

Translating Television in Latin America (with Laurena Bernabo)

[opening music]

00:21 **Juan Llamas-Rodriguez:** Welcome to the Global Media Cultures podcast. I am your host, Juan Llamas-Rodriguez. Today we are discussing the technical, practical and socio-political considerations of dubbing a U.S. television show for Latin American audiences. Our guest is Dr. Laurena Bernabo. She's an assistant professor in the department of Entertainment and Media Studies at the University of Georgia. Dr. Bernabo earned her PhD from the University of Iowa in the Department of Communication in 2017. Her dissertation titled "Translating Identity: Norms and Industrial Constraints in Adapting *Glee* for Latin America," won the top dissertation award from the Organization for the Study of Communication, Language and Gender. Work from this dissertation has been published in the journals *Critical Studies in Media Communication* and *The Velvet Light Trap*, and has earned an award from the media industries group of the International Communication Association. Dr. Bernabo continues her study of translation, having visited The Kitchen, a prominent Miami dubbing studio, and she has a forthcoming book chapter on U.S. responses to the subtitled Oscar-winning film, *Parasite*. Laurena, welcome to the Global Media Cultures podcast.

01:37 **Laurena Bernabo:** Thank you, Juan.

01:39 **JLR:** I wanna start by asking you, so your work broadly, I would say, works on media and translation, right? Could you talk to us about why this topic interests you, and then why is it an important topic to study?

01:53 **LB:** Sure, so I've always been interested in the representation of gender in television. I grew up watching TV obsessively. I had an Excel document to make sure I don't ever miss an episode of one of my favorite shows. I'm a little insane. And I wrote extensively on *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* in college. So that's always been kind of my passion. And so when I was getting my PhD in Media Studies, I wanted to bridge that with my experiences of serving in the Peace Corps in Costa Rica. I had spent a lot of time down there watching TV, both as a way to feel connected to my home, to kind of fight the feeling of isolation, and also to help me pick up some Spanish, to develop my

Spanish skills by listening to dubs and reading translations. And so I found that I was really interested in how the translation process affects the ways that gender and identity get reconstructed or reconstituted, particularly when we're talking about the diverse collection of identities like you find in a show like *Glee*, in a culture here referring to a kind of all over Latin America that we think of traditionally as being more kind of hegemonic masculine, and we're familiar with concepts like machismo.

03:23 **JLR**: Right, so the specific article that we are talking about today is "Progressive Television: Translation and Globalization," which appeared, which was published in the journal *Velvet Light Trap*, volume 80 in 2017. So can you give us a brief history of this particular article, where it came from? How did the project originate? How long did it take, all of that?

03:46 **LB**: So this is basically kind of highlights of my dissertation. I was very lucky I think. I like to think of it as a combination of luck and moxie, but I happened to meet the creator of *Glee* in 2012 when he tagged along with a couple of the actors from *Glee*. They came to Iowa to do a get out to vote kind of event for the 2012 election, and so while people were lining up to meet the actors, I went over to fawn all over the creator, and I happened to ask, is there any chance that a scholar, someone like me, who has written about *Glee* in her graduate courses, could visit the set?

04:25 **LB**: And he said, "Sure, we have people on the set all the time for things way more annoying than scholarship," and I thought like, "Yes! Less annoying than a journalist. That's my entry point." And so I was able to do a visit to the set, speak with the creator Ian Brennan for an hour. I met with another executive producer, Dante Di Loreto, and I talked to them in these interviews about the way *Glee* travels around the globe, and they weren't really very well-informed about part of it, they were very much focused on *Glee*'s immediate production, but they passed me along to people who would know how to answer those questions, and I kind of got passed along up the ladder as it may be, until I was in contact with the dubbing studio in Mexico City that dubs *Glee* for all of Latin America.

05:16 **JLR**: Great, and so what was that like? Once you finally get in contact with the dubbing studio in Mexico, then you go there. You did some on-site sort of research?

05:26 **LB**: Yes, so I did two site visits. I was very lucky to have a good chunk of funding from the University of Iowa to conduct research, and so I was able to afford two different research trips. My first trip happened in the summer of 2014, I believe it was

August, and *Glee* was not being dubbed at the time because it was on hiatus, but I wanted to get a sense for the facilities, for the team, for the process, all that good stuff. And so I went down and spent about a week. I was there, I think, most days. There might be an occasional day where they were working on something that was more under wraps, but if it was something that had already been released in America, then it was something that I could be, I could sit in on. So for example, with my first trip, they were dubbing a movie called *As Above So Below*, I believe is a horror film set in France, it's kind of psychological. And so I got to watch some of that, and then a biopic about...

06:29 **LB**: I don't remember who, Jackie Robinson maybe? I remember it was a Black man and that Dan Ackroyd was in it, and so I was able to, again, observe and just sit in the editor's booth, the guy who actually does the recording and talks to the director through the big window and just ask any question that came to mind. They were just, they were all so friendly. I spent a lot of time with Brenda, who was kind of the office manager, who did a lot of kind of technical nitty-gritty of getting files and sending files off. I was able to do a phone interview with the man, Jesús Vallejo, who wrote some of the Spanish language script of *Glee*.

07:08 **LB**: So we just did a phone interview on that first trip, and then I was able to meet Nicolas Frías, who was a director for *Glee*, as well as a few of the voice actors who perform on *Glee*, and kind of get my feet wet, get a sense of things and get to know them a little bit. Then when I returned in March of 2015, they were fully dubbing *Glee*, and so I was able to go spend a week again in the studio, watching the entire process of them dubbing a single episode, and during that week, I was also able to go visit Jesus Vallejo the translator where he lives about 95 minutes outside of Mexico City, and he let me observe him as he translated the next episode that was gonna be dubbed, so I was able to get kind of soup to nuts full picture of the dubbing process.

08:00 **JLR**: That's great. Yeah, you really got to see all of the different elements, and it's one of those things for industry research, the getting the access is hard enough, but then them being allowing you to be so open, to get the different access to the processes and answering all of your questions, I think is... It's great.

08:19 **LB**: I think it was helpful to have them getting those emails from each person along the way saying, "Please help Laurena." As a scholar, I wasn't out to do any kind of journalistic gotcha. I was very non-threatening, I didn't even have my PhD at the time, and even now in subsequent research that I did in Miami, again, they seem to

struggle to understand what it is that you're trying to do, because to them it's just a job. It's a profession that they're good at and they care about, but they don't always understand why it might be of interest to an academic.

08:56 **LB**: And so I had to send them this article, and tout my references as someone who can be relied upon, to be respectful in a professional setting, to respect whatever boundaries are put up, so some content that you can't access. There was one day, for example, that New Art was working on a dub of one of the *Fast and the Furious* movies, and they said, "Do not show up on Wednesday, you will not get in the building, we are under lock and key." But both companies were very friendly. Once they understood that I was not a threat and that I was just kind of there to observe and explore and understand, it's just people who I think are understandably flattered that someone cares about what they might perceive as being mundane work.

09:47 **JLR**: Right, for sure. So you mentioned that one of the things that seems to be a gap is industry professionals not fully grasping why you are interested in knowing about this work, if you don't work in this work. So how did you explain it, or even generally, how would you explain what is the importance of this work from a scholarly perspective, why study the actual production process of a dubbing of a show?

10:14 **LB**: I think part of what's missing from so much scholarship in production studies is attention to translation. Production studies has considered global media flows, but the actual translation process kind of gets glossed over unless you specifically study translation. Translation studies often don't come from a place of looking at translation as a verb, as an action. Translation studies are often based on the text, on the translation as a noun, and so what my research does is not to just look at producers, the scriptwriting, the process, and not just look at the final product, but putting those two together to see what is happening behind the scenes, what are the kinds of norms or expectations or constraints, what are the factors that shape what they can or cannot do, and then given all those factors, how does that shape the ways that identity are constructed?

11:16 **JLR**: Right, I think it's really interesting because you are bringing in two fields that are interested in ostensibly similar things, but from different angles, and what you're saying is like both angles could benefit from learning from another, so Production Studies is interested in the actual processes and the labor and the industry organization of how we get the media text that we consume, but most people are not looking at one of those aspects, which is translation, especially media that travels

around the world. Translation Studies is very interested in the final product but less interested in how we get to that process, and in some way what your work is doing is bringing those two together and having them speak to each other.

11:54 **LB**: Right, and I think the fact that I was able to kind of maneuver my way into the dubbing studio in the first place is kind of a testament to why so much translation studies is so focused on the text, because it is hard to get that access, to have the funds to be able to go and actually do the study, so that might in part explain why people are so reliant on just kind of comparing the original to the translation and to comment on fidelity or to point out things that changed for better or worse.

12:31 **JLR**: Right, so you were explaining how the work started, which is you met the creator of *Glee* and got to visit *Glee*, the set, and then sort of get contacts through there to other people. So in some ways, the practical consideration is that's why you're focusing on *Glee* because it's the one you have access to, and as you mentioned, you don't always have access to it.

12:53 **LB**: Right.

12:53 **JLR**: But are there other reasons why *Glee* works as a very helpful case study for the kind of questions that you're asking?

13:00 **LB**: Absolutely, I don't think I could have picked a better case study. It was kind of a perfect storm and the stars aligned to allow me to have this be my case study. I think before I met the creator, I already knew kind of broadly because I was a couple of years out, I was only, oh my gosh... I was starting my third year of grad school, so I wasn't at the dissertation stage yet. But I knew that I wanted to look at American programming in Latin America, and once I got access to *Glee*, I thought, "Hey, what are the odds that *Glee* is airing in Latin America?" And sure enough, it is.

13:38 **LB**: It is one of many Fox productions that airs on Canal Fox, which airs throughout Latin America. And so, they air any number of shows, and I would imagine that, at a certain point, I wasn't talking to *Glee* people anymore, I was talking to Fox people. And so, Fox people could have passed along and said, "Give Laurena access, please, to translation of Fox programming." And so, I'm sure there were other things that I could have picked, but *Glee* is a show that I watched as a fan. I was familiar with it, I was able to pick up on nuances. So, if I heard a character being performed in a

dubbing studio, I could, with my own subjective position, have a critique of its strengths or weaknesses as I saw them, compared to the original.

14:30 **JLR**: Right, yeah, and as you point out, at some point, you move into Fox and Fox connection to the distribution in Latin America. And it's interesting, not surprising in some way, but interesting, that the studio that dubs Glee for Latin America is based out of Mexico City: New Art Dub. So could you give us a brief explanation of why this is not so surprising? What is the centrality of Mexico for Latin American television?

15:00 **LB**: Yes, so I would say Mexico City, along with Miami and, I believe, Venezuela, have large dubbing industries in development. Mexico's has been around for a long time, so I believe New Art Dub, under its original name, which I don't remember. It was originally created in the 1950s or 1960s, and it was Disney's go-to. So, they got a lot of work that way. And so, while there are a number of dubbing studios in Miami... I'm sorry. While there are a number of dubbing studios in Mexico City today, New Art Dub really has a long history. And so, they are able to rely on that history as evidence of their longevity, of their professionalism, that they can be relied on as a partner in creating texts for a very diverse population.

15:50 **JLR**: Right, so the industrial elements are there too. And then, especially thinking of places like Mexico City and Miami, there's also... They're understood as cultural centers for Spanish-language media in some ways as well.

16:05 **LB**: Yes. Yeah, Mexico City has or Mexico in general is perceived as having the neutral Latin accent, so a lot of the... Even the original productions that you'll find throughout Latin America will be from Mexico. I think, Mexico, Colombia and Argentina, I believe are the primary producers of telenovelas, for example. But Miami, they really have a leg up because their accent... and this is the discourse, and take it with a grain of salt, but that their accent can be understood by anyone anywhere.

16:39 **JLR**: Right, and becomes, for a number of historical reasons, becomes that "neutral accent." There's no neutral accent, but it's the accent that we've gotten used to.

16:48 **LB**: Exactly.

16:49 **JLR**: So, you assume that, "Oh, if he has a Mexican accent, he'll be fine, 'cause everyone can understand it." As opposed to something that is very, very accented and

unusual. So, it helps to have the dubbing studio there, I guess. And even if, I guess, the actors themselves that you hire are not Mexicans themselves, they'll probably be living in Mexico City for a while and they've been in the industry, so they've learned to develop a neutral... "Neutral accent."

17:13 **LB**: Sure. I imagine it is comparable to people who want to be newscasters on CNN, and they have to rid themselves of their Southern drawl or their Bostonian... If you can call that an accent. Those kinds of regional markers.

17:31 **JLR**: Exactly, yeah, you rid yourself of the regional-ness and be able to create a specific voice that is understood throughout.

17:39 **LB**: Exactly.

17:41 **JLR**: So, let's talk about *Glee* specifically. So you mentioned it actually worked out great that this was the case study. What are some things about *Glee* that made it such a fruitful case study at the level of text let's say?

17:54 **LB**: So what makes *Glee* so handy a text to do this kind of analysis of is that it has such a diverse cast. My article focused on, I believe, comparing two different gay men, for example, and how they're represented. I commented on two different transgender characters. So, you're able to have that distinction as well. I believe, one transwoman and one transman. And I believe I also commented on a Black woman and an Asian woman. And so, talking about those elements.

18:26 **LB**: In my larger dissertation, I believe I also talk about the presentation of the character with Down syndrome, and the weird ways in which Santana Lopez's character becomes less Latina in a Latin American setting, because the character of Santana would mock herself in the original as ethnically different by dropping the occasional Spanish word, but in the Spanish dub, it's all Spanish. And so, she kind of loses that distinction. And so, I commented more broadly than in this specific article. But there's just so much to work with, to think through how those identities get represented or re-presented by the translation process.

19:13 **JLR**: Right, so it's interesting. So the dissertation focused on more... The article focuses on race, between Mercedes, who's the Black character in *Glee*, and then focuses on gender, so the two transgender characters, and then focuses on sexuality, or the representation of sexuality through voice as well.

19:36 **LB**: Yes.

19:37 **JLR**: So what are some issues with the dubbing of something like the character of Mercedes and the question of race? And what gets gained, what gets lost in translation there?

19:49 **LB**: Right, so when I... I think I might have met the woman who did the dubbed voice for Mercedes, and she was very clearly not Black, and I happened to ask, "Are there Black voice actors? Do you know of any?" And she said no. I don't know the racial breakdown in Mexico City. I know that Latin America broadly speaking is so very racially diverse. Again, I lived in Costa Rica for two years, and depending on where you went, you had very large populations of Black Costa Ricans. But within the kind of pool of actors that New Art Dub draws from, it didn't seem that they had Black actors, and as I was told... I don't remember who exactly phrased it this way, but they said, "No one here does Black voice." And I'm... Oh, how do I say? I would be troubled, I think, for someone who's not Black to "perform Black voice." That seems problematic, but it also, I think is problematic that they don't have Black voice actors to choose from. So for better or worse, they had a White Latina doing Mercedes' voice, and so she did not sound audibly Black in the way that the original actress does. The original actress has a very deep husky voice and the dubbing actor did not have that at all.

21:24 **LB**: The other way that Mercedes as a character marked herself as Black or as different is in the use of slang in references to herself as Black. But for various reasons, as I outlined in the article, she is kind of not allowed to do that, or not allowed to do that as much in the translation. Because again, you have all these many and competing contradictory rules for what you can or cannot do, and because this one Miami dub—I'm sorry, because this one dub in Mexico City has to translate, be translated for all of Latin America, you can't use any kind of slang. So while Colombia might have a Colombian version of Black American vernacular, that would not be understood elsewhere, same as Mexican might not. And so you have to have very generic language, and in doing that, that in combination with the desire to get really strong lip synchronicity, resulted in many instances in which her references to her blackness got stripped away.

22:32 **JLR**: Right, and I think that speaks to your concern about not being able to account for translation without thinking about this production process. Because someone only looking at the dubbed *Glee* episode would say, "Oh, they chose to make

Mercedes in a White voice," and analyze all sorts of things just from that, but getting to that meant all these different implications. It's a labor issue, there aren't any Black voice actors or employed by this dubbing in Mexico City, and there probably is generally a lack of Black actors in Mexico City just because of its industry discrimination practices broadly. And then the ones who do is a question of, do they perform a "Black voice or not Black voice," and what are the issues with that.

23:18 **LB**: Exactly.

23:18 **JLR**: And then how race gets constructed orally, it's not just the voice, but also the slang. But as you point out, you can't use the slang because it has to be not locally-specific, it has to be regionally-specific. So although these considerations end up explaining, not justifying, but explaining why Mercedes has that voice in the Spanish dub.

23:42 **LB**: Exactly.

23:44 **JLR**: But then the other thing that's interesting about *Glee*, is not only... It's a show that is very concerned with race, with sexuality, with gender, and therefore these things need to be accounted for in the translation, but it's also a show that has songs. It's a musical. So how does this complicate the translation process?

24:07 **LB**: So the two ways in which it translates or complicates the translation process. The first being that the songs are not translated, and so while the episodes are dubbed, when it comes to the song lyrics, Jesús would just use strict translations that would be subtitled onto the screen. And so you're still hearing the original actors, and in some cases, as you would expect, or as you might hope, the voice of the original actor as they sing matches pretty well with the dubbing actor's voice, and so you don't really get... It's more of a smooth transition from dialogue to singing. In other cases, not so much. The other way in which it being a musical affected the process was that when it was first decided that they were going to dub *Glee*, it had not been determined or at least New Art had not been informed of whether or not the songs would be dubbed as well.

25:09 **LB**: And so the dubbing studio, in trying to figure out who might be the voice actor for Kurt or for Rachel or for any given character, they had to make sure that these voice actors could sing. And so the process for casting was that for any given character, they would pick three potential actors and send samples to Fox in Los

Angeles. So somebody at Fox... And I was not able to access these people and figure out exactly why they made the choices they did because I absolutely did not agree with some of the choices. But they chose from the three that they were given, and so they're choosing from a very small pool, preselected pool. They made their choice, and that's who is the voice. And again, that might explain why you have someone voicing Kurt who does not sound like the original actor and whose dynamic with his boyfriend is kind of twisted...

26:08 **LB**: Oh God, it's kind of flipped on its head by the translation, because they cast the show with the dubbing actors. And then after they had been doing some recordings, once they had established that they weren't going to be dubbing the songs, they continued to cast actors for future episodes because they were dubbing from the beginning. And so when you had additional actors introduced on the show and they had to select new dubbing actors for these new characters, they didn't have to worry about who could sing, and so they were able to choose...

26:42 **LB**: They had a bigger pool to choose from for picking actors to again send to Fox to make that final decision. And so what you ended up with, this example I keep referring to, is you have Kurt, who in the original is the kind of quintessential effeminate gay men with a high wispy voice, by contrast his boyfriend in the original is, as I think as one of the women at New Art described it, like any other guy, he does not "sound gay." But in the show, in the dubbed version of *Glee*, because of who they cast in these parts, the more masculine of these two gay men actually has the higher voice in the dub.

27:28 **JLR**: Yeah, and that makes it really interesting that the... Let's say the original cast ends up having... not always matching or not always being the perfect match, because they weren't sure if they had to sing or all these other considerations. And as you move through the show, the voice starts matching better, or once they know different considerations it changes. So it'd definitely, for people like you who very well knew the show, were able to pick up on these differences and how... This is not all to say that anything, because this is a decision of the production process, they don't... They still mean something in the final product. So it means something that in the dub, the masculinity portrayed through their voices is inverted in the case of Kurt, and is it Blaine?

28:18 **LB**: Blaine, yeah.

28:19 **JLR**: Blaine, right? And it's important for us to know how we got to that point. But then also think about what does it mean in and of itself, right?

28:28 **LB**: And of course, people who are watching the Spanish language dub in Latin America, who haven't watched the original un-dubbed English version, they might not have the first clue that anything is different. They might not know that Kurt's voice is actually much higher than it appears to them in the Spanish dub.

28:47 **JLR**: Right, exactly. So now it creates two, or at least three different audiences. Right? Audiences who only watched the English version, audiences who watched only the dubbed version, and then audiences who are able to watch both and notice these kinds of differences.

29:00 **LB**: Exactly.

29:00 **JLR**: Yeah. So one of the things that you mentioned in thinking about how race is translated, how sexuality is translated, in the show, and in the dub, is that for some people, translation of difference (so how do we mark differences from the norm in the process of translation) will require stereotyping. But you call this out as being a problematic contention. Could you explain why some people hold that? Why are they assuming that it has to be stereotyping in translation of difference and why you're pushing back against that?

29:32 **LB**: So I think what I'm specifically pushing back against there was... I think it was the... Oh. Gosh, I believe the woman that I pushed back against was talking about Black stereotypes, and this was after establishing that Black stereotypes with regards to voice tend to be that they don't speak clearly or well. And so stereotypes aren't always inherently bad, but stereotypes of Black voices in dubs are not good. And so to play up stereotypes is to remove them, whichever minority group it is, from the kind of more idealized White hetero-normative masculine ideal.

30:18 **LB**: And so I was really pushing back against the idea that her Blackness could be reconstituted through grammatical errors, as opposed to literally commenting on her race. I'm sure... I would imagine that Jesús Vallejo, the translator, being the very progressive liberal man that he is, could have found a way to re-introduce those kind of race-based comments, maybe with more time or energy. I think even someone as wonderful, as even as someone as big an ally as Jesús, he's got X number of jobs to do, he's got X number of hours to translate an episode, and if he's able to do

something that works with the lip synchronization, it might just not seem like as big a deal to him. That might just be a blind spot for him.

31:20 **JLR**: Right, well, this speaks to another issue generally in studies of translation, which is translation is inherently subjective, and this is something that translation studies points out, and that you point out, but what you're interested in is how does it reflect the values of the translators, and not necessarily in a negative way of saying, "Translators are trying to say something through the translation," but rather their perspective or their view on both the society where the original text comes from and the society that they're translating for, their perspective on that society will inflect how they translate, right? So could you talk to us a little bit about that, and Vallejo, how concerned they were about who they were translating for, and especially how *Glee* who was trying to promote these progressive ideals about sexuality or race, how they were conscious in trying to address those in the translation as well?

32:16 **LB**: Sure. So, one of the things I would point out inherent in the question, is that *Glee* is trying to promote these progressive representations, and they kind of are, but they're also... They rely on a lot of stereotypes, and there are a lot of really cringy moments where they seem to do the opposite of what they're trying to do, and they don't always, they're not always aware of it. So for example, I grilled Ian Brennan when I was interviewing him and I pointed out, you have this great scene in the first season where Kurt's father... Kurt is being called a fag and his father busts in and says, "You will not call my son that." And the kid tries to defend himself like, "I didn't mean... I'm not calling your son a fag. I'm not homophobic." And the dad just calls shenanigans and some says like, "You are absolutely coming after my son, this is not allowed." And it's this great moment that we can really celebrate. But then in the next season, the father comes to Kurt and says, "You know, I talked to his mom, and it sounds like you had a crush on him and you are making him feel uncomfortable." And you've undone all this work by saying, "Be as gay as you want but don't make a straight man feel uncomfortable because that's not okay."

33:33 **LB**: So even the translators, creators... I think it'd be hard-pressed to find someone working in production who sees all of those things and where they're going and the effects that they'll have. And so even a show as progressive as *Glee* is gonna have some problems in terms of how it represents different identities. Given that, it is still a very diverse show. It's a very diverse cast dealing with a lot of issues having to do with diversity and the lived experiences of diverse people. And so when it's translated by Jesús Vallejo, who has lived in the United States for a few years and is an

upper class educated white man, he carries that identity with him into the translation, and so he is not homophobic and he is not racist, and therefore neither are *Glee*'s audiences. He seemed to take for granted that we're living in a kind of post-closet world.

34:26 **LB**: For example, I was asking him about gay stereotypes in Mexico City, and he said, "Oh, we don't have like... There are no gay stereotypes." And I said, "So you didn't know Kurt was gay until he came out in the fourth episode?" And he thought about it and he said, "No, I knew right away." Exactly, because the gay iconography that he's speaking in this high breathy voice and he's got the pretty boy hair and he looks like a little Hummel doll. He had to kind of... In talking to me, he became aware of... That maybe for all of his claims that Latin America is not this beautiful post-race, post-closet haven for all people. And so I think that was something he had to selectively confront. He wasn't always... It didn't always occur to him to maybe pay as much attention to these things as someone with multiple degrees in gender studies would.

35:24 **JLR**: Right, yeah, and even... 'Cause we talk a lot about biases, especially now, we're talking about biases as a way to get at structural issues, but it's... Sometimes the bias works in the opposite direction. Like Vallejo... The issue there was that he already imagined that the society or the audience that would be watching *Glee* was already on board with there being an openly gay character. Or there being a transgender character in the later seasons and so on and so forth, and that might not be the case. The people who are watching the show might not be thinking about those things until they are confronted with the show, so the way he's translating and assuming that audience is already on board... Already speaking these implied or implicit perceptions affects in some way how the translation gets done and also how the translation gets taken up by audiences afterwards, right?

36:18 **LB**: Exactly.

36:20 **JLR**: So it's really fascinating to track those things. Okay, so where is this work going then? So, you said the article is in some ways sort of the greatest hits of the dissertation in thinking about race and gender and sexuality, and where has this work gone since in the last, I guess, three years?

36:44 **LB**: So this project hasn't gone as far as I would like, just the kind of cruel reality of the current job market and funding available to do this kind of research. I was not

able to carry on my research until last September. I was able to go down to The Kitchen in Miami and kind of... I was hoping to do a comparable study, but the show to which they gave me access was a translation of South Park, which I know I watched as a child. I could probably name the four main characters, but I'm just... I'm not literate in it in the way that I am with *Glee*, and so I feel like that wasn't the optimal experience. Originally, my plan had always been to do a trans-local comparison of the three main sites in which American television might be dubbed into Spanish. So Mexico City, Miami, and Spain. And so after meeting with The Kitchen in Miami, they very helpfully, very friendly, very friendly bunch. I told them about my hopes to go to somewhere in Spain to study dubbing and they said, "We have a Kitchen in Spain. Go see in Madrid. We will help you out." And so I was gonna go there the first week of April of 2020.

[chuckle]

38:01 **LB**: And that did not happen... So...

38:03 **JLR**: Yeah.

38:05 **LB**: And who knows when it will be safe to do so. But I guess my interest in my research questions, I'm kind of keeping those in the back burner, I'm looking forward to a day when I can safely travel to Madrid and continue this line of questioning and wrap up, all nice with a bow, the three main locations for translating American programming into Spanish languages and seeing how those compare, ideally coming up with maybe some best practices. I don't know to what extent translators in Spain or Miami or Mexico City talk to each other, but it might be interesting to see what can be done to develop a richer audio tapestry in a dubbed program.

38:57 **JLR**: Right, yeah, for sure. And also, once you move... When you went to study The Kitchen, it brings up an earlier point that you made about the show, and which shows you have access to or don't have access to. So, it's interesting that the show itself will help the kind of questions and insights that you can draw on. And your familiarity with that show.

39:19 **LB**: Exactly.

39:19 **JLR**: And I guess even like medium. Because *Glee*, a lot of the insights come from knowing that it's a musical. Thinking about whether the singing voice and the speaking voice will match for the translator, but then *South Park* is an animated show.

It's one of those things where the lip matching is helped a little bit by the fact that there's not that much lip moving in animation. The repetitive opening and closing. So even dubbing for animation will add another dimension to the kind of questions that you're asking about difference and how do you convey that solely through the voice.

39:52 **LB**: Exactly.

39:53 **JLR**: For sure. I guess you started to get at this, with the pandemic... But I wanted to ask about recent developments both in the world and in scholarly fields, that are helping your questions, that are getting you to rethink the project or add to it?

40:15 **LB**: Again, very unfortunately, due to the circumstances of where I've been in my career, I haven't gotten to really sit in this research as much as I'd like to. So I know I've gathered resources to read, I've done the second research trip. I was hoping to do the third. I think the only real translation-related project I've been able to take up more recently is in an upcoming book chapter I have in an edited collection. I look at responses to *Parasite* as a translated text in America, because *Parasite* came out, it's that Korean film, it was subtitled and not dubbed, and it won not just best international film at the Oscars, but best film. People responded on Twitter very angrily to different degrees, not only about, should foreign films be winning best film in America, because the Oscars are supposed to be, apparently, American.

41:17 **LB**: But this debate that became a little more mainstream about subtitles versus dubbing, and the racist rhetoric that came into it. So, this isn't something that came out so much in the study, in the article that we're talking about today, but part of the, especially, my dissertation is, why subtitle versus dubbing, and issues of cultural imperialism, that one is more or less imperialistic than another. Why might a country choose to dub versus subtitle? And so, it became... There's a flash point of popular cultural conversations in the United States about the merits of dubbing and subtitling. I thought it was very fascinating to see how those played out.

42:05 **JLR**: Yeah, for sure. And I think the other player aspect in here that we think about a lot, at least more recently, is Netflix, is becoming now the behemoth not only in streaming media, but also having an entry into dubbing, and into subtitling, because it has all of this original content, but that is trying to get at an international audience. So, it's trying to... So, it's mapping onto all of these other existing networks of dubbing and translation. Right?

42:36 **LB**: Yeah, I would absolutely love... And I feel like I know someone who knows something, so I have to tap into that moxie again. I would love to get access to Netflix dubbers and learn about that process at a big-picture scope.

42:54 **JLR**: Maybe that's the next project, thinking about Netflix and translation...

42:58 **LB**: Definitely, I'll make a note of that.

43:01 **JLR**: As a behemoth, yeah, there you go. And oh, you mentioned this as a setback, definitely, for your book project. But it's also an interesting divergence, which is, what is happening with dubbing during the pandemic, which is, you can't probably travel there. But as we're recording this now, not in the same room, there might be some aspects of the dubbing industry that can be done from home, and people are probably adapting to that. So then, I don't know what's happening in dubbing in the pandemic. There's all these considerations, how they would do their own booth, and then, I'm assuming from what you describe, part of the process is the director is like they're recording a song, the director is giving them notes, and pausing, and recording, and so on and so forth. So, you'd have to develop some way to do that virtually as well.

43:51 **LB**: Yeah, and they were different. I will say, the dubbing of *Glee* in Mexico City, it was a large recording booth, and so, the dubbing actor stands with their script in front of the TV, so they're able to see the actor that they're supposed to synchronize with. And the director has a little table in the corner, so he's got a script, he is actively directing every line. And then, on the other side of the window, you have the little booth with all the tech, where the guy tells them, like, "Speed it up, slow down, go again." He plays it back for them, all that jazz. So, those were very distinct roles. What I've observed, the dubbing of *South Park* in Miami, it was just the one guy. It was a tiny, little recording booth, where the actor or actress would go in, kind of the size of a phone booth, and then, the engineer, I guess you would call him, was doing all those roles together. And I don't... I find myself wondering now about that kind of choice. I think, with an animated series like *South Park*, lip synchronicity becomes a much easier role. I wonder at that kind of choice and how that plays out.

45:16 **JLR**: Yeah, the architecture of the studio itself.

45:18 **LB**: Right.

45:19 **JLR**: How that helps or doesn't help too, yeah. Alright, is there anything I haven't asked that you wanted to mention about the article, about dubbing, about any of the things we talked about?

45:33 **LB**: Just this idea that you can't divorce the product from its production, that you can't just study a translated text. You have to study the myriad factors that went into producing that specific text, that you need that kind of context, which again, can be very difficult to access. And I'm very lucky and grateful to have achieved that.

45:58 **JLR**: Alright. Laurena, thank you so much for joining us in the podcast.

46:02 **LB**: Thank you, I look forward to hearing the final product.

[closing credits music]

46:09 **JLR**: This episode of the Global Media Cultures podcast was produced by me, and edited by Alan Yu. Opening music by Podington Bear. Closing credits music by cloud mouth. This project is supported in part by the School of Arts, Technology, and Emerging Communication at the University of Texas at Dallas.

The Global Media Cultures podcast introduces media scholarship about the world to the world. I'm Juan Llamas-Rodriguez. Thank you for listening.