



Aggressive speech acts or expressions of friendliness? Translating taboo words in Fatih Akins' *Soul Kitchen* (2009) into Italian subtitles

Claudia Buffagni

Università per Stranieri di Siena

Siena, Tuscany, Italy

buffagni@unistrasi.it

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0011-5858> 

Abstract: The paper analyzes the occurrences of taboo words in Fatih Akin's German comedy *Soul Kitchen* (2009). The film is particularly rich in taboo and swear words which are mainly used by certain characters and seem to play a specific role. According to a classification of taboo words in central semantic groups and along with the definition of aggressive speech act by Havrlyiv (2017, 2018, 2022) and of insults by Alfonzetti (2017), the paper initially identifies the most recurrent speech acts in the context of their occurrence, investigating the pragmatic functions of taboo words in the original German dialogues of the comedy also in relation to the humorous aims pursued. Next, according to Díaz Cintas and Remael's (2007) subtitling classification the paper analyzes the Italian subtitles, investigating the translation strategies selected and the solutions adopted. Special attention is paid to the strategies chosen for the translation of cultural-bound elements. The translation of scatological taboo words holds a particular relevance.

Keywords: audiovisual translation; interlingual subtitles; German language; Italian language; taboo words.

1. Introduction

Taboo words belong to basic expressions of human language and have been present since early recorded history in most languages (Ljung, 2011), characterizing in the Western world typically the spoken informal variety. The present paper uses *taboo word*¹ as a hypernym, meaning words and

¹ In the scholarly literature there is no consensus on this yet, referring to them, with slight meaning shifts, as e.g. *forbidden words*, *f-words*, *7-words*, *dirty words*, *disphemisms*, *vulgarisms* (in English), *Schimpfwörter*, *Kraftausdrücke*, *unanständige Wörter*, *schmutzige Wörter*, *Disphemismen*, *Vulgarismen* (in German), *parolacce*, *parole oscene*, *turpiloquio*, *disfemismi*, *volgarismi* (in Italian). Cp. among others, Pinker (2007), Beers Fägersten et al (2022), Jay (2009), Schröder (1995), Heller (1998) and Moore (2012). Translations in English are mine.

phrases which are forbidden in usual verbal contexts (in formal and standard discourse, forbidden in the sense of not desired). These phrases have different functions and not only a swearing one, as will be further discussed. Therefore, the label *taboo words* was preferred to *swear words*. They consequently appear especially in the representation of dialogues in fictional literary and audiovisual works but are also present in popular science and newspapers. Contemporary auteur films have shown great sensibility for realistic sounding, “mimetic” dialogues. This also regards taboo words, increasingly widespread in many languages including German and Italian.

The growing use of taboo words in Italian language is highlighted by Trifone according to the largest dictionary of Italian usage GRADIT (Trifone, 2022, p. 10–47). As observed for different languages, in many ways taboo words are also connected with verbal aggression (for German: Aman, 1973, p. 153–167; Gauger, 2012, p. 10–20; Havryliv, 2022, p. 61–71; Pfeiffer, 1996, p. 7–8). Italian public and political communication show on various occasions violent verbal outbursts (Bazzanella, 2020, p. 17) which would have been unthinkable only thirty years ago. In Italian taboo words from the semantic domains of sexuality and religion and in German from the scatological domain are traditionally quantitatively well represented (Havryliv, 2018, p. 27–45; Havryliv, 2022, p. 61; Kostrzewa, 2015; Nübling & Vogel, 2004, p. 19–25).

Taboo words have become the focus of a vast interdisciplinary field of study for (neuro)psychology, medicine and diverse branches of linguistics such as Lexicography, Pragmatics, Conversation Analysis, and Translation Studies. Studies have been devoted to taboo and swearing from a contrastive perspective (Ljung, 2011; Nübling & Vogel, 2004) also with reference to film dialogues and audiovisual translation, especially from English to Italian (Bruti, 2021; Pavesi & Malinverno, 2000) or from English to other languages (for German: Jüngst, 2020). Instead, the translation of German films into Italian subtitles has been rather seldom the focus of scholars’ interest (Buffagni, 2017). Following a mainly qualitative method, the present paper investigates the functions of taboo words in Fatih Akin’s *Soul Kitchen* (2009) and their translation in the official DVD Italian subtitles from a pragmatic perspective according to Havryliv (2017, 2018, 2022) and Alfonzetti (2017).

2. Taboo words in the original dialogues in Fatih Akin’s *Soul Kitchen* (2009)

Turkish-German director Fatih Akin (1973) figures among the most attentive filmmakers of his generation for the faithful depiction of immigrant lives, among others through realistic sounding dialogues². Many of his films reveal a specific attention for the German spoken by young immigrants (especially of Turkish origin) and marginalized characters: *Kurz und schmerzlos*, Eng. *Short Sharp Shock* (1998), *Tschick*, Eng. *Goodbye New York* (2000), *Gegen die Wand*, Eng. *Head-on* (2004), *Auf der anderen Seite*, Eng. *The Edge of Heaven* (2007), *Soul Kitchen* (2009), *Aus dem Nichts*, Eng. *In the Fade* (2017), *Rheingold*, Eng. *Rhinegold* (2022). As a typical feature of contemporary informal spoken German, taboo words play a central role in Akin’s films.

² Fatih Akin was a.o. awarded with the best screenplay at Cannes for *Auf der anderen Seite*. *Soul Kitchen* also received the North German Film Award 2009 in the category Best Screenplay.

Soul Kitchen is a professedly feel-good comedy (Akin, 2011, p. 200) and represents a special sort of director's training in the middle of a sequence of highly dramatic films³. Akin defines it furthermore as a *Heimatfilm*, hence inscribing it in the wave of the rediscovery of this classical German film genre, very popular in the Fifties and Sixties and later considered as notorious. In these films, characterized by conflicts between opposite social classes and backgrounds and a consolatory happy-ending, topography plays a central role (Heizmann, 2016, p. 7–17; Matthes, 2012, p. 131–144). In fact, *Soul Kitchen*, set in Wilhelmsburg, shows a precise suburban district in Hamburg and its inhabitants (Hilman & Silvey, 2012). Central to the events is the eponymous restaurant, which is a focal point for the characters: much of the film's dialogue revolves around food and the restaurant (Buffagni, 2017, p. 114–119)⁴. The main characters are the decidedly different Zinos and Illias Kazantsakis, second-generation Greek immigrants, and their friends, mostly proletarian workers and petty criminals. The bourgeois world in the film is mostly represented by the family of Nadine, Zinos's girlfriend. The language of the main characters is lexically and syntactically of a low register. Furthermore, on a phonological level it presents features in common with Turkish German (Heiss, 2010)⁵. As for the genre, the film shows ironical overrepresentation of melodrama – e.g. the different variations of the song *La Paloma*'s and the overly romantic sequences regarding Nadine's departure to Shanghai –, a typical stylistic feature of Akin's films.

As the heroes are men, the film can also be read as a depiction of a new form of masculinity and male values. The main characters are no longer asserting their otherness – as immigrants – attacking and fighting (like the gangsters of *Short Sharp Shock* or frustrated Cahin in *Head-on*), but rather peacefully fighting to protect their new place in German society (Akin, 2011, p. 200). They also willingly conquer traditional female places (the kitchen) and cultivate – despite various misfortunes – mostly peaceful relationships in the family and with friends. The film depicts in this sense a successful integration story. And yet, since the characters remain among themselves and keep performing quite humble activities, the doubt may arise that they have only conquered a marginal border of *Heimat* to live in, remaining confined therein. In fact, it is as if they had not really “arrived” in Germany, i.e. in the higher, political, successful German society represented in the film by Nadine's family (Matthes, 2012, p. 142–143). However, Zinos's story is a successful one, since he evolves from being a junk food vendor, learning from chef Shayn and becoming a fine chef. The film thus offers a limited happy-ending or a transcultural utopia with vaguely traced confines.

The film comedy, acclaimed internationally, was very successful in Germany, in Italy and in other foreign countries⁶. When it was released, many reviewers especially highlighted its visual and

³ The director meant to have a *Sparring*, a training in boxing during the preparation of the last part of the dramatic trilogy on *Death and Devil*. The inspiration for this comedy came spontaneously, but the preparation was very challenging and the shooting more difficult than expected (Akin, 2011, p. 207–208). Fatih Akin put special attention on the final effect. Thus, the dialogues were studied very attentively.

⁴ Many recent German films and series dealing with food and cooking experiences are set in restaurants, e.g. *Solino* (Akin, 2011), *Bella Martha* (Nettelbeck, 2001), *Bon Appétit* (Pinillos, 2010). For an analysis of English audiovisual fictional products delving into food language, see Monti (2019, p. 199–228).

⁵ Heiss (2010) highlights the greeting form plus allocutive “ey Alder” and phonological elements (pronunciation of “e” in “Dicker” and typical [isch] pronunciation of [ich]). In *Soul Kitchen* the same phenomena occur.

⁶ The film earned altogether 18.164.139 USD. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1244668>

situational humor (Knoben, 2010; Koll, 2009; Mihm, 2009)⁷. Although both aspects are relevant in the film, in this paper it will instead be argued that a fundamental part of the film's humor is based on the language variety and on the taboo words spoken by the characters. Their dialogues show a very high frequency of taboo words and phrases (5,3%): in fact, these phrases – which appear in ¾ of the entire film dialogues – are much more frequent than in average German and Italian everyday language. For English, cp. Jay (2009, p. 155–156). Referring to Mehl and Pennebaker's (2003, 2007) study, he cites their result: 0,5% to 0,7% (i.e. 80-90 taboo words a day). For Italian see the *New Basic Dictionary of Italian (Nuovo Dizionario di base dell'italiano)* by De Mauro (2016), which records among the most frequent words as new entry ca. 10 taboo words, differentiated between fundamental and frequently used: these words are very frequently used both in written as in spoken contemporary Italian. As for German it is usually assumed that the frequency of taboo words is lower than in Italian or English. According to a survey of the educational platform *Preply* each German uses 9,5 taboo words per day, men (11) more than women (9), young people swear twice as much as the older generation (55+) (Perks, 2023). These features seem to play a role as linguistic markers of a specific urban and suburban milieu. This paper seeks to investigate if the pursued aim is rather a documentary one or an expressive one and, in the second case, if the offending words are meant as pejorative or not pejorative (Technau, 2020, p. 85). The study analyzes a selection of film sequences⁸ and aims at investigating, in the context of global pragmatic configuration (Bazzanella, 2020, p. 21–22), the semantic areas and communicative functions of taboo words in the original German dialogues (chapter 1). In chapter 2, these dialogues will be then compared with the Italian subtitles, focusing on the differences in strength and the possible shifts of meaning.

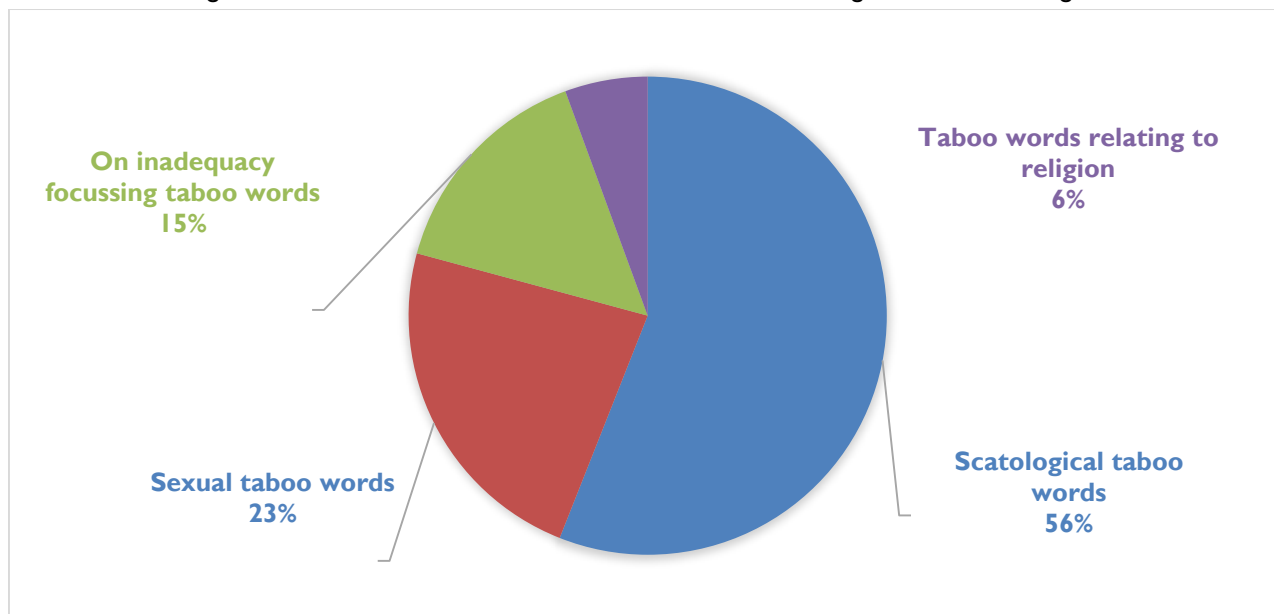
Four main semantic categories for taboo words were recognized: scatological, i.e. related to obscenity or preoccupation with obscenity, especially referring to excrements (Collins dictionary); related to sexual acts, persons and body parts involved; focusing on some inadequacy (e.g. psychic or physical nature) of the addressee; dealing with religious questions or entities perceived as almost sacred (e.g. the mother in Italy)⁹. Expressions of weakness or other fallacies, maybe expressed through comparisons/metaphors with animals in a negative way, are also enlisted in this group. Table I shows the occurrence of the detected utterances in the original German dialogues. As to the procedure followed, the single occurrences of the lexemes were considered, without distinguishing between lowercase and capital letters (German nouns are indicated by the initial capital letter).

⁷ Koll (2009) highlights the delirious character of the comedy, which is also “noisy and weird”, while some pseudo-gags miss the mark. Ebert (2010) also defines it as “a goofy, affectionate comedy that combines slapstick pratfalls with bawdy jokes”, while Knobel (2010) considers *Soul Kitchen* “funny, sentimental, sometimes also flat, crude and predictable, then again rousingly exuberant”.

⁸ As they were not relevant to the present study, individual sequences exclusively featuring markedly formal language were excluded from the analysis.

⁹ Cp. the examples presented by Schröder (1995, p. 11): “Sexuality; money and income; own history and past; homosexuality; death, illness and disability; incest; bodily sounds; AIDS; criticism of religion and church”. In the present paper they were resumed to the enlisted four macro semantic categories. Cp. as well: Pfeiffer (1996, p. 7) and Siebicke (1996, p. 496).

Figure 1: Semantic fields of Taboo Words in *Soul Kitchen*'s original German Dialogues



Source: Author (2024)

Table I highlights the dominance of scatological taboo words (56%) in the German dialogues, followed respectively by sexual taboo words (23%), taboo words revealing different kinds of inadequacy (physical, psychic...) (15%) and finally taboo words related to religion (6%).

As for the linguistic form, most taboo words belong to the word classes of nouns and adjectives, but there are also some verbs usually relating to primary physical functions associated with unpleasantness or obscenity (e.g. “*lecken*”, Eng. “to leak”; “*pissen*”, Eng. “to piss”)¹⁰. As far as the pragmatic dimension is concerned, taboo words, whose use represents a disrespect towards the norm of socially acceptable language, are associated with verbal impoliteness. They are frequently used in aggressive speech acts categorized as FTA (*Face Threatening Acts*), thus attacking the positive, i.e. the need to be liked, or negative face, i.e. the need for independence of the addressee (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Ehrhardt & Neuland, 2021, p. 190–194, 234–238).

3. Speech acts and functions of taboo words in *Soul Kitchen*'s dialogues

The analysis follows Havryliv's (2018, p. 27–45) structural-semantic and pragmatic classification of aggressive speech acts¹¹ modified according to Alfonzetti (2017). The schema will be applied to

¹⁰ Moreover, in many cases some nouns and adjectives have developed into pseudosuffixes, e.g. in the language of youth (*Jugendsprache*) (Deppermann & Schmidt, 2001, p. 27–37; Neuland, 2008, p. 109–127, 173–206) or in special languages. In the paper words that no longer belong to the taboo words were not considered, since they have in the meantime become part of everyday (informal) language (e.g. “*geil*”, Eng. lit. “horny”, “awesome”; “*Dicker*”, Eng. lit. “fat”, “mate”; “*bescheuert*”, Eng. “stupid”).

¹¹ Havryliv's (2018) empirical study focuses on aggressive speech acts with scatological taboo words in written and oral surveys carried out among Vienna inhabitants aged 14–90.

speech acts with taboo words occurring in *Soul Kitchen*'s selected dialogues¹²: examples for insult, curse, threat and injunction will be analyzed¹³.

The category of INSULT refers to utterances which show the speaker's intention to express hostility and aggression towards the addressee (e.g. "*Du Arschloch*", Eng. "You asshole"; "*Du bist so'n Arschloch*", Eng. "You are such an asshole")¹⁴. Meanwhile, INJUNCTIONS refer to sentences which express the expectation that a certain – mostly unpleasant and/or humiliating – action shall be performed by the addressee ("*Verpiss dich!*", Eng. "Piss off!"; "*Leck mich am Arsch!*", Eng. "Kiss my ass!")¹⁵. With CURSE are meant expressions which do not refer to the addressee but to a situation, an inanimate object or an action (e.g. "*Scheiße*", Eng. "shit"; "*Verdammte Scheiße*", Eng. "Holy crap").

Functions of aggressive speech acts are reactions to negative emotions, offending the addressee, joking use (praising, fondling and as creative self-representation) (Havryliv, 2017, p. 3). Aggressive speech acts are complex: they never present performative verbs and taboos words are usually used figuratively. Below will be presented examples of aggressive speech acts containing taboo words used with metaphorical or metonymical meaning taken from the film. Taboo words may occur with literal ("*Ich bin in die Kacke getreten*") or with figurative meaning ("*Scheiße!*"). In this second case, they can be uttered as a universal curse and expletive (*Scheiße!*) or as an insult ("*Du falsches Stück Scheiße*") (Havryliv, 2018, p. 29). As to the morphological structure, the analyses showed the presence of many derived compounds with pejorative scatological pseudoaffixes, which sometimes overlap with sexual taboo words (cp. "*Dreckfotze*", Eng. "dirty cunt") or with other taboo words also from the animal world ("*Drecksau*", Eng. lit. "dirty pig"; "*Kackvogel*", Eng. lit. "little fuckbird"). Taboo words are also used in a metaphorical sense (cp. Table 3).

The speech act INSULT occurs:

1. frequently alone, in complete sentences or in simple nominal exclamations: "*Du bist so'n Arschloch*" (Eng. "You are such an asshole"); "*Ihr Dreckfotzen!*" (Eng. "You asslickers"); "*Du Arschloch!*" (Eng. "You asshole");
2. in combination with attributes: "*Scheiß bum bum Musik*" (Eng. "Fuck bumbum music"); "*Du verdammtes Arschloch*" (Eng. "You damn asshole");
3. rarely as a self-insult: "*Ich bin hier der verdammte Eigentümer*" ("I am the [damned] owner of this place")¹⁶;
4. in derogatory observations and comparisons. Here it is differentiated between direct and indirect insult:

¹² The individuation of single speech acts in a conversation is – as well known – a complex operation; in some cases, the same expression may present a "composite illocutionary force, resulting from a mix of different ingredients" (Alfonzetti, 2017, p. 85).

¹³ Havryliv (2018) also studied examples of malediction. In *Soul Kitchen* examples from this category could not be found.

¹⁴ Some authors consider these expressions as desemantised, thus similar to curses (2). However, the idea presented in this paper is that a quantity of the original word's offensive meaning remains and may be still considered offensive – also depending on the context – by the addressee (Technau, 2020, p. 220).

¹⁵ Since these expressions are not intended literally, some authors consider them desemantised and also regard these expressions as curses. In this study we consider them according to their syntactic construction (sentence) and the modality (imperative) as a separate group.

¹⁶ The example differs from those in Havryliv (2018), in which the speaker expressed dissatisfaction with himself. In this case, Zinos reacts to the violent attack of Neumann's friend (cp. example 3). Havryliv (2018) also inserted the category "fictive insult", while in this study we consider this use as a fictive insult as a transversal one.

4. a. A direct insult, if it is directed at the addressee: “*Du hast einen Stock in deinem Arschloch drin*” (Eng. “Stick a rod to your ass”); “*Und deine Reaktion find’ ich scheiße!*” (Eng. lit. “I find your reaction is shit”);
4. b. An indirect insult, if it is directed at people other than the addressee (including the same speaker) or objects (16) “*Mein Rücken ist im Arsch*” (Eng. “My back got fucked”); “*Ey Mann, das ist voll für’n Arsch*” (Eng. lit. “Hey man, that’s a load of ass”).

According to the classification (Havryliv, 2018), 39 proper insults could be found in the film. Derogatory observations and comparisons (1.4) are considered direct insults if they are directed against the addressee, and indirect ones if they are aimed at other persons (including the speaker) or at things:

1. The speech act INJUNCTION, in which the speaker summons the addressee, occurs quite often, frequently producing an amusing effect: “*Leck mich am Arsch*” (Eng. “Fuck off”); “*Ey, verpiss dich, du Filzlaus!*” (Eng. “Fuck off, groin louse!”)
2. As to the speech act CURSE as expletive, considered less typical in German than in Italian or English (Havryliv, 2018, p. 37): as expected, the most frequent is “*Scheiße*” (“shit”) (cp. 3). It occurs frequently in the film.
3. The speech act THREAT occurs only twice: “*Ich kann dir auch in die Suppe pissen*” (Eng. “I can piss in your soup”), “*Ich bring dich um*” (Eng. “I’m gonna kill you”)¹⁷.

Among the speech acts enlisted, the most frequent are insults (64%) and curses (23%), followed by injunctions (13%) and, more rarely, threats (2%). Since injunctions can also be considered in a wider sense as insulting remarks, in the end 75% of all taboo words are used in insults. The majority of them present faecal words (cp. table 1).

In the film there is a clear distinction between characters who utter taboo words and characters who do not (upper class characters and professionals: restaurant proprietors, doctor, physiotherapist, civil servant at the auction, notary). A very amusing situation occurs when characters of the second group – in extreme cases – utter taboo words. This happens e.g. in example 4 and at the funeral of Nadine’s grandmother¹⁸. The film shows a typical comic situation in which the humor originates from the rupture of the frame (Goffman, 1981): the comical situational together with the verbal humor produced by the taboo words’ utterances make them among the film’s funniest sequences.

As the examples show, the repetition of different taboo words (nouns, adjectives, adverbs) occurs quite often, also in combination with interjections (e.g. “ey”), pejorative suffixes and prefixes (Alfonzetti, 2017, p. 105–106; Havryliv, 2018, p. 43). The dialogue passages realizing aggressive speech acts are linguistically quite varied and creative, a typical feature of fictional works (Díaz Cintas

¹⁷ Among the threats, “*Ich bringe dich um*” was also considered, since it refers to a major taboo realm (depriving s.o. of life: death/life).

¹⁸ At the funeral, during the priest’s sermon, Zinos adventurously reaches the ceremony unnoticed. Suddenly, noticing that Nadine is hand in hand with a young Chinese man, he loses control and unintentionally makes the coffin fall ruinously down, opening itself and revealing a leg of the deceased grandmother. In the general chaos, Nadine’s father reacts with an insult (“*Verdammt Saul!*”, Eng. “You bastard!”) and hits Zinos with an umbrella.

& Remael, 2007, p. 195–196), while spontaneous speech usually turns out to be – given the time constraints and the emotional involvement – simpler and more repetitive. The dense film dialogues produce, thanks also to the creative formulation of aggressive speech acts including taboo words, surprising, saucy and thus amusing effects.

The hypothesis of this paper is that the frequent taboo words significantly contribute to making the featured characters speak as machos, making them apparently perform many aggressive speech acts, especially insults. As follows, these acts are analyzed in context. As for the pragmatic context, most of the exchanges are symmetrical and take place in the group of inmates. Examples 1-6 show the characters, their dialogue turns and the investigated speech acts: when taboo words are featured, these are signalled by TW. The first sequence, which takes place in the restaurant, features old Greek mother tongue seaman Sokrates, who lives in the garage of Zinos’ restaurant, referring to the latter with a request.

Table 1: Example 1 – *Soul Kitchen* (2009) – 00:00:49 – 00:00:57

Zinos and Sokrates at the <i>Soul Kitchen</i>	Original German dialogue¹⁹	Speech acts with and without taboo words (TW)
Sokrates	Hey, du Arschloch! Ich frier’ mir beim Duschen die Eier ab! Besorg du warmes Wasser!	INSULT (TW) DESCRIPTION (TW) INJUNCTION
Zinos	Bezahl du erstmal Juli, August und September!	INJUNCTION
Sokrates	Leck mich am Arsch!	INSULT (INJUNCTION) (TW)

Source: Author (2024)

In Example 1, Sokrates addresses Zinos with an insult expressed through a taboo word (*Arschloch*, Eng. “asshole”) to make a request in the imperative form (“*Besorg du mir warmes Wasser!*”, Eng. “Get hot water!”). Zinos reacts on his part with an active response (Alfonzetti, 2017, p. 117), i.e. with the injunction to pay the rent (“*Bezahl du erstmal Juli, August und September!*”, Eng. “Pay first July, August and September!”) at which Sokrates responds with a vulgar INJUNCTION (“*Leck mich am Arsch*”, Eng. lit. “Lick my ass!”). This is a partly unwilling INSULT, since Sokrates does not actually intend to insult Zinos, who is offering him free lodging. This can be explained in part by Sokrates’ limited command of German: therefore, his style – rich in scatological and sexual terms²⁰ – is due to some extent to his lack of perception of their actual rudeness. INSULT and INJUNCTION therefore characterize the verbal exchange. However, they do not pragmatically produce negative perlocutionary effects on the relationship since no one takes offense. The characters have known each other for a long time and are on good terms. These expressions thus cannot be regarded as prototypical insults (Alfonzetti, 2017). In a continuum between the two poles of cooperative and

¹⁹ Eng. “Sokrates: ‘Hey, bastard! I cannot have shower, my ass is freezing! Give me hot water’”. Zinos: “Pay July, August and September rent money first”. Sokrates: “Fuck off!”. The translations of *Soul Kitchen* dialogues are taken – with slight changes – from *scripts.com*.

²⁰ For another example, Sokrates addresses Lutz with “*Scheißausländer*” (Eng. “fucking foreigner”), without fully understanding the lexeme offensiveness, as Lutz’ reaction confirms (“*Ich liebe dich auch, Sokrates*”, Eng. “I love you too, Sokrates”) (Buffagni, 2017, p. 117).

non-cooperative rudeness, they can be considered forms of “unmotivated non-cooperative rudeness” (“the violation of the norms of polite behavior due to ignorance”). In this case, Sokrates shows a very aggressive style and Zinos reacts consequently to preserve his face (Alfonzetti, 2017, p. 117; Kienpointner, 1997, p. 261–269). Apart from Sokrates, similar verbal endeavors are also shown by chef Shayn and waitress Lucia on different occasions²¹.

Table 2: Example 2 – *Soul Kitchen* (2009) – 01:09:09– 01:09:34

Neumann, Milli, Zinos, Goat, Illias, Lucia	German original dialogue ²²	Speech acts with and without taboo words (TW)
Neumann	Warte mal, warte mal. Gib mir noch 'ne Chance. Nur du und ich, wir beide. Tausend Euro.	INVITATION (INJUNCTION TO PLAY)
Milli	Bist du bescheuert, Alter? Scheiß drauf.	INSULT + CURSE (TW; INDIRECT SPEECH ACT: INJUNCTION TO STOP)
Goat	Scheiß drauf, Alter, komm schon.	CURSE + TW + INDIRECT SPEECH ACT (INJUNCTION TO STOP)
Illias	Warte mal, warte mal, warte mal.	INJUNCTION (REQUEST OF MORE TIME)
Goat	Lass gehen, Mann.	INJUNCTION (TO STOP)
Lucia	Ey! Ich hab' kein' Bock mehr, ich hau jetzt ab.	ASSERTION
Goat	Schon egal, lass abdüsen, in Dollhouse, Alter, lassen wir's knallen, ey, eh, weißt du doch! Komm schon Mann, weg hier.	INJUNCTION (TO STOP) + TW
Milli	Was soll der Scheiß?	INDIRECT SPEECH ACT (CRITIC) + TW
Illias	Warte zwei Sekunden.	INJUNCTION (ASK FOR MORE TIME)

Source: Author (2024)

Example 2 shows a case of motivated rudeness (“competitive rudeness in [semi]private conversations”) among Zinos, Illias, Milli and Goat, all long-time friends. Illias is challenged by Neumann and wants to play another (very risky) hand of poker. Milli and Goat, who know Illias’ weaknesses and gambling obsession repeatedly try to dissuade him. CURSES, INSULTS and INJUNCTIONS belong to their usual verbal strategies to reach this communicative goal. They highlight their fellowship (Alfonzetti, 2017, p. 117), “to express solidarity and belonging to the group”) and try preventing Illias to fall in Neumann’s trap. In fact, the verbal competition takes place indirectly – on a deeper, semantic level – between Neumann and Illias’ friends.

²¹ In other film sequences, bad-tempered chef Shayn refers also to Zinos with insulting remarks (e.g. calling him *Idiot*), while Shayn actually intends to work with Zinos and help him have success with the restaurant.

²² Neumann: “Wait, wait. Give me one more chance. Just you and me. Thousand euros”. Milli: “Are you crazy man? Fuck it.” Goat: “Fuck it man. Stop, stop. Fuck it man”, Illias: “Wait, wait, wait”, Goat: “Let’s go man”, Lucia: “Hey! I am leaving.”, Goat: “Let’s go man, Let’s have fun at Dollhouse. Let’s go. Are you crazy? That is enough. Let’s go” Illias: “Wait a second”.

Table 3: Example 3 – *Soul Kitchen* (2009) – 01:15:46 – 01:16:03

Sokrates, Neumann's friend, Zinos at the Soul Kitchen	Original German dialogue²³	Speech acts with and without taboo words (TW)
Sokrates	He, lasst mein Boot, ihr Ratten!	INJUNCTION + INSULT (TW)
Zinos	Was macht ihr da, ihr Arschgeigen?	QUESTION + INSULT (TW)
Neumann's friend	Was willst du denn, du scheiß Ostfotze?	QUESTION (TW) + INSULT + PHYSICAL ATTACK (TW)
Zinos	Ich bin hier der verdammte Eigentümer!	DESCRIPTION/ASSERTION (TW)
Neumann's friend	Neumann ist hier der Eigentümer! Und du Kackvogel verpiss dich jetzt besser! Weiter.	DESCRIPTION/ASSERTION + INSULT (TW) + INJUNCTION (TW) INJUNCTION

Source: Author (2024)

Instead, Example 3 shows an aggressive exchange (motivated rudeness: competitive rudeness in inter-groups confrontation) between different groups: Sokrates is reacting to the brusque removal of his beloved ship from Zinos's garage performed by Neumann's friends, after the latter has gained ownership of the restaurant having defeated Ilias at poker. Sokrates calls them "*Ratten*" (Eng. "rats", i.e. dirty and disgusting animals). Furthermore, Zinos addresses them with the very vulgar term – meaning a passive homosexual – "*Arschgeigen*" (Eng. "bastard"). Even more vulgar is the verbal reaction, referred to Zinos, since "*Scheißostfotze*" (literally "fucking eastern cunt", Eng. "motherfucker") combines three different offensive lexical morphemes: scatological "*Scheiß*" ("shit"), *Ost* ("east") as coming from East Germany (considered backward), "*Fotze*" ("cunt") as the female sexual organ, metaphorically – in a macho discourse – a worthless man. This is verbally quite a creative INSULT, accompanied by a physical attack. Zinos reacts – in a very amusing scene – describing his role with a taboo word ("*Ich bin hier der verdammte Eigentümer*", Eng. "I am the damned owner of this place"). A further vulgar INSULT and an INJUNCTION follow: "*Und du Kackvogel verpiss dich jetzt besser!*" (Eng. "Corbie! You better fuck out of my face!"). The characters do not know each other; the relation is asymmetrical, since external, intruding characters are physically stronger. The speech acts uttered by Neumann's friend are aggressive both verbally and with their actions. In fact, these foreigners are recognisable as incapable of control and as uncivilized people. Insults present terms from the scatological, sexual and non-conformity domains (inter-group rudeness: Kienpointner, 1997, p. 271–277).

In Examples 4 and 5, taboo words and INSULTS take place unexpectedly in more formal contexts and in asymmetrical conversations, showing frame ruptures.

²³ Sokrates: "Leave my boat, you rats!", Zinos: "What are you doing, bastards?", Neumann's friends (to Zinos): "What you want motherfucker?", Zinos: "I am the owner of this place!", Neumann's friends: "Neumann is the owner of this place! Corbie! Get the fuck out of my face! Go on".

Table 4: Example 4 – *Soul Kitchen* (2009) – 00:05:49 – 00:06:24

Chef Shayn and Client at a chic restaurant	Original German dialogue²⁴	Speech acts with and without taboo words (TW)
Client	Ich habe die Dame um eine heiße Gazpacho gebeten, nichts Weiteres. Deshalb dieser Aufstand?	ASSERTION + QUESTION (INDIRECT SPEECH ACT: INSIST ON HIS REQUEST)
Chef Shayn	Gazpacho ist ein traditionelles spanisches Gericht, was kalt serviert wird.	ASSERTION (INDIRECT SPEECH ACT: DESCRIPTION of the reason why the request cannot be accomplished =REFUSAL)
Client	Haben Sie keine Mikrowelle in der Küche?	QUESTION (INDIRECT SPEECH ACT: you can refuse accomplishing a client's request only in case of a major hindrance, in this case i.e. the lacking a microwave: REITERATION OF REQUEST + implied OFFENSE)
Chef Shayn	Komme ich auf Ihren Arbeitsplatz und erkläre Ihnen, wie Sie Ihre Arbeit zu verrichten haben?	QUESTION (INDIRECT SPEECH ACT: you cannot ask what is not expected to be served: CRITICAL REFUSAL)
Client	Ich will jetzt eine heiße Gazpacho!	ORDER
Chef Shayn	Nein! Ich kann dir auch in die Suppe pissen! Dann ist sie auch heiß!	REFUSAL + THREAT + ASSERTION (TW + TW)
Restaurant Owner	Shayn, es reicht!	REPRIMAND – ORDER
Chef Shayn	Ja. Es wird verkauft, was hier verkauft werden kann! Die Liebe, der Sex, die Seele... auch die Tradition!	COMMENTARY (OUTBURST)
Restaurant Owner	Steck sie dir irgendwohin! Raus! Du bist gefeuert! Es reicht!	INJUNCTION + FIRING

Source: Author (2024)

Example 4 shows a sequence in which aggression takes place in an indirect way, exploiting the asymmetrical situation (public context, client versus chef). The client insists on his unusual request, remaining formally polite. He reacts to the negative answer with an offensive verbal speech act, implicitly meaning that, giving the implication that the only reason why any client's request may not be accomplished is the lack of the necessary equipment, the conclusion is that the restaurant must be lacking a microwave. The latter can therefore be interpreted as an extremely arrogant utterance, face threatening both for the chef and the restaurant. Shayn's reaction, breaking the frame of the polite professional, refers to the implication of the utterance, underlining that the client has no right to present such a request, disrespectful of his role. This leads to an escalation, with direct speech acts: the client asks for a hot gazpacho and Shayn refuses, performing an actual aggressive act, i.e. hitting the table furiously with his knife and threatening to urinate in the gazpacho to make it hot. A taboo word ("pissen", Eng. "to piss") occurs only in the final climax phase of the tense

²⁴ Client: "I just want to have hot gazpacho from the lady. That's all. What's the big deal?", Shayn: "Gazpacho is a traditional Spanish dish which is served cold", Client: "Don't you have a microwave in the kitchen?", Shayn: "Do I come to your place of work, and teach you how to do your job?", Client: "I want to have a hot gazpacho!", Shayn: "No! I can piss in your soup! That will warm it up!", Owner: "Shayn that is enough! This is the last time. I don't want you here anymore. Out!", Shayn: "Ya, ya! You sell everything you can sell, don't you? Love, Sex, soul... Also Traditions!", Owner: "Get your traditions and fuck off! Get out! You are fired! That is enough!"

sequence, in which also the restaurant owner breaks the frames uttering a vulgar INJUNCTION (“Steck sie dir irgendwohin”, Eng. “Get your traditions and fuck off!”).

Another (climax) central comic sequence in which humor arises from the clash between the formal context and the informal and aggressive use of taboo words is produced, in the sequence at the auction, by Sokrates’ insults – intruding in a formal communicative context with inadequate verbal means – and the reaction of the civil servant.

Table 5: Example 5 – *Soul Kitchen* (2009) – 01:30:25 – 01:31:17

At the auction, Civil Servant, Neumann’s client, Sokrates	Original German dialogue²⁵	Speech acts with and without taboo words (TW)
Neumann’s client	Zweihunderttausend.	OFFER
Sokrates	Was? Du Arschloch! Du leck mich am Arsch, du Kapitalistenschwein!	COMMENT + INSULT (TW) + INJUNCTION (TW)+ INSULT (TW)
Civil servant	Entschuldigen Sie bitte. Setzen Sie sich!	INJUNCTION
Sokrates	Du Arschloch! Du Landratte, du! Scheißkapitalist!	INSULT (TW) + INSULT (TW) + INSULT (TW)
Civil servant	Setzen Sie sich bitte! Wir sind hier in einem deutschen Gericht! Das ist ja die Unmöglichkeit hier! Ruhe!	INJUNCTION + REPRIMAND + COMMENT + INJUNCTION
Sokrates	Leck mich am Arsch! Ich bring dich um...	INJUNCTION (TW) + THREAT
Civil servant	Wo waren wir stehengeblieben?	QUESTION
Neumann’s client	Bei zweihunderttausend.	ANSWER
Civil servant	Zweihunderttausend sind gesetzt. Zweihunderttausend zum ersten, Zweihunderttausend zum zweiten, Zweihunderttausend zum...	DECLARATION
Zinos	Zweihunderttausend und fünfzehn Euro!	OFFER
Civil servant	Zweihunderttausend und fünfzehn Euro. Zweihunderttausend und fünfzehn zum ersten, Zweihunderttausend und fünfzehn zum zweiten, Zweihunderttausend und fünfzehn zum dritten. Herr Kazantsakis ist der Meistbietende. Dieses Gebot wurde nach dreimaliger Verkündigung an Herrn Kazantsakis vergeben.	DECLARATION
Neumann’s client	Einspruch! Einspruch!	REACTION AT DECLARATION
Civil servant	Damit ist der Verkauf abgeschlossen.	FINAL DECLARATION

Source: Author (2024)

The sequence (Example 5) shows an official, public auction, taking place in a solemn room, the civil servant who performs the act is sitting at a table in front of the public. Neumann’s client

²⁵ Neumann’s client: “Two hundred thousand.”, Sokrates: “What? Asshole! Bastard, Capitalist pig!”, Civil servant: “Sit down!”, Sokrates: “You asshole! Farm rat! Dirty capitalist!”, Civil servant: “We are in a German court! Unbelievable! Quiet!”, Sokrates: “Bastard! I will kill you!”, Civil servant: “Where we were?”, Neumann’s client: “Two hundred”, Civil servant: “Two hundred thousand is offered. Two hundred thousand, going once... Two hundred thousand, going twice...”, Zinos: “Two hundred thousand and fifteen euro! Two hundred thousand and fifteen euro!”, Civil servant: “Two hundred thousand and fifteen, going once... Two hundred thousand and fifteen, going twice... Two hundred thousand and fifteen, going three times... Mr Kazantsakis gave the highest bid. Sold to the highest bidder”, Neumann’s client: “Objection! Objection!”, Civil servant: “Auction is closed”.

has offered a much higher sum, easily defeating the rivals. The conversation highlights the different registers involved: on the one hand, the very formal register of the civil servant and of Neumann's client and, on the other hand, the informal and rude one of Sokrates. The voices of the civil servant and of Sokrates overlap each other and show a peculiar triangulation. Humorous is the reaction of the civil servant, who is shocked by Sokrates's verbal outbursts in the sacred auction room. While he addresses Sokrates, summoning him to moderate his language, the Greek sailor keeps on insulting and threatening Neumann's client and must be accompanied outside. On his part, the client does not even react to the insults and threats, thus not recognising Sokrates as a participant in the verbal exchange and, especially, in the economic transaction which is taking place. The wealthy businessman wants to buy the *Soul Kitchen* to demolish it and build apartments for well-off people, thus contributing to Hamburg's gentrification. In fact, in his rude way Sokrates expresses Zinos's and Akin's idea of preservation of an iconic symbol of Hamburg's cultural heritage. Thanks to a sudden setback of the rich client, in the end Zinos luckily succeeds in rebuying the *Soul Kitchen*, being assigned it publicly at the auction.

Suburban language and taboo words contribute to the construction of an identity and produce humoristic effects both in the representation of the good-hearted and bad speaking characters (Examples 1 and 2), both in the clash between them and other, a low (example 3) or a higher register (examples 4 and 5) speaking characters.

Given the film's multicultural nature, some expressions are Greek. They are typical for certain characters: the expression "*malaka(s)*"²⁶ for example, Eng. "man who masturbates"²⁷, literally "wanker", "jerk off", "idiot". It is a very frequently occurring slang word, especially among brothers and close (male) friends and has different meanings depending on the context and on the paraverbal language such as mimicry and gestures; in many cases it means "dude" or "mate". In the film, it is uttered on two occasions by Ilias when speaking with Zinos²⁸. This word belongs to Ilias's idiolect: he qualifies himself as a Greek (and especially part of the diaspora), expressing at the same time the deep bonding with his brother, for whom he feels respect and affection. The Greek taboo word contributes thus to create a sense of identity, also giving Ilias's character a humorous trait.

In fact, in the film the main characters continually utter vulgarisms in their everyday communication, not confining them to aggressive speech. This vulgar language accompanies coherently adequate gestures and mimicry. On the one hand, they are mainly pejoratives and rarely ethnically based (Technau, 2019, p. 84). On the other hand, the reactions of the characters are easy-going and relaxed; conflicts do not arise from these utterances.

In particular, male inhabitants of the suburban districts portrayed in *Soul Kitchen* show an attachment to taboo words, which makes them also appear as well-meaning simpletons. The main male characters appear almost childish: Zinos is quite naïf, often acting irrationally, good-hearted; gaming addicted Ilias is unreliable, while unscrupulous Neumann light-heartedly takes advantage of the altered state of Ms. Schuster, the revenue officer. Some of them are featured almost like animals, e.g. Ilias's friend is named Goat. These adult men are depicted as not fully capable of controlling

²⁶ "*Malakas*" is the basis form. "*Malaka*" is the vocative form.

²⁷ The Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon (LSJ). <https://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/Iris/reg.jsp>

²⁸ Ilias greets Zinos with "Jassu Malaka" visiting him at the restaurant ("Howdy Malaka?") and exclaims: "Malaka. Ich bin so glücklich" (Eng. "Malaka. I am so happy") as he discovers being in love with Lucia.

their instincts. Their common language is rich in macho-like utterances, with individual differences. Three female characters play a consistent role, representing different models of attractive and modern femininity (Akin, 2011, p. 203): among these, waitress Lucia – who works in a male-dominated context – uses the most (and most creative) taboo words, while Nadine resorts to them only occasionally and Anna does not at all.

Taboo words are thus used to characterize the language of inhabitants of suburban districts, also showing a multicultural society. These taboo words can also contain ethnic slurs, but only among the participants in the group (E.g.: Zinos to Illias: “Grieche” or Sokrates to Lutz: “Scheißausländer”). The use of taboo words proves to be mostly expressive (Technau, 2019, p. 75–107). The characters show their emotions also through aggressive speech acts, even if they do not intend – but for single occasions, e.g. for lacking command of the language or to defend themselves – to insult or damage the addressee. Aggressive acts also take place without use of taboo words, “then only with reference to a certain conversational setting and to a cognitive setting of the speakers an insult can become an actual offense” (Bonacchi, 2017, p. 18–19).

The analysis of the selected sequences showed that the use of taboo words is mainly expressive and builds a sense of community, a form of identity marker which also has the function to make the audience sympathize with these rough-speaking but all in all good-hearted characters. It is frequently a form of reaction to negative emotions (Havryliv, 2017, p. 1–17) and the presence of taboo words – in many cases scatological – can either mark the expressivity or focus on the suburban milieu of the speakers (Havryliv, 2018, p. 30). In fact, as the analysis showed, the major contrasts happen between different groups (Example 3) while in the group the very frequent insults can be related to imperfect command of German (Examples 1, 3 and 5) or as a group code, i. e. as expressive and not pejorative (Technau, 2019, p. 85).

4. *Soul Kitchen*'s taboo words in Italian subtitles. The translation of *Scheiße*: occurrences and functions

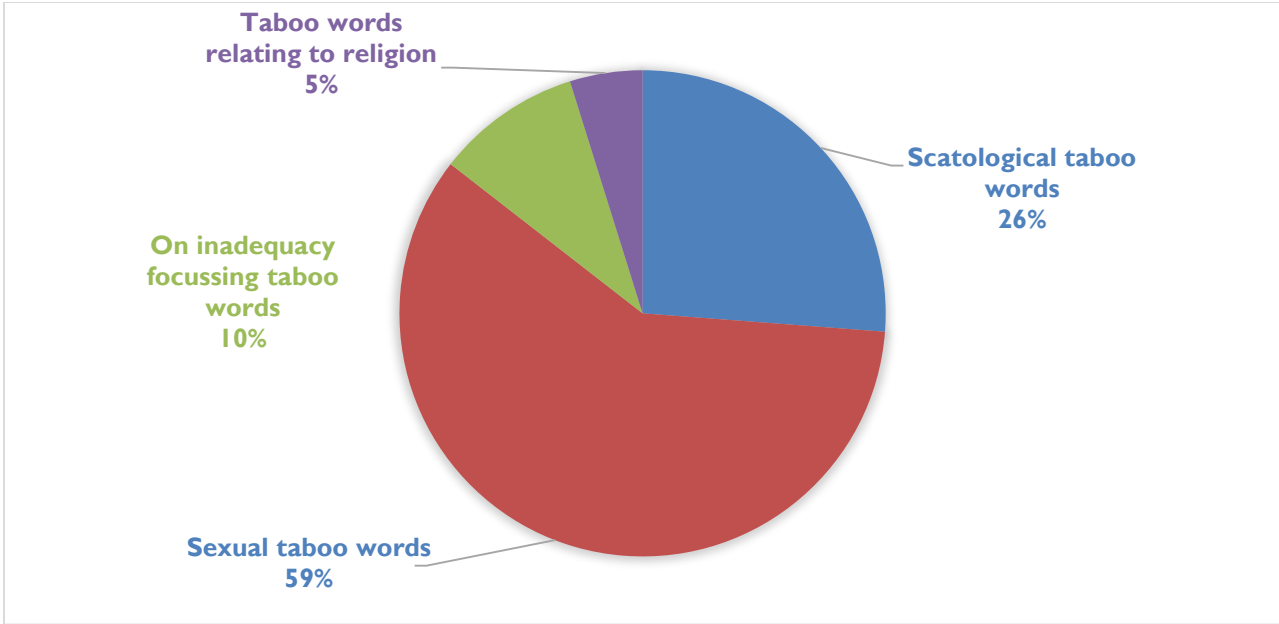
Due to social evolution with its secularization and massification phenomena, e.g. de-elitization of literature, with consequent increasing usage of swear words in high level contemporary novels (Novelli, 2017), in the last decades Italian taboo words from the scatological and sexual sphere have gradually become more accepted because of the extended usage and even the encouragement coming from the mass media (TV and internet). On the other hand, Italian taboo words remain consistent as to phenomena relating to death and are becoming more sensitive with regard to the social sphere (working position, social class, earning, age and weight) (Canobbio, 2011), gender (Anfuso, 2020, p. 134–135) and ethnic differences (Capuano Romolo, 2007, p. 37–41).

German language is traditionally known for the very high presence – in comparison with most European languages – of scatological terms (Kostrzewa, 2015, Nübling & Vogel, 2004), referring to excrements, the corresponding parts of the body and the related actions considered as disgusting. Furthermore, as in Italian, also in the German language a greater acceptance of scatological terms and a higher frequency of sexual related terms have been recently observed (Havryliv, 2022; Technau, 2019). Since both languages show similar trends, a comparison between



the original film dialogues and their Italian subtitles may reveal interesting aspects. As is well known, Italy is a dubbing country and *Soul Kitchen* was also dubbed into Italian. However, in the last two decades it has become increasingly common in Italy to enjoy films in the original language, in many cases with subtitles. This makes the production of accurate and precise subtitles, which are carefully evaluated by an evermore competent audience (Jüngst, 2020), highly relevant. The analysis of interlingual subtitles offers therefore an opportunity to investigate the level of accuracy achieved in this sector. The results of the analysis of the Italian subtitles in the investigated scenes are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Semantic fields of Taboo Words in *Soul Kitchen*'s Italian subtitles



Source: Author (2024)

Figure 2 highlights the significant presence of sexual taboo words in Italian subtitles (59%). The comparison of table 2 with table 1 reveals that the percentage of scatological taboo words in German original dialogues (55%) closely corresponds with that of sexual taboo words in Italian subtitles (59%) and vice versa (sexual taboo words in German dialogues 24% versus scatological taboo words in Italian subtitles 26%). Despite the similar trends observed above, these results confirm the traditional peculiar uses of taboo words in the two languages. Instead, taboo words on inadequacy and on religion show similar rates in the German dialogues and in the Italian subtitles (respectively 15% and 6% in the original dialogues, 10% and 5% in the subtitles). Interestingly, there is again no real difference in the percentage of religious taboo words in German and Italian, although Italy is traditionally considered as a more sensitive society for religious issues, thus showing a higher presence of taboo words and phrases related to these themes.

The following section presents an analysis of the translation of the word “Scheiße” (“shit”) in the Italian subtitles: among the strategies enlisted by Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007, p. 195–207), in *Soul Kitchen* omission, compensation, lexical recreation, transposition (cultural adaptation) and calque were adopted. Here the results of the analysis follow.

As far as the strategy “omission” (23%) is concerned, it is used to translate *Scheiße* as a simple expletive (1), as an expletive accompanied by an adjective (2) or by a prepositional adverb (3), as a modifier of a compound (4 and 5), but also as a metaphor (6 and 7).

Table 6: Strategy “omission” in *Soul Kitchen*’s Italian subtitles

Example	Original German dialogue	Italian subtitles ²⁹
(1)	Scheiße.	--
(2)	Verdammte Scheiße, das war doch mal Karstadt hier. Das war doch mal Karstadt hier, oder nicht?	Prima qui c’era un grande magazzino. / È vero?
(3)	Scheiß drauf, Alter, komm schon.	Ah, senti, lascia perdere.
(4)	Ich kann nicht zum verdammten scheiß Arzt.	Non ci posso andare.
(5)	Scheißegal. Scheißegal!	Fai te.
(6)	Dann verkauf ich diese Scheiße.	Allora lo vendo e chiuso.
(7)	Ich will diese geklaute Scheiße hier nicht haben!	Questa roba rubata non la voglio!

Source: Author (2024)

In all the occurrences shown in Table 6, the Italian subtitles avoid or skip the taboo word. In (1) Zinos is reacting to the discovery of the broken dishes in the dishwasher: the audiovisual translator has probably considered that mimicry and gestures convey sufficiently his astonishment and delusion. In (2) Illias is going to a disco with Zinos and Lucia, in which he has taken an interest. The expletive expression “*verdammte Scheiße*” is probably sacrificed because it is not considered strictly necessary for the psychological depiction of Illias’s character and for brevity reasons, because of the longer space required for the translation of “*Karstadt*”³⁰ with “*grande magazzino*” (explicitation through a hypernym). In (3) (see Example 2) “*scheiß drauf*” (“screw it”) is rendered with neutral “*lascia stare*”, meaning “forget about it”. In (4) the vulgar offensive morphem *scheiß* is not translated (“[zum] *verdammten scheiß Arzt*”, lit. “damn shit doctor”, is simply translated with the clitic pronoun “*ci*” (“there”, referring to the doctor). In (5) “*Scheißegal. Scheißegal.*” (“don’t give a damn”) is translated with “*Fai te*”, meaning “You choose”. In (6) Zinos refers to the restaurant with “*diese Scheiße*” (“this shit”), which in the subtitle is rendered by the simple pronoun “*lo*” (Eng. “it”). In (7) “*diese geklaute Scheiße*” (“this stolen shit”) is translated with the more neutral “*questa roba rubata*” (“this stolen stuff”). As shown, the expressions chosen for the Italian subtitles are altogether less expressive than the original ones; this is especially the case of Zinos, who frequently pronounces the word “*Scheiße*” and whose utterances therefore appear considerably weaker and more polite in the involved subtitles. Though, it must be also considered that in the context other expressions can be inserted to compensate for the loss of color.

With 64%, the most frequent strategy is transposition, i.e., cultural adaptation through other expressions. In Table 7 are presented different syntactic structures featuring “*Scheiße*” in the dialogues and the corresponding Italian translations.

²⁹ In this section, the English subtitles of the official DVD version (IFC Films 2010) are reproduced in the footnotes: (1) --; (2) Shit, wasn’t this / a department store?; (3) Let’s go; (4) I can’t see a fucking doctor; (5) --; (6) Then I’ll sell the place; (7) I don’t want / this stolen shit here!

³⁰ Karstadt Warenhaus GmbH was a German department store chain founded in 1881 by Rudolph Karstadt in Wismar. His strategy of offering fixed low prices was successful and many stores were opened. By 2009 the company had been through various ups and downs, but it still counted ca 90 department stores throughout Germany.

Table 7: Strategy “transposition” in *Soul Kitchen*’s Italian subtitles

Example	Original German dialogue	Italian subtitles ³¹
(1)	Nadine! Scheiße.	Nadine? Cazzo.
(2)	Deine scheiß Bum-Bum-Musik ist alle! Ah ah ah. Idiot!	Hai chiuso con quella tua musica/ bum bum del cazzo, eh? Coglione.
(3)	Es ist scheißegal.	È uguale, che cazzo!
(4)	Was für’n scheiß Funkloch, Alter?	Ma quale cazzo di campo?
(5)	Ich find’ deine scheiß Platten nicht.	Che cazzo sono questi dischi?
(6)	Hey, Illias! Dein Bruder arbeitet mit kaputtem Rücken in der Küche und deine Reaktion find’ ich scheiße!	Tuo fratello lavora con la schiena / rotta e tu stai qui a giocare? Stronzo!
(7)	Der Laden interessiert mich ’n Scheiß. Ich reiße das Ding sowieso ab.	Non me ne frega un cazzo del locale. / lo lo prendo e lo demolisco.

Source: Author (2024)

In the analyzed occurrences *Scheiße* is very frequently translated with “cazzo” (“dick”), which appears as a single word (1) and as a modifier of a compound word (2), (3), (4), (5). In (2) (“*Deine scheiß Bum-Bum-Musik ist alle!*”) the vulgar Italian word makes its appearance in a nominal phrase governed by the preposition “di” (“of”) (“*musica del cazzo*”, Eng. “fucking music”), while in (3) (“*Scheißegal*”), it appears as a single exclamation following “che” (“*È uguale, che cazzo!*”, Eng. “What the fuck”), showing also a form of compensation. Furthermore, in (4) “*Was für’n scheiß Funkloch*” is translated with the phrase “*quale cazzo di campo*” (Eng. lit. “What fuck of a signal”). Furthermore, the assertion in (5) “*Ich find’ deine scheiß Platten nicht.*” is translated with a question “*Che cazzo sono questi dischi?*” (“What the fuck are these records?”). The translation of (6) (“[...] *deine Reaktion find’ ich scheiße*”) with “*E tu stai qui a giocare? Stronzo!*” (lit. “And you are playing here? Bastard!”) shows the strategy of explicitation for the string “*deine Reaktion*”, since the subtitle gives more information on Illias’s activities than the original dialogue. The following string “*find’ ich scheiße*” is translated with the insulting one-word-sentence “*Stronzo!*” (lit. “piece of shit”; translated as “asshole, bastard”). As to taboo words, the strategies involved here are transposition and compensation. But for (6) of Table 7, in all examples shown the German faecal word was thus rendered with a sexual Italian word. Interestingly, an indirect insult regarding an action of the addressee (Table 7, n. (6)) becomes an insult towards the addressee (“*stronzo*”). Apart from some examples, speech acts are maintained, and curse dominates. It can be observed that on some occasions the creativity typical of German compound words *ad hoc* of the original dialogue is lost (cp. Example 6).

Table 8: Example 6 – *Soul Kitchen* (2009) – 01:18:17 – 01:18:22

Zinos, Illias, Milli and Goat driving to Neumann’s office	Original German dialogue ³²	Italian subtitles ³³
Milli	Ist das nicht oberkackscheißegal, wo wir zuerst einbrechen?	Chi cazzo se ne frega chi è / che andiamo a scassinare prima! //
Goat	Was scheißegal, Mann! Ich muss doch wissen, wohin ich fahren soll!	Chi se ne frega un cazzo! / lo devo sapere dove devo andare!

Source: Author (2024)

³¹ (1) Nadine! / Shit; (2) That’s the end / of your bloody noise!; (3) I don’t give a shit; (4) What do you mean?; (5) I don’t know your records; (6) Hey, Illias, your brother’s / working with a bad back, // and you’re gambling? (7) I’ll tear it down anyway.

³² English Translation of the original German dialogue: Milli: “Doesn’t fucking matter where we go”, Goat: “It doesn’t fucking matter? I need to know where to drive”.

³³ English subt.: Milli: “Who cares / where we break in first?”, Goat: “I need to know where to go!”.

The compound “*oberkackscheißegal*” consists of four lexical morphemes: the prefix “*ober*”, meaning “extra, very”, two taboo words referring to the excrements (“*Kacke*” and “*Scheiße*”) and the adverb *egal* meaning “the same”. In the Italian subtitle the question has become an assertion, presenting again “*cazzo*” and the reflexive verb “*fregarsene*”, meaning “don’t give a damn”. Even though the vulgar tone is maintained in the subtitle, semantic content referring to “*ober*” and “*kack*” is therefore not translated. Since in the original German dialogue the repetition of the reference to the excrement and the augmentative prefix convey significant humorous elements which get lost in the Italian subtitles, in these latter the speaking characters are deprived of relevant ridiculous aspects. A further consideration is of interest in this context: in Goat’s reply, which constitutes a metalinguistic reflection³⁴ on the previous exclamation, the subtitle shows a change in the syntactic structure, the focus lying in Italian on “*un cazzo*” and so highlighting the relevance of the question.

Table 9: Strategy “compensation” in *Soul Kitchen*’s Italian subtitles

	Original German dialogue	Italian subtitle
Client	Iss deinen Scheiß doch selber!	Mangiatela te, coglione! ³⁵

Source: Author (2024)

In Table 9, we see as an example of compensation (5%) the comment of one of the old clients of the *Soul Kitchen*, who does not appreciate the new menu of the restaurant: “*Iss deinen Scheiß doch selber*” (“*You eat your shit*”). The Italian subtitle (“*Mangiatela te, coglione*”) maintains the same imperative form of the original, replacing the taboo faecal word with a pronoun (“*la*”, Eng. “it”) and using the colloquial reflexive use of the verb “*mangiare*” (“*mangiarsi qc.*”). This is followed by the INSULT “*coglione*” (“*dickhead*”), referring to the male anatomic part (Eng. “ball”). Once again, the faecal taboo word was replaced by a sexual taboo word.

Table 10: Strategy “calque” in *Soul Kitchen*’s Italian subtitles

	Original German dialogue	Italian subtitle
Zinos	Scheiße	Oh, merda ³⁶

Source: Author (2024)

In the film, there is an example of a calque (table 10): On one occasion “*Scheiße*” was translated with a faecal taboo word (“*Oh, merda*”, Eng. “Oh, shit”) (3%), being uttered by Zinos as an exclamation of astonishment and worry because of the imminent inspection of the restaurant by the Health Department. It suits Zinos’s simple, adolescent-like idiolect.

Table 11: Strategy “lexical recreation” in *Soul Kitchen*’s Italian subtitles

	Original German dialogue	Italian subtitle
Shayn	Es macht geil wie Schifferscheiße ³⁷	Ti mette una tigre nell’uccello ³⁸

Source: Author (2024)

³⁴ According to Technau, this can be considered as a neutral use of offensive words (Technau, 2019, p. 85).

³⁵ Eng. subt.: “Eat your crap yourself!”.

³⁶ Eng. subt.: “Oh, shit”.

³⁷ Translation of the German dialogue: “It makes you so horny, you’ll be climbing the walls”.

³⁸ Eng. subt.: “Makes you horny as a goat”.

A final strategy to mention (Table 11) is a kind of lexical recreation (5%): referring to a Honduran root with aphrodisiac powers, Shayn describes this feature with a simile (literally “it makes you horny like seaman’s shit”), meaning “a great deal”. The Italian subtitle “*Ti mette una tigre nell’uccello*” (lit. “It puts a tiger in your dick”) refers to an old, very successful advertisement campaign of ESSO (Exxon Mobil) oil company, which starred a friendly tiger waiting at the fuel tank. The campaign “Put a tiger in your tank” started in Norway, was later continued in the US and in 1966 in Italy. The solution is therefore a creative and effective one, because the expression may be known by the target audience: again, the faecal word is translated with a sexual word (“*uccello*”, literally “bird”, meaning the male sexual organ, vulgar: “dick”).

5. Conclusions

The multicultural comedy *Soul Kitchen*, set in the eponymous restaurant, shows a very high rate of taboo words; the paper, following a qualitative method, investigated their functions and their translation in the Italian subtitles.

The analysis of selected sequences with taboo words showed that the most diffuse speech act is the INSULT, equated with INJUNCTION, followed by CURSE and THREAT. However, the use of taboo words, which in the German dialogue are prevailing faecal, proved to be mainly expressive and not pejorative, i. e. not meaning a real verbal aggression, but rather constituting a form of identity marker which makes the audience sympathize with the characters. Taboo words contribute therefore to the humorous depiction of a multicultural group of friends who stick together and – but for some unorthodox actions – do not show aggressive intentions.

In fact, major conflicts take place with people outside the group: the real danger and the aggression seem to come from other sources, who initially appear to be more polite and well-mannered, like arrogant clients and unscrupulous businessmen. A peculiar role is played by estate agent Thomas Neumann, who connects different worlds together (his criminal friends, the rich investor, Zinos and his friends) and alternates low and high register according to the addressee.

As to the translation, the subtitling of taboo words resorts to the same strategies envisaged by Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007) for cultural words: transposition, omission, compensation, lexical recreation and calque. The analysis of the *Scheiße*-occurrences confirmed that most faecal words were translated with sexual words, which corresponds to the target public’s expectations: the subtitles, which traditionally (Perego, 2005) tend to minimize the impact of swearing, maintain in most cases their disruptive, disrespectful tone in the Italian subtitles. Overall, subtitles adequately reproduce the dominant tone of the original characters, thus confirming their good quality (see Buffagni, 2017, p. 121). Nonetheless, some losses in their psychological characterization and in the humor of some speeches could not be avoided.

Given the increased interest for the fruition of audiovisual programs in the original languages from audiences who are becoming ever more competent, the interlingual translation of subtitles has acquired a more central role in the transmission of linguistic and cultural contents in other languages and cultures. In this context, the analysis of taboo words in German films and tv-series and of their interlingual subtitling is a very promising research field. To perform empirical, quantitative relevant



studies, it would be necessary to invest in the creation of sizeable film dialogue and – especially – wide subtitling corpora dedicated to German films and TV-series and the corresponding subtitles in other languages. For now, quantitatively adequate corpora exist primarily for English language films and TV-series subtitled in German³⁹.

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³⁹ Even the German subtitle corpus *Filmuntertitel*, part of the major digital lexical system *Digitales Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache* (dwds), which is a collection of film and TV-series subtitles based on the German-language part of the community platform opensubtitles.org, mostly collects German subtitles of English speaking films and TV-series. <https://www.dwds.de/d/korpora/untertitel>

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Claudia Buffagni

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Translating taboo words in Fatih Akins' Soul Kitchen
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