

Translating Humour (And More) For Dubbing and Subtitling: The Case of "Young Frankenstein"

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Abstract

This paper investigates translation for dubbing and subtitling when dealing with humour and other language- or culture-specific elements, which may hinder the ultimate purpose of producing the same intended effect of the original film among the target-language audience. Whether this aim is achieved or not will often depend on the strategies adopted by the translator, who may lean towards source-oriented solutions or target-oriented ones. As a case study, Young Frankenstein by Mel Brooks (1974) has been selected due to the numerous and different types of challenges involved in the audiovisual translation of this film. After an introduction presenting the content and the research question of this paper, its theoretical core will be illustrated, followed by a section that will briefly outline the film. A comparative analysis will come next, focusing on the original screenplay, the Italian dubbing and the Italian subtitling, so as to examine the most problematic cases and their translation. The results will then be discussed by distinguishing between the occurrences of literal translation and those of adaptation. Finally, the conclusions will reveal the extent to which the target-language dubbing and subtitling can be considered as source-oriented or target-oriented, if not as a combination of both approaches.

1. INTRODUCTION

As Galassi (2000) states, the task of adapting film dialogues into another language entails the ability to provide the target-language (TL) audience with the same information and emotions as those conveyed by the source text (ST). The complexity of this task increases when humour is involved, as people from different countries may not be amused by the same factors. Indeed, while smiling and laughing are two universal human responses to humour, what causes them is often language- and culture-bound (Chiaro, 2010), which further complicates the export of those elements that are meant to trigger these two reactions. For example, as Delabastita (1994, p. 223) explains, "the target language more often than not fails to produce a counterpart" for wordplay in the source language (SL). Moreover, films contain other components that are typical of how people express themselves, such as idioms, swear words and extralinguistic references, which might not have an equivalent in the TL. From a technical point of view, there are other hurdles to tackle. As far as dubbing is concerned, once the dialogues are translated, they must be adapted to the actors' lip movements and synchronised with the images. As for subtitling, the process of transposing the SL screenplay into a TL must comply with certain length and time constraints.

In order for humour and other language- or culture-specific features to successfully cross the borders of a foreign country, every single case needs to be scrutinised, so as to evaluate all the available options

and select the most effective one. The final product is often the result of either a source-oriented approach or a target-oriented one. Therefore, it is interesting to analyse how film dialogues are rendered into another language, as this can reveal whether the choices made by the translator stem from the former or the latter tendency, or perhaps from both.

With the purpose of discovering the extent to which these assertions are valid (or not), we shall examine a remarkably challenging film, i.e. *Young Frankenstein* (1974) by Mel Brooks. Firstly, we shall focus on the theories on which this paper rests. Secondly, the film in question will be shortly presented. Thirdly, the original English screenplay, the Italian dubbed version and the subtitled one will be compared, by inspecting different categories of humour, as well as other linguistic and cultural elements, and their translation. Finally, the findings of this investigation will be discussed, and the conclusions will determine whether the Italian dubbing and subtitling of *Young Frankenstein* are target-oriented or source-oriented, or both.

2. THE THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THIS STUDY

Research on dubbing from American and British English has revealed that solutions adopted in the target version tend to deviate from the TL rules and be unnatural or lacking in fluency (Heiss, 2000; Soria, 2000). Moreover, the way in which Italian dubbing is influenced by English continues to attract the attention of many scholars (Sileo, 2018; Minutella, 2021; Galiano, 2024). Other studies have underlined the integration of Anglophone syntactic structures and lexical items in subtitling, concluding that this practice is generally source-oriented (Pedersen, 2011) – a tendency that has also emerged from more recent publications addressing style (Napoli, 2023)¹ and cultural references (Alfaify, 2023). Both phenomena might be due to technical aspects, such as the synchronisation of spoken words (in dubbing) and written words (in subtitling) with images, as well as to the arduousness of making the SL humour and other linguistic and cultural peculiarities successfully reach the TL audience.

To investigate what may happen when a film is transposed into another language and the aforesaid obstacles must be dealt with, we can borrow Toury's (2012) theories on adequacy and acceptability. When translators lean towards the former, the process will be characterised by "attempts to have the ensuing text reflect the source text along with the norms embodied in it, and through them features of SL itself, or of a particular tradition within it, occasionally even of the source culture at large" (Toury, 2012, p. 79). If they opt for the latter instead, "target norms will be triggered and set into motion, thus relegating the source text and its unique web of relations based on SL features to a secondary position as a source of constraints" (Toury, 2012, p. 79-80). The first path leads to a source-oriented approach, which preserves the source system but may create some incompatibilities with what is considered as normal in the target culture. The second one implies a target-oriented translation act, which aims at naturalness in the TL, so that, for example, a translated screenplay will appear as if it were the original and the translator's intervention will not be perceived (Bertazzoli, 2015).

It is difficult to delineate the contexts in which one of the two strategies is more appropriate than the other. Perhaps, as Eco (1995) argues, it is not possible to formulate a rule, as a source-oriented approach and a target-oriented one should be applied flexibly, depending on the problems posed by the text to be translated. On the other hand, alternating between different methods can have some negative consequences, such as a loss. Cavaliere (2008, p. 76) defines this in relation to humour as "a large residue of verbal and referential humour associated with the linguistic structures or socio-cultural background of SL which does not manage to 'cross the border'", but it could apply to other ST components too. For this reason, Eco (2003) suggests establishing some compromises with the ST, in order to reduce the aforesaid loss and try to compensate for it, by making some resolute decisions and

¹ To be precise, based on the outcome of his analysis, and drawing upon Toury's terminology (2012), Napoli (2023, p. 310) writes that the Italian subtitles resulted as being adequate rather than acceptable, while the opposite was true for the Italian dubbed version.

"betting" on their validity.

3. THE FILM: YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN

Young Frankenstein is a parody of the 1930s and 1940s films that revolve around the story of a scientist with a strong interest in the reanimation of corpses, drawing upon the novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) by Mary Shelley. It was released in the United States in 1974 and directed by Mel Brooks, who shot it in black and white to follow the tradition of the classic horror genre. He wrote the screenplay with Gene Wilder, who also plays the leading role of Frederick (Freddy) Frankenstein.

The Italian version² was edited by Roberto De Leonardis, although it was reworked by the dubbing director, Mario Maldesi.³ His goal was not to lose any of the funny elements of the original film, so as to give Italian viewers a product that would be as entertaining as the source one. As for the subtitles, they were created by Adriana Tortoriello.

4. ANALYSIS OF THE ITALIAN DUBBING AND SUBTITLING

This section will examine all those instances which are interesting from a translational point of view, whether for linguistic reasons or for cultural ones. They will be divided into categories and each case will be observed by reporting the original version in the first column, the dubbed version in the second one and the subtitled version in the third one, as illustrated in Table 1 for reference. Where the terms "literal translation" and "adaptation" are used, the former will be intended as "a close, direct translation of words and structures, staying as faithful as possible to the SL" in a way that makes sense and sounds natural in the TL (Štefčík, 2025, p. 12).⁴ The latter will stand for "a process where elements of the ST are modified or adjusted to better suit the cultural or contextual norms of the TL audience" (Štefčík, 2025, p. 12).

4.1 Homonymy

The screenplay of *Young Frankenstein* contains several puns that rely on homonymy, which concerns those words that are "formally completely identical, both phonetically and orthographically" (Schröter, 2005, p. 164), but do not have the same meaning.

The first example leverages the term "knockers", in a scene where Freddy is carrying Inga in his arms, while also looking at the two big doorknockers of the castle. The girl misunderstands him and thinks that he is referring to her breast.

Original	Dubbing	Subtitling
Freddy: What knockers! Inga: Oh, thank you, Doctor.	Freddy: Mai visti due così! Inga: Oh, grazie, dottore!	Freddy: Alla faccia! Inga: Grazie, dottore.

Table 1.

Italian does not have a word that conveys both the meanings expressed in English. Therefore, the only solution consisted in ignoring this term and resorting to a structure that could express the astonishment of the Doctor as if he were alluding both to the large metal parts of the door and to Inga's bosom. Despite the linguistic obstacle, the sentence *Mai visti due così!* ("Never seen two like these!") makes the joke travel quite well. In the subtitles, a short expression of wonder is used, and it is thanks to Inga's answer that the ambiguity is preserved.

² The edition used for this paper is the *Frankenstein Junior - Italian Fans Edition DVD*, distributed by 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment in 2006.

³ Maldesi directed the dubbing of other famous films, such as *A Clockwork Orange*, *Barry Lyndon* and *Shining* by Stanley Kubrick, *Star Wars* by George Lucas and *Batman* by Tim Burton.

⁴ Cfr. "word-for-word translation" in Štefčík (2025, p. 12).

Another case of homonymy is connected to a pun made by Igor who has just had an intuition, which in English can be indicated with a word relating to what affects his back, namely "hunch".

Original	Dubbing	Subtitling
Igor: I heard the strangest music from the upstairs kitchen and just followed it down. Call it a hunch!	Ho sentito una stranissima musica da sopra, in cucina, e così l'ho seguita fin qua... Ho fatto un colpo gobbo!	Ho sentito una strana musica dalle cucine e l'ho seguita fin quaggiù. Diciamo che... l'ho sentito nella gobba.

Table 2.

If we translate Igor's body trait into the TL, we have *gobba*, but if we want to render the other meaning too, there is an idiom that is linked to the aforesaid Italian word, i.e. *fare un colpo gobbo* ("to make a smart move"). This option is the most appropriate one, as it allows the translator to ensure a fluent equivalent outcome in the target text (TT). In the subtitles, "hunch" is rendered with *gobba*, which however does not imply the other connotation that the English word has. Nonetheless, the solution, which back-translates as "I felt it in my hunch", is quite effective as it is in line with Igor's bizarre way of expressing himself.

Finally, we have a scene where Freddy asks Igor to help him take Elizabeth's two suitcases inside. The assistant misunderstands the Doctor's request owing to the term "bags", which, in addition to what Freddy means, is an offensive way to address a woman in its singular form.

Original	Dubbing	Subtitling
Freddy: Ayegor, will you give me a hand with the bags? Igor: Certainly, you take the blonde and I'll take the one with the turban. Freddy: [...] I'm talking about the luggage.	Freddy: Aigor, vuoi aiutarmi a portare queste due? Igor: Certo, lei porta la bionda e io questa qui col turbante. Freddy: [...] Parlavo delle due valigie.	Freddy: Aigor, mi dai una mano con queste? Igor: Certo, lei prende la bionda e io quella col turbante. Freddy: [...] Parlavo delle valigie.

Table 3.

In Italian, there are no words covering the semantic duplicity of "bags", but the adaptation can be deemed successful, as the question *Vuoi aiutarmi a portare queste due?* ("Do you want to help me carry these two?") features a feminine plural demonstrative pronoun and a numeral one, leading the audience to think that Freddy is talking about Elizabeth and Inga rather than the two suitcases. The same strategy is adopted in the subtitles ("Will you give me a hand with these?"), although the numeral pronoun *due* ("two") is missing, probably for reasons of length. Despite this, *queste* ("these") is enough to create a reference to both the luggage and the two women.

4.2 Ping-pong Punning

The jokes that we are about to examine could be considered as belonging to different types. Nevertheless, as a general category, we have chosen the expression "ping-pong punning", which is used by Chiaro (1992, p. 114) "to describe what happens when the participants of a conversation begin punning on every possible item in each other's speech which may contain the slightest ambiguity".

The first instance takes place in a scene where Igor is driving a carriage through a wood on the way home, whilst Freddy is in the rear with Inga. At some point, the woman hears a wolf howling and the puns start. She uses the term "werewolf", which creates a certain ambiguity with something like "where wolf". Since Freddy has not heard the howling, he repeats the same word as a question, which makes Igor think that he wants to know where the wolf is, hence his answer "There".

Original	Dubbing	Subtitling
Inga: Werewolf. Freddy: Werewolf? Igor: There. Freddy: What? Igor: There wolf. There castle.	Inga: Lupo ulula. Freddy: Lupo ululà? Igor: Là! Freddy: Cosa? Igor: Lupu ululà e castellu ululì!	Inga: Un lupo mannaro. Freddy: Mannaro? Igor: Là. Freddy: Cosa? Igor: Là il mannaro. Lì il maniero.

Table 4.

As we can see, the whole joke is built on homophony, which somehow had to be reproduced in Italian. On this note, Bollettieri Bosinelli (2002) tells us that once Malesi confessed that no solution could be found, until he had a brainwave and thought of the assonance between *ulula* ("howls") and *là* ("there"). Therefore, he adapted the sentence "There wolf. There castle" with *Lupu ululà e castellu ululì*, which is impossible to back-translate into English. What can be said is that the words *ululà* and *ululì* result from the combination of the third person singular form *ulula* ("howls") and two Italian ways of saying "there", namely *là* and *lì*. In order to enhance the comic effect, *lupo* ("wolf") and *castello* ("castle") are uttered by Igor with a different vowel at the end, i.e. *u*. As regards the subtitled version, the puns are recreated on a lexical level, thanks to the assonance between the terms *mannaro*, which is the Italian adjective that makes a normal wolf a werewolf, and *maniero* ("manor house"), although the "where/there" wordplay is lost.

The next comic situation is based on the well-known game called charades. To be more precise, while the monster is trying to strangle Freddy, the latter looks for help and starts gesticulating to make Igor and Inga understand that they should give the creature a sedative.

Original	Dubbing	Subtitling
Freddy: Quick, give him the... Igor: What? Give him the what? Three syllables. First syllable. Sounds like... Inga: Head. Sounds like head. Bed? Said? Igor and Inga: Said. Igor: Said. Inga: Said. Second syllable. Little word. This? That? The? Igor: A? Said a? Inga: Said a? Igor: Dirty word. He said a dirty word. Igor & Inga: Sounds like... Inga: To give? Give? Igor: Sedagive. Give him a sedagive. Inga: Oh, ...tive. ...tive. Sedative.	Freddy: Presto dategli il... Igor: Cosa? Dategli cosa? Cerchi di mimarlo, quattro sillabe, prima sillaba, suona come... Inga: Te? Suona come me? Te? Sé? Igor and Inga: Sé... Igor: Sé! Inga: Seconda sillaba, preposizione come di, con, su? Igor: Da! Se-da... Inga: Da...Se-da... Igor: Ha detto sedano, ha detto sedano. Come? Se-da-davo, date un sedadavo. Inga: Tivo! Sedativo!	Freddy: Presto. Dategli il... Igor: Cosa? Dategli cosa? Quattro sillabe. La prima. Assomiglia a... Inga: Io. Assomiglia a... io! Me! Me stesso! Se stesso... sé! Igor and Inga: Sé! Inga: Seconda sillaba. Parola breve. Là, qui, qua... da! Igor: Se-da... da sé. L'ha detto da sé. Inga: Assomiglia a... vivo. È vivo. Igor: Sé...da...vivo. Dategli un sé da vivo. Inga: Oh, tivo... tivo... sedativo.

Table 5.

When translating this sketch, the first problem to tackle is the different number of syllables which compose "sedative" and the Italian *sedativo*, i.e. three and four respectively. Furthermore, it is obvious that the process of making someone guess a word in English and the same act in a TL will differ from each other. For example, in the original screenplay we have "head", "bed", "said", whereas in the Italian dubbed version we hear *me* ("me"), *te* ("you"), *sé* ("oneself"). As for the second syllable, it includes the same vowel in both languages, so that we find *se-da* corresponding to the SL "said-a", with preposition *da* ("from") in the former and the indefinite article "a" in the latter. Moving to the third English syllable

"tive", which corresponds to the two syllables *tivo* in Italian, in the SL game it is associated with "give". In the TL, this is substituted with *davo* ("I gave"), which is the first person singular of the imperfect tense of *dare* ("give"). In the subtitles, what stands out the most is their reduced length compared to the English scripts, besides the word *vivo* ("alive") replacing the SL "give". Despite being shorter, they provide the audience with most of the information which is needed to recreate the funny side of the dialogue, cutting off the superfluous repetitions. This choice is probably due to the fact that, as the rhythm of the SL audio version is very quick and pressing, the viewer would not have enough time to read a more detailed transposition of the dialogue.

4.3 Sexual Innuendos

This section explores those dialogues characterised by a sort of sexual tension, which at the same time are in line with the general humorous tone of the film. We shall start with a scene where Inga is holding and kissing one of Freddy's hands to then press it on her breast, while saying "I could give you a little peace".

Original	Dubbing	Subtitling
Inga: Oh, Frederick, [...] if there was some way I could help you to relieve the tension. If there were just some way I could give you a little peace.	Oh, Frederick, [...] se io trovassi modo di consolare tutte tue sofferenze, se io potessi, io mi prenderei tutto tuo pene.	Oh, Frederick... [...] Se solo potessi aiutarti a... mitigare la tensione. Se solo potessi darti un po' di pace.

Table 6.

The TL dubbed version manages to be even more effective than the ST, as a pun built on homophony is introduced. In particular, it leverages the fact that, as Inga says, she would take all the sorrows that afflict the man. This option allows the use of *pene*, an Italian term that stands for both "sufferings" and "penis", so that the ambiguity is perfectly recreated. Inga's German accent and grammatical mistakes result in a sentence where the lack of agreement between *tutto tuo* (masculine singular standing for "all your") and *pene* (masculine singular meaning "penis" and feminine plural meaning "sufferings") further contributes to the successfulness of the wordplay. As regards the subtitles, they consist of a literal translation of the SL, which keeps the scene on a more neutral level.

In the next instance, the key element is "Elevate me", which the Doctor says with the purpose of asking Inga to raise the platform, as he explains later. Since they are as close to each other as two lovers about to kiss would be, the woman confuses that imperative with something physical that she should do to him.

Original	Dubbing	Subtitling
Freddy: This is the moment. Well, dear, are you ready? Inga: Yes, Doctor. Freddy: Elevate me. Inga: Now, right here? Freddy: Yes, yes, raise the platform. Inga: Oh, the platform, oh that, ja, yes.	Freddy: Questo è il momento. Bene, cara, è pronta? Inga: Sì, dottore. Freddy: Lo tiri su! Inga: Ora? Proprio qui? Freddy: Sì, sì, alzi il piano mobile. Inga: Oh! Il piano mobile! Oh, quello, sì, sì, ja.	Freddy: È il momento. Mia cara... sei pronta? Innalzami. Inga: Qui? Ora? Freddy: Sì, solleva la piattaforma. Inga: Oh, la piattaforma. Oh, quella. Ja... sì.

Table 7.

The Italian dubbing presents an adaption that creates a *double entendre*, i.e. "a common form of wordplay functioning particularly as sexual innuendos" (Mansfield, 2008, p. 37). Firstly, "platform" is translated with *piano mobile* ("moving surface"); secondly, "Elevate me" becomes *Lo tiri su!* ("Pull it up!"), where the masculine pronoun *lo* is justified because it is related to *piano mobile* and, at the same

time, can be deemed as an allusion to a specific part of Freddy's genitalia. In the subtitles, a literal translation is adopted, but, similarly to the ST, the misunderstanding is still plausible, thanks to the suprasegmental features of the two characters' speech and to the images.

4.4 Malapropisms

As regards this category of puns, it is worth providing some information on its etymology. As Chiaro (1992, p. 20) clarifies, "Sheridan's Mrs. Malaprop (*The Rivals*) is famous for her continual attempts at using inappropriate words in place of ones which resembled them in sound. This resulted in disastrous effects such as 'arrangement of epitaphs' for 'arrangement of epithets'".

The following instance is based on the confusion made by Freddy in relation to the French term *fiancée*. First, we hear *financier* and then *financée*, the former of which exists in English but is pronounced by Freddy as if it were a French word, whilst the latter is the feminine form of the past participle of *financer* ("to finance") in French.

Original	Dubbing	Subtitling
Freddy: This is my financier, Elizabeth. Inga: Oh, I'm so happy to meet you at last. Freddy: Financée.	Freddy: Questa è la mia finanziata, Elizabeth. Inga: Oh, sono felice di la conoscere finalmente. Freddy: Finanziaria.	Freddy: Questa è la mia finanziata Elizabeth. Inga: Finalmente ci incontriamo. Freddy: Finanzata.

Table 8.

In the TL dubbing, we have *finanziata* ("financed") and *finanziaria* ("financial") respectively, although the former is the equivalent of *financée* and the latter would be closer to *financier*. Nonetheless, the comic effect of the original film is maintained. As for the subtitles, they are effective too, as the first word is translated with *finanziata*, which perfectly renders the SL slip of the tongue, and the second one is replaced with *finanzata*, which differs from *fidanzata* ("fiancée") in one letter only, as it occurs with *financée* and *fiancée*.

4.5 Combination of Verbal and Visual Humour

This paragraph concentrates on the difficulty of adapting funny moments resulting from a mix of semantic and visual elements. An interesting example is reported below, as Freddy exclaims "Damn your eyes!" to his assistant, after he spotted two light switches in the dark which turned out to be dangerous. The fact that Igor is cross-eyed makes the situation even more hilarious, as this trait of his is brought to the audience's attention with a foreground of the man pointing at one of his eyes, while answering "Too late".

Original	Dubbing	Subtitling
Freddy: Damn your eyes! Igor: Too late.	Freddy: Ma è un malocchio questo! Igor: E questo no?	Freddy: Certo che hai occhio! Igor: Modestia a parte...

Table 9.

In the Italian dubbing, the witticism is recreated with Freddy complaining of the evil eye, i.e. *malocchio*, that someone must have given him. Igor interprets that word literally, as a reference to a bad eye, owing to its morphology (*mal*: "bad"; *occhio*: "eye"). This leads him to have a punchline relating to his other eye, which in English stands for "And what about this one?". In the subtitles too, the Doctor's sarcasm and Igor's self-irony are both reinvented and the comic effect is maintained, although the TL lines are semantically different from the SL ones. Indeed, they back-translate as "You surely have a good eye!" and "Modesty aside".

4.6 Idioms

The category of idioms represents one of the main obstacles for a translator, as it is often an exacting task to find a parallel expression or at least a phrase that conveys a similar meaning and sounds natural in the TL. According to Schröter (2005, p. 243), "idioms normally start out as a metaphorical way of expressing something and then gradually grow to be more fixed, with the metaphorical aspect typically becoming less pronounced in the minds of speakers and hearers". These aspects further complicate their translation, which makes the result not always likely to be satisfying.

In the screenplay, there are six cases which are worth observing and they are reported below. An analysis of the strategies adopted in the dubbed version and in the subtitled one will follow.

Original	Dubbing	Subtitling
Elizabeth: You bet your boots, it does.	Ci puoi scommettere le mutandine.	Ci puoi scommettere.

Table 10.

Freddy: Be of good cheer.	Sul col morale.	Non abbattetevi.
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Table 11.

Inga: Oh, hello! Would you like to have a roll in the hay? It's fun. Roll, roll, roll in the hay.	Oh, Gruss Gott, lei venire in fieno con me? Prego, mi montare subito. Io tanto aspettare.	Salve. Le andrebbe un ruzzolone nel fieno? È divertente, di qua e di là, tra il fieno.
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Table 12.

Freddy: That's the ticket, yes.	Ha ragione, sì.	Senza dubbio.
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Table 13.

Freddy: Why, he'd be as right as rain.	Sarebbe il ritratto della salute.	Sarebbe sano come un pesce.
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Table 14.

Elizabeth: Penny for your thoughts.	Beh, non dici niente?	Un soldino per i tuoi pensieri.
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Table 15.

Overall, the dubbed version shows a trend to adapting the English idioms in a way that is as fluent as possible. In particular, Tables 10, 11 and 14 feature Italian idioms, although the first one is milder than it would normally be, thanks to the use of the diminutive form *mutandine* ("knickers"), being Inga the person uttering that expression. Similarly, the examples in Tables 13 and 15 highlight the choice of solutions that can be perceived as natural in the TL; nonetheless, they cannot be considered as idioms in Italian. Finally, Table 12 contains a metaphor related to the sexual sphere, which is used by Inga to invite Freddy to join her, while she is rocking herself on a bed of hay. Since there is no equivalent phrase in the TL suggesting the same meaning and tying in as well as the original with the visuals, the dubbing relies on a rather literal translation where the sexual reference is initially lost, although it is then reinserted in the second sentence by means of the verb *montare* ("to mount"). Moving to the subtitles, here too, the idioms of Tables 10, 11 and 14 are replaced with Italian ones; to be precise, the first one is rendered in a more neutral way, as the object of the bet is omitted. Table 13 presents a fluent adaptation, which however does not correspond to an idiom in the TL. As for the expressions in Tables 12 and 15, they are transposed in a literal way. Thus, the former requires the reader to infer the sexual reference from Inga's playful behaviour. The latter sounds rather unusual in Italian; on the other hand, it needs to be said that *Un soldino per i tuoi pensieri* was already used in the Italian version of several American films, such as *Casablanca* (1942).

4.7 Swear Words

The translation of foul language from English into Italian in films has always posed significant problems, because, as Pavesi and Malinverno (2000) state, this task goes beyond the mere research of semantic equivalences. Indeed, it also involves the field of pragmatics and culture in its wholeness. Depending on the intended audience, the translator might want to consider all the available options and perhaps follow (or not) the prevalent trend in the target country.

In *Young Frankenstein* there are different examples of swear words and informal language, which are listed below and analysed afterwards.

Original	Dubbing	Subtitling
Freddy: [...] my accidental relationship to a famous... cuckoo.	[...] la mia accidentale discendenza da un famoso... coglione!	[...] la mia fortuita parentela con un famoso... folle.

Table 16.

Freddy: You filthy, rotten, yellow son-of-a-bitch!	Brutto, sporco, lurido, figlio di puttana!	Bastardo, sporco figlio di puttana.
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Table 17.

Freddy: Why, you mother-grabbing bastard!	Brutto bastardo, incestuoso e porco!	Ehi, schifoso bastardo.
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Table 18.

Freddy: My grandfather's work was doo-doo!	Il lavoro che ha fatto mio nonno è solo cacca!	Il lavoro di mio nonno era popò.
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Table 19.

Freddy: Jesus Christ, [...].	Miseria schifosa! [...]	Gesù Cristo. [...]
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Table 20.

Inspector Kemp: Oh shit.	Cazzen!	Merda!
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Table 21.

Starting with Tables 17 and 18, we can see an adaptation in the dubbed version for both of them, with the former sounding completely natural in Italian, while the latter does so slightly less due to the adjective *incestuoso* ("incestuous"). Indeed, it belongs to a higher register than "mother-grabbing" and would not normally be heard in offensive speech in the TL. Tables 16 and 19 feature the words "cuckoo" and "doo-doo", which are not particularly vulgar. However, the first one is replaced with a much more insulting term (*coglione*, i.e. a rude word for "testicle"), whereas the second one is rendered with a noun from the same register as the SL, i.e. from the vocabulary that also a child might use. The two remaining instances are interesting too, although for different reasons. In Table 20 we have an imprecation, which is toned down in Italian with what back-translates as "Nasty misery!", being the target country strongly Catholic, especially when the film came out. In Table 21, the word "shit" is substituted with a vulgar one standing for "penis", which is often used in films in this case. Whilst the TL term is ruder than the SL one, it is mitigated thanks to the addition of the German-sounding suffix *-en*, which helps create a humorous effect.

As far as the subtitles are concerned, not only are they very close to the original screenplay, but they also result in perfectly fluent solutions. On the other hand, it is fair to point out that the content of Tables 17 and 18 is transposed in a slightly shorter way. Despite this, both reproduce the offensive language successfully. Finally, it is worth dwelling on the curse of Table 20, as it is surprisingly translated with its exact Italian equivalent, although it has been noticed that people generally perceive written swear words and similar lexis as more shocking than spoken ones (Roffe, 1995; Schröter, 2005).

4.8 Songs

Whenever we watch a foreign film and we hear a song in our language, perhaps we rarely ask ourselves how that sounds in the source version. Nonetheless, it is a very interesting matter to study, as the translator has various options to tackle this kind of issue.

In *Young Frankenstein*, we notice two different ways of dealing with the songs of the original soundtrack. The first one is a jazz piece called *I Ain't Got Nobody*, which was recorded by Cab Calloway in 1935. Igor sings a few lines while resting his chin on a shelf from behind, as if his head had no body.

Original	Dubbing	Subtitling
Igor: I ain't got no-body. And no-body cares for me. Yakatata Katakata Ah!	Ahi, la testa ho perso, e la testa e poi... Yakatata Katakata Ah!	Io... io... io... non ho nessuno e nessuno mi amerà mai.

Table 22.

It is likely that if the song had been left as it is in the English version, Italian people would not have caught the funny link between the image and what Igor says. Thus, there were two strategies left: 1) looking for a well-known TL tune that talks about the same subject, by means of almost the same words; 2) simply translating the SL lyrics into the TL, possibly to be sung with a similar melody. The latter is the one chosen for the dubbing here, as we hear Igor sing the original melody with some Italian words, which however do not perfectly mirror the English ones, as the second sentence is missing. Overall, the comic situation is preserved, although the duplicity of "nobody" and "no body" is lost. In the subtitles, we have a literal translation of "nobody" in *Io non ho nessuno* ("I have nobody") and the meaning is somewhat altered, as the remaining part of the sentence back-translates as "nobody will ever love me".

The second instance is in a scene during which Elizabeth is alone with the monster, after being kidnapped by him, and unexpectedly falls in love with him. She expresses her feelings through the lyrics of a song from the American musical *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, directed by George Roy Hill in 1967.

Original	Dubbing	Subtitling
Elizabeth: Oh, ah, oh, ah, ah... Ah, sweet mystery of life, at last I found you. Ah, at last I know the secret of it all...	Io sono sempre stata... sono sempre, sempre... sempre libera, degg'io folleggiare, di gioia in gioia, voglio fare sempre l'a...	Oh, dolce mistero della vita ti scopro finalmente. Conosco infine il vero segreto...

Table 23.

The dubbed version features some lines from a famous Italian opera by Giuseppe Verdi, *La Traviata* (1853). To be more precise, Elizabeth says "I have always been..." and "I always want to make l[ove]", but the words uttered in between are those sung by Violetta towards the end of the first act, which back-translate as "Always free, I must enjoy myself from joy to joy". This option helps maintain an equivalence in terms of the source from which the references are taken, i.e. theatre. It is evident that what the character says in Italian does not reflect what she sings in English, but at least, with the help of the images, we can deduce that the woman is discovering love – and some viewers might even catch the allusion to *La Traviata*. Moving to the subtitles, similarly to the previous case, here too we can identify a literal translation of the ST.

4.9 Other Cultural References: Names of Drinks and Measure Units

Starting with the translation of names of drinks into Italian, it is useful to pay attention to what Bovinelli and Gallini (1994) write on this subject. They assert that these elements are normally replaced with things that are closer to the target culture rather than to the source one.

As far as *Young Frankenstein* is concerned, we can observe various strategies, such as those shown below:

Original	Dubbing	Subtitling
Fraü Blucher: Would the doctor care for a brandy before retiring? [...]	Il dottore gradisce un brandy prima di ritirarsi? [...]	Il dottore desidera un brandy prima di ritirarsi? [...]
Fraü Blucher: Some warm milk, perhaps? [...]	Una buona camomilla, può darsi? [...]	Del latte caldo, magari? [...]
Fraü Blucher: Ovaltine?	Orzata con latte?	Ovomaltina?

Table 24.

The first name of a drink is "brandy", which is left unvaried, probably because this liqueur is widespread and called the same in Italy too. Then we have "some warm milk", which turns into "a (cup of) good chamomile" in the TL. Perhaps the dubbing director discarded the idea of warm milk, as it is something that children would have rather than adults, hence the reference to another hot beverage that is generally drunk before going to bed. The third drink is mentioned by means of its trademark, i.e. "Ovaltine", which in Italy is known as *Ovomaltina*. Nevertheless, in the TL version we find the equivalent of "orgeat with milk", which is a completely different type of product. As regards the subtitles, once again, they stay perfectly close to the original screenplay with a literal translation of the three drinks.

The same trend emerges from the next example:

Original	Dubbing	Subtitling
Harold: I was gonna make espresso.	Volevo offrirti anche una sambuca.	Stavo per fare un caffè?

Table 25.

In the dubbed dialogue, the "espresso" of the ST is replaced with *sambuca*, which is somewhat inexplicable, as coffee is one of the aspects characterising Italy the most. The reference is kept in the subtitles instead, where we read "a coffee".

Moving to another type of culture-specific element, there is an interesting instance of measure units that is worth examining.

Original	Dubbing	Subtitling
Freddy: Are you saying that I put an abnormal brain into a seven-and-a-half foot long, fifty-four-inch-wide gorilla?	Vorresti dire che io ho messo un cervello abnorme in un energumeno lungo due metri e venti e largo come un armadio a due ante?	Mi stai dicendo che ho inserito un cervello anormale in due metri e venti per un metro e trenta di gorilla?

Table 26.

The first aspect to underline is that both the dubbing and the subtitling feature the metric system, namely the one used in Italy. Another intriguing detail is that, while the subtitles closely mirror the TL, the dubbed version transforms the "fifty-four-inch-wide gorilla" into a "two-door wardrobe". This might be due to the fact that *un armadio* ("a wardrobe") is often used in Italian to talk about a big tall person.

4.10 The German Language and Accent

The German language and accent frequently appear in the film in question and they represent a particularly challenging issue from a translational point of view. As far as this subject is concerned, Di Giovanni (1994) reminds us that a translator should reproduce in detail all the peculiar connotations of any language variety found in a film.

In the Italian dubbing and subtitling, different strategies are embraced, as we can see, for example, from the next two tables:

Original	Dubbing	Subtitling
Inga: He would have an enormous Schwanzstück!	Allora avrebbe un enorme Schwanstück!	Avrebbe un enorme Schwanzstück.

Table 27.

Fraü Blucher: I'm going to set you free. Would you like that, meine Seuchekopf?	Adesso ti libero. Ti piacerebbe meine Süsse, capoccione?	Adesso ti libero. Sei contento, meine Seuchekopf?
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Table 28.

In the first case, we find the German term *Schwanzstück*, which is an informal way to talk about male genitalia. Its meaning can be inferred from what Inga says before, upon realising that every single part of the monster's body has to be huge for the experiment to be successful. In Italian, both the dubbing and the subtitling have kept the foreign word, probably as a way to produce the same intriguing and comic effect on TL audience. In the second case, the German expression *meine Seuchekopf* is substituted with *meine Süsse* ("my sweetness") in the dubbed version, and it is followed by the Italian word *capoccione*, which describes a person with a big head. As for the subtitles, they stay close to the original screenplay and keep the German phrase unchanged.

Another interesting phenomenon emerges from an analysis of the four instances quoted below:

Original	Dubbing	Subtitling
Inspector Kemp: Und we had better confirm the fact that Young Frankenstein is indeed vollowing in his grandvather's footscheps.	Noi deve essere molti sicure che giovane Frankenstein è veramente [unclear words]... che segue i passi di nonno suo, Viktor.	Und sia meglio avere l'assoluta certezza che Frankenstein Junior stia veramente zeguendo le orme del zuo afo.

Table 29.

Inspector Kemp: I think what is in order is for me to pay a little visit on the good doctor, und to have a nice quiet chat.	Io dica che è molto melio, molto, che io vado a fare un visitina a caro Doktor, caro, und a fare due parlate, due, con lui.	Credo che sia il caso che io faccia una visitina al buon dottore und scambi con lui quattro chiacchiere.
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Table 30.

Helga: Oh I love my pretty little flower.	Io ama mia bella fiorellina.	Oh, che bello il mio fiorellino.
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Table 31.

Announcer: Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen, tonight it is my great privilege of introducing to you a man whose family name was once both famous and infamous. And now may I present [...]	Illustri colleghi, signore und signori, stasera ho il piacere und privilege di voi presentare un uomo cui sua famiglia una volta ha avuto grande fama und grande infamia, und ora posso voi presentare [...]	Illustri colleghi, signore e signori, questa sera ho il grande onore di presentarvi un uomo il cui nome in passato è stato sia esaltato che esecrato. Ed ecco a voi [...]
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Table 32.

In the SL film, we notice a different degree of German interference for each character. In particular, the child Helga barely has an accent and the announcer has one but makes no linguistic mistakes, while Inspector Kemp's speech is strongly marked by a German intonation, pronunciation and vocabulary. Overall, there are no grammatical issues. In the Italian dubbed version, the nationality can easily be identified for these three characters, thanks to the presence of German lexical elements and syntactic errors, besides their accent. This also applies to Helga, who makes mistakes such as subject-verb

disagreement, article omission before the possessive adjective *mia* ("my") and incorrect noun gender with *fiorellina* ("little flower"). As regards the subtitles, they are very close to the original, as they do not feature any additional linguistic problems. Indeed, only the two following aspects are recreated: 1) the substitution of /s/ with /z/ in *zeguendo* and *zuo*, and of /v/ with /f/ in *afo* in Table 29; and 2) the use of *und* in Table 30. It could be argued that, since this type of audiovisual translation cannot convey spoken foreign traits, heavier lexical and grammatical nuances of German would have been justifiable in the other instances too, possibly even more than in the dubbing, where the strong accent that we hear might have been enough.

5. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

Starting with the Italian dubbing, the predominant approach aims at acceptability and is therefore target-oriented, as 81.24% of the solutions adopted can be classified as adaptations of the SL. In eight of these twenty-six cases, something is added or emphasised compared to the original, probably as a way of compensating for another dialogue where something – such as a form of humour – was lost (Chiaro, 2017). Conversely, a source-oriented attitude can be observed in 9.38% of the instances, where a literal translation was the most appropriate option to transfer the SL content into Italian in a linguistically natural way. The remaining 9.38% of the cases can be viewed as hybrid in that they arguably stem from both approaches. One of them is a song, the lyrics of which are recreated in the TL but sung to the melody of the piece used in the original film.

As far as the subtitles are concerned, they display a different trend. Indeed, 56.25% of the excerpts that we have scrutinised originate from a source-oriented process. Despite this, it would not be correct to speak of adequacy in the sense proposed by Toury (2012), because these examples of literal translation correspond, overall, to perfectly fluent linguistic choices in the TL. Nonetheless, it needs to be acknowledged that, among these eighteen cases, two sexual references are lost, one solution is more neutral than in the SL and another is not particularly natural in the TL. As regards the opposite approach, the instances that can be considered as driven by the principle of acceptability account for 31.25% of the total. They can be identified as adaptations and thus as target-oriented. However, one of them is not a typical expression in the TL, while another lacks a specific nuance of the SL. Finally, 12.5% of the subtitling examples are hybrid cases, resulting from a combination of adaptation and literal translation. More precisely, in one of them an adjective is omitted, perhaps for length reasons, whilst in another the same discrepancy described above for the dubbing of a song occurs.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this paper was to investigate translation for dubbing and subtitling by examining the film *Young Frankenstein* by Mel Brooks (1974), which was selected by virtue of the humour-related, linguistic and cultural challenges that it entails. After expounding the theoretical bases of this study, the film was briefly introduced. The Italian dubbed version and the Italian subtitles were then compared with the original screenplay, by analysing thirty-two examples of homonymy, ping-pong punning, sexual innuendos, malapropisms, combinations of verbal and visual humour, idioms, swear words, songs, names of drinks, measure units, and German language and accent. Finally, all the results were discussed in an overview, which answered the research question of this paper.

In the light of these findings, it can be concluded that the Italian dubbing of *Young Frankenstein* is target-oriented, due to the predominance of adaptations in the TT. By contrast, the subtitling displays a less creative approach, owing to a higher number of literal translations and thus source-oriented solutions. Nevertheless, it could be claimed that it contains more target-oriented and hybrid renderings than one might expect. It has also emerged that Toury's notion of adequacy does not fully apply here, as we have noticed that a source-oriented approach does not necessarily imply the appearance of SL norms and features in the TL. This means that the Italian audience might experience a slightly lower level of entertainment, but not a significant sense of linguistic estrangement. Finally, when all the

different types of obstacles posed by this film are taken into account, it is fair to state that both the Italian dubbing and the Italian subtitling can be considered as highly successful examples of audiovisual translation. Indeed, they align with the images and recreate the intended impact of the original in an effective way, including when humour is involved.

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