

Spike Lee's
Bamboozled

Spike Lee's *Bamboozled*

*A Contrastive Analysis
of Compliments and Insults
from English into Italian*

By

Sara Corrizzato

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



Spike Lee's *Bamboozled*: A Contrastive Analysis of Compliments
and Insults from English into Italian

By Sara Corrizzato

This book first published 2015

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2015 by Sara Corrizzato

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-7177-X

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-7177-8

To my grandfather Angelo,
who showed me the value of investigating reality through books.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES	ix
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xi
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER ONE	5
A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH	
1.1 VOCABULARY	8
1.2 PHONOLOGY	11
1.3 SYNTAX	13
CHAPTER TWO	17
SPIKE LEE: CREATURE AND CREATOR	
2.1 SPIKE LEE AS SCREENWRITER.....	25
2.2 THE FILM: <i>BAMBOOZLED</i>	26
CHAPTER THREE	29
VISUAL DIALOGUES AND LINGUISTIC IMAGES: THE AUDIOVISUAL LANGUAGE	
3.1 THE NATURE OF AUDIOVISUAL DIALOGUES	32
3.2 SCREENWRITING AND SCREENPLAYS	34
CHAPTER FOUR	37
AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION	
4.1 SUBTITLING	41
4.2 REVOICING	43
CHAPTER FIVE.....	47
AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION AND PRAGMATICS: COMPLIMENTS AND INSULTS	
5.1 SPEECH ACTS THEORY.....	49

CHAPTER SIX.....	57
COMPLIMENTS IN <i>BAMBOOZLED</i>	
6.1 EXPLICITLY ADDRESSED TO THE LISTENER	58
6.2 IMPLICITLY ADDRESSED TO THE LISTENER.....	79
6.3 ADDRESSED TO A THIRD PARTY	84
6.4 AS INSULTS.....	87
CHAPTER SEVEN	93
INSULTS IN <i>BAMBOOZLED</i>	
7.1 EXPLICITLY ADDRESSED TO THE LISTENER	94
7.2 IMPLICITLY ADDRESSED TO THE LISTENER.....	112
7.3 ADDRESSED TO A THIRD PARTY	128
7.4 AS COMPLIMENTS.....	137
CHAPTER EIGHT	139
CONCLUDING REMARKS	
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	151

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

TABLE 1-EXAMPLES OF ALTERNATIVELY-DEFINED WORDS IN AMERICAN ENGLISH AND AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH	9
TABLE 2-SYNTACTIC CLASSIFICATION OF COMPLIMENTS	51
FIGURE 1-CLASSIFICATION OF COMPLIMENTS	139
FIGURE 2-CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF COMPLIMENTS IN THE ORIGINAL AND DUBBED VERSIONS	140
FIGURE 3-CLASSIFICATION OF COMPLIMENTS IN THE ORIGINAL SCRIPT ...	141
FIGURE 4-CLASSIFICATION OF COMPLIMENTS IN THE DUBBED VERSION OF THE SCRIPT	141
FIGURE 5-FUNCTIONS OF COMPLIMENTS IN THE BOTH VERSIONS	142
FIGURE 6-CLASSIFICATION OF INSULTS	143
FIGURE 7-CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF INSULTS IN THE ORIGINAL AND DUBBED VERSIONS	144
FIGURE 8-CLASSIFICATION OF INSULTS IN THE ORIGINAL SCRIPT	145
FIGURE 9-CLASSIFICATION OF INSULTS IN THE DUBBED VERSION OF THE SCRIPT	146

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A great number of people have contributed to the making of this book. First of all, I would like to thank Prof. Roberta Facchinetti, Head of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature of the University of Verona, and Prof. Daniela Carpi, Coordinator of the Doctoral Program in English Studies at the time I was progressing my PhD. A special thanks also to Prof. Roberto Cagliero, who has always supported me during my academic growth, giving me wise advice and precious guidance. Without his counsel and support I could not work on this project. Thanks to his courses, I became immersed in the American lingua-cultural dimension, becoming fond of African American English.

I am also greatly in debt to all those who gave me “food for thought” through both discussion and useful material – Paola Vettorel, Marta Degani, Stefano Rosso and Catherine Benson.

Moreover, I am immensely grateful to Angela M. Spencer Nelson, who believed in me throughout this project, and dedicated her time to give me valuable information about African American cinema and TV series.

This book would not have come into being without the great and immense help of Yahya Jongintaba, a writer and expert of African American language and culture, who offered me important advice throughout.

Several other people have given me their support in different ways: Serena Gandini, a sister in struggle, generously read parts of the manuscript as well as giving me important criticism and opinions; and Giada Goracci helped me not to give up when everything seemed impossible.

My special thanks go also to my family; my mother and my father for being my guardian angels, for believing in me, and giving me the opportunity to study and to go abroad.

Last but not least, my deepest gratitude goes to my husband Eugenio, who has always sustained me at times when I was nervous and stressed.

Finally, my greatest thanks go to my daughter Emma, who is teaching me to look at the world in a different way.

INTRODUCTION

“Translating only the linguistic component without taking into account the value of the other semiotic dimensions of film would certainly be a recipe for a disaster. Culture, cultural identity and pragmatic functioning in their more or less explicit localised forms ooze from all the film or programme’s semiotic system and pragmatics.”

—Díaz Cintas 2009: 9

The foregoing epigraph, a passage taken from the introduction of linguist Jorge Díaz Cintas’ *New Trends on Audiovisual Translation* (2009), anticipates the basis of the present study, in which I reveal the strategies adopted in the English-to-Italian translation of the American film, *Bamboozled*. My project, with regards to this film, written and produced as it is by African American film-director Spike Lee and released in the year 2000, is to examine the verbal component of the audiovisual texts not simply as a neutral and aseptic linguistic product, but also as the embodiment of constituents which tend to mirror the society and the lingua-cultural panorama in which they were produced and translated.

My work is made possible and indeed viable in the world of film scholarship given the late twentieth-century emergence of audiovisual language and audiovisual translation, in the new discipline called Translation Studies (Freddi and Pavesi 2005; Díaz Cintas 2008; Díaz Cintas and Anderman 2009; Díaz Cintas 2009). Lately, the attention given to audiovisual language and audiovisual translation has grown to the point of involving a broad spectrum of humanistic studies. As the increasing number of academic publications, international conferences, and university courses suggest, audiovisual language and audiovisual translation have become a source of interest for scholars in such fields as linguistics, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and pragmatic philosophy.

This growing interest in audiovisual language and audiovisual translation is due to the heterogeneous and versatile nature of these studies as a breeding ground for social patterns and lingua-cultural archetypes. Film, documentaries, video clips, video games, social networks, video-sharing websites, and so on; no matter the audiovisual genre, it is simply impossible to detach any given media from the socio-cultural context in which they are created, developed, and regularly used. This is part of what

makes the fields of audiovisual language and audiovisual translation so interesting to increasing populations of scholars, as well as to students and aficionados of film.

My own interests along these lines derive partly from scholarly work in the area of pragmatic value; audiovisual language and audiovisual translation as communicative exchanges in television programmes; and TV series and films aimed at faithfully reproducing face-to-face conversations where the principles of naturalness and verisimilitude govern the speech and dialogue (Freddi and Pavesi 2005: 12). Taking into consideration the significance of Austin and Searle's late-1960s theories of speech acts in human communicative processes, I focus on the presence of compliments and insults in Spike Lee's *Bamboozled*.

Specifically, I set out to evaluate the linguistic nature and socio-cultural value of the compliments and insults in the situational context in which they are uttered in order to decode the illocutionary force and, where necessary, the perlocutionary force of both the original and the dubbed expressive speech acts. My purpose is to consider the authentic cultural validity and pragmatic value of the original and dubbed expressive speech acts and to take into account any obstacles or complications caused by the process of adapting the original expressive speech acts to the target language. This is particularly challenging and interesting because the original text translated into Italian is not simply American English but often African American English; a vernacular variety whose vocabulary and idiomatic expressions are typical of the lingua-cultural background of the United States.

The socio-cultural and situational contexts that I take into account in my work on *Bamboozled* have been as challenging and interesting as Spike Lee's film is controversial, but further considerations arise that deepen and enliven the project. There is, for example, the fact that the film was written to be a satire that contends with the way in which African Americans have been portrayed on television and in film since the inception of these visual media. Spike Lee does not disappoint on this matter, for from the very beginning of the film he depicts a controversial African American character with characteristics that are fictive if not incendiary in the new millennium.

Aside from the film's fictitious character and narrative elements complicating what might otherwise be a more straightforward approach to analysis, there are, as pointed out by Ranzato (2010: 10), important macro-structural components to consider, including the political, economic, social, and historical factors in which the film and its dubbed version are produced. In the context of this consideration, and the other considerations

I have mentioned, my project presents and discusses the differences between the source and the target versions of the compliments and insults in *Bamboozled*, in order to interpret the translators' choices and to surmise the reasons that may have led to a change in the semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic dimension.

A book-length project has been the result of my interests and research because the compliments and insults in *Bamboozled* are not merely occasional, but so frequent as to constitute the very character of the film. This fact necessitated all the more a broad-spectrum and multi-faceted analysis that would embody historical, social, pragmatic and lingua-cultural elements. For the reader, this means that my comparative analysis of forty-four compliments and forty-four insults in both the source and target versions, both the original English and the Italian dubbed texts, has created for consideration a complex organization of linguistic and semantic relationships that make great "food for thought".

Rich is this "food for thought", given the fact that I identified the film's forty-four compliments and forty-four insults only after carefully transcribing from the film the original English and Italian dialogues. The transcription of the English text turned out to be necessary given that there were several versions of the English screenplay. Moreover, the transcription of the Italian text was necessary given that no Italian version of the screenplay existed. The work of transcription proved to be tedious, but this necessary approach fostered a broad-spectrum and flexible analysis whose organized network is based on a micro-syntactical and pragmatic study. Where required, I have included a brief explanation of a scene revolving around the expressive speech acts; but this is no substitute for the deeper understanding to be achieved by the reader from a critical viewing of the film. Indeed, the greatest benefactor of my work will be the reader who undertakes a careful viewing of the entire film, not necessarily as thorough as my own viewing, but nonetheless thoughtful.

In summation of the main guidelines for this study, I include all the instances of compliments and insults in both the English and Italian versions of *Bamboozled*, omitting none from my comparative analysis. I classify and contextualize every compliment and insult, even when the pragmatic and syntactic texture of source and target versions completely coincides, therefore providing a deeper understanding of the pragmatic micro-cosmos within the audiovisual product. I give special attention to the micro-linguistic level, evaluating case by case the sub-standard linguistic features of the original screenplay and the translation. Finally, for a clearer and more comprehensible reading of my analysis, I follow

Kebrat-Orecchioni's typology (1987) to categorize the compliments and insults according to their explicitness and implicitness.

Some scholars, according to the Kebrat-Orecchioni's typology, classify expressive speech acts as *direct* and *indirect*. Speech acts are *direct* when the speaker addresses the interlocutor by making the complimentary or offensive remark directly to him. Speech acts are *indirect* when the speaker addresses the interlocutor by making the complimentary or offensive remark to a third party linked to the addressee. Another classification offered by Bruti (2005) entails compliments and insults being *overt* or *covert*. Remarks are *overt* when containing semantically positive or derogatory lexical elements, and *covert* when containing no complimentary or insulting words. To this, Bruti adds a third category called *dishonest*, in which utterances that sound like compliments or insults reveal the opposite illocutionary force due to their verbal texture.

For this work I offer a classification of four categories. The first section includes compliments and insults directly addressed to the listener, while in the second one, all remarks implicitly addressed to the interlocutor are grouped. The third category consists of those expressive speech acts addressed to a third party and the fourth group includes *dishonest* comments.

Although every expressive speech act is analysed and discussed, cases where there is more than one example in the same line are not divided into smaller units. Too rigid a segmentation of the discursive flow, as such division would cause, would lead to an unfaithful analysis of the utterances. Completely detaching them from their situational context would make them meaningless.

CHAPTER ONE

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH

“African American English, the linguistic variety spoken by many African Americans in the USA, is a system with specific rules for combining sounds to form words and words to form phrases and sentences.”

—Green 2004: 76

The present linguistic study focuses on Spike Lee’s *Bamboozled*, a film firmly set within an African American cultural context and inclusive of African American vernacular language. It could sound nonsense, therefore, if this project did not provide a brief introduction to African American English, including its vocabulary, phonology, and syntax before entering the deeper phases of the linguistic analysis of compliments and insults.

The point of taking the time to provide this brief overview is in part to illustrate the complexity of African American English not only in terms of its origins, meaning, and grammar, but also in terms of the complexity involved in its translation into another language. Understanding the complexity involved in this project is important because part of the work entails examining the verbal component of the audiovisual texts not simply as a neutral linguistic product, but also as the embodiment of constituents that tend to mirror the society and the lingua-cultural background within which they were conceived and produced.

This chapter will offer a thorough illustration of the complex traits of African American English, and especially its translation, firstly by pointing out the changing designations used over many years in order to identify and categorize it. Much like the verbal component of the audiovisual texts that will be examined in due course, the evolving designations for African American English tend to mirror the social and the lingua-cultural dimension in which they were produced. In roughly chronological order, the designations include:

Negro dialect
Non-standard Negro English
Negro English
American Negro Speech
Black communications
Black dialect
Black folk speech
Black street speech
Black English
Black English Vernacular
Black Vernacular English
Afro-American English
African American English (AAE)
African American Language
African American Vernacular English (AAVE)¹

These designations, as different as they may appear to be, all refer to the same linguistic variety of ethnic speech, with the designate “African American” presently preferred over the other labels. The descriptive “black” (for example, “Black English”) is still used and considered inoffensive and acceptable, but the descriptive “negro” is clearly archaic and considered by African Americans to be distasteful. Also, where previously the term “dialect” was used, the trend has slowly turned toward the use of such designates as “speech”, “communication” and “language”. These terms reflect a more complex perspective that suggests, as Green (2002: 6) notes, that some of the characteristics of this ethnic variety of speech are common or similar to other ethnic varieties of English.²

The evolution of language designating African American English, and the attendant debates over which language most appropriately describes it, reflects something of a disagreement over the origin and evolution of African American English. As with the development of human language and the English language, scholars disagree with the origin of African American English, suggesting different perspectives, which can be grouped roughly in three main approaches. These hypotheses aim at

¹ This list was taken from “African American English: A Linguistic Introduction” (Green 2002: 6). For a more detailed explanation, see Tottie 2002, Green 2002, Wolfram and Thomas 2002, Finegard and Rickford 2004.

² ‘Ebonics’ is another term used to classify African American English. This label, however, is especially excluded from the list because, as Green explains (2002), the term refers not alone to language spoken by African Americans in the United States but to African peoples in the Caribbean.

uncovering the roots of African American English going by the names Anglicist Hypothesis, Creolist Hypothesis, and Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis.

The Anglicist Hypothesis, which was theorized by Kurath (1949) and McDavid (1951) and reigned for a couple of decades in the mid-twentieth century, posits that African American vernacular speech derived from British dialects of the poor and illiterate whites of colonial America. Supported by Bailey (1965), Stewart (1967) and Dillard (1972) the Creolist Hypothesis, the first major alternative to the Anglicist Hypothesis, is based on the idea that a combined language has resulted from the contact of two groups of people unfamiliar with each other's language but needing to communicate. From this pidgin, there subsequently emerges among progeny a language that is fully developed and grammatical, and at this point considered creole. Scholars believing this hypothesis applies to African American English tend to identify the encounter of languages as involving the white planters of the antebellum slave South, and the enslaved Africans whose speech patterns derive from the Bantu family of languages in West Africa. Crystal (2003: 96-97) identifies the initial contact of whites and Africans as dating back to the first permanent colonial settlements in the seventeenth-century South to which Africans were imported to work on the sugar plantations. The system of slavery continued until 1865,³ so over the years of slavery the new linguistic code enabling mutual communication spread and evolved from a pidgin to a creole language.

The Creolist Hypothesis came under scrutiny when the written records of formerly enslaved African Americans appeared to historians and linguists to show more linguistic similarities to the white postcolonial dialect than previously believed. In contrast to the Anglicanist Hypothesis, the Neo-Anglicanist Hypothesis does not hold that modern features of African American English can actually be traced to British dialects. African American English may have originated in the contact with British dialects but the early contact cannot be verified given that at some point the African American vernacular diverged from the white dialects to develop distinctive linguistic characteristics and rules.

Suggested by Montgomery and Fuller (1996), the neo-Anglicist hypothesis has gained support among the linguists but, as indicated by Wolfram and Thomas (2002), disagreement prevails regarding the nature of the historical data, the circumstances of early language contact between

³ Slavery in the U.S.A. was abolished at the end of the American Civil War with the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. The Amendment was passed by the Senate in Spring 1864, by the House in January 1865 and officially adopted in December 1865.

Africans and Europeans, and the circumstances that surrounded the speech of early African Americans (14).⁴

In preparing the present discussion of the speech acts of compliments and insults in Spike Lee's *Bamboozled*, a brief introduction to African American English will continue through the discussion of the three fields generally of concern in linguistics:

Vocabulary
Phonology
Syntax.

1.1 Vocabulary

Speakers of African American English do not have a lexicon that differs much from other cultural speakers of English. As the present categorization of compliments and insults in *Bamboozled* will evidence, however, African Americans have created and do sometimes use words and phrases not associated with other varieties American English. Additionally, as Green (2002) and Tottie (2002) point out, some of the African American English lexicon is articulated with the same sound as standard American English while expressing different meanings. These differently-defined words and expressions have, over the years, come into common usage not only among white and other ethnic populations in the United States but among peoples worldwide who are reached by the media in which this sort of speech is common. Given this expanding common-ground for cross-cultural understanding, the following examples of alternatively-defined words and expressions compiled by Tottie (2002: 225) should be more or less familiar to foreign viewers attracted to such African American films as Spike Lee's *Bamboozled*.⁵

⁴ For a full discussion of the origin of African American English see Green 2002 (8-11) and Wolfram and Thomas 2002 (12-15).

⁵ Factors causing the spread abroad of African American speech idioms include the various media coming out of America, such as television, film, and literature. The spread of African American music has involved not only the international marketing of recordings but the international travel of African American musicians who for over a century have brought such genres as the spirituals, blues, gospel, jazz, and hip-hop to worlds far from their places of origin.

Table 1-Examples of alternatively-defined words in American English and African American English

Word	Standard American English ⁶	African American English ⁷
brother	Male relatives with the same mother and father	A black man
cool	Fairly cold Calm Unfriendly Confident	Excellent
hip	The area at either side of the body between the top of the leg and the waist Knowing what is fashionable in clothes or music, etc.	Wise, sophisticated
man	An adult male human being	A form of address when speaking with another man
sister	Female relatives with the same mother and father	A black woman
square	A geometric shape with four angles of 90° and sides of equal length	The opposite of hip

The foregoing examples might appear sufficiently straight forward to foreigners familiar with the African American English, but by dividing these sorts of lexical items into three categories Green (2002: 12-33) reveals some of the complexity involved:

- General words and phrases crossing generational boundaries and likely to span regional and class boundaries
- Verbal makers
- Current slang items used by adolescents and young adults

The first of the above categories, ‘general words and phrases,’ includes words that are systematically used by speakers of African American English without diaphasic, diastratic, and diachronic constraints. The diaphastic language encompasses words used without variations due to

⁶ Definitions are taken from *Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary* (8th edition).

⁷ Explanations of the words are taken from Tottie’s definitions (2002: 225-226)

stylistic or individual particularities. The diastratic language encompasses words used with consistent meaning no matter the age, gender, education, social status, and geographic background of speakers. Most intriguing of all is the diachronic language, which can be used without change over long periods of time. Evidencing this, Green (2002: 14) refers to *Juba to Jive: A Dictionary of African-American Slang* (1994), a classic work compiled and edited by African American poet and novelist Clarence Major. Major includes in his dictionary, words used from the early seventeenth century into the late twentieth century.⁸

Slang is perhaps the most fascinating aspect of diaphasic, diastratic, and diachronic African American English. Crystal (2003: 182) cites the Oxford English Dictionary defining slang as “a language of a highly colloquial type, considered below the level of educated standard speech.” More in keeping with the character of this colloquial speech is the definition issued by the American poet Carl Sandburg, whom Crystal relished to cite. Slang, declares Sandburg, is language that “takes off its coat, spits on its hands – and goes to work” (ibid. 182). Clarence Major (1994), speaking of the African American tradition in particular, says slang has its aspect of humour, compassion, and wisdom but has never been consistently reputable given its history of bigotry, sexism, self-contempt, and arrogance (ibid. xxvii). Major goes on to say,

“African American slang cuts through logic and arrives at a quick, efficient, interpretative solution to situations and things otherwise difficult to articulate” (ibid: xxviii).

This logic and efficiency in African American English cut across the four types of slang Major identifies: slang of the rural South (which is burgeoned from roots in slavery), of the urban music world (evolved between the beginning of the twentieth century and the 1960s), of the roughneck street culture (the precursor of rap and hip-hop music), and of the working class.

In *Bamboozled* there is likely a representation of all four types of slang since on the one hand the film is set in New York City while on the other hand it addresses the tradition of minstrelsy whose roots reach down into rural southern slavery for its caricatured plantation language.

It is probably in part because of slang that various populations, outside as well as inside the United States, have some familiarity with African

⁸ Major, at the end of the introduction, highlights that “the entries represent African-American speakers in every section of the country, from as early as the 1620s through the 1990s” (XXXV).

American English; at least this aspect of it. This familiarity could have come by way of the channel of African American film, specifically the historical precursors of Spike Lee's *Bamboozled*, or by way of the long reach of African American television, music, and literature. There is indeed a significant population of Italian speakers of English who actually know African American slang expressions.

Today the greatest exposure of slang comes through hip-hop music. In fact, the language of hip-hop, according to Alim (2004), is directly related to African American English given that the creators of hip-hop culture are products of the broader African American cultural community (396).

As in hip-hop, slang in the broader African American cultural arena is not simply a way of spicing up speech to make African American television, film, literature, and music more interesting and marketable. Slang is so much a part of African American English that, in the manner of language in general, it can be said to help create and reinforce various African American identities and communities. This is important given the fact that African American identities and communities are generally permeable enough to include people of various ethnicities and nationalities who identify with the African American culture from which the slang has emerged. In other words, anyone choosing to use African American slang sympathetically, without intentional or unintentional stereotyping and caricature, has the option of identifying as "black" and to varying degrees and among varying populations can be recognized as part of the black community.

1.2 Phonology

Phonology is another important field of research relevant to this study, since pronunciation and articulation by speakers of African American English tend not to mirror the pronunciation and articulation by speakers of Standard American English. If describing the pronunciation of African American English is difficult, Tottie (2002) points out, it is even more difficult to describe the distinctive intonation characteristic among the sound patterns that make African American English identifiable (220). Once more wanting to emphasize the point of the complexity surrounding the present linguistic project, it could be satisfactory for the moment if this section may succeed in giving a descriptive summary of the system of pronunciation and articulation in African American English.⁹

⁹ This introduction to the AAE sound system follows the contributions given by Green (2002) and Tottie (2002).

The specific point that the present overview wants to make regarding the African American English phonetics is that any value judgment made regarding the sound of the speech can be no more than a matter of personal taste. Any value judgment of the African American English phonetics in *Bamboozled* can also be no more than a matter of personal taste, except where African American speech itself is satirized and intended to be distasteful. The insinuation of distastefulness occurs in the speech associated with caricature in the film's "new millennium minstrel show" and, in a more subtle instance, in the speech of protagonist Pierre Delacroix who over-compensates in his English pronunciation in order to sound "proper" or "white".

1.2.1 Vowel System

- Short [e] before nasal sounds *n*, *m*, and *ng* [ŋ] is often pronounced [ɪ] → *pen* and *pin* are the same vocalic sound;
- Diphthong [aɪ] before voiced consonants or at the end of the words is pronounced as a single vowel [a] → *side* [sad] – *my* [ma];
- Diphthong [oɪ] is used by older speakers in words like *road* [roid] – *coach* [kɔɪʃ];
- Lowering of the [ɛɪ] sound in words like *prepare* and *hair*;
- When a voiced nasal phoneme follows a vowel, the nasal consonant is deleted and the vowel is nasalized → *man* [mā] – *find* [fã:]

1.2.2 Consonant System

- Consonant cluster reduction in words like *post* [pos], *mask* [mæs], *gift* [gɪf] or raised [rez];
- Consonant devoicing occurs at the end of words → *cab* sounds cap, *feed* sounds feet;
- Word-initially voiceless sound *th* is normally pronounced [θ] → *thing* [θɪŋ];
- Word-initially voiced sound *th* [ð] is pronounced [d] → *these* [diz];
- Word-medially and word-finally sound *th* sounds as [f] or [t] → *bath* [bæf] – *with* [wɪt];
- Word-medially and word-finally sound *th* [ð] sounds [v] or [d] → *bathe* [bev];
- Liquid *l* at the end of the words is vocalized: *bell* [bɛə] – *cold* [kɔ:] - *I'll* [a];

- Since it is an r-less sound system, when the consonant *r* is not followed by a vowel, it is generally dropped (intervocalic *r* can also drop) → floor [flo:];
- The word-ending nasal sound - ing [ŋ] is generally pronounced as [n] → running [rʌnɪn] – dancing [dænsɪn];
- The sound *str* at the beginning of words is often substituted by the sound *skr* → street [skrit] – strawberry [skrɔberi] – stretch [skrɛʃ];
- The phonemes [ks] and [s] tend to be replaced by [k] → box [bok].

1.3 Syntax

Without good cause, people often make value judgments about speakers of African American English based on phonology. It is easy to imagine then that value judgments all the more abound when, in African American English, there are variations in syntax. The sound of speech cannot be associated with language being proper or improper, but the usage of syntax can suggest correctness or incorrectness when measured against standard grammatical rules.

Once again, Spike Lee in *Bamboozled* is making no value judgment of African American phonology and syntax, but even the culturally sensitive viewer of the film might be confused by the fact that African American English is intentionally used to invoke viewer value judgments. African American English phonology and syntax are necessarily part of Lee's satire, given the speech of the minstrel personages of the "new millennium minstrel show" on the one hand and, on the other hand, the over-compensated speech of protagonist Pierre Delacroix who tries hard to sound "proper". Into this complex linguistic panorama come the compliments and insults that, the reader can now see, make for a very challenging and interesting study.

African American English presents specific and systematic features regarding grammar and especially tenses, which differ significantly from standard American English and other English varieties.¹⁰ The purpose in this brief section is to present the main patterns and rules of African American English tenses in order to shed light on the principal derivations from standard American English while at the same time proving that the syntactic system of the verbal markers is not haphazard but governed by rules (Green 2002: 74). Special attention will also be given to the morphology of the language and the way words are combined to create sentences:

¹⁰ Most examples shown here are taken from Green (2002) and Tottie (2002).

1.3.1 The verb ‘to be’

- Absence of the copula *be* (when not stressed and not in the first personal pronoun):
 - He Ø a man
 - She Ø singing
 - He Ø gonna go
 - Who Ø you?
- Use of the verbal marker ‘be’ to signal frequent or habitual situations:
 - Those computers be light
 - He be working on Monday
 - Michael be good
 - John be mad

1.3.2 Auxiliaries

- In the present tense, a single verb can be used with all subjects:
 - He walk
 - She don’t eat
 - She have a car
 - He always do silly things

1.3.3 Past Tenses (generally Simple Past form is preferred)

- Tottie (2002: 222) illustrates the general uses of past tenses with three examples:
 - She did sing → she has just finished singing
 - She done sung → she sang recently
 - She been sung → she sang a long time ago
- *Bin* + –ing form indicates an activity or situation in the remote past or phase that continues up to the moment of speaking.
 - According to the different stress patterns *bin/been* has different meanings:
 - He bin running → he has been running for a long time;
 - He been running → he has been running
 - She bin had him all day → she has had him all day
- The verbal marker *dən* indicates that a situation or activity is ended:
 - I told him you dən changed → I told him that you have changed
 - I dən already finished it → I have already finished it

1.3.4 Preverbal markers: *finna*, *steady*, *come*

- *Finna* (with non-finite verb forms): refers to an event that is imminent:
 - I'm finna leave → I'm getting ready/about to leave
 - Y'all finna eat? → Are you getting ready/about to eat?
- *Steady* (followed by a verb form in the progressive): indicates that an activity is being carried out in an intense or consistent manner:
 - They want to do their own thing, and you steady talking to them → [...], and you're continuing to talk to them.
- *Come*: is used to mark the speaker's indignation:
 - They come walking in here like they was gon' make us change our minds → they walked in here as if they were going to do or say something to make us change our minds

1.3.5 Double Negation

- Don't know nothin' about nobody → I don't know anything about anybody
- Ain't got no milk → I don't have any milk
- Freeze! Don't nobody move! → Freeze! Don't anybody move!

1.3.6 Existential *it* and *dey*

- It be too many cars in the parking lot → there are usually/always too many cars in that parking lot

1.3.7 Questions (absence of auxiliaries)

- You know my name? → Do you know my name?
- He sleeping in the car? → Is he sleeping in the car?

1.3.8 Left dislocation

- The teacher, she yell at them all

1.3.9 Omission of the suffix –s (in the case of the genitive and in the plural forms)

- The boy hat
- John house

The following analysis of expressive speech acts both in the original and in the Italian version would probably be difficult to justify and develop without first proving a brief but detailed introduction to African American English, including its vocabulary, phonology, and syntax. Likewise, the project could not be fully understood without a brief introduction to Spike Lee. The present work, therefore, will now proceed to say introductory words about the film's producer. An African American who is himself part of the African American cultural context in which his film is firmly set, Spike Lee did not simply produce this filmic work, he is, in a sense, that which he produced. Indeed, Spike Lee could not have produced such a film, perhaps would not have produced such a film, were he not in some way or to some degree bamboozled.

CHAPTER TWO

SPIKE LEE: CREATURE AND CREATOR

“The decision to identify is, in the moment of decision, not so much a recognition of something, a “blackness”, already given, but rather an existential choice—an act of imagination, of creativity.”

—Lively 1998: 228

Spike Lee was born in Atlanta, Georgia in 1957 to artistic and education-oriented parents, an African American mother who was a school teacher and an African American father who was a jazz musician and composer. At birth, the boy was named Shelton Jackson Lee, but as a young child, his mother started calling him “Spike” because of his tough attitude toward life. When Spike was still young, the Lee family relocated to Brooklyn, New York. As a college-age youth, he returned to Atlanta to attend Morehouse College, one of the most prestigious historically-African American colleges in the United States. There at Morehouse Spike Lee studied for the bachelor’s degree in Mass Communication while taking film courses at nearby Clark Atlanta University.

In addition to his primary work as a filmmaker, Spike Lee also had a hand in music, writing and advertising, thus contributing to his success and indeed worldwide reputation as an artist and multi-faceted businessman, who now even owns a chain of shops called Spike’s Joint, which originally sold merchandise linked to the titles of his movies and his film company¹.

The roots of his interest in film can probably be traced back to his boyhood when his mother took him to Broadway plays and his father to the famous Newport Jazz Festivals, but it was after completing his first

¹ In addition to his filmic production, Spike Lee has produced several music videos for artists like Michael Jackson, Prince, Steve Wonder and Eros Ramazzotti. He has also directed two *Pavarotti and Friends* videos. He has since appeared in many documentaries and asked to work on Nike, Levi and Telecom Italia advertising campaigns.

film project at Clark Atlanta University that he fell in love with film. Following graduation from Morehouse College, Spike Lee returned north to attend the highly-touted film program at the Tisch School of the Arts, at New York University. There at the Tisch School he earned Master of Fine Arts (MFA) Degree in film production, with primary work done in filmmaking.²

It was as early as his Tisch school years that Spike Lee started developing his filmic style, including the way in which he would leave space in his films for viewers to draw their own conclusions regarding outcomes. During these years he also thought a great deal and discussed the importance of having a positive black presence on screen. The result has been that his African American characters are not required to adapt to the mainstream white culture, absorbing its morays and habits (Moneta, 1998). His characters lead the viewer miles from the traditional concepts of racial depiction, closer to the way in which African Americans themselves have always known and experienced themselves (Tate, 1993).

Although Spike Lee has his detractors, the most vocal of them being the late African American writer of the Black Renaissance Amiri Baraka, the vast majority of artists, filmmakers, and film critics hail Spike Lee as the greatest revelation in film of the last few decades (Audino and Fasoli, 1993; Chiacchiarri 1996; Moneta 1998; Rizza and Rossi 2007). The credit follows his worldwide fame as the first undisputed African American filmmaker to challenge with irreversible consequences the traditional set of racial assumptions on which the whole Hollywood machine had always been based. Through his filmic production, on-going since the 1980s,³ Spike Lee has indelibly unhinged and modified the way in which African

² In addition to his filmic production, Spike Lee has produced several music videos for artists like Michael Jackson, Prince, Stevie Wonder and Eros Ramazzotti. He has also directed two *Pavarotti and Friends* videos. He has since appeared in many documentaries and was asked to work on Nike, Levi and Telecom Italia advertising campaigns.

³ Spike Lee is an American film director, producer, writer, and actor. His first film production was the independent film *Joe's Bed-Stuy Barbershop: We cut Heads* (1983) submitted as his Master Degree thesis at the Tisch School of Arts (University of New York). His first feature film was *She's Gotta Have it* (1986), which received three prestigious awards: "Award of the Youth" for Foreign Film (Cannes Festival Film 1986); "New Generation Award" (Los Angeles Film Critics Association Awards 1986); "Independent Spirit Award" for Best First Feature (Independent Spirit Awards 1987). His filmography boasts more than twenty movies, including worldwide famous feature films and short films, including *Do the Right Thing* (1989), *Jungle Fever* (1991), *Get on the Bus* (1996), and *Bamboozled* (2000).