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ADAPTING ORAL MARKERS IN MOCKUMENTARY DUBBING
A case study of *Modern Family* (2009-2020)

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Abstract – Steiner's view of translation (1975) as a "leap" of faith in the source text on behalf of the translator takes on new complexities when applied to Audiovisual Translation (AVT). While tele-cinematic products require audiences to suspend their disbelief visually (*visual belief*), and dubbed content asks viewers also to accept the plausibility of the target language speech delivered on the screen by source language characters (*acoustic belief*) (Bucaria 2008), the challenge is even greater when considering mockumentaries, which blend fictional narratives with documentary filmmaking techniques. In this regard, the case of *Modern Family* (ABC, 2009-2020) stands out as a peculiar example: conceived as a simulated docu-reality or mockureality (a mock docu-reality show), it skillfully employs the visual language typical of the genre. Yet, it adheres to scripted scenarios, resulting in what we might term 'triple duplicity' inherent in its adaptation: the interplay of scripted spontaneity, mockumentary conventions, and interlingual translation. Through qualitative analysis of selected episodes from three distinct seasons (1, 6, and 10), this research examines how Italian adaptors handle specific carriers of orality (Pavesi 2008) in their translation choices. The analysis focuses on three categories of oral markers: pause fillers ("you know", "I mean"), tag questions, and vocatives. The findings reveal distinctive patterns in adaptation strategies: pause fillers show choices unrelated to synchronization constraints; tag questions demonstrate creative solutions despite limited Italian equivalents; and vocatives highlight complex negotiations between source and target language conventions. These results suggest that mockumentary dubbing requires specific approaches to maintain authenticity while navigating genre-specific constraints.

Keywords: mockumentary; AVT; dubbing; orality; discourse markers.

1. Introduction: Mediation and pre-fabricated orality

At its core, communication is an act of mediation that requires appropriate conditions and the cooperative engagement of both the sender and the receiver of a message. Indeed, the very etymology of the word "mediation" suggests some inherent duplicity:

> OED: 1.a Division by two; division into two equal parts; halving, bisection. Obs.

In its more modern sense, "mediation" has acquired the new perspective of an additional third party involved in the process:

> OED: 2. Agency or action as a mediator; the action of mediating between parties at variance; intercession on behalf of another.

Mediating between parties to achieve communication therefore requires the intervention of a third party acting as a bridge between separate banks of the same river. Translation, as a form of mediation, involves intermediaries transferring content from one linguo-cultural system into another, be it orally or in writing. In the context of Audiovisual Translation (AVT), this mediation brings forth additional complexities, particularly when dealing with genres that blur the lines between reality and fiction (Roscoe – Hight 2001; Campbell

2017). This is the case with mockumentaries, namely fictional works presented in a documentary style that combine elements of scripted storytelling with the techniques of traditional documentary filmmaking.[1] Mockumentaries aim to create an illusion of authenticity using visual and narrative conventions typically associated with non-fiction documentaries or reality television: characters either engage directly with the camera, emulating the format of a real documentary, or find themselves constantly in the limelight due to the continuous presence of a camera, akin to a reality show.

This research examines how Italian dubbing professionals navigate what we refer to as 'triple duplicity' – the convergence of scripted spontaneity, mockumentary conventions, and interlingual translation. 'Triple duplicity' is intrinsically linked to the notion of pre-fabricated orality. Steiner's view of translation as a sequence of hermeneutic motions (1975) posits that the translation journey starts with a "leap" of faith, an act of trust, and an investment of belief in the source text on behalf of the translator. In AVT, this process goes beyond the translator to the audience, demanding a parallel commitment to the translated text on behalf of its user(s). While tele-cinematic products require audiences to suspend their disbelief visually (*visual belief*), dubbed products need a similar suspension of disbelief in the spoken language, asking viewers to believe in the plausibility of the target language speech uttered on-screen by source language characters (*acoustic belief*) (Bucaria 2008). Duplicity is inherent in dubbing: actors on screen, immersed in a distant and foreign world, converse in the same language as the audience. However, this linguistic medium is artificial, characterized by "pre-fabricated orality" (Romero-Fresco 2009) and an unnatural use of discourse markers (among others, see: Formentelli 2007; Pavesi 2008; Quaglio 2009; Sileo 2017; Vignozzi 2021).

Grounded in AVT theory, particularly exploring how pre-fabricated orality functions within the unique constraints of mockumentary dubbing, this study examines the adaptation challenges of oral markers through a qualitative analysis of selected episodes from the American TV series *Modern Family* (ABC, 2009-2020) (henceforth, MF). The research focuses specifically on three categories of oral discourse markers – pause fillers, tag questions, and vocatives – in selected episodes from three distinct seasons of MF: Season 1 (2009), Season 6 (2014), and Season 10 (2018). This selection allows for examination of the adaptation strategies across different phases of the series' development. The analysis focuses on how oral markers are handled in the Italian dubbed version, considering both linguistic and cultural implications while avoiding quantitative claims; examples are analyzed for their implications for character development, narrative coherence, and cultural adaptation.

The paper develops as follows: Section 2 explores the theoretical framework of duplicity in dubbing and its particular manifestations in mockumentaries; Section 3 presents MF as a case study, with its specific features as a mockumentary and the challenges these pose for dubbing; Section 4 provides detailed analysis of how oral markers are adapted in the Italian version, offering specific examples of pause fillers, tag questions, and vocatives; Section 5 discusses the implications of these findings for AVT practice and theory.

[1] Over time, a wide variety of labels have been attached to such works, including "faux documentary", "fake documentary", "cinema un-vérité", "pseudo-documentary", "cinema vérité with a wink", "quasi-documentary", "black comedy presented as in-your-face documentary", and "spoof documentary" (Roscoe – Hight 2006, p. 908). However, the most commonly used term to refer to these works is the neologism "mockumentary", derived from blending the English words "mock" and "documentary".

Preliminary findings from an ongoing larger project on the adaptation of "carriers of orality" (Pavesi 2008, p. 90) in audiovisual products are here presented: the project started with Sileo's 2017 study on the said elements in a fictional product, more specifically a soap opera (*The Bold and the Beautiful*, broadcast since 1987; henceforth, BB), aimed to analyze the impact of the "double duplicity" in the dubbing adaptation of purely fictional works and compare it to the effect of "triple duplicity" in the dubbing of mockumentary sitcoms (such as MF). The insights gained from these initial analyses will inform the methodology and focus of a broader project, allowing for refinement of the approach to studying the complexities of dubbing in this particular genre and other related TV genres, such as mocu-soaps (Hight 2010).

2. "Triple Duplicity" in Dubbing Mockumentaries

In the context of mockumentaries, the aforementioned interplay between visual and acoustic belief is further amplified, as the audience is asked to engage in a "double" suspension of disbelief at the same time, which turns the duplicity into a somewhat "triple duplicity". First of all, they must believe in the documentary aesthetics while knowing that it is fiction (*double visual belief*): the use of handheld cameras, direct addressing of the camera, and other documentary conventions signal authenticity, yet the viewers are aware of the fictional nature of the content. Then, as with dubbed versions, they must accept characters speaking in the target language (acoustic belief) despite the visual cues that place the narrative in a different linguistic context. This creates a complex viewing experience that goes beyond traditional fiction film reception, and in the case of dubbed mockumentaries, problems arise related to the authenticity paradox: while visual cues aim to establish credibility, the dubbed dialogue can potentially undermine such carefully constructed authenticity. This "triple duplicity" thus encompasses the artifice of scripted spontaneity in dialogue, the tension between documentary aesthetics and fictional content, and the linguistic and cultural transposition in dubbing.

The challenge for dubbing professionals is therefore threefold: to maintain the illusion of spontaneity, to preserve the documentary aesthetics, and to ensure the translated dialogue remains credible and consistent. This "triple duplicity" – the layered artifice of scripted spontaneity, mockumentary style, and interlingual translation – represents a convergence of linguistic, cultural, and performative challenges that push the boundaries of traditional dubbing practices to encompass audiovisual genres which – Italian – viewers are used to associating to other AVT modalities.

Dubbing involves the synchronization of source text lip movements with the target text, unlike other oral audiovisual modalities, such as voice over, which prioritizes verisimilitude and plausibility, while allowing viewers to hear part of the original dialogue. In voice over, in fact, the volume of the original soundtrack is minimized and then overlaid with an oral speech in the target language (Díaz-Cintas 2009, p. 5). This processing is more suitable for programs intended to convey a sense of veracity (usually low-budget television products on non-mainstream channels), and represents a faster and cheaper alternative to dubbing. Whereas subtitling and dubbing are still considered the primary audiovisual translation modalities, with voice over typically ranking third (Remael 2010, pp. 12-13), the Italian landscape somehow diverges, due to the development of so-called non-labial rhythmic synchronism, also known as lector dubbing or phrase sync – or locally as simil sync, a semi-novel form of adaptation, finally re-labelled in the latest national agreement as "linear sync" – i.e., non-lip synchronism,

maintaining identical quantitative synchronism with the source line in order to enhance the perception of veracity and plausibility demanded by "factuals". Docu-realities are but one example of this trend: here, the insistence of the camera is on the character, which is expected to record emotions and reactions not previously written in a script and therefore unpredictable and unpredicted. Hearing background voices and noises adds to the acoustic credibility of docu-realities; missing the original soundtrack decreases acoustic credibility in mockumentaries, thus increasing the sense of implausibility both at a visual and at an acoustic level.

The convergence of these multiple layers of duplicity creates unique challenges for AVT professionals. While previous research has examined dubbing challenges in fictional content (Bucaria 2008; Pavesi 2008) and documentary translation (Roscoe-Hight 2001), the specific complexities of mockumentary dubbing remain underexplored. This gap becomes particularly significant when considering products like MF that deliberately play with conventions of both genres.

3. *Modern Family*: a case study in "triple duplicity"

Airing on TV from 2009 to 2020 across 11 seasons, MF, an American mockumentary (mock documentary) or docu-comedy (Dore 2019b, p. 58), adopts the devices typical of a docu-reality. The sitcom – awarded twenty-two Emmys and one Golden Globe – tells the story of an extended family that goes beyond the usual traditional canons, consisting of three sub-families somehow related to each other: Jay Pritchett lives in Los Angeles with his second wife and her son; the other two *nuclei* are composed of Jay's children, Claire – married to Phil and mother of three children – and Mitchell, who adopted an Asian baby girl with his partner Cameron. The show attempts to provide a realistic insight into the constantly-changing contemporary US family, featuring characters with different personalities, sexual orientations, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds.

As is known, tele-cinematic dialogue has characteristics of both written language – such as lack of interaction between sender and receiver, message preservation and planning, and predominance of the visual channel (Alfieri-Bonomi 2008, pp. 14-16) – and oral language – including instantaneous interactivity between interlocutors, fragmented or non-planned syntax, colloquial style, immediate consumption of the message, predominance of the acoustic channel (ibid.). This dichotomy creates a continuum of transmitted varieties that oscillate between the opposite poles of orality and writing, often resulting in an unnatural product that has been labeled "filmese" (Perego-Taylor 2012), to refer to the language typically spoken in Italian dubbed movies. However, if characters were to replicate real-life speech, with all its false starts, elisions, hesitations and self-corrections, digressions, tag repetitions or tag questions and segmented sentences, authenticity could backfire, with two possible consequences: either the audience would begin to suspect that the actors had forgotten their lines, or they would fail to grasp the information needed to understand what was being said, and consequently struggle to follow the plot (p. 65). Furthermore, spontaneous language is, among other things, largely dull and banal, and tends to repeat a limited number of concepts and words using equally limited lexical and phraseological resources (p. 64). Nevertheless, the illusion of the mimesis of orality must still be conveyed, albeit without naturalistically reproducing it.

To achieve this goal and produce speech that is as plausible and natural as possible, film and TV dialogues resort to what Pavesi terms "carriers of orality" (Pavesi 2008, p. 90), namely, linguistic elements that are significantly more common in spontaneous

speech, whereas fictional language demands higher information density and semantic continuity for the narrative to be easily followed (p. 80). Achieving realism involves different strategies, such as incorporating discourse markers – like "now", "you know", "you see", and "I mean" into the language of film and television. These particles, which function as linguistic bridges, are either adapted by means of more or less natural target language equivalents or completely omitted in the target language rendering.

As already anticipated, the qualitative analysis of some typical features of oral speech from an inter-linguistic perspective will mainly focus on discourse markers, which have been subdivided as follows:

1. pause fillers
2. tag questions
3. vocatives

4. Analysis and results

4.1. Pause fillers: "you know" and "I mean"

As previously mentioned, while abundant in real conversation, discourse markers are expected to be less frequent in film-television dialogues, as these texts need to closely imitate spontaneous speech without thoroughly replicating it. The markers are mainly placed at the beginning or end of a sentence and may also include phono-symbolisms such as "ah", "oh", and "hey".

Among the most frequent discourse markers is "you know", which serves multiple functions:

a. expressing shared knowledge between the speaker and listener;
b. indicating confidence between the interlocutors, as if they shared common ground (Chaume 2004);
c. seeking confirmation;
d. softening the impact of a statement or opinion, as a hedge (Östman 1981).

In terms of positioning, "you know" can occur at various points within an utterance, including the beginning, middle, or end. Its placement can affect its pragmatic function and the overall structure of the discourse. When used at the beginning of an utterance, "you know" may serve to introduce a new topic or preface a statement, whereas its occurrence in the middle or at the end of an utterance may indicate a desire for confirmation or a check on the listener's understanding (Erman 2001).

"You know" is, therefore, a widely used strategy in spontaneous interlocution. In Chaume's 2004 study analyzing the script of the film *Pulp Fiction* (1994), only five occurrences of "you know" were detected, a figure markedly lower than what one would expect in everyday conversation. In Sileo's 2017 study on adapted soap opera dialogues, this marker seems to be omitted in almost half of the instances detected. Other frequently-used equivalents in the target text are *insomma* and *sai* (more frequent than the former); only one occurrence was found for *vedi*, *sì*, *no*, *ricordi?*, *in effetti*, *in realtà*, and *sapevi che*.

The analysis of MF selected episodes shows several noteworthy patterns in the adaptation of "you know". Consider the following example:

CLAIRE: There, *you know*, I said it.
È così, *insomma*, l'ho detto. [S1E1]

In this scene, as in a regular documentary, Claire and her husband are addressing the cameraman, with Claire openly sharing her concerns about her teenage daughter's future. The use of "you know" in this context serves to emphasize Claire's attempt to connect with the audience by acknowledging the common experience of parental concern. The diverging adaptation choice, translating "you know" into *insomma*, cannot be attributed to synchronization issues, as there is no evident lip movement in the original line to justify either the lack of symmetry between the source and the target text or the addition of a clearly visible bilabial consonant sound – a feature counted among the so-called "battiti" (Guardamagna 2007) or "beats", that are the most evident lip movements, along with open and closed vowel sounds. One might assume that the adaptors have opted for the most natural-sounding rendering in Italian, so in this case functional equivalence (Nida 2004) takes precedence to ensure plausibility of the element within the larger sentence-context, a paramount consideration within this genre. One should also keep in mind that markers like "you know" and "I mean" are undergoing grammaticalization, shifting away from their literal meanings and acquiring conventional nuances (Chaume 2004, p. 850).

However, the choice to translate "you know" as *insomma* in the above instance has implications for the characterization of Claire and her perceived relationship with the audience. By using *insomma*, one concludes an argument, introduces a summary and global judgement, abbreviates and refocuses the discussion of an argument that was likely to digress and to drag on (Vocabolario Treccani online). Thus, the Italian adaptation seems to slightly alter the original intention of the source text, which seeks to establish a connection with the audience by invoking shared knowledge.

In the following example, contrary to the omitting tendency observed in Chaume (2004) and Sileo (2017), a discourse marker aiming at stressing the closeness and shared knowledge between the interlocutors (*sai*) replaces the adversative conjunction used in the source text to express the contrast between this statement and the previous one.

CLAIRE: But it's not always fun being the backstop.
Sai, non è sempre divertente dover pensare a tutto. [S6E8]

In this scene, Claire is talking to her husband, Phil, about the responsibilities she has to take on in the family. She feels overwhelmed by the constant need to be the backstop and make sure everything is running smoothly. The use of "but" in the original dialogue highlights the contrast between Claire's role and her desire for a more relaxed approach to family life. The Italian adaptation replaces "but" with *sai*, shifting the focus to the shared understanding and common ground between Claire and Phil.

In spite of this general tendency, we do find some instance of a direct translation between the source and the target text, a word-for-word adaptation approach which permeates the whole line, and seasons it with a taste of artificiality (see, among others, Sileo 2018).

CLAIRE: *You know*, there's no reason you and I can't relax a little.
Sai, non c'è motivo per cui io e te non possiamo rilassarci un po'. [S6E8]

"I mean" is another common discourse marker in English, often omitted in the adapted text, serving primarily as a repair strategy (Chaume 2004) or a device for clarification: it allows speakers to modify or elaborate on their previous statements, ensuring that their

intended meaning is conveyed accurately (Schiffrin 1987). Regarding its positioning, "I mean" typically occurs at the beginning of an utterance or clause, marking a transition from the previous discourse to a clarification or elaboration. However, it can also appear in the middle of an utterance, particularly when the speaker wishes to repair or modify a specific part of their statement (Brinton 1996). The placement of "I mean" can influence the interpretation of its pragmatic function and the overall coherence of the discourse; its possible omission in the target language is not surprising, since it would be additional and not always essential for clarifying possible misunderstandings, and would not, therefore, be of much use (Chaume 2004, p. 853). In Sileo's (2017) study, the marker is omitted in the vast majority of the occurrences: such an omission coexists with a substantial variety of Italian renderings of this element, comprising a total of 9 different options in the BB corpus – among which, *insomma* (which is much more frequent than) *voglio dire*; interestingly, *cioè*, one of the most functional and natural equivalents for this discourse marker, is entirely absent.

In the episodes analyzed in the present study, a note-worthy case of omission and one of addition have been detected, along with a single instance of direct equivalence.

In one scene, Alex is talking to her parents about her upcoming departure for college. She notices that they have started using her old crib to keep another baby warm, which she finds intriguing.

> ALEX: Interesting. *I mean*, I'm going off to college soon. All of a sudden, you're keeping something warm in my old crib.
> Io sto per andare al college e all'improvviso tu tieni qualcosa di caldo nella mia culla. [S6E8]

The omission of "I mean" and, even before that, of "interesting" in the Italian adaptation of Alex's line has implications for her characterization and the perception of her relationship with her parents. In the original dialogue, "I mean" serves as a filler, indicating Alex's hesitation and her attempt to process her thoughts before expressing them. By omitting this marker, the Italian version presents Alex as more direct and assertive, potentially altering the audience's perception of her character. This adaptation choice may have been influenced by the specific constraints of dubbing, such as the need to maintain both qualitative – or lip – sync and the limited time available for the utterance or quantitative sync. However, it is essential to consider how such omissions can impact the nuances of characterization and the overall tone of the scene.

While adapting a script into another language, translators are well aware that occasional losses may occur during the journey from one bank of the river towards the other. They generally avoid omitting informationally relevant and dense content, which is the reason why discourse markers are perceived as expendable when issues of quantitative synchronization are at stake. However, at times adaptors manage to find a way to compensate the losses; the episodes under analysis offer occasional instances of addition, not due to sync issues:

> MANNY: Long story short.
> *Insomma*, ti spiego. [S6E8]

Insomma is, together with *cioè*, the most plausible Italian equivalent of "I mean", which – however – is not present in the source text to influence lip sync choices and match any original visible lip movement. A perfectly functional and natural equivalent to Manny's line could have been *Per far(te)la breve*.

The adaptation of "I mean" in the analyzed episodes shows interesting choices in maintaining the marker's repair function. One significant example appears in:

> MANNY: *I mean*, of-of course I felt something, and you do have them -- *I mean* …
> *Insomma*, certo che ho sentito qualcosa, dal momento che ce le hai … [S6E8]

Manny is the awkward teenage son of Jay's second wife, Gloria. He used to have a huge crush on Haley, Claire's daughter and Jay's granddaughter. Haley is driving the car when Manny accidentally touches her breasts. The embarrassing mishap leads to Manny trying to defend himself by claiming that he did touch them, but he did not feel anything. The ambiguity in his line lies in the polysemic "feel", which might mean that he did not have any inner reaction to the touch (in order to reassure her that his feelings for her are now gone), but also that he did not perceive the presence of her breasts since they are too tiny. The misunderstanding reaches its climax in this line, when Manny tries to clarify that he did not mean to offend her, and implements a repairing strategy exemplified by the repeated use of the marker.

In the original dialogue, the repetition of "I mean" highlights Manny's nervousness and his attempt to clarify his previous statement, which inadvertently offended Haley. By using *insomma* in the Italian adaptation, Manny's awkwardness and his desire to rectify the situation are conveyed not as effectively as *cioè* would have, since the latter has a declarative and explanatory function, as it is used to reformulate a previous utterance, whereas the former is employed to draw a conclusion (Vocabolario Treccani online). However, the decision to avoid repeating *insomma* in the second instance may slightly diminish the emphasis on Manny's discomfort and his desperate attempt to backtrack.

The analyzed examples suggest *insomma* serves as a routine translation choice for "I mean", although in this line we notice that the repetition has been avoided, presumably because in Italian repetitions are not readily welcome. However, we should keep in mind that they are perfectly normal in spoken discourse. Here, we can notice an additional lack of content symmetry between the source "and you do have them" and the target *dal momento che ce le hai* – in other words, between an emphatic structure meant to stress the fact that the girl does have breasts, in an attempt to make amends for the previous blunder made by Manny, and a causal proposition, meant to complete the preceding main clause by providing the cause for it.

4.2. Tag questions

Interrogative tags serve the purpose of soliciting approval or agreement from the interlocutor, fulfilling the phatic function of language, which aims to keep the line of communication open, and are therefore typical of oral dialogue (Minutella 2009, pp. 65-66). When translating from English into Italian, a challenge arises due to the limited availability of equivalent markers in the Italian language. Generally speaking, *eh?* seems to be the most natural solution (p. 68) coupled with *no?*, although they are less frequently used compared to their English counterparts. This discrepancy has led to their occasional rendition with calques of the original structure, as seen in responses like *vuoi?* for "will/would you?" (Petillo 2012, p. 67) or *puoi?* for "can you?", or with translation routines – rarely used by native Italian speakers in spontaneous conversation – such as

(non è) vero?, *(non) è così?*, *(non) credi?* (Minutella 2009, pp. 66-67).[2] Sometimes these tags are left untranslated, thus resulting in the loss of a nuance of meaning that could affect the content of the utterance, transforming an attempt to establish empathy with the interlocutor into an unquestionable assertion (pp. 68-69). This oversight may stem from inattention within the Italian dubbing industry towards elements constructing oral interaction but lacking propositional value (pp. 68-69). The examples found in the corpus analyzed by Sileo 2017 are not particularly numerous; no omission has been retrieved; most of the renderings detected comprised translation routines that would be somewhat unnatural in everyday spoken Italian and are therefore only partially used by native speakers; notably, however, Anglicized equivalents were absent.

In the episodes of MF under analysis, several noteworthy examples were identified: generally speaking, the tendency revealed a preference for less natural equivalents in Italian, such as *vero?, non è vero,* and *o non è vero?*.[3] Moreover, a closer examination of the pragmatic functions of tag questions in the source language reveals the complexity of their use and the challenges they pose for translation.

> CAM: Us wearing dresses upsets you, *doesn't it*?
> Se ci vestiamo da donna, a te dà fastidio, *non è vero*? [S6E8]

In the above example, the tag question "doesn't it?" serves to seek confirmation and agreement from the addressee. The rising intonation of the tag question in English reinforces this pragmatic function. In the Italian translation, the use of *non è vero?* with a falling intonation may not fully capture the confrontational aspect of the original, potentially altering the dynamics of the interaction between the characters.

Worth mentioning in the following example is the omission of the vocative "buddy", a topic of debate when it comes to its translation into Italian (see also paragraph 4.3). Identifying a single passepartout rendering of "buddy" into Italian seems impossible; in this case, Claire is speaking to her son, thus making commonly selected Italian options like *amico* or *bello* implausible in such a conversation. Presumably, the same implausibility can be detected in the source text.

> JAY: Well, this is frozen.
> Bene, è congelato.
> CLAIRE: Luke had some. You're fine. *Aren't you*, *buddy*?
> Luke l'ha mangiato. Stai bene. *Non è vero*? [S10E10]

The pause between "You are fine" and the following question forced the adaptors to replicate the original structure, serving the aim to request the interlocutor's confirmation.

The scripts analyzed in this paper also include relevant examples of a not-so-direct equivalence between the source and the target text: in the following line, "uh?" has 'diverged' from its corresponding Italian interjection *eh?* and been replaced with *vero?*, which is equally functional and plausible in the target language; however, the adaptation choices suggest interesting patterns in the use of *vero* as a translation solution:

[2] It is worth underlining that several years have passed and that numerous interferences have become 'acclimated' in everyday spontaneous Italian, so presumably these phrases are no longer perceived as unnatural.

[3] CLAIRE: You knew about this, *didn't you?*
Tu lo sapevi, *o non è vero?* [S10E10]

DYLAN: Check out this sledding polar-bear paper. Cannot look at that and not be in a good mood, *uh*?
Questa carta con l'orso polare mette subito di buon umore, *vero*? [S10E10]

The scarcity of suitable Italian equivalents for English tag questions poses a significant challenge for dubbing professionals. Despite some divergencies between the source text and the target text, the analysis of MF revealed a notable absence of overtly unnatural phrasing in the adapted dialogues, suggesting an effort to balance faithfulness to the source text with the demands of plausibility in the target language.

4.3. Vocatives

Biber et al. (1999) identify eight classes of terms of address in English, which might be "grouped into four more general groups: proper names (first names, last names, nicknames, etc.), kinship terms, titles and occupational terms (honorifics, social titles, medical and academic professional titles, etc.), endearments and terms of friendship" (Formentelli 2007, p. 182), and which in Gramley and Pätzold (2020, pp. 196-98) are labelled "descriptors". Vocatives fall within the category of *unbound* or free *forms* of address, which are syntactically free and may occur before, after, or in the middle of a sentence, as opposed to *bound forms*, which are integrated parts of a sentence (Formentelli 2007; Braun 1988). The examples analyzed in this section all belong to the subcategory of unbound forms of address known as *vocatives*. Vocative expressions embody instances of emotive language which are particularly common in spoken fictional dialogue: "from a pragmatic point of view, [*they*] can reinforce or attenuate the illocutionary force of a speech act, inasmuch as they can enhance either the consensual or conflictual nature of an interaction" (Vignozzi 2021, p. 76).

Numerous studies have explored the use and occurrence of this class of discourse markers in fictional discourse compared to spontaneous speech: Quaglio (2009), as an instance, demonstrates that informal and expressive vocatives, including terms of endearment, are more frequent in the sitcom *Friends* than in unplanned conversation; likewise, Formentelli (2014) demonstrates that vocatives in British and American movies are more abundant than in natural communication.

CLAIRE: *Wow*, you're not wearing that outfit.
Signorina, tu non vai in giro così. [S1E1]

MF offers an interesting example of addition: the emotive interjection has been replaced by a term of endearment, which falls into the fourth class of vocatives as categorized by Gramley and Pätzold (2020), though uttered in a reproachful tone. This adaptation choice demonstrates how vocatives can be employed to replace other discourse markers while maintaining or even enhancing interpersonal dynamics.

The above case highlights a lack of direct correspondence between the source and the target text. "Wow" functions as an emotive interjection and stands as one of the most frequent Anglicisms in contemporary dubbed Italian (Pavesi 2005; Minutella 2017); from there, it has seamlessly integrated into spontaneous everyday discourse. Minutella (2018, pp. 204-5), in her study of direct Anglicisms in Italian, concludes that dialogue writers seem to carefully avoid repetitiveness and provide a variety of Italian equivalents. Sileo (2010) offers a diachronic perspective on the escalating use of this interjection in the latest seasons of *Friends* compared to season 1, where "wow" was adapted into *accidenti* and *evviva*.

The omission of the interjection "wow" and its replacement with the vocative *signorina* in the Italian translation significantly alters the tone and dynamics of the interaction between Claire and her daughter. In the source language, "wow" expresses Claire's surprise at her daughter's outfit choice. By omitting this interjection and instead using the vocative *signorina*, the Italian version shifts the focus from Claire's emotional reaction to a more direct and confrontational address, emphasizing her authority as a mother. This choice affects the characterization of Claire, presenting her as more assertive, conflictual, and less emotionally expressive in the dubbed version. Furthermore, the use of *signorina*, a formal and somewhat dated term of address, highlights the generational gap and the tension in the mother-daughter relationship, which may not be as evident in the original dialogue.

PHIL: *Buddy*, uncool.
Bello, non è fico. [S1E1]

"Buddy" is a colloquial term denoting friendship and indicating shared ground and closeness between the interlocutors. As anticipated in the previous paragraph, there are adaptation options for this vocative. *Bello* is presumably the most suitable choice, also in terms of both qualitative and quantitative sync (matching line length and articulatory movements). However, to a native speaker, it often sounds regionally marked.

In the source language, the vocative "buddy" serves multiple pragmatic functions in Phil's utterance. On one hand, it is used to establish a connection with his son, suggesting a friendly and non-parental relationship and an attempt to maintain his "cool dad" persona while still asserting his authority as a father figure. On the other hand, the juxtaposition of "buddy" with the blunt statement "uncool" creates a sense of irony and mild confrontation, as Phil is reproaching his son for using his toy gun against his younger sister.

In the Italian translation, the vocative *bello* conveys a similar sense of informality and familiarity, but it may not fully capture the complexity of Phil's attitude towards his son, as it presents a more straightforward and less nuanced interaction.

PHIL: You two … keep it real. No mean, *son*?
Voi due … state con i piedi per terra. Chiaro, *figliolo*? [S1E1]

"Son" represents a very frequently-used kinship term, based on Gramley and Pätzold's (2020, pp. 196-98) categorization; it is used to refer to one's own children but also to other speakers who are of lower status than the utterer of the sentence. Phil is speaking to his daughter's new boyfriend, trying to intimidate him into behaving himself when he is around his daughter Haley. He is known for being a "cool dad", as he admits himself, and therefore he uses a colloquial style, featuring abbreviations, acronyms, and linguistic choices typical of youth jargon. This convergent strategy is supposed to bridge the generation gap; however, he closes his line not by using terms like "pal, man, dude, buddy" – which might have further signaled a lack of distance between them – but by addressing him as "son", reverting to his distant position as a parent and possible father-in-law. *Figliolo* counts among the unnatural vocatives in Italian – a term of endearment typical of the Tuscan region, endowed with a familiar connotation –; its contrived flavor is supposed to evoke a native grin, assuming the speaker's idiolect has not been heavily influenced by the artificial language of careless mechanical adaptations (Sileo 2018).

The analysis of vocatives in the selected episodes of MF strengthens the idea that kinship terms, such as "son" and "buddy", emerge as significant vocatives in TV series.

These findings seem to align with those of other studies on vocatives in fictional discourse, such as Bruti and Perego's (2008) analysis of vocatives in a corpus of British and American films, which found that kinship terms and proper names were the most frequent categories. However, the presence of kinship terms and endearments here underscores the importance of these vocative categories since they establish and keep interpersonal relationships within the fictional family dynamics of the series.

Vocatives, which serve to reinforce or attenuate the illocutionary force of a speech act, are particularly challenging to adapt due to their cultural specificity. The occasional presence of vocatives in the Italian dialogues that lack justification in the source text highlights the role of cultural norms and expectations in shaping dubbed dialogues.

5. Final remarks

This study has explored the complexities of orality in the context of "triple duplicity" when dubbing the mockumentary series MF from English to Italian. In this sense, the concept of "triple duplicity" – the scripted nature of spontaneous-seeming dialogue, the faux documentary style, and the interlingual translation process – presents unique challenges for AVT professionals. The analysis of discourse markers, tag questions, and vocatives in the selected episodes shows the extent to which these elements of orality are negotiated in the dubbing process, questioning the intricate balance between fidelity to the source text on the one hand, and plausible, natural-sounding dialogue in the target language, on the other.

The analysis of orality markers revealed distinctive patterns in three main areas:

- pause fillers ("you know" and "I mean"), which demonstrated adaptation choices that appear unrelated to synchronization constraints, as seen in the examples where *insomma* serves multiple discourse functions in the target language;
- tag questions, for which suitable Italian equivalents are scarce, leading to calqued sentence structures that, while less plausible in spontaneous conversation, notably lack entirely unnatural phrasing in the selected episodes. The solutions adopted in the analyzed episodes, while demonstrating creativity in maintaining character dynamics, suggest the influence of established dubbing conventions; and finally,
- vocatives, whose presence is at times not justified by the source text and which posit major adaptation challenges due to their association with culture-specific values. The use of vocatives revealed complex negotiations between source and target language conventions, particularly evident in cases where vocatives were introduced without corresponding markers in the source text.

This study not only sheds light on the nuanced aspects of the dubbing process, particularly within (fake) docu-reality contexts, but also might provide a set of strategies that can inform future dubbing endeavors in this unique narrative landscape.

While the present study is based on a qualitative analysis of a selected number of episodes from MF, it is part of a wider project, taking its first steps from the study conducted by Sileo (2017) on a dubbed soap opera (BB). The findings presented here, while not exhaustive, provide insights that will guide the expansion of this research, which deserves further exploration of the same discourse elements in related – and relatively unexplored – TV genres, such as mocu-soaps, thus allowing for more generally applicable conclusions about the challenges of adapting oral markers into Italian and about the role played by genre in influencing dubbing choices.

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