

How “Brassed off” became *Grazie, signora Thatcher*

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This paper will investigate various types of linguistic performances which are linked to the culture of some films that have been dubbed and subtitled (for the DVD version) from English into Italian¹. It will explore the widespread challenge of conveying the meaning of certain types of linguistic performance and how the translators have dealt with this challenge. The examples are taken from the following English films: *Brassed off* (*Grazie, signora Thatcher*, Mark Herman, 1996); *Bend it like Beckham* (*Sognando Beckham*, Gurinder Chadha, 2002); *Saving Grace* (*L'erba di Grace*, Nigel Cole, 2000); and *The full monty* (*Full monty-Squattrinati organizzati*, Peter Cattaneo, 1997).

The various differences between the English and the Italian cultures are shown from the outset by the different titles given to the abovementioned films in the source and target languages. The titles were changed because a literal translation was considered unsatisfactory, with the consequent (occasional total) loss of the original meaning. For example, *Brassed off* is a title which contains a partial reference to a pun whereby “brass” (*ottone* in Italian) refers to the metal composition of the musical instruments of the band (made of brass) and to the fact that the miners are indeed “brassed off” (strike weary). This meaning is lost in the Italian *Grazie, signora Thatcher* although this expression was often used ironically by English native-speakers who said *Thank you, Mrs Thatcher* ironically in that she made British industry more

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¹ To go into the matter more thoroughly cfr. J. Dries, *Dubbing and Subtitling: Guidelines for Production and Distribution*, The European Institute for the Media, Manchester 1995.

efficient but at the cost of tens of thousands of jobs. Similarly, *Bend it like Beckham* derives from David Beckham's ability as a football player to do free kicks, thus underlining the fact that Jess, the main character in the film, scores the final goal that leads the team to victory, indeed "bending it like Beckham". The Italian translation *Sognando Beckham* (Dreaming of Beckham) though it maintains the reference to the football player, loses the allusion to his particular ability to do free kicks, causing the loss of the connection with football.

Continuing with the analysis of the film titles, *Saving Grace* also contains a double meaning. According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*² a "saving grace" is «the one good quality that a person or thing has that prevents them or it from being completely bad». A similar explanation is given by the *Oxford Dictionary of English*³ that defines it as «the redeeming grace of God». In the film, the title also refers to the name of the main character in the film (Grace) and to her need to be rescued from her husband's debts after his demise. In this case the literal translation of the English title would not have conveyed the same religious reference and it has instead been replaced with *L'erba di Grace* where *erba* means either "grass" or "cannabis" and connects the Italian spectators to the plot of the film from the very beginning, as they know the twofold Italian meaning of the word *erba*.

Analysing another film title, *The full monty* is also a pun as, according to the OALD⁴, it refers to «the full amount that people expect or want» and according to the *Oxford Dictionary of English*⁵ to «the full amount expected, desired or possible» and it is replete with sexual implications. The title in Italian remains the same (excluding the article *the*) with the addition of *Squattrinati organizzati* (people with little or no money but who know how to survive) to provide an indication of the content of the film as *Full monty* was not translated for Italian spectators and the ironic use of language to highlight the fact that the main characters are prepared to perform a complete striptease at the end of the film (thus rendering their performance possibly unique) is lost.

In this connection, it can be pointed out that often the titles of both books and films are not chosen by the translators but by the

² A. S. Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2010 (VIII ed.).

³ *Oxford Dictionary of English*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2003 (II ed.).

⁴ Hornby, *Oxford Advanced*, cit.

⁵ *Oxford Dictionary of English*, cit.

publishing companies and the film companies according to their own marketing ideas.

A second point regards the linguistic and cultural translatability of various utterances from these films⁶. Some examples from three categories (food-locations-institutions)⁷ are going to be examined here. Taking various utterances from *Bend it like Beckham* examples of “food category” are: «do you know I cooked a lovely curry the other day» (884-00:57:37,991 --> 00:57:39,925), which becomes «I cooked rice curry» in both the dubbed and subtitled Italian versions, (possibly because, in Italian culture, the English word *curry* is only used in connection with rice) and «I was trying to cook *beans on toast*» (325-00:19:13,302 --> 00:19:16,294), which becomes only *un toast* for Italian dubbing and *stavo preparando un toast* for Italian subtitling, leaving the word “beans” untranslated and completely changing the meaning of the meal the woman was preparing. This is because in Italy the word *toast* has a completely different meaning (two slices of bread filled with cheese and ham and toasted) and the Italian audience is not familiar with this English recipe.

Another example of the same film, included in the category of food, is given by the utterance: «The *teriyaki sauce* is the goalkeeper» adapted for both the Italian dubbing and the subtitling process as “*Salsa di soja*”, again because of the usual trend of domesticating the target language to the source language, “soy sauce” being known to the Italian audience. «In all the three examples the translation makes sense for the target audience but loses the qualifying sentiment of the original»⁸.

As regards the category of places, an example taken from the same film is «I got to go to *Ealing* for my facial. Later» (82-00:04:41,712 --> 00:04:45,079) which is only translated with *Ciao*, leaving *Ealing* not translated in both the dubbed and subtitled Italian versions. The translators of this film possibly decided that this area of London would not be known to an Italian audience and they evidently did not prefer a name substitution as the famous London areas, that is those known to an Italian audience (Chelsea, Piccadilly etc.), would not generally be

⁶ To go into the matter more thoroughly cfr. D. Delabastita, *Translation and Mass-communication: Film and TV Translation as Evidence of Cultural Dynamics*, in “Babel”, 35, 4, 1989, pp. 193-218.

⁷ Cfr. R. Antonini, *The Perception of Dubbese*, in D. Chiaro, C. Heiss, C. Bucharia (eds.), *Between Text and Image*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam-Philadelphia 2008, pp. 135-47.

⁸ E. Trincanato, *Translating Films, Translating Cultures: The Adaptation of the Cultural References to the Italian Audience*, in “The Journal of Translation”, 10, 4, 2009, p. 352.

frequented by Indians on shopping or hairdresser trips not for racist reasons but for a matter of habits and traditions. The translation is effective but it loses its specific cultural context.

Another example is given by «I can't. My mum's waiting, and my dad's on earlies at *Heathrow*» (130-00:06:56 --> 146-00:06:59,013) and «I was eight. My mum was working overtime at *Heathrow*...» (324-00:19:10,266 --> 00:19:13,235), where “Heathrow” has not been translated for both the Italian dubbing and subtitling, perhaps because of the difficulty of pronouncing it, as it should have been left as it is even in the target language. So in the first utterance “Heathrow” is not translated and the Italian translation of the original utterance is *non posso mi aspetta mia madre e mio padre lavora*, while in the second utterance the name of the airport is not mentioned at all and in Italian it becomes: *lavorava all'aeroporto*.

The same happens in: «I can put in a good word for you at *H.M.V.* with me» (417-00:24:43,165 --> 00:24:45,258) which becomes for both the Italian dubbing and subtitling *Cerco di farti assumere nel posto dove lavoro io*, and «They think I've got a job at *H.M.V.*» (464-00:28:37,800 --> 00:28:39,461), which is dubbed with *Credono abbia trovato un lavoro per l'estate* and subtitled with only *a lavorare!* In both the cases *HMV* disappears and it cannot be translated or even mentioned for the Italian audience as the spectators do not know this shop, even if it is very popular in England as a music shop.

In the utterance «You're going to a football match. It's not *Ascot*. You look lovely» (1185-01:22:59,035 --> 01:23:02,994), translated correctly “Ascot” for the dubbing version but *Il Derby di Ascot* for the subtitling version, making a cultural mistake as no football derby has ever been played in Ascot which, instead, is a well-known place for horse races.

With reference to the category of local institutions in *Bend it like Beckham*, «Jessie, the A level results» (1121-01:14:52,815 --> 01:14:56,307) has been translated as “Level A” in the dubbed Italian version and it has not been translated at all in the Italian subtitled DVD. The translation *Livello A* (Level A) is somewhat meaningless to an Italian audience (the Italian equivalent of *state exams* might have been appropriate) and in the subtitled version this utterance has been removed altogether. Both cases highlight a lack of knowledge of the English school system (*A-Level results*) by all those involved in the translation process. Here the translator oscillates between a «domesticated translation and a foreignizing translation»⁹ without making a single choice.

⁹ L. Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*, Routledge, New York 1995.

As concerns the dubbing of utterances related to culture there are numerous other examples of words or expressions that reflect a certain unfaithfulness in their translating process. In the translation of names of places or local institutions from English into Italian for the dubbing of the film *Saving Grace*, «It seems like an *Irving Nichols*' window at Christmas» (947-00:59:54,472 --> 00:59:57,025) becomes «It seems a window of *Harrods* at Christmas» (*sembra una vetrina di Harrods a Natale*) “Irving Nichols” being unknown to most of the Italian audience, who are instead very familiar with Harrods.

In the same film, there is a scene where one of the main characters takes some food (“fish and chips”) to his fishermen friends on the boat and to the question: «What is this?», he answers ironically «*Cornish pasties*» (715-00:45:12,073 --> 00:45:14,211). The Italian translation both for the dubbing and the subtitling process was *anatra all'arancia*, changing not only the denotative meaning but also the social component as most of the people invariably associated *anatra all'arancia* (duck *a l'orange*) with food eaten by the upper classes whereas they associated “Cornish pasties” with humbler folk, as they are sold in supermarkets and bakeries on the streets of Cornwall, Devon, Wales, north-east England and some parts of Ireland. The irony used by the character when he says “Cornish pasties” is also given by the fact that there is a related tradition that it is bad luck for fishermen to take pasties to sea so obviously none could bring some to his fishermen friends on the boat. This irony has been conveyed in the dubbed Italian version with the translation *anatra all'arancia* as this is a posh type of food that would never be eaten by fishermen (on or off a boat)¹⁰.

Further problematic choices for the Audiovisual Translation¹¹ are the translation of forceful pragmatic expressions, such as courtesy forms, and the inappropriateness of using different regional and social accents in the films. As regards the former, the translation (or lack thereof) of the courtesy forms (*tu* or *Lei* to indicate formal or informal relationships), is important for the translators as this highlights the link between language and culture, these forms dealing both with the language (the issue of different registers), the culture of the source text and the language and culture of the target text. For example: «Gloria, senta il suo report è fantastico» (from *Brassed off*: «Gloria, listen your report is really good [...]») sounds a little strange to the

¹⁰ Trincanato, *Translating Films*, cit., p. 355.

¹¹ Cfr. C. J. Díaz, A. Remael, *Audiovisual Translation: Subtitling*, St. Jerome, Manchester 2007.

Italian spectators as they would expect something like: «Signorina/Signora Millon, or Dott.ssa Millon or even Signorina/Signora Gloria». However this way of “bridging the gap” between the informality of the English (“Gloria, you”) and the formality of the Italian (Signora/Signorina/Dott.ssa Millon) has become really common in the Italian translation of English/American films.

As regards the matter of the difference of the accents characterising different social classes and regions within a single country, there is a total and necessary loss of the source accent in the dubbed Italian versions of most American and English films, which means that people talk in “standard” Italian regardless of their social class or education¹². The standardization of the language in *Brassed off*, whereby both the miners and managers speak in standard Italian, leads to a loss in diatopic variation. A further example of this “accent standardization” can be observed in the case of *Bend it like Beckham*, where second generation Indians speak in standard Italian to distinguish them from first generation Indians (parents and relatives), who speak what can be termed an “immigrant pidgin” of Italian with a particular but unreal accent for Italians. The intention here is possibly to reproduce Indian English, spoken by first generation Indians in the original version of the film, and standard English, spoken by Indians born and educated in England. Following a general Italian trend, the dialogist of *Bend it like Beckham* has created an artificial and somewhat patronising linguistic form in attempting to verbally illustrate societal differences.

Regarding the loss of diastaty which characterizes the dubbing process and the Italian dubbing process in particular, and the rise of a standard language without a particular accent, such as those which can often be heard in dubbed Italian films, Pavesi¹³ 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 Sarti¹⁴ is allowed to speak “Bolognese”, while German Inspector Derrick and American Lieutenant Colombo¹⁵ in their

¹² Cfr. M. Pavesi, *La traduzione filmica. Aspetti del parlato doppiato dall'inglese all'italiano*, Carocci, Roma 2005.

¹³ M. Pavesi, *Osservazioni sulla sociolinguistica del doppiaggio*, in R. Baccolini, R. M. Bollettieri Bosinelli, L. Gavioli (a cura di), *Il doppiaggio. Trasposizioni linguistiche e culturali*, CLUEB, Bologna 1994, p. 129.

¹⁴ Italian television character who speaks Italian.

¹⁵ Who speak German and English respectively in their original form.

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.

At the end of this short analysis about the translation of the cultural references, it can be said that the dubbed versions from English to Italian of all the above mentioned films aspire to translate cultural elements of the aforementioned cultural categories by replacing them with other elements of the same categories, different in their literal meaning but more familiar to the target audience. As Bovinelli and Gallini¹⁶ state in their study of the translation of various lexical/discourse categories, the dubbed translation makes an attempt to bring the text closer 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.

As regards the subtitled versions of the same films, they show more omissions than substitutions and changes made in moving towards the target language. However it must not be forgotten that if the cultural translation of cultural elements represents a problem for all kinds of translation (translation of books, of poems, of pamphlets and so on), in Audiovisual translation it becomes more difficult to perform due to the presence of the images in the background for dubbing and to the presence of both images and original language in the subtitling process. Background scenes or background voices cannot be either translated or cancelled.

Conclusions

As regards the translation processes of cultural references in dubbed and subtitled films, in this paper we have seen that adaptation of the source language to the target language is widely used and preferred. The target audience that goes to the cinema and watches the film dubbed from a foreign language (generally from English, given the predominance of the American film industry) should have the sensation

¹⁶ B. Bovinelli, S. Gallini, *La traduzione dei riferimenti culturali nel doppiaggio cinematografico*, in Baccolini, Bollettieri Bosinelli, Gavioli (a cura di), *Il doppiaggio*, cit., p. 90.

of watching a film as if it had been written in that language. They should forget or suspend their belief that the film they are watching was scripted in a different language to their own. That can be done in translating not only the language but all the cultural elements, which could prevent the spectators from understanding what is happening on the screen. However, it should be remembered that invariably, 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), various culturally-related language elements cannot be totally changed and they are, instead, translated literally and thus give a certain 'exotic' feel to the film. This same "cultural translation" can also be noticed not only in dubbing but also in subtitling processes, which take into consideration the fact that not only the image but also the source language is always present on the screen and, consequently, the differences involved in translating cultural references can still be heard and understood by the speakers of the target language.