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# Culture Matters: Analysis of Nationalism in *Captain America*

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation studies the effects that the constraints of subtitling and the wrong choice of translation strategies have on transmitting American patriotism in the trilogy *Captain America*. Following the strategies mentioned by Tomaszewicz in Zoë Pettit's chapter in *New Trends in Audiovisual Translation*, it argues how an accurate use of a specific strategy does not guarantee an accurate transmission of the intended meaning in the original language. It attempts to demonstrate how important it is to have a proficient knowledge of both source and target culture by suggesting a possible interpretation that the audience might have done when reading the subtitles. While previous scholars have examined the degree of importance that precise translation of cultural references have on the correct transmission of the message, this study investigates the negative effects that the lack of accuracy when choosing translational strategies have on showing American nationalism.

Keywords: subtitling, strategies, nationalism, culture, *Captain America*

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## **Introduction: AVT, Subtitling and Culture**

Audiovisual translation (AVT) could be defined as a field that has not been the focus of study until very recent times. Even though nowadays it is very well known, the first studies about it were very brief, which has caused a lack of proper historiography of audiovisual translation (Díaz-Cintas 2009, 1). This type of studies emerged several decades ago, around 1950s and 1960s there were many compilation of papers related to it, but it was not until the 90s when AVT was in its golden age (2009, 3), which coincides with the rise of globalization and the increase of the impact that media had in society that still remains nowadays. Since then, innumerable are the research and studies done about AVT, investigating different translational approaches according to different genres and audiences or the pros and cons that subtitling and dubbing have. What is more, it has been agreed among experts to exist mainly three most used translation modes of AVT: dubbing, voiceover, and subtitling. The latter is the mode in which this research is going to be focused on. Subtitling stands for the presentation of “a written text, usually along the bottom of the screen, which gives an account of the original dialogue exchanges of the speakers as well as other linguistic elements which form part of the visual image (inserts, letters, graffiti, banners and the like) or of the soundtrack (songs, voices off)” (Díaz-Cintas 2009, 5). There have been several relevant works in AVT studies which confirm the increasing importance that this field has within the world of translation and AVT in general, exemplified by Caillé and Cary in the journal *Babel* in 1960 dealing with cinema translation (Díaz-Cintas 2009, 2). Also, Marleau’s article in 1982 offered a classification of the challenges that can be found in subtitling, and Titford in the same year affirmed that a problem when defining subtitling existed because there were constraints imposed on the translator by the medium itself, introducing for the first time the definition of subtitling as a “constrained translation” (Díaz-Cintas 2009, 2). As Titford and later Mayoral Asensio pointed out, subtitling has always been a constrained activity. It has a lot of issues which need to be considered and which can be a challenging task for the subtitler, as Bogucki asserts: “the temporal, spatial and other restrictions imposed on the screen translator narrow down the range of possible equivalents and translation strategies to an absolute minimum” (2004, 71). Such constraints can undermine the tone of the film and can cause some loss of the meaning in it (Díaz-Cintas 2009, 13-14).

Essential in the understanding of the loss of meaning when translating from the source language to the target language is the awareness of the innumerable existing cultures and the popular culture attached to each of them. The translator needs to bear in mind that the source

culture and its cultural references will not be the same as the ones in the target culture and a plan needs to be drawn up to transmit all the cultural information present in the source language accurately. Other than that, it is crucial that the translator has “a solid background information about the cultures they are working with, particularly the geography and contemporary social and political history. These form the backbone of a culture’s cognitive environment. This also means being aware of the popular culture (the culture’s heroes, TV, films, personalities, etc.)” (Katan 2014, 11-13). There is no better example of American popular culture than the superhero Captain America, because he fights for “truth, justice, and the American way” (Dittmer 2005, 7) and he is considered a *co-constitutive* component of “both American identity and the U.S. government’s foreign policy practices” (2005, 3). What is more, one cannot think about the most representative icon of the United States and without considering army, soldiers, and American exceptionalism, since Captain America “was written as a super-soldier created by the U.S. government and later sees himself as the living embodiment of the American Dream” (2005, 7). Previous works as the ones that will be cited in this dissertation have insisted on the fact that the main goal of an AVT translator must be to deliver the message as faithful as possible, highlighting the importance of an accurate transmission of cultural references from the source culture to the target culture. This was Katan’s affirmation in his work *Translating Cultures: An Introduction for Translators, Interpreters and Mediators* when he stated that the “translator or interpreter, should concentrate on author intention or text function within a context of culture – and concentrate, in particular, on the facilitation of communication between original author and end receiver” (2014, 191). Also, it has been pointed out that while the essence of the film is preserved the translator must feel free to utilize any strategy that it is needed to arrange the subtitles in terms of length, timing but also in terms of meaning in the target culture. Nonetheless, the failure to transmit cultural references and represent popular culture in the target language subtitles due to its constraints has not been an issue of discussion yet. Therefore, the question is, firstly, to what extent the transmission of cultural references can be accurate when the target culture is different from the source culture and, secondly, how this transmission could be developed in a way that successfully achieves the aim of the subtitling process. The overall picture seems to be that due to subtitling being a constrained translation and to the choice of strategies of translation made by the subtitler, there are American cultural references of nationalism that have been lost while translating from the original language to the target language. In the light of this, it is the aim of this dissertation not only to examine the translation of cultural elements that link American culture and nationalism in the Spanish

subtitling in *Captain America*'s films but also to observe how translators have dealt with the constraints of subtitling and with the different translation strategies.

The analysis covers examples that can be seen in the three films of *Captain America: Capitan America: The First Avenger* (Johnston 2011), *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (Russo and Russo, 2014), and *Captain America: Civil War* (Russo and Russo, 2016). Even though there have been a lot of them that would have been a very interesting field of research, due to space limitations they have not been able to be mentioned. Indeed, the suggestion that there is a lack of achievement in the transmission of some of the cultural elements in the films has been made under the assumption that the Spanish audience does not have a high level of knowledge about American culture and English language in general. Any approach on how to proceed if the audience is aware of American culture and history is out of the scope of this work. Also, the Spanish subtitles which have been taken as the reference for the analysis are the ones that appear in the platform Disney +, leaving any other possible subtitles out of the study. Indeed, the translational strategies that have been followed are the ones proposed by Tomaszekiewicz in the book chapter written by Zoë Pettit in *New Trends in Audiovisual Translation*, but any other strategy not mentioned in the book will not be subject of discussion. The dissertation has been organised in three different sections: the first one begins by defining the strategy of borrowing, followed by an example of a borrowing in the film and how this strategy does not transmit the nationalist connotations initially seen in the source language. The second section starts with the definition of what a charactonym is, example of it in the film and a further explanation of the strategy of literal translation together with a brief explanation of the role America had in the World War II and the relationship that has with the charactonym. It ends with a clarification of how an irony made by the use of literal translation hinders the understanding of the national pride present in the original dialogue. The third and last section of the work deals with the concept of generalisation and neutralisation of cultural references, referring to a proper name that had impact in both American and British culture. It deals with the concept of American exceptionalism and it ends with an explanation of how Americans feeling threatened by British is neutralised in the example of the film. The three parts end with a proposal of one or more strategies that might have achieved the transmission of American patriotism and national pride.

## Breaking with Borrowings

Borrowing, literal translation and neutralisation strategies have been found to be very useful in terms of successful translations. Despite being efficient on innumerable occasions, their usage in the examples that will be presented in this work have not contributed to the communication of the nationalistic feeling which is present in the whole trilogy. In the main part of this dissertation, the principles outlined in the introduction will be applied to a series of examples. Firstly, the example of the acronym ‘S.H.I.E.L.D.’, which appears in the three films, will be analysed in order to show the failure of the translator’s use of borrowing as a strategy and how choosing the equivalence strategy instead would have provided better results. Later, the translation of the name given to Captain America in the film *Captain America: The First Avenger* will be discussed as an example of how literal translation cannot be applied to any kind of translation, especially in subtitling. The last example will deal with how the transmission of patriotism is lost by showing the example taken from *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, and how the strategy of generalisation does not contribute to the preservation of the nationalistic feeling.

It cannot be denied that the use of borrowings has become a trend in audiovisual translation (AVT) because “thanks to global communication, cultures come closer together and share more and more references with every passing day. This phenomenon considerably facilitates the translators’ task since there is a decreasing number of references that need to be adapted” (Hurtado de Mendoza Azaola 2009, 75). In spite of this, the main purpose of the subtitler should be to deliver to the public the nationalistic feeling that is evident in the source language. According to Tomaszewicz’s strategies used in film subtitling, the strategy of borrowing consists in using the original terms from the source text in the target text (Tomaszewicz apud Pettit 2009, 45). In the three films analysed, several acronyms are found to refer to Marvel organisations, being ‘S.H.I.E.L.D.’ and ‘S.T.R.I.K.E.’ the most frequently mentioned. Specifically, ‘S.H.I.E.L.D.’ is a U.S. spy and intelligence agency with which Captain America initially collaborates to keep both national and global security. Because of the close relationship between the organisation and the superhero, the word ‘shield’ has a crucial meaning for the transmission of the American nationalistic feeling that creates the moral climate of the whole trilogy. Given this, the transmission of this message to the audience cannot be triggered, as the English word ‘shield’ cannot elicit any meaning in Spanish (unless the audience has some knowledge of the foreign language). For the communication between the source language and the target language (also called interlingual



communication) to be successful, three principals need to be taken into consideration: “(1) the formal features of the source-language text, (2) the cognitive content of the source -language text, and (3) the emotive response of the receptors” (Nida 1977, 100). In the case of ‘shield’, the formal feature of the word being used as an acronym is followed. Indeed, it is clear that the word has been specifically chosen to convey an implicit meaning of not only protecting the nation but also to protect the highest representative of the nation, Captain America. Nonetheless, there is no assurance that Spanish viewers will have enough knowledge of the English language to realise that ‘shield’ means ‘escudo’ in English. Therefore, the sense of protection of the nation from any potential threat will be inexistent and consequently, there will be an important loss of the feeling of patriotic duty towards America.

Had it been the subtitler’s intention to transmit this meaning, he or she should have used the strategy of equivalence or adaptation. The former consists on the translation having a similar meaning and function in the target culture, and the latter stands for the translation being adjusted to the target language and culture, in an attempt to evoke a similar meaning to the original (Tomaszkiewicz apud Pettit 2009, 45). If subtitlers had applied these strategies, they would have been expected to reinvent another acronym that would have formed a word whose meaning was similar to ‘shield’ or, at the very last, one that could elicit similar associations. It could be argued that coming across a set of words that has a believable meaning and, at the same time, constitutes a whole word whose meaning is similar to ‘shield’ might be very difficult; however, there is no mention in the film of the specific words that form the acronym, giving the subtitler a higher degree of freedom. Taking this point into consideration, it would have been a good choice to take any Spanish word that suggests the same meaning as the original and write it down as if it was an acronym. The message of, for instance, ‘E.S.C.U.D.O.’ (which means ‘shield’ in Spanish), would have remained visually as an acronym but the implicit meaning would have been more accurate and thus the Spanish speakers who have little knowledge about English would have captured the connotations that the use of this word may have within the context of the film.

The reason why a better use of the name which defines the U.S. spy agency would have contributed to the preservation of the nationalist feeling of the film lies in the fact that Captain America’s offensive and defensive weapon is a shield. His shield was made of the most resistant iron that existed at the time, vibranium, and he can defend himself from almost any attack from his enemies. Since the Captain and the leader of S.H.I.E.L.D., Nicky Fury, work together in several missions to keep the peace in America and the entire world, it would

be safe to say that in the same way that Captain America's is committed to protect the nation from any threat and to do so he uses a shield, the U.S. spy agency is committed to act in many occasions as both protector of the nation and of Captain himself, as it can be noted in the film *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*: "All SHIELD pilots, scramble. We're the only air support Captain Rogers has got" (Russo 2014, 01:44:24). This is perfectly translated in Spanish, "Pilotos de SHIELD, al aire. Somos el único apoyo aéreo del Capitán Rogers" (2014, 01:44:24). Moreover, subtitling is a constrained translation, which means that the subtitler must bear in mind, for instance, the time that a semantic unit can last on the screen, the accurate length of the sentences for the viewers to read them, among others. As noted by Díaz-Cintas and Aline Remael, it seems to be that no more than 40 characters in each line is the norm (2014, 84), and that when spotting a dialogue, periods longer than six seconds should be split (2014, 89). In this particular example, 'E.S.C.U.D.O.' and 'S.H.I.E.L.D.' have the same number of letters, so the length and the timing of the subtitles would not be altered. Taking into consideration the lack of knowledge of the English language that viewers might have, the importance of the meaning of 'shield' as a word itself, and the lack of formal changes that coming across a word in Spanish would have meant, it can be stated that by using the borrowing strategy the understanding of the importance that the acronym has within the story of the film has been obscured.

### **Unintentional Irony in Charactonyms**

The misunderstanding of a message caused by an inaccurate choice of strategy can ultimately derive in delivering the wrong meaning to the audience. According to previous research about the subject, word-formation mechanisms when translating comic books charactonyms have been divided into two periods: the first one dated until the late eighties and attempts were made at linguistic translation (Balteiro 2010, 48). The second period started in the nineties and is still present nowadays, and repetition is the prevailing strategy (2010, 48). Moreover, the author establishes the difference between the two classifications:

Concerning the first period, both in the case of compounding and in the case of derivation it can be observed that the lexical process in Spanish tends to be the same, regardless of whether the word was a pre-existent one or created for the Marvel Universe. As for the second period, it has been observed that, regardless of the word-formation process used, and with the exception of extremely obvious cases where

linguistic translation is almost unavoidable, it appears that the translator retains the charactonym from the original. (2010, 49)

Here the charactonym, which stands for the names given to new characters or heroes intentionally “in order to create a motivated relationship between their name and their characteristics, almost in the way allegorical medieval traditions personified vices or virtues” (2010, 34) has been used in the comic book version and translated afterwards in the film industry, but the periods are still applicable. Indeed, it seems to be that the choice of the subtitle of *Captain America: The First Avenger* was to use the first and old-fashioned option instead of approaching the second one.

By choosing the option of translating ‘The Star-Spangled Man’ as ‘El Hombre Estrellado’, the subtitler decides to use literal translation, “where the solution in the target text matches the original as closely as possible” (Tomaszkiewicz apud Pettit 2009, 45). As a consequence, it shows a very clear example of how choosing an inaccurate strategy when dealing with charactonyms lead to a bad translation: the Spanish audience could wrongly perceive that mockery and irony were implied in this name due to the double-sense of *estrellado*. To understand the ambiguous interpretation that the translation may have, it needs to be highlighted that Steve Rogers was a man who tried tirelessly to join the army, and after lots of rejections due to his poor health and physique conditions, he is finally accepted as a product of a physical experiment. He is injected a serum that turns him into a Super-Soldier, but he eventually realises that he is used as a product that American government tries to sell to convince young men to join the army. He is suited in a red, white and blue uniform, which are the colours of the American flag, and a star in the middle. He also wears boots and a kind of helmet with wings, and he is forced to perform in front of a public.

It is also worth mentioning the importance that this idea had for America at the time and its related relevance within American patriotism. After being aware of the threat that Hitler and the German Nazis were for the U.S., the government decided to create tones of propaganda in order to create awareness among U.S. citizens about the importance of serving the nation. Not only did it meant to join the army but also to put everyone’s needs in second place and give all that they had to the country. What is more, government used social propaganda to fight the war on the home front and to change American society (Johnson 2012, 37), being the creation of superhero soldiers as Captain America their most useful tool to influence Americans: “The Captain America creators were among the first comic book writers and artists that combined anti-Nazi and pro-American sentiment. More importantly, they had created a character that was not only emulating public opinion, but also shaping it”

(2012, 36). Indeed, so strong is the feeling to serve his nation that Steve Rogers has, that he himself feels a bit ashamed to be treated as a selling product instead of being allowed to be in the front line with the rest of soldiers: “You know, for the longest time, I dreamed about coming overseas and being on the front lines, serving my country. I finally got everything I wanted and I’m wearing tights” (Johnston 2011, 00:52:51). What is more, he is booed by rest of the soldiers by being called “Tinker Bell” (2011, 00:51:26) and “chorus girl” (2011, 00:54:33).

As Johnson narrates, in the real historical event around 1940, the American government found themselves in a difficult position when they realised that they were about to enter a war. Japan and America had been badly hit by The Great Depression and they needed to find new sources of raw materials and additional resources. Japan was in urgent need of natural resources and the U.S. wanted an economic boost, but America revoked the commercial treaty with Japan and eventually found themselves in an oil embargo against Japan. This conflict together with the growing power that the Nazi Germany had over western Europe forced the U.S. to raise the question if they would need to go to war and when would they need to do so. The uncertainty created a “new cultural landscape and filled the nation’s thoughts” (Johnson 2012, 34). Due to the new atmosphere created in the U.S. government, they decided to ask comic book superheroes writers to include patriotism in their stories to increase nationalism among citizens (2012, 36), which meant that comic book superheroes entered the World War II even before the U.S. itself had entered. What is more, this type of superhero figure was created to have the ability “to connect the political projects of American nationalism, internal order, and foreign policy (all formulated at the national or global scale) with the scale of the individual, or the body. The character of Captain America connects these scales by literally embodying American identity, presenting for readers a hero both of, and for, the nation” (Dittmer 2005, 627). For this reason, the decision to use popular culture like comic books as a tool to reinforce and promote American patriotism shows the importance that Captain America’s figure had within the shaping of the new concept of Americanness that emerged before and during the World War II.

Therefore, because this event was decisive in the shaping of the new Americanness, its popular culture and its role inside the war, the subtitler’s choice of a literal translation for ‘The Star-Spangled Man’ goes catastrophically wrong, hinting at a sense of irony instead of the strong patriotic feeling was initially intended. As Katan suggests, sometimes “distortion can occur through a faithful, literal translation . . . This can happen by focusing more attention on the word itself in the TC” (2014, 188), which is exactly what happens in the

strategy used. Moreover, if the scene that appears on the screen is analysed together with the literal translation, it can be observed that Steve Rogers is not comfortable with being dressed in a suit with thighs, helmet with wings and with being forced to sing and dance in front of a public. The figurative meaning of *estrellarse* in English, according to Collins Dictionary, is “to fail” (n.d.), so when the Spanish audience watches that scene and reads the translation ‘El Hombre Estrellado’, they can link the protagonist’s facial expression of discomfort with the ironical meaning of the verb used and deduce that he has been given this name because he has failed to achieve what he had been dreaming of all his life: he fought against all odds to join the army to serve and fight for his nation. Once he is admitted, he is used as a showman instead of a soldier. The importance that scenes on the screen have when interpreting the dialogue is supported by Lawrence Venuti, who argues that “the audiovisual image can support at least two, possibly three interpretations that strain logic, . . . The viewer’s decision as to how the subtitle should be interpreted, moreover, can ensure a corroborating interpretation of the audiovisual image, of the montage and the actor’s voice, or, vice versa, the viewer’s interpretation of the image can ensure the selection of a particular interpretation of the subtitle” (2019, 134). Probably, the borrowing strategy proposed by Tomaszewicz might have suited better for the accurate transmission of the patriotic connotations that ‘The Star-Spangled Man’ carries. By taking the original term from the source text and using it in the target text, the name would have remained in English but at least the ironic and mockery connotation that translating it into Spanish would have been avoided. Indeed, even though the Spanish audience might not know the meaning of the name, ‘star’ and ‘man’ are quite common words that, thanks to globalization, are known worldwide. This means that almost any viewer could have deduced the meaning by relating the image of a star and a man appearing on the screen with the words written in the subtitles. By paying attention to the implicit meaning that the translation of ‘The Star-Spangled Man’ into ‘El Hombre Estrellado’ offers to the Spanish audience, the deviance of meaning ends up in not only a loss of American patriotism but also a mockery to one of the most representative figures of the American popular culture.

### **British Threat for American Patriotism**

The failure of transmitting American nationalism in *Captain America*’s films may be also due to the neutralisation of some expressions that would highlight American patriotism. In this particular example, what is neutralised is not American patriotism but the sarcastic tone

towards the British that can be perceived in the dialogue of *Captain America: The First Avenger*: “What’s with the accent, Queen Victoria?” (Johnston 2011, 00:19:57). National pride and the obligation to defend it have been part of the American life since the beginning of the formation of the country by having the principles of American exceptionalism as a life motto. What is more, what is known as American exceptionalism emerged due to the need that English colonisers had to prove they had created something new and powerful. The principles under which it was built have been agreed to be the following ones: the United States and its citizens are divinely ordained to lead the world to betterment; the United States differs politically, socially, and morally from the Old World of Europe; and the United States is exempt from the “laws of history” that lead to the decline and downfall of other great nations (Pease 2018). Nonetheless, as stated by Howard Zinn in his work *A People’s History of the United States, 1492-Present*, British colonizers “found that by creating a nation, a symbol, a legal unity called the United States, they could take over land, profits, and political power from favorites of the British Empire. In the process, they could hold back a number of potential rebellions and create a consensus of popular support for the rule of a new, privileged leadership” (2005, 56; American spelling in the original). What is more, Jason Dittmer affirms that “the discourse of American exceptionalism is not only produced through the arguments of political and academic elites; it is also co-constituted through popular culture” (2005, 11). Supported by both Zinn and Dittmer’s discourse, it would be safe to say that the sarcastic tone present in *Captain America* might be due to the U.S resentment of their nation being built by British citizens, since it seems to be they wanted to detached permanently from any tie that related them to Great Britain. This need for creating a new nation only for themselves is represented through one of the main representatives of American popular culture, Steve Rogers.

The disappointment of the soldiers in Steve Roger’s division when they realise they will be supervised by a British woman called Peggy Carter is undeniable. Indeed, they do not hesitate to show their discontent in front of her by saying: “What’s with the accent, Queen Victoria? I thought I was signing up for the US Army” (Johnston 2011, 00:19:57 – 00:20:00). Then, it is curious to observe how the subtitler chooses to approach the Spanish translation by using the strategy of generalisation, which according to Tomasziewicz might also be referred to as neutralisation of the original (Tomasziewicz apud Pettit 2009, 45), since he or she writes: “¿Nos va a dar órdenes una británica? Esto es el ejército de los Estados Unidos” (2011, 00:19:57). This examples matches with the affirmations made by Ellender, who affirms that cultural references cause translation problems (2015, 199), and concludes that

when using the strategy of generalisation there is a high possibility of losing some of the implicit meaning that the source text (ST) tries to convey (2015, 200). The piece of dialogue previously mentioned can be split into two parts, both worth of analysis. On the one hand, in the first part, the subtitler has opted for omitting the name of the Queen of England and it has been changed into the demonym, which is a perfect example of the strategy of generalisation: a proper name of the maximum representative of a nation has been substituted for a name that refers to any citizen of Great Britain. This inevitably has had a substantial influence on the transmission of the initial meaning since Queen Victoria “is associated with Britain's great age of industrial expansion, economic progress and, especially, empire. At her death, it was said, Britain had a worldwide empire on which the sun never set” (Royal UK, n.d.). By deleting the name of a powerful monarch in British history, the subtitler is also deleting the connotation of American soldiers feeling threatened by another British woman who is going to rule them, in this case in the army's division. This shows the soldiers' strong commitment to their nation and the principles that stand for American exceptionalism, easily perceived in the source language, and it also has a connection to masculinity and male chauvinism. By making this affirmation, the intention is to transmit how important was for the Americans to be led by a U.S. representative, which is one of the principles of the American exceptionalism, and how the omission of the proper name contributes to diminish that feeling. Indeed, the soldier highlights her accent as a distinctive feature of the British, so he establishes a clear differentiation between America and Great Britain, letting the audience understand that American accent has nothing to do with the British one. By eliminating the allusion made at Peggy Carter's accent, it has also been eliminated the differentiation the soldier wanted to accentuate between the two countries. Together with it, the implied feeling of repulsion towards anybody who is not American has also been deleted. The best approach to avoid such a loss of cultural reference would have been the use of the borrowing strategy, because even though the Spanish audience may not know exactly which was the importance that Queen Victoria had in British history by using the original term from the source text (ST), they can deduce that it must be someone than could potentially threaten American's need to be the most powerful ones. For the translation of ‘what's with the accent’, the best option would have been the use of literal translation to make clear to the audience that something was wrong with her accent, that hers was perceivably different from the soldier's, and that clearly it was not pleasant for him.

On the other hand, in the second part of the dialogue, the subtitler does not opt for a generalisation but for the omission of a verb which is a key element for the accurate transmission of Americanness. According to the strategies suggested by Tomaszekiewicz, omission happens when “the cultural reference is omitted altogether” (Tomaszekiewicz apud Pettit 2009, 45). Here the subtitler has decided to avoid the translation of ‘signing up for the U.S. Army’ by translating it as ‘esto es el ejército de Estados Unidos’. By deleting the verb ‘signing up’, the translator has also obscured the effort that the U.S. government put in the creation of propaganda, using popular culture to convince young American citizens to specifically join the army, or what is the same, to sign up for the army. As previously mentioned, “Federal government devised propaganda that encouraged men to join the military, preached the importance of supporting servicemen, showcased the need to buy war bonds, and provided guidelines of how patriotic Americans should act” (Johnson 2012, 47). Then, by omitting the translation of a verb that represents the work that the U.S. government has put to create propaganda the strong patriotism that can be seen within the verb is also deleted. It is not the same to have ‘signed up for the U.S. Army’ than simply remind that the division belonged to the U.S. Army. The difference is that the source dialogue is an example that shows how successful the government was in promoting the military service since it uses one of America’s key expressions, and consequently it shows the strong patriotic feeling that was needed at the time. Nonetheless, the translation made in Spanish does not carry out that connotation of having joined the army but simply reminding that this was the U.S., not Great Britain. Then, it is safe to say that the sarcasm in the first part of the whole fragment of dialogue neutralises an attack to the British crown, the proper names that represent one of the most iconic figures of the history of British empire is generalised, and the use of a phrasal verb that is key to understand the propaganda the American government created to promote the military and Americanness. All these observations lead to conclude that the Spanish subtitles fail to transmit not only the rivalry that the U.S. had in terms of being the most powerful nations, but also the nationalistic feeling spread by the use of propaganda.

It is true that probably most of the American and British audience of the film will be aware about the implications that Great Britain had over the U.S. and vice versa, and it is also true that Spanish audience, especially the younger ones, might not have studied this side neither of history in general nor of the World War II. Indeed, since no propaganda about joining the military was made in Spain during the war, Spanish viewers could not understand



the importance of the expression of “signing up for the army” and the effort that carries behind. Despite of this, the best option would have been to follow the borrowing strategy with the translation of Queen Victoria because if any viewer knew the relevance of this woman in British society they would have understood the implicit meaning, and by leaving the word ‘queen’ in English somebody can deduce that it has to do with an English monarch. Another valid option would have been the use of the explication strategy, which involves a paraphrase to explain the cultural term (Pettit 2009, 45). Nonetheless, this last proposal would not fit with the constraints of subtitling since a brief explanation of who Queen Victoria was would break with the timing that the dialogue has to appear on the screen and also the length would be longer than permitted. Regarding the translation of ‘signing up for the U.S. Army’, the most accurate strategy to be used would have been literal translation, simply for the fact that even though viewers might not be aware of the campaign made by the government to convince men and women to join the army, the translation would be closer to the original one and the timing and space allowed in the screen would not vary, thus the constraints in the subtitles would not be altered.

## **Conclusion**

This dissertation has discussed some of the intricacies surrounding translation strategies when dealing with cultural references highlighted in the trilogy of *Captain America*. Indeed, it has called the attention to the relation that subtitling has with several constraints, specifically regarding the time a subtitle is allowed to appear on the screen and the maximum length that each of the sentences translated must have in order to fit that timing. Being the appearance of a dialogue restricted due to time and space limitations, there is no denying that one of the major protagonists of the failure of Spanish subtitles to transmit the strong national feeling present in the trilogy is the fact that subtitling is considered a constrained activity. Together with such constraints, the choice of a less accurate translational strategy also plays a major role in the lacking of transmission of American patriotism, since different connotations and wrong messages might have been delivered to the audience. There are innumerable researches made about strategies when subtitling but the ones proposed by Tomaszewicz cover the basic approaches that any translation could have. By taking a look to the analysis done in each example that has been mentioned, it is hard to say that the subtitler of *Captain America: The First Avenger*, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, and *Captain America: Civil War* has successfully achieved what should be any translator main aim, which is to communicate as

accurate as possible the intentions, tone and meaning that the original writer wanted to transmit to the audience.

It has been corroborated the statements made by previous works about AVT related to cultural references and cultural translation. It has been stated that any translation of popular culture or elements to an audience which has little in common with the source culture is extremely challenging despite the translator's efforts, since there are expressions of a language that denote a relevant meaning for the culture and that are difficult to translate to any other language. This has been demonstrated to be the case of 'S.H.I.E.L.D' and of 'Star-Spangled Man'. Indeed, the lack of knowledge about the source culture and history the target audience may have also challenges the understanding of certain ironies or sarcasms which are crucial for the transmission Americanness and American exceptionalism, as in the case of 'What's with the accent, Queen Victoria?'. By putting all the information in common it has been concluded that there are no guarantees in doing a good translation in subtitling, no matter how many strategies and theories are followed. The transmission of such a crucial feeling as nationalism is something that no strategy will ever be able to portray strongly enough to anybody that does not have that sense of belonging to that nation.

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