

# Thinking Out of the Box in English Linguistics, Language Teaching, Translation and Terminology



Proceedings of the XXIX AIA Conference

edited by  
Katherine Ackerley, Erik Castello, Fiona Dalziel,  
Sara Gesuato, Maria Teresa Musacchio  
and Giuseppe Palumbo

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## *THE PLACE OF ACTIVIST TEXTS IN TRANSLATION STUDIES*

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This paper investigates activist communication as a translation domain to propose an “out-of-the-box” approach to translator training. After outlining the “condensing” and non-professional translation practices that are rife in the activist context, the study focuses on the titles of Greenpeace reports to shed light on the peculiar aspects involved in their translation and expound the role that their analysis can perform in the translation classroom. The pragmatic force of these titles hinges on figures of speech, puns and culture-bound references, and their translated versions are a showcase for the translation loss that characterises the passage from English into Italian of Greenpeace reports. The paper will expose the fact that translation failure is often determined by the binding constraints of the translatability of rhetoric, but also by a “soft”, superficial approach to translation. In this respect, emphasis will be laid on the alternative solutions, proposed by MA students at IULM University, to the inaccurate translations of Greenpeace’s titles. This examination will further draw attention to the translation of persuasive activist titles (and, more broadly, texts) as a fruitful subject to explain transcreation in context and encourage students to develop those analytical skills and transcreation abilities that have become essential in the modern translation market.

*Activist report, titles, translation loss, transcreation, untranslatability*

### *1. Background and aim*

Untranslatability is a long-standing issue in Translation Studies, which keeps holding out challenges to modern translators and translation scholars alike (Hermans 2009: 301-303). One of these challenges has been launched in recent years by communication in the activist context. Faced with countless environmental crises and human rights abuses perpetrated by either corporations or national governments, activist organisations have been striving to influence public opinion in various bioethically sensitive areas

of social, political and economic life. In an attempt to maximise the reach of their informative messages, they regularly adopt popularisation strategies (Garzone 2006), leverage creative language (Jones 2016) and resort to visual arguments (Degano 2017); these are all features that place activist texts “among the least translatable texts”, that is “those that consciously exploit the idiomatic resources of a given tongue” (Hermans 2009: 302). Like all those genres that are characterised by the insistent use of puns and polysemy, the activist report, thus, “insistently [...] begs and demands to be translated” (Hermans 2009: 303) not only by virtue of its apparent untranslatability but also and especially because of its significant role in disseminating scientific discoveries and popularising bioethically sensitive issues on a global scale.

When analysing the translated versions of activist reports, a question arises: who is in charge of translating these reports? There is no simple answer to this simple question. As a general rule, activist groups do not disclose the names of the translators of their reports. Translation in the activist context has been the object of several scholarly studies (Baker 2006; Pym 2013, 2014), which have revealed its most salient feature and innovative element, that is the volunteer nature of the work. In particular, it is usually carried out by “translators who communicate with each other online” (Pym 2014: 128) but these “translators” actually belong to “amorphous groups of professional and non-professional translators who service a broad range of humanitarian and activist groups” (Baker 2006: 463). Therefore, the target texts are generally the outcome of a “workflow that integrates professional translators and non-translator experts” (Pym 2013: 492), a group that includes, among others, Greenpeace activists (Pym 2013: 492, 2014: 129). Translation in the activist context, thus, appears to be a prerogative of “a community of users” who harness the Web as a space for “community translation” or “collaborative translation” (Pym 2014: 128) that is primarily meant to bring about tangible social benefits.

The translation process is thus significantly socialized. In more committed cases such as Greenpeace or Amnesty International, we might more readily say that the work of volunteer translators constitutes active intervention, an empowering democratization of translation technology. Activists point out, correctly, that remunerated translation services tend to be for the texts of *official* culture, so volunteers are required to translate alternative, resistant cultural forms. (Pym 2014: 128)

This “mobilization of numerous individuals with very different backgrounds and attributes around specific political, humanitarian, or social issues” (Baker 2006: 462) presents two specific and interrelated challenges: first, “a major challenge to individual professional paid translators” (Pym 2014: 128), who are apparently excluded from the activist domain; second, a

challenge to translation scholars, who are called upon to describe the socio-professional, genre and translation features of a partially unfathomable and relatively novel sphere in which “translation quality may ultimately not be the major problem” (Pym 2014: 129).

As regards this second challenge, the study of activist communication as a translation domain lends itself to the analysis of various research areas in the field of Translation Studies, besides that related to the investigation of the volunteer character of translation; these areas include the study of translations as a fuzzy set (Garzone 2015), the examination of source-language interference in the target text (Toury 2012), the investigation of the role of multimodality in the creation and transfer of meaning (Kress 2010) and the exploration of the concept of transcreation (Pedersen 2014). Considering the non-professional nature and ethical purpose of translation in the activist context, this paper focuses on the fourth of these aspects to answer one research question: to what extent can the instances of creative language produced in the activist context be reproduced interlinguistically?

## 2. Method

In order to provide an answer to the research question, the study builds on a parallel corpus of fourteen Greenpeace reports and their translations into Italian. Table 1 provides an overview of the corpus.

<i>Source texts (STs)</i>			<i>Translated Texts (TTs)</i>		
<i>Title</i>	<i>Text type</i>	<i>Number of tokens</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Text type</i>	<i>Number of tokens</i>
Eye on the Taiga	Multimodal report	18,838	Salviamo la grande foresta del Nord	Non-multimodal briefing	1,937
Fashion at the Crossroads	Multimodal report	32,049	La moda a un bivio	Multimodal report	3,580
Footprints in the Snow	Multimodal report	16,011	Impronte nella neve	Multimodal report	3,861
Feeding the Problem	Multimodal report	7,481	Soldi pubblici “in pasto” agli allevamenti intensivi	Non-multimodal briefing	6,347
Less is More	Multimodal report	19,093	Meno è meglio	Multimodal report	21,471

Supply Chained	Multimodal report	8,237	Quella sporca filiera	Non-multimodal briefing	3,150
Bees in Decline	Multimodal report	19,392	Api in declino	Multimodal report	4,787
Dripping Poison	Multimodal report	5,652	Gocce al veleno	Multimodal report	1,592
The Bees' Burden	Multimodal report	16,112	Api, il bottino avvelenato	Multimodal report	3,782
A Toxic Eden: Poisons in Your Garden	Multimodal report	7,589	Eden tossico. I loro veleni nel tuo giardino	Multimodal report	1,077
Plan Bee – Living Without Pesticides	Multimodal report	30,505	A come Ape. Un'agricoltura senza pesticidi è possibile	Multimodal report	2,873
Dirty Laundry 1	Multimodal report	43,318	Panni sporchi 1	Non-multimodal briefing	1,651
Dirty Laundry 2: Hung Out to Dry	Multimodal report	7,705	Panni sporchi 2	Multimodal report	3,692
Dirty Laundry 3: Reloaded	Multimodal report	15,107	Panni sporchi 3	Non-multimodal briefing	2,225

TABLE 1. Technical details of the parallel corpus

Table 1 enables the reader to grasp at a glance the essence of translation in the activist context, as well as the areas that deserve attention in Translation Studies. All the TTs, with the exception of *Meno è meglio*<sup>1</sup>, are characterised by a drastic reduction in the number of tokens and some of them (five out of fourteen) are not categorised as multimodal reports but, rather, as non-multimodal briefings. This is because the translation from English into Italian

<sup>1</sup> The Italian version of the report entitled *Less is more* is the only one among the TTs that sees a slight increase in the number of tokens compared to the ST. The reason lies behind the fact that this TT is the only one that resulted from an accurate translation of all the textual content of the ST (including captions); the higher number of words is, therefore, not due to arbitrary explicitations but to the syntactic and stylistic differences between English and Italian.

of Greenpeace reports is often characterised by a transition from multi- to mono-modality – stemming from the choice to eliminate pictures in the TTs (Brambilla 2020) – and by a significant “condensation” (Garzone 2015: 37) of the textual content, which is often the result of deletions (Brambilla 2020) that deprive the TTs not only of pictorial elements but also of some of the technical details that determine the overall discursive configuration of the STs. Translation in the activist context is, thus, best viewed as a process of “intercultural mediation”, understood “as a broad concept encompassing rewriting, transediting and transcreation strategies” (Musacchio and Zorzi 2019: 483-484).

This paper does not focus on the condensing practices that characterise the passage from English to Italian of the reports published and translated by Greenpeace, but centres on the titles and subtitles of these reports because they exemplify the linguistic creativity that bestows persuasive qualities on activist discourse. Hence, the study does not draw on corpus linguistic methods for the analysis but qualitatively explores the translation of rhetoric, broadly understood as “the art of persuading others, that is, of influencing their thoughts, beliefs and behaviour, through the use of language” (Partington 2010: 175). The English titles and their Italian counterparts will be examined against the backdrop of the concepts of translation loss (Hervey and Higgins 1992: 24) and transcreation (Pedersen 2014), with a view to shedding light on the peculiar aspects involved in their translation. As Musacchio and Zorzi (2019: 497) note in relation to the translation of newspaper, magazine and news agency articles, transcreation is often used for headlines, as they aim at attracting the attention of the readership through creative references to the theme addressed in the main texts.

Given their promotional nature, activist texts can be compared to those produced in the world of marketing and advertising, one of those domains in which the notion of transcreation has found its way (Pedersen 2014: 57). As in this field, transcreation in the activist context precisely “seeks to perform all the adjustments necessary to make a campaign work in all target markets, while at the same time staying loyal to the original creative intent of the campaign” (Pedersen 2014: 58). In this respect, the analysis will show that transcreation is the prerequisite for *translating* the source-language title (and/or subtitle) by actually *creating* a novel one, which enables the translator to recast the inherent creativity of the ST to meet the requirements of a different readership speaking a different language.

While examining the titles and subtitles that are present in the parallel corpus, reference will also be made to several English or Italian titles of untranslated Greenpeace reports. This extensive analysis of title creation and transcreation by Greenpeace activists and volunteer translators will not only

further the exploration of translation in the activist context, but will also provide a broader contribution to the study of untranslatability and enable the design of an “out-of-the-box” method to address transcreation in practice within translation classrooms.

### 3. Data analysis

The examination of the corpus suggests that, despite their differences, all the titles of Greenpeace reports share specific features. First, they always contain a play on words for an intended humorous or rhetorical effect. Second, they always contain a reference to the theme addressed in the report, owing to the contextual nature of wordplay (Attardo 2018: 93). The pragmatic force of the titles precisely stems from the interplay between these two elements, which creatively hints at the topic in question. Two examples can be observed in Figure 1.



FIGURE 1. Examples of activist report titles

Figure 1 displays the front covers of two 2014 reports on a bioethical crisis that Greenpeace activists have been consistently tackling over the last few years, that is the link between the use of pesticides in agriculture and the steep decline in bee populations. The title of the first report contains an alliteration and a reference to the theme of the report, because the noun *burden* alludes to the contaminated pollen that bees grab and bring to the hive. The title of the second is also characterised by a reference to the theme of the report and the presence of a pun, broadly understood as a textual occurrence involving the presence of minimally two senses (Attardo 2018: 91); the noun *bee* is put in place of its homophone *B*, the second letter of the alphabet, to figuratively tell the reader that there is a solution to the decline in bee populations.

In a translation perspective, the constant discursive interaction between the wordplay and the thematic reference regularly poses challenges to the translators. Notably, these challenges are compounded by the fact that resorting to compensation strategies (Harvey 1995) is not an option when translating these particular instances of humorous and/or creative language, because the title plays the crucial role of an attention-seeking device (Munat 2016: 100), whose persuasive power is magnified by the foregrounded position it occupies on the cover page; therefore, this instance of creative language cannot be displaced anywhere else within the text, as the function of the title cannot be performed by any other textual element of the report. In this respect, the titles of the reports in the corpus provide telling examples of the alleged untranslatability of linguistically creative and rhetorically persuasive texts.

The contrastive analysis of the titles confirms that “untranslatability [...] mostly appears in relative form, as a matter of aspect, kind or degree” (Hermans 2009: 302). In the passage from English to Italian, “there [often] remains an untranslatable rest, for instance in the shape of connotation, nuance or poetic quality” (Hermans 2009: 302). In particular, the translated versions of the titles of Greenpeace reports can be divided into three groups based on the translation strategy used and the successful or failed preservation of the rhetorical effect:

- literal translation preserving the rhetorical effect;
- transcreation preserving the rhetorical effect;
- literal translation leading to translation loss.

The first group gathers those rare cases in which the expression used in the English title has an equivalent in Italian. It is the case of the 2015 report *Footprints in the Snow*, translated as *Impronte nella neve*. In this case, the Italian translators were helped by the fact that the term *impronta* also has the meaning of *ecological impact*, in that it is a semantic calque (Santulli 1999: 94) of the English *footprint*. Another report entitled *Fashion at the Crossroads*, addressing sustainability in the fashion and textile industries, did not pose any translation problems, as far as its title is concerned: the idiomatic expression *at the crossroads* was translated as *a un bivio*, and the meaning and vividness of the English title were preserved in the Italian text, enabling the Italian readership to grasp the challenging nature of the crisis that is besetting fashion companies. A further example of those report titles for which literal translation was sufficient to preserve their rhetorical effectiveness is provided by a 2018 document entitled *Less is More* and disseminating the alarming data on the sustainability of the global food system; the evocative power of the saying *less is more* was maintained through the Italian title *Meno è meglio*, whereby the translators managed to convey in the very same succinct manner the green imperative of reducing worldwide consumption of meat and dairy products.

The reports entitled *Bees in Decline* and *A Toxic Eden: Poisons in Your Garden* can also be said to pertain to the first of the three groups, as they were respectively



translated as *Api in declino* and *Eden tossico. I loro veleni nel tuo giardino*. The *Dripping Poison* report can also be said to fall into this first category, although it was not literal translation that enabled the preservation of the creative, evocative and rhetorically effective reference to the theme of the report, that is the impact of the use of pesticides on bee populations; opting for transposition, “where an SL word is rendered by a TL word of a different word class” (Bakker, Koster, van Leuven-Zwart 2009: 270), the translators transferred the central idea of poison trickling into the lives of bees (through pollen) and out of their product (i.e. honey) by replacing the verb *dripping* with the noun *gocce* and by qualifying it with the adjectival phrase *al veleno*, which substitutes the noun *poison* in the English title.

Finally, this first group can also be said to include the report entitled *The Bees’ Burden* and translated as *Api, il bottino avvelenato*. Actually, this translation is not literal but characterised by an explicitation. The Italian term *bottino* was qualified with the adjective *avvelenato* to make the polysemous nature of the English *burden* explicit in the TT title; its double sense of *load* and *encumbrance* is, therefore, conveyed through a noun phrase, although the Italian equivalent *ardello* would have dispelled the need to resort to an explicitation strategy. This explicitation could be interpreted as an attempt to make up for the loss of the alliteration in the TT, as – despite the translators’ efforts to produce an effective translation – the Italian version of the title is less creative and riveting than its English counterpart; notably, this remark would also have held true if the translators had opted for the title *Il fardello delle api*. In this regard, this specific example suggests that the activity of translating activist titles is at times rather demanding. Indeed, these report titles that belong to the first group do not reflect the diverse translation challenges posed by the others, which generally put the transcreation abilities of the translators to the test, as shown in Figure 2 below.



FIGURE 2. Example of transcreation in context (1)

Figure 2 displays a report in which the idiom *to feed the problem* is used to warn against the intensification of animal farming in Europe. This communicative objective is pursued creatively, by means of a pun exploiting the polysemy of the verb *to feed* in its double sense of *to nourish* and *to foment*. In the Italian title, this creative reference to the theme of the report was preserved by choosing an expression that denotatively refers to animal farming but also has a figurative meaning, that is *dare in pasto a*. This is an example of transcreation in context, whereby the translators managed to preserve both the thematic reference and the rhetorical effect by replacing a typically English pun with another, typically Italian and equally effective. Notably, though, the picture of intensive pig farming “disappears” in the Italian document. In this regard, Figure 2 also provides visual evidence of how certain multimodal reports are “transformed” into non-multimodal briefings, in which the absence of pictures renders transcreation advisable but not necessary. A further proof of the same rewriting process that some reports undergo in the passage from English into Italian is visible in Figure 3, which shows another example of the titles pertaining to the second group, namely those that were successfully adapted with a view to replacing an attention-seeking device with another.



FIGURE 3. Example of transcreation in context (2)

Figure 3 shows the cover page of a report on human rights abuses in the tuna industry, entitled *Supply Chained*. Within this phrase, the noun *chain* was turned into the adjective *chained* to trigger an association with slavery and consequently allude to human rights abuses in the industry. As regards the Italian version of the title, the translators managed to retain linguistic creativity through the expression *Quella sporca filiera*, which makes reference to the movie *Quella sporca dozzina* and, especially, contains the adjective *sporca* that hints at the huge, controversial problem addressed in the report. Again, an instance of linguistic creativity is adapted, replaced with another one that is suitable to the target culture and compatible with the theme of the report. However commendable,

these examples of transcreation in context cannot be observed very frequently in the corpus and they remain isolated cases. Take Figure 4, displaying the cover page of a report on the destruction of Russian forests and its related translation into Italian.



FIGURE 4. Example of translation loss (1)

The persuasive force of the title shown in Figure 4 hinges on the homophony between *taiga* and *tiger* to mimic the famous phrase *the eye of the tiger*. In this case, the translators failed to preserve the rhetorical features of the title, as they reduced the expression to its literal meaning (*Uno sguardo sulla taiga russa*). Unlike what happened for the titles belonging to the first group, opting for a literal translation in this case led to translation loss, as the pun and the evocative reference to the famous phrase could not be preserved in Italian. An attempt at compensating the loss can be observed, as the Italian title is “downgraded” to the position of subtitle, while the title position is occupied by a first-person-plural appeal to save the Russian biome (*Salviamo la grande foresta del Nord*); despite this endeavour, though, the Italian version of the report title cannot be said to be as effective as its English counterpart. This example suggests that rhetoric is often untranslatable, as there was probably no chance to preserve both the wordplay and the reference to the theme addressed in the report. In certain cases, then, the captivating expression must be reduced to its literal meaning in order to produce a title that at least reflects the content of the report, though not in a linguistically creative or rhetorically effective manner.

Taking a look at other untranslated Greenpeace reports, the challenges posed by activist discourse – epitomised by report titles – further stand out. Figure 5 displays two reports, one written in English and addressing the consequences of krill fishing, the other written in Italian and dealing with commercial whaling. These two reports were not translated for unknown reasons; certainly, observing the translations of their creative titles would have been interesting for research purposes.

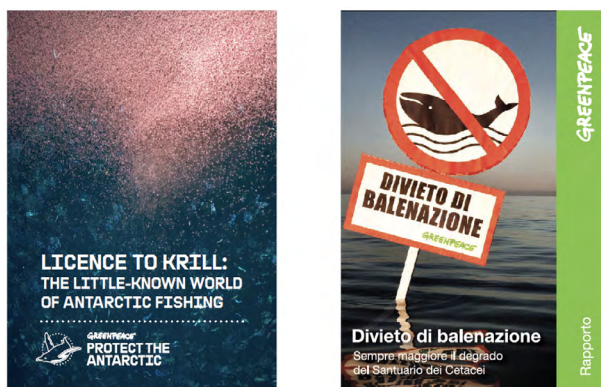


FIGURE 5. The (alleged) untranslatability of activist discourse

How could *Licence to Krill* be effectively translated into Italian, or *Divieto di balenazione* into English? Where do the boundaries of translatability frustrate the possibilities for transcreation? What is sure is that preservation of both the wordplay and the thematic reference appears to be paramount because, in the activist context, the rhetorical effectiveness of report titles (and, more in general, slogans) is determined by the co-presence of these two elements. In spite of apparently insuperable obstacles, the translator should, therefore, always strive to shape the TT title on the basis of these two features. Since an attempt should always be made, the above titles also deserve a translation. In the first, the phrase *licence to kill* – disseminated by the 1989 film of the James Bond series – is harnessed to point to the devastating fishing practices that are rife in the Antarctic Sea; yet, the verb *kill* is replaced by the almost homophonous noun *krill*, which enables the readership to immediately grasp that krill in particular is endangered by the destructive fishing methods exposed in the report. Since krill is widely known to be a crucial element of the aquatic food chain, the consequences of its drastic reduction immediately appear daunting, as their negativity is magnified by a well-recognisable phrase associated with spies and murderers. The loss of these rich references would provide the Italian readership with a report that would immediately appear to be less riveting than the English ST. When translating into Italian, reference could be made to the Italian version of the film, but since it was translated as *007 - Vendetta privata*, the evocative power unleashed by the kill-krill association would inexorably fade. The same would happen if the translator decided to use the Italian phrase *licenza di uccidere*, which was actually a translation of another *007* film released in 1962 and entitled *Dr. No.*; this choice would preserve the vivid reference to killing, but not the equally crucial one to

krill, that is the object of killing. In the light of the failures to which the most intuitive translation choices would lead, a more strenuous effort should be made to take care of the two discursive pillars of activist titles (i.e. a wordplay and a reference to the theme addressed in the report). Since the verb *to kill* is not totally unknown to the Italian readership, the translator ought to look for expressions containing the verb in question which have passed as borrowings into Italian national culture. In this respect, *serial killer* is a noun phrase that is familiar to most Italians. The head of the noun phrase, that is *killer*, could therefore be turned into the creative *kriller*, giving rise to a title such as *Serial kriller: Il mondo poco conosciuto della pesca nell'Antartico*. This title is characterised, just as the ST title, by the presence of a wordplay (hinging on the near homophony between *killer* and *kriller*) and a reference to the theme addressed in the report (i.e. the consequences of krill fishing). The same remarks hold true for the title of the second report whose cover page is shown in Figure 5. The Italian phrase *divieto di balneazione* is exploited to allow the use of a picture displaying a warning sign in which the writing is creatively distorted into *Divieto di balenazione* to denounce commercial whaling. Again, the rhetorical effectiveness of the title, stemming from the interplay between a play on words and a reference to the theme of the report, can only be conveyed to target audiences by preserving its two constitutive elements. *Whalert!* could be a solution: by blending the terms *whale* and *alert*, a creative title is produced to attract the attention of the reader and convey the message concisely, as both the reference to whales and the idea of danger are preserved. Although the transcreations of these titles can also be disputable, these two examples demonstrate that a) the creative language used in activist reports frequently poses challenges to the translator, and that b) these challenges may not be as serious as they initially seem to be. Though compensation can be resorted to within the report, the creativity of activist discourse is condensed in the title, in which a rhetorical strategy is regularly used to draw the attention of the readership to an appalling environmental predicament; therefore, the transcreation of this rhetorical strategy is paramount if the translator wishes to confer the same persuasive power and emotional strength on the title of the target text.

This transcreation approach was apparently not used when translating several titles that can be found within the corpus, namely those that, together with *Eye on the Taiga*, fall into the third group, gathering those instances that were translated literally and whose language creativity and rhetorical effectiveness were not preserved in the passage from English to Italian. Unlike the *Eye on the Taiga* report, though, the lack of creativity and rhetorical effectiveness in these TT titles does not seem to be caused by insuperable hindrances to translation, but rather by the translators' refusal or inability to transcreate. This kind of discursive and rhetorical pauperisation can be observed in the translations of the subtitles of the three *Dirty Laundry* reports.

In the first one, the subtitle *Unravelling the corporate connections to toxic water pollution in China* is reformulated into *Il segreto tossico dietro l'industria tessile*; the English expression is reduced to its literal meaning and the evocative reference to the textile industry, made through the verb *to unravel* in the ST, is lost. Though the informative content of the subtitle is preserved in Italian, the translation choice raises a few doubts, as resorting to an Italian expression such as *sbrogliare la matassa*, *sbrogliare i fili* or *districare i legami* would have enabled the translators to convey not only the informative content of the subtitle but also the creative allusion to the theme of the report.

The second volume of the report series is entitled *Dirty Laundry 2: Hung Out to Dry*. The expression *hung out to dry* echoes the idiom *to air out one's dirty laundry in public*, informing the reader that Greenpeace is continuing to expose the polluting production methods cherished by fashion companies. In the Italian text, this subtitle is omitted. Admittedly, translating this subtitle appears to be rather demanding because, on the English cover page, the expression interacts with the picture in the background showing T-shirts and trousers hung outside. Yet, an enhanced commitment to transcreation could have enabled the translators to preserve the persuasive features of the title; this stance was confirmed during a lecture on the translation of rhetorical texts held at IULM University in Milan; the 2<sup>nd</sup> year MA students in Specialised Translation and Conference Interpreting were informed about the rhetorical peculiarities of the titles of Greenpeace reports and were, then, asked to translate a selection of titles and subtitles, including those of the second *Dirty Laundry* report. They proposed a few solutions to the translation problem, including *Panni sporchi 2: stesi alla luce del sole* and *Panni sporchi 2: appesi in bella mostra*; as the Italian TT is a multimodal report, each of these alternatives would have kept the interplay between words and pictures alive, providing the Italian readership with a heading that boasts the same linguistic creativity and pragmatic force as the ST title.

The pictures, shown in Figure 6, of the titles and subtitles of the *Dirty Laundry 3* and *Panni sporchi 3* reports, further suggest that it is the translators who sometimes refrain from resorting to transcreation, thereby failing to preserve the linguistic creativity and rhetorical effectiveness of Greenpeace titles.



FIGURE 6. Omission of creative elements in the TTs

In the third volume of the *Dirty Laundry* report series, the verb *to reload* is used to affirm vividly that the toxic substances contained in the clothes produced by renowned fashion brands keep being discharged into public waterways. The lexical item *reloaded* conjures up an intertextual association with the second instalment of *The Matrix* saga (*The Matrix Reloaded*). More importantly, the verb evokes a gun, something potentially deadly, and therefore plays a crucial pragmatic role in conveying the idea of danger. In the Italian non-multimodal briefing, the verb is eliminated, and all these references and connotative meanings are lost in the translated text. There are no attempts at translating this powerful and crucial verb, despite its importance and the presence of an equivalent in Italian, the verb *caricare*, which is also used in relation to laundry and guns. The fact that a greater effort on the part of the volunteer translators would have led to better results was, again, corroborated by the alternative solutions put forward by the above-mentioned MA students; these solutions include *Panni sporchi: un nuovo carico*, *Panni sporchi: un nuovo lavaggio* and *Panni sporchi: risciacquo*, which preserve the wordplay and the thematic reference alike. Figure 7 offers another example of the disputable translation choices made by Greenpeace translators.



FIGURE 7. Example of translation loss (2)

Figure 7 displays one of the reports that was already shown in Figure 1, flanked by its translation into Italian. Faced with the title *Plan Bee – Living Without Pesticides*, the translators decided to retain the reference to a letter of the alphabet, namely *A*, the initial letter of *ape*. In this regard, they probably acknowledged that the noun *bee* performed a rhetorically significant function in the ST; yet, if *Plan Bee* contains a very effective pun hinging on the homophony with the phrase *Plan B*, *A come ape* makes no sense and is likely to bewilder the Italian readership. Possibly unaware of the

mechanisms that provide report titles with persuasive power and rhetorical effectiveness, the translators struggled to find a solution in which reference could be made to a letter of the alphabet, rather than striving to transcreate the pun, that is replace it with a different but similarly allusive one in the target language. Again, the students came up with an alternative: *Una vita apesticida*. This solution is also disputable because a loss of rhetorical effectiveness can nevertheless be observed, and because the alpha privative here is used ungrammatically with a noun and not an adjective, which might prevent readers from catching the wordplay and understanding the broader sense of the whole title (at least when reading it for the first time). However, the choice to start from the phrase *without pesticides* to create a term that with the alpha privative refers to bees denotes a commitment to harnessing those transcreation abilities that are essential for translating persuasive texts.

#### 4. Conclusions

In the light of the study outlined in the previous section, the parallel corpus used to analyse the titles of Greenpeace reports and their translations into Italian can be said to be a showcase for the binding constraints of the translatability of rhetoric, for the translation loss that characterises the interlinguistic and intercultural mediation of activist texts, and for transcreation in practice. In other words, the contrastive analysis of the titles provides manifold answers to the research question, offering evidence that untranslatability appears in relative form (Hermans 2009: 302), as it leaves more or less visible traces in the TT titles. In particular, the study indicates that the translated versions of the titles of Greenpeace reports can be grouped into three categories based on the translation strategy used and the successful or failed preservation of the rhetorical effect. First, literal translation preserving the rhetorical effect; second, transcreation preserving the rhetorical effect; third, literal translation leading to translation loss. Although some examples pertaining to the third category suggest that linguistically creative and rhetorically persuasive texts are often untranslatable, others show that, despite objective difficulties, it is the translators who sometimes refrain from resorting to transcreation, thereby failing to preserve the rhetorical effectiveness of the ST titles.

Incidentally, the analysis also reveals the place that the study of activist texts can occupy within the realm of Translation Studies. The examination of the disputable solutions put forward by the mixed team of Greenpeace activists and translators, compared with the more effective alternatives proposed by students committed to transcreation, provides further insights into the study of untranslatability and transcreation, fostering the debate on



the role that the analysis of activist titles and their translations can perform in the translation classroom. In particular, starting from the observation of the corpus, a few comments can be made. Since those who translate in the activist context are not always professional or totally committed translators, an exclusively descriptive approach is not sufficient to examine and explain untranslatability and transcreation in training settings. This stance also derives from the need to move towards an “activist translation pedagogy” (Scarpa 2008), an approach that aims at “introducing in the teaching of translation a new type of prescription”, whereby the teacher presents “the students with descriptive norms based on solid empirical evidence drawn from professional translations but in a critical and, ultimately, prescriptive way” (Scarpa, Musacchio, Palumbo 2009: 39-40). As regards the titles of activist reports, students could and should, then, be encouraged to discuss instances of apparent untranslatability and to propose creative and alternative solutions by sticking to a few fundamental tenets drawn from the observation of the corpus: they should be informed that the preservation of the rhetorical effectiveness of ST titles is paramount, as titles act as attention-seeking devices and catalysts for linguistic creativity; they should, then, be warned that, when faced with a creative title, they should – after an examination of the rhetorical strategy used and its translatability – either preserve or replace the wordplay while retaining the key reference to the theme of the report, remembering that there will be cases in which the creative expression will have to be reduced to its literal meaning.

Notably, this creative, collaborative and interactive work on the translation of activist titles will not only be functional to describing the rising challenges of a new translation domain but will also play a more general and instrumental role in explaining language creativity, translation loss and transcreation. By transcending the details of translation in the activist context, it will gradually help trainees to acquire and develop those analytical skills and transcreation abilities that have always been essential in the translation market, which is now confronted with the new challenges launched by activist communication.

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