

Product placement and screen translation.

Transferring references to U.S. brands unknown to other cultural contexts

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Abstract

Spoken references to brands are common in American films and sitcoms, allegedly to make dialogues more realistic, but also favored by the fact that major studios have become conglomerate companies which try to maximize profits with indirect advertising. These legal formalities are rarely mentioned in audiovisual translation studies, and this paper will analyze how product placement of American food and beverage brands still trans-nationally unknown are dealt with by Spanish dubbing translators, since they might require some degree of linguistic manipulation to provide equivalent implicatures (Grice, 1975). Following Franco Aixelá's (1996) taxonomy of translation of culture specific items, absolute universalization is the most widespread strategy, but the erasure of source text dialogues in dubbed productions allows for more daring approaches to replace opaque brands.

Keywords: screen translation; dubbing; culture specific items; product placement; advertising; implicatures; film; television

1. Introduction

Brand names in films and television sitcoms may involve big business for American major studios nowadays, since, if a commercial agreement is reached in the source context, commonly known as product placement, it implies a commitment to a the visual and/or spoken presence of a brand on screen in exchange for a payment that will contribute to the funding of the production. And even if the inclusion of a commercial product is not legally binding, and is considered solely for narrative purposes, producers still generally ask for clearance from the companies involved in order to avoid legal trouble.

Product placement is not so widespread in other cultural contexts, whose national film industries do not resort to this kind of indirect funding.: “With respect to product placement in Europe, the EU as a whole and individual

European countries have enacted much stricter limitations compared with those in the USA” (Lowrey *et al.*, 2005: 117). When American films are exported to these countries, the visual or spoken inclusion of brands might produce an alienating effect due to the perceived exposure to unwanted advertising by foreign audiences customarily protected from it¹. Concerning audiovisual translation, the alienating effect of spoken product placement would be heightened by the fact that, according to Russell (2002: 308): “As compared to visual stimulation, auditory information is often characterized by its greater intrusiveness and intrinsic alerting properties”. And if the brands are unknown to these target cultures, some degree of linguistic manipulation can be expected on behalf of the screen translator in order to avoid further estrangement, to contribute to the decoding of the opaque term or to merely maintain the cohesion of the dialogue in the target language.

A greater liberty is taken by dubbing translators, as compared to subtitlers, since the disappearance of the *gossiping effect* (Törnqvist, 1995), that is, the echo of the brand name in the original soundtrack, allows for a wider range of options. One is the use of alternative brands in the target text, a strategy not so commonly considered by the subtitler, since audiences might expect to hear in the original dialogue the brands printed in the subtitle, even if they did not understand a word of the source language. However, this dubbing option might interfere with economic agreements reached in the source context, so the chosen solution for translators would ideally be a term that transfers the implicatures without trespassing any legal boundaries. We shall see in the following pages how this issue is dealt with in the professional practice of translation for dubbing in Spain. In the corpus of analysis used for this article, we will focus exclusively on brand names of food and beverages, since they are the typology of products which most have contributed to pivotal moments in the blending of advertising and film production. I have brought together a glossary of 128 brand names from 46 American films and sitcom episodes produced between 1985 and 2012 and dubbed into Spanish for commercial distribution in Spain, and will be analyzing throughout this article some representative examples of the most widely used translation strategies, and also some very highly revealing exceptions.

¹ The European Audiovisual Media Services Directive published on 11 December 2007 permitted product placement in cinematographic works, but established in Article 3g (3) that viewers had to be informed of its existence at the beginning and the end of the audiovisual production. Ginosar and Levi-Faur (2010: 9) emphasise: “The new Directive allows EU member states to set stricter rules, which means that the long list of restrictions included in the AVMSD creates only minimum standards, and member states may preserve the policy of total prohibition of product placement.” This is not currently happening with imported U.S. productions.

2. Product placement

The intentional presence of brand names can be tracked down to the very beginning of film history. In *Laveuses* (Louis Lumière, 1896), two cases of the Lever soap *Sunlight* are so blatantly located in the foreground while three women are doing their washing in a washtub that it could be considered the first product placement ever (Newell *et al.*, 2006).

For the purposes of this article, it is obviously the advent of sound which makes this practice more relevant, and will also allow us to narrow our scope to the food and drink industry as the most active in this field. Reportedly, it was in 1933 when Coca-Cola signed a half-a-million dollar contract with MGM for including their beverage visually and verbally in film productions (Eckert, 1978). The first documented case of a spoken reference to this brand in an American film, *Imitation of Life* (John M. Stahl, 1934), did not pose a problem for its translation for dubbing in Spain when it was released the following year, since the popular drink had started being commercialized there in 1926.

However, at least an earlier example of a spoken reference to a brand name can be found, in this case of a ring-shaped hard candy, in the film *Horse Feathers* (Norman Z. McLeod, 1932), a comedy feature of the popular Marx Brothers. In a canoe scene, Groucho Marx and his romantic interest try to embrace, which results in her falling into the lake. She then screams (46'42"): "Throw me the life-saver! The life-saver!" and he unwraps a piece of *Life Saver* candy and throws it at her. The polysemic use of a brand name with a denotative meaning (in this case, candy and also a life preserver stored in boats) is the humorous resource applied. As far as the Spanish target cultural context is concerned, the product was unknown, and the translation for dubbing simply focused on the denotative meaning ("¡Tíreme un *salvavidas!* ¡Un *salvavidas!*"), therefore omitting the cultural reference and the polysemy, which significantly reduces the coherence of the dubbed dialogue.

An easily remembered example of the period was Popeye's contemporary spinach consumption², which made a huge impact on children's healthy diets; even though no commercial brand was related to it, it still had a very positive effect in the food industry. Many other food and drink product placements would be either subtly or blatantly present in cinema and television for the following decades, from *Budweiser* [*A Slight Case of Murder* (Lloyd Bacon, 1938)] to *McDonald's* [*Black Belt Jones* (Robert Clouse, 1974)].

But in 1982 a commercial situation concerning a very popular film became a milestone that changed the relationship between the audiovisual industry and advertising. Universal Pictures and Amblin Entertainment were looking for copyright clearance to use candy in the film *E.T. the Extraterrestrial* (Steven Spielberg, 1982). Mars Company turned down the request to use their *M&M's* for

² Paramount Pictures started producing cartoon shorts of *Popeye the Sailor* in 1933 (Dave Fleischer).

unspecified reasons, and Hershey supplied *Reese's Pieces* without any money being exchanged, though the chocolate company did launch a million-dollar advertising campaign to spread the word that E.T. was eating *Reese's Pieces* (Segrave, 2004). As a result, their sales reportedly rose 65% within one month of the release of the film in the U.S. (Nitins, 2006), and two months later over 800 movie theatres that had never sold *Reese's Pieces* in their premises were placing orders because of requests from spectators. In this case, there was no spoken reference to the product in the film, only its visual presence, so Spanish dubbing translators did not have to struggle with yet another brand unknown to the target context.

Since then, product placement has been working the other way round from the pattern established in the 1930s. Hollywood studios set up specific units to start offering deals to manufacturers in order to place their products on yet-to-be-made films and sitcoms. In this way, they could fund a substantial amount of the production budget, and film, television and advertising companies have not looked back since. We shall now see how this practice has affected the work of audiovisual translators.

3. Translation strategies for culture-specific items

“Foreignization” and “domestication” (Venuti, 1998) as generalized translation strategies have been the two terms most commonly used to refer to archetypically opposed tendencies in academic literature. In the field of translation for dubbing, the image sets the audience in a “foreignised” location, whereas the dialogue in the target language allows for a spoken “domestication” in order to grant coherence to an audiovisual narrative that might not be grasped if spoken *culturemes* (Nord, 1997) are not suitably decoded by the new target audience.

As far as the field of analysis of this paper is concerned, the film industry of the U.S.A. is so overwhelmingly powerful in the Western world that its standardized narrative might be even more easily recognizable for many foreign audiences than their own national audiovisual production. And concerning American food and beverage brands, some of them have become so ingrained commercially worldwide that younger generations might not even perceive them as foreign, as they find them so substantial to their existential routine. This could actually be the reason why, when brands unknown to Spanish audiences are mentioned in American films, there is a greater tendency to erase the ‘foreignization’ by means of translation strategies, and adapt the lexical element so that it can admit the same easiness of decoding as other better known products. Therefore, Spanish dubbing translators are willing to give a helping hand in those cases where the mere repetition of the opaque brand may produce a semiotic noise (Jakobson, 1961), i.e. the perception of a translation loss, in the dialogues.

I will now pick out from the seminal catalogue of translation strategies for culture specific items developed by Franco Aixelá (1996), the ones which are customarily applied by Spanish dubbing translators in these cases. They are:

- a. Intratextual gloss: In order to solve an ambiguity, the brand name is preceded by a hyperonym that clarifies the typology of the product (*Budweiser* becomes *cerveza Budweiser*, that is, ‘Budweiser beer’).
- b. Limited universalization: The brand name is replaced by another brand name from the same typology of products, which also belongs to the source cultural context but might be more familiar for the target context (a fast-food franchise such as *White Castle*, unknown for to the target context, would become *McDonald’s*).
- c. Absolute universalization: The brand name is replaced by a hyperonym, and all cultural nuances are erased (using *cerveza*, ‘beer’, instead of *Budweiser* in the target text).
- d. Naturalization: The brand name from the source text is replaced by a brand name that belongs to the target cultural context. It is hardly used nowadays, but the television sitcom *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* (1990-96) was a sensation at the time in Spain because of its tendency to replace American culture specific items with Spanish ones). For instance, in the first episode of season 5 (6’35”), the reference to international pop star Janet Jackson was replaced by one to Spanish rock singer Ramoncín.
- e. Autonomous creation: The use of an ad-hoc coinage that refers to a brand name in the target text which is non-existent in the source text. For instance, in the dubbed Spanish version of the sixth episode of season 1 of *How I Met your Mother* (2005-2014) we can find *Bucanero King* (8’30”), that is, ‘Buccaneer King’, a paronymic reference to *Burger King*, not present in the source text, which produced a suitable humorous effect in the target text.

When dealing with unknown brands, the safest and most widespread choice is absolute universalization, that is, the inclusion of a hyperonym as a replacement, since keeping the brand name untouched may disrupt the coherence of the target text, and using other brand names may involve legal issues. At the other end of the scale, there is a thin line between relative universalization and autonomous creation, since the implicatures supplied by a brand name in the source text unknown to the target context could be conveyed by another product not directly related to it. As well as this, ad-hoc polysemies or paronyms prove to be more effective from an illocutionary perspective than a straightforward hyperonym. According to Gould *et al.* (2000: 42): “Although many American movies are widely exported, their product placements usually are not culturally adapted. Therefore, the result is generally either standardization or nothing”. Nothing would not be a common option for dubbing translators in Spain.

Actually, screen translators give the impression of being free to manipulate brand names in order to meet their ideal target of a coherent dialogue, and we shall be seeing in the following pages some examples of the application of this variety of strategies. However, with so many legal issues at stake, it is remarkable that, sometimes, commercially doubtful translation options have been taken in the Spanish context with no apparent concern from all the parties involved. The interdisciplinary approach proposed by Chaume (2004) concerning audiovisual translation and film studies could, therefore, consider including law as well.

From a translation perspective, as we shall see, most examples prove the high standards of dubbing professionals in Spain. However, self-restraint may eventually become the norm if subliminal or blatant advertising keeps on taking over American audiovisual productions, and film distributors, multinational companies, or European government agencies have a closer commercial look at the resulting dubbed movies and sitcoms.

4. Product placement nowadays

Two years after *E.T. The Extraterrestrial* unexpectedly shook film and advertising history, its producers, Amblin Entertainment and Universal, were looking for products that had changed their appearance between 1955 and 1985 for *Back to the Future* (Robert Zemeckis, 1985), a full feature film in which the main character, Marty McFly (Michael J. Fox) travelled to the past and found life so different. They landed a lucrative deal with PepsiCo, whose main beverage container had gone through very noticeable changes, which was not the case of their rivals, Coca-Cola, whose bottle had kept the same design over that period. However, there was a serious commercial drawback. By the time the legal agreement was sealed with PepsiCo, the script had almost reached a final draft, and there was a polysemic joke involving a brand name from the Coca-Cola company which Zemeckis refused to withdraw. When McFly walked into a 1950s bar, the bar tender asked (36'45''):

-Are you going to order, kid?

-Give me a *Tab*.

-I can't give you a tab unless you order something.

Tab is a diet cola soft drink launched by Coca-Cola in 1962, seven years after the scene is set in, therefore unknown for the bar tender, and the denotative meaning of the brand made for an ideal polysemic joke. In order to compensate PepsiCo for the inclusion of the rival company's brand, the following two lines were added:

-Right. Give me a *Pepsi Free*.

-You want a *Pepsi*, pal, you're going to pay for it.

Caffeine-free *Pepsi* was introduced in 1982 with that brand name, therefore it would also be unknown in the 1950's, allowing for yet another humorous misunderstanding.

The Spanish translation for the dubbing of the whole segment was the following:

- *¿Vas a tomar algo, chico?*
- *Deme una Fanta.*
- *Una Fanta. ¿Qué diablos es una Fanta?*
- *Pues deme una Pepsi Sin.*
- *¿Sin? ¿Sin qué? ¿Sin pagar? Aquí todo se paga.*
- *A Fanta. What the hell is a Fanta?*
- *Then, give me a Pepsi Without.*
- *Without? Without what? Without paying? You pay for everything here.*

In the first case we can see an example of limited universalization, which also proved that the translator had done some homework: a Coca-Cola product, *Tab*, was replaced by another drink, *Fanta*, manufactured by the same company. Unfortunately, the polysemy was non-existent and, therefore, the humorous illocutionary effect was practically lost³. As for the second example, *Pepsi Free* was commercialized at the time in Spain as *Pepsi sin* ('Pepsi without'), which had to be glossed intratextually with '*pagar*' ('paying') in order to achieve a successful equivalent humorous effect. More importantly, in both cases there had been a suitable commercial adjustment to the references of the source text, also made easier by the absence of visual references to the brands.

This was not so in the following example. A step further had been taken when technology made it possible to erase, replace or insert advertising in post-production, opening a wide range of commercial possibilities. The landmark of virtual manipulation took place in the futuristic film *Demolition Man* (Marco Brambilla, 1993) after its production company, Warner Bros, agreed on a deal to place visually and orally a restaurant chain that belongs to PepsiCo (Papp-Vary, 2015). In its American release, the following dialogue took place between the two lead stars while they drove past a logo of *Taco Bell* heading to one of its franchised premises (54'56'"):

- *Taco Bell* is the only restaurant to survive the Franchise Wars.

³ Actually, the Spanish subtitle of the DVD versión was far more effective, and daring, with the same choice of *Fanta*. The bar tender's reply was: "*¿Para qué quieres una manta? ¿Tienes frío?*" ('What do you want a blanket for? Are you cold?'), establishing a witty paronymy between *Fanta* and *manta* ('blanket'), and taking no notice of the much dreaded *gossiping effect*.

-So?

-Now all restaurants are *Taco Bell*.

-No way.

However, for its international release, *Taco Bell* was replaced by *Pizza Hut*, another chain restaurant from PepsiCo, due to the fact that a first attempt to open up franchises of the former abroad had been unsuccessful and the commercial boost would have fallen flat, for instance, in Europe. This decision implied a digital replacement of the logo in the background, and also the fact that the actors had to dub themselves the modified fragment scripted for international distribution, including a previous reference to Mexican food that, obviously, became Italian. It did not pose a problem in Spain, where the translator simply stuck to the international version (the first *Pizza Hut* had opened there in 1980), but it generated a backlash in some non-dubbing countries such as England and Australia, where the perception of the artificial rewording produced an estranging effect. There have been no more documented instances of this dubbing practice in the U.S. since then, something that cannot be said of post-production visual manipulation.

Two revealing cases of unauthorized use of a brand name took place the following year. One of the iconic dialogues in *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino 1994), prior to a gruesome scene, is between two murderers who have a casual conversation about how some varieties of McDonald's hamburgers bear a different name in France (08'05"). Even though there was no commercial arrangement (Lehu 2007), no complaints were filed by the franchise in spite of the negative nature of the characters involved; it eventually became a cult scene⁴. And in another film released the same year, *Natural Born Killers* (Oliver Stone, 1994), a remarkably violent murder was committed with a Coca-Cola billboard in the background which had not received commercial clearance. According to Nitins (2006: 14): "The only reason Coca-Cola refused to sue was to avoid drawing greater attention to the placement."

Two years later, Reebok did sue TriStar pictures over an alleged derogatory portrayal of its brand in the film *Jerry McGuire* (Cameron Crowe, 1996) after having originally invested 1.5 million dollars for product placement (Nitins, *ibid.*). Throughout the plot, a sportsman complained permanently that Reebok did not acknowledge his merits, and the preconceived legal agreement between the two companies was that, during the credits at the end of the film, a fictional commercial would be shown establishing that the sportsman and Reebok had come to terms with each other. But Crowe decided to remove it in post-production because it did not fit in with the overall narrative of the film, leaving Reebok without the

⁴ The dialogue did not pose a problem for Spanish dubbing because a *Quarter Pounder* is commercialized locally as *Cuarto de libra* even though this measurement unit is not used in the country. On the other hand, *McRoyal*, the French alternative, retained its "foreignizing" effect in Spain.

possibility of getting involved in any promotional campaigns, so they sued (Karr *et al.*, 2003). An out of court settlement was reached, with TriStar having to pay 10 million dollars for compensation.

Even though these cases did not compromise the work of dubbing translators, with all these serious legal issues happening in the American source context concerning brand names in films, a greater care could be taken with screen translation choices in Spain. The headquarters of the *Office for Harmonization in the Internal Market*, concerned with the protection of trade mark rights in the European Union, is based in Alicante, and when I consulted them about some of these cases, they referred to a *Trade Practices Act* (Whish, 2001; Howe, 2005) claim that protects manufacturers from a misrepresentation of their product on the grounds of intellectual property. Concerning audiovisual translation, however, there is still no documented proof of a successful claim related to a hypothetically derogatory manipulated reference of a brand name in a dubbed or subtitled film.

As for film and television international distribution companies, there is a so-called *Key Names and Phrases Master Glossary* document (KNP for short)⁵ which they submit for translation purposes with a thorough explanation of supposedly unclear terms. The translation into the foreign language and the back translation into English have to be sent back for approval before the post-production process of the dubbing or subtitling of the film or sitcom actually gets started. Interestingly enough, according to Spanish professional screen translation circles, only Walt Disney Studio Motion Picture and Netflix seem to follow this practice regularly. In most other cases, translators would theoretically be free to act according to their own will in the scripts they submit to Spanish studios for the post-production process, where those in charge would have the final word. We shall see now some examples of the strategies they tend to follow.

5. Commonly applied translation strategies for the dubbing of opaque brand names

In the *Back to the Future* fragment featured above, we have already seen examples of both limited universalization (*Fanta* for *Tab*) and intratextual gloss (*Pepsi sin pagar* for *Pepsi Free*). However, the most commonly used strategy is absolute universalization, that is, the erasure of the brand name and its replacement by a hyperonym. In *27 Dresses* (Anne Fletcher, 2008), for instance, we can find it in two separate fragments:

- You got them champagne glasses and a bottle of *Cristal*. (21'48")

⁵ A template of the KNP document of Netflix can be requested and downloaded from <https://backlothelp.netflix.com/hc/en-us/articles/219048698>.

- Let me give you some advice. Do not drink *Moët* on an empty stomach. (07'07")

In both cases the brand names were replaced in the dubbed Spanish version by the hyperonym *champán*. It might be understandable that, in the first case, the *Cristal* brand might be difficult to identify in Spain, and the polysemic term resulting from its denotative meaning in Spanish could cause further confusion. However, *Moët- & Chandon* has been commercialized in the target context for decades and would have been easily decoded. And, macrotextually, considering that the film itself is located in a trendy setting where sophisticated brand names seem to be so important, the removal of both brands does not seem to be so effective from a marketing perspective, resulting in a far less colorful target text. In any case, with the use of a hyperonym the visual absence (in these two fragments) or presence of brands is rendered irrelevant.

It must also be pointed out that Spanish legislation on advertising of alcoholic drinks (Law 34/1988)⁶ is far stricter than in the U.S., so applying an absolute universalization would always be safer, since there would be no grounds for a legal intervention against the two companies whose brands were featured in the source text.

Sometimes brand names have added implicatures that go beyond the typology of the product, requiring further manipulation in the form of the intratextual glosses previously mentioned. An interesting example can be found in the film *Funny People* (Judd Apatow, 2009), when a stand-up comedian sees yet another spectator leave the venue half-way through his performance and utters (17'02"): "Save some *Kool-Aid* for me". This spoken reference to a brand of flavored drink mix (visually absent on screen) carries with it an implicature of desperation, since it was historically ingested with cyanide by followers of a religious cult in a mass suicide in Jonestown, Guyana, in 1978. So this culture specific item would ironically imply, in the film, that those spectators want to commit suicide after listening to the jokes, and that the comedian himself is willing to join them.

The Spanish dubbing translator decided on ¡*Guardadme un poco de cianuro, por favor!*, with the inclusion of the intratextual gloss "cyanide" as an actual replacement for *Kool-Aid*. The reference to Jonestown is lost (it is hardly known in Spain), and *Kool-Aid* is not commercialized in the target context anyway, so this might have been the most suitable choice available in order to produce an equivalent illocutionary effect. The explicit reference to cyanide could be considered derogatory but, since the brand name is erased, there are no grounds for complaints.

Television sitcoms are also open to product placement, even more so than films, since the medium is traditionally more prone to advertising. Audience rates on free television have generally determined the survival or cancelling of series based on the economic turnover during commercial breaks. With the advent of

⁶ http://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-1988-26156

technological devices that allow the viewer to skip commercials, placing the brand within the programme has eventually become a more common tool for advertising.

How I Met your Mother (2005-2014) has been one of the most referred to shows in academic research of product placement on television for various reasons (Brasel 2012). From the very first season we can find several instances, and I would like to analyze one fragment in order to exemplify two translation strategies that still have not been mentioned in this analysis. In episode 6 (8'30") from season 1, we find two of the characters dressed up as pirates for a fancy dress party. The dialogue is the following:

- And what'd be a pirate's favorite fast food restaurant?
- Arr-by's.
- 'Twould think it would be *Arby's*. But, actually, it's *Long John Silver's*.

These are references to two fast food chain restaurants in the U.S. not visible on screen. The first one is a false etymology that relates the customary onomatopoeic sound of pirate talk⁷ to the name of a meat restaurant chain in the U.S. and Canada, whereas the latter is an obvious reference to Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883), but also to another U.S. based fast food restaurant chain specialized in seafood, which would fit in much better with their costumes. The Spanish dubbing translation of the fragment that included these two brand names unknown to the target context was as follows:

- ¿Y cuál es el restaurante favorito de comida rápida de un pirata?
- Bucanero King.
- Lo lógico sería pensar que es Bucanero King, pero en realidad es Corsario Fried Chicken.

The ad-hoc coinages *Buccaneer King* and *Corsair Fried Chicken* are obvious paronymical references to *Burger King* and *Kentucky Fried Chicken*, a blending of translation strategies that would include a partial universalization (replacing an opaque culture specific item of the source context with another one more easily identifiable from the same context) and an autonomous creation, since technically there is no connection between the seafood, hamburger and chicken chain restaurants. In any case, the dubbing translation wittily manages to achieve an equivalent humorous illocutionary effect, and the reference to two varieties of privateers could not be considered derogatory either within the context of a fancy dress party⁸.

⁷ In the same way as "Ho, ho, ho!" is traditionally related to Santa Claus or "Booo!" to ghosts.

⁸ A landmark product placement in *How I Met your Mother* has been widely referred to (see Brasel, 2012). Episode 18 from season 2 (2006) was re-aired in 2011 with a digitally inserted magazine on a shelf in the background which included an advert of the film *Zookeeper*

Finally, I will give two remarkable examples from *Harold and Kumar go to White Castle* (Danny Leiner, 2004) concerning brand name replacements in translation for dubbing. The project got to a highly unusual start in the U.S. Five film production companies jointly produced this comedy about two cannabis smokers who decide to go out to find food. It is reported that *Krispy Kreme*, a chain of doughnut stores, was asked for clearance but they refused to take part in the film. Eventually, *White Castle*, a fast-food hamburger restaurant chain, agreed without any payment involved (they ran their own campaign of collectibles related to the movie), and ended up in the title of the film. Only in the U.S., though, since the franchise is unknown elsewhere; even in the U.K. the title was changed to *Harold & Kumar get the Munchies*. In any case, such a blatant placement would not have been popular in European box-offices: “The centrality of the brand/product to the plot can alert the viewers to the placement effort and even cause resentment” (Karniouchina *et al.*, 2006: 31).

Other brand names are mentioned during the film as well, but under a not extremely positive light. In the following fragment (13’19”), in order to quench their thirst, one character suggested: “Let’s get ourselves some fucking *Mountain Dew*”, an American carbonated soft drink not commercialized in Spain. The dubbed equivalent was: “*¡Vamos a tomarnos un puto Aquarius!*”. The reference to this brand, a mineral sports drink launched in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, would be considered a naturalization, since a culture specific item of the source context without any visual presence on screen is replaced by one of the target context (*Aquarius* is sold in a dozen countries, but none of them English-speaking). The only problem that could have arisen was the fact that, whereas *Mountain Dew* belongs to PepsiCo, *Aquarius* is produced by the European branch of Coca-Cola, their main rivals. No complaints were filed, and the expletive terms that precedes both brand names would not have been perceived as derogatory considering the nature of the characters involved.

Far more remarkable was the dubbed fragment (10’32”) in which a suggestion is made about having something to eat. The dialogue in the source text was:

- What about *KFC*?
- We’ve been there too many times.

Kentucky Fried Chicken has been established in Spain for decades, and is also referred to as *Kentucky* for short, which would have contributed to the lip synchrony of the dubbed version. However, the translator astoundingly opted for: “*¿Y un Guarronalds?*” The blending of the word *guarro* (“filthy”) and *McDonald’s* results in a derogatory ad-hoc coinage with an obvious paronymical reference to the burger

(Frank Coraci, 2011), which was just about to be released. This anachronistic practice opens up a wide range of possibilities for product placement, even though it would not affect, so far, translators for dubbing or subtitling.

chain restaurant, which is witty, and also offensive (the back translation I would suggest is *MuckDonald's*, though I have not asked for commercial clearance either!). This would have caused a legal stir in the U.S., but there were no reports of filed complaints in Spain. No KNPs had been sent over by the film producers, though KFC had such an obvious solution that nobody would have expected a different option. As for McDonald's, no Trade Practices Act claim was reportedly made either, perhaps in the belief that drawing attention to this misrepresentation of their product could only make matters worse. So yet another talented dubbing translator, Kenneth Post, got away with humorous manipulation, but with so many globalised legal issues concerning advertising at stake, we may start wondering how long this 'free for all' attitude will last.

6. Conclusion

To sum up, the purpose of this paper has been mainly to foreground the different translation strategies that may be applied to transfer the implicatures of unknown brand names mentioned in films and television sitcoms to other target cultural contexts. At the same time, I have also pointed out the contrast between the legal issues which arise in the U.S. concerning product placement and the, so far, laid back attitude to the required manipulative translation of some of these opaque products for the dubbing process in Spain⁹. The most common strategy applied is absolute universalization (71 of the 128 cases put together in my glossary follow that pattern, 55.4%), which is the safest choice even if it might fail to comply with commercial agreements reached in the source legal context concerning the spoken reference to a brand. But other choices made, such as limited universalizations (28 cases, 21%), especially when the alternative brand chosen belongs to a rival company, or autonomous creations (15 cases, 11.7%) which might turn out to be derogatory towards a brand that is not even mentioned in the source text, would make us wonder if these liberties can be taken so randomly much longer. The current evolution in translation practices, as proven by these statistic figures, is towards a legally safer use of absolute universalization.

Another important issue is that 105 cases (85,7%) are related to comedy, either because the production belongs to that genre or it is a comical relief fragment in a production from a different genre. According to Karniouchina *et al.* (2006: 42), this is due to an overall advertising strategy: "Dramas are usually more cognitively demanding, and romance films tend to send the viewers on an emotional roller

⁹ In Spain, the *Ley General de Comunicación Audiovisual* passed on March 31st 2010 regulates product placement (Article 17) and, following the pattern of the European Union, requires an announcement of this practice at the beginning and the end of the audiovisual production. The seemingly uncertain legal territory is that the regulation would not apply to a production of a country that does not belong to the EU and, even though the dubbing and/or subtitling is performed in Spain, it would still be American.

coaster, leaving little room for processing secondary information”. But comedy is far more demanding for audiovisual translators, since humorous resources are based on plays on words and immediate decoding of subtextual implicatures which require hard work to transfer them interlinguistically, as we have seen in most cases with opaque brands mentioned above.

By no means do I want to spoil the fun of both the talented Spanish dubbing translators and the audiences who watch these productions by remarking on some of these very extreme cases that could have legal consequences. It would seem, however, that, in the international market, U.S. companies are not willing to take the trouble to survey how their brand is portrayed in dubbed or subtitled audiovisual productions, if only to avoid giving greater publicity to derogatory presentations or drawing legal attention from foreign governmental institutions. Or, perhaps, they also believe, as Oscar Wilde (1891: 2) once wrote, that: “There is only one thing in life worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about”.

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