Worldwide fast-food chains, with their standardized menus, seem to have eradicated any local taste from food, promoting a process of thorough (food-)globalization (Pravettoni 2005). In a wider perspective, terms like McDonaldization/Starbuckization (Ritzer 1993, 2004) have come to indicate a shift from cultures built on tradition to a global homogenization of economic and socio-cultural life (Ritzer 1993: 1). Nonetheless, specific food items possibly remain “the most sensitive and important expression of national culture” (Newmark 1988: 97), and still function as an extraordinary vehicle of self-representation and/or ethnic signifiers. This close-knit identitarian relationship between language and food has been clearly highlighted also by Lévi-Strauss (1977:36): “cooking […] is with language a truly universal form of human activity: if there is no society without a language, nor is there any which does not cook in some manner at least some of its food”.

However, although many (audiovisual) texts have focused on the interplay of food and identity, the relationship between food, culture and translation remains under-researched (Chiaro and Rossato 2015: 237), and particularly in an AVT perspective, parameters that influence the complex decision-making process of translators in their cultural adaptation of food-related terms have to date rarely been investigated. If “translation is a battlefield of many opposing strategies and views” (Paloposki and Oittinen 2000: 375), above all “food terms are subject to the widest variety of translation procedures” (Newmark 1988: 97). This is so because food is to be considered “an ensemble of texts” (Geertz 1973: 24) that must be continually interpreted and construed. Accordingly, food cannot be given a once-and-for-all, clear-cut meaning, but especially today the meaning is often (re)negotiated through practices, discourse, and representations within the daily interactions of the global flows of information, goods, individuals and groups. My study is a corpus-based analysis of the translation strategies chosen to render food-related terms, conducted in a comparative, descriptive, non-judgmental manner. Drawing on the works of well-known translation/AVT scholars, my investigation has been carried out on the English audio script version of 25 films chosen on the basis of their food-connected plots, along with their Italian subtitles. Qualitative examples are analysed in detail, and results and socio-cultural motivations are discussed. In most examples denotative messages are easily understood, even though most humorous nuances are lost, or undergo a “chunking up” process (Katan 2004: 147), due both to linguistic structures and/or to the intrinsic untranslatability of the ST term. As a result, many ST and jokes are invalidated. My main research hypothesis, in a diachronic perspective, is that the more recent the film, the more subtitlers opt for foreignization strategies, thus “retaining something of the foreignness of the original” (Yang 2010: 77). Yet, my study did not aim to question the subtitlers’ choices, but rather to demonstrate the challenge of translating culture-bound elements – food terms in particular – and more importantly, to consider new insights into approaching translation problems in AVT practice.