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To what extent is Alessandro Rossi's version of 'Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind' 2004, a gendered translation?

The film '*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*' 2004, was translated as '*Se mi lasci ti cancello*'¹ by Alessandro Rossi. This study will examine four examples of dialogue from various points in the film drawing from feminist and gender theories in relation to the historically patriarchal use of language. Using these ideologies in relation to the conversational dialogue in *Se mi lasci ti cancello*, I will advocate that the Italian translation assumes colloquial sexist language and normative gender stereotypes that have little basis in the original English text.

The first example I will discuss how the language selected by the *doppiatore* has altered the representation of Clementine which portrays her character in line with traditional female stereotypes. Furthermore, I will maintain that the choice of Rossi's language reinforces such stereotypes.

Discussion will then focus on three examples of colloquial Italian terms used to describe the female genitalia where there is no basis in the English text. Again, I propose that use of such language perpetuates dominant patriarchal language and consequently, the subjugation of women in Western society.

The film presents the life of an American couple, Joel and Clementine who have recently broken up. Clementine decides to have Joel erased from her memory using the services of a company

¹ Directed by Michel Gondry and screenplay writing by Charlie Kaufman

that specialises in just this. Joel discovers what she has done and decides to have the procedure done himself.

Selecting this film for analysis hinged on numerous aspects. Firstly, the target text (TT) oriented title translation '*Se mi lasci ti cancello*' is a radical departure from the original imaginative line '*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*' from Alexander Pope's poem, *Eloisa to Abelard*, 1794. This overt disregard for the original sentiment therefore seems to warrant further investigation given that Rossi retained none of the original content or form. Dubbing in Italy is a large, prolific industry and Italian *doppiatori* or dubbers are some of the most revered in the world. Given the sector's size this therefore means, according to Even-Zohar's Polysystem theory that translated dialogue is more likely to be TT oriented as it is not marginal commercial literature, but an established process within the field of translation in Italy (Even-Zohar reprinted in Venuti 2012:162) . Therefore it is more likely that within the vast industry translations include Italian ideologies and cultural norms, (Toury reprinted in Venuti 2012:168).

Secondly, it is appropriate to analyse this film with a focus on gendered language given that it is generally accepted in the field that the gender identity of the translator influences the form the translation takes, known as the 'translator-effect' (Flotow, 1997:35). Therefore the author's gender identity imprints onto their translation in some way and changes the text (Chamberlain, 1988: 455). The translator for the Italian dialogue is male; as is the protagonist of the film, Joel Barish whose main focus throughout the entire film is his lover, Clementine Kruczynski. Therefore within the relationship dynamic between these three figures the control and dominance lies with the men; i.e. the *male* translator, *male* protagonist and the female love-object creates a situation that I think debatably facilitates sexist gendered language. Furthermore, Clementine is a strong-willed character which I will suggest has been moderated in the Italian translation potentially because her characteristics are not consistent with traditional tropes of female passivity and submissiveness.

Additionally, the nature of translating from an English ST to an Italian TT is worth considering given that English contains more gender neutral language than Italian. It is therefore an appropriate exercise to critique and compare the outcome and the ways in which the TT has been produced. As Munday notes, '*Although the words of the ST are a basic constraint against which the TT, choices may deliberately choose to subvert them or may unconsciously distort them by patterns of low-level lexical choices.*' (Munday, 2008:11). It is this idea that I wish to explore as this analysis presents an opportunity for both discreet and salient gendering of language. Particular focus will be given to the choice of language used in the TT, with emphasis on colloquial terms. I think it is also worth noting that when translating film dialogue, there is limited possibility for mediation or explanation of the text through footnotes which makes it an important exercise to revise language choices often informed by cultural constructs. It is possible that translated film transcripts contain more problematic language as the texts are not necessarily academic and it is more difficult to understand the semantic choices made.

To start, discussion will centre on the representation of Clementine. At 13:06 a scene unfolds where Joel has just returned home after socialising with Clementine at her flat, having asked him to call her as soon as he arrives home. He dials the number and she picks up, see appendix 1 for the dialogue in English and appendix 2 for the Italian translation.

In the English text, "I do" refers to the marriage vows taken by a bride and groom and therefore justifies Clementine's response which transpires as humorous. However, the Italian translation cannot assume the same play on words as "I do" cannot be literally translated to elicit the same meaning to an Italian audience. Consequently, Rossi has retained the reference to marriage, but simply substituted the dialogue of '*Oddly enough I do*' for '*Strano a dirsi ma è così*' which eradicates the word play. In the next line, Clementine says '*Ahh, hai detto che ti manco, allora significa che siamo sposati.*' I argue therefore, that instead of the rendering of a humorous and slightly inappropriate comment, the semantic loss in the translated dialogue presents Clementine

as more irrational than in the English text. Although as a character her role is impulsive and hyper-active, the English text conveys an element of her witty character, whereas the Italian translation misconstrues the original pun, rendering her more hysterical and emotional.

Representations such as this draw upon antique female stereotypes of the Western woman and ideas that women are irrational, hysterical and child-like have been dominant ideologies for most of western history, stemming back to Greek philosophers such as Aristotle and Hippocrates.

During the 20th Century the work writers such as Otto Weininger², Cesare Lombroso (Wolfgang, 1961:373) and the Italian philosopher Antonio Rosmini Serbati reaffirmed this historical rhetoric which today still dominates Italian gender stereotypes,(Tosi, 2001: 79). As a result the translation reinforces these traditional tropes through the adoption of these stereotypical characteristics which were more inconspicuous in the English text.

Focusing on the choice of specific Italian words used, I have located three examples of colloquial gendered language that have no basis in the English version. The first occurs at 22:05 when Clementine is sat at her job in the library and is greeted unexpectedly by her lover Patrick. The greeting in English is shown in appendix 3 and the dialogue in Italian is show in appendix 4. As shown, the English nickname '*Clem-ato*' uses word play on Clementine's name plus *tomato* to form a sentimental nickname. Rossi has translated this nickname into the colloquial Italian noun, '*Patata*'. However, the selection of this word is not unproblematic. In Italian, *patata* is a colloquial term for the female anatomy. The use of this word itself is questionable, but given that Clementine is the object of this name, it additionally objectifies her and therefore reduces her. Regarding the use of the word itself, that language is a male conceived and controlled entity is well known in philosophy and literature, and since this tradition became a Western trope, women have not had control of discourse, and more importantly, discourse concerning them, (Cavarero, 2003: 49). During the 16th Century only the educated men and members of the church were taught scholarly Latin (Guardi, 2013:409), which is emblematic of women's exclusion from high academia, in

² Although Otto Weininger was Austrian, his works were translated into Italian and circulated

particular Philosophy, (Cavarero, 2003:43). Consequently, the term used here reflects and reinforces patriarchal language, of which Italian is inherently sexist, (Tosi, 2001: 79). Research suggests that male dominant language facilitates the subordination of women and that gender disparity in use of speech not only maintains the difference but also perpetuates a male dominant society. (Brückmuller, Hegarty, Abele, 2012:42 and Flotow, 1997:5). Considering that Italian is grammatically an overtly patriarchal language that assumes the masculine form where possible e.g. in the professional sphere and for pluralising, I suggest that the prevalence of this language perpetuates and maintains male supremacy. This is supported by Arturo Tosi who highlights the continued prevalence of national debate concerning the biological degrees of difference between men and women within Italian culture which in turn influences language usage. Modern national debate surrounds three main notions which include possible biological reasons for language difference between sexes, language gender difference that reveals disparate attitudes towards life and finally, the inbuilt system of gendered Italian grammar that reflects the historical inequality between men and women, (Tosi, 2001: 80).

With this in mind, I will now focus on the final two clauses in the film's dialogue. Both instances use the same word '*fica*' which is a colloquial term for the female genitalia. Example one occurs at 1:00:08, see appendices 5 and 6 for the English and Italian versions respectively. The English word used here is '*crotch*' which more generally refers to either to '*the part of the human body between the legs where they join the torso*' or to '*the part of a garment that passes between the legs*' (Oxford Dictionaries Online, 2013) rather than explicitly to the vagina. Hence *crotch* is debatably a less explicit and objectifying use of language. In Italian the word '*fica*' is interchangeable with '*figa*' and '*vulva*' which denote '*gli organi genitali esterni femminili*', (Dizionario Lo Zingarelli minore, 2012: 468) which is a more overt reference to the genitals on behalf of the male translator compared with the English word that refers more generally to the area.

Later on, near the end of the film at 1:33:00, another instance occurs where Rossi uses the same word *fica* as the substitute for the superlative 'best' (see appendix 7 and 8). Joel enthusiastically tells Clementine how much he enjoyed himself after a successful date calling it '*...the best fucking night of his entire fucking life...*' which contains no comparable reference to the vagina whilst *fica* is added in the Italian translation entirely spontaneously. Even though the colloquial Italian word for penis, 'cazzo' is used here and throughout the film, it is because language already has an implicit male bias that spontaneous use of gendered female words may serve to perpetuate the oppression of women. Therefore as a male translator, it could be argued that Rossi's impromptu employment of gendered language such as the examples above in conjunction with the evidence presented serves to maintain male dominance in society.

Gender translation study is an important area of research and it is very pertinent to this translated transcript. I have argued that the Italian text of *Se mi lasci ti cancello* complies with gender constructs that are an intrinsic part of Italian language and culture. Furthermore, I have highlighted ways in which gender stereotypes have been employed and gendered language has been appropriated in Rossi's translation. With the task of dissecting critically Rossi's translation and other similar translation undertakings, gendered and potentially sexist language integrated into the fabric of texts and the wider cultural society can be highlighted and challenged. Exercises in this could be crucial to feminist liberation as the feminist translator Lori Chamberlain puts, '*what must be subverted is the process by which translation complies with gender constructs.*' (Chamberlain, 1988:472). It should not be overlooked that as a romance language, gender is constantly signified in written and spoken language which I think must serve to reinforce gender inequality.

Appendices

Appendix 1.

Clementine: Do you miss me?

Joel: Oddly enough, I do.

Clementine: You said "I do", I guess that means we're married.

Appendix 2.

Whereas in Italian the dialogue has been translated as such:

Clementine: *Ti manco?*

Joel: *Strano a dirsi ma è così.*

Clementine: *Ahh, hai detto che ti manco, allora significa che siamo sposati.*

Appendix 3.

Patrick: Hey, Clem-ato!

Clementine: Patrick, baby boy!

Appendix 4.

Patrick: *Eyy, Patata!*

Clementine: *Patrick, piccolo mio!*

Appendix 5.

Clementine: Look, honey, my crotch is still here just as you remember it.

Appendix 6.

Clementine: *Guarda, Tesoro, non ti muovere, la mia fica è ancora qui, come te la ricordavi.*

Appendix 7.

Joel: I had the best fucking night of my entire fucking life last night!

Appendix 8.

Joel: *È stata la notte più fica che abbia passato in vita mia cazzo!*

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