The Lingua-Cultural Importation of African American Identity in the Italian Dubbed Version of Spike Lee's *Bamboozled*

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Abstract

The process of translating audiovisual texts always implies a cultural process: in fact, every word that the audience of both the source and target cultures hears can be considered as the product of several factors, which are part of a multifaceted system composed of verbal and visual elements. More specifically, the language includes specific connotations which are irreversibly linked to the situational as well as the socio-cultural context of the film. With its story and the themes it deals with throughout the plot, *Bamboozled*, produced by the Afro-American filmmaker Spike Lee, is a product which includes many specific cultural references to the Afro-American environment and black heritage. The dubbed version of the script addressed to the Italian audience tends to weaken or lose some of this ethnic group's mono-cultural traits in favour of a target-oriented translation, which aims at importing and reconfiguring the contents of the film and, therefore, the representation of blackness.

Keywords: *audiovisual translation, Afro-American culture, Bamboozled*

Dubbing: Just Simply Translation or Socio-Cultural Adaptation?

"Each language reflects sociocultural concepts which have been crystallized over time, and even the most skilled translator cannot sever a language from the society which uses it".[1] This statement by Nir anticipates the basis of this article, which aims at revealing the translation strategies adopted by Italian experts in terms of cultural adaptation and acceptability in *Bamboozled*, a film written and directed by the Afro-American filmmaker Spike Lee[2].

In consideration of the fact that audiovisual products are generally seen as an inexhaustible means of investigating human language from multiple linguistic angles

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[1] Raphael Nir, "Linguistic and Sociolinguistic Problems in the Translation of Imported Films in Israel", *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 48 (1984): 83.

[2] Considered as one of the most challenging American film figures of the last few decades, Spike Shelton Lee is known worldwide as the first black director to undermine the white mainstream set of assumptions on which the Hollywood industry has always been focused. His ability, in fact, lies in persuading viewers to analyse the reality of Afro-American people in all its complexity, questioning all rooted stereotypes associated with the black population. Lee aims at reconceptualising black as well as white identities by presenting dramatic characters whose individuality has to face a chaotic and complex American environment. Besides his undisputed qualities as a director, his success is also based on his talent as a screenwriter and his experience as a producer. His filmography includes more than 20 films, containing famous feature movies among which *Do the Right Thing (*1989), *Jungle Fever* (1991) and *Get on the Bus* (1996).

and socio-cultural perspectives, this movie is herein considered as a precious source with which to approach and understand the Afro-American socioculture at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The language used by the characters within the plot, as well as the socio-cultural references to the environment surrounding them, encourage a broad-spectrum analysis regarding black ethnicity and heritage. There are, indeed, many occasions in the script through which viewers can experience the characters' world, a way of life that is not at all fictitious but a faithful representation of the American universe, in which every person offers his/her own individuality by promoting a documentary representation of human existence and encouraging sociological understanding and interpretation.

In this respect, Freddi and Pavesi,[3] considering the relevance of audiovisual dialogues in both the source and target versions, draw attention to the fact that the language spoken in films is inseparably linked to the situational context, whose roots can be found in the plot itself, and to the socio-cultural dimension, which is influenced by historical and cultural factors.[4]

Drawing on these observations, Paolinelli and Di Fortunato[5] highlight the importance of audiovisual products in Translation Studies, explaining that audiovisual translation not only implies a cultural process summarised by the term *translation*, but is also a complex and multi-faceted universe, whose inter-semiotic properties permanently link the audiovisual text to the original lingua-cultural background. More specifically, dialogues and images are the product of a culture, a race and an ethnicity that will remain irreversibly bound to the original product.

Therefore, the crucial role of translators, as many scholars point out (including Díaz Cintas, 2004; Bogucki and Kredens, 2010; Ranzato, 2010), cannot only be summarised by the translation of words from one linguistic code to another, but their task is to adopt and adapt the socio-linguistic framework of the original cultural environment to which the film is linked and reconfigure and reconceptualise it in the target dimension.

Re-configuration of Socio-Cultural References in the Italian *Bamboozled*

Set in the world of television, the film, produced in 2000, presents the story of an Afro-American screenwriter, Pierre Delacroix, who works for an independent television network called CNS. The protagonist, although well paid for his job, constantly suffers by always being forced to face his white superior Dunwitty's narrow-mindedness. The latter, in fact, feels free to behave and interact with other people on his staff by embracing offensive traditional stereotypes generally associated with the black

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[3] Maria Freddi and Maria Pavesi, *Analysing Audiovisual Dialogue. Linguistic and Translational Insights* (Bologna: CLUEB, 2005), 12.

[4] Although linguists have undervalued audiovisual text and its translation for many years (Díaz Cintas and Remael, *Audiovisual Translation: Subtitling*, 8), Díaz Cintas and Andermann (*Audiovisual Translation. Language Transfer on Screen*, 3) clarify the considerable change in the world of traditional translation studies that has occurred in the last two decades. A great number of experts, in fact, have focused on the translation of audiovisual products considering their relevance in many areas of research, such as socio-linguistics, anthropology and psychology (Díaz Cintas, Matamala and Neves, *New Insights into Audiovisual Translation and Media Accessibility*).

[5] Mario Paolinelli and Eleonora Di Fortunato, *Tradurre per il doppiaggio. La trasposizione linguistica dell'audiovisivo: teoria e pratica di un'arte imperfetta* (Milano: Hoepli, 2005), 1.

population and, since he is married to an Afro-American woman, explicitly declares to know black people better than the main character himself. Dissatisfied with his job, the protagonist decides to suggest a programme whose framework imitates the traditional minstrel show of the early twentieth century in order to be fired, but, contrary to expectations, Dunwitty accepts his unusual proposal. As a consequence, the new show, despite its racist and offensive ideas, is aired and becomes extremely popular with the public. A large part of the black audience, however, is angry at the themes that the programme deals with and takes to the streets to protest. The ending of the film is anything but happy because the actors and the screenwriter himself pay for their newfound success by being murdered by those who want revenge. When Delacroix is fatally shot, the audience is offered a lengthy montage of old, racially offensive Hollywood clips representing Afro-Americans in the previous century.

As discussed in the previous introductory analysis of *Bamboozled*, the complex process of audiovisual translation, in this specific case dubbing, often causes trans-cultural representations of identities that are, in most cases, neutralized and replaced in the target universe to be understood and interiorised by the new audience[6]. In fact, there are many examples in the Italian dubbed version where the cultural references to the Afro-American community, their heritage and the place in which they live, are weakened or neutralized to leave room for a more comprehensible version specifically addressed to the target audience. The very plot of this film deals with sensitive issues irreversibly linked to Afro-American history: as Lee explained, his work can be considered as a "showdown", since, being produced at the beginning of the 21st century, the story aims at depicting the way in which the Afro-American population has been represented from the beginning of American cinema production. *Bamboozled*, as the director himself clarified, is a term often used by the black leader Malcom X, who wanted to signal the fact that his people were defrauded of their identity, deceived and offended by white Americans throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Therefore, the film aims at being a satire depicting a controversial America even in the 21st century. The references to the black universe given by the audio and visual components, in fact, provide a detailed portrayal of the history of Afro-Americans offering an antithetical panorama that is always jeopardised by white-black conflict.

The main protagonist's project to air a new minstrel show is, in itself, a paradoxical metaphor to make viewers think of what minstrel shows in the previous centuries represented and meant. They were popular forms of entertainment developed in New York between the 1830s and the 1940s that aimed at representing black people as white America wanted to see them, i.e. buffoonish, lazy and purposeless individuals. Portrayals of Afro-Americans were performed by white actors in blackface makeup and

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[6] The present analysis aims at taking into consideration the inclusion of cultural elements, in reference to the American environment and to Afro-American background, in the source text and their transposition in the target version. Any change regarding the linguistic dimension has not been examined here. Due to the systematic characteristics and the constraints of the Italian language and to a target-oriented translation, linguistic traits, including morpho-syntactic and phonologic features typical of African American English, are often adapted in the dubbed version and, therefore, neutralized. Unlike the previous aspects considered, from a lexical point of view African American English includes a great variety of slang expressions whose meaning encompasses implicit socio-cultural references, which will be taken into account herein.

these TV shows promoted the development of racism and offensive behaviour towards black people throughout the century.[7]

Lee's perspective explicitly criticises the minstrel show depicting it as a form of anti-black attitude which promotes negative Afro-American stereotypes. Through the female character, Pierre Delacroix' personal assistant Sloan Hopkins, this kind of anti-black TV show is often challenged: in other words, she acts as a catalyst trying to make the other characters think of what minstrel shows meant and still symbolise for the Afro-American community. She, in fact, is the person who explains to the audience the role black people had in Hollywoodian productions of the 20th century, the stereotypes that white actors embraced to portray Afro-Americans and the ritual they observed to make their faces as black as they could. To emphasise this blatant racism in minstrel shows, the woman suggests that the protagonist should look at a series of clips from the most famous Hollywood minstrel shows, which are, in fact, shown to viewers at the end of the film. Obviously, every reference to the history of Afro-American cinema is fully understood by American viewers, but the same cannot be said of the Italian audience. In many cases, in fact, the distance between the American black background and the target culture prevents them from capturing the meaning behind the pictures and explanations.

The same consideration can be said of any allusion to the history of the Afro-American population. Although the dubbed version faithfully reports the majority of the contents offered in the original text, all the possible implications connected to the wider lingua-cultural context remain hidden to those audiences who are not familiar with the black American world. The role coon-themed antique collectibles play in the film, for instance, is explicitly clear in the American cultural product, whereas they seem to lose their meaning in the Italian translation. However, this is only partially caused by the translation of dialogues because, for those who know what these items symbolise, it is the objects themselves that automatically acquire a deeper meaning throughout the development of the plot. When Delacroix is given the first collectible, a Jolly Nigger Bank[8], he, like the audience, does not understand the reason for the gift, but then, when he is going to meet his end, he realises the relevance these objects have in Afro-American settings. In fact, they are racist-themed items whose aim is to represent black people as inferior individuals. After having seen the consequences of his choices, the protagonist blames the objects, defining them as *spear chuckers*, *porch monkeys* and *jungle bunnies*. The first expression is an offensive phrase which refers to Afro-American people's presumed pre-historic ability to hunt animals with primitive tools like spears. Likewise, the second insult has a deep cultural value, since it refers to black individuals sitting on their porches all day, wasting their time and doing nothing. The term *monkeys* is probably the most commonly used, being a derogatory expression comparing Afro-Americans to apes: the negro-ape metaphor suggests the popular stereotype which describes black individuals as primitive, rude and aggressive. As explained by Lee Lott,[9] the dehumanizing analogy with monkeys began to be widely spread at the end of the 20th century when an Afro-American, Rodney King, was almost

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[7] Robert C Toll, *Blacking Up. The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 25-26.

[8] This is a stereotypic representation of a black person, whose function is to eat money: a coin is placed on the hand and, when a small lever at the back of the item is pushed down, the arm lifts and the coins enters the mouth. As the coin is eaten, the eyes roll back.

[9] Tommy Lee Lott, *The Invention of Race: Black Culture and the Policy of Representation* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999), 14.

beaten to death by seven Los Angeles police officers following a high-speed car chase. Defined as *gorillas* by the L.A. police department, black individuals have often been associated to apes to reaffirm their presumed inferiority. The last insult, *jungle bunnies*, similarly aims at discrediting Afro-Americans and accusing them of hiding in cities like scared animals; the term *bunnies*, instead, represents the presumed ability of black criminals to escape from the police by jumping out of the windows. The cultural connotations of these expressions is neutralised in the Italian version. In fact, a "faithful" translation of the lingua-cultural implications of these nominal phrases is not possible.

This neutralization is further exemplified by a key-sentence which is often recalled and used throughout the film. One of the secondary black characters, playing the role of a stand-up comedian, acts out a poem whose refrain includes *Nigga is a beautiful thang.*[10] For the source audience, the implications of this sentence exceed its literal meaning. Used by an Afro-American, the term *nigger* gains a positive connotation and aims at reaffirming solidarity between speakers. In this case, the sentence ironically shows black people's need to affirm their values and identity in the mainstream white-oriented society. Only an expert viewer could understand the provocative illocutionary force of the utterance, which contains the African Americans' desire for liberation from white cultural hegemony and their wish to establish themselves as an autonomous community, out of the shadows of white America, which seems ineradicable.

In regard to this point, another relevant issue of Afro-American background is omitted in the dubbed version. Spike Lee, in fact, sheds light on the obstacles his community had to overcome throughout the 20th century when the mass media explicitly stood for the mainstream culture and portrayed black people as a monolithic community, whose main traits were laziness, ignorance and stupidity. Afro-American integration has, in fact, been made more difficult by the mass media which had encouraged the rest of the nation to be afraid of black people by only broadcasting scenes of violence and crime in which they were the protagonists. Before the Civil Rights Movement, TV programmes tended to foster the white mainstream attitude, which minimised black social problems by not giving neutral and detailed accounts of anything that happened in the American panorama. It is exactly for this reason that, in *Bamboozled*, when the main character is ironic about Reverend Al Sharpton[11]'s and Johnnie Cochran[12]'s activism, he is accused of being *like the media*. Taking into consideration the relevance of the argumentative path presented in the source text, the Italian translation has opted to reveal the character's superficial and unbiased comment by translating the interlocutor's insult with a more weakened but clearer line: Delacroix is admonished for *talking like a white*.

Unlike in the previous case, the Italian adaptation distances itself from Lee's film when the main protagonist, Delacroix, alludes to Marion Barry[13]'s arrest in January 1990. Ironically commenting on the absence of any African American member in his

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[10] Written and pronounced in African American English, the line means *Nigger is a beautiful thing.*

[11] Born in New York in 1957, Alfred Charles Sharpton Jn. is a civil rights activist and Baptist minister.

[12] Johnnie L. Cochram (1937 – 2005) was an American lawyer. He is still remembered for his role in the defence of several African Americans, such as O.J. Simpson, Sean Combs, Tupac Shakur, Snoop Doog and Michael Jackson.

[13] Born in 1936, Marion Shepilov Barry Jr. is an Afro-American democratic politician who is currently serving as a member of the Council of the District of Columbia. He became internationally famous as mayor of Washington D.C. for sixteen years (between 1979 to 1991 and between 1995 to 1999).

new team of screenwriters, he says that "perhaps they couldn't put their crack pipes down long enough to apply",[14] implicitly mentioning the civil-rights activist who became famous because he was videotaped smoking crack cocaine and arrested by the F.B.I. Too specific to be fully understood by the target audience, the allusion has been omitted in the Italian text, leaving room for a more general comment on cocaine addicts.

Other interesting references to Afro-American heritage are weakened in the target version. For example, Sloan Hopkins' brother defines his sister as a *house nigger*. This phrase is commonly considered as a pejorative term for a black woman because it is used to compare someone to a slave-owner's house slave from the historic period of legal slavery in the U.S.A. The dubbed version seems to aim at being more "politically correct" avoiding to use the equivalent Italian term for *slave* by choosing a weaker term more similar to *servant*. In another example, one of the secondary characters talks about the slavery period experienced by Afro-Americans defining it as their *holocaust*. The Italian translation, although it could be faithful to the original, offers a paraphrased version: the term, undoubtly satured with a specific historic meaning, is weakened and translated with *the suffering endured by the Afro-American race*. In this case the allusion to the genocide of the Jews in the 20th century has been deliberately omitted by Italian translators to leave room for a more general line, whose meaning is not univocally linked to the Nazi persecution. With this choice, however, the illocutionary force of the original metaphoric expression is lost in the Italian text.

The metaphoric expression *to drink the Kool-Aid* is lost in the dubbed version too. This term is typical of the American lingua-cultural field since the Jonestown tragedy in the late '70s, when more than 900 members of the Peoples Temple religious organisation killed themselves after drinking a soft drink similar to Kool-Aid, probably containing drugs.[15] Being a monocultural reference,[16] the allusion to this tragic event has been made clearer for the source audience too. The speaker specifies that he has no intention of imitating Jim Jones, the founder and leader of the aforementioned spiritual congragation. Taking into account the lack of an equivalent expression in the dubbed language, the line has not been translated into Italian where a free illustrative translation has been opted for. The key-theme remains that of suicide but the speaker explicitly points out he does not want to run into danger, so he decides to leave the programme.

Audiovisual Products as an Epitome of Afro-American Identity

As for cultural, social and historical references, the inclusion of previous or contemporary famous audiovisual products in *Bamboozled* helps Lee to represent and

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[14] Spike Lee, "Brainstorm," *Bamboozled*, DVD, directed by Spike Lee (New York: New Line Cinema, 2001).

[15] Rebecca Moore, "Drinking the Kool-Aid: The Cultural Transformation of a Tragedy," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 7/2 (2003): 92 – 100, accessed February 12, 2012, doi: 10.1525/nr.2003.7.2.92.

[16] Jan Pedersen, "How is Culture Rendered in Subtitles?" in *MuTra 2005-Challenges of Multidimentional Translation: Conference Proceedings* (2005), accessed December 12, 2011, http://euroconferences.info/proceedings/2005_Proceedings/2005_Pedersen_Jan.pdf.
Pedersen explains that "ECRs [Extralinguistic Culture-bound References] are expressions pertaining to *realia*, to cultural items, which are not part to a language system" (2). As clarified by the linguist, Extralinguistic Culture-bound References can be divided in three groups: transcultural ECRs, which are not associated with the source culture and are easily understood by viewers; monocultural ECRs, whose comprehension is more difficult for the target audience; and microcultural ECRs, which are too specialized or too local to be understood even by viewers of the source culture.

contextualise Afro-American identity, promoting a multifaceted and evolving portrayal of the black community. In fact, the plot itself and the themes that revolve around it, foster a constant comparison between the new TV programme created by the main character and Afro-American audiovisual products that appeared on American television in the second part of the 20th century.

The first TV series mentioned are *Homeboys in Outer Space* and *The Secret Diary of Desmond Pfeiffer.* The former is an American science fiction sitcom that aired between 1996 and 1997 starring the Afro-American actors, Flex Alexander and Darryl M. Bell. The story revolved around the two protagonists, who were astronauts travelling around the universe in a fictitious future. The short-lived late '90s UPN sitcom is taken by the protagonist of *Bamboozled* as a negative example of Afro-American audiovisual products, since it supported the stereotypical characterizations of Blackness. Likewise, *The Secret Diary of Desmond Pfeiffer*,[17] aired one year later, is criticized by the screenwriter because it still aimed at portraying Afro-Americans as inferior individuals. Unfortunately both TV series were not imported to the Italian peninsula so, in the dubbed version, the two allusions to the sitcoms are necessarily lost and, likewise, the controversies revolving around them from the social and cultural perspective are not transferred either.

The same choice has been made by the Italian translation for *In Living Color*, an Afro-American sketch comedy television series aired on Fox between 1990 and 1994. Presenting a talented group of actors that included Damon Wayans, Kim Coles and Jim Carrey, the comedy show aimed at challenging the traditional stereotypes associated with black people and at parodying the mainstream racial misconceptions. It was soon acclaimed by the black as well as the white audience, for its clever, witty and provocative sketches, so that it even won an Emmy award in 1990. As a consequence of the low popularity of the programme in Italy, it is not included in the target version.

Unfortunately, the comic misadventures of teenagers Kenal and his friend Ken are omitted in the Italian script too. Like the other black comedy sitcoms mentioned in Spike Lee's film, *Kenal and Ken* ran on the American television in the late 90s, gaining the favour of the public. It focused on the antics of the two mischievous protagonists, who, although apparently offering the audience the traditional black image that they were expected to give, were intelligent and came from rich Afro-American families. On Italian television, the teen comedy sitcom aired some years later but it did not become as popular as in the country in which it was produced.

Among all the TV programmes mentioned by Spike Lee's characters, the only comedy talk show included in the Italian version is *The Chris Rock Show*, which ran for four seasons between 1997 and 2000. The weekly show was created and presented by the internationally famous Afro-American, Chris Rock, who aimed at discussing the image of blackness explicitly suggested by the white cultural hegemony. Rock's genius, furthermore, lies in the fact that he was one of the first to challenge Malcom X's philosophy, whose main idea was not to air Afro-American dirty laundry in public. In fact, through clever sketches, interesting interviews with illustrious American public figures and eye-opening footages of every-day life in the U.S.A., the stand-up comedian addressed serious and controversial social and political problems, pulling apart many of the core issues surrounding the black community, such as politics, racism, integration,

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[17] Accused of dealing with Afro-American slavery superficially and ironically, the American sitcom, aired on UPN, was soon cancelled.

religion and education. For this reason, as Acham[18] points out, *The Chris Rock Show* played, and still plays, a central role in the history of Afro-American television and the construction of black representation. Many subsequent TV shows have imitated and taken the cue from this Afro-American stand-up comedian's style and comedy approach. Unlike the other protagonists of the TV programmes included in the original film, Chris Rock also became quite popular in Italy during the 90s for his roles played in action movies such as *Beverly Hills Cop II*, therefore his show is not omitted in the dubbed version. Unfortunately, as for other important references to Afro-American culture and heritage, the relevance of Rock's programme is not fully understood by target viewers, who can only be encouraged to know more about him and his ideas in order to learn more about the Afro-American environment.

The Importation of White – Black Derogatory Terms in the Italian Script

The film includes many expressions typical of the Afro-American dimension which may be difficult for an audience other than the source one to comprehend because it does not share the same cultural knowledge as the one to which the film is primarily addressed[19]. As stated above, in fact, although the target adaptation could faithfully report the semantic value of the original line, its illocutionary force always tends to be weakened or neutralized in the second script because of the lack of the same cultural traits. The term *nigger*, for instance, is often used by Spike Lee's characters and aims at depicting the atavistic opposition between black and white people, who exploit their counterparts' skin colour to stress the difference between the two communities. The term is commonly used with a derogatory connotation to describe black people as buffoonish, rude, lazy and ignorant. Parallel to *nigger*, another term, *coon*, is generally used to summarise all stereotypes associated with blacks. The expression, although not originally racially offensive, gained an offensive connotation in the 20th century and is still used by white people to portray blacks as inferior individuals whose main characteristics are lack of education, impoliteness and an unwillingness to work. On the other hand, the terms *whitey* and *cracker* are chosen by Afro-Americans to insult white Americans: both the terms aim at demeaning white people focussing on the colour of their skin. Obviously, whereas the first denigrating term, *nigger*, is translated into Italian, the target language provides no equivalent expression for the others, whose cultural connotation therefore remains hidden.

Furthermore, the film offers some examples of offensive terms which are generally used by Afro-Americans to insult other members of their own community. *Uncle Tom* or *Tom*, for instance, is a way of accusing a black individual of behaving like a white person. In general terms, indeed, those people who are well-educated, have

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[18] Christine Acham, *Revolution Televised: Prime Time and the Struggle for Blackness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 180-181.

[19] Explanations of the African American terms analysed in this paragraph will be given taking into consideration three of the most illustrious texts dealing with the topic:

Jonathan Green, *Slang Down the Ages. The Historical Development of Slang* (London: Kyle Cathie Limited, 1993).

Jonathan E. Lighter, ed., *Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang* (New York: Random House, 1994).

Clarence Major, ed., *Juba to Jive. A Dictionary of African-American Slang* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994).

a good job and a respectable social status, are considered as traitors of their own race and are therefore referred to as *Uncle Tom*. Although this term is reported in the dubbed version, only an expert audience could catch the allusion to the 1852 book *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* whose protagonist is a dutiful, long-suffering black servant faithful to his white master.

From an etymologic perspective, the expression *Handkerchief-head* is also interesting. It was coined from the stereotypical Afro-American mammy figure, *Aunt Jemima*. This female character is popularly known to Americans because she was often included in minstrel shows in the early twentieth century. In the scene, the complete noun phrase *Handkerchief-head-wearing ass* is used as a synonym for *Uncle Tom*, and aims at describing a servile and submissive black individual. Given the lack of an equivalent expression in the dubbed language, the translators have opted for a more common Italian expression which, as in other cases discussed previously, again necessarily loses the cultural connotations and social references of the source text. In addition to the above expressions, *Sambo* is another racial offensive term commonly used in the situational context of the film, as well as in the black socio-cultural panorama to portray Afro-Americans as buffoonish. Imported by the Spanish word *zambo*, the term was originally used in the 19th century to describe those of mixed African and Indian or European origins. Since Bannerman's book *The Story of Little Black Sambo* was published in 1899, the term began to have a derogatory connotation and was used by Americans to depict black people as ignorant and lazy.

In regard to this aspect, another derogatory epithet, *Benedict Arnold,* is included in the audiovisual product. In order to understand this insult, it is necessary to know the metaphoric path offered by this expression. Arnold was a soldier who fought during the American War of Independence. He initially began his career as an American general, but he turned tail and decided to join forces with the English Army. Despite the clear meaning in the original language, the expression has not obviously been reported in the dubbed version. Most viewers, in fact, are not familiar with the negative American icon and therefore the translators have opted for more common Italian offensive terms which could describe the character as a traitor.

Conclusion: Does Italian Audiovisual Translation Neutralize Afro-American Identity in *Bamboozled*?

According to Pettit[20]'s words, "language is an expression of culture and culture is expressed through language. An audiovisual text offers a cultural representation of the world, both through language and the image". Therefore, taking into consideration both source and target cultures, experts generally aim at mediating between the two socio-cultural backgrounds as well as the two linguistic codes used by the script. The insurmountable problem they often have to face deals with the constant presence of mono-cultural references in the original audiovisual text, which are difficult, or even impossible, to translate. In fact, a cultural trait always contains culturally specific information which cannot often be faithfully reported because of the lack of an equivalent term in the target linguistic code, the lack of an expression carrying the same message or just because target viewers could not clearly understand the underlying

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[20] Zoe Pettit, "Connecting Cultures: Cultural Transfer in Subtitling and Dubbing," in *New Trends in Audiovisual Translation*, ed. Jorge Díaz Cintas (Bristol/Buffalo/Toronto: Multilingual Matters, 2009), 44.

meaning of a line since they are not familiar with the cultural world portrayed by the audiovisual product.

Having to face every constraint conveyed by the process of translation, translators tend to opt for a negotiating approach, whose goal is to amalgamate the two cultures in order to preserve what can be saved from the original cultural dimension and mix it with the target one. Such a process can often cause the loss of lingua-cultural features typical of a precise place or a specific ethnic group characterized precisely by a distinct culture.

Taking into consideration Spike Lee's film *Bamboozled*, made in the year 2000, the Italian dubbed version aims at being as fair as possible to the original in translating the content of the English lines, always trying to focus on the illocutionary force of every characters' utterance. Audiovisual translation, however, finds it extremely difficult to import and adopt many of the references irreversibly linked to Afro-American identity. Social and cultural elements are often attached to the lingua-cultural system in which black individuals live and cannot simply be replaced in the target culture because they would not be contextualised and understood correctly by the new audience.

Yet, the Afro-American producer's creation itself, does in fact aim at addressing serious and controversial themes whose origins date back to the 19th century and the period of slavery. Since, neither such social issues nor the American white-black struggle are included in the cultural panorama of most Italian viewers, in some cases, the translators have been forced to weaken or even neutralise the topics discussed by the protagonists to offer the target audience a more accessible translation even if the meaning of the original is substantially altered. As a consequence, the cultural traits of the Afro-American population, namely their widespread sorrow and anger for the way in which white Americans have portrayed them on television, remains ostensibly hidden to the Italian audience, allowed only a partial access to the otherwise palpable tension between blackness and whiteness.

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Importul lingvistic şi cultural al identităţii africano-americane în versiunea dublată a filmului *Bamboozled* regizat de Spike Lee

Procesul traducerii textelor audiovizuale presupune întotdeauna şi o dimensiune culturală: fiecare cuvânt perceput de către telespectatorii culturii sursă, precum şi cuvintele ce ajung la telespectatorii culturii ţintă sunt produsul mai multor factori care compun un sistem plural format din elemente verbale şi vizuale. Mai precis, limba are anumite conotaţii specifice legate ireversibil de contextul situaţional şi socio-cultural al filmului. Date fiind povestea şi temele pe care le abordează în intriga sa, filmul *Bamboozled* al regizorului afro-american Spike Lee este un produs ce include mai multe referinţe culturale specifice mediului afro-american şi moştenirii negrilor. Versiunea dublată a scenariului, care se adresează unui auditoriu italian, are tendinţa de a face mai puţin pregnante sau chiar de a omite unele dintre trăsăturile monoculturale ale acestui grup etnic, în favoarea unei traduceri orientate spre cultura ţintă, care are ca scop importul şi reconfigurarea conţinuturilor filmului şi, prin urmare, importul şi reconfigurarea reprezentărilor identităţii negre însăşi.