

RECLAIMING THE PLACE OF TRANSLATION IN ENGLISH COMPOSITION AND  
TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION: TOWARD HOSPITABLE WRITING

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**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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## ABSTRACT

The defining characteristic of a pedagogy informed by philosophical cosmopolitanism is a focus on the dialogic imagination: the coexistence of rival ways of life in the individual experience which incites us to interrogate common sense assumptions on culture, language, and identity, and combine contradictory certainties in an effort to think in terms of inclusive oppositions while rejecting the logic of exclusive oppositions.

One of the goals of the Trans-Atlantic and Pacific Project (TAPP), an educational network of bilateral writing-translation projects that establishes links between students in different countries, is to invite students to mediate between languages, cultures, and rhetorical traditions with the goal of transcending differences and find common ground. Students who participate to TAPP understand what is at stake when they write for a global audience by cultivating an attitude of openness that invites hospitable communication practices.

The goal of the explorative study illustrated in the second part of the dissertation is to identify regularities of translation strategies in the genre of technical instructions. The dataset consists of a corpus of 40 texts compiled by pairing up 20 instructions written in English by students majoring in different areas of engineering in an American university and their translations into Italian (19,046 words), completed by students majoring in English in an Italian university.

The research questions are: With reference to the translation strategies explicitation, implicitation, generalization, and particularization, what evidence is there of uniformity of practice in the translation of instructions from English into Italian? What are the most typical causes of zero shifts? Why do translators resort to rhetorical shifts? Results show that non-professional translators tend to resort more to implicitation than explicitation, and more to

particularization than generalization. Due to the limited size of the corpus, it was impossible to identify typical causes for zero shifts, but further studies should focus on how writers can facilitate translation by using the topic/comment structure. Finally, translators resort to rhetorical shifts for reasons that have to do with cultural appropriateness in the target locale. The most common type of rhetorical shifts are context-related shifts in emphasis.

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## DEDICATION

To my transnational families and my wife Stefania.

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CHAPTER 1. THE SOCIOLINGUISTICS OF GLOBAL ENGLISH  
AND THE RHETORIC OF INVITATION AND HOSPITALITY

**1.1. Reconceptualizing English**

With reference to the debates on English only policies in American schools and universities, and the ensuing calls for a translanguaging approach to the teaching of English in the field of composition, this study draws from social-constructivism and philosophical cosmopolitanism to promote a reconceptualization of spoken and written English that is in line with descriptions of the contemporary world in terms of flows, mobility, and increased contact between speakers of different languages. The exigence for this study is not to promote multilingualism or pluralism as the panacea of all problems concerning intercultural communication. The problem is not one of promoting languages other than English in countries where English is the most spoken language, or allowing each different language group in the U.S. to cling to its own language at the exclusion of all other languages, with the goal of preserving and celebrating a singular, fixed, unchanging identity. These types of language policies could favor cultural and political Balkanization rather than integration between peoples. Rather, the central problem addressed in this study is one of definition. We need to ask ourselves how we understand English, and how we define the scope and goals of spoken and written communication in English within the ecology of cross-cultural communication. Every effort at developing pedagogies of English that address the needs of both native speakers and speakers of other languages must start with a reassessment of the functions that this language is asked to perform in the global sphere.

In 2006, Graddol estimated that by 2010-2015 a third of the entire human population would be learning and using English as a contact language. As the focus in applied linguistics shifted from native speaker English to functional varieties of English used in a wide range of cross-cultural interactions, the problem of defining and describing the hybrid, non-standard Englishes used in these interactions inspired several research projects. An influential voice in this new area of study, Barbara Seidlhofer, defines English as a lingua franca (ELF) as “any use of English among speakers of different languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option” (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 7). This conceptualization of international English, as well as the idea that this functional variety can be effectively ‘isolated’ and studied, was questioned by scholars who are skeptic about the usefulness of the construct ELF. Suresh Canagarajah (2007), for example, argues that ELF is intersubjectively constructed in specific contexts of interaction, therefore it is difficult to describe this language a priori. In a similar vein, Matsuda and Friedrich (2011) describe ELF as a context-dependent function of English whose variability cannot be captured by linguists. And yet, just like William Labov (1972) showed that variation in the speech of New Yorkers was not random, but correlated with age, attitude and social situation, ELF scholars have provided ample evidence that ELF exhibits regularities which contradict the notion that performance varieties are totally arbitrary and erratic. Their research shows that, far from being erratic, ELF interactions are characterized by self-regulating strategies of accommodation and levelling that deserve to be investigated. Even if these studies focus on spoken English, I believe that findings on the lexicogrammar and pragmatics of ELF can help shed light on processes of linguistic negotiation that characterize the collaboration between writers and translators.

In the field of English language teaching (ELT), research on ELF has provided cogent arguments for a move beyond the idea of the native speaker (henceforth NS) as the norm-providing ideal to more realistic and relevant language models (see., e.g., Cook 1999). But invitations to reconsider how we conceptualize English in the twenty-first century often fall on the deaf ears of administrators and decision-makers whose main goal is to sell NS English (especially NS accent) as the most precious commodity on the way to success and personal achievement. Native English remains the version of language taught to non-native speakers (henceforth NNS) around the world in a prescriptive way and with emphasis on the goal of ‘sounding’ like an American or an English person. Pronunciation courses offered within Intensive English Language Programs, for example, attract international students with the promise that they will learn how “American English” actually sounds when spoken. The assumption is that there is one “American English,” and that we know exactly how this language always “sounds,” no matter the context or rhetorical situation, no matter whether the speaker was born and raised in Boston or New Orleans. While this gross simplification is functional to the creation of an unambiguous message that can stimulate enrollment to this type of courses, the psychological impact of positing a dogmatic pronunciation standard for American English is often overlooked. When we construct the idea of rigid, fixed, ruled-based standards for pronunciation, all English learners who struggle to reproduce particular sets of phonemes will feel frustrated, and possibly lose motivation for studying English on the grounds that they will never sound like a native speaker; no matter how hard they try.

As a consequence of this way of conceptualizing spoken English, accommodation and adaptation are typically seen as a one-way road. It is NNSs who have to make all the effort to meet NS in their linguistic comfort zones. Working with a tendency of presenting English as a

fixed, monolithic language, this approach to intercultural communication as a one-way road damages not only NNSs, by setting learning goals that are often unrealistic and sometimes irrelevant for them, but also NSs enrolled in composition courses, who often graduate from college unprepared to interact with speakers of other languages. In contrast, when English is conceptualized as an international lingua franca, both NSs and NNSs are invited to see themselves as mediators in the global exchange of beliefs, ideas, and knowledge, with very important trickle down effects as far as the quality of communication and the propensity toward reciprocity are concerned. Significantly, once spoken English is reconceived as a lingua franca, our understanding of written communication in English also undergoes an important transformation. Writers who use languages as shared repertoires of resources for intercultural communication are less likely to understand their mother tongue as a vehicle for the celebration of a reified national culture or a naturalized social identity. Rather, they will use languages as the most important instruments of social and cultural mediation. A social-constructivist approach to the definition and teaching of writing calls for more attention to interlocutors and audiences as social agents who are involved in the production, not only the reception, of meaning; more attention to how we can invite ‘strangers’ to use our writing or actively join the conversation that we intend to establish through writing.

Our new communication technologies have facilitated contact between peoples and groups from diverse cultural backgrounds. But besides virtual or digital proximity, the constant rise in immigration flows and, more in general, the increased mobility of both skilled and unskilled workers is bringing people in what can be considered a troubling physical proximity. When the stranger becomes a member of the community, new strategies for communication have to replace nineteenth-century notions of language as constitutive of national identity and local

affiliations. The social dynamics that characterize our age demand that we move toward an idea of language as a shared resource for communication whose main function is to facilitate a productive dialogue between individuals and groups who are strangers to each other. In particular, global languages such as English, or Arabic, have to be redefined as flexible expressive codes that are collectively owned; codes that allow users to mediate between the competing needs of projecting specific social identities and establishing a conversation with the Other characterized by an attitude of openness.

## **1.2. Communication as an ethical exercise in mediation**

The central philosophical tenet of this study is that speakers and writers who use international languages and digital channels to distribute a variety of messages have an ethical obligation to encode these messages in a way that does not exclude an ample range of potential receivers from access to information. Even when the exigence for an act of communication is the strengthening of existing bonds within a delimited social group, once a message is launched in today's mediascapes the addressed audience for this message increases exponentially, and in ways that are difficult to predict. A highly idiomatic movie review written for a well-defined invoked audience might easily be visualized by diverse internet users who consult review aggregators such as Rotten Tomatoes or Metacritic. These 'unexpected' readers might find the style of the review impenetrable, and the review itself useless. In other words, they have been cut out from the conversation, and excluded from the transnational circle of movie buffs even when they have invested time and money to learn English with the goal of gaining access to this and other transnational social groups. By using a restricted jargon to encode a message that is likely to reach diverse audiences, the author assumes a position of dominance in the relationship

established with readers. Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin (1995) have exposed this approach to communication as informed by a rhetoric of patriarchy characterized by the attempt on the part of the author to demonstrate superior or insider knowledge of a subject matter. Only a circumscribed group of receivers, the chosen few, will be able to partake of the joy of reading and sharing ideas, provided that they implicitly acknowledge the position of authority assumed by the sender. All the other readers are just erased from the scene of communication. In contrast, an invitational rhetoric as conceptualized by Foss and Griffin, a rhetoric built on the values of equality, immanent value, and self-determination, would aim at establishing more balanced and less-hierarchical relationships between speakers and audiences, writers and readers. A key legacy of feminist scholarship is this very emphasis on a rhetoric of inclusion and the values of hospitality.

Foss and Griffin's understanding of the rhetorical act as an "invitation to the audience to enter the rhetor's world" (p. 5) appears to be particularly relevant in discussions on the role of communication in the Twenty-first century. In the age of contact and fluid modernity, we have a moral obligation to prepare students for their encounters with a wide range of 'strangers' both in the social and the professional sphere. Or else, if we fail to prepare our students for this type of encounters, how can we expect them to resist the siren calls of particularism, nationalism, and authoritarianism? How can we stimulate them to detect and expose the fallacies of the rhetoric of divisiveness and intolerance? How can we invite them to embrace a rhetoric of listening, rather than what Booth (2004) calls "a win-rhetoric," characterized by adversarial attitudes? In opposition to win-rhetoric, Booth defines listening-rhetoric as "the whole range of communicative arts for reducing misunderstanding by paying full attention to opposing views" (2004, p. 10), and Rhetorology as the "deepest form of LR: the systematic probing for common

ground” (2004, p. 11). These definitions are perfectly in line with an understanding of communication as an exercise in mediation.

The search for common ground is a disposition, a social orientation that we can embrace through increased contact with difference, and, on a pedagogical level, through projects and activities that ask students to collaborate with transnational groups of peers in the production of written documents. The idea of establishing common ground as an exigence for rhetoric appears to inform Burke’s observations on identification in *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1969). We can persuade our interlocutors, Burke writes, only in so far as we try to talk their language “by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea” so as to identify our ways with their ways (p. 55). I believe that this need for a form of identification that is compensatory to division should drive our communicative efforts. It explains why students who participate to the Trans-Atlantic and Pacific Project (TAPP) tend to realize a variety of speech acts (especially forms of salutation) in similar ways after an initial mismatch of communicative routines. It sheds light on the motives that lie behind their use of hedging to save and protect face, and their willingness to linguistically accommodate one another through a variety of pragmatic strategies that range from reformulation to explicitation (Verzella & Mara, 2015).

But if we want to promote communication as a form of identification we also need to reflect on *habitus* as a ‘force’ that we need to contain. I am referring, here, to Bourdieu’s definition of *habitus* as a property of social agents (whether individuals, groups or institutions) that comprises a “structured and structuring structure” (Maton, 2012, p. 51). *Habitus* is “structured” by one’s past and present circumstances, such as family upbringing and educational experiences. It is “structuring” in that one’s *habitus* helps to shape one’s present and future practices. Bourdieu also explains that *habitus* comprises a system of dispositions which generate



perceptions, appreciations and practices (Maton, 2012, p. 51). The term “disposition” designates a way of being, a habitual state and, in particular, a predisposition, tendency, propensity or inclination. Importantly, dispositions tend to last over time, and regulate what we perceive as familiar and acceptable. As social agents, we tend to gravitate toward those social fields and those types of interaction that best match our dispositions, and try to avoid situations that involve a field–habitus clash, that is a clash between our dispositions and contexts that cannot be understood through familiar patterns of thought and reasoning. By presenting different forms of spoken and written communication as activities of mediation that help people find common ground, we encourage students to find ways to cope with the unfamiliar by revealing how the hidden workings of *habitus* shape our anxiety vis-à-vis the exogenous. We invite them to consider alternative notions of allegiance and affiliation, and a more inclusive interpretation of what constitutes a community or a cohesive social group. In this way, we prepare them for the interactions that will shape their social and professional lives in a cosmopolitan world where differences are transcended, rather than emphasized.

### **1.3. Hospitable writing**

In light of these observations, throughout this study I will elaborate arguments in favor of what I call hospitable writing, which I consider to be an ethical imperative in both technical and non-technical communication. Hospitable writing enacts three crucial social functions: it connects individuals and groups in non-hierarchical relationships; it allows mediation of real or perceived differences between people; and it provides access to knowledge and information. In the case of technical communication, hospitable writing also facilitates translation with a cascade of benefits in terms of enhanced international relations, improved quality of cross-cultural and

cross-functional team work, reduction of localization costs, and so on. In this connection, translation is a very important form of writing whose mediating function is rarely brought to light in the mainstream academic conversations about writing pedagogy. The very way in which teachers and scholars refer to composition, i.e. without clarifying that by composition they mean English composition, is suspect. The process of composing always involves the act of drawing expressive resources from the repertoires of several languages and semiotic systems. In other words, composing is always an act of translation, and has often been described by means of translation metaphors.

While many compositionists have endorsed LeFevre's (1987) understanding of invention as a social act, Lunsford and Ede's (1990, 2011) description of writing as a collaborative activity based on text negotiation, and the New London Group's call for promoting multiliteracies (1996), while debates around multilingualism, translanguaging (e.g. Horner, Lu, & Matsuda, 2010, Horner et al. 2011) and translanguaging pedagogy (e.g. Canagarajah, 2011, 2013) have become well-established, there seems to be relatively little attention for translation studies in the otherwise very inclusive field of English composition. Preferred interests listed in descriptions for positions in English composition include basic writing, creative writing, professional writing, multimodality, digital humanities, and many other compelling specializations, with the notable exclusion of translation theory. Finding translation theory classes in lists of courses offered by English Departments is an equally difficult task, even if several scholars, especially in the field of technical communication, have devoted significant research work on translation (Maylath, 2013; Maylath et al., 2013), localization (for example, Agboka, 2013; Humbley et al., 2005; Zhu & St.Amant, 2010), and cultural differences (for example, Barnum & Li, 2006; McCool & St.Amant, 2009). The fact that in 2016 a special issue of the journal *Connexions* (edited by

Maylath, Muñoz Martin, & Pacheco Pinto) was devoted to translation and professional communication supports the claim that translation studies are relevant to the field of technical communication. The rapidly expanding corpus of studies on the Trans-Atlantic and Pacific Project (see, for example, Maylath, Vandepitte, & Mousten, 2008)—a project that promotes the shared authoring of bilingual technical documentation between students enrolled in writing courses in the U.S. and students majoring in English and translation in many universities across the world—provides further arguments in support of the internationalization of writing pedagogy. However, all these calls for the integration of translation studies and intercultural communication theory in writing classes and technical communication courses are not always addressed by administrators and program directors.

It appears to me that even those who describe writing primarily as ‘outer-directed’—“more interested in the social processes whereby language-learning and thinking capacities are shaped and used in particular communities” (Bizzell 1982, p. 214), tend to associate the idea of community with the local community, cemented by the shared adhesion to a precise set of linguistic and cultural habits. Similar concerns about a tendency toward parochialism in English composition have been offered in an opinion article written by Wendy Hesford for *PMLA* in 2006. While Hesford concedes that interest in “transnational identifications,” multiliteracies, and the mediation of cultural practices is growing, she also laments that a turn toward the global is hindered by a “resurgent localism and strategic retreat to disciplinary homelands” (p. 789). Exactly ten years later, it is still possible to observe a tendency, within the field of English composition, to safeguard disciplinary identities and methods that “take for granted the nation-state,” to use Hesford’s words, and “ignore the global forces shaping individual lives and literate practices” (p. 788). It can be argued that an effect of these “global forces” is a more accelerated

hybridization and multiplication of our social identities. As we join different communities, local and translocal, in our journeys through space and cyberspace, our affiliations shift, while our ideas, values, and beliefs gradually become adjusted to diverse cultural traditions. I subscribe to Hesford's claim that crucial to the global turn "is an understanding of the intertextuality of local and global cultures" (p. 792) because this statement perfectly captures the interplay of discourses that constantly reshape the geographies of world cultures. By highlighting the porousness of cultures, Hesford rejects essentialism, particularism, and nationalism, while inviting writing teachers to 'foreignize' their curricula, to borrow a word that in translation theory is often opposed to the 'domestication' and assimilation of the foreign.

It is significant that in the same year in which Hesford proposed her vision for a cautious global turn in composition studies, Paul Kei Matsuda (2006) offered a cogent argument on the myth of linguistic homogeneity, which he defines as "the tacit and widespread acceptance of the dominant image of composition students as native speakers of a privileged variety of English" (p. 638). What is especially problematic about the 'one nation-one language' myth is the way in which it might covertly inform program and curriculum development through pedagogies that invite students to communicate effectively with audiences and in contexts that are relatively familiar to them. It is alarming to observe how many textbooks canonically adopted in composition classes present contexts of professional communication and the genres that mediate social action within these contexts as relatively static, rather than dynamic and shifting based on the needs of audiences and interlocutors that are more and more diverse. In a study aimed at investigating how and to what extent a global perspective has been incorporated into technical communication textbooks published between 2005 and 2007, Matsuda and Matsuda observe that sections devoted to the study of the dynamics of international technical communication remain

very few. When the limelight does shift to international technical communication, its dynamics are somewhat simplified and reduced to the interaction between a technical communicator, who is a monolingual native English user, and his or her international audience, consisting of nonnative English users in need of cultural and linguistic accommodation (2011, p. 187). While it is certainly true that speakers of other languages might benefit from mindful efforts at linguistic accommodation, what remains out of the scene of writing and collaboration as depicted in these textbooks is the active role that these actors play as producers, not only passive consumers, of technical content. For example, translators actively contribute to the creation of bilingual documentation by running usability tests on early drafts of technical documents. This means that their feedback has a significant impact on the creation, not just the distribution of content. Another problem identified by Matsuda and Matsuda is that the discussion of issues in international technical communication tends to draw heavily on stereotypical representations of cultural differences, reflecting contrastive cultural analyses that have been problematized by studies in many related fields, from anthropology to applied linguistics. Finally, they emphasize that technical communication books tend to present “language differences as *deficiencies*” (p. 188), rather than resources that can be harnessed at the creative stage of *inventio*. I believe that writing theorists and technical communicators should be wary of presenting a scene of writing in which native speakers of English are the authoritative producers of meaning who supervise the production of content while also managing and policing the reception and interpretation of meaning. It is important to recognize the active contribution of diverse audiences in the creation of content, especially technical content. The work of professional translators, in particular, can yield precious information on the usability and translatability (what a localization expert would call *world readiness*) of instruction manuals and other types of technical documentation.

#### **1.4. Transcending differences through collaborative writing and translation**

The goal of the case study presented in chapter 4 and 5 is to investigate how individuals who speak different languages negotiate writing by collaborating in the translation of technical documents. In contrast with countless mainstream studies in intercultural communication, the focus here is not on misunderstandings caused by presumed differences between cultures, understood as essences. Rather, the focus is on how human beings bridge lingua-cultural differences through the multiple forms of negotiation that characterize the process of translation. Translation offers a particularly rich field for the study of the way in which individuals negotiate written communication by allowing researchers to shift their focus from cultural differences based on national affiliation to how individuals resourcefully use language, or better, a range of interlanguages, to transcend real or perceived cultural boundaries (see Cronin 2003).

Within the genre of technical instructions, the goal of this study is to identify regularities that shed light on how non-professional translators mediate between languages, cultures, and rhetorical traditions. The four research questions are:

- With reference to specific translation methods—Explicitation, Implication, Generalization, Particularization—what evidence is there of uniformity of practice in the translation of instructions from English into Italian?
- What are the most typical causes of zero shifts?
- Why do translators resort to rhetorical shifts?
- Based on these findings, can we hypothesize ways in which writers can facilitate a translation process that aims at obtaining functional equivalence between source text (ST) and target text (TT)? Can we devise new strategies of collaboration between writers and translators?

While the present study tries to find regularities in the behavior of non-professional translators, research in the field of English composition can benefit from an analysis of findings concerning a very specific type of reception of written texts. A reception that is shaped by the exigence to translate the ST in a different language. Translation can be seen as a form of usability testing that provides precious information on the strengths and weaknesses of writing strategies at the level of lexicon, grammatical structure, and higher order concerns that involve questions related to the stages of *inventio* and *dispositio*. By studying what type of shifts translators are likely to make, and, more in general, how their text is received, used, and manipulated by translators, writers can develop new ways of encoding directions and technical explanations.

Chapter 2 of this study will focus on why we should resist theoretical and methodological nationalism in studies of intercultural communication, applied linguistics, and English composition. To support my claims, I will briefly touch on long-engrained ways of understanding otherness that are often imbricated in predispositions toward authoritarianism informed, in their turn, by ideologies of particularism. In the second section of chapter 2, I will offer a critique of traditional methodologies used in intercultural communication research with the goal of showing how these methodologies are shaped by essentialist views that often reduce culture to national culture, a ‘software of the mind’ that determines our behaviors. Chapter 3 will provide arguments in favor of a reconceptualization of English as a shared repertoire of resources for the mediation of meaning across diverse lingua-cultures. The second part will explain why it is important to reintroduce translation in writing pedagogy. In the same way as the introduction of English as a lingua franca can help students enrolled in EFL/ESL classes to move beyond native English norms in language learning, the reintroduction of translation in writing pedagogy can help expert users of English understand writing as a process of negotiation and cultural

mediation. Chapter 4 and 5 will present a case study that draws from the methodology of linguistic discourse analysis to investigate the relationship between writing and translation within a specific context and a specific genre. The context is educational: this case study explores how American students of technical writing collaborate with Italian translators in the production of bilingual technical documentation. These two groups of students are connected through their participation to an instantiation of the Trans-Atlantic and Pacific Project.

Finally, chapter 6 will offer my interpretation of the finding for the case study as well as a call for an understanding of communication as an activity characterized by the goal of sharing the responsibility of meaning making, especially when the code selected for communication is an international lingua franca, as in the case of English. I believe that it is an ethical duty of writers and technical communicators to invite receivers to jointly and actively participate to the production of a message.



CHAPTER 2. A RETURN TO LANGUAGE AND TRANSLATION  
IN THE STUDY OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

**2.1. The problem of the stranger**

Zygmunt Bauman (1990) writes that much of our social organization relies on a systematic effort to reduce the frequency with which hermeneutical problems are encountered while mitigating the horrors of indetermination. Immigrants, refugees, and resident aliens often represent an incongruous synthesis of nearness and remoteness. The problem with ‘strangers’ is that they bring into the familiar circles of proximity the kind of difference that is usually understood and appreciated only at a distance. “Indeed,” writes Bauman, “the stranger is a person afflicted with the incurable sickness of multiple incongruity” (p. 150). Georg Simmel provides a similar definition of the stranger as a person whose position in a social group is affected by the fact that she does not belong in it initially and thus she “brings qualities into it that are not, and cannot be indigenous to it” (1971, p. 143). This way of understanding the Other is tied to an ideological stance that is typical of the ideologies of particularism and nationalism, characterized by a tendency to collectivize friends and enemies while containing the threat posed by the incongruous stranger. “The national state,” Bauman emphatically states, “is designed primarily to deal with the problem of strangers, not enemies” (1990, p. 153). Immersed as we are in a sea of propaganda aimed at strengthening our sense of national identity (see Piller, 2011), we tend to forget that communities that seem to be very old and natural are in fact conventional and artificial, created ad hoc through political decisions. The nation, as Benedict Anderson argues, is a political community imagined as both *limited* and *sovereign*. *Limited* because membership in this type of community is protected by boundaries that include as much as they exclude;

*sovereign* because the idea of the nation was born in an age in which the triumph of reason undermined the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm. Interestingly, the nation, a product of our own ‘imagination,’ has been progressively reified into something real and concrete, into a stable entity that has always existed and will always exist; an entity that demands our exclusive and undivided loyalty and social commitment.

Similarly, standard/national languages, artificially constructed by political elites through laws and regulations, are seen as fixed communicative codes surrounded by an aura of prestigious antiquity and authenticity that justifies their celebration at the expense of other national languages or regional dialects. In modern European history, Milroy (2001) observes, the progressive standardization not only of languages, but also of monetary systems, factory made goods, and weights and measurements went hand in hand with the rise of trade and capitalism. Standardization can certainly be a positive force when it connects people, it promotes collaboration and the exchange of information, or facilitates the exchange of goods. But when the goal of standardization is to suppress diversity in the name of ethnic chauvinism and national cohesion; when standardization is invoked as an instrument to preserve a single, reified cultural identity, the result is an impoverishment of social life in terms of cultural dynamism. Narrow linguistic prescriptivism can be considered to be the armed branch of standardization. Many English teachers would be at a loss if asked to explain logically why they marked an expression as incorrect. They would feel that there is no need to justify the marking of unconventional forms as incorrect. However, these common-sense views on correctness are “ideologically laden attitudes” (Milroy, 2001, p. 535) connected to hegemonic views of what is legitimate, appropriate, and acceptable within the boundaries of a social group. The prestige associated to certain language varieties is an index of specific configurations of power-relations. Social elites

arbitrarily decide what is right and what is wrong in language use as a first step toward the imposition of a set of rules that are presented almost as natural, rather than the product of fallible human judgement. In this scenario, those who do not speak the language of power for reasons that have to do with access to formal education, social status, geographical provenance, and cultural affiliation are often marginalized, and sometimes even indirectly blamed for their lack of competence, rather than encouraged to develop their multicompetence in local and translocal languages. The very designation of speakers of languages other than English as non-native speakers describes millions of people by placing emphasis on skills that they lack, the ability to reproduce the RP pronunciation, or their tenuous grasp of idiomatic language. The fact that imperfect speakers of English are also multilingual speakers who are generally more adept at intercultural communication than monolingual speakers is often overlooked.

The English only movement in the U.S. draws from a political agenda that appears to be somewhat tinged with xenophobic hues. Those who support this policy often wave the banner of common sense—after all English is the major traditional language and the most spoken language in the U.S. —to cover ideologically laden attitudes. The common belief is that languages and natural cultures have to be supported and protected lest they become corrupted and succumb to decay. The boundaries of linguistic correctness and propriety have to be protected in the same ways as the physical boundaries of the nation-state are protected, with the goal of safeguarding the perpetuation of the hegemonic order against the corrupting influence of the subaltern, whose non-belongingness is sanctioned by non-standard usage.

Paradoxically and problematically, this tendency to construct languages as cultural possessions that perfectly express the genus of a specific nation has been embraced by the subaltern too; by former colonies and formerly oppressed social groups. Through a compelling

study conducted by Annie Brisset (1996) we know that, between 1968 and 1988, Québécois drama translators worked to fashion Québécois French into a mother tongue that was remarkably different from French. Their goal was to challenge the subordination of Québécois French and the Québécois people to North American English and Parisian French by bestowing cultural authority to Québécois French, and supporting a national literature through the elevation of Québécois from its status as a dialect. And yet, Brisset suggests that a struggle against one set of linguistic and cultural hierarchies might install others that are equally exclusionary. Both the translations in Québécois and the dictionary of Québécois aimed less to codify usage than to accentuate the difference between Québécois and the French of France; a difference that was constructed as an index of the difference between the people of Québécois and the people of France. Once again language was used to divide peoples into separate groups, each characterized by reified cultural differences that can be easily evoked when it comes to justify ideologies of division and conflict. The point that I am trying to make here is that it is extremely important that the promotion of diversity does not result into a celebration of parochial affiliations and the elevation of *one* cultural identity into *the* cultural identity that sets apart a social group from all other groups. The challenge for our civilization is to balance a desire for rootedness and belongingness, a need to pin down our identity on one, clearly identified culture, with the need to be open to other possibilities of socialization through a willingness to interact with ‘strangers’ with the goal of transcending differences and find common ground.

## **2.2. The tension between particularism and cosmopolitanism**

The tension between the demands of particularism and the ideals of cosmopolitanism is perfectly captured in a foundational text of Western civilization, Cicero’s *On Duties* (44 BCE), a

philosophical essay couched in the form of a public paternal sermon. In this work Cicero elaborates a distinction between duties of justice (*iustitia*) and duties of material aid (*beneficentia*). The duties of justice are very strict and require high moral standards; they involve an idea of respect for humanity. Cicero formulates an international law of humanity based on the idea that for a human being to take anything away from another human being or to augment her advantage at the cost of another person's advantage is more contrary to nature than death. The point is that universal law condemns any violation which, should it be general, would undermine human fellowship. This principle is a part of nature and this law is morally binding on our actions, even when we are outside of the realm of positive law. In contrast, the duties of material aid allow elasticity and give us room to prefer the near and dear. Since there is an infinite number of people in the world (*infinita multitudo*) who might ask us for something, we have to draw the line at the point in which helping other causes results in personal diminution (1913, p. 57). This means that anyone considering whom to benefit should consider the series of concentric circles of relations that establish the degree of closeness and remoteness in human society. For Cicero, one should favor the closer relations by helping and supporting, among others, fellow-citizens over foreigners. While Martha Nussbaum (2000) concedes that Cicero provides good arguments that justify a partial asymmetry in our material duties, she has good reason to protest that "people outside our own nation always lose out. They are just that *infinita multitudo* who would drain off all our resources if we let their demand be heard at all" (2000, p. 187).

With sociologist Anthony Kwame Appiah (2005) we could say that the problem is that cosmopolitanism unmodified is a hard sell, and that "telescopic philanthropy," oblivious to the misery and suffering of one's own community, is absurd. Influenced by Cicero's configuration

of the cosmopolitan ethos (especially in *On Duties*) and following sociologist Ulrich Beck, Appiah advocates for “rooted cosmopolitanism,” a paradigm based on the idea that there is no contradiction between being citizens of the world and being concerned for one’s fellow citizens. Cosmopolitanism, in Beck’s words, is “having roots and wings at the same time” (2003, p. 17). Following Beck and Appiah, I believe that the defining characteristic of a cosmopolitan perspective is the dialogic imagination: the coexistence of rival ways of life in the individual experience which incites us to compare, reflect, criticize, and combine contradictory certainties, to think and live in terms of inclusive oppositions and reject the logic of exclusive oppositions. We cannot possibly reject the idea that we have obligations to those who are near and dear, we cannot deny the importance of serving our local communities, but we should resist the temptation to associate the local on the base of geographical boundaries. When we see the connections between the local and the translocal, and learn to appreciate the commonalities between the indigenous and the exogenous we embrace the principles of rooted cosmopolitanism. Even more importantly, an attitude of openness toward the unfamiliar and a willingness to be engaged in local and translocal spheres of human interaction allows us to move beyond essentialist definitions of cultural identity based on the association between standard languages and national character.

This idea of the language of a people as an expression of their national character was heavily promoted by Johann Herder, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Friedrich Schleiermacher and other prominent members of the German Romantic movement. These thinkers saw language not so much as an instrument for mediation and communication, but rather as constitutive in its representation of thought and reality. Simplifying for the sake of brevity, according to these philosophers different languages embody different ways of conceptualizing the world. As it

were, the genealogy of the concept of linguistic relativity is strongly tied to European nation building. Now, if it is not hard to agree with a weak version of linguistic relativism, i.e. the idea that language influences thought, the strong version of linguistic relativism is a dangerous piece of propaganda than can be invoked by all those who embrace values of divisiveness. The truth is that the limits of the languages we speak are not the limits of our worlds. Our mother tongue is not a prison-house for thought; it does not constrain our ability to reason logically, and it does not prevent us from understanding ideas expressed by speakers of other languages. But this does not mean that the whole concept of linguistic relativism should be discarded without second thoughts. Far from it: We have now accumulated a solid body of empirical evidence that shows how languages do shape our cognitive activity. For example, research conducted by Haviland (1979) and Levinson (2003) on speakers of the Australian language Guugu Yimithirr, shows that people who speak languages that rely on absolute directions are remarkably good at keeping track of where they are, even in unfamiliar landscapes or inside unfamiliar buildings. It appears that the very requirements of their languages trains this cognitive prowess. Recent work by Boroditsky & Gaby (2010) reports on the way in which all members of an Australian aboriginal community, the Kuuk Thaayorre, associate the cardinal directions east-west with the time sequence earlier-later. Unlike English speakers, who tend to lay out time from left to right, this people, who think about space in terms of absolute cardinal direction since they do not have relative spatial terms such as left and right, lay out time in absolute space. Another experiment conducted by Fausey et al. (2010) shows how languages that do not require speakers to express the agent when describing an accidental event influence how people construe what happened, and have consequences for eyewitness memory.

This growing body of research in the field of psycholinguistics provides evidence that the categories and distinctions that exist in particular languages do meddle in our mental lives in a significant way. Each language influences the way in which we perceive, categorize, and make meaning in the world. And yet, languages differ not so much in what they *may* convey, as to what they *must* convey, as Roman Jakobson pointed out (1959). In theory, languages are flexible and adaptable enough to express any concept. What oscillates is what information each language obliges its speakers to express. For example, speakers of Italian have to assign gender to all nouns, but do not have to express the agent when they describe accidental events. In contrast, English allows speakers to ‘hide’ references to gender, but obliges us to specify certain bits of information that can be omitted or left to the context in other languages. This means that each language pressures its speakers to pay special attention to certain aspects of the context that surrounds an event, while disregarding others; hence the bilinguals’ common impression that they see things differently according to the language they use to interact with others, and process what happens around them.

Significant as they are, these recent findings in the area of psycholinguistics have not spawned a new wave of enthusiasm for the strong version of linguistic relativism. The idea that language fully determines thought remains hard to prove, and does not take into consideration that, as human beings, we all have basic needs that produce similar thought patterns. The checkered history of the theory of linguistic relativism calls for caution and a good deal of hedging in the development of new paradigms. But while linguists hesitate to hail language as the deity that presides over all our cognitive faculties, politicians, administrators, and decision-makers of all stripes are far more assertive when they postulate that our behaviors are determined by our culture, understood as *national* culture, and defined as the software of the mind. In this



model, our cultural affiliations are so powerful as to determine both content and shape of our thoughts. If we return to Bauman and his definition of the stranger as an individual who embodies the horrors of indetermination, we understand how the lack of competence as a speaker of the dominant language of the nation can become the stigma of the stranger, the index of an otherness that cannot be resolved into a recognizable frame.

### **2.3. Nationalism and authoritarianism in the western world**

What is troubling about the way in which we perceive strangers, or the way in which we consider unfamiliar languages as irremediably foreign and removed from the boundaries of our imagined cultural communities, is that this interpretation of difference and otherness appears to be strikingly at odds with celebrated visions of the world as a global village. I agree with Joseph Stiglitz (2007) when he responds to hasty proclamations that globalization and technology have made the world flat (Friedman 2005) by emphasizing how the world is everything but flat. If anything, the world is becoming less flat in terms of economic prosperity and less open in terms of social policies. Stiglitz's critique of the idea of a flat world is formulated from within a debate on the asymmetries of economic globalization and the problems caused by development policies imposed by western countries. Importantly, he laments that economic globalization has outpaced political globalization, and that our international institutions are not strong enough to deal with the challenges posed by unregulated globalization. In other words, the development of the global economy has not been matched by a corresponding development of political doctrines aimed at promoting sustainable, equitable, and democratic development that focuses on access to education and the improvement of living standards. But unjust economic policies are not the only way in which western societies are undermining the utopian dream of a more integrated world.

As immigration flows increase, it does not take long for nationalistic propaganda that depicts strangers as untrustworthy to incite fear of minorities.

The 2015 Syrian refugee crisis in Europe can be brought up as an example of the way in which a perceived social threat, the threat posed by a group of desperate people reductively seen as strangers, became instrumental to rekindle xenophobic policies and nationalistic feelings that seem to linger on the edges of people's minds, ready to resurface whenever particularistic interests are perceived to be under attack. Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban, the proud leader of what he himself defines an "illiberal democracy," decided that the best way to be prepared for the in-flux of immigrants and refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and Northern Africa was to post signs with messages like "If you come to Hungary, you cannot take the jobs of Hungarians!" (Kounalakis, 2015). In her opinion article for the *New York Times*, the former United States ambassador to Hungary, Eleni Kounalakis observes that, since the billboards were in Hungarian only, it was clear that the government's target audience was Hungarian citizens, and the goal of the message was to rekindle the spirit of proud nationalism by conjuring up an idea of the stranger as a stealer of jobs.

In the U.S., Donald Trump has managed to win the race for the Republican presidential nominee by inciting racism, xenophobia, and jingoism with comments and remarks that cannot be simply dismissed as banal political propaganda when polls conducted across the country show that his rhetoric of divisiveness is perceived as timely by a large percentage of the Republican Party's constituency. A growing body of research on authoritarianism (Hetherington & Weiler 2009; Stenner 2005), when this term designates a psychological profile of individuals who are characterized by a desire for order and a fear of outsiders, shows that in times of accelerated economic and demographic changes many Americans are easily seduced by the outlandish

proclamations of strong leaders who vouch to preserve the status quo threatened by change. According to Stenner's theory, it is the perception of a social threat that activates latent authoritarianism. To make matters worse, the findings of research into authoritarianism seem to converge into the theory according to which the contemporaneous perception of social change and physical threats could lead even non-authoritarians into embracing intolerant attitudes and demanding extreme policies. These lines of research into authoritarianism somewhat predicted how many Americans would react to populist and nationalist propaganda under the 'right' conditions. Working with the traumatic loss of working-class jobs during the 2009 recession and the intensification of migration flows across the world, the recent terrorist attacks in Paris, Brussels, and San Bernardino have created the conditions for a resurgence of xenophobic and racist feelings that can be harnessed into a strong uniting force of purpose by a charismatic leader.

Just like authoritarianism, ideological nationalism can be seen as a latent force that feeds on social anxiety to incite people to reject not just one group of outsiders or one type of social change, but rather to reject all of them. Nationalism and authoritarianism conjure up an idea of division that is strategically tied to linguistic difference to present an essentialist idea of cultural identity as fixed and objective. These ideologies also determine the way in which many of us see a standard language and the culture associated to it as a given, almost a fact of nature, without considering how these ideas are social constructs produced in response to specific historical and political needs. Even intercultural communication studies, whose goal should be to help us understand how people transcend perceived cultural boundaries to collaborate in a variety of social activities, tend to focus on how cultures, understood as national culture, differ with regard to different sets of value orientations. The focus is on how our behaviors are determined by

culture, rather than on how we do culture. I agree with Ingrid Piller (2011) when she observes that the discourse of nationalism emanates from state institutions, but is often taken up by non-state actors to the point of becoming enmeshed with a wide range of discourses. Since the publication of Hofstede's research on intercultural organizational communication in 1980, the multidisciplinary field of intercultural communication has been characterized by a strong tendency to ground research methodologies on the one-on-one mapping of culture onto nation onto language. In the two sections that follow I will point out some of the fallacies connected to the essentialist view of the nation as the foundation of culture by tracing the chequered history of quantitative intercultural communication research inspired by essentialism, reductionism, and positivism.

#### **2.4. Methodological nationalism in intercultural communication research**

Research in the field of intercultural communication has been shaped for thirty-five years by the work of Dutch organizational anthropologist Geert Hofstede. In the groundbreaking study *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values* (1980) and its subsequent update, entitled *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations* (2001), Hofstede provided the methodological and theoretical foundation for studies into cultural difference. These works are cited ubiquitously and across disciplinary boundaries. Scholars who readily embraced the classification of culture in value dimensions can be found in the macro-areas of social sciences, communication, psychology, and English.

Hofstede's starting point is an understanding of culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another" (1980, p. 25).

Elsewhere he defines culture as the software of the mind, something that people have, rather than something that they do. From this perspective, culture is an essence that is ‘installed,’ if we want to preserve the digital metaphor, in individuals in equal measure by birth and belonging. In Hofstede’s view our behaviors are determined by our culture, understood as national culture, and defined as the software of the mind. In this model, our cultural affiliations are so powerful as to determine both content and shape of our thoughts. It is our received culture that controls our behaviors.

Hofstede derives his four (that later become five) dimensions of cultural variability from examining work-related values in employees of IBM who lived, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, in 40 countries and regions, and spoke 20 different languages. The first dimension, individualism–collectivism, offers a reconceptualization of a construct that enjoyed enormous attention in the history of social thought. According to Hofstede, individualist societies emphasize autonomy, emotional independence, and individual initiative, whereas collectivist societies stress collective identities and group solidarity. In individualist societies people are expected to stand up for themselves and their immediate family, whereas in collectivistic societies individuals act as members of a lifelong and cohesive group or organization. People have large extended families, which are used as a protection in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. The second dimension is power distance, defined as “the extent to which a society accepts the fact that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally” (Hofstede, 1980, p. 45). High power distance cultures are hierarchical: the less powerful accept power relations that are more autocratic and paternalistic. Subordinates acknowledge the power of others simply based on where they are situated in certain formal, hierarchical positions. The third dimension, uncertainty avoidance, is defined as “the extent to which a society feels threatened by

uncertain and ambiguous situations and tries to avoid these situations by providing greater career stability, establishing more formal rules, not tolerating deviant ideas and behaviors, and believing in absolute truths and the attainment of expertise” (Hofstede, 1980, p. 45). People in cultures with high uncertainty avoidance tend to be more emotional. They try to minimize the occurrence of unknown and unusual circumstances. Low uncertainty avoidance cultures accept unstructured situations or changeable environments, and try to have as few rules as possible. People in these cultures tend to be more pragmatic, and more tolerant of change. The fourth dimension is masculinity–femininity. Masculine cultures values are competitiveness, assertiveness, ambition and power. Differences between gender roles are more dramatic and less fluid than in feminine cultures. Hofstede and Bond (1988) later developed a fifth dimension, Confucian dynamism (a.k.a. long- vs. short-term orientation) that describes the extent to which individuals within the culture focus on the short-term and immediate consequences versus take a long-term focus.

Another influential voice in the field of cross-cultural communication is that of the anthropologist Edward T. Hall. Based on his experience in the Foreign Service, Hall published three books, *The silent language* (1959), *The hidden dimension* (1966), and *Beyond culture* (1976), that offer several conceptual instruments to understand cultural difference. Hall proposed to differentiate cultures on the basis of communication styles. He observed that individuals within certain cultures—those he labeled as high context—rely on indirect communication and contextual information to convey meaning, whereas individuals in low-context cultures rely more on direct communication to convey meaning. In high-context culture people rely heavily on nonverbal and subtle situational messages when communicating with others. There is tendency to employ a calculated degree of vagueness to avoid direct

confrontation. Knowledge is situational, relational. Decisions and activities focus around personal face-to-face relationships, often around a central person who has authority. In low-context cultures, communicators are usually more direct and explicit. The interpretation of people, behavior, and products more often depends upon what is actually said or written. Hall also focuses on the way in which communication styles are influenced by the different ways in which individuals attend to the nature and strength of relationships, the way in which they conceive time and space in social interactions.

The impact of Hofstede's and Hall's frameworks on subsequent research on cross-cultural communication, especially in business contexts, is hard to overestimate. Over the time other major cultural value frameworks have been developed (for example, House et al., 2004; Schwartz, 1994; Trompenaars, 1993), but quite a few of the new dimensions proposed by these social scientists conceptually overlap with Hofstede's influential framework. In their review of quantitative studies of intercultural communication, Taras et al. (2009) argue that it was not until the publication of Hofstede's *Culture's consequences* in 1980 that the field of intercultural communication experienced an explosion of interest in the issue of culture measurement. Kirman, Lowe and Gibson show that between 1980 and 2002, almost 200 studies that used Hofstede's dimensions were published in 40 journals and book series (2006).

## **2.5. An alternative model for the study of intercultural communication**

Along with praise, Hofstede's and Hall's theories had to endure harsh criticism on both conceptual and methodological grounds. The dimensions of cultures have been defined overly broad and "fuzzy" (Earley & Gibson, 1998) constructs, and a catchall to represent all possible forms of cultural differences (e.g. Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). The idea of the

nation state as the locus of culture, the reduction of culture to five dimensions, and the idea that value orientations can be quantified have been questioned, among others, by Brendan McSweeney (2002) and Ingrid Piller (2011). According to McSweeney, the main shortcoming of Hofstede's model is the fact that it describes culture in terms of national culture. The problem is that more often than not nations are home to a diverse number of ethnic groups whose distinctive cultural practices have stood in the way of complete integration into a homogenized national culture. For example, in Hofstede's model, Yugoslavia is presented as being characterized by a precise set of cultural features that in theory should apply to each single state created after its disintegration: Croatia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia, and Slovenia. But recent history has proven that these national cultures are far from forming a homogeneous group (2002, p. 111). McSweeney has got a good point, and so has Ingrid Piller when she points out that Hofstede's understanding of culture is theoretically and practically inadequate in that it is based on essentialist views of the nation as the foundation of culture and (2011). Culture, Piller observes, is something that we do, not something that we have. This understanding of culture is the keystone of the present study, and I will return on the idea of doing culture through translation and text negotiation in the third and fourth chapters.

With reference to methodological debates in the interdisciplinary field of technical communication, Barry Thatcher defends the quantitative approach by warning against local approaches to global studies that he associates to outdated critical and cultural studies models. Most of the key intercultural researchers, he observes, use quantitative descriptive methods to explore values across cultures, looking for patterns as well as exceptions. Thatcher also criticizes the idea of the incommensurability of cultures, that is the idea that, "cultures are so unique that comparing one snowflake (or culture) to another is simply not possible; in fact, it's an absurdity"



(2010, p. 5). But while rescuing quantitative approaches to the study of culture from the unfair criticism of postmodern and postcolonial scholars, Thatcher advocates for qualifying etic approaches with emic details: “Using the etic approach in global professional communication research and then qualifying it with emic details improves the logistics, fairness, and validity of the research” (p. 13). Hofstede’s dimensions of cultural variation serve as etic frames for understanding cultural differences, but it is necessary to integrate these models with theories produced through constructivist approaches.

Thatcher’s goal here is to reconcile different traditions and competing paradigms in the study in intercultural communication, but his passionate call for mixed method research leaves a central question unanswered. While it is true that, as human beings, we all share behavioral frames, the main problem with etic approaches is that culture is unfailingly associated, or better conflated, with national affiliation, as if the most distinctive traits of our personality, behavior, and communication style were directly related to the first page of our passports, that carry precious information on who we are. The paradox is trying to escape from the traps of the local by playing the trump card of national affiliation. Our identity as citizens of different nations is clearly an important factor in the shaping of our identities, but the national network is only one among many other networks in which we participate in our daily activities. As we interact with people from a variety of backgrounds in our fluid and ‘connected’ society, our identity is constantly reshaped in response to stimuli that arrive from all directions. As we come into contact with others, and renegotiate our identity to accommodate them, or make space for them in our lives, we change, we become part of new communities of practice. In this context, our national affiliation is but one descriptor of our identity, but it is this single affiliation that becomes reified in intercultural communication studies.

In tracing the limitations of Thatcher's proposal for a reconciliation of emic and etic approaches, I do not mean to reject it. Rather, I believe that researchers who are interested in adopting a quantitative approach to the study of cultural difference need a theoretical framework that allows them to compare and draw typological generalizations concerning similarities and dissimilarities between social groups. But as we measure value attitudes comparatively through Likert-type scales, we must exercise caution in the interpretation of data, and make sure to integrate numbers with thicker descriptions of the nature of linguistic interactions between individuals from different cultures. The study of language in interaction, especially when it follows the methods identified by Jonathan Gumperz (1982a, 1982b), a pioneer in the study of interactional linguistics, can shed light on what people do with their languages in social interactions, and how people do culture by using language as a shared repertoire of resources that make social interaction possible.

A study that I conducted with Andrew Mara (2015) on the impact of different modes of self-construal on the way in which students from different countries collaborate on a writing-translation project, and, more specifically, the way in which they use language to establish rapport in computer-mediated written communication, shows that quantitative testing was useful only in so far as it gave us an idea of where the students would start their interactions. By combining the test of Self-Construal, i.e. the individual's inclination towards collectivism or individualism, with a discourse analysis of the conversations between the research participants, we obtained a richer and more finely-detailed picture of the coordinations that occur between intercultural interlocutors. By reinstating the place of linguistic analysis in intercultural communication studies, and by focusing on the way in which the participants used English as a lingua franca for communication, we learnt how students managed to pragmatically adapt their

communication strategies to afford a degree of face-saving without largely modifying their directness. We learnt how apologies and reassurances remained rather phatic, even as the students must have surely been more aware of the difference in using apologies and reassurances to keep the project moving. We learnt how students often withheld full commitment to assertions by assuming a tone of tentativeness through the use of lexical verbs such as “seem” and “try” (for example: “I am trying to include everyone, bot engineers and experts”; Ofelia); the use of modals, conditional clauses, litotic constructions, the sentence frame “I hope...”, “I am not sure I...”, “I suppose I”, and other hedging devices. Importantly, we learnt that high scores in Independent Self-Construal did not translate into low receptiveness to others, or the use of self-enhancing forms of presentation (which might be more typical in interactions between high IndSC people who know each other well). In contrast, some students used self-deprecating comments. The student that, for the sake of anonymity, we named Cleopatra, for example, wrote: “I’m a woman and I’m not very practical with cars.” Goneril wrote: “Hopefully that description makes sense.” With the goal of reassuring Hermione, who shared her struggles with learning English, an American student, Leontes, wrote: “I have been speaking English my whole life and I can still use more practice.” In a similar vein, another American student, Iago, wrote: “While reading your email I received a sense that you are better at English than me.”

Finally, the qualitative study of the email exchanges between student pairs involved in a writing-translation project revealed that concern for mutual intelligibility was shown by the constant use of explanations and rephrasing. For example an Italian student, Desdemona, wrote: “Who is the target audience? I mean is this translation going to be a website, a guidebook or something else?” In this case Desdemona, a student of translation theory, realized that her partner might have problems deciphering the meaning of the technical term “target audience.” In

several emails, American students avoided the unclear antecedent problem by repeating the logical subject of the sentences instead of using pronouns. Leontes: “I hope you do not have any more problems with the files. If you have any more problems with the files, just let me know and I will try to help fix them.” Notice here how the native speaker of English uses linear syntax and repetition to facilitate the decoding process. Notice also the use of hedging (“I will try to help”). Anthony accommodated to his partner’s level of competence in American English by defining himself a “third-year student” instead of a “junior.” Another American student, Goneril, added “3rd year” between parenthesis to explain what she meant by “junior.” Demetrius wrote: “I’m a second year Computer Science student”. Volumnia wrote: “This is my second year at university.” Finally, one American student (Florizel) was so concerned about his partner that he provided the transcription of the pronunciation of his name (I cannot reproduce it here).

## **2.6. A return to language and translation in multidisciplinary studies of intercultural communication**

An approach to the study of intercultural communication that moves beyond quantitative research methods to study how individuals establish common ground through a pragmatic use of language promises to yield findings that can help us design pedagogies based on cosmopolitan values. Even more importantly, a return to language as the most important factor to consider in intercultural communication studies promises to help researchers in a variety of disciplines to develop theories that are more grounded in the facts of real life; on real encounters between individuals who are willing to use a wealth of accommodation strategies to interact with other individuals who are not seen as strangers, but rather as interlocutors and collaborators in the social construction of knowledge and meaning. A return to language in the study of intercultural

communication entails a return to translation as the most typical form of mediation for written language.

If we reject common material origin (biology, ethnicity, nationality, consanguinity and other such potentially dangerous affiliation criteria) as mediums of sociality with the goal of promoting a more hybrid view of cultural identity, we need to carefully study how languages are used in spoken and written communication to mediate and transcend differences. We need to focus on how individuals negotiate their meaning making strategies by relying on a variety of translation processes whose goal is to synthesize the familiar and the unfamiliar into hybrid expressive forms. In this way we can at least try to strike a balance between diversity and unity, cultural relativism and universalism, particularism and cosmopolitanism. I believe that emphasis on particularism, nationalism, monolingualism, difference, and division can be counteracted through research that investigates how individuals transcend real or perceived boundaries as they exchange ideas and information. In order to redress methodological and theoretical shortcomings in intercultural communication research, we need to move our assumptions away from essentialism and nationalism and toward alternative paradigms offered by social-constructivism and philosophical cosmopolitanism.

According to Vertovec and Cohen (2002), *cosmopolitanism* suggests something that simultaneously transcends the nation-state model; is able to mediate actions and ideals oriented both to the universal and the particular; is culturally anti-essentialist; and is capable of representing various repertoires of allegiance, identity and interest. While traditional models of intercultural communication and many calls for pluralism appear to be characterized by the hunt for “cultural difference,” cosmopolitan theory invites us to focus on the shared process of creating a working consensus between individuals of different backgrounds. It is important to see

cosmopolitanism not so much as a condition that either exists or does not, but rather as “a cultural medium of societal transformation that is based on the principle of world openness” (Delanty, 2006, p. 27). It is important, in this connection, that we rediscover the importance and value of negotiation and cultural mediation, two practices that shape the social world by furthering “multiple, overlapping allegiances which are sustained across communities of language, ethnicity, religion, and nationality” (Benhabib, 2004, pp. 174-175). When scholars replace the paradigms of nationalism and positivism with the alternative paradigms of social constructivism and cosmopolitan thought, culture is seen as an ongoing process of construction, something that individuals do rather than simply reproduce. This paradigmatic shift favors a return to language as an instrument of communication, and a return to translation as a practice that can teach us how to build bridges between languages and cultural traditions.

CHAPTER 3. UNDERSTANDING ENGLISH  
AS A SHARED RESOURCE FOR COMMUNICATION

**3.1. Global English as a shared resource without owners**

In 1992, Robert Phillipson's description of English as an instrument that can be used to foster inequalities between English and other languages caused a commotion in the field of applied linguistics. English teachers and educators around the world started questioning their role as the unwitting agents of a new form of cultural imperialism. The ensuing debate on the role of global English continues to this day, particularly with respect to language teaching. Phillipson argues that the end of direct colonialism did not bring about the end of imperialism. Far from it: Imperialism continues to flourish with all its traditional characteristics both in a general cultural sphere and in specific political and social practices. Phillipson's focus is on the linguistic legacy that imperialism bequeathed to us, and on what Skutnabb-Kangas (1988) calls *linguicism*, a form of prejudice or racism related to a person's or group's use of language. Linguistic imperialism takes place within an overarching structure of asymmetrical North/South relations in situations in which the lives of the speakers of language X are dominated by language Y to the point where these speakers believe that they should use only language Y in professional and other types of higher order transactions.

For many who joined Phillipson in his campaign to protect local languages from the expansionist ventures of global lingua francas, there were others who resisted Phillipson's indictment of the role of English in former colonial states. Even if substantially aligned to Phillipson's view of the nefarious consequences of linguistic imperialism, Alamin Mazrui (1993) observes that neither African languages nor European languages are necessarily instruments of liberation. He offers the example of the colonial forces in Kenya: Christian missionaries wanted

to use the local language to “capture the African soul” (1993, p. 354) the people; colonial administrators were in favor of English to raise a class of low-level government employees; and aggressive British settlers did not want the locals to study English because they feared that they would become too ‘civilized’ and no longer accept the role of wage laborer. In the same study, Mazrui observes that the language of the oppressor can be transformed to carry new meaning and express new values, to the point of becoming a weapon of struggle for liberation. From a different perspective, Davies (1996) dwells on the contradictions that beset Phillipson’s stance. Davies evokes the case of Tanzania, whose government’s decision to adopt Swahili as a national language is often brought as an example of an effective form of resistance to the encroachment of English. The paradox here is that Swahili itself is a lingua franca whose ‘promotion’ as the new national standard comes at the expense of several other local languages. To be precise, Swahili is an artificial language based on natural, related languages and dialects in East Africa.

One weakness of Phillipson’s argument is that it fails to consider two important points: That the choice of English might be determined by the exigence of granting access to education and flows of information; and, that to restrict the teaching of English in highly multilingual societies is to reinforce the privileges of the élite who have access to this symbolic commodity through private and/or foreign higher education.

While Phillipson’s work is eye-opening for the way in which he deconstructs long held beliefs concerning the presumed ‘neutrality’ of language spread while alerting decision-makers on the importance of preserving local languages from decay and extinction, his argument presents weaknesses that cannot be overlooked. It can be argued that individuals who live in underdeveloped countries have a right to education that can be often fulfilled, in a way that is economically sustainable, only through the medium of English. It is an ethical imperative to



allow disadvantaged individuals to emerge out of poverty, isolation, and social paralysis by offering them the means to acquire and share knowledge, or to profit from their knowledge through skilled work. English can be a means to promote education and empower individuals, or allow users to communicate with the global community, expose corruption of hegemonic groups, and denounce injustice and exploitation by the corporate powers of the hegemonic global 'North.' Another reason why the rejection of English and the contemporary promotion of minority languages can be dangerous has to do with the fact that linguistic revival movements tend to be connected to secessionist claims based on reified cultural differences between social groups. In its celebration of division in the name of essentialist notions of culture, language, and identity, this type of particularistic orientation is at the antipodes of cosmopolitanism. As Blommaert (2010) explains, programs aimed at stimulating local languages tend to tie these languages to particular local environments, constructed as static. In their turn, the speakers of these languages are tied to a place, their connection with the environment becomes fixed, or frozen. At that point, they are excluded from translocal flows, their social (and upward) mobility is hampered by the fact that they find themselves unable to reach wider audiences, unable to make their voices heard by the global community. Blommaert concludes that a mindless promotion of people's mother tongues, especially when performed within a monoglot strategy, is "an instrument preventing a way out of real marginalization and amounting to keeping people in their marginalized places, and locked into one scale-level: the local" (p. 47).

Arguments against the mindless promotion of regional dialects at the expense of national standards and lingua francas have also been voiced by Eric Hobsbawm and Antonio Gramsci. In a lecture published with the title *Language, culture, national identity*, Hobsbawm asserts that the concept of a single, exclusive and unchanging cultural identity is a dangerous piece of

brainwashing: “Human mental identities are not like shoes, of which we can only wear one pair at a time. We are all multi-dimensional beings” (1996, p. 1067). Hobsbawm argues in favor of the spread of lingua francas (Pidgin English, Swahili, Pilipino, Bahasa Indonesia) developed for intercommunication between people who do not talk each other’s languages, and against “linguistic Balkanization,” the product of language policies that multiply the occasions for conflict among people. Gramsci also warns against the celebration of regional dialect in light of his support for the liberation of the working classes. A person who only speaks a dialect, he writes, “has an intuition of the world which is more or less limited and provincial, which is fossilized and anachronistic in relation to the major currents of thought which dominate world history” (cited in Forgacs, 2000, p. 327). In Gramsci’s vision, workers and farmers from poor and isolated regions of southern Italy and Sardinia had to learn standard Italian in order to participate in the political life of the nation (see Ives 2009).

Finally, the argument that English is hegemonic can hold only if one accepts the implicit assumption that intrinsic qualities of the language remain unchanged in different locales, rather than become adapted to suit the needs of different kinds of speakers in different contexts. In a seminal book on global English, Pennycook describes the ways in which the flows of cultural forms produce new forms of localization, and the use of global Englishes produces new forms of global identification. His focus is on how English is involved in global flows, how English “colludes with multiple domains of globalization” (2007, p. 19). Behind his study of hip hop as a postindustrial signifying practice characterized by transgressive semiotic practices, is the idea that corporatizing and globalizing designs always meet with resistance, reactions, and responses that take many forms (from translation to appropriation, re-articulation, and transculturation). If

it is true that, at times, globalization can accentuate homogeneity, it is also true that it can produce increased local diversity influenced by contact across cultural boundaries.

With Appadurai (1990), globalization can be seen as a localizing process that entails a reorganization of the local, an asymmetrical and fuzzy hybridization of languages and cultural practices. The central metaphors that characterize positions such as those espoused by Appadurai, Bauman (who coined the term “fluid-modernity” to describe our age), Canagarajah, Pennycook, and Blommaert revolve around the idea of flows, fluidity, and mobility in an effort to move beyond the static dialectic between the local and the global. Importantly, the intention is not to reject English, but to reconstitute it in a more inclusive, ethical, and democratic terms so as to give voice to the disempowered and transform their speechlessness into a vocal defense of their rights. It is on these grounds and in response to this vision of the ‘mission’ of the English language that applied linguists have promoted the study of English as a lingua franca, or ELF, defined as “any use of English among speakers of different languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option” (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 7).

Both as a concept and area of study, ELF has aroused a good deal of animated debate. Critiques of the usefulness of this construct have been raised from the field of applied linguistics and English composition. For instance, Canagarajah (2007) argues that it is difficult to describe ELF a priori because this language is intersubjectively constructed in each specific context of interaction. In a similar vein, Matsuda and Friedrich (2011) describe ELF as a context-dependent function of English whose variability cannot be captured by linguists. And yet, just like William Labov (1972) showed that variation in the speech of New Yorkers was not random, but correlated with age, attitude and social situation, ELF scholars have provided convincing evidence that ELF exhibits regularities which contradict the notion that performance varieties are

totally arbitrary and erratic. Their research shows that, far from being erratic, ELF interactions are characterized by self-regulating strategies of accommodation and levelling that deserve to be investigated.

We owe to Jennifer Jenkins (2000, 2002) the Lingua Franca Core paradigm, a pronunciation syllabus for ELF that offers an alternative to commonly adopted classroom models (RP and General American) by promoting both intelligibility and regional appropriateness among interlocutors. A close examination of her work goes beyond the goals of this study. In contrast, findings on the lexicogrammar and the pragmatic features of ELF provide useful conceptual tools that can be used in the analysis of the linguistic negotiations operated by translators. Because translators are often speakers of ELF, their spoken performance in English can certainly influence their translation practice, even when they translate from English into their native languages. Seidlhofer (2004) argues that among the typical features of ELF lexicogrammar are the increasing of redundancy by adding prepositions (e.g. *We have to study about History*) or by increasing explicitness (e.g. *How long time* vs *How long*); and the use of new words and non-conventional collocations (e.g. *to make research*). As concerns the pragmatic features of ELF, among the most important are: paraphrase; reformulation; regularization (of morphology); reduction of the diversity of vocabulary; simplification of syntax; adjustment of pitch, loudness, and tempo; use of clarification checks and explicit boundary devices. To this list, Meierkord (2002) adds *topicalization*, the strategy of moving focused information to the front of the utterance (e.g. “This guy, he is alone”). In chapter 4 we will see how writers who do not follow the topic/comment, or theme/rheme structure can cause problems to translators.

### **3.2. Resisting Standard English ideology and monolingualism in English composition**

In an influential position paper that appeared in 2002 in *College Composition and Communication*, Bruce Horner and John Trimbur chart the history of the tacit language policy of unidirectional monolingualism in American institutions of higher education. Writing instruction in the modern university, they observe, was institutionalized in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries as part of a larger modernizing initiative to replace the classical curriculum with writing instruction in English, the new language of power. In the 1890s four reports of the Harvard Committee on Composition and Rhetoric alerted decision-makers on entering students' poor preparation in written English, and posited this serious problem as the grounds for a required first-year writing course in English. The First Report (1892), in particular, attacked the pedagogical orthodoxy that the best way to learn to write English was to translate orally Greek or Latin. Despite the value of having students move between languages by translating Greek and Latin into English, for the authors of the report the only solution to the problem of limited literacy was to make more time in elementary and secondary education for instruction in written English. More and more educators deemed the oral recitations of the classical curriculum inadequate or non-conducive to the mastery of the most precious commodity of all, written communication in English. The nineteenth-century oratorical culture had to give way to the print culture of the modern age.

The triumph of the vernacular and written culture was accompanied by the sudden appearance of first-year writing courses in written English, the gradual erosion of classical studies, and the "territorialization" of the modern languages now understood as distinct academic entities defined by national borders—French, German, Spanish, and Italian were offered in reading courses that promised to shed light on national literatures and cultures. English was

separated from Greek and Latin as the vehicle of writing instruction, and the modern languages settled into their respective departments as national literatures. Horner and Trimbur see the settlement arranged by the moderns in terms of a chain of reifications that has informed the tendency to conflate specific national affiliations with specific languages, specific cultures, and even specific identities. Where language is an entity in constant flux, characterized by varying material practice and instability, it came to be understood as a fixed, idealized entity removed from the vagaries of time, place, and use. Importantly, the abolition of requirements in Greek and Latin marked a shift away from translation, translanguaging, and translanguaging that further reinforced the reification of English as the only language worthy of study for a successful life.

Lawrence Venuti (1998) observes that one negative consequence of the repression of translation is that it conceals the inscription of British and American cultural values in the foreign text while treating English as the transparent vehicle of universal truths. Rather than accepted and appreciated, the foreign is domesticated through a process of assimilation. In contrast, a pedagogy of translated literature would help students understand how the translating language and culture are valorized through the situated practice of translation; how translated texts often express interests (and sometimes hidden agendas) of certain domestic groups; how translations reinvent texts for different audiences and rhetorical situations to answer to contemporary, domestic values that always supplement the goal of establishing mimetic relations with the source text. A pedagogy of translated literature, according to Venuti, would allow students to go beyond a view of culture as monolithic and unchanging and toward an appreciation of the way in which our lingua-cultures are open spaces in which different histories, languages, and experiences intermingle amid diverse relations of power.

Nowadays, the context of writing appears to be implicitly presented and characterized as monolingual. Activity and assignments typically assume that writers are native-English speakers writing for a local audience of English-only readers. Service learning projects invite students to support local NGOs or local businesses that can be properly served only in the official language of power and prestige. The communities to be served are almost invariably local, the language to be used almost invariably Standard American English. In times of fluid modernity, intense migration movements, increased contact between people, electronic propinquity, and translocal flows of information, the communities in which the students are asked to serve are still characterized by their spatial proximity. The mission statements of countless English programs make reference to the goal of serving the community, but these communities, far from being presented as translocal and transnational, are almost invariably identified on the basis of very precise spatial coordinates. Students are warmly encouraged to develop their literacy to be able to effectively collaborate with their neighbors, and, sometimes, their fellow citizens, implicitly identified with native speakers of English born and raised in the U.S.

For instance, Ball State University offers a learning opportunity called Creative Writing in the Community. Students of creative writing meet with young writers in the community to write a text collaboratively. The Web page states that a key objective is to “include the enrichment of the creative writing major, through engagement in the local community... The end product will be a public community reading and published collection” (par. 2). A way to make this initiative and learning experience even more interesting would be to have writers in the U.S. connect with translators overseas to create multiple versions of the target texts. This type of translingual, tranlocal, and transnational collaboration would expose students to important dynamics of mediation and cross-cultural communication. Both the source text and the target text

could then be sent for publication in two different local journals, or perhaps in an international journal. Creative writing classes at North Dakota State University are often paired with literary translation classes in Europe within the Trans-Atlantic and Pacific Project. Recently, a short story written by an American student and its translation were published in a Portuguese literary journal.

It is not difficult to understand why policy makers and administrators are loath to celebrate hybridism, multilingualism, or cosmopolitanism. To sustain its legitimacy, the nation state has to constantly produce its people, construct identities as national identities, and define social and geographical spaces by overlaying a stratum of 'primordialism' on the history of these spaces. Through institutions as diverse as museums and universities, prisons and stadiums, the nation state deploys a large number of techniques to induct individuals into imagined political communities, or communities of sentiment (Anderson, 1983), that are reified as the only possible grounds of identity. Schools and universities, in particular, are assigned the crucial task of producing citizens who can operate within the national context, and within the boundaries of cultural orthodoxy. It is up to non-Americans to learn how to interact with Americans; the others, the resident aliens, the members of minorities or disempowered social groups, have the onus of learning the official language of the nation, and developing accommodation strategies to cooperate with the speakers of English.

Standard English thus becomes the most precious commodity for all those who try to move up in the social ranks, often at the cost of alienation and marginalization. Language schools thrive by promising English learners that they can achieve native speaker fluency in five or six months. A marketing-driven consumer demand constantly fosters unrealistic expectations, and informs extreme measures such as tongue surgery to eliminate accent (Lu, 2006). Basic



writers are segregated into remedial writing classes until they can accurately use the dialect of prestige. Their competence as users of other varieties of English is either not acknowledged or labeled as a problem to fix, a disease that needs to be eradicated so that the seeds of monolingualism can be planted. Illness metaphors, as Mike Rose (1990) has pointed out in his passionate defense of alternative, non-standard literacies, abound in the discourse on literacy: People “*diagnose* various disabilities, defects, deficits, deficiencies, and handicaps,” Rose writes, then they “*remedy* them” (p. 209). From this perspective, errors are considered to be symptomatic of isolable defects in students’ linguistic capacity. These defects can be cured only through drill and exercises. Such corrective teaching, Rose concludes, teaches students that the most important thing about language is grammatical correctness, not the communication of something meaningful. The illness metaphor serves to exclude from the academic community students who are marked with the stigma of otherness because of their origins, their social affiliations, their cultures and languages.

Borrowing from Bauman’s (1990) lucid characterization of the figure of the stranger, we can argue that people who do not belong “disturb the resonance between physical and psychological distance. They are physically near while remaining spiritually remote. They bring into the inner circle of proximity the kind of difference and otherness that are anticipated and tolerated only at a distance—where they can be either dismissed as irrelevant or repelled as inimical” (1990, p. 150). Within the rhetoric of the ‘good fit’ that is so pervasive in American higher education discourse, the stranger is the student or teacher who can never perfectly ‘fit.’ From this perspective, the stranger’s sin is her disruption of the social order, her embodiment of incongruity, the fact that she stands for the fallibility of order, and the penetrability of the inside. When one cannot really avoid the encounter with the stranger, the next best solution, is, in

Bauman's words, the "mismatching," a set of techniques to de-ethicalize the relationship with the other: "Its overall effect is a denial of the stranger as a moral object and a moral subject" (1990, p. 152).

In a position paper published on the *Journal of Advanced Composition*, Gary Olson (1998) praises scholars such as Bauman and Luce Irigaray for claiming the importance of ethics in the postmodern age. With these thinkers, Olson defines postmodern ethics as "the encounter with the Other" (p. 46). Because we bring our own agendas in our interactions with strangers and foreigners, Olson adds, more often than not, these interactions are characterized by dissymmetries of power and culture between individuals. Consequently, how we negotiate our encounter with the Other is a weighty responsibility, and precisely what ethics is about. In perfect alignment with Olson's stance, one of the main philosophical goals of the present study is to argue that the capacity of being hospitable communicators is a central ethical dimension of being literate in our times.

Before moving to the place of translation in composition studies, it is important to dwell on the paradigm of translanguaging, whose manifesto, signed by Bruce Horner, John Trimbur, Min-Zhan Lu, and Jacqueline Jones Royster was published in 2011. The proponents of this approach move away from what they call the "bankrupt notions" of "standard English speaker" and "Standard Written English," and claim that language norms can be adapted in response to a rapidly growing set of communicative needs that characterize the interaction of individuals from different cultural backgrounds. In their view, far from being a problem, difference represents a resource, provided that teachers start investigating what this difference can do, how it might function expressively and rhetorically. From their perspective, the 1974 CCCC resolution that

declared the students' right to their own language has been too often ignored or neglected in light of what the majority of English teachers still respond to linguistic creativity.

At the foundation of the translingual approach is the idea that 'monolinguals' are not an ontological reality (Horner et al., 2011). Individuals constantly shuttle between codes, registers and discourses in order to communicate effectively. In other words, while we all have multilingual competence, we are often unaware of our communicative resourcefulness; we do not realize that this innate ability to mediate and negotiate meaning could be further enhanced by paying more attention to what we do with language (and other semiotic codes) and why. In contrast to the traditional monoglot approach to the teaching of language, the expression "translingual fluency" is an umbrella term for an approach to the teaching of writing that aims at stimulating students' "deftness in deploying a broad and diverse repertoire of linguistic resources" along with a heightened "responsiveness to the diverse range of readers' social positions and ideological perspectives" (Horner et al., 2011, p. 308). Horner et al. (2011) also address the anxieties of those teachers who fear that their monolingualism will raise issues of trust and credibility among the students. This anxiety stems from the erroneous assumptions that monolingualism is an ontological reality. In fact, we are all multilingual in one way or another, we can all move across languages and other communicative codes, or even mix and mesh these expressive resources to achieve our goals in a variety of situations. Far from being exotic and obscure phenomena, multilingualism and translanguaging are very common communicative strategies that we have all deployed in different forms. Rather than stigmatizing dialects, we should present them as expressive resources that in some circumstances can facilitate communication or facilitate specific rhetorical purposes. However, this does not mean that students should be allowed to use only resources that are familiar to them. Rather, it is very

important to show them ways in which they can export their locally acquired resources to other places and spheres of society. Those who believe in the value of the translingual approach generally agree on the fact that students need to acquire communicative resources, rather than immobile languages, with the goal of following translocal and globalized trajectories of education and mobility.

Suresh Canagarajah's influential studies on translingual practice, codemeshing, translanguaging, and English as a lingua franca (2002, 2006, 2007, 2011, 2013) serve as a platform for understanding the translingual practice model. His focus is on the complex dynamics of intercultural communication, and the pragmatic strategies that multilinguals use to negotiate meaning. Canagarajah he has been among the first scholars to suggest ways in which we can encourage translingualism and translanguaging in both ESL and composition courses. In some cases, Canagarajah started from ideas and proposals that had already been circulating in the field of composition, but gave teeth to these pre-existing ideas. For example, whereas Elbow allows for codemeshing in low-stakes writing (1999/2011), Canagarajah allows it in high-stakes writing (2011). In this respect, the story of the student Buthainah is emblematic. Canagarajah reports that Buthainah provides the following rationale for her decision to include an Arabic proverb in Arabic script in her class essay: "If I translated everything, then the readers would simply go through it. But, if I did not translate it ... then, I am encouraging the reader to question the relationship between the poem and the stories being told and promote critical thinking" (2011, p. 16). The feedback offered by some of her classmates suggests that the intended effect was achieved. Mark, an Anglo-Canadian student, comments: "To me, a non-Arabic speaker, this quote is a beautiful collection of alien writing, fascinating but incomprehensible. It is a statement to me that there is something Buthainah understands that I do not. It is a move that

distances me from Buthainah but also leaves me intrigued and interest[ed] in reading more” (p. 16). By introducing an element of difference in her text (a literacy autobiography), Buthainah escapes the traps of cultural domestication, i.e. the common urge to dissolve diversity into linguistic homogeneity. The Arabic proverb and other types of translanguaging that Buthainah uses in her essay encourage her readers to find new ways to cope with unfamiliar languages and hone their reading and interpretation skills.

The Achilles’ heel of many arguments in defence of the translingual approach is the tendency to identify the exigence for this paradigm shift in pedagogy in the fact that international student populations are rapidly growing in U.S. universities, and that English classes are more and more multicultural. If the rationale for implementing the translingual approach is that our English classes are now diverse and multi-ethnic, what should teachers do when all their students belong to a relatively compact local community? Should they just set aside the translingual approach and return to it when contexts and audiences are more appropriate? The truth is that native speakers of English need to understand how to use language in a global age at least as much as non-native speakers do, since their lack of practice in intercultural communication often informs a monodimensional understanding of the complex practices of spoken and written communication. Native-speakers of English, especially students coming from rural areas and culturally homogeneous communities, need to become competent users of English in both wider national contexts and international contexts.

### **3.3. Reclaiming a place for translation in English composition and technical communication**

In the same way as the introduction of English as a lingua franca can help students enrolled in EFL/ESL classes to move beyond native English norms in language learning, the reintroduction of translation in writing pedagogy can help students understand writing as a process of linguistic, rhetorical, and cultural mediation. The process of composing always involves the act of drawing expressive resources from the repertoires of several languages and semiotic systems. In other words, composing *is* an act of translation. Not too long ago, in 1996, the members of the New London Group made a compelling case in favor of a pedagogy of multiliteracies that focus on how individuals negotiate cultural and linguistic differences. Effective citizenship and productive work, they argue, require that we interact using multiple languages and communication patterns that cross cultural, linguistics, and national boundaries. The work of Lunsford and Ede (1990) clearly shows how authorship is inherently collaborative and writing a response to other writing or symbolic action. I shall return to the work of Lunsford and Ede in chapter 4 of this study. At this stage, it can be more useful to illustrate how translation is connected to composition.

The exigence to explain how theory and research in the field of composition should inform academic policies and programs spurred a group of compositionists to collaborate in the identification of threshold concepts whose disciplinary significance is widely recognized. The product of this collaboration, the book entitled *Naming what we know* (Adler-Kassner & Wardle 2015), offers a classification of threshold concepts in one metaconcept and five overarching concepts. The first of these overarching concepts states that *writing is a social and rhetorical activity*. Kevin Roozen writes that authors are never isolated, and writers always draw upon ideas

and experiences of countless other writers in their creative process (p. 17). Writing, he adds, “puts the writer in contact with other people, but the social nature of writing goes beyond the people writers draw upon and think about” (p. 18). It can be argued that this characteristic of writing evokes similar characteristics of translation as an activity that establishes relationships between authors and rhetorical traditions. Writing her entry on writing as a process of addressing, invoking, and creating audiences, Lunsford observes that, especially in the digital age, consumers of information can become producers as well. The collaborative and social nature of literacy, she adds, “allows for greater agency on the part of both writers and audiences” (p. 21). Within this scene of communication, translators can be seen as consumers who absorb and manipulate information for the benefit of new audiences. Another threshold concept explains how writing “mediates—comes between, intervenes in—the activity of people” (p. 26). This definition would perfectly describe one of the key functions of translation. It is both through writing and translation that people coordinate their activities in a way that is more effective and long-lasting when compared to speech or (simultaneous or consecutive) interpretation. In his reflection on the semiotic nature of language and the use of writing as a technology, Dryer argues that the array of symbols that populate the written page “translate speech and thought into inscriptions,” (p. 28, emphasis in the original) thus directly establishing a relationship between writing and a form of translation that Jacobson would call *intersemiotic*. Within the entries of the overarching concept *writing as a social and rhetorical activity*, we also find an important definition of writing as an activity involving ethical decision making. Translators always have to juggle between the competing demands of faithfulness and the duty of rendering form and content in a way that is appropriate to a new locale. Finally, Brooke and Grambil call attention to the fact that connectivity allows writers to distribute writing to large and widely dispersed

audiences (p. 33). From this premise it follows that writing in the digital age should be hospitable, i.e. translatable, so that an ample gamut of audiences can have access to information.

In the section devoted to the second overarching concept, *writing speaks to situations through recognizable forms*, we find references to the intertextuality and the dynamics that connect texts in complex networks. The study of the way in which literary traditions are built around conversations between authors, readers, and translators operating in different contexts is a typical area of investigation in translation studies, and a central focus of Polysystem theory (Even-Zohar 1972). In the section on the idea that *writing enacts and creates identities and ideologies*, Lunsford asserts that writing is never an isolated activity, but rather “part of a larger network or conversation” (p. 54). When this conversation moves beyond the boundaries of one language and a circumscribed social group, it is translation that allows the exchange of ideas and the collaborative production of knowledge. Finally, reflecting on how writing involves negotiation, Paul Kei Matsuda argues that in today’s globalized world “it is more important than ever to see the negotiation of language as an integral part of all writing activities” (p. 69). In any writing context, Matsuda adds, “the audience will likely include translingual individuals—those who grew up using different varieties of the target language or another language altogether” (p. 69). Undoubtedly, this is the most significant, albeit implicit, call for the incorporation of translation theory in the field of English composition.

One would expect that this classification of threshold concepts, based as it is on the idea that all acts of reading and writing are “integrally related acts of translation and transformation as well as negotiation” (Lu & Horner, 2013, p. 584), had inflicted a mortal blow to theoretical, pedagogical, and programmatic orientations that are influenced by the ideologies of monolingualism and monoculturalism. And yet, despite repeated calls for the internationalization



of composition studies, interest in translation as the art of cultural mediation and negotiation is still scarce in English departments across the U.S. Preferred interests listed in descriptions for positions in English composition include basic writing, creative writing, professional writing, multimodality, digital humanities, and many other compelling areas of study, with the notable and tell-tale exclusion of translation studies. Finding translation theory classes in course catalogs is an equally daunting task even if there is no dearth of technical communication scholars who have explained why it is important to devote more attention to translation (Maylath, 2013; Maylath et al., 2013) and localization (for example, Agboka, 2013; Humbley et al., 2005; Zhu & St.Amant, 2010) in the macro-area of English composition.

Chapters 4 and 5 will provide arguments to sustain my call for the reintroduction of translation in English classes, especially technical writing classes. At this stage, I will only offer an example of a classroom activity that might stimulate a reflection on the importance of translation while providing multilingual speakers with an opportunity to play the role of experts in their own language instead of confining them in the role of incompetent L2 speakers. In one of the first-year writing classes that I taught at North Dakota State University, I encouraged a native speaker of Russian to introduce a new word and concept to her classmates, the concept of “avos.” My student argued that this word is untranslatable even if some near synonyms (“happy-go-lucky,” “counting on a miracle,” “blind faith in divine providence,” “pot-shot,” “hit-or-miss,” etc.) can partially unveil the meaning of “avos” for an American audience. When she presented her research on “avos” to the classroom, this student became an expert not only of Russian but also of English in that she encouraged native speakers to translate this word into English, and evaluated their proposals explaining whether they could adequately render “avos” or not. The challenge of translating a foreign concept into the English language proved to be an intriguing

activity for my students; an activity that encouraged them to understand communication as a constant negotiation of meaning that requires mediation skills, patience, good will, open-mindedness, and flexibility.

It is important to add, here, that introducing translation in composition courses does not only mean having students try their hand at bringing the unfamiliar back to the familiar. Teaching translation entails pointing out, for example, that many rhetorical concepts evoked in composition classes have been conceived and developed in a remote past and in a foreign language. *Ethos, logos, pathos, Kairos, decorum*, and many other words used in rhetorical theory are not ‘domestic products,’ but ‘foreign’ ideas that have been gradually assimilated by mainstream pedagogical theory. This incorporation entailed a restructuring of these concepts whose meaning and value is now different; the very way in which we ‘use’ these concepts has changed and evolved as layer after layer of different interpretations enriched the texture of the original ideas. This means that all the concepts and notions that we teach to our students are, in a way, translations, adaptations of materials which have been circulating for centuries in Western culture.

### **3.4. Cross-cultural text negotiation and the Trans-Atlantic and Pacific Project**

Just like genre theory, service learning pedagogy emphasises the importance of having students understand writing as a situated activity, a way to exercise their citizenship in the community. But more often than not this community is tacitly identified with the local community. What appears to be missing in the complex array of pedagogical theories spawned by compositionists is a stronger attention to the internationalization of curricula and class projects. I believe that teachers who want to internationalize composition studies should make an

effort to organize exchanges between classes in the U.S. and classes in foreign classes. Many projects that involved international collaborations between student groups from different countries have been described in the last ten years (Anderson, Bergman, Bradley, Gustafsson, & Matzke, 2010; Du-Babcock & Varner, 2008; Klein & La Berge, 2012; Stärke-Meyerring & Andrews, 2006). The pedagogical import of such forms of collaboration has been also emphasized in studies that analyzed the dynamics of cross-cultural virtual teams (two recent ones are Flammia, 2012; Flammia, Cleary, & Slattery, 2010).

The study presented in chapters 4 and 5 of this book focuses on the collaboration between students of technical writing and translators who participated to the Trans-Atlantic and Pacific Projects (TAPP). TAPP was born in the 1999-2000 academic year, when Bruce Maylath paired his Technical Writing class at the University of Wisconsin-Stout with Sonia Vandepitte's Essentials of Translation class at the Mercator College of Translation and Interpretation in Ghent, Belgium (Humbley et al. 2005; Maylath, Vandepitte, & Mousten, 2008; Mousten, Vandepitte, & Maylath, 2008; Mousten et al., 2010; Mousten et al. 2012). In short, the first version of this project was organized in the following way: the American students wrote a set of instructions and then prepared them for translation. The Belgian students negotiated the translation with the authors and then sent the final version to the American students. The project later expanded to include many other translation classes in a variety of European universities. In 2010 two projects took place simultaneously: a US-to-Europe project involving co-authoring, translation, and usability testing; a Europe-to-U.S. project involving editing (see Maylath et al., 2013).

In the 2012 reiteration of this multilateral project, besides a class in international technical communication at NDSU, four other classes from four different countries participated

in the project: Spain, with a class of engineers who acted as subject matter experts; France, Belgium, and Denmark with students enrolled in English and translation classes, and Finland, with a group of students who tested the instructions produced (in English) by American and Spanish writers for usability. As a student participant in this more complex version of the TAPP, I could directly assess the benefits that international collaboration can bring to both students and teachers especially in terms of metalinguistic and metapragmatic awareness. Projects like TAPP help students learn how to design and write technical documents for an audience made up of speakers of English as a foreign language; how to tailor their writing strategies to the needs of a composite set of translators speaking different languages; how to build trust and mutual respect by resorting to face-negotiation techniques; how to manage complex projects; and, finally, how to build on the feedback received through usability tests to assess the readability, accessibility, and usability, of the documents they crafted.

In the remainder of this section, I will briefly describe a simplified version of TAPP that I organized in a first-year writing class during the spring semester of 2013. The students involved were enrolled in a first-year writing course at North Dakota State University and a translation course (English-Italian) at Molise University (Italy). The task of the American students, all native speakers of English, was to write a profile of an influential leader for an international audience of non-native speakers of English with the purpose of informing and entertaining. Once their profiles were complete and partially revised (global revision and substantive editing), NDSU students had to send them as Email attachments to their TAPP partners in Italy, the translators. The task for the translators was to run ‘usability tests’ on the profiles and provide feedback on such issues as clarity, readability, and rhetorical appropriateness. Finally, students from both sides of the Atlantic were encouraged to enter a process of text-negotiation; in other

words, they were asked to collaboratively rewrite passages that posed problems of intelligibility or rhetorical effectiveness.

The most interesting exchanges between American and Italian students concerned the use of the hypernym *get*, understood as a vague and confusing word by the Italians; the use of idioms such as *average Joe*, which was considered to be less transparent than “common people” for non-native speakers of English; and the use of unconventional collocations and phrasing, which were regularly flagged as difficult to translate. The students in Italy appreciated attempts at translanguaging made by the NDSU students as when the latter tried to upscale their register by drawing from the French and Latin repertoires of English words (e.g. by using such words as *determine*, instead of *find out*; *continue* instead of *go on* etc.). In several cases, this register switch proved to be extremely useful not only to facilitate comprehension but also to signal willingness, on the part of the writers, to establish a connection with readers by using ‘their’ words. Finally, all the suggestions provided by the students in Italy were expressed in a careful and sometimes tentative tone to avoid offending their American partners. Students in Italy showed a remarkable expertise in the use of hedging to soften the impact of their statements. Typical expressions used by Italian students include, “You could consider...;” “If I were you, I would probably...;” “There seems to be something wrong here...;” and many other linguistic realizations whose function is to preserve face. At the other end, the American students did not take long to align their communication style to the friendly and informal tone adopted by their project partners in Italy. As the course instructor, I did not need to point out that mutual respect is at the foundation of good cooperation because all participants seemed well versed in the use of politeness strategies to mitigate the effect of speech acts that are potentially face threatening, such as advising or commenting. In this way, intercultural communication stimulated a new

understanding of pragmatics as a central component of language ability. Interestingly, American students tended to trust non-native speakers even when the latter suggested to revise phrasing and grammatical structure. Occasionally, the suggestions offered by the Italian students were rather misleading, but the American students did not hesitate to accept these suggestions and revise their papers accordingly because the majority of them believed that Italian students knew more about English grammar, syntax, and spelling rules than they did.

When we consider how native-speakers of English often lack the meta-knowledge of how their language actually works, we cannot fail to see how the feedback offered by the Italian students indirectly invited the American students to reflect on the English language. On the metacognitive level, the American students gained new insight on what they do with language and why. They became familiar with features of the English language that they had never observed before. They learned to recognise phrasal verbs and functional shift, assess idioms for appropriateness considering the rhetorical situation, pay attention to word choice, collocation and colligation. In short, they understood the importance of adapting their use of language to specific audiences and rhetorical situations. Another important goal achieved at the NDSU end was to have students loosen the tie between the English language and local communicative scenarios to reconsider the function of English as the international language of communication. The American students involved in the project let the Italian students lead and set the tone for the conversation so that they could gradually adjust their communication strategies to the needs of this unfamiliar audience. Convergence between the two groups of students was not achieved immediately, and occasional misunderstandings made the collaboration challenging for two different pairs of students, but after the initial disorientation the vast majority of American students was able to collaborate with the Italian students.

As concerns the Italian students, a ‘dual attitude’ emerged. At times the students followed the directions and provided feedback on the ‘usability’ of the profiles; at other times they provided suggestions on how to revise expressions and passages that were clearly ‘usable’ but, from their perspective, stylistically awkward or grammatically incorrect. This behaviour can be explained by the fact that many EFL courses in Italy are still anachronistically based on a prescriptive, rather than functional, approach to language. Instead of focusing on the effectiveness and usability of the texts they assessed, the Italian students appeared to be almost obsessed by the idea of grammatical correctness, to the point of indirectly endorsing standard English ideology and native speaker ownership of English. Clearly, findings of research into English language teaching do not easily trickle down to pedagogical practice. Teachers have still to find effective strategies to make learners understand that the so-called native speaker model is an ‘ideal’ one, and that their primary goal is to become skilled mediators, rather than imitators of native speakers.

## CHAPTER 4. STUDYING THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN WRITING AND TRANSLATION: THE CASE OF TECHNICAL INSTRUCTIONS

### **4.1. Dethroning the individual author: Writing and translation as connected activities**

The goal of the case study that is presented in this chapter and in chapter 5 is to identify regularities of translation strategies in the genre of technical instructions. By studying the strategies adopted by translators to render this type of technical texts from English into Italian, the focus will not be on errors and miscommunication, but rather on the type of relationship established between writers and translators through the joint creation of a source text (ST) and a target text (TT). This research is intended as a contribution to product-oriented Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS), a branch of Translation Studies that sets out to describe translation by comparing and analyzing ST–TT pairs. Within the paradigms established by the pioneering theoretical work of Gideon Toury (1995), DTS purports to describe translational phenomena with a focus on identifying regularities that allow to generalize and formulate probabilistic laws of translational behavior relating to all variables found relevant. This approach to the study of translation has been influenced by the work of a group of scholars—Raymond van den Broeck, Theo Hermans, James S Holmes, José Lambert, André Lefevere, and Gideon Toury—who decided to focus on translated literature and its function in the target system. These scholars, and those who followed them in the 70s and 80s, converged on the idea that descriptive studies of translated literature have to move beyond approaches to translation that are based on the supremacy of the “original” and the assumption of translation as a secondhand and second-rate reproduction thereof. Within a reaction to centuries-long speculative and prescriptive writing on



translation, another goal of this movement was to establish translation research as an empirical discipline.

Toury's efforts in establishing the theoretical and methodological foundations for this discipline were influenced by Even-Zohar's (1979) Polysystem theory in so far as these scholars agree that translational phenomena should be explained by their systemic position and role in the target culture. Among Toury's most important contributions to translation studies are his three-phase methodology for systematic DTS; the concept of the invariant; and the concept of translation norms: the complex array of unwritten regulations that govern translation practice in the target culture at a certain place and time. We shall return to translation norms later in this chapter. What must be emphasized here is that in the 1995 book *Descriptive Translation Studies – and Beyond*, Toury deems it extremely important to clarify that a target oriented approach to the study of translation does not exclude the analysis of the source text. The observation starts with the target text but it is not exhausted at this stage of analysis. What this means is that it falls within the scope of DTS to investigate TTs and translation methods in their organic relationship with STs and writing strategies determined by rhetorical considerations. In keeping with this orientation to the study of translation as an activity that is imbricated with the activity of writing, the present study invites readers to consider how translation affects the process of writing; how these two activities are mutually conditioned; and how writing is in itself a form of translation, while translation is a form of writing, rather than a derivative effort in imitation.

Those who understand writing as a solitary activity and the product of individual genius and inspiration, in the wake of Romantic idealism, will have a hard time seeing the connection between writing and translation. According to Lawrence Venuti (1998), the negative evaluation of translations vis à vis original texts, the idea that translations are derivative and parasitic copies

of authoritative originals, is a profoundly troubling legacy of romantic notions of authorship that must be debunked for the sake of a more egalitarian approach to international technical communication; for a more open and ethical encounter with otherness. The relatedness of writing and translation is especially clear to those who see invention as a social act (LeFevre, 1987) and writing as an inherently collaborative and iterative practice. Extensive research conducted by Lunsford and Ede (1992) has provided ample evidence on the distributed nature of authorship in a variety of organizations. Among the snapshots of writers at work that they offer is the case of a construction equipment firm in which all exchange of written technical information is regulated by a rigid style guide. In this environment, writers and the text editor program (humanized and named “Max”) that checks the correct use of controlled vocabulary and syntax are “very much partners” (2011, p. 102) in the authoring process. The use of a controlled language allows employers in this construction company to establish important ties with the people around the world who maintain their equipment. This collaborative bond, Lunsford and Ede comment, is established through the constraints imposed by their highly controlled language (2011, p. 103). The needs of the primary audience for technical documentations shape the writing process via the imposition of a set of constraints that are carefully laid out in the style guide. In this way, the responsibility for the written transmission of information is shared among human and non-human actors: writers, audiences, and the text editor program that is in charge of translating bits and fragments of text from natural language into controlled language. In 1995 the Boeing Company sponsored a study (Shubert, Holmback, & Spyridakis, 1995) to test the translatability of a controlled language called Simplified English (SE), used in maintenance procedure documents in the airline industry. The study examined the effect of document type (SE versus non-SE) and passage (Document A versus Document B) on the translatability of these documents. Native

speakers of Chinese, Spanish, or Japanese read and translated either the SE or non-SE version of one of two procedures. Results show that SE compliant documents lead to better translations in certain languages.

The acknowledgment of how writing is shaped by the reception of texts and the requirement of usability leads to a new conceptualization of translators as a special category of addressed audiences. While all readers are involved in the textual production of meaning, what sets translators apart is that they are *directly* involved in the process of writing in their role as linguistic and cultural mediators. With reference to Lunsford and Ede's (1992) distinction between hierarchical and dialogic collaboration, a distinction based on the rigidity of roles occupied by different actors, the idea that writers and translators engage in dialogic collaboration can be contested. Indeed, several generations of translators and translation theorists have described the collaboration between authors and translators as typically hierarchical. In this tradition, the writer is hailed as the solitary author and owner of an original document, while the translator is simply the conduit through which one text is adjusted for a new audience and locale. In the U.S., as early rhetorical instruction and emphasis on oral discourse as communal discourse were displaced by writing, romantic theories of "genius" and originality constructed writing as a solitary act and the text as the intellectual property of the individual author (Lunsford & Ede 1994, p. 420). Lunsford and Ede (1994) trace the connection between this view of authorship and the tension, in American culture, between individualism and commitment to the community. Importantly, they lament that even scholars who are traditionally associated with collaborative learning, James Moffet, Donald Murray, Peter Elbow, Ken Macrorie, "hold implicitly to traditional concepts of autonomous individualism, authorship, and authority for texts" (1994, p. 426).

What is problematic about the identification of individualism and individual creativity as the foundation of good writing is the connection of this view with a view of communication as a one way or linear process in which the authoritative sender transmits a message that the receiver will decode according to the specifications provided by the sender. The individual author is enthroned in a hegemonic position of power at the expense of the receiver, who is relegated to a passive, subaltern position, and whose only task is to passively receive the message, without the possibility to contribute to its construction, reshaping, or even fine-tuning. I believe that a reconceptualization of English as a shared repertoire of resources to negotiate meaning is instrumental in moving toward a more egalitarian and more just view of communication; a view that is predicated on the idea of communication as a form of socio-cultural mediation. But if the goal is to re-empower the receiver as an active contributor to the production and exchange of meaning in any act of communication, we need to reclaim a space for translation and its metaphors in our pedagogical discourse. We need to see translators as prototypical receivers who are also producers of meaning, and translation as an act of cultural mediation enacted through the negotiation of meaning making. A cursory look into methods for software development will suffice here to show how the contribution of translators and localization experts to the creative process of product development is already well-established in certain types of professional practice.

One of the key features of Lean UX is the move away from the idea of a product as a series of features to be built, and toward the idea of a product as a set of hypotheses that must be continuously validated through different forms of usability testing. Laura Klein (2013) explains that, like Agile, Lean focuses on collaborative work between designers and developers in cross-functional teams that work quickly and in short cycles to incorporate user feedback at the all

stages of development. Klein invites developers to see every product as a solution to somebody's problem. Once a problem, or an exigence, has been identified, developers need to make sure that what they are building solves the problem that they have identified. In Klein's understanding of Lean UX, the best way to determine whether a product really solves somebody's problem is to perform product validation, which means showing prospective users an early version of the product being developed with the goal of obtaining feedback that will drive subsequent stages of development in an iterative process. Against this background, we could see technical writing—which is typically driven by a very specific exigence or problem that needs to be solved—as an activity that would clearly benefit from early validation. In this new scene of writing, translators become key actors in the iterative process of validation of hypotheses that concern the quality of the cooperation between senders and receivers in terms of the Gricean (1975) maxims of quantity (provide the most appropriate amount of information), quality (provide accurate and true information), relevance (provide information that is pertinent to the topic and function of the text), and manner (provide clear and usable information).

If technical writing is conceived as a way of responding to a specific need of a determined audience, this very audience has to be involved in the process of writing through the mediating agency of translators, if not directly. Whenever a technical document is created to solve a problem that people across the world might encounter, translators and localization experts have the responsibility to act as brokers in the exchange of information. For this reason, project managers and technical writers should not request their services *a posteriori*, once the writing process is concluded, but rather *in itinere*, at key stages of the writing process, so that writers can understand whether or not the document that they are creating can be rendered in another language, or more generally, localized, in a reasonable amount of time and reasonable

costs. But even in those cases in which this type of work flow cannot be implemented, the work of translators on a ‘beta version’ of a technical document can still help to spot weaknesses and usability issues that should be addressed by writing teams before the document is adapted for a variety of different locales. In other words, even with reference to the locale in which and for which it was originally conceived, a technical document is never ‘ready’ to be published and distributed until translators have been involved in the development process with the goal of assessing the readability and usability of a ‘product.’ This conception of design and the development process is perfectly in line with calls for participatory design (Getto 2005) and ethics of engagement (Salvo 2001) expressed in technical communication research.

The case study that I will illustrate throughout chapters 4 and 5 investigates the relationship between writing and translation within a specific context and a specific genre. The context is educational: the word *writers* in this study refers to a group of undergraduate students enrolled in the upper-division writing in the discipline (WID) course in an American institution of higher education. The translators are a group of students enrolled in a Translation (English to Italian) course in an Italian institution of higher education. These two group of students are connected through their participation to an instantiation of the TAPP, an international project whose main features have been illustrated in chapter 3. In this particular case, writers acted as subject matter experts as they developed sets of instructions for different types of users. Each writer was asked to send his/her first complete draft to a project partner in Italy, whose task was to translate the document received, ask questions and offer feedback to the authors. This form of collaboration can be understood as a special type of peer review in which the stakes are higher because the reviewer has an interest in having the writer revise and edit the original text to facilitate the translation process. The translator who provides quality feedback by flagging

linguistic or design features that are difficult to adapt for a new locale will benefit from a revision of the ST that will streamline the translation process.

The willingness of authors and translators to negotiate the ST increases the probability that the TT is at once *adequate* and *acceptable*. These two technical terms to describe the orientedness of a translation have been proposed by Toury with reference to the existence of a set of translation norms that act as constraints in the translating process. Toury (1995) argues that the basic *initial norm* refers to a strategic choice that translators make before starting their work: they decide whether they want to subject themselves to the norms realized in the ST or to the norms of the target culture or language. If their main concern is faithfulness, then the TT will be *adequate*; if the target culture norms prevail, then the TT will be *acceptable* (p. 57). Translating a text can be compared to walking on a tightrope between the need to preserve meaning and form of a ST and the competing need of adapting the ST for a different audience and locale. This difficult act of balancing can become less daunting when translators work with texts that have been prepared for translation by means of a process of co-authoring and text-negotiation that involves the translators at multiple stages of the development of a document.

An understanding of technical writing as collaborative, iterative, and user-centered circles back to an understanding of intercultural communication as a form of mediation of meaning and content, and the use of English as a repertoire of resources for communication, rather than a code owned by native speakers who control and regulate its use unilaterally. Intercultural communication and technical communication should be understood as activities of mediation that involve the negotiation of meaning with the aim of producing messages that can travel across diverse locales without losing their functional *raison d'être* (reason of being). There are no privileged actors in intercultural communication. Whoever uses English in spoken and written

communication cannot expect multilingual receivers to make all the decoding effort; rather, senders have to invite receivers to join them in the production of meaning with the goal of facilitating the translatability of the message, or more generally, the malleability of the message, its ability to travel across locales without loss of functionality. With reference to writing, we need to move from a focus on senders and their expressive needs to a focus on receivers as actors that should be involved in the encoding, not just the decoding, of meaning. We need to move towards an understanding of communication as an activity characterized by the goal of sharing the responsibility of meaning making, especially when the code selected for communication is an international lingua franca, as in the case of English. In this global age, it is an ethical duty of users of English, especially technical communicators, to develop strategies to become hospitable speakers and writers; to find ways to invite receivers to jointly and actively participate to the production of a message.

#### **4.2. Mediating difference and negotiating functional equivalence through translation shifts**

Informed by theories that focus on the problem of equivalence, descriptive translation studies approaches to the study of translation typically investigate shifts between STs and TTs, whose occurrence has been singled out as a universal of translation by many translation theorists (Toury 1995). These shifts result from attempts to deal with systemic differences between languages (source languages or SL and target languages or TL), cultures, and rhetorical traditions. We owe to John Catford the first book-length influential study of shifts, which he defines as “departures from formal correspondence in the process of going from the SL to the TL” (1965, p. 73). A *formal correspondent* is any linguistic item that plays the same role in the target language system as a linguistic item of the source language plays in the source language



system (Catford 1965). In contrast, a *textual correspondent* focuses on the relationship between a specific pair of ST and TT, rather than the correspondence between a pair of languages. In Hatim and Munday's extremely clear definition, a shift "is said to occur if, in a given TT, a translation equivalent other than the formal correspondent occurs for a specific SL element" (2004, p. 28). Popovič provides a broader definition of shifts as "all that appears new with respect to the original, or fails to appear where it might have been expected" (Popovič 1970, p. 79). Importantly, Popovič ventures beyond shifts that are explainable through linguistic theories and concepts to consider shifts caused by literary (he deals mainly with literary translations), textual, and cultural considerations.

Another conceptual distinction has been introduced by Toury (1980), who differentiates between obligatory, linguistically motivated shifts, and non-obligatory shifts. Importantly, Toury (1995) also cautions against a negative view of shifts as errors or departures (often seen as unnecessary or unwarranted) from formal equivalence. His understanding of the concept of translation equivalence, as expressed in his 1995 study of translation, is at odds with prescriptive approaches sanctioned by older paradigms in translation theory. Toury assumes that the equivalence between a TT and a ST is a given. For this reason, analysis should not focus prescriptively on whether a given TT or TT-expression is 'equivalent' to the ST or ST-expression. Instead, it should focus on how the assumed equivalence has been realized. In this view, shifts are indexes of the type of relationships established between writers and translators, STs and TTs. In other words, the search for translation shifts should not be aimed at finding what the translation could have had in common with the original text but does not. Rather, the goal should consist in finding the type of relationships established between ST and TT, and how these relationships might influence the writing process. In perfect alignment with this understanding of

the goals of descriptive translation studies, the focus of my own research is not on miscommunication due to linguistic and cultural differences, but rather on how individuals negotiate these differences to overcome real or perceived obstacles in the way of intercultural communication. Instead of trying to understand *why* writers and translators disagree on the treatment of textual material or *why* cultures clash (a trendy and lucrative topic for publishers across the world), this study, inspired by philosophical and methodological cosmopolitanism, focuses on *how* communication is negotiated across professional domains, cultures, and languages.

Critics generally agree that the most comprehensive taxonomy of translation shifts is to be found in Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet's *Comparative Stylistics of French and English* (1958/1995). By examining parallel non-translated as well as translated texts, Vinay and Darbelnet describe a detailed and systematic model for the analysis and comparison of a ST–TT pair. According to their model, the first step involves identification and numbering of the ST units and the units of translation. The second step calls for the matching of the two. Finally, Vinay and Darbelnet classify shifts based on the translation procedures that triggered the shift. They differentiate between direct translation, which covers borrowing, calque and literal translation, and oblique translation, which relies on transposition, modulation, equivalence and adaptation. These translation methods can be applied on three levels of language: the lexicon; the grammatical structures; and the message. Within Vinay and Darbelnet's framework, a shift can be defined as an oblique translation method that results in the breaking of the formal correspondence between ST and TT. All procedures other than literal translation are likely to result in a shift. This definition of translation shifts informs the research design and methods adopted in the present study.

The major challenge of this type of descriptive studies is that the decision as to whether a shift has occurred tends to be subjective because an evaluation of the equivalence of the ST and TT units is required. One way to capture a shift is to compare units from both the ST and TT to an invariant meaning that is independent of both texts. But this strategy is also fraught with difficulties as concerns the identification of this hypothetical intermediate, the *invariant*, or *tertium comparationis*. Van Leuven-Zwart (1984, 1989) tried to solve this problem by positing the concept of the *architranseme*, the invariant core sense of a ST linguistic unit or *transeme*. After pointing out that the success of the *architranseme* relies too heavily on decontextualized dictionary meanings and the analyst's ability to accurately decide whether a shift has occurred in the translation context, Hatim and Munday (2004) report on how the notion of *tertium comparationis* has been progressively abandoned by theorists. However, when writing is more controlled, as in the case of technical documents created to instruct workers on how to effectively and safely follow specific procedures, the task of 'extracting' an invariant meaning that is independent of both ST and TT becomes less daunting. For this reason, the notion of *tertium comparationis* can still be of value in the search, classification, and analysis of translation shifts in technical documents.

This does not mean that the notion of word for word faithfulness has to be reified as the major prerogative of technical translations. While it can be tempting to label a number of shifts as unnecessary deviations, the truth is that an ample gamut of shifts appear to be reasonable and justified when the function, or *skopos* (Vermeer, 1989), of the translation is adequately assessed. Many translation shifts that at a superficial level of analysis might appear to be unnecessary can be justified when one considers the exigence for the translation and the needs of both translators and the final users of the translated document. Only what Nida (1964) calls *dynamic equivalence*

(later renamed *functional equivalence*), i.e. a form of equivalence in which the focus of attention is directed toward the receptor response, rather than the source text, can guarantee the usability of a technical document. This means that translators of technical documents should adopt a functional/pragmatic concept of invariance that entails a willingness to manipulate the ST as needed, so that the TT can function in a new locale in exactly the same way in which the ST functions in the original locale. Skopos theory is extremely relevant to technical translation in so far as it does not simplistically advocate for a domestication of the source text to conform to the target culture. This is just one possibility for the translator, not the only one. According to the aim specified by the commission, i.e. the instructions on how to carry out a specific action given by oneself or someone else, the translators will have to decide what is the most effective way to complete the task at hand. Clearly, when the focus is on function and usability, it is wise to replace traditional hierarchical relations between ST and TT with an approach to translation that steers away from the idea of the ST as the authoritative original to which the docile translation has to conform.

One final point has to be made here concerning the role of the translator as a cultural vector. Strands of research associated to the cultural turn in translation studies invite to consider how three different cultural frames influence translation. Based on Edward T. Hall's iceberg model, the "Triad of Culture" (1959/1990), translators might focus on the visible aspects of culture with the goal of transmitting information with minimum loss; or pay more attention to the semivisible and invisible aspects. The semivisible, in this case, means the pattern of shared practices which guide language use, and asks of translators that they follow culturally specific translation norms. The invisible, what Hall calls the 'Informal,' because is not normally accessible for metacognitive comment. At this level, culture can be understood through

Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, "a system of dispositions which generate perceptions, appreciations and practices" (Maton, 2008, p. 51). With reference to this stratification of culture, Lefevere and Bassnett (1990) describe translation as a bicultural practice requiring multiple shifts from one linguacultural model of the world to another, and mediating skills to handle the refraction between one reality and another. On a superficial analysis, a descriptive study of technical translation would appear to fall within the first cultural frame, in which signs have a referential function. Yet, professional translators know that things are not that simple. For instance, whoever compares manuals and instructions written in English with their translation in Italian cannot fail to notice that commands expressed in the imperative mood are often replaced by the infinitive form of a verb, the effect of which is to make the command more impersonal, and more polite, and thus more acceptable for users who are native speakers of Italian. This is to say that rhetorical and cultural considerations impact the translation process even when the ST is a technical document. All our utterances, albeit in different degrees and depending on the formality of the register used (controlled languages, for example, may achieve high levels of accuracy), leave a residue of meaning that is inextricably linked to rhetorical and cultural values that have to be unpacked, disassembled, and reassembled by the translator who wants to create a usable document for the target locale. Technical translation is rhetorical and requires an in-depth understanding of both SL culture and TL culture not only at the visible level of the cultural iceberg, but also at deeper, more hidden levels.

#### **4.3. The genre and language of technical instructions**

Mike Markel (2015) defines a set of instructions as "process description written to help readers perform a specific task" (p. 551). Lannon and Gurak's definition provides a more

nuanced identification of the typical audiences for this technical documents. After underlining that instructions “spell out” the steps required for completing one or multiple task, they observe that the audience for this type of document might be people who do not know how to perform the task, or people who either performed the task but cannot remember how or want to perform it more effectively (2016, p. 243). Tebeaux and Dragga distinguish between procedures, which provide general guidelines for performing a task, and instructions, which provide specific, detailed steps (2015, p. 274). They also place emphasis on how instruction carry heavy legal liability: “Well designed, clear, complete, accurate instructions can become good sales documents while preventing lawsuits if equipment or products are damaged because users did not or could not follow the instructions (p. 275). Johnson-Sheehan (2015) distinguishes between instructions, specifications, and procedures/protocols, and provides the following definition for the genre of instructions: “Instructions describe how to perform a specific task. They typically describe how to assemble a product or do something step by step” (p. 153).

All these technical communication scholars agree that writers should carefully analyze audience, purpose, and context of use for a specific set of instructions before making decisions concerning their scope, design, structure, and style. The only fixed and stable feature of this genre appears to be the organization of directions into sequential steps to be followed in an ordered fashion. At the rhetorical level, Humbley et al. (2005) describe instructions as persuasive texts with a perlocutionary function with reference to the fact that rather than dry informative documents, instructions aim at readers performing activities in a certain way, or a certain order, or with the right equipment, etc. As concerns the style in which instructions should be couched, a certain flexibility in the selection of register and tone is to be expected, but there is no leverage with monoreferentiality (the strict association between a word and a delimited, well defined

meaning) and terminological consistency; these typical features of specialized language should always be preserved.

Limiting our analysis to linguistic concerns, any decision on the type of functional language, or register, to be used for a set of instructions will depend on a thorough assessment of the rhetorical situation. The exigence for the creation of a set of instructions can be identified with the need to instruct an audience of lay persons on how to complete a fairly technical task safely, and in a reasonable amount of time. This means that the typical communicative scenario will involve two types of participants, the specialist writer, or subject matter expert, and the interested lay person. What characterizes this communicative situation is the fact that the invoked audience of instructions and user manuals is not made up of experts or members of a determined discourse community, i.e. a group of peers cemented by the use of a specific jargon and a well-established set of rhetorical moves (Swales, 1990). This means that writers of instructions can enjoy a certain degree of freedom in their rhetorical and linguistic choices provided that their tactics are tailored to users' needs and expectations. Do readers expect the instructions to be couched in casual speech, consultative style, or formal style? Do they expect to be directly addressed by the writer or not? Do they expect the writer to be detached and use impersonal constructions or not? In other words, what type of relationship do the writers want to establish with their readers? Instructions do not have to be always formal and impersonal, especially in cases in which readers might find the information intimidating, writers could try to reassure readers through a variety of pragmatic strategies that include the use of a more casual, informal style, than what might be expected.

Now, whatever the rhetorical strategy adopted in the original text, the translators will have to assess a different set of expectations before they select their own translation strategies.

With reference to the concept of norms that we have introduced earlier, translators should consider what Chesterman (1997) calls *product or expectancy norms* and *process or professional norms*. Product or expectancy norms are established by the expectations of readers concerning what a translation of a technical document should be like. Translators will have to consider the predominant translation tradition in the target culture, as well as the discourse conventions that regulate the creation and distribution of similar genres in the TL. In other words, they will have to determine what is the appropriate and/or acceptable translation of a specific text variety for their new audience. As concerns *professional norms*, Chesterman proposes three types: *The accountability norm*, an ethical norm that binds the translator to professional standards of integrity and thoroughness; the *communication norm*, a social norm that assigns the translator the role of broker that whose goal is to ensure maximum communication between the parties; and, finally, the *relation norm*, a linguistic norm that focuses on the relation of functional equivalence between ST and TT, a relation that will be determined by consideration of the rhetorical situation, genre, commissioner's goal, the intentions of the original writer, and the assumed needs of the new users.

Typically, the description of fairly technical procedures might call for the use of a specialized language. Rather than being detached from natural languages, these use-based or functional varieties utilize all the resources typically offered by natural languages while showing a tendency to restrict their linguistic rules along a continuum at whose extreme ends we find natural languages, at one end, and controlled languages, at the opposite end (Scarpa, 2008). If we adopt Snell-Hornby's (1988) distinction between *opaque* and *transparent* style, we might argue that a prototypical technical document should exhibit a transparent style that will strive to enact the principles of precision, objectivity, economy, clarity, and appropriateness of expression.



However, this way of conceptualizing the stylistic goals of a technical document is quite misleading in that the realization of each of these principles can have a negative impact on the realization of a different principle. For example, the observation of the principle of economy might call for the elimination of redundancy and the use of nominalization for the sake of lexical density. But the quality of technical communication, as Scarpa (2008, p. 21) points out drawing primarily on the work on Gotti (1991, 2005), is also assessed in terms of clarity, maximal reduction of ambiguity, transparency, and readability, or ease of comprehension. Clarity and ease of comprehension are far from enhanced when lexical density, typical of scientific texts and academic articles, replaces the grammatical intricacy that is typical of the casual style. As John Kohl convincingly argues, any decrease in the use of grammatical words and syntactic cues corresponds to an increase in the probability of translation errors. Syntactic cues, writes Kohl, “are elements or aspects of language that help readers correctly analyze sentence structure and/or to identify parts of speech” (1999, p. 149); they also make it easier for readers to predict the structure of subsequent parts of a sentence (p. 150) and eliminate certain types of ambiguities that might cause problems to both human translators and machine-translation systems. Among the most important and recurring recommendations for technical writers that can be found in *The Global English Style Guide* (Kohl, 2008) are: avoid functional shift (often used for condensation and metaphorization, e.g. *Where are you headed?*); avoid noun clusters; limit the use of the passive voice; use a verb-centered writing style; and achieve cohesion through lexical repetition whenever the use of a pronoun might cause ambiguity (unclear antecedent problem). Many of these strategies do not sit well with the principle of economy that is typical of both academic and scientific writing.

This short excursus into debates on the nature and use of specialized languages in technical and scientific communication shows how difficult it is to lay out stylistic guidelines for writers and translators who collaborate on the creation of a technical document. While rules such as monoreferentiality (a calque from Gotti's *monoreferenzialità*), that postulates the use of one signifier for one specific and semantically delimited signified, or consistency should be rigorously respected by writers and translators, other rules traditionally associated to scientific genres and specialized languages can be either ignored or violated for the sake of the most important functional requirement for a set of instructions, their usability.

#### **4.4. Methods for the case study**

While the main goal of this explorative and theory building case study is to find regularities in the behavior of non-professional translators, it is extremely important to understand how research in the field of English composition can benefit from the study of a very specific type of reception of written texts; a reception that is shaped by the exigence to translate the ST into a new different language with the goal of making the TT usable for a new audience, in a new locale. From this perspective, translation can be seen and appreciated as a form of usability testing that provides precious information on the strengths and weaknesses of diverse writing strategies at the level of lexicon, grammatical structure, and higher order concerns that involve questions related to the stages of *inventio* and *dispositio*. By studying what type of shifts translators are likely to make, and, more in general, how source texts are received, used, and manipulated by translators, subject matter experts can develop new ways of writing and designing documents.

On a conceptual and theoretical level, this study is indebted to the work of Shoshana Blum-Kulka on *explicitation*. Blum-Kulka (2002) understands translation as an act of communication that is related to the linguistic, discursual, and social systems holding for the two languages and cultures involved. One of her main contributions to translation theory is her identification and description of *explicitation* as a typical feature of both what she calls “interlanguages” (English used as a lingua franca by speakers of other languages, for example) and translated texts. Blum-Kulka observes how translators tend to expand the TT, building into it a semantic redundancy which is absent in the ST. Her conclusion is right on mark: “It might be the case that explicitation is a universal strategy inherent in the process of language mediation, as practiced by language learners, non-professional translators and professional translators alike” (2002, p. 294). What is striking about this conclusion is the fact that researchers who investigated the pragmatic features of English as a lingua franca considered as a spoken language (House, 2002; Meierkord, 2012), have also identified explicitness as one of the most important communicative strategies used in cross-cultural interactions. Explicitation is indeed a universal strategy of linguistic mediation.

Within the genre of technical instructions, the goal of this study is to identify regularities that shed light on how non-professional translators mediate between languages, cultures, and rhetorical traditions. The four research questions are:

- With reference to specific translation methods—Explicitation, Implication, Generalization, Particularization—what evidence is there of uniformity of practice in the translation of instructions from English into Italian?
- What are the most typical causes of zero shifts?
- Why do translators resort to rhetorical shifts?

- Based on these findings, can we hypothesize ways in which writers can facilitate a translation process that aims at obtaining functional equivalence between ST and TT?

Can we devise new strategies of collaboration between writers and translators?

A corpus of 40 texts was compiled by pairing up 20 instructions written in English by students enrolled in a technical writing class in the U.S. and their translations into Italian, completed by students majoring in English studies in an Italian institution of higher education. The authors of the instructions are all native speakers of English while the translators are native speakers of Italian. The total number of words for the corpus of English instructions is 19,121. The total number of words for the corpus of instructions in Italian is 19,046. The average length of the STs (in English) is 956 words. As concerns the TTs (in Italian), the average length is 952.

Two criteria governed the selection of texts for this corpus: diversity and level of technicality. The corpus covers a wide range of topics and disciplinary areas that go from agriculture to engineering. At the same time, the instructions included in the corpus are semi-technical, i.e. created by subject matter experts (or *specialists*) for *interested lay persons*, to use Gläser terminology and classification (1995), i.e. for users who are not necessarily experts in a particular field of study or line of work but might be interested in completing the task described in the instructions. In other words, the instructions included in the corpus can be used by an ample gamut of individuals to complete tasks that require easily findable equipment and a working knowledge or fuzzy understanding of theories and technical concepts in the topic areas to which these technical documents can be ascribed. When compared to highly technical instructions, semi-technical instructions place less linguistic and pragmatic constraints on both the writing and translation processes, thus opening a space for a wider range of shifts in the TT. In light of the research goals for this study, i.e. the identification of general translation strategies,

the translation of technical terms will be assessed only in passing; as it were, this type of analysis would require a study ad hoc.

With reference to the comparative analysis of pairs of STs and TTs, the present study adopts Toury's three-phase methodology where stage one is to situate the text within the target culture system; stage two is to compare the ST and the TT to identify relationships between 'coupled pairs' of ST and TT segments. Stage three is devoted to the formulation of generalizations about norms of translational equivalence through the analysis of the regularities evinced by translation shifts. Stage two can be further divided into the following steps: the identification of the units of translation; the alignment or mapping of units of translation in the ST onto units of translation in the TT; and the coding and classification of shifts based on a specific set of translation methods singled out as particularly significant in the genre of technical instructions. Toury's methodology has been adopted for two main reasons: First, this research method is appropriate to the particular genre of texts under investigation in this study; as Munday underlines in one of the most influential introductions to translation studies, the descriptive model lends itself to the examination of the translation of technical texts (pp. 115-116). Second, the adoption of this widely used method enhances the replicability of this study.

It must be acknowledged, however, that the second step of Toury's methodology is one of the most controversial areas in the debates around methodologies for DTS. The identification and matching of ST and TT segments into coupled pairs rests on the validity and stability of the concept of the unit of translation, a concept that replaced the idea that it is possible to translate texts word for word. Within product oriented approaches, researchers view the unit of translation as "the target text unit that can be mapped onto a source-text unit" (Malmkjær, 1998, p. 286). The identification of coupled pairs of target solutions to source problems is always challenging

because the boundaries of such coupled pairs are difficult to determine, given their dynamic nature and context dependency (Kenny, 2009). While there is a certain convergence on the idea that the translation unit often coincides with the clause (Malmkjær, 1998), it is often difficult to process clauses that include articulated noun and verb phrases. For this reason, this study will assume that the unit of translation is the phrase; that the *topic* and *comment*, the noun phrase and verb phrase, tend to be processed separately at the very beginning of the decoding process; and, that, in some cases, noun phrases and verb phrases are segmented into smaller constituents, other noun phrases, adjective phrases, and adverb phrases, for optimal processing.

Undoubtedly, different translators and translation scholars might have slightly different ways of segmenting STs and TTs to obtain coupled pairs, but this variability is not dramatic either. Very few translators operating within Indo-European languages will try to translate word for word, and even fewer will try to translate clauses with many constituents as if they were single units. The latter method would put such a strain on short term memory that we would be barely able to understand the meaning of these chunks of text, let alone translate them. One thing is to process the clause *He bought a new car* as one unit, another thing is to translate the clause *Last year, in May, at 7 o'clock of a rainy day, Tim's older sister bought a new car* as one unit. The translation units in this case will be 1) *Last year in May* 2) *at 7 o'clock of a rainy day* 3) *Tim's older sister* 4) *bought a new car*. The fact that some translators might combine units 1 and 2, or units 3 and 4 into a single unit does not affect the identification and classification of translation shifts.

This study will investigate variables that have been found to be relevant to this specific corpus of instructions by a preliminary comparison of ST and TT, and by collecting feedback on procedural challenges from writers and translators. These variables are six different translation

methods that can be used to render technical messages. For the definition of these variables, I draw mainly from Vinay and Darbelnet's (1958/1995) classification and taxonomy:

1. **Explicitation:** A stylistic translation technique which consists of making explicit in the target language what remains implicit in the source language because it is apparent from either the context or the situation.

2. **Implicitation:** A stylistic translation technique which consists of making what is explicit in the source language implicit in the target language, relying on the context or the situation for conveying the meaning.

3. **Generalisation:** The translation technique in which a specific (or concrete) term is translated by a more general (or abstract) term.

4. **Particularization:** The translation technique in which a general (abstract) term is translated by a specific term

5. **Rhetorical shift:** shift caused by purely rhetorical considerations

6. **Zero shift:** this category represents an addition to Vinay and Darbelnet taxonomy of translation methods. It stands for shifts that fail to appear where they might have been expected. A zero shift is easy to spot in that it often consists of awkward or unnatural renderings in the TT caused by the adoption of direct translation methods (a borrowing, a calque, or a literal translation) in situations that call for the use of oblique translation methods, especially equivalence, i.e. the strategy of describing the same meaning/situation by using completely different stylistic or structural methods.

Reliability checks were conducted throughout the study in order to maintain an acceptable level of agreement among coders. All texts were coded by two independent raters, and the different types of translation shifts identified at the end of the process are only and

exclusively those for which there was agreement between the coders. The findings of this study will be illustrated in chapter 5 along with comments on what these shifts reveal about the process of translation. The findings of this type of research can guide us toward a fine-tuning of writing programs that intend to prepare students to the challenges of global technical communication. Before we can help students write for a global audience we need to understand how the form and content of technical messages are manipulated by professional and non-professional translators. More specifically, we need to understand when and why translators decide to abandon their ‘quest’ for formal equivalence to adapt phrasing and ideas to the needs of new audiences. Translation shifts tell us the complex and fascinating story about the constantly evolving relationships that are established between STs and TTs. From these perspective, shifts can be said to carry a significant semiotic load: they are multi-layered signs that encapsulate the dynamic relationship between writing traditions that are connected to cultural and rhetorical traditions



CHAPTER 5. UNCOVERING THE STORIES BEHIND TRANSLATION SHIFTS:  
DOING CULTURE THROUGH TEXT NEGOTIATION

**5.1. Research questions**

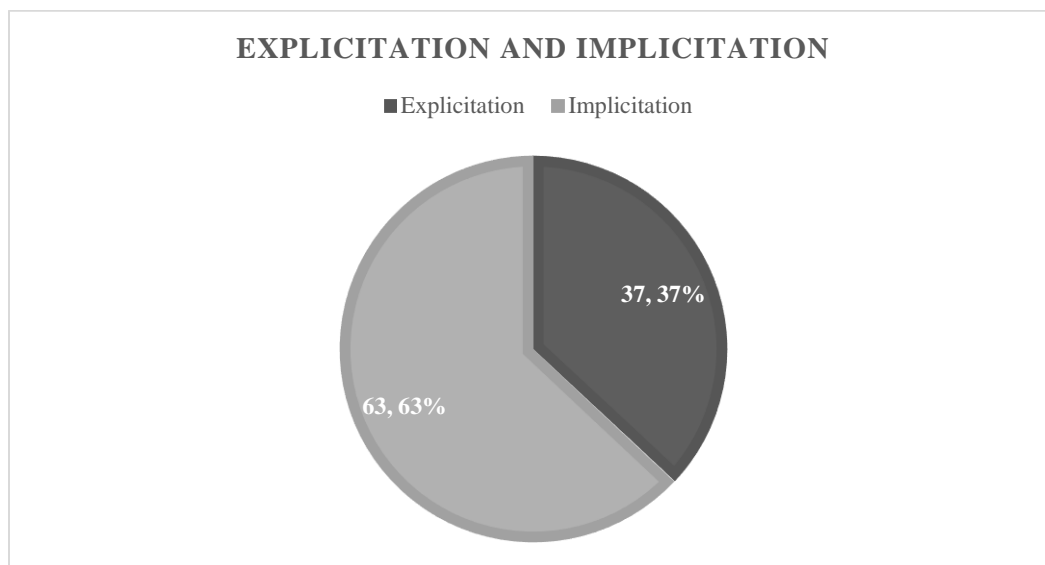
This chapter will offer the results of the research project described in chapter 4. The total number of words for the corpus of English instructions is 19,121. The total number of words for the corpus of instructions in Italian is 19,046. The average length of the STs (in English) is 956 words. As concerns the TTs (in Italian), the average length is 952. The four research questions are as follows:

1. With reference to specific translation methods—explicitation, implicitation, generalization, particularization—what evidence is there of uniformity of practice in the translation of instructions from English into Italian?
2. What are the most typical causes of zero shifts?
3. Why do translators resort to rhetorical shifts?
4. Based on these findings, can we hypothesize ways in which writers can facilitate a translation process that aims at obtaining functional equivalence between ST and TT?  
Can we devise new strategies of collaboration between writers and translators?

Sections 5.2 and 5.3 will address question 1; section 5.4 will focus on zero shifts; and section 5.5 will provide an ample range of examples that shed light on the use of rhetorical shifts on the part of translators. Finally, section 5.6 will offer an interpretation of the results and ideas for further research in the intersecting areas of Descriptive Translation Studies and International Technical Communication.

## 5.2. Explicitation and implicitation

Out of 219 identified shifts in the category explication/implication, the two coders identified 82 occurrences of explication (mean: 4.1; median: 3.5; mode: 3;  $\sigma$  2.4) and 137 occurrences of implicitation (mean: 6.85; median: 6.5; mode: 9;  $\sigma$  3.8). When compared to the dataset of explication, the dataset for implicitation is more dispersed, which suggests that there is higher variation in translation behaviors as far as implicitation is concerned. The percentages of explication and implicitation shifts are given in the pie chart below (Figure 1)



*Figure 1.* Percentages of explication and implicitation.

These results can be surprising given that translation theorists often point out that translated texts tend to be longer than original texts. However, it is important to keep in mind that the authors of these texts are not professional translators, but undergraduate students majoring in English and Translation. While technical writers resorted to several techniques of disambiguation in their texts—redundancy, repetition of the logical subject of the sentence,

clarification—translators appeared to be more concerned about questions of style, flow, cohesion, and economy of expression. Translators enhanced the cohesion of the texts through the use of an ample range of pronouns, especially *ci* and *ne*. The following examples will clarify how these pronouns are used in Italian:

ITA: Sei andato a New York? Sì, *ci* sono andato (*ci* replaces *in Inghilterra*).

EN: Did you go to New York? Yes, I did (or I have been there).

ITA: Quanti fratelli hai? *Ne* ho sette (*ne* replaces *fratelli*).

EN: How many brothers do you have? I have got six.

In Italian, *ci* can replace a phrase referring to a place, introduced by the Italian prepositions *a*, *in*, *su*. *Ne* can replace a noun when this is introduced by a number or an expression of quantity. *Ne* can also substitute a complement introduced by preposition *di* when it refers to a topic. Just like the English pronouns *this*, *that*, *these*, and *those* (Kohl 105), *ci* and *ne* can cause translation problems because their antecedent might be unclear or ambiguous. While human translators might find it easier to disambiguate meaning in this type of linguistic contexts, machine-translation software is likely to offer inaccurate renderings of the original segment. With the goal of improving flow and cohesion, the translators who participated to the TAPP project often overlooked the need for clarity and accuracy in technical documentation.

In the two sub-sections that follow, I will offer some examples of explicitation and implicitation shifts along with comments on the causes and consequences of these types of shifts.

Examples of explicitation:

Example 1: From instructions *How to make Dippin' Dots with liquid nitrogen / Come preparare i Dippin' Dots con l'azoto liquido*

EN: This will allow *air bubbles to escape*

ITA: Questo permetterà *alle bolle d'aria intrappolate nel gelato di fuoriuscire*

EN (back translation): This will allow *the air bubbles entrapped in the ice cream to come out.*

Comment: This is a very typical example of explicitation shift. The goal of the translator is to disambiguate meaning by qualifying the noun phrase *air bubbles* with the adjectival phrase *entrapped in the ice cream*.

Example 2: From instructions *How to perform CPR / Come eseguire un RCP*

EN: Pinch the nostrils shut for mouth-to-mouth breathing and cover the person's mouth with yours, *making a seal*.

ITA: Chiudete le narici con le dita per praticare la respirazione bocca a bocca e coprite la bocca del paziente con la vostra, *cercando di non lasciare spazio per il passaggio dell'aria*.

EN (back translation): Close the nostrils with your fingers to perform mouth-to-mouth breathing, and cover the person's mouth with yours, *trying not to leave a space for the air flow*.

Comment: In this case the translator reformulated the unit *making a seal* into a longer adverbial clause that allows readers to understand not only what needs to be done, but also the goal of the specific action to be performed.

Example 3: From instructions *Making Rope from Tree Bark / Come fare una corda con la corteccia di un albero*

EN: Use a wooden wedge *to gently lever the inner bark* away from the rest of the tree.

ITA: Utilizzare un cuneo in legno *a mo' di leva sulla corteccia interna* per farla distaccare dal resto dell'albero.

EN (back translation): Use a *wooden wedge as if it were a lever on the inner bark* so that it is disconnected from the rest of the tree.

Comment: In this case, what caused the explicitation shift was the use of functional shift in the ST. The writer used the noun *lever* as a verb, a perfectly fine solution in English, a language that allows words to take new grammatical functions without morphological change. Because the Italian language does not allow users to transform nouns into verbs without processes of derivation, the translator had to resort to an explicitation shift that involved an extensive rephrasing. It is also important to observe, here, that the translator's effort to preserve functional equivalence between ST and TT results in a target segment that is syntactically convoluted and potentially ambiguous.

Example 4: From instructions *How to build a computer / Come assemblare un computer*

EN: Ready your case *for your motherboard*.

ITA: Preparare il case *per l'installazione della scheda madre*.

EN (back translation): Prepare your case *for the installation of the mother board*.

Comment: At the beginning of this sentence, the use of the idiomatic form *ready* (another functional shift) caused the first departure from literal translation. The ellipsis of the

entire phrase *for the installation* also caused some troubles to the translator, who had to do some guesswork to recuperate the missing part of the sentence for the benefit of clarity and improved usability.

Examples of implicitation:

Example 1: From instructions *How to create a YouTube Channel / Come creare un canale YouTube*

EN: Videos on YouTube are accessible to everyone without setting up a channel, but to upload a video *yourself* you will need to create a personalized *channel*.

ITA: I video su YouTube sono accessibili a tutti senza creare un canale, ma per caricare un video avrai bisogno di crearne uno personalizzato.

EN (back translation): Videos on YouTube are accessible to everyone without setting up a channel, but to upload a video you will need to create a personalized *one*.

Comment: This example shows how the pronoun *ne* is used as a suffix of *creare* (to create) with the goal of avoiding the repetition of the word *channel*. While a human translator should not have problem translating this sentence back into English or into other languages, the use of *ne* does not facilitate comprehension in that *ne* could refer to both *channel* and *video*. Google Translate renders the Italian sentence in this way: “The videos on YouTube are accessible to all without creating a channel, but to upload a video you will need to create your own. The question is whether *your own* refers to the video, or the channel. While the use of *ne* in technical translations can cause ambiguity, many translators seemed to consider economy of expression, rather than clarity, as a priority.

Example 2 below shows a similar translation shift.

Example 2: From instructions *How to make a solar powered USB charger / Come costruire un caricatore USB alimentato da energia solare.*

EN: Using the soldering iron, put some solder on the twisted connections to make sure *the wires* are connected securely.

ITA: Usando la saldatrice, saldare il punto di giunzione dei fili, per assicurarne una connessione sicura.

EN (back translation): Using the solder, solder the point in which the wires connect to ensure *they* are securely connected.

Example 3: From instructions *Making Rope from Tree Bark / Come fare una corda con la corteccia di un albero*

EN: The *dead protective* outer bark *that the eye can see* is not the stuff you are looking for.

ITA: La parte più esterna della corteccia non è ciò che vi serve.

EN (back translation): The outer part of the bark is not what you need.

Comment: In this example the translator decided to cut two descriptors of the outer bark, *dead protective* and the entire relative clause *that the eye can see*. Presumably, the translator found this information either not relevant or not helpful, and opted for economy of expression instead. Whether the extra information provided in the ST is relevant or simply redundant is open to debate. Considering that many freelance translators are paid per word, and that many users of instructions only skim through steps and descriptions, it is wise to aim for conciseness in technical documentation, provided that the elimination

of redundancy does not reduce the clarity and effectiveness of the instructions. On the other hand, the addition of details and information often contributes to disambiguate meaning and clarify procedures. It is up to writers and translators to negotiate ST and TT in way that safeguards both cost-saving economy of expression and clarity. In cases like this, a translator could ask the writer how the addition of *that the eye can see* contributes to improve the usability of a particular segment of the TT. This question could either lead to the revision of the ST or the preservation of the original phrasing in both ST and TT. Importantly, this example shows why it is important that writers and translators collaborate to the creation of the original text through an iterative cycle of writing and usability testing that can result in a translation-ready source text.

Example 4: From instructions *How to build a computer / Come assemblare un computer*

EN: *If you have heard a single beep*, congratulations you have successfully built your own computer.

ITA: *Se ciò si verifica*, complimenti avete costruito con successo il vostro computer

EN (back translation): *If this happens*, congratulations you have successfully built your own computer.

Comment: in the translated version, the demonstrative pronoun *ciò* replaces an entire clause that more clearly describes the type of auditory signal that users should hear when they successfully complete the task described. In cases like this one, the use of implicitation strategies is usually discouraged by experienced translators, due to the loss of meaning that it entails.



Example 5: From instructions *How to make a solar powered USB charger / come costruire un caricatore USB alimentato da energia solare*

EN: Look back to step 7 to see *what is wrong with the circuit*.

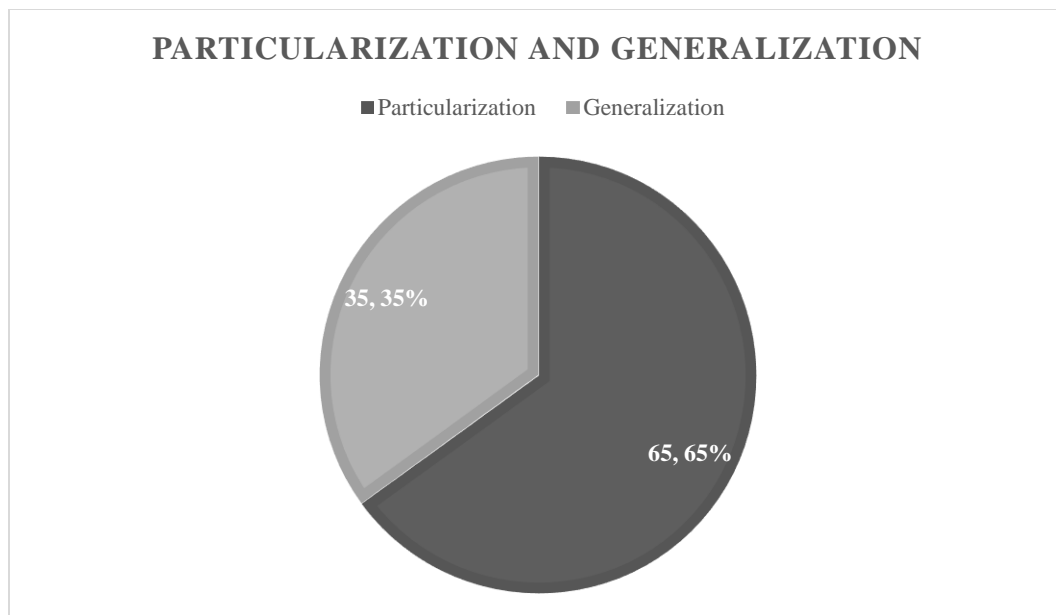
ITA: Tornare all'istruzione numero 7 per vedere *cosa è sbagliato*.

EN (back translation): Go back to instruction number 7 to see *what is wrong*.

Comment: In this case, the phrase *with the circuit* has been cut not so much to enhance cohesion or eliminate redundancy, as to avoid dealing with an idiomatic expression that the translators found difficult to render in Italian. While the goal of the translator was to achieve the best possible result with minimum effort, the target phrase is ambiguous as a result of the elimination of the phrase *with the circuit*. If the writer had avoided using an idiomatic expression, the translator would not have had to resort to reformulation and implicitation, which in this case produced ambiguity in the TT.

### **5.3. Particularization and generalization**

Out of 118 identified shifts in the category particularization/generalization, we identified 77 occurrences of particularization (mean: 3.85; median: 3; mode: 3;  $\sigma$  2) and 41 occurrences of generalization (mean: 2.05; median: 2; mode: 2;  $\sigma$  1.3). The percentages of particularization and generalization shifts are given in the pie chart below (Figure 2)



*Figure 2.* Percentages of particularization and generalization.

These results show that translators are keen to correct cases of hypernymy, i.e. vagueness in lexical choice, by replacing broad, general words with more precise equivalents. For the language pair English-Italian, and in this precise context of collaboration, the frequent use of particularization shifts shows that non-professional translators are aware of the importance of precision and accuracy at the word level. While at the sentence level we have seen how translators tend to sacrifice precision and clarity to improve cohesion and flow, at the word level they are keener to abide by the rules of good practice in technical communication. Vice versa, non-professional technical writers go to great lengths to avoid ambiguity through redundancy and repetition at the sentence level, but then do not spend enough time on the selection of technical terms that can more accurately convey the meaning they are trying to express. This lack of accuracy at the level of lexical choice can cause numerous types of problems for translators, whose interpretation, and sometimes reconstruction, of meaning might significantly deviate from the semantic value carried by the original message. This means that, at the stage of editing and

proofreading, technical writers should try to refine, calibrate, and fine-tune their word choice so as to avoid that translators take the task of transforming hypernyms into hyponyms for the sake of precision and clarity. In their turn, translators should try to be more faithful to the target text at the sentence level. Even more importantly, translators should be consistent in their use of particularization strategies. The examples that follow show how some translators oscillated between particularization and generalization within the scope of a short section or paragraph of the ST.

Examples of particularization:

Example 1: From instructions *How to make Dippin' Dots with liquid nitrogen / Come preparare i Dippin' Dots con l'azoto liquido*

EN: Eyewear

ITA: Occhiali protettivi

EN (back translation): Protective eyewear

Comment: This example shows how the translator tries to enhance the accuracy and precision of the target text through hyponymy. In contrast, example 2 below, taken from the same pair of instructions, reveals that translators are not always consistent in their use of particularization. My hypothesis to explain this type of behavior is that translators are almost instinctively driven to improve the semantic precision of the ST translation units, but lack metacognition of the importance of this translation strategy.

Example 2: From instructions *How to make Dippin' Dots with liquid nitrogen / Come preparare i Dippin' Dots con l'azoto liquido*

EN: Protective gloves

ITA: Guanti

EN (back translation): Gloves

Comment: When safety is at stake, and to prevent liability problems, it is extremely important that directions are clear and accurate. Writers and translators should do more collaborative work to identify terms and expressions that will convey meaning in the most precise and clear way. A lack of consistency in the use of technical terminology can be observed throughout the corpus. Because non-professional writers and translators seem to underestimate the importance of consistently using one word for one referent, it is important that instructors of technical communication and technical translation classes include activities and workshops on terminology management.

Example 3: From instructions: *How to make a solar powered USB charger / Come costruire un caricatore USB alimentato da energia solare.*

EN: *Using figure 10*, solder the two pieces together.

ITA: *Tenendo d'esempio la figura 10*, saldare solder the two pieces together.

EN (back translation): *Keeping figure 10 as a reference*, solder the two pieces together.

Comment: Rather than resorting to a literal translation and render the hypernym *using* with the formal equivalent *usando*, the student in Italy opted for a more precise phrasing that clearly explains how to use figure 10, i.e. as a reference while completing the step. In this and many other cases the recourse to particularization at the word level can be considered part of an explicitation shift at the sentence level.

Examples of generalization:

Example 1: From instructions *Making Rope from Tree Bark / Come fare una corda con la corteccia di un albero*

EN: In many trees this inner bark is very strong and stringy and can be *peeled away*.

ITA: In molti alberi questa corteccia interna è molto dura e fibrosa e può essere *rimossa*.

EN (back translation): In many trees this inner bark is very strong and stringy and can be *removed*.

Comment: The verb *remove* is more broad and general than *peel away*, but the translator opted to resort to the minimax strategy. While translation theory tends to be normative and focus on optimal solutions, Jiří Levý (1967), observes that actual translation work is pragmatic: translators tend to choose renderings that promise a maximum of effect with a minimum of effort. In this case the generalization is unlikely to cause problems to users because the context helps to disambiguate the meaning of *rimossa*. This example shows how translators often need to walk the rope between faithfulness, usability in the target locale, and also pragmatic concerns (time to complete the translation, most importantly).

Example 2: From instructions: *Coleman 3-person tent building / Montaggio della tenda Coleman 3-person*

EN: If needed, *readjust* the tent stakes.

ITA: Se necessario, *sistemare* i pali della tenda.

EN (back translation): If needed, *fix* the tent stakes.

Comment: The Italian verb *sistemare* is very broad and ambiguous; it can convey an ample range of meanings depending on context. Once again, the translator resorted to the

minimax strategy to save time; two other options were *aggiustare* and *allineare*, but *aggiustare* is still rather broad, and *allineare* is closer to *align* than it is to *readjust*.

#### **5.4. Zero shifts**

The zero shift is a measure of linguistic convergence: It tells us stories about how the translators stretch the grammatical and lexical boundaries of the Italian language to make space for borrowings and grammatical constructions that are typical of English. A striking example of this tendency to hybridize the Italian language can be observed in the way in which the phrase “glass cuvette,” is rendered in Italian with the formal equivalent “*vetro cuvetta*.” A foundational rule that characterizes romance languages is that modifiers typically follow the noun; and yet, in the translated sentence the modifier *vetro* (glass) appears before the noun *cuvette* (cuvette). To think that the translator, a native speaker of Italian, is not familiar with this rule would be preposterous. So how can we account for this striking case of zero shift? My hypothesis is that just like the English language is constantly ‘Italianized’ through contact, the Italian language is also manipulated to reduce the distance that separates it from English. This type of linguistic manipulation is not always the product of a conscious desire to bridge the gaps between languages. Rather, it appears to operate at an unconscious level. As bilinguals draw from the resources offered by two different systems, they produce interlanguages in which features of two different languages appear to coexist. Zero shifts like the one described above are not uncommon in spoken communication between non-native speakers of English, but the fact that it was not identified and corrected by the translator even after a thorough revision of the first draft tells us a story of how the Italian language might slowly change in response to the growing influence of the English language.

Other examples that show the translators' readiness to hybridize languages are the rendering of *video content* with the calque *contenuti video*, rather than the more idiomatic and economic *video*; the literal rendering of *YouTube is a social platform* as *YouTube è una piattaforma sociale*, which replaces the more common borrowing *social network*; the borrowing of the word *latex*—*lattice* in Italian—in the expression *palloncino di latex (latex balloon)*; the literal rendering of *electronic knowledge* with the unconventional *la conoscenza elettronica*; the awkward phrasing *non innalzate una tenda* for *don't erect the tent* in a context in which Italians typically use the collocation *montare una tenda (mount/build a tent)*; the borrowing of words like *set* in expressions like *questo set di istruzioni (This set of instructions)*, or *location*. At times, syntactic structures that are typical of English are calqued into the Italian language regardless of the jarring effects obtained, as in the case of the sentence head *Here are some important questions*, rendered literally with *Qui ci sono alcune questioni*, a very unconventional sentence in Italian. In one case, a translator opted to preserve a specific cultural reference to the Walmart store chain as the place where readers could buy products needed to complete a task. The problem with this solution is that there are no Walmart stores in Italy. Once again, the establishment of good communication channels might have prevented this error, which can be imputed to the fact that the writer failed to see Walmart as a typically American institution, while the translator did not think of running a quick internet search to determine whether Walmart has stores in Italy. At the Italian end, a possible solution would have been to render Walmart with the major hypermarket chains Carrefour or Auchan.

The extended example that follows illustrates how zero shifts can be caused by the choice, on the part of writers, to invert the logical order theme→rheme or known→new. Following the terminology of the Prague school of linguists, Halliday and Matthiessen (2004)

use the term Theme to designate the element which serves as the point of departure of the message. The function of the Theme is to locate and orient the clause within its context. The remainder of the message, the part in which the Theme is developed, is the Rheme. Halliday explains how a Theme can be announced explicitly, by means of some expression, such as *with regard to . . .*, *about . . .*; *as for . . .*; these expressions, Halliday continues, have the effect of focusing the Theme (p. 67). Focusing the theme is particularly important in technical communication, when readers need to clearly grasp the topic of a direction, and what they need to do about the topic, i.e. what kind of action they need to perform with reference to the issue identified in the topic. In my experience as a teacher of English as a foreign language, I have often observed a tendency on the part of learners to disambiguate the Theme of their message by starting a sentence with *about*, e.g. *About Amy, how is she doing?* This explicitation tactic has been often observed in conversations in English as a lingua franca, but it is rather unusual in conversation between two native speakers of English. Through direct instruction, teachers of technical communication should invite students to appreciate the strategic value of this type of linguistic realizations when it comes to reduce linguistic ambiguity.

Example 1: From instructions *How to create a YouTube Channel / Come creare un canale YouTube*

EN: You will need to create a new Gmail address by selecting the blue button if you do not have one.

ITA: Cliccando sul pulsante blu, avrai bisogno di creare un nuovo indirizzo Gmail, se non ne hai uno.



EN (back translation): By clicking on the blue button, you will need to create a new Gmail address, if you do not have one

Google Translate version: By clicking on the blue button, you'll need to create a new Gmail address if you have one.

Comment: The sentence in Italian is stilted, but understandable for an expert user of Italian. The same cannot be said for Google Translate, which works by drawing from vast banks of existing parallel translations, searching for patterns in language use. The Google Translate rendering of the Italian sentence back into English is inaccurate. In contrast, when the Italian sentence is reformulated so that the Theme appears at the beginning—*Se non ne hai uno, puoi creare un nuovo indirizzo gmail cliccando sul pulsante blu*—Google Translate can accurately render the sentence in English. This shows that by placing the Theme at the beginning of sentence and following the logical sequence known→new, speakers and writers can make a sentence translation-ready in both English and Italian. By reformulating the original sentence by having the Theme come first—*If you do not have a Gmail address, you will need to create a new one by clicking on the blue button*—the author would have facilitated a more idiomatic rendering in Italian. Even Google Translate can perfectly render this revised version of the original sentence into the clear and idiomatic version: *Se non si dispone di un indirizzo Gmail, è necessario crearne uno nuovo cliccando sul pulsante blu.*

## 5.5. Rhetorical shifts

Rhetorical shifts are shifts that cannot be explained by differences between what languages must say. For example, in Italian you do have to assign gender to words such as *table*

and *chair*; there is no way around this requirement. Italian is also a nonagentive language that allows constructions such as *si è rotto il vaso* (*the vase broke* or *the vase broke itself*), whereas English speakers tend to prefer transitive constructions like *Mario broke the vase* even for accidents. It is these differences between what languages can, and in certain cases, must say, that often call for translation shifts whose function is to establish a dynamic equivalence between STs and TTs. In contrast, a rhetorical shift is not imposed by the asymmetries between two languages. Rather, rhetorical shifts are due to considerations of the cultural and rhetorical appropriateness of the meanings being conveyed.

A qualitative study of pairs of units of translation shows that the most common type of rhetorical shift is the shift in emphasis. The examples below show how English writers and Italian translators often disagree on what contexts and directions call for emphasis.

Example 1: From instructions *How to Extract Blood from a Canine Jugular Vein* / *Come prelevare sangue da una vena giugulare canina*

EN: A *necessary* procedure utilized in vet...

ITA: Una delle procedure *fondamentali* utilizzate in veterinaria...

EN (back translation): One of the *fundamental* procedures utilized in vet...

Comment: Instead of using the equivalent of *necessary* in Italian, i.e. *necessarie*, the translator opted for a more dramatic rendering of the original word perhaps to capture the attention of the reader, or to emphasize the importance of the procedure so that readers will be careful as they complete the tasks described.

Example 2: From instructions *How to grow a vegetable garden* / *Come realizzare un orto*

EN: Terraced hill sides are *suitable* for a garden.

ITA: I pendii di colline a terrazza sono *perfetti* per il giardinaggio.

EN (back translation): Terraced hill sides are *perfect* for gardening.

Comment: There is a perfect Italian equivalent for *suitable* (i.e. *adatti*) but the translator preferred to maximize effect through the use of the more incisive adjective *perfetti* (*perfect*). Interestingly, from the perspective of the Italian translator, even a technical document needs to engage the reader through emphatic descriptions.

Example 3: From instructions *How to grow a vegetable garden / Come realizzare un orto*

EN: Start with plants that are more *difficult to kill*.

ITA: Inizia con piante che *muoiono meno facilmente*.

EN (back translation): Start with plants that do not easily die.

Comment: In this case the Italian student sent an inquiry to the American student to ask about the use of the verb *kill* in a context that does not seem to ‘invite’ such a charged word. The author explained that the use of *kill* in this context would not surprise American readers in that it is relatively conventional. The translator accepted the explanation but made a strong case for the need to resort to functional (rather than formal) equivalence in the target text for reasons that have to do with cultural appropriateness and reader expectations in the target locale. The American student kept the word *kill* in the original, while the translator opted for the litotic expression *plants that don’t easily die*.

On a superficial analysis, these three examples and other similar shifts that can be identified throughout the corpus might suggest that Italian translators have a tendency to increase the emphasis and impact of explanations and directions. But a more in-depth study of rhetorical shifts in emphasis reveals that there are contexts in which translators are ready to diminish emphasis by mitigating the force of statements in contexts that are unfamiliar to them—life in the outdoors, for example. Individuals living in southern Italy are likely to spend warm spring and summer days at the beach, rather than hiking or camping in the woods. Because they do not see how exciting and challenging camping can be—the whole experience is just unfamiliar to them—they tend to water down what they perceive to be hyperbolic statements concerning survival strategies in the outdoors. The examples below, from the instructions *Making rope from tree bark* (*Come fare una corda con la corteccia di un albero*) perfectly capture this attitude:

Example 4:

EN: *Survival* scenario

ITA: Situazione di *difficoltà*

EN (back translation): *Situation of difficulty*

Example 5:

EN: You now have another *survival* skill that may come in useful

ITA: Avrete imparato qualcosa che *può esservi utile*

EN (back translation): You will have learnt something that *could come in handy*.

Rhetorical shifts might also be caused by a tendency on the part of translators to replace inanimate agents with living agents. Due to the small size of the corpus, it is not possible to generalize based on the few cases identified. However, these limited findings show possible directions for future research in the area of descriptive translation studies, cross-cultural rhetorics, and international technical communication. It is important to keep in mind that the present study is exploratory in nature: My primary goal is to identify patterns in the use of translation shifts that could be further investigated through the creation of bigger corpora. The examples below illustrate examples of how inanimate agents are replaced with living agents in two different pairs of instructions.

Example 1: From instructions *How to grow a vegetable garden / Come realizzare un orto*

EN: The amount of water *this garden has access to*.

ITA: La quantità d'acqua *da fornire all'orto*.

EN (back translation): the amount of water that needs to be provided to the garden

Comment: In this case, the translator indirectly reintroduced human agency by using the infinitive construction *da fornire*. Because a literal translation would be perfectly appropriate here, the translator's rendering is marked. Translators rarely go through the trouble of changing the structure of the sentence unless they believe that the original phrasing is not effective in the target locale.

Example 2: From instructions *How to Extract Blood from a Canine Jugular Vein / Come prelevare sangue da una vena giugulare canina*

EN: You will want to immediately place the cap back on your needle *to prevent it from poking anyone else*.

ITA: Reinserire immediatamente il cappuccino sull'ago *per evitare che qualcun'altro si possa tagliare*.

EN (back translation): Immediately place the cap back to avoid that *somebody else can cut himself*.

Comment: As in example 1 above, agency is transferred from the needle to the indefinite pronoun *qualcuno*, always used to replace human subjects. It cannot go unnoticed, here, that the solution adopted by the Italian translator unwittingly introduces a tinge of sexist language in the message, considering that *qualcun'altro* can only refer to masculine agents.

## CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

### 6.1. Writing and translation as integrated and iterative processes

The in-depth qualitative study of the parallel corpora compiled for this research revealed that there is a certain uniformity of practice in the translation of instructions from English into Italian. Non-professional translators tend to use implicitation more than they use explicitation, and particularization more than generalization. This means that translators are very careful to enhance clarity and accuracy at the level of the word, but give high priority to economy of expression, rather than explicitation, at the level of the sentence. This attitude might have something to do with writing pedagogy in Italy, and the emphasis that instructors place on avoiding repetition and redundancy for the sake of variety of expression. In particular, translators appeared to be focused on improving the cohesion of the source texts in two different ways: through a more extensive use of pronouns, and the transformation of compound sentences into complex sentences to improve the flow of their writing. There is certainly more attention to style in traditional Italian writing pedagogy, with many high school teachers keen on having students focus on form and appropriateness of expression as the most important factors of writing. The separation of ‘higher order concerns’ (invention, arrangement) and ‘lower order concerns’ (style), taken for granted in the literature of English composition, is extraneous to Italian writing pedagogy. A spelling mistake, a poor word choice, and a garbled or convoluted sentence are marked in red in the essays produced by Italian high school students, which results in their understanding of writing as a bundle of style and content.

While Italian students’ attention to style and economy of expression is certainly laudable, when it comes to translating a technical document they should follow a different set of priorities.

A careful assessment of the rhetorical situation should prompt them to concentrate on the elimination or reduction of ambiguity, rather than using too much time to ponder questions of stylistic fluidity and cohesion. Similarly, translators should understand that repetition is not a taboo in technical communication. Far from it: Consistency in the use of terminology is one of the primary features of specialized and controlled languages. A typical pattern that was identified in the corpus of target texts is a lack of consistency in the rendering of technical words. Whereas the writers appeared very careful to use one word for one precise referent throughout the instructions, the translators creatively offered an ample range of synonyms to designate the same referent. While there is certainly room for creativity in technical communication, especially when it comes to simplifying complex concepts for lay audiences, monoreferentiality remains a key feature of usable documentation.

To recapitulate, non-professional translators appear to be more focused on stylistic issues than clarity issues. A clear pattern emerges from the analysis of pairs of STs and TTs: A tendency to improve the flow and word choice of the ST at the expense of attention to clarity at the sentence level and consistency at the level of word choice. Rather than expanding the STs, a typical strategy adopted by more experienced translators to disambiguate and localize meaning, students of translation tend to resort to implicitation to avoid repetitions and redundancy. This means that instructors of technical translation in Italy should invite students to pay more attention to the rhetorical situation and the constraints of different genres and specialized languages. On the other hand, it is also true that some of the repetitions and redundancies found in the STs appeared to do very little in terms of enhancing the clarity of content. Technical writers should keep in mind that translation service providers often charge per number of words. When



clarity and accuracy are not sacrificed, economy of expression can reduce translation costs for technical documentation.

These problems of calibration between faithfulness and appropriateness, precision and economy of expression should be resolved through a more intense collaborative work between writers and translators. The quality of the bilingual documentation compiled in the two corpora was negatively impacted by the translators' tendency to oscillate between different translation strategies that were not always selected for the purpose of improving the usability of the documentation in the target locale. Because both writing and translation were not always seen as iterative processes that require collaboration and constant negotiation of meaning, STs and TTs often appear, so to say, disconnected; instead of heading straight toward the goal of accessibility and usability, the two texts appear to have slightly different goals, usability in the case the English texts, stylistic appropriateness in the case of the Italian texts. This disconnect between STs and TTs, which is due to the influence of different pedagogical, rhetorical and cultural traditions, could be mitigated if writing and translation were understood as iterative processes that can be more tightly integrated through the establishment of feedback loops. Good UX is contextual: Translators should be invited to take part in the development/writing process, rather than hired a posteriori to localize products/texts that they do not understand. In other words, translators should be invited to contribute to the creation of technical documentation during all stages of development, so that they can fully understand what writers intend to do with language and why. I believe that we can obtain quality localization only when authors and translators negotiate content in a cyclical, iterative way.

This idea of collaboration and shared authorship is at the very foundation of the philosophy of hospitable writing, which I consider an ethical imperative in both technical and

non-technical communication. There is no doubt that a capacity to be hospitable readers and writers is a central ethical dimension of being literate in our times. Through iterative and cyclical collaboration, the production of multilingual documentation connects individuals and groups in non-hierarchical relationships; encourages students and professionals to elaborate strategies for mediation and accommodation; and provides access to knowledge and information to an ample range of audiences. In particular, technical documentation conceived to be used by individuals from different backgrounds should be the product of cycles of negotiations between authors and an ample range of audiences. It is not by chance that among the central tenets of technical communication are user-analysis (Redish, 2010; Barnum & Redish, 2011) and participatory design, understood as central moves of an invitational rhetoric that involves users at all stages of product or content development. In this redefined scene of shared ‘authorship,’ translators can be seen as prototypical users/receivers who are also producers of meaning, and translation as an act of cultural mediation enacted through the negotiation of meaning making. Translators can help development teams to understand what type of cultural differences are relevant for user experience design, how much language matters in design, why linguistic design is important (Quesenbery & Szuc, 2012), and, most importantly, what shifts and adjustments are necessary to tailor digital products to specific locales.

## **6.2. The stories told by zero shifts and rhetorical shifts**

As concerns zero shifts, due to the limited size of the corpus it is not possible to account for their occurrence in the corpus of TTs. They certainly provide evidence for a tendency, on the part of translators, to hybridize languages at both the lexical and the grammatical levels. The English language, in particular, appears to exercise a strong pressure on the Italian language,

which results in renderings that exhibit features of both languages. Countless studies in sociolinguistics have shown how languages change through contact. The histories of all languages are histories of change and evolution. And yet, some language academies see it as their mission to contain these changes with the goal of preserving the purity of the prestige standard. Article 24 of the 1635 statute of the French Academy (l'Académie française) states: "La principale fonction de l'Académie sera de travailler, avec tout le soin et toute la diligence possibles, à donner des règles certaines à notre langue et à la rendre pure, éloquente et capable de traiter les arts et les sciences." The most important function of the Academy is to 'promulgate' the rules of the French language so that this language can remain as *pure* and immaculate as a blanket of freshly fallen snow. The "Bas-Lauriol law" and the "Toubon law" further strengthened the role of French through prescriptive regulations on usage. This is a dangerous attitude. By placing emphasis on the idea one nation-one language, governments facilitate the spread of intolerance and close-mindedness, and promote what Ingrid Piller (2011) and Michael Billig (1995) call 'banal nationalism.' The goals of the French Academy are clearly anachronistic. No academy can stop or control the evolution of a natural language. No Academy can control the creative manipulation of expressive resources on the parts of diverse users of natural languages, especially in the information age.

A final observation on zero shifts, before we move on to rhetorical shifts. Even if it is extremely difficult to understand what causes a zero shift, the present study identified what seems to be a promising direction of research with reference to sentence structure and the arrangement of Theme and Rheme. Translators seemed to encounter problems when processing sentences that did not follow the logical sequence known information→ new information. In particular, research could focus on different ways of focusing the Theme to determine which

strategy better prepares a text for translation. Research in this specific area of interlinguistic mediation would also be important to bridge translation studies with the constantly expanding body of research on English as a lingua franca as one of the most important spoken languages of intercultural communication.

Rhetorical shifts proved to be the most interesting phenomena of cultural mediation observed in the corpus. Like all the other types of shifts, rhetorical shifts tell stories not only about cultural differences, but also about strategies that we all might use to transcend these differences and find common ground. More than quantitative studies of how cultures differ based on arbitrarily selected and broadly defined values such as individualism and collectivism, descriptive translation studies offer thick descriptions of how cultural and rhetorical traditions influence, but do not determine, the way in which translators adjust form and content for a new locale. It is important, here, to reiterate the idea that our culture cannot be understood, following Hofstede, as the software of the mind that determines our behaviors. While it is certainly true that language and culture influence our perception of the reality, our thoughts and actions, it is also true that human beings have the power to do culture, which often entails playing with multiple identities that tie individuals to diverse contexts, communities, and social structures.

As a way to encourage writers and translators to get to know their respective lifestyles and interests, in 2015 I set up a Facebook group for the Trans-Atlantic and Pacific Project. As students from both sides of the Atlantic posted videos and images, I noticed how the Italian students were eager to meet the expectations of the American students by posting images of delicious foods, while the American students posted photos that showed their exciting life in the outdoors. It is difficult to tell whether all these students consciously decided to present themselves in a way that confirmed assumptions that the two groups had of each other *a priori*.

But I believe that it is fair to interpret these communication and socialization strategies as the students' attempt at doing culture by selecting features of their lifestyle that would not surprise or disorient their interlocutors. It is for the sake of identification that students presented their cultures and constructed their identities without contradicting traditional representations of these identities and cultures.

Students did culture also by manipulating the rhetorical force of statements and directions. Among the most important findings of this research is how translators emphasize or de-emphasize the illocutionary force of descriptions, definitions, and directions, depending on context. Intensifiers were typically added to more neutral descriptions of technical procedures like cardio-pulmonary resuscitation, but also eliminated when actions or procedures being described have less relevance or 'appeal' in the target culture. Because life in the inhospitable outdoors is not particularly appealing, or exciting, to individuals born and raised in the urban environments of southern Italy, what two American students described as survival strategies were demoted to the rank of useful skills to know. A word of caution is necessary here: These shifts in emphasis suggest a general tendency, rather than a clear pattern. Future research on larger corpora could adopt the methods of computational linguistics to obtain more extensive and reliable data on the use of intensifiers in texts translated from English into Italian, just to mention one out of several possibilities for investigation.

The incident of the word *kill*, used in a set of instructions on gardening, also tells a story of how individuals do culture even as they create technical documentation. We should not forget that many of the American students who authored the instructions are also hunters who know how to use a range of guns and rifles, whereas gun-ownership is extremely rare in Italy, where the vast majority of the population condemns hunting as a cruel practice. The act of killing is

more familiar in the American Midwestern prairies and forests than it is in the southern Italian expanses of vines and olive tree cultivations. For this reason, writer and translator could not reach an agreement on the use of the word *kill*: The writer preserved this charged word in the ST, while the translator opted for *plants that are harder to kill* to avoid ‘shocking’ readers in the target locale. The most important story that translation shifts tell us is that rhetorical and cultural traditions play an important part even in the shaping of technical communication. Technical and scientific documentation is rarely neutral and aseptic, but always influenced by discourse conventions and rhetorical traditions that characterize both specific disciplinary areas and different cultural traditions. Even when languages and rhetorical moves are more controlled for the sake of precision and clarity, culture still plays a very important role in the shaping of communication. More than quantitative studies on how cultures, understood as *national* cultures, differ based on vaguely defined values, qualitative studies of collaborative work between writers and translators can shed light on how all human beings do culture both to establish differences, when the goal is the affirmation of group identity, and to transcend differences when the goal is to effectively communicate and establish relationships with diverse audiences and interlocutors.

### **6.3. Cosmopolitanism, hospitable writing, and the dialogic imagination**

What this study reveals is that sensitivity to the range of possible interpretations that a text might trigger at both local and global level is a very important aspect of communication, the more so when it comes to transfer technical information. When subject matter experts create documents that aim at global readers performing activities or completing tasks in precise ways, the main concern becomes the usability of a text. In its turn, usability involves, and in a way starts with, translatability. Once considered to be a tool for replacing translators, machine

translation (MT) systems are now more widely accepted as a sort of CAT tool that can speed up the translation process. However, MT software cannot accurately process idioms, garbled syntax, unconventional phrasing, and figurative language. In addition, the use of idiomatic forms or opaque jargon-based expressions in technical documents with varying degrees of formality slows down, sometimes considerably, the work of translators who more often than not work with tight deadlines. Along with professional translators, all internet users have access to free statistically-based machine translation services like Google Translate. Macduff Hughes, the engineering director of Google Translate, recently stated that Google Translate attracts 500 million active users every month, across all our platforms (Hardy, 2015). Barak Turovsky, the product leader for Google Translate, revealed that 95 percent of these active users live outside the United States (Dougherty, 2015). With 80 to 90 percent of the web in just 10 languages it is easy to understand how translation is often the only way to access information for many people around the world. What this means is that technical documentation should always be translation ready through the use of controlled or ‘negotiated’ language and rhetorical moves.

The ability to negotiate writing and mediate between the push and pull of different languages and rhetorical traditions signals an attitude of openness that is typical of cosmopolitanism. When we learn how to collaborate with individuals who speak unfamiliar languages, we disrupt the ideological divisiveness predicated on the idea that our identity is determined by our native language, native culture, and national affiliation. The truth is that the limits of the languages we speak and the cultures that we *do* are not the limits of our worlds. Our mother tongue, in particular, is not a prison-house for thought; it does not constrain our ability to reason logically; it does not prevent us from understanding ideas expressed by speakers of other languages. One of the most important goals of the Trans-Atlantic and Pacific Project is to invite

students to mediate between languages, cultures, and rhetorical traditions by developing strategies to connect with individuals and groups with whom they have never interacted before. The challenge for our civilization is to balance a desire for rootedness and belongingness, the need to pin down our identity on one, clearly identified culture, with the need to be open to other possibilities of socialization through a willingness to accept otherness and interact with ‘strangers’ with the goal of transcending differences and find common ground.

Writing pedagogy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should trace new directions for creative agency and collaboration in a connected world. The defining characteristic of a pedagogy informed by cosmopolitan thought is a focus on the dialogic imagination: the coexistence of rival ways of life in the individual experience which incites us to question orthodoxies, interrogate common sense assumptions on culture, language, and identity, and combine contradictory certainties in an effort to think in terms of inclusive oppositions while rejecting the logic of exclusive oppositions. If it would be foolish to deny the importance of serving our local communities, it would be equally foolish to remain confined within the limits of the known, constantly searching for the comfort of the familiar. Rather, we should work to establish connections and appreciate the commonalities between the local and the translocal, the indigenous and the exogenous. Even more importantly, an attitude of openness toward the unfamiliar and a willingness to be engaged in translocal, transcultural, and transnational spheres of human interaction allows us to move beyond essentialist definitions of cultural identity based on the association between standard languages and national character. Human beings are not simply products of language and culture, human beings have the power to *do* culture and shape languages for the sake of accommodation, mutual understanding, and the establishment of relationships based on equality.



Economic globalization has outpaced not only political globalization, but also philosophical cosmopolitanism. The vision of a more integrated world is undermined by a corrosive mix of ideologies that include particularism, nationalism, and authoritarianism. Combined with a lack of job security that now defines the ‘precariat’ as a new social class, the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis in Europe and the recent terrorist attacks in Paris, Brussels, and San Bernardino have created the conditions for a resurgence of xenophobic and racist feelings that charismatic leaders from Europe and the US are exploiting in their rise to power. Research on authoritarianism shows that the contemporaneous perception of social change and physical threats can lead even non-authoritarians into embracing intolerant attitudes and a rhetoric of divisiveness. Just like authoritarianism, ideological nationalism can be seen as a latent force that feeds on social anxiety to incite people to reject outsiders and, with them, social change and cultural transformation. Together, nationalism and authoritarianism conjure up an idea of division that is tied to essentialist ideas of cultural identity as fixed and objective. Conscientious educators need to offset these centrifugal forces by encouraging students to explore the history of cosmopolitan thought, and assess the work and policies of transnational governmental and non-governmental organizations. At the same time, international projects such as TAPP can help students understand what is at stake when they write for a global audience, or collaborate with speakers of other languages in cross-functional teams. Mediation skills can be developed only through contact, provided that students cultivate an attitude of openness that invites hospitable communication practices and curiosity for the new and the different.

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APPENDIX A. PAIRS OF SOURCE TEXTS AND TARGET TEXTS  
INCLUDED IN THE CORPUS

	Source Text In English	Number of words	Target text In Italian	Number of words
Pair 1	How create a YouTube channel	525	Come creare un canale YouTube	445
Pair 2	How to make Dippin' dots	662	Come preparare I Dippin' dots	674
Pair 3	How to make a balloon powered car	974	Come costruire un'automobile a palloncino	944
Pair 4	How to grow a vegetable garden	2561	Come realizzare un orto	2579
Pair 5	Sodlon bicycle computer basic setup	432	Come programmare il ciclomotore Sodlon	463
Pair 6	How to perform CPR	874	Come eseguire un RCP	915
Pair 7	How to Change the Engine Oil in Motorized Vehicles	678	Come cambiare l'olio a un veicolo a motore	668
Pair 8	Making rope from tree bark	570	Come fare una corda con la corteccia di un albero	563
Pair 9	How to make a 3D printed prosthetic Hand	941	Come produrre una protesi per la mano stampata in 3D	955
Pair 10	How to assemble a computer	1198	Come assemblare un computer	1183
Pair 11	How to make a solar powered USB charger	1157	Come costruire un caricatore USB alimentato da energia solare	1152
Pair 12	How to disassemble and clean an AR-15 rifle	1208	Smontare e pulire un fucile AR-15	1219
Pair 13	How to change oil in your car	871	Come cambiare l'olio della tua macchina	883
Pair 14	How to change a tire	641	Come cambiare una gomma	630
Pair 15	How to build an Electromagnet	705	Come costruire un elettromagnete	707
Pair 16	Coleman tent building instructions	621	Istruzioni di montaggio della tenda Coleman	616
Pair 17	How to extract blood from a canine jugular vein	1648	Come prelevare sangue da una vena giugulare canina	1633
Pair 18	How to set up a Tom Tom 50	1279	Come regolare un Tom Tom 50	1286
Pair 19	How to Sharpen Ice Hockey skates	932	Come affilare pattini da Hokey	893
Pair 20	How to perform a full tire check	644	Come eseguire un controllo accurato dello pneumatico	628