

# Censorship or Profit? The Manipulation of Dialogue in Dubbed Youth Films

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Article abstract

Youth films are a field of special interest to AVT scholars due to the genre's propensity for potentially disturbing content, both thematic and linguistic. In youth films the depiction of teenage sexuality, violence, crime and drug consumption often combines with strong language. Both represent problematic areas for the dubbing translators, who often act as censorial agents under the pressure of a number of factors, including target cultural norms and values as well as local regulations. Existing work on censorship in AVT has showed that potentially disturbing elements tend to be toned down, if not censored, in dubbed films. Based on both textual analysis and archival research, this study provides further evidence to previous research, while also showing the role of distribution companies in deciding the level of manipulation imposed on the film dialogue.

# MANIPULATING FOR DIFFERENT AUDIENCES

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## Censorship or Profit? The Manipulation of Dialogue in Dubbed Youth Films

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### RÉSUMÉ

Ce qui rend les films sur la jeunesse un domaine de recherche intéressant pour les études de la traduction audiovisuelle, c'est leur propension à des contenus potentiellement perturbants. Dans ces films, la représentation de thèmes comme la sexualité, la violence, la criminalité et la consommation de drogue se combine souvent avec un langage vulgaire. Ce sont là des domaines problématiques pour les traducteurs audiovisuels, qui souvent se comportent comme des agents de la censure, sous la pression de différents facteurs – les normes et les valeurs de la culture visée, aussi bien que la réglementation locale. Les études courantes au sujet de la censure dans la traduction audiovisuelle ont montré que les éléments potentiellement perturbants tendent à être mitigés, ou même censurés, dans les films doublés. En combinant l'analyse textuelle et la recherche dans les archives, cet article confirme les conclusions des études précédentes. Il montre au même temps que les sociétés de distribution et leurs stratégies de marketing jouent un rôle important pour décider le niveau de manipulation des dialogues dans le doublage.

### ABSTRACT

Youth films are a field of special interest to AVT scholars due to the genre's propensity for potentially disturbing content, both thematic and linguistic. In youth films the depiction of teenage sexuality, violence, crime and drug consumption often combines with strong language. Both represent problematic areas for the dubbing translators, who often act as censorial agents under the pressure of a number of factors, including target cultural norms and values as well as local regulations. Existing work on censorship in AVT has showed that potentially disturbing elements tend to be toned down, if not censored, in dubbed films. Based on both textual analysis and archival research, this study provides further evidence to previous research, while also showing the role of distribution companies in deciding the level of manipulation imposed on the film dialogue.

### MOTS-CLÉS/KEYWORDS

cinéma pour la jeunesse, sous-titrage, manipulation, censure, Italie  
youth films, dubbing, manipulation, censorship, Italy

### 1. Youth films and AVT

Youth films are a research field of special interest to audiovisual translation (AVT) scholars. Since World War II, youth has been a hot item in Western countries. Over time, its cultural representation has proven to be “a key indicator of the state of the

nation,” whereby youth “is expected to reflect the cycle of booms and troughs in the economy; shifts in cultural values over sexuality, morality, and family life; and changes in class relations, concepts of nationhood, and in occupational structures” (Griffin 1993: 17). Acting as a mirror to a society’s hopes and anxieties, youth has soon become a privileged target of media representation and “exploitation” (Doherty 2002). American cinema’s “cultural fascination with stories about and images of young people” (Shary 2003: 490) has had an undoubtable impact on European cultures (Biltereyst 2007), where the influence of Hollywood imagery has always been paramount. However, differences in the way juvenile cultures are represented locally make youth films an area particularly exposed to ideological manipulation (Bianchi 2008: 184). Youth films typically address sensitive issues such as sexuality, violence, crime and the use of drugs. Moreover, the depiction of potentially disturbing situations is consistent with the language employed to characterize the young, which involves heavy use of slang, swearing, and taboo words in the dialogue.

At the same time, youth films are to be regarded as the profitable products of an industry catering to a specific and loyal public, which explains Hollywood’s long-standing “courtship of the teenage audience” (Doherty 2002: 188). As Tropiano (2006: 13) remarks, “[w]hile teen films certainly have artistic merit and effectively convey a social message, they are still produced for the primary purpose of making profit.” The combination and interconnection of all the above mentioned elements will thus have to be taken into account in order to contextualize and explain the strategies adopted by dubbing translators, who are expected to cater to a number of factors, namely the source text, the target audience, the censors and the distributors. Since the latter are likely to be concerned more with profit than with authorial respect, considerations regarding marketing strategies and audience appeal may be conclusive in deciding the adaptation strategies adopted by the dubbing translators.

When it comes to linguistic transfer, youth films appear to be a privileged site of censorship and manipulation. Because of their disturbing potential, youth films are likely to attract censorial intervention on the part of official censorship and, consequently, or perhaps preventively, to encourage a certain degree of manipulation on the part of the dubbing translators. Generally speaking, “the detectable policy with fiction products [in Italy] is consistently one of ‘toning down,’ in order to dilute the impact of potentially offensive themes” (Ranzato 2009: 44). With youth films, this trend seems to be particularly evident, as policies and cultures concerning teenagers and young people in general often differ strikingly from country to country in terms of accepted mores and morals. The dubbing translators are thus faced with the difficult task of adapting (which often means redesigning, retargeting and ultimately rewriting) a product for a special local audience under the constraints of national regulations, accepted moral codes and directions imposed by the commissioners.

Films are often regarded by film majors and distribution companies more as marketable products than as authorial creations. Therefore, the idea that “the audiovisual industry takes the public into greater account than the author himself” (Ranzato 2009: 46) may be not too far from the truth. Recent research has argued that the manipulation, dilution, censoring or “cleansing” (as it were) of all such items that may become disturbing to the intended audience has been the norm in Italian dubbing of feature films and is still particularly evident in the adaptation of imported

TV programmes.<sup>1</sup> It has also been suggested that economic and marketing factors have an impact on the way a film is translated and adapted, thus leaving “little room to considerations about a respectful treatment of the original product” (Bucaria 2007: 251). The distributors may take “a deliberate decision on the ‘direction’ the work should take in order to influence the way it [is] received and enjoyed by the public” (Ranzato 2009: 46). It is precisely the direction distributors impose on the film that leads to the most striking examples of manipulation.

To date, a definition of the norms which govern the translation of imported youth films in general, and in the case of Italy in particular, is still to be outlined. The aim of this paper is thus to take a first step towards that goal. The analysis has been conducted on three popular US films produced during the 1970s and their respective Italian dubbed versions: *American Graffiti* (1973),<sup>2</sup> *The Lords of Flatbush* (1974),<sup>3</sup> and *Grease* (1978).<sup>4</sup> All these films did extremely well at the box office and have had an enduring impact on popular imagery and culture.

This paper will generally address the way youth language and culture are conveyed in dubbing. More specifically, it will tackle some issues that appear of particular interest from the perspective of AVT. Some of the questions that will be addressed are: How are sensitive subjects such as swearing, blasphemy, violence, crime and sexual references handled in translation? Given the amount of potentially disturbing references to adolescent sexuality, will some kind of manipulation or censorship be applied in the target text? The study of the strategies used in adapting youth films will also contribute to addressing more general questions regarding AVT: How can we distinguish censorial intervention from textual manipulation triggered by marketing strategies? What is the role of commissioners in the way a film is adapted by means of dubbing? Is the idea of translators anticipating censorial response still valid in light of the findings achieved through archival research? How important are translators’ self-censorship and concern with protecting the audience? How much of the manipulative intervention depends on genre? And finally, what is the role of film directors in deciding the adaptation strategies adopted and in directing the reception of their work abroad?

In the pages that follow, I will try to provide an answer to the questions posed above by means of a comparative textual analysis of both original and dubbed dialogue exchanges. The discussion will be supported by information drawn from archival material. For this purpose, part of the research has been carried out on original documents held at the archive of the Bureau for Cinematographic Revision (BCR) at the Direzione Generale per il Cinema in Rome (see Acknowledgements). Documentary material will help us understand the actual role of official censorship on the reception of imported films as well as the effects of distributors’ decisions.

The analysis will illustrate and discuss the various forms of text manipulation applied to dubbed youth films of the 1970s. Special attention will be paid to the linguistic and thematic areas that become more vulnerable in the process of translation:

- (a) adolescent sexuality;
- (b) youth delinquency;
- (c) strong language.

I will argue that, along with censorial interventions ascribable to the need to comply with national regulations or audience sensitivity, other factors are to be taken into

account when dealing with film dialogue manipulation: namely film genre, marketing strategies (which may lead to genre relocation) and degree of authorial control.

## 2. Youth films in the 1970s: themes, language and audience design

The recognition of the youth film as a genre is fairly recent (Shary 2003: 493). Variably referred to by film scholars as either *teen films*, *teen movies*, *juve films*, or *teenpics*, youth films are intended here as films “about the youth experience” (Shary 2003: 495), having as protagonists young people between the ages of twelve and twenty. The range of years includes the actual teen years as well as pre- and post-adolescence.

The Hollywood industry has targeted youth both as an object of representation and as an audience (Considine 1985; Lewis 1992; Doherty 2002; Shary 2002; 2003; Tropiano 2006; Driscoll 2011). Undoubtedly, the *juvenilization* of Hollywood films after World War II (Doherty 2002) has gone hand in hand with the production of films especially targeted at a young audience. Started in the 1950s with James Dean’s archetypal performance in *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray 1955), US film industry’s exploitation of the youth market flourished in the 1960s and culminated in the 1970s, when teen films became “the most marketable of movie commodities” (Doherty 2002: 188). Indeed, the 1970s witnessed a “voluminous outpouring of films directed toward and featuring teens” (Shary 2003: 502), which anticipated the explosion of the genre in the 1980s. However, in order to appeal to the changing youth market and ensure profits, Hollywood had to revise its formulas and schemes through a process of “generic expansion” (Shary 2003: 502), which entailed an updating and widening of the range of characters, situations, and themes addressed.

The basic ingredients of 1970s youth blockbusters were music, sex, and style, as epitomized by films such as *Saturday Night Fever* (1977)<sup>5</sup> and *Grease*, which made John Travolta an icon of the time. Although the subjects of love, premarital sex, and teenage marriage had been tackled by several films in the 1950s (Tropiano 2006: 73), 1970s youth films brought about a “new abundance of teen sexuality onscreen” (Shary 2003: 503). Themes such as the discovery of sex, the losing of one’s virginity and the handling of pregnancy were addressed quite regularly.

In these films, sex combined with music, but also with nostalgia. Dominated by juvenile delinquency in the 1950s, as exemplified by *The Wild One* (1953)<sup>6</sup> and *Blackboard Jungle* (1955),<sup>7</sup> the youth-oriented film format in the 1970s offered its audience a thematic updating, while at the same time depicting “a more redemptive image of teen conditions in the past” (Shary 2005: 45). *American Graffiti*, for instance, was meant “to celebrate the supposed nostalgia of an era that was only eleven years earlier, before the fun of the 1950s faded into the cynicism of the 1960s” (Shary 2005: 46), and *Grease* “also hearkened back to the 1950s, yet avoided confronting the teen troubles that were so prevalent in films from that era” (Shary 2006: 208).

As far as language is concerned, Doherty explains that:

Hollywood’s teen-targeted material has mainly meant teen protagonists coping with teen dilemmas in a teen milieu. The *sine qua non* is a certain verisimilitude in the stylistic expressions and cultural rites of the moment, notably the inside-dope details of vernacular, fashion, and music. (Doherty 2002: 207)

In this paper I will argue that, on the whole, the sociolinguistic variation is preserved in the transposition into Italian by means of dubbing, mostly through the use of

markers of orality, age-specific lexical items, slang and a special acting style aimed at mimicking youth-speak, whereas other constituting features of 1970s teen films, both linguistic and thematic, tend to be altered. My hypothesis is that neither official censorship nor translators' self-censorship suffice to explain the extensive manipulation that some of the analysed films underwent when dubbed into Italian.<sup>8</sup>

### 3. The target culture context: Italian film censorship and legislation regarding minors

Film screening and distribution is regulated in Italy by law 161/62, which states that any public screening of films must be subject to the release of a special certificate called *nulla osta*. The certificate is granted by the Ministry of Italian Performing Arts, in accordance with the opinion of the Revision Commission that is in charge of the examination and rating of films. When the film is submitted for approval, the complete translated dialogue list is also handed in.

Italian film rating is articulated into four categories:

- a) suitable for all;
- b) unsuitable for under 14;
- c) unsuitable for under 18;
- d) unsuitable for all.

If a film is rated as unsuitable for minors, the producer or the distributor may resubmit the work to the Commission in order to get a more favourable classification, provided that the film has been modified as regards title, scenes or dialogue exchanges. As a result, it is possible for different (cut and uncut) versions of the same film to circulate within the country (EU Final Report 2003: 184).

According to D.P.R. No. 2029/63, a film is defined as unsuitable for minors when it contains "vulgar content," "induction to immoral behaviour," "erotic or violent scenes," "scenes dealing with the use of drugs," "incitation to hate and revenge and presentation of crimes inducing to imitation or suggestive presentation of suicide" (EU Final Report 2003: 185). A different age rating is attributed to the film depending on the presence and gravity of all such elements. The same age ratings apply to television, theatrical releases, video and DVD distribution.

Film production and distribution companies can appeal for changes in classification. In order to obtain a new certificate, a new version of the film must be submitted. Changes on the film are carried out by means of cuts, which may consist in both scene eliminations and so called *alleggerimenti*, i.e. omission of lines of dialogue that may be disturbing to minors.

That imported cinema has always been the subject of manipulation is a well known fact. Cutting of film footage is one way, the other being dubbing, which is the most invisible and subtle form of censorship that was current in Italy since the beginning of the sound era. In the past, censoring by means of dubbing has often been imposed on imported films by political, religious and moral institutions (Billiani 2006; Mereu 2012); in more recent times, dialogue manipulation has been used as a viable tool for preventing age restrictions, so as to grant foreign films the widest possible circulation on screen. As Chiaro (2007) suggests, it does not seem unlikely that producers and distribution companies may require those involved in the dubbing process to tone down, dilute and even censor taboo language and themes in order to

ensure the film a favourable classification and avoid negative audience reactions. One of the results of the Italian regulation is that films intended for a wide audience are likely to undergo extensive censoring in order to be “expurgated of all possibly supposedly disturbing elements” (Bucaria 2007: 251) so as to make them suitable for unlimited screening.

#### 4. Translating teens on screen: *American Graffiti* (1973), *Grease* (1978), *The Lords of Flatbush* (1974)

US youth films of the 1970s typically recounted coming of age stories set in “the good old days,” either the 1950s or the early 1960s. Movies such as *American Graffiti*, *The Lords of Flatbush*, and *Grease* depicted teenagers and addressed adolescence related themes (love, sex, friendship), high school life, and male gangs, while juvenile delinquency, that had been a major concern in youth films of the 1950s, remained somewhat in the background.

##### 4.1. *Inventing youth-speak: manipulation and creativity in American Graffiti*

*American Graffiti* ushered in the series of nostalgic teen movies which dominated the movie market until the late 1970s. The film “marked the beginning of an all-out fifties/early sixties revival” (Tropiano 2006: 117), whose basic ingredients were rock’n roll, high-school life, teenage friendship, love and sexuality. With a cast of unknown actors and an appealing soundtrack, this low budget film unexpectedly turned out to be extremely successful at the box-office and “proved that a film about teenagers could have a wide audience appeal” (Tropiano 2006: 117).

Rated Parental Guidance Suggested (PG) in the US for language and some sexuality, this motion picture was classified as “suitable for all” by the Italian film commission. The strategy adopted by the dubbers was to preserve the linguistic colour of youth-speak created in the original dialogue by means of vintage youth slang:

- (1) Don’t you think the Beach Boys are boss?  
*Non trovi che i Beach Boys sono bestiali?*  
 [Don’t you think that the Beach Boys are cool?]  
 (*American Graffiti* 1973; *American Graffiti* 1973; my back-translation)
- (2) It’s just that she was with a really cute guy in a really boss car.  
*Solo che lei stava con un tizio fichissimo in una macchina schiantosa.*  
 [It’s just that she was with a really cool guy in a really neat car.]  
 (*American Graffiti* 1973; *American Graffiti* 1973; my back-translation)
- (3) What a bitchin’ babe!  
*Che bionda bestialissima!*  
 [What a sexy blonde!]  
 (*American Graffiti* 1973; *American Graffiti* 1973; my back-translation)

Creative solutions were often adopted as a compensatory strategy for losses in register variation, as in the following examples:

- (4) Then keep your smart-ass mouth shut.  
*Allora mettiti la chiusura lampo alla bocca.*  
 [Then zip up your mouth.]  
 (*American Graffiti* 1973; *American Graffiti* 1973; my back-translation)



- (5) And don't take all day drinkin' it. Please.  
*Non ci mettere un anno luce a berla, eh?*  
 [Don't take a light year drinking it. Okay?]  
 (American Graffiti 1973; American Graffiti 1973; my back-translation)
- (6) Tell him I aim to blow his ass right off the road.  
*E che se accetta la sfida gli faccio fare i gargarismi di polvere.*  
 [And if he takes up the challenge I'll make him gargle dust.]  
 (American Graffiti 1973; American Graffiti 1973; my back-translation)

On the whole, while showing a tendency toward the dilution of swearing and taboo words, the target language version manages to convey the polyphony of the youth voice by means of creative translation.

Still, censorial interventions are detectable throughout the dubbed film. Obviously enough, the area that proves most vulnerable to censoring is sexuality, as exemplified by the following exchange of dialogue:

- (7) Steve: We're still gonna be goin' together, but we can date other people.  
*Stiamo ancora insieme, ma possiamo uscire con chi ci pare.*  
 [We're still going together, but we can date whoever we want.]  
 Eddie: And screw around. I know. Hey, I hear college girls really put out.  
*A limonare, eh? Si sa. Quelle del college hanno il pomicio facile.*  
 [And pet, yeah? I know. College girls are easy-petting.]  
 (American Graffiti 1973; American Graffiti 1973; my back-translation)

Quite interestingly, the translated script that was submitted to the Revision Commission contains a literal rendering of obscenities: *A scopazzare, eh? Si sa/ Lo so. Le ragazze del college la danno facile* [*And screw around. I know. College girls really put out*], which is a far more explicit rendering of the source text (BCR, file 64479: 20). The decision to dilute the obscene terms contained in the dialogue exchanges must thus have been taken at the moment of recording the dubbed soundtrack.

A similar case is the example below, where the line containing an explicit erotic offer made to one of the protagonists by a young waitress is subject to radical rewriting thanks to the speaker being off camera:

- (8) Budda: Listen. I'm off in an hour, and I thought you'd maybe like to come over.  
*Ehi, senti, tra un'ora smonto, e... se ti facesse piacere venire da me...*  
 [Hey, listen. I'm off in an hour, and...if you'd like to come to my place...]  
 Steve: I don't know.  
*Non lo so.*  
 [I don't know.]  
 Budda: Well, why not? This time it'd just be for fun. Okay?  
*Perché no? [off-camera] Non ci siamo mai conosciuti bene a scuola... E tu parti domani... [medium close up] Non mi fraintendere. [off-camera] Se pensi che voglia incastrarti... Visto che parti, è chiaro. Non ho secondi fini. Okay?*  
 [Why not? We never had a chance to know each other well at school... And you're leaving tomorrow... Don't take it wrong... I don't want to trap you into a relationship... Since you are leaving, it is quite clear that I have no hidden purpose. Okay?]  
 (American Graffiti 1973; American Graffiti 1973; my back-translation)



Special attention is paid to the depiction of authority. In the following example, for instance, the line uttered by a school teacher is expurgated of any sexual allusion:

- (9) Mr. Wolfe: If old Mr. Simpson came here and saw me dancing with one of you sexy little... excuse me... one of you young ladies, he'd have my rear end.  
*Se capitasse qui il preside e mi vedesse ballare con una sciacquetta sai... No, no, no. Volevo dire, con una studentessa... mi prenderebbe a sculacciate.*  
 [If the headmaster were here and saw me dancing with a flighty girl... No, no, no. I mean, with a student... he'd give me a spanking.]  
 (American Graffiti 1973; American Graffiti 1973; my back-translation)

Here, the word *sexy* is replaced by the non-sexually connoted *sciacquetta* [*flighty girl*], so as to conceal the linguistic traces of the man's sexual appetite. His use of colloquialisms evidently perceived as inappropriate to his status is also censored by suppressing the closing remark, "he'd have my rear end." Indeed, the toning down of strong language is the norm, as evidenced by the stretches of dialogue that follow:

- (10) Budda: All right, all right, you old fart! Relax!  
*Va bene. Va bene. Ho capito. Calmati.*  
 [All right. All right. I got it. Relax!]  
 John: You probably think you're a big shot going off like this. But you're still a punk!  
*Eh, eh. Sì. Lo so, lo so. Tu magari pensi di essere chissà chi partendo così. Ma resti sempre quello che sei.*  
 [Yes, I know. You probably think you're a big deal going off like this. But you will always be what you are.]  
 (American Graffiti 1973; American Graffiti 1973; my back-translation)

The latter is a case of euphemistic rendering, which contrasts with the explicit translation offered by the translated script in the Revision Commission file (BCR, file 64479: 100): resti sempre una merda! / sei sempre un bamboccio! / un mediocre! [*You'll always be a shit / a jerk / a mediocrity*].

The dialogue analysis has revealed that the Italian adaptors found themselves at pains in dealing with the mores of American teenagers and thus resorted to textual manipulation in order to avoid potentially disturbing elements. We do not know whether this strategy was decided by the dubbers themselves or encouraged by the distributor, perhaps at the suggestion of the Revision Commission. What seems clear is that the Italian audience was (and still is) exposed to a far more innocent portrayal of teenagers than was its US counterpart.

#### 4.2. Selling the clean teen: censoring strategies in the Italian dubbing of *Grease*

The motion picture *Grease* can be regarded as the culmination of the 1950s retro-craze initiated by *American Graffiti*. In the US, this high school musical was rated PG-13 for sexual content, teen smoking and drinking, and language. These very items were the target of censorial intervention on the part of the Italian dubbing translators,

who apparently succeeded in cleaning the story of its potentially disturbing elements, thus allowing the film to obtain a “suitable for all” certificate from the Revision Commission.

When comparing the original and the dubbed versions, the presence of extensive dialogue manipulation is immediately detectable. As expected, one of the sensitive areas targeted by censorial intervention is strong language. Linguistic crudity is heavily mitigated, as exemplified by the word *carcass* used by Mutzie to refer to Sonny’s mother, which is deleted in translation:

- (11) Mutzie: Oh! Your old lady dragged her carcass out of bed for you?  
*Senti un po'. La vecchia si è trascinata fuori dal letto per cucinare.*  
 [Listen a bit. Your old lady dragged herself out of bed to cook.]  
 (Grease 1978; Grease Brillantina 1978; my back-translation)

Swearing and taboo words abounding in the boys’ speech are also diluted, as in the case of Sonny’s confrontation with Mrs McGee, head of Rydell High School:

- (12) Sonny: I just ain’t gonna take any of her crap. That’s all. I don’t take no crap from nobody.  
*Niente. Non mi faccio mettere i piedi in testa. Quest’anno le rispondo per le rime.*  
 [Nothing. I won’t let her push me around. This year I’m gonna fight fire with fire.]  
 (Grease 1978; Grease Brillantina 1978; my back-translation)

This line is followed in the original version by a rather strong insult in Italian, which is also toned down in the Italian version:

- (13) Sonny: *Brutta puttana.* [Ugly bitch!]  
*Ma guarda sta’ vecchia befana.*  
 [You old hag!]  
 (Grease 1978; Grease Brillantina 1978; my back-translation)

References to teenage sexual activity are kept as vague as possible. In the scene where Danny is asked by his friends about his summer love story, his allusion to sex is left intentionally vague through the suppression of the word *horny*:

- (14) Danny: Come on, you don’t want to hear all the horny details.  
*Oh, andiamo ragazzi, non vorrete mica sapere tutti i particolari.*  
 [Oh, come on boys, you don’t want to hear all the details.]  
 (Grease 1978; Grease Brillantina 1978; my back-translation)

Quite similarly, Jan’s allusion to Marty’s lost virginity is not clearly reflected in the Italian dubbed version:

- (15) Marty: Here, Frenchy, you can use my virgin pin.  
*Frenchy, usa la mia spillina d’oro.*  
 [Frenchy, you can use my golden pin.]  
 Jan: It’s nice to know it’s good for somethin’.  
*Ecco, meglio di così non la potevi inaugurare.*  
 [Here, that’s the best way to start using it.]  
 (Grease 1978; Grease Brillantina 1978; my back-translation)

Female characters in the film are portrayed as either good or bad girls, with Sandy playing the innocent, romantic teen and tough-talking Rizzo acting as the sexually active and linguistically unrestrained adolescent. Translational choices are sensitive to gender role and a clear tendency towards cleansing the girls' speech can indeed be detected in the dubbed version. In the sleep-over scene, the girls drink alcohol, smoke and talk about boys. The Italian rendering is clearly aimed at toning down linguistic roughness, as in the following example:

- (16) Jan: What's wrong? We don't got cooties.  
*Su, coraggio, mica ci sbronziamo.*  
 [Oh, come on. We're not getting drunk.]  
 (Grease 1978; Grease Brillantina 1978; my back-translation)

The character of Rizzo is especially subject to censorial treatment. In the translated dialogue, her uninhibited behaviour and use of rough language are weakened in a number of ways, even though acting style and voice tone are used as a compensatory strategy. By replacing declarative with interrogative mode in the following line, the translation contributes to defuse the sexual innuendo in the girl's words:

- (17) Rizzo: You got a lot to offer a girl.  
*Hai qualcosa da offrire a una ragazza?*  
 [Have you got something to offer to a girl?]  
 Kenickie: Yeah, you know it.  
*Sì, proprio così.*  
 [Yes, I do.]  
 (Grease 1978; Grease Brillantina 1978; my back-translation)

Euphemism is another favourite strategy to achieve the same goal. Rizzo's sarcastic allusion to masturbation in an exchange with Danny is rendered by selecting a much less vulgar euphemism, which allows for lip synchronisation:

- (18) Rizzo: Where are you going, to flog your log?  
*Ti vai a fare un solitario?*  
 [Are you going to play a solitaire game?]  
 (Grease 1978; Grease Brillantina 1978; my back-translation)

Interestingly enough, the translated script in the Revision Commission file (BRC, file 3022: 36) contains an uncensored, straight-forward rendering of the sentence: Dove vai? A farti una pagnetta? [*Where are you going, to give yourself a hand-job?*]. A similar case in point is Rizzo's outspoken reference to group sex, where the need for lip sync results in censorial manipulation by means of euphemistic attenuation:

- (19) Rizzo: OK. What do you guys think this is? A gangbang?  
*Ehi, ragazzi, credete che sia venuta per fare una scampagnata?*  
 [Hey, boys, do you think I've just come for a picnic?]  
 (Grease 1978; Grease Brillantina 1978; my back-translation)

The strategy of keeping things as vague as possible is also apparent in the rendering of Rizzo's comment about the hickeys given by her boyfriend Kenickie. The word

*hickeys* is carefully avoided in the translated dialogue and the rather uncomfortable image of the *leper* is erased, the word being replaced by the less negatively charged *measles*:

- (20) Rizzo: I got so many hickeys, people will think I'm a leper.  
*Ho tanti segni rossi che penseranno che m'è venuto il morbillo.*  
 [I've got so many red marks that they'll think I've got measles.]  
 (*Grease* 1978; *Grease Brillantina* 1978; my back-translation)

Given the phonological similarities between the word *leper* and its Italian equivalents (name *lebbra*, adjective *lebbrosa*), lip synchrony cannot be identified as the main reason behind the dubbers' choice. In fact, the solution adopted in the translated script that was submitted to the Revision Commission (BRC, file 3022: 55) was much closer to the original dialogue: Ho tanti segni rossi che penseranno che sono lebbrosa [*I've got so many red marks that they'll think I'm a leper*]. It is clear enough that lexical substitutions of this kind were inspired by considerations other than technical constraints.

As opposed to Rizzo, Sandy is portrayed in the film as the pure, innocent girl and this aspect of her character is further emphasised in the dubbed version, as on this occasion where sexual allusions are blurred and made as vague as possible:

- (21) Sandy: I wish I'd never *laid eyes on you!* [...] *Vorrei non averti mai incontrato!* [...] [I wish I never met you! [...]]  
 Mutzie: So she *laid* her eyes on you, huh, Zuko? *E così vi siete incontrati, eh, Zucco?* [So you met, eh, Zuko?]  
 Budda: I bet that's not all she's *laid* on him. *Si sarà offesa perché non le ha dato la rivincita.* [She must be upset because you didn't agree to a return match.]  
 (*Grease* 1978; *Grease Brillantina* 1978; my back-translation)

As the above examples illustrate, the censorial treatment of sexuality and potentially disturbing elements is consistent throughout the dubbed film. Curiously enough, the translated script that was submitted to the Revision Commission did not contain all of such deletions. So, why were the dialogue exchanges so extensively and consistently manipulated in the end?

My hypothesis is that the reasons behind the censoring of the original dialogue are not to be found in the constraints specific to the medium, but are rather to be ascribed to the distribution company, that normally has the last word on the production process and gives instructions to the dubbing translators. The purpose for the censoring was clearly to ensure the film universal acceptance and success. The filter of dubbing allowed for the film to be received as a modern tale about growing up, suitable for any type of audience. The toning down of sexual references and allusions was clearly the result of a conscious effort on the part of the adaptors, who were probably required to sterilise the potentially disturbing elements contained in the original translated script. This finds confirmation in the available archival material, which seems to suggest that the censorial interventions were not carried out in order to overcome the constraints of official censorship, as the Revision Commission appar-

ently approved of a translated script which is more loyal to the source text than the dubbed soundtrack. This seems to suggest that further censoring took place during the process of dubbing.

The reasons behind the censorial interventions operated on a teenage cult film such as *Grease* can thus be identified in the following:

- a) to present the film as a clean teen romance;
- b) to provide an idealised and universally acceptable portrayal of teenage life, which entailed mitigating or suppressing all potentially disturbing elements;
- c) to avoid age restriction and make the film a palatable product for all types of audience, thus ensuring popularity and, most importantly, large profits.

#### **4.3. Manipulation as commercial operation: dubbing *The Lords of Flatbush in the age of Happy Days***

*The Lords of Flatbush* (1974) is a nostalgic drama set in 1958 Brooklyn, having as protagonists a group of leather-jacketed young men in transition from teenagers to grown-ups. Known mainly for being the film debut of Henry Winkler, who was to become the icon of the popular sitcom *Happy Days* (1974-1984),<sup>9</sup> this unpretentious film capitalized on the legacy of *American Graffiti* and, most prominently, on the success of *Grease* the musical, offering an interesting mix of their main ingredients: rock-'n-roll music, high-school setting, teenagers' early experiences with sex and love, and greaser gangs.

A sense of disillusion and uncertainty permeates the story, which features rough, cynical, unredeeming characters who seem to have no sense of direction or motivation. Interestingly, this aspect was completely obliterated in the Italian dubbed version, which appeared long after the film's original release, namely in 1979, and resulted in a totally different product. A comparison of the original and the dubbed versions reveals that the movie was arbitrarily adapted for the Italian distribution by means of complex text replacements and extensive rewriting, which ultimately resulted in a substantially different script.

Due to sexual content and strong language, the changes carried out on the Italian dubbed version allowed possible censorial restrictions to be avoided and granted the film a "suitable for all" rating. And yet, the factor that most prominently influenced the dubbed version was the distributor's marketing strategy, which consisted in creating an explicit connection with blockbuster *American Graffiti* and, most prominently, the popular TV series *Happy Days*. This double legacy is apparent in the story of the film title. Originally distributed in the Italian cinemas under the title *Happy Days – La banda dei fiori di pesco* 1979 [*Happy days – The gang of peach flowers*], the film was renamed *Brooklyn Graffiti* for its 1984 re-release (BRC, file 73287). The production company decided to make the link with the *Happy Days* series even more apparent by having Butchey named Fonzie in the dubbed version. Fonzie was the name of the character played by Henry Winkler in the US sitcom, which was first aired on Italian TV at the end of 1977, soon becoming extremely popular among the young.

One of the most apparent differences between original and dubbed versions consists in the insertion of a narrator's voice-off, naturally in the person of Fonzie. His monologues have a fundamental function, setting the tone of the film as truly comedic, as exemplified by the opening one:

- (22) Eravamo quattro amiconi inseparabili in quegli ultimi mesi di scuola. Stanley, Chico, Wimpy ed io, Arturo Fonzarelli, detto Fonzie. Ripetevamo quella classe per la sesta volta perché, più che la grammatica, ci piacevano le pupe. Per noi giuggioloni quelli erano sempre happy days, allegri, spensierati.  
[We were four inseparable mates in those last months of the school year. Stanley, Chico, Wimpy and I, Arturo Fonzarelli, aka Fonzie. We were repeating that year for the sixth time because we liked chicks more than grammar. For boobies like us, those were happy days: cheerful and carefree.]

(*The Lords of Flatbush* 1974; *Happy Days – La banda dei fiori di pesco* 1979; my back-translation)

With the catch-phrase “Happy Days” repeated throughout the film as a mantra, the intertextual reference to the TV series could not have been made more evident.

Arbitrary changes were made to the script which aimed at contextualizing and emphasizing such connection. Furthermore, script revisions were done in order to impose a comedic tone on the dialogue exchanges. Extensive rewriting allows for the insertion of farce elements that were absent in the original script, as when fire drills are replaced by a composition about sexual education in schools. Lines containing gross humour were added, as exemplified by the following stretch of dialogue:

- (23) Teacher: I want you to put your last name first, and then your first name last at the top followed by today's date and the period that you are here. Which, for your information, is homeroom. Now, I'll be... Class! I'll be right back, so please have those sheets filled out.

*Mi raccomando. Non fate gli spiritosi scrivendo parolacce o, quel che è peggio, riempiendo i fogli di disegni pornografici. Ricordate. L'educazione sessuale... L'educazione sessuale non va presa sotto gamba.*

[Please, don't try to be funny by writing bad words or filling those sheets with obscene drawings, which would be even worse. Remember: sexual education... Don't make light of sexual education (lit. don't put sexual education under your legs).]

Student: She believed me! That's it, get the blackboard.

*In mezzo sì, però. Chi non ama il sesso è un fesso!*

[You can put it between them, though. If you don't love sex, you're a jerk!]

(*The Lords of Flatbush* 1974; *Happy Days – La banda dei fiori di pesco* 1979; my back-translation)

On the contrary, mitigation or radical rewriting are imposed on the text when adolescent sexuality comes into the picture. In the following example, for instance, manipulation is resorted to in order to mitigate the idea of Chico taking Annie out with the sole purpose of having sex with her. Changes are done by taking advantage of off-camera shots:

- (24) Annie: Chico, this is the outfit I was telling you about this afternoon.

*Chico, quando mi hai telefonato ho pensato a un bidone.*

[Chico, when you rang I thought it was for standing me up.]

Chico: Yeah.

*Perché?*

[Why?]

Annie: I got it special, just for you. Give me a hand with the blanket.  
*Perché sei speciale. Ecco perché.*  
 [Because you're special. That's why.]

Chico: Sure.  
*Speciale? Non me l'ha mai detto nessuno.*  
 [Special? Nobody ever told me that.]

Annie: You know, Chico? I don't know why I came here tonight. Oh, take your boots off and put them in the corner. No, really, I thought you were taking me out for a change. I got all dressed up.  
*Sai, Chico? Sono felice di stare qui stanotte. Accanto a te mi sento terribilmente donna. Una donna completa in tutti i sensi, capisci?*  
 [You know, Chico? I'm happy to be here tonight. When I am with you I feel so incredibly woman. A true woman in all senses. Do you understand?]  
 (*The Lords of Flatbush* 1974; *Happy Days – La banda dei fiori di pesco* 1979; my back-translation)

The consequences of premarital sex are negatively emphasized, as when Chico asks Annie about her friend Frannie, who is thought to be pregnant:

(25) Chico: What's she gonna do?  
*Che intenzioni ha?*  
 [What's she gonna do?]

Annie: Stanley's gonna marry her, that's what she's gonna do.  
*Farsi sposare da Stanley.*  
 [She's gonna have Stanley marry her.]

Chico: Yeah. (Not dubbed in Italian)

Annie: You know something, Chico? There are a lot worse things in this world than getting married.  
*Lui l'ha inguaiata e lei lo incastra. È la legge del taglione, no?*  
 [He got her into trouble and she is going to trap him. It's the *lex talionis*.]  
 (*The Lords of Flatbush* 1974; *Happy Days – La banda dei fiori di pesco* 1979; my back-translation)

Mentions of contraceptive methods are obscured in the translation and replaced by more vague statements:

(26) Frannie: Stanley, I'm pregnant. That rubber band didn't work.  
*Stanley, sono incinta. Te l'avevo detto 'sta' attento'.*  
 [Stanley, I'm pregnant. I told you to be careful. ]  
 (*The Lords of Flatbush* 1974; *Happy Days – La banda dei fiori di pesco* 1979; my back-translation)

Similar treatment is accorded to explicit remarks regarding actual sexual intercourse, which are normally neutralized through euphemism.

(27) Frannie: How would you like me to tell those guys over there that you cry when you come?  
*E tu non sei quel maschione che vuoi far credere ai tuoi amiconi.*  
 [And you're not the macho man you want your friends to believe you are.]  
 (*The Lords of Flatbush* 1974; *Happy Days – La banda dei fiori di pesco* 1979; my back-translation)



or replaced by rewordings that make things appear more innocent:

- (28) Butchey: You take a dip in the pool or something?  
*Ehi, quanti baci?*  
 [Hey, how many kisses?]  
 (*The Lords of Flatbush* 1974; *Happy Days – La banda dei fiori di pesco* 1979; my back-translation)

Another area subject to censorial intervention is juvenile delinquency. The dialogue in the scene where Chico's friends agree on stealing a car for him is heavily manipulated so as to carefully avoid the verb *to steal*, which is replaced by *to borrow*:

- (29) Butchey: You wanna steal a car?  
*Ne prendiamo una in prestito?*  
 [Shall we borrow one?]  
 (*The Lords of Flatbush* 1974; *Happy Days – La banda dei fiori di pesco* 1979; my back-translation)

Accordingly, the reference to theft in a subsequent exchange is obliterated by means of substitution:

- (30) Butchey: We steal Chico a car and we sit here like a pack of schmucks.  
*Ehi, ragazzi, Chico non viene e noi stiamo qui come scemi.*  
 [Hey, guys. Chico isn't coming and we're sitting here like idiots.]  
 (*The Lords of Flatbush* 1974; *Happy Days – La banda dei fiori di pesco* 1979; my back-translation)

What is most striking about this dubbed film is that the process of textual manipulation is so pervasive that it affects both character design and plot, thus inevitably altering the whole meaning of the film. One of most interesting examples of manipulative rewriting concerns a long stretch of dialogue between Butchey and Eddie, the owner of the malt shop where the boys hang out. In the original version, Eddie advises Butchey not to waste his brains and life, whereas in the dubbed version we hear nonsense talk about dating, girls and sex:

- (31) Butchey: Hey, Eddie. Why do you think we spend so much time in this stinking place?  
*Sai, Eddie. Vorrei una rossa. Ce l'hai per caso tra le mani?*  
 [You know, Eddie. I'd love a red-head. Do you happen to have one at hand?]  
 Eddie: Must be my egg creams.  
*Mi prendi per ruffiano?*  
 [What do you think I am? A pimp?]  
 Butchey: Yeah. I guess so.  
*No. No. Per un amico.*  
 [No. No. I don't. Just a friend.]  
 Eddie: Butchey. Do you mind if I... stick my two cents worth in where it don't belong?  
*Ehi, Fo, questi sono favori che vi fate fra voi balordi. Io non c'entro.*  
 [Hey, Fo, that is the kind of favour that you small-time criminals do. I've got nothing to do with that.]

- Butchey: Can I stop you?  
*E se fosse una bruna?*  
 [How about a dark-head?]
- Eddie: If you don't mind me butting in.  
*E se fosse una battona, eh?*  
 [How about a whore?]
- Butchey: As long as you don't come here and give me a big kiss anything goes.  
*Ma io ho intenzioni serie, sai. Magari me la sposo. Fra dieci anni...*  
*Chiaro, no?*  
 [But I'm serious, you know. I might even get married. In ten years time.  
 Clear, isn't it?]

(*The Lords of Flatbush* 1974; *Happy Days – La banda dei fiori di pesco* 1979; my back-translation)

As the analysis has shown, the manipulation of dialogue is robust, ranging from censoring of potentially offensive elements to radical rewriting leading to a completely new text with altered content and plot. The effect of such alterations is twofold and only apparently paradoxical: while references to teenage sexuality and delinquency that are deemed disturbing are weakened and even deleted, innocuous sexual content is introduced by means of translation, which turns the film into a comedy in the style of both a high school farce and a *Happy Days* remake. Changes to the script are done by taking advantage of off-camera shots and musical breaks. As a result, a film that aimed at depicting a world of confused, sometimes even cynical, teenagers in search of an identity was turned through dubbing into a comedic, unproblematic re-evocation of the old good times. In order to achieve this result, the lines containing possible dramatic overtones were radically rewritten and a narrator's voice was introduced, thus giving the story a comedic, light-hearted tone.

## 5. Conclusions

In the present paper, I have addressed the set of manipulative interventions that operate in the dubbing of three youth films, all of which result in a partial revision of the film content. In line with the norms that govern film dubbing in Italy, toning down of strong language and mitigation of references to sensitive subjects such as adolescent sexuality and youth crime were found as regular features, with the notable (though partial) exception of *The Lords of Flatbush*.

As shown by the examples discussed above, the manipulation of dialogue may take the form of true censorial intervention, which often combines with heavy rewriting. It has often been noted that the complexity of the dubbing process allows for a degree of arbitrariness on the part of the dubbing director and actors, who are at liberty in manipulating the translated text on the grounds of technical constraints and target culture social norms. Faced with a certain audacity in the way some themes were portrayed in 1970s youth films, the Italian dubbers adopted solutions that reveal similarities in terms of implicit moral codes and translational behaviour. The hypothesis is that the dubbing translators toned down the disturbing elements found in the original dialogue in order to make the films acceptable to both the board of censors and the Italian audience, while at the same time making them more palatable for the local market in order to ensure large profits.

The core question is whether manipulation is to be ascribed to official censorship, translators' concern with local moral codes or distribution requirements. In this paper I argue that the degree of manipulation depends first and foremost on commercial considerations and the niche the film is intended to occupy on the market. As Bucaria (2007: 251) remarks, "it is reasonable to hypothesize that translators/adaptors are often likely to have little power in the decision-making aspect of the adaptation process," with distributors having the last word. The analysis carried out here has shown that not only is dubbing used to ensure that the film does not run into problems with the local censors, but it also functions as a flexible tool in the hands of the distribution companies, who may urge that the film be silently changed at different levels in order to comply with marketing strategies. These changes may affect dialogue exchanges, character profile, storyline, as well as the whole authorial process. The ways in which films and scripts are altered by means of translation can thus be ascribed to both ideological pressure in the target culture (Fawcett 2003) and commercial factors (Gambier 2002: 208). By looking at a specific film genre, this study has provided further evidence to the assumption of dubbing as a form of manipulation and censorship that remains covert. The analysis has confirmed that censorship is indeed to be regarded, as suggested by Scandura (2004: 125), as one of the restrictions imposed on AVT.

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#### NOTES

1. See Bucaria (2007; 2008; 2009), Chiaro (2007) and Ranzato (2009), who all agree that "manipulative practices in Italy today are more diffused in television than in the cinema" (Ranzato 2009: 66).
2. *American Graffiti* (1973): Directed by George LUCAS. USA.  
*American Graffiti* (1973): Italian version of *American Graffiti* (1973).
3. *The Lords of Flatbush* (1974): Directed by Martin DAVIDSON and Stephen VERONA. USA.  
*Happy Days – La banda dei fiori di pesco* (1979): Italian version of *The Lords of Flatbush* (1974).
4. *Grease* (1978): Directed by Randal KLEISER. USA.  
*Grease – Brillantina* (1978): Italian version of *Grease* (1978).
5. *Saturday Night Fever* (1977): Directed by John BADHAM. USA.  
*La febbre del sabato sera* (1978): Italian version of *Saturday Night Fever* (1977).
6. *The Wild One* (1953): Directed by Laslo BENEDEK. USA.  
*Il selvaggio* (1954): Italian version of *The Wild One* (1953).
7. *Blackboard Jungle* (1955): Directed by Richard BROOKS. USA.  
*Il seme della violenza* (1957): Italian version of *Blackboard Jungle* (1955).
8. For a definition and discussion of the notion of self-censorship in translation, see Billiani (2009: 30).
9. *Happy Days* (1974-1984): Directed by Garry MARSHALL. USA.  
*Happy Days* (1977-1999): Italian version of *Happy Days* (1974-1984).

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