Dora Renna*

THE ROUTE TO IDENTITY: ITALIAN TRANSLATION AND AFRICAN AMERICAN LANGUAGE(S) IN SPIKE LEE'S *GET ON THE BUS*

This paper investigates translation issues emerging from the analysis of Spike Lee's movie *Get on the Bus* (1996)[1] and its Italian adaptation, *Bus in Viaggio*.

The choice is motivated by African American Vernacular English (AAVE), used in the film by a group of men that get on the bus to reach the Million Man March in Washington (1995). During the journey, characters will confront each other on different topics, such as African American male identity in that precise moment and for the future, as well as their role within the black community (Conard). As in other movies by Spike Lee, the traditional and stereotyped media portrayal of African American people is challenged and subverted (Corrizzato 2).

This dialogical construction poses a set of challenges for the translator/adaptor, especially because it is characterised by a use of language that has no equivalent in Italian. (Un)translatability of non-standard varieties is indeed the main focus of this research, as it originates a series of crucial questions: can idiomatic expressions that are typical of a non-standard variety of English be translated? (Ramos Pinto) Which translation strategies have been used in the audiovisual translation? (Díaz-Cintas and Anderman; Pavesi; Freddi and Pavesi) How can the tension between constant loss and gain in translation be problematized? (Gambier and van Doorslaer; Shuttleworth and Cowie; Baker; Chesterman).

These questions will be analysed through a reading of the speech patterns enacted by one of the characters, the *wannabe* Hollywood star Flip.[2] This character represents a typical "screen" black man, a stereotyped portrait quite apart from each other man on the bus, and engaging into a conflict that is first of all metaphorical. In fact, as stated by McGowan, African American unity betrays its limits as enmity among the characters breaks through:

> The Million Man March on October 16, 1995, had as its aim not the celebration of antagonism but the expression of unity. (...) Spike Lee's 1996 film *Get on the Bus* centers around the Million Man March, but rather than echo the spirit of unity that this event hoped to foster, Lee uses the collective action to present the unrelenting presence of antagonism amid the most determined efforts to create wholeness. (...) Lee doesn't do this simply to upset cherished convictions about

---

* *Dora Renna (dora.renna@univr.it) is a PhD candidate in Foreign Languages, Literatures and Cultures at University of Verona, Italy. Her main research interests concern translation studies and audiovisual translation, non-standard varieties of English in migration contexts and language contact. In particular, she is now focusing on language contact in the United States and on the translation of its stereotyped media representations.*

[1] The plot of the movie itself is rather linear: a group of African American men join a bus trip organised by George, with destination Washington D.C., where the Million Man March will take place. The march is an actual historical event wanted by the African American activist Reverend Louis Farrakhan in 1995 (real footages of the manifestation are shown towards the end of the movie). Among the passengers, there are black men of all ages and from disparate social, cultural and personal background. The main characters are: a father with his son, chained to each other by court order, a gay couple (one out of the closet, the other still struggling to accept his sexual orientation), a mixed-race policeman, a wannabe Hollywood star, a student who wishes to become a moviemaker (and tapes the whole journey), an ex gang member who converted to Islam to find redemption and an old and wise man. The main part of the movie is constituted by the (not always peaceful) interactions among them, in the attempt to define themselves as individuals and to contribute to the construction of the African American male identity against stereotyping and towards unity, which is a crucial precondition for civil rights claims.

[2] Flip (Andre Braugher) immediately shows his desecrating attitude as he first enters the scene: the group prayer that starts the journey on the bus is interrupted by his "Hot damn!" exclamation as he steps on the bus. Since then, he will engage in conversations with many of the characters, most often provoking them verbally until, towards the end, he will cause a physical fight – he will be defeated by Kyle (interpreted by Isaiah Washington), a closeted gay man and former military.

unity and wholeness but out of a sense of the emancipatory power of antagonism. If we can recognize antagonism at points where we imagine wholeness, we can emancipate ourselves from the ideological trap that wholeness represents and attach ourselves instead to a bond forged through antagonism rather than through its repression. (McGowan 106-7)

In this light, the role played by Flip is not a disturbance, but rather becomes pivotal for the whole journey. His opponents have to face this incarnation of the minstrel show's "black face" (Bean, Hatch, and McNamara) to determine their peculiar identity of black men beyond stereotypes. Thus, such self-affirmation is the result of a cathartic liberation from the idea of wholeness and essentialism of African American identity as a sufficient reason to be necessarily united. Indeed, the basic assumptions behind racism, allowing discrimination of entire social, cultural, and ethnic groups are impregnated with essentialism, to be intended as the belief in the existence of an "underlying essence (...) that represents deep-seated and unalterable properties" (Tadmor, Chao, Hong, and Polzer 1). Openly criticising the ideal of wholeness might then become a way to challenge generalising presuppositions, implying that African Americans are a complex group made of individualities that cannot be assimilated. It is Spike Lee himself to encourage this approach to his movie: "we wanted everybody to have their say on this bus, because in a lot of ways each person has to stand for some ideology or some aspect of African-American men" (Lee and Fuchs 128). This point of view stresses once more the metaphorical, but also the political value of the conflict among Lee's characters in the movie, and shows the importance of looking at how Flip, being the one who triggers numerous clashes, fulfils his "duty" – not just from the point of view of content, but linguistically as well. In fact, Flip's speech patterns are built on AAVE grammatical features, and sprinkled with idiomatic expressions, slang and references to American and African American cultures; this might not be not casual in terms of representation, as stated by Ramos Pinto:

(T)he creative use of linguistic varieties in (...) dialogue helps to inform the reader about which character is speaking and under which circumstances. It becomes a textual resource that helps the reader to define the sociocultural profile of the character, as well as his/her position in the sociocultural fictional context. (Ramos Pinto 291)

As a consequence, translation has to deal with the linguistic peculiarities intrinsic in non-standard varieties, as they have a meaning that goes "far beyond the linguistic level" (Ramos Pinto 291). However, AAVE is strongly embedded in its linguistic and socio-cultural context, and rendering it into another language will be a complex task for any translator (Gambier and van Doorslaer; Shuttleworth and Cowie; Baker; Chesterman). Thus, linguistic peculiarities will be neutralised, replaced, or omitted in the adapted version. This weakens the lingua-cultural difference between Flip and his opponents, especially the proud homosexual Randall[3] and the "mulatto" Gary[4]. Audiovisual translation also poses a further challenge, given the constraints deriving from its very nature: a screenplay is a text written to be performed, and its translated version has to take into account lip-synch, timing and (supposedly) intelligibility for the target audience (Díaz-Cintas and Anderman; Pavesi; Freddi and Pavesi).

For the purpose of our analysis, Flip's speech reading will be threefold, focusing on different and yet convergent aspects:

- AAVE linguistic features: lexicon, grammar and morpho-syntax
- Idioms
- Cultural references

---

[3] Randall (Harry Lennix) is a gay black man, out of the closet and proud of his sexuality. At the beginning of the journey he is Kyle's boyfriend, but he is soon abandoned, since Kyle is still struggling to accept himself and needs to be on his own. Nevertheless, Kyle will defend Randall from Flip's verbal attacks.

[4] Gary (Roger Guenveur Smith) is a policeman, born from the union of a white woman and a black man. His father was a police officer, too, until he was killed by a fellow black man. In spite of his mixed origin, Gary considers himself as a black man, and that is why he decides to join the march.

In particular, those parts of Flip's speech that might better represent the uniqueness of AAVE will be selected, and compared to their Italian equivalent in the dubbed version, in order to identify the translation strategies that have been adopted. The terminology concerning translation issues and strategies coined in the milestone work of Mona Baker[5] will be the main reference in the classification. The translation method taken into consideration is dubbing, given its pervasive use in Italy as the main audiovisual translation technique (Formentelli, Pavesi, and Ghia). Moreover, although the present study will not focus on phonetic elements, it is worth mentioning that Flip has a stronger AAVE accent when compared to his main opponents Randall and Gary. A brief overview on the main speech events activated by Flip might prove useful for a more in-depth understanding of his way of interacting. In this respect, one of his main features is "dissing:" several scholars have distinguished among various kinds of events, such as Signifyin' (Smitherman), Playing the Dozens (Abrahams), joining, capping, sounding (Green). What all these events have in common is a ritualised series of insults performed in public, with the participation of listeners. Flip seems rather keen on dissing, as he engages in constant verbal fights with the other passengers, trying to provoke their reactions. The others normally do not respond with the same enthusiasm, making Flip switch from one opponent to the other. He also resorts to marking (Green 142), which consists in imitating the words (and actions where possible) of the opponent, while adding remarks about him/her, as in the following example:

> RANDALL: Randall Royal, if you don't mind.
> FLIP: Well, Randall-Royal-if-you-don't-mind (...) can you even say the word "pussy"? (...)
> FLIP: Hear that, Randall-Royal-if-you-don't-mind? Your boyfriend may give up his membership.

Another event enacted by Flip – this time not with opponents – is rapping: Green (136) defines it as "casual talk which include(s) exchanges between a male and a female, in which the male tries to win the favours of a female as he delivers a compliment (in his estimation) by using verbal expertise." Flip is trying hard to win the favours of two girls, until his rapping is interrupted by his opponent Gary, who attracts the girls' attention. Flip also indulges in self-complimenting or, more precisely, in toasts. These imply defining oneself as "fearless, defiant, openly rebellious, and full of braggadocio about his masculinity, sexuality, fighting ability or general badness" (Smitherman 157).

All of Flip's speech is characterised by the *mise en scène* of typically African American linguistic behaviours, which he tends to exaggerate, as he barely seems to be able to have a conversation without trying to provoke his interlocutors or starting to boast. It is indeed this exaggeration that turns Flip into a symbolic character: his function of the stereotype with whom all other characters have to deal with, in order to affirm themselves is announced when he is nicknamed "Ben Vereen", an actor whose brilliant career declined after performing in blackface (Taylor and Austen 132). Flip replies that Ben Vereen is not on the bus, but indeed he is the blackface performer on the bus. The awareness of his symbolic role makes it even more important to render the peculiarity of his speech in order to make the metaphoric level of the movie readable.

AAVE offers its speakers a broad and peculiar linguistic repertoire. In particular, this variety tends to develop slang items that are added to the lexicon, although slang items might change quite rapidly (Eble 11). One of the main sources of new slang items is the tendency to label people, places, and activities – which is defined

---

5 In particular, from the chapter concerning equivalence at word level the drawn categories are those concerning the common problems of non-equivalence: culture-specific concepts "unknown in the target culture" (Baker 21); concepts that are lexicalized in the source but not in the target language; semantically complex words; different distinctions in meaning between source and target language; lack of a superordinate (a more general word) in the target language; lack of a hyponym (a more specific word) in the target language; differences in Physical or interpersonal perspective; differences in expressive meaning, which "relates to the speaker's feelings or attitudes rather than to what words and utterances refer to" (Baker 13); differences in form; differences in frequency and purpose of a specific form; use of loan words in the source text (Baker 21-26). The terminology concerning strategies is drawn from the same chapter: translation by a superordinate; translation by a more neutral/less expressive word; translation by cultural substitution; translation using a loan word or loan word plus explanation; translation by paraphrase using a related word; translation by paraphrase using unrelated words; translation by omission; translation by illustration (Baker 26-42).

as "labelling" by Green (27). In particular, Flip uses a series of labels for men and women that are at times challenging for translators.

original version	dubbed version	translation problem	adopted strategy
What up, *black*?	ciao, *amico*	non-lexicalized concept + target has no specific hyponym	more general word
freaks	squinternate	culture-specific and semantically complex word	more general word
"*player*" is written all over me	io sono sempre *farcito di donne*	non-lexicalized concept	paraphrase with unrelated word + less expressive word
brother/sister	fratello/sorella	culture-specific concept	more neutral/less expressive word + superordinate

Chart 1: Labelling

Chart 1 shows the labels that can be found in Flip's speech. In the first case, the translation issue lays in the fact that "black" as a label for a fellow black man is not an item included in the Italian vocabulary: using a racially marked term in Italian would also have a stronger linguistic impact. That is why the adaptors opted for a more general word. The same happens with the word "freaks," replaced by "squinternate." Although it could be referred to an "extravagant person," in the context of labels the word "freaks" refers to women that have an eccentric sexual taste (Cagliero and Spallino 283). "Squinternate" refers to someone having an unorganised life style.[6] The Italian translation is far more general, as having an unorganised lifestyle does not necessarily imply any particular sexual habit. The case of "player" is more complex, since it may be referred to someone generally skilled, a gambler or a respected rapper, but in this case is referred to a man that is able to seduce women, a playboy (Cagliero and Spallino 531). Italian might offer some similar items, such as "dongiovanni," but this word has a rather positive connotation, which does not imply the kind of manipulation which would be intrinsic in the "player" behaviour. In this case, the original is replaced by "farcito di donne," which literally means "filled with women:" it is a much less expressive label, as it implies a passive role for the male; it is also quite uncommon (if ever used) in Italian. Another recurring issue in African American speech is the use of the labels "brother" and "sister." In African American culture, a brother is a friend, a comrade, or a black man in general (Chapman 46). Italian people mainly use the word "fratello" for actual siblings. The same happens for the female correspondent "sister" (Chapman 400) and "sorella." Since this item is very specific to African American culture and has no exact equivalent in Italian, the translator/adapter chose to use a literal translation that has a less expressive meaning and is also more generic.

Other lexical problems are linked to those concepts that, as claimed by Baker (21), are not lexicalized in the target language (shown in Chart 2). The first two examples concern African American history, while the last one is interesting for its link to Flip's fundamentally chauvinist vision of manhood.

original version	dubbed version	translation problem	adopted strategy
are you (...) *light skinned*?	hai la pelle chiara?	non-lexicalized concept	paraphrase with related word
a house slave	uno schiavo	non-lexicalized	paraphrase with

---

[6] http://www.garzantilinguistica.it/ricerca/?q=squinternato. Last visited January 16, 2016.

	addetto alla manutenzione della casa	concept	unpacking of the meaning.
you're on that *henpecked tip*	tu devi essere un burattino	non-lexicalized concept + different distinction in meaning	more general word, change of register

Chart 2: Non-lexicalized concepts

Non-lexicalised concepts can be linked to African American history and cultural heritage. It is the case of "light skinned" and "house slave." In the United States, it might make a significant difference how "dark" African American people are. In fact, people with lighter skin are at times considered more attractive, to the point that this particular complexion becomes a defining attribute (Davis, Daniels, and See 69-70; Gunn Morris and Morris 529-531). However, the American situation is unique – Italian does not have specific definitions for different tones of "blackness," thus the paraphrase: "being" light skinned becomes "having" a light skin. Peculiar to the United States is also the history of slavery with its specific roles and figures, such as the "house slave." House slaves were the slaves employed in the white masters' houses (and especially women). Although they generally enjoyed better material conditions, they were constantly exposed to any caprice or lust of their owners (Scarborough). Italian translators opted for a paraphrase with "unpacking of the meaning" (Baker 38) to convey the idea. Another example is linked to contemporary slang: "henpeck" is an informal way to call a man that is totally "domineered over by a wife" (Partridge 548), while "tip" is a group of people (Dalzell 993). The Italian word "burattino" is referred to a puppet, a marionette, both in literal and figurative sense, referring to one with little or no personality and easily manoeuvred by other people.[7] This translation choice implies not only the use of a more general word, but also a change of register. The Italian adaptation is more general because a "burattino", a puppet, can be manoeuvred by anyone, while a "henpeck" is specifically referred to a man with his partner. The term is also less expressive, because "burattino" can be used in both formal and informal contexts, while to be "on that henpecked trip" is a strictly colloquial expression.

Another problem linked to lexicon consists in semantically complex terms (Flip uses them in two occasions, as shown in Chart 3), single words that can have "a more complex set of meanings than a whole sentence" (Baker 22).

original version	dubbed version	translation problem	adopted strategy
FLIP: pussy RANDALL: I have to say I'm looking at one	FLIP: passerina RANDALL: che stai cercando di dimostrare?	semantically complex word	omission
Big fat Jamaican blunt	maxi cannone imbottito di cocaina e marijuana	target language has no specific hyponym	use of a superordinate

Chart 3: Semantically complex terms

The word "pussy" has two meanings: one is a vulgar way to refer to female genitals, while the other is an insult for weak or useless people (Cagliero and Spallino 551). While Flip is referring to the first meaning, Randall answers by shifting to the second one. In this case, the translators opted for the omission of the double meaning: since no Italian equivalent to the first meaning of "pussy" matches this complexity, the pun in the exchange between the two opponents gets lost in translation. In the second case, the target language lacks of a specific hyponym. In fact, a blunt is a cigar whose original content (tobacco) was replaced with marijuana (Cagliero and Spallino 95), and the reference to Jamaica serves to reinforce the link. The Italian

---

[7] http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/burattino/. Last visited April 14, 2016.

word "cannone," apart from meaning cannon, is also youth jargon for a cigarette filled with marijuana or hashish (Dal Lago and Quadrelli 376). While the most popular is probably "canna," the word "cannone" sounds like an augmentative, thus recalling the "big fat" used in the original. In this case, the term was replaced by a superordinate: the word "blunt" is not as generic as, for example, "joint" or "spliff," which would be closer to the Italian adaptation. Given the lack of hyponyms in the target language, a more general word was here chosen.

AAVE also has a peculiar syntax, as well as a series of distinctive verbal markers. A peculiar case concerns auxiliaries, which have specific properties[8], some of which find much space in Flip's speech. For example, the second property (Green 36) implies that auxiliaries can appear in contracted, reduced, or zero forms. The third property (Green 41) implies that auxiliaries can host the contracted negator *n't* (not); the fifth property (Green 42) allows the omission of auxiliaries in questions. Those properties are found in Flip's speech, as displayed in Chart 4.

original version	dubbed version	translation problem	adopted strategy
I *din* know	non sapevo	different form (second property of AAVE auxiliaries)	less expressive form
y'all -- some serious brothers	come mai siete tutti così seri?	different form (second property of AAVE auxiliaries)	less expressive form
you *ain't* got to think about it	non hai niente a cui pensare	different form (third property of AAVE auxiliaries)	less expressive form
-- you ever smoke somebody?	hai mai ammazzato?	different form (fifth property of AAVE auxiliaries)	less expressive form

Chart 4: Use of auxiliaries

Given the uniqueness of such uses, the strategy adopted is the use of a less expressive form in all cases. In the first example, "din" is the contracted form of "did not;" in the second case the auxiliary "are" is omitted (zero form); in the third case, "ain't" is the negative form for both "to have" and "to be" auxiliaries (very common in spoken AAVE). The auxiliary is also omitted in the fourth example, although there was a partial attempt to retrieve the "incompleteness" of the original by excluding the object "somebody."

The so-called "aspectual markers" are another peculiar feature of AAVE. According to Green (45) aspect "refers to duration, completion or habitual occurrence" of actions. AAVE has its peculiar markers, among which there is *dən*. It may refer to an action or event located in the recent past or already concluded; it may also be used to describe a past experience (Green 61), which is the case of Flip's use (Chart 5). It might also be important to note that aspectual markers represent new lexical entries as well (Green 25).

original version	dubbed version	translation problem	adopted strategy
I *dən tagged* all kinds of freaks	*attiro sempre* quelle più squinternate	different form + non-lexicalized concept	cultural substitution/omission

Chart 5: Aspectual marker *dən*

---

[8] According to Green, African American auxiliaries have specific properties: 1) in presence of auxiliary + main verb combination tense is marked on the auxiliary, while in the past perfect the main verb is in the simple past form and the past tense is marked on the auxiliary (40); 2) auxiliaries can be contracted, reduced or zero form (40); 3) auxiliaries can host the contracted negator "n't" (41); 4) auxiliaries can be inverted in question formation (41); 5) auxiliary are not necessarily used in questions (42) while in tag questions, auxiliaries work as if the auxiliary of the main question was present, even when it is in zero form (43); 6) they can replace omitted material in verb phrase-ellipsis and verb-phrase fronting (43).

"Dən" is a typical aspectual marker of AAVE, and it is used by Flip to reinforce his boasting about having experienced all kinds of female partners. Those partners are also defined "freaks," a slang term used to describe prurient women (Cagliero and Spallino 283). The substitution here chosen implies an omission of the original meaning. The original is not translated, but replaced with something different. In this context, "tag" is a rather vulgar reference to sexual intercourse (Dalzell 971), while "attirare" only means "attract." The aspectual *dən* is transformed into present. "All kinds of freaks" is transformed into "quelle più squinternate." In the Italian version, Flip seems to depict himself as a victim of insane women (see first chart), while in the original he was boasting about having experienced sex with numerous and libidinous partners.

Syntactic and morpho-syntactic properties of AAVE are also peculiar elements, especially for what concerns negations and the use of verbal "–s". In fact, an African American utterance can contain multiple negations (Green 77), while the standard distinction between singular and plural can be ignored (Green 99), and this also includes replacing the past form "were" with "was" (as shown in Chart 6).

original version	dubbed version	translation problem	adopted strategy
we can't go to no march	non possiamo andare alla marcia	different form	omission
you was salivating	stavi sbavando	different form	omission

Chart 6: Negations and use of verbal "–s"

In Italian, double negation is admitted. Thus, the choice of keeping it would not produce a marked form. The use of a different person for the verb "essere" does not have a specific status like in AAVE. As a consequence, replacing it would simply look like a grammar mistake.

AAVE also has a very rich and expressive array of idioms. These are particularly challenging for the translator, because of their cultural or historical references. In Chart 7, the first three idioms have no equivalent, and each of them has been dealt with according to a different strategy; the last example shows the hardships of translating an idiom that is used in both literal and idiomatic sense in the source text.

original version	dubbed version	translation problem	adopted strategy
Hot damn!	ehilà!	idiom with no equivalent	more neutral word
X marks the spot?	Malcolm X?	idiom with no equivalent	cultural substitution
you poured salt on my rap	---	idiom with no equivalent	omission
You better wake up and smell the coffee, nigger! Cause 9 times out of 10 your momma's in the white's kitchen brewing it	è meglio che apri gli occhi e guardi alla realtà, negro! 9 volte su 10 la tua mamma è di là a pulire la cucina dell'uomo bianco	an idiom is used in both literal and idiomatic sense	idiom translated by paraphrase

Chart 7: Idioms

In the first example, "hot damn!" is an idiom that has no exact equivalent in Italian. It is an exclamation of astonishment or approval (Chapman 225), and is rendered in the target version with a neutral greeting, which manages to maintain a certain degree of informality. In the second example, Flip is trying to connect the name of his interlocutor, whose pseudonym is X, to something he knows because he finds it weird. In the original, he links it with an idiom that marks the exact position of a target (Chapman 491). The idiom does not have a cultural function, and was only used for the presence of the letter "X." Thus, since there is no equivalent idiom in Italian, the name of a widely known African American activist[9] was used, as it contains

---

[9] www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/malcolm-x. Last visited October 22, 2016.

the letter "X" and could also have been likely in the context. The sentence in the third example was completely ignored by the translators – the fact that Flip utters these words while many other characters are talking and laughing might serve as an excuse. The expression "you poured salt on my rap" has no equivalent in Italian. "Rap," apart from the music-related meaning, refers to rapping as a speech event: Flip's opponent Gary has just spoiled Flip's attempt to approach some girls. In the following scene, we notice Flip's lips moving while no voice is heard. In the last case, there is an idiom used both in literal and idiomatic sense: "wake up and smell the coffee" is an idiom used to invite the interlocutors to open their eyes to reality. The idiom is translated by paraphrase. This spoils the pun, that has to be changed into a more general reference to black women working as cleaners. As a result, it breaks the logical cohesion between the first and the second part.

Untranslatability often concerns culture-specific references, which can derive from both American and African American culture (everyday life, cinema etc.).

original version	dubbed version	translation problem	adopted strategy
Ben Vereen	Tambourine	culture-specific reference	cultural substitution (attempted)
I went to SC	No, Trojans	culture-specific reference	(partial) omission
"Boyz n the Hood"	"Boyz n the Hood – strade violente"	culture-specific reference	cultural substitution
Harriet Tubman, Alice Walker, Angela Davis, Nikki Giovanni or whatever sister you think you are	Harriet Tubman, Alice Walker, Angela Davis, Nikki Giovanni o qualunque altra sorella ti credi di essere	culture-specific reference	no strategy applied
your daddy got *187'd* by a brother	un fratello criminale ha *seccato* tuo padre	culture-specific reference	more neutral word (not exactly suitable)
so you never pulled a Rodney King on a brother?	comunque non sei uno di quelli che pestano?	culture-specific reference	paraphrase with unrelated word

Chart 8: Culture-specific references

These examples show a range of different translational approaches to cultural references. Ben Vereen is an African American actor, singer, and dancer. His initially bright career collapsed due to personal issues, including the fact that he performed in blackface in 1981 (Starkey 316-317). The fact that Flip is compared to Vereen can also be symbolic of his role in the movie. Tambourine does not seem to recall a specific reference for the Italian public, although it might be possibly linked to the Bob Dylan song "Mr. Tambourine Man": the singer asks this hypothetic – maybe metaphoric – Mr. Tambourine Man to play a song for him so as to make him forget his own sorrow.[10] Cultural substitution was here attempted, although no specific reference to Italian culture was found. In the second example, there is a peculiar feature American culture, as both "SC" and "Trojans" refer to USC Trojans men's basketball team at South Carolina University, a team competing in the NCAA.[11] The original answer implies that Flip supports the team because he went to South Carolina University, which is indeed represented by the Trojans. In this case, the translators opted for omission: saying "Trojans" means Flip supports the team, without specifying the motivation – the university he attended. The system of University basketball championships is widely known throughout the United States, but has no direct equivalent in Italy.

---

[10] http://bobdylan.com/songs/mr-tambourine-man/. Last visited April 14, 2016.
[11] http://www.usc.edu/. Last visited April 13, 2016.

In the third example, both versions refer to the same movie[12], which was released in Italy with the subheading "strade violente." These words aimed at compensating for the specificity of the original title: the spelling of the words and the use of the word "hood"[13] in order to convey a sense of ghetto reality. In this case, the Italian adapted title includes the original one. It can thus be possible to call this a strategy of cultural "addition" (in other cases, such an operation would have implied a complete substitution). Cultural references, although possibly obscure for the average Italian public, were otherwise left intact. During an argument with Randall, Flip mentions a number of African American female activists.[14] Although in other parts of the movie similar references have been omitted or adapted, this one was left as it was in the original – even if an Italian audience is not as familiar with these names as an American one.

The last two examples concern crime, justice and racism. The number 187 is used as a verb: California Penal Code section 187 is the one defining murder, and number 187 is also used as a code for murder in law enforcement jargon (Cagliero and Spallino 7). A more neutral word is used in the translation. However, the adopted solution does not seem too target-oriented either, since the Italian infinitive "seccare" (literally, "to dry") is not associated to an intention to murder. Forms such as "fare secco" (lit. "to make sb. dry," informal for "to assassinate") are widely preferred. In the last example, crime and racism are mixed within a historical reference carrying a strong political and cultural value: Rodney King was an African American man who, having been beaten up by police officers in Los Angeles in 1991 (Gooding-Williams), became a symbol of racial conflicts in the United States. The episode was recorded and broadcasted nationwide. It is now a symbol of violent racism in the United States (Gooding-Williams 4). The translation is a paraphrase, and is also more generic: while in the original Flip asks about past experience, in the translation he asks a question about general attitude ("non sei uno di quelli che pestano" literally means "you are not one of those who beat people up"). Furthermore, the original question asked by Flip to Gary was much more controversial, as it implied that he saw Gary (a police officer of mixed race) as a white person.

Sometimes apparently irrelevant cultural references can severely affect cohesion and coherence of the target text, which might then become a non-text (Baker 112)[15], as shown in Chart 9.

original version	dubbed version	translation problem	adopted strategy
FLIP: You must have had your *Wheaties* this morning! KYLE: Better hope you had yours, bitch! FLIP: I know you didn't just call me a bitch GARY: Sounded like "bitch" to me FLIP: I know you didn't just call me a bitch!	FLIP: Ma come siamo cattivi... hai bevuto il *lattuccio* stamattina? KYLE: Esattamente come te, puttana! FLIP: Non hai detto solo "puttana" GARY: Sì, a me sembrava "puttana" FLIP: Io so che non hai detto solo puttana!	culture-specific reference + semantically complex word	attempted cultural substitution, non-text

Chart 9: Non-text

---

[12] http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0101507/. Last visited April 13, 2016.

[13] Shortening of "neighbourhood," stays for a quarter, generally a degraded one or a ghetto (Cagliero and Spallino 371).

[14] Harriet Tubman (c. 1820-1913): a former slave who escaped and became a leader of abolitionism and worked with the Underground Railroad (Sernett); Alice Walker (1944-): acclaimed African American writer, Pulitzer-Prize winner, Civil Rights and Women Rights activist (Bloom); Angela Davis (1944-): scholar, writer and activist for Civil and Women Rights (Davis); Nikki Giovanni (1943-): poet and activist, major personality in the Black Arts movement (Fowler).

[15] Drawing inspiration from Halliday and Hasan (24), Baker defines non-text as "a random collection of sentences and paragraphs" (112).

Two apparently simple words ("Wheaties" and "just") generated a series of "misunderstandings" that made the Italian version unintelligible. The Wheaties are breakfast cereals, well known in the United States for being popular among athletes.[16] The Italian word "lattuccio" comes from "latte" (milk), and is a term of endearment used in familiar contexts. It conveys the idea of something cozy that a child might have before going to sleep. "Just" is a semantically complex word, as it might mean both "appena" (which is the case here) and "soltanto" (= only). This is probably the least appropriate translation in the adapted version, which in this case becomes a non-text.

Since cinema has a massive impact on society, and considering the great amount of people having access to movies, it might be possible – and may even be due – to extend to the audiovisual field the contribution of imagology, as its aim is to "describe the origin, process and function of national prejudices and stereotypes" (Beller 11-12). In this respect, language plays a crucial role in creating an image of a social/ethnic/national group that does not concern its actual identity, but only its representations (Gambier and van Doorslaer). Translating the audiovisual product significantly contributes to the transferral of those images across the world, as it re-produces (or alters) the image conveyed by the original text, and creates a new one for its target public (van Doorslaer, Flynn, and Leerssen). This function becomes particularly important when the represented group is so specifically embedded in a nation (in this case African American men in the United States), to the point that the target audience has little or no access to non-filtered knowledge. The purpose of this article was to trace back the linguistic elements that create the image of the African American male stereotype and to discover how such a complex issue was approached within the field of audiovisual translation. Another significant constraint is the usability (Pavesi) for the target audience, and the conception os the audiovisual product as a form of entertainment that needs to convey its message in the most immediate possible way.

Works cited

Abrahams, Roger D. *Deep Down in the Jungle: Black American Folklore from the Streets of Philadelphia*. Piscataway: Transaction Publishers, 2006.

Baker, Mona. *In Other Words. A Coursebook on Translation*. London: Routledge, 1992.

Bean, Annemarie, James V. Hatch, and Brooks McNamara, eds. *Inside the Minstrel Mask – Readings in Nineteenth-century Blackface Minstrelsy*. Hanover & London: Wesleyan University Press, 1996.

Beller, Manfred. "Perception, image, imagology." Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen, eds. *Imagology: the Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007.

Bloom, Harold, ed. *Alice Walker – New Edition*. New York: Infobase, 2007.

Cagliero, Roberto, and Chiara Spallino. *Slang Americano. Dizionario Slang americano-italiano*. Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori, 2010.

Chapman, Robert L. *The Macmillan Dictionary of American Slang*. London: Macmillan, 1995.

Chesterman, Andrew, ed. *Reading in Translation Theory*. Helsinki: Oy Finn Lectura, 1989.

Conard, Mark T., ed. *The Philosophy of Spike Lee*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011.

Corrizzato, Sara. *Spike Lee's Bamboozled: A Contrastive Analysis of Compliments and Insults from English into Italian*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2015.

Dal Lago, Alessandro, and Emilio Quadrelli. *La città e le ombre: crimini, criminali, cittadini*. Milano: Feltrinelli, 2003.

Dalzell, Tom, ed. *The Routledge Dictionary of Modern American Slang and Unconventional English*. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Davis, Angela Yvonne. *Angela Davis – An Autobiography*. New York: International Publishers, 1974.

Davis, Katheryn B., Maurice Daniels, and Letha A. (Lee) See. "The Psychological effects of Skin color on Afrian Americans' Self-Esteem." *Human Behavior in the Social Environment from an African American Perspective*. Ed. Letha A. (Lee) See. Philadelphia: Haworth, 1998. 63-90.

Díaz-Cintas, Jorge, and Gunilla Anderman. *Audiovisual Translation: Language Transfer on Screen*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Eble, Connie. *Slang and Sociability: In-Group Language Among College Students*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1996.

---

[16] http://www.wheaties.com/. Last visited April 16, 2016.

Formentelli, Maicol, Maria Pavesi, and Elisa Ghia. *The Languages of Dubbing: Mainstream Audiovisual Translation in Italy*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2015.

Fowler, Virginia C. *Nikki Giovanni: a Literary Biography*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2013.

Freddi, Maria, and Maria Pavesi, eds. *Analysing Audiovisual Dialogue. Linguistic and Translational Insights*. Bologna: CLUEB, 2005.

Gambier, Yves, and Luc van Doorslaer, eds. *Handbook of Translation Studies, Volume 3*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2012.

Gambier, Yves and Luc van Doorslaer, eds. *The Metalanguage of Translation*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2009.

Get on the Bus. Spike Lee, 1996.

Gooding-Williams, Robert, ed. *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Green, Lisa J. *African American English: a Linguistic Introduction*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University, 2002.

Gunn Morris, Vivian, and Curtis L. Morris. "Racism Inside the Race: Light Skin Versus Dark Skin." *Encyclopedia of African American Education, Volume 1*. Ed. Kofi Lomotey. Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2010. 529-531.

Halliday, Michael Alexander Kirkwood, and Ruqaiya Hasan. *Cohesion in English*. London: Longman, 1976.

Lee, Spike, and Cynthia Fuchs. *Spike Lee: interviews*. Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2002.

McGowan, Todd. *Spike Lee*. Champaign: University of Illinois, 2014.

Partridge, Eric. *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English – 8th Edition, edited by Paul Beale*. London: Routledge, 2006.

Pavesi, Maria. *La traduzione filmica: aspetti del parlato doppiato dall'inglese all'italiano*. Roma: Carocci, 2005.

Ramos Pinto, Sara. "How Important Is the Way You Say It?: A Discussion on the Translation of Linguistic Varieties." *Target International Journal of Translation Studies* 21.2 (2009): 289-307.

Scarborough, William Kauffman. *Masters of the Big House. Elite Slaveholders of the Mid-Nineteenth-Century South*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2013.

Sernett, Milton C. *Harriet Tubman. Myth, Memory and History*. Durham and London: Duke University, 2007.

Shuttleworth, Mark, and Moira Cowie. *Dictionary of Translation Studies*. Manchester: St. Jerome, 1997.

Starkey, Brando Simeo. *In Defense of Uncle Tom: Why Blacks Must Police Racial Loyalty*. New York: Cambridge University, 2015.

Tadmor, Carmit T., Melody M. Chao, Ying-yi Hong, and Jeffrey T. Polzer. "Not Just for Stereotyping Anymore: Racial Essentialism Reduces Domain-General Creativity." *Psychological Science* 24.1 (2012): 99-105.

Taylor, Yuval, and Jake Austen. *Darkest America: Black Minstrelsy from Slavery to Hip-Hop*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012.

van Doorslaer, Luc, Peter Flynn, and Joep Leerssen, eds. *Interconnecting Translation Studies and Imagology*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2016.