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# DO CULTUREMES TIME TRAVEL IN CULT TV SERIES?

The case of *Dark*

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*Reception studies*
*German series*
*Culturemes*
*Complex narratives*
*Prefabricated orality*

**ABSTRACT**

*Time travel is a plot device widely used in cinema. If the "suspension of disbelief" is no longer appealing, writers create complex narratives to confuse the viewer. To help them unravel the chronological sequence of events, we use images and dialogue as cultural references (culturemes).*

*If these mind games are applied in film products from distant cultures such as the German, it is worth asking whether the messages conveyed through these culturemes are perceived as such.*

*To this end, the series Dark (2017) has been analysed and reception questionnaires have been proposed, which have shed light on this issue.*

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# 1. Introduction

Time travel is a plot device widely used in literature and film. In literature, we have *The Time Machine* (H.G. Wells, 1895) and the *Trojan Horse* saga (J.J. Benítez, 1984-2022).

In cinema, iconic films such as *The Terminator* (James Cameron, 1984), *Back to the Future* (Robert Zemeckis, 1985) and *Twelve Monkeys* (Terry Gilliam, 1995)—to name only a few—have made use of this fiction that many of us would wish to experience: travelling back in time changing things we may have done wrong. Yet, all of them warn of the dangers that such actions would entail.

In these fictional works dealing with time travel or depicting different eras, the temporal order of events is often altered so that, at times, viewers must rely on the information provided by their own life experience and cultural references to follow the narrative thread and determine the specific moment in which a scene is set.

Since our primary research subjects are Spanish-speaking audiences, we must bear in mind that the examples above belong to the Anglo-Saxon sphere, whose cultural references are already part of the cultural background of most Spanish-speaking viewers.

When these narrative "mind games" occur in films from cultures less familiar to our target audience—such as German productions—, it is worth asking whether messages conveyed through images and dialogue that are representative of different time periods are actually perceived as such and correctly assigned to the intended era.

To address the translation of audiovisual products in which temporal arrangement plays a fundamental role, we first need to define the different types of complex narratives from the perspective of temporal plot development, in order to establish which ones are present in our corpus.

In parallel, drawing on audiovisual translation studies, we will analyse how this discipline proposes to tackle the challenges posed by these products through sociolinguistics, given that our selected corpus reflects phenomena typical of multilingual societies, such as linguistic convergence (in this case, with English.

With this purpose, we have sought a film product in which complex narratives converge with the restrictions of audiovisual translation associated with culture-specific references. We have chosen to analyse the Season 1 of *Dark* (Baran bo Odar and Jantje Friese, 2017), a cult series among young audiences, and to select those segments most relevant to both disciplines.

## *1.1. Theoretical framework*

The concept of narration has evolved from an exclusively linguistic approach (Genette, 1989) towards an intersection between narrative and various media. Ryan (2004) reflects on what it means to "narrate" and on the kinds of stories can be expressed across different media environments, offering a comparative study of narrative in five spheres: spontaneous oral communication (what she calls "face-to-face" narrative), still images, moving images, music and digital media. This approach reveals how the medium shapes the concrete realisation of narrative.

Fictional narrative has become so widespread that, while some have perceived a decline in its artistic value, its role as a communicative vehicle has multiplied (Perdomo, 2016). Cinematic discourse, understood as a communicative act, can be interpreted by viewers in four ways: referential meaning (the viewer constructs a world related to the film or audiovisual product), implicit meaning (the story offered by the film product, the chronological union of the events presented), explicit meaning (the viewer's reflection based on the plot) and symptomatic or repressed meaning (interpretations derived from broader reflections on the film product) (Bordwell and Thompson, 1995).

The understanding of events in a strictly temporal sequence—according to the traditional definition of narrative as the chronological arrangement of causally linked events (Cameron, 2008, p. 3)—is no longer the default mode of expression in contemporary audiovisual products, which seek new forms of expression in the digital age.

Works increasingly operate outside the linear order of past, present and future. Authors such as Elsaesser consider that

> "*the traditional "suspension of disbelief" or the classical spectator positions of "voyeur", "witness", "observer" and their related cinematic regimes or techniques (point-of-view shot, "suture", restricted/omniscient narration, "fly on the wall" transparency, mise-en-scène of the long take/depth of field) are no longer deemed appropriate, compelling, or challenging enough*» (Elsaesser, 2009, p. 16).

Thus, new narratives come to life, designed to unsettle and disorient the viewer, and which the author calls "mind-game films".

There are multiple labels for narratives that depart from traditional linearity. Cameron (2008, pp. 16-17) examines the erosion of the conventional separation between past, present and future through modular narratives, which foreground temporal configuration and create "a play among duration, frequency and order". He proposes a systematic taxonomy of the formal variations of modular cinematic narrative (2008, pp. 6-16), that is particularly relevant to this study (Cameron, 2008, pp. 6-16):

*Anachronic narratives*. The most common within modular forms, these depart from the hierarchy described by Genette (1980, p. 48), where the main temporality is interrupted by analepses or prolepses (flashbacks and flash-forwards, respectively) as subordinate sequences. In anachronic modular narratives, no single temporal thread predominates; rather, segments from different temporal lines interrupt chronological order and blur hierarchies.

*Forking-path narratives*. The term, proposed by Bordwell (2002) and adopted by Cameron (2008), comes from Borges" short story, *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* (written in 1941; published in *Ficciones* in 1944; first English edition in 1958). Borges's story discusses fictions in which all possible temporal alternatives of a plot are fulfilled and each outcome branches out into several different possible paths. Similarly, these narratives juxtapose various mutually exclusive outcomes as if multiple temporal alternatives were fulfilled simultaneously.

These narratives of forking paths are central to our discussion because they model "ways of thinking about time in terms of simultaneity and causal linkage" (Cameron, 2008, p. 12) and align closely with Kinder's "database narratives", which are defined as narratives "whose structure […] thematizes […] the selection of particular data (characters, images, sounds, events) from a series of databases or paradigms, which are then combined to generate specific tales" (Kinder, 2002, p. 6).

The next type of narrative analysed by Cameron is *episodic narratives*, which he defines, based on Aristotle, as those "in which the episodes follow one another in no probable or inevitable sequence" (seen in Cameron, 2008). These appear in our analysis but are not the most salient to our aims.

The modular nature of these three types of narratives is articulated along more or less orderly timelines, while the last type of narratives addressed by Cameron, *split-screen narratives*, have a modular nature that is articulated in spatial lines: the screen is divided into two or more frames showing concurrent or prior events simultaneously. Although this type does not appear in our corpus, we mention it for completeness.

Whether termed modular or database narratives—or, more broadly, complex narratives (Simons, 2008, p. 111)— this phenomenon recurs in contemporary audiovisual products and merits attention in audiovisual translation studies in order to identify their treatment and relevance in the target culture.

Film and series combine multiple codes of meaning that distinguish them from literary texts and pose challenges for professional translators. Particularly relevant is the interaction between meanings transmitted by the visual channel (with iconographic and photographic codes of special interest here) and those transmitted by the acoustic channel, both including verbal elements (dialogue) and non-verbal elements (background music, songs typical of a particular period, paralinguistic elements, etc.) (Chaume, 2004, p. 163).

We will also adopt the Vigo School's definition of the audiovisual text as

> "a sequence of iconotextual entities where both the iconic unit and the verbal unit are apprehended successively and globally in an intersemiotic relationship that produces a back-and-forth movement from one code to another, from which meaning is born"[1] (Yuste Frías, 2011, p. 62).

An audiovisual text must present synchrony between verbal and non-verbal elements—what Mayoral terms "character synchrony" (Mayoral et al., 1988)— whether acoustic (e.g., words and sounds) or visual (e.g., subtitles, images).

Accordingly, we understand the audiovisual text as a "semiotic construct" containing heterogeneous signs, each of which can influence the translation in one way or another and must be considered when transferring dialogue or images into the target product. In our case, we will examine the difficulty of translating into the target culture a range of culture-specific elements from German, whether linguistically marked or iconographic, that are relevant for location the viewer in a particular historical moment.

These culturally marked linguistic or iconographic units, which have been variously labelled in translation studies: *realia*, culturemes, cultural referents, cultural references, etc., will be termed as "culturemes". While the concept is usually attributed to Vermeer (1983), we follow Pamies"s definition: "extra-linguistic cultural symbols, which behave like metaphorical models, motivating figurative expressions in language (lexical or phraseological)" (Pamies, 2017, p. 100). This is currently the most widely used term internationally and is less restrictive than its alternatives.

Within this category we include:

> "[…] any specific cultural symbolic item, whether simple or complex, corresponding to an object, idea, activity or event sufficiently well known among members of a society, bearing symbolic value, and serving as a guide, reference or model for interpretation or action for the members of that society"[2] (Luque, 2009, p. 97).

From both dialogues and images, viewers may infer historical periods: vocabulary, grammar and other linguistic features are essential for evoking eras and in audiovisual translation—especially in dubbing—evocation is the key word (González-Camino, A., 2021).

We will also adopt a sociolinguistic perspective to define some of the characters via language varieties, and we will analyse the translator's linguistic and extralinguistic subcompetences (Hurtado et al. 2003). By linguistic (bilingual) subcompetence we understand the ability to understand the source text and to produce the target text, encompassing pragmatic, sociolinguistic, textual, grammatical and lexical knowledge in both languages.

Pragmatic knowledge covers the appropriateness of speech acts in a given context (for our purposes, orality among other factors), and sociolinguistic knowledge includes register recognition (field, mode and tenor per Hatim and Mason (in Agost 1999, pp. 28-31), as well as social and regional varieties, standard and non-standard language, and educated vs. colloquial registers. Register will be fundamental for us.

Extralinguistic sub-competence includes declarative knowledge of source and target cultures, as well as encyclopaedic knowledge about the world. This is a crucial sub-competence for our analysis.

Our aim is not only to analyse the Spanish translation of certain culture- and idiom- specific German references, but also to determine to what extent original texts and translations are perceived by viewers as logical and representative of the depicted era at any given moment.

Viewers inevitably interpret images and dialogue through the lens of their own intellectual background and life experience.

If I may speak in the first-person singular, as a member of a particular generation, I realised that my sociolinguistic analysis of the translations might be biased: I can comfortably comment

[1] Own translation.
[2] Own translation.

on the dialogue of young characters from the 1980s, but less so for present-day youth and even less for characters from the 1950s.

Consequently, questionnaires have been used to gauge public perceptions of selected statements, both in the original dialogues and in their translations. We understand questionnaires as "the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions, serving as a versatile tool for gathering quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods data" (Check and Schutt (2012); in Ponto (2015)), commonly used in social and psychological research.

### *1.2. Objectives*

In audiovisual translation studies, few reception-based investigations have been conducted to date on how viewers perceive language adaptations in series or, more broadly, in fictional audiovisual products that recreate periods other than the present. In our view, this gap is noteworthy, as one of the main challenges in representing past eras on screen is the language used to evoke them.

Our main objective, therefore, has been to obtain data on the impressions of native speakers—both German and Spanish—regarding a selection of statements from the series, with the aim of drawing conclusions about the phenomenon of feigned or prefabricated orality (Chaume, 2001, 2004), which may provide useful insights for professional translators.

To this end, we have set ourselves the following secondary objectives:

- to determine the extent to which English-language statements found in German audiovisual products are the result of the influence of the English dialogues that German audiences are exposed to in Anglo-Saxon fiction, or whether they are statements used in their daily lives, and
- to identify the extent to which these elements of the English language have been incorporated into the Spanish translation and to assess which of them are recognisable to Spanish speakers.

### *1.3. Methodology*

For our study, we applied a descriptive analysis methodology based on Gideon Toury's model (2004).

First, we viewed and analysed the ten episodes of the series' first season (approximately 480 minutes), distributed on the Netflix video-on-demand platform.

Next, we selected textual and visual elements that signalled a particular era. To identify the culturemes, we followed Floros (2007), who adapts Mudersbach's (2002, as cited in Floros 2007) system for recognising culture in texts to translation.

We then compiled a table containing the segments selected for their relevance to our research aims (a total of 137), together with their translation into English and Spanish.

Once this index of items had been created, we designed an ad hoc questionnaire using a mixed quantitative-qualitative approach, presenting these textual elements to native German, English and Spanish speakers of different ages. However, we have decided not to report the results from native English speakers because the number of responses (15) was not sufficiently representative.

Respondents were recruited through academic, professional, family and friendship networks, who in turn circulated the questionnaire among their contacts. The survey instrument was created using Google Forms (free version) and the responses were collected anonymously.

The questionnaire aimed at native Spanish speakers consisted of 26 multiple-choice questions and received 165 responses. The first question captured the respondents' age; each of the remaining questions presented one of the statements drawn from the Spanish dubbed/subtitled dialogues.

Depending on age, the wording of the question varied slightly:

a. Respondents who were young in the 1980s were asked whether they considered the expression to be typical of the 1980s, current, both, or unfamiliar.

b. Respondents who are young today were asked whether a given expression sounded current or outdated (e.g., used by their parents), and, additionally, whether it is an expression they use regularly.

The questionnaire for native German speakers comprised 36 multiple-choice questions and collected 83 responses. Its structure mirrored that of the Spanish instrument. The difference in item count stems from an observation that became one of the study's findings: several distinct

German segments were translated in the same way into Spanish, resulting in less variation in the Spanish questionnaire.

Although we also analysed some culturemes appearing in sequences set in the 1950s, we did not include dedicated items on this period due to the lack of respondents who had lived through those years and could answer reliably based on first-hand experience.

Finally, the responses obtained were analysed and the relevant conclusions were drawn.

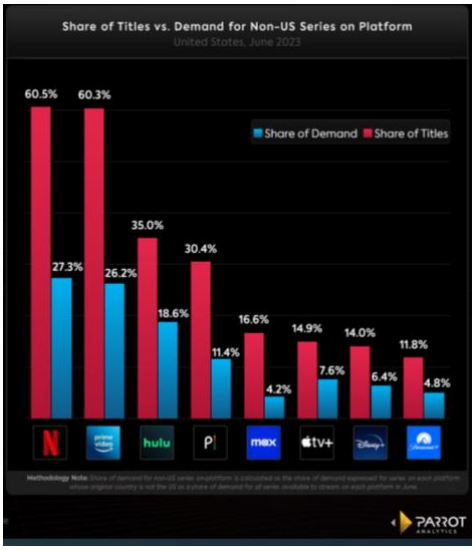
## 2. Analysis

In this section, we present information about the selected corpus and its distribution platform. We then summarise the systematic records we compiled and analyse sample text segments, together with their translations into Spanish and English.

### *2.1. About Netflix and Dark*

In recent years, consumption of series via various streaming platforms has increased exponentially, as illustrated by statistics extracted from Parrot Analytics on demand for non-US produced series in the United States during the second quarter of 2023.

**Figure 1.** Share of demand for non-US series vs. total titles




Source: https://www.parrotanalytics.com/, 2023.

The chart shows that almost half of the titles demanded in the United States were series produced outside the country, which is actually significant. Of course, the 2023 writers" strike likely influenced that year's pattern, but it nevertheless marks a turning point.

The Estudio de Televisión Conectada 2025 conducted by IAB Spain, sponsored by Publiespaña and produced in collaboration with Elogia, analyses users' consumption habits, as well as their preferences between free content with advertising and paid content on different platforms. According to its figures, Netflix was the most subscribed video-on-demand platform in Spain last year, with a 51% share, followed closely by Amazon Prime Video (IAB Spain, 2025).

According to the same report, series (84%) and films (77%) are the most consumed content on Connected TV, followed by news, sports and talk/entertainment. This consolidates series as an ideal vehicle for intercultural dissemination, especially among younger audiences.

As for the series *Dark*, Parrot Analytics data indicate that audience demand for this series in Germany was 14.6 times the average for series in that country, while in Spain audience demand for *Dark* was 4.9 times the average demand for television series (Parrot Analytics, 2018).

This series was the first Netflix original series produced in Germany (Netflix, 2016). In our opinion, it is a product worthy of analysis, given its widespread consumption in Spain, as well as its suitability for our research objective.

The plot draws on principles of time relativity of time proposed by Einstein and later developed by quantum physics and posits the circularity of space and time.

At the beginning of the first episode, an opening quote from Albert Einstein in German is shown as an insert:

"*Der Unterschied zwischen Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft ist nur eine Illusion, wenn auch eine hartnäckige*", translated into English subtitles as: "The distinction between past, present and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion".

The content of this quote is a reference alluded to throughout the series in various contexts, always related to the study of time.

The series begins in 2019 (we know this from an insert that appears at minute 00:00 of the first episode), in a fictional town called Winden, where one young man has disappeared and another is about to disappear. The search for these young men is unsuccessful for a long time, but various clues lead to the discovery that the missing youths have travelled through time, due to the confluence of energy emitted by a nuclear power plant built in 1953 and maintained until 2019 by human hands, which created devices (in 1986) to intensify this energy and open wormholes[3] inside mysterious caves.

The fact that exactly 33 years pass between one era and another and that events repeat themselves with this specific periodicity is relevant in the esoteric and scientific fields, but we will not go into that now because it is not interesting for our purpose.

What is interesting to us is that, throughout this first season, only the aforementioned insert which informs that the story takes place in 2019 guides us through these time travels. During the rest of the episodes, the plot jumps from one era to another, making brilliant use of the complex narratives we mentioned earlier, and the characters change their physical appearance (and language?) according to their age in each of the three different eras in which the plot unfolds.

However, the creators of the series do not inform us of the era we are in at any given moment (probably on purpose), so viewers must be guided by the images (clothing, interior design, buildings...), the soundtrack (especially for events taking place in 1986) and, last but not least, by the language used by the characters.

Such is the difficulty of following the plot due to the time jumps that the platform itself created a specific website in several languages, accessible exclusively on mobile devices, with a family tree for each season and each episode of the series, clarifying who is who and where they are at any given moment: (https://dark.netflix.io/es)[4].

### *2.2. About our selection of culturemes*

Due to its considerable size, the complete table is not included in this contribution, but it is available for consultation at Glosario lenguaje Dark web. Here we will show the most relevant data.

### *Iconographic elements*

The high school is a key setting, and students" clothing helps situate viewers in time. In 2019, students show blue-dyed hair and contemporary clothing (TCR 1 12:55)[5] , as well as Markus's hairstyle and VUPAX jacket and Franziska's ripped trousers (TCR 2 06:50-07:00). In 1986, the same building appears, but students arrive on skateboards and small BMX bikes, the girls have bouffant hairstyles and wear paisley scarves as headbands, while the song *Shout* by Tears for Fears, released in 1984, plays as the soundtrack.

These elements are easily recognisable to both German and Spanish viewers. However, other non-linguistic culturemes are not so easily recognisable:

1) Iconographic culturemes: In the first episode, the mother of Ulrich Nielsen, a police officer and father of Mikkel, one of the missing children, shows him the wrapper of a chocolate bar called "Raider" that she found in the forest as something unusual. No further explanation is given.

This brand of chocolate bar was one of the most popular in Germany, and its name change to "Twix" in 1991 caused confusion and divided opinion in the country (Osterloh, 2009). The reason was the negative meaning of the term "raider" in English (assaulter, mugger).

[3] For a definition of this term, we refer to Wormhole | Definition & Facts | Britannica.

[4] This web is still operational as of the date of submission of this article.

[5] Time references are shown as follows: (TCR = Timecode Recording, episode number and MM:SS).

Although this chocolate bar could be found in Spain in the 1990s, its consumption was much more widespread in German-speaking countries, so this cultural reference is much more obvious to German viewers than to Spanish ones.

This "Raider" wrapper appears again on several occasions, notably in episode 4 (TCR 33:18), where it has the same referential meaning, as well as in a television advertisement that is played at the beginning of episode 3 (TCR 00:03). This advert informs German viewers immediately that the plot takes place in 1986, while Spanish viewers see and hear the entire advert with the German theme tune and song, and only have the image of the 1980s television set to place themselves in the correct era.

Another image that may not be understood by today's young audience is that of a pendant with a 1-Pfennig coin, a German currency unit worth one hundredth of a German mark (DM), which was the currency in Germany until 2002. A mysterious character places this pendant around the neck of a teenager in a closed room with childish wallpaper on the walls, which, together with the coin, also places us in the 1980s for viewers who have lived through this era, but probably means nothing to younger viewers. This sequence occurs, without transition or any information, in episode 1 (TCR 48:16). The coin reappears in episode 7 (TCR 44:04).

Episode 8 opens with the image of a boy riding a large, very old-fashioned bicycle, with a leather satchel on his back. The boy is dressed in a wool blazer, waistcoat and shirt, with tweed trousers and lace-up shoes shown in close-up. Clearly, the script wants to transport the viewer back to 1953. In case there was any doubt, the boy arrives at an open field where a display of old-fashioned police vehicles and uniforms can be seen.

This episode takes place in 2019 and 1953 without any transition. In 1953, the appearance of a corpse with characteristics unusual for the time is being investigated: a jumper with a label that says "Made in China" (TCR 8 10:49) and a pendant with a 1-Pfennig coin minted in 1986 (TCR 8 10:35). On this occasion, at least, we have the help of the coroner and the police to place these objects in different eras, but this does not happen often, as we have been explaining.

2) Soundtracks: We have already seen how music can help place us in a specific era when we discussed the song *Shout*.

The first "forking path" in this series occurs in the first episode (TCR 23:11), where we cut from 2019 to an old TV set playing a video clip of the song *You Spin Me Round (Like a Record)* by the band Dead Or Alive, released in 1984. This television is located in the room with wallpaper that we described earlier.

After this fleeting glimpse of the 1980s in the middle of the episode, we return to 2019 without further explanation. At the end of this same episode, in 2019, the body of a child appears with a portable Walkman® player that is no longer distributed, indicating that this child has some sort of connection with the 1980s, in addition to the music contained on the cassette: the song *Irgendwie, irgendwo, irgendwann* by the German group Nena (1984). Without any transition, the same television is then shown in the same room with the same wallpaper, where the video clip for this song is playing.

Curiously, in the Spanish-dubbed version, the subtitles have not been embedded, so the song can only be understood if the subtitles are specifically enabled. However, in the English-dubbed version, subtitles have been embedded. In our opinion, the latter is the more appropriate decision, as the content of the song is related to the plot of the present, past and future.

### *Linguistic elements*

As the title of the present contribution suggests, we have asked whether dialogues, as culturemes, travel through time. Whether linguistic elements contribute to placing the viewer in a specific era.

Now, we will discuss and analyse the fragments we have selected from among all those included in the glossary linked to at the beginning of this section 2.2. and those proposed in the questionnaire:

1) Taboo and offensive language

Following our previous research, we have concluded that taboo and offensive language is particularly useful to get psychological and social insights of the characters in film products.

In our corpus we have observed the same scheme, as can be inferred from following examples:

- *Spasti*: This term is classified in the Duden dictionary as "derb" (common, vulgar) and discriminatory. It is an abbreviation of the medical term "Spastiker", a person who suffers from spasms due to cerebral muscle hypertonia.

  A total of five occurrences of this term has been recorded, all uttered by teenagers in 2019, and translated into Spanish as "*gilipollas", "idiota"*, and "*imbécil"*.

  Although the two last Spanish terms are derived from medical terms denoting certain degrees of mental illness ("*idiocia*" and "*imbecilidad*", respectively), the degree of insult is greater in the German term, perhaps equivalent to "subnormal"* in Spanish, a derogatory term that, fortunately, has fallen into almost complete disuse today, but which was very common in the 1980s and 1990s.

  The *Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* (hereinafter DWDS) provides usage statistics for different terms based on their appearance in numerous daily and weekly newspapers throughout Germany since 1945. According to this, the term "*Spasti"* originated in the late 1970s, saw a notable increase in usage in the early 1980s, and then returned in the 1990s, with a peak in usage around 2016 (DWDS).

- *Freak*: A derogatory term that appears twice (TCR 1 13:03 and TCR 5 31:21) in our corpus, both times uttered by teenagers in 2019.

  This originally English term has been translated into Spanish as "loco" or "tío raro" and in English it has remained as "freak". Once again, we see that the variety in Spanish is greater, depending on the context, but none of both terms refer to a specific period. It would have been more meaningful to translate it as "*friqui"*, given that this term was not used in Spain until around 2000 and became standardised in 2006 to designate members of a subculture, united by their love of literature, cinema, comics, science fiction and fantasy (Martínez, 2013).

  For the record, we note that, in the case of episode 1, this phrase has not been translated in the dubbing, and can be heard in German in the background, in what we consider a dubbing error.

  According to the DWDS, the term "Freak" began to be used in Germany in the 1970s, its use increased in the 1980s and has had ups and downs since then, with a sharp decline in use since 2016 (DWDS).

- *Brillenschlange*: A demining term that appears in episode 9 (TCR 17:22), uttered by a teenager in 1986.

  It is a term used exclusively to refer to women who wear thick glasses and appear clumsy. The German term for men with the same characteristics would be "*Streber*".

It has been translated into Spanish with the equivalent term "*cuatro ojos"* and into English as "four-eyes".

  The use of this term is interesting because, according to the DWDS, it was mainly used in the 1950s, fell into disuse in the 1960s and 1970s, and experienced a resurgence in the 1980s.

- *Schwer von Kapee sein*: Derogatory expression that appears in episode 2 (TCR 40:58), uttered by a teenager in 1986 and meaning a person who is slow to understand.

It translates as "*tonto"* in Spanish and "*dense* (subt.) / *stupid* (dubbing)" in English.

  The first recorded use of this expression is in the novel *Misere* by Helene Keßler (published in 1897 under the pseudonym Hans von Kahlenberg) (Redensarten-Index).

As for its usage, the DWDS does not offer any verified data on its use until the 2000s.

- *Spinner*: This is a term that has several non-pejorative meanings, such as a type of butterfly, a fishing reel or a weaver, but here it is used in a derogatory sense.

We have recorded two occurrences: (TCR 8 14:59, uttered in 1953, and TCR 2 40:47, uttered in 1986).

> It has been translated into Spanish as "*idiota*" (1986) and "*imbécil*" (1953), and into English as "*fool*" and "*weirdo*" respectively. The Spanish translation does not convey the same meaning of a crazy or insane person as the German, although it is used in various contexts.

Given its various meanings, we cannot be sure of the frequency of use of the term in a derogatory sense.

2) Idioms

We have found in our corpus a great number of German idioms, which we have included in our questionnaire.

Here we include some interesting examples with explanations:

***1953:***

- *jemandem der Zaster aus den Ohren quillen*: expression uttered by teenagers (TCR 8 15:26).

It has been translated into Spanish as "*salir el dinero por las orejas*" and into English as "got dough coming out of one's ears".

> The term "Zaster" is a very interesting one. It is a vulgar way of referring to money. Etymologically, it comes from the Romani word "saster", which means iron, but its meaning changed in military slang to "money" at the end of the 19th century (DWDS).
>
> According to the DWDS, its use is mainly recorded in the 1950s, and has been very limited since then, so that its use in the German version seems well documented.

In the Spanish translation, the term is generalised in an idiomatic expression that cannot be attributed to a specific period.

- *Jemanden auf die Folter spannen*: expression uttered by an adult (TCR 8 24:43).

It has been translated into Spanish as "*dejar con la intriga*" and into English as "the suspense is killing me".

The term literally means "to stretch on the rack" but idiomatically means to leave someone in suspense.

> According to the DWDS, its use is mainly recorded in the 1950s and 1960s, declining from then until the late 1980s and rebounding at the end of the 20th century.
>
> In this case, it seems that the documentation of the original product is correct, while the translations once again generalise. Perhaps we could have translated it into Spanish as "dejar en ascuas" (to leave in suspense), an expression whose use is mainly restricted to past years.

- *Altes muss Neuem weichen*: another expression uttered by an adult (TCR 8 27:08).

It has been translated into Spanish as "*lo antiguo deberá hacer hueco a lo nuevo"* and into English as "the old must give way to the new".

The correct German formulation of this expression is "*das Alte muss dem Neuen weichen"*.

> According to the DWDS, its use is mainly recorded in the 1950s, it practically ceased to be used after 1970, it returned in 1986, perhaps for socio-political reasons (*die Wende*), and its use has declined since then to the present day.

This idiomatic expression is also appropriate for the period in which it is used. In Spanish and English, a description has been chosen that cannot be attributed to a specific period.

***1986:***

- *Wie ein Schluck Wasser in der Kurve aussehen*: expression uttered by an adult (TCR 3 06:21).

Literally, the expression means to look like a puddle of water on a bend in the road, and it has been translated into Spanish as "*pareces un trapo sucio*" (you look like a dirty rag) and into English as "you look like a limp dishrag". The German expression describes a personal appearance of exhaustion, lack of energy and stooped posture.

The DWDS dictionary only records its use from 1992 onwards, with peaks in 1995, 1997 and 2021.

In the Spanish translation, we consider that the image proposed may seem strange to the viewer, given its similarity to the expression "*trapos sucios*" (dirty rags), as well as raising the suspicion that this segment has been translated from English, due to the similarity in structure and vocabulary.

In this case, apparently, an expression has been used that does not belong to the period in which it is applied in the series.

- *Brimborium aus etwas machen*: expression uttered by an adult (TCR 3 26:21).

It has been translated into Spanish as "*ser escandaloso*" (to be excessive) and into English as "make a big display".

The origin of the term "*Brimborium*" dates back to 15th-century France and is an assimilation of the ecclesiastical Latin "*breviarium*". In German, it is first documented in Goethe's *Faust*. It means complication, effort.

The complete expression is not recorded in the DWDS, but the term "*Brimborium"* is. This website has recorded occurrences since 1946, with a notable increase in the 1990s and 2000s.

According to the Duden, this expression belongs to colloquial language, although we consider that it has been carefully selected to reflect a past time, given that it could have been expressed with more generic German terms such as "*Aufwand"* or "*Aufheben"*.

In the Spanish translation, a generalisation is proposed, while in English an equivalent idiomatic expression is proposed. Neither can be attributed specifically to the 1980s.

- Cool *sein*: expression uttered by a child (TCR 5 26:57) in a dialogue between Mikkel (a little boy in 2019 that has travelled to 1986) and a little girl from 1986:

Little girl: Du bist *cool* (trad. *Eres guay* / You are cool)
Mikkel: Nee, ich bin Mikkel (trad. *No, yo soy Mikkel* / No, I am Mikkel)

In this dialogue, the scriptwriters want to make it clear that the expression "cool *sein"* is typical of the 1980s and is not understood by a child living in the present day.

However, the DWDS tells us that this expression has been recorded very rarely since the 1970s and that its use has been increasing until reaching its peak today (recorded in 2024).

***2019:***

- *Baguette-Verstecken spielen*: expression uttered by a teenager (TCR 1 13:18).

In its literal sense, the expression means to play hide and seek with a baguette and is translated into Spanish as "*mojar la baguette*" and into English as "playing "hide the baguette"".

It is actually an intertextual reference to *The Simpsons* (episode 5 of season 21), where Homer meets Sarkozy and Carla Bruni, and therefore the time period in which it is set is correct.

It is a intertextual reference difficult to recognise, even for German viewers, but the sexual meaning is obvious. We find the proposed solution in Spanish to be appropriate, as it uses the verb "mojar" (to dip), which already has sexual connotations in vulgar language.

- *Hier sagen sich der Fuchs und der Hase gute Nacht*: expression uttered by an adult (TCR 1 18:22).

This expression means litearally "hier fox and hare greet each other good night" and is translated into Spanish as "*aquí nunca pasa nada*"(nothing ever happens here) and into English "nothing like that ever happens here".

This expression applies to particularly remote and quiet places where nothing ever happens.

According to the DWDS, it is an expression that has been used with roughly the same frequency since 1948, with peaks in 1978 and 1991.

In both Spanish and English, the expression is generalised and cannot be attributed to any particular period.

- As a third example of expressions that place the viewer in a specific era, we can include the widespread use of pure English expressions (without any adaptation to German) that we have been able to record in the original dialogues of the young characters set in 2019.

We can see the complete list in the glossary linked to at the beginning of this section 2.2, with the corresponding TCRs, but the following terms serve as examples:

**Table 1.** English expressions included without lexicalizing in the original version

| | **Translation into Spanish** | **Translation into English** | **TCR** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **joint** | porro | joint | 1 15:48 |
| **dope** | hierba | dope | 1 21:13/24:08 |
| **bullshit** | gilipollez | bullshit | 1 21:28 |
| **easy** | fácil | easy peasy | 1 23:57 |
| **shit** | (omitted) | stuff | 1 23:56 |
| **ultimate fist-bump** | chócala, tío | ultimate fist-bump | 1 31:39 |
| **what the fuck?** | ¿qué coño era eso? | what the fuck? | 1 40:19 |
| **boyfriend** | novio | boyfriend | 4 09:17 |
| **fuck** | mierda | fuck | 5 29:54 / 10 16:29 |

Source: own elaboration.

## 3. Results

Questionnaire data among German audiences show that younger respondents often align with adults but not always with how segments are used in the series. For example, most adults (70%) and young people (45%) consider "*Spasti*" to be typical of the 1980s, although in the series it is only used in sequences set in 2019.

Same occurs, for instance, with the expression "*hier sagen sich der Fuchs und der Hase gute Nacht*": the majority of adults (68%) and younger people (57%) consider it to be distinctive of the 1980s, but in the series it is only used in a sequence set in 2019, well understood that it is uttered by an adult.

We have also found expressions used in the series in the 1950s that young people today are completely unfamiliar with, as are many adults, such as "*jemandem der Zaster aus den Ohren quillen*".

English expressions reproduced verbatim are widely recognised by German speakers across ages as belonging to current language and reflect a trend perceived in German series.

Most German poll persons consider expressions such as "bullshit" (55% of adults, 43% of young people) or "what the fuck" (77% of adults, 47% of young people) to be in common use today, and this is how the series' scriptwriters have understood it.

Young people also say they regularly use English expressions such as "joint" (42%), bullshit`" (38%), and "what the fuck" (35%).

However, there are some expressions that are not known to young speakers (41%) nor adults (58%), such as "Ultimate-Fist Bump". As we have seen in the table above, the translations of these terms into Spanish respond well to current language and move away from English structures and terms.

Terms have been found that are unmistakably part of the youth language of our time, such as "*zocken"* (TCR 5 13:00), meaning to play computer games, with no equivalent in Spanish or English.

With regard to the Spanish recipients, it is striking how many responses, from both adults and younger people, are judged valid for both eras, likely due to the generalisation in translation of culturally marked segments in German, which weakens period marking in Spanish.

In most cases, young people and adults agree, except in specific cases: "*molar*" (being cool) (both groups recognise this expression as belonging exclusively to their generation) or "camello" (drug dealer) (many adults consider it to be from the 1980s and most young people consider it to be current).

Likewise, the same phenomenon that we have seen in the original version sometimes occurs with certain expressions that are more idiomatic. For example, the term "*loquero"*, meaning a psychiatric institution, as a translation of the German term "*Klapse*", is a term that most adults (71%) and young people (72%) consider to be typical of the 1980s, although in the series it is only used in sequences set in 2019. The same is true of "*Kulleraugen*", translated as "*ojitos de carnero degollado*" (sweet eyes), which most adults and young people (70% and 58% respectively) consider to be an expression from the 1980s, but which is used in 2019.

In general, it is striking how many respondents, both adults and younger people, consider an expression to be valid for both eras. We believe the reason for this is the generalisation in the translation into Spanish of segments that are culturally marked in German.

This is probably also the reason behind the fact that the vast majority of expressions used in Spanish are known to both adults and young people, except for a few specific cases, such as "*parecer un trapo sucio*" for "*Wie ein Schluck Wasser in der Kurve aussehen*", uttered in the series in 1953. 19% of adults and young people do not know it and 69% attribute it to the 1980s, perhaps due to their lack of knowledge. We believe that it is a non-idiomatic expression and, therefore, not recognised as such by the respondents.

In contrast, in the case of German, since they are using more idiomatic segments, these are therefore more likely to be attributed to certain generations. Hence, there are more cases in which a considerable proportion of respondents are unfamiliar with the term, such as "*Brimborium um etwas machen*", "*schwer von Kapee sein*", or "*verschlossen und versiegelt*" (the latter translated as "I won"t say a word" and which could also be translated more idiomatically into Spanish as "*Soy una tumba*" (I"m a tomb) or something similar).

A paradigmatic case, both in German and Spanish, is "*Baguette-Verstecken spielen*", which is not understood by neither the German nor the Spanish public, as it is a very specific intercultural reference from the American audiovisual sphere.

## 4. Conclusions

Following the analysis and after reviewing the results, we can conclude that the initial objectives have been achieved:

We consider the sample obtained from native German and Spanish speakers to be sufficiently representative to draw conclusions about the phenomenon of feigned or prefabricated orality.

We have seen that the documentation carried out to develop the dialogues for each of the periods reflected in the original version of the series has been accurate in most cases and coincides with the viewers" impressions.

Culturally marked elements in the original are not systematically transferred into Spanish via equally marked choices; translations often generalise, yielding expressions perceived as valid for both the 1980s and 2019 and thus offering limited temporal guidance.

However, the culturally marked segments in Spanish, which correspond to more idiomatic expressions, have been recognised as such by the respondents. Hence, a more deliberate use of period-specific Spanish expressions could improve temporal orientation for the target audience

We believe that it would be a good suggestion for professional translators—within their linguistic and extralinguistic sub-skills—as well as for dubbing directors and decision makers in audiovisual translation to modify the tendency towards generalisation in translation, especially in film products based on complex narratives, as the dialogues convey messages and connotations that go beyond their literal meaning.

We have also seen that English-language statements are perceived by German audiences as belonging to the oral tradition of our times, and that young people regularly use certain terms that appear in the series, so that it seems to indicate alignment between simulated and actual orality.

We have also found that this penetration of English has not occurred to the same extent in dialogues translated into Spanish.

Precisely because of their descriptive nature, the results of this study can be extended to other lines of work (teaching and research) related to audiovisual translation and can serve as a basis for future studies.

Given the descriptive nature of this study, findings can inform teaching and research in audiovisual translation and support professional practice, especially in complex narratives where linguistic and cultural nuances are key. Future reception studies with viewers who have watched the series would offer additional depth.

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