



'Did You Really Say That?' *Voiceover and the (Re)creation of Reality* *in Berlusconi's 'Shocking' Interview for* **Newsnight**

by Denise Filmer

In one of his last appearances as presenter of *Newsnight* (BBC 20 May 2014), veteran political journalist Jeremy Paxman interviewed former Italian premier, Silvio Berlusconi. Three minutes into the voiced-over interpreter-mediated dialogue, the journalist known as "*Newsnight's* Rottweiler-in-chief" (Siddique 2014) asked: "Is it true you called [Angela Merkel] an unfuckable lardarse?" Momentarily flustered, Berlusconi toyed with the earpiece from which he listened to the interpreter translate. Recomposing himself he replied: *Non ho mai, in venti anni di politica, insultato nessuno* [I have never, in twenty years of politics, insulted anyone]. While the veracity of Berlusconi's response is debateable, the issues at stake in this contribution are others. A respected political journalist breaks politeness rules on British television using the f-word in a bald, on-record utterance while committing a face-threatening act against Silvio Berlusconi. The offending utterance is not, however, Paxman's own. He is merely 'quoting' Berlusconi but quoting him through translation. Berlusconi's alleged sobriquet for Merkel, *culona inchiavabile* [unscrewable big arse],¹ was widely reported

¹ This is a literal translation and the most neutral rendering, in my opinion.



in the international media in its translated form, yet the insult cannot legitimately be defined as a quotation for the very reason that there was no evidence that he did in fact say those words (Filmer, forthcoming). *Newsnight* is pre-recorded. The taboo nature of the utterance, magnified through the target language rendering could have prompted the BBC to bleep it out. Instead, the BBC chose not to censure the offending term. On the contrary, Paxman's subversion of censorship was 'leaked' to the British press before the programme was actually aired. The "news" that Paxman's audacious question had 'stunned' Berlusconi (Brady 2014a, 2014b; Siddique 2014) triggered a series of intertextual discourse chains (Fairclough 1995) across the gamut of the British press and in the social media.

1. RESEARCH AIMS

The episode elicits a series of intriguing questions that this contribution aims to explore. Combining approaches from ethnomethodology with critical discourse analysis (CDA), the triangulated methodological framework has been designed to shed light on interconnected aspects of the communicative event from a translation studies perspective. The first focuses on its technical and linguistic construction; the (instrumental?) choice of voiceover actor, the editing, and the use of translation and interpreting to overcome linguistic barriers. Some significant examples of divergence from source to voiceover target text are discussed. The second aspect asks what motives, ideological or other, prompted the editorial decision to allow such offensive language in the television interview. Did the obscenity escape the censorship net because it was ostensibly relayed through translation? Was Paxman's question planned or improvised? Was the interpreter advised beforehand? Providing insight on the social actor's perspective, as journalist and TV presenter, Jeremy Paxman's views were sought on the role of interpreting and voiceover techniques in the Berlusconi interview. A series of open-ended questions were put to him via email communication (22 January 2015) yielding valuable data analysed here (section 6). The third aspect of the study relates to the discursive construction of the event and outlines the intertextual chains (Fairclough 1995) it generated. A review of British newspaper coverage of the interview is offered through the analysis of a small dataset adopting approaches from critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2003; Schäffner 2004). Finally, the contribution offers some closing remarks and directions for future research. What follows below is a brief overview of salient research on the specific fields of voiceover, and selected works on media interpreting relevant to this study.

2. MIND THE GAP – VOICEOVER IN TRANSLATION RESEARCH

The nebulous area of voiceover translation has long remained an underdeveloped area of research within the broader and burgeoning field of audiovisual translation (Orero 2006: 2; 2009: 131). As Orero (2006: 2) points out "given the fact that voice-over



is the modality most commonly used for translating politicians' speeches and to inform about international news, the lack of attention it has received is surprising from the perspective of Audiovisual Translation, and Translation Studies in general". She argues that there is ample scope for research into this form of AVT, particularly regarding "its function, its formal features and the translation of content" (ibid.). Furthermore, Orero (2009: 131) sustains that the many definitions found in the limited amount of literature on voiceover are either "misleading or inaccurate". The present study refers to Díaz-Cintas and Orero's (2006: 477) comprehensive overview of what voiceover techniques entail:

A voice offering a translation in a given target language (TL) is heard simultaneously on top of the source language (SL) voice. As far as the soundtrack of the original program is concerned, the volume is reduced to a low level that can still be heard in the background whilst the translation is being read. It is common practice to allow the viewer to hear the original speech in the foreign language for a few seconds at the onset of the speech and to reduce subsequently the volume of the original so that the translated speech can be inserted. The translation usually finishes several seconds before the foreign language speech does, the sound of the original is raised again to a normal volume and the viewer can hear once more the original speech.

Voiceover has long been associated with non-fictional genres and the (re)creation of reality (Orero 2006; Franco 2001; Daly 1985; Ávila 1997; Franco *et al.* 2010). As Franco *et al.* (2010: 26) state, "its defining features contribute to the feel of reality, truth and authenticity that factual programmes count on". Kilborn (1993: 648), for example, claims this transfer mode is "particularly well suited as a method for the rendering of speeches by foreign politicians", so much so that "many in the audience would now deem it wholly inappropriate if any other mode were used". Lukylen *et al.*'s (1991) work was one of the first studies in the field. Viewed from a Media Studies perspective, the authors define voiceover as "the faithful translation of original speech" (ibid: 80). Franco *et al.* (2010: 26) note in fact that from a Media Studies perspective, voiceover is assumed to be a "faithful, literal, authentic, and complete version of the original audio" and as such has been conferred the "status of trustful transfer mode". However, some would question the notion of 'faithful' translation in the case of voiceover products that could well be problematised from a translation studies standpoint. Absusalem (2006, in Orero 2006: 3), for example, observes, "reporting translated scripts is far from a literal translation exercise" and identifies the translator's ideologies, questions of dominance and power, current political debates, and political gains as of critical importance to the evaluation of translation in voiceover, as indeed with any form of meaning transfer across linguistic and cultural divides. In the wake of Darwish, (2006), Darwish and Orero (2014), and Straniero-Sergio (2011), this study contends that probing the use of voiceover in news products and interrogating voiceover practices is fertile and valuable research terrain. As Darwish and Orero (2014: 130) comment, "there is certainly a dearth of research into news translation and the effects of these



audiovisual modalities on the objectivity and perception of translation-mediated news reporting".

In the British cultural context, voiceover is preferred to dubbing or subtitling for non-fiction TV genres and is frequently used in BBC news broadcasts (Darwish and Orero 2014; Orero, 2006). Gieve and Norton (2007: 189) identify two non-fiction genres in which linguistic Otherness need to be overcome; lifestyle and travel programmes featuring British celebrities, and more serious, 'issue-based' documentaries and news programmes. In both genres, strategies such as voiceover summary, subtitles, and interpreting are adopted in order to overcome linguistic difference. Both genres also share "a reluctance to allow the 'foreigners' who feature [in the programmes] to 'speak' in their own voices" (ibid.: 193). Even documentary or news genres appear averse to exposing the British viewing public to talk in a foreign language and tend to "minimise any kind of communicative stress both for the participants in the programmes and for the audience at home" (Norton and Gieve 2010: 206).

The authors conclude that the representation of linguistic Otherness on British television tends to flatten or erase linguistic difference, a fact they consider cause for concern. Their findings reveal that an asymmetrical view of linguistic Other competence is promoted on British television, "constructing non-native speakers of English as linguistically deficient" (ibid.) but not English speakers who are unable to speak other languages. English speakers are rarely shown attempting strategies to overcome linguistic difference, "thus reinforcing the notion that it is not important to learn foreign languages" (ibid.) and that negotiation and mediation are not necessary in cross-cultural encounters.

The power of representation lies firmly in the hands of the broadcasting media where "the possibilities for negotiation of identities is [sic] controlled and constrained by decisions taken by programme makers in the production process" (ibid.). Non-native speakers are particularly vulnerable in this situation as they "have to negotiate their identity positions across linguistic difference, and may not be wholly aware of the programme makers' priorities and objectives" (ibid.: 207). By analysing the choices made at different stages of the production process the authors aim to reveal "the ideological repercussions on the discursive construction of identity and cross-cultural relationships" (ibid: 2008).

2.1. Constructing Reality through Voiceover

The use of voiceover in representing the foreign thus crucially brings into focus the question of accent and delivery as well as their role in creating the feeling of a 'hyper-reality' or the constructed reality so essential to non-fiction genres or news (Orero 2006: 1-9). As Franco (2001: 290) explains:

the type of delivery we hear in voice-over translation is an important strategic way of reassuring viewers that what they are being told in their own language is what



is being said in the original language, although it is known that what they will be listening to is in fact only a representation of the original discourse.

This is also significant for the construction of identity of the individual whose voice is being represented. One of the intrinsic characteristics of the voiceover technique is that of hearing a few seconds of the original recording—the voice of the speaker in her/his original language at the beginning before the voice actor takes over. According to Luyken *et al.* (1991: 80) this contributes to the sense of "authenticity" and "prevents a degree of mistrust from developing". Voiceover can be pre-recorded or live. In the case under discussion, Paxman confirmed that the voiceover was produced following the interpreter mediated interview but pre-recorded before the video was broadcast on *Newsnight*.

The Berlusconi interview entailed multi-layered translation and interpreting processes that took place before the final product was received and consumed by the audience. The invisibility of translation in journalistic texts has already been recognised (Bielsa 2005; Shäffner 2004, 2008) and is particularly relevant for this analysis (Filmer 2014). Voiceover products carry some similar traits. Paxman and Berlusconi's apparently seamless conversation is made possible by interpreters who simultaneously translate Berlusconi's utterances for Paxman, while Paxman's questions and comments are translated into Italian for Berlusconi. The earpieces discreetly worn by both participants allow them to hear the interpreters' translation. The audience are not really aware of any of this. The interpreting act is inaudible and invisible; furthermore, it is shrouded by the use of voiceover. Berlusconi's own voice only is perceptible to the audience at the beginning of his utterances but is then faded out as the voiceover actor starts to relay the translated version. This construction of reality gives rise to what Gieve and Norton (2007: 200) describe as "the peculiar situation of two people apparently speaking to each other in different languages", which has become the "normalized approach to overcoming linguistic barriers on British Broadcast TV". In other cultural contexts, however, far from being invisible, media interpreting can become part of the performance. Katan and Straniero-Sergio (2003: 133) have suggested that "an interpreted TV programme must first and foremost be entertaining". In the Italian context, talkshow interpreting challenges the two principles that have until very recently governed the interpreter's behaviour: "unreserved loyalty to the source text and a clear-cut role definition" (Katan and Straniero-Sergio 2001: 213). The scholars argue that the trend for participatory interpreting in entertainment and the media might well require a redefinition of the roles of interpreters and, more specifically, their visibility. Their observations lead them to surmise that the entertainment function prevails over the information function in television interpreting and that, "The ethics of entertainment is likely to become part and parcel of an interpreter's ethics not only in Italy, where the habitus already functions as a fertile environment for this development, but in other countries as well" (*ibid.*: 234).

In news production, simultaneous interpreting is often viewed as an imperfect form of cross-cultural communication, as Straniero-Sergio (2011) has observed. Whilst



a simultaneous interpreter may sometimes deliver the translated text in a disjointed manner, the revoicer's version is smooth and fluent. The voiceover script is usually based on the interpreter's translation, which, according to Straniero-Sergio (ibid.: 179), is:

edited in terms of fluency and style, as well as content. Mistranslations, omissions and generalisations are redressed: inaccurate lexical choices, calques and unmotivated loanwords are replaced [and] unnecessary repetitions are deleted in the edited version.

In analysing a speech made by George Bush on 21 September 2001, which was voiced-over for Italian television, the author's analysis reveals that "the voice-over translation often shows a different order of the ST units, with syntactic reshuffling and shifts from coordination to subordination" (ibid: 196). He infers that "the interpreter's text may be a form of pre-text for the broadcaster to develop, manipulate and adjust to the requirements of news making and news reporting", concluding that at times the revoiced version of a text "can hardly be considered a translation at all" (ibid.: 194). Having outlined the existing literature on the subject of voiceover translation technique, in the next section we turn, instead, to the issue of research design and the methodological perspectives adopted for this study.

3. A SYNCHRETISM OF INTERPRETATIVE METHODS

The work presented here is based on an interpretive constructionist research philosophy, that is:

[To] accept that there is a reality but argue that it cannot be measured directly, only perceived by people, each of whom views it through the lens of his or her prior experience, knowledge and expectations. That lens affects what people see and how they interpret what they find (Rubin and Rubin 2012: 15).

Qualitative interviews that focus on individual narratives of "how the social world is experienced and understood" (King and Horrocks 2010: 11) are an essential means of gathering data on the way social actors and stakeholders perceive certain social phenomena. In order to understand the ways in which translation, interpreting and voiceover are perceived by those who constructed the representation of *Newsnight's* interview with Berlusconi, one of the original aims of this study was to interview members of the production team, the interpreters themselves, and the journalist/presenter Jeremy Paxman. However, adopting ethnomethodology as a means of obtaining data can present major drawbacks and limitations. The researcher is totally dependent on the availability and willingness of the (desired) participants for their co-operation. Several email attempts were made to contact the programme's planning producer, Samantha McAlister, however, to no avail. Without first having her



input, it was impossible to attempt to trace the actual interpreters, or identify the voiceover actor. Jeremy Paxman, on the other hand, was willing to co-operate. He agreed to respond to a number of questions via email but declined to take part in a phone interview. He was contacted through his agent who acted as intermediary.

3.1. Critical Discourse Analysis in the News

The second approach adopted in the research design draws on critical discourse analysis (van Dijk 2009a, 2009b; Fairclough 1995, 2003) with particular reference to its application to Translation Studies (Hatim and Mason 1997; Schäffner 2004), and Media Studies (Bell 1991; Fowler 1991). The aim of CDA is to make connections between the use of language and society thus revealing how discourse is instrumental to maintaining existing power relations. Van Dijk (2007: 354), one of the first theorists to develop the CDA paradigm, defines the field of study thus:

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality.

The ideas endorsed by dominant ideologies are rarely questioned and they are typically perceived as "common sense" (Wodak and Meyer 2009: 8). For our purposes here we use the term ideology to mean "a body of assumptions which reflects the beliefs and interests of an individual, or group of individuals, a societal institution, etc., and which ultimately finds expression in language" (Hatim and Mason 1997: 218). Fairclough (2003: 218) defines ideology as "representations of aspects of the world which contribute to establishing and maintaining relations of power, domination and exploitation", which is closely related to his critical approach to discourse.

Whilst meaning-making processes emerge within a single linguistic code through the methods of CDA, the construal of discourse becomes even more complex when it is relayed across linguistic and cultural boundaries where ideological clashes can occur. A critical approach to the (de)construction of meaning thus becomes essential. Schäffner (2004: 145) was one of the first scholars to draw on CDA in order to identify the ways in which translated text can be manipulated in news reporting. For example, she notes that CDA can expose the practice of "using and abusing texts for purposes of national ideologies" and "positive self-representation and negative presentation of others". Specifically, her CDA approach to translation in news texts can reveal ideological slippage and distortion in rendering political discourse across cultures. Munday's (2012) adaptation of appraisal theory provides the paradigm for analysing "critical points" in translator decision-making. In the following section, news



texts extracted from a cross-section of British newspaper websites on the alleged insult to Angela Merkel are analysed.

4. BERLUSCONI VERSUS MERKEL – THE INTERTEXTUAL CHAINS

Culled from a wiretapped conversation that was not transcribed, on 10 September 2011, Berlusconi's alleged soubriquet for Angela Merkel, *culona inchiavabile* [unscrewable big arse], was first reported in the left-leaning Italian newspaper *Il Fatto Quotidiano* (Nicoli 2011). The rumour was instantly disseminated via translation as 'unfuckable lardarse' by online news outlets and newspapers around the world, thus provoking international media-debates. The German tabloid *Bild* (11 September 2011) inquired: *Riss Berlusconi schlimme Witze über Merkel?* [Did Berlusconi insult Merkel?]. Diplomatic reverberations were indeed felt and Italy suffered the repercussions on the European financial markets. The incident is significant for three reasons: first of all, it raises questions regarding journalistic ethics as the utterance originated from an unreliable source and cannot be verified; secondly, the taboo nature of the epithet solicits varying forms of editorial censorship reflected in the translational strategies adopted; lastly, as Mackenzie (2014, in Filmer 2014: 151) of Reuters observes: "The incident was important [...] because it coincided with the euro crisis. Italy was dependent on the Germans who were their paymasters". In *The Independent*, Paterson (2011) reported the alleged verbal indiscretion within a longer article entitled "Angela Merkel undermined by outspoken MPs". First, the accusation: "The gaffe-prone tycoon has been overheard referring to the German leader as an 'unfuckable lard-arse'" (ibid.). In terms of transitivity, the passive verb form initially indicates an agentless action—we do not know who overheard the utterance; therefore we cannot even be sure that the speech act took place. However, the following subordinate clause "according to wiretaps reported by Italian newspapers" (ibid.) attributes the verification of the fact to a journalistic source, highlighting the way in which the dialogic relationship between the British and the Italian press is instrumental to the legitimizing process. The penultimate paragraph states once again that the wiretapped conversation was 'overheard' by 'investigators' but offers no substantiation to this assertion. Nor does it explain the lack of hard evidence as the wiretappers did not transcribe what they 'overheard'. *The Independent's* rendering of the insult as 'unfuckable lard-arse' is the boldest of all the British press and was the version that was largely quoted by internet news outlets and the social media. The reporting of the incident and the exaggeratedly comic note to the translated insult, arouses suspicion that the news values adopted by *The Independent* are distinctly 'infotainment' oriented. This thought was later confirmed by the journalist responsible for the rendering (Filmer 2014).

In 2014, the discourse chains surrounding the Berlusconi interview on *Newsnight* echo the headlines of three years earlier. Several British newspapers (*The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The Independent*, *Mirror*, *Mail*, to name a few), both quality and tabloid, reported on the contents of the interview before the programme was aired. *The Independent* resorts to asterisks in its headline: "Silvio Berlusconi's answer to Jeremy Paxman's



question 'Did you call Angela Merkel an 'unf**ckable lard-a**e'?' (Selby 2014). This might be expected with the more conservative papers such as the *Mail* but as *The Independent* had no qualms with printing the insult in 2011, this censoring is curious. The reasons could be twofold: firstly, reticence in the form of censorship could have more impact than explicit vulgarity, or perhaps because obscene language might be acceptable in the body of a news text but not permissible in the headline. *The Guardian* (Siddique 2014: online) appears to actively promote the broadcast by writing, "With less than a month remaining in his role as *Newsnight's* rottweiler-in-chief, Jeremy Paxman has added another high-profile scalp to his legacy of public-figure grillings". Thus, thanks to the PR office of the BBC the myth of Paxman as an incisive political journalist is perpetuated through newspaper discourse. It could safely be argued, however, that Paxman's 'lardarse' question and the use of taboo language panders to the criteria of infotainment (see questionnaire, section 6) and tabloid tactics rather than exemplary journalism. This hypothesis is evinced by tabloid paper the *Mirror's* online headline: "Watch Jeremy Paxman Shock Silvio", with a 59" clip from the interview. The video comes with the proviso: "Warning, this video contains content some viewers might find disturbing", thus highlighting the news value of impact (Bednarek and Caple 2012: 41).

While Sanderson (2014) of *The Times* also praises Paxman for his "grilling techniques", and incorrectly refers to Berlusconi as the "former Neapolitan balladeer" (Berlusconi is from Milan), fellow *Times* journalist Turner (2014) takes a far more critical stance towards Paxman's attitude. She is also the only journalist to make any reference whatsoever to the use of translation in the broadcast. In her article, she denounces the presenter's apparent collusion with Berlusconi's sexism:

"When Paxman met Berlusconi" was flagged by *Newsnight* as the moment Jeremy dared ask Silvio if he'd called Europe's longest-serving leader "an unf***able lardass". Paxo, eh, what a lad! ...Enthroned like a Medici noble in his glorious garden, Berlusconi denied saying anything so vulgar. His eyes twinkled and Paxman gave a wry smile. (Ibid.: online)

She then condemns the broadcast as "spitting Image TV":

an encounter between two cartoonish figures for public hilarity. Let's gawp at Berlusconi's hairline or revel in his Tony Soprano charm. Forget his corruption and sex crimes while we titter again at a crude slight against a woman who makes him look a political dwarf. (Ibid.: online)

Ultimately, she decries Paxman's lack of incisive cross-examining of Berlusconi, and suggests the cause was the language gap:

The problem, it seemed, was that Paxman doesn't speak Italian. Thus he'd lob Berlo a subject, allow him to babble his innocence at length, then listen to the translation. Paxman, therefore, was powerless to interject, let alone take Berlusconi to task. (Ibid.: online)



Nevertheless, she does not pose the crucial question, and that is, did Berlusconi really make that comment about Angela Merkel, and if so, what was the source language version?

5. WHEN PAXO MET BERLO – OVERCOMING LANGUAGE BARRIERS IN THE INTERVIEW

Described on the BBC's (2009: online) website as "the BBC's flagship news and current affairs programme, noted for its in-depth analysis and often robust cross-examination of senior politicians", *Newsnight* has been broadcast since 1980. Jeremy Paxman was the main presenter and interviewer for twenty-five years, stepping down soon after the Berlusconi interview in June 2014, described by some in journalistic discourse as his 'swansong'. His questions to senior British politicians are often delivered with a wry sense of humour and irony. Norton and Gieve's (2010) observation that the linguistic Other is rarely shown on British television is confirmed by the very few examples of foreign guests that appear on the programme, unless they speak in English.

The following analysis focuses on some significant examples of translational shifts to illustrate the ways in which meaning is subtly manipulated in order to create a certain representation of Berlusconi that re-enforces the stereotype.

5.1. Berlusconi Gets "the Paxman Treatment" – The Voiceover Interview

The video clip of *Newsnight's* interview with Berlusconi was retrieved from YouTube. The sequence lasts just over 10 minutes and was originally broadcast on 20 May 2014. Jeremy Paxman introduces the pre-recorded interview explaining that it took place at Berlusconi's villa just outside Milan. He then frames the content by warning that "this interview does contain a little strong language at the beginning", thus priming the audience for the use of an expletive. What follows are some selected examples of the voiceover translation extracted from the text along with an analysis.

As the literature indicates, the voiceover commences after a few words of Berlusconi's own speech have been heard. The voiceover delivery is slow and pedantic. We note a middle-aged male voice with an Italian accent. The revoicer's use of prosody emphasises certain national characteristics that coincide with the media representation of Italianness. Other representations on British television of Italians speaking in English are provided by TV commercials for Italian food brands; for example Bertolli, who produce oils, and Dolmio, who produce pasta sauces, both use TV advertising featuring Italian caricatures who speak with heavy Italian accents. Franco *et al.* (2010) point out that although accents are usually avoided in voiceover delivery, the tendency is not universal. They cite Fawcett (1983, in Franco *et al.* 2010: 79), who claims that in the UK, the voice-artist often comes from the same geographical area as the person being revoiced in order to create a semblance of authenticity. However, a study published by the BBC in 1985 found that "60% of the



audience prefer a British voice, while only 14% prefer a slight foreign accent" (ibid.). Thirty years on it would be interesting to see if public opinion on the use of voiceover in Britain has changed. The question begs here whether the decision to voiceover with an Italian accent is an ideological one, thus putting Berlusconi on a par with the Italian stereotypes found in other popular cultural products.

Following Paxman's first question, "There will never be a United States of Europe, will there?" we hear the beginning of Berlusconi's response, which is then faded out as the voiceover begins:

0:46.00 – 0:58.00

Berlusconi's words	Literal translation	Voiceover
No, non ci saranno mai - questo era un sogno.	No, there will never be - it was a dream.	No, that was a dream that will never come true.

Table 1

Here we see the "syntactic reshuffling" that Straniero-Sergio (2011) has previously observed. The effect is to shift the emphasis of the expression and to focus on the idea of a united Europe as a dream. In the source text (ST) the clause "it was a dream" is clearly subordinate to the main idea that there will never be a United States of Europe. The short phrases in the ST also lend decisiveness to the statement that the target text (TT) lacks.

This initial utterance from Berlusconi is audible to the audience, but he is then only heard in the background as the voiceover continues. At certain points Berlusconi's own voice becomes audible again, perhaps to remind the audience that in fact another language is being spoken. For example, when Berlusconi enunciates the name of the former US President, George Bush, this can be heard. He pronounces the name with a noticeable Italian accent, ending both forename and surname with a perceptible schwa sound. It could be argued that this characteristic of some Italian pronunciation of English has been left in during the editing for ideological purposes, in order to reinforce the national stereotype.

1:32.00 – 1:38.00

Berlusconi's words	Literal translation	Voiceover
George Bush, di cui sono orgoglioso di essere amico.	George Bush, of whom I am proud to be a friend.	George Bush, who is a good friend of mine.

Table 2

Paxman's next question, "Is Europe growing apart or continuing to grow closer?", is followed by Berlusconi's answer:



2:26.00 – 2:36.00

Berlusconi's words	Literal translation	Voiceover
...E quindi, dobbiamo fare un' opera molto forte di cambiamento.	...and so we need to make a work of radical change.	We need to radically change the situation in Europe.

Table 3

As illustrated, editing has obviously taken place. Berlusconi's comment is taken mid-sentence and does not answer Paxman's question. Berlusconi then goes on to speak about EU policy regarding Russia, and then the need for a central European bank. The video then cuts to images of Merkel and Sarkozy, with the title "Good friends?", and returns to the interview situation, where Paxman asks: "Do you have a particular problem with Angela Merkel?" The video is edited so that this first question is rapidly succeeded by, "Is it true you called her an unfuckable lardarse?" From the version of the video analysed here, Berlusconi immediately responds, gesticulating theatrically:

3:51.00 – 3:59.00

Berlusconi's words	Literal translation	Voiceover
Non arriverei...non ho mai... [Paxman interrupts with ...but... alright, let's take...] No, scusi, non ho mai, in 20 anni di politica, insultato nessuno.	I would never go so far...I have never... No, I'm sorry; I have never insulted anyone in 20 years of politics.	No, I have never had any problems with Angela Merkel. In 20 years of politics I have never insulted anyone.

Table 4

Berlusconi's own voice and his response can be heard clearly as the voiceover translation is consecutive. However, the voiceover, as can be seen above, begins by answering Paxman's first question to which Berlusconi is not given time to respond, or that he omits. Thus, in Italian we hear Berlusconi emphatically saying that he has never insulted anyone, while the voiceover forcefully says, "I have never had any problems with Angela Merkel". Berlusconi's interjections and unfinished phrases at the beginning of his negation are also omitted from the TT rendering. This type of dissonance and lack of semantic synchronisation has the effect of adding to the comic hyperbole of this construction of reality. In other versions of the same few seconds of video, e.g. *The Times* website, the question has not been cut and shows Berlusconi visibly thrown by the question. The twenty-second clip posted on the *Mail's* website shows a different Berlusconi reaction compared to the *Newsnight* edited version. Here we clearly see a bemused Berlusconi listening to the interpreter's rendering of 'unfuckable lardarse', whereas on the video on *The Times* website 'unfuckable lardarse' is bleeped out. Ten seconds pass while Berlusconi listens to the translation and then starts to gesticulate indicating that he negates the accusation. Another example of comic effect emerges when Berlusconi recounts his version of events regarding the



time he said "cuckoo" to Angela Merkel in order to demonstrate that he and the Chancellor had been on very good terms. At the end of his explanation he says:

5:37.00 – 5:40.00

Berlusconi's words	Literal translation	Voiceover
E questo per dirle dei rapporti di grande confidenza che esistevano fra di noi.	And this is to tell you of the great familiarity that existed between us.	It was funny.

Table 5

Berlusconi's voice is heard speaking the above words. During a pause in his speech, the voiceover interjects with "it was funny". The revoicer pronounces the exclamation in a jocular high-pitched tone, in stark contrast to Silvio Berlusconi who is speaking in earnest about the nature of his relations with Angela Merkel. The editing and translation of this utterance emphasises the disparity that can occur between the TT voiceover translation and the ST. This is all the more cause for concern because as we saw in the literature, and as Paxman himself confirms (see section 6), voiceover translation is primarily used for non-fiction genres and is widely considered to be the most "faithful" form of translation.

Online audience comments are deemed "a legitimate data source and basis for investigation for sociologists of popular culture" (Poulton and Durell 2014: 7). The following comment from one YouTube viewer of the video under discussion focuses on the issues at stake here: "Where the hell did they hire the translator!!! Makes [Berlusconi] sound retarded. Honestly, I can translate better than that, and I'm not a professional translator. Bet I could apply for that job. E che cazzo BBC LoganBaugler" (*Newsnight* 2014: online).

In the first place, this viewer is obviously bilingual, or at least sufficiently proficient in English and Italian to be able to make such a judgement. The viewer notes the prosodic elements of the voiceover, not only the content, and concludes that Berlusconi is made to look foolish. The viewer seems to understand that the "translator" (or in this case interpreter perhaps?) is one and the same as the voiceover artist. The same viewer also notes that "It looks as if they edited the video quite a bit to make it look as if he wasn't answering the questions". This appears to be true, as we have seen from some of the examples discussed above.

The final dataset presented here employs ethnomethodology in order to glean information from Jeremy Paxman himself regarding the Berlusconi interview. What follows is an account of the data yielded from the questions he was asked.



6. POINTING THE QUESTIONS AT PAXMAN – THE INTERVIEW DATA

Paxman's responses to the open questions sent to him via his agent provide valuable insight into practices at *Newsnight*. They also indicate the ways in which one of the key participants of the discursive event perceives the voiceover technique and interpreter-mediated interviewing. As might be imagined, as a journalist more used to asking questions than answering them, Paxman's answers proved to be terse and on the defensive. What follows are the questions I put to Paxman, with an analysis of his answers.

In keeping with Paxman's interviewing technique and pithy communicative style, all the responses to the questions posed are curt and to the point. Contrary to the recognised patterns of interviewing techniques in the social sciences that suggest "warming up" the interviewee with easy questions to start (Rubin and Rubin 2012), the first question went straight to the point. The rationale for this approach was that as a seasoned journalist, Paxman would not be lulled into a false sense of security in any case, and secondly, as a busy person, he would not appreciate wasting his time. Thirdly, responses that yield valuable data and an idiographic account (Carniero 2000: 149) were the goal.²

Question 1	Answer
Your question on Merkel has been referred to as ' <i>Newsnight's nadir</i> '. Why did you decide to ask that question?	Why not? As for the 'nadir' jibe, who said it? Ask yourself why they said it.

Table 6

Predictably, the question solicited a defensive reaction and Paxman answers it with not one but two questions, which could be interpreted as a strategy of avoidance. In another sense, the second question might be construed as a maieutic question, relating to the Socratic process of assisting a person to become fully conscious of ideas previously latent in the mind. Paxman, in what could be construed as a patronising prompt, believes that the researcher needs guidance in understanding the underlying motivation for the critique.

It was in fact fellow journalist Piers Morgan, former editor of *News of the World* and the *Mirror*, who tweeted the comment: "Paxman asked Berlusconi last night if he'd called Angela Merkel an 'unf***able lard-a**e'. Lowest moment in *BBC Newsnight* history" (9:59 AM - 21 May 2014). One might be tempted to agree with Paxman that the insult was simply a way of getting attention. On the other hand, Morgan might have genuinely felt that by asking such a question, Paxman had resorted to the 'nadir' or lowest form of tabloid tactics and infotainment.

² In Cultural Anthropology the term signifies that events are "unique and specific, and therefore ungeneralizable" (Carniero 2000: 149). In this context it is used to emphasise the individual narrative of Paxman, his relationship with translation, and his own individual experience of it within his work.



Question 2	Answer 2
The soubriquet 'unfuckable lardarse' was first published in the <i>Independent</i> (Sept. 11 2011). Did you ever wonder about the original (alleged) Italian insult, and that it might not have been not so 'strong' or as obscene as the English translation?	No.

Table 7

Paxman's monosyllabic response leaves no space for interpretation: the issues of language, culture, and translation do not seem to have relevance to the journalist. The bald on record negation clearly indicates he also has no time for such ponderings or dilemmas. This could give rise to the question: as a journalist, surely one of the aims is to 'get to the truth'? Paxman takes the translation at face value.

Question 3	Answer
Was it necessary to obtain permission to ask the question and to use the f-word on <i>Newsnight</i> ? Was there any discussion about bleeping it or censoring it in any way? Many newspapers, for example, in reporting the 'leaked' news of the interview used asterisks, and/or bleeped out the word on the video clip shown on their websites. Why do you think the BBC agreed for it to be aired?	I did not try to obtain permission. Nor did it occur to me to do so.

Table 8

The question was prompted by the desire to clarify the BBC's position on the use of language in this particular context. Paxman asserts that he felt it unnecessary to consult, for example, the Editorial policy advisor. On the BBC website, Editorial Guidelines, section 5 on "Harm and Offence", "Language", it states:

Output controllers and programme or content producers should ensure that strong language, especially the strongest language, is subject to careful consideration and appropriate referral, to ensure it is editorially justified, before it is included in our output.

According to Paxman, the decision to use the f-word was not "subject to careful consideration and appropriate referral". The guidelines go on to affirm:

We must also make careful judgements about the use of the strongest language post-watershed and ensure it is clearly signposted. Any proposal to use the strongest language (cunt, motherfucker and fuck or its derivatives) must be referred to and approved by the relevant output controller, who should consider the editorial justification. Chief Adviser Editorial Policy may also be consulted.

A proposal was not made, as Paxman states. Furthermore, as a pre-recorded programme the BBC were obviously aware of the content. In fact, as mentioned above the "news" of the discursive event was even publicised, also on the BBC news website.



Question 4	Answer
Was the person interpreting into English for you a native English speaker or Italian? Was Berlusconi's interpreter a native Italian speaker?	Both were Italian.

Table 9

We learn therefore that the interpreter translating for Paxman was translating into English, against the recognised interpreting and translating norms. It is likely that the interpreters were employed locally, rather than being BBC staff.

Question 5	Answer
Was the voiceover done by one of the interpreters or by a third person? What is your opinion of using a voiceover with an Italian accent in this instance?	It was done later, as is usually the case, in order that an absolutely accurate record can be made.

Table 10

Paxman's answer here does not fully answer the question. It is not clear if the voiceover was performed by one of the interpreters or by a voice-actor subsequently brought in. What is clear is Paxman's belief that by recording the voiceover later, the result is an "absolutely accurate" translation, even though some scholars, like Straniero-Sergio (2011: 193), point out that sometimes voiceover pays very little resemblance to the source text. Neither does Paxman offer an opinion on the use of an Italian accent for the voiceover.

Question 6	Answer
Do you know if the interpreter who was translating for Berlusconi was forewarned about the question you wanted to ask?	There was no forewarning.

Table 11

This means that the translator was left with an ethical dilemma on how to render the vulgar expression. What becomes obvious from the outtakes of the interview shown on the *Mail.com* and the *Mirror* newspaper website is the clear delay in the interpreter relaying the message, and Berlusconi's visible disconcertion.

Question 7	Answer
On some of the clips of the interview found on YouTube Berlusconi is clearly taken aback by your question. This was edited out by <i>Newsnight</i> . Why do you think that is?	No idea, it must all have come from <i>Newsnight</i> .
Question 8	Answer
How does it feel conducting an interview through interpreters in this way? It is very common on Italian television, for example, but translation mediated interviews are much less frequent in the UK. From your perspective, in which ways does interpreter mediated	I don't much care for it, you lose a lot of intimacy.



interviewing differ from a one-to-one interview conducted in English?	
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Table 12

Once again Paxman’s succinct answers leave us in no doubt that translation mediated interviews are not at all to his liking. Used to being in control of the interview situation, the loss of power the journalist feels in communicating across language barriers through actors such as interpreters could be the root cause.

Question 9	Answer
Have you ever wondered if something gets distorted or manipulated in the act of simultaneous interpreting or translating for political talk shows?	—

Table 13

Paxman left this most pertinent question blank. One is left to surmise the reasons for his silence. Perhaps it would have required too much effort to respond, although he could have given a simple yes or no answer, as he had done previously. The motive could be, on the other hand, a small realisation on his part that such things do indeed happen, but that he had never given it so much as a thought in the past.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The instant circulation of international news is taken for granted in our globalised and globalising society. The technicalities of cross-cultural meaning transfer are usually invisible and largely unknown to audience. Within the news media, voiceover translation is a widely used technique for overcoming linguistic barriers in televised coverage of what foreign politicians say. However, its ‘assumed’ hyper-representation of reality is a form of translation whose ideological consequences on the construction of foreign news are still very much under-researched. This preliminary study of the construction of a voiced-over television interview with Silvio Berlusconi aimed to demonstrate that in order to get a better understanding of such complex communicative events, a triangulation of methodological approaches can be effective. A research design that integrates ethnographic perspectives, a comparative analysis of SL and TL texts, and applies CDA tools to examine the discursive construction of the media event highlights three crucial ideological issues: firstly, the questionable criteria for news values and the encroaching influence of infotainment in foreign news reporting; secondly the impact that such news media representations of the Other might have on the audience and most significantly, the role, or dare we say manipulation of translation in transferring news information.

In this specific case, it could be argued that the Italian accented voiceover, the slow delivery, the omissions and additions, and the post-production editing all conspire to make Berlusconi appear even more of a buffoon than he already might be.



The representation of Berlusconi in this way coincides with the familiar stereotypes of Italians already present on British television.

Finally, the ethnographic sample confirms that participants and actors involved in news production believe that voiceover is a 'faithful' and 'accurate' form of translation. This lack of awareness, or perhaps interest of the possible ideological manipulations and the distortion of information in voiceover techniques and the representation of the Other in foreign news reporting is disconcerting, to say the least. Research and collaboration is clearly needed between translation studies scholars, journalists, and media institutions in order to improve the quality and reliability of linguistic and cultural competency within the context of news media.

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