

Metaphorical dimension of idioms in TV series for German, Norwegian and Spanish audiences

María Labarta Postigo¹

Recibido: 29 de septiembre de 2021 / Aceptado: 27 de enero de 2022

Abstract. Over recent years, internet TV series have grown in popularity to become one of the audiovisual products with the highest audiences worldwide. The Covid crisis, with limitations on movement, has further increased their success during 2020-21. English is by far the most common language for such productions, which are typically offered to non-anglophone viewers in translated format, with either subtitles or dubbing. One of the main challenges in translation here concerns the use of idioms, since these do not always have a fixed equivalent in the target language. Taking as a starting point a corpus of drama series from Netflix and Amazon Prime, this study considers the metaphorical dimension of idioms in original TV series in English and the subtitling of these in German, Norwegian and Spanish. The aim is to analyze the strategies used in the translation process, and to look at the differences between the original dialogues and the translated subtitles. The data are described from a cognitive and contrastive perspective, according to the methodology developed by the author. The results of the analysis show a general trend towards the reduction of metaphorical expressions in the translated subtitles. Significant differences are found between the translations into the three target languages under examination. A surprising finding is that there are more similarities between the German and Spanish translations than between those into German and Norwegian, despite these latter two belonging to the same Germanic linguistic family.

Keywords: idioms; metaphors; internet TV series; English-German; English-Norwegian and English-Spanish translation; linguistic families; Germanic Languages

[es] La dimensión metafórica de las locuciones en series de TV para España, Noruega y Alemania

Resumen. Las series de TV por internet se han convertido en uno de los productos audiovisuales de mayor audiencia a nivel mundial. La crisis ocasionada por la Covid-19 con limitaciones de movimiento han incrementado su éxito durante 2020-21. El inglés es con diferencia el idioma original de estas series, que llega a los espectadores no anglófonos, en formato traducido, con subtítulos o doblaje. Uno de los retos fundamentales en la traducción es el de las locuciones, ya que no siempre tienen un equivalente fijo en la lengua meta. Tomando como punto de partida de la investigación un corpus de cuatro series de drama, ofrecidas por Netflix y Amazon Prime, este trabajo estudia la dimensión metafórica de las locuciones en series de TV originales en inglés y en los subtítulos en alemán, noruego y español. El objetivo es analizar las estrategias utilizadas en el proceso de traducción y estudiar las diferencias entre los diálogos originales y los subtítulos traducidos al alemán y a las otras lenguas meta. Los datos se describen desde una perspectiva cognitiva y contrastiva, de acuerdo con la metodología desarrollada por la autora. Los resultados del análisis muestran una tendencia general hacia la reducción de expresiones metafóricas en los subtítulos traducidos. El análisis contrastivo pone de relieve que existen diferencias significativas entre las traducciones a las tres lenguas meta. Sorprendentemente encontramos más similitudes entre las traducciones al alemán y al español que entre aquellas al alemán y al noruego, a pesar de pertenecer estas dos últimas a la misma familia lingüística de las lenguas germánicas.

Palabras clave: locuciones; metáforas; series de TV por internet; traducción inglés-alemán; inglés-español e inglés-noruego; familia lingüística; lenguas germánicas

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Cómo citar: Labarta Postigo, M. (2022). Metaphorical dimension of idioms in TV series for German, Norwegian and Spanish audiences. *Estudios de Traducción*, 12, 151-162.

¹ Universitat de València (IULMA)
maria.labarta@uv.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3648-402X>

1. Introduction

The Covid crisis, with long quarantines and other limitations on the movement of people, has led to the increased success of Internet TV series over the last two years. Even before the pandemic, they were among the audiovisual products with the highest audience in the world. For this reason, I have taken them as the focus of the present study, which will apply an analytical methodology developed in a previous study (Labarta 2000) in which I explored the metaphorical dimension of idioms in German and Spanish movies and their translation into English subtitles.

In that study, contrastive analysis showed significant differences between the strategies followed for German-to-English and Spanish-to-English translations. This motivated a further study (Labarta 2021), which approached the issue from the opposite direction: the translation of English as a source language (SL) into German and Spanish. Instead of looking at movies, I analyzed idioms in TV series with multilingual subtitles to highlight the translation strategies used in subtitling. For this latter study, I expanded the number of translated languages (TLs) and considered other languages and varieties, besides German and Spanish.

The latter, qualitative study raised questions relating to observed differences in the translation of idiomatic expressions and figurative meaning found within language families, i.e. Germanic and Romance. This was a motivation to carry out an analysis of a larger corpus in order to shed further light on the issue.

The present paper takes a contrastive approach to original idioms in subtitles as a means of exploring their translation from the SL (English) into German (Ger) and two other languages, one from the same Germanic family, Norwegian (Nw), and another from a different family, Spanish (Sp).

A further goal of the analysis will be to compare the results of the analysis of translations into two Germanic languages, English-to-German and English-to-Norwegian, and also to compare the English-to-German and English-to-Spanish translations.

The paper is divided into five further sections. An overview of the translation of idioms in filmic texts is given below, to be followed by a presentation of the theoretical framework and a description of the source of the data in Section 3. The results of the qualitative analysis are set out and illustrated with selected examples for each translation strategy in Section 4. The fifth section offers the results of contrastive analysis between the SL and the TLs, as well as between German and the other TLs. Finally, Section 6 summarizes the conclusions.

2. The challenge of translating idioms

This analysis will focus on the metaphorical dimension of idioms in fictional dialogs of TV series and their translation. Idioms, as with other figures of speech, go beyond the literal meanings of words to provide readers with a figurative meaning which can convey new cultural and imaginative insights. Idioms can be highly expressive, as the following examples will show. The German idiom *Jemanden das Ohr abkauen* (Literally: to chew someone's ear off) is a colloquial expression meaning that someone gets on the nerves of the interlocutor with their endless talking (especially on the phone). The metaphor 'to chew off an ear' introduces a humorous nuance to the description of an unpleasant situation that everybody has probably experienced as an interlocutor. A similar expression exists in English: 'to talk someone's ear off' and 'to bend one's ear', and indeed something comparable can be found in various languages. A different example is *Seinen Senf dazu geben* (Literally: to add your mustard to it), that is, to give your opinion/advice about something, including when this opinion is unsolicited. The figurative meaning of this gastronomic metaphor is that someone's advice could improve a conversation or add information on an issue, just like mustard can improve the taste of a dish or make it spicy. Nevertheless, the metaphorical dimension of this idiom is complex. Besides its figurative sense, it offers a double meaning. Since mustard does not combine well with every dish, it can be an uncomfortable and indeed unpleasant addition to food, just as unsolicited advice from someone who just wants 'to add his/her mustard' might be unwelcome or unhelpful. Thus, this idiom of just four words has an enormous expressivity, one that cannot be achieved without the metaphorical dimension.

In a recent publication I noted the importance of idioms in daily communication and how their understanding differs from those of literal expressions:

Most idioms are metaphorical and must therefore be processed by the listener/reader in a different way than literal expressions. The use of an idiom may trigger a metaphorical cognitive process, evoking in the listener/reader an association with an image/idea that leads to its understanding. This is not the case, or it happens significantly less, when the listener/reader is processing literal paraphrases of idioms (Labarta 2020: 51).

My main interest here is the metaphorical and cultural dimension of idioms. I will consider all kinds of idioms, from those which are widespread, to culture-specific or culturally-bound idioms. Widespread idioms are those which exist in various languages with the same or similar structure and figurative meaning (Pirainen 2006). Examples include 'to hit the nail on the head' (Ger: *den Nagel auf den Kopf treffen*, Nw: *å treffe spikeren på hodet*, Sp: *dar en el clavo*) and 'to have got a screw loose' (Ger: *eine Schraube locker*, Nw: *du har en skrue løs*, Sp: *te falta un tornillo*). Culture-specific idioms constitute the opposite case. They belong within the conventionalized

knowledge of a particular culture and hence are difficult to translate. A good example here is ‘to take a rain check’ or just ‘rain check’. It is easy enough to understand, but not so easy to translate. The reason is that it is a unique idiom from American English, deriving from baseball games of the 19th century. We can find examples of culturally bound idioms in all languages under scrutiny here. In German, for instance, *das sind für mich böhmische Dörfer* (Literally: these are Bohemian villages for me, meaning I don’t understand anything), in Norwegian *å stå med skjegget i postkassen* (Literally: to stand with your beard in the mailbox, meaning to have been cheated or to have bad luck), and in Spanish *quedarse a la luna de Valencia* (Literally: to stay on Valencia’s moon, meaning that the hope of a desire or intention is frustrated).

With the possible exception of widespread idioms, which come closest to being open to direct translation, idioms are generally considered to be one of the greatest challenges for translators. Especially difficult is the translation of cultural-specific idioms, since these do not exist as such in the TLs and indeed may be untranslatable.

In addition to possible cultural differences, idioms may be affected by semantic and grammatical changes (gender, number, verbal person, etc.). All this entails a high degree of complexity when translating them from one language to another. As such they constitute one of the fundamental challenges in the translation of subtitles for movies and series. Practical proof of this can be seen in the HERMES test, designed by Netflix, the world’s largest video streaming service company, to select and hire translation professionals. With the slogan ‘looking for the best translators around the globe’ it was ‘the first online subtitling and translation test and indexing system by a major content creator’. The company’s blog (Netflix Tech Blog² indicates that there are approximately 4,000 idioms in English, and that being able to translate them in a culturally accurate way is critical to preserving the creative intent of the content. For the selection of translators, the candidates underwent a multiple choice test, which evaluated their skills. One of the four main skills of translation was ‘to translate idiomatic phrases into their target language’.

3. Methodology and corpus

The theoretical framework of the current research is based on Lakoff’s Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff 1993, Lakoff & Johnson 1980); it also embraces Gibbs’ work on metaphor and culture (Gibbs 1996, 2001; Gibbs, Bogdanovich et al. 1997) and on idioms and idiomatic and literal meaning (Gibbs, Nayak, & Cutting 1989; Gibbs & O’Brien 1990).

Labarta (2020) developed a methodology to analyze translation strategies used in producing English subtitles for original movies in Spanish and German, based on various approaches to different translation types and goals (Baker 1992; Gottlieb 1992, 1994; Newmark 1998; Corpas 2000; Díaz Cintas & Anderman 2009; Trim 2007; Ebeling 2012; Conca & Guía 2014; Díaz Cintas & Ramael 2014; Oltra 2015; van Lawick 2006). In Labarta (2021) I applied this methodology, focusing on the four most frequent categories or strategies, to analyze TV-series: Total equivalence (TE), Partial Equivalence (PE), Omission (O), and Explicit meaning (EM). The first two of these strategies use an idiom in the translation, whereas the latter two do not. These categories can be defined thus:

- Omission (O): to omit an idiom from the SL in translating it into the TL.
- Explicit meaning (EM): to leave out the idiom from the SL and to translate it using a word or non-idiomatic expression which coincides with the idiom’s figurative meaning.
- Partial equivalence (PE): Somewhere between total equivalence and the absence of equivalence. The strategy involves translating the SL idiom into a similar, but not identical, idiomatic TL expression, one which has the same meaning as in the SL. The two idioms have identical target domains, but do not fully correspond in their metaphorical structure, image, or source domains.
- Total equivalence (TE): This is of course the ideal translation, in which an exact metaphorical equivalent in the TL is found.

In addition to these four categories, a more detailed classification of partial equivalences depending on the degree of equivalence with the SL idiom is possible. Labarta (2021) defined three main subcategories on a 3-point scale, although the author also recognized and explained that more nuances and gray areas are always possible. Degree 1 would imply slight differences in the metaphorical image and/or domains, such as in one specific detail. Degree 2 would be where the same metaphorical scheme is present, but there are different domains: for example, ‘to have skeletons in the closet’ vs. Ger. *Leichen im Keller haben* (to have corpses in the cellar). In the case of Degree 3, the metaphorical scheme, image, and domains are completely different.

This methodology will be used to analyze the current corpus, with the aim of studying the similarities and differences between the original dialogues and the translated subtitles, as well as between the German translations and the other two TLs. Figure 1 shows an example of the original idiomatic expression ‘he’s licking his chops’ and the subtitle options in the three TLs.

² <https://medium.com/netflix-techblog/the-netflix-hermes-test-quality-subtitling-at-scale-dccea2682aef> [last access: 14 May 2022]



Figure 1. Subtitles options in the series *The Man in the High Castle*

In the present study, the corpus consists of some 400 expressions: 100 idioms in English and their corresponding translations in the three TLs: German, Norwegian and Spanish. The idioms appear in the dialogues of selected drama series from recent years. The criteria for the selection were the genre, including different types of drama (political, fantasy, crime and mystery); the time of production, that is, this century; their availability in the three TLs; and that production ran to at least two seasons, so that enough different idioms (20-30 each series) could be collected.

The following series, originally offered in American English and with multilingual subtitles by the main multimedia service providers Netflix and Amazon Prime, are the basis for the corpus:

- *The Good Wife* (2009-2016). Drama about a disgraced politician's wife who resumes her career as a defense attorney after her husband is jailed for corruption.
- *The Man in the High Castle* (2015-2019). Fantasy drama with elements of science fiction about an alternate version of life in the US in the 1960s, assuming that Nazi Germany and Japan had won WWII.
- *Mindhunter* (2017-2019). Crime drama set in the late 1970s, in which two FBI agents are tasked with interviewing serial killers to solve open cases.
- *Homecoming* (2018-2020). Mystery drama series centered on an unconventional wellness company that helps troubled veterans return to civilian life.

4. Qualitative analysis. Translation categories and examples

The qualitative analysis of the corpus addresses the issue of which strategies are used in the translation of idioms from English into the subtitles of the TLs. To illustrate the results, I will present and comment on some of the most notable examples from each category and subcategory (degree of PT).

4.1. Omission (O)

This strategy consists of omitting the idiom from the SL when translating into the TL.

Example 1. From the series *The Man in the High Castle* (Season 3, Episode 2)

SL Eng: Uh, just long lines at the pumps. **It was nuts**

- TL Ger: *Riesige Schlangen an den Zapfsäulen* [Literally: Huge lines at the pumps]
- TL Nw: *Det er lange køer ved pumpene* [Literally: There are long queues at the pumps]

Both in German and Norwegian the idiom is omitted, while the Spanish subtitles do contain a translation: *Fue una locura* (Literally: it was madness). Although the Spanish translation is a non-idiomatic expression, it provides the meaning of the original text, while in the two Germanic languages this meaning is clearly lost completely. The strategy used to translate into Spanish will be presented and discussed in the next section.

4.2. Explicit Meaning (EM)

The EM does not employ an idiom in the TL to translate the one in the SL, but instead translates it using a word or a non-idiomatic expression, one which explains, paraphrases, or even interprets the figurative meaning of the idiom.

Example 2. From the series *The Good Wife* (Season 2, Episode 3)

SL Eng: **We're hitting a brick wall**

- TL Ger: *Hey, wir kommen nicht weiter* [Literally: Hey, we're not getting any further]

The metaphorical image of hitting a hard surface like a brick wall to express the idea that something is impossible or has ceased to make sense is not available in the German subtitles. The translation instead offers the idiom's meaning.

In this case, only German chooses EM, the other two TMs keep the idiom in direct translation. In Norwegian: *Vi møter veggen her* (We meet the wall here) and in Spanish: *Nos estamos pegando contra la pared* (We're hitting the wall). These cases will be discussed in detail in Example 7.

Example 3. From the series *Mindhunter* (Season 1, Episode 9)

SL Eng: **Probably by kissing his ass**

- TL Ger: *Hat sich wohl eingeschleimt* [Literally: He surely achieved it by flattery / He has buttered him up]
- TL Nw: *Sikkert ved å smiske* [Literally: Sure by flattery]
- TL Sp: *Lo habrá adulado* [Literally: He will have flattered him]

There is no idiom in any of the three TMs in Example 3, although it exists an identical expression in Norwegian: *Sannsynligvis ved å kysse han i ræva*. By not including an idiom, not only is the metaphorical image lost, but also the strong language of the English idiom 'his ass' disappears. Furthermore, interesting differences at the level of register can be observed between the three translations. The Norwegian one can be used as a colloquial expression, whereas the Spanish one cannot. The Spanish verb *adular* is inappropriate to translate 'to kiss his ass', since it belongs to a more formal linguistic register, but the German expression *sich einschleimen* is colloquial and metaphorical, and therefore a more appropriate translation.

Example 4. From the Series *Homecoming* (Season 1, Episode 9)

SL Eng: **I have a situation here**

- TL Ger: *Es gibt hier ein Problem* [Literally: There is a problem here]
- TL Sp: *Tengo un problema, urgente en cierto modo* [Literally: I have a problem. It is urgent in a way]

Both the Spanish and the German subtitles choose to explain the idiom. The reason may be that both languages lack an equivalent one, to the best of my knowledge. Also of interest here is that the Norwegian translation does have an equivalent idiom, *Jeg har en situasjon her*.

Example 5. From the series *The Man in the High Castle* (Season 1, Episode 2)

SL Eng: **Your mission is off the books**

- TL Ger: *Deine Mission ist inoffiziell* [Literally: Your mission is unofficial]
- TL Nw: *Oppdraget ditt er hemmelig* [Literally: Your mission is secret / unofficial]
- TL Sp: *Tu misión es extraoficial, Joe* [Literally: Your mission is unofficial, Joe]

In example 5 all three TLs offer an explicit translation of the idiom. ‘Off the books’ seems to be one of those unique idioms, untranslatable with an idiomatic expression, at least in the three TLs here. It is a culture-specific idiom, as described above.

4.3. Partial Equivalence (PE)

Somewhere between total equivalence and the absence of equivalence is the strategy PE. This involves translating the idiom of the SL into a similar, but not identical, idiomatic expression in the TL, one which has the same meaning as in the SL. The two idioms have identical target domains, but do not fully correspond in their metaphorical structure, image, or source domains.

The following examples are classified in three grades or degrees of equivalence, although as noted below, more nuances are always possible.

4.3.1. Grade 1

Example 6. From the series *The Man in the High Castle* (Season 3, Episode 1)

SL Eng: **...to tell me which way's up**

- TL Sp: *... que me diga dónde está el norte* [Literally: ... to tell me where the north is]

In example 6 the metaphorical scheme in SL and TL is the same, but the domains are slightly different. In English is it ‘the way up’, in Spanish *el norte* (the North).

Example 7. From the series *The Good Wife* (Season 2, Episode 3)

SL Eng: **We're hitting a brick wall**

- TL Nw: *Vi møter veggen her* [Literally: We meet the wall here]
- TL Sp: *Nos estamos pegando contra la pared* [Literally: We're hitting the wall]

Let us now return to the idiom in example 2 and explore the idiomatic translations into Norwegian and Spanish in more detail. The same metaphor of hitting something very hard, like a wall, is used to indicate that something/an action has no sense or is no longer useful and that it is necessary to move on. Nevertheless, there is a slight difference between the source domain of the SL and those of the TLs. The metaphorical image in the English idiom is to hit a ‘brick wall’, while in Norwegian it is simply a wall, which is ‘met’ instead of ‘hit’. The image in the Spanish idiom is also just a wall, without mentioning what material the wall is made of.

The differences in this example are so subtle that there may be some doubt as to whether the translations can be classified as TEs. In any case, since they are certainly not 100% TE, they might be seen as representing a transition between the TE and PE categories.

4.3.2. Grade 2

Example 8. From the series *Mindhunter* (Season 1, Episode 10)

SL Eng: **When things got out of hand?**

- TL Ger: *Als alles aus dem Ruder lief* [Literally: When everything went out of the rudder/oar]

Example 8 shows another case of the same metaphorical scheme, but with different domains in English ‘hand’ and German, *Ruder* (rudder/oar).

Example 9. From the series *Homecoming* (Season 1, Episode 3)

SL Eng: ...**that we’re on really different pages here**

— TL Ger: ...*wir sind nicht auf der gleichen Wellenlänge hier* [Literally: (... We are not on the same wavelength here)]

This is another example of a translation using the same metaphorical scheme but a different domain. The metaphorical image in English is that of a book, of paper, of the page of a book (‘to be on different pages’), while in German the metaphor is about sound and wavelength, to be synchronized or ‘on the same wavelength’, which is itself an idiom in English.

4.3.3. Grade 3

Example 10. From the series *Mindhunter* (Season 2, Episode 2)

SL Eng: (I though the last thing we need is) **for Holden to have everyone walking on eggshells around here?**

— TL Ger: *Ihn wie ein rohes Ei behandeln* [Literally: To treat him like a raw egg]

— TLNw: *Å behandle han med silkehansker* [Literally: To treat him with silk gloves]

The metaphorical scheme, image, and domains are completely different in the two TLs languages here. German and English have in common the image of eggs as something fragile, although English refers to the delicate act of walking on eggshells, whereas in German it is the raw egg inside the shell which is seen as delicate; meanwhile, the Norwegian idiom uses the image of wearing ‘silk gloves’ as a way of carefully handling something which is very fragile.

The Spanish subtitles use a non-idiomatic explanation in this example *Que todos fuesen con cuidado con Holden* [Literally: everyone be careful with Holden].

Example 11. From the series *Mindhunter* (Season 2, Episode 1)

SL Eng: **Gonna be on us like stink on shit**

— TL Ger: *Er wird uns umkreisen wie die Fliegen die Scheiße* [Literally: He’ll circle us like flies circle shit]

— TL Nw: *Han følger oss med argusøyne* [Literally: He follows us with Argus eyes]

— TL Sp: *Se nos pegará como una lapa* [Literally: It will stick to us like a limpet]

In example 11 we can observe idiomatic expressions in all the TLs. The metaphorical scheme, image, and domains are completely different in the four languages.

The expression ‘Gonna be on us like stink on shit’ is a scatological metaphor to express the consequences of a possible decision by two FBI agents. If they act on their own, they will have to endure very close and permanent (like the two items in the metaphorical image) surveillance by their superiors in the future. A completely different metaphor is used in each of the TLs, while the source domain is the same: the idea of being watched/followed extremely closely.

While the English idiom is colloquial and rather vulgar, the Norwegian translation is an expression from a totally different linguistic register. According to Vannebo (2019: 19) *Argusøyne* is related to Greco-Roman mythology, where *Argus* (Greek *Argos*) was a monster with a hundred (in other sources: a thousand) eyes. The expression belongs to a higher sociolinguistic level, even to literary language.

In Norwegian there is no direct translation for the English idiom, but a good solution could be: *De kommer til å henge rundt oss som fluer rundt et møkkalass* [Literally: they will be hanging around us like flies around a load of shit.]

The Spanish idiom is somewhere between, being colloquial without including vulgar language or unpleasant words.

4.4. Total Equivalence (TE)

This, of course, is the ideal translation, in which an exact metaphorical equivalent in the TL is found. Translation of wholly equivalent idioms comes closest to being like the direct translation of lexicon items, and indeed dictionaries

are available that contain the most frequent idioms in various languages. Sometimes we found TE in only one of the languages, as in examples 12,13 and 14:

Example 12. From the series *The Man in the High Castle* (Season 4, Episode 1)

SL Eng: **We should take note**

— TL Sp: *Deberíamos tomar nota* [Literally: We should take note]

The Spanish subtitles here offer a totally equivalent idiomatic expression, while the other two TLs paraphrase its meaning: in German *Das sollten wir zur Kenntnis nehmen* (We should acknowledge it), and in Norwegian *Vi burde lære fra dem* (We should learn from them). Interestingly enough, this exact idiom is not used or does not exist in the other two Germanic languages, but it does in Spanish.

Example 13. From the series *Homecoming* (Season 1, Episode 4)

SL Eng: **Anthony was kind of vanilla, wasn't he?**

— TL Nw: *Anthony var litt vanilje³, ikke sant?* [Literally: Anthony was a little vanilla, right?]

Example 14. From the series *The Man in the High Castle* (Season 3, Episode 1)

SL Eng: **I'll take a chance.**

— TL Nw: *Jeg tar sjansen*

In examples 13 and 14, Norwegian is the TL which uses the total equivalent idiom. German and Spanish do not have an equivalent to the idiom 'to be vanilla' and translate it with different strategies: EM in German *Er war zu normal* (he was too normal/conventional) and PE in Spanish *era muy soso* (he was flavorless/tasteless), an idiom with a culinary background.

In example 14, the Norwegian translation is also 100% equivalent, while the subtitles of the other Germanic TL explain the meaning — *Dann will ich's wagen* (Then I want to risk it) — as do the Spanish subtitles: *Voy a arriesgarme* (I am going to risk it).

As we will see in the next section, Norwegian has the highest occurrence of TEs, although occasionally a TE in Spanish and German may be found while the Norwegian translation is EM, as in the following example.

Example 15. From the series *The Man in the High Castle* (Season 2, Episode 1)

SL Eng: **Get him to pull some strings**

— TL Ger: *Damit sie⁴ ein paar Fäden ziehen* [Literally: So that they pull some strings]

— TL Sp: *y tirar de algún hilo* [Literally: ...And pull some strings]

The German and the Spanish subtitles contain an idiom which is equivalent to the English one. The Norwegian translation does not have a figurative meaning in this case: *få dem til å gjøre noe* means 'make them do something'. This must be a choice by the translator, because there is an equivalent idiom in Norwegian: *å trekke i trådene/ den som trekker i trådene*.

Finally, there are often examples of equivalent idioms in all three languages, such as in the following cases:

Example 16. From the series *Mindhunter* (Season 1, Episode 11)

SL Eng: (Well I took your polygraph.) **I'm an open book**

— TL Ger: *Na ja, ich hab den Test gemacht. Bin'n offenes Buch* [Literally: Well, I did the test. I'm an open book]

— TL Nw: *Jeg tok løgndetektortesten, jeg er en åpen bok* [Literally: I took the lie detector test, I'm an open book]

— TL Sp: *Bueno, si ya hice el polígrafo, soy un libro abierto* [Literally: Well, if I already did the polygraph, I'm an open book]

³ The expression 'to be vanilje' is extremely unusual in Norwegian. A better expression would be 'var litt kjedelig'.

⁴ The difference between the singular pronoun *him* and the German translation *sie* (they) can be explained by the context of the film.

The translations into the three TLs in example 16 are totally equivalent to the SL idiom.

Example 17. From the series *The Man in the High Castle* (Season 3, Episode 1)

SL Eng: You must have shit on all of 'em
— TL Ger: <i>Du hast genug Scheiße über jeden da</i> [Literally: You got enough shit about everyone]
— TL Nw: <i>Du må ha dritt på alle sammen</i> [Literally: You must have shit on everyone]
— TL Sp: <i>Seguro que tienes mierda de todos ellos</i> [Literally: You sure got shit from all of them]

In example 17 the idiomatic expression and the strong language has been translated into all three TLs.

5. Results of the contrastive analysis

5.1. Original Language vs. Translated Languages

In order to compare the use of idioms in the subtitles in English and their translations, the following table offers a summary of the findings for the three TLs.

Table 1. Summary of the results of analysis

Translation Strategy	Sum of translated idioms	Percentage of translated idioms
Total Equivalence	51	17%
Partial Equivalence	114	38%
Explicit Meaning	130	43.33%
Omission	5	1.66%
Total	300	100%

Translation by Explicit Meaning (EM) is the most frequent, amounting to 43.33% of the analyzed idioms. So, almost half of the idioms are translated in such a way that the idiomatic/metaphorical meaning is in fact left out.

The second most frequently used strategy is Partial Equivalence (PE). The analysis here found that 38% of the idioms were translated into an idiomatic expression in the TL which is not identical with that in the SL, but which has the same meaning. This option is accurate in terms of translation, and offers the audience a figurative meaning in the TL.

Less frequent is the category Total Equivalence (TE), and is only possible if the idiom exists in both the SL and TL. In the corpus here, 17% of the translated idioms are totally equivalent. In such cases, the process of understanding the translated idiom should be the same for the audience using subtitles as in the original language.

The number of omissions was very low (1.66%) and therefore not significant for our analysis. Nevertheless, totally omitting the translation of an idiom has consequences, which will be discussed in the conclusion.

5.2 German-Norwegian vs. German-Spanish

We also observed that different strategies of translation were followed in the subtitling of each TL.

I will compare the results of the language blocks analyzed (German-Norwegian and German-Spanish) in order to identify similarities and differences between German and the two other TLs, which belong to different linguistic families.

Table 2. Contrastive analysis: German-Norwegian

Translation Strategy	Translations into German	Translations into Norwegian
Total Equivalence	13%	23%
Partial Equivalence	42%	28%
Explicit Meaning	42%	47%
Omission	3%	2%
Total	100%	100%

The omission strategy is quite similar in both languages, at 2% in Norwegian and 3% in German, while in the remaining categories important differences are found. Total equivalence is far more frequent in Norwegian (23%) than in German

(13%). The EM category, on the other hand, is also more frequent in Norwegian (47%) than in German (42%). As for partial equivalence, there is also a notable difference of 14% between the two languages. In German, 42% of translations are partial equivalences, while in Norwegian this is only 28%. We can see all these differences more clearly in Figure 2:

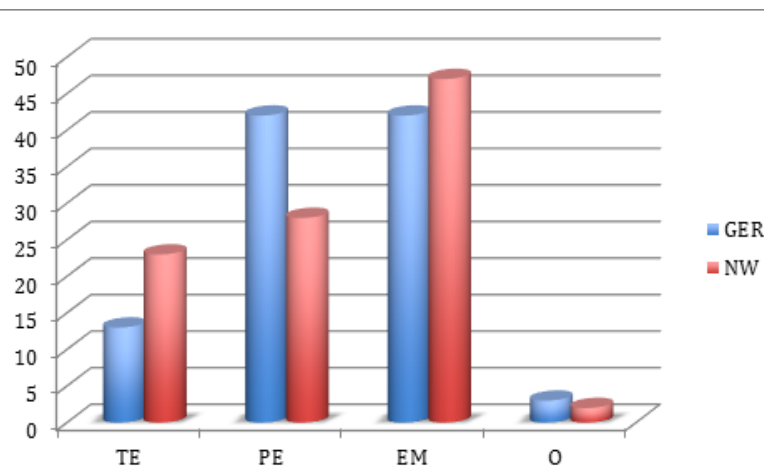


Figure 2. Contrastive analysis: German-Norwegian

It is surprising that the differences between German and Norwegian are so great, despite both being Germanic languages and belonging to the same family as the source language, English.

We turn now to the differences between German and Spanish, these set out in the following table:

Table 3. Contrastive analysis: German-Spanish

Translation Strategy	Translations into German	Translations into Spanish
Total Equivalence	13%	15%
Partial Equivalence	42%	44%
Explicit Meaning	42%	41%
Omission	3%	0%
Total	100%	100%

The greatest difference between the German and Spanish translations concerns the category O. We don't find omissions at all in the Spanish subtitles, while in German the percentage of omissions is 3%. Total equivalence is a little more frequent in Spanish (15%) than in German (13%). Partial Equivalence is slightly higher in Spanish (44%) than in German (42%). Even though this difference is only 2%, it is somewhat surprising to find less idiomaticity in the German subtitles, given that German is from the same Anglo-German language family as the SL. As for the category Explicit Meaning, the differences were minimal: German 42%, and Spanish 41%. We can see all these differences more clearly in Figure 3:

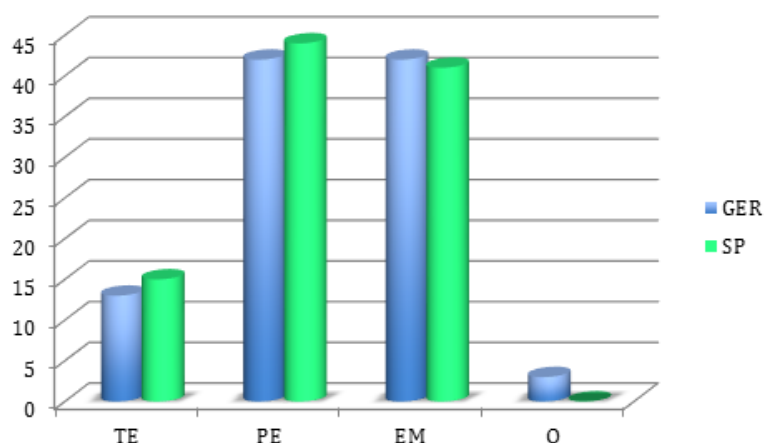


Figure 3. Contrastive analysis: German-Spanish

Surprisingly, the results of the contrastive analysis of the German and the Spanish categories are very similar. The differences are minimal, oscillating between 1 % and 3 % in the four categories.

Table 4 and Figure 4, below, offer overviews of the total results plus the contrastive analysis between the three TLs.

Table 4. Contrastive analysis between the three TLs and the total results

	GER	NW	SP	Total	%
TE	13	23	15	51	17%
PE	42	28	44	114	38%
EM	42	47	41	130	43.33%
O	3	2	0	5	1.66%
	100	100	100	300	100%

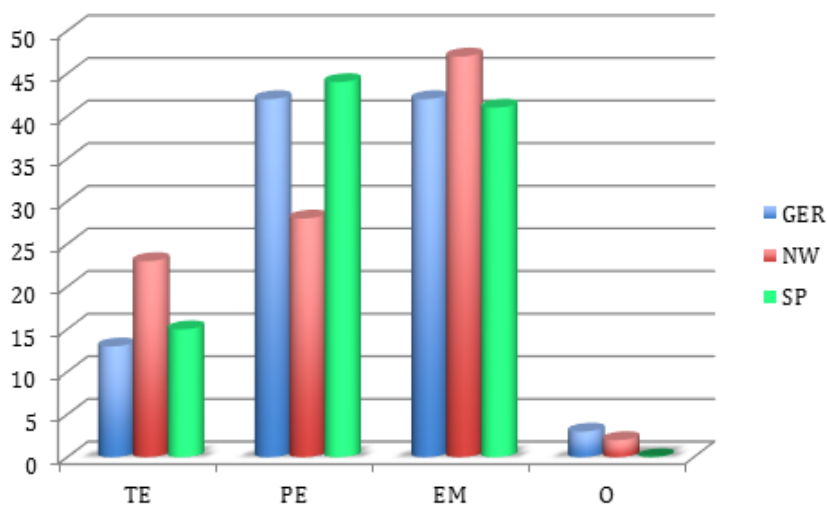


Figure 4. Contrastive analysis: German-Norwegian-Spanish

6. Conclusion

The current study has found remarkable differences between original TV dialogues and the translated subtitles of these, from a metaphorical and idiomatic perspective. As Table 1 illustrates, almost half of the idioms were translated by leaving out the idiomatic/metaphorical meaning itself. The use of this strategy might make a literal understanding easier and faster, but might also have consequences in terms of the loss of other levels of meaning. According to Gibbs (1997: 141) access to conceptual metaphors when understanding literal phrases is significantly less than when understanding idioms. The choice of this translation strategy may therefore significantly hinder the understanding process, in that the metaphorical dimension in the content of the SL idiom isn't available in the TL translation. Furthermore, omitting the idiom implies a loss of meaning, such as information relating to register, humor, etc. The idiom tells us something about the character who uses it: their sociolect, idiolect and style, among many other factors. Idioms are used frequently in colloquial language, introducing expressive force and an element of personal style into the action. These features of conversation become lost if the TL translation is a literal phrase instead of an idiom.

Taking into account the overall results and those of the contrastive analysis, I conclude that despite belonging to different language families, there is far greater similarity between the Spanish and the German translation strategies than between those of the two Germanic languages, as illustrated in Table 4 and Figure 4.

This confirms the findings in Labarta (2021), based on a smaller corpus, and adds further weight to the claim that belonging to the same linguistic family is not a sufficient criterion to explain similarities and differences in the translation of idioms in series subtitles. The analysis shows examples in which equivalent idioms in English do indeed exist in the TL, yet despite this an explicit translation is chosen, as in example (1), 'It was nuts', which was totally omitted in German, or in example (15), 'to pull the strings', which was translated as 'make them do something' instead of the equivalent idiom in Norwegian. It seems that the translator or team of translators could play a fundamental role in the construction of the figurative meaning in subtitles, in addition to the proximity between SL and TL in linguistically related languages.

The findings of this study raise new questions that merit further study. One of these has to do with the similarities and differences observed in the translation of idiomatic expressions and figurative meaning within language families. Another possible line of research concerns the translation of idioms with strong or potentially offensive language, focusing on the degree of fidelity to the original linguistic register. To shed further light on these issues, a necessary first step would be an analysis of corpus (or parallel corpora) of films/series with subtitles in linguistically related and non-related TLs. Additionally, more work in this area would help us to better understand the reduction of figurative meaning in translated subtitles in general.

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