

# “MIND YOU, THAT’S JUST, LIKE, A GUESTIMATION” A diachronic analysis of morphological creativity in American teen talk and dubbing

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**Abstract** – The language of adolescents has always been of particular interest to linguists mostly for being extremely creative. Adolescence is, in fact, a transition stage that coincides with the entrance into secondary school, where teenagers strive to construct their own identity, mainly through linguistic innovation (Eckert 1989, 1997, 2004). In this sense, language becomes a strong identity marker (Edwards 2009) whose role is crucial in the portrayal of adolescent characters in films. The present paper aims at investigating the language of American adolescents in three famous movies of different decades from the 1980s to 2000s, namely *Sixteen Candles* (1984, Hughes), *Clueless* (1995, Heckerling) and *Juno* (2007, Reitman), which revolve around teenagers’ life at high school. The first step in the analysis consists in the identification of some characterising features of teen talk, especially focusing on word formation. Then, the analysis will be carried out contrastively and cross-culturally from a translational perspective, since these phenomena will be also investigated in the Italian dubbing. More specifically, it will be ascertained whether or not these features are transposed into Italian, if so, pinpointing the most common strategies employed as well as the strategies used for compensation when, on the contrary, the complexity and difficulty in rendering certain linguistic and cultural specific phenomena hamper to find efficient translating solutions in the target text. Finally, problems deriving from this type of audiovisual translation, like lip synch, will also be taken into account and it will also be checked if the dubbed version succeeds in depicting the characters in the same way as in the original text.

**Keywords:** identity; creativity; morphology; English; dubbing.

## 1. Introduction

The language of adolescents has always been of particular interest to linguists mainly because it is extremely creative. Adolescence is, in fact, a transition stage that coincides with starting secondary school, where teenagers strive to construct their own identity, mainly through linguistic innovation (Eckert 1989, 1997, 2004). In Carter’s words,

creativity in language is not unconnected with the search for and expression of identities. [...] Identity is multiple and plural and is constructed through language in social, cultural and ethnic contexts of interaction. (Carter 2004, p. 199)

As shown in previous studies (among many, Labov 1972, Eckert 1989, and Bucholtz 1999), the language of adolescents is characterised by variation according to the social group or community they belong to and to the region they live in. In Eckert’s words,

Adolescents do not talk alike; on the contrary, differences among adolescents are probably far greater than speech differences among the members of any other age group. And it is this production of difference that defines adolescents linguistically. What unifies adolescents is not their similarities, but their joint participation in a life stage that brings out difference. (Eckert 2004, p. 374)

Yet, as this study will show, certain common trends can be identified in the way adolescents communicate, thus distinguishing them in some way from adults. In this sense, language becomes a strong identity marker (Edwards 2009) whose role is crucial in the portrayal of adolescent characters in films.

The present paper aims to investigate the language of American adolescents diachronically in three famous movies of different decades from the 1980s to 2000s, namely *Sixteen Candles* (1984, John Hughes), *Clueless* (1995, Amy Heckerling) and *Juno*<sup>1</sup> (2007, Jason Reitman), which revolve around teenagers' life at high school. The first step in the analysis consists of identifying some characterising features of American teen talk, especially focusing on word formation, such as compounding, blending, abbreviation and clipping. Then, the analysis will be carried out contrastively and cross-culturally from a translational perspective, since these phenomena will be also investigated in Italian dubbing. More specifically, it will be ascertained whether or not these features are transposed into Italian, if so, pinpointing the most common strategies employed as well as the strategies used for compensation when, on the contrary, the complexity and difficulty in rendering certain linguistic and cultural specific phenomena impede finding efficient translating solutions in the target text. Finally, problems deriving from this type of audiovisual translation, like lip synch, will also be taken into account and, last but not least, it will also be checked whether the dubbed version succeeds in depicting the characters in the same way as the original text.

It is worth pointing out that the decision to analyse films from different decades was made also to verify how original English film language and Italian dubbing have changed over time, since also the way of acting has, which necessarily influences any kind of representation.

## 2. The corpus

The three films chosen for this study revolve around teenagers' life at high school. The portrayal of adolescents in different decades, especially through language, which in fact plays a crucial role in all of them, is the *trait d'union* among these three films. *Sixteen Candles* and *Clueless* are considered cult-movies of the 1980s and 1990s, respectively. The first tells the story of Samantha "Sam" Baker, an ordinary adolescent who longs to celebrate a memorable sixteenth birthday, but is deceived by her whole family, who has forgotten about it as they are all busy organising Sam's sister's wedding. Moreover, she is in love with Jake, the most popular boy of the school who is dating the Prom Queen, and she is tormented by a freshman, Ted, also called "the Geek", who has a crush on her but who eventually will help her attract Jake's attention, thus making her sweet sixteenth birthday unforgettable. This film is particularly interesting for the director's and screenwriter's ability to accurately depict teenagers, which gave him the opportunity to introduce several terms and expressions typical of teen slang of the '80s.<sup>2</sup> In *Clueless*, loosely based on Jane Austen's *Emma*, the protagonist is a wealthy shopaholic sixteen-year-old Californian girl, Cher, who, despite her superficiality, is nevertheless good-hearted and likes helping people. So, she starts playing match-maker with her best friend Dionne and decides to befriend a new girl, Tai, turning her from a nerd into a popular high

<sup>1</sup> From now on, also *SC* for *Sixteen Candles*, *C* for *Clueless* and *J* for *Juno*.

<sup>2</sup> As reported by many articles on the web about the film (cf. among others, <http://www.tcm.com/this-month/article/313419%7C0/Sixteen-Candles.html>).

school girl. However, Cher is also very sensitive and she is looking for the perfect boyfriend, whom she ends up finding where she least expected. It is worth pointing out that this film is considered a milestone in the history of American English, since in the attempt to faithfully portray Californian adolescents and their way of speaking, it has contributed to the spread of the so-called “Valley slang”.<sup>3</sup> As linguist Carmen Fought states,

(t)he interesting thing about *Clueless* is that the language was basically another character in that movie, [...]. A lot of research was put into it to really capture how Californians talked at the time, and I think that was the first time that people in different parts of the country got a clear exposure to all the features of the California dialect. (Fought in Bierma 2005)

The crucial role played by language was actually fully recognised by director Amy Heckerling, who in fact also wrote the screenplay and included among the promotional material of the film a booklet of the invented terms used in it, a sort of glossary called *How to Speak Cluelessly*,<sup>4</sup> which soon became part of real teen lingo at the time.

The last film under investigation, *Juno*, tells the story of a very smart sixteen-year-old girl facing an unplanned pregnancy. This film won several awards for the best original screenplay by Diablo Cody, among which the Academy Awards and the BAFTAs in 2008. It is reported that the screenwriter created the *Juno*-lingo by finding terms on the web or totally inventing them.<sup>5</sup> However, the film was so successful that the language it employs had a considerable impact on real spontaneous conversation, thus penetrating into the vernacular.

As we will see in the following sections, even though at different levels, innovation and creativity are the most characterising features of teen talk in the films analysed, thus making the translator/adaptor’s task quite challenging in the attempt to express the characters’ identity in the same way as in the original text. However, as Table 1 shows, since all films have been transcribed in their original version and in the Italian dub, the first striking difference that can be noted is the number of words, which is lower in the target text, confirming a general trend regarding dubbing (Chiaro 2009).

	Film title	Year	Director	Country	Runtime	Words (ENG)	Words (ITA dub)
SC	<i>Sixteen Candles</i>	1984	J. Hughes	USA	93'	7,464	6,909
C	<i>Clueless</i>	1995	A. Heckerling	USA	97'	11,671	11,321
J	<i>Juno</i>	2007	J. Reitman	USA	104'	9,265	8,628

Table 1

The film corpus for a diachronic analysis of morphological creativity in American teen talk and Italian dubbing.

### 3. Analysis

In what follows, the original soundtrack of the three films under investigation will be analysed in order to identify the most characterising features of American teen talk, with a special focus on morphological processes, namely affixation, compounding, conversion,

<sup>3</sup> Cf. [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2005-07-20/features/0507190293\\_1\\_clueless-slang-amy-heckerling](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2005-07-20/features/0507190293_1_clueless-slang-amy-heckerling)

<sup>4</sup> See the trivia section of the film on <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0112697/trivia>

<sup>5</sup> Cf. <http://nypost.com/2008/02/24/this-is-like-english-juno/>

clipping, blending, acronym/initialism and reduplication, which in fact herald innovative and creative terms. Some of these phenomena are included in what Dressler and Merlini (1994) identify as cases of “extra-grammatical morphology” (1994: 36-41), as they do not pertain strictly to morphology mainly because of the difficulty in the identification of clear-cut processes for word formation and their unpredictability. This is actually quite a recent area of research, which has led to the publication of several works, among which Mattiello (2013), who justifies the ever-growing interest in such matters with the “increasing numbers of novel words obtained by means of these non-rule-governed mechanisms” (2013: 2). Since lexical innovation through morphological processes is one of the most characterising traits of teen talk, this aspect will also be tackled from the translational perspective, as each linguistic phenomenon will be analysed in the dubbed version of these films.

## 4. Morphology

### 4.1. Affixation

Affixation is the most common strategy to create new words by simply adding prefixes or suffixes – i.e. affixes – to an existing base (Plag *et al.* 2007). Such a morphological process is used only in few cases in both *Sixteen Candles* and *Clueless*, while the more recent *Juno* displays many more instances. In the first film mentioned, an example is the adjective ‘forgettable’, carefully and ironically chosen by Sam to describe herself physically, as she has just turned fateful sixteen, but without the expected changes in her figure. As can be seen in (1) below, this adjective, preceded by the intensifier ‘utterly’, is transposed in the Italian dub with a totally different and longer utterance, which is made possible by the fact that the character pronounces her line with her back to the camera, thus avoiding lip sync problems.

(1) SC

Character	Original	Dubbing	Back translation <sup>6</sup>
SAM to Randy (on the phone)	<i>Nope</i> , I look exactly the same as I have since summer-- <i>utterly forgettable</i> . (...)	<i>No</i> . Sono esattamente identica a quest'estate. <i>Non è cambiata una curva</i> . (...).	<i>No</i> . I look exactly the same as I have since summer. <i>No curve has changed</i> .

Similarly, in *Clueless*, the very same word in the title is an example of affixation and it is used throughout the whole film several times by Cher and, interestingly, every time it is rendered in a different way in the dubbed version, thus losing a key concept and *leitmotiv* of this film :

(2) to be **clueless** > 1. essere inadeguata < [BT: to be inadequate]  
> 2. non sapere proprio niente < [BT: to know absolutely nothing]  
> 3. non capire proprio niente < [BT: to understand absolutely nothing]

Despite the fact that the original version of these two films does not provide many examples of affixation, in their dubbed version there seem to be more attempts to exploit

<sup>6</sup> Also abbreviated as BT.

this morphological process to emulate teen talk, even when the source text shows unmarked cases. See the examples below:

(3)

Film	Original	Dubbing
SC	underpants	<b>mutandine</b>
	big party	<b>mega-festa</b>
C	a cool guy	un ragazzo <b>carinissimo</b>
	lectures	<b>predicazzo</b>
	some bump	<b>ficozzo</b>

Generally, almost all the examples in (3) show a rather high use of various types of suffixes, which are actually very productive in the Italian language, ranging from the diminutive ‘-ine’ in *mutandine* to the intensifier rendered with the superlative suffix ‘-issimo’ in *carinissimo*. However, there is also one instance of the Latin prefix ‘mega-’, which is reported to be in increasing usage in contemporary Italian (D’Achille 2003: 106).

By contrast, in the original soundtrack of *Juno* there are several instances of affixation in the first place, with which the target text tries to comply by finding equivalent expressions resulting from the same morphological process, when possible. This is what happens in examples (4i), (4ii) and (4v). Especially in (4v), the target text appears to be extremely creative, since the rhyme obtained with the ‘-o’ suffix added to the words ‘egg’ and ‘preg’ – which is also a clipped<sup>7</sup> form of the adjective ‘pregnant’ – in the source text is reproduced with the use of the Italian suffix ‘-otto’, which also exploits the same vowel sound as the original. In the remaining cases, intensifiers are generally used, such as the adverb *veramente* (‘really’ in English) in (4iii), or a specific lexical item may be chosen to give a similar flavour of youth, as the word *pazzeschi* in (4iv), which is attested as being part of Italian teen talk with the meaning of ‘incredible, unbelievable, exceptional’ (Cortellazzo 2010).

(4) J

Original	Dubbing
i. <i>super-classy</i>	di <i>super-classe</i>
ii. <i>super-healthy</i>	<i>super-sano</i>
iii. <i>super-lame</i>	fa <i>veramente</i> pena
iv. <i>super-hard</i>	<i>pazzeschi</i>
v. your <i>eggo</i> ’s <i>preggo</i>	l’ <i>ovulotto</i> è <i>pienotto</i>
vi. <i>pregnant-er</i>	<i>sempre più</i> incinta

Moreover, as happens with SC and C, the dubbed version of *Juno* displays even more cases in which affixation is employed when the source text is unmarked or different means to represent teen talk are used. For example, in (5) when Juno tells her best-friend Leah that she did not have the courage to make the doctor’s appointment to end her pregnancy, the source text is quite standard, while the Italian dub is characterised by the use of the prefix ‘stra-’ added to the adjective *usate* (‘used’ in English) with the function of a superlative, typical of colloquial speech, which also modifies the meaning of the original utterance.

<sup>7</sup> See section 4.4 devoted to clipping.

(5) *J*

Character	Original	Dubbing	Back translation
JUNO to Leah	I couldn't do it, Leah! It smelled like a dentist office in there. And there were these horrible magazines <i>with water stains</i> . (...)	Non ce l'ho fatta. C'era puzza di dentista lì dentro. E c'erano delle orrende <i>e vecchie</i> riviste <b>stra-usate</b> . (...)	I couldn't do it. There was dentist smell in there. And there were some horrible and old <i>super-used</i> magazines.

## 4.2. Compounding

Another very productive way to create new words in English is by combining two or more words together to form a new lexical item, namely through compounding. This morphological process is employed in all the three films under investigation, especially in the more recent *C* and *J*, whose dubbed versions also show a greater effort in the attempt to be in line with the original soundtrack, as far as translating options are concerned. More specifically, not only is *SC* characterised by a significantly lower number of occurrences of words formed through this particular morphological process, but also the transposition of the utterances containing these expressions is not very creative and generally tends to explicitation if not reformulation, often totally changing the content of the original message. See the two examples below:

(6) *SC*

Character	Original	Dubbing	Back translation
GUY to Jake	Come on, Jake. You talk like you're <b>hard up</b> . You got Caroline, now, she's a woman.	Andiamo, Jake, <i>che vai cercando dalla vita?</i> Tu hai Caroline! E lei è una donna vera!	Come on, Jake, <i>what are you looking for in life?</i> You have Caroline! And she's a real woman!

(7) *SC*

Character	Original	Dubbing	Back translation
SAM to Randy (on the phone)	I have to go to this wedding and look like Miss Pretty Princess in this <b>dipshit bridesmaid dress</b> . I don't even have one-tenth of the <i>bod</i> to fill the stupid bust up. So what? Should I just waste myself and spare the agony?	Tutti <i>mi rompono</i> da stamattina perché vogliono una damigella bellissima, ma <i>mi hanno mollato</i> un vestito orribile, e il bustino è per un seno almeno tre volte più grande del mio. Il suicidio è il solo rimedio per mettere fine a questa agonia.	Everyone's <i>been bugging</i> me since this morning because they want a beautiful bridesmaid, but <i>I got landed with</i> a horrible dress, and the corsage is for at least a three-time bigger breast than mine. Suicide is the only remedy to put an end to this agony.

In (6) the compound adjective 'hard up', a colloquialism for 'desperate' used by Jake's friend to describe his state of mind as he expresses his feelings in his search for a different kind of girlfriend from the perfect but superficial Caroline, is rendered with quite an unusual and old-fashioned phrase in the Italian dub, which neither corresponds to the original meaning nor can be considered to be typically used by youngsters. In (7) the compound noun 'bridesmaid dress' preceded by the rude compound adjective 'dipshit' is normalised in the dubbed version with the use of the general term *vestito* (i.e. 'dress') followed by the common adjective *orribile* (i.e. 'horrible'), explicitly avoiding the use of a swearword and thus depriving Sam's speech of a perfectly suitable feature of teen talk. However, some compensation strategies have been adopted in other parts of Sam's talk, also to overcome other translation problems such as the rendering of the clipped form

'bod', namely the use of more colloquial terms or phrases like *rompere* and *mollare* that are much more ascribable to Italian teen talk.

Similarly, in *C*, the highest number of cases of compounds are generally rendered with normalisation and explicitation, often with a variation in meaning, as in (8) below, which, however, also shows the use of compensation strategies, like affixation in (8iii), the use of an additional adjective in (8ii) and a careful choice of words in (8vii) with the French *mise* in correspondence to *ensemble* in the original, thus conveying the same tone of sophistication used by Cher when talking about clothes.

(8) *C*

Original	Dubbing	Back translation
i. <b>loqued out jeep</b>	fantastica jeep	fantastic jeep
ii. <b>brown-noser</b>	secchione e ruffiano	nerd and sycophant
iii. superficial <b>space-cadet</b> <sup>8</sup>	furbettina presuntuosa e superficiale	sly, full of yourself and superficial
iv. a <b>tow-up</b>	è completamente da restaurare	she totally needs renovating
v. a <b>cake boy</b>	una <i>checca persa</i>	a total queer
vi. <b>damsel-in-distress act down</b>	nella parte di damigella in pericolo	=
vii. the <b>most responsible-looking ensemble</b>	la <i>mise</i> adatta per l'avvenimento	the suitable <i>ensemble</i> for the event

However, in a high number of cases, the Italian dub is characterised by reformulation, often associated to variation in meaning with respect to the original utterance, but also resulting as creative on a different level. This is the case of (9), when Cher is living her match-maker phase and is determined to find a girlfriend for one of her teachers, Mr Hall. So, she starts examining every female teacher in her school starting with her P.E. teacher, Miss Staeger, who, she has to immediately admit, is homosexual. In the source text, a creative but transparent compound is employed, while in the target text a pun is preferred, with humorous effects.

(9) *C*

Character	Original	Dubbing	Back translation
CHER (voice over) during a close-up on Ms Staeger scoring a basket with a cafeteria napkin into the rubbish bin	And in the grand tradition of <i>P.E.</i> teachers, Miss Staeger seemed to be <b>same-sex oriented</b> . (...)	Come nella migliore tradizione delle insegnanti di educazione fisica, la Signorina Staeger era <b>un'abitante dell'isola di Lesbo</b> . (...)	In the grand tradition of Physical Education teachers, Miss Staeger was <b>an inhabitant of Lesbos Island</b> .

Similarly to *C*, *J* is very rich in creative compound words, but unlike *C* its dubbed version in Italian seems to respect the source text more fully, by making a special effort to find innovative translating solutions. This is done either by inventing new compounds in line with the original version, as in (10), or, when employing explicitation and reformulation, with a careful choice of words which sound perfectly natural when uttered by an adolescent, as in (11) when Leah, on seeing the ultrasound of Juno's baby, makes some

<sup>8</sup> In this case, the compound noun 'space-cadet', a typical slang expression to refer to someone who appears to be not in touch with reality, is transposed into Italian with *furbo/a* (i.e. roughly 'sly' in English) mitigated by the diminutive suffix '-ina', thus modifying the meaning of the original utterance.

funny comments on the size of his head and describes it as a *mappamondo* (i.e. ‘world globe’) with a cleft sentence, using vague language and referring to the baby as *coso* (i.e. roughly ‘gizmo’) and finally making a cultural reference to a famous film, i.e. *Alien*.

(10) *J*

Character	Original	Dubbing	Back translation
JUNO (voice over)	(...) Oh, and she inexplicably mails me a cactus every Valentine’s Day. And <i>I’m, like</i> , “Thanks a heap, <i>Coyote Ugly</i> . This <b>cactus-gram</b> stings even worse than your abandonment”. (...)	(...) Ah, inspiegabilmente mi spedisce un cactus ogni San Valentino. E <i>io faccio, tipo</i> : “Ti ringrazio una cifra, brutta strega. Questo <b>cacto-gramma</b> ferisce più del tuo abbandono”. (...)	(...) Oh, and she inexplicably sends me a cactus every Valentine’s Day. And <i>I’m, like</i> , “Thanks a heap, awful witch. This <b>cactus-gram</b> hurts even more than your abandonment”. (...)

(11) *J*

Character	Original	Dubbing	Back translation
LEAH to Juno	WOW! Check out <b>Baby Big-Head</b> . <i>Dude</i> , that thing is <b>freaky-looking!</b>	Wow! Accidenti <i>che mappamondo che ha per testa quel coso! È il figlio di Alien</i> .	Wow! Damnit, <i>what a world globe that gizmo has for head! He’s Alien’s son!</i>

Moreover, the higher level of creativity and innovation that characterises the Italian dub of *J* can be detected also in the invention of novel compound lexemes even when absent in the source text. For example, in (12), the figurative and idiomatic expression ‘to go live’ used by Juno to describe the moment in which her boyfriend Bleeker became sexually active is rendered in the Italian dub with the totally invented compound verb *sesso-attivarsi* (i.e. to ‘sex-activate’).

(12) *J*

Character	Original	Dubbing	Back translation
JUNO (voice over)	Oh, I hate it when adults use the term “sexually active”. What does it even mean? Can I deactivate someday, or is it some sort of permanent state of being? I guess <i>Bleeker went live</i> that night we did it, I guess that’s why he got that look on his face. (...)	Ah, odio quando gli adulti che usano l’espressione “sessualmente attiva”. Che significa? Che un giorno mi disattiverò o è uno stato permanente? <b>Bleeker si è sesso-attivato</b> quando lo abbiamo fatto, e forse per questo aveva quella faccia. (...)	Oh, I hate it when adults use the term “sexually active”. What does it mean? That will I deactivate one day or is it a permanent state? <b>Bleeker sex-activated</b> when we did it, and maybe this is why he had that face.

### 4.3. Conversion

Conversion is defined as “[o]ne of the most productive non-concatenative processes in English, especially for the derivation of verbs” (Plag *et al.* 2007: 99). In fact, it entails creating a new word by simply changing the word-class of a base word without using any affixes, and this is why conversion is also called “zero-derivation/affixation” (2007: 99). Even though there are only few instances of conversion in all three films analysed – with *SC* showing just one example – it is worth pointing out that they all entail the formation of new verbal forms from a different part of speech, be it a noun or a preposition. Both in



(13) and (14), new verbs are derived from nouns: ‘to bus’ and ‘to BS’, which is also an initialism<sup>9</sup> for the swearword and noun ‘bullshit’. Concerning translation, the general tendency is to choose normalisation and, especially in (14), standardisation, intentionally avoiding using taboo language by replacing the swearword used in the source text – even though mitigated by the initialism – with a standard verb like *barare* (i.e. ‘to cheat’), thus downgrading the aggressiveness of Cher’s utterance. However, a compensation strategy is employed here by using affixation in *prediccozzi* instead of the neutral term ‘lectures’ used in the original.

## (13) SC

Character	Original	Dubbing	Back translation
GEEK to Cliff	Sophomore, <i>dude</i> , Sophomore. <i>Fully-aged Sophomore meat. Dude, we bus</i> together.	È del secondo, <i>amico</i> , del secondo! Un appetitoso bocconcino del secondo anno. <i>Prendo l'autobus</i> con lei.	She’s a Sophomore, dude, a Sophomore! A tasty delicacy Sophomore. We take the bus together.

## (14) C

Character	Original	Dubbing	Back translation
CHER to Josh	And, Josh, spare me your lectures on how driving is such a big responsibility and <b>you can’t BS</b> your way through it, okay?	Josh, risparmiami i <i>prediccozzi</i> del tipo “guidare è una grossa responsabilità, <i>non puoi barare</i> con gli esaminatori”, ok?	Josh, spare me your lectures, like, “driving is a big responsibility, you can’t cheat with driving inspectors”, okay?

On the other hand, *J* shows more cases of conversion, which are also more varied, such as the verb ‘to down’ derived from a preposition in (15), which is transposed in the Italian dub using the idiomatic expression *spararsi* (i.e. literally ‘to shoot oneself’, thus with an extremely negative connotation, but corresponding to the English ‘to treat oneself to’, which is normally associated with positive objects) that is very commonly used by Italian teenagers.

## (15) J

Character	Original	Dubbing	Back translation
JUNO to Mac	Which maneuver, sir? The one where I moved an entire living room set from one lawn to the other, or the one where I <b>downed</b> a sixty-four ounce blue <i>slushie</i> in ten minutes?	Quale manovra, signore? Quella per cui ho spostato un intero salotto da un prato all’altro, o quella per cui <i>mi sono sparata</i> un secchio di granita blu in dieci minuti?	Which maneuver, sir? The one where I moved an entire living room set from one lawn to the other, or the one where I treated myself to a bucket of blue slush in ten minutes?

It is worth noticing that such an expression is used to render another case of conversion in the film, namely Juno’s boyfriend, Bleeker, saying ‘we’re gonna *donut*’ with *ci spariamo le ciambelle* (i.e. ‘we’re gonna treat ourselves to donuts’, V < N), but most interestingly *spararsi* occurs also in *C* to translate the slang verb ‘to spark’. Therefore, the frequent occurrence of *spararsi* as a translating option for generally marked expressions in the source text may suggest that it is a translational routine in Italian dubbing.

<sup>9</sup> See section 4.6. for acronyms and initialisms.

#### 4.4. Clipping

Clipping is a morphological process belonging to the macro-category of abbreviation or shortening that involves the deletion of part of a lexeme, without changing its word class. Clippings can be classified according to the part of the lexeme that is dropped, which is generally the beginning as in ‘phone’ (< ‘telephone’) – i.e. fore-clipping – or the end as in ‘lab’ (< ‘laboratory’) – i.e. back-clipping.<sup>10</sup> As pointed out by Mattiello (2013), clipped forms are used “to establish or reinforce informality and closeness” (2013: 220), but they also express “the speaker’s familiarity with the concept they denote” (Plag *et al.* 2007: 101).

There are several examples of clipping in all the three films under investigation, but as regards dubbing they are usually normalised<sup>11</sup>, with only few exceptions, as can be seen in (16) below:

(16)

Film	Original	Dubbing	Back translation
SC	i. <b>bod</b> (< body) [2]	un po’ più di ciccia / Ø	some more flab / Ø
	ii. <b>duped</b> (< duplicated)	duplicato	duplicated
	iii. <b>rep</b> (< reputation)	una buon nomina*	a good reputation
	iv. <b>undies</b> (< underpants)	mutandine	undies
	v. <b>panties</b> (< underpants)	mutandine	panties
C	i. a photo <b>op</b> (< opportunity)	macchina fotografica	camera
	ii. a <b>prop</b> (< proposition)	la vuole fare divertire	he wants to entertain her
	iii. <b>depos</b> (< depositions)	deposizioni	depositions
	iv. <b>dorms</b> (< dormitories)	dormitorio	dormitory
	v. <b>frat</b> (< fraternity)	festa	party
J	i. <b>bod</b> (< body)	corpicino	body
	ii. <b>Goth</b> (< Gothic)	dark	dark
	iii. <b>lab</b> (< laboratory) [2]	di gruppo / Ø	group / Ø
	iv. <b>limo</b> (< limousine)	limousine	limousine
	v. <b>rad</b> (< radical)	super-tosta	super-tough
	vi. <b>fave</b> (< favourite)	preferite	favorite
	vii. <b>legit</b> (< legitimate)	legale	legal
	viii. <b>cello</b> (< violoncello)	violoncello	cello

In the first set of examples, taken from *SC*, it is interesting to notice that the same clipped form ‘bod’ occurs twice throughout the film, but once it is transposed using reformulation with a change in the original meaning of the utterance pronounced by Sam, while in the second case it undergoes total deletion. Conversely, the two variants of one of the most important elements in the film, namely underpants, ‘undies’ and ‘panties’, which are also characterised by affixation, with the diminutive suffix ‘-ie’, are always translated in the same way into Italian, i.e. *mutandine*. Moreover, in (iii) ‘rep’ is quite oddly mistranslated into *nomina*, which actually means ‘appointment’ or ‘designation’ instead of *nomea*, that is reputation. The examples in *C* are generally normalised or reformulated with variation in meaning, while in *J* a stronger effort towards creativity can be spotted, with the use of

<sup>10</sup> For an extensive classification of the various types of clipped forms see Mattiello (2013).

<sup>11</sup> It is worth pointing out that in Italian clipping is not as frequent as in English; however, it is reported to be a characterising trait of the Italian language spoken by youngsters, with particular reference to the shortening of proper names (Cortellazzo, 2010), and to be spreading in the Italian language in general, due to the great influence of anglicisms (Fanfani, 2010).

affixation as in the cases of (i.) ‘bod’ and (v.) ‘rad’, but especially when the source text does not show any clipping. See the following exchange in (17), in which Juno tells Bleeker about her decision to get an abortion:

(17) *J*

Character	Original	Dubbing	Back translation
JUNO	Oh, you know, I was just-- I was thinking <i>I'd just nip it in the bud</i> before it gets worse. Because they were talking about it in health class, how pregnancy can often lead to-- an infant.	Ecco, sai, io stavo-- stavo pensando di <i>stopparlo</i> subito, prima che sia peggio. Perché a educazione sessuale dicevano che la gravidanza di solito porta a un neonato.	Well, you know, I was-- I was thinking to stop it right now, before it gets worse. Because in sex education class they said that pregnancy usually leads to an infant.
BLEEKER	Typically, yeah, yeah. That's-- That's what happens when our <i>moms</i> and <i>teachers</i> get pregnant.	Generalmente, sì. Sì. Va così quando le nostre madri e le <b>prof.</b> sono incinte.	Generally, yes. Yes. It happens like this when our mothers and teachers are pregnant.

As can be seen, in the Italian dub of Bleeker's turn there is a case of clipping, namely *prof* (< *professoressa*), a quite widespread and colloquial term to refer to teachers in Italy, which however translates the standard ‘teachers’ in the source text.

#### 4.5. Blending

Blends are another example of shortening created by resorting to two contextual processes, that is the cancellation of part of the base of two different lexemes and the combination of the remaining parts into a new word (Plag *et al.* 2007). There are only few examples of blends in the films analysed and, more specifically, only one in *SC*, that is ‘bohunk’ formed by ‘Bo(hemian)’ + ‘Hung(arian)’ with the modification of the last consonant <g> into <k>, which is used in the original soundtrack to refer to Ginny's fiancé and is translated with general terms such as *tipo* or *uomo* – i.e. ‘dude’ and ‘man’ respectively in English – in the Italian dub, and few more instances in *C* and *J*, some of which are shown in (18)-(20) below.

(18) *C*

Character	Original	Dubbing	Back translation
CHER (voiceover)	Dionne and I were both named after great singers of the past who now do <b>infomercials</b> .	Io e Dionne abbiamo lo stesso nome di due cantanti della preistoria che ora fanno le <b>televendite</b> .	Dionne and I have the same name as two prehistoric singers who now do infomercials.

(19) *C*

Character	Original	Dubbing	Back translation
JOSH to Cher	Hey, <b>braniac!</b>	Ciao, <i>cervello pazzo!</i>	Hello, mad brain!

(20) *J*

Character	Original	Dubbing	Back translation
JUNO (on the phone)	- I'm gonna say it's been about-- two months and four days since the sex. Mind you, that's just, like, a <b>guestionation</b> .	- Ecco, sono passati circa due mesi e quattro giorni da che ho fatto sesso, però è <i>un'ipotesi molto circa all'inquasi</i> .	- Well, it's been about two months and four days since I had sex, but it's a very approximate hypothesis.

Generally, blends are created by speakers for various purposes (Mattiello 2013), among which to establish social closeness and to be informal as in (19), or simply to express jocularly and convey novelty, although with a hint of irony as in (20). Besides, some of these new formations are so repeatedly used that they become lexicalised, as 'infomercials' in (18) – i.e. 'info(rmation)' + '(com)mercials' – which has an equivalent also in Italian, namely *televendite*. However, the Italian language is reported not to be so productive in this regards, since blends are quite rare with respect to other languages like English (Bertinetto 2001). As a consequence, all the cases of blends in the source text represent a big challenge for the translator/adaptor which often ends with the choice for literal translation as in (19). Differently, sometimes it is possible to find creative solutions as in (20), which again shows the greater effort ascribable to the dubbing of *J* with the invention of a totally new expression to be in line with the original.

#### 4.6. Acronyms and initialisms

The last type of shortening that is here analysed is acronyms and initialisms, which, similarly to blends, both involve deletion and more than one word. More specifically, they entail using only the initial letter of the words of a phrase to form a new word: in initialisms such a sequence of letters is pronounced separately (e.g. UK, DVD, etc.), whereas in acronyms they are pronounced as a regular word (e.g. NATO, NASA, etc.). *SC* and *J* showcase only a couple of instances of this phenomenon, while *C* is quite rich in this kind of abbreviated forms. Although acronyms and initialisms are among the most characterising traits of modern languages, as observed by Demartini (2011) also regarding Italian, the analysis of the transposition of these morphological formations in the Italian dub shows that they are hardly ever rendered with an equivalent acronym/initialism. However, an exception is represented by the example in (21) from *SC*, where the general term and initialism 'VD', standing for 'venereal disease', is translated with the more specific acronym *AIDS* in the target text, which actually is also an English acronym standing for 'acquired immune deficiency syndrome', thus showing the widespread tendency of the Italian language to maintain the order of constituents of English medical terms (Demartini 2011).

(21) *SC*

Character	Original	Dubbing
GEEK	Would it be totally off the wall if-- if I asked if I could have sex with you?	Credi che crollerebbe il mondo-- se ti chiedessi di fare sesso con me?
SAM	You know, you asking me is not as off the wall as why I won't.	Crollerebbe il mondo se ti spiegassi perché non lo faccio.
GEEK	<b>VD?</b>	<b>AIDS?</b>

More often, as the higher number of cases occurring in *C* show, acronyms and initialisms tend to undergo explication, sometimes through reformulation, if not deletion of part of

the abbreviation in the Italian dub. For example, instances of simple explicitation are ‘P.E. teacher’ with *insegnante di educazione fisica*, and ‘R.S.V.P.’ in (22) – which is also a case of conversion of an entire phrase used as a verb – standing for the French *Répondez s’il vous plaît*. By contrast, reformulation was adopted for the following: ‘the PC term’ for ‘politically correct’ transposed with the phrase *è più carino dire* (roughly ‘it’s nicer to say’ in English) and ‘you can’t BS’<sup>12</sup> with *non puoi barare*. Finally, deletion was applied in cases such as ‘NYU’ standing for ‘New York University’, which is rendered simply as *New York*, or ‘L.A. buses’, that is ‘Los Angeles buses’, which is normalised with the general term *autobus*.

(22) C

Character	Original	Dubbing	Back translation
CHER to class	(...) But it’s <i>like</i> , when I had this garden party for my father’s birthday, right? I said “ <b>R.S.V.P.</b> ” because it was a sit-down dinner. But people came that, <i>like</i> , <b>did not</b> “ <b>R.S.V.P.</b> ” so I was, <i>like</i> , <i>totally buggin’</i> . (...)	(...) Situazione analoga si verificò quando organizzai il compleanno di mio padre. Sull’invito c’era scritto <i>di confermare</i> perché era una cena seduti, ma alcuni vennero lo stesso, <i>senza aver confermato</i> , e questo mi fece molto irritare. (...)	A similar situation happened when I organized my father’s birthday. On the invitation I wrote <i>to give confirmation</i> because it was a sit-down dinner, but some came nonetheless, <i>without giving confirmation</i> , and this irritated me a lot.

Finally, in *J*, apart from the case of the initialism ‘HVAC’, a technical term meaning ‘heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning’ used by Juno to describe her father’s occupation, which undergoes simple explicitation in the Italian dub,<sup>13</sup> there is another interesting case exemplified in (23), namely ‘saps’, standing for ‘sad and pathetic’ to which the inflectional morpheme for the plural is added. Since there is no possible equivalent in Italian, the translator/adaptor chose to use a very colloquial term, namely *piagnone*, followed by a metaphorical expression that sounds very informal in Italian, yet extremely realistic in a youngster’s mouth.

(23) J

Character	Original	Dubbing	Back translation
JUNO to Leah	Excuse me, I am a sacred vessel, alright? All you’ve got in your stomach is <i>Taco Bell</i> ! It’s amazing that there’s actually <b>saps</b> that cry at this.	Se permetti, io sono un veicolo di santità. Tu nella pancia hai soltanto cibo messicano. E dire che delle <i>piagnone</i> si <i>squagliano</i> per questa cosa.	If you would allow me, I am a vehicle of holiness. In your belly you only have Mexican food. And what about the fact that there are <i>whiners that melt down</i> for this thing.

#### 4.7. Reduplication

The last morphological process that will be investigated for the creation of new words in American teen talk is reduplication, which entails the repetition of a portion of a word,

<sup>12</sup> This is also another case of conversion, which has already been analysed in section 4.3.

<sup>13</sup> The difference in length between the initialism in the source text and its explicitation in the target text is possible because the utterance is pronounced in voiceover, so we do not see Juno’s speaking but the scenes she describes, which solves any lip-synch problem.

either totally or partially with some vowel or consonant variation (see Mattiello 2013 for an extensive description). This word formation process is totally absent in *SC*, while *C* and *J* provide only few instances, which, as shall be noted, always undergo normalisation and reformulation in the Italian dub, due to the scarcity of such phenomenon in the Italian language.

In *C* there are cases of rhyming reduplicatives, where only one element is meaningful, while the other only rhymes with it, as in the slang expression ‘**super-duper** nice’, where it is used as an intensifier, which is totally deleted in the transposition in the Italian dub (see e.g. 24), as well as in the line pronounced by Murray in the original soundtrack ‘Could you stop all that to-death-do-us-part **mumbo-jumbo?**’, which undergoes total deletion and thus change being reformulated as *Finché morte non vi separi. Un bell’impegno! Chi ce la fa?*<sup>14</sup> uttered by Travis in the target text – the character shift is obviously made possible because the camera wanders anywhere but near the interlocutor.

(24) *C*

Character	Original	Dubbing	Back translation
TAI to Cher	No, you are entitled to your own opinion, all right? <i>I’m the tart</i> here. Cher, you’ve been nothing but <b>super-duper</b> nice to me.	No, no, no, ognuno ha diritto alle proprie opinioni, ok? Sono io <i>la stronza</i> . Cher, tu ti sei sempre comportata <b>bene</b> con me.	No, no, no, everyone has the right to have their own opinions, okay? I am the bitch. Cher, you’ve always been nice to me.

Finally, in *J*, there is only one reduplicative composed of two meaningful words that rhyme one with the other and show initial consonant variation, namely ‘fertile myrtle’ in (25), the slang expression used by Rollo to ironically ask Juno about the results of the pregnancy test she has just done in his shop. Interestingly, in the Italian dubbed version, the same morphological process is employed thus creating a brand new expression which, on the one hand, is partially different from the original one, as ‘myrtle’ is replaced with the famous Leonardo da Vinci’s *Gioconda* only because it rhymes with the Italian *feconda*, but on the other it represents again a further instance of the strong effort that features *J*’s dubbing to be in line with the original text.

(25) *J*

Character	Original	Dubbing	Back translation
ROLLO to Juno	What’s the prognosis, <b>Fertile Myrtle</b> : minus or plus?	Qual è la prognosi, <b>Feconda Gioconda?</b> Meno o più?	What’s the prognosis, <b>Fertile Gioconda</b> : minus or plus?

But even more interesting is the fact that such a creative strategy is employed in the target text also where the source text is quite standard, as a compensation strategy. An example is (26), where the novel rhyming expression *fighettine perfettine* translates the standard ‘cheerleaders’ in the original soundtrack. It is fair to say that this translational choice balances the fact that in Juno’s utterance the marked American term ‘jocks’ used to refer to popular guys at high school (Eckert 1989) is rendered with the standard, even though not general, *atleti*. Besides, apparently, such innovative expressions are used in the dubbed version of Juno to reinforce an ironic comment. Another example is *uccelli porcelli* (i.e.

<sup>14</sup> BT: ‘Till death do us part. A big commitment! Who can put up with that?!’.

roughly ‘piglet penises’ in English) for the slang phrase ‘pork swords’, used ironically by Juno to describe what she cannot help thinking about when seeing the entire school athletic team running in their golden shorts.

(26) *J*

Character	Original	Dubbing	Back translation
JUNO (voiceover)	Oh yeah, <i>jocks totally eat that shit up</i> . They just won't admit it, because they're supposed to be into perfect <i>cheerleaders</i> , you know? Like Leah, who incidentally is into teachers.	Gli atleti si nutrono di queste <i>stronzate</i> . Solo che non lo ammettono perché in teoria dovrebbero puntare alle <b>fighettine perfettine</b> tipo Leah, a cui, peraltro, piacciono i <i>prof</i> .	Athletes feed with this shit. but they don't admit it, because in theory they are supposed to aim at <b>perfect hotties</b> like Leah, who by the way is into teachers.

## 5. Conclusion

What has emerged from the analysis of the original soundtrack of the three films object of the present study is, first of all, the fact that a wider and wider set of phenomena is represented in more recent productions like *C* and especially *J*. Conversely, *SC* is characterised by fewer lexical innovations not only concerning quality but also quantity, when present; for example, there is only one instance of blending, while reduplicatives are totally absent. Second of all, and most importantly, the way of representing teen talk is closer to spontaneous communication in the latest film, namely *J*, where discourse is also characterised by typical features of orality such as false starts, self-corrections, hesitations, discourse particles, etc., which are nearly absent in the older *SC* and very few in *C*. This aspect is obviously connected to the way of acting, which seems to have changed over time with the general tendency to adhere to real conversation by trying to reproduce it as most genuinely as possible. This aspect is also observable in TV shows, which nowadays have a strong influence on youngsters and help spread their jargon.

As regards the transposition of such creativity in the Italian dub, increasing attention to lexical innovation has been observed, so that a wider variety of translating strategies have been adopted. The most common techniques range from simple paraphrase, explicitation, literal translation and reformulation with quite standard expressions, generally employed when morphological processes such as compounding, blending, clipping or reduplication are used in the source text – basically due to the lack of corresponding expressions in the target language – to more versatile attempts at creating new terms in line with the source text, especially in the more recent *J* (e.g. the use of brand new rhyming phrases either to render reduplicatives or as a compensation strategy, the use of colloquialisms and idioms, affixation, invented expressions exploiting blending, etc.).

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