

# HOLY GEE: BLASPHEMIES AND INSULTS AGAINST RELIGIOUS FIGURES IN ITALIAN FILM DUBBING

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Drawing on Agar (1994, 28), it can be claimed that 'language is loaded with culture' and as culture evolves over time and varies in space, so does language (Niyogi, 2006). Cultural and linguistic changes are also mirrored in taboo topics and curse language, which are hallmarked by 'forbidden words' varying across cultures (Allan and Burridge, 2006). The concept of taboo is culturally bound and evolves over time. Taboo topics may range from sex, disease and death to the act of naming a sacred entity (Allan and Burridge, 2006:1). When uttering taboo words or addressing taboo topics, people may feel discomfort, harm or offence (*ibid.*). For these reasons, taboo words can be censored either lightly or extensively in film dubbing, especially if they are perceived as particularly offensive in the target language, or unsuited to the target audience (Paolinelli and Di Fortunato, 2005:19). The latter, for instance, is the case of youth films, in which making a film accessible to under-age subjects prevails over the need for a faithful language rendering (Paolinelli and Di Fortunato, 2005:19; Zanotti, 2012).

This paper is aimed at investigating the rendering and change over time (if any) of the curse language of American-English films in the Italian dubbing. In particular, blasphemies and religious swearwords will be addressed. In Italy, epithets against religious figures are particularly unpleasant. According to Italian scholars (Nobili, 2007; Tartamella, 2009), in the deep-rooted Catholic Italian culture blasphemies and religious insults are ranked among the most offensive taboo words. Suffice it to say that it was only in 1999 that the Italian criminal code ceased to punish those who blasphemed. Today, under the Italian law no. 205 of 25<sup>th</sup> June 1999, blasphemies and curses against religious figures are punished with a fine. In order to corroborate how Italians rank and feel about taboo words, Tartamella (2009) carried out a survey in which he claimed that utterances against God (such as 'filthy God') or against the Virgin (such as 'filthy the Virgin') are considered by far the most vulgar swearwords an Italian could hear or utter (Tartamella, 2009:122). 2.615 Italians participated in the survey: the majority declared to be believers (57.8%) and 28.7% declared to be non-practising believers (Tartamella, 2009:121). The survey is claimed to be the largest linguistic questionnaire ever carried out in Italy on the matter (*ibid.*, 119). Another similar (if not as extensive) survey was carried out among undergraduate students in California (Jay and Janschewitz, 2008). On the basis of their survey, the authors claimed that students considered taboo words against God, such as "goddamn" as medium offensive, whereas swearwords revolving around sex, such as "cocksucker", "cunt" and "fuck" ranked the highest (Jay and Janschewitz, 2008:277). Such differences in the perception of taboo topics are underpinned in Italian film dubbing, where epithets against God or religious figures are

perceived to be so harsh as to be censored.

In light of the above, this paper is aimed at investigating whether epithets such as 'goddamn' (and its variants: 'goddamn', 'goddamn it'), 'Jesus fucking Christ' (henceforth JfC), and 'holy shit' or 'holy fuck' are used in American-English films and, if so, to what extent. In particular, the claim that blasphemies are very rare in English (Pavesi and Malinverno, 2000:76) will be either corroborated or refuted on the basis of the findings. Afterwards, light will be shed on the translations of such epithets and an analysis of their renderings will be carried out. In particular, this paper will explore whether audiovisual translators tend to provide faithful translations or acceptable equivalents of swearwords, or if, instead, they censor them. In the former case, this paper will explore to what extent the rendering is acceptable. In the latter case, this paper will investigate whether the censorship is outright or mitigated by using creative strategies or resorting to fixed translation patterns. The relevant literature claims that audiovisual translators often opt for fixed expressions which substitute certain foreign words. In doing so, they tend to adhere to translation norms (Toury, 1995; Simeoni, 1998). These substitutes are not always perfect or acceptable equivalents, but they are nonetheless used for lip-syncing reasons (Pavesi and Malinverno, 2000:77; Paolinelli and Di Fortunato, 2005:20), as well as standardisation, or aversion to risk-taking (Pym *et al.*, 2008:324ff).

In light of the above, in order to carry out a representative analysis, a corpus of 24 films has been created. The films composing the corpus include drama, comedy, action, romance and thrillers, and the years covered go from 1974 to 2015. The reason for the selection lies in the fact that those films present a high level of informal spoken discourse, ranging from street language to outright vulgarities. The films are: *Young Frankenstein* (1974), *The Gauntlet* (1977), *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), *Flashdance* (1983), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), *Hero* (1992), *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Die Hard with a Vengeance* (1995), *Kids* (1995), *City of Angels* (1998), *The Matrix* (1999), *Scary Movie* (2000), *Scary Movie 2* (2001), *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003), *The Saw* (2004), *The Saw 2* (2005), *Lucky Number Slevin* (2006), *Gran Torino* (2008), *Get Him to the Greek* (2010), *Paul* (2011), *Ted* (2012), *A Good Day to Die Hard* (2013), *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013) and *Ted 2* (2015). As stated above, the blasphemies searched in the corpus are the following: "goddamn / goddamned / goddamn (it)", "holy shit / holy fuck", and 'JfC'.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

It cannot go unnoticed that the expression 'JfC' is clearly a swearword. On the other hand, evidence is needed as far as 'goddamn' and 'holy shit / holy fuck' are concerned. In literature, they are considered swearwords (Jay, 1992; Mohr, 2013), despite losing much of their taboo-ness in the light of their increased use in everyday language (Mohr, 2013). As a matter of fact, before analysing data and translation choices, it may be useful to clarify how taboo language has evolved and, in particular, how the words in question have entered everyday life. For instance, as early as in 1992, Jay (1992:124) claimed that 'goddamn' was the fifth most used swearword after 'fuck', 'shit', 'asshole' and 'Jesus'. Furthermore, the Google Books corpora<sup>1</sup>, in particular the American English and

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1 <https://googlebooks.byu.edu/x.asp> accessed 07/12/2018

British English subcorpora, provide the following corroborating information (Table 1, 2 and 3):

*Table 1. Use of 'goddamn' in Google Books (number of instances)*

Year	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
North America	3	-	8	7	130	2.744	3.750	5.409	9.128	23.017	32.302	52.215	67.787
Great Britain	-	3	-	-	8	9	86	369	883	979	884	1.697	2.060

*Table 2. Use of 'boly shit' in Google Books (number of instances)*

Year	1880	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
North America	3	1		1	49	386	1.514	3.370	9.703
Great Britain	-	-	-	-	1	8	192	113	260

*Table 3. Use of 'JfC' in Google Books (number of instances)*

Year	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
North America	2	4	47	178	386	675
Great Britain	-	-	5	11	27	77

Although this search only considers data up to 2000, it shows an increasing trend. The following information has been retrieved from the Subzin film quote online database. As can be seen in Table 4, data highlight a pervasive use of blasphemies (Table 4):

*Table 4. Counting of 'goddamn', 'boly shit' and 'JfC' in films*

Swearwords	Counting
Goddamn	29.770 phrases in 10.163 film titles
Holy shit	7.281 phrases in 4.624 film titles
JfC	511 phrases in 452 film titles

Given the statistical relevance of these swearwords, it is now interesting to investigate if and how they are rendered in Italian dubbed films. As claimed by literature, foul language should be rendered as faithfully as possible, at the cost of sounding harsh (Fernández Fernández, 2009:212). Nonetheless, among audiovisual translators, self-censorship is a common practice (Pérez-González 2014: 130; Giampieri, 2017; Di Giovanni and Gambier 2018: 60). This is supported by budget logic (Israelsen-Hartley,

2010; Palsson *et al.*, 2013), as the more censored a film is, the larger the audience able to watch it will be (Pérez-González 2014: 130).

### 3. ANALYSIS

#### 3.1 *The corpus*

A first analysis of the corpus reveals some interesting insights. Table 5 below shows how the word 'goddamn' is translated in the corpus, together with its back translations and the word frequencies (i.e., how many times each different translation is uttered in the corpus and its corresponding percentage value).

Table 5. Translations of the word 'goddamn' and their frequencies in the corpus

Translations of 'goddamn' (headword) into Italian	Back translations	Total	%
omissions	-	55	42%
<i>maledetto, dannato, maledizione</i>	damned, damn (it)	31	24%
<i>(del) cazzo</i>	dick/cock	12	9%
<i>porca miseria/vacca/cane</i>	filthy misery, filthy cows	5	4%
<i>porca puttana/troia</i>	filthy whores	5	4%
Other (non-foul or light insults): <i>stupido, forza!, diavolo, che rottura di palle</i>	stupid, come on!, hell, that's ball-breaking	4	3%
<i>(vaf)fanculo</i>	fuck you	3	2%
<i>(che) schifo, schifoso</i>	(that's) gross	3	2%
<i>stronzo/etto, di merda, merdoso</i>	shitty, piece of shit	3	2%
<i>sacramento, santo cielo</i>	sacramental, holy heaven	3	2%
<i>fottuto</i>	humped	3	2%
euphemism: <i>cavolo</i>	euphemism: cabbage	2	1,5%
Other (foul): <i>Perdio, sono nella merda</i>	by God; I'm in deep shit	2	1,5%
Total		131	

In the majority of instances (42%) no translation is provided; in these cases, the swearword is disregarded or omitted. A fairly high share (24%) is instead represented by '*maledetto, dannato, maledizione*' (back translated as 'damned' and 'damn it'), which, however, do not convey the same intensity and rudeness of 'goddamn' (Pavesi and Malinverno, 2000:76). In Italy, translating 'goddamn' with '*maledetto, dannato, maledizione*' (back translated as 'damned') is a frequent solution owing to lip syncing, translators' self-censorship, and/or fixed equivalence (Pavesi and Malinverno, 2000:77). This, however, has given rise to forms of 'dubbese' (*ibid.*:78) and 'foreignisms' (Paolinelli and Di Fortunato, 2005:20; Fernández Fernández, 2009:212). As a matter of fact, according to

the research carried out by Tartamella (2009), '*maledetto, dannato, maledizione*' (i.e., 'damned') are not considered taboo words any more. The word '*cazzo*' ('dick/cock') (9%), instead, is ranked medium-low (*ibid.*, 123). Therefore, it could be considered an equivalent, albeit weaker than the original swearword. What comes to the fore is that only a few acceptable equivalents are present in the corpus, such as: '*porca puttana*' or '*porca troia*' ('filthy whores') (4%) and '*stronzo*' ('piece of shit'), or '*fanulo*' ('fuck off') (2% each). According to Tartamella (2009, 122), '*porca puttana*', '*porca troia*' ('filthy whores') and '*fanulo*' are ranked medium-high, whereas '*stronzo*' ('piece of shit') is ranked high. Hence, they are acceptable equivalents. '*Fottuto*' ('humped', a very light form of 'fucked') (2%) is instead considered a form of 'dubbesse' (Pavesi and Malinverno, 2000:77-78), because it is very infrequent in everyday language. Nonetheless, '*fottuto*' has started to be used by many youngsters copying film language (Fernández Fernández, 2009:212). Finally, a few instances include creative collocates or new pairs. This is the case of '*sacramento*' ('sacramental') (2%) and '*cavolo*' ('cabbage') (1,5%), which will be later addressed in detail. From the above corpus, it can be inferred that the foul language of English-American films tends to be downtoned or manipulated (Ranzato, 2009). The same conclusions are drawn by Fernández Fernández (2009:210-225). As a matter of fact, in some cases audiovisual translators downgrade the unspeakable swearwords and transform them into less offensive epithets, such as scatological insults or sexual slurs. Sometimes they use *ad hoc* swearwords, which are uttered in natural discourse (such as: '*stronzo*', back translated as 'piece of shit', or '*porca puttana*', back translated as 'filthy whores'). Alternatively, translators resort to words which sound unnatural (such as '*fottuto*', back translated as 'humped'). In some other instances, they just censor them instead. Consequently, little room is left for the truthful rendering of a character, a particular setting or even an entire plot (Zanotti, 2012:365).

Commento [AC1]: eliminato

A few last words should be spent on the Italian film rating after dubbing. An analysis of the film rating, in fact, will reveal some discrepancies (Giampieri, 2018:130-133). Table 6 and 7 here below highlight the renderings and back translations of 'goddamn' in the corpus of 24 films, dividing the films rated G (general public) from those rated NC-14 (no one under 14 admitted).

Table 6. Translation of 'goddamn' in the corpus films rated G in Italy

Goddamn (films rated G)	Back translations	Total	%
omission	-	37	49%
<i>maledetto, dannato, maledizione</i>	damn, damed	18	24%
Other (non-foul): ( <i>che</i> ) <i>schifo, cavolo, che rottura di palle, forza!, stupido</i>	(that's) gross, cabbage, that's ball-breaking, come on!, stupid	5	7%
( <i>del</i> ) <i>cazzo</i>	dick/cock	4	5%
<i>porca miseria/vacca/cane</i>	filthy misery, filthy cows	3	4%
<i>sacramento, santo cielo</i>	sacramental, holy heaven	3	4%
<i>fottuto</i>	humped	3	4%

<i>stronzo/ etto, di merda, merdoso</i>	shitty, piece of shit	2	3%
<i>porca puttana/ troia</i>	filthy whores	1	1%
Total		76	

Table 7. Translation of 'goddamn' in the corpus films rated NC-14 in Italy

<b>Goddamn</b> (films rated NC-14)	<b>Back translations</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
omission	-	18	33%
<i>maledetto, dannato, maledizione</i>	damn, damned	13	24%
<i>(del) cazzo</i>	dick/cock	8	15%
<i>porca puttana/ troia</i>	filthy whores	4	7%
Non offensive/non-foul: <i>cavolo, diavolo</i>	cabbage, devil	4	7%
<i>(vaf)fanculo</i>	fuck you	3	5%
<i>porca miseria/ vacca/ cane</i>	filthy misery, filthy cows	2	3,5%
<i>stronzo/ etto, sono nella merda</i>	piece of shit, I'm in deep shit	2	3,5%
<i>perdio</i>	by God	1	2%
Total		55	

As can be seen, discrepancies hallmark the data of the two tables. For instance, it goes without saying that omissions abound in films for the general public (49%), whereas they are less numerous in NC-14 films (33%). Instead, the back translation 'damn/damned', which badly renders 'goddamn', remains unvaried (24%). The back translation 'dick/cock' is also frequently uttered in NC-14 films (15%), whereas it is almost absent in G films (5%). Similarly, 'filthy whores' is almost unuttered in G films (1%), whereas it is more present in NC-14 films (7%).

The films which make the most extensive use of the word 'goddamn' are: *Pulp Fiction* (1994) (26 times), *Hero* (1992) (20 times), *Die Hard with a Vengeance* (1995) (15 times), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) (10 times) and *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013) (8 times). In the majority of the cases, the word 'goddamn' is censored in the Italian dubbing, as Table 8 summarizes:

Table 8. Highest frequencies and back-translations of 'goddamn' in the films composing the corpus

Translations of 'goddamn' into Italian	Back Translations	Pulp Fiction	Hero	Die Hard with a V.	Full M. Jacket	The Wolf of W. Str.
omission	-	6	6	12	4	4
<i>maledetto, dannato, maledizione</i>	damned, damn it!	1	7	1	5	3
<i>(del) cazzo</i>	dick	6	1	0	0	0
<i>accidenti</i>	dash it!	5	0	0	0	0
<i>porca miseria/vacca/cane</i>	filthy misery/cows/dogs	1	0	0	1	0
<i>porca puttana/troia</i>	filthy whores	2	1	0	0	0
<i>(che) schifo, schifoso</i>	(that's) disgusting	2	0	0	0	0
<i>cavolo</i>	cabbage	0	1	0	0	0
<i>sacramento</i>	sacramental	0	2	0	0	0
<i>stronzo/etto</i>	(little) piece of shit	1	0	1	0	0
<i>che rottura di palle</i>	ball-breaking	0	0	1	0	0
<i>fanculo</i>	fuck off	0	0	0	0	1
<i>forza!</i>	come on!	0	1	0	0	0
<i>perdio</i>	by God	1	0	0	0	0
<i>santo cielo</i>	holy Heaven	0	1	0	0	0
<i>sono nella merda</i>	I'm in deep shit	1	0	0	0	0
Total		26	20	15	10	8
% (out of 128)		20%	16%	12%	8%	6%

In *Pulp Fiction* (1994) the word 'goddamn' is either omitted (6 instances out of 26), or rendered with '*cazzo*' (back translated as 'dick/cock': 6 out of 26) and '*accidenti*' (back translated as 'dash it!': 5 out of 26). Hence, censorship is applied quite extensively. Only '*cazzo*' ('dick/cock') can be considered an acceptable equivalent, due to its vulgarity. Indeed, as outlined in the pages above, '*cazzo*' is considered a medium-low offensive swearword (Tartamella, 2009:123). In *Hero* (1992) and *Full Metal Jacket* (1977), the translation strategy is different, as it mostly revolves around the words '*maledetto, dannato, maledizione*' (back translated as 'damn', 'damn it') (7 times out of 20 in *Hero*; 5 times out of 10 in *Full Metal Jacket*). In other instances, instead, the swearword is simply omitted (6 times in *Hero* and 4 times in *Full Metal Jacket*). As pointed out by many scholars (Pavesi and Malinverno, 2000:77; Paolinelli and Di Fortunato, 2005:20), the word '*maledizione*' (back translated as 'damn') badly conveys the intensity and gravity of the swearword 'goddamn'.

With reference to the Italian translation of 'holy shit', Table 9 below reports some interesting findings.

Table 9. Translations and frequencies of 'holy shit', 'holy fuck' and 'holy dogshit' in the corpus

Translations of 'holy shit', 'holy fuck' and 'holy dogshit' into Italian	Back translations	Total	%
omission	-	14	36%
<i>cazzò</i>	dick/cock	11	28%
<i>Dio santo</i>	holy God	4	10%
<i>porca puttana/troia</i>	filthy whores	3	8%
<i>porca miseria</i>	filthy misery	2	5%
<i>merda</i>	shit	2	5%
<i>oddio</i>	oh God	1	3%
<i>stronzò</i>	piece of shit	1	3%
<i>strano</i>	how strange/weird!	1	3%
Total		39	

Only in 11 films of the corpus are the above swearwords uttered. These films are: *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), *Hero* (1992), *Die Hard with a Vengeance* (1995), *Kids* (1995), *City of Angels* (1998), *The Matrix* (1999), *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003), *Paul* (2011), *Ted* (2012), *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013) and *Ted 2* (2015). As can be noted, omissions prevail in the Italian dubbing (36%). In this case as well, omissions can take the form of outright censorship (i.e., no swearword is uttered), or of replacements using non-foul words, such as '*santa pupazzò*' (literally 'holy puppet'), or '*accidenti!*' (literally 'dash!'). After the omissions, the most frequent rendering is 'dick/cock' (28%). In other cases, appeals to divinities (such as: '*Dio santo*', back translated as 'holy God', 10%) are preferred. It may be argued that '*Dio santo*' ('holy God') and '*oddio*' ('oh God', 3%) are still blasphemies, because they misuse God's name. Nonetheless, it is self-evident that '*Dio santo*', '*oddio*', '*porca miseria*' and '*strano!*' (back translated as 'holy God', 'oh God', 'filthy misery' and 'how strange!') are by far less incisive than the original utterances. In this respect, it can be argued that self-censorship is quite common amongst audiovisual translators (Pérez-González 2014: 130; Giampieri, 2017; Di Giovanni and Gambier 2018: 60). As a matter of fact, the above renderings are instances of manipulations, which downtone the curse language of the original film. Utterly omitting swearwords without finding proper replacements is manipulative, because it alters the language of the film with the risk of "altering the whole meaning of the film" (Zanotti, 2012:365).

Finally, Table 10 here below sheds light on the translations of 'JfC', which is increasingly used in both fiction and prose, as outlined in the pages above.

Table 10. Translations of 'JfC' in the corpus

Translations of 'JfC' into Italian	Back translation	Total	%
<i>(che) stronzo</i>	(what a) piece of shit	1	20%
<i>Cristo santo</i>	holy Christ	1	20%
<i>porca miseria</i>	filthy misery	1	20%
<i>porca troia</i>	filthy whores	1	20%
<i>sono nella merda</i>	I'm in deep shit	1	20%
Total		5	

'JfC' is uttered only in 3 films composing the corpus: *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Ted* (2012) and *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013). In *Pulp Fiction* (1994), it is uttered once, when Vincent finds Mia (his boss's wife) unconscious, lying on the floor and probably dying of an overdose. The situation is very dramatic, because they had just returned home from a night out. In Italian, the words he utters are '*Cristo santo*' (back translated as 'holy Christ'). In *Ted* (2012) 'JfC' is uttered by the living teddy bear Ted, who finds himself locked in a room with a spoiled child who wants to harm him. The Italian dubbing resorts to a scatological epithet and Ted utters '*sono nella merda*' (back translated as 'I'm in deep shit'), which fits the context perfectly. In *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013), the epithet is uttered three times, all in dramatic situations: when delivering laundered money (twice) and when Jordan Belfort, the main character, is found by his wife doped and lying on the floor. In Italian, this epithet is translated as '*stronzo*', '*porca troia*' and '*porca miseria*' (back translated as 'piece of shit', 'filthy whores' and 'filthy misery', respectively). It may be argued that some of these utterances do not do justice to the hard feelings or the anger the characters experience. In particular, the first two slurs could be considered acceptable equivalents of 'JfC', because '*stronzo*' ('piece of shit') is ranked high and '*porca troia*' ('filthy whores') medium-high (Tartamella, 2009). On the other hand, '*porca miseria*' ('filthy misery'), is too weak to match the tense situation.

From a general overview, it is apparent that 'goddamn', 'holy shit' and 'JfC' are often disregarded and omitted in the Italian film versions. On the one hand, it can be inferred that Italian audiovisual translators tend to downgrade the offensive force of expletives. This is the case, for instance, of '*porca miseria*' ('filthy misery') which should render 'goddamn', 'holy shit' and even 'JfC'. In some other cases, the insults are not entirely lessened, as utterances shift from religious to scatological swearwords, such as the example '*sono nella merda*' (back translated as 'I'm in deep shit') which replaces 'JfC'. On the other hand, some swearwords lead to creative solutions, such as '*sacramento*' ('sacramental'), which will be addressed in the next section. Lastly, other swearwords undergo an outright manipulation that reverses the meaning of the utterances. This is the case, for instance, of '*santo cielo*' (back translated as 'holy Heaven') replacing 'goddamn'; '*Dio santo*' ('holy God') replacing 'holy shit' and '*Cristo santo*' ('holy Christ') replacing 'JfC'.

Commento [AC2]: eliminato

### 3.2 Extracts from the corpus

This part will provide instances of dialogues extracted from the film corpus and of their renderings into Italian. Noteworthy examples will be brought to the fore. First of all, it goes without saying that in the 1970s censorship was particularly harsh and the act of naming God was utterly prohibited, as Table 11 reveals:

Table 11. Translation of blasphemies in the Italian version of *Young Frankenstein* (1974)

Situation: Dr Frankenstein has entered the monster's room, but he suddenly changes his mind and wants to run away.

Original version	Italian dubbing
Doctor: <u>Jesus Christ</u> get me out of here!! Open this <u>goddamn</u> door, I'll kick your rotten heads in!	Dott: <u>Miseria schifosa</u> !! Tiratemi fuori di qui! Aprite se non volete che vi schiacci la testa!  Back-translation: [ <u>Filthy misery</u> ! Get me out of here! Open up, if you don't want me to crush your heads!]

It is evident that not only is the word 'goddamn' censored, but the 'Jesus Christ' appeal is also turned into '*miseria schifosa*' (back translated as 'filthy misery'). The act of calling on God for trivial purposes must have been considered inappropriate.

Another film where God naming and blasphemies are removed is '*The Gauntlet*' (1977). In this film, 'goddamn it' (uttered six times) is translated as '*dannazione*' (back translated as 'damned') and '*porca vacca*' (back translated as 'filthy cows') in two instances; instead, it is completely omitted in all other four instances (see Table 12):

Table 12. Omissions of 'goddamn' in the Italian version of *The Gauntlet* (1977)

Original version	Italian dubbing
Come on, goddamn it!	Ti vuoi sbrigare, sì o no?  Back-translation: [Will you get a move on, yes or no?]
That's 150 miles of goddamn desert	Sono 200 Km di pieno deserto  Back-translation: [That's 200 Km of full desert]
Half the goddamn police force	Metà dei suoi uomini  Back-translation: [Half his men]
Goddamn, motherfucking...	(no utterance)

In the last instance, the words 'goddamn, motherfucking..' are completely censored. This is possible because in this scene the character shows his back to the camera, so there are no lip movements to follow. Therefore, the audiovisual translators evidently preferred to censor the swearwords. In this film, it is also interesting to note that the expression 'Holy Gee' is rendered with the typical and stereotyping Italian utterance '*mamma mia!*' ('my mother!') (Table 13):

Table 13. Omission of blasphemies in the Italian version of *The Gauntlet* (1977)

Situation: Ben, a policeman, is in a bar talking with a waitress.

Original version	Italian dubbing
Ben: I've got a plane to catch. Waitress: <u>Holy Gee!</u> No way you'd get me on a plane. I mean, not after the airline pilots I've dated. I wouldn't let those assholes drive my car.	Ben: Devo prendere un aereo. W: <u>Mamma mia!</u> E chi ci mette piede su un aeroplano? Dopo aver conosciuto piloti di tutte le linee, le assicuro che io non mi lascerei guidare neanche un carretto.  Back-translation: [B: I have to take a plane. W: <u>My Mother!</u> Who's willing to put a feet on an airplane? After meeting pilots from all airlines, I can tell, I wouldn't let even drive a cart!]

From the excerpt above, other language manipulations are evident, such as censoring the swearword 'assholes' and removing the pilot dating. Although these manipulations are interesting, they go beyond the scope of this paper; therefore, they will not be dealt with any further.

In *Hero* (1992), two remarkable substitutions come to the fore. They are: '*sacramento*' and '*cavolo*' (literally 'sacramental' and 'cabbage'). Although they may appear odd, there are some sensible reasons for their choice. In particular, '*sacramento*' is uttered by the main character when addressing a man who apparently saved people after a plane crash. In such a circumstance, he utters '*sei un sacramento di santo*' (literally 'you're a sacramental saint'), instead of the original 'you're a goddamn saint'. In this case, the audiovisual translators proved to be creative, as the words 'saint' and 'sacramental' could, to some extent, collocate or at least make sense together. '*Cavolo*' ('cabbage') is instead uttered by the main character when addressing his son, because '*cavolo*' is an Italian euphemism for '*cazzo*' ('dick'), as Table 14 shows.

Table 14. Translation of blasphemies in the Italian version of *Hero* (1992)

Situation. Bernie is imparting sound advice to his son.

Original version	Italian dubbing
Bernie: It's a <u>goddamn</u> , excuse the vulgarity, jungle out there.	È un <u>cavolo</u> , scusa la volgarità, di giungla quella in cui viviamo.  Back-translation: [It is a <u>cabbage</u> , excuse the vulgarity, of jungle the one we live in].

In the excerpt above, '*cavolo*' ('cabbage') is therefore adjusted to (or better, tuned in with) the phrase which follows, i.e.: 'excuse the vulgarity' (Pavesi and Malinverno, 2000:76). It could be stated that, in this film, the audiovisual translators propose some original censoring solutions, which neither misrepresent the main character, nor affect the context. Nonetheless, in *Hero* there is the utter censorship of 'for Christ's shit', uttered at the beginning of the film, when Bernie, the main character, goes bankrupt. This utterance is rendered, again, with '*cavolo*' ('cabbage'), although in this case it is a euphemism which does not convey Bernie's anger.

A good and audacious rendering can be found in the following excerpt from *Pulp Fiction* (1994) (Table 15)

Table 15. Translation of blasphemies in the Italian version of *Pulp Fiction* (1994)

Situation: Vincent and Jules work in the world of narcotics. Jules has just communicated his desire to quit and Vincent is reacting badly.

Original version	Italian dubbing
Vincent: Jesus Christ!	V: Oh, Cristo Santo...
Jules: Don't blaspheme.	J Non bestemmiare!
Vincent: <u>Goddamn</u> it.	V: <u>Perdio</u> ...
Jules: I said, don't do that!	J: Ti ho detto di non bestemmiare!
	Back-translation: [V: Oh, holy Christ... J: Don't blaspheme! V: <u>By God</u> .. J: I told you not to blaspheme!]

In the excerpt above, '*perdio*' (back translated as 'by God') is an audacious and blasphemous rendering of 'goddamn', which fully conveys the tense situation. Furthermore, it perfectly fits with the two characters, especially Jules, who was about to quit on religious grounds. '*Perdio*' is described as a religious blasphemy by the Italian Treccani encyclopaedia.

As outlined in Tables 5-8 above, the swearword 'goddamn' tends to be either omitted or back-translated as 'damn (it)/damned'. It is hence wise, in *Pulp Fiction*, to change

strategy, although omissions still remain the preferred option.

Another interesting case of omission can be found in the film *Lucky Number Slevin* (2006). It is not the swearwords of this film which are remarkable, but a whole sentence which must have been a challenge to the audiovisual translator (Table 16):

Table 16. Translation of blasphemies in the Italian version of *Lucky Number Slevin* (2006)

Situation: Two men break into Slevin's room and want to take him away. This is what one of them says when Slevin tries to explain he is not the man they are looking for.

Original version	Italian dubbing
The <u>Virgin Mary</u> could come waltzing up with her fine ass, titties hanging out and everything. If she told me your name was <u>Jesus Christ</u> , I still gotta take you to see the Boss.	Potrebbe venire la <u>regina d'Inghilterra</u> in persona, con il suo bel culo, le tette al vento e tutto il resto, e se mi giurasse che tu sei il <u>principe Carlo</u> , dovrei portarti comunque dal Boss!  Back-translation: [The <u>Queen of England</u> could come in person with her fine ass, her teets exposed and all other stuff, and if she swore to me that you are <u>Prince Charles</u> , I should take you to the boss anyway!]

Although the words uttered are neither swearwords nor curses, the excerpt above can be considered challenging because of the act of naming and the sexualisation of religious figures. As can be noted, the translators opted for a change of the figures in question.

A few words will now be devoted to *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013). What is relevant about this film is not the translation of the word 'goddamn', which is omitted most of the times (4 out of 8), but a particular utterance. There is, in fact, a daring example of a religious swearword uttered in the Italian version, when the original film does not refer to any. Such a swearword is probably chosen in order to convey the main character's boldness and excitement (Table 17):

Table 17. Translation of blasphemies in the Italian version of *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013)

Situation: Jordan is the founder of a successful brokerage company and has made millions by betraying his clients. He is now training his new brokers.

Original version	Italian dubbing
My fucking warriors, who will not hang up the phone until their client either buys or <u>fucking</u> dies!!	I miei fottuti guerrieri che non riagganceranno il telefono fino a quando il cliente o compra o <u>perdio</u> schiatta!!  Back-translation: [My fucked warriors, who will not hang up the phone until the client either buys or <u>by God</u> drops dead!!].

The first literal rendering of '*fottuti*' ('humped') does not sound natural in Italian and gives rise to a form of 'dubbese', which has long been debated in literature (Pavesi and Malivenrno, 2000:77-78; Paolinelli and Di Fortunato, 2005:19-20). The translation choice revolving around that term is, hence, highly debatable. On the contrary, the rendering of the original utterance 'fucking' with '*perdio*' is perspicacious. As outlined above, the epithet '*perdio*' ('by God') is considered blasphemous and unpleasant in Italian. Therefore, it fits perfectly in a context where a red-faced Jordan is providing training to his brokers while shouting and cheering on the easy money they can make.

A few last words should be spent on *Ted 2* (2015), because this film represents a breakthrough in the rendering of swearwords and blasphemies (Giampieri, 2017). Table 18 and 19 below highlight interesting examples of how blasphemies can be rendered effectively.

Table 18. Translation of blasphemies in the Italian version of *Ted 2* (2015)

Situation: Ted, a living teddy bear, is imparting good news to his friend Johnny.

Original Version	Italian dubbing
Ted: Tami-Lynn and I. are gonna have a baby! Johnny: Holy shit! You?	Ted: Tami-Lynn e io. avremo un bambino! Johnny: Oh, ma che cazzo! Voi?  Back Translation: [Ted: Tami-Lynn and I. are going to have a baby! Johnny: Oh, what the cock! You?]

Table 19. Translation of blasphemies in the Italian version of *Ted 2* (2015)

Situation: Ted asked for help to a famous actor, who denied it. Ted and his friend, Johnny, are very disappointed.

Original Version	Italian dubbing
Ted: I can't believe it. That son of a bitch! Johnny: That was very selfish of him. Ted: I know, after I've watched his piece of shit movie like a hundred times. Goddamn it!	Ted: Non ci credo, figlio di puttana! Johnny: È stato proprio un grande egoista. Ted: Sì, dopo che io ho guardato quel suo film di merda un centinaio di volte. Vaffanculo!  Back Translation: [Ted: I can't believe it, son of a bitch! Johnny: He's really selfish. Ted: Yeah, after I've seen his shitty film a hundred times. Fuck him!]

It is evident that in *Ted 2* (2015) swearwords ranked medium offensive ('cock' and 'fuck you') replace blasphemies. Unfortunately, this does not occur in the whole film, as other utterances against God are utterly censored. Tables 20 and 21 highlight some examples.

Table 20. Translation of blasphemies in the Italian version of *Ted 2* (2015)

Situation: Ted has just encountered Tony, a man who kidnapped him.

Original version	Italian dubbing
Ted: Holy shit, Tony! Tony: It's so good to see you, Ted.	Ted: Porca pupazza, Tony! Tony: È bello rivederti, Ted.  Back Translation: [Ted: Filthy puppet, Tony! Tony: It's good to see you, Ted.]

Table 21. Translation of blasphemies in the Italian version of *Ted 2* (2015)

Situation: Ted is being laid off.

Original version	Italian dubbing
Boss: I can't keep you on as employee because you're technically... Ted: ...Technically not a person, yeah. Jesus Christ!	Boss: Per la legge non posso tenerti come dipendente perché mi hanno informato che tecnicamente... Tony: ...Tecnicamente non sono una persona, sì, porca pupazza!  Back Translation: [Boss: By law I cannot keep you as an employee because I was informed that technically... Tony: ..Technically I am not a person, yes, filthy puppet!]

As can be noticed above, even a trivial call on God such as 'Jesus Christ' has triggered censorship. Therefore, although *Ted 2* (2015) launches new patterns in audiovisual translation, some instances are still anchored to past habits.

### 3.3 Final Remarks

In light of the gathered data, it is important to refer to what Pavesi and Malinverno (2000:76) claimed: “Che l'ambito religioso sia interdetto più fortemente nella cultura anglosassone viene suggerito dal fatto che le bestemmie sono molto rare in inglese”: [the fact] That the religious sphere is more strongly interdicted in the Anglo-Saxon culture is suggested by the fact that blasphemies are very rare in English [my translation]. In light of the analysis carried out above, what Pavesi and Malinverno claimed is partly true, at least as far as British films are concerned. The films composing the corpus are mostly North American films; therefore, this paper can neither refute nor criticise the claim that the Anglo-Saxon culture interdicts the religious sphere. It can narrow down the second part of the statement and confine it to British English. However, it should

be remarked that some British films or series can be considered quite blasphemous (see *Monty Python's Life of Brian*, 1979).

On the one hand, this paper has provided instances supporting the hypothesis that swearing and cursing, especially against religious figures, have become quite *in vogue* in American English films (Ferraio, online). On the other hand, the assumption that Italian dubbing censors blasphemies often without proposing acceptable equivalents does not imply that Italian is a poor language as far as religious swearwords are concerned. Addressing this topic might seem going astray from the scope of this paper, but it is worthwhile mentioning. It could be speculated that in Italian films swearwords are uttered less frequently owing to the fact that the Italian language cannot count on a national *repertoire* of insults, slurs and curses as the American or English language (Ferrario, online). In Italy, in fact, swearwords are combined with regionalisms and dialects (*ibid.*). Furthermore, literature reports that 'Roman curses were much more elaborate' than the English ones (Mohr, 2013:44). In this respect, the Italian Treccani encyclopaedia lists a great deal of creative euphemisms revolving around religion which are in use today, such as: '*cribbio*' (nonsense word used instead of 'Christ'); '*porco zio*' ('filthy uncle'), '*porco qua e porco là*' ('filthy here and there'), '*porco due*' ('filthy two') (all replacing 'goddamn'); '*madosca*' (instead of calling on the *Madonna*, the Virgin) etc. In English, there is an apparently less vast *repertoire* of euphemisms, such as: 'darn', 'goshdarn (it)' (Jay, 1992:104); 'Gee'; 'dang', 'darn', 'durn' and all variants ending in '-ed' or starting with 'gold-' or 'gosh-' (The Collins Dictionary). The assumption that fewer euphemisms can be found in English corroborates the speculation that swearwords such as 'goddamn' are fairly used in everyday language and do not need as many replacement words and euphemisms as in Italian.

Commento [AC3]: eliminato

Commento [AC4]: eliminato

However, it should be pointed out that the analysis carried out in this paper only took into consideration film language. It goes without saying that everyday language can be hallmarked by a wider or smaller variety of epithets, swearwords and expletives.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Firstly, this paper shed light on the fact that epithets against religious figures or expletives using religious words, such as 'goddamn', 'holy shit', 'holy fuck' and 'JfC' have become increasingly in use in everyday language and in films. For this reason, analysing the translations and renderings of the above terms into Italian was considered interesting, especially from the perspective of language evolution. To this aim, a corpus of 24 American-English films dating from 1974 to 2015 was compiled and their original and Italian dubbed versions were analysed. What came to the fore is the fact that Italian audiovisual translators mostly omit the swearwords 'goddamn' (in 42% of the instances) and 'holy shit' / 'holy fuck' (36%), due to reasons of legal prohibition (swearwords against the divinity are fined in Italy), unsuitability, or social non-acceptance (Tartamella, 2009). Furthermore, for reasons of adherence to fixed translation patterns (Pavesi and Malinverno, 2000), the swearword 'goddamn' is often translated as '*maledetto*, *dannato*, *maledizione*', (back translated as 'damned', 'damn it') in many instances (24%), leaving little room for creative solutions. In some other instances, 'holy shit' and 'holy fuck' are replaced by calls on the divinity, such as '*Dio santo*' (back translated as 'holy God': 10%) and '*oddio*' (back translated as 'oh God': 3%). '*Cristo santo*' (back translated as 'holy Christ': 20%), instead, replaces 'JfC'. Such solutions are not effective renderings because they do

Commento [AC5]: eliminato

not convey the characters' feeling when facing a dramatic situation or experiencing a tense moment. Nonetheless, some interesting patterns emerged. For example, in the film *Hero* (1992), 'goddamn' is replaced by '*sacramento*' ('sacramental') when referring to a saint-like person; the Italian euphemism 'cabbage' is used when addressing a little boy. In addition, in both *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013), a quite daring '*perdio*' ('by God') is uttered in moments of surprise or intense excitement. Finally, in *Ted 2* (2015) swearwords such as 'fuck you' and 'cock' are used to render 'holy shit' (28%) and 'goddamn' (9%). '*Cazzo*' (back translated as 'cock') can be considered a fairly acceptable equivalent because it is considered a medium-low insult (Tartamella, 2009). An effective scatological replacement of 'JfC' is instead '*sono nella merda*' (back translated as 'I'm in deep shit') (*Ted 2*).

In conclusion, what emerged from the analysis carried out, is that, unfortunately, audiovisual translators cannot always express the linguistic potentials of the Italian language. Only in a few instances were they able to find suitable renderings and create new collocates. What would be recommendable in the years to come is that audiovisual translators should use a wider range of replacements.

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