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HUMOROUS CULTURE AND CULTURAL HUMOR:
A THEORETICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE TRANSLATION OF CULTURAL
AND HUMOROUS ELEMENTS IN AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTS.

CANDIDATA

DEBORAH SORIANO

RELATRICE

CHIARA BUCARIA

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INTRODUCTION

Over recent years, the discipline of Translation Studies (TS) has significantly developed. It has been arousing interest not only among linguistic scholars, but also among researchers involved in fields that differ from the literary and linguistic ones, such as those of Cultural Studies, Communication Studies, Film Studies, Media Studies, Humor Studies, and Gender Studies, just to name a few. The increasing number of disciplines with which Translation Studies interrelate has led to the contributions of numerous scholars who have found their way into the discussion on translation. As a result, many researchers, when referring to the notion of translation, tend to describe it with the adjective “interdisciplinary”, thus underlining the intertwined net of notions and knowledge that contribute to this field.

Especially over the last decades, with the introduction of new technologies, the meaning of translation has broadened to the point that scholars have identified a new kind of discipline, known as Audiovisual Translation (AVT), which focuses on the translation of multimodal products, and which is only been getting the attention and the interest of Translation Studies scholars since the 90s. The purpose of my thesis is to offer a theoretical analysis of the translation problems that arise in AVT. Specifically, my investigation will focus on the issues related to cultural references and humorous elements in audiovisual products.

The first chapter of this paper serves as a general introduction to the field of Translation Studies and to the process of translation. By focusing on the intrinsic link between language and culture, I will attempt to highlight the reasons behind the complexity of the translation process and the obstacles that the translator has to face. In the second part, the focus will shift to the field of Audiovisual Translation, with a description of the discipline and its modalities.

In the second chapter the main focus is the translation of culture and humor in audiovisual products. The purpose of this chapter is the introduction of the main difficulties and strategies of translating humorous elements, as well as culture-bound references in AVT. In the first section, the discussion about the translation of culture will concern the case of allusions and extra-linguistic references, with a special regard to idioms and fixed expressions. In the second part, the analysis of humor translation will then concentrate on the particularities of translating jokes and puns.

The third and final chapter concerns the translation tendencies regarding the issues discussed in the paper of Italian translators when translating from English into Italian. Moreover, it presents an analysis of the user reception of the translated audiovisual products, with a specific focus on Italian audiences.

CHAPTER 1 – TRANSLATION AND ITS ISSUES.

1.1 The concept of translation and the reasons behind translation problems.

According to the Cambridge English Dictionary, the term “translation” means “the activity or process of changing the words of one language into the words of another language that have the same meaning”. Although this definition is usually what comes to mind when thinking about translation, in the field of languages this concept acquires several meanings. The first one is the general subject field or phenomenon, which is what we refer to when talking about Translation Studies; the second one alludes to the product, the text that has been translated; the third one is the process of producing the translation. For the purpose of this paper, the term “translation” will mainly be used in reference to the latter definition. That is, the process of translation, which involves the changing of an original text (source text or ST) produced in the original language (source language or SL) into a text (target text or TT) in a different language (target language or TL). However, this traditional approach does not take into consideration the cases in which there are multilingual versions of the same text, or the instances in which the source text is in constant need of being updated and readapted, thus requiring a modification of an existing TT rather than a new translation (Munday 2016: 8). Bearing this in mind, in his paper ‘On linguistic aspects of translation’ (1959), Jakobson differentiates between three categories of translation, which can be summarized as follows: intralingual translation or “rewording”, which involves the interpretation of verbal signs using other signs of the same language; interlingual translation or “translation proper”, which is the interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language; and intersemiotic translation or “transmutation”, which is the interpretation of verbal signs by means of non-verbal signs (ibid.: 233). These definitions are all based on the concept of semiotics, “the general science of communication through signs and sign system” (Munday 2016: 9), but for the sake of my analysis I will only be referring to the concept of interlingual translation.

The study of translation as an academic subject is fairly recent and is now known as Translation Studies. Much of the early research that delineated this discipline we owe to scholar James S. Holmes, who describes this new field as concerning “the complex of problems clustered round the phenomenon of translating and translations” (Holmes 1988/2004: 181). In his paper ‘The name and nature of translation studies’, Holmes puts forward a framework describing the topics of this field. As described by Jeremy Munday in his book *‘Introduction to Translation Studies’* (2016), Holmes differentiates between “pure” and “applied” translation studies. The subject matter of Holmes’ “applied” areas of research is the application to the practice of translation and concerns the translator’s training, translation aids (such as dictionaries), and translation criticism, which refers to the evaluation of the TT. Alternatively, the goals of the “pure” areas of research are the description of the phenomena of translation, and the establishment of the general principles to explain such phenomena. This area is further divided into the “theoretical” and the “descriptive” branch. The first one is further divided into general theories, which describe the types of translation through generalizations, and partial theories, which can be restricted according to the medium, the area, the rank, the text type, time, or a specific problem. The descriptive branch, also known as Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS), concerns the

product, the function, and the process, and can be oriented towards any of these three. Product-oriented DTS examines existing translations; function-oriented DTS describes the function of translation in the different sociocultural situations, therefore it concentrates on the contexts rather than the texts; process-oriented DTS deals with the psychology of translation and the thought process of the translator.

In order to better understand the approaches to translation, in his article 'Factors in dubbing television comedy' (1994), Zabalbeascoa states that "the nature of translation theory and translation studies are inevitably tied to our understanding of what translation is and what it involves" (ibid.: 89). He describes two different lines of thought, namely the prescriptive theory and the descriptive theory, which can be reconnected to the Descriptive Translation Studies. According to Zabalbeascoa, the prescriptive theory of translation is connected to the knowledge of the theories, definitions, principles, and strategies of translation, which is fundamental in order to produce an acceptable TT (ibid.: 90). The descriptive theory, on the other hand, applies the opposite approach starting from the idea that translation is what translators do and building a theoretical framework around that process (ibid.).

In this thesis I will mainly be referring to the descriptive theory, and consequently to Descriptive Translation Studies. The reason behind this is that this approach takes into consideration all the factors that influence the translation process, as well as the importance of the translators themselves. The descriptive approach, in fact, revolves around the three contexts that play a key role in translation: the original context of the source text (time, place, language, culture, society, audience, and discourse factors); the context of the target text, which includes all the parameters used in the source texts and adds the purpose of the text and the intertextual element; and the importance of the translator and of the context in which the translation process takes place. One of the first scholars who attempted to develop a methodology for DTS is Gideon Toury. For Toury, "translations occupy a position in the social and literary system of the target culture" (2012: 23). With this concept in mind, he proposes a methodology for DTS based on three important steps: situate the text within the target culture system; carry out a textual analysis of the ST and the TT to identify the relationship between the segments of the texts; attempt generalizations about the identified patterns. By analyzing the different kinds of norms that influence the translation process, Toury attempts to formulate what he calls "the 'laws' of translation" (2012), notably the law of growing standardization and the law of interference. The first one refers to textual relations and ST patterns that are not common in the TL and which therefore are modified or ignored by the translator. The second one concerns the interference from ST to TT, that is ST linguistic features that are copied in the TT and that will either result in non-usual patterns ("negative interference") or normal patterns ("positive interference").

Up until the second half of the 20th century translation was considered to be a "word-for-word" process. However, in the last decades many scholars started to reject this conception, advocating for a "sense-to-sense" approach. One of the most relevant contributions to this change was originally provided St. Jerome, who dismissed the word-for-word method in favor of a translation that allowed the sense and content of the ST to be carried over without following the form too closely, in order to avoid the creation of a final product that

would result absurd and senseless to the target audience. This approach is now generally referred to as “free” translation, which is opposed to the concept of “literal” translation. In this sense, it is important to mention the work of John Dryden (1680), who, by criticizing translators who had the tendency of producing “verbal copies” of the source texts, proposed a categorization of the translation process. In his model all translations can be reduced to three categories:

- “metaphrase”, which corresponds to a literal or word-for-word translation;
- “paraphrase”, which involves changing whole sentences of the text and which corresponds to a free or sense-to-sense translation;
- “imitation”, in which both sense and words are abandoned and which today we may call “adaptation”.

Although Dryden’s model had a great influence on later research on translation, his writings were very prescriptive, as it was the norm at the time. Opposing Dryden’s author-oriented method, Tytler’s ‘Essay on the principles of translation’ (1790) proposed a more reader-oriented model. According to Tytler, a good translation has to be oriented to the target language reader, and to do so it has to follow three general rules: it should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the source text; it should follow the style and manner of writing of the source text; it should have the same fluency of the source text (ibid.: 209).

Looking back to the “literal” versus “free” translation division, in more recent years Vinay and Darbelent (1958/1995) carried out a study which resulted in the identification of the two translation strategies, namely “direct translation” and “oblique translation” (ibid.: 128-137). As it may be easily grasped, the former refers to literal translation, and the latter to free translation. In their analysis, Vinay and Darbelent list the seven procedures of the two strategies. Direct translation covers the first three: borrowing (the SL word is transferred directly to the TL); calque (the SL expression might not have a literal meaning, but it is transferred in a literal translation); and literal translation (word-for-word translation, which should only be sacrificed when the structure of the ST cannot be preserved in the TT). Oblique translation covers the remaining four procedures: transposition (the TT changes a part of the ST while still preserving the sense), which can be obligatory or optional; modulation (the semantics and point of view of the SL is changed), which can be obligatory or optional; equivalence (the SL and the TL describe the same situation but they utilize different styles and structures); and adaptation (the cultural reference of the SL is changed because of the lack of an equivalent one in the TL). In addition to this, Vinay and Darbelent later introduced a number of other techniques, such as: amplification (the TT uses more words of the ST); false friend (a term with a similar structure in the ST and the TT but with a different meaning); loss, gain and compensation (not all nuances of the ST can be preserved, but the TT compensates by introducing a gain); explicitation (implicit information in the ST is rendered explicit in the TT).

Another extremely important contribution to the development of a translation theory was given to us by Eugene Nida (1964). By discarding the terms “literal” and “free”, Nida played a key role in developing a path away from the word-to-word translation and introduced a more reader-based approach by proposing a model

based on two “types of equivalence” (ibid.: 159). The first one, formal equivalence or “formal correspondence”, focuses on the message and its form. On the other hand, dynamic or “functional” equivalence deals with the “equivalence effect” which, according to Nida, is the achievement of a relationship between receptor and message that is the same as the one between the original receptors and the message (ibid.: 164). This distinction was then repropounded years later by Newmark (1981), who talked about “communicative” and “semantic” translation, stating that “communicative translation attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to the one obtained on the readers of the original. Semantic translation attempts to render the exact contextual meaning of the original [...]” (ibid.: 39). Newmark also distances himself from the animosity towards literal translation by claiming that semantic or word-for-word translation is usually the best approach in cases where it would not result in abnormalities in the TT and as long as the “equivalent effect” is achieved. Although Nida’s line of thought was later criticized for being too concerned with the word level and still very ST-oriented, the concept of equivalence is still extremely relevant when talking about translation. In order to have a better understanding of what equivalence is, it is worth going back to the work of Jakobson. Building on Saussure’s theory of language, Jakobson (1959) investigates the mechanism of interlingual translation and identifies two main issues: linguistic meaning and equivalence. He then moves on to consider the problem of equivalence in meaning, which is the aspect I am interested in here, and explains how “there is no full equivalence between code-units” (ibid.: 127). This statement is based on the concept of linguistic relativity, which claims that “the differences in languages shape different conceptualizations of the world” (Munday 2016: 60). However, full linguistic relativity would imply the impossibility of translation, which of course is not the case. Jakobson obviates this issue by stating that in interlingual translation the message can be equivalent since “all is conveyable in any existing language” (ibid.: 131), but the two code-units will necessarily be different because the languages differ both in structure and terminology. The concept of equivalence was then further analyzed by Koller (1995: 186), who attempted to answer the question of what it is that has to be equivalent in translation. In doing so, he categorizes equivalence into five different types: denotative (equivalence of extralinguistic elements); connotative or stylistic (equivalence of lexical choices); text-normative (equivalence of text type); pragmatic or communicative (oriented to the receiver of the TT); and formal or expressive (related to form and aesthetics). Today, the notion of equivalence remains one of the key issues in translation studies. However, it was heavily criticized by numerous scholars, and, as Chiaro points out, “recent debates [...] have been favoring TT oriented approaches [...]” (2005: 577).

The question of equivalence and translatability is strictly connected to both the skopos theory and the role that the cultural context plays in translation. Although briefly, it is worth mentioning the skopos theory of translation, which was first introduced by Vermeer and Reiss. “Skopos” simply refers to the aim or purpose of a translation, more specifically to the purpose that the TT has to fulfill. It is essential to acknowledge the importance of the skopos theory and the key role it plays in underlining the influence that culture has on the process of translation. In their explanation, Vermeer and Reiss (1984) state that the TT and the ST are always shaped by their skopos and by the function in their relative linguistic and cultural contexts. In Vermeer and Reiss’ model, the translator plays a fundamental role in recognizing that the function of a TT in the target

culture is not necessarily the same as the one of the ST in the source culture. Furthermore, Nida was also one of the first scholars to move away from the idea that words have a fixed meaning and towards a new definition in which the word acquires a meaning through its context and culture. The shift from the conception of translation as text to translation as culture is what Mary Snell-Hornby (1990) calls “the cultural turn”. Her essay is part of the collection ‘Translation, History and Culture’ (1990), in which Bassnett and Lefevere also dismiss the translations that do not consider the text in its cultural environment and focus on the interaction between translation and culture.

Culture exerts a great influence on the field of Translation Studies, as it is closely connected to language. Translation is, in fact, an act of intercultural communication during which the message has to be carried over from one cultural group to another, while both preserving the sense of the ST and avoiding the presence of abnormal structures in the TT. Therefore, keeping into consideration the sociocultural environment of both the source and the target language is extremely important. The reason for this is that the translator could come across issues in translating both linguistic cultural references, which concern the different aspects of language, and culture-bound extralinguistic elements, which refer not to the language itself but to the real world. In describing the latter, Pedersen uses the acronym “ECRs” (extra-linguistic cultural references) and talks about how they can produce “translation crisis points”. In his paper “How is culture rendered in subtitles?” (2005), Pedersen states that these moments constitute turning points at which the translator has to make active decisions, thus further stressing the importance of both the role and the working process of the translator. The most common type of “translation crisis points” occurs when a reference to the source culture is made and there is no obvious equivalent to utilize in the TT (ibid.: 2). When an element in the ST is inextricably linked to the cultural system it originates from, its rendering into another language, and therefore into another culture, can be problematic, especially if there is no similar item in the target culture. When writing the ST, the author makes assumptions about how much the audience knows, but the TT readers will most likely have a different kind of knowledge since they are part of a different cultural system. If the translator is not able to perform as an intercultural mediator between the two cultures, the translation will result abnormal to the target audience and therefore it will not be adequate. In chapter 2, a more in-depth analysis of the issues related to the translation of cultural references will be presented. For the time being, it is essential to understand how the positioning of the source text, the target text, and the translator in their respective cultural environments can exert a strong influence on both the translation process and the text it produces.

1.2 The role of the translator.

Ever since the cultural factor has been introduced into the field of Translation Studies, one of the key issues that scholars have touched on is the role played by the translator. If we consider translation to be an act of intercultural communication between two different cultures, then we have to ask ourselves to which extent the positioning and the involvement of the translator influence the translation itself. One of the first scholars to reject the idea of the translator being a “neutral mediator” is Maria Tymoczko. In her paper ‘Ideology and the positioning of the translator. In what sense is a translator “in between”?’ (2003), she tackles the problem of

the “positionality” of the translator by stating that “the ideology of a translation resides not simply in the text translated, but in the voicing and stance of the translator” (ibid.: 183). Toury also takes up the question of the position of translators and defines them as being “persons-in-the-culture of the target system” (1995). This implies that, if translators are part of their own cultural system, their positioning, which Tymoczko calls “ideological positioning” (ibid.), will necessarily affect the strategies and the choices they make in their work, and, consequently, the overall outcome of the translation.

Lawrence Venuti is one of the most relevant theorists that analyzed the importance and the influence of the translator. In his *The translator's invisibility* (1995), Venuti discusses the concept of “invisibility” in reference to the translator’s situation and activity. According to his theory, invisibility can be produced both by the way the translator tends to translate “fluently” in order to produce a “readable” TT thus creating an “illusion of transparency”; and by the way the final translation is read by the target readers (ibid.: 1). In his analysis, the translated text is “judged acceptable [...] when it reads fluently, when the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer’s personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text – the appearance, in other words, that the translation is not in fact a translation, but the ‘original’” (ibid.). In relation to the translator’s task to achieve this kind of invisibility, Venuti identifies the two translation methods that the translator has to choose from and that concern both the choice of text and the translation method. “Domestication” is the one Venuti frowns upon as it involves an “ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to the receiving cultural values” (ibid.: 15), meaning that the pursuit of an “invisible style” results in a minimization of the foreignness of the TT and therefore in a reading that does not keep into consideration the provenience of the text. On the other hand, “foreignization” is considered to be the most adequate approach as it attempts to “send the reader abroad” by making the receiving culture aware of the linguistic and cultural differences inherent in the foreign text (ibid.). In order to achieve this effect, Venuti believes that the translator has to employ a heterogeneous translation style that highlights the foreign identity of the ST, renders the translator “visible”, and makes the readers realize they are reading a translation of a work from a different culture. Although the debate between translators who choose a more domesticating approach and those who tend towards foreignization is still ongoing today, the two lines of thought are not to be considered as opposites but rather as part of a continuum. Venuti himself, despite advocating for foreignizing translations, recognizes that the two methods are not mutually exclusive, and that foreignization involves a degree of domestication since it translates a ST for a receiving culture.

The issue of whether or not to erase the foreign nature of the ST becomes extremely relevant when dealing with a text that contains references specific to the SL cultural environment. If the translator decides to adapt a concept to the target culture and if the translation choice proves to be effective, the reader will experience the text in its entirety and the translator will have achieved their goal of inducing in the target audience the same effect that the original author had intended for the SL readers. However, the translator will be “invisible”, and the TT readers will not be made aware of the fact that they are dealing with the translation of a foreign work. At the same time, the decision of maintaining the foreign nature of the ST might result in a

translation that is not idiomatic and fluent in the TL, with the risk of creating confusion and disorientation in the target reader, who will not be able to experience the full intended effect of the text. Of course, there is no established rule that states one technique is better than the other, and each translator will have to make an active decision about which method to employ based on their own ethics and the type of text they are working with. Naturally, the task of a translator that has to deal with an audiovisual product rather than an exclusively written text is much more insidious and presents a number of different obstacles. When dealing with Audiovisual Translation (AVT) the translator has to take into account a lot of the extralinguistic and technical details that are not as relevant in other types of translation, as well as the physical constraints of time and space and the non-verbal elements of the ST. In the next section of the chapter, while illustrating the different types and methodologies of AVT, I will attempt to give an overview of the adversities and restrictions that translators have to deal with when working in AVT.

1.3 Audiovisual Translation.

Initially overlooked by translation theory, in more recent years the field of Audiovisual Translation has been growing rapidly and is now attracting the interest of an increasing number of scholars. The prime reasons behind the current boom of interest and activity that this practice is experiencing are, first and foremost, the development of new technologies and the increase in the production of multimedial products, which creates the need for audiovisual translations. When talking about AVT we refer to an interdisciplinary field that encompasses not only the research areas close to Translation Studies, but also a number of what Irene Ranzato defines as “ideologically charged disciplines [...] that encourage to apply the notion of intersectionality to AVT [...]” (2019: 173). Yet, it should be noted that interdisciplinarity does not automatically exclude independence because, as Fresco (2006) states, “the most faithful studies on AVT include or assume to some extent two basic notions: the independence of AVT as an autonomous discipline and its dependence on other related disciplines”.

In *'The Palgrave Handbook Of Audiovisual Translation And Media Accessibility'*, Elisa Perego and Ralph Pacinotti define audiovisual translation as the “process of interlingual transfer in a multimodal context” during which “a given portion of the ST is transformed and relocated in its new shape in the same complex audiovisual ensemble” (2020: 35). Audiovisual translation can be considered an “overlapping umbrella term” (Chiaro 2005: 141) as it incorporates a series of other definitions, such as “media translation”, “screen translation”, and “multimodal translation”, all of which are based on “the interlingual transfer of verbal language when it is transmitted and accessed both visually and acoustically [...] through some kind of electronic device” (ibid.). The multimodal nature of AVT is what differentiates it from common text translation since it is influenced both by the written dimension, and the visual and acoustic contexts. In this regard, Delabastita refers to AVT as dealing with a “multi-code type of communication” and goes on to describe these codes as: the verbal code, which refers to the style of the text; the literary and theatrical code, concerned with the plot and the dialogue; the proxemic and kinetic code, connected to the non-verbal elements; and the cinematic code, which deals with camera techniques, genres and so on. This means that the texts AVT is

concerned with work on multiple levels simultaneously and the numerous codes that they are made of interact with one another to create an “inseparable whole”. Therefore, despite the fact that the translator can operate and intervene only on the verbal level, the visuals of the product are still to be taken into account, especially if we consider the process of dubbing. Apart from the specific constraints and difficulties of both dubbing and subtitling, which will be presented later in this chapter, all AVT translators have to face obstacles that are, of course, relevant in written translation as well, but that in this field reveal themselves to be much more problematic.

Although research on AVT has been rapidly growing, “many of the translation concepts and theories that have been historically articulated cease to be functional when scholars try and apply them to AVT” (Diaz-Cintas 2004: 112). However, even if a universal method to audiovisual translation has yet to be delineated, translation scholars have been able to identify the most predominant methods used to translate multimodal material, which can be categorized into two macro-modes: revoicing and captioning (Zabalbeascoa 2012: 18). In revoicing the spoken language of the product is retained and the original dialogue is replaced by a new soundtrack in the TL. This is the case of: lip-sync dubbing and narration, where the replacement of the original soundtrack is total; and voice-over and interpreting, where the original soundtrack is still audible in the background. Captioning, on the other hand, is the process of changing the spoken language of the screen product into written form by adding text on the screen. This method is mainly known as subtitling, and it includes interlingual, bilingual and intralingual subtitles (or close captions, for the hard of hearing). To these, we can add the categories of audio description, mainly used to facilitate the visually impaired, and of surtitling, which occurs when subtitles are projected above the stage during theater productions.

To summarize, AVT modalities can be divided in:

- Revoicing:
 - Dubbing or “lip-synchronization”
 - Narration
 - Voice-over
 - Interpreting
- Captioning:
 - Subtitling

For the purpose of this paper, I will only introduce the practices of dubbing and subtitling, since they are also considered to be the most widespread AVT modalities among the ones listed above.

1.3.1. Dubbing.

Dubbing is the process of replacing the original speech of an audiovisual product with a translated one, with the purpose of making the dialogues in the TL “look as if they are being uttered by the original actors” (Chiaro 2008: 144). In order to achieve this effect, the translator attempts to follow the timing, phrasing, and lip-movements of the original text as closely as possible. Although the main focus of this method is the spoken

content, dubbing involves a translation process that works on different levels simultaneously. As a matter of fact, the translation of the written text (the script) is not the only process that takes place, the reason being that in order to produce an effective translation the translator has to pay close attention to the acoustic and visual contents as well. The oral sounds, such as intonation and interjections, and the special effects of the original soundtrack can get lost, therefore limiting the experience of the viewers. As for the visual aspect, the constraints concerning lip-synchronization can result in a translation that is less faithful in terms of content as the translator is sometimes forced to make choices that divert from the original script but that are similar to the visuals on screen. In this sense, it is worth differentiating between translation and adaptation. In the dubbing process, in fact, the written script is first translated by a translator who usually provides a quite literal translation of the material. Thereafter, it is the adaptor or “dubbing translator” who adjusts the rough translation to fit the images and the lip-movements on the screen in order to make it sound like a natural TL dialogue (Chiaro 2008: 145). Traditionally, the adaptor does not need to be fluent in the SL as long as they are proficient and creative in the TL. However, it is undoubtedly important to have an understanding of the ST, therefore “it is becoming ever more common for the two processes (the translation itself and the adaptation) to merge and be carried out by a single translator who is proficient in both languages” (Chaume 2006).

Despite the fact that dubbing is considerably more expensive and time-consuming compared to subtitling, it is still the most common modality employed when dealing with AVT but, nonetheless, it still has its drawbacks. The complete replacement of the original dialogues with the translated ones makes dubbing a truly domesticating practice in which the translator embodies the principle of invisibility. However, this can also become a double-edged sword. While the audience is able to experience the screen product in its entirety without the interference of either the SL or the ST, one of the most relevant arguments against dubbing is that it often results in a loss of authenticity. The original actor’s voice, with all its prosodic features (accent, rhythm, pitch, intonation patterns, volume, and so on), is completely erased and this takes away the uniqueness of both the actor and the character they play. Not to mention that gestures, facial expressions, and body language are strictly linked to the actor’s voice and work together to convey a considerable amount of information. Pairing the visuals of one person with the voice of another can result in incongruities and an overall loss of effect. As mentioned before, another crucial element that could result in a loss of authenticity is the fact that the new dialogue in the TL is adapted as much as possible to the lip-movements of the actors on screen. Although this element tends to be more problematic with close-up shots, it is still something that the translator has to consider when making their translation choices.

Aside from the hurdles of dubbing a screen product, translators also have to follow a number of specific constraints and restrictions because “dubbing ranks as the most constrained mode of translation” (Mayoral 1988). These constraints prevent the translator from using the first natural option that they may find in their target language (Chaume 2020: 110), but they can also be seen as a way of enhancing creativity and effectiveness. In his review of the dubbing approach, Ferriol (2010) identifies six categories of constraints that operate in this practice: professional, imposed by the commission and the working conditions; formal,

concerned with quality standards and lip-synching; linguistic, imposed by registers, dialects, and language variations; semiotic, which are inherent to film language and primarily deal with coherence between the words and the images; sociocultural, focused on the two cultural systems involved; and void or absence of constraints.

However, it is important to note that when the translator is able to comply with the norms and to make strategic and effective choices, dubbing can become a state-of-the art practice, which is why it is not surprising to see that it remains the favored screen-translation approach in large parts of the world.

1.3.2. Subtitling.

Subtitling is the second most common approach to AVT and can be defined as the rendering in a different language and in written form of the spoken dialogue of a screen product. Opposed to dubbing, which completely erases the verbal exchanges happening on the screen, subtitling preserves the original text and adds an extra layer of information. This results in a final product that is made up of three essential elements: the original text (spoken or written), the original image, and the added subtitles. As observed by Luyken, subtitles present themselves as “condensed written translations of the original dialogue which appear as lines of text, usually positioned towards the foot of the screen [...] where they appear and disappear to coincide in time with the corresponding portions of the original dialogue [...]” (1991: 31). Following Gottlieb’s (1997) classification, subtitles can be divided according to a linguistic or a technical parameter. From a linguistic point of view subtitles can either be interlingual, when they are translated from one language to another, or intralingual, referring to the transcription within the same language. The second parameter allows us to differentiate between open subtitles, which cannot be eliminated from the screen, and closed subtitles, which can be removed by the viewer. Furthermore, Gottlieb distinguishes between vertical subtitles, which transcribe oral discourse, and diagonal or oblique subtitles, which transports the text from oral discourse in the SL to the written text in the TL. According to Antonini (2009), in order to obtain an effective translation in subtitling, the translator has to carry out three essential operations: elimination of elements that do not modify the meaning of the dialogue (e.g. hesitations) or that can be grasped from the visuals (e.g. a nod); rendering, which often results in elimination of linguistic features, such as dialects or slang; condensation, which refers to the simplification of the original syntax so as to facilitate reading.

Despite not being the most used modality of screen translation, subtitling seems to enjoy a more positive reputation compared to dubbing. One of the most practical advantages of subtitling is that, in most cases, it is a much cheaper and quicker process. Nevertheless, the retention of the source language is undoubtedly the most significant benefit of this practice. Firstly, the presence of the original visual and acoustic contents of the product allows the audience to experience the full effect of the original acting. The actor’s voice is not substituted with the one of another, so the viewer is able to receive the information conveyed through vocal elements and body language, without the risk of it creating misunderstandings. For example, a change in pitch or intonation that could potentially get lost with dubbing, is retained in subtitling, and paired with the translation of the actual utterance so that the audience will understand the message as a whole. Furthermore, with the original dialogue always present and accessible, the viewers who are familiar with the SL can follow

the acoustic element along with the subtitles. However, when the viewer is somewhat familiar with the SL the translation is required to have a higher degree of accuracy. The reason for that being that in this case, we would find ourselves in front of what Diaz-Cintas calls “vulnerable translation” in which the subtitles will have to “stand up to the scrutiny of an audience” (2007: 40). Moreover, many scholars believe that watching screen products with subtitles promotes the learning of foreign languages, but the veracity of this theory has yet to be established.

Needless to say, much like dubbing, subtitling also has its limits and disadvantages. On a visual level, there could be a contrast between the textual and the visual elements. Subtitles could be hiding part of the image, or, vice versa, the image could render the textual element difficult to read. Plus, if the subtitles are not adequately timed with both the speech and the image, the audience might fail to comprehend what is happening and therefore will be left confused and disoriented in front of the screen. Additionally, the presence of written text on the screen could turn the audience’s attention to the captions and away from the image, thus resulting in even more loss of information. Another important issue with subtitles is the one concerned with written language. First of all, reading subtitles that are synchronized with images is different than reading written sentences that remain still. Therefore, if the viewer is unable to read the whole line or to understand it properly, it is not possible to go back and reread the content of the text. This is why, in order to enhance readability, brevity and contractions are the essence, but this often results in a loss of information as well as of lexical meaning. Moreover, in Jakobson’s terms, subtitling can be described as an “intersemiotic translation” because it deals with a ST in spoken form and a TT rendered in written form. Hence, according to Georgakopoulou (2009: 32), subtitles, as a form of writing, fail to conform to the “real” writing because their goal is to reflect speech.

Aside from the drawbacks that adding subtitles to a screen product presents, this practice is also filled with constraints and restrictions that translators have to follow. In ‘Subtitling for the DVD industry’ (2009), Georgakopoulou proposes a classification of the constraints based on three parameters: technical, textual, and linguistic. The technical constraints mainly refer to the space, time, and presentation of the subtitles. In short, all subtitles need to have a certain number of characters and lines, and they have to be on the screen for a specific amount of time, while also being synchronized with the images of the product. Textual constraints refer to the transfer from speech to writing and to the issues that this shift in mode may create. The written text will have difficulties reproducing the characteristics of spontaneous speech and, therefore, the subtitler could decide to either eliminate them or simplify them. In addition, when watching a subtitled product, the audience will have to concentrate on two different types of information: the images and the text. In order to minimize the negative effects of this, subtitles should contain only the most basic linguistic information and should be arranged in a way that can enhance readability. Finally, the linguistic parameter refers to the discourse elements. With reduction being the most utilized strategy in subtitling, the translator has to be able to differentiate between the indispensable elements that must be translated, the partly dispensable elements that can be condensed, and the dispensable elements that can be omitted.

Having underlined the theoretical aspects that characterize AVT and its challenges, the second chapter of this paper will focus on the hurdles and strategies of translating cultural and humorous elements in screen products.

CHAPTER 2 – TRANSLATING CULTURE AND HUMOR IN AVT

2.1. Translating culture.

In the field of Translation Studies, the topic of culture and the translation of cultural references is one of the most diffused subject matters that researchers and translators have had to deal with. As Toury points out, translations are “cultural facts of a target culture” and “there is no way a translation could share the same systemic space with its original” (1995: 5). This is to say that, although the cultural element is persistently influencing the translation process, most of the time it constitutes an issue, and it presents the translator with a considerable number of obstacles. An element or a reference that is inheritably tied to the cultural system of the ST will rarely have an exact correspondent in the TL that allows the translator to perform a perfect transfer of meaning. As mentioned in Chapter 1, cultural references in the ST are defined by Pedersen as “Extralinguistic Culture-bound References” (ECRs) and they create what he calls “translation crisis points” (2005: 2), during which translators have to make an active decision about what is the most effective strategy to implement. Together with Pedersen, another pioneer researcher in this area of Translation Studies is Ritva Leppihalme. She proposes one of the best-known studies on the translation of cultural elements, which she refers to as “allusions”. By adopting a more TT-oriented approach, Leppihalme (1997) highlights how important it is for the translator to consider not only the relationship between the ST and TT, but also the one between the TT and its readers. The translator needs to be aware that a translation that is technically correct does not prove effective if the target reader is not able to understand it. A translation that does not keep into consideration the different cultural backgrounds “runs the risk of being unintelligible” and of creating what Leppihalme calls “culture bumps” (ibid.). A more in-depth analysis of the translation strategies and issues regarding both ECRs and allusions will be presented in the next section of the chapter.

In the specific domain of AVT the question of cultural references becomes extremely relevant. This is due to the fact that in the translation of audiovisual products the linguistic element is strongly linked to the visual context, thus making it an even more arduous task for the translator to find an acceptable translation that will not clash with the image on the screen. In particular, if we consider the practice of subtitling, this issue becomes even more evident as the ST and the TT coexist and are presented to the viewer simultaneously. This could result in either the translator being forced to make a translation choice that is closer to the SL but more difficult to understand for the viewer, or in the translator deciding to adopt a more domesticating approach with the risk of creating incongruities, especially to an audience that is to some extent familiar with the SL. Moreover, and speaking about both dubbing and subtitling, the specific constraints of these methods (e.g., time and space constraints, lip-synchronization), create even more hurdles for the translator, who has to face cross-cultural differences while not having as much freedom as they would have with a written text.

2.2 Cultural references, allusions and ECRs in audiovisual products.

Culture-specific references in AVT are described by Ramière as “verbal and non-verbal signs which constitute a problem for cross-cultural transfer because they refer to objects or concepts that are specific to the original

sociocultural context of the film [...]” (2006: 155). Similarly, Chiaro defines such elements as “highly culture-specific references (CSRs)” (2009: 156) and presents Katan’s classification of the three different approaches translators can opt for when handling these references: “chunking up”, which involves the use of hypernymy to make the CSRs in the TT more general than the ones in the ST; “chunking down”, which occurs when the ST reference is replaced by a more specific one in TT; and “chunking sideways”, when the CSR are replaced with same level equivalents. Many scholars have analyzed the issue of translating cultural references and have introduced classifications and strategies to help the translators understand what it is that they are dealing with, and which approach it is best to employ. The study of the translation of cultural items is mainly concerned with the relationship between source and target culture. Nonetheless, most researchers stress the importance of taking the point of view of the target audience and adopting a more TT-oriented approach. Among them, Ranzato (2020) proposes a classification of cultural references and identifies two main categories: real-world references and intertextual references. The first category refers to non-fictional elements and can be further divided into: source culture (SC) references, which are elements embedded into a given culture and are more or less known to other cultures; intercultural references, which are concepts of the SC that have been absorbed to some degree by the TC; third culture references, which don’t belong to either of the cultures involved in the translation process; and target culture (TC) references, which originate from the target culture. On the other hand, intertextual references deal with direct or indirect allusions to other texts and can also be further classified into: overt intertextual allusions, when there is an explicit quote of a text; covert intertextual allusions, when there is an indirect reference to a text; and intertextual macroallusions, when the whole audiovisual text is an allusion to other texts (Ranzato 2020: 650).

As we have seen, it is almost impossible to talk about the translation of cultural references without mentioning the concept of allusions. Leppihalme’s study of allusions has had such an impact on the field of Translation Studies that, to the present day, scholars use the terms “allusion” and “reference” almost interchangeably. Although allusions are usually described as a literary phenomenon, Leppihalme observes how they can be found in all types of text, including audiovisual products. She proposes an extensive analysis of this phenomenon while also presenting a list of strategies to overcome the problems that allusions pose. In her categorization, Leppihalme (1997) differentiates between: “allusion proper” (PN allusions), which are allusions that contain a proper name linked to the SC; “key-phrase allusions” (KP allusions), which do not contain a proper name and simply contain an element connected to the SC; “stereotyped allusions”, such as clichés and proverbs, which are so frequently used that they become part of the common language and difficult to trace back to a source; “semi-allusive comparisons”, also defined as “superficial comparisons”; and “eponymous adjectives”, which are adjectives derived from proper names. In her book *‘Culture bumps’* (1997), Leppihalme mainly focuses on proposing solutions to the translation of PN and KP allusions, since these are also the most common ones found in texts. When encountering a PN allusion the translator can choose between retaining the name and, if needed, adding some guidance for the TT reader (e.g., small alterations and additions); replacing the name with another SL name or with a TL name that would convey similar information as the SL name; or omitting the name by either using a common noun in its place or omitting the allusion

altogether. On the other hand, KP allusions can pose a greater number of translation problems, since it is not rare for them to also contain an element of humor. Therefore, Leppihalme's proposes a more articulated list of translation strategies for KP allusions, which includes: use of a standard or "official" translations that have been accepted; minimum change, i.e. performing a word-for-word translation; use of extra-allusive guidance, where the translator can add information to clear confusions in the TT readers; use of marked wording and syntax that differ from the style of the ST to signal the presence of borrowed words; rephrasing the allusion, which results in an omission of the original reference; re-creating the allusion in a creative way while still conveying the connotations of the original reference; and, finally, completely omitting the allusion. Moreover, Leppihalme discusses the different functions of allusions, which include humor, characterization, and expression of interpersonal relationships between characters. However, her analysis of allusions does not provide an exhaustive investigation of their sources as her corpus mainly draws from biblical texts and 20th century literature, and her study tends to neglect other types of culture-specific allusions, such as those linked to the "material culture" (e.g., proper names of things used metonymically to indicate food, drinks, and so on) (Dore 2008: 192). Furthermore, although Leppihalme's allusions cover a wider area than Pedersen's ECRs, they mainly refer to other texts and, thus, demand for intertextuality as a prerequisite to be included in the list. Conversely, despite the fact that Pedersen's model does not include intralinguistic cultural expressions, his definition of ECRs covers references to anything that is extralinguistic and culture bound, and not just to other texts (Pedersen 2005: 2).

Pedersen (2005) defines Extralinguistic Culture-bound References (ECRs) as references created "by means of any culture-bound linguistic expression, which refers to an extralinguistic entity or process [...]" with a "referent within the encyclopedic knowledge of the audience [...]. In other words, ECRs are expressions pertaining to realia, to cultural items, which are not part of the language system" (ibid.: 2). In his paper 'How is culture rendered in subtitles?' (2006), Pedersen differentiates between three types of ECRs based on the parameter of transculturality. Transcultural ECRs are not bound to the ST and can be understood by both ST and TT audience, as they derive from common encyclopedic knowledge; monocultural ECRs are references intrinsic to the SC and, therefore, less identifiable by the majority of the TT viewers. This is the category of references that create what Pedersen calls "translation crisis points", which I already mentioned in the previous sections. Lastly, microcultural ECRs are bound to the SC but they are so specialized that the majority of both the ST and the TT audience are unable to recognize and understand them. In his study of ECRs, Pedersen investigates the different approaches for the translation of such items. However, he neglects the verb "translate" and instead opts for "render", as not all methods include a process of translation. According to Pedersen (2006), when it comes to transferring ECRs from a ST to a TT, the translator can choose from a list of seven strategies. Using an Official Equivalent that has been "authenticated" is undoubtedly the most effective strategy and the one that entails less difficulties. Unfortunately, the cases in which a cultural element has an official equivalent in the TL are rare. Retention "allows the element in the SL to enter the TL" (ibid.) and can sometimes be adjusted to meet the TL conventions by changing the spelling or the pronunciation. This is the strategy that "displays the most fidelity towards the ST" (ibid.). Specification involves the retainment of the ECRs but adds

information to the reference, through either explicitation or addition. Direct translation is mainly used for proper names and does not involve any additional information. However, performing a direct translation could sometimes result in calques, which are “the result of a literal translation that may appear exotic to the TT audience” (ibid.). Generalization simply means replacing the ECRs with a more general item in the TL. Substitution involves the replacement of the ECR in the SL with either a different ECR (cultural substitution) or a paraphrase (either retaining or omitting the sense and connotations of the ECR). Lastly, omission is the complete elimination of the reference. Although often frowned upon, omission can sometimes be the only valid method employable as long as the translator resorts to it only after having considered all the other strategies. Retention, specification, and direct translation are considered to be SL-oriented strategies, whereas generalization, substitution, and omission are more TL-oriented approaches. It is worth mentioning that, especially when dealing with AVT, and particularly with subtitling, these strategies are likely to overlap, and the translator may also opt for a modification of the ST prior to translating.

While allusions and ECRs can be both linguistic and extralinguistic, it is important to note that cultural references can also present themselves as purely linguistic elements, as it is the case with fixed expressions and idioms. Since culture and language are so deeply intertwined, as we have seen in Chapter 1, it comes to no surprise that the translation of language-based expressions is likely to present problems related to transferring both the meaning and the stylistic features of the text (Dore 2002: 43). Idioms and fixed expressions (FEIs) are extremely common in everyday discourse, especially in the English language, so it is of utmost importance for the translator to be familiar with them and to recognize their cultural background. Idiomatic expressions have both a literal meaning, which is usually insignificant, and a metaphorical meaning, which is the one that prevails and communicates the message. If the translator is not able to recognize that they are dealing with an idiomatic expression, they run the risk of performing a literal translation of the sentence. This can result in not only the creation of confusion in the target audience, but also in a loss of the metaphorical meaning implied by the ST. FEIs are “frozen patterns of language which little to no variation in form” (Baker 1992: 63), which means that they contain very specific words and allow little space for word order variations. This element is extremely relevant in the case of AVT. Because of their cultural nature, FEIs may require some sort of rephrasing and explicitation in order to render the message clear to the target audience. If in written texts the translator can decide to add extra information through addition and explicitation (excluding the cases in which there are space and length constraints), translating audiovisual products takes away this freedom. In the case of dubbing, the importance of lip-synchronization can be problematic if the transferring of a FEI in the TL requires more words than the SL. With subtitles, space and time constraints may impede the translator to give the needed explanations to the audience and may sometimes result in a complete omission of the expression.

2.3 Translating humor.

Together with linguistic and extralinguistic cultural references, the translation of humor is an extremely problematic aspect of Translation Studies. Because of the difficulties that humorous elements present in

translation, the fields of Humor Translation, Translation Studies, and AVT “have favored different peaks of academic interest” and are becoming “flourishing and challenging research interests” (Veiga 2009) among scholars. The (un)translatability of humor has been a highly debated topic among researchers, who have developed two opposite lines of thought. On one hand, scholars like Chiaro, favor the view that translating humor is simply impossible because of its culture-bound nature and its inability to cross both linguistic and cultural boundaries. In her book, Chiaro claims that “the intertwining of formal linguistic features and socio-cultural elements contained in a joke is often so specific to a single language community that, beyond its frontiers, the joke is unlikely to succeed” (1992: 78). On the other hand, there have been academics who not only consider the translation of humor to be possible, but who also strive to demonstrate that the translations can sometimes prove to be more effective than the original. It is also true that some studies, such as the one conducted by Attardo (1994), have tried to find a balance between the two extremes. Regardless, there is no doubt that tackling the translation of a humorous text is no easy task.

One of the primary reasons for which humorous translation represents such a challenge resides in the definition of the concept of humor itself. For reasons of space, I will not go into detail about the numerous and disparate theories concerning the definition of humor. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that one shared belief among scholars seems to be that humor is subjective: it varies across cultures but also across single individuals and proves to be effective when there is some kind of shared knowledge between the sender and the recipient (Mateo 1999). In order to find a neutral solution among the different interpretations of humor, Attardo simply describes it as “whatever a social group defines as such” (1994: 9). Given the underlining cultural element of humor, the most effective translation choices will prove to be the ones which take into account the context and the readers of the TT. Therefore, it becomes apparent that, in most cases, the translator will have to perform some kind of manipulation of the text and shy away from a literal translation while moving towards a more domesticating approach. Drawing on Nida’s idea of “dynamic equivalence”, Vandaele states that “interventionist actions” in the TT are justified by the need to achieve on the target readers “the same or similar effect” (2002: 151) experienced by the ST readers. However, if we consider the specific case of AVT, the multimodal nature of screen products, together with the constraints of its modalities, does not make this always possible.

As it is the case with the translation of cultural references, the AVT practice that proposes the most challenges is subtitling. The numerous technical constraints that surround subtitles often force the translator to adopt strategies such as condensation and reduction, which will undoubtedly result in a loss of meaning and/or a loss of the humorous effect. According to Bogucki, the task of the subtitler is to “render this humorous effect not as faithful as possible to the ST, but as logic as possible in the TT” (2013: 75). Certainly, the situations in which the translator decides to completely omit the humorous element are not rare. However, in most cases, the link between the visual aspect (e.g., written texts, body language of the actors), the acoustic elements (e.g., music, canned laughter), and the dialogue itself, makes it impossible to leave the humorous element out of the translation. Needless to say, the specific constraints of dubbing also propose their own obstacles when it comes

to the translation of humor. Factors like timing, turn-taking, lip-synchronization and, in the case of comedy screen products, canned laughter, do not leave much freedom to the translator, who runs the risk of creating misunderstandings in the viewer. Although to a lesser degree compared to subtitling, the interference of the source text and of the source language in dubbing may result in a lack of coherence and intelligibility, a loss of the humorous element, and a loss of naturalness (Zabalbeascoa 1994: 91). When translating humor, in general but particularly in AVT, the translator needs to make use of “recontextualization” which “consists of totally or partially abandoning the literal, prepositional or locutionary level, while maintaining the illocutionary act as far as possible” (Hickey 1998: 222). In other words, the rendering of the humorous effect on the target viewer is much more important than the performance of a literal translation, or a translation that is close to the ST in terms of language and content.

2.4 Jokes and puns in audiovisual products.

The translation of verbal humor has always been one of the most problematic issues in translation. As we have seen, while many scholars insist on the untranslatability of humor, others believe the opposite. Among these, Diana-Elena Popa claims that nearly all humor can be translated as long as the translator is aware of the complexity that derives from having to transfer “the situational, cultural, and linguistic content of the SL joke to the TC” (Popa 2005: 49). In her article ‘Jokes and Translation’ (2005), Popa adopts a target audience-oriented and Skopos-oriented approach and states that the translator has to focus on both the “target-language socio-cultural framework” (ibid.) and the purpose of the humorous text in order to determine which translation strategy to employ. According to Popa, being able to transfer all the features of a joke from the SL to the TL does not automatically guarantee an effective translation and “the two jokes co-exist in terms of time but in different spatial frames of reference” (ibid.). Therefore, it becomes apparent that one of the primary tasks of a translator who has to deal with the translation of a joke is the identification of its purpose. In this sense, Zabalbeascoa proposes a classification of jokes to help translators, specifically those involved in the practice of dubbing, make sure that the original purpose of the joke is retained. In his model jokes can be categorized into:

- International or bi-national jokes, when they don’t rely on any language or cultural feature and their humorous effect solely depends on the content. In this case the translator’s knowledge of the TC is essential.
- National-culture-and-institutions jokes, which contain some sort of culture-specific feature.
- National-sense-of-humor jokes, which usually refer to stereotypes and, therefore, “may not convey the same humorous effect in another culture” (ibid.). In this case the translator may resort in a substitution and replace the stereotype with one more familiar to the TC.
- Language-dependent jokes, which involve language-specific features. This is the case of puns and wordplay.
- Visual jokes, which include both visual and non-visual elements that the translator has to match coherently.

- Complex jokes, which “can incorporate two or more of the aforementioned typed of jokes” (ibid.).

In his paper ‘Translating jokes and puns’, Low considers jokes to be “short units of verbally expressed humor” (2011: 69). and offers a series of strategies for tackling their translation. Following his model, the translator should always start by translating the punchline first and preparing the grounds for the translation process by contemplating whether or not there is a need for explanations of implicit details. As for the strategies that can be implemented, Low favors a very TT-oriented practice. The strategies he proposes include compensation, which involves the replacement of the joke with other forms of verbal humor; explicitation, which can often result in a longer sentence in the TL; exaggeration; substitution; and others that I will not mention as they do not apply to the AVT of humor.

Often considered to be a subcategory of jokes, puns present what is probably the most challenging issue for translators because, unlike the majority of verbal humor, “they use specific features of a particular language” (Low 2011: 59). Puns are defined by Low as “wordplays that exploit the ambiguities of words and phrases” (ibid.). This means that puns are created on some kind of linguistic asymmetry, which often results in “cases of inequivalence in translation” and in the need for “a wider range of linguistic maneuvering” (Sanderson 2009: 125). In order to better understand how puns work, Delabastita analyzes the different types of wordplay focusing on the “degrees of formal similarities between the two components” (1993: 78). He distinguishes between: homophony, when two words or phrases have different spelling but same pronunciation; homography, when two words of phrases have same spelling but different pronunciations; homonymy, when two words or phrases are identical in spelling and pronunciation; and paronymy, when two words or phrases are almost identical in spelling and pronunciation. Because different languages have different semantic structures and vocabularies, transferring a pun from the ST to the TT is an extremely difficult task for the translator. The translator has to evaluate which feature of the pun is more relevant and has to be retained, the stylistic and linguistic form or the humorous sense. While in written translation the instances in which the priority is given to the style are more frequent, in AVT the situation is reversed and most of times, because of the visual aspect of the screen product, the humorous characteristics of the text have to prevail. The reason for this being that in audiovisual products puns are not only linked to language, but the unexpected semantic layer that produces the humorous effect is also rendered visually (Sanderson 2009: 130). Consequently, the translator needs to prioritize the cohesion between the visual and acoustic channels over the retainment of the semantic structure. Surely, this aspect poses more problems for the subtitler, as the elimination of the original voices during the dubbing process “enables the translator to manipulate the text to a higher degree” (ibid.). Although the translation of puns can be a complicated and challenging process, scholars like Delabastita believe in the possibility of successfully transferring them from ST to TT. In his investigation of the translation of wordplay, Delabastita (1993) offers a list of eight translation techniques for the translator to choose from. However, the last one does not apply to AVT and, therefore, it will not be mentioned. The pun in the ST can “be rendered with a pun in TT” (ibid.: 192). This is undoubtedly the most effective strategy, but it is only employable in rare cases. The pun can “be translated with a non-punning element” (ibid.: 202) in the TT by retaining either

one or both meanings of the ST pun. The pun can be transferred in the TT “by using some other wordplay-related rhetorical device” (ibid.: 207). The pun can be transferred in the TT in its original form without being translated or be adapted to the TT linguistic system. In less frequent cases the translator can translated a portion of the ST that has no pun with some sort of wordplay or, alternatively, create a pun in the TT “from zero” that will not have any counterpart in the ST (ibid.: 215-217). Lastly, the translator can choose to omit the pun. As we have seen in the previous sections of this chapter, this strategy, although valid, should be resorted in only when there is no other alternative, especially when translating audiovisual products.

2.5. When culture and translation work together.

Having analyzed the forms and issues of humorous and cultural elements in translation, I find it interesting to note how the two elements are rarely mutually exclusive. Because the relationship between humor and culture is so deeply embedded into language, it comes to no surprise that the two often work together in texts. It is extremely frequent, in fact, to come across items that combine both humorous and cultural features such as realia-based and FEIs-based puns or humorous culture-specific allusions. As Popa (2005) points out, humor is “based on ‘secret’ agreements or shared information between the speaker and the audience in the source culture. If this information is not introduced in the target-language and socio-cultural world, there can be no ‘secret’ agreement between the parties” (ibid.: 56). This means that the translator has to first understand what are the cultural implications of the humorous element and in which way it is linked to the cultural environment of the SL. Subsequently, they need to insert the humorous element in the target culture and adapt it to its cultural environment. The reason for this being that the source and target audiences will obviously have different sets of shared knowledge. If the translator fails to do so and introduces an element of the SC that is unknown to the target audience, the viewer will be confused as to what is being referenced, and the humorous effect will be lost. No matter how technically correct the translation is, if it is not intelligible to the target audience, it is not a successful translation. Consequently, it is vital for the translator to have a deep understanding not only of the SL and the SC, but also of the TL and the TC, in order to effectively recognize which elements can be retained from the ST and which ones need to be tailored around the target audience.

One of the most common examples of translation items that combine humorous and cultural features are FEI-based puns. As we established, fixed expressions and idioms are strongly connected to the cultural environment they originate from. Because of the linguistic nature of both puns and FEIs, it very common to find the two combined in a single element. Usually, the humorous effect is obtained through the variation of either the linguistic structure or the semantic meaning of FEIs. Because FIEs are so fossilized and typically unalterable, this variation creates an opposition of meaning that defeats the viewer’s expectations and allows a new interpretation of the item. One of the most in-depth studies about the translation of idiom-based puns is the one conducted by Veisbergs (1997: 164-171), in which he analyzes the different methods employable in this process. In the most fortunate cases the translator is able to perform an “equivalent idiom transformation” (idib.) and, therefore, will transfer the idiom-based pun in the TL maintaining the same linguistic and idiomatic meanings. When this is not possible, the translator may resort in one of five other strategies. The idiom-based

pun can be translated literally into the TL (“loan translation”); it can be transferred with the addition of extra information (“extension”); it can be replaced by a TL idiom that is similar in form and has the same meaning (“analogue idiom transformation”); it can be substituted with a TL idiom that is different in form but has the same meaning (“substitution”); or it can be either entirely omitted or omitted while still preserving the idiomatic characteristic (“omission”). Veisbergs also proposes two additional strategies that do not apply to the translation of audiovisual products.

Despite not being humorous per se, like other linguistic phenomena, culture-specific allusions can be exploited in order to convey potential humor. This effect is usually achieved by “creating incongruity between the borrowed linguistic items (and the implicit meaning they entail) and the new context in which they are embedded” (Leppihalme, 1997: 40). Antonopoulou (2004) explains the importance of retaining allusions, and specifically PN allusions that convey a potentially humorous effect. She believes that “if an entity is referred to by name, then the producer of the message is assumed to have reason to believe (a) that the entity in question is worth naming and mentioning by name and/or (b) that the recipient of the message is in the position to identify the referent” (ibid.: 234). However, many scholars, including Leppihalme herself, believe that allusions, particularly PNs, should be omitted or translated by implementing a domesticating approach oriented to the TC. Retaining the original culture-specific element, in fact, could result in a loss of meaning and of the potential humorous effect because the audience will fail to recognize the reference and, simply put, won’t get it. Among translators, the strategy considered to be most effective seems to be the replacement of the allusion with a similar one in the TL, as it preserves both the style of the text and its humorous characteristics. Generally speaking, humorous allusions do not pose a great number of additional difficulties for the translator compared to purely cultural ones. Nonetheless, it is important for the translator to bear in mind the possibilities of coming across allusions that contain a cultural reference, but that are also trying to convey a humorous effect.

Having analyzed the issues and strategies of translating cultural references and humorous elements in audiovisual products, I find it interesting to shed light on the Italian situation regarding AVT. The next chapter will briefly focus on Italian dubbing and its characteristics and will then move on to provide a general overview of the reception of translated screen products by Italian audiences.

CHAPTER 3 – THE EFFECTS OF AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION.

3.1 The Italian scenario.

Like many other European countries, Italy's movie industry largely depends on the importation of foreign screen products, particularly American TV series and movies. It is therefore not surprising to see that Italian research on AVT often focuses on American audiovisual works and their translation. For this reason, henceforth I will be referring mainly to American English and American screen products. As I have had the chance to learn during my academic journey, English is a deeply idiomatic language. Idioms and fixed expressions linked to the cultural context permeate the everyday discourse and, therefore, can be found extremely often in screen products' dialogues. Moreover, English humor is predominantly based on linguistic features and frequently relies on the exploitation of puns. Consequently, Italian translators often struggle to transfer these items not because of the humorous element, but because of their linguistic composition. Certainly, this is also due to the fact that English and Italian have highly different linguistic and syntactic structures. While in both formal and informal English the sentences tend to be relatively short and repetitive, Italian presents itself as a very articulated language with longer sentences, a low tolerance for repetitions, and a tendency to use a higher and more formal register. If we consider the field of AVT, where the translator also has to deal with time, space, and lip-synchronization constraints, these linguistic factors can create numerous translation problems. Because Italy can be categorized as a "dubbing country" (Luyken 1991: 24), this is the AVT practice I will be referring to in this section.

When comparing original Italian productions to Italian translations from English, Brincat (2000) observes how translated products show systematic simplifications and a shift towards a "neutral" standard Italian. Because of the abovementioned linguistic differences, translators find themselves forced to filter many features of spontaneous spoken Italian into this type of simulated oral language (Morucci 2003) and the outcome is an unusual and weird language. In an attempt to obtain an adequate lip-synchronizations, the translated products often turn out to be strongly influenced by the ST. This can result in calques and syntactic structures that do not sound familiar to the target audience, and which give to the product a fictional nature. Many scholars and professionals have analyzed the language of audiovisual products translated into Italian and have defined this "plain, redundant language influenced by the source language" as "doppiagese" (or "dubbese" in Pavesi and Perego's English adaptation). In this sense, Italian screen-adaptors tend to translate humor by flattening it out or compensating it with an element that often sounds unusual to the target audience. This is extremely relevant in comedy television products that utilize canned laughter to signal a humorous instance. In these cases, it is impossible to leave the humorous element out of the dialogue and Italian translators tend to convey the intended meaning with an element that is theoretically humorous, but that to the target audience it is simply not funny. As for language- and culture-specific elements, the general tendency is to maintain their presence in order to retain the colloquial and informal aspect of the text. However, as we have seen, this is not always achievable. As a solution, La Polla (1994) proposes the use of "doppiaggio creativo" (creative dubbing), which can easily be linked back to the strategy of domestication. In his paper, he suggests

the introduction into the TT of cultural references that are familiar to the target audience, especially if they contain some kind of humorous sense.

Moreover, in the Italian AVT scenery, the translator is a very marginal figure and much more importance is given to the adaptor to the point that there seems to be a tendency to consider the process of Italian dubbing as an adaptation rather than a translation. Italian adaptors often do not have degrees related to Translation Studies, and it is possible that they are not familiar with the SL. As a result, equivalence to the ST in Italian AVT is not considered to be essential. The goal of the final production is, therefore, merely adjusting the source cultural context to the target cultural context, and afterwards, with the work of the dialogist, adapting the text in the TL to the visuals of the product (Bovinelli and Gallini 1994: 62). Hence, the predilection of the term “adaptation” rather than “translation” for Italian dubbed products.

3.2. User reception.

Over the last decades, numerous studies have been carried out on screen translation, its modalities, and its strategies. However, most scholars tend to not take into account the ultimate and direct recipients of the final products, the viewers. As we have seen in the previous chapters, in order to perform a successful translation, it is vital to consider both the TC and the target audience. Of course, the successful reception of an audiovisual translated product heavily depends on the quality of the translation itself. Nevertheless, the most effective translation is the one that, no matter how technically correct, is the most intelligible by its recipients. Because of the lack of research about user reception in AVT, many authors, including Toury and Leppihalme, advocate for the need of experimenting in the field of TS stating that “there is a clear need for more research on receivers, the extent and the type of their knowledge, and their expectations” (Leppihalme 1996: 215). Nonetheless, there are some studies that focus on the user reception of AVT, such as the one conducted by Chiaro and Antonini (2009) on Italian audiences. Again, with Italy being labelled as a “dubbing country”, most studies, including this one, focus on dubbed screen products. The premise of any audience-oriented study is, of course, the fact that the viewer expects to hear a natural-sounding text in their language. In order to analyze the cases in which this does not happen, Chiaro and Antonini use the term “lingua-cultural drops in voltage” (2009: 100). These refer to “viewer perception of lingua-cultural uneasiness or turbulence, such as a cultural reference which is not completely understood, an unnatural sounding utterance, an odd-sounding idiom or a joke which falls flat” (ibid.). Interestingly, in reference to language-specific features the reception scores pointed “towards average acceptance” (ibid.: 111). This means that Italian audiences are perfectly aware of the presence of “doppiagese” and, although they were “hardly convinced of their Italianness” (ibid.), none of the linguistic elements were rejected. Because of these results, Chiaro and Antonini describe Italian viewers as affected by “linguistic bipolarity”. “On the one hand they are aware that TV dubbese is unlike real Italian, on the other hand they are willing to accept it as long as it remains on screen” (ibid.: 112). As far as cultural references are concerned, Chiaro and Antonini found that most of the allusions that were not adapted to the TC were either not noticed or not understood, and therefore they created puzzlement in the viewer. It is important to note that even in the instances in which the references are adapted to the cultural context of the TL, their understanding largely

depends on the knowledge of the viewers, as well as on their cultural environment, age, sex, social class, education, and all other social factors that differentiate between groups of people within a given cultural context. The question of the reception of humor is slightly more complicated. During their research project, Chiaro and Antonini found that when the humorous element required a relatively straightforward translation the question of the quality of the translation itself was not particularly relevant. The reason for this being that the successful reception of a fairly easily translatable humorous item “depends almost entirely on whether the recipient is *au fait* with a certain piece of knowledge or not” (Chiaro 2004: 49). In other words, in these cases the funniness depends on the viewer’s encyclopedic knowledge. Conversely, when the humorous element depended on a “linguistic element (e.g., a pun) or a combination of language and culture” (ibid.), the quality of the translation itself was indeed a significant factor for the audience. However, it is worth noting that, as we have seen in the previous chapter, humor is subjective, “it depends on a person’s personality as well as the mood and state of mind they are in when they are exposed to a humorous stimulus” (ibid.). Moreover, “laughter is triggered differently in different cultures. A given instance of humor may produce the same humorous effect in different versions (original, dubbed, subtitled), for radically different reasons” (Luque 2003: 295). Additionally, the concept of what is considered humorous can change throughout time, but also across age groups, gender and social class. For this reason, it is absolutely crucial that Translation Studies, AVT Studies and Humor Studies carry out more research in terms of user reception and that translator be aware of the significance of knowing their audience and the cultural context in which they are situated.

3.3 Conclusion and final remarks.

The purpose of this thesis was, first and foremost, to offer a general introduction to the fields of Translation Studies and Audiovisual Translation Studies. My goal was to discuss what is the meaning of translation and why it is considered to be such a complex and articulated practice. What I hope I was able to convey in my analysis, is that the process of translation consists in so much more than merely transferring a word from one language to another. Translating means being able to make two different cultures communicate with each other and compromise with each other. In this sense, I found it essential to underline the reasons behind the immense importance the figure of the translator holds. The process of translation is influenced by such an intricate intertwining of factors, that referring to the translator’s work simply as a language transfer is extremely reductive. The final product is affected by the sociocultural contexts of both the SL and TL; by the fluency, the creativity, the personality, the environment and the preparation of the translator, as well as their general orientation towards the concept of translation and their ability to make conscious and effective choices; by the linguistic and syntactic structure of a particular language; by the degree to which the two cultures involved are familiar with one another; and by the audience it is directed to, their cultural background, their encyclopedic knowledge and their expectations. These are just a few of the numerous factors that come into play when we talk about translation, but I believe it to be enough to highlight the fact that being proficient in the SL and the TL is simply not enough. A successful translation cannot be achieved if the context of the source culture, the translator’s work, and the target culture are not brought into the conversation.

In this thesis, the focus was on the specific domain of AVT. The reason for this being, firstly, my personal interest. I have always been attracted to this field and this proved to be the perfect chance to investigate it in an academic setting. Secondly, although my academic journey has revolved around the field of Language Studies, as well as the one of Translation Studies, AVT was never really present in the discussion about translation practices. Because of this, focusing my analysis on AVT gave me the opportunity to challenge myself and to broaden my horizons, hopefully opening myself up to future research on this topic. Conversely, the decision to concentrate on the translation of culture and humor was dictated by their constant presence in the discussion on translation. In the last three years of my studies, the concepts of culture and humor have always accompanied me, but, again, never in audiovisual perspective. Therefore, adopting this new point of view allowed me to gain a better understanding of what it means to deal with the translation of cultural and humorous elements, what strategies prove to be the most successful, and in what way they affect the final product and its reception. Although numerous scholars consider culture and humor to be two of the most problematic issues in the field of TS, they are not the only factors that contribute to the complexity of this practice. With the continuation of my studies in the field of Translation Studies, my hope is to be able to conduct a more exhaustive and in-depth investigation of the concepts behind translation issues. Moreover, the purpose of my future research is to make use of this theoretical analysis in a more practical way. Building on the strategies and solutions presented here, it would be interesting to see how they apply to the translation process and if they provide enough guidance to be able to effectively translate an audiovisual product that is based on humorous culture and cultural humor.

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