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“That Went Down Like a Lead Balloon”: Classification and Analysis of Mistranslations in the Subtitling of *Good Omens* (2019)

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Abstract

Good Omens (2019) apart from being a great tv series with great actors, it is also a great source of linguistic wizardry. Neil Gaiman is a writer that loves to play with the English language, that is why it is no surprise that he did just that with the adaptation of the novel that he and Terry Pratchett wrote together, and which was published in 1990. Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett wanted to see an adaptation of *Good Omens* since the moment they wrote it, but it would not be until four years later of Terry Pratchett's death that said adaptation would see the light.

When adapting a novel, the way to reach bigger audiences is by means of dubbing or subtitling which is why the figure of the translator plays an important role in adaptation. The translator not only has to translate faithfully a source text into the target language but also has to overcome the many difficulties that arise when working on the Audiovisual Translation field, such as the time and space restrictions. That is why being critic with translations is important. Even though the job is not an easy one, the faithfulness of the translations which will reach millions is important and will differentiate the translator among the good and the bad ones.

Key words: *Good Omens*, translation techniques, analysis, mistranslation

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	4
2. Theoretical Framework: Audiovisual Translation and Translation Techniques.....	7
3. Cases of study.....	10
4. Conclusion.....	20
5. Works Cited.....	22

1. Introduction

Walter Benjamin argued in “The Task of the Translator” that translation is not copying, paraphrasing, or reproducing some fixed nontextual meaning; rather, it is an engagement with the original text that causes us to see it in a different light (1992, 77). The translator has to overcome many problems that might arise when engaging with a source text as not only they have to translate the words but make them make sense in a specific cultural context by adapting the text. Furthermore, adaptations, which is the medium that this essay deals with, are “translations in the form of intersemiotic transpositions from one sign system (for example, words) to another (for example, images). [Adaptations] is translation but in a very specific sense: as transmutation or transcoding, as necessary a recording into a new set of conventions as well as signs” (Hutcheon 2008, 16). Adaptations are in itself a translation between mediums with different criterion to be followed as they simplify the source text, but also extrapolate and amplify it (3). That is why the task of a translator, as well as the script writer are so important, they must convey the message of the original work in a concise and successful manner.

In this day and age, the success of literary adaptations is undeniable. Said success may come from the familiarity and the following a literary text already has in comparison to an original screenplay. Being successful is much easier when one already has an audience and as Bolter and Grusin argue, not only will an adaptation appeal to connoisseurs but new supporters will be attracted to the product (1999, 45), both the adaptation and original. According to Hutcheon “the act of adaptation always involves both (re-)interpretation and then the (re-)creation” (2006, 8) but can, a tv series like *Good Omens*, which script has been written by one of the original authors, be considered a reinterpretation? It can be argued that whenever a story is adapted to a different form of media, it is a reinterpretation which as Hutcheon suggests, it is part of the process of adaptation (22). Neil Gaiman in an interview for *The Verge* admitted that his creative process when writing the script was to divide the book – a copy which had roughly 360 pages – by putting a post-it note every 60 pages which resulted in a six-episode tv series. When writing a screenplay, the writer’s main goal – in this case Gaiman’s – is to simplify the original text in a way that conveys the same message by means of images and fewer words (1). Albeit some changes were made plot and characters wise, the essence of the *Good Omens* was thoroughly kept. Gaiman participation as scripter and producer of the tv series show a great level of commitment, which is not surprising, taking into account that Gaiman was entrusted

with the task of adapting and overwatching the project so that it would be a faithful adaptation as per Terry Pratchett's dying wish (Rovira and Rovira-Collado 2020, 7).

Good Omens, The Nice and Accurate prophecies of Agnes Nutter, Witch (2006) was written in 1990 as a collaboration between authors Terry Pratchett and Nail Gaiman. Filled with comedy and the supernatural, "the novel shifts its focus from the spectacle of horror to the absurdity of prophecy" (Clemons 2017, 86) creating this way an ineffable text full of well-constructed characters who have to navigate preposterous situations which will decide the future of the earth as they know it. *Good Omens* is a novel about an angel and a demon trying to prevent the apocalypse after the son of Satan is born, marking the start of a countdown which would culminate eleven years from then. After a mishap when Crowley delivered the baby – literally, he delivered the baby in a basket – Aziraphale and Crowley, who have known each other since the original sin, decided to both influence the child in order for him to just be normal so the day the Armageddon comes, he would not fall pray of the dark side. But eleven years later they found out that they have been influencing the wrong child so the race to stop the end of the word starts, with only four days to stop it. Even though it was written in 1990, when feminism and equality were hard to find in mainstream media, the novel touched topics such as the patriarchy – by the hand of an eleven-year-old girl – and challenged cultural norms without batting an eye. The novel soon became a cult classic (478) which was attempted to adapt on numerous occasions, one of them was going to be directed by Terry Gilliam. From Satanic nuns to bloodthirst angels with a side of Spanish inquisition, the wide range of characters and situations make this cult classic novel worth the praise.

The aim of this essay is to analyze examples of translations from the tv series *Good Omens* (2019) and asses if those are mistranslations or if the translator successfully translated the meaning intended. Therefore, this study will focus on the classifications made by Hurtado and Molina in "Translation Techniques Revisited: A Dynamic and Functionalist Approach" (2002) for the translation techniques and on the classification of translation errors by Christiane Nord found in *Text Analysis and Translation* (1997) as a way of classifying the translations. This essay will start by explaining the theoretical framework which will be used when analyzing and classifying. Firstly, we will start with literary adaptation and the problems it may bring to the table when adapting a literary work; secondly, we will continue with audiovisual translation and finally we will explain the translation techniques from Hurtado and Molina's classification. Subsequently the essay will continue with the actual classification and analysis which will be firstly divided between language translation problems, pragmatic translation problems and text-specific translation problems in which the analysis of some of the examples will take place.

Within each group, another classification will be done, this time with tables which will contain the source text, the target text and the translation technique used.

Before we start with the classification, the author sees relevant to give a brief glossary of acronyms which will be frequently used throughout the essay.

Acronym	Meaning
ST	Source Text
TT	Target Text
SL	Source Language
TL	Target Language
LTP	Language Translation Problem
PTP	Pragmatic Translation Problem
TTP	Text-specific Translation Problem

2. Theoretical framework: audiovisual translation and translation techniques

Translators, when dealing with the source text (SL) to generate a target text (TT), must overcome many problems which they face midst translating since it is a matter of mixing two different cultures, two perceptions, and two languages into a one final product which the target audience must understand (Rahmatillah 2013, 16). Scripts have to become a simplified version of the original text since a film – or a tv series in this case – relies on images rather than on words and imagination; the complexity that the original text had is lost (Hutcheon 2006, 1).

Until the early years of the 2000s Audiovisual translation had not been taken seriously (Gambier 2003,) and had been neglected due to a series of reasons such as the fact that Media and Translation Studies were still relatively new; the disregard for the task of the subtitler in academic settings because audiovisual translation was not considered as highly as literary translation and because audiovisual translation became such a mass production process instead of an artistic and professional activity (Chaume 2002,). However, according to Gambier, this situation has changed due to the celebration of annual conferences on Audiovisual Translation, the rising number of publications on the subject and the new technology which has made the access and production of audiovisual translation easier. Regarding Audiovisual Translation and according to Diaz (2009) “there are two basic approaches to dealing with the transfer into another language of the spoken dialogue of the original programme” which would be oral output, or revoicing, also called dubbing, and written output, also called subtitling (4) and the one we will focus on.

One of the main problems, and one that the translator has to solve, is the temporal restrictions when subtitling because as Luyken et al (1991) suggests, the average reading speed varies between 150 and 180 words per minute. Not only that but there are also spatial restrictions which in general take up a maximum of two lines. The space taken by the subtitle is, as De Linde and Kay (1999) argue “a function of the original utterance and, in the case of interlingual subtitling, the comparative properties of source and target languages” (6). For this reason, not only has the translator to deal with the linguistic or cultural problems that might come up, but they also have to take into account the spatial and temporal restrictions of subtitling.

To analyze translations and study the way translation works it is important to know and understand the way in which translation techniques are divided. When it comes to translation techniques there is a great disagreement between scholars, not only on the matter of terminology but also conceptual, or even on how to call the categories: if procedures, techniques, or strategies (Hurtado and Molina 2002, 499). However, even though there are many different classifications to choose from, this essay will focus on the classification developed by Hurtado and Molina (2002). Before we dive into the techniques, it is important to understand the difference between translation method and translation techniques. According to Hurtado and Molina, translation method deals with “the way a particular process is carried out in terms of the translator’s objective” (507) which refers to the decisions made by the translator that affect the whole text. They also divide the methods into four: interpretative-communicative (regarding the sense of the text), literal (in which the translator reproduces word by word the morphology, syntax and meaning), free (where the translator does not seek to convey the same sense of the ST but keeps the same information) and philological (which is characterized by the use of commentary notes.) The method the translator chooses will affect directly the translation techniques, or “the way in which micro-units of the text are translated” (508). Furthermore, Hurtado explains that strategies are the procedures used by the translator to solve problems that emerge when carrying out the translation process (508). Both, “strategies and techniques occupy different places in problem solving: strategies are part of the process, techniques affect the result” (508).

After all the aforementioned, translation techniques are defined as “procedures to analyze and classify how translation equivalence works” (509). Thus, we present the techniques proposed by Hurtado and Molina and their definitions¹:

- **Adaptation:** to change a cultural element from the ST to one that suits best the TT which will be more comprehensive for the reader.
- **Amplification:** to introduce details that are not on the ST as a way of explaining, or explicative paraphrasing. For example, adding “the Muslim month of fasting” next to “Ramadan.”
- **Borrowing:** to take a word or expression from the ST in the same way. There are two types of borrowing: pure, where there is no change, or naturalized, where the spelling is changed to fit in the TL. For example, using the word *Lobby* in a Spanish text (pure) or translate “football” to “fútbol” (naturalized).
- **Calque:** creation or use of a neologism adopted from the SL. For example, “to stan” translated to “estanear”
- **Compensation:** consists of introducing an element of information or stylistic effect that could not be reflected in the same place as the ST. For example, with an example of our ST, translating “Archangel fucking Gabriel” to “Arcangel Gabriel, joder”
- **Description:** to substitute a term or expression by its actual description or function. For example, translating “*panetone*” to “el bizcocho tradicional que se toma en Noche Vieja en Italia.”
- **Discursive creation:** to create a temporary equivalence which will only make sense on its own context.
- **Established equivalent:** to translate the same reality using another one from the SL which is recognized as an equivalent in the TL. For example, translating “they are as like as two peas” to “se parecen como dos gotas de agua.”
- **Generalization:** to translate a term for a more general or neuter one. For example, translating “*guichet*” (from the French) to “window.”
- **Linguistic amplification:** consists of adding linguistic elements. For example, translating “yeah, sure” to “claro que sí” instead of “sí, claro.”

¹ All the examples and definitions have been taken from Hurtado, Amparo and Lucía Molina. 2002. “Translation Techniques Revisited: A Dynamic and Functionalist Approach.” *Meta* XLVII, no. 4: 498-512.

- **Linguistic compression:** to synthesize linguistic elements that are used specially on subtitling and simultaneous translation. For example, to translate “yes, so what?” to “¿Y?” instead of “¿sí, y qué?”
- **Literal translation:** to translate word by word. This technique is only applied correctly if the TT keeps the same syntax, style and sense of the original text. For example, to translate “they are as like as two peas” as “se parecen como dos guisantes.”
- **Modulation:** this technique introduces a semantic change or of perspective in relation to the ST. For example, it is not the same ideologically to translate “Golfo arábigo” than “Golfo pérsico”
- **Particularization:** to translate a term for another one more concrete. For example, to translate “window” to “*guichet*.”
- **Reduction:** to suppress ST information in the TT. For example, translating “the month of fasting” to “Ramadan” when translating into Arabic
- **Substitution:** to change linguistic elements for paralinguistic elements such intonation or gestures. For example, to translate the hand gesture used to ask for the bill to “la cuenta, por favor”
- **Transposition:** to change a grammatical category. For example, to translate “see you soon” as “nos vemos”
- **Variation:** to change linguistic or paralinguistic elements such as intonation and gestures that affect the linguistic variation such as change on tone, dialect (social or geographic), style, etc.

Two concepts which will be largely used from this point onwards are “mistranslation” and “faithful translation.” Mistranslation, according to Popovič, who also labels it as “negative shift”, is “an incorrect translation caused by a misunderstanding on the part of the translator”. On the other hand, faithful translation, or more exactly faithfulness as a characteristic of translations, is described by Shuttleworth and Cowie as a “term used to describe the extent to which a TT can be considered a fair representation of ST” (57). Although it is true that different scholars prefer the use of terms such as “equivalence”, we will use “faithful” for the sake of clarity.

3. Cases of Study

Mistranslations can be attributed to a diverse arrange of causes such as lack of comprehension, inappropriateness to readership, misuse of time; and based on different levels: language, pragmatics and culture (Pym 1992, 4). Albeit some mistranslations might be more severe than

others, the subtitling of *Good Omens* (2019) is not an exception. From misgendering a character to translations that lack the original expected meaning, all of these errors have an intention behind them as it is the translator's job to not counterfeit the author's intent (Nord 1997, 32) and actively exhibit subjectivity when translating.

Hereunder the author intends to classify an arrange of examples, both mistranslations and faithful translations, into three different categories: pragmatic, linguistic and text-specific translation errors or problems. According to Nord, pragmatic translation problems (PTP) arise as a result of the contrast between the situation in which the source text is produced and that of the target text; linguistic translation problems (LTP) ensue from the structural differences between source and target text; and text-specific translation problems (TTP) originate from specific characteristics of the source text (167). The examples to be analyzed will be classified by the categories aforementioned and, at the same time, into tables which will contain the source text with the page – if found on the book – and the episode/minute where it can be found, the Spanish subtitles, and the translation technique used. Some of those examples will be analyzed in detail and given an alternative translation.

Linguistic Translation Problems (LTP)

As aforementioned, linguistic translation problems, or LTP, are those which are related to an inadequate translation when the focus is on language structures. All the examples below belong to the linguistic category and, even though not all of them can be considered mistranslations, they have been included as a way to show examples of the different translations techniques and how the translator has solved the problems that they have encountered on the ST with the frequent use of colloquial language and set phrases that characterizes both the book and the script.

English	Spanish subtitles	Technique
That went down like a lead balloon (p.3; Ep1/03:38)	Menudo follón se ha montado	Transposition
Bugger this for a lark (p.15; Ep1/08:23)	Me tiene harto	Transposition
Teensy-weensy little hoofkins (p.31; Ep1/19:53)	Pezuñitas	Reduction
Ambassadorship (x; Ep1/21:31)	Embajadorencia	Literal translation

Get thee behind me, foul fiend (x; Ep1/29:55)	Apartad de mi vista, mi virulento adversario	Adaptation
Be a real feather in your wing (p.66; Ep1/34:31)	Serías un ángel en toda regla	Established equivalence
Nutter (p.60; Ep2/09:10)	La chalada	Literal translation
Oh bugger (x; Ep2/11:37)	Vaya	Reduction
It was on the money (p.59; Ep2/13:50)	Daba en el clavo	Established equivalence
Scarlet woman (x; Ep2/24:57)	Putas de babilonia	Transposition
Angler's times (p.152; Ep2/30:15)	Jarra y sedal	Adaptation
For my money it was just an ordinary cock-up (p.114; Ep2/32:04)	Yo creo que fue una cagada de toda la vida	Adaptation
Tip-top condition (x; Ep2/35:20)	Impecable	Reduction
Bugger off (x; Ep2/37:54)	Lárgate	Reduction
Inquiries (x; Ep2/39:02)	Pesquisas	Literal translation
Luck of the devil (p.127; Ep2/39:20)	La fortuna del diablo	Literal translation
Toesie-woesies (p.128; Ep2/40:06)	Piececitos	Transposition
Absolutely tickety-boo (x; Ep2/50:00)	Chachi piruli	Adaptation
We'd be inconspicuous here (x; Ep3/08:24)	Aquí no cantaríamos	Reduction
You're up to no good	Tramas algo mezquino	Reduction

(x; Ep3/10:00)		
Hard on the buttocks (x; Ep3/10:20)	Te dejan el culo hecho un cisco	Discursive creation
Heads/tails (x; Ep3/11:30)	Cara/cruz	Established equivalent
An amateur (x; Ep3/12:51)	Nada profesional	Transposition
If it all goes pear-shaped (x; Ep3/16:20)	Por si acaba como el rosario de la aurora	Established equivalent
Played for suckers (x; Ep3/20:37)	Han salido trasquilados	Discursive creation
Enough babbling (x; Ep3/22:24)	Basta de cháchara	Literal translation
Wicked (p.170; Ep3/38:21)	Qué pasada	Expansion
Smoking your <u>fatty spliffers</u> (x; Ep3/42:51)	Porros	Established equivalence
Pip-pip (x; Ep3/45:40)	Arreando	Transposition
Ye great southern <u>pansy</u> (p.218; Ep3/45:48)	Señorito	Adaptation
Great pustulent mangled bollocks to the great blasted plan (x; Ep3/51:11)	A la mierda el gran, apestoso y puñetero plan	Compensation
That's a bit holier-than-thou, isn't it? (x; Ep3/51:52)	No me seas santurrón	Reduction
Clever bugger (p.196; Ep4/14:30)	Espabilados	Reduction
What the heaven is going on? (p.296; Ep4/29:15)	¿Qué está pasando?	Reduction
In a jiffy	Enseguida	Reduction

(x; Ep4/51:51)		
Two shakes of a lamb's tail (x; Ep4/51:54)	En un pispas	Reduction
foul fiend (x; Ep4/52:40)	Criatura del averno	Established equivalent
Wiggle-on (x; Ep5/13:14)	Arreando	Modulation
Wahoo (x; Ep5/22:02)	Olé tu	Adaptation
The southern pansy (p.351; Ep5/23:13)	Afeminado	Literal translation
Boffins (x; Ep5/31:17)	Espabilados	Established equivalent
Mucked things up (x; Ep5/34:08)	Se lo cargan	Modulation
I'm calmly worried (p.383; Ep5/38:46)	Me preocupo reposadamente	Expansion
Waterboarded (x; Ep5/38:53)	Torturen	Adaptation
What the heck (x; Ep5/45:18)	¿qué puñetas?	Established equivalent
All the chickens are coming home to roast (p.416; Ep5/49:26)	Todas las gallinas vienen a casa para acabar en la cazuela	Literal transition
Wee bairn (p.421; Ep6/08:46)	Chiquillo	Reduction
Cheek (x; Ep6/14:32)	Descarado	Literal translation
Gold star (p.429; Ep6/15:12)	Minipunto	Adaptation
Tickety-boo (x; Ep6/32:55)	Genial	Literal translation
What the hell?	¿qué leches?	Established equivalent

(x; Ep6/35:48)		
Archangel fucking Gabriel (x; Ep6/42:45)	Arcángel Gabriel, joder	Compensation
Shut your stupid mouth (x; Ep6/43:46)	Cierra el pico	Reduction
Gone native (x; Ep6/44:36)	Ha cambiado	Adaptation
On the money (x; Ep6/49:29)	En el clavo	Established equivalence

In this classification fifty-five examples are analyzed with a total of nine different techniques: established equivalence with ten examples, reduction with thirteen, literal translation and adaptation with nine each, transposition with six, expansion and compensation with two each discursive creation with two and modulation with two. Of those fifty-five examples, the author will analyze ten of them.

Set phrases are difficult to translate considering that the translator not only has to convey the meaning which sometimes can be quite abstract, but also look for an equivalent in the TL, if there is one just as Usmonova argues: “some idioms are ‘misleading’, because they have both a literal and idiomatic meaning” and also they “may have a close counterpart in the TL which looks familiar but has a different meaning” (2021, 136). This is the case of our first example, “that went down like a lead balloon” which has been translated into Spanish as “menudo follón se ha montado” which, if we pay attention to the context of the scene in which this line is said, the idea is the same, but the mood is different. With “menudo follón se ha montado” the scene is much more aggressive than the light tone with which the line was delivered. Perhaps an alternative translation as to keep the lighthearted tone could be “menuda se ha liado.”

On the examples that were chosen, we have a few instances where the same word has been translated in different ways. This of course would only be a problem if the context of the words were all the same, but the translator decided to change the translation, then the TT would lack of consistency. This is what happens with the translation of “pansy” which is translated as “señorito” (“3” 2019, 45:48) and “afeminado” (“5” 2019, 23:13). Both times the word is said, it is said by the same character and in the same context: Witchfinder sergeant Shadwell when referring to Aziraphale as “the southerner pansy.” Because both contexts are quite similar and one of the translations is the more accurate or faithful one, the author believes that the translation which should had been used is “afeminado”, that way the word does not lose its

intended meaning. It is important to note that the character of Shadwell, a crude northerner, would have no qualms in using the word “afeminado.”

Another example of the above can be found with the continued use of the word “bugger” but with the difference that with bugger, the context changes so the lack in consistency is justified. The first time we find “bugger” is with the set phrase “bugger this for a lark” (“1” 2019, 08:23) which is faithfully translated by means of a transposition to “me tiene harto.” The next instance is with “oh bugger” (“2” 2019, 11:37) which is translated by reduction to “vaya.” With this translation the problem that we find is that a simple “vaya” does not convey the meaning of “bugger” as an exclamation even though “vaya” can also work as one. An alternative translation would be “maldición” which carry the resignation with which Witchfinder Thou-Shalt-Not-Commit-Adultery Pulsifer accepts his fate, and blows up, literally.

Literal translations, as the definition by Hurtado and Molina states, are the translation of “a word or an expression word by word” (510), and that is what is seen in the ST “all the chickens are coming home to roast” (“5” 2019, 49:26) which was translated as “todas las gallinas vienen a casa para acabar en la cazuela.” The ST is an idiom with an abstract meaning which is ‘one’s actions will eventually have consequences’, however, in Spanish the closest idiom in meaning would be “a todo cerdo le llega su San Martin.” The TT fails to convey the meaning intended by the author and at the same time confuses the audience since “todas las gallinas vienen a casa para acabar en la cazuela” does not mean much beside the literal meaning of chickens going home to roast.

Following the line of literal translations, we find the example “ambassadorship”, used to refer to a person and translated as “embajaorencia”, a term that does not exist in Spanish. The character that delivers that line is Satanic Nun Mary Loquacious and whose intelligence – or lack of thereof – caused the mishap when delivering the son of Satan to the correct family. For this reason and knowing that the use of “ambassadorship” (“1” 2019, 21:31) was to refer to a person instead of the building, the translation to “embajadorencia” is a faithful translation which keeps the pun intended by the author.

On one hand, on adaptations, which are defined as the replacement of cultural elements from the ST to one of the target culture, on the examples we find a faithful one with the translation of “Angler’s Times” (“2” 2019, 30:50) – playing with the idea of *The New York Times* but for anglers – to the Spanish equivalent of “Jarra y Sedal.” Albeit it is a surprise to find this not so modern cultural reference, the decision of including it was a satisfactory one by means of an adaptation. On the other hand, we find the adaptation of “wahoo” (“5” 2019, 22:02) to “olé tú” which, even though Spanish people do use “olé” quite often, the context in which

was used seemed artificial. The complete sentence for context is “can I hear a ‘wahoo’?” which was translated into “¿me daréis un ‘olé, tú’?”. As an alternative translation the author would suggest “yuju”, it is an equivalent to “wahoo”, and it is often used in Spanish.

To conclude with the passage on Linguistic translation problems, they do perhaps carry more weight than cultural errors. Nord argues that linguistic errors “depend on the level of knowledge and competence of the translator, on the translation skopos (stylistic, functional and pragmatic qualities required of the TT), as well as the working conditions” (166)

Pragmatic Translation Problems (PTP)

Pragmatic Translation Problems, or PTP, are those related to the discourse in which translators’ major problem is the knowledge they have on the SL culture and the ST. In this category we will discuss problems such as the misgendering of a character, the excessive use of God-related expressions, the mistranslation of a scene in which the characters speak Shakespearean English or the absence of translation for a whole scene.

English	Spanish subtitles	Technique
Jolly good (p.135; Ep2/49:47)	Dios sí	Transposition
Oh dear (x; Ep3/00:50)	Vaya por dios	Expansion
Sign here <u>Sir</u> (x; Ep3/10:23)	Firme aquí <u>señora</u>	Discursive creation
This is Pollution (x; Ep3/11:23)	Ella es Polución	Discursive creation
Your boyfriend in the dark glasses (x; Ep4/40:44)	Tu amiguito de las gafas de sol	Adaptation
Jolly good (x; Ep4/52:08)	La madre de Dios	Expansion
My boyfriend (x; Ep5/16:05)	Mi novio	Literal translation

While translators look for the best options when working on a text – in this particular case a script – the inaccuracy regarding pronouns is not that common. That is why, on the series when the misgendering of a non-binary character happens, not only once but a total of three times during the time the character, Pollution, is on screen it is deemed as noteworthy. Even though the character on the book is male – using he/him pronouns – and on the tv show they

are non-binary – using they/them pronouns – the Spanish subtitling decided to treat them with she/her pronouns and female gendered terms. Examples of this can be found by the mistranslation of “they” to “ella” (“4” 2019, 11:23) as well as the wrong use of plural “han” when the original said, “they have” (11:18) referring to Pollution. Furthermore, an example that could be argued upon is the translation of “sir” to “señora” (10:23). Albeit “sir” might not be considered gender neutral for some, the direct translation into “señora” is a clear misgendering towards Pollution. But is the misgendering of a character a simple mistake? Spurlin would argue that:

“If we understand translation as a transcultural and mediating practice, it seems important to pay attention to the multiple strategies available for moving a text from one language and culture to another while being careful not to lose sight of the ideological inflections and cadences that are imbricated within a textual and cultural practice like translation and operate in the very spaces where disparate languages and cultures intersect and collide” (2014, 204-5)

Or in other words, the translator, when taking decisions on how solve translation problems, has to keep in mind the ideologies that are intrinsic of the society and the culture to which the translation is directed. It does not seem so simple as to be an honest mistake if we take into account the number of decisions a translator has to make while working with a ST. It is important to understand that the text is not an old one, the tv series premiered in 2019, a moment when inclusivity was not something new. And this may just happen for a scene that lasts at most ten minutes, but the disregard for the autonomy of a character and the damage that it causes lasts for the entirety of the series.

Some other PTP might not be as severe as misgendering a character but can be found just as aggravating. This is the case of an array of scenes which are set in mid 17th century Lancaster and where the characters are clearly using what is known as Modern English or Shakespearean English but in the scenes are translated to present day Spanish and not the Spanish equivalent for the time period (“2” 2019, 11:18). Consequently, the same happens whenever any of Agnes Nutter’s prophecies are read out loud, the character would be reading modern English, but the subtitling would be in present day Spanish. Therefore, part of the effect the writers wanted to conceive is lost in translation. Words such as “thou”, “art” or “gents” which are intended to reproduce a specific kind of speech, lost their intensity when they are translated as simple “vosotros”, “sois” and “gentes.”

Finally, throughout the whole TT we can find the translations of some interjections which are delivered by Aziraphale, who is an angel, that contain some form of God-related expression. “Jolly good” (“2” 2019, 49:47), which was translated to “Dios sí” feels blasphemous coming out of an angel’s mouth, more so when the mood of the scene did not ask for an emphatic response such as “Dios sí”. The entire line that Aziraphale delivers is “oh uh, jolly good, yes” and neither the ST nor the situation need an energetic response, a “genial” would have suffice. This happens again with the same expression “jolly good” (“4” 2019, 52:08) some episodes later, which this time is translated as “La Madre de Dios” that, once again, has nothing to do with the intended meaning by the author. In this scene Aziraphale has been talking with Metatron, who ask for him to come up to heaven and gear up for the incoming battle. As he is saying goodbye, he says also “jolly good” as in “great, I’ll be there” but the translator misses the point quite greatly. Lastly, we find an “oh dear” (“3” 2019, 00:50) translated as “vaya por Dios” which would not be entirely wrong within the context, but Aziraphale was just talking to God herself and using her name freely when Aziraphale is a god-fearing angel does not seem acceptable when a “vaya” would have be enough.

Text-specific Translation Problems (TTP)

Text-specific translation problems, or TTP, are those, among others, that are related to puns and word plays, where the translator has to play with the language to deliver specific jokes. In this script the possibilities are endless being a highly humorous text.

English	Spanish subtitles	Technique
well, I’ll be damned (p.68; Ep1/34:59)	Pues tienes razón	Modulation
It’s not so bad when you get used to it (p.68; Ep1/34:59)	No está tan mal cuando te acostumbras	Literal translation
Art thou a witch <u>evil crone</u> ? (p.116; Ep2/33:29)	¿Sois una bruja, <u>vieja bruja</u> ?	Adaptation
Squirming-at-your-feet-ish (x; Ep3/03:14)	De arrastrarse por el suelo	Adaptation
Fork (p.226; Ep4/10:20)	Dares un revolcón	Adaptation
He’s toast (x; Ep4/20:42)	lo abrasaremos	Discursive creation

And that's gonna hurt? (x; Ep4/20:44)	¿abrazar? ¿eso duele?	Discursive creation
Lick some serious butt (x; Ep6/04:32)	Dar unos cachetes	Discursive creation
Kick butt (x; Ep6/04:32)	Repartir leña	Discursive creation

While it is true that in such a deeply humorous series as *Good Omens* it is hard to translate so many punchlines, it is a shame that many of them cannot be successfully translated with their full meaning. This is the case for some of the dialogs: some changed the punchline to another one and others just lost it completely. There is a dialogue between the angel Aziraphael and the demon Crowley when discussing what they should do with the antichrist that was just born: A: “well, I’ll be damned” C: “it’s not that bad when you get used to it” (“1” 2019, 34:59) making fun on how demons are condemned to eternal suffering and hence the frightened face Aziraphale makes to that answer. However, the Spanish subtitling go as follows: A: “pues tienes razón” C: No está tan mal cuando te acostumbras” losing the demonic punchline and turning the dialogue into a mere petty argument.

In opposition we can find another dialogue, this time between the Duke of Hell Ligur and Duke of Hell Hastur when deciding what they will do once they find out if Crowley is not fulfilling his duties as a demon: L: “he’s toast” H: “and that’s gonna hurt” (“4” 2019, 20:42). Here they play with the idea of burning Crowley, “toast” him, but Crowley being a demon fire might not do much, hence the implied question per part of Hastur and the later assurance by Ligur. Howbeit, in the Spanish translation we find how the translator tried to keep the humorous tone: L: “lo abrasaremos” H: “¿abrazar? ¿eso duele?” exploiting a wordplay between “abrazar” and “abrasar” with how similar their pronunciations are and how clueless the character of Hastur sometimes is. This is a good example of discursive creation, where the translator established a temporary equivalence, in this case to maintain the pun albeit not the original one, which would not make sense out of context.

4. Conclusion

The number of problems and decisions a translator has to face when translating a ST can sometimes be a considerable amount, but it is their job to deliver the most accurate and faithful translation possible. While it is true that no translation can be perfect, the goal is to commit the lesser number of mistranslations possible. The *Good Omens* translator did a great job in some

aspects, such as the great delivery of some of the puns and the word plays that was capable of score successfully. However, other instances such as the misgendering of a character, the failure on translating the Shakespearean English scene or the excessive use of God-related terms, highlight the deficiencies the translator had on the understanding of the pragmatic, cultural and linguistic of the source text. The possibilities the translator had to make puns and play with the language were there, the script gave those possibilities, but they were not met.

To the question, it is the subtitling of *Good Omens* good? This author would respond that it is, and it is not. The audience can easily follow the plot without getting lost with a language that is easy to comprehend. But at the same time, the mistranslations that are seen and have been analyzed in this essay are too great to ignore. The strategies the translator choose did not work most of the time in the sense that the techniques and the approach to the cultural side of the ST were not met successfully and many of the puns and intended meanings are lost in translation.

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