



*(Mis)representations of Motherf** in Italian Film Dubbing*

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1. INTRODUCTION

It is generally argued that the perception of taboo language varies across cultures and over time (Allan and Burridge 2006; Hughes 2006: 462). By applying this concept to audiovisual translation (AVT), it is possible to notice that the same film can be dubbed differently over time, even within the same culture. As a matter of fact, over the years a film may be re-dubbed within the same country by following different translation patterns or by choosing different replacement words. This could be due, for instance, to change in the perception of taboo concepts or obscenities. The UK Office of Communications (OfCom), for instance, reports that many swearwords which were once considered very offensive, have now been downgraded to mildly offensive or almost non-offensive (Millwood 1998: 49; OfCom 2005: 14; Gorji 2007: 11). Instances of these types are swearwords such as "crap", "screw" (OfCom 2005: 14), or "bloody" and "damn" (Millwood 1998: 49), which have now become tolerated. Amongst the taboo swearwords which are, instead, still perceived as unutterable, is the incestuous but notorious "motherfucker" (Jay 1992: 178; Millwood 1998: 49; OfCom 2005: 83; Jay and Jay 2015). In The United States, 7 are the "dirty words" which cannot be uttered on television (Sullivan 2010). The epithet "motherfucker" is one of them (Sullivan 2010). In this respect, OfCom states that it is "most offensive and most [people] can't see any context when it would be acceptable" (OfCom 2005: 83). Nonetheless, such a bad word is used very frequently in films, where it loses its incestuous literal meaning to



serve a pervasively insulting purpose (Corrizzato 2012: 107) and it is normally addressed to men (Jay 1992: 178). This swearword, in fact, has been uttered in many films since the 1970s for abusive purposes, as this paper will confirm. Some scholars claim that it is mostly uttered by Anglo-Americans (Bucholtz 2011: 260; Filmer 2011: 82); whereas others argue that it is particularly common in African-American vernacular English (Corrizzato 2012: 107). Confuting or corroborating these claims would go beyond the scope of this paper. However, for reasons of clarity it was worthwhile mentioning. In practice, the epithet is used because it fits with a tense situation where anger must be signified (Jay 2009: 155), or because it challenges the addressee's outrageous behaviour.

From an Italian perspective, scholars report that incestuous language is prohibited in film dubbing (Pavesi and Malinverno 2000; Canu 2013: 19). As a matter of fact, "motherfucker" is an insult which has always been censored, if not omitted outright (Corrizzato 2012: 113, 128). The Italian replacement words which have been used in order to convey the outrageousness of such a bad word vary from "son of a bitch" to "bastard" (Pavesi and Malinverno 2000: 79; Corrizzato 2012; Canu 2013: 19). Both insults, in fact, carry the same illocutionary force (i.e., the speakers' intention, Searle 1969) as the original utterance. In his research on Italian insults and swearwords, Tartamella (2009: 122) claimed that the Italian "son of a bitch" is considered very offensive; whereas "bastard" is considered medium-highly offensive. From a native language perspective, instead, "bastard" is the insult which carries the most abusive force of the two and is equal to "motherfucker" (Jay and Jay 2015). Hence, the epithet in question is normally rendered by these two fixed equivalents, leaving little room for creative "additions" (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007: 207). In this respect, many scholars lament the fact that adherence to translation norms or recurrence to patterned translation chunks generally prevail (Pavesi and Malinverno 2000; Pavesi 2005), due to translators' risk aversion (Pym *et al.* 2008: 324ff). This entails that certain taboo words are generally translated with fixed equivalents, which would not always fit with the context or with the scene's outrageousness (Pavesi and Malinverno 2000: 78; Corrizzato 2012: 107). As outlined above, the reasons for such a choice can be found in the fact that a literal translation of "motherfucker" would express a taboo concept which is strictly forbidden in the Italian culture (Pavesi and Malinverno 2000: 79; Canu 2013: 19). In addition, technical constraints characterizing film dubbing should be considered, as they could influence audiovisual translation choices. Another aspect which could determine whether to use one word or another, is visual synching, especially in close-up scenes.

In light of the above, this paper aims at corroborating or confuting the literature's findings. In particular, it will investigate whether the Italian translations of the epithet "motherfucker" has changed over the years; whether its main renderings are based on fixed back translations, namely "son of a bitch" and "bastard", or some new back translation patterns are in sight. To this aim, a corpus of 24 American films will be implemented. In particular, in each original film the utterance "motherfucker" will be counted and their translations, back translations, or omissions, will be reported



in a table for further analysis. In this way, an insight into its recurrences and renderings, if any, will be provided. In particular, this paper will try to highlight whether the illocutionary force of the utterances (i.e., the speaker's intention, Searle 1969) is maintained in the target language. For further reference, a book dealing with this topic is now in press (Giampieri, in press).

2. ANALYSIS

2.1. The Corpus

As stated above, this paper will try to explore whether and to what extent the epithet "motherfucker" is rendered in American films dubbed into Italian. To this aim, a corpus of 24 films will be implemented in order to analyse both the original and the dubbed film versions. The corpus consists of the following films: *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987); *Terminator 2* (1991); *Dazed and Confused* (1993); *Pulp Fiction* (1994); *Die Hard with a Vengeance* (1995); *Kids* (1995); *Scary Movie* (2000); *Scary Movie 2* (2001); *Saw* (2003); *The Girl Next Door* (2004); *Saw 2* (2005); *Borat* (2006); *American Pie 5: The Naked Mile* (2006); *See No Evil* (2006); *Gran Torino* (2008); *Get Him to The Greek* (2010); *The Project X* (2012); *A Good Day to Die Hard* (2013); *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013) *The To Do List* (2013); *Premature* (2014); *Ted 2* (2015) and *Dope* (2015). As can be seen, the films composing the corpus belong to several different genres; from youth films (the *Scary Movie* saga, *Borat*, *American Pie 5*, *The To Do List*, *The Project X*, *Premature*, *Dope*) to action films (*Terminator 2*, the *Die Hard* saga), horror films (the *Saw* saga, *See No Evil*), dramas (*Saturday Night Fever*, *Kids*, *Dazed and Confused*, *Gran Torino*, *The Wolf of Wall Street*), love stories (*The Girl Next Door*), comedies (*Get Him to The Greek*, *Ted 2*) and black comedies (*Pulp Fiction*). The wide variety of the films composing the corpus should ensure a fair distribution of the renderings of the epithet. Most of all, it will be interesting to explore how the swearword has been translated not only over the years, but also across the various film genres. On the one hand, in fact, the years covered (1977-2015) should help to pin down language and translation variations, if any. On the other hand, the variety of the film genres could imply a wide spectrum of translation solutions.

2.2. First Analysis: General Overview

A first analysis will be focused on all the films composing the corpus, without dividing them into categories. Table 1 below reports the translations and back translations of "motherfucker" in the corpus. For the purpose of this paper, "motherfucker" has been considered a headword. Therefore, also the modifier "motherfucking" has been included in the analysis.

Renderings	Back	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m	n	o	p	q	r	s	t	u	v	w	x	TOT	%
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f= <i>Die Hard with a Vengeance</i> 1995
g= <i>Kids</i> 1995
h= <i>Scary Movie</i> 2000
i= <i>Scary Movie 2</i> 2001
j= <i>Saw</i> 2003
k= <i>The Girl Next Door</i> 2004
l= <i>Saw 2</i> 2005
m= <i>Borat</i> 2006
n= <i>American Pie 5: The Naked Mile</i> 2006
o= <i>See No Evil</i> 2006
p= <i>Gran Torino</i> 2008
q= <i>Get Him to The Greek</i> 2010
r= <i>The Project X</i> 2012
s= <i>A Good Day to Die Hard</i> 2013
t= <i>The Wolf of Wall Street</i> 2013
u= <i>The To Do List</i> 2013
v= <i>Premature</i> 2014
w= <i>Ted 2</i> 2015
x= <i>Dope</i> 2015

By analysing Table 1 above, it can be clearly noticed that in the original film scripts the swearword “motherfucker” is uttered 129 times, where only *Pulp Fiction* (1994) (letter e) counts for 35 (almost 30%). Furthermore, it can be clearly inferred that the insult (back translation) used the most is “son of a bitch” (40%), which corroborates the literature's findings (Pavesi and Malinverno 2000: 79). This rendering is considered very offensive by Italians (Tartamella 2009: 122). Therefore, it could be stated that its illocutionary force parallels the one of “motherfucker”. Omissions are very high (26%); whereas the second-best replacements are scatological insults, such as “piece of shit” and “shit face” (16%). These epithets are considered highly offensive in Italy (Tartamella 2009: 122). Some other insults (back translations) are, for instance: “dickhead” / “cock” (3%), which are ranked medium/low (Tartamella 2009: 123); the very mild “bloody” (3%) and the insult “faggot” (2%). “Faggot” is very abusive in Italian, as innuendoes to male homosexuality are defined as very insulting, given the prevailing male culture (Nobili 2007: 1).



Research carried out by Tartamella (2009) confirms that *frocio* (“faggot”) is very offensive. Therefore, it could be claimed that, together with the back translations “son of a bitch” and “piece of shit / shit face”, such a sexual insult conveys the same illocutionary force, intensity and offence as the original epithet. The remaining slurs, on the contrary, are quite mild; these are “silly”, “you filthy”, “clumsy”, “imbecile”, and “fat lump” (2%). Unfortunately, they do not carry the same insulting power (or illocutionary force) as the original utterances. Other swearwords, instead, are curses, or imprecations, which are not addressed to anyone in particular, such as “filthy whores” or the verb “be pissed off” (1%).

From a first analysis, it could be stated that the literature's findings are partly corroborated, given that the epithet “motherfucker” is either (back) translated “son of a bitch” (40%), if not omitted (26%). As far as the rendering of “bastard” is concerned, instead, the films composing the corpus do not seem to confirm the literature (Pavesi and Malinverno 2000: 79; Corrazzato 2012; Canu 2013: 19), as it is practically neglected (1%). In addition, as outlined above, a new translation pattern seems to have emerged sporadically over the years (16%). This is hallmarked by the insults “piece of shit” or “shit face”. Unfortunately, no other patterns are in sight. Therefore, as far as translation norms are concerned (Pavesi and Malinverno 2000; Pavesi 2005), it can be stated that audiovisual translators have probably adhered to them almost unswervingly. Other reasons, however, could be found in technical constraints and/or visual synchronization.

2.3. Second Analysis: Film Genres

Another analysis is now called for. It will focus on film genres, in order to explore whether the utterances and renderings of the epithet may vary on the basis of the film genre. Table 2 below highlights the films where the epithet is mostly uttered, together with its renderings.

Renderings	Back translations	e	x	r	g	f	t
<i>Figlio di puttana</i>	Son of a bitch	21	8	0	3	1	0
Omissions	-	8	3	1	2	6	2
<i>Stronzo, merda, pezzo di merda</i>	Piece of shit / shit face	3	1	8	1	0	0
<i>Testa di cazzo, cazzo</i>	Dickhead / cock	0	0	2	0	0	2
-	(other)	6	2	1	3	0	3
TOTAL	-	35	14	12	9	7	7

Table 2: Films with the highest rates of occurrence of the epithet “motherfucker” (headword) and its renderings.



From Table 2 above, it can be noticed that the epithet is uttered mostly in the following films: *Pulp Fiction* (1994, black comedy, letter e: 35 occurrences); *Dope* (2015, youth film, letter x: 14 occurrences); *The Project X* (2012, youth film, letter r: 12 occurrences); *Kids* (1995, drama, letter g: 9 occurrences); *Die Hard with a Vengeance* (1995, action, letter f: 7 occurrences) and *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013, drama, letter t: 7 occurrences). In light of the above, it could be argued that the epithet is uttered particularly in dramas and youth films, but further research would be called for in this respect. As far as translations are concerned, instead, the epithet is mostly (back) translated as “son of a bitch”, if not omitted. Therefore, it could be stated that the film genre does not actually impinge on translation choices. However, in *Project X*, the insults “piece of shit / shit face” emerge substantially (8 utterances out of 12); whereas in *The Wolf of Wall Street* the epithet in question is often replaced by “dickhead / cock” and no “son of a bitch” is uttered. Apart from being fairly recent (2012 and 2013, respectively), one might wonder what these two films have in common which makes them so different from the others. If these films were analysed further, their ratings would come to the fore, as both films are rated a sort of NC-13 (no-one 13 and under admitted) in Italy. As a matter of fact, what the first analysis has overlooked, is the film rating, which might play a crucial role in the translation process (Giampieri in press). Therefore, the next paragraph will shed light on possible discrepancies in this respect.

2.4. Film Ratings

As outlined above, an important variable which should not be disregarded is the film rating. As a matter of fact, a different rating in the target culture, for instance, could impinge on the translations of the epithet. In this respect, the literature claims that American R-rated films abound in epithets such as “motherfucker” (Bucholtz 2011: 260). Therefore, if the films composing the corpus had a different rating in both countries (for example: R in North America and G in Italy), this would probably affect the renderings in the Italian versions, as words would be likely to be manipulated (Ranzato 2015), because films would be extended to a younger audience (Zanotti 2012). Therefore, if this were the case, omissions and censorship would be likely to be found in the Italian dubbed versions. As a matter of fact, changing the film rating is something which can occur in view of the target audience but, most of all, on commercial grounds (Israelsen-Hartley 2010; Palsson *et al.* 2013). It is claimed, in fact, that the lower the rating, the higher the profits (Israelsen-Hartley 2010; Palsson *et al.* 2013). Furthermore, a much more variegated scenario would come to the fore if the ratings were different within each country (for example: if some films were rated R and others G, or PG-13, in the United States and in Italy, respectively).

In order to dispel any doubt, a rating analysis will be carried out in Table 3 here below, which shows the film ratings in both countries.

Films	US Rating	Italian Rating
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<i>Saturday Night Fever, Full Metal Jacket, Pulp Fiction, Scary Movie, The Girl Next Door, Saw 2, Borat, American Pie 5, See No Evil, The Project X, The Wolf of Wall Street, Ted 2</i>	R (restricted: under 17s need accompanying)	NC-13 (no-one 13 and under admitted)
<i>Terminator 2, Dazed and Confused, Die Hard with a Vengeance, Scary Movie 2, Saw, Gran Torino, Get Him to The Greek, A Good Day to Die Hard, The To Do List, Premature, Dope</i>		G (general audience)
<i>Kids</i>	NC-17 (no-one 17 and under admitted)	R

Table 3: Film Ratings in The USA and Italy.

It is unfortunate that the film ratings in both countries are not consistent. As can be seen from Table 3 above, in fact, only the film ratings in The USA are consistent across all the films composing the corpus. The only film which is rated differently is *Kids* (1995), which, ironically, is the only one rated R in Italy. There, no films (except *Kids*) are rated R, but a sort of NC-13 (no-one 13 and under admitted) and G (general audience). As outlined above, the Italian ratings were probably decided on commercial grounds (Israelsen-Hartley 2010; Palsson *et al.* 2013). These, however, may alter the film dialogues greatly (Zanotti 2012) and, hence, the language renderings.

For this reason, the films should now be grouped into two categories: those rated NC-13 (together with the one film rated R) and those rated G. At first, a separate analysis of the two types of films will be carried out, in order to highlight the peculiarities emerging from each group. Then, a comprehensive outlook will be provided.

2.5.Third Analysis

As outlined above, discrepancies have unfortunately come to the fore as far as the film ratings are concerned. Given the fact that all films are rated consistently in The United States, inconsistencies are only found in the Italian ratings. This has made it necessary to resort to two separate analyses of the renderings of the epithet “motherfucker”, because it is highly probable that the swearword is translated differently in the two groups of films.

2.5.1.Films rated NC-13

Insights will be firstly provided into the Italian dubbed films rated NC-13 (and R). Table 4 here below highlights some interesting data.

Renderings	Back translations	a	b	e	h	g	k	l	m	n	o	r	t	w	TOT	%
<i>figlio di puttana</i>	son of a bitch	0	1	21	1	3	1	1	1	2	1	0	0	1	33	40%



omission	/	1	1	8	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	0	16	20%
<i>stronz(ett)o, merda, pezzo di merda, faccia di merda</i>	piece of shit, Shit face	0	0	3	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	8	0	2	16	20%
<i>testa di cazzo, cazzo</i>	dickhead, cock	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	4	5%
<i>puttanata, fottuto</i>	bloody stupid thing, bloody	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	4%
<i>imbranato, scemo, schifoso</i>	clumsy, silly, filthy	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	3	4%
<i>finocchio, frocio</i>	poof / faggot	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2%
<i>fanculo</i>	fuck off	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2%
<i>imbecille, palla di lardo</i>	imbecile, fat lump	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1%
<i>coglione</i>	idiot (lit.nut)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1%
<i>porca troia!</i>	filthy whores!	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1%
Total		1	3	35	3	9	1	2	1	4	1	12	7	3	82	

Table 4: Renderings of the epithet “motherfucker” (headword) in the corpus of the Italian films forbidden to 13s and under (NC-13) and restricted (R).

Table 4 above still corroborates the literature's findings; i.e., that the mostly-used rendering of the epithet is the back translation “son of a bitch” (40%), which is considered very abusive in Italian (Tartamella 2009: 122). However, it is noticeable that omissions (20%) equal the scatological insults “piece of shit” and “shit face” (20%). It is also noteworthy that these insults are considered highly offensive by Italians (Tartamella 2009: 122). This confirms that, probably, new translation patterns with the same illocutionary force have emerged, although quite sporadically over the years. Less used are the insults “dickhead” and “cock” (5%), which are ranked medium-low in Tartamella's survey (2009: 123). Also mild expressions such as “bloody”, “clumsy” and “filthy” are used (4%), revealing, in this way, censoring strategies. In particular, these renderings would be highly debatable, as they do not have the same illocutionary force (i.e., the speaker's intention in the utterance) as that of the original epithet. It is also noticeable that the occurrence rate of the insult “faggot” is (still) 2%. In particular, this insult is mentioned only in two films dated 1987 and 1995, respectively. One might argue whether insults on virility have decreased their abusive force over the years or have become politically incorrect, but further research would be called for on this matter. Finally, what this table does not confirm, is the recurrence to “bastard” as a replacement insult (Pavesi and Malinverno 2000). As can be noticed, in fact, no NC-13 films use it. This, however, corroborates the findings of Table 1 above; i.e., that it is not used to render the original epithet.



It would now be interesting to verify whether the years of production or the film genres impinge on the translation choices. However, the films with the highest utterances of the epithet are practically those analysed in Table 2 above. Therefore, the same conclusions can be drawn; i.e., that more than relying on the film's year of production or genre, the translation choices serve the purposes of the film rating and, hence, of the target audience (Zanotti 2012).

2.5.2. Films rated G

An analysis of the renderings of the Italian dubbed films rated G is now mandatory. It will be interesting to verify whether it confutes or corroborates the data shown in Table 4 above. Table 5 below provides some interesting results.

Renderings	Back translations	c	d	f	i	j	p	q	s	u	v	x	TOT	%
<i>figlio di puttana</i>	son of a bitch	2	1	1	0	1	0	3	2	0	1	8	19	40%
omission	/	0	2	6	2	0	2	1	0	1	0	3	17	36%
<i>stronz(ett)o, merda, pezzo di merda, faccia di merda</i>	piece of shit, shit face	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	1	4	9%
<i>puttanata, fottuto</i>	bloody stupid thing, bloody	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2%
<i>finocchio, frocio</i>	poof / faggot	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2%
<i>imbecille, palla di lardo</i>	imbecile, fat lump	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2%
<i>coglione</i>	idiot (lit.nut)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2%
<i>troietta, troia</i>	slut	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2%
<i>bastardo</i>	bastard	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2%
<i>incazzarsi</i>	get pissed off	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2%
Total		2	4	7	3	1	6	6	2	1	1	14	47	

Table 5: Renderings of the epithet "motherfucker" (headword) in the corpus of the Italian films rated G (general public).

Apart from corroborating that "son of a bitch" is the most recurrent back translation of "motherfucker", Table 5 also highlights some important findings. For example, omissions have increased to 36%, which confirm that in order to make films available to a wider audience (as films rated G are), some degree of language manipulation is necessary (Zanotti 2012). Secondly, the epithets "piece of shit / shit face" have decreased to 9%, which corroborates their high offensive force (Tartamella 2009) and, hence, the fact that they could be acceptable replacement words for "motherfucker". Films restricted to 13s and under, in fact, make wider use of them



(16%). Furthermore, their decrease in G-rated films also confirms a certain amount of censorship in films aimed at a wider audience, as well as a stricter adherence to translations norms (Pavesi and Malinverno 2000; Pavesi 2005). Other offensive swearwords, such as “dickhead” and “cock” have instead disappeared in Table 5. This corroborates, again, that censorship is more invasive in dubbed films rated G.

2.6. Final Overview

From a comprehensive analysis of Table 4 and 5 above, it can be undoubtedly stated that the insult “son of a bitch” is the most recurrent substitute for “motherfucker” in the Italian dubbed films composing the corpus. The insult “bastard”, instead, is practically neglected by audiovisual translators. One could argue that such an insult has become outdated, or is not considered offensive enough, but further research would be called for. Other reasons could be due to technical issues and/or visual synchronization.

Other insulting utterances and omissions, whose illocutionary force is sometimes the same and other times debatable, vary on the basis of the ratings of the dubbed films. In NC-13-rated films, for example, “piece of shit / shit face” (which are considered quite insulting) are fairly widely used; whereas “dickhead / cock” (which are considered moderately insulting) are used less. These two categories of insults, however, have not been used consistently over the years and no stable or increasing trend is yet in sight. Nonetheless, they still represent an emerging translation pattern. In these films, omissions occur in 20% of the cases. In G-rated films, instead, omissions are much higher (36%); “piece of shit / shit face” are used rather less and no instances of “dickhead / cock” can be found.

These discrepancies, unfortunately, impinge on the faithful rendering of a scene or even on a character's representation (Zanotti 2012, 365). Table 6 here below summarizes these findings, together with the ranking (or offensive force) of each utterance.

Renderings (back translations)	Ranking (offensive force)	% of utterances in NC-13- and R-rated films	% of utterances in G-rated films
Son of a bitch	Very high	40	40
Omissions	-	20	36
Piece of shit, shit face	High	20	9
Dickhead, cock	Medium/low	5	-

Table 6: Analysis of the differences in the renderings in the Italian dubbed films rated NC-13, R and G.

In light of the above, it can be argued that the dubbed films rated G are not likely to provide a faithful rendering of the original film utterances. On the contrary, the films rated NC-13 and R, irrespective of their year of production and genre, attempt to parallel the original film language, although omissions are still present. In this respect,



however, it may be argued that the swearword is sometimes omitted because repeating it could be perceived as unnatural in the target language (Ciordia 2016).

One last remark should now revolve around the shortcomings of this analysis. In particular, the corpus which has been implemented can only indicate “what is or is not present” (Bennet 2010; 3). Therefore, at this stage, the data gathered cannot be generalized if not confirmed by further research.

3.CONCLUSIONS

The literature claims that the epithet “motherfucker” is considered one of the most offensive insults in English (Jay 1992; Millwood 1998: 49; OfCom 2005: 83; Sullivan 2010). Nonetheless, it is fairly widely used in American films, although its meaning is not literal (Corrizzato 2012: 107). In Italian AVT, scholars report that it must never be rendered faithfully, because incestuous language is forbidden in film dubbing (Pavesi and Malinverno 2000: 79; Canu 2013: 19). Therefore, other swearwords should be used as replacements, when outright censorship is not applied. In the first case, the literature claims that audiovisual translators often resort to fixed equivalents, such as “son of a bitch” and “bastard” (Pavesi and Malinverno 2000: 79; Corrazzato 2012; Canu 2013: 19). Both the epithets serve the same purposes of the original insult, as their illocutionary forces (i.e., the offensive intents of the speaker, Searle 1969) are almost the same. Scholars claim, in fact, that “son of a bitch” is considered very offensive in Italian; whereas “bastard” is perceived as medium/highly offensive (Tartamella 2009: 122). These two epithets are hence considered fixed substitutes, which audiovisual translators have normally resorted to (Pavesi and Malinverno 2000).

In light of the findings of this paper, it was confirmed that the back translation “son of a bitch” is widely used in AVT, and it is probably a faithful rendering of the original epithet, given its illocutionary force (Searle 1969). However, this analysis also brought to the fore some discrepancies in the use of the back translation “bastard” (Pavesi and Malinverno 2000). In particular, its percentage of occurrence was 2% in films rated G; whereas no occurrences could be found in films rated NC-13. Therefore, it could be stated that this insult was practically neglected in the films composing the corpus, despite being considered quite offensive by the literature (Tartamella 2009; Jay and Jay 2015). A possible reason for this avoidance, could be found in the disruption of word/image synch. As a matter of fact, an important parameter to be considered when dealing with dubbed films, is whether or not the dialogue is spoken in close-up. In this case, in fact, visual synching inevitably comes into play as a key determinant of translators’ choices. This could also explain the occurrence of alternatives to “son of a bitch” as the preferred equivalent for “motherfucker”. Another relevant factor that would help account for translators’ choices, could be the role played by technical constraints, which are specific to film dubbing.

This paper also highlighted that NC-13 films make use of “piece of shit / shit face”, which carry the same illocutionary force as the epithet in question. Therefore, they can be considered quite insulting. Their relevance, however, has almost been



random over the years and no increasing trend can yet be described. Nonetheless, they represent a new translation pattern.

Another insult which has emerged tentatively in recent NC-13 films was “dickhead / cock”. Its illocutionary force, however, is not the same as the one carried by the word in question.

In light of the above, it can be claimed that NC-13 films (and the R one) are more adherent to the intent of the original utterances, irrespective of their years of production and genres. Nonetheless, much has yet to be undertaken, in order to render the obscene language of original films more faithful. Therefore, audiovisual translators should be called on drawing on the vast repertoire of swearwords available in the Italian language (Tartamella 2009).

Finally, some last remarks were mandatory and revolved around the corpus itself. In this respect, the greater limit of this analysis lay in its corpus. As a matter of fact, a corpus can only tell us “what is or is not present” in it (Bennet 2010: 3). Therefore, the findings of this paper could only be valid within the selected corpus as it is not possible to generalize them. Consequently, it would be interesting to verify whether they could be confirmed by further research.

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