



I-LanD Journal

Identity, Language and Diversity

Chief Editors: Giuditta Caliendo & Maria Cristina Nisco

Translating and Interpreting Linguistic and Cultural Differences
in a Migrant Era

I-LanD Journal
peer-reviewed
bi-annual journal
n. 2/2019 - December 2019

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Director: **Elisabetta Donadono**

Authorisation n. 60 issued by the Court of Naples on 20/12/2016

I-LanD Journal - n. 2/2019 - December 2019

Introduction: Translating and Interpreting Linguistic and Cultural Differences in a Migrant Era

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In Metamorphoses (2002), Rosi Braidotti argues that those who do not like complexities cannot possibly feel at home in the third millennium; and in Transpositions (2006) she expands this idea with the notion of

“transposition”, a term which indicates (Braidotti 2006: 7): An intertextual, cross-boundary or transversal transfer, in the sense of a leap from one code, field or axis into another, not merely in the quantitative mode of plural multiplications, but rather in the qualitative sense of complex multiplicities. It is not just a matter of weaving together different strands, variations on a theme [...], but rather of playing the positivity of difference as a specific theme of its own.

Transpositions are in-between spaces “of zigzagging and of crossing: nonlinear, but not chaotic; nomadic, yet accountable and committed; creative but also cognitively valid; discursive and also materially embedded – it is coherent without falling into instrumental rationality” (Braidotti 2006: 7). “Trans-” implies translation, movement, a nonunitary, complex, paradoxical and contradictory vision of life.

This is, one could say, the main aim of this monographic issue

Fighting Inferiority: Negotiating Identity and Otherness through (Self-)Translation

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Abstract

In an increasingly multilingual and multicultural world, more and more people live in-between cultures and languages. Migrant literature is a means through which people can express their feelings of loss and gain, exile and belonging and, more specifically, people can find their own true identity.

*Some immigrant writers may decide to write in a different language from their mother tongue for several different reasons. Eva Hoffman, for example, is a case of self-translation where the writer, who is a native Polish, decides to write in English, her adopted language. This shift from one language to another and from a culture to another serves the purpose of building a new identity, an identity which strives to fight her inferior status of immigrant and makes her more suitable for the new environment in which she is living. The aim of this work is to explore the deep connections between language, culture and individual identity. Firstly, the connection between translation and migration will be investigated to show how these two phenomena are linked through the practice of self-translation. Secondly, this paper will attempt to explore how language(s) and culture(s) shape identities through a text analysis of Eva Hoffman's novel *Lost in Translation*.*

Keywords

(self-)translation, immigration, identity, self, otherness

Intercultural Cohesion in the Japanese-Italian Netflix Subtitles: The Failure of Cultural Mediation

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Abstract

This study presents a preliminary survey carried out on Netflix in 2018 with a special focus on six Japanese TV series subtitled in Italian. The survey has identified some common categories of intercultural impasses and shows how the lack of intercultural cohesion observed in Italian subtitles is primarily due to underestimating both the mono- and micro-cultural elements present in the source texts. The observations produced by this study lead to in-depth reflections on the qualitative characteristics of current Japanese-Italian interlinguistic subtitling. Considering that the skopos of the translations on paid streaming platforms such as Netflix is the ability to meet the requirements of a general audience, one not necessarily familiar with the Japanese culture, then high-quality translations together with adequate semantic coherence able to ensure a clear use of the translated texts should always be the prerequisites of any interlinguistic audio-visual subtitling. This is important to prevent intercultural inconsistencies that risk corroborating and validating stereotypes or being denied the pleasure of discovery that underlies the audio-visual experience.

Keywords

intercultural cohesion, interlinguistic subtitling, loan word, ethnocentrism

Censorship and Manipulation in the Italian Dubbing of LGBT-Themed Series: An Analysis of Will & Grace and Modern Family

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Abstract

The manipulation and censorship of sensitive materials in audiovisual translation studies have attracted the interest of a number of scholars over the last few years. It has been argued that the presence of LGBT characters is still rather rare in Italian TV series and films; gay issues are less mainstream on Italian TV than in the UK and USA, and the gay lexicon is not shared by the general population (Ranzato 2012). Thus, the aim of this paper is to analyse the Italian dubbing of two American TV series, Will & Grace and Modern Family, chosen because they treat homosexuality without having only a gayoriented target. After a brief overview of the available literature on the dubbing of potentially disturbing items, including references to sex and homosexuality, the series will be presented along with the corpus used for our analysis. Then, the Italian dubbed dialogues will be analysed, in order to detect instances of actual censorship and cases of manipulation in the translation of references to sexual orientation or roles. The analysis will also try to demonstrate whether the lexical imbalance between English and Italian plays a role in the translation of sexual orientation terms and of expressions of dysphemism for homosexuality. Overall, our analysis aims at exploring whether the Italian dubbed versions have the potential to promote a change in the stereotypes of homosexuality.

Keywords

dubbing, LGBT, manipulation

I-LanD Journal - n. 2/2019 - December 2019

Global(ised) Sexualities in the Mass Media: The Rewriting of LGBT+Identities in Gaycation

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Abstract

This paper analyses how global LGBT+ identities have been translated in the documentary series Gaycation. Firstly, we will examine the influence of international information flows on the shaping of sexual minorities and their exposure as a community to different degrees of homogenisation and uniformity on a global scale. Based on the conclusions obtained, we will approach translation as an ideal way to observe the discourse mechanisms at play in the building of sexual identities in the linguistic and cultural transfer that takes place during the rewriting of texts produced in mass media. We will look at specific examples in the case of the documentary series Gaycation, comparing the information shown in the original version in English and in the version dubbed into Spanish.

Keywords:

translation, globalisation, mass media, LGBT+, gaycation

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Defining and Translating LGBT Identities: The EU Legal and Institutional 'Viewpoint'

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Abstract

The aim of the study is to analyse discourse and translation practices concerning transgender issues from a legal perspective. In particular, attention will be focused on the lexical choices adopted by the EU to define LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) identities. Definitions, alongside with adjectives and adverbials, are functional to the expression of evaluations of reality. In the study, the main goal will be to focus on the ideological EU 'viewpoint' concerning the promotion of LGBT rights. In a corpus including some legal provisions in the time span 2010–2017, the adoption of different phrases applied to LGBT people and some different co-textual lexical choices will be taken into account in the English and Italian versions with the final aim to investigate European ideologies when promoting LGBT rights.

Keywords

transgender rights, EU ideologies, translation procedures, standardization

The New Migration Discourse: How Migrants Are Depicted on the Web

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Abstract

This study addresses the United Nations Migration Agency's online platform 'I am a migrant' (IAAM) to investigate the discursive and multimodal representation of migrants. The corpus analysed consists of migrants' narratives in English and Italian, as well as of their pictures found on IAAM. The written representation of migrants is investigated through a cross-linguistic corpus-assisted discourse studies approach (Baker et al. 2008). In addition, pictures are analysed using multimodal discourse analysis, based on the work of Machin and Mayr (2012) and Ledin and Machin (2018). The discourse on migration taken from this platform counters the dominant discourse of politics and the media, which attaches migrants labels such as violent, desperate and illiterate. By contrast, IAAM proves to be a major resource to support the promotion of accurate and human terminology which goes beyond the excessively general, unfair and incorrect categorisation of migration as a threat, a plague or a plight in order to recognise, respect and re-humanise the subjectivities of individual migrants. A new discourse emerges from the IAAM platform, which is free from the constraints of ordinary discourse, where other people (e.g., politicians, journalists, etc.) usually speak on behalf of migrants. Instead, the platform gives voice to individual migrants who are finally able to show their own face and give their own side of the story.

Keywords

biographies, pictures, corpus-assisted discourse studies, critical multimodal, discourse analysis, English, Italian

Translating Migration in the Visual Arts: Calais Children and Project#RefugeeCameras as Collaborative Counter Narratives

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Abstract

This study investigates the modalities through which the migrant crisis is portrayed in the creative artistic sector while accelerating the spread of political participatory and activist movements in the areas of subtitling and amateur translation. Participation and activism have stimulated the sphere of translation that has been acting as an important stimulus for the international mushrooming of artistic creativities on public spaces and digital platforms, and also for a different political and cultural reframing of the migrant crisis. 21st-century mobility has made translation a crucial device for the negotiation of linguacultural transactions within cultural institutions, public spaces and digital contexts through a variety of media, genres and discourses. While acquiring an increasingly metaphorical significance within and across domains, translation has become the instrument by means of which knowledge is produced, shared and put into practice. Meanwhile, collaborative communities are contributing to the spread of non-professional translation practices within digital frameworks that function through crowdsourcing platforms (Jiménez-Crespo 2017). Drawing on recent research on narrative theory in translating dissent (Baker 2016) and issues of (re) narration in translation studies (Baker 2014), this study is based on the analysis of Sue Clayton's documentary Calais Children: A Case to Answer (2016) and Kevin McElvaney's exhibition Project#RefugeeCameras (2015) from the perspective of Michael Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, as well as according to audiovisual translation strategies. These works are looked at as artistic counter narratives, where most attention is given to the ideological and structural diversities between misleading news reporting and the narrative modalities employed in the visual arts as digital audiovisual interventions for the construction of migration, which can potentially give rise to discourses of translation for dissent and protest, where migrant repertoires can emerge with a greater sense of authenticity.

Keywords

crowdsourcing, amateur translation, collaboration, migration, systemic functional linguistics, the visual arts

The Role of Non-Professional Translators and Interpreters in Emergency Migratory Settings: A Southern Translocal Perspective

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Abstract

Migration involves the intense circulation of peoples, goods and cultures as well as, less explicitly, hierarchical and hegemonic power relations between territories and their inhabitants. Languages, and the borders they establish, are essential to such movements and relations. But no language is innocent or neutral, because it reflects and structures our ideology and worldviews.

This is particularly easy to observe when taking into consideration the practice of language mediation across the Mediterranean routes, where migration flows and transnational interests are leading to new models of contacts between people with different linguistic and cultural heritages thus problematising our traditional understanding of language as a social projection of territorial unity held together by shared behavioural norms, beliefs and values. More specifically, the main theoretical goal here is to challenge the boundaries of translation and interpreting theory and practice and move beyond the traditional concepts and forms of professional practices, ethics, and language ideologies. Against this background, this paper reports on a research project that involved conducting interviews with several volunteer interpreters, translators and language mediators who have worked with newly-arrived migrants in Southern Italy, and attempts to explore the intersections between the language mediator's role and agency, local practices, and politics and ethics of hospitality. To this end, interview questions addressed a range of issues concerning trust, empathy, solidarity, hospitality, conflict, denial, testimony, and communitarian objectivity that simultaneously focused on how the politics and ethics of hospitality is contingent upon local practices and how the language mediator acts in vulnerable situations (e.g., ferries, camps, conflict zones, reception and detention centres).

Keywords

translation, migration, activism, community

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Migration and Translation: Changing Concepts, Critical Approaches. An Interview with Doris Bachmann-Medick

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Introduction

Migration and translation are two major issues of contemporary life and are recurrent themes in theoretical and critical thought across many disciplines. Language practices in migratory times go beyond the level of linguistic and communicative activity and make us aware of the power of language, translation, mutual understanding and social/political/cultural practices. In order to better understand the challenges and potentials facing us as interpreters, translators or scholars in Translation Studies we need to move beyond our disciplinary borders and open the discipline up to new perspectives and methodologies. Starting from these premises we believe that Doris Bachmann-Medick's work on migration and translation is central for a critical rethinking of the role of translation, translators, interpreters and cultural mediators in a period of massive migrations towards Western Europe. The interview proposes a new approach for studying, researching and working with linguistic/cultural translation in an era of transnational movements and displacements.

Keywords

translation, self-translation, migration, framing, Actor-Network theory



Intercultural Cohesion in the Japanese-Italian *Netflix* Subtitles: The Failure of Cultural Mediation

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Abstract

This study presents a preliminary survey carried out on Netflix in 2018 with a special focus on six Japanese TV series subtitled in Italian. The survey has identified some common categories of intercultural impasses and shows how the lack of intercultural cohesion observed in Italian subtitles is primarily due to underestimating both the mono- and micro-cultural elements present in the source texts. The observations produced by this study lead to in-depth reflections on the qualitative characteristics of current Japanese-Italian interlinguistic subtitling. Considering that the skopos of the translations on paid streaming platforms such as Netflix is the ability to meet the requirements of a general audience, one not necessarily familiar with Japanese culture, then high-quality translations together with adequate semantic coherence able to ensure a clear use of the translated texts should always be the prerequisites of any interlinguistic audio-visual subtitling. This is important to prevent intercultural inconsistencies that risk corroborating and validating stereotypes or being denied the pleasure of discovery that underlies the audio-visual experience.

Keywords

intercultural cohesion, interlinguistic subtitling, loan word, ethnocentrism

1. The qualitative emergency of interlinguistic subtitling

In recent years, the diffusion of audio-visual products on the Internet has dramatically increased, particularly works from Japan (Pérez-González 2014; Vitucci 2014, 2016a, 2016b, 2018). After the initial success of streaming websites, which offered movies, *anime*, and TV series that were subtitled by 'fansubbers', a change is being witnessed thanks to integrated platforms, such as *Netflix*. These enable not only a chronologically 'customised' experience but also the selection of different translation methods according to the users' individual needs. Within the current context, however, we require a careful reflection on the qualitative characteristics of these translations, stressing that the training of interlinguistic subtitlers cannot and should not be subjected to immediate cultural mediation by those who should, conversely, assume the 'ethical responsibility' of these translations (Cavagnoli 2012). As noted by Ramière (2006) since it brings cultures into contact with one another by transferring values, ideas and information, audiovisual translation raises considerable cultural issues. Among



them, interesting is the issue of the impact that translation strategies may have on audiences' perceptions of the source culture. In this sense, according to Ramière (2006: 153), "[...] because of its tremendous social impact and visibility as a mode of intercultural exchange, [dubbing and subtitling] may in fact affect cultural representations to a greater extent than other types of translation".

Some years ago, Díaz Cintas (2014) confirmed the qualitative inadequacy of interlinguistic subtitles, thus agreeing with the observations contained in the recent studies carried out by Bruti, Buffagni and Garzelli (2017) where the authors comment that even today, professional translators are mistaken for fansubbers. This study associates the high presence of a number of loan words observed in the works of fansubbers in the activity performed – often illegally – by many online communities, with a strong dependence on the source text, as well as with idiosyncratic choices made by each individual translator (Bruti/Zanotti 2012). These observations are also confirmed by another study carried out by Ramière (2006) in which the scholar found out that subtitlers in Australia do not necessarily have a pre-established general strategy for the translation of cultural specifics giving priority to communicative translation over cultural considerations. Translation problems aside, there is little awareness in society regarding both the imbalance generated in the audio-visual translation market by the presence of these intermediaries and the damages suffered by professionals in the industry (Bruti *et al.* 2017).¹

Unfortunately, fansubbing is not the only issue to call into question as a translation practice.² A critical analysis of the official subtitling available on platforms such as *Netflix* – which are still dependent on intermediaries akin to non-professionals (Katan 1999; Perego 2005; Pym 2010; Ranzato 2011) – should be put into place.

As highlighted in the reference literature, an audio-visual text – as with other textual types – is rooted in its own culture of origin and requires high symbolic management competencies by the subtitlers, (Suzuki 1973, 1990; Kramersch 1993; Katan 1999; Petillo 2008; Hasegawa 2012; Ellender 2015) in order to accurately transfer original symbols presented through iconic and verbal channels to a meta-context where the target audience may not necessarily share the same codes and socio-cultural background (Kádár/Mills 2011; Ranzato 2011; Burczynska 2012). In particular, this task seems to be even harder in the case of language pairs that are very different from a typological and cultural standpoint, such as the Japanese-Italian one.

As a matter of fact, audio-visual texts belong to a specific culture, where the reference audience can decode its polysemiotic complexity (Machida/Katō 2004; Pym 2010). Therefore, it might contain not only specific verbal characteristics but also major iconic elements, such as geographical locations, objectemic and vestemic inputs, relevant historical contexts, kinesic codes, as well as non-verbal signs of communication and cinematic conventions which bind the audio-visual text to a dense network of relations established between the text and its original context (Ranzato 2011). According to Ramière (2006), the SC context must be understood very broadly at any moment

¹ Professional subtitling is subjected to strict quality controls as well as greater constraints compared to non-professional subtitling. See, for example, translation blogs such as *Qabiria* (<<https://qabiria.com/blog/item/546-confessionidi-una-fansubber>> [Last accessed: February 6, 2018]) where non-professional subtitling is still regarded as legitimate and deprived of any actual difficulty of adaptation.

² It should be stressed that, with translations from Japanese, many fansubbers actually use the English texts as the source text (Vitucci 2016b). For an in-depth analysis of the so-called 'cybersubtitles', one can consult Díaz Cintas (2018) in this bibliography.



and the translator has to consider it attentively in order to reach a successful transcultural translation. As a consequence, she suggests taking into consideration the following elements before subtitling:

- ◆ Linguistic co-text.
- ◆ Polysemiotic context.
- ◆ Function and relevance of the culture-specific reference in the larger context of the audio-visual diegesis.
- ◆ Technical constraints at that particular moment in the story (in particular, long and fast-paced lines of dialogues for subtitles).
- ◆ Genre of the audiovisual product.
- ◆ Target audience of that particular product.
- ◆ Distribution context (e.g., paratexts accompanying the release of the product, which may influence the larger cultural environment in which the product is received).
- ◆ General cultural context (to what extent are cultural references shared between source culture and target culture? What relationships exist between them?).

As pointed out in the above list, contextual factors play a pivotal role in screen translation since the nature of the medium is characterised by particular technical constraints and implies strong visual and contextual embeddedness (Ramière 2006: 160). It should not come as a surprise that identifying these relations is what allows the subtitlers to consider the issues related to the cultural specificity of the text and its transfer to another socio-cultural world through a translation based on: an in-depth analysis of the AV text; the needs of the intermediaries (mainly companies that entrust the subtitling and distributors); and the requirements of the end viewers (target audience). As a matter of fact, viewers themselves are also in an intercultural position since translators and distributors are not the only ones responsible for the cultural transfers of audio-visual products. And mostly in the case of paying users, they do play a role. This is partly highlighted also by the comments they leave on platforms such as *Netflix*. By analysing a small corpus of 54 reviews posted by the Italian viewers (regarding three of the Japanese series presented in this study), one can note that their relationship with subtitles seems to be central to their fruition since it allows them to: (1) deepen their knowledge of the genre, and (2) Express and share comments on the net (see Table 1.1).

Although one cannot deny the presence of a certain narcissism in these reviews, as shown in Table 1.1, the most recurrent topics seem to be the following two:

1. Gratitude: since viewers are allowed to watch Japanese series outside Japan and to understand them in their mother tongue;
2. Criticism: in particular, regarding translations they consider qualitatively poor and inefficient by an intercultural perspective.

In other words, *Netflix* viewers expect subtitles to support them at a semantic level, but they become rather sensitive when they experience a qualitative decline in the aforementioned intermediation. As already highlighted in the past, once they know the source language (in this case, the Japanese), their criticising power increases and makes them



Table 1.1. *Netflix* users' comments on Italian subtitles of Japanese series
(Last accessed: August 12, 2018). English back translation is mine

Series	Italian comments	English translation
1. <i>Good Morning Call</i>	A: Mi fa piacere che ci siano i sottotitoli, perché doppiata la serie sarebbe risultata strana. B: La serie è davvero carina, ma la traduzione è stata fatta un po' maluccio.	A: I'm glad there are subs, because if it were dubbed, the series would have been weird. B: The series is really cute, but the translation was pretty bad.
2. <i>Itazura no KISS – Love in Tokyo</i>	C: [...] La presenza dei sottotitoli italiani rende accessibili queste serie anche a noi e non si può essere che grati della loro presenza. Speriamo si continui in questa direzione con altre proposte sottotitolate nei prossimi mesi.	C: [...] The presence of Italian subs makes these series accessible to us and we are deeply grateful for them. We do hope (<i>Netflix</i>) will continue in this direction with other subbed series in the next months.
3. <i>Saborīman Kantarō</i>	D: [...] Divertente e a tratti imbarazzante per via delle espressioni di Kantarō un po' equivoche.	D: [...] Funny and embarrassing at times because of the somewhat ambiguous Kantarō's expressions.

act as experts in the field of subtitling which in fact they are not (Szarkowska 2005).

2. Intercultural impasses in Japanese series

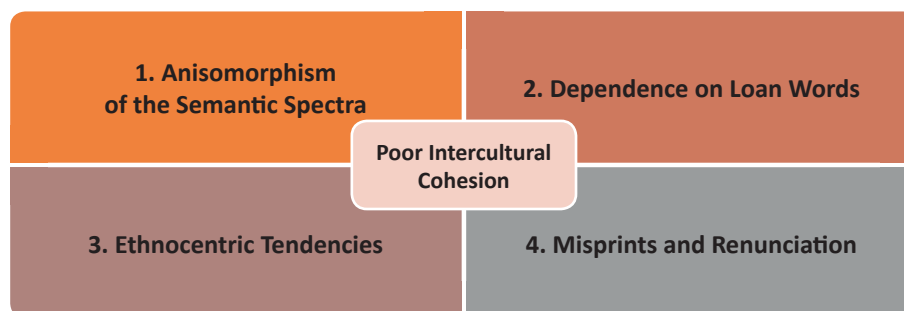
Between March and August 2018 the author carried out a preliminary survey on six Japanese series subtitled in Italian and marketed by *Netflix*: *Itazura no KISS – Love in Tokyo* (1st series, 2013), *Minami kun no koibito* (1st series, 2015), *Erased* (1st series, 2017), *Good Morning Call* (1st series, 2017), *Saborīman Kantarō* (1st series, 2017) and *Switched* (1st series, 2018). In particular, *Itazura no KISS – Love in Tokyo*, *Good Morning Call* and *Minami kun no koibito* are transpositions of Japanese *shōjo* manga with a focus on the romantic relationships among their young protagonists (often high school students). On the contrary, although they are also *manga* transpositions, *Erased* and *Switched* belong to the 'suspense' genre, whereas *Saborīman Kantarō* is a hybrid series that focuses on Japanese confectionery while presenting recurrent elements of the detective story. In order to collect the data presented in this study, a small corpus of forty-two screenshots was collected whenever intercultural inconsistencies in translation hampered the semantic decode of the subtitled text in Italian. After a thorough examination of the screenshots, one could identify some common categories of intercultural impasses as described below:

1. Anisomorphism of the semantic spectra (14.3%): lexical inconsistencies due to the extension/erroneous application of semantic spectra from the target language to the source language.
2. Dependence on loan words (14.3%): lexical inconsistencies caused by the literal translation of greetings, idiomatic or phraseological expressions generating ambiguity in the target language.
3. Ethnocentric tendencies (28.6%): translation inconsistencies caused by replacing cultural elements belonging to the source culture with other elements pertaining to the target culture.



4. Misprints and renunciation (42.8%): orthographic/typographical errors and translation strategies which involuntarily lead to a reduction of intercultural information.

Figure 1.1. Main categories of intercultural impasses in *Netflix* subtitles



The first two types of interventions identified in this study aimed at putting the metatext inside a so-called ‘high translatability’ framework, while the others focused more on ‘domesticating’ strategies, thus falling within a so-called ‘low translatability’ category. Although this polarisation has been widely discussed and confirmed in the reference literature (Venuti 1995; Aixelá 1996; Szarkowska 2005; Faini 2008; Osimo 2010, 2011), the argument put forward by most scholars is that translators have at their disposal a whole range of strategies to translate cultural specific items and that the type of strategies used will impact on TC perceptions of SC and therefore on the way the AV product is perceived in the foreign market (Ramière 2006: 156-157). As it will be highlighted in the following paragraphs, regardless of the strategy employed, the Italian subtitles of the above Japanese series often fail to promote intercultural cohesion, preventing the semantic contents of the original texts from being properly received (Katan 1999). This especially applies to peculiar cultural elements (such as food, traditions, folklore, or popular commercial products), which convey specific aspects of the Japanese way of life that are absent in Italy and which tend to spread and encroach upon other cultures (Katan 1999; Szarkowska 2005; Balboni/Caon 2015; Vitucci 2016b). This discovery seems to be in sharp contrast with the intrinsic purpose of official subtitling itself as described in the reference literature. In fact, as it involves the least interference with the original text, subtitling should contribute to experiencing the flavour of the foreign language, its mood and the sense of a different culture more than any other translation mode (Szarkowska 2005). In order to better identify the problems underlying poor intercultural cohesion, some of the cases mentioned above will be analysed in the next section.

2.1. Anisomorphism of semantic spectra

Figure 2.1.1 shows a translation impasse from category 1 (‘Anisomorphism of semantic spectra’ – 14.3% of impact on Italian subtitles), where a failure to properly decode the meaning of the Japanese adjective *dasai* (trans.: ‘rustic’, ‘rough’, ‘boorish’) leads to an incorrect recoding of the semantic spectrum in the target language

(‘*noioso*’ → ‘boring’) that in turn affects the content of the line as well the final translation.

Figure 2.1.1. The poor awareness of the ‘anisomorphism of the semantic spectra’ may affect the perception of the cultural micro-context (from the *Saboriman Kantarō* series, 2017)



But why can this impasse be considered intercultural? The answer lies in the micro-context of the scene; the child is eating some *ohagi* (traditional Japanese sweets made of rice and *azuki* sweet beans) which can be either home-made or purchased in traditional shops. In this scene specifically, the child – who is used to eating mass-produced foreign sweets – is tasting *ohagi* for the first time and likes its unexpected flavour. In this case, the adjective ‘boring’ used in the Italian translation results in anomalous translation synaesthesia, where taste (→ the sweets eaten by the child) overlaps with emotion (→ his reaction to the tasting experience). This translation clearly reveals the absence of a ‘symbolic-value’ competency (Suzuki 1973, 1990; Kramersch 1993), as well as poor knowledge of the so-called ‘implicit cultural context’ (Katan 1999; Balboni/Caon 2015) which might have helped the translator overcome the merely denotative meaning of the word *dasai*, while enhancing the connotative meaning associated with this specific circumstance (old-fashioned traditional sweets → never tasted → ‘outdated’? / ‘old-fashioned’? / ‘intended for the elderly’?). Accordingly, the translation leads to a semantic uncertainty that involuntarily hides the intracultural context, since foreign viewers will not be able to grasp either the child’s amazed reaction to the *ohagi* or the reason for his ‘emotional’ and ‘generational’ detachment from this product.

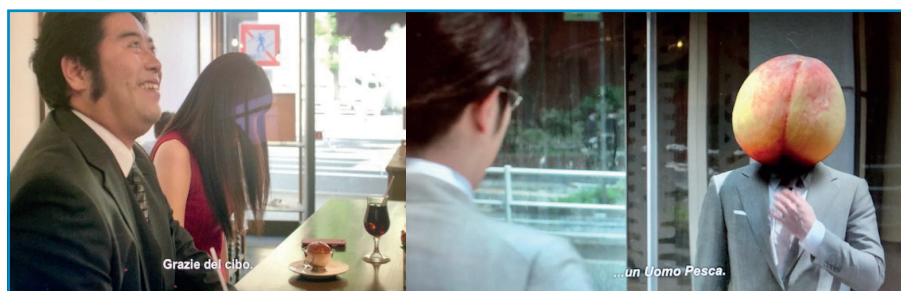
2.2. Dependence on loan words

As mentioned in the previous studies (Bruti *et al.* 2017), one of the most common aspects observed in amateur translation is the heavy dependency on direct translations (Aixelá 1996; Faini 2008; Osimo 2010, 2011). Again, in the following scene – which belongs to the type of impasse in category 2 ‘Loan words’ (14.3% of impact on Italian subtitles) – and is clearly oriented towards a ‘distancing effect’ – the translation involuntarily increases the ‘text ambiguity’ (Hasegawa 2012) and is likely to corroborate stereotypes and cultural fakes (Vinay/Dalbert 1995), thus affecting the final semantic decoding. In Figure 2.2.1, on the left, the Japanese word *itadakimasu* (which is



recited at the beginning of each meal and can be translated as ‘enjoy your meal’) is translated in Italian through a loan expression meaning ‘thank you for our food’ (*itadaku*, literal meaning: ‘receive’ → receiving implies a ‘thanksgiving’ → ‘thank you’) thus validating the intercultural stereotype according to which the Japanese people are obsequious and attentive even in apparently informal contexts. Paradoxically, in this case, the poor intercultural cohesion is due precisely to an ‘excessive intermediation’ by the subtitle, as well as to his/her inability to loosen the so-called ‘bonds of belonging’ (Ranzato 2011) of the original text, thus changing the mood of the Italian line; in this case, the interlinguistic translation should elicit a state of ‘excitement’ instead of an unreal ‘thanksgiving’. In fact, even from an iconic point of view, the man seems focused on his *savarin* (a French dessert) and is not going to thank the Japanese gods for his food.

Figure 2.2.1. The use of loan words corroborates the stereotypes or annihilates the source culture (taken from the *Saboriman Kantarō*, 2017 and *Saboriman Kantarō*, 2017 series)



The online style guide that *Netflix* provides its translators defines the qualitative standard of interlinguistic subtitling in a short but detailed list of orthographic/typographic recommendations for each translation pair present on the platform.³ However, if the expression ‘qualitative standard’ coincides with adequate management of the intracultural elements to be translated, then, apart from punctuation, the software used by *Netflix* would lack some crucial functions such as explanatory pop-ups or the so-called displays,⁴ which would help the cultural contextualisation for the target audience. Considering that subtitling does not always act as an exhaustive translation (often following the principle of relevance),⁵ the translator should expand the text through cultural explanations. According to Perego (2004: 147):

Despite the need for brevity required by the subtitling process, there are in fact some cases when the subtitler has to expand the source text in order to better depict film reality and to be able to mediate non-converging world-views giving the audience enough encyclopedic knowledge about the setting of the film to let them understand and appreciate what is really going on.

Another clear example of loan words is shown in Figure 2.2.1, on the right, where the Japanese proper name *Momotarō* has been translated into Italian as ‘Peach Man’ (*Momo* → trans.: ‘peach’ → ‘peach [man]’) through a loan word which deprives the spectator of adequate intercultural depth. In reality, *Momotarō* is the protagonist of a popular

³ See <https://backlothelp.netflix.com/hc/en-us/articles/215349898-Italian-Timed-Text-Style-Guide> (last accessed on 8 March 2019).

⁴ *Displays* are short translations into the target language positioned on billboards, shop signs, names of places or streets, mobile phone or computer displays with the purpose of adding information to the soundtrack (Vitucci 2016b: 28).

⁵ *Relevance* means achieving the minimum cognitive effort by the audience and the maximum efficiency of the subtitled text for the global comprehension of the script (Kovačič 1994).

Japanese tale whose references – although widely recalled in the original proto-text both on a verbal and on an iconic scale – are completely hidden by the ‘naturalisation-oriented’ method adopted by the subtitler.⁶ Obviously, the lack of any explanatory pop-up results in intercultural difficulties for the Italian subtitling and impacts the decoding of the ‘communicational purpose’ of the text (Bruti 2011); in fact, since the reference to the Japanese tale of *Momotarō* has been hidden in the Italian subtitles, the audience will not be able to grasp some of the following lines, such as: *Momotarō, inu mo saru mo kiji mo daremo tsuite wa konai kedo* (→ “Momotarō, [during your journey] nobody will travel with you, neither your dog, nor your monkey or birds”).⁷ Here, adding text could have helped the audience better contextualise the narration. From Perego (2004: 148) we learn:

Additions are the most common devices offering the audience new or more explicit information on the film setting and on the way in which the original dialogue has to be interpreted and contextualised. [...] at times inserting them into the subtitles may be vital for a correct interpretation of the film plot because they actively contribute to informing, or even reminding, the viewer of the setting of the film itself.

2.3. Ethnocentric tendencies

The third category of impasses to emerge from the survey is associated with ‘Ethnocentrism’ (28.6% of impact on Italian subtitles). In particular, this study refers to ethnocentric impasses as the renunciation of any cultural difference, where translators: “[...] are literally unable to explain cultural differences in complex ways and think that there are no differences among people of different cultures” (Castiglioni 2005: 186).

As expected, this often guides subtitlers towards the ‘low translatability’ sphere, as well as towards ‘transposition’ and/or ‘substitution’ strategies (Aixelá 1996) that are likely to obscure the main elements of the narration. According to Wakabayashi (1991), this phenomenon occurs when there are two languages that are very different from a typological and cultural standpoint (like Japanese and Italian), whose ‘symbolic mediation’ requires the subtitler to have high intercultural management competencies (Hasegawa 2012). Let us consider some examples.

⁶ According to the most famous version of the story, dating back to the Edo period (1603–1868), *Momotarō* was born inside a big peach that was drifting in a river. The peach is a symbol of fertility in Japan.

⁷ According to the tale, after some time, *Momotarō* leaves his family to hunt for the ogres (*oni*) on the isle of Onigashima and along the street he bumps into a dog, a monkey and a pheasant (not a bird!) which help him complete his quest.

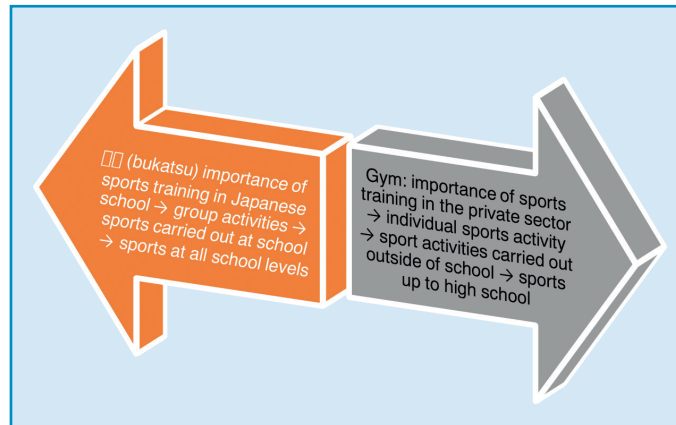
Figure 2.3.1. Ethnocentrism is likely to promote the diffusion of *cultural fakes* (taken from the *Good Morning Call* series, 2017)





Figure 2.3.1 shows a girl who is asking her classmate whether he has just been to the ‘gym’; however, in the original Japanese dialogue, the girl uses the word *bukatsu* (‘sports club activity’),⁸ and not *jimu* (‘gym’, according to the meaning that it has taken on in the Western world). Now, let us try to outline the implicit context of the original Japanese term (*bukatsu*) by comparing it with the meaning of the Italian translation (‘*palestra*’). The result appears as two divergent vectors (Figure 2.3.2):

Figure 2.3.2. Divergent values in ethnocentric translation



In this case, the translation of the Japanese word *bukatsu* requires the subtitler to be familiar with the sports practised during the different levels of the Japanese school system (elementary, middle, high school, and university), where students are encouraged to participate in group activities at the school facilities. In addition, from an iconic point of view, the two students in this TV series are clearly talking about the activity carried out at the *bukatsu* (they are both walking home from school) and not at the ‘gym’ which, in Italy, indicates an individual paid activity performed away from the educational context (since schools offer sports lessons only up to high school level in Italy). As we see in this example, comparing the sports activities carried out by Japanese and Italian students, the ‘ethnocentric’ translation has hidden the implicit context of the narration, thus creating a divergence of perspective likely to convey a ‘cultural fake’. In this case as well, a brief text addition in a pop-up could have helped the viewer both in terms of micro-narrative setting and with the intercultural understanding.

Unfortunately, these translation inconsistencies are very common and have also been found in the other TV series which were examined in this survey. For example, in *Minami kun no koibito* (2015), *sandoicchi* (trans.: ‘sandwich’) has been translated as ‘bread roll’ (‘panino’ in Italian), thus involuntarily comparing the typical Italian bread roll tradition with the common practice of buying sandwiches at the numerous convenience stores in Japan; moreover, in the *Saborīman Kantarō* (2017) TV series, *bodhisattva* has been translated as ‘saint’ (It. ‘*santo*’), thus wrongly attributing Christian traditions to Buddhist ones and needlessly hiding a word which is relatively common, even in Italy. Similarly, the inversion of the Japanese ‘surname-name’ order with the Italian ‘name-surname’ in soundtracks or the conversion of

⁸ *Bukatsu*: agglutinated compound word. Its extended version is *kurabu katsudō* (‘sports club activity’).

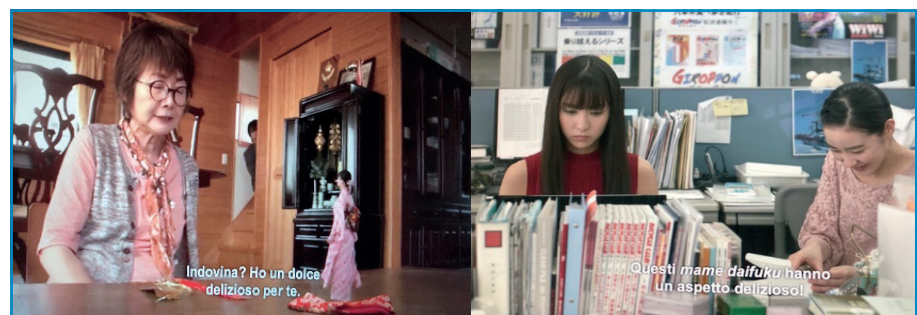
the Japanese yen into US dollars reflect the ethnocentric attitude, although none of these strategies will ever result in ‘culturally equivalent’ solutions in Italian.

2.4. Misprints and renunciation

The fourth category of impasses identified in the survey is the ‘Misprints and renunciation’ category (42.8% of impact on Italian subtitles). In this case, it was noted that while renunciation is often a result of idiosyncratic decisions made by subtitlers, misprints also arise from poor post-production activities performed by the companies that entrust the subtitling. These two phenomena – albeit in different ways from the previous cases – may equally affect both the intercultural cohesion and the target audience’s final semantic decoding. In particular, this survey shows that renunciation often results from translation strategies, including ‘transcription’ and the ‘hyponym-hypernym translation’, which will be briefly described below.

For example, in Figure 2.4.1 on the left, an old woman is talking to a fairy and telling her that she has prepared a ‘delicious cake’ (*dolce delizioso* in Italian). In this case, the subtitler has given up on the translation of the Japanese word *yōkan* (a dessert made of *azuki* bean jelly) in spite of its connotations in the proto-text, which are made by referencing two of its main cultural characteristics: its ‘delicacy’ (correctly reproduced with ‘delicious’), and also its ‘refinement’, an element completely overlooked in the translation.⁹ In addition to losing this last connotation, the ‘hyponym-hypernym translation’ interlinguistic strategy (*yōkan* vs. ‘dessert’) weakens the intracultural mood (i.e., the important role *yōkan* plays in the dialogue), because it cannot inform the Italian audience about the relevance of this mono-cultural reference (Ranzato 2011).

Figure 2.4.1. Renunciation may result from various translation strategies (*Minami kun no koibito*, 2015 and *Saborīman Kantarō*, 2017)



⁹ In Japan, *yōkan* are often sold in expensive stores and are accompanied by refined green teas.

¹⁰ It is clear that the classic ‘bar’ shape of typical *yōkan* prevents the Italian audience from iconically recognising the product.

Furthermore, this lack of in-depth understanding also leads to an intersemiotic imbalance between the verbal element (the dialogue mentioning the *yōkan*) and the image of the *yōkan* in the following frames, since it will be impossible to associate the typical icon of the ‘dessert’ intended in its western meaning with the Japanese iconic reference (Chuang 2006; Gupta 2015; Taylor 2016; Vitucci 2017).¹⁰

On the other hand, Figure 2.4.1 on the right, refers to the ‘transcription’ strategy, since the subtitler gave up on translating the



term *mamedaifuku* (a typical dessert coated with rice paste and filled with *azuki* beans) and transcribes it into the main text of the subtitle. Since the product is not a recognisable icon, the text should have been expanded by means of an explanatory pop-up in order to inform Italian audiences of the content and avoid any ambiguity in the translation. As mentioned earlier, the presence of this phenomenon emerges frequently, in this survey, especially with respect to terms related to Japanese culture that are not particularly common in Italy (such as food, traditions, folklore, or popular commercial products) and generally do not belong to the European/Anglo-Saxon-American traditions (Katan 1999; Vitucci 2014, 2016b; Balboni/Caon 2015). This reveals an ‘ethnocentric’ approach which does not regard ‘high translatability’ as an efficient solution for subtitling. However, this solution is not cohesive on an intercultural level because the target audience is not likely to know what *mamedaifuku* are.

Another case includes translation misprints that, as in the previous case, can affect the intercultural cohesion, thus prompting an in-depth reflection on the qualitative characteristics of current interlinguistic subtitling. For example, *annindōfu* (Chinese almond jelly) was translated as *tōfu* (soybean curd) in the *Saborīman Kantarō* TV series, and in Figure 2.4.2 on the left, the incorrect transcription of *tsuban* instead of *tsubuan* (a kind of *ohagi* dessert made with a grainy paste) misleads the viewer.

Figure 2.4.2. Misprints hinder a correct intercultural analysis
(*Saborīman Kantarō*, 2017)



On the right, the word *ūroncha* (Chinese Oolong tea) has been translated as ‘blue tea’, thus using an expression that simply does not exist in Italian. As suggested above, these misprints are due to a partial or non-existent post-production practice by the companies that entrust the subtitling, which not only affects the intercultural cohesion of the subtitling, but also the semantic decoding by the end-users. This has also a major impact on the identification process and on the ability to enjoy a global audio-visual experience (Pavesi 2015).

3. Conclusions

As already mentioned in the reference literature, AV translation does not simply take place between words but rather between cultures (Szarkowska 2005). The aim of this preliminary survey was to highlight the qualitative problems of intercultural translation with respect to



the Japanese-Italian interlinguistic subtitling of six online TV series distributed by *Netflix*. From the analysis of the data, one could observe that the lack of intercultural cohesion observed in the Italian subtitles was primarily due to underestimating both the ‘mono-’ and ‘micro-cultural’ elements present in the source texts (Pedersen 2005, 2011). In line with the findings in recent literature (Díaz Cintas 2014; Bruti *et al.* 2017; Vitucci 2018), this survey revealed that translation impasses were observed even in cases where the words were ‘easily’ translatable on an interlinguistic level, despite the lack of an equivalent term on an intercultural level. These issues are identified and divided into four translation macro-attitudes: (1) anisomorphism of the semantic spectra, (2) dependence on loan words, (3) ethnocentrism, and (4) misprints and renunciation, which in turn, produce the following intercultural cohesion problems:

1. a tendency not to apply the concept of anisomorphism of the semantic spectra to the analysis of the lexicon (Osimo 2010, 2011). This urges subtitlers to use translational synaesthesia, which reveals the absence of actual symbolic-value competencies (Suzuki 1973, 1990; Kramersch 1993) as well as a poor understanding of the so-called implicit cultural context of translated audio-visual texts (Katan 1999; Balboni/Caon 2015);
2. a tendency to depend on direct translation strategies, such as loan words, justified by achieving a ‘distancing effect’ and the ‘naturalisation’ of the meta-text (Aixelá 1996; Faini 2008; Osimo 2010, 2011). In this case, involuntary stereotypes and ‘cultural fakes’ are often observed (Vinay/Dalbernet 1995), together with a high level of text ambiguity (Hasegawa 2012) that makes the semantic decoding of the narrative even more complex. Paradoxically, the loan word can be associated with excessive intermediation which impedes the loosening of the so-called ‘bonds of belonging’ (Ranzato 2011) and affects the narrative mood in the target language, causing intercultural difficulties across the entire subtitling;
3. a tendency to depend on ethnocentric translation strategies requiring transpositions and/or replacements of text (Aixelá 1996) that alter the reception of the cultural contents of the narration (Vinay/Dalbernet 1995), thus generating ‘perspective divergences’;
4. a strong tendency towards constant translational renunciations caused by specific idiosyncratic decisions made by the subtitlers (specifically transcriptions and hyponym-hypernym translations), as well as misprints, which conversely result from inadequate post-production policies. Moreover, the final decoding of these translations is further complicated by the risk of an intersemiotic imbalance when there is no cohesion between the lexical elements shown in the dialogues and the relative iconic signifiers on the screen. More specifically, this phenomenon has been observed in culturally specific items (Aixelá 1996) typical of Japanese culture, thus interfering with the immersion in a global experience of the audio-visual text (Pavesi 2015).



These observations lead to in-depth reflections on the qualitative characteristics of current Japanese-Italian interlinguistic subtitling available on paid platforms, and on the need to invest in training to ensure proper mediation in terms of intercultural cohesion, and *a priori* knowledge of the literature concerning audio-visual translation. Since, as seen in this study, the transferral of a socio-cultural universe into the subtitler's native language requires an accurate systemic analysis of the text (Cavagnoli 2012) as well as the ability to meet the needs of the intermediaries (primarily companies that entrust the subtitling and distributors) and the final users (target audience), then only trained translators will be able to guarantee the so-called 'ethical responsibility' of the translation. As far as viewers are concerned, this study has highlighted that *Netflix* viewers expect subtitles to support them at a semantic level, but they become rather sensitive when they experience a qualitative decline in the aforementioned intermediation. Considering that the *skopos* of the translations on paid streaming platforms such as *Netflix* is the ability to meet the requirements of a general audience, one not necessarily familiar with Japanese culture, then high-quality translations together with adequate semantic coherence should always be the prerequisites of any interlinguistic audio-visual subtitling (Taylor 2016; Vitucci 2018).

Along with training of the translators, the technical characteristics of the subtitling software are worth considering; as shown in this survey, the lack of software which would allow explanatory pop-ups or displays to be added to various areas of the screen may lead to impaired decoding of the intercultural narration in the target languages. As a case in point, although most Japanese audio-visual products address a general audience, Italian viewers of Japanese series demand a high level of mediation, especially for paid services on audio-visual platforms. This is important to prevent intercultural problems that risk corroborating and validating shameful stereotypes or being denied the pleasure of discovery that underlies the audio-visual experience.

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