A cross-cultural and cross-linguistic analysis of Freedom Writers: dubbing emotional upheavals from US English(es) into Italian
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Abstract

Within the field of English for Psychological Studies, expressive writing is a very common practice. Following Smyth and Pennebaker (2008), there is reason to believe that when people transform their feelings and thoughts about personally upsetting experiences into language, their physical and mental health often improves. In this paper, the screenplay of Freedom Writers (LaGravenese 2007) is analysed, a film about a young teacher thrown into a class of at-risk students during the Los Angeles Riots of 1992. The name comes from the fact the students are given diaries in which to write whatever they want, which can be private or read by the teacher. They write about their family situations, their feelings, and their being at-risk teens, while experiencing cultural, ethnic and racial tensions.

For the lexical analysis of the screenplay, I have relied on the perspective proposed by Pennebaker and Chung (2007), based on four categories: “negative-emotion words”, “positive-emotion words”, “causal words”, and “insight words”. This study is also cross-cultural, as the Italian dubbing (by Valerio Piccolo under the direction of Valeria Nardini, only for home video) is compared to the source screenplay, characterized by diatopic and diastratic variations of American English. In particular, the students speak a socially marked variety of US English, an idiolect which is rich in features denoting in-group identity, often combined with low social status, such as slang words (generally associated with an urban street culture), cursing and taboo words.

As will be shown, the Italian dubbed version is a more standardized and socially flattened text, characterized by more neutral colloquial markers.