

## DIRTY DUBBESE: DUBBING AS A MEANS OF TABOO LANGUAGE TRANSFER FROM ENGLISH INTO ITALIAN

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**Abstract:** Taboos and taboo language are culture-specific, although overlapping areas do exist between different lingua-cultural systems (Pavesi and Malinverno 2000). When it comes to tele-cinematic products, the use of intensifying expletives seems to be increasingly frequent in English source texts whereas (self)censorship still prevails in Italian *dubbese*. Yet, taboo language is present in Italian dubbese as a footprint left behind by over-mechanical adaptations, offering word-for-word renderings of the source text and resulting in the so-called “doppiaggese”: this hybrid language is a pseudo-colloquial variety of Italian, characterized by routine translations, cliched phrases or sentences, repetition/redundancy and, more importantly, by calques from the source language (Rossi 1999; Alfieri *et al.* 2003; Sileo 2018). This essay analyzes taboo language transfers from English into Italian through dubbing, by providing examples from dubbed products and relying on corpora of contemporary spoken and written Italian as well as on dictionaries of the Italian language. Transfer phenomena are categorized based on both qualitative and quantitative criteria: as in Toury 1995, they are divided into either positive or negative transfers; on the basis of previous work by this author (Sileo 2018), an additional qualitative categorization is proposed, contrasting semantic and structural calques; moreover, a quantitative criterion takes into account the “size” of calques – ranging from lexical or word-level to sentence-level interferences. The aim is to determine whether and to what extent “dirty” dubbese has been influencing the taboo language production of Italian native speakers. The analysis revealed that the transfers are mainly of a negative type and cross word-unit borders, embracing more structured and more extended phrases; semantic calques seem to be scarcely present. This study, in spite of its limitations, might serve as a starting point for more extensive and in-depth analyses of presumable interferences from English into Italian.

**Keywords:** taboo language; AV products; dubbese; interference; English vs. Italian.

## 1. Introduction

Uttering or hearing certain expressions may cause discomfort due to fear, religious feelings, prudery, embarrassment (Galli de' Paratesi 1964: 17-19). The areas of taboo involved range from the divinity, some animal species, sexual activity, birth, damnation, body fluids (Apte 1994), and are culture-specific (Pavesi and Malinverno 2000: 76): although some overlapping can be detected in such areas as sexual repression and magical-religious fear within the western tradition in tele-cinematic discourse, references to the religious sphere (“the hell”, “bloody hell”) are less frequent in the Anglo-Saxon context compared to the Italian one: the minor frequency is supposedly due to the fact that cursing is more blasphemous in English (*ibid.*). Among the target language equivalents generally proposed for dubbing, in fact, Italian *che diavolo* (“what the hell”) and *maledetto* (“damn”) do not possess the same intensity and aggressiveness of their English equivalents (*ibid.*). It is also worth noting that the actual morphology or, one might say, phono-morphological attire of the word seems to be involved in the amount of discomfort a word arises, since other equivalents pertaining to the scientific field and to “baby talk” do not bother the recipient (Galli de' Paratesi 1964): “poo”/*popò* is less uncomfortable than “crap”/*merda*. In other words, semantics is not the only factor involved in the choice of words for everyday communication. When it comes to audiovisual (AV) communication, a wider range of issues have to be taken into account.

## 2. Taboo language in tele-cinematic products

The use and frequency of intensifying expletives seems to be increasing in English movie scripts: in the past two decades, they have almost doubled in the Pavia Corpus of Film Dialogue, and this is due to two main tendencies, as identified by Formentelli and Ghia (2021): on the one hand, the occurrence of swearwords is growing in Anglophone tele-cinematic products; on the other hand, censorship has lessened its grips, at least in the English-speaking world (*ibid.*: 64), whereas an opposite direction seems to have been taken by dubbing into Italian, where “omission and mitigation have increased considerably in the last decade” (*ibid.*: 47). This suggests that Italian dubbing continues to pursue, or even reinforce, partial (self)censorship of bad language, as already documented by Pavesi and Malinverno (2000), Chiaro (2007), and Mereu Keating (2004). Mitigation is also accompanied by sharp change in register, which appears to be a typical feature of film translations (Pavesi and Malinverno 2000: 82).

The lexico-grammar constructions in which [*expletives*] occur show different degrees of routinisation in set expressions (*bloody hell*, *fucking hell*) and fixed syntactic frames (*bloody/fucking/(god)damn* + headword; *WH-word* + *the fuck/the hell*) that in most cases do not coincide with those available in Italian. (Formentelli and Ghia 2021: 48)

They are mainly intensifiers (see Fuchs 2017) or emphasizees used in formulaic interrogative constructions and also in phrasal verbs; they are employed as expletive slot fillers to modify nouns, adjectives, verbs or adverbs (Formentelli and Ghia 2021: 50) and serve an emotive function (Jakobson 1959). Whereas expletive interjections are not retrieved in syntactic constructions with other words, expletive slot fillers are syntactically combined with other linguistic elements in a versatile way, as in some of the cases under analysis: they generally follow the canonical English order (i.e., occurring before a headword), but at times they are also inserted in fixed phrasal units, proper names or compound words (Formentelli and Ghia 2021: 50). These expletives have undergone a process of grammaticalization/delexicalization: this is generally due to the frequent use of an element which becomes a filler or a habit in the speaker's idiolect, especially if the speaker is a youth<sup>1</sup>. Most of them belong to two lexical fields: sexuality and religion (*ibid.*).

In dubbing, adaptation choices depend on 3 main factors (Pavesi and Malinverno 2000: 78-81):

1. semantic and functional correspondence, based on affinities which may also end up establishing stereotypes (“damn” > *maledetto/dannato*), whereas in some cases it is not always possible to retrieve literal correspondences and one has to opt for semantically-related terms (*bastardo, figlio di puttana*);
2. technical parameters, namely the sync – thus, “bullshit” > *balle* instead of *stronzate*; they come into play in case of close-ups, in particular;
3. adaptor's creativity, which plays a major role in this specific case, since swearwords are not resorted to as a means for the plot to progress, so “fidelity” to the source text content is not paramount here (“Bullshit!” > *Ehi, palle di merda!*).

The orientation in rendering intensifying expletives in Italian is towards source language expressions, i.e., calques (Formentelli and Ghia 2021: 47). Many of these calqued equivalents contribute to a thriving Italian dubbese, locally known as “doppiaggese”, a term loaded with a negative connotation and used to refer to both an artificial way of acting and to some pre-fabricated “plastic” speech, featuring interferences from the source language, which is mainly English.

In this study, I am going to focus on the latter meaning of “doppiaggese” as a pseudo-colloquial variety of the Italian language characterized by routine translations, cliched phrases or sentences, repetition/redundancy and, more importantly, by calques from the source language (Sileo 2018).

<sup>1</sup> Taboo language is, at least in movies, more frequently detected in young speakers and, in terms of gender, more in men than in women (Pavesi and Malinverno 2000: 78). Although dubbed scripts generally reveal minor frequency of taboo language, the equivalents are increasingly closer to the source language ones (*cavolo* > *cazzo: ibidem*), a tendency which is retrievable also in Italian TV products (Sileo 2018).

### 3. Categorizing calques

Over the past decade or so I have carried out analyses focused on calques from English compounds, phrases, and sentences which have been transferred into everyday colloquial/spoken, but also written, Italian. These analyses fall into a line of inquiry that has been pursued by several scholars (among others: Rossi 1999; Alfieri *et al.* 2003; Sileo 2018), whose findings converge to show that such transfer does indeed take place. However, not much has been said on whether the process extends to taboo language, and to what extent it is actually employed in everyday Italian. The taboo expressions have been subdivided into both qualitative and quantitative criteria, following the categorization proposed in Sileo 2018.

As regards the **qualitative criterion**, calques may be divided into either semantic or structural. The former refers to a calque of the meaning of the original element: it generally takes place between words belonging to two different languages and having similar phono-morphological “attire” and meanings: the interfering language adds an additional nuance that did not exist in the target language. Some of these calques are labelled as “cavalli di ritorno”: in other words, a horse that had been given/lent to some other owner and that has been returned to the original “breeder” enriched with additional embellishments (or meanings), generally more abstract/metaphoric. This is the case of *realizzare*<sup>2</sup>: from “turning something from imaginary to real” in a concrete sense, *realizzare* is now being used in Italian with the meaning “to understand, to make something real (in one’s mind)”.

A structural calque takes place when the structure of the compound/phrase /sentence is copied or reproduced in the target language: in other words, the constituent order of the original is replicated, but the elements used pertain to the recipient language, and this is why the interfered phrase is less evident to the target language speaker, since the presence of the source language is hidden behind the “curtains” of already existing words in the target language. Two examples of (sentence-level) structural interferences follow:

- *Il tuo segreto è al sicuro con me*, which is the exact replica of “Your secret is safe with me”, to replace the more natural *Manterrò il segreto*;
- *Quello che vedi è quello che hai/che c'è/che avrai* for “What you see is what you get”, retrieved in *The Bold and the Beautiful* (Episode 6535): the expression is absent in the relevant literature and also in the dictionaries consulted. It is an example of a negative transfer (not justified by sync) for which there is no direct and unique rendering in Italian: *Sono quello che vedi* might be a functional equivalent, albeit shorter than the original version and less elastic, because it is less suited to cover the manifold semantic nuances of the English source.

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the most renowned case of semantic calque; the added meaning is a more abstract and metaphoric one. For further information, see Rossi 1999 and Sileo 2018.

A further **qualitative criterion** goes back to Toury's distinction between positive and negative transfers – the former referring to elements which already exist(ed) in the target language but whose frequency is increased due to the influence of the source language/text, the latter referring to elements which did not exist in the target language and occasionally violate the rules of the target language.

A quite popular instance of positive transfer (PT) is *già* to translate “yeah” instead of *Sì*, *hai ragione* (Rossi 1999: 26) or *infatti*, although other Italian equivalents would be possible, depending on the context. In dubbed Italian, it occurs with excessive frequency. The result is a frequently unnatural use: instead of its evaluative function – you evaluate what has been said and you agree –, the particle often takes on the function of a filler (Pavesi 1994: 137). According to Bucaria (2008: 155), this is one of the clearest examples of articulatory similarity between source and target text, especially in close-ups, and this is to the detriment of the natural rendering and very often also the meaning of the original text.

One of the most frequently analyzed negative transfers (NT) is the holophrastic use of *assolutamente* (without adding *sì/no*) to translate both “absolutely” and “absolutely not”: this was probably due to an initial interference from French, then supported and spread by English in the affirmative and, later, in the negative form. According to the OED, in fact, the colloquial elliptical use of “absolutely” with affirmative meaning is of American origin and attested no earlier than 1892, in Mark Twain's *The American Claimant*, so an English influence prior to French cannot be assumed. In the earliest attestations of absolute usage in literary corpora, in fact, the adverb has a positive meaning – which can be inferred, with difficulty and not without uncertainty, from the context –, and this leads to infer that speakers might have later extended this usage also to negation<sup>3</sup>.

The **quantitative criterion** employed is based on the “size” of the calque, ranging from:

1. lexical or word-level calques, which basically coincide with semantic calques, since they pertain to single words and their meanings being calqued (see footnotes 2 and 3);
2. intra-syntagmatic calques: they include interferences which take place within a syntagm, generally a noun phrase, for example possibly redundant possessives<sup>4</sup> and the pre- or post-nominal position of adjectives<sup>5</sup>;

<sup>3</sup> The aim of this investigation into the origins and development of the English source is to underline how one should not neglect the influence and the role played by French in introducing interferences into Italian.

<sup>4</sup> In Italian, the possessive should be omitted if the term of reference seems obvious; omission is mandatory when the controlling verb includes an atonal pronoun with an affective-intensive function (Serianni 2006: 271-72). However, overly mechanical translations, faithfully replicating the source text, spread stylistic unnaturalness, such as the hammering repetitions of the pronouns *tu* and *tuo* that are certainly dependent on the English structure, but also, in the case of advertising, on the desire to emphasize message personalization (Giovanardi *et al.* 2008: 87).

<sup>5</sup> In this rather unstable area of Italian, loosely defined normativization may result in gray areas where usage is at the speaker's discretion, with renderings often strongly unnatural, semantically anomalous (Cardinaletti and Garzone 2005: 13), yet not automatically a-grammatical. In Italian, the position of the qualifying adjective is not necessarily fixed. There are, however, differences

3. inter-syntagmatic calques: they include interferences which occur in the area between syntagms, generally referring to verb government phenomena<sup>6</sup>;
4. quasi-sentence calques: these interferences include cases which extend beyond the inter-relations between individual syntagms and embrace partially variable structures which almost reach the sentence level, but allow for variations, in terms of subjects and subsequently verb form variation. In other words, they are not fixed structures, invariantly replicated, and they do not possess the status and independence of an actual sentence: for example, *esserci sangue cattivo*, as in *Abbiamo saputo che c'era sangue cattivo* (*Chicago Fire* S4E15), whereas *non scorreva buon sangue* might be the most natural equivalent in Italian; and,
5. sentence-level calques, fixed structures holding the status of independent invariable clauses, as in the examples provided in the previous pages, to which we could add a newly introduced interference, as in “what you see is what you get” to translate *quello che vedi è quello che hai/c'è/avrà* (Sileo 2018).

#### 4. Sources and methodology

Since my aim here is to investigate how English strongly impacts on everyday Italian, with reference to taboo language, in order to ensure reliability of results and analysis, the potential interferences detected in the corpus analyzed have been searched within a reference corpus which is as comprehensive as possible, and includes the following dictionaries, listed in a chronological order and covering a wide time span (from the late nineteenth century to the 2010s):

- a. Crusca: *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*, Cellini, Florence 1863-1923, voll. 12, 5<sup>th</sup> edition.
- b. IEI: *Vocabolario della lingua italiana*, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, Rome 1987, voll. 5.
- c. Zingarelli: *Lo Zingarelli: vocabolario della lingua italiana*, Zanichelli, Bologna 1997.
- d. Nuovo DELI: *Il nuovo dizionario etimologico della lingua italiana*, M. Cortelazzo-P. Zolli-M. Cortelazzo (eds), Zanichelli, Bologna 1999, voll. 5.
- e. GRADIT: *Grande dizionario italiano dell'uso*, T. De Mauro (ed.), UTET, Turin 2000, voll. 6.

between the two orders involving multiple levels of analysis: a difference in semantics, in function, in the speaker's attitude, and in register (Dardano and Trifone 1995: 517). According to Klajn (2012: 186), the N+Adj sequence is obligatory in French much more often than in Italian, where, not only in poetry, the position of the adjective was extremely free for centuries. Then, certainly also due to the influence of French, the post-nominal position began to stabilize, without becoming exclusive. Nowadays the tendency is supposedly to restore the pre-nominal order.

<sup>6</sup> The case of *ringraziare/grazie + di/per* is rather emblematic: Italian admits both sequences in a considerable percentage of cases, as an additional gray and poorly normatively structured area. However, one often happens to find typically purpose structures such as *ringraziare/grazie + per + present infinitive* used with a causal (past) sense, resulting in a grammatically incorrect solution, as well as a theoretically unnatural one, as in “Grazie. Grazie per starmi vicino, grazie per ... per capirmi, per sopportarmi” [*CentoVetrine* 3238-39-40-41]; the increasing frequency in its use – most importantly in everyday spontaneous social-media Italian –, however, seems to be slowly changing the native speaker's perception (Sileo 2018).

f. Devoto-Oli: *Vocabolario della lingua italiana Devoto-Oli*, L. Serianni-M. Trifone (eds), Le Monnier, Florence 2007.

g. OED: *Oxford English Dictionary*

Among the reference corpora used, a domestic newspaper has been included, since newspaper language is generally more open and more ready to welcome new words or loan words, also occasionalisms which are not necessarily present in dictionaries, thus not (yet) officially recognized as being part of the receiving language. The reference newspaper is *La Repubblica*, and the time span covers the period from 1/1/1984 to 27/8/2022, which enables the retrieval and comparison of data both from a synchronic and from a diachronic perspective.

“Spontaneous” Italian has also been taken into consideration during the analysis: PAISÀ<sup>7</sup> is a large corpus of authentic contemporary Italian texts from the web, harvested in September/October 2010 and sprung from the project PAISÀ (an acronym which stands for “Piattaforma per l’Apprendimento dell’Italiano Su corpora Annotati”); its aim is to provide a large resource of freely available and authentic Italian texts for language learning. The project is a joint effort of: University of Bologna; CNR Pisa; European Academy of Bozen/Bolzano; University of Trento.

The study also relies on a corpus of multi-language (non)adapted cinematic dialogue, *Forlìxt*, a project launched in 2003 at the University of Bologna.

## 5. Corpus analyzed

The elements under analysis are drawn from both an American soap opera, *The Bold and the Beautiful* (henceforth, BB) – episodes from 6516 to 6537, aired in 2013 – and the short script entitled *Un dialogo possibile*, produced and filmed by AIDAC, the Italian association of audiovisual script translators and adaptors. It was launched in May 2008 during a conference held at the Accademia della Crusca and pre-fabricated by the association in order to show how Italian dubbese is imbued with interferences from English and how the interferences mainly go unnoticed by the average audience. Among them are numerous instances of taboo language, which make the script of particular interest for the present study. Quite the opposite can be said about BB: as pointed out by Alfieri *et al.* in their 2003 study on the Italian adaptation of its dialogues, the tendency towards (self) censorship is relatively marked and still seems to be hard to fade away, despite decades’ passing by.

The present analysis has been focused on three main clusters, mostly rotating around one passepartout word serving as the main constituent of a phrase or even used within a sentence: Cluster 1 – the religion-related cluster – is further divided into two sub-clusters, both pertaining to “(the) hell” and the concept of “damnation”; Cluster 2 revolves around the word *culo* as the recurring fixed element within larger phrases; Cluster 3 dwells on the dichotomy between an

<sup>7</sup> Corpus Italiano (last accessed on 11/07/2023).

alleged transfer from English (“to fuck” > *fottersi*) and a presumably more natural Italian equivalent (*vaffanculo*).

## 5.1. Cluster 1. “(The) hell” and “damn(ation)”

### 5.1.1. “The hell” and its renderings into Italian

This is one example of English swearwords which serve emphatic functions, also on the screen. In the research carried out by Formentelli and Ghia (2021) on the Pavia Corpus of Film Dialogue, this expletive turned out to be quite limited in use, but one which showed a marked increase in translations over time and a lower incidence of omissions (*ibid.*: 62-63). The routines adopted in Italian adaptations are mainly source-oriented (*che diavolo*) but have a milder offensive force than *che cazzo/cavolo*, which appear to be very rarely used in older films (p. 63). A similar tendency towards (self) censorship can be detected in *The Bold and the Beautiful*, as already mentioned:

- i. **Bill:** Steffy gave it *a hell* of a try.  
**Bill:** Steffy ci ha provato una volta.<sup>8</sup> [BB6516]
- ii. **Bill:** Will you just back *the hell* off, Taylor?  
**Bill:** Puoi farti gli affari tuoi, Taylor? [BB6533]
- iii. **Bill:** I’m scared *as hell* for Katie. ...  
**Bill:** Mi spaventa lo stato in cui è Katie. [BB6533]
- iv. **Bill:** Are you kidding me? What *the hell* are you doing?!  
**Bill:** Sei ancora qui? Ma che *diavolo* stai facendo?! [BB6533]

Examples (i), (ii), and (iii) seem to be at odds with the thesis proposed by Formentelli and Ghia (2021) on film dialogue: this might be due to several reasons, including the different medium (cinema vs. TV); a corpus of TV dialogue is much needed in order to draw clearcut conclusions. Example (iv) testifies to the mitigation of the source text as a fundamental requirement for this genre, as confirmed by the literature. As Pavesi and Malinverno (2000: 82) point out, due to its flexibility, in Italian it may be translated as *diavolo* only after interrogative words, as in example (iv), whereas in example (ii) the expletive has been completely omitted in Italian and the register selected is quite higher than the source text; in other contexts, it seems to be disappearing, as also proved by examples (i), (ii), and (iii), at times replaced by other intensifying elements, which however do not possess the same meaning in terms of emotions (*ibid.*: 82).

<sup>8</sup> In this specific case, one might argue that the omission of “hell” is due to the specific syntactic/lexical context, as the possible direct equivalent in the receiving language would not fit the context and the resulting utterance would sound unnatural. However, this omission could have been compensated by relocating the informal-register phrase in the following sentence, for example; since this is not the case, we may conclude that this is an instance of (self)censorship aimed at ensuring a style that is more formal than the original one.

Table 1 sums up the results of the analysis and displays the number of occurrences in *La Repubblica*: 878 occurrences of *che diavolo*, 696 of *che cazzo*, and 395 of *che cavolo*; the latter two are supposedly the most natural in Italian.

In Paisà, we find: *che cazzo* (34), *chi cazzo* (9), *chi diavolo* (7), *che diavolo* (9), *come diavolo* (6), *come cazzo* (2), whereas in Forlìx, *che/chi diavolo* and *dove diavolo* are retrieved in German and French movies; in two cases, “the hell” has been translated into *che diavolo*.

**Table 1.** Cluster 1 – results.

	a) <i>DIABOLO</i>	b) <i>DANNATAMENTE</i>
<b>Dictionaries</b>	[No example detected <sup>9</sup> ]	<b>GRADIT:</b> 20 <sup>th</sup> century <b>ZINGARELLI:</b> “rare”
<b>Newspapers</b>	<i>che diavolo</i> (878) <i>che cazzo</i> (696) <i>che cavolo</i> (395)	<u>894 occurrences</u> (as an adverb) [1984-1994: <u>12 occurrences</u> 2012-2022: <u>451 occurrences</u> ]
<b>Film dialogue</b>	<i>che/chi diavolo; dove diavolo</i> (English, German, French)	<i>Dannatamente:</i> <u>0 occurrences</u>
<b>TV series / SO dialogue</b>	[see the examples provided above]	<i>dannatamente frustrato</i> [BB6537]
<b>Web Italian</b>	<i>che cazzo</i> (34), <i>chi cazzo</i> (9), <i>chi diavolo</i> (7), <i>che diavolo</i> (9)	<u>110 occurrences</u> [intensifying adjectives & modifying verbs]

The larger use of *che/chi/dove diavolo* – mainly in questions and exclamations – in the reference corpora as opposed to less polite equivalents seems to confirm that the tendency towards (self) censorship is still thriving, at least in dubbed Italian; newspaper Italian and spontaneous Italian provide a slightly different insight into the phenomenon. All things considered, however, the construct WH+ *diavolo* seems the most frequent, although the least natural in Italian. For all these reasons, we might conclude that this is a structural positive transfer, at an intra-syntagmatic level.

### 5.1.2. “Damn”

As for *dannatamente* to render “(god)damn” but also “fucking<sup>10</sup>” (Pavesi and Malinverno 2000: 85), found in *The Bold and the Beautiful* (E6537: *dannatamente*

<sup>9</sup> In a more recent online version of GRADIT, we find instance of *chi diavolo* used in interrogative sentences (*Diavolo > significato - Dizionario italiano De Mauro (internazionale.it)*). One might argue that the usage has been introduced more recently, thus confirming the thesis advanced in the opening pages.

<sup>10</sup> “Gus is fucking awesome” > *Gus è dannatamente bravo* (source: Paisà).

*frustrato*) followed by an adjective: GRADIT dates it to the twentieth century, with the hyperbolic meaning of “exaggeratedly, very much, too much”, as in “they are damn unfortunate, it was a damn difficult exam”; also in Devoto-Oli 2007 the adverb is attested in the twentieth century, while it is absent in Nuovo DELI and Crusca. It is attested in Zingarelli 1997, though defined as “rare”. Given its rather recent attestation, we can conclude that this is a negative transfer; in *La Repubblica*, we have 894 occurrences for the adverb (12 occurrences in the 1984-1994 span, 451 occurrences in the 2012-2022 span). In Paisà, we find 110 occurrences, both before/intensifying an adjective and modifying a verb. Forlì features 0 occurrences for *dannatamente* and 1 occurrence for *dannata*.

In conclusion, the phrase *dannatamente* + adjective/verb is a negative transfer, a structural calque at an intra-syntagmatic level.

## 5.2. Cluster 2. “Ass”/culo

This element can be found inserted within different stock phrases or even sentences, such as *to save somebody’s ass*, *to have one’s ass*, *to shag ass* (Giordano 2020). Based on the research carried out by Giordano (*ibid.*: 137-138), this is generally a case of omission, especially in a diachronic perspective. In GRADIT, among the phrases whose meaning is somehow related to the elements analyzed in this section, we only find *parare il culo* (“to cover one’s ass”) and *levarsi di culo* (presumably obsolete and no longer intelligible to native Italians).

In the dialogue “fabricated” by AIDAC<sup>11</sup>, we find some interesting combinations:

- a. Lei: Dacci un taglio, sennò *porto subito via il mio culo da qui*.  
[BACK TRANSLATION – Woman: Cut it out, or *I’ll get my ass out of here right now.*]
- b. Lei: E la cosa giusta da fare ora [...] è *portare via il mio culo da qui*.  
[BACK TRANSLATION – Woman: And the right thing to do now (...) is *get my ass out of here.*]
- c. Lui: Attenta al gradino!  
Lei: Grazie, amico, *mi hai salvato il culo!*  
[BACK TRANSLATION – Man: Watch the step! Woman: Thank you, man, *you saved my ass!*]

**Table 2.** Cluster 2 – results.

	<b>SALVARE IL CULO</b>	<b>PORTARE VIA IL CULO (DA ...)</b>
<b>Dictionaries</b>	<b>GRADIT: <i>parare il culo</i></b>	<b>GRADIT: <i>levarsi di culo</i></b>

<sup>11</sup> The script is not a spontaneous one, it serves as a caricature – thus, an exaggeration – of interferences which have been featuring tele-cinematic speech adapted from English into Italian; the objective of AIDAC was to “season” the dialogue with an abnormal amount of such elements, which are still constantly retrievable and retrieved in adaptations into Italian.

<b>Newspapers</b>	<i>Salvare il culo</i> (10) <i>Salvato il culo</i> (11)	<u>1 occurrence</u> : 8/12/1988 [in a translation]
<b>Film dialogue</b>	<b>Forlixt*</b> : <u>0 occurrences</u> <b>AIDAC</b> : Grazie, amico, <i>mi hai salvato il culo!</i> [Thank you, man, you saved my ass!]	<b>Forlixt</b> : <u>0 occurrences</u> <b>AIDAC</b> : a. <i>Porto subito via il mio culo da qui.</i> [I'll get my ass out of here right now] b. E la cosa giusta da fare [...] è <i>portare via il mio culo da qui.</i> [And the right thing to do (...) is get my ass out of here]
<b>TV series / SO dialogue</b>	<u>0 occurrences</u>	<u>0 occurrences</u>
<b>Web Italian</b>	<u>1 occurrence</u>	<u>0 occurrences</u>

AIDAC's "dialogo impossibile" provides us with a couple of alleged negative transfers which are not attested in the Italian dictionaries, but are timidly present in newspaper Italian. In *La Repubblica*, we find:

- 11 occurrences for *salvato il culo*, only one of them dating back to 23/7/1995 – as for the other 10 cases, dating ranges from 2002 to 2020: 4 of them are translations;
- 10 occurrences for *salvare il culo*: only 2 of them date back to the 1990s, 1 to the 2000s;
- only one occurrence for the phrase *portare via il culo*, dating back to 8/12/1988, within a translation.

In Paisà, we only find 1 occurrence for *salvare il culo*, zero occurrences for *portare via il culo*. One interesting example is the phrase (*potere/ci*) *scommettere il proprio culo*, found only in Forlixt in a movie adapted from English:

Nigel: *You bet your size-six ass.*

*Ci puoi scommettere il tuo culo* 42. (*The Devil Wears Prada*, 2006)

All things considered, we can conclude that *salvare il culo*, (*potere/ci*) *scommettere il proprio culo*, and *portare via il culo* (*da* + noun phrase) are negative transfers, structural phrase calques.

### 5.3. Cluster 3. *Fottiti/vaffanculo*

Based on the OED, "fuck" was first attested in Middle English, also as "fuk" in the 16<sup>th</sup> century: it supposedly answered to a "ME type \*fukēn (wk. vb.) not found; ulterior etym. unknown. Synonymous G. ficken cannot be shown to be related". First attested a. 1503 in Dunbar's *Poems* as a verb, and first used as "the coarsest equivalent of *damn*" in imprecations and exclamations in Joyce's *Ulysses*.

Nuovo DELI and GRADIT define *fottere* as to sexually possess a woman, from colloquial Latin *füttere*, of uncertain etymology. Attested in the XIV century, in Dolcibene, Petrocchi's *Novo dizionario universale della lingua italiana* dates it back to 1887 as an equivalent of *ingannare, imbrogliare* ("to cheat").

GRADIT first dates *vaffanculo* back to 1953, in A. Palazzeschi's *Roma*; as for *fottuto*, the dictionary defines it as an adjective already used in Italian before 1535 in injurious epithets. *Andare/mandare a farsi fottere/a fare in culo* are attested in Gadda (1893-1973); *fottersene* and *fottuto* are used in Vincenzo Monti (1754-1828).<sup>12</sup>

AIDAC repeatedly featured *fottersi* in their "impossible dialogue" as a rather evident example of "doppiaggese":

1. Lei: Chi *se ne fotte* di Nanni Moretti!  
[BACKTRANSLATION – Woman: Who *gives a fuck* about Nanni Moretti!]
2. Lei: Per chi mi prendi [...]? *Fottiti*, amico!  
[BACKTRANSLATION – Whom are you taking me for [...]? *Fuck you, man!*]
3. Lei: *Fottiti* tu e i film americani!  
[BACKTRANSLATION – *Fuck you* and American movies!]

In *La Repubblica*, we find 70 occurrences for the alleged transfer – *vaffanculo* amounts to 959 occurrences –, mainly used by journalists complaining about the artificiality of *fottiti*, labelled as most frequently used in/on Italian TV (12/01/2007). Among the "complainers," we find I. Bignardi, claiming that Italian swearwords have their own right to a better translation from the English "fuck off" (14/06/1991). *Fottiti* is defined as most frequently used in TV Italian (12/01/1994) and a more natural equivalent is called for.

Based on the data collected in Paisà, *vaffanculo* seems to be the most natural and the most frequently used, with its 45 occurrences vs. 0 occurrences for *fottiti* and 3 for *si fotta*. In Forlì, we only find 2 occurrences for *fottiti*, in a German movie (*Nordrand*, 1999); *vaffanculo*, by contrast, can be found in 25 instances, in German, French, Chinese, and Italian movies.

**Table 3.** Cluster 3 – results.

	<b>FOTTITI</b>	<b>VAFFANCULO</b>
<b>Dictionaries</b>	OED: a1503, Dunbar Poems, tr. "to copulate"; 1922, <i>Ulysses</i> , imprecation/exclamation GRADIT: XIV cent., coll. Latin <i>füttere</i>	GRADIT: 1953, A. Palazzeschi, <i>Roma</i>

<sup>12</sup> Fabio Rossi in parole oscene in "Enciclopedia dell'Italiano" (treccani.it) (last accessed on 11/07/2023).

<b>Newspapers</b>	<u>70 occurrences</u> 28/1/1995: «nei doppiaggi italiani, [...] l'assurdo insulto “fottiti”?»	<u>959 occurrences</u>
<b>Film dialogue</b>	<b>Forlixt:</b> <i>fottiti</i> (2, German) <b>AIDAC:</b> a. <i>Fottiti</i> , amico! [ <i>Fuck you, man!</i> ] b. <i>Fottiti</i> tu e i film americani! [ <i>Fuck you and American movies!</i> ]	<u>25 occurrences</u> (7 German, 3 French, 1 Chinese, 14 Italian) <b>AIDAC:</b> <u>0 occurrences</u>
<b>TV series / SO dialogue</b>	<u>0 occurrences</u>	<u>0 occurrences</u>
<b>Web Italian</b>	<i>Si fotta</i> (3); <i>Fottiti</i> (0)	<u>45 occurrences</u>

Although average Italian speakers seem to perceive *fottiti* as unnatural and consequently to scarcely use it in spontaneous communication, the etymology and first attestations of both exclamations lead us to conclude that *fottiti* might be an additional case of semantic calque, at a word level, but of a positive type, since it was already used in Latin, borrowed by English around the early XVI century. It presumably remained latent in the Italian vocabulary, to subsequently come back to the surface due to the so-called “English invasion”, powered both by the prestige of the language and by the mentioned tendency to over-mechanic translations.

## 5. Conclusions

The present study has analyzed only a limited number of swearwords and taboo expressions from English into Italian. The corpora of contemporary spoken and written Italian and the Italian dictionaries which served as reference corpora have yielded fruitful insights into the phenomenon. The alleged transfer phenomena, divided into subcategories based on previous literature (Touy 1995; Sileo 2018), have been analyzed with the aim to determine whether and to what extent “dirty” dubbese has been influencing the taboo language production of Italian native speakers. The results, summarized in Figure 4, show how the English language retains a strong impact on everyday Italian, also when it comes to taboo language.

**Table 4.** Summing up results.

<b>Cluster 1</b> 1a. WH- word + <i>diavolo</i> 1b. <i>dannatamente</i> + adj/verb	PT; structural; intra-syntagmatic level NT; structural; intra-syntagmatic level
<b>Cluster 2</b> 2a. <i>salvare il culo</i>	NT; structural; phrase calque

2b. <i>portare via il culo</i> (da + NP) 2c. <i>(potere) scommettere il proprio culo</i>	NT; structural; phrase calque NT; structural; phrase calque
<b>Cluster 3</b> <i>Fottersi</i>	PT; semantic; word-level

As shown by Table 4, the majority of transfers are of a negative type and cross word-unit borders, embracing more structured and more extended phrases. Semantic calques seem to be scarcely present in the corpus analyzed. Although in its preliminary stages, this study might serve as a starting point for more extensive and in-depth analyses of presumable interferences from English into Italian in the realm of taboo language by resorting to the method applied and the reference corpora used.

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