

Flower Moon Lost in Translation: Killers of Osage Voices in Dubbing

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Abstract

In recent years, multilingualism and third language (L3) have become integral to film narratives, shaping characterisation, plot development, and story-world construction. The representation of multilingual elements in dubbed versions of polyglot films is therefore crucial. This study examines the rendering of L3 in two Persian-dubbed versions of *Killers of the Flower Moon* (2023), a film distinguished by its deliberate use of Osage. Comparative analysis shows that the two studios adopted markedly different strategies. One version retained traces of L3 through “preservation” or “quantitative reduction,” maintaining a degree of linguistic and cultural otherness. The other largely “neutralised” multilingualism, in some cases, producing *cultural interpolation* and mismatches between the “non-verbal visuals” and the “verbal-auditory” track. The findings indicate that both technical and ideological manipulation shaped these choices.

Key words: audiovisual translation (AVT), multilingualism, third language (L3), dubbing, characterisation, polyglot genre.

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Introduction

Wahl (2008) identifies the *polyglot film* genre as one that integrates multilingualism into the script to reflect characters' linguistic realities through a "realistic strategy" (p. 1), in contrast to films where foreign languages are reduced to markers of otherness or mere "noise" (p. 2). This makes linguistic authenticity a key narrative device, central to research on multilingualism in audiovisual translation (AVT), especially dubbing. In AVT, multilingualism is often discussed through the concept of the third language (L3). L3 is any language, variety, or constructed system distinct from the source text's main language (L1) and the target language (L2) (Corrius, 2008; Corrius & Zabalbeascoa, 2011). The rise of the polyglot genre has thus coincided with an increase in films in which L3 is integral to the plot and characterisation.

Several factors explain growing multilingualism of cinema (Rezvani Sichani et al., 2022, 2023). Polyglot films reflect a globalised world of migration, intercultural contact, and complex linguistic identities (Aparicio & Bairstow, 2016; Corrius, 2024; Dore, 2019; O'Sullivan, 2011), a diversity also promoted by institutions such as UNESCO (2012). Filmmakers increasingly foreground linguistic plurality, exemplified by Spielberg's choice not to subtitle Spanish in *West Side Story* (2021), which Tan (2021) notes disrupts English hegemony and affirms the cultural identity of Spanish-speaking characters. Beyond its prevalence, L3 fulfils key narrative and aesthetic functions, especially immersion—the audience's emotional and cognitive engagement with the fictional world (Szarkowska & Boczkowska, 2020, p. 5). Authentic linguistic practices enhance perceived realism (Cho et al., 2014), deepen character identity and construct culturally grounded worlds, while risking stereotyping if mishandled.

These risks intensify in translation, particularly in dubbing, which entails a form of "technical manipulation" (Díaz Cintas, 2012, p. 284) that removes access to the original audio and is often associated with censorship and homogenisation as a covert translation mode (Bogucki, 2024). Consequently, recent scholarship has examined how multilingualism and characterisation are reshaped in dubbed polyglot films (Bogucki, 2024; Corrius, 2024; de Higes Andino, 2014; Dore, 2019; Minutella, 2020, 2021; Monti, 2019; Rezvani Sichani et al., 2023; Zabalbeascoa, 2024; Zabalbeascoa & Corrius, 2014). However, Persian dubbing remains underexplored. Existing studies (Rezvani Sichani et al., 2023) note its historical association with censorship, homogenisation, and domestication (Rezvani Sichani & Afrouz, 2019; Rezvani Sichani et al., 2022; Rezvani Sichani et al., 2021), posing particular challenges for representing multilingualism. Given its roots in promoting linguistic uniformity (Naficy, 2011), examining Persian dubbing's treatment of linguistic otherness is especially significant. Therefore, *Killers of the Flower Moon* (2023) was selected as a case study, given the central role of multilingualism in its narrative and production. Two Persian-dubbed versions were analysed to examine the rendering of L3 and how these choices shape characterisation and narrative. The study addresses: how L3 is rendered, which strategies convey linguistic otherness, and how these decisions affect characterisation and narrative.

1. Multilingualism, Characterisation and Dubbing

L3 treatment in dubbing has attracted growing scholarly attention. Zabalbeascoa and Corrius's (2014) study of Spanish dubbing in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* shows how L3 signals cultural otherness, social identity, and comic effect—functions often altered or lost. Zabalbeascoa (2024) adds that foreignness itself may generate humour, especially when multilingual features are manipulated or erased. de Higes Andino (2014), analysing *It's a Free World...*, found Spanish dubbing often neutralises multilingualism due to lip-sync and distributor decisions; subtitling preserved variation better but faced its own limitations. Dore (2019, p. 52), studying *Modern Family*, observed a shift in Italian dubbing from systematic neutralisation toward “*functional manipulation*,” preserving multilingualism selectively to mark “otherness.” Similarly, Minutella's (2020) analysis of *Despicable Me 2* highlights how code-switching and accented speech aid humour and characterisation; dubbing professionals noted genre, audience, and production constraints influence such decisions. Focusing on Persian dubbing, Rezvani Sichani et al. (2023) identified a strong tendency toward neutralisation, erasing linguistic identities in multilingual exchanges and rendering them in Persian. While some L3 elements (e.g., Arabic or Turkish words) were retained, they were often decontextualised, and compensatory strategies such as accented Persian, were inconsistent. The study also noted the loss of character-specific traits, as with *Jason Bourne*, whose linguistic versatility is key. Corrius (2024) recently examined challenges of preserving L3 when it overlaps with L2, reaffirming multilingualism's central role in characterisation and narrative.

2. Killers of the Flower Moon (2023)

Martin Scorsese's *Killers of the Flower Moon* (2023; hereafter KOFM) is a 3-hour-26-minute historical drama based on David Grann's book, depicting the 1920s Osage murders after oil was discovered on their land. The critically acclaimed film, earning 10 Academy Awards and 9 BAFTA nominations, is defined by its multilingualism—English, Osage, Latin and French—which functions as a key tool for characterisation and authenticity. It is thus a clear example of an *L3-as-theme* film (cf. Corrius & Zabalbeascoa, 2019, p. 74) and fits Wahl's (2008) *colonial* polyglot sub-genre, where linguistic difference reflects unequal power relations, domination, resistance and identity. The Osage Nation was actively involved in production. Their Language Department collaborated closely on dialogue, teaching, and subtitling (Osage Nation Language Department., n.d.). Lead actor Lily Gladstone described learning Osage as transformative for inhabiting Mollie's perspective (Carr, 2023, December 13), and language consultant Christopher Cote praised the film's linguistic authenticity while acknowledging its outsider perspective (Coggan, 2023). Scorsese and the cast emphasised that Osage was central to historical and cultural realism – Scorsese stated, “We're making a film about a historical event that is central to the Osage history, so of course it's important [that] we spoke that language” (Juneau, 2023), a view echoed by Gladstone on how Osage restored dignity and realism (Knoke, 2024).

Given its meaningful use of multilingualism for narrative and character-building, KOFM and its two Persian-dubbed versions were selected for analysis. One version was produced by the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), the state-run institution that, despite growing private competition, remains the most established and influential actor in Iran's dubbing industry. With its nationwide reach, resources, and infrastructure, IRIB typically employs prominent dubbing professionals. This version was broadcast on national television and is available on Telewebion, IRIB's official video-on-demand (VOD) platform. The second was produced by Faraz Studio, a private dubbing studio, and distributed via Filmnet, a subscription-based private VOD service, and Rubika, a semi-public streaming platform. While both were produced by professional dubbing actors and directors, the IRIB version is more accessible via free-to-air broadcast. Conversely, private VOD platforms require subscriptions, potentially limiting access, though they are popular among viewers who perceive their productions as less ideologically constrained—an assumption that does not always extend to dubbed foreign content. These two versions—one produced by a public broadcaster and the other by a private studio—offer a revealing contrast for examining the handling of L3 in Persian dubbing. The analysis also touches on Díaz Cintas's (2012, pp. 284–285) distinction between *technical* manipulation, driven by audiovisual constraints like lip-sync or timing, and *ideological* manipulation, involving deliberate shifts for political, cultural, or moral reasons.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive translation studies (DTS) approach to examine how Persian dubbing teams render the multilingual elements of KOFM. The analysis is guided by Minutella's (2021, p. 79) framework for L3 in dubbing. Although originally developed for the transfer of English linguistic varieties in Italian-dubbed animated films, this model is particularly suitable here due to key parallels between Italian and Persian dubbing traditions, notably their historical association with censorship, linguistic homogenisation, and domestication (cf. Ranzato, 2013, p. 228). Moreover, Minutella's model represents one of the most recent and comprehensive frameworks for analysing L3, building on earlier work (Corrius & Zabalbeascoa, 2011; De Bonis, 2014, 2015a, 2015b; Parini, 2009). Minutella (2021, p. 79) identifies five strategies: *neutralisation* (L3 is replaced by standard L2), *quantitative reduction* (L3 is partially retained), *preservation* (L3 is maintained, preserving linguistic identity), *hypercharacterisation* (L3 traits are exaggerated), and *adaptation/transformation* (L3 is modified to fit the target culture).

The analysis followed three main steps. First, all multilingual instances were identified by viewing the film in its entirety, during which scenes containing languages other than English—primarily Osage—were marked. As Osage constitutes the film's dominant and narratively significant L3, the analysis focused exclusively on Osage scenes, while other marginal L3s (e.g., Latin) were excluded. Second, the publicly available, official script of KOFM (Roth & Scorsese, 2022) was consulted to verify scene selection and extract Osage dialogue. The narrative functions and contextual significance of Osage in these original scenes were then examined and clarified. Where Osage utterances were provided, they were retained (e.g., wah-kohn-dah, sho-mee-kah-see); where the script only indicated "Speaking

Osage” or supplied English subtitles, these labels were recorded accordingly in the appendices. All lines were manually cross-checked against the film. Although the author is not a speaker of Osage and minor transcription inaccuracies may persist—particularly where the pronunciation or exact phrasing in the final film version does not fully correspond to the script—these lines were retained to highlight the importance of promoting linguistic diversity and multilingualism, thereby enhancing the visibility of a highly marginalised language to the extent possible within the scope of the study. Finally, the dubbing strategies adopted in each Persian version were analysed using Minutella’s taxonomy, with attention to their effects on characterisation, narrative authenticity, and the representation of cultural and linguistic otherness.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings are summarised in Table 1, which reports the 35 L3 Osage instances identified in the original script and their corresponding dubbing decisions. For brevity, the IRIB version is referred to as *Di1* and the Faraz Studio version as *Df2*. The results reveal two contrasting approaches: *Di1* largely preserves L3 through preservation or quantitative reduction, whereas *Df2* predominantly neutralises Osage. Eight plot- and character-relevant scenes were selected for close analysis, as they clearly reflect each team’s overall strategy. The analysis first examines the function of L3 in the original script. Then it assesses how these dubbing strategies influenced or altered the filmmakers’ intended use of it.

Table 1

Strategies Used in Representing L3 in the Persian Dubbings of KOFM

Strategy	<i>The Di1 Dubbing</i>	<i>The Df2 Dubbing</i>
Neutralisation	7	24
Quantitative Reduction	10	4
Preservation	14	4
Hypercharacterisation	0	0
Transformation	4	3

4.1. The Ceremonial Pipe Burial Scene: A Case of Reterritorialization

The opening scene of KOFM is central to the plot and characterisation, introducing the film’s core themes. An Osage elder, a respected spiritual leader, performs a ceremonial act with a sacred pipe, symbolising abandonment, collective mourning, and erosion of long-held cultural traditions. The scene is entirely in Osage, with English subtitles in the original version. Elsewhere, some Osage-

language scenes remain unsubtitled, preserving opacity and positioning viewers outside the Osage perspective.

Table 2

Di1 and Df2 Dubbings of the Ceremonial Pipe Burial Scene¹

Original	Di1 Back-translation	Df2 Back-translation
Tribe Elder [in OSAGE with ENGLISH subtitles]: Kah-see(n) ta(n) theh-ksheh ah(n)-kee-xeh ta(n)-kah txah(n). Nah(n)-nee-oh(n)-pah theh-ksheh nee-kah-shee-kah eh-koh(n). Theh-ksheh wah-kohn-dah wah-pah zheen theh nahn-peh. Nah(n)-nee-oh(n)-pah ksheh wah-xeh ah-xoh-peh eh-txah(n) koh-eh ee-eh ee-tah ee-heh ah(n)-theh tah ah-kxai. Zhee(n)-kah-zhee(n) ah-shee dah nah(n)-zhee(n) pah ee-eh eh-zhee(n) pee-oh(n) tah ah pah. Ee(n)-shdah-xee(n) nee kah-shee-kah ah-pah wah koh(n)-zeh tah ah-pai. Ohk'-ah(n) tseh-kah pee-oh(n) tah ah-pah kah-koh(n) tah(n) ohk' ah(n) ah(n)-koh-dah-pee ee pah-hoh(n) zhee tah ah-pah.	Tribe Elder [in PERSIAN]: We ask you to accept this offering from us. Tomorrow, we will bury this pipe. May it carry our message to wah-kohn-dah . It is time to bury this pipe with respect and set aside its teachings. Our children, who listen from outside, are learning another language. They are being taught by white men. They will learn new ways, and none of them will ever understand our principles and ideals.	Tribe Elder [in PERSIAN]: O Lord, O our Sustainer, O Merciful One — we ask for Your help. Our people are in hardship, our people are in trouble. Help our tribe, help our people. Watch over us — we swear by what is sacred to You. Help us, help this tribe. O Lord, grant us Your mercy. O God, we have no one but You, and we ask You for help. Let Your rain of mercy pour upon us. Your greatness is evident to all. O Lord, we are sinful servants who have done nothing but show ingratitude for Your blessings.

The original Osage dialogue in Table 2 laments cultural loss and the encroachment of whiteness, exemplified in bolded lines such as: “Those children who are outside listening, they will learn another language. They will be taught by white people. They will learn new ways and will not know our ways” [adapted from English subtitles]. These lines foreground assimilation anxieties and the disappearance of Indigenous knowledge. In Di1, most Osage dialogue is neutralised into Persian, except for a single term, “Wah-kohn-dah” (‘God’), a quantitative reduction preserving minimal L3. Yet key thematic references to “white men” and cultural loss remain, allowing the ideological thrust to persist despite linguistic neutralisation. By contrast, Df2 fully neutralises Osage and substantially rewrites the scene.

¹ Tables 2–9 in the Results and Discussion section present adapted excerpts of key dialogue and contextual elements from Supplementary Tables 1S–8S. Full scene-by-scene transcriptions of dialogue, original Osage lines, contextual details, Persian dubs, and other supplementary documentation used in the analysis are available for further reference in Supplementary Tables 1S–8S via the link in the Data Availability Statement.

Dialogue becomes a generalised religious prayer resembling Muslim or Middle Eastern devotional discourse. References to children taught by white men, learning “new ways,” and losing traditions are omitted. Crucially, responsibility shifts onto the tribe, recasting the elder’s speech as a confession of collective guilt: “O Lord, we are sinful servants who have done nothing but show ingratitude for Your blessings,” shifting him from a figure of wisdom to moral culpability. Additional invocations, such as “Let Your rain of mercy pour upon us,” exemplify cultural interpolation—introducing target-culture-specific religious motifs absent from the source, compensating for neutralisation or aligning dialogue with dominant norms. This produces a marked dissonance between the film’s Osage setting and the dubbed dialogue, which evokes an Abrahamic religious framework. Consequently, the non-verbal visuals no longer align with the verbal-auditory track, breaking the cohesion between image and language. The dubbing team appears to have written entirely new dialogue for the images—a form of audiovisual adaptation or reterritorialisation—where lines fail to match the visuals, disregarding the original script and overwriting its intended meanings. This example demonstrates that the absence of L3 in dubbing is not merely a technical or linguistic matter; it also involves ideological manipulation.

4.2. The Wealth Display and Salesperson Scene: A Case of Intratextual Translation

This scene is pivotal, visualising the Osage community’s newfound wealth after oil discovery. A white salesman tries to sell a blanket to a wealthy Osage couple, who speak only Osage, while he speaks only English. Their bilingual driver mediates, acting as an interpreter. This multilingual interaction foregrounds shifting socio-economic power and the linguistic barrier. In Di1, Osage dialogue is preserved without dubbing, sustaining the scene’s multilingual texture and the driver’s narrative function. Retaining the original’s verbal-auditory element allows viewers to experience linguistic otherness and maintains the interpreter’s mediating role, essential to characterisation and plot. In contrast, Df2 neutralises all dialogue into Persian. As shown in Table 3, the Osage couple now speak Persian directly, while the driver redundantly repeats their statements. These newly written lines, created without close reference to the original, disrupt the narrative. The interpreter’s role becomes illogical, recasting the couple’s behaviour as aloof or socially superior—contradicting the original premise, where linguistic difference necessitates mediation.

Table 3

Di1 and Df2 Dubbings of the Wealth Display and Salesperson Scene

Original	Di1 Back-translation	Df2 Back-translation
[The Osage couple speak OSAGE and tell the driver that they buy the blanket pointing to the colour they like]	[The Osage couple speak to each other in OSAGE and point to the driver, indicating they’ll buy that colour.]	[The Osage couple, in PERSIAN:] Come on, let’s get one. We want it. We want it.

Original	Di1 Back-translation	Df2 Back-translation
[The driver acts as an interpreter and tells the white salesperson in ENGLISH]	[The driver, acting like an interpreter, tells the salesperson in PERSIAN:]	Driver [in PERSIAN] : We'll buy one — this colour, this colour.
Driver: We'll take one. In that colour.	Driver: We'll take one — in that same colour.	

These findings echo Zabalbeascoa and Corrius's (2014) analysis of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, where English–Spanish interactions are flattened into monolingual Spanish, erasing the narrative function of “intratextual translation” (p. 268). A similar change occurs in *Carla's Song*, where a character originally acting as an interpreter becomes a cultural “host” in the Spanish dub. As Zabalbeascoa and Corrius (2014) note, such metatranslational shifts obscure language differences, replacing them with cultural generalisations. Dore's (2019, p. 64) study of *Modern Family* highlights Manny as an “incidental interpreter” (cf. Chiaro, 2014) for his Spanish-speaking mother, clarifying her code-switching and lexical errors while reinforcing his second-generation bilingual identity. A parallel occurs in Df2 of KOFM, where the interpreter's bridging role is erased and the multilingual encounter is rendered monolingual. This distorts power relations, misrepresents the narrative function, and exemplifies the loss of intratextual translation (Zabalbeascoa, 2012). As Díaz Cintas (2001, p. 41, as cited in Zabalbeascoa & Corrius, 2014, p. 261) observes, a key challenge in dubbing multilingual films is avoiding a “sterilized and uniform language.” Df2 demonstrates how linguistic homogenisation can overwrite crucial social, cultural, and narrative meanings.

4.3. The Ernest-Mollie Driving Scene: A Case of Altered Character Representation

The third scene involves Ernest Burkhart (Leonardo DiCaprio), a white WWI veteran who speaks only English and has just arrived in Osage County, driving Mollie Kyle (Lily Gladstone), a wealthy full-blood Osage fluent in Osage and English, home while attempting to flirt with her. Osage dialogue is central to establishing linguistic and cultural distance. Table 4 shows the original dialogue alongside the Di1 and Df2 Persian dubbings.

Table 4

Di1 and Df2 Dubbings of the Ernest-Mollie Driving Scene

Original	Di1 Back-translation	Df2 Back-translation
Mollie [in ENGLISH] : I didn't realise this was a race. I don't care for watching horses.	Mollie [in PERSIAN] : I didn't realise you were racing. Watching horses doesn't interest me.	Mollie [in PERSIAN] : I didn't know there was a race! I don't like horse races.
Ernest [in ENGLISH] : Well, I'm a different kind of horse.	Ernest [in PERSIAN] : Well, I'm a different kind of horse.	Ernest [in PERSIAN] : Well, watching this race with me is different!

Original	Di1 Back-translation	Df2 Back-translation
[Mollie speaks OSAGE and Ernest does not understand what she says]	[Mollie speaks in OSAGE, and Ernest doesn't understand what she says.]	Mollie [in PERSIAN]: Oh God, just what I needed. Seriously!
Ernest [in ENGLISH]: What? What was that?	Ernest [in PERSIAN]: Huh? What'd you say?	Ernest [in PERSIAN]: What'd you say?
Mollie [in OSAGE]: Sho-me-kah-see,	Mollie [in OSAGE]: Sho-me-kah-see.	Mollie [in PERSIAN]: Exactly what you heard—you're deaf?!
Mollie [in ENGLISH]: That's how you are.	Mollie [in PERSIAN]: Means — it's how you are.	
Ernest [in ENGLISH]: I don't know what you said, but it must've been Indian for "handsome devil."	Ernest [in PERSIAN]: I don't know what you said, but I'm sure it was something like "handsome devil."	Ernest [in PERSIAN]: I didn't catch what you said, but maybe in your language it means "handsome guy."

In Di1, the actor dubbing Mollie attempts to pronounce the original Osage lines, thereby preserving the multilingual element. This strategy effectively maintains the scene's narrative function: Ernest's inability to understand Mollie. This linguistic gap marks a turning point in Ernest's character arc, motivating his later efforts to learn Osage and engage more deeply with Osage culture and history. By contrast, the Df2 version neutralises all multilingual content by rendering Mollie's Osage utterances in Persian. As Table 4 shows, culturally loaded expressions such as "Sho-me-kah-see" (Coyote)—a playful insult likening Ernest to a trickster figure—are completely omitted. Consequently, Ernest's confusion becomes illogical, and Mollie's sarcastic response—"Exactly what you heard—you're deaf?!"—loses coherence, as both characters now speak Persian. Instead of the original teasing tone conveyed through Osage, Mollie is given the line "Oh God, just what I needed. Seriously!", which shifts her characterisation from witty and culturally confident to merely irritated. Ernest's later line—"I didn't catch what you said, but maybe in your language it means 'handsome guy'"—also becomes nonsensical in the absence of code-switching. As de Higes Andino (2014, p. 228) notes, removing multilingual elements may lead viewers to assume a shared linguistic space where none exists, erasing linguistic struggle and distorting emotional development. The Df2 version exemplifies this effect by collapsing intercultural tension into a monolingual exchange. This flattening mirrors cases discussed by Zabalbeascoa and Corrius (2014) in *Carla's Song*, where an interpreter is redefined as a "host", and by Rezvani Sichani et al. (2023), where Jason Bourne's multilingual competence is erased in Persian dubbing. In KOFM, the loss of Osage similarly alters characterisation, removes Ernest's language-learning trajectory, and undermines the realism of the multilingual setting.

4.4. The Wedding Ceremony Scene: A Case of Code-Switching

The wedding ceremony constitutes another key scene in which L3 fulfils an essential narrative and cultural function. During the traditional Osage wedding of Ernest and Mollie, an Osage elder officiates

entirely in Osage, performing rituals that foreground community customs. The deliberate use of unsubtitled Osage signals that full semantic comprehension is not required; meaning is conveyed through ritualised speech, tone, and performance. King Hale (Robert De Niro)—Ernest’s uncle, a powerful white cattleman who claims close ties to the Osage—attends the ceremony and exploits the occasion to perform respect and cultural proximity. He briefly code-switches into Osage when addressing Mollie and emphasises his familiarity with Osage culture by noting that he always referred to her late father by his Osage name, Nah-kah-e-se-y. These linguistic choices construct Hale as a culturally “hybrid” figure who performs alignment with the Osage community while concealing his violent intentions. The alternation between Osage and English thus functions as a narrative strategy that exposes the performative and manipulative nature of Hale’s apparent solidarity.

Table 5

Di1 and Df2 Dubbings of the Wedding Ceremony Scene

Original	Di1 Back-translation	Df2 Back-translation
[The Osage elder is performing a traditional Osage wedding ceremony for Ernest and Mollie, speaking OSAGE]	[The Osage elder performs the wedding ceremony in OSAGE]	Osage Elder [in PERSIAN]: You two—Mollie... Ernest—may the blessings and grace of the Lord be upon you both. Wherever you go, whatever you do, whatever it may be, May you walk under the mercy and blessing of the Great Lord, And live a healthy life together. I now pronounce you husband and wife.
King Hale [in ENGLISH]: I’ve known Mollie and her sisters since they were little girls running around, making a lot of trouble.	King Hale [in PERSIAN]: I’ve known Mollie and her sisters since they were little and causing trouble.	King Hale [in PERSIAN]: We all knew Mollie and her sisters since they were kids—and they were real troublemakers.
[Mollie and King Hale exchange OSAGE words]	Mollie [in PERSIAN]: We weren’t that much trouble. [King says a word in OSAGE in response to Mollie]	Mollie [in PERSIAN]: Say something else, please. King Hale [in PERSIAN]: Alright.
King Hale [in ENGLISH]: Mollie’s dear departed father, Nah-kah-e-se-y, was a dear, dear friend of mine, a beloved friend of the heart. He always used to tell the white men just to call him Jimmy, but I always called him by his proper name, Nah-kah-e-se-y. We had great respect for each other.	King Hale [in PERSIAN]: Mollie’s late dear father, Nah-kah-e-se-y, was a very dear friend of mine—someone I truly loved from the bottom of my heart. He always told white folks to call him Jimmy, but I always used his real name—Nah-Kah-e-se-y. We had a deep respect for each other.	King Hale [in PERSIAN]: Mollie’s dear father, who is no longer with us—E-Ka-E-Se-Wai—was a very close and dear friend. He used to tell the white folks to call him Jimmy, but I always used his real name— E-Ka-E-Se-Wai—because I had and still have great respect for him.

In line with this, the Di1 dubbing team preserves the Osage elder's speech without dubbing. Table 5 presents the original dialogue alongside the Di1 and Df2 Persian versions. Di1's strategy respects the filmmakers' intent and sustains the ritual's authenticity. Although Hale's and Mollie's brief Osage exchange is partly neutralised, one Osage word is retained in Hale's speech, a minimal but meaningful case of quantitative reduction. Even this limited code-switching supports Hale's portrayal as a linguistically and culturally hybrid character, a function frequently highlighted in studies of multilingual cinema (cf. Corrius & Zabalbeascoa, 2019, p. 87; Monti, 2014, p. 165). Notably, Mollie's father's Osage name is preserved in both Persian versions, maintaining its symbolic narrative value. The Df2 version, by contrast, replaces the Osage speech with Persian, which constitutes another act of cultural interpolation. As shown in Table 5, the elder delivers a generic Abrahamic-style blessing ("May the blessings and grace of the Lord be upon you... I now pronounce you husband and wife"), transforming the Osage ritual into a ceremony resembling Iranian or Christian wedding traditions. This erasure of cultural specificity undermines Hale's constructed alignment with Osage traditions, producing a visual-verbal mismatch that distances viewers from the intended atmosphere of the original scene.

4.5. The Racial Tensions Scene: A Case of Visual-Aural Inconsistency

The fifth scene is central to the film's exploration of racial tension between the Osage and white settlers. Ernest's white relatives visit Mollie's family home, where Mollie's dying mother, Lizzie—an elderly full-blood Osage woman who speaks Osage primarily—has just seen an owl, a traditional Osage omen of death. Surrounded by her daughters and mixed-race grandchildren, Lizzie expresses anger and despair in Osage: "Because of you... You all marry white men. Our blood is getting white" (adapted from the English subtitles). Later, Aunt Annie and Uncle Jim openly comment on the children's skin colour and mixed heritage. Table 6 presents the original dialogue alongside the Di1 and Df2 Persian dubbings.

Table 6

Di1 and Df2 Dubbings of the Racial Tensions Scene

Original	Di1 Back-translation	Df2 Back-translation
Mollie's Mother [in OSAGE]: Wah-poh-kah ee-thah-theh?	Mollie's Mother [in PERSIAN]: Did you see the owl too?	Mollie's Mother [in PERSIAN]: My Daughter, <i>how's your diabetes?</i>
Mollie [in OSAGE]: hahn-kah-zhee.	Mollie [in PERSIAN]: No, I didn't.	Mollie [in PERSIAN]: Not too bad.
Mollie's mother [in OSAGE]: Ee-thah-theh thah-hah oh-peh-nee eh ahn-xee-thah ahn-kah-kxah-eeen. Thee-eh dahn ... een shdah-heen wah-shtsoo-xah-peh. Wah-peen ahn-koh-dah-pee ah-kxah	Mollie's Mother [in PERSIAN]: Whenever you see them, it's a sign that your time has come. It's because of you. You all married white men. Our blood is	Mollie's Mother [in PERSIAN]: I'm worried. I'm worried about myself, too. I'm really unwell and dealing with a lot. And on the other hand, you—my children—have your own problems to deal

Original	Di1 Back-translation	Df2 Back-translation
skah ah-hee-peh. Hoh-wah-eeen-kee Anna? Anna konbrah meenk-sheh.	turning white. Tell me—where’s Anna? I wish Anna were here with me now.	with. I don’t know what to say. It’s a hard time. But be careful. Be careful of the strangers in our family.
Aunt Annie [in ENGLISH]: This one’s whiter than that one. You’d never know this one’s a half-breed, would you?	Aunt Annie [in PERSIAN]: This one’s whiter than the other. You can’t even tell this one’s mixed-blood.	Aunt Annie [in PERSIAN]: That one’s bigger than the other. You can even tell from a distance which one’s bigger .
Uncle Jim [in ENGLISH]: They’re both a couple of little half-assed savages, as far as I’m concerned.	Uncle Jim [in PERSIAN]: As far as I’m concerned, both of them are half-breed savages.	Uncle Jim [in PERSIAN]: No one would ever guess there’s anything wrong with their bloodline.

In both dubbed versions, all Osage dialogue is neutralised into spoken Persian. In Di1, this choice is defensible: the original film subtitles these lines, and Di1 fully preserves the racial critique and emotional force in Persian. Moreover, dubbing rather than retaining Osage with Persian subtitles aligns with common Persian dubbing practices, where blended modes remain rare despite their acknowledged potential benefits (cf. Beseghi, 2020; De Bonis, 2015b; de Higes Andino, 2014; Heiss, 2004; Rezvani Sichani et al., 2023). By contrast, Df2 not only neutralises Osage but also substantially rewrites the dialogue. Lizzie’s condemnation of interracial marriage and bloodline dilution is replaced with vague references to diabetes and “strangers in the family,” shifting attention from racial anxiety to illness and personal concern. A similar case occurs with Aunt Annie’s line about the mixed-race babies. In the original (and Di1), she says: “This one’s whiter than that one. You can’t even tell this one’s a half-breed.” In the Df2 version, this racial reference is replaced with the illogical “That one’s bigger than this one,” creating a direct contradiction between the verbal auditory channel (the dubbing) and the non-verbal visual channel, as the baby labelled as “bigger” is visibly the younger and smaller of the two. This disruption breaks the film’s audiovisual coherence. Although Df2 later gestures vaguely toward lineage (“No one would guess there’s anything wrong with their bloodline”), systematic deletions of whiteness, mixed blood, and racial hierarchy constitute clear ideological manipulation. The inconsistent handling of racial tension across scenes further indicates insufficient sensitivity to these narrative elements.

4.6. The Diabetes Treatment Scene: A Case of Quantitative Reduction as Compensation

In the sixth scene, a key moment occurs during Mollie’s diabetes treatment, as two white doctors administer insulin in Ernest’s presence. When Mollie initially lies about what she has eaten, Ernest switches to Osage to gently prompt her to tell the truth. This brief code-switch creates an intimate Osage-only space that excludes the doctors and signals the couple’s growing linguistic and emotional bond. In Di1, this exchange is partially preserved through the retention of one Osage phrase, “Zah-Nee Skee!” (Table 7). This constitutes a quantitative reduction but can also be read as a compensatory strategy: as Rezvani Sichani et al. (2023) observe, Persian dubbing occasionally retains isolated

foreign-language items to mark linguistic otherness and preserve cultural distinction when full multilingual transfer is constrained. By contrast, Df2 eliminates all traces of Osage, erasing the private linguistic space between husband and wife and flattening the interaction into monolingual Persian dialogue. As a result, the scene loses both cultural nuance and character depth, and the exclusion of the white doctors—crucial to the original power dynamics—disappears. A further divergence concerns the doctor’s remark to Mollie. In the original script and in Di1, the doctor suggests that she should not eat like white people, a line carrying clear racialised and paternalistic implications (“if you eat like a white...”). In Df2, this is mistranslated as: “You’ll lose your foot—or worse, you’ll have to eat white folks’ food” (Table 7), a reversal that distorts the original meaning while removing its racial and ideological undertones.

Table 7

Di1 and Df2 Dubbings of the Diabetes Treatment Scene

Original	Di1 Back-translation	Df2 Back-translation
Doctor James [in ENGLISH]: Have you eaten in the last hour? Mollie [in ENGLISH]: No.	Doctor James [in PERSIAN]: Did you eat anything an hour ago? Mollie [in PERSIAN]: No.	Doctor James [in PERSIAN]: Did you eat anything an hour ago? Mollie [in PERSIAN]: No.
Ernest [in OSAGE]:...wah-shee shkee	Ernest [in PERSIAN]: What about the other stuff?!	Ernest [in PERSIAN]: Don’t say anything.
Mollie [in OSAGE]: Zah-Nee Skee!	Mollie [in OSAGE]: Zah-Nee Skee!	Mollie [in PERSIAN]: Then you say it.
Ernest [in ENGLISH]: Well, she’s had, uh... taffy and bacon too. Go on. Tell ’em.	Ernest [in PERSIAN]: Actually, she also had toffee and some beef.	Ernest [in PERSIAN]: Well, she also had some chocolate and meat. Just say it.
[Mollie speaks OSAGE indistinctly]	Mollie [in PERSIAN]: What are you saying?	Mollie [in PERSIAN]: Oh, come on!
Ernest [in ENGLISH]: You gotta tell ’em.	Ernest [in PERSIAN]: You’ve gotta tell them.	Ernest [in PERSIAN]: You have to tell them.
Doctor James [in ENGLISH]: If you don’t stop eating sweets, this won’t matter. You will lose your feet, or worse, if you eat like a white.	Doctor James [in PERSIAN]: If you don’t stop eating sweets, it’ll get worse. If you eat like white folks, you might lose your foot—or worse!	Doctor James [in PERSIAN]: If you don’t stop eating sweets, it’s useless. You’ll lose your foot—or worse, you’ll have to eat white folks’ food.

4.7. The Dispute Over Insulin Effectiveness Scene: A Case of Dubbed vs Undubbed L3

One of the film’s most thematically charged moments is the seventh scene. Two white doctors arrive to administer insulin—a treatment deliberately used to poison Osage community members—but Mollie, growing suspicious, refuses and questions its effectiveness, marking a turning point in her

awareness of diabetes among her people. She repeatedly addresses Ernest in unsubtitled Osage, creating a private linguistic space that excludes the doctors. These exchanges underscore the couple's intimacy and foreshadow Mollie's suspicion that the "medicine" may be harmful. Although Osage is unsubtitled, viewers infer her anxiety or distrust from context, while subsequent English dialogue suggests she asked Ernest to send the doctors away.

Table 8

Di1 and Df2 Dubbings of the Dispute Over Insulin Effectiveness Scene

Original	Di1 Back-translation	Df2 Back-translation
Mollie [in OSAGE]: Hahn-pah theh, eh-kee-mahn kohn-brah theen-keh. Toh-wah-kxah mahn-theen tseh-ah.	Mollie [Undubbed original OSAGE]: Hahn-pah theh, eh-kee-mahn kohn-brah theen-keh. Toh-wah-kxah mahn-theen tseh-ah.	Mollie [PERSIAN dubbed]: Please tell them to leave. I want to talk to you.
Ernest [in OSAGE]: Dah-dahn?	Ernest [Undubbed original OSAGE]: Dah-dahn?	Ernest [PERSIAN dubbed]: Now?
Mollie [in OSAGE]: Eh kohn-bra mahn-zhee hahn-pa theh.	Mollie [Undubbed original OSAGE]: Eh kohn-bra mahn-zhee hahn-pa theh.	Mollie [PERSIAN dubbed]: Yes, right now.
Ernest [in OSAGE]: ... wah-kahn-dah-kee eh ah-kxah.	Ernest [Undubbed original OSAGE]: ... wah-kahn-dah-kee eh ah-kxah.	Ernest [PERSIAN dubbed]: They came all the way here for us.
Mollie [in OSAGE]: Hahn-kah-zhee	Mollie [Undubbed original OSAGE]: Hahn-kah-zhee	Mollie [PERSIAN dubbed]: Well, let them have.
Ernest [in OSAGE]: Shouns eh ah-kxah, wah-kahn dah-kee eh ah-kxah.	Ernest [Undubbed original OSAGE]: Shouns eh ah-kxah, wah-kahn dah-kee eh ah-kxah.	Ernest [PERSIAN dubbed]: They're preparing your insulin. How can I just kick them out?!
Mollie [in OSAGE]: Toh-wah-kxah mahn-theen tseh ah.	Mollie [Undubbed original OSAGE]: Toh-wah-kxah mahn-theen tseh ah.	Mollie [PERSIAN dubbed]: Not my problem. Ernest [PERSIAN dubbed]: Oh, come on! But...
Mollie [in OSAGE]: Weh-ah-see eh, weh-ah-nahn-he mahn-zhee meen-ksheh.	Mollie [Revoiced OSAGE performed by dubbing actor]: Weh-ah-see eh, weh-ah-nahn-he mahn-zhee meen-ksheh.	Mollie [PERSIAN dubbed]: I don't want this treatment anymore.
Ernest [in OSAGE & ENGLISH]: Thee-eh wah-kahn-dah-kee nee-eh shtsoots'-ah-keh meen-ksheh. We need the shots and the insulin. What then, Mollie? What?	Ernest [Revoiced OSAGE & PERSIAN performed by dubbing actor]: Thee-eh wah-kahn-dah-kee nee eh shtsoots'-ah-keh. We need the syringe and insulin. Then what, Mollie? Then what?	Ernest [PERSIAN dubbed]: What do you mean you don't want this treatment? It's not up to you! You want the shot and the insulin—how can that be? It just can't, it's impossible.

In Di1, the scene exhibits internal inconsistency, as dubbed and undubbed Osage coexist (Table 8). Some lines are revoiced or imitated in Persian, others remain in the original audio. This fragmented

strategy aims to preserve multilingualism while accommodating dubbing constraints, but such inconsistency, even within a single scene, disrupts immersion and weakens perceived authenticity. De Bonis (2015b, p. 66) notes that revoicing non-Western or “exotic” languages poses logistical and economic challenges, requiring actors fluent in or capable of convincingly imitating such languages—which is a costly solution. Di1’s partial revoicing reflects these constraints, illustrating De Bonis’s claim that revoicing often remains a largely theoretical solution for less commonly spoken languages like Osage. By contrast, Df2 fully replaces all dialogue, producing a linguistically homogeneous track. While this eliminates Osage’s private, exclusionary function and reduces the scene to an ordinary domestic exchange conducted before the doctors, it achieves vocal consistency that may seem cohesive to viewers unfamiliar with the source languages. Crucially, this shift alters narrative logic: in the original, the doctors’ surprise at Ernest’s request stems from their exclusion from the preceding Osage exchange, whereas in Df2, the same exchange occurs in Persian and is fully intelligible to them, making their reaction incongruous.

4.8. Lizzie’s Funeral Scene: A Case of Marked Multilingualism

The final scene analysed—the funeral scene—is among the film’s most culturally significant moments. In this closing ritual, a traditional Osage elder conducts Lizzie’s funeral, guiding the ceremony while reciting prayers in Osage and waving a feather. The ritual includes the elder assisting Lizzie’s granddaughter onto the coffin and concludes with its burial with two apples placed on it. The entire ceremony unfolds in unsubtitled Osage, accompanied by mourning cries. The visual focus rests on the mourners’ faces, encompassing the Osage family (Mollie and her sisters) and white relatives (Ernest and King Hale). This sustained focus underscores communal grief and the persistent continuity of Osage spiritual practice amidst the community’s destruction.

Table 9

Di1 and Df2 Dubbings of the Lizzie’s Funeral Scene

Original	Di1 Back-translation	Df2 Back-translation
Tribe Elder [in unsubtitled OSAGE]: Meen thoh-dahn kah-txahn he thah-hah we-tsee-koh meen ahkxah mahn-xeh	Tribe Elder [Undubbed original OSAGE]: Meen thoh-dahn kah-txahn he thah-hah we-tsee-koh meen ahkxah mahn-xeh	Tribe Elder [Undubbed original OSAGE]: Meen thoh-dahn kah-txahn he thah-hah we-tsee-koh meen ahkxah mahn-xeh

In both dubbed versions (Di1 and Df2), the elder’s Osage prayers are preserved without revoicing (see Table 9). This decision is particularly significant, as these prayers are also left unsubtitled in the original English version, thereby aligning with the filmmakers’ clear intent to maintain cultural specificity. By retaining the Osage language, the dubbing preserves the scene’s authenticity, reinforces the film’s cultural grounding, and exemplifies marked multilingualism (de Higes Andino, 2014)—or what has been termed “undubbed multilingualism” (Corrius & Zabalbeascoa, 2019)—wherein a language is deliberately left intact to foreground cultural identity.

5. Conclusion

As shown in Table 1, the Di1 dubbing of KOFM adopts a preservationist stance toward L3, employing preservation and quantitative reduction to retain some linguistic diversity for Persian audiences. Df2, by contrast, systematically neutralises L3, erasing multilingual markers and flattening the film's cultural complexity into near-monolingual Persian. This contrast challenges assumptions about public versus private AVT institutions (cf. Rezvani Sichani & Afrouz, 2019): while the IRIB-produced Di1 selectively preserves multilingual elements, the VOD-based Df2 opts for near-total monolingualisation. In Di1, traces of Ernest's efforts to learn Osage and key ceremonial Osage elements signal emotional investment and cultural bridging, while Df2 removes this arc entirely, creating a false impression of shared linguistic fluency. Intercultural tension is thus misconstrued as uniformity, aligning with de Higes Andino (2014) on how neutralising multilingualism can imply harmony where struggle existed. Chiaro (2008, p. 23) observes that a common strategy is "simply not to deal with [variation] and homogenise it into the standard, mainstream variety of the target language"—a description that aptly characterises the approach of Df2. Di1's inconsistent yet preservationist approach echoes Zabalbeascoa and Corrius (2014), who argue that multilingual films use varied translation strategies. This mirrors Italian dubbing trends: Monti (2019, p. 225), citing Venuti (1998, p. 242), notes that retaining culturally specific references allows "the translated text [to become] a site where a cultural other is not erased but manifested," preserving linguistic flavour. Similarly, Beseghi (2020) highlights the Italian dubbing of *Lion*, which largely preserves multilingual elements with subtitles as needed, often via blended-mode translation. Neither Di1 nor Df2 uses this approach, likely due to logistical, economic, or actor constraints, contributing to a broader monolingualisation pattern in Persian AVT, where L3 neutralisation erases linguistic and cultural otherness. Here, the inconsistent but preservationist approach of Di1 emerges as an exception rather than the rule. Even in contexts like Italy, where preservation is more common, this general rule has exceptions: Minutella (2020) shows that in *Despicable Me 2*, Gru's foreign accent is erased, whereas Di1 selectively preserves multilingual texture. By contrast, Df2 appears shaped by ideological constraints. Racially charged Osage lines, such as Lizzie's warning about "blood turning white" or Aunt Annie's comment on mixed-race children, are rewritten to focus on diabetes or size, softening the critique of racial hierarchy. Di1 preserves or partially reduces these lines, maintaining narrative tension and cultural specificity. These translation choices shape characterisation (Ernest's Osage learning, the couple's private Osage exchanges, Hale's performative hybridity), narrative unfolding, and the depiction of colonial domination, underscoring how preservation versus neutralisation profoundly affects narrative texture, intercultural representation, and ideological framing.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on Figshare at: <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.29085944>.

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