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“Santa mozzarella!”: The construction of Italianness in *Luca* (Disney and Pixar, 2021)

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ABSTRACT

Eighty-one years after *Pinocchio* (1940), Walt Disney and Pixar are back with a new animated film set entirely in Italy, *Luca* (2021). It is a coming-of-age story based on a deep friendship between two sea monster boys and a human girl from Portorosso, an imaginary sea coastal town in the Cinque Terre (Liguria), in the nostalgic mid-1950s. This study intends to investigate the construction of Italianness in the film on the visual and acoustic levels. First, this article will briefly examine the visual representation of Italian people, objects and traditions that contribute to the overall construction of fictional Italianness in the film. Then, the fictional language used to characterise the inhabitants of Portorosso to distinguish them from the sea monsters will be examined in more detail; this will be done by analysing code-switching instances, where Italianisms will be included in four different categories. Unlike *Pinocchio*, *Luca*'s producers have created an artificial code that is of particular interest to researchers in the field of Sociolinguistics and Audiovisual Studies. This study will mainly focus on the construction of identity and Kozloff's functions of film dialogues. In the final sections of the article, which will analyse code-switching, Brown and Levinson's impoliteness theory will also be addressed.

Keywords: sociolinguistics, English linguistics, film studies, characterisation, fictional language.

1. Introduction

Despite the repetition of common stereotypes typical of audiovisual products (Lippi-Green 2012), *Luca* can be considered a tribute to Italian culture. It is an American fantasy film which was produced by Pixar Animation Studios and distributed by Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures in June 2021. It is the

second full-length Pixar film after *Soul* that, due to Covid-19, has not been released in theatres but exclusively on Disney+. The film is directed by the Genoese Enrico Casarosa, written by Jesse Andrews and Mike Jones, and produced by Andrea Warren. It is set on the Italian Riviera, in the fictional coastal village of Portorosso (the name is a blend of those of the Italian villages of Portovenere and Monterosso), inspired by the Cinque Terre in Liguria, in northwest Italy. The setting and soundtrack are inspired by Italian society of the mid-1950s, “a golden age that feels timeless” (Nemiroff 2021), giving the film a touch of Italian nostalgia that is often stereotypically used in audiovisual products. The film centres on Luca, an adorable 13-year-old sea monster boy who lives with his species under the water’s surface. The sea monsters have the ability to assume human form on land, unless water touches their body, which causes them to revert to sea monster form. In a reverse perspective, however, the audience sympathises with the sea creatures and sees humans as a threat to them. The people of Portorosso, especially the fishermen sailing distant waters, occasionally spot them and put the sea monsters’ lives at risk. The barriers between humans and sea monsters are broken down at the end of the film when the two species finally coexist in the town of Portorosso and several minor characters – especially lovely old Italian women – reveal their true nature as sea monsters. In the style of a coming-of-age story, Luca meets Alberto, another sea monster boy, who encourages the protagonist to venture out of the sea for the first time and shows him his ability to look human when dry, which had been kept secret by his family. The film can be interpreted on several levels, and the messages that it conveys are equally diverse – deep friendship, inclusion, exaltation of differences, love. As the producer Andrea Warren explains, “we always liked the idea that the metaphor of being a sea monster can apply to so many different things. There is a theme of openness, showing oneself and self-acceptance, as well as community acceptance” (Jefferson 2021). In an over-interpretive mood, *Luca* has been seen as the story of a homosexual relationship between Luca and Alberto, who, in order to be accepted by society, hide their true sea monster identity; others have interpreted the film as a metaphor for refugees and immigrants. The director welcomed all these interpretations, but admitted that it was all unintentional (Style 2021). In a nostalgic vein, however, *Luca* is primarily a tribute to Italy in its depiction of a typical 1950s-1960s Italian summer by the sea, “the summers of our youth – those formative years when you’re finding yourself” (Jefferson 2021). In preparation for the film, Disney and Pixar sent some of the film’s artists on a research trip to the Cinque Terre, where they took photos of the region’s

landscape and people. For many of them, the trip to Italy meant visiting the places their ancestors came from, and their emotional engagement is evident in the film. The portrayal of the landscape and the people is meticulous, if often clichéd.

2. Aim and methodology

This article will analyse how Italianness is constructed in *Luca*. After watching the film several times in the original language – i.e. in English – I have noted a variety of elements used to portray fictional Italian people, culture and society. Since this work aims to contribute to the existing literature on linguistic issues, it will only briefly touch on non-linguistic elements and will focus on the fictional language used to represent Italian characters. The analysis will mainly deal with:

- (a) Giulia Marcovaldo, an Italian girl who loves adventure and the entire universe. She studies in Genoa, the city of great opportunities, but returns to Portorosso in the summer to live with her father – a fisherman; she helps him deliver fish to people’s houses in Portorosso. She befriends Luca and Alberto and tries to help them win the Portorosso Cup.
- (b) Massimo Marcovaldo, Giulia’s father. Despite his size and skill with a knife, he has a soft heart, especially for his daughter.
- (c) Ercole Visconti is the local bully of Portorosso, a repeat winner of the Portorosso Cup race. He has two henchmen, Ciccio and Guido, ready to do his bidding. Ercole Visconti embodies the Italian guy who loves fashion, wears expensive clothes and loafers and bullies other kids who do not wear fashionable and expensive clothes.
- (d) People on the street.

This study is mainly concerned with the construction of identity – primarily through language – and Kozloff’s functions of film dialogue; Brown and Levinson’s impoliteness theory will be applied in the final sections of the study, where instances of code-switching are examined and Italianisms are presented in four different categories. The originality of this paper lies in

the fact that it provides a detailed description of the visual and especially acoustic strategies used to construct fictional Italian characters in a 2021 Disney and Pixar film. Eighty-one years after the release of *Pinocchio* (1940), Disney and Pixar are back with another film set entirely in Italy. However, as will be discussed in the following sections, *Luca* differs from *Pinocchio* in the way it portrays Italians linguistically.

3. Fictional voices

Voice is one of the means available to directors to give their characters their own personality and identity. The quality of the voice changes depending on various sociolinguistic variables such as age, social and geographical origin, gender, and sex, but also on factors not directly related to society and culture, such as the speaker's emotional state, health condition, or distinctive pronunciation (e.g. stuttering, sigmatism). The use of non-standard voices is of particular importance in audiovisual products, where they are often used to convey social and dialectal features of fictional speakers, and "especially in contemporary fictional dialogue, build on a network of references and allusions which are deeply embedded in a precise regional and social context" (Montini – Ranzato 2021: 2). Although the term "voice" alludes more directly to the articulatory nature of accents, it is often used to refer to both accent and dialect. Nevertheless, worth noting is Trudgill's (1994: 7) distinction between the two terms, according to which accent "simply refers to pronunciation" while dialect "has to do also with the grammatical forms that you use, as well, perhaps, as any regional vocabulary that you employ." Audiovisual products "are particularly versatile to embed and exploit the potentialities of the representation of accents and dialects: in a way which is arguably more potent than on the written page, audiences are exposed to different modes of speech, and this contributes to highlighting the relationship between standard and non-standard English" (Montini – Ranzato 2021: 4).

Sarah Kozloff (2000: 33) has presented a taxonomy in which she lists as many as nine functions of dialogue in audiovisual products. However, it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss them all, as this study focuses only on the functions that are actually used to characterise the fictional Italians in *Luca*. Additionally, Ranzato (2021: 153) maintains that dialects "can be thought of as having been devised by authors to achieve one or more of the ends listed in (Kozloff's) taxonomy which can thus be applied to the analysis and interpretation of accented dialogue." She explains that

non-standard accents are used especially to [...] provide the necessary context for the character (*anchorage of the diegesis*): they can tell us where the story is set and the origins of the character, their regional and social milieu; and they are used to make dialogue sound more realistic (*adherence to the code of realism*) and perhaps more relevant to our current social, even political concerns. Dialects [...] are used sometimes in ways that are at the opposite end of realism, even unnaturally, dissonantly, in a blatantly 'fake' way to construct an idiolect which provides very often, but not always, a comic relief (*exploitation of the resources of language*).

As will be explained in the following sections, only two of the functions listed by Kozloff are exploited in *Luca*, namely "anchorage to the diegesis" and "exploitation of the resources of language"; on the other hand, "adherence to the code of realism" is consistently disregarded.

Nevertheless, audiovisual language must be treated with caution, and any generalisation should be well considered. It departs from real language because it is non-spontaneous and pre-fabricated; it is inauthentic orality, a mere imitation of spontaneously spoken language (Pavesi et al. 2015: 7). Ferguson (1998) defines the study of fictional linguistic varieties occurring in literature as *ficto-linguistics*, and Hodson (2014: 14) explains that the designation "ficto-linguistics can be extended to include the study of language varieties in all works of fiction, including narrative poetry, film and television". Audiovisual dialogue is an "inaccurate" imitation of natural conversation that has been "scripted, written and rewritten, censored, polished, rehearsed, and performed. The actual hesitations, repetitions, digressions, grunts, interruptions, and mutterings of everyday speech have either been pruned away, or, if not, deliberately included" (Kozloff 2000: 18). Therefore, many linguistic features that recur in the use of language in the real world (e.g. hesitations, interruptions, ongoing corrections, etc.), and which are mostly invisible and taken for granted due to the improvised nature of spoken language, acquire their own meaning when they occur in audiovisual language, which is not a spoken variety *tout court*, but rather a written-to-be-spoken language; it is not un-prepared and spontaneous, therefore each linguistic and paralinguistic feature contributes to the construction of the speaker's identity. For this reason, when writing film dialogues, producers choose very carefully the linguistic features that will characterise their fictional speakers. The characters' identities are thus constructed on the basis of what they do and the way they speak.

In a poststructuralist vein, identity is not something that an individual is born with, but rather a social and cultural construction that is also based on language, as “the relationship between language and identity is rather considered as constructive” (Motschenbacher 2011: 153). It is also through language that speakers create and perform their identities, and it is also in the language that one’s identities are reflected and to be found. It does not follow that the language a speaker uses results from a particular identity; rather, language is one of the ways that people have to shape their identities. Identity is not something an individual has, but something an individual does; “rather than *have* identities, people *perform* them” (McConnell-Ginet 2001: 8). The same is true for fictional people.

However, since fictional characters should be easily categorised and recognised by the audience, they are usually endowed with a reduced number of linguistic features that are reiterated in audiovisual and literary products. This is directly related to the use of stereotypes, which is a common practice in the process of media characterisation (Gross 1991: 26-27). Studies in the field of sociolinguistics have showed that the media play an important role in reinforcing linguistic stereotypes (Lippi-Green 2012), which are “uninformed and frequently culturally-biased over generalisations about subgroups that may or may not be based on a small degree of truth” (Swann et al. 2004: 298). Hall (1997: 258) claims that “stereotypes get hold of the few simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized characteristics about a person, reduce everything about the person to those traits, exaggerate and simplify them, and fix them without change or development to eternity.” The selective nature of stereotyping is highlighted by Ranzato and Zanotti (2018: 1), who maintain that “[r]epresentation is always the result of an act of selection of traits and features, both visual and verbal.”

As will be detailed below, Italianisms usually occur when code-switching takes place, signalling that the transition from English to Italian is due either to a sudden emotional shift (e.g. fear, surprise, anger) or to a perceived intimacy, or both, mainly in the form of kinship terms (e.g. a boy addresses his father as “papà”) and diminutives (“oh, *piccolina mia*”, said by Ercole to his *Vespa*). As will be discussed more thoroughly, emotional shift often leads to impoliteness, where, as Brown and Levinson (1987) argue, linguistic Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) occur. People have an identity face that they seek to preserve and promote in their social relationships. Impoliteness occurs when at least one FTA is used to attack someone’s face, i.e. when people’s desire to be acknowledged and not to be impeded in their actions is deliberately disrespected.

4. Analysis

In this section, the film *Luca* is analysed from two main perspectives: the visual and the acoustic codes. The first includes all the visual elements that contribute to the construction of Italianness, while the second includes both the soundtrack and the fictional language spoken by the characters. Both codes are examined in order to describe in detail how the producers managed to construct Italianness in the film. It should be borne in mind that this is an American production, which affects the way Italian elements are portrayed.

4.1 Visual code

Two settings are shown in the film: Portorosso and the realm beneath the water’s surface inhabited by sea monsters. The former is of particular importance to this study and is shown right from the opening scene of the film, which sets the story in an Italian seaside landscape, where the sleeping town is depicted in the moonlight as *Gelsomina*, a small boat with its *lampara*,¹ cuts through the waves. Two fishermen wear a beret, a traditional hat usually associated with men from the South – especially Sicily – but used here as a form of generalisation to characterise two men from Liguria, in north-western Italy. The location is made clear by a map written in Italian, showing Mar Ligure and Liguria. In addition, the two fishermen enjoy opera music played by an old gramophone, while nostalgically admiring the sea. The landscape is typically Italian, with marvellous sun and water, rocks, sand, Mediterranean maquis shrubland, olive trees, vines and seagulls. Posters, shop signs, books, menus displayed outside restaurants, everything containing the written language is in Italian. When Luca meets Alberto, the latter shows him a poster depicting a boy on a Vespa² with the motto “Vespa è libertà”³. Other posters show Italian food and drinks (e.g. Chinotto,⁴ ice-creams) and artistic products (e.g. “Vacanze Romane”,⁵ “La Strada”,⁶ “Pinocchio”, the Colosseum, Leonardo da Vinci’s flying machine). The boats have Italian

¹ Fishing lamp used in the Mediterranean to attract fish.

² An Italian scooter brand manufactured by Piaggio. The name means wasp in Italian.

³ “Vespa is freedom” (my translation)

⁴ A traditional Italian soft drink that tastes like Coke but has a bittersweet flavour and is made from the juice of the fruit of the myrtle-leaved orange tree.

⁵ A 1953 American romantic comedy film set in Rome and produced by William Wyler.

⁶ A 1954 Italian film directed by Federico Fellini.

names painted on their sides (Gelsomina, Elena, Focaccia). The people in Portorosso have mainly dark hair and eyes and tanned skin, as is typical of Italians. The women wear dresses and scarves on their heads (especially old women), while the men wear berets. Some women carry baskets full of laundry on their heads; laundry is hung outside of the buildings, directly above people's heads. The buildings are old and colourful, with beautiful balconies and plants. Old men play "scopa", a traditional Italian card game, while old women comment on the passengers. Boys play football in the square, where a white Fiat 500, a red Vespa and an Ape⁷ are parked. People drink espresso, eat watermelon, ice-cream, sandwiches and pasta (e.g. trenette al pesto⁸). The sea monsters visiting Portorosso enjoy Italian cuisine, as is typical for foreign tourists. Street names are marked by picturesque signs, as is typical of Italian tourist towns (but not only). Painted on the buildings are shop signs like "Bar Pittaluga", "Circolo Pescatori", "Latteria San Giorgio", "Trattoria⁹ da Marina", "Bar Giotto", "Focacceria", "Pescheria", "Bar piccolo", "Alimentari¹⁰ Rispetto". All the locals in Portorosso talk with their hands and over-gesticulate as is customary (and stereotypical?) among Italians. The price tag on a Vespa shows the amount in Lire, the old Italian currency that was replaced by the Euro in 2002.

4.2 Acoustic code

The acoustic level is the main concern of this study. Two elements contribute acoustically to the construction of Italianness in the original, English film: the soundtrack and the fictional language spoken by the characters.

4.2.1 Soundtrack

Like the visual elements analysed in the previous section, the soundtrack helps to place the story in time and create the Italian nostalgia of the mid-1950s. Foreign audiences may not be able to place the story exactly in time, as the chronological references are not explicit but rather implied by certain songs or visual elements; nevertheless, the stereotypical image foreigners have of Italy is very much in line with what Italy looked like some sixty years ago. These culture-specific references (CSRs) situate the film in the

⁷ Ape is a three-wheeled light commercial vehicle, manufactured and marketed by Piaggio.

⁸ It is a traditional Ligurian dish.

⁹ A *trattoria* is an Italian restaurant, usually less formal than a *ristorante*;

¹⁰ An *alimentari* is a typical Italian grocery shop.

1950s-1960s. More specifically, the posters of “Vacanze Romane” and “La Strada”, both films from 1953-1954, can be seen as references successfully positioning the story in time. The songs and opera music included in the soundtrack also help to revive the nostalgic mid-1950s. However, when the scenery shifts to below the water’s surface, these Italian popular songs and arias are replaced by unfamiliar celestial background sounds and songs, but using musical instruments commonly associated with Italian folk music (e.g. accordion). The film opens with “Un Bacio a Mezzanotte”,¹¹ which immediately sets the story in place and time. In the opening scene, an old gramophone plays “O Mio Babbino Caro”,¹² an aria used repeatedly in Anglophone audiovisual products to give the scene a touch of Italianness (e.g. in James Ivory’s 1985 *A Room with a View*; John Huston’s 1985 *Prizzi’s Honor*; Steve Bendelack’s 2007 *Mr. Bean’s Holiday*; Olivier Dahan’s 2014 *Grace of Monaco*). Giulia’s father, Massimo Marcovaldo, sings “Largo al Factotum”,¹³ and whistles “La Donna è Mobile”,¹⁴ and the cavatina “Una Voce Poco Fa”.¹⁵ The song “Il Gatto e la Volpe”¹⁶ is used to portray the deep friendship between Luca and Alberto. Although the song is anachronistic – as it was composed in the 1970s – it is inspired by the Cat and the Fox, two characters from the Italian novel *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (Collodi 1883), which has become one of the symbols of Italian culture in the world. “Andavo a Cento All’ora”¹⁷ is used to portray the so-called “Italian economic miracle”, an expression used to refer to the long-lasting period of strong economic growth in Italy, especially in the years 1958-1963. “Andavo a Cento All’ora” (literally, I was driving 100 km/hr) refers to speed and new means of transport such as the Vespa and Fiat 500; in the film, the song is played by Ercole Visconti’s radio while he drives a loud red Vespa. Similarly, “Fatti Mandare dalla Mamma”¹⁸ is used to refer to the typical lifestyle of the 1960s, as is “Viva la Pappa al Pomodoro”,¹⁹ which is played in a scene involving food. The credits are accompanied by “Città Vuota”, an iconic song released in 1963 by the most famous Italian female singer of all time, Mina. However,

¹¹ A very famous Italian song by Quartetto Cetra, released in 1952.

¹² A soprano aria from the opera *Gianni Schicchi* by Giacomo Puccini (1918).

¹³ An aria from *The Barber of Seville* by Gioacchino Rossini (1775).

¹⁴ An aria from Giuseppe Verdi’s *“Rigoletto”* (1851).

¹⁵ An aria from *The Barber of Seville* by Gioacchino Rossini (1775).

¹⁶ A song composed by Edoardo Bennato in 1977.

¹⁷ A song released by Gianni Morandi in his first album, in 1963.

¹⁸ A song released by Gianni Morandi in 1962.

¹⁹ A song by Rita Pavone, released in 1965, when *Il giornalino di Gian Burrasca* by Vamba was adapted into a popular RAI TV-series starring Rita Pavone in the title role. “Pappa al pomodoro” is a traditional dish from Tuscany, including bread and tomato.

foreign audiences may not understand the song lyrics nor have enough Italian CSRs; nevertheless, the purpose of culture-specific elements in *Luca* is not to provide the foreign audience with content they should understand, but rather to provide formal elements that match the foreign audience's expectation of what it means to live in Italy and to be Italian. The soundtrack and visual elements (e.g. objects, food, buildings, people) do not reflect the real, contemporary Italy that is gradually losing its peculiar characteristics, as is common in many countries and especially in touristic areas. CSRs are used to create an emotional response to certain sounds and images that tend to repeat stereotypes about Italians that are used over and over again in audiovisual products. *Luca*, in fact, offers no unexpected representation of Italianness, and everything fits into the stereotypical portrayal of Italians in fiction.

4.2.2 Language

Italianness is a feature that characterises above all the inhabitants in Portorosso. Nevertheless, not only are the proper names of the inhabitants of Portorosso Italian, but also those of the sea monsters, whose surnames are often translations of fish species into Italian. The surnames of the protagonists, Paguro and Scorfano, mean "hermit crab" and "rockfish" respectively. Other sea monsters are Mr Branzino and Bianca Branzino (seabass) and Mrs Aragosta (lobster). Additional names include Caterina, Giuseppe, Enrico, Daniela, Uncle Ugo, and Mona Lisa, the last name being a reference to the painting by Leonardo da Vinci. The CSRs to the fish species in Italian will be fully understood only by Italians, who are undoubtedly those who enjoy the film the most. Nevertheless, as with the soundtrack and visual elements, the formal level of these CSRs – i.e. the exotic sound of the surnames – will help to create the mental image of Italians in the foreign audience.

The language used by the characters in the original English version is a hot topic in recent articles discussing the film.²⁰ It seems to me that there is a big linguistic difference between the inhabitants under the water's surface and the locals in Portorosso. The former tend to use standard North-American English, while the people of Portorosso tend to adopt a kind of Italian English that, in line with Kozloff's function of "adherence to the diegesis", is responsible for creating the fictional world of the narrative. This Italian English variety is completely unrealistic and deviates from the norm in pronunciation and the use of Italianisms. What strikes the viewer, however, is

²⁰ See, for example, Clarke (2021); Hogarty (2021); NPR (2021).

the portrayal of Italians speaking English – a language different from Italian. The opening scene not only sets the spatial and temporal framework for the story – as already described – but also establishes the linguistic variety that the viewer will experience throughout the film. The fishermen Tommaso and Giacomo speak English with a strong Italian accent, which is strange as there seems to be no reason why two old, Italian fishermen in Liguria would do so. The variety used by the people of Portorosso, referred to in this article as Italian English, does not aim to realistically reflect the way people would speak in the Cinque Terre in the mid-1950s. Kozloff’s function of “adherence to the code of realism”, which aims to make the dialogues sound realistic, despite being perfectly adaptable to accented voices, as suggested by Ranzato (2021), is rather disregarded in *Luca*.

The Italian English variety certainly aims to anchor the characters in the diegesis, but the function of film dialogues that is most used in *Luca* is “exploitation of the resources of language”, where the audiovisual language is anything but realistic, being rather an artificial variety that creates a comic effect. The way inlanders pronounce English is certainly comical for English speakers, and the same goes for Italians when it comes to Italianisms, which are often mispronounced or creatively invented as if the characters were foreigners and not from Liguria. Both the varieties (i.e. the standard North-American English used by the sea monsters and the Italian English used by the people of Portorosso) are rather informal and colloquial as well as anachronistic, since the English slang words used in the film do not fully correspond to the years in which the story is set. Moreover, it is not surprising that the two protagonists of the film belong to the underwater world, where the standard language is spoken; as a matter of fact, Italian English is mainly used to portray minor characters (who are, however, consistently shown on screen), such as Ercole Visconti, Massimo Marcovaldo, and other passengers like a priest, a policewoman, fishermen, and old men and women on the street. They play a more or less secondary role in the film, with the exception of Giulia Marcovaldo, who could be considered a co-protagonist. Despite the use of Italianisms and typical features of Italian English, Giulia’s accent is less strong than the others’, perhaps due to her more central role in the film, or her stay in Genoa for her studies. Had the protagonists spoken this fake English variety full of Italianisms all the time, it might have been more difficult to follow the story and the audience would have struggled to empathise with these characters; the reason for this is what is known as “reader resistance”, which is perfectly adaptable to audiovisual texts – caused by “rendered speech that departs to any appreciable degree from standard

colloquial speech" (Toolan 1992: 34). Surprisingly, there is no evidence of Italian dialects or non-standard Italian accents in the English film, which is unexpected given the chronological and social setting (i.e. mainly working-class fishermen in the 1950s). It is hard to believe that mainly old people in a small town in Italy in the mid-1950s would speak standard Italian and not non-standard dialects. The Italian lexicon used in *Luca* is not dialectal, but rather belongs to what Sobrero – Miglietta (2011: 99) call "italiano popolare",²¹ "quell'insieme di usi frequentemente ricorrenti nel parlare e (quando sia il caso) nello scrivere di persone non istruite e che per lo più nella vita quotidiana usano il dialetto, caratterizzati da numerose devianze rispetto a quanto previsto dall'italiano standard normativo."²²

The Italian English variety is characterised by the following phonological and prosodic features, partly adapted from Mammen – Sonkin (1936) and used throughout to represent the Portorosso people in *Luca*. In particular:

(a) Vowels

- Because Italian has fewer vowels than English does (7 compared to 20), and certain vowel substitutions occur here, this variety shows a reduction in the number of vowels used, thus [i:] for [i:] and [ɪ], [u:] for [u:] and [ʊ], etc.; moreover, speakers of Italian pronounce some English vowels with greater quantity (length);
- Certain diphthongs show monophthongization of [eɪ] to [e:], and [ou] to [ɔ:];
- Occasional paragoge of the vowel schwa [ə] results in the addition of this vowel to the ends of consonant-final English words, since Italian words are regularly vowel-final;

(b) Consonants

- [r] is pronounced and trilled in all positions, especially inter-vocalic ones;
- [θ] and [ð] are pronounced as [t] and [d];
- The plosives [p] and [k] can be dentalised and unaspirated;
- In initial, prevocalic position, [h] is dropped, as in Italian;

²¹ Popular Italian.

²² Linguistic uses that are typical of the spoken and (sometimes) written language, common among uneducated people who mainly use dialect in daily life, and characterised by numerous deviations from standard Italian. (author's translation)

(c) Prosody

- Intonation exhibits a pitch range which is wider than it is in English;
- Suprasegmental patterns differ from those of English, and syllable timing, regular in Italian, can replace stress timing, which results in increased stress on syllables receiving secondary or tertiary stress in English.

From a lexical perspective, code-switching is consistent throughout the film. Code-switching “refers to instances when speakers switch between codes (languages, or language varieties) in the course of a conversation. Switches may involve different amounts of speech and different linguistic units – from several consecutive utterances to individual words and morphemes” (Swann et al. 2004: 40). Code-switching in *Luca* occurs mainly inter-sententially, i.e. a switch occurs at the end of a sentence/clause-level unit and marks the unit that follows. However, there are also cases of intra-sentential code-switching – also known as code-mixing – which “involves the embedding or mixing of various linguistic units [...] from two distinct grammatical systems or subsystems within the same sentence and the same speech situation” (Tay 1989: 408). Inter- and intra-sentential code-switching thus signal the different identities with which a speaker is endowed and which are reflected in (or rather constructed by) the different codes s/he uses. In *Luca*, however, this does not seem to be the case. Code-switching does not signal that the people of Portorosso can speak both English and Italian, but is a fictional construction to convey the idea that the people of Portorosso are Italian and, in a strange agreement between the producers and the audience, must restrict their Italian to certain situations and use English more extensively in order to be understood by the English-speaking audience. The use of English is only functional for understanding, and the true identity of the people of Portorosso is revealed when they speak Italian – their “real” language. Code-switching does not occur randomly, and many situational variables and grammatical rules influence the frequency and position of code-switching. In *Luca*’s case, for instance, code-switching seems to occur more frequently when the speaker experiences an emotional shift, often but not necessarily for face attacking purposes. The expression “emotional shift” has been adapted from Hodson’s “emotional style-shifting”, which, in contrast to code-switching, refers to a change between speech styles *within a single language* (my emphasis) caused by a sudden change in the speaker’s emotional state. Emotional style-shifting occurs when characters are surprised, upset or disturbed from their normal emotional state; the

same is true of code-switching, which, unlike style-shifting, is an inter-linguistic phenomenon that occurs when characters switch from one code to another. Through “emotional” code-switching, speakers show their true nature, because speech styles expressed when people are under emotional pressure seem to be more authentic (Hodson 2014: 174-175).

The Italianisms in *Luca* have four main functions, which are quite well balanced, as can be seen in *Figure 1*.

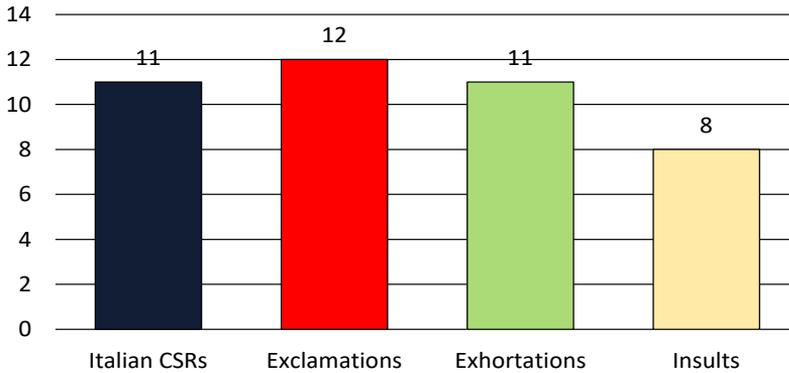


Figure 1. Italianisms in Luca

They occur more frequently in exclamations (29%), which generally express a sudden emotional shift. As can be seen in *Table 1*, most exclamations do not exist in Italian and are constructed on the basis of typical Italian food (“per mille sardine”, “per mille cavoli”, “santa mozzarella”, “santa ricotta”, “santo pecorino”, “santo gorgonzola”). They replace common Italian expressions that contain religious elements that would not be understood by the English-speaking audience (e.g. “santo cielo”, “santi numi”, “santa madre”) with typical Italian food that is well-known abroad and in most of the cases cannot be translated into

Table 1. Exclamations

Exclamations
“Per mille sardine!”
“Mannaggia, here we go!”
“Mannaggia, not a great catch today!”
“Santa mozzarella, we did it!”
“Santo pecorino, that’s the best idea ever!”
“Porca paletta, what was that?”
“Per mille cavoli, Guido!”
“Mamma mia!”
“Oh mamma mia, please no more ravving!”
“La mia bambina! Oh mamma mia!”
“Santa ricotta!”
“Oh santo gorgonzola, I need to pack for school!”

English (e.g. *mozzarella*, *pecorino*, *ricotta*, *gorgonzola*). These exclamations are mainly used to express surprise (e.g. a fisherman shouts “per mille sardine!” after seeing sea monsters; Luca exclaims “santa mozzarella!” after riding a bike for the first time; Giulia exclaims “santa ricotta!” after finding out that Luca and Alberto are sea monsters), which is also expressed with the exclamation “porca paletta!”. The interjection “mannaggia”,²³ which also occurs in Italian, is used to express bother (as in “mannaggia, here we go!” exclaimed by a policewoman when she hears Ercole’s noisy Vespa approaching) and regret (“mannaggia, not a great catch today!”, exclaimed by Massimo Marcovaldo). Fear is expressed above all with “mamma mia”, when Ercole is afraid of the sea monsters or his sparkling Vespa falls down. “Mamma mia” also expresses exhaustion as in “mamma mia, please, no more raving!”.

Italianisms are also used for Italian culture-specific references (CSRs, 26%, see *Table 2*), i.e. “words or composed locutions typical of a geographical environment, of a culture, of the material life or of historical-social peculiarities of a people, nation, country, or tribe and which, thus, carry a national, local or historical colouring and do not have precise equivalents in other languages” (Ranzato 2015: 67). In *Luca*, Italianisms are used to express mainly ethnographic references,²⁴ more specifically objects of daily life (*pescheria*,²⁵ *trenette al pesto*, *pasta*, *fusilli*, *trofie*, *cannelloni*, *lasagne*, *espresso*, *olio d’oliva*²⁶). There is a case of socio-political CSR (Maggiore²⁷), which refers to institutions and functions. Most CSRs refer to typical Italian food and drinks that are well known all over the world. CSRs borrowed from a foreign language are useful for constructing an exotic environment, as they convey an air of foreignness.

Table 2. Italian culture-specific references

Italian culture-specific references
“It smells like behind the <i>pescheria</i> ”
“ <i>Maggiore</i> , another sighting, in the harbour this time”
“Dinner’s ready. <i>Trenette al pesto</i> ”
“Every year they change the <i>pasta</i> . You have to be ready for everything. Could be <i>cannelloni</i> , <i>penne</i> , <i>fusilli</i> , <i>trofie</i> , even <i>lasagne</i> ”
“ <i>Espresso!</i> ”
“Ciccio, hold still. <i>Olio d’oliva</i> ”

²³ Damn!

²⁴ For a classification of CSRs, see Díaz Cintas – Remael (2007: 201).

²⁵ Fishmonger.

²⁶ Olive oil.

²⁷ Major.

Exhortations and orders, as shown in *Table 3* (26%), imply an emotional and power imbalance, where speaker A imposes his/her decision on speaker B. They are examples of intentional FTAs directed at speaker B's negative face. Brown and Levinson (1987) claim that FTAs addressed to the speakers' negative face (i.e. the desire not to be hindered in one's actions) take the form of an order, a request. This is the case with imperatives such as "andiamo!",²⁸ "mangiamo!",²⁹ "via, via!",³⁰ "a casa!"³¹ (in this last example, the verb "andiamo" is omitted), but also of the interjection "basta!",³² with which an old woman rebukes a group of noisy boys. The interjection "forza!"³³ is used instead to support the listener – not the opposite. "Silenzio, Bruno!"³⁴ is an FTA against Bruno's negative face, an imaginary voice in Luca and Alberto's heads – a kind of conscience – that clips their wings; for this reason, it should be silenced.

Furthermore, Italianisms are used to express insults (*Table 4*, 19%), which, unlike exhortations, are FTAs against people's positive face, i.e. the desire to be recognised. The insults are mainly voiced by Giulia and Ercole, both very loud characters (Giulia complains

Table 3. Exhortations

Exhortations
"Andiamooooo!"
"Stop crying and tag Guido. <i>Andiamo!</i> "
" <i>Silenzio, Bruno!</i> "
" <i>E basta!</i> "
" <i>Hey, Ercole, basta!</i> "
" <i>Mangiamo!</i> "
" <i>Forza, Luca!</i> "
" <i>Forza, Giulietta!</i> "
" <i>Buongiorno, andiamo dai!</i> "
" <i>A casa!</i> "
" <i>Out of the way, via, via!</i> "

Table 4. Insults

Insults
"What's wrong with you, <i>stupido!</i> "
" <i>'sto imbecille</i> thinks he can be a jerk" " <i>Imbecille!</i> "
"You can't swim, you can barely ride a bike. <i>Siete un disastro!</i> "
" <i>Ma sei scemo, Ercole!?</i> "
" <i>Disgraziati!</i> "
"Ah, <i>idioti</i> , you let it get away!"
"Eat, <i>idiota</i> , più veloce!"

²⁸ Let's go!

²⁹ Let's eat!

³⁰ Go away!

³¹ Go home!

³² Enough!

³³ Come on!

³⁴ Silence, Bruno!

that people think she is “too much”). Giulia’s insults are mainly directed at Ercole’s positive face (“imbecille”,³⁵ “scemo”³⁶), while Ercole’s insults are directed at his supporters Ciccio and Guido (“disgraziati”,³⁷ “idioti”³⁸).

It is interesting to note that the use of Italian is often associated with impoliteness. This is because most Italian characters in *Luca* are portrayed as extremely dynamic, sociable and passionate people who tend to talk a lot, loudly and expressively. However, the use of impolite Italianisms should be seen as a natural consequence of a change in the emotional status of the passionate Italian characters, who switch to the language “of the heart” when they feel the need to express something heartfelt. This is common among people who speak more than one language, one of which (or more) tends to have affective connotations and is considered “better” for expressing a person’s emotional status.

5. Conclusions

In 1940, Walt Disney Productions released *Pinocchio*, an American animated musical fantasy film based on the 1883 Italian children’s novel *The Adventures of Pinocchio* by Carlo Collodi. This was the second animated film produced by Disney (after *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, 1937), and the first (and last) film set entirely in an Italian village (in Tuscany) and featuring only Italian characters. Most of the characters’ names are Italian (e.g. Geppetto, Pinocchio, Figaro, Cleo, Stromboli). However, only one of the characters, Stromboli, speaks English with a strong Italian accent. He is a cruel puppet-maker who forces Pinocchio to perform in his theatre to earn money and uses him as firewood when he grows old. He exemplifies Disney’s dishonest villain. Despite his Italian accent, there is no sign of Italianisms in the language used to portray Stromboli. When emotional shifts occur (especially when he gets angry), he speaks slurred words with a typical Italian prosody and sounds. The construction of Italianness in *Pinocchio* is thus minimal compared to that in *Luca*. This could be due to the different trends in the representation of foreign characters in the two eras in which these products were released – i.e. the 1940s and the 2020s, respectively.

³⁵ Imbecile.

³⁶ Fool.

³⁷ Rotten.

³⁸ Idiot.

Eighty-one years after *Pinocchio*, Disney and Pixar are back with a new animated film set entirely in Italy. Unlike *Pinocchio*, *Luca* is a tribute to Italy and its culture. The visual representation of a small coastal town in the Cinque Terre in the mid-1950s is meticulous, and the language adopted is worth studying. The producers put extensive effort into creating an artificial language that would convey the idea of exoticism in both time and space. As mentioned earlier, it is an English-based variety that differs from standard North-American English in both its pronunciation and lexicon. The Italian accent is used to characterise only the inhabitants of Portorosso and to distinguish them from the sea monsters living under the water's surface. The accent is stronger in Ercole Visconti, who embodies the loud and boastful Italian bully, who is rich and ostentatious, and weaker in Giulia Marcovaldo, who lives in Genoa, where she goes to school, and only returns to Portorosso in the summer, thus losing some of the "rusticity" of Portorosso locals. Unlike in *Pinocchio*, where Stromboli stammers, confusing Italian sounds that are incomprehensible to both English-speaking audiences and Italians, the people of Portorosso wrap up their sentences either with real Italianisms or with creative expressions that do not exist in Italian, but are perfectly understandable to both English-speakers and Italian-speakers. These expressions make consistent use of typical Italian food, well-known all over the world. As described in previous sections, characters switch to Italian mainly in response to emotional outbursts, as evidenced by the high frequency of Italianisms in exclamations, exhortations and insults. In addition, Italianisms are also used for CSRs, especially to refer to food and drink. Italian expressions are standard but belong to a low register (*Italiano popolare*), characterised by colourful expressions, vernacular imprecations ("mannaggia"), and apheresis, as in "'sto imbecille", where the adjective "questo" (this) is reduced to "'sto". Interestingly, no Italian dialects appear, which could be explained by commercial reasons behind the American production of the film. Paradoxically, the effort made by *Luca's* producers to distinguish the language of the sea monsters from that of the people of Portorosso is unfortunately lost in the Italian dubbing, where dialects could be used for characterisation. Nevertheless, all the characters speak standard Italian indistinctly and the funny moments created by the use of Italianisms in the original are eliminated. While it is true that the portrayal of people of Portorosso is more authentic in the Italian dubbed version, since they are Italians who actually speak Italian, perhaps the Italian dubbing could have used accents and dialects from Liguria to distinguish the inland characters from those who live underwater, as is done *mutatis mutandis* in the original version.

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