

Increasing or Decreasing the Sense of “Otherness”: the Role of Audiovisual Translation in the Process of Social Integration

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Whether domesticating or foreignizing in its approach, any form of audiovisual translation [...] ultimately plays a unique role in developing both national identities and national stereotypes. The transmission of cultural values in screen translation has received very little attention in the literature and remains one of the most pressing areas of research in translation studies. (Baker and Hocheil, 2001: 76)

ABSTRACT

This paper is aimed at analyzing the impact and potential of audiovisual translation (AVT) in the process of social integration. AVT is mainly characterized by the use of language which, far from being neutral, can be used in many different ways in order to manipulate meanings and exert a strong influence on society as a whole. Language has always been associated with power, manipulation and ideology and as such is at the core of any study carried out in the field of AVT. The type of language transfer chosen in any country depends on many factors, such as historical, political, cultural, religious and even economic preferences. However, it has become more and more common to refer to ‘foreignizing’ and ‘domesticating’ (translation) strategies when deciding upon and judging the type of language transfer to be used in particular contexts. It is not surprising that these strategies are used in translation in order to decrease or increase the sense of ‘otherness’. Subtitling is an example of foreignizing translation where the ‘otherness’ is given freedom to express itself because it is the target culture that moves towards the source culture. Despite being viewed initially as a lower quality product as compared to dubbing, subtitling is now much more valued than it was in the past thanks to its ‘respect’ for the culture and language of other

countries. Dubbing, on the other hand, is a classical example of linguistic nationalism aimed at domesticating the 'otherness' in order to minimize the sense of 'foreignness' for the target culture. There is nowadays an increasing awareness of the importance and the need to strengthen language learning and to promote a new model of cultural pluralism which breaks away from xenophobic and racist attitudes and empowers minority groups in various countries. AVT is an important field of interdisciplinary research which should be deeply analyzed in order to better value its potential of promoting multilingualism and multiculturalism in the world. Drawing upon examples of dubbed Italian versions of some Walt Disney movies, this paper aims at re-evaluating dubbing in a much more positive light and showing how it can help strengthen social integration in an increasingly globalized world.

1. INTRODUCTION

Translation studies is a very large academic field which over the years has included a large variety of studies and has combined many different fields together. This is why it is not surprising that many translation scholars are undertaking research in the field of Film Studies focusing especially on the phenomena of dubbing and subtitling. Many translation theorists in the past have recognized the power exerted by translation in terms of an ideological tool for manipulating language. In the field of Film Studies as well there has been a considerable interest in considering television and cinema as two major channels of power distribution. This is because both fields are characterized by the use of language which, far from being neutral, can be used in many different ways in order to manipulate meanings and exert a strong influence on society as a whole.

Nevertheless, it is fundamental to recognize the importance played by television and/or cinema and translation in general in terms of breaking down language barriers and reaching the whole world through communication. It is thanks to translation that many different cultures and peoples in the world have had the chance to communicate with one another; and it is also thanks to the mass media that these peoples have enjoyed, and still do, a different and much more international environment. This interest of translation scholars in the field of Film Studies has created a typology of translation called 'screen translation' or 'film translation' or even 'audiovisual translation'.

2. DEFINITIONS

Audiovisual translation (AVT) is a term used to refer to any language and cultural transfer aimed at translating original dialogues coming from any acoustic or visual product. AVT is also named film translation, screen translation, cinema translation and multimedia translation. It seems, however, that the term AVT is more appropriate in that it includes all these definitions within it. AVT is not a new subject at all, although it has been only recently developed. Research and seminars started to become more and more frequent after 1995, the year in

which the European Council celebrated the anniversary of the birth of the cinema and, on that special occasion, a forum on audiovisual communication and language transfer was organised (Perego, 2005:7). AVT is very much criticised in all its forms by many people who either do not consider it as a proper form of translation but rather as an adaptation or who regard it as a linguistic game used to 'spot the error' as also acknowledged by Shochat and Stam (1985:46). There are, indeed, many websites in which dubbing or subtitling gaffes are carefully reported. Nevertheless, few people really understand the importance of this extremely challenging and complex form of translation. It involves, indeed, a number of technical, linguistic and cultural constraints, not to mention social and economic constraints.

There are many types of audiovisual translation, although subtitling and dubbing are among the most commonly used and mentioned in most parts of the world. AVT can, indeed, be divided into two main groups, that is, intra-lingual (or monolingual) subtitling for the 1) hard-of-hearing and the deaf, 2) audio descriptions for blind people, 3) subtitling for the theatre or the opera and 4) live subtitling (generally used in the news broadcasts); and inter-lingual translation which includes 1) dubbing, 2) subtitling and 3) voice-over. Broadly speaking, AVT can also be simply divided into oral (dubbing) and written (subtitling) forms of language transfer.

Traditional dubbing countries include the so-called FIGS group, that is, France, Italy, Germany and Spain and the reasons for their choice is mostly linked to history and to their past political regimes. Subtitling countries are the Netherlands, Greece, Portugal, Slovenia, Croatia, Denmark, Norway and Sweden among others. Economic and social reasons partly explained their preference for subtitling which is generally cheaper than dubbing and allows for bilingualism. According to O'Connell (2007) the target audience is also an important factor which exerts some kind of influence on the selection of dubbing or subtitling. Factors such 'as the age, sex, educational background and social class of the audience' tend to be taken into consideration in the selection process (ibid.:128). Delabastita also acknowledges that film translations do not only pose linguistic problems, but they are 'conditioned to a large extent by the functional needs of the receiving culture and not, or not just, by the demands made by the source films' (1990:99). It is not, however, the aim of this paper to look in detail into the reasons that motivate the choice of a particular AVT technique but rather to analyse what impact a particular choice can have from the point of view of increasing or decreasing the sense of 'otherness'.

3. GLOBALISATION AND LINGUISTIC PLURALISM

In an increasingly globalised world, there seems to be the need to preserve identity and promote cultural pluralism and the use of AVT could either increase or decrease the sense of 'otherness'. Globalisation has had significant impact not only on countries' economic and political systems but also on the language itself which is used as a means of communication. Globalisation has greatly contributed to the homologation and linguistic standardization which are evident in the

translation strategies used both in subtitling and dubbing. This would, in turn, contribute to the gradual disappearance of linguistic and cultural heritages, especially for those minority or endangered languages all around the world. Dubbing, in particular, seems to be the major communication means which tends to standardise the language towards the 'Self' community and damaging or making the 'Other' community disappear. Initially adopted as a way of simplifying and enhancing the comprehension of foreign films, its use in some countries, such as Italy for instance, has been the symbolic expression of a xenophobic purism aimed at avoiding contacts or contaminations with different foreign 'Other' realities. It is not surprising, indeed, that dubbing has been chosen in the past in order to hide the foreignness of films coming from different countries. Strong nationalistic countries, such as Germany, Italy and Spain for instance, had adopted dubbing for real ideological reasons or, as Danan (1991:612) puts it, as 'an assertion of the supremacy of the national language and its unchallenged political, economic and cultural power within the nation boundaries [...]']

There are also, however, several significant technical reasons which explain the adoption of dubbing in some countries, such as the impossibility or complexity of rendering specific non-standard linguistic varieties. Among them, there are all those regional varieties, slang, accents and colloquial expressions which are extremely difficult to render through dubbing. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that these non-standard linguistic varieties represent an expression of identity and belong to the linguistic community of the country of origin. Suppressing and avoiding these varieties means suppressing all those cultural and linguistic diversities which belong to the 'Others' around us thus threatening the survival of some minority languages and dialects. Many people argue that this does not normally happen in subtitled films or programmes, but this is not entirely true. In the case of subtitling in minority language settings, such as Wales or Ireland for instance, there seems to emerge a tendency to reinforce the major language through subtitles instead of promoting the minority ones. O'Connell mentions the study carried out by d'Ydewalle et al. in Belgium in 1987 which proved the impossibility of avoiding reading subtitles. As a consequence, since reading requires more concentration than listening, one could argue that subtitling tends to favour and strengthen the major rather than the minority languages (2007:131).

Dubbing, on the other hand, should not always be regarded as something negative aimed at domesticating the Others' language and culture in favour of the target audience. The merit of reducing, in some cases, racist stereotypes in all those movies where particular linguistic and cultural communities are targeted should be recognised. In order to prove this point, this paper will explore how a specific category of films, Walt Disney feature films, can contribute to reinforcing stereotypes and how the dubbed (Italian) versions maintain or eliminate them altogether.

4. SUBTITLING

Subtitling is 'the process of providing synchronized captions for film and television dialogue' (Shuttleworth and Cowie, 1997:161). From a linguistic point of view,

subtitles can be *intralingual* (within one language) and *interlingual* (between two languages), based on the distinction made by Jakobson in 1959; however, from a more technical point of view, they are divided into *open* (not optional, i.e. shown with the film) and *closed* (optional, i.e. shown via teletext) (*ibid.*).

There are many obvious advantages related to the use of subtitling which is generally regarded as a cheaper and faster modality of audiovisual translation. Thanks to subtitling the original soundtrack can be preserved and it can also play an important role in language acquisition. In this respect, Danan (1991:613) asserts that interlingual subtitling, in particular, 'indirectly promotes the use of a foreign language as an everyday function in addition to creating an interest in a foreign culture'.

Nevertheless, there are also several constraints which should not be disregarded. In his article on subtitling Gottlieb (1992) discusses all those *formal (quantitative)* and *textual (qualitative)* constraints which characterise television subtitling. *Formal* constraints include all those issues related to the *space factor* and the *time factor*. On the other hand, *textual* constraints derive from the visual context of the film. Among the most influential theorists who have discussed subtitling constraints extensively, there is also Delabastita (1989) who considers, among other issues, the topic of reduction as being one of the most problematic aspects of this form of translation. Constraints involve selection on the behalf of the translator who has thus a very complex task and responsibility. From a pragmatic perspective, some scholars have applied notions derived from relevance theory to subtitling and claim that 'decisions about deletions are context-dependent' (Kovačič, 1994:250).

Subtitling can be seen as a form of foreignization where the stress is laid upon the identity of the foreign text leaving the sense of 'otherness' unchanged.

5. DUBBING

The technique of dubbing was introduced further to the introduction of sound in films and this explains why this term can be assigned more than one definition. For the purpose of this study this term refers to lip-sync dubbing, that is 'where the foreign dialogue is adjusted to the mouth movements of the actor in the film' (Dries, 1995:9).

It is interesting to note that when watching a dubbed film, not many people would realise that they are presented with a translated version of the original and therefore, this technique tends to be less criticised in terms of 'error spots' (Shochat and Stam, 1985:49). This, however, does not mean that dubbing is not subject to any constraints. Many scholars seem to agree upon the fact that one of the major constraints of dubbing is that of synchrony defined as 'the agreement between the articulatory movements seen and the sounds heard' (Barbe 1996:259). Script editors make, from time to time, changes in the translated versions to make sure that each utterance matches the lip movements of people acting in the film.

One of the merits of dubbing is that it does not distract people's attention from the image and is therefore suitable for people or children who do not have

particularly fast or good reading skills. It also involves less reduction of the original dialogue as compared to subtitling and, generally speaking, it contributes to a more relaxed viewing. However, despite these important positive elements, there are also several constraints related to the use of dubbing. First of all, it is very expensive and takes much more time and effort to realise as compared to subtitling. Secondly, it involves the inevitable loss of the original soundtrack. Thirdly, viewers are not given the opportunity to listen to the foreign language and this has a very significant impact on language learning issues. Dubbed material is, to a certain extent, limited to its country of origin and as such 'exclude(s) certain categories such as tourists and other visitors who may not speak the local language' (Baker and Hochel, 2001:75). Dubbed material tends to be also associated with ideology and censorship as well as with other kinds of 'undetected textual manipulation' (O'Connell, 2007:126). A very interesting example of this can be seen in the Italian version of the American series the *Nanny* that was aired on CBS from 1993 to 1999. The Italian version has been adapted in such a clever way as to reproduce the same cultural impact on the target audience. In both versions there are examples of stereotypes and comic elements which, although culturally different, seem to be very successful. In the US version the protagonist, Fran, is a young Jewish woman coming from Flushing, Queens (New York) whereas in the Italian version her origins are from Southern Italy. In the US version Fran speaks with a strong accent which immediately makes the audience think of the stereotypical Jewish / New York woman. In the Italian version Fran does not speak with any particular accent but language play and manipulation are achieved through the use of some specific dialectal expressions which the viewers associate with Southern Italy and stereotypes. In this case dubbing contributes to maintaining and, to some extent, reinforcing typically-voiced national stereotypes.

Dubbing is a perfect example of domestication in translation. It has historically been associated with nationalism, and it is not surprising indeed that Germany, Spain and Italy are amongst those countries which have adopted dubbing for socio-political and ideological reasons related to their strong sense of patriotism and their political regime of the time. It would be wrong, though, to think of dubbing only in terms of nationalism and xenophobic purism. On the contrary, dubbing can play a very important role in international communication transfer as a means to dilute the degree of racism which can be noticed in some audiovisual materials. This could be seen, for example, in some of the most famous Walt Disney movies.

6. CULTURAL TRANSFER IN TRANSLATION

It is undoubtedly a very challenging enterprise to make sure that a film released nationally in a specific country can eventually enjoy success abroad. Both linguistic as well as cultural differences are among the most common obstacles to be overcome. This contributes to raising cross-cultural issues which cannot be avoided or ignored if a translation is to be successful. In the past, but still nowadays, cultural issues have been at the core of heated debates which focused their attention on the issue of translatability. This issue was approached from two dif-

ferent perspectives, that is, the universalist theory and the monadist one. According to the first theory, supported by Jakobson, Bausch, Hauge and Nida among others, translatability is possible thanks to the existence of linguistic universals. Whereas, on the other hand, the supporters of the monadist approach, such as Edward Sapir for instance, assert that translatability is jeopardised by the way each linguistic community interprets reality in its own way. In the last few years there has also been another important approach to the issue of translatability coming from the Deconstructionist theory where the notion of translation as transfer of meaning is questioned.

There is an inevitable link between language and culture and this can be seen, for instance, in fairytales and children's literature. Disguised as education tools, fairytales can sometimes twist truth by perpetrating and reinforcing wrong prejudices among children. Some fairytales tend to reflect a society's culture and bias against some other cultures. Translation of fairytales can either leave these stereotypes and prejudices unchanged or eliminate them altogether if they are deemed to be offensive for the target culture. It is therefore the aim of this paper to show how a dubbing translation strategy can indeed soften and, in some cases, completely eliminate racist stereotypes originated in the USA according to Western thinking and presented in Italy which is not traditionally a multilingual community, although things are beginning to change.

7. LANGUAGE, IDEOLOGY AND MANIPULATION

The use of language is inevitably linked to the issues of power, ideology and manipulation. Simpson defines ideology as 'the taken-for-granted assumptions, beliefs and value-systems which are shared collectively by social groups' (1993:3). It is worth noting, in this respect, that Walt Disney animated movies tend to reflect the American attitude towards particular races and ethnicities. Some of these assumptions may also be shared by some other Western countries and the role played by AVT in this respect is fundamental because it can help decrease the sense of 'otherness' through the use of language. Language should not be regarded as being merely a tool for communication, but it carries with it moral, religious and socio-political values which could reflect or manipulate particular ideologies. The term ideology is not easy to define since it is a very controversial issue which is interpreted and consequently defined in different ways. According to Thompson (1984:3) 'to study ideology is, in some part and in some way, to study language in the social world'. A similar position is taken by Gruber (1990: 195) who claims that 'ideology manifests itself linguistically and is made possible and created through language'. Despite numerous definitions of the term 'ideology', there seems to be a common agreement that all ideologies find their clearest expression in language as also acknowledged by Hodge and Kress (1993) who made a distinction between different levels of language, such as the lexical-semantic level and the grammatical-syntactic level. Hatim and Mason also declared that:

Ideologies find their clearest expression in language. It follows, therefore, that the analysis of linguistic forms is enriched by the analysis of those ideological structures

which underpin the use of language. [...] Behind the systematic linguistic choices we make, there is inevitably a prior classification of reality in ideological terms. The content of what we do with language reflects ideology at different levels: at the lexical-semantic level, and at the grammatical-syntactic level. [...] Whatever is said about the degree of freedom the translator has, the fact remains that reflecting the ideological force of the words is an inescapable duty. (1990:161)

It is, indeed, through language that such ideologies are shaped and reality itself is shaped. Language is not neutral and through the use of particular words or constructions it can distort messages and realities. There are obvious differences in the use of language that people select to create ideas, express opinions and interpret the world. Language is linked to power and power relations and it helps control discourse and, thus, reality. The best way to untangle discourse is through a careful analysis of the language used.

For the purpose of this study, the term ideology simply refers to a range of ideas, beliefs, value systems, prejudices, stereotypes, legends and any other notions of language that can be seen through the use of particular accents and/or dialects in the original movies and the use of standard language in the dubbed versions.

8. REDUCING RACIST STEREOTYPES IN DUBBED FILMS

Although dubbing may be accused of domestication and, in some cases, a deep sense of nationalism, it is worth noting that it could prove to be a very useful means of reducing or avoiding racist stereotypes. This is particularly true in the case of Walt Disney feature films whose importance is fundamental in that they directly target children.

The Walt Disney Company is one of the most powerful and best-known media corporations which targets children, parents and teachers from all over the world and presents a worldview based on innocence, magic, and fun. Its main and declared aim is to educate children through entertainment. However, behind these images of innocence and fantasy there is a hidden ideology aimed at reinforcing class, age, gender and racist stereotypes.

There are several examples of racism that can be found in Walt Disney's animated features, such as 1) the native cannibals in *Alice Cans the Cannibals* (1933) 2) the Indians from *Peter Pan*, 3) the merchant and evil Jafar from *Aladdin*, 4) the crows from *Dumbo*, 5) Sebastian from *The Little Mermaid*, 6) Sunflower the centaur from *Fantasia* and 7) King Louie from *The Jungle Book* and 8) the Siamese cats in *Lady and the Tramp*. 'Otherness' seems to be one of the major recurring themes in Disney's production, as also acknowledged by Di Giovanni who claims that 'since the primary aim of Disney films is to appeal to large audiences worldwide, especially children, representations of the Other are necessarily smoothed and simplified by the selection of exotic elements which are well-known to the Western world, being part of a more or less fixed repertoire' (2003:211). Unfortunately, in their attempt to 'simplify' concepts, Walt Disney productions tend to stereotype all those typical features of culturally different 'Others' towards a certain degree of racism, whereas the Americans tend to be portrayed mainly as the 'good people'.

Children's minds are very easy to control and when they watch these cartoons they make connections to their favourite characters and relate to them. Garrett and Bell (1998:3) claim that '[...] media use can tell us a great deal about social meanings and stereotypes projected through language and communication [...]'. People are usually taught from childhood to make social distinctions and this will, in turn, have a significant impact on their own cultural tolerance and social behaviour in the future. Stereotypes are reinforced through actions and language variations as also acknowledged by Lippi-Green (2005). Racist stereotypes can, indeed, be expressed through accents in non-native speakers. Native speakers primarily play the main roles, while non-native speakers act as servants or villains from the lower class. Children eventually learn to associate foreign accents with evil and native standard accents with good. This is mainly due to the fact that children tend to passively absorb this kind of information and they do not actively analyse it. It is not surprising, therefore, that all Disney characters that speak with a foreign accent and are characterized by a foreign look are mainly associated with negative features. Native Americans, for instance, are clearly portrayed as savages in *Peter Pan* and *Pocahontas*; Arabs act just like barbarians in *Aladdin*; African-Americans are portrayed as jive crows in *Dumbo* and as human-wannabe orangutans in *The Jungle Book*; strangely enough, they seem to be totally absent in *Tarzan's Africa*, where people would probably expect them to be; both Latinos and African-Americans become street criminals in *The Lion King* and, finally, the unfaithful Siamese cats in *Lady and the Tramp* resemble Asians. Stereotypes can be stressed by both images and verbal language although the latter seems to have a much stronger impact. Hudson (1980: 193) also claims that 'language is one of the most important factors by which social inequality is perpetuated from generation to generation'.

Walt Disney feature films are famous all over the world and, as such, they are translated and shown either in dubbed or subtitled versions in many different languages. Nevertheless, in most dubbed Italian versions, many of these stereotypes are completely eliminated and a standard language is used for all the characters. Thanks to this strategy racist stereotypes are omitted and children are somehow unaware of them. This could be a positive aspect of dubbing which, in a nationalist effort to ease the comprehension for the target audience, eliminates stereotypes and prejudices. Let us look at some of these examples in the following sections.

8.1 DUMBO (1941)

Dumbo was released in 1941 and it was Walt Disney fifth animated movie. It tells the story of a 'peculiar' and, at the same time, 'special' little elephant that is laughed at by others because of his big 'funny' ears. Thanks to his friend, Timothy Mouse, *Dumbo* is able to transform his weakness into a special gift as he is taught how to fly by a group of crows. Apparently, this movie seems to give a very positive message, that is difference is not bad but a good thing to be appreciated. Diversity seems to be accepted, tolerated and praised in a way. However, if one looks a little deeper into this movie, s/he would realise that the crows are 'different' from all the other characters. They resemble Afro-Americans whose accent is

unquestionably typical of black people and, more precisely, they tend to portray proletarian blacks as also acknowledged by Wilmington (1980). Expressions such as 'I seen a horsefly [...]' or 'Uh, what's all the rookus? C'mon, step aside brothuhs, uh, what's cookin' around heah? What new? What fryin', boys?' are obviously very typical of black colloquial dialects. It is not surprising, then, that when it comes down to singing and dancing they do it in a typical jazz style and, furthermore, one of them is called Jim Crow¹. In the dubbed Italian version all these references are completely lost. The accent is standard or, at least, cannot really be associated with any particular stereotype. The reference to Jim Crow is pointless and smoothed in the dubbed version. There does not seem to be any way in which Italian children can possibly perceive any form of racism in this film based on language differences.

8.2 *THE JUNGLE BOOK* (1967)

In 1967 Walt Disney decided to release its version of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. It tells the story of a young boy called Mowgli who, after losing both parents in an accident, is raised by some wolves in the jungle. When he starts growing up, panther Bagheera decides that it is time for the boy to return to the 'Man Village'. Mowgli, however, seems determined to remain in the jungle and does not want to live in the 'Man Village'.

There is a scene in this movie where Mowgli is abducted by a group of apes that resemble Afro-Americans in both the way they talk and the way they sing and dance. Metcalf (1991) claims that apes in this movie represent the unhappy situation of black people living in the States and their will to be treated just like white people. The song performed in this scene is a clear example of this and the way they sing and dance over this tune resemble the typical Jim Crow dance. Their accent is typically black whereas all the other animals in the jungle speak in a British accent.

In the Italian version the accent chosen is just a standard one where there is no way to associate the apes with any ethnic community. As a result, both the song and the dance performed by the apes acquire no specific meaning and they only serve the purpose of entertainment for children. This means that references to Jim Crow are lost in the dubbed Italian version thanks to the decision to opt for a standard accent.

8.3 *THE LITTLE MERMAID* (1989)

This movie was released in 1989 and was adapted from Hans Christian Andersen's original version. *The Little Mermaid* tells the story of Ariel, King Triton's youngest daughter, who is fascinated with the human world and has fallen in love with the human Prince Eric. Ariel goes to the evil sea witch, Ursula who promises to turn her into a human for three days in exchange for her voice. If Ariel can obtain a kiss of true love from Prince Eric within the three days, she can remain human forever. If not, she will have to become Ursula's slave.

One of the main characters of this movie is Sebastian the crab who is the only one to speak with a typical Jamaican accent. There is a particular scene in this movie where Sebastian tries to persuade Ariel that life is much better 'under the sea' because at least nobody has to do any work or get any job compared to what

happens on the surface. He then sings a song that goes like this:

Up on the shore they work all day, out in the sun they slave away
While we devoting full time to floating under the sea

This could be a typically voiced stereotype about Jamaican people who are regarded as lazy people who do not like to do any work. In the Italian version this stereotype is not shown thanks to the decision to opt for a standard accent. There could have been a way to maintain it even in the Italian version by opting for a Southern Italian accent since it is commonplace in Italy to regard people from the South as lazy people who do not like working. This strategy would have respected the English version but, at the same time, would have reinforced negative stereotypes commonly voiced in Italy. Negative associations are smoothed in the dubbed Italian version and children seem not to be negatively influenced as compared to their English counterparts.

If we compare this movie to *Lady and the Tramp*, it is interesting to note how the Siamese cats that speak with a typical Asian accent are dubbed into Italian with a clear Chinese accent. This decision may be coherent with the original version but it is not definitely coherent with previous choices to opt for a standard accent for all the characters. Moreover, their slanted eyes and buck-teeth contribute to reinforcing existing stereotypes of Asians.

8.4 ALADDIN (1992)

Aladdin was released in 1992 and it tells the story of a poor and homeless boy who lives in a large and busy town with his faithful monkey friend Abu. One day he accidentally meets Princess Jasmine at the marketplace and he saves her from a merchant who wants to cut off her hand for stealing an apple to give to a starving child. Under the orders of the evil Jafar, Aladdin is taken to the castle and thrown in jail. Thanks to the help of the genie of the lamp, Aladdin gets rid of Jafar and marries the princess.

Several examples of stereotypes of Arabs or Moslems can be found in this film and this can be seen in the very first scene where there is a man sitting on a camel who sings the following song:

‘Oh I come from a land/ from a faraway place/ where the caravan camels roam/ **where they cut off your ear/ if they don’t like your face**/ it’s barbaric, but hey, it’s home’.

This lyric makes a clear reference to a law in the Middle East known as The Sharia Edict of cutting off the hand of a thief. Because of these words, the movie was heavily criticised by the Arab communities and Walt Disney was forced to change the sentences in bold to ‘Where it’s flat and immense/ and the heat is intense’. It is interesting, though, to note that the final verse ‘it’s barbaric, but hey, it’s home’ is left in the revised American version. In the Italian version, this lyric is fully reproduced, except from the final verse which is changed to *non è facile, ma io ci vivo laggiù* (It is not easy, but I live over there).

It is worth noting how, in the original version, only the villains look different as compared to Aladdin or Jasmine who look very anglicized. Jafar and the other villains speak with an accent, whereas both Aladdin and Jasmine speak very good American English. Their accent, somehow, seems to help them get closer to the viewers who, on the other hand, too often make an association between foreign accent and evil.

In the dubbed Italian version, there is no such a difference between the villains and the main protagonists. All of them speak with a proper standard accent and therefore the sense of 'otherness' is domesticated in a positive light. As a matter of fact, it is worth noting that Aladdin came out during the Gulf War and provided the viewers with an exotic but, at the same time, a barbaric reality of people living in the Middle East. Children cannot obviously link the movie to the Gulf War, but by watching this movie they could learn that strange things happen in those 'places' where there does not seem to be any kind of 'civilization'. In other words, children learn that people with an Arab look and accent should not be trusted.

8.5 *THE LION KING* (1994)

The Lion King was released in 1994 and it tells the story of a young lion in Africa named Simba, who learns of his place in the great 'circle of life' and overcomes many obstacles to claim his place as the rightful king. Son of the king of all lions, Mufasa, his birth angers Mufasa's brother Scar, who would have been next in line to the throne, and so he plots to kill both of them. Mufasa is eventually killed by a herd of Wildebeest whereas Simba is led to believe by Scar that he is responsible for his father's death. Simba decides to run away and Scar becomes king of the Pridelands. After several years, Simba is persuaded to return to the Pridelands to help his friends and get rid of Scar.

Although this movie was very well acclaimed, it also received several serious criticisms in terms of racist, sexist, homophobic, violent and stereotyping issues contained in it. The racist issues can be clearly seen in the portrayal of both the hyenas as well as Uncle Scar. The Lion king is set in Africa but whereas Simba, the protagonist, speaks with a good and clear English accent, the hyenas or 'bad characters' speak non-standard English typically spoken in the street and it resembles the inner city African American dialect. Two white American actors were chosen for the voice of Simba whereas the hyenas are voiced by Hispanic and Black actors.

In the Italian dubbed version, the choice of opting for a standard accent once again smoothes the sense of otherness and all the xenophobic considerations which can be found in the original version. Italian children only perceive the hyenas as evil only because of their behaviour but there is no connection between 'foreign' accent and evil. There are no racist representations or stereotypes in the Italian version which could exert influence over children.

9. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The media plays a very important role in terms of ideological manipulation of reality. This is particularly important when racist stereotypes or comments may damage linguistic and cultural pluralism. In an increasingly globalised world

there is a need to unite people and eliminate all forms of discrimination and AVT can certainly help in this respect.

This paper attempted to show the power of AVT in increasing, decreasing or even maintaining the sense of 'otherness' through carefully selected linguistic choices. Except from *Lady and the Tramp*, all the Disney animated movies analysed in this paper showed how the racist issues related to language in the original version disappeared in the dubbed Italian versions thanks to the dubbing strategies adopted. It is not really possible to assert firmly that such choices were made in order to eliminate racism, but this is the final result in the dubbed versions.

Dubbing, therefore, should no longer be considered as something negative aimed at reinforcing nationalist values against foreign different 'others'. It is nowadays a means of helping the 'others' fit in with the socio-cultural and linguistic community they come in contact with. In the case studies presented in this paper dubbing served the role of introducing diversity in a very mild manner away from stereotypes and racist attitudes. The dubbed Italian versions analysed in this paper offer children as well as adults a new perspective of 'others' which is not based on prejudices. The villains are presented as bad characters only on the basis of their behaviour not because of their 'foreign' accent.

However, as previously mentioned, it is not only the verbal language but also the images which manipulate viewers and unfortunately this element cannot be avoided in the dubbed versions. Racism is, nevertheless, smoothed thanks to the adoption of standard language and Disney animated movies lose most of their racism for the Italian audience.

It was not the aim of this paper to explore the reasons why Walt Disney movies contain all these forms of racist and sexist stereotypes, but they certainly deserve a further investigation.

NOTES

1 Jim Crow arose in the wake of the Civil War and it can be defined as an informal term for the practice of segregation. Jim Crow's name is taken from 1838 minstrel show character, played by a white actor called Thomas Rice who used to sing songs in blackface. He wrote a song called 'jump Jim Crow' where he depicted blacks as lazy, singing and dancing fools. The term 'Jim Crow' became a racial epithet for blacks and by the end of the 19th century, it was used to describe laws and customs that oppressed blacks, particularly in the South of the United States.

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