Spanish, and it is on these two swearwords that this study has focused. In the *Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual* (CREA) frequency list, the only swearword which precedes *coño* and *joder* is the much softer *mierda*.<sup>9</sup> Should it be for cross-cultural differences, for time

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<sup>9</sup> The CREA frequency list can be found at <http://corpus.rae.es/lfrecuencias.html>. *Coño* occupies the 8379th position, whereas *joder* occupies the 10502th position.

and space constraints in subtitling, for the change of mode from spoken to written language, or for the fact that a film is not normally watched in private, the fact is that the most frequent solution has been the omission of the swearwords analysed (See Graph 2 and Graph 3). Omission reached a percentage of 42.4% in the case of *joder* and 51.7% in the case of *coño*. In the cases in which these two swearwords are translated, there is a diversity of TT lexical items used as counterparts. Thus, *joder* is translated by means of seven different swearwords, whereas *coño* has eight different equivalents in the English subtitles. The swearword most frequently used to translate *joder* in our corpus is its direct English counterpart, *fuck*, described in Andersson and Trudgill (1990: 60) as “one of the most interesting and colourful words in the English language today”. According to Andersson and Trudgill (1990), this swearword may be used to describe many different emotional states. This versatility is also reflected in the different grammatical functions this swearword may fulfil as well as in its morphological flexibility. Moreover, as indicated for instance by Jay (2009: 156), *fuck* – together with its morphological variants – is the commonest swearword in English. Its frequency of use, added to the fact that *coño* has no direct counterpart in English as an expletive, may explain why, in those cases in which *coño* is translated, its most frequent TT equivalent is *the fuck*.

According to the explanation offered by the *Cambridge Dictionary* online, “[i]n English, swearing which involves ‘religious’ taboo expressions is likely to be weaker than swearing that involves ‘parts of the body’ taboo expressions”<sup>10</sup>. In this sense, it could be said that when *joder* is translated as *God* or *Christ*, or when *coño* is translated as *for Christ’s sake*, *dammit* or *the hell*, the ST swearwords have been toned down. In other words, they have been replaced by weaker swearwords in the TT. This softening solution has also been applied in the translation of *joder* as *shit*, or in the translation of *coño* as *shit* or *holy shit*. In this sense, *shit* is described in Ofcom (2005: 82; cited in Santamaría Ciorda, 2016: 296)<sup>11</sup> as “mild, toilet word, everyday language, not really offensive (though could be if used about a child/young person)”. In the same report (Ofcom 2005: 84; cited in Santamaría Ciorda, 2016: 296), *fuck* is defined as “[s]trongly disliked by many, very offensive most of time, but occasional toe-stubbing use appears tolerated”. All in all, the translation of *joder* involves some degree of sanitation in 60.5% of the cases, whereas in the case of *coño* this percentage rises to 70.9%. As mentioned above, when used as an interjection, *coño* lacks a direct counterpart in English. This fact, together with the

<sup>10</sup> <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/grammar/british-grammar/swearing-and-taboo-expressions>

<sup>11</sup> *Ofcom* stands for the *Office of Communications* – the UK regulatory and competition authority for the broadcasting, telecommunications and postal industries – which commissioned research from the Fuse Group about viewers’ attitudes regarding offensive language in broadcasting.



extremely high degree of offensiveness of the dictionary equivalent of *coño*,<sup>12</sup> may explain the difference in the solutions adopted to translate the two swearwords focused on in this paper. The images included below portray some of the translations of the two swearwords analysed.

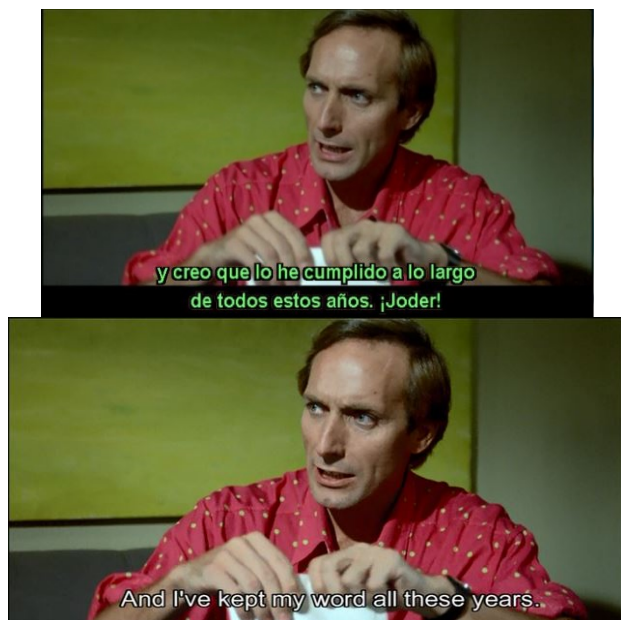


Image 1. Translation of *joder*: omission. (*La ley del deseo* 00:49:18)

<sup>12</sup> See in this respect The Slang Online Dictionary (<http://onlineslangdictionary.com/meaning-definition-of/cunt>), according to which *cunt* “is widely considered to be one of the most offensive words in the English language. It is referred to as the ‘c’ word”.



Image 2. Translation of *joder: fuck*. (*Hable con ella* 01:23:15)



Image 3. Translation of *joder: shit*. (*Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* 00:32:59)



Image 4. Translation of *coño*: omission. (*Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* 01:16:01)



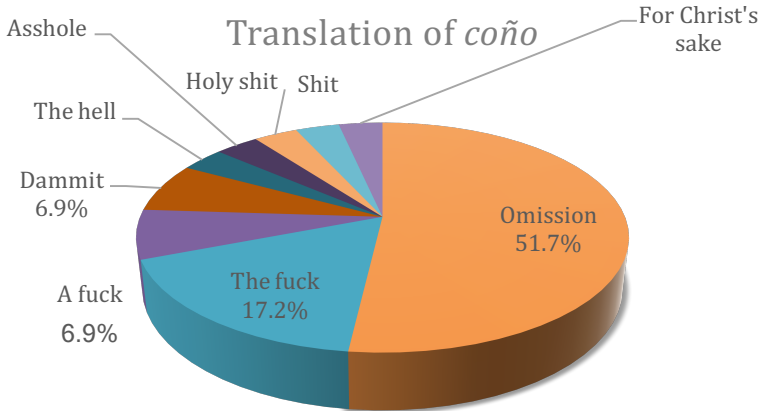
Image 5. Translation of *coño*: *the fuck*. (*Kika* 00:26:29)



Image 6. Translation of *coño*: *dammit*. (*Todo sobre mi madre* 01:18:01)



Graph 2. Translation of *joder* in Almodóvar's films.



Graph 3. Translation of *coño* in Almodóvar's films.

In spite of what has been said above regarding the translation of swearwords, it is also true that some occasional examples have been found in which a swearword is introduced in the TT corresponding to source textual fragments which contained no swearword at all. Aware of all the instances in which ST swearwords have been sanitized in the TT, translators may have decided to compensate for all those cases by introducing swearwords at some other points in the text. Examples 16 to 18

illustrate this type of compensation. Thus, in example 16, *mala*, used here as an intensifier, is translated as a swearword also functioning as an intensifier, *fucking*. Likewise, the intensifier *gran* in example 17 is also rendered as *fucking* in the TT<sup>13</sup>. In example 18, the adjective *imposible* is not intensified in the ST, whereas in the ST *fucking* is also introduced to precede *imposible*. In example 19, *me vais a tocar el fandango* – a quite vulgar but also euphemistic expression – is translated into English as *are getting on my fucking nerves*, an expression containing a much stronger swearword.

## Example 16

Speaker	ST subtitles	TT subtitles
AGRADO	Dieciocho años sin decir ni mú, ni una carta, ni una mala llamada.	18 years, not a word, not a letter, not a <b>fucking</b> call.

(*Todo sobre mi madre*: 00:23:00 --> 00:23:03)

## Example 17

Speaker	ST subtitles	TT subtitles
ROSA MANUELA	Fue tu paisana, Lola./ ¡Lola! ¡Lola!/ ¡Hija de la <b>gran</b> puta!	It was your compatriot Lola.  That lousy <b>fucking</b> bitch!

(*Todo sobre mi madre*: 00:41:31 --> 00:41:39)

## Example 18

Speaker	ST subtitles	TT subtitles
NINA	Eres igualita que Eva Harrington/ y te aprendiste el texto de memoria a propósito./ ¡Es imposible aprendérselo sólo oyéndolo por los altavoces!	Just like Eve Harrington.  You learned the text on purpose./  It's <b>fucking</b> impossible to learn it over the loudspeakers!

(*Todo sobre mi madre*: 00:54:38 --> 00:54:44)

## Example 19

Speaker	ST subtitles	TT subtitles
RAIMUNDA	Mira, me vais a tocar el fandango tú y tu tía, las dos.	You and your aunt are getting on my <b>fucking</b> nerves!

(*Volver*: 01:24:56 --> 01:24:59)

<sup>13</sup> For the translation of insults from a relevance-theoretic perspective, see Mateo and Yus (2000).

## 6. Concluding remarks

Concerning the representation of language and identity in the English subtitles of Almodóvar's films, it can be asserted that, in general terms, the ST features analysed in this paper are not represented at the same level in the TT. Some differences may be found, however, across the different features which have been studied. Thus, geographical varieties of the SL are not represented in the English subtitles at all. At most, some occasional colloquialisms are introduced. The general tendency, therefore, implies a standardisation of the dialectal features present in the ST. Consequently, a great deal of the information about the characters whose speech presents dialectal features is not available to the TT monolingual viewer.

Gayspeak is represented in the ST by the reversal of derogatory terms – more specifically by the reversal of the originally derogatory and insulting *maricón* –, cross-gender reference or girl talk, a specific homosexuality-related lexicon, and an occasional use of French. Only the latter two achieve an equivalent level of representation in the TT as compared to that of the ST, whereas the reversal of derogatory terms and girl talk are much less common in the English subtitles than in the ST. The representation of gay identity through language, hence, is much less evident in the TT than in the ST, which has an obvious effect on characterization as well.

Regarding swearwords, such as *joder* and *coño*, the most frequent translation solution is omission. Moreover, when these words are translated, the ST swearwords are rendered by means of different swearwords and expressions in English and on some occasions they are replaced by weaker swearwords in the TL. A tendency to sanitation, then, can be perceived in the English subtitles of Almodóvar's films. A multiplicity of reasons might be adduced to explain this finding. Thus, one of them is related to the change from oral to written language. The fact that films are normally viewed in public and the time and space restrictions in subtitling may also account for the less significant presence of swearwords in the English TT. In spite of this general tendency to sanitation, some differences have been found regarding the translation of the two swearwords analysed. Thus, for instance, although in both cases the most frequent solution has been omission, the percentage of use of this solution has been higher in the case of *coño* (51.7%) than in the case of *fuck* (42.2%). Cross-cultural differences may account for this finding. Thus, whereas *joder* used as an expletive has a direct counterpart in English, this is not the case with *coño*. In addition, the English equivalent of *coño* offered by bilingual dictionaries is considered as a really offensive word. As mentioned for the translation of geographical dialects and for gayspeak, this general tendency to the sanitation of swearwords in the English subtitles may have consequences for the way in which monolingual English viewers perceive some characters in Almodóvar's films. It is also true, though, that some occasional cases of compensation have been found, so that some swearwords introduced in the TT correspond to non-swearing ST fragments.

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