“You better werk.” Camp representations of RuPaul’s Drag Race in Spanish subtitles

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Condagulations, fierce, realness, werk or «Shante, you stay» are only some of the expressions from the contestants’ lexicon of RuPaul’s Drag Race (RPDR), a popular reality television show that started airing in 2009 in the USA. Through an academic lens, the study of this type of expression was anecdotally called “lavender linguistics,” during the first explorations of the sexual minorities’ ways of talking. Since then and till now, concepts related to gender, sexuality, and the works of representation have influenced both linguistics and Translation Studies, which in turn has led to critical perspectives on translation, identity transfer, acculturation and, of course, the way language works.

This paper begins by briefly referring to drag queens living in Lima, Peru, and how they have changed the way they talk to each other and about themselves. As will be argued, a cultural product such as RPDR and the necessary interlingual subtitling into Spanish –commercial or fan-made– have been influencing their linguistic engagement. Further on, the concepts of camp and camp talk will be presented as they were first introduced to Translation Studies with the work of Keith Harvey during the late 1990’s. Camp representations will be then analyzed in commercial and fan-made subtitles to reveal the semiotic and pragmatic constraints resulting from cultural-specific gay identities. From this first approach, new inquiries on audiovisual translations in general and identity acculturation in particular will be proposed.

Iván Villanueva Jordán has done research on the manipulation of children’s literature and queer theory. He obtained his Master’s degree in Cultural Studies at the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru by defending an ethnographic thesis on transgender and drag queen identities in Lima. He works as a full-time lecturer and as the Translation Studies coordinator at Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicadas (Lima, Peru). He is currently a Visiting Professor of Translation (English- Spanish) at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey. He is also preparing his doctoral dissertation on the translation of camp talk in audiovisual products under the direction of Professor Frederic Chaume, at Universitat Jaume I (Castellón, Spain).