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Translating culture-specific elements in dubbing: A case study on the series "The Office"

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Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation is to identify the cultural elements in the American TV series “The Office” with a focus on comedic elements of the programme and their translation in the Italian dubbed version of the show. Chapter 1 describes the nature of audiovisual translation, a relatively new field of study whose peak of development can be traced back to the 1990s and which many scholars reject to classify as translation proper (Minutella, 2009). It constitutes a semiotic construct made up of both images and words, that it is worth to thoroughly consider when taking audiovisual translation into analysis. The focus will then switch to the differentiation into two poles of the translation approaches, which are substantiated on the one hand by the strategy of adequacy and on the other hand by that of acceptability. Whilst adequacy shows a clear tendency towards an adherence to the characteristic traits of a given source product, acceptability is more oriented toward the target culture.

Dubbing, which is the thesis' main focus, is defined, together with subtitling, as a form of constrained translation (Díaz-Cintas, 1999); still in the first chapter, the constraints of dubbing are explained and a report of the theories and opinions of academics is provided.

The second chapter is devoted to the explanation of the domesticating strategy peculiar to dubbing, which, to a certain extent, obliterates the foreignness of the source product, reaching in some cases instances of de-culturalization (Minutella, 2009). The results of a survey conducted by Angela Sileo between 2019 and 2020 on the importance of total synchrony in Italian dubbing are then reported, showing that synchrony, per se, represents the greatest constraint of dubbing (Cordéus, 2009). This is followed by a review of related notions such as the cinematic illusion that AVT must pursue (Mason, 1989) and Chaume's (2008) invisibility of translation. Finally, the focus shifts to the explanation of the three main categories that make an audiovisual product culturally specific, i.e. general elements of culture, figurative language, and humour, noting that the latter occupies a prominent place in the third chapter.

Chapter 3 seeks to analyse, as a case study, the TV series "The Office", taking into consideration the jokes and the humorous elements relying on cultural references and their translation. A quantitative and a qualitative analysis of those instances in the first season of the programme is offered. Suggestions, or rather, translation alternatives are proposed for some of the examples studied in order to shed light on certain points and

connotations that have been lost in the passage from the English source product to the Italian target product.

1. Audiovisual Translation

This chapter will introduce a relatively recent field of study, which is at its “embryonic stage” if compared to others within Translation Studies. The label “Audiovisual Translation” (AVT) itself can be considered “a new dynamic umbrella” (Orero, 2004: 7), which testifies to the problematic use of terminology in this field, the changing attitudes towards the field itself, and the debate regarding its core essence (Minutella, 2009: 4). For the purposes of this study, the term AVT refers to the translation processes involving audiovisual products.

1.1 Introduction to audiovisual translation

Audiovisual translation represents a young field of study which experienced a strong boost during the 90’s, an *impetus* that was marked by the growing importance of technology and multimedia products. As suggested by Gambier (2012: 45), “AVT has become more familiar and more frequently discussed in translation studies since the 100th anniversary of the cinema (1995), which also coincided with the booming of the so-called new technology.”

When it comes to defining AVT, several factors are to be considered in order to do justice to and advocate for its unique nature, which involves multiple channels and equally unique translation issues and strategies. The interrelation between “codes”, i.e. “linguistic, paralinguistic, kinetic, musical, photographic and so on” (Ajtony, 2020: 30) and “channels”, e.g. the aural one, is extremely complicated (Ranzato, 2010: 25), since they normally coexist in a defined and finished audiovisual product, but one may overshadow the others depending on the target addressee. For instance, if hard of hearing people happen to represent a media company’s target audience, the crucial channel would be the visual one, where subtitles provide not only a script of the characters’ dialogues, but also “written descriptions of sound features from the diegetic action that would otherwise not be accessible to Deaf viewers” (Pérez-González, 2014: 25).

The inability to define properly and in an all-encompassing manner AVT is undoubtedly intertwined with the above-mentioned problematics. As Minutella (2009: 4) argues, “[t]he fact that audiovisual products are complex semiotic systems, in which verbal signs are combined with images and sounds, and acquire meaning also through this combination, makes the practice and study of such translations more problematic.”

Given that the translation of one channel cannot take place without taking into account the other ones, the approach to be adopted in the analysis of audiovisual products coincides with a thorough look at the products themselves. As Chaume (2002: 3) put it, “[t]he discovery of translation studies and rhetorical mechanisms unique to the construction of audiovisual texts is only possible from an analysis of audiovisual texts that looks at their peculiarity: meaning constructed from the conjunction of images and words.”

An audiovisual text is a semiotic construct made up of a number of different signifying codes that work together to create meaning, therefore understanding how each code works, as well as the possibility of all verbal and non-verbal signs appearing in a translation, is what the translator is interested in (Chaume, 2004a: 16). Audiovisual texts are an invaluable source of information which can be translated through two communication channels (aural and visual) that simultaneously transmit coded meanings using different sign systems (Chaume, 2013, see also Ajtony, 2020).

Within this framework of extreme variety and diversity, different types of approaches to audiovisual translation interface: dubbing (cf. 1.4), interlingual and intralingual subtitling, voice over, surtitles, and finally, audiodescription (Ranzato, 2010: 24).

In conclusion, it is necessary to do away with bias and preconceptions, especially the ones that do not consider this kind of linguistic transfer as “translation proper” (Minutella, 2009: 4). What distinguishes AVT is that it includes not only a purely verbal dimension, but also additional, and by no means superfluous, components (Díaz-Cintas, 2005) that form an *orchestra* of visual, auditory elements, also linked to the interpretation of human facial expressions. In other words, everything that appears on the screen has the potential to convey an important message.

Each multimodal and multimedial text (Pérez-González, 2009: 13) therefore contributes to the linguistic transfer occurring from one language to another, giving life to a *concert* orchestrated by several instruments (i.e. codes), staging a *performance* in which each has a voice that rises precisely to be heard.

1.2 Adequacy and acceptability

Both Orero (2004) and Chaume (2012) depict translation as an activity that is pervaded with the need to oscillate in two different directions, a continuous swing from the pole of

adequacy to that of acceptability, being the former the direction in which adherence to the source product values prevails, and the latter home to a type of translation that “embraces the linguistic and cultural values of the target polysystem” (Orero, 2004: 29).

These two poles can be associated to two equally valid, but at the same time opposite, methods of translation, i.e. the domestication approach, on the one hand, and foreignization, on the other. The former is closer to the tendencies of the acceptability pole, being a strategy that consists in making the translation “closely conform to the culture of the language being translated to, which may involve the loss of information from the source text so as to focus on the target audience” (Menis, 2014).

Conversely, foreignization is a type of translation that is oriented towards translating the source language and culture into the target language while preserving some of the exotic flavour that is associated with the source language itself (Wang, 2014: 2424), therefore it may be collocated closer to the adequacy pole, rather than to the one of acceptability.

Precisely, “in a domesticating translation, a text is translated with the target culture in mind much more than in a foreignizing translation, where source-culture items are often kept, and it is obvious that the new text is a translation. As with domestication, localized products do not seem to stem from a foreign origin” (Malmkjær, 2011: 473).

The terminology pertaining to the world of translation (not only audiovisual) is rather varied and, although scholars have made use of various labels, it is important not to lose sight of the semantic and conceptual value within the terminology itself. As Agost (2004: 71) argues, a more than lively debate has long animated translation scholars, Yet, for the purposes of this dissertation, Toury’s (1980) definition of an “adequate translation” is retained, i.e. one that is oriented towards the norms of the language and culture of the source text. Also Venuti (1995) and House (1981) referred to the same concept, albeit using different terminology: Venuti’s theoretical framework leans on the term “foreignizing translation”, while House’s one on the expression “overt translation” (Agost, 2004: 71).

As all the above points have demonstrated, adequacy and acceptability, intended respectively as the counterparts of foreignization and domestication, display a vital function in defining a translated product. In the field of AVT, for instance, Božović’s (2019) study of Serbo-Croatian audiences and their attitudes towards the two approaches

showed that the vast majority of the participants ended up preferring the foreignization strategy in subtitling and the domestication approach in dubbing, as target-culture-oriented solutions may feel out of place in subtitling, clashing with the socio-cultural context of a given audiovisual product.

1.3 AVT's pivot techniques: dubbing and subtitling

Dubbing and subtitling are the two most commonly known and employed audiovisual translation methods. Similarly to how AVT has generally faced a horde of disparaging criticism, the two linguistic transfer methods have had to wait some time to be defined as a form of translation.

Both subtitling and dubbing are to be considered as “constrained translation” (Díaz-Cintas, 1999: 31), i.e. audiovisual translations that imply very precise constraints. Specifically, dubbing, which represents the primary interest of the present work, has its main constraint in the aural and visual channels. Their coexistence generates problems for the translator, whose range of possibilities is particularly limited by the plural nature of the audiovisual product itself (Ranzato, 2010: 25). For subtitling is instead the “binding dowel” represented by space represents the most limiting aspect of this translation method, as the translator's solutions must accommodate to the “spatial synchrony” (Díaz-Cintas, 1999: 33). It should therefore be considered that about 30% of the original dialogue of a given audiovisual product is reduced in subtitling (Gottlieb 1994), whereas dubbing “is affected by the constraints of lip and body movements of the actors in the film, as the translated text needs to be synchronised with them, together with the time constraint, as the translated dialogue cannot last longer than the original one” (Minutella, 2009: 12).

Among the detractors of subtitling, it is possible to find different opinions that, more or less unambiguously, see this method as partial and incomplete. Some scholars firmly claim that subtitling is nothing more than a simple tool that facilitates the understanding of an audiovisual product's plot; they thus annihilate the essence of subtitles, denying their ability to perform linguistic transposition (Paolinelli and Di Fortunato, 2005: 38).

From an economic viewpoint, the two forms imply different costs and investments, as dubbing is much more expensive and time-consuming, whereas subtitling is less costly and production is also relatively quick (Minutella, 2009: 14).

It is also possible to draw a quasi-geographical pattern representation the distribution of these two techniques across the globe. Indeed, some countries have always (or in most cases) had a history linked to dubbing, while others have mainly been devoted to subtitling. “Europe may be divided into ‘dubbing’ countries (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Austria, Switzerland, etc.) and ‘subtitling’ countries (Belgium, Cyprus, Portugal, Sweden, Wales, etc.)” (Minutella, 2009: 15), according to their past choices of prevalently directing the production of translated audiovisual products towards one linguistic transfer method or the other, although this geographical division may have become “too simplistic given that technology allows flexible solutions” (Minutella, 2009: 15, see also Gambier, 2003: 173). In a historical perspective, early 20th century dubbing countries such as Italy, Germany, and Spain, this choice can be considered an “expression of nationalism” (Danan, 1991: 606; see also Díaz-Cintas, 1999). Dubbing “was used as an ideological tool with a double edge” (Díaz-Cintas, 1999: 36), as it was manipulated by the totalitarian regimes of the time to conveniently operate on foreign products and exercise censorship.

1.4 Dubbing

Following Chaume (2012: 1) “[d]ubbing is a type of Audiovisual Translation [that] consists of replacing the original track of a film’s (or any audiovisual text) source language dialogues with another track on which translated dialogues have been recorded in the target language.”

In the case of dubbing, translation must, however, take into account several constraints, such as lip-synchronisation with respect to the actors on the scene, as dubbing represents a *cinematic illusion* (Mason, 1989: 13) giving a semblance of realism (i.e., making the audience believe that the actors are actually speaking in their language).

When the client provides a copy of the movie or program to the dubbing studio, the preproduction stage of dubbing begins. This copy, referred to as the ‘master’, also includes the original script to make translation easier, as both the film itself the written script serve as the translator's two primary sources. Once translated, the new target-language soundtrack is then timed to match the actors' lip movements and the other

images as accurately as possible (Martinez, 2004: 3). The stage of the dubbing process where special attention must be paid to the actors' lip movements and to the matching of a translated text in a language other than the original is called *synchronization*, which concern three categories, i.e. lip synchronization, isochrony or synchronization between utterances and pauses, and kinetic synchronization (Chaume, 2004b: 41; see also Minutella, 2009: 37).

Lip synchronization is a process that aims to achieve perfect matching between sound and the actors' lip movement, at least in close-ups where there is a focus on the actors' lips, in order to ensure the aforementioned cinematic illusion. This type of visual synchronization is based on the coexistence, or rather co-presence, of the original actors' lip movements with the spoken words and phrases heard in the dubbed version (Minutella, 2009: 37).

The timing of the translated sound-track must also match that of the actor's lips openings and closings for the utterances to be in isochrony with the visual. Isochrony deficiencies are the main target of criticism in poorly dubbed films because this is where viewers are most likely to catch the flaw (Chaume, 2004b: 39, see also Whitman, 1992: 20). In this sense, it is possible to discern a similarity between dubbing and subtitling, as both linguistic transfer methods are subject to the supreme constraint of time, which holds the reins of the process of isochrony, thus decreeing whether a product has been effectively translated or not.

Finally, kinetic synchrony refers to a synchronisation process in which the translation respects the body movements of the actors on screen (Minutella, 2009: 39), i.e., an effective translation cannot disorient the final consumer by presenting utterances or words that clash with the body language of the actors in the film or audiovisual product.

Clearly, it is worth mentioning that the degree of closeness between the source and the target language facilitates considerably the synchronization during the dubbing process (Chaume, 2004b: 47); when there are similar words in both languages, even close-ups do not cause any problems for translators, so they do not have to dwell on a possible translation hypothesis that also coincides with lip mimicry.

One of the problems inherent in the process of a translation for dubbing, which is to be seen as part of a global and detailed context, concerns the linguistic variants that do not correspond to standard language (Minutella, 2009: 46). For instance, regional idioms

relating to territorial realities that do not coincide with the standard language of a nation are often neutralised (Minutella, 2009: 46) by adopting sociolinguistically unmarked phonetics (Pavesi, 2005: 37). In the Italian case, little seems to have changed since the harsh climate surrounding dubbing in the 1930s, so much so that most films dubbed today continue to linearly respect the rules required for an Italian rendering according to the Romano-Florentine pronunciation, to a strict adherence to grammatical standards and norms, and to an average lexicon (Raffaelli, 1996: 25-28). Not everyone can be in favour of a system in which the essence of the original product is neutralised, which is why some condemn dubbing for totally annihilating “the musicality of the original language, its rhythm and colour” (Martin, 1996: 154).

In a sociolinguistic perspective, it is also necessary to consider another constraint that dubbing translators must attend to, namely the *cultural embeddedness* of the product to be translated (Ranzato 2010: 36). An obvious consequence of this is, as Pym (2010: 127) suggests, the fact that the more a film (or any audiovisual product) is rooted in its socio-cultural context of reference, the more difficult it will be to come up with translation solutions (in dubbing) that can conceal the foreign nature of the product itself.

Although harsh criticism surrounds dubbing (Fasoli, 2014: 65), the difficulties that dubbers have to deal with to create a translation-illusion, which should not instil doubts in the audience while preserving the emotional-sentimental aspect contained in the gestures of the actors on screen, should also be acknowledged. With this in mind, however, it is also fair to admit that there may be translations for dubbing that have failed to convey one or more of the inherent features of AV products, e.g. humour in TV comedy series.

The divergence between the original audiovisual and the dubbed product will be dealt with in the third and final chapter of the dissertation, while bearing in mind the notions recently addressed in the current section. In particular, "cultural embeddedness" (Ranzato, 2010: 36) will be focused, which can be a real linguistic-cultural barrier leading to reductive solutions if compared to the original product. Several constraints of audiovisual content have been mentioned, which are substantiated on several levels (Díaz-Cintas, 1999: 31). Suffice it to say that the visual one strongly limits the translator's creativity, or that every typology of synchronisation counts when dubbing, even the kinetic one, which is linked to the movements of the actors on the screen.

The characteristic features which can make an audiovisual product a cultural product, resulting from the social context in which it was developed are the specific focus of the following chapter.

2. Interlingual dubbing from English to Italian

2.1 A target-oriented strategy

It has already been emphasised how dubbing, or audiovisual translation in general, can entail an annihilation of the musicality and colour of the original text (Martin, 1996: 154), but it is worth specifying how this process is substantiated and what causes such a phenomenon.

In fact, dubbing is a linguistic transfer method that generally opts for the domestication of the product, which implies a strategy oriented towards the target language and, at the same time, the target audience: this orients the present discourse towards considerations that are closely linked to the cultural elements inherent in a given language (be it the source or target language), which can cause various translation issues.

Ghia and Pavesi (2016: 236) define as *endemic* two congruent and complementary processes. The first one is standardisation with reference to the text and the target language, which poses only one of the threats to the “colour” of the original text and is substantiated by a simplification and generalisation that can occur, for example, at dialect level, where there is no faithful reproduction in Italian of the lively linguistic landscape of English. The second phenomenon is neutralisation with reference to the target language, which can take the form of the omission of cultural elements that do not correspond to the conventions, beliefs and socio-cultural traditions of the language into which the product is translated. Both phenomena are part of the domesticating tradition of Italian dubbing, whose driving force can be traced back to the ambitions of the fascist regime, which would have not allowed an exotic tone to be chosen for the audiovisual products broadcasted in Italy. This nationalist culture dictated the course of Italian dubbing for quite some time, leaving traces of resistance to another culture (Ranzato, 2010: 75).

In dubbing, however, the translator's choices do not always land on the side of domestication, although this is still the most common strategy to eliminate or attenuate traces of exoticism in the original product, especially in Italian television, which is oriented towards a minimisation of culturally specific elements of the source text, as these are perceived as an “obstacle” to the smooth reception by the public (Ranzato, 2010: 75). The final output is the result of different manipulations, which may occur to varying

degrees, ranging from the extreme in which only a minimum adjustment can be noticed to that in which a "trivialisation of the dialogues in all their aspects" takes place (Ranzato, 2010: 52), leading to what Minutella (2009: 24) defines as "de-culturalisation" of the foreign film.

As already stressed above, in a foreignizing approach, the reference is the target-audience, which does not represent a mere abstraction, but is to be considered as an organic and physically existing whole, which specific socio-cultural heritage, ideals, values, intrinsically linked to the nationality of origin of individuals. These considerations are in line with Ulrych's analysis (2000: 132; see also Minutella, 2009: 25) regarding the significance of the target audience's way of thinking: dubbing "implies resistance to hegemonic cultures and languages, but at the same time it entails an appropriation and adaptation of the source-text – 'the other' – to the target culture. Thus the choice of translation strategy is also to be seen in the light of how the target language and culture view 'the other'" (Minutella, 2009: 25).

2.2 Synchronisation in Italian dubbing

Putting the translator's creative skills to the test (Orero, 2004: 35), synchronization represents one of the main constraints of dubbing (Cordéus, 2009: 5) and considers all the following issues (Chaume in Orero 2004: 41): lip movements that are to be matched with (a) the dubbing script (*lip synchronisation*), (b) the duration of the utterances pronounced by the character(s) as visible on screen (*isochrony*), and (c) the actors' body movements (*kinetic synchronisation*).

In order to understand the extent to which overall synchronisation (i.e., one encompassing the three criteria mentioned above) is necessary and most appreciated in the field of Italian audiovisual translation, it is helpful to make use of quantitative data demonstrating the preference (again, in the Italian context) for dubbing over other transfer methods. Specifically, reference is made to the survey carried out by Sileo (2020: 3) between 2019 and 2020, which contrasts dubbing with *simil synch* or SRNL, i.e., a type of transfer method that can be defined as "partial dubbing", as it respects isochrony but not lip synchronisation.

The survey was conducted by comparing the preferences of a small sample (80 native Italian speakers) concerning dubbing and SRNL. Predictably, the results of the

study showed that “83.6% of the interviewees found dubbing more effective than SRNL” (Sileo, 2020: 7). This confirms that Italy is still a strong dubbing country, so much so that partial synchronization is insufficient for the audiovisual product to be considered effective by the Italian public, which has grown accustomed to total synchronization, or real dubbing, and cinematic illusion (Mason, 1989: 13). The viewer is thus projected (almost unconsciously) into a dimension in which the characters of a film or any other audiovisual product seem to fluently speak his/her language, despite the fact that there may actually be many contents indicating that the setting is not Italian, e.g. shops or street names: in that case, the translation strategy will not tend towards dubbing, but rather towards voice-over or subtitling, creating a feeling of alienation in the spectator (Minutella, 2009: 91). Within this framework of “on-screen illusion”, one could identify the search for spontaneity as the central focus, especially in Italy, which is characterised by a greater orientation towards natural dialogue (Herbst, 1997: 293), thus instilling a sense of familiarity in the target audience.

However, the overall synchronization towards which Italian dubbing is directed takes no small expense, as a translator's effectiveness is intimately related to his/her working conditions and consequently the amount of money he is paid to do that job.

The seemingly mundane issue of working conditions also has an influence on the quality of synchronization. A well-paid translator will ensure that synchronization is effected thoroughly and carefully at all stages of the process, whereas a badly paid translator will become demoralized and end up ignoring the finer restrictions synchronization places on translation. (Chaume, 2004b: 48)

The impression of reality that is instilled in the audience of a given audiovisual product, as mentioned above, is strictly dependent on synchronisation. This can be understood in the framework of what Chaume (2008: 129) defines as "invisibility of translation", which takes place when the original audio is totally erased and then replaced with one translated into the target language. It is also worth pointing out that dubbing is a transfer method that is hardly perceivable by the viewers, as they are not immediately led to think that what they are watching is a foreign product, but rather have the opposite impression, i.e. they are witnessing a *real spectacle* (Metz, 1974: 4).

2.3 Dealing with cross-cultural elements in dubbing

For the purposes of the analysis in Chapter 3, it is necessary to identify the context in which issues related to cultural references (CRs) arise most frequently when translating a

text from one culture to another. It may be enlightening to rely on the argument made by Guillot (2016: 3) according to whom the linguistic level represented by pragmatics is "a locus of difference when attention is on how meaning is constructed by speakers from different cultures, that is, approached cross-culturally."

"Pragmatics can be usefully defined as the study of how utterances have meanings in situations" (Leech, 2016): therefore, pragmatics is concerned with "meaning seen in context" (Thomas, 1995: 156), i.e., the meaning speakers attribute to the utterances they generate in certain communicative situations, or how meaning itself is manipulated (Guillot, 2016: 13). It is precisely at this linguistic level that the main *locus of difference*, mentioned above, can be identified, which therefore represents the degree of difference between a given culture and "the other's culture" (Minutella, 2009: 23; cf. Ulrych, 2000: 132).

For instance, a language may present itself as intrinsically structured to have phrasal formulation options that sound courteous and polite: in Italian, as in Spanish, it is possible to resort to interrogatives aimed at giving advice to the interlocutor, whereas in the transposition to English this would result in a direct order with the use of the imperative, thus generating an "unintended impoliteness" (Guillot, 2016: 7).

Consequently, it is crucial to bear in mind that what natives could take for granted in terms of pragmatics, may actually represent a *locus of difference* whose margin is to be assessed according to the degree of proximity between the two languages and cultures of reference.

However, given that the product the viewer will be watching has already been dubbed into the target language and, thus, will not include any "foreign" or "alienating" traces, this differential margin can go unnoticed.

To explain how the final product is something entirely on its own and actually represents the result of a mediation across cultures (Barra, 2013: 101), we can once again draw on Chaume's (2008: 129) theories and use the concept of "invisible translation" in relation to dubbing, which is thus understood as a linguistic transfer method that partially or completely erases the essence of the original product.

When Italian viewers watch a US TV series or sitcom, the product is, often unbeknown to them, different from the one its original audience enjoyed. Many jokes, references and plays on words are reconstructed to better fit another culture, society and media system. And even the choice of single words, the structure of some phrases, or the actors' intonations may differ

at least slightly from the intentions of the original authors and producers from abroad. This mediation seeks to translate and adapt the original product for a better fit to the target culture. The process is guided not only by linguistic and cultural aims but also by economic goals and professional habits. (Barra, 2013: 102)

Localisation is one of the strategies implemented in AVT to reach a specific target audience, aligning itself with the value system of the country where the audiovisual product is intended to be aired. It can be defined as "translating a product to suit the target users, technically as adjusting technical specifications to suit the local market, and culturally as following the norms and conventions of the target community" (Chan, 2004: 134).

Therefore, it is the invisibility of the translation that reigns over a dubbed localised product (Chaume, 2008: 129), leaving no trace of what is foreign, and consequently erasing its "global" essence, that is, turning it into a product that can only be understood locally. Naturally, the explanation of localisation given in this work is reductive with respect to what it really represents, but it can be useful to achieve a bird's-eye view on the matter, oriented towards an interpretation of dubbing as a technique mostly aimed at getting closer to the target audience, attempting the most "familiar" approach possible.

This may lead one to engage in a contrastive reasoning between what is global and what is local. For instance, an audiovisual product conceived on a global scale, which will most probably be an English-language product can be localised for an Italian audience by relying on the strategies that generally lean towards the domestication approach. Hence, this a process "making the global invisible [and] the local visible" (Chalaby, 2013: 4).

2.3.1 Cultural references

Cultural elements, also known as culture-specific or *realia*, are textual elements with cultural rather than linguistic content. In films and other audiovisual products, such references are verbal and non-verbal signs [...] that are specific to the source socio-cultural context and may be unfamiliar to the target culture. (Ranzato, 2010: 39, my translation)

The notion of the "colour" of the source text (Martin 1996: 154; see also Ranzato, 2010) can be easily applied to cultural elements, since they are the ones to "colour" a given text, i.e., they make it peculiar and unique.

Colour is not to be sought in the "darkest meanderings" of a given text, but it is actually quite evident, since almost everything we refer to on a daily basis, within the sentences we formulate, can be traced back to culture-specific elements, which therefore

another culture could not immediately grasp (Minutella, 2009: 23, see also Ulrych, 2000: 132). If one is looking for a systematisation within this framework of culture-specific elements, it is possible to refer to the classification proposed by Ranzato (2010: 41-42, see also Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2007), as summarised in Table 2.1.

Geographical references	Ethnographic references	Socio-political references
Physical geography concepts	Everyday objects	References to administrative or territorial units
Geographic objects	References to work	References to institutions and functions
Endemic animal and plant species	References to arts and culture	References to socio-cultural life
-	References to nationality or place of birth	References to military institutions and objects
-	Units of measurements	-

Table 2.1 General classification of cultural references adapted from Ranzato (2010: 41-42)

Cultural elements would thus unfold within three major macro-areas and concern not only culture in and of itself, as one might mistakenly believe, but also range from purely geographical elements to units of measurement, for which the degree of knowledge and familiarity varies significantly depending on the source culture.

For explanatory purposes, consider the category of geographical references and notice how it is pregnant with cultural values: Citing Minutella (2009: 74), faced with a reference to Warwickshire, Italian audiences would not be able to trace this geographical region back to Shakespeare, let alone recognise it as the English poet's place of origin. For this reason, in the Italian version of *Shakespeare in Love* (by John Madden, 1998) the reference to Warwickshire is replaced with Stratford.

This shows how when tackling cultural differences, and thus of a locus of difference (Guillot, 2016: 13), a translation strategy of the cultural element per se (in the case, for example, of a dubbed audiovisual product) is to be carefully thought through.

There are various types of strategies for the rendering of a cultural element into a language and culture that are different from the source one. However, since the dubbing *medium* requires directness, not all CR translation expedients can be used. Cultural substitution is the most popular one, and it is also evidence of a domesticating approach (Minutella, 2009: 24). As Ranzato (2010: 45, my translation) pointed out, “it is more frequent to be faced with forms of substitution of the element with another one that may have only a distant link with the original.”

This reinforces the concept of locus of difference intended as the scale of difference related to of the degree of knowledge or familiarity of a given CR, a basis from which it is possible to identify strong differences between the source culture and the target culture, which is an aspect that enables the introduction of an equally important concept. Encounters with cultural elements that present a very large differential margin between the source culture and the target one can result in *cultural shocks*, in case the impact is extremely felt, or *cultural bumps*, in the case of “a clash of cultures of lesser degree than the ‘shock’” (Ranzato, 2010: 48).

The translation process of an audiovisual product is one in which the “addressee” of the final product is an audience with precise systems of values, linked to factors such as its nationality. Very often, in Italian dubbing for television series, the cultural elements of the source text are either eliminated or manipulated in the target text, which can lead to a trivialisation of the final product compared to the source text (Ranzato, 2010: 48). Clearly, trivialisation or censorship with regard to the source text are extreme forms of transposition. In fact, it would be more accurate to speak in terms of “reducing” the presence of culturally specific elements: “with a few exceptions, dubbing in Italian television prefers to minimise culture-specific elements since these are perceived to be an obstacle to smooth reception by the audience” (Ranzato, 2010: 52, my translation).

Returning to the concept of cultural shocks and cultural bumps, the obstacle that Ranzato mentions and that translators classify as such can therefore have an alienating and shocking effect on the target audience, for which it is the translator’s responsibility to intervene promptly and preventively so that the invisibility of the translation prevails (Chaume, 2008: 129), thus smoothing out any friction between the two languages and cultures of reference. In other words, it is necessary to cope with the cultural elements and “decode” them as they can be defined as elements that “stand out from the common

lexical context, they distinguish themselves for their heterogeneity, and consequently they require a reinforcement of attention” (Finkel 1962: 112, see Ranzato, 2015:53).

It has been mentioned several times throughout this dissertation how the target audience is to be understood in a physical, living, and organic sense, as the bearer of very specific values and ideas, but it is necessary to take a step further by emphasising how the degree of difference between cultures can also derive from the discrepancies in the viewpoints of different cultures (Leemets, 1992: 473).

As Ranzato (2015: 54) put it “similar concepts or objects may exist both in the SC and in the TC, but the view-point from which the two cultures involved look at them may be different.” For this very reason and because of the factors mentioned so far, it is indispensable to work out the extent of the differential margin, i.e., the abovementioned locus of difference.

This discrepancy between cultures can be referred to in multiple ways: for example, Mailhac (1996: 173) speaks of “degree of opacity”, a concept that fits like a glove when compared antithetically with Chaume’s (2008: 129) concept of the invisibility of translation. Still, its multiple denominations do not exempt the translator from the hard work of comparing and analysing the two cultures, so that *invisibility* prevails over *opacity*.

2.3.2 Figurative language

Figurative language is to be regarded as highly cultural, since every language can be used figuratively according to the value system it carries through its culture of reference. The definition implanted in this study is one that understands figurative language in terms of “a deviation from what speakers of a language apprehend as the ordinary, or standard significance or sequence of words, in order to achieve some special meaning or effect” (Abrams, 1988: 63; see also Teilanyo, 2007).

The definition itself hints at the mere aspect of semantics, whereby the usual meaning is transposed and a new mode of use of the part of speech is created. However, the logical-mental aspect behind the figurative use of language cannot be overlooked. As Qiong and Zhang (2005: 122) argue, “figurative language is considered as a language device to integrate language and human logic thinking”, with human thinking turning out

to be the driving force behind the creation of figurative language itself and strongly influenced by the culture of reference.

Hence the image of the translator in the guise of a mediator, a veritable “bridge between two languages/cultures” who “must make the TL readers receive the SL information and furthermore help the TL readers get the artistic conceptions so as to appreciate the beauty conveyed in SL” (Qiong & Zhang, 2005: 123). The translator’s task is therefore that to transmit the true essence of the source text (ST) in such a way that it is fully appreciated by the target audience, who may not know the language or culture of origin and therefore requires a mediation by the translator.

Leemets’ considerations (1992: 473) about the cultural attitudes toward certain concepts which are behind peculiar linguistic implications (see 2.3) are useful in explaining the complexity of translating figurative language from one language to another. When figurative language is translated, a process is carried out not only at the semantic level, but also at the level of the “form of that meaning: the illusionary pattern created by the associations and the underlying and surface structures” (Arcos-Garcia 1996: 158).

The most widely known form of figurative language is undoubtedly the metaphor, which can be defined as “a word or phrase which is frequently used with another word or phrase, in a way that sounds correct to people who have spoken the language all their lives but might not be expected from the meaning” (Cambridge advanced learner’s dictionary 2008). Hence, when considering a metaphor as a whole, the overall meaning goes beyond that of its components, to express something usually inexpressible or provide a condensed form for the expression of complex ideas, or even convey greater sense of liveliness to what it is intended to explain (Ortony, 1980: 37).

However, within the framework of audiovisual translation, another type of figurative language is more prominent than metaphors, i.e., idioms. “Idioms or idiomatic phrases can be defined as fixed groups of words which allow little or no variation in form and whose meaning is not entirely derivable from the sum of the meanings of the individual words. They are fixed multi-word units whose meaning is not transparent” (Minutella 2009: 86). Since their meaning is opaque, it is up to the translator to find the most suitable strategy to make the translation “transparent” or even “invisible” (see Chaume 2008), with respect to the original communicative context (i.e. the comparison

between two languages and cultures whose degree of difference may be substantial). The non-transparency of idioms can be traced back to their being “grammatically illformed” (Dewi, 2016) as they do not stem from determined grammatical rules. Idioms represent an obstacle in translation as they are sometimes difficult to recognise and the process of identifying a corresponding idiom in the TL is equally intricate (Minutella, 2009: 86).

2.3.3 Humour

The Cambridge dictionary describes humour as “the ability to find things funny, the way in which people see that some things are funny, or the quality of being funny”. Thus, a humorous effect can be achieved passively as well as actively as a person can catch the humorous spirit of a joke made by someone else or make a joke himself/herself aimed at making people laugh or producing irony.

To comment on the translation strategies adopted in humorous texts in dubbing, it is appropriate to introduce the intrinsic elements of humour, which may allow the understanding of non-immediate aspects. A humorous intent can be realised on the basis of three ‘inputs’, which are better known as “the three theories of humour” (Critchley 2002: 2), as summarised in Table 2.2.

	Superiority	Relief	Incongruity
Theory’s supporters	Plato, Aristotle, Quintillian, Hobbes	Spencer, Freud	Hutcheson, Kant, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Lowell
Humour causes	A feeling of superiority over other people	An attempt at releasing “pent-up nervous energy”	A perception of the incongruous inside a joke

Table 2.2 The three theories of humour adapted from Critchley (2002: 2).

As Critchley argues (2002:2-3), comical effect can be pursued according to multiple modalities and illustrates three main causes for humour: superiority, relief, incongruity.

The superiority theory finds among its supporters the most diverse figures, from ancient sages, e.g., Plato, to late 19th century philosophers such as Hobbes. Following this theory, people tend to laugh “from feelings of superiority over other people” (Critchley, 2002:2); hence, mockery (not necessarily with malicious intent) is one of the modalities triggering the comic effect. As for “relief”; Critchley (2002:3) posits that, in certain cases, “laughter can be explained as a release of pent-up nervous energy”. He provides evidence by referring to Freud’s “Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious” (1905), according to which people may find relief in laughter since the act of laughing itself “economizes upon energy that would ordinarily be used to contain or repress psychic activity” (Critchley, 2002:3).

Finally, the idea of humour as incongruity concerns the cases in which “humour is produced by the experience of a felt incongruity between what we know or expect to be the case, and what actually takes place in the joke, gag, jest or blague” (Critchley 2002: 3). In other words, humour results from an inconsistency between the expectations about a certain idea or event and what is actually associated to that idea or event (Mulder, 2002).

In general, the humour techniques that are used comedy series are deemed to include the following (Juckel, 2016: 586; see also Dore, 2019): allusion, misunderstanding, parody, and clumsiness. This shows that humour is not a monolithic element, but can manifest itself in various ways, depending on the personality of the addresser. Given the versatile nature of humour, it is not surprising that translating it is a difficult task; “the translation of humorous discourse concerns the most complex types of language to translate owing to the fact that it needs to come to terms with the very tenets of translation theory, those of equivalence and (un)translatability” (Chiaro, 2004: 37).

Equivalence is a relation between the source and the target text that does not require total equality as the SL expression “may be a single word, a phrase, or a sentence within a text, but its target-language equivalent may have to be rendered at a different level” (McArthur, 2005: 1798).

The search for equivalence is a struggle for the translator since it is challenging to find a corresponding form that completely reflects the essence of that of the SL. When

considering humorous instances, the "stranglehold" becomes even tighter, making the work even more arduous, since it must not only fulfil the criteria of equivalence, but also reproduce the humorous effects of the source language.

As Chiaro (2004: 37) explains, "[i]t is highly unlikely that two languages will be so similar as to possess, for example, exactly the same homophonous, homonymous or polysemous items upon which to create puns, formal equivalence is extremely difficult if not impossible in translation." A potential hierarchical list of elements to be given priority at the time of translation (Zabalbeascoa, 1996: 235) could thus prove useful. If the client's request is to faithfully reproduce the comic effect of the source language, formal equivalence would become one of the most effective means (Zabalbeascoa, 1996: 235), in order not to create too wide a discrepancy between the SL and the TL, so, once again, the objective is that of an invisible translation (Chaume, 2008).

In the case of dubbing, the main subject of interest in this dissertation, the visual constraint can also affect the translation of humour. Consider, for instance, kinetic synchronisation, whereby the translator should try not to create ambiguity between the utterances of the actors on screen and their physical movements, especially when a character is engaged in making a joke that also involves a particular gesture (Chiaro, 2004).

The discrepancies between ST and TT that can undermine the humorous effectiveness are not only represented by visual elements, but also by other aspects (Martínez Sierra 2008: 143-150; see also De Rosa 2014), which range from community-and-institutions elements (see also 2.3.1) such as the name of a politician or a well-known singer in that given society, to paralinguistic elements, "which account for the humour derived from paralinguistic traits such as a foreign accent, a tone of voice and the imitation of a celebrity's way of speaking".

In conclusion, the main direction to be pursued in the translation of humorous elements is that of recognising the very essence of humour, i.e. the driving force behind the creation of the humorous situation itself (Critchley, 2002), and denoting the fundamental elements of comic efficacy, which will therefore be preserved also in the target text (Zabalbeascoa, 1996: 245)

3. Italian dubbing of the series “The Office”

This chapter offers a linguistic analysis of the humorous culture-specific elements in the American TV series "The Office" and its Italian dubbed version, in a both quantitatively and qualitatively perspective. Besides providing quantitative data on the strategies used to translate those elements, the analysis will also describe their adequacy in the specific context.

3.1 “The Office”: plot

The Office is based on a pre-existing series filmed in the UK titled “The Office UK”. *The Office* is instead an American comedy series that consists of nine seasons, aired in the early 2000s. The format is also called a “mockumentary” (Schneider, 2013) as, although it is a fiction with a script at the core, it is to be perceived almost as a *meta-show*. Indeed, it is filmed as if it were a documentary, i.e., the characters are aware of the presence of cameras.

More specifically, the series is shot in the office of a paper-selling company – Dunder Mifflin – located in the small town of Scranton, and tells the stories of the staff members, who unexpectedly enliven the monotonous life of the office. Among the main characters are Michael Scott, the hilarious and controversial regional manager played by Steve Carell; Dwight Schrute, henchman of and assistant to the regional manager, a social climber with great ambitions and an heroic personality, played by Rainn Wilson; Jim Halpert, played by John Krasinski, who is a sales representative bored with his job and whose only amusement seems to be making fun of his colleague Schrute, but also finds "recreation" in chatting with the woman he is in love with, Pam Beesly, the office secretary and a great friend of Halpert's, who is in a relationship and thus cannot reciprocate his love. Other characters clearly intervene to lift the office's spirits, and although they play a secondary role, they very often present peculiar humorous traits, as summarised in Table 3.1.

Character's name	Actor/actress	Role in the office	Type of humour
Michael Scott	Steve Carell	Regional manager	Lack of common sense and controversiality

Dwight Schrute	Rainn Wilson	Assistant to the regional manager	Lack of social skills and common sense, loyalty to the justice system
Jim Halpert	John Krasinski	Sales Representative	Sarcastic remarks and facial expressions to the film crew
Pam Beesly	Jenna Fischer	Secretary	Sarcastic comments
Kevin Malone	Brian Baumgartner	Part of the accounting department	Blunt comments
Oscar Martinez	Oscar Nuñez	Accountant	Inquisitive and critical questions
Stanley Hudson	Leslie David Baker	Salesman	Grumpy comments
Ryan Howard	B. J. Novak	Temporary employee	Mysterious and erratic

Table 3.1 *The Office* characters, retrieved from the website "Dunderpedia".¹

Being an adaptation of a British original, harsh criticism towards the American remake could have been expected as the success of the British "The Office" was mostly believed to derive from its "Britishness", i.e., the cultural elements that characterised it and that, thus, didn't contain any "alienating" traces (i.e., foreign features) for the country of production (Beeden and De Bruin, 2010). The main fear was that of the loss of the original "colour" (Martin, 1996: 154, see also 1.4) peculiar to the British TV series, and thus a fear of what "the different" could actually bring as a positive.

The main dynamics of the series (specifically of the first season, which will be the object of the linguistic analysis) were naturally changed to convey a different cultural *patina* in the American adaptation. Even the most banal elements, such as the theme song, are proof of this: the British original has a very slow rhythm dictated by the classic piano instrument, whereas the US version exalts cheerfulness with its lively theme tune. Similarly, different images are shown during the two theme songs, i.e., buildings in British one and the actors in the American version, while on the phone or simply working, give a greater sense of "community", typical of the American society (Beeden and De Bruin, 2010: 10).

¹ Source: https://theoffice.fandom.com/wiki/Main_Page

The behaviour of the managers in the two versions of the series also mirrors the different senses of community created in the American office and the British original working environment.

Both managers have controversial humour as their characteristic trait, which almost embarrasses their employees (sometimes even the audience, which finds itself watching unpleasant, albeit humorous, scenes), but it is aimed at two different purposes (Beeden and De Bruin, 2010: 10). On the one hand, the British manager continually tries to captivate the interest of his employees through his jokes to gain their respect, whereas Michael Scott's

attempts at comedy are designed not to garner respect and power from his employees but rather to entertain them, to create a “community” within the workplace. “Where was my Oprah moment?” Michael asks, and proceeds to organize a group training session in what he calls “an environment of welcoming” (I.ii). Michael’s use of comedy and his interactions with employees are all designed to foster a community spirit and are an attempt to find himself friends, followers, and admirers (Beeden and De Bruin, 2010: 10).

Having provided the essential content-oriented elements, it is now possible to move on to the linguistic-cultural analysis of the series. The next section will highlight the predominantly humorous nature of the culturally-specific features present in the American comedy-series, which will be described on both a quantitative and qualitative level.

3.2 Cultural references in “The Office”

The selected episodes which are the object of this analysis are all from the first season of the series. More precisely, six episodes will be considered that offer some interesting insights into the translation of humour and CRs in a linguistic and cultural perspective. The categories used to classify and describe CRs of a comic nature are seven: some are taken from Minutella (2009: 73-90), ‘slangs or idioms’, ‘dialects and accents’, ‘vulgar and sexual references’, and ‘culinary references’, while others were purposely created to account for specific instances found in the series that could not be associated to Minutella’s categories. These include ‘references to TV programs or films’, ‘references to public figures’, and ‘taboos’.

3.2.1 CRs: a quantitative analysis

The analysis reveals a strong presence of cultural references to TV programmes or films, with a frequency of 5 out of 15 examples (Table 3.2). More specifically, one of these

references also concerns "public figures", i.e. Oprah Winfrey, who is referred to through the programme she presents. For the category of slangs and idioms, three examples were found, two of which concern vulgar references and sexuality (i.e., 'whoorehouse' and 'tit for tit') but were included in slang and idioms category because they present an idiomatic meaning, while the third example is the transposition of the term 'grasshopper'.

The examples of humour relying on dialects and accents are two: one is the imitation of a Latin American accent, which is also maintained in the Italian dubbing, and the other is the imitation of the Italian-American cadence, which is lost in the Italian translation. Likewise, culinary references are two and both concern two desserts, i.e., flan and custard.

The category encompassing vulgarities and the sexual sphere only includes the two instances ('tit for tit' and 'whoorehouse') associated to the category of slang and idioms, as previously explained.

The remaining categories (i.e., 'public figures', and 'taboos') also includes two examples each. The examples relating to public figures include one reference to the world of basketball and one to the sphere of television (i.e. Oprah); the latter can also be linked to the category relating to television programmes. The 'taboos' category involves two jokes which can be defined as politically incorrect, since they touch on racial issues and themes that still today divide public opinion (e.g., 9/11).

Category (Frequency)	Ep.	EN version	IT version	Translation strategy
References to tv programs / films (5)	1	Michael: "Do you like the Jamie Kennedy Experiment? [...] Punk'd and all that kind of stuff"	Michael: "A te piace l'esperimento Jamie Kennedy? [...] Scherzi a Parte , quella roba li"	Cultural substitution
	2	Michael: "Was there any emotion going on? Were – no! Where was the heart? I didn't see any heart. Where was my Oprah moment ?"	Michael: "Ci sono state emozioni impossibili da contenere? No! Dov'era il cuore? Io non ho visto cuore. Dov'era la commozione ?"	Explicitation
	5	Michael: "[mocking] I'm a dragon slayer "	Michael: " Sei il mio tesoro "	Explicitation

	6	Michael: “[making fun of Oscar] Oscar the Grouch! Right? I thought of that.” Katy: “ That was on Sesame Street ”	Michael: “Oscar il Musone! Carina? Questa è mia.” Katy: “è un personaggio televisivo ”	Explicitation
	6	Michael: “[British accent] What is your name, my fair lass? ”	Michael: “Come ti chiami, mia dolce fanciulla? [speaking normally]”	Omission
Slangs or idioms (3)	1	Michael: “Is this what you’re saying, grasshopper? ”	Michael: “È questo che stai dicendo, sanguisuga? ”	Transposition
	2	Dwight: “Retaliation. Tit for tit ”	Dwight: “Si chiama rappresaglia. Occhio per occhio. ”	Transposition
	5	Michael: “This is our warehouse, or, as I like to call it, the «whoorehouse» ”	Michael: ““Questo è il magazzino merci, o come amo definirlo, il magazzino meerci ”	Omission
Dialects and accents (2)	1	Michael: “Came to me and said «[Spanish accent] Mr. Scott, would you be the godfather of my child?”	Michael: “Lui venne da me e mi disse «[mocking the Spanish cadence] Señor Scott, mi farebbe l’onor de far da padrino a mi filios?»	Calque
	2	Kevin: “[mocking the Italian-American cadence] Maybe some spaghetti”	Kevin: “Magari un buon piatto di spaghetti” [speaking normally]	Omission
References to the culinary sphere (2)	1	Jim: “Ok, Dwight, I’m sorry because I’ve always been your biggest flan ”	Jim: ““Ok Dwight, ti chiedo scusa. Lo sai, sono sempre stato un tuo grande flan ”	Loan word
	1	Ryan: “You should have put him in custard-y! ”	Ryan: “Avresti dovuto farlo tremare come una gelatina! ”	Transposition
Vulgar and sexual references (2)	5, 2	“whoorehouse”; “Tit for tit”(see context in the idioms section)	See idioms section	Omission and transposition
References to public figures (2)	2	Michael: “Where was my Oprah moment?”	See tv programs section	Explicitation
	5	Roy (Pam’s fiancé): “Look at Larry Bird ”	Roy: “Guarda Michael Jordan ”	Cultural substitution
Taboos (2)	2	Michael: “Why don’t we just defer to Mr. uhm...”	Michael: “Perché non ci limitiamo a fare solo quello che dobbiamo	Calque

		Mr. Brown: “ Mr. Brown ” Michael: “Alright” First test! I will not call you that” (Mr. Brown’s character is a person of colour)	fare insieme al Signor...” Mr. Brown: “ Signor Brown ” Michael: “Oh, che ironia! D’accordo. Per prima cosa non la chiameremo così”	
	2	Michael: “You’ll notice I didn’t have anybody be an Arab. I thought that would be too explosive ”	Michael: “Avete notato che non ho inserito gli Arabi? Sarebbe stato troppo esplosivo ”	Calque

Table 3.2 Cultural elements in the first season of “The Office”; quantitative analysis.

As for various translation strategies put in place (see 3.2.2 for a qualitative analysis), these include an equal number (3) of calques, transpositions, omissions, and explicitations, 2 cultural substitutions and 1 loan word.

Although the amount of linguistic transpositions is high, it should be pointed out that they are not always effective in reproducing the hilarity and comicality of the original audio (which will be discussed later on in the dissertation); it should be noted that the presence of omissions determines either the complete “flattening” of the colour (Martin, 1996) of the English original or to the loss of some nuances the original essence of the joke. again, we have a fair amount of calques (3), also known as literal translations (Ranzato, 2010: 42).

Three out of 15 linguistic examples are calques, as are transpositions, omissions and explicitations; a total of two out of 15 are represented by cultural substitutions, while only one is a loan word (Figure 3.1).

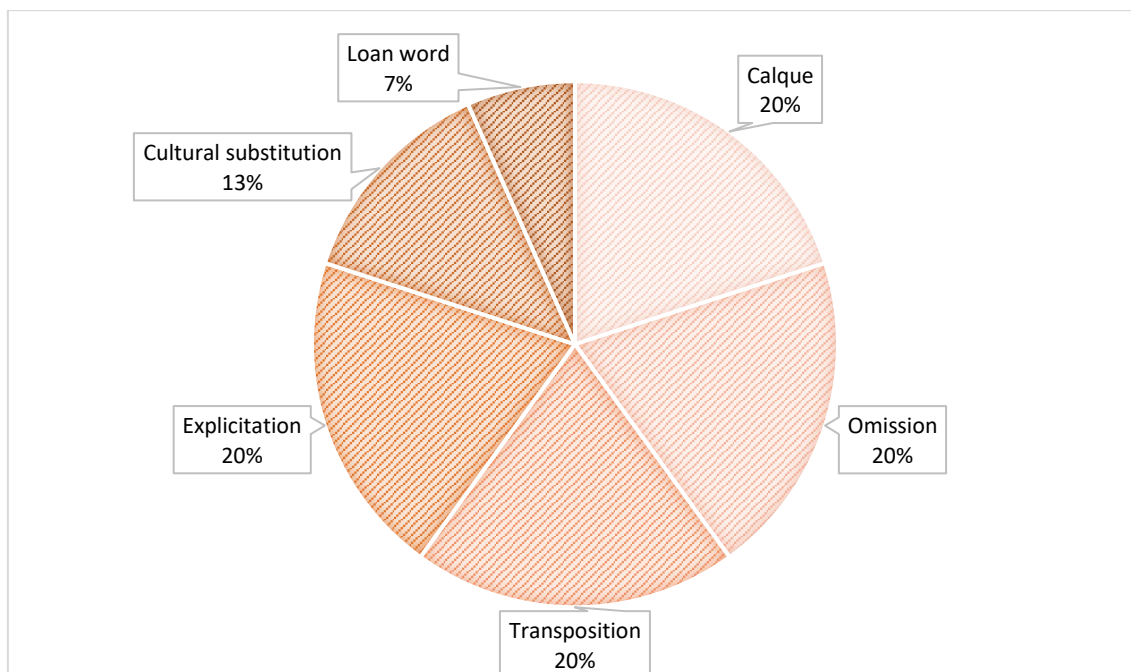


Figure 3. 1 Translation strategies found in the analysis.

As it is made clearer by the values expressed in percentages, calques, transpositions, omissions and explications have the same frequency (3 out of 15, thus 20% of the examples), on the other hand cultural substitutions with a frequency of two out of 15 account for 13%, and finally the only loan word represents 7% of the examples.

3.2.2 CRs: a qualitative analysis

By taking up the seven categories drawn up in section 3.2, it is possible to outline a more in-depth analysis from a linguistic-cultural point of view, not only by explicating the connotations of the categories per se, but also by providing clarifications regarding the translation strategies adopted in Italian dubbing.

For the category of “references to TV programmes or films” five examples were found, involving the translation strategies of cultural substitution (1), explication (3) and omission (1) This type of reference can reveal the personality of a character, e.g. depending on the TV programme or film cited, it is possible to infer his/her hobbies and passions.

(1)

Michael: “Do you like the Jamie Kennedy Experiment? [...] Punk’d and all that kind of stuff”	Michael: “A te piace l’esperimento Jamie Kennedy? [...] Scherzi a Parte, quella roba lì”
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Example 1 refers to the Jamie Kennedy Experiment, which is a Candid Camera for young audiences with Kennedy targeting victims via pranks and practical jokes². This show is well-known in America, but is not part of the Italian cultural background. This makes this reference irrelevant for Italian viewers, unless one is particularly immersed in the American life and culture, to the point of understanding and grasping such references. “Punk’d” is a similar programme, which is equally unknown to the Italian audience, so the translation strategy used in the Italian dubbing is that of cultural substitution, i.e. “the translation of some known or unknown concepts in the source language by using the substitution from the culture of the receptor language rather than by other available means of meaning equivalence” (Pokasamrit, 2013: 215). In this case, the cultural substitution recreates the same humorous effect as in the English original, which refers to a very specific scene in which Michael Scott tries to make Pam Beesly, the office secretary, believe that she has been fired (just as if it were candid camera). In the Italian dubbing, reference is made to a popular television show understood, *Scherzi a Parte*, which also fits into the trend of prank programmes filmed by a camera crew.

(2)

Michael: “Was there any emotion going on? Were – no! Where was the heart? I didn’t see any heart. Where was my Oprah moment? ”	Michael: “Ci sono state emozioni impossibili da contenere? No! Dov’era il cuore? Io non ho visto cuore. Dov’era la commozione? ”
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The scene in Example 2 takes place following what was supposed to be a training meeting on the importance of diversity in the workplace, held by the coordinator Mr. Brown. Michael Scott, however, decides to have his own educational meeting, which he thinks should be held in a moving and emotional tone. Hence the reference to Oprah Winfrey,

² Source: <https://www.tvguide.com/tvshows/jamie-kennedy-experiment/1030165162/>

the presenter of an American programme known for its interviews and tear-jerking moments. However, such a programme is only known to a restricted audience in Italy (i.e. mainly young adult audiences being familiar with American TV shows and series), thus the explicitation in the Italian dubbing seems a reasonable option as "the text is made more accessible with a specification or generalisation" (Ranzato, 2010: 42). More precisely, in this case generalisation is used, i.e. the implication, made known to the audience, that what the character wants to enact is something related to "emotions" and therefore highly sensitive, even if, in this way, there is a certain omission of what was conveyed in the ST.

(3)

Michael: “[mocking] I’m a dragon slayer ”	Michael: “ Sei il mio tesoro ”
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In Example 3, the manager animatedly mocks Dwight for being too "nerdy" and alludes to the dwarf Gimli, in J. R. R. Tolkien saga, "The Lord of the Rings". Specifically, Michael utters the line "I'm a dragon slayer" addressing Dwight in order to embarrass him. A lexical calque, e.g. “uccisore di draghi”, would not have been totally clear to the Italian audience as it does not represent a famous quotation that could trigger a comic effect. For this reason, the content of the ST is replaced by another popular quotation from The Lord of the Rings pronounced by the character of Gollum, which is particularly familiar to the Italian audience and often used in Italian parodies and comedy shows.

(4)

Michael: “[making fun of Oscar] Oscar the Grouch! Right? I thought of that.”	Michael: “ Oscar il Musone! Carina? Questa è mia.”
Katy: “ That was on Sesame Street ”	Katy: “ è un personaggio televisivo ”

In the passage in Example 4 Michael attempts to impress the purse-saleswoman Katy by making fun of his employee Oscar because of his grumpiness (at least in that particular moment), for which he nicknames him "Oscar the Grouch". He claims paternity for this funny expression, when in fact Katy points out to him that he is a character from Sesame

Street, the American programme whose protagonists are known as "Muppets". However, as the Muppets are mostly known collectively and the programme itself is little known in Italy, the Italian dubbing opted for explicitation through generalisation, with the name of a specific programme being replaced with a general reference to a TV show.

(5)

Michael: “[British accent] What is your name, my fair lass?”	Michael: “Come ti chiami, mia dolce fanciulla? [standard Italian accent]”
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In the scene referred to in Example 5, a filmic reference is made: the British accent Michael tries to mimic is a reference to the film “My Fair Lady” (1964), in which the famous movie star Audrey Hepburn plays the role of a naïve, uneducated girl who is taught by a phonetic professor how to speak ‘proper’ English instead of Cockney accent.

The category of slangs and idioms concerns Examples 6 and 7 below. As anticipated in 2.3.2, idioms are “fixed groups of words which allow little or no variation in form and whose meaning is not entirely derivable from the sum of the meanings of the individual words. They are fixed multi-word units whose meaning is not transparent” (Minutella 2009: 86); slangs, instead, typically consist of "new words and novel or extended meanings, and develop from the attempt to find fresh, vigorous, colourful, pungent or humorous expressions" (Mattiello, 2008: 35).

(6)

Michael: “Is this what you’re saying, grasshopper? ”	Michael: “È questo che stai dicendo, sanguisuga? ”
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In the scene referred to in Example 6, Michael is talking to Jim in his office, and affectionately calls him "grasshopper", which figuratively indicates a person who is usually young, not very experienced, and sometimes has difficulties or does not want to settle down and start a family (Urban Dictionary). An attempt was therefore made to transpose this idiomatic expression into Italian by using in figurative sense the term "sanguisuga" (leech), which however does not render the original meaning of the ST,

insofar as *sanguisuga* in Italian has a purely negative connotation, often referring to a person who is a freeloader.

(7)

Dwight: “Retaliation. Tit for tit ”	Dwight: “Si chiama rappresaglia. Occhio per occhio. ”
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Example 7 is taken from a scene where Dwight mispronounces the expression "tit for tat" when talking to Jim. According to the Cambridge dictionary, this idiom refers to "actions done intentionally to punish other people because they have done something unpleasant to you". The blunder "tit for tit" vulgarly alludes to the female breast, an aspect which is omitted in the Italian version, which only convey the semantic content through the transposition “occhio per occhio” (lit. “an eye for an eye). Yet, the Italian audience misses the vulgar wordplay replacing “tat” with “tit”.

(8)

Michael: “This is our warehouse, or, as I like to call it, the « whoorehouse »”	Michael: ““Questo è il magazzino merci, o come amo definirlo, il magazzino meerci ”
--	--

The case here examined in Example 8 concerns instead the use of vulgar language. It is important to note that Ryan and Michael are the characters in the scene, and they are determined to visit their branch's warehouse, which Michael pronounces as “whoorehouse”, thus creating a wordplay by replacing “ware” with the word "whore", which would thus refer to a "brothel". In the Italian dubbed version there is not even an attempt at transposing it into Italian and the humorous intent and the joke itself are omitted. Only a phonetic adjustment is made, with the vowel /ε/ being uttered as an artificially long one, probably only for lip synch purposes.

Examples 9 and 10 concern the use of specific dialects or non-standard language variants.

(9)

Michael: “Came to me and said «[Spanish accent] Mr. Scott, would you be the godfather of my child?”	Michael: “Lui venne da me e mi disse «[mocking the Spanish cadence] Señor Scott, mi farebbe l'onor de far da padrino a mi filios?»
--	---

In Example 9, Michael mentions what he thought the greatest achievement of his entire career was, i.e. hiring a young man from Guatemala who had just arrived in the United States. When recalling this event, he reports a request he had received from the young man (to be godfather to his son) by imitating the Spanish accent peculiar to Latin America. This phonetic traits was tentatively replicated in the TT through an exaggeration of the sounds /s/ and /r/ and the use of (broken-)Spanish (e.g. Señor and *filios for 'hijos').

(10)

Kevin: “[mocking the Italian-American cadence] Maybe some spaghetti”	Kevin: “Magari un buon piatto di spaghetti” [speaking normally]
---	--

Example (10) represents a case of omission and falls within the category of accents and dialects. The omission consists in the total elimination of the distinguishing phonetic traits in the joke, which hampers its humorous intent and consequent success. It is by no means a rare occurrence for this to happen in Italian dubbing, since it is difficult to find a match in the TL for peculiar diastratic and/or diatopic varieties . As Minutella (2010:46) argues:

British and American films tend to be rich in geographical and social dialects, which play an important part in defining each character. However, as there is no correspondence between the characteristics and connotations of English and Italian regional dialects, there is a tendency to lose this type of information in dubbed films, so that the different characters usually speak with the same standard Italian, in terms of accent.

(11)

Jim: “Ok, Dwight, I’m sorry because I’ve always been your biggest flan ”	Jim: ““Ok Dwight, ti chiedo scusa. Lo sai, sono sempre stato un tuo grande flan ”
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Example 11 paves the way to the introduction of the culinary culture-specific elements. In this scene, in order to entertain himself while working at the office, Jim enjoys pulling harmless pranks on his co-worker Dwight, and his most recent prank involved hiding the latter's stapler inside of jelly; this started a whole series of jokes about food, or more specifically, desserts, and in particular the word "flan" was used. The play on words exploits the assonance between “flan” and “fan”. However, in the Italian culture, a flan can also be understood as a savoury dish and not a sweet, which would cause inconsistency in the series of jokes. This notwithstanding, the loan word ‘flan’ also appears in the Italian dubbing.

(12)

Ryan: “You should have put him in custard-y! ”	Ryan: “Avresti dovuto farlo tremare come una gelatina! ”
---	---

Example 12 includes a wordplay between "custard," a dessert similar to pudding, and "being put in custody," which means "to be arrested". Maintaining the use of a word that indicates a dessert while also finding an assonance with an expression that refers to the meaning of "arresting" would be impracticable in Italian. Hence, an attempt was made to at least transfer the sense of "threat" present in the original joke, while finding a cultural substitution for "custard", i.e., ‘jelly’.

A public figure is mentioned instead in Example 13.

(13)

Roy (Pam’s fiancé): “Look at Larry Bird ”	Roy: “Guarda Michael Jordan ”
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Specifically, Roy, Pam's fiancé and a warehouse worker, refers to Jim as "Larry Bird" after a basketball game between the office workers and the warehouse staff. Larry Bird is a former American basketball player. Naturally, such a joke would not have generated much resonance in the Italian public, as very few people know Larry Bird. For this reason, a cultural substitution has been put in place by referring to Michael Jordan, another former basketball player who enjoyed wide popularity in Italy.

Finally, Examples 14 and 15 concerns taboos. In Example 14, the line is clear only when viewing the scene and realising that Mr. Brown is a person of colour. Consequently, Michael's statement makes direct reference to his complexion. The Italian dubbing is substantially a literal translation of the English script, where Mr. Brown's surname is left in English also because a possible translation would have had a greater "humorous" effect, but would have hampered the cinematic illusion and left the Italian viewer wondering why an Italian surname was used in a foreign context.

(14)

Michael: "Why don't we just defer to Mr. uhm..."	Michael: "Perché non ci limitiamo a fare solo quello che dobbiamo fare insieme al Signor..."
Mr. Brown: " Mr. Brown "	Mr. Brown: " Signor Brown "
Michael: "Alright" First test! I will not call you that" (Mr. Brown's character is a POC)	Michael: "Oh, che ironia! D'accordo. Per prima cosa non la chiameremo così"

(15)

Michael: "You'll notice I didn't have anybody be an Arab. I thought that would be too explosive "	Michael: "Avete notato che non ho inserito gli Arabi? Sarebbe stato troppo esplosivo "
--	---

Also Example 15 is linked to Mr. Brown, since it is related to the same episode and to a similar situation. As explained earlier in this paragraph, Michael Scott was not satisfied with the meeting held by coordinator Brown on the importance of diversity also in the work environment, therefore he decides to have his own "educational" meeting. He then

gathers all his employees in the meeting room and makes them play a game in which they have to talk to each other. Unfortunately, Michael's lack of common sense cannot but lead to something catastrophic. The activity he proposes consists in wearing on one's forehead a name tag (which the person wearing it cannot read) with the name of an ethnic group (Italian, Mexican, etc..) and go around confronting the other participants to find out what ethnic group is marked on the card by simply asking questions.

Michael specifically mentions this activity when he says that he did not include Arabs among the various ethnic groups because "it would have been too explosive," alluding to the still-open wound caused by the tragic events of 9/11. In this case, the translation strategies used was that of literal translation.

3.3 Alternative solutions for the Italian dubbing

This section provides some tentative suggestions to achieve a greater comic effect in specific examples. Alternatives to what we have examined will be given here only for two specific cases, keeping in mind that this is in no way intended to override or detract from the position of the translators who have handled the dubbing of this series.

(2)

Michael: "Was there any emotion going on? Were – no! Where was the heart? I didn't see any heart. Where was my Oprah moment? "	Michael: "Ci sono state emozioni impossibili da contenere? No! Dov'era il cuore? Io non ho visto cuore. Dov'era la commozione? "
---	---

As anticipated, Oprah Winfrey's show is little known to Italians, and if it is known, then it is primarily to the new generations, who are more globally interconnected. An alternative translation strategy would probably have been that of cultural substitution through one of the various Italian TV programmes framed along the same lines as Oprah, e.g. Barbara D'Urso's shows in which emotions are taken to excess during her interviews, as shown below.

Michael: "Was there any emotion going on? Were – no! Where was the heart? I didn't see any heart. Where was my Oprah moment? "	Michael: "Ci sono state emozioni impossibili da contenere? No! Dov'era il cuore? Io non ho visto emozioni alla Barbara D'Urso! "
---	---

(5)

Michael: “Is this what you’re saying, grasshopper? ”	Michael: “È questo che stai dicendo, sanguisuga? ”
---	---

Moving to Example 5, also shown below, the term *sanguisuga* in Italian has a purely negative meaning (cf. 3.2.2). The idea of the ST is to identify Jim's character as a *novellino*, a novice, while identifying Michael as a more experienced person. In Italian there could be two main options: one involves the loss of the animal metaphor and includes the simple use of the Italian word *novellino*, which stands for “novice”, while the other relies on the term *cavalletta* with the expression *aquilotto* (lit. eaglet) a term used mainly in aeronautical jargon to refer to newbies in the world of aviation (*Dizionario Treccani*).

(Option 1)

Michael: “Is this what you’re saying, grasshopper? ”	Michael: “È questo che stai dicendo, novellino? ”
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(Option 2)

Michael: “Is this what you’re saying, grasshopper? ”	Michael: “È questo che stai dicendo, aquilotto? ”
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However, the term *aquilotto* may be a bit of a stretch in Italian, as it is an expression closely associated with the world of aviation, and it may also be considered as an old-fashioned term; that is why Option 1 could represent the most suitable solution.

3.4 Concluding remarks

In conclusion, the results of the quantitative analysis show that there are basically four types of translation strategies that were most frequently adopted in the Italian dubbing of the American TV series examined in this work: calque, omission, transposition and explicitation. We have ascertained how often, in the various examples, omission was the

easiest solution to choose, when faced with the lack of direct pragmatic equivalents, as it is also the case for the linguistic strategy of calque. Furthermore, it is worth underlining how transposition may represent, in certain aspects, a form of cultural substitution, insofar as the same scene should arise and be activated in the mind of the spectator if the transposition turns out to be effective, despite the degree of difference between the two cultures. Finally, with the explicitation it could be noted how one has a clarification of the ST through a specification or a generalisation (Ranzato 2010). All these strategies are valid answers to a translation barrier, but, in the present work, the challenge of finding alternatives for some of the examples under analysis was also posed.

Conclusions

The primary goal of this work was to analyse how the culture-specific elements of a humorous nature in the television show "The Office" were translated into the Italian dubbed series. The focus was on the transition from an English source text (in its specifically American variant) with cultural intricacies of sociolinguistic derivation, to an Italian target text with an intended audience that is itself the bearer of various socio-cultural ideals and customs.

A linguistic investigation of both a quantitative and qualitative nature was conducted, using examples from the episodes of the first season of the television show as a reference. 15 examples were analysed which unravel in various classes of culturally specific elements; seven categories were examined, and they included references to TV programs or films, slangs or idioms, dialects, accents, references to the culinary sphere, to public figures, vulgar and sexual references, and taboos.

The category of references to films and TV shows had the highest frequency among the examples (four out of fifteen), thus appearing to be an essential component of the quotations used in the show's character jokes. In contrast, references to the culinary world, vulgarity, famous people, and taboos had the lowest frequencies (each accounting for two instances out of fifteen).

In the Italian dubbing, various strategies were employed. Six types can be identified, ranging from calque to transposition, from omission to explicitation, from cultural substitution to loan words: the highest frequency is represented by the first four translation devices mentioned above (three out of fifteen, 20%), whereas cultural substitution holds second place (two out of fifteen, 13%), and finally, the use of loan words comes in last place (one out of fifteen, 7%).

The examples showed how that the translation strategies employed did not always produce an effective translation into Italian.

In conclusion, it can be argued that the most commonly used translation techniques (calque, transposition, omission and explicitation) were conceived as tools to curb the *locus of difference* between cultures (Guillot 2016). , When the differential margin is too wide, then a calque from the structure of the source text can be one of the

most valid alternatives, or omission (which avoids the problem upstream), or again explicitation, which with a specification or generalisation makes a given reference more comprehensible (Ranzato 2010). Finally, transposition can be employed, which, unfortunately, may not yield the desired results in translation.

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Riassunto

Il presente elaborato mira ad analizzare i riferimenti culturali umoristici rilevati nella prima stagione della serie televisiva americana “The Office”.

Sul piano organizzativo, la tesi si divide in tre capitoli. Il primo, mirato all’esplicazione del piuttosto recente filone di studi legati alla traduzione audiovisiva (TAV), illustra nozioni quali la molteplicità dei canali che vanno a interagire e a sovrapporsi nei prodotti audiovisivi (Chaume 2002), le sostanziali differenze tra l’approccio addomesticante e quello estraniante, spesso adottati rispettivamente nel doppiaggio e nel sottotitolaggio. Inoltre, viene posta la problematica del radicamento culturale (Ranzato 2010) proprio dei prodotti audiovisivi, che risultano essere *de facto* prodotti di un dato contesto socioculturale e linguistico. Di fondante importanza, all’interno del primo capitolo, è la messa a confronto dei metodi di traduzione audiovisiva più noti, il doppiaggio e del sottotitolaggio, quadro che Díaz-Cintas definisce di “eterno conflitto” (1999) per via dei numerosi detrattori dell’uno e dell’altro strumento traduttivo; le differenze sostanziali sono ravvisabili anzitutto nei costi (il doppiaggio richiede un sostegno dei costi di produzione non indifferente) e nelle tempistiche necessarie al processo lavorativo considerato olisticamente (Minutella 2009). Entrambe le tecniche sono forme di *constrained translation*, ossia ‘traduzione vincolata’ (Díaz-Cintas 1999), ovvero una traduzione che deve considerare i limiti spazio-temporali e, nel caso doppiaggio, contenutistici, imposti dall’immagine e dal suono del prodotto audiovisivo originale. Uno dei vincoli fondamentali del doppiaggio è la sincronizzazione, la cui buona riuscita ed efficacia è in grado di decretare il grado di successo del prodotto doppiato; più specificatamente, più un prodotto di natura audiovisiva è curato sotto l’ottica della sincronizzazione, più esso risulterà convincente agli occhi del pubblico, che a quel punto vivrà una vera e propria illusione cinematografica (Mason, 1989), nella misura in cui sarà quasi portato a credere che gli attori sullo schermo parlino la sua stessa lingua (quando in realtà, intimamente, vi è la consapevolezza di star guardando un prodotto straniero).

Sul piano concreto, la sincronizzazione si declina in tre forme precise: sincronizzazione labiale, isocronia e sincronizzazione cinetica (Minutella 2009); esse quindi si sostanziano nel tentativo di far combaciare mimica labiale, tempi di pronuncia e linguaggio corporeo

del prodotto originario con il dialogo nella lingua d'arrivo, che, chiaramente va a sostituire l'audio del prodotto di partenza.

Il secondo capitolo si concentra sul doppiaggio, fulcro del presente lavoro e tecnica prediletta in Italia per la traduzione di audiovisivi di intrattenimento. Particolare riferimento si fa Guillot (2016) e a *locus differenziale* tra le culture che spiega le categorie entro cui esso può comportare un margine differenziale più o meno ampio, ossia, delle tre classi di riferimenti presenti in un prodotto audiovisivo che rendono quest'ultimo radicato culturalmente, nonché difficile da trasporre in traduzione (elementi culturali generali, linguaggio figurato, e infine l'umorismo). Per quanto concerne gli elementi culturali di natura generale, la presente tesi fa riferimento al lavoro di Ranzato (2010), che propone una divisione tripartita degli elementi culturospecifici: individua tra questi la classe dei riferimenti geografici, quella dei riferimenti etnografici, ed infine quella dei riferimenti sociopolitici; contrariamente a quanto si possa pensare, una mera indicazione geografica può essere pregnante di valore culturale ma soprattutto culturospecifico, nella misura in cui una persona, a seconda della cultura di appartenenza, può sentirsi più o meno vicina a un determinato luogo geografico, sia concretamente che in via astratta, dal momento che anche città, strade e paesi sono in grado di innescare determinate immagini mentali, che risulteranno più vivide e cariche di significato in coloro che posseggono con essi un legame culturale (Minutella 2009). Ancora, a rendere un prodotto audiovisivo culturospecifico troviamo il linguaggio figurato, che, come illustrano Qiong e Zhang (2005), è strettamente connesso al pensiero logico umano; tuttavia, la trasposizione di un elemento appartenente al linguaggio figurato può risultare alquanto intricata, specie se le lingue di arrivo e di partenza risultano distanti in termini di possibili analogie a livello culturale: di qui l'importanza di riconoscere l'entità del *locus differenziale* tra due culture, delle discrepanze che possono destare problematiche al momento della ricerca di una forma equivalente tra una lingua e l'altra. Infine, la specificità culturale si denota anche in ambito umoristico; Chiaro (2004) ha ampiamente discusso di come la comicità sia in grado di rivelare le più intime informazioni culturali, e di come, proprio per tale motivo, sia estremamente laborioso e complicato trasporre correttamente da una lingua all'altra una battuta, mantenendo la sua essenza e riuscendo al contempo a sortire l'effetto umoristico desiderato.

Il terzo e conclusivo capitolo della tesi propone un'indagine linguistica quantitativa e qualitativa di dati offerti nelle varie sezioni, e presenta come caso studio la prima stagione

della serie comica americana “The Office”, composta di un totale di sei episodi; essa si svolge tra le mura di un comune ufficio americano, ma i dipendenti che lo animano non possono definirsi altrettanto comuni: ognuno ha una propria personalità, ma soprattutto un proprio umorismo, che risulta arduo poter trasporre in italiano.

Gli elementi culturospecifici che si vedono protagonisti di tale analisi sono sistematicamente divisi in classi o categorie: riferimenti a programmi tv o a film, slang o formule idiomatiche, dialetti e accenti, riferimenti al mondo culinario, a figure pubbliche, alla sfera della volgarità e sessualità, e infine, i tabù. Sul piano quantitativo si possono rilevare quattro tecniche principali di traduzione: il calco, l’omissione, la trasposizione e l’esplicitazione, che dall’analisi portata avanti hanno registrato la medesima frequenza di tre su quindici esempi di elementi culturospecifici (ciascuno rappresenta il 20% dei traduenti). La sostituzione culturale concerne il 13% dei casi e il prestito il 7%, andandosi pertanto a classificare come le strategie adoperate di meno in tutto il campione di indagine.

Vengono inoltre riportati e analizzati individualmente svariati esempi appartenenti alle diverse categorie, e, infine, vengono offerte delle alternative di traduzione per alcuni degli esempi. Tra le proposte, vi è quella della resa del riferimento culturospecifico rappresentato da Oprah Winfrey con una figura che possa essere nota a tutti gli italiani; nel doppiaggio italiano della serie viene perso completamente il riferimento alla conduttrice americana, e viene fatto semplicemente cenno all’emotività (il programma di Oprah Winfrey è conosciuto per i suoi momenti strappalacrime). Il presente studio, pertanto, si prefigge di inquadrare le dinamiche legate al processo di doppiaggio, ma soprattutto, attraverso il caso studio analizzato, di svelare la natura degli elementi culturospecifici all’interno del contesto umoristico proprio delle sitcom televisive.