WHEN BLACK STORIES GO GLOBAL

PROJECT LEAD: PROFESSOR EVA WHEELER
PROJECT MANAGER: BERNARD COLES

TEAM MEMBERS: LUCI JONES, DAVI SAPIRO-GHEILLER, BRIAN GLUCKSMAN, MIRIAM SHAMS-RAINEY
PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Translators act as cultural navigators, traversing through forests of connotation and denotation to spread important narratives. Translation has the potential to challenge geographic and linguistic boundaries. However, differing cultural norms and understandings of race and racialized language can make it complicated to disseminate Black stories on a global scale. This project examines the methods used in translating African American Black film and literature. In doing so, the research team considers how translation affects the international understanding of Black bodies and narratives as well as how cultural nuances can impact how racial terms are translated in different countries.

Our project follows the spread of Black stories as they travel globally, interpreting the results through a social-scientific lense that contextualizes the cultural and linguistic impacts of translation within our data. We performed a corpus-based analysis that explores the lexical choices and translation strategies employed by translators in selected works of African-American literature and film, as well as a macro-level analysis of the geographic and linguistic spread of these types of translations.
THERE IS VALUE IN UNDERSTANDING OTHER COUNTRIES’ IMAGININGS OF RACE SO THAT WE CAN UNDERSTAND HOW RACE, BOTH HERE AND ABROAD, IS A CONCEPT THAT IS HISTORICALLY-SPECIFIC, CULTURALLY-MANUFACTURED, AND POLITICALLY MODIFIABLE ACCORDING TO WHATEVER FOUNDATIONAL FICTIONS (AND REALITIES) A NATION WISHES TO PRODUCE.

JOHN KEENE, “TRANSLATING POETRY, TRANSLATING BLACKNESS”
ABOUT US

PROFESSOR EVA WHEELER
OAKWOOD UNIVERSITY

BERNARD COLES
DUKE UNIVERSITY

LUCI JONES
BROWN UNIVERSITY

BRIAN GLUCKSMAN
DUKE UNIVERSITY
PHASE I

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1) How is the culturally-bound language in African-American literature and film rendered for international audiences?

2) How do variables such as TERM TYPE, WORD CLASS, PURPOSE, GENRE, FRAMING, SPEAKER RACE, AUDIENCE RACE, and TRANSLATION COUNTRY interact with the dependent variable TRANSLATION STRATEGY?

3) How are translators approaching specific terms?

4) What are Spanish and Portuguese translation norms?

METHODOLOGY

HAND GENERATED DATASET
(5 NOVELS, 1 FILM)

RANDOM FOREST MODEL

CONFIRM CORRELATION BETWEEN VARIABLES WITH CHI-SQUARED TEST
PHASE II

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1) Which parts of the African-American experience are being translated? (Genre)
2) Where are these translations occurring? (Geographical Spread)
3) When are these translations occurring? (Temporal Spread)
4) In what languages are these translations occurring? (Linguistic Spread)

METHODOLOGY

SCRAPE WorldCat AND IMDB

VISUALIZE RESULTS IN R AND RSHINY
CONCLUSION I: OFFICIAL EQUIVALENT AND INTERVENTION ARE THE MOST COMMON TRANSLATION STRATEGIES FOR RENDERING RACIAL LANGUAGE.

Pruned Tree Model By Translation Strategy:

- **Term Type IS an Ethnoracial Label**
  - Official Equivalent 0.64
  - Language is NOT Portuguese
    - Official Equivalent 0.75
    - Audience IS Black
      - Official Equivalent 0.86
    - Audience is NOT Black
      - Official Equivalent 0.77
  - Language IS Portuguese
    - Speaker addressing member of same race
      - Intervention 0.47
    - Speaker addressing member of different race
      - Official Equivalent 0.53
- **Term Type NOT an Ethnoracial Label**
  - Official Equivalent 0.88
  - Official Equivalent 0.85
  - Intervention
Spanish translations rely more heavily on official equivalents while Portuguese translations use intervention and official equivalents at similar frequencies.

Portuguese translators are more comfortable intervening on culture-bound phaseologisms to avoid sounding awkward.

Portuguese translations are done predominantly in Brazil, which has historically been more open to racial dialogue than European nations like Spain and Portugal.
CONCLUSION II: AA FILM AND LITERATURE IS MOST COMMONLY SCREENED IN EUROPE

- English and European language speaking countries, specifically the United Kingdom, France, South Africa, and Australia, see the highest concentration of AA film screenings.
- European language speaking countries, specifically Central and Southern Europe, see the highest concentration of AA literature publications abroad.
- Continental Africa shows a very low concentration of AA film and literature screenings.
countries, specifically the United Kingdom, see the highest concentration of AA literature publications abroad. Specifically Central and Southern Europe, see the highest concentration of AA film and literature.
French, Spanish, and German are the three most common languages of translation for AA film.

German, French, and Spanish are the three most common languages of translation for AA literature.

The most common languages of translation are used in countries with a history of being colonizers.
D LITERATURE IS MOST COMMONLY TRANSLATED TO WESTERN EUROPEAN LANGUAGES

Number of Books Translated in Each Language

- German
- French
- Spanish
- Italian
- Chinese
- Korean
- Danish
- Japanese
- Dutch
- Swedish
- Norwegian
- Polish
- Finnish
- Turkish
- Portuguese
- Hungarian
- Hebrew
- Arabic
- Vietnamese
- Czech

CONCLUSION III: AA FILM AND LITERATURE IS MOST COMMONLY TRANSLATED TO WESTERN EUROPEAN LANGUAGES (LINGUISTIC)
CONCLUSION IV: AA FILMS HAVE BEEN TRANSLATED WITH INCREASING FREQUENCY SINCE THE 1980S (TEMPORAL)
Recent AA films like “Get Out,” “Black Panther,” and “Us” have proven that movies with majority Black casts can be big blockbusters (comps, in filmspeak), creating an uptick in releases around 2018.

Markets must be crafted for Black stories before they can travel in a global market, as they require a “proof of concept” that films with predominantly white casts often do not.

Potentially signaling a narrowing of the Racial Empathy Gap.
CONCLUSION V: HISTORY AND TRANSLATED GENRES AMONG AA 

Mean Number of Market Releases by Genre (minimum 5 films)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Mean Number of Markets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>history</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>biography</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>action</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drama</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crime</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comedy</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
History and Biography can be relegated to the past by white audiences.

Historical and biographical accuracy necessitate Black characters while other genres make roles more race-neutral or open to interpretation.

Blackness often associated with victimhood, which leads to the fetishization of Black trauma and pain.

Narratives of victimization prevent the creation of dynamic Black characters that exhibit love and life outside of violent contexts.

American awards often prioritize Black films that depict Black pain and suffering.
0.1 AS RESEARCHERS, WE HAVE OUR OWN RACIAL BIASES.

The research team acknowledges that they all come from different walks of life and their respective backgrounds influence the way in which they approach the data, consciously or not. They hoped to have mitigated the effects of this by engaging in critical dialogue with one another on a regular basis and using the team’s diversity to keep one perspective from dominating the discourse. However, their analysis of the data is undoubtedly still influenced by the ways in which they’ve previously interacted with and been educated about race.

0.2 THERE IS NO SINGLE “BLACK STORY.”

The research team acknowledges that “Black story” is a nebulous term that can have multiple definitions. For the purposes of this project, a “Black story” was understood to be any work of literature or film that had a Black author/director and featured a predominantly Black cast of characters. In these works, there exists an emphasis on the Black gaze and the Black perspective is central to the narrative. There are many other ways of defining this, but the research team felt these parameters allowed them to create what they believed to be a “representative” corpus of data.

0.3 RACIAL + RACIALIZED LANGUAGE MUST BE APPROACHED WITH CARE.

The research team acknowledges that the language of race is also the language of power. A racialized or racial word is not just a word. It carries with it a history of violence, oppression, and discrimination that continues to this day. Therefore, this language much be approached with care and inclusivity. Although the team sought to discuss the data freely, they also recognize that much of the language they analyze is derogatory. To enable open discourse, they assigned each term a number and referred to this number instead of the word itself when referencing the data.
ABOUT THE ANALYSIS...

DISPROVING THE 'BLACK FILMS DON'T TRAVEL' HOLLYWOOD MYTH

WHY WHITE PEOPLE DON'T LIKE BLACK MOVIES

TRANSLATING POETRY, TRANSLATING BLACKNESS

HARD TIMES FOR BLACK WRITERS

WHY WON'T HOLLYWOOD LET US SEE OUR BEST BLACK ACTORS?

WAKE