

Francesco Vitucci  
Università di Bologna

Representation of masculine speech in the Japanese dub  
of the American series *Never Have I Ever* (2020): fictional idiolects  
or linguistic experimentation?

Abstract

This case study analyzes male language in the Japanese-language version of the American series *Never Have I Ever* (2020),<sup>1</sup> produced and dubbed by Netflix. Building upon audiovisual translation and recent Japanese sociolinguistic studies, this article intends to highlight the gap that has grown over the years between the non-native actors' language and the real speech of Japanese speakers, as well as the hypermasculinization of fictional speech aimed at indexicalizing an informal, funny and cool male model, through the phenomenon of *transduction*. In the Japanese audiovisual context, it is possible to trace a sort of linguistic essentialism in both male and female speech, which heavily leans on the so-called *body of otherness* and which risks reinforcing stereotypes of gender, race and social class. Will this also be the case for this new series?

1. *Introduction*

This case study analyzes male language in the Japanese-language version of the American series *Never Have I Ever* (2020), produced and dubbed by Netflix. Before introducing the details of the analysis proposed in this study, it is useful to dwell briefly on how audiovisual materials intertwine with the topic of identity and diversity through their worldwide circulation. As already suggested by numerous studies conducted in the field of translation (Alfano 2018; De Marco 2006, 2009, 2016; Díaz Pérez 2018; Ranzato and Zanotti 2018; von Flotow and Josephy-Hernández 2018; Zabalbeascoa 2012), the translated text

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1 Hereafter abbreviated to the acronym NHIE.

plays a crucial, mediating role for the (re)definition of identities, while needing to achieve balance between the accurate description of the characters and the risk of developing or reiterating stereotypes. Regardless of the difficulties intrinsic to various types of translation (consider, for example, the characteristics and purposes of dubbing with respect to interlingual subtitling), as already underlined by Díaz-Cintas (2012), the mediation offered by translated text today plays a key role in the formulation of cultural concepts such as femininity, masculinity, race or otherness. From this viewpoint, translators – far from passively transmitting the source texts with which they are confronted – act as active agents in the formation of the ideological discourse of their culture, and can consciously or unconsciously accept the system of values, contributing to their diffusion or subversion (282-3). In particular, in the wake of the aforementioned observations, Balirano (2014; 2015) underlines that, since language plays a fundamental role in simultaneously producing and reproducing both social exclusion and inclusion, today we need to deepen the link between the use of audiovisual texts and the way in which they shape meanings and identities, both from a sociological and a translational perspective.

As already suggested by Nakamura (2013) in one of her pioneering studies on genderlects in Japan, the gap between the dubbed language of non-native actors and the real speech of native speakers has become more prominent over the years. This has stimulated various linguistic phenomena including a hypermasculinization of fictional speech aimed at indexicalizing, through the so-called phenomenon of *transduction*, an informal, funny and *cool* male model. In the Japanese audiovisual context today, both through male speech and female speech,<sup>2</sup> it is possible to trace – especially in the genre of comedy – the use of a certain linguistic essentialism that uses a *body of otherness* to spread a distant Japanese through autochthonous interactional patterns, thus reinforcing stereotypes of gender, race and social class.

This type of practice is quite common in Japan. Nakamura demonstrates how the *yā style* youthful register, for example, aimed to generate a contrast with male speech considered *ideal* and in line with the characteristics of the class of Japanese office workers (*sararīman*). Based on her perceptive observations, the *yā style*:

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2 To this end, it would be helpful to mention Jugaku Akiko, Endo Oriie, Tanaka Kazuko and Okamoto Shigeko research on the topic.

is associated with the image of young, nonnative men who are cool and informal. Translators linked the style with foreignness by selecting marked features that came to be avoided by Japanese men, such as the greeting *yā* and the sentence-final form *sa*. The use of the style in a parody emphasizes the negative meanings of the style, including excessive informality and a lack of politeness and formality, which works to legitimate opposite meanings such as politeness and formality as fundamental traits of ideal Japanese masculinities, such as hegemonic *sararīman* masculinity. (Nakamura 2020a, 257)

Albeit from a slightly different perspective, Suzuki (2020) also underlines how in the Japanese context identity factors such as nationality, race, social class and sexuality often lead translators to indulge in misleading representations of non-Asian male speech by relying on an ill-concealed *cultural nationalism* which considers only the natives as holders of an exquisitely correct language from the viewpoint of diatopic (mastery of dialects), diastratic (mastery of slang) and diagenetic (male speech) mastery of speech variants (227). As the scholar suggests, non-Asians are often considered *the ultimate Other* (233) and, therefore, unable to convey a Japanese language that serves as a model for native audiences. In this regard, following Suzuki, it is imperative to mention the studies by Nohara (2018) and, above all, by SturtzSreetharan (2017), who have been studying male languages in the Japanese media for years. In particular, it is interesting to note that in agreement with Suzuki and Nakamura, SturtzSreetharan identifies the speech of the *sararīman* as the male reference model of the Japanese media, despite the fact that in recent years sociolinguistic studies have amply demonstrated that:

[...] Actual speakers of Japanese do not exhibit usages that conform to these ideals. Empirical investigations of speakers indicate that there are specific contexts wherein women and men use language that more or less matches the stereotypically gendered situations described above; but these same investigations show just as clearly that these norms of language use do not hold true most of the time. [...] Of course, male and female speakers can borrow one another's so-called sex-specific language to various ends. Women have been found to use so-called 'men's speech norms' for purposes that range from directness and anger to sarcasm and joking [...] In naturally occurring all-male peer-group conversations, men have been found to use far fewer so-called 'men's speech norms' than was assumed to be the case. (SturtzSreetharan 2017, 180-1)

As the scholar suggests, as the boundaries between male and female speech have become more permeable in Japan, the representation of certain idiolects

in the media (and, in particular, in audiovisual products) not only exerts a profound influence on the perception of masculine and feminine speech by various reference audiences, but it can also stimulate more or less correct forms of juxtaposition between this and certain gender ideologies. Thus, the ways in which media represent discourse shape expectations of what should resonate as appropriate in diagenetic terms. Precisely for this reason, the phenomenon of exposure to audiovisual speech must be analyzed alongside the *indexical bleaching* phenomenon theorized by Squires (2014) and cited by Nakamura (2013; 2014; 2020a; 2020b; 2021), according to which the degree of diffusion of audiovisual products would play a preponderant role in the process of emulation and diffusion of certain idiolects in society.

Declining the aforementioned observations in the context of identity perception, if from a purely post-structuralist perspective gender is not innate a priori, but is configured through a practice that is continuously renegotiated within certain sociocultural and historical contexts (Abe 2010; Norton 2021; Ranzato 2012; Vitucci 2020a, 2020b), exposure to idiolects performed within certain audiovisual artifacts, could represent an opportunity to rearrange and indexicalize new semantic values of speech. As will be noted for the series examined in this study, thanks to the translation strategy that Nakamura defines as *distinction*, it is possible to witness the creation of genderlects that outline identity profiles that tend to be *distant*. Nonetheless, as Nakamura herself states, this type of creative experimentation can also turn into an opportunity for linguistic innovation (2013, 114) even if it is necessary to understand whether these genderlects were created with the aim of renewing the expressive baggage of Japanese male speech, or if, on the other hand, they aim to accentuate the distance between translated language and normative speech. As Leonardi recalls in this regard:

AVT is mainly characterized by the use of language which, far from being neutral, can be used in many different ways in order to manipulate meanings and exert a strong influence on society as a whole. [...] However, it has become more and more common to refer 'foreignizing' and 'domesticating' (translation) strategies when deciding upon and judging the type of language transfer to be used in particular contexts. It is not surprising that these strategies are used in translation in order to decrease or increase the sense of 'otherness'. (Leonardi 2008, 158)

## 2. Dataset and content

The dataset of this study is based on dubbed and subtitled texts in Japanese and English of the first two seasons of the American series *Never Have I Ever* (2020)<sup>3</sup> created for Netflix from Mindy Kaling and Lang Fisher and distributed in Japan. Each season consists of ten episodes<sup>4</sup> and narrates the life of the high school student Devi Vishwakumar, a fifteen-year-old Indian-American Tamil girl residing in Sherman Oaks (near Los Angeles) who is infatuated with her Japanese-American classmate Paxton Hall -Yoshida. The tragicomic series paints a constantly evolving American society in which Devi and her peers confront intergenerational and intercultural problems, as well as the difficulties related to their personal growth and sexual identities.

Based on a previous study conducted by Nakamura in the context of other US television series distributed in Japan (2020a) and the observations of Okamoto (2016) and Vitucci (2020a) about the relationship between gender, linguistic resources and contexts of use, this study focuses on the speech of male protagonists of the series, namely: Paxton (young American of Japanese origin), Ben (American of Jewish origin) and Trent (American with Latin traits), considering the various degrees of indexicality of their speech.<sup>5</sup> Given that the prosodic aspect is of fundamental importance, for reasons of concision, this investigation is restricted to the morphological-lexical aspects of the speech (Nakamura 2013; 2014; 2020a; 2021; Okamoto 2016; SturtzSreetharan 2017). The study will: 1. Describe the most salient characteristics of the Japanese speech of each speaker; 2. Compare the Japanese dubbing with subtitling in the same target language; 3. Compare Japanese texts with the original ones in English; 4. Analyze the positioning of male speech in order to intercept any evolutions and/or possible manipulative practices.

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3 Title of the Japanese version: 私の“初めて”の日記 (Watashi no “Hajimete” No Nikki).

4 The average duration of twenty-seven minutes, for a total of about nine hours for all twenty episodes.

5 In particular, spatial-temporal locus of the communicative context (deixis, use of adverbs of time and place), personal characteristics of the speaker (age, gender, geographical origin), social identity (belonging to one or more groups), linguistic acts, social activities (debates, narrations, dialogues), affective and epistemic attitudes.

### *3. Translation analysis of the scenes*

Below is a qualitative analysis of the translations into Japanese of three scenes extrapolated from the NHIE series with a particular focus on Trent, Ben and Paxton's speech. For the purposes of an objective examination, the tables show the original text in English, and the three speakers – all young men of the same age attending the same school – interacting both with their peers and adult interlocutors. The interlocutors of the scenes examined are both male and female. To better contextualize their speech, the analysis of the scenes is preceded by a brief polysemiotic analysis (setting, para and extraverbal elements, literary-theatrical and kinematic analysis), followed by a linguistic examination of the translated texts (Vitucci 2019, 2020a). In order not to limit the analysis to short portions of speech, every single scene has been inserted in its entirety.

#### *3.1 Paxton and Trent at home. Episode 3 (2nd season): Scene 1 (min. 06:00-07:00)*

- a) **Setting.** Trent awaits Paxton at home and is sitting on the sofa located at the entrance. In front of him, resting on a low table, there are various snacks and cookies purchased by the young man. Even if not framed, there is a television in front of him (during the dialogue Trent will mention it) and resting on the ground there are some boxes. Next to the sofa, there is a wooden table above which many objects are placed in bulk (tanks of motor vehicles' oil, metal containers). The atmosphere is completely informal. At the center of the scene in the background, one can see a shirt and various photos hanging on the wall.
- b) **Extra and paraverbal elements.** The fact that Trent awaits Paxton at his home, makes one assume that he frequents the house with relative freedom. Trent's clothing is rather informal: he wears jeans and a sweatshirt, while Paxton wears jeans and a gray-colored shirt on a black t-shirt. Trent's body language, like resting his feet on the table suggests an extremely confidential relationship between the two, which is also confirmed both by Trent's gestures (he opens the arms showily when he speaks and inserts various deictic signs with the right hand in rhythm with his statements as if to emphasize the importance of his speech) and by the eye contact (they often lock eyes during this exchange). On the paraverbal level, one can detect several pairs of demand/response asked at a high speed by Trent, and at lower pace by Paxton.

- c) Literary-theatrical analysis. The dialogue between the two young men involves a very hard moment for Paxton who, due to an injury, had to suspend his swimming career, through which he had hoped to gain admission to some prestigious universities. Trent tries to console his friend by telling him that in life, it is not necessary to attend university and that he, for example, aims to make his way as a YouTuber on the Internet. In the meantime, they will always be able to have fun together, while distancing themselves from the stress of the future.
- d) Kinematic analysis of the scene. The director develops a precise narrative through the framing of the scene, starting from a medium long shot of Trent aimed at showing part of the setting of the scene (Paxton's house) and which evolves towards the close-ups of the two adolescents framed from the chest up with an almost frontal shot. This type of technique allows the viewer to perceive the degree of confidence existing between the two and to enter into the details of the discussion that will develop from here on. From this moment on, the scene is divided into an alternation of medium fields (field/counterfield) which will follow the rhythm of the ongoing dialogue between the two characters.
- e) Text analysis. As can be observed in Table I, the Japanese dialogue between Trent and Paxton moves within the perimeter of a plan speech (*futsūgo*) with partial forays in the men's slang (*wakamonogo*) characterized by pairs of questions and answers in rapid succession. The level of symmetry of the exchange reflects the personal closeness of the speakers, as well as the confidential relationship that binds them (they attend the same high school and spend time together outside of this context). This type of sociolinguistic positioning of the Japanese translation is in line with the original characterization of some male characters of this series that are often portrayed in superficial exchanges (they exclusively speak of fun, alcohol, drugs, parties, online games and fitness)<sup>6</sup> and which flows into a stereotyping, at times excessive, of their registers.<sup>7</sup> Recalling the studies of Díaz Cintas (2012), Messerli (2019), Vitucci (2020a) and Zabalbeascoa (2012), it

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6 The female characters, on the contrary, are portrayed more frequently dealing with social issues such as sexual identity, anorexia, family and emotional relationships.

7 Not surprisingly, even the dialogues between male speakers are largely lower in numerical terms compared to those between female speakers.

is important to remember that the voice of the so-called “collective sender” – i.e. of all those who contribute to the stratification of the subtexts in the audiovisual product – reaches the target audience in three different ways: through the diegetic system of narrative fiction, the place of origin of the audiovisual product, and the cultural space where the product is used. After considering this possibility, the target audience can confirm its belonging to another sociocultural group, its role of a spectator of a certain imaginary space and, ultimately, its capacity as “external” agent of looking for cultural contents from the original film communities. In the interlinguistic passage, this system, as suggested by Zabalbeascoa (2012), gives the translator the difficult task of mediating between the accurate description of the uniqueness of the characters and the risk of developing stereotypes. This risk is also underlined by Nakamura (2013) when she states that the reiteration of certain idiolects in translation risks leading to a grotesque speech (*yakuwarigo*) that could completely escape the sensitivity of the target audience. This is also confirmed, even if from different perspectives, by the studies of Abe (2010), Okamoto (2016) and Okamoto & Shibamoto-Smith (2004), in which they explore the diagenetic variation in Japanese from a post-structuralist perspective.

In examining the scene, one can note the presence of several informal greeting forms in the subtitling (line 1: *Yō* → *en. Hey*) which are not inserted, for example, in the dubbing, and of pseudo-fool language expressions in both Japanese texts (line 19: *Majika yo* → *En. Oh shit*). The dubbing is more aligned with the stereotype of a cool and tendentially rustic speech. This is noticeable, for example, when Trent calls for Paxton’s attention with an extremely scurrilous interjection, omitted in the subtitle and absent in English (line 13: *Ooe* → *Lit. Hey you!*), or through the reiterated use of the negative/interrogative suffix *-jan* in its agglutinated form instead of *-janai* (lines 1, 12, 16), the informal suffixes in explanatory mode *-nda*, *-nanda*, *-ndayo* (lines 6, 7b, 11), the pragmatic suffix of confirm/recall *-na* in place of the most formal *-ne* (lines 2, 4), the first person male pronoun *ore* and of its corresponding possessive adjective *oreno* (lines 4, 10, 16), the replacement of the auxiliary *-nai* with its allomorph *-nē* (line 2: *Oyogenē* → *Lit. You can’t swim*), the agglutinated imperative form *sunna* in place of *suru na* (line 14: *Shinpai Sunna* → *Lit. Don’t worry!*), and the male emphatic suffix *-ze* (line 18). As already outlined in recent studies on Japanese audiovisual dialogues translated from the Anglophone area, in this case the presence



of sociolinguistic marks typical of highly characterized idiolects in diagenic terms appears more incisive in the dubbed text than the subtitled one (above all, because of the space and time limits of the second), even if the subtitles of this scene do not completely abandon this type of linguistic characterization (see the reiteration of some male speech marks in lines 2, 3, 4, 11, 15, 19). Compared to the English prototext, however, it is possible to notice how – unlike the translation in Japanese – Trent’s speech, apart from some foul expressions (*You wanna blow some shit up?*), is not characterized by the use of a real slang. This is true also in the case of Paxton who, even if he seems to resort to a more informal register, is poorly connoted in slang terms (see the lines 4, 8, 14, 15). Nonetheless, by observing the polysemiotic components of the scene and the different treatment of speakers between the English and the Japanese text, one can notice in the latter the absence of the greeting *-yā*, and of the suffixes *-sa* and *-kai* traced in previous studies (Nakamura 2013, 2020) and attributable to the so-called *yā style* (often used for anglophone teenagers in translation). The absence of these elements, while not denying the possibility of a diachronic evolution of this style, could refute part of the previous sociolinguistic analyses conducted on male idiolects in Japanese translation. However, to offer a more objective overview of NHIE’s male speech, the next section will analyze the speech of Ben, another male protagonist of the series.

	ENG DUBB-SUB	JAP DUBB	JAP SUBS
1	T: Hey, what are you doing home so early?	T: Okaeri, nandayo? Zuibun hayai jan?	T: Yō, kyō wa hayakatta na
2	T: Oh, right. No swimming for you, Nemo.	T: Ah, sōkka. Ima Nimo wa yogenē mon na	T: Sōka mō Nimo janai nda
3	P: Yeah, no swimming for me.	P: Ah, sō iu koto	P: Aa, oyogenai kara na
4	P: Wait, do you usually come hang out at my house when I’m not home?	P: Na, ore ga inai toki mo, kōyatte shocchū heya ni kiteru noka?	P: Ore ga inai toki mo oreno ie ni kiteta no?
5	T: Yep. I find it’s a peaceful place to sit with my thoughts,		
6	T: or to watch porn	T: Aa. Ochitsuite kangaegoto ga dekiru basho nanda. Ecchidōga miru ni mo	T: Kimochi ga ochitsuku shi adaruto dōga mo mirareru

7	P: Didn't need to know that. T: What's wrong, buddy? You seem down.	P: Shiritaku nakatta	P: Naruhodo
7b	-	T: Nani ochikonde ndayo?	T: Dō shita?
8	P: Ms. Warner said that without swimming, college isn't looking too great for me.	P: Wānā san ni oyogenakya daigaku shingaku wa muri tte iwareta	P: Suieishu o yametara daigakushingaku wa kibishii tte
9	T: Eh, who needs college?	T: Daigaku nante iku hitsuyō nai	T: Daigaku nante hitsuyō nai
10	T: After high school, I'm going straight to Youtube.	T: Ore ga sotsugyō shitara yūchūbā ni naru	T: Sotsugyō shitara yūchūbā da
11	T: Get this. I'm gonna react to reaction videos.	T: Nanto riakushon dōga ni riakushon suru nda	T: Riakushon dōga ni riakushon suru nda
12	P: Cool. T: I know, right?	P: Ii jan	P: Ii ne
12b	-	T: Yappa, sō omou?	T: Sō daro?
13	T: Paxton, you good?	T: Ooe, daijōbu ka?	T: Daijōbu ka?
14	P: Yeah. Yeah, I'm...I'm great, man.	P: Ha, daijōbu datte – Shinpai sunna	P: Aa, ore wa heiki da
15	P: I just kinda don't know what I'm doing with myself.	P: Tada, korekara dō sureba iika wakaranakute	P: Kono saki dō sureba iika wakaranai nda
16	T: I'll tell you what your doing. You're hanging out with me.	T: Dō suru tte? Ore to asobeba ii jan!	T: Ore to tsurundetara ii
17	T: Now that you're free, we can party every day.	T: Hima ni natta ndakara, mainichi asobimakureru	T: Kore kara wa mainichi pātī da
18	T: You wanna blow some shit up?	T: Hadeni buppanasō ze!	T: Bakuha saseru?
19	P: Oh shit.	P: Magika yo	P: Magika yo

Table 1<sup>8</sup> – Paxton and Trent at home.

8 The Japanese text is reported with its transcription in Latin characters as in sociolinguistic studies. Interpunctive signs follow the original texts, except for the dubbing in Japanese where they have been inserted in the table for transcription needs. Subtitles do not reflect the original organization of the text on the screen. English subtitles and dubbing are identical as in the original texts.

3.2 *Devi at Ben's birthday party. Episode 8 (1st season): Scene 2 (min. 1:03:15-1:05:15)*

- a) **Setting.** In this scene, Ben welcomes Devi in his luxurious home, descending from the stairs leading to the living room. There are several young people who chat and sip drinks in a relaxed and informal atmosphere with music in the background. After having welcomed his friend, Ben leads Devi into his theater room where they continue to converse sitting next to each other, isolating themselves from the rest of the group.
- b) **Extra and paraverbal elements.** Ben's formal clothing reveals the importance that he assigns both to his birthday and to the visit of Devi, who is particularly important for the young man. Ben is dressed in a red jacket and a black t-shirt, with carefully styled hair for the occasion. Devi wears a black dress with floral decorations and carries a green fabric shoulder bag. Ben's embarrassment is palpable – he cannot look at Devi in the eyes and speaks loudly (probably because of the uproar that surrounds them). On the other hand, Devi seems to be relaxed and at ease. They both lower the tone of their voice and intensify the eye contact once they have entered the theater room.
- c) **Literary-theatrical analysis.** This dialogue between Ben and Devi is set in a crucial moment of the narration because it is the first time that Ben tells Devi about his life as a single child and of the continuous absence of his parents. After receiving a birthday gift from Devi, Ben understands that he has feelings for her and he will try to kiss her later.
- d) **Kinematic analysis of the scene.** The narration that develops from a long shot (intended to frame Ben as he descends the stairs) showing part of the setting of the scene (the rest of the house and the other young people around) and then evolves into close-ups of the two speakers. Positioning the two youth in front of each other, during the dialogue the camera is placed diagonally behind the interlocutors, while once inside the theater room, the shot develops from the medium long shot to close-ups by shooting Ben and Devi together with a slightly diagonal and never frontal cut. Depending on who is speaking, the camera is always behind one of the two speakers.
- e) **Text analysis.** As one can observe in Table 2, the Japanese dialogue between Ben and Devi develops within a horizontal and informal perimeter thanks to the informal register (*futsūgo*) used by both. Also in this case, the level of symmetry of the exchange is undoubtedly due to the fact that both personally relate to the topic discussed, as well as their confidential relationship (they are classmates). Unlike the previous scene, the sociolinguistic positioning of

the Japanese translation appears somewhat in line with the English prototext and is characterized by a significant decrease of the male marks in the speech of Ben.<sup>9</sup> From an exquisitely sociolinguistic viewpoint, the Japanese texts – moving away from the *yā style* characteristics – also lacks the typical features of the Japanese youth language (*wakamonogo*) which, according to Ishiguro (2013), is characterized by an unconventional use of emphatic adverbs (ex. *chō, sagoku, maji, geki, hanpa naku, mecha* → Lit. *Very*), morphological alteration or qualifiers (ex. *uzai* in place of *uzattai* → Lit. *Annoying*; *kimoi* in place of *ki-mochiwarui* → Lit. *Disgusting*; *muzui* instead of *muzukashii* → Lit. *Difficult*; *hazui* instead of *hazukashii* → Lit. *Embarrassing*), semantic shift of qualifiers (ex. *yabai* in place of *sugoi, yoi* → Lit. *Good*; *samui* instead of *omoshirokunai* → Lit. *Uninteresting*),<sup>10</sup> frequent use of lexical abbreviations<sup>11</sup> (ex. *hitokara* instead of *hitori karaoke* → Lit. *Singing alone in karaoke*; *kokuru* in place of *kokubaku suru* → Lit. *To confess One's Love*; *motokano* instead of *moto kanojo* → Lit. *Ex-girlfriend*), alteration of the courtesy copula *-desu* (ex. *-suka* instead of *-desu [ka]*; ex. *-sshō* in place of *-des [hō]*), and abbreviation of adverbs and conjunctions for reasons of speed (ex. *kihon* in place of *kihontekini* → Lit. *Basically*; former. *Aru imi* in place of *aru imi dewa* → Lit. *In some way*).

In this second scene, despite Ben speaking with a female interlocutor (giving him more opportunity to insert distinctively male speech in the dialogue), his Japanese dubbing develops according to the canons of confidential speech (one can notice the use of plain verbs and of the male singular first person pronoun *ore*), but without resorting to the aforementioned strategies of the *wakamonogo*, nor to those of the *yā style* (characterized by the greeting *-yā*, and the suffixes *-sa* and *-kai*). This is noticeable in lines 15-6 (*Oya ni yare tte iwareta, tanjōbi ni hitori ni shite warui to omotteru nda* → Eng. *They're the ones who told me to throw it. I think they feel guilty about ditching me on my birthday*), where Ben explains the reason why he is allowed to use his home for a birthday party, in lines 18-21 (*Iiya. Nareteru. Ore no jinsei wa Hōmu Arōn da. Demo ryōshin wa musuko ga inai koto ni kizuita ato mo, sono mama Pari ni iru* → Eng. *I'm used to it. My life's*

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9 Among these, the maintenance of the informal suffix in explanatory mode *-nda* in line 16 appears to be noteworthy.

10 *Yabai* → Lit. *Dangerous*; *Samui* → Lit. *Cold*.

11 For further information on the subject, Leo Loveday's studies on the subject are recommended.

kinda like *Home Alone*, but if the parents realize that Kevin got left behind, and they just like stayed in Paris) in which he complains that he is often left alone by his parents just like the protagonist of the film *Home Alone*, and in the lines 26-7 (*Wow! Arigatō! Haisha kara no posutokādo igai de moratta no wa kore dake da!* → Eng. *Wow. Thank you. It's actually the only present I got other than a postcard from my dentist*) in which he rejoices in Devi's gift, telling her that the last he had received one was a postcard from his dentist. Despite his sarcastic and disenchanting tone, it is possible to observe that in the Japanese texts of the scene, Ben does not intend to convey a cool language, partially contrasting the counter-narrative that Japanese dubbese gives to young Western teenagers. As confirmed by Ishiguro, since in sociolinguistics expectations often feed stereotypes (2013, 97), like in spontaneous speech, even in the text it is absolutely legitimate not to expect predefined results. In fact, given his age, social status and his ethnic and gender characteristics, in translation Ben appears to modulate his own register in a conscious and prudent way, showing how the Japanese dialogue writers, in this case, were able to go beyond an essentialist approach in translation. To deepen this aspect and verify how linguistically other male protagonists of the NHIE series are characterized, the next section will examine a dialogue between Paxton, another male protagonist of the series, in conversation with his father.

	ENG DUBB-SUB	JAP DUBB	JAP SUBS
1	B: <i>David!</i> You came.	B: Dēbi kita noka?	B: Debiddo kitaka
2	B: Welcome to <i>mi casa</i> .	B: Uchi e yōkoso	B: Yōkoso
3	D: Wow. Like, I knew you were rich,	D: Wow! Kanemochi tte shitteta kedo	-
4	D: but this is like the house they live in <i>The Bachelor</i> .	D: Koko wa marude <i>Bachelor</i> ni dete kuru ie mitai	D: Kono ie <i>Bachelor</i> ni dete kuru gōtei mitai
5	D: Wait. Is it that house?	D: Matte! Kono ie nano?	D: Moshikashite ano ie?
6	B: No, but it was used in a Peloton commercial once.	B: Chigau yo! Komāsharu no satsuei ni tsukawareta koto wa aru.	B: Chigau kedo CM ni wa tsukawareta
7	B: Here, let me give you a tour.	B: Annai suru yo	B: Annai suru yo
8	B: Take a right.	B: Migi da	B: Migi e
9	D: Oh, my God. Is this a friggin' screening room?	D: Uaa sugoi! Kono heya tte moshikashite shiatā rūmu?	D: Uso desho Jōeishitsu made aru no?
10	D: Can you imagine watching <i>Finding Nemo</i> on this?	D: Koko de <i>Faindingu Nimo</i> o mitara	

11	D: He'd be like this big.	D: Nimo ga dekkaku naru!	D: Kono sukurin da to Nimo ga kyodaigyo ni naru
12	B: Thanks. My dad tore down a historical landmark to build it.	B: Dōmo. Rekishiteki kenzōbutsu o kowashite tateta	B: Oyaji ga shiseki o kowashite tateta
13	D: Aren't your parents gonna be pissed you threw a huge party here?	D: Ookina pātī yatte ryōshin ni okorarenai?	D: pātī shite okoranai?
14	B: Oh nah.	B: Iiya	
15	B: They're the ones who told me to throw it.	B: Oya ni yare tte iwareta	B: Oya no teian da Isshoni sugosenai kara tte
16	B: I think they feel guilty about ditching me on my birthday.	B: Tanjōbi ni hitori ni shite warui to omotteru nda	
17	D: Oh. I'm sorry. That sucks.	D: Ah! Zannen dane. Sore wa iya da	D: Sabishii ne
18	B: I'm used to it.	B: Iiya. Nareteru	B: Nareteru
19	B: My life's kinda like <i>Home Alone</i> ,	B: Ore no jinsei wa <i>Hōmu Arōn</i> da	B: Ore no jinsei wa
20	B: but if the parents realizes that Kevin got left behind,	B: Demo ryōshin wa musuko ga inai koto ni kizuuta ato mo	
21	B: and they just like stayed in Paris.	B: Sono mama Pari ni iru	B: Oya ga Pari kara modoranai <i>Hōmu Arōn</i> da
22	D: That's messed up, dude.	D: Sore wa hidosugiru	D: Sore tte sayaku
23	D: Well, I brought you a present.	D: Ah! Watashi purezento mottekita	D: Sō da purezento ageru
24	D: My mom would be mad if she found out I came here,	D: Kita no ga baretara okorareru darō kedo,	
25	D: but she'd kill me if I came empty-handed.	D: Moshi tebura dattara mama ni korosareru	D: Tebura de kita tte baretara mama ni korosareru kara
26	B: Wow. Thank you.	B: Wow! Arigatō!	B: Arigatō
27	B: It's actually the only present I got other than a postcard from my dentist.	B: Haisha kara no posutokādo igai de moratta no wa kore dake da!	B: Haisha no hagaki ga yūitsu no purezento kato
28	D: Happy Birthday, Ben.	D: Happi basudē, Ben!	D: Omedetō

Table 2 –Devi at Ben's party.

3.3 *Devi Paxton talks with his father. Episode 9 (2<sup>nd</sup> season): Scene 3 (min. 38:45-39:30)*

- a) **Setting.** The scene takes place inside Paxton's room, where the boy is sitting on the sofa located at the entrance and is working on the computer positioned on a low wooden table in front of him. In the room, weights, two built-in wardrobes and plastic boxes can be seen leaning to the side. There is little light in the room and Paxton's father enters the door carrying a plate. Behind the young man, a shirt and several photos hang on the wall.
- b) **Extra and paraverbal elements.** The clothing of the two speakers suggests the home setting of the scene: Paxton wears a dark green t-shirt and jeans with holes in the knees, while his father wears a beige short-sleeved Hawaiian shirt. Since during the dialogue the parent remains standing and Paxton is sitting on the sofa, the proxemic distance between the two forces them to maintain prolonged eye contact, interspersed with occasional lowering of their gazes. The pace of the dialogue is not particularly fast and the tone of voice of both is not high.
- c) **Literary-theatrical analysis.** The dialogue between Paxton and the father focuses on a tragic chapter of their family history, namely the imprisonment of his great-grandfather and his grandfather in a concentration camp during the Second World War that Paxton casually discovered while preparing research project for school. Although his grandfather adores his grandson, he has never told him about it, and his father confirms that this has always been a taboo topic for their family.
- d) **Kinematic analysis of the scene.** The narrative develops from a medium long shot aimed at framing Paxton's father as he enters the room and then evolves on close-ups of the two speakers. During the dialogue the camera is always positioned behind one of the two interlocutors (horizontal when framing Paxton, bottom up when filming his father), as they face each other. Depending on who is speaking, the camera will always be behind one of the two speakers.
- e) **Text analysis.** As one can observe in Table 3, the Japanese dialogue between Paxton and his father develops within a horizontal and informal perimeter thanks to the use of the quotidian register (*futsūgo*) used by both. In this case, the level of symmetry of the exchange is due to the familial relationship between the two speakers. This relationship and the topic of their discussion (grandfather's life in the concentration camp) puts them almost on the same psychological level: the father remembers his adolescence, while Paxton – who

is still a teenager – tries to dig in the life of his elderly progenitor as his father did in the past. As in the previous scene, the sociolinguistic positioning of the Japanese translation appears in line with the prototext in English and is characterized by a significant decrease of male marks in Paxton's speech, as well as by the total absence of the *yā style* and Japanese youth language (*wakamonogo*). As also illustrated in previous studies (Vitucci 2020c), the Japanese quotidian register (*futsūgo*) often tends to indexicalize a strong psychological closeness between speakers which, in this case, would also be justified by the emotional closeness between Paxton and his father.<sup>12</sup> Among the few features typical of male language, in dubbing one finds the use of the informal suffix in an explanatory tone *-nda* (line 2: *Kadai no shiage o shiteru toko na nda* → Eng. *I'm finishing up an extra-credit project for school*), the plan interrogative suffix *-ndarō* (line 7: *Nande daremo oshiete kurenakatta ndarō?* → Eng. *Why hasn't anyone ever told me about it?*), the pragmatic confirmation/reminder suffix *-na* instead of the more formal *-ne* (line 11), while in the subtitled text one notes the use of the male first person pronoun *ore* (line 7), omitted, however, in the Japanese dubbing.<sup>13</sup> Overall, the translation appears to be oriented towards an effective and catabolic rendering of Paxton's speech (Nakamura 2013) and less oriented towards a cool register, as it seems to be more interested in describing the character on stage according to a practice that intends to overcome the limits of realism and credibility as the only reference points of fictional speech (Zabalbeascoa 2012, 64). Apart from the tone of the final salutation in line 15b (*Sankyū, otōsan* → Eng. *Thanks, Dad*) in which Paxton bids farewell to his parent with an extremely updated and widespread formula among youngsters in Japan (which is also a clear direct strategy of translation from English), the dramatic level of the linguistic exchange stimulates a progressive identification with the character in the target audience, as well as a process of immersion so deep that it overshadows the level of adherence of the fictional speech of Paxton with the idiolects of his peers in Japan.<sup>14</sup>

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12 In the second scene, the register indexicalizes a strong community belonging, the social context in which Ben and Devi are called to act (the school, friends'community) and the role played within these contexts (they are classmates, but also a couple of teenagers who spend time together in their private life).

13 Note that the same male marks are used in his father's speech.

14 In this regard, Zabalbeascoa recalls that: the standard for the quality of translated film dialogue is often measured against a comparison with the way people are actually supposed to



	ENG DUBB-SUB	JAP DUBB	JAP SUBS
1	F: Hey, Pax. You skipped dinner, so I brought you a plate.	F: Paxton, shokuji ni konakatta kara, motte kitazo!	F: Yūshoku ni konakatta kara, motte kitayo
2	P: I'm finishing up an extra-credit project for school.	P: Kadai no shiage o shiteru toko na nda	P: Tsuika no tan'i ga toreru kadai o
3	F: Oh. Okay.	F: Sō nanoka?	F: Sōka
4	P: Hey, did you know that <i>Ojīchan</i> was in an internment camp?	P: Ojīchan ga kyōseishūyōjo ni ita tte shitteta?	P: Ojīchan wa horyoshūyōjo ni itano?
5	P: I just found his dad's journal.	P: Ah, ojīchan no nikki ni kaite atta	P: Hiojīchan no nikki ni
6	F: Yeah, he...he was a little boy there.	F: Ah, kodomo no toki rashii na	F: Kodomo no koro no hanashi da
7	P: Why hasn't anyone ever told me about it?	P: Nande daremo oshiete kurenakatta ndarō?	P: Ore wa shiranakatta
8	F: Dad, uh, never wanted to talk about it growing up.	F: Oyaji wa hanashitagaranakatta nda	F: Otōsan wa sono hanashi o saketeta
9	F: Whenever we asked, he shut down.	F: Tōsan ga kiitemo damatteta	F: Kiku to mukuchi ni natta
10	F: I guess I learned not to talk about it too.	F: Sore de, tōsan mo kiku no o yameta	F: Dakara watashi mo hanasanakattanda
11	P: Maybe he should talk about it.	P: Demo, ojīchan hanasu beki da to omou na	P: Hanasu beki da to omou
12	F: Well, if anyone can get him to open up, it's you.	F: Nā, omae ni nara, kokoro hiraku	F: Otōsan o settoku dekiru no wa omae dake da
13	F: He made his license plate "GRAMPAX."	F: Nanise, kuruma no purēto wa "Guranpakusu" dakara	F: Nanbāpurēto mitaro
14	P: Yeah, I really wish he had not done that.	P: Ah, mago no "Pakkusu" tte yamete hoshī yo	P: "Guranpakusu" wa kanben shite
15	P: But yeah, I'll give him a call. Thanks, Dad.	P: Demo, wakatta. Denwa shite miru	P: Denwa shite miruyo
15b	-	P: Sankyū, otōsan!	P: Arigatō

Table 3 – Paxton talks with his father.

speak in the country of the translation. However, the source-text dialogues in the fictional setting may not even be very close to the way anyone speaks in the first cultural context (2012, 64).

#### 4. Considerations and perspectives

The NHIE scenes examined in this study produced an almost unexpected result. Taking Japanese sociolinguistic literature as a point of reference with a particular focus on audiovisual translation and gender studies, this study aimed to probe to what extent the male speech of the teenagers in the NHIE series reproduced the stylistic features of some fictional genderlects that have emerged in previous sociolinguistic investigations and, specifically, whether these idiolects were used to create a counter-narrative to the normative speech of young Japanese. In particular, the comparison of the dialogues of the three male protagonists of the series – namely Trent, Ben, and Paxton – only partially confirmed the adherence of Japanese *dubbese* to the stereotypes conveyed through the so-called phenomenon of *transduction*. As illustrated by numerous studies, *transduction* tends to convey an informal and cool male model by exploiting the *otherness* of foreign speakers both to reinforce stereotypes and to legitimize a fictional Japanese language far from native interactional models. Among the speakers analyzed, only Trent seems to partially adhere to the canons of the so-called Japanese *yā style* with his occasional forays into Japanese slang (*wakamonogo*). In fact, the analysis of Ben and Paxton's speech revealed a significant distance from these positions, confirming instead a translational dynamism that tends to avoid manipulative intentions or pre-existing preconceptions.

Specifically, the style of Ben and Paxton seems to be characterized by an intimate speech that mainly resorts to a few male marks and to the Japanese plain register (*futsūgo*). This could be considered a new frontier of *dubbese* since, without adhering to the sociolinguistic portfolio of Japanese teenagers' speech, it seems to be inspired neither by the principle of realism nor by that of credibility (Zabalbeascoa 2012). This means that even Japanese viewers may be aware of the fictional degree of this *translated idiolect*. However, reviewing some previous studies conducted on the subject, it is debatable whether these idiolects could actually represent a counter-narrative to the speech of Japanese *salarymen*, as the previous studies conducted by Nakamura, Nohara and SturtzSreetharan argue. From the viewpoint of this contribution, just as it is evident that the translated speech of foreign teenagers is not always casual, perhaps it is not even possible to prove that the genderlects found in NHIE act as a counterbalance to a speech style considered normative in Japan. In various scenes of the series the young male protagonists of the series are able to express

themselves in very complex diaphasic registers, especially when they have to converse with older people: in more than one scene, for example, Ben resorts to the courtesy language (*teineigo*) and the Japanese honorific register (*sonkeigo*) when he interfaces with Devi's family, often eluding the informal register that most characterizes him when he converses with his peers. This shift is particularly interesting, as it highlights a high degree of indexicality on the part of the speakers examined, contradicting some previous positions set out in the literature (compare Nakamura 2020a, 256).

Another element that contradicts the previous literature is that the three speakers examined in this study never converge from the viewpoint of speech style: in fact, despite Trent's *cool* speech, on the contrary Paxton expresses himself only rarely with forms of greeting, exclamation or gratitude that can be traced back to the *wakamonogo* or *yā* style (*Yā*,<sup>15</sup> *Wow!*, *Sankyū*), just as Ben limits himself to confidential speech that is essentially articulated through the use of verbs in plain form and use of the masculine first person singular pronoun *ore*, which certainly cannot be labeled as *essentialist* in translation terms. On the other hand, this is also confirmed by the extreme accuracy of the translation with respect to the reference English prototext. Paradoxically, to intercept a hyper-masculinized language one has to look for it in the speech of some adult characters and not teenagers: for example, the dermatologist in love with Devi's mother who shows off the marks of male speech, since he is often portrayed in amorous scenes that seem to be suitable to this kind of stereotyping.

Finally, another element which plays against the thesis hypothesized in some previous studies concerns the methodology: if it is true that the sociolinguistic approach involves interviews with speakers of the target language, it is equally true that the datasets used during these interviews are often reduced to very few excerpts of dialogues extrapolated from fictional Japanese which, in some cases, also imply a good dose of *cultural nationalism* (that is, that only the Japanese can judge Japanese texts). An interlinguistic translation approach such as the one adopted in this study, which consists of the analysis of about nine hours of dialogue and multilingual subtitles, could constitute an important enrichment for future analyses on Japanese dubbing and subtitling. This would be even more effective if carried out with the help of multilingual

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15 Paxton uses *yā* only once in the first two seasons of the series.

scholars from the field of audiovisual translation studies in collaboration with native speakers of the target language competent in several foreign languages.

In conclusion, as illustrated above, if non-Asian speakers are often considered the *Ultimate Other* and, therefore, unable to convey a Japanese that serves as a model for native audiences, the NHIE analysis reveals how the *speech style* of the three male characters examined in this study can represent a sort of creative experimentation (Nakamura 2013), even if it is not currently possible to understand the hidden purposes of this translation operation, i.e. whether these genderlects were created with the purpose of renewing the expressive baggage of Japanese male speech, or if, on the other hand, they aim to mark the distance between what is considered normative and what, instead, can be intercepted as *distant*. The only certainty is that the public will find themselves listening to them in the awareness that, as Díaz Cintas and Remael (2021) suggests, the translated text is always the result of a mediation and that the community of international scholars must further investigate the link between audiovisual artifacts, translation, and gender identity, whenever they cross the borders of their original countries.

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Francesco Vitucci is Associate Professor of Japanese Linguistics in the Department of Modern Languages, Literatures, and Cultures at the University of Bologna. His main research topics are audiovisual translation, interlingual subtitling and dubbing, multimedia teaching. Among his publications: *La traduzione audiovisiva per le lingue extraeuropee* (2021), *Ciak! Si Sottotitola* (2016), *La Didattica del Giapponese attraverso la Rete* (2013) and several essays on national and international journals. He is director of the Japanese series *Arcipelago Giappone* (Luni Editrice, Milano) and collaborates with Ca' Foscari Challenge School in the *Master in Fine arts in filmmaking* together with other several cinema festivals in Italy.