Translating migrants:
Lost voices in the Italian documentary film
Come il Peso dell'Acqua
and its English subtitles

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1. Introduction

Human migration has become a defining issue of this century. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 65.6 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide at the end of 2016. As for Italy, 123,000 migrants arrived by sea that same year, mostly from Syria, Eritrea, and various countries in West Africa.

In this context, the role audiovisual texts play in portraying such bi- and multilingual dialogues, as well as culture contact and conflict, cannot be underestimated and the proliferation of films and film festivals about migration is a testament to the increasing prominence of this social and cultural phenomenon. Thus, the translation of audiovisual texts – because of their enormous social impact and high visibility as a site of intercultural exchange (Ramière, 2006) – can play a crucial role in creating, spreading, and re-negotiating the way in which representations and identities of migrants are both constructed and communicated in polyglot films.

Following Wahl, polyglot films are "anti-illusionist in the sense that they do not try to hide the diversity of human life behind the mask of a universal language" (2005: 2). As a consequence, contrarily to what normally happens in commercial filmmaking, polyglots threaten cinema's internationalism in terms of its democratic and diplomatic

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potential, as well as the universality of the filmic language which has been promoted by Hollywood since the advent of sound (Shochat and Stam, 1985: 36).

While it is only since the 1990s that films have been dominating the cinematographic representation of "migratory and diasporic experiences" (Berghahan and Sternberg, 2010: 16), migration has always been a significant element in the production, distribution, and exhibition of films. It has been largely documented (Dwyer, 2005: 304) that the success of Hollywood films in cinema's silent era depended in fact on the exoticism of their narratives, with migration as one of the most popular cinematic themes. In fact, the early cinema days coincided with a period of great influx of European immigrants towards the United States. Thus, films often depicted popular attitudes toward immigrants, their aspirations, and the obstacles they encountered in hosting countries, such as in *The Immigrant* (1917), a short comedy featuring Charles Chaplin which was made a few years after Chaplin arrived in the United States from England. Moreover, the birth of sound, which coincided with an unprecedented wave of global migration towards the US, was precisely celebrated with a talking picture, *The Jazz Singer* (1927), dramatising and personalising the migrant experience. Many other migration films followed both in the US – such as *Abie's Irish Rose* (1929), celebrating ethnic intermarriage as a vehicle of assimilation – and in other countries, such as the French film *Toni* (1935) directed by Jean Renoir, with dialogues in at least three languages: French, Spanish, and Italian.

As far as European cinema is concerned, as a result of the socio-political and geopolitical changes which have occurred over the past twenty-five years, a growing number of films is now increasingly determined by multicultural and multiethnic presences and themes. By articulating 'difference' and 'otherness', these films often use language diversity as a way to represent migrant and diasporic identities, thus challenging the myth of film as a universal language and contrasting the cultural and linguistic colonisation initiated by Hollywood's film industry on foreign markets after the advent of sound. The faithful representation of language diversity on screen, which is the central tenet of these pictures, may increase the difficulties in making such films accessible to their heterogeneous audience, as will be discussed in the following section.

2. Translating language diversity on screen

Migration films have been identified by Wahl (2008: 341) as one of the five subgenres of polyglot cinema and described as "a valuable contribution to the discussion of the sociological shifts actually taking place in Europe" (*ibid.*). Migration certainly represents an ideal subject for celebrating the diversity of language on screen both horizontally, within the film narrative, and vertically, in the interaction between the characters and the audience. In this context, it is also important to stress that audiences should not be considered as a homogeneous and uniform entity. As Cronin (2009: 25) puts it "the differentiated and staggered nature of the multiple reception of films complicates any simple readings of what it is that films might be doing". Viewers may have different linguistic and cultural backgrounds affecting the way in which they perceive the film and its narrative functions.

It follows from the above that this attention to the sound of linguistic diversity in polyglot and, more specifically, in migration films affects different layers of the cinematic experience, being closely linked to the need to faithfully represent the singularity, at different social, cultural, and linguistic levels, of each character for the purpose of realism; in Wahl's (2005: 2) words, in polyglots "languages are used in the way they would be used in reality. They define geographical or political borders, 'visualise' the different social, personal or cultural levels of the characters and enrich their aura in conjunction with the voice". This matching is what O'Sullivan (2007: 82) calls "vehicular matching": instead of avoiding linguistic diversity or conflict, vehicular matching accepts them "[...] suiting the variations in the representational medium to the variations in the represented object" (*ibid.*). Therefore, realism is an intrinsic characteristic of polyglot films, to such an extent that Wahl (2008: 335) considers it as a requirement for the genre. Thus, the presence of two or more languages on screen, as well as the emphasis on realism, makes film translation – an activity which is already highly complex, implying several phases and requiring a number of multifarious skills and competences – an increasingly difficult task.

The decision on whether to translate or not multilingualism on screen depends on both quantitative and qualitative factors. As for the quantitative point of view, the prominence given to what is called L3, using the terminology coined by Corrius (2008) and Corrius and Zabalbeascoa (2011), that is the third language, influences the way such language is transferred (or not) to the target audience. However,

even languages which occur occasionally may play a key role in the film narrative. Thus, the qualitative aspect must also be taken into account, that is the function of L3 and the role it plays in the plurality of the film. In addition to that, it is necessary to take into consideration the context in which L3 occurs, as well as the expectations of the average viewer. As for the former, other semiotic codes may help the viewer understand what is going on in that particular scene and no translation may then be the most obvious choice. As for the latter, the primary target audience's linguistic background and its mastery of the languages involved may influence the decision not only on whether but also on how to translate L3.

As far as translation issues are concerned, theoretical discussions have focused both on the role that translation plays within polyglot films (Cronin, 2009; O'Sullivan, 2007; Şerban, 2012, among others) and on how the translation of multilingual films can be managed by translators. As for the latter, while some scholars have examined the combination of translation modes (Agost, 2000; Corrius and Zabalbeascoa, 2011; De Higes Andino, 2014, among others), others have favoured subtitling for preserving the complex relationship between the characters and their individual voices in different languages (Naficy, 2001; Wahl, 2005) and for enabling the target viewers to wholly experience the foreignness of polyglot films (Baldo, 2009; Cronin, 2009). Therefore, according to these scholars, subtitles seem to offer an excellent translation alternative to dubbing for preserving the authenticity of language diversity by creating an effect of alienation – which, at the same time, does not hamper comprehension and enjoyment – and by translating "the linguistic multiplicity of the planet into a familiar idiom" (Cronin, 2009: 106). However, in order to allow the audience to make use of the so-called "suspension of disbelief" (Coleridge, 1817/1985: 314), subtitles should be as unobtrusive and intelligible as possible. This means that the linguistic characterisation of the speakers can get lost in the subtitling process, as will be shown in the following sections.

3. Come il Peso dell'Acqua: a 'migration documentary'

European countries, particularly in the Mediterranean region, do not have a long tradition of migration and have been experiencing a large flux of migrants only since the late 1980s and early 1990s. In this context, the surge in anti-migrant rhetoric in recent years has been

accompanied by a wave of feature films and documentaries on the subject. Besides the longest-running film festival on issues surrounding immigration, the *San Francisco International Immigrant Film Festival*, the theme of migrant experiences was recently also at the core of the prestigious 2017 *BFI London Film Festival* programme. As far as Italy is concerned, among the directors who have represented the migrant experience on screen, Andrea Segre has successfully focused on the Euro-Mediterranean migrant crisis with *Mare Chiuso* (*Closed Sea*, 2012) and, more recently, with *Come il Peso dell'Acqua* (*Like the Weight of Water*, 2014), where he reflects on the real-life linguistic diversity of three migrant women, whose host country language is unfamiliar to them.

Produced and distributed by Rai 3 in 2014, *Come il Peso dell'Acqua* premiered on 3rd October 2014, on the anniversary of the Lampedusa shipwreck which caused the confirmed death of 366 people, as well as about twenty missing people. The film features two award-winning Italian actors (Marco Paolini and Giuseppe Battiston), who play a fictional role, and three migrant women from Africa and the Middle East, who narrate through interviews their real-life stories.

Come il Peso dell'Acqua can be seen as the result of a hybridisation of two cinematic genres, documentary and drama, for merging nonfiction and fiction modes. Therefore, using Wahl's (2005: 2) definition and classification of polyglot cinema (Wahl, 2008: 340), *Come il Peso dell'Acqua* can be defined as a 'migration documentary' for using four different languages and for representing "the process of integration, whether successful or not, to a foreign society and language" (*ibid*.). As far as its multilingual nature is concerned, relying on Corrius (2008) and Corrius and Zabalbeascoa (2011) system to distinguish the three types of languages in multilingual films, in *Come il Peso dell'Acqua* Italian acts as the L1, or first language, that is the dominant language in the source text used by Paolini and Battiston. Nasreen Tahfrom Syria and Semhar Hagos from Eritrea narrate their stories in Arabic and Tigrinya, respectively, while Gladys Yeboah Adomako from Ghana uses English as vehicle for self-narration. Therefore, English, Arabic, and Tigrinya act as the three L3, or third languages, that is the languages used by the three migrant women. On the other hand, as a documentary, *Come il Peso dell'Acqua* can be defined as an "observational documentary" (Nichols, 1991: 43), for making the audience experience the film as a template of life as it is lived. This even strengthens the film's need for realism, which is also an intrinsic characteristic of all polyglot pictures (Wahl, 2008: 335).

The film is divided into three different but interconnected narrative spaces. The first one is represented by an empty room, where Giuseppe Battiston plays a middle-class Italian man. Despite being well-aware of the arrivals of migrants and refugees, he is afraid of discovering the true dimension of the Euro-Mediterranean migrant crisis. However, his fear soon turns into a need to understand the complexity of the Mediterranean scenario. He thus embarks on a personal journey of knowledge by introducing Gladys, Nasreen, and Semhar. Indeed, the second narrative space is occupied by the three migrant women, who emigrated to Italy from their countries of origin (Ghana, Syria, and Eritrea), and their stories. The interviews follow three storylines: the memory of the journey, the crossing of the Mediterranean Sea and, finally, their arrival to and current life in Italy. As for the style of the interview, questions have been edited out in the finished film; no interviewer enters the frame and the audience can see and hear only the interviewees. Therefore, Gladys, Nasreen, and Semhar and their stories are the prime focus of attention and the audience is asked to adopt the perspective of 'the other', whose voices are often unheard or silenced and whose experiences are usually mediated by the hosting society.

The third narrative space is represented by a high-school classroom, where Marco Paolini plays a cartographer who shows both the audience and Battiston the migrant routes across Europe and the current migration flows by drawing geographical maps. Battiston will then hang up these maps on the walls of his initially empty room, together with the most symbolic objects representing the three women's journeys.

Before the three women start narrating their arrival to Italy, the centrality of the theme of the journey which permeates the whole film is further stressed by Battiston reciting a few lines of Giovanni Pascoli's poem *Italy*. Here, the Italian poet represents not only the loss of identity and the sense of estrangement felt by a family of Italian immigrants who return to their home country, but also the discomfort experienced due to linguistic misunderstandings with their Italian relatives. The film ends with Battiston reading an excerpt from Ryszard Kapuściński's book *In Viaggio con Erodoto* (Travels with Herodotus), where the late Polish writer tells the story of two intertwined journeys: the author's literal voyages across the world, and his pursuit of Herodotus, the Greek historiographer who reported from foreign lands in the fifth century BC.

Starting from the functions carried out by multilingualism in fictional audiovisual texts as identified by Wahl (2005, 2008),

Bleichenbacher (2008), and Díaz-Cintas (2011), among others, as well as in polyglot plays by Delabastita (2002), it is possible to determine the role of language diversity in *Come il Peso dell'Acqua*. First of all, in the film under study, multilingualism aims at achieving a realistic effect and languages are used in the same way they are used in the real world, in a way that Wahl (2005: 2) would call "naturalistic". Consequently, Nasreen and Semhar share their stories respectively in Arabic and Tigrinya, which are their mother tongues, while Gladys uses English as a vehicle for self-narration, that is the language she normally uses in Italy as a communication tool. In this context, multilingualism also serves another function, that is marking the identities of the three women as migrants, by using a language which is different from that of the hosting country (i.e., Italy). This challenges the monolithic notion of identity that marginalises the figure of the migrant by giving them an 'individual voice' through which they can share their personal stories. However, if we take the audience's perspective, the multilingualism at work in *Come il Peso dell'Acqua* may also function as a 'marker of otherness', depending on viewers' primary language and the way in which multilingualism is treated from a translational perspective.

As far as the original version is concerned, no translation is provided for L3 dialogues (English, Arabic, and Tigrinya), either intradiegetically or extradiegetically (O'Sullivan, 2007; Cronin, 2009; among others). Therefore, in this case, the director decided not to make translation part of the story by using, for example, an interpreter who mediates between the interviewer and the interviewed, while at the same time translating for the audience. Nor did he make the artistic choice (Şerban, 2012) of adding translation in the original for the audience to understand L3, such as voice-over or "part-subtitling" (O'Sullivan, 2007: 81), that is subtitles which are planned from an early stage in the film's production and are aimed at the film's primary language audience.

The absence of any form of translation in the original film is more a commercial rather than an artistic or political choice. It was not because the director wanted to make the audience experience a sense of incomprehension while confronting L3 dialogues, but rather to make the film as flexible as possible and easily adaptable to singular distribution needs. In Segre's words: "In my films, I always use multiple languages […] and all my films travel abroad, even in more than 40 countries […] but different translation modalities are used depending on the distributors, the channels of distributions, and the country itself" (A. Segre, personal communication, May 16, 2017; my

translation).[1] As will be shown in the following sections, the different translation modalities which have been used to distribute *Come il Peso dell'Acqua* in Italy and in the USA shall enable us to explore the difficulties multilingualism poses to both translators and viewers, sometimes altering the representation and perception of migrant's experience and identity.

4. *The distribution of* Come il Peso dell'Acqua*: in Italy and in the USA*

Come il Peso dell'Acqua is distributed by ZaLab, a small Italian association of which director Andrea Segre is also part. As far as Italy is concerned, depending on the context of distribution, a different translation modality has been adopted. When broadcasted on Rai3, where it premiered in 2014, the film had the dialogues of the three migrant women translated into Italian via voice-over, that is "the final product we hear when watching a programme where a voice in a different language than that of the original programme is heard on top of the original soundtrack" (Orero, 2009: 132). On the other hand, when distributed through the Italian cinema network, voice-over was substituted with Italian subtitling (A. Segre, personal communication, May 16, 2017). Thus, in both cases, the Italian language works both as L1 and L2, being the target language into which the three L3 (English, Arabic, and Tigrinya) are rendered. As for the US, *Come il Peso dell'Acqua* premiered in 2017 with English subtitles at the "Italy and the Euro-Mediterranean Migrant Crisis" event as the final stage of a joint project between University of Macerata (Italy) and Montclair State University (USA).[2] Therefore, Italian works as L1, English as L2, Arabic and Tigrinya as L3. However, as it is the case for the Italian audience, Gladys's English also works as L3 for US viewers, being here a variety typical of non-native speakers.

Ghana is a multilingual society with about 49 indigenous languages and a number of dialects spoken across the country (Davis and Agbenyega, 2012).[3] Even though the ability to speak English is still the

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[1] The interview was carried out with the support of Giulia Fratini (University of Macerata, Italy) as part of her MA thesis research.

[2] The project was coordinated by Elena Di Giovanni (University of Macerata, Italy), Teresa Fiore (Montclair State University, USA), Marisa Trubiano (Montclair State University, USA), and Francesca Raffi (University of Macerata, Italy).

[3] Despite the fact that nine Ghanaian languages have, since independence in 1957, been officially approved by the state to be studied in schools, they still com-

prerogative of a minority of the population, it often serves as a vehicular language, considering the numerous local languages spoken in the country (*ibid.*). Similarly, Gladys uses English instead of her mother tongue in the film while she is being interviewed since it is obviously more comprehensible than her Ghanaian mother tongue and it enables Gladys to make her story more easily accessible. With English being her second language, it sometimes deviates from standard norms and is often characterised by pragmatic and morphosyntactic simplifications, as shown in Table 1 below, with ST being the original audio of the film.

TABLE 1
Gladys's non-standard variant of English

ST	
1	My father is a farmer. My mother has six and the next wife has four. So let me say we are ten in number. So not all of us go to school.
2	He works very hard. When I had my baby, I don't work, I don't go, I'm at home and only my husband works.
3	You cannot stay in Libya permanent because human rights is not there.

In the examples 1 and 2, Gladys is describing her life in Ghana when she was a child. In addition to omitting the word "children" ("My mother has six and the next wife has four"), the adjective "next" is used inappropriately to indicate her father's second wife. Moreover, since she is speaking about her childhood, verbs should be used in the past tense. Similarly, in example 2, the verb "work", "go", and "be" are all wrongly used in the present tense.

In the example 3, Gladys is explaining why she decided to travel from Libya to Italy, where she arrived in 2006 after leaving her home country. The adjective "permanent" occurs in an adverbial position, where the adverb "permanently" should be used instead, and the noun-verb agreement is not accordingly structured ("human rights is not").

The fact that Gladys uses a non-standard variant can be easily recognised by mother tongue English viewers and by members of the audience with some knowledge of the English language. But

pete aggressively with English. Since 2002, English has been used as the only medium of instruction in primary schools and has become the sole official language of Ghana.

what happens when the film's primary target audience is composed of Italian speakers who can only hear Gladys's original speech in the background? We shall try to answer this question in the following section.

5. Come il Peso dell'Acqua *in Italy*

Come il Peso dell'Acqua broadcasted on Rai3 in 2014, with L3 dialogues (English, Arabic, and Tigrinya) translated via Italian voice-over, an audiovisual translation modality usually associated to nonfictional productions (Orero, 2009). Three different female voice-artists, with no regional or foreign accents, overlay the three women, contributing to create a feeling of reality. However, while it is clear that Nasreen and Semhar use a Semitic language, which is clearly far from the linguistic background of its primary audience, as far as Gladys is concerned, the Italian audience may have difficulties in detecting that hers is a non-native English through the soundtrack, not only because viewers may not be so fluent in English but also because of the voice-over, which almost wholly covers Gladys's voice.

Moreover, even though it is true that voice-over has the ability to portray a feeling of authenticity thanks to the delay between the original and the translated soundtrack, as far as translation is concerned, voice-over is far from being a literal translation exercise and it sometimes departs from the original text. It is interesting to focus on two excerpts taken from the original dialogue (ST) and their Italian translations via voice-over (TT).

TABLE 2
Come il Peso dell'Acqua: Italian voice-over

ST	TT (VOICE-OVER)	BACK TRANSLATION
1 The two boats moved together: this one is here, this one is here.	Le due barche sono partite insieme: una da un lato, una dall'altro.	The two boats left together: one on one side, one on the other.
2 Because this is not big boat, this is Zodiac. So, we moved together.	Perché non sono barche grandi, sono gommoni. Quindi, siamo partiti insieme.	Because they are not big boats, they are dinghies. So, we left together.

As shown in Table 2 above, in the example 1 Gladys relies on deictics

"this" and "here" to describe the position of the two boats while Gladys was leaving Ghana with her husband. Instead of relating them to the current situation, she uses "this" and "here" to refer to how the two boats were positioned at that time. Therefore, we may infer that the use of deictics here acts as a compensatory behaviour: Gladys relies on extra-linguistic context to convey a message she would not be able to easily express using her limited vocabulary. Moreover, Gladys's words are accompanied by two pointing co-speech gestures (i.e. simultaneously with speech), one to the left and one to the right, to show that the two boats were aligned side-by-side. The Italian voice-over (TT) translates Gladys's sentence with "una da un lato, una dall'altro" (i.e., one on one side, one on the other), thus explicating her pointing words and gestures.

In the example 2, Gladys uses the trade name "Zodiac", the world-leading company allegedly producing the boats more frequently used by people smugglers for transporting migrants across the Mediterranean (Andersson, 2014: 297). Again, we may infer that Gladys compensates the lack of vocabulary with her extra-linguistic knowledge: she knows the brand name of the boat, which has sadly become very popular among migrants, but she does not know the specific English term of that typology of boat. Similar to what happened in Example 1, voice-over explicates the term used by Gladys, and instead of the brand name "Zodiac", we find "gommoni" (i.e., dinghies).

Therefore, the Italian voice-over 'corrects' the non-fluent English spoken by Gladys, thus altering her identity as a migrant struggling to communicate her personal experience in a language which is not her own. In particular, the translation of the word "Zodiac" into dinghies not only shortens the linguistic distance between the Italian audience and Gladys but it also relocates the 'other' within a more familiar cultural and social space, a space where the word "Zodiac" probably does not evoke any reference to people smugglers.

It could be argued that the synchronisation of both the original and voice-over soundtracks where the first and/or the last part of an utterance in original is audible contributes to creating the illusion of authenticity – which somehow recalls the notion of suspension of disbelief. However, it could also be said that the way Gladys is represented, not only linguistically but also culturally and socially, has been shaped through the translation process by the fact that voice-over partially covers the source text, thus hampering the audience to possibly recognise the non-standard variant used by

Gladys, because of the translation choices made and, finally, for the deletion of grammatical errors.

The tendency of opting for standard English is also visible in the way Semhar and Gladys's original lines have been rendered in the subtitled version of the film distributed in the USA, as shown in the following sections.

6. Come il Peso dell'Acqua *in the USA*

Come il Peso dell'Acqua premiered in the USA with English subtitles and director Segre provided the subtitler and the proofreader, who was asked to revise the first translation, with a dialogue list in which both Arabic and Tigrinya were already translated into English. Since neither the subtitler nor the proofreader have knowledge of Arabic and Tigrinya, they both solely relied on the dialogue list to translate Nasreen and Semhar's interviews. Therefore, Nasreen and Semhar's linguistic identities have been already mediated from the pre-subtitling stage.

In the following sections, focusing on some significant examples, the multiple layers of the subtitling process will be taken into account: the passage from the soundtrack (ST) to the translated dialogue list provided by the director (TT1), the first subtitled version (TT2), and its proofread version (TT3).

7. Translating Semhar: From the source text (ST) to the third translation (TT3)

Since we do not know either Arabic or Tigrinya, we are not able to determine whether the translator working from the original dialogue has provided an accurate or faithful English translation of Nasreen and Semhar's lines. However, we can focus on an interesting passage, the only one in the whole film in which Semhar uses English while being interviewed. Gladys has just finished describing how dangerous travelling via sea is, then Semhar also tries to explain the difference between traversing the sea and the Sahara.

English is currently used to some extent in public life in Eritrea and is also the language of instruction in secondary schools (Hailemariam *et al.*, 2011: 231). Being a non-native English language speaker, Semhar uses a non-standard variant of English, like the one used by Gladys.

TABLE 3
Semhar's non-standard variant of English: from ST to TT1

ST	TT1
Sahara you can stay more than days and days but in the sea you think maybe I'm no swimming. Maybe after two or one hour I will be die.	In the Sahara you can stay for days and days but in the sea you think, maybe I cannot swim. You think, maybe after one or two hours I will be dead.

Semhar's English is clearly very poor in the original audio track (ST), while in the dialogue list (TT1) it has been improved considerably by adding necessary elements, such as the preposition of place "in" and definite article "the" which have been inserted before "Sahara" and the static verb "stay". Moreover, other grammatical mistakes have been corrected, for example by substituting the infinitive "die" with the past participle "dead". These interventions have had a direct impact on both the first subtitled version (TT2) and its proofread version (TT3), as shown in Table 4 below:

TABLE 4
Semhar's non-standard variant of English: from TT2 to TT3

Timing: 00:39:30:22 - 00:39:49:37

	TT2	TT3
1	In the Sahara you can stay for days and days.	In the Sahara you can stay for days and days.
2	but in the sea you think, maybe I cannot swim.	but in the sea you think: "Maybe, I cannot swim".
3	You think, maybe after one or two hours I will be dead.	You think: "Maybe, after one or two hours, I will be dead".

As far as the technical aspect is concerned, only a more accurate use of punctuation is introduced in the proofread version, with the appropriate insertion of a colon and double quotation marks before the quotation "Maybe, after one or two hours, I will be dead".

More interestingly, despite both the subtitler and the proofreader have access to the original audio track (ST), they both rely on the highly-improved English dialogue list (TT1) for producing TT2 and

TT3. This is maybe due to the fact that the majority of subtitling guidelines, from Ivarsson and Carroll's *Code of Good Subtitling Practice* (1998) to the ones developed by Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007), state that the language of subtitles should be grammatically correct. While Ivarsson and Carroll (1998: 20) advocate the function of subtitles as "a model for literacy", Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007: 192-193) provide a different reason for correcting grammar mistakes of non-standard variants: since these traits are signalled through the auditory channel, as well as the context and "local colour" (*ibid.*) of the audiovisual product, viewers with some knowledge of the source language will have no problem in recognising them. Considering that grammatical mistakes in writing can cause a greater impact on the audience than in oral speech, appearing in enormous letters on the cinema screen, this tendency is also in line with the commonly shared belief that subtitling has to be as invisible as possible and, to facilitate the reception of subtitles for viewers, "the focus must remain on the puppet, not the puppeteer" (Béhar, 2004: 85) in order to make the audience achieve the suspension of disbelief.[4]

The tendency of opting for standard English in the subtitles and therefore redressing grammatical mistakes of L3 is clearly visible in the way Gladys's English has been rendered in the final version of the subtitles (TT3), as shown in the following section.

8. Translating Gladys: from the source text (ST) to the third translation (TT3)

When we discussed the distribution of *Come il Peso dell'Acqua* in Italy and in the USA, we analysed three examples of Gladys's non-standard variant of English. In this section, we show how the subtitler and, then, the proofreader have respectively coped with these instances in the subtitles. Table 5 below presents the source text (ST), that is the original audio, the first translation (TT2), and its proofread version (TT3).[5] We shall discuss the two versions together, referring back to the source text when appropriate.

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[4] The fact that the invisibility of subtitling is a frequently reiterated theme not only in academia but also in the subtitling profession has been recently confirmed by Szarkowska (2016), who investigated through an online survey among professional subtitlers current market practices on subtitle presentation.

[5] Here, ST (i.e., the original audio) and TT1 (i.e., the dialogue list) coincide.

TABLE 5

Gladys's non-standard variant of English: from TT2 to TT3(timing: 00:13:37.42 - 00:14:26:74)

		Timing: 00:13:37.42 - 00:14:26:74	
	ST	**TT2**	**TT3**
1	My father is a farmer. My mother has six and the next wife has four.	My father is a farmer. My mother has six and the next wife has four.	My father is a farmer. My mother had six children and his second wife had four.
2	So let me say we are ten in number. So not all of us go to school.	So let me say we are ten in number. So not all of us go to school.	So let me say we were ten in number. So not all of us went to school.
3	He works very hard. When I had my baby, I don't work, I don't go,	He works very hard. When I had my baby, I don't work.	He worked very hard. When I had my baby, I didn't work.
4	I'm at home and only my husband works.	I'm at home and only my husband works.	I stayed at home and only my husband worked.

One interesting aspect which immediately strikes the eye is the maintenance in TT2 of Gladys's simplified and incorrect English. On the other hand, the proofreader has opted for standard English, redressing the grammatical mistakes found in both ST and TT2.

Contrarily to what happened in the above-discussed examples, in the subtitles shown in Table 6 below both TT2 and TT3 have redressed the grammatical mistakes found in ST.

TABLE 6

Gladys's non-standard variant of English: from TT2 to TT3 (timing: 00:28:09.74 - 00:28:25:14)

	Timing: 00:28:09.74 - 00:28:25:14	
ST	**TT2**	**TT3**
That's Libya…	That's Libya…	That's Libya…
You cannot stay in Libya permanent because human rights is not there.	You cannot stay in Libya permanently because there are no human rights.	You can't stay there permanently because there are no human rights.

As shown in Table 6 above, both TT2 and TT3 substitute the adjective

"permanent", which occurs in the ST in an adverbial position, with the adverb "permanently". Moreover, the noun-verb agreement has been restored and the negative adjective "no" has been added before the noun phrase in both versions ("there are no human rights"). Of additional note here is that in TT3 the word "Libya" has been substituted with the deictic "there", which harks back to the previous subtitle, thus improving cohesion. Moreover, the long form "cannot" has been substituted with its contraction, "can't", maybe to give a sense of informality and to try to reproduce Gladys's non-standard English without hampering the readability of subtitles.[6]

Therefore, the proofreader has almost 'rewritten' Gladys's original lines by correcting mistakes, improving cohesion, and enhancing readability. Considering that Italian, Arabic, and Tigrinya have been also translated into standard English, part of the polyphony of voices that the film tries to represent seems to get lost in the subtitles because of their homogenising effect. However, the audience the subtitles address is an English-speaking audience and is supposed to compensate the loss also thanks to the perception of visual and acoustic elements as one indivisible unit, as further discussed in the following section.

9. Conclusions

According to Meylaerts (2006: 3), translation can no longer be seen as "the full transposition of one (monolingual) source code into another (monolingual) target code for the benefit of a monolingual target public". In this context, the polyglotism in *Come il Peso dell'Acqua* portrays a linguistic and cultural contact zone, thus being a powerful mechanism through which to explore how migrants' identities are represented on screen.

In the original version of *Come il Peso dell'Acqua*, Gladys, Nasreen, and Semhar use different languages (non-standard variants of English, Arabic, and Tigrinya) to narrate a very similar personal story: leaving their country, traveling by sea, and trying to find a new place to live. Therefore, these languages interact one another within the same narrative space as a means to express, one the one hand, the women's cultural and linguistic diversity and, on the other, their

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[6] If the translator had decided to use the long form "cannot", we would have had a 34-character line. Considering that line length was limited to 38 characters, we assume that the decision to use the contracted form "can't" was not made because of space constraints.

common experience of being three migrant women and mothers now living in a hosting country. In this context, Gladys's lines deserve special attention. By using English as a *lingua franca*, which is likely to be more accessible than her Ghanaian mother tongue, she creates a linguistic space into which neither the 'host' nor the 'migrant' has the advantage of possession, thus opening some private space to 'the other' and making an attempt of resettlement.

Italian is the language of the two fictional characters (i.e., two Italian men) and of the primary audience of the film (i.e., Italian viewers), both representing 'the host' who tries to understand 'the migrant' and the complexity of this process of understanding is manifested by the diversity of languages used in the film. As a consequence, polyglotism operates on two different levels: in the interaction between the film's characters (i.e., the diegetic level) and on viewers' perception of the identities depicted on screen (i.e., the extra-diegetic level). Therefore, translation affects both the horizontal and the vertical level of communication, thus shaping both the representation and the perception of migrants' identities. Starting from Italy, *Come il Peso dell'Acqua* has been screened with voice-over for Italian television and with subtitles within the cinema network (A. Segre, personal communication, May 16, 2017).[7] First of all, the choice of adopting voice-over somehow limits the full perception of the film as multilingual, with the original soundtrack overlaid with a new soundtrack in the target language. Therefore, since 'the host' and 'the migrant' share the same language, the delicate balance between the 'desire to understand' and the 'difficulty of understanding' migrants' direct stories is altered and lost in translation. Moreover, as shown in the present study, the voice-over version presents a standard Italian accent which lacks any nuance that may reveal the different origins of the three migrants. Even if it is true that the audience can still hear the original speech in the background and that they can rely on the visual code and the overall context of the film to perceive the three women as three separate but intertwined identities, in the voice-over version their voices are somehow 'silenced' and integrated in the hosting

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[7] Although Italy has always been and still is a dubbing country, voice-over is systematically used to translate documentaries, interviews, and current-affair programmes in several contexts, among them on national television channels, such as Rai. On the other hand, subtitling is generally the preferred translation modality within the cinema circuit, especially for less commercial films which are expected to attract a niche target audience.

sociocultural and linguistic context. This is even clearer if we focus on the linguistic characterisation of Gladys, which is lost to any Italian viewer without a high level of spoken English. In addition to that, the translation choices made contribute to altering the representation of the migrants' experience and identities, thus possibly negatively affecting audience engagement. On the other hand, subtitling – which was also the preferred translation modality chosen to distribute *Come il Peso dell'Acqua* in the US – more effectively preserves language diversity and the lingua-cultural identities of the three migrants at the level of the soundtrack.

As far as the US audience is concerned, spectators may also rely on their knowledge of the English language to recognise that hers is a non-standard variant of English, thus perceiving Gladys as a migrant who sacrifices her own language to communicate more effectively in her hosting country. However, subtitling does not achieve the same result at the level of the verbal code. Considering that subtitles should be grammatically correct so as not to create problems of comprehension and to remain "invisible" (Díaz-Cintas and Remael, 2007: 192), syntactic and semantic mistakes have not been included in the subtitles and all the instances of broken language have been erased. This inevitably leads to homogenisation and neutralisation: all subtitles are written in standard English, thus depriving all the different cultural identities present on screen of their linguistic component.

As discussed in the previous sections, in the subtitled version of *Come il Peso dell'Acqua*, both in Italy and in the US, it is the relationship between the original dialogues in different languages and the subtitles into the target language which could enable the audience engage with the stories of the three migrant women and perceive the film as multilingual. Therefore, we can extend the notion of "synchresis" (Chion, 1994: 63) to subtitling, that is "the spontaneous and irresistible weld produced between a particular auditory phenomenon and visual phenomenon when they occur at the same time" (*ibid.*). Subtitles are indeed a visual element which is added to the original film, and this is precisely what the opponents of subtitling have always objected to, for making the translation process transparent and explicit. The difficulties that the asymmetry between auditory and visual channels pose to the audience may be challenging and even painful, but it is exactly this synchresis which gives meaning to migrants' 'voices'. On the contrary, as far as voice over is concerned, as shown in previous sections, the forging between something one sees (i.e., the moving pictures) and something one hears (i.e., the polyphony of voices) is

more difficult to be achieved because the audience can only hear the original speech in the background.

To conclude, since migrants can be defined as "translated beings" who are constantly engaged in "translating and explaining themselves" (Rushdie, 1983: 49), it is easy to understand why polyglots representing the migrant's hybrid status have always presented a potential threat to commercial filmmaking, not only for giving voice to characters, either real or fictional, who normally cannot find their own place on screen but also for asking for an extra effort on the part of the audience, also depending on the chosen translation modality.

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