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DEBRECENI EGYETEM OLASZ TANSZÉK

4032 Debrecen, Egyetem tér 1. Postacím: 4002 Debrecen, Pf. 400.

Telefon/fax: +36 52 461-553, +36 52 512-900/27026

E-mail: italdeb@arts.unideb.hu

www.italdeb.unideb.hu

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Language and sexuality: euphemism, dysphemism and discourse in Italian comedies¹

di PAOLO ORRÙ E STEFANIA ABIS

Sexual identity is a vastly unexplored topic in contemporary Italian linguistics. Even more, if we consider the highly problematic aspect of homosexual identity/ies. In this study we analyze the construction of a stereotypical image of homosexuality and LGBT people in Italian film production throughout the second half of the 20th century. Cinema has played an important role in the development of a cultural common ground in a highly fragmented reality such that lived in post-Unitarian Italy, hence carrying out a fundamental social function rather than only an artistic one.

The analysis is based on a wide corpus which range from popular comedies to author dramas, so that we can consider a large variety of nuances in the representation of homosexual identity. The aim of the article is to show how media reinforced heteronormativity in Italian popular culture by depicting almost only a stereotypical view of homosexuality, thus playing a crucial role in constructing and shaping social identities.

Key words: Italian language, discourse analysis, movies, cinema studies, Italian linguistics

1. Introduction

Over the last few years linguistics in Italy has started to pose questions on the relationship between language and identity and on topics which linguists had overlooked for a long time². However, if we were to describe the current situation of Italian linguistic studies in a nutshell, we could easily quote Rudolph Gaudio's words about North America in the nineties: «If one were to take sociolinguistic literature as actually representing social groupings in the United States, one would think that gays, lesbians, and bisexuals scarcely existed» (1994: 30).

The 'reality' of sex does not pre-exist the language in which it is expressed; rather, language produces the categories through which we organize our sexual desires, identities and practices (Cameron, Kulick 2003: 19).

¹ Although the present paper is the result of a joint effort by the two authors, Paolo Orrù must be credited for paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 4, Stefania Abis is the author of the paragraph 5, while conclusions were written by both authors.

² Queer theory studies are mainly included in and/or affected by cultural and literary studies. See Ross, Scarparo (2010); Thüne, Leonardi, Bazzanella (2006), Fresu (2008) for a comprehensive overview of linguistic studies about gender.

Therefore, the repetition of certain discourses – in the *foucauldian* sense of the term – reinforces social practices of group interaction. Ideologies organize social representations and imply power dynamics that affect the way we conceptualize and categorize reality. Power dynamics find their shape in language use and in stereotypes. Particularly, lexical meanings are strictly connected to specific mental schemata which derive from experience and social life:

«Linguistic phenomena are social in the sense that whenever people speak or listen or write in ways which are determined socially and have social effects. Even when people are most conscious of their own individuality and think themselves to be most cut off from social influences – “in the bosom of the family”, for example – they still use language in ways which are subject to social convention. [...] Social phenomena are linguistic, on the other hand, in the sense that the language activity which goes on in social contexts (as all language activity does) is not merely a reflection or expression of social processes and practices, it is a part of those processes and practices» (Fairclough 1989: 23).

To sum up, a discourse is a set of ideological and linguistic processes that displays themselves through texts. With ‘texts’ we mean not only spoken and written language, but also any semiotic performance based on images (Fairclough 1995), thus movies as well. In Italy, filmmaking has managed to overcome the simple artistic or leisure expression; filmmaking actually gave its contribution to the process of social and linguistic unification (Rossi 2006), engendering a “new folklore” (De Mauro 1991: 123) out of which new normative models emerged. Among such models, the ones concerned with representing sexual alterity are strongly relevant.

2. Corpus

The object of this essay will be the language of movies. However, before carrying out the actual analysis it is crucial to tackle some methodological issues. In defining our corpus we have exclusively collected lines effectively uttered and audible in the final version of each movie. In no occasion have we considered synoptic documents such as scripts. We have analyzed utterances as they are received by the general public (that, besides, has usually neither access nor interest in scripts).

The corpus will include only Italian productions (or co-productions), which were written and directed almost always by Italian directors and scriptwriters.

Therefore, we have omitted any instance of that «insincero Italian» (Mengaldo 1994: 70) typical of dubbed movies and have chosen to study conversational language, also for reasons of adherence between cultural system and linguistic code.

Under these premises, we have collected and analyzed a solid corpus composed by 32 comedies, which were produced from 1946 to 2010. For the sake of comparison, 27 dramatic movies were also analyzed and included in the corpus. The choice of so consistent a number of movies in so large an amount a time is explained by the attempt of defining tendencies in the evolution of stereotyped representations in the language of movies. A constant objective of this study has been to produce a picture as comprehensive as possible of the various facets of homosexual characters in Italian films.

3. Prejudice and referential strategies

Among language areas, lexicon is the one that most immediately identifies sexual preferences and conveys specific social conditions. As Reisigl and Wodak state, «The simplest and most elementary form of linguistic and rhetorical discrimination is that of identifying persons or groups of persons linguistically by naming them derogatorily, debasingly or vituperatively. Single anthroponymic terms [...] are sufficient to perform racist or ethnicist slurs on their own, as they connotatively convey disparaging, insulting meanings, without any other attributive qualification» (Reisigl, Wodak 2001: 45). Language has the power to constitute individuals as specific subjects, to give them an identity (Butler 1997: 29). However, discursive practices and naming are also able to continuously engender discriminations and verbal violence, thus placing some subjects in subaltern positions inside society.

Lexicon can carry out two functions that we may define as *self-identification* and *external attribution*. In the former we can include any linguistic pattern used by LGBT people to define themselves with respect to sexual orientation; in the latter we might instead include any instance of naming directed to gay, lesbian and trans-sexual people in order to mark their identity, either offensively or not. That the same word can be invested, as we will notice, with both functions does not at all imply a reduction of ideological spin; on the opposite, this fact reinforces the placement of homosexuality in a position of marginality that prompts gay people themselves to make use of this often discriminatory body of words to speak of themselves.

A first meaningful fact is the almost complete absence of explicit lexical items in the production immediately after World War II. Homosexuality was

simply used as something risible for the general heterosexual public and its eccentric and stereotyped representation only served to reinforce commonplace assumptions. In this period visual representation does not go along with a clear practice of naming. The situation is perfectly described in *Parigi o cara* (1964), especially in the famous scene where the main character (Delia) meets his brother migrated in Paris after many years. The sight of the man's white tuft of hair triggers Delia's curiosity, who stops right on the point of uttering the decisive word:

[*Parigi o cara*]

Delia: Ma tu sei Claudio?

Claudio: Eh eh Delia...

C: Pesa?

V: Mbeh.

C: [lifts the bag]

D: [stares at her brother's white tuft of hair with curiosity] Ma che sei tinto? /

C: Sì

D: Fossi...

C: Sì.

D: Ah non sapevo.

With the rise of the *Commedia all'Italiana* genre (roughly translated with "comedy in the Italian way") in the first years of the sixties, the use of offensive terms towards homosexuals becomes systematic. In *Sesso in testa* (1974), many classic instances that will define the genre in the years to come make here their appearance: along with the neutral term *omosessuale*, we can notice, in this order, *pederasta*, *finocchio*, *frocio*, and *ricchione* from the southern dialect. *La Patata bollente* (1969), while belonging to the tradition of trash comedies and sexy comedies, is interesting in its facing homosexuality. Its approach is probably the first that does not simply ridicule gay people but gets concerned with civil commitment and accurate dialogues (Schinardi 2003: 84).

[1] Claudio: [close up on his buttocks] Dai sbrigati non ce la faccio più.

[2] Gandhi: Forse è meglio farla per endovena [long pause] e poi senti va fattela da solo.

[3] C: Lascia perdere va tanto non è nemmeno morfina e poi tanto ho capito.

[4] G: Cos'hai capito?

[5] C: Ho capito che tu hai capito cosa sono.

[6] G: No io non credo di aver capito.

[7] C: Ma sì che l'hai capito, non fare l'ipocrita.

[8] G: Ma no dai, tu mi stai prendendo per il cu.. in giro.

[9] C: No guarda che sono proprio come pensi tu, avanti dillo tanto non è mica una cosa grave.

[10] G: Vabbè insomma se è come penso io... un po' grave lo è eh...

[11] C: E ci sono tanti termini per dirlo, quale vuoi usare: omosessuale? [now with a Neapolitan accent] Ricchione, diverso, oggi si dice diverso, o meglio culattone, come dite voi!

[12] G: E no guarda che questa volta l'hai detto tu eh!

[13] C: Sì però tu lo pensi, lo pensi?

[14] G: E vabbè ma se me lo dici tu un po' lo penso no?

[15] C: Ah vedi che lo pensi?!

[16] G: Va bene lo penso mi hai convinto

The scene is interesting in many respects. The main character, Gandhi, rescues and hosts Claudio in his house after he has been beaten up by a gang of fascists. In a phone conversation occurring during the preceding cut, Gandhi reveals Claudio's sexual orientation especially by using gender-bending devices (that is, using morphemes that refer to the feminine gender instead of the masculine one: «dica a quella stronza», «spero proprio che non si innamori di quella pazza»). Gandhi then gives up the act of making an injection in Claudio's buttocks. The dialogue is based on reticence and contrast between affirmation and negation, especially in lines 5–10. Claudio wants to openly display his sexuality (but without naming it) and, more importantly, wants his interlocutor to recognize it [5] («ho capito che tu hai capito che cosa sono»); Gandhi, however, prefers an evasive answer [6] («no io non credo di aver capito»); in [7] and [8] there is even a “ma” (but) that begins the dialogue in a mirror-like manner. «ma sì che l'hai capito»/«ma no dai». In line [8] the main character stops right before pronouncing the whole word *culo* (ass), notwithstanding that in Italian conversational speech it is a basically harmless idiomatic word. The choice falls for a word that sounds unusual for an actor as genuine as Pozzetto. This ballet of negations is turned upside down in [9] and [10]: Claudio prompts Gandhi to express himself freely, as homosexuality «non è una cosa così grave»; Gandhi's reply aims to mean precisely the opposite: «se è come penso io, un po' grave lo è». Mitigation strategies worth observing are discursive signals like “vabbè” (whatever), quantifiers such as “un po'” (a little bit) and the hypothetical period “se è come penso io”, all of which are condensed in a short dialogue which contributes to fully communicate Gandhi's aversion towards the concept of homosexuality along with his choice of putting distance, both linguistically and conceptually.

The pivotal passage is in [11] («E ci sono tanti termini per dirlo, quale vuoi usare: omosessuale? Ricchione, diverso, oggi si dice diverso, o meglio culat-tone, come dite voi»). What is interesting is not the lexical choice per se, as all words were already known to the audience, but rather the purpose with which they are used. Indeed, Claudio displays his determination in claiming his condition and opposes himself against people's prejudice. In this situation he seeks to demonstrate that he does not feel threatened by the large body of words that are everyday used against him, up to the point that he even suggests Gandhi which terms he could use: according to the regional origin («ricchione», «culat-tone, come dite voi») or to the spin («diverso», «omosessuale»).

Among what we could call southern dialects there are instances from Campania such as *femminiella/o* and *ricchione*. The latter is a widely known and used word, especially in the *commedia all'italiana* comprised between the seventies and the eighties, even though its origin is not altogether clear. The *ricchione/orecchia* assimilation – “orecchia” means “ear” (an instance in *Delitto al blue gay*, 1984, see below) is suggested by superficial factors: the assonance between the two words and the typical gesture of touching one's ear when there is an allusion to homosexuality. Nevertheless, an unambiguous interpretation is not available at the moment.

Among the most occurring words there are mainstream and vulgar terms such as *finocchio*, *checca* and *frocio* (the three of them being similar to *faggot* and *sissy*). *Finocchio* and *checca* are of Tuscan origin but they have been widely spread in Italy for a long time; in both cases the semantic shift that caused the connotation is not clear. Similarly, the origin of Roman dialect word *frocio* is uncertain and subject to several readings. Finally, there is a batch of lexical choices that signal alterity: *strano* (weird), *malattia* (illness), *invertito* (gender-bent or invert), *equivoco* (equivocal), *anormale* (abnormal), *ambiguo* (ambiguous).

Homosexuality as illness is a concept usually expressed by contrast. That is, it is a relation expressed in terms of cure and recovery with lexical choices that imply some type of illness. In our corpus, direct reference to homosexuality as illness occurs only once, in *Amore a prima vista*. The Sicilian Mafia's boss, soon to be father-in-law of the main character, played by Vincenzo Salemme, hints at the dramatic situation occurred to another boss, who was the unlucky father of a homosexual son.

Mafioso Siciliano: Ah povero don Cesare, le tentò tutte per salvare il figlio, e ma quello era finocchio, perso. Con le buone o con le cattive tentarono tutto per fargli passare la malattia. Chiesero anche il miracolo a Santa Rosalia. Niente, dovettero abatterlo.

In *Matrimonio con vizietto* (1985) the comedic device is based on turning upside-down the concept just expressed. Renato (Ugo Tognazzi) pretends to have suddenly turned homosexual so as to force his partner Albain (Michel Serrault) to marry a woman and therefore inherit a remarkable amount of money. The scene is introduced by a series of semantic oppositions: in [1] *normale/anormale* (normal/abnormal), «insomma è diventato normale»/«normale per lei dottore»; in [5] *eterosessuale/invertito* (heterosexual/invert), «era invertito e si è disinvertito»; in [8] and [11] *malattia/cura* (illness/cure), «la sindrome della doppia inversione non è facile da curare»/«ci sarà pure un'operazione da fare, una bella cura»; *virilità/effeminatezza* (manliness/effeminacy) [9] «finocchi integrali, delle vere checche»/«mandrilli». The term *invertito* (translatable with *invert*, now a rare word substituted by *queer*) has been for a long time scientific jargon to define a homosexual person who was deemed sexually inverted. What might at first glance seem like a practice of resistance against commonplace judgment reveals itself as a comedic device that, through the use of a paradox, prompts the laughs of the audience:

[1] Dottore: Insomma è diventato normale...

[2] Albain: ma che dice? Normale! Normale per lei dottore!

[3] D: Interessante, molto interessante...

[4] A: Ah sì?

[5] D: Era invertito e si è disinvertito.

[6] D: Un fenomeno di doppia inversione, molto interessante!

[7] A: Beh felicissimo che la cosa le interessi ma io gradirei molto recuperarlo.

[8] D: La sindrome della doppia inversione non è facile da curare.

[9] D: Ho visto dei finocchi integrali, delle vere checche trasformarsi in mandrilli!

[10] A: Ah stia zitto, zitto la prego dottore!

[11] A: Ma insomma ci sarà pure, che so, un'operazione da fare, una bella cura...

[12] A: Io sono pronto a tutto anche a sacrificarmi per salvarlo!

[13] A: Dottore sono certo che mi capisce, quanto le devo?

[14] D: Ma niente, niente...

[15] A: Tanto sono sicuro che mi rivedrà presto, siamo all'inizio della tragedia!

[16] A: Che inferno!

The *normale/anormale* opposition is at the base of the whole plot of *Conformista* (1970), adapted from the homonymous novel by Alberto Moravia (1951) and set in Italy during the peak of the fascist rule; the main character, Marcello Clerici, has been obsessed by a strong drive to be like his friends since he was young. The novel focuses more on the sexual facet: at school Marcello is oppressed because of his gentle behavior and ephobic looks. His classmates' insults bring Clerici to meet the young chauffeur Lino Semirama, who tries to lure him. In the movie this experience is recalled by a confession prior to marriage. To Marcello, normal life means the regular heterosexual relationship as opposed to «peccato di sodomia» (sin of sodomy); here the director (Bernardo Bertolucci) highlights, thanks to the confessor's pressing questions, the morbidity of Catholic Church in investigating and punishing homosexual relationships more harshly than the real crime (that is, Lino's homicide) which ends up in the background.

Prete: Adesso raccontami tutti i particolari...

Marcello: Basta, vi prego, sembra quasi che per la chiesa un peccato di sodomia sia più grave dell'uccisione di un uomo...

P: Come ti permetti insolente! Ricordati che io sono un prete e tu sei un peccatore!

Prete: E dopo quella volta hai avuto altri rapporti con uomini?

Marcello: No vita sessuale normale.

P: Vale a dire?

M: Il bordello verso i 18 anni e poi soltanto rapporti con donne.

P: E questa secondo te è una vita sessuale normale?

M: Sì perché?

P: Ma tu figliolo hai vissuto da sempre nel peccato. Normale vuol dire il matrimonio, avere una moglie una famiglia...

M: È quello che voglio.

P: Bravo, bravo, bravo.

M: Sto per costruirmi una vita normale, sto per sposare una piccola borghese.

P: Allora dev'essere una brava ragazza.

M: Mediocre, piena di idee meschine, di piccole ambizioni meschine.

Another dialogue in the same movie sheds light on the dominant ideology about sexuality. Marcello, talking to his blind friend Italo (a character not present in the novel), asks him about the meaning of normality:

Marcello: Com'è un uomo normale secondo te? / Italo: Un uomo normale? Per me l'uomo normale è quello che si volta per la strada per guard-

are il sedere di una bella donna che passa, e scopre di non essere il solo a essersi voltato e ce ne sono almeno cinque o sei, ed è contento se scopre gente uguale a lui, i suoi simili.

In Moravia's novel, references to sexuality occur with higher frequency and they are more explicit; however, the conclusion of the movie, once again modified by Bertolucci, exploits the erotic point of view as a key to read the whole story. During the night of the fall of the regime and liberation by Nazi occupation, Marcello wanders through Rome with his friend. The two of them, arrived at the Coliseum, come across Lino Semirama while he is attempting to lure a male prostitute: this triggers in the main character a violent reaction against the man that embodies all his neuroses («è un pederasta, fascista»). In the claustrophobic final scene of the movie, Clerici is filmed while, dejected, stares at the young male naked prostitute lying on a bed. His political and sexual certainties have been shattered and he is now ready to embrace his former "diversity": normality in *Conformista* thus reveals his worst face, one of an order that is oppressing and frustrating.

After this period, the neutral terms *gay*, *omosessuale*, *lesbica* all make their appearance. With the advent of the *politically correct* and anti-discriminatory practices advocated by LGBT movements, neutral forms have become more and more frequent, largely taking over the place formerly occupied by the lexicon so far described. The word *gay*, indeed already attested before, in the United States of the sixties starts to be extensively used as a non-marked term (Cory 2003: 36) and, not much later, it makes his entrance in Italy as well (the word being attested in dictionaries since 1959) where it backs up *omosessuale*. The latter term progressively lost the pejorative medical-scientific nuances that had characterized it for a long time.

Nevertheless, there has not been a self-identifying word for a long time, with the result that it was necessary to make use of pejorative words. In *Una giornata particolare* (1977), Gabriele (Marcello Mastroianni) is an Eiar radio speaker (Ente italiano per le audizioni radiofoniche, the first public Italian broadcaster, now Rai) about to be confined because, according to the fascist party, he is "disfattista, inutile e con tendenze depravate" (defeatist, useless and with deviant tendencies); in the day Hitler arrives in Rome, Gabriele meets his neighbor Antonietta (Sophia Loren), mother and model of fascist behavior. The two of them spend the whole day together and the housewife, eventually exhausted by the role assigned by the fascist society, tries to escape reality through an offhand relationship with the marginalized Gabriele, who, however, will not be able to conceal the truth:

Gabriele: Che ti aspettavi? Che ti aspettavi? Baci, mozzichi, tastate sotto le vesti. È questo che ti aspettavi da stamattina? È questo che si deve fare quando si resta soli con una donna? Rispondi, tanto tutti gli uomini sono uguali. Bisogna farglielo sentire perché è questo il muscolo più importante, è vero?

Antonietta: [runs away] Non mi toccate!

G: Mi dispiace per te ma ti sei sbagliata, ti sei sbagliata, io non sono il maschione virile che ti aspettavi!

G: SONO UN FROCIO, FROCIO, così ci chiamano!

The opening sequence of rhetorical questions emphasizes the ideological features in the normative gender relationship («che ti aspettavi? Baci, mozzichi, tastate sotto le vesti», «è questo che si deve fare quando si resta soli con una donna?») and the masculinity of the Italian prototypical male. A man is only expected to have sexual drive («bisogna farglielo sentire») while any other possibility of intellectual relation is precluded. Anger, finally, brings Gabriele to the statement shouted in Antonietta's face, who tries to ignore him and then runs away: «sono frocio, frocio, così ci chiamano»: self-identifying with a hurtful word is sometimes the only way to claim an identity «Thus we sometimes cling to the terms that pain us because, at a minimum, they offer some form of social and discursive existence» (Butler 1997: 26). Thus Mastroianni's shouts aim at breaking through the wall of silence of his homosexual condition.

With respect to the topics in object, *Una giornata particolare* is a true jewel in Italian postwar filmmaking, particularly when we consider the year of production, right in the middle of those seventies in which the *commedia all'italiana* would propose nothing but examples of stereotypical and degrading homosexual characters. Scola's movie is devoid of pathetic feelings, introducing in a dramatic context a plausible homosexual character, with a complex inner life.

Always on this topic, in *Saturno contro* (2006) we can observe an enlightening dialogue between the elderly Sergio and Minnie, mother of a gay young man who is about to die after having undergone intracranial hemorrhage. The line «No, io sono frocio [...] sono all'antica» hints at that long period in which, as we have observed, there was no neutral term at LGBT community's disposal and the only ways to self-define one's own identity were pejorative low or dialectal terms uttered by heterosexuals out of derision or despire.

Minnie: Anche lei è così? /

Sergio: Così come? /

M: Come loro, come lui insomma... /

S: Addolorato?

M.: No, gay. /
 S: Gay io? No, io sono frocio. /
 M.: Ah ecco, ma non è la stessa cosa?
 S: Sì, ma io sono all'antica.

The same procedure, but carried out with completely opposite goals, is displayed in *Sesso in testa*. Lucio the waiter finishes the line of the female main character (a university student that temporarily prostitutes herself) defining himself with the derogatory word *finocchio*. In this case there is a clear intention of ridiculing the character: the term, in itself already detrimental, is surrounded by a series of ironies about sexuality: gender-bending («è come una sorella»); the abnormal condition («e come ti è successo?»); the pun between *orecchioni* (mumps) and *ricchioni* (*faggot*) («stando a letto con gli orecchioni).

Totuccio: E tu spogliati, denudati, mettiti pure a letto, il nettare degli dei te lo servo io di motu propria!
 Prostituta: Ma lui?
 T: Non far caso a lui è come una sorella! [laughs]
 Lucio: Grazie onorevole.
 T: [laughs] Lui non fa caso al nudo femminile!
 L: Anzi onorevole mi fa senso, per me le donne sono come i marziani: non esistono!
 P:: Ma allora sei...
 L: Finocchio signora, per servirla!
 P: E come ti è successo?
 L: Mah, stando a letto con gli orecchioni! [giggling]

4. Taboo and the censoring of language

Sexuality has always been a taboo subject in everyday conversation³. In general, everything related to sexual practices, organs, physiological states and perversions have constantly been subject to intense processes of implicit and explicit (self-)censorship⁴. The social stigma on those sexual practices considered as deviant has gone along with Western Civilization for many centuries. In his

³ See for example Radtke (1983); Allan/Burridge (1991) e (2006).

⁴ «L'interdizione sessuale è forse, assieme al timore magico-religioso, l'inibizione più forte tra quelle che sono alla base dei fenomeni di interdizione linguistica. Come quella religiosa essa, pur venendoci dall'esterno, cioè dalla società e dalle sue usanze, è fortemente interiorizzata ed opera ormai nell'inconscio» (Galli de' Paratesi 1969: 91).

analysis about changes in sexual discourses, Michel Foucault based his point on observing the increasing repression of sexual speech in the XVII century:

Calling sex by its name thereafter became more difficult and more costly. As if in order to gain mastery over it in reality, it had first been necessary to subjugate it at the level of language, control its free circulation in speech, expunge it from the things that were said, and extinguish the words that rendered it too visibly present. And even these prohibitions, it seems, were afraid to name it (Foucault 1980: 17).

Italian media largely reflected and affected those tendencies that caused a progressive sexual liberation especially of images (the impressive display of female bodies does not seem subject to censorship or limitation and nowadays even the male body is more and more visible and exposed, especially for commercial use) and in language, where this tendency is displayed by a strong ‘detabooization’ of certain areas of discourse that were prohibited until some decades ago⁵ (for example, lexical references to sexual organs or the displaying of private life and intimacy as topics of public communication).

The immediate linguistic consequence of ‘tabooization’ in general (and of the sexual sphere in particular) is the removal of the related lexical item. Reticence is thus the *par excellence* figure of speech of community’s disapproval. In Italian comedy filmmaking reticence is one of the most overused devices: it hints rather than censors. Reticence satisfies two needs: on the one hand it protects the individual by accepting the social taboo; on the other hand, it emphasizes the marginalized status, building sender-receiver relationships powered by empathy. Reticence leaves a void which allows the observer to autonomously finish the line and share a ritual event which, in this situation of ridicule directed to the homosexual character, reinforces a stereotyped idea of alterity.

As we discussed lexicon, we have seen some example of lexical omissions used to define homosexual characters. We now aim to provide an overview of the many types of omission in the corpus. The first type is the total removing of lexical references. In *Mani di fata* (1982) Andrea, the main character, suspects that his wife has been charmed by a self-confessed lesbian colleague, who in the final scene of the movie is discovered sleeping with a man. The word *lesbica*, uttered throughout the movie, is clearly self-censored in this exchange:

⁵ Nencioni (1982: 15–18).

Andrea: Ma a te non piacciono le donne?
 Jaqueline: Anche!
 Andrea: Ma allora mia moglie non è una...

Something similar happens in *Amore a prima vista*. Following a request of explanation after an interrupted sentence, there is some hinting and finally a direct reference to the character's sexual orientation:

Ladro1: Non pensavo che lei fosse...
 Ladro2: Statti zitto!
 Fortunato: Che lei fosse?
 Ladro1: Eh insomma dai si capisce dai...
 Ladro2: Stai zitto!
 Fortunato: Tu ti fai 3 anni in più, vedrai se esci di galera questa volta!
 Ladro2: Brigadiè io non ho detto niente, io non tengo niente contro l'uomosessuale!

The word *gay* is used euphemistically in *Ho visto le stelle*; in this case one of the supporting actor's gestures (Nicola) manage to disambiguate it. Using a vocabulary marked by up-to-date politically correct nuances is perceived as euphemistical. The sentence «tu è inutile che parli pulito tanto il significato è sempre lo stesso» reinforces the idea that homosexuality is not only still perceived as a taboo topic, but also that it is translatable in an insult that thus needs defense («io non so come ho fatto a difenderti») and discourse repression. Thus, the “clean” word is opposed to the “dirty” concept or at least to a referent usually associated with a low, slang or dialectal vocabulary.

[*Ho visto le stelle*]

Nicola: Totò io no saccio comm aggia fatto a difenderti con Renato, tu vieni qua e mi chiedi pure un anticipo?
 Antonio: E che difeso? Perché? Che ho fatto?
 N: Quello mi ha chiesto se sei: [bringing both hands to the ears]
 A: Gay?
 Nicola: Tu è inutile che parli pulito tanto il significato è sempre lo stesso!

However, the most frequent device in our corpus is the use of an euphemistic form followed by either a reticence or an epithet: è un po' (he is a bit/a little). This phrase is always uttered with a supporting gesture that disambiguates the reticence: touching or bringing one's hand close to the ear to hint at a person's homosexuality. The use of episodic non-verbal signs is one of the first processes

of substitution of stigmatized words and concepts. Such traits are displayed along with both straight lexical choices and allusive alternative terms, but they may also significantly fill the void of the censored word (Galli de' Paratesi 1969: 38-39). In case one needs more explicitness, the same weakened term matches words such as: *culattone*, *diverso*, *strana*, *stranetto*, *anormale*, *frocio*. By euphemism, the range of sexual diversity and taboo infringement is reduced.

Another typical cover-up procedure to lessen offensive or disagreeable elements is the substitution with an adverb or demonstrative pronoun. «Un gesto, una smorfia bastavano. Bastava anche dire che Fadigati era “così”, che era “di quelli”», Giorgio Bassani wrote in *Gli occhiali d'oro* (1958) concerning the novel's main character, a gay doctor. We find a similar sentence in the 1987 film adaptation, «a Roma quelli come Fadigati li mandano a lavorare in Sardegna», with a further clear reference to the fact that in those times fascism sent homosexual to exile.

Lavezzoli: Ma lo sa dov'è la loro camera? Sopra la mia!

Signora: La capisco, me ne rendo conto, dev'essere davvero spiacevole.

Uomo: A Roma quelli come Fadigati li mandano a lavorare in Sardegna, nelle miniere di carbone

Lavezzoli: Nelle miniere di carbone? Ma come? Con tutti quei giovanottoni a torso nudo?

In the next example we observe a demonstrative pronoun followed by the adverb of place *là* (there) and by the personal pronoun *loro* (they), which strengthen the marking of an ideal distance, as in the following passage from *La patata bollente*:

Gandhi: E poi quando ti ho incontrato, io non ho capito che tu eri uno di quelli là

Gandhi: mica cammini come loro

Claudio: perché “quelli là” come camminano?

Gandhi: Eh camminano così [makes a parody, moving his arms sinuously and holding his hands on his hips]

5. Stereotypes and heteronormativity

Aside from the purely linguistic factors, in many plots the choice of a specific narrative solution also affects how homosexual characters are treated. There are a number of important questions that arise from this topic.

First, what are the external traits of homosexual characters? Are there aesthetic clichés that help to immediately frame them? Of course, physical elements are the first ones that convey meanings in a representation. It is thus important to verify whether these representations are recurring and consistent in the corpus.

Second, in what situational contexts do we find LGBT characters? From which are they excluded? Which occupations do we see them in? Places, habits and social practices taking place where the action is set might turn out as important factors to either strengthen or weaken commonplace stereotypes; analogously, removing circumstances reckoned as normal might have the same stereotyping effect on the audience.

Third, and lastly, what behavioral dynamics are built between the main characters? Are these relationships ones of inferiority/superiority, discrimination and derision between homosexual and heterosexual? Depending on the point of view, the story might reveal precise ideological connotations and shed light on discursive and social practices of disparity and abuse.

We have seen that, starting from the fifties, gay characters have been associated to extravagance and affectation. This link between effeminacy and homosexuality has its origins at the end of the nineteenth century, and has gradually been advocated by medics and psychiatrist (Foucault 1980: 43). According to Tamagne, Oscar Wilde's trial in 1895 was decisive in reading effeminacy, indolence, luxury and aestheticism as symbols of homosexuality (Tamagne 2007: 172). These features are all present in *L'imperatore di Capri* and *Totò a colori*. The Neapolitan actor on the one hand adopts the aesthetic canons of Capri snobs, all of which are reinforced by an extreme use of proxemics and kinesics (see: fig. 1); on the other hand he cannot give up flirting with the most beautiful women of the island, somehow normalizing his figure. In the following dialogue, more than the final lines by Totò («Oggi per fare colpo bisogna essere eccentrici, futili»), the surprise of his interlocutor and the movements of the camera prove decisive. In this scene the camera slowly frames Toto's figure from the bottom to the top, lingering on every aesthetic particular and creating an effect of surprise, finally concluding with a close-up.

Amico: Mi sono informato, è una delle più belle donne di Capri, un po' stravagante, ma bella.

A: Sarà una serata indimenticabile!

Totò: [Totò's voice out field] Eccomi qua!

A: Eeeh... [surprise. Totò has not yet been framed]

A: [framing of Totò from the bottom to the top to slowly catch every particular and create surprise] Ma perché ti sei conciato così?

- A: Ma come ti sei combinato? Ma in testa che cosa hai messo?
 T: Mi son vestito alla caprese, alla Lallo, alla Foffo, alla Lello e Cecchini.
 T: Tu piuttosto non vorrai mica venire vestito così? Mi faresti sfigurare!
 A: Ma io non posso conciarmi così, sono un attore serio!
 T: Oggi per fare colpo bisogna essere eccentrici, futili!
 T: Tu ti devi futilizzare, dai retta a me futilizzati!

The distinctive traits in clothing are jewels (necklaces, bracelets, earrings), accessories (handbags, scarfs, hats) and shirts of different patterns. The use of female accessories reflects what is probably the most spread stereotype of homosexuality, expressible in the propositions «gay = woman; lesbian = man». There are many discursive examples of this model, starting with *Il sorpasso*: Vittorio Gassman directs to his butler Occhiofino (Sharpeye) the remark: «ecco il nostro Occhiofino sempre lindo e solerte come una brava donnina di casa». In three more movies there is a duality concerning child games usually considered gender typical: dolls versus toy soldiers. It seems implicit that homosexuality manifests itself since childhood, an idea which assumes human nature and identity as immutable, predetermined and impossible to modify⁶. In the second excerpt, from *Uomini, uomini, uomini*, it can be observed how the concept of ef-feminacy is put to crisis in the relation between heteronormative activities and sexual orientations: «io giocavo con il mitra, facevo a cazzotti tutti I giorni/però m'è sempre piaciuto il cazzo».

[Parigi o cara]

- C: Eh già non saresti sempre la solita cavallona che stava coi ragazzacci per strada!
 D: Sì e te stavi sempre a casa a pettinamme le bambole...
 C: Sì passò quel tempo Enea!

[*Uomini, uomini, uomini*]

- S: Ma scusa non ho capito, perché peccato che siamo froci? Eh?
 S: Pensi che siamo 4 mammole?
 S: E ride lui, ma che ti credi che io da ragazzino giocavo con le bambole?
 S: Ma io giocavo con il mitra, facevo a cazzotti tutti i giorni!
 S: Però m'è sempre piaciuto il cazzo.

⁶ «Crucially, identity has been relocated: from the “private” realms of cognition and experience, to the “public” realms of discourse and other semiotic systems of meaning-making. Many commentators therefore argue that rather than being reflected in discourse, identity is actively, ongoingly, dynamically constituted in discourse» (Benwell, Stokoe 2006: 4).

[La Vespa e la regina]

Madre: Nini lo zio Antonio è stato sempre carino con te.

Padre: Quando eri piccolo ti mandava sempre dei bei regali

Renato: Certo come no, pistole soldatini carrarmati, ah un Natale anche una mitraglietta.

M: Ma tesoro che ne sapeva lui che giocavi con la casetta di Barbie!

In comedies, from the Seventies to nowadays, the imagery of flashy dressed gay gets stronger and stronger. Gay characters usually sport pink, silver, light blue clothes, often with an open-collared shirt and a scarf around the neck, features which stand out all the more when compared to heterosexual characters' clothes. Finally, gestures are pivotal to connote sexuality and increasing the comic side of these figures: hands often circularly twirl trying to support a statement, or they are crossed at the chest, or they are suspended in mid-air with the palms facing upwards. Linguistically speaking, the equation «gay = donna» is based on morphological choices: using feminine for masculine; using superlatives and suffixes like *-etto*, *-uccio* and *-ino*. Lexically speaking, homosexual characters tend to use expressive words such as *stupendo*, *divino*, *carino*⁷ (gorgeous, goddess-like, cute).

Lesbians are strongly underrepresented in the corpus. Apart from some erotic films, essentially directed to a male audience, the presence of lesbian main character is rare. In *Il ciclone* (1996), Selvaggia, the main character's sister is depicted with some classic lesbian traits: very short hair, masculine clothes and awkward moves, partly affected by the countryside environment (Fig. 3). *La vespa e la regina* (1999) is maybe the only movie to show a small lesbian community. The main character Ginevra is the singer and leader of an underground punk band and has some typical male traits: she is impetuous, quick-tempered and a football lover. *Io amo Andrea* (1999) avoids these simplistic views: the two main characters, Andrea e Francesca, are two perturbing and fascinating women. The former is a successful engineer, realized and self-confident.

In order to grasp the degree of heteronormativity in Italian filmmaking it is important to observe the situational contexts in which LGBT figures are represented. Notably, one-way representations of a social category of people strengthen stereotypes and commonplace assumptions.

At first, homosexuals are often characters bound to filmmaking and show business. In *Costa Azzurra*, Alberto Sordi must deal with a director that tries

⁷ Robin Lakoff (1990) in her work on women's language was the first to note this aspect in the language of gay people.

to subtly allure him by promising a part in one of his movies. There is a similar situation in *I vitelloni*, where Leopoldo, an aspiring dramatist, must face a subtle sexual advance from an old actor. In *Parigi o cara*, Claudio is an Italian migrant in France that plays in cabaret shows.

There are many productions in which the role of shows and clubs are pivotal. The most outstanding example is the strong presence of drag queens in the trilogy of *Vizietto* and in *Delitto al blue gay*. According to common sense, fashion world is related to homosexuality: in the corpus we find several stylists, salespeople and boutique owners (*Mani di fata*, *Vacanze di Natale '90*, *Ma l'amore... sì*). Art world has always been a safe shelter for homosexuals looking for jobs that allowed more freedom of expression and better social possibilities (Pini 2011).

By observing the characters' social arrangement, it is possible to notice that in comedies homosexual characters mainly belong to mid-high social classes, in contrast with an audience of largely popular or petty bourgeois extraction. Therefore, these comedies offered the audience laughable, funny characters who were not examples for the audience: homosexuals are never portrayed in everyday situations and do not seem to have a personality or a behavioral richness that allow them to stand out.

Putting aside rare exceptions such as *La patata bollente* or *Splendori e miserie di Madame Royale*, LGBT characters in Italian comedy are mainly supporting characters or perform very minor roles to make the movie more lively. They never play the main characters. Quite different is the situation in dramatic productions, where we discover more variety of narrative choices (for instance, prostitution in *Le Buttane* and *Mery per sempre* and homosexuality in the Army in *Marcia trionfale*), a central role for homosexual characters (*Una giornata particolare*, *Gli occhiali d'oro*) and deep psychological introspection (*Il Conformista*).

However, along with situational contexts, we shall also consider social relationships that take place in the movies. Such social relationships can take place in little groups, like families, or in big ones, like small communities.

One of the main themes is identity concealment and the so-called coming out. This theme can be analyzed according to two strong tendencies: first, identity can be concealed for one's own decision or out of somebody else's pressure (either from the family or not). Second, identity can be claimed and displayed. There are then more or less blurred phases in claiming one's own sexual preference. The first tensions usually show up next to the beloved ones: in *La moglie in biancol'amante al pepe*, young Gianluca hides his sexuality to his father during the whole plot, as he is troubled with doubts and offenses from other countrymen. However, this choice is presented as a comical device to trigger laughs and misunderstandings, as the director continuously plays with by increasing

or decreasing the suspects of homosexuality. In the nineties and in two thousands the “coming out” issue becomes more and more topical in both comic and dramatic movies, due to the relevance in public discourse. In *Il Ciclone* among the many characters there is a lesbian couple, Isabella and Selvaggia (sister of the main character): the former has decided to openly live her condition while the latter is still bound to provincial prejudices.

The following exchange, while brief, on the one hand highlights a number of discursive choices which have the goal of weakening prejudice; on the other hand, displays typical concealment strategies. In [1] Isabella makes her point by explaining that there is a love relationship between the two women («io a tua sorella voglio bene davvero»), an important premise since commonplace ideas see homosexual couples linked only by erotic relationships and thus unable to keep solid bonds. Levante justifies her sister’s reticence by hinting at the restricted provincial context [2] («questo è un paese ci sono I pregiudizi della gente») and the possible problems with her father [6] («perché forse il babbo non avrebbe capito»). These points cause the angry reaction of the woman in [3] («io dei pregiudizi della gente me ne sbatto i coglioni») and [7] («ipocriti, tutti»). Isabella is for the first time a strong character, resolved in openly defying community’s and family’s judgement («a mio padre lo dissi quando avevo 15 anni e lui soltanto 3 anni fa me l’ha perdonata»). Some choices in the whole exchange are explicitly rhetorical and show that the movie wants to dissociate from classic comedy movies («la vera vergogna è provare vergogna»; «come se l’omosessualità fosse un peccato mortale»; «bisogna uscire allo scoperto, alla luce del sole»).

[1] Isabella: Guarda che io a tua sorella voglio davvero bene, ma non possiamo continuare a nasconderci!

[2] Levante: Isabella te tu cj hai ragione, ma questo l’è un paese ci sono i pregiudizi della gente...

[3] I: Io dei pregiudizi della gente me ne sbatto i coglioni, la vera vergogna è provare vergogna!

[4] L: Ma non è questione di vergogna...

[5] I: E se non è vergogna perché non l’ha mai detto a tuo padre?

[6] L: Perché forse il babbo non avrebbe capito...

[7] I: Ipocriti, tutti, io a mio padre lo dissi quando avevo 15 anni e lui soltanto 3 anni fa me l’ha perdonata, ma poi perdonare cosa? Come se l’omosessualità fosse un peccato mortale.

[8] U: Cj ha ragione lei, se tu sei buco dillo!

[9] I: Diglielo a selvaggia, non ne posso più non si può più continuare a nasconderci come due ladre, bisogna uscire allo scoperto, alla luce del sole!

Here the figure of the father is a major hurdle in the act of self-revelation. Other examples are found in *Ravanello pallido* (2001), where the fiancé of the main character confesses after nine years that their relationship was just to conceal homosexuality from his father:

Gemma: Ma allora perché stavi con me? DIMMELO! PERCHÉ STAVI CON ME?

Mummia: NON POSSO DIRLO A MIO PADRE!

Gemma: Nove anni la copertura di un gay!

Mery per sempre, Ma l'amore... sì and, in minor terms, *L'uomo che ama* (2008) address this aspect with the opposition father-mother, the former being synonymous with refusal, the latter with understanding. In *Mery per sempre* it is the mother who tries to mediate while the father threatens the son with a knife: «Lascialo stare, chisto è fijomio, mio», with the repetition of the possessive adjective as a sort of statement of ownership. Conversely, the man sees homosexuality as a mark of infamy whose responsible is the woman: «Mery lo chiamano, Mery lo chiamano questo figlio tuo finocchio, un carruso mi hai partorito, chisto mi hai fatto».

Fratello: Fermo! Garruso fermo!

[The father holds a knife in his hand and Mery's hair in the other while her brother stops him]

Padre: E dopo questi ti taglio anche i coglioni così vera femmina diventi hai capito?

[The mother steps in]

Madre: Lascialo stare, chisto è fijo mio, MIO! [The mother steps in]

Padre: Mery lo chiamano, Mery lo chiamano questo figlio tuo finocchio, un carruso mi hai partorito, chisto mi hai fatto!

The social changes in Italy and the steps forward in the public debate about sexual and gender topics have poured into cinema and filmmaking. In *Ma l'amore... sì* young Carmelo is frightened to reveal to his father that he works in a fashion boutique (where only homosexual people are actually work) and lives the discovery of his bisexuality, revealed only to his sister, with anguish. However, the mother's role balances the father's: as she discovers that his son has a relationship with another man, she manages to get over her prejudice. The dialogue that follows takes place when the mother notices Carmelo kissing a guy next to a building's front door. The taxi driver's comment reinforces the idea that males should not be kissing in public and that homosexuality is some-

thing one must live covertly and with shame: «anvedi questi, ma la vergogna proprio non c'è». Notwithstanding the difficulties in accepting that her son is gay, Annuccia reacts with a meaningful comeback that, in its didactic and reiterated structure, seems directed to the audience: «se era figlio a lei sarebbe stato zitto, perché avrebbe più bisogno di capire che di giudicare. Sarebbe stato meno volgare, più sensibile e forse una persona più migliore».

[The taxi driver and Carmelo's mother see Carmelo while kissing another guy next to the front door]

Taxi: Anvedi questi, ma la vergogna proprio non c'è.

T: Se era mi fijo.

Annuccia: Se era figlio a lei sarebbe stato zitto, perché avrebbe più bisogno di capire che di giudicare! Sarebbe stato meno volgare, più sensibile e forse una persona più migliore!

A: Quindi vedi che non può essere figlio a lei. Anche perché è figlio a mia!

A: [throws the money and runs to her son] Tieni il resto!

This theme is tactfully discussed in *L'uomo che ama*. Carlo, a young call center employee, decides to reveal his homosexuality to his parents during one of the many family lunches. In *Il più bel girono della mia vita* (2001) it is the mother, head in the family hierarchy, who afflicts his son. In fact, she is morbidly devoted to the traditional family imagery, up to the point that she defines homosexual relationship and adoption by a gay couple as a mere «scimmiotamento di una famiglia»

The second thematic strand is about openly lived sexual life. We can observe how the evolution of customs of the last decade has caused an intensified representation of homosexual couples with feelings. Three movies, indeed not mainstream, are however exemplary in this respect: *Giorni* (2001), *Il vento di sera* (2003), *Riparo* (2007), in which a variety of nuances of LGBT life in Italy are explored (HIV-related problems, the lack of acknowledgement of the rights of common-law couples, prejudices) without sacrificing plausible sentimental plots, on the contrary often overly pathetic and strained. Conversely, in comedy movies those characters whose sexuality is overt have the role of prompting laughs. The feeling they prompt is, at best, that they are lowly funny.

In the social sphere homosexuals are always in a subordinate position. Even just the hint of a lack of manliness can engender hostility and despise by both the individual and the community. In the immediate post-war period gay people were the target of arrest and oppression by the police because of crimes against public morality (Pini 2011). In *Il più comico spettacolo del mondo* (1953), the main character, who ends up working in a hairdresser salon for women,

has not a flattering behavior towards one of his male customers. After having painted his head, he cracks a joke with an explicit reference to jail: «le ho tolto per lo meno vent'anni, adesso gliene darei venti... di carcere». In *La moglie in bianco, l'amante al pepe*, the inhabitants of the village where the plot is set insult and oppress Gianluca's father, who is systematically subject of jokes, laughs and threats. The hardships of living in the province are thoroughly described in Vituzzo's monologue in *L'uomo delle stelle*. He is a hairdresser in a little Sicilian village and, in front of the camera of a self-styled talent scout, admits his homosexuality. In [1] he wishes he could be seen, for once, as who he really is, overcoming the prejudice («me guardasse per quello che sono»). Then [3] he lists certain categories of people that, according to him, should at first be sympathized with or disdained («banditi, cornuti, buttane»), just to associate them to positive feelings («tutto perdonano», «loro sono valorosi, meschini, necessari»). The use of the omnicomprehensive third person refers to all of the population and increases Vituzzo's isolation: «Jarruso no, jarruso non lo puoi essere». Then, in [4] villagers' hypocrisies are remarked. They think highly of Vituzzo's handcraft abilities («Vituzzo fa, Vituzzo è bravo») but they pitilessly condemn his sexuality [5] («sei namedda», «fai schifo», «te fanno i pireti, mi fanno il verso»). Thus the delusion of becoming an actor is the chance to escape from the oppressing everyday reality, a concept that Vituzzo emphasizes by repetitions: «me ne voglio andare, me ne voglio andare, me ne voglio andare».

[1] Vituzzo: Me guardasse per quello che sono, mi guardasse...

[2] Morelli: Va bene va bene facci sé stesso...

[3] V: Tutto perdonano, a tutti i disgraziati, banditi, cornuti, buttane, loro sono valorosi, meschini, necessari. Jarruso no, jarruso non lo puoi essere. Jarruso in questo paese non lo puoi essere perché sei na medda.

[4] V: Fai schifo, ma deve vedere appena vengono a mia per farsi i capelli. "Ah vituzzo mi raccomando la pemanente come la sai fare tu che dura na semane", "Vituzzo le basette così" "Vituzzo a sfumatura alta", "Vituzzo fa, Vituzzo è bravo".

[5] V: Ma appena posa l'occhio sopra un giovanotto, ah, /.../ te fanno i pireti, mi fanno il verso, me ne voglio andare, me ne voglio andare, me ne voglio andare. Meno male che ho incontrato a lei dottore Morelli, è la mia fortuna, la mia fortuna!

While it is true that in many cases Italian filmmaking focuses on real society dynamics, the issue is assuming totally uncritical perspectives by directors and scriptwriters which eventually strengthen stereotypes and prejudices. We are referring to the use of practices of mocking and marginalization directed to

homosexuals as comical devices that serve to trigger laughter. This mechanism reinforces the idea that homosexuality is something abnormal, immoral, deviant. It is worth emphasizing how in many movies LGBT characters are eventually normalized through heterosexual relationship: such an epilogue takes place in *La moglie in bianco, l'amante al pepe, Vacanze di Natale '91, La vespa e la regina, Io amo Andrea* and *Diverso da chi?*

Conclusion

In this essay our goal has been to investigate the difficult relationship between language and alterity in Italian filmmaking, particularly considering how movies have contributed to build a popular imagery. Indeed, cinema has contributed to spread of Italian language into a context fragmented both politically and linguistically. However, language is not only a matter of lexicon and discursive structures but of ideologies and stereotypes too.

Throughout our corpus analysis, we have tried to provide a description as deep as possible of the composite set of linguistic resources through which discriminatory and identity practices are carried out. Although our analysis has considered only language areas (phonology, lexicon, rhetoric), these domains interweave one another and should therefore be analyzed in their entirety.

Particularly in comedy movies, prosody, intonation and phonetic traits are strictly connected to the visual representation of characters. This representation aims at emphasizing effeminacy and extravagance. The stereotype of the indolent and aesthete homosexual, bound to the sphere of show business and haute bourgeoisie, strongly marked the fifties and the sixties. From there, the stereotype evolved into a more comical, oddball character often represented as subject of insults and social marginalization. This trend has feebly declined in the two thousands due to an expansion in the range of expressions, a change made possible by the improving of sensibility and information about LGBT themes. It is remarkable how in dramatic films such degrading connotations have always been absent; so that we can safely state that a higher level of sensibility was possible in comedies as well.

If we maintain that language intrinsically has the power of building the social persona, then it is indisputable that identity construction hinges on lexicon. The use of degrading and offensive epithets as the preferred way to name homosexual people concurs in reinforcing stereotypes and discriminatory practices. Epithets situate the nicknamed individuals in subaltern and marginal positions. Moreover, the fact that LGBT people can almost only define themselves through a pejorative lexicon supports the ideologies behind those words.

Social stigma towards homosexuality is reflected in especially through euphemism, understatement, and reticence. The sexual sphere is the most struck by language (auto-)censorship. Removing exact references, particularly by means of periphrases, strengthens the aversion against the idea of homosexuality. Such devices promote homosexuality as something to be ashamed of.

Finally, we have investigated a number of relevant narrative and aesthetic choices in the construction of stereotypes. Placing homosexual characters in a limited number of situations or contexts (show business, prostitution, *haut-bourgeois* circles) enhances certain beliefs about homosexuality. The same applies for aesthetic canons, such as wearing extravagant clothes, using feminine jewels and accessories, sporting short hair and the overall shabbiness of lesbians. This act of framing engenders simplistic generalizations of homosexual identity. Removing LGBT characters from everyday situations reflects and reinforces a heteronormative vision of society.

In conclusion, with this work we have tried, starting from the description of a corpus of movies, to face the problems of representing marginalized and stereotyped alterity. We have especially seen how this representation does not contribute to people's emancipation but, on the contrary, perpetuates discursive and social practices of inferiority and discrimination.

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