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INDEX / CONTENTS

PALINSESTI / PALIMPSESTS

- Memoria poetica e propaganda augustea. Per un commento di tre luoghi sidoniani sulla battaglia di Azio*
FRANCESCO MONTONE (Università di Napoli Federico II) 3-25
- Il filo di Aracne. Variazioni e riscritture italiane*
DANIELA CODELUPPI (Università di Parma) 27-49
- Discours scientifique et littérature. Approche de la citation chez Martin Winckler*
FABIENNE GOOSET (Université de Liège) 51-80
- “You’re Talking Like the Computer in the Movie”.
Allusions in Audiovisual Translation*
IRENE RANZATO (Università di Roma La Sapienza) 81-107

MATERIALI / MATERIALS

- “Svolazza” Lucifero come le anime dei morti? (“Inferno”, XXXIV, 46-52)*
MARCO CHIARIGLIONE (Biblioteca Civica Centrale – Torino) 111-121
- “Vous êtes libre”. Une citation de Madame Hanska*
MARIOLINA BONGIOVANNI BERTINI (Università di Parma) 123-133
- Fortuna moderna dell’antico. Echi catulliani in Ionesco, Totò, Monicelli*
DAVIDE ASTORI (Università di Parma) 135-142
- “Follow the white rabbit”. “The Ultimate Display” e “Matrix”*
MILENA CONTINI (Università di Torino) 143-153

ARCHIVIO / ARCHIVE

- The Films at the Wake. Per un catalogo*
RINALDO RINALDI (Università di Parma) 157-250

LIBRI DI LIBRI / BOOKS OF BOOKS

[recensione/review] Ruth Finnegan, *Why Do We Quote? The Culture and History of Quotation*, Cambridge, OpenBook Publishers, 2011

GUIDO FURCI

253-257

[recensione/review] *Da un genere all'altro. Trasposizioni e riscritture nella letteratura francese*, a cura di D. Dalla Valle, L. Rescia, M. Pavesio, Roma, Aracne, 2012

ALBA PESSINI

259-271



IRENE RANZATO

**“YOU’RE TALKING LIKE THE COMPUTER IN
THE MOVIE”. ALLUSIONS IN AUDIOVISUAL
TRANSLATION**

1. Introduction

This article relates to culture specific, source text allusions and to the way the problem of their translation has been discussed in Translation Studies and in Audiovisual Translation¹ in particular. Although the term ‘allusion’ is given a considerable latitude by scholars, Ritva Leppihalme, in her influential book on translating allusions, uses it in the sense of a “pre-formed linguistic material² in either its original or a modified form, and of proper names, to convey often implicit meaning”.³ The author’s focus is

¹ For an assessment of this fertile branch of Translation Studies, see F. Chaume, *Film Studies and Translation Studies: Two Disciplines at Stake in Audiovisual Translation*, in “Meta”, 49, 2004, pp. 12-24.

² See H. Meyer, *The Poetics of Quotation in the European Novel*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1968.

³ Cf. R. Leppihalme, *Culture Bumps. An Empirical Approach to the Translation of Allusions*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters, 1997, p. 3.

less on allusions as a literary phenomenon and more on them as a translation problem requiring the use of appropriate translation strategies. The present contribution will share the same translational perspective.

In terms of definitions, the proximity of the concept of allusion to that of culture specific (or culture-bound) term cannot be overlooked. Riina Kosunen and Susanne Väisänen consider culture-bound terms as a form of allusion, and Yves Gambier discusses examples of allusions that could also be classified as culture-specific items.⁴ For her part, Minna Ruokonen considers that

“On the whole, it seems that the overlap between the three concepts of allusion, quotation and culture-specific item is more of a question of delimitation (keeping the material manageable) than of definition (establishing essential differences between the concepts).”⁵

Although Leppihalme awards the term allusion a considerable scope, making it coincide in fact with culture specific terms, it is also true that the focus of her study appears to be literary references. Without theoretically excluding other objects (i.e. commercial products, celebrity names etc.), the term allusion is preferred, in the studies on this subject, when it is referred to more complex intertextual elements and concepts.

The present contribution will consider allusions which in either an overt or covert form are contained in dramatic dialogues and in visual elements in television shows, as well as the way they were translated into Italian for the specific purpose of dubbing. A quantitative and qualitative

⁴ See R. Kosunen – S. Väisänen, *Kääntämisen opetussanasto*, Turku, University of Turku, 2001 and Y. Gambier, *Traduire le sous-texte*, in *Langage et référence. Mélanges offerts à Kerstin Jonasson à l'occasion de ses soixante ans*, ed. by H. Kronning e. a., Uppsala, Uppsala Universitet, 2001, pp. 223-235.

⁵ M. Ruokonen, *Cultural and Textual Properties in the Translation and Interpretation of Allusions: An Analysis of Allusions in Dorothy L. Sayers' Detective Novels Translated into Finnish in the 1940s and the 1980s*, PhD Thesis, Turku, University of Turku, 2010, p. 34.

analysis of allusions has been carried out on the basis of a substantial *corpus* of television programmes selected and categorised by the author following a Descriptive Translations Studies⁶ paradigm.

2. The 'corpus'

The main criterium which guided the selection of the material to include in the analysis was the need of a sufficiently large *corpus*, necessary to evince norms, trends, tendencies or regularities in translation following the Tourian paradigm which recommends studies to be carried out on large and varied corpora. Not only should the *corpus* be large but it should cover various genres, contain a substantial number of episodes, and possibly involve different adapters.

The series included in the *corpus* are different in genre, origin and prospective audiences: *Friends* (David Crane and Marta Kauffman, 1994-2004) is an American sitcom which ran on the channel NBC in the United States from September 22, 1994 to May 6, 2004 and whose main plot is very simple, revolving around a group of New York City friends and their way of coping with reality and growing up (six seasons analysed for a total

⁶ At a time in which Translation Studies was decidedly marked by source-orientedness, the work of Gideon Toury in the 1980s and of Itamar Even-Zohar before him contributed to deviate the course of this newly-founded discipline towards an attention and emphasis on the target text. In order for the discipline of Translation Studies to stand on more solid scientific grounds and to be able to study more thoroughly this reciprocal interplay of influences between source text (and culture) and target text (and culture), Toury advocates the need for a methodology and research techniques which go beyond sets of isolated and randomly selected 'examples' and study regularities of translational behaviour by analysing a substantial corpus of purposefully selected material. Toury's advocacy of the descriptive approach generally associated to his name and in particular his notion of norms have had a huge influence on Translation Studies, supporting the most active research programme in this field to date. See G. Toury, *In Search of a Theory of Translation*, Tel Aviv, The Porter Institute of Poetics and Semiotics / Tel Aviv University, 1980 and Id., *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 1995.

of 145 episodes of about twenty-two minutes per episode); *Life on Mars* (Matthew Graham, Tony Jordan and Ashley Pharoah, 2006-2007) is a British Police procedural which inserts elements of science fiction into a traditional detective story, broadcast by BBC One in Britain between January 2006 and April 2007 (two seasons analysed for a total of sixteen episodes of sixty minutes per episode); *Six Feet Under* (Alan Ball, 2001-2005) is an American drama series created by well known scriptwriter Alan Ball, broadcast by HBO from June 2001 to August 2006: one of the finest examples of auteur television and the object of several academic film studies,⁷ it deals with potentially disturbing contents and is centred on the life of a family of undertakers (two seasons analysed for a total of twenty-six episodes of sixty minutes per episode).

3. *Culture Specific Elements and Allusions: Definitions and Boundaries*

The first problem in defining a culture specific reference derives from the fact that, in a language, everything is practically culture specific, including language itself.⁸ Relatively few scholars in Translation Studies, and even less in Audiovisual Translation, offer systematic definitions of

⁷ See, among others, *Six Feet Under TV To Die For*, eds. K. Akass and J. McCabe, London, I. B. Tauris & Co, 2005; L. Buonomo, *Six Feet Under. La morte è di casa*, in "Ácoma", 36, 2008, pp. 110-121; R. Bury, *Setting David Fisher Straight: Homophobia and Heterosexism in 'Six Feet Under' Online Fan Culture*, in "Critical Studies in Television", 2008, 3 (2), pp. 59-79; *Considering Alan Ball: Essays on Sexuality, Death and America in the Television and Film Writings*, ed. T. Fahy, Jefferson & London, McFarland & Company, 2006; *The Essential HBO Reader*, eds. G. R. Edgerton and J. P. Jones, Lexington, The University Press of Kentucky, 2009; *Quality TV. Contemporary American Television and Beyond*, eds. J. McCabe and K. Akass, London, I. B. Tauris, 2007.

⁸ See J. Franco Aixelà, *Culture-specific Items in Translation*, in *Translation Power Subversion*, ed. by R. Alvarez and M. C. Africa Vidal, Cleveland & Philadelphia, Multilingual Matters, 1996, pp. 56-57.

culture specific references. In what follows, an overview is offered of the most relevant positions relative to those elements which have been defined using a vast array of terms: culture specific, culture bound references / elements / terms / items / expressions, *realia*, allusions, or, more generally, cultural references. Although allusions are usually considered a specific form of cultural elements, it is important to remember, as noted above, that the two terms often coincide in the relevant literature on the subject.

One of the earliest scholars who attempted to pinpoint the characteristics of culture specific terms and expressions is A. M. Finkel, for whom these elements "stand out from the common lexical context, they distinguish themselves for their heterogeneity, and consequently they require a reinforcement of attention in order to be decoded".⁹ Only a few years later, Sergej Vlahov and Sider Florin, defining more precisely the nature of culture specific references, which they termed *realia*, offered a now classical definition:

"[...] words (and composed locutions) of popular language which constitute denominations of objects, concepts, which are typical of a geographical environment, of a culture, of the material life or of historical-social peculiarities of a people, a nation, a country, a tribe, and which thus carry a national, local or historical colouring; these words have not precise equivalents in other languages."¹⁰

⁹ Cf. A. M. Finkel', *Ob avtoperevode*, s. l., TKP, 1962, p. 112. Citato in traduzione italiana in B. Osimo, *Manuale del traduttore*, Milano, Hoepli, 2003², p. 65: "escono dal testo lessicale comune, si distinguono per la loro eterogeneità, e di conseguenza esigono un rafforzamento dell'attenzione per essere codificate".

¹⁰ S. Vlahov – S. Florin, *Neperovodimoe v perevode. Realii*, in "Masterstvo perevoda", 6, 1969, p. 438. Citato in traduzione italiana in B. Osimo, *Manuale del traduttore*, cit., p. 64: "parole (e locuzioni composte) della lingua popolare che costituiscono denominazioni di oggetti, concetti, fenomeni tipici di un ambiente geografico, di una cultura, della vita materiale o di peculiarità storico-sociali di un popolo, di una nazione, di un paese, di una tribù, e che quindi sono portatrici di un colorito nazionale, locale o storico; queste parole non hanno corrispondenze precise in altre lingue".

Culture specific terms could be included in the wider group of ‘untranslatable’ words, as Leemets defines them:

“Every language has words denoting concepts and things that another language has not considered worth mentioning, or that are absent from the life or consciousness of the other nation. The reasons are differences in the ways of life, traditions, beliefs, historical developments – in one word, the cultures of the nations. Also, differences can be observed on conceptual level. Different languages often nominate concepts from different viewpoints, and they also tend to classify them slightly differently.”¹¹

Although Leemets focuses more generally on all lexical gaps between two languages, her emphasis on culture makes the quotation perfectly suitable to culture-bound material.

Jean-Pierre Mailhac, on the other hand, is more specifically concerned with the nature of culture specific elements which he defines even more interestingly by stating that: “by cultural reference we mean any reference to a cultural entity which, due to its distance from the target culture, is characterized by a sufficient degree of opacity for the target reader to constitute a problem”.¹² This definition is particularly useful because by referring to the degree of opacity Mailhac emphasises how the interpretation of cultural references is characterised by a varying degree of subjectivity. His mentioning of the distance between target culture and source culture indicates the relativity of the concept, which is the main cause of the difficulty in finding univocal and unambiguous strategies for the translation of these references.

¹¹ H. Leemets, *Translating the “Untranslatable” Words*, in *Papers Submitted to the 5th EURALEX International Congress on Lexicography*, ed. by H. Tommola, K. Varantola, T. Salmi-Tolonen and J. Schopp, Tampere, University of Tampere, 1992, p. 2, p. 475.

¹² Cf. J.-P. Mailhac, *The Formulation of Translation Strategies for Cultural References*, in *Language, Culture and Communication in Contemporary Europe*, ed. by C. Hoffmann, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters, 1996, pp. 133-134.

Another scholar who refers explicitly to the problem these items constitute in translation is Javier Franco Aixelá for whom these references are

“ [...] those textually actualized items whose function and connotations in a source text involve a translation problem in their transference to a target text, whenever this problem is a product of the non-existence of the referred item or of its different intertextual status in the cultural system of the readers of the target text.”¹³

His definition clearly states how the translation problems may stem from two different situations: an objective one (the “non-existence of the referred item”) and a relative one (the “different intertextual status” of the target text respect to the source text). The latter situation is relative as the intertextual status keeps shifting and varying, because the relationship between two cultures can change in a very short period of time. In other words, because of their dynamic nature, “no two elements retain the same relationship over a sufficient period of time”.¹⁴ Hence, the translation strategies used at some point in time may not be appropriate at other time.

The problems of translating culture specific elements are also underlined by the already cited Leppihalme. This author prefers to refer to a particular set of culture specific elements, allusions, which may create a culture “bump” to the translators, that is, a small-scale culture shock which may cause problems in finding the right cultural equivalent. The great quantity of examples Leppihalme provides shows that what she means by allusions is a wide range of possibilities from simple quotations (which may or may not be obscure to the target culture or even the source culture) to more oblique hints. An important aspect of allusions is literature’s ability

¹³ J. Franco Aixelà, *Culture-specific items in translation*, cit., p. 58.

¹⁴ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 57.

“to create new literature out of the old”,¹⁵ that is to say, to involve the reader in a recreation by alluding to partly hidden meanings that the readers should be able to get and then use in order to achieve a deeper knowledge of the work. Since the 1980s, the growing interest of researchers in audience reception and in the role of the reader, has made this a particular relevant point.¹⁶ Readers who recognise a creative allusion, i. e. an allusion which has not become stereotyped because of too many repetitions, attain a deeper understanding of a text, which means that they are in some way participating in its creation and can consequently feel a sense of fulfillment because they feel part of a restricted circle of readers who are on the same wavelength as the author.¹⁷ As John Anthony Cuddon also states:

“It is often a kind of appeal to a reader to share some experience with the writer [...] . When using allusions a writer tends to assume an established literary tradition, a body of common knowledge with an audience sharing that tradition, an ability on the part of the audience to ‘pick up’ the reference.”¹⁸

This definition also supports my view that the term allusions is privileged when made in connection with literary or, more broadly, artistic works. In other words, the term allusion, rather than culture specific reference, is preferred when it is referred to more complex intertextual elements and concepts than those taken from everyday life, i.e. to the words from a speech of a politician rather than to the politician himself / herself, or to an oblique reference to a film or novel character rather than to their author. Allusions create two kinds of links in the extratextual world: they

¹⁵ Cf. A. L. Johnson, *Allusion in Poetry*, in “PTL: A Journal for Poetics and Theory of Literature”, 1, 1976, p. 579.

¹⁶ See R. Leppihalme, *Culture Bumps. An Empirical Approach to the Translation of Allusions*, cit., p. 8.

¹⁷ See *ibidem*, pp. 32-33.

¹⁸ J. A. Cuddon, *Allusion*, in *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, ed. by J. A. Cuddon, London, Penguin Books, 1999, p. 27.

connect the alluding text to the previous literary tradition and create a sense of connection between the author and the reader, "cultivating intimacy and forging a community".¹⁹

In terms of translation strategies, Leppihalme proposed taxonomies for rendering proper name allusions and key-phrase allusions, i. e. explicit quotations and more covert allusions to other texts. The first one Leppihalme includes:

- retention: as such or with guidance, that is addition of information to guide the Target Text reader, including footnotes;

- replacement by another name;

- replacement by a common noun which serves as a sort of explanation, for example 'Fangio', if thought unfamiliar, may be replaced by 'Formula driver';

- omission.²⁰

Leppihalme's taxonomy is very simple but it is a useful tool for analysis as it includes the basic strategies that could be applied, with some further elaboration, to the translation of culture specific elements in general. Her taxonomy for the translation of key-note phrases is also important for the purpose of translating quotations, which have been included in my analysis. This taxonomy is not easy to summarise because Leppihalme explains each strategy by relating them to different types of allusions:

- treat them like idioms: in the case of dead and dying allusions;

- standard translation and minimum change: when an official translation exists in the target culture;

¹⁹ Cf. W. Irwin, *The Aesthetics of Allusion*, in "The Journal of Value Inquiry", 36, 2002, pp. 521-522.

²⁰ See R. Leppihalme, *Culture Bumps: On the translation of allusions*, Helsinki, Department of English / Helsinki University, 1994, p. 106.

- guidance, external marking: which means explicitation and the possible addition of markings such as inverted commas or italics to signal the presence of the quotation;
- internal marking or simulated familiarity: which consists in signaling an allusion by using stylistic contrast;
- replacement of a Source Language allusion by a Target Language-specific allusion;
- reduction to sense by rephrasal: whereby the Target Language synthetic image is abandoned in favour of a rephrasal which both explicates and tries to save some components of the original;
- omission;
- recreation: creation and addition of new material to convey as much of the meaning and tone of the original allusion.²¹

In spite of its apparent lack of systematicity – the above listing is derived from the scholar’s extensive reflections on a series of examples – the above classification has the merit of proposing strategies to translate longer and more complex units than the generally single-word terms which have so far been included in the taxonomies of culture specific references. As these longer units are included in our study, Leppihalme’s methods of translating key-note phrases is a valuable instrument which enables to add further insights to the analysis of allusions.

Audiovisual Translation scholars who have dealt with culture specific references²² did not tackle the problem of translating allusions

²¹ See *ibidem*, p. 107 and pp. 114-126.

²² See R. Agost de Canos, *Traducción y Doblaje: Palabras, Voces e Imágenes*, Barcelona, Ariel, 1999; L. Santamaria Guinot, *Subtitulació i referents culturals. La traducció com a mitjà d’adquisició de representacions socials*, PhD Thesis, Barcelona, Universidad Autònoma de Barcelona, 2001; J. Pedersen, *How is Culture Rendered in Subtitles?*, in *Proceedings of the Marie Curie Euroconferences ‘MuTra: Challenges of Multidimensional Translation’* (Saarbrücken, 2-6 May 2005), ed. S. Nauert, web address

directly and have not explicitly referred to them in their taxonomies. In order to overcome this substantial ambiguity, in this contribution the distinction between realistic and intertextual cultural references is acknowledged. The former are references to non-fictional persons and objects: living or once living people, food, currency, institutions, and everything which composes our reality. The latter are intended as explicit or indirect references (which we term allusions) to other texts, creating a bond between the translated text and other literary, audiovisual or artistic texts. The nature of these latter references is different from the former, and allusions to and quotations from other fictional works are here included in the domain of culture specific elements more explicitly than it has been done by other scholars. Their different nature, however, is acknowledged as allusions create a special relationship between the audience and the text itself and, to a certain extent, they presuppose a disposition on the part of the target culture audience to retrieve information and make associations which are usually more than just encyclopedic as they require a certain degree of specialistic knowledge.

In the television programmes included in the *corpus*, allusions were found to 'high-end' works or to popular culture products, however all of them require what Finkel terms a "reinforcement of attention"²³ by the audience. The following example shows how this type of allusions creates,

www.euroconferences.info/proceedings/2005_Proceedings/2005_Pedersen_Jan.pdf2005 ; Id., *Scandinavian Subtitles. A Comparative Study of Subtitling Norms in Sweden and Denmark with a Focus on Extralinguistic Cultural References*, PhD Thesis, Stockholm, Stockholm University, 2007; Id., *Subtitling Norms for Television*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 2011; J. Díaz-Cintas and A. Remael, *Audiovisual Translation: Subtitling*, Manchester, St. Jerome Publishing, 2007; N. Ramière, *Strategies of Cultural Transfer in Subtitling and Dubbing*, PhD Thesis, Brisbane, University of Queensland, 2007; D. Chiaro, *Issues in Audiovisual Translation*, in *The Routledge Companion to Translation Studies*, ed. by J. Munday, London, Routledge, 2009, pp. 141-165.

²³ Cf. A. M. Finkel, *Ob avtoperevode*, cit., p. 112. Citato in traduzione italiana in B. Osimo, *Manuale del traduttore*, cit., p. 65: "rafforzamento dell'attenzione".

in the original dialogue, a quite sophisticated effect even in a sitcom aimed at a large, mainstream audience such as *Friends* (series 3, episode 19):

CONTEXT

Joey's bitter feelings towards a fellow actress inspire Chandler's Shakespearean repartee.

ORIGINAL FILM DIALOGUE

JOEY: Just because she went to **Yale drama**, she thinks she's like the greatest actress since, since, sliced bread!

CHANDLER: Ah, **Sliced Bread, a wonderful Lady Macbeth.**

ITALIAN ADAPTATION

JOEY: Solo perché ha frequentato la scuola di recitazione a Yale crede di essere l'attrice più brava dal... dal Medioevo.

CHANDLER: Oh, **il Medioevo, l'epoca d'oro del nostro teatro.**

BACK TRANSLATION

JOEY: Just because she went to Yale drama, she thinks she's the greatest actress since, since the Middle Ages.

CHANDLER: Ah, **the Middle Ages, the golden era of our theatre.**²⁴

The humour of the original joke is created by the contrast between Joey's incongruous use of an everyday object (sliced bread) and Chandler's high-end literary remark on Shakespeare's *Lady Macbeth*. The humour is diluted in the Italian adaptation for dubbing, which eliminates the allusion to Shakespeare's play and substitutes it for a more general comment on the Middle Ages.

Although intertextual references naturally participate in the same categories as realistic references, i. e. they may belong to the source culture, to a third culture, and so on, their origin is considered here as a secondary aspect compared to their universal nature and potentially timeless status of works of art, literature and popular culture. This status makes them, in a way, supercultural. In other words, whatever the origin of *Hamlet*, *Mona Lisa*, the *Odyssey*, *Super Mario*, *Mr Tambourine Man* and

²⁴ Emphasis added.

Mickey Mouse, it is the intertextual relationship created between two texts, and the effect this relationship has on the target audience, that sets these elements apart from the others. The referents of allusions belong to a body of "assumed shared knowledge",²⁵ which may be general or specialised, be part of the source culture, of the target culture or of any third culture, but whose nature is different from realistic culture specific references.

4. Allusions in the 'Corpus'

The analysis of the three series demonstrates that the original dialogues contained in the *corpus* rely heavily on the use of allusions. More specifically: out of the 1867 culture specific references detected in *Friends*, 428 are allusions, equal to 22,9% of the total; out of the 431 culture specific references in *Life on Mars*, 89 that is 20,6%, are allusions; out of the 679 culture specific references in *Six Feet Under*, 76 are allusions, that is 11,1%.

Allusions can be overt and covert. The category of overt allusions includes intertextual references explicitly quoted in the text. Formal implicitness or covertness is traditionally considered a defining characteristic of allusion.²⁶ Gérard Genette, for example, adopted this view in his influential overview of the different types of intertextuality.²⁷ However, other researchers studying allusions have argued for a more flexible approach stating that allusions can also appear as exact quotations or proper

²⁵ Cf. M. Ruokonen, *Cultural and Textual Properties in the Translation and Interpretation of Allusions: An Analysis of Allusions in Dorothy L. Sayers' Detective Novels Translated into Finnish in the 1940s and the 1980s*, cit., p. 32.

²⁶ See J. M. Pucci, *The Full-Knowing Reader: Allusion and the Power of the Reader in the Western Literary Tradition*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1998, p. 6.

²⁷ See G. Genette, *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré*, Paris, Seuil, 1982, pp. 8-9.

names²⁸ or otherwise “preformed linguistic material”²⁹ and even state openly their source reference.³⁰

When elements of this nature are widely known, there is the further difficulty for the translator of having to refer to the title or quotation as it was officially translated in the target language, with the risk of losing the meaning / reference of the original allusion in the new context. In this sense, it is particularly difficult to adopt a suitable strategy in the translation of titles, lyrics and literary quotations. In cases where the words of a quoted text are necessary, for example, to understand a joke, the replacement with an element which belongs to the target culture or is at least better known to it, is often chosen to get the message effectively across.

The following example demonstrates how allusions can enrich a television text and shows how the original dialogues of *Life on Mars* (series 2, episode 2) achieve a quality standard which is higher than that of the average police story, thanks especially to the skilful handling of both highbrow and lowbrow allusions:

CONTEXT

After sending away two twin boys who were asking Sam, the protagonist of the series, for information, Gene, his boss, is puzzled by Sam’s perturbed expression when he reads the front page of a newspaper.

ORIGINAL FILM DIALOGUE

GENE: Oi! **Bill and Ben**, sod off. We're working here.

GENE (*noticing SAM's face*): What's up with you? You're as white as a pint of gold-top.

²⁸ See Z. Ben-Porat, *The Poetics of Literary Allusion*, in “PTL: A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature”, 1, 1976, p. 110.

²⁹ Cf. R. Leppihalme, *Culture Bumps. An Empirical Approach to the Translation of Allusions*, cit., p. 3.

³⁰ See W. Irwin, *What is an allusion?*, in “The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism”, 59, 2001, p. 287.

SAM: The bloke who looked after me when I joined the force. He's dead.

GENE: Oh. Close, were you?

SAM: You could say he was my mentor. I used to go to him for advice on everything.

Even when they promoted him upstairs. I learnt the job from him, really.

GENE: I think I knew him. It was DI **Frankenstein**, weren't it? He's certainly lumbered me with **a monster**.

ITALIAN ADAPTATION

GENE: Fuori dai piedi, **Cip e Ciop**. Stiamo lavorando.

GENE: Che ti succede? Sei bianco come la schiuma della birra.

SAM: Il comandante in carica quando sono entrato in polizia è morto.

GENE: Oh. Eravate legati?

SAM: E' stato il mio mentore. Andavo da lui per chiedergli consiglio su tutto, anche quando l'hanno promosso a cariche importanti. Ho imparato il mestiere da lui.

GENE: Lo conoscevo anch'io. Si chiamava **Frankenstein**. Mi ha lasciato in eredità **un mostro**.

BACK TRANSLATION

GENE: Off you go, **Chip'n'Dale**. We're working.

GENE: What's up with you? You're as white as beer foam.

SAM: The chief in charge when I joined the police is dead.

GENE: Oh. Were you close?

SAM: He was my mentor. I used to go to him to ask for advice on everything, even when they promoted him to important positions. I learnt the job from him.

GENE: I knew him too. His name was **Frankenstein**. I inherited **a monster** from him.³¹

The name of Frankenstein, an intercultural allusion,³² was kept as a loan. The example also contains a more popular allusion to the twin characters Bill and Ben from a British children TV show, *Flower Pot Men* (Freda Lingstrom and Maria Bird, 1952-1954). In Italian, they have been transposed into the more internationally popular Disney chipmunk characters. In addition to the fact that the Chip'n'Dale characters look like twins and belong to the world of childhood just like Bill and Ben, the adapters also tried not to lose the alliteration present in the original

³¹ Emphasis added.

³² In the taxonomy devised to analyse this *corpus*, which cannot be expounded here in its entirety, by intercultural allusion we mean a reference to an element belonging to the source culture which is probably known and by various degrees absorbed by the target culture.

dialogue by the use of the two names of “Cip e Ciop”, pronounced in Italian as Chip and Chop.

It can be argued that the character that the rough Gene, Sam’s boss, is referring to is the Frankenstein of the more popular and low-brow world of horror cinema, but it is also true that his use of this allusion, his referring correctly to Frankenstein as the creator of the monster (instead as to Frankenstein as the monster itself, as in more popular usage), and the fact that this association was triggered by Sam’s reference to a mentor, render Gene’s last line one of those fairly sophisticated remarks which are interspersed in this story of raw policemen and criminals.

Whether high-brow or low-brow, allusions are thus generally perceived as having a sophisticated quality to them. They represent a sensitive category in translation because of what could be termed ‘the presumed ignorance’ of the target culture audience by the translators. In other words: presuming that the target culture audience might be ignorant of that particular content, translators may feel the need to simplify or otherwise alter the content itself in order for the audience to understand. This is true with excerpts from the great literature but also with much simpler references to titles of popular songs, films or TV programmes. The following adaptation for dubbing, taken from *Six Feet Under* (series 1, episode 3) is an example of this kind of manipulative translation:

CONTEXT

Nate, a member of the Fisher family of undertakers, has gone to the morgue to recover the body of a dead person.

ORIGINAL FILM DIALOGUE

ATTENDANT: He's like in a lot of pieces.

NATE: **Humpty Dumpty**, I know.

ITALIAN ADAPTATION

INSERVIENTE: E' come una specie di puzzle.

NATE: **Me l'hanno detto che è ridotto male.**

BACK-TRANSLATION

ATTENDANT: He's like a kind of puzzle.

NATE: **They told me he was in a bad shape.**³³

Humpty Dumpty is a character of an English children limerick, an egg which at the end of the story goes to pieces. It also figures famously in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*. Children in Italy are not familiar with Humpty Dumpty, it is a character known mainly among lovers of English literature, so the reference in this case would not have got across to the audience.³⁴ However, there is an attempt at compensation in the Italian adaptation by the introduction of "puzzle" in the attendant's line. By keeping within the same semantic area of children games, the translation maintains some of its original flavour although the effect in English is more grotesque and incisive. The reality of death is transferred to the Italian screen with images of lesser impact.

Six Feet Under shares with many other contemporary fiction works the postmodern taste for quoting, elaborating, interweaving, playing on allusions to other fictional works and characters. Along with a number of loans and official translations, the tendency to elimination (or omission, as it is generally defined by translation scholars) is prevalent. The following example (series 1, episode 8), which involves both a visual and a verbal allusion, is noteworthy:

CONTEXT

In the 'death prologue' of the eighth episode, a woman dies a horrible death while celebrating with her friends.

ORIGINAL FILM DIALOGUE

³³ Emphasis added.

³⁴ However, times change and the fact that this character recently featured prominently in the Dreamworks animation film *Puss in Boots* (Chris Miller, 2011) probably had an impact on children's awareness of this character.

Chloe stands up and sticks her head out of the sunroof. She rejoices in her newfound freedom.

CHLOE: I'm king of the world! I'm king of the world! I'm king of the world!

At that moment, the limo passes a cherry picker on the side of the road at the same level as Chloe's head. It smashes her face in. Her friends are splashed with blood and scream in terror. The screen fades to white.

ITALIAN ADAPTATION

CHLOE: Sono la padrona del mondo!

BACK-TRANSLATION

CHLOE: I'm the master of the world!³⁵

The description included in the example, which portrays Chloe standing up on the car seat and sticking her head out of the rooftop, is fundamental to understand the visual impact of the scene. However, it is not wholly accurate. It should be added that as well as sticking her head out, Chloe is standing in such a way as to stick half of her body, from the waist up, out of the car: she makes a swaying movement which, aided by the words she utters – the now famous line “I’m king of the world!” – reminds audiences of the iconic scene from the American film *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997) in which Leonardo Di Caprio similarly sways on the ship’s prow, his body blown by the wind in an image of joy and freedom. Unfortunately, the association is lost in Italian as Chloe’s words do not quote the film’s official Italian adaptation which translated the words literally: *Sono il re del mondo!*. Words which are now embedded in the Italian culture as part of our transnational consciousness.

As implicitness is traditionally related to the concept of allusion, we may derive that covertness is the quintessential characteristic of allusions, while overt allusions may be classified as allusions by extension. As William Irwin states, it is clear that an allusion is a type of reference, but in “what way it must be covert, implied, or indirect is a matter of some

³⁵ Emphasis added.

dispute".³⁶ Covert allusions include indirect references and more or less oblique references to other texts. They are often felt as problematic and sometimes too cryptic by audiovisual translators to be kept unaltered in the Target Text, even when an official translation may already exist. An example of covert allusion is the following (*Friends*, series 1, episode 15):

CONTEXT

Monica is describing the restaurant where she is going to start work. Her description prompts her friend Chandler's reference to the fairy-tale of *Goldilocks and the three bears*.

ORIGINAL FILM DIALOGUE

MONICA: ...It's this cute little place on 10th Street. Not too big, not too small. Just right.

CHANDLER: **Was it formerly owned by a blonde woman and some bears?**

ITALIAN ADAPTATION

MONICA: ... E' un posticino nella 10° strada. Non è troppo grande, né troppo piccolo. Proprio la misura ideale.

CHANDLER: **Avevi il centimetro per misurare tutto così bene?**

BACK TRANSLATION

MONICA: ...It's this cute little place on 10th Street. Not too big, not too small. Exactly the ideal measure.

CHANDLER: **Did you have a metre to measure everything so well?**³⁷

The story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, a fairy tale first recorded in writing by Robert Southey in 1837, is well known in most parts of Europe. Monica's description of the restaurant she has just seen reminds Chandler of Goldilocks's often repeated words in the fable: "This chair is too big... This chair is just right!". This clever reference has been eliminated in the version for Italy, where the story is also known but perhaps not as popular as in the English-speaking countries, and the solution opts for a nondescript comment by Chandler on Monica's description.

³⁶ Cf. W. Irwin, *What is an allusion?*, cit., p. 287.

³⁷ Emphasis added.

Sometimes it is an entire programme which at a macrolevel turns out to be an allusion to another text, playing from beginning to end with the presumed familiarity of the audience with a given hypotext.³⁸ In the present analysis, such allusions are termed intertextual macroallusions. This operation can be carried out overtly, when a work is explicitly based on the Source Text (for instance, to quote an example not taken from the *corpus*, *South Park* states from the very first lines of the script to be an adaptation of Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*),³⁹ or it can be carried out covertly, disseminating hints and clues for the members of the audience who will slowly discover the hypotext(s) behind the hypertext. This is the case, for example, of the film *Bridget Jones's Diary* (Sharon Maguire, 2001), a covert macroallusion to Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*; and even more covertly of the film *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (Beeban Kidron, 2004), a subtle allusion to Jane Austen's *Persuasion*. As in the case of these two films, macroallusions are grasped by the audience by capturing dialogue excerpts, character and plot similarities, visual hints and the like and by joining all the pieces in a bigger picture. However, macroallusions appear to be more than just the sum of several overt and covert allusions and they can be fully grasped and appreciated in the wider context of the entire text which only if taken as a whole will fully clarify its bonds with the hypotext.

In our *corpus* the series *Life on Mars* plays with various macroallusions, the most notable of which is represented by the frequent

³⁸ I am borrowing here Genette's influential definition of what he terms 'hypotext': a source text giving origin to other texts (the 'hypertexts') which use material from their source on different levels and with different styles in an act of intertextual recreation. See G. Genette, *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré*, cit., pp. 11-12.

³⁹ See *South Park* (Trey Parker and Matt Stone, 1997- in production), season 4, episode 5.

echoes from the *Wizard of Oz* (the book by L. Frank Baum and Victor Fleming's celebrated film) which is sometimes quoted explicitly as in the following examples (series 1, episode 2 and series 1, episode 1):

CONTEXT

Gene's sarcastic comment to one of Sam's weird remarks.

ORIGINAL FILM DIALOGUE

GENE: Hello, is that the **Wizard of Oz**? The **Wizard**'ll sort it out. It's because of the wonderful things he does.

ITALIAN ADAPTATION

GENE: Pronto, è il **Mago di Oz**? Il **Mago di Oz** è uscito. Sai, ha un sacco di cose da fare.

BACK-TRANSLATION

GENE: Hello, is that the **Wizard of Oz**? The **Wizard** has gone out. You know, he has a lot of things to do.

CONTEXT

Sam's new colleague, Annie, is puzzled by Sam's weird associations.

ORIGINAL FILM DIALOGUE

SAM: **Follow the yellow brick road.**

ANNIE: And what will you find? Mist? A big cliff? White door?

SAM: I don't know.

ITALIAN ADAPTATION

SAM: **Segui la strada di mattoni gialli.**

ANNIE: E che cosa troverai? Nebbia? Una grande scogliera? Una porta bianca?

SAM: Non lo so.

BACK TRANSLATION

SAM: **Follow the yellow brick road.**

ANNIE: And what will you find? Mist? A big cliff? White door?

SAM: I don't know.⁴⁰

In addition to these direct quotations, the character of Gene Hunt sometimes calls Sam "Dorothy", in reference to his supposed effeminate manners, as *friends of Dorothy* is a slang expression meaning gay. Dorothy is the name of the main character in *The Wizard of Oz*, a supposedly gay

⁴⁰ Emphasis added.

cult character played by Judy Garland in Fleming's 1939 film.⁴¹ Dorothy is not linked to the gay imagination in Italy and, in general, *The Wizard of Oz*, although very popular, is far from being a nation's cautionary tale as it is in the USA and, to a lesser degree, in Britain.

The pivotal character of Frank Morgan in the series is also the name of one of the actors in *The Wizard of Oz*, who played the dual roles of Professor Marvel in the Kansas sequences and of the Wizard in the Oz sequences. The Frank Morgan of *Life on Mars*, too, has a dual role: he is both Gene's nemesis in 1973 and Sam's surgeon in 2006. Finally, one of the songs from the soundtrack of the film, *Over the Rainbow*, sung by Judy Garland, features prominently in the last episode of the series in which, when Sam and Annie finally kiss, a rainbow can be seen at a distance.

These intertextual allusions to *The Wizard of Oz* work as a macroallusion in the sense that their significance permeates the whole concept of the show: Sam is in fact like a Dorothy in a strange, magic world which, just like in the fable, may be just a hallucination, the result of the concussion suffered in the first episode. Or maybe not. This kind of literary references, in the form of covert and overt allusions to other works of fiction, add new and sophisticated layers of meaning to a storyline which, on the surface, resembles a typical detective and crime story.

Allusions in audiovisual texts can of course be nonverbal. They can be visual or acoustic. These elements are, in audiovisual programmes, some of the most characterising in terms of place and time. Their embeddedness⁴² into the source culture cannot be rooted out and these

⁴¹ See M. Harvey Monica and A. Ravano, *Wow The Word on Words*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1999, p. 305.

⁴² According to Anthony Pym the more the text "presupposes its place of production", the more difficult it is to transfer it to another culture. "Texts belong", to use a definition by the same author that is to say that they are rooted in a context of space and time in which they are best comprehensible. Cf. A. Pym, *Translation and*

elements cannot be transferred into the Target Text by any translation strategies other than elimination (muting or cutting), by an explicitating caption on screen, or by simply leaving them 'untranslated'. See *Friends*, series 5, episode 20 and series 1, episode 6:

CONTEXT

Ross is fooling a round with a police siren lamp.

ORIGINAL FILM DIALOGUE

ROSS: (*He sticks the lamp under his shirt. It's just there flashing through his shirt*) Hey Gary, who am I? **Phone home.**

ITALIAN ADAPTATION

ROSS: Ehi, Gary, indovina chi sono? **Telefono casa.**

BACK-TRANSLATION

ROSS: Hey, Gary, guess who I am. **Phone home.**

CONTEXT

Monica protests that she does not have the bossy and obsessive personality her friends say she has.

ORIGINAL FILM DIALOGUE

MONICA: You guys, I am not that bad!

PHOEBE: Yeah, you are, Monica. Remember when I lived with you? You were like, a little, y'know, (*sound and gesture from PSYCHO*) **Ree! Ree! Ree! Ree!**

MONICA: That is so unfair!

ITALIAN ADAPTATION

MONICA: Andiamo non sono poi così cattiva.

PHOEBE: Io dico di sì invece. Io ho abitato con te e tu eri una piccola **Ui, ui, ui, ui, ui, ui!**

MONICA: Questo non è affatto giusto.

BACK-TRANSLATION

MONICA: Come on, I'm not that bad.

PHOEBE: I say you are, on the contrary. I lived with you and you were a little **Ouee, ouee, ouee!**

MONICA: This is not at all fair.⁴³

If, in the first instance, the visual allusion to the film *E.T.* (Stephen Spielberg, 1982) is clearly recognisable, also thanks to the direct quotation from the film dialogue which accompanies it (“Phone home”), the allusion contained in the second example proves to be too sophisticated to be immediately perceived by the audience, probably not only the Italian one, but also that of the source culture: by imitating the gesture and the sounds of *Psycho*’s (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) deranged character Norman Bates when he impersonates his mother, Phoebe acts out a subtle visual and acoustic allusion which is rendered even more ‘covert’ in Italian by the poor dubbing (as the transcription of the adaptation tries to convey).

Often neglected by adapters, the potential of nonverbal allusions should be fully grasped as these signs are sometimes part of more complex verbal and nonverbal communicative acts. In this sense, Patrick Zabalbeascoa writes of complex jokes, which combine the acoustic and the linguistic codes to achieve their humoristic effect. Jorge Díaz Cintas includes noise in this category, by which he means not only noise in itself but also suprasegmental and paralinguistic information such as intonation and regional accents.⁴⁴ Nonverbal signs are easier to deal with in subtitling than in dubbing, as they may provide information which do not need to be repeated in a verbal form in the subtitle.

Nonetheless, as highlighted by Díaz Cintas and Aline Remael, in all types of Audiovisual Translation, “the most difficult situation arises when a linguistic sign, a phrase, refers metaphorically to an iconographic sign or

⁴⁴ See P. Zabalbeascoa, *Translating Jokes for Dubbed Television Situation Comedies*, in *Wordplay and Translation: Essays on Punning and Translation*, Special Issue of “The Translator: Studies in Intercultural Communication”, 2, 2, 1996, pp. 251-255; J. Díaz-Cintas, *La traducción audiovisual: el subtitulado*, Salamanca, Ediciones Almar, 2001, p. 122.

image that the source and target culture do not share".⁴⁵ Visual and acoustic allusions may be hard to grasp for the target culture audience and adapters often choose creative ways of conveying the information, as in the following example (*Six Feet Under*, series 1, episode 2) which includes a complex joke:

CONTEXT: Nate is mocking his brother David whom he suspects having had sex the night before.

ORIGINAL FILM DIALOGUE

NATE: (*speaking in a robot voice, similar to HAL in 2001: A Space Odyssey*) Morning, Dave. Aren't those the same clothes you had on yesterday?

DAVID: Everything I own looks alike.

NATE: I sense you're not being completely honest with me, Dave.

DAVID: Have you changed any since you were 14?

NATE: (*laughs*) Hey. **I'm all for you getting laid**, believe me. [...]

NATE (*always keeping the HAL voice*): We are looking quite spiffy in that suit, Dave.

DAVID: That's so clever. **You're talking like the computer in the movie.** Wow, you're funny.

ITALIAN ADAPTATION

NATE (*parla con voce normale*): Buon giorno, David. Che è successo, hai messo gli stessi vestiti di ieri?

DAVID: Sono quelli del lavoro, tutti uguali.

NATE: Strano ma sento che mi stai nascondendo qualcosa, David.

DAVID: Hai smesso di crescere quando avevi quattordici anni, vero?

NATE: **Se c'è una donna faccio il tifo per te.** [...]

NATE (*parla normalmente*): Con quel completino sei un vero schianto, David.

DAVID: **Grazie mille Mr 2001 Odissea nello strazio.** Non sei divertente.

BACK-TRANSLATION

NATE (*speaks with a normal voice*): Good morning, David. What happened, are you wearing the same clothes as yesterday?

DAVID: They are work clothes, they're all the same.

NATE: Funny, but I feel you're hiding something from me, David.

DAVID: You stopped growing up when you were fourteen, right?

NATE: **If there's a woman, I'm all for you.** [...]

NATE (*speaks normally*): With that little suit you're a real knockout, David.

DAVID: **Thank you very much Mr 2001 A Pain Odyssey.** You're not funny.⁴⁶

46.

⁴⁵ Cf. J. Díaz-Cintas and A. Remael, *Audiovisual Translation: Subtitling*, cit., p.

⁴⁶ Emphasis added.

The allusion to Stanley Kubrick's classic film *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) is quite subtle as in the original dialogue the film is only evoked by Nate's intonation, in his imitation of the computer Hal, and by David's vague words ("you're talking like the computer in the movie").⁴⁷ In Italian, though, Nate speaks with a normal voice and it is by manipulating the film title in David's last line that the dialogue manages to achieve, by compensation, its goal of sarcastic humour.⁴⁸ The dynamics of the joke change completely from a joke containing a paralinguistic element to one based on a word play on allusion.

In conclusion, whether they refer to elements deeply embedded in the source culture or to more universally spread items, nonverbal allusions are felt as problematic in dubbing. In this type of translation the substitution of the original voices with those of the dubbing actors, and sometimes also the replacement of ambient and other diegetic sounds and noises with a different soundtrack may result in distancing the target audience from the reference.

5. Conclusions

On the basis of the theoretical positions illustrated above, it can be safely stated that the concept of allusion is closely related to that of culture-bound reference and that the boundaries between the two concepts, especially from the empirical perspective of descriptive Translation

⁴⁷ The main character in Kubrick's film was also called David.

⁴⁸ The other implications of the Italian adaptation of this dialogue, notably the 'heterosexual' translation of Nate's generic line "I'm all for you getting laid", cannot be explored here, but for a discussion on the manipulation of gay themes in *Six Feet Under* see I. Ranzato, *Gayspeak and Gay Subjects in Audiovisual Translation: Strategies in Italian Dubbing*, in *La manipulation de la traduction audiovisuelle / The Manipulation of Audiovisual Translation*, ed. J. Díaz Cintas, "Meta", 57, 2, 2012, pp. 369-384.

Studies, may be hard to pinpoint. However, allusions have been recognised by scholars as cultural references of a particular nature, working as a privileged medium of intertextuality. As it has been shown in the examples from the dubbing adaptations that have been analysed, and in the high percentage they are implemented, allusions in audiovisual translation are used exactly to this end, to create links between texts in a sophisticated game of intertextuality. Failure to recognise their vital role in translation results in an impoverishment and banalisation of television dialogues.

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