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Found in Translation: An Analysis of Popular American Film in Spain

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Senior Capstone/Honors Project

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Introduction:

While studying abroad in Spain during the 2014-2015 school year, I ate *comida*¹ with my host family nearly every single day. On days when my older host brother César was home, while we ate we would watch *Los Simpson* - the wildly popular Spanish-dubbed version of the classic American adult cartoon show. I noticed that the verbal jokes based on following the dialogue throughout the episode and/or including humorous and clever phrasing would appeal to César, but I favored the humor that was rooted in cultural context (such as mentioning a reference to American pop culture, a particular place in the states, or a piece of US history) which was often lost on my host brother. While we both enjoyed the show, we found it funny for different reasons. This disparity calls into question the roles that both language and culture play in creating meaning, and how interpretation of a popular culture text might be affected by translation from one linguistic and cultural context to another.

In a world with an ever increasing, constant flow of elements between countries with different cultural and linguistic qualities, it is impossible to deny the existence of a global culture and more specifically global *popular* culture. The constant exchange of popular texts such as music, movies, and books between different cultures across the globe is so prevalent that products from one culture often blend right into the cultural fabric of another, for example if you hear a song on the radio by Spanish pop artist Enrique Iglesias, or catch an episode of the British series *Sherlock* on television or Netflix. However, in order for many individual popular culture texts created in one country to receive success in another, they frequently must be translated. Good translation is vital to understanding and enjoying most popular texts, but other factors besides just language

¹ Food; comida is the word most commonly used to mean lunch in Spain

come into play. The cultural background of a popular film is engrained in the text, and words often have meanings beyond the dictionary definition. Jokes and references are culturally grounded, and entire genres or subgenres of media can be completely entrenched in the culture of its place of origin, for example, the Hindi language Bollywood films of India or Spanish telenovelas. This observation begs the question: when a popular culture text is translated from one language to another, which cultural elements are translated along with that? How does the translation of language affect cultural meaning, and does the displacement of a text from one culture to another affect how it is interpreted and understood?

In my research, I look at American popular film in Spain to understand how the removal of a popular text from its original cultural background affects its interpretation in the new cultural context. I compare the original and translated versions of the films *The Avengers* (2012, Joss Whedon) and *Django Unchained* (2012, Quentin Tarantino) to explore what might be lost - and found - in translation. Additionally, I include film reviews and critiques of the films from American and Spanish sources to consider perspectives outside of my own. This research uses the terms 'America' and 'American' to mean of or relating to only the United States of America, and the language of the text or person being referred to is English. I categorize Spain as a non-English speaking Western country; and the term 'Spanish' is used to refer to the *Castellano* language (Spanish from Spain, as opposed to *Latino* Spanish), people from Spain, and cultural texts that are of Spanish origin both geographically and linguistically.

The American motion picture industry commonly referred to simply as 'Hollywood' is a multibillion dollar enterprise. A portion of this commerce is derived from international exports of American films, which must be translated and produced with

subtitles (called subbing/subbed) or entirely voiced-over in a different language (dubbing/dubbed). These translated films can be very successful in other countries, sometimes even performing better abroad than in the United States. Furthermore, it is not uncommon in many places outside of the United States that the American film industry is equally or even more successful than that which is native to the country. In Spain, Hollywood films are frequently translated and released in theatres, and tend to be quite successful. These films are translated both linguistically from English to Spanish (movies and television shows are typically dubbed in Spanish rather than distributed in English with Spanish subtitles), as well as culturally, from the social and cultural environment of the United States of America to a country with a significantly different historical and everyday culture. While Spain and the US share many cultural aspects because both countries derive their main cultural dynamics from Western norms, the individual cultural values of the two are vastly different, as are the historical events engrained into both cultural fabrics. As I explore the linguistic and cultural translation present in *The Avengers* and *Django Unchained*, understanding how specific cultural elements are dealt with during translation will be a key aspect to answering the core question motivating the research.

This research is significant because it contributes to the academic field of popular culture and provides insights into the inner workings of the processes of global popular culture and Americanization. In this study I explore two translated films as well as critiques and reviews of the films in order to understand the implications of linguistic and cultural translation. Ultimately, I conclude that the surface-level interpretation of a Hollywood blockbuster will not change dramatically with translation, but the deeper meaning or interpretation of a film does not happen at the surface. Therefore, meaning

can change with interpretation, but the films and movie reviews and critiques do not reveal this directly.

Literature review:

Global popular culture and trends of globalization, Westernization, and specifically Americanization have become prevalent academic themes over the last few decades. However, there is an apparent significant gap in the literature available concerning how the processes of Americanization and elements of American culture affect and manifest in the country of Spain, not to mention specifically how American popular film is translated, received, and understood. To explore the themes around which my research is centered, it is necessary to break down my research topic and examine literature contextually related to the broadest elements - primarily that of global popular culture and Americanization. Having a well informed understanding of what Americanization is, as well as knowing how I am defining and using other related terms, is an important cornerstone to the research.

First and foremost, as previously mentioned, for the purposes of this research terms such as 'American' and 'America' represent only the United States of America, therefore, 'Americanization' is solely representative of US processes, sometimes referred to as "USAmericanization" (Robertson "Rethinking Americanization" 257). I am basing my definition of Americanization, a culturally grounded term, off of that which is offered in *Americanism and Americanization: A Critical History of Domestic and Global Influence* by Mel Van Elteren. Americanization is, at best, a loosely defined umbrella term used to describe the effects of American influence elsewhere around the world (Elteren 1, 102). It can apply to cultural phenomenon as well as economic and political, and can also be

used to describe domestic processes in the United States (Elteren 103), but for this research I will focus solely on Americanization as a cultural manifestation abroad. In Europe, trends of Americanization are so prevalent that in the introduction chapter to *European Readings of American Popular Culture*, Rob Kroes calls America "Europe's 'significant other,'" offering a point of reference for cultural contrast and comparison within the same Western ideology (xxv). As I explore the relationship between Spanish people and American cinema to discover how the meaning of a cultural text might change once removed from its original socio-cultural and linguistic background and translated to another, it is important to consider the aspect of dynamic Americanization. American popular texts tend to be "significantly culturally marked" by the environment in which they were created and originally marketed (Darling-Wolf *Imagining* 23). However, as these texts are removed from their origins, and one culture absorbs or adopts an "American" idea, cultural text, tradition, etc. it is no longer strictly American (Darling-Wolf "Getting Over" 4). The entity may remain American in spirit in some cases, but has been transformed by the culture in which it now exists. Conversely, in the same way that global entities become local, local cultural products are also contextualized in global processes (Darling-Wolf *Imagining* 1).

Mel Van Elteren's definition of Americanization is a crucial foundation to his research, as well as mine. In his book he examines the cultural politics of Americanization abroad, specifically focusing on Western nations, and taking into consideration historical context. Elteren conceptualizes the processes concerned in terms of power relations regarding the cultural influence of the United States, arguing that although the concept of Americanization has been critiqued and deconstructed by a variety of scholars, it still has value and merit today - he states in the introduction that it

is the general purpose of the book to convince the reader as such. While Elteren also focuses on how Americanism and the concept of Americanization function within the United States, his mastery of the subject in general makes this source very valuable.

European Readings of American Popular Culture is a compiled anthology of essays focusing on different interpretations of American popular culture in various European perspectives, speaking to trends of Americanization in Western nations and global popular culture as the United States and Europe exchange popular culture products and other cultural trends. In his introduction chapter, "A Clash of Imagined Communities," Rob Kroes focuses on the two communities of the United States of America and Europe (as a whole) coming together and exchanging popular culture and sociological trends. In his essay, Kroes includes explanations and analyses of historic and modern European views and conceptions of America, as well as includes points of European critique of America and American culture. As I analyze pieces of American popular culture and include the Spanish-European perspective, Kroes' foundation is key to consider.

As much as Americanization is the cornerstone to my research, the concept of *translocal* is also crucial to this study, as it serves as the lens through which I analyze the primary data. Several scholars over the years have attempted to define this elusive element that is apparent yet hard to describe when analyzing global popular culture. In *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*, Roland Robertson discusses the term *glocal* (global + local) and explains that it originated as a marketing term. In his analysis he claims that the "complex relationship between 'the local' and 'the global'" is being downplayed and in some cases ignored when considering aspects of global culture (174). *Glocal* is not quite right for defining the complexities of the processes at hand. Hybridity theorist Marwan Kraidy states in *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalization*, "A

translocal approach focuses on connections between several local spaces, exploring hitherto neglected local-to-local links" (155). The neglected local-to-local links are the same lack in the local-global relationship Robertson highlighted, and the name given to this phenomenon is translocal. Kraidy further defines, "A translocal perspective calls for an analysis of how these different nations' hybrid cultures are shaped by their mutual interaction, in addition to their links with the West" (155). The idea of global entities becoming enveloped in local contexts is a central aspect to this research. Globalization and hybridity scholar Fabienne Darling-Wolf adapts the idea of the translocal in order to "further theorize the intersection of the global and the local" ("Getting Over" 189).

Fabienne Darling-Wolf's book *Imagining the Global: Transnational Media and Popular Culture beyond East and West* addresses some shared themes with Americanization scholar Elteren, but through an even broader, global perspective. She examines how individuals imagine global ideas as cultural products and how social relations are removed from local contexts by examining transnational forces at work in the relationship between France, Japan, and the United States. Defining and elaborating on globalization and the media are two key features that make this text stand out. Darling-Wolf's article in *Communication Theory* touches on similar themes discussed in *Imagining the Global*. In "Getting Over Our 'Illusion d'Optique': From Globalization To Mondialisation (Through French Rap)", Darling-Wolf addresses concepts related to my own research as she explores the hybridity and translocality of French hip-hop. Hip-hop, of course, originated as a 1980s American cultural product that has since been adapted by the French to create a distinct subgenre with fully French contexts. In her conclusion, Darling-Wolf advocates that "the global is locally negotiated" ("Getting Over" 201), which is a critical theory for my research. Darling-Wolf's work supports the notion (and the

hypothesis of my research question) that a global popular culture text such as an American film that is translated in Spanish will be locally negotiated by the language and culture of Spain, possibly affecting interpretation and meaning in the process.

Methodology:

This study explores the translated versions of Spanish and American films in an attempt to understand how meaning changes with interpretation across linguistic and socio-cultural boundaries. I look at two sets of films and apply textual analysis techniques when examining the translated versions. The films I chose for this study are *The Avengers* and its Spanish translated counterpart *Los Vengadores* as well as *Django Unchained* along with the translated *Django desencadenado*². These two films were both released in 2012 in the United States (*Django desencadenado* was released in 2013 in Spain) and have subject matter - either explicit or implicit - related to expressly American themes, such as US politics or major historical/cultural events. This is done so that the data collected reflects current trends, and specifically aims to answer the question of how film from the United States is interpreted in Spain by seeing if the American ideas are understood as such. These specific pairs of films were selected first and foremost because they were both commercially successful in the United States and in Spain. Figure 1 shows the box office rankings of the two films -

| Gross Box Office Results via BoxOfficeMojo.com | |
|---|---------------|
| The Avengers (Joss Whedon, 2012) | |
| US - #1 | \$623,357,910 |
| Spain - #6 | \$20,220,212 |
| Django Unchained (Quentin Tarantino, 2012) | |
| US - #15 | \$162,805,434 |
| Spain (2013) - #8 | \$14,328,129 |

Figure 1

Django desencadenado ranked on the 2013 chart for

² Note: not capitalizing "*desencadenado*" is not improper grammar - in Spanish only the first word of a title is capitalized (unless the word is a proper noun, like with *Los Vengadores*)

Spain because the dubbing process often takes a while, and only huge movies are released immediately following the US release date. For example, when I was in Spain the only two movies that were shown during the same weekend of the US release were *The Hunger Games* and *Fifty Shades of Gray*. Typically a film will be released in Spain many months after the US release, and for *Django Unchained* the that date was December 25, 2012 while the Spanish release was less than a month later on January 18, 2013.

Another reason these two films were selected was for their inherently American content. While modern superhero films are generally created to be universal so as to garner the biggest possible profit by selling the films internationally, any film prominently featuring a character called Captain America definitely has a distinctly American tone. As Steve Rogers/Captain America (Chris Evans) and Tony Stark/Iron Man (Robert Downey Jr.) butt heads throughout the film, they represent two conflicting American ideologies - the old and the new way of doing things. Captain America is a character whose personal background is set in World War II, though he is living in a modern society, and Iron Man has ties to the US conflict in Afghanistan - their military relations with entirely different periods of US war history further highlight their differences. Annika Hagley and Michael Harrison in "Fighting the Battles We Never Could: *The Avengers* and Post-September 11 American Political Identities" make the case that all of the six members of the team of superheroes are representations of different facets of the American cultural and historical identity. They state that Iron Man represents the military industrial complex and Captain America the "traditional notions of patriotism and acceptance of authority" (120). Natasha Romanoff/Black Widow (Scarlett Johansson) is Russian and Clint Barton/Hawkeye (Jeremy Renner) is a trained eagle-eye assassin, and the pair of lethal spies call to mind the Cold War era. Bruce Banner/Hulk (Mark Ruffalo) is noted for "the

duality of his nature, [which] speaks to the contradiction between the human capacity for great intelligence, kindness, and empathy, and an astonishing ability to twist those characteristics and use them to 'smash'" (121). Finally, Thor (Chris Hemsworth) is representative of the "American warrior ethos" and later in the film the differing relationships between the United States and European allies post 9/11 (122). Hagley and Harrison confirm that Loki (Tom Hiddleston) can "stand in easily for international terrorists" (122), and state, "The heroes are successful in preventing disaster through the balanced combination of their American or pro-American identities and ideologies" (123). They also state that *The Avengers* can be easily read as an allegory to the September 11 terrorist attacks on New York City in 2001. The film is set in New York City, involves alien-creatures crashing plane-like gliders into buildings (when looking for it, the burning building imagery is actually quite obvious), and requires the strength of unity and the prevalent idea of *united we stand* to be victorious and save New York, America, and the world. In this vein, the triumph of the team of superheroes coming together to defeat the terrorist Loki and his alien army signifies the United States recovering from the attacks and proving we cannot be defeated. As this victory is rooted in a US tragedy, the so-called universal superhero film is still very much American.

Django Unchained, on the other hand, is American in no uncertain terms. Set in mid-1800s Mississippi, the film follows the life and story of a slave, Django (Jaime Foxx), as he accompanies a German bounty hunter, Dr. King Schultz (Christoph Waltz), who frees him of his slave status. They eventually find themselves on the infamous plantation where Django's wife Broomhilda (Kerry Washington) is a slave. Avoiding any spoilers for those who have yet to see the film - and this is not a spoiler as it is a Tarantino film, and this is typical of Tarantino - but it ends with a lot of blood and death. The fact that this

film highlights a particularly horrific and awful period of US history obviously marks it as being a very American film. References to the inner workings of the US slaving industry and a long scene including the Ku Klux Klan are elements of the film that make sense to an American audience but might be lost abroad, to viewers without a rich knowledge of American history. Additionally, Quentin Tarantino is a highly praised Americana director. His affinity for extreme amounts of violence, as well as the use of satire and American popular culture references, among other distinguishing characteristics, creates a style that is distinctly Tarantino and distinctly American.

Finally, as both films were released in 2012 in the United States (as previously mentioned, *Django desencadenado* was released in 2013 in Spain) they are part of the same modern movement. The cultural context surrounding the films while they were being made as well as when they were released is the same - this is true for the original movies as well as the translated versions, as Spanish culture would not have changed dramatically between 2012 and 2013. It is important to consider at least two sets of original and translated film in this study as this creates more space to explore the similarities and differences between the original films and their translated counterparts and provides a more solid ground upon which to base the conclusions I draw from the various methods of analysis I apply to the cultural texts. I elected to only examine two sets of films (and not more) for the sake of maintaining clarity and brevity in the research gathering and data analysis process.

For each set of films I watched the original English version and within a day or two followed with screening the translated Spanish film. This was done so that the film was still fresh in my head but I had time to process it over the short amount of time between watching the two versions. I watched the American films in English, and the Spanish

translations in dubbed Castellano Spanish. All four movies were watched using internet sources, the English versions from American sites, and the translations from Spanish sites. For both films I was able to elect to stream in either Latino or Castellano Spanish, so I was sure to be watching the versions seen by audiences in Spain. In order to distinguish exactly how translation differed from the original version, I watched *Los Vengadores* with the original English script of the film pulled up on my phone and followed along. I read the lines in English and listened for differences as the Spanish was spoken. This allowed me to immediately see which cultural references were cut or altered, and therefore to distinguish the cultural translation. With *Django desencadenado* I attempted to do the same, but quickly realized the published script of *Django Unchained* and the text of the original movie were rather different (this was not the case with *The Avengers*), and I could not use the digital script to follow along. Instead, I simultaneously streamed the Castellano version of the film with audio on, and synced it (down to the second) with the English version with subtitles on and audio off. This way I was able to read what exactly was said in the original film, and hear what the Spanish translation was.

When analyzing the two sets of films I focus primarily on the translated versions as they are read with and against their original-language counterparts - this is done so that the emphasis remains on the elements of translation and connection to the academic realm of global popular culture. By viewing the original and translated films and considering them together, I am able to clearly understand what has been altered to fit the new linguistic and socio-cultural context into which the film is translated. As previously mentioned, I lived in Spain for nine months and studied modern Spanish culture at the interactive level - this by no means makes me an expert on the subject of Spanish film interpretation, but I did experience full immersion in everyday Spanish culture for an

extended period of time. This allows me to have enough insights to confidently speculate on why changes might have been made to the films during the translation process, as well as how these changes might affect interpretation. The concentration of my research looks at the changes made during translation that were altered specifically for the purpose of cultural clarity.

Popular culture is a very subjective area of study. By conducting textual analyses of a popular text, a lot of information about the culture in which it was created and the messages it contains can be gathered. However, to explore what people think of a certain modern text, it is crucial to go directly to the source - people. In order to understand how popular American film is understood after being removed from its original socio-cultural and linguistic context and translated into Spanish to be viewed by people in Spain, it is important to add another element to the data. After conducting my personal content analyses of the texts, I consider film reviews of both the original as well as translated versions of the films in order to understand the native opinions and interpretations of both movies. By comparing the American and Spanish reviews and critiques, I am able to see which interpretive elements of the films were altered in translation, albeit from an academically informed perspective rather than the average moviegoer's point of view. Using professional film critic reviews of the films rather than the opinions of everyday individuals was not my first choice to showcase the Spanish perspective, but it serves its purpose in that it still provides better insights than the conclusions I would arrive at if only looking at a textual analysis of the films. To collect the Spanish reviews and critiques of both films I consulted the websites of five major Spanish newspapers: *ABC* [no relation to US corporation], *El Mundo*, *El País*, *La Razon*, and *La Vanguardia*; and two popular film sites: www.cinemaniamania.es, www.fotogramas.es.

For the American reviews I consulted the websites of *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *The Washington Post* and two reviews from the movie review website www.rogerebert.com. Exploring the comparisons between the Spanish responses and the American perspective is what serves as the key element to understanding how the interpretations of a popular text change when removed from their original contexts and translated to another.

Dubbed Film and Samuel L. Jackson:

I would like to provide a bit of background concerning the process of watching an American film dubbed in Spanish. Dubbing is very important in Spain as the rise of movie culture in the 1930s and 40s coincided with the fascist dictatorship led by Francisco Franco for almost forty years. Franco was extremely conservative and nationalist, and any foreign film that would be released in the country, aside from undergoing heavy censoring, had to be dubbed in Spanish rather than kept in its original language and subtitled. This tradition became so rooted in Spanish culture that despite all the cultural changes that occurred after the fall of Franco's regime, dubbing continues to be the leading form of film and television translation in Spain today. Due to this extensive history of the art and practice of film dubbing, it is a very advanced and precise business. Linguistic translations, as I have found out, tend to be almost exact matches with the original versions of popular texts. Furthermore, the newly translated text occupies the exact same amount of speaking time as the originals - this is to say, when the actor's mouth is open and moving, they are talking, and when their mouth is closed, they are silent. The stereotype about dubbed movies based on poorly English-dubbed martial arts movies from the 1970s, where the moving mouths of the actors and the choppy dialogue

do not match up at all, could not be further from the truth concerning modern Spanish dubbed film. Because of the precise nature of the dubbing and the skilled work of the voice actors portraying the character in the new language, screening the dubbed Spanish films quickly felt as natural as watching the English versions, and I was surprisingly not distracted at all while streaming *Los Vengadores* and *Django desencadenado*.

One random similarity between the two films I chose, which was by pure coincidence, is Samuel L. Jackson appearing in both films. In *The Avengers*, Jackson portrays Nick Fury (Nick Furia in Spanish), the director of S.H.I.E.L.D, and expertly performs Stephen, the extremely anti-black racist house slave at the infamous plantation owned by Calvin Candie (Leonardo DiCaprio). This is an interesting connection between the two films as it highlights the talent of many leading Spanish voice actors. In Spain and in many foreign dubbing industries, when a voice actor is cast for a major Hollywood actor, that person reads the dubbed lines for every film that actor/actress stars in. Their voice does not always closely resemble the actor's actual voice (sometimes they are quite different), but to a Spanish audience who has never heard the actual actor or actress speak, their voice *is* that of the voice actor. The voice actors can be quite spectacular, however, and I believe the Spanish man who reads for Samuel L. Jackson is very successful in performing the actor's often iconic roles. The differences between Nick Fury's strong and authoritative intonation and Stephen's elderly, explosive style of speaking were just as apparent in both the English and Spanish versions of the films, which highly impressed me. The high quality of the dubbing industry in Spain made watching the Spanish films quite enjoyable, and gathering data from that experience was very enriching.

Findings:

My hypothesis when beginning this project was that because popular culture texts are so culturally marked, the translation of a popular movie would change the text dramatically and therefore the interpretation of the translated version of the films would be different from that of the original film as well. However, what I have found in conducting textual analyses of the original English as well as the Spanish translated versions of *The Avengers* and *Django Unchained*, and combining the data from that analysis with a review of English and Spanish critiques of the films, is that translation does little to change the surface level interpretations. That is not to say the interpretation does not change, but it is difficult to gauge the meanings of the films just from professional movie reviews. I have found that critiques and reviews are not nearly enough to provide a solid understanding of a film, as movie critiques are written (in almost all cases) for an audience of average-minded moviegoers, not film or popular culture scholars. While, for example, it is easy to read *The Avengers* as an allegory for 9/11, and many scholars such as Annika Hagley and Michael Harrison agree, the American film reviews do not even mention this interpretation. Instead, the reviews and critiques focus on aspects such as the performances of the actors, comparing the action with the comic relief, and the visual effects. The Spanish reviews discussed the same themes, although Carmen L. Lobo in *La Razon's* "Un superentretenimiento"³ mentions in her brief plot summary, "La Tierra está en serio peligro"⁴ and Noel Ceballos in the www.fotogramas.es review "Para amantes del cine como tren eléctrico"⁵ states, "Un

³ A super entertainment

⁴ The Earth is in serious danger

⁵ For lovers of film like an electric train

enemigo inesperado amenaza con poner en peligro la seguridad mundial."⁶ These two Spanish reviews specifically make the case that the *world* is in danger, not just New York City, and not just America. Granted, this is definitely true in the film - Loki is after *world* domination, and one scene towards the start of the film even takes place in Germany - however, none of the US reviews felt it necessary to mention the global peril. This specification in the Spanish reviews and simultaneous omission of the mention of world danger in the American critiques speaks something to the 'American vs. universal' nature of the film. The international interpretation of the translation in this case makes the film more universal, which the Spanish reviews make apparent.

Aside from the previously stated point, the reviews did not provide much in the way of aiding in answering my core research question, so the analyses of the films and cultural-knowledge-based speculations of changing interpretation and meaning make up for a greater portion of the relevant data and findings. In *The Avengers*, the elements that were noticeably translated out or changed in the process of converting the film from English to Spanish were often small cultural references that a Spanish audience would not understand, or phrases that would not make sense when translated directly to Spanish. The first example of this I noticed when watching the translated film was pretty far in (about half way, more or less), with the changing of the English line Stark says to Thor, calling him "Point Break." In *Los Vengadores* he simply calls Thor a nickname for handsome which translates similarly to heart-throb, as the reference to the 1991 Patrick Swayze movie would have been lost on a Spanish audience. Not all popular culture references were cut however, for example later when Stark calls Hawkeye "Legolas," the bow-and-arrow slinging elf from *Lord of the Rings*. This reference is kept in Spanish, as

⁶ An unexpected enemy threatens to endanger world security

the general populous will be familiar with that series and its characters. Other minor referential changes were made, and there are a few examples of a common phrase being replaced with the closest Spanish equivalent. These changes, from what I can tell, will not change the interpretation or meaning of the film, but rather make the film more universal and internationally understandable.

My speculation, however, is that just as a deeper reading of *The Avengers* reveals it as an allegory to the September 11 terror attacks, the subsurface meaning of *Los Vengadores* is what will connect to a different interpretation. For example, while the Spanish audience understands that the film is American in origin (the mere presence of Captain America makes that hard to forget), the idea of a foreign terrorist attacking a city is not an unfamiliar concept in Spain, having dealt with their own train bombing terror attacks led by Al Qaeda on March 11, 2004. The international terrorism aspect is not lost, and could lend itself to a deeper interpretation of the film in a Spanish context. Additionally, while I make the case that Captain America is a constant reminder of the American nature of the film, he potentially does not even serve as representative of the United States of America to the Spanish audience members seeking deeper meaning from *Los Vengadores*. Rather, he is interpreted as somebody who is very patriotic and nationalist, set in old-fashioned ways of thinking and doing things, cares for order and rules, and at times struggles to keep up with a rapidly advancing society. As Spain was ruled by fascist dictator Francisco Franco from 1939 to 1975, many members of the older generations in Spain are viewed this way. This aspect related to the character could affect how Captain America and the film as a whole is interpreted. The quarrels and clashes throughout the film can connect to the new and old politicians going head to head on Spanish political issues and not getting anywhere, and unity of the team in the end

symbolizes Spain's need for its parties to work together to make progress. The average Spanish moviegoer might not interpret the translated film this way, just as the average American viewer might not consider American politics or recent events when watching the original version. Interpretation of a film happens at a secondary level, beyond that of merely watching and enjoying a flashy action movie with comedic undertones, and this holds true for the original and translated version of *The Avengers*.

Concerning *Django Unchained*, comparing the English and Spanish reviews revealed many similarities and a few obvious differences concerning what the authors viewed as important to include for the readers. Nearly all of the reviews in both languages noted the similarities between *Django Unchained* and *Inglourious Basterds* (*Malditos bastardos*⁷ in Spanish). Additionally, all of the writers were very aware of the distinct Tarantino nature of his films; some of the Spanish reviews even classify the film as "tarantiniano," essentially turning Tarantino's name into an adjective because there is no better word to describe his work. All but one of the *Django Unchained* critiques also talked about the Spaghetti Western genre in some capacity (the one lacking was the Roger Ebert piece, which was actually a blog post and *not* a film review). Oti Rodríguez Marchante, author of ABC's review of the film, called it "un magnífico western a la carbonara," referring to the Italian pasta sauce, rather than directly calling it a Spaghetti Western, which I personally found hilarious. I was surprised to find that the Spanish reviews were more likely to mention the 1966 Sergio Corbucci authentic Italian Spaghetti Western which Jamie Foxx's character is named in homage to, *Django* (three Spanish reviews out of six total included *Django*, with an additional two naming Corbucci but without specific reference to that particular film, whereas only one out of six American reviews did the

⁷ Damn bastards - as it is traditionally spelled in Spanish, unlike the intentionally alternately spelled American title

same). This might be because the Spanish reviewers thought it important that their readers understood the connection to the film, or because the Spanish audience might already be aware of the film by the famed Italian director, given Spain's close proximity to Italy and very similar cultures. However, some of the Spanish reviews also included references to American Western genre films, for example Marañón discusses "las varias texturas del Oeste"⁸ in his critique. The Spanish critics were also sure to include a mention of the scene with Don Johnson and the Ku Klux Klan, answering my curiosity as to whether a Spanish audience would understand the significance of that short part of the film. Marchante of *ABC*, Javier Ocaña of *El País*, Luis Martinez of *El Mundo*, Carlos Marañón of www.cinemanía.es, and Jordi Costa of www.fotogramas.es specifically mentioned Tarantino's tendency to mix comedy with serious subjects in reference to the scene, further proving their grasp of that element of American history and culture, and perhaps explain to any readers who did not comprehend what was going on. None of the American reviews discussed the KKK scene, which could be because the authors did not need to establish that they understood its significance or potentially subtly explain it to a less internationally literate audience. The Spanish reviews in general seemed to be more likely to give deeper insights about the film and provide smaller details, for example, four out of the six Spanish reviews mention by name the German fairytale "Siegfried" ("*Sigfrido*" in Spanish), which is what Dr. Schultz compares Django's quest for Broomhilda to, as the heroine in the story is named Broomhilda. By comparison, none of the American reviews mention this detail at all. The American critiques instead tended to focus on the "big picture" of the movie - in general, that Quentin Tarantino hates slavery and racism. The comparisons of the Spanish and English *Django Unchained* reviews were

⁸ The various textures of the West

more telling than the reviews and critiques of *The Avengers*, but still do not provide enough information to reach conclusions concerning differing interpretations of the two versions of the film. So again, the textual analysis of the film itself and cultural-knowledge-based speculations will be more influential in answering my research question.

The verbal translation to *Django desencadenado* involved even fewer changes than with *Los Vengadores*, likely due to the different time periods in which the films were set, as well as the genres. *The Avengers* is a superhero action film that American critics have identified as a subtle comedy with action sequences which is set in modern times. Popular culture references are abundant and the cast uses current manners of speaking (save for Thor and Loki). *Django Unchained*, conversely, is an American Spaghetti Western set in the 1800s, which immediately eliminates any obvious modern popular culture references - this is somewhat unusual for a Tarantino film. The most obvious changes between the English and Spanish versions occur when characters criticize the highly educated manner of speaking that Dr. Schultz uses throughout the film. In the very first scene of the film when Dr. Schultz is arranging to purchase Django from the slave owners who were on their way back to their plantation from a recent auction, the uneducated men tell Dr. Schultz to "talk English," which is translated as "habla en cristiano,"⁹ however, this change was also noted when the line "speak English" is translated in *The Avengers/Los Vengadores*. Aside from that, I noticed virtually no differences between the English and Spanish spoken text in the film. Even names such as "Candyland" (Calvin Candie's huge plantation) and "Big Daddy" (the plantation owner performed by Don Johnson) are kept in their original English, sometimes overly

⁹ Speak Christian

pronounced as such. Like *The Avengers*, if cultural translation changes the meaning or interpretation of the film, this occurs subsurface.

The very first thing I thought might be interpreted differently when watching *Django desencadenado* is one of the opening lines - actually, it is not even a line, but text which appears on the screen following the conclusion of the Western theme ballad which introduces the film. The opening text reads "1858 / Two years before the civil war / somewhere in Texas." The Spanish version of the last line of that text is translated as "en algun lugar de Texas." This is a direct translation, but immediately calls to mind the introduction to the famed Spanish literary treasure *Don Quijote* by Miguel de Cervantes, which essentially every Spaniard knows the opening line to by memory. (While I was in Spain one of my professors insisted that we learn it, and one day when I brought it up while conducting a weekly tutoring session with two teenage girls they confirmed and both recited the line so fast, in unison, I could hardly understand them). *Don Quijote* begins, "En un lugar de la Mancha..." Surely any Spanish person reading those beginning words in *Django desencadenado* would recall the famous tale, and it is possible that the following adventures of Django and Dr. Schultz will then be read as those of knights on a quest. The later retelling of the German fairytale "Siegfried" (adapted from Nordic/Germanic legend) and its parallels to the movie's plot liken the action in the film even more similarly to a noble mission, which is perhaps why the Spanish reviews were so apt to include this small detail, because it carries more significance to the Spanish audience. In "Faster Quentin! Thrill! Thrill!" by Roger Ebert (the piece is included as an entry in *Roger Ebert's Journal* rather than as a straight movie review on the site), he likens the character of Dr. King Schultz to that of a wizard from a fairy tale, and it is possible that the Spanish audience might be even more apt to pick up on this theme than

the American audience. The translated version and Spanish reviews for *Django desencadenado* provide compelling evidence that there might be more that can be found in translation than shown at the surface.

Conclusion:

This study explores global popular culture and the implications of translating a popular text, both linguistically and culturally. After analyzing the original English and the translated Spanish versions of *The Avengers* and *Django Unchained*, as well as American and Spanish reviews of the films, I conclude that while translation *can* and likely *does* affect interpretation, this happens at a secondary level, so on the surface both versions of the films appear to be pretty much the same. Despite heavy cultural coding, the films still translate very easily into Spanish, and there were not nearly as many changes in dialogue as I was anticipating when beginning the data-gathering process of watching both films. Popular culture references in *The Avengers* were sometimes altered, according to what would and would not still make sense in a Spanish cultural context, while *Django Unchained* was hardly changed at all. Flashbacks and vivid depictions of the horrors of the time provided background information for a foreign audience who might not already have the necessary knowledge of US history to make complete sense of the film. I argue that although the surface-level linguistic translation kept the Spanish versions nearly identical to the original English films, the deeper meaning of the movies might be interpreted differently by American and Spanish audiences due to the cultural aspect of translation.

Secondary research conducted by leading globalization scholar Roland Robertson, Americanization specialist Mel Van Elteren, hybridity theorist Marwan Kraidy, and

globalization and hybridity academic Fabienne Darling-Wolf informs this study. Kraidy's use of the term *translocal* and Darling-Wolf's adaptation of the idea is particularly influential to the research, as the realms of the local and the global intersect heavily in a translated popular film. The global entity of the original movie is affected as it is linguistically and culturally translated and interpreted by a local audience in a foreign community. This is seen in *Los Vengadores* as cultural references are altered to be more universal and the subsurface interpretation of the film lends itself to serve as a metaphor for Spanish politics, which is just one speculation of a possible altered meaning. *Django desencadenado* is a translocal text as it is interpreted in a non-American socio-historical context, and perhaps instead is read as a knight's quest.

Suggestions for further research relating to this topic would be to follow my initial research plan and go to the people. I still believe, despite the fact that I did not enact this methodological route, that interacting directly with average people is the best way to get to the heart of this research. In order to truly understand how a culture relates to and interprets a popular text, it is necessary to consult individuals from that culture - I used the Spanish and American reviews as data sites so as to not entirely lose this element. Additionally, similar research conducted using different films or a different language and/or culture would be equally interesting. I believe the only way to fully answer the research question I have posed would be to use a survey and interview methodology and expand to include many participants from many different cultures, therefore more deeply exploring how the meaning of a cultural text changes with translation. This methodology might provide the means to gather the data necessary to truly and fully answer the question of how the translation of a popular culture text affects its meaning and interpretation.

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