

LANGUAGING GENDER AND GENDERING LANGUAGE

Euphemism and Dysphemism in Dubbing

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Abstract – The study is concerned with euphemistic and dysphemistic locutions that discursively construct LGBT identities in specific socio-cultural contexts through the medium of cinema. It focuses on the interlingual and cross-cultural translation carried out on a selected corpus of cinematographic dialogues, investigating how specific approaches to dubbing can unveil deeply rooted socio-cognitive mind-sets. At the same time, such translation strategies can challenge previous frames by generating new mind-sets towards gendered discourse (Sunderland 2004) and towards those public discourses on homosexuality (Baker 2005) that involve a constant linguistic ambivalence between (genuine or fake) homophilia and (covert or overt) homophobia. Both socio-cultural and linguistic attitudes highlight issues related to homophily, groupthink (Baron 2005) and group cohesiveness (Eisenberg 2007), as well as to the dynamics of (socio)linguistic in-groupness and out-groupness (Duszak 2002b). Analysis of the translation of taboo words in film dubbing from English into Italian proves effective in understanding cultural gaps, social attitudes, stereotypical “typifying” features, marginalization and dominance factors, especially when dubbing alters, emphasizes or dismisses euphemistic or dysphemistic taboo words. The present analysis intends to underscore the mutual influence of language and given socio-cultural scenarios, describing how society and individuals react to and negotiate homosexuality and the language that represents it. Gender language nourishes, and is affected by, social cognition on the double axis of “linguaging gender” and “gendering language.”

Keywords: gender; euphemism/dysphemism; (film)dubbing; identity

*To the extent that I favoured any one angle, it was the social:
language as the creature and creator of human society.*
(M.A.K. Halliday)

1. Introduction: topic and aims of the study¹

Euphemisms and dysphemisms are communicative and pragmatic strategies that encompass “clear-cut markers, such as social, cultural, gender and distance markers” (Wenzhao 1999). From a sociolinguistic viewpoint, they stimulate insightful reflection on taboo topics and, as I will argue, on their social acceptance, mitigation or avoidance. Euphemisms and dysphemisms constitute strong performatives aimed (consciously or unconsciously) at moulding identity and identity awareness (Butler 1990; Robinson 2003; Sedgwick 2003), especially when used by the weapon-like language of media (Bolinger 1980; Allan and Burridge 1991 and 2006). Within Austin’s seminal theory on “constative” and “performative” utterances, it is possible to conceive of euphemisms or dysphemisms

¹ This study is the revised and extended version of a paper presented at the “Language and Gender” section of the AIS (Associazione Italiana di Sociologia) annual Conference, which was held at the University of Naples Federico II (24-25 September, 2015) [<http://www.ais-sociologia.it/call-for-papers/convegno-di-fine-mandato-2012-2015-il-genere-nella-contemporaneita-tra-sfide-e-risorse-call-for-papers-4323/>].

as capable of triggering specific actions and/or emotionally “loaded” images in the interlocutor, so as to blur, in some cases, the distinction between illocutionary acts (what is really meant by the utterance) and perlocutionary acts (the factual consequences of those acts, Austin 1962).

The present study is concerned with the use of euphemistic and dysphemistic locutions and patterns that discursively construct LGBT identities in specific socio-cultural contexts through the medium of cinema. The study focuses on the interlingual and cross-cultural translation carried out on a selected corpus of cinematographic dialogues, investigating how specific approaches to dubbing can unveil deeply rooted socio-cognitive mind-sets. At the same time, such translation strategies can also challenge previous frames by generating new mind-sets towards gendered discourse (Sunderland 2004) and towards those public discourses on homosexuality (Baker 2005) that involve, as I shall argue, a constant linguistic ambivalence between (genuine or fake) homophilia and (covert or overt) homophobia. Both socio-cultural and linguistic attitudes highlight issues related to homophily,² groupthink (Baron 2005) and group cohesiveness (Eisenberg 2007), as well as to the dynamics of (socio)linguistic in-groupness and out-groupness (Duszak 2002b).

Predictably, film dialogues are not the same as naturally occurring speech (a difference on which I shall return later), but for my present purposes it is relevant to notice, firstly, how film directors aim to recreate ordinary speech and, secondly, how and why such dialogues are altered in the translation process. Furthermore, the noteworthy influence of cinema has been amply demonstrated (Leap 2014; De Marco 2012 and 2006; Motschenbacher 2010; Lind 2004) to shape our daily language, culture and world-views. Although, of course, the synergy of sound and image has an extraordinary power to resist and contest the established order and hegemonic discourses, the policies of the *mainstream* cinematographic industry and the massive impact of its verbal-visual messages cannot be overlooked, especially with regard to the interpersonal implementation of gender and gender attitudes:

Mass media are one of the tools through which these [prejudiced] behaviors and roles are filtered and made socially visible. In so doing, they are primarily responsible for the reproduction and perpetuation of stereotypes and common places [...] *Cinema has a strong power to shape people's views according to the norms and clichés that the dominant social groups impose.* There are many strategies that cinema implements in order to meet the audience's expectations, thereby instilling certain ideas and habits that in a more or less subtle way contribute to making social relationships more and more linked to gender-related prescriptions. (De Marco 2006, p. 2, my emphasis)

The hyperbole *prescriptions* in the quote above could be perplexing, yet one must reflect on how communicative events and speech acts in films and multimedia products such as videos etc, facilitate the “iterability” of utterances (Derrida 1982), i.e. their repetition and alteration,³ as well as Bakhtinian “double voicing” and “polyphony”, namely the plurality

² “Homophilia” refers here to the quality of “advocating or supporting the interests, civil rights, and welfare of homosexuals”, while “homophily” concerns the sociological category rooted in the inclination of individuals to associate with similar other individuals, as expressed in the first seminal study by Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954), who described both “status” homophily (individual associating because of their similar social status) and “value” homophily (individuals associating because of similar views and opinions), thus focusing on variables such as age, gender, ethnicity, religion, education etc.

³ For Derrida, every iteration and repetition of the sign is an alteration and it engenders an infinity of new contexts: “Every sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, spoken or written, as a small or large unity, can be cited, put between quotation marks; thereby *it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new*

of discourses that are enacted and reinforced – in this case through cinema – by the individual when s/he perceives a word or an expression and associates it to dialogues s/he perceived before, in different contexts and co-texts.

Analysis of the translation of taboo words in dubbing from English into Italian proves an effective tool towards the understanding of cultural gaps, social attitudes, stereotypical “typifying” features, marginalization and dominance factors. This especially occurs when dubbing alters, emphasizes or dismisses the euphemistic or dysphemistic nature of taboo words, as I will show in my case studies. More poignantly, the audiovisual translation process sheds light on the modalities through which specific verbo-visual-gestural patterns engage in building distinctive socio-cultural discourse frames concerning gender (male/female binarism), homosexuality (gay/hetero binarism) and, more generally, the treatment of sexual orientations.

2. Theoretical background

In this study, the analysis of film dubbing intends to underscore the mutual influence of language and given socio-cultural scenarios, aiming to describe the way society and individuals react to and negotiate homosexuality and the language that comes to represent it. Individual speech acts in given micro-communities (Duszak 2002b, p. 4) simultaneously mediate and produce specific socio-cultural attitudes, as they trigger emotional responses while shaping identities. Gender language nourishes, and is affected by, social cognition on the double axis of “languaging⁴ gender” – that is, constructing, representing, displaying, in one word, “doing” gender identities – and “gendering language” – that is, constructing and deploying “loaded” language on and about gender. Both these processes entail the notions of psychological and social identity and in both processes the use of euphemisms or dysphemisms plays a major role. Thus, the investigation of euphemisms/dysphemisms in speech, especially dialogic interpersonal communication, needs a multidisciplinary framework involving the various socio-cognitive and socio-linguistic domains which have enhanced our understanding of the notions of identity, taboo and linguistic variation: primarily, for my present purposes, a discourse analysis informed by a constructionist perspective emphasizing a participatory notion of social knowledge, one wherein “knowledge can not be dissociated from knowers” (Riley 2007, p. 6).

contexts in an absolutely non saturable fashion. This does not suppose that the mark is valid outside its context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any center of absolute anchoring. This citationality, duplication, or duplicity, this iterability of the mark is not an accident or anomaly, but is that (normal/abnormal) without which a mark could no longer even have a so-called “normal” functioning. What would a mark be that one could not cite? And whose origin could not be lost on the way?” (Derrida 1982, p. 12, my emphasis).

⁴ Halliday includes “languaging” in one of his definitions of linguistics as the inquiry into “how people exchange meanings by ‘languaging’” (Halliday 1985). Investigating the prominent role of memory, cognition and affect, Cortese defines “languaging” as the “rooting of the psychological and moral individual in the local social dimension” (Cortese 2001, p. 199). Through ‘languaging’, she argues, “memory reverberates onto new contexts; our own experience of the world, and the network of mental representations which builds on it, expands by appropriating the experience of others within powerful motions of affect” (Cortese 2001, p. 200). From the perspective of translation studies, see Neubert (1997), quoted in Cortese and Duszak (2005). It is worthwhile noting Hymes’ explanation of the whole title of the well-known collection, “*Languaging in and across Human Groups: Perspectives on Difference and Asymmetry*,” in his Preface (Hymes 2001, p. 190).

Discourse analysis, in the sense of the study of language in use, takes a functional view of language and assumes, as famously stated over thirty years ago, that its scope “cannot be restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent of the purposes or functions which those forms are designed to serve in human affairs” (Brown and Yule 1983, p. 1). Slightly over one decade later, the claim was clearly reformulated from an interdisciplinary perspective:

Discourse analysis is not strictly a unified discipline with one or few dominant theories and methods of research; instead, it exhibits a multiplicity of approaches and interdisciplinarity [...] Interdisciplinary study is indispensable, since it is almost impossible to separate discourse from its uses in the world and in social interactions; as a result, linguistic tools alone are not sufficient for its comprehensive study. (Georgakopoulou 1997, p. 29)

Later still, we find a growing awareness of the relevance of linguistic tools in the so-called “linguistic turn” within the social sciences, more precisely the study of the relationship between social structures and thought. Importantly, in defining the approach of the sociology of knowledge to the “maintenance of social reality and the social knowledge system”, Riley (2007, p. 3) points out that knowledge is not immanent but conveyed by social practices and stresses the wide-ranging nature⁵ of such a methodology:

The sociology of knowledge embraces the whole range of a society’s intellectual output, including its belief systems and ideologies, its collective representations, its theories and discourses and its culture, as well as the social practices that vehiculate them. (Riley 2007, p. 6)

As members of a social community, individuals make sense of specific real-life situations, they bestow ethical and moral values on them and they constantly communicate and reverberate them. In the wake of Vigotskian socio-constructivism,⁶ Riley (2007, p. 9) sees personal identity as “essentially social” and, by quoting Berger, underscores the paramount role of language and of interaction:

Language is *both the foundation and the instrumentality* of the social construction of reality. Language focalizes patterns and objectivates human experience. It is the principal means by which an individual is socialized to become an inhabitant of the world [...] and it also provides the means by which, *in conversation with others*, the common world becomes plausible to him. (Berger 1970, p. 379, quoted in Riley 2007, p. 18, my emphasis)

⁵ From a diachronic perspective, it is relevant to note that philosopher Giambattista Vico is often credited as one of the pioneers of the constructionist approach. Vico's ideas mainly concerned the relationship between truth, knowledge, the origins of language and the desire of the human mind to create knowledge. As Warrick effectively notes, Vico’s main postulation was that “the human mind can only know what the human mind has made” (Warrick 2001, p. 9), e.g. in his study of geometry and language, where he stated that “*we demonstrate geometry because we make it*” (Vico [1710], 1982). In analyzing Vico’s study of the origins of Latin language, Warrick lays stress on the overlapping of “verum” and “factum” in the philosopher’s system: “Vico took as his thesis the identity of the true with what is made or done [...] by pointing out that the Latin words “verum (the true) and “factum” (what is made) are interchangeable” (Warrick 2001, p. 9).

⁶ Constructivism only refers here to the sociology of knowledge and of language. The present study does not take into account the essentialist/constructivist dichotomy that has been shaping a fervid debate in Gender and Queer Studies since 1990s (Craig 2012; Nagoshi *et al.* 2013). On the contrary, my research points to the ways film and filmic language can shape specific mind-frames about gender and homosexuality. Although the analyzed corpus of my ongoing research includes case studies focusing on the representation of heterosexual and homosexual women/men, for reasons of space and consistency within the study, the present discussion is focused on three case studies concerned with male homosexuality.

From this perspective, it is easier to see how the language employed in films or multimedia that aim to recreate “real life situations” and authentically occurring speech comes to affect the future speech of the spectators, allowing them to build what Berger named “cognitive and moral norms” and “theoretically-articulated” world-views:

On this linguistic base is erected the edifice of interpretative schemes, cognitive and moral norms, value systems and, finally, theoretically-articulated “world-views” which, in their totality, form the world of [the] collective “representations” of any given society. (Berger 1970, p. 376, quoted in Riley 2003, p. 19)

Thus, cinematographic discourse, as well as pop culture in general, are powerful vehicles for the depiction of credible life situations that both mirror and shape social behaviors and opinions. They favor the identification and empathy, or the detachment and disengagement, of the audience, thus encouraging their solidarity or their prejudicial rejection. For this reason, the treatment of gender and homosexuality in media coverage is highly significant in terms of strengthening stigmatization and prejudice or, from a more encouraging perspective, in terms of overcoming discrimination and intolerance.

The pertinence and advantage of an integrated analysis of the relationships between the psychological, social, cultural and linguistic elements that shape one’s reality, especially in the study of language and gender, was conspicuously noted by Crawford when arguing for a linguistic approach in terms of gender rather than sex differences:

Conceptualizing language as dynamic and fluctuating in response to speakers’ goals and intentions in particular social circumstance [...] suggests the use of interpretive research such as ethnomethodology, speech act analysis, and discourse analysis”. (Crawford 1996, p. 17)

[...]

The statement is particularly relevant when the interrelation of language and gender is at stake, When gender and language are placed in a social constructionist framework, different questions emerge than those that proceeded from a sex difference perspective. (Crawford 1996, p. 18)

When, for instance, speakers use dysphemistic terms to refer to women, homosexuals or to any other minority groups they build a moral image in the mind of the listener or (in Goffmanian terms) of the over-hearer/eavesdropper. The same, it could be claimed, happens when people absorb certain expressions from cinematographic discourse, so as to form and/or stigmatize precise “collective representations” both in the minority group that is being labeled and in those who are external to it.

Identity is mainly attributed to a human being by other human beings (“we do need other people to tell us what we are and they do so all the time”, as thoroughly argued by Riley 2003, p. 86). Therefore, also the fictive language of audiovisual media, due to its power of influence, informs us on the multiple ways social identity can be established or negotiated. From a social constructionist perspective, language is to be seen as “a set of strategies for negotiating the social landscape”, since “talk is a powerful resource [...] in influencing other people, enlisting their help, offering them companionship, protecting ourselves from their demands, and presenting ourselves as having the qualities that they (and we) admire” (Crawford 1995, p. 17). The dichotomy between “they” and “we” becomes a subtly ambivalent game of mutual identity attributions. In this respect, Riley significantly speaks of “membershopping strategies” that are knowledge- and language-based: individual identity is often created “from a *communicative and epistemic autobiography* consisting on the experience and knowledge acquired as a member of that configuration of groups” (Riley 2003, p. 113).

If we think, as a key example, of the highly misogynist, homophobic and dysphemistic language employed in rap culture,⁷ the identification of young people with their idols obviously encourages affiliation or, on the side of the detractors, non-alignment. As argued by Duszak, “in order to exercise them [alignments or non-alignments] in social life we must be capable of conveying, and receiving, messages of solidarity and of detachment” (Duszak 2002b, p. 1). Among the numerous examples of overt homophobia in rap or hip-hop music and culture that have been causing a turmoil within LGBT communities, one can refer to the case of extremely popular rapper Eminem, who, in some lyrics, has used homophobic (as well as misogynist) expressions such as “I want to break a table over the back of a couple of faggots and crack it in half”; “you fags think it’s all a game”; “all you lil’ faggots can suck it”. When interviewed and challenged by the mainstream magazine *Rolling Stone*, he asserted that he never really “equated those words to actually mean homosexual [...] It was more like calling someone a bitch or a punk or asshole” (Hiatt 2013).⁸

Besides associating the offensive terms “faggot” and “fag” to other equally offensive terms belonging to the semantic fields of (misogynist) sex, scatology and animal abusives and to a vulgar register on which I will return later with regard to cinema, Eminem deploys the specific kind of “irony” that, according to Baker, clearly implies homophobia. The utterer of the curse words, Baker maintains, usually states or pretends to imply that “it was only a joke”, thus “making the interlocutor feel oversensitive or humourless” (2005, p. 220). Using such derogatory epithets construes a specific “gendered discourse” and precise “gendered ways of seeing the world” (Sunderland 2004) that enhance a prejudicial approach to homosexuality. In this case, Eminem fans, through identification⁹ and indirect interaction with their idol are likely to iterate those expressions in general speech, reinforcing group-cohesiveness and groupspeak through social and linguistic camaraderie. Thus, such a linguistic profile that emphasizes the *us/them* distinction is likely to exacerbate the fact that “others” are also “those who cannot speak *our* language” (Duszak 2002b, p. 1). Various codes can then be used (and repeated to the point of reification), while their inferences, as stated by Duszak, can “turn into symbols of ideologies”:

⁷ Although this study focuses on film dialogue and dubbing, rap culture is taken here as a key example of a mass culture product that has both a context-spamming market and an influential socio-cultural and linguistic impact. The misogynist and homophobic stance that many rap singers take is here emblematic of the above-quoted membership strategies favouring alignments or dis-alignments, tolerance or prejudice.

⁸ “So that word was just thrown around so freely back then. It goes back to that battle, back and forth in my head, of wanting to feel free to say what I want to say, and then [worrying about] what may or may not affect people. And, not saying it’s wrong or it’s right, but at this point in my career – man, I say so much shit that’s tongue-in-cheek. I poke fun at other people, myself. But the real me sitting here right now talking to you has no issues with gay, straight, transgender, at all. I’m glad we live in a time where it’s really starting to feel like people can live their lives and express themselves. And I don’t know how else to say this, I still look at myself the same way that I did when I was battling and broke” (Eminem, in Brian Hatt 2013).

⁹ In his study of hip-hop related anglicisms in German, Berns points out words, phrases and particular features of Black English (such as the ending *-z* or articles like *tha* or *da*) that are very common among German youth and used to identify with the global hip-hop community (Berns and Schlobinski 2003). A similar analysis of the words *nigga*, *shit*, *fuck*, *ass* and *bitch* appears in Beers Fägersten (2008) and in the analysis of code-switching and code-mixing in Terkourafi (2010), a sociolinguistic study of hip-hop as a globalized phenomenon. See also Androutsopoulos and Scholz (2003).

Both “we” and “they” can be skillfully managed in discourse in order *to construct, redistribute, or change the social values of ingroupness and outgroupness* [...] that possession is a [linguistic] sign of ingroupness for some and a source of social stigmatization or rejection for others. (Duszak 2002b, p. 6, my emphasis)

Due to their ability to stigmatize, reject, tolerate or, conversely, to accept difference, therefore, lexical choices or phrases can change the linguistic profile of a social domain, they can constitute “effective subcultures and nested communities”, producing regional and even global patterns of “shared, similar communicative strategies in specialist networks” (Gumperz and Levinson 1996, p. 12). Context is paramount here, since social meanings are always enacted through discourse and relative to a particular context of use: “language serves as a tool for the expression of social identities in terms of cultural, national, ethnic, professional, gender or political affiliations” (Duszak 2002c, p. 213). As a result, Duszak argues, identity construction and management is a dynamic process “that interacts with a variety of discourse configurations, such as recipient design, genre characteristics, intentions and goals” (*ibid.*). In this respect, it is useful to refer to Hymes’s earlier emphasis on the conflation of the “referential” and the “stylistic” functions of language: “languages have conventional features, elements and relations serving referential (‘propositional’, ‘intentional’, etc) meaning, and they have conventional features, elements and relations that are stylistic, serving social meaning” (Hymes, 1974, p. 146) and the two functions constantly overlap. Similarly, in his social semiotic system of signs, Halliday repeatedly highlights the “mutual creativity” of context, interpersonal meaning and social meaning:

If we say that linguistic structure “reflects” social structure, we are really assigning to language a role that is too passive [...] Rather we should say that linguistic structure is the realization of social structure, *actively symbolizing it in a process of mutual creativity*. Because it stands as a metaphor for society, *language has the property of not only transmitting the social order but also maintaining and potentially modifying it* (this is undoubtedly the *explanation of the violent attitudes that under certain social conditions come to be held by one group towards the speech of others*) [...] *Variation in language is the symbolic expression of variation in society: it is created by society, and helps to create society in its turn*”. (Halliday 1978, p. 255, my emphasis)

3. Methodological framework

In the light of the theoretical background described above, this study focuses on the socio-linguistic shaping of LGBT identity through the lens of Italian audiovisual translation (AVT) of American films. As mentioned, cinema both mirrors reality and “distorts it by constructing certain images and clichés that grip the audience and mould their perception of the world” (Díaz Cintas 2009, p. 8):

Given the power exerted by the media, it is not an exaggeration to state that AVT is the means through which not only information but also the assumptions and values of a society are filtered and transferred to other cultures. Films and other audiovisual productions now represent one of the primary means through which commonplaces, stereotypes and manipulated views about social categories (women, blacks, Arabs, homosexuals, religious minorities) are conveyed: dubbing, voiceover and subtitling enable such views to be made accessible to wider audiences unfamiliar with the language of the original production. (Díaz Cintas 2009, pp. 8-9)

Through the translation of film dialogue in its audio-verbal-gestural components, the target culture is revealed in its ideological frames, religious and moral beliefs. More specifically, the present analysis considers sexual taboos, constructed and deployed through euphemistic or dysphemistic language, affecting the representation of homosexual identity. As Marcella de Marco argues, “film, translation and sociological studies have a lot in common”, and “the way in which images are portrayed and dialogue dubbed or subtitled acquires social and ideological connotations because of their impact on the audience’s feelings and their perception of reality”, especially when such reality directly involves those social categories “whose voices have long been silenced because they were minorities in a Western-patriarchal-heterosexual social system” (De Marco 2009, p. 177). As I will argue in the case studies below, quite a number of swear words related to homosexuality are commonly softened and sanitized into conceptual metaphors (Lakoff 1994) such as, for instance, SEX IS EATING or SEX IS A GAME, that favour either mitigation or verbal abuse through an intense process of lexicalization and through connotative language. These verbal images, both euphemistic and dysphemistic, represent, to various degrees, homosexuality as perversion, as a childish game, as “feminization” or “devirilization” of the gay male or (socially disagreeable) masculinization of the homosexual woman, thus reproducing the same sexist framework that has long marked gender stereotypes, women’s roles and sexual dimorphism in western hegemonic socio-cultural domains (see among others Lakoff 1975; Cortese 1992; Tannen 1986, 1990, 1993; Crawford 2000, 2006; Spender 1980; Douthwaite 2007; Mills 2008; Zimman, Davis and Raclaw 2014; Mooney and Betsy 2015). The present analysis of film dialogues and dubbing takes into account the vast amount of critical research in the field¹⁰ that revealed, and then further investigated, all the technical difficulties that such a hybrid translation normally encounters during the production process. This long and complex procedure includes, as Martínez thoroughly explains, several phases and manipulations that significantly modify the first draft of the script translation.¹¹ Due to lip-synchronization, moreover, dubbing is famously a kind of constrained translation that unavoidably alters the source text. On a more conceptual level, as remarked by several scholars (among others, see especially Díaz Cintas 2014 and Pavesi 2008), dubbing is also “constrained” because of its cross-cultural nature. Translating for the screen, especially popular films

¹⁰ The rise and proliferation on screen translation studies has famously given rise to the concept of “dubbese”, i.e. the language of dubbing as a specific discourse that deserve close scrutiny. O’Connell underlines how AVT studies is a field of research that has developed exponentially over the last two decades, “clearly deserving of attention, not least because of its increasingly important role in the dissemination of popular culture through the audiovisual media” (2007, 120). In “The language of dubbing: a matter of compromise”, Chaume analyzes “dubbese” and its frequent use of calques and the balance between planned and spontaneous speech that results in “an *orality* which may seem spontaneous and natural, but which is actually planned or [...] feigned, false, *prefabricated*” (Chaume 2012, p. 82).

¹¹ “Film script translation for the purposes of dubbing is one of the most peculiar disciplines within the field of translation. For one thing, the text delivered by the translator is not definitive, indeed it is not even one of the final phases of the overall project. The translator produces a text which will serve as the starting point for a lengthy and complex process during which the text will pass through many hands and operations, which may be more or less respectful of the original translation. The audiovisual dubbing process comprises several closely linked phases, which must follow an established order and rhythm, something akin to a production line. If one of these phases is delayed or runs into problems the entire line may be affected. Also, so many different people are involved that problems do tend to occur” (Martínez 2004, p. 3). On the history, theoretical background and linguistic strategies of AVT see also Baccolini, Bollettieri Bosinelli, Gavioli (1994); Bollettieri Bosinelli (2002); Orero (2004); Azzaro (2005); Di Giovanni (2005); Taylor (2006, 2003, 2000); O’Connell (2007); (Díaz-Cintas (2009, 2015); Pavesi (2008, 2005, 1994); Chaume (2012); Bogucki (2013); Chiaro (2014, 2008); Pavesi, Formentelli, Ghia (2014).

that are commercial blockbusters, involves problems related to censoring and censorship (Allan, BurrIDGE 2004, p. 24)¹² and to those moral codes of linguistic conduct that govern and frame the target culture. Therefore, dubbing clearly requires and reveals strategies of adequacy or acceptability (Díaz-Cintas 2004, p. 29) that, in the case of downtoning or emphasizing taboo language, disclose patterns of ideology both in the source and in the target socio-cultural domains. It is for this reason that descriptive translation studies alone can not fully meet the requirements of a thought-through analysis of AVT. On the contrary, such an analysis should point, again, towards interdisciplinarity¹³ and, more precisely, to:

A methodology that neither prioritizes broad concerns with power, ideology and patronage to the detriment of the need to examine representative examples of text, nor contents itself with detailed text-linguistic analysis while making do with sketchy and generalized notions of context. (Harvey 2000, p. 466)

It is across this double interpretive axis covering language and context that the present study is situated, aiming to suggest the reasons why dubbing often alters the source dialogues and shapes a specific socio-cultural and ideological languaging of gender. Therefore, also bearing in mind the extra-linguistic elements that are factored into the socio-economic and ideological imperatives in film industry, it is crucial to refer to the concept of “patronage” originally expressed by Lefevre in 1985, namely “the [...] powers (persons, institutions) which help or hinder the writing, reading and rewriting” and that “can be exerted by persons [...], groups of persons [...], a social class, a royal court, publishers [...] and, last but not least, the media” (Lefevre 1985, p. 228). As argued by Díaz Cintas, audiovisual products are much more exposed to commercial forces and to ideological, economic and social status: “in the case of AVT it opens the doors to the study of the state’s interference through film censorship or cinema legislation (screen quotas, dubbing and subtitling licences, financial subsidies) and the participation of higher bodies and authorities” (Díaz Cintas 2004, p. 32; see also Pavesi 2005).¹⁴

The corpus for this study has been selected from films whose Italian dubbing reveals major alterations concerning taboo language in its euphemistic or dysphemistic elements, thus disclosing specific ideological traits of sexism, homophobia or politically correct homophilia. For reasons of space, the analysis only concentrates on content synchrony, i.e. the synchrony that “encompasses all the verbal challenges involved in the

¹² “We shall use the phrase “the censorship of language” only for institutional suppressions of language by powerful governing classes, supposedly acting for the common good by preserving stability and/or moral fibre in the nation. The phrase “the censoring of language” encompasses both the institutionalized acts of the powerful and those of ordinary individuals: everyone censors his/her own or another’s behaviour from time to time, and for such an occasion s/he can be justly described as a censor” (Allan, BurrIDGE 2004, p. 24).

¹³ On the need of interdisciplinarity in AVT and especially on the fruitful interface of AVT studies and Discourse Analysis see Díaz-Cintas (2004b) and Pan (2014).

¹⁴ Although the present research does not involve strictly political censorship, it is relevant to refer to specific studies that already in 1990s underscored how dubbing, more than many other kinds of translation, had been manipulated for the sake of ideology and propaganda in dictatorial regimes. See Brandt (1995) on censorship in the Federal Republic of Germany; Danan’s political reading of hegemonic languages in dubbing (1991); Ballester (1995) on dubbing in Franco’s Spain; Ganz-Blättler (1994) on the case study of American series *Magnum P.I* in Federal Germany, whose dubbing omitted all references to the Nuremberg Trials and Nazi war criminals.

dubbing process” (Whitman-Linsen 1992, p. 19)¹⁵ and considers examples of equivalence/non-equivalence in the translation of dialogues, as well as of neutralization/downtoning or, quite the reverse, increase of vulgarity by substitution or by hyperbolic euphemisms. Equivalence especially appears in the translation of dysphemistic epithets or overtly homophobic slurs, while non-equivalence appears in the translation of equally dysphemistic terms that are rendered with euphemistic expressions or with a wide range of cross-varietal synonyms. In the cases of the most evident changes operated by dubbing, I only analyze those expressions or dialogue segments that do not present technical problems of lip-synch and whose lack of semantic equivalence in the target text is not due to the limits imposed by phonetic equivalence. For each dialogue I provide the original and the dubbed Italian version, while in some cases, due to the salience of some expressions, I also provide my back translation or the translation into other languages. Finally, the present study only investigates dubbing and does not take into account subtitling, because of two main reasons: 1) unlike subtitling, dubbing has to be taken at face value, since viewers can not access the source text on screen and are not able to infer linguistic manipulation, whereas this could happen with subtitles; 2) dubbed versions are, most of the time, the versions shown in cinema theatres (thus directly operating on the audience’s cognitive and emotional response, on a psycholinguistic level), as well as those still favoured for home vision by a large amount of Italian people (based on empirical evidence).

The selected films are:

1) *The Hangover*. American comedy by Todd Phillips, 2009, distributed in Italy by Warner Bros; US Box Office: \$ 277.3 M; Rating: R (for pervasive language, sexual content including nudity, some drug material). Italian title: *Una notte da leoni*.

2) *I Love You Phillip Morris*. American comedy-drama by Glenn Ficarra and John Requa, 2009, distributed in Italy by Lucky Red; US Box Office: \$ 20.7 M; Rating: R (for sexual content including strong dialogue, and language). Italian title *Colpo di fulmine - Il mago della truffa*.

3) *A Simple Man*. American drama film by Tom Ford, 2009, distributed in Italy by Archibald Films; Us Box office \$9.1M; Rating: R (for some disturbing images and nudity/sexual content). Italian title: *A Simple Man*.

3.1. Policies in dubbing – Case study 1. The Hangover

Through some of its emblematic scenes, the film *The Hangover* serves here the purpose of introducing the topics of taboo language and the use of euphemisms or dysphemisms in dubbing. The film is an adult comedy showing the adventures and debauchery of Phil, Stu, Doug and Alan, four friends who have a wild bachelor party in Las Vegas. At the beginning, they get drugged with a date rape drug. They wake up (“hangover”) in a total chaos, there is a tiger in their hotel room, they have no recollection of what happened and

¹⁵ In 1992, Whitman-Linsen classified three categories of dubbing synchrony: (1) *visual/optical synchrony*; (2) *audio/acoustic synchrony*; (3) *content synchrony*. “Visual/optical synchrony is then broken down into *lip synchrony* proper, *syllable synchrony* and *kinetic synchrony*. Audio/acoustic synchrony covers *idiosyncratic vocal type*, *paralinguistic/prosodic elements* (tone, timbre, intonation and tempo) and *cultural specifics* such as regional accents and dialects. Content synchrony is understood to encompass all the verbal challenges involved in the dubbing process” (1992, p. 19). On synchronization and more in general on dubbing, see also Perego and Taylor (2012).

Doug, the groom-to-be, is missing. The plot then continues as they try to understand what happened and to find their friend.¹⁶

Although the film is not gay-themed, nor does it present a direct depiction of LGBT identity, there are some scenes that deserve attention and that can foster reflection. The very first scene portrays the bride-to-be: she is in fervent preparation of her elegant wedding and she anxiously tries to reach both her fiancé and his three friends over the telephone. None of them answers and we hear voicemail messages. One of them contains a homophobic statement, as shown in Table 1:

<i>English</i> Hey, this is Phil. Leave me a message or don't. Do me a favor, don't text me. <i>It's gay.</i>	<i>Italian</i> Ciao, sono Phil. Lasciate un messaggio se volete, ma per favore non mandate sms. <i>Roba da gay.</i>
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Table 1 (my emphasis)

Phil is the most undisciplined character, he has a macho narcissistic mind-frame and he is the one who uses taboo language most. By referring to being gay as something “uncool” to be avoided, he takes an overtly homophobic, derogatory stance. “It’s gay” – translated almost literally in Italian as “it’s gay stuff” – is a common dysphemistic expression that equates being gay with being negative. Soon afterwards, though, a stronger dysphemistic expression (“faggot”) is translated with an alternative that is not even a cross-varietal synonym but a totally different locutionary act, in a vulgar register related to the scatological semantic field. Stu’s conservative girlfriend, Melissa, is not happy about the imminent bachelor party and the following conversation takes place between the two:

<i>English</i>	<i>Italian</i>	<i>Back Translation</i>
Stu: What is the matter? M: I don't know. Melissa: I hope you're not gonna go to some strip club when you're up there. Stu: Melissa, we're going to Napa Valley. I don't even think they have strip clubs in wine country. Melissa: Well, I'm sure if there is one, Phil will sniff it out. Stu: It's not gonna be like that. Besides, you know how I feel about that. Melissa: I know, I know. It's just boys and their bachelor parties, <i>it's gross.</i> Stu: You're right, it is <i>gross.</i> Melissa: Not to mention it's pathetic. Stu: Those places are <i>filthy.</i>	Ma che ti prende? Lascia stare. Spero solo non giriate per strip club. Melissa, andiamo nella Napa Valley. Non credo ci siano strip club nella regione del vino. Eh, ma se ce n'è uno, di certo Phil lo scoprirà. Non sarà come credi. E poi lo sai come la penso su certe cose. Lo so, lo so. È solo che questi addii al celibato <i>io li trovo schifosi.</i> È vero, hai ragione. Sono <i>schifosi.</i> Per non dire patetici. Quei posti sono <i>immondi.</i>	What's wrong with you? Just leave it. I just hope you won't hang around in strip clubs. Melissa, we are going to Napa Valley. I don't think there are strip clubs in the wine country. Well, if there is one, Phil will sure find it. It won't be as you think. Then, you know how I feel about certain things. I know, I know. It's just that these bachelor parties... <i>I find them gross.</i> It is true, you're right. They are <i>gross.</i> Not to say pathetic. Those places are <i>filthy.</i>

¹⁶ The film won the Golden Globe Award for best comedy and received numerous accolades, as well as both critical and popular acclaim. Moreover, it was a commercial success, becoming the second highest-grossing R-rated comedy in the United States. It also had a major impact on Caesars Palace (the hotel where it is set) and on tourism in Las Vegas. Lawrence reported that in 2013 hotel guests still quoted lines from the film; *Hangover*-themed slot machines were created in casinos all over the city; the Caesars Palace gift-shop produced and sold thousands of *Hangover*-related souvenirs (Lawrence 2013).

<p>M: Yeah. Melissa: And the worst part is.....that little girl.....grinding and dry humping the fucking stage up there.....that's somebody's daughter up there.</p> <p>Stu: I was just gonna say that. Melissa: See? I just wish your friends were as mature as you. Stu: They are mature, actually. You just have to get to know them better. <i>Phil:(yelling from outside): Paging Dr. Faggot.</i> Phil: <i>Dr. Faggot!</i></p> <p>Stu: I should go. Melissa: That's a good idea, <i>Dr. Faggot.</i></p>	<p>Sì. E la cosa peggiore è vedere...una ragazzina... che sculetta e si struscia <i>su una merda di lurido palo</i>...quella ragazzina "ha un padre e una madre"</p> <p>S: Insieme l'abbiamo detto! Vedi? Vorrei che I tuoi amici fossero maturi come te! Loro sono maturi. È solo che tu....non li conosci bene.</p> <p>Phil (urlando da fuori): Il <i>Dottor Scorreggione</i> è in casa? <i>Dottor Scorreggione!</i></p> <p>Io vado. Buona idea, <i>Dottor Scorreggione</i></p>	<p>Yes. And the worst thing is to see...a young girl sashaying and grinding on <i>a shitty filthy pole</i>..that young girl has a father and a mother.</p> <p>We've said that together! See? I wish your friends were as mature as you. They are mature. It's just that you don't know them well.</p> <p>Is <i>Dr Farter</i> at home? <i>Dr Farter!</i></p> <p>I'm going. Good idea, <i>Dr Farter.</i></p>
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Table 2

From this dialogue, it is possible to infer that swear words are not necessarily changed into euphemistic synonyms. For example, the expletive “fucking” in the locution “fucking stage” is even further intensified with a double vulgar expletive, i.e. “merda di lurido palo”, aiming, as Azzaro’s extensive analysis of English taboo words explains (2005), to trigger an emotional response in the interlocutor (in this case, extreme disapproval and disgust). The same emotion is provoked by the adjective “filthy” referred to the strip clubs: in Italian, it is rendered with the semi-equivalent “immondi”. While “filthy” means extremely dirty, disgusting and offensive, the Italian “immondo” also connotes a stronger moral sense of disgust, being something “contaminated by sin or by a moral fault”, so as to evoke religious issues of guilt (since “immondo” originally means disgusting and dirty “like the Devil”). The most striking example of non-equivalence by means of substitution is given by the strongly offensive and homophobic “Dr Faggot” that Phil uses to poke fun at his friend, dentist Stu, in front of his girlfriend. On a first reading, the translation “farter”, instead of “faggot”, seems to be made to delete the original offensive homophobic remark. This strategy is apparently in line with a general policy in Italian dubbing, as Delia Chiaro has demonstrated by analyzing the con-text of TV series and censorship. The same con-text, however, can be applied to a general mind-set and ideology concerning dubbing in Italy:

References to sex and sexuality in imported fictional products tend to be *severely mitigated* in their translated forms. Furthermore, *it also appears that sexual behaviour beyond traditional male/female 'mainstream' sexual practices becomes increasingly taboo in translation*, as they too are *either toned down or totally eliminated*. Relegated to cable and satellite channels or late-night/early morning viewing on one of the privately owned Mediaset channels, programs containing very explicit sexual content such as US produced ‘Sex and the City’ *are moderated quite significantly for Italian audiences, not only in terms of the pervasive use of strong, taboo language, but also for explicit references to a variety of sexual practices.* (Chiaro 2007, p. 255, my emphasis)

Chiaro skillfully illustrates, with several examples, how very offensive terms like “spunk” in the series *Sex & the City* are translated as “il bianco” (“the white”) in order not to upset

the audience. Nevertheless, Chiaro also notices how equally offensive terms with a sexist connotation (as referred to women) get translated literally, as in “blow jobs” – rendered with the equivalent vulgar and offensive “pompini” – or the strong locution “I had a hard on just looking at you” that wasn’t rendered with the easy and morally acceptable orthophemism “un’erezione” (“an erection”), but with a very vulgar and coarser locution (“il cazzo si è rizzato solo guardandoti”) (Chiaro 2007, p. 267). Since sex is often toned down on socio-cultural grounds, the reason for changing the jokingly homophobic insult “faggot” in *The Hangover* could be explained by applying the same claim, i.e. the translation seems to have opted for an expression that completely deletes homophobia, in order to sound “politically correct”. At the same time, though, there are other factors at stake. As we shall see in the case studies below, the issue is far more complex. Firstly, substituting “faggot” with a more vulgar (but less offensive) scatological term like “scorreggione” (“farther”, “gassy”, “flatulent butthead”) echoes a long farcical tradition in Italy that dates back to the comedy of art (“commedia dell’arte”, 16th century). This popular genre, with its grossly deformed characters, gestures and jokes, still informs and shapes contemporary comedies “Italian-style”. Secondly, the Italian literal translation of “faggot” (“finocchio”) would not have had the same comic effect (although similar terms are often used in their hypocoristic, diminutive or augmentative forms, such as “frocetto” or “finocchiona” – “faggot”, “fairy”). Thirdly, as I will further argue, it is a common habit to mitigate LGBT terms in Italian, when they are not meant as insults but as jokes or neutral statements: they are far too offensive on men’s virility and would provoke too forceful a reaction of uneasiness on the audience,¹⁷ who are expected to be unable to

¹⁷ A key example of how homosexuality in Italy is steeped in ignorance and taboo is provided by the prestigious and long running encyclopaedia *Treccani*, a reference point in Italy for the popularization of science. In 2010, a group of scholars and researchers wrote to the Minister of Cultural Heritage to denounce how the entries “transgender”, “homosexuality”, “lesbianism”, “intersexuality” and “gender” had been written and dealt with. In all of them, a “moral judgment” systematically prevailed “on objective scientific information”, “lack of proper bibliographic data”, “the consistent amount of essays on these topics published within the last thirty years, in the fields of medical, social and juridical sciences”. The authors of the letter pointed out the “lexical carelessness of the above-quoted entries” along with “their stigmatizing contents”. Both the language and the contents of the entries did undermine “the everyday work of activists and scholars who work against sexist and trans/homophobic prejudice and violence”, and could ultimately “result in an actual authoritative legitimization of that prejudice and violence”. To quote a few examples, the entry “transsexual” read as follows: “Mostly, *transsexuals* abhor homosexuality and try to correct in their bodies what they consider as a *mistake* of nature. According to the different social, economic and legislative conditions, transsexuals *look for a solution* using hormones and medications, and turning to cosmetic surgery and to the *so-called* sex reassignment surgery. But *sex reassignment surgery* is not effective: it gives just the appearance of the coveted gender, *irreparably destroying the anatomy* of the original one” (my emphasis). The same ideological and distorted representation of non-heterosexual sexuality appeared in the “gender” entry: “Some anthropologic studies point out the urgency of regaining *the complete perspective on the individual*, in which all the dimensions are collected: an ontological equality and a biological and psychic peculiarity, that is *the uniqueness of being a man or a woman*. The fulfillment of sexual identity shows itself in being a man or a woman and in the *purposes of sexuality (reproduction and generational continuity)* and it centres on a *clear corporeal dimension*: the individual can only develop a psychic identity based on the latter”. In “homosexuality” there is a rhetorical choice pointing towards the wrongs of non-heterosexual nature: “Given the *evident male/female bipolarity*, nowadays we can surely state that *heterosexual orientation is innate, in-naturae*, however *some peculiar interactions with familial and social environment* can cause a homosexual orientation in the subject”. The entry “lesbianism” states that lesbians are basically heterosexual women: “The psychosocial behaviour of the homosexual women does not differ from the heterosexuals, and *the pseudo-masculinity* in their life-style is quite rare; *generally speaking, lesbians adapt their experiences to heterosexual role-models*: we see a *masculine, dominant partner and a substitute for the wife*, which often change their roles”. In this last entry, the original Italian word was not “substitute” but “surrogate”, which has an even stronger

tolerate such a comparison, even if the use of “faggot” may simply (and even more offensively for gay people) refer to being stupid or to being a loser and not necessarily to actually being gay. Beside the case studies below that corroborate this argument, it is crucial to look at the ways “faggot” in this initial scene was translated into other languages:

<i>English</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>German</i>	<i>Spanish (Spain)</i>	<i>Spanish (South America)</i>
Paging Dr. Faggot!	On demande Docteur Tantouze!	Anruf für Dr Schwuchtel!	Doctor Maricón, acuda a recepción!	Doctor Puñalon!
Dr Faggot!	Docteur Tantouze!	Dr Schwuchtel!	Doctor Maricón!	Dr Puñalon!

Table 3

Table 3 shows how “faggot” was always translated with equivalent expressions. Both the French “tantouze” and the German “schwuchtel”, in fact, mean “homosexual” and refer to being effeminate, following the cognitive metaphor GAY AS A WOMAN, a long-term dysphemistic tradition that superficially associates homosexuality with the negative idea of being “feminine” (according to the sexist and prejudicial image of the woman as “inferior”). The same happens with the two expressions used in Spanish, two cross-varietal synonyms meaning “faggot”, “deprived of manliness”, “excessively feminine”. So, dubbing in these four languages has accepted the vulgar and offensive joke as part of a male hetero-normative perspective that accepts the gay joke within men’s speech acts and their group-speak’s conversational attitudes (thus making the offended gay person feel oversensitive or lacking irony, as Baker argued with regard to the strategies used, consciously or unconsciously, to disguise one’s homophobia; Baker 2005, cf Section 2 above).

The fact that Italy is the only linguistic and cultural domain that has not accepted it is not a sign of disapproval of covert/overt homophobia, but rather an avoidance strategy for taboo language that is far too offensive. This can be better understood by comparing this instance of substitution with conversely-oriented substitution in a subsequent scene: here the offensive term “checca” (“faggot”) is used in spite of its total absence in the original script, and it refers to a gay man who does not share the four friends’ in-group cultural and linguistic bond. During their adventures and their search for the missing friend Doug, the boys discover that, when drunk and drugged, they had stolen the tiger from boxer Mike Tyson. Hence, they are supposed to give the tiger back to him. At the same time, they are also chased both by a Chinese gay villain and by the drug dealers. While they try to narcotize the tiger, Stu improvises a song at the piano:

connotation of fakeness (English Translation of the entries by the authors of the letter: De Leo Maya, Zappino Federico, Scarmoncin Laura, Michela Balocchi *et al.*, 2010). The letter, signed by a number of researchers from all parts of Italy, can be retrieved from: http://www.intersexioni.it/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Lettera_Treccani.pdf.

<i>English</i>	<i>Italian</i>	<i>Back Translation</i>
What do tigers dream of When they take a little tiger snooze? Do they dream of mauling zebras Or Halle Berry in her Catwoman suit? Don 't you worry your pretty striped head We're gonna get you back to Tyson And your cozy tiger bed And then we're gonna find Our best friend Doug And then we're gonna give him A best-friend hug	Cosa sogni tigre Mentre dormi come tigre tu Sogni di papparti zebre O una cenetta tra Catwoman e tu Non temere bel rigato capoccione Ti portiam da Tyson E al tuo comodo lettone Ritroveremo il nostro amico Doug E poi lo abbracceremo come i veri amici fan	What are you dreaming of <i>tiger</i> While you're sleeping as a tiger, you Do you dream of gobbling up zebras. Or a lovely dinner between Catwoman and you Don't fear beautiful striped big head We'll bring you back to Tyson And to your cosy big bed We'll find our friend Doug back And then we will hug him as true friends do
Doug, Dougie, Dougie, Doug, Doug <i>But if he's been murdered</i> <i>By crystal-meth tweakers</i> Well, then we're shit out of luck	Doug, Doug, Doug, Dougie, Doug, Doug, Dougie <i>Ma se è stato ucciso dalla gialla</i> <i>checca</i> Allora noi siam nella cacca.	Doug, Doug Dougie, Dougie, Doug, Dougie <i>But if he's been killed by the</i> <i>yellow faggot</i> Then we're shit out of luck.

Table 4

Besides the obvious text alteration given by the search for rhymes and meters and the avoidance of the cultural reference to Halle Berry (who is not as famous in Italy as she is in the USA), the Italian lyrics are especially striking for the substitution in the closing lines. The friends are worried that Doug might have died as he was possibly kidnapped by the Chinese gay villain, though he might also have had troubles with the drug dealers. In the original song, Stu sings that he fears Doug might have been murdered by “crystal meth tweakers”, i.e. methamphetamine-addicts. The term is a slang expression – a morphological variation of “tweaker” – that has no equivalence in Italian (*Urban Dictionary* defines it as an extremely deceptive person: “tweakers are known for their extreme paranoia, flagrant dishonesty, and lack of non-tweaker friends. A tweaker will steal your stuff and then help you look for it”). Although there is no equivalent noun in Italian, the translation could have easily worked on drug-related lexis (for example, “chicca” is a slang form for an ecstasy pill and could have created a consonance with “cacca” – “shit”) or on the semantic field of crime. Instead, it was decided to refer to the other sub-plot in the story and to insert the dysphemistic term “checca” for “gay”, adding the ethnic slur “giallo” (“yellow”) to connote the villain’s Chinese origins. Following the useful distinction between cursing and insulting by Azzaro (2005), “checca” is here quite edgy, since it is neither addressed to a present interlocutor (as in a proper insult), nor does it function as cursing proper, although it has the same semantic and pragmatic power to trigger an emotional response in the viewer, namely that of associating homosexuality with evil and fear.

Moreover, the avoidance of euphemism (or of the orthomorphism “gay”) suggests that translators and producers found it acceptable to use such a pejorative to express negative feelings. On the contrary, as in the instance above, to jokingly call a friend “faggot” was not deemed acceptable. Here, instead, using the derogatory “checca” for a homosexual – not for a humorous effect but to despise that person – seems to reinforce the

bonding and in-groupness of the four characters as straight people and, more poignantly, it includes the audience in such a hetero-normative and homophobic bond.¹⁸

Thus, the conceptual and contextual frame governing the use of these offensive or vulgar expressions is usually intricate, as it commonly happens with taboos and taboo language. When analyzing these linguistic features, in fact, one has to bear in mind the lack of consistency in the use of swearwords in dubbing, due to several extra-linguistic factors:

Perhaps a possible explanation for the inconsistencies in the rendering of swearwords might be found in the *different themes and expectations* that surround certain TV products, which in turn make the use of strong language or even humour in a given series *more or less acceptable* than in another. (Bucaria 2009, p. 19, my emphasis)

The audiences' expectations play a crucial role in the marketing dimension, which, in its turn, affects the lexical choices in both the source and the target texts. Such choices, as argued above, reveal a mind-frame rooted in the respective socio-cultural domains. To help us understand the multifaceted nature of the issue, it is useful to refer to a philosophical and linguistic analysis of the famous vulgar comedy series *South Park*, which shows how comedy is generally meant to break taboos:

Those who condemn *South Park* for being offensive need to be reminded that *comedy is by its very nature offensive*. It derives its energy from its *transgressive power*, its *ability to break taboos, to speak the unspeakable*. Comedians are always pushing the envelope, *probing to see how much they can get away with in violating the speech codes of their day*. Comedy is a social safety valve. We laugh precisely because *the comedian momentarily liberates us from the restrictions that conventional society imposes on us*. We applaud the comedian because he says right out in front of an audience *what, supposedly, nobody is allowed to say in public*. Paradoxically, then, the more permissive American society has become, the harder it has become to write comedy. *As censorship laws have been relaxed, and people have been allowed to say and show almost anything in movies and television* – above all to deal with formerly taboo sexual material – comedy writers like Parker and Stone must have begun to wonder if there was any way left to offend an audience. (Cantor 2007, pp. 99-100)

As a very popular comedy, in fact, *The Hangover* was expected to be “gross”, offensive and somehow “filthy” in its liberating depiction of the young men’s debauchery, as it is also evident from the reasons for its R rating, i.e. “pervasive language, sexual content including nudity, some drug material”. The language, both in the original and in the Italian

¹⁸ The in-groupness bond (or “membership strategy”, to quote Riley 2007) established among the four friends and including the audience who identify or wish to identify with them, is also reflected in the translation of the title: *The Hangover* is rendered as “Una notte da leoni”, “A Lions’ Night”. The word “hangover” has no real equivalent in Italian and the usual partial translation “postumi della sbornia” does not have the same pragmatic effect. Concurrently, it is also true that the translation of the title presents a deliberate social and linguistic choice. While the original focuses on the negative consequences of the wild night (*The Hangover*), the Italian title focuses on the glorious night itself by qualifying it as adventurous and brave through the metaphorical use of “lion” as applying to someone “brave and proud”, a common use that appears, for example, in the idiomatic expression “una impresa da leoni”, i.e. “a lion’s enterprise”. The use of the plural, moreover, further reinforces the cohesion of the group, since they constitute the target domain for the conceptual metaphor. Translating “Hangover” also proved difficult in French but the final title was an English alternative, more accessible for the target culture but also closer to the source title: *Very Bad Trip*. As in the English original, the title for the French audience focuses on the consequences of the night and alludes to the conceptual metaphor DRUG AS A TRIP, which in this case has negative attributes (“bad”).

dubbed version, is undoubtedly vulgar, extremely informal and often insulting, up to the point that Alan, one of the main characters, complains with Stu and says “your language is offensive” (a meta-linguistic description of the film itself). Numerous occurrences of swear words such as “fuck”, “assholes”, “fuck off”, “whore” and “moron” are respectively translated as “merda”, “stronzi”, “vaffanculo”, “troia”, “coglione”. In addition, some translations, as already mentioned, use stronger intensifiers¹⁹ for the original swear words, or replace a neutral locution with a homophobic or offensive one, so as to produce, together with the above-mentioned occurrences, an even “filthier” and “grosser” version.

3.2 “To speak the unspeakable”. Taboo, euphemisms and dysphemisms

As the dubbing of *The Hangover* shows, taboo language is a multiform concept because of the highly varied nature of taboo itself. Hence, research has to take into account the numerous elements that construct the social and moral nature of taboo and, concurrently, the ways taboos get “translated” into taboo language. It is essential to reflect on the concept itself of taboo, on the reasons why homosexuality is still a taboo, as well as on the way taboo can en-gender an ideologically-oriented language.

According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica of Sociology,²⁰ taboo is “the prohibition of an action based on the belief that such behaviour is either too sacred and consecrated or too dangerous and accursed for ordinary individuals to undertake”. The word *taboo*, of Polynesian origin, was introduced into English by Captain James Cook after his travelling to Tonga in 1771 where it was translated to him as “consecrated, inviolable, forbidden, unclean or cursed”. As all dictionaries report, the word derives from alleged Tongan morphemes *ta* (“mark”) and *bu* (“especially”), so as to originally suggest something that is “especially marked”. However, as Marshall underlines, “its contemporary use is broader, most generally meaning a *social* and often sacred prohibition put upon certain things, people, or acts, which render them *untouchable or unmentionable*” (Marshall 1998, my emphasis). The qualifier “social” is relevant here, as it reveals how taboo topics and taboo language are subject to change, both from a diatopic and from a diachronic point of view. Hence, one has to carefully ponder social and cultural principles, religious or superstitious beliefs, moral or ethical judgment, codes of conduct and so forth.²¹

According to Allan and Burrige, “taboo refers to a proscription of behaviour for a specifiable community of one or more persons, at a specifiable time, in specifiable contexts” (Allan, Burrige 2006, p. 9) and the relation between taboo language and its

¹⁹ Apart from the general policy of mitigation in Italian dubbing (Chiaro 2007, 2008; Pavesi 2008), one must also note that there has recently been a turn to increasingly opt for explicitness, as in *South Park*, whose first seasons were firstly strongly mitigated and then re-dubbed by a different dubbing company to be closer semantically and pragmatically to the “political incorrectness” of the original (See Arp 2007). Nifosi, in her translation of Arp’s book, provides footnotes with the euphemistic expressions used in the Italian dubbing: by using the Italian dubbed version in the Italian translation of the book, Arp’s philosophical arguments (derived from the language of the *South Park* TV series) was totally annihilated, due to the major alterations of the source text (Arp, 2009). See also Fernández 2009.

²⁰ *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, “taboo” [<http://www.britannica.com/topic/taboo-sociology>].

²¹ As Marshall points out, the phenomenon was investigated in prominent early studies by Sigmund Freud (1938), Claude Lévi-Strauss (1969) and James George Frazer (1925). In 1966, anthropologist Mary Douglas established, for the first time, the value of taboo as a “social marker” that creates and maintains social classifications (*Purity and Danger*). In a similar fashion, in 1973, ethnologist Raymond Firth accounted for the mechanisms of social control implicit in taboos (*Symbols. Public and Private*) (see Marshall 1998).

context of use is unavoidable: “[taboo language, euphemisms and dysphemisms] are determined by the choice of expression within a given context: both the world spoken *of* and the world spoken *in*” (Allan, Burridge 1991, p. 4, emphasis in the original; see also the chapter “Contextual Issues” in Crespo-Fernandez 2015). Despite the differences in culture, religion and law in specifiable historical periods or socio-geographic domains, however, the main spheres related to taboo seem to be trans-cultural and they mainly invest the topics of religion, death, age, sex and bodily effluvia. Burridge (2005, p. 983) mentions items believed to be ominous, dangerous, offensive or evil and therefore avoided in several ethnographic contexts, such as naming dangerous animals, touching or talking to people of higher social classes, aspects of birth, death and menstruation. In western cultures, taboo derives from “*social sanctions* placed on behavior that is regarded as *distasteful* or at least *impolite* in a given social context” (Burridge *ibid.*, my emphasis). Therefore, taboos “ultimately rest on *traditions of etiquette* and are *intimately linked with social organization*” (*ibid.*). Such an inextricable link with social organization triggers another conceptual, social, and linguistic connection, i.e. that with the locution and concept of “social stigma”, which directly informs my analysis of gendered language in LGBT discourse. Since homosexuality is still taboo in several countries, LGBT people are often labeled as “deviant” from and by the dominant social order and, therefore, “stigmatized”.²² Social stigma works as a label of disapproval placed on a person or a social group who are thus “branded” or identified with a “mark of disgrace” (OED) due to reasons of ethnicity, disability, education, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity etc. According to OED, “stigma” (c. 1400) is a “mark made on skin by burning with a hot iron”, from Latin *stigma*, and from Greek *stigma*, i.e. “a mark of a pointed instrument, puncture, tattoo-mark, brand”; deriving from the root of *stizein* “to mark, tattoo”, from PIE root **steig-* “to stick; pointed”. Its figurative meaning as “a mark of disgrace” appeared in English from about 1610 (related to the “marks resembling the wounds on the body of Christ”). The linguistic parallel between “taboo” (something especially *marked*) and “stigma” (the *mark* of a pointed instrument) can here suggest how taboo, and its linguistic deployment, insightfully reveal the social traits of discrimination, stereotyping²³ or unmentionables, thus orienting the analysis of taboo-related language.

In the same line, in a 2007 corpus-based study, Beers Fägersten stated the necessity to consider not only the usage of swear words but their use and their function in a social context:

²² In 1991, Allan and Burridge claimed that social attitudes towards homosexuality were changing for the positive and provided the example of the vulgar locution “it sucks” to underline how it was generated by a tabooed vision of homosexuality. “Although attitudes to homosexuality have changed towards the positive in recent years, it is still an effective insult to accuse a man of sexual alliance with other men. The ubiquitous North American malediction “it sucks” (“it is contemptible”) is, in origin, a transference from the negativity in the homophobic jibe “he sucks (cock)”, that has lost the link with its past in most users’ minds; as a result, both “he sucks” and “she sucks” can be used without fellatio coming to mind” (Allan, Burridge 1991, p. 81). Despite this growing acceptance of homosexuality in several socio-cultural domains, similar linguistic attitudes leading to marginalization are still present.

²³ Stereotype, in its connection to “social stigma”, is here used following the definition by Calefato (1997, pp. 69-73) who defines it as “a verbal expression, an image that somehow *sticks to a person, a social group*, as well as to a behavior, a feeling, a value, without being filtered through logical reasoning. The stereotype lives on unchanged, leaving some implicit presuppositions that end up *being unconsciously taken for granted by the great majority*. Because of the *implicit messages conveyed by language*, stereotypes take root so strongly in our minds that it seems that there are no other words or images that could be used to define an object or action, or to refer to a person” (quoted and translated by De Marco 2007, p. 9, my emphasis).

To date, linguistic research on profane language has focused primarily on the following areas: *historical occurrences and evolution, grammar and semantics, frequency of usage and offensiveness ratings*. Typically *word-centered and context independent*, these studies document the superficial trends and taboo status regarding dirty word usage, but shed little light on the function and interpretation of profane language use in a social context. (Beers Fägersten 2007, p. 15)

Indeed, the semantics of taboo lexis is inextricably connected with the performative functions of such lexis and with its “ideological” use, as language does construct a specific ideology governing taboo, dominance, marginalization, as well as policies of avoidance or minimization. From a very early psycholinguistic perspective, Farb stressed the social and symbolic value of words by affirming that “any word is an innocent collection of sounds until a community surrounds it with connotations and then decrees that it cannot be used in certain speech situations. It is the symbolic value the specific culture attaches to the words and expressions” (Farb 1973, p. 91).²⁴ Therefore, linguistic taboos involve a constrained and controlled use of specific words or phrases due to social restrictions. By drawing on previous research, Beers Fägersten emphasizes the “disputable status of the linguistic taboo”, defining it as a topic that still awaits full investigation,²⁵ since there is always “a blurred line between what does and does not qualify as swearing” (Beers Fägersten 2007, p. 15). Offensiveness, she argues, is determined by evaluative and semantic differentiation rating techniques; research has revealed how “some words are consistently judged to be more offensive (abrasive, aggressive, impolite, profane, upsetting, etc.) than others, *with sexual terms generally rated most offensive*, followed by excretory terms which, in turn, are typically judged more offensive than sacred terms” (ibid, my emphasis; see also Beers Fägersten 2012). This connects to the ambiguous, often undifferentiated distinction between politeness and impoliteness, as Culpeper’s systematic work clearly shows (following Brown and Levison, and Goffman). By stating that “impoliteness is *partly inherent in linguistic expression*” (Culpeper 2011, p. 124, my emphasis), Culpeper acknowledges that the perlocutionary effect of any expression is *context-dependent* and not dependent on the specific semantics of coarse language, thus multiplying the semantic and pragmatic nuances of given coarse expressions in specified contexts, speech-acts and speech-events.

Nevertheless, sex is generally tabooed “as a topic for public display and severely constrained as a topic for discussion” (Allan and Burridge 2006, p. 144; see also Hammad 2007). Although this applies to all forms and aspects of sex being tabooed or linguistically censored, Allan and Burridge emphasize how “the taboos on male homosexuality²⁶ and ‘unfaithful’ wives have been the strongest”:

²⁴ This connects to the coeval, Freudian-inspired and seminal analysis of taboo in sacred language by Benveniste: “That is linguistic taboo proper: a given word or noun must not be uttered. It is simply removed from the register of the language (“langue”), expunged from use, it must no longer exist. However, and that is precisely the paradoxical condition of taboo itself, that term, at the same time, must exist precisely because it is forbidden” (Benveniste 1974, p. 255, my translation; “C’est proprement le tabou linguistique : un certain mot ou nom ne doit pas passer par la bouche. Il est simplement retranché du registre de la langue, effacé de l’usage, il ne doit plus exister. Cependant, c’est là une condition paradoxale du tabou, ce nom doit en même temps continuer d’exister en tant qu’interdit”).

²⁵ Similarly, Crespo-Fernández underlines the case in point of Hock’s book *Principles of Historical Linguistics* (1991), in which taboo only covered nine out of 679 pages (Crespo-Fernández 2015, p. 1).

²⁶ They especially underline the effect of Victorian culture and quote from the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 (the same that caused Oscar Wilde’s imprisonment). For the purpose of the present study, it is relevant to lay stress on the adjective “gross” as a pre-modifier of the noun “indecency”: “Any male

In most cultures, the strongest taboos have been against non-procreative sex and sexual intercourse outside of a family unit sanctioned by religion and lore or legislation. Although these strictures have been relaxed in modern Anglo societies, their hold has not completely loosened. (Allan and Burrige 2006, p. 145)

So, within general sexual taboo, homosexuality is still seen as more controversial and nuanced, according to several factors and to the intersection of social discipline, hegemonic control, dominance, and their effects on both individual psychologies and speech acts.

Following Foucault's well-known argument concerning the "steady proliferation of discourses on sex" (Foucault 1987) despite repression, Fleming and Lempert extensively explain how (social and linguistic) proscription is productive, i.e. "the more intense the interdiction, the more power seems to accrue to the transgressive act" (Fleming, Lempert 2011, p. 5). Therefore taboo topics and their being unmentionable mainly depend on "regime proscriptions" (Fleming, Lempert 2011, p. 6; Crespo-Fernandez 2015, p. 7):

Ironically, proscriptions and even the appropriate substitutes these regimes recommend (e.g., euphemisms, circumlocutions, special citational forms like "the F-word") make taboo utterances more salient. And rather than fix or stabilize a speaker's relation to the taboo object—by ensuring a safe, respectful "distance," for instance—proscription and efforts at containment seem to make such relations less stable. As conventions, they may now be flouted, parodied, played upon, or otherwise altered for strategic and interactional effect. (Fleming, Lempert 2011, p. 6)

On a linguistic level, in fact, "the language of sexual pleasuring and copulation gives rise to a great deal of verbal play and figurative language" (Allan and Burrige 2006, p. 144). There are numerous strategies to linguistically avoid taboos although the most common are: cross-varietal synonyms, euphemisms, dysphemisms, baby-talk ("poo" for "shit"), circumlocution, hyperbole, ellipsis, indirect language, conventional or novel metaphors (or "artful" metaphors, as defined by Crespo-Fernandez 2008, p. 98), loan-words ("lingerie" for "underwear") and technical terms, usually Latin derivatives ("faeces" for "shit"). Their boundaries are extremely wide (encompassing body parts and effluvia, sexual acts, underwear), so as to significantly increase language variation and foster "over-lexicalization" (Halliday 1978, p. 165). Allan and Burrige state that "the degree of synonymy in the vocabulary for the genitalia and copulation has no parallel elsewhere in the English lexicon [...] there are approximately 1,200 terms for "vagina", 1,000 for "penis", 800 for "copulation", and around 2,000 for "whore" (Allan, Burrige 1991, p. 96).

Discussion on taboo and the (self)censoring of language by means of euphemism leads to a consideration of what is polite and impolite, speakable and unspeakable, and the interaction with social and cultural norms. The term euphemism (Greek "eu", "good, well" and "pheme", "speaking") naturally indicates politeness while its counterpart "dysphemism" (Greek "dys" – "bad, unfavourable") indicates insulting and impoliteness.

person who, in public or in private, commits, or is a party to the commission of, or procures or attempts to procure the commission by any person of, any act of *gross indecency* with another male person, shall be guilty of a misdemeanour, and, being convicted thereof, shall be liable, at the discretion of the Court, to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years with or without hard labour". The authors then add that "when it was pointed out to Queen Victoria that women were not mentioned, she is reported to have said, 'No woman would do that'" (Burrige, Allan 2006, p. 152).

Instead, “orthophemism” (Greek “ortho” – “proper, straight, normal”) refers to neutral expressions. According to Allan and Burrige, “often a euphemism is linked with the speaker’s point of view”, while dysphemism “with some other view: it is an *us versus them situation*” (Allan, Burrige 1991, p. 50, my emphasis). In fact, there are “alternative points of view in different communities and at different times; and perhaps occasionally within the mind of a single individual on different occasions” (Allan, Burrige 1991, p. 52). Euphemism is generally “used as an alternative to a dispreferred expression, in order to avoid possible loss of face: either one’s own or, by giving offense, that of the audience, or of some third party” (Allan, Burrige 1991, p. 60). Dysphemism, instead,

is sometimes motivated by *fear and distaste*, but also by *hatred and contempt*. Speakers resort to dysphemism *to talk about people and things that frustrate and annoy them, that they disapprove of and wish to disparage, humiliate and degrade* [...] Dysphemistic expressions include curses, name-calling, and any sort of derogatory comment directed towards others in order to insult or to wound them. It is also a way to let off steam; for example, when exclamatory swear words alleviate frustration or anger. To be more technical: a dysphemism is a word or phrase with connotations that are offensive either about the denotatum and/or to people addressed or overhearing the utterance. (Allan, Burrige 2006, p. 30)

As argued by several scholars (Burchfield 1985; Warren 1992; Peng 1999; Hai-long 2001; Allan, Burrige 2006; McGlone et al. 2006; Fleming and Lempert 2011; Crespo-Fernandez 2015), the boundary line between euphemism and dysphemism is often indistinct, as both can generate a number of similar illocutionary and perlocutionary acts.

From a discourse analysis perspective, therefore, the further distinction between “dysphemistic euphemisms” and “euphemistic dysphemisms” is particularly meaningful:

Euphemistic dysphemisms and dysphemistic euphemisms are expressions at odds with the intentions that lurk behind them. More formally, the locution is at variance with the reference and illocutionary point of the utterance (i.e. what the speaker is doing in making the utterance). The expressive exclamation “Shit!” typically expresses anger, frustration or anguish, and is ordinarily a dysphemism. Its remodelled forms “Sugar!, Shoot!, Shivers!” or “Shucks!” are euphemisms – they are linguistic fig leaves for a thought that can be castigated as dysphemistic; [so] a speaker’s dysphemistic intention can be accomplished euphemistically [...] *A euphemistic dysphemism exists to cause less face-loss or offence than an out-and-out dysphemism (although it will not always succeed in doing so). Conversely, there are locutions which are dysphemistic while the illocutionary point is euphemistic.* For example, *apparent terms of opprobrium are used in good-humoured raillery to display friendship and affection to someone close to you.* Calling a good mate “an old bastard” or “silly little dog” is to use dysphemistic euphemisms. (Allan, Burrige 2006, p. 39)

For the purposes of the present analysis, this more nuanced distinction significantly connects with the classification of insulting speech-acts by Mateo and Yus (2000). They distinguish between the “target” of the insulting activity and the “type” of insults used. The target can be “offence-centered” with the intention of insulting (“you bastards!”; or the occurrence of “gialla checca” in the Italian dubbing of *The Hangover*); “praise-centered” with no intention of insulting (“you lucky bastards!”; “Paging Dr Faggot!” in *The Hangover*), or “interaction-centred”, with the effect of reinforcing the social bonds and in-group cohesion among the interlocutors (as I suggested above, this happens in the occurrences of “Dr Faggot”, “gialla checca” or “It’s gay” in *The Hangover*).

It should be noted, then, how discursively both lexical choice and its orientation in dyadic or multi-party conversation are relevant in terms of speaker intention: firstly, the choice from the cline ranging between the extremes of euphemism and dysphemism and secondly, the choice of human target from the Goffmanian triad (hearer, overhearer,

eavesdropper), will contribute to qualify speaker intention to converge with addressee, thus providing a micro-context of mutual accommodation and membership within a given group, or to more or less violently diverge from the addressee, emphasizing asymmetry, distance, dominance, dis-alignment and thus designating or rather demarcating difference and out-groupness. Quite obviously then, the Goffmanian notion of face and its social dynamics – on which I shall return later – are central to utterances or fragments of utterances involving taboo language, whose occurrences instantiate either face-saving and face-maintenance or face-loss within the interactional process, thus proving that usage is contexted as much as contexting: as Duranti and Goodwin amply demonstrated, verbal behaviour is affected by context but is also a main resource to set up or change a given context (Duranti and Goodwin 1992).

These considerations must be kept in mind when observing the strategies adopted in dubbing into different languages and the expected “sensitivity” of a given audience: the mitigation strategies differentially adopted with regard to sexist and homophobic locutions respectively in dubbing for an Italian audience as compared to the strategies applied for a different national audience (see 3.1 above) prove how dubbing is a form of translation which is culturally based on a certain “grammar of expectations” with regard to the kind of verbal behaviour that will be preferred or dispreferred by a given audience, and therefore more marketable or less marketable. Mitigation occurs where the majority of the audience are expected not to be cooperative; mitigation is not applied where the majority audience are expected to share the stance that is displayed and the offensive meaning thereby construed. Does the verbal behaviour in film dialogue carry a type of stigma that is universal in substance but will not necessarily construct a complacent, solidary stance within a given audience? Then mitigation is likely to occur, and the reasons are not necessarily moral but rather connected with the financial consequences of a marketable product that is unlikely to be successful. *Mores* and the quality of the public being addressed will affect the decisions which regulate dubbing when it comes to stigma and vulgarity: the unspeakable may be speakable, to a degree.

At the same time however, since the cinema industry cannot evade that fundamental law in economics, that supply creates its own demand, the reverse is also true, in that a given product will create its own public. Thus, ultimately, *tempora* and *mores*, and verbal art with its displayed and construed meanings, are relative and related; abiding by, or flouting and violating the thin borderline between the speakable and the unspeakable, is also a question of representing behaviours for which a given public may not be expected to be ready and yet consensus and even (homophobic) complicity will be in the air.

4. “My word is my bond!”. Case study 2. I Love You Phillip Morris

I Love You Phillip Morris is a 2009 comedy drama starring two major Hollywood stars like Jim Carrey and Ewan McGregor, two actors that have dramatically influenced marketing in the USA and in other countries, as well as dubbing and cross cultural translation. It is based on the true story of Steven Jay Russel (played by Jim Carrey), a con artist and multiple prison escapee who, after leaving his married life, decides to live freely as a gay man, though he maintains his rooted identity as a “masculine” husband, and as a (stereotypically) crafty, astute and determined man. Once in prison, he falls in love with Phillip Morris (McGregor), a fellow inmate who shows all the cliché qualities of the “feminine” subordinate type, i.e. sentimental delicacy, sensitivity, romanticism, elegance,

dependence and subordination to the masculine type. Steve repeatedly escapes from prison to get reunited with his lover. At the same time, he continues to be involved in amazing frauds and keeps lying to his lover about them.²⁷

These preliminary remarks about the plot and the characters are relevant to the manner in which dubbing has altered the original lexis and the dialogues between the two lovers as well as within the social interaction of the masculine, chauvinist and homophobic micro-community of the prison. Here, the agents of social interaction are mainly male larrikins and macho types disparaging gays, women and effete behaviours. As stated, interaction, though fictive, represents a particularly salient context to understand how specific discourses – favouring or disparaging minorities and tolerance – are construed:

When people interact they consciously or unconsciously tend to evaluate each other. Their way of speaking – *in terms of both content and form* – may help building a favorable image of some groups and a less favorable one of others which *contributes to making language an expression for stereotypes, prejudices and inequalities*. (De Marco 2006, p. 8, my emphasis)

The two main characters literally reproduce both the stereotypes of man and woman and those of the gay couple who, given the “grammar of expectations” mentioned above, replicate a man/woman relationship. Besides, through their idiolects and typified social practices, the two gays are moulded by following those common metaphors that favour conceptual and linguistic stagnation among those (covert /overt) homophobic groups that see/accept/reject homosexuality as “difference” from the dominant rule: GAY AS WOMAN (McGregor), MALE HOMOSEXUAL AS A FLOWER²⁸ (McGregor), GAY AS ECCENTRICITY (Carrey) and GAY AS A DEVIANT HETEROSEXUAL (Carrey).

Before analyzing some excerpts from the film, it is important to mention how the Italian promotion has been highly deceptive, in that it totally silenced the theme of homosexuality and of gay romance in the title, in the advertising posters and in the theatrical trailer. All of them are completely different from the original. Firstly, the title has changed into *Colpo di Fulmine. Il Mago della Truffa*, namely “Love at First Sight. The Sorcerer of Frauds”. The translation emphasizes the illegal and adventurous activities of the main character and dramatically minimizes his “love” for Phillip Morris: in Italian the idiomatic locution for “love at first sight” literally translates as “bolt of lightning”, surely more vague than “*I Love You Phillip Morris*”, since the male recipient of love is not mentioned. Secondly, as shown in Figure 1 below, the two posters are completely different:

²⁷ Despite its limited theatrical release, the film grossed more than \$20 million worldwide, especially because of the appealing presence of Jim Carrey, an actor that has an enormous marketing impact due to his previous slapstick comedies (a genre that is extremely popular in Italy too, due to the abovementioned influence of the comedy of art). The film has only received very positive critical and popular reviews, all of them stressing its funny jokes, rhythm and amazing plot structure.

²⁸ The metaphor was introduced and convincingly analyzed by Crespo-Fernandez. She pointed out how the cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system projects attributes of the source domain (delicateness, softness etc.) onto the taboo target of homosexuality. It is in this correspondence between source and target domains that conceptualization fulfills its euphemistic or dysphemistic function (Crespo-Fernandez 2008, p. 97).



Figure 1

Italian poster (left) and American poster (right) of *The Hangover*.

The original poster, on the right, foregrounds the gay couple in its highly stereotyped features (with such attributes as pure-breed dogs, fashionable clothes, exotic and expensive holiday location and the cheerful “gay” attitude). Quite the reverse, in the Italian poster the audience could only see Jim Carrey in the foreground, in three different metamorphoses reflecting the several identities he assumes in the story; his lover was instead isolated in the distant background, more than half the size of the original and with his face barely visible. The visual element of lightening that frames the central image of Carrey, moreover, is not only the visual equivalent translation of the Italian idiom “colpo di fulmine” (“love at first sight”) but, again, it subliminally misleads the audience. In fact, a bolt of lightening is also symbolic of loss of ignorance, high speed, smart and clever personality. In addition, the word “colpo” (“hit”) in the locution is written in much bigger fonts, so as to immediately capture the viewers’ attention and subliminally influence their understanding and perception. Due to the numerous collocations of the noun “colpo” in Italian (“hit/shot”; as in, among others, “non sbagliare un colpo”: “not to miss a shot”; “colpo in canna”: “lock and load”; “colpo grosso”: “big shot” and, especially “colpo gobbo”: “dirty trick”), it is likely that the audience did not immediately recognize the meaning of “love at first sight”. On the contrary, the original title in the original poster visually increased the semantics of love through the use of a red heart-shaped letter “o” in the word “love”. Not only does the red colour stand out from the dominant white and sky-blue, but the heart is placed right at the centre and its color creates a vertical visual pattern of connection with the other red elements, i.e. the name of the actors above and the red tagline below, which reads as “being gay is really expensive”. Thus, on the red vertical reading axis, the whole poster immediately reads as “Carrey and McGregor > love > being gay is very expensive”, so as to summarize the main plot of two men loving each other and then getting involved in illegal affairs to put up with an expensive life-style. Finally, the Italian tagline “il mago della truffa” (like the subtitle) eliminates the reference to being gay and the nature of the two characters’ relationship. Other posters used in the American

advertising campaign (Figure 2) focused on the romantic love of two prison inmates, and unmistakably confirm the strong manipulation carried out for the Italian marketing:



Figure 2
Additional posters used for the American promotion of *The Hangover*.

In addition, it is worth noting how even the images chosen for the DVD disc are strikingly dissimilar (Figure 3):

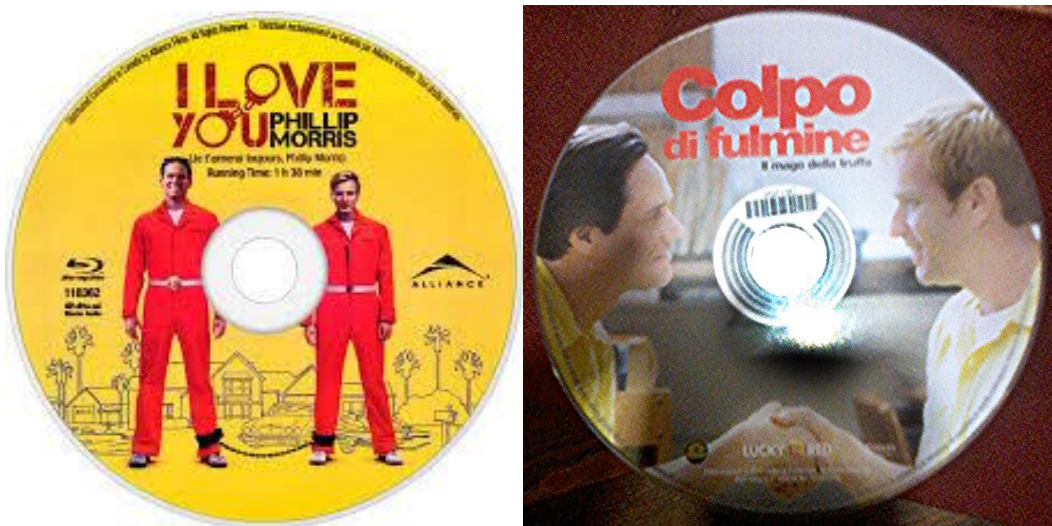


Figure 3
Images on the American DVD disc (left) and the Italian DVD disc (right).

While the original image is the same as one of the posters, suggesting a double bond, physical through imprisonment and sentimental through romance, in the Italian visual translation the two lovers are seen as shaking hands, a gesture that reinforces the male

dominant image of, e.g., men agreeing in common business, planning successful enterprises or, even easier, two “friends” engaging in a mutual pact of loyalty. These are all robust male clichés that foster in-groupness in the male hetero-normative segment of the audience, since such typified images and conceptualizations represent an acceptable positive social practice, again rooted in the cliché of male “strength”.²⁹

So, these meaningful elements show how the film was “translated” for an Italian audience that looked for a “standard” funny comedy,³⁰ the same audience, one could think, of *The Hangover*, one that was not expected to feel at ease with the theme of male homosexuality.³¹ Those marketing strategies, that also establish the translation strategies employed, give the eye to a male audience that is expected to need identification with the dominant male in-groupness of the film’s characters. Thus, they do not risk to feel “out-grouped” or to have their static beliefs challenged. Rather, they are reassuringly aligned with the same community that accepts coalescence in terms of shared typified thoughts and typified language, in this case concerning male homosexuals. These, when stereotyped, construct a LGBT public discourse that assures the maintenance of the social order:

Verbal language is the place where social stereotypes are more easily reflected, but they can also be perceived in individuals’ behaviors, *in their ways of thinking and in the roles that they are expected to fulfil*. Mass media are one of the tools through which these behaviors and roles are filtered and made socially visible. In so doing, they are primarily responsible for the

²⁹ Also the Italian trailer is completely different from the original which is simply based on the development of the main character’s free gay life. The original starts with a scene of Steven kneeling with his wife while they pray before going to bed; then a close up of the astounded wife as she (and the audience) hears the voice of her husband shouting “I am gay!”. Flashy images of his subsequent flamboyant gay life follow. Then the verbal message “being gay is really expensive” appears and is soon followed by a scene of a credit card fraud. The trailer ends with the two lovers’ meeting, and their following (detailed) romance. The film is qualified as “daring”, “subversive” and “funny” (original trailer at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01dljlcgiMw>). On the contrary, by using the device of the narrating voice over, the Italian trailer firstly presents the contrast between Steve’s public honest image (“a perfect husband”; “a respectful citizen”) and his real personality as a con artist. The voice over then says that “for money he would do anything” and, soon afterwards, we see the scene of him shouting “I am gay!”. The connection in the montage clearly induces viewers into believing that he was only pretending to be gay, as part of a fraud to gain money. Then the verbal message “che colpo!” appears in bold capital letters and it is visually related to a scene of robbery in prison, so that the word “colpo” in the title becomes even more ambiguous and detached from the idiomatic meaning of “love at first sight”. Finally, the last scene shows Steve’s wife asking “are being gay and stealing two things that sort of go hand in hand?”. No scene and no verbal/visual message related to the love story was maintained, aiming, one can easily suppose, to make the audience perceive the film as only a funny and adventurous slapstick Jim Carrey-style comedy. (Italian trailer at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qANUZi-r7UE>).

³⁰ When interviewed about such drastic changes in the marketing process, Lucky Red Marketing Manager denied any homophobic prejudice and stated that: 1) the title was changed because the name Phillip Morris could be identified with the [American] brand of cigarettes and could have sounded as promotion of smoking; 2) she quoted another film with Carrey, *The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, a drama whose title was changed into the comedy-like *Se mi lasci ti cancello*; 3) generally they try to adapt titles to make the film more appealing to as many market segments as possible; 4) comedy attracts more people; 5) the title still maintains a reference to love; 6) Lucky Red is not a social and humanitarian association; 7) E. Mc Gregor was almost concealed in the poster because he is not “a selling point” (English in the original) like J. Carrey. The interview can be retrieved at: <http://www.cineblog.it/post/21421/il-caso-colpo-di-fulmine-il-mago-della-truffa-cineblog-intervista-la-lucky-red>.

³¹ A blogger reports how, during the showing he attended, many people reacted very badly, as they were not expecting that kind of film. Many reported comments were strongly homophobic, expressing surprise, shock, disgust, disapproval. See <https://amperini.wordpress.com/tag/il-mago-della-truffa/>.

reproduction and perpetuation of stereotypes and common places. (De Marco 2006, p. 2, my emphasis)

Firstly, as mentioned, the two main characters replicate, through the lenses of gender (i.e. the main beliefs concerning men and women in western societies: Bem 1993; Talbot 2003; De Marco 2006) the male/female bipolarity, in that the gay couple is stereotypically supposed/expected to surrogate the straight couple (where the manly gay is active, strong and dominant and the womanly gay is passive, weak and subordinate). The lexis that constructs LGBT discourse is still rooted in such a socio-cultural dimorphism and, as Allan and Burrige show, this is due to historical reasons that still prove to be influential in contemporary society:

The use of “gay” [from the mid of the century] was probably enforced by the roles assumed by the so-called pansies, queens, nellies and other fairies, faggots, fruits and “Friends of Dorothy”. All these were, and still may be, *dysphemistic terms of derision when used by straights, but adopted as in-group solidarity markers by queers*. Terms like sissy, buttercup, dinge-queen (white who prefers blacks), rice-queen (white who prefers east Asians), nance, nancy boy, homo, puff/poof, poofter, chi-chi man, batty boy, invert, pervert, degenerate, sod, shirt-lifter, arse-bandit remain for the most part *used by straights as dysphemisms [...] The top or active partner is a wolf, butch, stud – type who advertises himself as straight-acting, masculine, athletic. The bottom, or passive, partner was once a Mary-Ann (nineteenth century) or pogue (early twentieth century), later a punk, queen, faggot, pansy, fairy, she-man*. (Allan and Burrige 2007, p. 158, my emphasis)

So, although even among gay people such lexis is used as an in-group solidarity marker (thus transforming proper dysphemisms into euphemistic dysphemisms), it is true that the role of the “passive” gay is still associated with a negative concept of the womanly type seen as “weaker”; it is not surprising, therefore, that all those expressions denoting femininity (“nancy-boy”, “Mary-Ann”, “queen”, “fairy”, “she-man”) have constructed the powerful and all-pervasive conceptual metaphor GAY AS A WOMAN that also informs the language of this film, again underscoring how the audience was not expected to be able to embrace difference but to feel the need be reassured about conventional clichés (that make homosexuality more tolerable even among homophilic groups). This way, they also feel superior with respect to stereotyped minorities, as argued by De Marco: “stereotypes arise from the assumption that one group or one culture represents the ‘normal’ and is, therefore, assumed to be superior to other groups or cultures” (De Marco 2006, p. 3).

Let us look first at a few examples of Phillip’s “feminine speechways”³² and how they reassuringly fit with those of his “male” partner :

³² Cf. the seminal early work by Robin Lakoff. Though outdated and criticized, namely for overlooking the difference within “various if not divergent groups of women” (note the focus on “intragroup differences and intergroup overlap” in Eckert, McConnell-Ginet 1996, p. 193, among others) it still proves effective when analyzing *stereotypical* representations of women or, in this case, of the concept GAY (behaving) AS A WOMAN. Lakoff famously proposed the gender deficient model according to which women’s speech could be distinguished from men’s for several recurring features, such as, among others: edges (“sort of”, “kind of”, “it seems like”); highly evaluative adjectives (“divine”, “adorable”, “lovely”, “gorgeous”); super-polite forms; high frequency of apologizing forms; coarse language avoidance; indirect requests; grammar and pronunciation correctness or use of prestige grammar; frequent phonological emphasis (Lakoff 1975). See also Tannen 1990; Cortese 1992; Spender 1980; Crawford 2006; Mooney and Betsy 2015.

<p>1) Phillip: [<i>Over the phone, to Steve</i>]: I'm still angry with you, <i>but</i> there's something I want you to know.... even if sometimes I don't know who you are... <i>I love you</i>... I never stopped... <i>loving you</i>. I guess you and me are just <i>fools for love</i> or something '<i>written in the stars</i>'... or some crap like thatbut it was never better than with you, Steve. Never more real. And now I realize all that crazy shit you did in your own fucked up way <i>was always for me, always for us. You're the most amazing man. You take my breath away.</i> And even though I can't be with you right now, <i>I'll always be yours... forever.</i></p>
<p>2) Phillip (voice over, uttering his own letters to Steven): Dear Steven. <i>I keep thinking about you saying</i> I'm shy. I guess you're right, but <i>I don't feel shy around you.</i> I think that means something.. Anyway thanks for the chocolate, but I should tell you I'm diabetic so I probably shouldn't... but I did anyway. It's been so long since anyone's shown me any <i>kindness</i> and well, <i>it means a lot.</i> I just wish you were here...</p>
<p>3) Phillip: Don't bullshit me. Did you pay to have him beat up? Steven: Yeah, I did. Phillip: Steven...[<i>a tear comes to Phillip's eye</i>]....This is <i>the most romantic</i> thing anyone's ever done for me [He clamps onto Steven and <i>hugs him</i> with all his life]. I love you so much! Steven: <i>I just want you to be happy, baby.</i> Phillip: You are so amazing!!! [<i>they roll on the bed playfully...</i>] You are my soulmate.</p>

Table 5 (the translation of these excerpts does not present any major semantic alterations)

Phillip's body language (a tear in his eye; hugging; being playfully happy) and speech reveal an acute and fragile sensitivity lexically marked by the recurrent use of cliché expressions that sound like tacky and popular romantic songs (as in the meta-linguistic "crap like that"). These are immediately recognized as non-male, non-heterosexual social behaviours: "I never stopped loving you"; "fools for love"; "something 'written in the stars'"; "it was never better than with you, Steve"; "never more real"; "always for me, always for us"; "you're the most amazing man"; "you take my breath away"; "I'll always be yours... forever"; "this is *the most romantic* thing anyone's ever done for me". Secondly, as indicated by the numerous suspension points, Phillip's speech is also characterized by ellipsis and hesitancy, as if he would not dare to speak out his feelings/ideas. Thirdly, his use of some hyperbolic forms, together with constant focusing on Steven and praising him unconditionally ("I'm still angry with you, *but*..."; "all that crazy shit you did was for me"), reveals his self-subordination to the "male" partner: "you're *the most amazing* man"; "I keep thinking about *you saying*..."; "I don't feel shy around *you*"; "you are so amazing!". Finally, his (rare) use of course language – a trait that is not usually associated with the feminine stereotype – only happens uncontrollably when he is over-sentimental and emotionally touched, or when he's "hysterically" angry at his lover.³³

Conversely, the only utterance by Steven in Table 5 ("*I just want you to be happy, baby*") reveals his patronizing role as a strong protective male, as it happens throughout the film in connection to the marked use of euphemistic and dysphemistic expressions:

³³ Although this is beyond my present purposes, this analysis has been also informed by numerous neurological and neuro-linguistic studies on coarse language as governed in the brain by the cingulate cortex – a component of the limbic system involved in coding for emotions. These studies pointed to non-linguistic thinking affecting the structure of language, e.g. in the Tourette Syndrome, where 25–50% of the patients swear involuntarily, or in specific cases of aphasia (Berecz 1992; Jay 2000; Bowers 2011).

<i>English</i>	<i>Italian</i>	<i>Back Translation</i>
<p>Steven: I know a guy. He took care of it. <i>I'm gonna take care of everything...</i> [Steven gently caresses Phillip's face. Phillip is melting. Then suddenly, Phillip grabs Steven's bottom]. Phillip: <i>Enough romance, let's fuck.</i> [They launch themselves onto the bunk and as they get to business...] Stephen [exclaims]: Don't bite! Don't bite! [then, with pleasure]: <i>What the fuck!</i> FADE OUT.</p>	<p>Conosco un tizio. Ci ha pensato lui. <i>Mi occuperò io di tutto.</i></p> <p><i>Basta romanticismi. Facciamo!</i></p> <p><i>Non mordere! Non mordere! Che bocca hai!</i></p>	<p>I know a guy. He took care of it. I'm gonna take care of everything.</p> <p>Enough romance! <i>Let's make!</i></p> <p><i>Don't bite! Don't bite! What a mouth you have!</i></p>

Table 6

The scene introduces the first sexual experience of the couple: Steven has miraculously managed to reach his lover in another section of the prison where he was not allowed. Firstly, “I’m gonna take care of everything” reiterates Steven’s masculine protecting role in the couple. At the same time, though, the sexual initiative is taken by the feminine character, who, in a bout of romantic eroticism grabs his lover and, by using an imperative form, exclaims the vulgar “Let’s fuck!”. This has been down-toned into the more indefinite “facciamo”, a clear euphemism for sexual intercourse (although in Italian the verb “fare” as a euphemism for “fuck” is mainly used in the past participle “fatto”, “made”) that suggests the need not to offend or shock the audience who would otherwise perceive the stereotyped feminine assuming a disturbingly leading role (or even a gay couple clearly uttering “fuck”).

The subsequent expression in Table 6 shows, once more, a conversely-oriented substitution and leads to further socio-cultural considerations. As the two engage in fellatio, we are only shown Stephen’s face moaning and then exclaiming the idiomatic expletive “what the fuck!”, a vulgar but not insulting locution. Strangely enough, the Italian translation that had just opted for the euphemistic “facciamo”, opts here for a more direct and explicit expression: “what a mouth you have!”. Some reasons could be hypothesized to understand such a choice. While, for an Italian audience, “let’s fuck” (“scopiamo”) would have caused uneasiness, in that it would subvert Phillip’s subordinate role, to clearly express liking about his mouth engaging in fellatio seems to reflect and reinforce a previous mind-set rooted in the intersection of the conceptual metaphors WOMAN AS PREY, WOMAN AS OBJECT (for sex) and GAY AS ANIMAL.

While the “euphemism “facciamo” relies on ambiguous and highly connotative language, the Italian “che bocca” (“what a mouth”) appears as a dysphemistic synecdoche by means of which Steven – who identifies his lover as a weak recipient for his protection and care – identifies him also as only “a mouth” dedicatedly satisfying his sexual appetites. Both expressions (euphemistic and dysphemistic) fulfill the need to understand the sexual taboo in terms of different conceptual domains. “Mouth” and “bite” could be referred to the broader metaphor SEX IS EATING, designating, as Fernandez argues, the

taboos “copulate” and “promiscuous female” (Crespo-Fernandez 2008, p. 99).³⁴ While the euphemistic alternative provide a socially acceptable practice and a tolerable way to deal with the taboo of gay sex, the dysphemistic expression implies that the “feminine gay” is seen as a sexual object to be used. The ambivalence here also reflects the numerous current discourses on homosexuality:

Unlike previous decades, there is no single “dominant” discourse of homosexuality at present; rather there are a number of related yet conflicting discourses, which point to a dramatic reformulation of the way that western society conceptualizes sexuality and gay men view themselves. (Baker 2005, p. 220)

Discussing some “definitions” of homosexuality in contemporary western discourses, Paul Baker emphasizes how the most common stereotypes (gays as promiscuous, outrageously flamboyant, attempting to convert children) “go back to the 19th century medical, religious and legal discourses which cast gay men as criminal deviants” (Baker 2005, p. 221). In addition, in the specific case of homophobia, Baker shows the frequency with which both tabloid newspapers and gay erotic texts utilize a discourse of gay men as having the sexual appetite of animals, although “in the former this is characterized as a disturbingly negative trait associated with being predatory, whereas in the latter it is seen as a positive sign of virility” (Baker *ibid.*).

So, while “virile” sex is still paradoxically deemed as more positive even among gay people, some segments of the audience may feel threatened by the same virility they admire in heterosexual people when this virility comes to characterize gay men (“let’s fuck” / “facciamo”). Let us look at the following dialogue between the two main characters:

English	Italian	Back Translation
<p>[Post-coitus cuddle and talk]. Phillip: And for a while I was Executive Assistant to a Broadway Producer... Steven: Really? What’s a Broadway producer doing in Atlanta? Phillip: <i>I didn’t ask.</i> Stephen: What’d you do for him? Phillip: <i>Well</i>, I mainly just rode around town in his limo, drinking and sucking him off. [giggles]. Phillip: Oh well, he was a nice guy. I only dated him for a little while anyway. Then I dated this full-blooded Apache <i>who made me</i> dress up like a baseball player.</p>	<p>E per un po’ sono stato assistente esecutivo di un assistente di Broadway. Davvero? Cosa ci faceva un produttore di Broadway ad Atlanta? <i>Non gliel’ho chiesto.</i> Che facevi per lui? <i>Beh, insomma</i>, me ne andavo in giro nella sua limousine bevendo e <i>facendogli tanti yo-yo</i>. Sì, ma era uno simpatico. Ci sono stato per un po’, poi mi sono messo con un Apache purosangue. <i>Mi faceva vestire da giocatore di baseball.</i></p>	<p><i>Well, actually</i>, I rode around in his limo, drinking and giving him a lot of yo-yos.</p>

Table 7

³⁴ See also Hines who studies eating metaphors in conceptualizations that equate women as sex objects with the implications of “powerlessness, inanimacy and procurability” (2000, p. 146).

The dialogue in Table 7 shows again Phillip’s feminine speech (following Lakoff’s deficient model) characterized by “speaking less” or avoiding direct questions (“I didn’t ask”) and hedges like “well” that, in Italian, got even intensified (“beh, insomma” instead of “well, I mainly”). Although the deficient model asserted coarse language avoidance in feminine speech, in the original we see that coarse language was instead legitimated (“sucking him off”), as Phillip refers to fellatio through the highly taboo phrasal verb “to suck off” that is even stronger and more vulgar than the most common “to suck”. In Italian, there is another euphemism – “yo-yo” – that conceptually associates oral sex to the metaphor SEX IS GAME, not only for the content (a toy) but also for the register that may be reminiscent of baby-talk (thus reinforcing the idea of the feminine weak needing protection). In Italian, the euphemistic word “yo-yo” is very rarely used to replace the dysphemism “blow-job” or to indicate the orthomorphisms “fellatio” or “oral sex”, although it is occasionally used in some Southern dialects.³⁵ SEX IS GAME is the source of other English euphemisms pointed out by Crespo-Fernandez (2008, p. 107), such as “play doctors/ play nurses”, “score” for “copulate”, “play around” for “copulating casually” or “play the field” for “be sexually promiscuous”. Interestingly enough, only “play doctors” has an Italian equivalent (“giocare al dottore”), so as to indicate that in Italian the conceptualization chosen by translators is less pervasive than in English. Nevertheless, as Crespo-Fernandez explains, “the imagery of game and sports favours an unbiased reinterpretation of sexual encounter *as an innocent past-time*. This clearly determines *the perception of the receiver*, who is compelled to understand the sexual taboo in terms of this particular conceptualization, leaving aside other *unacceptable* semantic traits of the referent” (ibid, my emphasis). The same conceptual connection to innocence, also in terms of child-like behavior and language, is spread throughout the film’s dubbing:

English	Italian	Back Translation
[Prison Cell. Steven greets Arnie, a new cellmate]. Steven: Hi. Welcome to prison. I’m Steven. [Arnie is terrified, speechless] Steven: Oh don’t worry, I’m not gonna hurt you. Steven: First time? Arnie nods. Steven: Well you just need to know <i>a few ins and outs</i> and you’ll be fine.	Benvenuto in prigione sono Steven Non avere paura, non ti farò del male. Prima volta? Già. <i>Impara cosa è in e cosa è out e te la caverai.</i>	Welcome to prison, I’m Steven. Don’t be scared, I’m not gonna hurt you. First time? Right. <i>Learn what’s in and what’s out and you’ll be fine.</i>

³⁵ I acknowledge Dr Fabio Corbisiero for suggesting the use of the word in Sicilian dialect (during the post-panel discussion at the AIS Conference where the original version of this article was presented). It is interesting to note that, by consequently searching the internet for other uses of the word, I found a forum devoted to yo-yo toys, which includes a discussion on the ways the word is used in other contexts. One of the users’ answers was: “in my region you say so *when a woman practices oral sex to a man*” (ex. “*she gave me a yo-yo*”). The statement is actually revealing of the ways many people tend to 1) associate women to sexual objects 2) not even think of gay sex when they think about sex. Although not within the scope of this study, another significant reference in the forum was to the pop song “Like a Yo-Yo” by internationally acclaimed 80s singer Sabrina Salerno. Since the star was marketed as a sexy highly stereotyped bimbo type, the text of the song, playing on the double meaning, reveals women’s subordinate role and again stresses on the concept of SEX AS GAME: “Like a yo yo/You’re spinning me up and down/ No matter how I try/ I just can’t get away/ Time after time/ *You can always make me stay/ You treat me like a toy/ That you’re gonna throw away/ Again and again/ You make me want to play/ Like a yo yo*”. See the forum at <http://www.yoyomaniacs.it/forum/viewtopic.php?f=20&t=1135>.

<p>Steven escorts Arnie through the prison, <i>friendly</i> waving to to everybody. He then points an older inmate.</p> <p>Stephen: See him? Over there? Him? Anything you want from outside, he's the guy. Candy, cigarettes, drugs, whatever. He's the guy. Just keep in mind- it's gonna cost you a lot of money. <i>Or you could suck his dick. Your choice.</i></p>	<p>Vedi quello? Là in fondo? Quello? Qualunque cosa vuoi dall'esterno è il tipo giusto. Caramelle, sigarette, droga, quello che ti pare. È lui. Però ricordati che ti costerà un sacco di soldi. <i>O gli fai un lecca lecca. A tua scelta</i></p>	<p>See that one? Over there? That one? Anything you want from outside, he's the guy. Candy, cigarettes, drugs, whatever. He's the guy. Just keep in mind- it's gonna cost you a lot of money. <i>Or you make him a lollipop. Your choice.</i></p>
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Table 8

English	Italian	Back Translation
<p>Steven [patronizing, to Arnie]: You're gonna catch a beating any day now, that's just the way it is. I lost three teeth and cracked a vertebrae. Anyway, all you need to do is fight back. Win or lose, just fight back. Or you could <i>try to suck the guy's dick. Your choice.</i></p>	<p>Ti becchi una pestata uno di questi giorni. Così vanno le cose. Io ho perso tre denti. Ho una vertebra incrinata. Comunque devi solo reagire. Vinci o perdi basta che reagisci. <i>Oppure fai un lecca lecca al tizio. A tua scelta.</i></p>	<p>You're gonna catch a beating any day now, that's just the way things go. I lost three teeth. I have a cracked vertebrae. Anyway, you just need to fight back. Win or lose, just fight back. <i>Or you make him a lollipop. Your choice.</i></p>

Table 9

In stating that Arnie must learn “some ins and some outs”, Steven operates a clear in-groupness strategy meant to assert his dominant role in the community where the weaker, subordinate Arnie aspires to belong. Being a masculine gay character, Stephen uses the coarse “suck his dick” to refer to fellatio as exchange good in prison. This becomes a means to be aligned in the inmates’ community and therefore to avoid being marginalized. By using an extremely artful metaphor – since “lecca lecca/lollipop” for “blow job” is very unusual – dubbing resorted again on the SEX/GAME/CHILDISH conceptualization. To hear a coarser expression (equivalent to the original) in Italian, uttered by the masculine type in a male friendly exchange, was deemed as unacceptable and translators opted for a metaphor that again associates homosexuality with being childish, playful, innocuous. The four occurrences of the word “lecca-lecca”³⁶ – together with the previously mentioned “yo-yo” – reinforce conceptual association with a dreamy, childlike³⁷ dimension that is apparently less intimidating for the audience than direct coarse words depicting gay sex.

³⁶ The other two occurrences of “suck dick”, translated as “fare un lecca lecca”, are in the following dialogues: 1) Stephen: [...] you're gonna have to pay for it if you wanna get it. Five bucks per item or *you can suck my dick*. 2) Steven and Arnie arrive at the doorway of their cell. Steven: Well that's about it. You're gonna be fine. Don't worry. And if you need anything you just let me know. Alright? Arnie thinks for a moment. Arnie: So, uh, do I need *to suck your dick*? Stephen: That'd be great.

³⁷ As the *Dictionary of Euphemisms* show, several Victorian euphemistic expressions for “homosexual” (still used nowadays) were referred to the semantic field of “unreal dream” or “childlike experiences” in connection to “being feminine and effeminate”: “Nancy”; “nancy boy” (diminutive of Annis, Anne); “Miss Evelyne”; “fairy”; “namby-pamby”. Even “sod” (sodomite), on a psycholinguistic level, could be associated to the semantics of childhood, given the possible association to the vulgar “little sod” (naughty

The Italian dubbing has thus opted for what could be defined as a “hyperbolic euphemism”, namely an inflated and overstated uncommon euphemism that doesn’t magnify the meaning of the original referent (as in hyberbole proper), but rather decreases it by magnifying the euphemistic effect and, in doing so, it maximizes the distance, in the receiver, from the original unacceptable and unspeakable concept.³⁸ Such a semantic and pragmatic operation, carried out on the double axis of translating a taboo subject into a euphemism and translating a taboo expression into another socio-cultural and linguistic domain, seems to verge on the rhetorical operation, in Ricoerian terms, of metalogism: “a deviation, not between words and meanings, but between the meanings of words and reality, the reality term being taken in the most general sense of extra-linguistic referent of discourse” (Ricoeur 2003, p. 200). As a consequence, Ricoeur maintains, such tropes “do not only disturb the lexicon but also the referential function” (Ricoeur 2003, p. 201).³⁹ This conflict between meaning and reality seems to be closely related to the type of (often biased) social and linguistic knowledge that (dubbed) films are able to construct in the viewers’ minds (knowledge being not immanent but conveyed by social practices; see Riley (2007, p. 3) and section 2 above).

These metaphorizations in the use of euphemisms reveal both the reasons for the speaker’s use of such expressions and the expectations of what is deemed as speakable or unspeakable for the given targeted audience. What Crespo-Fernandez claims about the receiver’s reaction to euphemisms and dysphemisms can easily apply to the reactions of the film’s audience, thus construing and shaping specific opinions and mind-frames, or making pre-existing ones static and unaltered:

[Understanding of the metaphorical substitute is] a process in which the receiver’s role must by no means be underestimated. Indeed, the associative links between the metaphorical item and the taboo require an active participation on the part of the receiver *who is expected to identify an alternative and novel meaning in the designation of the forbidden concept* and, in so doing, go *beyond the literal meaning and arrive at the speaker’s intention to be respectful or offensive*. Otherwise, a literal understanding of metaphors would impede effective communication because, after all euphemism and dysphemism must necessarily be ambiguous to carry out their communicative function. (Crespo-Fernandez 2008, p. 105)

In the case of cinema marketing, this “grammar of expectations” sometimes reflects pre-existing mind-frames that are further emphasized, so as to consolidate, through language, group membership and cohesiveness, dominance and marginalization. This is especially visible in the first scene of gay sex in the film, presenting, in the Italian version, an unusual euphemism for orgasm, though rooted in the common metaphor **SEX AS A JOURNEY**:

annoying child): Similarly, also women were linguistically depicted as “tots”, as in the expression “tot hunting” (“prowling for women”). Paradoxically, while the film shows how several of these expressions have been replaced, over time, by more direct speech-acts in English, the Italian dubbing reveals here a more conservative approach rooted in the socio-cultural norms of certain segments of the population.

³⁸ The concept of “hyperbolic euphemism” is here suggested due to the unusual nature of the euphemisms used and their high frequency in the Italian dubbing. It will be further investigated in the light of a larger corpus of which the present study is part.

³⁹ Within his study on metaphor, Ricoeur further applies such concepts to “the bridge between metalogism and metasememe”: “But it is because metaphor has been separated from the complete statement that it appears to be another sort of figure, and that only its incorporation into a metalogism lets it participate in the referential function recognized in the allegory, fable and parable, while the metasememe as such remains a transformation operating at the level of every element of discourse, of every word (Ricoeur 2003, 202-203).

English	Italian	Back Translation
<p>[Vigorous lovemaking is heard until we make out Steven's face as he's performing the active role].</p> <p><i>Stephen: I'm gonna come, I'm gonna come...</i></p> <p>[Suddenly we see the face of a man in the passive role].</p> <p>Man (shouting): <i>Do it Man! Come in my ass!</i></p>	<p><i>Sto per venire...sto per venire...</i></p> <p><i>Dai! Dai! Riempimi di gioia!</i></p>	<p>I'm gonna come, I'm gonna come...</p> <p><i>Come on! Come on! Fill me with joy!</i></p>

Table 10

The scene is meant to shock since, until then, Steven had not been revealed as a gay character, so that the audience was expecting to see a face of a woman instead of a man. The surprise and shocking effect is further increased by the very vulgar expression of the man ("come in my ass"), which has been dramatically toned down with an abstract metaphor ("joy" instead of "semen"). This serves as another very unusual euphemistic choice to meet the audience's expectations and/or not to increase their potential (moral) shock. As noticed earlier, euphemisms are again used when the taboo words are not meant as direct insults. In this case, the film shows how, once again, homophobic insults are not mitigated but at times exacerbated, whereas an excessive proliferation of non-homophobic slurs does get mitigated (in accordance with general dubbing policies in Italy).

English	Italian	Back Translation
<p>[Phillip is eager to receive a letter from Steven]</p> <p>Phillip: Hurry up would you?</p> <p>Cleavon: <i>I ain't no motherfucking DHL, faggot!</i></p> <p>Besides I ain't got nothing for you anyway...</p> <p>Phillip: But it's been three days.</p> <p>Cleavon: You got a tracking number, <i>motherfucker?</i></p> <p>Phillip: No.</p> <p>Cleavon: <i>Then shut your faggot ass!</i></p>	<p>Oh Avanti Cleavon!</p> <p><i>Non sono un finocchio figlio di puttana della DHL ..comunque non ho niente per te.</i></p> <p>Ma sono già tre giorni!</p> <p>Ce l'hai il numero della spedizione?</p> <p>No.</p> <p><i>E allora chiudi quell finocchissimo culo!</i></p>	<p>Oh come on Cleavon!</p> <p><i>I'm not a motherfucking faggot!</i> Besides I ain't got nothing for you anyway...</p> <p>But it's been three days!</p> <p>You got the tracking number?</p> <p>No</p> <p><i>Then shut your super-faggot ass!</i></p>

Table 11

English	Italian	Back Translation
<p>[Phillip has asked Cleavon to play a romantic tune].</p> <p>Phillip: Fine. But you gotta play the whole thing.</p> <p>Cleavon: Yeah, alright.</p> <p>Phillip: Promise?</p> <p>Cleavon: <i>Fuck you- my word's my bond motherfucker, Fuck you!</i></p>	<p>Ok. Devi farla suonare tutta.</p> <p>D'accordo, d'accordo Prometti?</p> <p><i>Piantala! La mia parola è un impegno, capito? Piantala!</i></p>	<p>Fine. But you gotta play it all.</p> <p>Alright, alright. Promise?</p> <p><i>Stop it! My word is my bond, capisce? Stop it!</i></p>

Table 12

The dialogues in Tables 11 and 12 are taken from scenes in which Phillip interacts with Cleavon, the roughest and most vulgar prison inmate who constantly use coarse language and homophobic remarks. In the first instance of taboo expressions, one notes how the homophobic offence-oriented insult “faggot!” has been deleted, but the word (literally translated as “finocchio”) has remained in a different sentence. In Italian, Cleavon does not address the slur to Phillip but rather uses the vulgar and offensive word to state that *he* is not a faggot. What seems at first a translation directed to mitigate homophobia is actually a reinforcement of the character’s alignment with the hetero-normative rule that accepts the insult towards minorities. Those following the rule do so precisely because they are not or do not want to be part in it (“I am not a faggot”, so I insult you as a faggot) and, by avoiding alignment with the tolerant group, they feel superior with respect to the minority. Soon afterwards, the offensive “shut your faggot ass”, a strong dysphemistic locution where the epithet faggot is nominalized to qualify the vulgar “ass”, is translated, for no apparent reason, with an even stronger qualifier, namely the superlative form of the Italian (literal) “finocchio” (“finocchissimo”). Reinforcing the dysphemistic word makes the Italian audience perceive a greater out-group detachment between the two characters, so that it becomes easier to assume a specific ideological stance towards one of them.

Even more surprising – showing again the ambivalence of linguistic taboo – is the final section of the dialogue in Table 12, where Cleavon repeatedly insults Steven by using a non-homophobic slur (“motherfucker”) and curses him with the common “fuck you”. This time, both expressions have been down-toned as simply “stop it” (“piantala”). Although the reasons may be various, it is possible to infer from the other instances, that here the character’s speech was too rough and overstated, and had to be smoothed for reasons of offensiveness. Quite the reverse, all of his homophobic remarks had to be kept or even augmented in order to consolidate the same detachment he felt towards the gay Phillip.

This process of distancing through the use of insulting language shows how Cleavon’s social bond is rooted in language, as the expression “My word is my bond” (that he angrily exclaims) may suggest. The utterance may be used to meta-linguistically describe the speech-acts highlighted throughout the film, namely those linguistic and social practices that are likely to be recognized and accepted by the audience, so as to ultimately construct the audience’s bond of in- groupness or their sentiment of out-groupness. As maintained by Duszak, the “we” and/versus “they” relationship can construct or change the social values of ingroupness and outgroupness and, even more relevant for the present study, the possession of the same linguistic sign can be a “sign of ingroupness for some and a source of social stigmatization or rejection for others” (Duskak 2002b, p. 6). In this case, given also the economic implications of cinema industry, it is plausible to hypothesize that the the film was distributed and translated with a precise audience in mind, one that is more likely to identify with the homophobic stance than with the homophiliac one. Moreover, the use of hyperbolic euphemisms suggests that the same audience was not supposed/expected to accept homosexual sex uttered in explicit terms, especially within men’s speech behaviours, so that omitting or strongly mitigating the original verbal images may favour, in the Italian audience, the stagnation of pre-existing prejudicial or ignorant mind-frames.

4.1. “You had a mouth on you!”. Case study 3. A Simple Man

Based on the homonymous novel by Christopher Isherwood, Tom Ford’s *A Simple Man* recounts the events of a single day – November 30, 1962 – in the life of George Falconer

(Colin Firth), a middle-aged closeted gay Professor who moved from England to teach in a College in Los Angeles. Planning to commit suicide on that day, he lives his normal routine: he teaches, talks to Kenny, a student he is fascinated by, runs into a young male prostitute, and then meets his life-long friend Charlie (Julianne Moore), a glamorous dipsomaniac divorcee who pretends to be lighthearted but conceals a life of misery and depression. After having dinner with her, George goes to a bar, gets drunk and meets Kenny again. During the day, he has continuous flashbacks of his past life with his lover Jim, who died in a car accident about a year before.⁴⁰

The film emphatically shows American culture in the early 1960s, a period of socio-cultural and political unrest complicated by the Cuban missile crisis, dated precisely one month before the day of the narration (“What future?”, says Kenny, “I mean, Cuba might just blow us up”). The specific context is still significantly affected by the conservative climate of 1950s, particularly strict in terms of gender and sex, thus characterized by taboos and prudish conformity. At the same time, there were early signs of the social strife and turbulence that led to the counterculture in the second half of the decade, with the Civil Rights Movement, Feminism, the Gay Rights Movement and the sexual revolution challenging authority and hegemonic culture. This turmoil was reflected in different uses of language, and language, in its turn, simultaneously constructed different mind-sets moulding a different socio-political context. The intersection of language and context, language being “*both the foundation and the instrumentality* of the social construction of reality” (Riley 2007:9), is reflected in the filmic idiolects and the way characters use and respond to coarse language. Predictably, given the prevailing moral climate, taboo language is not prominent in the film, thus giving salience to the rare occurrences of insults, vulgar expressions and cursing as social gendering markers enabling the rise of LGBT discourse then. Such markers exercise the same function today, especially in those socio-cultural domains still characterized by homophobia, prejudicial stances towards minorities, or by “politically correct” approaches, all of them “*linguaging*” specific conceptualizations of gender and homosexuality. Here, translation practices in dubbing shed further light on cross-cultural differences.

As the analysis will show, the main character’s speech is characterized by correct standard grammar and by the formal prestige variety. He avoids swear words except for a single occurrence (“shit”), uttered in a drunken state and repeating someone else’s language.

At the beginning of the film, George is teaching and has a revealing public conversation in class, as his initial answer in Table 13 shows:

⁴⁰ The film was altogether positively received; negative criticism pointed out how the film was too glossy and visually manieristic. Although not a blockbuster product, but rather targeting a niche intellectual market, the film had a wide world distribution. As for the gay theme, both the poster and the commercial trailer proved controversial, in that they were censored and “de-gayed” to reach a broader audience (see http://www.indiewire.com/article/a_tale_of_two_trailers_the_de-gaying_of_a_single_man#). An early poster for *A Single Man* featured a close-up shot of Colin Firth and Julianne Moore romantically lying together. Ford expressed distaste because the poster made the film look like a comedy. A new poster was then issued with Moore situated in the distant background. Many scenes of homosexual love were instead deleted from the original trailer. Tom Ford declared “I have to say that we live in a society that's pretty weird. For example, you can have full-frontal male nudity on HBO, yet in cinema, you can't have naked male buttocks. You can't have men kissing each other without it being considered adult content. So, in order to cut a trailer that can go into broad distribution in theaters, certain things had to be edited out. But it wasn't an intentional attempt to remove the gayness of the movie.” (See: http://www.ebar.com/arts/art_article.php?sec=film&article=704).

George: The Nazis were obviously wrong to hate the Jews. But their hating was not without a cause... But the cause wasn't real. The cause was imagined. The cause was FEAR. Let's leave the Jews out for a moment and think of another minority. One that can go unnoticed if it needs to.
 [Looks directly at Walter, a slightly effeminate young man, who turns away embarrassed].
There are all sorts of minorities, blondes for example, but a minority is only thought of as one when it constitutes some kind of threat to the majority. A real threat or an imagined one. And therein lies the FEAR. And, if the minority is somehow invisible...
 [Another glance at Walter].
 The fear is even greater. And this FEAR is the reason the minority is persecuted. So, there always is a cause. And the cause is FEAR. *Minorities are just people. People...*
 [Again a subtle look at Walter]...like us.

Table 13 (no major semantic alterations are present in the Italian dubbing)

George's formal register (the only informal elements being contractions), is the same in this didactic exchange and outside the lecture room. Throughout the film we infer that this impeccable idiolect is purposefully constructed and made possible by linguistic and social self-discipline and self-censoring. Here, his words convey a reflection on minorities in general, while the orientation of his gaze is attempting to construct and convey alignment and membership within a specific minority: the interaction with his class, in other words, builds up a general, detached stance and a more private, solitary one at the same time (cf. Duszak 2002b, p. 1). He is thinking of the "invisible" homosexual minority that, like all minorities, represents a threat to a majority frightened by difference. The fact that he never explicitly mentions homosexuality introduces us to the reasons why, unlike the student Kenny, he always employs orthomorphisms and socially acceptable forms, and carefully avoids taboo topics and taboo language. Omission, indirectness and periphrasis are in fact other ways of "speaking" euphemistically to avoid a truth deemed unpleasant both for the interlocutor and, possibly, for the speaker. George's neutral and "ungendered" language reveals how the taboo of homosexuality shapes his social behavior, despite a life-long gay relationship. Besides, homosexuality as taboo is magnified by the taboo of old age (on which I shall return later) that also affects him, as his lexical choices and rhetorical use of repetition reveal further on during his class.⁴¹

Kenny, instead, is the outspoken and "bad-spoken" character in the film and his speech is characterized by slang taboo expressions, cursing and extreme informality, revealing a blunt approach to society's conforming rules:

Kenny: Sir! *May I* speak to you for a minute? Why don't you talk to us like that all the time?
 George: I don't think it went over very well.
 Kenny: *Man*, fear of things gets to me all the time, but you can't talk about it with anyone or you just sound like a fool.
 Kenny: Sometimes my fear of things can almost paralyze me. *It's like I* get really panic stricken and I feel like I *might* explode or something... *May I* ask you a personal question sir?
 George: Of course.
 Kenny: Do you ever *get high*?

⁴¹ George: "Fear, after all, is our real enemy. Fear is taking over our world. Fear is being used as a tool of manipulation in our society. It's how politicians peddle policy and how Madison Avenue sells us things that we don't need. Think about it. Fear that we're going to be attacked, fear that there are communists lurking around every corner, fear that some little Caribbean country that doesn't believe in our way of life poses a threat to us. Fear that black culture may take over the world. Fear of Elvis Presley's hips. Well, maybe that one is a real fear. Fear that our bad breath might ruin our friendships... *Fear of growing old and being alone. Fear that we're useless and that no one cares what we have to say*".

George[stops walking]: *How old do I look to you?*
 Kenny: Have you ever taken any drugs sir?
 George: Of course, *Kenny*.
 Kenny: Like what?
 George: I *shouldn't* really be discussing *this* with *you* on campus *Mr. Potter*.
 Kenny: If you ever want *to get high* sir, I usually have some dope.
 George: You're really *mad* aren't you?
 Kenny: Sorry, sir. I guess *you don't feel very comfortable talking like this*.
 George: What makes you say that?
 Kenny: Lois thinks you're *kind of cagey* [...]
 Kenny: You let us ramble on and on [...] – but you never really tell us EVERYTHING you know about something.
 George: Well, maybe that's true up to a point. *It's not that I want to be cagey*. I can't really discuss things *completely openly at school. Someone would misunderstand..*

Table 14

Despite the initial attempt at politeness (“May I”), Kenny indulges in locutionary acts, lexis and idiomatic expressions (“It’s like I get”, “get high”, “dope”, “get high” etc.) unconventionally informal for the times, both in terms of tenor (addressing a professor he is not well acquainted with) and in terms of field (drugs or, more generally, personal issues). George’s responses oscillate between conservatism and a freer speech influenced by the questions posed by the boy and by the way they are posed. In fact, he even calls him by his first name (“of course Kenny”), although, soon afterwards, after the boy insists on drugs, he reverts to the conventional address form: “I should not (...) you *Mr Potter*”. The sentence also marks the social distance between the two, in that emphasis is on the *I/you* dichotomy expressed by the impossibility to discuss “that”, namely the taboo topic of drugs (here a referent for a number of other taboos, including sex, old age and, simply, personal circumstances). The student is in fact complaining that George does not tell “everything” about “something”, i.e. the fact that he acts “cagey”, constantly hiding his actual stance, or only partially revealing it (“I can’t discuss things *completely openly*”). George’s reply “someone would misunderstand” obviously reveals his fear of breaking social conventions, but it especially points out the strong boundary he feels between “the speakable and the unspeakable”. This, in Goffman’s terms, is “face-work”, i.e. “what individuals do in order to maintain their and other participants face”, in order to “counteract incidents, that is events whose symbolic implications threaten face” (Goffman 1967, p. 12). His facework clearly manifests both verbal membership strategy and communication of knowledge about the social groups the two participants belong to:

Social identity means that individuals know about their own membership and the membership of others of the same group and that they presuppose this knowledge for the others. Usually this knowledge is communicated to people of the same group in order to *confirm and re-establish this relationship as well as to people of other groups in order to raise a difference in the relation to them*. It is a common experience that social groups develop certain [verbal] signs of recognition which their members use in order to communicate them to other non-members. (Helmbrecht 2002, p. 21)

This conversation is just one of the countless occurrences in the film that reveal how the two social practices of linguistic concealment vs linguistic exposure are always juxtaposed in the student/professor interaction. Moreover, it is interesting to note that, while Kenny’s speech is always informal but picks up refined lexis through conversation (as in his opening choice of modality above), George’s formality, challenged by the young man, often verges on the opposite register. This clearly demonstrates, in the specific micro-

context, how social identities are co-constituted by linguistic and extra-linguistic factors and thus “tend to be indeterminate, situational rather than permanent, dynamic and interactively constructed” (Duszak 2002b, p. 2).

Further, the two opposing but mutually-shaping idiolects display social distance and, also, a generation gap. When Kenny repeatedly asks about drugs, the professor puzzlingly replies “how old do you think I am”, so as to stress (for the second time in the film), the taboo topic of old age (increasingly charged with emotion in the story).⁴² His fear of old age, in connection to his being “cagey”, reflects his concern about what Baker calls “aspirational discourse” on and about homosexuality, that is to say the tendency to construct (both in heterosexual and homosexual individuals) an “ideal” gay man, having only positive attributes that must be consistent in his linguistic, social and cultural practices. This leads to a “commercialization of gay culture” construed by several discourses within gay male culture, namely “an increasing set of characteristics which appear to promote conformity rather than diversity” (Baker 2005, pp. 221-222) and, especially, a set of characteristics that, although mirroring homophilia rather than homophobia, are still rooted in stereotypes.

This persistency of the stereotype also connects to particular and standard forms of well-mannered speech that could be explained in terms of the “middle-class politeness criterion” (MCPC), after Allan and Burridge:⁴³

Although the X-phemistic value of language expressions is determined by the particular context in which they are uttered, many are perceived as (and marked in dictionaries as) intrinsically orthophemistic (faeces, euphemistic poo) or dysphemistic (shit). Such default evaluations are motivated by the middle-class politeness criterion. *The MCPC is determined by what would be considered the polite form when addressing a casual acquaintance of the opposite sex, in a formal situation, in a middle-class environment. Etiquette demands that a speaker addressing a public audience should automatically assume the MCPC; in other words, the language is carefully and consciously selected, with a respectable mixed-gender middle-class audience in mind [...]* We saw examples of pejorization; it usually results from society’s perception of a word’s tainted denotatum contaminating the word itself. (Allan, Burridge 2007, p. 54)

MCPC as social practice is displayed in the interaction between George and his friend Charlotte, with whom he shares both English nationality and social class. Different from George’s socio-cultural conformity, Charlie, though sharing the automatisms of politeness and well-spokenness, tends to be apparently more outspoken, selling this as a trait of her glamorous sex appeal and need to free herself from social and class restrictions. Her

⁴² Before analyzing the conversation between George and his friend Charlie, also deploying a meaningful euphemism for “old age”, another reference to the topic occurs while the two are drinking and listening to the jazz song “Stormy Weather”. Suddenly, Charley runs across the room to change the record and puts on a wilder song: “Charley: Wait, wait, wait! Don’t move. I LOVE this / George: You are *insane!* / Charlie: *Come on old man!*”. Both “insane” and “old man” are typical dysphemistic euphemisms that perform the function of “praise-centered offence”, reinforcing the bond of friendship rather than distancing through insults. In Italian, “insane” was rendered with the equivalent “pazza” while “old-man” with the semi-equivalent “vecchietto”, i.e. the hypocoristic for “vecchio” (old), slightly diluting the pragmatic effect but emphasizing the bond of affection and the interaction-centered function of the otherwise offensive expression.

⁴³ As for the vague and debatable notion of “middle-class” the authors specify that as: “what is a middle-class environment? It is a deliberately vague notion used to exclude, on the one hand, those so rich and/or so powerful that they can disregard social conventions observed by the mass of the community; on the other hand, it also excludes those so uneducated, poor and deprived that they are unaware of, or cannot afford to observe, the niceties of such social conventions” (Allan, Burridge 2007, p. 54)

register is thus generally formal, using standard lexis, but she also jokingly curses and purposefully uses epithets to be “outrageous”, as in the following emblematic example:

English	Italian
Charley: Oh, resolution number two! More smoking and more drinking and <i>screw it all!</i> So, come mix me up a drink. I'll have a gin and tonic please ... <i>watch out baby!</i>	Oh, proposito numero due! Fumare di più, bere di più <i>e mandare affanculo tutti!</i> Quindi vai, preparami un bel drink. Voglio un gin and tonic (sic) per favore ... attento tesoro!

Table 15

Charlie intersperses her speech both with informal/slang and coarse expressions. In this case, the expletive “*screw it all!*” which has been rendered in Italian as “*mandare affanculo tutti!*”. The translation maintains the vulgarity by using the common equivalent for “screw you!” or “fuck you!” (“*vaffanculo*” in all of its morphological variants) but has reinforced the pragmatic effect by changing the expression into an indirect vocative (“*vaffanculo a tutti!*”). Though vulgar and unconventional for Charlie’s class and speech, “screw it all!” does not have the same offensive effect as the Italian rendering does, since “screw it all” is actually a dysphemism – here used as an interaction-centered taboo word – for other orthomorphistic informal expressions such as “who cares” and “whatever”. So, a more equivalent translation, both from a semantic and a pragmatic point of view, could have been, for example, “*chissene frega!*”, or, to maintain the vulgar register of “screw”, they could have opted for something ruder like “*chi cazzo se ne frega!*”. On the contrary, “*mandare affanculo tutti!*”, even stronger than the possible “*mandare affanculo tutto!*”, make her sound much more offensively direct and implies a stance of self-distancing from the rest, feeling superior in a solid in-group membership (an intention that was not present in the original exclamation).

Charlie uses vulgarity as a mark of irony, a face-protecting device towards Charlie and one she expects him to recognize.⁴⁴ In a subsequent scene, in fact, besides discussing about old age again, they remember her even greater linguistic freedom in London. George paradoxically complains about being addressed by a student with the euphemism “senior citizen” which he considers as symptomatic of a “breakdown of culture and manners” in the USA. It is a paradox because the euphemism should downgrade the impact of a dysphemistically-used expression like “old” (which in other contexts of use could be considered an orthomorphism). Thus, George *recognizes* and feels offended by the use of the polite euphemistic form precisely because, being affected by the taboo and fear of ageing, he is able to detect the semantics proper of the dysphemistic euphemism and the unpleasant truth⁴⁵ it failed to hide:

⁴⁴ “Face” represents “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself *by the lines others assume* he has taken during a particular contact (Goffman 1967, p. 5). Following Goffman, in 1987 Brown and Levinson distinguished two types of face: “positive face” (reflecting an individual’s desire to be accepted by others) and “negative face” (desire to be free and independent) (Brown and Levinson 1987). Generally, people cooperate in maintaining each other’s face needs and the context of the interaction is essential in defining the boundaries between the two. Equally relevant to understand the nature of the dialogues above, is the post-Brown and Levinson study by Culpeper, in that he argues about the various emotional degrees ranging from impoliteness to overpoliteness, wherein overpoliteness can also provoke a context-dependent perlocutionary effect of offense (Culpeper 2011).

⁴⁵ See for example a 2004 article by Pulitzer-awarded journalist William Eckenberger who discusses the offensive and misleading nature of the euphemism “senior citizen” by saying that it is “condescending, demeaning, patronizing”: “It is the latest incarnation in the age-old struggle to find a term for old that is linguistically, ethically, and most of all, politically correct [...] The other thing that’s wrong with “senior

English	Italian
<p>George: Seriously, “old” doesn’t exist anymore. The other day a student called me a “senior citizen”.</p> <p>Charlie: I wouldn’t mind if “old” didn’t exist, but I’m not sure “senior” is what I’m aiming for either.</p> <p>George: It’s all becoming so bland... it’s not why I came to America. It’s <i>a complete breakdown of culture and manners</i>.</p> <p>Charley: Well, <i>the young ones have no manners</i>. The other day at the car wash I a young man look me up and down and ask me if I was a natural blonde!</p> <p>George: What did you say?</p> <p>Charlie: I looked him straight in the eye and said: “Well, let’s just say that if I stood on my head I would be a natural brunette with lovely breath.”</p> <p>George: You did not!</p> <p>Charley: I did! And the amusing thing was that it went right over his head!</p> <p>[They laugh].</p> <p>George: <i>You had a mouth on you even back in London! Do you remember that old lesbian who threw her drink at your head because you asked her “if she was hung like a donut!?”</i></p> <p>[They laugh hysterically].</p>	<p>George: Sul serio, non c’è più il concetto di vecchiaia. L’altro giorno uno studente mi ha definito un “cittadino anziano.”</p> <p>Charlie: Magari non esistesse più la vecchiaia, ma non so <i>se la mia intenzione è diventare anziana</i>.</p> <p>George: è diventato tutto insulso...non sono venuto qui per questo. È il crollo totale della cultura e delle buone maniere.</p> <p>Charlie:<i>I giovani non conoscono le buone maniere</i>. L’altro giorno all’auto-lavaggio un ragazzo mi ha squadrato dalla testa ai piedi e mi ha chiesto se ero una bionda naturale.</p> <p>George: E tu?</p> <p>Charlie: L’ho guardato dritto negli occhi e ho detto “diciamo che se mi metessi a testa in giù sarei una bruna naturale con l’alito buono”.</p> <p>George: Non ci credo!</p> <p>Charlie: Già ... e la cosa divertente è che non gli ha fatto né caldo né freddo.</p> <p>George: Non hai peli sulla lingua! Sin dai tempi di Londra...Ti ricordi quella lesbica che ti rovesciò il drink in testa perché tu le hai chiesto “<i>ce l’hai grossa come una ciambella</i>”</p>

Table 16

In Italian, the semantic and social implications of the adjective “senior” are difficult to translate. The obvious choice “anziano” literally translates “elderly” and does not have the direct (euphemistic) reference to experience as “senior”, owing, also, to the other collocations and contexts of use it has in English. Besides, though less offensive than “vecchio”, “anziano” could also be considered a dysphemism in some contexts or interaction.

Although George is offended by the student’s euphemism, he is amused by Charlie’s anecdote about the blunt young man and by the fact that she answered in kind. In doing so, she put herself at the same level as the young man who was taken as an example of those who “breakdown good manners”. Her similar irreverent tone *without using any swearwords* is part of the “face” she protectively claims towards George and that he easily recognizes, thus becoming a source of irony and laughter. As George later exclaims, she has a “mouth” on her, a metaphor that indicates that she is able to speak freely, outspokenly. The Italian translation is again slightly different on a semantic level and seems to emphasize more a psychological trait than an important feature in her speech behaviour: “non avere peli sulla lingua” is the equivalent idiom for “not mince words”,

citizen” is that it speaks of a homogeneity that does not exist. Indeed, the longer one lives, the more experiences one has and the more diverse one becomes. But “senior citizen” connotes shuffleboard and pinochle, rocking chairs and golf carts, frailty and dependency. There are far too many 70-year-old hang gliders, computer whizzes, and marathoners for the stereotype to have any validity at all” (Ecenberger 2004).

namely “saying what you mean as clearly and cuttingly as possible”. On the contrary, the expression “you had a mouth on you” (with the reference to the London days and to an even more conservative culture) focuses more on *how she speaks* than on *what she says*. The expression used is more reminiscent of the idiom “to have the mouth of a sailor”, i.e. “to have a tendency or proclivity to use rude, coarse or vulgar language”.⁴⁶ This is confirmed by George’s recollection in direct reported speech (“do you remember that *lesbian* [...] because *you* told her ‘if she was hung like a donut’”). As in his constantly polite speech, George uses the orthomorphism “lesbian” to refer to the homosexual woman and he does not refer to her in dysphemistic terms like “dyke”, i.e. a masculine lesbian, which could have been plausible given Charlie’s locution “she was *hung* like a donut”. The term “hung” is normally referred to men and it is a slang vulgar expression meaning “sexually endowed”, i.e. having a big penis. To refer to a lesbian with such a “masculine” expression was deemed inappropriate and offensive (hence the lesbian’s reaction), but also humorously irresistible for the two friends, since it broke the etiquette and created a sense of irreverent freedom. In Italian, the explicitness and assertiveness of the simile is completely diluted into the locution “ce l’aveva grossa come una ciambella” (“she had *it* as big as a donut”). The use of a direct object pronoun (“la”) in accordance with the feminine adjective “grossa” makes the Italian audience understand that she is referring to the woman’s vagina, but the sexual organ had never been mentioned. So, it is an indirect, periphrastic locution that avoids the sexual word. The organ wasn’t mentioned in English either, but to use the sexual adjective “hung” was a clear reference to it. It also reversed the woman’s gender identity by typifying her as a male surrogate in a vulgar informal register. All of these elements have disappeared in the dubbed version, which again appears as more politically correct.

Though the two friends initially reminisce and amuse themselves by dancing, chatting and drinking, Charley’s misery and her desire for a deeper relationship with George surface in the conversation. She shows her failure to understand George’s relationship with Jim and calls their love story “a substitute for something else”; dubbed as “surrogato”/ “surrogate”). This angers George and leads to a violent verbal fight in which the two reveal their ideological stances, i.e. George’s covert sexism⁴⁷ and Charlie’s covert homophobia. She admits she was jealous of Jim and then angrily complains about having being left by her husband and her son. The fight then climaxes and ends with the following lines in which Charlie bursts out with strong homophobic name-calling which has significantly been altered in the Italian version:

English	Italian
George: You have lots of friends. You’ll be fine. Charley sighs.	Sei piena di amici, andrà benissimo.
Charlie: Yes, I have friends. But none of them need me. And yes I have you and if you weren’t such a goddamn poof we could have been happy!	Si certo ho gli amici. Ma nessuno ha bisogno di me. Io ho te, e <i>se tu non fossi così finocchio</i> saremmo stati felici.

Table 17

⁴⁶ The other idioms combining the verb “to have” with the object “mouth” are “to have a big mouth” (to be gossiper) and “to have a loud mouth” (to be loud and excessively talkative). None of them is relevant here for the elliptical and synecdoche-like “to have a mouth on you”.

⁴⁷ Charlie: “It’s not as easy for a woman”. [...] George: Move back to London! Change your life! *If you’re not happy being a woman then stop acting like one.* [...] Charlie: Living in the past IS my future. *You’re a man.* It doesn’t have to be yours”.

During the fierce argument, George never uses any coarse language. Charlie abandons all the slang (non-vulgar) expressions she had been using until then and resorts to her formal well-spoken idiolect, so as to assert and underline her dignified social role. At the same time, within her refined speech, she swears twice: firstly, she uses the same expletive she used before (“screw you!”) and, secondly, at the climax of the fight, she insults George by calling him “a goddamn poof”. The expression is the most offensive in the film and can be read as the ultimate verbal response not only to her repressed feelings but also, and more poignantly for the present analysis, to her repressed vulgar and coarse speechways, constrained by the middle class politeness criterion. In fact, even when she “had a mouth” on her, Charlie had never been so offensive as she is now.

The Italian rendering is again weaker in terms of the pragmatic effect achieved by the locution “se non fossi *così* finocchio”. It literally translates as “if you were not *so* poof”. So, the abusive and coarse intensifier “goddamn” has been down-toned into the more neutral and not offensive “so”. Although “finocchio” could render the “extremely disparaging and offensive”(OED) “poof”, there are probably other expressions in Italian that are more vulgar, especially in such an emotion-loaded speech-event. As Pavesi and Malinverno demonstrated, the word “goddamn” is felt as extremely disrespectful due to its blasphemous implications, as all religion-oriented curses are in English (Pavesi, Malinverno 2000, p. 76). Therefore, to render such a strongly intensified insult as “goddamn poof” would have required a stronger expression such as, for instance, “finocchio di merda!”, one that could express a more forceful sense of despise and disgust and extreme distancing.⁴⁸ The reasons why the insult was down-toned cannot be ascertained: on the one hand, it could have been for the purpose of mitigating the homophobic strong remark and achieve a less “politically incorrect” stance or, on the other hand, and in the light of the other exemplified excerpts, in order not to shock a potentially middle-class audience, one that was expected to share the characters’ language, status, sense of humour and “middle-class politeness criterion”. Or, simply, an audience who was not expected to hear such an offensive insult uttered by a seemingly politically correct “friend” of a gay man, a woman the audience could easily sympathize or even identify with.

As a result, while the audience feels more reassured or less disturbed, Charlie’s covert homophobic stance, that suddenly becomes so outright, passes virtually unnoticed. In other words, the audience here miss that social and identity asymmetry between the two friends, and potentially misinterpret how the two not only “broke down [that] culture and manners” they seemed to wish to preserve, but also revealed their fake assumptions on their mutual social behaviour and identity statuses.

5. Conclusions

The study intended to highlight how film dubbing – cross-cultural translation biased by marketing reasons – can provide significant insights into the ways gender and LGBT identities come to be represented through major semantic and pragmatic alterations in film dialogues.

⁴⁸ In their corpus-based analysis of “slanguage” in screen translations, Formentelli and Monti note, for example, how in the film *Ocean’s Eleven* the intensified insult “goddamn hippie” was translated as “hippie di merda” (Formentelli, Monti 2014, p. 182).

Along the double axis of language and context, the analysis has focused on major changes in the *translatio* from source to target texts in order to understand the potential reasons why such changes were carried out and became social practices able to shape, in the Italian audience, specific socio-cultural and ideological languaging of gender.

The treatment of gender and homosexuality in film is highly significant in terms of strengthening stigmatization and prejudice or, from a more encouraging perspective, in terms of overcoming discrimination and intolerance. Nevertheless, many of the exemplified dialogues seem to contribute to perpetuating stereotypes related to LGBT identity. The use of euphemism and dysphemism, both in the source and in the target texts, shows mitigation or verbal abuse through an intense process of lexicalization and through exploitation of highly connotative language. The verbal images employed, both euphemistic and dysphemistic, represent, to various degrees, homosexuality as perversion, as a childish game, as “feminization” or “devirilization” of the gay male or (socially disagreeable) masculinization of the homosexual woman, thus reproducing the same sexist framework that has long marked gender stereotypes, women’s roles and sexual dimorphism in western hegemonic socio-cultural domains.

The case studies are part of a broader inquiry into male/female homosexuality. Throughout the study, focus is on how films enable and foster specific alignments or dis-alignments within the audience, affecting homophobic, homophilic or “politically correct” stances and cognitive frames. This construction of knowledge via the construction of specific “knowers” (Riley 2007), through dubbing, ultimately leads audiences to respond by accepting or rejecting in-group solidarity or out-group distancing (Duszak 2002b), that is to say tolerance or intolerance, acceptance or marginalization. In this sense, this study may apply to similar dynamics affecting other minorities, more “others” whose presence or arrival on the EU scene is a major test for the ethics and politics of individuals and whole nations today.

Due to the marketing and economic issues in the cinema industry, dubbing is also culturally based on a “grammar of expectations” with regard to the kind of verbal behaviour that will be preferred or dispreferred by a given audience. As Bucaria noted, the use of taboo language and the rules governing it (censorship or self-censoring) also present constant inconsistencies in the rendering of swearwords, because of the different themes and expectations that surround certain products (Bucaria 2009, p. 19). Besides, as I have argued, coarse language is highly context-dependent *per se* and the boundary line between “speakable” and “unspeakable” is often very blurred.

Although the study needs to be corroborated by a larger corpus of film dialogues, thus far the findings show that mitigation in Italian translations occurs where the majority of the audience are expected not to be cooperative. Conversely, mitigation is not applied where the audience are expected to share the stance that is displayed and the offensive meaning thereby construed.

The analyzed corpus suggests the repetition of certain dubbing strategies within the general policy of Italian dubbing to down-tone vulgar and offensive language (a policy that, as shown, is gradually changing). Although sex is often mitigated on socio-cultural grounds, often some homophobic remarks such as the epithet “Dr Faggot” in the film *The Hangover* are substituted with non-homophobic expressions, suggesting at first an ideological choice of acceptance or rejection of homophobia. However, since the same films often present conversely-oriented substitutions (i.e. changes of non-homophobic expressions or locutions into undoubtedly homophobic ones), this suggests that the changes are not directed towards the mitigation of homophobia but rather towards the belief that dealing with homosexuality in given speech events is unacceptable and

“unspeakable”. More precisely, depending on the degree of the perlocutionary act of offense, I have noted how strong homophobic slurs tend to be maintained or even exacerbated, whereas locutions referred to gay sex with no offensive intentions are often mitigated. Besides, these deemed-as-taboo locutions are downgraded by means of euphemisms or artful metaphors also when, as in *I Love you Phillip Morris*, sex is just the outcome of a gay romantic bond (“let’s fuck” becomes, for example, “facciamo”, i.e. “let’s make”).

In its constant employment of cross-varietal synonyms, dubbing often resorts to what I have referred to as “hyperbolic euphemisms” (“blow job” rendered as “lecca-lecca” or “yo-yo”), namely inflated and overstated uncommon euphemisms that do not magnify the meaning of the original referent (as in hyberbole proper), but rather decrease it by magnifying the euphemistic effect, so as to maximize the distance, in the receiver, from the original unacceptable and unspeakable concept. In this case, the “addressee” includes both the interlocutor in the film dialogues and the audience. The audience in fact is a participant in the interaction, identifying with the specific stance/s construed by the film idiolects and, subsequently, by their dubbed (altered) versions. This is of no mean significance in any reflection on the power and the infinitely nuanced possibilities that film – and dubbing – have in terms of languaging gender and gendering language.

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