Translating *Irmina* (2014), by Barbara Yelin, from German into Spanish

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Abstract

IRMINA, by Barbara Yelin,—a comic about the life of a woman in Nazi times, first in England, then in Germany, and, decades after the Second World War, in Barbados—is a very personal story, but also one deeply ingrained in European History. The translation of this graphic novel travels across space and cultural boundaries—from Germany to Spain—, but also across time, since the story begins in 1933, finishes in 1983, and is translated into Spanish in 2018. This requires not only the translator's historical knowledge, but also a reframing of the story so that the Spanish reader can understand it with as few difficulties as possible. All this has to be done while paying attention to Yelin's drawings, which cannot be easily modified. To further complicate things, the translation is bound by the comic medium's specific constraints: unlike literature, comics do not generally tolerate the use of long paraphrases in the way of explanations. The article will discuss specific problems encountered and solutions found in translating this graphic novel for a Spanish-speaking audience.

BARBARA Yelin's 2014 graphic novel *Irmina* tells the story of a German woman during the Nazi era and her attempt to come to grips with her past five decades later. Inspired by her late grandmother's diaries and letters, the book was written in Yelin's mother tongue, German, and first published in Germany by Reprodukt. Irmina is an ambitious young German who moves to London in the mid-1930s. At a cocktail party, she meets Howard Green, one of the first black students at Oxford, who, like Irmina, is working towards an independent existence. However, their relationship comes to an abrupt end when Irmina, constrained by the political situation in Hitler's Germany, is forced to return home. Irmina moves to Berlin and, as war approaches and her contact with Howard is broken, changes radically. She turns into a person who does not ask questions, who looks the other way—one of the countless passive accomplices of her time, even a supporter of the regime. Many years after the war, she travels to Barbados, where Howard is living now, facing her decisions earlier in life. *Irmina* is a reflection on the dramatic tension between personal integrity and social advancement, on the complicity that results from the choice—conscious or otherwise—to look away.

Immersed in a spiral of disappointment, Irmina's life reflects a whole catalogue of ignominies, which were the shame of German society in the 1930s—xenophobia, racism, hate, repression, humiliation, poverty, and grief—and which made her an uncomplaining part of a society where individualism was punished.

The three stages in the life of Irmina—London, Berlin, Barbados—correspond to three different parts in the graphic novel. Although Yelin's palette is muted and melancholy throughout the book—grey, charcoal, slate blue, and browns predominate—, in each section she chooses one signature colour that adds symbolism. For London it is the bright blue of Irmina's scarf, mirrored in Oxford's sky and river, as well as in the odd street or lady's dress. In Berlin, the red of the Nazi flag crops up in lipstick, dress patterns, flowers, wine, or décor on a background that turns greyer and greyer, until the only red is equated to the spilling of Jewish blood. In a scene where a friend of Irmina's tries to make her hear what she does not want to—that the Jewish are being taken to the East to be killed—, she drops a jar of berry preserve, spattering scarlet everywhere. Finally, to evoke the calm and natural beauty of 1980s Barbados, the chosen hue is hopeful seafoam green. In this sense, by using colours that not only reflect the environment but also the mood—both Irmina's personal one, but also the general mood around her—, the comic signals movement across both space and different moments in time.

In *Irmina*, Barbara Yelin goes beyond narrating Nazism and the difficulties of the time, to deal with the consequences of silence among the generation of Germans who lived under Hitler and through the war: a generation mainly known "for its silence [...] as an active process of suppression, which took hold immediately during the events to be suppressed [and which] led to a speechlessness that could barely be overcome", as historian Alexander Korb points out in his afterword to the book (282). *Irmina* seems to be asking the questions that the children or grandchildren of her generation failed to ask, trying to answer them through the reconstruction from the empty spaces of memory. In this sense, the graphic novel moves across time; the 2019 Spanish translation further adds a spatial dimension to this journey, as it aims to enlighten Spanish-speaking readers about memory processes that are rooted in a geographical, cultural, and linguistic space unfamiliar to them. In this article, I, as the translator of *Irmina* into Spanish, will offer an analytical reflection on my own practice, having a look at the different challenges faced and strategies used in trying to bridge the multi-dimensional gap to enable understanding of a complex historical and personal experience.

Moving across Space

As Federico Zanettin has pointed out, when translating comics, the journey of the text across space, from one country to another, can imply a change of genre, readership, or publication format, which will govern primary translation choices (8); in other words, verbal language may not be the only component of comics which gets translated. However, retouching the pictures, to remove or redraw unwanted elements or to modify the size and shape of speech balloons, is

not generally a feasible option given the high costs involved for publishers. There is further a current tendency among European publishing houses to manipulate and alter comics to be translated as little as possible due to the reading public's increased awareness of the artistic importance of comics and the concept of authorship (Rota 85).

All this means that, even if a more intersemiotic translation might be possible—for example, by choosing a different format—, the translation of *Irmina* into Spanish did not involve any change of format, genre, or intended readership: the German graphic novel was translated into a graphic novel in Spanish, with the same format save the softcover.[1] We are therefore faced with an instance of "translation proper", as first defined by Roman Jakobson (145) in the late 1950s and later elaborated by other theorists, including more recently Zanettin (9–11) (see also Zanettin's contribution to this issue of *New Readings*). With Jakobson, we will understand the translation of *Irmina* as the interpretation of verbal signs (i.e., a natural language) into other verbal signs (i.e., another natural language), as might happen with a work of literature, with a layer of difficulty added by the images in the form of "constrained translation", as we will see later.

Even if in "translating" the format we opt for a foreignizing strategy (Rota 84), we must not forget that, allowing for certain exceptions, most comics are predominantly visual texts which may (or may not) include a verbal component. Moreover, words in comics not only have a purely linguistic meaning, but they are also "treated 'graphically' and in the service of the story, function as an extension of the imagery" (Eisner 10). Therefore, when translating comics, we are dealing with a multimodal medium (as defined by Borodo 25), in which the written text has to be translated in association with another semiotic mode (in this case, image), complicating the translator's task and constraining it.

Roberto Mayoral defines *constrained translation* ("traducción subordinada") as one in which the text is only one of the components of the message or as a translation in which the text is only a previous state of a speech to be said aloud (1). In fact, comics are a mix of these two situations, since their written messages are, as we have already seen, very much intertwined with graphics; but most of them are conceived as dialogues in which it is possible to visually represent the non-verbal components of interaction (body language, facial expressions, use of space, etc.), giving them a quality more akin to drama (where the embodiment of the actors adds modes to their communication) than to novels (based solely on words). We will speak of this as *constructed orality* ("oralidad ficcional") (Brumme), that is, oral manifestations that are written with linguistic resources deemed typically oral—repetition, hesitation, reformulation, the use of vocatives, interjections, onomatopoeia, ideophones, and so on—to evoke the authenticity and natural feel of spoken language (Rodríguez Abella 6).

In comic translation, we have, then, a communication system which combines visual narration and dialogue in constructed orality, which will be received simul-

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[1] *Irmina* was first published in Germany as hardcover and only made available there as a softcover edition a few months after publication of the Spanish version.

taneously through the same sensory channel.[2] This circumstance makes them inseparably connected and entails two constraints.

According to Carmen Valero Garcés (77), a translated text should aim to maintain content synchrony with the other message components, which can limit the possibilities for cultural adaptation. An example of this would be Irmina saying "For me, every day is stew day" (143) (fig. 1)[3] as a reaction to a propaganda poster in which the German population is invited to eat *Eintopf* [stew] every Sunday and donate the saved food to the poor; since the poster shows the stew, it is not possible to culturally adapt the dish in the dialogue.

Fig. 1. *Eintopf* poster and corresponding dialogue in the German (left) and English (right) versions of *Irmina* (Yelin 143).

As we can see in this panel, the translation is constrained by the interplay of visual and verbal signs. The second constraint is linked to the space in balloons, which limits or entirely prevents explanations or periphrase. Comic images constrain the translator's activity not only because of their interaction with the written text message, but also because of the visual limitations to the physical space available for the written word.

> El texto [. . .] tiene la limitación física de los bocadillos, que nos delimitan la extensión de nuestra traducción [. . .]. De esta manera, podemos vernos obligados tanto a acortar nuestra traducción para que quepa en el bocadillo que le corresponde, como a alargarla porque no podemos dejar vacío el bocadillo en cuestión, aunque a veces el propio espacio en blanco del bocadillo puede ser tan importante para la comunicación como el propio texto.

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[2] I do not include captions in the written text here considered, since for Irmina they are a purely deictic tool, not a narrative voice, and therefore, not subjected to multimodality.

[3] I quote here from the English translation to make understanding easier. The page numbers in the German, English, and Spanish versions coincide, since neither translation involves a change of format.

[The text has the physical constraint of the speech balloons, which limit the length of our translation. In this manner, we may be forced to shorten our translation so that it fits, or to lengthen it because we cannot leave the bubble concerned empty; although sometimes the blank space in the balloon can be as important for the communication as the text itself.] (Villena Álvarez 510; my translation)

As André Höchemer reminds us, this constraint would not be so difficult to navigate if texts did not vary so much in length when translated. In the case of translating from German into Spanish, my experience is that we are lucky to have shorter words in Spanish to make up for the fact that Romance languages tend to use more words than Germanic ones (*The Economist*).

Apart from the text in balloons and captions, we also have to take into account the text that appears in the images themselves, that is, text that is drawn as an integral part of the image and not separated from it by any means. We are talking here of onomatopoeic words, signs, or any other inscriptions meaningful to the story, such as tattoos, book titles, or textual elements not written but drawn. As their length is adapted to the image of which they are part, this kind of text does not allow for much flexibility in translation, even where it needs to be translated to facilitate understanding of the storyline. A striking example of this in *Irmina* is the radio broadcast of Hitler's 1 September 1939 Reichstag speech. Here the text is not contained within a speech balloon but presented as a whirled drawing mixing onomatopoeias and words emerging from the radio (see fig. 2).

Fig. 2. Radio broadcast as an example of text in image with no delimitation (Yelin 197).

But that is not the only problem of this kind of text. What happens in a book like *Irmina* where text is not only drawn into the images due to Barbara Yelin's particular graphic style, but where this kind of text is part of the social context of the character, providing relevant background information? For example, as the protagonist moves between different locations, signs are in English when in London and Barbados, but in German in Germany. The decision to translate such inscriptions or leave them untouched could lead to different understandings of the content.

As we can see from the preceding observations, comic translation is a question of space. In summary, the space-related difficulties in *Irmina* that I will try to illustrate and offer solutions for are: (1) lack of space in balloons, (2) text in the images themselves when it can be translated, (3) text in the images which has a bearing on the message but is not translated because this would require redrawing.

Moving across Time

Oₙₑ of the main issues in *Irmina* is how the protagonist becomes one of those Germans that, not being Nazis in the beginning, turn a blind eye to the regime and even end up supporting it. In this respect, the comic gives a series of temporal references, unavoidable in Irmina's evolution. The use of propaganda in the Third Reich to create a *Volksgemeinschaft* [people's community] has been widely studied. As Heidi J. S. Tworek argues in her book on the German information warfare during the first half of the twentieth century, for chief Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels, "Propaganda had a dual task of changing and maintaining a Nazi mood and attitude. [. . .] For Goebbels, propaganda created political values to support the Nazi state. During World War II, Goebbels suggested that propaganda to support military interests provided the fastest road to victory" (40).

Although it has been debated to what extent Nazi propaganda did effectively create a *Volksgemeinschaft* as a social reality, beyond presenting the image of a society that had transcended social and class divisiveness (see, among others, Welch; Korb), it cannot be argued that state propaganda and its machinery to control mass media and violently persecute opponents of the Nazi regime played an important role in mobilizing support for the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) and maintaining the party in power.

Propaganda had the task of re-educating the population for a new society based on National Socialist values, which drew mainly from the Romantic *völkisch* [national] doctrine, whose major themes were: 1) appeal to national unity based upon the principle: "The community before the individual" (*Volksgemeinschaft*); 2) the perceived need for racial purity; 3) a hatred of enemies, which increasingly focused on Jews and Bolsheviks, and 4) charismatic leadership (*Führerprinzip*) (Welch 217).

According to these themes, propaganda would focus on the "Deification of Hitler" by portraying him "as a messianic figure to be followed", "Defining the

enemy and justifying their treatment", and "Rallying the masses" (Narayanaswami [2]). To achieve this, propaganda would make use of slogans (e.g., "Die Juden sind unser Unglück" [The Jews are our misfortune]), posters, films, books—art in general—, and the repetition of messages through the mass media.

In this context, the concept of inclusion as a comrade of the community was essential to the pseudo-religious vision of a "national awakening". In the years leading up to the Second World War, propaganda continuously praised the achievements of the regime. The press, radio, newsreels, and film documentaries concentrated on the impact of Nazi welfare services, such as Strength through Joy (a state-run leisure and tourism organization for workers) and Winter Relief. Posters reinforced in-group bias—"the tendency for people to give preferential treatment to other people that they perceive as being members of their own group" (Narayanaswami [6])—, the radio bombarded the public's social conscience with charitable appeals, and the press stressed the value of belonging to a *Volksgemeinschaft* and the need for self-sacrifice in the interests of the state. Throughout the war, even as the military defeat began to loom on the horizon, the Nazi propaganda machine continued its efforts to convince the German public of the nation's glorious destiny.

Closely linked to the idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft* was the regime's desire to maintain social conformity and the already mentioned in-group bias. To this end the regime created a series of public rituals celebrating important days in the Nazi calendar, but also some smaller rituals connected with the social relief program (Winter Relief), such as the *Eintopf* meal (literally, "one pot"; translated as "stew" in the English version of *Irmina*), which encouraged families once a month during the winter to have only one dish for their Sunday lunch and donate what they had saved to collectors who came to the door (Korb). There are instances of all of these aspects in the written text of *Irmina*, but most substantially in its visuals— that is, in balloons and in the images themselves. Some of these references are translatable (balloons), some are part of the characters' background (images).

All these elements of Nazi propaganda were embedded in what Victor Klemperer called *Lingua Tertii Imperii* (The Language of the Third Reich)—a language which helped the regime to create its culture: the language of Nazism. Since we are dealing here with the translation of language, it is impossible to avoid this aspect, which can be observed even in small details like the way people salute each other or the use of the military expression *Jawohl* [yes, sir] in normal speech.

We can see that the original text moves across time not only because it follows Irmina through different stages of her life, but also because there is a cultural change between the three historical stages of the comic. German society and its language changes from the London stage to the Berlin one, and once again when the story moves to Barbados; the end of the graphic novel returns to Germany. The use of German in the Nazi period will be discussed when talking about the translation challenges. Bringing *Irmina* to Spain therefore means crossing not only cultural and linguistic boundaries, but also different historical contexts.

Translation Strategies

B<small>EFORE</small> looking at specific challenges in my translation, I would like to quickly review the possible strategies for overcoming, on the one hand, problems of lack of space and, on the other hand, cultural differences.

Strategies to Overcome Problems Related to Lack of Space

As discussed earlier, when translating comics we are limited by the physical space available for the written word. Since the original work is created in a certain language, the translator is constrained by the original text distribution; the text cannot take up more space than that provided by the author. For aesthetic reasons and out of respect for the author, changing the font size is not an option. Furthermore, we need to allow for the possibility that the choice of font could itself be conveying a message: capital letters read as cries, smaller fonts as whispers, trembling letters as a sign of fear, etc. (Eisner 10–12). So, to address the problem of insufficient physical space we have to look for linguistic solutions.

In the occasional case in which the translation is shorter than the original, the easiest solution is to use a paraphrase in the form of an explanation, or add a redundancy, which is one of the peculiarities of oral language, which in the case of fictional dialogue we have earlier referred to as *constructed orality*. More commonly, however, we will need to shorten the text in translation. Here, conversely, we can either erase redundancies or—following the suggestions by Daniel Castillo Cañellas (17) and drawing on my own working experience—resort to any of the following strategies:

1. use reformulations, choosing systematically the shorter expression in the target language;

2. leave out repeated letters or punctuation marks: for example, translate "Waaah!!!" as "Buaa!";

3. write numbers as numerals: for example, translate "She's nineteen" as "Tiene 19 años" (instead of "Tiene diecinueve años");

4. use deictics: for example, translate "The woman in a red dress is my mother" as "Esa del vestido rojo es mi madre" [The one in the red dress is my mother] (instead of "La mujer que lleva el vestido rojo es mi madre"). Here, any redundancy between text and image can further assist in reducing the linguistic material; or

5. redistribute the text in the bubbles: that is, when a sentence is divided between two subsequent bubbles, we can move part of the text in the first bubble to the second, or vice versa, depending on which of the two can be shortened more easily.

Strategies to Overcome Problems Related to Cultural Transfer

The translator is usually a compromise-seeking agent between two languages and two cultures, trying to remain invisible in the process. Even if it is generally easy to find equivalents in the target language for universal words, the same is not true for culture-specific items, which Lionginas Pažūsis considers to be part of "the group of non-equivalent lexis" (qtd. in Horbacauskiene et al. 112). In this case, the translator will have to choose from a variety of translation strategies, always under the pressure to enhance cross-cultural communication.

The translator's role as cultural mediator means that he or she "has to be well-acquainted with the source and target cultures and know both similarities and differences between the languages and cultures" (Horbacauskiene et al. 114). According to Forogh Karimipur Davaninezhad, it is good practice for translators to "know the purpose of the communication" (qtd. in Horbacauskiene et al. 114); they further need to "evaluate the importance of cultural aspects" (Horbacauskiene et al. 114) and make a decision on how essential it is to translate these, "provid[ing] required presuppositions" (114) to the target readers so that they can understand the message. Jolita Horbacauskiene et al. further point out that "the term, definition and classification of realia have not been determined so far" and that there is no "consensus on the list of strategies that could be universally applied for translati[ng]" this non-equivalent lexis (112). To be able to comment on my examples in *Irmina*, I will turn to the classification of realia according to Ana Fernández Guerra and to the strategies defined by Eirlys E. Davies.

Fernández Guerra classifies non-equivalent lexis or realia into four types: "Geographic and ethnographic terms" (4); "Words or expressions referring to folklore, traditions and mythology" (4); "Names of everyday objects, actions and events (such as food and drinks, clothes, housing, tools, public transport, dances and games, units of measurement, money, etc.)" (4); "Social and historical terms denoting territorial administrative units or divisions; departments, professions, titles, ranks, greetings and treatments; institutions, patriotic and religious organisations; etc." (4). This classification suits the problems encountered in *Irmina*.

Although in this context translators often aspire to achieve *dynamic equivalence*, as defined by Eugene A. Nida (159), our commitment is more to *fidelity to the author*, as discussed and defined by Érico Gonçalves de Assis. This means that our aim is to find a way for the readers in the target language to experience reading as readers might have in the source text language (Assis 8). Taking into account that there are a number of translation strategies to satisfy this commitment, I will turn to the classification proposed by Davies as my framework. Davies distinguishes the following seven translation strategies:

1. Preservation: the translator simply transfers the foreign word to the target text, either in form or in meaning (72–73).

2. Addition: the term is explicated in the way of an explanation, either in the main text or outside its formal borders (77–78). Peter Newmark calls this strategy "notes, additions, glosses" (91–92), which could be more explicative.

3. Omission (79): the explanatory insertion makes the original item redundant, which can therefore be omitted.

4. Globalization: "the process of replacing culture-specific references with ones which are more neutral or general, in the senses that they are accessible to audiences from a wider range of cultural backgrounds" (83). Newmark refers to this as "functional equivalent" (91–92).

5. Localization (83): replacing realia with an approximate equivalent existing in the target language. In Newmark's terminology, this is called "cultural equivalent" (91–92).

6. Transformations: a distortion of the original; that is, the translation does not use exactly the same realia. Davies herself admits that it is not easy to determine clear differences among these last three categories (86).

7. Creation (88): the production of realia which are not present in the source text.

Having established the difficulties and the strategies that can help the translator to overcome them, we will now have a look at specific examples from Barbara Yelin's graphic novel.

Irmina: Specific Translation Difficulties and their Resolution

Iₙ the remaining pages of this article, I will carry out a micro-discursive comparative analysis of my translation of *Irmina*, following the three stages in Irmina's life outlined above. Some of the examples discussed may be rather straightforward and self-explanatory, but it seems to me that they provide relevant context to my way of translating and illustrate the decisions I have taken.

London

Irmina starts her journey on a boat to London. When she is on deck discovering the white cliffs of Dover through her binoculars, we find the first instance of an out-of-date German term that a crew member uses to refer to her, "Backfisch" (fig. 3). In this example, the solution is quite simple since the balloon has enough room to accommodate a term that is equivalent to the original one without exceeding the space available. The term in question here is a universal word, which refers to a female teenager. Since its only difficulty is the out-of-date flavour, I looked for a term that could be used to name a young girl in the 1930s in Spain and arrived at *pimpollo* as a dynamic equivalent.

During this stage of Irmina's life (England), we find quite a lot of place-specific realia in the form of titles, greetings and treatments. Yelin chooses to almost consistently use the English titles (Miss, Mrs, Madam…) when her characters address
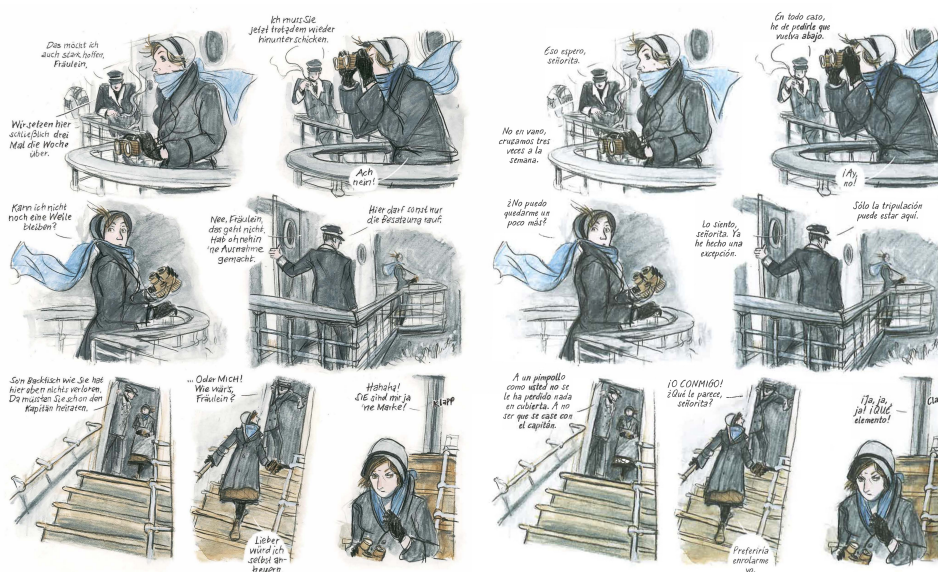
Fig. 3. German (left) and Spanish (right) versions of Irmina's exchange with a crew member: "Backfisch" translated as "pimpollo" (Yelin 8, panel 5).

each other. Since this is one of the tools to give depth and dimension to the setting of the action, I opted here for a preservation strategy, simply transferring the widely known foreign terms into the target text. The strategy of preservation has also been used with certain English words sprinkled into the German dialogue to different effects. For example, in the German text "apple pie" is given as British realia and subsequently universalized with the German word "Apfelkuchen" with reference to the same cake—here, I preserved "apple pie" and translated "Apfelkuchen" as "pastel de manzana"; the paper boy's call of "Evening paper!" to advertise the news remains unchanged; and the deliberate misspelling of "Gerrrmans" is also preserved, to the effect of having a Briton rolling the *r* in imitation of Germans speaking English.

Throughout Irmina's stay in England, we find another kind of realia which seems problematic from the point of view of translation. Yelin decides to use the English names of significant sightseeing highlights in London and Oxford (Westminster Abbey, Carfax Tower, Bridge of Sighs, Hertford College, Radcliffe Camera. . .). This could be seen as a tool to give body to the background. However, we must not forget that German texts (e.g., travel guides) generally preserve the original English names of places. This is not the same in Spanish, where we use functional equivalents for some of them and preservation of names for some others. Since in this chapter Yelin herself uses the German names of geographic terms, such as "Themse" [Thames] or "Karibik" [Caribbean], I decided to take this as a cue for using the more natural strategies in Spanish and therefore translated, for example, "Westminster Abbey" as "abadía de Westminster" or "Bridge of Sighs"

as "puente de los Suspiros", but preserved, for example, "Hyde Park", following the usual strategies for travel guides. This is intended for the Spanish readers to be able to follow Irmina's journey in a guidebook, in the same way a German reader would be able to.

I have already referred to the signs and other inscriptions meaningful to the story that are drawn into the comic panels. In the case of London, the signs in shopfronts, newspapers, and pamphlets are all in English. The letters Irmina writes or receives, on the contrary, are written in German, which is logical, of course. The background is drawn from reality and given verisimilitude. In this sense, London would not have visible signs in German, and Irmina would communicate in German with her family and friends in Germany. Following this pattern, in the Spanish version of the comic, the English text is preserved in English and the passages in German are translated. In the case of newspapers, for example, Yelin herself uses the speech balloons to explain in German what her characters are reading, so that the translation into Spanish will have the same role for Spanish readers.

Onomatopoeia will be dealt with here, although it occurs in all three stages in the comic. Many onomatopoeic words used in Spanish have been inherited from the English-speaking comic world but are now considered part of Spanish culture. Although I provided the publisher with Spanish translations for all instances of onomatopoeia in the comic—many were translated according to my general background knowledge as a comic reader, some were ad hoc creations aimed at imitating the natural sound[4]—, not all of them made it into the published Spanish version. The reason was presumably that the technical difficulties and the additional costs of changing the images to substitute onomatopoeic words were perceived to outweigh the benefits—especially in light of the fact that most of them can be understood even where the spelling or sound do not mirror those commonly used in Spanish.[5] For example, the sound of a typewriter in German (which is ubiquitous in Irmina's story) is captured as "Klack, Klack, Klack", drawn in different sizes and fonts throughout the book; in Spanish, the usual translation would be "tiqui tiqui tic" (Riera-Eures and Sanjaume 159), which would require the redrawing of a large number of pages. However, Spanish readers pronounce the onomatopoeic "Klack" identically to their German counterparts, making the sound immediately recognizable in the company of a typewriter. This can be understood as a foreignizing element, since it draws attention to a cultural difference in the text, even if it is as slight as the sound of a machine.

Another example of onomatopoeia is "Platsch", the sound of someone falling into the water, which in Spanish would typically be renderd as "chof" (Riera-Eures and Sanjaume 189). The proximity of the German onomatopoeic word to the very

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[4] María Ángeles Martín R-Ovelleiro translated childish words in Rachel Carson's *El sentido del asombro* much in the same experimental way.

[5] I was never really offered an explanation of the reasoning behind the publisher's decision. This could be read as a sign of the obscurity that sometimes exists between different agents in the publishing process.

recognizable and widely known English "splash", in addition to the fact that we can see Irmina disappearing into the water, make modifying the drawing unnecessary, saving costs along the way. This principle applies all throughout the graphic novel.

A final example of realia translation for the London stage of Irmina's life is specific to the Nazi era, paving the way to the most difficult part set in Berlin. The English term "Blackshirts" (75) is used as an instance of British realia, pointing towards the supporters of the British fascist political party. The problem is that, while the existence of the British organization may be known to many Germans, the same cannot be said of the Spanish readers. On the other hand, the fact that at the time members of the Falangist paramilitary militia in Spain were referred to as "Camisas Azules" (Blueshirts)—parallel to the German "Braunhemden" (Brownshirts) and the Italian "Camicie Nere" (Blackshirts)—, makes it likely that the Spanish readers will recognize the link with the fascist movement if "Blackshirts" is translated as "Camisas Negras", using a transformation strategy instead of keeping the English term.

Berlin

This is the stage in which more difficulties were found in the translation of realia. At this point of her life, Irmina is in her home country, where German is the language not only of dialogues but also of the background, and this background offers significant insights into the process of her turning into what Germans call a *Mitläuferin* [(female) fellow traveller]. It therefore seems particularly important that the reader can fully understand what is happening both in the speech balloons and in the images.

First, I will focus on the information in the background, what Nadine Celotti calls "linguistic paratext" (33): signs on shopfronts or means of transport, newspapers, propaganda posters, official documents, book titles, leaflets, and, in one case, a radio message (Yelin 197, see fig. 2). In all these instances, I provided the publisher with a translation, following which we had a discussion about what might be the best solution for the Spanish readership.[6] The following strategies were offered: (1) to translate the text in the images themselves, (2) to translate the text on a template of the page, (3) to explain the text outside its formal borders, that is, as footnotes at the bottom either of the panel or of the page, or (4) not to translate at all. I will now review the pros and cons of each of these strategies.

Translating the text in the images typically poses two major problems already mentioned above: the cost of changing the images, and the perceived disrespect towards the artistic integrity of the original drawing; as Assis argues, comic readers often understand pictures as directly linked to the author's intentions, and

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[6] To call this process a discussion might seem farfetched, since only a couple of e-mails were exchanged. First, I explained the translation strategies set out in this paragraph, highlighting their pros and cons. Then, I was asked to clarify in each case how necessary I considered the translation to be. Finally, the publisher agreed to provide translations, although I had no say in the final choice. These limits to the translator's agency are characteristic of the current publishing business.

changing them can appear an act of disrespect. But in the case of *Irmina*, there is an additional issue. As we have already seen for London, inscriptions in the background add authenticity to the story. Even if readers accept a translation's implicit appeal to suspend disbelief, would it not be exceedingly strange to have Irmina live in a country where Nazis write their signs and propaganda in Spanish? And then, would it be plausible to have realia copied from historical sources to be modified to look Spanish? These considerations made me dismiss the option of translating the text in the images.

What about not translating it? This strategy was adopted wherever the text did not seem relevant for the story or could be easily understood without a translation. An example of non-relevant text are the signs on shopfronts on a double-page spread showing a Nazi parade in the middle of Berlin (fig. 4); these signs are clearly irrelevant to what Yelin wants to show us.
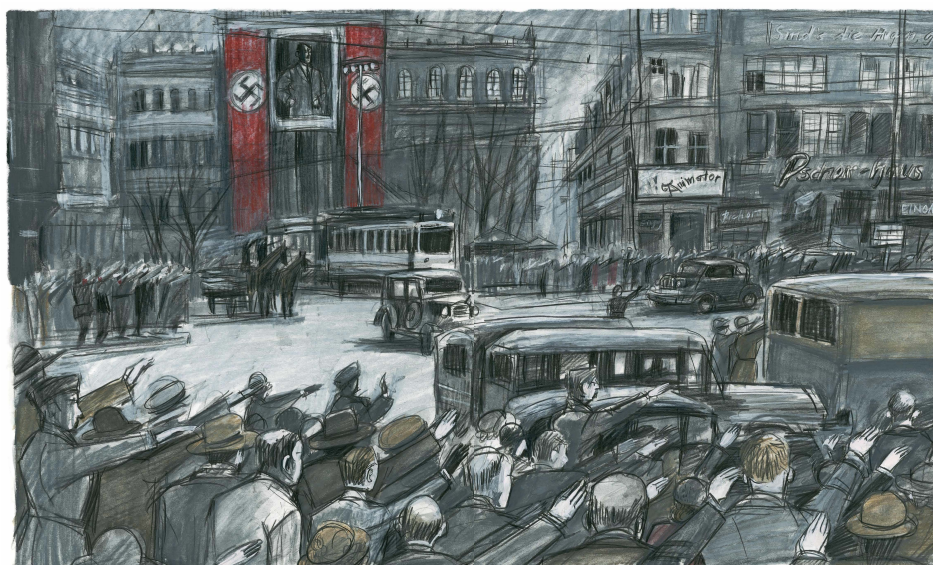

Fig. 4. Double-page spread showing Nazi parade in Berlin (Yelin 158–59).

An example of background text that can be understood without a translation is the scene where Irmina is preparing coffee, only to discover that she has run out of milk (fig. 5). Both containers have legends in German, but "Caffee" is perfectly recognizable for a Spanish reader (who would say "café"); "Milch", on the other hand, cannot be anything other than milk, since it is added to coffee and served from a milk can. In these cases, I thought that any translation would be more detrimental than beneficial and decided to use a preservation strategy.

As I have suggested earlier, the linguistic paratext plays an important role in making the reader understand the changes in Irmina's attitude throughout her years in Berlin. These texts play such an explicit part in the comic's diegesis that, in some cases, not translating them would render the story incomprehensible. A clear example of this is the antisemitic Nazi propaganda (fig. 6).

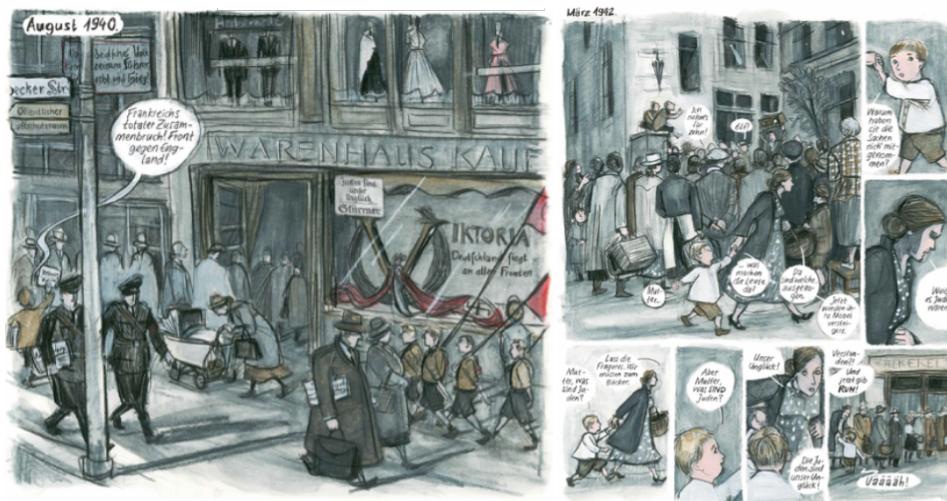Fig. 5. Original German tier showing Irmina preparing coffee (Yelin 183).

Fig. 6. Left: antisemitic Nazi propaganda ("Die Juden sind unser Unglück" [The Jews are our misfortune]; Yelin 199). Right: conversation between mother and son in German version of *Irmina* (Yelin 203).

Irmina is walking across the city with her son in tow, when they see some people auctioning Jewish belongings because their owners have fled or been arrested. The boy asks his mother twice what Jews are, to which, after some hesitation, she finally replies: "The Jews are our misfortune!" (Yelin 203). This slogan has appeared before on a shopfront, as a headline taken from *Der Stürmer* (Yelin 199), and is reinforced by all the negative messages about Jews in other shopfronts (Yelin 126, et passim). Only readers able to understand those inscriptions can grasp that Irmina is merely repeating what she has read and heard a million times. This is, in fact, one of the ways in which Nazi propaganda persuaded Germans to identify with the *Volksgemeinschaft*.

In light of the pressing need to translate these realia without altering the images, I considered translating the text on a template of the panel that would function as a kind of endnote (fig. 7): a template showing only the silhouette of the panel drawing with no details is reproduced at the end of the book, with Spanish translations in place of the original German text.

Fig. 7. Left: panel from German version of *Irmina* (Yelin 143). Right: corresponding template with Spanish translation of realia.

Although this strategy has the undoubted advantage of being unobtrusive, its huge drawback is that the readers will not have the information unless they decide to jump ahead to the final pages; and the act of doing this is more disruptive than reading a note on the same page.

The solution to this dilemma was never really in my hands, since this kind of editorial decision is usually in the hands of the publisher, who thus imposes an additional constraint on the translator. In my case, the publisher opted for footnotes. To make them less obtrusive—avoiding costly changes to the pages— and more aesthetic, the decision was to place the notes in the footer of the page rather than in the gutter below the respective panels (see fig. 8). This option has the advantage of making space restrictions irrelevant, thereby facilitating realia translation.

With regard to the realia present in the dialogues, I encountered some of the problems already discussed at the London stage of Irmina's life, arriving at the same type of solutions. In Berlin titles are, of course, in German and have been translated into Spanish accordingly. Certain greetings and military ranks that are distinctive of the Nazi era, however, are problematic. For example, there is no straightforward way of translating the emblematic greeting "Heil Hitler" (122, et passim), which has therefore been preserved in German. Ranks such as "Gruppenführer" (162) or "Oberscharführer" (161), on the other hand, could certainly be translated—mostly through addition or localization. However, in Spain it is common in historical essays to keep the German terminology as an indication of their use only under the Nazi regime, and so they have also been preserved.

Another interjection that merits a comment is the dialectal "Servus" (116) uttered by Irmina to greet one of her housemates in a boarding house. Although a

Fig. 8. Example of footnotes in the Spanish edition (Yelin 206).

common greeting in Austria and Bavaria, the regional flavour is quite difficult to translate into Spanish. To make the greeting sound slightly strange to the reader I decided to translate it as "Salve", which is really a poetic kind of greeting borrowed directly from Latin. I chose not to use a preservation strategy because "Servus" in Spanish could be misunderstood as a first name. The publisher agreed on the use of something a bit different to translate what, in the context of the graphic novel, is a common greeting.

In a later panel on the same page, a radio transmission of a speech by Goebbels starts with the interjection "Jawohl". This word is, in fact, an affirmative response to an order given. During the highly militarized Nazi era, however, this tended to be of common use beyond the military, which is one reason why some people link it directly to the Third Reich German language. It would have been an acceptable translation to simply write "Sí" (yes); but since the interjection "Jawohl" is widely associated with figures like Hitler or Goebbels and, more generally, with German soldiers—probably because films dubbed into Spanish tend to preserve the German word in the Spanish dialogue, which has led to a degree of familiarity that allows the Spanish readership to understand it in context—, I decided to preserve the German word.

During the Berlin stage of the graphic novel, Nazi institutions and expressions linked to the regime and the war era include "Frauenschaft" [National Socialist Women's League] (144, et passim), "Kraft durch Freude" (commonly reduced to "KdF") [Strength through Joy] (167), "Winterhilfswerk" [Winter Relief] (143, et passim), "Blockwart" [Block Warden] (208), "Die Reihen fest geschlossen" [The ranks tightly closed] (162), and the metaphorical use of "Christbäume" [Christmas Trees] (208) to refer to the marker flares dropped by the Allies before their bombing runs. I opted to complement the translation of "Frauenschaft" and "KdF" with a gloss in a note in the footer of the respective pages, as explained above (see fig. 8), since the balloons did not allow for enough space to include the gloss there. In the case of the lyrics "Die Reihen fest geschlossen", in the German edition the bubble includes an explanation: "Bei uns hält man zusammen" [We help our own]. It was fortunate that the literal translation of the sentence into Spanish means exactly that, so I used the space gained to gloss that the line is part of the NSDAP anthem and worked during the Nazi era almost as national anthem (Geisler 71). The same strategy was used for the translation of "Christbäume", but omitting a repetition in the preceding speech bubble to free up space for a comparison of the trees with the Spanish word for flares (*bengalas*) (fig. 9). This was necessary to maintain the double meaning of the reference to the Christmas tree, which motivates another verbal exchange on the same page:

> German text:
> (*Blockwart*): Los, los! Beeilung! / Die Christbäume schweben schon wieder!
> (*Boy to mother*): Mutter, können wir auch'n Christbaum haben?
>
> Spanish translation:
> ¡Rápido! Las bengalas… / …ya caen como árboles de Navidad.
> Madre, ¿podemos tener también un árbol?
>
> English translation of Spanish version:
> Quick! The flares… / …are already falling like Christmas trees.
> Mother, can we also have a tree? (Yelin 208)

With regard to the terms "Winterhilfswerk" and "Blockwart", I decided to follow a localization strategy, since these two institutions were in fact copied by the Spanish fascist regime and given official names in our language. So, even if they were not exactly the same, the Spanish equivalents of these institutions would help the readers to understand what they were in Germany. In a translation intended for a comparative study or an academic edition, it would arguably be preferable to make consistent use of a single strategy. But when translating for a commercial publishing house, as was the case for my translation, decisions are often arrived at more intuitively, on a case-by-case basis, prioritizing the target audience's perceived needs.

Although the concept of constructed orality cannot be covered in full in the limited space available here, I want to point out two important aspects. The first

Fig. 9. Page with dialogue playing on the double meaning of "Christbaum" (Yelin 208). Left: German edition. Right: corresponding page in Spanish.

one is the dated language the characters use, not only with regard to Nazi terms. The story is set in the late 1930s and '40s, and the characters speak accordingly. The aim of my translation was to make the Spanish sound equally dated as the German. One easy place to achieve this is with interjections, which I copied from Spanish comics of the 1950s (e.g., "cáspita", "colosal"). While these expressions may sound comical to present day readers, they are immediately recognizable as belonging to the first decades of the fascist regime in Spain.

Another aspect of constructed reality worth a brief comment is accents and dialects, which are always complicated in translation. In *Irmina* both Berliner and Bavarian dialects are briefly present. Since there are not equivalents for them in Spanish, the decision here was to use a transformation strategy, changing the focus from the characters' geographical origin to their social status—as shopkeepers and blue-collar workers in Berlin, and as peasants in Bavaria. That is, instead of dialects the Spanish translation uses sociolects to lend a degree of authenticity to the characters' dialogue.

Barbados

The situation during the third and final stage of Irmina's life is very similar to that in London. English signs, titles, and background inscriptions were therefore treated in the same way. The main difference in this part of the graphic novel lies in the constructed orality, which uses far more recent language and has been translated accordingly. I will briefly comment on two examples. The first one is the steward's message on the aeroplane (234), which had to be localized rather than translated.

The message given in German is, in fact, the one a traveller would presumably hear on a plane arriving from Germany to Barbados, but does not correspond to what a Spanish steward would say in Spanish. To avoid an unnecessary awkwardness for the Spanish readership, I copied the corresponding Spanish announcement. The second example has to do with the fact that Irmina's maiden name is "von Behdinger", which arouses her neighbour's interest (230). This is because *von* in German surnames is usually a nobiliary particle. In Spain, the same preposition is used to indicate a noble patrilineality, making the surname a compound one, which is in fact the way we designate this kind of surname (*apellido compuesto*). Since using the German *von* would not make sense to a Spanish reader, in this case I decided to localize and translate:

> German text:
> (*Neighbour*): Du warsch eine VON?
>
> Spanish translation:
> ¿De apellido compuesto? (Yelin 230)

In fact, "apellido compuesto" is not only the functional equivalent to the German nobiliary particle, but also the exact description of what a surname constructed with a preposition as *von* is, so that the localization does not create any confusion about the character's origin.

Conclusion

As I suggested at the beginning of this article, the Spanish translation of *Irmina* concludes the protagonist's journey: having been to London, Berlin, and Barbados in the course of several decades, now she has to be understood in Spain and in a completely different time, where the readers are unlikely to have much knowledge of life in Nazi times. And yet, Irmina's personal story is deeply ingrained in European history and might help to put up for discussion the question of what happened to women who, after experiencing a high degree of independence during the Weimar Republic, turned into *Mitläuferinnen* under the Nazi regime. These issues that arise from Irmina's life story are the reason why it seems so important that all the related historical information, both in the speech balloons and in the linguistic paratext included in the images, gets through to the Spanish reader.

The translator is faced with the often difficult task of choosing from the range of strategies set out in this paper in light of the translation's overall aim—that is, to ensure that the graphic novel's German origin remains visible in the Spanish version. Having chosen fidelity to the author (as outlined by Assis) as the translation's overarching aim, the loci of translation are translated or not, according to their function. That is, in London and Barbados, English messages in the paratext are left in English. When a translation is necessary for comprehension purposes, as is the case for the Berlin stage, the translator encountered a new constraint, this time imposed by the publisher. The tension between the translator's perceived

need to translate certain elements, on one hand, and the economic pressure not to do so, on the other, was eased by adding footnotes at the bottom of the pages. Despite these compromises, as the translator of *Irmina* I believe that this strategy is overall coherent, allowing for the story to flow naturally.

The translation of *Irmina* describes a journey through space as well as time. Originally published in 2014, the story spans fifty years, from the 1930s to the 1980s. As we have seen, the different time periods of the storyline have informed the author's choice of language both in the paratext, which draws on historical sources, and in the constructed orality, which deliberately uses dated language of the period concerned. Transposing this carefully crafted text for a contemporary Spanish readership has been challenging and stimulating. I can only hope that the result shows a fair amount of coherence while reflecting my respect for the original and an adequate understanding of, and empathy for, the reader.

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