Multilingual Translation of English Idioms in Internet-based TV series: A Contrastive Approach

MARIA LABARTA POSTIGO

Universitat de València (IULMA)
E-mail: *maria.labarta@uv.es*

This paper analyzes the strategies and challenges involved in the translation of English idioms in a specific domain of broadcast media. Current technology and distribution networks make it possible to watch series from around the world shortly after they are aired in their original language. Although sometimes dubbed, Internet-based TV series are often broadcast with multilingual subtitles. I will focus here specifically on idioms in subtitles translated from English into German, Norwegian, Spanish, and Portuguese. The study considers 10 comedy and drama series screened by media service providers (Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Filmin).

The data will be described from a cognitive and contrastive perspective. I follow a methodology drawn from a previous article (Labarta Postigo, 2020). My main aim is to shed light on the strategies used in the translation process and to compare translation outcomes across languages. In terms of contrastive analysis, variants of the same language, such as Latin-American and European Spanish, and Brazilian and European Portuguese, have been considered.

The findings of this study are of potential use in pedagogical applications that develop learners' cultural awareness and their understanding of figurative language in the foreign languages in question, as well as in the field of audiovisual subtitling translation.

INTRODUCTION: INTERNET-BASED TV SERIES, MULTILINGUAL TRANSLATION, AND SUBTITLING

Present-day technologies and the fast, wide distribution of media networks have made it possible for viewers to access new series from around the world far more easily than was previously the case. Companies such as Netflix and Amazon, which offer a wide variety of filmic material, also produce their own series. In recent years, these companies have chosen to distribute their series and films on the Internet due to the ease of accessibility. At the same time, there has been a growing tendency on the part of consumers to favor Web-based, on-demand entertainment.

Most of these companies' productions are in the source language (SL) English, and as Dwyer (2017) notes, the most widely viewed films across the globe are produced in English:

> As Charles Acland (2012) summarises, English 'is the dominant language of origin for the most visible and available films viewed by most countries.' According to these reports, the market dominance of English and Hollywood has only increased in recent years. (p. 2)

Dwyer (2017) goes on to note that if we consider the mother tongues of the global audience, less than 5% of the world's population is estimated to speak English as a native language, and this percentage is currently decreasing. If native speakers of English represent only 4.92%[1] of the world's population, the vast majority of the worldwide audience, some 95.08%, watch filmic productions (screen media) in their foreign language—English—in translated format, with either subtitles or dubbing.

My research interest in this study focuses on original series with English as a source language (SL) and with subtitles in other languages. In a previous study (Labarta Postigo, 2020), I explored the metaphorical dimension of idioms in German and Spanish movies and their translation into English subtitles. Contrastive analysis showed significant differences between the strategies followed for German-to-English and for Spanish-to-English translations. This has motivated the present study, which approaches the issue from the opposite direction: the translation of English as a SL into German and Spanish, as well into several other languages. Instead of looking at movies, I will explore TV series offered by media providers, since these are currently among the most successful formats in the entertainment industry. The most typical form in which such series are offered is in multilingual versions using subtitling[2], that is, adding text to the screen in one of various languages, while retaining the original soundtrack.

The present study takes a qualitative and contrastive approach to figurative language in the form of idioms in subtitles. It explores the translation of idioms from English, the source language, into various translated languages (TL) in order to highlight the translation strategies used in subtitling. For my analysis I have chosen to focus on two Germanic and two Romance translated languages: German (Ger) and Norwegian (Nw), and Portuguese (Pt) and Spanish (Sp). For the sake of illustrating certain points, I will occasionally provide examples in other languages, including Arabic (Ar), Catalan (Ct), French (Fr), Italian (It), Danish (Dn), and Swedish (Sw). For this study, I wanted to increase the number of translated languages, but keep the same linguistic families (i.e., Germanic and Romance). As for the example outside these two language families (e.g., Arabic), it is interesting and pertinent to my arguments. The criteria for the language choice were the availability of subtitles and the languages that I speak and understand.

A further goal of the analysis will be to consider varieties of the same language, such as Latin-American and European Spanish, or Brazilian and European Portuguese, since these varieties are sometimes offered separately in subtitle options.

The paper is divided into four sections. An overview of idioms and their importance in filmic text translation is followed by a presentation of the theoretical framework and a description of the source of the data. Then the results of the analysis are presented, illustrated with selected examples for each translation strategy. The final section offers conclusions and some suggestions for further research.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE AND IDIOMS

What is meant by figurative language? Figures of speech such as metaphors, sayings, and idioms go beyond the literal, denotative meanings of words to give readers new cultural and imaginative insights. Figurative language plays a significant role in all areas of language use and is therefore of crucial importance in applied linguistics. According to Steen (2006), when applied linguists study metaphor, they are typically concerned with metaphor in *language as use*, rather than *language as a system*. A metaphor or idiom acquires concrete meaning in the moment

and context of its use. Consequently, second language (L2) learners need to know how metaphors and idioms are used in real-world contexts in order to successfully communicate in the language. The knowledge and ability to use metaphor is called *metaphoric competence* (Littlemore & Low, 2006; Low, 2008). This competence as well as the ability to understand idioms and figurative language in general is indeed one of the greatest challenges for second and foreign language teaching and learning. Littlemore and Low (2006) claim that "learning about words is not the same as learning to use them or deciding whether one is being manipulated, and control over metaphor is one of the essential tools for empowering learners to cope successfully with native speakers" (p. 287).

For many linguists today, metaphors are a matter of non-literal mapping across conceptual domains (Lakoff, 1993; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). The theoretical framework of the current research is based on Lakoff´s Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff, 1993; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980); it also embraces Gibbs' work on metaphor and culture (Gibbs, 1996, 2001; Gibbs et al., 1997) and on idioms, idiomatic, and literal meaning (Gibbs, Nayak, & Cutting, 1989; Gibbs & O'Brien, 1990). My analysis will focus on idioms, considered by providers like Netflix to be one of the greatest challenges for translators. In order to select and hire professionals to produce subtitles, the company has designed an online subtitling and translation test called HERMES. Its goal is to evaluate candidates' skills by focusing on four main abilities, one of which is to "translate idiomatic phrases into their target language." Indeed, idioms are given an extraordinary importance in Netflix content production, as noted on the Netflix Tech Blog:[3]

> Idioms are expressions that are often times [*sic*] specific to a certain language ("you're on a roll", "he bought the farm") and can be a tough challenge to translate into other languages. There are approximately 4,000 idioms in the English language and being able to translate them in a culturally accurate way is critical to preserving the creative intent for a piece of content.

Most idioms are metaphorical and have a figurative meaning. The figurative meanings of idioms are highly expressive in all languages, which we can illustrate with some examples. Thus, the Spanish idiom "*dar calabazas a alguien*" (literally, to give someone pumpkins) means to turn someone down. A different example is "to hit the nail on the head," which means precisely the same in English as it does in the German "*den Nagel auf den Kopf schlagen*," that is, to do or say something that is exactly right or to the point. There is in fact a Spanish version of the same idiom, "*dar en el clavo*," but here less precision is implied, although its literal meaning, "to hit the nail," is similar. In this context, the Portuguese idiom to express the same idea "*acertar na mosca*" (literally, to hit the fly) is interesting, selecting as it does the metaphorical image of a fly, a moving being, rather than a static object, the nail. Precision is once again seen to be necessary.

As Labarta Postigo (2020) explained, "Idioms are essential in daily communication. We use them constantly, and as in real life, the fictional dialogs in film also use them to reflect the reality of verbal communication" (p. 49). The article goes on to say that:

> Most idioms are metaphorical and must therefore be processed by the listener/reader in a different way than literal expressions. The use of an idiom may trigger a metaphorical cognitive process, evoking in the listener/reader an association with an image/idea that leads to its understanding. This is not the case, or it happens significantly less, when the listener/reader is processing literal paraphrases of idioms. (p. 51)

Idioms can be classified according to different criteria, such as grammar or syntax, depending on their function in the utterance. "To be on the same page" or "to be an open book" are nominal, while "to stay in the game" or "to clear the air" are verbal. Detailed categorizations of phraseological units according to such criteria can be found in Corpas (1996, pp. 53-213) and García-Page (2008, pp. 82-212). However, my main interest here is not the grammatical features of idioms but rather their cultural dimension. For my analysis I will consider widespread idioms and culture-specific or culturally bound idioms in particular. I will also discuss the type known as travelling idioms. Explanations and examples are presented in section 4 below.

METHODOLOGY AND CORPUS

In Labarta Postigo (2020), I developed a methodology to analyze translation strategies used in producing English subtitles for original movies in Spanish and German, based on various approaches to different translation types and goals (Baker, 1992; Conca & Guía, 2014; Corpas, 2000; Díaz Cintas & Anderman, 2009; Díaz Cintas & Ramael, 2014; Ebeling, 2012; Gottlieb, 1992, 1994; Newmark, 1988; Oltra, 2015; Trim, 2007; van Lawick, 2006). The following translation categories (Labarta Postigo, 2020, p. 53) were applied in the analysis:

Category	**Abbreviation**
1. Omission	O
2. Explicit meaning	EM
3. Partial equivalence	PT
4. Total equivalence	TE
5. Loan translation	LT
6. Creation	C

I will focus here on the four most frequent categories, according to my first analysis of movies, and on the current study of series: Total equivalence (TE), Partial Equivalence (PE), Omission (O), and Explicit meaning (EM). The first two of these strategies use an idiom in the translation, whereas the latter two do not. These categories can be defined thus:

- Omission (O): to omit an idiom from the SL in translating it into the TL.
- Explicit meaning (EM): to leave out the idiom from the SL and to translate it based on its literal meaning in the TL, that is, using a word or an unidiomatic expression which coincides with the idiom's original meaning.
- Partial equivalence (PE): Somewhere between total equivalence and the absence of equivalence. The strategy involves translating the SL idiom into a similar, but not identical, idiomatic TL expression, one which has the same meaning as in the SL. The two idioms have identical target domains, but do not fully correspond in their metaphorical structure, image, or source domains.
- Total equivalence (TE): This is of course the ideal translation, in which an exact metaphorical equivalent in the TL is found.

In addition to these four defined categories I would like to propose a more detailed classification of partial equivalences, one that depends on the degree of equivalence with the

SL idiom. It seems to be the case that an extensive detailed gradation is possible here, as Corpas (2000) notes in the case of phraseological units:

> The equivalence relationship between phraseological units of two different languages is gradual and may be caused by various factors, these including semantic, figurative and connotative incongruences. The phraseological correspondences are not typically black and white terms: describing them properly requires an extensive range of textual grays, whose tonalities vary depending on the text and context. (p. 490)

For the practical purposes of my analysis, I will define three main subcategories on a 3-point scale, although it is recognized that more nuances and gray areas are always possible. In these three cases, the SL and TL idioms are similar with regard to their actual meaning, but differ in their metaphorical images, as follows:

1) PE 1: Slight differences in the metaphorical image and/or domains, such as in one specific detail. For example, "this is water under the bridge" vs. Spanish "*eso es agua pasada"* (it is passed water).
2) PE 2: Same metaphorical scheme, but different domains. For example, "to have skeletons in the closet" vs. German "*Leichen im Keller haben*" (to have corpses in the cellar).
3) PE 3: The metaphorical scheme, image, and domains are completely different. For example, "to hit a brick wall" vs. Portuguese "*dar murro em ponta de faca*" (to punch the tip of the knife).

This methodology can be used to analyze any kind of fictional Web-based series. In the present study, the corpus consists of 250 expressions from selected episodes of 10 fictional series within the genres of comedy and drama (crime, political, psychological, etc.). The series are offered by some of the main media service providers for the big and small screen: Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Filmin. All series were originally in English, mostly American English (e.g., *Lie to Me*), but also in other English varieties such as British (*Endeavour*), Australian (*Miss Fisher's Murders Mysteries*), and Irish English (*Jack Taylor*). The complete list of series is provided in Appendix 1 and in the References under the names of the executive producer(s).

As for the TLs, the subtitles offered vary depending on the media service provider and the series. For this reason, specific TLs can be different in each example presented in the qualitative analysis.

RESULTS OF THE QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Based on a qualitative analysis of the corpus, I explored the most salient strategies used to translate SL idioms into TL subtitles. To illustrate the results, I will set out the different categories and give at least one example of a subtitle from each category. For reasons of space, only the text of the subtitles analyzed is provided with these examples.

Total Equivalence (TE)

For the category of total equivalence translations, let us consider the idiom "to come out" (short for "to come out of the closet"), as it is used in a scene from *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*. The context is as follows: two detectives are in a police car talking to the driver, who happens to be their boss, and suddenly one of them asks her boss, "When did you come out?" The translation of this expression is almost identical in the subtitles of the five languages selected here, indicating relaxed attitudes towards homosexuality in these cultures, in which it is legal and widely accepted by society.

Example 1. *From the Series* Brooklyn Nine-Nine *(Season 1, Episode 1)*

SL Eng: **When did you come out?**

- TL Nw: *Når kom du ut?* [Literally: When did you come out?]
- TL Pt: *Quando saiu do armário?* [Literally: When did you come out of the closet?]
- TL Sp: *¿Cuándo salió del armario?* [Literally: When did you come out of the closet?]
- TL Ger: *Wann war Ihr Coming-out?* [Literally: When was your "Coming-out"?]

In Norwegian, the idiom is translated in its shorter form: *Når kom du ut?* literally, "When did you come out?" The Portuguese and Spanish translations (*Quando saiu do armário? / ¿Cuándo salió del armario?*) favor the preservation of the original full form. Finally, in German the idiom appears verbatim in English.

The Norwegian translation is the closest to the English idiom, whereas the Spanish and Portuguese subtitles preserve the full form of the original idiom in the translation (losing part of the colloquial inflection of the English model). In turn, the distinctively English expression "coming-out" is fully accepted in German and is included in dictionaries, as in Duden Wörterbuch (2020).

Loan words from English into German are quite common and the process of borrowing has increased in recent years. This may be the result of increased language contact between the languages, or, according to Kettemann (2002), may simply be a matter of fashion reflecting the political, economic, cultural, and social situation within the group of languages.

German is not the only TL with this Anglicism. This also occurs in Italian: "*Quando ha fatto coming out?*" (literally, "When was your coming-out?"). Despite all these variants, the examples of subtitles for these five languages belong to the category TE.

If we look at the etymology of expressions such as "*salir del armario*," "*sair do armario*," "*kommer ut*," or "Coming-out (German)/coming-out (Italian)" in the dictionaries of the respective languages, we see that their English origins are always acknowledged. The idiom "to come out (of the closet)" is therefore a good example of what is called a "travelling idiom,"[4] that is, an idiom whose popularity has led to its spread from one language (English, in this case) to many others. This particular idiom "has traveled" from English to Spanish through its occurrence in many forms of discourse. We also know that "*salir del armario*" comes from the literal rendering of the English "to get/come out of the closet" by the translator of Sue Townsend's *Adrian Mole* novels (Corpas & Mena, 2003; Pamies, 2009).

A further example of TE is the expression "I was hoping he and I could bury the hatchet" from the series *Lie to Me* (Season 2, Episode 3), translated into Spanish as "*Esperaba*

enterrar el hacha de guerra" (literally, "I was hoping to bury the war hatchet"). The same expression "bury the hatchet" (*Endeavour* Season 6, Episode 1) has a perfect equivalent in Catalan as "*enterrar la destral*." The expression "There is another way to find the needle in this haystack" (from *Elementary* Season 5, Episode 6) becomes in Spanish "*Hay otra forma de encontrar la aguja en el pajar*." These examples are all cases of widespread idioms. This means that an idiom can exist in various languages with the same or similar structure and figurative meaning (Piirainen, 2006). One of the most widespread idioms is "You have got a screw loose," an expression that has equivalents in many languages:

- Ger: *Du hast eine Schraube locker*
- Nw: *Du har en skrue løs*
- Pt: *Você tem um parafuso a menos*
- Sp: *Te falta un tornillo*
- Fr: *Il te manque une vis*
- Dn: *Du har en skrue løs*

In conclusion, the TE of existing idiomatic expressions in the TL is only possible in the case of widespread idioms and only when the idioms are common to both languages. Of course, a literal translation of the idiom, without the previous existence of the idiomatic expression in the TL, is possible but it would be considered a loan translation rather than a TE. I have not found any such examples in the present corpus, but a translation of this kind might signal the beginning of a traveling idiom, as was the case with "to come out of the closet."

Partial Equivalence (PE)

To express the idea of madness, English offers many figurative possibilities, such us "to go bananas," "to go/be nuts," or "to lose one's marbles," "to be as nutty as a fruitcake," "not playing with a full deck (of cards)," "to have bats in the belfry," "to turn into a basket case," "to be away with the fairies," etc. In the languages analyzed here, we find similar idiomatic expressions:

- Ger: *Du hast nicht alle Tassen im Schrank* (Literally: you don't have all the cups in your cupboard)
- Nw: *Har du røyka sokka dine?* (Literally: have you smoked your socks?)
- Pt: *Você tem macaquinhos no sotão* (Literally: you have little monkeys in your basement)
- Sp: *Se te ha ido la olla* (Literally: your kettle is gone)
- Fr: *devenir chèvre* (Literally: to become a goat)
- It: *Hai perso la bussola* (Literally: you have lost your compass)
- Ct: *Estàs tocat del bolet* (Literally: you are touched in your mushroom)
- Dn: *Du har roterende fis i kasketten* (Literally: you have rotating fish in the cap)

Although the metaphors vary from language to language, all these idioms point to the same meaning. In German, for example, a mad person doesn't have "all the cups in his/her cupboard," while in Spanish the missing item is someone's "kettle." In Norwegian, somebody who is crazy "has smoked his/her own socks," while in Brazil the person "keeps little monkeys

in the basement." To choose one of those expressions for a translation of "to be nuts" is a partial translation or partial equivalence (PE).

This strategy consists of the translation of the SL idiom into a similarly idiomatic expression in the TL. The three subcategories of degree introduced in section 3 have also been considered in the analysis and will be described in what follows.

PE Degree 1

An example of the first degree is the translation into German and Danish of the idiom "water under the bridge" to refer to a situation in the past that no longer matters.

Example 2. *From the Series* The Good Wife *(Season 2, Episode 21)*

SL Eng*:* **A lot of water under the bridge**

- TL Ger: *Seitdem ist viel Wasser den Bach runtergeflossen* [Literally: A lot of water has flowed down the drain since then]
- TL Dn: *Det er løbet meget vand i åen siden da* [Literally: There has been a lot of water in the river since then]

The same metaphor of a stream of water that flows and passes by is used to indicate that something is from the past and no longer matters. Nevertheless, there is a slight difference between the two source domains here. In the English idiom, water flows "under the bridge," while in German the water flows "down the drain" without the image of a bridge, but with a sense of waste. A similar degree occurs in Danish. The source domain is a river instead of a drain, and there is no bridge in the metaphorical image.

This strategy is also used in translations from *Endeavour* into Spanish and Catalan subtitles. The context for the scene is a conversation between two men; one apologizes for something that happened previously, and the other man responds.

Example 3. *From the Series* Endeavour *(Season 6, Episode 3)*

SL Eng*:* **As far as I was concerned, it is all water under the bridge**

- TL Sp: *En lo que a mi respecta, es agua pasada* [Literally: As far as I was concerned, it is past water]
- TL Ct: *Pel que fa a mi és aigua pasada* [Literally: As far as I was concerned, it is past water]

The metaphorical image of the idiom in these two languages is reduced to "it is past water." There is no bridge, no river, no drain, but the target domain remains the same. Such translations can thus be considered partial equivalences, degree 1.

PE Degree 2

An example for the second degree can be found in the translation of the idiom "my ass is on the line" into Spanish and Norwegian. When the main character in the series *Lie to Me* asks a police officer for classified information, the officer makes him aware of the risk he is taking and the price to be paid for his request, with a physical metaphor (in English and Spanish) as opposed to a less extreme loss (in Norwegian).

Example 4. *From the Series* Lie to Me *(Season 2, Episode1)*

SL Eng*:* **My ass is on the line**

- TL Sp: *Me juego el cuello* [Literally: My neck is at stake]
- TL Nw*: Jobben min står på spill her* [Literally: My job is at stake here]

Here, the same metaphorical scheme (the idea that something is at stake) appears in the three languages. In the English source domain (and in Spanish) the cost is physical, while in the Norwegian version what is at stake is not a part of the body, but the job. The choice of different metaphors in each TL has to do with each particular culture, as I will discuss in the Conclusions.

PE Degree 3

We find an example of the third degree in the translation of the idiomatic expression "Are you fucking nuts?" into Spanish and German in the series *Homecoming*.

Example 5. *From the Series* Homecoming *(Season 1, Episode 2)*

SL Eng: **Are you fucking nuts?**

- TL Ger: *Hast du sie noch alle?* [Literally: Do you still have them all, a short form of the idiom "*Hast du nicht alle Tassen im Schrank*?", Don't you have all the cups in the cupboard?]
- TL Sp: *¿Se te ha ido la olla?* [Literally: Is your kettle gone?]

The idiomatic expression "Are you fucking nuts?" is uttered as a reaction of one of the characters, who is very surprised at his friend's idea. A wholly different metaphor is used in each of the three languages analyzed, while the source domain is the same: the idea of madness.

Explicit Meaning (EM)

This strategy consists of using an unidiomatic expression explaining or paraphrasing the idiom's actual meaning, rather than using an idiom in the TL. In this section, I will include some of the examples already mentioned, in which the translator opts for the explicit meaning (EM) instead of a total or a partial equivalence (TE or PE). I will also provide some new examples for this strategy, plus untranslatable idioms.

The translation of the expression "water under the bridge" in *MacMafia* is not always a partial equivalence as in the translations presented in PE, degree 1. In each of the following languages it is translated with an unidiomatic expression paraphrasing the idiom's meaning.

Example 6. *From the Series* MacMafia *(Season 1, Episode 7)*

SL Eng*:* **A lot of water under the bridge**

- TL Latin-American (LA) Sp: *Asunto olvidado* [Literally: The matter is forgotten]
- TL Brazilian (Br) Pt: *Isso ficou no passado* [Literally: This was/stayed in the past]
- TL Nw: *Det hører fortiden til* [Literally: It belongs to the past]
- TL Dn: *Det er forbi nu* [Literally: It is over now]
- TL Sw: *Det är förlåtet* [Literally: It is forgiven]

The Spanish and Portuguese translators skip the metaphor of the stream and choose the idiom's explicit meaning in each language, for example in Latin-American Spanish "*asunto olvidado*" (the matter is forgotten), or "*isso ficou no passado*" (this was/stayed in the past) in Brazilian Portuguese. Both Norwegian and Danish translators skip the idiom altogether and choose to give an explanation for "water under the bridge" that relates to the past (to an irrevocable past). In Swedish the slightly different translation "it is forgiven" appears, with the same strategy of avoiding the idiomatic expression.

An interesting example of non-translated idioms (due to censorship) is the vague/imprecise/non-committal translation of the above-mentioned expression "to come out of the closet" we find in Arabic:

Example 7. *From the Series* Brooklyn Nine-Nine *(Season 1, Episode 1)*

SL: **When did you come out?**

- TL Arabic: متى افصحت من ميولك؟
  [Literally: When did you disclose your tendencies?]

The euphemistic expression "to disclose tendencies" may be a means of avoiding any explicit reference to homosexuality, which is illegal in most Arab countries and is stigmatized by society.[5] The translator avoids full reference to acknowledged homosexuality, a behavior that the expression "comes out" has made banal. This is not surprising, since even legislation in some Arabic-speaking countries refers to homosexual acts only implicitly, as Ferchichi (2011) explains in his *Law and homosexuality: Survey and analysis of legislation across the Arab World*:

> Some Arab legislation tends to rely on the use of generic terms to describe homosexual acts. For example, legislation in four Arab countries (Lebanon, Syria, Bahrain, and Morocco) uses the term "acts against nature" or "contrary to nature." For example, Article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code declares that "all sexual intercourse against nature, is punishable by imprisonment up to one year." (pp. 5-6)

Another case in point is the translation of the example noted in PE degree 3 from *Homecoming* to European and South American cultural contexts. The European Spanish and German translations are closer to the English than the Latin-American Spanish version:

Example 8. *From the Series* Homecoming *(Season 1, Episode 2)*

SL Eng: **Are you fucking nuts?**

- TL (Latin American) LA Sp: ¿*Estás loco?* [Literally: Are you crazy?]
- TL Ger: *Hast du sie noch alle?* [Literally: Do you still have them all?–a short form of the idiom "*Hast du nicht alle Tassen im Schrank*?", Don't you have all the cups in the cupboard?]
- TL Sp: *¿Se te ha ido la olla?* [Literally: Is your kettle gone?]

The Latin-American Spanish translation merely offers a part of the explicit meaning. It not only skips the idiom, but also omits the swear word.

Two additional examples of this EM strategy are found in the translation of the Australian detective series *Miss Fisher's Murders Mysteries* into French. The beautiful, intelligent female character who is a private detective in the series tells Inspector Jack (the official law representative) that she doesn't follow orders:

Example 9. *From the Series* Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries *(Season 3, Episode 2)*

SL Eng: **I dance to no one's tune**

- TL Fr: *Personne ne me dit ce que j'ai à faire, Jack* [Literally: No one tells me what to do, Jack]

The French translation conveys assertiveness by using a more direct style, and the partial translation of the idiom is thus more effective. In turn, the translations into German (*Ich tanze nicht zu niemandes Pfeife, Jack*) and Norwegian (*Jeg danse ikke etter noes pipe, Jack)* use equivalent idioms: "I don't dance to anyone's pipe."

Finally, I will present another example of the EM strategy from the series *The Blacklist*. In this scene, the protagonist shoots his host prior to the dinner he was supposed to have with his victim and the victim's wife. While the injured man lies on the dining room floor, the killer/assassin sardonically apologizes to the wife: "I am sorry but… I'll take a rain check on the stroganoff."

Example 10. *From the Series* The Blacklist *(Season 1, Episode 11)*

SL Eng: **I'll take a rain check on the stroganoff.**

- TL Nw: *Jeg kommer gjerne tilbake for stroganoff.* [Literally: I would love to come back for the stroganoff]
- TL Ger: *Das mit dem Stroganoff holen wir ein andermal.* [Literally: We'll get that with the stroganoff another time]
- TL Sp: *Tendré que dejar el stroganoff para después.* [Literally: I will have to leave the stroganoff for later]
- TL Pt: *Vou ter que deixar o estrogonofe para outra hora.* [Literally: I'll have to leave the stroganoff for another time]

The translation of "to take a rain check" is one of the most challenging cases, because it is a unique idiom from American English. It has its origins in baseball games in the 19th century. If it rained and a game was postponed, the ticket holder could get a "rain check" and use it as a ticket for another game. Idioms of this kind are "culture-specific" or "culturally bound." They belong within the conventionalized knowledge of a particular culture and hence are difficult to translate, or indeed are untranslatable.

This particular idiom occurs quite frequently in the series analyzed and is usually translated with a phrase explaining the meaning of postponing something. Here are some examples of culturally bound idioms in other languages:

- Ger: *Ich verstehe nur Bahnhof* (Literally: I only understand "train station," meaning I don't understand anything)
- Nw: *saken er biff* (Literally: the matter is beef, meaning the matter is settled)
- Pt: *chutar o pau da barraca* (Literally: To kick the tent pole, meaning you don't care anymore about something and abandon it)
- Sp: *casarse de penalty* (Literally: to marry with a penalty, meaning to marry urgently because the bride is pregnant)
- Eng: to take/get a rain check / to kick the bucket / out of the park
- It: *in zona Cesarini* (Literally: In the Cesarini zone, meaning *in extremis* or to say that something has been saved for the last minute, a usage that derives from soccer, referring to an Italian player in the 1930's who often managed to save games in the last minute)
- Ct: *fer randa sense boixos* (Literally: to make lace without sticks, meaning to do very difficult things)

I have not found an idiomatic expression equivalent to "rain check" in other languages, but nowadays it is also used, or at least understood, in other English-speaking countries like Ireland and the UK. Some examples of series with main characters from those countries follow.

In *Jack Taylor*, a series set in Galway, Ireland, the protagonist says:

Example 11. *From the Series* Jack Taylor *(Season 1, Episode 9)*

SL Eng: **I'll take a rain check**

- TL Sp: *creo que vamos a pasar* [Lit: I think we will pass]

In *Elementary*, a crime series based on the character Sherlock Holmes, we find this idiom as well:

Example 12. *From the Series* Elementary *(Season 5, Episode 12)*

SL Eng: **Can I get a rain check?**

- TL Sp: *¿Lo podemos posponer?* [Lit: Can we postpone it?]

According to these examples, "to take a rain check" can be considered an "idiom" across English-speaking areas/countries. Contemporary films and TV series (audiovisual culture) have played an important role in the spread of such idioms.

CONCLUSIONS

The qualitative analysis presented in the current study has shown that only three out of the four most frequent strategies I described in previous research (Labarta Postigo, 2020) are utilized in the present corpus: Total Equivalence (TE), Partial Equivalence (PE), and Explicit Meaning (EM). No omissions (O) have been found. Also, only one strategy with no idiomatic expression in the translation (EM) was found. The two remaining categories with idioms in translation, TE and PE, are both well represented, as well as the three subcategories of Partial Equivalence.

The Omission (O) Strategy doesn't appear at all in the series analyzed, as was sometimes the case in my earlier analysis of German and Spanish movies with subtitles in English. This is a positive result of the current study in terms of translation accuracy, because omission implies that both the literal meaning and all possible connotations of the idiom are lost. It doesn't seem to be a problem in the series analyzed, since there is always a translation, either idiomatic or not.

As for translation through the TE strategy, I have shown above that it is only possible in the case of widespread idioms. The existence of the idiom in both SL and TL is a precondition for using this strategy, although it is not always what the translator chooses. According to the analysis, instead of TE, explicit meaning translations also occur.

Considering the results of the analysis, we can say that partial translations are used when a totally equivalent idiom doesn't exist in the TL, but when the translator wants to retain a figurative meaning similar to that of the SL expression. The three proposed subcategories of degree allow for a more subtle classification of the results in the current analysis. The first degree is close to TE and can be considered as a kind of transition between TE and PE. The third subcategory of PE requires more creativity from the translator. Despite the absence of

an equivalent idiom in the TL, the translator finds an idiom that manages to retain the figurative meaning in the translation.

The second subcategory is especially interesting because of its cultural dimension. The choice of images can be culturally related to a language, such as in the Example 4 "my job is at stake" in Norwegian versus the English "my ass is on the line." This can be a case of cultural transfer, in which a concept is transferred from one language to another and the metaphorical image changes to fit the TL. The translation into Norwegian suggests that one's job enjoys high value in Norwegian society. This is indeed the case, since it is common to have clear codes of conduct at work, not only at an institutional level, but also in private companies (e.g., Telenor, Equinor).[6] Those codes of conduct set out high standards of integrity and anticorruption rules. Employees must sign the code along with their contract, sometimes annually. Percival (2018) notes in his book *Working with Norwegians* how important work and quality of work are in Norway, and explains that Norwegians take great pride in their work.

Turning to idiomatic translations into other languages, my analysis shows that the figurative meaning of English idioms is considerably reduced in the TLs. This is mainly due to the frequent use of the EM strategy in all the languages analyzed. There are two possible reasons for the use of a translation without idiomaticity in the TL:

1) The idiom from the SL is translatable, but a non-idiomatic one is chosen instead.
2) The idiom from the SL is not translatable in the TL.

In the first case, the translator's own decision is in operation, since an idiomatic expression is indeed possible as a means of translating the idiom. As noted in Labarta Postigo (2020, pp. 63-66), omitting the idiom implies a loss of meaning and complexity in terms of content, which might be of a different nature, for example information relating to register, humor, etc.

The second case (i.e., the idiom is not translatable in the TL) corresponds to Example 11, "I'll take a rain check," a culturally bound idiom. This kind of idiom is either untranslatable or difficult to translate, as discussed above. In the case of culturally bound idioms, the EM strategy is the most suitable choice available. It would be a considerable challenge for a translator to create a new metaphor. While for the field of translation this is a very complex topic, for foreign language teaching, specific cultural idioms constitute a very rich source of learning. Each language and culture (or diversity of cultures) has its own culturally specific metaphorical expressions, in addition to those shared with other languages. These types of expressions, I believe, constitute a valuable resource that we can take advantage of in the transmission of concrete information about the target culture to students. Such idioms may reveal specific knowledge at historical, regional, and societal levels. To understand a message that is preserved in the original meaning of an idiom, specific knowledge, both linguistic and cultural, is sometimes required. Learning such content can facilitate a better memorization of the language, and, of course, can lead to its use in the foreign language. Understanding and knowing how to use idioms in a foreign language is undoubtedly one of the most difficult aspects of foreign language learning. Discovering, understanding, and acquiring certain metaphorical structures as they are used in the society whose language we are learning affords us the chance to better understand the culture itself, including its values and ways of thinking. This can be used in the classroom as a means of developing learners' cultural awareness.

Finally, I would like to point out one of the more surprising results of the current analysis, which is that some of the examples do not share many similarities, even when the respective languages belong to the same linguistic family.[7] There are also some noteworthy

differences to be found in the subtitles of two varieties of the same language. A good example here is Example 6 "water under the bridge" as translated into Brazilian and European Portuguese. Despite the existence of "*águas passadas*" (past water), the strategy chosen in the Brazilian Portuguese is EM "*isso ficou no passado*" (literally, this was/stayed in the past). This translation has more in common with the translations into the Scandinavian languages Norwegian and Danish, or even with the Swedish translation, than it does with the idiomatic translation into European Portuguese "*águas passadas*" (past water), which the translator chose not to use. These issues indicate the importance of the role of a specific translator in terms of the type of strategy chosen. Despite the availability of an idiomatic expression, the choice is sometimes to avoid it. Translators do, of course, have to follow guidelines, and censorship policies are also in force in some countries (as shown in Example 8). It is only after going through these filters that translators make their linguistic choices.

Something similar to what happens in Example 6 with the two varieties of Portuguese also occurs with European Spanish and Latin-American Spanish, as we have seen in the translation of "Are you (fucking) nuts?" in Table 8. German and European Spanish use the strategy of PE Degree 3, with an idiomatic expression in the translated subtitles, whereas Latin-American Spanish simply employs an objective explanation "*Estás loco*" (You are insane).

In addition to avoiding the idiom, the word "fucking" is also left untranslated into Latin-American Spanish. This occurs frequently, especially when the subtitles in the SL contain offensive words. In the same series, "you fucking nailed it" is translated into Spanish as "*has dado en el puto clavo*" (you hit the fucking nail on its head), while in Latin-American Spanish it is "*estuviste fantástico*" (you were awesome). This is an extreme euphemism and may be related to politeness or censorship rules in some Latin-American countries, where according to Scandura (2004, p. 130) translators are forced to tone down strong language.[8]

The qualitative approach to translation employed in this article has raised new questions that merit further study. One has to do with the differences that have been observed in the translation of idiomatic expressions and figurative meaning found within language families. To shed further light on this issue, an important step would be to carry out a quantitative analysis of a larger corpus, or of parallel corpora, of films/series to ascertain how translators of linguistically related TLs, e.g., Spanish and Portuguese, construct the figurative meaning in subtitles. Moreover, a detailed analysis of the translation of idioms—especially those which use strong language—in the subtitles of varieties of the same language, e.g., Spanish and Latin-American Spanish, would serve to support the findings presented here. Additionally, more work in this area will help us to better understand the reduction of figurative meaning in translated subtitles in general, and the toning down of strong language in Latin-American Spanish subtitles in particular.

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NOTES

[1] According to the 2019 edition of *Ethnologue*, published by SIL International, based in the United States.
[2] Diaz Cintas and Remael (2014, p. 8) define subtitling as follows: "Subtitling may be defined as a translation practice that consists of presenting a written text, generally on the lower part of the screen, that endeavors to recount the original dialog of the speakers as well as the discursive elements that appear in the image (letters, inserts, graffiti, inscriptions, placards and the like) and the information that is contained on the soundtrack (songs, voices off)".
[3] https://medium.com/netflix-techblog/the-netflix-hermes-test-quality-subtitling-at-scale-dccea2682aef
[4] For deeper insights into "travelling idioms," see Pamies (2009, pp. 30-42).
[5] According to Shaeer and Shaeer (2014, p. 2417), homosexuality is illegal in almost all Muslim countries, and punishable by death in many of them.
[6] See https://www.telenor.com/about-us/corporate-governance/code-of-conduct/ and https://www.equinor.com/no/how-and-why/sustainability/codes-of-conduct.html.
[7] See Appendix 2.
[8] According to Scandura (2004, p. 130): "A typical instance of censorship in Latin America is the usual habit of forcing translators to tone down strong language, i.e., substituting neutral words for vulgarities (e.g., using "penis" or "making love" for other slang expressions with the same meaning). In Latin American cable TV, it is difficult to find subtitles with strong or vulgar language."

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APPENDIX 1

Table 1
Subtitled Languages Available for the TV Series in this Study

Analyzed TLs	**Ger**	**Nw**	**Pt**	**Sp**						
Other Languages					**Ar**	**Ct**	**Dn**	**It**	**Fr**	**Sw**
SERIES										
Brooklyn Nine-Nine	√	√	√	√	√			√		
Elementary	√	√	√	√						
Endeavour	√	√	√	√		√				
Homecoming	√	√	√	√			√	√	√	
Jack Taylor	√	√	√	√						
Lie to me	√	√	√	√						
McMafia	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Miss Fisher´s Murders Mysteries	√	√	√	√					√	
The Blacklist	√	√	√	√				√	√	
The Good Wife	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√

APPENDIX 2

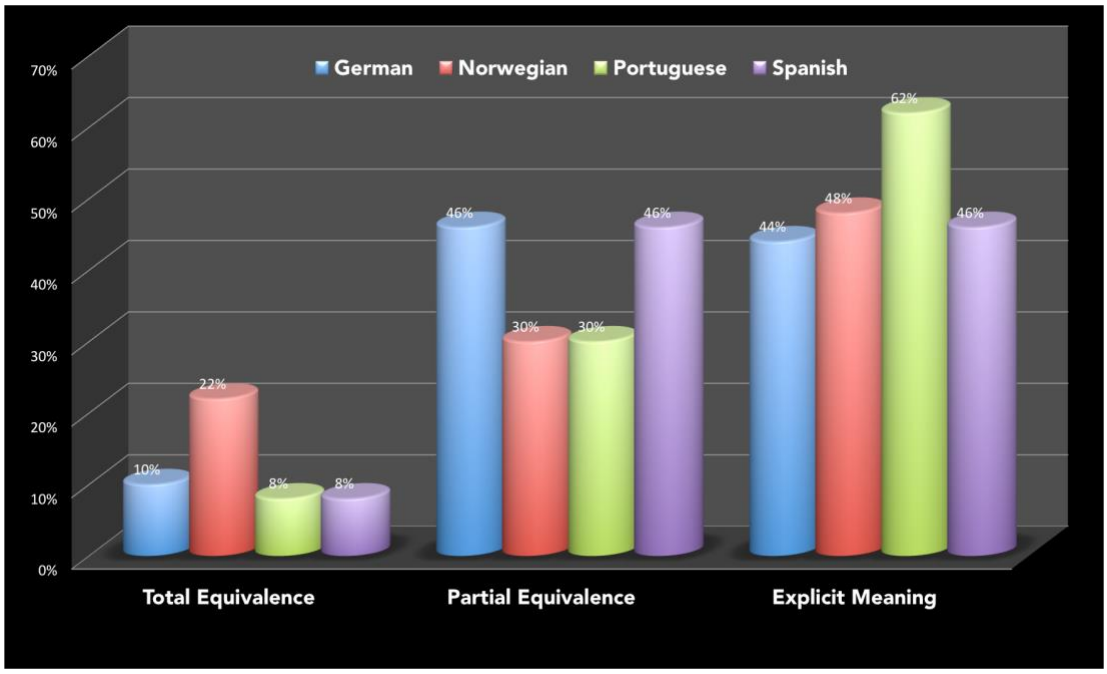

Figure 1. *Contrastive Analysis: German/Norwegian/Portuguese/Spanish.*