

# American scriptwriters increasingly incorporating Spanish in their dialogues

December 23 2009

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Nieves Jiménez Carra, a researcher and lecturer at the Pablo de Olavide (UPO) University in Seville has studied how scripts swap from one language to another in American television series and cinema. One of her conclusions is that English-Spanish bilingualisms are increasingly common in scripts.

Over recent years, the cultural reality and growing presence of Latin American immigrants in the United States has led to more and more Americans alternating between English and [Spanish](#) as they talk. "There has been a real boom, which can be seen not only in Spanish being the leading foreign language studied in high schools and universities, but also in its presence in film and television", Jiménez Carra, author of the study and a researcher at the UPO, tells SINC

The study, which is based on five television series (The West Wing, Friends, Without a Trace, Cane and Dexter) and two films (Quinceañera and Real Women Have Curves), and which has been published in the *Vial-Vigo International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, focuses on the strategies that original scriptwriters use to incorporate Spanish or characters of Latin American background, and studies the subtitling and dubbing strategies used by Spanish translators to translate these 'bilingual' scripts into the kind of Spanish used in Spain.

The North American actors and actresses who take the leading roles usually speak perfect or near perfect Spanish. The people playing minor or occasional roles usually have an accent when they speak Spanish, in

other words they are not bilingual, even if they are of Hispanic origin. Most of the North American audience cannot appreciate this difference, but it is significant for this study, and shows the varying degrees of fluency in Spanish of the Latino population living in the United States.

The US scriptwriters usually use English subtitles if the Spanish spoken in the series or film is important to the plot. If this is not the case, and it is just interjections, then they are not subtitled. In conversations that are not of any relevance, the subtitle 'speaks Spanish' sometimes appears.

"This prevents the audience from understanding what the characters speaking Spanish are saying. If there are regular characters who speak Spanish, as in the series *Cane* or *Dexter*, these characters will sometimes translate their own comments. For example, if they say: "¿Cómo estás?", they will sometimes add immediately afterwards: "How are you?", explains Jiménez Carra.

In addition, the Spanish used in American scripts usually has the characteristic features of a particular Latin American country, such as Mexico, Puerto Rico or Cuba, depending on the part of the United States where the film or series is set, but when this is subtitled or dubbed for the Spanish audience it is adapted to the kind of language used in Spain.

Translation into Spanish is very difficult, because it must try to reflect the bilingualism of the script, which can only be differentiated in the original version, but it very rarely achieves this.

Provided by Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology

Citation: American scriptwriters increasingly incorporating Spanish in their dialogues (2009, December 23) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-12-american-scriptwriters-increasingly-incorporating-spanish.html>

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