

Multilingualism in and out of Films and Stereotypes

Subjects: [Materials Science, Coatings & Films](#)

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Films serve to (re-)create a 'world' within the mind of the audience. Additionally, they introduce or reinforce stereotypes portrayed as a reality of the modern world through multiplexity and the strategic use of foreign languages, dialects, and non-native language use, among others. Various concepts of stereotypes can be explored in fiction feature films, especially as film characters are often based on different kinds of stereotypes. Audiovisual texts tend to operate as cultural constructs that reflect and convey certain ideologies within an industry that holds the power to marginalize or belittle voices. Multilingual films highlight the contrasts among and within cultures; hence, they can further exacerbate the marginalization and stereotyping of different cultures and nations, ultimately having damaging effects on society's perception of different stereotypes, such as race and gender groups, which is shown with the examples from a multilingual film.

multilingual film

stereotypes

audiovisual translation

mass media

1. Multilingualism in and out of Films

Over time, societies face multilingual situations due to immigration, technological development, tourism, international commerce, and even war. Subsequently, multilingualism is recognized as a new way of communication by [Díaz-Cintas \(2011\)](#). Hence, much of the world's population uses two or more languages daily. Multilingualism, as a sign of the times ([Delabastita and Grutman 2005](#)), is rapidly rising due to increased ease in migration, social/workforce mobility, the importance of mastery of a lingua franca for political, cultural, social, and economic reasons, and "media globalization" ([Mamula and Patti 2016, p. 1](#)). In this view, this social, cultural, linguistic, and individual phenomenon, which is fast becoming one of the main issues of modern societies, should be known and investigated. Multilingualism is a mirror of society but simultaneously impacts society. In other words, the ever-increased complicated realities of the new world and perpetual and radical shifts that our societies are living through have led to tangled changes in current multilingualism; therefore, today, multilingualism can be considered a reality, and complexity is the main feature of contemporary multilingualism as a reflection of current societies ([De Zarobe and De Zarobe 2015](#)). Hence, filmmakers are increasingly eager to make multilingual films (MLFs) mirror a more genuine and real-life society ([Díaz-Cintas 2011](#)). Before embarking on a detailed discussion, it is essential to clarify what researchers mean by "heterolingual" or MLF. These films depict ethnic diversity, multicultural situations, and intercultural encounters as their storylines are often related to immigration, tourism, war, and the multicultural aspect of current society ([Berger and Komori 2010](#); [Wahl 2005](#)). In most cases, each film comprises at least two languages or dialects, with a range of varieties in itself ([Delabastita and Grutman 2005](#)).

Similarly, distributors should be mindful of asymmetric power relations by assigning more importance to one particular language, culture, society, race, or ethnicity and pushing them into inferior positions ([Moraza and Jose 2000](#)). This can be particularly daunting in the case of minority languages, cultures, societies, races, ethnicities, and gender, where multiplexity could promote inequality by silencing such categories. Nevertheless, what matters is the impact of MLFs on audiences or the perception of audiences from MLFs.

2. Stereotypes

Stereotyping is attaching a label to a race, ethnicity, gender, role, or anything else. Walter Lippmann presented the term “stereotype” as a “distorted picture or image” ([Lippmann 2008](#)) that is culturally driven. According to him, stereotypes are formed due to social, political, and economic motivations, and they juxtapose the illusory and unreal world with the real world, which can become quite pervasive and resistant to change ([Lippmann 2008](#)). [Wilson and Gutiérrez \(1995\)](#) opine that a stereotype is an oversimplified and conventional idea or concept that induces special meaning among the members of a group. In other words, these are cognitive patterns that convey information, attitudes, and outlooks about individuals based on their societal membership. These general ideas and representations or clichéd depictions of similar people that have been engraved in mind through different media types, as well as through social relationships and prevailing thought due to their abundant use, are considered stereotypes. People can build suppositions according to what they have heard or seen ([Berry 2009](#)). By consuming media like films, audiences attract and rely on the indirect information conveyed by media because of their insufficient information or interaction with the subject being displayed ([Pressler 2019](#)). [Berry \(2009\)](#) believes that almost everyone in society carries stereotypes grouping people into categories, namely race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender, and occupation. In this way, typical features of a group are emphasized and exaggerated to inculcate cultural messages that become naturalized via media exposure ([Bogle 1989](#)). Stereotypes have been utilized as an effective instrument in the media to identify a group of people and to fasten specific values and characteristics to them according to their appearance or participation as a group member. In other words, through stereotypes, audiences can determine a character’s expected value system and behavior based on their appearance, possessions, etc., and compare them to their own value system. Stereotypes can influence societal perceptions of others, such as their behavior, beliefs, and roles. These stereotypes and clichés are assigned to different groups to establish differences among people, which can result in prejudices and carry negative meanings. It can constitute a barrier to comprehending the true nature of others without any prejudice and misunderstanding, which is particularly prominent in a multicultural society. This barrier can pose challenges to human interaction or communication.

Why are there stereotypes? [Charles Hurst et al. \(2016\)](#) opine that the main reason is the deficiency of individual acquaintance with other racial or ethnic groups. It is worth mentioning that stereotypes are used to justify the disparity between one group and others. They are mostly inaccurate and oversimplified beliefs that one group has of another’s lifestyle. Societal circumstances have influenced and changed some stereotypes over time. Stereotypes play a role in conveying messages by modifying the message through socially cultivated ideas or mispresenting minorities. For example, the difference in character portrayal between black and white villains when

engaging in the same immorality is visibly apparent, which provokes socially established attitudes that refer to black people as rough and untrustworthy, making the story about race instead of morals, even if unconsciously grasped by audiences in an immoral way that is not necessarily true.

There are different types of stereotypes. Regarding gender stereotypes, these clichés can lead us to subscribe to the view that women are “communal by nature” ([Kumar et al. 2022, p. 31](#)), which means that they are warm and sensitive to others, while men are “agentic by nature” ([Kumar et al. 2022, p. 31](#)), representing their independence, confidence, and aggression towards others ([Koenig 2018](#)). This categorization of gender is contingent upon the circumstances of the comparisons ([Oakes et al. 1994](#)). However, according to the roles and expectations of genders in recent years, gender stereotypes have changed significantly, indicating a trend toward more equality between men and women. In other words, recent data show a reduction in stereotypical gender attributes, such as male–work and female–home, implying a departure from the traditional separation and distinction of men’s and women’s societal roles ([Bhatia and Bhatia 2021](#)), and more women are entering science and engineering and taking on leadership roles compared to the past ([Charlesworth et al. 2021](#)). The reception and affirmation of gender stereotypes into people’s schema, particularly among audiences, are greatly influenced by their experiences, including those shaped by the media ([Ward et al. 2005](#)).

The other types of stereotypes are racial and ethnic stereotypes. Race describes physical characteristics, while ethnicity refers to cultural recognition. Race is derived from what we inherit, whereas ethnicity follows what we learn. Racial stereotypes are established beliefs that refer to all members of the same race as having the same characteristics, which are mostly negative ([Jewell 1993](#)). Beyond specific effects on particular groups, especially in the media industry, racial clichés are displayed as entertainment, which can distort audiences’ understanding and trigger categorizing people according to their race and ethnicity ([Yuen 2019](#)). The media can have a detrimental effect on people’s understanding of people of color and racial stereotypes, which can worsen xenophobia. Nonverbal features of people of color, such as their physical appearance and customs depicted in popular media, affect racial biases. Due to the lack of connection between racial groups, people rely on what is displayed in the media to formulate ideas about others outside of their own race or ethnicity.

Many scholars have investigated MLFs from different angles, including their multimodality ([Sanz Ortega 2011, 2015](#)), the functions of multilingualism ([Beseghi 2020](#); [De Bonis 2014](#); [Dore 2019](#); [Magazzù 2019](#); [Martínez-Sierra et al. 2010](#); [O’Sullivan 2011](#); [Sana Mansoor et al. 2016](#); [Sanz Ortega 2011, 2015](#)), translation in MLFs ([Cronin 2009](#); [Meylaerts and Serban 2014](#); [Raffi 2019](#); [Zabalbeascoa and Corrius 2012](#); [Zabalbeascoa and Voellmer 2014](#)), or from an aesthetic aspect ([Serban 2012](#)).

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