

# **SUBTITLING AND DUBBING SONGS IN MUSICAL FILMS**

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## ***Abstract***

*Audiovisual translation (AVT) is a type of translation subjected to numerous constraints. Until now, many studies have been carried out about subtitling and dubbing in films. In musical films, which have been less studied, language transfer is mainly made through songs and, due to their characteristics, their translation is additionally constrained. This article provides some insights into some elements that make translation of songs for dubbing and subtitling a complex task using songs from the musical film My Fair Lady.*

## ***Keywords***

*Subtitling, Dubbing, Musicals, Translation, My Fair Lady.*

## **Resumen**

La traducción audiovisual (AVT) es un campo de la traducción sujeto a numerosos condicionantes. Hasta la fecha se han desarrollado múltiples estudios sobre la subtitulación y el doblaje de películas. En los musicales, menos estudiados, la transferencia lingüística recae en gran medida en las canciones y, por sus características, su traducción está sujeta a limitaciones adicionales. El presente artículo proporciona un análisis sobre algunos elementos que hacen de la traducción de las canciones para subtitular y doblar musicales una labor compleja, usando como ejemplo el musical *My Fair Lady*.

## **Palabras clave**

Subtitulación, doblaje, musicales, traducción.



## Introduction

The term 'subtitling' is used to refer to an activity which consists of adding printed words on a foreign film to translate the dialogue, or any other linguistic element, bearing in mind the variables the translation is subject to. Dubbing consists of replacing the original soundtrack of a film by another soundtrack on which the translation of the original version has been recorded, and it is also subjected to extra-linguistic variables

Subtitles came into existence due to the need to convey the linguistic content of the film in a foreign language. It was decided to insert titles on the screen. In the 1930s, Jacob Karol invented a recording system by which it was possible to synchronize the movement of the lips of an actor in the film with the voice in another language of another actor who was in the recording studio. Ever since, we have witnessed a development of the subtitling and dubbing industry. Tendencies in the different countries towards one or the other modality differ. The reasons why a country is more pro-dubbing or favors subtitling have been of interest for many researches<sup>1</sup>. With the advent of technological progress the film industry has also developed and the wider

use of DVDs as one of the technological devices has benefited subtitling and dubbing; it is possible to watch films in the original version, with subtitles or dubbed in different languages.

Dubbing and subtitling are practices which make part of the generic term 'audiovisual translation' (AVT). There is not an agreement on the exact number of AVT modalities. AVT, apart from dubbing and subtitling, also encompasses many other practices like voice-over or subtitling. Ana Isabel Fernandez and Gustavo Mendiluce (2005) have raised information about the multiple opinions on the number of practices which are included in AVT. Due to the explosion of technology development the list will probably continue being not delimited. For the purpose of this article, we will only refer to subtitling and dubbing.

In subtitling, apart from translating the dialogue and overcoming the linguistic problems of translation when dealing only with written texts, the translation must be adjusted to the space provided for the subtitle and to the time the speakers are on the screen. On the other hand, when dubbing a film the translation must also be adapted to the time the original statement lasts and there must

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the scholars who have examined this issue in depth are Josephine Dries (1995) and Georg-Michael Luyken et al (1991).

be a synchronization of the actor's lips to the translated speech. In the translation for both dubbing and subtitling coherence between image and sound must be maintained. Several constraints, thus, have to be taken into account in both cases.

Christopher Titford (1982, p. 113-116) first used the term 'constrained translation' when he referred to subtitling. Soon after, Roberto Mayoral, Dorothy Kelly and Natividad Gallardo (1988) made wider use of this term by applying it to screen translation<sup>2</sup>. Constrained translation refers to limitations imposed on the translation which prevent us from translating freely, as opposed to translating isolated written prose. These limitations include restricted space and time in the case of subtitling (adapting the translation to the time the original utterance lasts) and synchronizing the movements of bilabial consonants and open vowels in the original language with those of the dubbing language.

In the case of musical films the elements that constraint the translation are particularly evident. This type of films cannot be considered as conventional ones. In musical films, a large part of the language contents lies in songs which combine music with a linguistic element (the lyrics). Some of the decisions

made when transferring songs between two languages in musical films are similar to those taken when translating dialogues in films. However, the number of elements present in the songs of musical films, which are intrinsic to them, is an aspect that should not be overlooked. These elements shape the choices that have to be made in the process of translating. Several scholars have thoroughly examined language transfer in films in general. Although some have considered how songs in films are or should be approached when translating (Jorge Díaz Cintas, 2003, p. 272-276; Ella Shohat & Robert Stam, 1985, p. 37; and Jan Ivarsson & Mary Carroll, 1998, p. 158), there is a lack of in-depth research into the translation of songs in musical films in the literature available.

The objective of this article is to contribute to the research by examining and assessing a non-exhaustive list of constraints in songs from the musical film *My Fair Lady* (1964) and their translations into Spanish for subtitling and dubbing.

## **1. Song analysis**

**W**e have identified some constraining elements for the translation of the songs from the musical film *My Fair*

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<sup>2</sup> Screen translation is a broader term which included localization. Lately multimedia translation is gaining ground. See Mayoral [http://www.ugr.es/~rasensio/docs/TAV\\_Sevilla.pdf](http://www.ugr.es/~rasensio/docs/TAV_Sevilla.pdf)

Lady for dubbing and subtitling and we have grouped them into three categories: repetitions (rhyme and intratextual sentences), equivalences (accents and distinctive phonetic characteristics, universal referents and cultural references and stereotypes) and technical aspects (presentation rules for subtitling and image-sound coherence for dubbing).

## **2. Repetitions**

### **2.1 Repetition of sounds: Rhyme**

Rhyme is one of the best-known features of songs, although it is not always as evident as it is in written poetry. Getting lines to rhyme is time-consuming and a distinctive activity of creativity. By such a practice the musicality of any language is highlighted, even more so when combined with other elements in musicals, such as music, the plot or actors' actions. Rhymes are obtained by the repetition of terminal sounds of words or of verse lines. It is noticed by the audience of the same language and it is also evident to the audience who speak a foreign language. In the translation for songs, as happens with written poetry, the meaning has to be conveyed and also the poetic aspect has to be transmitted. In musicals, moreover, also music (amongst other elements

that we will mention further on) must be taken into account.

Let's take the first six lines of the first song in *My Fair Lady* and its subtitles<sup>3</sup> and dubbing in Spanish as an example.

The dubbed version keeps the rhyme and opts for a more poetic translation. The rhyme, the fidelity to the original and the image-sound coherence have to be led by the music. Díaz Cintas believes that 'Conviene conservar, si es posible, la rima- o al menos, cierto ritmo- de las canciones, aun a costa de traicionar levemente el texto original' (2003, p. 275). Translating a song for dubbing is possible, and the musical film *My Fair Lady* is a good example of it; but it is far from easy, as can be seen in María del Mar Cortés Ramal's analysis of scores of a song from the musical *Grease*.

In the subtitled Spanish translation, the English end rhyme has completely disappeared and the choices for the translation have the tendency to be more stick to the original. This lack of rhyme in the subtitles, however, is not due to physical constraints such as the limited spaces for the subtitles

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<sup>3</sup> The subtitles have been literally copied from the DVD, including the Spanish quotation marks

**Table 1.** Why Can't The English

Original	Subtitles	Dubbing
"Look at her, a prisoner of the gutters	" <i>Mírela, prisionera de los suburbios</i> "	<i>Mira a ese desecho de la calle</i>
"Condemned by every syllable she utters.	" <i>Condenada por cada sílaba que pronuncia</i> "	<i>lo mismo habla que una condenada</i>
"By right she should be taken out and hung,	" <i>Deberían ahorcarla</i> "	<i>Valiera quizás más hacerla ahorcar</i>
"For the cold-blooded murder/ of the English tongue"	" <i>Por el asesinato a sangre fría / de la lengua inglesa</i> "	<i>Porque la muerte del inglés quiere lograr.</i>
"This is what the British population,	" <i>Esto es lo que el pueblo británico</i> "	<i>Esto en Londres piensan los maestros</i>
"Calls an elementary education"	" <i>Llama educación básica</i> "	<i>que es de la enseñanza los comienzos.</i>

Source. By the author.

When there is the possibility, as in this case, a very slight change of the same words used in the subtitles and a small adding, might give the audience the illusion of reading poetry by maintaining a certain rhyme.

**Table 2.** Suggested Subtitled Version. Why Can't The English?

Original	Translation For Subtitles
Look at her, a prisoner of the gutter,	" <i>Mírela, prisionera de las cloacas</i> " " <i>De los suburbios presa</i> "
Condemned by every syllable she uttered.	" <i>Condenada por cada sílaba que profesa.</i> "

By right, she should be taken out and hung,	" <i>Ahorcarla deberían</i> "
For the cold-blooded murder of the English tongue	" <i>Por el asesinato de la lengua inglesa a sangre fría.</i> "
This is what the British population,	" <i>Esto es lo que la población británica,</i> "
calls an elementary education.	" <i>llama educación básica.</i> "

Source. By the author.

## 2.2 Repetition of sentences: Intratextual sentences

Whether the translation has dubbing or subtitling purposes, whenever the song includes a sentence, a reference or any other element linked to a part of the film which appears after or before the song, the translation should normally be the same so as not to mislead the audience. This criterion of maintaining the same translation depends on the level of importance of the element. It is not a minor factor since these elements that keep repeating could, and sometimes have, become the most characteristic feature of the musical. In *My Fair Lady*, one of Professor Higgins' exercises for teaching Eliza to speak English correctly is making her repeat these sentences. With 'The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain' Eliza practices her vowels. The aim of the second, 'In Hartford, Hereford and Hampshire hurricanes hardly ever happen', is to practice the pronunciation of the letter 'H'.

**Table 3.** Intratextual Sentences Used

Original	Subtitles	Dubbing
The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain.	<i>La lluvia en Sevilla es una maravilla.</i>	<i>La lluvia en Sevilla es una pura maravilla.</i>
In Hartford, Hereford and Hampshire hurricanes hardly ever happen.	<i>En Hartford, Hereford y Hampshire es raro que haya huracanes.</i>	<i>En Jalapa, Jamaica y Java háganse en junio enebros y jaras.</i>

**Source.** By the author.

Not only phonetic reasons are included in the first one but cultural references (which will be treated further on) are present too. ‘La lluvia en Sevilla es una pura maravilla’ plays with the phonetic sound [λ] (‘ll’ in ordinary script), as the English does it with the sound [eɪn] (‘ain’ in ordinary script). Both sounds repeat three times in the sentence. Thus, the translator not only has to bear in mind English phonetics but also the movement of the lips of the actors.

While in the first example almost the same choice has been taken in dubbing and subtitling; in the second example (‘In Hartford, Hereford and Hampshire hurricanes hardly ever happen’) we can find one in subtitling and the other one in dubbing. Their use in the musical is consistent both in normal dialogue and in the songs. The Spanish viewer, thus, would receive the same logic as the

English one. Otherwise, the audience could lose an important element for the threat of the musical.

### 3. Equivalences

#### 3.1 Equivalences: Accents and distinctive phonetic characteristics

A particularly challenging aspect for translators is to transfer specific aural features of a speaker into another language including accents, register, a speech impediment, a marked regional accent... On what basis and with what authority a particular accent can be linked with the connotation which it had in the original version? This thorny issue has been approached by Mona Baker (1993, p. 233-250) with a technique called leveling by which all the geographical speaking differences are standardized<sup>4</sup>.

On this aspect, *My Fair Lady* is a particularly difficult challenge. The plot (based on George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*) focuses on phonetic characteristics of English.

The sentence ‘The [reɪn] in [speɪnstelz meɪnlɪ] in the [pleɪn]’ pronounced with Eliza’s Cockney accent reads

<sup>4</sup> It should be mentioned that Disney, as a powerful film production company, is in charge of the dubbing of its products and creates different versions of songs depending on the country. Similarly, there are several versions of Spanish dubbed films; for Spain and for Latin America



as follows: ‘The [raIn] in [SpaIn staIz maInI] in the [plaIn]’. Many discourse constraints shorten the translator’s range of possibilities. It could be thought that one of the reasons to translate this sentence as ‘La lluvia en Sevilla es una maravilla’ in the subtitles and ‘La lluvia en Sevilla es una pura maravilla’ in the dubbed version is the fact that the position of the mouth when pronouncing [eIn] is very similar to the one when pronouncing [λ] ‘ll’ from a visual point of view to maintain the image-sound coherence. However, there is no parallel in the perception of non-standard English (Cockney). Eliza’s Cockney accent<sup>5</sup>, together with the vocabulary she uses, automatically places her as London working class. The spanish equivalence for this example in the film [dz] is not typical of a low register. The equivalence in the film of the sound in the elocution exercise of the standard english sound [eIn] ‘ain’ is [λ] ‘ll’. [λ] ‘ll’ is the correct spanish equivalent of the mispronunciation [dz] ‘y’. However, [λ] ‘ll’ is even hard to pronounce for most spaniards nowadays, which is not the case for most english speakers when pronouncing [eIn] ‘ain’. In this case, though, Eliza’s difficulty in pronouncing [λ] ‘ll’ can be compared to the difficulty many spaniards would have at present. The room for the translator to maneuver is incredibly limited in this case due to all the constraints that

influence his choice (see also image-sound coherence).

**Table 4.** pronoincación, phonetic and letter equivalences

	English	Spanish
<b>Ordinary script</b>	The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain	<i>La lluvia en Sevilla es una maravilla./ La lluvia en Sevilla es una pura maravilla.</i>
<b>Pronunciation as appears in the subtitles</b>	The rine in Spine stais minely on the pline.	<i>La lluvia en Seviya en una maravilla.</i>
<b>Phonetic equivalences</b>	[eIn]	[λ]
	[aIn]	[dz]
<b>Letter equivalencies</b>	-AIN	LL
	-INE	Y

Source. By the author.

It also should be added that the distinctive features of her speech should be ideally systematic throughout all the film. In practice, this is not always possible. Her normal speech in the Spanish dubbed translation is full of low register vocabulary and mispronounced Spanish words, which get the same effect in the Spanish audience as in the English version. In the dubbed songs, on the contrary, her working class accent has to disappear if we are to obtain an audible piece of art.

<sup>5</sup> An analysis about translating Cockney into Italian can be read in Irene Ranzato’s work.



The Spanish subtitles of Eliza's interventions; when she sings (and when she speaks) are neutralized and translated as standard Spanish, leveling them, as mentioned above. It is obvious from the plot of the film, though, that Eliza does not speak English correctly. It would be an artistic and linguistic challenge to find an equivalent, but in this case, the audience will not be missing the information that Eliza does not speak a standard English.

It is worth noting that a different strategy was employed for the French subtitles in this film. We think they often withdraw important information and the content of the songs is largely changed, but they do draw the distinction between Eliza's way of speaking (low French register) and standard English (standard French) by using low-register vocabulary and the outcome is very believable. Such an option of including vocabulary associated to a non-standard Spanish could have also been used in the Spanish version.

### 3.2 Equivalences: universal referents

Occasionally the translator will come up with 'universal words', words which are understandable to anyone regardless of the language in which they are said. Some of these words are 'proper

names', that is, the audience recognizes them without the subtitles.

'The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain' will also illustrate this aspect. Spaniards would be familiar with the term 'Spain', even more if the articulation of the mouth is exaggerated and repeated, as happens in the song where they reel the sentence off in English. Therefore a play must be invented in the Spanish version too.

**Table 5.** The Rain in Spain

Original	Subtitles	Dubbing
The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain	" <i>La lluvia en Sevilla es una maravilla</i> "	<i>La lluvia es maravilla en Sevilla.</i>
Now once again, where does it rain?	" <i>Una vez más. ¿Qué es la lluvia?</i> "	<i>¿En qué ciudad dijiste que es?</i>
In the plain, in the plain	" <i>Una maravilla, una maravilla</i> "	<i>En Sevilla, en Sevilla.</i>
And where is that soggy rain	" <i>¿Y dónde llueve?</i> "	<i>¿Y en qué nación la ves?</i>
In Spain, in Spain	" <i>En Sevilla, en Sevilla</i> "	<i>En España, en España.</i>

**Source.** By the author.

In the fifth line 'Spain', it is obvious even for a foreigner by the way it is exaggeratedly sung that the original version does not correspond with the subtitle. Since the song talks precisely about the country for which this

translation is been made, it would be reasonable to be as careful as possible when translating ‘Spain’. However, it has already been pointed out the phonetic importance of this sentence which narrows down considerably the possible choices. Cultural references are also present and, as will be seen, act as additional constraints.

On the contrary, the dubbed version has come up with a very balanced decision. All the aspects that must be combined for the importance of this particular sentence have been taken into account. And Spain (‘España’) is included in the dubbed version.

### **3.3 Equivalences: cultural references and stereotypes**

Helen Reid (1987) said that ‘If language were just words, nothing would be easier. But behind the words lies a world of associations, customs and institutions; “a whole culture”’ (p. 29). In films, cultural references can be represented through lyrics and in images. In musicals it is frequent to see cultural mimics inserted in the song themselves. The music is accompanied by a whole range of gestures, movements and choreography. These cultural references have to be conveyed to the audience bearing in mind not only the technical constraints in dubbing and subtitling

but also the choreography that comes with the music.

Translation research has been prolific in analyzing how to face the cultural-related problems for translation. Birgit Nedergaard-Larsen established several general strategies (1993, p. 216). These five can be applied to solve culture-bound problems: loan words, imitation, literal translation, idiomatic equivalence and cultural adaptation. Specifically to solve culture-bound problems, two approaches have also been identified: depending on the context and the type of reference, it can be translated literally leaving the foreign nuance and adding, if possible, an explanation (foreignization), which is complicated in subtitling and dubbing because of the spatio-temporal constraints, or ‘domesticate’ the reference. This implies conveying the meaning of the element in a way which is closer to the audience. Certain cultures have been so much exposed to others that there is no need to substitute the reference for a ‘national’ one. As an example, Spain is stereotyped by ‘bull-fighting’ or ‘flamenco’ because these items represent parts of Spanish culture.

Spanish cultural references are found in *My Fair Lady*; when they sing ‘The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain’. They pretend they are in a ‘corrida de toros’ and dance ‘flamenco’. In the English version, Spain is associated with these

references because for foreigners, these references are stereotypes of Spain. In Spanish, these allusions also fit with the setting used in the translation for dubbing and subtitling ('En Sevilla') which is one of the places where these activities are mostly known.

### **3.4 Equivalences: cross-cultural politeness**

When translating an oral text from English into Spanish, the translator will inevitably have to decide whether the speakers should begin addressing each other in an informal manner. It is well known that in English the relationship between the speakers makes no difference to the verb conjugations used and to the pronouns. In Spanish, the polite form of addressing people will always be used when the speakers do not have a close relationship. For example, if they have only recently met ('usted', 'ustedes') will be preferred. An informal form ('tú', 'vosotros', 'vosotras') will be used, however, when a closer relationship is forged. In Spain in recent years the form 'usted' has disappeared in many situations, attracting attention and even alarm. Age tends to be the first criterion which determines how people address each other. Children learn to address strangers and older people by the polite form. Usually a person addressed in the polite form asks for the informal form to be used if this is what he prefers. Up until recently the

polite form was used as a sign of respect. However, nowadays more and more people are finding this form outdated. Uncertainty often arises in the case of adults of similar age. Other factors such as social class, profession or relationship between the speakers must be taken into account. In films, the way most people address each other is immediately established, as no significant changes take place in their relationship. However, the protagonists often meet each other at a certain point in the film and later form a closer relationship. This change should be handled smoothly in order not to surprise the audience. The time to make the change will depend on the film and on the particular characteristics of the plot.

In the case of musical films, songs offer a good opportunity to introduce these changes, presumably because the audience is distracted by the music and does not pay much attention, so these changes will be unperceivable. Songs are used to establish when the characters fall in love or when there has been a change in someone's perception of another person, making it easier to decide when a relationship has become close enough for two people to begin addressing each other in the familiar form. Therefore, songs are often used to switch forms of address or to introduce any other linguistic aspect that is related to the relationship between the actors.

This is seen in *My Fair Lady*. The relationship between the speakers is peculiar and it evolves all along the film. The close relationship that they have at the end of the film (e.g. they recognize being in love with each other) is transmitted to the audience linguistically, and mainly, through songs. The subtitled and dubbed versions use different scenes to demonstrate that the characters' relationship is getting closer. In the subtitled version, Professor Higgins addresses Eliza in an informal way at the beginning of the penultimate scene. The two have argued in the previous scene and Eliza still addresses the professor by the polite form. However, she begins addressing him informally when she claims she is no longer under his control. In the dubbed version, Professor Higgins addresses Eliza by the familiar form from the beginning, to show his superiority to Eliza, the difference in their ages (he is around 40, while she is around 20) and their social difference: Eliza is a street flower seller, while Higgins is a professor. Eliza addresses him in an informal way at the very end, just before the song 'Without You', when she realizes she can live without him. In the song itself she switches back to the formal form of address probably because of the syllable count: the words 'without you' repeats several times in the song (3 syllables). The Spanish words '*Sin ti*' (2 syllables) are too short to be properly synchronized with the music. '*Sin usted*', however,

has the same number of syllables as 'Without you'. This change, however, for a Spanish audience is not noticeable as it comes up very naturally. It would not have been appropriate to switch to the 'tú' form at any other point because the relationship between the two characters remains unchanged until the end of the film. Eliza, due to her social class and occupation, would be reluctant to address Higgins in the 'tú' form.

From this example it can also be clearly seen that constraints in dubbing and subtitling have a different repercussion on the translation's choice. The subtitles, having to take fewer variables into account, have opted for a more informal translation and closer to the original version content-wise.

**Table 6.** Without you

ORIGINAL	SUBTITLES	DUBBING
"If they can do without you, Ducky, / So can I	" <i>Si todos pueden seguir sin ti, cielo, / yo también</i>	<i>Pues, sin usted mi amigo fácil es pasar.</i>
"I shall not feel alone without you	" <i>No me sentiré sola sin ti</i>	<i>Sola no quedaré sin usted.</i>
" I can stand on my own-without you	" <i>Puedo vivir sin ti</i>	<i>La existencia mejor pasaré.</i>
"So go back in your shell / I can do bloody well	" <i>Vuelve a tu caracol, / me las apaña muy bien</i> "	<i>Su saber guárdese ahora yo ya me Valgo</i>
"Without..."	(no subtitle)	<i>Sin us...</i>

Source. By the author.

## 4. Technical aspects

### 4.1 Subtitling: presentation rules

All too often subtitles are criticized because of their poor quality. However, contrary to what is thought by the general public, the translator is not the only person involved in the subtitling process, and various obstacles have to be overcome. Very often the translator does not have access to the film, but only to the dialogue list where all the details of the film and the dialogues are specified. Thus, any minor mistake in one part of the process will have a great impact on the final product. When the translator has accomplished his work, the adaptor adjusts the translation according to the timing of the film (another link in the chain). The translator and the adaptor rarely work together. Moreover, as Díaz (2001, p. 84) points out, the adaptors who make certain changes to the translation, do not always know the source language. And the translator is not always allowed to see the final version in order to check whether major changes in meaning have been made. Both, Díaz (2001, p. 84) and Luyken (1991, p. 57), believe that the ideal solution would be to give the jobs of translator and adaptor to a single person. This would improve the quality of the subtitles and increase the fee.

Presentation styles vary depending on when the film was subtitled, and on the subtitling or broadcasting company.

In general reading, upper case letters take more space and take longer to be read. This is also the case on the screen so it would be advisable to use them when they are really needed. In our opinion *My Fair Lady* uses them too often, always putting them at the beginning of every line regardless of grammar, e.g., the use of the upper case after a full-stop.

Whenever the source of the linguistic elements is a different one from that of the dialogue, it is also marked on the subtitles. In the case of musical films, it is further complex due to the constant interlink between dialogue and songs. In *My Fair Lady*, each subtitle begins by quotation marks and these are closed only in the last subtitle of the song, in order to show that it is not a part of normal speech. This acts as an additional constraint for the translation availability of space

**Dubbing: Image-sound coherence**

In musical films, actors act more than in a conventional film. They accompany the lyrics with dances and mimics. This aspect adds complexity to find a translation that does not contradict the image on the screen. This does not mean that subtitling does not have to respect the coherence with the image

but, in this sense, fewer constraints are imposed upon it because the subtitles do not have to deal with the sound track of the musical. The elements analyzed in this section include mouth and facial muscle movements, and other visual features such as gestures and body movements that correspond to the dialogue. Examples of the constraints that body movements impose on translation music for dubbing are numerous.

In *My Fair Lady*, Professor Higgins sings the following line while pretending to tie a knot around his neck.

**Table 7.** I’M An Ordinaty Man

Original	Subtitles	Dubbing
“Let The Others Of My Sex	“ <i>Deja que los de mi sexo</i>	<i>Que los otros hombres den</i>
“Tie The Knot Around Their Necks	“ <i>Se pongan la soga al cuello</i>	<i>En ahorcarse me está bien.</i>

**Source.** By the author.

In this case the subtitles convey practically the same meaning as the original version, although ‘ponerse la soga al cuello’ means ‘to be threatened by a high risk’ and ‘to tie the knot’ means ‘to get married’. The dubbing is brilliantly achieved using a different metaphor although there is a slight mismatch in the gestures. The ones that would be used to illustrate the Spanish expression would be clutching the neck as if

being strangled and he exactly ties a knot around his neck.

Another expression is found in the following example. Once again the method used in the subtitles is different from that employed in the dubbed version. The problem here is not the lack of an equivalent expression in Spanish, as shown in the subtitles, but the lack of time available to sing ‘dar una palmadita en la espalda’ in the dubbed version. The dubbed version, thus, opted for a shorter direct explanation.

**Table 8.** An Hym To Him

Original	Subtitling	Dubbing
“Pickering, why can’t a woman be more like a man?”	“ <i>Pickering, ¿por qué las mujeres /no se parecen más a los hombres?</i>	<i>Pickering, ¿por qué no puede la mujer ser como el hombre?</i>
“Yes, why can’t a woman be more like a man?”	“ <i>Sí, ¿por qué las mujeres /no se parecen más a los hombres?</i>	<i>Sí, nada del hombre imitan jamás</i>
“Men are so honest, so thoroughly square	“ <i>Los hombres son honestos, cabales</i>	<i>Bueno y honesto, el hombre es tenaz</i>
“Eternally noble, historically fair	“ <i>Eternamente nobles, /históricamente justos</i>	<i>Y suele ser noble y justo además</i>



“Who, when you win will always give your back a pat?”	“Cuando ganas, ¿quién te da / una palmadita en la espalda?”	Si algo haces bien te felicita tu rival.
“Why can’t a woman be like that?”	“¿Por qué una mujer no puede ser así?”	¿Por qué una dama no lo hace igual?”

**Source.** By the author.

Synchronizing lip movements with the dubbed version is as important as synchronizing other images and sounds. When the translation has been finished it is passed on to the adaptor whose task is to adapt the dialogues to the lip movements, the length of the utterance and the phonetic structure. The distribution of vowels, consonants and stressed syllables should be as similar as possible to the original. Special attention should be paid to the labial consonants (/p/, /b/ and /m/) and open vowels, particularly those at the end of a sentence since they are more evident to the audience.

A good example of this can be found in ‘Show me’. The expressiveness of the actress, the exaggerated lip movements, the numerous close-ups, the extremely poetic and synthetic English compressed into very short lines, and the rhyme impose too many constraints at once to obtain good synchronization between lip movements and the dubbed translation. The professionalism of the dubbed (and subtitled) songs in *My Fair Lady* is

remarkable. Still we perceive that limitations are so numerous that in some instances, such as this one, the sounds fail to be as well synchronized with the lip movements as the usual standard. Cortés Ramal (2005) and also citing Catalina Martínez, asserts that it would be very useful for the translator; when working on a song translation for dubbing to have musical knowledge. Thus, the work would be more complete. It is undeniable that it would contribute positively to gain time and efficiency.

The sentence commented above has already been dealt with but since it also has to do with image and sound coherence. The aspects explained are not part of a song themselves, but they are worth mentioning because the sentences are also used in a song in a different part of the film. Thus, when choosing a translation option for the song, it also has to be considered that the same election has to be used in this complex scene for synchronization.

Eliza has to repeat ‘In Hartford, Hereford and Hampshire, hurricanes hardly ever happen’. Every time she pronounces the English ‘H’ correctly a flame will move and if she drops it, the flame will remain stationary. In English there are 6 ‘Hs’ at the beginning of words and one word which does not begin with ‘H’. Eliza pronounces 6 words without ‘H’ and one with it so the flame moves 6 times and it remains stationary



once. The Spanish subtitled version of Eliza's pronunciation (transcription from the Spanish subtitles: En 'artford, 'ereford y 'ampshire es raro que 'jaya' huracanes) tries to make up for the impossibility of making a similar play on words and image, by adapting the translation to the image as best as they can to obtain the same relation between the mispronunciation of a letter and the movement of the flame. The dubbed version is even more difficult to obtain because the synchrony between the lips, the sound and the image has

to be maintained. The translation given is '*En Jalapa, Jamaica y Java háganse en junio enebros y jaras*'. This option plays with the mispronunciation of the sounds 'J' and 'H'. The flame stays stationary when pronouncing Spanish 'H' correctly, that is, not pronouncing it, and the flame waves when pronouncing 'J' correctly. The content has been changed for the dependency to the image but the effect for the Spanish viewer is the very same as when watching the original.

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<sup>6</sup> Gottlieb said that ' a good subtitler (apart from being a good translator) needs the musical ears of an interpreter, the no-nonsense judgement of a news editor and a designer's sense of aesthetics. In addition, as most subtitlers do the electronic time-cueing themselves, the subtitler must also have the steady hand of a surgeon and the timing of a percussionist'. (2001)

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In this article we have provided various insights into some of the constraints that determine the translation for dubbing and subtitling of the musical film *My Fair Lady*, which is, in our opinion, a remarkably well-achieved result bearing in mind all the elements that must be taken into account. From this analysis several conclusions can be drawn:

First of all, many activities are complex since they require not only the translation knowledge but also to understand the whole process. The adaptor plays an important role in the final product and sometimes his task overlaps with the translator's because he has to adapt the translation to the space or the synchronization of lips.

Because the constraints are diverse in subtitling and dubbing songs, some differences can be drawn between the ways of translating.

In dubbing a song, rhyme, rhythm, music, content and visual coherence must be necessarily taken into account. We could say that in translating songs for dubbing, even better musical ears are required than the ones expected from a subtitler<sup>6</sup>.

In subtitling, rhyme is generally not respected, music does not interfere with the translation, visual coherence is not as strict as in dubbing but there is limited spacing. On the contrary, a subtitled version is able to pay more attention to the original in content-synchronization with the images. It has been noticed that there is more content accuracy in subtitling than in dubbing, or, at least the content translation appears more synchronized with the original. This 'advantage' of subtitling is a double-edged sword because there is the risk of translating too close to the source. One of the possible reasons why subtitles are sometimes criticized of being too literal or of lacking an element is because they are more exposed to comparison with the original. Without taking into account all the constraints involved, it is far too easy to 'spot the error'. In dubbing the content is easier to manipulate or, at least, less noticeable.

After having analyzed several elements influencing the job of a translator for dubbing or subtitling songs in musical films, it seems evident that not only a proficient command in all the registers of the languages is necessary, but also knowledge specifically on dubbing and subtitling spatio-temporal constraints and on the intrinsic characteristic of songs.

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