

Italian American Gangsterspeak in American Cinema and Italian Dubbing

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the language variety spoken by Italian Americans gangsters in a corpus of five American drama films released in the 1990s, as well as the strategies used during the process of dubbing into Italian. Several studies have focused on the representation of Italian American gangsters in Hollywood films. However, most of the scholars who have worked on this topic have approached it from a film studies or a cultural perspective, while, to my knowledge, no one has investigated the characters' linguistic characterization. Indeed, the identity of Italian American gangsters in American movies is always clearly identifiable thanks to a series of visual and other extra-linguistic elements which recur in the films of the genre. However, it is a fact that language plays an extremely important role in the construction of the stereotyped identity of these characters, as the final result is achieved not only through the selection of the elements which act at the level of the visual code, but also thanks to the interaction of these features with the ones that act at the verbal one.

Undoubtedly, the language variety spoken by the protagonists of the films that constitute the object of study of this research is heavily loaded with connotations. Such connotations definitely contribute to characterizing the speakers, conveying both their ethnic origins and their social background. The elements that characterize the variety as an ethnolect are identifiable mainly at a phonological (intonation; pronunciation), and a lexical level (phenomena of code switching and code mixing, and slang), while those which characterize it as a sociolect mainly act at a syntactic (non-standard forms), and lexical level (taboo language, and, again, slang). Italian dubbing seems to have established a set of consolidated strategies aiming at transposing the connotations conveyed by the original language in the target texts. The language variety spoken in Italian dubbing, indeed, cannot be considered as standard, as it turns out to be connoted both from a diatopic and a diastratic perspective. The characterization of the language from a diatopic perspective acts at the phonological (intonation, pronunciation), morphosyntactic (geographically connoted structures), and lexical levels (code switching and code mixing, phraseology, and slang), while the elements that connote the variety diastratically act at the syntactic (non-standard forms) and lexical levels (taboo language and, again, slang). In general, the connotations seem to be maintained in dubbing, although there are obviously differences among the various films, and some of the target texts are less connoted than their corresponding source texts.

KEYWORDS: audiovisual translation, dubbing, ethnolect, identity, sociolect

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