

Dealing with the N-word in Dubbing and Subtitling *Django Desencadenado*: A Case of Self-Censorship?

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Resumen

Como actividad de comunicación llevada a cabo por individuos, la traducción de cualquier texto, ya sea escrita, oral o audiovisual, puede verse afectada por problemas de índole ideológica. Esto es particularmente evidente cuando se trabaja con material sensible, como en el caso del lenguaje racista. En este artículo se estudia la traducción de la palabra *nigger* al español peninsular, tanto para el doblaje como para la subtitulación de la película estadounidense *Django Unchained* (Quentin Tarantino, 2012). Como se mostrará, en un gran porcentaje la solución propuesta en las dos versiones traducidas fue *negro*. Tras el análisis de estos casos, la conclusión a la que se llegará es que la elección de esta solución no responde únicamente a criterios traductológicos o técnicos, sino que parece poseer una clara base ideológica en forma de autocensura.

Palabras clave: traducción audiovisual, ideología, (auto)censura, lenguaje racista y tabú, Tarantino.

Abstract

As a communicative activity undertaken by individuals, the translation of any text, whether written, audiovisual or oral, may be affected by issues of an ideological

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Ideas, III, 3 (2017), pp. 39-56

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nature. This is especially evident when working with sensitive material, such as racist language. In this paper we study the translation of the word nigger into Castilian Spanish, both for dubbing and subtitling, in the American film Django Unchained (Quentin Tarantino, 2012). As it will be shown, in a vast percentage of cases the proposed solution in both translated versions was negro. After analysing these cases, the conclusion that will be reached is that the choice of this solution does not purely respond to translational or technical criteria, but that it seems to show a clear ideological background in the form of self-censorship.

Keywords: audiovisual translation, ideology, (self)censorship, racist and taboo language, Tarantino.

Fecha de recepción: 17-06-2016. **Fecha de aceptación:** 11-10-2017.

1. Introduction

As Hurtado puts it, “translation is a communicative activity that takes place in a social context.” She further argues that it is precisely this social nature of translation that explains the relationships that arise between translation and ideology. Besides, she mentions that, being two more or less different cultural contexts (source and target), the author of the original text, on the one hand, and the translator, on the other, may have distinct ideological motives (Hurtado, 2001, pp. 615-616). This ideological consideration of the decisions taken at the time of translation seems to have been inevitable since the determining cultural turn in translation in the late eighties and the early nineties of the last century (Chaume 2012, p. 151).

We do not aim to review all the translation and ideology-related debates. We shall, therefore, restrict ourselves to referring the reader to several works in Translation Studies such as those of Hermans (1985), Bassnett and Lefevere (1990), Venuti (1995), Hatim and Mason (1997), Vidal Claramonte (1995 and 1998), Mayoral (1999), Carbonell (1999), and Merino and Rabadán (2002), among others, as well as to those focused on audiovisual translation, such as Ballester (1995), De Marco (2006 and 2012), Zanotti (2012), Díaz Cintas (2012), and Richart (2012).

Overall, the question of ideology in the field of audiovisual translation is usually restricted to four areas, such as those mentioned by Chaume (2012), whose views are summarized in this paragraph: censorship, standardization (normalization), gender-related matters, and patronage. The first area, namely

ensorship, is directly related to the institutional control of translation. Spheres such as politics, religion, sex, and physiological functions are especially sensitive to this practice. Political correctness may also be included under the ambit of censorship when, for instance, it seeks to conceal misnomers or taboo words. It is true that censorship is certainly more notable under totalitarian regimes, but the truth is that not even the most democratic systems can evade censorship. The fact that the translator may censor himself/herself is equally remarkable and of particular relevance here. Moving ahead, standardization, meanwhile, is an inevitable process in all languages, since they would become chaotic without the same. However, if we talk about linguistic censorship, we are now touching the subject of imposition. The desire to tone down the expletives or taboo words is of particular interest for our goals. As far as gender is concerned, feminism and sexual freedom have radically changed the way we address minorities. For example, sexist language is one of the aspects that need to be taken into consideration. Lastly, and with respect to the subject matter of patronage, it deals with a concept introduced by Lefevere (1992, p. 15) to refer to “the powers [...] that can further or hinder the reading, writing or rewriting of a literature.”

Nigger, as we shall see, is a term that gives birth to a high socio-cultural complexity and that is indiscriminately used in the source version of the film *Django Unchained* (Quentin Tarantino, 2012). The issues related to manipulation with a view to translating that term shall be of particular concern in this article. Thus, those aspects concerning the management of taboo words and *sensitive* language, not to mention political correctness, shall be absolutely relevant.

2. *Django Unchained*

Firstly, we shall dedicate some lines to introducing the movie that we consider in our study. The film, Tarantino’s special tribute to B-westerns, narrates the story of Django, a black slave who, shortly before the outbreak of the American Civil War, is bought by King Schultz, a bounty hunter. Dr Schultz promises the slave to reunite him with his wife Broomhilda if Django helps him catch the Brittle brothers. As the plot progresses we witness the transformation of the character of Django. This is a movie that has received numerous awards, including two Oscars (best original screenplay and supporting actor) in 2013.

Django Unchained has also been subjected to widespread criticism for what some consider to be a particular view of the historical events unfolding in the

years prior to the Civil War, in particular those directly related to the issue of slavery and racist attitudes. The core of such criticism will not be discussed in detail here, since it is not our goal. We shall only point out that these critics mainly base their displeasure on what they consider a wrong view of history, one that ends up achieving the opposite of what it hoped to achieve as far as racism is concerned. Maybe the most significant proof of this lies in the testimony of film director Spike Lee, promoter of a movement to boycott the film as he considers it to be offensive to his ancestors.

Sociological debates aside, one of the reasons that motivated the selection of this film for the current study was the fact that the word *nigger* is used extensively. Platforms such as The Lens (2013, online), based in New Orleans and whose main aim is to work as a virtual newsroom, point out the generous use of the aforesaid word as the reason behind most of the negative attitudes towards the film. It is worth noting that Spike Lee already pointed out the *liking* of Tarantino for the use of the word *nigger* when the latter directed *Jackie Brown* in 1997, a foray into the blaxploitation genre.

3. The word *nigger*

As has been mentioned, the plot of *Django Unchained* unfolds in the years leading up to the Civil War, at the height of the slave reality of the country, a period when the usage of the word *nigger* was widespread. As the African American film director Antoine Fuqua¹ stated in an interview, one may argue that, if the story narrated in the movie takes place in the late 1850s, “you’re going to hear the word ‘n---r’, because that’s the way they spoke then, and you’re going to discuss slavery because that was part of the reality” (*New York Daily News*, 2012, online). Thus, is the criticism of the use of the word in question, which is a clear example of the harsh reality of the period for all the blacks, an attempt to exercise patronage to erase or sweeten a bitter element from the map, by not being politically incorrect? Should the creator, Tarantino in this case, yield to such pressures? Or is it perhaps the fact of a white man freely using that term what bothers us? Indeed, the word clearly has a derogatory sense attached to it – that of a racial insult – if a white person uses it to address a black one, although, as we shall see, the tone may change if it is used by the members of the black community among themselves.

1. Director of films such as *Training Day* (2001), a movie set at the present time, in which the character played by actor Denzel Washington profusely uses the word *nigger*.

According to *The Merriam-Webster dictionary* (2015, online), the present meanings of the word *nigger* are:

1. *usually offensive*: a black person
2. *usually offensive*: a member of any dark-skinned race
3. a member of a socially disadvantaged class of persons <it's time for somebody to lead all of America's *niggers*... all the people who feel left out of the political process — Ron Dellums>

Concerning the usage referred to in the first two entries, the aforementioned dictionary reveals the following (2015, online):

Nigger in senses 1 and 2 can be found in the works of such writers of the past as Joseph Conrad, Mark Twain, and Charles Dickens, but it now ranks as perhaps the most offensive and inflammatory racial slur in English. Its use by and among blacks is not always intended or taken as offensive, but, except in sense 3, it is otherwise a word expressive of racial hatred and bigotry.

Regarding its origin, *The Merriam-Webster dictionary* states that it stems from the "alteration of earlier *neger*, from Middle French *negre*, from Spanish or Portuguese *negro*, [...] from Latin *niger*," and that the first known usage of the word goes back to 1574 (2015, online).

Middleton and Pilgrim (2001, online) provide a complete account of the origin and the subsequent evolution of this term, on the web page of the organization African American Registry. Here is a brief summary of their most noteworthy points. Philological and etymological questions aside, the truth is that this word consolidated its position as a derogatory term from the early 1800s onward. Since the story narrated in the movie under consideration takes place a couple of years after the outbreak of the aforesaid Civil War in 1861, we therefore need to understand that the usage of *nigger* has had the discriminatory nature which we have just discussed since those days. It has come to assume a sense inherent in white racism in the twenty-first century. The word *nigger* is the sum total of all the hatred and repugnance for the Afro-American community, and reinforces the negative stereotype of the lazy, stupid, filthy, and insignificant people with marked cruelty, regardless of whether it is used as a name, a verb, or an adjective. In fact, it is also used to offend other ethnic groups, like the Jews (*white-niggers*), the Arabs (*sand-niggers*), or the Japanese (*yellow-niggers*), thereby establishing a racial hierarchy, wherein the whites find themselves at the very top and the blacks occupy the last rung.

The term has even transcended the scope of interpersonal relations, and its results are, for example, a puzzle game launched by the McLoughlin Brothers (New York) in 1874 which was known as the *Chopped Up Niggers*. We could also mention the tobacco brand *Nigger Hair Smoking Tobacco* that was commercialized by B. Leidersdory Company (Milwaukee) from 1878 onward. More recently, an advertisement in 1916 showed a black baby drinking ink, with the caption “Nigger Milk”, and the J. Millhoff Company started selling some cards on which one could see ten small black dogs with the legend “Ten Little Nigger Boys Went Out to Dine” in 1930.

The presence of this word has not been elusive to literature, either. Agatha Christie published the novel *Ten Little Niggers* in 1939. However, this title was changed (patronage, yet again) to *And Then There Were None* in the early eighties of the last century. Mark Twain’s case deserves special mention here. Just like other writers such as Charles Dickens, Twain used the word *nigger* to reflect the society in his time.

In the field of music, in the first half of the twentieth century it was not unusual to find scores in which the word *nigger* appeared, not to mention the latest rap music. It is common to hear black rappers who rap about *niggers* without any pejorative intentions. Snoop Doggy Dogg, for example, was successful with the single *You Thought*, in which he raps “Wanna grab a skinny nigga like Snoop Dogg.”

This last idea leads us to another aspect, at least, curious about the usage of the term that we are reviewing: its usage by the members of the black community. As Hughes (2006, pp. 327-328) explains:

A third usage, strictly dependent on context, is a reclaimed currency of the term by those previously insulted but used exclusively among themselves, as an affectionate, ironic, or jocular epithet. This usage is comparatively recent, with quotations dating only from the 1950s, especially in contexts expressing solidarity, [...].

In this sense, as pointed out by the organization African American Registry, it is possible to find uses of the word *nigger* in poems composed by black authors, as in the work of the contemporary poet Imamu Amiri Baraka. If we notice the language used in the streets, if a white person in the United States uses this word, he/she shall be almost certainly attributed with a racist intent, whereas the usage thereof by the blacks can be interpreted in various ways: to refer to the blacks as a group, to certain stereotyped behaviors,

to objects, to enemies, or – and here is the surprising part – to friends. Expressions such as *Zup niggah* are popular in the urban environment, which means that the term is less offensive, or even affectionate, when used by a black person, although we must specify that the word that is generally used in these contexts (Black English) is *niggah* or *nigga* and not *nigger*², with an intended new meaning. In any case, the issue is open for debate, since, despite the fact that there are members of the black community who certainly use this word, it is also true that other voices clearly disagree with the same. Whatever the case may be, the word *nigger* has made a move to the popular culture, having a significant presence in other movies of Tarantino like *Pulp Fiction* (1994) or the aforementioned *Jackie Brown* (1997), wherein it became a symbol of street authenticity and the *coolness quotient* (*hipness*) (Middleton and Pilgrim 2001, online). Even famous black comedians like Chris Rock or Chris Tucker, although others like Richard Pryor stopped doing so, do not hesitate to include it in their monologues, and not in a manner that can be termed as kind, maybe as an attempt to reappropriate the term³.

Broadly speaking, this is the complex outlook on the term *nigger* in the United States, wherein the usage of the word in different situations and with diverse, although closely related, meanings becomes intermingled with attempts at censoring its usage and making it a social taboo. Some of those attempts would include resorting to euphemisms such as “n*gg*r” or “the N-word” or to generally accepted terms such as *negro* (maybe an already outdated term), *black*, or *African-American*. We are thus dealing with a complex scenario that is not at all comparable (neither culturally nor historically) to the one that the word *negro* has in Spain, a country with its own peculiarities.

4. The translation of *nigger* in *Django Desencadenado*: *negro*

Nigger is not the only term with racist overtones used in the movie under consideration (other examples are *blackie*, *specimen*, *boy*, *Jimmy*, or *garboon*), but it is certainly the most frequent. In fact, this word is used up to 115 times⁴.

2. Relevant in this regard is the work of Allan (2007).

3. Croom (2011) provides an interesting discussion on this matter.

4. Whether or not the Spanish word *negro* always carries the same offensive nuance along with it is a matter that we would leave for verification by means of future pragmatic or discursive research (for instance, the Principle of Relevance could be highly useful in this regard). If not, maybe a combined usage of the words *negro* and *negrata* (or any other word similar in nature) would have been justified. On the other hand, it would also be worth studying the role played by the intonations (paralinguistic features) of the dubbing actors and actresses in the determination of the degree of offensiveness.

On the other hand, it is translated as *negro* 101 times in the dubbed version, and 104 times in the subtitled version. Clearly, the dominant tendency – in the sense of regularity – is towards translating the term *nigger* as *negro*:

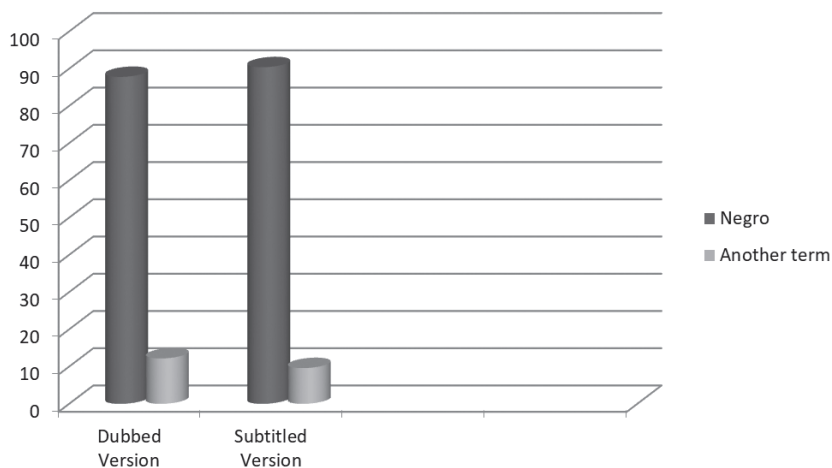


Chart 1. Translation of *nigger* either as *negro* or as another term in the dubbed and subtitled versions.

Before talking about this tendency in greater detail, here are two tables to illustrate the cases wherein a different solution for the term in question has been sought:

TCR	Source Version	Dubbed Version
00:23:55	Old Man Carrucan: I got no use for a nigger with sand.	Old Man Carrucan: El mono tiene agallas.
00:29:45	Spencer Bennett: You can't treat him like any of these other niggers around here, cause he ain't like any of the other niggers around here.	Spencer Bennett: No puedes tratarlo como a uno de los gañanes de por aquí porque no es como uno de los gañanes de por aquí.
00:56:57	Django: Oh, no, she ain't no field nigger .	Django: No, ella no es una rata de campo.
00:57:17	Django: She ain't no field nigger but ain't good for the house no more either.	Django: Ella no es una rata de campo, pero ahora ya no es buena pa la casa.

01:07:12	Dr. Schultz: I sought you out to purchase a fighting nigger at above top-dollar market price.	Dr. Schultz: Le he buscado para comprar un mandingo por encima del precio más disparatado del mercado.
01:17:54	Calvin Candie: When I pay \$500, I expect to get five fights out of a nigger before he roll over and play dead.	Calvin Candie: ...y cuando pago 500 dólares espero sacar cinco peleas de un gorila antes de que se dé la vuelta y se haga el muerto.
01:20:10	Calvin Candie: Mr.Stonesipher, let Marsha and her bitches send D'Artagnan to nigger heaven.	Calvin Candie: Sr. Stonesipher, que Marsha y sus perras envíen a D'Artagnan al paraíso de los monos .
01:38:04	Dr. Schultz: I need something more than just a big nigger .	Dr. Schultz: Necesito algo más que un gorila .
01:44:43	Calvin Candie: These niggers are tough, Dr. Schultz, no doubt about it.	Calvin Candie: Son duros, Dr. Schultz. Eso sí que es cierto.
01:48:48	Stephen: Yeah, Hildi. Her and Django, them niggers know each other.	Stephen: Sí, Hildi. Ella y Django. Esas cucarachas se conocen.
02:06:55	Man 2: Fucking nigger !	Hombre 2: ¿Pero qué...?
02:07:06	Man 2: Who the fuck gave a nigger a goddamn gun?	Hombre 2: ¿Quién cojones le ha dado un arma al mandril ?
02:16:31	Stephen: Then they're gonna hit you in the head with a hammer, throw your ass down the nigger hole.	Stephen: Ese día, te darán un martillazo en la cabeza y tu fiambre irá a la fosa pa los bichos .

Table 1. Cases (13) in which *nigger* has not been translated as *negro* in the dubbed version.

TCR	Source Version	Subtitled Version
00:23:55	Old Man Carrucan: I got no use for a nigger with sand.	Old Man Carrucan: El chico tiene agallas.
00:57:17	Django: She ain't no field nigger but ain't good for the house no more either.	Django: No es de campo, / pero tampoco es buena para la casa.
01:08:13	Calvin Candie: You see... you wanna buy a beat-ass nigger from me, those are the beat-ass niggers I wanna sell.	Calvin Candie: Si quiere comprarme un negro peleón, // esos son los que quiero vender.
01:13:13	Django: You niggers are gonna understand something about me.	Django: Tenéis que entender algo de mí.

01:19:53	Calvin Candie: Now, seeing as you won't pay a penny for this pickaninny here, you won't mind me handling this nigger any way I see fit?	Calvin Candie: Ya que no vais a pagar / un centavo por ese mico, // ¿no os importará que haga / con él lo que me parezca?
01:27:16	Man: Niggers don't walk around here. Niggers run!	Man: ¡Aquí los negros no caminan, corren!
01:38:35	Dr. Schultz: Now, I'm not saying that Eskimo Joe is the wrong nigger , <i>per se</i> ...	Dr. Schultz: No digo que Esquimal Joe / sea inadecuado <i>per se</i> .
01:38:53	Calvin Candie: But one must not forget the most important thing in the nigger fight game.	Calvin Candie: Pero no hay que olvidar / lo más importante de este negocio:
01:39:59	Calvin Candie: Nigger love's a powerful emotion, boy.	Calvin Candie: Es una emoción poderosa.
01:44:43	Calvin Candie: These niggers are tough, Dr. Schultz, no doubt about it.	Calvin Candie: Son duros, no le quepa duda.
01:48:48	Stephen: Yeah, Hildi. Her and Django, them niggers know each other.	Stephen: Sí, ella y Django se conocen.

Table 2. Cases (11) in which *nigger* has not been translated as *negro* in the subtitled version.

This is not an accidental tendency, as we shall see, but one that has rather been carried out in a deliberate manner. We have already discussed a decent part of the nuances that the word *nigger* carries in the United States⁵, and shall agree with the fact that it is a particularly sensitive term and that it has an enormously pejorative and degrading potential, especially when it is used by a white person to address a black man/woman, which certainly is a racist use of the language. The question that arises at this point is: if the word has such a negative meaning, why has it been used so much in the original version of the film? Certainly, all those people who feel that it is justified will refer to the same reason why it is used so many times (more than two hundred times) in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; that is, as a reflection of both the society in which the story unfolds and its vernacular usages. However, it is also true that the issue has been open to debate. In fact, in 2010 an American publishing house released a new and *politically correct* version of Mark Twain's novel, in which the term *nigger* has been omitted and replaced by the word *slave*.⁶

5. We are alluding to this country since it is the place of origin of the movie that is being analyzed here, not to mention the fact that it was the center stage in the historical events (slavery) that serve as a backdrop for the unfolding of the plot narrated in the movie in question.

6. It should be noted that this novel was compulsory reading in the schools of the United States.

Can this decision be construed as a result of an effort to censor a term that is considered inappropriate?

In the words of Rodríguez González (1996, p. 223, our translation):

Everyday language reflects, like life itself, the cultural and moral values of our society. But it also passes on and reinforces those values, and hence the enormous power of this word. The prejudices against any minority or social group that has been underprivileged, persecuted or proscribed at any point of time in history, on the basis of their sex, ethnicity, or any other factor whatsoever, right away penetrate the language shaped as negative connotations of the terms used to address them. And as a reaction, the speakers sometimes shun or tone down the expression by using euphemisms or fine words in order to counter or mitigate its effects and hide a reality that is perceived as unpleasant and undesirable.

If what was done to Twain's work is censorship, does the same phenomenon apply to *Django Desencadenado*? As we saw earlier, in a clearly high percentage of cases and in both the dubbed and the subtitled version, we observed that *nigger* has been translated as *negro*. *Negro* is a word that exists in English and in Spanish, and it can have a negative connotation in these two languages, especially in English, since in Castilian Spanish the said derogatory nature of the word in question is closely linked to matters such as the intonation or the use of intensifiers (in fact, none of the twenty entries of the word in *DRAE – Diccionario de la Real Academia Española – dictionary* imply a racist connotation *per se*.) As pointed out by Rodríguez González, the word *negro* bears a more pejorative nuance in English than in Spanish right since its origin, which is directly related to the days of slavery. For this reason the nineteenth century brought about the usage and spreading of the term *black*, a normal term to refer to a black person in general, but one that had not been used in a racial context until then (1996, p. 225).

After talking to several American citizens, one realizes that the term *black* is acceptable and that it can be used without arousing any suspicion. Similarly, there is an agreement to place *nigger* at the other end, except in certain situations in which it is acceptable provided that it is used by a black person to address another (recall the previously mentioned notion of *reappropriation*.) However, what happens in the case of Spanish? Can we liken the terms *black* (English) and *negro* (Spanish) to each other? From a purely philological point of view, it seems that we can (in fact, that is what the meaning of *negro* in *DRAE* seems to

suggest), but there will surely be no dearth of politically correct opinions that, from extremism, suggest otherwise⁷. There is a saying that goes as follows: Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. In the case of language, one could argue that racism lies in the mentality of the speaker or perhaps the listener⁸; after all, one cannot give up the color of his/her skin (Rodríguez González 1996, p. 228), and there will always be that someone who will feel that we can perfectly talk about *black* and *white* with the same ease in which we talk about *tall* or *short* and *fair* or *dark*. As Soca (2013, online) writes at elcastellano.org, in response to the recent initiative led by the House of Afro-Uruguayan Culture aimed at forcing the *DRAE* to delete the expression *trabajar como un negro* (i.e. to work like a black person, which implies the sense of extremely hard work) from its dictionary, words do not spring from dictionaries. Rather, they are collected by lexicographers as descriptions of the language spoken by people. Excluding words or expressions that are in use, no matter how discriminatory they may be, is a mistake committed by dictionaries, sometimes out of self-interest or due to political, ideological, or religious motives⁹. Similarly, and in a clear reference to politically correct solutions, Rodríguez González (1996, p. 228) points out that addressing the race in a way that distances it from the simple and straightforward language, with expressions other than *black* in English and *negro* in Spanish, is suspicious at the very least.

Be it as it may, this controversy surfaces because, as Rodríguez González puts it, English has the advantage over Spanish in that it has a term like *black*, which lacks all references to *negro* (1996, p. 227). So, what can a translator do when he/she is faced with a case such as the film at hand?

Quico Rovira Beleta, the translator for the Spanish market of the dubbed and subtitled versions of *Django Unchained*, tells us the following through electronic correspondence (our translation¹⁰):

As far as *nigger* is concerned, not only does one need to bear the

7. As Marián Ariza (2013, online) asks in *Madrid Escribe*, the educational support blog for the students of the creative writing and poetry workshops of the libraries of the Madrid City Council, why this unhealthy obsession with political correctness? Why is it more important to claim to be open-minded and unbiased through what we say than to really be so?

8. Marián Ariza (2013, online) also expresses it in the same terms by saying that maybe the wrong intention lies in the mind of those who listen to us.

9. On the other hand, Saussure (1916) already differentiated among *langue*, language, and *parole*, speech or the usage of the former.

10. Our sincerest thanks to this great professional for having shared his stance on the magnificent work that he has done on this film.

characteristics of the word itself in mind (slang, pejorative), but also the historical period in which the story unfolds. In that sense, the Spanish term *negrata* is too modern (and too derogatory) for that time. Although we allowed ourselves, given Tarantino's idiosyncrasy, to introduce some *puto* (*bastard*) to avoid so much repetition of *jodido* (*fucking*), in spite of the fact that *puto* is a modern term, *negrata* seemed a little excessive to us. Thus, we went with *negro* and, especially in the dubbed version, we used other colloquial terms, like *mono* (monkey), *mandingo* (a black African, especially one hailing from Mali, Guinea, or Senegal), *gorila* (gorilla), etc.

Unlike what happened with the aforementioned work by Twain, in the case of *Django Desencadenado*, *a priori*, and since it was concerned with an audiovisual product, a plausible hypothesis would have been to believe that perhaps the preference for *negro* as a translation of *nigger* could be owing to lip-sync issues in dubbing, or space saving, in the case of subtitling. However, we see that the option *negro* is partly due to the historical context under consideration and to an expressed desire to avoid using another more modern term that could have turned out to be inappropriate. However, first it should be noted that, as pointed out by Middleton and Pilgrim (2001, online), the word *nigger* consolidated itself as a derogatory term from the early 1800s onward. Consequently, we can assume that this word already had a clearly discriminatory nature in the historical context of the movie¹¹. In the twenty-first century, the word *nigger* is, as we have seen, very powerful from a racist point of view. Thus, is *negro* the word that can best generate all those perceptions or, in pragmatic terms, the same perlocutionary speech act or even the same cognitive effects? Or has it perhaps been used as an exercise of self-censorship?

As Mark Twain wrote in a letter addressed to George Bainton in 1888, "The difference between the *right word* and the *almost right word* is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug" (the italics are ours). So, is *negro* the *right* or the *almost right* word? We are not going to answer this question here, as we do not intend to express our opinions on whether one is better than the other, although we do wish to reflect on the same in order to try to reveal the underlying ideology. As Ruiz Elvira writes in the *Culture* section of *El País* (2011, online), even though it is translated as *negro* into Castilian Spanish, the literal translation of the *nigger* used by Twain would

11. This finding is supported by the information provided by Hughes (2006, p. 327), when he explains that "The second and dominant sense is that of the contemptuous and highly offensive racial insult (ca. 1800 to the present)."

be *negrata* (a highly pejorative, racist term in Castilian Spanish¹²). Therefore, it seems possible to lay down the following equivalents (ENG → ESP): *black* → *negro* and *nigger* → *negrata*¹³. In Castilian Spanish there certainly does not exist a 100% *right* solution that has the same slave connotations as *nigger*, a word that constitutes a considerably specific American cultural reference. So, if *negrata* is a word that, although not completely – it is a matter of degree –, seems to get the best hold of the essence of *nigger* – and in the *rightest* way – as a racial insult, why has it been translated as *negro* in Twain's work? And why has the same been done in the case of *Django Desencadenado*? If, as already pointed out, the questions of lip sync or space saving have not been the determining factors, is it purely a question of historical adaptation? As we have seen, this can be doubted, since one may argue that, for example, *puto* is also a modern term, just like Quico Rovira himself expresses, and it has still been used in the translation of this movie. Therefore, there seems to be another background that is not related to the aforesaid historical adaptation. If we pay attention to his words, the translator himself acknowledges the fact that the term *negrata* seemed “a little excessive” and “too derogatory.” So, do we perhaps find ourselves before the reflection of an act of (self) censorship and the expression of a determined patronage to tone down the rude or taboo words in a clear example of politically correct standardization? If that is the case, the following comment of Chaume (2012, p. 153) is relevant here: “Dubbing cannot reasonably serve as the ‘watchdog’ or filter of the media.” We may assume that the same could be said about subtitling.

Someone who is only fluent in the target language, in this case Spanish, and therefore has access only to the translated versions, shall certainly remain oblivious to this alleged protectionist desire, but let us put ourselves in the shoes of the bilingual spectator who may enjoy both the original and translated versions of the movie. On seeing the first, we can capture the harshness of the

12. Besides *El País*, it is also translated that way in other Spanish written media like *La Vanguardia*, *La Gaceta*, *Público*, *ABC*, *El Mundo*, *El Periódico de Extremadura*, *La Opinión de Málaga*, *Chance* (of Europa Press), or *Marca*, to name a few, apart from a host of forums or websites about movies and even the dubbing of some films like *R3sacón* (*The Hangover Part III*, Todd Phillips, 2013). It also appears twice in the subtitled version of *Reservoir Dogs* (Quentin Tarantino, 1992), strangely enough, not as a translation of *nigger* (that is translated as *negro*) but of *black* (we thank José Javier Ávila Cabrera for this last piece of information). See also Ávila Cabrera (2014).

13. We must say that *negrata* does not appear in *DRAE*, and that dictionaries such as Collins or Cambridge translate the word *nigger* as *negro*, by all means highlighting its offensive nature. However, it is unfortunately a part of the street slang and, as we just saw, of different media. Moreover, other dictionaries such as Word Reference translate *nigger* as *negrata*, and so do lexicographers such as Carbonell Basset (2009), who includes both options, *negro* and *negrata*, as a translation of the term in question.

moment through, among other matters, that word that constantly belittles the subordinated slaves. And the fact is that, when watching any of the two translated versions (the dubbed one or the subtitled one), one cannot stop feeling deprived of something and believing that he/she is being provided a sanitized version of what Tarantino intended to convey. Obviously, some might prefer the second scenario. In fact, works such as that of Fong (2009) highlight the fact that the common practice in dubbing is to tone down (or even delete) the intensity of the taboo or harsh words. As Soler Pardo (2012) indicates, whenever the word *nigger* has appeared in the original version of a Tarantino movie, it has been translated as *negro* in the version dubbed in Castilian Spanish (with the sole exception of the movie *Pulp Fiction*, wherein it has been translated as *moreno* once.) Taking this recurrence into account (leaving aside what happened in the translation of Twain's work), and despite the consequent reduction in derogatory intensity referred to here, could we find ourselves face-to-face with the sign of an operational norm of audiovisual censorship, such as the one defined by Ballester (2001)?

In any case, one may argue that the translated versions that we are discussing might have been falsely toned down. Are the words *mono* (monkey), *gorila* (gorilla), *mandril* (baboon), or *cucaracha* (cockroach) less hurtful to the viewer discretion or are they, in any way, less derogatory than the word *negrata*? Or is it just that the attempt to tone down has resulted in achieving something maybe even worse: the animalization of a human being?

5. Concluding remarks

For better or for worse, the issues raised here to keep shedding light on the ambit of translation and the role played by ideological issues raise questions that, perhaps, are tough, profound, and uncomfortable for some sensibilities. Still, they are necessary. At the end of the day, translation is basically the art of making decisions, and all decisions have an inherently subjective backdrop and can, therefore, be affected by ideological influences. In fact, have we censored ourselves in the title of this article, by writing "the N-word" and not "nigger"?

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