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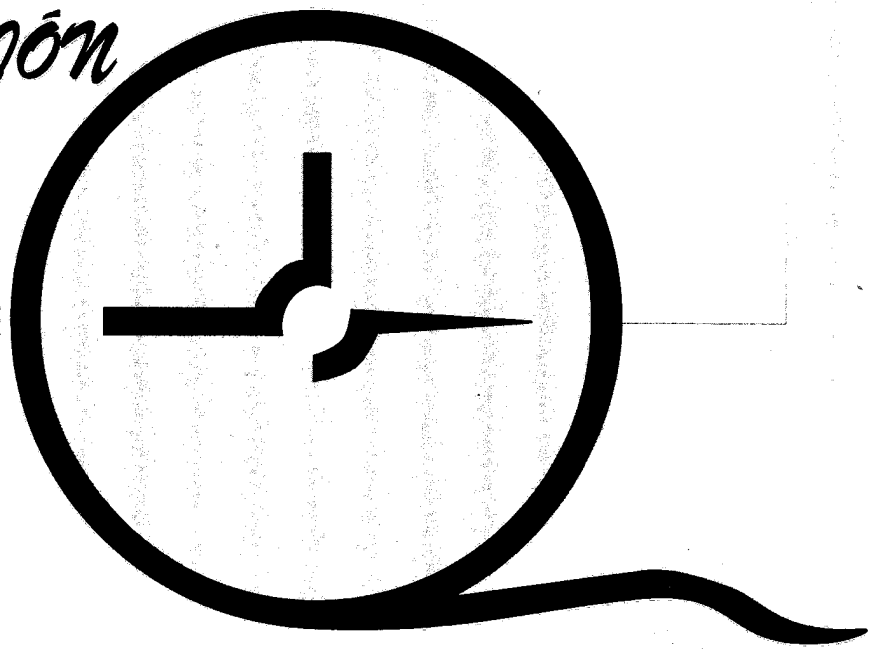

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¡ATAME! SIGNIFICA "TE QUIERO" MEDIA-MEDIATED GENDERLECT AND FILM TRANSLATION

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> There is a very blatant discrepancy between the obvious importance of translation in the media and the limited attention it has thus far been thought worthy of(...). It is safe to assume that translation processes in mass communication play a very effective part in both the shaping of cultures and the relations between them.
>
> (Delabastita, 1989, p.97)

In hijacking Robin Lakof's concept of Genderlect [1] for the purpose of conceptualising the male-mediated language which passes for women's discourse in film, I reject any implication that men's and women's speech is essentially different - only that they have different social implications. I take Genderlect to mean women's discourse in film which is overwhelmingly written by male script-writers. I will argue that the myths of women's speech when mediated through popular culture into film, and more specifically, when translated across culture, uphold stereotypical myths of femininity" against the grain of social change" as Cheris Kramarae puts it (1981, 99). Although in this paper I advocate a return to the Lacanian centrality of language in analysing the translation of scripts, I do not propose to employ the enigmatic "Joycing" of language which makes this author's work so inaccessible I will instead use a more personal and hopefully accessible style which has become, ironically, traditional, in feminist analyses and which makes overt the particular bias of my approach.

I have chosen to focus on the subtitled (SUB) and dubbed (DUB) versions of Pedro Almodóvar's *¡ATAME!* (1990) for two reasons. Firstly, the man from La Mancha continually emphasises the centrality of language to an understanding to his work. "All my films are literary (...). For me, literary cinema is one in which the language is centre-stage, and is the motive force of the action(...). Dialogue is action for me." [2]. Secondly, the director frequently stresses his love for what is culturally coded as feminine [3], and it is this centrality of the feminine, in all its changing facets, and expressed with a marked discourse freedom by the (fe)male characters, which poses the greatest challenge to film translation.

In looking at Pedro Almodóvar's genderlect, I am conscious that it is a discourse form accepted by most critics as the way women really speak. This preconception is itself worthy of further study. In this paper, however, I will concentrate on its translation. We can therefore, identify a complex series of events

taking place between women's speech and its eventual translation, and I am looking at a small slice of that transposition. Hélèle Cixous, the French feminist, argues very convincingly that the feminine voice need not be written by a biologically female writer and I think that it is an interesting observation when looking at this director[4].

It is true, as Delabastita points out, that translation scholars pay very little attention to SUB and DUB. I would add that theorists of popular culture, feminist sociolinguistics, and Hispanism, ignore it almost completely. An entertaining exception is Santoyo's chapter on the censorship of film in the Franco era in *El Delito de Traducir* (1990). When theorists do tread the area, they tend to concentrate on technical analysis (Delabastita: 1989, Rabadán: 1991) and/or strong feeling of disappointment and loss. Reasons for this include an adherence to the comforting old dichotomy of High and Low Culture and our almost obsessive attachment to literary translation for our enquiry. Not many of us, it seems, were receptive when Theo Hermans argued 11 years ago for:

> *A view of literature as a complex and dynamic system; a conviction that there should be a continual interplay between theoretical models and practical case studies; an approach to literary translation which is descriptive, target-oriented, functional, and systemic; and an interest in the norms and constraints that govern the production and reception of translations, in the relation between translations and other types of text processing,and in the place and role of translations both within a given literature and in the interaction between literatures.* (1985, pp. 10-11).

There is also, of course, the perception that the shortcomings of film translation are due mostly to spatial and temporal constraints. However, there is another point which may help explain the lack of interest. One of the most salient features of film translation is its neutralising effect, not just on source culture-specific concepts, but on most concepts which do not coincide with dominant target culture ideologies (particularly patriarchy). And as we can see, with the possible exception of Julia Kristeva, most feminist analyses of language and gender are neither widely available nor studied by popular culture theorists[5]. One final point worth mentioning is the overwhelming focus of film research on the visual elements[6] which are privileged by those who control the encoding of symbols in our society. I approach this field conscious of an industry which is still male-dominated, consumer-oriented, and time-is-money conscious. I therefore, expected to find elements of intensification, simplification, and outright suppression. I have to admit to being surprised by the extent to which the target scripts I examined encode crude male-female binarisms which in most instances systematically undermined Almodóvar's original script.

While I do not offer a simplistic causal link between the representation of women's discourse in film, its translation and the continued subordination of

women in a society like Europe where, according to the very latest statistics, three out of five of us bring in half or more of our family's income[7], I do find the SUB and DUB can be added to the long list of complex interdependent factors which ultimately shore up methods of social dominance and control.

Before I go on to the specific examples from *¡ATAME!* which I feel illustrate this, allow me to outline some of the interactional features of language and gender which inform my approach. Theorists such as Dale Spender (1975), Cheris Kramarae (1981), Jane Mills (1991), and Jennifer Coates (1993) clearly identify the "negative semantic space" which characterises anything associated with women, while the contrary operates for men. Apparently neutral terms acquire negative semantic connotations once they become identified with women. An example is the 19th century male name, Shirley. Since given to girls, it has developed such negative connotations that it can now be used by adolescent boys as an insult with homosexual overtones (at least in Ireland). Otherwise camouflaged as aesthetic rather than social bias, beliefs about the pitch of female voices[8] and the identification of women's speech as gossip or gabble[9] clearly highlight the role of language in transmitting and perpetuating social inequality. This occurs in spite of overwhelming evidence which finds little or no difference between the language of men and women.

In the wider context of women's representation in the media, Tuchmann coins the term **symbolic annihilation** to explain our mysterious absence and says: "it is thought that the media perpetuate sex role stereotypes because they reflect dominant social values and also because male media producers are influenced by these stereotypes". (1991, 35-39)

¡ATAME! significa "te quiero". With this quote, Almodóvar encapsulates a quirky love story which begins in physical captivity and ends in emotional bondage. Riki (Antonio Banderas), a 23 year old orphan, is released from a psychiatric institution and goes in search of Marina (Victoria Abril), an erstwhile porn actress and ex-junkie whom he had screwed and fallen in love with the year before. Rather tellingly, she remembers nothing of this since casual sexual encounters were the norm and only remembers when he has a chance to perform in bed. He mugs her and ties her to the bed, refusing to release her until she falls for him, marries him and agrees to have his babies! Marina is a forceful character who does admittedly fall for Riki in the end but only when the latter has shown an abject desire to cater for her every need. This is evident in the lengths he goes to (being beaten to within an inch of his life by drug pushers) to get her the fix she needs to cure, of all things, her toothache! (rather female of him, don't you think?) As Judi McGinn puts it: "In effect he ties her up, while she ties him down and so the tables are ironically turned". (1994, 24).

The critical response to Almodóvar's work in Anglophone countries is significant to this study. Paul Julian Smith said *¡ATAME!*'s reception in English-speaking countries was much more hostile than that of his earlier films (1992,

204) and again"...some critics have seen ¡*ATAME*! as promoting (rather than documenting or analysing) a shallow and flashy consumerism in which people are mercilessly reified and commodities lovingly fetished", critical, as are the majority of English-speaking monolingual, critics. The examples you have below go some small way, I believe, towards explaining this response. It is interesting to note the positive reaction of Hispanists like Paul Julian Smith and Peter Evans, both fluent in the language and, more significantly, aware of the sub-cultural themes so effectively used by the director. I would guess that they viewed the work with very little reference to the subtitles and so these translations, which amount almost to caricature, did not inform their analyses.

In the film, the self-possessed Marina, her feisty sister Lola (Loles León), her loveable mother (the director's own mother, Francisca Caballero) and unflappable niece, form the central norm of social and familiar reproduction - quite independent of men. When Riki joins this gyno-family it is on their terms (clearly expressed by Lola in the last scene) and is a result, I believe of his feminine, nurturing attributes.

Delabastita invites us to analyse the shifts introduced (specifically in the DUB process) as evidence of the respective Symbolmilieus (Hesse-Quack, 1964, quoted in Delabatista, 1989) of the Source and Target Cultures (hence SC and TC). While emphasising analysis of the respective prestige enjoyed by both, he concludes that "*the actual reality of film translation is conditioned to a large extent by the functional needs of the receiving culture* (my emphasis), *and not, or not just, by the demands made by the source films* (1989, 99).

Characterisation in ¡ATAME!

Let us compare three main areas of characterisation in ¡ATAME!

[A] The relationship between the protagonists. RIKI

EX1

0	SUB	DUB
Si, pero es solo para tranquilizarla ¿eh?	That'll calm her and she won't bother us.	So you make sure she doesn't, o.k.?

EX2

0	SUB	DUB
Ya puedo incorporarme a la sociedad.	I'm allowed to join society.	I'm being let loose on society.

EX3

O	SUB	DUB
¿Cuánto tiempo vas a tardar en enamorarte de mí?	How long before you'll fall in love with me?	I'd like to be told how long I'll have to be here waiting?

Riki, the nurturing psychotic, becomes far more threatening and aggressive. MARINA on the other hand, becomes far more timid and submissive.

EX4

0	SUB	DUB
Algo tendrás. Si vas a llevarme contigo será mejor que me vaya familiarizando.	Well you have to have something. If you're taking me away, I might as well get used to you.	Still there are eyes. If I am to be yours, I must know what's behind that hood.

EX5

O	SUB	DUB
Claro, por eso me sonaba tu cara.	That's why you look so familiar.	Please go away!

EX6

0	SUB	DUB
Por eso follas tan bien.	That's why you screw so well.	Well, that's life I suppose.

[B] Female Professionals. The Nurse

This middle-aged woman's representation in the original has shock value. She is first seen in adulterous fornication in the drug dispensary and can't be bothered attending to her patient's needs, sending the couple instead to the local drug-pusher. As you can see in both translations she becomes a more conventionally moralistic health professional.

EX7

O	SUB	DUB
Podéis encontrar todas las pastillas que queréis.	You'll find all the pills you want.	The pushers there will sell you any poison in existence.

EX8

O	SUB	DUB
La madre que los parió.	Goddam motherfuckers.	Damn it! I will go I suppose.

EX9

O	Film SUB	Video SUB	DUB
¿Queréis porro?	Would you like a cigarette.	Would you like a joint?	Like a smoke?

EX10

O	SUB	DUB
¡Hija mía! ¡Eres una toxicómona inata!	You're a born dope fiend!	You're a born addict. I despair for you Marina.

EX11

O	SUB	DUB
Pues estáis buenos los dos.	You're quite a pair.	She's too passsionate for her own good.

This complex character is shown in the same scene as the perfect caring mother, doting over her twin baby girls, while at the same time casually offering the pair a joint. In EX10 Berta's exclamation is softened by the affectionately maternal "¡Hija mía!" Not so in both translations. In EX11, perhaps the unkindest cut of all, Berta's dubbed comment clearly invites Riki, whom she has just met, to collude in her criticism of Marina.

[C] El Viejo Verde Sobre Ruedas. Máximo Espejo

In analysing this male character I want to establish that it is not some biologically determinant female who is being "done wrong", but rather Woman as a subordinate category in the dominant ideology. The same considerations would, I believe, apply to race, sexual orientation, class and disability as we can see here.

EX12

O	SUB	DUB
Es muy buena chica.	She's a sweetheart.	That's what I call sex!

EX13

0	SUB	DUB
Lola, disculpa mi agresividad típicamente alcohólica...	Lola, forgive my typical alcoholic aggressiveness...	Lola, please forgive my typical male chauvinist aggressiveness...

This "consummate mirror" suffers the fate of the Hubble telescope in translation, mostly in the dubbed version. From pathetic creature obsessed with sex to counter his obvious impotence and disability, to hard, macho, and more aggressive, the treatment of Máximo's character illustrates for me a translator clearly uncomfortable with the character's "anatomical incompleteness" to adapt Lacan's term [10]. There is a hostility evident in the rendering of the "viejo verde" which establishes a distance from a character who undermines the cultural ideal of virile masculinity.

Conclusions

We see elements in both translations which force the original script to conform to a set of dominant target culture myths of femininity and masculinity, although this is clearly more pronounced in the DUB versions. This despite the fact that these myths are common to both source and target cultures and it appears obvious that Almodóvar set out to undermine them. The net effect is that excluded groups are systematically re-encoded to invite censure if they step beyond of what is conventionally deemed normal, and acceptance if they behave in a way that upholds cultural norms. Because of the spatial limits of this paper I haven't been able to supply more examples from SUB to illustrate this but they are far more subtle than the DUB version.

Bordwell (1985) in his analysis of viewing pleasure believes we test out schemata or hypotheses about the direction a story is going to take. I believe it is obvious from any analysis of film translation that many of us derive pleasure from seeing social interaction unfold as we expect, and from seeing characters who challenge the norms punished. When Myra MacDonald (1995) shares her guilt feelings as a closet fan of Cagney and Lacey and a feminist, she invites us to look beyond simplistic analyses of what is happening when women view movies and I would add when they translate them. We should also consider Laura Mulvey's work (1989) which shows that the majority of spectators adopt an essentially masculine subject position. In light of this research we must reject simplistic conspiracy theories where the male-dominated media are actively promoting the myth of femininity which dominate our lives, and look instead at the complex and uncomfortable interaction of all spectators who collude to greater or lesser extents in male domination and the process of film translation of media - mediated genderlect which perpetrates this social reality.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Professor Lakoff's use of this term seems to imply an acceptance of a different sociolect used by men and women.

[2] Interview with Paul Julian Smith in *Sight and Sound.*

[3] Quoted in an interview with Charo Izquierdo "Ahora está de moda el placer" in *Dunia* 29th November 1983.

[4] Compare Callie Khouri's laconic scripting of *Thelma and Louise.*

[5] If we look at theories of Popular culture, Translation Theory, and Sociolinguistics we quickly realise that reference to each other's work is the exception.

[6] See examples like the controversy surrounding Hitchcock's *Vertigo* for evidence of this.

[7] Results of the latest European Union survey carried out by the Whirlpool Foundation, May 1995.

[8] There is intriguing evidence to suggest that pitch is not necessarily gender related. The voices of deaf male children do not break, for example. There is an interesting character in Alomodóvar's *Pepi, Luci, Bom, ...* who is represented in all her possessive jealousy with a grating, high pitched voice and a full beard which she is constantly shaving!

[9] See Scottish poet Liz Lockhead's rap poem.

[10] Lacan is, of course, referring to the anatomical incompleteness of the Mother who lacks a penis.

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