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*Translating Racial Slurs: A Comparative Analysis of  
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DENISE ANNE FILMER

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MA by Research

Dissertation

School of Modern Languages and Cultures

Durham University

2011

*Translating Racial Slurs*

*A Comparative Analysis of Gran Torino  
Assessing Transfer of Offensive Language  
between English and Italian*

Candidate: Denise Filmer

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## Abbreviations

AVT: Audio visual translation.

FTA: Face Threatening Act, with particular reference to Brown and Levinson's definition within Politeness Theory, Discussed in Chapter 2 (1987).

DTS: Descriptive Translation Studies.

*OED: Oxford English Dictionary.*

*RSDB: Racial Slur Database, [www.racialslursdatabase.com](http://www.racialslursdatabase.com). Racialslurdatabase.com is a peer operated website which lists all racial slurs with their supposed origins. Contributions are provided by the general public and therefore it cannot be considered an academically reliable source. However it does shed some light as to possible origins of slurs which have become part of folklore.*

ST: source text. To avoid an excessive use of acronyms, these have been used discerningly, preferring the explicit noun couplets where the discourse allowed me to have a more elegant flow with them in the explicit form.

SL: source language.

TT: target text.

TL: target language.



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## Introduction

Social cognitions, in general, and ethnic attitudes, in particular, are acquired, shared, validated, normalized, and communicated primarily through talk (and the media) rather than perception and interaction. (Van Dijk 1987: 31)

The words we use and how we use them shape and reveal our world view, yet by the same token those choices of expression are mediated by the flux and flow of social mores and linguistic taboos. Until recent years swearwords and foul language were conceived as transgressing codes of ‘decent behaviour’, incurring rebuke, censure or even litigation (Hughes 2006: xv). Today, the shock potential of blasphemy has lost its sting, while swearing, cursing, and ‘rude words’ have become an established part of the linguistic environment, indeed a part of British cultural history (see Gorji 2007). Changes in the structure and composition of contemporary societies and the advent of political correctness have engendered a shift in linguistic taboos. Four letter words have been surpassed: racial slurs and ethnic epithets are now the last linguistic taboo in Anglophone contexts (see Allan and Burridge 2006; Hughes 2006; Gorji 2007).

Controversial and ideologically loaded, racial slurs spawn ‘race rows’ in journalistic meta-discourse and intertextual media debates. Fuelled by discussions on the politically correct, public opinion oscillates; are racial slurs offensive relics of colonialism and radical racism or innocuous manifestations of ethnic humour? Knotty questions, no doubt, but if the gamut of racial epithets in the English language is now problematic within English language contexts, what enormous challenges do they represent for intercultural communication and translation? Can their deeper semantic meanings, embedded in their socio-cultural and historical specificity, be rendered across linguistic and cultural barriers? For Translation Studies and the translator the dilemmas are many.

This study reflects on the culture-bound nature of this lexical minefield, by choosing a challenging source text (ST), *Gran Torino* (2008), and its rendering into Italian (2009), as a source of examples stemming from actual practice in translating

racial slurs. Subsequently, the investigation explores some of the implications this has on translation strategies adopted in subsequent target text renderings. The enquiry then looks beyond the text so as to consider the role of the translator and the translation norms of the receiving culture in constructing the target culture product, thus engaging with wider discussions on the translation of ideology and the ideology of translation (Hatim and Mason 1997).

Racial discourse has been the object of study for a select number of scholars in both European and English Speaking contexts since the early 1980s (Billig 2001; Duane 2003; T.A. van Dijk 1983, 1987, 1992, 1997, 2004, 2007; Wetherell 2003; Wodak 2001, 2003 *et al*). They have approached the subject from various disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives (Discourse Studies, Ideology, Social Psychology, sociolinguistics, Socio-Historical, Anthropology) thereby providing a general theoretical framework within which to locate this research. The thrust of previous scholarship in the field of race talk and text has however tended to engage with implicit, if no less pernicious forms of racism, and not on explicit racial slurs per se, and even less so from a cross-cultural perspective. In fact very few investigations, as discussed in Chapter 3 and 4, focus on the translation and transmission of racial slurs or on how cultural differences between English-speaking countries and Italy influence the use and the reporting of racial insults via the media.

From the points of view of translation studies and sociolinguistics, these issues constitute an area of study yet to be examined to its full potential.

## **The research question**

The aims of this enquiry are two-fold; at micro-level, the first objective focuses on ethnophaulisms<sup>1</sup>, their culture-linked use, and their renderings in the film dubbed version of the film *Gran Torino* (2008) with reference to the language pair English/Italian. In order to do this some underlying questions needed to be explored beforehand. Firstly, what constitutes a ‘racial slur’ today? Why does the English language possess a vast array of racial terms while there is an apparent dearth of such

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<sup>1</sup> ‘A contemptuous expression for (a member of) a people or ethnic group; an expression containing a disparaging allusion to another people or ethnic group.’ *OED*.

expressions in neostandard Italian<sup>2</sup>. How are these expressions perceived within the two cultures in question and have ideas changed over the last 20 years as to what constitutes race talk within the respective lingua-cultures? This last question leads to the crux of this study which engages with the question of their translatability. If racial slurs are inextricably culture-bound, context-dependent and temporally contingent, can adequate translation solutions be found in the target language, and if not, what are the consequences for the target text?

With the purpose of exploring these questions a case study of the film *Gran Torino* (dir. by Eastwood, 2008) analyses examples of racist and offensive language from the original film script in view of their significance in character portrayal, aesthetical value and their function in the construction of the film's narrative. A comparative analysis is then carried out on the target text renderings of lexical items from this semantic field and the outputs are discussed in the light of current debates in translation theory.

The second aim has a broader scope which reflects on the sociological and ideological issues regarding translation practices, in the specific case, dubbing, and the far-reaching effects of meaning transfer across languages and cultures. For this racial slurs are viewed in the context of taboo words and their cultural dependency. Considering the lingua-cultural distance between source culture and target culture perspectives, the analysis intends to highlight the substantial impact that target culture ethics and ideologies (or more specifically, perhaps those of the individual translator) have on the target culture product – for a discussion on the use of lingua-culture in this study see section 1.5. The highly sensitive nature of societal taboos and their linguistic manifestation requires scrupulous attention in cross-cultural meaning transfer. The present analysis of *Gran Torino* demonstrates however that in some cases racial slurs and other offensive expressions have been manipulated or even censored in the translation process to adhere to receiving culture values, thus causing extensive translation effects, distorting the source text meanings via the superimposition of another culture's world view.

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<sup>2</sup>See Beccaria 2006 for a discussion on the state of the Italian language today.

In examining racial slurs, or lack of them, in comparing them cross-culturally we can only glean more about their lingua-cultural aspects and, in the case in point, gain insight into Anglo-American and Italian attitudes to cultural otherness via linguistic choice. Ultimately, and most significantly in relation to research carried out in Translation Studies, this enquiry aims to shed light on how those attitudes are revealed and transmitted through translation and what effects they have on the end product and the end user. The following section provides a brief outline of this study.

### **Structure and aims of this study**

The study is divided into six chapters with a final section of general conclusions. The first chapter maps out the terminological and cultural choices underpinning this research, providing the view taken by the researcher and glossing the terminology in those instances in which the meaning of the terms used need to be adjusted and better aimed for the purposes of this study (e.g. lingua-culture).

The process involved in formulating the eclectic methodological approach developed for this research is described in Chapter 2, while Chapter 3 introduces the theoretical perspectives in Translation Studies that sustain this research, sweeping from Descriptive Translation Studies (Toury 1995) via the Translator's Habitus and Social norms (Simeoni 1997), to discussions on audiovisual translation (AVT). Chapter 4 begins with a brief overview of the analytical procedure implemented and explains why the film *Gran Torino* was chosen as the object of analysis. The second part of Chapter 4, as well as the entire Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 provide the core of the study, illustrating the questions under scrutiny: twenty examples containing offensive racial remarks were selected for their significance and are examined.

Detailed comparative analyses of the source and target text bring to light how racial slurs and abusive language have been rendered in the dubbed Italian version and comment on the strategies and techniques employed in the translation/adaptation process. The first sequence (section 4.3) shows the first face to face encounter between the protagonists Walt and Thao. Walt uses the first direct racial slur of the film and affronts Thao with the offensive term 'zipperhead'. The etymology of the source

language expression is described as originating during the Korean war while subsequent sections of the chapter argue that translation effects are afoot in the Italian rendering ‘muso giallo’ [yellow muzzle]. Sections 4.4 and 4.5. discuss the (over)use of this expression in the Italian dubbing of *Gran Torino*. Table 1 illustrates that the TT has been flattened by the overwhelming permeation of ‘muso giallo’ compared to the array of SL ethnophaulisms against Asians. Section 4.6 goes on to speculate on ‘muso giallo’s’ hybrid status as an invented racial slur which has apparently been adopted in authentic language.

Chapter 5 continues the analysis from *Gran Torino* with two samples that form an intertextual parody involving Walt, his Italo-American barber, and Thao. Walt and Martin’s bantering repartee include racial slurs and offensive language as in-group identity markers in ‘real man’ discourse. Thao’s attempts to emulate their sociolect<sup>3</sup> fail, confirming his out-group status. An analysis of the TT renderings from the two scenes highlights the translational dilemmas linked to the lexical field of racial slurs and how the translator circumvents them, with varying degrees of success. The translator’s habitus makes itself felt in some of the translation choices. The samples in Chapter 6, on the other hand, feature verbal abuse spiked with racial overtones in highly volatile situations of conflict. Here the intentionality of the speakers is clear; racial slurs are meant to offend and incite. The TT renderings demonstrate the use of domesticating and omission strategies, subverting the source text meanings. In the Conclusion some final reflections and considerations are offered, with indications of the directions that future research in this field might profitably take.

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<sup>3</sup> ‘A variety of a language used by a particular social group or class’ *OED*.



# Chapter 1

## Racisms, taboo, and lingua-cultures

### 1.1 Chapter overview

This chapter introduces the key issues and terminology which are fundamental to understanding the premises of the enquiry; terms such as racial, racist and ethnic are discussed in relation to racism and prejudice. Later sections define and explain the concepts of lingua-culture and taboo, in order to clarify their use throughout this work.

### 1.2 Racism: back to the roots

The obvious starting point for this investigation is one of the predominant features of Post-modernity; mobility and transfer, the light and liquid global flow in contemporary societies (Bauman 2000: 13). Mass immigration is a consequence of this new fluidity, producing contrasting effects; on the one hand it is perceived as a globalizing, universal, and homogenizing process but on the other it is counterpointed by a show of resistance in the form of marked localisation. Giddens (1991: 1) explains:

One of the distinctive features of (late) modernity, in fact, is an increasing connection between the two extremes of extensionality and intentionality: globalising influences on the one hand and personal dispositions on the other.

‘Personal dispositions’ in the specific case reveal themselves in the form of racism, prejudice and intolerance, the downside of this global diaspora. Societies are no longer static; disembeddedness, change, and flux are the order of the day, and language as an expression of our culture and society reflects those changes and our attitudes to them.

A tendency to intolerance towards racial diversity seems to have manifested itself linguistically since humans began travelling and encountering peoples from other cultures and religions with terms such as ‘barbarian’ and ‘infidel’ appearing in the

English language during the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries (Hughes 2006: 146-7). In the English-speaking world, the semantic field of ethnic insults and xenophobia has shown periods of growth and decline, linked to periods of migration, religious conflict, war, immigration and colonialism. This is demonstrated by the fact that the English language accrued a considerable number of ethnic insults in the periods which coincide with colonialism and the two world wars (ibid.).

An in-depth discussion on the causes and nature of racism are beyond the scope of this work; to try and define such a complex human phenomena in just a few words would be futile, considering that it is very much a ‘contested concept’. As Duane (2006: 257) remarks: ‘While there is widespread social consensus that racism is an extremely negative phenomenon, there is also significant disagreement as to exactly what “racism” is’. However, it is useful for our purposes to clarify the meanings of ‘race, racist, racial, and ethnic as used in the current context before considering the concept of racism from a discourse perspective.

### ***1.2.1 Race and racism vs. ethnic groups and ethnic intolerance***

In his essay ‘Insultare l’altro sugli schermi anglo americani’ [insulting the Other on Anglo American screens], Azzaro (2007: 74) notes that the term ‘race’ is a misnomer; there is only one ‘race’, and that is the human race. According to his interpretation, following the horrors of WW II, UNESCO’s first ‘Statement on Race’ (1950) upheld the notion that homo sapiens were one species and therefore the term ‘race’ should be substituted with ‘ethnic group’ (ibid.). For this reason the terms ‘racial’ or ‘racist’ should be avoided when discussing verbal abuse associated with ethnic origin. Hughes also adopts the expression ‘ethnic insult’ in his *Encyclopedia of Swearing: the social history of oaths, profanity, foul language and ethnic slurs in the English-speaking world* (2006).

Nonetheless, subsequent declarations from UNESCO (1951, 1967, and 1978) somewhat negate this first attempt to censure the use of the word ‘race’ and tacitly accept that anthropologically speaking, there are three main ‘races’ or ‘groups of homo sapiens. Moreover, the general use of the term ‘racism’ has not abated in spite of the introduction of the more politically correct expression ‘ethnic intolerance’, indicating

that it is as difficult to eradicate the concept of race from the collective conscious as it is to eliminate the word from everyday language. However UNESCO's aim of establishing the principle of equality for peoples of all backgrounds, origins and capacities is clear, thus forming the basis for the later *Declaration on Cultural Diversity* (2001).

If we accept the use of the terms race and racism in discussing ethnic diversity, we can then concede the use of the syntagm 'racial slur'. Far more slippery is the issue of what constitutes racism. The 1950 declaration of UNESO, *The Race Question* affirms:

Racism is a particularly vicious and mean expression of the caste spirit. It involves belief in the innate and absolute superiority of an arbitrarily defined human group over other equally arbitrarily defined groups. Instead of being based on scientific facts, it is generally maintained in defiance of the scientific method. As an ideology and feeling, racism is by its nature aggressive. It threatens the essential moral values by satisfying the taste for domination and by exalting the contempt for man. Concern for human dignity demands that all citizens be equal before the law, and that they share equally in the advantages assured them by law, no matter what their physical or intellectual differences may be. The law sees in each person only a human being who has the right to the same consideration and to equal respect' (3).

From a critical discourse analysis perspective (for an explanation of CDA see sections 2.4-2.5), racism can be defined: 'as a system of social domination and inequality that is reproduced in many ways, for instance by discriminatory practices. One of these practices is discourse' (van Dijk 2004: 1). He goes on to explain:

Discourse is specifically relevant in the reproduction of racism because it is also the principle means for the reproduction of racist prejudices and ideologies. And since these racist beliefs in turn are the basis of discriminatory practices (including discourse), it is obvious that discourse plays a prominent role in the reproduction of racism.

Duane concurs that 'Discourse is not merely communication or "debate", it is an attempt to influence both the rules of the game and others' perceptions of social reality'

(ibid.: 256). Wetherall (2003: 13) sees discourse and racism as interlinked: ‘racism is not a state of mind and then a mode of description of others [...] discourse is intimately involved in the construction and maintenance of [racial] inequality. Van Dijk (2004: 1) identifies two major forms of racist discourse:

1. racist discourse directed *at* ethnically different others;
2. racist discourse *about* ethnically different others.

The first type involves the blatant use of derogatory slurs, insults, impolite forms of address, and other forms of discourse that explicitly express and enact superiority and lack of respect. Van Dijk opines: ‘Since today such blatant forms of verbal discrimination are generally found to be “politically incorrect”, much racist discourse directed at dominated ethnic group members tends to become more subtle and indirect’ thus producing the second form of racist discourse:

This is usually addressed to other dominant group members and is about ethnic or ‘racial’ Others. Such discourse may range from informal everyday conversations or organizational dialogues (such as parliamentary debates), to many written or multimedia types of text or communicative events, such as TV shows, movies, news reports, editorials, textbooks, scholarly publications, laws, contracts, and so on. The overall characteristic of such racist discourse is the negative portrayal of Them, often combined with a positive representation of Ourselves. (ibid.)

Van Dijk’s comment on the first type of racist discourse implies that blatant verbal abuse on the wane, dismissed as ‘old racism’ and nigh on extinct while the second insidious form of racist discourse pervades all areas of social life. On the contrary, it is posited here that ‘on record’ (Brown and Levinson 1987), up front racial insults have recently acquired new twists and nuances in their interpretations which have raised their level of visibility once again. The next section outlines the notion of ‘racial slur’ today, as both derogatory insult and ironic defiance.

### 1.3 Racial slurs and ethnic insults: racist labels or humorous irony?

In spite of the unpleasant connotations associated with the term ‘race’, as discussed above, the adjectives ‘racial’ and ‘racist’ are the preferred nouns or adjectives to allude to an insult or prejudice pertaining to different ethnic groups in both popular and academic discourse. The adjective racial is defined as ‘arising from or relating to ethnicity or difference in race’ (*OED*) and the definition for ‘ethnic’ simply cannot avoid the word ‘race’: ‘Pertaining to race; peculiar to a race or nation; ethnological. Also, pertaining to or having common racial, cultural, religious, or linguistic characteristics, esp. designating a racial or other group within a larger system; hence (*U.S. colloq.*), foreign, exotic’ (*OED*). Therefore from this overlapping of meaning it could be concluded that broadly speaking the expressions ‘racial slur’ and ‘ethnic insult’ are interchangeable in terms of what they denote although from a politically correct perspective ‘ethnic insult’ has the edge.

That said, British newspapers of all political persuasions prefer the syntagm ‘racial slur’, perhaps for the headline potential in its alliteration and the inevitably ensuing ‘race row’ – now a stock-in-trade expression for the tabloid press (see section 2.3). Whichever term we use to denote ethnophobias, according to Hughes (2006: 146) they are manifest forms of racial intolerance: ‘[they] are the most obvious linguistic manifestation of xenophobia and prejudice against out-groups [...] based on malicious, ironic or humorous distortion of the target group’s identity or “otherness”’. Rappoport (2005: 46) gives a slightly less severe definition as ‘insulting or disparaging remarks that serve as a kind of shorthand way of referring to the negative qualities associated with any particular group’. This much we glean from scholarly definitions but it is their myriad connotations and various pragmatic uses that make racial slurs a metaphorical can of worms. One need look no further than the most controversial of all racist insults, the so-called ‘N-word’ or ‘nigger’ by any other name (see section 6.1.2). Along with other slurs, ‘nigger’ has been reclaimed by certain members of the offended ethnic group thus forming a counterculture in an attempt to neutralise their historically negative connotations (Hughes 2010: x). In fact, it has been argued that the ambivalence of racial slurs, aggressive instrument of prejudice on the one hand and

powerful defence against it on the other, are the perfect weapon against racism if used with irony and humour (Nobili 2007; Rappoport 2005). These perspectives are opposed by advocates of the politically correct, who condemn the use of racial insults as ‘nasty and ugly’ (Stourton 2008: 3; Hughes 2010: 3) and actively censure their use in the public sphere.

The British Broadcasting Corporation’s policy on ‘acceptable language’ perfectly illustrates the issues that will be described in more detail in the following section; that is, lingua-culture, shifting societal values and linguistic taboos. The Corporation’s current prescriptive attitude to ethnophaulisms is symptomatic of changing tastes and heightened public awareness to possibly offensive racial references. Only two decades ago swearing and sex on television caused public outcry, instead today’s societal mores impose the censoring of what is now perceived as ‘racist abuse’ even from programmes of previous eras<sup>4</sup>.

The problem hardly arises in the Italian context where the issue of multiculturalism is relatively new and overt racial slurs are uncommon in the public sphere. One might argue that racial slurs are rarely heard because the Italian language is deficient in the gamut of derogatory terms for different ethnic groups (see section 1.4). However, this should not be conceived as a lack of racism within the Italian cultural system. There are two very visible exceptions within the public arena; football stadiums and political discourse. It could be counter-argued further that this is the case principally because the cultural system and people’s attitudes in Italy do not place great importance on political correctness. Nevertheless, as Duane (ibid.: 260) points out ‘in the twenty-first century, no-one wants to be accused of racism or be called a racist’.

For the purposes of the present analysis both forms of racist discourse are relevant but it is the verbalised expressions of an overtly racial or racist nature and how their meanings are relayed across cultures which is at the heart of this research.

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<sup>4</sup> *The Telegraph’s* Michael Deacon (18 January 2010) wrote a particularly incisive article on the censoring of Eighties British sit-com *Only Fools and Horses*. He quotes the programme’s creator, John Sullivan, who had to ‘edit old episodes to cleanse them of politically incorrect dialogue. He cited an episode from the Eighties in which Del told a child to “pop down to the Paki shop”. That line is no longer broadcast in repeats’.

## 1.4 A working definition, lingua-culture

Ever since the ‘Cultural Turn’ in Translation Studies (Bassnett 1991: 22), translation scholars have contended with the concept of culture bound, exploring to what extent culture-specific items, ideas and ideologies can be linguistically transferred from one speech community to another. The notion of ‘lingua-culture’ is significant in this context in determining the translatability of culturally rooted lexical items and therefore necessary to consider it in the present study.

In order to understand this compound term, first we should define its components. If we take ‘lingua’ to mean language (as it does in Italian, for example), the *OED*’s first acceptance of ‘language’ in its strictest sense is more than adequate for our purposes: ‘The system of spoken or written communication used by a particular country, people, community, etc., typically consisting of words used within a regular grammatical and syntactic structure’. Getting to grips with the meaning of the word ‘culture’ is a little more complicated. Raymond Williams (1976; 1983: 87-93) provides a detailed six-page etymology and definition which begins by noting its complexity: ‘Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language’. He observes that ‘Culture in all its early uses was a noun of process’ connected to the verb to cultivate in the sense of to grow. It has subsequently taken on different meanings in different scholarly disciplines; in Cultural Anthropology the reference to culture is primarily to material production of a society, while in History and Cultural Studies the reference is to ‘signifying or symbolic systems’. He concedes though, that there is considerable blurring and overlapping between these two perspectives. The *OED* entry for culture is equally long, giving seven definitions before arriving at the ones which are most pertinent to this enquiry:

1. The distinctive ideas, customs, social behaviour, products, or way of life of a particular society, people, or period. Hence: a society or group characterized by such customs, etc.
2. With modifying noun: a way of life or social environment characterized by or associated with the specified quality or thing; a group of people subscribing or belonging to this.

From these notions of language and culture, it becomes clear that the two are inextricably tied, thus justifying a preference for the broader term when discussing language as communication in context rather than as simply a set of signs. The term lingua-culture has been adopted in recent years in various interdisciplinary frameworks but its core meaning has undergone subtle changes and is interpreted in different ways.

Paul Friedrich first coined the expression in an article for *American Anthropologist* (1989: 295-312), when he commented that 'language is loaded with culture' and went on to define linguaculture as 'a domain of experience that fuses and intermingles the vocabulary, many semantic aspects of grammar, and the verbal aspects of culture' (ibid.: 306-307). This rather vague explanation was later refined to these three elements: 'the universe of vocabulary, grammatical semantics and verbal culture.' This idea was then borrowed by Agar and formed the basis for his anthropological study *Language Shock* (1994) in which he explains the indissoluble tie between language and culture (he prefers the term 'linguaculture'). Juliane House (1997) borrowed the term linguaculture yet again, claiming that her definition was 'adapted from Agar (1996)' which she interpreted as 'roughly in the sense of language community'. Robert W. Schrauf and David C. Rubin (2003) give a succinct outline of the concept, identifying the three components as linguistic competence, communicative competence, and cultural competence. They conclude that 'perhaps the best term for this interwoven linguistic cultural whole in which a person comes to such competence is linguaculture'. The term is used in the present work with this latter acceptance, as it highlights the connection between word and sociocultural context. Indeed this study sustains that in order to analyse discourse, linguistic practice must be perceived as an integrated part of other cultural and social practices and the general social context. One may agree or disagree with the concept, but for the purposes of cross-cultural communication and translation, the term lingua-culture functions as a convenient umbrella term for defining that juncture in which language and culture meet in order to create meaning.

## **1.5 Linguistic taboos and lingua-culture**

So, could this idea of lingua-culture determine how and if social taboos are manifested linguistically, even influencing the type of a linguistic taboo? Does lingua-culture affect the presence or absence of racial insults and how they are received in a language community?

Furthermore, it could be argued that racial slurs, racist language, and ethnic epithets are the linguistic manifestation of one culture's attitudes to the other. Ultimately it is our choice of words that indicate our deep-seated feelings and values, both as members of a particular social group and also as individuals. As Van Dijk (2007: xix-xlii) affirms:

Word choice is one of the ways people betray their underlying opinions, social attitudes and ideologies, also because the use of certain lexical items is associated with underlying norms and values.

Therefore, if we consider that each lingua-culture has its own unique experiences, its own traditions, and therefore its own perceptions, attitudes, and ways of verbally expressing a given reality, is it possible to convey the deeper meaning of these sometimes apparently harmless expressions? In other words, can the connotations of a particular slur be communicated into another language?

### ***1.5.1 Defining linguistic taboos***

If we consider the construction of culture as a process, the concept of what constitutes a linguistic taboo is part of that process, shifting and changing within a language community thereby reflecting that culture's values. It becomes then necessary to touch upon the concept of taboo at least at linguistic level. Hughes (2006: 462) defines a taboo as:

[...] that which is generally unmentionable because, on a hierarchical scale, it is either ineffably sacred, like the name of God, or unspeakably vile, like cannibalism or incest. [...] Historically, taboos have tended to move from religious to secular, especially sexual to racial topics, but they can manifest

themselves in relation to a wide variety of things, creatures, human experiences, conditions, deeds and words. The term is now used somewhat loosely of any social indiscretion that ought to be avoided, since strictly speaking, a taboo action should not be performed nor referred to, and a taboo word should never be uttered.

In the light of this definition, the idea of a linguistic taboo is somewhat oxymoronic. In fact Hughes concedes that in recent decades the notion of linguistic taboo has shifted from being actual to mythical, with modern dictionaries perpetuating the myth by using the label 'taboo' of sexual and racist terms, even though these words are acknowledged to be in common use (2006: 463). Therefore one could skeptically argue that in actual fact the term linguistic taboo can generally be applied to mean 'offensive' or 'insulting' rather than strictly prohibited. Modern day linguistic taboos fall into five main semantic categories;

1. The name of God, the Devil, death, damnation.
2. Disease, madness, physical disability.
3. Varieties of excretion, urination.
4. Copulation, sexuality and genitalia.
5. Race. (Hughes 1998, 2006; Allen and Bur ridge 2006)

These categories would appear to be universal in Western societies, but the strength of their 'taboo' quality is variable; usage, connotations, and even semantic groups can shift, diachronically and topographically, thus the perception of what constitutes a linguistic taboo or verbal offense is not static within a language community (see Hughes 1991; Gorki 2007), let alone across cultural boundaries.

This is of fundamental importance from the perspective of translations as objects of reflections in Translation Studies, and a vital point to take into account in intercultural communication. In the realms of audiovisual translation (AVT), it has been suggested that swearwords and obscenities function as discourse markers or expressions of feelings. As such they are not important to the plot and therefore do not require a faithful rendering in the TT. (Pavesi 2005: 48). This may be true in a case like 'bullshit' being translated as 'palle di merda' [shitty balls] but the present study argues that if the transposition strays too far from one category into another, certain ideological, cultural,

and moral issues come to the fore in meaning transfer, the implications of which simply cannot be ignored. In other words, it is not enough for the translator to pluck any offensive term from the target language repertoire of obscenities to substitute one found in the ST.

In recent decades Anglophone cultures have witnessed a shift in linguistic taboos, moving from the sexual sphere to racial slurs and insults. According to Allen and Burrige (2006: 106-107) ‘blasphemy, religious profanity and religious insults have all lost their punch [...] what is now perceived as truly obscene are racial and ethnic slurs’. Gorji confirms this with the results of two surveys carried out on the British Public in 1998 and 2000. She notes that the survey carried out in 1998 by the Broadcasting Standards Commission found that although words such as ‘cunt’, ‘motherfucker’ and ‘fuck’ remained strongly offensive, religious words such as ‘Christ’, ‘God’, ‘bloody’, and ‘damn’ were much weaker in their capacity to offend (Hargrave, cited in Gorji 2007: 11). The second survey focused on attitudes to the use of offensive language in broadcasting. Conducted by the Advertising Standards Authority, British Broadcasting Corporation, Broadcasting Standards Commission and the Independent Television Commission, the results showed a marked change in semantic fields of what is considered a linguistic taboo. ‘Racial abuse, such as Paki and nigger was at the top of the scale, and such terms were “felt to be unacceptable in today’s society”’ (Hargrave in Gorji 2007: 11).

By contrast, it would seem that in Italy no such shift has taken place. While Nobili (2007: 1) laments the proliferation of bad language and swearing in both the public and private sphere, the taboo areas remain the same in an Italian context. Deep-rooted Catholicism, a male dominated culture and a language which subsequently reflects those patriarchal values are all factors which have ensured that blasphemy, homophobia, and religious insults are still ranked highest in terms of what is considered taboo. Casting aspersions on virility with homophobic undertones is what really causes offence. Racial slurs are a relatively new category to contend with (see section 6.1).

Taking these factors into account, from a translation critic perspective, are there socio-cultural and ideological issues relevant to political correctness and race talk which must also be allowed for in the translation process? Conversely, from a translator

perspective, how to translate these lexical items which have no corresponding terms in the target language? On the latter point, Scatasta (2002: 99) notes:

Gli insulti a sfondo razziale sono [invece] molto diffusi nella lingua inglese, in particolare negli Stati Uniti dove praticamente esistono termini offensivi per ogni razza o etnia [mentre] in italiano gli insulti rispecchiano soprattutto rivalità fra località vicine o fra il Nord e il Sud del paese.

[Racial insults are [instead] very common in the English language, particularly in the United States where offensive terms exist for practically every race or ethnic group [while] in Italian insults reflect above all local rivalry or between the North and South of the country]

There are no immediate solutions for ‘equivalent effects’ (Nida 1964; Catford 1965) in the rendering of racial insults from English into Italian. In fact Scatasta (ibid.) comments: ‘comunque [è] inutile tentare di tradurre un insulto razziale americano con un italianissimo “terrone” perché si cadrebbe nel ridicolo’ [however it would be useless attempting to translate an American racial insult with the very Italian ‘terrone’ because it would just sound ridiculous]<sup>5</sup>. The following section deals with the question of racial slurs in the two cultural contexts and compares their uses and status within their linguistic environments.

## **1.6 Comparing racial slurs in English and Italian**

A detailed investigation on the underlying reasons for the restricted number of racist epithets in neostandard Italian is beyond the scope of this investigation. Suffice it to say that historically Anglophone cultures have had far more contact with other ethnic groups over the last 500 years over whom they have invariably held a position of dominance. Those contacts have intensified over the last 60 years spawning the first multicultural societies. Italy has lagged behind the rest of the developed world in this respect. Nevertheless, it is hard to ignore the fact that in recent times a significant increase in immigration to Italy has taken place from areas as diverse as China, the Maghreb, central Africa, and Eastern Europe, provoking a palpable rise in hostility towards people of different ethnic, geographic and cultural backgrounds. Only in the

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Terrone’ is an insult used by Northern Italians to denote Sicilians. It originates from ‘terra’ meaning land.

last decade has immigration featured seriously on the agenda of Italian governments, whipping up political and public debate on the issue.

This broad brush contextualisation serves only to suggest that the Italian language has not yet recorded the variety of racial slurs that British, American, and Australian varieties of English already have. Undoubtedly, racism and racist attitudes are alive and kicking on the Italian peninsular (one only has to hear about the chants of ‘negro di merda’ [shitty nigger] on the football terraces or peruse the right-wing newspaper *Il Giornale* to know it<sup>6</sup>). According to Scatasta (2002: 100) however, it is simply a matter of time before the Italian lingua-culture generates its own racial slurs: ‘Il cambiamento della società italiana, però, fa ipotizzare che purtroppo nasceranno presto anche da noi insulti legati alla razza o all’etnia’ [the changes in Italian society, however, makes one think that unfortunately racial or ethnic slurs will soon emerge here].

In her analysis of insults in Italian films, Polselli (2007: 138) notes that rather than explicit racist comments: ‘sono preferite forme di rappresentazione indiretta o messe in scena che rimandano implicitamente alle realtà di emarginazione di coloro che sono etnicamente altro dalla maggioranza della popolazione rappresentata’ [indirect references or mis en scene which implicitly refer to the marginalisation of those who are ethnically diverse to the majority of the population]. When they are actually used, racial insults in Italian tend to pivot around the nationality or regional origin of the person in question, qualified by a negative adjective like sporco [dirty], di merda [shitty], or the more vulgar del cazzo [prick] (Scatasta 2002: 100). Polselli (2007: 171) goes on to comment: ‘il rinforzo degli insulti etnici con insulti scatologici o legati alla sfera sessuale, conferm[a] ancora una volta come questi ultimi siano le offese distintive della lingua italiana’ [the intensifying of ethnic insults with insults of a scatological or sexual nature confirms once again that the latter (sexual) are the distinctive offences of the Italian language].

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<sup>6</sup> *Il Giornale* was responsible for the headline ‘Ma Questa Volta...HANNO RAGIONE I NEGRI’ (9 January 2010) with reference to immigrant fruit pickers protesting against their deplorable working and living conditions in Rosarno, Reggio Calabria. The issue here is the use of the term ‘Negri’ which would translate as ‘Niggers’. The same newspaper perpetrated the same crime with the term ‘muso giallo’; cf. *Il Giornale*, 30 April 2009.

The salient feature of ethnic insults in Italian is not, therefore, the reference to the ethnic origin of the person in itself, but the addition of scatological or sexual insults, usually with undertones of (passive) homosexuality. The very reference to homosexuality makes the utterance truly offensive – in terms of its reception – from an Italian perspective, as the Italian lingua-culture seems to persist with the stereotype of homosexuals as impotent, lacking virility, and generally contemptible (see Tartamella 2006).

This last perspective seems to be confirmed in the renderings in the sequences analysed for this study.

### **Closing remarks**

This chapter has introduced the research context within which this project locates its findings and observations. It presented its aims, underlining the core resource for observation, which is the case-study analysis of the translation of racial slurs in the film *Gran Torino*. Background themes relevant to the research such as racial discourse, taboo language and lingua-culture have been discussed, thus situating the case study within a multi-disciplinary framework. The following chapter looks in-depth at the methodological approaches adopted for the analysis.

## Chapter 2

### Methodology: a multidisciplinary approach

Chapter two deals with the process of formulating a methodological framework for this research. How the project evolved and why the choice of primary sources influenced the methodological perspectives is discussed in sections 2.1 and 2.2. A summary (section 2.1.2) of the methodological framework is given followed by an overview of Critical Discourse Analysis (section 2.2), and in particular of those works by Teun van Dijk (2.2.1), Norman Fairclough (2.2.2), and Reisigl and Wodak (2.2.3) that are relevant to this study. Subsequently, Schäffner's application of CDA to Translation Studies is described with particular reference to political discourse (2.3). Halliday's theories on social context and Language are outlined (2.4) and his Functional Systemic Linguistics is explained (2.4.1). Julian House's model of translation quality assessment (section 2.4.2) and Mona Baker's pragmatic approach to analysis (section 2.4.3) are summed up followed by a review of Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (section 2.5). Hatim and Mason's semiotic level of text analysis and its application in a case study of film dialogue from *Un Coeur en hiver* (Claude Sautet 1992) is described (2.6) and reception theory and audience studies (sections 2.7.1, 2.7.2) are proposed as a means of situating the source and target texts within a socio-cultural context. The intellectual drive to consider such a variety of approaches is summed up in Whorf's empiricist attitude to the analysis of his data: 'it consists essentially in marshalling the facts, working out a methodology to deal with them and trying to assemble them under a few general statements or 'laws' (Whorf 1928, cited in Lee 1996: 3).

#### 2.1 Reflections on methodology

The process of devising a methodology for this enquiry was guided by one overriding criterion: empiricism, or trial and error by any other name. This approach was adopted

for two reasons; firstly, the multidisciplinary nature of the research questions entailed exploring and experimenting with different theoretical and methodological perspectives before honing in on the most appropriate. Secondly, the initial data collection spanned different genres (newspapers, magazines, books, film) requiring different frameworks of reference. Only after deciding which mood of translation would be the best provider of an appropriate case-study to become the object of analysis was it possible to define a precise research methodology to answer the research question.

The driving force behind this research project was initially of a practical nature stemming from a simple linguistic and cultural observation: Anglophone cultures have produced a linguistic patrimony of racial insults and ethnic epithets. On the contrary, there are few and far between racial insults and ethnic epithets in neostandard Italian. Given this premise, the pivotal question from the point of view of Translation Studies is if and how effective meaning transfer can be achieved when the cultural relationship with notions of race and ethnicity are so significantly different. The culture-bound, taboo, and politically loaded meanings inherent to this lexical field are at issue, presenting the translator with challenging dilemmas. The various forms of ethnic slur and linguistic taboo present within a specific language community depend on a range of cultural, socio-historical, socio-psychological, and socio-linguistic factors as briefly summarised in section 1.2. These areas of enquiry need to be broached in the research process to gain clearer insight on the question at hand as they influence both the translation process itself and the resulting translated text. Having thus contextualised the issues at stake, the difficulty lay in selecting a suitable primary source to serve as a case-study and then finding the right methods and perspectives with which to analyse them.

The quotation above serves to illustrate that starting from ‘facts’ without first having a clear idea of how to analyse them is not the preserve of novices. Whorf’s succinct three-step method makes the whole research process seem deceptively simple; in truth the procedure is a painstakingly laborious one. Indeed, ‘working out a methodology’ was the biggest hurdle in this particular research process. However, in retracing steps, a path emerges and the perspectives and approaches underpinning this

analysis begin to form a multi-faceted and flexible methodology drawing on several sources to explore the research questions from several angles.

Aspects of Politeness Theory (Brown and Levinson 1978, 1987), Linguistic Anthropology (Allan and Burridge 2006), Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 2003; Van Dijk 2006), Historical Discourse Analysis (Reisigl and Wodak 2001), and Ideology (Hatim and Mason 1997), combined with notions adopted within Descriptive Translation Studies (Toury 1995) and those of a more sociological slant (Simeoni 1998) are some of the elements which provide an analytical framework to this study. Then, in order to include the practitioners' perspective the Dubbing Director of the film under analysis, *Gran Torino*, was contacted with the hope of getting first hand information on the translation processes involved.

## **2.2 Selection of primary sources; the data for analysis**

The initial question which motivated the research project was 'can effective meaning transfer be achieved in translating racial slurs across the language pair English/Italian, and if so, how?'. This question came to mind while reading Stourton's *It's a PC World: What it Means to Live in a Land Gone Politically Correct* (2008). The author asserts that the terms 'wop', 'hun', 'nigger', and 'dago' should be judged as offensive and therefore their use is unacceptable in forward-thinking societies where language awareness use must go hand in hand with ideals of respect and equality (10). Reflecting on the nature of these epithets and their origins, the inevitable question of their translatability came to mind as happens to bilingual people who bestride two cultures.

In the same period a spate of articles appeared in the British and Italian press regarding reports of so called 'race-rows', that is, media discourses on speech acts of well-known figures in British culture such as the defunct Queen Mother, Prince Harry, Carol Thatcher, and Bruce Forsyth, who had allegedly used, or defended the use of, racial slurs. On the Italian front, Silvio Berlusconi triggered an international 'race-row' when he called the president of the United States, Barack Obama, 'suntanned'<sup>7</sup>. These media incidents prompted reflection on cross-cultural meaning transfer of racial

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<sup>7</sup> 'Obama: Berlusconi faces race row as he calls America's first black president "suntanned"', *The Daily Mail*, 7 November 2008.

slurs, whose underlying connotations are often culturally specific and ideologically loaded. For example, could the full force of associations linked to the insult ‘paki’<sup>8</sup> be relayed into Italian, a lingua-culture which has no socio-historical connection with Pakistanis, even less with the race- hate discourse spewed forth by the extreme right in Eighties Britain, which spawned the skinhead movement? The debates surrounding these ‘race rows’ and their subsequent representations in the press became the source for what would have been one of the areas of this investigation; the representation of racial slurs in the press across the two lingua-cultures. In fact a substantial archive of written texts has been compiled by the constant scanning of a broad spectrum of newspapers and journals in both languages: a wealth of material has been yielded by paying close attention to news stories, advertising campaigns, and media events which touch on racial issues.

The other source of primary materials which it was hoped would provide a significant amount of data for analysis was films. The nature of the research concerns the translation of culture-bound lexical items originating from socio-cultural and linguistic realities found within the source language and culture, therefore audiovisual translation (AVT) was an obvious choice. The fact that globalisation has encouraged a trans-cultural approach to audiovisual products, that DVDs are now available in several languages and that cinema as a form of entertainment is popular worldwide means that AVT is probably one of the most visible forms of translation today. For that very reason it wields enormous power, able to disseminate cultural and linguistic

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<sup>8</sup> The reference here is to the Prince Harry ‘Paki’ row (January 2009) widely reported in both tabloid and quality press in the UK. The episode occurred when a private video of Prince Harry’s, shot during his time as a trainee officer at Sandhurst, fell into the hands of the scandal sheet *The News of the World*. The clip also had an accompanying commentary by Prince Harry in which he refers to one of his comrades as ‘our little Paki friend’. The same commentary also contains the racial slur ‘raghead’. These events were subsequently reported in the Italian press. The centre-left quality paper *La Repubblica* explicated the slurs ‘Paki’ and ‘raghead’ thus: Ogni lingua ha i suoi insulti, lo ‘slang’ con cui denigrare una persona in base al sesso, alla religione, alla razza. In inglese, ‘paki’, derivato da pachistano, è un termine usato per indicare in modo offensivo gli immigrati o i discendenti di un immigrato dal Pakistan, e più in generale da qualsiasi paese del subcontinente indiano, che un tempo faceva parte dello sterminato British Empire. ‘Raghead’, alla lettera ‘straccio in testa’, ovvero qualcuno che porta un turbante o un copricapo simile, è invece usato per indicare, sempre in modo ingiurioso, tutti gli arabi o i musulmani. Non sono, insomma, due parole che asiatici e arabi o islamici prendono alla leggera (*La Repubblica*, 12 January 2009). [Every language has its insults, its ‘slang’ with which to denigrate someone on the basis of gender, religion, race. In English, ‘paki’, derived from ‘Pakistani’ is an offensive term used to indicate Pakistani immigrants or their descendants, and in general, an immigrant from any country of the Indian subcontinent, which once belonged to the now inexistent British Empire. ‘Raghead’, literally ‘head of rags’, that is, someone who wears a turban or similar head covering is used on the other hand, to indicate all Arabs or Muslims in an offensive way. In short, these two words are not taken lightly by Asians, Arabs or Muslims.] All back translations in this study are mine unless otherwise stated.

ideologies across what were until recently insurmountable barriers. This factor of spread influenced the selection of the case-study.

Uncertain whether a synchronic or diachronic perspective would be most suitable, or indeed feasible, the first phase of data collection was tentative, consisting in searching out and watching films (preferably with dubbing or subtitles in both languages) selected on the basis of themes, characters or historical periods which might have yielded examples of racial slurs in either of the two languages under analysis. It is mentioned below that computer aided corpus studies were not within the particular sphere of interest of this study. However for future reference, the adoption, search, or access to electronic bilingual corpora of film scripts would make this type of case-studies far more effective and reliable. At the researcher's level, it would be beneficial and certainly much quicker to look through corpora than adopt the time-consuming (albeit enjoyable) method of watching and note-taking as the main data-gathering system.

These explorative investigations revealed that while English speaking countries had produced films such as *The Godfather Part 1* (1971), *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *East is East* (1999), *Jackie Brown* (1999), and *Towelhead* (2007) which contained racial slurs, none had apparently been produced in Italy. PolSELLI (2007: 141) notes that in spite of the growing number of cinema productions which deal with the recent phenomenon of immigration in Italy, 'non rinveniamo occorrenze linguistiche di offese etniche [...] la discriminazione etnica viene rappresentata esclusivamente attraverso il canale visivo e situazionale' [We have not discovered any linguistic occurrences of ethnic insults [...] ethnic discrimination is represented exclusively through a visual or situational channel]. This would imply that as a lexical item, a racial slur has hardly ever featured in an Italian film dialogue *if not in dubbing or subtitling*. This was a very significant discovery for the purposes of this enquiry and broke the balance in the initial data collection allowing to favour a case study from the audiovisual over the combination of AV and journalistic materials analysed. In Italy regional insults are far more common than ethnic epithets (Pavesi 2005; Scatasta 2002; Lotti 1991), reflecting the fact that until relatively recently

prejudice and discrimination was very much contained within the peninsular; the North-South divide being the predominant source of insult routines.

Thus it was established that if films were to be the primary source, racial insults would necessarily have to be viewed from English into Italian as being the source to target language perspective. The turning point to this data gathering activity came in March 2009 when the film *Gran Torino* (2008) was released in Italy. The film proved to be manner from heaven, from a research point of view. The high concentration and range of racial lexicon contained in the film is described elsewhere (see section 4.2), but it is worth noting here that the first viewing of *Gran Torino* was at the cinema and in Italian. Therefore it was the impact of the dubbed TT version which initially aroused my curiosity. This fact inevitably influenced the methodological perspective, the logical choice being the target orientated standpoint prescribed by Toury (1995) (see sections 3.1-3.1.3).

The occupational hazard of a source language speaker who watches a dubbed film is that of trying to guess what the ST is for a particular phrase or word in the TT version. The expression which aroused most curiosity from the dubbed *Gran Torino* was one that reverberates throughout the TT dialogue, ‘muso giallo’ – for its discussion see Chapters 4 to Chapter 6. Clearly an ethnic insult aimed at the Asian characters portrayed, it was repeated so many times in the course of the film that it almost seemed a mantra. Speculating on what the ST slur could have been, ‘muso giallo’ became my translational *bête noir*. The literal translation ‘yellow muzzle’ was obviously out of the question as in English no such slur exists. Months later when film was released on DVD it was finally discovered that ‘muso giallo’ was the dubbing solution for a host of racial insults ranging from ‘zipperhead’, ‘gook’, to ‘chink’.

Subsequent viewings in subtitled and original versions confirmed *Gran Torino* as the ideal primary source for the purpose of this research. The sheer quantity of analysable material in the dialogue combined with the qualitative rather than quantitative approach already decided upon indicated this type of case study would be the most suitable form of investigation. This choice has inevitably meant abandoning all other primary sources, but it is hoped that further investigations will be carried out

and that the data collected will be of relevance in future research into the conditioning factors in the translation of racial slurs in the English into Italian direction.

### **2.3 Methodological framework**

As outlined above, this exploration of cross-cultural meaning transfer related to racial slurs was originally conceived with a binary configuration with two main sources of primary materials; newspapers and films. The former was eventually eschewed in favour of the latter, purely on the grounds that working with two different genres would have involved devising and adopting two sets of methodological and analytical frameworks, producing outputs of a comparable nature. Although it could be said that in both instances the basis of analysis were to be focused on Critical Discourse Analysis in the limited timeframe of this research, a thorough bidirectional and bimodal investigation would necessitate a larger and more far-reaching study and considerably more time than the constraints of this dissertation allowed.

Having identified the object of analysis, the quest for a methodological framework could then be more focussed. The idea of doing a comparative study on racial slurs has always been biased towards the qualitative, pragmatic, sociolinguistic, sociological, and above all cultural aspects rather than a purely quantitative statistical, or systematic slant. From the outset the methodological hub of the project had to be Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 1995, 2003; Fowler 1991; Van Dijk 1985; Wodak and Reisigl 2003) as it encapsulates, via its interdisciplinary approach focused on the usage and the users of a language at the same time, the ethos and nature of this project.

The core notion to the research is that racial slurs are an inextricably culture-bound lexical field which can be observed and understood only in the broader view of discourse within a particular lingua-culture. Taking Hatim and Mason's definition of discourse as 'modes of speaking and writing which involve social groups in adopting a particular attitude towards areas of socio-cultural activity (e.g. racist discourse, bureaucratise, etc.)' (1997: 216), it is obvious that before attempting to translate

certain types of discourse, it is essential to analyse the ST thoroughly, and critically. This is why CDA is the backbone of the analysis, but in the specific form adapted to this study which is described in the next section.

Critical Discourse Analysis is an approach to study ‘texts’ – often intended in a very broad sense, see section 2.3.2 below – which today embraces several areas of interest within the humanities and social sciences. Both its method of analysis and theoretical perspective in recognising the importance of language and how it effects all aspects of social life, the many forms of CDA allow for flexible applications to specific research areas. The following paragraphs describe those which have been most influential in this particular research project.

### ***2.3.1 Socio-cognitive Discourse Analysis***

A pioneer in the field, Teun van Dijk has been developing Critical Discourse Analysis with particular reference to racist<sup>9</sup> discourse for nearly 30 years. In that period his multidisciplinary research, methods and theories have influenced the work of many other scholars within the Social Sciences who acknowledge the nexus between *Discourse and Society* (also the name of the journal founded and edited by van Dijk). Throughout its evolution, various labels have been associated with this form of study; Critical Linguistics, Discourse Analysis, Register Analysis, Text Analysis, Critical Discourse Studies, etc. Van Dijk prefers the term Critical Discourse Studies, as it implies a broader sweep encompassing analysis, theory, and applications. Similarly, the term Discourse Studies is suggested rather than Discourse Analysis, as it designates a multidisciplinary field. However in the academic community perhaps the name CDA is the one which is most often used. Van Dijk defines CDA as ‘Discourse analysis with attitude’ (2001: 95). In his contribution entitled ‘Multidisciplinary CDA: A Plea for Diversity’ he refers to its ‘combined scholarly and social responsibilities’ and declares that ‘its multidisciplinary theories must account for the complexities of the relationships between discourse structures and social structures’ (2001: 96). He

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<sup>9</sup> For an explanation of the various terms used throughout the dissertation regarding ‘race’, ‘racial’, ‘racist’ and ‘ethnic’, see section 1.3-1.3.1.

also makes the case for accessible scholarship, ‘which do[es] not require abstruse jargon and offers profound insights [which] need no arcane formulations’ (2001: 97).

Van Dijk’s approach to discourse is largely socio-cognitive, that is, the relations between mind, discursive interaction and society. For instance, in his various research projects on racism (Van Dijk 1984, 1987, 1991, 1993a, 2005, 2007b), ideology (Van Dijk 1998), and context (Van Dijk, 2008a, 2009), he posits the theory that discourses are both mental and social phenomena. However, given the fundamentally verbal nature of discourse, he sees CDA as needing a solid ‘linguistic basis [...] to account for at least some of the detailed structures, strategies and functions of text and talk, including grammatical, pragmatic, interactional, stylistic, rhetorical, semiotic, narrative or similar forms of verbal and paraverbal organisation of communicative events’ (2001 97).

### ***2.3.2 Critical Discourse Analysis in the Social Sciences***

Drawing on a number of social theorists from Bordieu to Habermas, heavily influenced by Van Dijk, as well as extremely original in its application of CDA, the work of Norman Fairclough came soon after to have an impact on this research. Fairclough (2001: 121) focuses on the social effects of texts, more specifically on political discourse, power relations, and ideology. He uses the term ‘text’ in its broadest sense to include written and printed material, transcripts of conversations, and interviews as well as television programmes and websites. According to Fairclough, texts are part of social events which can have causal effects, such as ‘inculcating and sustaining or changing ideologies’ (2003: 9). CDA plays a crucial role in clarifying the contribution a text makes to the process of meaning making in social life and for this reason he proposes CDA as a viable method for social scientific research:

[CDA] is in my view as much theory as method – or rather, a theoretical perspective on language and more generally semiosis (including ‘visual language’, ‘body language’, and so on) as one element or ‘moment’ of the material social process (Williams, 1977) which gives rise to ways of analysing language or semiosis within broader analyses of social processes. (2001: 121)

Like Van Dijk, Fairclough considers CDA as being in a 'dialogical relationship with other social theories and methods, which should engage with them in a 'transdisciplinary' rather than just an interdisciplinary way' (2001: 121). The framework for linguistic analysis is based on systemic functional linguistics (Halliday 1994).

### ***2.3.3 Discourse-historical approach***

In analysing social and political problems specific to Austria, namely xenophobia, discrimination, and social exclusion, Reisigl and Wodak (2001) devised their discourse-historical approach. Their methodology brings to light the importance of contextualising historically the discourse under analysis and the need for ethnography to underpin research findings. Reisigl and Wodak set out to study Heider's political campaign during the 1990s, culminating in the analysis of the 'Austria First Petition', a 12- point petition on immigrant controls. Their 'critical gaze is directed to exposing contradictions and oppositions between discursive and related social practices' (2001: 33). In other words, their aim is to unmask forms of discursive manipulation and via analysis make the text producer's intentions transparent. The text processing is sequential, detecting all salient features at once, justified by the cohesive and coherence structure of the text (Wodak and Meyer 2001: 85).

These three interpretations of the umbrella term CDA are particularly relevant to this work; both van Dijk and Wodak have produced studies dealing with adjacent historical, ideological, socio-political and cultural questions surrounding race talk, while Fairclough explores the importance of language and meaning making in social life. In Fairclough and Wodak's eight-point definition (1997: 258), there are many elements common to my research:

1. CDA addresses social problems.
2. Power relations are discursive.
3. Discourse constitutes society and culture.
4. Discourse does ideological work.
5. Discourse is historical.
6. The link between text and society is mediated.
7. Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory.

8. Discourse is a form of social action (Scollon 2001: 141).

## **2.4 Bridging the gap between CDA and Translation Studies**

This research project implements CDA to slightly different ends from the research approaches aforementioned. While the above approaches deal with analysing discourse produced in one language in one socio-cultural environment, in this project CDA is used as part of a methodological and analytical framework with the purpose of comparing a target text with the source text. Using CDA in the particular field of Translation Studies is not new. The most programmatic and innovative connection was made by Christina Schäffner in her paper *Political Discourse Analysis from the point of view of Translation Studies* (2004). She points out that ‘It is through translation that information is made available to addressees beyond national borders; and it is frequently the case that reactions in one country to statements that were made in another country are actually reactions to the information as it was provided in translation’. Although her observations relate ‘the fine grain of linguistic behaviour to politics’ (ibid.: 119) her definition of ‘Political’ is sufficiently generalised and flexible to the extent that ‘what is considered political depends on the participants in the communicative context’. However, in a stricter definition, political texts ‘either discuss political ideas, beliefs and practices of a society or a part of it (e.g. textbooks, academic papers, essays) or texts that are crucial in constituting a political community or group’ (119). Inherent to both, however, is the question of lexical choice, an argument which is central to my research. Schäffner points to CDA and a critical reflection on the strategic use of ‘key words’ for achieving specific political aims. She affirms:

meanings are not inherent to words. Neither are they stable. It is rather the case that language users assign meanings in communicative contexts. [...] Political concepts too are relative to the discourse of a *cultural* or political group, and thus contestable. The *experiential and socio-cultural background* of language users also needs to be taken into account when it comes to translation’. (my emphasis, 2004:121)

Race, racism, and discrimination are clearly political arguments; therefore by metonymy, so are racial insults. Schäffner identifies one of the aims of CDA as highlighting and examining the particular and ideological uses of language, and the underlying power relations with reference to one language and one culture (132). In the case of Translation Studies, however, textual features, ideological contexts and underlying relations of power apply both to the source text and culture and to the target text and culture, thus providing the means to make comparisons between two linguistic realities. Schäffner (2004: 136) points out that in Translation Studies today ‘the focus is on social, cultural and communicative practices, on the cultural and ideological significance of translating and of translations, on the external politics of translation behaviour and socio-cultural factors’. Schäffner identifies this interest in human communicative activity in socio-cultural environments and the texts and discourses which are its products as the common link between Translation Studies and Critical/Political Discourse Analysis.

Having established CDA as the basis for the methodological framework, an overview of the more specific analytical and linguistic tools used will follow in particular, the influential methodological tools derived from Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL). An outline will then be given of how certain translation scholars have modified Michael K. Halliday’s original SFL notions to the purposes of analysing cross-cultural meaning transfer.

## **2.5 Social context and language**

‘Language is at the same time a part of reality, a shaper of reality and a metaphor for reality’ (2003: 35). This quotation from M. A. K. Halliday sums up his approach to linguistics, a perspective which sees the process of meaning making as contingent to social context. From this premise Halliday formulated what he terms Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL), a theoretical framework which considers function and semantics as the foundations of language and communicative activity. Contrary to the Structuralists who focus on syntax, rendering language an abstract semiotic system, Halliday’s approach considers language as embedded in a social context, taking as a

point of reference Malinowski's 'context of situation'. In perceiving language as an intrinsic part of social life and therefore intrinsic to human experience, simultaneously engaging with other issues which also affect humanity: 'Systemic theory is a way of thinking about language and of working on language – and through language – on other things' (Halliday 2003: 97). This notion of working through language to study other areas of human experience is surely why SFL has been applied to various areas of study within the humanities.

Scholars who implement CDA in their research (including those discussed above) cite Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday 1978; 1985; 1994) as the foundation and reference for linguistic aspects of their analyses (Fairclough 2003, Fowler 1991, Kress 1976, van Dijk 1998, Wodak 2001). The model is particularly relevant to fields of social research because it conceives language as communication, as a process of meaning-making which evolves from the text producer's linguistic choices, then relating those choices to a broader socio-cultural framework. For the purposes of Translation Studies, Baker, (2002, 2006), House (1997), Hatim and Mason (1990, 1997), and Taylor (2000), to name just a few, have largely based their frameworks of analysis on the principles of SFL, an outline of which is given below.

### ***2.5.1 Systemic Functional Linguistics***

In a nutshell, and with no pretence of being exhaustive or detailed on what is one of the most complex and persuading theories of linguistic organization, we simplify the most relevant nodes of SFL that have had an important impact in discussing translation from a theoretical perspective. It can be said that one of the most influential postulations of SFL starts with the analysis of communication in the context of situation or sociocultural environment. This environment and communicative event in turn influences the genre, or text type. Different kinds of situation that constitute a culture engender different kinds of text, that have different 'registers' – that is, 'linguistic features which are typically associated with a configuration of situational features' (Halliday and Hasan 1976). The register of a text is composed of three elements:

1. field: total event in which the text is functioning, the purposive activity of the text producer, including subject matter
2. tenor: type of interpersonal relationship between the participants involved
3. mode: channel taken by the language, e.g. written or spoken and its genre, rhetorical mode, as narrative or didactic.

These three values determine linguistic features and correspond to three metafunctions which together form the discourse semantics of a text. These metafunctions are realised by the lexicogrammar, i.e. word choice and syntactic structure.

1. ideational: transitivity patterns, active/passive structures, verb types.
2. interpersonal: modality, modal verbs, adverbs, evaluative lexis.
3. textual: thematic, information structuring (clauses, order of elements) and cohesion.

### ***2.5.2 SFL in House's Translation Quality Assessment***

The Translation Studies scholars mentioned above have all focused on different elements of this framework, adapting them to suit their different spheres of interest. For instance House's model of translation quality assessment (1997) is based on Halliday's register analysis, covering the slightly modified categories of field, tenor, and mode. House uses this model to analyse the ST, then carries out the same process on the TT before comparing them for what she calls 'mismatches' (ibid.: 45). These mismatches are categorised by genre; they can be of a functional nature, errors of dimension which are called 'covertly erroneous', or denotative errors which are considered as breaches in the TL system known as 'overtly erroneous'. House adds that the former of these two categories, the 'covertly erroneous', 'demands a much more qualitative-descriptive, in depth analysis, [and] have often been neglected' (45). The aim of the present research is to carry out precisely this type of detailed analysis which takes into account not only the obvious mismatches, but also the deeper levels of meaning and meaning transfer in order to establish the validity of the choices made in the translation process. House (1997: 47) concedes, however, that quality assessment of translation can never be completely objective:

in the last analysis, translation is a complex hermeneutic process. Translation evaluation – despite the attempt in my model to objectify the process by providing a set of categories – must consequently also be characterized by a necessarily subjective element, due to the fact of course that human beings are an important variable. It seems unlikely, therefore that translation quality assessment can ever be completely objectified in the manner of the results of natural science subjects.

### ***2.5.3 SFL in Baker's pragmatic approach***

Mona Baker (Baker 1992) also borrows terminology from SFL with an emphasis on the textual metafunctions. Her seminal course book on translation techniques (1992; 2011) works on a bottom up approach to discuss the various translation strategies which can be adopted at each level of equivalence. Starting from word level with the smallest translatable unit, a morpheme, Baker's notions move in concentric circles to cohesion (surface structure), and coherence ('making sense', 1992: 218) in analysing equivalence at sentence and textual level. The next level evolves to thematic and information structures which influence information flow and how texts are organised and developed. In her last chapter of the 1992 edition, Baker goes beyond linguistic equivalence and textual features altogether to look at how language is used in real situations to generate meaning. The last and largest concentric circle deals with pragmatic level analysis, which is 'the study of meaning not as generated by the linguistics system but as conveyed and manipulated by participants in a communicative situation' (217). This final notion of 'language in use' rather than language as a code, an abstract system, is of most relevance to this study. For Baker, there are three concepts in pragmatics that are particularly relevant to translation and cross-cultural understanding; Grice's (1975) notion of 'implicature' or 'what the speaker means or implies rather than what s/he actually says' (Baker 1992: 223), 'presupposition' which Baker defines as 'pragmatic inference', and finally coherence above text level, which 'depends on the hearer's or reader's expectations and experience of the world' (1992: 219). It is the concept of implicature (see Hatim and Mason's 'intentionality' below), which gains the most currency. Grice's maxims of co-operative communication are applied to translation, and it is also noted that in addition to the supposedly universal maxims of quantity, quality, relevance and

manner, the maxim of politeness should be added. While Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1978, 1987) posits that some features of politeness in speech acts are universal, Baker contends:

Politeness is a relativistic notion and different cultures therefore have different norms of 'polite' behaviour. They also have different ideas about what is and what is not a 'taboo' area. Sex, religion and defecation are taboo subjects in many societies, but not necessarily to the same degree within similar situations.

This last point is of great significance for the present study, where later it will be suggested with that in translating linguistic taboos in *Gran Torino* such as racial slurs the Italian target culture norms prevail over the source culture tenets, thus endowing meanings or censoring the target text product in at both micro and macro text levels. In the next section, Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1978, 1987) is discussed in relation to this study.

## **2.6 Politeness Theory**

Brown and Levinson themselves felt it necessary to modify their original thesis (1978) to allow for the cultural variable (1987). Although the premise to their framework is the universal nature of politeness in speech acts, they subsequently concede in a revised version that 'in any particular society [this notion] would expect to be subject to much cultural elaboration' (1987: 13).

The term 'politeness' in Brown and Levinson's conceptualization is not simply the idea of showing courtesy, but as Hatim and Mason explain, it 'covers all areas of language usage which serve to establish, maintain, or modify interpersonal relationships between text producer and text receiver' (1997: 80). For this reason, it is an important concept to consider in cross-cultural communication, especially if applied to the fields of sensitive language, such as taboo, racial slurs, and offensive language in general. The basic premise for their theory is that 'all competent members of adult society have "face", the public self-image that every member wants to claim

for himself' (1987: 61). Brown and Levinson's notion of 'face' was inspired by Goffman's ideas (1967) and they gloss the term as follows:

Each individual member of society has 'face' – that is her/his self-esteem and public self-image, tied up to the idea of embarrassment or humiliation. Face is something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction. [...] normally everyone's face depends on everyone else's being maintained, and since people can be expected to defend their faces if threatened, and in defending their own to threaten others' faces, it is in general in every participant's best interest to maintain each other's face. (Brown and Levinson 1987: 61)

This concept of face consists of two aspects:

- a) Negative face is the want of every 'competent adult member' that his/her actions be unimpeded by others. The claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction – i.e. freedom of action and freedom from imposition.
- b) Positive face is the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others. The positive consistent self-image or personality including the desire that her/his self-image be appreciated and approved of. (ibid.)

The two aspects of face, the negative and the positive, in turn dictate various strategies which can be employed by the speaker in order to maintain face. These strategies can also aid in situations when there is a Face Threatening Act (FTA). FTAs are loosely defined as 'those acts that by their nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or the speaker' (1987: 67). But there are some linguistic acts which inevitably compromise face, such as asking for a favour, or as in asking for payment, as in the second sequence analysed see section 5.1-5.1.3. These FTAs according to Brown and Levinson require certain linguistic tactics which minimise the risk of losing face. While the nature of FTAs are to some degree dependent on a cultural variable, there are some strategies which can be adopted to soften the effect:

1. Don't do the FTA.

2. Do the FTA 'off record', that is an indirect or ambiguous request (positive politeness).
3. Do the FTA 'on record', with redressive action (negative politeness). This means to state the communicative intention unambiguously.

In order to save face, then, it is necessary to use one of various strategies to diminish the threat to the addressee, the choice of which depending on variables such as the pragmatic aims of the speaker, the power balance and social distance between the interlocutors.

However if we wish to go beyond a theory of universal collaboration in communicative acts (see section 6.1-6.2.2), we can see that politeness theory cannot adequately account for every type of communicative situation. Brown and Levinson concede that certain FTAs 'threaten the positive face want by indicating that the speaker does not care about the addressee's feelings, wants, etc'. For instance, 'expressions of disapproval, criticism, contempt or ridicule', 'violent (out-of-control) emotions' or 'raising of dangerously emotional or divisive topics, e.g. politics, race, religion' resulting in a 'dangerous-to-face atmosphere' (1987: 66) alter the reactions of positive face. Yet, despite they concede that this happens, their theory does not adequately explain how these situations are negotiated and to what outcome. It is clear that where there is no desire to save the addressee's face and the risk of losing one's own face is insufficient deterrent for discrediting the other, the concept of 'mutual collaboration' is, or becomes, irrelevant. In other words, confrontational communicative acts will implicate a complete breakdown of verbal politeness as posited by Brown and Levinson. Therefore, such communicative situations require a broader theoretical and analytical framework for their interpretation, especially in the field of translation where cross-cultural comparison of politeness strategies must be taken into account.

Nevertheless, Politeness Theory remains an effective and useful method of analysing discourse for translation purposes if combined with other analytical tools. Hatim and Mason (1996) successfully exploit some of Brown and Levinson's theories from a discourse analytical perspective in their examination of translated film texts, which is discussed in the next section.

## 2.7 Social semiotics and Pragmatics in Context

Power and distance are two sociolinguistic variables common to Brown and Levinson's theory and to Hatim and Mason's analyses of contextually determined communication strategies. According to Hatim and Mason (1990), these phenomena form part of the pragmatic and semiotic dimensions of context. Crucial to their analyses of translation and translating processes, the first dimension (pragmatics) deals with the relation between utterances and the interpretation of their user's intentions and the second (semiotics) looks at the ways in which 'signs' (texts) interact within a socio-cultural environment. In this way Hatim and Mason's approach to discourse analysis goes beyond Halliday's original model of the register variables of field, mode, and tenor to consider the text producers' intentions, beliefs, presuppositions and inferences thereby incorporating additional layers to the meaning making process and how these elements are subsequently relayed across linguistic and cultural barriers.

Hatim and Mason's model of analysis introduces other criterion such as 'intentionality' which refers to intended meaning in a particular situation and the 'appropriateness of the linguistic form to achieve the pragmatic purpose' (Hatim and Mason 1997: 219), and 'motivateness' in the use of language, which is 'a set of factors which rhetorically regulate the text user's choices, whether conscious or unconscious' (ibid.: 221).

Unlike many translation scholars working in the field of audiovisual translation (see section 3.5-3.6), Hatim and Mason make no distinctions between different forms of translating. They aim to highlight common concerns in all areas of translation, emphasising what unites rather than what divides or distinguishes them (1997: 2). They explore some aspects of audiovisual translation in their analysis of the English subtitled version of the French film *Un Coeur en hiver* (dir. by Claude Sautet, 1992). Politeness theory is the core element to their case study, highlighting cultural differences and ensuing dilemmas in rendering politeness strategies cross-culturally via constrained translating as exemplified by subtitles. Hatim and Mason's analytical perspective proved to be most inspirational in establishing an analytical framework for the present case study.

On a more theoretical level, Hatim and Mason's *The Translator as Communicator* (1997) provides invaluable insight on the translator's role in shaping discourse and the ways information is or is not conveyed to text receivers operating in a different cultural and linguistic environment (144). Given that one of the aims of this enquiry is to critically analyse the racial, dysphemistic and taboo discourses in the film *Gran Torino*, and how they have (or have not) been rendered in the receiving lingua-culture, Hatim and Mason's reflections on ideology in translation and the translation of ideology (146) have particular relevance to the present work.

## **2.8 Reception and perception of racial slurs in *Gran Torino*: comparing target and source culture reactions**

The final methodological component regards the reception and perception of the translations of racial slurs in *Gran Torino*. Situating the film in both Source and Target polysystems (Even-Zohar 1990: 9), was an essential preliminary phase for the purposes of this investigation. This was achieved by collecting reviews and data from a variety of media in both English and Italian in order to gauge reactions to the film and also by carrying out a small sample survey in order to obtain some audience feedback. From these indications, the audience's 'horizon of expectation' (Jauss 1982) can be partially determined.

### **2.8.1 Epitextual data**

A sub-area of translation criticism in Holmes original 'map' of Translation Studies (Munday 2008: 12) is 'criticism' of the text to be analysed which covers in this case the study of film reviews published in newspapers, on websites, and in blogs. Adopted from Jauss's reception theory (1982), these forms of paratext (or metatext) yield some important insight as to how the film was received in the respective socio-cultural and linguistic contexts. For example, *The New York Times* review, entitled 'Hope for a Racist, and Maybe a Country' (12 December 2008) tells us that Eastwood 'has slipped another film into theaters and shown everyone how it's done' with a film which shows 'an urgent engagement with the tougher, messier, bigger questions of American life'. However, the reviewer describes the main character Walt as 'a foulmouthed bigot with

an unprintable epithet for every imaginable racial and ethnic group', and ends with the observation: 'The film has some exceedingly foul language, a great many racist slurs and bloody violence'. The blog *coolercinema* had an interesting debate on the film, while American academic Jessie Daniels (see section 4.2) gives a reading of the film which highlights the nexus between white masculinity and racism on the website *racismreview.com*.

Eastwood himself spoke out against critics. In an article entitled 'Eastwood slams the politically correct culture' (*Daily Express*, 26 February 2009), he is quoted as saying

People have lost their sense of humour. In former times we constantly made jokes about different races. You can only tell them today with one hand over your mouth or you will be insulted as a racist. [...] I find that ridiculous. In those earlier days every friendly clique had a 'Sam the Jew' or 'Jose the Mexican' - but we didn't think anything of it or have a racist thought. It was just normal that we made jokes based on our nationality or ethnicity. That was never a problem. I don't want to be politically correct. We're all spending too much time and energy trying to be politically correct about everything.

The Italian press on the whole wrote favourably on the film, without commenting however on the actual dialogue. A strap-line from an interview with Eastwood in *La Repubblica* (4 December 2008) read 'L'artista americano è regista e interprete di una pellicola sulla tolleranza' [The American artist is director and actor in a film on tolerance]; while two other critics note the racial slur 'muso giallo' but make no allusion to its use. Lietta Tournabuoni of *L'Espresso* (*trovacinema.it*) comments: 'I vicini di casa asiatici li chiama "musi gialli", come faceva durante la guerra di Corea dove ha combattuto' [He calls his Asian neighbours 'yellow muzzles' as he did during the Korean war where he fought] and Serafino Murri of *XLRepubblica* describes Thao as 'un giovane "muso giallo" di etnia Hmong' [a young yellow muzzle of the ethnic group Hmong] (*trovacinema.it*).

From the perspective of the Italian Film industry, the dubbed version was highly acclaimed, winning awards at the *Gran Gala del Doppiaggio Romics* 2009 for best dubbing actor (Michele Kalamera who dubbed Eastwood) and best dubbing

director (Filippo Ottoni). Furthermore, a review of the Italian dubbing of *Gran Torino* published in the online journal *aSinc*, an edited journal very close to the organ of the Italian dubbing and subtitling industry, gives a perspective on how the dubbing and linguistic transpositions were perceived within its field. From these indications it is thus possible to compare the perceptions of the original text within the source culture polysystem, with the target culture product within the target culture polysystem. The last element in this framework would be the possibility of administering a large survey to gauge audience response to the translation of racial slurs – a pilot was run on a homogeneous sample of respondents and its results drove the initial phases this study to focus on particular aspects of the analysis, but the sample size was too small to provide anything more than vaguely indicative results.<sup>10</sup> A reliable methodology for

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<sup>10</sup> As external constraints allowed only a pilot survey, the results are only presented here in a footnote, as an indication. The sample size, its composition, and the limited timescale to prepare a scientific survey do not allow me to use its findings for anything else than indications of the potential power of a full-fledged and accurate audience response questionnaire study. Dubbed translations of racial slurs were selected from *Gran Torino* and a pilot-survey was carried out on 21 final year undergraduates in Cultural Mediation at the Faculty of Modern Languages, University of Catania. Data gathered from such a small, homogenous, and monolingual group cannot be considered scientifically valid, it nevertheless yields some insight into the ways in which young Italians perceive and respond to racist insults in general, and highlights gaps between the source and target lingua-cultures. The survey was devised in two parts. The first part was completed before seeing two of clips discussed in Chapter 4, 5, and 6 below; this part consisted of three open questions in order to establish the students' level of awareness, and/or use of racist expressions in Italian. Having watched the clips, the second part required an evaluation on a scale of 1 (max) to 5 (min) of how offensive certain expressions were, and on the existence of certain racial expressions in their language. The first question, 'do you know any racial insults in your language?' forced the students to reflect for several minutes before putting pen to paper. They answered with expressions like *Rom* [Rom people], *marocchino* (Moroccan), and the anachronistic *abissino* (Abyssinian). Most of the students included expressions like *extracomunitario* (non-European), *immigrato* (immigrant), and *negro* (nigger); the latter accompanied by the pejorative adjective *sporco* (dirty), a common collocation in the spoken language (Scatasta 2000: 100). The expression *vu compra*, derived from *vuoi comprare?* (do you want to buy?) was also mentioned, which according to Beccaria (2006: 144) is 'an expression used by street vendors of North African or African origin to encourage passersby to look at their wares'. Insults which are regional rather than international were also mentioned; in Italy, 'racism' has long been and still continues to be an internal issue. The second part consisted of three further questions. Having watched three clips from the dubbed version of the film, the students answered the following questions: 1. Would a native Italian speaker ever use the expression *muso giallo* to refer to someone of Asian origin? 2. Would a native Italian speaker ever use the expression *mangiariso* (rice eater) to refer to someone of Asian origin? 3. Have you ever heard the expressions *mangiapasta* (pasta eater) or *mangiapizza* (pizza eater) to describe an Italian?

Having already mentioned that this survey is only indicative as its results are not in anyway scientific or accurate, as a corpus or body of research into these collocations and expressions simply does not exist as yet, it is nonetheless useful to make some passing observations on its results. To the first question initially 75% replied that an Italian would use the expression *muso giallo*. However, this replay was however qualified; some commented that a more common expression in Italian would be 'occhi a mandorla' [almond eyes]. Others replied that yes, an Italian 'would' use the expression, but added 'I've never heard it'. In the subsequent discussion – an informal focus group on the survey questions and the reasons for asking the questions – which took place after finishing the questionnaire, students themselves concluded that the expression 'muso giallo' was one they had heard in dubbed American war films rather than in authentic dialogue and suggested that it was a form of dubbese. All replied that the expression *mangiariso*, does not exist in Italian, although 90% considered it would be offensive. *Mangiapasta* and *impasta pizza* were also unanimously considered invented insults, to describe Italians, but if they were called so, the students said they would not be offended. However, they all agreed they would be insulted if someone called

obtaining such data is most difficult to devise, requiring research methods which are beyond the analytical scope proposed here, however the findings are used as a starting point for discussion on the reception and perception of racial slurs in the forthcoming contribution (Filmer 2012) 'Racial Slurs and Ethnic Epithets; last linguistic taboo and translational dilemma' in *Audiovisual Translation across Europe: An Ever-changing Landscape*. London: Peter Lang

### **Closing remarks**

This chapter has provided a methodological overview for this study, identifying discourse analysis and ideology in translation as the two most significant elements to the methodological framework. These elements are closely linked to the theoretical perspectives on cross-cultural meaning transfer discussed in the next chapter. The intertwined issues of target-oriented approaches to Translation Studies (Toury 1995), the translator's socio-cultural environment and personal habitus (Simeoni 1998) and ideology in translation (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990; Hatim and Mason 1997; Venuti 1995, 2008) are examined in relation to audiovisual translation.

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them *senza documenti* [without papers] or *clandestino* [clandestine]. Finally, after watching sequence three of film the students discovered that *mangiapasta* and *mangiapizza* were the TT versions of the ST slur, 'wop'. Once it had been explained to the students that one of the possible origins of 'wop' was 'without papers', and therefore an Anglo-American version of *senza documenti* the irony was not lost. This small-scale survey administered early on this project let me find out that there are also considerable issues of the audience perception of offensive language found in the ST that are reduced in the TT which cannot be fully addressed by comparing the ST and TT only. The respondents' replies emphasized that the omission of several racial references from the TT dilutes the dramatic impact and compromises the macro-level meaning of sequence. The survey confirmed that full-scale systematic surveys on audiences are needed to overcome the barriers of dubbese. Studies such as Chiaro (2004) and Antonini (2009) should become the new currency of research in AVT certainly for the study of offensive and taboo language.



## **Chapter 3**

### **Theory meets practice:**

#### **perspectives on target-oriented approaches**

The previous chapter discussed the methodological framework implemented for this study, identifying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in Translation Studies as the prevailing perspective. As Fairclough points out (section 2.2), it is an approach which links theory and method by looking at language and meaning making within a broader perspective of social processes. This chapter sets out to describe the various theoretical issues which underpin and overlap with the methodology adopted here. Section 3.2 explores Descriptive Translation Studies as a comparative target-orientated method of analysis while section 3.2.1 discusses how DTS sheds light on the theoretical understanding of the norms at work in the translation process. In shifting the research perspective towards the target culture, inevitably the translator himself comes to the fore. Section 3.2.2 focuses on Toury's reflections on 'how translators translate' and looks at Pym's reading of Toury's laws of translation. Section 3.3 examines Simeoni's sociological stance and argues that the notion of translator as agent, ultimately subservient to the dominant translational practices of her/his own society might be chosen as a paradigm to explain film dubbing practices in Italy. Section 3.4 reflects on the effects of target-oriented translation, discusses Berman's analysis of 'textual deformation', and engages with Venuti's notions of 'foreignizing' and 'domesticating'. The remainder of the Chapter outlines some theoretical considerations pertaining to audiovisual translation (AVT) (section 3.5), in particular dubbing in the Italian linguistic and cultural environment (section 3.5.1). Finally, section 3.6 reviews existing research in the language pair English/Italian on meaning transfer of racial and insults and linguistic taboos in AV products.

### **3.1 Introduction**

The complexity of issues that surface in attempting to translate racial slurs and their inherent ideological and socio-cultural semantics call for a frame of reference that draws on diverse schools of thought within current Translation Studies. Translation studies have long since moved on from the dichotomies of purely linguistic comparisons of ST and TT, literal versus free translation or matching of equivalence. In the last fifteen years, as Chesterman (1998: 201) points out, this field of research has witnessed: ‘a broadening of interest from translational studies (focusing on translations themselves) to translatorial studies (focusing on translators and their decisions)’. In a multifarious post-modern society, issues in translation today are unavoidably cultural, ideological, and political delving above and below the surface of the text itself to question the motivations on the part of the translator (Simeoni 1998; Yannakopoulou 2008), the power relations involved in the translation process (Hatim and Mason 1997; Venuti 1995, 2008) and the mindset, cultural beliefs, in other words, the ideologies of both text producer (author and translator), and receiver (Bassnett and Bielsa 2009; Munday 2007; Tymoczko 2003). Considering that the very nature of translation implicates a bi-dimensional perspective involving two (or more) languages and cultures, the present study attempts to embrace both points of view.

### **3.2 Within Descriptive Translation Studies**

This study can be situated within Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) using a tool kit from empirical target-oriented approaches. It identifies two phenomena on rendering offensive language that are analysed critically to gain some understanding of translators’ behaviour. DTS was first identified as a distinct branch of translation studies by Holmes (1972; 1988). On his ‘map’ of Translation Studies, this branch was further divided into three sub areas of research; product- oriented, process-oriented, and function-oriented. However, as Toury observes, these divisions are somewhat superficial as a thorough investigation would necessarily involve all three aspects, thus revealing their interdependency in order to gain real insight into translational phenomena (1995: 11).

Toury's model of DTS approaches translation from a target-oriented perspective according to which the position and function of translated texts and the activity of translating within a target culture influence the form the translation takes and the strategies employed in order to achieve it. He therefore refers to translations as 'facts' of a target culture and explores target-bound considerations rather than relegating these constraints as merely incidental to the source oriented preoccupations which dominated Translation Studies in the 1970s (Toury 1995: 24). These target-oriented empirical methods are to some extent the basis for this case study. While CDA provides the methodological framework for macro-level text analysis, Toury's framework is an appropriate analytical approach as it proposes a micro-analysis of some selected lexical items with the TT product as the starting point, a three-step method of performing linguistic comparisons between ST and TT which is both practical and simple to perform:

1. situate the TTs in their TT cultural system;
2. 'map' TT segments, which have been chosen ad hoc, onto the ST equivalents;
3. try to draw generalisations regarding translation strategies employed and the norms at work. (Munday 2008: 120)

In order to obtain a significant amount of data with which to identify patterns of translational behaviour, a series of such analyses would need to be carried out on different texts to observe the norms at work in the translational process. In fact this was Toury's objective. However, Munday has argued that Toury's proposed method to some extent overlooks 'the complex ideological and political factors such as the status of the ST in its own culture' (2008: 115). If meaning making is regarded as both a bottom-up and top-down process, it is clear that contextualising the lexical items that are the object of this study is a fundamental part of analysing their meaning transfer. As has already been noted (see section 1.5), the pragmatic use of taboo words and swearing is very much context-dependent, therefore the translation choices can only be evaluated in terms of that particular context. For this reason the present study offers comparisons of ST and TT lexical items selected ad hoc, i.e. racial slurs, accompanied

by a detailed examination of the functional, pragmatic, and situational aspects of the ST sequences in which they are found. This type of macro-analysis can only be achieved within a longer stretch of dialogue, thereby gaining a broader view of the meaning making process and the intentionality of the text producer (Hatim and Mason 1997: 1). Furthermore, the interaction between text, ideology and culture is evidenced by the main analytical framework of reference which is based on Critical Discourse Analysis (see section 2.2).

### ***3.2.1 DTS and the search for laws of translational behaviour***

DTS, on the other hand, is fundamentally interested in identifying and isolating translating norms that are drawn from concrete examples taken from a number of different texts. Toury introduced the notion of norms to account for patterns of translation behaviour within a specific sociolinguistic situation. He describes the concept of norms as ‘performance instructions appropriate for and applicable to particular situations, specifying what is prescribed and forbidden as well as what is tolerated and permitted in a certain behavioural dimension’ (1995: 55). In assessing the adequacy (source culture norms prevail) or the acceptability (target culture norms prevail) of translation choices it is hoped that translational universals known as ‘laws of translation’ will be revealed. Toury postulated two main rules:

- 1. The law of growing standardization** (Toury 1995: 267-74): where the limited selection of linguistic options found in the TL lead to a loss of variation in style in the TT. Therefore, an unusual collocation or a marked use of an expression in the ST becomes ‘neutralised’ or standardised with a more habitual option from the TL.
- 2. The law of interference** (1995: 274-79): where ST linguistic features (mainly lexical and syntactical patterning) are transferred into the TT. This can be perceived as either ‘negative transfer’ causing deviations from the normal, codified practices of the target system, or ‘positive transfer’ whereby the choices are ones which are used in any case in the TL.

Of these two ‘laws of translation’, the law of growing standardization prevails in the analysis of *Gran Torino* (see sections 4.3-6.3). As previously observed (see section 1.5.1), the target lingua-culture has no immediate equivalents to many racial slurs,

hence the translator has chosen strategies of repetition and omission in some cases. This reduction in lexical richness inevitably produces a neutralising and flattening effect on the TL product. On the other hand, if the law of interference were construed as ‘cultural interference’ it could explain the number of purely invented, albeit creative, solutions to the lexical gaps that racial insults represent.

### ***3.2.2 Toury’s laws of translation and Pym’s re-interpretation***

The laws of standardization and interference are, thus, the two exemplary universals which Toury pinpoints in translational behaviour. He puts forward the theory that the former is perhaps the result of translation training which does not encourage risk-taking in real-life translational decisions (Pym 2008: 325). Toury sees other variables such as biological and bilingual age, experience as a translator, and so on as other influential factors in the law of standardization. On the other hand the law of interference which governs the phenomenon of ‘discourse transfer’ from source to target text is most probably due to the basic mental processes involved in translation which are manifested unconsciously by the translator (Toury 1995: 275). Socio-cultural factors are also considered important conditions of the law.

More than ten years after Toury’s seminal *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* was published, Anthony Pym, Daniel Simeoni, and Myriam Shlesinger edited a series of essays in a volume entitled *Beyond Descriptive Translation Studies: Investigations in homage to Gideon Toury* (2008). In his contribution to the volume, Pym (2008: 311) revisits Toury’s laws of standardization and interference and critically analyses Mona Baker’s subsequent attempt to establish what she calls translational universals. In Cartesian manner he considers each of Baker’s four universals, *Explication*, *Simplification*, *Normalization* and *Levelling out*, in turn, before dismissing them as repetitious elaborations of Toury’s original law of standardization. Pym also notes that her four universals make no reference at all to the law of interference. Pym concludes that the duality of Toury’s proposition offers a broader outlook on causal explanations to translational behaviour. He observes, however, that even these explanations are dependent on sociocultural variables and therefore cannot be considered properly universal. Pym, instead, looks for other

explanations for these two translational phenomena and proposes the translator's tendency to risk avoidance. In the translation process the translator is frequently faced with choice. Choice implies doubt, i.e. which is the best solution. In a real-life translation situation where time is the main constraint, where client and consumer expectations are all part of the equation, Pym (2008: 324) posits that the translator will play it safe and avoid risk:

We thus have two general ways of dealing with doubt: either say what seems normal or safe (standardization) or say what someone else can be responsible for (interference). Both sets of strategies are ways in which translators reduce their personal risk burden. In accordance with both laws, at the same time, many translators do not tend to take on communicative risk in their own name.

Pym develops this hypothesis further and suggests that a different system of reward structures might influence how translators react when faced with a risk:

If translators are going to be rewarded (financially, symbolically or socially) for taking risks, then they are likely to take risks, rather than transfer them. Translators may then have an interest in breaking all the maxims, norms, laws or universals that theorists throw at them. (ibid.: 325)

He rightly observes that the current reward structure for the translator's activity encourages translators to be risk averse – a tendency which once embedded will reproduce itself. It is here, then, that Pym sees the explanation for certain patterns in translational behaviour, looking beyond the purely linguistic level to embrace sociocultural variables such as prestige, reward, position, and so on. For Pym, risk dynamics are a crucial link in formulating a law which has 'a more human causation', that is 'translators will tend to avoid risk by standardizing language and/or channelling interference, if and when there are no rewards for them to do otherwise' (ibid.: 326).

It might be noted here that this theory of risk avoidance could aptly describe the dubbing strategies and practices adopted in Italy - there are several considerations on the professional status of dubbers and subtitlers within the social, linguistic, and cultural system of the film industry in Italy that should be taken into account (see

Paolinelli and Di Fortunato 2005). In the first place the field of film translation/adaptation is practically a closed shop with just a handful of veterans dominating the market (Pavesi 2005: 137). This oligopoly is inevitably responsible for establishing translational norms, or more to the point, maintaining those already in act. In other words there is little room for experimentation; the rewards for doing so would be relatively scarce while it is rather in the interests of those few dubbing directors who wield the power to simply maintain the status quo.

On the question of rewards, Pym adds that for him the 'reward' as such lies not in the formulation of the theory itself, but in the idea of achieving cooperation between cultures. This wisp of a notion is brought forward in the analogy that follows. He compares Baker's readily applicable and easily understood universals to Toury's more abstruse concepts which require time and effort to comprehend. The former reaps short-term and immediate rewards, while the latter 'has the potential to produce rewards over vast stretches of space and time' (ibid.: 327). This analogy could be interpreted as an apology for risk-taking in translation; that the rewards might not be immediate but the long-term benefits of real cross-cultural understanding would prove to be the real reward. One possible construal of Pym's stance could be summarised thus the advocacy of risk-taking as a translation policy even though there is a possibility that in the short term meaning appears to be obscured. This short-term obscurity would be justified in the long run, however, as true intercultural understanding depends on knowing the Other in her/his own terms rather than trying to find 'equivalence' in the target culture in order to explain something which is clearly culture-bound.

In the light of a subsequent personal communication, however, it appears that the above interpretation alludes to an idealism which the author himself does not share:

Cross-cultural cooperation is the goal, so that non-cooperation is failure, and that is how I would want to define risk. But that does not necessarily entail that we ever reach – or need to reach – an understanding of the Other[s] in their own terms. I am unable to justify such idealisms. Any transitory obscurity, since you mention the image, may instead be justified in terms of what

different communication participants are seeking from the communication act. Some may simply enjoy the mystery; others find pleasure in the receptive effort; the source culture might find satisfaction in the representation they recognize; there may be a long-term learning process on both sides... at the same time as some segments of the potential public may be alienated, leading to non-cooperation.

I think that's where I would now want to see risk management operate: in facilitating one kind of cooperation, we necessarily raise the risk of non-cooperation for someone else. *The mediator somehow decides that the value of what is gained is greater than the value of what is lost* (as in vaccination programs, where many lives are saved but some are always lost). And that would be the ethics of risk management: privileging long-term cooperation between cultures over short-term understandings between individuals. (My emphasis; private communication 8 March 2011)

And there is the crux of the matter – the *somehow*. Which are the criteria that the mediator/translator must use in order to evaluate the losses and gains in the negotiation of understanding? And how are those criteria developed?

In the next section the concept of 'habitus' is explored as a possible explanation of how and why individual translators make certain decisions in the task of meaning transfer.

### **3.3 The Translator's habitus and social norms**

In his essay 'The Pivotal Status of the Translator's Habitus' (1998), Simeoni sees the conceptualisation of the cognitive tasks of the translator from a cultural perspective and argues for the precedence of culturally orientated studies over biologically inspired cognitive approaches in translational issues. He defines Toury's as a cultural approach to translation theory, pushing towards Holmes' idea of a 'socio-translation studies'. However, Toury's model of how bilingual speakers become translators, and how their environment conditions their translational behaviour is central to Simeoni's sociological slant on translation practices. Simeoni's essay essentially examines why translators are willingly 'subservient' to prevailing norms. According to him the process of socialization and the inculcation of normative behaviour influences the activity of translating. These social constraints are gradually internalised by the translator, ultimately manifesting themselves in the end-results, the translation product

(1998: 5). Simeoni's investigation aims to look beyond the 'norms' as abstract concepts to reach the agency behind them.

Norms have the upper hand. Translators adhere to them more often than not. They may not like this, and may often wish they could distance themselves more from them, but they recognise their power. However, since the process is very much the same in all sectors of society governed by norms, i.e. pretty much everywhere, the question of agency behind norms in general and behind translational norms in particular, begs for an answer. (ibid.: 6)

This concept is particularly relevant to this study and to the field of AVT in general where it appears that norms and patterns in translation decisions prevail in the form of 'translation routines' (see section 3.5). He argues that environment, social milieu, training, in brief 'the internalized position of the translator in his field of practice [...] may turn out to be the single most determining factor' in the translator's behaviour (1998: 12). Taking Bordieu's sociological concept of Habitus, defined by John B. Thompson thus:

The habitus is a set of dispositions which incline agents to act and react in certain ways. The dispositions generate practices, perceptions and attitudes which are 'regular' without being consciously coordinated or governed by any rule. (1991: 12)

Simeoni develops the theory of a translator's habitus building on Toury's observation that the decisions made by an individual translator are not erratic but tend to follow distinct patterns (1995: 147). Thus Simeoni (ibid.: 23) states:

we are responsible as translators for the conservative decisions we make, not only because we want to avoid 'negative sanctions' (Toury 1995: 163) but also because those choices are the ones we know and fully assimilate during our training periods and our practice, given also the relational character of our highly personalised backgrounds.

While at pains to point out that his theory of the translator's habitus is in no way in conflict with the programme of DTS, the functional approach or the importance of

norms, Simeoni stresses that the emphasis shifts from texts and polysystems to the translational activity itself; translatorial habitus rather than translational norms. In his opinion a socio-cognitive approach to cultural process and outcome can only increase our knowledge of the extent to which norms apply, in translation as in other intercultural modes' (34).

The present study deals with the translation of film, which is sometimes construed as 'constrained' translation (see section 3.5) due to the technical restrictions it poses on the translation process and its polysemiotic nature. The other constraints imposed on the translated audiovisual product, as with all forms of translation are very much culture dependent, and subject to the abiding societal norms. Inevitably, as Simeoni posits, the translator belongs to a certain society and either reacts against or in accordance with its values. From this perspective it was considered important not only to discuss the genre of translation, but also refer to the individual translator in the outcomes of this investigation (see Conclusion).

Yannakopoulou (2008: 5) goes one step further and sustains that it is not norms, or even translational habitus which govern the translator's choices, but the translator's personal habitus.

When dealing with actual translations, norms seem to be insufficient to account for translation choices. They are indispensable if one is to understand the context in which a translation came into being, they can also describe the position a particular translation had in the target culture, but cannot account for the motivations behind the translator's choices. Therefore, in my view they should be supplemented with the notion of habitus in order to achieve a more thorough outlook of the work of a particular translator.

In discussing a case study of Angelos Vlahos' Greek Translation of *Hamlet*, Yannakopoulou argues that the systemic dimension inherent in DTS works to the detriment of human agency in explaining translational behaviour, in particular to account for deviation from the norm. He (2008: 10) disagrees, with the abiding notion in Toury and Simeoni that in the end the translator is guided by norms rather than personal choice:

when looking into the translator's choices, from the selection of text down to the micro-level strategic choices in the process of actual translations, the translator's personal habitus should be taken into consideration, probably even more so than his/her professional one. In other words, the professional habitus can account for only part of the choices he makes, whereas other choices, especially those that tend to be seen as idiosyncratic stylistic preferences could be approached via his personal trajectory.

According to Yannakopoulou, the personal habitus of the translator determines translational behaviour; individual choice reigns over predominant norms. While this theory could to some extent account for the way individual translators translate, especially in the case of deviations from norms, further consideration must be given to the basic premise of translation, i.e. what is the ethical aim of the translating act (Berman 1985: 277) and how this influences the translator's decisions. This question is investigated in the following section.

### **3.4 'Negative Analytic' in Berman and Venuti's concepts of 'foreignizing and 'domesticating'**

Antoine Berman explains why translation is the 'trial of the foreign' in his seminal paper of the same name. He perceives translation as establishing a relationship between the 'Self-Same' and the 'Foreign' by exposing us to the 'utter foreignness' of the source language work (Berman, cited in Venuti 2004). Translation is also a trial for the Foreign, as the foreign work is uprooted from its *language ground* and transplanted into the receiving culture, thereby revealing its 'most original kernel' its very essence, the translating act accentuating its strangeness. Berman calls for a reflection on the 'properly *ethical* aim of the translating act', which he sees as receiving the Foreign as Foreign.

Berman proposes an analysis of the systems of 'textual deformation' which he sees as blocking that central aim, thus enabling a 'critique of translations' which is neither descriptive nor normative. His negative analytic is concerned with 'ethnocentric annexationist translations and hypertextual translations (pastiche, imitation, adaptation, free writing) where the play of deforming forces is freely exercised' (ibid.: 278). In other words, target-oriented translations which 'deform' the

original text via a series of tendencies identified in translation. Berman lists twelve such tendencies which he clearly considers having a detrimental effect on the translated text. Of the twelve, five refer to the ‘destruction’ of elements such as underlying networks of signification, expressions and idioms, or vernacular networks. Two elements refer to ‘impoverishment’ while the last refers to the effacement of the superimposition of languages’. The other four could in fact be considered standard translation strategies such as clarification (explication) and expansion. These twelve tendencies form what he refers to as the ‘negative analytic’, which he distinguishes from other ‘norms’ such as literary, social, and cultural, which partly govern the translating act but are applicable to any writing practice. On the contrary, ‘the analytic [...] focuses on the universals of deformation inherent in translating as such’ (ibid.: 288). Berman perceives these deforming tendencies as referring back to a Platonic conception of translation:

From its very beginnings, western translation has been an embellishing restitution of meaning, based on a typically Platonic separation between spirit and letter, sense and word, content and form, the sensible and the non-sensible. When it is affirmed today that translation must produce a ‘clear’ and ‘elegant’ text (even if the original does not possess these qualities), the affirmation assumes the Platonic figure of translating, even unconsciously. All tendencies noted in the analytic lead to the same result: the production of a text that is more ‘clear’ more ‘elegant’, more ‘fluent’, more ‘pure’ than the original. *They are the destruction of the letter in favour of meaning.* (my emphasis, 1985: 288)

From the point of view of this interpretation, the function of translation is ‘the restitution of meaning’. Berman argues, however, that perhaps this is not the ultimate task of translation. His analytic, exposing thus the deforming tendencies assumes that there is another figure of translation: literal, as in ‘attached to the letter’ (288). For Berman, working on the ‘letter’ in translation has a double function. On the one hand it ‘restores the particular signifying process of works (which is more than their meaning) and on the other hand transforms the translating language.’ He sees this second function, this ‘formative role’ of translation which labours on the letter as a catalyst in ‘fashioning and refashioning the great western languages’. The purpose of

the analytic of translation is therefore to bring to light this ‘other essence of translating, which where it was practiced’ (ibid.: 289).

Lawrence Venuti, who translated Berman’s essay from the original in French, echoes these sentiments with his still controversial and influential *The Translator’s Invisibility, A History of Translation* (1995; 2008) in which he calls for a theory and practice of translation that ‘resists dominant values in the receiving culture so as to signify the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text’ (2008: 18). This experimental strategy of *resistancy* employs various aspects of the translating language – including registers, dialects, styles and discourses as well as lexicon and syntax, eschewing the prevailing fluent strategies in favour of a concept of ‘abusive fidelity’ (Lewis, cited in Venuti 2008: 18). Venuti’s well-known terms ‘domestication’ and ‘foreignization’ are not a simple binary opposition of discursive features such as ‘literal’ versus ‘free’ or ‘semantic’ versus ‘communicative’, but ‘indicate fundamentally *ethical* attitudes towards a foreign text and culture, ethical effects produced by the choice of a text for translation and by the strategy devised to translate it’ (19). He supports an approach to translation which questions cultural standards in both the foreign and receiving situations, and perceives translation as a simultaneous process of identity formation:

No culture should be considered immune to self-criticism, whether hegemonic or subordinate, colonizer or colonized. And without such practices as foreignizing translation to test its limits a culture can lapse into an exclusionary or narcissistic complacency and become fertile ground for ideological developments such as nationalisms and fundamentalisms which may certainly drive emancipator projects such as anticolonial movements, but which – once autonomy is achieved – may also harden into another form of oppression. (2008: 20)

Venuti’s theories were originally posited with regards to what he conceived as the British and American domesticating practices applied to translation over the centuries. For him the issue was also a political and ethical one, reflecting the cultural hegemony of Anglo-American societies. However, in the later edition of his work (2008) he concedes that ‘foreignizing can be productively applied to translating in any language

and culture' (19) which presupposes that other languages and cultures outside the English speaking countries have also adopted domesticating strategies in meaning transfer (Pym 1996: 170; Munday 2008: 121). Audiovisual translation, in particular dubbing, has been singled out as a prime example of such domesticating practices as Gambier notes in his introduction to a special edition of *The Translator*:

Translation may ultimately be involved in exclusively domesticating programmes and films, manipulating them to please dominant expectations and preferences, for the sake of target-language fluency or reader-friendliness, sometimes going as far as reinforcing language purism, censoring dialogues or changing part of the plot to conform to target-culture ideological drives and aesthetic norms. (2003: 179)

In the next section an overview of some theoretical perspectives regarding audiovisual translation is provided in order to contextualise the specific frame of reference adopted in this study.

### **3.5 AVT: adaptation or translation**

As the findings of this dissertation belong to the corpus of studies now generally referred to as either Audiovisual Translation (AVT) or Screen Translation, it is essential to adopt one of the two definitions and gloss the rationale for doing so – as they are not commonly accepted. The two definitions are contentious and refer to distinct approaches to the definition of the texts being studied; the risk of oversimplification is enormous, but suffice here to say that this debate is per se productive of significant research (see Chaume 2004; Delabastida 1989; Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007; Gottlieb 2006; Gambier 2003). For the purposes of this study, the term adopted, although the variety of strategies collected under its umbrella term still begs a more precise and shared definition. For the purpose of this study, this umbrella term covers a variety of meaning transfer activities in multisemiotic dimensions, which Gambier identifies thus: interlingual subtitling, dubbing, consecutive interpreting, simultaneous interpreting, voice-over, free commentary, simultaneous (or sight) translation, and multilingual production (2003: 172). To this list we could also

add surtitling and audio description. In the context of this research however, AVT will refer largely to interlingual dubbing and occasionally to subtitling.

The dichotomy between AVT's conception as translation proper or adaptation is highlighted by Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007) who note that the spatial and temporal constraints imposed by the medium have prompted the preference for the term 'adaptation'. This is certainly the case of film translation in the Italian context. However, the implicit semantic shift in the use of the term adaptation 'seems to equate the [translational] process to a *lesser activity* and becomes enough of an excuse to carry out a linguistic transfer that is clearly inadequate but nonetheless justifiable since it is only a case of adaptation' (my emphasis, 2007: 9). Díaz Cintas and Remael argue that AVT should be considered as translation proper, but in a more 'flexible, heterogeneous and less static perspective' of translation as a whole, 'that encompasses a broad set of empirical realities and acknowledges the ever-changing nature of the practice'.

Italian scholars have tried to pinpoint the nature of AVT, although general consensus verges towards its conception as adaptation rather than translation proper. For example, Pavesi (1994: 29) and Bollettieri Bosinelli (2002: 76) favour the term 'constrained translation', Di Fortunato and Paolinelli (2005: 52) state that the only form of translation possible for audiovisual texts is adaptation, while Dubbing Director, Filippo Ottoni, refers to the 'linguistic transposition' of *Gran Torino* in a personal correspondence (3 September 2010). These perspectives are counterbalanced by Taylor who affirms that 'the word is still the anchor for everything' (2000: 153). In discussing solutions and strategies adopted in subtitling in the Italian context, Taylor's comment might equally apply to dubbing and, to some extent, to many audiovisual experiences (aesthetic constraints in film dialogues and their rendering can be noted not only in the case of *Gran Torino* in which the use of racial slurs is an essential addendum to the linguistic characterisation of Walt; indeed they form the warp and weft of the narrative.). It is thus crucial to recall that Jakobson's 'translation proper' firmly remains in its rightful place as the core to meaning transfer in audiovisual products and should be perceived as such by the various operators in the audiovisual field. This work subscribes to the view that although the intersemiotic and multimodal

aspects of film translation cannot be ignored, they must not undermine the importance of the translator, rendering her/his work as merely instrumental to the overall audiovisual product.

The very fact that there is still considerable dissent on approaches to AVT could explain why it is one of the most prolific areas in translation research (Dìaz-Cintas 2010). The increase in visual communication in a global context over the last two decades has certainly brought the issue of translation to the fore. Michael Cronin comments in *Translation and Globalisation*:

Our narrative imagination, our ability to try to imagine what it is like to be someone else from another language, another culture, another community or another country – it is itself a mere figment of the imagination if we have no way of reading books, watching plays, looking at films produced by others. In other words, if citizenship is seen as no longer exclusively defined by nationality or nation-state (Delany 2000) then any active sense of global citizenship must involve translation as a core element. (2003: 6)

It has often been observed that in audiovisual translation the most difficult elements to rely into the target language are what are referred to as ‘culture-bound’. The concept of lingua-culture (see section 1.3) in relation to the translatability of culture-bound lexis comes into play here. While one may or may not agree with the notion, the expression lingua-culture functions as a convenient umbrella term for that point where language and culture meet in order to create meaning, especially in the field of audiovisual translation. Pederson (2010: 67) affirms ‘it is a well-known fact that translators not only transfer the meaning of words [...] they also function as cultural mediators, helping the target language readers gain necessary insight into the source culture’. In order to do this, the translator must have a profound knowledge and understanding of both source and target lingua-culture. This is not always the case in AVT (as in all areas of translation) and Bollettieri Bosinelli admits that in the dubbing process ‘Chi traduce il copione originale è spesso una figura diversa dalla dialogista, che, nella maggior parte dei casi, non conosce la lingua di partenza’ [The person who translates the original screenplay is often a different figure to that of the dialogist, who in the majority of cases does not know the source language]. Nowhere is the need for

cultural awareness greater than in the field of audiovisual translation, where the multimodal aspect increases the risk of inaccuracies and where visual evidence must somehow be accounted for. Furthermore, as Cronin's observations quoted above, the worldwide diffusion of AV products in recent years brings us regularly in contact with other cultures, and how we perceive those other cultures is largely determined by how they are represented through translation. The necessity for this cultural and linguistic sensibility is perhaps beginning to filter through to the audiovisual industry, as Díaz-Cintas *et al.* observe (2010: 12): 'As clear evidence of the fruitful marriage between Translation Studies and Cultural Studies, today's AVT authors tend to show an increased awareness of the cultural embeddedness of translation'. This very tentative statement, however, implies that there is still a long way to go, and proves that research in the field is vital to deeper understanding of the phenomena of AVT and its effects on both receiving and foreign cultures.

The translations to be analysed in this study encompass both subtitles and dubbing, however the focus of the investigation is to a greater extent placed on the latter. This is because Italian culture privileges this form of AVT. Within the realm of AVT, the practice of dubbing presupposes a theory of translation such as Toury's which inclines toward the target culture needs. According to Gambier, however, what happens in the process results in an irrevocable loss of the source text voice, as mentioned above, especially as dubbing 'conform to target-culture ideological drives and aesthetic norms' (2003: 179). In the same article, Gambier then poses a fundamental theoretical problem: 'But then, aren't certain types of screen translation (*dubbing*, voice-over, remakes) in fact instruments of the protectionist use of culture, violating ethical principles to some extent by erasing traces of the other – including his/ her speech?' (2003: 179).

Within a European context, Italy is known as one of the 'dubbing countries' alongside Austria, Spain, France, and Germany. The next section contextualises this with some of the socio-historical reasons for this preference and discusses Italian scholarship on dubbing practices.

### ***3.5.1 Dubbing in Italy***

Why a particular language community prefers one method of meaning transfer to another in audiovisual products is an issue which has not received a great deal of attention in translation studies. In the case of Italy one could hypothesise that the ethnocentric inclination of the receiving culture and its limited knowledge of foreign languages could impede the adoption of subtitling approaches found in other areas of Europe where English is practically a second language and perhaps more readily accepted in audiovisual products. On the other hand historical events have played an important role in forging what is one of the most commercially successful dubbing industries in the world which, in spite of a growing appreciation for films in original language with subtitles, shows no sign of abating (Duranti 1998: 482).

This predilection for dubbing is evident not only at the cinema but above all on Italian television<sup>11</sup>. The vast number of imported programmes, particularly from the Unites States, indicates that a large proportion of all programmes broadcasted are dubbed. Although there are no official figures, Antonini (2009) suggests that in 2003 ‘the weekly broadcasting of imported programmes on Italy’s main TV channels exceeds 350 hours [and] the privately owned Mediaset group alone broadcasts more than half of the total (ca. 218 hours weekly – 60%), thus qualifying as the most significant sponsor of the TV dubbing industry in Italy’. This last point is relevant when we consider the type of programmes – largely sit-coms, series, serials and soap operas – and the sheer volume of audiovisual material which would require dubbing. Inevitably these factors influence the quality of the end product in the target culture:

The massive use of American telefilms in the burgeoning television industry has recently resulted in lower standards, especially at the translation end of the process; adapters and actors barely manage to survive the loss of nuances [...]

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<sup>11</sup> The Eurobarometer survey (2001) on the language skills of European citizens and their attitudes towards language learning revealed that 60% of Europeans prefer to watch dubbed (as opposed to subtitled) foreign films and programmes. Italy, together with Austria, Spain, France and Germany, belongs to the block of European “dubbing” countries, where more than 70% of the respondents expressed support for dubbing as their preferred form of audiovisual translation, while the other block, formed by Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Greece confirmed their strong support for subtitled products. [...] In Italy, dubbing is the most commonly used form of language transfer and a public service provided by all private and public terrestrial and satellite broadcasters’ (Antonini 2009).

and the excessive simplifications and real howlers often noticeably mar the quality of translated dialogue. (Duranti 1998: 482)

Historically there are two causes for Italy's use of dubbing. The first dates back to before the Second World War when illiteracy was widespread on the peninsula and thus subtitling would have excluded a large proportion of the population. Furthermore the Fascist regime feared 'contamination' from exposure to foreign languages (Duranti 1998: 482). Between 1929 and 1931 the use of foreign words was prohibited under Mussolini. This had notable consequences for foreign films. However, as Fabre (2007: 54) points out, the United States' government evidently voiced their displeasure at the commercial implications that such a ban would have on the American film industry, and the ban was partially lifted:

In December 1929 the Ministry of the Interior [...] was obliged to rewrite a circular on foreign films. The previous order was to ban all foreign sound films in their original languages and (this order was, apparently, given by Mussolini in person) all films set in Russia. This resulted in the banning of several films from the United States. Following objections from the American commercial attaché, this initial measure was relaxed on 25 December 1929 to allow sound films containing songs (and not dialogue) in a foreign language, and also films set in Russia with the exception of films which could 'provocare nel pubblico sentimenti di reazione o di protesta contro l'ordine sociale e l'ordine giuridico' [provoke feelings of reaction or protest against the social and judicial order on the part of the public]. Once again, the initial xenophobia had been diluted.

The signing of the Alliance Peace Treaty (1943-45) confirmed dubbing as the predominant form of film translation in Italy as Hollywood lobbyists stipulated a clause to make dubbing of their films explicitly mandatory. This factor enabled the growth of a strong and highly specialized Italian dubbing industry (Duranti: 482).

The very fact that Italy is a dubbing country would explain why there is considerable academic interest in the field of AVT. One of the earliest studies, 'La traduzione dei riferimenti culturali nel doppiaggio cinematografico' (Bollettieri Bosinelli and Gallini 1994) deals with the specific problem of cultural references in dubbing. In describing the translation strategies adopted for the six categories of culture-bound elements identified (geographical references, units of measure,

institutions, food and drink, games and entertainment, nursery rhymes and proverbs), the authors noted ‘una certa preferenza per la sostituzione di un determinate riferimento culturale con qualcosa più familiare al pubblico della lingua di arrivo’ [a certain preference for the substitution of a particular cultural reference with something more familiar to the target language audience]. While Bollettieri Bosinelli and Gallini note that the translator is poised between a choice of educating the audience via source culture exoticisms or creating solutions which bring the text nearer to the target culture, they conclude that the latter is the most common in Italian dubbing techniques. Moreover, they add that these strategies contribute to the audience’s ability to identify with the foreign text.

This tendency to domestication in Italian film dubbing first identified in the early nineties is still apparent today. In spite of Dias-Cintas’ comment on growing intercultural awareness in AV translation (see section 3.5), domesticating strategies still prevail in Italian dubbing. For example, studies into dubbing the very culture-bound area of humour have found flattening and even censoring strategies are used in order to bring the text closer to the target culture (Chiaro 2000; Bucaria 2008), while Toury’s law of standardization is demonstrated in Zanotti’s study of racial representations in Italian dubbing:

The levelling strategy adopted by the Italian dubbers results in a substantial loss of meaning, since linguistic parody and racial stereotyping are used in the film with a specific intent, that is, to expose the subtleties of racism [...]. Quite interestingly, in its lack of stereotypical racial markers, the Italian version seems to perform an unconscious act of repression of the racist discourse of the original, thus neutralizing its subversive potential. (Zanotti 2011)<sup>12</sup>

Zanotti’s interest is in the translation of racial stereotypes in Italian film dubbing. She investigates the source culture’s representations of ethnic minorities, then analyses how those linguistic representations are interpreted, even ‘deformed’ in Berman’s terms, through the dubbing for the target culture. In a diachronic study she compares TT and ST film dialogue chosen ad hoc from four films, *She done him wrong* (1933),

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<sup>12</sup> I am grateful to Serenella Zanotti for allowing me to read the final proof of her article prior to its publication.

*Gone with The Wind* (1939), *Casablanca* (1942), and *Bamboozled* (2002). Her approach reveals the ways in which the target culture's racist attitudes are unmasked through the translation process. It is noted, for example, that in the Italian dubbing of *Casablanca*, Sam, calls Rick (Bogart's character) 'Padrone' which translates as 'master' rather than the ST 'boss' (9). While it is true the back translation implies that the Italian dubbing is more overtly stereotypical of the 'slave' imagery surrounding blacks, it could also be said that the ST appellation, 'boss' is not without connotations of slavery, if other Hollywood film dialogues can be believed.

Zanotti carried out an analysis of the dubbing of Spike Lee's *Bamboozled* (2000), a film in which linguistic parody and racial stereotypes are used to denounce the racist practices of the media. In her study, Zanotti (2012) observes:

Neutralization is the translation strategy adopted in the Italian dubbing, in spite of the explicit reference to openly racist representational practices of the past which would have required the adoption of equivalent discursive strategies in the target language. The levelling strategy adopted by the Italian dubbers results in a substantial loss of meaning, since linguistic parody and racial stereotyping are used in the film with a specific intent.

Thus we see how consciously or unconsciously, translators' decisions reflect the ideological discourses of their culture, and in doing so annul significant meanings in the source text. From this perspective Simeoni's notion of 'habitus' is also at work, with the translator obeying cultural and social norms of her/his environment. Zanotti claims this is particularly evident in the case of race ideology (ibid.). In conclusion she calls for greater attention to be paid to the issues of racial and ethnic representation in AVT, especially in an era when blatant forms of verbal discrimination are often considered to be politically incorrect.

Zanotti's work is one of the few examples of investigations into the sphere of racial representations in film translation in the Italian context. The next section focuses on the work of two Italian scholars, Paula Nobili and Maria Pavesi, who have carried out more lexically-based enquiries in this largely underexplored field.

### 3.6 Racial slurs and offensive language' in Italian film dubbing

Van Dijk affirms that 'Experiences and analysis [...] have repeatedly shown that the dominant media in various degrees have always perpetuated stereotypes and prejudice of minority groups' (1991: 11). Written some twenty years ago, it would appear that this statement is as relevant today as it was then. In recent years the study of such phenomena has become ever more urgent as post-modern societies evolve towards interculturality, and the question of cross-cultural communication intertwines with issues of racism and prejudice.

In her introduction to the volume *Insulti e Pregiudizi: discriminazione etnica e turpiloquio in film, canzone e giornali*, Paola Nobili (2007: 11) notes with regards audiovisual products in the Italian context:

non solo le pressioni linguistiche trasmesse dai mezzi audiovisivi provocano nefaste contaminazioni che investono sia la forma che il contenuto. [...] Attraverso la ripetitività stereotipata di designazioni e di appellativi etnici (*marocchino, negro, immigrato, ecc*) formulati in contesti che li permeano di connotazioni negative, si insediano, si consolidano e si perpetuano quei sentimenti negativi verso l'*altro* che sintetizzano l'essenza del pregiudizio.

[Not only do the linguistic pressures transmitted by audiovisual media provoke inauspicious contaminations which influence both form and content. Through repeated stereotypes of ethnic designations and epithets (Moroccan, nigger, immigrant, etc.) formulated in contexts which are permeated with negative connotations, they settle, they are consolidated and they are perpetuated (in listeners, viewers, and readers) even those attitudes of refusal and those negative sentiments towards the Other, which synthesise the essence of prejudice.]

The theme of racial slurs and swearing in the media is explored in Nobili's edited volume of essays from various theoretical and methodological perspectives, and across different linguistic realities (Italian, English, French). For example, using electronic corpora, Azzaro's quantitative diachronic analyses demonstrate the frequency of various racial and other insults in British and American films and TV programmes (2007). Polselli, on the other hand takes a more semiotic slant in examining 'Offese e altre forme di discriminazione all'italiana' [Insults and other forms of discrimination

Italian style]. She examines an ad hoc sample of Italian films in order to develop her reflections on the verbal representation of racial discrimination in the context of Italian cinema.

Of major interest here, however, is Nobili's essay 'Indignazione e Satira nel film *Lenny*: dalla parolaccia all'insulto etnico *tradotto*' (2007) [Indignation and Satire in the film *Lenny*: from the swear word to ethnic insult *translated*], a largely descriptive and sociolinguistic analysis which looks at some of the issues involved in translating racial slurs. The first part is dedicated to a general introduction of swearwords, blasphemous expressions and insults and their communicative functions. The second part then analyses the use of swear words and ethnic insults in the film *Lenny* (1974) which narrates the story of the eponymous Jewish American comedian Lenny Bruce. Social critic and satirist, Bruce was convicted by the New York State authorities for (verbal) obscenity in 1964 then granted a posthumous pardon, the first time in New York State history.

Nobili investigates the etymological and sociolinguistic origins of racial slurs used in the film dialogue and subsequently focuses on the renderings of these lexical items in Italian, Spanish and French via tabled comparisons of the ST with TT solutions, thereby highlighting the 'deformed' TT renderings and sometimes bizarre translational choices which have no bearing on the original text. Two examples of slurs which have been rendered unfaithfully also happen to feature in *Gran Torino* (see section 5.1). We discover that in *Lenny*, 'wop', an insult to designate Italians is translated into Italian as 'greco traditore' [Greek traitor], while Polack is rendered with the inexplicably inaccurate 'muso giallo'.

Another thread in Nobili's enquiry is her critical approach towards Bruce's discourse; the social utility of Bruce's scurrilous language and verbal abuse is underlined, blending historical fact with apology and observation through the film medium. In this framework the problem of meaning transfer from ST to TT of culturally specific lexicon is broached. Nobili (2007: 38) underlines:

Se la questione dell'adeguamento linguistico e semantico pone dei seri problemi in un film come questo, film di parole e non di azione, con tematiche

politiche e sociali delicatissime, ancor maggiore sarà la difficoltà nella trasposizione di elementi culturali.

[If the issue of the linguistic and semantic adequacy poses serious problems in films such as this one, a film of words, not actions, with delicate political and social themes, even greater will be the difficulty in the meaning transfer of the cultural elements.]

Nobili concludes that the purpose of her study is to: ‘dimostrare come talvolta persino la parolaccia può essere utilizzata a fini socialmente utili, [e] smascherare, tramite un processo di analisi linguistica, le false immagini che sciatte e incontrollate traduzioni presentano ad un pubblico ignaro’ [to demonstrate how sometimes even swearwords can be used to socially useful ends, [and] how the false images which slipshod, unchecked translations present to an unsuspecting audience can be revealed via a process of linguistic analysis]. It could be said that the first of these aims is merely an echo of Lenny Bruce himself. In the monologue analysed by Nobili, Dustin Hoffman, who plays Bruce, repeatedly and profusely verbally abuses all the ethnic groups present at one of his live performances. Apart from the Italians and Polish mentioned above, he also picks on the Jews and the Blacks in the audience haranguing them with a litany of racist insults. He then explains that his motive is to desemanticize the offending terms because according to Bruce, it is the ‘suppression of the word that gives it the power, the violence, the viciousness’ (cited in Nobili 2007: 34). In rendering the offensive language ‘innocuous’ by constant repetition, Bruce sustains ‘Then you’d never be able to make a black kid cry because somebody called him a nigger in school’ (ibid: 34). A highly contentious hypothesis and one which is difficult to hold up in practice, Nobili herself comments on the Utopian – possibly dystopian - if not controversial nature of his thesis.

The second of her objectives, to reveal the inaccurate and at times unfathomable translational choices, is certainly evinced. However, having noted various anomalous translation solutions, Nobili does not go much beyond purely descriptive linguistic observation, ignoring, for example the diachronic aspect of translation practice and the fact that the film was probably subtitled or dubbed in the seventies. This fact might have influenced the (undeniably slipshod) approach to meaning transfer. Her focus lies in the lexical field itself rather than translation theory

and the processes involved in producing the TT. Neither does she engage with issues regarding translator's role in perpetrating these linguistic 'crimes', thus the underlying reasons for the translational distortions remain largely undiscussed.

Pavesi on the other hand scrutinises relationships between spoken language and the translation of spoken language in dubbed film dialogues in the language pair English/ Italian (Pavesi 1994; 1996; 2004; 2005; Pavesi & Malinverno 2000). The creation of natural-sounding fictional dialogues has been identified as one of the greatest challenges in screenwriting and dubbing (Chaume 2004, 2009). In a contribution entitled 'Prefabricated Orality', Chaume and Baños-Piñero outline the characteristics of this *mélange* of fiction and reality in speech patterns used for screen dialogues:

The challenge does not lie so much in trying to imitate spontaneous conversations, but in selecting specific features of this mode of discourse that are widely accepted and recognised as such by the audience. The implementation of those features should not hinder the understanding of the dialogue, but must succeed in recreating a spontaneous-sounding conversation. [...] We are therefore dealing with texts which are characterised by a strange kind of oral discourse, an orality which may seem spontaneous and natural, but which is actually planned or, as Chaume (2004a: 168) terms it, 'prefabricated' (Baños-Piñero and Chaume 2009).

Pavesi's investigations comprise comparative studies between spontaneous, natural dialogue and the scripted dialogue in films, which are 'written to be spoken as if not written' (Gregory and Carroll 1978: 42). She identifies what she refers to as translational 'routines' in dubbing (2005: 48) which are automatic, fixed 'equivalents'. Pavesi notes that these often originate from calques, or literal translations from the ST; in Toury's terms, interference. This observation is illustrated with a list of English expressions which have a fixed formula in Italian dubbing that clearly do not correspond to natural Italian speech. For example 'Can I help you?' becomes the word for word 'Posso aiutarla?' rather than the more typically Italian 'posso servirla?' [Can I serve/help you?] or 'desidera?' [What would you like?], while the English idiomatic expression 'Cut it out' meaning, 'stop it, is translated literally as 'Dacci un taglio'

[give it a cut] rather than 'smettila' [stop it], 'piantala' [plant it] or 'finiscila' [finish it]. The vocative 'man' in Anglo American has no corresponding expression in neostandard Italian (although it has several corresponding terms in regional Italian dialects) and becomes 'amico' [friend] in dubbese. Pavesi describes this process whereby conversational routines employed in the ST dialogue in order to create 'orality' are then transferred into the dubbed TT creating a hybrid language, known as dubbese<sup>13</sup>. 'L'espressione, prima *routine* conversazionale in inglese americano, diventa routine traduttiva e frequente stilema di doppiaggese italiano, cui non corrisponde alcun uso reale nell'italiano degli italiani' [Initially a conversational routine in American English, the expression then becomes a translational routine and frequent styleme of Italian dubbese, which does not correspond to any real use of the Italian as used by Italians].

In her book *La Traduzione Filmica: aspetti del parlato doppiato dall'inglese all'italiano* (2005), Pavesi also examines the question of obscene language in film translation. She notes the tendency to censure, neutralize or eliminate bad language found in the original text where it correlates to an informal register or use of slang, because repetitive swearing in the TT would seem excessive (46). She also highlights the use of 'set' equivalences and laments the lack of imagination on the part of the majority of Italian dubbing directors/translators who use a limited range of insults in film dubbing compared to the much richer variety found in the source text, even though the Italian language and in particular the regional dialects contain a repertoire of insults and imprecations, which are rarely exploited. These fixed equivalents in translating the obscene, vulgar, or blasphemous are characteristic of Italian dubbing. Pavesi (2005: 48) surmises instead that the translators could have free reign to their imagination in translating insults, vulgar epithets, or strong language given that bad language is only a 'linguistic gesture':

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<sup>13</sup> In her enquiry on the reception of Italian dubbing, in TV programmes(2009), Antonini explains dubbese thus: 'dubbese is the hybrid language variety that most Italian screen translators resort to when they translate and adapt a film or any other fictional and non-fictional programme for the big and the small screen (Cipolloni, 1996; Rossi, 1999). The term "dubbese" (in Italian doppiaggese) was coined by Italian screen translators to negatively connote the linguistic hybrid that over the years has emerged as the "standard" variety of Italian spoken by characters in dubbed products (films, series, etc)'.

Il turpiloquio [...] agisce a commento di quanto viene espresso o narrato, è sintomo di sentimenti, atteggiamenti e stati d'animo, ma non è un mezzo di avanzamento della trama e non richiede quindi una traduzione il più possibile aderente all'originale (cfr. Luyken *et al* 1995).

[Bad language [...] acts as a comment on what is being expressed or narrated, it is a symptom of the feelings, attitudes and state of mind, but it is not a means of developing the plot and therefore does not require a translation which is as faithful as possible to the original.]

While it is true that swearwords, oaths, and profanities often fulfil a merely expletive function in Anglo-American discourse, it is also true that the very nature of those expletives is indicative of the culture. That some expressions are taboo in one culture while accepted, or at least tolerated in another conveys important sociolinguistic information (see section 1.6). To consider this lexical area as merely linguistic wallpaper which can be largely manipulated or ignored in the dubbing process to suit the target requirements seems reductive and superficial to say the least.

Particularly relevant to the present study is a contribution entitled 'Usi del turpiloquio nella traduzione filmica' [The use of swear words in film translation] (by Pavesi and Malinverno 2000). Before commenting on the essay, proceedings from a conference entitled *Tradurre il Cinema* (1996) it should be noted again, as mentioned earlier, that fifteen years is a long time in AVT. Moreover, the lexical field of 'bad', offensive, taboo language is also temporally contingent (see section 1.5); therefore some sociolinguistic changes may have taken place concerning the usage of certain taboo terms. That said, the observations regarding linguistic taboos, in particular those regarding the English language and culture, are as questionable now as they would have been in 1996.

In the first place, it is affirmed that curses such as 'goddam', 'hell', 'bloody hell' are more taboo in English-speaking cultures than they are in Italian (*ibid.*: 76). According to Pavesi, proof that the religious sphere falls into the area of linguistic taboos in Anglo-American cultures is suggested by the fact that 'bestemmie sono molto rare in inglese' [blasphemy is very rare in English]. In her opinion, such language is more easily accepted in the Italian culture, therefore the literal translation of 'goddam', which would be 'maledetto' loses impact in the TL. This contorted logic

leads the authors to infer that the translation of 'It's a goddamn, excuse the vulgarity, jungle' is justifiably rendered with 'È un cavolo, scusa la volgarità, di giungla' [It is a cabbage of a jungle]. It is ironic, therefore, that 'cavolo', which literally means cabbage, is a euphemism in Italian for 'cazzo' [cock]. Pavesi reasons that as 'maledetto' in Italian lacks pragmatic force, it was necessary to substitute the curse with a more vulgar sexual term, but this is rendered with a euphemism. What is more, these observations pivot on a single line of dialogue which is disembedded from any context or pragmatic situation. Therefore we do not know who uttered the original words, how, or in what circumstances. It is also contestable that blaspheming can be considered highly taboo these days in Anglo-Saxon cultures. On the contrary, it is the sexual sphere which poses more of a linguistic taboo, with racial slurs being the absolute (see section 1.5) in English speaking countries. Religious swearing is far more unacceptable in the Italian cultural context, *porco Dio* [God is a pig] being the ultimate imprecation. Finally, it is evident that the authors themselves demonstrate a linguistic prudishness regarding their own language that can only be considered contrary to academic principles. Further on in their investigation they (2000: 78) note with reference to the same euphemism 'cavolo', 'inizialmente unico traduttore di *fuck*, ora viene quasi sempre sostituito dal suo corrispondente meno educato' [it was initially the only way to translate *fuck*, now it is almost always substituted with its less polite corresponding term].

Of particular relevance to the present study, however, are the observations Pavesi makes regarding the Anglo-American expressions 'motherfucker' and 'son of a bitch'. The first, a frequent appellative in contemporary films which has various pragmatic functions, has absolutely no correspondence in Italian (see section 6.2):

Non è mai possibile riscontrare una traduzione letterale del termine inglese, dal momento che una simile resa esprimerebbe un concetto tabù, il rapporto incestuoso, fortemente interdetto nella lingua italiana. (2000: 79)

[It would be impossible to find a literal translation of the English term, given that such a rendering would express a taboo concept, an incestuous relationship, which is severely prohibited in the Italian language.]

Before looking at the translation dilemma this poses, here it must be pointed out that incest is equally taboo in Anglo-American cultures as it is in Italian. The expression of such a sexual taboo goes to demonstrate how linguistic taboos initially reflect societal values. The standard solution to this sociolinguistic obstacle, observes Pavesi, is to translate ‘motherfucker’ with ‘son of a bitch’. This is an example of where translation clichés become cemented in practice resulting in a flattened TT. To compound this particular problem, a film dialogue which contains the term ‘motherfucker’ will invariably also contain the insult, ‘son of a bitch’, consequently the dubbed version will abound with *figli di puttana* and lack linguistic variety.

Pavesi and Malinverno carry out a sample survey in which they test the acceptability of certain translation choices concerning bad language in films. They conclude that this area of research is one which goes beyond mere semantic correspondence in translation choices but which also touches on larger pragmatic and cultural considerations such as the emotional value invested in language, and phenomena such as the prohibition, censorship and what constitutes the unutterable (88).

In the wake of Pavesi, Nobili, and Zanotti, the following three chapters analyse the racial insults and linguistic taboos contained in stretches of dialogue extracted from the film *Gran Torino* (2008). With marked attention to discourse, translation effects and the wider sociological implications of dubbing strategies, source text and target text solutions are contrasted and compared within the methodological and theoretical framework expounded in this and the previous chapters.



## Chapter 4

### Fictional slurs and real insults

Chapter 3 located the research context of the present study and connected its approach with particular reference to the works of three Italian scholars, Nobili, Pavesi, and Zanotti, who have conducted enquiries into the meaning transfer of racial and racist representations and linguistic taboos in AVT across English/Italian cultures. Chapter 4 presents three of the five comparative analyses which form part of this case study on translating racial slurs and taboo language from the film *Gran Torino* (2008). Section 4.1 outlines the analytical procedure followed. An overview of the film is given in section 4.2 while section 4.3 gives tabulated data on the etymologies of certain racial slurs which are useful to the analyses. An introductory stretch of dialogue is analysed in section 4.4, while sections 4.5 and 4.6 examine and compare two samples from parallel scenes containing intratextual references. Finally, section 4.7 makes some concluding remarks.

#### 4.1 Analytical process

Having established the methodological framework, what follows outlines the procedures adopted to scrutinize the film:

1. Selected the primary source, *Gran Torino* (2008) in DVD version (2009).
2. Watched the film several times in SL and TL in various combinations of subtitles and dubbing (i.e. Italian subtitles with English dialogue, Italian subtitles with Italian dubbing, English subtitles with Italian dubbing) not only to cross-check translations across languages but also to compare TL dubbing and TL subtitling solutions to the lexical area under scrutiny.
3. Researched and listed the racial slurs contained in the SL dialogue.

4. Checked the meanings, definitions and etymologies of the racial slurs in the SL.
5. Watched the TL version again to identify the TL translation of each racial slur as it occurred in the ST. In this way it was possible to ascertain if the variety and quantity of racial slurs in the original dialogue had been respected in the TT.
6. In order to focus on the translation of the lexical items under scrutiny, ad hoc samples were extracted from the dialogue and organised in comparative tables of ST and TT with back translations to highlight linguistic and semantic divergences from the ST.
7. At the same time, the stretches of dialogue most suitable for the purpose of analysis were identified, i.e. those containing a concentrated number of ethnophaulisms and which represented situations where certain pragmatic functions are illustrated via the use of insults and slurs.
8. The analyses were carried out on the selected texts, using the methodology described in Chapter 2.
9. The linguistic macrostructure of the original film dialogue was considered and compared to the TT. More specifically, in relation to the recurrent TT slur *muso giallo*, the possible effects of its repetition were speculated upon, thus forming the basis of a focussed investigation on this racial expression that appears to have been generated from dubbing.
10. Devised and carried out sample survey on the reception and perception of racial slurs.
11. Conclusions were then drawn from the analyses in the light of relevant translation theory on the ideology of translation, and the translation of ideology.

## **4.2 Why the film *Gran Torino***

Clint Eastwood left his personal hallmark on *Gran Torino* (2008), a film that he directed and produced, for which his son wrote the musical score, and in which he

interprets the leading role. It is a film whose verbal and extra-verbal script counts for most of the mise-en-scene; it is no coincidence that Nick Schenk won the National Board of Review Award for Best Original Screenplay with *Gran Torino* in 2008. The film narrates the story of Walt Kowalski, a Korean War veteran, retired Ford worker and ‘full-blown, unrepentant racist’ (Schenk 2008: 6). The central theme is Walt’s relationship with his young Hmong neighbour, Thao. Initially hostile towards Thao and his family, as the story develops Walt emerges as an unlikely father figure. In the opening scenes Walt’s prejudices are undisguised and he is openly hostile towards the young man and his family but as the story unfolds Walt realises that he has more in common with his Asian neighbours than with his own family. The plot builds to climax when Thao’s sister is raped by a gang of youths and the allegoric dénouement sees Walt renouncing his own life to defend the very people he had initially so despised.

There are several reasons why *Gran Torino* was chosen for this study. The first and foremost reason is the plethora of racial terms in the ST that provides ample and variegated material for analysis. There are over fifty direct derogatory utterances and numerous other allusions to race and ethnic origin. Fourteen different epithets are used for people of Asian origin, while insults to other social groups such as African Americans, the Irish, Italians, Poles, Jews, and Hispanics pervade the film script.

The second reason for choosing *Gran Torino* is Clint Eastwood himself. A respected actor, an accomplished film director, and a guaranteed box office hit, his presence both in front of and behind the camera guarantees access to funding for subtitling and dubbing at the top level, usually awarded only to high-quality productions. For this reason also it is an example in best practice in providing dialogue lists as we will see in Chapter 5. Manohla Dargis’s article entitled ‘Hope for a Racist, and Maybe a Country’ in *The New York Times* suggests that Eastwood ‘has slipped another film into theaters and shown everyone “how it’s done” with a film which shows “an urgent engagement with the tougher, messier, bigger questions of American life”’.

The third reason is that the version dubbed in Italian was also well received and won awards at the *Gran Gala del Doppiaggio Romics* 2009 for both best dubbing

actor (Michele Kalamera who dubbed Eastwood) and best dubbing director (Filippo Ottoni). Lastly, the film deals with controversial issues such as ethnic prejudice, political correctness, old-age, multiculturalism, shifting values, and the changing face of society, thus provoking debate among critics and in the media alike. Daniels (2009) summarises two opposing points of view regarding the film:

Gran Torino can be viewed as a story of one man's personal triumph over racism and his redemption through his friendship with the Hmong Lora family; and, that certainly seems to be the intention of the film's director, the author of the screenplay, and the interpretation of many critics. Yet, a different reading of the film suggests that the central narrative relies on the intertwining of racialized stereotypes juxtaposed with heroic white masculinity.

Daniels' reading of the core narrative of the film highlights the issue at stake; the question of meaning transfer here is not purely a linguistic one but also linked to socio-cultural norms. When *Gran Torino* was released in the US it was hailed as a masterpiece yet simultaneously criticised for its politically incorrect language<sup>14</sup>. The film's debut in Italy prompted no such controversy, so was there something amiss in the 'linguistic transposition'? Is there a cultural dimension to political correctness and race talk which also needs to be considered in translation?

The analysis of the renderings in the examples below shows that the translators' dilemma for *Gran Torino* rests in its intertwining foul language with racism in the verbal exchanges of a character in evolution. It is in fact the sheer quantity and diversity of racial insults in the ST dialogue that represents the crux of matter: the linguistic gamut of racial slurs<sup>15</sup> that exists in Anglo-American lingua-cultures does not have a corresponding variety of similar expressions in neostandard Italian, for the

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<sup>14</sup> See Burk's article 'Politically Incorrect: Gran Torino and Racial Façades', *Writing 20* (Spring 2010): Staging History. Eastwood himself spoke out against critics. In an article entitled 'Eastwood slams the "politically correct culture"' published in the *Daily Express*, he is quoted as saying 'People have lost their sense of humour. In former times we constantly made jokes about different races. You can only tell them today with one hand over your mouth or you will be insulted as a racist. [...] I find that ridiculous. In those earlier days every friendly clique had a "Sam the Jew" or "Jose the Mexican" - but we didn't think anything of it or have a racist thought. It was just normal that we made jokes based on our nationality or ethnicity. That was never a problem. I don't want to be politically correct. We're all spending too much time and energy trying to be politically correct about everything'.

<sup>15</sup> Racialslurdatabase.com is a peer monitored website which lists racial slurs and attempts to give etymologies. Currently there are over 500 entries. In combination with the Oxford English Dictionary (*OED*) used to verify the terminological reliability of the RSDB terms, the RSDB database has been used to assess the status of insults and racial slurs in sociolinguistic terms throughout this essay.

various reasons mentioned in section 1.4. These lingua-cultural gaps implicate translational dilemmas on various levels, as will be seen from the following analyses.

English	Italian translation	Back translation
swamp rats	topi di fogna	sewer rats
zipperhead	muso giallo	yellow muzzle/snout/face
barbarians	babari	barbarians
chinks	musi gialli	yellow muzzles. Bilingual dictionaries offer translations of chink as 'cinese' [Chinese]
chinito	culo giallo	yellow arse
slope	muso giallo (di merda)	(shitty) as above
(fucking) rice nigger	(frocio) mangiariso (del cazzo)	(queer) rice eater (fucking/prick)
fish head	occhi da pesce	fish eyes
gook	muso giallo	(as above)
egg roll	riso lesso	steamed rice
slope	grugno giallo	yellow snout
dragon lady	donna drago	Dragon woman
zip	mongolo	Mongol (disparaging, stupid, idiot, Down)
nip	(as above)	(as above)

**Table 1. SL: Racial insults for the Hmong people in *Gran Torino***

#### ***4.2.1 Introduction to the analyses: organisation of data***

In the following sections five sequences are presented and analysed, comparing ST and TT with specific reference to racial slurs and linguistic taboos. The sequences are arranged over Chapters 4, 5, and 6 that are divided thematically rather than respecting the chronological sequence of the film. In the first, Walt and Thao meet face to face for the first time, Walt utters the first direct racial slur of the film, 'zipperhead' and the analysis that follows traces the origins of the TT rendering 'muso giallo' and its uses in *Gran Torino*. In the second and third sequences racial slurs are used as in-group markers of solidarity; Walt goes to the barber's for a haircut and indulges in some 'manly' banter, while in the third, Thao learns the art of 'how men talk', clearly a parody of the previous scene. The TT renderings and the translation strategies employed are discussed. On the contrary the fourth and fifth sequences illustrate the use of slurs in situations of open conflict: Walt intervenes when a gang of black youths harass Thao's sister in the fourth sequence; Thao is verbally assaulted by Hispanic gangbangers in the fifth sequence analysed. These last two in particular demonstrate

the considerable impact of the target-culture oriented approach on the translated product.

### **4.3 First sequence: Thao at Walt's door (00:6:35,000-00:06:48,000)**

Just minutes into the film, Walt's wife's funeral has just taken place and friends and family are gathered at the protagonist's home. Thao unwittingly calls at the house to ask Walt a favour. Brief and to the point (a total duration of 18"), this first sample illustrates some interesting points regarding Politeness Theory and translation while introducing the theme of cross cultural meaning transfer of racial slurs.

Walt and Thao come face to face for the first time. Thao is oblivious to the fact that he lives next door to an incorrigible racist but the audience is already aware of Walt's antipathy towards his immigrant neighbours. In the preceding scene, Walt is heard muttering, 'How many swamp rats can you cram in one room?' (see Table 1) while observing a stream of Hmong people entering the house next door. This is the first of a long litany of racial insults that punctuate the text.

Analysing the scene from a Politeness Theory perspective, Thao is about to commit a Face-Threatening Act (FTA, see section 2.7) by making a request. According to Brown and Levinson (1987) this type of communicative act automatically puts the speaker in a position of weakness, thus risking a loss of face. In this particular case Thao's inoffensive petition for a set of jump leads is aggravated by the irascible character of his interlocutor and the circumstances of the funeral. Walt's bigotry comes to the fore and he quickly establishes an asymmetrical power balance thus cementing the footing of their relationship. Physical, psychological and sociological factors all come into play in the construction of their unequal rapport; Thao's youth, ingenuity and natural shyness, his low stature, his hesitant speech and his ethnic origin render his position one of inferiority and vulnerability. These characteristics are sharply contrasted with Walt's maturity, experience and self-assurance, his height, his speed and directness of speech and finally his white 'superiority' (see Daniels 1997: 11-71). The scene is shot in such a way as to highlight this inequality. The camera angles are indicative, alternating from one character's

perspective to the other. Bearing down on Thao from Walt's perspective, the audience watches the bewildered expression on Thao's face as questions are fired at him. Then from Thao's perspective the camera peers up at the towering, sneering Walt. The final act of slamming the door in the young man's face is an obvious symbolic gesture of closure and rejection and in so doing Walt also shuts out the audience. In terms of paralinguistics, Walt's facial expressions indicate aggressiveness and disdain while the voice prosody reflects his brusque, rude behaviour. The exchange is only five lines long in terms of script, but it effectively sets the scene for the development of the relationship and the film's narrative.

Walt's first utterance as he opens the door immediately breaks away from accepted norms of politeness. By firing direct, blunt questions before his interlocutor has a chance to open his mouth, Walt imposes a non-reciprocal relationship. He barks the questions 'Who are you? What do you want?' and Thao tries to placate by adopting an indirect strategy, responding that he lives next door. The indirectness of his reply infuriates Walt further, who snaps back with the vulgar imperative 'C'mon, get the shit out of your mouth and tell me what you want'. Thao then implements a bald, on-record approach and asks, 'Do you have any jumper cables?'. This momentary directness is swiftly followed by a mumbled justification for the request, which neither interests or invokes sympathy in his interlocutor. Walt interrupts again and curtly replies that he has no jump leads, and reproaches Thao for not showing respect for the family in mourning. This brief tirade ends with the Walt slamming the door and uttering the first up front racial slur, 'zipperhead'.

According to the *OED*, the term 'zipperhead' is American slang. It is given two acceptations; the first is 'a stupid person, a fool' while the second, coined by American soldiers during the Korean war, is to denote the indigenous people. It is classified by *OED* as 'offensive'. The etymology of 'zipperhead' is not clear, however. It is obviously a compound noun made up of zipper + head yet it is unlikely that many English speakers from either side of the Atlantic know the origins of this racial slur. Various theories on this have been mooted and collated on *RSDB*, the implications of which are quite horrific:

1. If Asians were shot in the head with high-powered weapons, their heads would split as if you unzipped them.
2. Vietnam War slang for 'Zero Intelligence Potential' (i.e. just kill them, no reason to interrogate them).
3. Many times the Asians would be run over by military Jeeps, which left tire tracks on them that resembled zippers.
4. Asians tend to part their hair down the middle, leaving a zipper-like strip.
5. I'm not sure if the military used body bags to transfer dead enemy soldiers, but there's a possible reference to the zipper on said bag. (RSDB)

While the source may be considered untenable, these 'etymologies' nevertheless indicate an undeniable indifference to the violent acts of war to which the Korean population was subjected. Walt's use of the slur would certainly be in keeping with his character, as the audience is told within the first minute of the film that he served in Korea. We also learn during a conversation with the priest that according to Walt 'the things that haunt a man most are the things he isn't ordered to do' implying that the worst atrocities committed during war are done by soldiers of their own free will (00:29:00,000).

Thus far, then, we have identified the textural encoding of the power relationship in the source text via lexical choice (insults and dysphemism, Allan and Burridge 2006), sentence form (imperative, interrogative, Halliday 1978) unfinished utterance, intonation, and finally the multimodal aspect of camera perspective (Thibault and Baldry 2006). These are some of the features that illustrate the interpersonal dynamics of the conflictual speech act.

#### ***4.3.2 Comparative analysis***

Now we will turn to the target text rendering, with particular attention to the racial and dysphemistic content and how these meanings have been relayed. It has already been noted that these lexical areas cause considerable difficulty in cross-cultural communication (see section 1.3), implicating issues of cultural transfer, equivalence and fidelity and above all sociolinguistic function. In her introduction to *Translation, History and Culture* (1990: 8), Susan Bassnett affirms that 'faithfulness' to the source text is relative to the concept of function:

Faithfulness, then, does not enter into translation in the guise of ‘equivalence’ between words or texts, but if at all, in the guise of an attempt to make the target text function in the target culture the way the source text functioned in the source culture [...] to achieve ‘functional equivalence’ a translator may have to subsequently adapt the source text.

Nida also worked on this premise when speaking of ‘dynamic equivalence’ (1964: 159) the aim of which is to find the ‘equivalent effect’ while maintaining a ‘naturalness of expression’. In order to achieve this, adaptations of cultural references are often required thus minimalising the ‘foreignness’ of the ST. Toury’s target orientated theories echo similar aims, whereby the translated text must be ‘acceptable’ in the target culture (see section 3.2.1). Considered from these perspectives, the dubbing in this stretch would be acceptable to the target audiences expectations.

**Example 1. Face to face with the enemy**

Who are you? What do you want?  
Chi sei? Che vuoi?  
[Who are you? What do you want?]

Beginning with the first line, the pithy interrogatives are literal translations. It can be noted that the personal pronoun *tu* has been dropped from the TT in accordance with unmarked Italian usage, and the choice of ‘Che vuoi’ rather than ‘Che cosa vuoi’ renders the TT interrogatives as effective as the ST having the same clipped urgency.

**Example 2. Thao greets Walt**

2. Hi. I live next door...  
Salve. Abito....  
[Hi. I live...]

Thao’s greeting to Walt is ‘Hi’ - such a little word can cause considerable consternation in terms of translation. It has already been observed that interpersonal

pragmatics and politeness are linguistic areas which often suffer in screen translation (Mason 1989; Hatim and Mason 1997; Pavesi 2005). In American culture such an apparently informal term as 'hi' is perfectly acceptable to use even in formal situations, whereas in the target culture (it might be noted here, in British culture, too) the choice of greeting is very much dependent on the type of relationship. The ST multipurpose monosyllable greeting has been rendered in the TT with 'salve'. Pavesi (2005: 51) notes that 'salve', is a translational 'routine' that is the production of automatic correspondences with no heed to sociolinguistic factors. Several translational routines and formulae have generated dubbese, a variety of Italian that could be defined as a hybrid language created by the translation effects of certain words and expressions which are difficult to translate as they fulfil very specific sociolinguistic functions within the SL and as such have no exact correspondence in the TL (see section 3.5.1-3.6).

In dubbese 'hi' always equates the Italian greeting, 'salve', regardless of pragmatic or sociolinguistic considerations. It must be acknowledged in meaning transfer that for socio-cultural reasons American English intrinsically carries a level of informality which the Italian lingua-culture does not possess; the mere fact that polite forms such as the personal pronoun 'Lei' still exist in neostandard Italian proves the point.

Pavesi (ibid.) notes that these translation *routines* do not correspond with spontaneous speech, but by the same token concedes that the constant repetition of these dubbing routines has in fact influenced Italian speakers:

Il doppiaggio è d'altro canto probabilmente all'origine della diffusione di *salve* tra i parlanti italiani, in particolare i giovani. La formula di saluto neutralizza le differenze tra forma di rispetto e forma di familiarità nel rapporto tra interlocutori, riempiendo, in posizione iniziale, un vuoto socio pragmatico in italiano e permettendo così di evitare la scelta fra *ciao* e *buon giorno/buona sera*. 'Salve' è nel doppiaggio italiano una *routine* traduttiva dell'inglese *hello/hi*, formule di saluto utilizzabili anche quando non c'è familiarità tra interlocutori.

[The diffusion of the greeting *salve* among Italian speakers, particularly among young people, is probably due to dubbing. This formula neutralises the difference between forms of respect and forms of familiarity in the relationship

between interlocutors filling a socio-pragmatic gap in the Italian language, thereby avoiding the choice between *ciao* and *buon giorno/buona sera*. *Salve* is a translational ‘routine’ in Italian dubbing for the English *hello/hi*, greetings which can be used even when there is no familiarity between interlocutors.]

Thus we have a dichotomy: until fairly recently it would have been considered disrespectful for a youth like Thao to use ‘salve’ when addressing an unknown person of a certain age, yet today this greeting appears to be increasingly employed as an alternative to more traditionally formal expressions, possibly due to dubbing practices. Therefore should the use of ‘salve’ in film dubbing now be read as a reflection of spontaneous speech or a relic of dubbese?

Returning to the analysis, Thao’s explanation that he lives next door is swiftly halted by Walt’s vulgar interjection:

**Example 3. No beating about the bush**

C’mon, get the shit out of your mouth and tell me what you want.

Coraggio, sputa il rospo. Dimmi che cosa vuoi.  
[Courage, spit the toad. Tell me what you want.]

The translator has chosen an idiomatic expression from the target culture which renders the idea, but is not so grossly offensive as the TT because the scatological reference has not been maintained. It could be argued, however, that a metaphorical toad in the throat is practically as repugnant as excrement in the mouth, while the use of an equivalent expression from the target culture brings it nearer to the target audience. At this point Thao is forced to make his on record request:

**Example 4. Zipper head: The first direct racial slur**

Do you have any jumper cables? My uncle’s car is old and....

Ha dei cavetti da batteria? La macchina di mio zio è vecchia e...  
[Do you have any battery leads? My uncle’s car is old and...]

No, we don't have any jumper cables, and show some respect, zipperhead. We're in mourning here.

No, non abbiamo dei cavetti e mostra un po' di rispetto, muso giallo, siamo in lutto qui.

[No, we don't have any leads and show a little respect, yellow muzzle, we're in mourning here.]

The question 'Do you have jumper cables?' is transposed literally and the polite form of address, 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular of the verb 'avere' [to have] is used as one would expect of a young man speaking to his senior in the Italian lingua-culture. Thao tries to explain why he needs the jump leads, but Walt interrupts yet again with his brusque rebuff that has also been rendered word for word in the TT.

In the next line we arrive at the climax of the exchange; Walt adds 'and show some respect, zipperhead, we're in mourning here.' This insult is one of the leitmotifs of *Gran Torino* and its transposition is of considerable importance to creating meaning at microtext and macrotext levels. The translation of zipperhead is rendered here with the expression 'muso giallo' [yellow muzzle]. This syntagm appears to have very little to do with authentic Italian speech but has frequently been used in the Italian dubbing of American war films where the 'enemy' was of Asian origin<sup>16</sup>. However the origins of 'muso giallo' can be traced back to the libretto of Puccini's opera 'La fanciulla del West' (see section 4.5 for a more in-depth analysis of the expression). In terms of dubbing, it certainly dates at least from the period of the Vietnamese war as portrayed in *Full Metal jacket* (1987) where the translations for both 'gook' and 'zipperhead' are in fact 'muso giallo'.

We can surmise that target culture norms prevailed in the translation choice, as they do throughout the film, and thus the literal translation 'testa di cerniera' would probably have been dismissed as meaningless to the end user, the Italian audience. This may well be true, but in terms of semantic meaning, the sinister undertones of the ST slur are totally lost on the target audience; 'muso giallo' has very different

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<sup>16</sup> As noted in Giuliana Sana's review of the dubbed version of *Gran Torino* in the online magazine *aSinc*, 'The politically incorrect attitude (purposely over the top) of Walt towards the Hymongs, who he insults by calling them 'sipper head' [sic], 'chink', 'gook', all offensive words invented by American soldiers to refer to Asians. In the Italian version these insults are rendered with the classic 'muso giallo' [used a lot in the dubbing of old American war films, recalling the exact context of reference] *aSinc*– Rivista in rete *aSinc*.it.

associations for the target culture compared to the ominously racist connotations the slur zipperhead has for the source culture. From Venuti's perspective (2008: 20) a foreignizing translation here would be of moral value, passing on the source culture through a 'resistent' or 'abusive' approach to translation, eschewing fluency in favour of cultural integrity.

From a linguistic point of view, some morphological considerations on the creation and use of racial slurs is relevant here. Hughes (2006: 149) notes that the degree of grammatical flexibility of a racial slur is indicative of its level of assimilation into the (English) language. So, for example most terms can be used as an adjective, as in 'a jap car' or a 'gook grave'. In addition, it should be said that it is also due to the more frequent noun+noun collocation of the English language which also allows constant creation of new compound nouns, insults are easily created. For instance the SL zipperhead is a formed thus, zipper + head, whereas a hypothetical literal rendering in Italian would require a noun phrase with preposition [testa + di + cerniera]. The awkwardness of the sintagm could have influenced the decision not to go for a word for word rendering.

A final fleeting reflection on how racial slurs are invented regards another American film, *Towelhead* (dir. by Alan Ball, 2007)<sup>17</sup> and its dubbed Italian version. As with *Gran Torino* racial insults are the crucial linguistic feature. The title of the film itself provides the first example; in Italy the film was released as *Niente Velo per Jesira* [No Veil for Jesira] thereby eliminating the problem of finding a translation for 'Towelhead' (see section 2.2, 'Raghead') while the insult when used within the film script is transposed as *beduino*. On the contrary 'camel jockey' is rendered with 'portacamelò' [camel rider] and sand nigger with 'negro del deserto' demonstrating that a literal translation is possible even if the insults do not exist in the receiving culture. It also goes to show that there are no hard and fast rules as to translation strategies for this lexical field and other strategies are equally possible and adopted.

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<sup>17</sup> Directed by Alan Ball, Oscar winner for the screenplay of *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes, 1999) and creator of cult black comedy *Six Feet Under*, the film *Towelhead* (2007) recounts the story of teenager Jasmira, half Lebanese, half Irish, living in Texas during the period of the Gulf War. The plot focuses on her budding sexuality intertwined with issues regarding her identity. As the title of the film suggests, Jasmira (like Thao) is the victim of racial taunts and insults, emblematic of the hostile climate in the United States towards anyone of Arab or Middle East origin.

#### 4.4 The uses of ‘muso giallo’

The first sequence introduced the dilemmas involved in translating the culture specific characteristics of racial slurs by examining the source culture insult ‘zipperhead’, and its target language non-literal rendering ‘muso giallo’. From this analysis it becomes clear that the translation choices made have profound implications on the meaning transfer of ethnophaulisms and how they are subsequently perceived in the target culture. To illustrate this point further, we scrutinize the case of ‘muso giallo’ as a racial slur in the target text. Used in the first scene and subsequently throughout the text to translate a range of slurs aimed at peoples of Asian origin (see sections 4.2, 4.3, 4.7, 4.7.2, 5. 3), its frequency in the film script is most likely due to the lack of target text equivalents. The logical outcome of this is a less diversified text which is aesthetically and semantically impoverished. ‘Muso giallo’ is uttered no less than twenty five times (including derivations such as ‘culo giallo’ and ‘grugno giallo’) in a film which lasts 112 minutes.

##### 4.4.1 Ethnophaulism: insulting people of Asian origins

This section focuses on the most frequently enunciated racial slur in the dubbed Italian version of *Gran Torino*, ‘muso giallo’. Including its derivatives (culo giallo, gringio giallo, etc), the expression is uttered fourteen times. The Table 2 below provides an overview of the various rendering used to translate ethnophaulisms linked to Thao’s Hmong ethnicity.

English	Italian translation	Back translation
zipperhead	muso giallo	Yellow muzzle
chinks	musi gialli	Yellow muzzle In <i>Il Ragazzini</i> bilingual dictionary, chink is translated as <i>cinese</i> [Chinese] thus posing further questions as to the meaning transfer
chinito	culo giallo	yellow arse/ass
slope	muso giallo (di merda)	(shitty) (as above)
gook	muso giallo	(as above)
slope	grugno giallo	yellow snout
screaming gooks	musi gialli	(as above)

gooks	musi gialli	(as above)
zipper head	muso giallo	(as above)
gook	muso giallo	(as above)
zipper head	muso giallo	(as above)
gook	muso giallo	(as above)
shrimp dick midget	impotente palla di unto giallo	impotent ball of yellow grease

**Table 2 TL renderings of ethnopaulisms against the Hmong in *Gran Torino***

What this means is that for the six alternatives in the source text, only one, with its variations is used in the TT. The insistent reiteration of racist language in the ST becomes an overwhelmingly monotonous reverberation in the TT, in spite of the translator's efforts to modify the base expression. Perhaps to avoid overkill, on other occasions the translator renders 'zipperheads' with 'teppisti' [hooligans], and 'nip' or 'gook' as [mongolo] (see section 5.2)

While it is true that the source text, as already noted, is dense with racial and ethnic epithets, the origins and authenticity of source language expressions such as 'zipperhead', 'gook', and 'slope' have an etymology which can be traced back to socio-historical events, and can be found in reliable sources such as dictionaries (*OED*, *Merriam Webster*, *Collins*) as well as less tenable fonts online (*RSDB*, *urban dictionary.com*). In other words they are expressions which are used by real people and not simply found in film scripts. This also means that they are embedded in the source culture and however politically incorrect they appear to be, they are still and remain part of the linguistic repertoire of Anglophone countries.

On the contrary, the syntagm 'muso giallo' has no such socio-cultural or historical associations within the target language and culture, and the reasons for its appearance in the Italian language are somewhat uncertain. It will be suggested here that its increased current usage and diffusion of this expression in audiovisuals, the media and in literature is to a large extent due to the influence of audiovisual translation and not from real world experience. It will furthermore be proposed that its use in authentic speech acts in the target language is limited and is generally recognised as dubbese by native Italian speakers. So just where did this racial insult come from and how has it been assimilated into the Italian lingua-culture?

## 4.5 Investigating the origins of ‘muso giallo’

After formal enquiries through the *UTET Dizionario Italiano* and other reliable encyclopaedia and lexicographical resources, as query was posted on the *Italian-Studies* mailinglist hosted by the *jisc.mail.ac.uk*. The list is used by scholars and academics in Italian culture and language. Before resorting to this strategy all attempts to glean information on the subject via monolingual dictionaries, the *Dizionario della Crusca* (the lexicographic resource managed by the academy registering the innovations and changes to the Italian language) and renowned Italian linguists proved to be fruitless. In fact, as mentioned, none of the official dictionaries of the Italian language, including the *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* (De Mauro 2000) contain such an entry. While ‘giallo’ often connotes people of Asian origin and ‘muso’ can have a derogatory acceptance for ‘face’ the actual collocation ‘muso giallo’ is not recorded. In contrast, Zanichelli’s *Ragazzini* bilingual dictionary (2005) gives this expression as the translation for ‘gook’. The very fact that it is present in a bilingual dictionary might indicate that the term’s existence is a cross-cultural phenomenon rather than a product of the Italian language community.

### 4.5.1 From Puccini to Full Metal Jacket

The request for help in tracing the origins of *muso giallo* provided some surprising and illuminating information, although some gaps remain in establishing with a formally rigorous etymological research its path into the Italian language. Computerized corpora, for example, could have aided the research in finding the expression in dubbed post-war films. However, some interesting facts have emerged.

It appears, rather surprisingly, that the first recorded occurrence of this expression refers to performances pre-dating cinematography. It has in fact been traced back to the libretto for Puccini’s opera *Fanciulla del West* where *muso giallo* and *faccia di cinese* are used as interchangeable insults (Brancato; Barnaby; on *Italian-Studies Scholarly Discussions*). Brancato also notes that the expression appears in Felice Cavallotti’s late 19<sup>th</sup> century poetry, although it is not clear if it refers to Asians or not. The use of this collocation in turn of the century literature or art would have an impact on the language but it may be argued that its power of spread would

have been greatly increased later by other forms of popular entertainment such as cinema or comics. Furthermore, the expression would have struggled to enter into common usage as there were simply fewer occasions to use it before the Second World War: the boom in immigration from Asian countries was still to come. Some scholars point to war comics such as *Super Eroica* as disseminating the expression during the late 60s; as Professor Carlo Caruso explains: ‘l’espressione “muso giallo” riferita ai Giapponesi negli episodi della Guerra del Pacifico era assolutamente standard’ [The expression ‘muso giallo’ was absolutely standard to refer to the Japanese in the episodes of the Pacific War in comic strips] while scholars and experts in the field of audiovisual translation lean towards the theory that dubbing is the source of the current usage of the expression (Azzaro, email correspondence 8 September 2010; Paolinelli, email correspondence 17 June 2011). Certainly in the films *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), which portray the harsh realities of the Vietnam war, ‘muso giallo’ appears in the Italian dubbed versions as the translation for ‘gook’ and ‘zipperhead’. Perhaps for the very reason that this expression appears in contexts which are very far removed from Italian realities that the Italian speaker cannot identify with its real implications and just perceive it as yet another prefabricated expression used in the fantasy world of film. On this point Paolinelli (email communication) comments:

Compito del dialoghista è quello di individuare gli equivalenti linguistici che meglio sostituiscono un testo già predisposto, non certo quello di censurarlo; sta poi alla nostra sensibilità e cultura far entrare o meno certe espressioni nel linguaggio comune nel rispetto della differenza esistente tra fantasia e realtà, cosa per molti non scontata.

[The duty of a scriptwriter is to identify the linguistic equivalences that better substitute a text that has already been set, certainly not that of censoring it. In one’s own sensibility and culture rests the decision to let enter or not some expression in everyday language while respecting the difference that exists between imagination and reality, which is not a given for everybody.]

The present dissertation certainly does not subscribe to any form linguistic censorship in the act of translation; on the contrary, it sustains the view that true understanding of other cultures comes with translation strategies that let the source lingua-culture shine

through. However, inevitably censorship sometimes happens in diluted forms of control (Billiani 2007: 3) where the translator's habitus (Simeoni 1996; Guoanvic 2002; Inghilleri 2005) unconsciously performs acts of censorship. Furthermore, Paolinelli appears to wash his hands of any linguistic and sociocultural responsibility on the part of the translator, which is perhaps underestimating the real impact audiovisual translation can have on its recipients.

#### **4.6. Xenophobic implications of translation effects**

Wherever the expression came from, one thing is sure: today it exists, not only in the realms of literature (a cursory word check on Google books produced 5,700 results) and film, but it also appears to be gaining ground as an authentic racial insult. Giuseppe Caliceti recounts in his book *Italiani, per esempio: l'Italia vista dai bambini immigrati* (2010) how racism is perceived by immigrant children in a Milanese primary school. One child of Chinese origin comments: 'Un mio amico dice che io ho la pelle gialla perchè tutti cinesi hanno gli occhi a mandorla e la pelle gialla, infatti lui certe volte mi chiama 'muso giallo', ma io ho la pelle gialla? No' [A friend of mine says that I have yellow skin because all Chinese people have almond-shaped eyes and yellow skin; he calls me 'yellow muzzle' at times; but do I have yellow skin? No, I don't] (2010: 86).

Another example shows how the use of this expression has impacted on the receiving lingua-culture and caused near disastrous repercussions for international diplomacy. In an article published in the right wing national newspaper *Il Giornale*, (owned by Silvio Berlusconi's brother, publishing editor Paolo Berlusconi) the slur 'muso giallo' was used to describe a group of Japanese people at an award ceremony, ironically to pay homage to Italian ex-premier Lamberto Dini (see Conclusion). The Japanese Embassy in Rome wrote a scathing letter to the newspaper register their abhorance at the use of the 'offensive' slur published in the newspaper. This unfortunate incident, which could have had serious diplomatic repercussions between the two nations, illustrates why it is imperative to acknowledge the importance and the power of intercultural communication and translation in our global society where

ideologies, prejudices, and politics cross paths and where a heightened awareness and sensibility is required in dealing with race talk, societal taboos, and their meaning transfer.

### **Closing remarks**

In this section the focus was placed on the target language insult ‘muso giallo’ and its origins, and its ubiquitous presence in the TL text. Initially found as the TT rendering of ‘zipperhead’ within the first sequence analysed, its appearance thought the film is discussed. In a nutshell this first sample illustrates the issues dealt with throughout this case study. The first racial slur is translated using what could arguably be termed as a ‘dynamic equivalent’ from the target culture, inasmuch as it is a racial insult designating people of Asian origins. On the one hand, the TT solution ‘muso giallo’ fulfils the objectives of target-oriented translation strategies, whilst, on the other hand, its fabricated orality alienates it from natural dialogue and furthermore hides the unsavoury origins of the ST slur. The use of the equivalent idiomatic expression ‘spata il rospo’ lends authenticity to the TT while the transposition of the initial greeting ‘Hi’ to ‘*Salve*’ perfectly illustrates Pavesi’s observations on translational routines. Attempting to make closer examination of it’s the origins of *muso giallo* and its current usage in the Italian language, the etymological research resulted in surprising and merely indicative results, thus underlining the possible power of uses in audiovisual translation of this couplet to increase its circulation and currency in the Italian language. In the following Chapter two sequences are analysed which demonstrate the pragmatic in-group/out-group usage of racial slurs and taboo language within non-conflictual situations.



## Chapter 5

### Pragmatics and parody in the use of slurs

#### 5.1 Second Sequence: Walt at the barber's (00:29:16,000-00:30:00,000)

The next sequence worth analysing is Walt's visit to his usual barber's shop. As they have been friends for years, the two men indulge in some light-hearted verbal sparring, which is evidently part of their conversational routine. Insults, racial and otherwise, are the main lexical feature of their exchange.

##### 5.1.1 *ST analysis*

What we really have here is a short, sharp exchange of pithy, tongue in cheek insults used to establish and maintain a bond and power balance between the two characters. Both Walt and Martin belong to similar socio-economic groups; they are working-class, white, male, and middle-aged (to elderly), and could be first generation immigrants in the US. In spite of their different ethnic origins, they have found common ground in their adopted homeland and the film narrative leads the viewer to believe that they would probably share similar points of view. They use linguistic strategies such as insults and ethnic epithets not to offend but to enhance their sense of solidarity deriving pleasure from their ironic bantering. It is a linguistic code to which only they are a party; outsiders cannot accede unless they, too, have been initiated and accepted (see section 4.7). This is *the* pragmatic function of the taboo language used in this stretch, language which in a different context and with different interlocutors could cause offence and possibly even incite to violence is used as the code of the two characters' relationship. In this situation, however, the verbal abuse is mitigated by the voice prosody and kinesics that clearly indicate amusement and irony. The openly smiling expressions at the end of the exchange (at least in Martin's case, Walt/Eastwood is notoriously stony-faced) and relaxed, natural body language all go

to create a situation of joviality. A last point with regards voice quality and accents; the character of Martin is stereotypically dubbed with a Sicilian accent, implicating that Italian immigrants to the United States came from the South Italy rather than the North.

In terms of Politeness Theory, this sequence illustrates another type of FTA, and how it is negotiated. Martin cuts Walt's hair and he wants to be paid. Having first deployed the positive face strategy of using in-group identity markers (in this case dysphemistic euphemisms, Allen and Burridge 2006: 39) in order to claim common ground, Martin is then ready to make a bald on-record request – 'That'll be ten bucks, Walt'. Walt's reaction to this request could be construed in the light of Goffman's concept of 'ritual' in politeness. He remonstrates with Martin, complaining about the price. From Martin's response ('It's been ten bucks for the last 5 years, you hard-nosed Polack son of a bitch'), we understand that Walt's objection to paying is all part of the routine, an interpersonal ritual which aids in maintaining the relationship.

### ***5.1.2 Comparative analysis***

Having established the communicative functions and strategies used in the ST, a look at how this exchange has been rendered in the TL will yield some evidence as to the adequacy of the translation choices. The ST begins with an insult; Martin complains that Walt does not come to have his hair cut as frequently as he should because he is mean with money.

#### **Example 5. Martin the barber teasing Walt**

You shouldn't wait so long between haircuts, you cheap son of a bitch.

Perché fai passare tanto tempo tra un taglio e l'altro, taccagno figlio di puttana?  
[Why do you let so much time pass between one cut and another, you stingy son of a whore?]

The insult 'cheap son of a bitch' has been transferred (Gottlieb 1992:166) into the TT with what is apparently an equivalent expression 'taccagno figlio di puttana'. A logical

decision, and one with which it would be difficult to find fault. From some perspectives, it could even be construed as more colourful and amusing than the source text as ‘taccagno’ corresponds to the more extreme adjectives *stingy* or *miserly* in English. The use of the translational routine ‘figlio di puttana’ (see section 3.6) is more problematic if not rather questionable from a sociolinguistic point of view. In the Italian lingua-culture, this insult has more serious inferences than its English equivalent in this pragmatic situation. Italy is still very much a Roman Catholic society, mothers are still considered sacred, and even if said in jest, such an insult might be hard to brush aside by a man of Walt’s generation (see Pavese 1996).

**Example 6. Walt teases the barber**

Yeah. Well, I’m surprised you’re still around. I was always hoping you’d die off and they’d get someone in here who knew what the hell they were doing. Instead you just keep hanging around like the doo-wop dago that you are.

Già. Mi meraviglio che tu sia ancora in giro Io spero sempre che tu crepi e che finalmente qui prendano qualcuno che sa fare il suo mestiere e invece ci sei sempre tu, con la grazia di quel mangia maccheroni (subtitles)/impasta pizza (dubbing) che sei.

[Already. I am surprised you are still around. I hope always that you die and that finally here they take someone who knows his trade and instead you are always here, with the grace of that maccheroni eater/pizza maker that you are.]

Walt’s retort in the ST plays on the classic insult for Italians, ‘wop’. He elaborates on it adding ‘doo-wop-dago’, doo-wop being a kind of music from the 1950’s thus rendering the potentially offensive epithets ‘wop’ and ‘dago’ as apparently harmless components of the expression.

The origins of racial slurs are often unclear; they are usually accounted for by what Hughes refers to as ‘folk etymology, meaning the plausible but inaccurate explanation of the origin of the term’ (2006: 150). From this premise then, it is generally agreed that ‘dago’ is an insult used for Italians, Spaniards, or Portuguese which probably originates from a corruption of the name ‘Diego’ (Green 2008; Hughes 1991; *OED*; Rappaport 2005) while it would appear that the slur ‘wop’ dates

back to the early 1900s when a vast number of Italians emigrated to the US, very often as illegal immigrants and were the object of racial prejudice. The *RSDB* provides some possible theories as to the etymology term:

1. The acronym for [w]ith[o]ut [p]apers, relating to the illegal immigrant status to the majority of Italians entering the USA at that time.
2. The acronym for '[w]orking [o]n [p]avement' with reference to the manual labour Italian immigrants in the US often performed.
3. From the Neapolitan term 'guappo' meaning bold, showy or even criminal, a bully.

The *OED* corroborates these possible etymologies, adding that it could also be derived from the Latin 'vappa'. The term is glossed as being American slang and 'offensive'. A more complete etymological investigation is given in *Chambers Slang Dictionary* (2008: 1455):

Wop n. [Sp. Guapo, a dandy, which was taken up in Sicily during an occupation by Spain and thus imported to the US by 19C immigrants; note Torres, *After Hours* (1979): 'Plenty of the guapi (pretty ones), Neapolitan and Sicilian, around in those days. But they wasn't all pretty, at least to the Irish, who tagged them "wops"'; note Tosches, *Where Dead Voices Gather* (2001): 'The probable root of "wop" is the Latin uappo, which was used literally to describe wine gone bad, but was also used figuratively [...]. From uappo came the Sicilian vappu and guappu, which connoted arrogance, bluster and maleficence entwined. It was these Sicilian words that were commonly used to describe the work-bosses who lured their greenhorn paesani into servitude in New York City in the early years of the twentieth century [...] eventually the labourer himself, and not the boss was known as guappo [...] which was pronounced more or less wop']. A derog. term for an Italian.

Although 'dago' is considered an ethnic insult, according to all these sources, the origins of 'wop' make it much more of a disparaging slur. In fact, if we take a cursory glance at the entries in two recent editions of dictionaries for learners of English (*Oxford advanced Learner's Dictionary* 2010 and *The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* 2009), 'wop' is defined as a very offensive taboo word. *The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* goes even further and takes a

prescriptive stance with the warning: 'Do not use this word'. What is noteworthy here is the regulatory approach adopted by the editors of dictionaries aimed at learners of English as a second language. Therefore, it can be inferred that on the one hand political correctness demands the censorship of terms such as 'wop', while on the other, Rappaport (2005: 52) argues that in certain circumstances, racial and ethnic slurs used as in-group slang tend to lose their culturally conditioned insult value. He concludes 'one of the more interesting psychological aspects of ethnic slurs and insults is their ambiguity. The old cowboy cliché, "smile when you say that, pardner", captures this phenomenon very nicely'.

For the translator, however, the intrinsic dilemma remains; how to render such a racial slur that has no corresponding term in the TL. Ironically in this case it is Italian ethnicity being ridiculed; the Italian language lexical repertoire seems to have no equivalent for this offensive term to indicate Italians. To circumvent this problem some inventiveness was required on the part of the translator, resulting in 'impasta pizza' [pizza maker] in the dubbed version, and 'mangia maccheroni' [maccheroni eater] in subtitles. While both of these fulfil, perhaps, the function of perpetuating a stereotype of Italians as consumers of pasta and pizza, thus echoing the humorous note of 'doo-wop-dago' neither expression hints at the underlying meaning of the ST expression. Of the two solutions 'mangia maccheroni' works slightly better as it retains the sonority and alliteration of the ST 'doo-wop-dago'.

The following exchange provides an intra-textual reference to the first insult hurled by Martin. This time Walt accuses Martin of being money-minded.

**Example 7. Walt accuses Martin of being miserly**

That'll be 10 bucks, Walt.

Fa dieci verdoni, Walt.  
[Makes ten big green ones, Walt]

Ten bucks? Jesus Christ, Martin, what are you, half Jew or something? You keep raising the prices.

Dieci verdoni? Cristo Santo, Martin: Non sarai mica diventato ebreo per caso?  
[Ten big green ones? Christ Saint, Martin, You haven't become Jewish, by chance?]

It's been ten bucks for the last five years, you hard-nosed Polack son of a bitch.

É dieci verdoni da cinque anni, brutto testone d'un polacco figlio di puttana  
[It is ten big green ones from five years, ugly, big head, (pig-headed) Polack son of a whore.]

Yeah, well, keep the change.

Il resto, mancia, ragazzo.  
[The change, tip, lad]

The ethnic stereotype of Jews as misers is apparently cross-cultural (Dundes 1971: 199), therefore Walt's allusions to Martin being Jewish because of his business acumen are easily transferred into the TT. Martin's response is self-defensive and retaliates with 'you hard-nosed Polack son of a bitch.' The Italian translation has the addition of 'ugly' making it even more amusing than the ST, and much in keeping with the style of Italian insults (Scatasta 2002: 100). Here, though, it should be mentioned that while the word 'Polacco' in Italian simply denotes a person of the male sex who comes from Poland, 'Polack' in English is now considered derogatory (*OED*). Another nuance of the ritual bantering devoided of its narrative power.

#### **Example 8. Closing retort by the barber**

See you in three weeks, prick.

Ci vediamo fra venti giorni, scimunito.  
[We will see each other in twenty days, idiot]

Not if I see you first, dipshit.

Sempre che tu ci arrivi, sacco di merda.  
[Always that you arrive, bag of shit]

The closing exchange includes the insults ‘prick’, rendered with the less offensive ‘scimunito’ (literally ‘stupid’ in Sicilian dialect), and ‘dipshit’ with the same scatological reference in the TT ‘sacco di merda’.

### ***5.1.3 Remarks on the second sequence***

In the film’s representation of reality, the second sequence ST shows the ways in which racial slurs can be used in communicative situations in order to maintain positive face and equal power relationships by establishing common ground, thereby justifying the claim to in-group membership. By comparing the ST with TT solutions for racial and other insults, it can be seen that attempts have been made to rely the meaning of certain expressions via literal translations where possible, and ‘dynamic equivalences’ (to use Nida’s well-know concept, in particular see 1964: 120) where it is not. For example, the TT solution ‘mangiamacceroni’ is clearly not a literal translation, nor does it contain any element of the semantic value of the ST ‘wop’. However, its stereotypical connotations of Italians as pasta eaters could be considered an acceptable equivalent in this pragmatic situation, also lending an element of humour. However, in the case of ‘son of a bitch’, there could be a dilemma of intentionality; perhaps in this context the TT translation ‘figlio di puttana’ could in fact be offensive. Overall, the language transfer has been successful; the pragmatic functions of the ST exchanges have been met in the TT translations; where possible, the literal translations employed ensure a high level of fidelity to the original text, and in spite of some semantic gaps, the humour comes across in the TT – yet a shift already appears in the form of deviations towards sexually-charged offensive language. In the third sequence, the scenario is somewhat different when Thao tries to imitate Walt’s non politically correct bantering in a scene which parodies the one just analysed.

## **5.2 Third Sequence: Thao at the barber’s (01:10:25,000-01:13:32,000)**

This sequence parodies the previous scene analysed above, in which it was noted that Walt and Martin’s quick-firing repartee is heavily laced with racial slurs and other profanities. Whilst in Walt’s and Martin’s relationship the overt use of dysphemism

combined with racial insults performs the pragmatic function of establishing in-group membership the case in point here is substantially different. In the following sequence these strategies are exacerbated to almost burlesque proportions and referred to in the text as ‘how men talk’.

Walt decides that Thao needs ‘manning up’ so resolves to initiate him in the art of bantering with the guys. An incredulous Thao listens as Walt and Martin put each other through their paces. Thao tries to emulate his mentor’s example but is too heavy-handed with the verbal insults and his attempts backfire. He offends Martin by misusing verbal in-group markers and almost gets his head blown off. These endeavours to ‘talk like a man’ finally pay off in a later scene where his new-found communication skills serve Thao well at an interview for a construction job.

### ***5.2.1 Analysis of ST***

The attitudes of white males towards race, gender and sexuality are heavily exploited in this scene in what is intended to be comic vein, yet the issues brought forth in this sequence permeate the whole text, and bear heavily on how the meaning of these particularly tricky lexical and ideological issues is relayed at both micro and macro levels. Nevertheless, the narrative of the scene makes a clear sociolinguistic statement regarding insults in general, and racial slurs in particular, that is, the import of the pragmatic dimension to language in social life.

Steeped in stereotypical and stereotyped ideologies, the discourses of Martin and Walt illustrate what Daniels labels ‘white supremacist discourse’ which ‘legitimizes and sustains privileges of race, class, gender and sexuality that are inherent in a white supremacist context’ (1997: 2). In this perspective Walt’s mission to ‘make a man’ out of Thao is an example of how the dominant group’s socio-cultural values are foisted onto the youth. In fact, Thao’s education begins with a lesson on the trading of racist epithets. On 17 January 2009, in her blog entry “‘Gran Torino’: White Masculinity and Racism’, Daniels, whose critique of the film foregrounds the nexus between race, gender, and sexuality in the construction of ‘whiteness’, or more specifically white masculinity, commented:

This scene in the barbershop, perhaps more than any other, illustrates the point that the form of white masculinity on display here relies upon overt racism for its raw material. Kowalski's only relationships in the film with friends or peers (the barber, the men at the bar) are premised upon this shared exchange of overtly racist language. (2009)

The opening line tells us exactly what the theme of the scene will be as Walt announces that Thao is going to learn how guys talk. What is implicit here is that Thao will get a lesson on not only what men say, but also what their ideologies are, or at least what they should present to the outside world if they want to be successful in life. Being successful in 'Men's' terms means having a 'job, a car, a girl, a dick' (original screenplay 01:12:33) and to obtain these things you must be one of the guys. To be one of the guys, it would appear you have to use foul language, be racist and denigrate women, thus the verbal symbols that illustrate these ideologies form part of the (individual's) performance in the presentation of self (Goffman 1959). These ideologies are also interwoven into the multisemiotic film text.

The audience view Walt and Thao entering the barber's shop from over Martin's shoulder. Martin is leaning back in his barber's chair, idly flicking through a soft porn magazine. This visual message provides evidence of the nexus previously mentioned between racism, gender and sexuality inherent in the white supremacist ethos. On seeing Walt and Thao enter the shop, Martin greets them with the insults 'Polack' and 'Chink', thus faking irritation at being disturbed. Walt responds in kind by calling Martin a 'crazy Italian prick' thereby sustaining the in-group bonding by using insults already encoded into their sociolinguistic sphere.

Martin's attention then turns to Thao. He does not address the youth directly, implying that Thao cannot speak for himself. Instead he asks Walt 'Who's the nip?'. By using an ethnic insult to a person he does not know, Martin is demonstrating that he is not in the least afraid of Thao and is convinced of his 'white supremacy'. Walt replies that Thao is his 'pussy kid' neighbour, immediately informing Martin of his low regard for the boy, i.e. he is effete and needs 'manning him up'. Again white male supremacy rears its head. Having heard the two men banter back and forth Thao is proudly informed that that is how real men talk. His doubtful question 'they do?'

emphasises his reservations regarding the type of comments he's supposed to reproduce and is in fact very reluctant to try. Walt's commanding imperatives 'Go out, come back in and talk like a man' highlight his domineering attitude and his intention to impose his will. They are bald requests which Thao initially tries to resist by adopting a strategy of pleading. Walt reiterates his request in more forceful terms, 'get your ass out of here' This time Thao obeys and half-heartedly attempts to imitate Walt's linguistic performance. Earlier we saw how Walt and Martin use insults and race talk as in-group terminology to convey their 'shared associations and attitudes' (Brown and Levinson 1987: 111). In contrast, here an outsider (Thao) addresses Martin with practically the same terminology previously used by Walt in a parallel context but instead of conveying camaraderie Thao's greeting 'What's up, you old Italian prick' provokes Martin to a melodramatic, purposely comic, yet violent reaction. He grabs a rifle, points it at Thao and hollers the vulgar insult 'you goddamn dick-smoking gook', thus combining three taboo areas, blasphemy, homosexuality, and race in a single offensive utterance.

By greeting the barber with a mix of street slang ('What's up?' meaning 'how are you?') and pure insult ('old Italian prick') Thao has infringed the rules on in-group etiquette on more than one count and committed a very serious FTA. He failed to realise (understandably, as the 'rules' of man talk were not sufficiently explained) that in terms of context, the register has changed in some respects; while the field and mode are the same the tenor (Halliday 1985:12) has been modified as the interpersonal relationship between Thao and Martin is certainly not that of Martin and Walt. Thao is a young man of Asian origin and a stranger to Martin. He shares none of Martin's socio-cultural background and has lower social status. Ultimately Walt has already cast the die on Thao's character by defining him as a 'pussy'<sup>18</sup>. Thao has none of the qualities necessary to be part of their in-group and therefore cannot use the same solidarity markers, (racial slurs in this case) because he does not belong. Although Thao's actual words ('What's up, you old Italian prick') are very similar to Walt's (How are you doing, Martin, you crazy Italian prick?) a closer look at the offending

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<sup>18</sup> '[S]lang (chiefly *N. Amer.*). A sweet or effeminate male; (in later use chiefly) a weakling, a coward, a sissy. Also: a male homosexual'. *OED*

phrase reveals where the discrepancies lie and why these discrepancies make a difference. There are variations, a certain amount of code switching and some differences in the voice prosody and kinesics. We note, for example, Walt addresses Martin by name, even though he then insults him. He greets him with 'How are you doing Martin' in a friendly tone and proceeds to call him 'crazy', but not 'old'. Finally, Walt's facial expression indicates amusement rather than malice. Thao, on the other hand, enters the shop and baldly exclaims 'What's up?' a different sociolect to the one shared by Martin and Walt. The bald insult 'old Italian prick' sounds far ruder coming from a young stranger.

The farce that follows enters the realms of slapstick but the lesson in pragmatics is clear: racial slurs can be used between men who have an equal power balance, share the same sociolect, and are part of the same in-group. It is also acceptable for someone from a position of power to use racial slurs to denigrate the other. On the contrary, it is not acceptable for someone who is younger, weaker, and less 'powerful' to use the same insults without being punished.

From this point onward the two elder men spout discourses to elucidate Thao on 'Men Talk' which carry all the hallmarks of sexual and racial stereotyping: 'bitching' about the girlfriend, the car, the boss, the mechanic who 'screwed [you] right in the ass', the 'old lady [who] bitches for two goddamn hours' then 'starts crying how we never talk' are some of the conversational bonding strategies they suggest to create solidarity between men.

Heeding their advice, Thao appears to have got the gist and makes a last attempt at talking like a man but again mixes codes, employing formality with slang and then incorrectly uses an interpretation of the expression, 'screwed me in the ass' to mean 'cheated'. Thao's rendition 'Boy, does my ass hurt from all those guys at my construction job' gives the impression that he has been sexually assaulted by his colleagues. This further reinforces the message that Thao is inept, stupid, and implicit yet insistent aspersions cast on his manhood substantiate Walt's earlier condemnation that he is a pussy, passive, and acquiescent, as all Asians are, to the insults thrown his way.

### 5.2.2 *Comparative analysis*

Such highly explosive linguistic material makes this into a text that requires a very close analysis in order to transfer meaning successfully. It should be mentioned at the outset that in some respects the Italian culture reflects the content of the ST. That is, it is a society where women are often treated as objects in advertising and in political discourse for sure (sweeping statement, perhaps, but the current political and social climate in Italy, in spite of a few notable exceptions, reinforce the notion that women succeed through sexual favours and by their physical beauty), homophobia is endemic (see section 6.2) and racial insults are more easily tolerated than in societies where political correctness has firmly taken root (see section 1.3). From this premise, we can move onto the comparisons.

#### **Example 9. Thao at the barber's**

Perfect. A Polack and a chink.

Perfetto. Un polacco e un cinesino.  
[Perfect. A Pole and a little Chinese]

How are you doing Martin, you crazy Italian prick?

Come stai Martin? Stronzo d'un italiano pazzo.  
[How are you Martin? Shit of an Italian crazy]

Walt, you cheap bastard, I should've known you'd come in. I was having such a pleasant day.

Walt, vecchio bastardo, dovevo immaginare che venivi. Stavo passando una bella giornata.  
[Walt, old bastard, I should have known that you'd come. I was having a pleasant day.]

What'd you do? Jew some poor blind guy out of his money? Give him the wrong change?

Ah, come mai? Hai fregato qualche povero fesso di cliente? Dandogli il resto spagliato?  
[Ah, how come? Have you cheated some poor idiot of a client? Giving him the wrong change?]

At first glance the first two ethnic references might be perceived as being translated faithfully with the Italian equivalents and possibly felt as acceptable in the target culture. As noted in section 5.1.2, however, ‘polacco’ has no negative connotations in Italian but in English ‘Polack’ is now considered derogatory, thus the inherent insult loses semantic meaning in the translation. ‘Chink’ on the other hand has no semantic equivalent as such. The Italian bilingual dictionary, *Il Ragazzini* (Zanichelli 2005) cites ‘cinese’ [Chinese] as the translation of ‘chink’. It is remarkable that the English term is derogatory, whereas ‘cinese’ simply denotes nationality and is not an insult in itself in the target culture, unless qualified by a pejorative adjective. As with other racial insults in the target language, it would need modifying with some offensive scatological or sexually insulting adjectives to render it so (see section 1.6). As noted by Scatista (2002: 100) ‘una volta identificato il gruppo a cui si fa riferimento, si aggiunge al termine in questione un aggettivo peggiorativo, come ‘sporco’, ‘schifoso’ e simili o farlo precedere da un ‘bastardo d’un...’ [once the group that is being referred to has been identified, a pejorative adjective is added to the term in question, such as ‘dirty’, ‘disgusting’ or similar or precede it with ‘bastard of a...’].

On the contrary, if we start from the TT and work back to the ST, the only English translation which could be found for the Italian ‘cinesino’ [literally ‘little Chinese man’] was one provided by *Google*, which translates the term as ‘chinese guy’. The suffix -ino/a is a diminutive that in some contexts could be construed as adding positive if not even affectionate connotations, but in this particular circumstance where ‘masculinity’ is at stake, it is unlikely that the term ‘cinesino’ is uttered with these intentions. It is worth mentioning here that the adapters and translators for the Italian audiences received a script (in Díaz-Cintas and Remael’s terms ‘a dialogue list’) denoting best practice in the sector.

A dialogue list is essentially the compilation of all the dialogue exchanges uttered in the film and it is a document usually supplied by the film distributor or producer of the film. Besides a verbatim transcription of all the dialogue, the ideal list also offers extra information on implicit socio-cultural connotations, explains plays on words or possible amphibologies, the meaning of colloquial and dialectal terms, gives the correct spelling of all proper names, clarifies implicit as well as explicit allusions, etc. (Díaz-Cintas and Remael 2007: 74)

They go on to say that despite recommendations at legislative and practical levels, the producers and distributors still deliver very different types of documents. It appears though that in the specifics of *Gran Torino*, principles of best practice in providing the dialogue list/script were applied. For instance, below are the indications given on the original dialogue list aimed at assisting the translator in completing the translation process of the sequence discussed in this section:

1378.14 Martin

Polack; derogatory term for a person of Polish descent – referring to Walt.

Chink; derogatory slang term for an Asian person (Here said affectionately).<sup>19</sup>

In the ST Walt responds in his habitual manner by referring to Martin as a ‘crazy Italian prick’. It could be asserted that this insult carries no racist implications, as such. ‘Italian’ is merely denotative indicating the nationality of the barber. Combined with the adjective ‘crazy’ and the substantive ‘prick’, however, the effect is that of a racial insult. This is reflected in the meaning transfer to TT.

Nevertheless, in the next line ‘cheap bastard’ has been rendered as ‘old bastard’, even though there is a linkage in the following line with ‘cheap’, meaning ‘miserly’. Due to this change, which could be considered as any decision from *translator’s license* to a slip in lexical inconsistency, this utterance becomes rather mesmerising and interesting from a sociolinguistic point of view. The second interrogative begins with ellipsis ‘Did you...’ while the verb is ‘jew’<sup>20</sup>. This colloquialism is used here with the acceptance of ‘to cheat’ and is now considered to be offensive and non politically correct. From a linguistic point of view, however, it demonstrates the great elasticity and flexibility of English morphology that lends itself to inventive word creation (see section 4.3 for other examples). Here, we have the opposite of nominalization which is largely associated with ‘alienation effects’ in discourse analysis (Hatim and Mason 1997: 24). On the contrary the immediacy and concreteness of the verb form, further emphasised by the ellipsis makes the use of the

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<sup>19</sup> I am grateful to the subtitler and dubbing director Filippo Ottoni who provided me copy of the screenplay in a personal email communication on 14 September 2010.

<sup>20</sup> ‘To cheat or overreach, in the way attributed to Jewish traders or usurers. Also, to drive a hard bargain, and *intr.*, to haggle. Phr. to *jew down*, to beat down in price; also *transf.* Hence *Jewing*’, *OED*.

verb ‘to jew’ even more potent in this pragmatic situation. The TL has no equivalent verb form and although, as previously mentioned, the stereotype of Jews being attached to money is cross cultural (see section 5.1.2), the allusion has not been maintained in the TT.

**Example 10. Martin’s curiosity**

Who’s the Nip<sup>21</sup>?

Chi è ‘sto mongolo?  
[Who is the Mongol]?

Oh, he’s a pussy<sup>22</sup> kid from next door. I’m just trying to man him up a little bit.

Ah, lui è una femminuccia e mio vicino di casa. Sto cercando di farlo diventare un po’ più uomo.

[Ah, he is a little girl, and my next door neighbour. I am trying to make him become a little more man(ly)]

There is a break in the repartee between the two men as Martin becomes curious about Thao. He asks Walt who he is, referring to him as ‘the Nip’. This epithet is the abbreviation of ‘Nippon’ denoting someone from Japan<sup>23</sup>. As with all epithets that denote ethnic origin, it is now considered offensive (*OED*). With no obvious equivalent in the target language, the translator has attempted to find an acceptable substitute and produced the questionable solution, ‘mongolo’ [mongol]. De Mauro’s *Dizionario della lingua italiana* (2000) denotes this term as derogatory as does the English equivalent, ‘mongol’ with the acceptance of an ‘idiot’ (*OED*). The intention of the translator here might have been to make the insult two-fold; firstly by alluding to the similarity in eye shape between someone affected with Down’s syndrome, and people of Asian origin, and secondly implying mental retardation. This dual meaning would surely be construed as highly offensive in any social context, and most certainly

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<sup>21</sup> In the dialogue list, the following gloss was given: ‘the Nip; slang derogatory term for a person of Japanese descent’, 14 September 2010.

<sup>22</sup> As mentioned in footnote 14 above, the slang here is used to emphasize the insult based on the notion that accusing another man of homosexuality challenges the person’s masculinity.

<sup>23</sup> ‘A Japanese person. Also occas. in extended use: an eastern Asian person of any nationality, esp. a Korean. slang (orig. Mil., usu. considered offensive)’. *OED*.

in the pragmatic situation under analysis. Furthermore, the use of the term ‘Mongol’ or its abbreviation, ‘mong’ in Anglophone cultures today would be severely chastised for its unacceptable intentionality of deriding disability<sup>24</sup> (Hughes 2010). By the same token, it could be argued that in terms of linguistic taboos, the translator has performed a ‘linguistic transposition’ which is in fact also a cultural one in substituting the source culture’s linguistic taboo, a racial slur which does not exist in the target language, with a term which would certainly be non politically correct in the source culture, and highly dubious in the receiving culture.

Even so, Nida’s concept of ‘dynamic equivalence’ (1964: 159) has not been respected as the pragmatic effect of the slur ‘mongolo’ is not the same as ‘nip’, even if we concede that sensitivity to the correct and acceptable languages is currently less acute in Italian society. To reason that the disabled and the ethnically diverse are both social out-groups so an insult to one is equivalent to an insult to the other is a theory that cannot be sustained if we reflect that the nature of the two groups’ Otherness is obviously quite different. The necessary inclination towards the target culture is nothing short of deformation (Berman in Venuti 2004) or outright ‘domestication’ (Venuti 1995; 2008) Furthermore, this rendering is also difficult to comprehend if we consider the context in which it is used and the semantic meaning that it carries. In the preceding scene, Walt gives Thao some fatherly advice on getting a job. In terms of interpersonal relationships, Walt’s original hostility towards the youth has morphed into an almost paternal interest. By now Thao is sufficiently comfortable with Walt’s idiolect to accept that the initially offensive term ‘zipperhead’ [‘muso giallo’ in the TT] gets abbreviated to the more confidential, almost affectionate ‘zip’. In the ST the original insult has become somewhat desemantised by the diminutive form and by the circumstances of its use. The translation, also in this case ‘mongolo’, could hardly be considered a term of endearment. The dilemma once again appears to be the lexical gap in the TL.

In answer to Martin’s question, Walt introduces Thao as his ‘pussy neighbour’, thus labelling him as effeminate. The exchange illustrates the machismo present in the ST, which is easily transferred into the TT with the similar taunt ‘femminuccia’. The

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<sup>24</sup> ‘Mongol. A person with Down’s syndrome. Now generally regarded as offensive’, *OED*.

social and moral values of the ‘macho man’ are to some extent parodied here, but in translation perhaps the parody is lost in the context of the predominantly non-politically correct perspectives of the target culture.

**Example 11. Martin goes mad**

Walt: You see, kid? Now that’s how guys talk to one another.

Vedi, ragazzo? E’ così che parlano gli uomini tra di loro.  
[See, boy? That’s how men talk to each other.]

Thao: They do?

Ah sì?  
[Ah, yes?]

Martin: What, you got shit in your ears?

Che hai, riso nelle orecchie?  
[What have you, rice in your ears?]

Walt: Now go out and come back in, and talk to him like a man. A real man.

Su, esci adesso e poi rientra e parlagli come fanno gli uomini. Da uomo.  
[Come on, go out now and then come back in and talk to him as men do. Like a man.]

Thao: Oh, c’mon Walt.

Ma dai, Walt.  
[Come on, Walt]

(Thao goes out and re-enters)

Thao: What’s up you old Italian prick.

Come stai, italiano di merda  
[How are you, shitty Italian]

Martin: Get outta my shop before I blow your head off you goddamn dick-smoking gook!

Fuori del mio negozio, che ti faccio saltare la testa, fottuto bocchinaro muso giallo!  
[Out of my shop, or I'll blow your head off, fucking cock-sucking yellow muzzle!]

In the first lines of Example 11, there is an attempt at compensation for the several references to race present in the ST which have been omitted from the TT. Instead of rendering Martin's rebuke, 'got shit in your ears?' with a scatological reference, the TT makes an allusion to Thao's ethnicity with the quip 'hai riso nelle orecchie?' [have you got rice in your ears]. There could be two reasons for this. Firstly, as Pavesi notes (2005: 41) the sheer quantity and density of bad language punctuating the dialogues of many contemporary Anglophone films cannot always be replicated in the Italian dubbed versions. Perhaps Italians are not so foul-mouthed as Anglophone speakers – or at least there is a pretension of this in dubbese – but if Italian dubbing is to appear remotely like authentic, spontaneous speech acts, then some editing of swearwords could be considered prudent. Therefore it is plausible that some gratuitously vulgar expressions were omitted from the ST for a question of orality (see section 3.5). If this is the case, a substitute word might have been necessary in order to synchronise lip movements<sup>25</sup>. A second hypothesis is that the translator was aware of the loss of racial and ethnic references throughout the TT and so tried to redress the balance in this oblique, even amusing manner.

The other relevant point here is the rendering of Thao's attempt to emulate Walt. As explained above, in ST, Thao's insult to Martin is uttered in a completely inappropriate context; the expression 'what's up?' to mean 'how are you' is not a greeting that Martin would use as it belongs to younger in-groups. Rendering this with the neostandard Italian 'come stai?' [how are you?] loses its original edge, as there is no hint of a sociolect. The insult 'old Italian prick' has been transposed with the similarly offensive 'italiano di merda', although one might wonder why a more literal translation, 'italiano del cazzo' [Italian prick] was not used. Martin's rage finds expression in the colourful syntagm 'goddamn dick- smoking gook'. The translator

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<sup>25</sup> Lip synchronisation is one of the so called 'constraints' of translating for audiovisual materials.

has managed a near word-for word rendering, keeping the three taboo spheres in the expression, ‘fottuto bocchinaro muso giallo’ [fucking yellow muzzle cocksucker].

At this point it should be noted that the SL imprecation ‘goddamn’ has all but lost its original meaning in current usage, its function now being exclamatory rather than injurious, or even used simply as a filler (Hughes 2006: 204). Paradoxically, the semantic equivalent in Italian, ‘dannato’ still retains something of its original semantic meaning of ‘condemned to burn in hell’<sup>26</sup> and therefore in a Catholic context would be perceived as a stronger form of cursing than the Anglophone expression in an Anglophone context. Perhaps for this reason it is translated here as ‘fottuto’, as it very often is in dubbing, another example of Pavesi’s translational routines (see section 3.6) and quintessentially dubbese. Ironically, this in turn would effectively back translate as ‘fucking’ or ‘fucked’ – which in an Anglophone context may be less of a taboo word than in the past but certainly much more so than ‘goddamn’. This shift might well cause further repercussions on a text where both ‘fucking’ and ‘goddamn’ are rendered with ‘fottuto’ thus impoverishing the lexical variety. Lastly, it can be observed that in terms of analysing linguistic taboos across cultures, the semantic fields has been changed to conform to target culture norms - from blasphemous in the ST to the sexual sphere in the TT

The second component of the insult is readily translatable with the vulgar expression ‘bocchinaro’. In the target culture, the term ‘bocchinara’ would be used to describe a woman who performs fallatio with expertise (‘bocca’ means mouth, ‘bocchino’, ‘blow job’) thus with the feminine gender ending in ‘-a’ (Zanni 2001: 45). For the purposes of rendering the word masculine with obvious homophobic undertones, the desinence has been changed to ‘-o’ which is less frequently used and strikes as unexpected. While it is an accurate semantic equivalent, what is lost is the potently comic image suggested by the figurative expression ‘dick-smoking’. The third and final element is racial, ‘gook’ being rendered with the omnipresent ‘muso giallo’ (see section 4.4).

#### **Example 12. Thao’s parting shot**

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<sup>26</sup> Zanichelli Dizionario online

Excuse me sir. I need a haircut if you ain't too busy you old Italian son of a bitch prick barber. Boy, does my ass hurt from all those guys at my construction job.

Mi scusi signore, dovrei tagliare i capelli, se lei non è occupato, italiano figlio di puttana barbiere del cazzo. Merda, m'hanno fatto il culo tutti quelli del mio cantiere oggi.

[Excuse me, sir. I should cut my hair, if you are not busy, Italian son of a bitch prick barber. Shit, they did my ass, all of those from the building site today].

After listening to Walt and Martin's sexist, homophobic and macho discourses as examples of how men talk, Thao has one last go at producing real 'man talk'. The ST shows evidence of the youth's sociolect with the 'the non standard verbal form 'ain't'. The TT utilizes polite third person standard Italian, thus losing a little of the original linguistic flavour; Thao's parting shot in the ST backfires with an unwitting double meaning. His exclamation, 'boy, does my ass hurt from all those guys at my construction job' was probably intended as a complaint about how the other men on his construction job make him work very hard. Instead what he pragmatically implies is that he was sodomised by all of his workmates! The double meaning is retained in the TT with the expression 'm'hanno fatto il culo' [they did my arse] which is a slight variation of the figurative Italian expression 'farsi un culo' [make/do an arse], meaning to work hard. By making this apparently small error the TT makes a direct reference to crude homosexuality. As we will see in a later sequence (see section 6.3), the homophobic undertones present in the ST become blatantly expressed in the TT, and is also used as a strategy for compensation where no racial slur exists in the TL. In the example here, the structure of the original sentence is:

- My arse (theme)
- hurts from all those guys (rheme)

Instead the grammatical structure of the Italian 'm'hanno fatto il culo' focus on the action 'fare il culo' (in the sense of sodomising) which emphasises the submission to a

violent act; 'they did this to me', instead of the consequence, 'my ass hurts' which is the focus of the ST utterance. While this may seem a miniscule detail, this subtle shift in rheme highlights a shift in perspective which reflects target culture attitudes. Thao's ineptitude at verbalising 'man talk' to the extent that he incriminates himself by implying he is homosexual, thus worthy of derision, is undeniably and definitely the non politically correct message of the ST. This is amply echoed in the TT.

### ***5.2.3 Some observations on sequence three***

In the film's narrative, the events of this sequence serve perhaps to ridicule the societal values the film appears to uphold. From a technical point of view it is clearly intended as comic relieve to the otherwise challenging issues intertwined in the text. Nonetheless, it provokes reflexion on social and sexual stereotypes which still persist in supposedly developed countries. Here we have a paradox; the values which are being to some extent satirised in the ST are in fact still part of the target culture's make-up. However, the dubious use of the term 'mongolo' to indicate a mild leg-pulling and compensate for loss of racial epithets tells us more about the translator's personal habitus than it does about Italians in general.

In the next chapter, the use of racial slurs is explored in situations of a more conflictual nature within the film's narrative. The two sequences selected for analysis contain situations where different cultures clash. A potent mix of swearing and cussing with sexual and racist innuendo provides the verbal ammunition.







## Chapter 6

### Racial slurs as aggressive verbal duelling

The previous chapter focused on the pragmatic function of racial slurs and swearwords in context of the narrative of *Gran Torino* as in-group markers; a linguistic encoding of offensive language which in fact connotes camaraderie between peers. In contrast Chapter 6 looks at some examples from the film where the intentionality promoting the use of these taboo words is unmistakably inflammatory. In section 6.1 the sequence narrates Walt's dealings with a gang of black youths. The renderings of his idiolect of antiquated racial slurs and the gang's street slang provide the object of analysis. The sequence analysed in section 6.2 aims to demonstrate how target culture norms and values in the guise of the Translator's habitus influence the rendering of the source culture's social and linguistic taboos, slanting perspectives towards the credos of the target culture, thus distorting the original text

#### **6.1 Fourth Sequence: Rescuing Sue (Full Timing 00:32:38,000-00:34:35,000)**

While driving along the street Walt sees Sue, his young Hmong neighbour, who is being harassed by three black youths. Reluctantly, he decides to intervene and pulls over in his pick-up. The leader of the gang, Monk, immediately throws the first insult. Walt gets out of the car, slowly and deliberately, and the verbal sparring begins. Walt pulls a gun on the group, while exhorting Sue to get into his truck. Trey, Sue's 'wigger'<sup>27</sup> boyfriend who has been cowering in the background, then congratulates Walt on his performance. Walt's disparaging response shows that he has no more sympathy for this character than he does for the three adversaries he has just overcome. In a withering reply, he verbally floors Trey, gets Sue into the truck and drives off.

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<sup>27</sup> According to *RSDB* a wigger is a 'white nigger' in American slang.

### **6.1.1 Black slang, ST analysis**

In this sequence racial slurs interlaced with swearwords are used to very different effect, and in a very different context to the two previous sequences. From the outset here we have a series of face threatening situations where the real issue at stake is establishing dominance and power. A whole gamut of criteria comes into play to shape the power relations; age, ethnic origin, gender, sexuality and physical violence, and all are laid bare here. Bald, on record and purposefully confrontational, the exchanges in the following stretch of dialogue demonstrate a notion of face (Goffman 1967) as the antithesis to Brown and Levison's postulations on Politeness Theory (1987); the speakers and addressees have no desire to collaborate in saving each other's face. Rather, the protagonists of this scene, Walt and Monk, aim to demolish and humiliate each other, thus violating societal taboos<sup>28</sup> regarding politeness in order to achieve their ends. In other words, their attitudes and behaviour could be construed as anti-social. This clash is due to many factors: Walt and the gang members are of different age, different ethnicities, and probably different socio-economic circumstances. Most certainly they do not share the same sociolect. Although both groups use abusive and offensive language, Walt's very particular idiolect establishes this generational and sociolinguistic distance.

Defined by Allen and Burridge (2006: 31) as 'words or expressions which have offensive connotations about the denotatum and/or the people addressed', dysphemisms are deployed in this pragmatic situation in two ways. On the one hand, insults and obscenities are used to ironic, even comic effect; on the other hand, they serve as a weapon to insult, humiliate, and degrade. This latter use of offensive language is also reflected in the voice prosody and kinesics. For example Monk's opening line 'What the fuck you looking at, old man?' is said in a challenging, derisive, and threatening tone, stressing the short, hard word 'fuck'. Walt growls his response 'What the hell you spooks up to' with the accent on 'hell'. The intonation in both instances is essential to create meaning, informing the auditors (Bell 1984) what to expect the ensuing scene.

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<sup>28</sup> For a definition of taboo in this context, see Allen and Burridge 2006, especially pp. 27 onwards.

Monk’s body language indicates a defiant stance. When Walt pulls up to the curb, Monk is loose-limbed and relaxed, cigarette in hand, sure of his territory. He adopts more aggressive gesticulations with an accusing finger pointed at Walt, on hearing the racial insult ‘spooks’, adding to a sense of foreboding. These intersemiotic elements go to create the overall meaning of the sequence, one which is full of tension, irony, intertextuality, and coded cultural references.

In terms of dysphemism, there is an almost clichéd insistence on standard swearwords (‘fuck’ ‘shit’ ‘motherfucker’), which appear in practically every utterance. A deeper analysis of their rendering in the ST also yields some remarkable comparative data on linguistic taboos within the two lingua-cultures under discussion as discussed below; the focus here is firstly on the inordinate number of overt and covert references to ethnic origin, age, and race crudely intended as colour of the skin. Walt is varyingly referred to as ‘old man’, ‘pops’, and ‘honky’. He is described as having an ‘old wrinkly white ass’ and is even referred to as ‘nigga’ by one of the gang, throwing an interesting light on the current usage of this greatest of all racial taboo words. Walt himself never utters the ‘n-word’. His preference is rather for outmoded slurs like ‘spook’ or ‘spade’ to denote African Americans, while he uses ‘Paddy’ to refer to Trey, a young man of Irish origin, and the unusual term, ‘ofay’ to denote white.

Table 3 below provides a succinct overview of how the Italian renderings for dubbing dealt with the slurs in this sequence. Table 4 on the other hand outlines attempts at finding the etymological roots of the ST expressions.

<b>English Source Text</b>	<b>Italian Translation</b>	<b>Back Translation</b>
honky	-	-
spooks	bulli	bullies
white ass	-	-
nigga	rottinculo	broken arse
(super)spade	palle nere	black balls
ofay	-	-
Paddy	irlandese	Irishman

**Table 3. SL/TL comparisons of racial slurs in sequence four**

<b>Slur</b>	<b>ethnicity</b>	<b>RSDB and OED Definitions</b>
Honky/	Whites	U.S. Black slang. A white man; white men collectively. Also attrib. or as adj.

		Disparaging in all applications. Possibly comes from the term 'Honky Tonk', which is a type of country music. Another interesting theory suggests it originated as 'Hunky' (and 'Bohunk') to refer to Slavic and Hungarian immigrants and eventually transformed into 'Honkey' to refer to all White people. Might also come from the African Wolof word 'Honq' meaning red or pink and used to describe white men. Yet another theory has it originating from white men honking their horns to call on the lounge singer/prostitute types in 1920's Harlem ( <i>RSDB</i> ).
Spook	Blacks	<i>slang</i> (orig. and chiefly U.S.). A derogatory term for a black person. Because of their dark skin, which can blend into the night, making them ghost-like.
Spade	Blacks	<i>slang</i> (orig. U.S.) depreciatory and offensive. As a term of contempt or casual reference among white people: a black person, esp. a black man. Formerly (among African Americans): a very dark-skinned black person. Possible origin 'back as the ace of spades'.
Ofay	White	U.S. <i>slang</i> (orig. and chiefly in African-American usage). Chiefly derogatory or depreciative. A white person. The root of the word appears to come from the Ibibio Afia, white or light-coloured. Hence in Harlem Offay means any light-coloured person and therefore a European. 1956 B. Holiday <i>Lady sings Blues</i> v. 63, 'Most of the ofays, the white people, who came to Harlem those nights were looking for atmosphere'.
Paddy	Irish	An Irishman. Freq. used as a derogatory form of address.

**Table 4. Definitions and possible etymologies of the racial slurs in sequence four.**

The following set of examples and comparative analyses demonstrate the difficulties these lexical areas have caused to the translator. It will be seen that some of the racial insults have been completely erased along with other taboo words, while others have undergone a semantic shift towards target culture norms.

Apart from the overtly racial, some of the marked usage of street slang found in the dialogue also requires some decoding to understand the connotative meaning in the context. This is not an easy task unless one has access to insider knowledge as it is hard to find precise definitions other than folklore and websites specializing in this type of vocabulary (such as *Urban Dictionary.com*).

### **6.1.2 Comparative analysis of TT**

As we have seen from the previous sequences, it is the lexical field of racial slurs that has caused the most problems in rendering the verbal text. The dubbed Italian version lacks the impact of the source text; semantic gaps are large and looming, slurs are decimated, covered by insults of a more generic nature, or simply omitted. Furthermore, some discrepancies can be noted between the pitch, intonation and delivery of the dubbed speech in comparison with the ST that has a visible impact on

the intensity of the sequence. It is worth reiterating here that audiovisual products are obviously multisemiotic texts and therefore the actual sound quality of words and voice prosody play a crucial role in meaning making. Thus, for film dubbing these paralinguistic considerations must be taken into account along with the translation of the linguistic content. In the field of literary translation, Berman (1985, in Venuti 2004: 283) discusses what he refers to as ‘sonorous richness’ of a text, which can be lost in the translation process. From the example below, the following two instances of changes in prosody, sound, and verbal rhythm clearly illustrate this point.

**Example 13. Walt goes into the breach**

What the fuck you looking at, old man.

Che cazzo hai da guardare, vecchio?  
[What the fuck have you got to look at, old man?]

What the hell are you spooks up to?

Voi bulli che state combinando?  
[You bullies, what are you up to?]

Spooks?

Bulli?  
[Bullies?]

You better get your ass on, honky, while I still let you. That’s what you better do.

È meglio che tiri via il culo, finché te lo permetto.  
[It’s better if you pull your arse away, while I still let you].

That’s right, bitch.

Ti conviene.  
[It’s better.]

From the very first line, the verbal gauntlet is thrown down to Walt who appears to have met his match in the street slang sparring of the black youths. It has been argued

that ‘fuck’ has lost its ‘semantic intensity’ due to the frequency of its current usage (Hughes 2006: 192-4; Allan and Burridge 2006: 106-107), but it is hard to deny that its sound quality when pronounced with force still packs a vocal punch. There is no doubt that the emphatic use of the expletive ‘fuck’ in the opening line is grossly offensive, the stressed syllable in the sentence uttered it resonates with violent intent. The interrogative is translated with the equally vulgar expression, ‘Che cazzo hai da guardare, vecchio’, an acceptable, suitable, and fit-for-purpose transposition for the target culture. However, the soft ‘c’ and open vowel sounds in ‘e’ and ‘a’ have a milder impact than the hard, fricative ‘f’ in ‘fuck’ followed by a closed vowel sound. It is also a question of sonority which renders Walt’s retort in the TT dubbing rather innocuous. The question, ‘Voi bulli che state combinando?’ is delivered with a sing-song intonation rendering it far more innocuous than the ST version – it could be argued though that the actor dubbing Eastwood’s voice might have decided to perform this sentence in a slightly different manner.

Moving on to the racial insults and their renderings in the the TT, ‘Spook’ is the first one and is uttered by Walt. It has already been mentioned above that this is an uncommon slur nowadays. In fact the youths seem more puzzled than offended by its use. It has been transposed in the TT as *bulli*, a loan word from the English ‘bully’, used in neo-standard Italian to denote an arrogant, swaggering, overbearing young man who wants to dominate even by force. In short, a bully<sup>29</sup>. While it is true that this definition perfectly describes the behaviour of these young men, the term has absolutely no reference to race or colour, and therefore the utterance loses important semantic meaning. In fact the surprised expressions and exclamations of the youths at being insulted in such an old-fashioned way in the ST are incongruous in the TT, belying the use of the word *bullo* as it has none of connotations of ‘spook’. Furthermore, the question in the target text ‘Voi bulli, che state combinando?’ places emphasis on the agents, i.e. the youths, whereas the ST stresses ‘What the Hell are you spooks up to?’ placing emphasis on ‘what’ is being done rather than ‘who’ is doing it.

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. De Mauro, *Dizionario della lingua Italiana* (2000), and *Il Ragazzini Dizionario Inglese Italiano/Italiano Inglese* (2005).

Monk's retort, 'You'd better get your ass on, honky' employs the first and only purely racial slur used against Walt. For this reason it is significant to the lexical texture (Berman 1985, in Venuti 2004) of the dialogue. There is no attempt to render the slur against whites in the TT, it has simply been omitted. As a note on street slang, one of the black youths refers to Walt as 'bitch' in the next line. Contrary to what one might think, this term is not used to cast aspersions on Walt's manhood by implying he is a female, effeminate or a prostitute. According to the *Urban Dictionary* contributors and compilers, 'bitch' can also be used to denote 'a person who performs a task for another, usually degrading in status'. This reference has also been eliminated from the TT which renders the exclamation with a simple 'ti conviene'.

**Example 14. Verbal sparring: Linguistic taboos to the fore**

What the fuck you think you at?

Giusto, stronzo, chi cazzo sei?

[Right, shit, who the fuck do you think you are?]

Ever notice how you come across somebody once in a while that you shouldn't have fucked with? That's me.

Avete mai fatto caso che ogni tanto s'incrocia qualcuno che non va fatto incazzare? Quello sono io.

[Have you ever noticed that sometimes you come across someone who you shouldn't piss off? That's me.]

Man, you fucking crazy man. Get out of here man.

Sei matto, vecchio del cazzo. Vedi di filare.

[You are mad, fucking old man. See you get away.]

Why don't you get your ass up out of here, before I kick you old wrinkly white ass?

Porta via il tuo culo grinzoso prima che te lo faccio nero a calci

[Take away your wrinkly arse before I kick it black].

Crazy motherfucker, man. What's wrong with him, man?

Il rottinculo è matto. Che cazzo vuole fare? Che cazzo fa?  
[The broken arse is crazy. What the fuck does he want to do? What the fuck is he doing?]

What the fuck? This motherfucker crazy man

Cosa gli prende?  
[What's wrong with him?]

What's wrong with this nigga, man? What the hell...

É da manicomio.  
[He should be locked away.]

Get in the truck.

Sali in macchina.  
[Get in the car.]

This crazy motherfucker, man. What's wrong with him, man?

È proprio matto.  
[He's really crazy.]

When it comes to dishing out the insults then, Walt has met his 'racist' match when one of the youths refers his 'wrinkly white old ass', with an overt reference to skin colour, thus using a racial slur against Walt. The TT ignores this aspect and ironically uses the expression 'te lo faccio [il culo] nero a calci'.

The foul language comes thick and fast now as another gang member calls Walt a 'crazy motherfucker'. The highly taboo nature of this obscenity in the Italian lingua-culture has been discussed elsewhere (see section 3.6). What is curious to note in here is that in the ST 'motherfucker' is uttered three times in a very short space of time; in the TT it is totally omitted twice, and once it is relayed with what might be considered a 'functional equivalent' but is in fact a very crude insult to homosexuals. Rather than its standard rendering as 'figlio di puttana' [son of a bitch] in Italian film dubbing (Pavesi 2005: 47), the translator has here chosen to use 'rottinculo' [broken arse], an extremely disparaging insult to passive homosexuals (Zanni 2001; 291) for

which it would be difficult to find an equally explicit equivalent in English<sup>30</sup>. What in fact has taken place here is a transposition of the linguistic manifestation of cultural prejudices; racial for homosexual, a theme which is explored in-depth in the next sequence.

The final racial reference in this example illustrates how the connotations of slurs can undergo quite dramatic changes in their usage over a period of time. The word in question is ‘nigger’. Much scholarship has been dedicated to its origins, history and the evolution and diversity of its uses today (see Asim 2007; Azzaro 2007; Kennedy 2002; Israel 2009 for a cursory glance), the breadth of which is beyond the scope of the present work. For our purposes it is enough to be aware that ‘nigger’ (or ‘nigga’) is no longer a straightforward racial slur, but its gamut of nuances in modern day interpretations have created an absolute hornets’ nest regarding its use, let alone in its translation.

In the example under discussion, the connotation of ‘nigga’ is most probably closest to the gangster rap tradition. That is, it is used to refer to ‘mere ordinary, law-abiding men or to lowlifes unworthy of respect’. On the other hand “‘real nigga” is an appellation reserved for those who have earned it’ (Asim 2007: 220) Paradoxically, the black youth uses this ironically disparaging term in referring to Walt who until now has been the only character in the film to delight in the irony of racial slurs. The problems surrounding the translation of these semantic inflections have been neatly avoided. In the TT the word has simply been omitted with no attempt at all to compensate for the loss.

The difficulty of rendering ‘black slang’ in Italian dubbing has been noted by Paollinelli and Di Fortunato when they describe the dubbing process of the film *Jackie Brown* (dir. by Tarantino, 1997). On its release Tarantino’s film caused a storm of protest due to its racist language – the word ‘nigga’ being invoked approximately 40 times (Asim 2007: 190). Paollinelli and Di Fortunato (2005: 62) comment:

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<sup>30</sup> Insults to gays which refer specifically to the act of sodomy tend to be wryly metaphorical or such as ‘fudge packer’, ‘toe toucher’, or ‘bum bandit’. Other gay insults have a whimsical element, such as ‘fairy’, ‘poofter, or’ ponce’. The word ‘gay’ itself can be used as an insult, voice prosody and context rendering it offensive.

Sulla possibilità di rendere in italiano questo particolare colore del parlato ferve il dibattito [...] L'uso di 'nigga' per indicare in senso ironicamente dispregiativo i 'fratelli neri' creano ogni volta al dialoghista il problema di mantenerne l'efficacia in italiano senza cadere nello stereotipo. Riteniamo che il problema vada affrontato volta per volta, e, che – poiché una traduzione non va fatta parola per parola –, si possa riproporre un linguaggio colorito andando a intervenire su quella che è la sua sostanza: l'invenzione e non la ripetizione. [The debate rages on as to the feasibility of rendering this particular nuance/feel of the spoken language in Italian. [...] the use of 'nigga' to indicate in an ironically disparaging way our 'black brothers' always creates the problem for the adapter-dialogist to maintain the effect in Italian without falling into a stereotype. We maintain that the problem should be tackled each time separately, and given that a translation is not done word for word, a more colourful language can be proposed by acting on the very substance of that language: invention and not repetition.]

**Example 15. Walt retaliates**

(Walt pulls a gun)

Come on now, hey pops. Come on now.

Ehi, nonnetto. Calmo, dai.  
[Hey, little granddad, calm down].

Shut your fucking face. You fucking don't listen, do you? Now, get in the truck.

Chiudi quella bocca di merda. Credete che io scherzi, eh?  
[Shut your mouth of shit. You think I'm joking, eh?]

Go on. Get in the truck, now. Shit.

Fai quello che dice.  
[Do as he says].

Way to go, old man.

Bravo, nonnetto.  
[Well done, little granddad]

Shut up pussy. What's all that 'bro' shit, anyway? Want to be Super Spade or something? These guys don't want to be your 'bro' and I don't blame them. Now get your ofay Paddy ass on down the road.

Tu, zitto, femminuccia. Li chiami fratelli, questi animali? Vorresti avere le palle nere come loro? Questi non ti vogliono come fratello, e fanno bene (dubbing) Ora vedi di portare a casa il tuo culetto irlandese.

[You, shut up, little girl. You call them brothers, these animals? Would you like to have black balls like them? These don't want you as a brother, and they are right. Now see about taking your little Irish arse home.]

Take care now.

Statemi bene.  
[Take care]

Yeah. You, too

Sì, anche tu.  
[Yes, you, too]

Oh Yeah.

Contaci.  
[You can count on it.]

The example shows a notable loss of lexical richness and density. Firstly, the tight-lipped admonition from Walt, 'Shut your fucking face, you don't fucking listen, do you?' is a typical example of the polyfunctional use of 'fuck' in the English language, both grammatically and pragmatically (see Ghassempur 2011: 49-64) which provides many a translator with a challenge. The adapter here has once again resorted to a translational routine by using the scatological expression 'di merda'. Further on in the text a gratuitous insult to the black youths has been added by calling them 'animali' [animals] where the ST makes no mention at all. The ironic epithet 'Super Spade' has been neutralised somewhat with the expression '*palle nere*' [black balls], and finally, the youth of Irish origin is told to get his 'ofay Paddy ass' on down the road in the ST, while the TT rendering loses both 'Paddy' and 'ofay'. 'Paddy' denotes someone of Irish descent and is considered slang, and derogatory (*OED*), while ofay (see table 4 above) is another slur for whites.

### ***6.1.3 Remarks on the fourth sequence***

The above examples expound some of the issues in rendering street slang fused with bad language and racial slurs. Here several factors concur in creating a considerably flattened text in comparison with the ST; perhaps the change in pragmatic mood was not fully understood, insufficient knowledge of ST lexicon and of the specific sociolects could have resulted in expressions being ignored or omitted, while the dubbed intonation and inflexion sometimes conveyed a different meaning to the original. These observations and criticism may all be more or less valid; the significant issue here is though that a compensation of the offensive language seems to turn regularly towards sexual or gender-based insulting words to compensate racial slurs.

What is more to the point for this study is the suppression of racial overtones, leaving the TT bereft of the many linguistic nuances in the lexical sphere of ethnophaulisms found in the ST. Secondly, confirmation of target culture values influencing translational choices can be seen in the elimination of several taboo words, in particular ‘motherfucker’ and the deliberate insertion of a homophobic insult where one was not present in the ST, thus deforming the original subtext. This last line of reasoning is explored in depth in the next sequence discussed below.

### **6.3 Sequence five: The ‘gook’ goes ‘gay’ (Full Timing 00:12:40,000-00:14:15,000)**

Thao is subjected to a tirade of racial and sexual insults perpetrated by a group of Hispanic gangbangers<sup>31</sup>. The scene opens as Thao is ambling down a deserted road, his head buried in a book. The menacing sound of a heavy bass riff can be heard blasting out of an approaching car. The subtitles identify the song as the ominously entitled *Esto es guerra* [This is War], by rap artists *Convoy Qbanito*. A growing sense of foreboding is evoked as the car full of youths gets closer and starts to cruise alongside the unsuspecting Thao. One of the gangbangers lets out a long wolf whistle, leans out of the back window and, with a smirk, starts to taunt. Thao walks on and is staunchly silent. He remains impervious throughout the scene ignoring the crescendo

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<sup>31</sup> ‘A gangbanger is ‘a member of a street gang, *especially* one who engages in gang violence’, *OED*.

of insults, vulgarities, and threats. Retribution arrives in the form of Thao's delinquent cousin Spider. Having observed the scene from his own gang's car he decides that his 'little cousin' needs his protection. His belligerent manner and verbal intimidation challenge the aggressors, who finally drive off in a cloud of dust leaving the apparently unperturbed Thao to his cousin.

The scene under examination here illustrates a multi-layered and complex culture clash between two minority marginalized or out-groups. Both the Hmong and the Hispanics portrayed here could be considered as currently occupying the lower echelons of the US society, representing within the dominant social system ethnic sub-groups who are economically and socially disadvantaged with a high percentage of youth unemployment. Yet despite the fact they share the stigma of being 'outsiders' to the predominant white middle class, there is no sign of solidarity between the two ethnic groups. Quite the reverse, the discrimination based on ethnic Otherness is exaggerated to extreme levels where sexuality, customs, and habits and the issue of dominance are all at issue. The macho Latino youths deride the 'effeminate' Asian male as personified by Thao. The puerile pleasure the gangbangers derive from attempting to decimate what they perceive as Thao's 'face', his 'public self-image' is indicative of the stereotypical Latino ethos that deems homosexuality an affront to male dignity. The concept of face in this instance is defined by Goffman (1955: 213) as 'the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self, delineated in terms of approved social attributes'. These offensive insinuations regarding Thao's sexuality juxtaposed with blatant racist taunts such as 'gook', 'slope', and 'rice nigger' are almost comic in their hyperbolic effect. The voice prosody however is sufficiently curt to retain an edgy menace while the constant and emphatic enunciation of the adjective 'fucking' renders the intentionality perfectly clear (for Hatim and Mason's notion of intentionality, see 1997: 219).

The meaning of 'gook' is difficult to date and equally unclear although its use became more widespread following the Korean War: for 'slope', the etymology is also rooted in the wars between the US Army and Asian countries in the Twentieth century, while 'rice-nigger' has more recent origins in modern street slang. Table 5

below outlines the possible etymology or at least the known denotations and connotations of the terms.

Gook	Asians	Term most likely dates back to the Philippine-American War (~1900) and has been used against a wide range of peoples, usually Asians but occasionally Europeans and even the English. Unknown origins, possibly ‘goo-goo’, from the Tagalog language (a major language spoken in the Philippines). Although many have it originating in Korea either by referring Korea’s original name, Hanguk, or during the Korean War when Koreans would ask American GI’s ‘Mi Guk?’ (‘American?’ in Korean) which sounded like they were saying ‘Me gook’. Adopted for use in the Vietnam War it should only apply to Koreans, but the Vietnam War made it most popular when applied towards the Vietnamese (RSDB).
Slope	Asians	Slope; US slang. An oriental person; more recently in particular, Vietnamese (abusive); also as ‘slopehead’ in <i>OED</i> . Origin, coined during Korean war, etymology, probably from slope, slant, reference to Asian eyes or shape of head.
Rice-Nigger	Asians	Rice-nigger is a common ‘derogatory slang term for a Chinese or other Asian person’ ( <i>Urban Dictionary</i> ).

**Table 5. Etymologies of racial slurs pertaining to Asian ethnicities**

Thao’s defence strategy throughout is absolute silence. His avoidance of conflict means he makes no verbal attempt to shield himself from the onslaught of FTAs. An FTA can be loosely defined as ‘those acts that by their nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or the speaker’ (Brown and Levinson 1987: 67; see section 2.7 for a fuller discussion). As such, a FTA can be anything from asking a favour, demanding payment, or, as in this case, verbal acts that imply challenges, disapproval, criticism, contempt or ridicule (ibid.: 66).

Six examples of disparaging insults which combine racial and homophobic overtones pertaining to people of Asian origins are discussed in the following analysis providing an overview of the different ways in which the TT seems to approach this specific area of dysphemism. Below some of the dysphemistic and racial expressions under discussion are summarised. In comparing source text with the transpositions at word level in the target text, a significant shift in emphasis and semantic meaning can be noted. Of the six expressions illustrated here, three have been rendered in the target language with homophobic reinforcements which are totally absent in the source text. The effect this has ultimately modifies the global meaning of the verbal and visual sequence, thus changing its cultural significance.

English	Italian	Back translation
chinito	culo giallo	yellow ass
Jackass and the Rice Stalk	Pollifrocio o Gialla neve	queer/queen/fairy/bugger o yellow snow
Homey	finocchietto giallo	little yellow fennel
(fucking) slope	muso giallo (di merda)	yellow muzzle
gooks	topi di fogna	sewer rats
(fucking) rice niggers	(froci) mangia riso del cazzo	(queer) rice-eaters of the prick.

**Table 6. Synopsis of the lexis to be discussed in the samples**

Table 6 illustrates the variety of insults which illustrate the recurring features of this slang: crude, vulgar, and deviant. The issue addressed in discussing their rendering focuses on the culture-bound ethnophaulisms and the translation solutions in reproducing their effects. It is however necessary to analyse them within the context of situation in order to fully grasp the implications of using them in terms of characterization and their complete verbal and extra-verbal cultural references. What follows is a contrastive analysis whose purpose is to describe the translation process that aimed to respond to what has already been identified as a gap between the two lingua-cultural systems.

### **6.3.1 From race to homophobia**

The next examples introduces further disconcerting changes of focus in the rendering, in which the offensive language is redirected from race to sexuality, compensating racial slurs with heavy weight gender-based and homophobic insults.

#### **Example 16. Gangbangers provoke Thao.**

Yo! Hey! Is you....is you a boy or is you a girl, man? I can't tell.

Ehi, Cosa sei? Sei un maschietto o una femminuccia, non si capisce.

[What are you? Are you a little boy or a little girl? It cannot be understood.]

The first utterance is a provocative and direct threat to Thao's face but is not overtly racist – the source text focus here is on male virility, masculinity and homosexuality. The opening taunt in the ST shows the marked use of the third person singular instead

of the second, indicating, perhaps, the speaker's poor grammatical skills or in any case an attempt to mark the character's sociolect. It is commonly noted that the conjugation of the verb 'to be' poses problems to less educated native speakers and learners of English as a second language. It is also the feature of some sociolects and dialects. While the verb 'Essere' poses similar problems to non native Italian speakers, in film dialogues often the infinitive is used to mark the non-native status of the speaker<sup>32</sup>. Here, though, we are dealing with what are probably native speakers, in the sense that they were born in the US, and this grammatical error in the ST is not reflected in the target text.

The idiomatic expression in English 'I can't tell' has no equivalent, so an impersonal use of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person with the negative form of the verb 'capire' [understand] has been employed. This changes the thematic emphasis (Baker 1992: 169-71) of the affirmation, however, implying that Thao's sex can generally not be determined by anyone who looks at him, whereas the ST gives an active sentence, thereby placing the responsibility of not understanding on the speaker. The Italian diminutive forms 'maschietto' [little man] and 'femminuccia' [little girl], and the repetition of the interrogative, 'are you' accentuate the infantile nature of the taunt. The voice prosody however is quite different in the two texts; the source text has a gruff, brusque tone, while the target text has the effect of imitating a child's voice, rendering the insult less pungent and more puerile.

In the next example, the insult 'chinito' could be described as a Hispanic diminutive for 'chink'.

#### **Example 17. Racial slurs and homophobia**

Hey, chinito, hey, if you was in the pen, I'd be fucking you in the ass. You'd be my bitch...

Ehi, culo giallo, se eri nella mia cella ti rompevo il culo. Diventavi la mia puttana.

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<sup>32</sup> For an overview and discussion of the ways in which non-standard spoken syntax by non-native speakers is rendered in Italian film dubbing, see Serenella Zanotti, 'Racial stereotypes on screen: dubbing strategies from past to present', forthcoming 2012.

[Hey, yellow ass, if you was in my cell, I broke your ass. You became my whore.]

‘Chinito’ has been rendered in the target text with ‘culo giallo’, here yet another permutation of the ‘classic’, expression ‘muso giallo’<sup>33</sup> in a more vulgar guise. Marked non-standard syntax is found again in the ST with the second conditional subordinate clause ‘if you was in the pen...’ instead of ‘if you were in the pen’. This is rendered in the target text with *Se eri...*; this use of the imperfect tense where the subjunctive should be used is marked. Although quite common in the spoken language, it is indicative of the low socio-cultural background of the speaker and still considered incorrect in neostandard Italian therefore reflecting the conjugational error in the ST. The conclusion of the sentence pushes innuendo to the explicit, illustrating an interesting socio-cultural comparison between SL and TL in terms of linguistic taboos. While in the ST the gangbanger says ‘I’d be fucking you in the ass’ – the target language expression ‘Ti rompevo il culo’ is not so sexually explicit, it literally means ‘I’d break your arse’. Apart from its literal meaning ‘to break’, ‘rompere’ has other connotations in Italian, for example, ‘to disturb’, ‘to irritate’, ‘to nag’. Accompanied by graphic gestures and kinetic action, however, we are left in no doubt that ‘I’d be fucking you in the ass’ refers precisely to sodomy in a very crude and violent way.

#### **Example 18. Insults and inventive translation**

What are you reading, Jackass and the Rice Stalk?

Che stai leggendo, Pollifrocino o Giallaneve?

[What are you reading, Polly-little-fennel or yellow snow?]

The rhetorical question ‘What are you reading, *Jackass and the Rice Stalk?*’ performs several functions within the context of this sequence in the film. Firstly, it mocks the very fact that Thao is reading; secondly, the insinuation that he reads fairy stories

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<sup>33</sup> Giuliana Sana’s already cited review of *Gran Torino* for *aSinc* takes a critical look at the Italian dubbing – albeit also introducing slips in her typographical representations of the dysphemetic words of the ST – ‘in the Italian version these insults are uniformly rendered with the classic *muso giallo* (frequently used term in the dubbing of old American war films, evoking the exact context being referred to’ [my translation].

reinforces the first comment about him being somewhat childlike. Thirdly it reiterates the gangbangers' point of view that Thao is stupid, and finally there is the ironic racial undertone. To achieve this, the title of the fairy tale *Jack and the Beanstalk* has been distorted to 'Jackass and the Rice Stalk' as a mildly racial and dysphemistic insult to comic effect. 'Jackass' is American slang for 'idiot' while 'Rice Stalk' carries obvious ethnic connotations. The two culturally specific elements require special attention in their rendering in the target language as a literal translation would have little meaning in the target culture and the wordplay would inevitably be lost. *Jack and the Beanstalk* is a fairy tale well-known in the English-speaking world, with over two hundred years of circulation in English, with probable Slavic origins, but it is not as widely known in the target culture, and secondly, a literal Italian translation would not have allowed for the necessary wordplay that renders the insult humorous. The translator has chosen to retain the lexis of fairy tales and has also maintained the racial insult by using an example familiar to the target culture and adapted it to the purpose. In an attempt to keep to the same semantic field, the adaptors have played on the names of two female characters from children's fiction. *Pollicina* (*Thumbelina* in the English version of the fairy tale) becomes *Pollifrocino* (*frocino* is a diminutive of *frocio*, an insult to gays) while *Biancaneve* [Snow White] becomes *Gialla neve* [Yellow Snow]. Here, then, the strategy is one of equivalent effect (Nida 1964: 159). There is a distinct semantic shift in the target language solutions adopted in the rendering; nonetheless, the first insult *Pollifrocino* is related to homosexuality rather than stupidity, implicit in the source text, and the fact that the target text contains the names of two fairy tales, not one, both conveying feminine, or perhaps in this case, effeminate connotations.

#### **Example 19. Transforming homey into homosexual**

Look at me when I talk to you, homes.<sup>34</sup>

Ehi, finocchietto giallo, guardami quando ti parlo.

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<sup>34</sup> 'Homes' is a variation of the American street slang term 'homeboy'. The *Merriam-Webster online dictionary* defines it as 'a boy or man from one's neighborhood, hometown, or region, a fellow member of a youth gang, an inner city youth'. *Urban Dictionary* also defines it as a term of respect, or as having French origins, from 'homme' which means man.

[Hey, little yellow fennel, look at me when I speak to you.]

As ridicule appears to have little effect, the gangbangers' sarcasm turns to more aggressive heckling in an attempt to goad Thao into a response. The urgency of the ST imperative 'Look at me' and the street slang appellative, 'homes', have been transposed in the target text with an insult that plays on sexuality and race. Here it is necessary to explicate the term 'finocchio' (literally fennel, as noted above), which is a dysphemistic term for homosexual in colloquial Italian. The etymology and the semantic shift of this derogatory expression have uncertain origins, however there is an interesting urban legend that connects the American English derogatory term 'fag' or 'faggot' for homosexuals with the Italian 'finocchio'. According to writer Giovanni Dall'Orto in his 'The history of eleven terms for homosexuals':

The etymological explanation which has really caused a scandal in recent years links fennel to the medieval act of burning sodomites at the stake. According to this explanation it was customary to use wood from the wild fennel plant, or even bundles of fennel thrown onto the fire in order to cover the smell of burning flesh.

Dall'Orto traces the origins and history of the expression – unfortunately without providing any evidence of rigorous criteria for his etymological and lexicographic research – but finally comes to the conclusion that 'the most likely etymology is without a doubt the one which links the current meaning of 'finocchio' with the meaning the word had in the middle ages when it had the acceptance of 'despicable', 'contemptible', and 'worthless'<sup>35</sup>. The *Online Etymology Dictionary* also acknowledges a similar legend regarding the American insult 'faggot' but quickly proves it wrong at least as far as England is concerned:

The oft-heard statement that male homosexuals were called faggots in reference to their being burned at the stake is an etymological urban legend. Burning was sometimes a punishment meted out to homosexuals in Christian Europe [...] but in England, where parliament had made homosexuality a

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<sup>35</sup> '(Obsolete) a silly, worthless person [14th Century; from latin *fenuculu(m)*].

capital offense in 1533, hanging was the method prescribed. Any use of faggot in connection with public executions had long become an English historical obscurity by the time the word began to be used for ‘male homosexual’ in 20<sup>th</sup>-century American slang, whereas the contemptuous slang word for ‘woman’ was in active use. It was used in this sense in early twentieth century by D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce, among others.

There is an extremely significant etymological and lexicographical point to rise regarding ‘finocchio’ and the translatability from Italian into English of the term ‘finocchio’ deserves one final observation. Mainly untranslatable with its denotative equivalent *fennel*, the translator could only have recourse to an English sociolect that, being particular of an Anglophone community, will retain the vulgarity of the derogative connotative meaning in comparison with the ordinary use of the denotative term. Only a sociolect of a distinct Anglophone language community would deliver similar meanings and nuances; i.e. equivalent terms such as ‘fag’, ‘poof’, ‘bugger’, or ‘queer’ are not interchangeable and would be appropriate only to specific social group of speakers. British English and American English often have very different terminology when it comes to swearing and insults.

### **6.3.2 From homophobia to racism**

Returning to our analysis, it could be argued that although there is no ‘fag’, ‘gay’, or ‘bugger’ in the ST here, the insult ‘finocchietto giallo’ fits in well with the general mood and linguistic context of the passage which juxtaposes racial slurs with homophobic undertones. It could even be affirmed that the insistence on insulting homosexuals in the target text is actually very much in keeping with the Italian way of delivering racial insults, which often have an added sexual reference to enhance the offensive impact (see Polselli 2007: 136). Possibly, this *deviation* or shift in rendering racial slurs has to be considered the most significant finding of this study as its recurrence in the translator’s solutions is evidence of a non-accidental approach; it could be argued that although not accidental this does not mean that this deviation is necessarily *wanted* or *explicitly* planned. Precisely because of the uncertainty on assessing the translator’s aware act of deviation, the discourse here refers more to the

norms of expectation, to Toury's law of standardization, and to Simeoni's postulation of the translator's *habitus*, as the next sections explain.

However this shift in semantic emphasis does have consequences for meaning transfer at text level. For example, the theme of the ST utterance 'Look at me when I talk to you' is the verb in imperative mood, 'Look'. This is important because it highlights the fact that the gangbangers find Thao's apparent indifference disconcerting; so much so that there is no insult, rather an exhortation on the part of the assailants who want to provoke a reaction. In the Italian dubbed film such insistence on a homosexual gibe in theme position of the sentence modifies this meaning. The shift is a significant deviation from the implied culture-bound behaviour of Thao: he is depicted in this sequence as continuing to behave according to the customs and rules of his culture, adopting a demeanour that his sister Sue explains in a later scene. Hmong people look down and never look their interlocutor in the eye; the direct eye-contact is considered rude. Furthermore, as we see Thao doing here, smiling and laughing is a way of hiding embarrassment and unease in the Hmong culture.

**Example 19. Mounting slurs and obscenities**

Fucking slopes, man, everywhere you look, man.

Dovunque ti giri trovi musi gialli di merda.  
[Everywhere you turn you find shitty yellow muzzles]

Gooks/Slopes everywhere we go, man.

Merdoesi topi di fogna.  
[Shitty sewer rats]

Go back to your rice paddy.

Tornatevene nelle risaie del cazzo.  
[Go back in the rice paddies (of the prick)]

The invective gets stronger and the racial slurs mount up. In the target text the occurrences of 'slope' are rendered with 'muso giallo', previously used in the same

sequence for ‘chinito’. This crescendo highlights the lack of alternatives in the TL for the variety of epithets and slurs in the SL. The verbal tick ‘man’ has been eliminated. ‘Gooks’<sup>36</sup> as discussed before in Table 5 dates back to the Korean war, military and derogatory against the population of Korea is rendered in Italian with ‘topi di fogna’ [sewer rat], a generic insult. This choice has little relevancy and is inaccurate. The racial slur ‘swamp rat’ exists in the SL and is even used by Walt, the reference being to the geographical characteristics of the Vietnamese or Korean countryside. Sewer rat instead would imply an urban animal and has no ethnic connotations. The reference to ‘rice paddy’ is kept in the target text in a sort of mixed solution which alternate, but not compensate, an omission to racial insults with a standardized form of insult similarly based on what are stereotypically perceived as the culinary habits of Asian populations.

**Example 20. Thao’s cousin to the rescue**

Yo, what’s up, motherfuckers?

Ehi, che volete vuoi, figli di puttana?  
[Hey, What do you want, sons of bitches?]

They fucking with you?

Ti stanno rompendo? Girate al largo pezzi di merda!  
[Are they bothering you? Keep away you pieces of shit!]

Fuck you, homeboy.

Andate affanculo.  
[Go and do an arse]

Go fucking back to your country.

Tornate nel vostro paese di merda.  
[Go back to your country of shit]

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<sup>36</sup> ‘US slang. Used as a term of contempt: a foreigner; *spec.* a coloured inhabitant of south-east Asia or elsewhere’, OED.

Oh, good, more fucking rice niggers.

Oh, bene, altri froci mangia riso del cazzo.

[Oh, good, more fag/queer/poof rice eaters of the prick]

In the last passage of dialogue the confrontation with Thao's cousin triggers a series of scatological and sexual dysphemisms, notably 'motherfucker' As discussed earlier, (see Section 6.2), for Pavesi (1996: 79) this swearword is impossible to translate literally into Italian 'dal momento che una simile resa esprimerebbe un concetto tabu, il rapporto incestuoso, fortemente interdetto nella lingua italiana' [Given that such a rendering would express a taboo concept, incestuous relationships, which is strongly prohibited in the Italian language]. Certainly, incestuous relationships are considered taboo in the Italian culture; one must hasten to add that these have been generally held to be a universal taboo by anthropologists, sociologists, and psychoanalysts alike for several decades now (Levi Strauss 1949; Durkheim 1897, 1963; Freud 1918/2009). The question at issue is here is the verbal representation of this societal taboo (Hughes 2006; 320) goes so far as to say that 'Clearly this term represents in its literal sense the violation of the most extreme sexual taboo, that of incest, and has thus been long regarded as a heinous term unmatched in impact'. This observation does not explain the verbal taboo in Italian either. What would explain it is probably more to do with the nature of the incest nominated in the insult, i.e. with the mother. The bond between Italian mothers and their sons is practically sacred, notoriously strong, if not verging on the Oedipus complex – which would in fact justify a creative rendering to replicate the power of offence of the source language - and it is once again these enduring links between religion and society<sup>37</sup> omnipresent in Italian culture that influence its forms of taboo language.

The last overt racial insult, 'fucking rice niggers' is translated with 'froci mangiariso del cazzo' [queer/fag rice-eaters of the prick]. The additional gay insult reaffirms the predilection for homophobic rather than racial dysphemisms in the target culture, which is duly reproduced in the TT renderings. Secondly, this invented term

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. section 3.6 regarding the insult 'son of a bitch.'

of racist abuse, like ‘maccheroni eater’ (see section 5.1.2) features eating habits. Allan & Burridge (2006: 189) emphasize:

Increasingly, it seems, food and drink are featuring in racial and ethnic slurs. Whereas early racial abuse displayed strong moral stereotyping (often with religious overtones) in modern times it plays much more on superficial characteristics to do with appearance and dietary habits. Abuse terms show a rich exuberance of racial insults based on food. Most of the expressions are extensions of the names of the food items stereotypically associated with each group.

### **Closing remarks**

In this last group of examples we have seen the invisibility of the translator cast an ideological slant to the text which, although present in the ST is greatly magnified in the target product. Here we have the demonstration, as noted previously by Poliselli, (see section 1. 6) that racial insults per se are not considered particularly offensive in the Italian lingua-culture; what makes them so is the addition of homophobic dysphemism.

## Conclusion

In the discipline of Translation Studies, one of the biggest challenges identified is the study of culture-bound expressions and the problems surrounding the ways in which their culture-specific meanings can or should transfer from source language to target language. In dealing with a lexical area such as racial slurs, steeped in societal taboos, ideology, and socio-cultural ethics, the questions adjoining their cross-cultural meaning transfer require further reflection. Apparently a terminological or lexical issue, the rendering of racial slurs across lingua-cultures goes much deeper than mere linguistic transposition, engendering far-reaching and complex ramifications relating to wider debates on cultural identity, the definition of in-groups and out-groups, and on the ways in which the boundaries between racism and taboo, the said and the unsaid, become blurred or redefined in different cultures. In other words, this lexical mêlée represents one of the thorniest issues; it goes beyond the scope of translation in the narrowest sense to embrace transversal themes such as cross-cultural aspects of race talk and the interpretation of political correctness in different lingua-cultures. The case study of racial slurs and obscene language in *Gran Torino* (2008) aimed to provide some stimuli for broader reflections on the complexity of race perception and use of offensive language. In the exploration of some of these themes, this study has focused on deviations to social and translation norms for the Italian rendering that shed some light on how one culture interprets another's prejudices via audiovisual translation. Albeit just a case study, *Gran Torino* provided evidence of significant connections and interrelations between race, religion, sexuality, and homophobia in the rendering of offensive language, which could fruitfully be developed into further doctoral research and beyond.

To summarise the findings, it is observed that in adapting *Gran Torino* for an Italian audience that would have listened to the dubbed version with Italian actors performing the dialogue, the translator has adopted, on the most part, a target-text oriented translation strategy. Modifying many insults to create new humorous epithets,

wordplays, and illusions, the translator's norms became those of the target society – thus allowing this study to further test Toury's law of normalization. At the same time the study has considered the thorny issues surrounding the question of the translator's ideology in rendering this particular semantic field, but also the translator's mental habitus in general, which consists in a combination of respect for target audience expectations and the adoption of the habitual repertoire of *dubbese*. On this very salient point, one of the most stimulating and debatable features of the original film, its racist language, has lost its essence as a discussion on US issues regarding racial tolerance and cohabitation with the Other. This loss has gone in some instances in a direction that favoured a homophobic slant in the Italian – partially due to linguistic constraints, but the study also wants to argue that it is partially due to more significant societal and translator's habitus.

The rendering of *Gran Torino* returns a rather paradoxical subversion of Venuti's notions of domestication/foreignisation (1995) that focus on the effects of Anglophone literature as a literature of a dominating language imposing domesticating strategies of translation on incoming foreign literature. In this target-oriented audiovisual translation Venuti's paradigm is inverted. As corroborating evidence it is useful here to refer to a comparative study of translations of *Harry Potter* comparing the Italian and Spanish versions with the source text carried out by Jeremy Munday (2008: 121). Subsequent to his analysis he asks: 'Is Italian culture given central position in its own culture, forcing the ST to adapt to it?' The case study of *Gran Torino* is possibly an answer to this rhetorical question, drawing upon a different text genre but describing phenomena that yield important evidence pertaining to this tendency. This study substantiates that the Italian translation follows a target-oriented macro-strategy privileging its own linguistic and cultural context to the depiction of foreign context. The translation approach can thus be seen as one in which a minority language domesticates the foreign to preserve its lingua-cultural specificity. The target culture here, the Italian culture, apparently prefers domestication, at least when it goes to the cinema.

Such an assumption, however, raises a set of disconcerting questions that open further avenues of research regarding the target culture's attitudes to linguistic taboos

and the way in which those attitudes are interpreted, represented, and reproduced by the dubbing industry, or in a broader context by the translator at large. Does the target culture prefer homophobic insults over racial insults? Does the translation normalization belong to the individual dubbers? Are they dealing with real viewers' expectations in respecting existing social paradigmatic views of cultural diversity and the Other as inferior? Does the audience or the translating strategies privilege a material and male-oriented vision of derogatory language in dealing with the culturally Other? Do Italian dubbing techniques give the impression that the Italian language in order to cope with racial slurs must consider the Other as a 'lower gender', be it gay or female – in the traditionally male-centred chauvinism?

In a broader framework, Italy has been under international scrutiny in recent years due to the scandals surrounding Berlusconi. It is noted in Chapter 2 that the current Prime Minister of Italy is no stranger to accusations of uttering non politically correct expressions. The foreign press have assiduously reported on his inopportune comments. Those comments were mediated via translation – how realistically and accurately do they reflect the source language utterances and the surrounding meta-debates? From an ideological point of view, in what ways could they influence the target audience's perception (in this case English) of the Italian lingua-culture? Possibly, future research combining translation analysis, case studies, sociological studies, and anthropological perspectives might provide answers to the challenges posed by the questions above to the core issue of the current degrees of linguistic taboo – what is worse a racial or an homophobic insult? Why can one replace the other in translating from one lingua-culture to another? These interrogatives could all be fertile starting points for intercultural and translational investigations on linguistic and societal taboos across the Italian and English-speaking cultures.

Returning to the present study, section 3.5.1 highlights the fact that Italy's dubbing industry is dominated by a handful of veterans some of whom have been working in the field for over thirty years. Such is Filippo Ottoni, dubbing director of *Gran Torino*. The film was a huge box office success in Italy as it was in English-speaking countries; therefore it would be naïve and professionally offensive to suggest that the quality of the dubbing was inadequate. The study is raising issues of a

different nature that go beyond the high quality professional practice of the individual and also for the dubbing industry itself. Indeed, viewed from the Italian lingua-culture perspective, the amusingly inventive lexical solutions were successful and many of the worst clichés of dubbing were avoided (such as ‘amico’ for ‘man’ or ‘fottuto’ for ‘fucking’ – though the former came into play in order to replace ‘goddamned’). What could be inferred from the analysis however, is a palpable socio-linguistic insensitivity to what are instead highly sensitive socio-linguistic issues, which surpasses the context of audiovisual translation. Social mores are wont at times to almost imperceptible shifts. These are shifts that nevertheless should be grasped by those who work in cultural production and the media. As Simeoni (1997: 31) observes:

It is theoretically possible for one translator’s expertise to eventually lose its deserved reputation and become less suited to the requirements of the field [...]. Changes affecting human cognition can be observed and described almost in real time, taking place at an unusually fast pace.

One could add here that translational practices in AVT do not perhaps reflect the changing sensibilities of certain consumers of audiovisual products. It is possible that a dubbing director, albeit highly respected, who has been in the business for two or three decades might have fallen into a rut of ‘translation routines’ thereby perpetuating both ‘expectancy’ norms and the ‘professional’ translation norms outlined by Chesterfield (1993). Thus we have something of ‘the chicken or the egg’ conundrum, as ‘translators govern norms as much as their behaviour is governed by them’ (Simeoni 1997: 31). Alternatively it could be that subtle societal changes in discourse are not discernible to some professional translators and parts of the population at large, when the loud and lurid pervading political discourse is as aggressive, crude, and vulgar as the current political debate in Italy, along with its report in televised and newspapers versions.

What impact do these factors have on the rendering of racial slurs in *Gran Torino*? On the level of the film as a whole, it means that the racial content, although still evident in the target text, is ultimately undermined by omissions, repetition, and the exaggeration of homophobic dysphemism. Secondly, the ironic and comic elements present in the ST are brought to the fore in the TT, not least by the semantic prosody

employed by the dubbing actors. This has the effect of dulling the dramatic edge which the ST creates in sequences five and six. However, in the case of sequence two the functional use of racial slurs as in-group markers in the characters' good-humoured banter means that the TT solutions, albeit lacking in the deeper semantic meanings of the ST slurs, are acceptable substitutes in the target lingua-culture context.

It must be reiterated that the lack of real alternatives in the target language for the array of racial insults in the source language has considerable impact on the target culture product. This reduced lexical pool occasionally seems lackluster and may imply that there is truly a limited lexical variety in Italian to select from; for example the adjective 'giallo' [yellow] is repeated four times in the space of two lines in example 17, in an attempt to find TL solutions to the apparently untranslatable slurs like 'slope' and 'gook'. This could be seen as a demonstration of Toury's law of 'growing standardization' whereby a marked ST expression is rendered with a more neutral option in the TT (see section 3.2.1).

Simultaneously, in sequences five and six, we note a process of domestication whereby the mere racial slur is not sufficient to be offensive, because what really offends in the target culture, according to the translator and his social environment, are homophobic insults. Of course, in a real life situation these nuances cannot be perceived. The audience cannot know what the ST was but can only judge on the TL product. Here the translator has the upper-hand, her/invisibility allowing to hide or expose those elements which she/he retains important. It is notoriously difficult to achieve credible field research in audience reception and perception, but the picture would not be complete without some attempt at obtaining the end user's reaction to racial slurs in the TT version of *Gran Torino*. To this end, the sample survey (see section 2.8.1) was carried out.

To conclude by considering how socio-linguistic changes in politeness need a linguistic context to flourish, the study comes full circle with a concrete example of how racial slurs, via audiovisual translation could be transmitted to a linguistic context ready to receive and use aggressive and derogatory language. The example of a cross-culturally transmitted racial slur and of the ways in which its outcomes can be disastrous is a suitable note to bring us back to the notion of the anthropological and

societal nature of linguistic taboos. The slur under discussion is precisely ‘muso giallo’, the very insult which prompted the present investigation (see section 4.4-4.6). In an article published by the right-wing national newspaper *Il Giornale* (of publishing editor Paolo Berlusconi, brother of the Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi), the slur ‘muso giallo’ was actually used to describe a group of Japanese people at an award ceremony. The racial slur was ironically used to report the ways in which the Japanese officials were paying homage to Italian ex-prime minister Lamberto Dini.

Lamberto fa incetta di consensi tra i musì gialli giapponesi. Va infatti a Lamberto Dini (nella foto) un premio che Tokyo riserva ai cittadini stranieri: il Gran cordone dell’Ordine del sol levante.

[Lamberto Dini is showered with praise by the yellow muzzles. In fact the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun goes to Lamberto Dini (in the photo), an award which Tokyo bestows on non-Japanese nationals.]

It is more than coincidental, possibly, the fact that *Gran Torino* had been released in Italy on the 13th of March 2009, just six weeks before the publication of the offending word in *Il Giornale*. As discussed in Chapter 4, 5, and 6, the original English-language film contains fourteen different insults for Asian peoples and its main rendering in the Italian version are largely re-invented in variations along the theme of ‘muso giallo’. While one cannot know if the journalist of the offensive news report, who did not sign the piece, had seen the film before writing the article, but it is reasonable to assume that s/he may well have heard about it. Subliminal suggestion would not be an hypothesis.

In disgust, the Japanese Ambassador to Italy wrote a stinging letter to *Il Giornale* in which he referred to the expression as having very negative, disparaging connotations and used gratuitously in the context<sup>38</sup>. He also asked for an apology to be

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<sup>38</sup> Egregio Direttore,  
ci riferiamo all'articolo apparso sul Vostro giornale il 30 aprile a p. 16, intitolato ‘Lamberto premiato dai giapponesi’. Nel medesimo si legge ‘Lamberto fa incetta di consensi tra i musì gialli giapponesi’. È ben accetta l'attenzione prestata alla notizia del conferimento dell'onorificenza al Senatore Dini da parte del Giappone. Tuttavia, riteniamo che l'espressione utilizzata per identificarci, ossia ‘musì gialli’, abbia una connotazione dispregiativa e molto negativa. Segnaliamo che l'espressione non sarebbe neppure necessaria nel

published in the newspaper. The newspaper in question has been cited elsewhere in the present study for its abusive, racist discourse and that also harbours strong homophobic tendencies. Yet here we are not talking about an extremist rag of a fanatical extremist group; as the representative for the Japanese Embassy points out, this is a national newspaper widely read in Italy, albeit of right-wing leaning. What is most worrying about this incident is the transmission of terminology that evokes xenophobia.

While contemporary societies with their official democratic voices such as newspapers and other media still do not subscribe to the UNESCO declaration on race thereby denouncing all racial slurs as not only not politically correct but also unacceptable because they are founded on unacceptable bases, equally worrying is that this type of discourse today evokes further issues regarding intercultural communication. It is a rather disturbing revelation that translation – here audiovisual translation – that should promote cross-cultural communication and understanding might in fact be the very agent by which a racial insult enters one lingua-culture from another.

By no means advocating censorship, these observations rather aim to suggest that we should be alert to these phenomena in the translation process and scrutinise possible outcomes. This unfortunate incident could have had serious repercussions on diplomatic relations between the two states, highlighting why it is essential to

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contesto, quindi il suo utilizzo è totalmente gratuito. Inoltre, tale espressione così grossolana non ci sembra consona né all'altezza di un giornale come il Vostro, a tiratura nazionale e con una sua tradizione nel giornalismo italiano. Pertanto, richiediamo quanto prima una spiegazione a scopo di rettifica sull'espressione 'musi gialli giapponesi' come apparsa sul Vostro giornale.

Attendendo una Sua risposta in merito, Le porgiamo distinti saluti.

Shinsuke Shimizu

Ministro e Vice Capo Missione

P.S.- Anticipiamo, inoltre, che la presente lettera sarà pubblicata in ogni caso sul sito della nostra Ambasciata al fine di informare i Vostri numerosi lettori.

[Dear Sir,

I write with reference to an article which appeared in your newspaper on the 30<sup>th</sup> April, on page 16, entitled 'Lamberto awarded by Japanese'. In the same article, 'Lamberto is showered with praise by Japanese yellow-muzzles' can be read. The attention given to the news of this decoration bestowed on Senatore Dini by Japan is most welcome. However, we believe that the expression used to identify us, that is, 'yellow muzzles', has very negative, disparaging connotations. We would also note that the expression is hardly necessary in the context, and therefore its use is purely gratuitous. Furthermore, it seems to us that such a vulgar expression is unsuitable and beneath the dignity of a newspaper such as yours, which has a national circulation and a tradition within Italian journalism. Therefore we request that at your earliest convenience an apology for the use of the expression 'Japanese yellow muzzles' as it appeared in your newspaper. I look forward to hearing from you on the subject, Yours faithfully, Shinsuke Shimizu. Minister and Vice-director of the mission.]

undertake further research into this underexploited area of study. It is of crucial importance in our global society to achieve a better understanding of the underpinning ideologies, the processes involved and the effects produced in rendering Otherness across linguistic and cultural barriers, thereby raising awareness to the increasingly pervasive role translation plays in shaping word and thought.

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