Transcribing film dialogue:
from orthographic to prosodic transcription

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1. *Introduction*

This paper intends to describe the process of transcribing original and dubbed film dialogue orthographically and prosodically. It will give a detailed account of the transcription conventions adopted, with specific reference to prosodic transcription, and will also identify the main difficulties arising during the transcription process of both the original soundtrack in English and the Italian dubbed version.

A transcript is the graphic representation of talk (Cameron 2001). However, transcribing does not simply entail writing down what we hear, it is on the contrary a much more complex process. As Green *et al.* (1997: 172) point out, "a transcript is a text that 're'-presents an event; it is not the event itself". This means that oral data must be analysed and interpreted by a transcriber/researcher in order to be represented and visualised graphically. More specifically, a transcript is "data constructed by a researcher for a particular purpose" (Green *et al.* 1997: 172), thus transcription should be intended as a subjective "interpretative act" (Lapadat, Lindsay 1999; ten Have 1997) based on the goals of the research project (Poland 1995). In this sense, oral data undergo selection by the transcriber/interpreter, who has to choose which aspects deserve attention and how detailed the transcript needs to be, with the aim of maintaining a balance between readability and accuracy (Tilley 2003); such a selective process implies the reduction of data, which in actual fact is the only possible option since interaction is too complex to be fully portrayed (Bailey 2008). Indeed, a speech event is characterised by various elements that all together make the interaction itself meaningful – i.e., the situational context, the relationship between the speaker and addressee(s), their social roles, their communicative intentions, paralanguage and prosody – and also help the researcher to understand and interpret it. Of course, the fact that different communicative codes – i.e., both verbal and non-verbal – have to be transposed into the written mode makes the task of transcription even more challenging.

Therefore transcription is also theory (Ochs 1999), since the representation of oral data in the written form involves several theoretical and descriptive problems – e.g., whether and how to represent non-standard varieties and consequently how to deal with the relation between spelling and pronunciation (cf. § 5) – and every decision made by the transcriber needs to be grounded on precise theoretical assumptions that are motivated by his/her general research purposes. In general, when we talk about transcription, we refer to the transcription of spontaneous conversation, whereas in this paper, the object of transcription is a specific type of data pertaining to orality, namely filmic speech. A few remarks on the differences and similarities between film language and spontaneous conversation when transcribing are briefly outlined below.

2

Firstly, film is an audiovisual text that shares some features with video-recorded, spontaneous, face-to-face conversation: more specifically, they may both contain visual and verbal elements, such as the setting (i.e., the situational context), prosodic and paralinguistic devices and deixis. These components are fundamental to obtaining a clear interpretation of an ongoing conversation, but are not easy to represent in a transcript since their inclusion requires a considerable amount of work and space (Bailey 2008).

Secondly, there are the so-called paralinguistic devices, which are not systematic, but instead constitute additional variations by which speakers signal the import of what they are saying (Halliday 1985: 30). The paralinguistic component of language is a kind of communicative behaviour, adopted by a speaker while talking, which also contributes to meaning construction. When interpreting an utterance, one has to account not only for *what* is said, but also for *how* it is said; in this sense, "the paralinguistic message obviously affects the interpretation of the utterance as a whole" (Ladd 1996: 34). O'Donnell, Todd (1980) distinguish between *vocal* and *non-vocal* paralinguistic devices: the first group involves pitch phenomena, volume, precision, continuity and tempo[1]; the second includes facial expression, eye-contact, posture, gestures and proximity.

Finally, deixis, by pointing to items outside the discourse or text, motivates reliance on paralinguistic devices still further.

2. *Transcription processes*

The language of the films in their original English version, together with the corresponding Italian dubbed version, was first transcribed orthographically and later prosodically. The transcription procedure was organised in three phases: in the first phase, the research team was actively involved in the transcription of the films, which contributed to the making of the *orthographic* transcript; then the first drafts of the transcripts underwent revision by the author as expert transcriber and, in the case of dubious or uncertain parts, were further checked by British native speakers; finally, the prosodic elements were introduced and the orthographic transcript changed accordingly. Prosodic features – i.e., intonation, pauses, voice tone, etc. – and other additional information such as paralanguage and setting are provided through a coding system described in detail in the following sections (cf. § 4., 4.1.).

As Johnstone (2002: 21) points out, "there is no single generally accepted way to represent speech on the page". We can find different systems of transcription within both Discourse Analysis and Conversation Analysis, among which those proposed by Tannen (1989) and by Du Bois *et al.* (1993). A widely used transcription system is the one developed by Jefferson – and described in detail in Atkinson, Heritage (1999) – which, however, often undergoes several modifications. In the case of the Pavia Corpus of Film Dialogue, there has been a further degree of adaptation and simplification due to the purposes of the research project and the peculiarity of film dialogue.

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[1] Prosody is part of the linguistic system and carries semantic contrasts in meaning. It consists of intonation, rhythm, pausing and stress (Halliday 1985: 30).

3. *Orthographic transcription*

An orthographic transcript is the recording of what is uttered as performed, similar to a "continuity script" (Rossi 1999: 22), which is the definitive dialogue resulting from the script given to actors after undergoing many changes during the shooting of the film. This definitive script is hardly ever published and can only be obtained by transcribing the film. Moreover, it is called an *orthographic* transcript because orthographic rules are observed as to punctuation, the use of capital letters for proper names, etc. Linguistic varieties are generally ironed out as regards the representation of pronunciation, standard spelling being preferred in order to allow a greater readability of the transcripts and facilitate the computer processing of the data.

The organisation of the text in both types of transcripts is similar. Each transcript of each film appears in a table with three columns, so that the data can be processed separately for analysis. The central column contains the transcript of the original soundtrack in English, while in the right-hand column there is the transcript of the corresponding Italian dubbed version. Other information is put in the left-hand column: first of all, the setting, which is always described in English, using lower-case letters and no full stops at the end, as showed in the example below taken from *Notting Hill* (1999, R. Mitchell):

(1)

Portobello Road

As can be seen, in this case the cells in the central and right-hand columns remain empty.

More importantly, the left-hand column contains the names of the characters (cf. § 4) who are engaged in the talk exchange, written in capital letters, as in (2) below, again from *Notting Hill*:

(2)

WILLIAM	What are the choices?	Quali sono le alternative?

In the case of unknown or minor characters, they are referred to either with the label UNIDENTIFIED or MAN/WOMAN or with the job they do in the film – e.g., waiter/waitress, etc. If there are several unknown characters in the same scene, they are numbered in chronological order of appearance, for example, BOARD MEMBER 1 (WOMAN), BOARD MEMBER 2 (MAN), etc.

When the character's voice – be it known or unidentified – is off screen, his/her name appears with the label VOICE in capital letters and in round brackets, as in the following scene taken from *Ocean's Eleven* (2001, S. Soderbergh):

(3)

REUBEN (VOICE)	Number three, the bronze medal. Pencil Neck grabs a lockbox at the Horseshoe.	Terzo posto, medaglia di bronzo. Mezzo Collo acchiappa una cassa a mano all'Horseshoe.

Finally, there are cases in which a character pretends to be someone else; here the true name is accompanied by the false one introduced by *as* in lower-case letters, as again in *Ocean's Eleven*:

(4)

| FRANK as RAMON | Eighteen. Blackjack! | Diciotto. Blackjack! |

A similar case can be found in *Sliding Doors* (1998, P. Howitt), even if this time, the same character – i.e., Helen/Gwyneth Paltrow – plays two different roles with the same name in two parallel stories, as the film tells two alternative versions of the story of Helen Quilley catching or missing her train to go back home from work. As a consequence, when the story splits up, the character of Helen is referred to as HELEN 1 or HELEN 2, depending on which version of the story the film narrates.

In some films, audible background songs are transcribed. In this case, in the left-hand column you will find the title of the song in lower-case italic letters, followed by the name of the singer or group in lower-case letters, both preceded by the label SONG in capital letters and a number signalling the chronological order of performance. The central and the right-hand columns contain the lyrics of the song transcribed in italics, since the music track is the same in both versions. See again an example from *Notting Hill*:

(5)

| SONG 1 – *She,* Charles Aznavour | *she may be the face I can't forget a trace of pleasure or regret may be my treasure or the price I have to pay* | *she may be the face I can't forget a trace of pleasure or regret may be my treasure or the price I have to pay* |

One last remark is needed to account for the fact that sometimes the same line is translated in the Italian dubbed version and ascribed to a different character. See the example below from *Bend it like Beckham* (2002, G. Chada):

(6)

| JULES in ENG/JOE in ITA | Put it over here. | Mettila lì. |

4. *Prosodic transcription*

The lay-out of the prosodic transcript mirrors the orthographic one with its three columns, even though some additions are made. In the left-hand column, together with the setting, more precise information is provided about the scene, for instance if it is a flashback, which is signalled with angle brackets, as in *Dead Man Walking* (1995, T. Robbins):

(7)

<Flashback>
memories of
HELEN'S
childhood

Unlike the orthographic transcript, the characters' names in each turn are written in small capitals to avoid confusion with capital letters used for other purposes (cf. emphasis in example 20), yet highlighting participants in the verbal exchange.

One last remark concerning the structural organisation of the transcripts refers to the fact that the division of the turns in the talk exchange is well defined. More specifically, not only are the lines uttered by different characters in different rows, but also when the same character speaks to different interlocutors in succession in the same scene, as can be seen in the example below from *Finding Forrester* (2000, G. Van Sant):

(8)

CLAIRE to HER FRIEND	I'm coming!.=	sì, arrivo!.=
CLAIRE to JAMAL	=hey, don't hold that bus there too long!.=	=ehi, non fare aspettare il bus!.=
CLAIRE to FLY	=nice to meet you, fly ((leaves))	=è stato un piacere, fly ((leaves))

The transcription convention used to signal *latching* is the symbol =, which appears both at the beginning and at the end of the turn of the same character speaking with different interlocutors in succession to give a faithful representation of turn-taking. Moreover, when more than two characters are engaged in the same talk exchange, in order to avoid ambiguity, the interlocutor is always indicated in the left-hand column and introduced by *to* in lower-case letters, e.g., BOARD MEMBER 1 (WOMAN) to DANNY and BOARD MEMBER 2 (MAN) to DANNY.

As already pointed out in the introductory part of this section, the central column of the table contains the transcript of the original English soundtrack of the films, while the third contains the Italian version. Unlike the orthographic transcription, the prosodic one generally uses lower-case letters – including proper names, countries, cities and weekdays – with the exception of the first person singular English pronoun *I* and special paralinguistic patterns, as described below.

Both the central and the right-hand columns contain the English description of paralinguistic and kinetic elements, including background noise and speakers' gestures when relevant in the talk exchange, in double round brackets, as in the excerpt below taken from *Finding Forrester*:

6

(9)

| CLAIRE to JAMAL | I'll see you monday. ok?... ((leaves with her dad)) | ci vediamo lunedì. d'accordo?... ((leaves with her dad)) |

If the name of a character appears in such comments, it is always written in small capitals, in order to highlight it and distinguish it from the orthographic conventions that represent other paralinguistic elements: for example, we get ((JAMAL leaves his essay on the floor and goes away)).

Information about the manner of speech is provided either by using specific signs or with comments in double round brackets. For example, double scare quotes are used for reported speech, and hyphens for false starts and self-corrections, as can be seen in (10) from *Sliding Doors*,

(10)

| HELEN 2 | ah, it's ok!. I-I haven't thought. I mean I-I-I didn't think that. or not | ah--, non fa niente!. io non-- non ho pensato. insomma i-i-io non ho pensato questo o quello |

Whereas *laughter* or *sigh* in double round brackets are used to signal if the speaker laughs or sighs in the course of the interaction, as in (11). More specifically, if the speaker says something while laughing, the portion of the utterance in question is highlighted using the label ((laughing)) before the part of the utterance affected. In such cases, a plus symbol marks the beginning and a star symbol the end of the segment. Compare the two examples below taken from *One Hour Photo* (2002, M. Romanek):

(11)

| NINA | oh no, really, it's fine. oh, no, please!. ((laughter)) I look horrible! | no, non importa. no, no, no, la prego!, ((laughter)) sono orribile! |

(12)

| NINA | oh jake!. ((laughing)) +yeah!.* a little sensitive maybe but um--. he likes you, sy | oh, jake!. ((laughing)) +sì.* è un ragazzino molto sensibile. lei gli piace, sy |

However, if the whole utterance is affected, it does not need to be identified with any convention, apart from the initial specification, as in (13) from *Secrets and Lies* (1996, M. Leigh). In this case, there is no ambiguity and the body of the transcript can thus be rendered more readable in this way:

(13)

| WOMAN | ((laughing)) I feel so silly! | ((laughing)) mi sento una stupida! |

The plus and star symbols are also used when two or more speakers speak simultaneously. The plus symbol marks the beginning of the *overlapping*, while the star symbol is placed at the end. If more than one overlap occurs in the same scene, consecutive overlaps are numbered, as in the following scene from *Crash* (2004, P. Haggis):

(14)

JEAN	yes!. the guy in there with the shaved head, the pants +1around his ass,* the prison tattoo!	sì!, quello rapato a zero, con le MUTANDE +1fuori dai calzoni,* marchiato dal tatuaggio!
RICK	+1oh, come on!* those are not prison +2tattoos*	+1oh, andiamo!.* non è un marchio +2il tatuaggio!*
JEAN	+2oh, really?,* and he's not gonna go sell our key to one of his gang banger friends the moment he is out our door?	+2AH, NO?.* e dici che non andrà a vendere la nostra chiave a qualche amico rapinatore quando uscirà +3di qui?*

Finally, even when the characters speak and there is a song in the background, it is considered a case of overlapping and is signalled with the same conventions. See another excerpt from *Crash*:

(15)

| SONG 4 – *In the Deep*, Kathleen York | *now you're out there spinning now you're out there swimming +now you're out there spinning in the deep, in the deep*, in the deep* | *now you're out there spinning now you're out there swimming +now you're out there spinning in the deep, in the deep*, in the deep* |
| ANTHONY to ILLEGALS | alright. everybody out, man!. +you're free to go. alright, come on!.. come on now, this is america, time is money!, chop, chop!, come on, y'all!.. come on!* ((helps them to get off))...= | ecco qua. avanti, +tutti fuori!. siete liberi. su andiamo!. su, questa è l'america!, qui il tempo è denaro!, presto, presto!, FUORI TUTTI!* coraggio! ((helps them to get off))...= |

Overlap constitutes an important difference with respect to the orthographic transcription, in which each speaker's turn is not divided to allow for the introduction of other speakers' interventions – i.e., as happens in the case of overlapping or when a character talks to different interlocutors – but appears in one piece. Compare the two ex-

cerpts below from *Crash*, where (16a) is an example of orthographic transcription, while (16b) is its corresponding prosodic transcription:

(16a)

MARIA	I'm sorry, Miss Jean. Is ok I go home now?	Scusi, señor, eh, va bene se io vado ora?
RICK	It's fine. Thank you very much for staying, Maria.	Va bene. Grazie di essere rimasta, Maria.
MARIA	You're welcome. No problem. Good night, Miss Jean.	No, no, non c'è problema. Notte, signora.

(16b)

MARIA (HOUSE-KEEPER) to JEAN	I'm sorry, miss jean..=	
MARIA to RICK	=is ok I go home now?	scusi, [Spanish: señor]--. eh--. va bene se io vado ora?
RICK to MARIA	it's fine, thank you very much for staying, maria	va bene, grazie di essere rimasta, maria
MARIA	you're welcome, no problem.=	no, no, non c'è problema=
MARIA to JEAN	=good night, miss jean	=notte, signora

Another interesting aspect that is worth noticing is that in the film corpus there are some films, like *Bend it like Beckham*, *Ae Fond Kiss* (2004, K. Loach) and *Crash*, that portray the multicultural melting pot in modern society, so that not only is diatopic linguistic variation rendered, but also code-switching, that is, languages other than English spoken by the same characters – e.g., Punjabi, Farsi, Korean, Spanish and Chinese. In the latter case, various configurations are possible: a) the use of subtitles that translate the foreign language, which is maintained in the original soundtrack/dubbing; b) dubbing into Italian; c) the foreign language is maintained in the source and in the target text without subtitles.

As regards transcription conventions, in the first case the subtitled text in English or Italian appears within square brackets and in italics, preceded by the name of the language actually spoken, while in the third case the foreign language is not transcribed, but simply indicated within square brackets, as can be seen in the following excerpt from *Ae Fond Kiss*, which includes both cases:

(17)

MR KHAN to MRS KHAN	[Punjabi: *On you go.*]	[Punjabi: *Prego, cara.*]
MRS KHAN to GUESTS	[Punjabi: *Peace be on you! Are you all right? Find the house ok?*]	[Punjabi: *Che la pace sia con voi!*]
MR KHAN and GUESTS	[Punjabi]	[Punjabi]

However, when the foreign language spoken is one an average Italian audience is assumed to be more familiar with, such as Spanish or French, the lines are fully transcribed in lower-case letters (not in italics) within square brackets, and always indicate the name of the language, e.g., [Spanish: señor] (as in 16b above).

Italics are also used for TV or radio programmes and for monologues. See an example from *Bend it like Beckham*:

(18)

| MAN SPEAKER on TV | *SAVED!. smith beats the keeper!. goal for kelly smith, the england international!* | *GRAN parata!. smith batte il portiere!. GOL!. è l'inglese kelly smith la rivelazione del campionato!* |

4.1. *Transcribing prosodic features and linguistic variation*

The following section concerns the prosodic features added to the *orthographic* transcript and is thus devoted to the description of intonation patterns, stress and pausing, all of which may be connected with precise codes; at this stage, however, intonation is simply associated with grammatical functions. Only cases of *intonation* other than the declarative tone have been indicated, so that for the interrogative tone, a question mark is placed at the end of the unit, while an exclamation mark is used for the exclamatory tone and a double hyphen for hesitations or interrupted speech. See some examples below from *Notting Hill*:

(19)

| WILLIAM | well, there seems to be--. lots of reasons why I shouldn't, so-- | bè, sembra che ci siano--. tanti motivi per cui non dovrei, perciò-- |
| ANNA | there are lots of reasons--!... do you wanna come up?.. | ci sono tantissimi motivi... vuoi venire di sopra da me?.. |

As can be seen, the symbols used to identify intonation may be followed by other types of punctuation marks such as commas and full stops (see example 19); these are symbols to mark pausing. More specifically, a comma identifies a simple intonation break

10

with no actual pause, while full stops indicate pauses which are measured along a scale of length: they range from a single full stop, which stands for a very short pause, i.e., at most 1 second, to two full stops for a medium pause of 2 seconds, to three full stops to indicate a very long pause of 3 or more seconds. Finally, capital letters are used to transcribe isolated words that are given particular stress, or even entire bits of conversation spoken in a loud voice. In the example below, taken from *Dead Man Walking*, capitals are used at the beginning of the turn to stress words and at the end to convey anger:

(20)

| MR DELACROIX | ME call YOU?. think about that, sister!. think about how ARROGANT that is!. EXCUSE ME! ((leaves)) | IO devo chiamare LEI?. ma rifletta, sorella!. rifletta su quanto è ARROGANTE una proposta del genere!. E ORA MI SCUSI! ((leaves)) |

Prosodic transcription also differs from orthographic ones because it aims to reproduce the non-standard pronunciation of words in English or Italian pronounced by foreigners, as well as the pronunciation of other peripheral elements, such as fillers, interjections, filled pauses and backchannel cues – i.e., pseudo-verbal sounds like *mh*, *huh uh*, etc. – discourse markers, invariant tags and contracted forms. In the excerpt below taken from *Crash*, we can observe, for instance, that the Asian speaker's non-standard grammar in the original English soundtrack is rendered also by exploiting the phonological level in the Italian dubbed version, so that the [r]sound is pronounced as an [l]sound, a typical feature of Asian speakers of Italian:

(21)

| KIM LEE | WHY?, it NOT my fault!. ((pointing at RIA, approaching)) it's her fault!, SHE DO THIS! | PELCHÈ?, non è MIA colpa!. ((pointing at RIA, approaching)) è SUA colpa! lei ha fatto! |

In the English soundtrack, again in *Crash*, the Persian character of Shereen/Martina Sirtis mispronounces [w] in *won't* as [v]:

(22)

| SHEREEN (FARHAD'S WIFE) | IT VON'T CLOSE! | NON SI CHIUDE! |

As regards response forms, backchannels and hesitators, different transcriptions have been adopted for the two languages. See the brief list below:

Table 1 – Based on Biber *et al.* (1999) for English and Poggi (1981, 1995) for Italian

Meaning/Function	English	Italian
response forms and backchannels	huh uh / uh huh mm / mhm	ahah mh
hesitators	uh / um (AmE) er / erm / ehm (BrE)	eh

Attention has also been paid to linguistic variation from a diatopic point of view, namely taking into account the different varieties of English. For instance, some invariant tags are spelt differently: *huh* for American English, *eh* for British English and *e* for Scottish English – see the examples below taken respectively from *Erin Brockovich* (2000, S. Soderbergh), showing the use of the American *huh*-tag (23), *Bend it Like Beckham*, in which Mrs Paxton/Juliet Stevenson uses the *eh*-tag (24) and finally, *Secrets and Lies*, in which the Scottish character Monica/Phyllis Logan uses the Scots *e*-tag (25):

(23)

| ED | you told me you were not feeling great!, huh? | mi avevi detto che non ti sentivi bene |

(24)

| MRS PAXTON | oh!, that's nice!, jesminda. lovely!. ((sigh)) well, ((sigh)) jesminda, I bet your room at home doesn't look like this, eh?. with all these great big butch women on the wall! | oh!, è carino!. jesminda. adorabile!. ((sigh)) bè--, jesminda, scommetto che la tua stanza non è così disastrata, eh?. con tutte queste donnone muscolose attaccate +al muro invece di--* |

(25)

| MONICA | the demon drink, e? | è il diavolo che ti fa bere |

Different transcriptions of this kind are fundamental for various reasons; more specifically, they portray a striking difference in the phonetic realisation, intonation and also syntactic and semantic connotations of this invariant tag in English. For instance, if we compare the English *eh* and Scots *e*, the first always occurs with a high tone level intonation and is pronounced [ɛɪ], while the second is typically realised as [ɛ] and is always stressed, constituting a tone group. In addition, syntactically the Scots *e* can occur only after affirmative utterances, having a negative polarity – and for this reason Millar, Brown (1979) refer to it as "reversed polarity tag particle" (1979: 33) – while the English *eh* can occur freely with any sentence type, as can be observed in the examples above.

With regard to attention signals and more colloquial greeting forms, we can encounter *hey*, *yo*, *oy* and *hiya*; other non-standard forms reflecting pronunciation are *gonna*, *wanna*,

12

gotta, the abbreviated form of *because* as *'cos*, and also *fella*, *ma'am*, *ain't* and *innit*. On the other hand, as far as Italian is concerned, the transcription of some interjections is worth noticing, namely *eh, bè/beh* and *ehi* (vs. English *hey*). The table below reports how other interjections and response forms are transcribed orthographically in both languages:

Table 2 – Based on Biber *et al.* (1999) for English and Poggi (1981, 1995) for Italian

Meaning/Function	English	Italian
Other interjections	aargh	ah
	ah / oh	ahi
	cor	bleah
	ooh	pss
	oops / whoops	ss
	ow / ouch	tsk
	sh	tz
	wow	
Other response forms	nope	
	yep	
	yeah	

Finally, also diastratic and diaphasic linguistic variation are reflected in the pronunciation of words, in line with other syntactic and lexical features that all together characterise a lower and colloquial register reflecting informality and relational proximity. For instance, the case of English personal pronouns such as *you* transcribed as *ya* or *myself* as *meself*, as can be seen in the following exchange between a working-class mother and her daughter, taken from *Secrets and Lies*:

(26)

ROXANNE	ain't you having none?	e tu non la mangi?
CYNTHIA	oh, I'll just fry meself an egg. do you want a beer?	no, mi friggo un uovo. vuoi una birra?
ROXANNE	we ain't got none	non ce l'abbiamo
CYNTHIA	I got you some!	sì, te l'ho comprata!
ROXANNE	oh!. did ya?	ah!. davvero?

5. *Issues and problems in filmic speech transcription*

The transcription of film language involves fewer problems in comparison to that of spontaneous speech. In fact, in the latter case, real-life environments are often characterised by numerous noises and disturbances which generally produce recordings of poor quality, making the transcriber's work hard and sometimes far from accurate (Gavioli, Mansfield 1990). However, despite its generally higher quality of recording, it is also true that film language can be quite unintelligible in some circumstances. The main causes are generally related to interferences caused by background noise, music and, above all, the overlapping of different speakers in crowded scenes, which make precise transcription very difficult to obtain; in the latter case in particular, it is often difficult to match speech with speakers. A

clear example of this is a scene in *Ocean's Eleven*, where the character of Rusty/Brad Pitt
is in a Hollywood club teaching a group of movie stars how to play poker:

(27)

BARRY	is that good?. +1ok*	e faccio bene?. +1ok, sono fuori*
RUSTY	+1done*	+1no, mettila giù*
BARRY to RUSTY	I'm out. +2what are you doing?*	+2ma che fai?*
TOPHER	+2and-- uh--*	+2e--*
RUSTY to BERRY	you're done	+3hai chiuso. sì. hai chiuso!*
TOPHER	dealer will take three	+3chiudon le carte. ne prendo tre*
RUSTY to BERRY	you're done=	
RUSTY to SHANE	=shane you got three pairs	shane hai tre coppie
SHANE	yeah	sì
RUSTY	you can't have three pairs. you can't have six cards in +a five card game!*	non puoi avere tre coppie, è un gio-co a cinque carte, +1ne hai una di troppo!*
JOSH	+it wasn't me!*	+1io non pago!*
UNIDENTIFIED (VOICE)	josh!	josh!, +2già cominciamo a im-brogliare?*
HOLLY	maybe one was +1mine*	+2forse una era mia*
JOSH	+1it wasn't me!, I might have--*	+3non è colpa mia, me le sono trovate così!*
UNIDENTIFIED (VOICE)	+2Ijust gave him the cards I was supposed to give*	gli ho dato solo le carte +4che gli dovevo dare*
TOPHER	+2fellows!, fellows!. all--*	+3RAGAZZI!,* +4RAGAZZI!. tutte--*
HOLLY	+2I think--. ok*	+4credo di aver--.* ok
TOPHER	reds! ((laughter))	rosse! ((laughter))
UNIDENTIFIED (VOICE)	+3yeah!*	sì
UNIDENTIFIED (VOICE)	+3look at you!*	+1ma guardate questo!*
UNIDENTIFIED (VOICE)	+3this guy!*	
UNIDENTIFIED (VOICE)	what a dog!	+1certo che ci vuole pure fortuna!*
UNIDENTIFIED (VOICE)	+4all right!, nice!*	
UNIDENTIFIED (VOICE)	+4I told you!*	+2ma guarda!, che disastro!*

UNIDENTIFIED (VOICE)	+4that's fine!*	+2allora lo potevi dire che sai giocare!*
UNIDENTIFIED (VOICE)	+5face. face. face*	tanto per vincere ci vuole solo la fortuna!
UNIDENTIFIED (VOICE)	+5I don't know*	che ci fai con tutti +3questi soldi?*
TOPHER	I'm gonna love spending your money!. I'm gonna get my car washed!	+3ah!, sarà un piacere* spendere i vostri soldi!. mi ci faccio lavare la macchina!

The great amount of even multiple overlapping, together with the fact that close-ups are very rare – i.e., we can only hear voices, without being able to identify who is actually talking – makes it impossible to obtain a perfectly accurate transcription. Italian dubbing is also of no help, since it either completely changes the content of the lines in the original soundtrack or adds new lines that may be misleading for the transcriber.

In other cases, it is impossible to understand clearly what the characters are saying because we can only hear their voices: for instance, when they are in a different place from the one framed by the camera. In this case, the linguistic items that are missing are expressed by three capital Xs in round brackets, as in the example below taken from *Secrets and Lies*: this involves a close-up of Hortense/Marianne Jean-Baptiste in her adoptive mother's room, reading some letters and overhearing what her two brothers are arguing about on the staircase:

(28)

| FIRST BROTHER (VOICE) to SECOND BROTHER | (XXX) we've got a family! (XXX) | noi abbiamo una famiglia! (XXX) bisogna pensare (XXX) come facciamo a (XXX) e poi chiamare a qualsiasi ora della notte e poi venire quando ti pare! |

If we compare the original soundtrack in English with the Italian dubbing, it is clear that both are characterised by incomprehensible parts, but also that in Italian a few lines are freely added to the original.

Another example is when music drowns speech, as occurs right at the beginning of *Ae Fond Kiss*, where the Italian version appears to integrate the original version by adding new lines:

(29)

| MR KHAN to DOG'S OWNER | ((background music)) hey, missus! (XXX) | ((background music)) va' via!. portalo via!. dico a te!, porta via quel cane! |

Another problem faced when transcribing film dialogue involved diatopic linguistic variation. The main spoken varieties of English are American English and British English, but a different range of accents are recognisable too. For instance, if we consider the films set in London, there are characters with a Scottish accent (i.e., Monica/Phyllis Logan in *Secrets and Lies*, James/John Hannah in *Sliding Doors*), an Irish accent (i.e., Joe/Jonathan Rhys Meyer in *Bend it like Beckham*, Anna/Zara Turner in *Sliding Doors*), a Welsh accent (i.e., Spike/Rhys Ifans in *Notting Hill*) and an American accent, too (i.e., Lydia/Jeanne Tripplehorn in *Sliding Doors*, Anna/Julia Roberts in *Notting Hill*). Moreover, in *Ae Fond Kiss*, as well as in *Bend it like Beckham*, language also varies according to ethnicity and many cross-cultural aspects come into play (see Monti's contribution, this volume). In the first film, there are Pakistani immigrants of first and second generation who speak in different ways, since the latter speak English with a Scottish accent whereas the former speak Indian English. The same phenomenon occurs in the Punjabi community portrayed in *Bend it like Beckham*. As regards the American films, Ebonic or Black English is spoken in *Finding Forrester* – i.e., Jamal/Rob Brown and his family and friends from the ghetto – and in *Crash* – i.e., the two black boys, Anthony/Ludacris and Peter/Larenz Tate.

The representation of all these different accents creates several problems. First of all, the balance between accuracy and readability: on the one hand, the use of spelling closer to actual speech is risky because it undermines intelligibility and understanding; on the other hand, as Roberts (1997) points out, "choosing to use the grammar and spelling conventions of standard UK written English aids readability, but at the same time irons out the linguistic variety" that certainly contributes to defining characters in films. Secondly, non-standard transcription would inevitably increase the number of different words – i.e., the type-token ratio – and make computer searches more complex (Pallotti, 1999: 388). Therefore, a compromise has to be made: in this study, we chose to limit the number of possible realisations of words to marked and meaningful cases – see the invariant tag *eh/huh/e* or the personal pronoun *you* that can only appear either as *ya* or *y'*. Moreover, to respect the relation between spelling and pronunciation, numbers are written out as words, and acronyms and initialisms are distinguished. For example, in the latter case, words like *US,* standing for *United States*, are spelt with lower-case letters separated by a space – i.e., u s – as they are actually pronounced, to avoid ambiguity with the first person plural pronoun *us*. Finally, hyphenated compound words – e.g., *daughter-in-law* – are one last case in which orthographic rules are disregarded in the prosodic transcription: since the hyphen is a convention that stands for self-corrections and false starts (cf., for example, 10), it is not used in the prosodic transcript, where instead there are simply words separated by spaces – e.g., *daughter-in-law > daughter in law*.

6. *Conclusions*

Transcription involves the re-elaboration of oral data: they are analysed, selected and interpreted by the transcriber/researcher, who decides which elements to represent and how, on the basis of the aims of the research project. Transcribers have to face various theoretical issues involved in the "translation of talk into text" (Tilley 2003: 758) and should always motivate the choices they make; this is why transcription is both an interpretative process and theory. It must of course be acknowledged that there are different ways to tran-

scribe oral data, as there are no standardised conventions, but only reference models that can be varied and adjusted during the transcription process itself. This is also true for the representation of filmic speech, a specific type of oral data, which creates several problems regarding how to deal with and describe the various aspects that characterise both verbal and non-verbal codes – i.e., linguistic variation, prosodic features and paralinguistic elements – in the written mode. A very important point is that the solutions adopted by the transcriber must respect the balance between readability and accuracy.

The two transcriptions, orthographic and prosodic, offer a wide range of opportunities for linguistic studies that focus on the comparison between original and dubbed film language. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses can be carried out, making particular use of prosodic and paralinguistic information that comes to the fore when phenomena relating to face-to-face interaction are investigated.

Appendix – List of conventions in the prosodic transcription

=	latching
+some*	overlapping
+1some*	multiple overlapping in succession
((laughter))	comments
((laughing))	comments preceding the whole utterance
((laughing)) +some*	comments preceding parts of an utterance
"some"	reported speech, titles, reading out
(XXX)	unintelligible speech
[Punjabi]	languages other than English or Italian
[Spanish: some]	languages other than English or Italian (but understandable for the average Italian audience)
[subtitle: *italics*]	subtitles
italics	songs, monologues, TV and radio programmes, song title in the left-hand column
CAPITALS	emphasis, stress, loud voice tone, SONG label in left-hand column, first person singular pronoun *I* in the central column with the English soundtrack
SMALL CAPITALS	name of characters
(VOICE)	off-screen voice
UNIDENTIFIED	unidentified character
WAITER/WAITRESS	secondary or unknown characters identified by their jobs
BOARD MEMBER (MAN)	additional information to describe secondary or unknown characters
BOARD MEMBER 1 (MAN)	secondary characters are numbered when more than one appears in the same scene
FRANK (DEALER)	additional information to describe characters when functional to understanding the talk exchange
FRANK as RAMON	same character plays a different role
HELEN 1, HELEN 2	same character plays the same role in parallel stories
FRANK to RUSTY	identification of interlocutor when the speaker talks to different characters in succession or in crowded scenes
,	intonation break without pause
.	brief pause (1 second)
..	medium pause (from 1 to 2 seconds)
…	long pause (3 or more seconds)
?	interrogative tone (grammatical function)
!	exclamatory tone
--	hesitation, interrupted speech
-	false start, self-correction