

# DUBBING DIALOGUES...NATURALLY. A PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO THE TRANSLATION OF TRANSITION MARKERS IN DUBBING

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## Abstract

Although research in Audiovisual Translation is said to have come of age in the past decade, there are still several key issues that have not received the scholarly attention they deserve. In the case of dubbing, the study of the naturalness of dubbed dialogue is a case in point. The aim of the present article is to analyse the use of transition markers in dubbing in order to look precisely at the naturalness of dubbed dialogue while taking into account the dubbing constraints at play. This analysis is carried out by comparing the dubbed dialogue (English-Spanish) of a popular American sitcom to the non-translated but prefabricated dialogue of a Spanish sitcom and finally to spontaneous conversation in Spanish. The results obtained in this study suggest that the analysis of discourse markers in dubbing may yield interesting conclusions not only from a translational perspective but also from the point of view of cross-cultural pragmatics.

## Resumen

Si bien la investigación en traducción audiovisual se ha consolidado en la última década, hay todavía una serie de aspectos clave que no han recibido la atención académica que cabría esperar. En el caso del doblaje, el estudio de la naturalidad de los diálogos doblados es un ejemplo de ello. El objetivo del presente artículo es analizar el uso de marcadores de transición en el doblaje para investigar precisamente la naturalidad del diálogo doblado sin olvidar las restricciones propias de este tipo de traducción. Este análisis se lleva a cabo comparando el diálogo doblado (inglés-español) de una conocida telecomedia estadounidense con el diálogo original pero prefabricado de una telecomedia española y finalmente con conversaciones espontáneas en español.

Los resultados obtenidos en este estudio indican que el análisis de los marcadores del discurso en el doblaje puede dar lugar a conclusiones interesantes no solamente desde el punto de vista de la traducción, sino también desde una perspectiva pragmática.

**Keywords:** Naturalness. Dubbed dialogue. Discourse markers. Transition markers.

**Palabras clave:** Naturalidad. Diálogo doblado. Marcadores del discurso. Marcadores de transición.

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## 1. From Audiovisual Translation (AVT) to the naturalness of dubbed dialogue: A multidisciplinary journey

Although off to a slow and shaky start in the late 1950s and early 1960s, research in Audiovisual Translation (AVT) has experienced a remarkable boom in the past fifteen years. As put by Toda (2005), gone are the days when articles on AVT used to start with an explanation of how little research had been carried out in this field. Scholars no longer need to offer detailed accounts of the terminology and publications available in this area before moving on to the focus of their study, not only because these accounts already exist but also because of the increasing difficulty of keeping up-to-date with them.

Looking back at what has been written so far, it seems that the most fruitful studies on AVT include or assume to some extent two basic notions: the independence of AVT as an autonomous discipline and its dependence on other related disciplines. Although apparently contradictory, these notions are perfectly compatible. The first one may be regarded as a starting point. As an autonomous discipline within Translation Studies, AVT is an entity in its own right, rather than a subgroup or a lesser manifestation of literary translation (Chaume 2002). When looking for models to apply to dubbing or subtitling, for instance, scholars no longer resort to extended versions of literary models (Bassnett 1980), as AVT has now its own models focusing on the specificity of this area. And here is where the second notion comes in, given that an important part of this specificity lies in its interdisciplinary nature. In this sense, if the autonomy of AVT is the starting point for research, its interdisciplinarity is the way forward (Díaz Cintas et al. 2006), as it is drawing on other disciplines that AVT finds new and fruitful avenues of research.

A case in point is the model for the analysis of audiovisual texts presented by Chaume (2004a). On the one hand, it moves away from models of textual analysis on general translation, thus highlighting the specificity of AVT as an autonomous discipline within Translation Studies. On the other, it draws on Film Studies and Communication Studies, which results in an innovative consideration of the audiovisual text as a result of the interaction of different audiovisual codes rather than as a sum of constraints.

The present article attempts to deal with the critical<sup>1</sup> and yet largely overlooked issue of the naturalness of dubbed dialogue (Bravo 2005), in this case in Spanish, taking very much into consideration the above-mentioned notions of the specificity of AVT and its interdisciplinary nature. Thus, dubbed dialogue is analysed here from the point of view of its specificity as dialogue that is written (from a source text) to be acted as if not written. On the other hand, based as it is on the premise that dubbed dialogue is to a great extent meant to emulate spontaneous conversation, this article draws on studies on conversation, especially on colloquial conversation. This pragmatic approach has benefited greatly from the recent growth in research in Spanish colloquial conversation (Briz 1998, 2002; Pons 2006), which seems to occupy within Linguistics a similar position to that of AVT within Translation Studies. In this sense, the main problem posed by this approach is the difficulty to narrow down the scope of the research, given the abundance of objects of study available in this area. In the case of the present article, the focus will be placed on discourse markers (DMs), regarded as essential for the analysis of naturalness in oral language (Gregori-Signes 1996), and more specifically on transition markers (TMs).

The aim of this study is thus to carry out a quantitative and qualitative analysis of TMs as a parameter to assess the naturalness of dialogues dubbed from English into Spanish, as well as to examine the potential pragmatic implications of the results obtained in this analysis.

The next sections are devoted to the explanation of the corpora and methodology used, the notion of naturalness, the factors to take into account when comparing real and dubbed language and finally the importance of TMs for the purpose of the present study.

## 2. Corpora and methodology

The three corpora used in this study are as follows:

- A parallel corpus consisting of transcripts of the American TV series *Friends* (ST) and their dubbed versions in Spanish (TT): 300,000 words approximately. *Friends* was one of the most successful series of all time and, in many ways, the quintessential sitcom, featuring dialogues that are designed to sound believable and spontaneous (Nye et al. 2005).

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1. Gottlieb (2006) singles it out, along with the different synchronies, as one of the two conventions at play in dubbing, and points at naturalness as the main potential loss in this type of AVT.

- A corpus made up of 26 episodes (one season) of the Spanish sitcom *Siete vidas* (Comparable corpus: CC): 150,000 words approximately. *Siete vidas* was the first sitcom produced in Spain, also very successful and clearly inspired by *Friends* in terms of characters, plots, settings, etc. (Huerta 2005). Following Baker (1995), this corpus has a great degree of comparability with the TT, as it covers a similar domain, variety of language (prefabricated colloquial conversation), time span (1997-2000) and has a similar length (135,485 words from CC and 108,960 from TT).
- The spontaneous speech section of the Spanish corpus CREA (<http://corpus.rae.es/creanet.html>), elaborated by the Real Academia Española, featuring approximately 9 million words. The conversations contained in this section of the corpus meet the criteria established by Briz (1998) to qualify as colloquial conversation.

The idea is to assess the naturalness of the TT (translated and fictional) by comparing it to the language used in CC (non translated and fictional) and especially to the language used in CREA (non-translated and non-fictional, i.e. spontaneous).<sup>2</sup> The underlying premise is that, given its intangible nature, naturalness is best tackled in as empirically a way as possible. In other words, a comparison between a ST and a TT and the native judgement of the researcher do not suffice to provide objective insights into the naturalness of the TT. It is thus necessary to resort to empirical data about the source and especially the target language, both from a practical (corpora of naturally-occurring conversations) and a theoretical (studies on colloquial conversation) point of view. The following section delves into this theory in an attempt to explain what is understood by naturalness in this study.

### 3. Orality and naturalness

When compared to subtitling –the other major type of AVT–, dubbing is often described as “the oral translation of oral language” (Hassanpour n.d.). Orality, regarded as the presence of linguistic, paralinguistic and interactive phenomena that are typical of the oral register (González Ledesma et al. 2004), is thus a central notion in the study of the naturalness of dubbed dialogue. This

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2. Given that, as will be described in section 4, the audiovisual text is regarded here as a semiotic construct comprising several signifying codes (shooting code, sound code, paralinguistic code, etc.) (Chaume 2004a), its naturalness cannot be assessed only on the basis of the linguistic code. However, this is usually the only code the translator can alter, which is why it has been chosen as the focus of this article.

explains the importance of pragmatics in this article, given that, as highlighted by Payrató (2003: 273; my translation), “orality cannot be analysed (at least globally) without the help and the tools of pragmatics”, both areas constituting “a marriage of convenience which will probably last for many years”.

The absence of orality is often highlighted as one of the biggest problems of dubbed dialogue. Fuentes Luque (2005), for instance, explains that this is the case for the Spanish language used in dubbing, which all too often distorts source texts by adding written features that have little to do with colloquial conversation. However, although the addition of such features may well provide dubbed dialogue with an artificial flavour, the same holds true for the addition of other features that do not necessarily have to be written, such as those of formal conversation. Orality is a wide notion that comprises different types of speech and different types of conversation, not all of which may be appropriate for a specific dubbed dialogue such as the one featuring in the TT to be analysed here.

It is for this reason that naturalness rather than orality has been chosen as the mainstay of this study. Naturalness is regarded here as a synonym of idiomaticity, albeit not in the traditional sense of “given to or marked by the use of idioms” (Onions 1964: 952). Instead, the notion of idiomaticity called upon here refers to the use of language that “sounds natural to native speakers of that language” (Sinclair 1995: 833). Rather than focusing on what is correct or grammatically possible, naturalness/idiomaticity refers in this case to what is conventional among the many grammatically possible choices (Warren 2004: 5). This point is sometimes made in analyses of the Spanish dubbing language, which often features expressions that are “intelligible and correct” but “uncommon in daily life” (Palencia Villa 2002: 66). Thus, drawing on Pawley and Syder (1983) and especially on Warren (2004: 1), naturalness is defined here as the nativelike selection of expression in a given context, which involves “knowing which particular combinations are conventional in a language community although other combinations are conceivable”.

The reference to a *given context* is very important, as it is precisely what enables this notion of naturalness to narrow down the wide scope covered by the concept of orality. All three corpora analysed in this study belong to the same register (colloquial) and type of discourse (conversation).<sup>3</sup> According to Briz (1998), they thus feature (or should feature) exchanges that are oral, dialogic, immediate, cooperative and dynamic. Their discourse is informal,

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3. Not all scenes in the TT and CC can be classified as featuring colloquial conversation, but only scenes featuring colloquial conversation have been analysed for this study.

it has an interpersonal focus and presents a relation of social and functional equality (- power, + solidarity) and shared knowledge (proximity), with a familiar setting or interaction and a non-specialised theme.

From a theoretical point of view, this is what the notion of naturalness applied to the TT comprises. In other words, this is what a natural TT is expected to comply with. From a more practical point of view, CREA is the yardstick against which the naturalness of the TT is to be measured. However, the TT and even the script of the Spanish sitcom (CC) have a series of characteristics that separate them from spontaneous colloquial conversation and thus from CREA, such as the fact that they are planned and feature pre-determined turn-taking. This does not invalidate the present study, but indicates that a number of factors, mostly to do with the specificity of dubbed dialogue, need to be taken into account before the comparison of the corpora is carried out.

#### 4. The specificity of dubbed dialogue<sup>4</sup>

The first characteristic feature of dubbed dialogue is that it comes from a ST that is not spontaneous. The prefabricated nature of the ST dialogue may thus have an impact on the naturalness of dubbed dialogue. According to Gregory and Carroll (1978: 42), the ST dialogue is “written to be spoken as if not written”. However, this definition cannot account for a sitcom script such as that of *Friends*, whose elaboration process starts weeks before the dialogue is written. As a matter of fact, the dialogue is introduced in a fixed mould or straightjacket which has already determined the number of characters and plots involved in an episode, the development of those plots and even the duration of every conversation. Every episode in *Friends* features at least six main characters and three plots made up of five or six scenes each (Kelly 2003). Since these plots are interwoven over a total duration of 21 or 22 minutes, every episode is usually made up of some 15 or 18 scenes lasting between 1 and 2 minutes. The dialogue is introduced once the structure has been laid out, and may thus be described as planned to be written and to eventually be acted as if not written or planned. Added to this are the conventions of fictional dialogue in general, whether for sitcoms or not, such as its polyfunctionality (Pfister 2001). This refers to the fact that fictional dialogue is addressed to both the characters (diegetic level) and the audience (extradiegetic level), and especially to the fact that “every linguistic unit – including phenomena of dysfluency and error” must fulfil a function in the

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4. For a more detailed account of these features, see Romero Fresco (2009a) and Romero Fresco (2009b).

“overall communicative goal of the dramatic dialogue” (Baumgarten 2005: 86). The dialogue still has to sound natural and spontaneous (Berger 1990), but this is a carefully planned spontaneity. The ST can thus be said to feature straightjacketed dialogue that is intended to sound natural.

As a translation of the ST, the TT also has the objective of sounding natural within such straightjacket, but its naturalness or lack thereof is also affected by other factors, not least the semiotic constraints posed by dubbing. The analysis of the dubbed version of *Friends* included here will take these constraints into consideration by referring to the model for the analysis of audiovisual texts devised by Chaume (2004a). As described in section 1, this model focuses on the specificity of AVT, namely the interaction of audiovisual codes that may bring about instances of constraints but also leeway, and accounts for all the synchronies at play in dubbing. Chaume explains that in Spain the norm is that lip-synchrony, including the translation of labial and bilabial sounds, is only taken into consideration in close-ups. In the rest of the cases, only isochrony (similar length of ST and TT utterances) and kinetic synchrony (synchrony between utterances and movements or gestures) apply.

Finally, one more aspect that determines the specificity of dubbed dialogue in Spanish is its particular prefabricated orality. Although most sitcom scripts, whether translated or not, feature prefabricated dialogue, dubbed dialogue in Spanish has its own conventions, determined both by professional practice and the few guidelines available on the subject. These conventions are described in the linguistic code of Chaume’s model (2004a: 167 et seq.) and do not necessarily have to be constraints. With regard to DMs, for instance, translators are advised to resort to these units so as to produce natural-sounding dialogue (Chaume 2007).

Having specified the main differences between the corpora, especially between the TT and CREA, a comparison can be attempted. However, it is important first of all to describe the DMs analysed in this study, with special attention to their importance and relevance in fictional and naturally-occurring corpora.

## 5. Transition markers in spontaneous and fictional dialogue

A common feature of written and spoken discourse is the need to mark continuity and discontinuity, that is, the need to, for example, shift a topic or start a new part of the discourse (Bestgen 1998). However, whereas writing often allows much editing and the use of resources such as punctuation, spoken discourse does not (Miller & Weinert 1998). Although there are other means available, such as paralinguistic devices, speakers often resort to DMs



to segment their discourse (Horne et al. 1999). Among the many DMs that have been identified and studied in the literature, TMs are particularly useful for this purpose. They are sometimes labeled topic changers (Aijmer 2002) or topic shift markers (Zitzen 2004). They will, however, be referred to here as transition markers (Nakano & Negishi 2004; Spitz 2005) because, apart from marking changing of topic, they also enable speakers to indicate the boundaries of the conversation, signalling the beginning of a new phase:

*Now then*, what should we do next? (Schiffrin 1987: 230)

According to Schiffrin (ibid.), TMs indicate “a speaker’s progression through discourse time, by displaying attention to an upcoming idea, unit, orientation and/or participation framework.” Schiffrin divides DMs in general into two groups –those focusing on prior information and those focusing on upcoming information. Although many markers can fulfil both roles, TMs always focus on upcoming information. As will be shown later on, this feature is especially relevant to the present study.

From a theoretical point of view, TMs are critical for researchers concerned with the key question of the study of units of talk (Bestgen 1998), as they provide valuable clues in this regard (Schiffrin 1987: 31). From a practical point of view, these markers facilitate discourse organisation for the speaker and comprehension for the hearer (Lam 2006). This last point is particularly relevant to the study of fictional conversation. As explained in section 4, fictional characters do not just address other characters, but also the viewers, who become addressees. It has also been mentioned that, in the case of *Friends*, every episode is made up of approximately 15 scenes lasting between 1 and 2 minutes. Each one of these scenes usually features a different conversation, and many of the 15-18 conversations featuring in an episode are already underway when the audience starts watching them. TMs that are commonly used in colloquial conversation, such as *okay* (Beach 1993), *alright* (Filipi & Wales 2003), *so* (Mariano 2002) and *now* (Schiffrin 1987), are often used at the beginning of these scenes to enable viewers to get their bearings before a new topic is introduced. The importance of this function for the viewers’ comprehension is illustrated by the fact that these transitions are sometimes also marked visually. In *Friends*, this can be with the shot of a city street or the camera panning up the side of a building where an event (or conversation) is about to occur (Kelly 2003).

After the description of the main characteristics of TMs and their importance in both spontaneous and fictional conversation, the next section focuses on the Spanish TMs analysed in this article.

## 6. The two transition markers (*muy bien* and *bueno*)

(*Muy bien* and (*bueno*) are common TMs used in Spanish conversation and are usually described by comparison or opposition to each other.<sup>5</sup> According to Martín and Portolés (1999), they are both framing, metadiscourse devices used to indicate a change in topic as well as progression or the beginning of a new stage in the conversation. Most of the general characteristics of TMs outlined above apply to these two DMs. However, there are several differences between them. First of all, *bien* is less lexicalised than *bueno*, as it can be modified into *muy bien* (Martín & Portolés 1999). Besides, *bien* lacks the expressive value of *bueno* and is more neutral, less friendly and often used by speakers who not only take part in a conversation, but actually manage it (Martín & Portolés 1999). The use of this TM is determined by (a) the social role of the speaker and (b) by his/her attitude, and is normally used by authoritative speakers who want to appear as cold and detached (Chaume 2004c).

According to de Fina (1997), *bien* is especially recurrent in discourse characterised by specific time boundaries, social expectations, institutional needs, goal orientations and especially by a “fundamental asymmetry between participants determined by the institutional responsibility of the teacher” (de Fina 1997: 339). De Fina gives the example of what is often referred to as classroom discourse (Sinclair & Coulthard 1975, Van Lier 1988, Cazden 1988). In this context, teachers use *bien* to signal an upcoming change in their discourse and very often the introduction of a new phase or activity in the class. The use of *bien* highlights the centrality of the teacher’s role and cannot be found in students’ talk. After a brief period of time in which the teacher and the students in the data studied by de Fina engage in personal, informal conversation, thus blurring the social boundaries, the teacher quickly resorts to *bien* to regain her authoritative position. In this sense, de Fina points out that “it is the type of relationships established between participants that seems to crucially determine the kind of functions that (*muy bien*) can have in spoken Spanish” (1997: 352).

In sum, (*muy bien*) does not occur in colloquial settings (Fuentes Rodríguez 1993), but in more formal and institutionalised exchanges such as interviews, therapeutic sessions or classroom discourse, that is to say, in situations where one of the participants is responsible for the management of the conversation (de Fina 1997). In contrast, *bueno* is commonly used in

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5. It should be noted that (*muy bien*) and *bueno* may also occur in colloquial conversation as DMs with other functions, such as that of markers of agreement (Martín & Portolés 1999).

colloquial conversation (Gregori-Signes 1996), mainly to signal transition. When used in other contexts, e.g. by teachers or doctors in institutional talk, it is normally to attenuate or soften up an utterance (Martín & Portolés 1999).

### 7. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the two TMs (*muy bien* and *bueno*)<sup>6</sup>

TM	TT	CC	CREA
<i>Bueno</i>	89	141	74.2
( <i>Muy bien</i> )	84.3	5.9	1.6
<b>Total</b>	173.3	146.9	75.8

Table 1: Occurrences of the TMs *bueno* and (*muy bien*) in the three corpora  
Occurrences per 100.000

TM	TT	CC	CREA
<i>Bueno</i>	51.6%	96.9%	99.6%
( <i>Muy bien</i> )	48.4%	3.1%	0.4%

Table 2: Preference for a formal (*[muy] bien*) or colloquial (*bueno*) TM in the three corpora

Table 1 shows the occurrences of (*muy bien*) and *bueno* in the three different corpora under study: the dubbed translation of *Friends* (TT), the original Spanish sitcom (CC) and the corpus of spontaneous colloquial conversation (CREA). Since these corpora have different sizes, a log-likelihood test was performed to check the significance of the results.<sup>7</sup> However, for the sake of brevity, it will only be mentioned when considered particularly relevant.

A first tentative look at the results shows, first of all, an overall lower occurrence of TMs in CREA than in CC and especially than in the TT. This may be explained by the fictional nature of the latter two corpora. As explained in the case of *Friends*, many of the conversations featuring in a sitcom episode

6. Given that the aim of this study is to analyse the naturalness of the TT, the focus will be placed initially on the Spanish markers, although both the ST units triggering them and the dubbing constraints will be taken into consideration.

7. The log-likelihood test is one of several methods available to ascertain whether the differences found between two corpora of different sizes are significant or not. If the result of the log-likelihood test is greater than 6.63, the probability of the result – i.e. the difference between the two corpora – happening by chance is less than 1%. A description of this test and a log-likelihood calculator can be found on the University of Lancaster website (<http://ucel.lancs.ac.uk/llwizard.html>)

do not start with a greeting or an introduction, but with a marker (visual, verbal or both) indicating transition between scenes. It thus follows that TMs are likely to occur more often here than in spontaneous conversation. Another aspect that stands out is the high occurrence of (*muy*) *bien* in the TT. Whereas both CC and CREA clearly opt for *bueno*, the dubbed script of *Friends* features an almost even distribution of (*muy*) *bien* and *bueno* (see table 2). This mismatch between translated and non-translated corpora could be due to some translational factor, such as the ST units triggering (*muy*) *bien* or dubbing constraints. To clarify this point and ascertain what effect the (over)use of this marker may have on the TT, a qualitative analysis must be carried out to see how it is used and what ST units it translates.

### 7.1. *Bueno*

ST unit	Times
So	28
Okay	27
Well	21
Alright	7
∅	4
Okay so	2
Now	2
Listen	2
Alright well	1
Right	1
Look	1
You know what	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>97</b>

Table 3: ST units triggering the TM *bueno* in the TT

The qualitative analysis of the corpora shows what seems to be a natural use of the TM *bueno* in the TT. It is used to translate English TMs that are common in colloquial conversation –especially *so*, *okay*, *well* and *alright*– and it fulfils the same function as in CC or CREA, as illustrated in examples 1-6 below. Thus, *bueno* is mainly used to change the topic and move on to a new stage in the conversation. Accordingly, it not only appears in the middle of a conversation (ex. 1 and 2), but also at the beginning, introducing the first topic (ex. 3 and 4), or at the end, introducing the farewell (ex. 5 and 6).

(Ex. 1) (*Friends*: episode 9 – season 1)

Rachel: I loved the moment when you first saw the giant dog shadow all over the park.

Phoebe: Yeah, but did they have to shoot him down? I mean, that was just mean.

Monica: **OK**, right about now the turkey should be crispy on the outside, juicy on the inside. Why are we standing here?

Rachel: Me ha impresionado ver la sombra de ese perro gigante sobre el parque.

Phoebe: Sí, pero, ¿era necesario dispararle? Ha sido muy cruel.

Monica: **Bueno**, el pavo ya debería estar doradito por fuera y jugoso por dentro. ¿Qué hacemos aquí?

(Ex. 2) (CREA)

Pero una vez que estás, o sea, que estáis juntos y en casa, pues siete no parecen tantos... **Bueno**, en fin, dejémonos de rollos y os cuento un poco, ¿no?

*Back translation*: 'But once you are, I mean, you all are at home together, then seven is not that many... Anyway, enough rambling and let me tell you, okay?'

(Ex. 3) (*Friends*: episode 14 – season 1)

Chandler: So...

Janice: Just us.

Chandler: **Bueno**...

Janice: Al fin solos.

(Ex. 4) (CREA)

*Hola. Aquí, Pepe. ¿Qué tal?*

*¡Hola! Bueno, ¿qué nos has traído?*

'Hi. Pepe here. How are you?

Hi! So, what have you brought us?'

(Ex. 5) (*Friends*: episode 9 – season 1)

Ross: **Well**, I'm off to Carol's.

Ross: **Bueno**, me voy a casa de Carol.

(Ex. 6) (*Siete vidas*: episode 8)

P: **Bueno**, y ahora si me disculpáis, me gustaría estar solo.

'And now if you'll excuse me, I'd like to be alone'.

On other occasions, as has already been mentioned, *bueno* is used both in CC and the TT as a device to help viewers get their bearings as they are introduced to a conversation that is already underway. In the case of (ex. 7), for example, the transition is, in keeping with the polysemiotic nature of a sitcom, three-fold: the TM *bueno* (acoustic and verbal), the preceding shot that shows

the side of the building in which the conversation will be taking place (visual, non verbal) and a short snippet of transitional music (acoustic, non verbal):

(Ex. 7) (*Friends*: episode 16 – season 1)

[New scene: Ross, Rachel, Chandler and Phoebe are talking while sharing a bowl of popcorn]

Chandler: **Well**, I ended up telling her everything.

Rachel: Oh, how'd she take it?

Chandler: **Bueno**, al final se lo he dicho todo.

Rachel: ¿Y cómo se lo ha tomado?

Although cases such as (ex. 7) are much more common in CC and the TT than in CREA, this fictional use of *bueno* is not problematic in terms of naturalness, as *bueno* is the most recurrent TM in colloquial Spanish conversation.

Finally, as regards dubbing constraints, the TT under study here only features four close-ups, none of which coincide with the use of a TM. The only synchrony that has a real impact on the translation is thus isochrony, i.e. the similar length of ST and TT utterances, give or take one or two syllables. This means that *bueno* can be used to translate all of the most common ST TMs (*so, okay, well, alright, right...*) and explains why on four occasions this Spanish marker has been added without being triggered by any ST unit (Ø). In example 8, the limited leeway that characterises isochrony allows the addition of a two-syllable TM such as *bueno*, which enables TT Joey to make clear that he is going to finish his monologue (unlike ST Joey, who does not resort to any TM):

(Ex. 8) (*Friends*: episode 1 – season 4)

Joey: Oh-oh! And then Ross's new girlfriend, Bonnie, shows up and Rachel convinced her to shave her head. And then Ross and Rachel kiss, and now Ross has to choose between Rachel and the bald girl **and...I don't know** what happened there either. Y'know what? Hold on, let me go get Chandler.

Joey: ¡Ah! Y luego apareció la nueva novia de Ross, Bonnie, y Rachel la convenció de que se afeitara la cabeza. Y después Ros y Rachel se besaron, y ahora Ross tiene que elegir entre Rachel y la chica calva y... **Bueno**, pues tampoco sé lo que ha pasado. ¿Sabéis qué? Esperad, voy a ver lo que ha pasado.

## 7.2. (*Muy*) *bien*

As explained in section 6, (*muy*) *bien* is usually regarded as a formal TM. While it is commonly found in institutionalised talk, it does not tend to occur in everyday conversation. This explains its low occurrence in both CC and CREA but not its frequency of use in the TT, where it translates different English TMs:

ST unit	Times
Okay	17
So	11
Well	8
Alright	4
∅	2
Fine	2
Go	1
Good	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>

Table 4: ST units triggering the TM *bien* in the TT

ST unit	Times
Alright	44
Alrighty	1
Okay	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>

Table 5: ST units triggering the TM *muy bien* in the TT

It must be noted that in English, *okay*, *alright* and *alrighty*, which constitute more than 70% of the ST units triggering (*muy*) *bien* (see tables 3 and 4), are commonly used in colloquial conversation as response markers but also as TMs (Levinson 1983; Leech & Weisser 2003). Things are different in Spanish: (*muy*) *bien* maybe used as a response marker in everyday conversation, but it does not feature as a TM.

A possible explanation for its use in the dubbed script as a TM may thus be that it is a direct translation from these ST TMs: the translator may simply have replaced them for (*muy*) *bien* without considering that (*muy*) *bien* may have different functions as a DM in Spanish, with different frequencies of use in different registers.

As shown in example 9, Ross is not agreeing with anything or anybody when he says *muy bien*, *adiós*. *Muy bien* is not a response marker here, but a TM used to initiate the closing of the conversation. The main problem posed by the use of *muy bien* with regard to the naturalness of the dubbed script is that it violates some of the key features of the colloquial register as described by Briz (1998) (see section 3). In a clearly informal situation, Ross suddenly addresses his close friends as if he was a stranger conducting an interview, thus creating a certain distance and a relation of social and functional

inequality (+ power, - solidarity) that is in sharp contrast with the colloquial nature of the ST (*alrighty*):

(Ex. 9) (Friends: episode 22 – season 1)

Ross: André should be there in like 45 minutes. **Alrighty**, bye bye.

Ross: André llegará allí dentro de 45 minutos. **Muy bien**, adiós.

This change in the social and functional relation between the participants in the TT may carry important implications from the point of view of the viewers' perception. Given that, as has already been mentioned, the dialogue is addressed both to the characters (hearers) and the viewers (overhearers), the distance introduced by the use of (*muy*) *bien* between the on-screen characters may also apply to the viewers. In other words, the viewers are also being addressed in a relation of social and functional inequality (+ power, - solidarity), even though the setting is clearly colloquial, which could make it difficult for them to project themselves inside the fiction and “vicariously share the experience of the characters” (Baumgarten 2005: 100). As put by Brown and Yule (1983: 21-22), “it is quite hard to feel friendly towards someone who addresses you as if you were an audience at a public meeting”.

In this sense, it is important to highlight that this sharp contrast does not only occur between the ST and the TT, but also between what the dubbing viewers can hear and what they can see. In example 10, for instance, the scene shows two characters with a great deal of proximity and shared knowledge (Chandler and Monica, best friends and also lovers) talking about an intimate topic (their first sexual encounter) in a very familiar setting (their bed). Yet, Chandler starts his intervention with the formal TM *bien*:

(Ex. 10) (Friends: episode 24 – season 4)

Chandler: **So**, uh, how are you? How you... how you... You okay?

Chandler: **Bien**, ¿cómo estás? Dime, dime: ¿estás bien?

Audiovisual constraints cannot account for the use of (*muy*) *bien* as a TM in the TT. As only isochrony (same length of ST and TT utterances) applies, the ST units triggering these Spanish markers (*okay, so, well, alright...*) could have been translated (and have been translated, in many cases) as *bueno*, for example.

In fact, the translator appears to opt for (*muy*) *bien* even in situations in which the interaction of the audiovisual codes provides ample leeway for translation. A case in point is example 11. Stuck in the vestibule of a bank with an attractive woman, Chandler is thinking about what his next move could be. We can hear his thoughts, but he never actually says anything. According to Chaume's model (2004a), this is a clear example of a diegetic voice off in the sound placement code which allows total freedom in terms of



translation. Not even isochrony needs to be respected, as long as Chandler's thoughts are heard before the scene ends. Even so, the dubbing translator still opts for *muy bien* as a transition marker:

(Ex.11) (*Friends*: episode 7 – season 1)

Chandler: **Alright**, okay, what next?

Chandler: **Muy bien**, ¿y ahora qué?

### 7.3. Two TT TMs that are not TMs: *está bien* and *de acuerdo*

Apart from the almost even distribution between *bueno* and (*muy*) *bien*, the qualitative analysis of the dubbed script reveals another mismatch with the non-translated corpora –the use of *está bien* and *de acuerdo* to translate ST TMs:

TM	TT	CC	CREA
<i>De acuerdo</i>	15.6	0	0
<i>Está bien</i>	37.5	0	0

Table 6: Occurrences of *de acuerdo* and *está bien* as TMs in the three corpora  
Occurrences per 100.000

ST unit	Times
Alright	19
Okay	21
Uh	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>

Table 7: ST units triggering *está bien* as a TM in the TT

ST unit	Times
Alright	9
Okay	7
∅	1
Great	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>

Table 8: ST units triggering *de acuerdo* as a TM in the TT

In the relevant literature, both markers are regarded as markers of agreement, but never as TMs. Camacho Adarve (2005) classifies *de acuerdo* as a “marcador interactivo de acuerdo” (*interactive marker of agreement*) and Llorente Maldonado de Guevara (1980) and Gómez Capuz (2001) regard *está bien* as a natural translation for *alright* when signalling agreement. Apart from having

a very different pragmatic function to TMs, these markers also differ from TMs in the key issue of their focus on the text (see section 5). As markers of agreement, *de acuerdo* and *está bien* introduce an anaphoric reference, that is, they point backward in the text (Schiffrin 1987). In the TT, however, they are used as TMs and are thus expected to point forward in the text to upcoming information (cataphoric reference).

In example 12, the repeated use of *está bien* by the nurse in the TT suggests that she is agreeing with something that has been said or asked before. However, this could not be further from her original intention, as she is using a TM (*alright* in the ST) to put an end to the chaos caused by the presence of all five friends of Ross' in the theatre as his ex-wife is about to give birth:

(Ex. 12) (*Friends*: episode 23 – season 1)

Nurse: **Alright, alright, alright**, there's a few too many people in this room, and there's about to be one more, so anybody who's not an ex-husband or a lesbian life partner...out you go!

Enfermera: **Está bien, está bien**. Ya hay demasiada gente en esta habitación y ahora va a nacer uno más, así que todo el que no sea un ex-marido o una pareja sentimental lesbiana... ¡piérdanse!

As in the case of (*my*) *bien*, the use of *está bien* and *de acuerdo* in the TT may be regarded as a calque of the English TMs *alright* and *okay*, both of which can act as markers of agreement and TMs. This seems to be a more plausible explanation than the influence of dubbing constraints, which, once again, do not seem to justify the use of these markers. Indeed, cases like example 13, taken from the same scene shown in example 11 featuring Chandler's thoughts, show that the translator decides to use *de acuerdo* and *está bien* as TMs even when there is absolute freedom to use any other unit:

(Ex.13) (*Friends*: episode 7 – season 1)

Chandler: **Alright, alright, alright**. It's been fourteen and a half minutes and you still have not said one word. Oh, God, do something. Just make contact, smile!

Chandler: **De acuerdo, está bien, está bien**. Han pasado catorce minutos y medio y aún no le has dicho ni una sola palabra. Haz algo... contacta con ella... ¡sonríe!

## 8. Conclusions

The present article suggests that the essential and yet largely neglected area of naturalness in dubbed dialogue may be studied empirically and that this study may yield interesting results both from a translational and a pragmatic point of view. The approach adopted here is based on two basic notions: the

independence of AVT as a discipline in its own right and its inherent multidisciplinary nature.

The first notion helps to take into consideration the specificity of AVT, in this case the study of dubbed dialogues and how they may be affected by the interaction of the different audiovisual codes. It is paramount to recognise and characterise dubbed dialogue as what it is before any comparison with other types of dialogue can be attempted.

As for the multidisciplinary nature of AVT, it is an indicator of where the “way forward” (Díaz Cintas 2006) lies for research in this field, which, in the case of the present article, may be the field of pragmatics. The study of the naturalness of dubbed dialogue has traditionally been regarded as a slippery subject prone to impressionistic assessments, often based merely on the comparison of a ST and a TT guided by the native judgement of the researcher. In this sense, the contribution from studies on colloquial conversation and the comparison between dubbed and spontaneous dialogue (with non translated, fictional dialogue as an intermediate step) give this study a more objective basis.

Finally, a key part of this objective basis is the notion of *naturalness* around which the present article revolves. It is argued that the commonly used concept of *orality* does not do full justice to the complexity of oral discourse, whereas *naturalness*, as defined here (*nativelike selection of expression in a given context*), allows the analysis of the corpora on the basis of the specific register and type of discourse they feature, in this case colloquial conversation.

The analysis of the data in this study along these lines has produced significant findings. The first one is the higher occurrence of TMs in both sitcoms (CC and TT) than in spontaneous conversation (CREA). This is explained by the fact that sitcoms seem to use TMs as fictional tools to orientate viewers on the many occasions in which they are faced with conversations that are supposed to be already underway.

Of the two Spanish markers analysed here, *bueno* seems to pose no problems in terms of naturalness, as its use in the TT matches what is described in the relevant literature and what is shown in both CC and CREA. The same does not hold true for (*mu*y) *bien*, whose use in the TT may be regarded as unnatural. Commonly found in real-life formal conversations, (*mu*y) *bien* is used in the TT almost as often as *bueno*, whereas it is virtually absent from both CC and CREA.

It is suggested that this use of (*mu*y) *bien* has a detrimental effect on the naturalness of the dubbed script, as it is in sharp contrast with some of the key features of colloquial register and creates a considerable distance between

the characters on the screen. This yields valuable insight from a pragmatic point of view, especially regarding the viewers' perception. On the one hand, the characters in the dubbed script suddenly seem to address each other in a cold and detached way, as if they were strangers instead of close friends, which is not coherent with the exchanges they have had before or with what the TT viewers can see on the screen. Furthermore, as overhearers, the viewers are also being addressed in a relation of social and functional inequality (+ power, - solidarity) in what otherwise is a clearly colloquial setting, which could make it difficult for them to share the experience of the characters.

An even more serious problem in terms of naturalness is the use of *de acuerdo* and *está bien* as TMs in the dubbed script. Used in spontaneous exchanges as markers of agreement, *de acuerdo* and *está bien* introduce an anaphoric reference, that is, they refer to something that has already been said. In the TT they are used as TMs, pointing to something that is going to be said (cataphoric reference), thus becoming confusing and, in general, unnatural.

As for the role played by dubbing constraints in this lack of naturalness found in the TT, the qualitative analysis carried out in this study suggests that, although existent, these constraints allow the use of natural TMs. The interaction of the different audiovisual codes gives the translator a certain leeway, yet s/he still chooses TMs that are not common in spontaneous colloquial conversation. A possible explanation for the use of the markers of agreement (*muy*) *bien*, *de acuerdo* and *está bien* as TMs in the dubbed script is that they are calques of *okay*, *alright* and *right*, which, unlike the Spanish DMs, can function both as markers of agreement and TMs in colloquial conversation in English. However, this explanation does not account for the occurrence of (*muy*) *bien*, *de acuerdo* and *está bien* to translate units such as *so* or *great*, which cannot be described as markers of agreement.

Future research could focus not only on studying other discourse markers<sup>8</sup> and units of colloquial conversation to confirm or refute the results obtained here, but also on finding out more about the causes of the lack of naturalness detected in dubbed dialogue thus far. It would also be interesting to gain further insight into why even if the Spanish dubbing language has been described (Gómez Capuz 2001; Duro 2001) and is still being described (Baños Piñeiro 2007) as somewhat unnatural, dubbing viewers have such a positive opinion about dubbing in their country, so much so that they seem to even forget that they are watching dubbed films (Palencia Villa 2002). Do

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8. An example of this would be *vale* (Gómez Capuz 2001; Romero-Fresco 2008), which fulfills many of the functions described in this article.

they not notice this lack of naturalness or is it rather that they do not mind it? Although a possible explanation may lie in the suspension of linguistic disbelief (Romero Fresco 2009a), this question calls for further research in the form of both reception studies and pragmatic research with a view to examining the potential cross-cultural implications of this lack of naturalness.

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