

## Censorial Interferences in the Dubbing of Foreign Films in Fascist Italy: 1927-1943

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Article abstract

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# CENSORIAL FORCES AT PLAY: PAST AND PRESENT

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## Censorial Interferences in the Dubbing of Foreign Films in Fascist Italy: 1927-1943

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### RÉSUMÉ

S'inspirant du projet d'Italia Taglia et de son étude de la censure visuelle et des autorisations de projection en Italie, le présent article a pour but d'explorer les interférences liées à la censure dans les versions doublées en italien de films étrangers projetés pendant la période fasciste. L'étude se concentre sur les pratiques liées à l'exclusion de texte verbal dans la langue cible, et illustre la réécriture à travers le processus de traduction des dialogues contenant des références dérangeantes à la politique, à la morale, et à la religion. Nous expliciterons l'influence des commissions de censeurs sur les studios de doublage ainsi que le rôle des censeurs dans le processus de traduction, lorsqu'ils ajustent et négocient le contenu des versions doublées en italien.

### ABSTRACT

Drawing insights from the project of Italia Taglia and its study on visual censorship and screening certifications in Italy, this contribution sets out to explore the censorial interferences in the Italian dubbed versions of foreign films that were publicly screened during Fascism. This study looks at practices behind the exclusion of verbal text in the target versions and highlights the rewriting of translated dialogues which contained uncomfortable political, moral and religious references. It will account for the influence of the film censorship commissions over the dubbing studios and show how the censors interfered with the process of translation, adjusting or negotiating the contents of the Italian dubbed versions.

### MOTS-CLÉS/KEYWORDS

doublage, censure, autorisations de projection, réécriture, taboo  
dubbing, censorship, screening certifications, rewriting, taboos

In its socio-cultural dimension, translation can be described as  
subject to constraints of several types and varying degree.

(Toury 1995: 54)

Much has been studied, in the field of Italian dubbing, of the linguistic aspects of translated audiovisual texts, of the constraints of the synchronisation process, and of the audience reception of dubbed versions, whereas some dedicated research still awaits to discuss the historical and socio-cultural constraints behind these audiovisual translation (AVT) practices. The present contribution follows in the footsteps of

historical and cultural-oriented research within literary translation studies that sees translation as an important component of a cultural system (Even-Zohar 1978; Toury 1995) and as a fundamental place to promote intercultural awareness (Venuti 2000).

Italy has always imported foreign language films and, ever since the silent era, it has been consuming a huge volume of translated foreign audiovisual programmes. To keep an eye on these imports, since 1914, state-run film commissions have been given the role of authorising or rejecting the theatrical screening of every cinematic work, including translated ones. Paying attention to the historical and cultural modes of film production, importation and distribution in Italy, this study seeks to acknowledge the role of the fascist censorship in addressing specific cinematic topics and to highlight the cultural and political constraints imposed on film translation during the dictatorship.

### 1. The Italian censorship system and regulation of film content

Since its establishment in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the film regulation system in Italy has evolved from its original role of defending the public from indecency and immorality on cinema screens. The changes in the national legislation regarding film censorship and translation usually took place in the wake of historical events and as a consequence of political turning points of great importance for Italy. The criteria for the selection of the film commissions have also changed over time, mostly in order to meet with the governments' political and cultural stance; the same can be said for the commissioners' role and their influence in controlling cinematic contents.<sup>1</sup> The present investigation will look in particular at the interference in film translation exercised by the fascist film commissions between 1927 and 1943.

The first legislative measure regulating film screenings in Italy was taken by the liberal government of G. Giolitti (1911-1914) with the law No. 785 of 1913, which authorised the monarch and his government to exercise control on (and tax) domestic and imported film productions. Thereafter, several legislative acts were passed by the Italian governments to ban the theatrical representation of specific subjects. In particular, the Royal Decree No. 532 of 1914 (*Regolamento per l'esecuzione della legge N. 785/1913 sull'esercizio della vigilanza sulle produzioni cinematografiche*)<sup>2</sup> listed a series of conditions which would serve as a model for the subsequent fascist regulations. In its Article 1, it banned

[...] representations offensive to the public morality, ethics, public decency and private citizens; representations against national reputation and decorum, or else disturbing good international relations; representations offensive to the decorum and the prestige of public institutions and authorities, of public officials and police officers; cruel, repulsive scenes and barbarity, also if of any harm to animals; horrifying murders or suicides and, in general, perverted acts or facts which may educate or incite to murder, or rather disturb the minds and excite evil. (*Royal Decree No. 532, Article 1; translated by the author*)<sup>3</sup>

The R.D. No. 532 of 1914 also introduced a clause in its Article 3 indicating the linguistic mode of reproduction permitted in Italian cinemas. Foreign film versions could, at this point in time, still circulate with their original "titles, subtitles and inter-titles" (*i titoli, i sottotitoli e le scritte*) as long as a correct and faithful Italian translation was also provided.

The fascist regime foresaw cinema's potential as a means of mass propaganda and, from the beginning it was able to make use of the already established film censorship system, modifying it in order to suit its political and economic objectives. The R.D. No. 3287 of 1923 is to my knowledge the first law promulgated under Fascism to regulate the theatrical screenings of films. Essentially, this act confirmed the same conditions prescribed by the previous liberal laws. However, throughout the *Ventennio* (1922-1943), the film regulation system inherited from the previous governments gradually took a more decisive nationalistic turn. Because the film commissions had the important role of controlling the content of every film prior to its screening on cinemas nation-wide, the boards' action could be exploited as a means of political censorship and film content could be modified according to the propagandist agenda of the regime.

During the thirties, film censorship passed from the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior (Ministero dell'Interno) to be included within the sphere of the newly established General Directorate of Cinematography (Direzione Generale della Cinematografia, 1934), first under the State Under-Secretariat for the Press and Propaganda (Sottosegretariato di Stato per la Stampa e la Propaganda, upgraded to Ministry in 1935) and later under the Ministry for Popular Culture (Ministero della Cultura Popolare, 1937). In general, to obtain the public screening for a film an application form from the distribution or production company had to be presented to the film commission. A first examining commission viewed the film and then decided whether to approve fully, partly (with age restrictions or other conditions) or reject the cinematic work. If authorised, the film would be distributed to cinemas. In the case of restrictions or rejection (approvata con riserva or vietata), the commission specified the sort of visual or verbal changes to be carried out on the work in order to obtain the authorisation. The producers or distributors had the option to re-edit the work in order to comply with such indications, and then re-send in the modified version for the approval. Otherwise, they could file an appeal against the first decision and the film would be reviewed by a second commission. If the latter confirmed the same verdict, the screening of the film was prohibited. To avoid this ban the distributors usually preferred to make the changes as indicated by the first instance. Perhaps also in order to prevent the expensive procedure of cuts and changes in the post-production phase, since 1934, the preventive control on screenplays was enforced more regularly. For domestic films in particular, this meant a further level of censorship at the early stages of a film's production, whereas for imported foreign works, the censors' interference could still be exercised on the translated versions of foreign scripts.

The following sections offer some examples of the results obtained after examining a total of 8,842 final decisions filed between 1927 and 1943, available on the *Italia Taglia* database.<sup>4</sup> This online database contains useful information of different genres of national and foreign audiovisual works: feature length films, medium-length films, short films, newsreels and commercials. It is divided into two different periods covering from 1913 to 1943 and from 1944 to 1955. The digitisation of the fascist archive (1913-1943) conducted by *Italia Taglia* has permitted the identification of some 30,000 titles, which were submitted to obtain the approval for the public screening between 3 May 1913 and 30 November 1943. These files are part of the five volumes of documents now stored at the General Directorate for Cinema, Ministry for Cultural

Heritage and Activities (Direzione Generale per il Cinema, Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, MiBAC) in Rome. They come originally from the Register Office of Film Censorship (Registro Protocollo della Censura Cinematografica) and represent the only documentation available at MiBAC for the period 1913-1943 regarding the film certifications which were produced by the film commissions during this period.

The following examples take account of US, British, French and German films whose translated versions were submitted to the Italian commissions for approval between the beginning of the Sound Era in 1927 and the fall of the fascist regime in 1943. A film's file usually contains the censors' final decision and only rarely does it include other procedural documents, scripts, or letters from the distributors. Unfortunately, most Italian versions of the works mentioned, both videos and scripts, were destroyed during World War II or have not been retrieved, which prevents me from offering a more detailed analysis of the complete process of translation. Nonetheless, the aim here is to contextualise the process of translating/rewriting undergone by these works by looking at the censors' verdicts with regard to the representation of specific subjects considered taboo during Fascism. Attention is also paid to the historical and cultural dimensions of film translation in Italy and to the developments in the theatrical film exhibition caused by the advent of the sound technologies between the late 1920s and the early 1930s.

Toury's (1995) stance of considering translations as facts of the target culture is pivotal in this paper. Dealing only with literary translation, he highlights that the process of importing foreign productions in a target culture implies the penetration of unfamiliar elements that are bound to be manipulated or adjusted by the dominant ideology of the target culture (Toury 1995: 166). In other words, what is translated, and how it is translated, is determined by the interests and structure of the target cultural system. Expanding his interpretation to include the realm of film translation, in the first part of this study I try to identify the topics which have been particularly constrained by the dominant ideology of the target culture (in the form of censorship intervention) and show how the film commissions dealt with the fictional representation of taboo by manipulating the target versions through verbal and visual cuts and alterations. In the second part, the examples illustrate how the censors also attempted to neutralise uncomfortable content by suggesting a different "rewriting" (Lefevere 1985; Merino and Rabadán 2002) of the Italian dialogue.

### *1.1. The transition to sound: dubbing and "la questione della lingua"*

Before proceeding with the analysis of the examples, it is worth mentioning the government's decisions in the mid-1930s that establish dubbing as the only permitted mode of film translation. As Gili (1981: 36) points out when discussing the repression and the promotion of the Italian film industry during Fascism, not only did the government have a strong economic interest in encouraging the development of the dubbing studios in Italy, but also the dubbing operation represented a very good solution to the problem of controlling film content and reinforcing the standard usage of the Italian language over the national territory.

This latter aspect can be explained by taking into account the very defensive attitude of the fascist regime towards the use of Italian. In the aftermath of World War I and at the beginning of the fascist era, due to the high degree of illiteracy in

the country, the state felt the urgency to spread a unifying language in order to promote the idea of a unified Italy and enhance mass consensus.

As Klein (1986: 28) explains, the debate about the unification of the language revolved around three main approaches. The first was characterised by hostility towards the dialects and the use of regional words in the national language; the second was an opposition against minorities' varieties, whilst the third represented a xenophobic reaction against any foreign intrusion in the Italian language. Klein (1986) also points out that, whatever the approach used, the common goal was to defend the national idiom in its purity and unity, eliminating any disturbing elements.

The question of language usage in dubbed films was becoming an increasingly important component of the public debate about film language, literacy and national identity (Hay 1987: 86). On 22 October 1930, a circular from the Ministry of the Interior banned the screening of any films which were spoken in a language other than Italian. From the entries provided in the censors' reports regarding sound films, many asked for the removal from the film soundtrack of any dialogue or line spoken in a foreign language. After extracting the documents provided by the *Italia Taglia* database for the period 1927-1935, I organised the data concerning foreign cinematic releases chronologically and thematically according to the censors' degree of intervention on film versions (silencing, cuts, textual substitutions). By my calculations, between November 1929 and August 1933, 486 foreign audiovisual works (including short, medium and feature-length films, newsreels, and commercials) were released in Italian theatres in a silent version by overwriting the muted dialogues with Italian intertitles.

A likely reason not openly stated for this silencing of films was the fact that cinema screens had yet to be supplied with the new sound system technologies. As pointed out by Raffaelli (2003: 152), the sound film process Vitaphone, developed by Warner Brothers, was introduced in Italy only in 1929, three years after its release in the USA and the first dubbing studio in Italy was not opened until the summer of 1932 (Guidorizzi 1999: 17). This means that during this gap of three years, foreign films could only be released in their original sound version, in the cinemas equipped with a sound system, or in a silent version with intertitles, the latter approach being favoured as the public was already accustomed to watching silent films. However, as talkies increased in complexity, they started to be dubbed into Italian abroad, mainly at the Paramount Studios in Joinville, France, where multi-language film versions were experimented by North-American producers in order to supply the European market, or in the United States, by Italian-American actors.

In addition to the cinema, other media were also under a similar xenophobic control when it came to banning the use of foreign languages. Raffaelli (1979; 1983) points out that the use of foreign words in newspapers was banned in February 1934 and their use to name public places or nightclubs was also prohibited in 1938. In 1940, a law banning the use of foreign words on signage and branding was passed and the same year, the Commission of the Royal Academy of Italy for the spirit of the Italian language (Commissione della Reale Accademia d'Italia per l'italianità della lingua) was established under the Ministry of the Interior with the role of eradicating the foreign words threatening the purity of the Italian language (Klein 1986: 125). It also had the power to decide whether there was an appropriate Italian equivalent for these words that ought to be used instead, or to allow the use of some

words in their original form if they were considered to have been part of the Italian vocabulary for a long time. The standardising solution suggested in Example 1 could be viewed in the light of the fascist political efforts as a means to ensure a unified national language:<sup>5</sup>

- (1) *La bande à Bouboule* (1931)<sup>6</sup>  
 [Bouboule's Gang]  
*Beato fra le donne*  
 [Blissful among women]  
 Cambiare la parola «chauffeur» in quella di «Autista».  
 [Change the (French) word "chauffeur" for (the more Italian) "autista" (driver).]  
 (File No. 27299 30 June 1932; translated by the author)

In addition to this, the hegemonic presence of foreign films (US films in particular) was increasingly overpowering the Italian market. It has been calculated that, between 1930 and 1939, a total of 2,434 foreign films were shown in Italian cinemas against the much more modest Italian production of 319 films (Mancini 1985: 66). Severe action needed to be taken in order to sustain the internal market and enhance the prestige of the fascist industry at the expense of foreign films. During the first half of the 1930s, the government tried to regulate the distribution of foreign films in the country with commercial agreements on importation and dubbing. To this end, the decree law No. 1414 dated 5 October 1933 (later L. No. 320/1934) banned any foreign feature-length sound films which had been dubbed in Italian abroad. By prescribing that dubbing had to be performed in the Italian territory by native speakers of Italian, the law ensured the standard of the language and the acceptability of filmic content, while, on the other hand, supporting the economy of the Italian film industry.

Before looking more attentively at the examples, it is also worth noting that US film companies were aware of the Italian censorial system and were therefore careful not to displease the politicised censors, mainly because they did not want to see their box-office revenues decrease in a profitable market like the Italian one. However, as mentioned above, since 1934, film censorship was enforced more regularly on scripts and protectionist laws on importation were directed towards restricting the sphere of activity of foreign cinemas in the Italian territory. As documented in Gili (1981: 8), in 1934, despite some protectionist measures aimed at reinforcing the domestic film industry, the Ciano-Hays agreement provided that Hollywood film companies would still be allowed to export into the Italian market the considerable amount of 250 films per year. In the meanwhile, in the US, the Hays Office established the Production Code Administration in 1934, requiring production companies to submit their films for a seal of approval or certificate before screening (Bernstein 1999; Black 1996).<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, even if sound films had undergone a process of regulation of content before leaving Hollywood, the many examples of Italian censorship show that the attitude of the two countries towards certain cinematic representations and historical and cultural references were substantially different.

A series of more severe protectionist measures followed in Italy during the second part of the 1930s, which culminated in 1939 with the withdrawal from the Italian market of the four US majors MGM, Paramount, Fox and Warner Bros.

## 2. Official censorship

It has been documented by Bonsaver (2007), Fabre (2007) and Rundle (2010) that the fascist administration often resorted to double standards when dealing with uncomfortable matters raised by cultural productions. At least with regard to literary translations and the publishing sector, Mussolini and his collaborators were very careful when dealing publicly with censorship issues and were often willing to leave room for manoeuvre to publishers, writers and translators. The regime tended to interfere directly, often by intervention of Mussolini himself, only when the case required a more official control. Self-censorship, on the other hand, was extensively practised and careful consideration was given to those foreign cultural productions which were perceived as threatening to the Italian cultural prestige and the regime's power, both at home and abroad. As mentioned before, a stronger degree of censorial activity against unwelcome works and authors developed in the late 1930s as a consequence of the regime's autarchic and racist turn.

The situation regarding state censorship and the role played by film translation during the dictatorship has been scarcely discussed in research on Italian Fascism. Like translated books, translated films provided numerous examples of different socio-political ideas and lifestyles that the public could easily absorb by going to the movies. This investigation is an attempt to shed new light on the censorial practices on translation of the time. In the following sections, I analyse how some topics were directly constrained by official censorship between 1927 and 1943. In the first section, the examples show that the commissions interfered with the fictional representations of taboo by applying verbal cuts to the target versions. The second part illustrates how the censors also manipulated the uncomfortable content by suggesting an alternative rewriting of the film dialogues, adjusting the translated texts to the fascist ideologies.

### 2.1. Cuts in the translated dialogues

This section deals with some of the cuts to dialogues proposed by the censors. The deletions were usually performed on the translated scripts and were carried out without providing any textual re-formulation or verbal compensation. All the examples are extracted from the *approvata con riserva* forms and each of them has got a file reference number.

Some of the cuts are found in political references to Italy, particularly to fascist Italy and to Mussolini (Example 2), because of their satire of the regime's pomposity and autarchic efforts:

- (2) *Men in Her Life* (1931)<sup>8</sup>  
*Gli uomini nella mia vita*  
 [Men in my life]  
 Che sia soppresso l'accenno a S. Ecc. Il Capo del Governo On. Mussolini.  
 [Suppress the mention of His Excellency the Prime Minister Hon. Mussolini.]  
 (File No. 27577 23 December 1932; translated by the author)

Films in which the representation of the Italian identity was considered somehow offensive to the national prestige of fascist Italy were distributed with a different title which neutralised the unwelcome reference to Italians. An example is the film *The*

*Adventures of Marco Polo* (1938).<sup>9</sup> This film obtained screening authorisation to Italian cinemas in 1939 with the title *Uno scozzese alla corte del Gran Khan* [A Scottish Man at the Court of the Great Khan]. As evident from the film outline produced for the Ministry (MiBAC, file No. 590/1939), the famous Italian traveller Marco Polo had been renamed by the translators with a Scottish sounding name MacBone Pan and his assistant Binguccio as Macniff.

In cases where the talking picture openly criticised or stereotyped Italians, the regime prohibited the distribution of the work altogether because it contrasted strongly with the celebratory image of the nation and of Italians that the fascists wanted to promote: an image of a strong and united Italy, proud of her cultural heritage and her *romanità* [Roman spirit]. A famous example of this preventive censorship is the film *Little Caesar* (1931),<sup>10</sup> a Hollywood classic of the gangster genre, which portrays the violent rise of the Italian-American gangster Rico Bandello and the Palermo Club in Chicago.

The banning of foreign languages on the screen had an impact on the representation of foreign nationalities (Example 3) and foreign countries (Example 4) whose values and ethics were considered in antithesis with the anti-liberal and anti-individualistic fascist ideology:

- (3) *Cyclone Cavalier* (1925)<sup>11</sup>  
*Diavolo e il suo maestro*  
 [Devil and his teacher]  
 Nella 2<sup>a</sup> e 4<sup>a</sup> parte sopprimere la parola «americano».  
 [In the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> parts suppress the word “American.”]  
 (File No. 24120 31 March 1928; translated by the author)
- (4) *L’Homme à l’oreille cassée* (1934)<sup>12</sup>  
 [The man with the broken ear]  
*L’uomo da l’orecchio mozzato*  
 [The man with a cut-off ear]  
 Togliere la scritta finale «Viva la Francia».  
 [Take out the final line “Long live France!”]  
 (File No. 29788 27 September 1937; translated by the author)

Political statements encouraging egalitarianism (Example 5) or hints at social struggle (Example 6) and class divisions were also subjected to deletion as these subjects were perceived as a potential risk of generating controversy and cultivating in the audiences ideas of social change and revolution. Italy was soon to be involved in World War II and the fascist government needed to consolidate an image of a strong united nation by silencing any nonconformist views:

- (5) *Viva Villa!* (1934)<sup>13</sup>  
*Viva Villa!*  
 Togliere le frasi a tinta socialiste. («Vi insegneremo i i ricchi e poveri son tutti uguali» ecc.)  
 [Take out the sentences bearing a socialist tone: “We shall teach you the rich and poor are equal” etc.]  
 (File No. 28683 December 1934; translated by the author)

(6) *Madame du Barry* (1919)<sup>14</sup>*Madama du Barry*Nella 1<sup>a</sup> parte togliere le parole: «O popolo che hai fame di pane e di gloria».[In the 1<sup>st</sup> part take out the words: "Oh, people who are hungry for bread and glory!"]

(File No. 27495 30 November 1932; translated by the author)

References to death, whether in the form of assassinations or suicides, were also prone to be deleted as their removal was legally prescribed by acts No. 532/1914 and No. 3287/1923. Being a religious taboo, suicide constituted a thorny issue and its cinematic representations were subjected to heavy editing (Example 7) or caused the total rejection of the work:

(7) *Little Friend* (1934)<sup>15</sup>*Raffiche*

[Gusts]

Limitare allo stretto necessario le scene di preparazione al suicidio – (togliere la busta sul letto – la frase in Tribunale della madre "mia figlia ha tentato di suicidarsi").

[Reduce to the strictly necessary the scenes preparatory to suicide. Take out the scene where the envelope is on the bed – in the court, the mother's line: "My daughter attempted suicide."]

(File No. 29017 30 September 1935; translated by the author)

Cases of censorship intervention with regard to suicide have also been documented for theatre plays and literature works. In theatre, according to Leopoldo Zurlo (in Bonsaver 2007: 64), the vice-prefect in charge of the Ufficio Censura Teatrale [Theatrical Censorship Office] from 1931 until 1943, many plays were censored because of their representation of suicide and the risk of offending public morality. Some episodes reveal that censorship was also employed as a self-preventive practice. In 1939, Mondadori, one of the most important publishing groups in Italy, "decided not to produce the translation of the crime novel *The Ten Little Niggers* (1939) by Agatha Christie<sup>16</sup> because it contained, according to Enrico Piceni, (translator from English and head of Mondadori's press office), "at least two undeletable suicides" (Bonsaver 2007: 53-54).

Dubious sexual references and arbitrary mentions of the Roman Catholic Church, the Trinity and the catholic sacraments were considered, by the same token, unpleasant or disrespectful. Even a marginal mention, as in Example 8, where the character gives his word in the name of his creed, is asked to be deleted:

(8) *Original title not specified*<sup>17</sup>*Per non pagare l'affitto*

[To not pay the rent]

Nella parte prima togliere la frase «Parola di cristiano».

[In the first part, take out the line: "Take my Christian word for it."]

(File No. 24762 28 February 1929; translated by the author)

As illustrated in these examples, the reasons for the cuts are traceable to the uneasiness of the Italian censors to authorise certain political, moral or religious references being included in films that were then shown on the big screen and watched by the Italian people. This reluctance concerned both foreign as well as domestic film pro-

ductions and an explanation for the commissions' attitude is provided by Hay (1987), when he discusses Italian popular film culture during the 1930s. According to his interpretation, in the act of watching a cinematic work, Italian audiences could identify themselves:

with modern, cosmopolitan images as well as [...] with more traditional, rural values which seemed threatened by the very influx of foreign cultural forms [...]. Because Fascist Italy's new order, its *cultura popolare*, was contingent on a variety of cinematic images and narrative formulas, it too must be discussed as multi-accentual and at times contradictory. Here one cannot ignore the role that the cinema, as a 'public' technology of the times, assumed in providing an undoubtedly more grandiose, epic, and heroic image of the world and of the nation than did other contemporary or previous media and cultural forms. (Hay 1987: 8)

From this point of view, it is understandable why the Other, set in a foreign place and portraying an unknown or unfamiliar subject, might become problematic. Hence, values that are perceived to contradict fascist popular images and the religious decorum of Italian society are removed so as to avoid compromising the audience's cultural domain in a negative way.

## 2.2. *Substitutions in the translated dialogues*

Official intervention in the form of substitution has frequently occurred ever since the translation of inter-titles in silent films. In the corpus under analysis, these substitutions are common and consist of textual reformulations or adjustments suggested by the commission in their final reports which then had to be incorporated into the translated scripts.

As the examples taken from the documents of the fascist *Registro Protocollo* confirm, these substitutions mainly toned down or forbade specific political allusions, references to foreign countries, morally ambiguous comments or offensive expressions such as foul language, profanities, blasphemies, etc. By suggesting a different translation, the objective of the censors was to minimise the impact of taboo-field areas without breaking the narrative flow so that the changes would pass unnoticed by Italian audiences. Substituting parts of the texts instead of cutting scenes had the advantage of minimising the post-productions costs. Inevitably, though, most of these changes tend to modify the characters' original representation and the semantics of the cinematic text as a whole.

The examples show that references to foreign countries are neutralised in various ways. For instance, in Example 9 the censors demanded the deletion from the inter-title of the original geographical indication, Liechtenstein, and to substitute it with an *imaginary* referent. From a historical standpoint, the Principality of Liechtenstein remained neutral during World War II despite the Nazi sympathies of its National Union party during the late 1920s. Liechtenstein is also a Catholic country, situated geographically close to Italy's alpine border. Perhaps in the light of uncertain political alliances at the time this film was released, and considering that the choices of the Italian titles would connote Liechtenstein in a negative way, the censors deemed more appropriate to replace this uncomfortable mention and to ask for its neutralisation into an abstract geographic location.

- (9) *Die selige Exzellenz* (1927)<sup>18</sup>  
 [The blessed Excellency]  
*Paese degli scandali*  
 [The country of scandals]  
 Alternative titles:  
*Lo scandalo del paese*  
 [The scandal of the country]  
*Scandali e peccati* (added in March 1931)  
 [Scandals and sins]  
 Sostituire il Principato di Liechtenstein con un altro immaginario.  
 [Change the Principality of Liechtenstein with another imaginary.]  
 (File No. 23816 30 November 1927; translated by the author)

In Example 10 the geographical reference is substituted with a more general indication. A translation that involves the larger European context avoids exalting the war sacrifices of neighbouring France, a country which was to become an opposing party in the second world conflict. In addition, because of the choice of the hypernym, Italy would also be included in the reference and implicitly celebrated in the film for its sacrifices in the war.

In this example it could also be noted that yet again the foreign geographical specification in the original title, Kentucky, is omitted from the Italian title *Ritorno alla vita* [Back to life]. As previously discussed in Examples 3 and 4, the very nationalistic attitude of the fascist government and the ban on the use of foreign languages in cinema also affected the representation of foreign nationalities and countries whose images were perceived as contradicting the fascist ideological agenda. In this example, the indication which sets the story in the United States is removed and reformulated with a specification on the film's topic:

- (10) *In Old Kentucky* (1927)<sup>19</sup>  
*Ritorno alla vita*  
 [Back to life]  
 Nel 2° atto [...] sostituire alla "Francia" "l'Europa" nella didascalia ove si accenna ai sacrifici di guerra.  
 [In the 2<sup>nd</sup> act [...] replace "France" with "Europe" in the intertitle which hints at war sacrifices.]  
 (File No. 24536 28 October 1928; translated by the author)

In Example 11, the naturalisation of unwelcome geographical or national references depicted in a positive light, in this case Russia, is performed by substituting them with countries more familiar or politically close to the Italian regime, like Germany:

- (11) *Im Geheimdienst* (1931)<sup>20</sup>  
 [In the Secret Service]  
*Spionaggio eroico*  
 [Heroic espionage]  
 Far risultare dalle didascalie che la spia russa ed il meccanico Sokalut sono di nazionalità tedesca. [...].  
 [From the intertitles show that the Russian spy and the mechanic Sokalut are of German nationality. [...].]  
 (File No. 26946 31 December 1931; translated by the author)

The representation of police and of public officials is another subject mentioned by the R.D. No. 3287/1923, which could motivate the commission to intervene. In Example 12, the censors suggested to clarify some aspects of the story that could otherwise risk being misjudged by the public so as to make sure they would be represented in accordance with the fascist political manoeuvres. The film *La Belle Equipe* [sic] was originally released in France in 1936 and it is considered one of the flagship films of the French alliance of left-wing political parties, Popular Front, of the inter-war period. In the film, the character Mario is persecuted by the police because he is a Spanish republican refugee there in France during the Spanish Civil War. When *La bella brigata* was released in Italy, the Italian regime had been giving its support to the Spanish Nationalist side in their fight against the Republicans. It was therefore necessary to reassert the positive role of the police in tracking the republican dissident Mario in order to prevent a different political interpretation by the audience. Moreover, possibly driven by moral and social concerns, the censors also suggested the rewriting of the final line in order to demystify the power of money:

(12) *La Belle Equipe* (1936)<sup>21</sup>

[The fair company]

*La bella brigata*

[The fair company]

1) Chiarire il motivo di espulsione di Mario (perseguitato dalla polizia;

2) Eliminare la scena dello sventolio della bandiera francese; 3) Cambiare la battuta finale del gendarme ed affermare chiaramente che il denaro non dona la felicità.

[1) Clarify the reason for the expulsion of Mario (persecuted by police);

2) Remove the scene of the French flag-waving; 3) Change the final line of the policeman and clearly state that money does not make you happy.]

(File No. 29633 31 May 1937; translated by the author)

As seen in Example 2, unsolicited references to the regime and unwelcome representations of Italians were cut or non-distributed. In a climate of strong nationalism, the regime focussed on its public image deleting any content that could irritate or generate opposition or doubts on Fascism and its institutions. Thus, indirect references were generally re-worded with less politically connoted expressions. In Example 13 the word *corporazione* [corporation] has to be substituted with the more neutral term *associazione* [association], perhaps because the former may remind the viewers of the fascist corporations, which were the sectoral unions that Mussolini created in the late 1920s to ensure a strong state control over the Italian economic system and which were not well regarded by the more liberal fringes of the Italian society:

(13) *Nu comme un ver* (1933)<sup>22</sup>

[Naked as a worm]

*Nudo come Adamo*

[Naked like Adam]

Nel banchetto dei commercianti, alla parola «corporazione», sostituire quella di «associazione».

[At the banquet of the tradesmen, substitute the word “corporation” by “association.”]

(File No. 28631 30 November 1934; translated by the author)

The mise-en-scène of morally ambiguous behaviours was often constrained by censorship. Sexuality in general, but especially prostitution, homosexuality, promiscuity, and extramarital relations were taboo which strongly fell afoul of the moral values of the Italian society. If a film dared contain such representations, the censors could either reject the film outright, and ban it from public viewings, or demand the cuts of the prohibited scenes. In those cases where the sexual allusions were part of the dialogue and visual editing was not adequate, the commissions manipulated the translations substantially, removing any inappropriate content. The latter strategy is evident in Example 14, where the clear reference to the sexually transmitted disease is removed and generalised in the translation by means of a less connoted expression, which is achieved with the use of a hypernym (*taint, illness*) in the target text to account for a hyponym (*syphilis*) in the source text:

- (14) *Der Fluch der Vererbung* (1927)<sup>23</sup>  
 [The Curse of Heredity]  
*Ereditarietà*  
 [Inheritance]  
 Nel IV atto sostituire la parola “lue” con “tara” o “malattia.”  
 [“In the 4<sup>th</sup> act substitute the word “syphilis” with “taint” or “illness.”]  
 (File No. 26151 30 November 1930; translated by the author)

The censors' intervention was also directed at protecting such catholic values as marriage and family and, for this reason, stories which depicted scenes of divorces or adultery were subjected to heavy cuts and manipulations. In the film *Captured!* (1933), the female character is involved in an extramarital relation while her husband, whom she barely knows, has been away for a long time fighting in the war (Example 15). The wife's behaviour was deemed to be disrespectful towards the religious values of the Italian society and the taboo was lightened by means of a substitution. By making her a fiancée rather than a wife, the unethical subject of adultery is softened and rendered somehow more acceptable or justifiable:

- (15) *Captured!* (1933)<sup>24</sup>  
*Catturato*  
 [Captured]  
 Che la figura della moglie sia trasformata in fidanzata.  
 [Change the wife into the fiancée.]  
 (File No. 28617 30 November 1934; translated by the author)

The selection of examples from the commissions' reports confirms that foreign films were translated and censored according to the ideological and cultural filters of fascist Italy. The analysis reveals how the source texts were accommodated to suit the perceived needs of the receiving system and illustrates how the ambiguous subjects portrayed in the original films were removed and adjusted with the use of less connoted terms and with more general or neutral rewritings. As a result, unwelcome places, references and behaviours represented in the foreign texts become more acceptable and familiar in the Italian translations.

### 3. Conclusions

In its ideological attempt to *fascistize* the Italians on a national level, it was necessary for the Duce to keep an eye on every aspect of the cinematic medium, from the pre-production of a film to its public exhibition in domestic theatres. In the case of foreign productions, the control was exercised on importation and during the post-production phase of translation and dubbing. Restrictions on imports were common during the thirties in order to support the national industry, but they failed to satisfy the market needs and the public, who preferred foreign films, especially the ones from Hollywood, to the fascist-aligned productions. At the same time, the certification system inherited by the previous liberal governments was gradually hardened.

With the advent of sound, a more or less invisible control could be exercised on foreign films during their translation and dubbing. The documents studied at the archive reveal that even before the talkies, and at least until the late 1930s, the treatment of foreign audiovisual texts raised problematic questions both for the translators and for the censors, who were aware of the political and cultural role played by film translation in determining the message of the productions that would be screened around the country. In this sense, the practice of self-censorship during the dictatorship is a matter that deserves to be explored. Further research is also necessary in order to retrieve film scripts and videos that would provide more insights into the manipulation of film dialogues during Fascism. This would expand the results of the investigation presented here and quantify chronologically and numerically the impact that the censorial operation had in the translation and dubbing into Italian of foreign films.

This preliminary study has tried to illustrate the various levels of manipulation and translation strategies that were performed to neutralise cultural references carried by foreign dialogues and deemed improper by the censors. During the fascist period, the Italian translations of foreign films were scrutinised by the censors in order to ensure their acceptability in terms of language standards and contents. The fascist policies on dubbing made sure that foreign works which were likely to contain susceptible themes underwent a process of neutralisation through the dubbing operation.

Moral and political issues seem to be the main areas that triggered the censors' intervention. They censored dissenting opinions and negative representations of Italy, of its political allies, and of religious and sexual matters amongst others. The modifications to the scripts were performed in an attempt to minimise the strangeness of the texts and to convey the government's ideals through cuts and translation strategies such as generalisation and specification.

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## NOTES

1. For detailed information on the evolution of the film regulation system in Italy up to the present day, see *Italia Taglia – La revisione cinematografica in Italia* (visited on 7 May 2012, <[http://www.italiataglia.it/la\\_revisione](http://www.italiataglia.it/la_revisione)>); on censorship during Fascism see *Italia Taglia – Cinema sonoro e fascismo* (visited on 7 May 2012, <[http://www.italiataglia.it/cinema\\_sonoro\\_e\\_fascismo](http://www.italiataglia.it/cinema_sonoro_e_fascismo)>); on visual censorship in Italian cinema, see Argenterio (1974; 1979).
2. Published in *Gazzetta Ufficiale* on 9 July 1914, No. 162.
3. “[...] spettacoli offensivi della morale, del buon costume, della pubblica decenza e dei privati cittadini; spettacoli contrari alla reputazione e al decoro nazionale o all’ordine pubblico, ovvero che possano turbare i buoni rapporti internazionali; spettacoli offensivi del decoro e del prestigio delle istituzioni e autorità pubbliche, dei funzionari e degli agenti della forza pubblica; scene truci, ripugnanti o di crudeltà, anche se a danno di animali; di delitti o di suicidi impressionanti e in generale azioni perverse o fatti che possano essere scuola o incentivo al delitto, ovvero turbare gli animi o eccitare al male.” Article 1, R.D. No. 532.
4. MINISTERO PER I BENI E LE ATTIVITÀ CULTURALI (©2008) *Italia Taglia – Progetto di ricerca sulla censura cinematografica in Italia*. Visited on 7 May 2012, <<http://www.italiataglia.it>>. The files cited in the examples 1 to 15 are from the *Italia Taglia* database.
5. For a discussion concerning the lexical substitution of foreign words and the role of the *Accademia d’Italia* during Fascism, see also Raffaelli (2006).
6. *La bande à Bouboule* (1931): Directed by Léon MATHOT. France.  
*Beato fra le donne* (1932): Italian version of *La bande à Bouboule* (1931).
7. For the complete text of the Hays Code and the MPAA rating system, see *The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930* (visited on 7 May 2012, <<http://www.artsreformation.com/a001/hays-code.html>>) and *The Motion Picture Association of America* (visited on 7 May 2012, <<http://www.mpa.org>>), respectively.
8. *Men in Her Life* (1931): Directed by William BEAUDINE. USA.  
*Gli uomini nella mia vita* (1932): Italian version of *Men in Her Life* (1931).
9. *The Adventures of Marco Polo* (1938): Directed by Archie MAYO. USA.  
*Uno scozzese alla corte del Gran Khan* (1939): Italian version of *The Adventures of Marco Polo* (1938).
10. *Little Caesar* (1931): Directed by Mervyn LEROY. USA.  
*Piccolo Cesare* (1963): Italian version of *Little Caesar* (1931).
11. *Cyclone Cavalier* (1925): Directed by Al ROGELL. USA.  
*Diavolo e il suo maestro* (1928): Italian version of *Cyclone Cavalier* (1925).
12. *L’Homme à l’oreille cassée* (1934): Directed by Robert BOUDRIOZ. France.  
*L’uomo da l’orecchio mozzato* (1937): Italian version of *L’Homme à l’oreille cassée* (1934).
13. *Viva Villa!* (1934): Directed by Jack CONWAY, Howard HAWKS and William A. WELLMAN. USA.  
*Viva Villa!* (1934): Italian version of *Viva Villa!* (1934).
14. *Madame du Barry* (1919): Directed by Ernst LUBITSCH. USA.  
*Madama du Barry* (1932): Italian version of *Madame du Barry* (1919).
15. *Little Friend* (1934): Directed by Berthold VIERTEL. United Kingdom.  
*Raffiche* (1935): Italian version of *Little Friend* (1934).
16. CHRISTIE, Agatha (1939): *The Ten Little Niggers*. London: Collins Crime Club.
17. The film was produced in the USA by Fox.
18. *Die selige Excellenz* (1927): Directed by Wilhelm THIELE. Germany.  
*Paese degli scandali* (1927): Italian version of *Die selige Excellenz* (1927).
19. *In Old Kentucky* (1927): Directed by John M. STAHL. USA.  
*Ritorno alla vita* (1928): Italian version of *In Old Kentucky* (1927).
20. *Im Geheimdienst* (1931): Directed by Gustav UCICKY. Germany.  
*Spionaggio eroico* (1931): Italian version of *Im Geheimdienst* (1931).
21. *La Belle Equipe* (1936): Directed by Julien DUVIVIER. France.  
*La bella brigata* (1937): Italian version of *La Belle Equipe* (1936).
22. *Nu comme un ver* (1933): Directed by Léon MATHOT. France.  
*Nudo come Adamo* (1934): Italian version of *Nu comme un ver* (1933).
23. *Der Fluch der Vererbung* (1927): Directed by Adolf TROTZ. Germany.  
*Ereditarietà* (1930): Italian version of *Der Fluch der Vererbung* (1927).
24. *Captured!* (1933): Directed by Roy DEL RUTH. USA.  
*Catturato* (1934): Italian version of *Captured!* (1933).

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