English-language dubbing: challenges and quality standards of an emerging localisation trend

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ABSTRACT

The availability of a significant amount of non-English audiovisual content on streaming platforms gave rise to a new localisation demand: English-language dubbing of films and TV series. This paper examines English lip-synch dubbing *vis-à-vis* the norms and quality standards that generally govern dubbing in other cultures and languages. It proposes an empirical analysis based on a selection of English-dubbed fiction series episodes streamed on Netflix. These are analysed *in primis* as target culture audiovisual texts in their own right and only later in comparison with their original counterparts. The intent is to identify: (1) recurrent patterns across English dubbed products; (2) challenging factors specific to English dubbing; and, (3) possible explanations to such challenges. The study reveals that due attention is given to dialogue synchronisation in terms of matching duration, pauses and lip movements, even though the last-mentioned also presents inconsistencies. Naturalness in the target language and speech tempo are pursued, sometimes affecting other quality parameters, such as rhythmic synchrony that turns out to be one of the major challenges throughout. Other patterns that emerge include unnatural intonation, in particular, speech melody, and instances of hollow sound quality, especially in outdoor scenes. The ultimate aim of the study is to lay the groundwork for further research into strategies that could possibly meet the identified challenges.

KEYWORDS

English dubbing, dubbing adaptation, dubbing quality standards, patterns, challenges, Netflix.

1. A growing market demand

New streaming platforms, particularly the ones that create their own original content, have recently given rise to an increase in the availability of non-English language productions. This has generated new audiences, which have in turn generated new localisation demands, or vice versa: the availability of localised products has generated new audiences, some of these less accustomed to accessing localised content, especially dubbed. Given the sudden boom — both in demand and availability — of English dubbed content, Anglophone native speakers have also become a dubbing audience, along with non-native speakers who reside in Anglophone countries and therefore have access to the English dubbed versions of non-English series.

This research study is triggered primarily by the emerging English-language dubbing market that has so far been accompanied by a somewhat mixed viewer response. The web and social media have been invaded by reviews, comments and articles dedicated to this phenomenon. The not-so-favourable feedback features adjectives such as "dubby" and "awkward" (Goldsmith 2019), as well as "non-realistic", "unconvincing", "lacklustre", "jarring", "stilted" (Netflix Twitter pages), while other random blogs and

websites offer guidelines to switch streaming settings back to the original language with subtitles, when the English dubbed version is provided as a default option.

Netflix has responded to this feedback to the extent of proposing newly re-dubbed versions, as in the case of *Money Heist* (*La Casa de papel*, Vancouver Media 2017-), or offering further audio options, as in *Fauda (Tender products 2015-)*, in an attempt to enhance quality standards and meet the favour of the English native audience.

Re-dubbing the first two seasons of *Money Heist* implied engaging a new dubbing director and a new cast of dubbing actors. Dialogue lines, too, were modified, though it is unclear whether the dubbing scripts were rewritten, or whether text adjustments were made on the spot by the professionals present in the recording studio. An interview with Netflix's English dubbing creative manager and their international dubbing director published in *The New York Times* (Goldsmith 2019) reveals that they have looked into the "questionable alignment of sync" in their products, and more attention is now given to the selection of directors, voice talent and role performance. Actors and directors with well-known film or TV series credits are being roped in, and actors enticed to get into the part and treat the scenes like film production scenes. According to the above article, in the second dub of *Money Heist*, voice actors wore red jumpsuits similar to those worn by the actors on set. The same article also mentions Netflix's approach with dubbing directors that is, allowing them the freedom and flexibility to follow their instincts in striking a balance between fidelity to the original version and natural-sounding performances. Another strategy sometimes applied is that of casting the original actors for the English dub when their language proficiency level enables this. A case in point is the Danish series *The Rain* (Miso Film 2018), as well as the German series *Dogs of Berlin* (Syrreal Entertainment 2018-).

In *Fauda*, Netflix restores the availability of some of the original voice tracks that had been replaced by English dubbed tracks in the English version. One of Netflix's Twitter announcements refers to the "audio problem" experienced by users, and the re-inclusion of the original Hebrew language option. The Israeli TV series, aimed at a Hebrew-speaking primary audience, features both Arabic and Hebrew dialogue, with Hebrew subtitles for the Arabic dialogue. In the English localised version, the Hebrew dialogue is therefore dubbed into English while the Arabic dialogue is retained and subtitled in English. Many English speakers, indeed, complained for not being able to access the original Hebrew dialogue with subtitles (Netflix's official *Fauda* Twitter page).

Overall viewer impressions and industry reactions around this new English dubbing phenomenon cannot but spark scholarly interest and the need for formal investigation. The word 'new' has been stressed, so far, because it could be key to understanding general viewer response to English dubbing.

Not that English dubbing had been previously inexistent, but it certainly has not, in recent past, been considered a solid traditional dubbing language and culture (or cultures, depending on the specific English variety). This lack of habituation concerns not only viewers, but also those dubbing professionals who may perhaps be approaching this specific industry without any previous background, and without long established norms, strategies or an English dubbing text repertoire to refer to.

As far as viewer response is concerned, Di Giovanni and Romero-Fresco (2019) and Romero-Fresco (2020) suggest that those who are not accustomed to dubbing are most likely to be 'immune' to the so-called *dubbing effect*. This refers to an unconscious viewing defence mechanism whereby the spectators' glance does not focus too much on the mouth movements visible on screen, allowing them to enjoy the dubbed product. In other words, viewer perception and engagement depend also on the degree of habituation, hence a 'different' response to English dubbing on behalf of Anglophone viewers may exist irrespective of the quality of the dubbed product. It would be interesting to further explore this proposition by investigating whether this 'different' response to English dubbing could be experienced also by non-native speakers of English, who are accustomed to dubbing in their own mother-tongue. This would need to take into account a possible unconscious comparison with the dubbing norms that they are accustomed to in their native tongue dubbing. Needless to say, further reception studies would be necessary to corroborate all this. For the purposes at hand, it is simply worth highlighting that this paper lies on the premise that the quality of the dubbed product may not necessarily be fully responsible for viewer response in the case of audiences that are not accustomed to dubbing, or at least, it may not be the only factor influencing the viewing experience.

This paper will investigate the dubbed product (and not its audience) *vis-à-vis* a set of commonly accepted quality standards, by proposing an empirical analysis based on a selection of English-dubbed fiction series episodes streamed on Netflix. These will be examined with the intent of identifying: (1) recurrent patterns (hence, potential norms) across English dubbed products; (2) challenging factors specific to English-language dubbing; and, (3) possible explanations to such challenges, with the final aim of paving the way towards further research focusing on applied strategies.

2. Quality standards

Commonly accepted dubbing quality standards are being used as a basis and benchmark for this study. Among the elements that have an impact on the dubbed end result, Chaume (2007: 73-75, 2012: 14-20) proposes the following: acceptable lip-synch, credible and realistic dialogue, cohesion between images and words, loyal translation or fidelity to the source text, clear sound quality, satisfactory actor performance and dramatisation. Ávila (1997) and Whitman-Linsen (1992) outline similar quality parameters

pertaining to the overall dubbing process. In addition to the above, suitable voice selection in terms of voice qualities and actor variety; and adequate sound editing and mixing (Spiteri Miggiani 2019: 33) may have a huge impact on the credibility of the end product, while pleasant phonaesthetics, that is, the avoidance of cacophonic sounds, can help reduce distraction and enhance viewer engagement (Spiteri Miggiani 2019: 33-34). Although attention to phonaesthetics does not qualify as a top priority, it would highlight meticulousness and the pursuit of high standards.

There is no general scholarly consensus on the prioritisation of quality standards. Some scholars advocate for a realistic oral register over lip synchrony (Martínez Sierra 2008: 58, drawing on Whitman-Linsen 1992: 55; Chaume 2012: 85–86, drawing on Caillé 1960: 107). However, in close-up shots, "phonetic equivalence overrides semantic or even pragmatic equivalence: it is much more important to find a word with a bilabial consonant than to find a synonym or a similar word in the TL" (Chaume 2012: 74). From a practitioner's perspective, lip synchronisation is what often — unconsciously or not — drives the decisions that lead to the target language output, sometimes at the cost of naturalness. This, most likely, is what is accountable for the so-called *dubbese* (Pavesi 1996) in the first place, or what could at least account for many dubbese features. Typical dialogue writing workflows may also have a hand in this, and a possible explanation can be sought in the cognitive processes triggered by the text adaptation itinerary (Spiteri Miggiani 2019: 85-94).

When considering naturalness in relation to intonation, it is certainly true that the dialogue script may have an impact on the actors' use of tone. However, *dubbitis*, that is, the typical prosodic delivery that usually characterises dubbed content (Sánchez-Mompeán 2020: 148), seems to derive mainly from the voice-acting process (Ávila 1997; Chaves 2000; Sánchez-Mompeán 2020) and recording methods, and not from the text (Spiteri Miggiani 2019). Hence, for the purposes of this study, natural-sounding intonation is considered as a distinct parameter, separate from natural-sounding dialogue which focuses on the linguistic code. A distinction between voice performance and intonation is also considered necessary because the quality of each one may depend on different factors.

Even though natural-sounding dialogue and natural-sounding intonation are taken as quality standards, it is important to reiterate that the degree of naturalness (Romero Fresco 2006) referred to is one that falls within the acceptance threshold of a dubbing audience without breaking the suspension of disbelief *(*Romero Fresco 2006*)*. For those viewers who are accustomed to dubbing, the natural-sounding or realistic register benchmark is determined by the tacitly-accepted *prefabricated orality* (Baños Piñero and Chaume 2009) of the dubbese-language code. This is usually rather standardised (Baños Piñero 2009) when compared to spontaneous oral discourse, and also characterised by a certain degree of *formulaicity* (Pavesi 2016) that has developed over time. In other words,

there is an extent of non-naturalness that is usually well tolerated by dubbing audiences, without it threatening the linguistic and prosodic suspension of disbelief, the latter implying that viewers also accept how the characters say what they say despite not sounding the way it would in a real-life situation (Sánchez-Mompeán 2020: 194).

This discourse may not necessarily be applicable in the absence of habituation to dubbed language typicality. The 'naturalness benchmark' for new dubbing audiences may well be that of spontaneous oral discourse, or the type of orality featuring in original fiction products. Therefore, in line with what was mentioned earlier with regard to the dubbing effect 'immunity' experienced by newer dubbing audiences (Di Giovanni and Romero-Fresco 2019; Romero-Fresco 2020), lack of naturalness in English dubbing intonation may possibly have a stronger negative impact on an English-speaking audience than that which other traditional dubbing languages and audiences experience.

As far as technical synchronisation is concerned, acceptable lip-synch as a dubbing quality standard has generally been intended as comprising *phonetic synch* (matching bilabial consonants, labiodental consonants and lip-rounded vowels) and *isochrony* (matching dialogue line duration and pauses) (Chaume 2012). Scholars make a distinction between the two, while the professional practice field uses the term *lip-synch* to refer to overall mouth and lip matching movements (Chaume 2004: 43-45, 2012: 15). When *dischrony* is perceived, it is mainly because of the viewers' involuntary and unconscious lip reading process (Fodor 1976: 48-51; McGurk and MacDonald 1976; Kauramäki *et al.* 2010).

Apart from matching the duration of each utterance as a whole, speech tempo is also fundamental (Fodor 1976: 31; Spiteri Miggiani 2019: 76-79; Sánchez-Mompeán 2020: 30). The delivery rate, or speed of utterance — that may depend both on the source language in question and on the actor's delivery rate — determines the number of mouth flaps or rhythmic beats to be matched. It is important to note that a target dialogue line could match the total duration, length and pauses of a source utterance, but not necessarily the internal rhythm and duration of the individual sounds.

For this reason, in this context, adequate lip-synch (in its broader meaning) is taken as a three-fold parameter comprising:
(1) timing or isochrony (matching duration of utterances and pauses);
(2) tempo or rhythmic synchrony (speech delivery rate and consequent mouth flap frequency)*;*
(3) lip articulatory movements or phonetic synch*.*

This study therefore proposes a fourth synchrony — *rhythmic synchrony* — in addition to the three types of dubbing synchronies generally accepted in Audiovisual Translation studies, and classified by Chaume (2004) as isochrony, lip-synch (phonetic synch), and kinesic synch (body language).

As far as technical sound parameters are concerned, the newly recorded voice tracks are mixed into the original music and effects track and edited in a post-synchronisation phase. Following exclusion of the original language voice tracks (while retaining original sound bites or whole audio sequences, where necessary), audio technicians need to ensure that the newly recorded and mixed tracks are free from noise or interference; that volume levels of speech are adequate and blend in well with the retained original tracks; that necessary filters and effects are applied to voices; and that suitable room/environment acoustics are reproduced (via reverberation, delay, and so on). In some cases, this may also imply enhancing the background noise even when this is included in the music and effects track.

When it comes to voice selection, allocating different voice actors to different characters contributes to the credibility of the end product. Moreover, voice adherence to the actors' physique du rôle also plays a fundamental role as stressed by Bosseaux (2015: 59) who, in turn, draws on Whitman-Linsen's notion of character synchrony that implies correspondence to what viewers expect a voice to sound like. Likewise, Martínez Sierra (2012: 78), in his categorisation of synchronies, refers to this voice compatibility as acoustic synchronisation or characterisation. This, naturally, goes hand in hand with the dubbing actors' voice performance and their ability to closely match the body performance-acting on screen.

The endeavour to provide adhering voice qualities can be considered as an effort to pursue fidelity to the source audiovisual text, just like ensuring matching dialogue and visuals is intended at intersemiotic fidelity. Dialogue writers are often obliged to move away from the original text in order to be faithful to the images or body language on screen (kinesic synch), thus prioritising the visuals over the semantic content of the verbal text. Having said that, fidelity to the source text, in this context, refers to faithfulness to the intended effect as a whole, hence prioritising a homologous approach to translation (Nord 2005: 81). It implies faithfulness to content, form or function, but not necessarily all three at once (Chaume 2016, drawing on Nord 2014).

2.1 Textual and non-textual quality parameters

For the purposes of this study, the commonly-accepted dubbing quality standards drawn on Chaume (2007), among other scholars, are revisited and classified into two categories: textual and non-textual.

Textual quality parameters:

1. Adequate lip synchronisation
2. Natural-sounding dialogue
3. Cohesion between dubbed dialogue and visuals

4. Fidelity to source text
5. Agreeable phonaesthetics

Non-textual quality parameters:

1. Suitable voice selection
2. Convincing voice performance
3. Natural-sounding intonation
4. Appropriate sound quality

The first category is mainly the concern of dubbing translators and dialogue writers, while the second category is influenced mostly by the other professionals involved in the dubbing workflow. Needless to say, these standards all complement each other and form part of a whole, and therefore this divide is simply meant to serve an analytical purpose. The initial raw translation will affect the adapter's script which, in turn will affect the dubbing actors' performance, and so on and so forth. Besides, during the recording phase, dubbing scripts often undergo changes prompted by dubbing directors or actors. Lip synchronisation is a direct result of the adaptation process, but the degree of accuracy also depends on other professionals in the dubbing chain: the dubbing actors who need to capture the right timing and enhance the result with recitation and articulation strategies, or the sound editors who can digitally advance or delay the newly recorded tracks. Vice versa, as Chaume (2012: 19) points out, even though dialogue writers may not be directly responsible for voice performance, ensuring a realistic register in the dialogues can certainly support role interpretation. Likewise, submitting a dubbing script that is functional and able to support the role of actors, directors, assistants and sound engineers (e.g., via specific dubbing notations, or dialogue that enables actors to capture the right intonation, or dialogue that eases articulation) can certainly have an impact on the non-textual parameters.

Even when the dubbing workflow is executed applying adequate standards, all it takes is one 'weak' parameter to produce an overall undesirable effect. In particular, the quality of the sound mix and editing can make or break a dubbed product; poor results in this sector can very quickly and easily undo all the standards achieved in the previous stages of the dubbing workflow.

This strengthens the concept that quality standards should be looked at as a combined 'formula', the balanced proportions of which determine the viewer experience, mainly in terms of credibility. The extent to which the compounds fit together harmoniously determine the end result. Ultimately, whether a dubbed product 'works' and obtains the desired result depends mostly on its ability to maintain the suspension of disbelief. This is directly linked to the identification process, and consequent emotional engagement, which is what ultimately entices viewers to dive into the next episode and keep watching a series.

Another common thread which seems to characterise many of the outlined quality standards, and that has emerged as an evident trait throughout the case study, is that of ensuring comprehension. Comprehension, here, is intended both on an aural level, that is, actually discerning what is being said, as well as on a semantic level, that is, understanding the meaning of what is being said.

Most of the standards outlined can have an impact on comprehension levels. As far as textual parameters are concerned, mismatching dialogue and visuals, as well as lack of fidelity to the text may impinge on viewer comprehension. In order to enhance comprehension, the norms governing dubbing translation and adaptation have, so far, been explicitation, naturalisation and standardisation. (Martínez Sierra 2008: 80, drawing on Goris 1991: 86–118, 127; and 1993: 173–185, among others). As to non-textual parameters, clear sound quality is fundamental, and sound volumes are customised to film purposes for this same reason. Sound engineers ensure that the final recording is free from unnecessary studio-derived noise or interference (Chaume 2016), the rustling sound of hard copy scripts, or pounding of the microphone, to mention a few. The actors definitely give their contribution by means of clear diction and articulation, therefore voice performance plays an important role in this, too.

Interestingly, lack of phonetic synch can also lead to miscomprehension of the actual words pronounced, which in turn implies additional effort required to understand the meaning of the dialogue lines in question. Cognitive research focusing on visual stimuli (mode of articulation) versus auditory stimuli (sound perceived) in the same language has demonstrated that absence of lip synchronisation enhances modified auditory perception to the point of possibly causing sporadic misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the dialogue. Phonetic dischrony (mismatched visual and auditory stimuli) leads viewers to experience a strong McGurk effect (McGurk and MacDonald 1976). The McGurk effect refers to a perceptual phenomenon whereby visual information can modify the hearing perception, changing the way a sound is heard. For example, the sound /ba/ dubbed onto the visible lip movement /ga/ is perceived by most subjects as /da/ (McGurk and MacDonald 1976). A conflicting visual consonant at the beginning of a word can lead to perceptual omission of the first letter, for example, the Finnish visual word *kuola* (drool) dubbed with the auditory *puola* (spool, coil) can be perceived as *uola* (non-existent word) (Möttönen and Sams 2008). The intensity of this effect varies according to the language, and, if applied to interlingual dubbing, this may possibly explain the viewer impact in the case of lack of phonetic synchrony.

3. The Study

This paper indulges in the empirical analysis of a selection of dubbed fiction series episodes, with the intent of identifying patterns in relation to the outlined quality standards. The analysis of the qualitative data collected is

based on observations mostly drawn on professional practice experience. Multiple viewings of each episode were necessary. Additional episodes from the same series were also watched simply to get a better feel of the series in English, despite not being under scrutiny. The content was viewed directly in the English dubbed version while flagging and transcribing specific dialogue lines and labelling them according to the outlined classification of quality parameters. The source text was resorted to only *a posteriori*, after having analysed each episode as a target culture audiovisual text in its own right. This further comparative observation served to corroborate (or otherwise) first impressions and conclusions drawn on the target text (Toury 2012).

3.1 Object of Study

The fiction series under examination are all drawn from the same streaming platform: Netflix. Products with US dubbed versions, therefore American English dubbing, were chosen over British English dubs. The data sample for this study encompasses the first episode from each of the following:
1. *The Hook Up Plan* (*Plan Coeur*, 2018-, French romantic comedy, 26 minutes)
2. *Money Heist* (*La Casa de Papel, 2017-,* Spanish thriller and crime drama, 48 minutes*)*;
3. *Better Than Us* (*Luchshe, Chem Lyudi*, 2018-2019, Russian sci-fi drama, 50 minutes)
4. *How to Sell Drugs Online (Fast)* (2019-, German teen and dark-comedy drama, 32 minutes)
5. *Fauda* (2015- Hebrew/Arabic, Israeli psychological and political thriller, 41 minutes)

It may be noted that viewers in Anglophone territory have access only to the English titles in the metadata section introducing each series. The original title (hence revealing origin and source language) is usually retained in the signature tune, together with the opening credits.

The selection aims to put together a variety of source languages and genres. *Money Heist* is included in view of the fact that the available dubbed version is a second dub of the said content. As mentioned earlier, Netflix had the first two seasons re-dubbed with the intention of enhancing quality. Therefore, it makes for an interesting case study in its own right, and even though no comparative analysis with the previous dubbing attempts is made, in this instance, it could perhaps set the grounds for further research.

Since the main aim of the study is a first step towards identifying patterns in English dubbing, another important selection criterion adopted is that of having a variety of dubbing companies and professionals (directors, translators, dialogue writers, voice actors, sound engineers) involved across the chosen episodes. This is done to avoid doubts as to whether any

patterns or tendencies may be attributable to the professionals involved rather than to the English dubbing field as a whole.

The selection focuses on pilot episodes because these, in terms of viewer reception, often determine the audience ratings of the episodes that follow. From a practitioner perspective, the pilot episodes imply the application of important creative choices in the dubbed versions because the dubbing scripts and episodes that follow (despite, perhaps, being adapted by other dialogue writers) will have to adhere to the same choices for the sake of consistency.

The analysis is divided into two sections in accordance with the classification of quality standards outlined earlier: non-textual and textual parameters examined across the chosen episodes, and discussed once again while drawing closely on the qualitative data collected. A number of examples are provided as a micro representation of the recurrent patterns across the sample data.

3.2 Data and observations pertaining to non-textual quality parameters

3.2.1 Voice selection, performance, intonation

As far as voice selection is concerned, due attention seems to be given to choosing suitable voice qualities according to physique, character role, gender and age of the actors on screen. In the case of children, the voices may perhaps sound slightly artificial, this may be due to the additional challenge when child voices are involved, both on a practical and performance level. Indeed, in a number of dubbing cultures, children are often dubbed by female adult voice actors. This is not the case in the data sample in question. The young girls reciting in *Better Than Us* are dubbed by a young actress who is just a few years older than the characters played. Pitch settings were possibly slightly adjusted to make the voice sound even younger (Time Code [TC] 31:52) thus contributing to the artificial effect perceived. The same actress dubs both children appearing in the same episode.

As far as voice variety is concerned, generally speaking, characters are allocated to different voice actors, except in *Better Than Us*, where most of the voice actors dub up to five or six characters each. The closing credits reveal a cast of 88 characters dubbed by 24 voice actors. That being said, it is not necessarily an issue since many voices are characterised by additional effects as in the case of robot characters or computerised voices (Fairybot 1, Female Bot 2, Female drone voice, Female system voice). However, in this same series, there are also instances of a perceived synthetic effect applied to human voices (*Better Than Us*, TC 30:31).

Fauda and *How to Sell Drugs Online (Fast)* present an interesting case in terms of voice selection because the main characters are dubbed in English by the original actors themselves, thus resulting in greater body-voice adherence. This strategy brings with it strong foreign accents in the English versions. In any case, these are likely to sound more credible than American voice actors imitating a foreign flavour, provided that the latter is an intended strategy in the first place. The contrast in accents, ensuing interaction between the main characters and other characters dubbed by American voice actors, is a potential counter-effect. A case in point is the male teenage character Dan in *How to Sell Drugs Online (Fast)* (TC 27:30) who stands out because of his English accent compared to the other German-flavoured English accents, when in reality the original product does not highlight any form of "otherness" (Bassnett 2005) associated with Dan's character.

In the other series analysed, standardised American English is used by default, irrespective of regional dialects and languages spoken. In *Money Heist*, for instance, the main Spanish characters originating from various regions in Spain all adopt a standardised American accent. Interestingly, the non-Spanish characters such as the Serbian character, Helsinki, adopt an American accent, too, therefore not reflecting the original version that adds an Eastern European flavour to the accent. All proper names are uttered with an American accent and pronunciation, too. These decisions are usually taken by the creative dubbing managers and dubbing directors, and are not left to the actors or dialogue writers. Hence, with regards to accents there is no single common pattern across the data sample because the choices were adapted to the context, specificities, and possibilities of the product at hand. Parallel contexts and situations in other series, and on other platforms, would need to be examined to be able to establish patterns.

Voice performance generally adheres to body performance across the data sample, though there are some moments when a *cultural discord* is perceived, a kind of visual-and-aural mismatch or contrast between kinesics and language (mainly on a suprasegmental level). This may perhaps occur because the body language and gestures visible on screen are not usually associated with English-speaking cultures, and more importantly with an English accent and pronunciation. This contrast emerges mostly in the Spanish series, characterised by a significant amount of hand gestures and mannerisms, as well as in the French series, where the visual speech articulation consists of many lip rounded vowels accompanied by specific facial expressions. This issue is distinct from the previously discussed semiotic cohesion between images and words, or more specifically body language and words (kinesic synch). The *cultural discord effect* referred to may occur even when images and words match on a semantic level. It is likely to be more evident in the case of British English dubbing.

This contrast is probably enhanced by the general flat speech melody throughout (see Table 1a), with the exception of a few voice actors who

apply a wider variety of rising and falling tones, in line with character facial expressions and attitude. This flat intonation seems to be a tendency across all the data sample, and emerges even more when the original actors dub themselves (Table 1a, examples at 1.1). *Au contraire*, when it comes to tonicity, and therefore emphasis, the case study seems to reveal an effort to mirror target language demands and spontaneous speech. Indeed, an intonation feature that appears to be present throughout is elongation, or stressed syllables (or *appoggiatura*), to place emphasis on specific words, especially on monosyllables. This also seems to depend heavily on the text adaptation and is accompanied by lip synchronisation issues (Table 1a, examples at 1.3). Interestingly, this dragging technique seems to be adopted in other dubbing target languages with the opposite intent: to achieve synchronisation when English is the source language (Baños Piñero 2009; Sánchez-Mompeán 2020). In the case of English dubbing, the elongation is included when this is not present in the original and seems to cause lip-synch issues. However, it may also suggest prioritisation given to natural prosody over synchronisation.

	Series	**Time code**	**Data samples analysing voice performance and intonation** ***Observations***
1.1	How to Sell Drugs Online (Fast)	17:26	- Then… then he picks it up and eats it later. - Cold pizza? With which he runs through half of Rinselm first. And also, Pinocchio pizza is right by his house it has five stars on Yelp. *Speech melody reflecting German intonation*
1.2	Money Heist	09:55	Those motherfuckers, I wish I'd thought of that first. *Mirroring same levelled tone as in original*
1.3	The Hook Up Plan	07:18	- She doesn't need a **man** to enjoy life. *Elle a pas besoin d'un* ***mec pour reprendre*** *sa vie en main.*
		18:19	- … that I love my **job** … *… Je m'éclate dans mon taf…*
		18:28	- I don't believe a woman needs a **man** to be happy, anyway. *Une femme n'a pas besoin d'un* ***homme pour*** *être épanouie et heureuse.*
falling tone - level - rising tone elongation			*Dragging effect produced by emphasis placed on a monosyllabic word, thus producing several empty mouth flaps in the dubbed version.*

Table 1a. Voice performance and intonation

Overall, the intonation features gathered in this study cannot be said to be natural sounding when taking oral discourse as a benchmark, though this is never the case in dubbing, as discussed earlier (Sánchez-Mompeán 2020). What is sought after is that extent of naturalness that lies within the viewers' tolerance threshold. However, in the absence of an established

English dubbed repertoire to refer to, the way it sounds probably comes across as something 'other' or 'new'. This perception will possibly change in time, once the English-language dubbing audience sets its own tolerance threshold.

When it comes to speech articulation and pronunciation, in some instances these are unclear, though it could be due to various factors including speech tempo: in English dubbing, a faster delivery rate is often required compared to that of average spontaneous speech (see Table 1b). Another factor that could contribute to the impression of unclear articulation is lack of phonetic synchrony (see Sect. 3.3.1).

	Series	Time code	Data samples analysing voice performance and articulation *Observations*
1.1	Money Heist	07:36	- I'd like **each of you** to pick a name *Quiero que cada uno elija un nombre*
		19:03	- Our **little lamb** just entered**.** *El corderito está entrando*
		21:24	- …Call my wife and tell the kids **so we can celebrate together**? For God's sake. *…Llamo a mi mujer, le digo que recoja a los niños,* ***y nos vamos todos a celebrarlo****?* *Por amor de Dios.*
		29:28	- You think you're real smart but **you've got that shitty** pin. *Con toda la cara de listo que tienes y pones esa mierda de pin.*
		32:58	- That smells better than **roast lamb**, dad, than **roast lamb** *Huele mejor que el cordero asado, papa, que el cordero asado*
		34:15	- **[Indistinct],** damn it. *Venga, coño.*
		37:06	- You know **he'd kill us.** *Y nos mata, ¿lo sabes?*
1.2	How to Sell Drugs Online (Fast)	09:11	The PIN is **the date we got** the idea from MyTems.
1.3	Fauda	37:18	-Doron **[indistinct…]** and he's running after some old guy **[…]** -**[…]** will be on you. -Nurit, tell Rescue to get a chopper **[…]** right now.
1.4	The Hook Up Plan	18:27	I am currently single, but it's by choice, **you know.**
			Unclear articulation possibly leading to lack of comprehension. In Money Heist this coincides with mismatched bilabials perhaps enhancing the unclear articulation effect.

Table 1b. Voice performance and articulation

3.2.2 Sound

In the examined sample, sound is generally clear and free from noise or interference, while the original music and effects, and background noise blend in smoothly. Volume levels of the dubbed voices in relation to

background noise is satisfactory. There are instances in which general crowd murmur or chatter is scarce, and there is no audible dialogue uttered by characters chatting away in medium shot (*Fauda*, TC 26:41). However, this absence is subsequently noted in the original version as well. This reveals that the dubbing sound technicians chose to adhere to the original, without enhancing the background chatter on their own initiative, as would often be the case in other dubbing languages.

In *Fauda*, the original voice tracks with Arabic dialogue are combined with the English dubbed tracks and the regular alternation between the two is hardly noticeable. The shift to the Arabic language — rather than the audio track itself — hints at a change in tracks. The *Hook Up Plan*, too, blends in sound bites and longer sequences from the original track (Elsa sings a French song at TC 18:38). Paralinguistic features are also sometimes drawn from the original track, and this is detectable in the dubbed versions via the audio (*The Hook Up Plan*: Elsa smiles, TC 18:36). However, these instances constitute exceptions: overall, paralinguistic features are dubbed and reproduced with appropriate filters or effects (*The Hook Up Plan*: Jules' voice over the phone, TC 11:20, Elsa covering her mouth as she speaks or laughs, TC 06:34, TC 12:25; *Money Heist*: Berlin speaking through a mask, TC 12:38; *Better Than Us*: voice on screen alternating between an indoor studio and outdoor environment, and combining medium and extreme close-up shots, TC 14:00).

A common pattern that emerges across all the data sample is a perceived hollow sound, a dryness in the voices, as though these were detached from the film setting. Only highly attentive listening would make this noticeable, but it could still have an unconscious impact on the credibility of the overall product. This could give the feel of voices not merging sufficiently with room tones or environment acoustics, in terms of reverberation levels. This *soundproof studio effect* is perceived mostly in outdoor scenes. On a similar note, volume levels are sometimes not consistent, for example, very often when two characters are at equal distance from the camera, one may sound louder than the other. Moreover, distant voice effect settings or physical distancing from the microphone are not always applied when utterances switch from long shots to close-up shots, or vice versa (*Better Than Us*: open air scene, TC 8:54. 34:26, *How to Sell Drugs Online (Fast)* TC 25:41, 27:36, 6:40, *Fauda* TC 05:18).

3.3 Data and observations pertaining to textual quality parameters

3.3.1 Lip synchronisation

Overall, the effort to attend to the aforementioned isochrony, rhythmic synchrony and phonetic synch is evident across all episodes (see Table 2a). The parameter that seems to be prioritised is isochrony: matching pauses, duration, and start and finish of dialogue lines; followed by phonetic synch, especially in close-up shots, though not consistently throughout. An evident

strategy apparent throughout is that of positioning proper names in the same instance as they are pronounced in the original. Interestingly enough, there are also instances of phonetic synch being catered for in long shots or when the characters' mouths are covered. This was detected due to lines that sound less convincing or do not adhere to the action on screen. Further investigation via comparison with the original text revealed an effort to adapt them for phonetic synch purposes, even when this may have not been necessary considering the visuals.

	Series	**Time code**	**Data samples analysing lip-synch** ***Observations***
2.1	Money Heist	37:29	-You sh**ou**ld know that I a**m** serious a**b**out **you** *Pero quier**o** que se**p**as que **v**oy en serio cont**igo***
	The Hook Up Plan	09:16	- You live in London and you're **my** **b**rother's **b**est **f**riend. *T'habites a Londres et t'es **m**eilleur **p**ote avec mon frère.*
		16:37	- I guess we're staying for a bite *On va grignoter*
		18:30	- I co**mp**letely agree *Entière**m**ent d'accord*
		18:32	- Sa**m**e thing, I never needed a **m**an to be ha**pp**y either *Pareil. Pas besoin d'un ho**mm**e pout être é**p**anoui et heureux.*
	Better Than Us	08:20	- Just re**member**, keep it even with the w**in**d or it won't go **up**. You ready to **m**ake this ha**pp**en?! Главное,**чтобы** он лег на в**ет**ер! Как бы живо**том**! И пото**м** будем отпускать, **да**?
			Matching isochrony and phonetic synch in close-up shots. In the last example in Russian, the "да" at the end of the dialogue line is followed instantaneously by the actor's lips pressing together, so the English dubbed version adds a bilabial to match that lip movement despite not coinciding with any sound.

Table 2a. Lip-synch

The target texts under examination reveal instances of mismatched phonetic synch especially at the end of dialogue lines in close-up shots. These occur due to visible lip rounded vowels which often contrast with the uttered target language words (see Table 2b, examples at 2.2), and also due to the lack of necessary bilabial consonants (see Table 2b, examples at 2.1). In some cases, the presence of bilabials that are not present in the original are also distracting. Interestingly, some of these instances of phonetic mismatch in close-up shots coincide with the inability to discern the words pronounced (see Table 1b). Repeated rewinds of the same line in English were necessary to understand what was being said. This difficulty in understanding the words is what actually led to the identification of mismatching phonetic synch. It was first attributed to unclear articulation, but once mismatching lip-synch was identified, this seemed to corroborate the theory mentioned earlier in this paper, by which perceived unclear

articulation could be a result of the modified auditory perception caused by mismatching phonetic synch (see Sect. 2).

	Series	Time code	Data samples analysing lip-synch *Observations*
2.1	Money Heist	10:10	- **W**e're not st**ea**ling their **m**oney. ***P**orque no va**m**os a ro**b**ar.*
		43:49	- We want them to think this is just a **heist.** *Vamos a hacerles creer que entramos a **robar.***
		22:00	- Just yesterday you were saying that you no longer **wanted her, and that you were** having problems. *Eras tú ayer el que decías que **estabais mal, que no la aguantas, que tenéis** problemas*
		22:56	- **Ok**? ...**Or divorce**. ¿**Sabes**? ...**Ni a por un divorcio**.
		23:10	- And... I was happy with **that**. *Y me parece una idea **bonita.***
		23:22	- But I want this for **us**. *Pero una idea **maravillosa.***
		34:15	- I'm not an **asshole** *No voy a hacer el **gilipollas***
	The Hook Up Plan	18:01	- She's completely lost herself. *Elle a tallement perdu confiance en elle que'elle croit plus en rien.*
	Fauda	12:30	- Talk to me for five minutes and I'll **give you the** k**eys**! דבר א'ת' חמש דקות ואב' אתן לך את המפתחות.
			Shorter utterances in English, missing bilabial consonants, several visible empty mouth flaps in close-up shots. Emphasis and stressed syllables highlighting a lack of rhythmic synchrony.
2.2	Money Heist	34:27	-Understa**n**d? [...] G**oo**d... **A**nswer **it**. *¿Entendid**o**? [...] B**ie**n... **Ahora***
	Fauda	12:23	- Are you angry because I am going or because I didn't **tell you**? על זה שאנ' נוסע או על זה שאנ' לא מדבר א'תך?
			Unmatched lip rounded vowels at the end of dialogue lines, in close-up shots.

Table 2b. Lip-synch

Rhythmic synchrony seems to be the least prioritised across all the data sample, and this is detectable via mismatching mouth flap movements half-way through or at the end of dialogue lines, thus revealing a different speech tempo in the dubbed version when compared to the speech tempo visible in the lip movements on screen (see Table 2b, examples at 2.1). Tables 2a and 2b include both replacing and replaced segments (cf. Toury 2012: 117) solely for further illustration purposes, and to help enhance the conclusions drawn.

3.3.2 Naturalness in dialogue and fidelity to source text

The target texts examined certainly reveal an effort to produce a dubbed dialogue which sounds as spontaneous as possible. This can be observed in the use of discourse markers, interjections, and in a clear attempt at domesticating the 'feel' of the verbal content, though not necessarily in a consistent manner throughout. This attempt goes to the extent of introducing less standardised language, that is, American colloquialisms and slang expressions in contrast with the norms that generally govern other dubbing cultures (see Table 3a, examples at 3.1 and 3.2). Similarly to other

dubbing languages, the English dubbed dialogue encompasses source calques mainly on a syntactic and structural level, as well as instances of literal translation. As outlined earlier, dubbese has its own prefabricated linguistic features that do not necessarily tally with spontaneous oral discourse. That said, this study takes into account the general feel and perception in the absence of a consolidated English-dubbese language previously accepted by its native audience. Hence, it intends to highlight instances in which the dialogue may sound 'less English' or somewhat 'new' to the viewers' ears. With regard to fidelity to source text, there are instances of dialogue adaptation whereby meaning differs from that in the original text, mostly to suit humour purposes or to ensure comprehension. These include examples of domestication that are less commonly opted for in other dubbing languages (see Table 3a, examples at 3.3). Hence, this seems to point at mixed degrees of naturalness and loyalty to text. These were detected in the target text due to some element sounding slightly unusual, out of place or quite domesticated. The source text was then referred to for further confirmation.

3.3.3 Cohesion between words and visuals

Generally speaking, it can be said that there is cohesion between what is happening on screen and the dialogue, and even more specifically between the words and body language and facial expressions (kinesic synch), though there are also instances of incoherence or less accuracy, as illustrated in Table 4.

3.3.4 General phonaesthetics

Overall, no instances of cacophonic phrases emerge, though it is worth highlighting the use of consecutive repetition of words and phrases. The original dialogue was referred to in order to check whether this pattern faithfully reflects the source text. In some cases, the repetition is indeed present in the original text, while in others, it seems to be an adaptation strategy intended at amplification, thus an attempt at making lines longer for the sake of isochrony.

	Series	Time code	Data samples - Analysing naturalness in dialogue and fidelity to source text ***Observations***
3.1	The Hook Up Plan Money Heist How to Sell Drugs Online (Fast)	various	You guys/ hey guys / no way / really /come on / oh man / I mean / hmm / ehm / you know / anyway Like / I mean / damn it / honestly / yeah / well / Hey / Come on / dude /wow / guys / well
			Target-oriented discourse markers, reactions, interjections, greetings, etc.
3.2	Money Heist Better Than Us Fauda How to Sell Drugs Online (Fast) The Hook Up Plan	17:42 29:29 41:59 14:30 24:58 27:28 07:49 17:50 18:01	- Do you wanna hang out with me? - You moron. - 300 grand. - Look, at you, what a hunk. - Don't stress out. - Just, relax, man, ok? - Total moron! - I freaked out. - It's stressing me out.
			Target-oriented colloquialisms, slang, informal language
3.3	The Hook Up Plan Fauda	7:22 30:16	- No, it's Jennifer Lawrence *Catherine Deneuve (orig)* - What's up, Chuck Nurit?
			Culture-specific references *The first is a reference to a well-known French actress, domestication strategy adopted. The second reference happens to belong to the target culture: American martial artist and actor Chuck Norris.*

Table 3a. Naturalness in dialogue and fidelity to source text

	Series	Time code	Data samples analysing naturalness in dialogue ***Observations***
3.1	Money Heist	09:44	- Realise that… *(you must know that)* *Pensad que…*
		19:19	- Now be careful what you do *(no false moves)* *Y ahora, mucho cuidadito con lo que haces*
		29:47	- Give me your hands *(hold my hands)* *Dame las manos*
		30:33	- Please, everybody, start breathing… Breathe *(breathe in or take a deep breath)* *Por favor, respiren todos… Inspiren*
		31:09	- That's me *(here I am)* *Soy yo*
		39:00	- We have love *(there is love)* *Amor había*
		46:31	- In the same as always *(just as I always do)* *Y de la misma forma que siempre*
	Better Than us	06:24	- I'll tell him, I promise, I will, **just a bit later** *(just not as yet)* *Я скажу. Обязательно скажу.* ***Но только позже***
		28:02	**- Heart attack appeared to be** the cause of death. *(The cause of death seems to be heart attack)* ***Сердечный приступ****, такое бывает*
			Lexical and syntactic source calques in the target text resulting in less naturalness

Table 3b. Naturalness in dialogue

	Series	Time code	Data samples analysing cohesion between visuals and text *Observations*
4.1	Money Heist	24:17	- Move back *Quieto, vamos, vamos! (Stay calm, move on, move on) (orig)*
		24:32	- Stay here *Mierda (Shit) (orig)*
		06:26	- We'll live here **away from** the worldly noise **for five months, for five months** we will study **how to pull off this heist.** - N, PP and RP - And obviously **relationships** are **forbidden**.
			Instances in which dialogue lines seem to contrast with action and visuals on screen. - *"Move back" is uttered when in actual fact the characters are enticed to get out and move forward.* - *"Stay here" is uttered when the addressee is lying down and tied, so he would not be able to move in any case.* - *"Away from" fits the gestures, while "five months" and "how to pull off this heist" do not coincide with hand gestures and the index finger pointing downwards.* - *The abbreviations N, PP and RP partially match the English version (names, personal questions, and relationships)* - *The hand being waved is a prohibiting gesture which coincides with the word "relationships", so it would have been ideal to change the structure or resort to other solutions, such as "And obviously, forget about relationships in here", or "I want no relationships among you", or similar.* *Having said that, the body language does not coincide with the semantic content in the original version, either, but the study has analysed the dubbed version as a target culture product that is independent from the original, thus having the possibility to adapt to the visuals in its own right.*

Table 4. Cohesion between words and visuals

4. Challenging factors specific to English-language dubbing

The above study is based on a limited data sample, yet it is enough to reveal a number of challenges in English-language dubbing, lip synchronisation among others. A plausible reason for the latter may be found in the very nature of the English language, that is, its brevity, which very often calls for amplification in order to match the length of other source languages. Expansion may indeed require more effort than condensation especially when excluding overabundant use of specific strategies, such as repetition or discourse markers, because these may result in an unnatural or cacophonic outcome. The English language is characterised by numerous monosyllabic words which very often imply a visual mismatch when used in coincidence with their disyllabic or multisyllabic source language equivalents, not to mention the elongated intonation that these often require.

That said, the 'length' of the English language is not the only possible explanation to the complexity of the lip-synch process. Two dialogue writing approaches could possibly account for the challenges in lip synchronisation:

(1) Priority given to natural-sounding language, given the absence of dubbese norms in English.

(2) Priority given to natural-sounding speech tempo, given that English does not have the same fast delivery rate as most of the source languages selected for this study.

Given the absence of dubbese norms in English, it is possible that pursuing natural-sounding language may affect other quality parameters, thus being counterproductive, to a certain extent. Established norms generally influence dialogue writers and client expectations; they guide dialogue writers into producing target texts that comply with a familiar and standardised dubbing language, a language that viewers would already be accustomed to. This 'standardised' language approach takes all parameters into account, or rather, the sought-after prefabricated balance that holds all dubbing parameters together is most likely accountable, at least in part, for the standardised dubbed language itself.

Reproducing the original delivery speech rate and tempo of most languages in English, is most likely to be perceived as unnaturally fast by dialogue writers, actors, and Anglophone viewers. However, opting for target language natural speed, emphasis, and *appoggiaturas* in the recitation style, has an impact on the lip-synch outcome. In English dubs it implies adopting a slower speech tempo, thus producing delays or lags on specific words. This constitutes a significant challenge in English text adaptation which places the dialogue writer between a rock and a hard place.

As mentioned earlier, one of the most difficult challenges to overcome is the possible *cultural discord effect* arising from culture-specific body language on screen that is not usually associated with the 'sound' of the English language. In time, this could perhaps become part of a tacit agreement between Anglophone viewers and English dubbed products. Eventually, it may perhaps fall within the tolerance threshold that is so necessary in maintaining the suspension of disbelief. The same applies for the type of intonation intrinsic to dubbing and which most likely derives from the actual recording workflow (Spiteri Miggiani 2019: 74-90).

In general, lack of habituation to dubbing is a major factor that challenges the effectiveness of English dubbing in terms of viewer response. This concerns not only viewers, but also dubbing professionals — be it actors, directors or translators and dialogue writers — who, due to the imminent needs of the industry, may have to approach this post-production process without having the time or possibility to undertake ad hoc training.

English dubbing is an emerging and rapidly growing trend and the industry had to quickly adapt to this new market demand by developing time efficient workflows with the human resources already at hand, while adding others along the way. This could also imply having to rope in translators with little or no experience in dubbing adaptation. Considering the variety of multiple language products requiring English dubbed versions, and the few available resources with the required competencies, the dubbing text process is often

split into two distinct phases: translation and adaptation, as revealed from most of the closing credits of the analysed data sample. The so-called adapter may not necessarily be proficient in the source text language and may have to work with a raw bridge translation in English, possibly drawn on the English subtitles, in the absence of an *ad hoc* translation for dubbing purposes. Despite this being the modus operandi of many other dubbing cultures, working with a raw translation and an unknown source language certainly brings about several challenges (Spiteri Miggiani 2019: 25-28).

Understanding the root of recurrent patterns and eventually establishing norms is a first step that could pave the way towards in-depth investigation specific to English-language dubbing. Further research, drawing also on studies and results pertaining to other dubbing cultures, could explore applied strategies in response to the aforementioned challenges related to the dubbing process as a whole, and more specifically to text adaptation. These could encompass strategies and devices to be applied both on a technical and linguistic level, as well as possible dialogue writing and studio recording workflow options aimed at achieving or further enhancing quality standards.

This 'newness', both for viewers and professionals, may also have a silver lining. English-language dubbing is not yet 'contaminated' by a long tradition of consolidated norms, strategies and familiar stock equivalents. Therefore, whatever emerges at this stage is necessarily a result of the dubbing workflow itself without previous influences. In a way, English dubbing is still in time to shape its own personality.

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Online social media

- **Twitter,**
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