Revisiting Toury.
Translation Tendencies

Juan José Martínez-Sierra
Universitat de València

Abstract

In this article a reflection is proposed on whether purely descriptive attitudes in research can continue in an indefinite way or the moment for prescriptive behaviors has arrived. Besides, reference to the Manipulation School is made to offer a complete and critical summary of norm theory, making frequent allusions to the field of audiovisual translation. Finally, the term tendency is suggested not only as an intermediate step between a strategy and a norm, but also as a useful tool to carry out research centered on the search for translation regularities.[1]

Key Words: tendency, norm, description and prescription, Toury, translation

1. Manipulation School and norm theory

I will begin our discussion with a brief reference to the Manipulation School, and later focus on norm theory, which is something that makes sense given that it is a theory which is developed within this model. The first vagueness that must be dealt with has to do with the fact that the *Manipulation School* is the subject of some terminological debates, because it is a model that is also known as *Descriptive Studies or Polysystem Theory*. In any case, as indicated by Marco (2002: 25), the experts seem to agree on calling the paradigm *Manipulation School* (although some do not consider it a *school* in the strictest sense).

With the object of completely and representatively summarizing the main ideas that are found in the Manipulation School, it will suffice to bring up the following Hermans quote (1985: 10-11)

> The group is not a school, but a geographically scattered collection of individuals with widely varying interests […]. What they have in common is, briefly, a view of literature as a complex and dynamic system; a conviction that there should be a continual interplay between theoretical models and practical case studies; an approach to literary translation which is descriptive, target-oriented, functional and systemic; and an interest in the norms and constraints that govern the production and reception of translations, in the relation between translation and other types of text processing, and in the place and role of translations both within a given literature and in the interaction between literatures.

Moreover, as Marco also concludes (2002: 33-36), it is a model that shows a series of defects that are detected together with the virtues that flow from the quote above such as, for example, not be able to completely cover the literary translation study field or the faint interest shown in Linguistics.[2] Authors such as Díaz Cintas (2005: 17) even point out the contradiction that shows a desire to avoid being prescriptive in practices such as subtitling, in which the very introduction of subtitles implies an inevitable level of prescriptivism. He is also critical of the fact that the model avoids evaluating and analyzing translation errors, which, according to him, besides reducing possible research venues, separates it from the teaching field, widening the breach between teaching and research. In a similar way, I realize that it casts a doubt on where the line is drawn between *descriptivism* and *prescriptivism*. That is, to what point can researchers limit themselves to stoically witness failed solutions? Can the audiovisual discipline advance without voices that, besides describing what occurs (current, extended practice), indicate what is to be done in order to improve what is described?[3] In any case, such

reflection will not be undertaken here, since I understand that this would be to question the theory with which we are dealing, something that would without a doubt surpass the marked boundaries and, thus, will be left for future reflection (could, perhaps, a mixed line be considered?).

Regarding norm theory, it should be noted that, although it is one of the main theories developed in the descriptivist paradigm, both models are not synonymous. In other words, the descriptivist focus should not be reduced to norm theory. Furthermore, the two concepts should not be confused, seeing that descriptivism constitutes a working methodology, while norm theory is precisely that, a theory.

According to Hermans (1999: 73), the descriptive perspective considers norms as study objects. This perspective tries to theorize and analyze their nature and the way they function and affect translation practice. However, it is not about establishing rules, norms or guidelines regarding the way in which the translator should proceed, something that would imply a prescriptive attitude.

I have spoken about *descriptive orientation* as one of the defining factors of the model at stake. In his time, Holmes divided Translation Studies into two separate branches: pure (theoretic and descriptive) and applied. In his 1972 scheme, he sub-divided the descriptive sub-discipline into three classes: studies oriented toward the product, function or process. Critiques aside, the *norm* concept formulation is derived from the study of the process or, more specifically, from the decisions and restrictions that characterize the process, according to Ballester (2001: 15). For my part, I do not consider the orientation toward the product or the process as two exclusive ends, because I think that there is a continuum between the two concepts. A descriptive work can study the result (product) of the translation process (i.e., the translation itself), just as it can examine the process and, within it, pay special attention to the decisions made by the translator (or translation team) of, for example, a television series, and even to the restrictions typical of the translation mode involved.

As Marco attests (2002: 29-30), the followers of the Manipulation School have advocated for the need to describe reality instead of intending to influence it or change it, which, as Toury well points out (1995: 15-19), would not preclude that there is no relationship between *theory* and *description* or that the conclusions reached by means of description and explication are not useful in the applied branch of Translation Studies. The objective is, then, to describe and explain the facts and, from empirical observation and its findings, formulate general laws about translator behavior. In my opinion, it is perhaps here where the borders between *description* and *prescription* are blurred, seeing that the formulation of these laws could be interpreted as a response to a prescriptive attitude, something that would result to be paradoxical. In any case, if we consider translations as products of a certain culture, we can investigate the reasons why translators have opted for some options and not for others, while attending to the conditions under which this selection has been carried out (works such as that of Veiga 2006 try to offer a better understanding of the essence of the translator's choices when it comes to translating the humor of an audiovisual product). When this observation makes the existence of regularities of behavior clear, it will be possible to consider that certain norms (established in the target culture) have governed the translator's work. As we will see later on, one would do well to wonder in what moment these regularities start to become norms.

From an audiovisual perspective, Karamitroglou (2000: 14) reminds us that the defenders of the descriptivist paradigm consider Translation Studies to be a *normative science* (*normative* not in a *prescriptive* way, but, as Chesterman 1993 clarifies, in the descriptive sense of *science that studies norms*). Karamitroglou also tells us that the term *norm* was coined in order to describe a wide range of social phenomena that follow a distinct pattern, and not just to deal with linguistic or translational phenomena. Regarding the latter, Marco (2002: 32-33) points out that, despite having emerged as a productive and key element in the descriptive branch of Translation Studies, the *norm* concept is not exclusive to these studies. In fact, it is a common

notion in the fields of Humanities and Social Sciences, particularly in Psychology.

Karamitroglou (2000: 14) adds that audiovisual translation seems to be particularly dominated by a strong presence of norms due to the impact of mass media communication in the audiences[4] and to the fact that, as Ivarsson (1992: 66) comments, viewers are creatures of habit. It is an area in which norms act, as Karamitroglou concludes, not just on the decisions taken at the lowest textual level, but also on the decisions that are made beyond that level.

Despite what I have stated so far, I conjecture that the fact that we resort to norm theory with the goal of theoretically sustaining a descriptive work should not be interpreted as that theory is capable of explaining everything that occurs in translation. Its value, then, has to be considered in its own measure and with precautions.

Let us now define the *norm* concept and review the different types of norms that have been detected both in the general translation framework and in the particular field of audiovisual translation.

2. The *norm* concept

2.1 The origin of the concept

As is read in Hermans work (1999: 73-74), Levý's generative model (1967) characterized translation as a decision-making process that emphasizes the fact that, in each level, the translator should choose one option from a series of alternatives knowing that each decision will affect the following. On the other hand, the decisions as a whole and the alternatives considered and discarded are what determine the form of the final text. In the last analysis, Levý's interest in decision making underlines the power and responsibility of the translator.

Thus, assuming the existence of a series of decisions that the translator makes and that are not completely predetermined or completely idiosyncratic, Hermans asks what is it that leads the

translator to opt for certain options and not for others, and not doing it in a sporadic manner, but rather regularly. He finds the answer to his question in Popovič (1970: 79), who, in referring to Levý, comments that translation involves a comparison of two sets of linguistic and discursive norms and conventions: on one hand, those that reside in the source text and, on the other hand, those which prevail in the target culture (or in a part of it). According to Hermans' understanding, in those cases in which it is possible to choose openly, the translator will decide for one option, and not for another, being aware of, and responding to, certain preferences and expectations that they know exist in the target culture. The regularity in making these decisions in different texts will facilitate the establishment (in a non-prescriptive sense) of patterns that, in turn, will affect the expectations of the recipients of the translated texts. This is how norms are set up and are, therefore, part of the answer of why a translator tends to make certain decisions instead of others. On this point, we cannot ignore works like that of Fawcett (2003), who, after the results of his study, claims the need to remember that, in audiovisual translation, as in other translation varieties, there is room for human randomness, opposing those who defend the idea that the *invisibility* of the translator is essential, in western translation practice.

At the end of the seventies, Toury introduced the notion of *norm* when referring to the regularities observed in translator behavior within a determined sociocultural situation, a notion that, since then, has had a great influence on the work done. His work (written under the title *Descriptive Translation Studies*) is derived from the Manipulation School paradigm. As Baker (1998: 163) reflects, Toury's interest (inspired by Even-Zohar's work) lies mainly in making statements about that which is made up of the translator's behavior, and not about that of which it should be made up; in other words, describing, not prescribing. In order that these statements are seen systematically and do not constitute a random selection of observations, they should be shown in a generalized way that applies to a particular class or subclass of phenomena and that can be tested intersubjectively (i.e., objectively between different subjects). The

notion of *norm,* therefore, gives Toury a descriptive category that permits him to make these non-random and verifiable statements about types of translator behaviors.

It is necessary to consider the place where Toury situates norms, in order to understand the concept at stake. For him (1995: 54), sociocultural restrictions have been described on a scale in which at one end there are general and relatively absolute *rules*, while at the other we find pure *idiosyncrasies.* In the wide space between both ends there is a series of intersubjective factors commonly called *norms,* which in turn form a *continuum* along the scale, with grey areas existing between various restriction types. Using this approach, we can understand rules as more objective than norms and idiosyncrasies as more subjective than norms.

Like Baker (1998: 164) and Hermans (1999: 75) point out, what Toury does, basically, is to echo the well known *langue* vs. *parole* dualism (such as in Saussure 1992) or *competence* vs. *performance* (such as in Chomsky 1965), and to introduce an intermediate level that allows him to investigate what is typical, and not only that which is or can be. That is, norms operate on an intermediate level between competence and performance, where *competence* refers to the group of options that the translator has at their disposal in a given context and *performance* to the subgroup of options that the translator chooses in real life. In this framework, norms will constitute a new subgroup of options that the translator regularly chooses to use in a particular socio-historical context.

As previously pointed out, the concept of *norms* is not confined to the Manipulation School and is a common notion in the fields of Humanities and Social Sciences. Besides, despite what the term *norms* could suggest, they are understood here (as by Toury) not as a group of options that are prescriptive in nature, but rather as a category for descriptive analysis. In the translation context, on the other hand, Toury considers that the concept of *norm-governed behavior* applies to all types of translation, not just literary, philosophical or biblical (1995: 57), and we could add to all general

modes of translation, thus justifying the application of this concept to areas such as audiovisual translation.

2.2 Norms as a social construct

Logically, norms do not just appear out of thin air. According to what Toury writes (1995: 55), individuals acquire norms during the socialization process, a process that, on one hand, is not exempt from penalties. Within the nucleus of a community, norms also serve as criteria by which we evaluate actual behavior instances. It is obvious, he adds, that to assume the existence of norms only makes sense in situations where different behavior types are possible (translation is a clear example), provided that the selection between them is not random. Thus, if and when a norm is truly active and effective, we will be able to distinguish a regularity of behavior in similar recurring situations. As Baker (1998: 164) points out, in the context of translation, then, norms will be the solution regularly chosen by translators in a particular socio-historical context.

Toury (1995: 55-56) understands norms as key elements in the establishment and maintenance of social order and states that, if they did not exist, extreme free variation would occur, because all decisions would be made individually. This does not mean that it is not possible to find a *non-normative behavior*. Indeed, as Hermans (1991: 162) explains, failure to comply with a norm in particular cases does not invalidate that norm. However, Toury notes, to opt for a type of behavior that forcefully deviates from the norm will normally result in a price to pay (1995: 55). That price, he continues, can be as small as the mere need to submit the final product for revision, or so steep that it will come to affect the translator's reputation, which is why non-normative behavior is usually an exception in real practice. On the other hand, we must not forget that when we look back on certain behavior of this type we can see that some have come to implement changes in the system, so much so that their study is also an interesting field (1995: 64).

2.3 Characteristics of norms

Toury (1995: 61-63) does not deny the importance of the difficulty that surrounds the detection of translation norms, which basically resides in two inherent features in the notion of *norm* and, therefore, are not exclusive to Translation Studies, which are their *sociocultural specificity* and their *instability*. On the one hand, a norm does not necessarily affect all sectors of a society. Likewise, neither will it inevitably apply across cultures. On the other hand, norms, just as any cultural aspect, are unstable and changing entities by nature, something that, for authors such as Diaz Cintas (2005: 14), frees us from prescriptive and authoritarian positions typical of previous theoretical trends. As Toury adds, on occasions, norms change quickly; at other times, they are more permanent, thereby lengthening the changing process. In fact, it is not unlikely to find three types of norms in one society competing among themselves: (1) norms that dominate the nucleus of the system and, consequently, the translation behavior in the dominant group, (2) the remains of previous norms and (3) the beginnings of new ones suspended in the periphery.

Alluding to Mukařovský (1970 [1936]), Hermans (1999: 75) mentions an aspect of norms that can somewhat relate to their dynamic character. Specifically, he states that different viewers or readers can evaluate the same work in different ways depending on the norms that are projected, which will not necessarily be the norms initially followed by the author. From this, I assume that the projection of diverse norms in a particular translation by different receivers may have a similar effect to that of the dissimilar interpretations of a text depending on the distinct knowledge of the world that each receiver previously possesses.

As Hermans (1999: 80) relates, the term *norm* refers to both a regularity of behavior (i.e., a recurring pattern) and an underlying mechanism that accounts for this regularity. This mechanism is a psychological and social entity that mediates between the individual and the collective, between an individual's intentions, choices and actions and the beliefs, values and preferences of the collective.

Norms are related to interactions between people, especially to the degree of coordination needed for continued and more or less harmonious coexistence of members within a group. Norms fulfill a regulatory social function due to the fact that they contribute to the stability of interpersonal relations by reducing the uncertainty, since they allow for behavioral predictions based on past experience and on predictions of future similar situations. It is precisely this predictive character of norms that, to my understanding, give the power of prediction to the results of descriptive research.

Similarly, Hermans (1999: 72) thinks of translation as social action. For him, learning to translate involves a socialization process, since it means learning to handle (and perhaps manipulate) translation norms. In this social context we can understand that a community adopts certain distinct norms compared to those of another group. Consequently, the notion of *correctness* (in terms of behavior, linguistic use or translation) constitutes a social, cultural and ideological construct, so that translation *correctness* is a relative concept from a linguistic, social, political, and ideological point of view (1999: 83-85). However, he continues (1999: 95), since the notion of *correctness* that is derived from norms has a cultural nature, it is thus possible to affirm that a correct translation will be that which responds to the expectations of what a *good* translation should be. Furthermore, this could trigger an interesting reflection on teaching translation in multilingual contexts.

According to what Baker (1998: 164) suggests, the concept of *norm* gives priority to the target text and, as Hermans (1995: 217) reveals, it has effectively replaced the *equivalence* concept as an operative term in Translation Studies. Moreover, as Baker (1993: 240) reminds us, the concept of *norm* assumes that the main object of analysis in Translation Studies is not an individual translation, rather a coherent corpus of translated texts.[5]

Finally, regarding the study of translational norms, Toury (1995: 65) suggests that norms are not directly seen (they are abstractions) and that only products are available, having two main sources from which to reconstruct the norms:

1) textual: the translated texts themselves, for all kinds of norms, as well as analytical inventories of translations […] for various preliminary norms;

2) extratextual: semi-theoretical or critical formulations, such as prescriptive 'theories' of translation, statements made by translators, editors, publishers, and other persons involved in or connected with the activity, critical appraisals of individual translations, or the activity of a translator or 'school' of translators, and so forth.

The fact that the norms constitute abstractions seems to raise doubts about how to classify them. In this sense, Hermans (1999: 85) agrees with Toury in the impossibility of observing norms directly. For him, the formulation of a norm and the norm itself are two different things. In other words, tracing regularities in different texts and understanding them as a result of the decisions and choices made by a translator does not tell us why they made such decisions or choices. Meanwhile, Nord (1991: 103-105) agrees that norms (she speaks of *conventions)* are not explicitly formulated. Therefore, she proposes a few sources that are considered more or less useful for identifying where (and how) they operate: (1) the analysis of existing translations, (2) translation reviews, (3) theoretical approaches, (4) user reviews and (5) multilingual comparisons of translations.

For my part, I think that is entirely possible to identify tendencies (a term that I will define later) and even norms by means of more or less extensive research, and to find a pragmatic and cultural explanation that can justify their use and presence in different audiovisual products. Therefore, in general terms we can adopt *norms* as a valid category for the descriptive analysis of audiovisual translation. As is nicely expressed by Diaz Cintas (2005: 14, my translation)

> what is suggested here is to carry out a *mapping* of what really occurs during translation, in order to avoid falling into absolute theorization. Only from real examples, that exist and

have been integrated into the target society, can we draw conclusions that let us advance in our knowledge of translation. And norms are, precisely, the tools that help us in this task.

2.4 Types of translation norms

The normative paradigm establishes an emergent theory that, in its present state, is not yet completely consolidated. It is not my aim in this article to make an extensive theoretic description of the *convention, norm, rule,* or *law* concepts. For my purposes, it will be sufficient to explain some terms that I deem capital. First, I will enumerate the types of translation norms proposed by Toury (the precursor), in order to then name those formulated by other authors.

2.4.1 Toury's norms
Toury (1995: 56-61) distinguishes three types of translation norms, which determine the type and breadth of equivalence seen in the translations:

1. *Initial norm.* This norm has to do with the basic choice between sticking to the requirements and norms of the source text or to those of the target text. In other words, the initial norm makes up the orientation either to the source system or to the target system, keeping in mind that a continuum exists between both orientations. In my view, it is possible to connect this initial norm with the notions of foreignization (adequacy) and familiarization (acceptability).
2. *Preliminary norms.* These norms have to do with two types of considerations often connected to each other. On one hand, the existence of a translation policy[6] and, on the other, a few considerations that affect the degree of tolerance that exists in regards to indirect translation (i.e., the translation of a translation).
3. *Operational norms.* These are norms that direct decisions which are made during the very act of translation, governing

that which will probably stay invariable and that which will vary. These norms are divided in turn into two subgroups: *matricial norms* (that govern "the very existence of target-language material intended as a substitute for the corresponding source-language material […], its location in the text […], as well as the textual *segmentation*") and the *textual-linguistic norms* (that "govern the selection of material to formulate the target text in, or replace the original textual and linguistic material with") (1995: 58-59).

2.4.2 Critique of Toury's Model and other Proposals

Critique. We cannot ignore that some of Toury's approaches have not escaped criticism. Below I will allude to some of Hermans' remarks – one of the authors that have tried to go a little further than what is postulated by the Israeli author –, since I broadly coincide with his evaluations. After that, I will also echo the most recent considerations of Diaz Cintas, another author who has criticized certain aspects of this model.

According to Hermans (1999: 76-77, 79-80), the most problematic aspect of Toury's theory, both conceptually and terminologically, is made up of the exclusionary notions of *adequacy* vs. *acceptability* of the initial norm. Hermans proposes as an alternative the substitution of the *acceptable* vs. *adequate* opposition for that of the *target-oriented system* vs. *source-oriented system.* Regarding the latter, I would like to indicate that, from my point of view, instead of speaking about absolute opposition, it seems more appropriate to talk about two ends of a continuum. For example, in an audiovisual production (such as a sitcom) we could find a combination of both methods.

Hermans specifies that it would even be better not to think of the initial norm as a forced choice between two poles, but rather as a norm in which multiple factors converge. For example, the vision that is had of the original text, if that text or other similar texts have been translated previously, if the translation is done for import or export, what the native language of the person in charge of carrying it out is,

or for what audience or for what purpose it is done (information that, in short, would constitute a complete translation brief).

Ultimately, Hermans, with undeniable functionalist background, highlights a number of issues that must be, in my opinion, considered when working with translation norms. As he well states, if we consider translation as a sociocultural activity, trying to conceptualize it in terms of a choice along a single axis does not seem to make much sense.

Another aspect that Hermans criticizes is that Toury had not explored the theoretical side of translation norms in more depth, since Toury basically focuses on the matter from the point of view of the translator and conceives norms as *constraints*, ignoring their role as *templates* that offer *ready-made solutions* to certain types of problems. In other words, Hermans understands that, when a translator opts for a particular option, they make a choice from an inventory of available solutions. Choosing an option means excluding the alternatives, although they remain dormant as a source for future possibilities (1999: 88). This view, I believe, justifies studies that crave to identify a series of translation tendencies or norms that contribute to the advancement of the discipline.

In addition to Hermans, we find another source of criticism in Diaz Cintas (2005: 14-15), who points out a series of limitations of the *norm* concept, such as: (1) it is true that norms' changing nature facilitates their analysis in texts from years past, but it is also real that it does complicate their study in contemporary texts, precisely due to that constant change, which is why he proposes to subtract priority to the historical dimension;[7] (2) the application of norms seems to produce better results when various films and not just one, are analyzed in a contrasting way, which in turn implies vast investigations that may require a team effort, minimizing individual research activity;[8] or (3) the danger of generalization that entails the desire to try to identify norms that have been in action too long, as well as the possibility that general conclusions can always be questioned given that it is a concept that, taken to the extremes, could equate the individual level with the normative level. Facing this last

obstacle, Díaz Cintas suggests diminishing expectations and amplitude to norms by means of searching for them in more homogeneous and manageable corpora (how many?). Consider that, as he reminds us, in the audiovisual field norms can be applied not only by translators on an individual basis (operational norms), but also by other agents involved in the process, such as studios, distributors, dubbing adaptors and directors, etc. (preliminary norms), something that, *a priori,* seems to facilitate the observation of normative regularities if we center the analysis on, for example, commercialized products for a particular television channel.

However, Díaz Cintas judges the former as minor objections that have not undermined the importance of the concept at hand. As he reflects, the success of the *norm* concept rests on the fact that it gives a clear objective to the researcher and directs them towards that which they must find. The objective, then, is clear, and one avoids falling into an erratic search. Rather than seeking to assess the equivalence of two translated texts, the importance lies in highlighting the reasons why, and the meaning that it entails in the sociocultural context in which the translation was carried out. Again the question that comes to my mind is whether it may be possible that this behavior could lead us to a dead-end in this discipline.

To all of this, we can add two reflections. First, one could argue that some contradictions are seen in Toury's work or, at least, certain questions that suggest non-confluent paths. One example of this is found when Toury (1995: 58) defines *preliminary norms* as instructions given by a publishing house. Let us remember that he defines these norms as "those regarding the existence and actual nature of a definite translation policy, and those related to the directness of translation". At first glance the term *policy* catches my attention, since this could suggest the existence of a rule (prescriptive and binding) and not just a norm (that the translator can opt to follow or not), keeping in mind that the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, for example, includes the following meaning of the term *policy:* "2. *a***:** *a definite course or method of action* selected from among alternatives and in light of given conditions *to guide and determine present and*

future decisions. b: *a high-level overall plan* embracing the general goals and *acceptable procedures* especially of a governmental body" (2013, online, italics are mine). In similar terms, the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines the word *policy* in the following way: "*plan of action*, statement of ideas, etc *proposed* or adopted by a *government*, political party, *business*, etc." (1989: 957, italics are mine). Moreover, the instructions (or *plan of action*) that a publishing house dictates in its style guidelines for the delivery of a translated work or any other type of manuscript are mandatory, and not something that the translator or author can decide to follow or not. This mandatory character, therefore, places the aforementioned instructions in an area that is more like rules, and not that of norms.

Secondly, Toury (1995: 61) concludes that norms are what determine the type and extension of the equivalence that a translation shows. To this he adds that "The study of norms thus constitutes a vital step towards establishing just how the functional-relational postulate of equivalence […] has been realized – whether in one translated text, in the work of a single translator or 'school' of translators, […]". So, he seems to consider the establishment of equivalence from the study of norms in a single translated text or from the work of a single translator. This is to some extent striking if we consider that one of the keys to identifying a norm is its recurrence. So how can we talk about recurrence from the study of just one single translated text? On the other hand, it is true that we can study regularities (or rather idiosyncrasies) in the behavior of a single translator (who, of course, will not necessarily, although probably, have to adjust to common procedure), but why? Does it really make sense to create a catalog of the regularities of each translator (as do some case studies that we see presented in various conferences or even published) if subsequently, as it seems to be the trend, these catalogued regularities are not compared with those by other translators and, thus, be able to come to detect norms? The answer that conforms to logic and that is most plausible suggests to the contrary, and surely Toury understands it this way as well, in the sense that, in order to be able to speak about norms, the path to follow

passes by the analysis of a large corpus of translations. In this context, the question again comes up: can we speak about norms by means of studying one single translated text or the work of one single translator?[9] The answer, again, leads us to question works that, for example, in the area of audiovisual translation, speak of norms in the study of one single film (without, at least, accompanying the word *norm* with adjectives like *possible* or *probable*, which is, in the very least, rash). From there, the question that follows is: if, in such cases, we cannot speak of norms, whether qualitatively or quantitatively, what can we talk about? To begin with, the term *idiosyncrasies* is the first one that jumps into the fray, but we can agree that, *stricto sensu*, an idiosyncrasy is not a norm, not even a weak one. So, what can we do then, in order to give a response to research (master or even doctoral thesis, for example) that tries to look for regularities and go beyond the realm of idiosyncrasies but whose scope makes it, at the very least, daring to speak of norms given, for example, that the degree of conformity to which Toury refers is unknown? It is true that he comments that "Even idiosyncrasies […] are seen more as personal methods of (more) generalized behavioral updating than as deviations in an completely unexpected direction", but he also warms that "idiosyncrasies […], in their extreme, constitute groups-of-one" (1995: 69).

Finally, I would like to add a critique to those already set forth, which has already been outlined in previous paragraphs. There exists a clear agreement on what *norms* are and about their usefulness in the descriptive translation study, at least where operational norms are concerned. But, to clearly define in what moment a recurring strategy stops being so and becomes a norm is a question that is still to be resolved.

Other proposals. Here, I will schematically gather some of the proposals that have tried to fill the possible gaps left by Toury's approach (since it does not extend beyond the micro-textual level, which can and should be done, perhaps the cultural context being the

limit) and that, on the other hand, reflect the lack of unanimity on this question:

- As Baker (1998: 164-165) summarizes, in the last few years a series of authors have tried to explore some of the theoretic aspects of the notion of *norm*, first distinguishing between *norms* and *conventions* (the latter does not have a compulsory character and only expresses a preference) and then between *constitutive norms* and *regulatory norms* (the former concern what is accepted or not as a translation and the latter the type of equivalence that the translator chooses or achieves).
- Meanwhile, Chesterman (1997: 64-70) has an even finer spin and distinguishes between *expectancy* (that reflect the expectations that those receiving a translation have on what it should be like) and *professional norms* (that govern the methods and strategies of the translation process). Chesterman's focus is, just like Toury's, descriptive. Chesterman and Wagner's contributions are also of interest (2002).
- Nord (1991), who speaks of *constitutive* and *regulatory norms* (or *conventions,* according to her terminology). Apart from these two conventions, in a subsequent work by Nord (1997) we find an expanded proposal. Nord (who describes *conventions* as social regularities formulated in a non-mandatory, tacit manner, based on common knowledge and expectations, 1991: 96) considers the role conventions play in the translation's functionalist approach. She (1997: 53) comments that, within scopos theory, Reiss and Vermeer limit themselves to the conventions of gender. However, she understands that there are more types of conventions that are to be considered in the context of functional translation (1997: 53-59): *genre conventions*, *general style conventions*, *conventions of nonverbal behavior* and *translation behavior*.
- Finally, I do not wish to forget about Rabadán's contribution (1991: 56-57), who, within Toury's group of operational

norms, adds *reception norms,* which, considering the type of audience that is expected (according to the translation brief), determine the way in which the translator works.

As is easily seen, we find ourselves in a terminological debate, since the authors refer, on various occasions, to the same concept but use different labels.

3. Rules, norms, and idiosyncrasies

Here I will focus on reviewing the differentiation Toury makes between *rules, norms,* and *idiosyncrasies.* Keeping their potency in mind, Toury (1995: 54-55) classifies the different constraints that affect translation in its sociocultural dimension along a continuum on whose two ends are placed, on one side, "general, relatively absolute *rules*" and, on the other, idiosyncrasies (individual and even sporadic actions). Norms, for their part, occupy the entire realm between both extremes, and we can find norms that are stronger or more objective (closer to rules) and others that are weaker or more subjective (almost idiosyncrasies). Now, as Toury himself recognizes, the limits between all these types of restrictions are diffuse, which obviously hinders their classification. Each concept, as well as its position on the scale, is also relative.

The change in status, as Toury points out (1995: 54), can also come from the temporal axis, so that a mere whim can penetrate and reach a normative status, or a norm can become so valid that it converts into a rule, or the reverse.

As Wexler indicates (1974: 4), "The existence of norms is a sine qua non in instances of labeling and regulating; without a norm, all derivations are meaningless and become cases of free variation". Obviously, the existence of norms makes sense only in situations in which different behaviors are possible and in which the selection of these behaviors is not random. We can distinguish, hence, regularities of behavior in recurring situations of the same type (Toury 1995, 55).

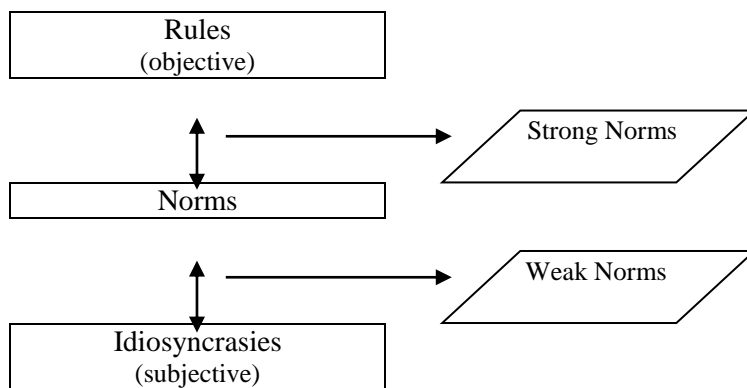In short, Toury's proposal can be summarized graphically as follows (Figure 1):

Figure 1. Regularities according to Toury.

4. The borders between concepts

The difference between a *norm* and a *rule* is, *a priori,* easier to guess, given that the latter can, in fact, appear explicitly verbalized and described in manuals, style books, or the like. However, where is the border between an idiosyncrasy and a norm? Toury himself (1995: 54) leaves the topic open, recognizing that "The borderlines between the various types of constraints are […] diffuse". In other words, we can understand that a norm becomes a rule when it acquires an expressly normative character (in the mandatory sense). But, in what exact quantifiable moment, does an idiosyncrasy convert into a norm, even a weak one? Is it a question of a dozen repetitions? Of fifty? One hundred? It is precisely in this context that it can make sense to speak about *tendencies*. Leaving quantitative matters aside, Figure 2 illustrates the possible norm derivation process:
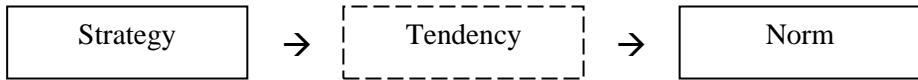
Strategy	→	Tendency	→	Norm

Figure 2. The norm derivation process.

We can establish a clear parallel between these concepts and those that Toury sets forth in the shortlist shown in Figure 1. Thus, a strategy would imply individual behavior, idiosyncratic, understanding by translation *strategies* the "procedures, conscious and unconscious, verbal and non-verbal, internal (cognitive) and external, used by the translator to resolve problems" (Hurtado 2001: 637).

We share the difference between *technique* and *strategy* made by Molina and Hurtado. According to them, techniques describe the result obtained, and strategies are related to the mechanisms used by the translator during the translation process with the goal of finding a solution to a given problem. In other words, techniques affect the results, and not the process. Thus, "strategies and techniques occupy different places in problem solving: strategies are part of the process, techniques affect the result" (2002: 507-508). From this standpoint we can conclude that, unlike techniques and like norms, strategies (being behavior patterns, according to Zalbalbeascoa's considerations 2000: 120) are not directly seen. Norms cannot be directly observed either, as Toury suggests when he qualifies them as *abstractions* (1995: 65). Nord, on the other hand, agrees that norms (or *conventions,* as she calls them) are not formulated in an explicit way (1991: 103-105). Therefore, by their procedural nature, it seems to make sense to include the concept of *strategy* in the equation of Figure 2, and not *technique*.

In Figure 2, *norm* would be equivalent to the *norm* concept as proposed by Toury. As we see, an intermediate concept appears between strategy and norm: *tendency*. If we go back to the parallels between the content of Figure 2 and that of Figure 1, it is easy to

understand that by *tendency* we could understand a potential *norm,* whether it be strong, weak or just a regular norm (Figure 3):
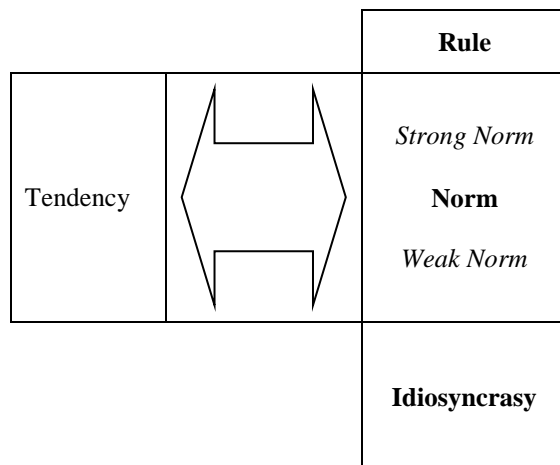
		Rule
Tendency	⟷	*Strong Norm* **Norm** *Weak Norm*
		Idiosyncrasy

Figure 3. Parallels between the concepts of Figures 1 and 2.

Some may want to argue that term *tendency* is unnecessary, or at least redundant, being synonymous with *norm*. Now, the problem is not qualitative as much as it is quantitative, and maybe the key to this debate is to reply to the question of whether norms are a question of normativity (obligation) or of frequency. Toury seems to refer to both possibilities, since, on one hand, he uses terms such as *validity*, *normative*, *force*, *status* or *binding*. On the other hand, he also refers to *regularity of behavior*, which clearly denotes a quantitative approach (*regularity* understood as *frequency*). In fact, Toury (1995: 56) refers to the "regulative capacity or norms" as a counterpoint to the translator solutions based "on an entirely *individual* basis" (idiosyncrasies) and that will give way to "extreme free variation". Therefore, from the first point of view (normative character, in the sense of mandatory fulfillment) despite their name, it could be understood that a norm does not have a normative nature, but rather points to an inclination, and that which has a normative character is a rule. From this perspective, *norm,* then, could be synonymous to

tendency (although, in fact, the border between idiosyncrasy and norm is especially blurry). Now, if we stay there, we run the risk that our interpretation of norm theory would be incomplete or biased. From the second point of view (frequency), we can distinguish between that which is extemporaneous, that occurs only once, twice, or thrice, but no more, the subjective and personal behavior of a specific translator (an idiosyncrasy), and that which presents a major behavior regularity and constitutes, then, a norm. Norms, in this case, are recurring not necessarily with a high degree of fulfillment,[10] but with sufficient fulfillment to call them as such. That right there is the key: what can we understand by *sufficient*? It is in this second scenario where the term *tendency* (understood as a possible norm, sensed but not sufficiently supported by appropriate research both in qualitative and, especially, quantitative terms) takes on special meaning.

5. Translation *tendencies*

In my view, and based on what has so far been set forth in this work, in the treatment of norms there are two preliminary questions that need to be addressed. The first suggests, inevitably, a work that surpasses the reach of this article and that could, by itself, be the object of analysis not just of another article, but even of a large research project that is done with time, personnel, and even funds. Specifically, the question that has been raised in previous pages is: after how many cases can we start talking about a *norm*? I have talked about translators opting for a solution regularly. But, where is the line drawn between sporadic behavior and regular behavior? I have also alluded to the analysis of extensive corpora, but how can these corpora be defined quantitatively? As I have said, the answer cannot be found in this article, and further reflection and research would be necessary in this sense. However, I believe I am in a situation to be able to affirm that it is necessary, or at least convenient, to face this question, and a possible first step I propose is to speak about

tendencies (regularities) detected in the translation of an audiovisual product or even in a written text,[11] something made possible not just by means of changes seen between two texts, but also by means of that which remains unchanged. These tendencies provide glimpses from which extend the number of, for example, chapters in a television series (or of films) examined and thus be able to begin to check which tendencies show a clearly recurring pattern in the translation of that television show (with which we could start talking in terms of *norms*) and which of them display a more sporadic nature (which would remain in the frequent application of a particular strategy[12]).

The second question is the following: what is the preliminary stage of a norm? In part, I have already answered this question in the previous paragraph. As I understand it, it starts with a series of individual decisions that a translator makes or, in other words, of a series of *translation strategies.* Once we see that same translator (or team of translators) regularly uses a certain strategy in the translation of similar cases (provided that the process is carried out under the same sociocultural parameters), we would be able to start to consider the possibility of a *translator tendency* (operational in this case). When we find the recurring behavior of a certain tendency we will be able to think about a *translation norm* even though, as already noted, this article will not go on to quantify the number of repetitions necessary to call it a *norm.*

Let us talk then about *tendencies,* a term, incidentally, that is not new and that we can already find in literature. Toury (1995: 67-68) echoes Jackson's research (1960) in the field of Sociology, and contains a classification of norms along a curve called the *return potential curve.* This curve describes the intensity of the behavior tolerated in the nucleus of a social group. First, is the set of *basic norms,* which are mandatory and of maximum intensity; secondly, *secondary norms or tendencies*, which are common but not mandatory and are of medium intensity; and, finally, *tolerated behavior*, which is of minimal intensity.[13]

Any work that seeks to study regularities (usually operational) becomes an arduous task that pushes the researcher to work in quicksand. As Toury (1995: 62) indicates, "it is often more a matter of apparent than of a genuine identity", not to mention the inherent instability of norms and the fact that they are not directly seen. However, this must not prevent the researcher carrying out their work with integrity and without, say, shallowness. Toury himself (1995: 63) warns that "real-life situations tend to be complex", but finds that "this complexity had better be noted rather than ignored, if one is to draw any justifiable conclusions". In fact, he himself recognizes that "The only way […] is to go beyond the establishment of mere 'check-lists' of factors which may occur in a corpus". Nevertheless, if we seek intellectual rigor in our research, it does draw attention the way Toury (1995: 64) addresses the question of how an idiosyncrasy becomes a norm: "an idiosyncrasy which never evolved into something more general can only be described as a norm by extension, so to speak."

Again, the moment that an idiosyncrasy converts into a norm is unclear. The question is not if we want to work in this penumbra, but rather if it is possible not to do so. Toury himself calls attention to the instability of norms and the tenuous boundaries separating idiosyncrasies from norms (1995: 62). That being the case, does it make sense to work in tight and dual/binary terms in the sense that a given regularity is either an idiosyncrasy or a norm? Is not it worth it that the norm researcher, given the difficulties of their study that we have gathered, moves on to an intermediate realm that is a little more flexible, not to mention safer, as may be that of tendencies?

And why a safe realm? A tendency is nothing more than a hypothesis, a suspicion that a norm exists. Graphically explained (see Figure 4), it is a utilitarian, working concept that indicates that one has managed to glimpse the tip of an iceberg, but that is not yet in a position to contemplate it in its entirety. A tendency, therefore, can be the announcement of a strong norm, a weak norm, a norm or even perhaps a rule (if, for example, it is discovered that there existed a written, binding text). With the impossibility of proving with rigor

whether or not a norm exists (maybe because the reach of the investigation carried out does not permit it, as occurs, for example, with case studies based on a single translated text), the term *tendency* allows us to announce that, probably, the sighted recurrent behavior will be a norm (weak or possibly strong), recognizing at the same time (and hence adjusting to the necessary research rigor) that in order to verify the suspicion further research is necessary (with a larger corpus and over a longer expanse of time).
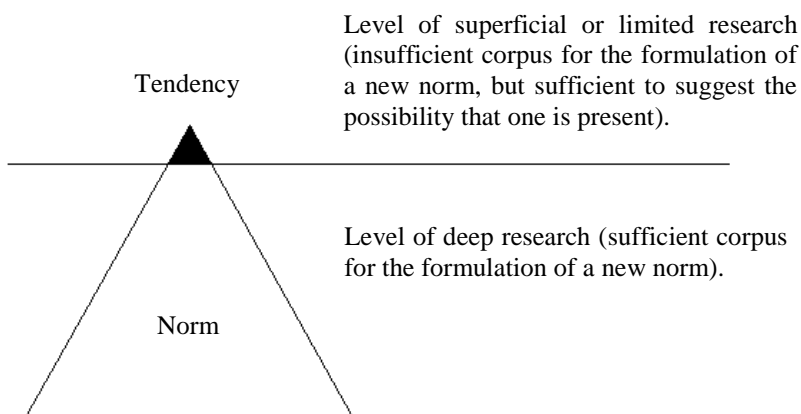
Tendency

Level of superficial or limited research (insufficient corpus for the formulation of a new norm, but sufficient to suggest the possibility that one is present).

Level of deep research (sufficient corpus for the formulation of a new norm).

Norm

Figure 4. Translation tendency and norm.

I have already mentioned the need to consider two preliminary questions in the treatment of norms. First, how many cases of recurrence are necessary before we can speak of a *norm*? I already indicated that the answer lies beyond the scope of this paper (is it perchance a mere statistical issue?), provided that it is possible to find one. In the meantime, it could be convenient and useful to talk about *tendencies* (regularities) detected in the translation of a certain text. Second, what is the state previous to a norm? The starting point entails a series of individual decisions (idiosyncrasies) that a translator makes or, in other words, a series of translation *strategies* (again, as Hurtado defines them 2001). Once we observe that a single translator (or group of translators, connected or not among

themselves) regularly applies a particular strategy in the translation of similar cases (as long as the process is carried out under the same sociocultural parameters), we will be able to start to consider the possibility of a translation *tendency* (operational, in this case). When we verify the recurring behavior of a given tendency it will be possible to think in terms of a translation *norm*, even though, as already noted, this article will not try to quantify the number of repetitions that is necessary to be in a position to talk about *norms* (not even weak ones).

6. Final words

In this article I have tried, essentially, to accomplish two tasks: first, to summarize the norm theory in order to offer the reader a complete and useful picture of it and, secondly, to put two questions on the table that I consider important enough to be asked and which I will summarize below.

The first question for reflection affects the descriptive paradigm in its entirety. In general terms, in the last decade research in fields like audiovisual translation has mainly been descriptive. It is a field that has been feeding off descriptive studies for years, aimed at the necessary mapping out of the discipline. Still, once the map is complete, if that is possible, what is the next step? Will we apply the pendulum law and regress to prescriptive behavior? Also, is it enough to describe so that the discipline advances or, besides explaining what has been done would we have to indicate how it should had been done and how it should be done in the future? And, if so, who should be in charge of that indication? Besides, and mainly thinking about the formation of new translators, it appears to be reasonable to assume that teaching has an important, although not necessarily unique, prescriptive component.[14] Therefore, is there perhaps a middle ground where description and prescription are not exclusive but rather complementary in the field of research, just as it surely already happens in many classrooms?[15]

Secondly, the concept of translation *tendencies* has come up as an intermediate step between strategies and norms, and as a useful working tool. Obviously, despite the discussion on these pages, there are still some aspects to overcome. The most important (and complex) is possibly the fact that the term *tendency* does not resolve the quantitative problem, since we can equally question when an idiosyncrasy becomes a tendency and when a tendency becomes a norm. In other words, and as was suggested earlier, we must define what is understood by *sufficient*, with the possibility of making use of the label *tendency* until a level of (agreed) sufficiency is reached. However, although clearing up this mystery seems necessary and pending, paradoxically it is maybe an impossible endeavor from sheer objectivity, not to mention that it could also be questioned who and with what authority should designate the borders between categories. In spite of all that, it continues to seem reasonable to think that this concept constitutes an extremely useful label for cataloging the results of the research (even the individual one) that seeks to make its descriptive nature clear and that wants to emphasize its intention to go beyond the detection of a few recurring strategies, at the same time avoiding to talk about norms ductily and even boldly and without neglecting the prudence that scientific rigor requires.

There are a few voices that request, in their right, that Translation Studies be respected and well regarded academically. However, how can we demand this respect if, at times, from the core of the very discipline itself rigor to obtain such recognition is neglected?

I am aware that there is no shortage of readers who might wonder what the problem is with using the term *norm* in any descriptive study, independent of the number of cases analyzed. Why propose another term? For my part, I have explained my reasons, but I would like to add one more in the form of a question: if it is enough to analyze two or three movies in order to talk about *norms,* what sense does it make to conduct corpus-based research? To what have research groups, which have spent years analyzing films in search of regularities, dedicated their efforts?

Lastly, these reflections do not try to reinvent a solid concept that already exists in translation theory, nor to propose a new theory, only to highlight and detail that which Toury exposed, in order to try to adapt it to the actual research practice without losing one iota of its value. So, what is written here is intended to be a reflection that leads us to consider our own work as researchers, and that leads us towards a rigorous research practice that meets minimum standards of accuracy and does not end in a catchall where anything goes; of course, if we want that, in these times that are so mired in description, the study of translation is considered a serious and scrupulous activity that does not become bedfellows with underhanded practices where *anything goes*, a risk that, perhaps too often, we fall when it comes to studying possible translation regularities. In short, we have two options: (a) the permissive one, relativizing – even trivializing – or making flexible norm theory so much so that it comes to the point of distorting it to accepting any old minimally repetitive behavior as a *norm* and (b) the strict one, an accurate reading of the theory, thanks to which we can adapt our language to the reality that we have on hand and be honest with the level or depth reached by our research, talking about *norms* only when there is sufficient scientific evidence to do so. Let each one choose the path they prefer.

Notes

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[1] Thanks are due to Frederic Chaume for sharing with me his reflections on this topic.

[2] The manipulation school initially arose in order to deal with the matters of literary translation. However, there has not been a lack of authors who have applied this approach to the field of audiovisual translation, although, as Cattrysse (1994: 43) points out, it was not until the late eighties when this model was first applied to this field.

[3] It seems that this question is starting to be addressed. In fact, some somehow prescriptive research projects have been launched, such as *Digital Television for All*, funded by the European Union. This project aims, among other objectives, to evaluate the quality of the subtitles in order to later offer some *recommendations* (for more information, see Romero Fresco 2009).

[4] See Martínez Sierra (2008).

[5] In the field of audiovisual translation, this seems to be ignored on occasions when we are presented with alleged norms from case studies that are reduced to a single film. At the other extreme, projects like *Forlixt 1, The Forlì Corpus of Screen Translation*, being completed by members of the Dipartimento di Studi Interdisciplinari su Traduzione, Lingue e Culture of the University of Bologna (Forlì), are since 2003 a good example of the scale that an investigation can reach, among other purposes, in searching for regularites and operational norms. The body of this project is currently made up of 99 films (for more information see Valentini y Linardi 2009). In any case, it again seems reasonable to establish (if possible) quantitatively and, therefore, objectively in what moment we can properly speak about *norms*, seeing that at the moment it seems to be a question that responds to subjective and even arbitrary criteria, something that would undoubtedly decrease the theory's validity.

[6] It is difficult to separate the term *policy* from a prescriptive viewpoint.

[7] In any case, it may be assumed that there will certain norms that, to change, will need a considerable period of time, which may minimize the effect of the aforementioned changing character.

[8] This argument is valid for supporting the appropriateness of *tendencies* as an intermediate stage between *strategies* and *norms*, as they enable individual or small group research.

[9] At this point, it is necessary to specify that, obviously, the detection of an already existing or recognized norm in a single text is an entirely legitimate research activity, taking into account that, in this case, a new norm would not be proposed.

[10] Keeping in mind that "behaviour which does *not* conform to prevailing norms is always possible too" (Toury 1995: 55), and that "non-compliance with a norm in particular instances does not invalidate the norm" (Hermans, 1991: 162).

[11] Let us remember that the concept of *norm-governed behavior* applies to all translation varieties and modes.

[12] As Valdés (1999: 147, my translation) reminds us, "a translator strategy is the result of decisions made by the translator during the translation process". See also Hurtado (2001), who distinguishes between *strategies and techniques*.

[13] Based on the definitions of the concepts *basic norms*, *secondary norms or tendencies* and *tolerated behavior* it seems possible to establish a parallel between these and those of *rule, norm* and *idiosyncracy*.

[14] On one hand, let us not forget that, as was previously mentioned, authors such as Díaz Cintas (2005) believe that the descriptive model has certain characteristics that seperate it from the teaching field. On the other hand, however, it is possible to identify certain aspects of the paradigm that can be applied perfectly to the teaching of translation, such as, for example, the predictive nature of norms and Hermans' (1999) suggested use of them as solution templates to problems.

[15] Authors such as Chaume comment that "we have resorted to the polysystemic paradigm by being the only one to date that has shown enough systematically and solidly so as to offer the methodological bases needed to undertake rigorous research", and that "this should not be the only scientific reference, since the study of translation norms has a limited horizon" (2004: 94).

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Juan José Martínez-Sierra
Departamento de Filología Inglesa y Alemana
Universitat de València
Avda. Blasco Ibáñez, 32
46010 Valencia
Spain
juan.j.martinez@uv.es