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# FOOD-RELATED TERMS IN AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION – A CROSS-CULTURAL INVESTIGATION

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## **Abstract**

Worldwide fast-food chains, with their standardized menus, seem to have eradicated any local taste from food, promoting a process of thorough (food-)globalization (Pravettoni 2009). In a wider perspective, terms like *McDonaldization/Starbuckization* (Ritzer 1993, 2004) have come to indicate a shift from cultures built on tradition to a global homogenization of economic and socio-cultural life (Ritzer 1993: 1). Nonetheless, specific food items possibly remain “the most sensitive and important expression of national culture” (Newmark 1988: 97), and still function as an extraordinary vehicle of self-representation and/or ethnic signifiers. This close-knit identitarian relationship between language and food has been clearly highlighted also by Lévi-Strauss (1977: 36): “cooking [...] is with language a truly universal form of human activity: if there is no society without a language, nor is there any which does not cook in some manner at least some of its food”.

However, although many (audiovisual) texts have focused on the interplay of food and identity, the relationship between food, culture and translation remains under-researched (Chiari and Rossato 2015: 237), and particularly in an AVT perspective, parameters that influence the complex decision-making process of translators in their cultural adaptation of food-related terms have to date rarely been investigated. If “translation is a battlefield of many opposing strategies and views” (Paloposki and Oittinen 2000: 375), above all “food terms are subject to the widest variety of translation procedures” (Newmark 1988: 97). This is so because food is to be considered “an ensemble of texts” (Geertz 1973: 24) that must be continually interpreted and construed. Accordingly, food cannot be given a once-and-for-all, clear-cut meaning, but especially today the meaning is often (re)negotiated through practices, discourse, and representations within the daily interactions of the global flows of information, goods, individuals and groups. My study is a corpus-based analysis of the translation strategies chosen to render food-related terms, conducted in a comparative, descriptive, non-judgemental manner. Drawing on the works of well-known translation/AVT scholars, my investigation has been carried out on the English audio script version of 25 films chosen on the basis of their food-connected plots, along with their Italian subtitles. Qualitative examples are analysed in detail, and results and socio-cultural motivations are discussed. In most examples denotative messages are easily understood, even though most humorous nuances are lost, or undergo a “chunking up” process (Katan 2004: 147), due both to linguistic structures and/or to the intrinsic untranslatability of the ST term. As a result, many ST and jokes are invalidated. My main research hypothesis, in a diachronic perspective, is that the more recent the film, the more subtitlers opt for foreignization

strategies, thus “retaining something of the foreignness of the original” (Yang 2010: 77). Yet, my study did not aim to question the subtitlers’ choices, but rather to demonstrate the challenge of translating culture-bound elements – food terms in particular – and more importantly, to consider new insights into approaching translation problems in AVT practice.

## 1. 21<sup>st</sup> century food-mania

Since the end of the twentieth century food has been receiving sustained investigation not simply as something to be prepared/cooked and then eaten for our physical sustenance, but also as a critical part of our daily interactions, with highly significant symbolic values (Bourdieu 1984; DeVault 1991; Cairns and Johnston 2015; Beagan *et al.* 2017), producing vital socio-economic and cultural networks among people(s) and countries, and fulfilling emotional functions (Johnston and Baumann 2010).

As appropriately claimed by McGee (2004), once food became more easily available, particularly in Western countries, an ever-growing attention to food and cooking has arisen, and food discourse has now become globally fashionable (Inness 2006: 2). This is proven by the countless television programs and formats<sup>1</sup>, TV channels<sup>2</sup>, books, magazines, websites, blogs and TV forums exclusively dedicated to food and cookery, often authored by superchefs who have become celebrities. Scholars too have been investigating food from transdisciplinary perspectives, encompassing different research areas from *gastrolingo*<sup>3</sup> to agribusiness, from environment/sustainability to technology, from malnutrition to inequities/lack of food, from (g)local food to small-scale agriculture, from marketing to packaging access, from welcoming gestures to elements of cultural resistance, from ‘food porn’<sup>4</sup> to health/eating disorders, not excluding religious/traditional food, (specialized) literature and literary trope, depictions in fine art, media representations, taboos, education, translation, and so on<sup>5</sup>. Yet, whatever the perspective,

<sup>1</sup> TV cookery format such as *MasterChef*, which follows talented amateur chefs as they strive to conquer their place as a *MasterChef* champion, has become a record-breaking global program phenomenon. First launched on British television in 1990, *MasterChef* is now translated and adapted in more than 58 countries, and in 2017 it was crowned the ‘Most Successful Cookery Television Format’ by Guinness World Records, with over 300 million viewers worldwide. The format has also several spinoff versions, including *MasterChef Junior*, *Celebrity MasterChef* and *MasterChef: The Professionals*.

<sup>2</sup> People’s constant media exposure to food in their daily life is ensured also thanks to channels on satellite and Digital Terrestrial Television that broadcast food-related programmes 24 hours a day. In Italy the most famous food-related channel is *Il Gambero rosso* which, in turn, publishes cookery books and magazines, and guides.

<sup>3</sup> In Dann’s (1996: 235) definition “*gastrolingo* is a specific micro-linguistic variety used in the tourism field to describe culinary traditions”.

<sup>4</sup> The term ‘food porn,’ coined by the feminist critic Rosalind Coward in her 1984 book *Female Desire*, refers to glamorized visual presentations of cooking or eating across various social media platforms which today include TV, cooking magazines, online blogs, mobile apps, websites and social media platforms. This social media phenomenon has acquired variously interpreted underlying implications. As maintained by Belasco (2008: 36-37), “these intensely sexualized associations between eating and loving [...] are so closely tied to life’s most intimately pleasurable experiences”, while journalist and food blogger Dolce (2001) claimed: “In Britain food is the new sex. Culinary magazines photograph food so intimately, you feel as if you’re almost up inside that fleshy pepper.”

<sup>5</sup> Food can transmit different values of identity (social and economic identity, i.e. the quantity and the quality of food consumed display class and wealth differences; religious and/or philosophical iden-

the explosion of food studies has highlighted the socio-political and material complexity of food events. Food is now considered as a trans-historical, global phenomenon, and, more importantly, a crucial aspect of cultural identity (Chansky and Folino White 2015).

## 2. Food items as ethnic signifiers

As highlighted by Montanari (2004: iii), “The food system contains and transports the culture of those who practice it; it is a repository for the traditions and identity of a group. It is, therefore, an extraordinary vehicle of self-representation [...]: it is a tool of identity, but also the first way to come into contact with different cultures, since eating other people’s food is easier, at least in appearance, than codifying their language” [my translation]. Food is as eminently a human expression as language, and “cooking [...] is with language a truly universal form of human activity: if there is no society without a language, nor is there any which does not cook in some manner at least some of its food” (Lévi-Strauss 1997: 28). Food is thus a form of cultural heritage and can be considered the lowest threshold of a boundary and the most accessible threshold of culture; eating other peoples’ food means crossing this threshold (La Cecla 1997). In the contemporary world, where different cultures are increasingly “interconnected and entangled with each other” (Welsch 1994: 198), and worldwide fast-food chains might seem, with their standardized menus, to have eradicated any enthusiasm for the local food, promoting a process of thorough (food-)globalization (Pravettoni 2009)<sup>6</sup>, the food system possibly remains “the most sensitive and important expression of national culture” (Newmark 1988: 97). Particular food items are still so closely associated with ethnically and culturally differentiated groups as to function as ethnic signifiers. Suffice it to recall the derogatory definition of French people as *frogs* and Italian-Americans as *spaghetti eaters*. Another case in point is ‘Food Fight’, a (digital) stop-motion animation directed in 2008 by Stefan Nadelman<sup>7</sup>.

tity: i.e. abstinence from certain foods, alimentary prohibitions, vegetarian diets, etc.; ethnic identity: i.e. food linked to places, customs and traditions), which can be investigated within various disciplines. Accordingly, food is the subject of a variety of scholarly fields, including Economics, Cultural Studies, Sociology, Aesthetics and Anthropology.

<sup>6</sup> In a wider perspective, terms like *McDonaldization/Starbuckization* (Ritzer 2008) have come to indicate the ever-spreading shift, driven by its inherent mechanics of the fast-food industry, from cultures built on tradition to a global homogenization of economic and socio-cultural life, which is mechanized and highly organized. More precisely “McDonaldization [...] is the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of [...] the world” (Ritzer 1993: 1).

<sup>7</sup> The film traces the general history of American-centric warfare from World War I up to the second Gulf War, substituting food for human beings (sushi, for instance, becomes a symbol of Japan as an entire nation/military army). T. Bryan, Food Fight: Stefan Nadelman’s “smorgasbord of aggression”. May 26, 2015. <http://nightflight.com/food-fight-stefan-nadelmans-smorgasbord-of-aggression/>. In 2008 Christopher Taylor directed a documentary entitled ‘Food Fight’ as well. It deals with American agricultural policy and food culture development in the 20th century, the California food movement rebellion against big agribusiness and their launch of a local organic food movement. ‘Foodfight!’ is instead a 2012 American computer-animated movie directed by Lawrence Kasanoff about adventures in a grocery store whose products spring to life when the doors have been locked and the employees have all gone home.



*Figure 1.* Food fight

Furthermore, nowadays, where “frequent intercultural contacts and migration carry [...] people and recipes across in either direction more than ever before” (Paradowski 2010: 138), food as a tool of self-representation has become vital not only to strengthen the identity of a group (Lupton 1999), but has also acquired a healing function in the lives of migrants, often as their major (sensorial) link with their home country/traditions, contributing to reduce the psychological trauma as a consequence of their break with their country and family of origin. Alternatively, food can also function as an extraordinary vehicle of cultural exchange which, more than words, can help mediate among different cultures, enhancing the interaction among different ethnic groups and cultures (Montanari 2002).

### **3. AudioVisual Translation and Food – narrowing the focus**

This unprecedented increase in the visibility of food and gastronomy, previously relegated to a niche audience, has resulted in their narration/representation in a wide range of areas, including cinema. There have recently been some interesting movies whose theme is life’s gastronomic pleasures, or where the above-mentioned metaphorical/identitarian value of food has been exploited from different perspectives, including AudioVisualTranslation (AVT). As Baker and Hochel (1998: 76) observe: “Whether domesticating or foreignising in its approach, any form of audiovisual translation ultimately plays a unique role in developing both national identities and national stereotypes, [while] it remains one of the most pressing areas of research in translation studies”.

Within the last fifteen years, the interest in AVT, i.e. “the translation of transient polysemiotic texts presented on screen to mass audiences” (Gottlieb 2010: 205-206),

has grown immensely. Nonetheless, AVT still lacks systematic theorization (Pérez-González 2014), due to its relatively short history as a research area. Furthermore, AVT encompasses several sub-disciplines including subtitling, dubbing, and audio description (Gottlieb 2000, Jüngst 2010), all of them strictly dependent on rapidly evolving technology. Additionally, “despite a rapidly expanding market for translation of food-related texts, i.e. cookery books and TV programs, magazines and food labels, to name just a few, [...] the relationship between food, culture and translation remains under-researched” (Chiaro and Rossato 2015: 237). Particularly from an AVT perspective, parameters that influence translators’ complex decision-making processes of cultural adaptation of food-related terms have to date been seldom investigated.

#### 4. Aims

It has long been recognized that “in a language, everything is culturally produced, beginning with language itself” (Franco Aixelá 1996: 58), and that “Language is embedded in culture [...] for the two are inseparable” (Bassnett 2007: 23). This is the great challenge of every translation act. Nonetheless there are words or concepts which, more than others, can lead to “translation crisis points”, i.e. make translators “stop and think a bit harder, and actively decide what translation strategy to use” (Pedersen 2005: 5). Every language “has words denoting concepts that another language has not considered worth mentioning or that are absent from the life or consciousness of the other nation” (Leemets 1992: 475). Additionally, sometimes the meanings of culture-bound items or concepts may be not conveyed by means of Extra-Cultural References (ECR). “ECRs are expressions that refer to entities outside language, such as names of people, places, institutions, food, customs etc., which a person may not know, even if s/he knows the language” (Pedersen 2007: 30). ECRs often pose predictable, sometimes insurmountable, difficulties for translators. Food in particular is, as we have seen, a cultural phenomenon whose elements are interconnected and influenced not only by past traditions, but also by blending with internal and external occurrences, and is to be considered “an ensemble of texts” (Geertz 1973: 24) that can be continually interpreted and construed. Accordingly, food meanings cannot be given once and for all and in a clear-cut way: especially in today’s scenario, they need to be (re)negotiated through practices, discourse, and representations within the vastly increased global flows of information, goods, individuals and groups in their daily interactions. This makes our investigation particularly timely and challenging. Not surprisingly, if “translation is a battlefield of many opposing strategies and views” (Paloposki and Oittinen 2000: 375), above all “food terms are subject to the widest variety of translation procedures” (Newmark 1988: 97). Furthermore, I chose to analyse the AVT of food-related items also because “Food and drink [...] is a semantic field, an area of human existence that, being so essential, has generated a multitude of figurative expressions over the centuries in the English tongue. By the 18th century many messages regarding human behavior – both positive and negative – were in fact forged in the linguistic heritage of English speakers by means of culinary expressions” (Pinnavaia 2006: 152). In particular, I decided to investigate the strategies of translation subtitles, since these are also valuable and proven didactics tools (Díaz Cintas 2009; Kruger 2008; Taylor 2009). Watching subtitled foreign language programs can be a big help in improving one’s reading skills and foster-

ing foreign language acquisition. Additionally, while “dubbing has become the subject of a growing number of studies and research projects, [...] the art of subtitling, possibly due to its lower profile on the international circuit, has received rather less attention” (Taylor 2000: 309), and even though it has been around since the beginning of the ‘talkies’ in the late 1920s, so far studies focused on subtitling have been relatively few (see Cavaliere 2008a, 2008b, 2010, 2012; Chiaro 2008; Diaz Cintas 2007, 2009; Gottlieb 2000, 2010; Pederson 2007, 2010; Taylor 2000).

## 5. Methodology and corpus

My study is a corpus-based analysis of the different translation strategies chosen to render food terms, conducted on a comparative, descriptive, non-judgemental basis, carried out on an English-Italian parallel corpus. I analysed the English audio script of 25 (mainly American) feature films, along with their subtitle translations. Even if the plots of the films are not all necessarily based on food, the films have been chosen because of the food related scenes they all contain and the cultural connotations their translation may convey<sup>8</sup>. Films were basically chosen on the basis of “culture bumps” (Leppihalme 1997), such as metaphors, proverbs, idioms and allusions, or Verbally Expressed Humour (wordplay; jokes; irony, etc.), or “out-of-awareness” elements (Hall 1990), i.e. core cultural issues for which there are no frames of reference, and whose meaning cannot be found in dictionaries, which made them particularly revealing for my research aims. I followed a three-step procedure: viewing the films<sup>9</sup>, transcribing the English utterances of films and the Italian subtitles of each film containing food terms, and, finally, examining the strategies used to translate these terms. Needless to say, a vast array of possible (AV) Translation strategies exists (see, for example, Vinay and Darbelnet 2000; Gottlieb 2000; Karamitroglou 2000; Katan 2004; Sánchez 2004; Díaz Cintas 2009), all taxonomies following a broad-spectrum progression along an axis from Source-to-Target orientation. My investigation mainly followed Pedersen’s (2011) proposed framework<sup>10</sup> and I also drew on the works of other well-known translation/AVT scholars, such as Katan (1999/2004), Newmark (1988), and Taylor (2000). Extremes of this scale represent tendencies or general strategies in relation to which each translation procedure is situated according to its degree of cultural mediation. Translators’ choices depend on how easily ECR meanings can be recognized/accessed by the

<sup>8</sup> The films under investigation are part of a wider project which investigates the rendering of food-related issues from English into Italian and viceversa in a wide variety of contexts (i.e. metaphors, idiomatic expressions, food tourism websites etc.).

<sup>9</sup> The comparative unit of analysis taken into account was a frame, the basic unit of a film. A frame is “a word or a stretch of words in the form of a subtitle, which appears for a length of time on the screen and disappears before another frame appeared” (Gaemi and Benyamin 2011: 42). In motion pictures, it is one of the successive pictures on the film strip.

<sup>10</sup> Pedersen’s taxonomy can be summarized as follows: Retention (implies no, or only small, adjustments to meet target language expectations); Direct translation (when translating the source text completely and accurately); Official Equivalents (an ECR is translated with an Official Equivalent when an official decision by some authority has generally been made, e.g. for converting measurements); Generalization, Specification, Substitution, and finally Omission which, due to the media-specific constraints of subtitling, is not an uncommon strategy, especially in cases of very high-paced dialogue. Nonetheless, it must be used only after testing and rejecting all other options (Leppihalme 1997: 93).



TA. ECR are assumed to be less identifiable to most of the relevant TA than they are to the relevant SA, because of differences in encyclopedic knowledge and competence. Both the names of the extreme points of those axes and the strategies themselves can vary according to different scholars. Nonetheless, all these strategies can be grouped into two macro-categories (Leppihalme 1997): Minimum Change Strategies, which add no new material to the TT rendering of the ST ECR (i.e. when the ECR is likely to be accessed encyclopedically, intertextually or deictically), and include Retention; Equivalent and Direct Translation; while Interventional Strategies – which are Specification, Generalization, Substitution, and Omission – supply the TT audience with more information to help access the ECR. However, all these translation strategies either combine or overlap, which makes them difficult to categorize accurately within a given body of work.

The films considered in this study are:

- Babette's Feast* (1987, directed by Gabriel Axel)
- Big Night* (1996, directed by Campbell Scott and Stanley Tucci)
- Chef* (2014, directed by Jon Favreau)
- Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* (2009, directed by Phil Lord & Chris Miller)
- Eat Love Pray* (2010, directed by Ryan Murphy)
- When Harry Met Sally* (1989, directed by Rob Reiner)
- Manhattan* (1973, directed by Woody Allen)
- Moonstruck* (1987, directed by Norman Jewison)
- My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002, directed by Joel Zwick)
- Pulp Fiction* (1994, directed by Quentin Tarantino)
- Ratatouille* (2007, directed by Brad Bird)
- Shall We Dance?* (2004, directed by Peter Chelsom)
- Something's Gotta Give* (2003, directed by Nancy Meyers)
- Soul Food* (1997, directed by George Tillman Jr.)
- The Devil Wears Prada* (2006, directed by David Frankel)
- The First Wives' Club* (1996, directed by Hugh Wilson)
- The Family Man* (2000, directed by Brett Ratner)
- The Godfather I* (1972, directed by Francis Ford Coppola)
- The Godfather II* (1974, directed by Francis Ford Coppola)
- The Godfather III* (1990, directed by Francis Ford Coppola)
- The King's Speech* (2010, directed by Tom Hooper)
- The Princess and the Frog* (2009, directed by Ron Clements)
- Today's Special* (2009, directed by David Kaplan)
- Tortilla Soup* (2001, directed by María Ripoll)
- Who is Killing the Great Chefs of Europe?* (1978, directed by Ted Kotcheff).

Subtitling greatly differs from isosemiotic translation, as space and time are limited, and this makes condensation an inevitable part of the subtitling process (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007)<sup>11</sup>. As Pedersen (2011: 1053) observes:

<sup>11</sup> It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore all technical subtitling constraints. Suffice it to recall here the most important ones: “the requirement of matching the visual image”; “the pace of the sound-



Subtitles primarily interact with the two verbal channels, editing and translating them [...] and all subtitling should be in harmony with the flow of the non-verbal visual channel. In this way, subtitles can be in harmony with the entire polysemiotic ST, and this creates a subtitled polysemiotic TT. [...] The subtitles themselves are monosemiotic, [...] but together they make up a polysemiotic text.

## 6. Results and findings

Due to word limitations, only a small selection of qualitative examples is investigated in detail. I decided to analyse scenes which offered a wide array of translation strategies in the rendering of food events. More importantly, in the chosen scenes, different socio-cultural reason(s) underlie different translating options, which helps to highlight not only the above-mentioned link between food and identity but, above all, the major challenge references to culture-specific terms pose to any translator/subtitler. This is the reason why “when a subtitler encounters an ECR in a ST [...] by far the most common strategy is to retain the ECR as it is, with just minor alterations to accommodate the rules of the TL” (Pedersen 2007: 31). Hence Retention, or Borrowing, is the most frequently used strategy for rendering ECRs, and in particular food terms in AVT.

However, the choice of leaving cultural names and concepts untranslated can be also intended as a concise celebration of the local ST culture and atmosphere. Cultural words can in fact often be borrowed in order to attract the Target Audience (TA) and convey a sense of intimacy between a Source Text Audience (STA) and its TA. Nonetheless, the more the proto-script is oriented towards its culture, the more its rendering raises problems since, while some lingua-cultural references may be understood straightaway, others may not. The domesticating strategy of emphasizing the ST culture is often meaningful only to an initiated audience and may cause problems for a general audience and limit the TA comprehension of (more) detailed and nuanced aspects. This is due to the “sociolinguistic force” (Kramsh 1998: 16) of a sign, where the linguistic sign may entertain multiple relations with its object, which may be simultaneously of a denotative, connotative, or iconic kind.

Even when the TA recognizes the terms, the absolute equivalence of such terms must always be questioned, once they are used outside their original context. Aspects of indigenous cultures survive and reach beyond their natural boundaries, and they frequently acquire new connotations/meanings via transmedia references. *Lasagna*, for instance, is a familiar presence in British cuisine, but the term does not evoke the same connotative potential once used outside the Italian context, while others may possibly not be recognized.

Let us consider some examples of Retention in film subtitling.

Throughout *The Godfather* saga food and eating figure largely as both cultural signifiers and narrative devices. Kitchen cooking plays a big part in the trilogy: in over 87 scenes food and drink are in the foreground – thus reinforcing one of the most common stereotypes about Italians in terms of their all-pervasive food-fixation<sup>12</sup>. In *The Godfa-*

track dialogue”; “physical constraints of available space”; “the reduction of the source text”; and “the shift in mode from speech to writing” (Hatim and Mason 1997: 65-66).

<sup>12</sup>Francis Coppola’s brilliant film adaptation of Mario Puzo’s bestseller, *The Godfather I*, released

ther trilogy the food speaks volumes on how Italian-Americans in the US are still very much in tune with their roots back home. One of the most oft-quoted lines in *The Godfather I* (1972) is hit man Peter Clemenza's recommendation to his partner in crime, Rocco Lampone, after killing Paulie Gatto: "Leave the gun. Take the *cannoli*"<sup>13</sup>. Here the exact word has been left untranslated, and although *cannoli* have already been mentioned in a previous scene by Peter's wife<sup>14</sup>, no explanations are ever given to possibly shed light on the content of the little parcel. Although the box could be recognized as a dessert package, some of the audience may be unfamiliar with *cannoli* as Sicilian desserts<sup>15</sup>, and both Peter Clemenza's cold detachment, worried only about the *cannoli* rather than the victim, and the dark sarcasm of the whole scene, might be lost. In this case Imitation, by entailing a loss of meaning, could turn into Resignation.

Other examples of Retention/Literal Translation can be found in *The Devil Wears Prada*<sup>16</sup> (2006), as shown in Table 1 (my italics).

English script	Italian frame
<p><u>Emily</u>: While you're out Miranda needs you to go to Hermès to pick up 25 scarves we ordered for her. Cassidy left her homework at Dalton. Pick that up. Miranda went out to meet with Meisel. She'll want <i>more STARBUCKS</i> when she gets back. <i>Hot Starbucks</i>.</p> <p>Miranda: I'll be back at 3. I'd like <i>my Starbucks</i> waiting.</p>	<p><u>Emily</u>: Già che sei fuori Miranda vuole che tu vada da Hermès a ritirare le 25 sciarpe ordinate. Cassidy ha dimenticato i compiti alla Dalton. Passa a prenderli. Miranda è uscita per l'appuntamento con Meisel. E vuole <i>altro STARBUCKS</i> per quando torna. <i>Starbucks bollente</i>.</p> <p>Miranda: Torno per le 3. Vorrei <i>il mio Starbucks</i> ad aspettarli.</p>

**Table 1.** *The Devil Wears Prada*: Retention

in 1972, is the first of a three-part series, and two other sequels followed: *The Godfather Part II* (1974) and *The Godfather Part III* (1990). *The Godfather's* influence institutionalized Italian mob stereotypes, turning them into part of the folklore of America and elsewhere, and has infiltrated popular culture: few films have entered the realms of social iconography and had such lasting effects on the worldwide lexicon; suffice it to mention the notorious, euphemistic lines "an offer he can't refuse" (Cavaliere 2012; forthcoming).

<sup>13</sup> The sentence is pronounced by Rocco Lampone, one of Michael Corleone's 'caporegimes', just after killing Paulie Gatto, right-hand man and personal chauffeur to Vito Corleone in *The Godfather I*.

<sup>14</sup> The original line, both in the script and the book, was never intended to mention *cannoli*. The line "take the cannoli" was ad-libbed by Richard Castellano, who played Clemenza, based on a suggestion from his onscreen and real-life wife, Ardell Sheridan, to riff on an earlier scene where she had reminded him, while leaving home, "don't forget the cannoli".

<sup>15</sup> *Cannoli* are pastry desserts made with ricotta cheese, typical of Sicily, the southern Italian region where Vito Corleone, the Godfather, and most of his henchmen came from.

<sup>16</sup> Storyline: Andy, a naive college graduate, goes to New York City and gets a job as a co-assistant to a fashion magazine editor, the ruthless and cynical Miranda Priestly – a hugely powerful and demanding diva within the magazine business.

Starbucks, as we know, is the world's biggest caffeine dealer and coffeehouse chain, with 19,435 stores in 58 countries, often defined overseas as “the third place”, where especially younger people spend most of their free time. Nonetheless, despite being inspired by Italian culture, to date Italy has been a “Starbucks-free nation”<sup>17</sup>. Consequently, the metonymic relation between the beverage – coffee – and the company which sells it – Starbucks – must not necessarily be taken for granted in Italy and may be lost by some of the Italian audience, especially by older and/or less educated people who are not accustomed to travelling abroad.

In this case the choice of leaving Starbucks untranslated – which might have simply been rendered with the functional equivalent *caffè* – could depend on the film production opting for a product placement (i.e. the process by which manufacturers or advertisers pay a fee in order for branded products to be prominently displayed in a movie, TV show or other media production).

A different explanation must be given for the subtitlers' decision to leave French words untranslated in the 1989 American animated musical fantasy film produced by Walt Disney *The Little Mermaid*<sup>18</sup>, when Chef Louis, while preparing a seafood dinner, sings a song about cooking fish. Here multimodal representation exploits both phonological features and iconic signs to depict the iconic French chef character. Song lyrics are almost always subtitled – starting with a white hash mark (#) and the final song subtitle with a hashtag at the start and the end – and left verbatim in the case of well-known songs, whether they are part of the action or not. However, in the case under scrutiny the song is unknown, and its lyrics are crucial to the humour of the scene. Even though the relations between signs and signifiers and their connotative and iconic value are totally arbitrary, they all bring further meanings into a specific mode. Particularly in diasemiotic representations, a recurring Mode, i.e. “any organized, regular means of representation and communication, such as still image, gesture, posture, and speech, music, writing, or new configurations of the elements of these” (Jewitt 2009: 184), becomes decidedly instrumental to characterization. In various ways, all the iconic representations enhance both the denotative and the connotative meaning of individual words and actions: “Just as language cannot be reduced to words and syntax, but needs visualization in order to function, so images are inseparable from language, in their very visuality” (Bal 1999: 82). In our example, the over-the-top Frenchness of chef Louis is marked not only by his French accent, but also by the (apparently) random lyrics of his song. The lyrics, as shown in Table 2, are meant to eulogize both the cook's passion for cooking fish and some major French iconic symbols: *Nouvelle cuisine*, *Les Champs Elysees*, *Maurice Chevalier* are all worldwide known French hallmarks<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>17</sup>In the early 1980s Howard Schultz, former Starbucks chairman and CEO, during a trip to Milan, was inspired by Italy's cafe culture to turn the US coffeehouse chain into a space that could be a community gathering place, and since then he has built his coffee empire. Schultz, however, always feared that the Starbucks model would not take off in Italy and that Italians would be reluctant to abandon their traditions. However, after more than thirty years, the first Starbucks café opened in September 2018 in Milan.

<sup>18</sup> Storyline: inspired by the classic Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale, the film narrates the love story between a mermaid (Ariel) and a human prince (Henry).

<sup>19</sup> *Nouvelle Cuisine* is the style of cooking originating in France during the 1960s and 1970s that stresses freshness, lightness, and clarity of flavour, *Les Champs Elysees* is possibly the most famous boulevard in Paris, leading from Place de la Concorde to the Arc de Triomphe, whereas *Maurice Chevalier*

As for the music, the song begins as a *Musette*, and then ends with a typical can-can being played<sup>20</sup>. Here the overall effect of the song is more important than its literal translation, so in the Italian version subtitlers either combined song-lines, or edited and combined song-lines, wherever possible trying to leave any rhymes intact and synchronize with audio. They alternatively opted for Retention in the case of French language or Paraphrase when translating into Italian.

English version	Italian version
<i>Nouvelle Cuisine</i> <i>Les Champs Elysées</i> <i>Maurice Chevalier</i> <i>Les poissons</i> <i>Les poissons</i> How I love <i>les poissons</i> [...] Then I pull out the bones <i>Ah mais oui</i> Ça c'est toujours delish	<i>Nouvelle Cuisine</i> <i>Les Champs Elysées</i> <i>Maurice Chevalier</i> <i>Les poisson, les poisson</i> farli a pezzi e servirli che bontà!

**Table 2.** *The Little Mermaid*: Retention and Paraphrase

In the above example, in both songs all French terms, whether referring to cookery or not, have been left untranslated. Even though not all the French references/connotations of the songs might be familiar to the English TA or the Italian TA (*Maurice Chevalier*, for instance, might not be recognized as the famous French *chansonnier* and entertainer), here the ultimate goal of Retention for the French words simply lies in their French resonance, not in their literal meanings.

Also, in the 2007 Pixar film *Ratatouille*<sup>21</sup>, phrases concerning food are often uttered in French language form, and left untranslated in the original English text, not only to give local colour and flavour, but mainly to validate the following assumption: “Although each of the world’s countries would like to dispute this fact, we French know the truth: the best food in the world is made in France. The best food in France is made in Paris.”

was among the most famous French cabaret musicians, and thus recalls French light entertainment and night life.

<sup>20</sup> *Musettes* are typically waltzes played on the accordion, an instrument frequently used in recordings of early 20th century French popular music. This is the reason why this particular genre played on an accordion, by memetic mutation, has come to be the musical ‘personification’ of Paris, together with the typical musical dance called French can-can, as it first appeared in the working-class ballrooms of Montparnasse in Paris at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. See Dauncey and Cannon (2003).

<sup>21</sup> Storyline: a rat named Remy dreams of becoming a great French chef despite his family’s wishes and the obvious problem of being a rat in a decidedly rodent-phobic profession. Despite the apparent dangers of being an unlikely – and certainly unwanted – visitor in the kitchen of a fine French restaurant, fate places Remy beneath a restaurant made famous by his culinary hero, Auguste Gusteau. Here opportunity knocks when Linguini, a clumsy youth hired as a garbage boy, discovers and partners Remy to produce the finest *Ratatouille* in all of France.

This is the opening sentence of the film, pronounced with an unmistakably French accent by a narrator's voice on television while the image of the Eiffel Tower is shown to immediately set the location in France. Along the same lines, in the following table, referring to another scene, not only is the name of the cheese in the English version rendered with French terms, but its excellence is also underlined by the determiner *any* in the preceding sentence “and not just *any* cheese”, with the underlying assumption that the cheese really is a rare treat. In the Italian version, instead, the French terms are translated literally into Italian, (possibly) because of the eternal rivalry between Italy and France about food and fashion. While American/English films, when intending to highlight food excellence, generally resort to the French language, the Italian version always translates into Italian, as is clearly shown in the following examples. This could be explained by an Italian reluctance to recognize French culinary supremacy.

English script	Italian frame
And not just <i>any</i> cheese: <i>Tomme de chevre de pays</i> • I need two racks of lamb • Two salmon, three <i>salade composée</i> and three <i>filets</i>  L1 English: → L2: French Code mixing	E non è un formaggio qualsiasi: È <u>toma di capra di campagna</u> • Due porzioni di costolette d'agnello • Mi servono due salmoni, <u>tre insalate miste e tre filetti</u>  → TT L3: Italian → Literal Translation

**Table 3.** *Ratatouille*: French Retention vs (Italian) Literal Translation

This claim might be much clearer in the following example, taken from *Something's Gotta Give*<sup>22</sup>, when the main female character Erica decides to buy some really extraordinary, delicious food; her sole choice is to buy French food. Accordingly, in the English script she goes to a French épicerie and, speaking French, orders typical French food (*paté, fromage, gâteau au chocolat*).

English script	Italian frame
<i>Je voudrais une tranche de votre paté merveilleuse et un morceau de votre fromage du gâteau au chocolat</i>	Vorrei un po' di quel vostro meraviglioso paté e una fetta del vostro miglior formaggio di capra [...] una bella torta al cioccolato

**Table 4.** *Something's Gotta Give*: French Retention vs (Italian) Literal Translation

In some cases, “the presuppositional knowledge forming the background to a text may prove to be problematic, conveying, as it does, information of a ‘sensitive’ nature

<sup>22</sup> Storyline: a swinging entertainment executive in his 60s surrounded by plenty of young girlfriends ends up falling in love with Erica, his latest romance's mother, who is closer to his age.

which may possibly even require suppression, or some other radical irruption into the text as a translation strategy” (Fawcett 1998: 121).

In the examples under scrutiny both *Crisco* and *Jarlsberg* refer to food brands quite exclusively known/used in the US<sup>23</sup>, hence a Substitution is required in order to aid the TA in understanding the relevant function or connotations of the ST ECRs.

English script	Italian frame
Nigel: “A little <i>Crisco</i> and some fishing line and we’re in business”	Nigel: “Oh sì... un po’ di <i>lubrificante</i> e un filo da pesca e il gioco è fatto”.

**Table 5.** *The Devil Wears Prada*: Substitution

English script	Italian frame
Andy: “Oh no no no, give me that. There’s like eight dollars of <i>Jarlsberg</i> in there”.	Andy: “Oh no no no, dammi qua. “Ci sono otto dollari di <i>formaggio</i> lì”

**Table 6.** *The Devil Wears Prada*: Substitution

### 6.1 Translating wordplay and other examples

According to Chiaro (2006: 2), the term wordplay “includes any conceivable way that language is used with the intent to amuse”. Wordplay, being “language-dependent jokes” (Zabalbeascoa 1996: 253), is extremely difficult to translate, and is often deemed as ‘untranslatable,’ since it employs particular structural characteristics of the SL for its meaning. Wordplay can be labelled in different ways. According to Delabastita (1996: 128), it can be divided into four main categories, based on the level of similarity concerning sounds and spelling:

- ‘homonymy’ (identical sounds and spelling)
- ‘homophony’ (identical sounds but different spelling)
- ‘homography’ (different sounds but identical spelling)
- ‘paronymy’ (there are slight differences in both spelling and sound), as in the example shown in Table 7.

In *The Godfather II*, Frankie Petangeli, one of the old-time gangsters who used to work for Vito Corleone, is uneducated and unaccustomed to the modern, de-Italianized style of Michael’s West-Coast party. He feels uneasy and says to Fredo, Vito Corleone’s son:

<sup>23</sup> Crisco is a sort of vegetable shortening marketed as a ‘must-have’ pantry staple for all US cooks and bakers, while Jarlsberg is a cow’s milk cheese that is the most popular imported cheese in the US (originating in Norway, it is also produced in Ohio).



English script	Italian frame
Frankie: Hey, what's with the food here? Fredo: What's the matter? Frankie: A kid comes up to me in a white jacket, gives me a <u>Ritz cracker</u> with chopped <u>liver</u> and says, 'Canapés.' I said, uh, 'can of peas, my ass, that's a <u>Ritz cracker and chopped liver!</u> '	Frankie: Ma che schifo si mangia qua? Fredo: Perché? Frankie: Perché arriva un picciotto con una <i>crosta di pane</i> e del <i>fegato</i> e mi dice: 'Canapés'. Io ci rispondo: 'Canapés', 'sta minchia, voglio un <i>timballo di melanzane!</i>

**Table 7.** *The Godfather II*: paronymy

In this example the ST message is substituted and partially omitted:

Ritz cracker: *crosta di pane* (literally bread crust);

chopped liver: (simply) *fegato*;

can of peas: *timballo di melanzane*, where the English paronymy canapés/can-of-peas is replaced with a food typical of the TA culture: *timballo di melanzane*. What we have here is a cultural substitution, replacing “a culture-specific item or expression of the SL with a TL item which does not have the same prepositional meaning, but it is *likely* to have a similar impact on the target reader” (Baker 1992: 31) [my italics]. Nonetheless, in this case the intended humorous English wordplay canapés /can-of-peas is totally lost. Thus, following Delabastita's (1996) taxonomy, the result is PUN > ZERO: “the portion of text containing the pun is simply omitted”.

In the next example from *The Devil Wears Prada*, the TL has no true equivalent for ‘Corn Chowder’, therefore a possible solution is cultural substitution. Subtitlers have different options: they can either substitute the ECR with another term, which could be either a similar ECR from the target culture (TC) or a better-known ECR from the source culture (SC), or one from a third culture.

English script	Italian frame
Nigel: That's an interesting choice, <b>Corn Chowder!</b>	Nigel: Scelta interessante, <b>Mine-stra, di Mais!</b>

**Table 8.** *The Devil Wears Prada*: Substitution

In *The Devil Wears Prada* there are also many examples of Generalization due to the many US/NewYork socio-cultural references. This often requires translators to choose Generalization and/or cultural-neutral terms, as in the following example when Nigel sarcastically asks:

English script	Italian frame
Nigel: Did someone eat an <u>onion bagel</u> ?	Nigel: Qualcuno ha mangiato <i>cipolla</i> ?

**Table 9.** *The Devil Wears Prada*: Generalization

The culturally specific ST ‘onion bagel’ has been made more understandable by undergoing chunking. In this regard translators adopt the technique of ‘chunking up’

(Katan 1999: 147-157). Chunking is one of the most important strategies translators resort to when rendering cultural terms; this expression, taken from computer science, where it refers to the changing in size of something, “is a simple operation of finding a (more or) less culture-bound, or rather, more (or less) culture-inclusive superordinate” (Katan 1999: 147), and comprises three different options: ‘chunking up’, ‘chunking down’, and ‘chunking sideways’. ‘Chunking up’ means that translators, in rendering a specific term, decide to put it into a more general context, while, ‘chunking down’ is a reverse strategy where the SL generic term is translated into the Target Language (TL) with a more specific one; ‘chunking sideways’, which is of particular interest when rendering cultural terms or any so-called ‘untranslatables’, occurs when the size is not altered and the translator manages to find other examples which are on the same level or belong to the same class. In our case, as has been said, subtitlers generally ‘chunk up’ the culture-bound elements and thus move from a narrowly-defined term to a broader definition, from hyponymy to hyperonymy, as when cultural connotations like *onion bagel* are flattened out in the Italian version, which is ‘generalized’ and rendered as *cipolla*<sup>24</sup>. However, ring-shaped breads have a long history in many other countries too, ranging from German *pretzels* to Chinese *girdeh nan*, or Italian *taralli* and *ciambelle*. In this example, a possibly better translation could have been *taralli alla cipolla*. Though conveying a very different connotation, this solution would have avoided Generalization and achieved greater clarity in terms of TA situationality. While it is in fact very uncommon for (Italian) people to eat onions as such, it is much more common to eat *taralli alla cipolla* as a snack at work.

English script	Italian frame:
Rose: Oatmeal	Rose: Farinata d’avena

**Table 10.** *Moonstruck*: Substitution

Other equivalent examples are present in the Italian subtitled version of *Moonstruck* (1987)<sup>25</sup>, a film where food and food sharing are the focal point for a great many scenes. In this film much of the action takes place in the family grocery store, the bakery, the family’s dining room, in the kitchen and most of all in the Gran Ticino Restaurant – a New York-based dining spot owned by the main characters. Food often becomes a metaphorical way to describe family relationships, ethnicity, and the changing moods of the characters. In the following example the subtitlers, basing themselves on the as-

<sup>24</sup> Although nowadays Americans consider bagels so typical of their culinary tradition to the point that February 9th has become ‘National Bagel Day,’ curiously enough ‘bagels’ were a staple of Polish cuisine (the word *bagel* may come either from the Yiddish word *beigen*, i.e. to bend, or a transliteration of the word *beygl* deriving in turn from the German dialect word *beugel*, i.e. ring or bracelet) and were introduced into the United States by Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, with their cravings for the foods of the old country, only at the beginning of the last century. America’s mass bagel consumption is all the more surprising because, until the 1960s, bagels were almost unknown outside large Jewish communities in major cities (Rothstein 2008).

<sup>25</sup>Storyline: Loretta Castorini, a Brooklyn widow in her late 30s, is to resolve the feud between her fiancé Johnny Cammareri and his estranged brother Ronnie. However, while Johnny is out of the country, visiting his dying mother, Loretta and Ronnie fall in love and have an affair. Loretta must decide what to do about choosing between her fiancé and her lover.

sumption that oatmeal is not common to a staple TA breakfast, neutralize its cultural specificity and resort to Substitution<sup>26</sup>.

In one of the first scenes of *The First Wives Club* (1996)<sup>27</sup>, the drinks that the three women order act indirectly as a type of introduction to their different personalities. Annie, “the one who can’t manage a simple declarative sentence” – as we learn later from her friends – tentatively orders “a Virgin Mary”, while her two self-assertive friends have spirits:

English script:	Italian frame:
<i>Virgin Mary</i>	<i>pomodoro condito</i>

**Table 11.** *The First Wives Club*

Here the adopted strategy is a kind of Expansion, where the subtitler deems it necessary to enhance the quality of TA understanding. By translating *Virgin Mary* (namely, a non-alcoholic version of a Bloody Mary) as *Pomodoro condito*, i.e. literally a (spicy) tomato juice, although the denotative meaning gets transferred, the humorous desired religious association of the English version is lost. Annie’s choice of a *Virgin Mary* was meant to create a hilarious contrast with her uninhibited friends and further adds some connotations to her strict, dogmatic personality.

## 7. Concluding Remarks

In AVT, the complex relationship between language and culture gets even more complex owing to the many theoretical and practical issues intertwining with the discipline itself (i.e. technological advances, technical constraints, film semiotics, script writing, economic and professional aspects and so on).

The upshot of our investigation allows us to confirm that Retention, with a distinguishably high rate of occurrence, is the most frequently used strategy in all motion pictures analysed. Our study confirms Taylor’s (2006: 8) assertion:

A tension [...] exists, when translating from English to Italian, between the temptation to translate literally and maintain the foreign flavor, and to tone everything down in a localization exercise. Thus, the pitfalls for the translator lie between the extremes of total disdain and novelty obsession, as neither position is taken up in Italian contexts.

In a diachronic perspective, it appears that, although every translation invariably domesticates language (Venuti 1995: 148), the more recent the film, the more subtitlers opt for foreignization, hence promoting the ST culture. Today, as a direct consequence in the process of global cultural communication and mergence, significant attention is given to cultural diversities. Interest in languages and customs of foreign countries has evolved, and both new translational activities and translation accuracy along with

<sup>26</sup> It must be noted, however, that, viceversa, when meals are ordered at the Gran Ticino Restaurant, typical Italian meals, in the original English version, are not translated.

<sup>27</sup> Storyline: reunited by the death of a college friend, three divorced women seek revenge on the husbands who left them for younger women.

them. In the 21st century, foreignization seems to be the expected common tendency in AVT. In most examples untranslated/foreign material did not affect intelligibility, also because a particularly recreational TA may not stop to consider every unfamiliar name. Nonetheless, especially in case of ECRs and their culture-laden value/specificity, foreignization and its related strategies may prevent (full) TA comprehension.

Osimo (2004: 133-134) observes that “The audience, tricked by the familiar language spoken in the movie, cannot grasp its implicit cultural specificity, which can only be understood in context”. Cultural concepts and/or items may, more often than not, entail a loss of meaning: what mainly gets lost, in the examples under scrutiny, are mainly humorous asides. Even the chunking up process tends to invalidate puns and jokes. This was quite predictable since, in terms of understanding, cross-cultural humour is probably the most difficult feature of another culture (Solomon 1997: 205). Each form of humour is inextricably embedded in the cultural cradle in which it was born, and it can hardly ever be understood without an explanation of the cultural mindset and rules/taboo which the humorous issue refers to<sup>28</sup>.

Yet, our study did not aim at questioning the subtitlers’ choices, but rather at demonstrating the challenge of translating culture-bound elements – food terms in particular – and, more importantly, at considering new insights into approaching translation problems in the AVT practice.

Investigations about translation strategies should lead scholars to analyse what remains largely unexplored in terms of translation loss, i.e. “what it consists in and whether it matters” (Dickins *et al.* 2002: 96). Can untranslated ECR terms convey their meanings to the TA, and if so to what extent? Is there a significant residue of untranslatable culture associated with the ST linguistic structures which is only partially conveyed, or is not conveyed at all? Has the ultimate goal of a successful translation been achieved, namely has real intercultural communication been enhanced? The field of end-user perception and appreciation of the translated product is still relatively unexplored<sup>29</sup>, therefore TA ‘perception analysis’ should be promoted in order to gauge TA comprehension and thus its perception and appreciation.

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<sup>28</sup> In this perspective, according to Solomon (1997: 204), “humour is to some extent ‘racist,’ not in the vile sense of demeaning some ethnic or racial group but rather in the more innocent sense that all humour is to some extent context and culture-bound”. See also Cavaliere 2008b.

<sup>29</sup> It seems that only a few scholars (Karamitroglou 2000; Chiaro 2004; Cavaliere 2008a) have so far oriented their research in this perspective.

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