



MA Film Studies

'Dubbing, humour and nonverbal communication in the films
of Marx Brothers'

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1. Introduction

Since its start, cinema has been one of the first 'globalized art forms.'¹ The interchanging of films between United States of America and Europe began to take place immediately away after the cinema was first developed. Europe and America competed to have a dominant role in the newborn market. This competition lasted until the start of the First World War when the then main producing European countries (France, Germany and Italy) entered the war negatively affecting their national film industries. Hollywood became the main exporter of films to Europe, ending the competition for the film market, a situation that remains to this day. This traffic of films was only possible from the beginning of film history due to the different audiovisual methods of translations.

The film industry is nowadays one of the largest and most important of America's industries.² The film industry- especially that of Hollywood- must be considered a business that seeks the minimization of risk and the multiplication of benefit with minor effort: this could be achieved, for example, with the domination of the Western film market. This point emphasises the great economic interest America has to expand the distribution of its films abroad. The European film industry, however, cannot be considered principally as an economic activity due to its reliance on subsidies and protective laws in order to survive; for example, Spain, by law, must show a minimum of twenty five percent of European films, a practice that is used to control the American monopoly.³ This type of protectionist law is common practice in Europe. The European film industry often tends to be understood as a form of national art.

One of the main difficulties distribution companies faced with the arrival of sound was the diversity of spoken languages worldwide. However, the first films mainly

¹ Abé Mark Nornes, *Cinema Babel: Translating Global Cinema* (London: Minnesota Press, 2007), p.4

² For more information on the economic importance of Hollywood see Gerald Horne, *Class Struggle in Hollywood, 1930-1950: Moguls, mobsters, stars, reds, and trade unionist* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), pp 3-39

³ Noticias Jurídicas, *Base de Datos de Legislación*, Ley 55/2007 de 28 December, artículo 18, Ley del Cine (http://noticias.juridicas.com/base_datos/Admin/l55-2007.html#a18, accessed at 17 August 2009)

showed moving images of every day life on a flat screen, sufficient to satisfy the initial needs of the audience. The first films did not tell a story; rather images on their own, easy to follow regardless of the country or language of the viewer. However, after the audience became accustomed to this new form of media, production companies had to invent a new element in order to maintain interest. Films became longer and more complex in their narrative, such as in *The Birth of a Nation* (D. W. Griffith, 1915). This racist epic is often considered the first blockbuster in history due to the film's high budget and the large profits made. It was also over three hours in length, much longer than the average of that time of just over an hour. Intertitles, musicians and lecturers were common in silent film cinemas in order to help the audience follow the new film language and compensate for the lack of sound. The exportation of films at this stage was still easy due to the simple substitution of intertitles in the local language and or translation of the lecturer's comments.⁴ The acting techniques of the silent films also compensated the lack of verbal words as the result of exaggerated mannerisms used.⁵ The physical gestures would help the audience to follow dialogues and feelings that could not yet be heard.

The appearance of sound, however, challenged American supremacy in the film market because much of the international audience would not be able to understand the English language.⁶ According to Chaves, Louis B. Mayer of Metro Goldwin Mayer, stated that linguistic diversity did not worry him because the popularity of American films would make English the official film language.⁷ The first talkies, then, were not translated; they were exported in English language to Europe. The producers and distributors first realised that a translation was needed when the European audience rejected the original versions of the films. The problems created for the film industry by Europe's linguistic differences were becoming more and more evident. With the arrival of sound, films would become encapsulated and understood within concrete geographical frontiers. The films would also underline the cultural differences among societies. Europe faced

⁴ M^a José Chaves García, *La Traducción Cinematográfica: El Doblaje* (Huelva: Universidad de Huelva, 2000), p. 21

⁵ Chaves, p. 23

⁶ Chaves, p. 27

⁷ Chaves, p. 27

difficulties in exporting its films due to the diversity of languages and dialects within Europe.

Hollywood, having realised that a translation into the local language was needed in order to ensure exportability of its films, decided to produce multiple language versions. They either imported various teams of actors and technicians of different nationalities to Hollywood (Metro Goldwyn-Mayer's idea), or they set up a production centre in Europe (Paramount's Pictures idea).⁸ The famous Parisian studios, *Joinville* (Paramount), produced *Marius* (Alexander Korda, 1931) which is the only multilingual film highly acclaimed by critics. This technique appeared to be too expensive during the Great Depression, due to its worldwide repercussions, to be a permanent solution. This practice was mainly used to avoid the rise of European national film industries that started to develop with the arrival of sound.⁹ Other temporary solutions were used until the arrival of dubbing which further strengthened Hollywood's position in the film market: according to Chaves, in 1937 Hollywood produced seventy percent of the films.¹⁰ (It is not clear whether she is referring to all films or solely Westerns)

As a method of film translation, dubbing has not always been uncomplicated due to the specificity of languages, cultures and types of humour which differ greatly between societies. A close analysis of a scene from the Marx Brothers in *A Night in Casablanca* (Archie Mayo, 1946) will show the problems involved in dubbing as a method of film translation.

The scene takes place outside a hotel which Ronald Kornblow (Groucho) is managing in Casablanca. Rusty (Harpo) has previously heard that Count Pfferman and Beatrice are planning to kill Kornblow. Rusty needs to inform Corbaccio (Chico) of this. Harpo always plays as a dumb character in the Marx Brothers films and therefore cannot use verbal language to communicate, instead using gestures and exaggerated and creative mannerisms. Harpo's 'dumbness' is a stock characteristic of Marx Brothers humour. A close analysis of Harpo's performance

⁸ Ginette Vincendeau, 'Hollywood Babel', *Screen*, 29 (2) (1988)

⁹ Chaves, p. 29

¹⁰ Chaves, p.31

is, therefore, extremely useful in establishing the difficulty of audiovisual translations because of the predominance of the visual channel which cannot be modified by the translators.

Rusty must tell Corbaccio that Ronald Kornblow is in danger. Firstly he put his finger over the upper lip to denote a moustache, Groucho's greatest visual characteristic. Then, in order to specify that he was referring to Kornblow he mimics the action of eating corn and blowing. The similar phonetics between Ronald's surname and the words corn and blow make possible a specific concept in an original way. He also uses this system to compound the words *surprise* with the combination of soup and rice, *Pekingese* with the words peek and knee and *Beatrice* with the combination of the letter 'b' or the insect bee and twist. There are other concepts that are expressed in simpler ways such as the moustache, a woman –described through her bodily curves-, and the action of entering a room.

The translation of this scene is particularly complex due to the fact that the meanings of the words are physically performed by Harpo in a way that is only applicable to their English translation. The word *maíz* (corn in Spanish) and *soplar* (to blow) would never create the surname Kornblow. Moreover, this pantomimic performance makes a clear reference to the game 'charades', in which one player mimes the words of a film or book while the other guesses its title. This game would be presumably unknown by the Spanish audience, thus creating a greater gap in understanding.¹¹ The Marx Brothers, however, have been extremely popular in Spain. The difficult nature of the Marx Brothers humour, meaning that the translators are not always successful, thus make their translations particularly interesting for this analysis, regarding the way in which the translators deal with

¹¹ The Elliott Avedon Museum and Archive of Games of the University of Waterloo, Canada, was contacted in order to gain a clear understanding of the origins of the game. According to Professor Richard Hughson:

'The game of Charades has evolved from a method of public communication in ancient Rome. Because the population of Rome included people from many conquered nations who did not understand Latin as such, announcements at public events were mimed in the Roman belief that these would be understood by non-Latin speakers. Thus, the game of Charades is found in some form in contemporary nations in which there were ancient Roman settlements, such as England, Spain, Germany, etc.' (Private communication)

It is now clear that this game existed in Spain however no trace of it has been found in contemporary Spanish society. It may have existed before the appearance of the television.

these types of scenes in order to carry over the humorous characteristic of the Marx Brothers films.

In the second chapter the process of dubbing in Spain will be analysed in order to fully understand the historical, cultural and technical limitations of the medium. Special attention will be given to the transfer of cultural references and word games into Spanish. The third chapter will assess the different types of humour and comedy and subsequently will introduce the main case study of this work: Marx Brothers films. The audiovisual translation of humour in will be then analysed. The last chapter will focus on nonverbal communication and its translation in the audiovisual medium. This project aims to assess whether the Spanish dubbed versions portray the same meanings and connotations as the original films. Special attention will be paid to the semiotic elements which place constraints on the audiovisual translation: the combination of verbal and nonverbal elements. The Marx Brothers are a very apt case study particularly taking into consideration Harpo's dumbness that forces him to find a parallel way of communicating.

2. Dubbing

This study will analyse the dubbed versions of the Marx Brothers films in Spanish language. The reasons why the dubbed versions, rather than the subtitled versions, have been chosen for this work will be listed below. Various definitions of dubbing will be given in order to fully understand what this type of translation encompasses and what its limitations are. Several examples of the case study, the films of Marx Brothers, will be given at the end of this section, in order to better illustrate the problems that are associated with dubbing.

2.1 Why dubbing?

Firstly, Francisco Franco, as part of his absolutist regime, passed a law on the 23rd of April 1941¹² according to which all foreign films exhibited in Spain must be dubbed in Spanish language. This law was inspired by 1933 Mussolini's Italian *Regio decreto-legge* (Royal Decree), which forbade the exhibition of any film that had not been previously dubbed in Italian language.¹³ This was a measure used to control the information that came to Spain from abroad. It was an easy way to avoid the actors using uncouth words, questioning religion, talking about sex or criticising the fascist dictator in order to achieve fully the indoctrination of the entire Spanish population. The censors could, therefore, control, manipulate and change important aspects of any film.¹⁴ Probably the most infamous case of dubbing in Spain under Franco's regime was of the film *Mogambo* (John Ford, 1953). In order to avoid portraying adultery, the Spanish censor made a married couple appear as siblings, ensuring that the extramarital relationship between the wife (Grace Kelly) and another man would not be seen as something bad and sinful. The Spanish version of the film portrayed instead a case of incest, an absurd solution to avoid adultery. The dubbed versions will be studied because they were the only versions available to the Spanish public during the Marx Brothers period. The majority of Spaniards only watched the dubbed version of Marx Brothers due

¹² Alejandro Ávila, *El Doblaje* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1997), p. 25

¹³ Francesca del Moro, 'L'inquietante gemello lineamenti di storia di doppiaggio in Italia', (Università degli studi di Bologna: Bologna, 1999-2000), p.7

¹⁴ For more information refer to Hans-Jörg Neuschäfer, *Adiós A La España Eterna: La dialéctica de la censura. Novela, teatro y cine bajo el franquismo* (Madrid: Anthropos, 1995)

to this ban that lasted until the new constitution was passed in 1978.¹⁵ The first subtitled Marx Brothers films only appeared on Spanish television in 1997 as a part of a special programme on TVE2 (Televisión Española, Spanish public television).¹⁶ The dubbed films will therefore be analysed here as they were the films that made the brothers famous in Spain. It should be mentioned that the Marx Brothers films were banned in Italy due to their content- 'a fact which filled the brothers with immense pride'¹⁷- and in Germany due to their Jewish origins.

Another aspect which determined the decision to focus on the dubbed versions is that they are presented as a complete substitution of the original text- even creating a new and independent product- an obvious factor that led to the decision taken by the Absolutist Regime to dub all films distributed in Spain. The subtitled version can be seen instead as a parallel text to the filmic one, meaning that the audience can recognise a text A –being the moving images with the original soundtrack- and a text B –being the subtitles- at the same time. The subtitles can then be understood as a fragmentary translation, whereas dubbing can be seen as an integral translation.¹⁸ Moreover, subtitles have to summarise and condensate in long speeches in order to allow the viewer time to read the subtitles. The different shades of meaning are missed more easily as a result of spatial limitation; the translators are often obliged to use a shorter word rather than one that has similar connotations with the original text. This study will analyse the way in which translators have integrated the Marx Brothers' humour into the Spanish version. Subtitling may offer an easier solution, such as a small comment stating the nature of a pun, although a translation should achieve the same effect for the target audience without many interfering comments from the translator.¹⁹ The fact that in the dubbed versions the audience needs only to focus on the filmic language

¹⁵ Ávila, p. 47

¹⁶ Adrián Fuentes Luque, 'La recepción del humor audiovisual traducido: estudio comparativo de fragmentos de las versiones doblada y subtitulada al español de la película *Duck Soup*, de los Hermanos Marx' (Universidad de Granada, unpublished: 2000), p.138

¹⁷ Ronald Bergan, *The Life and Times of the Marx Brothers* (London: Green Wood, 1992), p. 73

¹⁸ Henrik Gottlieb, 'Subtitling: Diagonal Translation' in *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology*, Volume 2, (1994) Number 1 pp. 101-122

¹⁹ Debra Raphaelson-West, 'On the Feasibility and Strategies of Translating Humour', *Meta: Translators' journal*, vol. 34, n°1, (1989) pp. 128-141

'[allows] viewers to concentrate on the visual aspects of the performance'²⁰- an aspect that would be more difficult in the subtitled versions, since the viewer focuses on the bottom of the frame where the subtitles are displayed. A close analysis of the nonverbal communication will therefore be more difficult to carry out in the subtitled version. To summarise, the dubbed versions offer a completed and integral translation that allows the viewer to concentrate on the visual aspects of the film.

The last aspect to be considered regarding the dubbed versions is the fact Spanish scholars who discuss audiovisual translations tend to claim that Spain is the leading country from the qualitative point of view of its dubbing.²¹ They do not, however, compare Spain with any other country with a historical tradition in dubbing such as France, Italy or Germany; they also state that the original filmmakers have acclaimed the translated versions (however they do not give any specific examples of this).²² It will therefore be interesting to gain an understanding of the quality of the dubbed versions from a neutral point of view. Spain has dubbed films since the beginning of the talkies, and Hollywood has sought the translation of its films for the Spanish market since the beginning of the film industry due to the large number of Spanish speakers around the world; Spain has also dubbed a great number of products due to the aforementioned law passed by Franco. These two factors are crucial when justifying the quality of the dubbing by the Spanish scholars. It should be clarified that nowadays two versions (or even more) of Spanish are available with each film. Spain now only dubs for the Spanish market, while Puerto Rico and Mexico, since the 1970s, have been largely responsible for the Latin American Spanish versions.²³

2.2 What is meant by 'dubbing'?

According to Alejandro Ávila, dubbing is 'la grabación de una voz en sincronía con los labios de un actor de imagen o una referencia determinada, que imite lo más

²⁰ Mark, p. 13

²¹ Ávila, p. 17

²² Ávila, p. 37

²³ Ávila, p. 70

fielmente posible la interpretación de la voz original.’²⁴ This definition emphasises the importance of synchronisation and imitation of the original interpretation. Chaves defines dubbing as ‘consiste en reemplazar la banda de diálogos originales por otra banda en la que esos diálogos aparecen traducidos a la lengua de término y en sincronía con la imagen.’²⁵ This definition also underlines the notion of synchronisation and translation. SGAE, Sociedad General de Autores, (The General Society of Writers) defines dubbing as:

En las películas cinematográficas y demás obras audiovisuales, acción y efecto por los que se sustituyen las palabras del actor que aparece en la imagen por las de otra persona que no se ve y que, acompasando su dicción a los gestos de dicho actor, habla en la misma lengua que éste o en otra diferente.²⁶

This definition emphasises synchronisation and the fact that the dubbing actor is normally different from the original actor, although there are cases in which the actor has dubbed himself in Spanish, for example Antonio Banderas in *Too Much* (Fernando Trueba, 1995), *Philadelphia* (Jonathan Demme, 1993) and *The House of the Spirits* (Bille August, 1993).²⁷ The notion of the ‘substitution of words’ is vague because it does not specify that it must be a translation from the original version. Possibly most complete definition of dubbing is given in the book *El Proceso del doblaje: Take a Take*.²⁸

El doblaje es un método de traducción interlingüística de adaptación intercultural que consiste en sustituir las bandas lingüísticas originales de una obra audiovisual con las voces de los actores de imagen, actores originales, por los otros actores, actores de voz, los cuales trataran de imitar fielmente la interpretación original manteniendo la máxima sincronización labial posible con los actores originales.

²⁴Ávila, p. 18 My own translation: ‘the recording of a voice in synchronisation with the lips of an actor in a moving image or with a specific reference which imitates the original voice as accurately as possible’.

²⁵ Chaves p. 44 My own translation: ‘consists of replacing the soundtrack of original dialogue with another soundtrack in which those dialogues appear translated into the local language and in synchronisation with the image’.

²⁶ Sociedad General de Autores, *Glosarios*, (http://www.sgae.es/tipology/glos/list/es/1061_D_1073.html, accessed at 28 July 2009) My Own translation: ‘In cinematographic films and other audiovisual works, the action and effect through which the words of an actor in a moving image are substituted for those of an unseen person who, matching the words and gestures of said actor, speaking in the same or a different language.’

²⁷ El Doblaje (<http://www.eldoblaje.com>, accessed at 12 August 2009)

²⁸ María Eugenia del Águila y Emma Rodero Antón, *El Proceso de Doblaje: Take a Take* (Salamanca: Universidad pontificia de Salamanca, 2005), pp. 19-20

2.3 Cultural adaptation

The above definition includes an aspect that none of the previous authors had addressed - that which is present in most of the films to a different degree: cultural adaptation. This aspect involves the need to change certain cultural references in order, whenever possible, to conform to the expectations and experience of the target audience so as not cause cultural disorientation. The translators in some cases will need to adapt, substitute or explain certain aspects from the foreign culture such as popular characters, places, aspects of history, political references and any other aspect that may be unknown in the target country. The process of adaptation in which certain cultural references are substituted by other references that are understood by the local audience has been coined by Lawrence Venuti as 'domestication.'²⁹ An example of this practise is listed in the book *El proceso del doblaje: Take a Take*³⁰ in which the television series *Sabrina, the Teenage Witch* comments on former Spanish president, José María Aznar, and other well known characters of Spanish society, rather than mentioning any American personalities. The Spanish audience, in these cases, can easily notice the manipulation, whereas in other cases the cultural adaptation is more subtle, such as in the example given by Chaves³¹ in *Dirty Tricks* (Michael Lindsay-Hogg, 1992). She states that in the original version Ed Harris, acting as the senator candidate to the American presidency, sips a glass of wine noisily in an intimate dinner. This action is considered rude and inappropriate in Spain, therefore they did not reproduce the noise in the dubbed version. This is also a cultural adaptation, as the senator's behaviour was not intended to be rude in the original version. The domestication can be vital to achieve the same response in the target audience; although at times can be seen to be manipulative.

2.4. Synchronisation

²⁹ Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's invisibility: a history of translatio*, (London: Routledge, 1995) p. 203

³⁰Del Águila and Rodero, p. 44 My own translation: 'Dubbing is a method of interlinguistic translation and intercultural adaptation which consists of substituting the voice and words of the original actors of an audiovisual work with voice actors who try to imitate the original actors, maintaining the maximum labial synchronisation possible'

³¹ Chaves, p.40

One of the major restrictions of dubbing is the technical and spatial limitations required in the process of synchronisation. Del Águila and Rodero define synchronisation as ‘encajar las palabras y los silencios del guión a los movimientos de la boca y los gestos del actor de imagen’³², also named by Chaves as ‘phonetic synchronisation.’³³ Both versions- the dubbed and the original- should communicate the same message. However, the pace of speech varies among languages, for example English is spoken more slowly than Spanish but is more concise, and for the Spanish version to adopt the English pace would produce an unnatural effect. These variations between languages cause the translators to shorten or lengthen the dubbed versions in order to meet the temporary limitation of an actor on screen. The synchronisation also needs to fit the translated speech into the actors’ lip movement in the most natural way possible. The sounds that are taken into special consideration are the lip movements that the audience can read more easily, such as vowels and labial consonants ([m] [b] [p] [v] [f]). This limitation makes translators adopt sometimes less accurate translations in order to achieve lip synchronisation.

2.5. Voice and Accent

Another aspect that seems to challenge the veracity of the dubbed versions is the choice of the voices. The actor’s voice is the major channel through which the translation of a film is completed; therefore special attention is needed. The actor of the original film is chosen by his interpretative skills, his appearance, his age and his popularity, while a dubbing actor is mainly chosen for his voice. Chaves said that the public should not be disappointed or disturbed with a too high or too deep voice.³⁴ Del Águila and Rodero addressed the need to achieve the ‘sincronismo de caracterización’ (character synchrony). They define it as the harmony between the voice of the dubbing actor and the physical appearance of the original actor.³⁵ Ávila made an interesting classification between acting roles in a film (such as the hero, the villain, the old person and the child) and the typology of voices. He expresses, for example, that the hero should have a deep and

³²Del Águila and Rodero , p. 58

³³ Chaves, p. 103

³⁴ Chaves, p. 47

³⁵ Del Águila and Rodero, p. 58

seductive voice, whereas the villain should have a similar voice but with lesser degree of deepness and seductiveness.³⁶ This emphasises that the dubbing actor should not try to imitate the original voice but rather follows a specific preconceived given classification. This aspect can make many actors sound very similar due to the high demand for deep voices. For example, would Groucho Marx be considered a hero in terms of dubbing specifications? He has an emphatic, slightly high-pitched voice in real life. The dubbing actor – whose name cannot be specified due to the absence of dubbing actors in the credits- has a deeper, fuller, more resounding voice. Chico's main speaking characteristic is his strong Italian accent, an aspect that is not translated in the Spanish version. His 'poor' English may justify his confusion between homophonic words, a strategy that Chico often used to conduct humour. A scene from *Duck Soup* will be analysed in order to better understand this point. The scene takes place during the war between Freedonia and Sylvania.

Chicolini (Chico): I wouldn't go out there unless I was in one of those big iron things go up and down like this. What do you call those things?

Firefly (Groucho): Tanks

Chicolini: You're welcome.

The dubbed version presents a literal translation where the word game is lost, due to the phonetic similarity between 'tank' and 'thanks' being absent in Spanish (*Gracias and Tanque*). The dubbed version seems to be more absurd due to the lack of information about Chico's poor language, which could have helped the viewer to understand certain examples of word confusion. This is an important fact to be considered in order to understand that veracity and different connotations are missed due to the substitution of the original voices.

2.6. Constrained Translation

Another aspect to be considered in this variant of audiovisual translation is what Mayoral refers as 'constrained translation', a concept coined by Christopher

³⁶Ávila, p. 67

Titford.³⁷ This concept articulates that verbal communication is only one of the channels of the film's message. Mayoral states that for certain types of translation, such as audiovisual, there is a need for a 'semiological focus' as well as a linguistic approach. This focus allows the translator to consider other nonverbal messages that are transmitted through visual and aural channels. Mayoral states that a film may have 'speech, images, music and noises' as different channels of communication and emphasises that all these elements belong to the source culture, while the translator can only substitute the speech. The other channels of communication cannot be changed, creating a 'noise' due to the bicultural nature of the message. This point illustrates the complexity in translating the nonverbal elements that form part of the film language. The verbal channels can be substituted and adapted to the target country, as has been explored. The modifications applied in a film can create, as mentioned, a completely new product. However, the nonverbal elements cannot be substituted and for this reason they must be strongly considered in the process of translation, as the visual element is the most important channel to communicate in films. The authors therefore prioritise the translation of the visual rather than the aural channels.³⁸ This element is one of the most important to be considered in the translation of nonverbal communication.

The final point to be highlighted is that audiovisual translation can be considered an economic activity, a social and cultural phenomenon, a technical process and an artistic activity together.³⁹ As Monserrat Quesada states, the business of dubbing moved several thousands of millions⁴⁰ annually. She claims that it was one of the healthiest industries in Spain until 1992. The audiovisual translations are therefore also part of the global economical circuit that aims to adapt the product to the target country in order to profit from the investment of the film. If the economic profit is understood as one of the most important aspects for the

³⁷ Roberto Mayoral, Dorothy Nelly and Natividad Gallardo, 'Concept of Constrained Translation. Non-Linguistic perspectives of Translation', *Meta: Translators' Journal*, vol.33 n° 3, (1988), pp 356-367

³⁸ Del Águila and Rodero, p.39

³⁹ Chaves, p. 43

⁴⁰ Monserrat Quesada Pérez, in Ávila's introduction, p. 14 She does not state the currency but due to the publication year it can be assumed that she refers to pesetas and not euros.

producers and distributors, it will not be surprising that Hollywood does not normally interfere with the translations in the different languages even if spoils the real 'sense' of the film.

The major limitations regarding the process of dubbing have been addressed in order to fully understand the problems achieving veracity. It is fundamental for this study to understand the ways the Marx Brothers' humour is constructed in order to see how nonverbal communication has been dealt with.

3. Comedy and Laughter

The case study of this project, Marx Brothers, belongs to the genre of comedy. In order to fully understand the limitations of translating comedy, a definition and exploration of the concept is necessary. This will help in understanding the mechanisms that make comedy work and, at the same time, will highlight the difficulties that can occur in the process of translation. Firstly, several theories regarding comedy will be addressed and different kinds of humour will then be listed. Subsequently, Marx Brothers' humoristic characteristics will be briefly introduced in order to then analyse the specific difficulties in translating humour, centring on the Marx Brothers' work.

Comedy is considered a film genre. Although 'genre' is a common term used in film criticism, a consensus of its meaning and uses have not yet been reached.⁴¹ As Altman states, the term 'genre' has to several connotations 'genres provide the formulas that drive production; genres constitute the structures that define individual texts; programming decisions are based primarily on generic criteria; the interpretation of generic films depends directly on the audience's generic expectations'.⁴² In this work, the term genre will refer only to the second of Altman's definitions: similar characteristics, patterns, intentions, styles and narratives that group films together. This is a necessary clarification needed before proceeding with the different theories on comedy and laughter.

The notion of comedy, humour or laughter –which surely appeared before the existence of film- has been discussed for centuries, producing a vast number of theories. Nelson summarises the most significant of these theories in the first chapter of his book *Comedy*.⁴³ Three main groups of theories can be taken from his writings. Firstly, Thomas Hobbes's *Superiority Theory* states that laughter is caused by a self triumph or by an 'indignity' or misfortune of another person. Hobbes claims that people laugh due to the feeling of superiority over others. Nelson

⁴¹ Edward Buscombe, 'The idea of genre in the American cinema, in *Film Genre Reader II* edited by Barry Keith Grant, (Austin: University of Texas, 1995)

⁴² Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: BFI, 1999), p 14

⁴³ T. Nelson, *Comedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 1-18

includes this theory in the greater category of 'malice theory', in which he includes scornful laughter and the laughter caused by fear. Aristotle's theory can also be included in this group, as he stated that laugh can be provoked by others' ugliness and deformity. Secondly, Schopenhauer's *incongruity theory* states that people laugh before a situation of incongruity. The final theory is the *psychic release theory*, mainly articulated by Freud, which states that people laugh when a repressed impulse is gratified (as Nelson expresses, most human beings have been taught not to laugh at other people's differences and deformities). This means that people laugh when societal barriers are overcome. These are the three main groups of theories that state the causes of laughter.

Geoff King, in his book *Film Comedy*, relates the broad notion of comedy to the specificities of the cinematic genre. He states that 'comedy was one of the most popular formats in the early years of cinema and has remained so ever since.'⁴⁴ Interestingly, he argues that comedy is often defined by the emotional reaction that it intends to provoke - laughter or humour - rather by its genre characteristics, as is the case with melodrama or horror genres. He states that comedy is often understood as a *mode* rather than a genre due to the hybrid between comedy and other genres. It would be difficult to list the main characteristics shared by all types of comedy due to the fact that comedic films can differ greatly. The most common formulae to create laughter are, amongst others, slapstick humour (based on physical actions), verbal comedy (based on the word game), black comedy (based on serious matters such as death or illness), screwball comedy (based on gender relations), satire (based on social criticism), parody (based on imitation) and absurd comedy (based on the ridiculous). The nature of comedy differs greatly, for example between slapstick and satire, therefore the narrative, as well as other characteristics of the film, will necessarily also differ.

King states that comedy 'plays upon a variety of elements to conceive its effect. It can only be understood in relation to specific contexts, including many of our basic expectations and assumptions about the world around us.'⁴⁵ This is a fundamental

⁴⁴ Geoff King, *Film Comedy* (London: Wallflower, 2002), p. 1

⁴⁵ King, p.4

point in understanding the relationship between the comedian and his audience: they must share a common context in order to understand the transgression of the comedic situations. This notion should be related to the aforementioned philosophical theories. It may appear obvious that an incongruent situation would vary considerably between different societies, as expectations are different according to cultural environments. The application of Freud's theory which one may also vary among societies, since restrictions, interactions with society and norms differ between countries and contexts. This point attempts to illustrate that although the general causes that create human laughter could be considered in some ways universal, the specific elements that activate those physical emotions are very much associated with an individual society or culture. This is one of the major problems that translators face: the lack of common ground between the original text and the new target audience.

Now that the major causes of laughter have been addressed, a deeper understanding of the specificities of the Marx Brothers' humour is needed in order to explain the specific problems that come with film translation. The Marx Brothers, then- since they constitute the case study of this work- deserve a thorough introduction, in order to understand the type of humour used in their films and to later comprehend the possible problems present in their translations.

3.1 The Marx Brothers

A feature which tends to identify the Marx Brothers is their Jewish origin – their mother was from Germany and their father was from Alsace, a region on the French-German border, and spoke both French and German. The brothers were, then, second-generation immigrants living in New York. They began their career-like Charles Chaplin- in the theatrical and popular genre of *vaudeville* which is considered one of the origins of the slapstick comedy. This was the place in which the brothers, apart from creating their characters, performed and tested the puns and jokes that would later appear in their films. Every Marx Brothers film featured Chico, Groucho and Harpo and occasionally by their younger brothers, Zeppo and Gummo. The younger brothers mainly collaborated in the theatrical shows.

Marx Brothers' scholars, such as Mark Winokur, established an important relationship between the Marx Brothers, their ethnicity and the world they satirise. Winokur expresses how the talkies changed the hegemony of the English language in America by the appropriation of foreign words and the acceptance of different accents.⁴⁶ This fact allowed the Marx Brothers to express themselves with a different voice, defined by Winokur as urban, Jewish and lower-class.⁴⁷ Their voices can therefore be defined as ethnic and poor, two important elements of the comedy of the Marx Brothers. It is important to note how Chico tends to play the roll of the Italian immigrant –establishing him as a possible outsider- and Harpo is dumb – he has no voice both literally and figuratively. The fact that they are outsiders to American high society (being poor and from an immigrant background) allows them to satirise the arrivistes - often represented as the villain: the pretension of upward mobility, society and its values - in an anarchic and surrealist way.

The Marx Brothers tend to be presented in an environment in which they do not fit, often as a result of their social status. In most of their films, their characters attempt to improve their economic situation, a fact that tends to provoke a confrontation with a source of power, one of the most common elements satirised in the Marx Brothers' comedy. Their characters are often immigrants who tend to struggle, in different ways, to fit in. For example, in *Monkey Business* (Norman McLeod, 1931) and *A night at the opera* (Sam Wood, 1935) they not only struggle to fit in with the environment, but also became fugitives due to their illegal immigrant status. Winokur comments on the characters' alienation within society which is present in their films: '[t]hey are exposure nightmares; they recreate the experience of being physically, socially and intellectually vulnerable to hostile environments that reveals the disjunction between one's inadequate personal resources, and the visible, yet inaccessible, abundance of goods.'⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Mark Winokur, *American laughter: immigrants, ethnicity, and the 1930s Hollywood film comedy* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996), pp. 136-140

⁴⁷ Winokur, p.137

⁴⁸ Winokur, p. 132

A clear separation is evident in the Marx Brothers' filmography: those films that were produced under the Paramount (such as *Duck Soup*) and those later produced by the Metro Goldwyn Mayer (*A night at the opera*). The first films are considered to be more outrageous and antisocial, portraying characters with which the viewers cannot identify. They were seen as an 'antisympathetic lampoons of all value.'⁴⁹ The films produced by MGM were less likely to satirise the romantic leads, as the brothers portrayed the participant couple as a serious and respectful element: they would often normally need to help a young couple to overcome some difficulties which would eventually lead them to marriage. The post-Paramount productions were based on eccentric characters which functioned as the main feature attraction of the film. Winokur expresses this change as 'the last instances of pure new-immigrant ethnic comedy and one of the first attempts in the 1930s to evolve from team comedy into a comedy more congenial to a middle-class and intellectual audience.'⁵⁰ This point is very interesting since their comedy was based on social dissolution, yet they attempted, in this later stage, to combine it with middle-class romantic comedy assimilation, this bringing new actors to perform the then fashionable 'screwball comedy'.

Once it is understood which major elements are satirised in the Marx Brothers' films, a brief introduction of each of the brothers- Groucho, Chico and Harpo- will underline their specific humoristic characteristics.

Groucho, it is said, adopted his name from the adjective *grouchy*, due to his complaining attitude. He is appraised as the intellectual member of the group and also the person responsible for most of the Marx Brothers' verbal humour. Although he always thought of himself primarily as a singer,⁵¹ he actually performed in fewer circumstances than his brothers in the films. Groucho performed with a strong German accent at the theatre as a humoristic strategy. He

⁴⁹ Winokur, p. 125

⁵⁰ Winokur, p. 126

⁵¹ Maurice Charney, *The Comic World of the Marx Brothers' comedy: "anything further father?"* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007), p. 34

adopted the Yiddish accent (although he could not speak the language) when America entered in First World War.⁵²

Chico adopted the roll of an Italian immigrant from the vaudeville spectacles. He is characterised by his strong Italian accent (learned from his barber). This characteristic justifies some of his word confusion as a result of his 'poor English', an aspect that is crucial to understanding his humour. Chico played the piano in most of the films in an enthusiastic manner- piano playing was his major economic income before participating in the theatre. It is also often said that Chico was a fervent gambler in real life.

Possibly the most interesting character regarding this study is Harpo. Harpo was not very confident with dialogue, so he took the decision to continue performing the art of the silent comedy, even though the talkies were already beginning to flourish.⁵³ He appeared at the time that silent actors such as Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton were in decline, as the genre gave way to the 'comedy of the absurd.'⁵⁴ The main difference between Harpo and other silent comedians is that he interacts in a speaking environment. He therefore needs to find another means of communication that allows him to interact with the other characters and the audience. He introduces the horn, as well as his coat, which has several pockets from which he is able to extract unexpected objects. This not only allows him to communicate with the other characters, but also to perform exaggerated gestures that enable him to create his own humoristic strategy. The combination of silent performance and the aural interaction of the other brothers is the aspect that is most relevant to this study. Other characteristics of Harpo were his blond curly wig, his hat and his frequent performing of the harp- the instrument from which he took his name.

A closer look at two scenes will make the humoristic difference between the brothers even clearer. The first scene to be analysed belongs to the film *Monkey Business*. It is set in a room in which a group of children are watching a puppet

⁵² Charney, p. 33

⁵³ Bergan, p. 10

⁵⁴ Bergan, p. 38

spectacle while Harpo is hiding from the cabin police. At the beginning of the scene, Harpo is laughing with the children about the puppet show. Soon after, the policeman enters the room and Harpo goes into the puppet box. He then participates in the puppet show, by presenting himself as a puppet, using the body of a puppet and his head with an exaggerated expression. Once he is discovered by the policeman they fight comically with each other. This scene provokes laughter by using different techniques. Firstly, the scene relies on slapstick humour due to the importance of the physical movements of the actors. According to the aforementioned theories, the spectator would laugh, following the superiority theory, as a result of laughing at someone's misfortune. Secondly, the incongruent setting- Harpo being a puppet- helps to create an absurd situation. This scene, due its pantomimic nature and the lack of importance of the verbal language, can be easily transferred to other languages.

The above scene will now be compared to the contract scene in *A night at the opera*. Chico and Groucho are dealing the contract for an opera singer. Chico is Ricardo's manager, while Groucho intends to sign Rodolfo Lassparri for the New York Opera theatre. An extract from the dialogue is sufficient to illustrate the type of humour used.

Chico: How much do you pay him?

Groucho: Well, I don't know. Let's see, one thousand dollars a night. (Speaking to himself) I am entitled to a small profit. What about ten dollars a night?

Chico: Ten dollars? (He laughs) I'll take it.

Groucho: All right, but remember, I get ten percent for negotiating the deal.

Chico: Yes, and I get ten percent for being the manager. How much does that leave?

Groucho: Well, that leaves him eight dollars.

Chico: Eight dollars, uh? Well, he sends five dollars home to his mother.

Groucho: That's leaves him three dollars.

Chico: Can he live in New York on three dollars?

Groucho: Like a prince. Of course, he won't be able to eat, but he can live as a prince. However, out of that three dollars, he'll have to pay an income tax.

Chico: ah, income tax?

Groucho: Yes, there is a federal tax, and a state tax and a city tax, and a street tax and a sewer tax.

Chico: How much does it come to?

Groucho: I can figure that if he doesn't sing too often, he can break even.

Chico: Ok, we take it. (They shake hands)

This scene relies on verbal language to provoke laughter in the audience, contrasting with the scene previously analysed. *A night at the opera* was produced in 1935 when the United States had not yet recovered from the Great Depression and the rate of unemployment was very high (unemployment peaked at twenty-five percent). This period was characterised by the implementation of very high taxes, which led to several strikes and protest by the American people, who demanded lower taxes. This scene makes a clear reference to the precarious situation in which lower class Americans struggled to make a living in the face of very high taxes. In this scene, the Marx Brothers rely on satire, criticising contemporary American society. The political and economic situation in Spain at the time was different. Although the translation of this scene may appear easy from a linguistic point of view, the knowledge of the American society would be fundamental to provoke laughter. These two scenes address two of the most common strategies for provoking laughter in the Marx Brothers: satire and slapstick.

To summarise, the three brothers had completely different characteristics: Groucho was grumpy, with sharp jokes and quick movements; Chico used his Italian accent to create ingenious word games and Harpo relied on his silent childish pranks. This diversity allowed the Brothers to enact various types of humour, from slapstick to satire. These films were characterised by foolish, furious and anarchic scenes in which incongruous situations were common. Satire and sharp critiques of the higher classes of American society are frequent in their films

- critiques which touch upon the viewer's sensitivity due to their disenchantment with American society, characterised by the Great Depression.

3.2 Can humour be translated?

Firstly, the subjective element of humour must be addressed at this stage in order to emphasise that a personal interpretation cannot claim a scene or action to be universally funny. Not everybody laughs at the same things, even if people belong to the same time and society, because laughter relies on the personal psychology and development of the individual. Nelson claims that people laugh at difficulties that they once feared but, with time, have mastered. He states that if people have not mastered the difficulty or if it creates a trauma, then they will not laugh.⁵⁵ Moreover, people have different tastes in type of humour. This is a crucial element to the study of humour. This study approaches the humoristic elements of the Marx Brothers films from an objective point of view.

There is no extended bibliography covering the translation of humour in the audiovisual medium⁵⁶; however, the article 'La traducción del humor en textos audiovisuales' by Patrick Zabalbeascoa Terran⁵⁷ illustrates the main difficulties. He explains how the first step in translating a humoristic passage is identifying it. This step, which today may appear obvious, would have posed difficulties in the 1930s due to the absence of the internet and a lack of flow of information between countries. Zabalbeascoa states that the translator also needs to be able to adjust the text in order to keep the original meaning and produce the same effect in the target language, and also to consider labial synchronisation. This notion has already been widely explored in Chapter 2.

Most classic films (a category that arguably includes much of the Marx Brothers' filmography) have been re-dubbed. The majority of them have been re-dubbed

⁵⁵ Nelson, p.8

⁵⁶ The journal *Meta*: Translator's journal dedicated the Vol.34 N. 1 (1989) to the translation of humour. Most of the essays that are included in that volume are written in French language and none of them is dedicated to the translation of humour in the audiovisual medium.

⁵⁷ Patrick Zabalbeascoa Terran, 'La Traducción del Humor en Textos Audiovisuales' in *La Traducción para el Doblaje y la Subtitulación* edited by Miguel Duro (Madrid: Cátedra, 2001), pp. 151-164

approximately three times (according to the Spanish dubbing database www.eldoblaje.com). The action of re-dubbing normally takes place to improve the quality of the audio and the quality of its translations, or to add passages deleted by the censors.⁵⁸ Neither the dubbing actors nor the dubbing studios appear in the film credits; therefore it is impossible to know which dubbed version of the film is being shown. This is an important limitation which creates difficulties in understanding the evolution of dubbing in Spain, the influence of the censorship and the understanding and interpretation of humour, among other aspects.

After this necessary clarification, we can refer back to the Zabalbeascoa's article, in which he states that once the humoristic elements in films have been addressed, the priority and function of these elements must be established. He states that the translation of humour must be assigned to any of these four groups according to its priority: *high* (comedy films such as *Life of Brian*), *medium* (adventure and romance films such as *Singin' in the Rain*), *low* (parliamentary speech with some ironic references or some word game) or *negative* (horror films in which the humour elements should be avoided). After this step is completed, an understanding of the function of humour in a specific passage must be assessed. The humouristic element can function as a source of entertainment, propaganda, didacticism, critique, rhetoric or therapy, among others.

Zabalbeascoa states that a sound appreciation of the priority and function of humour in the original film is fundamental in order to remain as faithful as possible in the dubbed version. He states that often, due to the cultural differences, the type of humour needs to be changed for the target audience. This is common in the case of parody or auto-critique, in which the audience may not be aware of the problems of the foreign society. He clarifies that if the translation is good, then the target audience may perceive the humour as a parody of *the other*. Zabalbeascoa also notes that humour can indicate the state of mind or ideology of the speaker (connoting racism, machismo, sarcasm, pessimism or morbidity, among other examples). He concludes by expressing that an ideal translation would allow for the priority, function and type of humour to remain the same in the dubbed

⁵⁸ Del Águila and Rodero, p.102

version. A close analysis of the crowded cabin scene in *A night at the Opera* may further clarify this point.

The scene begins with Harpo sleeping in a bed. Two female housekeepers then enter the room to make the beds. Harpo is taken off his bed, and, half asleep he hugs one of the girls. Soon after, the plumber knocks on the door:

Engineer: I'm the engineer. I'm here to turn off the heat.

Groucho: You can start right on him.

The Spanish dubbed version is translated as:

Engineer: Soy el plomero. Vengo a cortar la calefacción.

Groucho: Puede empezar por el rubio ése.

This scene has been analysed by Anjana Martínez Tejerina as part of her Phd Thesis, conducted at the Universidad de Alicante.⁵⁹ She analyses the translation of the Marx Brothers' word games into Spanish, and concludes that around thirty-five percent of word games were lost in translation. The pun of this specific scene relies on the word 'heat', which in English can refer to both a central heating system and to the libido. The Spanish version does not retain the ambiguity of meaning and intention that exists in the original version. Martinez suggested that the Spanish translation could have been mistranslated on purpose as the result of the potential censorship of any comment on sexuality. Following Zabalbeascoa's categories, the English version has a high level of humour that, with the exception of from Harpo's pantomimic movement, the Spanish version has not been able to transfer. Furthermore, the sexual connotation has been completely elided. The translation of humour, according to the three categories mentioned by Zabalbeascoa - priority, function and ideology - have not been successfully transferred in this case. The Spanish version presents a rather absurd situation due to the incongruent dialogue between the plumber and Groucho; the absurdity of the Marx Brothers in the dubbed version will be explored in the next chapter in more detail. In addition, the Spanish version uses the word 'plomero' instead of 'fontanero'; according to the

⁵⁹Alberto Santacruz, 'Lo que no entendimos de los Hermanos Marx', *La Provincia* (<http://www.lasprovincias.es/valencia/20081206/local/vida-ocio/entendimos-hermanos-marx-200812061409.html>, accessed at 3 August 2009)

Real Academia Española, 'plomero' is only used in Andalusia and Latin America to refer a plumber. This is a clear example of the practices used in Spain before the 1970s to create a 'neutral' type of Spanish in order to supply the dubbed version to all Spanish speaking countries.

Having analysed a scene according to Zabalbeascoa's guide to successfully translating a humoristic passage, the nature of the humour must now be taken into consideration regarding the process of translation. Debra Raphaelson-West, in her essay "On the Feasibility and Strategies of Translating humour", categorizes the verbal jokes according to their level of difficulty in being translated.⁶⁰

1. Linguistic, such as puns
2. Cultural, such as ethnic jokes
3. Universal, such as unexpected

She explains that the more difficult types of humour to be translated are those humoristic elements that are related to specific mechanisms of a language, due to the fact that they cannot be extrapolated into any other culture due to the idiosyncrasies of specific languages. This can be explained with the notion that homophonic and polysemous words, semantics and idioms, among other features, differ greatly in different languages. The previous example makes this point clearer: the Spanish word 'heat' does not have the same 'polysemy' family as English, therefore the word game between libido and heating system could not be easily achieved.

Raphaelson-West considers that the second most difficult humoristic elements to be translated are those relating to a specific culture. These elements can be adapted to the target culture, as has been previously mentioned, with several strategies; however, Raphaelson-West only studies the translation of humour in the literary medium: her classification does not consider the semiotic quality of the cinematic medium, therefore avoids the study of the image. For this reason, other two categories given by Zabalbeascoa will complement this overview: nonverbal humour and paralinguistic humour. The former refers to nonverbal communication –an image, a performance or the connotation of a song- and the

⁶⁰ Debra Raphaelson-West, 'On the Feasibility and Strategies of Translating Humour', *Meta: Translators' journal*, vol. 34, n°1, (1989) pp. 128-141, p. 130

latter to the combination of verbal and nonverbal communication. They are widely explored in the next chapter, which is dedicated to the nonverbal communication and its translation. Different scholars have discussed whether a translation of the humour is even possible: authors such as Newmark⁶¹ state that every joke is translatable, while others, such as Santoyo,⁶² state that when a joke is based on a word game, it becomes generally untranslatable. This study considers individual cases to assess whether or not the translator has been faithful and successful to the original text. However, the words constraints do not allowed for the assessment of a wide enough body of work to be able to state whether a translation is possible in every case depending on its nature.

To conclude, humour is one of the most difficult genres to be translated due to its connection to a specific culture, making the target audience at times unaware of the original intention of laughter. Zabalbeascoa's guide on the one hand, helps the translator to achieve a faithful translation while also helping the critic to assess the correctness of the translation. Raphaelson-West's category refers to the difficulty of translating a verbal joke: more the joke relates to a specific language or culture, the more difficult the translation becomes.

⁶¹ Peter Newmark, *Approaches to translation* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1981), p. 107

⁶² J. C. Santoyo, 'Traducción de cultura, traducción de civilización', in *Estudis sobre la traducció* edited by Amparo Hurtado (Castellón: Universidad Jaime I, 1994), p. 144

4. Nonverbal communication

This chapter will assess the parameters of nonverbal communication in order to outline the difficulties involved in its translation. Several examples from Marx Brothers films, in which nonverbal communication is an important factor in provoking laughter, will be analysed. This will help to determine the ways in which the nonverbal communication has been translated and how effective the dubbed versions are. This study aims to understand the way nonverbal communication has been dealt with in audiovisual translation. Finally, a study of the viewers' reception of the Marx Brothers' *Duck Soup* in Spain will clarify the extent to which it is possible, in the dubbed versions, to portray the same type of humour as the original.

Nonverbal communication has been described as including 'all communication that is *analogic, non-linguistic*, and typically governed by the *right brain hemisphere*.'⁶³ Messages are analogic when they have a 'direct, nonarbitrary, intrinsic relationship to the thing they represent'⁶⁴ - for example, a pat on the back could be considered an abbreviation of a hug; prolonged eye contact and smiling could express love. These two gestures are direct and intrinsic to the feelings they represent. On the other hand, digital communication is based on arbitrary codes such as a language: different words in different languages can refer to the same concept. Using the previous example, the conveying of love can be expressed as '*I love you*', or in Spanish '*te quiero*' - arbitrary words to someone with no knowledge of the language, which do not have any natural relationship to the expressed emotions. A person would need to *learn* the language in order to understand its meanings. These notions -codification, language, and relationship to the signifier- are the major differences between both communication systems: verbal and nonverbal.

Sometimes gestures can be included in both verbal and nonverbal communication systems. For example, the victory sign is considered a form of verbal

⁶³ Peter A. Anderson, *Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions* (Mountain View: Mayfield, 1999), p.3

⁶⁴ Anderson, p. 3

communication as it is a digital method (indirect, arbitrary and without an intrinsic relationship to the represented object). It is, however, considered nonverbal communication when it refers to the digit 'number two' due to its direct connection to the concept. The meaning of a specific gesture must be well known in order to be considered verbal communication. Some scholars, however, include in the definition of nonverbal communication any communication that is not a word.⁶⁵ These scholars will not therefore consider the victory sign as an example of verbal communication. This point illustrates the fact that the parameters of nonverbal communication vary greatly among scholars. Nonverbal communication includes physical appearance, oculusics (movement of the eyes), proxemics (interpersonal space), haptics (sense of touch), chronemics (use of time), vocalics (voice qualities) and kinesics, among many others.

According to Andersen, nonverbal communication is as important as verbal communication.⁶⁶ Using other scholars' findings, he suggests that only thirty-five percent of conversational meanings come from words.⁶⁷ While it would not serve this study to assess the exact percentage of the importance of nonverbal behaviour in the process of communication, the above statement demonstrates the importance of the translation, adaptation or explication of a significant nonverbal communication in a film text when it is unknown by the target audience. Each culture has its own types of nonverbal behaviour which distinguish them from other cultures. Cultural and linguistic references, such as word games, are two of the most difficult elements to translate. Cultural references, as aforementioned, can sometimes be adapted by creating references that are known by the target audience. Nonverbal communication cannot be substituted, in the way that verbal communication can, with the modification of the soundtrack. The manipulation of the image only tends to happen in countries in which censorship laws are enforced. Referring back to Andersen's study, the human being is not easily aware of his own nonverbal behaviour.⁶⁸ This fact complicates the understanding and learning of other cultures' nonverbal communication: the unawareness of a foreign culture's

⁶⁵ A. Mehrabian, *Nonverbal communication* (Chicago: Aldine-Atherton, 1972)

⁶⁶ Andersen, p. 1

⁶⁷ Andersen, p.2

⁶⁸ Andersen, p. 75

codes may cause discomfort due to feelings of strangeness and disorder.⁶⁹ To recapitulate, nonverbal behaviour is very important in the process of communication; it is culturally learned and is difficult to identify.

4.1 Kinesics

As a result of the wide range of elements included in nonverbal communication, this work will focus only on kinesics, due to its importance in Marx Brothers humour. Kinesics is defined by Fernando Poyatos as

Conscious and unconscious psychomuscularly-based body movements and intervening or resulting still positions, either learned or somatogenic of visual, visual-acoustic and tactile and kinesthetic perception, which whether isolated or combined with the linguistic and paralinguistic structures and with other somatic and objectual behavioural systems, possess intended or unintended communicative value.⁷⁰

Poyato refers in his definition to any type of movement, conscious or unconscious, learned or instinctive, intended or unintended and isolated or combined with other communicative systems. This study will only analyse gestures and body movements that, although learned, would not be considered an element of verbal communication, such as the aforementioned victory sign. Two major kinesic characteristics will now be addressed in order to understand the peculiarities of their translation. Firstly, Andersen makes reference to several researches that suggest that facial expressions that connote fear, disgust, anger, happiness and surprise are universal reactions - this means that they can also be understood universally. According to a study carried out on a group of blind children the children exhibited the same facial expression when they experienced certain stimuli⁷¹ - this would suggest that these reactions are not learned culturally. This indicates that our basic reactions are biological responses that have not been learned and therefore are universal across cultures, minimising the need of translation.

This factor could explain why silent pantomimes and slapstick humour are so easily understood worldwide. The scene with Harpo in *Monkey Business* (commented on in Chapter 3) can be used to better illustrate this point. Harpo's

⁶⁹ Andersen, p. 75

⁷⁰ Fernando Poyatos, *Nonverbal communication across disciplines: volume 2 Paralanguage, kinesics, silence, personal and environmental interaction* (Philadelphia: John Benjamin 2002), p. 185

⁷¹ Andersen, p.18

initial reaction is one of surprise: he opens his mouth slightly when he looks at the puppets. He then shows happiness with a wide smile and by clapping his hands. After he enters the puppet box, he makes an exaggerated facial expression in order to mimic a puppet. Harpo shouts when he is being pricked with a pin, and opens his eyes wide when he is being hit with a stick. All these expressions can be easily understood without the need of verbal clarification of Harpo's emotions. The only expression that cannot be understood out of context is the one in which he imitates the puppets; however, the humorous content of the scene makes Harpo's intention clear.

The second aspect to be considered is the cultural variation in the use of kinesics worldwide. As Anderson states, most Americans and northern Europeans appear inexpressive to people from Mediterranean countries while, conversely, Americans consider Mediterranean people to be over-expressive.⁷² In the context of this study, this means that the use of kinesics in North America is diametrically opposed to the use of kinesics in Spain. The Marx Brothers, however, gesticulate abundantly in their films, as opposed to the 'typical' inexpressive American, as described by Anderson. The Marx Brothers' gestures and body movements can be seen as being at times exaggerated, such as Groucho's way of walking. The gestures used to emphasise certain parts of speech- especially performed by Chico- can be assumed not to work, as a humoristic element, in Spanish society, as it is an 'over-expressive' society in which these elements are used as part of everyday speech. It can be suggested that the Marx Brothers' use of kinesic elements in their films somehow reduce the gap between an 'inexpressive' society and an 'over-expressive' one. This notion can be interpreted as a cultural approximation between the two cultures which, although at first glance would appear to be an advantage for the translator, actually reduces the humoristic impact in the Spanish dubbed version, due to the fact that the Spanish audience will not necessarily recognise their own stereotype.

⁷² Andersen, p.78

Moreover, Spain's culture is considered a 'contact culture' (a culture or society which displays considerable interpersonal closeness or immediacy)⁷³, as opposed a 'non contact culture' in which Anglo-American society can be included. This is an aspect that is also being often transgressed in the Marx Brothers' film- especially in the case of Groucho and Margaret Dumont. The level of hilariousness in Spain, in this case, is difficult to establish due to certain social strictness that Franco's regime imposed. The restriction of rights on the population seems to have modified the interpersonal relations in Spain during the Fascist Regime. This aspect and the difference in the use of kinesics portray some clear differences between Spain and United States. The fact that Americans use less body language than more expressive countries, such as Spanish, facilitates the process of translation due to notion that smaller numbers of elements are presented to be translated in the linguistic discourse. This does not mean, however, that the kinesics elements used in America are universally understood

To summarise, nonverbal communication is an important form of communication in human interaction, and it varies between cultures. Concentrating on the analysis of kinesics, certain facial reactions have been discovered to be universal. Americans use fewer gestures than the Spanish, facilitating, in this case, the process of translation. It would be interesting, in a further study, to conduct research on examples of Spanish nonverbal communication into English translation to compare the level and types of difficulties. The translation of humour, as discussed in the third chapter, is composed in the audiovisual medium of the combination of linguistic and cultural elements and image, with kinesics and paralinguistic elements hindering the process of translation. A closer analysis of the translation of nonverbal communication is necessary in order to understand the extent to which it can be adapted for the target audience.

4.2. Translation of Nonverbal Communication

The translation of nonverbal communication is indirectly referred to in most books that deal with audiovisual translation. According to many scholars, the power of the image -in which nonverbal communication can be included- must be

⁷³ Andersen, p. 83

considered. They do not, however, specify the different procedures that can be adopted to translate the diverse elements of nonverbal communication. A limitative bibliography in the translation of nonverbal communication in the Spanish audiovisual medium hinders the full understanding of the various adaptation processes of this type of communication. Frederic Chaume states, however, that new translating strategies designed for the audiovisual medium are not needed.⁷⁴ While considering the multi-channel quality of the film text, he states that the translator simply needs to understand the text as a whole. He claims that both texts –considering the visual and the aural elements- must be cohesive and coherent.

In his article ‘Translating nonverbal language communication in dubbing’,⁷⁵ Chaume divides the nonverbal elements (not solely the kinesics) into three groups according to the difficulty and achievement of their translation. The first group includes nonverbal signs that exist in the target culture. Chaume expresses that the main concern of the translator, in this case, should be achievement of cohesion and coherence between image and words. The second group comprises visual signs that do not exist in the target audience, yet can be understood with a verbal explanation. The last group covers nonverbal elements that do not exist in the target culture and cannot be explained due to the confusion it may create or the lack of meaning it may have for the target audience.⁷⁶

This classification indicates the possibility of finding certain nonverbal signs that become untranslatable for the target audience. Chaume, in his examples, does not use the combination of nonverbal communication and humour. He merely explores nonverbal communication as a normal element of the narrative. It can be assumed that the combination of both elements- humour and nonverbal communication- may greatly increase the difficulty of the translation, since these elements are difficult to translate by themselves, as have been discussed separately. It can be assumed that the combination of both elements leads to the constraining of each.

⁷⁴ Frederic Chaume Valera, ‘Translating non-verbal information in dubbing’ in *Nonverbal communication and Translation: New perspective and challenges in Literature, Interpretation and the Media* edited by Fernando Poyatos (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1997), p. 316

⁷⁵ Chaume, p. 320

⁷⁶ Chaume, p. 325

Examples in which humour and nonverbal communication are combined should be explored in order to better understand the difficulties of the combination. A moment present in *A night in Casablanca* can serve to illustrate this point. Chico and Harpo are playing at the roulette in the casino of the hotel. Harpo wins and decides to play again all his money to the same number.

Original Version:

Chico: Are you crazy? We gotta save something for a rainy day.

Harpo takes out his umbrella.

Spanish translation:

Chico: ¿Te has vuelto loco? ¿Quieres peder esa fortuna? Hay que dejar algo para los días malos.

This pun relies on the combination of the English idiom 'to save something for a rainy day' which means to save something, for example money, for a time in the future in which it may be needed. The English idiom could be translated into Spanish with the idiom '*ahorrar algo para la época de las vacas flacas*'. The literal translation is 'to save something for when the cows are thin'. The problem arises with the semiotic constraints of Harpo's umbrella. Had the Spanish idiom been used then the umbrella would be redundant - the Spanish viewer would not understand the presence of the umbrella. It would be confusing for the target audience to have an incoherent message between the visual and the aural text; the translators in this case have followed the second of Chaume's categories: the visual sign that does not exist for the target audience, yet can be adapted. The sentence *¿Quieres peder esa fortuna?* enables the Spanish audience to better understand the translated idiom. The sentence 'hay que dejar algo para los días malos' may have not been sufficient for the Spanish audience to fully understand the meaning.

Another example can illustrate a case in which the Spanish translators have not only failed to successfully translate the humoristic passage but may also have disoriented the audience. This scene was described in the introduction of this study (pages six and seven). As mentioned, Harpo needs to tell Chico about the

plan of murder against Groucho in *A night in Casablanca*. Harpo gesticulates the entire message.

Harpo gesticulates a moustache with his index finger above the upper lip.

Chico: Buffalo Bill?

Harpo mimes eating something (in English it forms the word 'corn')

Chico: ¿Que quieres comer melón?

Harpo nods, steps on Chico's foot and blows. (The English version composes the surname Kornblow)

Chico: ¡Ay! Mi callo, callo. ¡Claro!, esto me recuerda a 'Kallo'. ¿Qué sabes de él?

Harpo mimes drinking a bowl of soup. He then imitates a Chinese man (with his index fingers pointing to the sky)

Chico: ¿Sopa? ¿Qué sopa? ¿Un chinito? Que come sopa, que come arroz... sopa, arroz, sopa, arroz oh sorpresa! Tienen una sorpresa. ¿Qué clase de sorpresa?

Harpo mimes shooting a gun.

Chico: ¿Llevarle de caza?

Harpo passes his index finger through his throat.

Chico: ¿Qué quieren ahorcarle?

Harpo moves his hips back and forth.

Chico: ¿Asesinarle?

Harpo pulls on his jacket.

Chico: ¿Hacerle desaparecer? Que quieren hacer desaparecer a 'Kallo'.

An extract of the original scene can be used to identify the aspects that may not have been very well transferred in Spanish due to the visual constraints. Some gestures have not been translated: eating corn (in the Spanish version Chico asks 'are you eating melon?'); or the action of blowing. The German Nazi is named Kallo (rather than Kornblow in English). This helps the translator to refer to him with the action of stepping on Chico's foot as *callo* (corn in Spanish). The word 'surprise' is compound in the original version with the words 'soup' and 'rice'. The Spanish version uses the literal translation: *sopa* and *arroz*. The compound word is

rather unnatural, to the point that it may cause disorientation. The last gesture appears to be less connected to its signifier: pulling the neck of the jacket does not appear to have any logical relationship to the idea of 'disappearing'. The Spanish dubbed version portrays a confusing Harpo: he delivers messages that no one understands nor even tries to interpret. This aspect radically opposes Harpo's clever and well structured message in the original version.

To conclude, basic facial expressions are considered biological responses. This means that they can be easily understood universally, minimising the need of translation while making the pantomimic humour easily understood. The use of kinesics has been proved to be culturally related. This factor has made the Spanish audience to lose some of the humoristic intended message; thus rather unexpectedly, the Marx Brothers are very famous and popular in Spain.

4.3. How are the Marx Brothers understood in Spain?

This last point will attempt to clarify the reasons that the Marx Brothers have been so successful in Spain, despite the humoristic passages not being transferred correctly in their films. Empirical research conducted by Adrián Fuentes Luque⁷⁷ regarding the reception of Marx Brothers humour by an English speaking audience, contrasting that of a Spanish audience, offers, although not a definite conclusion on the response of translated humour, a greater understanding on how the foreign product is received in Spain.

Fuentes interviewed a group of English and Spanish speaking people. He found that the majority of the Spanish interviewees did not understand the majority of the intended jokes in a scene of *Duck Soup*, in comparison to the English speaking group, who understood and were able to identify most of the humoristic element. This fact is expected, due to the literal translation of many puns and humoristic scenes. The most relevant finding was the fact that the Spanish group interviewed found the 'misunderstood' scenes funny. The majority of the Spanish people

⁷⁷ Adrián Fuentes Luque, 'La recepción del humor audiovisual traducido: estudio comparativo de fragmentos de las versiones doblada y subtitulada al español de la película *Duck Soup*, de los Hermanos Marx' (Universidad de Granada, unpublished: 2000)

interviewed in the survey stated that the Marx Brothers' absurd and surreal dialogues were the element that provoked laughter. The absurdity of the dialogues was produced, as mentioned previously, by the literal translations and the visual constraints. This survey suggests that the Marx Brothers are in fact famous and appreciated by Spanish society even if the dubbed versions mistranslate many humoristic elements. It is surprising to discover that the same film can provoke laughter with different humoristic strategies in different locations.

Fuentes had not addressed in his study the possible relevance of the American distribution companies that impel the Spanish audience to watch the American comedians. This is an aspect that should also be taken into consideration, as Hollywood has enjoyed Western filmic supremacy since the beginning of the First World War. This may suggest that the Spanish audience, as part of a commercial circuit, watch the films that the filmic superpower desires them to, due to the strength of marketing and advertising campaigns, even if they are not familiar with American culture, politics or economics.

5. CONCLUSION

The film industry has been considered a globalised art form since its early development, due to the exportation of films. The arrival of sound, however, challenged this 'film traffic', the end of which would have caused a negative global economic impact. The existence of different languages in films became a tangible problem with the arrival of talkies, due to the lack of technology available for translating films. Various solutions were adopted until dubbing became the standard practice that once again stabilised the film market.

This study has analysed Spanish dubbed versions of the films of American comedic group Marx Brothers. They have been chosen due to the various types of humour used in their films: satire, 'ethnic' humour, pantomime, slapstick and word game humour, among others benefiting the range of analysis in this study. The study of the translated version of any film obviously brings to light the main differences between the original and the dubbed version. The intention of this study was to understand whether a completely faithful translation is possible in any humoristic case while identifying the major areas of difficulty. Of the films analysed, the Spanish dubbed versions portray radically different types of humour from the original in most cases. Three major areas of knowledge were explored in order to assess the extent to which the audiovisual translations of Marx Brothers' humour have been faithful and correct: the process of dubbing, the notions of comedy and laughter and the use of the nonverbal communication.

Dubbed, rather than subtitled versions, were chosen for this study for different reasons. Firstly, Spain was unable to broadcast subtitled films due to the censorship laws enforced by Franco's regime, which lasted until the late 1970s. The Marx Brothers became famous in Spain exclusively with the dubbed version of their films. Secondly, dubbing is a complete substitution of the original text, allowing the translators to adapt the humour of the Marx Brothers to the Spanish market with fewer restrictions. Dubbing also allows the viewer to concentrate in the visual text of the film, an important factor in recognising Marx Brothers

humour. The quality of the Spanish dubbing, acclaimed by Spanish scholars, has also been taken into consideration in this decision.

Synchronisation is the major technical limitation existing in the process of dubbing. Both versions, the original and the dubbed, should present the same information. The dubbed version, however, must adapt the pace of speech to the standard pace of the target language. This may require a shortening or lengthening of the translated version. This process also aims for the best lip synchronisation movement possible; however the synchronisation process limits considerably the faithfulness achieved in the process of translation.

Cultural adaptation is another problematic area present in audiovisual translation. This can vary from the substitution or adaptation of a local reference to other much more subtle transformations, and can be considered a manipulative process when it is done in keeping with censorship practices. Cultural adaptation is an important process that allows the target audience to experience a similar reaction to that of original audience. This adaptation, however, can only be completed through the aural channel. It must be considered that the original version has been designed for a specific society, where all elements communicated through different channels are presumed to be understood. Any visual elements not recognised by the target audience, if significant as a narrative element, may need their meanings to be conveyed through the aural channel. Audiovisual translations therefore have significant constraints due to the prevailing qualities of the image.

Spanish practices of dubbing also seem to modify important aspects of the original version. Spanish dubbing actors do not aim to imitate the voice, tone or accent of the original actor, and this has caused some significant losses. Chico's 'ethnic' humour, which consists of confusing homophonic words, is not translatable in the Spanish version with his characteristic 'poor English' and strong Italian accent. The Spanish version presents a character who accidentally confuses words without a narrative justification. Furthermore, Chico's verbal confusions have, in many cases, not been successfully translated into Spanish due to the literal translation of word

games. The Spanish translation reflects an absurd dialogue rather than the ethnic or word game humour characteristic of the comedians.

The second major area explored in this study was the translation of comedy and laughter. It has been shown that comedy is often defined by the emotional reaction that its creator intends to provoke: laughter. The translation of humour is more complex -to the point that some authors consider it untranslatable- as one must achieve the same physical reaction as in the target audience. Several philosophical theories on humour and laughter were referenced, in order to understand the major reasons for human laughter. These can be considered universal, yet the specific elements that activate that physical reaction are often associated with a specific culture. Laughter is caused by the transgression of a specific 'expected' situation, meaning that the viewer needs to understand the situation that has been transgressed in the film in order to laugh. This justifies the reasons why the translation of satire is so complex, as seen in the example of the taxes in the Marx Brothers' *A night at the Opera*. The Spanish viewer must to be familiar with the American economical situation otherwise it may appear to be just an exaggerated dialogue without specific meaning.

Zabalbeosca's process of the translation of humour has been used to assess whether the priority, the function of the humour and the state of mind or ideology of the speaker have been respected. This process is used to evaluate the faithfulness of the dubbed version with the original; for example, the priority of humour could not be retained in the word games, as several examples indicate. This is a result of the specificities of a language and constraints of the visual channel. Moreover, Franco's censorship also discouraged good translations in order to eliminate the sexual references present in the original films.

The final aspect studied was nonverbal communication in film language. Nonverbal communication has been neglected in translation studies, despite the audiovisual medium being a major source of information. This study only concentrated only on kinesics due to its importance in Marx Brothers humour, and because the word limit of this study does not allow for coverage of the great range of nonverbal

communication in the Brothers' work. The human being's basic facial expressions have been proved to be universal. This aspect allows the major pantomimic and slapstick gestures to be understood universally, minimising the need of translation.

The cultural differences in the use of kinesics have caused some losses in the transfer of humour. Spain is considered an 'expressive culture', unlike the United States. The Marx Brothers, especially Chico, use exaggerated mannerisms-opposing the stereotype of the 'inexpressive American'. The similar use of kinesics here can be understood as a cultural approximation between America and Spain. Chico, however, seems to play with the Italian stereotypes (Italy also being an expressive culture) and distances himself from the standard American use of kinesics as a humoristic strategy. The American audience laughs at the exaggerated mannerisms of the Italians; however, the Spanish audience who use similar gesticulation in their every day speech, would probably not find humour in Chico's mannerisms unless they were aware of their own cultural stereotype. In others words, this kinesic approximation, which at first appears to be an advantage due to fewer elements needing to be translated, represents a significant obstacle to cultural understanding of this 'ethnic nonverbal' type of humour.

Harpo's dumbness justifies the presence of many visual jokes. They represent one of the most difficult elements to be translated by Spanish translators. The Marx Brothers enrich their word games, already difficult to translate, with visual elements. This places a significant restraint on the translation because of the gestures and objects used by Harpo, which must be included in the translation, while considering the others problems already mentioned (synchronisation, cultural adaptation). In some cases, the verbal jokes were not successfully transferred, yet did not disorient the audience; however, other examples show that humour has not been transferred correctly into Spanish and also disorients the public due to their bad translations.

To conclude, all the aforementioned aspects indicate that most of the humoristic elements of the Marx Brothers films have not been transferred successfully to the Spanish dubbed versions. This indicates that their humour is particularly difficult

to translate, due to its connection to culture and language- two of the most difficult elements to transfer, as well as an often extra visual constraint. Secondly, the poor transferral of Marx Brothers humour in Spanish translations may indicate that the Spanish translators may not be the best worldwide from the point of view of quality. However, it would be necessary to assess the quality of Marx Brothers' dubbed versions in others countries in other to assess whether the humour of the Marx Brothers can be transferred in a better way, before judging Spain's position regarding dubbing worldwide.

The Marx Brothers are a popular group of comedians in Spain. The fact, as this study has shown, that key elements of their humour are not well transferred to the dubbed versions, suggests that the Spanish viewer laughs at the incongruity of the dialogues frequent in the dubbed versions. The 'witty word game' characteristic of this comedic group, is often substituted by an absurd dialogue or solution. This seems to suggest that Spanish and American audiences encounter two different types of humour in their respective versions. Further study on the reception of dubbed films would be necessary in order to better evaluate what people understand in relation to the humour of the films. This would allow for a broader assessment of the correctness and faithfulness of the translated versions.

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