

# **Translating the Pacific for children *Moana*: Polynesian identity and multilingualism through Disney lens**

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## **Abstract**

Modern forms of communication, such as audiovisual products, are widely used for representing different cultures and lands marking the passage from the purely written form to the multimodal one. Such representations become globally accessible thanks to translation that can represent a “liminal space” (Turner, 1967) where cultural and linguistic meanings are deconstructed and re-constructed through the use of different codes and channels of communication; however, representing the Other not rarely leads to alterations of cultural and linguistic meanings. This essay focuses on the adaptation of myth, story and culture in the Disney animated movie *Moana* which offers considerable insights into the different strategies used in reproducing the multilingualism of Polynesian world. The first part of this essay will focus on the Disney adaptation to the big screen of Polynesian culture and tradition, while the second part will centre on the possibility of translating Polynesian identity and multilingualism into other languages, with particular focus on its Italian adaptation.

## **Key Words**

Disney; *Moana*; Polynesian culture; AVT; cultural and linguistic identities

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## 1. Introduction

Audiovisuals are nowadays a highly productive vehicle for the transmission of knowledge for both adults and children, with the latter even more exposed to the inputs of new media. These, together with literature, play a big role in children's education and make the cognition of other lands, languages and cultures increasingly accessible and faster compared to the past. Not rarely, there is a connection between audiovisuals and literature, as in some Disney animated movies in which classics<sup>1</sup> from children's literature are the grounding for a representation on the big screen; however, sometimes this connection is not clear, hidden or even totally absent. This is the case of the Disney animated movie *Moana* (2016), where the relationship between movie and literature is hidden in the folds of a culture expressed through different means and channels of communication. Transition from the written text to the audiovisual one, indeed, involves several factors concerning multimodality and adaptation strategies (Gambier 2003, Costanzo Cahir, 2006; Dusi 2006). These strategies need to be taken into account during the process of both intersemiotic (from written to audiovisual) and interlinguistic translation (from one language to another) (Jakobson 1963).

The presence of Polynesian<sup>2</sup> languages in the movie was the starting point for the present study which aims to examine how the Polynesian world is represented on screen and translated by means of different modes, systems of signs and communicative channels. The first part of the essay will briefly illustrate, through a multimodal approach, how Polynesian myths and beliefs have been adapted to the big screen and how the Polynesian world, culture and multilingualism are reconstructed in *Moana*, linking written literature to audiovisuals. The second part of the essay aims to investigate the presence of Polynesian languages in the original version of the movie and how such multilingualism is managed in the Italian dubbing filling the gap left by no translation strategies wherever applicable.

## 2. From written literature to audiovisual multilingualism: a theoretical background

Nowadays, the growth of literary market goes hand in hand with that of the television market and film industry as, thanks to the reduction of production costs, the passage from the written form to the screen has become an even more common and pervasive practice. In this regard the word "text", as

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<sup>1</sup> Classics are intended as those books «that have been commercially successful over several generations in several countries» (O' Sullivan 2006: 147).

<sup>2</sup> Far from incurring in generalisations, the adjective "Polynesian" is here used to refer to Polynesian lands, languages and cultures in order to be consistent with the depiction of Polynesia conveyed in the Disney animated movie *Moana*.

*notational term* (Enkvist 1973), is not linked to single definition but it may vary according to different factors, among them the diamesic dimension and the oral-written continuum. In this respect, audiovisuals like *Moana* represent a text typology involving a diversity of semiotic components employed for producing messages and a constant cooperation between verbal and nonverbal codes. Along the oral-written continuum, this text typology can be placed among those hybrid forms where in addition to the two communicative codes (verbal and nonverbal) there are two channels of communication (visual and acoustic) thus generating four different types of sign: audio-verbal (speech), audio-nonverbal (sounds and noises), visual-verbal (written words), visual-nonverbal (other visual signs). In this regard, Patrik Zabalbeascoa defines a prototypical audiovisual product «as having the potential to include, at least at certain points, any combination of audio, visual, verbal and nonverbal elements» (Zabalbeascoa 2008: 25).

Such cooperation between different modes and channels of communication (acoustic, visual, verbal and nonverbal) was taken into account in exploring *Moana* which, drawing on Kaindl (2013), may be considered a particular case of intermodal and intermedial translation as the events displayed on screen are closely based on Polynesian culture, written literature and mythology. With regard to the mode and the medium of communication, Klaus Kaindl identifies four types of (audiovisual) translation distinguishing between:

- intramodal (translation of a mode with the same form of the mode, e.g. the translation of an image with another image),
- intermodal (translation of a mode with a different mode, e.g. the translation of an image with a linguistic text),
- intramedial (translation in which the communicative medium does not change, e.g. the translation of a book with another book);
- intermedial translation (translation in which the communicative medium changes, e.g. the translation of a novel into a film) (Kaindl 2013: 261).

Intermodal and intermedial translation is the heart of the following section, being common in animated movies whose origins often come from literature (Section 3). Children's literature, like literature in general, is strictly connected to the transmission of knowledge and, consequently, to the interlinguistic perspective of translation, whose main purpose is to mediate texts for a foreign audience. Different theories have been proposed on the translation of children's literature (Di Giovanni 2010; Lathey 2010; Epstein 2012) taking into consideration its pedagogical function largely discussed by Flavia Bacchetti (2013) who defines children's literature and imagination as powerful means in the process of education. Despite the adaptation of contents to the young audience could be a very effective translation choice, there is no lack of theories claiming that a too strongly pronounced adaptation of the source text to the target cultural context inevitably leads to an unjustified neutralisation of cultural differences in favor of a too strongly marked ethnocentrism. This condition is defined by Lawrence Venuti as «ethnocentric violence of domestication» (Venuti 2012: 19).

Adapting such theories to a different type of text which is the audiovisual one, it needs to be noticed that the translation choices may get more complex

when different languages are represented on screen. With reference to multilingualism on screen, De Bonis (2015: 52) argues that «the term ‘multilingual’ in relation to cinema refers to those films which depict an intercultural encounter, in which at least two different languages are spoken». Suggesting that the function of multilingualism may vary according to the film, De Bonis lists three main functions of multilingualism on screen:

- conflict: multilingualism as a means for the characters to claim their cultural diversity (linguistic-cultural identities are sharply depicted and strongly maintained on screen);
- confusion: the lingua-cultural identities are mixed up on screen in a “somewhat” disorderly fashion (humorous effect);
- realistic rendering: multilingualism is meant as a means to enhance viewers’ perception of the reality depicted on screen. (De Bonis 2014).

In line with the different functions of multilingualism on screen, it can be said that different translation choices may be employed in relation to the languages present in the movie. The different functions of multilingualism on screen implies the possibility to introduce new meanings in the target culture creating what the anthropologist Victor Turner would call “liminal space” referring to that space «where new ideas and relations may arise» (Turner 1981: 161). The anthropological concept of liminality describes a moment in which cultural structures are reversed and renegotiated paving the way for new constructions (Turner 1967). Linguistic and cultural identities in multilingual movies acquire new characteristics, are perceived in different and new ways and in this sense they change; this change represents a sort of rite of passage as those described by Turner in relation to both tribal communities and the developed world. In this sense, multilingualism in audiovisual products can be seen as a liminal space where identities are constructed, negotiated and re-constructed (Minutella 2020) through linguistic diversity in the source text (ST) and the target text (TT) as well. *Moana* original version and its translation provide interesting insights on the adaptation of multilingualism on screen as shown by the Italian translation of the movie discussed in Section 4.

### **3. *Moana* as myth and belief**

In the beginning there was only ocean until Mother Island emerged, Te Fiti. Her heart possessed the greatest power ever known, it could create life share it with the world. But, with time some begin to seek Te Fiti’s heart, they believe the faith could be possessed. The great power of creation would be vast. And one day the most daring of them all voyaged across the vast ocean to take it. He was a Demigod of Wind and Sea, he was a warrior, a trickster, a shapeshifter who could change form, with the power of his magical fish hook. His name was Maui. Without her heart, te Fiti began to crumble, giving birth to a terrible darkness. Maui fright escape, but was confronted by another, who saw the heart. Te Ka, a demon of Earth and Fire. Maui was struck from a sky. Never to be seen again and his magical fish hook. And the heart of Te Fiti, was lost to the sea. One thousand years Te Ka and the demons of the deep continued to hunt for the

heart hiding in the persisting darkness, draining the life from island after island, until everyone would face death. But one day the heart will be found by someone who would journey beyond the reef, find Maui, delivered him across the great ocean to restore Te Fiti's heart. And save us all (*Moana* 2016).

The animation movie *Moana*, appeared in USA in November 2016, begins with these words introducing the events through the narrating voice of Moana's grandmother, Tala. The movie tells the story of Moana, the 16-year-old daughter of the island chief of Motunui, who is bound to save her people and her land. It is clear from the quote that a significant role in the plot is played by Maui, a figure rooted in the ancient Hawaiian mythology and voiced by Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson. Mythology represents the bridge between the oral and written tradition and the screen, even though the transition from literature to audiovisual is not always faithful to the characters and the stories from which it originated. Maui is the current name of one of the Hawaiian Islands according to Hawaiian mythology where the name is indeed connected to the birth and the historical discovery of Polynesian lands and to the origins of their languages. The name Maui, together with Rata, is present in many inscriptions found on some islands in the Pacific. These inscriptions depicted him as one of the navigators who later became part of the protective spirits of the Pacific: the water man (Arecchi 2018). Moreover, Maui is represented in Polynesian culture in different forms linked to different circumstances and events. In the children's book *Il viaggio di Maui: La vera storia dell'Ho'oponopono* (Garbuio, Carone and Tuzzi 2017), Maui is described, before his arrival on the Earth, as a ball of light animated by pure love in an attempt to explain to a young audience the concept of *Aumakua*, which, with reference to ancestors or protective spirits, is elsewhere defined as «an entity having supernatural powers [...] which appears to men usually in the form of an animal, to give them advice, omens and sometimes punishments» (Gemori 2011: 7). In *Hawaiian Mythology* (Warren Beckwith 1976: 230), Maui is shown as a demigod, who as a child used to go to fish with his brothers and during a fishing trip his hook called *Manai-a-ka-lani* pinned to the seabed, thus fishing Pimoe, a mountain on the current island of Maui. With regard to navigation, Maui can be seen as the emblem of Polynesian identity, not only because he is known and respected by the majority of Polynesian people, but also because he represents a synthesis of the history, mythology and culture of Polynesian islands, being the navigator par excellence.

Water is one of the most significant elements in these cultures and it assumes a particular value in Hawaiian, where the word *wai* means «water and blood and passion and life» and «Hawaiians were fully aware of the power and wealth bestowed on those who controlled *wai*» (Wilcox 1997: 24). In addition to being the demigod who plays the biggest role in Moana's adventures, Maui represents the emblem of navigation by guiding the heroine in the quest for her roots. The endless power of water is shown on screen mostly by means of the visual channel, by means of images which are supported by the song *How far I'll go* representing the call of the Ocean to Moana to save her land. The demigod is shown as a contrasting figure in Polynesian literature and

mythology where he always seems to be animated by hard feelings. It is no wonder, then, that in the animated movie he is depicted with a bizarre personality and conflicting traits, like for example, in Moana's grandmother's narration, where the demigod, after countless heroics for the benefit of humans, seems to have stolen the heart of Te Fiti (Mother Nature in the movie) only to acquire endless powers. Despite this mischievous personality, the events will clarify that he always acts for the sake of humanity, moved by his desire to satisfy it. The book by Riko Tatoo (2015) *I popoli di Maui* also shows Maui's shape-shifting nature and his ability to turn into an eagle, a feature which is frequently recreated in the movie.

In *Moana*, Maui is visually depicted as a big man covered in tattoos, which he has gained for each heroic quest, with emphasis on his hook, one of the most appreciated tattoos in the Polynesian area (Gemori 2011). The issue of Maui's tattoos is a visual strategy that the audiovisual uses to reproduce part of mythology and culture in the movie, since tattoos are commonly associated to Polynesian people who, despite some linguistic and cultural differences, share many customs, rituals and symbols. Tattoos have a strongly felt meaning, representing the harmonious relationship with the environment and the surrounding world, such as the stingray that Tala chooses to tattoo on her shoulders. With reference to its capability to hide in the underwater sands, the stingray symbolises gracefulness, peacefulness, speed but also protection; in this sense the choice of Tala is not accidental. As mentioned above concerning the concept of *Aumakua*, animals in Hawaiian culture are seen as expression of the presence of some spirits or ancestors. The latter aim to bring a message or protection: thus, the choice of Tala, who will protect Moana in the form of a stingray even after death throughout the film, emerges as particularly significant.

Moana's grandmother is the perfect synthesis of Hawaiian culture, living a life that is alien to the rest of the village, and showing a harmonious connection with the surrounding world and a peace of soul during life and after death perfectly represented by her *hula*. Tala's relationship with the world around her, spirits and nature expresses itself in the *hula* beside the sea, where she evidently dances to get rid of negative thoughts and energies. The *hula* is connected to the Pele family and especially to the Pele sisters, Polynesian goddesses who are considered patrons of this art to the point of believing that *hula* songs are written by the Pele spirits rather than by humans (Warren Beckwith 1976: 180). Tala's peaceful relationship with the world could be identified with the Polynesian multi-faceted concept of *mana*, that spiritual strength that can be in people and «which distinguishes Polynesian religion from animism, which believes that spirits live in certain objects, and polytheism, the belief in many gods» (Mulholland 1989: 11).

As regards mythology it has to be said that, despite the death of Tala, there are no references in the movie to the concept of *Hawaiki* and *Po* and to that of the soul after death, probably due to the young age of the audience (Williamson 2013: 288-302). However, *Hawaiki* is one of those concepts that are totally or partially shared all over Polynesia, referring to the place where spirits go after leaving this world. Finally, it can be suggested that, although Tala's *hula*, Maui's representation and the supernatural idea of animals directly refer

to the Hawaiian myth, all Polynesian populations share common traits; in this sense, *Moana* seems to go over linguistic and cultural differences in the Pacific in order to represent a common sense of identity.

#### 4. ranslating *Moana's* multilingualism

Transposing a story, a myth and a culture on screen is a complex process that must take into account several and diverse elements. The combination of images, words and even music in soundtracks offers different vehicles to convey the message, nevertheless there are some elements which remain unchanged in both intersemiotic and intralinguistic translation. In this sense, the representation of Polynesian culture is sometimes managed by the image rather than the word or combined with the word in order to fill that gap that untranslated elements leave.

As discussed in Paragraph 3, *Moana* is characterised by frequent references to Polynesian cultures which find a correlation with the linguistic heterogeneity given by the use of different Polynesian languages used in the movie. On the basis of what said so far, it can be argued that as regards *Moana*, the function of multilingualism is that to express conflict, namely the cultural identity of the characters. «Multilingualism, thus, functions as a means for the characters to emphasise their cultural and linguistic diversity, giving rise to communicative problems which generally become hard to solve» (De Bonis 2015: 53).

Different theories have been proposed on the translation of multilingualism on screen. With regards to the translation of multilingualism in Italian dubbing, De Bonis (2015) lists three main strategies:

- preservation (maintaining in the TT the same level of multilingual situations present in ST);
- neutralisation (dubbing all the different languages present in the film into one language: Italian);
- reduction (reducing the multilingual situations represented on screen: cases of code-switching and code-mixing by bilingual characters).

Contrary to the strategy of neutralisation, also described by O' Sullivan (2011: 183) as multilingualism erosion (tendency leading to a flattening of linguistic features in the target text), *Moana* represents an inverted tendency as shown by the translation of soundtracks and proper names in the Italian dubbing. *Moana* tends to the strategy of preservation as the Italian version shows the same languages of the English version, from both a quantitative and qualitative point of view.

Multilingualism plays a crucial role in the translation of proper names in *Moana*, also considering that proper names translation in animated movies depends on different factors such as the value that they assume in the movie, identifying attributes of the characters, which can be partially revealed in the name or even the socio-cultural context where characters are located in. The following four main translation strategies for proper names are identified by Salmon Kovarski (1977: 76):

- interphonic transcription: the name is adapted to the phonological rules of the target language;

- interlinguistic translation: the name is translated into the target language without changing its connotation;
- transposition based on the sound or the meaning of the name: the typology of the name or the illustration of the character are reproduced in the target language;
- semiotic or functional transposition: the name is partially or totally modified to make the feature or concept that the name expresses easy to identify in the target context.

A further strategy is that of no translation (Kovarski 1997: 76) which is employed for proper names in *Moana* which basically do not change in the translation into Italian. A different case is that of the title of the movie which provides a case of semiotic transposition in Italian and a sort of intralinguistic translation in other European countries. In Europe, indeed, the name Moana would have caused some problems linked to the fact that it is a registered trademark, therefore in countries such as France, Germany and Spain the choice has been that to substitute the title *Moana* with *Vaiana* which is also used as the name of the main character. The translation of the protagonist's name can be defined as intralinguistic translation since it finds its meaning in Tahitian where *vai* means “water” and *ana* means “cave”. In Italy, instead, (due to the fact that Moana is not only a registered trademark but also the name of a famous pornstar, which could have been problematic for a product addressed to children) the main character is still named *Vaiana*, while the title has been changed into *Oceania* (<[www.movieplayer.it](http://www.movieplayer.it)>). This choice is a case of semiotic transposition as Moana means “ocean” in Māori, Hawaiian and other Polynesian languages, a concept which is encapsulated in the Italian translation *Oceania* referring to something associated to the Ocean (<[www.k-international.com](http://www.k-international.com)>).

Making exception for the title and the protagonist's name, the Italian version applies a no translation strategy to proper names such as *Maui*, *Hei Hei* the chicken, whose name exactly means “chicken” in some Polynesian languages, *Tui*, Moana's father who is named after a New Zealand bird, or *Tala*, her grandmother, whose name means “story” in Samoan ([www.themonsoon-project.org](http://www.themonsoon-project.org)). Moreover, the name of the protagonist reflects the already mentioned importance of water in the movie where it is expressed by means of images, dialogues and songs; the song *How far I'll go*, in particular, represents the call of the Ocean to Moana. All these hidden meanings and cultural references do not change their form when reported in the target text but inevitably lose part of their referential potential. These cultural references could also be explained in terms of cultural and linguistic untranslatability (Hofstede 2000; Nida 2004; Cassin 2017; Arduini 2020) as with the connection between Polynesian people and the Ocean which is a complex idea to represent in the Italian context, even only considering the absence of oceans in Italy. Proper names provide a first example of how multilingualism is handled in the Italian dubbing of *Maona*. However, the preservation of multilingualism is achieved not only by using Polynesian names but also through the movie soundtracks where Polynesian identity is expressed through the presence of Samoan, Tokelauan and Tuvaluan languages.



## 5. Translating Moana's soundtracks into Italian

Soundtracks in Disney movies express important moments and emotions of the characters of the story, which is why they are usually translated in the target language. John Franzon in his article *Choices in Songs Translation: Singability in print, Subtitles and sung performance* (2008: 276), lists five possible translation choices for songs:

- Not translating the lyrics;
- Translating the lyrics without taking the music into consideration;
- Writing new lyrics;
- Adapting the music to the translation;
- Adapting the translation to the music.

The translation into Italian of part of Moana's soundtracks is halfway between the strategy of no translation and translation of the text adapting it to the music. In fact, Polynesian languages present in the English original songs are not translated into Italian, differently from the English parts that are translated adapting them to the original music.

The three songs *Tulou Tagaloo* (0:52 min.), *An innocent warrior* (1:37 min.) and *Logo Te Pate* (2:06 min.), for example, are entirely written in Polynesian languages and are not translated into Italian in the process of dubbing. It is probably due to the function that they play in the movie. Indeed, *Tulou Tagaloo*, the song introducing the movie, is composed in Samoan and Tokelauan and is not translated, perhaps, to intentionally introducing the idea of a different culture and world. The song *An innocent warrior* (1:37), according to the composer Opetaia Foa'I, encapsulates the idea of Pacific identity and it is used to introduce the first contact between Moana and the Ocean and is composed mixing Tuvaluan, Tokelauan and Samoan ([www.opetaiafoai.com](http://www.opetaiafoai.com)). The choice of not translating the sentence *Logo Te Pate* (Tokelauan), is probably linked to the fact that the scenes in the song representing Maui's victory are strictly connected to Maui's myth and his Polynesian background; furthermore, the choice of no translation may contribute to strengthen this connection not disturbing the flow of the events and the reception of the message.

One further example is the song *We know the way* (2:21) (Table 1-4) which starts with a part in Samoan followed by another one in Tokelauan, which are both translated in the following English part providing a sort of explanation inside the song to avoid a loss of meaningful information for the non-native audience. I compiled the following tables referring to Corrius and Zabalbascoa's terminology (2011) who make a distinction between L1 which is the main language of a film, L2 which is the language used for dubbing and L3 which refers to any other language or variety of a language used in the film.

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**L3: Samoan**

Tatou o tagata folau e vala'auina  
E le atua o le sami tele e o mai  
Ia ava'e le lu'itau e lelei  
Tapenapena.

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**L1: English**

We read the wind and the sky when the sun is high, we sail the length of sea on the ocean breeze. At night we name every star, we know where we are.

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*Table 1. We know the way – Samoan stanza.*

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**L3: Tokelauan**

Aue aue  
Nuku i mua  
Te manulele e tataki e  
Aue aue  
Te fenua te malie  
Nae ko hakilia mo kaiga e

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**L1: English**

We keep our island in our mind and when it's time to find home we know the way. Aue, aue we are explorers reading every sign we tell the stories of our elders in the never ending chain.

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*Table 2 We know the way - Tokelauan stanza*

As shown by Tables 1 and 2, Samoan and Tokelauan parts are focused not only on the concepts of identity and belonging to Polynesian lands, but also on the idea that Moana's people are in the right place in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Italian version (Tables 2-3) only translates the English lines leaving Samoan and Tokelauan parts unchanged.

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**L3: Samoan**

Tatou o tagata folau e vala'auina  
E le atua o le sami tele e o mai  
Ia ava'e le lu'itau e lelei  
Tapenapena.

---

**L2: Italian**

Leggiamo il cielo che è infallibile  
L'oceano ci mostrerà  
La sua vastità  
Il nostro popolo ha la sua identità  
Noi tutti sappiamo chi siamo.

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*Table 3 We know the way ITA - Samoan stanza.*

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### **L3: Tokelauan**

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Aue aue  
Nuku i mua  
Te manulele e tataki e  
Aue aue  
Te fenua te malie  
Nae ko hakilia mo kaiga e

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### **L2: Italian**

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La casa nostra è il posto che  
Nel cuore ognuno di noi non lascia mai  
Navigatori dentro l'anima  
Però la strada che ci porta sempre a casa è scritta in noi  
È scritta in noi

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Table 4 *We know the way ITA - Tokelauan stanza.*

In other words, Italian adaptations are mainly based on a faithful translation of the English parts, showing semantic consistency with the Samoan and Tokelauan parts whose meaning is visually reinforced by the images accompanying the scores in the original and the dubbed version as well.

As regards the co-presence of different languages in the songs, Opetaiia explains that the decision to write the first part of this song in Samoan and the chorus in Tokelauan, was aimed to recreate a sort of Polynesian identity «Tokelauan can be understood by Samoans and also Māori. So, having Samoan first, followed by that, to me it made it Polynesian» (Opetaiia Foa'i 2017). Moana maintains the same multilingual level in the Italian dubbed version even though the linguistic heterogeneity may not be perceived by the non-native audience that makes no distinction between the different Polynesian languages used. Using Delabastita and Grutman's words (2005: 19) it can be said that «the translator's power can be assessed in terms of two variables: the importance of the message that is to be communicated, and the distance between the cultures which enter into communication via the translator». For what concerns Moana's soundtracks, translation choices were made taking into consideration the narrative value of songs in Disney movies and maintaining at the same time the distance between the represented cultures and languages through the no translation strategies employed for songs. Music, with its sounds and instruments, is strongly representative of Polynesian culture and another translation strategy not compromising the conveying of such cultural features in dubbed versions seems unlikely.

*Moana* belongs to that group of Disney animated movies which are set in a faraway place giving the idea of an enchanted world, and the use of indigenous language, then, may help achieve this aim. However, Polynesian languages in the movie, whether spoken or sung, represent a double-edged sword for non-native speakers, since the only information they can collect is that inferred by means of visual channels and some previous knowledge. The effects of this sort of foreignization have an impact on the audience as well as

Polynesian islanders, who can feel uncomfortable with their depiction in the movie. The question, then, is whether a multimodal product such as *Moana* may be considered a valuable tool to represent a culture, despite generalizations and gaps in both original and translations.

## 6. Cultural identities and stereotypes

The adaptation of contents to a largescale public, including adults and children as well, entails the risk of incurring in misrepresentations of cultural and linguistic diversity linked to common generalizations, stereotypes or translation needs. *Moana* came under fierce criticism for misrepresenting and stereotyping Polynesian diversity in the original version of the movie as well as its translations into other languages. In the last few years, *Moana* has been a vivid subject of debate and numerous articles have been published about the movie. The article *Beyond Paradise? Retelling Pacific Stories in Disney's Moana* (Tamaira and Fonoti 2018), for example, offers a critical analysis of the controversial hypothesis of stereotyping and embracing the Pacific in a movie.<sup>3</sup> Dionne Fonoti, as a Samoan filmmaker, has contributed to investigate the cooperation between Pacific cultural experts and Disney film executives of *Moana*. The specific focus of the article is on the idea of natural paradise linked to Polynesian islands dating from the eighteenth century when Western travelers relayed stories of idyllic places in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. The two authors argue that «the Walt Disney Company has been active in advancing the illusion of a “Pacific paradise” for Western popular consumption through many of its films» (Tamaira and Fonoti 2018: 297). The idea of a natural paradise in *Moana* is mainly given by means of the visual channel that introduces the verdant and tropical landscapes of Montunui. The article, moreover, discusses the topics of Oceanic voyaging, gender disparities and patriarchal hegemony in the Pacific «beginning with the assumption that voyaging and navigation are the purview of men» (Tamaira and Fonoti 2018: 308).

The choice of bringing the Pacific to the big screen is due to the film directors John Musker and Ron Clements who in 2011 suggested Polynesia as the next location for a Disney movie (Armstrong 2018: 3). From a postcolonial perspective, this choice can result from a «sustained geopolitical (re)orientation to the Pacific circuit under Barack Obama» (Bartels, Eckstein, Waller and Wiemann 2019: 82), although conflicting opinions have been expressed about the “Western way” of representing Polynesia authenticity. With regards to the concept of “otherness” and diversity in *Moana*, Michelle Anya Anjirbag says that «all members of a particular group will hold the same opinions — an assumption that is dehumanizing yet relied upon to sanction depictions of diversity across mainstream Western media» (Anjirbag 2018:3). In fact, in addition to the potential creation of a feeling of marginality in Pacific populations, it needs to be noted that several differences among Pacific cultures are partially flattened in the process of generalization for a largescale public. Re-

<sup>3</sup> See also Michelle Anya Anjirbag, *Mulan and Moana: Embedded Coloniality and the Search for Authenticity in Disney Animated*, Film Centre for Research in Children's Literature at Cambridge, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, 2018.

garding possible cultural stereotypes about Pacific in the movie Opetaiia Foa'i, as a Samoan songwriter, in an interview reported on the online magazine *The Spinnoff* (2017), thus affirms: I think for our people who have never been to the village, brought up in the city, it awakens something in them to want to go back, put their feet on the land. For people from other cultures to be interested enough to have a look at our culture that's more than just hula and ukulele". He argues that, although an unavoidable neutralisation of differences is made, the movie represents an excellent opportunity to make other countries approach to the Pacific reality as a whole. Moreover, these other countries would show on average a basic knowledge of the cultures under discussion and would not be able to perceive differences as they should. Hence Opetaiia's belief that the movie is a good first step in bringing Polynesian culture into the world.

Bearing this purpose in mind, it seems impossible to completely remove stereotypes from the movie as *Moana's* land is the expression of a world larger than her island, embracing the whole of the Pacific. The introduction of Tala (Section 3) confirms the idea that all Polynesian islands are on the same wavelength, the idea of people who, depending on fishing and Mother Nature's fruits, live harmoniously with nature and the ocean remaining essentially alien to modernity. Obviously, this scenery does not respond to reality. Modernity and civilization have reached the Pacific Islands but the strong and actual relationship with nature represents an excellent ploy to make children discover a different reality, probably taking place in the past, representing an effective strategy to bring them into another world. It is no wonder that in the transposition of the Pacific on screen the main activities on Moana's Island result to be fishing and navigation, with the latter being the key point for the main character to achieve her heroic quest and save her land. Indeed, in a subversive reversal of roles. Moana finds herself and her place in the world through the art of navigation, bringing a forgotten past back to life. Role change also makes reference to the patriarchal hegemony which, even today, represents a heavy burden for Pacific women. The last scenes of the movie, in fact, show Moana leaving a shell on the mountain of the ancestors as symbol of her leadership and authority.

From a cultural perspective the use of music in *Moana*, instead, Armstrong (2018) argues that Polynesian musical style, dominated by drumming and percussion instruments, is strongly present in *Moana's* soundtrack, but its authenticity is constantly contaminated by the use of American Broadway music. The movie offers therefore an insight into Polynesian culture but "while the narrative of Moana contains authentic Polynesian elements, Disney still controls what and who is depicted, and how they are portrayed" (Armstrong 2018: 7). However, as to what concerns the different languages occurring in the movie songs, Opetaiia takes up the concept of identity and affirms: «this is our culture, the Pacific, to share with the world» (Opetaiia Foa'i 2017). This claim seems to suggest that Moana does not focus on the idea of identity connected to a particular island but to the Pacific as a larger reality with the focus is on what these cultures have in common rather than their differences. Although the use of different languages may not be perceived by the foreign

addressee and may lead to a further generalization, the latter may represent a productive phenomenon, in this case, strengthening the idea of identity even in terms of Polynesian identity.

## 7. Conclusions

Although audiovisuals involve the possibility to incur the risk of generating stereotypes, generalizations and misrepresentations, they are nowadays powerful means to express stories, myths or cultures. Lyrics, music and images convey sounds and colors that otherwise could not be communicated to both adults and children, and that are potentially subject to adaptations during the process of translation into other languages. However, under certain circumstances adaptation meets cultural and linguistic gaps which are often managed by adopting no translation strategies.

This work was conducted considering the type of audience (adults and children) and the function that an animated movie may have in children's educational process. Indeed, even though preserving multilingualism in the Italian translation of the movie could be an obstacle for comprehension for a children audience, it can be said that such multilingualism is compensated by the presence of images and translations in the main language of the movie. In this sense, lyrics, music and images, cooperate not only to convey myth and history, but also to disambiguate what is happening on screen. Despite some inevitable cultural and linguistic loss (as with characters' names for example), it can be said that the linguistic heterogeneity of *Moana* does not undermine the understanding of the movie by its main audience, children, on the contrary, the strict relationship between Moana and Polynesian culture and literature plays an important pedagogical function (Bacchetti 2013). The example of *Moana* demonstrates that, even adapting the message to the young audience or to a public that is not very familiar with the narrated culture, audiovisuals aim to make the latter more accessible and easier to understand than it would be by means of the written channel. Moreover, the renewed sensibility towards the different cultures and languages represented on screen, demonstrated by movies like *Moana* (2016), *Coco* (2017) and *Encanto* (2021) in which different languages are used in addition to L1 and L2 encourages the idea of considering animated movies as pedagogical tool to build children's knowledge and sensibility.

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