

Lost in Warsaw: the subversion of multilingual humour in the Italian subtitles to the Polish war comedy *Giuseppe in Warsaw* (1964)

Monika Woźniak

University of Rome “La Sapienza”
monika.wozniak@uniroma1.it

Abstract

In 1964, many decades before multilingual movies have become fashionable, a Polish director, Stanisław Lenartowicz, made a war comedy called “Giuseppe in Warsaw.” It narrates the adventures of an Italian soldier who on his way home from the Russian front during World War II is stranded in Poland. Pseudo-language, translation, mistranslation, and mock translation figure conspicuously in the movie, which shows a series of clashes between Polish, German and Italian languages in the most improbable combinations. The original film used no subtitles, because the linguistic chaos was pivotal to showing the absurdity of the war through the deforming lenses of the comedy. This paper analyses various mechanisms of the multilingual humour in the original film and in its subtitled version in Italian, in order to see how the dynamics of humour change in the case of L3TT which becomes L2 in translation (Italian), especially when the point of the view of the audience is subverted and the viewers identify with the protagonist rather than the Polish characters in the movie.

Keywords: multilingual comedy, multilingual humour, translation, Polish Cinema

1. Introduction

Multilingualism in films has become more visible over the last few decades. On the one hand, multilingual movies¹ reflect the socio-political transformations in increasingly multi-ethnic and multilingual societies of industrial nations. On the other hand, the increase of multilingual practises in film and TV productions is with no doubt related to the changing attitude towards what was once called the “linguistic hubris” incarnated by Hollywood, which “both profited from and itself promoted the universalisation of English as *the* idiom of speaking subjects, thus contributing indirectly to the subtle erosion of the linguistic autonomy of other cultures” (Shohat & Stam 1985: 36). It is probably ironic that at a time when the American film industry is more powerful than ever, releasing at regular intervals billion-dollar global blockbusters watched dutifully by audiences around the world, a new sense of linguistic political correctness is inducing a more extensive use of multilingual practices. It is still more ironic, perhaps, that the phenomenon of multilingualism and

¹ The term “multilingual” can be used to describe texts incorporating official languages, dialects, sociolects, slang, pidgin and invented languages (Delabastita, 2009).

of the issues related to its translation only came into the focus to film and translation scholarship when they penetrated into mainstream cinematographic production. In fact, it has been pointed out that “the cinematic media have been marked by multilingualism since their very beginnings, as can be seen from the multilingual modes of production and intertitles in many silent movies, and the enormous extent to which Hollywood has always profited from foreign-language immigrants and other movie cultures” (Bleichenbacher 2007: 113). Therefore, even if the idea of the “linguistic turn” in cinema launched by some scholars as a result of a new global sensibility does reflect a recent tendency noticeable in mainstream films, the analysis of multilingual practices on screen does not need or indeed should not be limited to recent productions or some famous examples from the past, such as Jean-Luc Godard’s emblematic *Le Mepris* (1963). Going back in time and examining audiovisual productions created by “minor” national cinema industries may sometimes offer more complex and multi-layered multilingual material for studies than the multilingualism in films as celebrated and analysed as Quentin Tarantino’s *Inglorious Basterds* (2009).

2. Beyond diegetic anchorage: functionality of multilingual film practices

The most obvious role of multilingualism in the movies is to reflect the reality they are portraying: if the plot involves characters from different national, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, logically they should speak their own languages. However, this is rarely the case, unless there are some additional motives to introduce multilingual elements into the texture of the film. The most common practice for those mainstream movies which do not completely anglicise the context shown on the screen has been to employ so-called “audio-postcarding” (Wahl 2007: 337) or “evocation” (Bleichenbacher 2008), acknowledging other languages *en passant* and peppering the dialogue with some foreign words, in a half-hearted attempt to add some exoticism to the plot. As Diaz-Cintas rightly notices: “these productions can hardly be considered meaningful multilingual films, and, on the whole, do not usually pose any problems from the point of view of translation.” (2011: 217).

In fact, it could be argued that the multilingual element acquires real importance only if it becomes a bearer of the central theme of the film, which generally happens in productions that deal with the problems of cultural clash, of misunderstanding and of encounter with the Other. These issues are often embedded into a dramatic, or even tragic context, but they also provide ample opportunities to create comic situations.

2.1 Dynamics of multilingual humour

In the first place, one has to consider whether multilingual humour is subject to the same rules of other types of humour encountered in films, and therefore whether it creates similar problems in translation. Although the comic component in films comes to fruition both visually and verbally, often relying, indeed, on a close correlation between the image and the word, “at the end of the day, translating humor for audiovisuals is not too different from translating verbal humor *tout court*” (Chiaro 2010: 19). The main types of verbally expressed humour (Ritchie 2000) in films can be ascribed to three categories: a) humour based on wordplay, puns, rhymes, play with grammar or with spelling b) humour based on cultural references and allusions c) humour based on language variation. Traditionally, the first two categories are considered the most problematic in translation (Chiaro 2010: 5). The translation of wordplay and cultural allusions is complex mainly because they imply the complicity of the audience: to be amused the viewers should understand them, and in order to do that they need good knowledge of the mechanisms of the language spoken, and of the

cultural context the humour is embedded in. However, in multilingual comedies, which focus on “untranslatability, cultural disjunction and gaps in meaning” (Dwyer 2005: 305) these two types of humour have almost no *raison d’être* or in any case do not feature prominently, because it would be going against the principal mechanism of the narrative. On the contrary, the third kind of humour, based on language variation, appears to be one of the most obvious and prominent strategies in the multilingual context. Its mechanism can be activated in several ways:

- a) an individual tries to make himself/herself understood not knowing the language of the other speakers;
- b) an individual tries to make himself/herself understood by barely speaking the foreign language or distorting the pronunciation;
- c) an individual pretends to speak a foreign language without speaking it at all;
- d) a digetic translation is carried out by an unreliable translator.

Since trying to be understood without knowing the language often involves exaggerated use of gestures, the verbal humour in such situations frequently goes hand in hand with the visual. The comic effect also depends on the type of interaction taking place among the characters: whether the interlocutors are trying to understand each other, whether the recipient misunderstands the message or is not at all interested in any interaction. In any case, humour based on language variation, which in a slightly different way often appears in monolingual films, is considered relatively easy to render in translation: “A film that instrumentalizes ‘foreign talk’ is not commonly seen as problematic, since similar strategies can be developed in the target language to accommodate this. Incorrect syntax, pronunciation, inadequate lexical use, and so on, can be reproduced in all languages with little difficulty” (Heiss 2014: 7). Given that multilingual humour tends to rely heavily on stereotypes and clichés, as Christine Heiss seems to imply (2014: 4), it could even be argued that it is easier to translate language variation in comedy than in drama, where its multi-layered cultural significance may be more elusive for the foreign audience.

However, not all multilingual comedies are cliché-driven. Or rather, cultural and linguistic clichés may become just a starting point for a more complicated game with the audience. In any case, the crucial element in the mechanism of humour in a comedy set in the multilingual context depends on the decision whether to provide the viewers with subtitles when intradiegetic interlingual misunderstandings occur. The subtitles give the audience an advantage over the characters of the film. The additional information basically allows them to have fun at the expense of the clueless protagonists and to find humour in situations which for the intradiegetic characters may be frustrating or even dramatic. Save for the situations in which there is an overlap between L3 in the ST and L2 in the TT², this strategy makes the task of the translator relatively easy. To the contrary, multilingual situations on screen that remain not subtitled are challenging both for the audience and the translators. In dramatic films such as *Babel* the lack of subtitles puts the viewers in the same position experienced by the intradiegetic characters and may inspire understanding and empathy towards their plights and helplessness³. In a comedy, however, the audience needs to be able to comprehend enough of the communicative context on the screen to find it funny, even without understanding exactly what is being said. That means that more emphasis must be put on

² Here and throughout the text I am using the terminology proposed by Corrius, Zabalbeascoa (2011) in which L1 is the main (or only) language in the Source Text; L2 is the main (or only) language in the Target Text; and L3 is any language or linguistic variation that is distinguishable from L1 in the Source Text.

³ Of course, some viewers may know the L3 and therefore have an “advantage” over the intradiegetic characters. However, the linguistic politics of the film are aimed at the implied viewer rather than the real one.

nonverbal elements of the communication, on the implied cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the viewers, and on their willingness to undertake a cognitive effort. Therefore, the strategy of not using subtitles, aimed at a specific audience, is likely to create far more translation problems than using them would.

3. Polish cinema, multilingualism and *Giuseppe in Warsaw*

Given the political isolationism of communist Poland, the relative uniformity of the Polish language and society and the predominance of national and domestic themes in films, multilingualism or heterolingualism were not a frequent feature of post-war Polish cinematography. The only two foreign languages which appeared on a regular basis in Polish productions were German and Russian. The trauma of the Second World War and of the German invasion⁴ provided the topics of numerous Polish war films. Almost all of them observed the general rule of so called vehicular matching (Sternberg 1981: 223): Germans spoke German, Russians spoke Russian, Poles spoke Polish and – occasionally – German or Russian. Yet another particularity of those productions was the lack of subtitles. When it was deemed necessary, in some scenes an intradiegetic translator would be introduced, but usually it was left to the audience to guess or decipher the foreign talk. Such a strategy was not as venturesome as it would seem at the first glance. Russian, being a Slavic language, has many affinities with Polish and to a certain degree can be understood by the Polish viewers on an intuitive level. As for German, during the six years of the Nazi rule of terror in Poland during the Second World War, Poles learnt some basic German expressions, especially those used by the Gestapo. Perpetuated in movies about the war, these would be remembered by more than one generation of viewers.

For a long time, portrayals of the Second World War in Polish films were almost without exception dark and dramatic evocations of the tragedy of war. Over twenty years had to pass before it was acceptable for the Polish audience to enjoy a less serious take on the events of the recent past. Stanisław Lenartowicz's *Giuseppe in Warsaw* (*Giuseppe w Warszawie*, 1964) was one of the earliest attempts to show the times of war in a comedic light.

Looking for an efficient mechanism to offer a humorous vision of the everyday life in Warsaw under Nazi occupation, Lenartowicz and the writer Jacek Wejroch found it in upsetting the usual contrast between the evil Nazis and the heroic Poles by introducing an outsider, an Italian soldier accidentally stranded in Warsaw on his way to Italy from the eastern front. Separated from the other soldiers after a partisan ambush, the protagonist – Giuseppe Santucci – travels to Warsaw on a civilian train where his machine gun is stolen. Afraid of being court-martialled if he returns to the military barracks without his weapon, he follows Maria, a Polish girl met on the train, whom he suspects of the theft, to her flat and refuses to leave until he gets his gun back. His presence complicates the lives of Maria, who is indeed an active member of the Polish resistance, and her brother Staszek, a painter who abhors any kind of violence and only wants to lead a quiet life. In a course of humorous events Giuseppe falls in love with Maria and, along with the reluctant Staszek, becomes a hero of the Polish resistance. In order to make the cultural shock of the protagonist more authentic, the director insisted on casting an authentic Italian in the role of Giuseppe (Dondzik 2014: 42). The part went to Neapolitan Antonio Cifariello, known in Italy mainly for romantic comedies and adventure films.

⁴ For obvious political reasons films about Russian aggression against Poland during WW2 could not be portrayed in the films made under communist rule. In war films Russians appeared only as allies and friends.

3.1 The many faces of humour in *Giuseppe in Warsaw*

The humour in Lenartowicz's comedy works on many levels. On the macroscale the film comes across as a parody of serious Polish movies about the Nazi occupation. The audience is confronted with amplified versions of typical scenes from war films: street roundups, the Gestapo's brutality, military actions organized by the resistance, a thriving black market, and so on. Their satirical dimension is emphasised by the excellent score by Wojciech Kilar, who skilfully interweaved in his soundtrack several distinctive motifs related to different cultural contexts: a tarantella, a stylised version of Charlie Chaplin's *Titine*, a nostalgic waltz played on the mandolin, a sweeping military march and above all, variations on the well-known mocking Polish war rhyme *Siekiera, motyka* [*Axe, Hoe*]. A true masterstroke was to cast in the role of the gawky painter Staszek "the Polish James Dean", Zbigniew Cybulski, whom the audience associated with heroic characters in war films, especially his iconic role as Maciek Chełmicki in Andrzej Wajda's tragic *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958).

All kinds of visual and situational humour abound in the film, from Maria's neighbour, Mr Kowalski, terrified of Germans, who assiduously tries to disguise himself as an old man, a woman, and even as a child, to slapstick comedy effect in some scenes and sheer absurdity in others. Character-based national stereotypes are constantly played against each other. However, the comedy is driven mainly by verbal humour, exploited in every possible way.

3.2 Language variation in *Giuseppe in Warsaw*

There are three main languages spoken in the film: Polish (L1), Italian (L3¹) and German (L3²). However, given that the L3 may also be "an instance of relevant language variation, sufficient to signal more than one identifiable speech community being portrayed or represented within a text" (Corrius & Zabalbeascoa 2011: 115) it could be argued that the L1 is further divided into L1^a (standard Polish) and L1^b (regional Polish variation). Several comedic elements in the Polish dialogue are indeed associated with the characteristic local slang typical of the working-class of Warsaw. The Varsovian slang, full of diminutives, neologisms, and picturesque and funny-sounding expressions is frequently used for humorous purposes in Polish literature, songs and plays. It works to striking effect when employed to describe the dramatic realities of the war. This is particularly well-played during the first close encounter between Giuseppe and Polish civilians on board a train. He attracts the understandable curiosity of the passengers, who do not display hostility towards him, especially when the *kozak spod Sorrento* ("cossack from Sorrento") agrees that *Hitler kaputt* and *Mussolini pure* ("Mussolini as well"). They deem him to be a *swój chłop* (a slang expression for "cool guy" or "all right guy"), offer him vodka, and ask him to play guitar and sing Neapolitan songs.

The standard Polish (L1^a) in the film displays some interesting stylistic features as well. The members of the Polish Resistance use expressions typical of the military jargon known from the war films, which are not necessarily funny in themselves but assume parodic meaning in the situational context. They are also punctuated with absurd watchwords, such as *bocian pożarł kijanki* ("the stork ate tadpoles") *żaby złożyły skrzek* ("frogs deposited the spawn") or *Czy pani Alinka potrzebuje pasty na karaluchy?* ("does Mrs. Alina desire a cockroach repellent?") which are hilarious travesties of real code words used by the underground army during wartime. Finally, interwoven into the dialogue are some literary allusions and distorted literary quotes, mainly uttered by the art-lover Staszek, which provide comedic relief in potentially dramatic or sad situations.

3.3. Comedic strategies of interlingual communication

While the funny elements embedded in the Polish dialogue play an important role in the comedic dimension of the film, it is the interlingual communication that provides the main source of the humour. In the first scenes of the film, the comic effect stems from the attempts of communication between Giuseppe, who obviously does not know any Polish, and the Polish civilians on the train, who can only conjure up some isolated Italian or pseudo-Italian words. They ask him *Italiano?* and when he answers *Sì sì*, someone thinks he wants to urinate (*siusiu* in Polish). Later, when they want him to play guitar, they address him with a series of vaguely musical words: *canarino*, *Caruso*, *belcanto*, *bambini*. On the whole, although the “Italian” employed by the Polish passengers is hilarious, they are satisfied with the way the communication is proceeding. The first conversation between Maria and Giuseppe, also on the train, is not as successful. The girl approaches the Italian and tries to convince him to sell his weapon to her. He fancies her and thinks she is flirting with him, but when he finally understands that she is talking about money, he is convinced that she is asking him to pay for a sexual favour. He gives her his weapon willingly, and only when she tries to give him money and get away with the gun does he realize his mistake.

This kind of misunderstanding is recurrent in the film, but as the plot develops, the linguistic issues become more complicated. When Giuseppe and Maria arrive at her flat with her, there are Gestapo soldiers waiting for the girl – yet another typical dramatic scene from Polish war movies. Obviously, the soldiers speak German, yet there is something not quite right about their language: both the accent and the way of speaking (*Herzlich willkommen, Madam; Sacramente, Donnerwetter!*) are a bit strange. When the soldiers take Maria to another room for questioning, the mystery is solved: they are members of the Polish Resistance, masquerading as Gestapo and about to launch a military action against the Germans. Giuseppe, of course, fails to notice anything suspicious and while Maria screams behind the closed door, pretending to be tortured, he tries to convince the other “German” soldiers that the girl is innocent.

Later, when Giuseppe approaches military barracks, he is spotted by another Polish conspirator pretending to be an officer of the Gestapo. Knowing that the barracks are about to explode, the man tries to stop Giuseppe from entering, without betraying his identity: *Du, Italiener? Nach Soldatenheim? Verboten. Vietate. Fumare Soldatenheim. Non disputare. Bum bum. Vesuvio. Capito?* When the Italian, confused by this incongruous mixture of German and distorted Italian words, repeats helplessly *non capisco* (“I don’t understand”) and tries to continue to the barracks anyway, the Polish conspirator loses his patience and pushes him forcibly away with the comment *Spierdalamento!*, a combination of the Polish verb *spierdalać* (“fuck off”) and the Italian suffix *-mento*. Amusingly, just moments later, Giuseppe is stopped by a German patrol and asked where he has left his gun. This time he understands the question well enough, but pretends not to, saying again *non capisco* and adding some German words out of context: *Danke schön, Auf Wiedersehen*.

While staying in Maria and Staszek’s flat, after a bumpy beginning to the cohabitation and the initial hostility his hosts show towards him – also verbally, by calling him among others, “*Al Capone* and *Maciste* – Giuseppe manages to win Maria’s favour by stealing guns from German soldiers for her. He later becomes a member of the Polish Resistance and begins to communicate in pidgin Polish, making a lot of funny mistakes and mixing Italian and Polish words. His command and pronunciation of the local language do not improve significantly until the end of the film. Similarly, when Maria and Staszek engage in conversation with Giuseppe, they mix German, Italian and even Latin words to help him understand what they are saying (Table 1 ex. 3, 4, 5).

The linguistic conundrum does not stop here. At a certain point Staszek (whose only good clothes have been taken by the Italian), must borrow Giuseppe’s uniform to go out and buy some food at a market. Unfortunately for him, it happens to be 8 September 1943, the day the Armistice

between Italy and the Allies was made public and the Italians became enemies of the Germans. Staszek is arrested and brought to the headquarters of the Gestapo for questioning. Since revealing his true identity would only make things worse, he carries on posing as Giuseppe Santucci. Pretending not to understand German, he utters some disconnected German words, throwing in random expressions in Italian: *Nein, Herr Hauptmann. Urlaub. Sole mio. Roma, Italia, mamma mia* (Table 1 ex. 6, 7). The exasperated officer calls for an interpreter, who arrives and duly translates everything into Italian, even if his accent and pronunciation are outrageous. It seems that Staszek's cover is about to be blown, but he claims (in broken German) that the interpreter does not speak Italian: *Das is keine Italienischen Spreche. Nein. Das ist Scheiss. Er sprechen Deutsch keine Italiane*. The figure of an unreliable translator is a frequent motive in multilingual films (see O'Sullivan 2011: 87–88), but *Giuseppe in Warsaw* reverses the trick, transforming a reliable interpreter into an unreliable one.

What is arguably the most hilarious linguistic exchange in the film takes place a little later. Thrown in prison, Staszek–Giuseppe is approached by a prison guard who has been trying (unsuccessfully) to sell machine guns to the Poles and thinks the Italian soldier can help him to conclude the affair. Given that it could give him an opportunity to escape, Staszek promptly agrees. Now all he has to do is to talk the guard into a ridiculous idea of disarming Germans on the streets of Warsaw. Since he is still pretending to be Italian and his German is very limited, it takes quite a lot of linguistic acrobatics to explain the complicated plan to the slow-witted soldier: *Du... eine Strasse...nulla persona...niente. Eine Soldate. Nur eine Soldate. Du...keine Misericordia. Hände hoch!* When the guard hesitates, Staszek tries even harder: *Urlaub. Haus...Grossa valisa plena...tutta valisa pecunia...Geld! Kinder! Frau! Essen! Trinken! Luxus!* The ensuing scenes of “collaboration” between Staszek and the guard disarming Germans on the streets of Warsaw are hysterical, especially when Staszek runs out of German words and begins to speak “germanised” Polish (Table 1 ex. 8, 9, 10).

To sum up, the three languages used in *Giuseppe in Warsaw* are a starting point for several ingenious linguistic games. The most straightforward case is that of the Germans who in the whole film speak only German – the exception made for the interpreter into Italian, mentioned above. Giuseppe speaks mostly Italian and later in the film also some broken Polish. As for the Polish characters, however, the combinations are seemingly endless: approximative German (members of the Resistance), broken German (Staszek, Maria), Polish punctuated by Latin, German and Italian words (Maria) a mixture of German–Italian–Polish or German–Latin–Polish (Staszek), a mixture of German–Polish–French (Maria), Varsovian slang punctuated by random semi-invented Italian (passengers on the train), not to mention several neologisms created from mixed words in two languages (like *spierdalamento*, and *mit rencen*). In many scenes the linguistic misunderstanding is not necessarily humorous in itself but acquires a comic dimension in the visual context. This happens, for example, when Giuseppe takes a plant from a window ledge and tries to close the window in Maria's flat, only to be scolded violently by the girl, who tells him (in Polish) that he has to remember that in her apartment every object has its precise place and meaning. To the Polish audience this meaning is obvious: a plant in the open window is a sign that the apartment is safe. Poor Giuseppe, however, is completely baffled and ends up thinking that Polish people are fond of keeping their homes cold. His perpetual *non capisco* has a double meaning here: he does not understand the verbal explanation given him in Polish, but more importantly, he does not understand the situational context of the visual signals used in conspiracy.

Table 1. Some examples of multilingual humorous dialogue in *Giuseppe in Warsaw*

Mix of Varsovian slang, Italian/pseudo-Italian words		
1	Polish passengers trying to communicate with Giuseppe	Te, caballero, a ten, Mussolini kaputt?
2		Canarino, Caruso, belcanto, bambini. Dawaj, dawaj, dawaj.
Mix of Polish, German and French		
3	Maria trying to buy the gun from Giuseppe	Trzy tysiące, verstanden? Cztery tysiące. Cinq mille.
Mix of Polish, (incorrect) German and Italian words		
4	Maria talking to Giuseppe	No, dość tego, Raisa finita. Komm. Du gehen Soldatenheim. Arrivederci, dawaj pistolet.
Mix of German, Italian and pseudo-Italian and Polish utterances		
5	Staszek talking to Giuseppe	Tu verfluchte Maccaroni! Ty kreaturo śródziemnomorska! Dlaczegoś mi nie powiedział Germańców salutare?
6	Staszek (posing as Giuseppe) to Gestapo officer	Herr Hauptmann, logica... wagon... pistolet... capcarap
7		Herr Hauptmann. Krieg. Urlaub. Keine Waffe. Roma, Italia, Sole mio, dolce far niente...
Mix of (incorrect) German, and Latin		
8	Staszek encouraging the German prison guard to disarm other Germans	O, gute Konzeptione! In Nomine Patris, Alleluja! Victoria!
9		Schiessen! Schiessen! Alles Banditen. Alles! Pax Tecum!
10		Schiessen! Keine Zeit! Ars longa, vita brevis!

4. Lost in Warsaw: translating the untranslatable

The most obvious solution in translation of multilingual films, especially in dubbing, seems to replace L1 with L2 and to retain one or more L3, present in the original, intact (Zabalbeascoa & Voellmer 2014: 13–14). In the case of a hypothetical dubbing of *Giuseppe in Warsaw* (Polish comedies were not and are not dubbed into other languages)⁵ the logical solution would seem, therefore, to replace L1 (Polish) with the L2 of a given country and to leave the Italian and German dialogue intact. Other potential strategies of dealing with L3 in translation – adaptation and neutralisation/omission (Corrius & Zabalbeascoa 2011) – are *a priori* not a viable option, since the contrast between these three languages is the life-blood of the plot. However, even if it is

⁵ To be exact, they are not being translated into English or into other west European languages: *Giuseppe in Warsaw* has indeed a dubbed Russian version, which is a complete mess from a linguistic point of view: the Poles and Germans speak Russian, and Giuseppe speaks mainly Russian, switching sometimes to Italian or German (!). For example, when Zbyszek posing as Giuseppe approaches the German prison guard, they both speak Russian and it is not comprehensible why Zbyszek should talk with disconnected words like a particularly dumb two year old.

conceivable that a satisfying equivalent of L1^b (Varsovian slang) could be found among linguistic variations of L2 (sociolect or jargon or even a regional language variant), the challenge of reproducing all the exuberant linguistic mix-ups in a convincing way seems an almost impossible task. The simple transfer of Italian and German dialogue into a new linguistic context is not advisable. In the first place, the challenging linguistic strategy of the film is targeted at the Polish audience. As Carol O'Sullivan points out, one crucial question of multilingualism on screen is “the degree of a language’s foreignness” (2011: 27). While Polish viewers of the 1960s had some familiarity with German, especially with the standardized expressions in the context of the war, the same could not be expected of foreign audiences. However, to add subtitles to the untranslated parts of dialogue not only goes against the premise of the original film, but would be of dubious benefit, as well. The language and the behaviour of the German soldiers shown in the film often come across as brutal and menacing. They can only be interpreted as humorous if the viewer is able to understand their parodic and amplified character; otherwise, the scenes which are intended to be funny may be taken as frightening or offensive. A straightforward translation of the German utterances is likely to create this precise effect.

As for Italian, it was (and is) a far more exotic language for Polish viewers, although at the time of the film’s release the knowledge of Latin, still taught at schools, was more widespread than today and could be helpful to a degree. The screenwriter cleverly inserted into Giuseppe’s bits of dialogue several expressions which are easy for Polish speakers to guess. However, there is no denying the fact that there are substantial chunks of dialogue certainly not comprehensible to a non-Italian speaker, which means that the spectators must be willing to engage in the linguistic game. In the modern age, judging by the complaints and comments expressed by buyers on amazon.com every time a film on DVD has some untranslated parts of dialogue, such a challenge is generally not accepted.

4.1. Going back to Italy: *Giuseppe in Warsaw* for the Italian audience

The eventuality in which L3 in the original film coincides with L2 (L3ST=L2) is generally considered the trickiest issue in the translation of multilingual films. There are various strategies of dealing with this problem, discussed most extensively by Zabalbeascoa (2018, but also his previous articles): a) to replace L3 with another language; b) to render L3ST into a language variation of L2, or c) to render both L1 and L3 into L2 and to adapt the dialogue accordingly. Because of the character and the function of the multilingualism in *Giuseppe in Warsaw*, neither solution is feasible here. Hypothetically, an attempt could be made to replace the L3ST of the original with another L3TT by changing Giuseppe’s nationality, but given the historical context of the film and the importance of the Armistice of Cassibile for the development of the plot it would be a wasted effort. Indeed, the film was screened to Italian audience at the Venice Film Festival in 1964 and then put into distribution, most unusually for this country, especially in the 1960s, in the subtitled version (Dondzik 2014: 44). Nowadays, occasional screenings still happen as a part of special cinematographic events or festivals, but the film has never been released on DVD and is known only to a few *apasionados* of the Polish cinema.

Given that in the source text here are two variants of L1 and two L3 languages, neither of them subtitled, the choice of creating subtitles for one, two or all three languages coexisting on the screen has a very significant impact on the perception of the movie. The fact that Italian viewers can understand the language of the protagonist puts them in a particular position: they can easily empathise with Giuseppe and share his sense of loss and bewilderment while he tries to survive in the strange place where he has been stranded. While in Poland the introduction of the external point of view represented by the Italian soldier helped to create ironic distance towards the hardships of

life under occupation, to the Italian viewers the reality presented on screen appears (today more than ever) as exotic and absurd as it does to the poor Giuseppe. Indeed, the Italian audience could frequently parrot the most frequent exclamation of the protagonist: *non capisco!* Interestingly, the subtitles are not very helpful in this regard; in fact, the list of what has been “lost in translation” is very long. The subtitles flatten the linguistic variety of L1^a and L1^b, rendering both in standard Italian, and lose most of the humour embedded in the Varsovian slang. In some cases, they are also misleading: “Cossack from Sorrento” becomes *eroe di Sorrento* (“Hero from Sorrento”), *giry ci powyrywam* (“I will tear away your legs” – *giry* being a slang word) is converted into a menacing *ti faccio a pezzi* (“I will cut you to pieces”), and so on. The parodic character of the dialogue among the members of the Resistance has also disappeared. The only traces of humour are retained in the watchwords (*Signora Alinka ha bisogno di colla per gli scarafaggi*), but since the Italian viewers would not likely associate these utterances with the code words used by the Resistance, it is far more probable that they would just think that all Poles talk crazy. There is almost no attempt to reproduce the humorous linguistic fireworks which are the highlight of the original film (see Table 2).

Table 2. Italian subtitles to some of the utterances quoted in the Table 1 (numbers refer to the examples in that table)

4	No, dość tego, Raisa finita. Komm. Du gehen Soldatenheim. Arrivederci, dawaj pistolet.	Basta. La corsa è finita. Tu andare in caserma. Voglio la mia pistola.
5	Tu verfluchte Macaroni! Ty kreaturo śródziemnomorska! Dlaczegoś mi nie powiedział Germańców salutare?	Tu, sporco mangiaspaghetti. Tu, mostro mediterraneo! Perché non mi hai detto che i tedeschi vanno salutati?
6	Herr Hauptmann logica... wagon... pistolet... capcarap	Herr Hauptmann... logica... treno... andato...
7	Herr Hauptmann. Krieg. Urlaub. Keine Waffe. Roma, Italia, Sole mio, dolce far niente...	Herr Hauptmann... Guerra. Licenza. Non mi servono armi.
9, 10	Schiessen! Schiessen! Alles Banditen. Alles! Pax Tecum! Schiessen! Keine Zeit! Ars longa, vita brevis!	Fuoco! Fuoco! Sono tutti banditi! Fuoco! Non c'è tempo da perdere, la vita è breve.

Almost all the utterances in German have been translated into Italian, also with a negative impact on the comedic effect of the dialogue. In some scenes they are superfluous: for example, when the intradiegetic translation from German to Italian takes place, the words of a Gestapo officer are translated, even if an immediate verbatim translation into Italian follows. In other cases, a faithful translation of all the insults and threats uttered by Germans produces the effect mentioned above: it makes the scenes appear more dramatic than funny. The German spoken by the Polish conspirators is also translated into correct Italian, and it becomes rather hard for the Italian viewer to distinguish between “real” and “false” Germans.

Table 3. Some examples of broken/naïve German used by Polish characters and their translation into Italian subtitles.

<i>Du, Italiener?</i> [You, Italian?]	<i>Sei Italiano, vero?</i> [You are Italian, aren't you?]
<i>Was is das, mein Kind?</i> [What is this, my child?]	<i>Che cosa è questa?</i> [What's that?]
<i>Waffen kombinieren. Gescheft⁶, das is Gescheft.</i> [Weapons to arrange, business, this is business]	<i>Ci servono armi vere per affari veri.</i> [We need good guns to do good business.]
<i>Ich schützen, verstehen Sie?</i> [I to cover, do you understand?]	<i>Io ti copro... capito?</i> [I will cover you, understood?]

The general strategy of converting German and Polish dialogue into standard Italian creates yet another collateral effect. Like many comedies based on cultural and linguistic clashes, *Giuseppe in Warsaw* exaggerates national clichés and stereotypes. In the original film, all the characters are presented in a satirical way: Polish conspirators, German soldiers and the Italian protagonist. Giuseppe communicates his “Italianness” through amplified gesticulation and affected speech; he behaves like a typical Latin lover and dreams about a plate of spaghetti. The stylistic standardization of Polish and German dialogue in the translation significantly detracts from the caricatural portrayal of these two nationalities, so the stereotyped vision of the Italian character stands out and may be perceived as irritating by the Italian audience. Similarly, the variety of insults showered on Giuseppe by Maria and especially Staszek may be off-putting for Italians. In the context of the Polish colloquial speech, which tends to be colourful and inclined to hyperbolic expressions, they are socially acceptable and funny. Dutifully rendered in the subtitles, however, they make Maria and Staszek appear outwardly rude.

Table 4. Some examples of insulting words directed at Giuseppe and their Italian translations

Polish insult	Italian translation	Notes
łachudra	Bastardo	<i>Łachudra</i> means more or less wretch, scamp – typical of colloquial register; <i>bastardo</i> is a very strong insult in Italian.
bałwan,	Idiota	<i>Bałwan</i> (literal meaning: “snowman”) is typical of colloquial speech.
Gangster jeden	Bandito	In Polish “gangster” is often used in a facetious way; “bandit” in Italian has a serious and negative meaning.
Kreatura, kreatura śródziemnomorska	Mostro; mostro mediterraneo	literally: “creature”, “a Mediterranean creature” an unusual and ridiculous insult; in Italian “monster”, strange and rather off-putting.

⁶ *Gescheft* is a Yiddish word, a distorted version of German *Geschäft*, frequently used in Poland in the first half of the twentieth century.

byk polarny	Brutto bestione	In Polish, an amusing and unusual expression (literally: “polar bull”) – in Italian a standard insult: “ugly beast”.
makaroniarz	schifoso mangia spaghetti	“Pasta eater” – a popular slang name for Italians; in translation <i>schifoso</i> (“repugnant”) gives a pejorative edge to the word.
verfluchte Maccaroni	Sporco mangia spaghetti	A funny combination of German “damned” and pseudo-Italian “pasta”; in Italian very offensive “dirty spaghetti-eater”.
Bydlak	Bestione	“beast”
bandyta sycylijski	bandito siciliano	“Sicilian bandit”: in Polish an exotic, light-hearted insult, in Italian a serious allegation.

5. Conclusions

Giuseppe in Warsaw is an astounding example of the multitude of ways a multilingual context can be played to comedic effect. In addition to the humour related to the linguistic acrobatics of the dialogue, the verbal element plays a fundamental part in all the kinds of humour present in the film. Dark, farcical, hyperbolic, parodic, satirical, situational, character-based humour, comedy of errors and slapstick comedy: this impressive display of comic potentialities of the multilingualism is irrefutable proof that a multilingual comedy can go far beyond a simple game of misunderstandings, national stereotypes and cultural clichés. On the other hand, the multilingual dialogue in *Giuseppe* is so deeply embedded in the historical, cultural and linguistic context that if there ever were a film to be labelled as “untranslatable” it would certainly be Lenartowicz’s movie. As discussed above, none of the solutions typically used in the dubbing of multilingual films could reasonably be effective in this case, neither in the eventuality of L3ST = L2 overlapping (German or Italian) nor in other languages. The subtitling, however, does not fare much better. While it would likely be possible to produce more attentive subtitles for the film than those existing (English and Italian), some of the difficulties would be still unsurmountable. Subtitles cannot offer a satisfying version of the humorous character of the L1^b, nor can they render the parodic tone of some of the Polish and German bits of dialogue or signal the cultural subtext of others. In fact, the core of the untranslatability of *Giuseppe in Warsaw* does not stem from the technical problems of convincingly rendering purely verbal aspects of the speech on the screen, complicated as they may be, but from the audience the film is intended for. The movie relies on the viewer to have a precise knowledge of the historical and cultural background of the plot, a familiarity with Polish cinematographic conventions and with the most important Polish films about the war (such as *Forbidden Songs*, 1946 and *Ashes and Diamonds*, 1956). A good command of the Varsovian slang and some basic understanding of German would also be required: a set of competences no one can realistically expect to find in any foreign viewer. Above all, *Giuseppe in Warsaw* is aimed at an audience which is willing to enjoy a demanding linguistic challenge, something the average viewer of today is rather reluctant to engage with, even in Poland. It is telling, indeed, that some recently released Polish DVD versions of the film include subtitles or even a voice-over translation of the German and Italian dialogue. Therefore, Lenartowicz’s film appears as an isolated brilliant example of a complex use of multilingual humour for cinematographic purposes, unlikely to be ever repeated, but priceless as material for studies on the comedic potential of multilingualism and its translation.

References

- Bleichenbacher, L. (2007). 'This is meaningless – it's in Russian: multilingual characters in mainstream movie', in: Engler, B., Michalcak L. (eds.), *Cultures in Contact*. (SPELL 17.) Tübingen: Gunter Narr. pp. 111–127.
- Bleichenbacher, L. (2008). *Multilingualism in the Movies. Hollywood Characters and Their Language Choices*. Tübingen: Francke Verlag.
- Chiaro, D. (2010) 'Translation and humour, humour and translation', in Chiaro D. (ed.) *Translation, Humour and Literature. Translation and Humour V. 1* London – New York, Continuum, pp. 1–29.
- Corrius, M., Zabalbeascoa, P. (2011). 'Language variation in source texts and their translations. The case of L3 in film translation'. *Target*, 23 (1), pp. 113–130.
- de Higes Andino, I. (2014). 'The translation of multilingual films: Modes, strategies, constraints and manipulation in the Spanish translations of *It's a Free World...*'. *Linguistica Antverpiensia, New Series – Themes in Translation Studies*, 13, pp. 211–231.
- Delabastita, D. (2009) 'Fictional representations.' In Baker M., Saldanha G. (eds.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (2nd ed) London: Routledge, pp. 109–112.
- Diaz-Cintas, J. 2011, 'Dealing with multilingual films in audiovisual translation', in: Pöckl, W., Ohnheiser, I., Sandrini, P. (eds.) *Translation – Sprachvariation – Mehrsprachigkeit. Festschrift für Lew Zybatow zum 60. Geburtstag*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, pp. 214–233.
- Dondzik, M. (2014). 'Okupacja, konspiracja i "sycylijski bandyta". *Giuseppe w Warszawie Stanisława Lenartowicza*', in: Miller-Klejsa A., Woźniak M. (eds.) *Polsko-włoskie kontakty filmowe. Topika, koprodukcje, recepcja*. Łódź: Szkoła Filmowa w Łodzi – Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, pp. 39–56.
- Dwyer, T. (2005). 'Universally speaking: *Lost in Translation* and polyglot cinema', in Delabastita D., Grutman R. (eds.), *Fictionalising Translation and Multilingualism, Linguistica Antverpiensia*, 4, pp. 11–34.
<https://www.era.lib.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/3403>
- Heiss, C. (2004). 'Dubbing multilingual films: A new challenge?' *Meta: Translator's Journal*, 49(1): pp. 208–220.
- Heiss, C. (2014). 'Multilingual films and integration? What role does film translation play?', in Dror Abend-David (ed), *Media and Translation. An Interdisciplinary Approach*, New York/London/New Delhi/Sydney: Bloomsbury, pp. 3–24.
- Meylaerts, R. (2006). 'Heterolingualism in/and translation: How legitimate are the other and his/her language? An introduction.' *Target* 18 (1), pp. 1–15.
- O'Sullivan, C. (2011). *Translating Popular Films*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ritchie, G. D. (2000). 'Describing verbally expressed humour'.
https://www.academia.edu/403898/Describing_Verbally_Expressed_Humour
- Shochat, E., Stam, R. (1985). 'The cinema after babel: Language, difference, power', *Screen* 26 (3-4): pp. 35–58.
- Sternberg, M. (1981). 'Polylingualism as reality and translation as mimesis'. *Poetics Today*, 2 (4), pp. 221–239.

- Voellmer, E., Zabalbeascoa, P. (2014). 'How heterolingual can a dubbed film be? Language combinations and national traditions as determining factors'. *Linguistica Antverpiensia, New Series – Themes in Translation Studies*, 13: 232–250.
- Wahl, C. (2008). 'Du Deutscher, Toi Français, You English: Beautiful! – The polyglot film as a genre', in: Miyase C., Nezh E. (eds.) *Shifting Landscapes. Film and Media in European Context*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 334–350.
- Zabalbeascoa, P., Voellmer, E. (2014). 'Accounting for multilingual films', in: Dror A.-D. (ed.), *Media and Translation. An Interdisciplinary Approach*. New York/London/New Delhi/Sydney: Bloomsbury, pp. 25–52.
- Zabalbeascoa, P. (2018). 'Solution-types for representing dubbed film and TV multilingual humour, in: Ranzato I., Zanotti S., *Linguistic and Cultural Representation in Audiovisual Translation*. New York – London: Routledge, pp. 165–183.