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Linguistic Insights

Studies in Language and Communication

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# The Languages of Dubbing

Mainstream Audiovisual  
Translation in Italy

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## The languages of dubbing and thereabouts: an introduction

### 1. Why study the language of screen dialogue?

For a long time relatively few studies investigated the languages of the small and big screens despite the huge share in language reception these media discourses have across geographical borders. While the visual dimension and semiotic complexity of film mostly attracted critics' attention, the non-spontaneous and pre-fabricated character of audiovisual speech justified linguists' limited interest in this verbal expression. In the past few years, however, such surprising neglect has given way to a remarkable surge in scholarship, and a number of publications, monographs, articles and specialised papers have appeared on the topic. The need is now felt to move forward from the initial view of audiovisual dialogue as inauthentic orality, a mere and far-removed imitation of spontaneous spoken language, and make the fictional language of the screen a worthwhile object of inquiry in Linguistics and Translation Studies alike. As argued by Alvarez-Pereyre (2011: 48), film dialogue can rightfully be examined both as a language artefact deriving from an artistic and social endeavour as well as a specimen of real language use. *Fictive orality, simulated spoken language, parlato-recitato, dialogo riprodotto, oralidad prefabricada* (Brumme/Espunya 2012; Pavesi 2008; Nencioni 1976; Rossi 2002; Chaume 2013), just to mention a few of the labels used to refer to this variety of translated and non-translated language, deserve close inspection as stand-alone registers or genres, in which specific language features correlate with specific communicative functions. At the same time, both original and translated audiovisual speech constitutes a source of data that can contribute to our linguistic, sociolinguistic and

pragmatic knowledge, an effective indicator of how conversation is perceived (Rey 2001: 138; Quaglio 2009: 13) and a legitimate way of capturing oral discourse (Amador-Moreno/McCafferty 2011: 1).

Among the various translation modalities, dubbing is the one that most closely reproduces the goals and nature of the original dialogue, replacing the soundtrack of an audiovisual product in the source language with a soundtrack in the target language, with the aim of reproducing a semiotic whole acceptable to the new, receiving audiences. In addition, due to the wide circulation of audiovisual products, dubbing comes to the fore as the screen language viewers most frequently access in those countries where it is still predominant in cinemas and on television (e.g. Antonini 2008).

For these reasons, the purpose of this volume is to thoroughly investigate the language, or better the *languages*, of dubbing, with a special focus on Italian but broadening the perspective to the general debate on audiovisual language. The plural is intentionally used in the title to evoke the complex interplay of different codes in dubbing as well as the numerous levels of analysis involved. First and foremost, at least two are the languages in contact in the dubbing process, i.e. the source and the target language, which leave their visible marks in the alignment of translation to the target language norms and, perhaps to a lesser extent, in patterns of source language interference (Pavesi 2008). Secondly, several are the social and regional varieties spoken by characters that are dealt with in dubbing (Taylor 2006; Ranzato 2010) along with the growing multilingualism in films (O'Sullivan 2011; Minutella 2012). Finally, the reference to the *languages* of dubbing effectively captures the rich dimension of stylistic variation and the specificities of different fictional genres across and within television and filmic speech.