

# ***La Cage Aux Folles*: The use of Gayspeak in the English, French and Italian adaptations for the big screen**

Davide Passa

*Sapienza University of Rome*

## ABSTRACT

Voice is one of the means by which fictional characters reveal – among other things – their sexuality. People belonging to cultural minorities are often reduced to a few characteristics in fiction so that they can be easily recognisable to the audience. This study intends to apply the methodologies of Audiovisual Translation (AVT) Studies from the perspective of Language and Sexuality Studies, as it seeks to examine homosexuality and its linguistic representation in AVT, in line with the third approach to the study of gender in AVT research, as discussed by von Flotow – Josephy-Hernández (2019). The linguistic variety analysed in this article is the fictional representation of gayspeak, a way in which characters index their homosexuality. This case study focuses on a comparison between the French cinematic adaptation of *La Cage Aux Folles* (literally, “the cage of insane women”), a 1978 comedy film directed by Édouard Molinaro based on the 1973 play of the same name by Jean Poiret, and its adaptations into Italian and English. This article will analyse the way gayspeak is rendered in the three languages, as each culture indexes sexualities with different linguistic elements.

Keywords: Audiovisual Translation Studies, gayspeak, sexuality, dubbing, *La Cage Aux Folles*, Language and Sexuality Studies.

## **1. Introduction**

*La Cage Aux Folles* (1973, literally “the cage of insane women”) was originally a French play by Jean Poiret; it tells the story of a gay couple, Georges, the manager of a drag nightclub in Saint-Tropez, and Albin (also known as Zaza), the star of the club. It also depicts the adventures of Georges’s son,

Jean-Michel, and his future ultra-conservative in-laws. The play was later adapted into a musical in 1983, with music and lyrics by Jerry Herman and a book by Harvey Fierstein; it is considered to be the first Broadway musical to feature a homosexual relationship. A French-Italian film adaptation of the play was made in 1978, directed by Édouard Molinaro; the film is called *Il Vizietto* in Italian (literally “the little habit/vice”), starring Ugo Tognazzi and Michel Serrault. The film was also dubbed into English, and is considered a seminal work for gay cinema, an award-winning film that attempted to adapt the lives of gay men and drag queens for the big screen.

This study compares the way gayspeak is represented in the French source text (ST) – i.e. the cinematic adaptation of the homonymous play *La Cage Aux Folles* – and the Italian and English dubbing, as each culture indexes sexualities with different linguistic elements. It will examine how the sexuality of the characters is conveyed through language, with the ultimate aim of comparing the translation strategies used in the Italian and English dubbed versions. As will be discussed in the following sections, translation will therefore be seen as a sexuality-constructing activity, where the sexualisation of the English and Italian target texts (TTs) implies the reconstruction of the sexuality of the characters in a way that is appropriate to the target culture.

The paper will analyse a selection of dialogues which have been chosen for their relevance to the use of gayspeak and its translations. Therefore, this study will not analyse all the dialogues and their translation, but only the passages that raise problems in the rendering of the characters’ sexuality through language. The data have been obtained by carrying out a comparative analysis of the original version of the film and its dubbed versions. All the dialogues under scrutiny have then been noted down and included in a parallel corpus. As will be discussed in the next section, it should be borne in mind that this study seeks to analyse a fictional representation of gayspeak, and that any generalisations are only applicable to fictional gay men and their alleged linguistic variety as reproduced in this particular audiovisual product.

## 2. Fictional Gayspeak

The way characters speak contributes to the creation of their personality. The voice can index certain features of the characters, such as their geographical and social origin, their age, but also their gender and sexuality.

The characters' identities are thus constructed also on the basis of how they sound, as identity is a social and cultural construction that is also based on language, in the light of the constructive relationship existing between language and identity (Motschenbacher 2011: 153). This article intends to analyse the use of a fictional representation of gayspeak, which is allegedly used by fictional gay men and which is deliberately used with the intention of indexing the sexuality of the characters. The fictional nature of this variety implies that it is non-spontaneous and pre-fabricated as it artificially attempts to imitate spontaneous spoken language (Pavesi et al. 2015: 7) but it has actually been written, polished, corrected and rehearsed, thus lacking spontaneity. Therefore, this work lies in the field of ficto-linguistics, i.e. "the study of language varieties in all works of fiction, including narrative poetry, film and television" (Hodson 2014: 14).

For the fictional representation of gayspeak to be easily recognisable by the audience, it should be endowed with a reduced number of linguistic features that are reiterated in fictional products, thus becoming stereotypes, i.e. "uninformed and frequently culturally-biased over generalisations about subgroups that may or may not be based on a small degree of truth" (Swann et al. 2004: 298). Hall (1997: 258) claims that "stereotypes get hold of the few simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized characteristics about a person, reduce everything about the person to those traits, exaggerate and simplify them, and fix them without change or development to eternity." With specific reference to gayspeak, Ranzato (2012: 371) states that "fictional homosexuals and their fictional language [...] are more often than not stereotyped", as literary and audiovisual products have converted the gay man into a stock character that has been reiterated and fixed over the decades.

The term gayspeak<sup>1</sup> was coined by Hayes in a paper published in 1976. Gayspeak refers to "the modes and ways of homosexual communication" (Ranzato 2012: 371), i.e. the linguistic variety that is allegedly used exclusively by gay men, which is characterised by a number of features that have been reiterated and fixed in society and the media. This linguistic variety dates back to the sixteenth century, with the use of Cant, a secret code used by criminals (Baker 2002). Generally, Polari is referred to as the direct ancestor of gayspeak, as it was a spoken, secret code used by some gay people in the UK until the 1970s, which was popularised during the late 1960s by the BBC comedy radio programme *Round the Horne*; paradoxically, this

---

<sup>1</sup> For an exhaustive review on gayspeak, see Cameron – Kulick (2006).

programme became one of the causes determining the disappearance of this code, which became mainstream and lost its secrecy. Many of the words that once constituted Polari have survived in gayspeak (e.g. “butch”, “camp”, “cruise”, “trade”); similarly, some terms which were used to identify some categories continued to be used in gayspeak, namely terms of endearment, body parts, sexual activities, types of people (mainly referring to people’s sexual preferences), proper names (generally feminised); in addition to this, foreignisms were retained, but also euphemisms and innuendo, which used to be employed to avoid legal persecution.

### 3. Queer AVT

This article approaches AVT Studies from a queer perspective. Von Flotow et al. (2019: 296-312) claim that “the application of gender-focused theories to AVT Studies has been developing only since the early 2000s”, and this study is an example of it, in that it seeks to analyse a ST portraying queer language and content, and its rendition in the TTs. AVT Studies and Queer Studies, therefore, are at each other’s service (see also the works of Chagnon 2014; De Marco 2009, 2016; Lewis 2010; Ranzato 2012, 2015; Villanueva 2015; and Passa 2021a, 2021b, 2022, to mention a few). Bauer (2015: 1-14) maintains that “translation serves as a framework for analysing how sexuality travelled across linguistic boundaries, and the politics of this process,” and “offers compelling new insights into how sexual ideas were formed in different contexts via a complex process of cultural negotiation.” Translation is thus an activity that constructs gender and sexuality in different cultures; it thus shares with gender and sexuality their performative nature, in that they are “manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylisation of the body” (Butler 2006: 9). Focusing on the Italian translation of gayspeak, for instance, Ranzato (2015: 202) claims that “the relative poverty of the Italian gay lexicon as compared to the richness of the corresponding English terminology is a fact.” This is due to cultural and chronological reasons, since “the Italian culture has opened up to homosexual themes much more slowly than the Anglo-Saxon world” (Ranzato 2015: 202); the first publications on gayspeak, indeed, dates back as early as 1941 – Legman’s *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 (2000: 295) claims that “when translating such fiction, translators need merely to be aware of the comparable resources of camp in source and target language cultures.” Translators, therefore, have to find creative solutions to render the features indexing gayness in the ST, thus sexualising the translation to make gayness visible also in the TT.

4. Comparison

This section will provide a comparison of the original French film and its dubbing into Italian and English. Dubbing is a form of revoicing, where the original soundtrack is replaced with a new, translated one. Several factors have to be taken into account in dubbing, such as synchronisation, the imitation of a spontaneously spoken language, the interaction between image and words (Chaume 2006).

The trends found in the Italian and English dubbing will be organised into categories corresponding to some typical features of gayspeak, as can be seen in Figure 1.

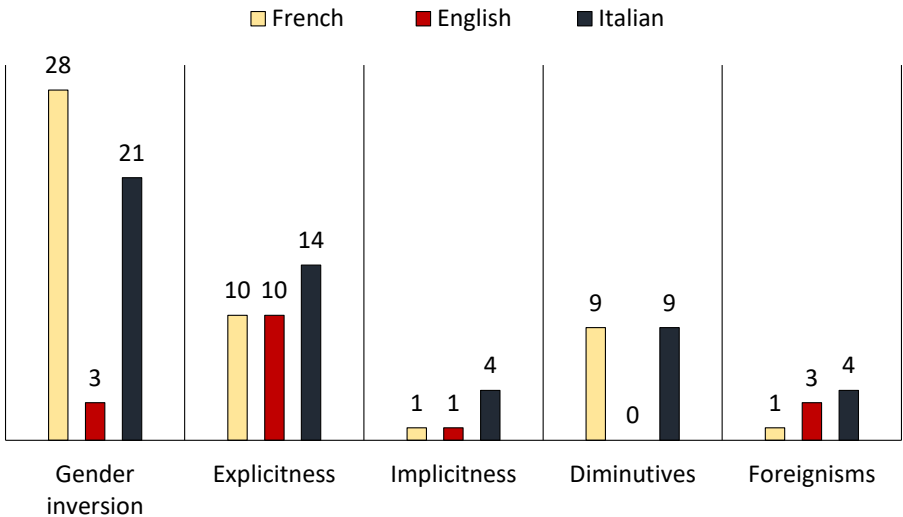


Figure 1. A comparison of the macro-categories traced in the sample

The table visualises the occurrences in the ST and the two TTs of some features that can be grouped into five macro-categories, namely gender inversion, explicitness, implicitness, diminutives and foreignisms. They will be discussed in the following subsections.

#### 4.1 Gender inversion

Gender inversion refers to the use of gender-inverted elements; in other words, it refers to the use of female forms when referring to men, which is a typical linguistic feature of camp talk (Harvey 1998, 2000). Harvey claims 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). Gender inversion is a way to criticise the rigidity of heteronormative gender roles, which are based on the assumption that “everyone is heterosexual and the recognition that all social institutions (...) are built around a heterosexual model of male/female social relations” (Nagel 2003: 49-50). In this way, biological sex, which is determined by one’s genitalia, does not necessarily correspond to the gender one wants to perform, as is particularly evident among drag queens, whose gender is a “free-floating artifice” (Butler 1990: 10). This vision of gender was welcomed by Butler (1990), who theorised that gender is performatively created by individuals; language – among many other elements – is an instrument through which people perform their gender identities.

As can be seen in Figure 1 and the examples cited below, the use of gender inversion, which is the most recurrent feature of gayspeak in the original French film, is also the most frequent feature of gayspeak in the Italian dubbing, whereas its use in the English version is almost negligible, but this is mainly for grammatical reasons, as will be discussed. It should be noted that all the instances of gender inversions that will be mentioned are used when referring to men both in and out of drag.

- (1) Et voici *la grande, la merveilleuse* Mercedes.  
*La grande, la meravigliosa* Mercedes.  
 And now, the great, the one and only, Mercedes.
- (2) Qu’est-ce qu’*elle* fait?  
 Ma che cavolo fa *quella*?  
 What the hell is *she* doing?

- (3) Coucou, me voilà. C'est l'épicière.  
 Passerotti sono qua! Arriva la vivandiera.  
 Uh, uh! Here I am, the grocery lady.

Gender inverted forms occur more often in the French ST and the Italian TT because the two languages share a similar grammatical gender system. Hockett (1958: 231) sees grammatical genders as “classes of nouns reflected in the behaviour of associated words”. Such classes are extremely variable in quantity depending on the language taken into consideration. In many languages, the grammatical gender of a noun is assigned semantically, according to some properties of the noun (e.g. biological sex); in others, it is assigned arbitrarily. Gender is selective at the level of nouns (e.g. in Italian, “penna” is feminine and “libro” is masculine; in French, for instance, “le stylo” is masculine), but it is inflectional with adjectives, pronouns, articles, past participles, determiners, quantifiers and others, generally functioning at the level of inflectional morphemes. The grammatical gender of these parts of speech agree with the gender of the noun to which they refer. English nouns, unlike Italian and French, for instance, are not regularly inflected between feminine and masculine forms (Baker – Love 2018). The gender of English nouns can be described as notional or covert, unlike the grammatical or overt gender of nouns in other languages (Quirk et al. 1985), such as French and Italian. In other words, languages categorise gender differently. In Old English, gender was grammatically significant, but today only few traces of it can be found in some nouns (e.g. actor/actress) and pronouns and adjectives in the third person singular. It should be noted, however, that pronouns and adjectives in the third person plural have no gender distinction in English. Corbett (1991) believes that a distinction must be made between languages with both grammatical and pronominal gender (e.g. Italian and French), and languages with only pronominal gender (e.g. English). To put it in a nutshell: Italian and French have completely different gender systems compared to English, which poses many problems in the translation process. As can be seen from the examples provided above, Italian and French use gender inverted forms more often than English, as in both languages it is possible to show the gender of the speaker also through articles, adjectives, past participles, pronouns. English gender inverted forms are generally nouns (e.g. “lady”) or third-person singular personal pronouns (i.e. “she”).

It is also interesting to notice that while Italian uses gender inversion slightly less frequently than French, there are some instances of addition

of gender inverted forms in the Italian TT, as can be seen in the following examples:

- (4) Albin, arrête de faire l'imbécile.  
Albin, su non fare *la cretina*, torna a casa!  
Albin, stop behaving like an idiot!
- (5) Zaza, on va vite se montrer pour que le docteur voie Zaza. Soyez raisonnable, je vous en prie.  
Adesso Zaza *da brava* si toglie il lenzuolo e il dottore *la* visita. Basta con i capricci *da prima donna*.  
You are going to come out now, Zaza. You've got to come out so the doctor can have a look at Zaza.
- (6) Qu'est-ce que j'ai de moins que les autres?  
Ho forse qualcosa in meno *delle altre*?  
The others have something I don't?

The gender-neutral terms in French in the examples above are deliberately feminised in Italian. This may be seen as a way of compensating the lack of a corresponding Italian version of French gayspeak by exploiting and exaggerating certain features of gayspeak that can be easily rendered in Italian. Gender inversion is completely lost in the English version of the examples above.

Unlike in French, the rendering of gender inversion in Italian is uneven, as there are dialogues where the use of gender-neutral forms are translated with their masculine counterpart, as is shown in the examples below:

- (7) Je fais deux mois de regime. Tu n'as même pas remarqué que j'avais maigri. Je me suis détraqué la santé pour toi.  
Sono a dieta da due mesi e tu non ti sei nemmeno accorto che sono *dimagrito*, mi son *rovinato* la salute per te.  
I've been dieting for two months and you've been completely blind to how thin I've become. On your account I've ruined my health.

The French version in example (7) does not reveal the gender of the speaker, at least considering only the verbal channel<sup>2</sup>, as the female adjective *détraquée*

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that this would not be true if the written channel were considered, as the female (*détraquée*) and male (*détraqué*) forms are spelt differently.



and its male counterpart have the same pronunciation; this genderlessness of the speaker is not kept in Italian, as the translator uses two past participles (e.g. “dimagrìto” and “rovinato”) in their masculine forms, where not only is the genderlessness lost, but also gender inversion, which is common in both French and Italian versions.

## 4.2 Explicitness

Explicitness refers to the use of direct words and expressions, such as insults and derogatory terms. Brown and Levinson (1987) define insults as threats to a person’s negative face, i.e. threats to the desire to be appreciated and recognised. A negative face-threatening act (FTA) occurs when this desire is disregarded, and the speaker is indifferent to the addressee’s positive self-image. Within Culpeper’s (1996, 2011) framework, negative impoliteness is defined as “the use of strategies designed to [...] scorn or ridicule, be contemptuous, do not treat the other seriously, belittle the other, invade the other’s space, explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect” (41). Among queer people, it is common to re-appropriate homophobic terms that have been used as FTAs by (mainly) heterosexual people and to transform them into typical terms of address (e.g. queen, fairy, fag). Harvey (1998) maintains that “ambivalent solidarity” is fundamental in the construction of a shared identity among non-binary people, since both the sender and the receiver of the FTA are mutually affected by it. He defines ambivalent solidarity as:

a feature of camp interaction in which speaker and addressee paradoxically bond through the mechanism of the face-threat. Specifically, the speaker threatens the addressee’s face in the very area of their shared subcultural difference [...]. Consequently, the face-threat, while effectively targeting the addressee, equally highlights the speaker’s vulnerability to the same threat. (Harvey 2000: 254)

Culpeper (2011: 215) asserts that mock impoliteness “takes place between equals, typically friends, and is reciprocal”. This is especially true for queer people, who may use homophobic slurs towards other queer people as a form of cultural re-appropriation of heteronormative pejorative terms, highlighting the vulnerability of both speakers to the same threat.

The use of explicit forms is as frequent in the ST as in the TIs, with the Italian version having even more instances of explicit forms than the original and the English dubbed version. Again, this could be due to the fact that the

Italian translators had to find a way to compensate for the absence of other features of gayspeak.

- (8) À la cuisine, *cretine*!  
Vai vai, vai a spasso, *cretina*!  
Back to the kitchen, *idiot*!
- (9) Allô! Je bois à votre bonheur, Andréa. *Merde*.  
Allô! Brindo alla vostra felicità. *Merde*.  
Hello! I'm going to drink to your future. *Shit*!
- (10) On m'a déjà traité de *neigre*, on m'a déjà traité de *tante*, mais jamais de français.  
Mi hanno dato del *negro*, mi hanno dato della *checca*, ma del francese mai.  
Well, I've been called *negro* and *queer*, but never been called French.
- (11) Je suis une *vieille tante*.  
Sono una *vecchia checca*.  
I'm just an *old fag*.
- (12) Laurant, *ne me casse pas les pieds*, je t'en prie! [...] Va-t-en *grosse vache*!  
Laurant *non mi rompere le palline* anche tu, per favore! [...] Vattene perché sei una *checca*!  
Laurant, don't bug me now, please do me a favour.

Interestingly, both French and Italian TTs use gender-inverted forms in examples (8), (10), (11) and (12), such as “cretine” and “tante”, translated as “cretina” and “checca”. English, on the other hand, uses gender-neutral nouns (e.g. “idiot” and “fag”). Moreover, in example (9), explicitness is also accompanied by another feature of gayspeak, namely foreignisation. The French expression “merde” is in fact retained as such in the Italian translation to give it an exotic touch. Foreignisms will be covered in the following sections. It should be questioned whether or not the terms “neigre”, “negro”, “tante”, “checca” and “fag” should be treated as derogatory forms, also considering the time when the films were released, when some of these expressions may not have had a negative connotation. Example (12) is characterised by the addition of an explicit form in the Italian dubbing, where the French euphemism “casser le pieds” is translated as “rompere le palline”; the stronger expression in Italian is mitigated by the use of the diminutive form “palline”, which will be discussed in section 4.4.

### 4.3 Implicitness

Implicitness includes all linguistic strategies used by gay men to hide their sexuality or to express themselves less directly. Double entendre is one of the strategies that belong to this category. It refers to the use of expressions characterised by the simultaneous presence of two meanings, one of which is necessarily sexual (Harvey 1998, 2000). The speaker can thus convey an ambiguous message whose second, implicit meaning is to be inferred by the interlocutor. Therefore, “through the double entendre the speaker can intentionally say something sexually explosive while appearing to say something unremarkable” (Harvey 2000: 250). In other words, a double entendre occurs by ascribing a sexual meaning to the overt meaning of the utterance. The responsibility for inferring taboo meanings, moreover, lies with the interlocutor, since the speaker explicitly makes just an innocuous remark, thus “trapping the other into the production of the event desired by the queer subject – a kind of homosexual seduction” (Harvey 2000: 250).

The Italian dubbing is characterised by the addition of *double entendres*, as the following example shows:

- (13) A: Qu'est-ce que j'ai de moins que les autres?  
 B: *Tu as quelque chose en plus. Tu sais faire la cuisine.*

A: Ho forse qualcosa in meno delle altre?  
 B: *Anzi, hai qualcosa in più. Anche se non ti serve.*

A: The others have something I don't?  
 B: It's that *you have more*. You are a good cook.

The *double entendre* in (13) originates in the fact that the dialogue takes place between Baldi and his butler, who wants to replace Zaza in a show. The allusion to his culinary skills is actually only the surface level of the implicature made by Baldi, as he is actually implicitly referring to his butler's penis. It should also be remembered that the butler is a dark man, which reinforces the hyper sexualisation of black men. The reference to the butler's abilities is replaced in Italian by the sentence “*anche se non ti serve*” (tr. “even if you don't need it”), which is a double entendre referring to the fact that he allegedly does not need his penis, also considering the fact that he represents the stereotypical camp figure, which is generally associated with a passive role between the sheets.

#### 4.4 Diminutives

The use of diminutives has been classified by Lakoff (1975) as a typical feature of women's language; it is one of the features of women's language that are shared by gay men. The use of diminutives to index the homosexuality of a speaker is particularly frequent in Italian, and it is obtained through the addition of suffixes like *-etto*, *-uccio*, *-ino* and their inflected forms (Orrù 2014: 76). The use of diminutives is also frequent in the French ST, while it is completely absent in the English TT.

- (14) Tu t'es fait mal à tes *petits poigns*?  
Ti sei fatto male coi tuoi *pugnetti*?  
Poor hands!
- (15) Coucou! Me voilà!  
*Passerotti*! Sono qua!  
Uh, uh! Here I am. The grocery lady.
- (16) Alors, on embrasse tout de même sa *Tatie*.  
Neanche un bacetto alla tua *Tatina*?  
Can you spare a kiss for your *Tatie*?
- (17) Ah non, ils ont écrit "*sa Tati-i*", c'est pas "*sa Tati-i*", c'est "*sa Tati-e*",  
"à mon Lolo, sa *Tati-e*", sinon "*sa Tati-i*", ça ne veut rien à dire. "*Sa Tati-e*".  
Eh no! S'è scordato un pezzo di scritta. "*À mon Lolo, sa Tati*". Eh "*Tati*"  
non è mica "*Tatina*".  
Eh no! "*Al mio Lolo, la sua Tatina*". Io avevo detto "*Tatina*", non "*Tati*".  
Oh no, they wrote "*Tati*" with an i... with ie. "*À mon Lolo*", it's "*Tatie*"  
with an "e", Otherwise it's wrong.
- (18) C'est ça. Et bien, je vais sur la scène.  
Allora ti lascio ai tuoi *intruglietti*.  
I'm going on stage then.
- (19) T'inquiète pas, ça ira très bien mon tonton.  
Andrà bene, non preoccuparti *coccolone* mio.  
It's all right my tonton.

There are passages where diminutives are added in the Italian dubbing, as in example (15), where "*coucou*" is translated as "*passerotti*" and "*intruglietti*",

and the addition of the word “intruglietti” in example (18). In example (17) Zaza is referring to a cake he ordered from a bakery. The word “Tatie” is the childlike form of the word “tante”, ending in “-ie” because it is a feminine noun. Nevertheless, the cake says “Tati” without the final -e, which turns the feminine word into its masculine counterpart, while keeping the feminine possessive adjective “sa”. For this reason, Zaza is upset after reading it and his words are difficult to translate into the other languages. Some French words are retained in the Italian dubbing, but since the words “Tati” and “Tatie” would not raise any gender problem in Italian, the translators decided to differentiate them by using the feminine diminutive form “Tatina”. Moreover, the first time what is written on the cake is mentioned in its original French form (i.e. “À mon Lolo, sa Tati”), while the second time it is translated into Italian (i.e. “Al mio Lolo, la sua Tatina”) to make it understandable for the Italian audience. In example (19), the childlike kinship term for “oncle” (i.e. uncle), namely “tonton”, is used by Zaza to address Baldi. This term is retained in English even when the possessive adjective “mon” is translated into English, while in Italian the kinship term is replaced by the form of endearment “cocolone mio”.

#### 4.5 Foreignisms

The use of foreign expressions is typical of camp talk (Harvey 2000), which gives it an air of cosmopolitanism. This is especially true of French terms, which are a way for gay men to stereotypically parody aristocratic mannerism. Harvey (2000: 251-252) claims that:

the use of French in English grows out of an appropriation of aristocratic gestures which has a long history in camp. [...] King (1994) has argued that one can trace a historical connection between the appearance of camp behaviour in homosexual subcultures in early 18th-century urban England and the newly established bourgeois economic and political hegemony. He suggests that homosexual subcultures deliberately challenged the emerging model of selfhood posited by the middle classes.

Similarly to the previous characteristics of gayspeak, foreignisms are mainly found in the dubbed versions of the film, as shown by the following example:

- (20) Allô! Je bois à votre bonheur, Andréa. Merde.  
 Allô! Brindo alla vostra felicità. Merde.  
 Hello! I'm going to drink to your future. Shit!

- (21) Ah non, ils ont écrit “sa Tati-i”, c’est pas “sa Tati-i”, c’est “sa Tati-e”, “à mon Lolo, sa Tati-e”, sinon “sa Tati-i”, ça ne veut rien à dire. “Sa Tati-e”.  
 Eh no! S’è scordato un pezzo di scritta. “À mon Lolo, sa Tati”. Eh “Tati” non è mica “Tatina”. Eh no! “Al mio Lolo, la sua Tatina”. Io avevo detto “Tatina”, non “Tati”.  
 Oh no, they wrote “Tati” with an i...with ie. “À mon Lolo”, it’s “Tatie” with an “e”, otherwise it’s wrong.
- (22) Oh là là là là. Il est de mauvaise humeur le petit maître blanc.  
 Oh là là là là. È di umore nero il padroncino bianco.  
 Oh là là là là. The master is in the most impossible mood.
- (23) T’inquiète pas, ça ira très bien mon tonton.  
 Andrà bene, non preoccuparti coccolone mio.  
 It’s all right my *tonton*.

Examples (20), (21) and (23) have already been mentioned in the previous sections, as the categories of gayspeak analysed in this article tend to overlap. Example (22) also uses the famous French expression “Oh là là”, which is retained in the Italian and English dubbing.

Interestingly, in example (21) the English dubbing keeps the gender problem raised in the ST at the level of morphology; indeed, Zaza refers to the morphemes “-i” and “-ie”, the former determining the masculine form and the latter the feminine form. This is not maintained in Italian, where a diminutive form “Tatina” is used to distinguish the feminine from the masculine “Tati”.

## 5. Conclusions

This study has sought to trace the most significant deviations existing between the French version of the film *La Cage Aux Folles* and the respective Italian and English TTs. These cinematic adaptations of the homonymous French play have been chosen for their significance in the panorama of Gay Studies, as they are considered classics and their portrayal of a homosexual couple pure avantgarde at the time of their release. Something similar had happened only with *The Boys in the Band*, whose cinematic adaptation was released in 1970, allegedly one of the first examples of a film with an explicitly gay plot, reflecting a shift in the portrayal of gay men on stage and screen

towards “more multifaceted, more complex, more liberated homosexuals than the either parodistic or the tortured and closeted gay men and women of earlier cinema” (Ranzato 2012: 380).

To the author’s surprise, the Italian TT has proved to be more explicit and irreverent than the English TT in re-constructing the characters’ homosexuality. The preconception preceding the collection of the actual data discussed in this work was that since Anglophone gayspeak has got a longer history than Italian gayspeak, the linguistic construction of homosexuality in the latter language would be more indirect and less successful; some features of gayspeak were believed as likely to be avoided in Italian, if not because of the linguistic limitations that Italian has in rendering Anglo-American gayspeak, as well as the cultural reservations about the topic, also due to the strong Catholic heritage. It is surprising to see that in almost all the categories that include the typical features of gayspeak – i.e. explicitness, implicitness, diminutives and foreignisms – the Italian TT makes a more abundant use of linguistic features than the French ST and the English TT. The latter, in particular, seems to almost eliminate the differences existing between gay and non-gay character in the ST, as Figure 1 shows.

The outspokenness of the Italian TT might be seen as a way of compensating for the loss in translation; however, it should also be born in mind that in 1978, when *Il Vizierto* was released, gay people had already been improving their conditions, also as a consequence of the Stonewall riots in 1969, when transgender and gender-nonconforming people managed to resist arrest in a police bar raid at the Stonewall Inn in New York City’s Greenwich Village, and the first activist groups were formed around the world. The first public demonstration within the LGBT community in Italy took place in San Remo in 1972 as a protest against the International Congress on Sexual Deviance. In addition to this, it is no coincidence that the first gay pride in Italy was celebrated on the occasion of the sixth congress of *Fuori!* held in Turin in June 1978, the same year as the release of *Il Vizierto*.

## REFERENCES

### Primary sources

- Poiret, J.  
2004 [1973] *La Cage aux Folles*. Paris: L’Avant-scène Theatre.

## Secondary sources

- Baker, P.  
 2002 *Polari: The Lost Language of Gay Men*. London: Routledge.
- Baker, P. – R. Love  
 2018 “Corpus linguistics and sexuality”. In: K. Hall – R. Barrett (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Sexuality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 194-209.
- Bauer, H.  
 2015 *Sexology and Translation. Cultural and Scientific Encounters across the Modern World*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Brown, P. – S.C. Levinson  
 1987 *Politeness. Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Butler, J.  
 1990 *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.  
 2006 *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (2nd edn.). New York: Routledge.
- Cameron, D. – D. Kulick (eds)  
 2006 *The Language and Sexuality Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Chagnon, K.  
 2014 *La manipulation et la censure du discours queer dans la traduction française de deux séries télévisées: Les enjeux de la reception*. Dissertation. Concordia University.
- Chaume, F.  
 2006 “Screen translation: Dubbing”. In: K. Brown (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics* (2nd edn.). Amsterdam: Elsevier Social Sciences, 6-9.
- Corbett, G.  
 1991 *Gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Culpeper, J.  
 1996 “Towards an anatomy of impoliteness”, *Journal of Pragmatics* 25, 349-367.  
 2011 *Impoliteness. Using Language to Cause Offence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- De Marco, M.  
 2009 “Gender portrayal in dubbed and subtitled comedies”. In: J. Díaz Cintas (ed.) *New Trends in Audiovisual Translation*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 176-196.  
 2016 “The ‘engendering’ approach in audiovisual translation”, *Target* 28 (6), 314-325.



- Flotow von L. – D.E. Josephy-Hernández  
 2019 “Gender in Audiovisual Translation Studies: Advocating for gender awareness”. In: L. Pérez-González (ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of Audiovisual Translation*. London: Routledge, 296-312.
- Hall, S.  
 1997 *Representation. Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage.
- Harvey, K.  
 1998 “Translating Camp Talk. Gay identities and cultural transfer”, *The Translator* 4 (2), 295-320.  
 2000 “Describing Camp Talk: Language / Pragmatics / Politics”, *Language and Literature* 9, 240-260.
- Hayes, J.J.  
 1976 “Gayspeak”, *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 62 (3), 256-266.
- Hockett, C.F.  
 1958 *A Course in Modern Linguistics*. New York: Macmillan.
- Hodson, J.  
 2014 *Dialect in Film and Literature*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Lakoff, R.  
 1975 *Language and Woman’s Place*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Legman, G.  
 2006 “The language of homosexuality: An American glossary”. In: D. Cameron – D. Kulick (eds.) *The Language and Sexuality Reader*. London: Routledge, 19-32.
- Lewis, E.S.  
 2010 “‘This is my girlfriend, Linda.’ Translating queer relationships in film”, *In Other Words: The Journal for Literary Translators* 36, 3-22.
- Motschenbacher, H.  
 2011 “Taking Queer Linguistics further: Sociolinguistics and critical heteronormative research”, *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 212, 149-179.
- Nagel, J.  
 2003 *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality: Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Orrù, P.  
 2014 “Lingua e alterità. Lo stereotipo dell’omosessuale nel cinema italiano del Novecento”, *LID’O. Lingua Italiana D’Oggi* 9, 47-86.
- Passa, D.  
 2021a “‘Reinas unidas jamás serán vencidas’: Drag queens in the Iberian Spanish voice-over of *RuPaul’s Drag Race*”, *Trans* 25, 349-371.  
 2021b “‘We work hard, we play hard!’. Fictional Gayspeak in the Italian dubbing of *The Simpsons*: A queer audiovisual translation study”, *Iperstoria* 17, 265-280.

- 2022 “‘Sunt! That’s French with a cedilla!’ Subtitling and dubbing *The Boys in the Band* into Italian”, *Lingue e Linguaggi* 48, 245-261.
- Pavesi, M. – M. Formentelli M. – E. Ghia
- 2015 “The languages of dubbing and thereabouts: An introduction.”  
In: M. Pavesi – M. Formentelli M. – E. Ghia (eds) *The Language of Dubbing: Mainstream Audiovisual Translation in Italy*. Berlin: Peter Lang, 7-26.
- Quirk, R. et al.
- 1985 *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English language*. London: Longman.
- Ranzato, I.
- 2012 “Gayspeak and gay subjects in audiovisual translation: Strategies in Italian dubbing”, *Meta* 57 (2), 369-384.
- 2016 *Translating Culture Specific References on Television*. London: Routledge.
- Swann, J. et al.
- 2004 *A Dictionary of Sociolinguistics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Villanueva, J.I.
- 2015 “You better *werk*. Camp representation of *RuPaul’s Drag Race* in Spanish subtitles”, *Meta* 60 (2), 376.

## Filmography

### *La Cage aux Folles*

- 1978 Directed by E. Molinaro. France.

Address: DAVIDE PASSA, Department of European, American and Intercultural Studies, Sapienza University of Rome, Circonvallazione Tiburtina 4, 00161, Rome, Italy.  
davidepassa@live.it.

ORCID code: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3327-2101>.