

Translating Foreign Languages and Non-Native Varieties of English in Animated Films: Dubbing Strategies in Italy and the Case of *Despicable Me 2*

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore how foreign languages (i.e., languages other than English) and non-native varieties of English are used in Anglo-American animated films and to investigate the strategies adopted in Italian dubbing to deal with such multilingual features. The paper combines insights into professional practice with a close examination of a specific case study. The film *Despicable Me 2* (dir. Pierre Coffin, Chris Renaud, Illumination Entertainment, 2013) has been chosen for analysis since it displays more than one language and several language varieties (British English, American English and foreign-accented English). The film also exploits visual and verbal stereotypes which enhance the comedic elements of the film. This multiplicity of voices and identities through language variety represents a challenge for audiovisual translators. By analysing the representation of characters and drawing on personal communication with Italian dubbing practitioners, the article aims to unveil how linguistic variation, multilingualism and diversity are dealt with in dubbing. The article will show that, although general trends may be identified as far as foreign languages and non-native varieties are concerned, the solutions offered by dubbing professionals often depend on a variety of factors and agents.

Key words: animated films, dubbing, linguistic variation, non-native varieties of English, multilingualism, dubbing strategies, Italian dubbing professionals, dubbing agents.

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1. Introduction

Language variation is often exploited in films with different functions. It can establish a setting, provide characterisation, construct identities and often (especially in comedies and animation) trigger humour. As pointed out by Lippi-Green (1997, p. 85, 2012), Kozloff (2000, p. 82) and Hodson (2014) among others, linguistic features typically associated with specific language varieties are used by scriptwriters to define characters and are often conveyors of stereotypes.

In animation, languages other than English and foreign-accented English are often used in what Wahl has described as “audio-postcarding” (Wahl, 2008, p. 337). Here, foreign-accented English and the peppering of a few foreign words and expressions may suggest the setting of the story (for instance French in Disney Pixar’s 2007 *Ratatouille* set in Paris). As Díaz-Cintas puts it, “foreign languages” are “minimised and are merely used as the brushstrokes of exoticism, in a forced and somehow unnatural attempt at reminding the viewers that the action, though spoken overwhelmingly in English, takes place on foreign soil” (Díaz-Cintas, 2011, p. 217).

However, perhaps the most frequent function of foreign-accented English in the dialogue of animated films is that of triggering humour. Actors voicing characters often play with their vocal performance and accents so as to recreate specific dialects and character types based on nationalities, areas of origin, or social class (see Wright and Lallo 2009; Lippi-Green 1997, 2012). This linguistic characterisation may be exaggerated and parodic, thus enhancing comedy (on the use of multilingualism as a vehicle of humour see Chiaro 2007, 2008; Chiaro and De Bonis 2019; De Bonis 2014a; Dore 2019 among others).

A further important feature that contributes to creating identities and triggering humour in animation is the interplay of semiotic systems: words and images, aural and visual elements are used to create characterisation. Di Giovanni has observed that in Disney films “visual and verbal stereotypes [...] are employed to narrate otherness” (Di Giovanni 2007, p. 93). A foreign identity or “otherness” is signalled through accent and language use (for instance Puss in Boots’ Spanish-accented English in DreamWorks’ the *Shrek* saga signals the cat’s Spanishness). Several animated films display characters whose English has a marked foreign accent or contains foreign words or expressions, as well as non-standard grammar. Some animated films also contain brief exchanges in more than one language and instances of code-switching and code-mixing. This multilingualism may signal a “foreign” (i.e., non-Anglo-American) identity of the speaker. However, it is worth pointing out that animation as a genre does not seem to contain a high quantity of exchanges in foreign languages. This may be due especially to the type of audience it is aimed at, i.e. children, and to the fact that it does not aim at a realistic portrayal of reality, but rather at comedy.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the presence of multilingualism in animated films, to describe how languages other than English and non-native varieties of English are used in Anglo-American animated films and to investigate and understand the strategies adopted by dubbing professionals to tackle such multilingual features, examining the constraints under which they work. For the

purposes of this study, the term “foreign languages” refers to “languages other than English,” and “foreign-accented English” refers to “non-native varieties of English,” these being language varieties which signal that the speaker is not a native speaker of English. These are instances of what Zabalbeascoa and Corrius define as L3 or third language, that is, “any intentional departure from L1, by resorting, for whatever reason, to dialects, idiolects, made-up languages, and foreign languages” (Zabalbeascoa & Corrius 2014, p. 256). Foreign accents, being instances of a language variety other than the L1 (the main language of the source text) and the L2 (the main language of the target text) are also included in this definition of L3.

The paper will focus on the English-language film *Despicable Me 2* (Illumination Entertainment, 2013), directed by Pierre Coffin and Chris Renaud, as a case study. As the film is a US production, American English is expected as the default English variety. *Despicable Me 2* has been chosen since it contains more than one language (English and Russian) and some characters speaking non-native varieties of English. This film also exploits visual and verbal stereotypes of Latinos (Ramírez Berg, 2002), British people and Italian-Americans to trigger humour. It is also interesting for the range of dubbing strategies that are adopted in the Italian dubbed version. The paper will show that, although general trends in dubbing may be identified as far as the translation of multilingualism and non-native varieties is concerned, the solutions offered by dubbing professionals often depend on various factors and agents.

As far as the data and procedures are concerned, the paper adopts an approach which combines linguistic analysis of a specific case study with insights into professional practice. Since the dubbing of animated films involves numerous agents, and since translation strategies may be determined by several factors, personal communication with some Italian dubbing practitioners took place between 2015 and 2020. The paper will focus in particular on the conversations with dialogue writer and dubbing director Fiamma Izzo, who was responsible for the Italian dubbed version of *Despicable Me 2* (F. Izzo, personal communication February and March 2019, April 2020). When relevant, the paper will also quote personal communication with Roberto Morville, who worked for more than 20 years as a Creative Director for the Walt Disney Company, supervising the dubbing production of Disney and Disney-Pixar animated films in Italy (R. Morville, personal communication, March 2019, April 2020).¹

2. The Translation of Multilingualism and Language Variation in (Animated) Films

The translation of linguistic variation and multilingualism for dubbing and subtitling is particularly difficult due to the challenge of reproducing all of the nuances and connotations attached to language varieties and multiple languages within a film. This is particularly demanding because of the non-equivalence between varieties in different languages. Research on linguistic variation and

¹ I would like to thank Fiamma Izzo and Roberto Morville for answering my questions and for their kind help.

multilingualism in audiovisual translation has flourished in the last 15 years with conferences, research projects (the TraFilm Project, the PluriTAV Project), articles, book chapters, books and journal issues being devoted to this topic. Several publications look specifically at the translation of linguistic variation and heterolingualism in dubbing and subtitling, focussing on various genres from different perspectives (Beseghi 2017, 2019; Chiaro 2007, 2008, 2009; Corrius, Espasa, and Zabalbeascoa 2019; Corrius and Zabalbeascoa 2011, 2019; De Bonis 2014a and 2014b; De Higes Andino 2014; Díaz-Cintas 2011; Dore 2019 and 2020; Ellender 2015; Heiss 2004, 2014; Monti 2009, 2016; Pérez de Heredia and De Higes Andino 2019; Ranzato 2010; Zabalbeascoa and Corrius 2014 among others). Recent examples are the 2019 *MonTi* issue entitled *Multilingualism and Representation of Identities in Audiovisual texts* (Pérez de Heredia and De Higes Andino 2019) and a volume edited by Corrius, Espasa, and Zabalbeascoa (2019).

In the context of Italian, the fact that dubbing traditionally uses standard Italian, with a neutral diction, complicates the issue even further. Chiaro has observed that in Italian dubbing there is a “homogenising norm” (Chiaro, 2008) according to which variation is neutralised. Studies by Pavesi (1994, 2005, see also 2016) have also stressed the tendency towards standardisation and neutralisation of sociolinguistic variation in Italian dubbing, with a few exceptions. Chiaro argues that “In dubbing it is quite unusual to connote all characters in terms of their geographic, ethnic or social origin. [...] [C]omedies constitute an exception to the homogenizing convention” (Chiaro, 2009, pp. 158, 159). It can be argued that animated films constitute another exception to this neutralisation and “homogenising norm” in Italian dubbing. Furthermore, it is plausible to argue that neutralisation and homogenisation only take place with specific language varieties such as British, American, Australian English and not with others (Minutella, 2021). For instance, the homogenising norm does not appear to be at work when characters speak foreign-accented English. This “foreign” characterisation in fact seems to be reproduced in dubbing (Minutella, 2012; Monti, 2016 among others). As pointed out by Heiss

The “cliché of foreign talk” has always been a favorite means of parodic character representation in comedy. [...] Dubbing a film that instrumentalizes “foreign talk” is not commonly seen as problematic, since similar strategies can be developed in the target language to accommodate this. Incorrect syntax, pronunciation, inadequate lexical use, and so on, can be reproduced in all languages with little difficulty [...]. Foreign accents also exhibit certain patterns that call up clichéd representations (Heiss, 2014, p. 7).

Recent research on a corpus of 21st-century US animated films shows that both non-native varieties of English and foreign languages tend to be conveyed in Italian dubbing through strategies of “preservation” (De Bonis, 2014b) and sometimes “hypercharacterisation” (Parini, 2009), especially when the function of such varieties is comedy and parody (see Minutella, 2021).

Furthermore, several studies on Italian dubbing have pointed out that, especially in comedies and in animation, some characters are geographically or ethnically connoted and Italian regional accents are sometimes used in dubbing (see Barra, 2007; Bruti, 2009; Bruti and Vignozzi, 2016; Chiaro, 2008,

2009; Dore, 2020; Ferrari, 2010; Fusari, 2007; Minutella, 2016, 2018, 2021; Pavesi, 1994, 2005, 2016; Ranzato, 2010; Rossi, 2006).

3. Comments by Italian Dubbing Professionals

Between 2015 and 2020 I had personal communication (both via e-mail, telephone and face-to-face) with Italian dubbing professionals involved in the translation and dubbing of Anglo-American animated films (for a more detailed account see Minutella, 2021).² Since the case study analysed in this paper is *Despicable Me 2*, I will focus in particular on the comments made by its dialogue writer and dubbing director, Fiamma Izzo, who provided information on how the Italian dubbed version was produced. What emerges from the conversations with dubbing professionals is that the approach to languages and accents in dubbing varies from film to film and is not a choice taken by the dubbing director or the dialogue writer, never mind the translator. Izzo actually points out that decisions about whether to use languages other than Italian, foreign accents, Italian regional accents or even Italian dialects in the dubbed version are usually taken by the client (F. Izzo, personal communication, March 2019). The term “client” refers to either the US production company or the Italian distributor of the US company. Izzo also points out that major distributors in Italy have a localization office and an in-house dubbing supervisor who provides guidelines on how to approach specific cultural and linguistic issues and comments on the final product. For some animated films there is also an international dubbing supervisor. In the specific case of *Despicable Me 2*, both an international dubbing supervisor and the film directors themselves controlled the dubbing process (F. Izzo, personal communication April 2020).

Izzo and other professionals have stressed the fact that with animated films, and especially those produced by Big Majors which have their own distributors in various countries, the client gives them precise directions on how to tackle foreign languages/accents and other translation issues. Izzo also highlights the fact that the dialogue writer and the dubbing director must always comply with the client’s requests. The client decides how the dubbing team should approach the presence of multiple languages or specific accents and dialects, whether to use specific accents or dialects in Italian. As Izzo puts it, commenting on the translation/dubbing choices regarding animated films and products by the Majors, “we never have freedom” (F. Izzo, personal communication, February 2019). The dubbing process of animated films distributed by the Big Majors is guided by the client, who supervises the various phases, from the translation and adaptation to the final mixing of the dubbed film. This situation is very different from what happens with several other audiovisual products, where the dubbing team is given much more freedom. As far as the choice of dubbing actors for animation is concerned, voice casting is guided by the client, with the marketing department playing

² The professionals were dubbing directors, dialogue writers, translators, dubbing assistants, dubbing actors and a creative director, all working on animated films.

a major role. As regards the main characters of animated films, voice tests are conducted in Italy and the voices are chosen by the US client (F. Izzo, personal communication, March 2019).

Discussing the use of foreign accents in Italian dubbing, Izzo states that as a dubbing director she prefers to resort to foreign accents only if there are foreign accents in the original version, and that, if possible, she prefers to cast foreign dubbers because she does not like affected accents, which sound “fake”. Alternatively, if no foreign dubbers are available, she usually appoints dialect coaches who help Italian dubbing actors to pronounce their lines and words in a natural-sounding way. Izzo points out that when she directs, she aims at authenticity. Nevertheless, she also admits that if the accent is affected and “fake” in the original film (usually with a comic aim), then it can be affected and fake in dubbing as well (F. Izzo, personal communication, March 2019).

The conversations with dubbing professionals have revealed that the production company itself or the distributor’s marketing department may impose the choice of celebrity dubbers for specific characters (Minutella, 2021; on the practice of casting celebrities as voice actors in animation and in dubbed animation see Sánchez-Mompeán, 2015).

As regards the issue of multilingualism and the presence of foreign languages and foreign-accented English, Izzo (personal communication, March 2019) and Morville (personal communication, March 2019) point out that dubbing professionals attempt to recreate the creative intentions of the original film and its director(s). Generally speaking, if the original film contains speech in a foreign language or with foreign-accented English, the foreignness tends to be retained in the dubbed version. However, dubbing practitioners also emphasise that this is not always possible and that the final strategy depends on a number of factors, among whom the director’s or distributor’s requests, that is, the translation brief (see Díaz-Cintas, 2011). In the case of animated films by Big Majors, the translation brief (or translation commission) consists of a number of documents which accompany the video file and the English dialogue file. These documents are sent by the US production company/the distributor to the dialogue writer and dubbing team. In particular, a specific document called Creative Letter contains information about the film, its plot and characters, guidelines on voice casting and on how to approach specific issues. The English script (called English Dialogue List) also contains explanatory comments (for further insights into the dubbing process of animated films and comments by Italian dubbing practitioners see Minutella, 2021; on dubbing post-production material and company guidelines see Chaume, 2012; Spiteri Miggiani, 2019).

4. The Case of *Despicable Me 2* (2013)

The protagonist of the *Despicable Me* saga is Gru, a tall, gloomy, genius super villain who is helped by elderly scientist Dr Nefario and a large number of yellow naughty creatures, known as the Minions. In the first film of the trilogy, Gru tried to steal the moon using a machine that reduced its size. In order to achieve this goal, he adopted three orphaned girls and he ended up caring for them. In the second film of the saga Gru has metamorphosed from super villain into a caring adoptive father who

organises birthday parties for his daughters and runs a jelly-making factory. However, a new, unknown super villain menaces the world: someone has stolen a mutagen from a secret Arctic laboratory. Silas Ramsbottom, the head of the Anti-Villain League (AVL), convinces Gru to work with them in order to find the person who stole the mutagen. The main suspects are two shopkeepers in a shopping mall: the Mexican restaurateur (Eduardo Pérez) and the Asian owner of a wig shop (Floyd Eagle-san). Table 1 below contains the list of characters, the voice actors in the original English version and the dubbing actors in the Italian dubbed version.

Table 1.

List of characters, voice actors and dubbing actors

Character	Voice actor – Original version	Dubbing actor – Italian dubbed version
Gru	Steve Carell	Max Giusti
Lucy Wilde	Kristen Wiig	Arisa
Eduardo Pérez/El Macho	Benjamin Bratt	Neri Marcorè
Antonio Pérez (Eduardo's son)	Moisés Arias	Alex Polidori
Dr Nefario	Russell Brand	Nanni Baldini
Silas Ramsbottom	Steve Coogan	Carlo Cosolo
Floyd Eagle-san	Ken Jeong	Haruhiko Yamanouchi
Margo	Miranda Cosgrove	Rossa Caputo
Agnes	Elsie Fisher	Arianna Vignoli
Edith	Dana Gaier	Veronica Benassi

Source: AntonioGenna, 2013.

Some observations can be made on the voice actors in the original version and the dubbing actors in the Italian version. First, the Mexican characters in the English film (Eduardo Pérez and his son Antonio) are voiced by so-called “Latino” actors, that is, American actors with Latin-American origins. Floyd is voiced by an Asian-American actor. This might suggest an attempt on the part of the filmmakers to provide believable or authentic accents, rather than using minstrelsy and fake accents. As for the Italian dubbed version, three Italian celebrities were cast as the protagonists. They were TV presenter Max Giusti, singer Arisa and comedian Neri Marcorè. The Asian character in the film is dubbed in Italian by a Japanese dubber, while the Mexican characters and Gru are dubbed by Italian dubbers.

4.1. Foreign languages and Foreign-Accented English in *Despicable Me 2*: the Original English and the Dubbed Italian Versions

Despicable Me 2 opens with some lines in Russian. Dr Nefario has an English (British) accent, and in particular a Cockney accent. Silas Ramsbottom speaks an upper-class British English (Received

Pronunciation), secret agent Lucy Wilde and Gru's adoptive daughters speak American English. The protagonist Gru speaks English with an undefined foreign accent, while the antagonist, Eduardo Pérez, speaks a heavy Spanish-accented English. His son Antonio also speaks with a Spanish accent, and a minor character in an Italian restaurant has an affected, broad Italian-American accent.

4.1.1. Russian

As previously pointed out, *Despicable Me 2* contains a quite uncommon case (in animated films) of the actual presence of a foreign language being left untranslated. The opening sequence of the film is set outside a "Top Secret Research laboratory, Arctic circle" (so the captions read). Two heavily-dressed men are playing cards when they suddenly see in the sky above their heads a huge magnet which attracts and takes the laboratory and all the metal objects off the ground. In this short sequence the characters (voiced by Nikolai Stoilov) speak some lines in Russian³, which are not translated into English in the original version. The use of the Russian language is meant to establish the setting and emphasise the "otherness" of the characters. Since understanding the content of the dialogue is not important for the development of the plot or characterisation, and the audience can deduce what the men are talking about from the images, the Russian language is left untranslated. These exchanges in Russian could be interpreted, using O'Sullivan's words, as "a musical feature of the acoustic landscape" of the film (O'Sullivan, 2011, p. 70). In the Italian dubbed version the foreign language (or L3, using Corrius and Zabalbeascoa's, 2011 terminology) is maintained and left untranslated. The dubbed version thus reproduces the choice made in the original version (see Díaz-Cintas, 2011).

4.1.2. Non-Native Varieties of English: Gru, Eduardo and the Waiter

US comedian Steve Carell, who voices Gru, explains in an interview that Gru's accent is "not based on any nationality," is "not really an accent," but that Gru is indeed from "not here." Carell claims that he played with vocal approaches that involved accents without choosing a specific one, without aiming at being realistic, and that the accent was invented. Through the use of this affected, made-up accent, Gru sounds evil yet comical. Nevertheless, despite the voice actor's intentions and opinion, Gru's accent is definitely "foreign": his voice and accent identify him as a non-native speaker of the English language. He is non-American, "other," and although the accent does not aim at any authenticity, it does sound eastern-European.⁴ However, no reference to his nationality is made in the film.

³ I would like to thank my colleagues Nadia Caprioglio and Massimo Maurizio for their comments and translation from Russian into Italian.

⁴ Comments on the characters' accents are based on my own perception as well as on feedback provided by a small group of Italian MA students, some native speakers of English and native speakers of Spanish.

In the Italian dubbed version, Gru's foreign accent is neutralised. This is quite an uncommon strategy in animated films, since non-native varieties of English tend to be reproduced in dubbing (Minutella 2021). The choice of erasing Gru's peculiar foreign accent and therefore his linguistic otherness was determined by extra-linguistic reasons. Izzo in fact explains that the marketing department of Universal wanted Gru to be dubbed by a celebrity (Izzo, personal communication, February 2020). The client (Universal) wanted the Italian dubbed version to have celebrities in the leading roles, as a marketing strategy. As a result, TV presenter Max Giusti dubbed Gru, singer Arisa dubbed Lucy, and actor-comedian Neri Marcorè dubbed Eduardo Pérez. This choice had repercussions on the characters' linguistic characterisation. Celebrities in fact are cast so that they can advertise the film, take part in openings and press conferences, in order to raise interest in the film and attract the audience (on celebrity voices in dubbed animated films see Sánchez-Mompeán, 2015 and Minutella, 2021). Universal chose Giusti as the Italian voice of Gru, and wanted his voice to be recognisable by the Italian audience. As a result, the "foreign" accent of Gru disappeared in the Italian version. The need to have a recognisable celebrity as the voice of the dubbed character overcame the foreign linguistic characterisation of Gru. This was also possible because, as previously observed, no mention of Gru's nationality or origins is made in the films.

However, the elimination of Gru's "foreign" accent in Italian has repercussions on the translation of dialogues in *Despicable Me 2* when Shannon (a woman with whom Gru has a date) makes a comment on his "exotic" accent. Since in the Italian dubbed version Gru does not have any "exotic" accent, dialogue writer Izzo had to modify the content of the lines, as illustrated in example (1) below:

(1) *Despicable Me 2* (2013)

English original version:

Shannon: Your accent is so exotic.

Gru: Oh, well, thank you very much. I was-

Shannon: I know someone who can fix that for you. And you'll be talking normal in no time!

Italian dubbed version:

Shannon: Hai un fisico così così pittoresco.

Gru: Ah, beh! Ti ringrazio molto. Stavo-

Shannon: Il mio personal trainer potrebbe allenarti e ritroverai la forma in un battibaleno!

Back translation:

Shannon: Your body is so picturesque.

Gru: Ah, well, thank you very much. I was-

Shannon: My personal trainer could train you and you would be back in shape in a jiffy!

In the original English dialogue Shannon makes an offensive comment on the "exotic," weird and therefore "unacceptable" foreign accent of Gru, which can be "fixed" by someone who can correct his pronunciation and help him speak "properly" (so becoming "normal"). In the dubbed version, this remark on the accent is changed into a different (though still offensive) comment on Gru being unfit. Although the content of Shannon's utterances is modified in the dubbed version, it is coherent with the images and cohesive/coherent with previous dialogue by the woman. In fact Shannon is obsessed with fitness (she does sit-ups in the restaurant) and she had just asked Gru whether he worked out and had immediately added "obviously, you don't" with an ironic tone. The change of content and loss of reference to Gru's foreign accent in the Italian version does not jeopardise the quality of the dialogues, since it perfectly matches the visuals and the parodic characterisation of the super-fit blonde woman obsessed with fitness.

Eduardo Pérez (voiced by Peruvian-American actor Benjamin Bratt) speaks with a strong Spanish (Latin-American) accent, using typical Spanish phonological features and interspersing his English utterances with words and expressions such as *Buenos días, un momento, mi compadre*. Allusions to Mexican culture are present in his dialogue (*Cinco de mayo, churros, guacamole*) and he is accompanied by the Mexican folk songs *Cielito Lindo* and *La cucaracha*. Eduardo's characterisation in this film is a clear example of the use of "visual and verbal stereotypes [...] employed to narrate otherness" in animated films (Di Giovanni, 2007, p. 93). Eduardo's physical appearance is exaggeratedly comical: he is overweight and partly bald, has a beard, wears a tight red shirt, black trousers and a big golden necklace. He owns the restaurant "Salsa y Salsa" and he predictably dances salsa. Furthermore, when he invites Gru and Lucy to his "Cinco de Mayo party", he opens his shirt to show them the Mexican flag tattooed on his large, hairy belly. The visual representation of Eduardo is thus not a positive one, and is highly caricatural (and perhaps offensive too).

Eduardo's behaviour also conforms to stereotypical Latino images in Hollywood films. As pointed out by Ramírez Berg, "As far as Hollywood was concerned, U.S. Latinos and Latin Americans could all be lumped together as people with identical characteristics; as such, they could all be uniformly depicted stereotypically as bandits, harlots, Latin lovers, and so forth" (Ramírez Berg, 2002, p. 6). Eduardo and his son Antonio embody two of these stereotypes: the bandit (Eduardo is dangerous and evil) and the Latin lover (both Eduardo and Antonio are very flirtatious). Visual and aural elements combine with Eduardo's heavy Spanish-accented English and references to Mexican culture to create a negative stereotypical character, immediately indexing his ethnicity and identity in a parodic way. Example (2) below shows how Eduardo introduces himself to Gru and Lucy:

(2) *Despicable Me 2* (2013)

Original English version:

Eduardo Pérez: Hallo. ... *Buenos días*, my friends! I am Eduardo Pérez, owner of *Salsa y Salsa* restaurant, across the Mall. Now, open for breakfast. And you are? [...]

This is just gonna take *un momento*. I'm throwing a big *Cinco de Mayo* party, and I am going to need 200 of your best cupcakes decorated with ...the Mexican flag. It looks something like this. [...]

And welcome to the Mall family.

Italian dubbed version:

Eduardo Pérez: C'è nessuno? ... *Buenos días, amigos*. Me chiamo Eduardo Pérez. Ho il ristorante *Salsa y salsa* qui al Mall. Ora aperto anche a colazione. Y voi siete? [...]

Ci vorrà solo *un momentito*. Darò una gran *fiesta* per il *Cinco de Mayo* e mi serviranno duecento dei vostri cupcake più buoni...decorati con...la bandiera *Mejicana*. È fatta più o meno così! [...]

Y bienvenidos nella grande *familia* del Mall.

Back Translation:

Eduardo Pérez: Hello. ... *Buenos días, amigos*. I am Eduardo Pérez. I have the *Salsa y Salsa* restaurant, here in the Mall. Now open also for breakfast. And you are? [...]

This is just gonna take *un momentito*. I'm throwing a big party for the *Cinco de Mayo*, and I am going to need 200 of your best cupcakes decorated with ...the Mexican flag. It looks something like this. [...]

Y bienvenidos in the large *familia* of the Mall.

Eduardo was dubbed by Neri Marcorè (a celebrity, not a professional dubber), with the help of a dialogue coach to sound more Spanish (Izzo, personal communication, February 2019). In the Italian dub Eduardo uses more Spanish words or expressions compared to the original version (*Buenos días, amigos; Me; Salsa y salsa; Y; Un momentito; fiesta; Mejicana; Y bienvenidos*). The dubbing team probably used more Spanish words than in the original version since they are unlikely to hinder comprehension due to the similarity between the two languages (*amigos-amici; un momentito-un momentino; Y bienvenidos-e benvenuti; fiesta-festa; mejicana-messicana; familia-famiglia*). The Italian dubbed version thus resorts to the strategy of “hypercharacterisation” (Parini, 2009): Eduardo’s heavy Spanish-accented English in the original version is not only maintained in dubbing but is further emphasised and exaggerated by adding several Spanish words. Izzo explains that the international dubbing supervisor (a person appointed by the production company to supervise the dubbing process in various countries) asked her to give the character a Spanish accent. Izzo further points out that, although she does not like foreign accents affected by Italian actors, in the case of El

Macho the marketing department wanted to cast an Italian celebrity as the voice of the dubbed character (F. Izzo, personal communication March 2019 and April 2020).

With the minor character of the Italian waiter in the restaurant where Gru and Shannon have dinner, visual and verbal stereotypes combine once again to trigger humour. A fresco of Venice, a gondola, spaghetti with meat balls and Italian folk music (*Funiculi, funiculà*) provide the setting of the scene (an Italian restaurant). The waiter appears. He is a thin man with black hair who gesticulates a lot. He speaks with a heavy and exaggerated Italian accent, characterised by the stereotypical pronunciation of a schwa sound (/ə/) between words, ungrammaticalities and the use of Italian words (*Scusi, sì*).

Since the character in the film is represented as Italian, his supposed native language corresponds to the language of the dubbed version. This represents a further challenge for the Italian translator/dialogue writer and dubbing director, as the language of dubbing coincides with the L3, but the character is represented as “other” and as Italian in the original film. In order to convey the “otherness” of the waiter and the humorous function of the waiter’s line, the choice of the dubbing team was to make him speak differently from the main language of the dubbed version (standard Italian). As a result, the waiter speaks with a marked regional pronunciation. The Italian-American of the original version is turned into regional Italian, with a heavy but somehow mixed, invented accent. In the Italian dubbed version the waiter has a comic linguistic characterisation which is achieved by using a mixture of pronunciation elements typical of Central/South Italian regiolects. A small reception study conducted among a group of 13 Italian MA students from various regions who watched the clip did not recognise a specific Italian dialect but features of Abruzzese/Umbro/Pugliese (Centre/South).

Example (3) below contains the waiter’s lines in the original English version and in the Italian dubbed version. Marked phonetic, lexical and syntactic regional elements are in italics.

(3) *Despicable Me 2* (2013)

English version:

Waiter: *Scusi*, what’s-a-happening here? *She no like?* [...] Oh, oh, *sì, sì*.

Italian Dubbed Version:

Waiter: *Scusi tando*, ma che sta *a succede’* qua? Alla signora *ugni* *piaace?* [...] Uh, oh oh, *sì, sì*.

Back Translation:

Waiter: I’m really sorry, but what’s happening here? Doesn’t the lady like it? [...] Uh, oh, oh, yes, yes.

As pointed out above, the film thus contains different foreign-accented characters: the main characters of Gru and Eduardo Pérez, Antonio (Eduardo’s son), and the Italian waiter. The translation strategies adopted in dubbing vary. Gru’s linguistic characterisation is neutralised, Eduardo’s

foreignness is emphasised (by an Italian celebrity affecting and exaggerating a Spanish accent and by the addition of Spanish words and expressions), Antonio's characterisation is maintained, the waiter's Italian identity is marked and adapted by resorting to regional Italian.

The reasons behind this plurality of translation solutions in the dubbed version are the following: for Gru, the marketing department required a celebrity with a recognisable voice. Also, Gru's otherness is not relevant to the plot, his nationality is never mentioned in the saga and the foreign accent only serves to create a humorous character.

In the case of Eduardo, his Mexican identity is stated in the film and visual elements and cultural references in the dialogue are intertwined with his foreign-accented English. His non-native variety of English and Mexican identity thus had to be reproduced in the dubbed version.

The waiter is also represented through a combination of visual and verbal means. The images, music and physical characterisation, as well as his gestures, typically Italian, called forth an Italian identity. In this case, since the L3 coincides with the L2, the dubbed version uses regional Italian. This appears to be quite a frequent solution in Italian dubbing when characters speak Italian or Italian-American in the original versions of animated films (see Minutella, 2021; Iaia, 2015).

5. Conclusions

It is worth noting that the conclusions and the contributions from the professionals quoted in this article relate specifically to *Despicable Me 2* and to the genre of animated films produced and distributed by Big Majors, which exert great control over form and content of their products during the post-production process. This paper has illustrated that foreign-accented English and multiple languages are used in animated films to signal setting, create identities, convey otherness and trigger humour, and that they can be approached by dubbing professionals in different ways. The article has shown that various factors determine the strategies used in dubbing, and that a combination of methods is required when accounting for how multilingualism and non-native varieties of English are dealt with in dubbing. Personal communications with dubbing professionals have proven that research can benefit from insights into professional practice. An analysis of the functions that linguistic variation, foreign-accented English and multilingualism play in each film is important to determine whether homogenisation and neutralisation are applied or not (see Corrius and Zabalbeascoa, 2011; Díaz-Cintas, 2011, p. 230; Heiss, 2014; Minutella, 2021; the TraFilm Project). The paper has shown that deciding whether to retain a foreign language in the dubbed version, and whether to neutralise, convey or exaggerate a non-native variety of English, depends on multiple factors. These can be the functions of the L3 instance within the film, the client's requests, marketing reasons, including the need to recast recognisable celebrities, the availability of dubbing actors.

The case study analysed has provided a portrayal of diverse "foreigners" who are translated in different ways in the dubbed version. Gru's representation through an undefined eastern-European accent emphasised by the US voice actor is neutralised in the Italian dubbed version (which casts a

recognisable celebrity as the dubbed voice), whereas the Spanish-accented linguistic characterisation of the negative Mexican character of Eduardo Pérez undergoes a process of “hypercharacterisation” (Parini, 2009) in Italian dubbing. The Italian identity of the waiter is conveyed in the dubbed version by resorting to a third language, that is, a variety that differs from standard Italian, through the process of adaptation.

This study has confirmed that the translation of multilingualism and accented English is a challenging task and deserves further attention. Animated films in particular, though not aiming at verisimilitude but rather at comedy and parody, resort to language varieties and multilingualism to a great extent, and therefore a comprehensive study on this genre may lead to interesting results. Future avenues of research may include comparative analyses of dubbing strategies for the same film in different languages, an analysis of dubbing strategies in a large corpus of animated films, an investigation of how non-native varieties are dealt with in other genres as well as a reception study.

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