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**Subtitling in popular TV series:  
an analysis of *The Office***

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to examine the Italian subtitles of the TV show *The Office US* by analysing the work carried out by the translators of two different streaming platforms (Netflix and Prime video); in addition, a functional alternative will be proposed whenever there is room for improvement. This thesis consists of 3 chapters: in the first one the birth of audiovisual translation as well as its evolution into different types will be considered. In the second chapter, the theory related to audiovisual translation will be analysed, along the most recurrent translation problems and the strategies to face them. Finally, in the third and final chapter, the TV series under consideration will be introduced in more detail together with the comparison and analysis of subtitles.

## INTRODUCTION

Translation has always existed since the dawn of time and has done nothing but evolve ever since, punctuated by the ways in which each era and historical event has allowed it to do so. Since prehistoric times it has been present as a simple interpretation of all the nonverbal elements that accompany communication between two people (facial expressions, tone of voice, body language, etc.), passing through the Rosetta Stone, to St. Jerome's translation of the Bible and ending its journey through the literary translation of the great classics, modern and otherwise, to the present day, with the advent of audiovisual translation. There are innumerable types of translation and innumerable fields in which it is applied, as well as innumerable strategies, which have been refined over the centuries from Jeanpaul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet in their *Comparative stylistics of French and English: a methodology for translation*, to the more recent studies carried out by scholars such as Catford, Toury, Vermeer and many others.

With the advent of the digital age, the entire world of entertainment has undergone significant changes. There is enough evidence to allow us to define the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century as an era dominated by technology and in this case by screens. With the rise of the media, communicating ceased to be just a means of self-expression and became a true form of entertainment. In order to be entertained, or to entertain, one must try to make the most of the available technologies, trying to engage as many senses and as many audiences as possible; in this regard, there are several obstacles faced by people who have difficulties related to the senses themselves, such as people with blindness and deafness, or in their more complex shades of severity. There are no more apt words to describe the phenomenon of audiovisual translation than those of Díaz Cintas and Nikolić (2018:21:21):

*It is fair to say that in today's society we have become increasingly dependent on the affordability offered by digital technology to communicate with our peers and, consequently, exchanges have become more audiovisual than ever before and a multitude of screens have taken over the private and public spaces. The transition from the paper page to the digital page has brought about a number of substantial changes that have had a great impact not only on the way in which information and messages are transmitted but also on the role played by users and consumers in this new and dynamic environment. The transmission of information through productions that combine the audio and the visual planes has gained*

*enormous ground in recent decades and has relegated other more traditional, conventional media such as books, journals or newspapers. After the invention of cinema at the end of the 19th century and the advent of television in the 1950s, the development of the internet in the 1990s can be hailed as one of the most significant milestones in human (audiovisual) communication.*

## CHAPTER 1

### AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION

#### **1. The birth and advancement of audiovisual translation**

The emergence of audiovisual translation can be traced back to the origins of the film industry, present in the translation of silent film captions in the 1920s and later with the advent of talking films, especially of U.S. origin. Indeed, the emergence of sound cinema made the need to translate imported films sharp. The skyrocketing market of film production was thus accompanied by the need to expand multimedia translation strategies. In the following decades the study of audiovisual translation was deepened and enriched, giving rise to multiple types of translation and a glossary related to the field. In silent cinema, key information or descriptions were passed with textual signs between scenes. The translation of these paratexts or paratitles was not particularly complex, as the film without sound, precisely, was easily adaptable through the mere translation of the sign. Over the years, however, the matter has become more and more complex. The modes of audiovisual translation are numerous, as are the applications in different fields. Nevertheless, it remained an unknown practice until at least the end of the 20th century, when it was later employed on a large scale. Initially various forms of translation were tried, but soon subtitling and dubbing became the preferred modes.

The term audiovisual translation (AVT) was created in 2013 by Yves Gambier, a French linguist, and it refers to film or tv show translation. It is fundamental to define this new concept of text as polysemic, which means that it communicates information using different channels. As a matter of fact, all contents are expressed through both one or more verbal codes and non-verbal codes such as images, sounds, music and gesture. This peculiarity of audiovisual texts also affects the translation process by adding a new code (as with subtitles) or by intervening with the addition of a narrator's voice, as in voiceover. In recent years, the field of audiovisual translation (AVT) has developed rapidly and is one of the newest areas of translation research. The more traditional forms of audiovisual translation have been largely studied by scholars, while the most recent ones, such as such as captioning for the deaf, fansubbing or audio description, are still



being analysed. Since its inception, audiovisual translation has played a fundamental role in audiovisual products to different audiences with different languages. All these products need to be available in different languages, but language is closely linked to culture, which changes and evolves rapidly.

## **2. Different types of audiovisual translation**

There are different types of audiovisual translation that are used in different ways depending on the field of use. Among the translation and adaptation solutions to which a film product may be subjected, one can distinguish, following the typology presented by Gambier (2003, in Perego 2005: 22-30), thirteen types of language transfer. According to this classification, eight are the dominant types - interlingual subtitling, dubbing, consecutive interpretation, simultaneous interpretation, voice-over, free commentary, simultaneous translation, and multilingual production - and five are the challenging types, which include script translation, simultaneous or real-time subtitling, surtitling, audiovisual description, and intralingual subtitling for the deaf. Of the thirteen methods above, only those considered most adherent to the areas of this thesis will be analysed.

### **2.1 Surtitling**

As described by Perego (2005: 24-25) surtitling is derived from subtitling and has been used since the late 1980s to translate theatre or opera: both surtitles and subtitling translate spoken language and condense it. There are numerous common features between this two, for example the maximum number of characters possible is generally 40 (with some exceptions) and these are arranged on a maximum of two lines. Another common feature is relative to the presence of time and space constraints, which make this mode of translation highly accurate and concise. Of course, as well as the commonalities there are some not insignificant differences. The main difference lies precisely in the mode of operation, since subtitles are added later to the already finished TV or film product, always occupying the same position on the screen unless there are contrasts due to what

is taking place in the scene. Surtitles are also prepared before the show, but actors on stage can make changes to their script, deciding on the spot to enhance a line or even eliminate it. As a result, this is precisely why surtitles, unlike subtitles, must follow step by step what the actors on stage are saying, giving rise to possible sudden changes. The subtitles we are most accustomed to are the ones on our TVs or the ones we rarely see in movie theatres, at least in Italy, because as we will see later, dubbing is the most widely used technique in Italy. As for the surtitles, however, these are placed on a led panel that is normally placed high on the stage, amidst the front curtains. For theatre audiences, surtitles are laborious to read, because it is difficult to put the focus on the set design, the stage, the actors while listening to the music often played by the orchestra. According to Mele Scorcio (2018: 182), “The audience will have to constantly move between the actor and the surtitles if they want to get the meaning of his words, otherwise they will have to make a decision about what is more relevant to them: the actor or the text”. Both scholars and critics have mixed opinions about surtitles, some considering them a barrier while others contemplate them as an indispensable aid to immersing oneself in the performance. This is precisely what Mele Scorcio (2018: 187) reflects on, highlighting the most crucial issues of surtitling:

*[...] can be a visual distraction and surtitle reading can prevent the audience from getting all the elements of the performance. This issue is also critical in spoken theatre surtitling when surtitles present problems of synchronicity with the spoken text or poor visibility: rather than a helpful device to the understanding of the production, they can be seen as a distraction.*

## **2.2 Dubbing**

Dubbing (or lip-synchronization) is the most well-known and widespread audiovisual translation procedure in Italy, as mentioned earlier. As explained by Perego (2005: 25-26), this consists in replacing by post-synchronization the original soundtrack of a film with a new soundtrack provided with dialogues translated into the language of the users. Consequently, we could state that dubbing has some constraints that concern lip synchronization, film rhythm and correspondence between dialogues and images. Dubbing is a complex procedure that requires several professionals to complete it,

including translators, screenwriters, adaptors, directors, dubbing directors and actors. All starts with the transcriber who elaborates the script by rewriting the dialogues or texts of the original product in the source language. Then, the script is given to the translator who will oversee the linguistic transposition of the original to the target language and, after the translation is finished, the adaptors and dialogue writers revise and adapt it according to the audiovisual technique of translation they have chosen and the tv format. Finally, the dubbing director must choose the actors who will lend their voices to the characters within the product, without changing the final text for any reason.

Dubbing is most definitely one of the most expensive, time-consuming and laborious audiovisual modes that requires uncommon attention to detail. It has been and it is one of the most widely used audiovisual translation procedures in the Italian television and film market. However, it is to be noticed that in recent times, there has been an increasing interest in original language films (mostly English) accompanied with subtitles. Such interest is visible in the presence of ad hoc film shows in movie theatres in between the classic dubbed ones, which opens a glimpse into an hopefully bright future for foreign language learning unless this is just one of many trends that will fade away in a short time.

To conclude this brief overview on dubbing, a table displayed by Díaz Cintas (2001: 49-50) and Gottlieb (1994: 272) containing the distinguishing features between dubbing and subtitling is presented.

<b>Dubbing</b>	<b>Subtitling</b>
Expensive	Relatively cheap
Loss of original dialogue	Respect for the integrity of the original dialogue
Laborious and slow procedure	Relatively quick procedure
It is presented as a local, native product	Promotes foreign language learning
Voice actors' voices can be reused and thus be repetitive	The original voices of the actors are kept intact
Beneficial procedure for an audience of children and/or (semi)illiterate people	Beneficial procedure for deaf, immigrants, and L2 learners
Total respect for original images	Partial defacement of original images
Minor reductions from the source text	Major reductions from the source text
Allows overlapping shifts to be maintained (several actors speak at the same time)	It does not allow the maintenance of shift overlap

The viewer can focus on the image	Dispersion of attention on 3 levels: image, written text in L1, original soundtrack in L2
Grants greater manipulation of original dialogues	Original dialogues are difficult to manipulate
Can convey more sociolinguistic variants present in the original version	Can convey less sociolinguistic variants present in the original version
The viewer can follow the plot while diverting attention from the screen	The viewer who gets distracted and does not read the subtitle loses information critical to understanding the message
Subordinate to lip synchrony	Subordinate to space-time constraints
Use of a single language code	Simultaneous employment of two different language codes, a situation that causes viewer disorientation
Original text = polysemiotic and spoken text	Original text = polysemiotic and spoken text
Preservation of orality = isosemiotic nature of translation	Dialectic variation (change from oral to written text) = diasemiotic nature of translation
Allows for greater cinematic illusion	Any cinematic illusion may come undone

### 2.3 Voice-over

Voice-over, or half-dubbing, is a modality which creates an overlapping of one or more voices to the original soundtrack. In other words, “from a translational perspective, voice-over consists in presenting orally a translation in a TL, which can be heard simultaneously over the SL voice” (Díaz Cintas, Orero 2010: 441). In this way, the original version is never heard in full, as the volume is reduced or kept to a minimum level to facilitate the audience’s reception of the translated version. Voice-over seems for all intents and purposes a middle ground between dubbing and subtitling. In fact, the translated text is brought back orally, but undergoes a process of synthesis and condensation that is a key feature of subtitling. Although it shares several features with dubbing, the voice-over offers reduced content as far as translation is concerned. It does not require lip-synchronization and from this point of view, since it is rarely read by professional actors or voice actors, it contains costs by a large margin. Very interesting in this regard is Franco's view (2001: 290), which describes voice-over delivery in an audiovisual product as “[...]an important strategic way of reassuring viewers that what they are being told in

their own language is what is being said in the original language, although it is known that what they will be listening to is in fact only a representation of the original discourse”.

## 2.4 Subtitling

Subtitling is a procedure of audiovisual translation that involves offering, through a written text usually placed at the bottom of the screen, a condensed translation of the original dialogues of the audiovisual product, whether it is a film, documentary or TV program. The viewer will therefore be placed before two different linguistic realities: that of the source language, perceived through hearing, and that which s/he reads on the screen simultaneously. Subtitles can be said to be effective when they are not intrusive and do not distract attention from what is depicted on the screen. Quoting the words of Díaz Cintas and Remael (2014: 22), subtitling can be defined as follows:

*All subtitled programmes are made up of three main components: the spoken word, the image and the subtitles. The interaction of these three components, along with the viewer's ability to read both the images and the written text at a particular speed, and the actual size of the screen, determine the basic characteristics of the audiovisual medium.*

It is necessary to make a distinction between intralinguistic, interlinguistic and bilingual subtitles. Intralinguistic subtitles do not correspond to a translation of the script but to a passage from the oral to the written variety of the same language, indicating with different colour each speaker, along with extra-linguistic elements crucial to the reception of the message, plot development or atmosphere, such as the sound of laughter, or irony (examples of such type of subtitling are subtitles for the hearing impaired). Intralinguistic subtitles are also used as a medium for foreign language learning, and not only allow us to learn language, intonation and vocabulary through sound, but also to contextualize the language and culture of another nation, through the customs and manners presented to us on the screen through images.

The second category, or interlinguistic subtitles, are those in which there is a transition

from a source oral language to a written target language; bilingual subtitles, on the other hand, are said to be those produced in geographical areas where two official languages are spoken and are arranged on two lines, each in a different language.

Another division regarding subtitles is the one between offline and online subtitles. The former are made following the recording of the program, so the translator has time to work on them before it is aired and they can be complete or reduced, depending on the need of the program in question. On the contrary, online subtitles are made in real time during news or events and are little used because they either involve several roles (those who interpret and those who reports the interpretation in writing) and often lack synchronicity or are translated by software speech recognition software, making the translation far from satisfactory. They are the type of subtitles most commonly used to make content accessible to the hearing-impaired.

From an historical perspective, the origin of subtitles, as mentioned above, can be traced back to the early era of cinema when silent films were first presented. During this period, films often featured live music accompaniment and audiences relied on the musical score to grasp the film's mood and atmosphere. As films evolved, incorporating dialogue, it became evident that some form of textual assistance was necessary to help viewers understand the spoken words. This gave rise to intertitles, concise pieces of text displayed between scenes. Initially, intertitles were rudimentary, employing basic text to aid in comprehending the plot. With time, they grew more sophisticated, integrating graphics, animations, and other visual elements to enhance storytelling. In the 1930s, the introduction of sound films marked a decline in intertitles. Subtitles emerged as a mean to translate dialogue, facilitating international audience comprehension. The 1950s and 1960s witnessed ongoing subtitle refinement, propelled by technological innovations that simplified subtitle creation and editing. The advent of television amplified the demand for subtitles, leading to the development of new subtitling techniques for broader accessibility. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the subtitling industry expanded further, benefitting from new technologies and tools that streamlined subtitle creation and editing. The ascent of cable and satellite television intensified the need for top-notch subtitles, prompting the establishment of advanced subtitling techniques and standards. The history of subtitles is marked by a continuous evolution, with emerging techniques and technologies aimed at enhancing audio-visual content accessibility. From the basic

intertitles of early cinema to today's intricate subtitling methods, the industry has made remarkable progress and continues to adapt to global audience demands.

In the present day, the subtitling industry has undergone significant transformations, spurred by digital technology's ascendancy. The surging popularity of digital platforms (better known as streaming platforms) such as Netflix and Prime video, has led to a heightened demand for subtitles, driving the development of software and tools that simplify subtitle creation, editing and delivery. Another substantial shift in the subtitling landscape is the growing demand for high-quality subtitles. In the fiercely competitive entertainment industry, content creators face pressure to produce top-tier content that appeals to diverse audiences. This has resulted in an increased reliance on professional subtitling services capable of delivering high-calibre subtitles tailored to content and audience needs. Cloud-based technologies have also gained prominence, allowing subtitles to be stored and managed in the cloud, facilitating remote access and editing from anywhere in the world. Consequently, new subtitling tools and services have emerged, streamlining content creators' ability to create, edit, and manage subtitles efficiently.

Streaming services widespread adoption has significantly impacted the subtitling industry, as the demand for high-quality subtitles has surged. This has prompted the development of tools and services to aid content creators in creating and delivering subtitles more effectively, ensuring broader audience accessibility. One of the tools in question is without a doubt machine translation. This technology in translation represents another notable change, with advancements in artificial intelligence and natural language processing enabling automated subtitle translation. While not flawless, machine translation has simplified the process of reaching a wider audience by offering multilingual content. The use of closed captions has also expanded, catering to viewers preferences by allowing them to toggle subtitles on or off. Particularly beneficial for individuals with hearing impairments, closed captions provide an audio transcript, enhancing accessibility in the era of streaming services.

Modern-day subtitles offer several advantages over traditional ones, thanks to technology's progress. These benefits include heightened accessibility for the deaf and hard-of-hearing through closed captions and SDH subtitles, multilingual support to bridge language barriers, improved quality, customizable options for viewers, real-time

engagement with content, cost-effectiveness and the ability to keep audiences fully immersed. Looking ahead, the future of subtitles holds exciting prospects. Anticipated changes include the continued evolution of machine translation for multilingual subtitles, the rise of AI-powered subtitling tools for accurate and high-quality subtitles, and the integration of subtitles into virtual and augmented reality experiences to ensure broader accessibility in these emerging forms of media.

## **2.5 Conclusion on the first chapter**

In this chapter we have described the history, evolution and subsequent ramification of the various procedures of audiovisual translation, indicating their characteristics and highlighting their commonalities and differences. In the next chapter we will focus on the more technical aspects and related theory of the audiovisual procedure that interests us most in the context of this thesis, subtitling.



## CHAPTER 2

### THEORY, TECHNICAL ASPECTS, STRATEGIES AND TRANSLATION ISSUES IN SUBTITLING

#### 1. Translation theory

In the history of translation, and specifically in the more recent history of audiovisual translation, many scholars have questioned the nature of the latter. There are numerous theories, sometimes similar sometimes conflicting, regarding audiovisual translation. Mason (1997: 182), for example, does not consider subtitles to be a “summary” of the original, but rather a “selective reduction” aimed at adapting the language to the circumstances and allowing it to represent what the speaker intended to communicate. Of course, such a process is opposed to translation in the strict sense (Gambier. 1994): in fact, only rarely is it possible to translate everything said in the original.

In their dictionary, Shuttleworth and Cowie (1997: 161) maintain a neutral stance and define subtitling as a type of language transfer used to make different types of audiovisual mass communication products usable. However, as can be clearly noticed, there is no reference to the term “translation”. Instead of using a more general term such as “translation”, the two aforementioned scholars opted for the term “subtitling”, which we recall is a highly specialised form of translation. It is inferred that subtitling, defined by Gottlieb as “a unique form of translation” (1992: 166), does not stand outside of translation, but as such is marked by distinctive characteristics and communicative purposes and the use of specific translation strategies, of which textual simplification and reduction are the most distinctive in frequency and extent. In fact, filmic translation through subtitles is one of the new forms of translation defined by the variation from the original texts in purpose and content (Sager, 1997: 33-5). In this regard, Pavesi (2002: 128) provides meaningful insights into the intentions characterizing subtitling:

*[...] the intentions behind the translated text change. They do not arise, like the original text, with the purpose of accompanying in a dual channel the images shown on the screen, but with the purpose of assisting the viewer from the target community in understanding the film*

*in its entirety. The translation, not replacing the original text but adding to it, thus loses its intentions, its original motivation.*

In the wake of Pavesi, we can therefore say in interlingual subtitling both the type of text and content change: the former from spoken to written language, the latter through a process that involve strategies ranging from elimination, to reduction, to explicitation and addition.

Subtitling, as mentioned earlier, involves a complex and dynamic process of language transfer, since the transition from SL to TL must be in consonance with the simultaneousness of the images and the sounds pertaining to them. The subtitle translator must be mindful of all the paralinguistic realities present in the audiovisual product, matching the superimposed text of the subtitle to the spoken text, calibrating the inevitable reductions so as not to hinder the flow of understanding by viewers and, when necessary, adopting strategies for bridging gaps in knowledge.

Before explaining the strategies, technical aspects, and the issues that a subtitle translator is very likely to face, it is necessary to provide an overview of the fundamentals of translation to which the subtitle translator must pay extreme meticulousness from a theoretical point of view but especially from a practical perspective.

## **1.1 Equivalence**

The concept of equivalence is used in translation, in the broadest sense, to describe the nature and type of relationships between the original text and the translated text. Since the concept is very complex, different types of equivalence have been identified: for example, there can be equivalence between individual graphic words or between lexical units between ST and TT. For Vinay and Darbelnet (1984: 280), resorting to equivalent expressions means making use in the metatext of expressions that agree with and fit the situation, that are appropriate and as relevant to the context and circumstances in which they are placed as the original ones were. Before delving into the purpose of equivalent translation, it is necessary to introduce the difference between “direct translation” and “oblique translation”, as beautifully exposed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1984: 31):

*Generally speaking, translators can choose from two methods of translating, namely direct, or literal translation and oblique translation. In some translation tasks it may be possible to transpose the source language message element by element into the target language, because it is based on either parallel categories, in which case we can speak of structural parallelism, or on parallel concepts, which are the result of metalinguistic parallelisms. [...] It may, however, also happen that, because of structural or metalinguistic differences, certain stylistic effects cannot be transposed into the TL without upsetting the syntactic order, or even the lexis. In this case it is understood that more complex methods have to be used which at first may look unusual but which nevertheless can permit translators a strict control over the reliability of their work: these procedures are called oblique translation methods.*

The goal of equivalent translation, or equivalence understood as an “oblique translation” procedure, is to replicate the same situation as the original by using, if necessary, different words to translate fixed idiomatic expressions, proverbs, etc. In contrast to formal equivalence, equivalence defined as “functional”, or “dynamic” is semantic in nature, i.e., it does not consider individual units of translation but focuses mainly on the overall situation on which the translation choices depend, and for this reason it lends itself to a certain elasticity. In other words, dynamic equivalence is based on the equivalent effect of the user’s TT.

Keeping well in mind the concept expressed by equivalent translation and knowing that in film translation it is rare to be able to maintain formal equivalence between ST and TT, the subtitle translator will be toned to safeguard the content of the dialogues, within the technical and physical limitations characterizing subtitling, as to allow the viewer to enjoy the same original effect despite the conciseness required by the subtitling (Kovačič, 1994).

## **1.2 Fidelity**

The term is generally used to determine whether a translation can be considered a reasonable and fair representation of the original (Shuttleworth, Cowie, 1997: 57). This assumes that the translator fully understands the meaning and message of the proto text. In this regard, the debate over the “translator-traitor” issue is still open: it is known that when translating a work from one language into another, there is always the danger of

leaving in the original text a considerable part of the meaning that the author actually meant to convey through his/her work. In any case, it is not unimportant that the translator must possess an in-depth knowledge of the foreign language and source text culture to be able to assess to what extent the text deviates from the linguistic norm usually adopted in a given situation to reproduce the original effect also in translation. Often, indeed, translation does not merely enrich the language and culture of a country with its own contribution, renew the original text, express and realise the relationships of languages to each other, but also becomes a way of accessing a language and culture that would otherwise remain unknown (Perego, 2005: 46).

The translator's first task is to understand the text, analyse it and highlight its general aspects before choosing an appropriate translation method. He must then bear in mind the entire work and the author's intention to ensure that the translation has the same persuasive and emotional charge as the original and influences the reader in the same way. Translation must thus be carried out with the awareness that translating can at best be an incomplete explanation of the content (Eco, 2003: 356), a betrayal of the original. But there is a limit to betrayal: since it is not possible to respect all aspects of a text composed in another language (especially if a film is to be subtitled), it is necessary to decide which ones to distort less.

### **1.3 Translatability**

The notions of translatability and untranslatability are fundamental in the discussion of the degree to which it is possible to translate from one language to another, whether single words or syntagms, or entire portions of text. When referring to untranslatability, this phenomenon may occur in cases of non-existence of shared concepts between cultures, these can be considered untranslatable if a direct correspondence is sought at the lexical level. However, the obstacles of untranslatability can be overcome if the translator resort to conveying the same message from the source text to the target text, by means of specific translation and textual strategies (explicitation, paraphrasing, reformulation, etc.), which allow for the meaning to be adequately conveyed (Shuttleworth, Cowie, 1997: 179-81). Therefore, as Perego (2005: 47) states when referring to untranslatability,

“it does not seem to make sense to speak of untranslatability when it is possible to refer to different degrees of adherence to the proto-text achievable using more or less equivalent or more or less adequate solutions”.

## **2. Translation strategies: Gottlieb’s model vs Lomheim’ model**

In the course of the evolution of audiovisual translation, various models relating to it have been theorised, and below we will briefly describe the contribution of two important scholars in the field, Henrik Gottlieb and Sylfest Lomheim.

Danish scholar and subtitler Gottlieb (1992) identifies ten different strategies usually employed by professional subtitlers. These are:

- Expansion: this strategy is used to provide viewers with additional information regarding specific elements of the source language culture that is important for full understanding of the filmic message. The expansion may be inserted within the subtitle itself if time and space permit, or it may be added in the form of a supertitle.

- Paraphrase: used mainly for the rendering in the target language of idiomatic expressions and idioms that are difficult to translate literally. In this case, there is a reformulation of the sentence to keep the message of the original unchanged.

- Transfer: with this strategy, the so-called literal translation is carried out by translating the original text word for word. Although the transfer is a direct and faithful rendering of the original, this strategy is not always the best solution. Sometimes, by resorting to strategies involving deviation from the original, it is possible to achieve more suitable solutions, avoiding poorly idiomatic results or outright misinterpretations of the original message (Perego, 2005: 105-106).

- Imitation: in this case, some elements of the original text are not translated, but are retained in the original language. This technique is usually used with the proper names of persons or things, greetings, song lyrics in languages other than the original or quotations taken from other languages.

- Transcription: it is used to rework the joke in the subtitles so that the viewer enjoys the same effect as in the original dialogue. This usually occurs in the presence of non-standard expressions in the source language, in the presence, for example, of dialect forms

or puns. The subtitler's task involves reformulating the joke to reproduce the characteristics that deviate from the standard. Of course, this strategy is not always feasible and sometimes results in not entirely adequate solutions.

- Dislocation: this strategy is often used to render with a coherent and comprehensible subtitle, traits typical of orality such as hesitations, sentences left unfinished, repetitions, etc. A different expression is used in the subtitle in comparison with the original dialogue to reproduce particular rhythmic effects. This technique is often adopted in the subtitling of songs or poems, where it is important to reproduce a precise melodic pattern (Perego, 2005: 108).

- Condensation: in this case the reformulation of the message is simply summarised while retaining the same content. There is therefore no loss of meaning, but only a different phrasing.

- Decimation: in contrast to condensation, when this type of strategy is used, there is an actual elimination of certain elements of the original message. In these cases, the elements eliminated are usually of little importance or in any case deducible from the context. The loss of information is therefore minimal if not entirely absent. Decimation is necessary in the case of fast-paced dialogues that prevent the full translation of the original text.

- Deletion: in this case, unlike decimation, the deleted elements are no longer individual words within a sentence, but entire utterances. Although the deleted strings are not of fundamental importance for the understanding of the message, since with the subtitling the original soundtrack always remains audible to the viewer, the presence of lines spoken but not present in the subtitles will be immediately noticed and, if reiterated, may be disruptive to the enjoyment of the film.

- Resignation: this technique is defined by Sandrelli (1996: 164) "the only case in which the translation process does not even partially return the original text". By employing resignation, elements deemed "untranslatable" are omitted or replaced by culturally related references, but which actually deviate from the source text. This occurs in the presence of culturally specific elements, which hardly lend themselves to conventional translation and tend to be neutralised to some extent (Perego, 2005: 112).

The Norwegian scholar Sylfest Lomheim also proposes his own model of strategies for subtitling (1995, 1999). Presented in parallel with Gottlieb's, it has several points in

common with this latter mode, but also some differences. According to Lomheim, subtitling strategies can be grouped as follows: “deletion”, “condensation”, “addition”, “hyponymy” or “generalisation”, “hyponymy” or “specification” and “neutralisation”. With regard to “deletion” and “condensation”, Lomheim’s view does not deviate from Gottlieb’s. Even in the case of “addition”, its purpose seems to be the same as Gottlieb’s “expansion”, that is to insert further information within the subtitles (or in the form of surtitles) to facilitate the viewer's understanding. We are dealing with “hyponymy” when certain terms in the original version are translated by employing a lexical unit of more general and extended meaning than one or more other lexical units that are included in it. Conversely, we speak of “hyponymy” when more general terms are replaced by more specific and explicative expressions. The last strategy proposed by Lomheim is that of “neutralisation”. It is implemented when lexical characteristics typical of the source language are eliminated in the subtitle.

### **3. Technical aspects and translation issues**

As illustrated above, interlinguistic subtitles are not just the literal translation of the original dialogue of a film. The process leading up to them is divided in three different complementary and simultaneous operations that are equally important for a successful product; these operations are textual reduction, diamesic transfer and translation. The main function of these three steps, which do not necessarily occur in that order and are not subordinate to each other, is to maintain the dynamism and communicative effectiveness of the original dialogues (Perego, 2005: 73). This delicate operation is absolutely necessary for the production of adequate subtitles. Translating everything that is said in the original dialogues in full would result in subtitles that are too long and complicated, impossible for the viewer to read comfortably. Unless one is dealing with a film with very short and very sporadic dialogues, some kind of textual reduction is obligatory. The reasons that lead the subtitler to make the reduction are many. The main ones are the space-time constraints for the introduction of subtitles which are in turn influenced by the viewers’ reading speed, but also by the type of editing of the film and camera movements. Several studies on eye-tracking in the enjoyment of a subtitled

product (Zahedi, Khoshsaligheh, 2021: 331-352) have indeed shown that keeping the same subtitle despite changes in framing will give rise to greater re-reading processes by the spectator who will be looking for references in the subtitle, but not in the image. The need to maintain the correct synchrony between original dialogue, images and subtitles will provide the subtitler with very limited time and room for manoeuvre; the subtitler must also remember that the processing times of a written text are very limited. S/he will also have to remember that the processing times for a written text are greater than those required for an oral text, and s/he will therefore need to be careful not to overload the audience time with subtitles that are too long, too fast or excessively loaded of information.

Finding the right balance between all these factors is no simple matter. To attempt this feat, subtitlers make use of various types of textual reduction: total reduction (or elimination) and partial reduction (or condensation). In the case of total reduction, what happens is the actual elimination of entire parts of the dialogue with possible loss of meaning. Subtitlers, in fact, tend to apply this reduction only in the case of information already mentioned previously or deducible from the context. Other elements often eliminated are the typical traits of orality: hesitations, redundant elements, repetitions and incomplete sentences. In the case of partial reduction, instead, condensation and reformulation of the source text are preferred: the text is rephrased while maintaining the same information content as in the original. Both these types of reduction can give rise to a third type, namely, explicative reduction. The elimination or condensation of the original message, in certain cases, allows the subtitler to insert within the subtitle elements in addition to the original text. These elements are inserted to enrich and redefine the message, creating an informational gain that would otherwise be unattainable.



### CHAPTER 3

#### ***THE OFFICE US: ANALYSIS OF THE ITALIAN SUBTITLED VERSION***

##### ***1. The Office US: from its origin to its remake***

Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant are the authors of *The Office*. This first series is now known as the “British version” because of its American remake, *The Office US*, also created by Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant. *The Office* was aired between 2001 and 2002 on the BBC Two channel and consists of two seasons and fourteen episodes in total. The series has won numerous awards, including the Golden Globe for “Best Comedy Series”. *The Office* introduces an important innovation within TV series by deciding to film it in a mockumentary style, characterised by fake interviews and single-camera footage simulating a documentary investigation. Through statistics provided by users on the most well-known and widely used websites that collect reviews, information and news about the world of film and TV series – such as Rotten Tomatoes and Metacritic – it is possible to note that the real success of the series is due to *The Office US* which has now reached cult status, becoming part of 2000’s pop culture. Unlike the British original, *The Office US* is certainly a longer-running series. It consists of nine seasons, which aired from 2005 until 2013, with a total of 204 episodes. Being *The Office US* a remake, the British and the American series share a very simple incipit: a silent, faceless crew decides to film a documentary witnessing the working days of a small branch of a company that sells paper products. This scheme departs conspicuously from older TV series, introducing a real novelty in the TV series industry. Another substantial difference with the comedy series of the 1980s and 1990s is also due to the absence of audience and recorded laughter, which are the cornerstones of equally famous series such *Friends*, a series filmed at the turn of the 1990s and 2000s. Nevertheless, TV series like *Friends* and *The Office US* do not present differences only but share commonalities too, such as human relationships and group dynamics that show the challenges and joys of friendship and love.

Within *The Office US*, the characters are not special, they do not do any exciting work, but lead their working lives as simple office workers. The evolution of the characters in

the series is closely monitored, also thanks to short 1-to-1 interviews, which occur frequently within each episode. What makes the series truly comical, apart from the characterisation of the characters, are the perfectly normal problems that can occur in any company but are dealt with, in most cases, in a completely absurd manner.

The success of this series, as of all series, is also due to its cast. Just to name a few in the leading roles we have John Krasinski (Jim Halpert in the series), Jenna Fischer (Pam Beesly in the series) and Steve Carell (Michael Scott in the series). Steve Carell is the mainstay of the series since much of the series' comedy stems from his character: a diligent worker unable to control an entire team because of poor foresight and management skills. *The Office US*, like *The Office*, was highly praised by critics, being awarded by several Emmys and Golden Globes.

Regarding the airing of *The Office US* in Italy, this took place on the GXT satellite channel in 2007. Later, it was also broadcast on other Italian networks, such as Comedy Central and Joi; in addition, the series was made available for streaming on various platforms, such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, which helped increase its popularity in Italy. The ratings figures speak for themselves: on google 94% of people liked the series and on Rotten Tomatoes the average audience score is 89%. The series has achieved similar results on similar websites to those listed above, such as on IMDb where the series has a corresponding rating of 9/10 and Metacritic with an 8.3/10. The series has garnered many fans in our country, acquiring today the cult status in Italy, with numerous fan events organized, online groups dedicated to the series and memes spread on social media.

## **2. Netflix and Prime video: comparison and analysis of subtitles**

In this last part of the thesis we will provide the analysis of the Italian subtitles of the TV series *The Office US*. We will look at the different subtitles created by the translators of two of the most important streaming platforms currently on the market – Netflix and Prime video – analysing their content in all its various facets through the subtitling techniques theorised by Lomheim. To facilitate reading, for each of the six subtitling translation techniques, examples will be grouped together with an explanation and a

possible alternative translation proposal. Before the sections related to subtitling translation techniques, a section correlated to mistakes and oversights will be presented.

## 2.1 Mistakes and oversights

Table 1

Season+ episode+ min.	Episode name	Example no.	Original line (EN)	Netflix subtitle (IT)	Prime video subtitle (IT)
1.1/0:43	Pilot	1	- So, you've come to the master of guidance?	- Quindi sei venuto dal maestro /N <sup>1</sup> per essere indirizzato?	- Quindi sei arrivato al master per essere indirizzato?
1.1/2:19	Pilot	2	- Look at that! Look at that face.	- Guarda qua! Guarda quella faccia.	- Guardalo! Guarda quella faccia.
1.4/11:38	The Alliance	3	- That wasn't a waste of time.	- Non ho perso tempo.	- Non ho perso tempo.
1.5/13:56	Basketball	4	- Dwight, I was open.	- Dwight, ero qui.	- Dwight, ero qui.

In example no. 1 Michael and Jim are talking about closing a deal regarding paper supply with a library. Here Michael, who says the line, is trying to impress Jim by showing him he is an accomplished manager of the company. With reference to the subtitles, it is evident how the Netflix subtitle is more coherent than the Prime video one. Being Italian the target language of the subtitles, the use of non-essential anglicisms is to be avoided, especially when the term in the target language does not leave room for any ambiguity, as in this case. Furthermore, if in the original “master” refers to someone to ask for advice, in Italian it is quite distinct. The use of master goes back to the Latin “magister”, coming closer to the meaning of “one who directs a hunting party, supervising its progress and giving all the necessary instructions or more generically, the organizer of any social pastime<sup>2</sup>”.

<sup>1</sup> This symbol will be used to display when a subtitle is spread over 2 lines

<sup>2</sup> Source: Dizionario Treccani

With respect to example no. 2, the scene takes places between Michael and Pam. After he makes a joke about a fax from Corporate, he turns to the cameraman laughing and pointing his finger at Pam. Being Pam a clearly female character, the Prime video subtitle contains a grammatical error. The male clitic pronoun “lo” is used instead of the correct and opposite clitic female pronoun “la” (an alternative translation will be illustrated in Table 2).

As far as example no. 3 is concerned, a birthday party for Meredith is being planned in the office and in the scene in question Dwight is talking to Michael, who must find a good joke to write on the birthday card. The line takes place when Michael dismisses Dwight. The error in the subtitle here is related to the literal translation that does not convey the sarcastic message that the original line wanted to convey (an alternative translation will be illustrated in Table 2).

Finally, in example no. 4, the scene takes place in the warehouse, where a basketball game among colleagues of the paper company is being played. Michael and Dwight play on the same team and Dwight prefers to shoot the ball rather than pass it to Michael. We are not in the presence of a real mistake, but the subtitle is certainly improvable by using a jargon more inherent to basketball (an alternative translation will be illustrated in Table 2).

Table 2

Original line (EN)	Netflix subtitle (IT)	Prime video subtitle (IT)	Suggested translation
- Look at that! Look at that face.	- Guarda qua! Guarda quella faccia.	- Guardalo! Guarda quella faccia.	- Ma guardala! Guarda che faccia.  - Guarda che faccia che ha fatto!  - Che faccia!
- That was a waste of time.	- Non ho perso tempo.	- Non ho perso tempo.	- Una totale perdita di tempo.  - Ho solo perso tempo.
- Dwight I was open.	- Dwight, ero qui.	- Dwight, ero qui.	- Dwight, ero libero.

## 2.2 Reduction

The act of subtitling cannot be done in a complete and faithful translation (Cintaz, Remael, 2014: 144). Even standing firm on the “complete transcription” is considered to be impossible (Hosseinnia, 2014: 134) and is obviously not doable. With no intention of producing low quality translation, text reduction is needed to overcome the spatial and temporal limitation. Text reduction does not deal with the loss of all the features of speech, but it rather tends to eliminate grammar and lexical items such as presented in “word order, incomplete sentences, and rhetorical questions” (Chiaro, 2007: 63). The elimination is simply done based on context-dependence. Further to it, Cintaz and Remael (2014: 144) explain the reason for text reduction as follows (Suratno, Wijaya, 2018: 1-2):

1. Viewers need enough time to register, process, and understand what is written in the subtitle. It happens since reading written text takes more time than listening to speeches.
2. While reading the moving subtitle, viewers also need to both listen to the sound (Matielo, 2011: 28-29) and watch the visualization of what actors are doing. Again, sufficient time is needed before the speeches change.
3. Viewers have the limitation of maximum two-line subtitles.

In table 3 different examples of reduction will be presented.

Table 3

Season+ episode+ min.	Episode name	Example no.	Original line (EN)	Netflix subtitle (IT)	Prime video subtitle (IT)
1.5/10:42	Basketball	1	- You know, I think I'm gonna impress a few people in here.	- Sapete, stupirò tutti.	- Sapete, stupirò tutti.
2.1/7:01	The Dundies	2	- Well, I think if you use the same jokes, it just comes across as lazy.	- Se fai sempre le stesse battute, poi stufano.	- Se fai sempre le stesse battute, poi stufano.

2.1/8:31	The Dundies	3	- Yeah, not bad, right? So let's make this the best Dundies ever. - Best Dundies ever.	- Bello, no?  - Quindi rendiamola indimenticabile.  - Indimenticabile.	- Bello, no?  - Quindi rendiamola indimenticabile.  - Indimenticabile.
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In example no. 1, the translation made here, in just one line of subtitle, have summarised quite a long line of the original dialogue. In this scene a basketball game is starting and Jim says the line while being interviewed by the documentary troupe. The choice made by the translators in the respective subtitles of Netflix and Prime video, effectively succeeds in transposing the message expressed by that “few”, which in this context is meant to indicate all the colleagues who will see him play.

Concerning example no. 2, the scene occurs between Jim and Michael talking about which jokes to use in a stand-up comedian show they will attend that night, so the subtitle is a crucial point for the continuation of the episode. Both in Netflix and Prime video subtitle, the message of the original line is transferred without altering the original meaning and the subtitle is leaner thanks to the Italian verb “stufare”, which summarises the meaning and reduces the characters per second (CPS).

In example no. 3 the scene takes place outside Michael’s office. The latter is giving a speech to boost the office morale for an evening of stand-up comedy among colleagues named “Dundies”. Here, instead of repeating the name attached to the show that will take place that evening, we can see how in both streaming platforms the translators have employed a reduction in the second and third subtitle. They employed a clitic female pronoun “la” attached to the Italian verb “rendere” and to the adjective “indimenticabile”; in doing so, the redundancy of repetition was avoided.

### 2.3 Condensation

Condensation may be presented and studied as a form of reduction or better one of three principal strategies of reduction, i.e., rendering, elimination and condensation

(Antonini, 2005: 213-214). As Antonini describes it, condensation deals with the simplification and fragmentation (changing the syntactic features). The strategy will produce a more reader-friendly text for viewers by doing reformulation of syntactical feature of ST. The translation, therefore, will not be done in a word-by-word method as it is essentially meant to convey maximum information yet using minimum linguistic means.

In table 4, numerous examples of condensation will be displayed.

Table 4

Season+ episode+ min.	Episode name	Example no.	Original line (EN)	Netflix subtitle (IT)	Prime video subtitle (IT)
1.2/20:06	Diversity Day	1	<p>- If I'd brought in some burritos or some coloured greens. Or some pad Thai. I love pad Thai.</p> <p>- It's collard greens.</p> <p>-What?</p> <p>- It's collard greens.</p> <p>- That doesn't really make sense. Because you don't call them collared people, that's offensive.</p>	<p>- Se avessi portato dei burrito /N o dei fagioli messicani di colore,</p> <p>- o gli involtini thailandesi.</p> <p>- Adoro quegli involtini.</p> <p>- Si chiamano fagioli neri.</p> <p>- Cosa?</p> <p>- Si chiamano fagioli neri.</p> <p>- Non ha alcun senso.</p> <p>- Non si dice "nero". È offensivo.</p>	<p>- Se avessi portato dei burrito /N o dei fagioli messicani di colore,</p> <p>- o gli involtini thailandesi.</p> <p>- Adoro quegli involtini.</p> <p>- Si chiamano fagioli neri.</p> <p>- Cosa?</p> <p>- Si chiamano fagioli neri.</p> <p>- Non ha alcun senso.</p> <p>- Non si dice "nero". È offensivo.</p>
1.2/21:12	Diversity Day	2	- Not a bad day.	- È stata una bella giornata.	- È stata una bella giornata.

1.4/0:57	The Alliance	3	- Bottom line. Do I need to be worried?	- Insomma, posso stare tranquillo, no?	- Insomma, posso stare tranquillo, no?
1.4/5:45	The Alliance	4	- There's one other thing and this is important.	- C'è un'altra cosa da tenere a mente.	- C'è un'altra cosa da tenere a mente. /N È importante.
1.4/20:11	The Alliance	5	- OK, OK. I have something that totally tops the box.	- Ho la ciliegina sulla torta.	- Ho la ciliegina sulla torta.
1.5/3:25	Basketball	6	- This is our warehouse. Or, as I like to call it, the wharehouse.	- Ecco il nostro magazzino, /N o come lo chiamo io, "macazzino".	- Ecco il nostro magazzino, /N o come lo chiamo io, "macazzino".
1.5/9:04	Basketball	7	- One o'clock, you better bring your "A" game.	- Farai meglio a dare il massimo.	- Farai meglio a dare il massimo.
1.5/12:49	Basketball	8	- You kind of have your foot in both camps [...]	- In pratica sei imparziale, no?	- In pratica, sei imparziale, no?
1.6/19:36	Hot Girl	9	- I think in order to be a ladies' man, it's imperative that people don't know you're a ladies' man, so I kind of play that close to the chest.	- Per essere un casanova, - è essenziale che le persone /N non sappiano che lo sei. - Quindi, lo tengo segreto.	- Per essere un casanova, - è essenziale che le persone /N non sappiano che lo sei. - Quindi, lo tengo segreto.
2.1/9:40	The Dundies	10	- Alright, alright, joke landed.	- Ok, ora basta con gli scherzi.	- Ok, ora basta con gli scherzi.

As regards example no.1, of all the examples of condensation, this one seems to be the most difficult to properly translate. Michael is talking to his employees and seems like nobody is listening to him. He quotes different type of food and then Stanley, an African American black man, corrects him. Here the pun revolves around the difference between "coloured" and "collard": the first one is considered in English an old-fashioned and offensive term to address black people. Stanley tries to correct Michael about the name of the beans he is referring to, but the whole thing ends with a complete misunderstanding.



Here the translators from both streaming platforms have conveyed the same pun in subtitles, playing around the same difference in the Italian language about “di colore” (being the Italian offensive term to address black people) and “neri” (being the right term to address black people).

In example no. 2, a clear example of condensation can be observed. In the scene Jim talks to the camera troupe describing the day at work and in the end of his monologue he says the line in question. Instead of translating literally, Netflix’s translator and Prime video’s translator conveyed the same message through condensation. “Non è stata una brutta giornata” would have been the literal translation of the original dialogue. As can be observed this translation is not incorrect, but the translators still decided to simplify the message without altering it, perhaps aware of the greater cognitive effort that literal translation would have entailed.

Example no. 3 is along the same lines as example no. 2. In the scene Michael and Dwight are having a conversation about downsizing. Being worried, Dwight asks Michael if he will or will not be fired. In this example the condensation is operated twice: the first one by replacing the original “Bottom line” with a simpler and shorter Italian adverb “Insomma” and the second one by conveying the same message from a different perspective (an alternative translation will be illustrated in Table 5).

In example no. 4, Dwight and Jim are talking about getting information about the downsizing that will most likely happen in the office. Here Netflix’s translator decided to omit part of the original line “and this is important” but using “da tenere a mente”, an Italian expression that implicitly means to remember something important. Prime video’s translator uses the same solution but still adds “È importante” (it is important). Given that the line is said almost whispering and the scene changes very fast, would be optimal to reduce as much as possible the CPS.

Another clear example of condensation, as in example no. 4, can be noted in example no. 5, where Jim runs to Pam to tell her the news about Dwight. Netflix and Prime video translators here adopted the same solution, even if, giving the excitement of Jim in giving the news to Pam, perhaps an exclamation mark should have been added or an adverb inserted to reinforce the condensation already achieved by both translators (an alternative translation will be illustrated in Table 5).

In example no. 6, the scene is about Michael showing the documentary crew the office's warehouse. The pun is about the word warehouse itself because Michael playing on the phonetics of the term introduces a swear word. Here Netflix and Prime video translators have perfectly conveyed the meaning of the pun by adapting it in the target language. By replacing the "g" with a "c" in the word "magazzino" in the target text, this appears to resemble an Italian swear word.

With respect to example no. 7, the scene takes place between Michael and Darryl, who will play in the 2 opposing teams in the upcoming basketball match. Michael tries to tease Darryl, saying that it will have to give his best to win the game. Since there is no exact equivalent of the English "A game" in Italian, the translators opted to transpose the message paraphrasing the original meaning into Italian via condensation.

Unlike the example no.7, in example no. 8 both streaming platform translators opted to employ a condensation/neutralisation. The scene takes place in the basketball court between Pam and Michael, who asks here to do the jump ball to start the basketball match. In the original line the expression "to have a foot in both camps" is used. This expression means to be connected to two groups with opposing interests and suits very well in the ongoing scene. Unfortunately, there is no equivalent in Italian, therefore the translators decided to paraphrase it to convey the same message as the original. Besides, both translators avoided the mistake of translating the English idiom into the non-equivalent Italian idiom "avere il piede in due staffe". It would have been incorrect to translate it this way because the Italian idiom is used to refer to a person who is cunning, hypocritical or panders to his or her convenience, exactly the opposite meaning of the original line.

In example no. 9 offers us a great example of how targeting the audience culture can not only be useful to avoid difficulties, but also lead to a perfect use of the condensation technique. In the scene tries to show off with the documentary crew about being a "ladies' man". Netflix and Prime video translators, use the term "Casanova", renowned 18<sup>th</sup> century man famous for his life as a fiery lover and libertine. Using Casanova's name certainly refers to his full love life, a quick and clever association for the Italian public given the scene in question that result in a less cognitive effort; furthermore, they avoid the redundant repetition of "ladies' man".

Finally, in example no. 10 the scene occurs in a restaurant where Michael and his employees are hosting their stand-up comedy show. Rather than translating literally,

causing the message to be completely lost, the translators of Netflix and Prime video employed the same solution. At first glance it may seem an easy line to translate, but in reality the strong relevance in a cultural context different from the target one (an alternative translation will be illustrated in Table 5).

Table 5

Original line (EN)	Netflix subtitle (IT)	Prime video subtitle (IT)	Suggested translation
- Bottom line. Do I need to be worried?	- Insomma, posso stare tranquillo, no?	- Insomma, posso stare tranquillo, no?	- Insomma, devo preoccuparmi?
- OK, OK. I have something that totally tops the box.	- Ho la ciliegina sulla torta.	- Ho la ciliegina sulla torta.	- Ho davvero la ciliegina sulla torta!
- Alright, alright, joke landed.	- Ok, ora basta con gli scherzi.	- Ok, ora basta con gli scherzi.	- Ok, bando alle ciance.

## 2.4 Addition

Addition (or expansion) is the inverse technique to reduction. Thanks to this technique, a message introduced by the original line is expanded, or rather the information within it, so that the cognitive effort in the target audience decreases and makes the final product smoother and clearer.

Table 6 shows one example of the aforementioned technique.

Table 6

Season + episode + min.	Episode name	Example no.	Original line (EN)	Netflix subtitle (IT)	Prime video subtitle (IT)
1.4/5:33	The Alliance	1	- And I spend hours thinking of ways to get back at him, but only in ways that could get me arrested. And then here he comes and he says "No, Jim, here's a way."	- E passo le ore pensando /N a come fargliela pagare,  - ma mi vengono in mente solo cose illegali,  - finché non viene da me e dice: /N "Jim, c'è un altro modo per vendicarti".	- E passo le ore pensando /N a come fargliela pagare,  - ma mi vengono in mente solo cose illegali,  - finché non viene da me e dice: /N "Jim, c'è un altro modo per vendicarti".

In example no. 1, the scene is about Dwight and Jim talking about an alliance due to downsizing rumours that are circulating in the office among colleagues. The exchange of lines is very quick and the scene varies between a dialogue, between the aforementioned, and a very short monologue of Jim in front of the camera. In the third subtitle that constitutes this example, where Jim quotes the words Dwight told him, both the Netflix and Prime video translator decided not to translate literally, but to use an addition to introduce a piece of information, making the dialogue easier to understand.

## 2.5 Hypernymy/Hyponymy

“Hypernymy and hyponymy are semantic connections between a word denoting a specific member of a category that is described by another term, the latter being a more general or overarching concept<sup>3</sup>”. To put it differently, it signifies the connection between a subcategory (hyponym) and a broader category (also referred to as an umbrella term,

<sup>3</sup> Source: Dizionario Treccani

blanket term, or hypernym). The semantic scope of the hyponym falls within that of the hypernym. Other techniques such as reduction, expansion or even neutralisation could be included within their range.

One example will be displayed in Table 7.

Table 7

Season+ episode+ min.	Episode name	Example no.	Original line (EN)	Netflix subtitle (IT)	Prime video subtitle (IT)
1.4/5:57	The Alliance	1	- I think it has something to do with Survivor, but I'm not sure.	- Penso sia una cosa da reality show, /N ma non ne sono sicuro.	- Penso sia una cosa da reality show, /N ma non ne sono sicuro.

The use of hypernymy in example no. 1 occurs in a scene where Jim talks to Pam about an alliance between him and Dwight. The original line mentions a TV show called *Survivor*. This show aired in the late 1990s/early 2000s and was very successful, especially in France and in the United States. Given that the TV series *The Office US* aired in 2005, it makes more than sense that the American audience of the show knows exactly what it is about, which is not so true when it comes to the Italian target audience. For this very reason, both translators decided that was a better choice to use an umbrella term, relying on “reality show”.

## 2.6 Neutralisation

The last technique we will discuss in this thesis is that of neutralisation. This has a very specific role, namely that of flattening and smoothing out the subtitling work. A well-known example is the omission of swear words, making the product more politically/family friendly. Another example could be identified for instance in subtitled products where the abstention to use dialect versions is very present.

Some examples are given below in Table 8.

Table 8

Season+ episode+ min.	Episode name	Example no.	Original line (EN)	Netflix subtitle (IT)	Prime video subtitle (IT)
1.4/4:13	The Alliance	1	- These are my party-planning beeyatches.	- Queste sono le mie schiave /N organizza-eventi.	- Queste sono le mie schiave /N organizza-eventi.
2.1/0:50	The Dundies	2	- Like Meredith or Kevin, I mean, who's gonna give Kevin an award? Dunkin' Donuts?	- [...] Chi darebbe un premio a Kevin? /N Forse McDonald's.	- [...] Chi darebbe un premio a Kevin? /N Forse McDonald's.
2.1/8:04	The Dundies	3	- [...] but WHAT THE HELL EVERYBODY!?	- Ma noi /N non ci facciamo scoraggiare, ragazzi!	- Ma noi /N non ci facciamo scoraggiare, ragazzi!

In example no. 1 the scene takes place in the office meeting room. Pam, Angela and Phyllis are organizing a birthday party for Meredith. Here Michael does his entrance by saying the line. In the original line Michael tries to mispronounce the word “bitches” both to win the sympathy of the organisers and, once again, to be the centre of attention and be recognised as the funny one. However, in the Italian Netflix and Prime video subtitles both translators decided to omit the swear word by substituting it with “schiave” (slaves). The translators in both streaming platforms decided to neutralise the swear word, but the message is still conveyed, given that the target text describes the same situation, i.e., employees who instead of doing their job are exploited to organise a birthday party.

In contrast to example no. 1, example no. 2 presents a peculiarity that might go unnoticed. In the scene Michael is talking to the documentary crew about the awards that will be given that night at the stand-up comedian show organized by him for his employees. In the original line can be noted that Michael is joking about the fact that, if it was not for him, one of his obese employees (Kevin) could only receive an award from Dunkin' Donuts, an American multinational coffee and doughnut company. Given that the company could be a problem for the Italian audience in terms of knowledge and

cognitive effort, since the almost total absence of American chain stores in Italy, in both subtitles offered by the streaming platforms, the translators have smartly opted for another fast-food chain which is certainly the oldest and most known in Italy, McDonald's.

Finally, in example no. 3 Michael is giving a speech to boost the morale of his employees, to get them excited for the imminent event that will take place that night. In the subtitles of both platforms, the translators employed a neutralisation, avoiding the swear word by replacing the entire subtitle with a more perhaps suitable subtitle that better encapsulates the scene that is taking place. It must be said, however, that even a literal translation of the original line could have been equally adequate, but it is the translator's task to translate in the most appropriate way that he/she deems at that moment, after all, everyone has their own sensitivity.

## CONCLUSION

We now arrive at the concluding section of this thesis. Its main objective was to describe the world of audiovisual translation from its inception to the present day while simultaneously offering a clear example of its application through the analysis of the subtitles of the American TV series *The Office US*. The analysis of the subtitles allowed me to highlight and probe the various techniques described by the scholar Lomheim, which undoubtedly also have a practical use and are often used unconsciously even by non-professional translators.

The series has a strong vein of humour, which is why the analysis of the work of the translators of the streaming services Netflix and Prime video revealed that the most frequently used technique is that of condensation, which we remember to be a linguistic reformulation with no alteration of the informative load. Certainly, the humour, strongly linked to the language in which the series is conceived, offers a lot of puns that translated literally would not lead to any good solution.

As it turns out, the translators, for the most part, have carried out their job superbly, succeeding in bringing to an Italian audience that may not have a perfect command of the English language, but likes to watch a subtitled series, a series that is well confined and perfectly successful even through ad hoc Italian subtitles. Of course, there has been no shortage of misinterpretations by translators who have sometimes misinterpreted the source language by rendering it wrongly in the target language. To this notice, an attempt was made to give one or more alternatives to correct and/or improve existing subtitles. We must remember that perhaps all too often in audiovisual translation, or more generally in the world of translation, delivery times are very tight, so translators find themselves willingly or unwillingly faced with exorbitant workloads. For this very reason they sometimes try as much as possible to translate literally so as not to get bogged down in translations that could have consequences in the continuation of their work. Having certainly much more time than them at my disposal, and pursuing a thesis focused on the subject, we perpetrated in this work a much more analytical eye focused more on the study of subtitles themselves than on their creation for mass audiences.



To conclude, I would like to say a few words on why on why this topic was chosen. Specifically, the TV series *The Office US* was chosen because I am a great fan of it and also because I was sure, having previously watched it in its original language with Italian subtitles, that it could offer various study points for a possible future thesis. Moreover, in addition to the reasons mentioned above, I can say with certainty that the world of subtitling and more generally the world of audiovisual translation fascinates me. The perfect audiovisual translator does not exist, but certainly a study of the theory coupled with a lot of practice in the field can lead to perfecting the technique and, why not, increase one's creativity through practice. Perhaps the reason why this world fascinates me stems from the incredible variety it offers and above all the huge amount of creativity that is required to complete a subtitling job. It is normal that as an outsider, and therefore as a non-expert, one perceives subtitling as a mechanical job, but I hope through this thesis to have shed light on how subtitling is instead a completely creative and original job that requires a considerable mental effort.

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