

# Compliment Patterning among Young Speakers: A Diachronic and Translational Study of English and Dubbed Italian Film Dialogue

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## *Abstract*

The construction and translation of socio-pragmatic meanings in film speech poses intriguing challenges due to the complex semiotic nature of audiovisual texts. This exploratory case study presents the results of an analysis that aimed to detect and discuss the use of compliments by teenagers in English and dubbed Italian film dialogue as represented in two cult teen movies released in different decades. The results indicate that compliments tend to occur quite frequently both as creative and formulaic structures. Moreover, the formulaic patterns themselves acquire creative features due to the presence of informal and trendy expressions. Hypotheses are made about the motivations behind different distributional patterns between the two movies, thus indicating potential diachronic variations. Translation strategies are also surveyed, and both cases of creativity and dubious solutions are highlighted.

*Keywords:* Compliments, Films, Translation, Youth Language

## *1. Introduction*

The contemporary era is far from the times when orality and writing used to be incontrovertibly the prototypical forms of human communication. Today screens are omnipresent in our daily lives, television sets, laptops, tablet computers, smartphones, and portable media players of all shapes and sizes being musts for individuals. The ubiquity of audiovisual technology makes it inevitable for linguistic research to acknowledge multimedia products as worthy of investigation in order to observe how language is used in semioti-

cally complex spaces such as films.<sup>1</sup> The distinctive feature of language in this type of audiovisual text is summed up in the formula with which scholars traditionally refer to film dialogue, i.e. “prefabricated orality” (Chaume and Baños-Piñero 2009: Section 1). This means that the scriptwriters assemble the linguistic items and rhetorical strategies available in one language to re-create the dynamics of oral interaction and produce believable dialogues. One of the fundamental factors at stake in this operation is the re-creation of the “illocutionary point”, i.e. the intention of a speaker when producing an utterance (Searle and Vanderveken 1985: 13-15). Due to the multi-channel nature of audiovisual texts, the speaker’s pragmatic goals should match the actions performed on screen in order to achieve coherence between words and images. This process is particularly challenging if a film is to be translated for dubbing, as is a standard practice in many countries such as Italy. In this case, in addition to coherence between words and the visuals, lip synchronization also plays a central role when the actor’s mouth is visible in close-ups.

Concerning the English/Italian language pair, which is the focus of the present study, extensive research has been conducted on film dialogue on the basis of corpora socio-linguistically varied in terms of the age of interlocutors (e.g. Freddi and Pavesi 2009). The genre of teen movies has largely been neglected, with the exception of a few case studies (e.g. Bianchi 2008; Zanotti 2012). This gap is surprising, given that research on the language used by teenagers in naturally-occurring conversation is extremely prolific both in English (e.g. Stenström, Andersen, and Hasund 2002; Bucholtz 2011) and Italian (e.g. Cortelazzo 2010). Moreover, teenage speech has always been appealing to linguists, mainly because it is extremely creative. Its level of interest lies in the fact that adolescents frequently manipulate standard linguistic structures so as to create a personal code for distancing themselves from adults. In this sense, their language is a strong vehicle of identity because it encodes their values, which change rapidly from one generation to another (Edwards 2009). For this reason, filmic teen speech is worthy of inclusion in linguistic research on dubbing.

Based on these motivations, the present study aims to investigate the language of teenagers as represented in English and dubbed Italian film dialogue, with a specific focus on the speech act of complimenting. For this purpose, I have conducted an exploratory case study that analyzes compliments in two famous American teen movies and their Italian dubbed versions, namely *Clueless* released in 1995, and *Mean Girls* released in 2004. More specifically, the questions which I intend to answer are:

<sup>1</sup> Today films are among the audiovisual products to which we are most frequently exposed. This can be deduced if we consider that there is a growing availability of TV channels airing movies 24 hours a day (e.g. AMC in the USA, Iris in Italy) and online or pay-TV movie libraries (e.g. Sky Store in Europe).

- a) What linguistic structures do teenagers predominantly use for complimenting in the English versions?
- b) How do compliments change from the 1990s to the twenty-first century?
- c) What critical issues may occur in their translation for dubbing in Italian?

In order to provide adequate background to situate the upcoming analysis, in the following Section I discuss key issues concerning compliments in naturally-occurring conversation and film dialogue.

## *2. Previous Studies on Compliments*

Compliments are defined in the literature as speech acts that “explicitly or implicitly attribute credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some ‘good’ (possession, characteristic, skill, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer” (Holmes 1986: 446). Compliments have the primary function of establishing or reinforcing common ground with the addressee, and a series of sub-functions which vary depending on the situational context such as thanking, greeting, or introducing to conversation (Wolfson and Manes 1980). For this reason, they can be seen as strategies for positive politeness aimed at minimizing the threat to the addressee’s positive face, i.e. the human social desire to be appreciated and approved by other people (Brown and Levinson 1987).<sup>2</sup>

### *2.1 Compliments in Naturally-Occurring Conversation*

Compliments in spontaneous conversation have been extensively studied in a wide range of languages, with English being to the fore (Wolfson and Manes 1980 on American English; Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 1989 and Lorenzo-Dus 2001 on British English; Herbert 1989 on South African English; Cordella, Large, and Pardo 1995 on Australian English; Holmes 1986 on New Zealand English).<sup>3</sup> The most substantial body of research which provides quantitative data on compliment types in American English, which is the subject of this study, was conducted by Wolfson and Manes (1980). They collected a corpus of 686 compliments used at the Universities of Virginia and Pennsylvania during a wide range of everyday interactions

<sup>2</sup> Pomerantz (1978) who first draws attention to compliments also highlights the interactional dilemma that compliments pose, where the Modesty Maxim (minimize praise of self) clashes with the Agreement Maxim (minimize disagreement between self and other).

<sup>3</sup> For studies on compliments in other languages, see Golato (2004) on German, Maiz-Arevalo (2012 and 2013) and Placencia and Lasso (1999) on Spanish, and Yuan (2002) on Chinese.

by taking down notes from naturally-occurring conversation. Nine recurrent lexico-grammatical patterns emerged, which led to the assumption that the speech act of complimenting has a formulaic nature. In particular, “NP is/looks (really) ADJ”, “I (really) like/love NP”, and “PRO is (really) a ADJ NP” account for nearly 80% of the entire corpus (Wolfson and Manes 1980: 402-404). Formulaicity also concerns semantics (*ibidem*: 400-402). Seventy percent of the adjectival compliments contain “nice”, “good”, “beautiful”, “pretty”, or “great”. Seventy-six percent of the compliments formed with a positive verb contain “love” or “like”. Regarding intensifiers, in over one third of the data only “really”, “very”, “such”, and “so” occur.

In subsequent years, the research by Wolfson and Manes (1980) came under criticism from scholars such as Boyle (2000: 27), who argues that the methodology adopted may have influenced the results, in that other “less noticeable” types of compliment may go unnoticed by observers taking down notes from naturally-occurring interactions. Boyle (2000) suggests that compliments can be separated into explicit and implicit. The explicit ones can be understood out of context and present a set of formulaic patterns, i.e. those identified by Wolfson and Manes (Boyle 2000). On the other hand, implicit compliments do not have fixed structures, and the judgment is understood by means of inference and indexical knowledge (Boyle 2000). According to Boyle (2000: 37-41), implicit compliments include either a comparison with a person that, according to the speaker, the addressee might admire (e.g. “There’s something Karen Carpenterish about your voice”, where the addressee is an amateur singer and Karen Carpenterish is a very famous one), or a reference to something that the addressee has done and which s/he is proud of (e.g. “You’ve worked with Elizabeth Taylor!”).<sup>4</sup> In addition to the implicit/explicit dichotomy, scholars such as Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1987) also propose the distinction between direct and indirect compliments, with the former attributed directly to the interlocutor (e.g. “You are really beautiful”), while the latter is attributed to a person associated with the interlocutor so that the effect reverberates metonymically on her/him (e.g. “Your husband has very good taste”).

Other categories established by Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1987) are the honest/dishonest pair, and the solicited/unsolicited pair. Honest compliments are sincere in nature, whereas dishonest ones have a subtle, “cruel” intention (“This dress really suits you. It makes you look slimmer”, i.e. the speaker is actually saying that the addressee is not slim, which is not a compliment). Unsolicited compliments are made spontaneously, while solicited ones are made when the addressee is expecting a compliment (Speaker: “Don’t you think I

<sup>4</sup> Explicit structures enhance the likelihood that the compliment is recognized as such, thanks to their conventionality (Wolfson and Manes 1980). Contrarily, implicit structures require more processing effort and contextual clues play an important role for interpretation. For this reason, implicit compliments are frequently used as a politeness strategy: they satisfy the Approbation Maxim, yet they cause no embarrassment to the addressee (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 1989).

look good?” Addressee: “You look amazing”). It should be noted that many different combinations of the types shown so far can occur. The previously mentioned dishonest compliment, for example, is also direct and implicit.<sup>5</sup>

## 2.2 Compliments in Film Dialogue

Compliments have also received some attention in the studies devoted to the realization of speech acts in film dialogue, in line with the general tendency within linguistic research to investigate multimedia language varieties, as mentioned in the introduction.

Rose analyzes a corpus of 40 American films released from the Seventies to the early Nineties. A quantitative comparison is made between the compliments identified in Rose’s corpus and the data emerging from the study by Wolfson and Manes (1980) in naturally-occurring interactions. All the nine syntactic formulas shown occur in Rose’s corpus with equal distribution, with the exception of the third pattern: “I (really) like/love NP” which is relatively infrequent (a difference of about ten points compared to spontaneous speech). However, the major clash with Wolfson and Manes’ (1980) results is that the occurrence of creative patterns – i.e. Boyle’s (2000) implicit compliments – is far higher than formulas (Rose 2001: 315-318). This is especially evident in semantics, where the five formulas account for less than half the data.

Bruti (2009) confirms the strong tendency towards creativity in film dialogue by analyzing qualitatively the realization of compliments in the Pavia Corpus of Film Dialogue, i.e. a parallel corpus of 12 British and American transcribed movies and their Italian dubbed versions released between 1999 and 2005. According to Bruti (2009: 147), the recurrence of creative patterns in complimenting can be explained as a device for developing characters throughout the plot. It should be added that a film needs to entertain the audience, and, intuitively, this is better achieved by means of creativity rather than monotony and repetitiveness.

Bruti (2009: 151-156) also examines how compliments are translated in the Italian dubbed versions of the films contained in the Pavia Corpus. She detects a tendency to translate compliments by intensifying the semantically positive load of the original utterances. Interestingly, this is identified by

<sup>5</sup> There is considerable debate among scholars about how to classify compliments according to the type of strategy with which the illocutionary point is expressed, and the terminology used is far from homogeneous. In order to simplify the question, a recent proposal is made by Bruti in line with Bączkowska and Izwaini (quoted in Bruti 2013: 37), who split compliments into the following categories:

- Direct: the compliment is attributed directly to the addressee and the judgment is incontrovertible.
- Indirect: the compliment is not attributed directly to the addressee.
- Implicit: the compliment requires an inferential effort.
- False: the compliment has a subtle illocutionary point of a different nature.

Alfonzetti (2006: 86) as a typically Italian verbal habit when a compliment is performed in naturally-occurring conversations. A prototypical example is the use of superlatives, e.g. “Vediamo questo braccialetto [lo guarda] è carinissimo”, literally “let’s see this bracelet [she looks at it] it’s the cutest” (Alfonzetti 2006: 86). However, Bruti (2009) advocates for more data in order to ascertain whether this translation strategy is adopted on a regular basis in film dubbing.

The studies on compliments mentioned so far were conducted on corpora sociolinguistically varied in terms of the age of interlocutors, while this study will focus on compliments exchanged among teenagers.

### 3. Methodology

The films under investigation are *Clueless* (1995, A. Heckerling, USA) and *Mean Girls* (2004, M. Waters, USA), hereinafter CLU and MG. The corresponding Italian dubbed versions are *Ragazze a Beverly Hills* (Dubbing: Mar International. Italian dialogues: Lorena Bertini. Dubbing director: Marco Guadagno) and *Mean Girls* (Dubbing: PUMAI Sdue. Italian dialogues: Fiamma Izzo. Dubbing director: Giuppy Izzo). These movies revolve around teenagers’ lives at high school, particularly that of the most popular girl in the school. I selected these movies with two motivations. First, they are milestones in the teen movie genre, and MG is considered a sort of up-to-date sequel to CLU (Driscoll 2011: 56-62). Many situational contexts are even similar across the two movies. In the light of this, diachronic comparisons can be construed “as like with like”.

Secondly, as mentioned in the introduction, language plays a central role in both the movies. Carmen Fought maintains that “the interesting thing about CLU 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 [...]” (quoted in Bierma 2005). In the same vein, an article recently published on *The Independent* refers to MG as a movie that “defined a whole generation – and gave it a new language” (Orr 2015). The dialogue used in the movie is made up of clever lines, and numerous words and expressions have entered the “vernacular” used in naturally-occurring conversation, with one hapax even used in the social network Twitter by the White House (*ibidem*).<sup>6</sup> In the light of this, an analysis of compliments may also have validity from a sociolinguistic point of view, i.e. to reveal how compliments are actually performed by teenagers in the 1990s and the twenty-first century.

In order to analyze compliments, the movies were fully transcribed orthographically by the author. In addition to the lines uttered by the characters, I included relevant paralinguistic behavior, kinetic features, non-linguistic

<sup>6</sup> The adjective “fetch”, coined in MG with the meaning of “cool”, was twitted by the White House on August 2013 as a caption below a photo of Obama’s dog.

contextual information, and graphic representations of linguistic signs which appear on screen (e.g. a close-up on chat messages). The internal organization of the transcripts can be seen in the examples 1-11 which will be shown in Section 4. In the left-column the names of the interlocutors are reported and comments are inserted. The central column is devoted to the English transcript, while the right-column presents the Italian version.

The analysis was structured into three main phases. The first was to detect the speech act of complimenting in the English versions. The starting point for disambiguation was the definition of compliments provided by Holmes (1986: 446) which is reported in Section 2. The second phase was to identify and discuss the distinctive features of the compliments found. As starting points for description, I used the taxonomies for compliments by Wolfson and Manes (1980), Boyle (2000), and Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1987) mentioned in Section 2.1. The third phase was to compare the compliments contained in the 1995 movie to those in the 2004 movie, and several hypotheses were made about the potential motivation behind the differences detected. The third phase was to examine and discuss how compliments are translated in Italian, in search of potentially critical issues and recurrent translational strategies.

#### *4. Results and Discussion*

The descriptive data that resulted from the analysis of the transcripts will be presented and discussed in the following sub-sections. As Table 1 shows, the total number of compliments found in the movies under analysis is 71.

Table 1. Compliments in CLU and MG

Film	Occurrence of compliments	Number of running words in the transcripts
CLU	34	11,719
MG	37	11,640
Total	71	23,359

#### *4.1 Features of Compliments*

##### *4.1.1 Formulas*

As starting points for description, Wolfson and Manes' (1980: 402-404) results on compliments in spontaneous conversation can be used. Table 2 shows the distributional patterns for compliments in Wolfson and Manes (1980) and in the movies under analysis.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> I am aware that Wolfson and Manes (1980) offer results corresponding to language use in the late Seventies, and that they focus on a different age group. However, I only use their results as a starting point of reference for a description of compliments in CLU and MG. Moreover,

Table 2. Syntactic Patterns for Complimenting<sup>8</sup>

Type (for citation in the text)	Syntactic pattern	Example	% of occurrence in spontaneous conversation (n=686)	% of oc- currence in filmic teen speech (n=71)
First	NP is/looks (really) ADJ	'You really look amazing'.	53.6	38.0
Second	I (really) like/love NP	'I love your skirt'.	16.1	9.9
Third	PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP	'That really is a good idea'.	14.9	7.0
Fourth	You V (a) really ADJ NP	'You're doing some great work here'.	3.3	-
Fifth	You V NP (really) ADV	'You did wonderful'.	2.7	2.8
Sixth	You have (a) (really) ADJ NP	'You have really good eyebrows'.	2.4	2.8
Seventh	What (a) ADJ NP!	'What a great pack- aging con- cept!'	1.6	-
Eighth	ADJ NP!	'Cool bag!'	1.6	8.5
Ninth	Isn't NP ADJ!	'Isn't it awe- some!'	1.0	-
Creative structures	Varied	'A little slice like you...'	2.8	31.0
	Total		100.0	100.0

Wolfson and Manes (1980) is the only study on American English where formulaic compliments are distinguished into sub-categories. More recent studies such as Yu (2005) distinguish between formulaic and creative compliments, but do not proceed to identify sub-types of the former.

<sup>8</sup> Legend: Really: any intensifier. Look: any sense-verb. Like and love: any verb of liking. ADJ: any semantically positive adjective. NP: A noun phrase which does not include a semantically positive adjective. PRO: you, this, that, these, or those. All verbs are cited in the present tense.

The predominant pattern is “NP is/looks (really) ADJ”, where the noun phrase often consists of the demonstrative pronoun *that* functioning as an exophoric or endophoric deictic, e.g. *That is so cute!* (CLU). All the other syntactic patterns identified by Wolfson and Manes (1980: 402-404) have at least one occurrence in the movies under analysis, with the exception of number four “PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP”, number seven “What (a) ADJ NP!”, and number nine “Isn’t NP ADJ!”. Although the data are too limited in number to assess whether or not the absence of these patterns is a coincidence, the results from the present study may serve as initial observations for further investigation. For example, it is interesting to notice that while the *What* and *Isn’t* patterns are not represented, a high frequency of informal structures such as incomplete sentences occur. In particular, ADJ NP recurs with an ellipsis of NP (‘Handsome!’ in CLU) or the addition of an intensifier (‘So adorable!’ in MG).

Subject ellipsis also occurs in several cases of the second pattern in Table 2, which is also quite recursive, e.g. ‘Love it!’ (MG). From a comparison between the two movies, the pattern “I (really) like/love NP” is mostly used in MG, while only one occurrence is found in CLU. This result triggers a curiosity about the uses of the *like/love* pattern in teen language from a diachronic point of view. Intuitively, judgments expressed with *like* and *love* have been subject to a significant exposure on the part of teenagers in the last decade thanks to the iconic 2003 commercial *I’m Lovin’ it* created by the worldwide famous fast food company McDonald’s.<sup>9</sup> This has been recently amplified thanks to the role of the Like button on which the global social network Facebook is based.<sup>10</sup> Considering this evidence, the gap between CLU and MG concerning the *like/love* pattern might be worthy of investigation with more quantitative data in order to verify whether its frequency of occurrence has increased over time.

In the movies under analysis, Wolfson and Manes’ (1980) formulaic patterns tend to acquire distinctive features, due to the presence of informal and trendy vocabulary and expressions, as exemplified in (1) and (2).

<sup>9</sup> There is a lively debate among grammarians on the frequency of use of dynamic forms of verbs generally considered to be of a stative nature. The specific case of McDonald’s slogan could be the creative flouting of a convention or the use of “love” in the progressive form with the meaning of “enjoying something”, the latter verb being normally used either statively or dynamically.

<sup>10</sup> For example, “Just click ‘like’” is the title of a recent article appeared on *The Journal of Pragmatics* by Maiz-Arevalo (2013) who surveys the realization of Spanish compliments on Facebook.

## Example 1. MG

JANIS	Why didn't they just keep home-schooling you?	Perché non hanno continuato a farti studiare a casa?
CADY	They wanted me to get socialized.	Volevano che socializzassi.
DAMIAN	Oh, you'll get socialized, all right. <b>A little slice like you...</b>	Oh, socializzerai eccome. <b>Sei una tale strafica.</b>
CADY	What are you talking about?	Di che stai parlando?
JANIS	<b>You're a regulation hottie.</b>	<b>Sei un'attizzatrice certificata.</b>
CADY	What?	Che?
DAMIAN	Own it.	Ammettilo.

Janis' second turn may be seen as a distinctive feature of the pattern "PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP". The predicative complement consists of a composite nominal where the head, *hottie*, is a deadjectival noun formed with the suffix *-ie*, meaning "a sexually attractive person" (derived from "hot", "sexually attractive"). The modifier, *regulation*, is a noun functioning as an adjective according to the expression "regulation hottie" which, as reported in the *Urban Dictionary*, indicates a girl who has the features to be attractive but nobody in her peer group has noticed her yet.<sup>11</sup>

Another creative variation occurs in ex. 2. Here the addressee, Christian, is showing his car to the speaker, Cher, who gives him a compliment on it. The pattern used may be seen as a distinctive feature of the formula "NP is (really) ADJ". Here, the adjective is a converted noun (*killer*) with the meaning of "outstanding".

## Example 2. CLU

CHER ((looking at his car))	<b>It's so killer!</b>	<b>Che macchina! È uno sballo!</b>
CHRISTIAN	Thank you. Your dad is pretty scary.	Grazie. Tuo padre è un tipaccio.

As far as semantics is concerned, a survey of adjectival choices reveals that 21 adjectives out of 45 correspond to the formulas identified by Wolfson and Manes (1980: 400-402), with *nice* and *good* being the predominant

<sup>11</sup> The *Urban Dictionary* is an online dictionary where the word entries and their definitions are entirely created by the users. It also has a section where the readers can rate the truthfulness of the definitions given by others. It is an interesting tool to collect newly-coined words and measure their diffusion, even if it cannot be considered as a definitive source of information.

ones. The rest of the adjectival compliments (24 out of 45, i.e. more than a half) contain other expressions, the majority of which are hapax legomena or are used only twice across the two movies. The most pertinent to teenage language are references to sex appeal, which is a typical subject among the young, i.e. the adjectives *hot* and *sexy*. Moreover, the adjective *cool*, which has long been acknowledged as an in-word among teenagers by scholars such as Danesi (1996), is present in CLU whereas it has no occurrences in MG. Vice versa, adjectives that occur in MG and not in CLU are *awesome* and *amazing*. A survey of the occurrences of *cool* in the speech acts other than compliments confirms the predominance of *cool* in CLU with respect to MG. This result may be worth investigating with more quantitative data in order to verify whether today the traditionally epitomized role of *cool* as the most popular word among teenagers should be disconfirmed.

In particular, among the adjectival choices used in MG, a newly-coined word is used, i.e. *fetch*. This is part of the idiolect of a character, Gretchen, who coins it as a shortening of the adjective “fetching” (“cool”). *Fetch* is also attested in the *Urban Dictionary* with a direct quotation from MG, and it receives almost 3,000 approving opinions in the section of the dictionary where readers can rate the entries. This leads to the hypothesis that *fetch* has entered as a new semantic formula among the top list adjectives used for complimenting.<sup>12</sup>

#### 4.1.2 Creative Structures

As scholars such as Boyle (2000) observed, compliments can occur in patterns other than the nine formulaic patterns. As far as CLU and MG are concerned, the row “creative structures” in Table 2 indicates that the frequency of the total number of creative compliments is only 10 points inferior to the frequency of the total number of formulas (31.0 compared to 38.1).

Creative compliments are varied in typology. Some fit well into Boyles’ (2000) categories which we have mentioned in Section 2.1. The first group includes comparisons to someone who the addressee is thought to admire. For example, in CLU, the speaker praises her friends’ wide vocabulary by comparing them to adults (*You guys talk like grown-ups!*). The second group includes comments on a performance of which the addressee is proud. For example, in CLU the addressee manages to drive well on the highway and escape potential car crashes. Her interlocutor, who is sitting next to her, gives her a compliment by saying *You did it, Dee!*. Within this group where a performance is praised, an interesting case is the compliment exemplified in (3). Here, the speaker verbally reproduces and substitutes body language.

<sup>12</sup> See footnote 6.

## Example 3. CLU

MR HALL	Any comments?	Ci sono commenti?
ELTON	My foot hurts. Can I go to the nurse?	Mi fa male un piede. Vado in infermeria?
TRAVIS	<b>Two very enthusiastic thumbs up.</b> Fine holiday fun.	<b>Molta grande entusiasticazione congratulate.</b> Buone vacanze felicitate.
AMBER	Hello? Was I the only one listening? I mean, I thought it reeked.	Oh, pronto? Visto che sono io l'unica che ascoltava, devo dire che l'ho trovato rivoltante.

In this scene, a girl has just finished delivering her speech in debate class. Travis praises her argument by uttering *Two very enthusiastic thumbs up*, followed by a good wish (*fine holiday fun*, meaning “have a nice holiday”) whose nonsense is due to the fact that the speaker is under the influence of marijuana. In this case, the compliment reproduces and substitutes the gesture of raising the thumb as a sign of approval.

The compliments mentioned so far pertain to one of the two sub-categories of implicit compliments identified by Boyle (2000), i.e. comparison, or performance. However, from a survey of compliments in CLU and MG, one does not fit well into either of Boyle's (2000) sub-categories. It is the case of *A little slice like you...* contained in ex. 1. This pattern is neither a comparison to a person admired, nor a comment on the addressee's performance. Its structure is made up of two components. The first is a noun phrase introduced with the indefinite article. The second is the adverb *like* followed by the pronoun *you* which refers to the addressee. This type of compliment is based on ellipsis. The complete pattern would be *You are a little slice and for this reason you will get socialized*. Incomplete sentences of this type may be considered a sub-category of implicit compliments.

Other particular cases which do not fit well into Boyle's (2000) sub-categories are the compliments in the form of questions. The first example is in (4), where the addressee, Cady, suddenly shows up nicely dressed for a party. Her interlocutor wants to compliment her on her look. He initially opts for an explicit compliment (*You look*), but this is immediately reformulated into an implicit compliment due to embarrassment. The speaker poses a question that attempts to mask the compliment by means of a neutral content (*New clothes?*). The compliment is recognized as the addressee accepts by thanking.

## Example 4. MG

AARON, (on seeing her all dressed up)	<b>You look... New clothes?</b>	<b>Cavolo! Come sei... vestito nuovo?</b>
CADY	Thanks.	Grazie.

The other example of implicit compliments through questions is in (5). Here, the speaker's goal is not to mask the compliment, but rather to emphasize it. In her first turn, Regina states that she needs to lose weight. By uttering *What are you talking about?*, the interlocutor pretends not to understand Regina's self-criticism. The violation of the Relevance Maxim is simulated, which emphasizes that the negativity conveyed by self-criticism has no logical association with the speaker. Moreover, it can be noted that the implicit compliment by Gretchen and the explicit one by Karen are also examples of solicited compliments. As can be seen in the left column of the transcript, the addressee shows that she is expecting a compliment through her body language.

Example 5. MG

REGINA	I really wanna lose two pounds.	Voglio proprio perdere un chilo e mezzo.
	((Everybody is silent. Regina lifts her eyebrows as if she were waiting for a positive comment))	
GRETCHEN	Oh my God, <b>what are you talking about?</b>	Oh mio Dio. <b>Ma di che cosa parli?</b>
KAREN	<b>You're so skinny.</b>	<b>Sei così magra.</b>
REGINA	Shut up.	Ah, ma smettetela.

#### 4.2 Translation Issues

From a contrastive analysis of the English and the Italian versions, I identified several factors that were at stake in the translation process. The first is the reproduction of an Italian culture-specific verbal habit (4.2.1). The second is the occurrence of mistranslations and calques (4.2.2).

##### 4.2.1 Intensification vs. Reduction Strategies

As mentioned in Section 2.2, Bruti (2009: 163) identifies the tendency for Italian translators to intensify the semantically positive load of compliments in the dubbed versions. This is consistent with a typically Italian habit of intensifying the positivity of the judgment in spontaneous conversation (Alfonzetti 2006). In MG this strategy is amply demonstrated by numerous examples. One of the most evident cases is exemplified in (6). In the English version, the compliment is expressed with a formulaic pattern (first type in Table 2) and a semantically vague adjective (*nice*). In Italian the positive load is intensified both quantitatively, through the addition of the interjection *accidenti* (pragmatically similar to “gee”), and qualitatively, through the use of a syntactically marked structure commonly used in Italian exclamations, *che bella* [*che è*] *casa tua* (literally, ‘how beautiful [is] the house of yours’).

## Example 6. MG

CADY ((entering Regina's luxurious house))	<b>Your house is really nice.</b>	<b>Accidenti. Che bella casa tua.</b>
REGINA	I know, right?	Lo so, tesoro.

Interjections are the types of lexical items most frequently added for intensification in MG. The range is varied, from taboo words such as *cazzo* and its euphemistic substitute *cavolo*, to informal terms (*però*) to small items (*oh*). Several examples of this strategy also occur in CLU. One case is observed in ex. 2, where an exclamation conveyed with a marked structure (*che macchina!*, 'what a car!') is added to the original compliment.

However, in CLU opposite strategies are also used. Explicit compliments can be translated with understated praise. One example is found in (7), where the speaker is trying to confess his love to the addressee. Here the compliment (*you know you're gorgeous, all right?*) is replaced with a more ambiguous statement (*beh, sai, non te lo devo dire io, no?*, 'well, you know, it shouldn't be me the one who says that, right?').

## Example 7. CLU

CHER	You think I'm beautiful?	Sono davvero bella?
JOSH	<b>You know you're gorgeous, all right?</b> And popular, and, uh, and... but this is not why I, you know, I come here. This is a good learning experience for me.	<b>Beh, sai, non te lo devo dire io, no?</b> Sei molto ambita e...ehm...però questo non c'entra niente. Io vengo qui ad imparare, a fare un po' d'esperienza. Capisci?

Another example is in (8), where one of the compliments (*handsome*) is substituted with a greeting (*benvenuto*, 'welcome').

## Example 8. CLU

CHER ((showing up in a short dress))	Christian.	Christian.
CHRISTIAN	Doll face.	Angelo.
CHER	<b>Handsome.</b>	<b>Benvenuto.</b>
CHRISTIAN	Stunning.	Sei accecante.

The propensity for intensification in MG and reduction of explicitness in CLU is also observed if we focus on the translation of individual lexical items. In MG the positive load of words such as *gorgeous* tends to be reinforced by means of trendy expressions typical of teenagers, i.e. *You're gorgeous* becomes *Sei un fico da paura* (similar to 'You're damn hot'), and *It's gorgeous* (referring to the ad-

dressee's hair) becomes *Pazzeschi* (similar to 'crazy'). In CLU, instead, typical words used among teenagers such as *cool* tend to be normalized rather than compensated, i.e. *Cool picture* becomes the ordinary *Bella foto* ('Nice picture'), and *That's so cool* (referring to the addressee's drawings) becomes the softer *Fantastico* ('Fantastic').

From the observations made so far, it is not possible to identify strategies adopted on a regular basis. However, a significant trend to intensify the compliment emerges when translating in Italian. This tends to be predominant in the movie of recent production with respect to the one released in the past decade. This leads to the hypothesis that standardized forms rather than markedly creative forms are more frequent in teen movies released before 2000.

#### 4.2.2 Mistranslation and Calques

In order to advocate for more inclusion of the teen movie genre in research on English/Italian dubbing, in this sub-section I point out some examples of mistranslation and calques. As mentioned in Section 1, one of the main features of audiovisual texts is the need for coherence between words and visuals. In some cases, however, the visuals may be misleading, as occurs in ex. 9. In this scene, Lawrence, a bald boy, is shaving Murray's head to make it look like his. Lawrence positively comments on this look by saying *It's the bomb*, 'it's exceptionally cool'. Murray agrees with Lawrence's positive comment by giving him a compliment (*You look good*), which is confirmed and returned (*As will you*).

In the Italian version, instead of an agreement, there is a clash between Lawrence's comment in his first turn and the following compliment-response pair. *It's the bomb* is rendered as *tipo palla da biliardo* ('like a billiard ball'). In this case, the positiveness of the original is completely lost in the Italian version and the comparison to a billiard ball may be even considered an insult. This clashes with the positiveness conveyed by the following compliment-response pair. *You look good* is rendered, via intensification (see 4.3.1), with *Sei arrapante* (literally, 'You're sexually arousing') and the addressee's response *As will you* is translated with its equivalent *Anche tu*. In light of this, the 'ball' translation seems to be incoherent. What is likely to have influenced the translator is the fact that, since Murray's head is in a close-up, its resemblance to the spherical shape of a billiard ball is extremely evident.

##### Example 9. CLU

DIONNE to CHER ((on seeing that Lawrence is shaving Murray's head))	Look! Look what he's done to his head! Can you believe this?	Cher, guarda. Guarda come si è combinato. Ti pare normale?
MURRAY ((pointing to Lawrence's shaved head))	Look at Lawrence's head. Alright?	Anche Lawrence. Hai visto?
LAWRENCE	<b>It's the bomb!</b>	<b>Tipo palla da biliardo.</b>

MURRAY to LAWRENCE	You know what I'm saying? <b>You look good.</b>	Sai che ti dico? <b>Sei arrapante.</b>
LAWRENCE	<b>As will you.</b>	<b>Anche tu, amico.</b>

Another case of a dubious translation is found in MG. The compliment in ex. 10 presents the pattern “That is (really) (a) ADJ”, which tops the syntactic preferences in spontaneous speech (Wolfson and Manes 1980: 402-404). In transferring deixis, the use of *questo* (‘this’) sounds quite unnatural to my intuition as a native speaker of Italian if compared to an alternative solution such as an adjective with no introducing items in ex. 11 (*Grande! Fantastico*, [‘You’ve been great!’ Fantastic]). The reason for the use of a demonstrative in one case and not in the other is probably linked to idiosyncratic choices of the translators, which are beyond the scope of this study.<sup>13</sup>

Example 10. MG

REGINA	Wait. What?	No, aspetta. Che cosa?
CADY	My mum taught me at home.	Mia madre mi insegnava in casa.
REGINA	No, no. I know what “home-school” is. I’m not retarded. So you’ve actually never been to a real school before? Shut up! Shut up!	Lo so che significa “studiare in casa”. Non sono ritardata. E non sei mai stata in una scuola vera prima d’ora? Ma dai! Ma dai! Ti prego!
CADY	I didn’t say anything.	Che ti devo dare?
REGINA	Home-schooled. <b>That’s really interesting.</b>	Studiare in casa. <b>Questo è molto interessante.</b>
CADY	Thanks.	Grazie.

Example 11. CLU

TAI ((handing him the book with her drawings))	Here.	Guarda.
TRAVIS	<b>Oh, wow! That’s really cool.</b>	<b>Grande! Fantastico.</b>
TAI	Thanks.	Grazie.

<sup>13</sup> Obtaining information on the motivations behind the choices adopted in dubbing is quite challenging, because many figures can intervene in the dubbing process and modify the dialogues, i.e. the author/s of the first draft, the adaptor, the actors, and the dubbing director. For a detailed account of the dubbing cycle and quality control process see Chiaro (2008). For critical insights on demonstratives in the language of film dubbing, see Pavesi (2013).

## 5. Conclusion

This study has attempted to shed light on compliments in teenage speech in film dialogue and dubbing in Italian. While compliments in film dialogue have received some attention, previous research has not looked at their realization in teenage talk. More specifically, the study aimed to identify features of the realization of compliments in English as represented in two cult teen movies released in different decades, how the formulation of compliments varies diachronically, and how compliments are translated into Italian.

The results indicate that compliments tend to occur quite frequently, both as formulaic and creative patterns. Creativity was also observed in formulaic patterns themselves, because they tend to acquire distinctive features due to the presence of informal and trendy vocabulary. From a diachronic perspective between the two movies, an unequal distribution of patterns such as "I (really) like/love NP" and the adjective *cool* emerged as a potentially interesting starting point for further studies. Finally, the strategies adopted for translating compliments were surveyed, and cases of creativity and dubious solutions were highlighted.

This study is mainly exploratory in nature and the findings should be interpreted as indicative and clearly not conclusive. Potentially interesting trends were pointed out on which it would be important to conduct further research on a larger corpus of teen filmic dialogue, also focusing on other language areas, e.g. morphology. In turn, a broader view of filmic teen speech would provide data for further comparisons with teen speech in spontaneous conversation, allowing for the measurement of media influence on everyday language, especially in relation to the translational routines such as calques to which film viewers are exposed.

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