

**TIM BURTON'S THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE  
CHRISTMAS VS. O ESTRANHO MUNDO DE JACK  
A SYSTEMIOTIC PERSPECTIVE ON THE STUDY OF  
SUBTITLING**

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Subtitling is an important area of Translation Studies. However, research in this field has concentrated on the technicalities involved in this activity, while overlooking the issue of how subtitles are constructed linguistically in accordance with contextual factors affecting their production and reception. This paper sets out to examine *Tim Burton's The Nightmare before Christmas* and its Brazilian Portuguese subtitled counterpart – *O Estranho Mundo de Jack*, aiming to investigate the extent to which 'generic' constraints in the receptor's 'context of culture' affect 'register' variation and, consequently, lexicogrammatical choices in the subtitled rendering. The theoretical framework informing the study is based mainly on notions of 'genre' and 'register' proposed by Ventola (1988) and Eggins (1994). This paper argues that a different perception of genre in the target context controlled the choice of register, which in turn, controlled the choices of language in the subtitling. A filtering in the rendered text was found to have occurred so as to increase the appeal to a specific audience – mainly children – privileging their grasp and understanding of the subtitled version at the expense of other relevant features.

## Initial Remarks

In the context of Translation Studies, the area of film translation<sup>1</sup> seems to have been largely neglected. Delabastita (1990: 97) claims that the lack of scholarly interest in this particular form of translation is related to the fact that 'social sciences tend to select their objects of study on the basis of cultural prestige, rather than intrinsic interest'. In other words, if someone wants to study translation s/he would probably prefer to study translations of Shakespeare to translations of soaps, films, comics, etc, which are less prestigious than the former.

Consequently, not much research has been undertaken in this particular field. Moreover, the investigations that have been carried out are centred on the description of *technicalities* and the defence of certain translation practices by those who are engaged in the tricky task of translating professionally. Owing to this, discussions are often devoted to technical constraints of text compression (subtitling) and lip synchronicity (dubbing) and the implications of working conditions in the final translation product.

As an illustration, Franco's (1991) MA dissertation entitled *Everything you wanted to know about film translation (But did not have the chance to ask)*, describes, from the translator's perspective, the characteristics of the film process which may (in)directly influence the final translation product. This description, based principally on working conditions, is made so as help film translation critics to provide more objective and realistic evaluations. According to Franco, these characteristics are: (i) *the selection of films to be translated*; (ii) *the translator's place of work*; (iii) *time limits*; (iv) *remuneration*; (v) *the equipment supplied by the laboratories*; (vi) *number of characters available for subtitling/phonological synchronism for dubbing*; (vii) *subtitle speed on the screen/speaking length synchronism*; (viii) *review* and (ix) *copyright*.

Another view on the study of subtitling is that offered by Gottlieb's (1994) article *Subtitling: People translating people*. After describ-

ing the courses on subtitling offered by the new European Film College in Ebeltof, Denmark; the author (*ibid.*: 263-273) sets out to discuss some issues related to the study of subtitling such as (i) the fact that many authors on the field refrain from defining subtitling as a type of translation; (ii) the impossibility of subtitling equivalently *literary texts* in opposition to the possibility of translating equivalently *technical texts*; (iii) the polysemiotic character of subtitles, among others. Predictably, Gottlieb ends his discussion by analysing the technical constraints which stem from the *reduction* factor.

Similarly, Kovacic (1994) focuses her discussion on *reductions*, by offering a set of cognitive notions that provide subtitlers with some guidelines on how to deal with them. In discussing the constraint of *reductions*, Kovacic says that

'Reductions [...] are dictated by the extralinguistic requirements of the media: reduction depends not only on the speed of the dialogue, but above all on the systemic similarities and differences between source and target language' (*ibid.*: 245).

As pointed out above, extralinguistic constraints seem to be the only factors that should be taken into consideration in dealing with reductions. Nevertheless, Kovacic seems to contradict herself when she mentions the fact that deduction depends not only on the speed of the dialogue, but on the similarities between languages.

After all, isn't the latter a linguistic requirement?

The last illustration worth noticing is Dries's (1995) guidelines 'for high quality language transfer'. These guidelines aim to inform producers and distributors on the importance of taking full account of the requirements of dubbing and subtitling in order to obtain a high standard of language transfer of their productions. Again, the discussion revolves around the technical constraints involved in dubbing and subtitling, once more confirming Delabastita's

claim that much of the research carried out in film translation is based on *technicalities*.

However important, the traditional studies in film translation mentioned above suffer from limitations in the sense that linguistic aspects seem to be only pertinent when discussing syntactic and lexical pattern length. Some of these limitations will be discussed next.

### **Gaps in Audiovisual Translation**

In his discussion on film translation, Delabastita points out that in many cases the dubbing and subtitling constraints above 'occupy a higher position in the translator's hierarchy of priorities than do considerations of syntax, style or lexicon' (1990.: 99).

Despite their acknowledged importance in film translation, dubbing and subtitling constraints, however, should not always be at the top of the researcher's set of priorities in describing the relationship between original and rendered films. There are plenty of other gaps concerning language investigation that need to be filled. Within these gaps, Delabastita (1990: 102) suggests: the rendering of particular language varieties, literary allusions, wordplay and other forms of humorous language use, the rendering of taboo elements and prosodic features, just to mention a few.

In addition to Delabastita's suggestions, this paper tackles an issue which is of vital significance to Screen Translation: the inclusion of *context of culture* and *context of situation* in translation studies as suggested by Steiner (1998:23) and Vasconcellos (1997:79).

The relevance of the inclusion of the contexts of culture and situation in Translation Studies lies in the fact that these two more abstract dimensions of language offer two other levels of meaning which seem to be crucial for the understanding of translational phenomena, as pointed out by Steiner:

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We insist on the incorporation of the levels of context of situation and context of culture in a definition of translation.

Although there are studies in translation dealing with the contexts of culture and context of situation, such as the works of Hale (1997), Kiraly (1995) and Gallina (1992), as pointed out by Vasconcellos (1998:78-80), these studies are inserted in different contexts, that is, they are not related to the particular area of audiovisual translation. Hale, for example, uses the registerial dimensions of the context of situation (field, tenor and mode) in study of court interpreting. Kiraly in an attempt to develop an effective translation pedagogy, draws on the Firthian concept of Context of Situation to account for linguistic choices in texts. And, finally, Gallina who explores the notion of context in the field of Interpreting.

Therefore, in an attempt to offer an alternative in filling this gap in audiovisual translation, this paper proposes to explore this missing link between the film *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and its Brazilian Portuguese subtitled counterpart – *O Estranho Mundo de Jack*.

### **The Corpus**

The corpus of the present work consists of the film *Tim Burton's The Nightmare before Christmas* (both the language as spoken by characters and as explored in songs, as well as the script to the film) and its Brazilian Portuguese subtitled version; namely, *O Estranho Mundo de Jack*.

*Tim Burton's The Nightmare before Christmas* (© 1993 Touchstone Pictures) is a 76-minute stop-motion puppetoon, rated PG<sup>2</sup>. It was directed by Henry Selick and produced by Tim Burton and Denise DiNovi in partnership with Walt Disney Co. The screenplay, based on a story and characters by Tim Burton, was written

by Caroline Thompson, while the film's music and lyrics by Danny Elfman.

The story of the film takes place in the land where holidays come from. One town celebrates Halloween each year; another celebrates Christmas, and so on. Tired of Halloween after Halloween, Jack Skellington, Halloweentown's Pumpkin King, longs for something different to shake him out of his post-holiday blues. He finds it when he stumbles upon the colourful and happy Christmastown. It is, then, Jack's fascination for this tantalising town that makes him have 'Sandie Claws' kidnapped and stage his own Christmas, despite the warnings from rag doll Sally that it would be a disaster. Unfortunately, 'Sandie Claws's kidnappers send him to Oogie Boogie's lair. Sally, trying to help Jack, goes to save Santa Claus from Oogie Boogie's hands, but she ends up his prisoner as well. Finally, after being shot down by the police, for pretending to be Santa Claus, and also for spreading fear and panic with malevolent presents, the story finds its way to a happy ending. Jack returns to Halloweentown and sets things right, saving Santa Claus and his lovelorn Sally from Oogie Boogie as well as Christmas.

The reason for the choice of this particular corpus was not a random one. Because of the fuzzy generic boundaries of the ST and the mitigation of the macabre/sinister element in the images of the TT advertising, a suspicion, concerning the way in which the lexical items in the subtitles had been treated, was aroused.

Hence my interest in finding out whether the complexity involving the generic categorisation of Burton's film in the source context as well as the mitigating role of the Brazilian marketing manoeuvres is lexically reflected in the subtitles, accounting for the choice of this particular film and its subtitled version as the corpus of the research.

## Research Question and Analytical Procedures

The present study looks at the question of generic configuration and the consequent register and language analysis in two particular texts. Therefore, the kind of analysis carried out in here is of a comparative nature, since it investigates how differences in the two contexts – source and target – have a bearing on the register and the lexical items of the two texts, thus affecting the meaning production in the subtitling.

Through a comparative analysis, then, the attempt to answer the following research question will be made:

- Was there a different treatment of the generic nature of the film, in terms of audience orientation, during the translation process? If so, was it reflected in the subtitles?

Considering the question above, the working hypothesis to be raised is that due to a different treatment of the genre in the target context the choice of its register was also affected. Consequently, the register variation in its turn controlled the choice of the lexical items, signalling the macabre/sinister element in the ST.

In order to answer the research questions above, the present research was carried out within the composite theoretical framework provided by Halliday (1978); Ventola (1988), Eggins (1994), following a Systemiotic perspective on language.

Borrowing Halliday's (1994a: xvi) words, the sort of analysis carried out here 'will take us further away from the language into more abstract semiotic realms'. And these 'more abstract realms', namely, *context of culture: genre* and *context of situation: register*, as pointed out by Eggins, are the determinants in the choice of language within the target text.

However, it seems necessary to say that the view on these two notions informing the present work differs slightly from Halliday's,

in the sense that it considers genre to have a higher level of abstraction than register. This point of view subscribes to Ventola's *systemiotic approach to text analysis*, in which she suggests the separate semiotics of the genre and register dimensions.

The importance of these two semiotic planes – as Ventola calls them – lies in the fact that they play a leading role in the selections of lexical features within the text. That is, the choice of genre controls the choice of register, which in turn controls the choice of language in the text. This relationship is shown in Figure 1.

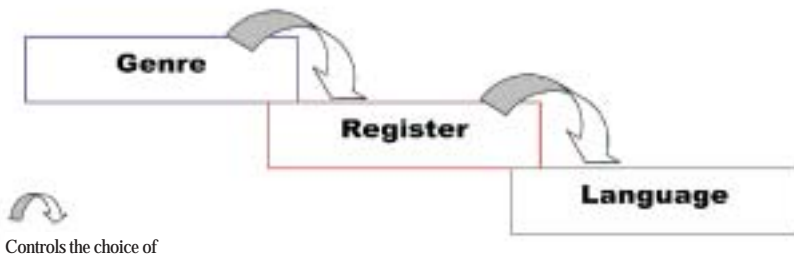


Figure 1: Ventola's (1998:57) systemiotic approach to text analysis.

According to Ventola, texts are structures generated by system choices on the three planes presented in figure 1. However, traditionally, linguists have mostly been interested in describing the language plane, i.e. its systems and structures. Consequently, the more abstract planes have received less attention. This work shares Ventola's claim that one cannot explain how language fulfils its social function without taking into consideration the two higher semiotic planes of genre and register.



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## The Analysis

Having sketched out the basic theoretical framework within which this paper is carried out, I shall now turn to the detailed discussion of the three semiotic planes, genre, register and language in relation to the corpus under investigation. The analysis will proceed in a “top-down” fashion and thus will start with genre.

Since one of the points meriting attention in the generic analysis is the contrast between the images used in the advertisements of ST and TT, that is, the visual marketing strategies when releasing the film both in the source and target contexts, a theory which helps to deal with visual communication of the adverts will be drawn upon: that of Kress & van Leeuwen's (1990) book, *Reading Images*.

### The Plane of Genre

The research into generic dimensions of texts takes the investigator away from the lexicogrammatical level alone into more abstract realms. Paltridge (1991: 296), commenting on genre analysis in the systemic context, also acknowledges this perspective of looking at texts, saying that

[w]hat seems clear is that the genre analyst needs to move away from the physical aspects of language and how they reflect reality to how the text, as a whole, is conditioned by external considerations.

Thus following this thread of thought, I shall consider first the place of the ST as a cinematic genre. Next, some aspects of social relations between images and viewers in the advertising of ST and TT will be discussed, so as to show from where my first hypothesis, concerning the mitigation of the macabre in the TT, originates. Finally, the comparison of the generic dimensions of ST and TT is carried out.

Tim Burton's [Fuzzy-Edged] *The Nightmare before Christmas*

As previously mentioned, *Tim Burton's The Nightmare before Christmas (TNBC)*, is a *cartoon-like* film based on *fantasy* and *wonder*, produced by Disney Co. At a first analysis, these three elements alone – cartoon, fantasy and Disney – However, might be indicative of the film's generic status: a children's movie production. The classification is not so straightforward as it seems to be, though. In fact, the film differs from other Disney's similar undertakings, such as *The King Lion*, *Aladdin* and *Pocahontas*, as regards its gloomy atmosphere and its grotesque and ghoulish characters. Cinematic critic Richard Collins (1993), highlights the peculiar features of TNBC by raising the following questions:

“What's this? A Disney Studio cartoon with banshees baying at the moon! What's this? An animated feature where each creature wants to eat you with a spoon! What's this? Black hats, black cats, a pack of blackguard rats! And bats that function as cravats! What's this? In just a spooky second you'll be certain that behind the cartoon curtain it's not Disney, it's Tim Burton. And it's bliss! (...) The full title – Tim Burton's *The Nightmare before Christmas*'- is a shock, for this is a film from the Walt Disney Co. Before, only the founder got possessive credit. But now Burton, with two other projects at the studio, is heading what he calls 'the Evil Twin Division' of Disney.”

After pinpointing some of the film's peculiarities, Collins argues that TNBC is not a typical Disney movie in two senses: (i) its characteristics do not tally with other films by Disney; and, (ii) it has been inspired by one of Tim Burton's stories. This last point, needs some clarification.

Tim Burton is a filmmaker whose artistic vision leans towards the shadowy and the macabre. This directorial vision can be seen in his previous features such as *Beetlejuice*, *Batman* and *Edward*

*Scissorhands*, to name but a few. As a matter of fact, Burton's art seems to stem from a desire to exorcise childhood demons, and maybe that is why his films operate at a twofold level, *blending the innocent with the macabre*. Certainly, the ambivalence which his movies work, would not be different for TNBC, since he has created the feature's story and characters. The film reviewer Berardinelli (1993:1) points out this ambivalence:

The film is designed for all but the youngest children, some of whom might be frightened by the bizarre inhabitants of Halloween Town. On its surface, the story is relatively straightforward, enabling younger viewers to enjoy the movie without becoming lost or bored. However, the film works on a second level, as well. The most deft humor is aimed at adults. Even those who aren't taken in by the charming tale or likable characters will be enthralled by the world Tim Burton and director Henry Selick have created. It is, quite frankly, an amazing achievement.

The dichotomised nature of TNBC, in which both the first and second levels are conveyed, makes it difficult to categorise the film's place within a specific cinematic genre. In other words, the ambivalent characteristics of the ST seem to create a categorisation problem. This comes as no surprise, since all Burton's works strive to defy categorisation, as he himself, in an interview given to *The New York Times*, reveals:

I was quiet, but early on, I got deemed as weird', he said. 'When someone says that and the whole world starts believing it ... by the time I was a teen-ager, I felt weird. From day one in my life, I've always responded against the tendency in our culture to categorize. It just seems to undermine all of us as human beings in all our complexity. Ryan (1997:1)

In addition, the ambivalence present in Burton's work results in fuzzy-edged boundaries in TNBC's generic classification, raising questions about the nature of the film in terms of audience orientation: Is this exclusively a children's movie or not? I particularly prefer to believe that this feature cannot be put into any of the existent generic categories without problematisation. In other words, subscribing to Berardinelli's view, this film is *Tim Burton's* genre and, as such, it is for all and sundry. This aspect is crucial for the understanding of the arguments developed in the next section, which discusses the treatment given to this ST characteristic in the target context.

#### The Mitigating Role of Image in the Advertising of TT

In the context of a discussion on images in visual communication, Kress & van Leeuwen describe the social relations of viewer and image by means of what they call 'dimensions of interactive meanings in images' (1990:23). Among these dimensions, there are three in particular, which are vital for an understanding of the 'mitigation of the macabre' in the advertising of the film in the Brazilian context. They are (i) *visual offers and visual demands*; (ii) *the vertical angle (power)*; and, finally, (iii) *the perspectival system of foreground and background*.

(i) Visual offers and visual demands: According to Kress & van Leeuwen (1990: 24- 28), in visual semiotics of western cultures, images are used to perform two types of 'image act': (a) *demands* and (b) *offers*, images which 'want something from the viewer', and 'images which ostensibly do not', respectively.

(a) *Visual demands* are realised by the glance of one or several (quasi-) human (or sometimes animal) represented participants in the picture towards the viewer. In other words, in pictures which 'want something from the viewer', one or more pair of eyes looks directly at the viewer. What the image wants from the viewer then depends on how the represented participants look at them.

(b) On the other hand, *visual offers* are realised by images, which offer the viewer represented participants as objects for contemplation, not demanding from the viewer the establishment of an imaginary social relation with them.

In the case of the two covers (presented in Figure 2), none of the represented participants seems to be staring at the viewer. In this sense, it cannot be said that they meet the requirements of the 'visual demand' aspect of the image act. Close inspection, however, is suggestive of a gradation along the 'demand – offer' cline. The ST cover portrays an image of Jack at a distance, looking away into the vacuum, as if inviting contemplation (visual offer), whereas the TT can be said to realise something closer to a visual demand, in that it portrays the quasi-human participants as smiling, thus entering upon a sort of imaginary friendly relation with the viewer. In this case, the relation called for is one of a friendly nature, counterbalancing the sinister-like quality of the ST cover. Figure 2 displays the ST and TT covers of the film.



Figure 2: Different covers for the source and subtitled versions.

ii) The second dimension pointed out by Kress & van Leeuwen is that of the vertical angle: power. Kress & van Leeuwen say that

this dimension is realised by the camera height: a high angle making the subject look insignificant and a low angle makes it look imposing (in the sense of intimidating the viewer). Stating it in a somewhat different way, one can say that if a represented participant is seen from a low angle, this suggests that this interactive participant has some sort of power over the viewer. If, on the other hand, a represented participant is seen from a high angle, this suggests that the viewer has some sort of power over the participant. Finally, if the picture is seen at the eye level, the point of view is one of equality, and consequently there is no power relation involved, or, at least, it is of a symmetric nature.

Bringing this into the discussion of the ST and TT covers in Figure 2, one can see that the TT's interactive participants are seen from a high angle, giving the viewer a sense of power over these participants, as they are portrayed as less threatening. Jack Skellington – the interactive participant in the ST – on the other hand, is seen from a low angle, giving the viewer(s) a sense of Jack's superior position in relation to them.

(iii) The third dimension explored is the perspectival system of foreground and background. As Kress & van Leeuwen see it, *foreground* is the nearest part of a scene in a picture or photograph, and *background* is what is behind the main object when a picture/photograph is looked at. The function of this dimension is to establish a semantic hierarchy, that is, what is more meaningful to the image-maker is put in the foreground of the picture/photograph and what is less meaningful in the background.

Within this perspective, one can see that both foregrounding and backgrounding have been realised differently in the two covers. In the ST cover, *foreground* and *background* almost blend in, reflecting the sombre and intimidating visual nature of the film. In contrast, a distinction between foreground and background is made in the TT. The background of the image is dark and sombre, whereas the foreground, integrating four more represented participants, displays different colours so as to express a serene and friendly imaginary world. Moreover, the TT cover portrays in its background the

bright and colourful Christmastown, while the ST's conveys the frightening shadowy pumpkin path.

Likewise, the posters, which advertised the film, shown in Figure 3 below, also establish the same relations between viewer and image as discussed above.



Figure 3: Different Advertising Posters and TT.

However, the comparison between the ST and TT's posters shows more clearly how any reference to darkness, fright and evil has been downplayed in the TT. The black colour was replaced with the white colour, and smiling Jack was gifted with a bright colourful "Sandy Claws" outfit.

The objective of the visual analysis carried out here was to show the way in which the two advertising forms of the TT attempt to diminish the impact of the "menacing" images in the original advertising. In point of fact, the TT poster creates an imaginary friendly relation with the viewer by means of demand, camera's high angle of vision, and backgrounding any reference to the sinister or completely neglecting it, as in the case of the TT advertising poster.

From all this, one may infer that in order to favour a specific audience, in this case Brazilian younger children, the mitigation of the sinister in the TT has occurred.

#### Generic Analysis between ST and TT

On the basis of the schematic structure suggested by Eggins (1994:89), both texts (ST and TT) can be assigned to the same narrative genre – *fairy tale* – as they comply with the basic elements whose schematic structure is comprised of the functionally labelled stages presented below.

Functional Labelling	Description
Orientation	indicating that a narrative is about to be told
Setting	giving the time and place of the story events
Action	events leading up to the main action
Complicating Action	the pivotal drama of the story
Resolution	the outcome of the drama
Evaluation	reaction to the story
Coda	wrapping up and finishing off

Table 1: Description of a basic narrative schematic structure (Eggins, 1994: 89)

Based on the description of each stage, table 2 below describes the schematic structure of the original film and its Brazilian subtitled version.



STAGE	SOURCE TEXT		TARGET TEXT	
	SCENE (Sc) Song (So)	DESCRIPTION	CENA (Ce) Canção (Ca)	DESCRIPTION
Orientation	Sc.: 1	Narrator indicates that a story is about to be told.	Ce.: 1	Narrador anuncia o início da estória.
Setting	Sc.: 1 So.: 1	Holidays world Halloweentown	Ce.: 1 Ca.: 1	Mundo dos feriados Cidade de Halloween
Action	Sc.:1 – 29 So.:2 – 9	Jack is bored with his annual duties as the Pumpkin King. When he chances upon Christmastown, a far cry from his own world, he gets enraptured by the colours and joy he sees. Back to Halloween town, Jack tries to explain to his cohorts, with no success, the meaning of Christmas. As a way of overcoming this failure, he, then, decides to run Christmas himself. To do so, Jack counts on the trio Lock, Stock and Barrel to kidnap “Sandy Claws” and all the other inhabitants to prepare the presents. Unfortunately, Sandy is sent to Oogie Boogie’s place. And lovelorn Sally after having tried to stop her beloved Jack from such	Ce.:1-29 Ca.:2-9	Jack está cansado de sua rotina como o Rei Abóbora. Quando se depara por acidente com a cidade do Natal, Jack se surpreende com tantas cores e felicidade que ele não conhecia desde então. De volta, a cidade de Halloween, ele tenta compartilhar o sentimento natalino com seus súditos sem muito êxito, decidindo então celebrar o natal ele mesmo. Com a ajuda do trio Lock, Stoch e Barrel, Jack seqüestra “ Papão Comeu” que é levado para o esconderijo do Bicho Papão. Depois de tudo pronto, Jack sai para distribuir os presentes feitos por seus súditos. Sally, a fã número um de Jack, depois de ter tentado inutilmente impedi-lo de cometer um ato tão hediondo, tenta amenizar as

		a heinous act, goes to save Mr Claws, whereas Jack sets out for the rooftops of the world.		coisas para ele, salvando Sr. Comeu. Enquanto Jack sai em busca de seu sonho natalino.
Complicating Action I	Sc.: 30	Jack creates panic and fear all over the world with his scary appearance and malevolent presents on Christmas's Eve.	Ce.: 30	Jack cria pânico e medo através do mundo com sua aparência horripilante e seus presentes malévolos na véspera de Natal
Resolution I	Sc.: 31 – 32	Jack is shot down from his sleigh by the police.	Ce.: 31 – 32	O trenó de Jáck é derrubado pela polícia
Evaluation I	Sc.: 33 So.: 10	In a moment of self-revelation, Jack realises the wrong he has done and also that he could not pretend to be what he never was.	Ce.: 33 Ca.: 10	Num momento epifânico, Jack percebe o mal que causou, e também que foi errado de sua parte ter fingido ser alguém que ele nunca foi.
Complicating Action II	Sc.: 34	Oogie Boogie tries to kill Sally and Sandy Claws.	Ce.: 34	Bicho Papão tentar matar Sally e Papão Comeu.
Resolution II	Sc.: 34	Jack does away with Oogie Boogie, saving Sally and Sandy Claws.	Ce.: 34	Jack se livra de Oogie Boogie, salvando Sally e Papão Comeu.
Evaluation II	Sc.: 34	Sandy Claws scolds Jack for his acts and says that Sally is the only normal person in Halloweentown.	Ce.: 34	Papão Comeu ralha com Jack e diz que Sally é o único ser normal em Halloweentown.
Coda	Sc.: 35 So.: 11	Santa Claus visits Halloween, bringing the feeling of Christmas to all inhabitants. Besides, Jack and Sally discover they are in love with each other.	Ce.: 35 Ca.: 11	Papai Noel traz ao habitantes da cidade de Holloween o verdadeiro espírito natalino. Jack e Sally descobrem estar apaixonados.

Table 2: Schematic Structure of ST and TT.

The table above demonstrates that both ST and TT have the same schematic structure. Therefore, the schematic representation of the texts' genre on its own is not enough to show whether there was

or not a different treatment of the generic dimension in the two texts. So, I shall now consider the register plane in order to proceed with the systemiotic analysis.

### **The Plane of Register**

The register analysis adds another dimension to the understanding of how ST and TT realise generic meanings. This analysis is carried out here by describing three register variables (Eggins, 1994: 52):

1. Field: "what the language is being used to talk about"
2. Tenor: "the role relationships between the interactants"
3. Mode: "the role language is playing in the interaction"

Field analysis suggests that ST and TT share a common social function, that is, telling a holiday tale in which the Pumpkin King of Halloweentown decides to kidnap Santa Claus and make his own Christmas with the help of his cohorts. However, whilst ST and TT are similar in terms of the field component of context of situation, TT stands apart when tenor and mode are considered. This basic difference can be accounted for in relation to image/sound dependence. In this sense, the rendered text is presented as largely image/sound dependent. That is, during the translation process, features of a spoken interactive mode in the ST are overlooked; this deficiency, so to speak, is compensated by a heavy reliance on the film's image and original sound. As a result, the TT creates a more formal and distant tenor configuration, establishing a different relationship between the narrator and his audience, and also between the characters.

Furthermore, the power relation holding between characters in the narrated universe and audience seems to be downplayed, increasing the affective involvement between those entities and consequently creating a new level of tenor operation: that between translator and new audience. The table below shows the register

description of ST and TT. The analysis was inspired by Halliday (1978:146), however, additional components referring to the relationship of the translator with the new audience have been integrated into the framework.

REGISTER VARIABLE	SOURCE TEXT	TARGET TEXT
Field	<p><u>Verbal art</u>: entertainment through story telling.</p> <p><u>Theme</u>: the harmful consequences of pretending to be somebody else.</p> <p>Projected through:</p> <p><u>Thesis</u> ('plot'): fictitious interaction of mythological and imaginary figures.</p>	<p><u>Verbal art</u>: entertainment through story telling.</p> <p><u>Theme</u>: the harmful consequences of pretending to be somebody else.</p> <p>Projected through:</p> <p><u>Thesis</u> ('plot'): fictitious interaction of mythological and imaginary figures</p>
Tenor	<p><u>Participants in the narrative</u>: close (high affective involvement) and informal (equal power)</p> <p><u>Script-writer / audience</u>: close (high affective involvement) and informal (equal power).</p>	<p><u>Participants in the narrative</u>: distant (low affective involvement) and formal (unequal power)</p> <p><u>Translator / new audience</u>: closer (higher affective involvement) and informal (equal power).</p>
Mode	<p>Text as self-sufficient</p> <p><u>Poly- &amp; isosemiotic medium</u> : to be listened to and seen as a private or communal act.</p> <p>Light film, original text projected onto traditional fairy tale genre, structured as narrative-with-dialogue, with moral as a pivotal element.</p>	<p>Text as not self-sufficient.</p> <p><u>Poly-&amp;diasemiotic medium</u> : to be listened to, seen and read as a private or communal act.</p> <p>Light film, translated text projected onto traditional fairy tale genre, structured as narrative-with-dialogue, with moral as a pivotal element.</p>

Table 3: Register Description of ST and TT

When the level of tenor operation involving translator/new audience is examined, the fact that the genre ambivalence of ST has been overlooked during the translation process can be seen more clearly. Table 3 above shows that a new, different relationship has been introduced in the TT, between the inhabitants of Halloweentown and their new spectators – ‘younger viewers’. The manner in which this option for the first level audience is realised in the TT language will be the next step of the investigation.

**The Plane of Language**

The analysis of language is centred on the discourse stratum, more specifically, on the lexical relations between ST and TT. The purpose here is to track down all those lexical items, which contribute to create the gloomy and macabre atmosphere of the ST, but which have been omitted in the TT.

Table 4 describes the lexical items suggesting the ST’s bizarre nature and their rendered Brazilian Portuguese counterparts. It is also worth noticing that the table below includes *back-translation* (BT) in the last column. Back-translation is here used in the sense proposed by Shuttleworth and Cowie (1997:14-15), that is, for the purpose of comparing specific lexical features from two languages. In other words, this procedure aims to use the evidence provided by BT to argue for the mitigation of the macabre in the TT.

<b>Source Text</b>	<b>Target Text</b>	<b>Back -translation</b>
Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas	O Estranho Mundo de Jack	Jack's Weird World
strange	diferente	different
everybody make a scene	venham todos ao espetáculo	everybody come to the spectacle
in the dead of night	na noite escura	in the dark night

surprise	atração	attraction
scream like a	grita como alma Banshee	screams like a wandering penada ghost
(most) horrible	pior / horrível	worst / terrible
you made walls fall...	abala minhas estruturas...	you shake my structures...
walls fall? you made the very mountains crack...	...estruturas? você abala minha montanha	...structures? you shake my mountain...
deadly nightshade	erva daninha	weed
excitement	diversão	diversion
a frightening and honourable mention...	com menção honrosa	with honourable mention
Mister Unlucky	Sr. Infeliz	Mr. Unfortunate
skull	cabeça	head
pox (syphilis)	pus	pus
ruler	governador	governor
fearsome	medroso	chickenhearted
to slay	passear	to go for a walk
Sandy Claws	Papão Comeu	“Boogie has eaten”
inside a nasty trap	na armadilha	in the trap
snakes	galhos	branches
come to your senses	comporte-se	behave yourself
rag doll	bonequinha de trapo	little rag doll

Table 4 Words/Expressions denoting the Macabre/Sinister in the ST and their Brazilian Portuguese Renderings.

Some of the words/expressions above may not directly evoke the ominous tone present in the ST; however, it is important to highlight that it is not their isolated meaning which is responsible for the atmosphere of the ST, but rather the interrelationship of the various meanings realised by each lexical item. It is, then, this combination that generates the original film's sinister ambience. In other words, the lexical items in table 4 cannot be analysed only

for their separate meanings, but for the cohesive meaningful relations holding among them.

For methodological reasons, the lexical items in Table 4 have been divided into three categories so as to offer a more systematic view of the TT's mitigation of the macabre: the titles, single lexical units and culture specific items. These are discussed separately below.

### The titles

Beginning with the titles, a lexical relation of meronymy, where the part is taken for the whole, can be noticed between them. Jack Skellington, one of the characters, is the focus of TT title, whereas in the ST the event itself is the main theme. In other words, although Jack, the protagonist of the story, is one of those responsible for the nightmare before Christmas, it is the Christmas disaster itself which constitutes the focus of the story and not its agent. In fact, the function of the original title is to delineate the path which the audience must follow in order to become aware of the moral, which could be stated in Corliss's (1993: 79) terms: 'Cultivate your own garden or graveyard. Don't try to be somebody else. Know your place and your strengths, and make the most of them.' Furthermore, the expressive meaning of the ST title has its ominous connotation mitigated in the TT title, that is, what sounded inauspicious in the ST now sounds peculiar and curious: *nightmare* is replaced with *estranho*.

Finally, it is also worth pointing out that in the TT context, Jack is an eponymous<sup>1</sup> character, that is, he is the character whose name forms the title of the rendered film. In the Brazilian Portuguese context, it seems that eponymous characters are a commonplace in the titles of children's movies, as can be seen in titles such as *Aladin*, *O Rei Leão*, *Pocahontas* and *Peter Pan*, just to name a few. Therefore, it would be strange if the TT title were an exception to the rule.

### Single lexical units

It is worthwhile mentioning that, for the purpose of lexical analysis, complex realisations will be treated as single lexical units. Table 4 shows the types of lexical meaning realised differently in the intercultural communication and also the lexical relations between single lexical items in ST and TT.

ST's Single Lexical Unit	Kind of Lexical Relation	TT's Single Lexical Unit
strange	(near) synonym	diferente ❶
in the dead of night	co-hyponymy	na noite escura ❷
surprise	meronymy	atração ❷
deadly nightshade	co-hyponymy	erva daninha ❸
excitement	meronymy	diversão ❷
a frightening and honorable mention	(near) synonym	menção honrosa ❶
skull	meronymy	cabeça ❷
pox	meronymy	pus ❸
ruler	(near) synonym	governador ❶
fearsome	antonymy	medroso ❷
to slay	no relation	passar ❷
snakes	no relation	galho ❷
nasty trap	(near) synonymy	armadilha ❶
rag doll	(near) synonymy	bonequinha de trapo ❶

❶ maintains similar propositional meaning, but different expressive meaning.

❷ changes the propositional meaning, but maintains similar expressive meaning.

❸ changes both propositional and expressive meanings.

Table 5 kinds of lexical relations and types of lexical meaning between ST and TT



According to the description above, five TT utterances that maintained similar propositional meanings, but different expressive meanings had a classification relationship of similarity (*diferente, menção honrosa, governador, armadilha* and *bonequinha de trapo*). On the other hand, eight TT utterances that changed both propositional and expressive meanings had varied types of lexical relations: two classification relationships of co-hyponymy (*na noite escura* and *erva daninha*) and one of antonymy (*medroso*); and three composition relationships of meronymy (*atração, diversão* and *cabeça*). And finally, only one TT lexical item had its propositional meaning changed, but maintained similar expressive meaning, establishing a composition relation of meronymy with its ST's counterpart (*pus*).

The description above demonstrates that the occurrence of similarity relations between ST and TT, which is the expected kind of relation to be held in the translation process, was replaced with other kinds of lexical relations, including antonymy relations.

#### Culture specific items (CSI)

Following Aixelá's (1996:59) classification of CSI, Table 4 presents two categories directly related to the corpus analysed, those of 'loaded proper nouns' and 'common expressions'. By *loaded proper nouns*, Aixelá (ibid.) means "those literary names that are somehow seen as motivated; they range from faintly suggestive to overtly expressive names and nicknames, and include those fictional as well as non-fictional names around which certain historical or cultural associations have accrued in the context of a particular culture". By *common expressions*, he means all expressions that cannot be included in the field of proper names, that is, idioms and fixed expressions restricted to each culture, functioning as a single unit of meaning, which cannot be worked out from its separate meaning.

Examples of loaded proper nouns in Table 4 are *Banshee*, *Mister Unlucky* and *Sandy Claws*. The lexical item *Banshee* (translated

as *alma penada* – BT: *wandering ghost*), is a spirit in Irish Mythology whose cry is believed to announce a death in the house. Obviously, as the word in question is culture bound, the finding of a Brazilian Portuguese equivalent<sup>2</sup> seems rather improbable. Therefore, in order to remedy this cultural constraint, the translator used the strategy of *limited universalisation* (cultural substitution) which involves replacing a CSI or expression with a target-language item that does not have the same propositional meaning, but is likely to have a similar impact on the target audience. However, the translator failed in causing the desired impact due to a collocational restriction problem, or in Eggin's words, an expectancy relation problem between the verb *gritar* and the compound noun *alma penada*. *Almas penadas* in the Brazilian Culture typically do not scream: either they make a strange wailing sound, or produce a clanking sound as they walk.

In the case of *Mr Unlucky*, both propositional and expressive meanings have not been preserved in the TT. *Sr. Infeliz* (Mr Unfortunate), may probably arouse a feeling of pity in the audience, rather than of fear and uneasiness, which is what the ST lexical item attempts to do.

The loaded proper name *Sandy Claws* is realised differently in the TT, both in terms of propositional and expressive meanings. The frightening connotation that the original CSI tries to pass on is partially neglected in the TT, that is, *Papão Comeu* may sound quite frightening to very young Brazilian children, but certainly it does not sound as threatening as the proper name in the ST, since it follows the same morphological structure of another word in Brazilian Portuguese which is used to scare kids when they are wrongdoing: *Bicho Papão* (BT: *Oogie Boogie*). In other words, by borrowing *Papão* and adding the verb to *eat* in the past tense to the proper noun, the translator created a somewhat frightening atmosphere, which is, however, integrated into the younger viewers' repertoire without such an impact as that suggested in the ST.

Another point concerning the same proper noun, which is worth

mentioning, has to do with the fact that *Sandy Claws* is a pun for *Santa Claus*. In the ST the pun is revealed in the scene that Jack finds out that Sandy Claws has hands rather than claws, contrary to what he had expected, as shown below.

ST	TT
Sandy Claws in person. What a pleasure to meet you. Why you have hands? You don't have claws at all!	Papão Comeu. Em pessoa. É um prazer conhecê-lo. Nossa, você tem mãos. Não tem garras.

Table 6: TT non-realisation of pun involving the loaded proper name *Sandie Claws*

Unfortunately, this revelation is completely senseless in the TT, as the pun is dissolved in the subtitling: the ambiguity suggested by the graphological and phonological confrontation between Sandy Claus and Santa Claus is not realised in the TT.

Four of the 'common expressions' presented in Table 4 – *everybody make a scene, come to your senses, you made walls fall (...)* and *walls fall? you made the very mountains crack (...)* – had their propositional and expressive meanings changed during their translation, with the consequence that they ended up maintaining no lexical relation with their Brazilian Portuguese counterparts. In the case of the last two expressions, a humorous tone was favoured instead of sticking to the supreme and vigorous mood of the original expressions.

On the other hand, despite the fact that the renderings of *I'll scare you right out of your pants* and *Jack will beat us black and green*, have not succeeded in preserving the expressive meanings of violence and brutality of the source language, generating instead a parent-child kind of talk. They have, nevertheless, made good at retaining at least the ST expressions of propositional meanings.

## Final Remarks

In answer to Delabastita's (1990: 98-99) claim that much of the research carried out in the field of subtitling has been centred on 'technicalities' and, consequently, little attention has been given to other relevant issues, this paper attempted to offer a new perspective on the analysis of subtitles, by focusing on the generic treatment in film translation.

Within the context of the association of *Systemiotic Approach to Text Analysis* with *Translation Studies* (TS), this study has investigated the following key issue:

- Generic issues in the production of the translated film in the Brazilian context, here included the different treatment given to the (under)realisation of the macabre in the TT.

This paper has illustrated how a multilayered approach to the analysis of source and translated texts can help the translator to understand their social meaning and to assess the texts in relation to the contexts where they are produced. On the plane of genre, it was possible to understand the fuzzy-edged generic boundaries of the ST and the marketing techniques realised in the target context so as to downplay this fuzziness. Consequently, a mitigation of the macabre occurred, favouring an audience of younger viewers (obviously literate).

On the plane of register, a new tenor relationship between the translator of the TT and new audience has diminished the power relation between audience and narrative character, creating a higher affective involvement between them.

Finally, on the plane of language, the mitigation of the macabre has been realised in terms of lexical relations and lexical meanings. The lexical realisations in the TT have shown a tendency to establish meronymy, co-hyponymy and sometimes no lexical rela-

tions at all with the ST, resulting in changes in both propositional and expressive meanings. From the analysis carried out it becomes evident that TT (the subtitling in the Brazilian context) was less effective than ST in the senses demonstrated by the discussions.

### Notes

1. This article is a slightly modified version of Chapter 3 of my MA dissertation with the same title as the article here presented.
2. For the sake of economy, Delabastita uses the term “film translation” encompassing TV programmes as well. We will share the same view in the present study.
3. Classified as suitable for children subject to parental guidance. This classification is probably due to the fact that young children could be quite frightened by the inhabitants of Halloweentown.
4. Composed of speech + image + music & effects (Gottlieb, 1994.: 271)
5. Composed of speech + image + music & effects + writing (Gottlieb, *ibid.*)
6. This work shares Newmark's (1988:146) definition of eponyms as ‘any word that is identical with or derived from a proper name which gives it a related sense’.
7. I use the term equivalence in the light of Baker (1992: 5-6), who adopts the term for the sake of convenience, that is, ‘because most translators are used to it rather than because it has any theoretical status’.

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