COPING WITH UNTRANSLATABILITY IN AVT

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Abstract: Many of the most penetrating thinkers over time have focused their attention on the issue of translation and highlighted how translating "may very probably be the most complex type of event yet produced in the evolution of the cosmos" (Richards 1953: 250). In the same vein, Walter Benjamin even maintained that "translations prove to be untranslatable" (Benjamin 1923 in Venuti 2004: 82). Such intricacy may basically be because translation "brings into play not only two languages but also two cultures" (Eco 2001: 62). As a consequence, the extent to which a text is (un)translatable may both depend on the socio-cultural distance between the Source and Target Languages and also on how deeply the text is rooted in its own Source Culture. Additionally, "the cultural implications for translation vary from lexical content and syntax to ideologies and modes of living in a given culture, including genre expectations/constraints" (Cavaliere 2019: 11). This explains why the problems inherent in all translations are at their most evident when translating and adapting a text for the screen. In AVT, in fact, in contrast to other static written modes of communication, the medium prevents both the audience from back-tracking in the text in order to retrieve meaning and, more importantly, the provision of a "thick translation […] that seeks with its annotations and its accompanying glosses to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context" (Appiah 2004: 399). Drawing on the works of well-known translation/AVT scholars, my study will be carried out on English audio scripts of well-known films/TV series and their subtitled/dubbed Italian version (qualitative examples chosen on the basis of their untranslatability will be investigated). My analysis aims to highlight how untranslatability may variously result from differences between linguistic structures to socio-cultural motivations, from the in-built constraints of the medium to the condition of temporality in translation. One of the important functions of translation is to inform about a foreign culture (Levý 2011: 96), and in this perspective, a renewed emphasis on connections among translation, linguistics, philology, philosophy, and socio-cultural issues through easy-to-grasp examples may offer students possibly stimulating (cross)curricular initiatives, especially at advanced undergraduate and graduate levels.

Keywords: untranslatability; subtitling; dubbing; culture-specific items; language-specific features.

1. Untranslatability: some preliminary notes

Many of the most penetrating thinkers have focused their attention on the issue of untranslatability, a concept which in the past may possibly have derived from a prejudicial objection: the sacralization of texts brought about the sacralization of languages themselves; hence, in this viewpoint, translation became an act of sacrilege (Ladmiral 1990). Untranslatability, though, has also long been debated from different perspectives according to the many disciplines with which it is connected and also to the many epistemological issues at stake, such as meaning, language, semiotics, and obviously translation proper. More recently, issues concerning the often insurmountable challenge represented by any translation process are clearly summarized by Richards, who posits that translating "may very probably be the most complex type of event yet produced in the evolution of the cosmos" (1953: 250). Walter Benjamin even maintained that "translations prove to be untranslatable" (Benjamin 1923 in Venuti 2004: 82), and Derrida also considers true translation unattainable: "In a sense, nothing is untranslatable; but in another sense, everything is untranslatable (1998: 67). Steiner even states that humanity has "formed" different languages to preserve territorial protection and cultural isolation (1975: 37). Hence, he maintains that languages are not meant to be translated because linguistic differentiation is a way of keeping one's identity protected inside one's own defined group. In most cases, however, scholars have tackled (un)translatability as a matter of degrees, differently negotiated on the basis of the elements to translate (syntactical or contextual, for instance). In this viewpoint, Berman, for instance, claimed the impossibility of translating only literary works' musicality and rhythm (1999: 132) while Meschonnic, among other scholars, considered untranslatability to be an essentialist notion that is proven wrong by actual translation, sustaining that "the untranslatable is social and historical, not metaphysical" (Meschonnic 1972: 51). As is well-known, a sign has not only a "metalingual force" (e.g. wordplay) but also a "sociolinguistic force", i.e. it may entertain several relations with its object that may simultaneously be of a denotative, connotative, or iconic kind, which both describe the ways in which specific meanings are attached to specific codes and which must be accounted for in translation. Each translation in fact "brings into play not only two languages but also two cultures" (Eco 2001: 62), and the extent to which a text is (un)translatable first depends on the socio-cultural distance between the Source Language (SL) and the Target Language (TL); hence, in some cases, SL texts/elements may require a 'longer transfer' from their original cultural context (historical, social, economic) to another for a successful translation to happen. Other significant variables for untranslatability depend on how deeply the text is rooted in its own Source Culture (SC) and the medium through which the text is delivered. "The cultural implications for translation vary from lexical content and syntax to ideologies and modes of living in a given culture, including genre expectations/constraints" (Cavaliere 2019: 11). In the case of AVT, the obstacles posed by the issue of 'unshared knowledge' between SL and TL audiences are in fact often made challenging by the technical restrictions imposed by the medium. This explains why the problems inherent in all translations are at their most evident in the wide number of ways in which a

text can be translated and adapted for the screen, which, apart from dubbing and subtitling, also include voice-overs, respeaking, subtitling for the hearing-impaired, and the ever-growing phenomenon of fansubbing.[1] Dubbing and subtitling, however, are the most used forms[2] and are therefore those considered in my investigation. They both pose so many challenges for translators that Zabalbeascoa (1996) suggests working in teams, while Pedersen maintains that in such contexts, it might be preferable to talk about "rendering" culture rather than "translating" (2005). Dubbing, in particular, presents numerous constraints in terms of different types of synchronization (also called adjustment or adaptation): the first is phonetic (usually called lip-sync) and is about the movements of the mouth and lips, which have to open and close while following a logical rhythm; the second is character synchronization, which guarantees correspondence between actors' body movements or gestures and what they are saying; while the third is about timing, namely isochrony, since the length of the translated text must be the same as the original (Pavesi 2005). These three kinds of synchrony often represent a great challenge for audiovisual translators who, though maintaining the general meaning, may be forced to notably modify the ST and change entire sentences in order to adjust the rhythm and make the sentences visually identical to the movements on the screen (Chaume 2004; Baños-Piñero and Chaume 2009).[3] As for subtitling,

> … the medium imposes additional constraints to those of other kinds of writing: calls these constraints 'formal' (quantitative) and 'textual' (qualitative), (Gottlieb 1992: 164) and they are both consequent upon the limitations imposed by space (each line of the subtitle must consist of approximately 40 characters or typographic spaces) and time factors (captions only remain on screen for a maximum of seven seconds). […] Because space is so limited, the physical space taken up by a single letter becomes significant (for example, more space for 'm' and 'w', less for 't' or 'l') and this may affect the words selected for the subtitle and so potentially erode the relationship between words and picture/words and meaning […] while certain features of speech such as dialect, emphatic devices including intonation, code-switching and so on are not automatically represented (Cavaliere 2010: 178-179).

However, in all AVT cases, in contrast to other static written modes of communication, the medium prevents both the audience from back-tracking in the text in order to retrieve meaning and, more importantly, the provision of a "thick translation […] that seeks with its annotations and its accompanying

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[1] "[F]ansubs are subtitled versions […] that fans (amateur subtitlers) produce primarily to express their disagreement with commercial subtitling practices and to impose linguistic and cultural mediation strategies of their own" (Pérez-González 2007: 70). Although fansubbing does not yet have any official recognition and may also be considered illegal due to its widespread consolidation, it cannot be ignored (Díaz Cintas and Muñoz Sanchez 2006).
[2] Certain larger European countries tend to prefer dubbing as an audiovisual translation modality, while others prefer subtitling (de Linde and Kay 1999; Perego and Taylor 2012).
[3] Dubbing is also commonly defined to as 'doppiaggese' with an underlying negative connotation (Perego and Taylor 2012).

glosses to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context" (Appiah 2004: 399).

2. Aim and Methodology

My analysis aims to highlight examples in which, despite the immediate general translatability from English into Italian, there is a large residue of meaning associated with the linguistic structures or socio-cultural background of the SL that either remain untranslated or, when translated, often result in a clumsy and/or inexplicable translation to the TL audience. This limitation, in the examples under scrutiny, cannot be generally attributed to a lack of competence on the part of the translators, given the undeniable general level of translational expertise, but depends both on the intrinsic untranslatability of too many lingua-cultural implications involved and also on the above-mentioned constraints of the screen medium. The analysis of clips from my corpus demonstrates that lingua-cultural-specific references are too often translated very vaguely, mistranslated, or even left untranslated and so cannot be properly appreciated by the TL audience in their intended lingua-cultural and/or humorous dimension.

Drawing on the works of well-known translation/AVT scholars (Delabastita 1996; Leppihalme 1994, 1997; Pedersen 2005, 2007, 2011), my study is carried out on English audio scripts of well-known films/TV series. Qualitative examples have been chosen on the basis of the challenges posed to translatability for their subtitled/dubbed Italian version (only in one case is the translation from Italian into English), since they require recognition of both linguistic and socio-cultural references, including puns, idiomatic expressions, famous characters, gestures, etc. which are very unlikely to be (totally) recognized and/or understood by the TL audience. My corpus comprises four films and two TV series.

- Films:
    - *Pulp Fiction* (1994, Quentin Tarantino)
    - *The First Wives Club* (1996, Hugh Wilson)
    - *Incantesimo Napoletano* (2002, Paolo Genovese and Luca Miniero)
    - *Inglourious Basterds* (2009, Quentin Tarantino)
- TV series:
    - *Friends* (distributed by NBC (US) and Rai (Italy), aired from 1994 to 2003, 10 seasons, 236 episodes)
    - *How I Met Your Mother* (premiered in the US on CBS in 2005 and ended in 2014, 9 seasons, 208 episodes)[4]

The examples have been subdivided according to two main categories:

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[4] In Italy it first aired in 2008 on Mediaset as *E alla fine arriva mamma!* (literally, *At last comes Mom!*) (Sutera 2008).

(1) "Culture-specific items" (Franco Aixelá 1996) or "extralinguistic cultural references" (ECRs) (Pedersen 2007: 30),[5] which are "expressions that refer to entities outside language, such as names of people, places, institutions, food, customs etc., which a person may not know, even if s/he knows the language" (Pedersen 2007: 30-31) and which may also include purely visual cultural specificity such as body language, images, symbols, etc.

(2) Language-specific features, comprising alliterations, idioms, wordplays, proverbs, songs, etc.

In some cases, culture-specific items and language-specific features may also overlap, which makes translation even more problematic. As aptly put by Franco Aixelá (1996: 56-57), "The first problem we face in the study of the cultural aspects of translation is how to devise a suitable tool for our analysis, a notion of 'culture-specific item' (CSI) that will enable us to define the strictly cultural component as opposed to, say, the linguistic or pragmatic ones. The main difficulty with the definition lies, of course, in the fact that in a language everything is culturally produced, beginning with language itself". Although, as expected, particularly for the transfer of culture-specific linguistic elements, there is no unique translation guideline (Diaz-Cintas 2003, 2004), my analysis mostly considers Pedersen's taxonomy which "matches the world, rather than trying to make the world fit the model" (2011: 74). He identifies six main strategies, which may be grouped into two main categories, i.e. SL-oriented and TL-oriented ones. SL-oriented strategies include Retention, when the CSI is rendered into the TL in an unchanged (complete retention) or slightly adapted (TL adjusted) form; Specification, involving the adding of more information which enables a better clarification/explicitation (Klaudy and Karoly 2005)[6] of the CSI (further subdivided into Addition and Completion); and Direct Translation, namely a word-for-word translation, further subdivided into calque and shifted. TL-oriented strategies, instead, comprise Generalization, occurring when the CSI is rendered less specifically in the Target Text (TT) than it is in the Source Text (ST) (for example, superordinate term or paraphrase) and Substitution (cultural or situational), entailing the replacement of the CSI of the ST by another CSI.[7] Finally, translators may even prefer Omission, where the CSI is ignored and not rendered at all. The choice of which option to apply depends both on the culture-specific linguistic element itself and on the broader, contextual, linguistic, or non-linguistic visual situation in which it is enshrined.

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[5] The concepts, to some degree, also overlap with other scholars' definitions, including *Newmark's "cultural words"* (1988), Baker's "*culture*-specific concepts" (1992), Leppihalme's "allusions" (1994, 1997), Nedergaard-Larsen's "culture-bound problems" (1993), and Florin's "realia" (1993).

[6] According to Klaudy and Károly's definition (2005: 16), "Explicitation takes place, for example, when a SL [..] unit of a more general meaning is replaced by a TL [...] unit of a more special meaning; the complex meaning of a SL word is distributed over several words in the TL; meaningful elements appear in the TL text; one sentence in the SL is divided into two or several sentences in the TL; or, when SL phrases are extended or 'elevated' into clauses in the TL, etc."

[7] "Another way of dealing with troublesome ECRs is to replace an unknown reference with a known one, either from the source culture (SC) or from the target culture (TC), and this is where the subtitler has to presume a degree of cultural interchangeability" (Pedersen 2017: 31).

3. Investigating some cases of AVT untranslatability

Language and culture are inextricably linked and, as in a type of conjoined twin-like relationship, they cannot be separated one from another. "Language is essentially rooted in the reality of the culture […] it cannot be explained without constant reference to these broader contexts of verbal utterance (Malinowski 1936: 305). As a consequence, translation happens across languages and cultures, or "linguacultures" (House 1997: viii) and is not a mere linguistic task but a cultural one. A translator, in turn, is required to

> act as an in-between, a link between the two parts, who plays the role of facilitator of communication as much as possible, both at [a] systemic level, coping with the constraints of the two languages involved, and at [a] cultural level. By and large, the whole process appears to be […] an act of interpretation/explanation performed by the translator, according to his skills and the criteria adopted. Meaning can and has to be modulated in different socio-cultural contexts, and translators can sometimes go beyond what is generally called the literalist approach if this allows better comprehension. (Cavaliere and Abbamonte 2006: 246)

Nevertheless, especially in AVT, the particular complexity of both theoretical and practical issues raised by cultural concepts may, more often than not, entail a loss of meaning, as the following examples will demonstrate.

3.1. Actions may speak louder than words

Screen characters are often depicted not only through their verbal language, which may include accents, register and of course lexical choices, but also through their body language; non-verbal gestures, such as mimicry and facial expressions, have a fundamental role in communication and may represent a sort of language of their own (Cozzolino 2003). As a matter of fact, in different cultures, meaning, and particularly phatic and pragmatic functions, are activated not only linguistically but also by gestural expressiveness which, sometimes, speaks louder than words, as clearly demonstrated by a scene from *Inglourious Basterds*, the 2009 war film written and directed by Quentin Tarantino.[8] In the first year of Germany's occupation of France, a group of Jewish-American soldiers known as 'The Basterds', a team of Jewish-American soldiers led by First Lieutenant Aldo Raine, joins forces with Bridget von Hammersmark, a German actress and undercover agent, to assassinate the leaders of the Third Reich. Their

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[8] The title is spelled *Inglourious Basterds*, and although various theories have been offered by viewers, Quentin Tarantino personally stated during a news conference at the Cannes Film Festival that he will never reveal the answer to this misspelling (Associated Press 2009), so any debate is just speculation. However, among the reasons why the title may be misspelled are that Tarantino is dyslexic, or in order to distinguish the film from a 1978 Italian war movie, *Quel Maledetto Treno Blindato* (translated into English as *The Inglorious Bastards*); 'basterd' may even be derived from the word '*basters*', a term derived from Dutch '*bastaard*' (bastard), indicating persons of mixed race like the Jewish-American soldiers of the film. The brains behind the operation, Bridget von Hammersmark, is played by Diane Kruger, Lieutenant Archie Hicox by Michael Fassbender, while First Lieutenant Aldo Raine is played by Brad Pitt.

fates unwittingly converge with the young French Jewish cinema owner Shosanna Dreyfus, who in turn seeks to avenge the Nazis' execution of her family. The scene under scrutiny is set in the basement of a French tavern where the German double agent von Hammersmark has arranged to meet the British officer Lieutenant Archie Hicox, and 'The Basterds' plan an attack on the cinema, where a film premiere will be attended by the Nazi leadership. Unfortunately, on the same night as the rendezvous, some German soldiers are at the tavern celebrating the birth of the son of a German Staff Sergeant. Hicox is unwillingly forced to speak with some SS officers who cannot help noticing his odd German accent. However, it is only the (incorrect) three-fingered way in which Hicox orders "*Drei Gläser*" (three glasses) of whisky that confirms the SS officers' suspicion: Hicox and his comrades are spies and posing as German soldiers! A firefight immediately breaks out in which many in the tavern are killed, but the reason for this unexpected carnage may remain inexplicable for those viewers who are unable to translate Hicox's gesture intersemiotically.[9] Hicox, who is posing as a German soldier, gives himself away as an impostor only when he asks the bartender for three glasses of whisky. In so doing, he holds up his three middle fingers, his index, middle, and ring fingers, while a true German would have ordered three with their index finger, middle finger, and thumb extended. For most Western Europeans (including Germans, Austrians, Belgians, Swiss, Italians, Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese, French, and Scandinavians), when counting with their fingers, their thumb is in fact always the first digit and represents number one, followed by the index finger, middle finger, ring finger, and finally the little finger. English-speaking countries, such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, instead typically count with the index finger as the first digit and end with the thumb to represent five. Research conducted at the University of Alberta-Augustana (Pika, Nicoladis and Marentette 2009) confirmed that the gesture also extends to how they order drinks. Consequently, in this scene, Hicox's spontaneous body language unmistakably betrays his British identity, thus explaining why the Germans begin the shoot-out. This *untranslated* sign is revealing of the too often underestimated importance of non-verbal language!

Other significant examples are offered in the films *Incantesimo Napoletano* and *The First Wives Club* – the former translated into English as *Neapolitan Spell* and the latter into Italian as *Il Club delle Prime Mogli* – which both offer evidence of some of the problems and difficulties of translating from Italian into English and vice versa owing not only to visual and lexical changes but to ECRs as well.

Many untranslated, though meaningful, non-verbal signs can be found in *Incantesimo Napoletano*,[10] a film which narrates the life story of Assunta Aiello, who, though born in Naples into a family of real Neapolitan 'integralists', has always lived with Northern customs, accents, and tastes since birth. Assunta's parents, for instance, obsessed with tradition and with the pride of being

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[9] The audience is given an explanation about this scene later on in the film.

[10] The film was written and directed by Luca Miniero and Paolo Genovese in 2002, and its plot, told in flashbacks by Assunta herself as a merry 80-year-old, develops along the many hilarious 'treatments' Assunta's parents devise in order to 'cure' their daughter from her dangerous 'deviance'. See Cavaliere 2007.

Neapolitans, desperately want her to master the Neapolitan dialect, to the point that they even hire a private teacher to teach her Neapolitan. Assunta, however, instead of practising the dialect, whiles away her time by drawing the Duomo of Milan. When her mother sees her drawing, she violently slams Assunta's bedroom door. Although it is obvious to the SL audience why Assunta's mother gets angry with her, since they can easily identify the cathedral of Milan in her sketches, can TL viewers so immediately recognize this untranslated symbol of the northern Italian town? In the same vein, when, later on in her life, a pregnant Assunta gets a craving for food, her mother resignedly brings her a cake, which can immediately be recognized by the Italian audience as *panettone*, but can the English-speaking spectators worldwide equally identify it as the sweet northern bread, typical of Milan? Throughout the whole film, Assunta keeps stubbornly rejecting her mother's Neapolitan cooking in favour of Milanese food: she always spits out any traditional Neapolitan food such as the pasta sauce called *ragout* and the *pastiera* (a classic Neapolitan cake generally eaten at Easter), and asks, instead, for risotto with saffron, more typical food from Milan. Once again, these cultural references and such a juxtaposition between food typically eaten in the southern and in northern parts of Italy can only be inferred because they are never overtly explained. Furthermore, in this case, the reference to *pastiera* is a clear example of an ECR representing a particularly thorny challenge for translators. The following table refers to the scene when Assunta's father reproaches her daughter after she spits out the Neapolitan *pastiera*.

Table 1. An untranslatable ECR

Original Italian script	English subtitled version	English literal translation of the Italian version
Padre: *Allora, che c'ha questa pastiera che non va? Questa è di Scaturchio, mica l'ha fatta tua madre*	Father: So, what's wrong with this *pastiera*? This is the one made by Scaturchio, not by your mother	Father: What's wrong with this *pastiera*? It's not the one your mother makes

As for *pastiera,* which remains untranslated, the translator here opts for borrowing or, in Pedersen's taxonomy, Retention, thus maintaining the same form as the ST; in addition, when Assunta's father refers to Scaturchio, one of the most renowned patisseries in Naples, particularly for its *pastiere,* desperately hoping to convince his daughter that the *pastiera* must necessarily be good, the translator decides to omit any mention of Scaturchio, which is really impossible to explain, and may be difficult to understand even for a general Italian-speaking audience, outside the Neapolitan one. The two very local terms (*pastiera* and Scaturchio) make the whole sentence too culturally loaded and difficult to render, and therefore the translator opted for Omission, i.e. the complete elimination of one word of the text in order to deculturalize it. Needless to say, Assunta's mother gets angry with her husband (since his underlying assumption is that, unlike the one made by the renowned pastry shop Scaturchio, her homemade *pastiera* is unpalatable and can thus be spat out), but once again, only the SL audience who recognize the cultural reference can understand and

appreciate the humour of the whole scene. Additionally, it must also be noticed that Assunta, from the very first scene, speaks with the purest Milanese accent, while all other characters have a Neapolitan accent and often use dialect, but this code-switching is never signalled in the translation. Language not only provides the main socio-cultural frame[11] but also functions as the primary means of characterization of the female narrator; since she was a toddler, for instance, Assunta calls for "*Mamy*" (as a Milanese would) instead of "*Mammà*" (as per the Neapolitan dialect). More importantly, in one of the first scenes of the film, an eight-year-old Assunta introduces herself as a "true blue Neapolitan", and she adds, ironically, "You can tell from my accent", with a perfect Milanese accent. This is a phonological feature that, though immediately apparent to the SL audience, is never made explicit in the TL version. No attempts are made to distinguish the different accents, and the Neapolitan lower-class dialect and the Milanese accent are both replaced with the Standard variety of the English language. The rendering and adaptation of regional and social varieties represent one of the main challenges for operators involved in any translation sector, and, as in many other audiovisual translations,[12] in *Incantesimo Napoletano*, we find inclusive language, i.e. language that does not connote people on the basis of gender, place of birth, age, social status, or other factors, so important markers like class-related accents and ethnic or geographical dialects undergo Reduction. This makes it difficult for the TL audience to understand immediately where, in the view of Assunta's parents, the problem lies, i.e. her Milanese mindset, which is instead immediately 'noticeable' for the TL audience from her way of speaking. These untranslated cultural references and non-verbal signs, however, are all highly instrumental in conveying the underlying message that all of Assunta's parents' efforts to 'convert' their daughter from feeling and acting like a Milanese into a real Neapolitan proved totally useless. Another example of untranslated ECRs, here again a gesture, is offered by a scene in which a fisherman, who is reassuring Assunta's father that he will keep his secret about his daughter, opens and closes his hand as if mimicking moving lips while speaking, then he blows his cheeks, puckers his lips, and says in Neapolitan dialect, "*Sò vint'ann ca stò miez è pisc. Avrò imparato qualcosa, no*?" which could be translated as "I've been living among fish for twenty years. I must have learned something, don't you think?" The Italian verbal message matches the gesture of the fisherman, who is implicitly referring to the Italian idiom 'as mute as a fish'. The poor English translation, resulting from Generalization, is "Don't worry. Do fish talk?", which for the TT audience, unaware of the implicit Italian idiom, results in an unnatural-sounding utterance, quite incomprehensible and uninterpretable both at a verbal and a visual level.

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[11] Following Leppihalme's definition (1997: 41), a frame is a "combination of words that is accepted in the language community as an example of performed linguistic material."

[12] "Since the translation and adaptation of regional and social varieties represent one of the main obstacles for operators involved in any field of translation, a dialect for-dialect approach, according to Pierre Mével, is generally dismissed because it presupposes not only linguistic, but also cultural and functional equivalences […]. Bartoll (2009: 4) suggests that all variants and the passage from dialect to standard language might reasonably be signalled with the addition of sentences uttered in dialect within brackets, or by resorting to the use of different colours, or to italics for all the secondary languages" (Cavaliere 2010: 179-180).

3.2. A focus on culture-specific references

The First Wives Club is a hit comedy directed by Hugh Wilson which, although released in late 1996, is still a scathing satire of North American modern society,[13] and in particular of Upper East Side and Tinseltown norms.[14] Adapted from the best-selling novel by Olivia Goldsmith, the film is about three wealthy Manhattanites, former close college friends who reunite for the first time in years and set out for revenge on their two-timing husbands who, after being helped by their spouses to build up hugely successful businesses, dump them for younger, 'trophy' wives. In one of the first scenes, the three friends are out having dinner and the drinks that the three women order act indirectly as a type of introduction to their different personalities. Brenda and Elisa, both self-assertive, have spirits while the shy, overly apologetic Annie, in line with her friends' description as "the one who can't manage a simple declarative sentence", tentatively orders a Virgin Mary, which the TL version explains as a *pomodoro condito,* i.e. a spicy tomato juice. In English, any 'virgin' drink is an alcohol-free drink, thus, in this case, the chosen approach, which makes the TT "intelligible and even familiar to the target-language reader"[15] (Venuti 1992: 5), seemed unavoidable in order to highlight the difference between Annie's soft drink and her friends' alcoholic ones in the Italian version. However, the Italian equivalent erases from the text any reference to the Virgin Mary, which in the English script was indirectly, but precisely, meant to foreground Annie's sobriety compared to her friends' 'high-spiritedness', matching the verbal message with gestures. As a result, the humorous response which is triggered in the English version is lost in the Italian rendering.

In another scene, Annie and Brenda visit Elise, who is visibly drunk, though she denies it. On finding a lot of empty liquor bottles in Elise's rubbish, the abrasive, wise-cracker Brenda exposes her friend's alcohol dependence by telling her: "Let's examine the evidence. Look! Nothing but bottles and gallon jugs!" Elise desperately tries to justify herself and to look for an excuse by replying "I had guests!", but Brenda sarcastically asks, "Who? Guns N' Roses?" The lines are literally translated as *"Ho avuto ospiti" / "Chi? I Guns N' Roses?"* In order to fully grasp Brenda's comic malice, the TL audience is not only required to recognize Guns N' Roses as one of the USA's most successful hard rock bands but also to be informed about the band's hedonism and rebelliousness. The flagrant alcohol and drug abuse by its members, often seen intoxicated both on and off stage, earned them the title of "the most dangerous band in the world" (BBC 2016) in

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[13] Anthony Puccinelli, in his 1996 review of the film, wrote in the *Chicago Reader*: "*The First Wives Club* is nonetheless worth watching and preserving for what they tell us about ourselves and our culture. Two hundred years from now *The First Wives Club* will be an anthropological artifact for historians studying the 1990s, revealing the degree of self-consciousness that comes with living in a media culture."

[14] Tinseltown – after the homonymous world famous, award-winning television show featuring the best of Hollywood and Bollywood – is the derogatory name for Hollywood and the insubstantial, superficial glamor the whole film industry represents.

[15] A message may be considered 'intelligible' if it is understood on a phonological, lexical, and syntactic level or 'comprehensible' if it is decoded at a semantic level, while 'interpretability' concerns the pragmatic level (Enkvist 1991: 7-8).

terms of being poor examples of role models, especially to their young fans, but the TL audience, especially an older one, is very unlikely to be in the loop. However, the pragmatic explicitation required to understand Brenda's caustic remark would be too unwieldy to be added as paratext, hence the sarcastic joke remains socio-culturally untranslated here and, as a consequence, slips by unnoticed by many. In the same film, Elise, a one-time Academy Award-winning actress, tells her friends that she has been offered a new role in a film whose main character is the young Monique, but instead of playing Monique, as expected, she has been given the role of her "grotesque mother". Consequently, Elise desperately cries: "I'm not Monique's mother! Angela Lansbury plays Monique's mother", which in the Italian version simply becomes "*Angela Lansbury è la madre di Monique*". A single Substitution takes place between the English verb 'plays' and the Italian verb *è* [is], while no supplementary information is given; in order to enable the TL audience to capture the original joke, an "extra distinction" (Neubert and Shreve 1992: 151), i.e. the integration of a discrete amount of paratext, would be required. Angela Lansbury, although a British actress, is a real institution in American theatre and television due to her features, which gave her an air of maturity that allowed her to pass herself off as much older than she actually was. While still in her thirties, Lansbury began playing many maternal roles, often to artists of her own age, and therefore, the SL audience can easily identify the butt of Elise's joke and its underlying assumptions. Lansbury, however, also obtained huge fame in the 1980s by starring as Jessica Fletcher in the light mystery programme *Murder, She Wrote*, a very successful series in Italy too, where it was broadcast as *La signora in giallo*.[16] As a consequence, the name of Angela Lansbury, if known, is misleading for an Italian audience because the only possible reference, rather than to her air of maturity and depiction of maternal roles, would be to her role in solving detective stories, which is totally out of context in the film's plot.

The examples given here are 'allusive'[17] expressions, which usually adhere to the culture that produced them and are based on the assumption that the ST audience share/recognize a given socio-cultural knowledge. Although the English sentences analyzed might be considered both 'intelligible' and 'comprehensible' to any TT audience with a basic knowledge of English, they might be fully 'interpretable' only if, for instance, the TT audience were able, in the last example to position Angela Lansbury's name within the intended US scenario. In *The First Wives Club*, many verbal and non-verbal socio-cultural-specific elements are also meant to convey biting parody, irony, or subversiveness concerning a certain character or event (Cavaliere 2008). The dubbed Italian version of this film, by failing to decode most of these elements, erases part of the original comic and satirical dimension of the SL script.

A similar example can be found in the 1994 film *Pulp Fiction* – another famous film written and directed by Quentin Tarantino – whose plot develops

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[16] In Italian, "*La signora in giallo*" can have a two-fold meaning since it can both evoke detective stories, given that in Italian *libro giallo* [yellow book] means a thriller, and may also mean a lady in a yellow dress.

[17] An allusion is a figure of speech that compares and/or refers to aspects or qualities of counterparts in history, mythology, art, literary, or popular or contemporary culture.

through three stories of criminal Los Angeles which intertwine, out of chronological order. The example refers to dialogues between Mia Wallace, the drug-addict wife of crime boss Marsellus Wallace, and Vincent Vega, one of Wallace's assassins. Wallace is in Florida and has therefore asked his hitman Vega to chaperone his wife during his absence.[18] One of the best-known scenes of the film is when Vincent is driving out Mia for dinner and she tells him, "Don't be…", and while drawing a square in the air, an animated square appears at Uma Thurman's fingertips on the windscreen of the car.[19] The English script and the Italian version are reported in Table 2.

Table 2. Example of an untranslatable idiomatic expression at both verbal and visual levels

Original English script	Italian subtitled version	Literal translation of the Italian version
Mia: This is Jack Rabbit Slim's. An Elvis man should love it.	Mia: *Questo è Jack Rabbit Slim's. A un Elvis-maniaco dovrebbe piacere.*	Mia: This is Jack Rabbit Slim's. An Elvis-maniac should like it.
Vincent: Come on Mia. Let's go get a steak.	Vincent: *Dai Mia, andiamo a farci una bistecca.*	Vincent: Come on Mia, let's go have a steak.
Mia: You can get a steak here, Daddy-O. *Don't be a…*	Mia: *La bistecca la puoi trovare qui, paparino. Dai, non fare il…*	Mia: Your steak can be found here, Pa. Come on, don't be a…
Vincent: After you, Kitty-cat.	Vincent: *Dopo di te, gattina.*	Vincent: After you, Kitty-cat.

The Italian translation is quite literal, and even Mia's unfinished sentence "Don't' be a…" is basically a word-for-word translation: "*Dai, non fare il…*".[20] Although the sentence is incomplete and despite it having been repeatedly noticed that Mia actually draws a rectangle in the air rather than a square, it is clear to any English speaker that she is annoyed and is implicitly telling Vincent "not to be a square" about the choice of the restaurant. Mia is referring to the English idiomatic expression "be there or be square", meaning that if one declines to attend a certain event, they are considered 'uncool' or out of touch with current

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[18] Mia Wallace is played by American actress Uma Thurman and has since become one of the most iconic characters in popular culture, while Vincent Vega is brilliantly portrayed by John Travolta.

[19] One of the characteristics of Quentin Tarantino's films is that they are always packed with endless references to touchstones from popular culture and/or other movies. The 'square' scene seems to have various sources and different examples where the mid-air square occurs have been provided, although no one has ever been able to determine which of them may have been Tarantino's source. However, the earliest mid-air square possibly appeared during a short called "Visual Thinking", a Muppet sketch that originated on *Sam and Friends*, an early Henson series that ran in the late 50s, in which characters visualized their thoughts thanks to the aid of on-screen animation. When Kermit the Frog and Harry the Hipster, for example, are discussing their taste in music and Kermit confesses to Harry that he does not like jazz, a square (or, better, a rectangle) appears in the air over his face. Other shows from the period also used the gag, including the 1957 Looney Tunes cartoon *Three Little Bops*, while at least two more popped up in 1961 in *The Flintstones* and the opening sequence of *The Parent Trap* (Wickman 2012).

[20] The scene is accessible on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_DGLUyuOYJQ.

trends and attitudes. The underlying assumption is that the place she has chosen is considered trendy and, consequently, that anyone who does not attend is dull. The etymology of this expression is unclear, although most sources claim the current meaning originated during the 1950s beatnik era[21] when, at least in the USA, it became the antonym of 'hip'. Soon after World War II, the term 'square' – which had long been used to refer to one's honest, direct and solid personality or to high-quality work, perhaps alluding to the perfectly symmetrical edges of a literal square – instead acquired a negative connotation to indicate an ordinary or conservative person in behaviour or demeanour, or even an outcast. Elvis Presley, for instance, used this expression in his song 'Jailhouse Rock', assuming that while all the cool people would be going to the warden's party, Sad Sack must have been a "square" for not going.

> The warden threw a party in the county jail.
> The prison band was there and they began to wail.
> […]
> Sad Sack was a sittin' on a block of stone
> Way over in the corner weepin' all alone.
> The warden said, "Hey, buddy, don't you be no square.
> If you can't find a partner use a wooden chair." (azlyrics.com, n.d.)

This English expression, however, cannot be literally rendered into Italian because even though the idiomatic expression *essere una persona quadrata* exists in Italian, its meaning is a very positive one.[22] It is meant as a compliment paid to someone who is considered reasonable, reliable, and level-headed; additionally, in this sense, the adjective '*quadrato*' [square] must always collocate with a noun, i.e. *un(a) persona/ donna/ragazza/uomo/quadrata(o)* [a square person/woman/girl/man]. As a consequence, a literal translation would be unacceptable and there is no single/true equivalence in Italian for the English idiom "don't be a square". The English concept could instead be rendered into different informal expressions, varying slightly according to the different contexts in which they are used, for instance, *non fare lo sfigato* [don't be a loser/unpopular person], *non essere pesante* [don't be a conformist, or someone out of touch], *non essere noioso* [don't be dull, boring], or *non fare il guastafeste* [don't be a party-pooper/don't spoil the fun]. The last meaning is possibly the one that could better fit an Italian equivalence in the given context (i.e. Mia wants Vincent not to spoil her night out and agree with the restaurant she has chosen). In any case, for the Italian viewer (except for an English-speaking one), the square/rectangle that pops up remains totally meaningless since the sign is intersemiotically untranslated and does not semantically match with the unfinished sentence "*Dai, non fare il….*"

The examples in this section analyzed instances of references that are very culture-specific in nature and which confirm that translators must possess not

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[21] More specifically, the meaning of 'square' changed around the time jazz became popular, and if someone were a square, they consequently did not appreciate jazz or swing music.
[22] In Italian, there is also the idiomatic expression *avere le spalle quadrate* [to have square shoulders] collocated within the positive concept of being a reliable hard worker and/or a well-balanced, strong-willed, sensible person.

only an extraordinarily good knowledge of the SL but also a broad knowledge of lingua-cultural issues of the SL, though both skills may still often prove insufficient in AVT. As anticipated, subtitling simultaneously requires, on the one hand, maintaining all the necessary information needed for the understanding of the dialogue and, on the other, without using any editorial techniques, facing the challenging decision of what to leave out, as often there is not enough space to include a translation of all the information available for the ST. In many cases, however, it may not be possible to omit the portion of text that contains the ECR either, even though the resulting translation then uses unusual and weird language.

3.3 The challenge of translating language-specific features

A slightly different example, also from *Pulp Fiction*, is a joke based on wordplay told by Mia to Vincent (reported in Table 3). Indeed, according to Chiaro, "the term word play includes every conceivable way in which language is used with the intent to amuse […] and conjures up an array of conceits ranging from puns and spoonerisms to wisecracks and funny stories" (1992: 2-4).

Table 3. Translating a wordplay from *Pulp Fiction*

Original English script	Italian subtitled version	Literal translation of the Italian version
Mia: Three tomatoes are walking down the street, poppa tomato, momma tomato, and baby tomato. Baby tomato starts lagging behind. The poppa tomato gets really angry, goes back and squishes him, says: "*Ketchup!*" [Catch up]	Mia: *Tre pomodori camminano per la strada, Papà Pomodoro, Mamma Pomodoro e il Pomodorino. Il Pomodorino cammina con aria svagata e Papà Pomodoro allora si arrabbia e... Va da lui, lo schiaccia e dice: "Fai **il** concentrato!"*	Three tomatoes are walking down the road, Papa Tomato, Mama Tomato and Baby Tomato. Baby Tomato is walking absent-mindedly so Papa Tomato gets angry and… He goes to him, squishes him and says: "Be ***a*** concentrated!"

The dark humour of this wordplay is based on paronymy,[23] i.e. slight differences in both spelling and sound between the English noun 'ketchup' – referring to the thick, smooth-textured, spicy sauce usually made from tomatoes – and the phrasal verb 'catch up' – here meaning 'succeed in reaching a person who is ahead of one', as in the case of the described scene of the 'Tomato Family'. Hence Mia's joke clearly exemplifies how a wordplay stands for "the various textual phenomena in which *structural features* of the language(s) are exploited to bring about a *communicatively significant confrontation* of two (or more) linguistic structures with *more or less similar forms* and *more or less different meanings*" (Delabastiata 1996: 128, emphasis original). However, when it comes to AVT,

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[23] Delabastita (1996: 128) subdivides wordplays into four main categories based on the level of similarity between sounds and spelling: homonymy (identical sounds and spelling); homophony (identical sounds but different spelling); homography (different sounds but identical spelling) and paronymy (slight differences in both spelling and sound).

even though in Italian the widely-used term 'ketchup' may be considered "a well-established borrowing, […] no longer considered as such and become a part of the respective TL lexicon and therefore needs no translation" (Vinay and Darbelnet 1995: 85), no similarity concerning either sound or spelling exists between the word 'ketchup', the English verb 'catch up', and its Italian translation, i.e the verb '*raggiungere*'. Hence, if translated literally, the English paronymic link would be lost, and the joke would be totally suppressed, which clearly confirms how "Jokes are also notoriously difficult to translate. […] The translation of idioms, proverbs, puns and other forms of wordplay are a good test of the untranslatable" (Bassnett 2014: 147).[24] Nevertheless, in the example under scrutiny, the translators managed to attain PUN > PUN – i.e. "the source-text pun is translated by target-text language pun" (Delabastita 1996: 134) – by modifying the frame not only linguistically but also situationally. Baby Tomato, rather than being depicted as someone/something moving slowly so that (s)he/it is behind them, namely someone who is 'lagging behind' and therefore needs to 'catch up' (and soon becomes 'ketchup' once squeezed), is described in the Italian frame as 'walking absent-mindedly [literally '*cammina con aria svagata*'] so that the focus is not on Baby Tomato's slow pace but rather on its lack of attention. As a consequence, Poppa Tomato gets angry because he wants his son to be 'concentrated' and so '*lo schiaccia*' [squishes it]. This is quite a rare instance of a 'self-evident' translation strategy where the Italian wordplay is based on homonymy, as it refers to a situation where two words have the same sound and spelling though with a difference in meaning. In Italian, like in English, '*concentrato*' [concentrated] can be both a noun indicating, especially in cookery, sauce or juice (i.e. something squeezed), having had water removed to increase its density, as well as an adjective meaning 'focused'. The former meaning is the one more immediately lexically related to a tomato, and as a noun, in Italian it requires the definite article *il*, which is in fact found in the pun (see Table 3). This is not required for the adjective. However, these two meanings of '*concentrato*' within this frame, i.e. the phrase on which the wordplay is based, can be reasonably related, as both of them may refer to Baby Tomato.

Meaningful language-specific examples are also reported in Table 4 from the American sitcom *How I Met Your Mother*[25] and refer to answers given by Marshall, a lawyer, to his wife Lily when he was pretending he was busy at work every time she called him.[26]

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[24] Some scholars (like Leppihalme 1997) treat puns as a separate subcategory of wordplay, whereas others, including Delabastita (1996) use the two above-mentioned terms interchangeably. The latter approach is adopted in this study.

[25] *How I Met Your Mother* is an American sitcom aired by CBS from 2005 to 2014 and created by Craig Thomas and Carter Bays, where, through flashbacks, the New York-based main character Ted Mosby narrates to his sons the events that led him, together with his best friends, to meet their mother. In Italy, it was broadcast on Mediaset from 2008 to 2014, initially as *E alla fine arriva mamma* (for the first three seasons), then under its original English title (Sutera 2011).

[26] The firm Marshall works for lost a lot of business and people got laid off, and there is only one other person in the office, but every time Lily calls Marshall, he tells her that he cannot talk, pretending he is extremely busy with his work. When Lily finally goes to Marshall's office and realizes that her husband had been lying about being overworked, she is outraged, but Marshall apologizes and explains that he had lied because he did not want her to see him fail.

Table 4. Examples from the TV series *How I Met Your Mother*

Example	Original English script (season 8, episode 21)	Italian subtitled version	Literal translation of the Italian rendering
1	Marshall: I'm working on a big case	Marshall: *Ho una grossa scatola di lavoro da sbrigare*	Marshall: I have a big box of work to knock out
2	Marshall: I've got to focus on The Client	Marshall: *Devo concentrarmi sul cliente*	Marshall: I have to concentrate on the client
3	Marshall: We've got a lot of balls in the air right now	Marshall: *Sta andando tutto per l'aria*	Marshall: Everything is going through the air

All these examples' humorous meaning is dependent on the witty exploitation of language combining with the visual experiential meaning, i.e. it requires viewers to be able to make the intersemiotic switch of meaning from the verbal to the virtually visual domain (*synesthesia*). Humour in the examples under scrutiny is in fact triggered by homonymy between the terms/idiomatic expressions Marshall uses, which could induce one to imagine a very busy work scenario whereas he is idling away, 'busy' with very trivial activities. By not properly rendering the juxtaposition of the character's actions and his expressions, the original sarcastic message (Marshall is far from being busy with his job) does not come across, and the meanings of the dialogue(s) and the whole scene(s) are jeopardized.

In example 1, for instance, Marshall is physically handling a big *case* (i.e. a cardboard container for storing something), whereas he is pretending to be working on a big case for a client (here meaning something that is decided in a court of law). Therefore, the homonymy in English between the term *case* enables Marshall's comic ambiguity, which is totally lost in the Italian version. Italian translators can only literally render the visual reference, i.e. the box [*scatola*] Marshall is handling, while the SL irony within the forensic frame and the allusion to Marshall possibly being at work on a legal case is unavoidably lost.

Examples 2 and 3, by Leppihalme's definition (1997: 141), are "intertextual wordplays" since they are based on a readily available SL phrase containing, for instance, the name of a book (example 2) and an idiomatic expression (example 3). In example 2, Marshall again has no work to do, and when his wife phones him, he tells her "I've got to focus on *The Client*" (my italics), which in English, and so to his wife, sounds consistent for a (supposedly) swamped lawyer. On the contrary, he, as usual, has nothing to work on, and so he is spending his time reading John Grisham's book entitled *The Client*, as is clearly shown in the sequence. The scene, however, might not be so immediately interpretable for ST viewers, who need to be able to translate the cover of the book Marshall is reading in order to fully interpret and appreciate the joke.

In example 3, the phrase is an English idiomatic expression alluding to juggling and, as such, refers to too many things happening or competing for one's attention at the same time. However, in this case, Marshall, rather than describing his overworked scenario in his office, as it might seem, is describing

exactly what his colleague is doing, namely, literally juggling with some little balls. The Italian translation is quite misleading and alienating because the same idiomatic expression, rather than meaning having to deal with many different things at the same time, means a plan or project failing or coming to nothing. As a consequence, there is no connection between the visual and verbal levels, while the ST audience might wonder which plan Marshall is indirectly referring to.

These examples prove untranslatable because in order to understand the ambiguity of the verbally expressed humour underlying such phrases, as explained, not only is sound linguistic competence needed, but ST word knowledge and skills, such as the ability to switch a frame of reference, are required too. This explains why, "[i]n terms of understanding, cross-cultural humour is probably the most difficult feature of another culture. Anthropologists who have mastered the language, joined families, steeped themselves in the culture and the religion, find themselves stumped by the humour" (Solomon 1997: 205). Many instances of "language-dependent jokes" (Zabalbeascoa 1996: 253) are in fact more often than not untranslatable, as the following examples from the hit 90s sitcom *Friends*[27] also demonstrate (Table 4). In the examples reported in Table 4, the ST jokes rely on language-specific features which prove untranslatable in the TL text and therefore fall flat.

Table 5. Untranslatable language-specific features from the TV series *Friends*

	Original English script	**Italian subtitled translation**	**Literal translation of the Italian rendering**
Season 1, episode 24	Ross: I have to go to China. Joey: The country? Ross: No, no, this big pile of dishes in my mom's breakfront…	Ross: *Devo andare in Cina.* Joey: *Quella vera?* Ross: *No, quella grossa pila di piatti nella credenza di mia madre…*	Ross: I have to go to China. Joey: The real one? Ross: No, that huge stack of dishes in my mother's cupboard…
Season 3, episode 17	Chandler: I can handle this. Handle is my middle name. Actually it's the middle part of my first name	Chandler: *Io ce la faccio. Io ho un'energia speciale. Ce l'hanno tutti i figli di divorziati!*	Chandler: I can handle it. I have a special energy. All children of divorcees have got it!

In the first example (season 1, episode 24), the English wordplay is again based on homonymy between the East Asian country China and the word 'china', used in English to indicate any porcelainware such as dishes, vases, or ornaments for domestic use. When Ross, one of the primary characters, informs his friends about his need to go to China, even though his announcement is clearly

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[27] *Friends* ranks among the most popular television shows of all time and premiered on NBC on September 22, 1994, with its final episode airing on May 6 2004. It narrates the personal and professional lives of a group of six friends in their 20s living in Manhattan. The characters, with their completely different personalities and memorable quotes, deftly mix humour and emotion, framed in locations which have since become iconic worldwide. The episodes offer a glimpse of a carefree New York lifestyle that all young generations would like to lead, which explains the show's enduring popularity even among the so-called Gen Z-ers around the world.

unambiguous, the witless Joey needs to clarify that Ross is definitely referring to China as a country. Ross cannot help answering ironically that instead of going to the People's Republic of China, which is obvious, he was planning to go to the porcelain inside his mother's cupboard. In the Italian version, the humorous English wordplay is totally lost since the ST wordplay is translated literally. In Italian, there is no homonymy between the two English terms 'China/china'. In fact, while China translates fairly similarly as *Cina*, 'china' instead translates as *vasellame, stoviglie,* or *porcellana*, and therefore the TL audience is totally unable to understand the connection between Ross' destination and what is inside his mother's cupboard. As a result, in the Italian version, not only does this scene lack any humour, but it is also puzzling for the SL audience.

In the second example (season 3, episode 17), the humorous dimension of the SL version is based on both 'partial' homography and homophony between the first name of one of the main characters of the series, i.e. Chandler, and the verb 'to handle'. More specifically, here Chandler considers his first name as a sort of portmanteau term containing the verb 'handle', which in English may be used to refer to the ability to deal with a problem or a situation successfully, plus the suffix -er, which is the English agent noun ending indicating a person or thing that does an action expressed by the root verb. Accordingly, when he is caught in a difficult situation with his friends, Chandler is trying to reassure them that he will be able to cope with it since he is a problem-solver, a *handler* (my italics) of troubles, as confirmed by his first name, or at least part of it, which in fact overlaps with the verb 'to handle', i.e. C*handler* (my italics). Unlike the literal translation in season 1, episode 24, here the ST message is partially omitted, and a situational substitution is considered the only viable solution. Very often, "For jokes to work they have to be reformulated (in those cases where a reformulation is possible), and news items have to be written with the express intention to communicate with the target group for whom the news is intended" (Bassnett 2014: 148). Nevertheless, in this example, the situational substitution opted for (i.e. Chandler referring to his having a 'special energy' rather than trying to get the SL wordplay across) does not trigger any comical response, quite the contrary. Here the indirect internal allusive reference (linked to the plot itself) is to Chandler's challenging childhood from which his 'energy', considered a defence mechanism he developed due to his parents' divorce, was generated and that, in his viewpoint, is the stamina common to all children of divorcees who experience such troubles.

In view of the immediacy of film and the technical constraints of audiovisual language transfer, the examples given show how AVT may imply giving priority to communicative translation over cultural considerations. For wordplay in particular, the need for a translation that could be easily accessible by the TA may often require neutralizing the ST's lingua-cultural elements, which confirms that by "focusing on wordplay and ambiguity as facts of the source text and/or the target text, we may be tempted to say that wordplay and translation form an almost impossible match, whichever way one looks at it" (Delabastita 1996: 133).

4. Concluding Remarks

In AVT, where possible explanations of ECRs in annotations and glosses is precluded, a merely denotative translation is often unsuccessful in conveying all the verbal (or even non-verbal) lingua-cultural specificities present in the SL scripts. When concepts relevant to the source culture setting(s) are not made explicit in the target culture setting(s), such as the difference between the English-speaking and Western European styles of finger-counting, or when semantic equivalents are not found, TT utterances may be totally incomprehensible or uninterpretable, jokes and wordplays are invalidated when out of context, etc. Furthermore, "It is apparent that culture, as an ingrained set of behaviours and modes of perception, becomes highly important in the learning of a second language. A language is a part of a culture, and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture. The acquisition of a second language, except for specialized, instrumental acquisition, is also the acquisition of a second culture" (Brown 1994: 165). Nonetheless, this relationship has not been fully exploited in the field of L2 teaching, and "The need for greater intercultural awareness" (Bassnett 2014: 143) has been rather underestimated to date, whereas translation itself, which "constitutes the ultimate cognitive experience of alterity" (Brisset 2003: 101), can represent an invaluable approach in didactic agendas. As highlighted by Pym (1997: 14), *"l'espace du traduire – le travail du traducteur – se situe dans les intersections qui se tissent entre les cultures et non dans le sein d'une culture unique."*[28] Translation, in fact, on the one hand, allows people(s) to overcome differences between languages and, on the other, enables us to "become aware that our own neighbours do not speak or think as we do" (Paz 1992: 154). Hence, enabling students to develop an appropriate perception of cultural differences could and should play an important and critical role in English language education and, in particular, the analysis of audiovisual (mis)translations could teach them how to cope with such differences (Gambier, Caimi and Mariotti 2015), offering them stimulating and even entertaining (and therefore more effective) ways of both perceiving and handling lingua-cultural variations. Within a didactic scenario, the investigation of (un)translated, easy-to-grasp examples from clips of well-known films and/or TV series could lead to renewed emphasis on connections among translation, linguistics, philology, philosophy, and socio-cultural issues and may also offer students possibly stimulating (cross)curricular initiatives, especially at advanced undergraduate and graduate levels.

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[28] "The space of translation – the translator's work – is placed in the intersections woven between cultures, not within a single culture" (my translation).

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