

Exploring sociolects in audiovisual texts. A new concept?

Los sociolectos en los textos audiovisuales. ¿Un nuevo concepto?

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Abstract: This article is based on a consideration of the audiovisual text as a system in which different signifying codes converge, giving it a multimodal nature. Studies on the nature of the audiovisual text have addressed a multitude of aspects to date, although there are still concepts to be explained within the audiovisual paradigm. One such aspect has to do with varieties of language, specifically with the notion of *sociolect*. After a review of the literature, fragments of television sitcoms will be analysed to observe the possible audiovisual nature of the given sociolect. Specifically, it will be illustrated how language levels, slang, and scientific-technical language deal with audiovisual humour. The idea will be fostered that in this type of text, sociolects go beyond the linguistic scope and connect with the aural and visual dimensions. Accordingly, phenomena such as humour can be constructed thanks to elements that surpass a purely linguistic conception of sociolects.

Keywords: Audiovisual translation, Signifying codes, Language variation, Sociolects

Resumen: Este artículo parte de la consideración del texto audiovisual como un sistema en el que confluyen diferentes códigos de significación, lo que le confiere una naturaleza multimodal. Los estudios sobre la naturaleza del texto audiovisual han abordado hasta la fecha multitud de aspectos, aunque todavía quedan conceptos por explicar dentro del paradigma audiovisual. Uno de estos aspectos tiene que ver con las variedades del lenguaje, concretamente con la noción de *sociolecto*. Tras una revisión de la bibliografía, se analizarán diferentes fragmentos de comedias televisivas, con el objetivo de observar la posible naturaleza audiovisual del sociolecto dado. Se expondrá la idea de que, en este tipo de textos, los sociolectos superan el ámbito lingüístico y conectan con dimensiones como la auditiva y la visual.

Palabras clave: Traducción audiovisual, Códigos de significación, Variación lingüística, Sociolectos

INTRODUCTION

As will be seen, it is possible to conceive the audiovisual text as the result of the convergence of different signifying codes. From this conjunction, the multimodal nature that each audiovisual text possesses arises. It is not our intention to delve into the concept of *multimodality* (for this purpose, see among others, Jewitt 2009). We aim to approach the concept of *sociolect* not to analyse its occurrence in audiovisual texts, but to ask whether, given the aforementioned convergence of codes that are not strictly linguistic, it is possible to conceive sociolects far from purely linguistic postulates.

The proposal made here is of a fundamental theoretical/reflexive nature, with a minor applied element. It is regarded as a basic research exercise in that it seeks to produce knowledge and theories (see Hernández Sampieri *et al.*, 2014). Based on works such as the one just cited, the scope of this research is exploratory, given that although indeed, the study of sociolect is not new, the idea that it may be possible to perceive the concept of sociolect in at least a broader way in audiovisual texts—beyond the merely linguistic—is scarcely explored terrain. The exploratory scope of this study and its qualitative nature make it advisable not to start from an initial hypothesis.

As for the structure of this paper, in the first part, we review concepts related to varieties of language, among which the sociolect stands out. Then we focus our attention on the audiovisual text. In a second phase, a merging of both fields is offered to illustrate how purely linguistic approaches may not be sufficient to account for the phenomenon of sociolect in texts that construct their information through different channels. To illustrate this suspicion, the field of humour will be used. Examples from television sitcoms will help us observe how the sociolect intended to generate humour behaves in an audiovisual product to support the idea that it seems necessary to go beyond words. Specifically, three examples will be shown, one for each of the axes of analysis under consideration: language levels, slang, and scientific-technical language.

1. THE VARIETIES OF LANGUAGE

We will start our journey towards the consideration of the sociolect in the audiovisual field¹ from the most basic questions as a key to providing coherence and context to the discussion that begins here. On the one hand,

¹ This article follows the path initiated by works such as that of Ramos Pinto (2017).

as Navarro Pablo states, by *speech*, we refer to the capacity of human beings to express their thoughts and communicate (2003, p. 323). To carry out such communication, we could add that human beings² will not necessarily limit themselves to the use of linguistic signs, since other types also serve our capacity to communicate.

In fact, there are different points of view that we can adopt to define different types of speech: for example, Mejia Jervis (2020) points out up to 17 types of speech. Here, we highlight types arising from the communicative element involved: oral, written, iconic (symbols), and non-verbal (facial, kinesic and proxemic) speech. We bring out that the linguistic elements are, in fact, absent in the iconic and non-verbal types.

On the other hand, and according to what Saussure advanced at the time he distinguished between *langue* and *parole*, there is a *language* that we can understand as «the social part of the language, external to the individual, which him/herself can neither create nor modify; it exists only under a kind of contract established between the members of the community» (1945, p. 42, translated by the author³). In this field, it is already possible to detect specific differences between the different speech communities. Not only that, but within each community is an element of maximum interest to us in the context of this article, it is also possible to find different language *varieties* that present a series of differences that «are determined by the particular characteristics of the speaker—his/her place of birth, cultural background, age, profession, etc.» as well as «by the characteristics of the communication context—relationship with the interlocutor, the objective of the message, the communication channel, time, etc.» (Centro Virtual Cervantes, 2020, par. 3*).

Within the scope of these varieties of language, we will place our initial approach. Trigo (2018, online*) refers to the varieties taken up by Coseriu (1958)⁴ and explains that it is possible to divide them according to the following parameters:

² It is also possible for animals to possess speech, as Montes Giraldo (1998) recognizes.

³ From now on, this indication will be replaced by an asterisk after the page number.

⁴ As Obedient Sosa reminds us, these variational parameters were labeled by Flydal (1951), who would distinguish between *diachrony* (a variation that has to do with the changes a language goes through over time), *diatopia* and *diatrathy*. Later, Coseriu (1981) would add *diaphasia* and Mioni (1983) the *diamesic dimension*, that is, «the linguistic variation that occurs depending on whether the code is oral or written» (2017). In any case, in this paper we are interested in the diastratic type.

- Depending upon the communicative situation, we can talk about *diaphasic varieties* (*style varieties* or *register*⁵ *varieties*). In this case, «each speaker uses some of these varieties and rejects others according to the moment». In short, the orientation is towards *usage*.
- Depending on the *user's* linguistic competence, it is possible to distinguish between
 - *Geographical dialects* or *diatopic varieties*, which are «related to the speaker's place of origin or residence».
 - *Diastratic varieties* or *sociolects*, which «have to do with supra-individual circumstances (educational level or social class of the speaker)».

As can be observed, the object of the present work, sociolects, is situated within the so-called *diastratic varieties*. However, before focusing on them, we will take note of the indications of the Centro Virtual Cervantes (2020, par. 2*) regarding the fact that:

Since the second half of the 20th century, studies on linguistic variety have been highlighted in disciplines that [...] include in the description of external language factors that explain its use. [...] For its part, the comparative and historical linguistics of the nineteenth century had already opened a very fruitful path in the study of historical and geographical varieties.

Variation studies, as compiled by Uclés (2017, pp. 5 -19), are certainly a prolific field within linguistics and related areas. Thus, it is possible to find studies that abound, to a greater or lesser extent, in different types of variation, going beyond the division just shown. For example, and without being exhaustive, we can find studies of variation in relation to sex (Lakoff, 1975), ideology (Liao, 2010), languages of specialization (Sánchez Jiménez, 2015), certain lines of research that explore the role of variety in relation to areas such as stylistics (Eckert and Rickford, 2001) or language teaching (Martín Zorraquino, 2000), literary translation (Catford, 1965; Slobodník, 1970; Newmark, 1988; Marco, 2002; Briguglia, 2009; or Tello, 2011), some general translation manuals (López and Minett, 1997), some theoretical compendium on variation and translation (Mayoral, 1999), or the field of audiovisual translation (Hernández and Tirado, 1997; Inigo and Wastall, 1997; Agost, 1999, [2000]; Zabalbeascoa, 2001; Díaz Cintas, 2003; Alemán, 2005; Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2007; García Luque, 2007; Baños Piñero, 2009;

⁵ In linguistics, the term *register* is commonly used. For further discussion, see works such as Halliday, in which *register* is defined as «a variety of language, corresponding to a variety of situation» (1985/89, p. 29), revised in others such as Lukin *et al.* (2011).

Carreras, 2009; Heiss and Sofriti, 2009; Lomeña, 2009; Mantarro, 2010; Arampatzis, 2011; Caparara and Sisti, 2011; or Carrera Fernández, 2014).

2. DEFINITION OF SOCIOLECT

Once the concept of *language varieties* has been defined and the sociolect has been identified as belonging to one of them, we move on to define it in more detail and continue our journey towards its consideration within the audiovisual field. However, it seems necessary first to briefly point out that we are aware that the barrier separating a sociolect from an idiolect⁶ can sometimes be somewhat diffuse, although it is not our intention to elaborate further on the subject.

Before considering the specialized bibliography, when defining any concept, it seems to us an interesting exercise to go to the definition found in dictionaries. In Merriam-Webster's dictionary (2020, online), the word *sociolect* is defined as «a variety of a language that is used by a particular social group».

In the Centro Virtual Cervantes dictionary of key terms (2020, par. 5*) we find the following consideration: «The socio-cultural or *diastratic* varieties (the linguistic levels) are the different ways of using a language according to the speaker's level of instruction and his or her esteem for the language. These varieties of language are also called *sociolects*».

As we can infer from definitions like the one above, «language has a social character, that is, it is shared by a community» which leads us to consider the fact that «every society is divided into different social classes» and «each of them constitutes a group of speakers with certain linguistic characteristics that form what we know as a sociolect or diastratic variety» (Trigo, 2018, online*). Statements like this abound in what authors like Halliday already expressed in their time, considering that «[v]ariation in a language is in a quite direct sense the expression of attributes of the social system» (1978, p. 2)⁷.

⁶ The *idiolect* concept refers to a *lingua individúale* and was introduced by Nencioni (1946). There are numerous definitions of *idiolect*, although, for our purposes, it will be sufficient to point out that, «from an individual point of view, the variety that defines a particular speaker, in terms of his or her profession, age, sex, level of studies, social and geographical origin, constitutes his or her idiolect» (Centro Virtual Cervantes, 2020, online*). For further elaboration on this notion, see, for instance, García de Toro (1994), Hatim and Mason (1997), Bilgrami (2005) or Sánchez Iglesias (2005).

⁷ It could be understood that the concept of *social class* is disputed and debatable; it could be asked, for example, if such concept is still valid in the 21st century and if, if so, by *social class* we can understand the same thing that was understood in past centuries or if it has evolved in some

Once it has been pointed out that by *sociolect* we refer to those «modalities of the language that **belong to a certain social stratum**», it should be noted, therefore, that «the most important factor is the level of culture and education of the speakers», allowing us to point out a series of factors according to which sociolects can vary: age, habitat, and occupations/activities (Trigo, 2018, online, emphasis in original*).

In this article, we intend to focus on the sociolect, which (without being exhaustive) can be broken down into three elements:⁸ the levels of language, slang, and technical or scientific language (Ruaño, 2020, online). It is precisely these three elements that will become the focus of attention.

3. THE AUDIOVISUAL TEXT

As Carrera Fernández (2014, p. 121*) points out, «linguistic variation affects all language productions, including audiovisual products». From there, an aspect to highlight to put this discussion in the right place is the peculiar characteristics of the audiovisual text, the features that differentiate it from other texts such as written or oral. It is in our opinion fundamental to understand the kind of texts we are referring to and facing.

Delabastita asks what kind of text a film is and answers that it constitutes a form of communication with a channel and multiple codes. It is about understanding *channel* and how the message reaches its audience; he points out that it should not be confused with the *codes* used to produce the real meaning of the audiovisual product in question (1989, p. 196). He adds that the signs of the different codes can be combined in many ways to form the macro sign of the film as a whole. Although Delabastita refers only to films, it should be understood that this idea becomes valid for any other type of audiovisual text (or *genre*, as Agost, 1999 would say).

Similarly, Chaume (2001, pp. 77-78) explains that, when working with audiovisual texts, we are dealing with texts that transmit information through at least two channels (the acoustic and the visual). This information, on the other hand, is coded using different systems or *signifying codes*, which will be detailed later. In this same vein, Carrera Fernández (2014, p. 122*) comments that «the cinematographic message is characterized by being a mixed sign composed of technological, visual, sound, and syntactic codes».

Thus, we see that the message transmission power of audiovisual texts is not limited to a single channel and therefore, it seems to make sense that

way. In any case, we do not intend to pursue this discussion here, so we will simply refer the reader to readings such as that of Martínez Cava (2018).

⁸ In this paper, we will not elaborate on the possible conceptual differences between them. To this end, see, for example, the review by Roffé Gómez (1996).

considering everything transmitted by both channels will be necessary if our intention is really to access 100% of what is being sent to us. Carrera Fernández points out that, in this type of text, «it is not enough to understand the words to translate them, and it is convenient to know how the audiovisual codes work» (2014, p. 121*).

We could add that the degree of understanding of which she speaks is not only necessary for translation but also for being able, as recipients of the source text, to grasp and assimilate the integrity of the message being sent. Therefore, as Chaume (2001, p. 87) suggests, it seems necessary not to forget that in audiovisual texts coexist, among other features, the signifying codes transmitted through the visual channel and that, therefore, in the analysis of oral discourse, we must go beyond the words spoken by the actors and the sequence of events that make up the story to ascertain how other elements contribute to telling us that story (including sociolects, we add) such as iconic language, lighting, the mobility and situation of the characters, the assembly of the different sequences, etc. These elements clearly open the door to new approaches far from those that only seem applicable to written or oral texts.

In the case of sociolects, audiovisual texts offer us, at least *a priori*, perfect terrain for the study of this variety in the field of fiction⁹. As Uclés points out, «the texts of films and series (audiovisual texts), along with literary ones, are perhaps the works of fiction that come closest to imitating the (supposedly) spontaneous speech of a given time and place (among others, Baños Piñero, 2009; Brumme, 2008; López Serena, 2007)» (2017, p. 1*). Let us not forget, moreover, that in modes such as dubbing, the linguistic diversity of the original works must not be overlooked, to which the *principle of adequacy* of which Televisió de Catalunya speaks must be applied; that is, adapting the registers of the characters and narrators. Thus, we are obliged to consider that the way each character speaks is diverse and determined by the historical and social context, his or her character, and the emotional situations he or she goes through... (1997, pp. 11-12).

However, we cannot lose sight of the alleged orality of audiovisual texts or, in other words, of their *prefabricated orality*. Authors such as Etxebarria (1994, p. 192) emphasize the orality of television since it is heard and not read, contrary to what happens with written texts. On this point, Chaume (2001, pp. 78-79) indicates that from the perspective of the source text, we are talking about an oral linguistic code. However, its linguistic characteristics do not completely match those of a spontaneous oral language, since, in truth,

⁹ We will not address the issue of nonfiction here, because we understand that that would be another debate.

the oral discourse we hear is nothing more than the recitation of a speech initially written which, despite everything, must appear to be oral.

Along this same line, Díaz Cintas (2001, p. 127) agrees that the alleged oral nature of the film text is nothing more than an illusion of a fictitious and artificial character since the dialogues usually originate from a script previously written. He speaks of a cinematographic mirage and reminds us that there is a certain distance between the language that naturally occurs in the street and the language that tries to create the impression of both naturalness and spontaneity.

In any case, this false orality does not imply that language varieties are out of audiovisual fiction. Simply put, they are present, although preconceived and alien to the influence of spontaneity. After all, as Rabadán (1991, p. 103) indicates, there must be an *illusion* of real spontaneous language, something that, we add, can clearly be encouraged by resorting to the different varieties of language.

4. THE SIGNIFYING CODES

As Carmona (1991, p. 65*, emphasis added) expresses,

Defining what a film is can be somewhat more complex and contradictory than it first appears. On the one hand, film refers to the object as such; on the other hand, it also refers to the **textual proposal** that said object exposes before the eyes of an audience; finally, film is also the result of appropriation and interpretation. For this reason, it would perhaps not be idle to try to delimit an operative field that implies defining the concept of **filmic text**, so that it is not reduced to the mere presence of visual and sound elements fixed on a support.

Words such as «textual proposal» or «filmic text» allow us to approach the issue from a textual approach such as that of Casetti and Di Chio (1991). This approach helps to unravel the «multiple signifying codes that operate simultaneously in the production of meaning [...]», as reflected by Chaume (2004, p. 8*). He advises not to forget that, as previously indicated, the complexity of an audiovisual text lies in the fact that a series of signifying codes interact, transmitted through two channels in a simultaneous and complementary manner. Therefore, their «meaning is woven and constructed from the confluence and interaction of [those] signifying codes, not only the linguistic code» (2004, p. 15*).

Based on considerations such as the above, authors such as Carmona (1991) propose a classification of filmic components, a proposal taken up by Chaume in various works and which is shown below (2004, pp. 17-22).

According to him, the first four items form the group of sound codes, while the rest give shape to the group of visual codes:

1. The linguistic code.
2. Paralinguistic codes (primary qualities, differentiators, alternators...).
3. The musical and special effects code.
4. The sound arrangement code (diegetic/non-diegetic sound, on/off sound...).
5. The iconographic codes. For Chaume, these are the most relevant codes transmitted through the visual channel. We can establish a clear bridge with other disciplines such as semiotics and talk about *icons*, *indexes*, and *symbols*, with all that this implies, we add, in terms of interpretation of meaning.
6. Photographic codes (changes in lighting, perspective, use of colour...).
7. The planning code (types of camera shots).
8. Mobility codes (proxemic, kinesic, and isochronic).
9. The graphic codes (inserts that appear on the screen).
10. Syntactic or editing codes (audiovisual punctuation marks...).

5. HUMOUR IN AUDIOVISUAL TEXTS AND ITS CONNECTION WITH SIGNIFYING CODES

As is well known, humour is one of the most present elements in, following the classification of Agost (1999), the dramatic and entertainment genres, whether in film, television, or any other type of support. Also, humour offers us an ideal terrain to study phenomena of all kinds, and language varieties are no exception. Therefore, to illustrate the idea we intend to develop or, at least, *suggest* in this work, we will resort to audiovisual comedy and its translation.

We do not aim to go deeper into a definition of *humour* or offer a panoramic view of it; for that purpose, there are already many works to be consulted, either those belonging to the theories of humour [see, for example, the volume edited by Raskin (2008)] or those focused on its translation [see, for example, Martínez Sierra and Zabalbeascoa, 2017)]. For our purposes, it will suffice to briefly summarize the updated proposal of types of potentially humorous elements (HE, from now on) that Martínez Sierra offers (2018, pp. 114-117):

- Referential elements: here we include cultural or intertextual elements (references and allusions) specific to one culture and unknown by another.

- Preferential elements: these do not imply a cultural specificity, but a preference for some topic about which to joke.
- Linguistic elements: based on linguistic aspects.
- Paralinguistic elements: all kinds of paralinguistic elements capable of producing humour.
- Visual elements: the images we see on the screen.
- Graphic elements: humour that emerges from an insert (any written message that appears on screen).
- Acoustic elements: all kinds of sounds, music included.
- Unmarked humorous elements: any element that has no place in any of the above types, but still has humorous potential.

In Martínez Sierra (2018, p. 121), we reflect on the points of connection between the classification of signifying codes (code/s, from now on) and the taxonomy of HE just presented:

Channel (Chaume 2003)	Type of code (Chaume 2004)		Type of HE (Martínez Sierra 2018)
Sound	Linguistic		Referential
	Paralinguistic		
	Musical and special effects	↔	Preferential
	Sound arrangement		Non-marked
Visual	Iconographic		Referential
	Photographic		
	Planning		
	Mobility	↔	Preferential
	Graphic		Non-marked
Sound	Syntactic		
	Linguistic	↔	Linguistic
	Paralinguistic	↔	Paralinguistic
	Musical and special effects	↔	Acoustic
	Sound arrangement	↔	Acoustic

Visual	Iconographic	↔	Visual
	Photographic	↔	Visual
	Planning	↔	Visual
	Mobility	↔	Visual
	Graphic	↔	Graphic
	Syntactic	↔	Visual

Table 1: The convergence of codes and HE

Table 1 allows us to observe the possible confluences between the concepts in question while serving as a support to guide the discussion we intend to have. It shows the intrinsic complexity of audiovisual texts. It should be noted, on the other hand, that concerning HE (a situation we think can be transferred to the respective codes with which they connect), the typical situation (at least in practices such as dubbing or subtitling) is that the translating agent cannot manipulate (in the good sense) all of them. He or she will be able to manipulate the unmarked, referential, preferential, linguistic, and graphic codes (with a translation that can be transferred either through an off-voice or through a subtitle, for example) and even the paralinguistic ones (in dubbing, for example, it will not be the translating agent but the actors and actresses who can account for them). On the contrary, in general terms and for the moment, the capacity to act on the visuals and acoustic codes is null. Even so, they must be considered since they are part of the audiovisual text and, as already explained, are, therefore, part of the message being sent.

6. AUDIOVISUAL AND SOCIOLECT: SOME QUESTIONS

Let us remember that if we want to access 100% of the message being sent to us in an audiovisual comedy, we cannot ignore any of the HE and codes above. As Chaves García (2000, p. 99*) comments, in an audiovisual text, «it is impossible to separate the images from the sounds, the verbal from the non-verbal in the genesis of meaning, and that is precisely where the specificity [of these texts¹⁰] lies in», which is why «the approach to the audiovisual text cannot be the same as to a written text» (or to an oral text, we could add).

At the outset, conceptions of *language varieties* and definitions of *sociolect* such as those listed above might suggest that in a film or television

¹⁰ There are numerous studies that from, for example, Reiss (1971), Fodor (1976), Tifford (1982) or Mayoral *et al.* (1988) have provided a good account of the specificity of the audiovisual text.

series, for example, it will be possible to detect a sociolect in the way a given character speaks and, therefore, it will be enough to consider carrying out, for example, an analysis of that sociolect. However, based on considerations about audiovisual texts such as those included above, it is worth asking whether the conception or treatment of the sociolect in audiovisual texts can be the same as in the case of oral or written texts.

In other words, if audiovisual texts are nourished by up to ten types of codes and the humour in audiovisual texts is constructed by the presence and combination of up to eight types of HE, does it make sense in these texts to limit the consideration of language varieties (of the sociolect, in this case) to those codes and HE that are only or more directly related to language, such as the (para)linguistic ones? Or, if we remain at the linguistic level, are we ignoring a good part of what gives entity (and humour) to a text of this nature, thereby offering an incomplete picture?

Another consideration: as mentioned, it is possible to conceive any audiovisual product as a text. If we add that texts and not languages are the objects of translation (Zabalbeascoa, 1997, p. 329), the result is that just as we can talk about *written*, *oral*, and *audiovisual texts*, we can establish a difference among *written*, *oral* (interpretation), and *audiovisual translation*. Following this same line of reasoning, it is also possible to distinguish among *written*, *oral*, and *audiovisual humour*¹¹.

Therefore, and as has been done with so many other phenomena—initially limited to other fields (for example, figures born in the bosom of rhetoric, such as metaphor, are now recognized in other planes, such as the audiovisual)—can we contemplate the possibility that, just as there is a *written* or *oral sociolect*, there is also an *audiovisual*¹² one, each constructed through the resources each type of language provides? In this sense and considering how, as shown, the intricate body of audiovisual texts and their humour is interwoven, can we understand that elements beyond the purely linguistic sphere will nourish an *audiovisual* sociolect destined, in this case, to comedy?

Strictly speaking, the definition of *lects* is limited to «**linguistic** varieties, with specific phonic, grammatical, lexical, and discursive features, which derive from the conditioning of certain geographical domains, social profiles, or certain situations and communicative contexts» (Moreno Fernández, 2012, 94*, emphasis added). However, if this definition is intended to address the

¹¹ Fuentes (2000) already puts us on the track of the specificity of the latter.

¹² After all, «audiovisual language, like the verbal language we use when speaking or writing, has morphological elements, a grammar and stylistic resources» (Marquès Graells, 1995a, online), as well as a series of dimensions, such as morphological, structural-syntactic-expressive, semantic and aesthetic (Marquès Graells, 1995b, online).

audiovisual field, it is insufficient since it ignores a high percentage of the codes on which audiovisual texts are based.

On the other hand, let us not lose sight of the fact that communication can be not only verbal but also non-verbal, understood as communication in which «no words are used to transmit information from sender to receiver» and which involves, in fact, all five senses (Lugo, 2020, online*), including, logically, the two that are key in the reception of audiovisual texts and, possibly, in the joint creation of sociolects in this type of texts: hearing and sight.

Finally, to face the reality of sociolects in audiovisual texts and to work completely and coherently, is it necessary to coin a new term or is it enough to rethink the one we already have?

7. TOWARDS SOME ANSWERS

It is time to step on the path towards possible answers to the different questions generated. These ones are doubts revolving around the possibility of speaking of an *audiovisual sociolect*, endowed with its own characteristics that, as occurs with the audiovisual text/translation/humour, distinguish it or make it stand out from the sociolects we find in written or oral texts. We will undertake this reflection, as has been announced, by resorting to humour to begin to guess how perhaps a sociolect is constructed in an audiovisual text with a comic intention.

As already indicated, our focus is on the three phenomena we can identify within the sociolectal umbrella: the levels of language, the slang, and the scientific-technical language. We will now turn our attention to each of these features, illustrating them with a fragment of a humorous audiovisual product, including translation (English > European Spanish dubbing) scenarios.

7.1 *Language levels*

Before proceeding with the first example selected, it is important to specify what we understand by *levels of language*. According to Trigo (2018, online*), based on the work of Coseriu (see, for example, his 1981 work), we are talking about those factors that allow us to distinguish between the following four social varieties:

1. **Cultured level:** This level describes educated people with a high cultural level. It is considered an «example of correctness». As main characteristics, we can point out the «correction in pronunciation, grammar, and lexicon», as well as «lexical correctness, which includes abstract concepts and can cover all

- areas of culture». It should also be noted that it «shares the characteristics of the literary tradition and reflects its richness».
2. Standard level¹³: At this level, we find «an average level of formality that meets the normative demands of the language in a less rigid way than the cultured level». It is considered the level «of the media and teaching».
 3. Popular level: This level describes «everyday life» characterized by «a subjectivity that materializes in the frequent use of interjections, irony, and exclamations», a «linguistic economy, which results in the existence of unfinished sentences, short phrases, pet words, etc.», «frequent allusions to the hearer», and «use of sayings, set phrases, and proverbs».
 4. Vulgar level: Finally, we find the level «of the speakers with a low level of schooling», characterized by «a poor lexicon and simple grammar», and a constant alteration of the norm, which translates into the introduction of vulgarisms whether lexical, phonetic, morphological, or syntactic.

Next, we consider a fragment of the famous television series *The Simpsons* (Matt Groening, 1989-present). Specifically, a scene in which a board is deciding whether Sideshow Bob (Bart's archenemy), now in prison, will be granted parole. At this point, Bob and Snake (a recurring character in the show, known as a low-life criminal), who has just been granted parole in the same session, exchange a few words of farewell:

Chairman of the board	Next up for parole, Bob Terwilliger, a. k. a. Sideshow Bob.
Bob	Take care, Snake. May the next time we meet be under more felicitous circumstances.
Snake	Ga?
Bob	Take care.
Snake	Ba.

Table 2

¹³ One might ask if perhaps this would be the unmarked level, in sociolectal terms. After all, as the Centro Virtual Cervantes states, «in the works on linguistic variation the term *standard variety* is used to designate what is common and neutral in a language, that is, the 'general language' not marked by individual or contextual factors» (2020, online).

If we compare Bob's first intervention and Snake's two interventions, the contrast between the cultured and vulgar levels, respectively, is evident. In fact, Bob includes in his speech a word like «felicitous», described by the Cambridge Dictionary (2020, online) as of *literary* use. On the contrary, Snake is not only unable to understand what Bob says («Ga?»), but he is not even able to utter intelligible words¹⁴.

However, there is more: in Bob's two interventions, it is also possible to observe an alternation of levels. Once he detects that his interlocutor cannot understand him, he decides to resort to a possibly more informal formula and, therefore, to place himself at a more intermediate level («Take care»). This fact, on the other hand, seems to be in line with the following assessment made by the Centro Virtual Cervantes (2020, online*):

A speaker with an educated level of language is one who can use the most appropriate register for each situation of communication; a speaker with a vulgar level, on the other hand, always uses the language in the same way—the only one he or she knows—, regardless of the conditions of communication.

Evidently, the linguistic content of this fragment already evidences the existence of an active sociolect. Now, if we do not go any further, are we really looking at the whole picture or just a part of it? Let us not forget the obvious: besides listening, we are seeing. Moreover, what do we see? In Bob's case, he appears on occasion dressed as a prisoner, given the situation at the time. However, the mental image of this character that possibly a fan of the series will keep in his or her head would imply casual or even more formal (for example, a suit) street clothes. On the contrary, Snake appears typically dressed, as shown in Figure 1.

¹⁴ «The use of vulgarisms shows the low degree of linguistic instruction of a speaker: for example, the use of poorly formed words [...] or agrammatic statements reveal a lack of knowledge of the language system» (Centro Virtual Cervantes, 2020: online*).



Figure 1: Snake
(*The Simpsons*, Matt Groening).

As we can see, Snake usually wears possibly denim fabrics, a vest with badly cut sleeves, and a T-shirt in one of whose sleeves he hides a pack of cigarettes. We can add a bad shave and the tattoo that runs along one of his arms, as well as a considerable size ring in one of his ears and a toupee that finishes off his hairstyle. In short, we are facing a stereotyped image that mixes traits from a biker, a delinquent, and a thug, an image that also sends us a message (sociolectal?).

In other words, if we were to return to the taxonomies listed in Table 1, it would initially appear that we would be looking at sociolectal markers given by the (para)linguistic codes/HE, although it could be understood that, as previously suggested, perhaps this picture would offer us an incomplete portrait of the phenomenon. Let us think, for instance, of the visual information that comes to us or that we have stored in our minds (previous knowledge of the world¹⁵ which also plays a role in this equation). The image of Snake (see Figure 1) activates, as has been suggested, an evident stereotype: that of a person from a poor background with little education and who, therefore, will not be able to go beyond a certain level of language (an unmarked HE, which would be transmitted, as we say, through the visual channel). On the other hand, as we have already explained, under normal circumstances Bob's usual attire invites (again, stereotypically) other sets of considerations regarding the levels of language through which he can move.

¹⁵ See, for example, Sperber and Wilson (1986).

The same reading is possible if we consider the Spanish dubbed version of this same fragment:

Presidente del tribunal	Concedida la condicional. Siguiendo caso, Bob Terwilliger, alias Actor Secundario Bob.
Bob	Cuídate, Snake. Espero que nuestro próximo encuentro tenga lugar en circunstancias más propicias
Snake	¿Eh?
Bob	Cuídate.
Snake	Ba.

Table 3

Therefore, we have seen that the signals for the expected sociolects of each character are given, in the first instance, by (para)linguistic aspects. However, it is possible to abound in the remaining range of codes and HE and detect other types that also transport information that, at least, reinforces the information provided by the former. For the time being, we have pointed out the visual codes and HE, but we could also mention those related to sound. For example, in the case of the original version of this fragment, the actor who gives his voice to Bob's character is Kelsey Grammer, who became popular for giving life to Frasier Crane in the successful television series *Frasier* (David Angell, Peter Casey and David Lee, 1993-2004), a wealthy psychiatrist who stands out, among other things, for being a tremendously cultured and at the same time pedantic person, characteristics that, coincidentally, also define Bob's character.

Therefore, by recognizing that voice (again, previous knowledge is crucial), a new mental connection is made, which takes us to the realm of a cultured language level. Interestingly, although exceptionally not in the episode that concerns us, the usual actor for Bob's dubbing in Spain is Antonio Esquivias. He was precisely also in charge of giving voice to Frasier Crane in the Spanish dubbed version so that in the target receiver that same mental connection would be given entirely, activating the expectation of a certain language level and, therefore, of a sociolect.

In short, we are faced with a case in which the (audiovisual?) sociolect perhaps takes shape not only from the typically expected instruments (the words and how they are articulated), but others contribute to this sociolect (particularized on a level of cultured or vulgar language, depending upon the case), or at least reinforce it, with the result that the possible humorous effect

of the fragment, arising in large part from the contrast between levels, has more significant tools to reach achievement.

7.2 Slang

As previously mentioned, slang is the second sociolectal horizon on which we are focusing. First, it is convenient to define what we can understand by *slang*. As the dictionary states, the term may refer to «1: language peculiar to a particular group: such as a: ARGOT b: JARGON 2: an informal nonstandard vocabulary composed typically of coinages, arbitrarily changed words, and extravagant, forced, or facetious figures of speech» (Merriam Webster, 2019, online). In the example selected to delve into the audiovisual aspect, the second meaning may have more weight. The example is a fragment of the once tremendously popular television series *The Prince of Bel-Air* (Andy Borowitz and Susan Borowitz, 1990-1996). In this show, we were told about the adventures of a teenager from Philadelphia who is fond of rap and moves in with his uncle, aunt, and cousins to a luxurious mansion in Bel-Air. To a great extent, the show exploited the contrast between two worlds: that of the young man (age is a factor) Will raised in a humble neighbourhood, and that of his host family, refined and surrounded by luxury thanks to the professional success of Uncle Philip Banks, a renowned lawyer.

In this scene, Will receives a message on his pager from one of his girlfriends, something that does not seem right to Uncle Phil. Ashley, Will's young cousin, also intervenes:

Uncle	What is that?
Will	That would be Aisha.
Uncle	Oh, no.
Will	You're right, Uncle Phil, wrong area code. That would be Stacy.
Uncle	Vivian, tell me that's not a beeper.
Ashley	Can I have one, Daddy?
Uncle	When Jesse Jackson gets a job. Will, there'll be no beepers worn in this house.
Will	Yo, what's up , Uncle Phil? My mom let me wear it in Philly .
Uncle	That's because she's your mother and she loves you. I'm your uncle. I just try not to hurt you.
Will	Come on, Uncle Phil, I need to keep in touch with my tasties .

Uncle	I beg your pardon?
Ashley	His tasties, Daddy. You know, his chubbies , his slimmies , his old ladies ?
Uncle	And, who are you? Queen Latifah?

Table 4

Once again, a linguistic approach would allow us to detect the presence of a sociolect immediately. In the transcription of the moment, we have highlighted in bold various words or expressions that dictionaries such as the Urban Dictionary (2020, online) catalogue as informal when not *slang*. Clearly, such expressions contrast with Uncle Phil's formal «I beg your pardon», and serve as a vehicle for building a specific identity. In fact, when Ashley, who admires her cousin and wishes to be part of his identity sphere, intervenes, she does so, using the same formula: the use of terms from the slang used by the group (young rappers) to whom she wishes to draw close.

The words and expressions highlighted above activate immediately and by purely linguistic and paralinguistic means (intonation also plays a role) a certain slang and, consequently, a certain sociolect. However, these slang-creating instruments do not act alone. On the one hand, there is Will's image, specifically his way of dressing, which immediately catalogues him as someone fond of this type of music (rap) and uses his clothes as a *symbol* (see Peirce's work, collected, for example, in Houser and Kloesel, 1998) of belonging to a certain urban tribe—clothes that clearly contrast with those worn by his uncle (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: Will and his Uncle Phil

(*The Prince of Bel-Air*, Andy Borowitz and Susan Borowitz)

We can add to this background two other visual HE also transferred through the visual code: the movement of Ashley's hand when she speaks, intended to emulate the typical way in which rappers move their hands when improvising their rhymes, and the handshake between cousins with which her intervention ends (see Figure 3 and Figure 4, respectively). Similarly, there is an evident acoustic HE (special effects code), the sound Will and Ashley's hands produce when they collide.

The moment is finally completed with the question Uncle Phil asks his daughter at the end of the fragment. Queen Latifah is a multifaceted American artist known, among other things, for a successful musical career as a rapper, with all this implies in terms of image and, ultimately, the constitution of a cultural element. In this case, it gives rise to an unmarked HE (previous knowledge) transferred through the linguistic code.



Figure 3: Will and his cousin Ashley (Ashley simulates the movement of rappers' hands)
 (*The Prince of Bel-Air*, Andy Borowitz and Susan Borowitz)



Figure 4: Will and his cousin Ashley (handshake)
 (*The Prince of Bel-Air*, Andy Borowitz and Susan Borowitz)

As shown below, the (para)linguistic HE (as we said before, susceptible to manipulation) present in the source version have been maintained in part in the Spanish dubbed version (highlighted in bold):

Uncle	¿Qué es eso?
Will	Debe ser Aisha.

Uncle	Oh, no.
Will	Es verdad, tío Phil, el prefijo es distinto. Debe ser Stacy.
Uncle	Vivian, dime que no es un busca.
Ashley	¿Puedo tener uno, papá?
Uncle	Cuando Jesse Jackson tenga trabajo. Will, no quiero que se lleven bucas en esta casa.
Will	¿Por qué, tío Phil? Mamá me dejaba llevarlo en Filadelfia.
Uncle	Porque es tu madre y te quiere. Yo soy tu tío y me basta con no herirte.
Will	Venga. Vamos, tío Phil. Necesito estar en contacto con mis pibas .
Uncle	¿Cómo has dicho?
Ashley	Sus pibas , papá. Ya sabes: sus chorbas , sus nenas , sus lobas ...
Uncle	¿Y quién eres tú? ¿Queen Latifah?

Table 5

Quantitatively, in this version, fewer words activate slang from a linguistic point of view. This fact may not be surprising because, for example, Arampatzis (2011) found in his study on linguistic variation in different television sitcoms, that in more than half of the cases analysed the target text is standardized (in terms of variation), which causes the connotations of such variation to be lost, something that would connect with one of the norms (tendencies, perhaps) detected by Goris (1993). Carrera Fernández (2014, p. 132*) concludes, after reviewing the work of a series of authors, that all of them «indicate that it would be desirable to reflect the connotative load of linguistic variation in the source text, but professional practice tends to neutralize in the target text the different varieties in dubbing and subtitling».

In any case, positions such as those set out in the previous paragraph perhaps contemplate only a part of what an audiovisual text is capable of transmitting, as explained above. Thus, despite this quantitative decrease of the slang linguistic HE, and in the absence of a reception study, we venture to say that the result will be the same as in the case of the source version, given that other HE are still present, such as the paralinguistic element (thanks to the dubbing actress), the visual and acoustic elements, as well as the

unmarked element (Queen Latifah, in general terms, known in the target context).

Therefore, we presume that the activation of the slang occurs and, therefore, of a sociolect (crucial in the humour of this scene) in both versions. The question lies in assessing whether this transmission occurs only by the (para)linguistic HE and codes or whether, on the contrary, the other HE and codes (mainly visual and acoustic) also play an active role in the generation of such a(n) (audiovisual?) sociolect.

7.3 *Scientific-technical language*

The last of the sociolectal phenomena to which we pay attention is scientific-technical language. As Gómez de Enterría (1998, p. 30*, emphasis in the original) points out, «when we speak of *scientific-technical language*, we are referring to those linguistic varieties that are strongly marked by the use of specialized terminologies». If there is a television situation comedy that has stood out precisely because of the use of such terminology, it is *The Big Bang Theory* (Chuck Lorre and Bill Prady, 2007-2019), a show used for our last examples. In the first of the two scenes we will analyse, we see Sheldon (a theoretical physicist with great intelligence) trying to teach physics to Penny (someone alien to the world of science). She wants to know more about the work of her boyfriend, Leonard (a scientist just like Sheldon), without him knowing. The contrast between Sheldon's scientific-technical language and Penny's non-specialized language (and even the opposition between different levels of the language), is evident.

Sheldon	Now, remember, Newton realized that Aristotle was wrong, and force was not necessary to maintain motion. So, let's plug in our 9.8 meters per second squared as A, and we get force, Earth gravity equals mass times 9.8 meters per second per second. So, we can see that MA equals MG, and what do we know from this?
Penny	Uh, we know that... Newton was a really smart cookie. Oh! Is that where Fig Newtons come from?
Sheldon	No, Fig Newtons are named after a small town in Massachusetts. Don't write that down!
Penny	Sorry
Sheldon	Now, if MA equals MG, what does that imply?

Penny	I don't know.
-------	---------------

Table 6

Later, the group of friends meets for dinner, and Penny, encouraged by Sheldon, decides to show Leonard the progress she has made. Besides Bernadette's intervention (something to be expected since she is also a scientist), Penny shows what we can consider a scientific-technical language and, therefore, a sociolectal mark.

Bernadette	Raj, you should've seen Leonard's experiment. The interference pattern was so cool when the electron beam was on.
Leonard	I'm glad you enjoyed it. Most people aren't that interested in what I do.
Penny	Actually, that's not true, Leonard. In fact, recently I've been thinking that given the parameters of your experiment, the transport of electrons through the aperture the nano-fabricated metal rings is qualitatively no different than the experiment already conducted in the Netherlands. Their observed phase shift in the diffusing electrons inside the metal ring already conclusively demonstrated the electric analogue of the Aharonov-Bohm quantum interference effect. That's it. That's all I know.

Table 7

The possible humour of these scenes lies on the one hand, in the contrast between Sheldon's use of this type of language and Penny's initial inability (as we said, a complete layperson in the matter; again, previous knowledge, in this case of the characters, is key) to move in that terrain. On the other hand, Penny, to the audience's general amazement, is finally able to utter a speech like the one she offers in the second scene presented. In both cases, the (para)linguistic sphere plays a determining role in the presentation of all the humour, although it is not the only sphere that is active.

For example, and not being exhaustive, in the first of the two scenes, Sheldon accompanies his explanations with a series of formulas written on a whiteboard (see Figure 5) that constitute graphic HE transmitted thanks to the graphic code. These inserts also construct the sociolect of the moment. Furthermore, on a more purely visual level (visual HE and iconographic codes) and whiteboard aside, the contrast we referred to above is observed beyond the words and how they are emitted 1) in the enthusiasm denoted by Sheldon's body movements (see Figure 5), and 2) the face of Penny not understanding anything (see Figure 6). Moreover, on the other hand, there is

the face of amazement of Leonard himself, among others (see Figure 7). To all this background, we can add the canned laughter, an acoustic factor not mentioned so far that undoubtedly reaffirms the viewer's reception of the intended message.

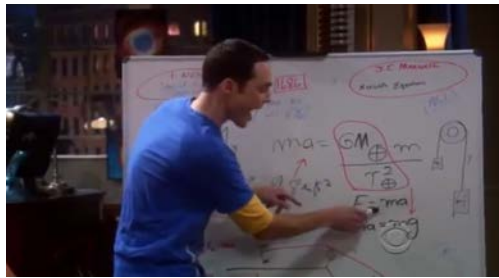


Figure 5: Sheldon explaining physics
(*The Big Bang Theory*, Chuck Lorre and Bill Prady)



Figure 6: Penny listening to Sheldon
(*The Big Bang Theory*, Chuck Lorre and Bill Prady)



Figure 7: Leonard surprised to hear Penny
(*The Big Bang Theory*, Chuck Lorre and Bill Prady)

The dubbed version of these two scenes reiterates, through (para)linguistic factors, the presence of scientific-technical language by the

different characters. These factors, together with the others also present and loaded with a sociolectal intention (such as acoustic or visual ones, especially), maintain the contrast between the use/non-use of scientific-technical language and, therefore, the humorous potential of the moment.

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout these pages, we have presented *sociolect* as a phenomenon, *a priori* (like any other *lect*), linguistic. However, we wanted to reflect on whether considering it as solely linguistic (or paralinguistic) is sufficient or even viable in texts with as many links as differential facts with written and oral texts, as is the case for audiovisual texts. In fact, our reflection has started from and led to a series of unknowns for which we have tried to find answers through the consideration, analysis, or exploration of fragments from three audiovisual products. For practical reasons, we also wanted to focus our reflection on a field full of opportunities for the researcher, such as humour.

We have tried to dissect the sociolects present in these segments, first by paying separate attention to the three phenomena typical of this diastratic variety (levels of language, slang, and scientific-technical language) and, second, by going beyond the (para)linguistic and attending to what reaches us as spectators thanks to the different codes that are, precisely, the highways through which the different HE travel—elements that give body to the jokes that make up a comedy and have to be taken into account integrally.

Given the scope of this article, we understand that it would be adventurous on our part to offer a categorical response to the various unknowns we have referred to. Perhaps our objective was precisely to pave the way for the generation of questions (which can be transferred to fields far removed from comedy) in the hope that thanks to the need (in our opinion) for new interdisciplinary research, they will build bridges that allow us to find more precise answers likely within the multimodal theory. Is there such a thing as an audiovisual sociolect?

As we recognized, we do not believe we are in a position to say in this work that we are offering irrefutable evidence of this phenomenon. However, we do, at least, suspect that the answer may be affirmative, without the necessity of coining a new term that would add to the already overloaded, not to say unnecessarily saturated, terminological reality in which we are immersed¹⁶. This article is only, in any case, part of an initial step towards a new standpoint regarding sociolects in audiovisual texts.

¹⁶ We are aware that «the proliferation of labels and terminology is often inconvenient and causes

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complaints among professionals in different fields of knowledge» (Fernández Pérez 1997, p. 157*).

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