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# Trabajo de Fin de Grado

Translation Strategies in ‘Mockumentary’ Comedies:  
The Case of *What We Do in the Shadows*

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# 1. Introduction

This dissertation studies the translation strategies more commonly used in the field of audiovisual translation of comedies and their suitability on the basis of an analysis of the lexical and grammatical systems of the source and target languages. More concretely, it is a study of the techniques adopted in Anglo-Spanish translations through a descriptive analysis of the strategies used in the Spanish version of the TV series *What We Do in the Shadows* (*Lo que hacemos en las sombras*) created by Jemaine Clement in 2019.

The purpose of this dissertation is to categorise the translation strategies used in the show *What We Do in the Shadows* and the effects they may have on the reception of the comedic nature of the source material once translated into the target language (Spanish), considering the socio-cultural context, the morphosyntactic and lexical aspects that differentiate the two languages, and the breach of intertextual references that are involved in the translation of a piece of media that combines spoken and non-spoken humour. This study aims to determine the accuracy of the strategies used in episodes 1 (“Pilot”), 3 (“Werewolf Feud”), 6 (“Baron’s Night Out”), 7 (“The Trial”), and 10 (“Ancestry”) of the show and to assess the possibility of better alternatives.

Firstly, I will provide technical information about the TV series and an overview of the plot it develops in its first season. I will then continue with some background on the translation of comedy on screen and the common difficulties that it causes, as well as provide some techniques frequently used to solve the translation problems. Secondly, I will present the corpus to be analysed in this dissertation by synthesising the plot of each episode chosen and its particular difficulties for translation as well as explaining the specific methodology on which the analysis of the corpus for this dissertation is based. Lastly, I will analyse the strategies used in each particular episode and then assess their level of accuracy, proposing a more appropriate solution if necessary.

## 1.1. Context of the TV show *What We Do in the Shadows*

The TV show *What We Do in the Shadows*, created by Jemaine Clement, premiered in 2019 on an American pay television channel (FX) with the same premise as the New Zealand film of 2014 by the same name, which was created and directed by Jemaine Clement and Taika Waititi and exists within the same world as the 2019 show. The series, as well as the film, was conceived as a ‘mockumentary’ horror comedy that follows the lives and sorrows of a group of four vampire housemates living in contemporary Staten Island and how they interact with each other and their surroundings. In an interview for IGN India mentioned by Knight (2019), one of the show’s writers, Stefani Robinson, defines the comedic nature of the show as a subversion of the traditional image of vampires and defends that the series deals with “the more mundane practicalities of being a vampire”.

According to Knight (2019), the series seems to be heavily influenced by Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, as well as other pieces of literature such as *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens* (Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, 1922), *Interview with the Vampire* (Anne Rice, 1976), *Martin* (George A. Romero, 1978), *Fright Night* (Tom Holland, 1985), *The Lost Boys* (Joel Schumacher, 1987), *Vampire's Kiss* (Robert Bierman, 1988), and *Nadja* (Michael Almereyda, 1994).

The main protagonist group consists of three old-fashioned vampires, one energy vampire, and one human that cohabitate in the same house. Nadia of Antipaxos, played by Natasia Demetriou, is a 500-year-old Greek Romani woman married to another of the vampires; Leslie “Laszlo” Cravensworth, played by Matt Berry, is a 310-year-old British nobleman who was transformed by Nadia and married her later on; Nandor the Relentless, played by Kayvan Novak, is a 760-year-old Ottomanian warrior and leader of a long gone kingdom; Colin Robinson, played by Mark Proksch, is a 99-year-old energy vampire, which means he drains the vital energy out of humans, as well as vampires, by boring them ‘to death’; lastly, Guillermo de la Cruz, played by Harvey Guillén, is a human young man who acts as Nandor’s familiar, a title given to humans who must serve a vampire master in order to become vampires themselves. The plot of the show is presented to the audience as a documentary carried out by human cameramen, whose job is to record the everyday life of this unconventional group, and thus the series begins in medias res as the vampires continue on their normal lives.

## 1.2. The Translation of Comedy and the Techniques Traditionally Used

According to Andrew Stott (2014: 4), comedy's roots can be found in its etymology, an amalgamation of 'kômai' (village) and 'oda' (song), as it translates to a hymn of celebration. In modern times, there is no real agreement about the conventions by which comedy can be defined but the term can be found defined as "drama of light and amusing character and typically with a happy ending" (Merriam-Webster, n.d., definition 2a), comedy films and TV series becoming one of the most popular genres of media. The popularity of these has multiplied the exportation of comedy productions and their translation to various languages has been essential to satisfy the demand in the globalised culture of contemporary times.

The translation of comedy has always been marked by the difficulty of preserving the cultural weight of the source text (ST) into the target text (TT), as comedy is, in nature, heavily dependent on the implicit complicity between the speaker and the receiver, and highly conditional on the cultural knowledge of the receiver, information that differs greatly between cultures and languages and must be provided by the translator in the target text in order to navigate the use of intertextuality without losing information from the source text (Botella Tejera, 2017). However, in many audiovisual translations, these references are transmitted through images and camera play instead of spoken text, as well as the use of voice inflexion, silence, and body language (Martínez Sierra, 2004: 202), which is the case of *What We Do in the Shadows*. Truth is, as claimed by Botella Tejera (2017: 89), it does not exist a universal rule for the translation of intertextuality, although it is influenced by cohesive factors within the structure of particular phrases and the text as a whole. It is essential for the source text to be respected at the same time that it is made accessible to the receiver of the target language and conveys the communicative intention of the original.

Through the analysis on which this dissertation is based I was able to identify six specific techniques used during the translation of *What We Do in the Shadows* that agree with those selected by Tretrapetch, Tipayasuparat, & Webb (2017: 289) from Nida (1964)'s translation approaches, Baker (1992)'s translation strategies, and Gottlieb (1992)'s subtitle translation: equivalence, adaptation, transposition, modulation, omission, and resignation. Other frequent techniques used in the translation of the show agrees with the strategies of amplification and explicitation, and literal translation as expressed by Gil Bardají and Presas (2008).

## 2. Corpus and Methodology

This dissertation centres around the analysis of the translation of the five highest-rated episodes (according to IMDb) of the first season of *What We Do in the Shadows* in both the English and Spanish versions of the series. The nature of the translation strategies mentioned below makes it necessary to use a small corpus, which is the reason why the corpus consists of five episodes that represent the comedy of the show as a whole, as they present the frequent nuances of translation that will be present throughout the four seasons (historical and cultural references, creative descriptions, colloquial language, and disorganised dialogues). However, they can also be argued to form a suitable basis for the analysis of the translation of comedy from the screen to the audience.

The first episode to analyse is also the “Pilot” episode of the show, where the main cast is introduced through fake confessionals as an allusion to documentary filmmaking, and the dynamics in the group are established. According to the HBO streaming platform, the plot of this episode focuses on the group of vampires trying to plan a “lavish bloodfeast in honor of a visit by their ancient master from the Old Country”. This particular episode is an introduction to the old-fashioned and descriptive use of the language of the characters, charged with multiple references to past historical events.

The second episode for analysis, “Werewolf Feud”, is the third in the series and where the werewolf pack of Staten Island is introduced, an element also present in the 2014 film. Laszlo starts a “feud” between the vampires and the werewolf pack, while Colin Robinson meets another emotional vampire at work, Evie. This episode, in contrast to the first, is filled with pop-culture references and modern (millennial) colloquial language as the werewolf pack is significantly younger than the vampire group. It is also in this third episode that Colin Robinson has a more protagonistic role, emphasising the boring nature of his character inside a comedy show and how the humorous intent is kept through translation in both languages.

The third episode in this study is the sixth in the series, “Baron’s Night Out”, which, according to the HBO platform, revolves around the Baron’s awakening, who “demands to experience the wonders of the New World in a night out in the town”. The translation of disorganised dialogues between the characters in this episode is particularly difficult but essential as it showcases the ‘mockumentary’ nature of the show.

The fourth episode for analysis and the seventh in the series, “The Trial”, starts where the last episode ended, with the death of Baron Afanas and the subsequent trial for murder. According

to the episode's abstract, "The vampires must defend themselves as an international vampire tribunal gathers to judge them for their transgressions". This episode suffers from the same difficulties as the previous one as the Council is formed by unserious vampires, allowing the same disorganisation to occur in communication.

The last episode in this study, as well as the last episode from the season, "Ancestry", focuses on the vampires taking a DNA test to show their ancestry and find their living relatives. This episode is especially interesting because of the references to modern culture as well as religious terminology.

The methodology used for the present study is inductive as, in order to draw conclusions on the suitability of the strategies selected, I analysed each particular case of translation in the chosen episodes through a detailed description of the cases at several levels. In order to interpret the results of the description, firstly, I will here explain the importance of the relationship of superiority as it was put forward by Vandaele (1995) and the effects this theory has on the difficulty of translation of the comedic nature of the show from one language (English) to the other (Spanish). Secondly, the inductive method will be complemented by a contrastive analysis of the collected data, a number of 22 fragments of dialogue (or cases) from both versions of the aforementioned five episodes, in terms of the lexicogrammatical aspects of each language and the translation techniques applied, which are based, as indicated above, on strategies selected by Tretrapetch et al. (2017) and Gil Bardají and Presas (2008):

1. Translation by a more neutral or stronger word (or formal equivalence): A word in the TT is significantly less or more expressive than in the ST.
2. Translation by cultural substitution (or adaptation): The change of a cultural concept that is unfamiliar or nonexistent in the TT into an equivalent variant.
3. Translation by paraphrase using a related word (or transposition): The substitution grammatical category of a word or sentence without changing the meaning of the message to attain a more natural result in the TT.
4. Translation by paraphrase using an unrelated word (or modulation): The transposition of the message in order to maintain the meaning.
5. Omission: The removal of unnecessary words or phrases from the ST once translated into the TT.

6. Resignation: This technique is used when the source version cannot be translated using any of the techniques listed, so a wholly different expression must be used, which may result in the original meaning being lost.
7. Amplification and explicitation: This technique is used to add more information in the target text to clarify the message at the same time that what is implicit in the source text is expressed.
8. Literal Translation: A word-to-word translation from one language to another with the appropriate grammatical equivalent in the TL.

Lastly, I will draw conclusions from the analysis conducted that will add to the almost non-existent studies on the translation of humour, as claimed by Vandaele (1995: 237), regarding, more specifically, 'mockumentary' comedies.

### 3. Analysis of the Most Frequently Used Translation Strategies

#### 3.1. Superiority Theory Applied to *What We Do in the Shadows*

Thomas Hobbes raised the idea that laughter originated from “a sense of superiority of the laughter against an object (what is commonly referred to as the “butt of the joke”)” (Attardo, 1994: 49). In essence, the concept of superiority is considered a social phenomenon easier to detect within the text (Vandaele, 1995: 255) but not less important when conveying humor to the audience. Vandaele (1995) considers two types of superiority: negative (or unironic aggressive humour), and positive (or non-aggressive humour).

Negative superiority is prominent for the presence of an object (the “butt of the joke”) that is destroyed through verbal irony, which is a humorous technique as irony represents a transgression of communicative norms (Vandaele, 1995: 255). This type of superiority can be present in the dynamics between characters but also in the implied relationship between the characters and the audience, a two-directional superiority relationship that emphasises the ironic condition of the characters’ nature, as is the case of *What We Do in the Shadows*, where the implied trust in the audience’s knowledge of cultural references and social conventions is especially important for the translation of humour into the target language. The relationship between the traditional vampires (Nadja, Laszlo, and Nandor) and the human familiar (Guillermo) is that of masters and servant, thus their treatment of Guillermo is of an inferior subject (human), less experienced and unaware of vampire customs, the superior entity. Guillermo is treated as the butt of all the jokes from the vampires, especially Nandor’s, sometimes resembling a pet to his owners:

COLIN: “He was peeing himself.”

GUILLERMO: “I did not pee myself, master.”

However, this superiority dynamic is ironic in itself as Guillermo is actually the only character with an understanding of both cultural references and social patterns within human interactions, as does the audience. This irony allows for the creation of camaraderie between the audience and the inferior character, which grants him a role of superiority against the self-acclaimed “superior” beings, adding to the comedic situation of the relationship between the characters: the

vampires are the actual “butt of the joke” in the show, as they are unaware of modern conventions, and Guillermo is the one in the superior position:

NANDOR: “I would like some of that colorful dust that sparkles”

GUILLERMO: “Glitter?”

This specific dynamic facilitates the translation of the humour style employed in the ‘mockumentary’ as it heavily relies on physical comedy and the incongruent relation of the vampires with their environment, and so the translator does not need to depend on extremely creative forms of translation outside common strategies. As stated by Marinetti (2005: 31), oral humour “tends to be (...) very reliant on performance”, and the audience is aware of the correspondence between the performance and the delivery of the joke, as well as of the established dynamics between the characters that allow the development of the comedic nature of the show.

### 3.2. Analysis of the More Frequent Techniques

After analysing the five chosen episodes, I have compiled a list of the more frequently used translation techniques in the show by selecting the phrases that could entail a difficulty for translation due to their comedic nature or cultural context.

The use of transposition seems to be very frequent throughout the five episodes in an effort to maintain the meaning of the message of the source text once translated into the target text. In most cases within the show, this technique seems to be used to create a more natural delivery of the dialogue in the Spanish version:

Source Text	Target Text
COLIN ROBINSON: Nandor, it’s time to name that tune	COLIN ROBINSON: Nandor, ponle nombre a esta canción

In this example, a literal translation would have negative repercussions in the target text as “Nandor, es momento de nombrar esta melodía” would sound to the Spanish audience as extremely unnatural and forced due to the colloquial nature of “tune” in the source system, which does not correspond to the more generic but formal “melodía (melody)”. To avoid this, the translator decided to paraphrase the message by maintaining a core phrase (“to name”) and modifying the rest of it by omitting the connotation of time (“it’s time”) as it is implied in the use of the verb in the imperative in Spanish (“ponle”) and replacing “tune (melodía)” for the more specific term of “canción (song)”.

The use of this technique seems to be abundant when the use of common and universal sentences cannot be translated literally at risk of causing a weird feeling in the audience (Treetrapetch et al., 2017: 300). Other examples where this claim can be observed are:

Source Text	Target Text
NANDOR: I don't remember this one. Is he a new one?	NANDOR: No me suena de nada, ¿es que es nuevo?
LASZLO: I was hypnotised NADJA: I used hypnotism on him LASZLO: Which I found out later	LASZLO: Me quedé hipnotizado NADJA: Usé la hipnosis con él LASZLO: Eso lo supe después
NANDOR: It's very tense	NANDOR: Cuánta tensión
NANDOR: It's not naked fight, is it? NADJA: I don't think	NANDOR: No habrá que luchar desnudo NADJA: No, creo que no

Nonetheless, in some instances we can observe that the transposition of the source text interferes in the delivery of the message, which could be considered a mistake of the translator:

Source Text	Target Text
NADJA: He's a vampire. He couldn't get an axe off a wall. NANDOR: Well, you should see it, it's like welded in there or something.	NADJA: Es un vampiro, ¿cómo va a coger un hacha de una pared? NANDOR: Si llegas a verla, está como soldada o algo, yo qué sé.

This case in particular presents both an incongruity in the translation to the Spanish version and within the coherence of the target system. In the English version, Nadja’s remark implies a direct relationship between Nando’s nature as a vampire and his physical strength (“He’s a vampire” ergo he should be able to take the axe by force), to which Nandor responds accordingly (the axe is too strongly attached to the wall, even for his vampire strength); in the Spanish version, however, the connection is established between vampirism and Nandor’s idea of getting the axe (“Es un vampiro (He’s a vampire)“, ergo he should have thought of another idea), and so this causal relationship results incoherent. The transposition of the affirmative sentence in English to an interrogative in Spanish can be considered unnecessary as the alternative of a literal translation does not hinder the clarity of the message in the target language (“Es un vampiro y no puede coger un hacha de una pared”), specially when the translator chose the literal translation technique in the next sentence, which results in an even more incoherent dialogue. We could argue that, if unavoidable, the transposition could work better by modifying the phrase as a whole by adding a negative, a verb of capability, and omitting the end of the phrase to avoid an overly large sentence: “¿cómo no va a poder coger un hacha?”.

The adaptation technique is relied on when the source text is so particularly specific with its cultural references that the meaning of the message may be at the risk of being completely lost to the target text’s audience; consequently, the translator must find references in the target culture (Spanish) that are equivalent in the source culture (American and British) (Tretrapetch et al., 2017: 299).

Source Text	Target Text
NANDOR: So deliciously macabre. Creepy paper.	NANDOR: Es deliciosamente macabro. Papel pelocho.
GUILLERMO: It’s crepe paper.	GUILLERMO: Es papel pinocho
NANDOR: Creepy paper. Oh, multipack!	NANDOR: Papel tocho. ¡Oh, paquete familiar!

In this case, the joke is set around a linguistic barrier that is difficult to convey through translation, which may signify some of the meaning being completely lost to the audience: the use of the term “Creepy paper” is ironic, as the vampire (Nandor) is looking for scary items in the store and, in his misunderstanding of the Anglophone cultural context and of the English language (as Nandor is originally from the South-Asian continent), mistakes “crepe” for “creepy”. In the Spanish version, however, we can observe that this irony is lost in translation as “papel espeluznante” has no meaning in Spanish but “papel pinocho” does, thus another phrase must be chosen, even if it does not belong to the same semantic field of “creepy”, that’s how “papel pelocho” ends up in the final version of the translation. We could argue that some kind of relation is kept with this loose translation as “pelocho” means “unkept or untidy” which could be associated with an abandoned place, a usual protagonistic setting in scary movies. However, this analysis is mainly hypothetical, and the real reason behind the chosen translation could be mere practicality as the words (“pelocho” and “pinocho”) are phonetically similar, especially considering that the next phrase in the English version (“creepy paper”) is translated as a totally different one from the previously used in Spanish (“papel tocho”).

Another especially notorious case of adaptation happens in the last episode, “Ancestry”, where we can observe an adaptation of a social and linguistic phenomenon that occurs in the English language:

Source Text	Target Text
LASZLO: It’s the jeepers man	LASZLO: Qué mal rollo

The term “jeepers” is an old-fashioned euphemistic alteration of the Christian “Jesus”, usually used as an ironic expression of surprise in American English that originates from the 1920’s minced oath *jeepers creepers* for Jesus Christ (Oxford, n.d.). This phenomenon is an outcome of religious fear in the American culture, as well as a result of British political conflicts between Catholics and Protestants. However, Spanish culture does not deem the second Commandment in the same way as the Americans do (Rivas, 2023), and thus, a literal replacement for the term is not available for translation nor is an equivalent term. Nonetheless, as we can observe in the aforementioned example, the adaptation technique is applied to the idea of ominous feeling that denotes the expression used by Laszlo, who, as a vampire, is an unholy being kept at bay through holy symbols such as crosses, holy water, and Biblical names and figures. Thus, the image of Jesus

Christ being present in the church is a source of uneasiness for Laszlo that he expresses through a minced oath whose equivalence is non-existent in the target language, but which could as well have been expressed as a simple “He gives me the creeps”, a phrase that is culturally equivalent to the final version of the translation: “Qué mal rollo”. This way, the idea of discomfort and unwillingness is maintained in the message delivered.

In the next example, we can observe a case of adaptation of a social concept:

Source Text	Target Text
WEREWOLF: We’re not all Indians, well, in fact, I’m Indian but that’s because my father’s from India.	WEREWOLF: No, no somos todos indios, de hecho, bueno, yo soy medio indio pero porque mi padre es de la India.

The idea of national identity differs in approach in both cultures. America is a fairly young country, where immigration has heavily shaped its demographic, creating a “melting pot” of different ethnicities that organised themselves in tight groups of small communities where their specific cultural traditions were kept and inherited. For some Americans, being born in an ethnic community has a stronger influence on their identity than the land they belong to, and so, having an Indian father is enough for the werewolf in the example to consider himself Indian. On the other hand, Spanish culture generally considers ethnic identity to be part of a person and not the whole of their cultural identity, thus the phrase “I’m Indian” is translated as “yo soy medio indio (half-Indian)” in the target text. The idea of heritage by parentage is kept but adapted to the cultural context of the target culture.

Formal equivalence is used in a similar manner to literal translation and transposition as its main purpose is to cause the message of the text to be understood equally in both the source and the target languages; however, this technique modifies the expressive force of the message by using an either less or stronger term that modifies its original neutrality (Tretrapetch et al., 2017: 299).

Source Text	Target Text
LASZLO: They didn't like the colour of our skin NADJA: Or the fact that we killed and ate people	LASZLO: Odiaban el color de nuestra piel NADJA: Y que matáramos y nos comiéramos a la peña

In this scenario, the same linguistic idea is conveyed in both languages, but a more expressive equivalent for “They didn’t like” is chosen in Spanish (“Odiaban”) which adds a particularly dramatic flare to Laszlo’s speech and thus, a more comedic turn to the dialogue.

This technique is usually found in scatological and hostile humour as they are traditionally considered simple and universally understood types of comedy, with the usual linguistic nuances in each language. In the show, expressions like “speak it out your butt” or “to talk the bullshit” are translated almost literally if not for a change in the implications of the delivery of the message: “butt (culo)” is changed for the more scatological term of “ojete (asshole)”, while the expletive “bullshit (mierda)” is substituted by a more neutral phrase like “una gran mentira (a big lie)”. We can observe how, in the latter case, the comedic charge is nearly completely lost in translation.

Source Text	Target Text
NADJA: Finally, someone speaks my language WEREWOMAN: Get ready to speak it out your butt, you Sense and Sensibility bitch.	NADJA: Por fin alguien habla mi idioma WEREWOMAN: Pues ve preparándote para hablarlo por el ojete, zorra victoriana.
LASZLO: She speaks the bullshit, we simply floated the idea	LASZLO: Eso es una gran mentira, solo nos planteamos la idea

In the case of modulation, although not as numerous as the previous techniques, it is highly noticeable throughout the episodes as the translated version in Spanish presents a less openly conveyed lexical or grammatical structure (Tretrapetch et al., 2017: 301). The modulation technique means a transposition of the message with the intention of maintaining its broad meaning, albeit losing the word structure.

Source Text	Target Text
GUILLERMO: Not on my watch	GUILLERMO: No lo permito

In this example, Guillermo uses a quite popular idiom in English that implies protection of others through one's own actions, a phrase that originates from battle-related language (a watch is the action of vigil in order to avoid unexpected attacks), which is difficult to find an equivalent for in Spanish, the closest version being a more literal translation (“No en mi vigilia” o “No mientras yo esté aquí”). However, in the target text, the message is paraphrased beyond recognition into a more general but natural phrase, “No lo permito (I don't allow it)”, if maybe a bit weird sounding. The Spanish version of the idiom maintains the defensive implications of the original while losing the battle-related connotations.

As we can observe, the use of modulation techniques is quite usual when translating idioms, and *What We Do in the Shadows* features an abundance of them, both from American and British English. In the case of the latter, they are commonly used by the character of Laszlo, as he himself is English and also very creative in his use of the language:

Source text	Target text
LASZLO: What in the blazes? As bold as brass!	LASZLO: ¿Será posible? Mira, dos hombres lobo tan frescos

The expression “What in the blazes?” is an old-fashioned English idiom used as “a way to give force to something you feel angry about” (Cambridge, n.d.) and could be another version of “What in the hell?” which is also an expression that refers to fire and heat. However, the version used in the target text does not maintain this reference and opts, once again, for a more broad message that expresses the same outrage and surprise (“¿Será posible?”). On the other hand, the idiom “as bold as brass (ni corto ni perezoso)” is substituted in the target text by a more colloquial phrase (“tan frescos”) that maintains the meaning of the message, instead of a more literally translated alternative.

In the TV series as a whole, we can find an overuse of literal translation, which conveys the realistic approach the show takes for its comedy, as the use of daily basis expressions is abundant and, even if in any other circumstance they could be considered boring conversation, it increases immensely the humour within normal interactions. Moreover, the use of literal translation allows the meaning of the source text to remain intact in the target text and thus deliver the same message to the target text’s audience, even at the risk of an unnatural outcome, as this specific technique relies on grammatical equivalence.

Source Text	Target Text
GUILLERMO: He awakens! Very cool, master. Very scary. NANDOR: Thank you	GUILLERMO: Se levanta! Mola mucho, amo. Da mucho miedo. NANDOR: Gracias
NANDOR: I was relentless. They would call me Nandor the Relentless. Because I would never relent.	NANDOR: Era implacable. Me llamaban Nandor el Implacable. Porque no me aplaco.
NANDOR: He’s gonna shit	NANDOR: Se va a cagar
TILDA: What is this? Is this lunch? NADJA: Yes, is lunch NANDOR: No, he is not	TILDA: ¿Qué es esto? ¿Es el almuerzo? NADJA: Sí, es el almuerzo NANDOR: No es el almuerzo

In most cases, as we can observe, the use of literal translation in common expressions usually facilitates both the translator’s job and the target language’s audience to receive the same message as in the original version, without losing the comedic nature of the interactions. However, in some instances that is not always the case:

Source text	Source text
COLIN: E. V. Emotional vampire	COLIN: E. V. Así que vampiro emocional

In this particular example from episode three, Colin encounters an antagonistic figure in his workplace by the name of Evie (“Evita” in Spanish), which he discovers is an anagram of the initials from “emotional vampire” (“E. V.”). As we can observe, in the source text the wordplay

relies on linguistic and phonetic features of the English language, which hinders the translation of the joke by finding an equivalent in the target language as “emocional vampiro” is grammatically incorrect, and thus the alternative “Eva” would not be possible. Likewise, the translator opts for resigning to the incongruity of the translation and avoid the omission of the message as a whole.

Omission and resignation as translation techniques are not usual but sometimes necessary. On one hand, the omission of some segments of the source text happens when parts of the message are unnecessary for its understanding in the target text or, in some cases, would mean confusing the target language’s audience. On the other hand, the resignation of the translator can happen in instances where the existence of proper nouns is heavily present and a very specific context is the focus of the interaction (Tretrapetch et al., 2017: 299).

Source Text	Target Text
GUILLERMO: This is a little coffin toy, I hope to be in one of these one day.	GUILLERMO: Esto es un ataúd de juguete, algún día quiero dormir en uno de estos
COLIN ROBINSON: He was peeing himself GUILLERMO: I did not pee myself, master	COLIN ROBINSON: Iba por ahí meándose encima GUILLERMO: Mentira

In the examples above, we can observe two different cases of omission: one where the segments are short and practically of non-importance (“little coffin” to “ataúd (coffin)”, the adjective “little” is omitted), and another where the whole phrase is lost in translation and, we could argue, modified through modulation as the meaning of the message (that what was previously said by Colin did not happen, ergo is a lie) is kept as a general idea in the Spanish version (“I did not pee myself” disappears and becomes “Mentira (Lies)”).

Lastly, amplification and explicitation techniques are not the most numerous throughout the episodes, but we could argue that they are one of the most notorious. Amplification is necessary for linguistic reasons when the message in the source text is culturally bound to the source language, usually used instead of adaptation. Explicitation is a technique that is used for conveying the implicit meaning of the source text’s message.

Source Text	Target Text
BARON AFANAS: Barren. B-A-R-R-E-N	BARÓN AFANÁS: Era capón, suena parecido a Barón, porque no tenía genitales

In this example, both techniques are used to deliver the message to the target text. This case is particularly challenging as the humour of the interaction relies on a wordplay between homophone words: Afanas' Baron title is fake and actually originates from the nickname 'barren' as they are both phonetically similar. The term "barren" (described by Cambridge as unable to have children) is translated to Spanish as "estéril (sterile)" or "infértil (infertile)", which do not work as paronyms of "Barón" and thus, do not communicate the comedy of the message. Due to this, the translator uses an extremely colloquial synonym in the target language ("capón") for the more formal term in the source text. "Capón (castrated cock)" is a term frequently used in the farming field referring to a chicken that has been castrated for consumption (RAE, n.d.), ergo the term meets both the terminology and the phonetic conditions necessary for an accurate translation. However, the term, even when colloquial, is unusual in the general public's jargon so an additional explanation is necessary, thus the amplification of the original phrase occurs, and, more noticeably, the explicitation of both the wordplay ("suena parecido a Barón") and the terminology ("porque no tenía genitales") instead of the spelling of the term ("B-A-R-R-E-N").

## 4. Conclusion

To conclude this dissertation, I will reassess the data that has been compiled through this analysis and draw conclusions on the suitability of the translation techniques used on the Spanish dubbed version of *What We Do in the Shadows* (*Lo que hacemos en las sombras*).

It can be observed that one of the most numerous techniques (6 cases out of 22) within the translation of the TV show is that of transposition, a strategy commonly used as a method to maintain the organic nature of the utterances within the dialogues of the characters, which is the main base of the humorous nature of the ‘mockumentary’ style chosen by the creators. However, in some instances, the use of this technique can result in a miscommunication of the message to the audience, as is the case of one of the examples presented in the analysis of the strategies, where the idea conveyed through the translation changes from a judgement of physical strength to one of lack of intelligence, at the same time that it creates an incoherence within the dialogue.

Moreover, literal translation, a strategy used in the translation of universal phrases and, in this specific case, used with the purpose of maintaining the organic flow of the dialogues between the characters, is another abundant technique (5 cases out of 22) that, even when practical and mostly uncomplicated, can present some difficulties to convey the same idea within the message once translated to the target language, as is the case with some of the examples analysed, where a problematic word order can alter the delivery of the message.

On the other hand, as a general analysis of the translation of the show displays a preference for a natural articulation of the message, there are few cases of adaptations (3 out of 22). However, these few cases are highly noticeable as, in some instances, they are detrimental to the delivery of the comedic dialogues and can be argued to hinder the organic flow of the conversations. The modulation technique suffers from the same problem, as its number is limited but extremely noticeable as it changes the message to the point of no recognition, its only purpose being prioritising the delivery of the idea behind the message.

To sum up, the main purpose of the techniques used in the translation of *What We Do in the Shadows* into Spanish is to maintain a natural and organic comedic delivery that ideally does not jeopardise the message of the source language in the target language, a requirement that is not always respected in order to prioritise the humorous dialogues characteristic of ‘mockumentaries’.

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