

The Domestication of Otherness: film translation and audience intercultural awareness assessment

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All translation is subject to varying degrees of microlinguistic, technical, cultural and societal constraints. In the case of film translation technical aspects have often been foregrounded, emphasis being placed on the requirements of lip and intonational nuclear synchronization (in dubbing) and spatial and temporal limitations (in subtitling) within a macro audiovisual context (Delabastita 1989: 196-199, 202-205), though it should be pointed out that much of this alleged specificity shares common elements with the various forms of interpreting (Gambier 1993: 274-277) and that some expert practitioners (particularly in the case of dubbing – Depietri 1994) have argued that the predominance of these technical factors in their work has been exaggerated. Rather than excluding film translation from scholarly attention, together with other forms of multimedial transfer, as was frequently the case until relatively recently (Lambert and Delabastita 1996: 35), the field of investigation covered by the (inter)discipline of translation studies needs to be, and is now being widened, though the full implications of this expansion are only beginning to be realized (Gambier 1994, Lambert and Delabastita 1996: 36).

The task of translation scholars studying film translation, just as in more traditional branches of the field, is to describe practice as exhaustively as possible, making critical use of the abundant contributions provided by those directly involved in the transfer process, and attempt explanations for choices in a global strategical context from both internal and external viewpoints. In the transfer of audiovisual texts from one culture to another in the world of contemporary mass communications the external factors of the power relationship between practitioners and commissioners (distributors) and the interconnected element of audience reception are a crucial influence on translational decision making. This paper will attempt to harmonize these aspects with a close internal micro analysis in a case study of the transfer of a very popular British film comedy to the German, French and Italian speech communities via the dubbing process.

In a recent book Lawrence Venuti (1995) opposes the fluent/domesticating trend that he identifies as the dominant current approach to translation in Anglo-American culture, which he defines as the "ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to dominant cultural values ..." (Venuti 1995: 81). Consequently, he favours

those translators who, flouting a long lasting tradition, were not afraid of highlighting cultural otherness. Admittedly in an audiovisual medium, domestication, at our present stage of technological development (Zabalbeascoa 1996: 254), can hardly be applied to the visual element (unless scenes are actually cut out or subjected to very limited manipulation, as does happen). Target audiences will receive images, which are far from being as culturally universal as is often believed, differently from source ones, in proportion to the extent of their pre-established visual knowledge schemata. The translator/dubbing scriptwriter/subtitler, however, has no role to play in this process. Decisions on the quality and quantity of otherness reduction will generally be related to the acoustically transmitted verbal signs. Expected low mass audience comprehension of cultural diversity has often been posited as the explanation for consistent reductionist translational strategies, in the Italian context, for example, in an attempt to widen the appeal of "art" films in the target culture, so as to meet market requirements (Licari 1994: 45). A particularly illuminating example can be provided by comparing a fragment of a scene from Harold Pinter's screenplay of Joseph Losey's film *Accident* (GB 1967) with the Italian dubbed version. The film is set in Oxford, the characters all having connections with the University. The following scene takes place in the common room of a college:

Interior. Don's Common Room. College.

STEPHEN, CHARLEY, the PROVOST, and HEDGES, a scientist, sit in armchairs, reading. CHARLEY reads a newspaper; the rest, books.

Silence.

CHARLEY. A statistical analysis of sexual intercourse among students at Colenso University, Milwaukee, showed that 70 per cent did it in the evening, 29.9 per cent between two and four in the afternoon and 0.1 per cent during a lecture on Aristotle.

Pause.

PROVOST. I'm surprised to hear Aristotle is on the syllabus in the state of Wisconsin.

Silence.

CHARLEY. (*still reading the paper*). Bus driver found in student's bed.

Pause.

PROVOST. But was anyone found in the bus driver's bed?

CHARLEY. Da un'analisi statistica sui rapporti sessuali tra studenti dell'Università di Colenso nel Milwaukee, è risultato che il 70% sono avvenuti di sera, il 29 e 9% tra le due e le quattro del pomeriggio, e lo 0,1% durante una lezione su Aristotele.

RETTORE. Dal che risulterebbe che Aristotele come afrodisiaco è da scartare a priori.

CHARLEY. Camionista trovato nel letto di una studentessa.

RETTORE. Ma, con la moglie del camionista chi c'hanno trovato?

The Provost's surprise about curriculum content in a minor American university rather than the sexual habits of its students and feigned belief that the bus driver was alone in a bed belonging to someone else is a familiar *topos* of British humour that would certainly have raised a titter among the educated 60s audience at which the film was aimed in the source culture. The radical changes introduced into the Italian version cannot be attributed to untranslatability at the linguistic code level or to technical problems of lip synchronization. They are clearly the result of the dubbing script writer's decision concerning the cultural inaccessibility for a wider target audience of this example of dry British academic humour. This is by no means an isolated example of levelling domestication in a film market where less clear cut distinctions are made in the distribution system between élitist and mass audience products. Although this trend is not perhaps as widespread as in the literary tradition described by Venuti and is in fact followed to a lesser degree by some prominent practitioners, who, due to their professional standing have greater independence in the initiator/practitioner power relationship (for example the widely acclaimed author of the Italian versions of most of Woody Allen's films – Jacquier 1995), it appears that the commercial interests of distributors do substantially favour ease of reception rather than more problematic, thought provoking translational visibility. The practice, for example, of introducing unwarranted erotic elements into titles without any content justification to attract audiences to films that would otherwise be of limited appeal is (or rather used to be) symptomatic (Bollettieri Bosinelli 1994: 15), not only in the Italian context. Alain Robbe-Grillet was not exactly a director of (even soft) pornography in the 60s; so one wonders how many disappointed Italian spectators soon abandoned the cinemas showing his film *Trans-Europ-Express - a pelle nuda!*

A longer and more complex example will now follow, taken from one of the most successful of British film comedies *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (GB 1993) directed by Mike Newell with a screenplay by the acclaimed TV comedy writer Richard Curtis (Curtis 1994). At first sight the cultural specificity of a film centred on church weddings and a funeral, despite some liturgical and denominational divergences, would appear to be rather low for European audiences and the antics of a group of youngish members of the British upper class, though representing examples of culturally embedded stereotypes of varying degrees of culture specific intensity, should not be expected to present significant target version reception difficulties.

The scene chosen for analysis comes shortly after the first wedding reception, during which Charles (Hugh Grant) met, and was strongly attracted by Carrie, a glamorous American (Andie Macdowell). Charles had booked to stay at "The Boatman". After changing his mind and deciding to stay at a country house belonging to an aristocratic friend, he found out that Carrie also

had a room at the same country pub, so he changed his mind again and decided to stay at "The Boatman" after all. On entering he finds Carrie sitting in the lounge. Unfortunately another wedding guest, George, is also staying there and is after Carrie:

31. INT. RECEPTION. THE BOATMAN. NIGHT

Charles: Hello?

Carrie: Hi.

Charles: Hi ... In the end it turned out there wasn't room for all of us, so ...

Carrie: You said it was a castle.

Charles: Yes, it is a castle. It's a very very small one. Tiny, in fact. Just one up, one down. Which is rare.

Waiter: A drink, sir?

Charles: Yes, I'd like a glass of whisky, please. Thanks. Do you want ...?

Carrie: Yes, sounds good.

Charles: And another one for the lady.

Waiter: Doubles, sir?

Charles: Thanks.

(at this point Carrie hides behind a chair)

George: Ah, you here too? How are you?

Charles: Hello ... fine.

George: You haven't seen Carrie have you?

Charles: Who?

George: Carrie. American girl. Lovely legs. Wedding guest. Nice smell.

Charles: No - sorry.

George: Damn. Blast. I think I was in there ... Look, if you do see her, could you tell her I've gone up to my room?

Charles: Yes, yes ...

Waiter: Your whisky, sir, (Charles: Thank you) and one for the ...

Charles: Road, lovely.

George: Actually, I think I might have one of those. Do you mind if I join you?

Charles: No ... that would be lovely.

George: (to waiter) Another whisky. And a cigar. Make that a bottle of whisky. (to Charles) we might as well settle in. Let's see if we can push on through till dawn, shall we?

George: Lovely wedding.

Charles: Yes, yes.

George: I was at school with his brother Bufty – tremendous bloke. He was head of my house. Buggered me senseless. Still, taught me a thing or two about life.

Where do you know him from?

Charles: University.
George: O splendid, splendid. Yes. I didn't go myself ... couldn't see the point. You see, when you're working the money markets, what use are the novels of Wordsworth going to be eh?
Waiter: Excuse me, sir – your wife says, could you come upstairs at once. Room Twelve in case you're so drunk you can't remember.
Charles: My wife?
Waiter: Yes, sir.
Charles: O – my wife, my wife!
George: God – You are drunk if you can't even remember you've got a wife!
Charles: Yes ... Do you mind if I ...?
George: O no, no – off you go – off you go..best of luck. (Charles: Thanks, yes) Lucky bachelor me, I think I'll have another search for that Katie creature.
Charles: Carrie.
George: That's the one. Damn fine filly. I think I'm in there.

To British audiences George represents the familiar stereotype of the matter-of-fact business man, with no cultural interests. He is a kind of (Thatcherite?) update of the old style "huntin', shootin' and fishin'" Public school educated (?) gentleman, totally devoid of sex appeal, who sees mounting a horse and having sexual intercourse as simple prosaic satisfaction of natural urges and expects women to be as subject to his manipulation as stocks and shares or other commodities, all this expressed in a blunt, officers' mess type language. The bluntness is partially communicated by the actor's physical appearance, body language, lexical choices, syntax and clipped prosody. If we now look at the German (*Vier Hochzeiten und ein Todesfall*), French (*4 mariages & 1 enterrement*) and Italian (*Quattro matrimoni e un funerale*) dubbed versions, we shall see that they have been subjected to varying degrees of manipulation. The versions are arranged along a rough foreignizing-domesticating cline, the German being the closest to and the Italian the more distant from the source text:

Charles: Hallo?
Carrie: Hi.
Charles: Hi ... Es hat sich herausgestellt, dass doch nicht Platz genug für uns alle war.
Carrie: Sie sagten doch es wäre ein Schloss.
Charles: Ja ... nein ... doch, es ist ein Schloss, es ist aber es ist sehr, sehr klein, ganz winzig nur ein Zimmer oben, eins unten, das gibt's selten.
Kellner: Einen Drink, Sir?

Charles: Ja, ich hätte gern einen Whisky, bitte. Danke. Möchten Sie?
Carrie: Ja, klingt gut.
Charles: Und noch einen für die Dame.
Kellner: Doppelter, Sir?
George: Ach, Sie sind auch noch hier. Wie geht's?
Charles: Hallo ... gut geht's. Ja.
George: Sie haben Carrie nicht gesehen, oder?
Charles: Wen?
George: Carrie. die Amerikanerin. Tolle Beine. Hochzeitsgast. Riecht gut.
Charles: Nein, tut mir leid.
George: Verdammt, so ein Mist. Ich glaube da hab'ich Chancen. Falls Sie sie sehen würden Sie ihr sagen, dass ich rauf in mein Zimmer gegangen bin.
Charles: Ja, ja, ja.
Kellner: Ihr Whisky, Sir ... und einen für ...
Charles: ... später.
George: Ich werd auch noch einen nehmen. Was dagegen, wenn ich mich Ihnen anschliesse?
Charles: Nein ... das wäre fabelhaft.
George: Noch einen Whisky und eine Zigarre. Sekunde noch, bringen Sie uns eine Flasche Whisky. Da wollen wir es uns gemütlich machen – was? Wollen wir mal sehen, wie wir die Nacht durchbringen können. Schöne Hochzeit.
Charles: Ja, ja, ja.
George: Ich war mit seinem Bruder Bufty im Internat. Toller Bursche, er war Tutor in meinem Haus. Er hat mich oft wahnsinnig flachgelegt. Trotzdem hat er mir was über's Leben beigebracht. Woher kennen Sie ihn?
Charles: Von der Uni.
George: Ah, prima, prima, ja. Ich selbst war nicht auf der Uni. Hatte keinen Sinn für mich. Wissen Sie – Wenn man am Geldmarkt arbeitet, was nutzen einem da die Romane von Wordsworth.
Kellner: Entschuldigen Sie, Sir. Ihre Frau sagt, sie sollen sofort nach oben kommen. Zimmer 12, falls Sie so betrunken sind, dass Sie es nicht mehr wissen.
Charles: Meine Frau?
Kellner: Ja, Sir.
Charles: Ach, meine Frau – meine Frau!
George: Oh Gott! Sie sind wirklich betrunken, wenn Sie nicht mal wissen dass Sie eine Frau haben.
Charles: Was dagegen, wenn ich ...
George: Gehen Sie ruhig, gehen Sie ruhig ... alles Gute. (Charles: Danke, ja) Ich bin zum Glück Junggeselle. Ich glaube, ich seh'mich nochmal nach dieser Kathy-Maus um.

Charles: Carrie.
George: Ja, genau die. Verdammt niedlich die Kleine. Ich denke da hab'ich Chancen.

Charles: Bonsoir.
Carrie: Tiens.
Charles: En fin de compte, il n'y avait assez de places.
Carrie: Je croyais que c'était un château.
Charles: Oui...non...C'est un château, mais il est très petit, très, très petit. Une chambre par niveau. C'est extrêmement rare.
Garçon: Je vous sers quelque chose?
Charles: Oui,, un whisky, s'il vous plaît. Merci. Ça vous...
Carrie: Oui, un whisky, volontiers.
Charles: Alors, ce sera deux whisky.
Garçon: Doubles, monsieur?
Charles: Oui, merci.
George: Vous dormez là vous aussi. Ça gaze?
Charles: Salut. Oui, ça va.
George: Vous n'avez pas vu Carrie?
Charles: Qui?
George: Carrie ... américaine, jolies jambes, une odeur excitante, elle était au mariage.
Charles: Non, non ... désolé...
George: Merde, alors ... c'est pas vrai. Je crois que j'avais le ticket. Si vous la voyez, vous voulez bien lui dire que je suis dans ma chambre.
Charles: Oui, oui, d'accord ...
Garçon: Votre whisky, monsieur, (Charles: Ah, merci) et un autre pour la ...
Charles: Route, très bien.
George: Excellente idée, j'en prendrais un moi aussi; ça vous ennuie que je vous accompagne?
Charles: Non, avec grand plaisir.
George: Un autre whisky et un cigare. Non mettez nous une bouteille de whisky, autant être parés. On verra bien si on tient jusqu'au petit matin. Chouette mariage.
Charles: Oui, oui.
George: J'étais en pension avec son frère Bufty, un type épantant. Il était chef de mon dortoir et il m'a bien enulé, le saligaud, on a beau dire ça apprend la vie. D'où tu le connais toi?
Charles: L'université.
George: Ah, bien, très bien ... oui. Moi, j'ai pas été en fac. Je n'en voyais pas l'utilité. Je me suis dit que pour travailler à la Bourse il n'était pas nécessaire d'étudier les romans de Molière.

Garçon: Excusez moi, monsieur – votre femme vous attend dans votre chambre. Chambre 12 au cas que vous seriez trop ivre pour vous en souvenir.

Charles: Ma femme?

Garçon: Oui, monsieur.

Charles: Ah ... ma femme, ma femme!

George: Dites donc. Vous êtes tellement soûl que vous avez oublié vous avez une femme?

Charles: Oui, oui...vous m'excusez, si je...

George: Oui, bien sur, allez-y, allez-y. Bonne chance. (Charles: Merci)..ça a du bon d'être célibataire. Je vais à la recherche de l'autre créature, Catie.

Charles: Carrie.

George: C'est ça. Un joli petit lot. J'ai vraiment le ticket.

Charles: Sera.

Carrie: Ciao.

Charles: Ah – ciao. A casa del mio amico non c'era posto per tutti, così ...

Carrie: Non avevi detto che era un castello?

Charles: Sì no ... cioè ... è un castello, è così ... ma è molto, molto piccolo. È un buchetto, direi. Ha soltanto due stanze; un'autentica rarità.

Cameriere: Un drink, signore?

Charles: Sì, buona idea. Mi porti un whisky, per favore. La ringrazio. Bevi qualcosa?

Carrie: Sì, un whisky, grazie.

Charles: Un altro whisky per la signora.

Cameriere: Doppio, signore?

Charles: Sì, grazie.

George: Ah – ma guarda che sorpresa. Come stai?

Charles: Ah – ciao – sto bene, grazie.

George: Hai visto Carrie per caso?

Charles: Chi?

George: Carrie. L'americana con quelle gambe chilometriche. Era al matrimonio, un vero schianto.

Charles: No – mi dispiace.

George: Che sfortuna. Peccato. Credevo fosse qui. Se dovessi vederla, potresti dirle che sono su in camera?

Charles: Sì, sisisì.

Cameriere: Il suo whisky, signore. (Charles: Grazie). E quest'altro ... per la ...

Charles: Per la notte, grazie.

George: Ah ... è un'ottima idea. Ti dispiace se ti faccio compagnia.

Charles: Ah ... no, no, tutt'altro.

- George: Allora, un whisky doppio con ghiaccio e anche un sigaro ... aspetti ... ci porti un'intera bottiglia di whisky.
- Cameriere: Sì, signore.
- George: Perché non ce la spassiamo un po'. Vediamo se tiriamo fino all'alba. Sarebbe stupendo. Bel matrimonio, eh?
- Charles: Sì – sì – fantastico.
- George: Io andavo a scuola con il fratello di Angus, Bufty, un tipo allucinante. Era il pù cattivo della classe. Ha tentato di inchiappettarmi un paio di volte. Comunque, mi ha insegnato a schivare i colpi nella vita. Tu, dove l'hai conosciuto?
- Charles: All'università.
- George: Ah, splendido, splendido. Eh, sì. Io non sono andato all'università. Mi sembrava una perdita di tempo. Quando cominci a lavorare e ti piovano addosso i soldi, a che serve conoscere i sonetti di Shakespeare?
- Cameriere: Mi scusi, signore. Sua moglie le chiede se può raggiungerla subito. Camera 12, nel caso fosse così ubriaco da averlo dimenticato.
- Charles: Mia moglie?
- Cameriere: Sì, signore.
- Charles: Ah ... sì ... mia moglie, mia moglie.
- George: Cazzo! Sei proprio ubriaco se ti sei anche dimenticato di avere una moglie.
- Charles: Sì ... mi gira tutto. Senti, se non ti dispiace, io vado ...
- George: No, no, figurati, il dovere ti chiama. In bocca al lupo. (Charles: Grazie, speriamo bene). Che fortuna essere scapolo – non mi rimane altro che andarmene in giro a cercare quella Katie.
- Charles: Ma non era Carrie?
- George: Sì è uguale. Una fica pazzesca. Credo che me la farò.

The varying intensity of translational intervention in the different languages mostly concerns George's speech style and cultural milieu. George's first reference to Carrie is closely followed both syntactically and lexically in the German version, slightly less so in the French one ("une odeur excitante" – a Gallic transformation of "nice smell") and radically altered by the Italian adapter, though the the later horse metaphor is too much even for the German translator ("damn fine filly" – "Verdammt niedlich die Kleine"). The French version maintains the idea of Carrie as a commodity ("Un joli petit lot"). The Italian George is thoroughly domesticated into a kind of primitive macho latino ("una fica pazzesca") and there is no attempt to maintain the telegraphic presentation of Carrie, the syntax being less marked ("L'americana con quelle gambe chilometriche. Era al matrimonio, un vero schianto").

Greater contrasts are to be seen in George's educational background and cultural attitudes. The source audience, either from direct experience, or, in the majority of cases, from second hand knowledge, are well acquainted with the British Public School system, its organization in boarding houses and the kind of sexual practices involving older and younger boys that are supposed to be common there. The humour in this scene comes from the matter-of-fact way in which teenage homosexuality is referred to with such disarming nonchalance. All three target cultures have private boarding schools, though comparisons are problematic. The German and French versions maintain the boarding school element ("Internat", "pension") and the age difference ("Tutor", "chef de mon dortoir"), the German maintaining an incomprehensible literal feature ("Haus"). The description of the sexual act is unequivocal in the French version ("il m'a bien enculé, le saligaud") but ambiguous in the German one. The German could be interpreted either as something like "he knocked me over" (i.e. bullied me) or "put me in a horizontal position" (!). The Italian version turns Buffy into a kind of same age sex maniac bully in an ordinary day school.

Concerning George's aversion to culture, the German version opts for risky literalness ("die Romane von Wordsworth" – how many German viewers know that Wordsworth was really a poet?), the French one for domestication and ease of comprehension ("les romans de Molière"), while the Italian version maintains the English cultural setting (Shakespeare is better known than Wordsworth), while removing the humorous element of self condemnation and showing that the character is simply not interested in wasting time on literature. There are many other instances of smoothing out George's dialogue in the last version to facilitate audience reception.

The technical element of lip-sync is clearly not the explanation for the changes described above. Attitudes to audience reception predominate. While the German adapter tends to foreignize (note also the maintenance of several English words) and the Italian adapter opts for thorough domestication, the French one tends to hover between the two. "Everything has its price" (Toury 1992) is a cogent maxim for translators. The Italian version is certainly more internally coherent than the other two, but this is obtained by radical reduction of the cultural otherness of the source film. Here covert translation indeed "fulfills its *illusory* role almost perfectly" (Lambert 1995: 176). One of the most thorough recent studies of audiovisual translation (Herbst 1994) seems to advocate ease of reception as the paramount virtue for a genre which does not allow translators the same spatial freedom at least for explanatory expansion as the written medium does, provided that plot carrying elements are maintained. On this count the Italian version by Simona Izzo is the most successful of the three. However one is left with the question: Was the price paid for this ease of reception too high?

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