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*READY PLAYER ONE: THE ANALYSIS OF SPECIFIC
DIALOGUE TRANSLATION PROBLEMS AND POTENTIAL
CULTURAL CONSEQUENCES*

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PRIMO APPELLO

A mia mamma, che mi ha aiutata a costruire il mio percorso pezzettino dopo pezzettino

Ai miei amici, per avermi riportata sulla retta via quando mi perdevo un po'

A chi ha demolito qualche punto del percorso e mi ha insegnato qualcosa

E ad Alessandro, la bussola che mi riporta sempre a casa

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1. Introduction

In a world where we find ourselves constantly talking about “the latest Oscar-material movie” and “that new super cool Netflix series”, it is impossible to deny that the entertainment industry is one of the biggest money machines ever created. The global box office revenue is forecast to reach the 50 billion USD mark in 2020 (Statista, 2018) and the global entertainment market size is expected to reach 114.93 billion USD by 2025 (Financial Buzz, 2018). Throughout the years, notably since the advent of Subscription Video On Demand services (SVOD) like Netflix and Hulu, accessing media products has become increasingly easier (Parrot Analytics, 2018), to the point where we now have an incredibly broad and commercial-free choice of contents at our fingertips (Abend-David, 2014, p. 293). This is especially true for English-speaking countries, but what happens when media products have to be translated and marketed in countries where English is not one of the main languages?

In countries like Italy, where the uncertainty avoidance score is quite high (that is, Italians tend to be intolerant towards things they do not know or understand) (Adab & Valdes, 2004, p. 184) it is crucial to translate and adapt media products correctly in order to sell them (Hofstede Insights). Furthermore, Italy represents an interesting case study because it is one of the few countries that still heavily relies on dubbed products (Pavesi, 2012, p. 7). This is mainly because foreign-language movies in their original version were banned by the fascist regime in the 1930s (Mereu, 2012, pp. 297-298), thus dubbing them became the only way for Hollywood studios to avoid losing the lucrative Italian market. Furthermore, subtitling was (and still is) a much cheaper option, but in 1931, given that 21 percent of Italians were illiterate, dubbed products rapidly became the preferred alternative. Dubbing was also deemed the most “aesthetically pleasing” option. In fact, Italians were not used to Hollywood’s realistic and unmusical delivery and preferred the more musical, passionate and theatrical Italian voices. Finally, dubbing media products was a very convenient tool for the fascist regime, given that they could simply censor what they considered offensive

and disrespectful by replacing it with completely different words (Abend-David, 2014, pp. 99-100).

Leaving Italy's preference for dubbing aside for a moment, this work aims to analyse the difficulties that arise when translating and adapting a media product, regardless of the form of translation used. In fact, subtitling and dubbing present a different set of challenges and require different skills (Pavesi, 2012, p. 19), but share a common goal: they build a bridge between two (or sometimes more) different cultures and make it possible for a foreign audience to enjoy a media product without continuously breaking the spell of fictitious reality that Hollywood so skilfully creates (Pavesi et al., 2015, pp. 10-11). In other words, the foreign audience wants to experience something as close as possible to what the lucky English speakers experience when they watch a Hollywood movie, a TV series, a cartoon, etc. in their native tongue. This paper will focus on dubbing for the sole reason that the case study, *Ready Player One*, was officially distributed in Italy as a dubbed product, but it goes without saying that it is sometimes impossible to find an adaption (subtitled or dubbed) that fully encompasses all the nuances, witty jokes and references that were an integral part of the original version (Pavesi, 2012, p. 16). A good adaptation can help bridging the gap.

Problems arise when adaptations do not meet certain quality standards and, therefore, can result in serious damage to the media product (Abend-David, 2014, p. 97). Using Steven Spielberg's 2018 science fiction adventure movie, *Ready Player One* (Spielberg, 2018), this study will highlight how a cheap and hasty adaptation work can heavily affect a media product. Finally, this paper will outline what skills a good translator should have in order to be able to overcome these obstacles.

A simple legitimate question that could arise at this point is "Why is it so important? After all, it's just a movie.". Yes, perhaps it is, but movies are one of the most widespread and influential tools when it comes to cultural transmission (Pavesi, 2012, p. 14). Movies mirror reality and their dialogues carry out the same function they have in real life: they establish and sustain social relationships and play a decisive role in making individuals unique (Pavesi, 2012, p. 9).

Furthermore, movies are not just a way to entertain the audience, but also and above all a way to educate it (Swain, 2013). For all these reasons, everyone should have access to the original media product, regardless of what language they speak. Not everyone is lucky enough to be born bilingual, but all of us should have access to something as precious and culturally rich as original moving pictures.

2. Why analyse *Ready Player One*?

At this point, the question that arises is: why choose *Ready Player One* as a case study? There are indeed countless movies that were damaged by their Italian adaptation (Abend-David, 2016, p. 97), sometimes even by something as simple as a bad title translation. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, marketed with an Italian title that roughly translates to the rom-com sounding “If you break up with me, I’ll erase you”, is a perfect example of this phenomenon, but the list is truly endless (Knight, 2012). *Ready Player One* is a good case study simply because it encompasses many of the mistakes that can be made when translating a media product. Choosing this media product is a way to lay them all out in black and white in order to get a general understanding of how similar mistakes can be avoided in the future. This chapter will therefore analyse what the main difficulties are when translating a media product like *Ready Player One* and provide possible solutions to overcome them. It will also highlight how important it is to have a solid cultural background in a specific field involving any kind of translation. This will be achieved by examining some of the movies translation mistakes that could have been avoided had the translator taken a closer look at the 1980s and 1990s pop culture and at “nerd” culture in general (appendix, table 1).

2.1. Plot overview and the difficulties of adapting the genre film

Steven Spielberg’s science fiction adventure movie *Ready Player One*, based on Arthur Cline’s 2011 science fiction novel by the same name, does not get off on a promising start. It is 2045 and life conditions on our planet have become so unbearable that people all over the world try to escape reality by spending most of their time in the OASIS, a globally networked virtual reality

world overflowing with pop culture references designed by programming genius James Halliday. Wade Watts, the story's protagonist, is a teenager who feels failed by reality and only logs off from the virtual world to eat and sleep. Like Halliday when he was young, he devotes most of his time to the study of the '80s and '90s' pop culture. When the programmer dies, the hunt for Halliday's Easter Egg begins: whoever can find the treasure hidden in the virtual simulation will inherit the man's fortune and the complete control of OASIS (Krupa, 2018).

Spielberg's movie can be described as a genre film (Maslin, 2011), in the sense that it was produced to fit into a specific film genre, thus following specific norms regulating its form and content, and is targeted to a specific audience (Langkjær, 2011, p. 41). This entails that, like every genre film, it taps into a pool of specific terms that are linked to that genre (Condis, 2016, p. 1). In this case, for example, expressions like "virtual reality" or "haptic-feedback gloves" are intrinsically linked to the world of science-fiction. If we add this to the fact that the movie is full of references to pop culture and the gaming world (Hertz, 2018), for example "MMORPG" (massively multiplayer online role-playing game) (Aronstein, & Thompson, 2015, p. 56) and "gamer tag" (Table 1), it is easy to understand why it is paramount for the person in charge of translating the media product to have a solid cultural background to draw from or, at least, to know where to look in case of doubt. Since the late 1990s, there has been a growing interest towards the gaming world and nerd culture in general, which now can be seen as a downright area of studies with its own lexicon (Farris, 2017, p. 215). Given that this area is thriving at the moment (Harrison, 2013), a translator who is given the task of adapting a product that falls in this category must be prepared to face the difficulties that this type of translation implies. In the next few chapters, this paper will illustrate what happens when a translator fails to successfully adapt culturally-bound terms and expressions belonging to a specific area of study.

2.2. Dos and don'ts of translating geek and nerd culture

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the cornerstone of *Ready Player One* are its almost endless nods to the '80s and '90s culture (Metz, 2018). To the casual viewer, Wade's journey could be seen as "nothing more than a trip down the Yellow Brick Road, where the bricks have been swapped out with reference upon reference to nerd culture" (Moreci, 2018). *Back to the Future*, *Batman*, *Akira*, *Star Wars*, *Mortal Kombat*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Elm Street*, to name a few "bricks" (Hertz, 2018). However, to the dedicated and geeky viewer, it is the range of cinematic quotation that gives the film its remarkable strength (Metz, 2018). Like in Wade's journey of finding the Easter Egg, those who can get the most references and know more about '80s and '90s pop culture will receive the biggest return and, in the case of the viewers, determine their enjoyment of the film (West-Knights, 2018). This is why offering the foreign audience a good adaptation is fundamental: it is the closest thing to giving them the chance to enjoy the movie in its completeness. Furthermore, Steven Spielberg, who had a huge role in shaping the '80s and '90s pop culture (McAteer, 2018), is famous for his inclination to connect with the audience and to direct movies that can resonate with the viewers' feelings (Coyote, 2018). Therefore, an adaptation that makes the references obscure for Italian viewers basically prevents them from fully enjoying the motion picture, nullifying the director's effort.

In practical terms, the problem here seems to be that the person in charge of translating the motion picture does not have the necessary cultural knowledge and professional training that is required to translate culturally-bound expressions and terms belonging to a specific lexicon. This becomes particularly evident when examining the way the translator deals with references to pop culture and with terms that are bound to American culture. In the first case, the translator often does not go beyond a simple, literal translation of the English terms. For instance, in order to provide an acceptable translation for the two examples listed below, the translator must have a minimum knowledge of the videogaming world. In fact, example 1 refers to the fact that wearable objects in videogames usually modify the player's *own* skills, while example 2 references a very popular series of artillery tactical video games called *Worms*, where the official Italian translation

for “holy hand grenade” is “granata sacra”. Any Italian *Worms* aficionado would know this, given that the holy hand grenade is probably the most popular weapon in the game, making this mistake (one that a simple Google search could have avoided) quite noticeable.

Example 1:

Timestamp: 06:08

Original version (English): [reading the description of a wearable object] Turn into any giant robot...

Dubbed version (Italian): Trasforma in un robot gigante...

Alternative suggestion: Trasformati [referred to a videogame object that can change the player’s skills and appearance]

Example 2:

Timestamp: 30:02

Original version (English): 20,000 for the holy hand grenade

Dubbed version (Italian): 20.000 per la santa bomba a mano

Alternative suggestion: 20.000 per la granata sacra [official translation used in the videogame saga]

In the second case, on the other hand, the translator does not even provide an Italian equivalent.

In the examples below (examples 3, 4 and 5), it is clear that the translator simply copy-pasted the culturally-bound expressions from the source language to the target language. The average Italian viewer would, of course, have no idea of what a Tootsie Pop or a TaB is, given that they were never even marketed in Italy. In this case, the translator must find a corresponding in the target language (Abend-David, 2016, p. 106; 108). The final result will, of course, never have the exact same nuances of meaning of the source language (ibid, pp. 106-107), but it will nevertheless allow the viewer to follow the story with the same feeling, instead of being disoriented (ibid, p.109).

Example 3:

Timestamp: 33:16

Original version (English): ...the center of the Tootsie Pop

Dubbed version (Italian): ...al centro del Tootsie Pop

Alternative suggestion: ...al centro di un Chupa Chups ripieno [the nod to the commercial can be translated to “È rotondo e dura molto!”, the Italian tagline when the product first came out]

Example 4:

Timestamp: 55:20

Original version (English): TaB

Dubbed version (Italian): TaB

Alternative suggestion: 20.000 per la granata sacra [official translation used in the videogame saga]

Example 5:

Timestamp: 1:13:32

Original version (English): All right. Gluten O's...

Dubbed version (Italian): C'è tutto: Gluten O's...

Alternative suggestion: C'è tutto: Kellogg's...

2.3. A brief history of nerd culture: how a hasty adaptation can undermine years of cultural progress

The second major obstacle of translating a media product like *Ready Player One* is represented by the fact that nerd culture has undergone a series of changes that progressively shaped the way society looks at it and the people belonging to this world. In fact, 30 or 40 years ago being a nerd was not seen as something positive. On the contrary, getting excited about movies, TV series, comics and videogames was strongly stigmatised and considered grounds for exclusion and ridicule. Over time, people started to realise how much money geeks and nerds could bring to the table. With the rise of the internet and Silicon Valley and the

advent of SVODs, the things that were once dismissed with a disgusted look started being considered “cool”. Ironically, pop culture is now dominated by comic book characters and fantasy sagas like *Game of Thrones*.

While this is generally a good thing, in 2014 it led to a controversy called Gamergate (Condis, 2016, pp. 8-9). Gamergate was basically a toxic cultural battle started by white, middle-class males (who represented the main target for advertisers and media producers when nerd culture appeared and still make up the majority of the pop culture enthusiasts today) about who gets to be a geek and who does not (Grady, 2018). This brutal kind of gatekeeping went as far as becoming abuse when women and people of colour started receiving rape and death threats just because they were deemed not worthy of considering themselves true nerds (West-Knights, 2018). While Cline’s 2011 book felt like an empowering message to nerds and outcasts all over the world, by 2015 people started realising how toxic nerd culture could be (Grady, 2018). This implied that any future representation of nerds and their world (and any adaptation in a foreign language, by extension) was to be thought out carefully in order to avoid sparking up a similar controversy again. While Spielberg did a good job and respected boundaries in his film adaptation (he mirrored reality quite faithfully and did not overdo it), the Italian translation of the movie sometimes makes gamers and pop culture enthusiasts look like madmen who are only obsessed with videogames and talk like over-the-top fools, as is quite evident in examples 6, 7, 8 and 9.

Example 6:

Timestamp: 06:22

Original version (English): ...that anyone could win if they had the skills

Dubbed version (Italian): ...che chiunque poteva vincere se era abbastanza skillato

Alternative suggestion: ...che chiunque poteva vincere se abbastanza abile

Example 7:

Timestamp: 29:55

Original version (English): Kills every avatar on the planet

Dubbed version (Italian): Killa ogni avatar...

Alternative suggestion: Uccide ogni avatar...

Example 8:

Timestamp: 50:20

Original version (English): Whereas my plan, which is cool

because I rock

Dubbed version (Italian): Mentre il mio piano, che era figo perché

io “rullo” [derivato da to rule in inglese]

Alternative suggestion: Mentre il mio piano, che era figo perché io

spacco...

Example 9:

Timestamp: 1:56:01

Original version (English): My real-world name...

Dubbed version (Italian): Il mio nome real...

Alternative suggestion: Il mio vero nome...

It almost looks like the Italian version is trying to portray gamers as people who deserve public ridicule because of the way they talk and behave, which is the opposite of what the movie wants to obtain. Perhaps the translator’s use of a bizarre and excessively informal vocabulary was simply a way to market the product to a younger audience, a possibility the next chapter of this paper will assess. In any case, the message here is that the translator must be able to tread lightly to avoid triggering a debate when the product he or she is adapting belongs to a field that rests on a delicate balance.

3. Causes and consequences of a bad adaptation

Despite having established that translating and adapting genre films is particularly challenging, it is appropriate to add that rendering *any* media product from one language to another is a difficult task (Esser et al., 2016, p. 2). The following chapter will focus on the main hurdles that translators need to overcome when working on any adaptation in the entertainment field and will also investigate the consequences of taking this job lightly. In fact, the language used in media products inevitably shapes the audience's everyday language (Paolinelli & Di Fortunato, 2005, pp. 8-9), which explains why an incorrect or imprecise translation from a source language to a target language can ultimately lead to the appearance of grammatical or syntactic errors in the latter (Antonelli, 2007, p. 36).

In Italy, for example, this phenomenon caused the rise of a language variety called “doppiaggese”, that is to say the variety of Italian used in some dubbed media products which, as the result of the limitations imposed by lip synchronisation, tight deadlines and other elements which will be investigated in this chapter, is often strongly influenced by the language of the original version and, therefore, does not sound natural. As a result of this, the unnatural and badly translated expressions start being used by the general public and negatively affect the target language (Sileo, 2015, pp. 59-60). An example of this is the word “crime”, often translated as “crimine” instead of “reato” in Italian, where “crimine” only refers to very serious offences. It is therefore crucial to translate and adapt media products thoroughly and with a particular focus on producing a natural-sounding translation.

As mentioned before, this chapter will explore which elements play a role in the production of a low-quality translation. This will be achieved by analysing the audio-visual translation process from four different points of view (1. Who was the intended target audience, 2. How much money was invested in the translation project, 3. Who was hired to lead the project and 4. What training or education did he or she receive) and pinpointing what can go wrong and why. Applying these criteria to *Ready Player One* only serves as a practical example, given that these

mistakes could lead to a low-quality translation no matter the media's product type, genre, original language, country of origin, etc.

3.1. Identifying the correct target audience

As mentioned in the previous chapter, incorrectly identifying the target audience is one of the mistakes that can lead to a low-quality media product adaptation (Ramière, 2003, sections 4.2 and 4.3). It is essential to point out that this does not apply exclusively to audio-visual translation, it is a postulate of translation in all its forms (Otava, 2013, p. 10). In fact, assuming that a translator's job is to make the target language translation sound as natural as possible (or, in other words, the target language message has to be the closest natural equivalent to the source language message), he or she can only achieve this kind of naturalisation by taking the target audience into account (Molina & Albir, 2002, p. 503). For example, the translation of a children's book about dinosaurs differs significantly from that of a documentary on the same topic aimed at adults. This perfectly applies to audio-visual translation as well and to movie translation and adaptation in particular.

When analysing the dubbed version of *Ready Player One*, it is evident that the person in charge of the project did not pay special attention to the intended audience of the movie. Given that most of the pop culture references found in the movie are from the late 1980s and 1990s, it is not a stretch to imagine that their aim was to give people the chance to relive the moments that shaped their youth (Coyote, 2018), namely people who are now in their late 20s or 30s (Stratton, 2018). What was meant to be a cornucopia of nostalgia and childhood memories with the occasional specific gaming term in the original version, quickly took the form of a cluster of gaming slangs that only the youngest generation of gamers would understand in the Italian version, as is quite noticeable in examples 6, 7, 9, 10 and 11.

Example 10:

Timestamp: 21:18

Original version (English): You noob

Dubbed version (Italian): Nabbo

Alternative suggestion: Sfigato

Example 11:

Timestamp: 56:13

Original version (English): A fanboy knows a hater

Dubbed version (Italian): Un fanboy riconosce un hater

Alternative suggestion: Un vero fan riconosce un impostore

The expressions that could perhaps be considered uncommon but still natural in the original version (e.g. fanboy, hater, noob) are not as widely used in Italian, where they sound unnatural and almost annoying. One need only think, for example, that a Google search for “noob” brings up almost 62 million results, while the term “nabbo” brings up around 330,000. Furthermore, even if pop culture is becoming increasingly popular and mainstream, being a gamer and a nerd culture enthusiast is still strongly stigmatised (Moreci, 2018). For this reason, aiming the movie to the wrong target audience can ultimately lead to the nullification of its efforts to humanise escapism and “geekiness” (ibid). The intended Italian audience could watch the movie and feel discouraged and embarrassed by the representation that shines through the dubbed version, once again frustrating the original version’s aims and efforts.

3.2. Money matters of audio-visual translation: budget problems

A further problem that deeply affects the quality of audio-visual translations is represented by the fact that carelessness, lack of time and slim budgets have become prominent issues in this field (Abend-David, 2014, p. 115). This is obviously detrimental to the form, meaning and connotations of the original media product and it damages the distributors, who seem to ignore that “the value added to a film by dubbing is reflected in its earnings” (Paolinelli, 2004, p. 178). Paired with the fact that the United States is the first largest exporter of media products in the world, thus dominating the Italian film industry (among many others worldwide) (Diaz, 2009, p. 7), it is easy to understand the huge economic impact that good film adaptations can have on the Italian audio-visual media sector.

More specifically, as for dubbing (considered the prominent form of film translation in Italy), the main issues that ultimately lead to a bad adaptation are: the complexity of the adaptation and translation process, technical difficulties, tight deadlines and the unwillingness of distributors and translation agencies to spend money. In the first case, the difficulty resides in the fact that adapting a media product can be seen as a holistic exercise, in the sense that translating a complex system like a movie is far more than just translating the single parts and gluing them back together. Adapting a media product means tearing it apart, reassembling it from the root and ultimately “restoring the illusion of a comprehensible, seamless whole” (Paolinelli, 2004, p. 172). As mentioned before, this is a long and intricate process that requires the attention of a professional and, subsequently, is not a cheap operation. The same assumption applies to the technical difficulties as well (lip synchronisation and time and space constraints, to name a few) (Diaz, 2009, p. 8), in such a way that, once again, the long and hard work of trained professionals is necessary to secure a high-quality adaptation. When adding these elements to the fact that the audio-visual market requires translators to follow very tight deadlines (Abend-David, 2014, p. 202), it is easy to understand why distributors and translation agencies are reluctant to invest money in lengthy and costly adaptations (Paolinelli, 2004, p. 173), which leads to the fourth problem: a competitive market that fuels the tendency to hire the cheapest bidder.

In fact, in recent years companies have started using dubious stratagems to cut production costs, clearly to the detriment of quality. For example, some international translation agencies hire language students and offer them 8% of what a trained professional would ask for a project (ibid), while other companies completely outsource the work to amateurs or non-specialised translators (Riggio, 2010, p. 34). Consequently, even dubbing firms that previously offered a high-quality product are crushed by the excessively competitive market and have progressively lowered their standards (ibid). In short, the “perfect” dialogue adapter is often the one who “will work for any figure, who works at a hectic pace, and delivers an average, standardized product, without frills and without bothering about the subtleties of language” (Paolinelli, 2004, p. 173). This appears to be the case of *Ready Player One* as well, considering that the project was managed by a multinational multimedia localisation agency that likely hires freelancers at a favourable rate and without thoroughly investigating the translator’s qualifications. One of the worst aspects of this is that, due to the physical distance, the producers of the original movie are probably totally oblivious to the fact that their product has received a similar treatment (ibid).

3.3. The importance of hiring professionals of the appropriate age group

Last but not least, as already mentioned in the previous chapters, it is important to point out, once again, how vital hiring translators with a solid professional background is. Translation in general is a process that entails a broad range of obstacles which someone who is not trained to recognise and overcome can have serious difficulties in tackling, even if they have a proper command of the foreign language (Diaz, 2009, p. 4). Moreover, the multifaceted approach that is required to provide a high-quality audio-visual translation is something that has to be acquired through professional training and through experience (a concept that the next chapters of this paper will expand) (Esser et al., 2016, p. 5). As noted above, in recent years companies have strived to cut production costs at the expense of quality, disregarding the importance of hiring trained professionals and leading to a general decline in quality standards. A “freelance translator” who boasts a language certification and costs half as much as a professional, qualified

translator will probably attract much more attention compared to the latter, if he or she promises to respect the tight deadlines that companies often impose (Paolinelli, 2004, p. 173).

This is luckily not always true, sometimes companies rightfully decide to invest in a quality translation but disregard another very important aspect: the translator's age and background. As much as an experienced translator might have everything it takes to deliver a decent audio-visual translation, sometimes hiring a younger translator is the best choice. In fact, in less than three decades, the world has seen an incredible increase in pop culture enthusiasts. This implied the creation of a new market segment for translators worldwide. Videogames, comics, music, movies and books now permeate our everyday life and more and more young translators have taken an interest in learning how to render them in different languages. Given that this phenomenon is fairly recent, as a general rule, the latest generations of translators are more qualified to deal with projects that revolve around popular culture (Mangiron Hevia, 2007, pp. 306-3079. A translation project like *Ready Player One*, for example, would have certainly benefited from the work of young, trained translators with a background in videogames localisation or pop culture translation. This is not to say that the older generations of translators are unable to carry out the same job, obviously. It is simply more common for millennials to take interest in a field that, in some way, was ingrained in their childhood and teenagehood and is currently dominating the market (Coomes, 2011, introduction to the chapter 'Pop culture trends in the life of millennials').

4. How to overcome audio-visual translation problems: the perfect dialogue adapter

After having examined the causes and consequences of a low-quality audiovisual translation, this chapter will further look into the solutions to be adopted in order to avoid making similar mistakes in future adaptations. When this happens successfully and the end product is a high-quality translation, the media product reaches its primary goal (to entertain, educate and inform) while

also allowing the distributors to get a much better return, avoiding to spark up a debate by being disrespectful to a particular segment of our society, safeguarding the correctness and integrity of the target language and, last but not least, keeping a market segment alive by avoiding to take advantage of the cut-throat competition and forcing more and more companies to lower their prices and, consequently, their standards. With the aid of examples from *Ready Player One*, the first part of this chapter will provide an overview of the difficulties of translating media products that were previously presented in this paper and offer a follow-up on the viable solutions that can be adopted to overcome them. The second part of this chapter will then provide more useful advice on how to go the extra mile and develop the full set of skills it takes to be the perfect audiovisual translator and dialogue adapter.

4.1. A summary of the most common audio-visual translation problems and the possible solutions to overcome them

With the aid of examples from *Ready Player One*, the first part of this chapter will provide an overview of the difficulties of translating media products that were previously presented in this paper and offer a follow-up on the viable solutions that can be adopted to overcome them.

4.1.1. Genre film and cultural references

As shown in chapter 2, dealing with a media product that belongs to the category of genre films and heavily relies on cultural references is no easy task, given that this requires the translator to have a solid cultural background and the extensive knowledge of a specific vocabulary. Mastering these two skills also allows the translator to know how to deal with a certain topic without being disrespectful towards a specific social group or distorting the image that the filmmaker wanted to convey in the original version. The best solution to achieve this is certainly to gather and absorb as much information on the topic as possible.

Articles, documentaries, films, books, podcasts, almost every piece of information on that topic can prove useful, at one point. Creating a glossary that focuses on specific vocabulary is certainly another valuable solution.

Furthermore, there is nothing wrong with not knowing something, but the perfect dialogue adapter has to know when and where to look things up. The final goal for the translator is to be confident and qualified enough to carry out a project without missing a reference and knowing how to adapt culturally-bound concepts but, at the same time, being humble enough to know when research is needed. In the case of *Ready Player One*, for example, had the translator read more information about the gaming world, he would have avoided mistakes like the ones present in examples 1, 2 and 12. Even a superficial knowledge in the field of videogames would have given him or her the chance to know the videogame series *Worms*, what a wearable object is or that “gamer tag” is rarely used in Italian compared to a word as common as “username” (783,000,000 Google results for “username” against 83,000,000 without even adding the Italian language filter).

Example 12:

Timestamp: 38:04

Original version (English): That’s her gamer tag

Dubbed version (Italian): Quella è la sua gamer tag

Alternative suggestion: Quello è il suo username

4.1.2. Target audience

This paper has already underlined the importance of correctly identifying the intended audience of a translation and the possible consequences in failing to do so. This chapter will now briefly lay out the procedure to follow in order to identify the target audience when translating a media product and, thus, make the best translation choices. The first step the translator should take is to simply read the text and try to imagine to whom the author is trying to direct it. Questions like “Who would be interested in knowing this? Does it fulfill their needs?” or “What is the aim of the text?” can certainly help develop an appropriate response (Sherlock, 2014). This is a crucial step in the translation process and it must not be underestimated, given that thinking long and hard about how to answer these simple questions can be enough to know what translation strategies can and must be applied.

If this first step is not sufficient, the translator can try to delve deeper by analysing the criteria that are taken into account by marketing and advertising experts when determining a brand's target audience: demographics (gender, ethnicity, age, occupation, etc.), psychographics (financials, interests, hobbies and other sociological and psychological factors) and consumer lifestyle (a group's pattern of behaviour, activities and opinions) (Percy et al., 2001, p. 65). This can be achieved with something as simple as a Google search, as nowadays statistics and data about media consumption are available everywhere (Statista, 2018).

If the translator is still not sure about identifying the correct intended audience, the best strategy is to render the text in the most "audience-friendly" way possible, i.e., with words and expressions that anyone can understand regardless of their age, interests, opinions, and so on. A neutral, comprehensible solution is much better than a cornucopia of unintelligible expressions that were intended for a different audience, as examples 13 and 14 clearly illustrate.

Example 13:

Timestamp: 07:02

Original version (English): Losing your shit means... Well, losing your shit

Dubbed version (Italian): Perdere tutto, beh... Perdere tutto vuol dire sclerare

Alternative suggestion: Perdere tutto, beh... Perdere tutto vuol dire perdere la testa

Example 14:

Timestamp: 1:52:44

Original version (English): How are you still playing?

Dubbed version (Italian): Come fai ad essere ancora in game?

Alternative suggestion: Come fai ad essere ancora vivo?

4.1.3. Budget problems

This chapter will focus on one of the few aspects of translation projects that does not directly depend on the translator. In fact, low-quality translations are often the result of underpayment or tight deadlines, and companies, translation agencies and translation multinationals are to be held accountable for this. The only solution to overcome this issue and raise standards to an acceptable level again is to draw up a plan that can change the current system from the ground up. This is certainly not a simple task, but it is the only way to stop greedy people from taking further advantage of qualified professionals and from lowering quality standards to the point that a good original product gets completely spoiled by its adaptation (Paolinelli, 2004, p. 173).

The main solution to start changing the system is certainly to impose a series of regulations at national and European level that can help determine who to hire and how much they should get paid. Some people, for example, are suggesting the creation of a professional list of translators and dialogue adapters who have the necessary qualifications to work on audio-visual products. The list would obviously be regulated by precise and specific rules in order to easily determine who can access it, expel the people who do not reach appropriate standards and establish a minimum wage and a minimum time frame that professionals should have in order to be able to deliver a high-quality product (ibid).

Moreover, another huge step forward would be the adoption of a “European cultural policy”, in other words the establishment of a financing system for the translation and dubbing of films made in the European Union. This would resize the American dominance in the European film industry, promote European films and protect small EU distributors who sometimes do not have the money to pay for a professional and high-quality adaptation.

When applied together, these two solutions can guarantee a better audiovisual translation of both American and European films, create a

healthier working environment and a less competitive market and promote and market European films worldwide. In examples 15 and 16, for example, something as simple as a review proofreading could have greatly benefited the final product. In fact, although the translated lines of dialogue are “understandable” by the Italian audience, working on them for 1 or 2 more minutes could have allowed the translator to find better solutions, both from a stylistic and grammatical point of view, and if he or she could not solve the problem, the monolingual proofreading of the dialogue in the target language by a native Italian professional would have. In fact, another major problem in audiovisual translation is that the lack of proof-readers is another major budget cut practice. This heavily reflects on the quality of the final product and permits these obvious errors to exist.

Example 15:

Timestamp: 1:40:23

Original version (English): Daito, now!

Dubbed version (Italian): Daito, dai!

Alternative suggestion: Daito, ora!

Example 16:

Timestamp: 1:57:18

Original version (English): That ain't so bad, is it?

Dubbed version (Italian): Non è tanto male, eh? [dubbing is rushed here]

Alternative suggestion: Mica male, eh?

4.1.4. Professional training

As previously stated, one of the main postulates of translation is that whoever wants to work as a translator must be sure to possess all the necessary skills required to carry out an audiovisual translation successfully. Translating is such a multidisciplinary domain that someone who wants to do it as a living, in

addition to having command of a foreign language, must necessarily participate in a training program or take a degree in translation studies in order to learn skills such as documentation, terminology, knowledge of specialized texts, the use of translation softwares etc. (Castro-Prieto & Olvera-Lobo, 2005, p. 132).

Unfortunately, sometimes having a solid professional background is not a key requirement, considering that another key aspect of the translation process that does not rest in the hands of the translator is the fact that some translation agencies hire people with no training in order to save money. This should not discourage aspiring translators, given that companies that prioritize money over quality, ultimately pay the price for their choice. Obviously, in the future it would be advisable and desirable for translation agencies (or whoever commissions a job) to hire people only after having thoroughly investigated their professional background.

Underpaying unqualified people to save money to the detriment of quality is unethical, if we also consider that more and more young and talented people are taking an interest in translation studies and are ready to start working in a field they love and respect. In Italy, for example, excellence programs like the ones offered by the University of Bologna (a first cycle degree in intercultural and linguistic mediation or a two-year master in specialized translation) produce highly trained translators every year (Unibo, 2018). As is quite evident in examples 17, 18, 19 and 20, in the audiovisual translation field, hiring people who are trained to do their job correctly is crucial to avoid grammatical mistakes, syntax errors, translated expressions that completely change the meaning of the original text or do not sound natural in the target language, etc..

Example 17:

Timestamp: 01:23

Original version (English): No pain, no gain

Dubbed version (Italian): Nessun dolore, nessun guadagno

Alternative suggestion: Chi non risica, non rosica

Example 18:

Timestamp: 29:03

Original version (English): The shareholders won't be happy

Dubbed version (Italian): Gli azionisti non sorrideranno

Alternative suggestion: Gli azionisti non ne saranno felici

Example 19:

Timestamp: 39:30

Original version (English): Yeah, well, he missed his chance

Dubbed version (Italian): Sì, beh, occasione mancata

Alternative suggestion: Sì, beh, ha perso la sua occasione

Example 20:

Timestamp: 53:56

Original version (English): And if you do happen to find...

Dubbed version (Italian): E se succedesse che trovi...

Alternative suggestion: E se dovessi effettivamente...

5. Conclusion

Using *Ready Player One* as a case study, this paper has shown that, when considering the cultural importance that moving pictures have in today's society, it is paramount to translate media products thoroughly and to avoid hasty and superficial adaptations. Working in the audiovisual translation field is certainly challenging when one considers the amount of technical, cultural and linguistic hurdles that the translator has to face when adapting a media product. Underestimating these issues, not identifying the target audience correctly, choosing money over quality and refusing to hire qualified professionals can ultimately lead to a low-quality translation that can severely damage the original product and have serious consequences on society's sometimes delicate balances.

Luckily, most of the aforementioned hurdles can be overcome by training more and more translators who are able to pay special attention to the product's

target audience and have a solid cultural and professional background. Furthermore, the growing interest in the audiovisual translation field bodes well in terms of improving the situation from an economic point of view. In fact, the creation of a set of regulations and the adoption of a funding policy at a European level could solve many of the problems that, at the present moment, threaten the economic stability of that segment of the market. In conclusion, if it is true that moving pictures are reflected in our everyday life, the opposite is also true. The huge impact that films, cartoons and TV series have had on mankind in the last century cannot be underestimated, especially when it comes to their role in shaping our culture and language. For this reason, making original media products available to as many people as possible by providing a high-quality translation is not just the response to a demand, but also and above all a duty.

6. Appendix

- = syntax error/doesn't sound natural in the target language
- = the meaning was altered in the target language
- = culturally-bound reference that needs to be adapted
- = wrong register/overuse or underuse of specific terms or jargon
- = good solution, but it can be improved

Table 1

TIMESTAMP	ORIGINAL VERSION (ENGLISH)	DUBBED VERSION (ITALIAN)	ALTERNATIVE SUGGESTION
01:21	Get ready for the feel, the feel of real	Preparatevi a sentire, sentire il reale	Preparatevi a un autentico assaggio di realtà
01:23	No pain, no gain	Nessun dolore, nessun guadagno	Chi non risica, non rosica
02:47	In 2045, Columbus is the fastest-growing city on Earth	Nel 2045, Columbus è la città più in espansione della Terra	Nel 2045, Columbus è la città in più rapida espansione della Terra
04:10	Surf a 50-foot monster wave	Surf su un'onda mostro di 15 metri	Surfare su un'onda (mostruosa) di 15 metri
08:27	If you're watching this, I'm dead	Se mi state guardando, sono morto	Se state guardando questo video, sono morto
9:10	In the form of my avatar	Nella forma del mio avatar	Nei panni del mio avatar
09:26	And those with the	E chi riuscirà a	E chi riuscirà a

	skill to survive these straits	fronteggiare queste vicende	fronteggiare queste difficoltà
10:16	And the scoreboard? Still empty	E il grande segnapunti? Ancora vuoto	E il tabellone segnapunti? Ancora vuoto
17:02	This is my workshop, touch nothing	Questa è la mia officina, non toccare	Questa è la mia officina, non toccare niente
19:58	[Fixing his hair]	Va meglio	Meglio
27:47	Nice racing, Padawan. You're the first to finish [He's the first person to win the challenge since it was created]	Bella corsa Padawan, sei il primo che ha finito	Bella corsa Padawan, sei il primo a portarla a termine
29:03	The shareholders won't be happy	Gli azionisti non sorrideranno	Gli azionisti non ne saranno felici
37:46	Can you fast-forward to...	Puoi andare veloce a...	Puoi saltare all'appuntamento di Halliday [in a video]
39:30	Yeah, well, he missed his chance	Sì, beh, occasione mancata	Sì, beh, ha perso la sua occasione
41:52	She could actually be a 300-pound dude	<i>Lei</i> può essere un tipo di 130 kg	<i>Lei</i> potrebbe essere un <i>lui</i> di 135 kg
45:43	You come prepared?	Sei preparato?	Sei pronto?
48:29	Pull!	Pulla	Pull! [like in skeet shooting]
53:56	And if you do happen	E se succedesse che	E se dovessi

	to find...	trovi...	(effettivamente) trovare...
54:38	No way [surprised]	Niente meno	Ma dai!
1:02:01	It's so much slower here	È molto più lento qui [cosa?]	È tutto (molto) più lento qui
1:12:51	This, the one with the lame tattoo	È lui, quello col tatuaggio sfigato	È lui, quello col tatuaggio da sfigato
1:14:19	You really think I'm gonna win?	Davvero pensi che vinco io?	Davvero pensi che possa vincere io?
1:16:24	...IDing my van	...sta schedando il mio van	...sta schedando il mio furgone
1:22:19	Just slow down, okay?	Non precipitiamo, ok?	Andiamoci piano, ok?
1:48:45	I've got 10 years' worth of shit inside of me	Ho 10 anni di roba addosso a me	Sono 10 anni che raccolgo roba
2:07:29	Well played, Parzival	Ben giocato, Parzival	Bella partita, Parzival
2:08:25	...salary was 25 cents, a quarter	...stipendio era 25 cents, un quarto	...stipendio era di 25 centesimi, praticamente spiccioli
56:17	You have a whole team of oologists in your ear	Hai un intero team di oologi nell'orecchio	[the joke is a bit obscure, oologists -> people who study eggs] Hai un intero team di tuttologi pronti a suggerire
1:51:33	Halliday's letting everyone watch the end of the contest	Halliday lascia guardare a tutti la fine della gara	Halliday vuole che tutti guardino la fine della gara [it's not really a

			choice]
04:31	You can... get there (implying sex)	Potete... andare lì	Potete... godervi la permanenza
06:34	You see, everyone starts the same	Perché, all'inizio siamo tutti uguali	Perché iniziamo tutti dallo stesso livello
06:58	Since people spend most of their time in the OASIS	Considerato il tempo che la gente passa su OASIS	Considerato che la gente passa la maggior parte del proprio tempo su OASIS
22:47	He told us to look in his brain. This was the next best thing	Ci disse di guardargli nel cervello, non sapevamo altro	Ci disse di guardargli nel cervello, questa era la cosa che ci andava più vicina
51:14	Division	Divisione	Dipartimento [it's a private company, not a public body]
06:08	Turn into any giant robot...	Trasforma in un robot gigante...	Trasformati [referred to a videogame object that can change the player's skills and appearance]
11:31	[mocking him implying he's feminine] Well, I didn't make a pit stop at the hair salon	Beh, non ho fatto un pit stop dal barbiere	Beh, <i>io</i> non ho fatto un pit stop dalla parrucchiera
30:02	20,000 for the holy hand grenade	20.000 per la santa bomba a mano	20.000 per la granata sacra [official translation used in the videogame]

			saga]
33:16	...the center of the Tootsie Pop	...al centro del Tootsie Pop	...al centro di un Chupa Chups ripieno [the nod to the commercial can be translated to “È rotondo e dura molto!”, the Italian tagline when the product first came out]
55:20	TaB	TaB	Fanta [TaB, that never existed in Italy, has to be translated to something that the Italian public actually knows, like in Back to the Future, where it was adapted using “Fanta” instead]
1:13:32	All right. Gluten O’s...	C’è tutto: Gluten O’s...	C’è tutto: Kellogg’s...
05:52	Man, getting’ my kills on, bro	Man, le mie solite kill, bro	[not natural and over the top] Zio, sto massacrando tutti come al solito
06:22	...that anyone could win if they had the skills	...che chiunque poteva vincere se era abbastanza skillato	...che chiunque poteva vincere se abbastanza abile
07:02	Losing your shit means... Well, losing your shit	Perdere tutto, beh... Perdere tutto vuol dire sclerare	Perdere tutto, beh... Perdere tutto vuol dire perdere la testa
21:18	You noob	Nabbo	[over the top and way too

			specific, only the youngest generation of gamers would get it] Sfigato
29:55	Kills every avatar on the planet	Killa ogni avatar...	Uccide ogni avatar...
38:04	That's her gamer tag	Quella è la sua gamer tag	[perhaps a bit too specific for the general public] Username
43:48	Kill	Killare	Uccidere
50:20	Whereas my plan, which is cool because I rock	Mentre il mio piano, che era figo perché io "rullo"... [deriva da "to rule" in inglese]	Mentre il mio piano, che era figo perché io spacco...
56:13	A fanboy knows a hater	Un fan boy riconosce un hater	Un vero fan riconosce un impostore
1:52:44	How are you still playing?	Come fai ad essere ancora in game?	Come fai ad essere ancora vivo?
1:56:01	My real-world name...	Il mio nome real...	Il mio vero nome...
29:41	Dude	Zio	Amico
06:09	That's rad	Spaziale	Che figata!
43:37	Get out of here	Andate via	[in a threatening tone] Sparate
1:11:32	Go on [to make her go away]	Continua	Va' avanti
1:40:23	Daito, now!	Daito, dai!	Daito, ora!

1:57:18	That ain't so bad, is it?	Non è tanto male, eh? [dubbing is rushed here]	Mica male, eh?
1:57:42	I'm gonna need a second	Ho ancora un secondo	Dammi ancora un secondo

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