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“We Work Hard, We Play Hard!”

Fictional Gayspeak in the Italian Dubbing of *The Simpsons*: A Queer Audiovisual Translation Study

Abstract

Despite being an animated sitcom, The Simpsons is a satire of contemporary American society and culture. This article intends to apply a queer perspective to Audiovisual Translation Studies, in line with what Flotow (2019) defined the third approach to gender-focused audiovisual translation, that is, the investigation of gay and queer source texts and their treatment in the target text. This study deals with the process of sexualisation of fictional gay men through fictional gayspeak. The analysis focuses on excerpts where the Italian dubbing departs from the original, and the strategies that have been used to reproduce gayspeak into Italian. The investigation rests on the idea that translation is a gender-constructing activity implying the queering of the target text, which is a process that varies from language to language.

Keywords: *English linguistics, Queer Audiovisual Translation Studies, gayspeak, The Simpsons, dubbing*

1. Introduction

The Simpsons is an American animated sitcom created by Matt Groening for the Fox Broadcasting Company. Since its first episode in 1989, the series has become a part of American and global culture, to the point that many expressions coined in the sitcom have been included in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (e.g. D’oh!; Meh). Despite being an animated series, it has several levels of interpretation, and can be seen as a satire of the American traditional nuclear-family sitcoms of the 1950s and 1960s, and of the state of contemporary American society and culture (Booker 2006, 47-68). Special attention is paid to the potential dangers of sexism, racism, homophobia, xenophobia, and religious fundamentalism (Henry 2012, 7). By satirising various minorities in American culture, *The Simpsons* aims at raising awareness about serious social issues, and at potentially effecting change. Satirical representations of the minorities in *The Simpsons*, thus, are not at their expense but in their support.

Research on the adaptation of the series has been carried out from multiple perspectives. Most studies investigating the adaptation of the sitcom so far have dealt with the creative solutions adopted to render certain characters’ non-standard language, which, results show, is mainly done through an extremely domesticating translation approach (Ferrari, 2009; Fusari, 2007; Monello, 2017). The Italian dubbed version of the sitcom—*I Simpson*—first appeared on *Canale 5* in 1991 and then moved to *Italia 1* from 1998 onwards. Ludovica Bonanome is the executive producer of the Italian version, whereas Tonino Accolla (S1-S23) and Cecilia Gonnelli (S24-today) have been the main dubbing directors.

This article, however, approaches the audiovisual translation of the sitcom from a queer perspective, focusing on the Italian translation of the linguistic features indexing characters’ gayness. Contrary to what the layperson might expect, *The Simpsons* makes abundant allusions to homosexuality, and the significant number of gay characters—both secondary and primary—is indicative of its commitment to this topic.

2. Queer AVT Studies

This article intends to approach Audiovisual Translation (AVT) Studies from a queer perspective. Flotow (2019, 296-312) declares that “the application of gender-focused theories to AVT Studies has been developing only since the early 2000s.” Flotow lists three main approaches to issues related to gender in audiovisual products: the analysis of feminist materials in Anglo-American audiovisuals and their translation into Romance languages; the study of the differences between subtitled and dubbed versions of Anglo-American source texts; the investigation of source texts containing gay and queer language and contents, and their treatment in translation. This paper follows the third approach (exemplified by the works of Chagnon, 2014; De Marco, 2009-2016; Lewis, 2010; Ranzato, 2012-2015; Villanueva, 2015), where AVT Studies and Queer Studies are at each other’s service. Ranzato (2012, 371) observes that “the field of audiovisuals portrays plenty of speech communities suitable to the study of researchers; [...] one of the most interesting idiolects spoken by a community is the so-called gayspeak, the modes and ways of homosexual communication.” Bauer states that “translation serves as a framework for analysing how sexuality travelled across linguistic boundaries, and the politics of this process” (2015, 1-14). He adds that “translation—understood in the broadest sense as the dynamic process by which ideas are produced and transmitted—offers compelling new insights into how sexual ideas were formed in different contexts via a complex process of cultural negotiation.” Therefore, translation is—among other things—a gender-constructing activity, in line with the performative nature of gender, which is a cultural construction

originating from repeated behaviours, gestures, linguistic features, clothes, and so on (Butler 2006, 45). Using Butler’s words, “gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes; [...] what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylisation of the body” (Butler 2006, 9). Consequently, each culture constructs gender in its own way and with its own means. Focusing on language and the Italian translation of gayspeak, which are the objects of this study, Ranzato (2015, 202) acknowledges that “the relative poverty of the Italian gay lexicon as compared to the richness of the corresponding English terminology is a fact.” She explains that this is because “the Italian culture has opened up to homosexual themes much more slowly than the Anglo-Saxon world” (Ranzato 2015, 202), where the first publications on gayspeak date back as early as 1941, with Legman’s glossary of homosexual male slang, *The Language of Homosexuality: An American Glossary*. She adds that “one of the first consequences of this state of affairs is that the language of homosexuals has long remained in Italy the language of a ghetto, and still today the relatively poor lexicon available is an objective obstacle even for the most unprejudiced translator” (Ranzato 2015, 202). Moreover, Harvey (2004, 295) declares that gayspeak “is regularly attested in fictional representations of homosexual men’s speech in [...] English-language texts from the 1940s.” He highlights that “when translating such fiction, translators need merely to be aware of the comparable resources of camp in source and target language cultures” (2004, 295). Flotow (2000, 16) adds that sexuality is “a field that is notoriously difficult to translate for reasons of cultural and generational differences.” As a matter of fact, if Anglophone societies have developed a gay sociolect, Italian gayspeak is not as established as its English counterpart. Therefore, Italian translators have to deal with the lack of a comparable sociolect and find creative solutions to convey the gay features of the source text. In other words, translators embark on a process of sexualisation of the translation to make queer identity and characters visible in the target text.

3. Fictional gayspeak

The linguistic variety analysed in this article is the fictional representation of gayspeak used to characterise fictional gay men. Audiovisual speech is non-spontaneous and pre-fabricated: it is inauthentic orality, a mere imitation of spontaneous spoken language (Pavesi 2015, 7). Pavesi adds that dubbing is the translation modality that

most closely reproduces the goals and nature of the original dialogue, replacing the soundtrack of an audiovisual product in the source language with a soundtrack in the target

language, with the aim of reproducing a semiotic whole acceptable to the new, receiving audiences. (Pavesi 2015, 8)

Ranzato (2012, 371) states that “fictional homosexuals and their fictional language [...] are more often than not stereotyped.” According to Gross (1991, 26-27), the use of stereotypes is a common practice in the process of media characterisation, since they are meant to be easily recognisable and understood by the audience. Dyer (1999) adds that stereotypes “make visible the invisible, so that there is no danger of it creeping up on us unawares; and make fast, firm and separate what is in reality fluid and much closer to the norm than the dominant value system cares to admit.” Stereotyping implies exaggerating the differences between the two poles of a binary system, and reducing the behaviour, speech and other characteristics of all the members of the less powerful side of the binary system to a mere few traits. It occurs where there are significant inequalities of power, and “identities which are problematic in some way tend to be the ones that become focused on” (Baker 2008, 13). Studies in the field of sociolinguistics have revealed that media play an important role in reinforcing linguistic stereotypes (Lippi-Green, 2012), which are “uninformed and frequently culturally-biased overgeneralisations about subgroups that may or may not be based on a small degree of truth” (Swann et al. 2004, 298).

Gross (1991) analyses the stereotypical features that are generally attached to gay men, that is lisping speech, limp-wristedness, and the effeminate sashay. Orrù (2014, 76; my translation) maintains that gestures are fundamental in determining one’s sexuality; hands tend to twirl circularly while speaking, cross at chest level, or be suspended in mid-air, the palms upwards.¹ Crystal (1975), on the other hand, is of the opinion that the “effeminate” quality of gayspeak is mainly to be found at the level of prosody, in the suprasegmental features of simpering voice, the use of a wider pitch-range, glissando effects between stressed syllables, a more frequent use of complex tones (e.g. the fall-rise and the rise-fall), the use of breathiness and huskiness in the voice, and switching to a higher (falsetto) register from time to time. Zwicky (1997) adds subjective stance, irony, sarcasm, resistance, subversiveness, meta-commentary, embeddedness, discursiveness, open aggression, seductiveness, reversal and inversion. Many of these characteristics are shared with what Lakoff (1975) calls women’s speech. These features may or may not occur in real-life gayspeak; nevertheless, in fictional gayspeak, at least some of

¹ “Le mani spesso volteggiano incessantemente [...] con movimenti circolari, oppure si incrociano all’altezza del petto o rimangono sospese a mezz’aria con il palmo rivolto verso l’alto” (Orrù 2014, 76).

them, especially features that are commonly attached to gay men (e.g. intonation, voice-pitch, elongation of vowels), are used to index characters’ homosexuality.

4. Data and methodology

This study is based on a corpus of five episodes, which have been selected for their significant contribution to the representation of gay characters in the Italian dubbing:

- *Homer’s Phobia* (S8E15)
- *Three Gays of the Condo* (S14E17)
- *E Pluribus Wiggum* (S19E10)
- *Flaming Moe* (S22E11)
- *Working Mum* (S30E7)

The analysis will focus mainly on four characters:

- Waylon Smithers, Mr Burns’ devoted assistant and stereotype of a closeted gay man. He is in —unreciprocated— love with his boss
- John, the owner of Cockamamie’s Collectibles Shop, an antiques shop
- Julio, a professional photographer and hairdresser
- Queen Chanté, a drag queen, inspired by RuPaul Charles

Since the purpose of this article is not to investigate how fictional gay men are depicted in *The Simpsons*, but to explore the Italian translation of the linguistic features indexing gayness, the focus of attention will be exclusively on the translational choices that depart from the source text. Although an extensive analysis of the Italian dubbing of gay characters might be useful, it is out of the scope of this paper to provide an investigation of the Italian dialogues that are merely close translations of the original.

5. Analysis

5.1 *Waylon Smithers*

Waylon Smithers is a major character in the sitcom. He is Mr. Burns’ devoted assistant and is in—unreciprocated—love with him. Despite being the most recurrent gay character in the series, Smithers is not linguistically marked as gay in the English version, and he is always very discreet in his manners. As in the source text, the Italian dubbing does not characterise his speech as gay. Nevertheless, especially when an emotional style-shifting occurs, the Italian dubbing seems to be characterised by a more dynamic intonation and a nasal voice. The term

“style-shifting” refers to an alternation between styles of speech within a single language. Emotional style-shifting occurs when characters are surprised, upset or otherwise disturbed from their normal emotional state. Characters, thus, display their ‘real’ speech styles when they come under emotional pressure (Hodson 2014, 174-175). In *Three Gays of the Condo* (S14E17), after Homer has broken up with Marge, he plans to move out of home; while walking on the street, he sees an advertisement for an apartment in the Gay District of Springfield, where he meets Smithers. The latter bumps into Homer—who is not expected to be there—and is evidently surprised. An emotional style-shifting occurs with Smithers raising his pitch, nasalising his voice, stuttering and nervously giggling. However, except these prosodic features that differ from the source text, the target text is a close translation of the original. It is worth noticing that the title has been translated as *Due nuovi coinquilini per Homer*,² with the omission of the reference to homosexuality.

5.2 John

John is the gay owner of *Cockamamie's Collectibles Shop*, an antiques shop filled with various ‘camp’ items. He is the protagonist of *Homer's Phobia* (S8E15), the first episode to revolve entirely around gay themes; it received a positive critical response both for its humour and anti-homophobia message, and won four awards, including an Emmy Award and a GLAAD Media Award. In the episode, Homer dissociates himself from new family friend John after discovering that the latter is gay. Homer fears that John will have a negative influence on his family and Bart's heterosexuality.

John is characterised as friendly, charming and festive. He is interested in decorative objects, home design and dancing.

John: Don't you just love the graphics on this box? [...] It's camp!
Non è entusiasmante la grafica di questa scatola? [...] È kitsch!
 [Aren't the graphics on this box electrifying? [...] It's kitsch!]

When showing Homer a game box, he reveals his emotions using the verb “to love,” which seems to be quite an excessive manifestation when referred to an object. The expression of emotions is a typical characteristic of women's speech (Lakoff, 1975). The verb is translated with the adjective *entusiasmante* (trans.: electrifying), which recreates the exaggerated emotional response that John has towards the object. The effect is enhanced by the fact that in the dialogue

² *Two new roommates for Homer* (my translation).

Homer’s enthusiasm is dampened and he is rather annoyed by the useless products that John sells in his shop. As a matter of fact, Homer replies “how can you love a box [...]? You’re a grown-up man,” where John’s enthusiasm is judged as inappropriate and childish. John defines the objects as ‘camp,’ which is a common term belonging to gayspeak, defined as “to speak, act, or in any way attract attention, especially if noisily, flamboyantly, bizarrely, or in any other way calculated to announce, express, or burlesque one’s own homosexuality or that of any other person” (Legman 1941, 22). The Italian translation *kitsch* drops the reference to homosexuality, but is in line with the other meaning of camp, that is to say “something so outrageously artificial, affected, inappropriate, or out-of-date as to be considered amusing” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). The exaggerated show of emotions continues when John realises that Marge’s kitchen curtains are the same as the curtains he has in his bathroom.

John: Oh, I’ve got the exact same curtains. Didn’t you just die when you found these?
Oh, io ho le stesse identiche tendine. Non è impazzita quando le ha trovate?
 [Oh, I’ve got the exact same little curtains. Didn’t you go crazy when you found them?]

The verb “to die” used in the source text is translated as *impazzire* (trans.: to go crazy). They are both very strong verbs, arguably used in an excessive way. In addition to these, the term “curtains” is rendered with the diminutive form *tendine*. Orrù (2014, 76)—who studied the use of Italian homosexual language in 20th century Italian cinema—maintains that Italian gayspeak is based mainly on two morphological peculiarities, that is gender inversion and the use of suffixes like *-etto*, *-uccio*, *-ino*. Moreover, from a lexical perspective, Italian gayspeak is characterised by the use of “expressive terms,” such as *stupendo*, *divino*, *carino*, which perpetuate the stereotype according to which gay men are more prone to expressing their emotions, in a rather exaggerated way. It is this emotional outburst that originates the frequent use of interjections and changes in the pitch.

The use of diminutives can be found also in *Three Gays of the Condo* (S14E17), when Homer meets Waylon Smithers at the Gay District of Springfield, and a gay man asks Smithers who Homer is. Homer is called ‘bear,’ which is “a term used by gay men to describe a husky, large man with a lot of body hair” (Urban Dictionary). The Italian translation is the diminutive form *orsacchiotto* (trans.: little bear).

Gay man: Hey Waylon. Who’s the bear? Woof!
Ehi Waylon. Chi è l’orsacchiotto?
 [Hey Waylon. Who’s the little bear?]

De Lucia (2015) has compiled a dictionary of the Italian gayspeak where he defines the term *orso* (trans. bear) as a “hirsute and sturdy gay man” (my translation).³

5.3 *Julio*

Julio, who was originally from Costa Rica, is said to come from Cuba later in the sitcom. He once lived as a straight man and was married to a woman. He later came out as gay, and he and Grady became partners and moved in together. Julio is a professional photographer and a hairdresser at his shop *Hairy Shearers*. Working in the beauty industry is a common stereotype for gay men. He is also a drag queen, which reinforces the stereotype according to which gay men tend to work in show business, where they feel accepted and free to express their real nature (Orrù 2014, 76). In the source text he is characterised by the use of a strong lisping speech and a Hispanic accent. The former refers to a functional speech disorder that involves the inability to correctly pronounce one or more sibilant sounds, usually [s] or [z]. Interdental lisp occurs when the tongue protrudes between the front teeth and the sibilants are pronounced [θ]. The Italian dubbing in *E Pluribus Wiggum* (S19E10) does not reproduce the lisping effect, but provides Julio with a soft and slow-paced voice. Furthermore, Julio makes use of diminutives, such as *tesorucci* (trans.: darling), and *trenino* (trans.: little train).

Julio: This meeting of the Democratic Party will come to order, babies. So, if we nominate this Rulph Wiggums, we will be like an unstoppable choo-choo.
Sto per iniziare la riunione del Partito Democratico, tesorucci. Allora se nominano questo Rulph Winchester, saremo come un trenino inarrestabile.
 [The meeting of the Democratic Party is about to start, darling. So, if we nominate this Rulph Winchester, we will be like an unstoppable little train]

In *Working Mum* (S30E7), Julio helps Marge to throw a Tubberware party (a parody of Tupperware) at her home. Marge lacks the confidence to be a good seller and Julio helps her find it. Unlike the previous example (S19E10), Julio is now characterised with a much stronger Spanish accent, which is not only noticeable in his pronunciation, but also his lexicon. His lisping voice in English is emphasised, as well as the use of the voiced palato-alveolar sibilant affricate /dʒ/ instead of the palatal approximant /j/, as in “you” (/ˈdʒu:/ instead of /ˈju:/). It should be borne in mind that in Spanish the phoneme [ʎ] is pronounced as [dʒ] in many non-standard varieties, especially in Latin America. The inversion of expected rhetorical routines—which, according to Harvey (2000) is typical of gayspeak—occurs in “it’s gonna take me a while to plan.

³ “Orso: [...] uomo molto peloso e spesso di corporatura robusta” (De Lucia, 2015).

How about tonight?”. The Italian dubbing, unlike in the previous episode, keeps the lisping quality of Julio’s voice, especially in the words that are mispronounced or are Spanish calques, like *tristesza* and *consiedermi*. It is worth saying that in Italian the stereotypical Spanish accent is characterised by a mispronunciation of the sibilants. The Spanish accent in the target text seems to be emphasised when compared to the source text, as can be seen in the addition of the exclamation *oh Dios mío*, words like *tiempo*, the preposition *de* and degemination—loss of double consonant—in *dime*.

Julio: Ok Marge, you’re like a black hole of sadness and split ends. What is wrong with you? [...] Just like a doormat, the key is underneath. I will throw a Tubberware party for you. But it’s gonna take me a while to plan. How about tonight?
Suvvia Marge, sei un buco nero de tristesa y doppie punte. Dime che cosa te turba! [...] Uh, Dios mío, è proprio come con lo zerbino, la chiave se trova sotto. Facciamo così, lo organizzerò io un Tubberware party per te, ma devi consiedermi un po’ de tiempo. Che ne dici di stasera?
 [Come on Marge, you’re like a black hole of sadness and split ends. Tell me what troubles you! [...] Oh my God, it’s just like the doormat, the key is underneath. I’ll tell you what, I will throw a Tubberware party for you, but you have to give me the time to plan it. How about tonight?]

A further linguistic feature shown by Julio in *Working Mum* is ludicrism through word-play. According to Harvey (2000, 247), ludicrism is one of the typical characteristics of camp talk, and is determined by a playful attitude to language form and meaning.

The ludicrist is a speaker who not only delights in intentionally exploiting the proliferating possibilities of the signifier/signified relationship, but also opens himself or herself [...] to the processes of instability, indeterminacy and multiplication (of senses and sounds) that are inherent in language.

Julio: Can’t, can’t! Marge, I never want to hear you use the C-A-Next-Tuesday word again.
Non puoi, non puoi! Marge, ahora basta! Puoi se vuoi e getti i “non” nei dimenticatoi.
 [You can’t, you can’t! Marge, enough! You can if you want and consign the “not” to oblivion.]

Julio is parroting Marge who repeats “I can’t do this, I can’t do this” while organising the Tubberware party. The “multiplication of senses” occurs in the modal verb “can’t,” which is playfully used as the acronym of “see you next Tuesday,” conveying the sense of procrastination. In the Italian dubbing Julio’s Spanish accent is once again emphasised with the use of the expression *ahora basta*, whereas the word-play based on the modal verb “can’t”—which is not

literally translatable into Italian—is reproduced with the rhyming aphorism, *puoi se vuoi e getti i “non” nei dimenticatoii*.

Marge turns out to be a successful seller thanks to Julio’s suggestions and style tips. Nevertheless, during the Tubberware party, Marge is mistaken for a drag queen since she naively uses several allusions to her potential masculine nature (e.g. “that’s not the only surprise I’ve got tucked away”). Julio is a drag queen himself, and his drag name is Penelope Cruising. The verb “to cruise” is typical of gayspeak and means “to walk or drive in an automobile through the streets [...] looking for a customer, or a companion for homosexual intercourse” (Legman 1941, 23). In the target text it is translated as *Pene-lo-piglio in Cruise*,⁴ which is both a word-play and double entendre, both belonging to ludicrism. Double-entendre is characterised by the co-presence of two meanings, one of which must be sexual. In other words, through the double entendre the speaker can intentionally say something sexually explicit while appearing to say something unremarkable (Harvey, 2000). Julio decides to introduce Marge to Springfield’s drag scene, which is led by Queen Chanté, *The Simpsons’* version of the most popular drag queen in the world, RuPaul Charles.

Julio: Marge, this is Queen Chanté, Barbara Streisman, the Mysterious Waylon and Fiona Adams Apple.
Marge, ti presento Queen Chanté, Barbara Streismaschio, la Misteriosa Waylon e Fiona Pomo D’Adamo.
 [Marge, this is Queen Chanté, Barbara Streismale, the Mysterious Waylon and Fiona Adam’s Apple.]

The gay icon Barbara Streisand is turned into Barbara StreisMan in line with Harvey’s ludicrism. In the target text, the same word-play is conveyed with Barbara StreisMaschio, where “man” is translated as *maschio* to keep the bilabial nasal sound /m/. In addition to this, “the Mysterious Waylon,” which is genderless in the source text, is marked as female in the target text, *la Misteriosa Waylon*. Harvey states that in camp talk “the clearest surface evidence of inversion is provided by the reversal of gendered proper names and the reversal of grammatical gender markers” (2000, 245).

⁴ To compensate for the lack of a specific Italian verb for “Cruising,” a word-play is created with the name Penelope; *Pene-* in Italian means “penis,” and *-lope* has been rendered as *-lo-piglio* (I take it, my translation). Moreover, “Cruise” has been added the preposition *in* to create the word-play “in Cruise,” which alludes to *in culo* (in the ass, my translation).

5.4 Queen Chanté

In the source text, Queen Chanté is voiced by RuPaul Charles herself. Since she is a drag queen, her language is characterised by typical drag expressions, very popular thanks to the Netflix series *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, led by RuPaul Charles.

Queen Chanté: Hello squirrel friend! [...] Honey, I spend half my day getting up and the other half getting down. OKURRR?
 Ciao, scoiattolina! [...] *Trascorro metà giornata ad alzarmi e l'altra metà a darci dentro. MI CI FICCO!*
 [Hello, little female squirrel! [...] I spend half my day getting up and the other half getting stuck in, I dive in!]

“Squirrel friend” is an expression that refers to drag queens, who are men that hide their “nuts”—genitalia—typically with duct tape, so that they are not visible. Translators have to work around the lack of an established drag lingo in Italian, and the expression “squirrel friend” is rendered as “scoiattolina,” which is marked as female in light of Harvey’s gender inversion, and makes use of the diminutive *-ina*, a typical feature of Italian gayspeak. Another drag term is the interjection “OKURRR?,” which was invented by Laganja Estranja, one of the contestants in *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, and it is a non-standard and exaggerated way of pronouncing “okay.” The interjection has become so popular that other contestants in the same and following seasons have continued adopting it. Since there is no equivalent expression in Italian, the translators have opted for a double entendre, which refers to the preceding verb “to get down,” which means “to descend” and “to relax and take part in social activity, play music, dance, etc.” (Collins Cobuild), but also “to have sex” (Urban Dictionary). The double entendre originates from the fact that Marge is surprised by Queen Chanté’s tallness, who replies “I spend half my day getting up and the other half getting down;” in this case, the first meaning of “to get down” is obviously “to descend,” but since drag language is subversive and irreverent, Queen Chanté is certainly referring to the other meanings, too. The target text compensates for the lack of drag terms by going further than the source text in terms of double entendre; as a matter of fact, “to get down” is rendered as *darci dentro*, which conveys the idea of making a big effort, as well as having a whale of a time. In addition to this, *darci dentro* has also a sexual connotation in Italian, which is emphasised by the following *mi ci ficco*, which replaces “OKURRR?” and refers to penetration. Double entendre is also used in the translation of “she’s a damn hero, is what she is, sis! (*tongue pop*),” which is a way to compensate for the lack of references to the paraverbal phenomenon known as *tongue pop*, which is typical of African-American culture and was popularised by Alyssa Edwards in *RuPaul’s Drag Race*. The translators add a reference to

male genitalia with the double entendre *bella tosta sopra e sotto*, where the adjective *tosta* (trans.: tough, hard) refers both to Marge’s personality and penis.

5.5 Other characters

In *Homer’s Phobia* (S8E15) Homer is worried about Bart’s potential homosexuality, and takes his son to a steel mill where he can learn what “real, all-American Joes do.” They soon realise that all the workers in the mill are gay. They are characterised as people that “work hard and play hard” and dance during the break. In the source text, two workers show the typical gay male lisping speech, which is omitted in the target text. In one case, the elimination is compensated for with the use of a wider pitch-range, whereas in the other with the addition of a Spanish double entendre (hot stuff coming through: *Largo, largo. Roba caliente*). Lisping speech is also used to characterise the bouncer at a gay club in *Flaming Moe* (S22E11), whose linguistic features indexing gayness are dropped in the target text. Another character showing lisping speech, but only in the source text, is Dewey Largo, Lisa’s music teacher, one of the most recurring gay characters in the sitcom.

6. Conclusions

Many other characters in the sitcom—especially the secondary ones—show the typical linguistic features of gayspeak as listed and analysed in the previous sections. Nevertheless, since this study deals merely with the dialogues where the target text departs from the source text in the sexualisation of fictional gay men, dialogues and characters that have been translated literally have not been mentioned. This article has sought to apply a queer perspective to AVT Studies, in line with Flotow’s (2019) third approach, that is the investigation of gay and queer source texts and their treatment in translation. The investigation has had to deal with stereotyping as a consequence of the fictional nature of the dialogues and the individuals that have been analysed. People belonging to cultural minorities, when represented in fiction, tend to be reduced to a mere few traits so as to be easily recognisable by the reader/audience. This process results in the use of stereotypes, which are reinforced in the media (Lippi-Green, 2012). Crystal (1975), Gross (1991), Orrù (2014) and Zwicky (1997) have analysed the linguistic features that have been historically attached to gay men. Studying how a translation conveys stereotypical, fictional gayspeak implies investigating the process of sexualisation of the target text. As a matter of fact, each culture and language have different linguistic items at their disposal to mark homosexuality. This study has shown that sexualising the target text means constructing the characters’ gender, which, in line with Butler, is a cultural phenomenon rather than a

biological feature of the body. The sexualisation of characters is investigated from linguistic and paralinguistic perspectives, comparing the passages where the Italian dubbing shows slight modifications in indexing homosexuality.

As for vocabulary, Ranzato (2015, 202) has acknowledged the “relative poverty of the Italian gay lexicon,” which is due to cultural reasons that are out of the scope of this study. This is especially evident in the translation of drag lingo—drag queens, such as Queen Chanté, have been included in this study since they are queer men—where expressions belonging to a well-established Anglophone drag culture (e.g. squirrel friend; okurrr?; *tongue pop*) lack an equivalent form in the Italian target culture. They have been rendered with the use of gender inversion and ludicrism—which are two linguistic characteristics that Harvey (2000) has listed in his study of camp talk—as well as diminutives, which are typical of Italian gayspeak (Orrù, 2014). Double entendre—one of the strategies of ludicrism—is especially common in the target text’s drag lingo. Double entendre, word-play, gender inversion and diminutives are also used to sexualise other gay characters in the target text. Diminutives are typical of women’s language, just like the manifestation of emotions (Lakoff, 1975). John is linguistically characterised by the use of inappropriately exaggerated verbs and adjectives of emotion.

At the level of prosody, Waylon Smithers tends to change his voice-pitch when an emotional style-shifting occurs. He is one of the main characters in *The Simpsons*; he is gay, but his sexuality is merely hinted at from a linguistic perspective. Gay characters generally show a wider pitch-range and elongation of vowels, both in the source text and in the target text.

Lisping speech is particularly evident in Julio, who is of Latin American origins. This gay feature is emphasised in the latest seasons, both in the source text and the target text; however, in the Italian dubbing it is also associated with Julio’s Spanish accent.

To sum up, with the exception of the Italian dialogues which are close translations of the source text, the lexical void that Italian translators have to face when dealing with gayspeak is filled by the use of word-play, double entendre, gender inversion and diminutives. In addition to this, lisping speech tends to be emphasised in the latest seasons as compared with the older ones.

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