

# ENGLISH DUBS: WHY ARE ANGLOPHONE VIEWERS RECEPTIVE TO ENGLISH DUBBING ON STREAMING PLATFORMS AND TO FOREIGN-ACCENT STRATEGIES?

DOBLAJE AL INGLÉS: ¿POR QUÉ SON RECEPTIVOS LOS ESPECTADORES ANGLÓFONOS AL DOBLAJE AL INGLÉS EN PLATAFORMAS DE STREAMING Y AL USO DE ACENTOS EXTRANJEROS?

DOUBLAGE ANGLAIS : POURQUOI LES SPECTATEURS ANGLOPHONES SONT-ILS RÉCEPTIFS AU DOUBLAGE ANGLAIS SUR LES PLATEFORMES STREAMING ET A L'UTILISATION DES ACCENTS ÉTRANGERS ?

DUBLAGEM AO INGLÊS: POR QUE OS ESPECTADORES ANGLÓFONOS SÃO RECEPTIVOS À MODALIDADE DA DUBLAGEM AO INGLÊS NAS PLATAFORMAS STREAMING E AO USO DE SOTAQUES?

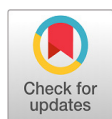
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## ABSTRACT

Accents are often utilised in fictional audiovisual products to determine the creation of character identity. This is due to the set of cultural connotations typically associated with any given accent in any given language community. However, is there really one monolingual target audience anymore? In the age of streaming platforms, and at the rate the localisation industry is creating subtitles and re-voiced versions, the target audience for many products has become multilingual. The English 'dubbing revolution', pioneered by streaming giant Netflix, perfectly depicts the broadening of target audiences in global distribution. The subject of this article is the popularly termed 'foreignisation' strategy, as it features in English dubs. The strategy is explored in relation to the novelty of (English) dubbing for most viewers as well as the ubiquity of foreign varieties of English in everyday life in the Anglosphere and, consequently, in English-language original fiction. Theoretical insights are also offered on the unique acceptance of English dubbing, in general, and of foreign accents as a dubbing strategy, in particular. The case of the Castilian-Spanish dubbing industry is also explored for contrastive purposes, elucidating the characteristics of (im)mature dubbing audiences: their habits, preferences, and (in)flexibility. The conclusions present a set of hypotheses drawn from the article's discussion that provide plausible answers to the questions posed in the article's title.

**Keywords:** English dubbing, foreign accents, Netflix, foreignisation. revoiced versions, AVT, English subtitles



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## RESUMEN

Los acentos suelen utilizarse en los productos audiovisuales de ficción para establecer la identidad de los personajes. Esto se debe al conjunto de connotaciones culturales que se asocian por lo general a cada acento dentro de una comunidad lingüística particular. Sin embargo, ¿puede afirmarse que sigue existiendo una audiencia objetivo monolingüe? En la era de las plataformas de *streaming* y a la velocidad a la que la industria de la localización está produciendo versiones subtitradas y con *revoicing*, la audiencia objetivo de muchos productos se ha hecho multilingüe. La revolución del doblaje al inglés, iniciada por el gigante del *streaming* Netflix, muestra a la perfección la ampliación de las audiencias en la distribución mundial. Este artículo trata sobre la estrategia conocida como “extranjerización”, tal como se utiliza en el doblaje al inglés. La exploración de esta estrategia obedece a la novedad del doblaje al inglés para la mayoría de los espectadores, así como a la ubicuidad de las variedades extranjeras del inglés en la cotidianidad de la anglosfera y, por lo tanto, en los textos de ficción creados en lengua inglesa. Se ofrecen perspectivas teóricas sobre la singular aceptación del doblaje al inglés, en general, y de los acentos extranjeros como estrategia de doblaje, en particular. También se explora, con el fin de establecer un contraste, el caso de la industria de doblaje al castellano o español, lo que elucida las características de las audiencias de doblaje (in)maduras: sus hábitos, preferencias e (in)flexibilidad. En las conclusiones se presenta un conjunto de conclusiones extraídas de la discusión del artículo, las cuales ofrecen una posible respuesta a las preguntas planteadas en el título del artículo.

**Keywords:** doblaje al inglés, acentos extranjeros, Netflix, extranjerización, versiones dobladas, TAV, subtítulos en inglés

## RÉSUMÉ

Les accents sont souvent utilisés dans les produits audiovisuels de fiction pour déterminer la création de l'identité des personnages. Cela est dû à l'ensemble des connotations culturelles typiquement associées à chaque accent dans une communauté linguistique particulière. Cependant, existe-t-il encore un seul public cible monolingue ? À l'époque des plateformes de streaming et au rythme où l'industrie de la localisation crée des sous-titres et des versions avec de *revoicing*, le public cible de nombreux produits est devenu multilingue. La « révolution du doublage » vers l'anglais, initiée par le géant du streaming Netflix, illustre parfaitement l'élargissement du public cible dans la distribution mondiale. Le sujet de cet article est la stratégie de « étrangéisation », comme on l'appelle souvent, telle qu'elle apparaît dans les doublages vers l'anglais. Cette stratégie est étudiée en relation avec la nouveauté du doublage vers l'anglais pour la plupart des spectateurs, ainsi qu'en relation avec l'omniprésence des variétés étrangères d'anglais dans la vie quotidienne de l'anglosphère et, par conséquent, dans les fictions originales en langue anglaise. On présente aussi des aperçus théoriques sur l'acceptation unique du doublage vers l'anglais, en général, et sur les accents étrangers en tant que stratégie de doublage, en particulier. Le cas de l'industrie du doublage vers le castillan ou espagnol est également exploré à des fins contrastives, élucidant les caractéristiques des publics de doublage (im)matures : leurs habitudes, leurs préférences et leur (in)flexibilité. Les conclusions présentent une série d'hypothèses tirées de la

discussion de l'article qui apportent des réponses plausibles aux questions posées dans le titre de l'article.

**Mots-cléf:** doublage vers l'anglais, accents étrangères, Netflix, étrangéisation, versions reenregistrés, TAV, sous-titres anglais

### RESUMO

Os sotaques são frequentemente usados em produtos audiovisuais ficcionais para estabelecer a identidade dos personagens. Isso se deve ao conjunto de conotações culturais que tem-se associado geralmente a cada sotaque em uma determinada comunidade linguística. No entanto, pode-se argumentar que ainda existe um público-alvo monolíngue? Na era das plataformas de streaming e da velocidade com que o setor de localização está produzindo versões legendadas e dubladas, o público-alvo de muitos produtos se tornou multilíngue. A revolução da dublagem em inglês, iniciada pela gigante do streaming Netflix, ilustra perfeitamente a ampliação do público na distribuição global. Este artigo trata da estratégia conhecida como "estrangeirização", usada na dublagem em inglês. A exploração dessa estratégia é motivada pela novidade da dublagem em inglês para a maioria dos espectadores, bem como pela onipresença de variedades estrangeiras de inglês no cotidiano da anglosfera e, portanto, em textos ficcionais criados no idioma inglês. Em seguida, são oferecidas perspectivas teóricas sobre a aceitação singular da dublagem em inglês em geral e dos sotaques estrangeiros como estratégia de dublagem em particular. O caso do setor de dublagem espanhol também é explorado para fins de contraste, elucidando as características de públicos de dublagem (in)maduros: seus hábitos, preferências e (in)flexibilidade. As conclusões apresentam um conjunto de conclusões extraídas da discussão do artigo, que oferecem uma possível resposta às perguntas feitas no título do artigo.

**Palavras chave:** dublagem para o inglês, sotaques estrangeiros, Netflix, estrangeirização, versões dubladas, TAV, legendagem para o inglês

## Introduction

English dubbing has been booming and blossoming on streaming platforms since late 2016. Soon thereafter, Chaume (2018, p. 87) remarked upon the emerging trend on Netflix to dub non-English-language content into English, which has been observed as a marketing strategy to attract viewership of 'foreign' content and termed 'the dubbing revolution' (Moore, 2018, as cited in Ranzato & Zanotti, 2019, p. 3). 'Revolution' is a notably apt term used to describe English dubbing, given its disruptive as well as cyclical meaning. That is to say that the novelty of dubbing as a mode of localisation, or audiovisual translation (AVT), for the into-English directionality is in fact illusory. What is actually in question is the resurgence and revamping of a practice. Whereas subtitling has long been the norm for localising live-action fiction into English, dubbing was in the limelight at the dawn of the talkies from the 1930s to the 1970s, over the course of which time it was often used for European cinema, Kung Fu films, and Spaghetti Westerns (Hayes, 2021). Dubbing did not disappear with the rise of subtitling, however. Rather, it became and remains to be the preferred mode of localisation for specialised (mostly animated) products such as cartoons and videogames (though animations involve [re]voicing more generally); ads, aka commercials, are sometimes dubbed too (Chaume, 2012, p. 10).

Despite these past and present realities, anglophone viewers tend to be less familiar with the dubbing mode or are, at least, unaware of their exposure to it, as dubbing is camouflaged in animation and live-action dubs are generally far removed in time and not often revisited. Many viewers are, therefore, watching English dubs on streaming platforms aka subscription video-on-demand services (SVoDs) for the very first time. Furthermore, many of these viewers are not only newcomers to dubbed versions but to localisation of live action in general. This reality arises from the pre-eminence of Hollywood on the one

hand and distribution distortion on the other. Distribution distortion arises from foreign-language live-action films being screened away from the mainstream in art-house cinemas and foreign TV not being broadcast on any readily available channels in anglophone countries.

This distribution process has brought about a pseudo-reality for anglophone viewers wherein subtitles and dubbed versions are how Other language communities consume English originals and wherein English subtitles constitute an exception for high-brow viewers attending film festivals or alternative cinemas. However, as streaming platforms have gained ground in media consumption as an alternative to TV or cinema, 'foreign' (hereinafter understood as non-English) products and their localised versions have entered the mainstream. In turn, the anglophone gaze has taken a 180-degree turn. Meanwhile, the novelty of localisation and dubbing for many viewers has played a pivotal role in the evolution of English dubbing; therein lies the subject of this article. It sets out to answer the questions posed in its title, exploring and explaining native-anglophone viewer acceptance of English dubbing as a mode of AVT and of foreign accents as a dubbing strategy. Drawing from the discussion throughout the article, arguments that could plausibly answer the questions posed are presented in a series of hypotheses in the concluding remarks.

## The Evolution of Mainstream (English) Dubbing

Netflix has been the streaming trailblazer of English dubbing, with 82 live-action Castilian-Spanish series and films dubbed into English in under five years, from 2017 to mid-2021 (Hayes & Bolaños-García-Escribano, 2022), not to mention its English dubs of originals from other varieties of Spanish, from other source languages altogether, or indeed voiceovers of non-fiction. It comes as no surprise, then, that English dubbing has suddenly attracted scholarly attention in the

field of translation studies (at the time of writing, these include Hayes, 2021; Sánchez-Mompeán, 2021; Spiteri Miggiani, 2021a; Spiteri Miggiani, 2021b; Hayes, 2022a; and Hayes and Bolaños-García-Escribano, 2022). Much of this scholarship on English dubbing to date has either centred around or at least acknowledged accent strategies employed. The reasons English-dubbing accent strategies have aroused such attention are that (i) there were somewhat shoddy beginnings and (ii) creative accent strategies have emerged that diverge from practices in other more established dubbing industries.

### Standard-Accent Strategies

As regards the first point, many early English dubs in 2017 opted for standardisation, which involved the use of either real-world accents recognised as standard due to their pervasiveness or artificially standardised accents that do not exist in a real-world context (see Hayes & Bolaños-García-Escribano, 2022, pp. 215–216). Audiences winced at the standardised accents and found their artificiality jarring. What followed were streams of invective on the matter (see, for instance, Fredette, 2017). The lack of authenticity in many of the voice actors' renditions is the product of their careers in the ilk of videogame dubbing (Hayes, 2021a, p. 19). Netflix responded to popular criticism in 2019 by reforming its standardisation strategy and even redubbing the first two seasons of its most ever watched foreign series on Netflix to that date—*La casa de papel* (Pina, 2017–present), or *Money Heist* in English, whose redub has drawn the attention of journalists and scholars (see, for instance, Goldsmith, 2019; Sánchez-Mompeán, 2021; or Spiteri Miggiani, 2021a, 2021b).

The redub mostly involved the replacement of artificially standardised accents with more authentically standard ones; however, reformulations also are also a feature; but as they are often not at the service of lip-sync or idiomacy (Sánchez-Mompeán, 2021, p. 187), anti-plagiarism and

originality seem more likely motivations. It should be acknowledged that, while real-world accents lend a better sense of authenticity to English dubs, they do not render the 2019-generation of English dubs immune from any artificiality whatsoever. As with all fictional dialogue, and especially with studio-performed dialogue (e.g., even original-version cartoons), dubbed dialogue often falls prey to the negative by-products of “prefabricated orality” (Chaume, 2004; Baños-Piñero & Chaume, 2009).

Prefabricated orality is the affected spontaneity in planned speech, which is typically fictional and written with the aim of reflecting natural speech (see Gregory & Carroll, 1978, p. 42). Oftentimes, a hypercorrection of speech spontaneity arises from the prefabricated orality of fictional texts, and voice actors of dubbed versions are most prone to these forced performances. This is partly due to the attention these actors must give to fulfilling lip-sync and synchrony of paralinguistic elements (e.g., sighs, gasps, panting, or laughter) as well as the ideological clash they must overcome when revoicing actors whom they can see are other and whose mouth articulations they can hear belong to another language entirely.

### Castilian-Spanish Dubbing

Furthermore, the consolidation of dubbing industries can create a self-perpetuating system insofar as artificial speech becomes a feature of dubbese that is required to meet audience expectations. This is perhaps best illustrated by the Castilian-Spanish dubbing industry wherein a homegrown dubbese prevails. It can be termed *doblenguaje*, reminiscent of the *doppiaggese* in Italian dubs (see Gatta, 2000 and Pavesi & Perego, 2006). *Doblenguaje* is a play on the words *doblaje* [dubbing] and *lenguaje* [specialised language or jargon]. The pronunciation of *doblenguaje* is somewhat cumbersome and requires slower-than-normal speech in order to be enunciated correctly. The term therefore aims to reflect the inauthenticity or artificiality

and premeditated nature of the enunciation and speech pace in *doblenguaje* itself.

One of the most salient characteristics of *doblenguaje* is its unnatural prosody, which in Spanish has been termed *doblajitis* (Wasabi & García, 2014), translating into ‘dubbitis’ (Sánchez-Mompeán, 2017, p. 324), and some of its traits being speech tension, dramatic intonation within individual words and across utterances, repetition of vowel sounds by shifting one’s pitch, and groan-like hesitations at the beginning of words or sentences. These final two traits are also referred to as ‘elongation’ (Baños-Pinero, 2009, my translation; Spiteri Miggiani, 2021b) or ‘dragging’ (Sánchez-Mompeán, 2020). Clear diction and decelerated speech are other traits of *doblenguaje*, with the latter often brought about by the slower pace of English and other languages vis-à-vis Spanish. Together, these features lead to a dubbing-take on a Central Peninsular Standard Spanish accent, which many industry practitioners claim is neutral, though it really differs only in *doblenguaje*. The term also accounts for atypical lexis and grammar, often termed dubbese (see Romero-Fresco, 2006); but as prosody pervades all speech, it constitutes a larger part of *doblenguaje*.

Despite its inauthenticity, Spanish audiences anticipate *doblenguaje* when watching dubs, to the extent of rejecting dubs that do not feature this speech variety particular to Spanish dubs. A case in point was the voicing of Spanish anime series *Memorias de Idhún* (*The Idhun Chronicles*) (Ruiz de Austri, 2020–2021). The series in question is an original version; but given that dialogues for animation are recorded in a studio and that in Spain these tend to be performed by voice actors rather than screen actors, this (re)voicing practice is often linked to dubbing. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the anime genre, normally imported from Japan, is usually dubbed into Spanish emulating the dramatic exclamations and high pitch of voices in the original. The creator of the series at Netflix decided to break the

mould and use actors specialised in screen acting rather than voice actors, with the exception of one actress (Michelle Jenner) who has expertise in both. This meant that both *doblenguaje* and genre-specific features were absent in the dub.

The result caused a furore among viewers in Spain, including a viral video addressed to Netflix by a Twitter user and voice actor in which he combined the original dub with a demo of his own voice dubbing the same scene in line with *doblenguaje*, and he appealed to Netflix for more consideration of its subscribers, which could be achieved by showing some respect to voice actors (he acknowledged Jenner as an outlier) (El Confidencial, 2020). The author of the books that were adapted for this series also expressed dismay at the portrayals by screen actors, having been involved in the selection of voice actors herself (Solà Gimferrer, 2020). There was also journalist coverage in relation to the series that acknowledged artificiality as a preference over naturalness for Spanish viewers when watching dubs and alluding to speech tension, affected or overacted laughter, clarity in the voice or diction, as well as unidiomatic instances (i.e., dubbese) as necessary evils in Spanish dubbing (Terán, 2020).

### Domestic-Accent Strategy

Given that the conventions of the Spanish dubbing industry are so deeply entrenched in Spanish TV and cinema culture, Spanish viewers are resistant to change; cult followings of the likes of anime are especially fanatic about conventions. Conversely, in the absence of tradition, viewers do not generally have expectations for English dubs, which enables experimentation. This trialling of techniques has surpassed the standardisation reformation and manifested in creative dubbing strategies using regional and/or foreign accents in English. As regards the former, localisation company VSI London has used domestication strategies availing of different varieties of British English for characterisation, such as in *Hache*

(Fernández, 2019–2021) and the redub of *How to Sell Drugs Online (Fast)* (Kässbohrer & Murmann, 2019–2021). Many such dubs use blanket domestication such that native and foreign accents in the original become native-English ones in the dub. However, some emulate the foreign and even reuse the original dialogue track where multilingualism is present (see Hayes, 2021a regarding *Hache*). Thus, one can observe that overarching strategies like domestication are not always clear-cut and can involve another micro-strategy.

### Foreign-Accent Strategies

A third strategy to emerge in Netflix's English dubs is fully fledged 'foreignisation', or the use of foreign accents in English derived from the language of the original. Examples are the original cast of Norwegian series *Ragnarok* (Hagedorn, 2020–present) revoicing their characters in Norwegian-accented English and a new cast of Hispanic voice actors dubbing Spanish series *La catedral del mar (Cathedral of the Sea)* (Frades, 2018). It is interesting to note that *How to Sell Drugs Online (Fast)* originally had a US dub using the original actors' German-accented English, made by VSI Los Angeles, but it was redubbed into British English at VSI London, which could be indicative of Netflix measuring the success of different accent strategies.

### Hybrid Accent Strategies

A fourth and final English-dubbing strategy on Netflix is a hybrid one. This can be heard in the English dubs of *Alguien tiene que morir (Someone Has to Die)* (Caro, 2020–) and *La valla (The Barrier)* (Écija, 2020), in which older-generation characters speak a Spanish-accented English while younger ones speak in standard American English, and the Otherness of the likes of an Argentine accent in Spanish is conveyed by a standard British English accent against the US standard. In most cases, there is no regional variation between youth and mature characters' Spanish in the original versions of these series. Where regional

variation does occur, it is overridden by age, e.g., a Mexican accent by a young character in *Alguien tiene que morir (Someone Has to Die)* is dubbed into American English but a more mature character's Mexican traces become Spanish, or foreign, instead.

For many Scandinavian series on Netflix, the original actors dub themselves, so the foreign accents tend to be authentic. However, a dialect coach, Lia Evans Schulman, worked on the English dub of *Ragnarok*, which suggests some actors may have needed direction. This might owe to the fact that many Scandinavians have native-level English with convincing accents. On the other hand, voice actors working on the English dubs of Spanish originals do not tend to receive voice coaching or direction on their renditions beyond the need to sound Hispanophone (Hayes, 2022a). The use of the original's actors in dubbing is the paragon of body-voice synchrony or coherence (i.e., the likeliness of a voice to emanate from a body type due to its being appropriately feminine or masculine, old or young, deep or high-pitched, etc.; for more on this type of sync, see: Fodor, 1969, p. 70, 1976, p. 72; Martínez Sierra, 2012, p. 78; and Spiteri Miggiani, 2021a, p. 12, Whitman-Linsen, 1992).

Choosing a foreign-accent strategy creates a space for original actors to dub themselves. Another worthy example of this strategy is in the English dub of *Pinocchio* (Garrone, 2019) for which the director sought to preserve the Italian identity of the story and his production and asked for an Italian dubbing director; three main characters dubbed themselves and the remainder of the cast was portrayed by Italian voice actors (Bruti & Vignozzi, 2023). Actor competences also weigh in on the feasibility of the strategy and the preparedness of the individual to self-dub. Against the backdrop of an overarching standardisation strategy in the English dub of *La casa de papel (Money Heist)*, including for Serbian-accented Spanish (character *Helsinki*), one polyglot actor with experience in voice acting, Luka Peroš (as *Marsella*

or *Marseille*), dubbed his Croatian accent into English, among other languages (López, 2021).

It is worth acknowledging that both self-dubbing and the non-dubbing of multilingualism can bring about optimum body-voice matching. It is also worth mentioning that there are many English dubs directed by dubbing directors native in the source language because they come from consolidated dubbing industries and boast years of experience and that such situations can facilitate or indeed lead to the use of foreign-accent strategies; however, native-anglophones have also employed these strategies and non-native-anglophone directors have equally directed native-anglophone voice actors (see Hayes & Bolaños-García-Escribano, 2022, for insight on the variables that influence accent strategy in English dubs).

Regarding the efforts made by dubbing casts composed entirely of voice actors, Spanish voice actress Susana Ballesteros (2018) rendered Spanish-accented English in her performances in the English dubs of *Fariña (Cocaine Coast)* (Sedes & Torregrossa, 2018), *La catedral del mar (Cathedral of the Sea)*, and *La valla (The Barrier)* and noted that there is an increasing demand for such accented dubbing. Ballesteros<sup>1</sup> (2020) also gave the insight that she allowed herself to emulate the Galician intonation when dubbing *Fariña*, although her own Spanish is from Madrid. Other voice actors performing in the same series stated that they did not pay attention to geographic specificity (see Hayes, 2022a), and many were matched to characters who spoke a different variety of Spanish to their own (see Table 1).

Furthermore, there were no instances of Galician Spaniards dubbing Galician characters. For many of the actors, their acting involved the use of their natural accents in English, and for others it meant relaxing their speech in English or exaggerating their natural accent (Ballesteros, 2020). In the case

of Hispanic American voice actors, these drew on their knowledge of Spanish-accented English in the US and gave generic renditions based on that. The result is a medley of pan-Hispanophone accents used to dub all characters in an indiscriminate manner, and no distinction is made between varieties of Spanish nor between Galician and Spanish, where diglossic code-switching occurs (Hayes, 2022a). Foreignisation strategies have also been used by other streamers, like in the English dubs of predominantly Spanish (Arabic also features) series *El Cid (The Legend of El Cid)* (Arranz & Velasco, 2020–present) and the aforementioned Italian film *Pinocchio* (Garrone, 2019) on Amazon Prime Video.

### Terminological Conundrum

When delving into why anglophone viewers accept an alternative to the standardisation strategy with no more criticism than usual and with any complaints tending to revolve around the dubbing mode more generally, rather than specific accent strategies (e.g., Fredette, 2017), the foreignisation strategy was chosen as a case in order to analyse the question. It is important to establish that the terms ‘domestication’ and ‘foreignisation’ have been availed of in line with their popular usage among Translation Studies scholars, that is, in relation to translation strategies rather than Venuti’s (1995) coinage of the terms to describe translation ideologies and a translation’s textual identity. This distinction is important insofar as dubbing is generally understood to be inherently domesticating as a mode of AVT (Chaume, 2012, p. 41), irrespective of the likes of accent strategies. That is to say that dubbing strives to be a diegetic form of AVT that hides the source text’s origins, whereas if the aim were to highlight those origins in a Venutian foreignising approach, the text would be subtitled instead. On the other hand, the imperfect lip-sync inherent in dubbing and the use of a language visibly foreign to the characters or setting could also make for an argument that dubbing is actually a type of foreignisation. Nevertheless, for want of less debated terminology, the term ‘foreignisation’ has been used to

1 Email and Instagram-messaging correspondence with Susana Ballesteros. 18 September 2020.



**Table 1** Actors and voice actors of main characters in *Fariña* (*Cocaine Coast*) and their origins

Character (Original)	Character's Origin	Actor/ Actress	Actor/ Actress's Origin	Voice Actor/ Actress	Voice Actor/ Actress's Origin
Sito Miñanco	Galicia, Spain	Javier Rey	Spanish: Galician	Bayardo De Murguía	Hispanic American-Mexican Roots*
Manuel Charlín	Galicia, Spain	Antonio Durán	Spanish: Galician	Diego Diment	LatAm—Argentine*
Nieves	Galicia, Spain	Marta Larralde	Spanish: Galician	Susana Ballesteros	Spanish—Madrid
Roque	Galicia, Spain	Tamar Novas	Spanish: Galician	Masato di Santo	LatAm-Ecuadorian/Argentine*
Terito	Galicia, Spain	Manuel Lourenzo	Spanish: Galician	Jordi Caballero	Spanish-Catalonian
Oubiña	Galicia, Spain	Carlos Blanco	Spanish: Galician	Gerardo Prat	LatAm-Argentine*
Esther Lago	Galicia, Spain	Eva Fernández	Spanish: Galician	Susana G. Esteban	Spanish-Catalonian
Sargento Darío Castro	Galicia, Spain	Tristán Ulloa	Spanish: Galician/French	Sergio Macián	Spanish-Andalusian
Camila Reyes	Panama	Jana Pérez	Spanish: Catalanian*	Rebeca Badia	Spanish-Valencian*
Ballesteros	Colombia	Juan Pablo Shuk	Colombian	Unknown**	—

Notes: \* These are actors and voice talents that portrayed characters of the other variant of Spanish (i. e., voice talents with Peninsular Spanish portraying Latin Americans and vice versa).

\*\*Due to missing information in the dub card in Netflix's credits for the series and fruitless further research, the voice actor(s) who portrayed the character Ballesteros remain an enigma. It should nevertheless be noted that in the first episode of the series, two voices with notably different timbres can be heard in character Ballesteros' speech in the English dub, with the second taking over from the first in the same scene, 59 minutes into the episode, and whose higher pitch ruptures acoustic synchrony.

discuss the use of foreign accents throughout a dubbed version.

Considering that domestication and foreignisation exist in a continuum, rather than being mutually exclusive as their often-dichotomous usage would suggest, 'standardisation' has been included as a third point of intersection in the continuum (see Hayes & Bolaños-García-Escribano, 2022, for further musings on terminology attributed to accent strategies).

### The Dubbing Trinity

Prior to analysing the specific case of how native-English speakers experience English dubs, it is necessary to consider how viewers experience dubbed versions, irrespective of the language of the dub. This experience can be described as 'the dubbing trinity' and is composed of the following threefold mechanism (as first described in Hayes, 2022a, p. 191).

1. The diegesis: In an effort to be diegetic, dubbed dialogue replaces the original track in a ‘horizontal’ (Gottlieb, 1994, p. 104) translation that preserves the ‘semiotic structure’ (Bosseaux, 2015, p. 85) of the audiovisual text intact, thereby creating a cinematic illusion and keeping the viewers within the narrative of the text. As dubbed dialogue strives to be diegetic, it is aided by (a) efforts at lip-sync and isochrony, (b) a ‘credible display of prosodic (and paralinguistic) traits’ (Sánchez-Mompeán, 2020, p. 33), and (c) dialogue manipulation where narrative and/or visuals require it for coherence (i.e., kinesic or visual-verbal synchrony). Beyond these technicalities, the willingness of the viewers is another factor that contributes to the diegetic effect of dubbed dialogue: ‘what dub lovers value is less an accurate translation of the foreign original than the obscure integrity of the cinematic narrative space. These spectators feel a fatal attraction to that sublime immersion in the film’s diegesis’ (Nornes, 2007, p. 228). For viewers to enter the diegesis of fictional texts, they must enter a ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ (Coleridge, 1817). This willingness is a function of habituation.
2. The dubbing effect: Romero-Fresco (2020, p. 31) coined the term ‘the dubbing effect’ to describe the optical illusion generated by the innate genius of the brain. The illusion in question is brought about by viewers of dubbed versions paying approximately 95% of their attention to characters’ eyes and 5% to characters’ mouths, whereas their attention distribution when watching originals is approximately 75% and 25%, respectively (Romero Fresco, 2020, p. 31). In other words, viewers subconsciously avert their gaze from characters’ mouths to avoid the eyesore of asymmetries, whether subtle or salient, in mouth articulations.
3. The suspension of linguistic disbelief: The 5% of attention that escapes the dubbing effect, allowing viewers to direct their gaze at characters’

mouths, means that they may focus on imprecise lip-synchrony, a contradiction between the setting and the language, or any other incongruences. Nonetheless, viewers manage to see past the diegetic danger zone existing in this 5% margin as they enter a subconscious agreement known as the ‘suspension of linguistic disbelief’ (Romero-Fresco, 2009, p. 49), which allows the harmonious coexistence of a foreign narrative in a domestic language. If viewers did not reconcile the cognitive dissonance triggered by dubbed dialogue tracks played over original visuals, it would otherwise be too psychologically demanding for them to suspend their disbelief of the narrative’s fiction.

#### **Habituation to Mode and Strategies: (Im)maturity of the Market**

In the burgeoning English-language dubbing industry, dubbing is often referred to as ‘lip-sync dubbing’ (see zoo Digital, 2022, for instance). The term is tautological and seems to serve a didactic purpose insofar as it highlights to native-English speakers that dubbing involves lip-synchrony, whereas their knowledge of AVT would generally have been focussed on subtitles prior to the dubbing surge. Furthermore, given the specialised distribution of subtitled products in anglophone countries, ‘subtitles’ have often been considered synonymous with foreign films in general with the reality of the practice not always grasped—hence the need to signal that dubbing is the type with lip-sync and therefore involves voices rather than written text. It is worth adding that viewer unfamiliarity also owes to the fact that elements of dubbing such as lip-sync often went unnoticed in pre-streamer dubs because dialogues in the likes of Kung Fu films or Spaghetti Westerns are few and far between—few utterances of brief duration and often occurring far into the distance (i.e., long shots). As for animation, visuals are generally neither convincingly domestic nor foreign (save the likes of ultra-sophisticated CGI) and mouth flaps have traditionally been simplistic and non-language specific, thereby concealing the dubbed nature of the text.

The novice status of native anglophones as viewers of dubbed versions has a knock-on effect on their experience of the dubbing trinity. Whereas audiences accustomed to watching dubbed versions willingly suspend their (linguistic) disbelief when watching dubs as they would with original fiction, anglophone viewers are unlikely to do so until they have become accustomed to the AVT mode. The willing suspension of disbelief is a function of habituation and is facilitated by early-age exposure (Romero-Fresco, 2020, p. 19). After all, ‘audience research has shown that people tend to prefer whatever form of [audiovisual] translation they grew up with’ (Nornes, 2007, p. 191). Studies are required to establish the point at which assuefaction is achieved (e.g., over the course of watching an episode, upon having watched an entire series, or after three weeks of watching dubs daily, based on the assumption that it takes three weeks to form a habit).

Habituation-based preferences can be illustrated by Netflix’s endeavour with dubbing in Poland, where viewers rejected the company’s Polish dubs, forcing them to revert to Polish voiceovers which is their conventional mode of localisation (Rodríguez, 2018). It is thought that introducing a new mode into a consolidated industry like this would be more successfully done with cartoons for children and live action for teenagers, as the viewing habits of these groups for foreign content may not be set in stone just yet. Anglophone viewers were not generally accustomed to any mode of localisation for live action prior to Netflix’s English-dubbing campaign and being accustomed to no mode is a preference in itself. This can be illustrated by the fact that viewers in the

US surveyed by Netflix claimed they would be unlikely to watch a product not in English; however, data revealed that when they did watch a foreign series on Netflix, more chose to watch the dubbed version rather than the original with subtitles and the viewers of the dub proved more likely to finish watching the series (Bylykbashi, 2019).

This disparity between a viewer’s perception and reception ultimately serves to substantiate the claim that viewers prefer the AVT mode they are used to, and this theory extends into a logical hypothesis that if viewers are *not* used to a set mode of AVT nor will they have a preference *for* or aversion *to* any one mode over another. What can be added, however, is that watching a dub is closer to the experience of watching an original version. This is because original and dubbed versions offer a leisurely or passive viewing experience compared with the cognitive effort required to read subtitles, and to the diegetic endeavours of dubbed dialogues to the point of narrative manipulation, as illustrated in Table 2, compared with subtitles rupturing that disbelief, which can be justified in their being visibly non-diegetic albeit conveying the dialogues.

When it comes to dubbing strategies, the novice status of viewers is crucial to the acceptance of non-standard accents. Unlike the consolidated Spanish dubbing industry wherein viewers recoiled from the dubbing strategy devoid of dubbitis, the English dubbing industry is currently fluid because of the quasi-absence of precedent and viewers’ lack of habituation to the mode or to any existing precedent. As viewers are not conditioned to have

**Table 2** *Vivir sin permiso (Unauthorized Living)* (Gabilondo, 2018: Season 1 Episode 2)

Original Version (Castilian Spanish)	Back Translation	English Sub	English Dub
Es que quería que aprendiese inglés.	She wanted me to learn English.	Yes, she wanted me to learn English.	She wanted me to be fluent in French.
Viajes a Inglaterra...	Trips to England...	In England...	Trips to France...

expectations when watching English dubs, it seems they are malleable to different accent strategies. Nevertheless, given anglophone viewers are accustomed to watching original versions in English, they do prefer hearing authentic linguistic varieties (also suggested by Spiteri Miggiani, 2021a, p. 6). This would explain their aversion to the accent specific to videogames used in Netflix's earlier dubs in contrast to virtually no comment made on the authentic accents used thereafter.

The use of authentic accents does not mean renditions in these latter dubs are exempt from displaying features of prefabricated orality; however, any telltale signs are *almost* as subtle (i.e., there is some overacting at play, typical of studio-recorded performances) as those in original versions, and significantly more subtle than the artificiality of videogame speak. Spiteri Miggiani (2021a, pp. 13–14) has noted 'flat intonation' and 'unclear' pronunciation in English dubs as quality issues; however, they could also be attributed to speech reflective of that which occurs spontaneously and is echoed in originals. English dubs do, however, display the clear sound quality characteristic of dubs (Chaume, 2012, p. 18) rather than the muffled reality of originals (see Pearson, 2022).

The fact that the novelty of dubs to anglophone viewers has allowed the introduction of creative accent strategies has far reaching effects on their viewing experience. Indeed, Spiteri Miggiani (2021a, p. 22) has referred to the 'newness' of English dubbing as a 'silver lining' (vs. the inexperience of practitioners also associated with its recent arrival). The use of authentic linguistic variation in English dubs leads to complex characterisations, allowing viewers to sooner suspend their linguistic disbelief and, in turn, be lured into the fiction.

### Familiarity with Foreign Accents

The position of English as the *de facto* lingua franca worldwide, propelled by globalisation,

technology advancements, and the culture of social media, has given rise to an enormous population of non-native speakers of English. With 1.35 billion speakers, English is currently the language with the highest number of speakers worldwide (Szmigiera, 2021), despite ranking third—after Chinese and Spanish—when only native speakers are taken into account, amounting to a speaking population of 379 million (McCarthy, 2020). English is also the most used language on the internet by a large margin (Johnson, 2021). Bearing in mind these data, it comes as no surprise that foreign accents (i.e., accents belonging to the phonology of other languages) pervade the English language. Given that these accents have phonetic repertoires distinguishable from any other variety of English and the characteristics of the repertoires are identifiably linked to the speakers' native-language community (e.g., Spanish-accented English), they can be considered ethnolects (a speech variety associated with an ethnic group that originally used another language, e.g., Italo-American English or African American Vernacular English).

These accents can also be considered features of non-dominant pluricentric varieties of English (see Edwards & Fuchs, 2019 on this concept regarding Dutch and German varieties of English). This is an alternative to considering foreign accents as a characteristic of 'Bad English' (see Peterson, 2020). Foreign accents are in fact—and arguably the most salient—part of foreign varieties, which are also replete with dialect in terms of both lexis and grammatical constructions. In fictional texts, however, both native and non-native varieties are rendered with diluted or no dialect for intelligibility purposes (see, for example, Díaz-Cintas, 2011; Hodson, 2014; Corrius & Zabalbeascoa, 2019; Ranzato, 2019; Chiaro & De Bonis, 2019; and Minutella 2020). This can be observed in the likes of the Norwegian and Hispanic varieties in Netflix's English dubs exhibiting flawless grammar and idiomacy and emphasising instead the phonetic and phonological characteristics of the variety (i. e., accent).

Anglophone viewers are accustomed to watered-down representations of foreign accents from watching both original-version live-action fiction and voiced over non-fiction. As regards the former text type, foreign accents are ubiquitous in English-language originals, to the extent of films set in foreign places using accents native to the setting throughout. Examples are German-accented English in *Schindler's List* (Spielberg, 1993) and Colombian-Spanish-accented English in *Loving Pablo* (León de Aranoa, 2017). As for foreign accents in non-fiction, these are often heard in the voiceovers of foreign news reporters or interviewees on the BBC (Filmer, 2019) and in documentaries. The use of foreign accents in both original and dubbed versions presupposes the validity of those accents as recognisable varieties of English.

The mere fact of creating a fictional representation of a German accent in English means that the accent has already been indexed, or recognised, as a linguistic repertoire (see Silverstein 1976; 2003 on indexicality) within the English-language community. Repertoires can be further indexed or enregistered (see Agha, 2003, 2007 on enregisterment) with social meaning, as seen in Netflix series using hybrid accent strategies wherein older generational characters speak Hispanic-accented English. By attributing heavily accented English to characters with traditional values and in an older demographic, it seems attitudes in the US towards Spanish as a language of immigration are echoed, and the dubs in question were indeed created in the US. This is a timely reminder that the values indexed by (foreign) accents differ across the Anglosphere.

In terms of the specificity with which native anglophones perceive accents in English, Wells (1982, p. 33) observed that spatial distance reduces interpretational specificity. Wells' example was that an Englishman might recognise a working-class Liverpool accent whereas a Chicagoan may perceive it as British without further diatopic or diastratic connotations. It seems

this Wellsian observation can be extended beyond spatial distance given that perceptual specificity also declines with *linguistic* distance. The latter observation on linguistic distance is the fruit of findings from a questionnaire carried out on how to sound Spanish in English (Hayes, 2022b), in which 126 native-English speakers were surveyed on different accents. There are two findings from the questionnaire particularly relevant to the extension of the Wellsian observation. The first is that the degree of perceptual specificity for foreign accents in English is reduced to language communities, whereas there was a greater level of specificity given for native-English accents. This means that where a native accent was perceived as being from Ireland (second-degree specificity) in particular and from Dublin (first-degree specificity), more specifically again, Hispanic accents were matched to the correct country at best, but the greatest level of specificity generally achieved was in indicating that the accents belonged to a Spanish-speaking country (third-degree specificity), with little or no distinction made between Spain and Latin American or between Latin American countries.

According to this finding, it may not be necessary to sound Peninsular Spanish in English in order to be perceived as Spanish; rather, it is sufficient to sound Hispanic, generally. In this context, 'Hispanic' is understood as encompassing the entirety of the Hispanophone world—not just Latin America. The other finding was that four phonetic realisations were perceived as iconic Hispanic characteristics and even their scattered presence could lead to a Hispanic perception by a native-anglophone viewer. These were the voiced dental fricative [ð] realisation of dental plosives (/d/ and /t/), the uvular fricative or *jota* realisation of /h/, the /s/ realisation of /z/, and the tapped and alveolar trill or rolled /r/.

Vague perceptions combined with iconic pronunciations serve to justify and explain the acceptance of the indiscriminate dubbing of

Galician, Colombian, and Panamanian accents in the English dub of Netflix series *Fariña* (*Cocaine Coast*) via the conflation of all Spanishes into one pan-Hispanic variety of English. Furthermore, the key consonant realisations elucidated by the questionnaire and their ability to trigger a Hispanic perception further explain why these took precedence over any features particular to Galician Spanish, like its intonation. Intonation can, however, be a defining feature of other foreign varieties of English, such as in Italian and Scandinavian accents. Although viewers do not require authenticity and nuancing in renditions of foreign accents, they may still benefit from actors rendering the specificity of an accent as it can aid performance and character creation. Dialect coach Brendan Gunn<sup>2</sup> and actor Jack Gleeson<sup>3</sup> (2020) highlight the importance of accent in performance. This can explain why the likes of Spanish actress Penélope Cruz and actor Javier Bardem received dialect coaching on Colombian Spanish for the aforementioned film *Loving Pablo* instead of rendering their natural Castilian-Spanish accents in English (Castillo, 2018).

### English Dubbing: A Unique Environment

It is worth calling into question what impact foreign-language varieties of English might have on the dubbing trinity. It seems reasonable to posit that foreign accents pertaining to the language and setting of the original may tally in the psyche of a viewer more easily than accents native to English, as the former are more likely to emanate from the actors. In turn, the foreign accents could lend verisimilitude to the text, thereby helping the viewer to suspend both linguistic disbelief and disbelief at the fictional nature of the narrative. Given the lesser degree of perceptual specificity for foreign accents, any subtle discrepancies across the voice cast's renditions would likely go unnoticed, and

this unawareness might act as a safety net for the suspension of linguistic disbelief—our ignorance is bliss. Whereas foreign accents would likely ring cacophonously in the ears of viewers in a consolidated dubbing industry, one can hypothesise that the lack of precedent or viewer exposure to dubs is responsible for anglophone viewers' acceptance or at least indifference towards foreignisation.

Furthermore, it seems reasonable to call into question whether native-anglophone viewers of English dubs also experience the dubbing effect (Spiteri Miggiani 2021a, p. 4) due to both their lack of habituation to dubbed-version consumption and to the range of dubbing strategies being used in English-language dubs. If a dubbing effect is experienced, it would be interesting to discern to what degree, especially when a foreignisation strategy has been employed. The dubbing effect has been tested using standardised Spanish and Italian dubs (Di Giovanni & Romero-Fresco, 2019) as well as with standardised Polish voiceover (see Flis et al., 2020). In all cases, the original was an English-language film.

While standardisation and domestication strategies require viewers to reconcile the fact that foreign visuals (people, settings, and mouth articulations) are accompanied by their language being spoken natively, it can be postulated that foreignisation might lead to a less psychologically demanding watch. In turn, it can be hypothesised that if mouth articulations created by foreign accents are not expected to mirror the target language as spoken by natives, the brain's demand for synchrony might be reduced, thereby narrowing the attention-distribution gap observed under the dubbing effect. This hypothesis is speculative and requires exploration in eye-tracking. This strategy could also allow awkward syntax and lexis—as a feature of foreign varieties of English—to go unnoticed, thereby creating more room for manoeuvring lip-sync.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that technological changes in dubbing might remove the question of whether foreignisation or other accent strategies

2 Zoom Interview. 14 December 2020.

3 Jack Gleeson, WhatsApp voicenote correspondence, 11 June 2020.

impact the dubbing effect. For instance, Polish videogame developer CD Projekt has begun using technologies that alter mouth articulations in videogames, such as in their game *Cyberpunk 2077* released in 2020, so that lip-sync is removed from the equation entirely (O'Hagan, 2021). In relation to three other games, Chaume (2019, p. 111) has noted this practice of facial modelling and synthesising mouth articulations based on audio input and has acknowledged that it would be most readily extended to non-fiction cartoons (see Baños, 2023).

As for live action, it is possible that a similar technology will be used, which is often associated with deep fakes (Vincent, 2021); however, it is of paramount importance that we note lip-sync is not the only cause of cognitive dissonance and that a whole new host of ideological issues could arise from using synthesised mouth articulations. For example, that of viewers needing to reconcile a famous anglophone actor from Hollywood apparently speaking Spanish or Italian accompanied by Anglo-Saxon body language and a foreign narrative. This issue of course arises with traditional dubbing also, but the incongruity might be exacerbated if viewers are not able to at least subconsciously register those mouth movements that do not match as a way of recognising the foreign nature of the text, consequently accepting traits of dubbing like overacting or *doblenguaje*. On the other hand, the general lack of familiarity that anglophone viewers have with film-industry celebrities in other language communities might reduce this cognitive clash.

In any case, there is a question mark over whether mouth articulations would look physiologically natural and synchronously convincing in terms of their belonging to the character's face (i.e., visual or corporal synchronisation). It may be for these reasons that such technologies are currently limited to head-on shots (see Yang et al., 2020) in non-fiction content. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that traditional dubbing will be done away with for fiction very soon, and this is echoed by universities (e.g., the University of Bristol and University

College London), dubbing studios (e.g., VSI London), and localisation companies (e.g., ZOO Digital), providing—whether internally and/or through partnerships or invited speakers—workshops and courses on script adaptation for English dubbing, which deal with lip-sync among other core concepts within the practice.

## Conclusions

The pseudo-novelty of English dubbing has been the necessary condition for introducing anglophones to (i) dubbing, as an unfamiliar mode of audiovisual translation and (ii) creative dubbing strategies that diverge from using standard(ised) accents. The most salient observations and hypotheses formulated in this article can be summarised in ten points:

1. Anglophone viewers have demonstrated a preference for dubs over subs when watching non-English content because they are not accustomed to watching 'foreign' fiction and dubs are diegetic, enabling a more leisurely viewing experience via the dubbing-trinity phenomenon than that of watching a foreign product with subtitles and which is ultimately closer to their experience of watching an English-language original.
2. Practitioners in the English dubbing industry have been able to experiment with dubbing strategies because the industry is scant on conventions and because most viewers are unfamiliar with any pre-existing ones.
3. Anglophone viewers are malleable to different dubbing strategies because of their lack of prior exposure to live-action English dubs and/or a lack of awareness of their exposure to English dubs of animation. This, in turn, means their viewing is not shaped by expectations for an English dubbese akin to *doblenguaje* or *doppiaggese*. Conversely, accents diverging from the standard would likely be rejected by viewers in consolidated dubbing industries.

4. Comparing the English-language dubbing industry to the consolidated dubbing industry in Spain informs our understanding on the agency of novelty in English-language dubbing, both regarding industry practices and viewer experiences.
5. English has been propelled into the unique position of de facto lingua franca on the back of globalisation, technology advancements and the culture of social media, and this has given rise to the pluricentricity of the language, including foreign varieties of English that are characterised largely by accent. The use of these accents in fictional texts validates their status as varieties of the English language.
6. Anglophone viewers of English dubs accept foreignisation strategies because foreign accents are familiar to them (whether their origins can be perceived to greater or lesser degrees) in addition to the fact that foreign accents are conventionally used in mainstream fiction, documentaries and news broadcasts in English. Foreign accents may therefore meet viewers' demands for authenticity.
7. Generic renditions or a mixture of accents pertaining to a foreign variety are acceptable to anglophone viewers as they tend to find their nuances imperceptible because they perceive foreign accents to third-degree specificity. This means that the iconic traits of a foreign variety featuring notably across a cast's varying renditions should be sufficient to contribute to a top-down cultural identity by viewers.
8. Lower degrees of perceptual specificity help to keep viewers' disbelief suspended, in the face of inconsistent renditions by a voice cast.
9. The use of non-native accents in English dubs, as a foreignisation strategy, might reduce the brain's demand for lip-sync, thereby leading to a more relaxed viewing experience closer to the consumption of an original version with no

audiovisual translation whatsoever and possibly closing the attention-distribution gap as observed under the dubbing effect with standardisation strategies. Where lip-sync needs to be prioritised, foreign accents could allow for this as there is reduced demand for native-English syntax and idiomacy.

10. Netflix lays store by accents in creating high-quality English dubs, as illustrated by their reformation of the standardisation strategy and redubbing using different accent strategies.

In future empirical research, it will be important to analyse the process of habituation as well as the impact of accent on native-English speakers' viewing experience of English dubbed versions, and eye-tracking technology will be crucial in doing so. It would also be worthwhile to contemplate the ideological soundness of different accent strategies in relation to theories on translation and textual identity. The hypotheses made in this concluding section are necessarily speculative and intended to encourage research that might validate or challenge them. The overarching aim of the article has been to provide a sound argument that lends legitimacy to the existing strategy of using foreign accents in English dubs, so that it might proliferate or, at least, continue to be practised.

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