Word-formation and the Translation of Marvel Comic Book Charactonyms

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Abstract

This article analyzes the solutions given in Spanish translations to the morphological creativity shown in the names of *Marvel* comic book characters. The English versions almost invariably provide a full description of the hero (or villain) by means of a wide variety of word-formation mechanisms leading to highly expressive charactonyms. Indeed, examples shall be listed of names of comic book heroes created through compounding, derivation, including prefixation or suffixation (both classical and Anglo-Saxon but also from other origins), lexical blending, abbreviation, clipping, onomatopoeia, and borrowings from Spanish or from other languages.

Early translations into Spanish seemed to be slightly less expressive than the original, even when the same word-formation mechanism was used, usually due to either problems of transparency mainly in some of the word parts or to translation constraints. In later periods, a number of factors, including the influence from other media featuring the same characters and the general trend towards globalization through English, have led translators to choose repetition as the most frequent strategy, which has almost eliminated the creative power of word-formation mechanisms in Spanish and their ability to convey the stylistic effects found in the English versions.

Keywords: comic book translation, word-formation, onomastics, charactonym, lexical creativity

Resumen

Este artículo aborda las soluciones ofrecidas en las traducciones al español a la creatividad morfológica utilizada en los nombres de personajes de cómic de la editorial *Marvel*. Las versiones en inglés casi invariablemente ofrecen una descripción completa del héroe (o de su enemigo) gracias a una amplia gama de mecanismos morfológicos que confieren gran expresividad al caractónimo. Observaremos ejemplos de nombres de superhéroes creados mediante composición, derivación

(ya sea prefijación o sufijación, clásica y anglosajona, o de otros orígenes), cruces, acrónimos, truncamientos, onomatopeyas, hispanismos, préstamos de otras lenguas romances, y préstamos de otros idiomas.

Las primeras traducciones al español parecían ser ligeramente menos expresivas que el original, incluso cuando se intentaba recurrir al mismo mecanismo de formación de palabras, a menudo debido a problemas tanto de transparencia de alguno de los elementos morfológicos que constituían el caractónimo como de la propia traducción subordinada. En períodos más recientes confluyen una serie de factores, entre los cuales se encuentra la influencia de otros medios de comunicación que usan los mismos personajes y las tendencias globalizadoras, que han llevado a los traductores a recurrir a la repetición como estrategia más frecuente, lo cual casi ha eliminado el poder creativo de los mecanismos lexicogenésicos en español y su capacidad de transmitir efectos estilísticos similares a los que se encuentran en los originales en inglés.

Palabras clave: traducción de cómics, formación de palabras, onomástica, caractónimo, creatividad léxica

1. Introduction

"*Must* a name mean something?" Alice asked doubtfully.

"Of course it must," Humpty Dumpty said with a short laugh: *my* name means the shape I am – and a good handsome shape it is, too. With a name like yours, you might be any shape, almost".

(Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*)

As a rule, studies on lexical creativity, both in English and in Spanish, tend to focus on word-formation mechanisms and on the lexical and semantic issues of each language, usually from a descriptive point of view (e.g. Kenny, 2001). A similar remark can be made on the translation of character names or charactonyms. Over the past decades there have been a number of studies on the translation of proper names, in general (see below), and in comics (Mehren, 2009, and various articles on *Asterix* characters, such as Embelton, 1991; Campos, 1992, or Delesse, 2006, to name a few). However, there is little research on the way each morphological or word-formation process has been dealt with in the translation of proper nouns from comic book characters. Mehren (2009) extensively deals with the translation of comic book heroes, based on the case of the *Secret Wars* series. Although she offers valuable insights, Mehren does not deal specifically with word-formation; therefore, there is no consideration of the parallelism between the word-formation

process used in the original and the translation strategy applied in the Spanish version, as this article shall try to establish.

One of the usual features of proper nouns among comic book heroes in English (and in many other languages) is a high degree of expressivity and creativity, which is achieved through a number of word-formation mechanisms, such as compounding (e.g. "Spiderman") and derivation (e.g. "She-Hulk", "Spidey"), in addition to other stylistic resources, such as alliteration (e.g. "Silver Surfer") and onomatopoeia (e.g. "Zzzax"). In fact, it is the highly descriptive character of charactonyms in comic books that represents the greatest challenge for translators, because through a number of word-formation mechanisms the source text has managed to create a constellation of meanings that are part of the perception of the character, which may be difficult to convey in the target language. Unlike proper nouns as a whole, whose status in all languages is special because they do not necessarily conform to the morphological rules of the language, charactonyms in comic books are almost always descriptive and the result of clear word-formation mechanisms. Indeed, their role is a very important one, since they must describe completely new creatures ("amazing", "astonishing", "uncanny", "incredible", as adjectivized on comic book covers), by definition different from the world known by their readers, belonging to the "unlikely fictional text-model", whose rules are a transgression of those of the objective, real world (as compared to historical events or potentially true events; see Albaladejo Mayordomo, 1986 and Locke, 2005).

This article looks into the strategies or mechanisms used by comic book English-Spanish translators, in their attempt to preserve the characteristics and connotations implicit in the names of comic book characters in English, especially those in which word-formation processes are involved.

2. Defining charactonyms

There are various, and often contradictory, approaches to the nature, characteristics and definition of proper nouns (see, for example, Ashley, 1989). Webster's dictionary defines proper noun as "a noun that designates a particular being or thing, does not take a limiting modifier, and is usually capitalized in English". This definition is supplemented by Franco (2000: 58), who states that proper nouns have no limitation regarding their morphological features, and therefore any word or term may at a given moment become a proper noun, because its nature as a proper noun does not derive at all from the words in it, but from their social function as such. Then, do proper nouns "mean" anything? In general, the position is that although originally they quite often did, i.e. somebody whose surname was "*Schumacher*" was originally a person who made shoes, or also

"Cambridge" is a place where there used to be a bridge over a certain river, such is not necessarily the case nowadays. Thus, somebody may be called "Mark Thatcher" and have nothing to do with roofs, or be called "Irene" and be anything but peace-loving. However, in literature, where characters are created *ex novo*, the original situation reappears in which they are intentionally named in order to create a motivated relationship between their name and their characteristics, almost in the way allegorical medieval traditions personified vices or virtues. A good example is the "Angel" in *X-Men*, who after becoming corrupt is re-named as "Death" for a short period, before he leaves the evil side and becomes the "Archangel". All this shows the strict connection between the signifier and the signified in the case of character names. Also, it may be said that proper nouns are referential, denotative, but also connotative, since they convey the characteristics of the person or character bearing them; they are, in Kalashnikov's words (2006) "explicit and implicit motivators".

In general, these names are referred to in the literature as charactonyms, and are usually exemplified through Fielding's "Mrs Malaprop" (*mal + a propos*), Shakespeare's "Malvolio" and "Benvolio", Dickens's "Miss Havisham" (whose life is a "sham"), etc. These charactonyms express some quality or feature of their bearer, either through their complete form (e.g. "Wasp") or part of their signifier (e.g. "Jack the Ripper", where the motivated part is the second one), and may apply to the Christian name (Galdós's "Fortunata" in *Fortunata y Jacinta*), the surname (Süskind's "Jean Baptiste Grenouille" in *Das Parfum*), to a combination of both ("Harley Quinn –Arlequin"– in *Batman*), or, of course, to the nickname, as in *Bluebeard*. This topic has been already dealt with, and there is a whole branch of literary studies, called "literary onomastics", entirely devoted to the descriptive power of proper names (with journals such as *Names* or *Onoma*, amongst others). One of the most interesting contributions is that by Barton (1990), who, from the characters in Plato, distinguishes between "cratylic" names, that is, those arising from a property of the holder, and "hermogenic" ones, i.e. arbitrary ones.

In comics, charactonyms become more important in the 1960s, especially with the appearance of *The Fantastic Four*, whose members have "normal" names and code names related to their abilities, such as "Reed Richards" ("Mister Fantastic"), "Susan Storm" ("Invisible Woman"), "Johnny Storm" ("The Human Torch") and "Ben Grimm" ("The Thing"). In earlier times, however, instead of focusing on the characters' names, visual action and dialogue were prioritized, mainly due to the low cultural level of the audience (see Martín, 2006a: 135). In general, in the world of comic books, proper nouns would be closer to what Hermans (1988) calls "loaded" nouns, which the reader perceives as motivated (as opposed to "conventional" ones), and more specifically, lie in the "expressive" end of the continuum (the

other one being the "suggestive" one), that is, the name of the comic book hero summarizes the whole nature of the character.

English appears to us as an especially apt language to achieve these effects thanks to the variety of word-formation processes available, which lead to highly expressive results, often difficult to obtain in other languages, such as Spanish, as shall be seen below.

3. The translation of proper nouns of comic book heroes in the past and today: linguistic and non-linguistic factors

American comics started to be translated in Spain in the early 20th century, and progressively gained importance as they became more attractive to Spanish audiences than their European counterparts (e.g. *Tintin*) and even than local products. This process did have its interruptions, especially during the post-war years (1940s), when censors took a dim view of what they felt as undesirable colonialism from a country which was not necessarily an ally until well into the 1950s. It was in the sixties, as explained below, that the genre acquired a status of its own.

A similar story can be told about the translation of proper names of comic book heroes, and indeed, about the translation of proper nouns in general. Historically there have been periods in which proper nouns were successfully translated, whereas in others the original has been kept, and in general, the rule for the translator is to conform to what is expected in a particular period. Thus, in the first translations, the semantic content prevailed, whereby "Superman" became *'Superhombre'* or even *'Ciclón'*, and "Batman" was rendered as *'El Hombre Murciélago'* (Gasca, 1966: 150). This could be due to the low level of knowledge of English (at the time, French was the foreign language taught at schools), and also to the influence of Latin American publishers of Spanish versions, such as the ones by Novaro in Mexico (see Mehren, 2009: 125), which favoured linguistic translations of proper nouns. It must be observed that there were other traditions in Spain, in different comic subgenres such as humour comics, where rhythm, alliteration and puns were frequent, as in *Rigoberto Picaporte, un solterón de mucho porte* and *La familia Trapisonda, un grupito que es la monda*. Of course, the native technique was also applied to translations, as in *Happy Hooligan* which became *'Las aventuras de Simplicio Bobadilla'* (Gasca, 1966:38), although linguistic translations were also applied, as in *Jungle Jim* which was translated as *'Jim de la Jungla'* (Gasca, 1966:165), for instance.

One important factor to take into account is that, although there have historically been original comics based on heroic characters in Spanish, from *Roberto Alcázar y Pedrín* (created in 1940) or *El Guerrero del Antifaz* (in 1944) to

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more modern series, such as *Capitán Trueno* (1956), *Jabato* (1958), *Dani Futuro* (1969), *Tequila Bang* (1978), etc., there have been no successful attempts to create heroes with superhuman powers in Spain. The tendency, as pointed out by Martín (1978: 120-122; 2006b: 17) was to translate from US English into Spanish (as is usually the case with most comic books, with notable exceptions; see, for instance, D'Arcangelo and Zanettin, 2004: 187-210). However, unlike what happens in other literary genres, there is no pre-existing, well-established set of conventions which translators have to (or might) adhere to in Spanish. If anything, the conventions are set not by an original genre, but by a *translated* one, that is, by previous translations of comics, especially when there is a great degree of intertextuality, as in the so-called "Marvel Universe", which shall be dealt with in the following sections. This may be regarded as a distinctive feature of comics, and more specifically those of the publisher Marvel Entertainment, Inc., which may take the following shapes:

- leading characters may perfectly have a secondary or co-starring role in other series. For example, "Hulk" may appear in a *Daredevil* comic, "Spiderman" may have a role in a *Fantastic Four* plot, in a phenomenon called "crossover", which, though sometimes used in literature, is an almost defining trait of the Marvel Universe;

- main characters, all having a leading role in their own series, may be included in teams, as in *The Avengers* (originally "Ant-Man", "Wasp", "Thor", "Iron Man"and "The Hulk"), *The Defenders* (most typically "Doctor Strange", "Silver Surfer", "Namor" and "The Hulk"), *Alpha Flight*, etc. or, in an extreme form, collective adventures may be created (e.g. *Secret Wars*, featuring components from two groups and several individual heroes against a group formed by over 10 villains, led by "Dr. Doom"); and

- villains, who may appear as enemies of the leading characters in various series. For instance, "Doctor Doom" appears in series starring the *Fantastic Four*, but also "Spiderman", "Captain Britain", the "Silver Surfer" and the "Punisher" amongst others; "Doctor Octopus" has battled "Spiderman" but also "the Punisher", "Captain America" and "Elektro".

It is quite relevant to point out that, while expressive names such as "Spiderman", "Hulk" or others may be translated, forenames and surnames, even if of a motivated nature (such as "Ben Grimm" in the "Fantastic Four"), are very seldom modified, since the result would extract the characters from their original background (see Franco, 2000: 29; Valero, 1999: 125), and this would damage the "credibility of the product" (Chaves, 2000; my translation).

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At present, however, there does not seem to be a uniform trend regarding translation. As a rule, substitution has been the prevailing technique during most of the 20th century (see Martín, 1978: 52), although over the past decades there has been a tendency towards exotization through preservation of the original, partly influenced by the existence of film versions favouring the original names of characters. However, many scholars have argued that this, far from proving the traditional maxim that proper nouns are not translated, is a sort of "translation", as it is a conscious decision and the resulting unit is not the same as in the original. As will be seen in the examples below, the preservation of some names in their original form makes the reader fail to perceive the underlying denotations or connotations. Therefore, it can be said that there *has* been a translation, into a unit which does not function in the target text as its counterpart did in the original.

As already mentioned, there are a number of factors influencing the choices made by the translator. The most important one, which prevails upon most others since it eliminates the very possibility of "choice", is the pre-existence of the character and the translations. As saw earlier, most leading characters and many secondary ones have usually appeared before in other translated comics, which rules out any creativity in the translation and imposes a certain adherence to the tradition. The reason for this is that the reading public is an extremely faithful one, and in all likelihood is familiar with the characters with their pre-established names. Thus, a translator in the seventies was not free, for instance, to translate "The Green Goblin" as anything other than *'El Duendecillo Verde'*, since the readers would not recognize the character and would probably react against such "innovation". This is indeed reinforced by other factors, namely, the fact that the translators themselves are usually avid readers of this genre *before* they start translating. According to Mehren (2009), they are often drawn from fans attending comic book fairs with some knowledge of English, which leads to their maintaining the previous solutions. Also, there is the extreme conservatism of many readers of this type of comic, who dislike great innovations which would break the "tradition" of the character.

These factors (the previous translations, the translators' background and the conservative audience) have a double influence upon the creative strategies used in the rendering of character names, both conscious and unconscious. On the one hand, translators are aware that the readers, like themselves, are conditioned by their previous experience, and might not be ready to accept excessively innovative strategies; on the other, the translators have previously acquired the referential world from their own reading experience, and have come to accept the previous translations as a given. This does not mean that the translator cannot move away from the previous solution, but if he/she does, it will very seldom lead to new

autonomous creations, but to repetition. In other words, the translators may accept or not accept *'Estela Plateada'* as the rendering of "Silver Surfer", but if they do not, most probably they will resort to repetition and use the original "Silver Surfer" in the Spanish version, rather than produce anything new. This places a constraint on word-formation mechanisms in Spanish, since the translator will either reproduce pre-existing solutions or use the English name, but will not create new derivations (as in a potential *'Surfista Plateado'*, although this solution does exist in Latin American Spanish).

Still, there are cases where translators make innovative decisions, either for new characters or where, due to new trends, they feel they can move away from the pre-established tradition. In such occasions they are still conditioned by a number of factors, namely:

- the space constraints (see, for instance, Valero, 1999: 117), and more specifically, the space available for text in the comic strip. This would rule out lengthy translations (e.g. intertextual glosses), which would simply not fit in the space provided;

- the link between the visual image and the text. The most extreme case is that of "Daredevil", whose D's on his breast preclude in principle any solution not containing such letters in the target text (see below);

- the lack of a native genre reference, or as said above, the fact that unlike the case of children's literature (where the translator can consider the "rules" of works written originally in the target language), there is no native superhero book in Spanish, and therefore the reference for both the translator and the reader is the universe of previous translations of the same series, as well as other comic books;

- the need to preserve a certain "exotic" element, since the actions and characters are specifically located in the source language culture, and any adaptation transferring them to the target one would not be acceptable; and, finally,

- the fact that the translators' fees are scarce, which may often lead to oversight or haste on the part of the translator.

4. The translators' responses to the lexical creativity of English in the names of comic book heroes in Spanish

As pointed out in the previous section, there are various translation strategies available which may be resorted to when translating proper names from English into Spanish. The problem has been quite amply dealt with in recent years, with

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interesting typologies, such as those proposed by Harris (2004), Fernandes (2006), Van Coillie (2006), Pedersen (2007) and Parianou (2007), which all seem to point, as one of the main motives for the translator's choice, to the connotation attached to the name. Perhaps the most illustrative classification, which includes proper nouns within the general category of culture-specific-items (CSIs), is that by Franco (1996), who establishes two basic poles: (1) conservation (the most extreme form being repetition, but also including orthographic adaptation, linguistic (non-cultural) translation, extratextual gloss and intratextual gloss) and (2) substitution (including synonymy, limited universalization, absolute universalization, deletion and, as the most extreme intervention by the translator, autonomous creation). Although these labels will be used for reference purposes here, the following paragraphs concentrate on the word-formation processes used for character names in English and Spanish.

As this article exclusively deals with word-formation processes and not with stylistic devices, alliterative repetition will not be included as a separate category, although numerous instances of it have been detected in comic book characters, such as "Peter Parker", "Bruce Banner", "Reed Richards", "Susan Storm", "Warren Worthington", "Crusher Creel", "Fing Fan Foom", "Xxan Xxar", etc. which are almost invariably translated into non-alliterative patterns ("Fantastic Four", *'Los Cuatro Fantásticos'*; "Silver Surfer", *'Estela Plateada'*; "Hammer Head", *'Cabeza de Martillo'*), with some exceptions such as the aforementioned "Daredevil", *'Dan Defensor'*; *"Rocket Racer", 'Corredor Cohete'*; or "Grey Gargoyle", *'Gárgola gris'*. It can be observed that, with the exception of *'Dan Defensor'*, where the alliteration is a direct result of the visual component, the alliteration is replaced by a mere linguistic translation; in other words, it does not seem important for the translator to maintain this device in Spanish. Apart from this, among the word-formation processes, infixation or tmesis will not be studied, since it appears to be extremely unusual in character names: in the *Marvel* universe only a one-off coinage has been identified (Reed Richards, or "Mr. Fantastic", is once referred to as "Mister Fan-total-tastic"). Thus, this study deals with (1) compounding, (2) derivation, (3) blending, (4) acronyms and initialisms, (5) clipping, (6) onomatopoeia, (7) borrowings from Spanish or other Romance languages, and (8) borrowings from other languages.

The criteria for the selection of the sample in which this study is based has been as follows: the starting point has been the list of comic book characters (both heroes and villains) offered by the official website of Marvel Entertainment (www.marvel.com), with over 1,500 charactonyms. Firstly, all those names which were morphologically simple (e.g. "Hulk") were eliminated from the list. Secondly, even if not featured in the official website, others were added as they appear in *Marvel* comics (e.g. "Terraformer"). Finally, all those characters which, to the best of my

knowledge, and after a detailed look at a good number of Spanish versions and an extended search in specialized websites and forums, have not appeared in *Marvel* translated comics in Spanish were also disregarded. This does not mean, however, that those characters whose names *have not been translated* into Spanish have also been eliminated. Indeed, most characters nowadays are left with their original names, but these have been retained in the sample (which includes 600 names), as conservation (repetition of the original form) is one of the translating possibilities. One cannot ignore the difficulties in selecting a sample in this genre, for practical reasons, such as the number of issues available (thousands, some of them extremely rare). Therefore, it must be accepted that any choice of material, however selective, is always partial and may hardly lead to a full account (on sample selection in super-hero comics, see Locke 2005: 28).

4.1. Charactonyms created through compounding

Compounding may be considered, by definition, the paradigmatic procedure for the formation of super-hero names in English. Given that most of them are men or women with unusual powers, sometimes resembling those of animals, it is only normal that they should be named by combining the two roots (ant-man, spider-girl, bat-man, etc.). Perhaps the most visible examples of compounds in the names of superheroes are "Spiderman" (sometimes spelled in English "Spider-Man") and "Daredevil". The former exemplifies a trend also observed in other cases, whereby in the earlier times the name was also translated ('*Hombre Araña*'), especially on the front cover, although the English name was not completely absent from the translation and did appear as a co-reference device. From the 1980's onwards the process is reversed: the compound '*Hombre Araña*' appears only occasionally and it is the original "Spiderman" that prevails in the Spanish version. This is consistent with the strategy followed with affective diminutives like "Spidey", and with other "byproducts", such as "Spiderwoman" or "Spidergirl", both seldom translated. However, the hypochoristic compound form "Webhead" is almost always translated into Spanish into the phrase '*cabeza de araña*'.

Special attention deserves, in my opinion, another compound, *Daredevil*, which has become one of the most frequently quoted cases of "constrained" translations. When the series first appeared, the usual practice was to translate characters' names ("Hulk", '*La Masa*'; "Iron Man", '*El Hombre de Hierro*'), but there was the added difficulty of the two D's on his costume, as already mentioned. The initial translators had no other option than to lose the semantic load of the original ("Daredevil, the man without fear"), despite the use of the compound form '*Dan Defensor*', which was rapidly adapted at the time (1970's). For their part, other

countries also went for other options related to the initials (derivatives, as in Latin American *'Diabólico'*, and Brazilian Portuguese *'Demolidor'*, simple forms as the French *'Démon'*, borrowings like the Italian *'Devil'*, and, the most coincident with the graphic element, the article and the noun, *'Der Dämon'*, in German). Decades later, the initial translation has been lost, and the name *'Daredevil'* has prevailed in Spain, which also eliminates any motivation based on the name.

In some cases, what scriptwriters do is resort to pre-existing compounds in order to name characters, sometimes translated through a compound, as in "Sin-Eater", *'Comepecados'*, after the medieval practice of taking on the sins of deceased persons, and "Dogface", *'Caraperro'*), or through derived forms ("Blockbuster", *'Machacador'*, "Hatemonger", *'Aborrecedor'*), "Ironclad", *'Acorazado'*), In general, one might be led to think that those compounds which predated the comic era have a greater chance of being translated, but this could be due simply to their time of appearance. In other words, it may very well be that more recent characters, which necessarily have been given a new coinage because the existing options have already been exhausted, have arrived at a time and age when repetition is the prevailing trend in the translator's character names. This could be proved by names like "Thunderbolts", conceived in 1997, which is left in the Spanish version (as opposed to "General 'Thunderbolt' Ross", which was translated in the past as *'Trueno Ross'*). Also, the fact that the word exists does not predetermine its translation if it is felt that the already existing dictionary equivalent might not be attractive: the mutant "Doorman" from the "Great Lakes Avengers" is translated with a compound (*'Hombre Puerta'*), not as the less glamourous derivative *portero*.

Other compounds which have been created *ad hoc* to describe the features of characters and have been replaced by a Spanish translation are "Skullbuster", *'Abrecráneos'*; "Shadowcat", *'Gatasombra'*; "Shadowbox", *'Abresombras'*, all of which retain the compound, and those with *–master*, such as "Lightmaster", *' Amo de la luz'*) and "Puppetmaster", *'Amo de las Marionetas'*), which were translated using noun phrases.

On the contrary, there are other names like "Bulldozer", which have been left untranslated. Probably the explanation for this preservation of the original is the fact that the word has for some time been used as an anglicism in Spanish (see, for instance, Görlach, 1994, or even the latest on-line edition of the *Real Academia* dictionary), and is therefore already known by the readers. This makes it possible to preserve the exoticism of the foreign term and yet create the necessary connotations. Similarly, other examples of compounds have also been left untranslated, although the reason here is that they appeared at a time when the trend was not to translate; such is the case of "Bookworm" or "Terraformer", both of which appeared in 1991.

Today most characters with compound names have little possibility of translation, such as "Agent Cheesecake" (2007), which appears as *'Agente Cheesecake'*, with the whole meaning of the word ("photographic display of shapely and scantily clothed female figures"), or the "Hulkbusters" (also left untranslated).

4.2. Charactonyms created through derivation

4.2.1. Prefixation

Within derivation, prefixation is quite scarce in names of heroes and villains. Furthermore, as regards translation into Spanish, it is usually easy to render the charactonym through the same word-formation process, especially when the elements are either similar to those used in Spanish or refer to Latin ("Bi-beast", *'Bibestia'*; "Octo-Sapiens", *'Octo-Sapiens'*). The most interesting example of prefixation (although Bauer (1983) would call this a compound) in the creation of comic book hero names is probably *She-* in "She-Hulk", the female version of "Hulk". The lack of unanimity in the translation of the male character (*'Hulk/ La Masa'*), together with the time of appearance (1980, when translators started to use original names), may have influenced the translation. Accordingly, in the initial periods there was hesitation between the suffix (*'Hulka'*) and the nominal phrase (*'La Mujer Masa'*), prefixation being impossible in Spanish due to the non-existence of gender-marking prefixes. Finally, *'Mujer Masa'* was dropped, together with the corresponding male phrase *'La Masa'*, and *'Hulka'* has remained. Though in principle opaque, the coinage *'Hulka'* is fully functional because it refers the reader to an already existing male character, *'Hulk'*, exactly like the original does.

Some prefixes are given a specific spelling, usually creating homophonous resemblances with pre-existing words, as in "D'Spayre" (a pun on *despair*, and a very descriptive one, since the character thrives on fear and loss of hope), with no attempt at translation. Another case is that of *X-* as a prefix as an alternative of *ex-*, as in "X-Humed" (a group of zombies), "X-Terminators" or "X-Ternals", translated as *'X-Humados'*, *'X-Terminadores'* and *'X-Ternos'*, even though the pronunciation of the English prefix does not fully work in Spanish; the letter is read "equis" (/ekis/), and therefore the Spanish reader probably does not perceive it as a prefix.

4.2.2. Charactonyms created through suffixation

4.2.2.1. Classic (adapted or non-adapted) suffixation

The use of classic (Latin or Greek) suffixation has a clear stylistic purpose which is always present in hero stories: the attempt to evoke classical heroes and

thus endow the characters with connotations from the heroic past. In some cases the authors resort to pre-existing classical or mythological heroes, such as "Hercules" or "Thor", but in others the classical connotations are added through a suffix, which can be either a Latin or Greek non-adapted one, such as *-us, -tor, -trix, -on* and *-x*, or a suffix which has already been adapted into English (and, in all likelihood, into Spanish), such as *-ian* (*'-iano'*), *-oid* (*'-oide'*), *-naut* (*'-nauta'*), etc.

In the first case, that of non-adapted classical suffixes, and like in science and in advertising, many of the names are new *ad hoc* formations by comics scriptwriters. In some cases both the root and the suffix are classical, as in "Abominatrix", whereas in others the classical suffix is added to an already existing English word (though Latin-based), such as "Adamantium" (a material hard as diamond), or "Computrex" (an evil computer which becomes even more evil through the addition of the suffix), "Annihilus", "Galactus", "Parallax" (a battle staff used to enter parallel universes), all of them also named with the same form in Spanish, or "Brutacus" and "Graviton" (from "gravity", for a character able to manipulate gravity, rendered as *'Gravitón'*). Other coinages are added to Anglo-Saxon elements, such as "Shatterax" also *'Shatterax'* in Spanish), but this time the expressivity is irreparably lost.

In the case of adapted suffixes, almost in all likelihood the name is translated using the same word-formation process (and, usually with the same suffix), the result being extremely transparent, as in "Aquarian", *'Acuariano'*; "Adversary", *'Adversario'*; "Anacronauts", *'Anacronautas'*; "Xandarians", *'Xandarianos'*; "Ovoids", *'Ovoides'*; "Ultroids", *'Ultroides'*; "Titania", *'Titania'* and "Vulcana", *'Vulcana'*.

4.2.2.2. Anglo-Saxon suffixation

In the case of Anglo-Saxon suffixes, such as *-er*, the general trend in the past used to be translation through the same word-formation process, which tended to maintain the same expressive values in Spanish. Such was, for instance, the case with "Healer", *'Curandero'*; "Energizer", *'Energizadora'*; "Avengers", *'Vengadores'*; "Reapers", *'Cosechadores'*; "Tinkerer", *'Chapucero'*; "Whizzer", *'Zumbador'*; "Smasher", *'Pegador'*; "Thinker", *'Pensador'*; "Bouncer", *'Saltador'* and "Vanisher", *'Desvanecedor'*, but there may also be some rare exception, where the derived form is translated into a simple word, such as "Stinger", *'Aguijón'*. There is one special case, that of the "Beyonder", a character whose name is formed first through conversion (or zero-derivation) and then suffixation (*-er* is a suffix usually applied to verbs, and not to adverbs or prepositions). Perhaps it is this unusual word-formation process in the original which leads the translator to choose a different process in Spanish, namely compounding (*'Todopoderoso'*).

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In the case of "Dazzler" there was an initial attempt at translation as *'Dazzler Deslumbrante'*, i.e. through an intertextual gloss, which was eventually dropped. This could be one of the clear cases of an extremely descriptive charactonym whose content is lost in the Spanish translation. Similarly, the earlier times of "The Punisher" saw a similar translation by means of the same word-formation process (*'El Castigador'*), but in later years, after a period of coexistence of the two forms, the English name has prevailed, especially after the film version was released (in 2003).

Worth mentioning is the "alien" suffix *-aar*, which is used to reproduce allegedly extraterrestrial names, as in "Blastaar" or "Huntaar". Quite obviously, it is an alternative spelling of *-er*, which maintains its transparency while giving the character an extremely exotic origin. Indeed, vowel doubling is a strategy which is used also to create alternative places, in conjunction with unlikely apostrophes (for instance, there is a parallel world in *Excalibur* called "Ee'rath", from "Earth"). In Spanish the translators, either because they have not recognized the "real" suffix, or because they have decided that the "alien" connotation is more important than the denotation ("Blastaar" appeared in those times when names were still translated), prefer to resort to the original name.

As mentioned earlier, there are occasional variations on charactonyms through diminutive or appreciative suffixes for humorous or ironic purposes, such as "Spidey" or "Doomsie", both also translated through suffixation in Spanish (*'Arañita'* and *'Muertito'*), which preserves the overtones of the original (including the oxymoron between the negative *'Muerte'* and the usually positive suffixes *-ie* or *-ito*). Other examples containing suffixes which have been translated through a similar process to that in the English form are "Dragoness", *'Dragonesa'* and "Sorceress", *'Encantadora'*.

4.2.2.3. *Other suffixes adapted from Romance languages*

In this section there are at least two interesting cases worth mentioning: "Makhizmo" and "Blitziana". It seems quite obvious that the names of these two characters have been formed by means of Spanish suffixes, which makes it very unlikely that they should be modified in the Spanish version, and in fact they are both preserved in Spanish. However, the success of such preserved element varies: in the first case, "Makhizmo" is an extremely transparent term, and the logic of the character's name is also visible in Spanish (together with its origin, the planet "Machus"), whereas in the second case, "Blitziana" is a term with a Germanic root and a Romance suffix, and the connection between the name and the character is non-existent for the Spanish reader.

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4.3. Character names created through blending

The solutions given to character names created through blending vary, depending on their degree of transparency. On the pole of repetition, worth mentioning are two cases: "Bizarnage", a blend from "bizarre" and "carnage", which has not been translated into Spanish, perhaps because Spanish does have the option of *bizarro*, and the potential sporadic coinage of "carnaje" might not be transparent enough. The other case, "Psyklop", created with the beginning of the combining form *psycho-* and the end of the word *Cyclops* (transparent: a one-eyed insectoid with hypnotic powers), is also left unchanged in Spanish, although the form *Psíclope* would be technically possible.

In spite of this, there are at least two blends in the sample which have been translated: "Catiana" and "Acidroid", both having in common the possibility of being interpreted as suffixed forms and not as blends, which facilitates translation. Hence, "Catiana" (interpreted as a blend, i.e. "Cat" + "Tatiana") has led, through linguistic translation, to *'Gatiana'*, which maintains both the word-formation process and the denotative power in the original. Similarly, "Acidroid" ("acid" + "android") has been rendered as *'Acidroide'*, which also leaves intact the most outstanding features of the English word. However, in the case of "Mandroid" ("man" + "android") rendered as *'Mandroide'*, the first element is not rendered as Spanish "hombre", although the English form may be quite transparent for the Spanish reader, especially for readers of comic books.

4.4. Charactonyms created through acronyms and initialisms

In the *Marvel* Universe, acronyms, both motivated and unmotivated, are used to refer to organizations and, less often, to individuals.

The most abundant category (as in general language) is that of organizations, which usually take on the form of motivated acronyms. Perhaps the most representative is "S.H.I.E.L.D.", which originally stood for "Supreme Headquarters International Espionage Law-Enforcement Division", though it was changed in the nineties to "Strategic Hazard Intervention, Espionage Logistics Directorate". In Spain, the first publishers of the seventies translated it with a simple form, "Escudo", although later the attempt was dropped in favour of repeating the English acronym *'SHIELD'*, albeit with a translation of the English words which did not match, i.e. *'Organización Internacional para la Ejecución y el Cumplimiento de la Ley'*. This preservation is quite understandable, since the logo was very frequently shown in the comics. In recent publications, an attempt has been made to reinterpret the acronym into Spanish words, with *'Servicio Homologado de Inteligencia, Espionaje, Logística y Defensa'*. Another possibly motivated acronym which appeared in earlier

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stages, "A.I.M." ("Advanced Idea Mechanics"), first featured in 1966, was translated preserving the word-formation mechanism as *'I.M.A.'* (*'Ideas Mecánicas Avanzadas'*).

However, other less frequent motivated acronyms for Marvel organizations, such as "A.R.M.O.R." ("Altered-Reality Monitoring and Operational Response"), "S.W.O.R.D." ("Sentient World Observation and Response Department"), or "H.A.T.E." ("Highest Anti Terrorism Effort"), have been reproduced verbatim into Spanish, with no attempt at correspondence between the acronym and the Spanish meaning. In other cases, motivated acronyms, such as "W.H.O." ("Weird Happenings Organization") have been translated as *'QUIEN' [WHO]*, that is, considering the English form as a simple word rather than as an abbreviation or initialism.

Worth noting, within the general tendency for organizations to be labeled with acronyms, is the case of "H.A.M.M.E.R.", which is shown as an acronym, but never explained, to such an extent that when, in the Prologue to *Captain America: Reborn*, one of the characters asks what it means, the answer is "it's classified – and you don't have security clearance". Even "HYDRA", which is not an acronym, is often shown capitalized as if it were, both in English and in the Spanish translation.

Apart from those, there are also non-motivated initialisms for organizations or groups, such as the "MLF" ("Mutant Liberation Front"), which is translated linguistically as *'FLM'* (*'Frente de Liberación Mutante'*), that is, with the same word-formation mechanism.

As mentioned earlier, there are also acronyms referring to individuals (either persons or machines). In general, there is no attempt at linguistic translation nor at explanation, as in "H.E.R.B.I.E." ("Humanoid Experimental Robot B-Type Integrated Electronics"), a motivated acronym for a robot created by Reed Richards, also resembling "Herbie", the diminutive affective form for *Herbert*, whose repetition in Spanish eliminates both the meaning and the pun. Obviously, if in this case the English acronym is repeated in the Spanish version, quite expectedly the same will apply to non-motivated acronyms, as in "MODOK" ("Mental Organism Designed Only for Killing"), which was left untranslated, or "MODOG" ("Mental Organism Designed Only for Genocide").

4.5. Charactonyms created through clippings

I have also found some cases of clippings in character names, such as "Necrom" (from "Necromancer", also a powerful sorcerer capable of raising the dead), the clipping containing the *Necro-* element, which agrees with its ability to produce instant death on the spot by absorbing its victim's life energy. In Spanish, the word remains

the same, preserving the word-formation mechanism, and the meaning, though not exactly similar to the linguistic equivalent (the word in Spanish is *nigromante*), does evoke other words related to death in Spanish (e.g. *necrofagia,*, *necrofilia*, etc.). As a rule, the examples show that the similarity between the English and the Spanish word, and the usage of the shortened form in Spanish, appear to be a decisive factor towards translation, albeit the number of cases is perhaps too reduced for any extrapolation. This can be seen in cases like "Nitro" (from *nitroglycerin*), a villain capable of exploding at will, where the Spanish equivalent is exactly the same, or "Synch" (from either *synchronize* or *synchronization*), translated as '*Sincro*' in the Spanish version. In both instances, *nitro* and *sincro* are frequent clippings in Spanish. Conversely, if the full word is similar in Spanish but there is no corresponding shortened form, the English clipping is preserved, as in "Nuke" or "Gator", which are not adapted, even if "nuclear" and "alligator" do exist in Spanish.

There are also clippings with an affective nature, such as "Doc Ock" or "Doc Oc", often used by "Spiderman" to refer to "Doctor Octopus". In both cases the Spanish version uses repetition; the only element which might surprise the Spanish reader is "Doc", but it is transparent (and usual enough) for the Spanish reader to accept it.

4.6. Charactonyms created through onomatopoeia

Although comparatively less frequent, two cases of onomatopoeic charactonyms have also been identified, where again similarity and previous translations seem to be a decisive factor. One is "Ticktock," a mutant criminal with time-related superpowers, adapted into '*Tic Toc*' in Spanish. Note that '*tic toc*' is used in Spanish, although the traditional onomatopoeia is *tic-tac*. Furthermore, another fact that favours the choice of '*Tic Toc*' is the existence of previous characters (the crocodile in Disney's *Peter Pan,* for instance) which have also been translated as '*Tic Toc*'. Unlike this, when there is no clear equivalent in the target language, the original is retained, as exemplified by Hulk's enemy '*Zzzax*' (sometimes spelled '*Z'zzax*' in order to make it appear more "alien"). The name is extremely alliterative and descriptive, and corresponds to a being of pure energy able to fly and travel through electrical lines. There is no attempt at autonomous creation or linguistic translation in Spanish, which could be either due to difficulty or perhaps simply because of the two factors in favour of repetition: on the one hand, the trend towards the usage of the original name, as mentioned earlier (although it appeared as early as 1973); on the other, the progressive Anglicization of onomatopoeia in Spanish, especially in comics, aided by the fact that the onomatopoeia is sometimes part of the visual art (on this topic, see De la Cruz & Tejedor, 2009 and Gasca & Gubern, 2008), which could also account for the above usage of '*tic toc*'.

4.7. Borrowings from Spanish or from other Romance languages

In English the use of Spanish or Italian names of characters has a well-established tradition, best exemplified by Jonson's *Volpone*, Shakespeare's "Benvolio" and "Malvolio", Middleton's "Fidelio", etc. Some examples in comic books are "Matador", "Lunatica" or the various characters named "Machete". As one could expect, these borrowings from Spanish are repeated in the Spanish version. Although apparently one might think that the meaning is maintained, the real effect is that the iconic exoticism of the original is lost; for instance, *'Matador'*, one of Spiderman's foes, is a bullfighter, but in Spanish the character becomes exceedingly superficial and stereotyped.

4.8. Borrowings from other languages

In this section, as with previous cases, a distinction must be made between previously existing borrowings in English which have been applied to characters, such as "Boomerang" and "Kangaroo" (from Guugu Yimidhirr, an aboriginal Australian language) or *"Juggernaut"* (from Sanskrit), or new coinages made from other languages, such as "Blitzkrieger" or "Gotteskrieger". In the first case, the obvious choice is the use of the same term in Spanish, but in its adapted form, if it does exist, as in *'Bumerang'* (the form alternates in Spanish with the prescriptive *bumerán)*, or *'Canguro'*; if it does not exist, it is rendered through repetition, as in *'Juggernaut'*, simply preserved in Spanish.

The second case, that concerning new coinages, may very well be illustrated by *Blitzkrieger* or *Gotteskrieger*. The former is a derivation from an existing Germanism in English (*blitzkrieg*), but non-existing as a derived form until the comic book (where the character possesses electrical powers), whereas the latter is a compound in German plus a derived form, and its relative transparency in English is derived from its analogy with *Blitzkrieger*. In both cases, the name is not translated in Spanish, either because these are recent characters or because there is no clear equivalent.

5. Conclusions

My findings show great variability in the use of word-formation mechanisms in the translation of comic book charactonyms, with two basic periods: an initial one, until the late eighties, when attempts were made at linguistic translation, and the present one, which approximately starts in the nineties and still applies, when repetition is the prevailing strategy.

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Concerning the first period, both in the case of compounding and in the case of derivation it can be observed that the lexical process in Spanish tends to be the same, regardless of whether the word was a pre-existent one or created for the Marvel Universe. As for the second period, it has been observed that, regardless of the word-formation process used, and with the exception of extremely obvious cases where linguistic translation is almost unavoidable, it appears that the translator retains the charactonym from the original. A number of reasons can be found for this, including the following:

- the general trend towards repetition, which can be observed in other visual media, namely cinema (for instance, many films translated into Spanish are shown with the original title). This factor is both a general symptom and a direct influence, in the case of films based on comic book characters, where the title and the script retain the original name (e.g *Los Cuatro Fantásticos y Silver Surfer', 'Iron Man', 'El increíble Hulk', 'Daredevil'*);

- the general trend towards globalization;

- the availability of other merchandising products (other than films) based on comic book characters, such as posters, toys, collectible figures, clothing, etc. which are imported and thus left untranslated;

- the appearance of the Internet, which gives comic book fans access to original materials before they are translated (or to others which are not translated at all), either through purchase, direct downloads or forums. This factor, although not specifically measured, may be more important in comic books than in other works of art, such as literature, given the profile of comic book readers (more prone to using the Internet for these purposes than, for instance, readers of canonical fiction). This is the main reason that explains why they are very likely to have access to the original version even before it is translated (unless it is released simultaneously, as is already the case with some films): as can be observed from forums, readers are waiting for the appearance of further issues from their favourite characters.

Apart from this, and concerning the first period, the results seem to prove that, what Moya (2000: 9) calls "a priori statements about translation" are indeed urban myths. It is usually said that proper nouns are untranslatable, and yet it can be seen that translators used to translate them, especially when their meaning is relevant to the character definition and to the action. The other statement, that "proper nouns must not be translated if there already is an existing translation" also appears to be false in the context of comics. However, as can be seen from the changes over the last decades, translators seem to move with their times, and

join the general trend towards repetition, due, amongst others, to the factors just listed. This is bad news, metaphorically speaking, for word-formation processes in Spanish, which are seldom used, and also for the lack of transparency of the result. The efforts by the scriptwriters are rarely, if ever, reflected in the Spanish version, which is more visual than textual. The lack of translation and loss of denotative force is especially important for minor characters, where, according to Maurer (1983), the name is the easiest form of characterization. In most cases, the Spanish reader has to wait until the character does something in order to learn about the "superpowers" it possesses, whereas the reader of the original version, given the transparency of the word-formation processes used, already has an idea of what the hero or villain (usually the latter) is capable of doing as soon as it is mentioned.

It must be remembered that, unlike what happens in literature (unless the book is part of a series), the comic book translator is nowadays seldom free to choose the target text solution as, with very rare exceptions, all the characters in a given comic have already appeared before, and the translator has to conform to the pre-existing strategies, as expected by its readers. This is an added factor towards preservation of the original name. Given the enormous weight of the available material, both translated and untranslated, and the close connections between all such materials, it does not seem that translators will be able to revert to autonomous creation in the future.

Regarding further research, and given that preservation and conservatism are probably enhanced by the existence of a whole Marvel Universe, film versions and merchandising, studies could be made on less popular series, i.e. comics by independent or smaller publishers, which are not conditioned because the characters have not appeared elsewhere, there is no external merchandising (no film version, no clothing, etc.), and the readers are less likely to be aware of their existence through the Internet (although, the artists being known from other comics, there is a possibility of the readers being informed about them all the same). In these cases, where these factors are not present, a predominance of linguistic translation and/or autonomous creation would indicate that these factors are decisive ones, whereas, if repetition of the original English term was the rule, this would show that the trend is an all-pervasive one, and that in translated comics, until the visual information appears, heroes and villains, with whose name one "can be any shape", are closer to Alice than to Humpty Dumpty.

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