snitch

by Class 1B

Abstract:

The English word snitch, meaning ‘spy’, ‘informer’, is an American slang word frequently used among young people. In British English, ‘a/to grass’ are used with the same meaning. Snitch is used in various situations, from irony to more serious contexts. It is often mentioned in rap songs with a derogatory and discriminatory tone against an individual.

In criminal contexts this word indicates someone who reports secret information to any authority, usually in order to receive personal compensation.

Even in less exposed situations, such as in everyday life, the individual who betrays the trust of his/her group is defined as a ‘snitch’.

If the points of view are reversed, a ‘snitch’ may have good intentions and reasons towards someone else, for example when s/he reports a problem involving a minor to a trusted adult.

Etymology:

**Meaning:** spy/snitch/informer

**Origins:** of obscure origin, the term probably derives from an underworld slang meaning ‘nose’ which apparently develops from an earlier meaning of ‘hit on the nose’, in turn probably from a Germanic noun [2].

It could also derive from the Middle English ‘trap’. It is also linked to the word snake, something slimy and creeping [3].

Nowadays, the term is used in American-English slang as ‘to snitch on’, i.e. ‘to report a crime’ and means ‘to be a spy’, ‘an infamous’: those who talk to the guards or those who decide to contact the authorities by collaborating and denouncing someone are identified as spy [4].

Having a ‘snitch’ among a group means dealing with someone who can’t be trusted because as soon as s/he turns around s/he tells all the secrets to others. In short, s/he is a spy: a person who talks about someone’s else business with others, and/or a person who tells more or less serious things that happened within the gangs to an adult.
Cultural specificity:

To examine the cultural specificity of the use of the term *snitch*, we have examined Italian and American English rap/trap songs.

**Italian rap/trap songs**

- **NO SNITCH FREESTYLE** (Tedua - 2017)
  
  “no snitch, non farlo ancora, non bisticci con noi/sul beet il pit è sciolto/minaccia il pitbull è libero” [no snitch, don’t do it again, don’t mess it up with us/ on the beet the pitbull is free]
  
  [https://youtu.be/L7RKvLvJxP8](https://youtu.be/L7RKvLvJxP8)

- **BASSOTTO** (Dark Polo Gang - 2019)
  
  “mio fratello ti fa un buco, se provi a farmi un torto ” [my brother blows you a hole if you do me wrong]
  
  [https://youtu.be/Hv4GCqUgXUE](https://youtu.be/Hv4GCqUgXUE)

- **SNITCH E IMPICCI** (FSK, Drefgold - 2020)
  
  “non voglio snitch nel gang” [I don’t want snitch in the gang]
  
  [https://youtu.be/9NSf6dfnOCw](https://youtu.be/9NSf6dfnOCw)

- **SIR!** (Sfera, Lazza, Thasup- 2022)
  
  “vorrei fare fuori gli snitch” [I would like to get rid of the snitch]
  
  [https://youtu.be/yscyWJziBMc](https://youtu.be/yscyWJziBMc)
American English rap/trap songs

**SNITCH** (Obie Tricie FT. Akon - 2006)

“Just do whatever you do, Snitch, Who decide he’s a member once he got pinched”


**SNITCH** (Reyn Hartley - 2018)

“Six foot ditch for my snitch”

[https://youtu.be/mrAbwRSUQ5E](https://youtu.be/mrAbwRSUQ5E)

**STOP SNITCHING** (YG - 2019)

“Everybody went down’ cause you snitched”


**NO SNITCHING**
(Lil Mabu, Dusty Locane - 2022)
“I could never snitch, that’s on my kids”

https://youtu.be/ZzyPZKO46ow

Rapper YG

We can notice that both in the Italian and in the English texts the word ‘snitch’ has a negative connotation and meaning. The American songs display a much heavier tone, a fact which is linked to the socio-cultural context of the American gangs. Due to a different urban setting, in Italy the word ‘snitch’ is adopted in a lighter tone, and the texts often make use of irony and levity.

And this is a rap written and sung by some of us:

**Il cappio**

I thought I could trust you
but the confidence given can hurt
It was a mistake doing good thing
’cause you repaid me only with blades
I called you bro
If you were with me
now I don’t call you
and you ask why
Often it is hard choosing
you made your choice
but there’s no maybe
There’s no place for excuses
if you’re snitch
it will remain in the blood
You hide yourself behind a curtain
but you should do it behind a tombstone
My f***ing secrets, I don’t tell much of them
Can’t you see I’m not laughing, don’t change face anymore
I’m not smiling any longer
since when I can’t remember
Now you deserve a noose at your neck
and I’m not saying this for being bad
but you deserve this ‘cause you hurt me
No one close, imagine a friend
or maybe for you I was only a puppet?
puppet, puppet
I’m sorry for what happened
for me you were like a brother
but now that you snitched you’re less than zero!

Lyrics by:

Problematization:

The term ‘snitch’ has lead us to reflect on concepts such as ‘loyalty’ and ‘trust’ (to the group or to the people to whom one is linked), ‘betrayal’ (of friends and values), ‘honesty’ (towards oneself and others), ‘honour’ (the quality of those who possess principles appreciated by society or by the group they belong to and who obtain respect, but also, more simply, of those who remain faithful to the pacts, to the word given).

In short texts, we reported experiences in which we were considered snitches, or we snitched someone, or witnessed episodes that led the peer group to assign this appellation to someone.

Here are some of the reflections:
A Contextualized Dictionary to Problematize Otherness

"To cheat", at least for me, is a much worse verb than 'to snitch'', because, when you betray a person, it means that you do it voluntarily, **not caring** about the **consequences** and about the **pain** that someone else might feel" (A.A.)

"For me, **trust** is everything and I try to pass it on to others as well, thus making it clear that I am a reliable person. If I were in **danger**, for example in the event that a friend of mine did something really wrong, then I would talk to **someone** telling what happened (...). In this case if they called me 'snitch', I would take it as a **compliment**" (A.A)

"All over the world, children and teenagers are left **without a home** and **family** (...). They often become part of **small groups** of guys with the same problems, and over time they will become **real gangs**. (...) [So, within these groups] if a person tells you **personal facts** that they wouldn't tell to others, it means that you have a **certain importance** in their life and you should be **honoured**" (Z.M.S.)

"**Cheating** to me is an unforgivable mistake. The moment you cheat, it's a bit like you're cheating on yourself too: you have **broken a promise** with yourself and with others, (...) you have decided to **break the trust** you have created with the other person or group" (E.J.)

"I believe that **honesty** is the basis of every **interpersonal relationship**, because you have to be correct towards yourself and towards all those who have entrusted us with their trust" (S.Q).

"A **positive sense** of the term is when people are considered 'snitches' because they **reported** to the authorities after seeing a **crime**" (G.M)

"Sometimes one **can betray** for the **good** of someone, such as when a **serious fact** that has occurred to a minor is revealed to an adult who can thus be of **help**" (C.V)

"**Honesty** is telling the truth, even if it is difficult and uncomfortable; **loyalty** is defending people dear to us even at the **cost of lying** to save them from negative consequences. In my opinion, a **balance** between the two values is needed" (S.M.)

"**Being faithful** means **honor** and respect, but unfortunately not everyone is **loyal**. I consider betrayal as a **sin**, a mistake without remedy, which marks the person you are forever, which identifies you as a 'traitor'" (A.F.)

"In my opinion, trying to put yourself in **someone's else shoes** helps a lot to respect values such as **honesty**, **loyalty**, **honor**. Betraying someone, on the other hand, means trampling on their **trust** and at the same time **lacking respect** for this person; for me, no one deserves to be betrayed" (G.R.)

"**Betrayal** should be considered from all **points of view** because everyone has one and, therefore, a **different version** of the facts" (C.F.)

"There was time when some friends of mine **backtalked** about other people that I know so I reported these things: I 'snichted'. Obviously, by doing this, I backstabbed the group but I think that **backtalk** is as serious as snitching. (...) A snitch could have good **intentions** and help someone" (L.G.)

"You can snitch for many reasons: **anger**, **fear**, **evilness**... for me it's always little justifiable" (M.C.)

**Communication strategies:**

We have examined how the word 'snitch' is represented in **movies** and in the **social media**.

**Films**
- Snitch (US, 2013; dir. R.R. Waugh), is based on the true story of James Settembrino, a businessman who decides to infiltrate a criminal organization to exonerate his son, unjustly arrested for drugs.

- In Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix (UK, 2007; dir. D. Yates), Draco Malfoy searches for evidence to accuse Harry of creating Dumbledore’s Army. Later, Chi Chang, a member of the exercise, betrays his friends and confesses everything to professor Umbridge. The word isn’t actually used in the film but we gave this interpretation to Chang’s behaviour.


Instagram

This image shows a tongue surrounded by barbed wire. We can read this picture as a threat or warning for those who behave as 'snitch'.

https://www.instagram.com/p/CGy-yfNAIOi/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=

This image portrays 6ix9ine, AKA Tekashi 69 or Tekashi, a famous Nort-American rapper, and represents the poster of the cartoon Lilo and Stitch (US, 2002; dir. C. Sanders & De. DeBlois) but with the word ‘snitch’ and the face of the rapper in it.
Snoop Dogg posted this image on his Instagram profile changing the name as *Lilo & Snitch* referring to the story of 6ix9ine, who was nicknamed 'snitch' because he passed from one gang to another, from Bloods to Crips. Bloods (the Reds) and the Crips (the Blues) were two rival street gangs of Los Angeles involved in criminal activities such as drug dealing and murdering. They are both active since 1970s.

The two images are very different.

The first image was made on the computer and it suggests silence but in a powerful, violent and direct way. It recalls the style of the Pop Art.

The second

**Twitter: snitch tagging**

[5].

Youtube

https://www.terminologiaetc.it/2019/09/19/origine-significato-snitch-tagging-twitter/
And here are some memes:

**Io che scappo dopo aver fatto lo snitch**

![Me running after I snitched](image1)

(me by: Carlotta Fiammazzo, Elettra Fiammazzo, Martina Iacovone, Giulia Rosso)

**Quando arriva alla festa uno snitch**

![When a snitch arrives at a party](image2)

(me by: Carlotta Fiammazzo, Elettra Fiammazzo, Martina Iacovone, Giulia Rosso)
Subversion:

The subversion opened a discussion among us students.

The main questions were: can we creatively subvert the term ‘snitch’? When can ‘snitching’ have a positive outcome? Under which circumstances?

The first example is in this rap written by us students where, in a peer relationship, the snitcher actually helps a friend in trouble.

Il bene nel male

Non ti piace niente

e poi vuoi fare tutto,

Good within Bad

You don’t like anything

and then you want to do everything
di ogni decisione  
puoi sempre il lato brutto.
Proprio in quei momenti  
c'è chi ti tira su,
dandoti qualcosa  
per non pensarti più.
Tu ti senti bella  
e importante in un momento  
e non ti accorgi che  
ti stai solo mentendo.
Le amiche, quelle vere,  
tu le chiami infami,  
ma è solo grazie a loro  
che poi tu ti ami.
Allora essere 'snitch'  
non è una brutta roba,  
se ti salva il c**o  
sopra ogni cosa

Testo di:  
Anna C., Carlotta V., Beatrice V., Melissa M.

Lyrics by:  
Anna C., Carlotta V., Beatrice V., Melissa M.

The second example is the cartoon below:
A final example is this creative/conceptual work where it reads that **snitching** becomes positive when it **defies omerta** (conspiracy of silence).

Here below are some of the phases of the work:
rolling the scroll  
each scroll contains a text
This has been a **collective, conceptual, and interactive** work.

We reflected on the **uses** of the term 'snitch' and on the concepts of 'loyalty' (to the group or people one is attached to), 'betrayal' (to friends and values), 'honesty' (to oneself and others), and 'honour'.

We arranged the **21 elements** (one for each of us in the class) by eye, using 1-cent coins as a guide for the **placement** of the **scrolls** where we wrote some reflections about the term 'snitch'.

The project made it possible to conceive an **elaboration** from a **concept**. Besides being an opportunity for us for a reflection-through-action, it will incite **new considerations** to all those who, by **approaching** the **work**, will pick up a scroll, read it and ask themselves **new questions** about the **judgmental term** 'snitch' and, conversely, the value of counteracting **omerta**.

At the end of our **collective discussions, reflections, and activities**, we were asked to identify a **word** to **summarize** the **path** and the **work** we had done:
Though some strong negative view of the ‘snitch’ are still present (‘infamous’, ‘betrayal’, ‘grave’, etc.) the activities done in class have contributed to enlarge the perspective and offer more nuanced interpretation of ‘snitching’ (‘change’, ‘trust’, ‘humanity’, ‘perspectives’, ‘points of view’) as a situated move which depends on the context and the circumstances.

Discussion:

- Had you ever heard the word ‘snitch’ before? In which occasions? In which contexts?
- Have you ever used the word ‘snitch’? In which occasions?
- Has someone else ever used the word ‘snitch’ to offend or hurt you? In which occasion?
- Have you ever witnessed (or done) something that you thought it had to be reported to a trusted adult to help someone in trouble or in danger?
- According to you, are there any circumstances in which being a ‘snitch’ can have positive outcomes towards an individual or a community?

References/Further Readings:
Links:

[1] https://www.urbandictionary.com


[3] [accessed March 13, 2023]

[4] [accessed March 13, 2023]