

**Translating Films, Translating Cultures:
The Adaptation of the Cultural References
to the Italian Audience**

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The simple fact of translation presupposes contact between at least two cultures, and does so in relation to language use, the social activity that perhaps most effectively and insidiously weaves relations of cultural identity (Pym 2)

1. Cultural Translation

The problem of translating as a means of contact among cultures is not as clear as it may appear. Each recent collection of writings on cultural criticism shows that whereas translation is a common topic in fields which are distinct but at the same time connected, including the linguistic theories on the

equivalence, the comparative literature, history, cultural anthropology, the aim and the meaning of cultural translation may be ambiguous according to the field where they are applied. In these last years the field of research into translation theory has spread from the normative studies to descriptive studies, from a linguistic perspective to a macro level of study that includes cultural context as a whole. Since the 80s the theory of translation has changed following different approaches. There is one trend in Translation studies that analyzes translation as a product, another that analyzes the translation as a social function, another, the didactics of translation, that analyzes translation as a necessary development of the theory of translation and there is Audiovisual Film Translation that has been developed recently and has been the subject of occasional debate between translators and scholars. In just a few years, thanks to the views of translation theorists, as Theo Hermans on literary translation, Audiovisual Translation has become the object of study of Translation studies losing its status as purely adaptation and elaborating a steady theoretical framework within which its rapid development may be rationalised.

When the most recent theories on anthropological or cultural conflict raise the question of translating cultures, they refer to semiotic or hermeneutical matters rather than to mere linguistic problems of faithfulness to the source text. *After Babel* (1975) written by Steiner leaves many unanswered questions regarding the conflictual nature of the intermediation of translating cultures and the relationship of the processes, in the translation process, with the ideological contest of the culture where the foreign text is written. Susan Bassnett Basil. Hatim Andre Lefevere Lawrence Venuti are among theorists whose works deal with relevant problems of culture in the field of Translation studies.

An approach to a certain culture is always linked to a translating process. Translation involves different levels and the linguistic level (the semantic equivalence) is the main one.

A cultural translation takes place when a foreign experience is interiorized and rewritten in the culture of the country receiving that experience. Although

with regard to the culture exchange there are more examples in the anthropological and ethnographic fields, the action of rewriting something to accommodate a different culture is meaningful in terms of a cultural contact. However, there is always an element of untranslatableness that allows the change of the original meaning according to the structures of the target language/culture.

This adaptation of the original language to the target language/culture is a very important aspect of a cultural translation. If translation studies have gone through a cultural turn, it is time that also cultural studies address translation. Translation studies scholars want to learn from the subjects of the cultural studies to widen their horizons. The so called "cultural turn" in 1970 has been a real turn in the field of translation, opening up new interdisciplinary research.

It was the pragmatic turn of the 1970s that made the emergence of Translation Studies as an independent discipline possible, it was what later became known as the "cultural turn" of the 1980s that largely established its basic profile. (Snell-Hornby 47)

The field is huge and none of the scholars who study each individual subject can fully understand the complex network of all the signs that make up a culture. Research needs to be widened and a new age of intercultural teaching must be initiated.

The concept of equivalence in translation has become wider and more flexible within the definition of cultural Studies or cultural approach, which is an approach that takes into consideration the reality that values, ideologies, and institutions change according to different historical times.

The first issue regarding the cultural approach to translation deals with the *Translator's Invisibility* of Venuti (1995), that is whether the translator makes his presence felt to the reader or not. Such translator's invisibility and the connected issues are the most interesting development in the field of translation studies.

All the related fields of research of translation studies (linguistics,

sociolinguistics, discourse studies, artificial intelligence) have given the translator a central role in the intercultural communication process. In the translation process a negotiation has to be established: on one hand there is the original text, with its own rights, constructed in the cultural frame where it was born; on the other hand there is the target text with a different cultural frame: that of those who will read the text (either academic or general readers). Each language group has conventions, values etc that are sometimes different and sometime the same. Cultures create a variability factor that must be taken into consideration by the translator. The trend in western countries is to accept the translated text as if it had been written in the target language. The direct consequence is to "domesticate" the foreign text, making it familiar to the target language reader. Therefore, in film translation there is both a process of "domestication" and of "foreignization" (Venuti 17) both in the translator's performance and in the spectators' mind.

The first "two laws about translatability," proposed by Itamar Even-Zohar (18) and revisited by Gideon Toury (25) state that "the translatability of a text is high when the traditions involved are parallel and when 'there has been contact between the two traditions' (Aixelá 54). There is a need to find a cultural tool (CSI: Culture- Specific Item) that is adapted for our analysis and that helps us to define the cultural component as against the linguistic or pragmatic components. In fact such a cultural tool does not exist but it is the result of the conflict that is born every time a problem in translating is noted, that is when a linguistic element of an original text is transferred to another language, where such an element does not exist or has a different value (according to ideology, use, frequency).

2. Film Translation

An example of cultural translation is Audiovisual translation and in

particular film dubbing and subtitling, fields where there is not many researches:

Scarseggiano tuttavia indagini empiriche che affrontino sistematicamente questioni inerenti alla lingua doppiata, ossia alla realizzazione del parlato simulato o parlato-recitato mediato da un'altra lingua. (Pavesi 7). ¹⁾

As Pavesi (7) ²⁾ observed:

La traduzione filmica ha di recente attratto l'interesse di linguisti ed esperti di traduzione non solo per la sua presenza pervasiva nel mondo della comunicazione di massa, ma anche per la peculiarità dei tratti che la contraddistinguono come attività polisemiotica dal forte impatto sociolinguistico.

Film translation is a kind of translation that differs from other types of translation in the very nature of linguistic expression: an original but at the same time simulated language that the translator/adaptor must transfer in another language. It interacts with the different non verbal features of a multimedial context, including the cultural features. For this reason screen translation is often oriented towards the target language, as it is illustrated in the case of the cultural terms that are often 'neutralized' and 'desemantized' and are replaced with expressions that are of a wider diffusion or of a more immediate intelligibility for the target audience.

Translation has a very important role in defining cultural relationships not

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- 1) There are not many empirical researches that deal with issues related to the dubbed language, that is to the performance of the simulated language or of the acted language mediated by another language (Translation of the author).
 - 2) Film translation has recently attracted the attention of many linguists and translation experts not only for its widespread presence in the world of mass communication but also for the particularity of its features as a poly-semiotic and sociolinguistic activity (Translation of the author).

only in linguistic terms but where language interacts with other codes and is determined by socio-cultural factors. Cinema deserves great attention, since the study of films in terms of language and translation reveals the dynamics of culture and really asserts the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to every form of contemporary communication.

If language and culture are strongly linked to each other, the adaptation into a different language of films with many cultural references is a really interesting case of comparison. Translating a culturally-centred film means translating otherness through the images and words used by the narrating culture. In culture centred films, the language itself is full of cultural values and reflects socio-cultural changes. The translation of cultural elements implies adaptation of all the contextual references and implications that the original language conveys. In fact it is in the adaptation of, for example, American expressions, idioms for the foreign audience that the difficulty in translation can be found.

In translating film from a cultural point of view twords have to respect 'exotism', that is they have to keep something of the original language. For example, talking about currency, keeping the symbol and the word "dollar", not replacing it with the symbol € (euro), transmits something of 'exotic' as it keeps something of the original language. Not only can the foreign words be exotic but also expressions in classic films, or in science fiction films or words belonging to the scientific, technical, medical o other special language lexis. Hence all the words have to be taken into consideration their cultural content, that is all the information bearing context and non verbal language. Among the most common problems in the field of subtitling but also in dubbing are the translation of the language related to slang expressions, swearing, language for specific purposes (for example legal language, jargon, botanic plant language), puns, idioms, quotations from Holy books (Bible, hymns, prayers, rhythm of the dialogue (fast, slow), paralinguistic elements, references to other films, punctuation (dashes, dots, abbreviations), songs,

poems, institutions, proper nouns, courtesy forms, currency. The subtitlers must know the cultural value of words and collect information for the translation of the original text both from the cultural context and from the words themselves. Total comprehension of the source language and culture are what one needs to make reliable subtitles that are able to reproduce as much as possible the message of the original text. (Trincanato 2008: 234-235)

These recent years have seen the contemporary development of translation and cultural studies and the idea that translation is purely a linguistic operation has given the way to the idea that translation is a form of intercultural communication where different cultures confront each other.

The role of translation becomes all the more vital in defining cultural relationships as well as identities not in purely linguistic terms, but on a wider scale, where verbal language interacts with other codes (image, sound) and is in turn determined by socio-cultural factors. (Di Giovanni 222)

If language and culture are so dependent upon one another, it is interesting to see how the adaptation, in case of Audiovisual Translation, into a different language of films with a lot of cultural references has been carried out. Film "culturally oriented" translation means translating the "otherness," but not only translating the language of the others but also translating or better adapting the images and words used by that particular narrating culture.

The process of translation of American films for the international audience necessarily implies the process of adaptation of all the cultural references and values that the original language bears inside itself. "The language itself reflects socio-cultural changes, expresses cultural stereotypes and establishes relationships with other cultures" (Di Giovanni 217), all factors which always interact with the translation and above all with adaptation process. Hence the difficulty in translating but above all in adapting the foreign cultural-related elements of a film (usually in English as the predominance of the American cinema industry) into a different language and culture, through different AVT

strategies, such as, in case of Italy, dubbing. Italy is a traditionally dubbing country and, in spite of the increase in subtitled products due to the advent of DVDs and of some musical programs on the television Sky channel, such will remain. All screenings at cinemas and all imported audiovisual products broadcast on free terrestrial television channels are dubbed.

3. Dubbing in Italy

Audiovisual products started to be dubbed in Italy in the 1930s, consequently to a Fascist law which forbade the use of any foreign word. Since then, the practice of dubbing has become deeply rooted in the Italian culture and the dubbing industry has become a profitable business. There has been and there is growing concern towards the quality of dubbing, that should make the audience forget that they are watching a translated product and not an original one. There is a tendency to make the language as neutral and unmarked as diatopic level, and to avoid any potential regional characterization of the variety spoken. …… Therefore, while in the past there were cases, for example, where Afro-Americans spoke Sicilian in the Italian dubbing to point out at the fact that they were not speaking "standard" English in the original version, nowadays such varieties are only used for specific aims. For example, to emphasize a comic dimension, in cartoons, or to stress the characters of Italian descent and distinguish them from the other characters, such as in film about mafia or Italo-Americans.

Dubbing has always been the main form of AVT in Italy and it is still today. When we refer to dubbing we refer to lip-synchronized dubbing, that is "where the foreign dialogue is adjusted to the mouth movements of the actor in the film" (Dries 9) and we do not purely refer to the first figure of the dubbing process, that is the translator, but to all the other figures that take part in the process of dubbing. The first is the dialoghista-adattatore ³⁾ who, no

matter whether he/she knows the foreign language, adapts the translated dialogue to the target language and to the target culture, above all when the dialogue contains cultural references that contain strong cultural references. Together with him/her, the figures of the dubbing director (who can also be the film translator and/or the film *dialoghista/adattatore*) the dubbing assistant and the sound-re-recording mixer (or dubbing mixer) play an important role⁴⁾

What it is evident is that in the process of dubbing the adaptation has become more important than the translation itself that imposes a certain faithfulness to the text. Consequently in the dubbing process the translation is not as literal as in subtitling, as in subtitling the original version of the language can still be heard in the background by the audience and the source language cannot be completely changed and in subtitled version more omissions than changes towards the Target language are noticed

It is not necessary for the dubbed dialogue to respect the point at which the speaker starts or finishes, or the order" while "subtitles are spotted to coincide with the precise frame where a speaker begins and finishes talking (Sánchez 13)

4. The translation of cultural elements in film dubbing and subtitling

In the dubbed version of a film from English into Italian the language

3) professionals who translate and adapt for dubbing into Italian dialogue of foreign films, tv movies, tv serials and all other forms of audio-visual products (Otoni, 2008)

4) A re-recording mixer, formerly known as a dubbing mixer, is a person who is part of a post-production sound team and works specifically with dialog, music and sound effects to create the final soundtrack for a production. They are responsible for ensuring that the sound in a film or television program is technically correct, and as near to the director's or sound designer's original idea (wikipedia).

aims at translating some cultural elements of some cultural categories (such as food, measurement units, venues, places, events, people, institutions, events), with other elements of the same categories but that are more familiar to the Target audience. In spite of the "diatopic" lost in Italian dubbing the translation of cultural elements like the ones above described, is made according to the target language. For example, in the dubbing of the film "Bend it like Beckham" (*Sognando Beckham*, directed by Grunder Chadha, 2002), as regards the cultural category of "food," "Do you know I cooked a lovely curry the other day?" becomes "I cooked rice curry." because in Italian culture the Indian/English word "curry" is almost often used in connection with rice (*riso al curry*) not considering any other way of using the famous Indian spice. Consequently, the translation makes sense for the target audience but loses the qualifying sentiment of the original.

Among the cultural related elements to be taken into consideration in AVT, references to humour, geographic locations, history, art, culture, songs, idioms, swearing words, gastronomy, religious elements, measures, weights, currency, well-known people, celebrities, mythology, institutions, actors, politicians, local festivals are to taken into consideration. According to Agost (99), there are four strategies for rendering these cultural elements into another language: no translation (in the sense of no literary translation); cultural adaptation (when the source elements are replaced by (quasi) equivalents in the target language); explanatory translation (the original elements are paraphrased) and omission. As regards the problem of humour, seen as an important cultural element of the language, and how to transfer the original foreign humour of some films into the target version of the films for the foreign market, Lorenzo, Pereira, Xoubanova (272 quote Zabalbeascoa's strategies (360) for the transfer of humour in audiovisual texts: "adaptation, substitution and different pattern of compensation (funny voices, intonation, irregular stress pattern, sound effects, puns, jokes)." However, they notice that (289):

in translation, there is an alteration of the tenor of the ST. This alteration could mean neutralizing changes of register (formal vs informal) which are sometimes necessary to reveal certain character traits

A striking problem in adapting the "otherness" to the target language (in this case into Italian) is to balance it with familiarity, that is changing colloquial American expressions according to exotic references to make cultural related expression understandable for the target audience.

However, the contemporary English expressions are more difficult to translate and adapt into Italian than those belonging to the ancient language. That is because some "modern" expressions usually refer to "modern" brands or "modern" characters which are often unknown to the foreign (Italian) spectators.

When both the source and the target cultures belong to the same cultural macro system (for example the West), there are a large number of cultural references that do not constitute a translation problem. However, it is not always easy to decide which of the original references are familiar the target audiences. Sometimes the translator is faithful to the source text (foreignization), sometimes he/she produces a text which is acceptable to the target audience (domestication).

Generally speaking, cultural and intertextual references drawn from outside the source culture are preserved of the source culture (foreignization), although on occasion the translator opts for domestication by means of introducing target culture references in order to preserve the humorous effect (Lourdes, Pereira, Xoubanova 289).

Bovinelli and Gallini (90), in their study of translation of some categories (food, units of measurements, toponymy, games, set expressions showing popular culture) do not take up any position in favour or against adaptation, but they end up saying that the dubbing translation makes an attempt to bring

the text to the target language:

la versione doppiata del film tende a tradurre gli elementi contestuali che abbiamo raccolto in queste 6 categorie con altri elementi delle stesse categorie, ma considerati più familiari al pubblico della cultura d'arrivo. 5)

It has been said that Translation has a very important role in defining cultural relationships, not only in linguistic terms but where language interacts with other codes and is determined by socio-cultural factors. Cinema deserves great attention, since the study of films in terms of language and translation reveals the dynamics of culture and really asserts the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to every form of contemporary communication. If language and culture are strongly linked to each other, the adaptation into a different language of films with many cultural references is a really interesting case of comparison.

Translating a culturally-centred film means translating 'otherness' through the images and words used by the narrating culture. In culture centred films, the language itself is full of cultural values and reflects socio-cultural changes. It has been said that the translation of cultural elements implies adaptation of all the contextual references and implications that the original language conveys. In fact it is in the adaptation of, for example, American expressions, idioms for the foreign audience that the difficulty in translation can be found. In film translation subtitlers, for example, must know the cultural value of words spoken in any particular AVT and collect information for the translation of the original text both from the cultural context and from the words themselves. Total comprehension of the source language and culture are what they need to make reliable subtitles that reproduce as much as possible the

5) The dubbing version of a film aims at translating the contextual elements of these 6 categories with 6 other elements belonging to the same categories but considered more familiar to the target audience. (translation of the author)

message of the original text. On the other hand, in dubbing process, in general, faithfulness to the source text is not guaranteed. Apart from the most striking example of making people talk standard Italian regardless of their social class or education, there are numerous examples of words or expressions that characterize 'unfaithful' dubbed Italian: "It seems a window of Irving Nichols at Christmas" becomes "It seems a window of Harrods at Christmas" (*sembra una vetrina di Harrods a Natale*)

In the dubbing of "Saving Grace" (L' Erba di Gracedirected by Nigel Cole, 2000). In the same film "Cornish pasties becomes *anatra all arancia*"⁶⁾ (Trincanato 2009 391) changing not only the literary meaning but also the social one, being *anatra all arancia* a posh type of food served on special occasions while Cornish pasties are a sort of popular food used by the miners and now sold in supermarkets or in special small shops in the streets of Cornwall, Devon, Wales, North East England, other parts of United Kingdom, Ireland. Furthermore, there is a related tradition that it is bad luck for fishermen to take pasties to sea and as in the scene the main character brings food to his friends who are fishermen and are on the boat. Consequently it is evident that saying "Cornish pasties" he wants to be ironic.

and that this irony wants to be transmitted also in the Italian dubbing with the expression *anatra all arancia* being this a posh type of food that can never could be eaten by fishermen on a boat.

Further examples of unfaithfulness to the source text there are: stereotypes, the wrong use of the *particella 'ci* as a personal pronoun, expressions such as *sicuro* (from the English 'sure'). However, the most problematic choices for the adaptor and for the forms of audiovisual translation are the translation of strong cultural or pragmatic expressions and it is some aspect of pragmatic meaning that it is usually changed between the source text and the target. For example, the lexical choices and the use of the courtesy forms *Tu, Lei* are

6) Orange-flavoured duck

interesting topics for the study of dubbing as they deal with both the language and culture of the Source Text and the language and the culture of the Target text.

The dubbed version of a film aims to replace the cultural elements of the cultural categories (the ones above mentioned), with other elements of the same categories which are more familiar to the Target audience, while, in a subtitled version of a film, there are more omissions than changes. For example, in the film "Bend it like Beckham" as regards the cultural category of locations, "I've got to go to Ealing for my facial", "Ealing" is not translated, in both the dubbing and in the subtitled version, because of the lack of familiarity with this area of London by the Italian audience. The translation is effective but loses a specific cultural context ("Ealing" is one shopping area crowded mainly by Indian people).

As regards the local institutions, for example, the sentence "Jessie, the A level results" is translated with "Level A" for the Italian dubbing and it is not translated at all for the Italian subtitling DVD version. In the dubbing version the literary translation of "Level A" with the Italian correspondent *livello A* does not have any sense for the Italian audience. On the other hand in the subtitling version there is a total loss in the transfer from English into Italian with the total disappearance of the utterance.

As concerns the typical controversial issue of the different accents of how to perform the different linguistic accents that usually represent the different social classes and regions inside a single country, the Italian dubbing process assists nowadays at a complete loss of the source accents. In the above mentioned film "Bend it like Beckham", the second generation Indians speak in standard Italian (originally British English) to distinguish themselves from the first generation Indians (parents and relatives) who speak "funny" Italian with a 'particular' accent (originally a mix of Indian and English) (loss in "diastropy"). This is done in order to reproduce the "Indian English" spoken by the first generation Indians and the "standard English" of the original version

spoken by the Indians born and educated in England.

Regarding this loss in "diastraty," that is the loss of the regional and social status accents, that characterizes the process of dubbing and of Italian dubbing in particular, giving birth to a standard language without any particular accent, that can be heard in Italian dubbed versions of films, Maria Pavese (1994: 129) says:

Although dubbing has been recently emancipated from literary and noble Italian, approaching a more colloquial Italian, it still shows a lack of dialectal and regional expressions, always present in national cinema and television. For example, Chief Police Sarti ⁷⁾ is allowed to speak "Bolognese," while German Inspector Derrick and American Lieutenant Colombo ⁸⁾ in their Italian dubbed form do not have a regional accent nor could they have. Consequently we have an Italian for dubbing similar to colloquial Italian as regards lexis and syntax but which from a phonetic point of view does not have any sociolinguistic characteristics.

5. Conclusion

The language has been considered as a cultural object totally integrated with the culture which it transmits. The language coincides with the group who speaks it and becomes their defining feature, recording their cultural identity. The translators, translating a foreign language, should at the same time develop a cultural awareness which goes together with the learning of the language. In the translation process of cultural references in film dubbing and subtitling it has been underlined that the adaptation of the source language to the target language is largely used and preferred. In particular it has been said that in high quality dubbing the target audience who go and watch the film dubbed

7) an Italian television character who speaks Italian

8) a man who speaks German and English respectively in their original form

from a foreign language (generally from English, as the predominance of the American film industry) should have the sensation of watching a film as if it had been written in that language. They must "forget" that the film they are watching has been made in another language different from their own. That can be done in translating not only the language but all the cultural elements that could prevent the spectators from understanding what is going on the screen. However it must be said that many times due to the presence of certain images on the scene, often linked to the culture of the country of the language spoken in the film, some culturally related language elements cannot be changed totally and are translated literary maintaining a certain "exotic" meaning. The same "cultural translation" can be noticed in the subtitling process, taking into consideration the fact that not only the image but also the source language is always present on the screen and consequently the difference in translating cultural references could still be heard and understood by the speakers of the target language.

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[Abstract]

**Translating Films, Translating Cultures:
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This paper focuses on audiovisual translation and in particular on films translation. The aim is presenting how the cultural elements of films are performed in their translated version. Examples are taken from some English films that have been both subtitled and dubbed into Italian and a comparative analysis of the language utterances linked to culture in these film has been carried out showing the general trend of translating according to the target language both in dubbing and subtitling. This is sometimes done in spite of the total loss of the original meaning and sometimes takes to the loss of meaning in the target language as well. That happens when the translation of a specific cultural item is done literally.

The paper wants to outline a framework that focuses both on the difficulties of translating the cultural elements in films and on role of the film translators/adaptors, for subtitling and dubbing respectively, who should develop a cultural awareness which goes together with the translation of a language.

► Key Words: audiovisual translation, cultural translation, film translation, dubbing-subtitling

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논문투고일: 2009년 10월 30일

심사완료일: 2009년 11월 15일

게재확정일: 2009년 12월 15일