

# TRANSLATING MULTILINGUALISM: THE ITALIAN DUBBING OF *MASTER OF NONE*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world, multilingualism has become an increasingly widespread and significant phenomenon. As migration, technology, and tourism continue to increase, people from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds find themselves living and working side by side in cities and communities worldwide. This blending of languages and cultures enriches society by encouraging the exchange of ideas, traditions, and perspectives, while also challenging individuals to connect across cultural boundaries and navigate differences with respect and openness.

Television series have embraced this reality, reflecting the multilingual and multicultural makeup of modern society in their storylines and character development. This article examines the primary challenges in translating multilingual audiovisual products that showcase linguistic diversity, emphasising the intricate relationship between multilingualism, translation, and characterisation. To explore how multilingualism is conveyed through Audiovisual Translation (AVT), this paper focuses on the Italian dubbing of *Master of None*, a multilingual TV series (Netflix 2015-2021). It represents an adequate case study since it features characters who navigate multiple languages and cultural identities, presenting a realistic depiction of everyday life in a multicultural setting. In particular, the investigation will focus on the first and second seasons of the show, since the third one can be considered a separate product: it has a different name, *Moments in Love*, and the main characters change, shifting gender perspectives and focusing mostly on the female experience.

## 2. MULTILINGUALISM ON SCREEN: FUNCTIONS AND TRANSLATION STRATEGIES

A multilingual film is a product where multiple languages or language varieties are spoken. This includes not only different languages but also variations within a single language, such as dialects, sociolects, and accents (Corrius and Zabalbeascoa, 2011; Beseghi, 2017; Delabastita, 2002 and 2009; Heiss, 2004; Voellmer and Zabalbeascoa, 2014). In the past decades the film industry, traditionally reluctant to portray languages other than English (Díaz Cintas, 2011: 216), has been undergoing important changes. Since the 1990s, there has been a significant increase in international films addressing multiculturalism, not only in terms of content but also linguistically. Indeed, scholars within the field of Film Studies and AVT Studies refer to such phenomena as a ‘multicultural turn’ (Meylaerts, 2006: 2) or ‘multilingual commitment’ (O’Sullivan, 2007: 84).

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As De Bonis (2015: 52) points out, multilingual films encompass a diverse range of films where multilingualism plays a significant role in both the narrative and the dialogue. Thus, multilingualism can be a feature of all cinematic genres and can serve multiple purposes. It can perform a realistic function when a film aims to provide an authentic representation of society's linguistic diversity (De Bonis, 2014, 2015; Díaz Cintas, 2011; O'Sullivan, 2011; Wahl, 2005). It can serve an ideological function when languages highlight an intercultural encounter, clash, or conflict, thereby taking on symbolic significance (Delabastita, 2002; De Bonis, 2015). Lastly, it can fulfil a comic function when a film employs languages to generate humour or confusion, for example in situations of misunderstanding or miscommunication (Chiaro, 2007; De Bonis, 2015; Brincat, 2019). As acknowledged by Beseghi (2020: 2), the functions of multilingualism are largely influenced by the cinematic genre in which they appear: comedies might employ multilingual exchanges for comic effects and humorous situations; while dramas might use linguistic diversity to depict social, cultural or ethnic conflicts. A particular function might be predominant in a film or play a crucial role in the plot, but in some cases multiple functions can coexist within the same film to suit the needs of specific scenes or contexts.

This evolution within the cinematographic field has inevitably led to a rise in academic studies on multilingualism in AVT. So far, these studies have focused mainly on films (Beseghi, 2017; Chiaro and De Bonis, 2020; De Bonis, 2014; Díaz Cintas, 2011; Minutella, 2021; Monti, 2018; Parini, 2015; among others). However, the use of multilingualism on screen has increasingly become a common representational strategy across other audiovisual formats, such as television series, which have surged in popularity due to digital streaming platforms (Beseghi, 2019; Dore, 2019).

Translating multilingual films often presents significant challenges, particularly in countries where dubbing is a common practice, such as Italy (Parini, 2015: 29). In the Italian dubbing panorama, three macro-strategies can be identified in relation to the rendering of multilingualism: the quantitative reduction of multilingual situations, neutralisation and preservation (De Bonis, 2014). The first strategy offers a middle ground between neutralisation and preservation. It involves reducing the number of multilingual scenarios, resulting in both the primary and secondary languages being translated into Italian, with partial retention of secondary languages only when deemed necessary by the Italian dubbing team. This approach often employs the use of specific regional accents, and it is quite common in the Italian dubbing industry, although it can lead to instances of linguistic inconsistency. The second strategy involves completely neutralising the linguistic diversity present in the original dialogues by dubbing the entire film in Italian. In this way, a multilingual product is transformed into a monolingual one, affecting the quality of the film and compromising its entire narrative structure. The third and final strategy maintains the different linguistic-cultural identities of the original dialogues by using a combination of dubbing and other audiovisual translation methods, generally subtitling. This technique, where the main language is dubbed and the secondary languages are subtitled in the viewers' language, is, however, not widely used at present (Cinato, 2021: 72-73).

### **3. MASTER OF NONE**

*Master of None* is an American dramedy created by Aziz Ansari, an American stand-up comedian and actor of Indian descent, and Alan Yang, an American screenwriter of Taiwanese descent. The TV series was released for streaming on Netflix from 2015 to

2021 and it is structured in three seasons. The title alludes to the phrase “Jack of all trades, master of none” (capable of everything, master of nothing), used to refer to people who juggle many fields without ever specialising in anything (Lewis, 2017). The series has earned widespread recognition and numerous awards: two *American Film Institute Awards* (2015, 2017), one *Critics’ Choice Television Award* (2015), one *Peabody Award* (2015), two *Primetime Emmy Awards* (2016), one *Primetime Creative Arts Emmy Award* (2017), and one *Golden Globe Award* (2017).

The importance of *Master of None* in the television landscape mostly lies in its diverse representation of gender and ethnicity, sharply contrasting with the traditional all-white casts of American sitcoms. It is a multifaceted series that tackles a wide range of themes often through the lens of multilingualism and multiculturalism, capturing the complexities of modern life with humour, authenticity, and depth. The protagonist, Dev Shah, is a thirty-year-old actor of Indian descent living in New York, who, like many people his age, struggles to balance love, friendship, family, work, and aspirations. As a first-generation American, Dev navigates the challenges of breaking into the entertainment industry while dealing with racial stereotypes and typecasting: he dreams of becoming a great actor, but only manages to land small roles – cameos in irrelevant films and TV commercials. The predominant theme of identity and cultural assimilation is also explored through another character, Brian Cheng, Dev’s best friend, who is of Taiwanese descent. Their storylines shed light on the clash between the traditional cultural values of immigrant parents and the attitudes of their American-born children. The themes of romance, friendship and ambition are also explored through the other main characters: Denise, an African American lesbian with brusque manners; Arnold, a tall, quirky metrosexual man; Rachel, Dev’s first girlfriend who dreams of shaking up her life; and Francesca, an Italian woman, Dev’s second love interest. Overall, the show addresses serious themes using a comedic approach, which not only provides entertainment, but also functions as a tool for critiquing societal norms.

The second season offers a broader and more introspective exploration of personal growth and cultural immersion as Dev relocates to Italy. In the opening shot, the camera frames a stack of DVDs next to the bed where Dev is sleeping: De Sica’s *Ladri di biciclette*; Antonioni’s *La Notte* and *L’avventura*; and Fellini’s *La dolce vita*, *8½*, and *Amarcord*. This frame sets the aesthetic and the mood of the entire season: the homage to classic Italian cinema is self-evident, especially through the black-and-white cinematography of the first episode.

#### 4. TRANSLATING MULTILINGUALISM IN *MASTER OF NONE*

In *Master of None*, English serves as the primary language, but the show frequently incorporates other languages to reflect the diverse background of the characters and enrich the story lines. Since the show skilfully weaves multilingualism into its narrative, it is a complex and challenging product to adapt. Indeed, translating and adapting linguistic variation and multilingualism is particularly difficult due to the challenge of capturing and conveying all the nuances and connotations associated with different language varieties and multiple languages within a film (Minutella, 2020: 49). When it comes to the Italian dubbing industry, there is a tendency to ignore or improperly translate linguistic varieties. In past studies, Ranzato (2010: 55) pointed out that the approach to translating language varieties in audiovisual products was often superficial, amateurish, or simply indifferent

to the problem. The present analysis of the Italian dubbed version of *Master of None* will investigate if this tendency to obliterate language diversity is still in use.

#### 4.1. English varieties, accents and migrant languages

In *Master of None*, most of the characters are Americans from New York who speak American English. Issues with translating varieties of a language arise from characters who speak one of the varieties of English and have a foreign accent (Dev's Indian parents, uncle and aunt), and those who speak English but do not come from English-speaking countries (Brian's Taiwanese father). Dev's parents, Ramesh and Nisha Shah, are Indian immigrants who moved to the United States in 1983. Coming from the Indian State of Tamil Nadu and being Tamil Muslims, Dev's family members are inevitably multilingual speakers. Since English is one of the official languages of India's federal government and a medium of instruction, they speak Indian English. They also speak Tamil and Hindi, and they know Arabic to some extent due to their religion. Their multifaceted identities are conveyed by the way they speak, as they employ the communication strategy of code-mixing. For instance, Ramesh and Nisha often start or end their lines with the Tamil expression 'poda', an informal and colloquial term that can mean 'go' or 'get lost'. It carries an impolite undertone when used in a formal context such as talking to elders, but it is often used in a teasing or playful manner<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, Dev's parents often use it to convey feelings of surprise or disappointment. Moreover, they regularly address Dev using the Hindi terms of endearment 'beta' (son<sup>3</sup>) and 'raja' (prince<sup>4</sup>), and they use typical Islamic phrases such as *Insha'allah*, *Salaam alaikum*, *As-salaam alaikum*, and *Alaikum salaam*.

In the Italian dubbing, Ramesh and Nisha, along with Salil and Sabina – Dev's uncle and aunt – speak slowly and do not keep an Indian accent. However, some lexical elements<sup>5</sup> are kept unchanged to preserve their foreignness. This is particularly evident in the episode *Religion*, which deals with cultural identity, parental expectations and generational conflict.

Table 1. Religion (season 2, episode 3)

	Original version	Italian dubbed version
Ramesh	Salaam alaikum, brother.	As-salaam alaikum.
Dev	Why you saying 'salaam alaikum'?	Perché dici 'as-salaam alaikum'?
Ramesh	Salil Uncle and Sabina Auntie are religious.	Zio Salil e zia Sabina sono religiosi.
Salil	As-salaam alaikum, Dev.	As-salaam alaikum, Dev.
Sabina	Dev, it is so good to see you, beta.	Dev, è bello rivederti, beta.
Ramesh	Salaam alaikum, beta.	Salaam alaikum, figliolo.
Dev	Alaikum salaam.	Alaikum salaam.

<sup>2</sup> *Tamil Slang Words You Should Know*, on [www.talkpal.ai](http://www.talkpal.ai).

<sup>3</sup> See *बेटा* (beta) on [www.shabdkosh.com](http://www.shabdkosh.com).

<sup>4</sup> See *राजा* on [www.shabdkosh.com](http://www.shabdkosh.com).

<sup>5</sup> In general, the names of traditional Asian food are always left unaltered (*mysore pak*, *murukku*, *mirchi*, *omapodi*, *popodam*, *korma*, *curry*, *shawarma*, *laddu*, *yukgaejang*, *kimchi*) to illustrate how important it is for the immigrant characters to preserve their traditions in a foreign setting.

Sabina	Navid, raja, are you feeling okay?	Navid, caro, è tutto ok?
Navid	Yeah, I feel a lot better after resting now.	Si, sto meglio dopo aver riposato.
Dev	Um, how was the prayer? Sorry I missed it.	Com'è stata la preghiera che ci siamo persi?
Salil	Your father's cell phone went off in the middle of the second rak'a.	Il cellulare di tuo padre ha squillato durante il secondo rak'a.
Ramesh	I set a reminder to go to the prayer. I set the wrong time.	Era per ricordarmi della preghiera. Ma era l'ora sbagliata.
Nisha	[speaking Tamil]	[speaking Tamil]
Ramesh	[speaking Tamil]	[speaking Tamil]

In the Italian dubbed version, the Muslim greetings are kept, not only to facilitate lip synchrony, but also due to their relevance to the theme of the episode. The Hindi terms of endearment 'beta' and 'raja' are subjected to different choices. Throughout the series, 'beta' is left in Hindi when pronounced by Dev's mother and aunt, while it is translated as 'figliolo' (son) when pronounced by Dev's father, while 'raja' is translated as 'caro' (dear). During the dinner, Ramesh and Nisha also speak Tamil to each other. In the original version, no subtitles are provided; and in the Italian dubbed version the same strategy is adopted. In this way, the scene can properly convey the other's characters perspective: people who do not speak Tamil and do not understand what they are saying to each other.

Besides the Indian characters, there are other Asian characters: Peter Cheng, Brian's father, is Taiwanese; Linda, one of Peter's girlfriends, is Korean; Katoman, a chef, is Japanese. As an immigrant, Peter speaks English fluently but retains his Chinese accent. He never speaks Mandarin with his son, he speaks it only on one occasion with a waiter at a Chinese restaurant, and subtitles are provided both in the original and in the Italian dubbed version. Unlike the Indian characters, the other Asian characters do not present distinctive linguistic traits in the Italian adaptation. Peter and Linda do not keep their Asian accent. This strategy of neutralisation collides with the relevant theme of immigration, which is widely discussed in the episode *Parents*. Throughout the episode we see some flashbacks, childhood memories of Ramesh and Peter, respectively set in India and Taiwan. These moments are respectfully kept in the characters' native languages, Indian and Chinese Mandarin, and subtitles are provided both in the original version and in the Italian adaptation. The episode delves into the cultural gaps between first-generation immigrants and their children, highlighting the sacrifices made by the parents. During the dinner scene, Nish and Peter recount their struggles as immigrants and the issue of communication when they moved to the United States.

Table 2. *Parents (season 1, episode 2)*

	<b>Original version</b>	<b>Italian dubbed version</b>
Dev	What about the first day, though? Did you go out and explore the city?	E che hai fatto quel giorno? Sei andata a farti un giro?
Nisha	No, I sat in the couch and cried.	No, mi sono seduta sul divano e ho pianto.
Dev	Well, that's really sad.	Ma che tristezza.
Nisha	[speaking Tamil] You asked!	Sei tu che me l'hai chiesto!
Dev	Well, is there anything else you remember?	C'è altro che ti viene in mente?

Nisha	Yeah, I was scared to answer the telephone, because nobody would understand me because of my accent.	Sì, avevo paura a rispondere al telefono, perché nessuno riusciva a capirmi per via del mio accento.
Peter	I was scared of answering the phone, too. They yell so much. 'What?' 'Huh?' I just got to this country. Why are they so mad?	Anche io avevo paura di rispondere al telefono. Tutti gridavano molto. 'Cosa?' 'Eh?' Io ero appena arrivato qui. Sembravano arrabbiati.
Brian	That's messed up. Your English is good.	È pazzesca questa cosa. Voi parlate bene.

The neutralisation strategy employed by the Italian dubbing team is evident by the obliteration of Nisha's Tamil expression. Moreover, the incongruity arises because none of the immigrant characters has a strong foreign accent, though it is the topic of their conversation. The same strategy is applied to Linda, a woman Peter is dating. In the episode *Door #3* (season 2, episode 7), Peter confesses to Brian that he is seeing a Korean woman. The conversation is followed by a dinner scene involving Peter and Linda. Despite pronouncing traditional Korean dishes (*yukgaejang*, *kimchi*) in the proper way, Linda speaks standard Italian.

An interesting case is that of Katoman, a Japanese man that Dev interviews in the TV show he hosts with Chef Jeff. The show is called BFFs (Best Food Friends), and it follows Dev and Chef Jeff as they explore different culinary delights and the cultural contexts around them.

Table 3. *Buona Notte* (season 2, episode 10)

	Original version	Italian dubbed version
Katoman	[speaking Japanese]	[subtitle] Per favore, mescolate e mangiate.
Dev	God, Katoman, this is amazing. Thank you.	Kotoman, questo è formidabile. Grazie.
Katoman	Arigato.	Arigato. [subtitle] Grazie.
Dev	Ah, so you speak a little English?	Ah, parli un po' della mia lingua?
Katoman	A little.	Solo un po'.
Dev	What's your favourite English word?	E qual è la parola che preferisci?
Katoman	Beer.	Birra.

Katoman is a Japanese chef who speaks very little English. When he serves food to Dev and Chef Jeff he speaks in Japanese. In the original version, no translation is provided, while in the Italian dubbed version the sentence is translated, and a subtitle is inserted. The Japanese word of thanks "arigato" is kept, but again the translation is provided in a subtitle. The strategy of preservation works fine until Katoman speaks English. In the Italian adaptation, his Japanese accent is obliterated, making the conversation odd, mostly because he pronounces the word 'birra' (beer) perfectly: Japanese people realise the liquid phoneme /r/ as an apico-alveolar tap [ɾ] or as an alveolar lateral approximant [l] (Magnuson 2009: 28-29). For a Japanese person the /l/ and /r/ sounds are difficult to differentiate due to their native phonological system, therefore Katoman's utterance is phonetically inaccurate and makes him scarcely credible.

The theme of immigration is further explored in the episode *New York, I Love You*, which is entirely dedicated to New York, a multi-ethnic and multicultural city, which is home to

many immigrants. Among the characters are a group of African immigrants who share a small apartment and work as cab drivers: Samuel, Junior, Jameson and Watson. Their origins are never made verbally explicit, though in their apartment there are flags on the wall from Burundi and Cameroon. Coming from African nations where both English and French are official languages, they all speak English fluently with an African accent, but Samuel and Jameson also speak French and Rwanda-Rundi languages. At the beginning of the episode, Samuel is on the phone with a friend and they both speak a Rwanda-Rundi language. In the Italian adaptation, following the original version, the dialogue is made understandable through subtitling. Later in the episode, the men go out and communicate in all their native languages.

Table 4. *New York, I Love You* (season 2, episode 6)

	<b>Original version</b>	<b>Italian dubbed version</b>
Samuel	How much is a bottle of vodka?	Quant'è una bottiglia di vodka?
Waitress	Eight hundred dollars.	Ottocento dollari.
Watson	Eight hundred dollars? Uhm?	Ottocento dollari? Uhm?
Jameson	[speaking Rwanda-Rundi]	[speaking Rwanda-Rundi]
Samuel	[French] Beaucoup d'argent! [subtitle] That's a lot of money!	[French] Beaucoup d'argent! [subtitle] Sono un sacco di soldi!
Jameson	[Rwanda-Rundi] [subtitle] Her nephew is probably eight years old.	[Rwanda-Rundi] [subtitle] Suo nipote avrà forse otto anni.

In the Italian dubbing, they all speak Italian fluently but while Samuel, Watson and Junior have a strong African accent, Jameson has a French one. As far as the other languages are concerned, the Italian adaptation keeps the original language and the subtitles when they are provided in the original version. Since both Samuel and Jameson (on one occasion he says 'Bonjour' and it is kept in the Italian adaptation) speak French, it would have been a more coherent and logic choice to give a French accent to both.

Lastly, in the episode *Old People*, Dev has dinner with Carol, his girlfriend's grandmother. He takes her to her favourite restaurant, which is Italian, and they speak with an Italian waiter.

Table 5. *Old People* (season 1, episode 8)

	<b>Original version</b>	<b>Italian dubbed version</b>
Carol	So, Anthony, what are the specials?	Allora, Anthony, che cosa proponi?
Anthony	Today we have an excellent chicken Milanese, a veal Francese, and my personal favourite, homemade pappardelle with an oxtail ragù. Buonissimo!	Oggi abbiamo un ottimo pollo alla milanese, vitello alla francese, e il mio preferito, pappardelle fatte in casa al ragù di coda di bue, buonissimi!

Bamonte's is a family-owned Italian American restaurant in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, New York City. The Bamonte family opened the restaurant in 1900, after migrating from Salerno, Italy (Kessler, 2014). The current owner, Anthony "Fat Tony" Rabito, Pasquale Bamonte's grandson, is part of the Bonanno crime family. Thus, the restaurant is

notoriously associated with the Italian American Mafia, and it was also featured in various film and television productions about organised crime, such as *The Sopranos*, *Kojak*, *Person of Interest*, *Cookie*, *Homeland* and *Blue Bloods*. In the original version, Anthony, the waiter, speaks with an Italian accent, not attributable to a specific region. The challenge for the Italian translator/adapter stems from the fact that the character is Italian, and his native language corresponds to the language of the dubbed version. In the Italian adaptation, to convey Anthony's foreignness, he speaks with a marked regional pronunciation: The Italian American of the original version is turned into a regional Italian, specifically the variety of Sicily. This is not an unusual strategy: from the 1970s – from the release of *The Godfather* (1972) – the Sicilian inflection and dialect have been used in Italian dubbing to characterise both Italians and Italian Americans, especially those related to the Mob (Minutella, 2021; Parini, 2019; Rossi, 2006). Instead of neutralising Anthony's speech, the stereotypical portrayal of the Italian American man is perpetuated. However, it would have made more sense to have Anthony speak with a Neapolitan accent, considering the origins of the restaurant's owner (the waiter has the very same name) and that the actor who plays him is indeed from Napoli.

#### 4.2. *Imitation of foreign accents*

In addition to the accents that convey a touch of realism and help in depicting the immigrant experience, *Master of None* also uses accent impressions to add a layer of humour to the characters' interactions. As observed by Chiaro (2010: 9), accents and traits of dialects are humorous, and they are often exploited in comedies. Indeed, throughout the series, some characters mimic foreign accents for humorous purposes. In the episode *Hot Ticket* (season 1, episode 3), Dev goes to a Father John Misty concert and brings Alice, a love interest, with him. Before the concert, Alice asks Dev to make a video of her and she goes on doing a British accent. She finds the impression funny, while Dev is surprised and perplexed by the woman's bizarre attitude. In the Italian adaptation, the accent is eliminated, and Alice speaks standard Italian. This strategy is used both because of the non-equivalence between varieties in different languages, and because the sentence is very short and irrelevant for the purposes of the narration. In the episode *Nashville* (season 1, episode 6), Dev and Rachel decide to go on a weekend-long date in Nashville. To make their stay in a hotel room more entertaining, they create a funny story about the room: it is haunted by various characters, including a ghost koala. Dev pretends to be the ghost and speaks using an Australian accent, since this species is native to Australia. In the Italian adaptation, the accent is obliterated, and Dev simply delivers the lines in a higher-pitched voice. In the episode *Mornings*, Dev and Rachel argue because Dev points out how messy and unclean the woman is.

Table 6. *Mornings* (season 1, episode 9)

	Original version	Italian dubbed version
Rachel	Great, I'll be your maid. Oh, excuse me? Room service. Oh, sorry, sir. You're here. I heard you want the floor clean.	Ottimo, sarò la tua cameriera. Ehm, mi scusi? Servizio in camera. Oh, scusi signore. Ho sentito che voleva che pulissi il pavimento.
Dev	What? All right, whatever accent you were just doing, it's very offensive, so you're a racist boo and a dirty boo.	Ma? Va bene, qualunque accento tu stia facendo, è molto offensivo. Sei un pochino razzista oltre che sporchina.

During the argument, Rachel gets angry and pretends she is a foreign maid: her accent is very ambiguous but is clearly Asian. In the Italian dubbing, Rachel does not imitate any accent, but she speaks in a higher-pitched voice, making it sound like a child's voice. The issue with the Italian translation is Dev's reaction: he points out to Rachel that imitating an Asian accent, and therefore perpetuating the cliché of Asians working the menial and low salary jobs, is a very offensive and racist action. Consequently, Dev's sentence in Italian seems nonsensical, since Rachel speaks her line with no foreign inflection and the sentence is grammatically correct.

#### 4.3. Italian as a main language in the source text

In season two, *Master of None* takes an even deeper dive into multilingualism by immersing itself in the Italian culture, particularly through the extensive use of the Italian language. The season begins with Dev relocating to Italy to learn the art of pasta-making; thus, the first two episodes are set in Italy – Modena and Tuscany. Finding himself in a new cultural and linguistic environment, Dev uses the Italian language as much as possible to adapt and integrate into the Italian way of life. His use of Italian is not limited to simple phrases or words but extends to meaningful conversations with many local characters. Dev's ties with the Italian language are not severed when he goes back to New York, because he keeps in touch with Francesca, an Italian woman he befriends and later develops feelings for. Their interactions are perfectly bilingual and emphasise the intimacy and mutual learning that characterise their bond. Hence, the season is mostly focused on the cultural and linguistic barrier that exists between Dev and Francesca, between the United States and Italy. As Díaz-Cintas (2011: 216) points out, language has the power to symbolise both understanding and misunderstanding or emphasise otherness. Languages are clear signs of geographical and political borders and have the potential to represent the different social, cultural and personal dimensions of the characters.

The peculiarity of the Italian dubbing is the choice of breaking with dubbing itself by entirely subtitling the episodes set in Italy and reintroducing dubbing for the episodes set in the United States. On one hand, subtitling allows viewers to experience the language as Dev does – sometimes fluently, sometimes stumbling through. All the characters are immersed in continuous code-mixing and code-switching: Dev speaks Italian, the Italians speak English, everyone has a marked foreign accent and makes mistakes. This language barrier serves as a storytelling tool, highlighting Dev's personal growth as he learns to adapt to a new culture and navigate relationships in a foreign language. On the other hand, the alternation of subtitling and dubbing is strange and alienating for the Italian audience, which is accustomed to the characters' dubbed voices. Moreover, a major discrepancy comes from the Italian characters in the original version: Francesca and Pino speak Italian with a Roman inflection as they are both from Rome, but in the dubbed episodes they are dubbed by dubbers who speak standard Italian.

Due to the translation choices, the drama of not understanding each other, the humorous moments and the beauty of teaching and being taught something new are either obliterated or transformed into meaningless and strange situations and dialogues. Indeed, several inconsistencies arise from the strategies employed by the Italian dubbing team. The first can be found in the subtitles of the episode *The Thief*. Dev is saying to his Italian friends that he will have lunch on his own at Hosteria Giusti to celebrate his birthday.

Table 7. The Thief (season 2, episode 1)

	<b>Original version</b>	<b>Italian dubbed version</b>
Dev	I need a little me time.	[subtitle] Ho bisogno di tempo mio.
Francesca	What's 'me time'?	[subtitle] Che significa?
Dev	It's, like, time to yourself.	[subtitle] Tempo per me stesso.
Francesca	That's sad. OK, we celebrate tonight. I'm gonna have some 'me time' in the bathroom.	[subtitle] Che tristezza. Va bene, festeggeremo stasera. Adesso ho bisogno di tempo mio in bagno.
Dev	Hey, don't use it like that.	[subtitle] Ehi, non usare così quell'espressione.

Francesca speaks good English, but her level of proficiency is not the highest. She is not acquainted with the English noun 'me time', referring to the time when a person who is normally very busy relaxes or enjoys something alone. In the Italian adaptation, 'me time' becomes 'tempo mio' (my time), making the conversation quite odd, since the sentence would not need any explanation.

Later, Dev's cell phone gets stolen, and he reports the theft to a policeman. Francesca leads the conversation as she is interpreting for both Dev and the policeman. Dev becomes frustrated due to the policeman's attitude and the uselessness of the conversation.

Table 8. The Thief (season 2, episode 1)

	<b>Original version</b>	<b>Italian dubbed version</b>
Francesca	No, ha spento il 3G perché sarebbe troppo caro.	
Policeman	Peccato, perché in questo caso sarebbe stato utile averlo attivo, no?	
Francesca	Well, he said: "That's too bad, because in this case, it would've been very useful to have it on".	[subtitle] Ha detto: "Peccato, perché in questo caso sarebbe stato utile averla attiva".
Dev	Come si dice 'no shit'?	[subtitle] Come si dice 'grazie al cazzo'?
Francesca	Do you want me to translate that?	Glielo devo tradurre?

In the original version, Dev gets annoyed and asks Francesca how to say "no shit" in Italian. The Italian subtitles are certainly odd since Dev asks how to say 'grazie al cazzo' (no shit) in Italian while speaking Italian, and Francesca asks if she should translate it.

In the episode *Le Nozze*, Dev is leaving for New York and goes to say goodbye to Francesca. Talking about what he would do back home, he says that he could open his own pasta shop and invites Francesca to go work for him.

Table 9. Le Nozze (season 2, episode 2)

	<b>Original version</b>	<b>Italian dubbed version</b>
Francesca	Why should I work for you? I mean, I'm better than you. I can come and open my own competing shop.	Perché dovrei lavorare per te? Io sono più brava di te. Verrò ad aprire il mio pastificio per farti competenza.

Dev	Your own 'competing' shop? Maybe people will come to mine when they want someone that can speak proper English. It's "competing".	Per farmi 'competenza'? La gente verrà da me perché parlo un inglese corretto. È 'concorrenza'.
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Francesca makes a mistake as she says 'competing' instead of 'competing', probably influenced by the nouns 'competition' and 'competitor'. In the Italian subtitles, Francesca mistakes 'competenza' (competency) for 'concorrenza' (competitiveness). Consequently, Dev corrects her. This strategy would have made sense if Dev had been Italian and Francesca a foreigner, or if they were speaking a third language. Instead, it seems that Dev, the American who does not speak Italian very well, knows Italian better than Francesca. In this way, Francesca comes across as uneducated about her own native language.

In the episode *The Dinner Party*, Francesca goes on a business trip to New York with Pino, her fiancé. She takes the opportunity to see Dev again and they meet at a museum.

*Table 10. The Dinner Party (season 2, episode 5)*

	Original version	Italian dubbed version
Dev	I gotta tell you something, though. I am very hungry. Is there any way we can see the entire museum in, like, three minutes and then go get food?	Ti dico una cosa, però. Io ho molta fame. Pensi che possiamo vedere il museo in tre minuti e poi mangiare?
Francesca	Se fai il bravo ti do un biscotto.	Se non ti lagni un biscotto guadagni.
Dev	What does that mean?	Eh, come dici?
Francesca	If you're good, I'll give you a cookie.	Se fai il bravo ti do un biscotto.

Dev is hungry and asks Francesca to hurry up and visit the museum so they can go eat right away. She answers in Italian and he does not understand the meaning of the sentence. In the Italian adaptation, Francesca's sentence changes a little and she does an impression of a regional accent, from Emilia Romagna. She is familiar with that accent because part of her family is from Modena, but in this context the translation choice is odd, because the sentence is clear and understandable. Therefore, Dev's reaction appears to be nonsensical.

Later, Francesca and Dev go to a dinner party together. Taking a break from the crowd, they go smoking on a terrace.

*Table 11. The Dinner Party (season 2, episode 5)*

	Original version	Italian dubbed version
Francesca	Merda, I think it's finished.	Minchia, credo sia finita.
Dev	What's 'merda' mean?	Che significa 'minchia'?
Francesca	Uhm, it means 'shit'. It's an Italian expression. We use it to say "shit, it's finished".	Significa 'cacchio'. È un'espressione italiana. La usiamo per dire "cacchio, è finita".

When Francesca realises that the electronic cigarette is empty, she uses the Italian emphatic exclamation 'merda' (shit). Dev, who is not accustomed to it, asks for the

meaning and she provides an explanation. In the Italian adaptation, ‘merda’ is replaced by ‘minchia’ and ‘shit’ by ‘cacchio’. ‘Minchia’ is a vulgar exclamation belonging to the Sicilian dialect, though it has entered the Italian language, and it means ‘dick’; similarly, ‘cacchio’ is a euphemism for dick. According to the translation, Dev is supposed to know the word ‘cacchio’ and not ‘minchia’. Francesca’s clarification (it’s an Italian expression) is even more nonsensical, given that they are both speaking standard Italian. Dev does not sound like a foreigner learning a new language at all. It would have been more appropriate to have Francesca speak the dialect of Modena, as this is the strategy which is often used in dubbing when the target language coincides with a main language in the source text (Minutella, 2021).

In the same episode, there is another scene where Francesca tries to teach some Italian words and expressions to Dev.

*Table 12. The Dinner Party (season 2, episode 5)*

	<b>Original version</b>	<b>Italian dubbed version</b>
Dev	Can’t believe you guys never taught me the bad words while I was living in Modena.	Non mi hai mai insegnato le parolacce quando stavo a Modena.
Francesca	You’re right. I think I should teach you something. Okay, lesson number one. Figlio di puttana. It means ‘son of a whore’.	Hai ragione. Ti posso insegnare qualcosa. OK, lezione numero uno. Figlio di una bagascia, che significa ‘figlio di puttana’.
Dev	Figlio di puttana.	Figlio di una bagascia.
Francesca	And there is brutto cornuto.	E poi c’è brutto cornuto.
Dev	What does that mean?	Che significa...?
Francesca	That’s really bad. It means ‘you’re ugly, and your spouse is cheating on you’.	Questa è proprio brutta, significa ‘sei brutto e tua moglie ti tradisce con un altro’.
Dev	Just those two words?	Solo in due parole?
Francesca	Yeah.	Sì.
Dev	When’s the last time you said that?	Uh, quand’è l’ultima volta che l’hai detto?
Francesca	I never say that. It’s really, really bad. I just say ‘li mortacci tua’.	Io non l’ho mai detto, è una cosa molto brutta. Io dico solo ‘li mortacci tua’.
Dev	What does that mean?	Che significa...?
Francesca	It means ‘go fuck yourself and all your dead family members’.	Significa ‘vai a farti fotttere, tu e i tuoi parenti morti’.
Dev	Wow. That’s cold.	Wow, questa è tosta.

Dev tells Francesca that nobody taught him Italian bad words while he was living in Modena. Thus, she proceeds to teach him some classic vulgar expressions. The Italian adaptation is totally nonsensical: again, it’s odd that someone who speaks standard Italian would mention that they do not know Italian very well. The first expression is ‘figlio di una puttana’ (son of a whore), which is translated as ‘figlio di una bagascia’, an expression that young people do not usually use. The second is ‘brutto cornuto’ (ugly cuckold), an expression that everyone who speaks fluent Italian knows, and the third is ‘li mortacci tua’ (fuck you), an expression belonging to the Roman dialect. The entire conversation would have made more sense if the strategy had involved the use of a dialect.

In the episode *Amarsi Un Po'* (season 2, episode 9), it is Dev's turn to teach some English to Francesca. They take a walk in a park, and she says that Pino has proposed to her.

Table 13. *Amarsi Un Po'* (season 2, episode 9)

	<b>Original version</b>	<b>Italian dubbed version</b>
Dev	How did he propose? Did he pull out all the stops? Do you know what 'pull out all the stops' means?	Come te l'ha chiesto? Ha fatto tutti i passi? Sai che significa 'fare i passi'?
Francesca	Yes, I do.	Sì, lo so.
Dev	How do you know that, and you don't know what cashews are?	E perché non sai cosa sono i cashews?
Francesca	I don't know. I just do. Wait. What cashews is?	Non lo so, non lo so e basta. I cashews che sono?
Dev	They're nuts. They're just those curved nuts.	Sono anacardi. Le noccioline ricurve.
Francesca	Okay.	OK.

When Dev asks Francesca how Pino proposed to her, he uses the English idiom 'to pull out all the stops', which means 'to do something on a grand scale'. Then, he is surprised because she knows the idiom, but she does not know the word 'cashews'. In the Italian adaptation, the idiom is translated with 'fare i passi' (to take the steps), which is not an equivalent of the English one and it is not even an idiom in Italian. It is odd that Dev asks Francesca if she knows the meaning of an Italian locution. Moreover, 'cashews' is kept in English, making the conversation even odder, because there is no reason why Francesca should know that word. Dev also comes across as someone who is more proficient in Italian than he is.

Later in the same episode, Dev and Francesca take a scenic helicopter ride and Dev finally opens about his feelings for her.

Table 14. *Amarsi Un Po'* (season 2, episode 9)

	<b>Original version</b>	<b>Italian dubbed version</b>
Dev	You really want to be with Pino? Is that what you want in your heart? You can't be lukewarm.	Vuoi veramente stare con Pino? È quello che vuoi nel tuo cuore? Non puoi essere tiepida.
Francesca	What's 'lukewarm'?	In che senso tiepida?
Dev	It means not hot, not cold. It's in the middle.	Cioè, né calda né fredda, nel mezzo.
Francesca	I don't want to be lukewarm.	Non voglio essere tiepida.
Dev	No, see? I just want to do this with you. I want to laugh with you. I want to define random English words.	No, vedi? Io voglio fare questo con te, e ridere con te. Voglio insegnarti strane parole.

Dev questions Francesca about her feelings, because he knows that there is a connection between them. He asks her if she really wants to be with Pino and tells her that she cannot be lukewarm, meaning that she cannot be indecisive, she must take a stand and choose who she wants to be with. Francesca does not know the word and Dev gives an explanation and says that he wants to teach her random English words. In the Italian

adaptation, the concept of being neither hot nor cold is kept, but Dev's closing line is problematic: he tells Francesca that he wants to teach her strange words. First, Francesca does not ask for the meaning of the Italian word 'tiepida' (lukewarm), but the sense applied to her situation. Second, it is certainly not an American who speaks little Italian who can teach Italian words to a native speaker. In the Italian dubbed version the teaching moment is obliterated, therefore Dev's final line is nonsensical.

Lastly, in the episode *Buona Notte*, Dev and Francesca go to Dev's house and act out a hypothetical first meeting and first dance together.

Table 15. *Buona Notte* (season 2, episode 10)

	Original version	Italian dubbed version
Dev	Buonasera.	Buonasera.
Francesca	Buonasera.	Buonasera.
Dev	Sono Dev.	Sono Dev.
Francesca	Francesca.	Francesca.
Dev	Piacere Francesca.	Piacere Francesca.
Francesca	Piacere Dev.	Piacere Dev.
Dev	Ehm, ti piace musica italiano?	Ehm, ti piace musica italiana?
Francesca	Sì, molto.	Sì, molto.
Dev	Quella vecchia?	Quella vecchia?
Francesca	Soprattutto quella vecchia.	Soprattutto quella vecchia.
Dev	Va bene. Vuoi ascoltare una canzone con me?	Va bene. Vuoi ascoltare una canzone con me?
Francesca	Mm-hmm. But I choose it.	Mm-hmm. Però la scelgo io.
Dev	Mh. Allora. Bella.	Mh. Allora. Bella.
Francesca	I know. You're supposed to ask me to dance.	Lo so. Ora devi chiedermi di ballare.
Dev	Vuoi... un dance? Mi dispiace, non parlo italiano bene.	Allora... danziamo? Mi dispiace, non so come si fa.
Francesca	No. 'Vuoi ballare?' Say it.	No. 'Vuoi ballare?' Dillo.
Dev	Vuoi ballare?	Vuoi ballare?
Francesca	Certamente.	Certamente.

This scene is particularly romantic and linguistically complex due to the code-mixing and code-switching characterising both Dev's and Francesca's speeches. Francesca plays *Un anno d'amore* by Mina and suggests Dev to ask her to dance. Dev does not know how to ask it in Italian and Francesca tells him the phrase. In the Italian adaptation, Dev uses the verb 'danzare' and Francesca corrects him by using the verb 'ballare', but they both mean 'to dance'. Therefore, Dev's apology is nonsensical.

The examples presented highlight inconsistent translation choices, which undermine the pleasure of watching a deep and multifaceted TV series.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Multilingual TV series are becoming more and more common, promoting linguistic diversity and exposing audiences to various language interactions. These shows highlight that language is essential for character development: characters express themselves and create their identities also through the languages they speak. *Master of None* stands out in

contemporary television because it offers a nuanced and authentic depiction of the multilingual realities of our society by portraying language learning, the blending of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and bilingual communication. Throughout the series, how the characters speak plays a significant role in character interactions and narrative development. As shown in the analysis carried out in this study, the Italian dubbing is structured on inconsistent translation choices, which fail to preserve some essential themes of the series (cultural identity, immigration, multilingualism) and undermine the pleasure of watching a deep and multifaceted TV series.

The Italian dubbing obscures foreign identities by mostly neutralising linguistic diversity: no Asian character keeps a foreign accent and having them speak slowly is quite offensive. Some immigrant characters speak their native languages on some occasions: in the Italian adaptation subtitles are provided only when they are present in the original version, otherwise they are dubbed into standard Italian. Overall, the Italian adaptation partly fails to convey the hybridity of the immigrant experience and does not do justice to the complexity and flavour of the original version.

The challenges of maintaining the authenticity and humour of the original while adapting the dialogue to suit Italian-speaking audiences increase in the second season, as some episodes are set in Italy and Italian becomes a main language in the source text. Code-switching and code-mixing function as important means of the bilingual immigrant's characterisation. The dialogues between Dev and Francesca certainly need to be adapted creatively, but the lack of coherent and creative translation strategies obliterates the multicultural and multilingual essence of the series. Moreover, Dev and Francesca are unjustly belittled, and they both come across as nonsensical most of the time.

The case study analysed might advance the conversation on the feasibility of dubbing multilingual audiovisual products and the employment of dubbing actors suitable for the roles of immigrants and multilingual speakers. Moreover, research could further explore the working dynamics within the dubbing studios to better grasp the reasons behind the translation strategies adopted. As Minutella (2020: 59) points out, dubbing strategies depend on multiple factors, such as the client's requests, marketing reasons and the availability of dubbing actors. Nevertheless, further research might be able to observe a greater number of factors.

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## FILMOGRAPHY

*Master of None* (2015-2017), Aziz Ansari and Alan Yang, Netflix, USA and Italy.

## ABSTRACT

Nel mondo odierno il plurilinguismo sta diventando un fenomeno sempre più significativo a causa dell'aumento delle migrazioni, della tecnologia e del turismo. Ciò comporta la coesistenza di diverse comunità culturali e linguistiche e il conseguente arricchimento della società. Negli ultimi decenni le industrie del cinema e della televisione hanno progressivamente incluso la diversità linguistica all'interno delle loro produzioni per fornire una rappresentazione autentica delle realtà multiculturali e plurilingue. Il presente articolo esplora la complessa relazione tra plurilinguismo, traduzione e caratterizzazione dei personaggi nei prodotti audiovisivi. In particolare, l'articolo esamina il doppiaggio italiano della serie TV americana *Master of None*, che raffigura personaggi immersi in più lingue e identità culturali. Inoltre, si identificano le diverse forme e funzioni del plurilinguismo e si analizzano le strategie di traduzione adottate nella versione doppiata in italiano.

In today's world, multilingualism is becoming more and more significant due to the rise in migration, technology, and tourism. This results in diverse cultural and linguistic communities coexisting and enriching society. In recent decades, the film and television industries have increasingly included linguistic diversity in their productions to pursue realism and represent multicultural and multilingual realities. This article explores the complex relationship between multilingualism, translation and character portrayal in audiovisual products. Specifically, it examines the Italian dubbing of the American TV series *Master of None*, which portrays characters navigating multiple languages and cultural identities. The article aims at identifying the different forms and functions of multilingualism and analysing the translation strategies adopted in the Italian dubbed version.

## PAROLE CHIAVE / KEYWORDS

multilingualism, linguistic diversity, audiovisual translation, Italian dubbing

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