

Translating Artificial Languages and Alien Identities in Science Fiction (Multilingual) Films

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Throughout history, artificial languages have often developed side by side natural languages, and although some of them have been relegated to the status of bizarre experiments, others have prospered and, as with Esperanto, are used to this day. In this sense, literature and cinema have often posited themselves as important arenas of linguistic creativity and have repeatedly voiced the impact new languages can have in societies where intercultural and interlinguistic issues are brought to the fore. From the Newspeak created by Orwell in *1984* to the Nadsat we find in *A Clockwork Orange* by Burgess, artificial languages have often represented important tools through which authors could question the relationship between language and power, the linguistic representation of Others, its consequences, and so on. In particular, because the genres of science fiction and, to a certain extent, fantasy represent the ideal settings in which the creativity of language can express itself, many of the artificial languages created throughout the 20th and the 21st century stem from this type of production. This paper therefore aims at analyzing some of the instances of artificial languages as represented in some of the most popular science fiction products of our age (the *Star Wars* saga in particular), focusing specifically on the way they were translated audio-visually for the Italian audience. As my paper suggests, the ineffective and often inadequate translations of these languages, which represent essential aspects of the fictional universes construed in these works, go to the detriment of the viewers' enjoyment and, more fundamentally, affect the many implications the source texts have at a linguistic, cultural, and philosophical level.

Keywords: artificial language, interlinguistic translation, audio-visual translation

Introduction

When addressing the potentials and the creativity of language, science fiction undoubtedly appears as a privileged arena, since in such genre the creativity of language is often taken to its extreme, in order to bring to life entire worlds and universes. Indeed, because of these works everything is a linguistic construction and the “worlds of words” created in literary, cinematographic, and television products become interesting fields of analysis, giving us the opportunity to consider the impact that language has on the molding of reality, the construction of identities, and the mechanisms at the basis of “inter-planetary” encounters. The latter clearly mimics the intercultural situations readers and viewers are confronted with in our human societies, demonstrating

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how science fiction has been used again and again as a resonance board for the concerns of humankind.

Consequently, the translation of artificial languages appears equally fundamental. Indeed, the way films and/or television shows that contain artificial languages are translated audio-visually determine whether their various functions and perlocutionary effects are maintained in the target texts, too (thereby establishing the success—or the failure—of the film and/or TV show in a different country). In addition, the way language is translated always bears important consequences not only at an epistemological level but also, and more relevantly here, from an ontological perspective, an aspect which assumes particular significance in this discussion due to the fact that in science fiction ontological interests are paramount (McHale, 1987).

Indeed, science fiction has always been exploited to represent not only epistemological issues related to the knowledge human beings might achieve in relation to the world surrounding them, but also ontological (and often ideological) ones. Specifically, the distinction between “human identity” and “alien identity” that is often staged in science fiction clearly represents the ontological concern *par excellence* (namely, what does make a human being into a human being) and simultaneously demonstrates the willingness to express the anxieties and preoccupations of the epochs these works stem from. It is not by chance, for instance, that the “space odyssey” sub-genre should flourish during the period of imperial conquests. Indeed, the genre gave voice to colonizers’ feelings typical of the imperial age. Similarly, the often catastrophic sub-genre of the “alien attack” expressed the fear of invasion by, according to the period, communists, fascists, Nazis (more in general, colonizers—for a detailed discussion see Canepari, 2013) or, in more recent times, immigrants, thereby demonstrating the strong ideological implications of the genre itself.

Furthermore, since science fiction has naturally been exploited to bring to the fore the linguistic construction of reality, it has often enabled readers to transcend the limits imposed by realism and, as Harrison (1991) stated, overflow the limits of the text. By so doing, science fiction has often affected readers’ assessments of the range of natural possibilities (Harrison, 1991), suggesting alternative possibilities of structuring reality and everything it encompasses.

The Development of Artificial Languages

The creation of artificial languages therefore represents an important mechanism in the construction of alternative realities and it certainly deserves critical attention. Throughout history, in fact, artificial languages have often developed side by side natural languages. Indeed, language planning and language construction started as early as the latter part of the 17th century, when Latin was losing its status as the language of scholarship and academies and authors started publishing their works in their native languages. The void of a *lingua franca* this retreat of Latin created thus triggered an interest towards an artificially produced language which could fill it.

Other factors that inspired the inventors of these early languages include the contemporary advances in mathematics. In particular, the invention of logarithms and Leibniz’s calculus in the 1670s sparked the construction of a language devised for the purpose of experimentation in logic, philosophy, or linguistics (Frathwiki, 2013). Naturally, a distinction should be made between what are normally defined as engineered languages (which serve as a means of philosophical, logical, or linguistic experimentation), auxiliary languages (namely invented languages that could be learned by everybody and that could be used internationally as a *lingua*

franca), and artistic languages (that is to say constructed fictional languages which were created by a particular author in a specific work of art). Within the first category, we can mention the Utopian language that Thomas More (2017) created in his *Utopia* (1516) and the philosophical language John Wilkins created in 1668, which in the author's intent should have been "a man-made language free from the ambiguity and imprecision that [afflicts] natural languages" (Okrent, 2009, p. 22). On the contrary, within the second category we can for instance refer to the Solresol language created in 1817 by François Sudre, which in his major work on the subject (namely *Langue Musicale Universelle*, published in 1866) describes it as the universal musical language. In addition, this category comprises other languages, such as the Universalglot created by the French linguist Jean Pirro in his *Tentative D'une Langue Universelle: Enseignement, Grammaire, Vocabulaire* (1868); the Volapük language created between 1879 and 1880 by the Catholic priest Johann Martin Schleyer, followed by the various Nov Latin (1890), Esperanto (1872), E-Prime (1933), Toki Pona (1978), Låadan (1982), and so on. Unfortunately, most of these languages have been relegated to the status of curious experiments. However, others have prospered and, as with Esperanto which was developed between 1872 and 1887 by Polish Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof, are used to this day.

Finally, the third category identified above consists of those languages created for (and in) specific artistic goods, such as novels, films, television series, etc. In this sense, literature and cinema have in fact often posited themselves as important settings and have often expressed the impact that new languages can have on actual societies where intercultural and interlinguistic issues play an important role. From the Newspeak created by Orwell (2017) in *1984* (1949) to the Nadsat Burgess (2015) invented in *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), artificial fictional languages have indeed become important tools through which authors could question the relationship between language and power, the linguistic representation of Others, its consequences, etc.

In particular, because the genres of science fiction and, to a certain extent, fantasy represent the ideal fields in which the creativity of language can express itself, many of the artificial languages created throughout the 20th and the 21st century stem precisely from this production.

For instance, let us think, among others, to the Sindarin language, the Hobbittish and all the other artificial idioms we find in *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1937-1949) (which are naturally reproduced in the novels' cinematographic adaptations of 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2001, 2002, 2003 respectively) or the Na'vi language from *Avatar* (2009), as well as the various languages represented in *Game of Thrones* (2011-in production).

It is however rather unquestionable that the best known artificial languages come from science fiction proper: from the Cityspeak spoken in *Blade Runner* (1982) to the Martian Language construed in *Mars Attack!* (1996), the Warm Language used in *Men in Black* (1997) or the various alien languages represented in the whole trilogy (1997, 2002, & 2012), and, possibly the best exemplification of all, the Klingon language created for the television series *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987-1994) and the subsequent spin-offs of the original series (1966-1969). Klingon was indeed adopted in all the following *Star Trek* feature films, too and it plays an important role in other products as well, as with the situation comedy *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-in production), where not only do the main characters regularly play Klingon Boggle (see for instance *S1 E1*, "Pilot"), but one of them, much to his wife's chagrin, writes his wedding invitations, precisely, in Klingon, (*S5 E16*, "The Vacation Solution"). Not only this, but—as Figure 1 well demonstrates—there are innumerable textbooks devised to teach

readers/viewers Klingon and many translations into Klingon of the major texts from world culture (among which *The Holy Bible*, *Hamlet*, and *A Christmas Carol*):



Figure 1. Composition of publications in and about Klingon.

This language was developed by Marc Okrand, a specialist in Native American languages and *Star Trek* enthusiast, who has produced an actual grammar and a lexicon of Klingon and now hosts online “courses” for those who want to learn this language (see for instance “Mark Okrand on Klingon”). During these lessons, for instance, he explains the “object-verb-subject” syntax of Klingon, its inflection of nouns (which can be either singular or plural, masculine or feminine), the inflection of verbs (which can be in the past, present, and future tense, can be in the indicative or the imperative mood and are distinguished by person and number), the uvular and retroflex consonants (the Klingon alphabet actually consists of five vowels and 21 consonants), and the strict syllable structure, according to which a syllable must start with a consonant, followed by a vowel.

As Klingon demonstrates, then, literary artificial languages are actual languages and in fact are often deliberately more elaborate in some way or another (in the specific case of Klingon, the phonological level appears particularly sophisticated) so that they would seem strikingly different from English and other widely-known natural languages. It is true that also writers from the 17th and 18th centuries have invented languages for the imaginary civilizations represented in their novels. Indeed, besides the philosophical works mentioned above, Swift (2012) himself suggested different languages in his *Gulliver’s Travels*, published in 1726, whose origins and mechanisms are still studied to this day (see for example Flood, 2015). In spite of this, it is actually during the 20th century, when the genre of science fiction experienced a real golden age, partly due to the developments of cinematographic techniques and special effects, that artificial, fictional languages prospered. In point of fact, science fiction products are rich of instances of artificial languages, and for instance, simply within the films belonging to the *Star Wars* saga (1977-2018), we can identify many different varieties of artificial languages (among others: Galactic Basic Standard, Droidspeak, Dug, Gungan, Ewok, etc.). These

languages—far from being mere eccentricities—actually enrich the production and add important sub-texts to the story itself, thereby determining the impact it can have on the audience and the function the films themselves can perform. It is therefore evident that the comprehensibility of these languages and their translation become fundamental.

Occasionally, the adoption of an artificial language does not actually require any translation, in so far as it might simply aim at portraying a particular character better, suggesting a peculiar trait, or creating an “alien”/“magical” atmosphere. This is for instance the case with *Harry Potter*, whose use of parseltongue in *The Chambers of Secrets* (2002), the second episode of the saga simply demonstrating that during the attack which scarred him for life, he acquired from Voldemort the ability to understand and speak this invented language which, contrary to other artificial languages, is not regulated by any grammar and has no fixed lexis, consisting mainly of hissing sounds.

Yet, very often, films and television shows actually present real instances of code-mixing and code-switching which render the way they are translated audio-visually extremely important. Thus, because artificial languages often have little or no actual relationship with real world languages, they require a significant effort of creativity on the translator’s part, too.

On the one hand, then, the science fiction products where the various characters, who usually come from different universes, are obliged to communicate with each other, can be compared to multilingual films, as they are based on the idea of (cosmic) multi- and inter-cultural realities. In this sense, the processes that normally regulate the translation of multilingual movies can be adopted in science fiction, too, often positing the choice between a domesticating and a foreignizing approach (Venuti, 1995). In actual fact, the issue of multilingual films has become increasingly important in our societies, to the extent that a new field—that of multilingual audiovisual translation—has recently come to life. From this perspective, it is patent that multilingualism and interculturality in science fiction goods suggest both the metaphorical nature of science fiction which, as maintained above, represents and gives voice to all too human concerns while simultaneously they point to the hyperrealism that—almost in contradiction with the nature of science fiction itself—characterizes this type of production. Indeed, albeit focused on alien and “unrealistic” worlds, expressions of stances that we could define, together with Swinford (2001), are “irrealistic” and in reality the worlds that science fiction frequently brings to life might be well described as “(hyper) realistic”, as they offer a detailed representation of Other worlds.

Thus, just as the processes involved in the translation of multilingual films have gained increasing academic interest and have been at the center of various publications (see for instance Heiss, 2004; Bréan & Cornu, 2012), so the audio-visual translation of science fiction products in which different languages are used should deserve the same type of academic interest. Indeed, if, as Jorge Diaz Cintas (2011) claimed, multilingual films are “those in which at least two different languages are spoken, by a single character or, more commonly, by several characters” (p. 215) and many of the examples mentioned in this article can be easily defined as multilingual works.

Translating Artlangs

Naturally, whereas translating the various natural languages present in multilingual films inevitably poses many of the problems that translating “monolingual” audio-visual products might present and on which various scholars have published (see for instance Pavesi, 2005; Perego & Taylor, 2012, among others), in the case of science fiction goods the issue is rendered more complex by the fact that the languages that need translating are not natural but artificial, man-made languages.

In general terms, artificial languages raise in fact peculiar issues in terms of translation. Indeed, despite what some scholars might maintain (see for instance Astori, 2017), the problems posed by auxiliary languages such as Esperanto are indeed very peculiar and originate. On the one hand, from the fact that artificial languages lack that historical development that, through specific etymologies, often assigns further meanings to natural idioms. On the other hand, the issues posed by auxlangs originate from the fact that, contrary to natural languages which—as amply recognized by many scholars who have emphasized in their work the importance of “the cultural turn” (see for instance Katan, 1999; Garzone, 2002, etc.)—always coincide with the expression of particular cultures, behind artificial languages there is no specific culture. On the contrary, auxiliary languages are often created specifically in order to be supranational and “above” individual cultural communities, as sort of *lingua franca*s through which people belonging to different linguistic communities could communicate.

It appears therefore clear that the process of translating artificial languages involves rather peculiar questions. This is particularly true when these languages belong to works of fiction and are the products of an author’s creative imagination. Indeed, in general terms, it is virtually impossible that a fictional language could have any equivalents in terms of units of translation that have an established corresponding terminology in both the source and the target text.

Furthermore, in such instances translators have to reproduce not only the formal meaning of the text—as it happens in a translation from a natural or an auxiliary language into a different natural language, for example—but they also have to express the function the artificial language performs in the source text, recreate the perlocutionary effects the artificial languages have in the source texts, and make sure that the pragmatic values that language assumes in the source are actually conveyed in the target text as well. The translator must therefore resort to strategies and procedures that could make up for the lack of existing equivalents, while still preserving the peculiar qualities of the source text. Indeed, in spite of the glossaries and actual grammars which, as noted above in relation to Klingon, have been compiled in an attempt to “standardize” some of these languages, when instances of code-switching are present in the (filmic) text, the translation process involving artificial languages has to take into consideration also issues of register, intonation, implicatures, etc.

Indeed, if, as suggested above, auxiliary languages do not express specific cultural issues which in fact they try to overcome, artlangs are often marked by the strong bond which normally exists between language and culture as well as language and identity. This is the reason why, for instance, the Klingon language does not have words for “thank you” and “you’re welcome”: The Klingon race is a proud and aggressive race, a warrior race that rejects all “softness”, which is in fact perceived as “weakness”, and the language it speaks is an expression of this cultural identity the Klingons have forged for themselves over the centuries.

We therefore see how—despite their artificial nature—the artistic, fictional languages on which this paper focuses distinguish themselves from the auxiliary languages introduced above. It is therefore obvious that also from a translation perspective the two kinds of languages require profoundly different strategies. Actually, whereas auxiliary languages are mainly utilitarian in purpose (in that most of the time they are conceived as purely informative means of communication), the scopes behind the fictional languages we find in literature and/or cinema are many and diverse: As suggested above, these languages might be considered a “realistic” expression of a different, alien culture, which therefore has to distinguish itself from the known languages of the existing human communities. In this sense, then, artistic languages seem the expression of a “realistic” effort, aimed at the construction of a plausible (albeit unrealistic) reality. In this sense, the alternative worlds construed, in spite of being different from those we know, are nonetheless governed by specific laws and logics.

At the same time, fictional languages such as that invented for example by Burgess might be created as a means to investigate the possibilities of (human) language and stretch its potentials to the extreme. From this perspective, artificial languages appear to overstretch the usual limits of human languages in order to create something new which—as Harrison (1991) noticed—could “overflow” realistic representations of the world and the passive attitude on the readers/viewers’ part they imply.

It therefore appears clear that these aspects and the main functions artificial languages are supposed to perform in the individual works they appear in are at the very basis of the strategies adopted during the translation process.

For instance, throughout the years much has been said on the way the languages created by Orwell in *1984* or Burgess in *A Clockwork Orange* work (see for instance: Evans, 1971; Fowler, 1995; Reznikov, 2001; Benet & Clarke, 2017) and the way the main functions artificial languages performed in the original works might be maintained in their translated versions, too, which has often become the object of academic interest (among others, see for example Maher, 2011).

Much less attention has however been devoted to the languages exploited in more popular science fiction products. Besides a handful of online sources, in fact, the academic and scientific interest in relation to the languages created for instance in the *Star Trek* or the *Star Wars* sagas and the way they were translated are very scarce. This is partly due to the fact that, for example in Italy, science fiction still has to fight against the prejudice which has relegated it to a genre too popular to deserve academic interest. In spite of this, as I have demonstrated elsewhere (see for instance Canepari, 2002; 2013), science fiction has often reached very high standards and it was by no chance adopted as the favorite means of expression of important authors, such as Salman Rushdie (1975), who for example in *Grimus* describes the adventures of his native American protagonist in a parallel universe.

In actual fact, science fiction—with its insistence on the Otherness of the alien—has often become a privileged laboratory of analysis, enabling authors such as Salman Rushdie—mainly known for his impact on postcolonial and postmodern literature (to which he contributed with fundamental works such as the novels *Midnight’s Children* (1981), *Shame* (1983), and *The Satanic Verses* (1988) and critical works such as *Imaginary Homelands* (1991)) and for his combination of magic realism and historical novel—to use science fiction as a useful tool to analyze the meeting of their cultures with Western modernity.

Indeed, when the alien is depicted as an invader and a conqueror, science fiction has often become a metaphorical and allegorical representation of historical situations, such as Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, or Apartheid South Africa. On the contrary, when the aliens are depicted as the conquered entities, they finally represent the various colonized subjects of human civilization. Thus, among other authors who adopted science fiction as a means of expression, we can also remember the Afro-American Samuel Delany—author of *The Einstein Intersection* (1967) and *Stars in My Pockets Like Grains of Sand* (1984); Octavia Butler—author of the “Xenogenesis Trilogy” (*Adulthood Rites*, 1988; *Dawn*, 1987; *Imago*, 1989); Nigerian author Buchi Emecheta—who after achieving international notoriety with her *Second-Class Citizen* (1974) explored the genre of science fiction with her post-apocalyptic novel *The Rape of Shavi* (1984); and the Indian Amitav Gosh, author of critical essays such as *In an Antique Land* (1994) and of various novels that might be considered as part of postcolonial literature such as *The Circle of Reason* (1986), *A Sea of Poppies* (2008), and *River of Smoke* (2011) as well as novels such as *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995), where the author—while remaining within the field of postcoloniality—in a similar way to Rushdie in *Grimus*, complies to science fiction canons, mixing western science with eastern mysticism.

Indeed, the relevance science fiction can assume in the context of postcolonial literature is fundamental and, as I will suggest below, enables us to draw some parallel between the strategies adopted during the translation process of postcolonial texts and those exploited in the arena of science fiction.

In particular, *Star Wars*—which represents one of the most prolific sub-genres of science fiction, namely that which Booker and Thomas (2009, pp. 40-52) term “space opera”, that is to say a sub-genre that comprises works focused on space journey (from *2001: A Space Odyssey* to *Star Trek*) and one of its variations such as interstellar battles (*Starship Troopers*, *Star Wars*, and *Alien*)—was adopted as a leitmotif for US cultural imperialism. In fact, the title of the movie would be later exploited in a synoptic book about the “theory and practice in postcolonial literatures” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1989), where the editors exploited the use that Rushdie had previously made of the title itself. Indeed, according to Rushdie, at a certain moment of their history of dispossession, writers from the colonies began to “write back” (Rushdie, 1982), suggesting, albeit very tentatively, that the subaltern (contrary to Spivak’s most pessimistic view) could speak. Indeed, although Spivak’s essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988) mainly concentrates on the situation of Asian women, some of her observations could, and have been, read as relating to the colonized subject in general.

Translating *Star Wars*

What is particularly interesting about the production (and, subsequently, the audio-visual translation) of the *Star Wars* saga is that the first two trilogies exhibit a completely different approach in terms of translation. As well known, the original trilogy was followed by a prequel trilogy (which from a logical point of view presented events that developed beforehand) and was then followed by a sequel trilogy, so that the whole saga appears composed as such (see Figure 2):

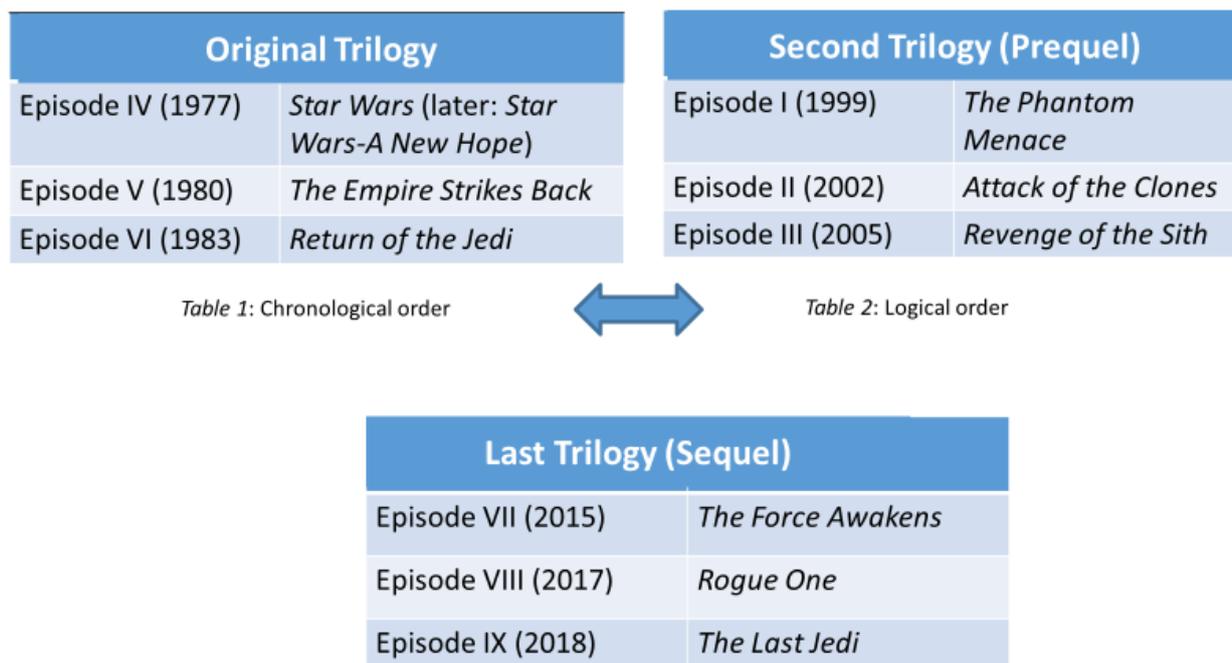


Figure 2. The last trilogy.

As the following extract from the sixth episode well demonstrates (*The Return of the Jedi*, 1983), the language spoken by Jabba the Hutt, which is translated partially into English in the subtitles provided in the original filmic text, seems to perform mainly an aesthetic function, facilitating an illusion of alien language in the film:

Jabba the Hutt: “Pah. Manga wanjee kohkpah (ooohl) Peecha wahnjee kohkpa tahng nahngee toochantkee troi. (puhhh) Fohtoooh ma Solo kaychahlah”.

English subtitles: “There will be no bargain. I will not give up my favorite decoration. I like captain Solo where he is”. (*The Return of the Jedi*, 1983)

In this scene, Jabba is bargaining with Princess Leila, who, in disguise, is trying to obtain the release of Han Solo, who was imprisoned in graphite. Clearly, the English subtitles are translated into Italian in the dubbed version of the film, whereas other stretches of dialogues are either directly and consciously translated by the droid C-3PO (who is called, rather amazingly, D3 BO in the Italian version, and who takes pride in being “fluent in over six million forms of communication”, thus testifying the importance of multilingualism in the universe conceived by George Lucas) or included in his response/comment, so that the audience can infer the sense of what the various characters say.

Clearly, as C-3PO seems to summarize the text when translating, viewers must assume that some of the information conveyed in the original has been left out in the translation, which cannot therefore be deemed faithful or literal in any way: In fact, fairly long extracts are not translated in any natural language. However, the intonation patterns (which are actually conveyed even when the language used is Droidspeak), the pitch adopted by Jabba, and the replies provided by other characters, which generally encapsulate the original message or make it clear by reacting to it, enable the audience to eliminate all ambiguity while appreciating the Huttese spoken by

Jabba, a language loosely based on the Quechua languages spoken in South America, whose alphabet contemplates three vowels and 15 consonants and which is characterized by a relatively free word order and inflections of both nouns and verbs.

Thus, this communicative translation manages to keep the atmosphere the director strived to obtain, namely a “multi-racial” environment where different species are present—with all their cultures and languages—and interact.

Similar cases are represented by the language spoken by the Ewoks, which is based on Tibetan, Mongolian, and Nepali languages, that of Chewbacca (the inseparable companion of Han Solo), and the Droidspeak of R2 D2 (who inexplicably became, in the Italian versions, C1 P8). This way, translators create instances of code-mixing and code-switching also in the target filmic text. This appears particularly typical of those situations when the artificial languages used do not actually have particular communicative capabilities (as, occasionally, with the Shyriiwook spoken by Chewbacca, which is essentially composed by the growling sounds produced by Grizzly bears). Rather often, in fact, these languages are mainly inserted in a product to give the realist illusion of an alien language, and by being left untranslated, at least in the first trilogy, they do not pose particular problems.

Indeed, this is actually what happens, in general, in the original trilogy, as exemplified by the following extract from the very first episode of the saga (now *Episode IV: Star Wars—A New Hope*), where the famous scene of the canteen has immortalized one of the best examples of linguistic richness and creativity (see Figure 3):



Figure 3. Standstill from *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope*.

Greedo: *Oonta goota, Solo.* (English subtitle: Going somewhere, Solo?)

Han Solo: Yes, Greedo. As a matter of fact, I was just going to see your boss. Tell Jabba that I've got his money.

Greedo: *Somepeetchalay. Vara trahm ne tach vakee cheetha. Jabba wanin cheeco-wa rush anye katanye wanaruska, heh heh heh. Chas kin yanee ke chusoo.* (English subtitle: It's too late. You should have paid him when you had the chance. Jabba's put a price on your head so large...every bounty hunter in the galaxy will be looking for you. I'm lucky I found you first.)

Han Solo: Yeah, but this time I've got the money.

Greedo: *Enjaya kul a intekun kuthuow.* (English subtitle: If you give it to me, I might forget I found you.)

Han Solo: I don't have it with me. Tell Jabba-

Greedo: *Tens hikikne. Hoko ruya pulyana oolwan spa steeka gush shuku ponoma three pe.* (English subtitle: Jabba's through with you. He has no time for smugglers...who drop their shipments at the first sign of an imperial cruiser.)

Han Solo: Even I get boarded sometimes. Do you think I had a choice?

Greedo: *Tlok Jabba. Boopa goompah-kne et an anpaw.* (English subtitle: You can tell that to Jabba. He may only take your ship.)

Han Solo: Over my dead body.

Greedo: *Ukle nyuma. cheskopokuta kles ka tlanko ... ya oska.* (English subtitle: That's the idea. I've been looking forward to this for a long time.)

Han Solo: I'll bet you have.

Thus, even though communicative capability is essentially a feature that is more often associated with natural languages and auxiliary languages, it is obvious that in fictional products, artificial languages display the same kind of ability. Because of the great complexity that creating a fictional language with full communicative capability involves, not all artlangs have evolved to the status of Klingon as far as its ability to facilitate spontaneous conversation is concerned. Furthermore, we must consider also the difficulty of getting people to become competent enough to actually "create" language beyond the words and expressions one could learn by heart. Yet, fictional languages can be said to be "communicatively capable", too.

In actual fact, even in the binary sounds of the Droidspeak or Huttese it is often possible to detect different intonation patterns which are supposed to perform an emotive and textual function (expressing for instance disappointment or anger), and the dialogues are clearly organized according to a turn-taking system in which, again, the end of a speaker's turn is often indicated by a change in the tone adopted.

Sometimes, even paralinguistic features, such as the timber of the voice, the pace, the pitch, and so on, concur in creating (realistically) un-real and fictional characters, thereby pointing to the hyper-realism that (despite the apparent contradiction) generally distinguishes science fiction. The dubbing process, then, should take into considerations these aspects, too, as they become important elements in the construction of the world the films want to conjure up.

This is why the first trilogy results extreme effectiveness also in its Italian version despite the inaccuracies that are detectable in the audio-visual translation of the films, in particular the rendition of the main characters' names which, besides the droids mentioned above, as we see in the figure below (see Figure 4), is less than accurate:

Source Text	Target Text
Lord Darth Vader	Lord Dart Fener
Han Solo	Ian Solo
Princess Leia	Principessa Leila
Palpatine [/pælpatin]	Palpatine [/pælpatain/]
C-3PO	D3 BO
R2 D2	C1 P8

Figure 4. The original names and their translated version.

Very different is the situation with which the audience is confronted in the second trilogy, especially the first episode (*The Phantom Menace*), where on more than one occasion the translation strategies adopted (much more domesticating and standardizing) nullify the effort made by the original director. And in fact, it was actually Lucas himself who repeatedly asked the producers to restore the original names of the droids in the Italian version, too, a choice that—albeit more respectful of the original filmic text—created much confusion in the audience, who after having grown accustomed to knowing the droids as “D3 BO” and “C1 P8”, in Episode 1 (*The Phantom Menace*), were introduced to “C-3PO” and “R2 D2”, that is to say the original appellations of the characters.

In addition, in the second trilogy, despite the occasional example of code-mixing, through which individual lexical items are inserted in the characters’ speech (as with: “that costs seven *wupiupi*”) most of the aliens speak Galactic Basic, the *lingua franca* that basically corresponds to human language and which in the filmic universe of the saga naturally coincides with American English. The latter is thus translated accordingly in standard forms, thereby muting all differences and homogenizing the universe construed by the narratives themselves.

As mentioned above, in Episode 1 instances of code-switching are practically absent, and perhaps more importantly, the Italian translation often assigns strong national and/or regional accents to alien characters, an operation which inevitably shatters the “willing suspension of disbelief” (Coleridge, 1979) that only can lead spectators to believe the unbelievable, so to speak, thereby turning the various characters into implausible caricatures.

Neimodians, for instance, native to the planet Neimoidia, speak in Italian with a very strong Russian accent. The reasons behind this choice are quite difficult to identify. Indeed, Neimodians have a reputation for being greedy, placing a lot of value on wealth and material possessions, thus actively seeking money and power by whatever means. Thus, to a certain extent, the connection might be—in the collective imagination the producers of the Italian version apparently wanted to activate—to the Russian mafia, which equally is considered focused on power, control, and wealth. However, besides the bewilderment created by the fact that a species born and bred in the midst of the universe should adopt in their speech a very human accent, the Neimodians are also famous for being cowards, which naturally appears in contradiction with the first trait identified above and seems to betray the pathetic isotopy (Greimas, 1966; Greimas & Courtés, 1979) put forward within the original text.

Perhaps even more disturbing is the choice of assigning a doubtful Italian southern accent to the dubbed version of Watto. The latter—who is a shady character and a swindler—actually becomes an example of the situational code-switching described by Blom and Gumperz in 1972. Thus, in the dubbed version, when he

addresses Jedi knight Watto uses an elementary Italian characterized by a strong southern accent and this choice naturally appears pregnant with meaning. Indeed, it is true that the translation opted for reproduces a standard way of translating audio-visual products (the notion of *doppiaggese* described, among others, by Pavesi, 2005; Perego, 2005; Di Fortunato & Paolinelli, 2005). Thus, from this perspective, the audio-visual translation simply perpetuates a way of translating. However, the fact that behind (and beyond) language, there are also, always, ideological stances, cannot be ignored, as this is extremely evident even when that language is used in translation. Indeed, the perpetuation of canonic ways of translating particular linguistic instances becomes an ideological tool exploited to obtain consensus and, by transforming acritic linguistic expressions into enclitic (Barthes, 1971), create and perpetuate stereotypes. Thus, although it was suggested that Watto could result offensive because with his large nose, beady eyes, and gravelly voice, he is portrayed as a stereotypical Jew (Hoberman, 1999), suggesting that the Jewish race is “behind the slave trade” (Gottlieb, 1999), in the Italian dubbed version of the film these perceptions are highly intensified by the linguistic choices made.

Thus, albeit this discussion is actually focused on linguistic and translation choices, because language is never, only, language, the consequences of specific linguistic choices extend—also within the field of entertainment as represented by such science fiction films as *Star Wars*—beyond language. As such, linguistic and translation choices have important consequences in the world that language wants to represent, perpetuating, in this instance, not only a way of representing specific identities, but also a way of bringing them to life and constructing them in the real world. Indeed, to the Italian audience, the association of a shady character with a person from the South of Italy will not go unnoticed and might reinforce the stereotype of the Italian Southerner as a criminal or, at least, a dishonest person.

The only exception to this linguistic anarchy might be represented by the language spoken by Yoda, which also in the original trilogy is characterized by a creative word order, rather than an altogether different lexis and grammar. Thus, within the original filmic texts, spectators are confronted with utterances, such as “When nine hundred years old you reach, look as good you will not”, which can be translated quite faithfully in other languages. However, in the case of Italian, the translators adopt a compensation strategy, so that a rhyme is added, while the de-familiarizing word order is maintained. As a result, the translated text is: “Quando novecento anni di età avrai, bello non sembrerai!”, where it is evident that the addition of the rhyme is certainly not required by the text or the target language and in fact it changes the pathemic isotopy of the original, presenting to the Italian audience a different Yoda.

Another exception is represented by the language spoken by Jar Jar Binks, native to the planet Naboo. Indeed, as we see in the figure below (see Figure 5), the original language corresponds to a mixture of American slang and sounds evocative of English. In the dubbed version, on the contrary, through a strategy of adaptation, the character speaks a hybrid language consisting of English, Spanish, the occasional “broken” Latin, and “ungrammatical” Italian. As a consequence, the incidence of romance languages appears much higher in the Italian version, thereby demonstrating the major role played by localizing strategies:

Source Text	Target Text
'tis embarrassing. But my afraid my've been banished. My forgotten, terrible tings if me goen back dare.	es imbarasante. Ma io, mi so estado miesso a bando. Mi dimenticà. I bosses fan me scios terribilis, terribilissimus, se io ritorna là.

Figure 5. The Gungan language spoken by Jar Jar Binks.

Yet, the standardization process which, in the dubbed version of the prequel, leads the various characters to speak the same language, naturally deprives them of their identity, turning them into simple “subjects” of the human race. The latter can thus be perceived as the “universal” colonizer, who clearly speaks the universal human language which, as suggested above, coincides with American English. The consequences of this state of affairs are therefore multiple and are partly due to the fact that the original films themselves have to a certain extent betrayed the linguistic policy adopted in the first trilogy, which was characterized by an incredible precision, attention, and respect for the many languages (and linguistic communities) represented in the texts.

As a matter of fact, in the prequel trilogy, the original production likewise assumes a much more domesticating attitude, translating into English most of the alien languages in which presumably the characters express themselves. This attempted uniformization, which is then magnified in the Italian version of the films, appears to contradict not only the original spirit of the saga itself, but also recent trends of translation and postcolonial studies, where an excessive domestication is deemed equivalent to muting—once again—the Other.

Conclusion

Indeed, I believe it is possible to take the comparison between science fiction as a genre and postcolonial literature posited above a step further and posit a parallel between the postcolonial translation of instances of postcolonial Englishes (characterized by phenomena of hybridization, code-mixing, and code-switching) and the translation of artificial, fictional languages that equally originate, in science fiction goods such as those analyzed in this brief article, instance of code-mixing and code-switching.

The interest in artificial languages has indeed often focused on historical linguistics (Bausani, 1970; Large, 1985; 1994; Carlevaro, 1989; Higley, 2007), linguistics (Blanke, 1985; Duličenko, 1989; Fiedler, 2007; 2012; Gobbo, 2009), and a generative perspective (Libert, 2000; Libert, 2003; Libert, 2004; Libert, 2008; Libert & Moskovsky, 2011), but the issue of translation has seldom been addressed.

Yet, we can actually see how the ineffective and often inadequate translations of these essential aspects of the fictional universes construed in these works go to the detriment of the viewers' enjoyment and, more fundamentally, affect the many implications the source texts have at a linguistic, cultural, philosophical, and ideological level.

Actually, the films of *Star Wars* (just as *Star Trek*) have often expressed the hope for a world in which different races—with their cultures and their languages—could live peacefully side by side. And in fact, it is not

by chance that Martin Luther King himself, a huge fan of *Star Trek*, really appreciated the show and acted as an intermediary, playing a major role in convincing Nichelle Nichols, who played the role of Lieutenant Nyota Uhura on the original television series (1966-1969), to remain on the show (Izadi, 2016). As a physicist Neil de Grasse Tyson emphasized, in fact, during the days when African-Americans were still fighting for legal equality in America, the role of Nichols took on special importance, in that her inclusion on the Enterprise spaceship pointed to a future when Americans could live and work together, putting race aside. And Luther King acknowledged this when he wrote to her saying that, despite her willingness to abandon the television show to pursue a career in Hollywood, she should not leave the series, as she had changed the face of television forever, leading for the first time the world to see African-Americans as equals and intelligent people.

The study of this kind of production and the way it is translated for the large audience, then, suggest the importance that “other” languages have (and have had) in human history and evolution. In point of fact, although the number of human languages has been considerably reduced over the past 500 years, there are still thousands of languages spoken and this diversity is not merely a historical accident, but is part of our cultural heritage and, as colonial and postcolonial literatures well demonstrate, it plays a major role in the construction of society, individual identities, and, ultimately, reality itself.

This is the reason why, in a world where language is acknowledged as forging reality, history and, above all, identity, the sophistication science fiction can achieve turns the genre into an essential laboratory, where other worlds are created through language, the dignity of minorities is acknowledged, the structure of reality as we know it is questioned, and the very ontology of humanity is investigated.

Thus, the translation process these products undergo should be considered a culturally fundamental enterprise, which raises issues that are extremely relevant to our contemporary world. As such, they appear worthy of critical attention, in so far as, precisely because they are directed to the masses and they can help to—as Barthes used to say—change our societies themselves (Barthes, 1973, p. 1611), by disseminating the notion that what was once considered the “curse” of Babel is in actual fact a blessing that enriches our universe.

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