

From Betty, la fea to *Ugly Betty*. Circulation and adaptation of TV narratives

De Betty, la fea a *Ugly Betty*. Circulación y adaptación de narrativas televisivas

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the adaptation of the Colombian telenovela *Yo soy Betty, la fea* to the U.S. TV series *Ugly Betty*, in order to examine the process of symbolic construction of ugliness from the ethnic status of its main character. To do so, we assessed the discourse developed around Betty Suárez, who serves as a vehicle to develop a narrative of the national identity on the Latino population in the United States. Through this analysis, we attempt to show that rather than a physical transformation, the character in this TV narrative has a socio-cultural change, her integration into a space that initially rejects her by her non-belonging. The study concludes on the importance of using socio-cultural approaches to address the representation of otherness in the media.

Keywords: television, immigrants, narrative semiotics, media representations, Latino immigrant population, United States of America

RESUMEN

En este artículo se examina la adaptación de la telenovela colombiana *Yo soy Betty, la fea* al serial estadounidense *Ugly Betty*, con el propósito de examinar el proceso de construcción simbólica de la fealdad a partir de la condición étnica de su personaje central. Para ello, se evalúa el discurso desarrollado a través de dicho personaje, Betty Suárez, que sirve como vehículo para elaborar una narrativa de identidad nacional sobre la población latina en Estados Unidos. La serie permite visualizar la propuesta televisiva de una sociedad figurada que constituye una alternativa de construcción simbólica de un grupo social como el latino. A través del análisis narrativo se explica la reformulación de las oposiciones simbólicas en ambos mundos (latino y anglo) lo cual dará paso a la paulatina aceptación de Betty no solamente en términos de su no-belleza física, sino también de su condición étnica y social.

Palabras clave: televisión, inmigrantes, semiótica narrativa, representaciones mediáticas, latinos, Estados Unidos.

•How to cite this article:

Murillo, S. y Escala, L. (2013). De Betty, la fea a *Ugly Betty*. Circulación y adaptación de narrativas televisivas. *Cuadernos.info*, 33, 99-112. DOI: 10.7764/cdi.33.531

INTRODUCTION

This article aims to describe the way in which television products created locally are adapted for global consumption. Specifically, we want to explain how TV serial narratives work. A soap opera, a television series, an advertisement, a film or a talk show are examples of stories circulating through the media that have the ability of projecting a world culturally possible. We seek to reflect on how TV series, by building possible cultural worlds, invite the audience to interpret that world from their cultural repertoire. The understanding of that world is part of the cultural system of the subject, a system determined by the conceptual schema of the referred subject¹ (Eco, 1979).

To advance on this objective, we will use the telenovela *Yo soy Betty, la fea* and its adaptation for the mainstream consumer through the television series *Ugly Betty*². This case is particularly interesting, because of how it was translated into a different cultural space, particularly how it evolved from a local product to a global one. In the serial narrative we can clearly see the processes by which a story that was created in a precise cultural environment becomes –through a mass media like television– a product that can be adapted for the sale and consumption, as a cultural object. Such a process is characteristic of the functions of the industry and the television market, allowing that a telenovela as *Yo soy Betty, la fea* goes through three different models of sale and adaptation: (i) Its broadcast in the original version; (ii) its adapted local production, i.e., the adaptation to each country made on the original script, and (iii) its imported and adapted production (for example, the broadcasting of *Ugly Betty* in Italian television, or the broadcasting of the Mexican version, *La fea más bella*, for the Spanish audience) (Medina & Barrón, 2010, p. 88). This study is focused on explaining the second model (adapted local production), which will help visualizing how the adaptation always comes accompanied by structural and content changes. Such transformations will be observed from a narrative semiotics.

The adaptation phenomenon, or audiovisual translation, requires a process through which a series of narrative references finds its counterpart in a new cultural system. The story of *Yo soy Betty, la fea* has circulated by different cultural systems, in which it has been reconstructed and adapted using as a basis the Andersen fable, “The ugly duckling”. Through such narrative

a culturally possible world is built, in which, there is an “ugly girl” – according to specific aesthetic canons (‘specific’ refers to aesthetically possible and correct for each cultural system)– who thanks to her intellectual skills, manages to ascend in an environment where she is naturally rejected. It is important to note that in academia there are various studies on the processes of adaptation that this telenovela has had. Two interesting examples are the work of Abhijit Roy (2011), which seeks to explain the characteristics of television market in India, the consumption patterns and the narrative, and of Adriaens and Biltereyst (2012), which examines the globalization of the format and the consumption of the Latin American telenovela in Europe, as well as the way in which national identities are represented in the process of adaptation.

The study case, as mentioned above, is the United States adaptation of the telenovela. In that version there are two relevant content changes: i) Betty is built like the daughter of undocumented Mexican immigrants in the United States; and (ii) her ugliness is built from her ethnic traits, which in turn serve as a vehicle to differentiate her from other ethnic groups. These transnationalization characteristics of cultural products allow reflecting on the ability that TV fiction has in mediatizing and shaping social phenomena such as migration, interculturalism and multiculturalism. This observation leads to the following question: What are the processes that allow the narrative creation of television texts that mediatize a social phenomenon, such as migration and cultural difference?

Undoubtedly, the process of adaptation of the studied telenovela to the TV series can operate as an indicator of a growing demand in the United States of television products of Mexican and Latin American origins. Above all, of an indicator of the growing demand for creating ethnic niche markets (Piñón, 2012) in the Spanish-speaking population in the United States, which often identifies or nominalizes as Hispanic, Latino, Mexican-American or Chicano.

Finally, such process of adaptation or cultural translation³ leads to questioning about which are the textual symbolic processes in which such constructions are supported. For the purposes of this paper, we sought to analyze the symbolic processes of construction of signs embodied in the story of *Ugly Betty*, which allow

the emergence and the reading of a possible Anglo-Latino world where there is an “ugly” girl who, moreover, is the daughter of a Mexican immigrant without legal documents (“illegal”, as they call it in the TV fiction) in the United States.

In the following sections of this article we examine the relationship between the concept of ugliness and the identity of Latino immigrant population in the United States, which could be considered a national identity, understood as a specific way in which a social identity is discursivized by language and other semiotic systems (Adriaens & Biltreyst, 2012, p. 6), to analyze the reconfiguration of the relationship between such identity (through the use of the character Betty Suárez) and the dominant American society (represented by her work environment and the characters that inhabit it). Betty’s relationship with her environment builds a possible world, structured from binary relations of symbolic opposition (beauty-ugliness, Latino immigrant-White and protestant world, among others). To this end, the empirical reference of our analysis consisted of the 23 episodes of the first season of this series⁴. We consider that this season accurately reflects not only the main characteristics of television series in general, but also the structural and content transformations and re-appropriations of a product, in terms of cultural representations, during its process of adaptation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The telenovela has been and is a genre that has expanded, globalized and transnationalized⁵ through the construction of stories and themes that allow their circulation worldwide (Uribe, 2008). *Yo soy Betty, la fea* is one of the most significant sales cases, both of the original version and of the format. The way in which this cultural product was adapted and appropriated in different places of the world is a clear example of the process of cultural transnationalization. It was sold to the companies Televisa, Sony Pictures Television International (SPTI) and Fremantle Media, which in turn sold their versions in many other countries, including the United States, through the ABC network. The Colombian telenovela was originally written by Fernando Gaitán (also author of other worldwide success telenovelas, such as *Café con aroma de mujer*) and produced by RCN in 1999. It tells the story of Beatriz Pinzón Solano, a girl with a conservative education, smart,

idealistic, timid and physically ugly. Betty gets a job at a company called *Eco Moda*, in charge of Armando Mendoza. Upon her arrival, she is stigmatized as an “ugly” woman, since her appearance does not match the other girls that work there. She falls for her boss, but he cheats on her, and when Betty discovers the deception, she leaves her job. Betty returns physically and emotionally transformed (more “beautiful”), so the previous rejection becomes acceptance.

According to the actress in the main role, Ana María Orozco, this telenovela was a narrative “turning-point” in Colombia, since:

In Colombia, a country battered by infighting, this telenovela is an escape from reality in a nation overwhelmed. Betty does not speak of guerrillas and drug trafficking. It is a parallel world to everything else that happens in the country. I think that this is a way to make people forget reality, while we laugh a little over half an hour or an hour a day. (El Universal, 2005)

However, the importance of this story is that, outside Colombia, it became a transnational cultural product which allowed many cultures to identify with the character and plot. The daily interactions of the characters showed different aspects of the social reality of Colombia which, nevertheless, are shared by different nations: The notorious social, economic, racial-ethnic, educational, and gender differences. Such issues contributed to the process of transnationalization.

The fundamental premise of the story is that the protagonist chosen to be the main character must be a beautiful person (according to the paradigms of beauty of each culture) that is “ugly” with the use of braces, thick glasses, old and loose clothes, among others. These elements contribute to her dramatic physical transformation at the end of the story. According to Santander (2009), the main conflict in which the original story unfolds was not strange for Colombians, since from the mid-1990s various melodramatic series frequently addressed the story of a man in love with a fickle and materialistic woman, who would entrust his sorrows to a socially maladjusted woman, with whom he will eventually fall in love⁶. Santander states that the substantial difference is that Fernando Gaitán noticed that there was a difficulty in the Latin American audience to relate with the male suffering. Thus, he could see that Betty embodied the feminine ideal of heroin, of sacrifice for love; “Her behavior, in

fact, is not attractive, sensual or liberating, but loving, protective and conservative” (Santander, 2009).

This is how Betty is accepted as a reality “model” by society, since it makes the transformation of ugliness to beauty plausible (not only aesthetic, but of her own set of values). These traits are those who have allowed the comparison of the telenovela with the Hans Christian Andersen fable “The ugly duckling”. Like the Andersen tale, Betty is the ugly girl in her neighborhood, her work place, the girl who grew up without security and that is despised by men and by society. According to Santander (2009), this characteristic allows Betty to develop her intelligence, i.e., she has no choice but to be intelligent. Such elements construct a possible cultural reality where the viewer has to play the role of protector of the rejected girl.

This narrative model also contributes to the phenomenon of the *glocalization* of TV series, understood as “the interaction between global and local factors that result in distinctive outcomes in different geographical areas” (Adriaens & Biltreyst, 2012). These processes imply, according to the authors, the flexibility that television markets have of integrating local content into global ideas, and the location, used as a synonym for universal content customization. This way, the story was broadcasted in more than 100 countries in its original version, translated into more than fifteen languages and adapted⁷ in more than 22 countries. The following table illustrates the various adaptations of the telenovela, the year in which they aired and the title of the corresponding adaptation.

A feature of the adaptation process is the title’s choice, since this is one of the main reading premises regarding the story and the ugliness. Being a narration, it must be guided through a process of reading about the ugliness or beauty and the values associated with the protagonist. This TV fiction is considered as a narrative, because a series of descriptions are identified in it, as Van Dijk (in Eco, 1979) explains, “they require for each action an agent, an intention of an agent, a state or possible world, a change, along with its cause and the purpose that determines it; to this mind states, emotions, circumstances could be added”(p. 222). This is how television narrative becomes a text that builds a possible world, i.e., a world that has a set of individuals endowed with some features. In such a world, possi-

ble events develop, referring to states of real things or sequences of states of real things, but cultural in their construction. As stated by Eco (1979), “No fictional world could be totally autonomous, since it would be impossible for it to outline a maximal and consistent state of affairs by stipulating ex nihilo the whole of its individuals and of their properties” (p. 185). This means that when anticipating a possible world, it is largely seek to show the real encyclopedic world of the reader.

Yo soy Betty, la fea and its various adaptations allow the reader different extensional and intentional processes⁹, in cooperation with the text, when interpreting this world that describes the existence of an “ugly” or “Latina woman”. A narrative world is not only significant to the extent that a proposition as “ugly woman” or “Latina” can be seen in the world of our experience (intentional problem), but also that the notion of a possible world allows the intentional problems to be displaced to an extensional perspective. Thus, when a narrative text proposes that a feature is worth for an individual in a possible world, and raises certain proposition as true in a possible world, this “means establishing that the text has certain *discursive strategies* to present something as true or false, as object of lie or reluctance (secret), as an object of belief or as an asserted proposition to ‘make believe’ or to ‘make to do’”¹⁰ (Eco, 1979, p. 260). All this is part of the construction of an ideological level in the text, verified through the characteristics of the narrated world and the properties assigned to the subject that performs the actions inside the text.

The above features allow corroborating the need to analyze the operations performed to tell us about a world that is possible, where an “ugly” woman enters a “beautiful” world in which she is naturally rejected because she does not fit into the aesthetic canons of that environment, and yet manages to succeed. Moreover, we need to look into the narrations that by such features manage to go global and allow processes of interculturality from the narrative worlds that they develop. Such processes are decisive in the story of *Yo soy Betty, la fea*, which was sold and adapted around the world respecting different features or characteristics of the possible world that was built in this narrative, and which determine its moral values, as well as its epistemic and ethical system.

Table 1. International official adaptations of the telenovela *Yo soy Betty, la fea*⁸

Country	Producer	Year or production	Title
Colombia (original)	RCN	1999	Yo soy Betty, la fea
India	SET India	2003	Jassi Jassi Koi Nahin No hay nadie como Jassi (<i>El País</i> , 2007)
Israel	SET Israel	2003	“תרעומה יתסא” Esti Ha'mechoeret Esti, la fea (Campos, 2009)
Germany	SAT1	2005	Verliet in Berlin Enamorada en Berlin (<i>El País</i> , 2007)
Russia	CTC Network	2005-2006	Ne Rodis Krasivoy No naciste bella (<i>El País</i> , 2007)
Turkey	Show TV y Kanal D	2005	Sensiz Olmuyor No consigo trabajar sin ti (Campos, 2009)
Mexico	TELEVISA	2006	La fea más bella (Esmas, 2006)
The Netherlands	Talpa/Tien	2006	Lotte (<i>El País</i> , 2007)
United States	ABC	2006	Ugly Betty Betty, la Fea (<i>El País</i> , 2007)
Spain	Tele Cinco	2006	Yo soy Bea (Corina, 2006)
Greece	MEGA CHANNEL	2006-2007	Maria I asximi María la fea (Lagarto, 2013)
Croatia	RTL Televizija	2007	Ne Daj se, Nina No te rindas Nina (Capos, 2009)
Belgium	VTM	2007	Sara (Campos, 2009)
Czech Republic	TV Prima	2008	Osklivka Katka Katka la fea (Campos, 2009)
Philippines	ABS-CBN	2008	I love Betty, la fea (Lagarto, 2013)
Vietnam	Phim	2008	Co Gai Xau Xi Chica fea (Campos, 2009)
Poland	TVN	2008	BrzydUla Ula la fea (Brzydula, s.f.)
China	Televisa-RCN-Hunan Satélite-Nesound	2008	Chou Nu Wu Di La fea sin rival (<i>El Universal</i> , 2009)
Brazil	REDE RECORD- TELEVISA	2009	Bela, a feia Bela la fea (Rede Record, 2010, Bela la feia, 2009)
Georgia	TV TERMETIS (TV11)	2010	Gogona Gareubnidan La chica de los suburbios (Lagarto, 2013)
Arab Countries	SONY	2013	Heba Regel- El Ghorab (Ouriques, 2013)

Source: Own elaboration.

In this regard, the Colombian telenovela and the U.S. series *Ugly Betty* manage a basis story on which a different expression is built. In the two versions, this is the story of an intellectually outstanding girl marginalized by her ugliness. In the last chapters of the Colombian telenovela, she undergoes a dramatic physical change, allowing her to be beautiful and marry the love of her life. In contrast to the Colombian version, in the U.S. series Betty Suárez does not have a physical transformation (although at some point over the last season, she gets rid of the fringe and the braces). Both versions were created under the format that mixes comedy and drama, giving birth to a new hybrid construction that Lacalle (2005) names as *dramedy*. This means that the construction of the narrative universe of Betty, as a global character, is different depending on the context in which it takes place. In principle, there is a strong difference between the symbolic construction of Betty's universe in the Colombian original and its subsequent reproductions. In the U.S. version, that universe (constituted by space, time and subject) focuses on the representation of the inclusion and acceptance possibilities of the "other" --in this case, the Latino population-- in the contemporary American society.

This way, the difference between *Yo soy Betty, la fea* and *Ugly Betty*¹¹ not only lies in the story format (telenovela, that is, a story built from fragments called "chapters" through which continuity is built, or series, i.e., the continuity is determined by macro and micro stories that operate based on two factors: (i) A situation which is always very similar and (ii) a certain number of characters who are main characters), but in the use of the character according to their context. Also, the use of racial and ethnic elements in the telenovela refers to a commercial logic of consumption directed at the Hispanic community, which represents 12.5% of the United States' population. In addition, it is certainly important to analyze how the narrative structure of a television text, in this case telenovelas and *Ugly Betty* series, makes possible to access the ways taken by meaning as a social process of communication in the American media space.

This leads to a final aspect regarding *Ugly Betty* TV series. It is no coincidence that it goes back to the figure of Latino characters to its television constructions, primarily because its media inclusion has increased in the United States. In that sense, the perception on

this population has been significantly modified. This has been seen especially in some television programs of Anglophone networks that have chosen to include these characters in their stories. That is the case of programs that include in their narrative forms Latino characters in traditional networks (NBC, ABC, CBS) or cable (HBO, FOX, Nickelodeon, WB, among others): *The Brothers García* (Nickelodeon, 2000-2003) and *Dora the Explorer* (Nickelodeon, 2000); *Desperate Housewives* (ABC, 2004-); the medical series *Scrubs* (NBC-ABC, 2001-); *Grey's Anatomy* (ABC, 2005-); *Modern Family* (ABC, 2009), and recently *Rob!* (CBS, 2012). These programs have diverse Latino characters, some even in starring roles. This inclusion is largely due to consumption market reasons of what it's called the ethnic niche (De Mora, 2003), that is, the consumption of Hispanics in the United States.

Access to 'generalist'¹² television occurs through four channels that compete for the Hispanic audience in the United States: Univisión, Telemundo, Azteca América and TeleFutura. According to Prado and Delgado (2007), the oldest and which has greater audience among the Hispanic audience is Univisión, which reaches 99% percent of Hispanic population (in its capacity as the country's largest ethnic and racial minority). Telemundo reaches 93% percent of this population and also belongs to the NBC group, while Azteca América reaches 88% of the Hispanic population. Without a doubt, Anglophone networks had to assess how to get part of that 45.5 million Hispanics market. This explains why some networks have dedicated to making adaptations of Latin telenovelas with English versions, and why the ABC network (which ranks fifth within the most viewed networks by Hispanics) incorporated this version in English. Not to forget, Latin America is the main creator of telenovelas in the world.

Earlier references give an idea of why a narrative that builds a possible world based on the social situation of the Mexican-American population can be so successful, especially when thinking on the way in which television fictions helps in the construction of national identities (Adriens & Viltreyst, 2012, Lacalle, 2008) or ethnic identities (De Mora, 2003).

Changes made to the story reveal important data, both in terms of economic uses and symbolic representations, which are indications that allow high-

lighting how this television series has transformed some guidelines regarding cultural consumption. *Ugly Betty* managed to include in new ways two or more communities –Latinos of immigrant descent and American natives– through universal concepts handled in the narration, which have standardized its consumption. This way, it is possible to observe how American networks are paying attention and investing resources on specialized television products for Hispanics, and identifies which genres of this market are attractive for diverse audiences. In turn, these audiences, according to the historical moment, are choosing to consume innovative products which, at the same time, relate to their affective needs and their world in a global reality (García, 2008).

Thus, *Yo soy Betty, la fea* and *Ugly Betty* are examples of cultural products' adaptations that tend to reproduce symbolic spaces through narrative worlds, and that allow to visualize the processes of reading required to update the content of the narrative. *Ugly Betty* is an example of how an adaptation is achieved through different logics: A commercial one, one of historical condition of an unusual genre in the United States; a political one (because of the situation of Latino population of immigrant descent in the United States); and a social and cultural reproduction which allows to observe transnational processes of narratives circulation and media consumption.

The last observation that will be made regarding fiction as a communication product and a system of significance will be to delineate the methodological perspective chosen for television text analysis. It is important to understand the role of media narrative within the communication processes, as well as in the processes of circulation in which they participate as cultural objects. In fact, the need to study the media in relation to cultural processes that are involved in some way in social life has taken great importance in social research. TV fiction is seen as a text generated at a specific time and space, since everything it states and the way it does it, according to Casetti (1999), restructures the surrounding reality. Thus, the television text is as an object with a social function, which builds sense and meaning, generating discourse networks within the space of culture.

Social Sciences and Humanities have lent special interest to understand what culture is, who produces it and how it is produced. Culture, according to Edles (2000), can have three meanings: i) As humanistic, refined activities of artistic elites, (ii) as a global vision of the ways of life of an individual or group, and (iii) as an exchange of a symbols system. These categories correspond to aesthetic, ethnographic and symbolic definitions. The symbolic character of the culture locates it on the extreme side of the natural, covering everything not common to the human being, all that s/he has learned, everything to which s/he has given meaning, observable through certain patterns, and everything that depends on social life, social fields, discourses and rules.

Thus, all social practices are potentially symbolic and, therefore, potentially cultural: Any kind of cultural object and its relationship to society can be examined as a system that produces meaning. That leads to think that a study that involves communication, culture and symbolism needs to be addressed from a semiotic perspective.

Klinkenberg (2006) explains that the task of semiotics is to answer the question about how we know the world, which leads this discipline to deal with the structure of the universe. We have access to the world through a culture's system of knowledge or values and the functions that it has determined to understand it through its units. There is, then, according to this author, a portion of the material universe associated with a portion of the conceptual universe, i.e., the sign "bears witness of a certain structure of the universe (things, feelings, values...), valid for certain people, under certain given circumstances" (p. 50).

Contemporary theorists (Zecchetto, 2002; Eco, 2005; Deely, 1996; Fabbri, 2004) coincide in affirming that semiotics is the theory of signs. For Zecchetto (2002), semiotics is a point of view about reality, "a look at the way in which things become signs and carry meaning" (p. 10), which, however, not only covers the description of signs and meanings, but explains semiosis as "the concrete dynamics of signs in a given social and cultural context". Desiderio Blanco (2006) explains that semiotics should be understood as a scientific project (as defined by Greimas) which seeks to study the significance, how significance occurs and how it is apprehended. Thus, semiotics tries to explain how the world is known, how it is thought, how it reasoned and how signs structure it and give it meaning.

A fundamental contribution in this regard is the one developed by the semiologist Umberto Eco, which aims at the study of the systems of significance. Eco (2005) has devoted special interest to the study of culture through the processes of communication in societies. He says that culture entirely is a phenomenon of signification and communication, and that humanity and society exist only when significance relationships and processes of communication are established (p. 24). On the other hand, the perspective that comes from generative semiotics, represented by authors such as Algirdas Julien Greimas, proposes the study of the logic of sense through the observation of the discourses that take the form of a story (Dallera, 2005). This perspective, which comes from a structural language trend, is useful for any discourse analysis. Klinkenberg (2006) classifies such semiotics as prescriptive, since it is based on a model designed to observe a process. For those who study media communication, this perspective is of vital importance, since the construction of the narrative is observable through a formal model that determines the production of sense, regardless of the different substances that circulate in the concerned environment, in this case, television.

To study the texts—the television narratives—from a semiotic model allows observing demonstrations from which a society generates information about itself, creates ways of communication and maintains a collective memory (Lozano, 1979). In that sense, the *Ugly Betty* series, being a text that has a narrative discourse mediated through television, represents society, culture and the different models of the world in constant migration and translation for a process of circulation of texts in different spaces and generates different processes of social semiosis (Verón, 1993).

METHODOLOGY

The object of study chosen is the television text *Ugly Betty*, consisting of the 23 chapters of its first season. The analysis orientation aims to identify a series of elements that generate coherence and meaning into the text. Each of the elements that compose it is oriented to build a level of meaning, which, in this particular text, refers to the relationship between the mainstream world of the United States society

(represented by people working in *Mode* magazine) and the world of 'the other' (represented by Betty, her characteristics, those of her immigrant family and their Mexican culture), and the eventual integration and acceptance of this character in that society.

This analysis deals with the television text as a narrative through which significant ethical values are built, observable through its narrative principles. In that sense, the narrative establishes that there are two levels of construction of meaning: the *ugliness* of the character and its *condition of immigrant descent*. In addition, our approach takes up the generative model of A. J. Greimas (1971). While in previous sections of this text we have made reference to several authors and their analytical proposals concerning semiotic and communication, we have chosen as a methodology model the one of Greimas, of structural semiotics, for two reasons:

- a) The text is a narrative or a story and has structural functioning specifically observable through this model, by the degree of formalization that it possesses. The observed stories have, structurally, the following characteristics: Stories that begin and end in a single emission, in which Betty undergoes a narrative path during which she will seek to reach a value object.
- b) This model allows observing the semantic level of narration, which means that ethical, moral and epistemic values granted to the main subject of the story, can be determined through semantics. Therefore, it is possible to determine the patterns of world that the narrative subject has and its identifying features. To identify such a model of world or proposed possible cultural world, we need to advance over the narration in an orientation that goes from the surface level (expressive level) to ideological or deep level, known as generative path.

In the various stories that occur in the episodes of the series, Betty's values are tested subsequently during the entire series, showing the values wanted for the character. This is evident through what Greimas (1971) called the semionarrative structure in the fundamental syntax and semantics, in which—according to this analytical perspective—the first articulations of meaning are given. In the fundamental semantics are the less elaborated and most basic terms of significance:

Ugly-beautiful, good-bad, male-female, life-death, etc. presented in basic binary oppositions. To Greimas, these oppositions are purely of logical framework and organized according with basic oppositions, world models, which are described by an universal schema, taken from the Aristotelian logic, called “semiotic square” (Dallera, 2005).

Thus, a narrated text, launched through television, can be thought of as a network of elementary meanings articulated by the mentioned relations (set-backs, contradictions, implications). This descriptive level tells how a story is likely to be read, because it sets out certain basic meanings (life, goodness, love, beauty) and focuses on exploring the meanings associated with them (if the story speaks of “ugliness”, it speaks of “beauty”, if it speaks of “love”, it speaks of “heartbreak”, etc). These minimum units, as part of a narrative, do not appear in a disorganized way. On the contrary, their organization is attributed to the elementary structure of significance, expressed using the semiotic square, which consist of “the visual representation of the logical articulation of any semantic category” (Greimas & Courtés, 2006, p. 96). I.e. the elementary structure of significance is the way in which, during the narration, the semantic opposition systems –which will be revealed by the actant through its actions within the narrative syntax¹³– are articulated.

In the different stories of the first season of the series we can find Betty’s narrative paths. These stories show the statements about Betty (how she has to be and what she has to do) and her processes of conjunction and disjunction, as well as the tests that she must pass to reach the object (for example, being efficient at work, be strong and upright, helping her boss to get a contract, etc). The stories show two types of narrative paths carried out by Betty: The first is the one made on syntactic terms to achieve a particular object, and the second is the one she develops to preserve the object, which is a positive value in the narration. This second path makes this adaptation of the original narrative, in comparison with the others, a singular text, since from such path semantic features are given, that will define the model of world belonging to a specific population, with certain axiological systems.

An example of the process in which these axiological systems are textualized in opposition systems can be exemplified through chapter 2 of the series, called *Queens for a day*. Betty calls her father, resident in the neighborhood of Queens, to obtain photographer Vincent Bianchi’s data and thus making him the photographer for a session of *Mode*. When Bianchi insists to meet Betty at a fashionable restaurant, she thinks that her appearance (assuming herself as someone not belonging to the mainstream world of *Mode*) will cause him not to accept the job. Thus, Hilda, her sister, gives her a makeover that does not convince anyone in *Mode*. Therefore, they try to trick Bianchi by sending Amanda¹⁴, who pretends to be Betty. Bianchi realizes the deception, stating that a woman from Queens cannot be as Amanda. In the end Betty appears in the restaurant and Bianchi agrees to be the photographer for *Mode*.

The following scheme explains the operations carried out on Betty’s story statements (what Greimas calls “narrative syntax”). Subjects and objects involved are a certain way, suffer transformations, do things and meet certain goals. This level allows us to capture the essence of a basic *narrative scheme*. In this scheme, it is possible to observe disjunctive and conjunctive relations and transformation processes. The analysis of such statements can thus detect if the actant is linked at a certain point of the narration to a function that defines its being and, therefore, generates a conjunctive state (regarding the object wanted); or, on the contrary, is separated from the function that defines it, generating a disjunctive statement.

Narrative path I

Disjunctive state S U O: Betty wants to get Bianchi.
To do statement: Betty calls Bianchi and he settles on a meeting.

Conjunctive state S \cap O: Betty gets the photo shoot for *Mode*.

Narrative path II

Disjunctive state S U O: Betty is ugly and wants to look beautiful.

To do statement: She changes her appearance, but fails to look beautiful.

Conjunctive state S \cap O: Betty is ugly and gets the contract.

Final state statement: Betty must keep her ugliness.

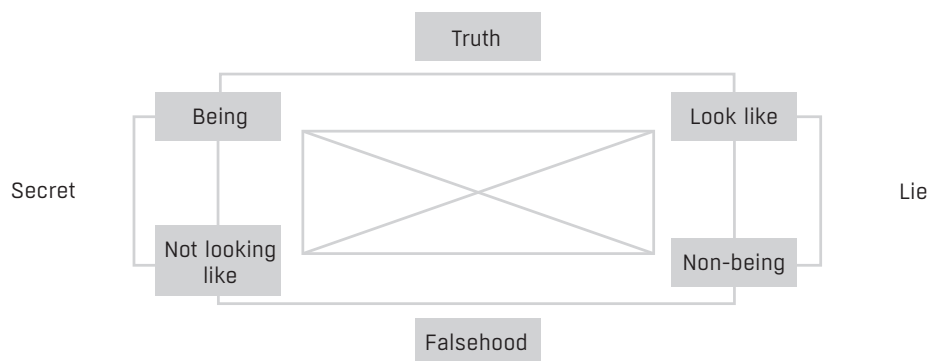
The contradictory opposition handled here is given through the manifestation of a modal system veridiction: “The truth in enounced discourse can be interpreted, first and foremost, as a registration (and reading) of veridiction marks, thanks to which the discourse-enunciate is displayed as true or false, lie or secret” (Greimas & Courtés, 2006, p. 432). To be and to look like are opposites, as is the denial of both and these relationships define the terms true and false. Between being and not looking like, there is a relationship of complementarity to define the term “secret”, and the same happens between looking like and non-being. Finally, truth and falsehood are contradictory terms, while secrecy and lying are contrary. It is now possible to understand the relationships between the terms considering the following, proposed by the television narrative (Figure).

In the series discourse, Betty moves within being and not looking like, i.e., she is beautiful, but she does not look like it. Similarly, she moves inside being from Queens and looking from Queens, which gives truth to her being, contrary to Amanda, that moves between not looking and not being from Queens.

What is involved in the game of veridiction, in terms of discursive structures, can be seen in four elements: Behavior, appearance, dialogue and spatial situation. Behavior shows what the actants do, how they behave, regardless of what they say. This is a pragmatic to do, it is a do-be that modifies or transforms the actions of Betty in a thoughtful way (given on the being of the actant) and transitive (occurring on another subject or

object). We also get to know the characters through what they build as their “appearance”, which reveals how the actants present themselves. Clothing is essential to look like-be or seem like, it has a semantic or descriptive sense that reveals a to make-know or to make-believe, that someone belongs to a particular place. On the other hand, the dialogues of the characters reveal the discourse that constitute a to do-be, to do-to do, to do-make know and to do-make believe, which is primarily a communicative action. Finally, all these elements are located spatially simulating a model of positions of the world, of the type “belonging here” or “belonging there”, where “here” represents the Anglo-Saxon cultural model and the “there”, the Latino immigrant cultural system, giving context to all types of to do of the actant.

The discursive levels, by being integrated into the text, allow the construction of semantic axes that imply the existence of different cultural “worlds”, which contain different semantic elements. A central element of such reformulation will then consist of the construction of a “them” (those who work at *Mode* and their values) and an “us” (Mexican and Latino immigrants in United States who live in Queens, and their descendants), facing the construction of the “them-us” raised in the initial exclusion of the story, where Betty is assumed as belonging to another cultural space. However, a fundamental aspect of this plot is precisely the reformulation of symbolic oppositions in both worlds, allowing a gradual acceptance of Betty not only in terms of her non-physical beauty, but also of her ethnic and social



Source: Semiotic square Own elaboration.

- Betty is beautiful and she looks like it: Truth
- Betty looks beautiful but she it is not: Lie
- Betty is not beautiful and she does not seem it: Falsehood
- Betty does not look beautiful but she is: Secret

status. This way, the first season of the series ends with an approach of social inclusion of the difference, which, even when being a proposal from fiction, is a cultural possibility choice (which will ascribe it to the field of multiculturalism) within the contemporary society of the United States.

CONCLUSIONS

Reflection on the construction of the imaginary in the telenovela *Yo soy Betty, la fea* and the analysis of the TV series *Ugly Betty* TV allow to appreciate the way that television makes possible to visualize the forms in which culture works through the representation of its imaginaries in narratives. In this regard, through the analytical perspective adopted in this text, we can see the construction of meaning regarding the adaptation or cultural translation. It also notes the way in which the characters of this series are presented, the features attributed to them, and the way in which the representation of social subjects of this plot develops and transforms.

Thus, adaptation allows us to visualize the forms adopted by the translation of cultural elements, the disposition of possible worlds designed for heterogeneous or multicultural audiences. Betty, as a global character, is accepted as a “model” of reality, because she makes

plausible the transformation of ugliness into beauty (in all versions); but, in addition, she makes credible the transformation or conservation of a positive set of values. Such possible world and its events refer us to states of things, or sequences of states of real things, but cultural in their construction, for example, the condition of Mexican and Latin American immigrants and their descendants in the United States. Betty is an individual who was endowed with features pertaining to a world recognizable by the reader. Looking at the values given to the subject through its practices, it is possible to recognize characteristics of a population, an ethnic identity identifiable through its traditions, values, language, rituals and practices in general. In the case of Betty Suárez, we can see ethical, moral and epistemic values transcendental to her way of acting in the American, mainstream world.

Although it is a television proposal for a figurative society, the transformation of Betty in this series, as noted, constitutes an alternative proposal of symbolic construction of a social group, which allows the reformulation of knowledge and social imaginaries. Finally, as mentioned previously, the reformulation of the symbolic oppositions in both worlds will lead to a gradual acceptance of Betty not only in terms of her non-physical beauty, but also of her ethnic and social status.

FOOTNOTES

1. In a conceptual schema, the possibility that things will happen in some way lies in the way in which those possibilities are described: “If A believes that a particular dog bites, is because he also thinks that the proposition that says that dogs are animals that can bite a man is true” (Eco, 1979, p. 187). The original quote reads: “se a crede che un certo cane sia mordache è perché crede anche che sia vera la proposizione per cui i cani sono animali che possono mordere l’uomo” (Eco, 1979: 133).
2. This production is an adaptation of the Colombian telenovela *Yo soy Betty, la fea* which aired in 1999 by the RCN Colombian television chain and whose success led to further reproduction in several countries and languages, including the U.S. version.
3. Eco (2008) argues that to carry out a translation a hypothesis about the possible world that is represented must be formulated. I.e., that the subject making the adaptation should seek the equivalent in the cultural context to define the possible world coming of the first source.
4. *Ugly Betty* had a strong impact since its broadcast in 2006, when ABC decided to include it in its prime slot (Thursday at 8 p.m.). The first chapter of this series premiered September 28, 2006 in the United States (ABC) and was seen by 16 million viewers (El Universal, 2006). It had four seasons (2006-2010), with 85 chapters in total. In its first season it had eleven nominations for the Emmy Awards (awarded to the best of television in that country); América Ferrera won the award as best actress and Salma Hayek for best production. It is relevant to mention this, because it illustrates once again the growing inclusion of Latinos and the strength they have achieved in various social, cultural and political areas of the United States.
5. Understood as “a way of reflection on how the complex processes that involve two or more cultural regions are impacted by the appropriation of symbolic forms or messages produced by commercial institutions, which legitimize the field of public entertainment” (Uribe, 2008, p. 6).

6. This researcher points out that *Yo soy Betty, la fea* has as a clear precedent in the series *Rosa de los vientos*, aired between 1989 and 1990. This story narrated the life of Tomasito, a skinny, gangly, student with braces and tortoiseshell glasses, who wore clothing inherited from his father. At the end of the story he accomplished a physical transformation very similar to Betty's.
7. It is claimed that in 2010 it entered the book of Guinness Records, where it is classified as the most successful telenovela in the history of television (RCN Television, s.f.)
8. The information in this table comes from various websites, in which a total of twenty-two adaptations of this telenovela are mentioned. In this case, we listed twenty-one versions in various parts of the world, and the missing one is probably the cartoon version entitled *Betty Toons*. RCN sold the cartoon series *Betty Toons* to Cartoon Network (FormulaTv, 2004).
9. Such movements, explained by Eco (1979) as cooperative movements, allow the reader to (i) generate a motion in extension, "what individuals are involved?, which states of the world?, which developments of events?, are we facing a series of assertions relating to the world in which we live or relating to a possible world?" On the other hand, the movements that the reader performs in intention determine (ii) what features will we attribute to the individuals involved, regardless of the fact that these exist or not in the world of our experience?, what abstractions represent these individuals?, are they good or bad?, do several individuals play the same role?, etc" (pp. 259-260).
10. Own translation. Original quote: "significa dire che il testo attua delle strategie discorsive per presentarci qualcosa come vero o come falso, come oggetto di menzogna o di reticenza (segreto), come oggetto di credenza o come proposizione asserita per far credere o per far fare" (Eco, 1979:185).
11. *Ugly Betty* tells the story of Betty Suárez, a young Mexican-American woman, daughter of Mexican immigrant parents. The family life of Betty develops in Queens, New York City, next to her father Ignacio (an undocumented Mexican immigrant) and her sister Hilda.
12. Generalist television is the one "that favors the commercial approach and the quite striking absence of public service orientation. It seeks to accumulate audience in order to sell it to advertisers as advertising impacts capacity, but the actual effectiveness of this action remains questioned"(Cebrián, 2004, p. 47).
13. For space reasons, we cannot elaborate on graphic representations of such structures of significance. For more information see Murillo (2010).
14. Amanda is the receptionist at *Mode* magazine, seen by all as an attractive woman (according to the aesthetic canons of that world), self confident and constantly worried about her appearance, clothing and social hierarchies. She had hoped to have Betty's work, so at the beginning they were rivals.

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