



The Dubbing of Gay-themed TV Series in Italy: Corpus-based Evidence of Manipulation and Censorship

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The manipulation and censorship of taboo and sensitive references in audiovisual translation (AVT) has attracted the interest of several scholars over the last few years, but systematic studies of the impact of such practices on different genres in different countries are still needed. This paper analyses the Italian dubbing of three gay-themed TV series, *Queer as Folk*, *Queer as Folk* (US remake), and *The L Word*. A brief overview of the available literature on the dubbing of potentially disturbing items, including sexual references and references to homosexuality, is presented in §1. The three series in question are briefly described in §2, along with the corpus used for our analysis; then, the Italian dubbed dialogues are analysed in §3. Finally, a tentative evaluation of the impact of manipulation and censorship practices is sketched in the conclusions (§4).

1. CENSORSHIP AND MANIPULATION IN ITALIAN DUBBING

It is probably helpful to start by providing definitions of *censorship* and *manipulation*. Gambier (2002) discusses three different types of censorship: (1) the form of control exercised by the national regulatory authorities which establish what is acceptable for



different age ranges; (2) 'soft' censorship brought about by market forces, which influence what is produced, exported, translated and broadcast; and, finally, (3) self-censorship on the part of translators, who may follow clients' guidelines or may take their personal initiative to tone down or suppress certain features of the source language (SL) text. In this essay, the term *censorship* is used in the first meaning, whereas the other two mechanisms are referred to as *manipulation*. Díaz Cintas (2012) points out that a distinction must be drawn between *technical* and *ideological* manipulation: while certain changes in AVT are necessary because of technical constraints, the target language (TL) text may be modified because of political, religious, moral or economic reasons. Cases of covert ideological manipulation are especially interesting to investigate, since "visual, time and space constraints should not serve as an excuse for toning down or leaving out controversial or sensitive elements present in the original dialogue, such as expletives, blasphemies, sexual references, or political comments" (ibid.: 284- 285).

Overall, there is a general consensus on the fact that Italian dubbing is characterised by a tendency to tone down or even suppress strong language and references to potentially sensitive subjects, such as religion, drug use, sex, and so on (Bruti 2009; Bucaria 2009; Chiaro 2007; Ledvinka 2010; Parini 2013, 2014; Pavesi and Malinverno 2000; Zanotti 2012). Parini (2014: 160) maintains that perhaps the reduction and mitigation of such expressions in Italian dubbing "should not be considered merely as an act of censorship, but rather as a domesticating strategy", since domestic productions rarely feature strong language, at least not to the same extent as US ones.

The treatment of references to sexual orientation and sexual practices is especially relevant to the present paper. Parini (2013) detected a lack of homogeneity in the translation strategies adopted for sexual references in three Quentin Tarantino films, and found evidence of self-censorship in the absence of linguistic or technical constraints. Similarly, Zanotti (2012) found several instances of manipulation of references to adolescent sexuality, juvenile crime and strong language in a corpus of youth films. Moreover, by comparing the dubbed dialogues with the translated scripts submitted to the Italian Revision Commission in charge of film rating, Zanotti was able to prove that certain changes were requested by the distributors.

Similar trends have emerged in TV dubbing. Bucaria (2009) analysed a number of mixed-genre TV series and found the Italian dubbing to be characterised by omissions and toning down of potentially disturbing items, but no recurring patterns or clear rationale for these manipulations were identified. She suggested a possible explanation:

what constitutes quality television or good television in the United States [...] is not necessarily shared by Italian mainstream culture and the AVT distribution industry, which feel the need to manipulate TV contents before releasing them to the end users, to the point of hiding the very characteristics that make these series unique in their country of origin. (Bucaria 2009: 28)



In her dissertation on the Italian dubbing of *South Park*, Poletti (2012-2013) interviewed three dubbing adapters on the various forms of censorship on Italian TV. They confirmed the influence of TV networks which routinely require translators to purge their texts of taboo references (especially religion and sex) and bad language, depending on broadcasting times and age bracket of the expected target audience; they also acknowledged a degree of self-censorship. Similarly, when Chiaro (2007) looked at the Italian dubbing of *Sex and the City*, she found empirical evidence of self-imposed censorship by the translators who frequently mitigated or omitted references to male and female genitalia, sexual intercourse and other sexual practices; all the more striking, given that the entire series is built around the explicit treatment of sexual subject matter. However, it is important to note that manipulation of the target text can take place not only during the translation process, but also in the dubbing studio:

When all is said and done, it is the dubbing director who has the final say. A script in the Italian 'dubbing cycle' constantly undergoes manipulation on its journey from translator to dubbing actor. If a dubbing actor feels a different utterance to the script is preferable, he or she is free to change it as long as the director agrees [...]. Thus, it seems that choices are in the hands of individuals who are free to decide what Italian viewers will or will not find acceptable. However, whether Italian audiences are as straight laced as dubbing operators think they are, or would like them to be, remains to be ascertained. (Chiaro 2007: 273-274)

The presence of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) characters is still relatively rare in Italian domestic series and films and no Italian equivalent of the series under analysis in this paper has been produced yet. As a result, gay characters and issues are less mainstream on Italian TV than in the UK and USA, and the gay lexicon is not shared by the general population. Indeed, as Ranzato (2012: 372) points out, there are several English loanwords in the Italian gay lexicon and "a poor translation might not be due necessarily to a tendency to manipulation but simply to the lack of a lexical counterpart". Ranzato analysed the Italian dubbing of several films and TV series from different periods, to investigate the translation of homosexual references from a diachronic perspective. The analysis focused on issues of special relevance to the present paper: the translation of camp talk, allusions to gay icons, terms describing sexual orientation and sexual practices, and the inversion of gender-specific terms. For example, 'butch' and 'dyke' were translated as *omosessuale* [homosexual] and *lesbica* [lesbian], for lack of equivalent terms; similarly, 'straight' was translated as *innocente* [innocent], thus equating heterosexuality with purity. Ranzato (2012: 82) also discovered many instances of gay references that were suppressed, transformed into heterosexual references, or translated by gender inversion (i.e. a 'dyke' becomes a woman who 'looks like a man'):

The Italian adaptation of many audiovisual programmes with gay content purposely perpetuates, at best, an old-fashioned and out-of-date view of homosexuality, primarily focused on the *inverted* sexual desires of tormented



figures. This interpretation betrays the content and the style of films and other programmes which, more and more often, in the course of the last decades, have depicted homosexual characters in a much more positive light. This manipulative operation is carried out by turning the positive discourse into a negative one and by transforming the words of liberation and pride into words of self-deprecation and ambiguity. In the worst cases, homosexuality is not even acknowledged and it is translated into a heterosexual and normalising lexicon.

By way of comparison, it is worth mentioning a study carried out by Valdeón (2010) on the dubbing of a different genre (*Will & Grace*) into a different language and culture (Spanish). Since the programme is a comedy, strong expressions such as 'fag', 'homo' and 'queer' were often used ironically by gay characters themselves, rather than dysphemically by straight characters. However, a close analysis of the Spanish dubbed version revealed that potentially offensive terms were more frequent in the TL than in the SL series: more specifically, the derogatory terms *maricón* [fagot] and *marica* [queer] were often used instead of the more neutral 'gay' or 'homosexual'. Similarly, the term 'straight' was often translated as *macho* or *machote* [butch], and the tendency to use feminine nouns, pronouns and adjectives when referring to male gay characters was also noticeable. Therefore, "The equation in the dubbed version compares heterosexuals to virile males, and, consequently, gays to the effeminate schema" (ibid.: 86). Overall, the patterns at work in the Spanish version of *Will & Grace* do not seem too dissimilar from the ones that Ranzato (2012) detected in her analysis of Italian dubbing.

This brief overview has established that there is plenty of empirical evidence to claim that manipulation and censorship of strong language and references to sensitive subjects are the norm in Italian dubbing. In the light of that, it seems interesting to investigate translation choices in the dubbing of three series that are entirely dedicated to gay issues and characters.

2. THE GAY-THEMED CORPUS

2.1 Three gay dramas

Queer as Folk (1999), *Queer as Folk (USA)* (2000), and *The L Word* (2004) were the first TV dramas that attempted to portray the daily life of gay characters. There are some differences among the three series, but all of them belong to the "soap drama" genre (Creeber 2004), a mix of soap opera, drama and comedy, and were ground-breaking in their representation of homosexuality not as a problem, but as one of the possible options in sexual orientation. All the leading characters were gay, with straight characters playing supporting roles, in a clear reversal of TV traditions.

Queer as Folk (QaF UK) was the first to put homosexuality centre stage playfully and defiantly, by narrating the lives of a group of gay friends in Manchester. When the show premiered on Channel 4 in April 1999, it was especially noticeable for its



depiction of gay sex that was completely devoid of any shame. The first episode began with explicit scenes and sex-themed monologues by the three leading characters, Vince, Stuart and Nathan. Even 15-year-old Nathan's encounter with 29-year-old Stuart was not depicted as a traumatic ordeal, but as an enjoyable and formative experience:¹

That underage sex, and particularly underage queer sex, should be presented as a positive decision devoid of angst or negative consequence was in itself fairly revolutionary in the context of a show produced for mainstream terrestrial television. That *intergenerational* underage queer sex should likewise be framed neutrally was, even on Channel 4 in the late 1990s, nothing short of incendiary. (Edwards 2010: 129)

The programme stirred up controversy, not only because of the sensitive issues it portrayed but also because of its strong language, even though it was broadcast after the 9 pm watershed. However, it was a resounding success, obtaining consistently high audience ratings, between 3 and 3.5 million viewers (ibid.: 125). In 2001 the Italian channel La7 bought the show, intending to broadcast it after 11 pm; however, after a change in management, the channel suddenly decided to cancel it. In 2002 it was broadcast in a dubbed version on satellite channel Gay.tv, then in 2005 on the more mainstream satellite channel Jimmy, and in 2006 it was released on DVD, both dubbed and in English with Italian subtitles.

The British series was never broadcast on US TV; instead, in 2000 a remake by the same title was produced and broadcast on Showtime, a cable pay-TV service. The American *Queer as Folk* (QaF USA) was set in Pittsburgh and initially followed the original very closely. However, while QaF UK only ran for two seasons (10 episodes overall), the American version ran for five seasons (83 episodes) and the range of issues it portrayed is much wider. The show was broadcast at 10 pm and obtained good ratings, but, unlike the original, it was aimed mostly at gay viewers who were willing to pay a subscription fee to watch it. The series premiered in Italy on Gay.tv in 2002, with Italian subtitles: the channel broadcast the first four seasons and then stopped, for unknown reasons. It was then dubbed and bought by satellite channel Jimmy in 2006. In 2007 and 2008 the repeats were finally broadcast very late at night on Iris, a free digital terrestrial channel, potentially accessible to all.

The L Word was originally broadcast on Showtime between 2004 and 2009 and ran for 6 seasons, for a total of 70 episodes. It portrayed the lives of a group of lesbian, bisexual, and transgender friends in trendy Los Angeles. The show did not focus simply on lesbian relationships, but also on homophobia, gay parenthood, IVF, and other serious matters. The Italian dubbed version was first broadcast on Jimmy in 2004; then, in 2005 the repeats were broadcast very late at night (around midnight) on La7, a free digital terrestrial channel.

¹ At the time legislation on underage gay sex was still quite strict in the UK, with the age of consent set at 18, as opposed to 16 for heterosexual intercourse. Section 28 of the Local Government Act was finally repealed in 2003.



Overall, the three series had a bumpy ride on Italian television and never managed to reach a wide audience: this was due partly to the controversies surrounding them even before they were broadcast, and partly to the frequent scheduling changes that made it difficult for viewers to follow them. However, over the years they have acquired a kind of *cult* status in the Italian gay community.

2.2. Corpus Data

During the academic years 2012-2013 and 2013-2014, MA students in Interpreting and Translation at UNINT (Università degli Studi Internazionali, Rome) carried out small projects on various TV series as a course requirement for their AVT module, and some of them chose to study the three series analysed in this paper. Moreover, two final-year students decided to write their dissertations on gay-themed TV series (Caselli 2012-2013, Biancullo 2013-2014). Although a full illustration of their findings goes beyond the scope of the present paper, it must be highlighted that all the transcripts on which this analysis is based were produced by students, who contributed to the expansion of the *DubTalk* corpus.² The transcripts follow the conventions adopted in the whole corpus (Bonsignori 2009). All the files were converted to plain text format (.txt) in order to compile 6 sub-corpora to be analysed with WordSmith Tools 6.0. The resulting gay-themed corpus currently includes 3 episodes of *QaF UK*, 10 episodes of *QaF USA* and 4 episodes of *The L Word*, about 10 hours of TV material overall:³

	duration (minutes)	English STs (tokens)	Italian TTs (tokens)
QaF UK	90	9,425	9,623
QaF USA	290	41,196	37,042
The L Word	225	23,555	21,339
TOTAL	605	74,176	68,004

Table 1: The gay-themed corpus

As can be seen in Table 1, the materials revolving around male homosexuality outweigh those focused on female homosexuality, both in terms of overall duration (380 vs 225 minutes) and in terms of tokens (50,621 vs 23,555). However, there are frequent references to both male and female homosexuality in all three series, so the corpus, albeit small and slightly imbalanced, is sufficient for a qualitative study. It must be stressed that the Italian dubbing of the three series was carried out by three different companies, who used different translators and dialogue adapters: Pumaidsue for *QaF UK*, Four Bi for *QaF USA* and Sefit CDC for *The L Word* (Genna 2003, 2004, 2006).

² The *DubTalk* corpus <<http://dubtalk.unint.eu>> is made up of transcripts of British and US TV series and films and their Italian dubbed versions. The project was launched in 2013 as a collaboration between UNINT, Rome, and the University of Pisa.

³ The episodes are (S= season, E = episode): *Queer as Folk* S1 (E1, E3); S2 (E1); *QaF USA* S1 (E2, first half, E3, E7, E8, E9, E10, E11, E13, E15); and *The L Word* S1 (E1, E2, E3, E4).



3. MANIPULATION AND CENSORSHIP

The language used in the three series has many interesting features, so the analysis has been restricted to two areas where the effects of manipulation and censorship are more tangible, namely sexual orientation and sexual practices.

3.1. Sexual Orientation Terms

Sexual orientation is a constant theme throughout the three series. Let us begin with neutral terms for heterosexuality in the SL series and the TL versions. The figures in Table 2 include usage of the terms both as nouns and as adjectives, and in both singular and plural forms (wherever applicable). Since there is no Italian equivalent for 'straight', only *eterosessuale* and its abbreviated form *etero* were included in Table 2:

	QaF UK	QaF USA	The L Word
SL dialogues			
straight	1	18	13
heterosexual	0	0	1
hetero	0	0	1
TOTAL	1	18	15
TL dialogues			
eterosessuale	0	0	6
etero	0	16	9
TOTAL	0	16	15

Table 2: neutral terms for heterosexuality in the SL and TL dialogues

'Straight' is virtually the only term used in the SL dialogues to describe heterosexual characters and lifestyles. In the dubbed dialogues of *QaF USA* the preferred option is *etero*, more colloquial than the full form *eterosessuale*, while in *The L Word* occurrences are more evenly distributed (9 vs 6): for example, *eterosessuale* is preferred in a scene taking place in a psychologist's office, probably because it is more appropriate to a medical setting.

There are also other translation choices for 'straight' that are not illustrated by Table 2. For example, the only occurrence of the term in *QaF UK* is in a scene in which Vince and his friends go to a gay club and meet a work colleague, Rosalie, who does not know that he is gay. In the Italian version 'straight' was rendered as *normale* [normal], a choice that highlights the 'abnormality' of being gay (Ranzato 2012; Caselli 2012-2013). It is a subtle but noticeable change, since the line is uttered by Vince himself:



	Original version	Dubbed version	Back translation
Vince	Work alert. We're going. See you outside. It's that bloody Rosalie! This place is getting so straight!	Allarme colleghi! Andiamocene! Ci vediamo fuori. È quella piattola di Rosalie. Questo posto sta diventando così normale!	Colleague alarm! Let's go away! See you outside. It's that pest, Rosalie. This place is getting so normal!

Example 1: *QaF UK*

The same strategy was used in the only scene in *QaF USA* in which the word 'straight' was not translated as *etero*, in a pun based on its double meaning of 'honest' and 'heterosexual': 'All right, well, I might as well be straight with you'. Once again, this becomes *normale*. Let us now have a look in Table 3 at neutral terms for homosexuality:

	<i>QaF UK</i>	<i>QaF USA</i>	<i>The L Word</i>
SL dialogues			
homosexual	1	1	0
Gay	1	30	21
lesbian	5	5	22
TOTAL	7	36	43
TL dialogues			
omosessuale	1	1	1
gay	2	31	21
lesbica	6	14	30
TOTAL	9	45	52

Table 3: neutral terms for homosexuality in the SL and TL dialogues

Interestingly, gay-related terms are more abundant in the dubbed dialogues than in the original SL dialogues in all three series. Moreover, while there is virtually no difference in frequency of usage of the words 'homosexual'-*omosessuale* and 'gay' in the two languages, the word *lesbica* has a higher number of occurrences than its SL counterpart 'lesbian'. One of the reasons for this is that in the corpus *lesbica* has often been used to translate 'gay' when it refers to female homosexuality: 'a gay couple' thus becomes *una coppia lesbica* [a lesbian couple]. This is probably because in the Italian language the loanword 'gay' tends to be more readily associated to male homosexuality. Moreover, the word *lesbica* is sometimes introduced to explain concepts that are unfamiliar to the TL culture: a bar for gay girls thus becomes a place 'where they are all lesbians' as seen in Example 2:

	Original version	Dubbed version	Back translation
Jenny	I think I kind of freaked out and not because was a gay bar , okay? But because I had absolutely	Credo di aver perso un po' la testa e non perché erano tutte lesbiche ma perché non avevo la benché	I think I lost my head a bit and not because they were all lesbians but because I had no idea



	no idea what I was doing there. You know?	minima idea di che cosa stessi facendo lì. Capisci?	what I was doing there. Do you understand?
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Example 2: *The L Word*

The overabundance of the term *lesbica* also stems from its systematic use in the translation of dysphemic English expressions, such as ‘dyke’, ‘lezzie’ and ‘lez’. In this case, the imbalance between the English and Italian gay lexicons is marked. In recent years the gay community has re-appropriated some of these expressions for positive or ironic use (Valdeón 2010), and such cases are indicated by the figures in brackets in Table 4:

	<i>QaF UK</i>	<i>QaF USA</i>	<i>The L Word</i>
SL dialogues			
dyke	0	4 (1)	2
(bull dyke)	0	1	0
lez/lezzie	0	0	5 (2)
lesbo	1	1	0
lesbionic	0	1	0
muncher	0	2	0
homo			1
TOTAL	1	9	7
TL dialogues			
lesbo	1	0	0
leccaciuffe	0	2	0
camioniste	0	1	0
TOTAL	1	3	0

Table 4: Dysphemic terms for female homosexuality in the SL and TL dialogues

All instances of dysphemic and slang expressions were neutralised in the Italian dialogues, except in 4 cases: noticeably, none of them in the series on lesbian issues. The shortened form *lesbo* appears once in the Italian version of *QaF UK*, matching the same expression in English (‘lesbo’) in a line delivered by a straight girl; the slang term *leccaciuffe* [bush licker] has been used twice in the dubbing of *QaF USA* to translate Brian’s definition of a lesbian couple as ‘the munchers’. Finally, as can be seen in Example 3, the word *camioniste* [female truck-drivers] was chosen as a translation of ‘bull dykes’, aggressively masculine lesbians, in a line in which they are contrasted with ‘bottoms’, gay men who receive penetration in anal sex:

	Original version	Dubbed version	Back translation
Brian	Why? With all those bull dykes around, is there a shortage of bottoms ?	Perché? Ci sono troppe camioniste e pochi passivi ?	Why? Are there too many female truck-drivers and too few passive men ?

Example 3: *QaF USA*



There are, of course, other slang expressions in the Italian lexicon to refer to female homosexuality, such as the words *frocio* (Ranzato 2012: 375), *lella*, *nurzia* and a few others, but they are only used within the gay community and on a regional basis, so the translators probably felt that they would not be understood by a wider audience. All these nuances of the SL dialogues are lost in Italian translation, which is probably unavoidable when such terms are used jokingly by gay characters. However, when the word ‘dyke’ is used dysphemically, it should be possible to modify the word *lesbica* and in Example 4 ‘those dykes’ could have been rendered as *quelle lesbicacce* [those nasty lesbians], with a pejorative suffix added to the word *lesbica*. Moreover, the slang expression ‘to have the low hangers’ was rendered with an Italian idiom of the same meaning but a higher register, *avere gli attributi* [to have testicles], instead of the more common *avere le palle* [to have balls]. In the absence of lip-synch requirements, as Emmett’s face can hardly be seen, these decisions seem to be the result of self-censorship.

	Original version	Dubbed version	Back translation
Emmett	You really showed those dykes who's got the low hangers!	Hai dimostrato alle lesbiche chi è che ha veramente gli attributi!	You showed the lesbians who really has testicles!

Example 4: *QaF USA*

Overall, as regards the references to female homosexuality, the Italian dubbed dialogues are less varied and more standardised than the SL dialogues. Let us now turn to dysphemic terms for male homosexuality. No such expression was found in *The L Word*, so Table 5 only includes the SL and TL terms found in the other two series. Once again, there are several instances of gay characters using dysphemic expressions to affirm their identity (see figures in brackets).

	<i>QaF UK</i>	<i>QaF USA</i>
SL dialogues		
fag/ faggot	1 (1)	16 (3)
queer	3 (2)	6 (2)
pervert	6	3
poof	3 (1)	0
queen	0	10
other terms	9 (9)	2
TOTAL	22 (13)	37 (5)
TL dialogues		
frocio/ frocetto	4 (2)	16 (2)
finocchio	1 (1)	8 (2)
checca	2 (1)	12
maschione	1	3
pervertito	2	3
pedofilo	3	0
diverso	1	2



succhiacappelle	1	0
regina	1	1
TOTAL	16 (4)	45 (4)

Table 5: Dysphemetic terms for male homosexuality in the SL and TL dialogues

In the Italian version of *QaF UK* there is a reduction in the overall number of dysphemetic expressions (from 22 to 16), whereas the opposite is true in the dubbed version of the US series (from 37 to 45). This confirms the lack of homogeneity in the translation approaches employed by different translators, as was shown in previous studies (see S2).

The preferred dysphemetic expressions in *QaF USA* are ‘fag’, ‘faggot’ and ‘queer’, whereas the British version tends to use ‘poof’ and ‘queer’. In the dubbed dialogues of both series there is an almost fixed equivalence between ‘fag’/‘faggot’/‘poof’ and *frocio*, which means that there is no diatopic variation in the Italian translations. Moreover, the word ‘queer’ has been generally translated as *checca*, a derogatory description of effeminate gay men. This translation solution does not seem to work very well when applied to gay men who are not effeminate at all, such as Vince and his US equivalent Michael. Perhaps another option, *finocchio*, would have been more appropriate in those cases; however, in the Italian *QaF UK* only Stuart uses it once to describe himself in his coming-out speech, while in the US version it appears to have been used as an all-purpose translation solution for ‘fag’, ‘faggot’, ‘fairy’, ‘homo’, ‘queen’ and ‘queer’. Although these choices may have been influenced by scene-related constraints, all the above nuances disappeared in the Italian version.

Another interesting case is the translation of ‘pervert’: in *QaF USA* it was rendered by its direct translation *pervertito*, while in the dubbing of the British series the word *pedofilo* [paedophile] was also used. In Example 5 Thomas, a young boy who has discovered his uncle’s homosexuality, tries to blackmail him. Two occurrences of ‘pervert’ have been translated using four offensive expressions: *porco* [sex-obsessed man], *pedofilo*, repeated twice, and finally *pervertito*. The impact of the Italian dialogue is thus much stronger than the original.

	Original version	Dubbed version	Back translation
Thomas	I’m telling him you touched me. Just then. You bloody touched me! You pervert! You bloody pervert! I want 50 quid. No, make it 100 quid.	E io gli dirò che tu mi hai toccato. Poco fa! Che tu mi hai toccato, che sei un porco , sei un pedofilo! Un pedofilo, un pervertito! Voglio 50 sterline. No, adesso ne voglio 100.	I’ll tell him that you touched me. Just then! That you touched me, that you are a dirty swine , you are a paedophile! A paedophile, a pervert! I want 50 pounds. No, now I want 100!

Example 5: *QaF UK*

Both series also contain expressions used only once (see ‘other terms’ in Table 5). In *QaF UK* there is a long list of expressions used by Stuart in his coming-out speech: ‘poofster’, ‘ponce’, ‘bum-boy’, ‘bent’, ‘batty-boy’, ‘fudge-packer’, ‘backside artist’,



'bugger', and 'arse-bandit'. As there is no Italian equivalent for most of these expressions, the dubbed dialogues resorted to the usual *frocio*, *checca*, *finocchio* (see Table 5) and to creative descriptions, such as *cavalco a pelo* [I ride bareback], *amo i trenini* [I love conga lines], *io sono la regina dei cessi pubblici* [I am the queen of public bogs], and many other solutions involving phallic imagery, mostly fruit and vegetables, or references to oral and anal sex.

In a few cases the translators added dysphemic expressions. In a scene in which Stuart goes to hospital to see his baby (he donated his semen to a couple of lesbian friends), he jokingly notes that they are surrounded by lesbians and Lisa, the baby's mother, attempts to shock him by mockingly recalling some graphic aspects of the birth ('my waters have broken'). In the Italian version, this has been replaced with a mild insult, *maschione*, questioning Stuart's virility. It is a rather gratuitous translation choice, possibly explained by lip-synch reasons.

	Original version	Dubbed version	Back translation
Stuart	Right Nathan, let's go. It's all getting a bit lesbian in here.	Dai, Nathan, andiamo, c'è un'aria un po' lesbica qui!	Come on Nathan, let's go, there is a slightly lesbian atmosphere here!
Lisa	My waters have broken!	Ha parlato il maschione!	Listen to the macho man talking!

Example 6: *QaF UK*

Other instances of manipulation consist in toning down or suppressing dysphemic expressions altogether, such as in a scene in which school kids are shouting abuse at Nathan and Stuart in *QaF UK*: one of the insults, the slang Jamaican expression 'batty man', has been transformed into a mocking comment on the couple: *Ma che dolce. Ehi piccioncini!* [How sweet. Hey, lovebirds!], and the swearword 'twat' has not been translated at all. Another insult, 'poof', has been changed into a comment that presumably refers to schoolboy Nathan having been initiated to gay sex by a much older man, Stuart: *Che cosa ti hanno insegnato, eh? Facci vedere cosa sai fare!* [What have they taught you? Show us what you can do!]. As there was no lip-synch constraint, these changes must have been made by the translator or dubbing adapter, possibly to compensate for the strong impact of one of the previous lines of dialogue, in which Stuart responds very aggressively to taunting from a schoolboy. In the dubbed version, illustrated in Example 7, his reply is even more graphic than in the original:

	Original version	Dubbed version	Back Translation
Boy	Come on, boys, give us a kiss!	Forza, datevi un bel bacio.	Come on, give each other a nice kiss.
Stuart	I'll give you a good fuck , you tight little virgin . You won't be laughing then!	Ti darei un bel cazzo nel culo, verginella stretta , così non riderai più tanto.	I would give you a nice cock up your ass , you tight little virgin , so you won't be laughing so much.

Example 7: *QaF UK*



The same scene is found in *QaF USA*, and the translator's choices are remarkably similar, with the use of the feminine noun *verginnella*, clearly associating gay men receiving penetration to young (virgin) women. This idea is further confirmed by other translation choices in both series, and especially in the characterisation of Alexander (*QaF UK*), alias Emmett (*QaF USA*). This is Alexander's introduction, in which his camp nature is described as 'a problem' and translated by a rather flat *bizzarro* [bizarre], giving viewers the impression that Alexander is just an oddball (Example 8):

	Original version	Dubbed version	Back translation
Vince	The thing about Alexander, he is a bit camp . But he's nice. Mind you, saying he's a bit camp is like saying Hitler was a bit naughty. But he's nice. You'll like him.	L'unico problema con Alexander è che è un po' bizzarro . Ma è carino! Dio, dire che lui è un po' bizzarro è come dire che Hitler era un po' cattivo. Però è simpatico, ti piacerà.	The only problem with Alexander is that he is a bit bizarre . But he's cute. God, saying that he is a bit bizarre is like saying that Hitler was a bit naughty. But he's nice, you'll like him.

Example 8: *QaF UK*

In the US version, Emmett is introduced in a similar way, 'Emmett can be a little campy', but he is also defined as 'a queen'. In Italian he becomes *vistoso* [flashy], an adjective that simply describes his appearance and is more frequently associated with women than men. The term 'camp' has entered the Italian gay lexicon as a loanword, but the general public cannot be assumed to know its meaning.

Alexander's lines are full of references to gay icons (David Beckham, Elton John, Princess Diana, etc.), which are replaced by similar references to US gay icons in Emmett's lines (Cher, Barbra Streisand, etc.). He often uses words such as 'fabulous' or 'fab', and his voice is rather effeminate (closely reproduced by the dubbing actor). The Italian translation tends to accentuate these traits, for example by replacing a reference to illicit sex in airplane toilets with a reference to women's shoes, as in Example 9:

	Original version	Dubbed version	Back translation
Alexander	Vince and Phil! Perfect boyfriend! Shags like a rabbit, can't understand a word I'm saying! It's fab , isn't it? Love job . We met in the club.	Vince e Phil! Il fidanzato perfetto! Scopa come un coniglio e non capisce una parola di quello che dico! È favoloso , no? È un vero amore . L'ho conosciuto al club.	Vince and Phil! The perfect boyfriend. Shags like a rabbit and does not understand a word I am saying! It's fabulous , isn't it? He's such a cutie . I met him at the club.
Vince	What club?	Che club?	What club?
Alexander	Mile high!	Tacchi a spillo!	Stiletto heels!

Example 9: *QaF UK*



In the dubbing of the US version, Emmett's effeminate characterisation is even more marked. A good indication is the frequency of use of the word *checca* to translate several SL expressions describing him or used by himself (Table 6):

occurrences	TL expression	SL expression
2	checca passiva	big nelly bottom
2	checca isterica	drama queen
1	checca drammatica	drama queen
1	checca pazza	big nelly queen
1	checca molle	pussy boy
1	povera checca impaurita	scared little faggot
1	checche	fags
1	nessun uomo, checca o Brian	no man, queen or Brian

Table 6: *Checca* as a translation solution in *QaF USA*

Here the word *checca* is qualified in various ways to refer to sexual roles: passive, hysterical, dramatic, crazy, weak, and frightened. An especially interesting case is *checca passiva* as a translation of 'nelly bottom', i.e. a gay man who plays a submissive role in sex. 'Bottom', as an adjective or a noun, is often used in opposition to 'top' and the Italian dubbing uses the slang equivalents *passivo* [passive] and *attivo* [active]. In the corpus, the word 'top' is accompanied by the adjectives 'brutal' (2 occurrences), 'big beefy' (x1) or 'beefy brutal' (x1), referring to the person's muscly build, his aggressiveness or both. In Italian this is made very explicit by introducing the idea of sodomy in all cases.

	Original version	Dubbed version	Back translation
Emmett	Well, I was going to say the same thing. I mean, I guess you can tell, I'm not a big, beefy top!	Stavo per dire la stessa cosa. Immagino che tu pensi che non sia un sodomizzatore brutale!	I was about to say the same thing. I guess you are thinking I am not a brutal sodomizer.

Example 10: *QaF USA*

Further evidence of manipulation can be found in the translation of the exchange in Example 11, in which Emmett is worried about meeting a chat-line acquaintance to whom he has been lying: his description of his own physical appearance and attitude in sex is diametrically opposite to his real self. In the SL dialogue he wishes he could be different, i.e. more similar to his online persona; in the Italian translation he sounds very submissive and effeminate and, above all, rather desperate for sex:

	Original version	Dubbed version	Back translation
Ted	Did you ever consider just telling him the truth?	Hai mai pensato di dirgli la verità?	Did you ever consider telling him the truth?



Emmett	What, that I'm a big nelly bottom who wishes he were a beefy, brutal top , but never will be?	Eh? E cosa? Che sono solo una checca passiva che vorrebbe essere sodomizzata ? E che non lo sarà mai?	Eh? And what? That I am only a nelly bottom who would like to be sodomised ? And who never will be?
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Example 11: *QaF USA*

A very similar mechanism is at work when Emmett is described as a *checca pazza* and a *checca isterica*, in which references to madness and hysteria have, arguably, a stronger impact than the SL expression 'drama queen'. Moreover, when Emmett, who works in a shop, defines himself as a 'nelly retail queen', he becomes a *commessa* [female shop assistant] *finocchia*, the hardly ever used feminine version of *finocchio*. The character's feminisation is thus complete.

3.3. References to Sexual Practices

The above discussion of sexual orientation terms has shown several instances of manipulation in the Italian dialogues. Predictably, however, the most significant modifications affected the gay sex scenes. There are cases of actual censorship and cases of manipulation involving the mitigation, suppression or addition of certain details. Let us begin with the most blatant case of censorship encountered in the corpus, in *QaF UK*.

In the British series, the character Nathan is 15 when he first meets 29-year old Stuart; in other words, the sexual acts portrayed on the screen are illegal. It must be noticed that in the US remake Justin is 17, i.e. one year older than the local age of consent. In the dubbed version Nathan becomes 16, even though in Italy the age of consent is 14. The decision to increase his age must have been taken by the translator or adapter, or perhaps even requested by the distributor, in an attempt to avoid controversy, since sex with minors is a strong taboo in the country.

When Stuart and Nathan first meet and have sex, in the Italian dubbed version some lines of dialogue were cut from the broadcast version (Example 12):

	Original version	Dubbed version	Back translation
Stuart	So what do you like doing?	//	
Nathan	I like watching telly.	//	
Stuart	What you like doing in bed!	//	
Nathan	This is fine.	//	
Stuart	Rimming?	Ti va una pompa?	Fancy a blowjob?
Nathan	Yeah.	Sì.	Yes.
Stuart	Go on, then.	Benissimo. Fammela allora.	Very good. Give me one then.

Example 12: *QaF UK*



The four lines in question do not contain any sensitive reference, but perhaps Nathan’s childishness emerged too clearly in his naïve reply (‘I like watching telly’); or perhaps the dubbing adapter decided that this part of the scene was irrelevant. Interestingly, the sexual practice mentioned by Stuart, ‘rimming’, was probably considered too adventurous and has been replaced by a more common one. Later on in the same episode, there is a very explicit scene in which Nathan loses his virginity, which was also cut from the Italian version (Example 13):

	Original version	Dubbed version
Stuart	No one told you about that, did they? That’s it. Slowly. That’s all of them. All the football team.	//
Nathan	All what?	//
Stuart	All of them. Naked and in shorts. And the referee’s going “yes, yes, yes, in we go”.	//
Nathan	Slowly, really.	//

Example 13: *QaF UK*

There are also several instances of suppression or mitigation of references to genitalia and sexual acts. Indeed, the overall number of terms related to genitalia is significantly lower in the dubbed versions of the three series. However, the analysis has shown different approaches taken by different translators. While all the occurrences of the words ‘cock’ or ‘dick’ in *QaF UK* have been translated as *cazzo*, the corresponding Italian slang word, the translator of *QaF USA* has also used the childish words *pisello* and *pistolino*. Likewise, s/he has chosen the childish term *patata* and the regional word *passera* to translate ‘pussy’. In *The L Word* the trend is even clearer: ‘pussy’ has been translated as *passera*, possibly because of lip-synch constraints, and ‘bush’ as *i peli* [the hairs], a very generic term that does not clarify the meaning of the SL original. Even the terms ‘butt’ and ‘ass’ have been sanitised by choosing the neutral word *sedere* (bottom), and the number of occurrences dropped from 9 to 2.

Expressions describing intercourse can be found in all three series, both neutral (Table 7) and slang (Table 8):

	QaF UK	QaF USA	The L Word
SL dialogues			
Sleep	1	2	17
have sex	6	14	8
TOTAL	7	16	25
TL dialogues			
(portarsi / andare/ essere stati) a letto	0	5	19
fare sesso	2	6	9
fare l’amore	0	2	4
Farlo	5	7	2
TOTAL	7	20	34

Table 7: Neutral references to sexual intercourse in the SL and TL dialogues



The expression ‘to sleep with someone’ plays a prominent role in *The L Word*, while the other two series prefer a more direct ‘to have sex’. In the TL there is more lexical variety than in the original dialogues: there is a direct equivalent of ‘to have sex’ [*fare sesso*], and a number of expressions built around the word *letto* [bed], e.g. ‘taking someone to bed’, ‘going to bed with someone’, etc. In addition, the TL versions also use *fare l’amore* [to make love] and *farlo* [to do it], with the pronoun *lo* [it] alluding to the sexual act. Furthermore, the overall number of neutral references to intercourse in the dubbed versions of *QaF USA* and *The L Word* is higher than in the original dialogues, because in some cases the dubbed dialogues are more explicit than the SL ones and transformed expressions such as ‘to touch’ into ‘to have sex’.

	QaF UK	QaF USA	The L Word
SL dialogues			
fuck	8 (35)	33 (144)	11 (46) ⁴
shag	23	0	0
get laid	0	4	3
have (someone)	5	2	0
other terms	1	2	0
TOTAL	37	41	14
TL dialogues			
scopare	29	29	12
farsi	4	7	0
fottere	3(1)	1	5(0)
Other terms	1		1
TOTAL	42	45	18

Table 8: Slang references to sexual intercourse in the SL and TL dialogues

As regards slang references, Table 8 shows that once again all diatopic variation disappears in Italian (e.g. there is no difference between the British ‘shag’ and the American ‘get laid’); moreover, the overall number of such expressions is actually slightly higher in Italian in all the three series: 42 vs 37 in *QaF UK*; 45 vs 41 in *QaF USA*; and 18 vs 14 in *The L Word*.

Interestingly, there are also some cases in which slang expressions have been replaced by neutral ones. For example, the verb ‘to fuck’ has always been retained in the TL dialogues when used by male characters, but it has been often replaced by milder expressions or omitted altogether when used by female characters. For obvious reasons the trend is more marked in *The L Word*. Thus, in Example 14, two girls, Shane and Lacey, describe themselves as active sexual partners in the SL dialogues, but this is flattened in the Italian dubbed text which uses three neutral expressions. Moreover, Lacey’s question in the first line has been transformed into an expression of self-doubt,

⁴ The first figure is the number of occurrences of the “f” word as an actual reference to sexual intercourse. The figure in brackets is the overall number of occurrences in its various forms (in-form, noun, verb...), including expletives, modifiers, in questions (who/what/where the fuck...), and so on.



a comparison with a rival. Thus, Lacey appears to have been relegated into a stereotypically female role, that of the jealous, insecure girlfriend.

	Original version	Dubbed version	Back translation
Lacey	Did you like fucking her better?	È più brava di me a letto ?	Is she better than me in bed ?
Shane	No.	No.	
Lacey	Because I really liked fucking you.	A me piaceva fare sesso con te.	I used to like having sex with you.
Shane	Yeah, I liked fucking you, too, Lacey.	Anche a me piaceva farlo con te.	I used to like doing it with you too.

Example 14: *The L Word*

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of this small corpus has confirmed most of the trends identified in other studies not exclusively focused on gay-themed series. While only a handful of instances of actual censorship have been detected, in a couple of explicit sex scenes between a grown man and a young boy, many cases of subtle manipulation have been found in the translation of references to sexual orientation, acts and roles.

Undoubtedly, as noted by Ranzato (2012), lexical imbalance between English and Italian does play a role, which is particularly evident in the translation of sexual orientation terms ('straight') and of dysphemic expressions for homosexuality. The Italian dubbed dialogues adopt a more standardised register, with a limited range of translation options that are combined and modified in various ways in an attempt to reflect the many subtle nuances of the SL dialogues. The Italian lexicon of female homosexuality used in the TL dialogues appears to be especially limited. As regards male homosexuality, there is more lexical variety but the notions of queerness and campness appear to pose seemingly insurmountable problems to the Italian mainstream culture. Indeed, the most tangible instances of manipulation concern the *camp* character Alexander/Emmett in both versions of *Queer as Folk*, where *camp* appears to have been equated simply with effeminate stereotypes in the Italian version (examples 9, 10 and 11). In the translation of references to sexual practices and sexual roles, gay men are portrayed as weak, effeminate and submissive.

Perhaps in an attempt to compensate for this flattening of nuances, the translators sometimes produce Italian dialogue exchanges that have a stronger impact than the original (examples 5, 7, 10, and 11). In the dubbing of *QaF USA*, this curiously contrasts with the tendency to resort to childish names to translate references to male and female genitalia. The translators seem less coy in the translation of references to sexual acts (tables 7 and 8). However, there is some reluctance in using slang expressions when translating lines uttered by gay women in *The L Word*. As a result, in Italian they sound gentler and possibly more stereotypically feminine (Zanotti 2012).



Clearly, the corpora analysed in this paper are small and cannot be taken to reflect all the translation practices employed in the dubbing of the three series. However, despite its obvious limits, the analysis presented here has shown some interesting trends. Given the revolutionary nature of the three series and their impact when they were first broadcast in their respective countries, it can be argued that, overall, the Italian dubbed versions missed a chance to promote a change in the deeply-rooted stereotypes on homosexuality that are still held by a large proportion of the population. As Díaz Cintas (2012: 281-282) notes:

audiovisual media and its translation play a special role in the articulation of cultural concepts such as femininity, masculinity, race, and Otherness, among others. It can contribute greatly to perpetuating certain racial stereotypes, framing ethnic and gender prejudices, and presenting viewers with out-dated role models and concepts of good and bad seen as rigid, diametrically opposed.

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