

**N**EW **T**RENDS IN **T**RANSLATION **S**TUDIES

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**Vol. 24**

# **Multilingual Films in Translation**

**A Sociolinguistic  
and Intercultural Study  
of Diasporic Films**

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Micòl Beseghi

Peter Lang

A contribution to the ever-growing field of audiovisual translation studies, this volume investigates the processes involved in the translation of multilingual films, a media genre where language, culture and identity are closely interwoven. To explore the relationships that get established between audiovisual translation, linguistic diversity and identity, the book analyses a corpus of immigrant films portraying the South Asian diaspora, with the aim of determining how diasporic identity is then reconstructed for the Italian audience through dubbing and subtitling. A sociolinguistic analysis model is proposed that covers all linguistic levels, including the use of ethnolects and some fundamental discourse strategies, such as code-switching and code-mixing, thus illustrating how linguistic choices and language variation are socio-culturally symbolic.

Micòl Beseghi holds a PhD in Comparative Languages and Cultures from the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia and teaches English language and translation at the University of Parma. Her main research interests concern the fields of audiovisual translation, the didactics of translation, corpus linguistics and learner autonomy in foreign-language education. She has published articles on audiovisual translation, focusing on the study of linguistic variation in films, the transposition of orality in subtitling, the use of subtitles as a pedagogic tool in translation classes and the phenomenon of fansubbing.



# Miccòl Beseeghi • Multilingual Films in Translation



# Multilingual Films in Translation

A Sociolinguistic  
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Oxford • Bern • Berlin • Bruxelles • Frankfurt am Main • New York • Wien

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# Multilingual Films in Translation

# NEW TRENDS IN TRANSLATION STUDIES

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## Introduction

*Multilingual Films in Translation* investigates the main sociolinguistic and intercultural issues involved in the process of translating multilingual films characterized by linguistic diversity, variation and hybridity. It is thus a contribution to the ever-growing field of audiovisual translation (AVT) studies and, more specifically, to the new field of multilingual audiovisual translation (MATV). Recent years have witnessed an increasing number of publications and conferences that focus on audiovisual translation, as well as the development of many different specialist courses in AVT at universities worldwide (Díaz Cintas and Anderman, 2009). On the topic of multilingualism in AVT, a growing number of studies have been published and conferences have been organized, such as the Marie Curie Euroconferences *MuTra* (<<http://www.euroconferences.info>>, 2005–2007) and *The Translation and Reception of Multilingual Films* (University Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3, 2012). Furthermore, the proliferation of new forms of entertainment such as DVD and pay-per-view TV has created a huge demand for the professional service of dubbing and subtitling, which are both indispensable tools to overcome language barriers for viewers with little or no knowledge of the foreign language(s).

Multilingual films have recently become more popular, as a result of directors and scriptwriters who wish to represent the linguistic diversity typical of contemporary society (Bruti and Di Giovanni, 2012). Focusing on multilingual films that narrate stories of migration and diaspora, this work investigates the forms which the relationship between translation, migration and identity takes in the context of AVT. In order to explore how multilingual cinema travels cross-culturally through audiovisual translation, it focuses on the dubbing and subtitling into Italian of South Asian diasporic films, a multilingual film genre which is strongly characterized by linguistic diversity and cultural hybridity. Through the analysis of the original dialogues of a selection of multilingual diasporic films – *The Namesake* (Mira Nair, 2006), *Ae Fond Kiss* (Ken Loach, 2004), *Bend It like Beckham*

(Gurinder Chadha, 2002), *East Is East* (Damien O'Donnell, 1999) – and their Italian dubbed and subtitled versions, translation strategies will be investigated for the aspects concerning the different levels of multilingualism and the sociolinguistic phenomena that mark the characters' ways of speaking and shape their identity in sociocultural contexts. The descriptive analysis, which is explicitly both intercultural and sociolinguistic, concentrates on the source texts and on the target texts – the Italian subtitled and dubbed versions – in order to observe the main issues in terms of linguistic diversity and transcultural transmission. Indeed, South Asian diasporic films seem particularly appropriate for the study of multilingualism, also in consideration of the close contact between linguistic and cultural issues in diasporic situations.

Chapter 1 presents a general overview of the existing literature in film studies and audiovisual translation studies on the topic of multilingualism. After a brief outline of audiovisual translation practices in the Italian context, with particular emphasis on dubbing and subtitling, the chapter discusses the complex nature of multilingualism and its multiple functions in films. Following Delabastita (2002, 2009), a film is considered here multilingual if it incorporates not only official languages, but also dialects, sociolects and ethnolects. The last sections of the chapter focus on the main issues and challenges involved in the translation of multilingual films. In order to study this phenomenon, the concept of third language (L<sub>3</sub>) proposed by Corrius and Zabalbeascoa (2011) is introduced. Following this model, the term L<sub>1</sub> is used to refer to the main language spoken in the original film, L<sub>2</sub> to refer to the main language used in the translated film, and L<sub>3</sub> is used to refer to any form of linguistic diversity in the source and target texts.

Chapter 2 proposes an intercultural and sociolinguistic framework for the descriptive study of multilingual films and their translation. It shows the importance of a multidisciplinary approach and the need to reconsider translation theories that are based on binary oppositions (e.g. source language versus target language) or that do not take into account the complexity of audiovisual texts. The chapter discusses the polysemiotic nature of audiovisual texts, namely how different semiotic modes give meaning to a film. Furthermore, the study is based on the broad assumption that

films display representations of identities, since they build fictional worlds where characters use various resources – including language – to define their identity (Kozloff, 2000). After considering the complex relationship between language and character portrayal in film, the nature of film language in terms of realism and fictionality is discussed.

Chapter 3 focuses on South Asian diasporic cinema – a multilingual film genre which is analysed in order to explore the topic of multilingualism and translation. The chapter illustrates the origin and development of South Asian diasporic films, their main traits and themes, their distinctive use of language(s) and their representation of migrant identities (Desai, 2004). Since issues of language, culture and identity are central to this film genre, the theoretical framework for the study of these films is grounded on the social constructionists' discursive approach (Edwards, 1997; Gergen, 1994; Harré and Van Langenhove, 1999) and the poststructuralist view (Bhabha, 1990; Brah, 1996; Hall, 1990), where the relationship between language and identity is mutually constitutive, and identity is characterized by multiplicity, fragmentation and hybridity, especially as a consequence of the increased transnational migration. Finally, the chapter presents the sample of South Asian diasporic films chosen for the study.

By means of a sociolinguistic analysis that involves all linguistic levels, Chapter 4 sets out to discover how linguistic identities manifest themselves in South Asian diasporic films. The investigation thus concentrates on the use of multilingualism and language variation through which different generations of immigrant people negotiate, construct and renew their sociocultural values and identities. The chapter illustrates some socioculturally symbolic discourse strategies, such as code-switching and code-mixing, typical of multilingual communities who use them as an act of self-expression. It then focuses on the use of ethnolects, seen as a form of multilingual expression. In particular, the variety of English spoken by South Asian first-generation immigrants (South Asian English), which is characterized by distinctive morphological, syntactic, phonological and lexical features is considered. Although this sociolinguistic analysis aims to show how diasporic films use language variation and multilingualism as a means to express the characters' hybrid identities and sociocultural values,

language is not the only means of characterization. The chapter ends with a discussion of the polysemiotic construction of characters.

Chapter 5 focuses on the dubbed and subtitled versions of the films, the significance of which is discussed from the point of view of the mechanisms underpinning language diversity in a diasporic context and its cross-cultural transposition by means of audiovisual translation. More specifically, the aim of the final chapter is to identify and discuss the compromises that are evident in the translated versions of the films in transferring multilingualism for an Italian audience. The translation solutions identified in the corpus are explained and exemplified, speculating on the translators' motivations behind their choices and considering their effects, especially on character portrayal. By looking into the preponderance of different kinds of linguistic diversity and variation, the data for each of the films examined provide insight into recurrent patterns in the translation and manipulation of multilingual films. However, the aim of the analysis is not to recommend or prescribe translation procedures. Rather, by adopting a descriptive perspective, the target texts are examined as 'facts' (Toury, 1995: 29), that is, texts belonging to the target culture, in order to identify the problems and the various solutions adopted by the translators when dealing with multilingualism.

## Translating multilingual films: Challenges and issues

All of us have, at one time or another, left a movie theater wanting to kill the translator.

— NORNES (1999: 13)

Every film is a foreign film, foreign to some audience somewhere, and not simply in terms of language.

— EGOYAN AND BALFOUR (2004: 21)

### Audiovisual translation: Towards a new scenery

Audiovisual translation (AVT) – a term used to indicate subtitling, dubbing and a wide variety of translational activities involved in the audiovisual market – is one of the most common forms of translation encountered in contemporary societies. It is a form of translation of ever-growing importance. In numerical terms, the translation activity produced in the audiovisual field is the most significant of our time: the number of audiovisual products available is enormous and increasingly accessible to a wide range of users.

AVT represents a separate area of study within translation studies (TS); its terminology is nonetheless far from being settled. The denomination of the field itself is not homogeneous, although the term AVT has become the standard referent. It has almost completely replaced all the terms previously used by different scholars such as ‘constrained translation’, ‘subordinate translation’, ‘film translation’, ‘film and TV translation’, ‘cinema translation’, ‘screen translation’ and ‘(multi)media translation’. Therefore, AVT is a generic term that encompasses ‘different translation



practices used in the audiovisual media – cinema, television, VHS – in which there is a transfer from a source to a target language, which involves some form of interaction with sound and images’ (Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2007: 12). Dubbing and subtitling are the two major types of screen translation within the profession and the most widely recognized by the audience, but AVT also includes other practices such as voiceover, narration, partial-dubbing, interpreting, subtitling for the deaf and the hard-of-hearing (SDH) and audio description for the blind and partially sighted (AD). Despite the fact that new practices like SDH and AD do not necessarily imply an interlingual transfer, they are now considered an integral part of AVT and are attracting the attention of many scholars (Díaz Cintas and Anderman, 2009).

During the 1960s and 1970s, after the advent of television and its development into a mass medium, a number of AVT studies were carried out, but AVT was still limited to a marginal area within the field of TS. It was especially during the 1980s that research in the AVT discipline became productive, with works that concentrated mainly on the issue of dubbing versus subtitling and on the constraints concerning this kind of translation (Mayoral Asensio et al., 1988). The 1980s also witnessed a significant growth in the audiovisual field, as well as in translation studies in general, reflected by a dramatic rise in the number of publications. However, the golden age of AVT truly took off in the 1990s with the proliferation of literature in the field of TS and the consolidation of a general and academic interest in audiovisual translation: ‘audiovisual translation was, finally, fully emerging as a field of its own, and growing out of the sporadic appearance which had characterized it during most of the 20th century’ (Franco Aixelá and Orero, 2005: 87–88). As underlined by Díaz Cintas and Anderman (2009: 8), ‘audiovisual translation has evolved to the point where, as a discipline, it is now one of the most vibrant and vigorous fields within Translation Studies’. AVT research (AVTS) has become a very active field in Europe, to the point that two regular international conferences are held annually (*Languages and the Media*, *Media for All*) and a research group, *ESIST* (*European Association for Studies in Screen Translation*), has been established to facilitate the exchange of information and to promote professional standards in the training and practice of AVT.