

Subtitling Italian politics and culture in

Paolo Sorrentino's *Il divo*

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Abstract

Paolo Sorrentino's film Il divo. La Spettacolare vita di Giulio Andreotti (2008) is based on the political career of Giulio Andreotti, the most prominent and controversial figure in modern Italian political history. To some extent, Andreotti's sharply ironic and enigmatic persona reflects the contradictions of Italian society, thus corroborating existing stereotypes. It is therefore not surprising that this movie has fomented a great deal of scholarly debate over the issue of political corruption, which seems inherently part of Italian culture (Antonello 2010, Marcus 2010a and 2010b, Marlow-Mann, 2010). More importantly, the film has become the focus of the debate regarding the ways recent audiovisual works by the new wave of young Italian directors have dealt with such a phenomenon (Holdaway, 2011).

The linguistic and cultural peculiarities of Il divo have cast doubt on the likelihood of its success outside its country of origin, which Sorrentino believed could be offset by his innovative cinematic approach to Italy's so-called cinema of 'civic engagement' (or cinema d'impegno) (Crowds and Sorrentino, 2009). Hence, this study concentrates on the comparative analysis of Il divo (Source Text, ST) and its English subtitled version (Target Text, TT). In particular, it considers the challenges that this film poses to its transfer. The examination of the two datasets shows that the translator has retained the language- and culture-specific references to Italian politics and related events in most parts of the text. However, this may require a substantial processing effort on the part of the target viewer and might be detrimental to the appreciation of the film itself.

Keywords: AVT, *Il divo*, Subtitling, Language-Bound References, Culture-Specific References

“La simpatia in politica è una pregiudiziale”¹
Cirino Pomicino, *Il divo*.

¹ “Niceness is detrimental in politics”.

1. Introduction

In his book-length study on political discourse, Chilton (2004: 3) has rightly pointed out that politics is essentially based on a power struggle between those who attempt to assert and maintain power and those who try to resist it. Furthermore, he claims that politics can also be seen as cooperation, “practices and institutions that a society has for resolving clashes of interest over money, influence, liberty and the like” (ibid. 3). In the introduction to his translation of Aristotle’s *The Politics*, Sinclair (1962) explains that this cooperation among humans can be achieved through language. To this end, he discusses Aristotle’s famous claim that humans are political animals and stresses that:

[M]an is a political animal, in a sense in which a bee is not, or any other gregarious animal. Nature, as we say, does nothing without some purpose; and she has endowed man alone among the animals with the power of speech. (ibid. 3)

Moreover, Schäffner and Bassnett (2010: 2) have observed that the language of political discourse, as a complex form of human activity, is shaped by specific political situations and processes.

Interestingly, none of these authors provide a definition of the way in which language shapes context in politics. From a cinematic point of view, dealing with such a fascinating issue is certainly difficult. Sorrentino’s 2008 film *Il divo. La spettacolare vita di Giulio Andreotti* (henceforth, *Il divo*) represents a case in point. It concentrates on Giulio Andreotti’s controversial political career, as well as the many unspoken secrets of Italy’s so-called ‘first republic’ (1946-1994)². The narration spans the period from Andreotti’s seventh time being elected in 1992, his failed bid for the presidency of the Italian Republic, the *Tangentopoli* bribe scandal (a.k.a. ‘Bribesville’; cf. Koff and Koff, 1999: 175-178 for an overview), and up to his trial in 1995. Andreotti’s decades-long political career amounted to a constant struggle to assert and maintain power and thwart those who opposed him. Hence, *Il divo* can be seen as an attempt to reflect on the power politicians can exert on society and how political discourse can be used manipulatively to shape reality. The film refers to major Italian scandals Andreotti was allegedly involved in, including the assassinations of the journalist Carmine (a.k.a. Mino) Pecorelli and judge Giovanni Falcone, politician Aldo Moro’s kidnapping and murder, as well as bank scandals. It also deals with the so-called ‘strategy of tension’: killings and bombings were carried out and then credited to anarchist and communist groups to spread panic among the citizenry, so Italians would call for the suppression of the Communist and left-wing parties in general (Crowdus and Sorrentino, 2009:

² After World War II and the overthrow of the Fascist regime, Italian people voted for the abolition of the monarchy and introduction of the Republic. The term ‘First Republic’ describes Italy’s political history from the 1946 election until the 1994 election.

33; Koff and Koff, 1999: 95). This strategy was supposedly orchestrated by the Italian secret services and allegedly supported by NATO-controlled and CIA-financed organizations, including neo-fascist groups.

Scholars interested in Italian Studies and Cinema Studies such as Antonello (2010), Marlow-Mann (2010) and Marcus (2010a and 2010b) have devoted much discussion to the way *Il divo* deals with political corruption and crime within Italian culture. More importantly, they have debated at length the ways recent audiovisual works by the new wave of young Italian directors have dealt with such a phenomenon, thus taking Italy's so-called cinema of 'civic engagement' (or *cinema d'impegno*) to a whole new level (cf. also Holdaway, 2011).

Sorrentino's film received rave reviews nationally (D'Avanzo, 2009) and internationally (Jeffries, 2009 and Weissberg, 2008), winning sixteen David di Donatello Awards in Italy as well as the Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival, and earning over \$11m (while its production budget was \$6.7m). Nonetheless, the culture specificity of this film has cast doubt on the likelihood of its success outside Italy. Brunette (2008) contends that: "the big question is how well the film will play to audiences outside of Italy, since even in its home territory many viewers will be baffled by the overwhelming cast of characters and the sheer complexity of Andreotti's many entanglements". In his response to Crowdus's question regarding the movie's international reception, Sorrentino suggested that there was no need for the audience to focus on the details of Italian politics as such; rather they should ponder on the metaphorical meaning of power in the film (Crowdus and Sorrentino, 2009: 37). This is consistent with the general idea that politics is the quintessential terrain of power struggles, as suggested above.

From a linguistic and cultural standpoint, *Il divo* is certainly an interesting case study. It is characterised by dense dialogues and monologues that are imbued with a vast amount of culture-specific references to Italian political scandals and crimes, which convey an extremely negative yet also fascinating image of Italy. Moreover, to some extent, Andreotti's sharply ironic and enigmatic *persona*, along with his vision of politics and truth, reflects the contradictions inherent in Italian society, thus corroborating existing stereotypes such as the Italians' tendency to bend the law or interpret rules to their own advantage.

Hence, it is worth investigating how the multiple challenges this film poses to its linguistic and cultural transfer have been dealt with and overcome when subtitled in English. To this end, the following section briefly discusses the characteristics of Italy's so-called *cinema d'impegno*, a genre to which *Il divo* can be said to belong (Marcus, 2010a: 246, Holdaway, 2011: 24). This can help us understand the importance of Sorrentino's cinematic style. Section 3 deals briefly with today's fast-growing audiovisual market, with a particular focus on the subtitling of culture-specific references. Section 4, with its comparative analysis of the Source Text (ST) and Target Text (TT), has a twofold aim. On the one hand, it seeks to show the function(s) culture-specific items have within the Italian ST. On the other hand, it seeks to explore how these items have been tackled by the

subtitled. Section 5 concludes this work by suggesting that the translator has very often been forced to retain the culture-specific references in most parts of the text. This may require a substantial processing effort on the part of the viewer, which might be partly offset by the innovative cinematic approach to Italy's cinema of 'civic engagement' that this film represents.

2. Italian *Cinema d'impegno*

Due to space limitations, an extensive analysis of the Italian film industry in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries cannot be offered here, and also falls beyond the scope of this study. Suffice here to recollect that Italian film output reached its peak between the mid-1960s and 1970s; yet, imported movies have constantly amounted to three times the domestic production, especially in recent decades (Holdaway, 2012: 279).

In his lucid analysis of the many crises Italian cinema has undergone, Holdaway nonetheless appears confident that these cyclical 'deaths and rebirths' can offer new possibilities for the industry's regeneration (ibid. 281). Examples of possible 'deaths' in Italian cinema are the so-called *cinapanettoni* (low-brow popular comedy), while the *commedia sentimentale* (rom-coms such as *Scusa, ma ti chiamo amore*, Federico Moccia, 2008) may be seen as an instance of the industry's merely 'vegetative state'. Dead or not, both these strands of Italian film production have so far met with huge popular success (Bayman and Rigoletto, 2010: 312). Nonetheless, Italian cinema can also boast noteworthy examples of 'rebirths' such as *Un eroe Borghese* (*Ordinary Hero*, Michele Placido, 1995), *Giovanni Falcone* (Giuseppe Ferrara, 1993), *Placido Rizzotto* (Pasquale Scimeca, 2000) and *I cento passi* (*One Hundred Steps*, Marco Tullio Giordana, 2000), which belong to the long-standing cinematic tradition of *cinema d'impegno* or *cinema politico*.

Holdaway (2011: 24) has subsumed *Il divo* under this latter category while, in a special issue of *The Italianist*, Marcus (2010a: 246) has hailed this film as marking a new phase in Italian cinema, one she has dubbed 'post-realist', since it comes after the realism that characterised the Italian cinema of the twentieth century. In addition, from a characterisation standpoint, Marcus has also highlighted Sorrentino's notable use of irony as part of Andreotti's *persona*. To this end, she has pinpointed the several moments when this feature becomes more evident (e.g. the subtitle to the film's title, the many scenes in which other characters admit their inability to comprehend Andreotti's impenetrable psychological makeup, his own continuous headaches, his avoidance of the truth).

Marcus's claims have stirred a lively debate among scholars in Italian Film Studies. In his response to Marcus, Marlow-Mann (2010: 263) has questioned the need for the 'post-realist' label and suggested moving beyond the realism vs. neo-realism paradigm. Moreover, he maintains that, rather than being a depiction of Andreotti's sharp irony, Sorrentino's *Il divo* should be seen as an instance of

fantapolitica, a movie that employs fictitious situations (e.g. the kiss between Andreotti and Riina, the former chief of the Sicilian mafia) to shed light on real political events and ultimately condemn Andreotti. Conversely, Marcus (2010a: 254) has suggested that Sorrentino leaves his cinematographic verdict on Andreotti's guilt open, whereas Antonello (2010: 261) has claimed that the director leaves the viewer "the freedom and responsibility to make a critical judgement". For his part, Gotor (2008) has explained that: "Sorrentino does not judge; he wants to tell a story. Indeed, this is not a movie against Andreotti but on Andreotti as a metaphor of Italian power, its boredom and solitude, and on the audience's duty to reflect on it [the metaphor] because it is not unfamiliar, quite the opposite" (my translation; cf. also Crowdus and Sorrentino, 2009: 37 for a similar reading of the movie).

Cinematically speaking, Holdaway (2011: 27) has remarked that *Il divo* retains some traditional features of old-style *cinema d'impegno*. For instance, it provides a 'foreword' (called Italian Glossary in the film) that serves as background information to the Italian context and a post-script that is used as a referent to Andreotti's story after *Tangentopoli*. Yet, both Holdaway and Crowdus seem to agree that *Il divo* only touches upon historical events in favour of a more innovative approach to cinematic narration. Sorrentino himself has claimed that he wanted to create a "rock opera" (Crowdus and Sorrentino, 2009: 34), a term which Marcus (2010a: 251) has criticised as inappropriate to the subject matter. Without launching into such a theoretical and technical discussion, it is nevertheless clear that Sorrentino's cinematic skills have helped create a more intriguing audiovisual work that moves away from the most traditional ways of depicting Italian political history. This film features a restless rock 'n' roll soundtrack matched by innovative cinematographic effects. Crowdus has pointed out the distinctive visual style of *Il divo*, which features "exaggerated camera angles, extraordinary compositions, slo-mo and state-of-the-art CGI effects, impressive editing (...) and long silky-smooth Steadycam" (Crowdus and Sorrentino, 2009: 32). In this regard, Sorrentino has remarked on the need for "packaging [films] in a more compelling, tricked-out visual style" (ibid. 34). I shall return to this later as it will prove to be relevant to the issues under scrutiny here.

While a lengthy multimodal analysis of the text is unfeasible here, due to space limitations, before proceeding with the comparative analysis of the two datasets, the following brief analysis of the DVD covers for the Italian and UK/American markets respectively may be of interest.



Figure 1. DVD covers of the Italian and UK/US releases

As can be seen in Figure 1, the Italian version (on the left-hand side) features the silhouette of Andreotti in the dark, which probably seeks to underscore the controversy swirling around this political figure. He is shown praying, as it is a well-known fact that Andreotti was a fervent Catholic who would regularly attend mass. However, this image also recalls the moment of confession, a theme that is central to the film. Confessing implies telling the truth in an act of repentance, in order to seek absolution of one's sins. As far as Andreotti is concerned, Sorrentino has cast doubt on whether the truth about his career is ever to be revealed (Crowdus and Sorrentino, 2009: 37). As Coviello (2010: 9) has shrewdly pointed out, Andreotti is pictured while confessing to the priest Mario in many scenes, yet his confessions become a sort of outlet for the former's secrets and political aims and desires. The message that we perceive is that these are not confessions *stricto sensu*, which also explains why Don Mario is never portrayed while absolving Andreotti. In one scene Sorrentino imagines the politician, alone, confessing his wrongdoings to his absent wife Livia, in a breath-taking monologue. What is important, however, is that his confession does not even require the presence of another person because political power here appears to absolve itself (*ibid.*). The Machiavellian idea that the ends justify the means, be they legal or perverse (Crowdus and Sorrentino, 2009: 35), is also supported by Andreotti's belief that his political deeds are part of the divine mandate he received, when he fiercely claims: "Questo lo sa Dio e lo so anche io" (subtitled as "God knows this, I know it too" in the film) (Coviello, 2010: 9).

As for the English version (on the right-hand side), it is interesting to note that Andreotti is pictured along with the affiliates to his political faction of the Christian Democrats, which may suggest these figures were his accomplices. Interestingly,

the cover also features a quote by Guido Bonsaver claiming that Sorrentino is where Fellini and Tarantino meet. Marlow-Mann (2010: 264) and Holdaway (2011: 28) seem to agree with this, as they have also remarked on the intertextual reference to Quentin Tarantino's 1991 *Reservoir Dogs*, along with a wealth of references to Fellini's movies in Sorrentino's film (cf. in particular Marcus 2010a: 252). Interestingly, neither version of the cover includes the film's subtitle; indeed, *La spettacolare vita di Giulio Andreotti (or The spectacular life of Giulio Andreotti*, which is an example of acceptable replicated idiomaticity in English) serves to mould the film's aesthetics in adherence to the ironic 'spettacolarità' surrounding Andreotti (Holdaway 2011: 30).

3. Audiovisual Translation in the New Millennium

In his 1989 study, Delabastita described AVT as a "virgin area of research" (ibid. 202). Yet, the continuously growing interest in AVT among scholars in Translation Studies has enabled it to develop "its very own theoretical and methodological approaches, allowing it to claim the status of a scholarly area of research in its own right" (Díaz-Cintas, 2009: 7). For his part, Chaume (2004) has placed particular emphasis on the need to integrate research in AVT with insights from film and communication studies, along with the classic translation-related disciplines like linguistics, literature and philology. To this end, he has pinpointed the elements that compose an AVT text, which are conveyed through acoustic and visual channels. The verbal text (i.e. what is said), para-verbal features (i.e. how the verbal text is uttered) and the non-verbal text (e.g. soundtrack, special effects, etc.) are received by the viewers through the acoustic channel. Conversely, the elements pertaining to the iconographic (e. g. icons, symbols), photographic (e.g. colour, light, etc.), planning (types of shots) and mobility codes (e.g. proxemic and kinetic signs) are conveyed through the visual channel. Consequently, he has remarked the importance of the non-verbal elements when multimodal products are transferred across languages and cultures through this mode (ibid. 22-23).

Chaume's analysis has focused particularly on dubbing, yet his reflections can be extended to AVT in a broader sense, since today's rapid advances in digital technologies have helped to develop new creative processes tailored to film production, which also affect the intralingual, interlingual and intercultural transfer. Directors and scriptwriters can make use of new communication tools on and off screen to convey their message by means of the multisemiotic texts they have conceived in their minds. For instance, animated writing has become an increasingly frequent feature of audiovisual works: text message conversations are reported on the screen while the audience sees the characters typing on their smartphones (cf. Pérez-González, 2012: 14 who defines this practice as 'authorial titles' – or titling – and demonstrates its application to the British TV series *Sherlock*). Pérez-González (2014: 194) has described animated writing as 'dynamic'

in order to distinguish it from the ‘static’ writing that can be traditionally found in audiovisual texts (e.g. intertitles, subtitles, etc. that flash on and off the screen). Dynamic writing exploits the intersemiotic features of audiovisual texts by changing their layout, font, colour, rhythm, speed, etc. (ibid. 203). As he explains, this innovative use of superimposed text “can influence the audience’s engagement with and immersion in the modal text” (ibid. 204). When translated, this particular feature of the original is often retained. A noteworthy example of retention is found in Pérez-González’s (2014: 195-198) discussion of the English translation of the Russian film *Nochnoi Dozor* (*Night Watch*, Timur Bekmambetov, 2004). In this case, the flowing messages in Russian have been replaced with their English counterparts.

The use, and translation, of dynamic writing in audiovisual productions is particularly relevant to the study at hand. Sorrentino’s insertion of this feature has been described as one of the elements that sets *Il divo* apart from traditional Italian filmmaking, especially when it deals with controversial issues such as politics, corruption and the Mafia (Crowdus and Sorrentino, 2009). As shown in Figure 2, Sorrentino inserts captions that strategically accompany the images (or actors’ lines) so as to provide background information as the story unfolds. Frenetically used, they mostly refer to the figures (be they perpetrators or victims) that have been involved in the dramatic events the film alludes to. Sorrentino’s decision to use a blood-like red colour for these captions is therefore unsurprising and consistent with the whole text. According to Holdaway (2011: 30), the audience is “visually assaulted” by these informative captions. Conversely, Marcus (2010a: 253) sees them in a more positive light, observing that they “dance about the screen in a kind of free-floating semiotic abandon”.

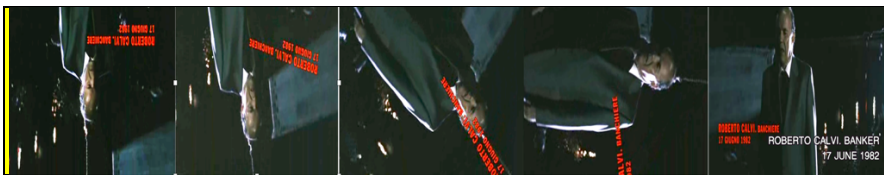


Figure 2. Dynamic and static subtitles in *Il divo*

As can be noted, these captions have been transferred into English by means of conventional static subtitles (cf. Figure 2), which follow the norms of the industry (i.e. white writing on transparent background, one or two lines at the bottom of the screen that do not exceed 35-40 characters per line; Chaume, 2013: 112). Subtitling is normally subsumed under the captioning category since the spoken ST is rendered in writing (ibid.). Yet, in the case of dynamic writing, the interlingual transfer takes place via the same semiotic sign, as is usually achieved through specific types of captions (e.g. newspaper headlines, written notes, window signs, text messages). Considering the importance of this stylistic addition, *Il divo* could

have probably benefitted from the application of a similar approach to further enhance the reception of this film by the TT viewers.

As mentioned earlier, AVT is a type of specialised profession that has to be carried out by taking into account several factors and constraints. In considering interlingual subtitling, which is also the AVT mode under investigation here, the technical constraints mentioned above have been shown to be the reason behind some degree of *medium-restricted* textual manipulation (Díaz-Cintas, 2012: 284). However, if we were to look at manipulation in a more positive light, we might well consider it as an opportunity to stimulate the translator's creativity, especially when the translation task at hand is heavily connoted by culture-specific references, as in the case of *Il divo*. Gottlieb (2014: 36) has remarked that subtitling is an addictive type of translation, as it always includes the ST (as opposed to non-addictive types such as literary translation, in which the original is not normally present), and the ST may also be influenced by factors such as the status of the source text or the knowledge of the source language and culture in the target culture, etc. The *cinema d'impegno* and *Il divo* in particular are imbued with specific linguistic and cultural references to Italian political events that are clearly bound to influence the subtitling process, and therefore also worth investigating.

The translation of culture-specific material (be it proper names, or more general linguistic references to the culture within which the material has developed, such as idioms, nursery rhymes etc.) has long been debated in Translation Studies in general and AVT in particular (Leppihalme, 1997, Davies González and Scott-Tennent, 2005, Pedersen, 2007 and 2011, Dore, 2010, Ranzato, 2016, just to name a few). These scholars have proposed categorisation frameworks and procedures to deal with such issues, particularly when dealing with either dubbing or subtitling. In a *medium-restricted* (Holmes 1988) mode of AVT such as subtitling, the original text can be heard along with the reading of the subtitles. Hence, Extralinguistic Cultural References (or ECRs, to use Pedersen's terminology) may be replaced by a series of procedures, including retention, literal translation, specification, generalization, substitution or even omission, when deemed possible (cf. Pedersen, 2007: 31-32 and Gottlieb, 2014: 38). In particular, Pedersen (2007, 2011) contends that culture-specific references can be replaced by transcultural ERCs, which are general references that can be grasped by a broader audience because they are internationally known. Conversely, Dore (2010: 20-21) has suggested the preferable practice of using a better-known reference that still springs from the original culture (e.g. translating 'Mr. Potato Head' as 'E.T'.) wherever possible. Lastly, subtitlers may resort to the use of references proceeding from the target culture, thus turning to the most *domesticating* solution (Venuti, 1998). With this in mind, the analysis of the two datasets in the following section serves to verify which types of *ad hoc* procedures and more general strategies have been used to transfer the culture-specific references from Italian into English in Sorrentino's *Il divo*.

4. Subtitling *Il Divo*

Il Divo was released few years before Sorrentino's Academy Award winning film *La Grande Bellezza* (*The Great Beauty*, 2013). The latter represented a continuation of Sorrentino's commitment to providing deep insights into Italian culture and politics by showing this nation's inertial and cultural decline (Picarelli, 2015). Viano (2010) has discussed *Il divo* through its depiction of Rome, a city which has often been seen as a symbol of eternity, or a "reminder of "eternity"" (ibid. 344). His reading of Sorrentino's account of Andreotti's political rise and fall is compared to the city itself and some of its most important places, such as *Via del Corso* and the palaces where Andreotti lived and worked. In his review titled "Bottom Line: Supremely entertaining political cartoon that may not play beyond its native Italy", Brunette's (2008) choice of the term "cartoon" for use in his title to refer to Andreotti's unappealing appearance (i.e. his stoop, his stiff torso, his impassive expression, with the actor all the while wearing a pair of ludicrous ear prosthetics) is not random. Caricatures and masks have often been used to represent the connection between power and the grotesque in Italian cinema (cf. Coviello, 2010 for an extensive discussion).

Earlier in this paper, I mentioned the fact that in *Il divo* the dialogues and monologues are dense, meaning that they are extremely loaded in terms of the information conveyed. In subtitling, this has often been regarded as a major issue since it entails the condensation of the spoken text. Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007) and Lomheim (1995) have reported percentages of text reduction ranging from 22% to 40%. Conversely, in the case of the text under scrutiny, the comparison I have carried out between the spoken ST and the English subtitled TT shows that the original Italian version amounts to 8,162 words whereas the English subtitles comprise a total of 7,542 words. Clearly, there is no extremely significant difference between the two datasets; less than 10% of text is not transferred in the TT. This may be explained by the fact that the actors almost always speak at a reasonably slow pace, thus conveying the idea that a thoughtful statement in the script is well pondered, especially in Andreotti's case. This probably helps keep the amount of omitted text to the minimum.

According to Gottlieb's (2014: 28) definition, the translation of *Il divo* from Italian into English can be defined as an upstream translation (i.e. from a dominated into a dominant language). Being subtitled, the original soundtrack "aurally influences the choices of the subtitler [...] with a potential outcome less idiomatic than what is most likely seen in monosemiotic translation" (e.g. literary translation; ibid. 31). Hence, idiomaticity and culture-specific allusions (Dore 2010) (or Extralinguistic Cultural References, to use Pedersen's 2007 terminology) can be used to gauge the level of *foreignisation* and/or *domestication* (Venuti, 1998) in AVT.

Before proceeding, it seems important to point out that the analysis that follows has been carried out on the subtitled version of the DVD marketed in the

USA and UK by a UK-based company named Artificial Eye. Interestingly, though, the subtitles themselves were produced by Laser S. Film s.r.l., a subtitling company based in Rome. Since it has not been possible to contact either the distributor or the subtitling company, the hypotheses put forward below are solely based on the contrastive examination of the two datasets.

As mentioned above, the film comprises a large number of linguistic and cultural references that need careful handling in order to transmit the necessary contextual and textual clues for the understanding of the film. In other words, I attempt here to establish how the translator has tackled the substantial amount of ‘Italianness’ that the film entails and what strategies and procedures they have used to convey it in the English language. In general, there is a high number of culture-specific references comprising one or more words in *Il divo*. As Marcus (2010a: 253) has pointed out, Sorrentino’s penchant for enumeration is evident in the many lists that can be found in the film, especially in the ‘foreword’ (and the post-script) to the film and the many captions and intertitles in it. The following is a minute description and analysis of the Italian original and the English subtitled version of part of the foreword of *Il divo*, since it serves to exemplify the complexity of the translation task at hand.

Ex. No.	Italian ST	English TT
1	Brigate Rosse (BR): Organizzazione terroristica marxista-leninista nata nel 1970. Nel 1978 le BR sequestrano il presidente della DC, Aldo Moro. Dopo 55 giorni Moro sarà ucciso. I <u>brigatisti</u> hanno sempre sostenuto di avere agito in autonomia, ma le indagini per individuare la prigionia di Moro possono essere state pregiudicate della loggia P2.	RED BRIGADES (BR): Marxist-Leninist terrorist group founded in 1970. Kidnapped DC president Aldo Moro in 1978, killed him after 55 days. <u>Terrorists</u> always maintained they acted independently, but search for Moro perhaps influenced by P2 lodge.

2	<p>Democrazia Cristiana (DC) Partito d'ispirazione cristiana, fondato nel 1942 da Alcide De Gaspari. Organizzato in correnti, ha governato l'Italia dal dopoguerra ai primi Anni Novanta, quando fu sciolto travolto dalle <u>inchieste di corruzione e finanziamento illecito dei partiti</u>, comunemente chiamata "<u>Tangentopoli</u>" I maggiori leader sono stati Aldo Moro, Amintore Fanfani, Giulio Andreotti.</p>	<p>CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS (DC): Christian ethics party founded by De Gasperi. Organized in factions, governed Italy from 1946 to early '90s, when, along with other parties, it was swept away by "<u>Bribesville</u>" scandal. Main leaders: Aldo Moro, Amintore Fanfani, Giulio Andreotti.</p>
3	<p>Loggia P2: La <u>loggia massonica</u> "Propaganda due" è stata un'associazione segreta nata durante la Guerra Fredda <u>in chiave anti-comunista</u>. Gestita da Lucio Gelli, si conoscono i nomi di 972 iscritti. Ha raccolto politici, giornalisti, uomini di d'affari, delle Forze Armate e dei servizi segreti, <u>con l'obiettivo di realizzare il piano di rinascita nazionale: un programma di trasformazione autoritaria dello stato</u>. Anche Silvio Berlusconi, <u>poi presidente del Consiglio</u>, è stato iscritto alla Loggia.</p>	<p>P2 LODGE: <u>Anti-Communist</u> Masonic secret society founded during Cold War. Run by Lucio Gelli, 972 known members: Politicians, reporters, businessmen, military, secret service personnel. <u>Objective was to install an authoritarian government</u>. Silvio Berlusconi was also member.</p>

Table 1. Translation of the Italian Glossary in *Il divo*

As can be seen in Table 1, each of the three sections in the ST aims to assist viewers in understanding the complex topic at hand. Sorrentino probably felt

compelled to provide such information, as he has stated that most Italians are likely unaware of these details (Crowdus and Sorrentino, 2009: 37). The TT clearly appears reduced in terms of number of words used. The reason for this is that each section of the ST remains on the screen while the TT subtitles flash on and off so as to cover only a minimum portion of the screen. Regarding the oft-debated issues of text reduction and omission, Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007: 148) point out that “[i]t is the balance between the effort required by the viewer to process an item, and its relevance for the understanding of the film narrative that determines whether or not it [the item] is to be included in the translation”. Clearly, here the translator has had to determine how much could be omitted or condensed in order to allow the foreign viewer to understand the film narrative and, most importantly, the culture-specific references to the Italian political landscape of that time.

As can be noted, in both (1) and (2) the translator has opted for translating “Brigate Rosse” (Red Brigades) and “Democrazia Cristiana” (Christian Democrats), while retaining the original acronyms (respectively, BR and DC). This may depend on the fact that both acronyms, which are easily understood by Italians, are extensively used in the movie. More interestingly, in (1) the translator has opted to neutralise the word “brigatista” (i.e. BR members) by using its superordinate (Terrorist) probably in the attempt to explicitate its meaning (defined as ‘generalization’ in Pedersen, 2011 and Gottlieb, 2014). In (2), “Tangentopoli” is correctly conveyed by its calque “Bribesville”, which has been used by the International English-speaking press to refer to this scandal concerning corrupt Italian politicians, as mentioned in the ST (“inchieste di corruzione e finanziamento illecito dei partiti”). Instead, the latter piece of information has been omitted in the TT. Although the word “Bribesville” is itself sufficiently self-explanatory, the TT viewers may need to acquire more information regarding it. However, it stands to reason that this choice has been made on the grounds that the film makes various references to these scandals as the story unfolds. Hence, omitting it may be felt as a viable solution.

In (3) the ST refers to P2, a Masonic lodge. In principle, Masonic lodges are fraternal organisations pursuing a common aim. They were based on Freemasonry and open to the public; some still exist in London¹. Conversely, the Italian P2 Lodge had the secret intent to install an authoritarian government in the country and oppose any possible Communist-based government that might have been established in Italy, as explained in detail in the ST (and partly omitted in the TT). In the TT, the reference to Silvio Berlusconi’s future political career has been omitted, although the reasons for this omission cannot easily be explained. Both the ST and the TT are superimposed respectively in the centre and at the bottom of the screen, meaning that processing time could be equal for both source and target viewers. It could be suggested that space limitations may have influenced the

³ Cf. the website devoted to Freemasonry: <http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/> (last accessed 01.12.0216)

translator's choice, but such possibilities at this point amount to mere speculation. Clearly, all these examples reveal the high level of cultural specificity that they entail.

To provide a systematic account of the large number of culture-specific references in the ST, I employ below a framework that I have used elsewhere to categorise these items (Dore, 2010). This framework is based on Leppihalme's (1997) seminal work on the translation of allusions. She uses 'allusion' as an umbrella term that includes: "a variety of uses of preformed linguistic material in either its original or modified form, and of proper names, to convey often implicit meaning" (ibid. 3). Hence, reference and allusion are used interchangeably here. Moreover, my taxonomy is an extended version of González Davies and Scott-Tennent's (2005: 166-167) categorisation of the sources of reference, which are defined as: 1) material: sources related to everyday objects; 2) ecological: sources related to places; 3) social: sources related to social organization and its manifestations in the arts, politics, history, leisure, etc., 4) religious: sources related to rituals and ideological manifestations; and 5) linguistic: understood as the means to express all of the above and which refers to attitudinal and conversational clues. These categories have been revised to include items such as popular culture (e.g. sports, show business, music, etc.) as opposed to high culture (e.g. institutions, literature, art, etc.) (Dore, 2010: 16).

Table 3 examines the four categories used for the comparative analysis of the culture-specific references in the original and translated text. I have not included here the many references to religion (e.g. Dio, Gesù, Giuda, San Bernardo), as they have been consistently translated with their English counterparts (e.g. God, Jesus, Judas, St. Bernard).

Type of reference	Italian ST	English TT
Material (drinks, food, measures, various types of products available on the market, etc.)	Optalidon; Tedax; La ragazza bella di Mondragone (mozzarella cheese)	Optalidon; Tedax; The fat girl;

<p>Popular culture (nursery rhymes, nicknames, sport, show business)</p>	<p>Il divo Giulio; la prima lettera dell’alfabeto; il gobbo; la volpe; il Moloch; la salamandra; il Papa nero; l’eternità; l’uomo delle tenebre; Belzebu; Il fanciullo; Limone; Lo squalo; Sua Sanità; Sua Eccellenza; Tarzan; La bestia</p>	<p>The Divine Julius; The First Letter of the Alphabet; The Hunchback; The Fox; Moloch; The Salamander; The Black Pope; Eternity; Man of Darkness; Beelzebug; The Lad;</p> <p>The Lemon; The Shark; His Healthiness; His Excellency; Tarzan; The Beast</p>
<p>Ecological (places, flora and fauna, etc.)</p>	<p>“il Lazio era vostro, la Campania mia la Sicilia di Lima e il Piemonte di Cristofori”; Piazzale Loreto;</p>	<p>Each one of us always took care of our own regions;</p> <p>--</p>
<p>High culture/ Institutions (literature, institutions, politics, art, history, honorifics, etc.)</p>	<p>Guerre puniche; “I dorotei”; IOR; Istituto di studi ciceroniani; Presidenza dei circoli musicali lauree onoris causa; Ministro al Bilancio; Corte d’Assise; Corte di Cassazione; il Quirinale</p>	<p>Punic wars; the other Christian Democrat faction; Vatican Bank; Institute of Ciceronian Studies; President of Music Society honorary degrees; Chancellor of the Exchequer; Assizes Court; Cassation Court; The Quirinal</p>

Table 3. Summary of references in *Il divo*

Categories are seldom clear-cut and often overlap. For example, “the Quirinal” refers to the Quirinal Hill in Rome, which is the location of the official residence of Italy’s head of state. However, in the text it synecdochically alludes to the Presidency of Italy and it has therefore been subsumed under the “Institutions”

category. Also, Piazzale Loreto is a square in Milan that became the scene of one of the most well-known events in the modern history of Italy, namely the public display of Benito Mussolini's corpse on 29 April 1945. Although the characters uttering the name of the square are indirectly referring to the historical event, I have chosen to subsume this item under the ecological category for the sake of clarity.

In general, proper names have been retained in the subtitles and are therefore not included here. Although the TT audience is unlikely to know whom most of these names refer to (e.g. Calvi, Dalla Chiesa, De Mita), the context may help them to understand. Moreover, the dynamic written text added on the screen is often used to describe the important role of these figures within the political and historical context that the film describes (cf. Figure 2 above). As for the items included in the 'material culture' category, the names of the medicines Optalidon and Tedax have been transferred directly. Andreotti used to take two medicines to alleviate his constant migraines. In the film, he repeatedly asks Cardinal Fiorenzo Angelini (see the explanation below) to make sure that these drugs are kept in the national health system's catalogue of authorized medications, despite debates as to their effectiveness. The fact that Andreotti initially succeeds in keeping the medicines on the list, while they are subsequently withdrawn, seems to be metaphorically employed to demonstrate first Andreotti's power and then his loss of influence. Interestingly enough, the mozzarella cheese in the Italian ST is described as "bella" ('beautiful') consistently with the Italians' passion for food. Conversely, the English version describes it as "fat", maybe because in the scene this term is used, all the characters are sharing a large mozzarella that one of Andreotti's affiliates had brought as a present.

The nicknames used to refer to Andreotti and his affiliates are noteworthy examples, as they show that both the source and target audience may need a substantial amount of background knowledge in order to process them. Moreover, the nicknames attest to the different procedures applied to their transfer into English. "Il divo Giulio" (The Divine Julius) was first coined by the journalist Mino Pecorelli, who compared Andreotti's charismatic persona to Julius Caesar's⁴. In this case, translating Andreotti's first name as Julius may be an attempt to make this reference clearer. Conversely, all the other nicknames have been translated literally to convey the images adopted in the original. "La prima lettera dell'alfabeto" (The First Letter of the Alphabet) was used by the other Christian Democrats leaders to show his importance. Similarly, "il gobbo" (The Hunchback) refers to Andreotti's deformed spine, but it also seems to reinforce existing (and time-old) stereotypes regarding hunchbacks as being evil creatures. Another easy-to-grasp metaphor is "la volpe" (The Fox), which was used to refer to Andreotti's political cunning. Interestingly, "il Moloch" (Moloch) – the biblical name of a

⁴ For an overview of the origin of Andreotti's nicknames, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giulio_Andreotti (last access 12/07/2017)

Canaanite dog – along with “il Papa nero” (The Black Pope), “Belzebu” (Beelzebub, used by Bettino Craxi, another important Italian politician at that time), “l’uomo delle tenebre” (Man of Darkness) and “la salamandra” (The Salamander) were all used to refer to Andreotti’s ability to pull the strings even from behind the scenes, manipulating events in a nefarious manner to perpetuate his leadership within the Italian political landscape. Finally, “l’eternità” (Eternity) and “il fanciullo” (The Lad) referred to his long-standing and enduring ability to remain in power despite the political turmoil Italy faced during the ‘first republic’.

The nicknames of his affiliates (respectively, “Limone”; “Lo squalo”; “Sua Sanità”; “Sua Eccellenza”; “Tarzan”; “La bestia”) have also been transferred literally. In particular, the translator has successfully transferred the nickname given to Cardinal Fiorenzo Angelini, at that time the President of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Health Care Workers. The paronymous wordplay in “Sua Sanità”, which both refers to “sanità” (“healthcare”) and plays on “Sua Santità” (His Holiness), has been aptly conveyed as “His Healthiness”.

As for the ecological references, all the names referring to the Italian regions have been generalised (Lazio, Campania, Piemonte). The time and space within which all this information had to be conveyed have probably dictated this condensing approach. The highly culture-specific reference to “Piazzale Loreto” has not been included in the subtitles; as mentioned earlier, it recalls the public display of Mussolini’s corpse on 29 April 1945 after he was captured and shot dead by the Italian Partisans. The words “Piazzale Loreto” are shouted several times by a number of politicians who are protesting against Andreotti in the Parliament, equating the latter to Mussolini and his betrayal of the nation. The subtitler may have thought that TT receivers are mostly unaware of the name of the square and its connection to the related historical event.

The “high culture/institutions” category includes various allusions to well-known Italian (and Vatican) institutions or historical events that are easily recognizable to the ST audience. The reference to the Punic Wars has been retained by using its English equivalent, while “il Quirinale” has been directly transferred as “the Quirinal” probably because the visual and verbal context and co-text can help to disambiguate the reference. The reference to the Vatican Bank (IOR) has been made explicit. Conversely, the references to cultural institutions and honorifics have been literally translated (Institute of Ciceronian Studies”; “President of Music Society, Chancellor of the Exchequer). Interestingly, “I Dorotei” has been made explicit with “the other Christian Democrats faction” – in fact, the Italian name derived from the convent dedicated to St. Dorothy, where the members of the faction opposing Andreotti used to meet. Such information is likely to escape most Italians, let alone foreigners; hence this procedure has effectively served its explicatory purpose.

As for the importance of the judiciary system within the context of *Il divo*, two noteworthy examples are the “Corte d’Assise” (Assizes Court) and “Corte di Cassazione” (Cassation Court) above. In England, the courts of assize were

periodic courts held in the main county towns and presided over by visiting judges from the higher courts based in London. They were abolished in 1972 and replaced by a single permanent Crown Court; they normally dealt with major crimes such as murders, forgery, rapes, etc.² Albeit no longer in existence, the use of this term to refer to this type of court might still be grasped by (part of) the TT audience; yet the North American audience might not be at all familiar with it. Conversely, the Courts of Cassation exist only in some judicial systems and are only competent – as in Italy – for verifying the interpretation of the law, not the facts as such, after an appeal trial has been completed. They differ substantially from the Supreme Court in many countries, as the latter can rule on the facts and the law³. In both cases, the references to the judiciary system may require fairly high amounts of encyclopaedic knowledge to be appropriately processed. More research is certainly needed to verify whether or not the target audience can understand these references and their relevance within the text. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the subtitles were created by Laser S. Film s.r.l. in Rome. This factor may have therefore influenced the translator’s decision-making process as well as the briefing a translator would receive from the translation agency or the client commissioning the subtitles. Such speculation has certainly to be proven by further research, which could concentrate on those cases in which the translator’s socio-cultural schemata (e.g. being a native speaker of English living in Italy for many years) may influence their choices and perhaps explain the reasons behind translation choices such as those reported above.

5. Concluding Remarks

This study has focused on the many highly specific cultural references with which Paolo Sorrentino’s film *Il dino* is imbued, and how they have been tackled in this film’s subtitling into English. These references span from historical and political events to the nicknames Andreotti was given as well as more general but still culture-bound allusions. The analysis has been prompted by several considerations. The themes Sorrentino deals with are part of the social, cultural and historical heritage of most Italians; the Mafia, the ‘strategy of tension’, the political scandals of the so-called ‘first republic’ and, most importantly, the impenetrable secrets underlying Andreotti’s political career have always been subjects of heated debate in Italy. Considering that such a multifaceted historical period is still difficult for many Italians to really comprehend, one rightly wonders

⁵ Cf. The UK Parliament website on the courts of Assizes at: <http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/laworder/court/overview/assizes/> (last accessed 12.12.2016)

⁶ Cf. the UK Supreme Court website <https://www.supremecourt.uk/> and the USA Supreme Court website <https://www.supremecourt.gov/> (last accessed 12.12.2016)

how it can be effectively transferred or conveyed abroad. The feasibility of this endeavour has been questioned by journalists and critics alike (Brunette, 2008, Crowds and Sorrentino, 2009). As mentioned earlier (Section 1), Sorrentino has minimised such difficulties by pointing out that the details can be overlooked in favour of the bigger picture *Il divo* offers.

Sorrentino's point is certainly well taken; indeed, he has created a cinematic masterpiece that serves as a disheartening critique of Italian society. At the same time, it has seemed to me equally interesting to investigate how the translator has navigated the seas of linguistic and cultural references that the film represents. Hence, the present study's comparative analysis of the Italian and English texts has shown that the subtitles have attempted to strike a balance between the need to convey relevant information regarding the social, historical and political context within which the film is embedded and the technical constraints the act of subtitling poses. What certainly shines through the analysis of the two datasets is that they both convincingly convey a complex picture – negative yet also powerful – of the Italian politics of that time, along with the peculiarities of Italian culture and society. However, given the enormous complexity of the subject matter for non-Italian audiences, the translator has been forced to opt primarily for a *foreignizing* approach, thus retaining the culture-specific references in most parts of the text.

By and large, the approach used to translate *Il divo* appears to be an attempt to maintain certain associations that convey, to some extent, the uniquely Italian ingredients of this cinematic meditation on power, which is, after all, a universal theme. Yet, such an approach may require fairly high amounts of encyclopaedic knowledge on the target audience's part, thus making the comprehension and appreciation of the movie a real challenge. Those willing to take on this challenge may not be many, but they will certainly be rewarded.

Clearly, more research is needed on both the production and reception of subtitling and AVT at large. Besides, it stands to reason that future AVT practice and scholarly research should pay more attention to the fast-changing landscape of audiovisual production (as in the case of dynamic writing). This may provide an exciting new impetus for creative and innovative output with an aim, as well, to enhancing viewers' experience of some of the complex films being turned out by today's auteur (and non) filmmakers. Finally, it can offer stimulating food for thought concerning the theoretical and practical underpinnings of the discipline.

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