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## **Vol 8, No 2 (2016)**

### **Translation and Comics**

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## ***Econocomics: Teaching Translation of Economic and Financial Texts through Comics***

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### **Introduction**

This paper outlines the partial results of a more comprehensive study which assumes that popular genres, such as comics and graphic novels, films and documovies, novels and fiction, can be used for educational purposes, in that they convey knowledge on specialized subjects to a non-expert public. More specifically, the purpose of the research is to find out innovative methodologies and tools to teach languages for special purposes (LSP) to University students attending a two-year MA program in specialized translation. In fact, we assume that the particular narrative style of these genres and their multimodal dimension may represent a breakthrough for the training of students with no knowledge in specialized domains. The use of multimodality, the blending of verbal language and visual signs, as well as of other semiotic systems, is likely to help addressees understand thorny, specialized issues.

As a matter of fact, the use of traditional teaching material, which exclusively relies on the verbal semiotic system, as well as the adoption of conventional training methods, which are mainly prescriptive and instructor-led, often prove to fail as they are unexciting, frustrating and hardly thought-provoking, especially with students who, though endowed with high linguistic skills, have scant or no competence in specialized domains. To face such drawbacks, new genres, including films and comic books, have been introduced in the syllabus, which are concerned with economic and financial topics. The new media are used with a twofold purpose: a) educating students on specialized subjects using media for entertainment; b) enhancing students' practice in translation of multimodal texts.

Some of the results achieved so far are presented in this paper. They show that comic books and graphic novels may be efficient tools to teach economics and finance to non-experts. Using a methodology which integrates studies on verbal and non-verbal language, e.g. cognitive linguistics (Evans and Green) and visual grammar (Kress and Leeuwen, *Reading*), the paper shows that comic strips can help students construct their knowledge of economic concepts and terminology. By contrast, although comics are typically considered a non-professional genre, their interpretation and translation, when they deal with specialized subjects, is not so easy a task as one may expect. Difficulties may be technical, structural and terminological, as the examples given in this paper show.

The paper describes the outcome of two case studies. The first concerns the empirical observation of an English-to-Italian translation of an American comic book, using Kress and Leeuwen's visual grammar and Christiane Nord's strategies. The second refers to the translations produced by the group of MA students who, using functionalist approaches to translation, were asked to localize a sample from an American graphic novel, dealing with the 2008 economic crisis. Both cases show that comics entail important cognitive skills and translation competence, when the subject of the text is economics and finance.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 1 deals with comics from an aesthetic and utilitarian perspective, focusing in particular on the educational role of comics. Section 2 explains the integrated approach used to carry out the study. Sections 3 and 4 illustrate the case studies in detail, and are followed by some concluding comments.

### 1. Comics for Educational Purposes

This section tries to shed light on the status of comics in modern literature. This topic is not new, of course; nonetheless, it deserves some words in order to legitimize the purpose of this paper. The troublesome question we start from concerns the perspective to adopt when talking about comics in order to determine whether they are representative of an aesthetic or of a utilitarian view of art. However, the paper does not claim to carry out a philosophical investigation of comics; rather, it tries to give, by and large, the *rationale* of our study, the important educational role that comics play today. Therefore, some questions arise: Are comics designed for entertainment only? Or, can they also have an educational function (*skopos*)<sup>1</sup>?

So far, much research has acknowledged the status of comics, not only as a “juvenile form of entertainment”, but also as “a highly regarded form of expression—The Ninth Art” (Pilcher and Brooks qtd. in Zanettin, “Comics in Translation” 5). Besides these two purposes, comics for leisure and comics for *art's sake*, a third purpose must be included: comics for education.

Strictly connected to this is an interesting, yet under-researched, niche in studies on comics: the adaptation into comics of specialized subjects. For example, the terms *Graphic Justice* has been coined recently to express the potentialities of comics and graphic fiction to carry out “a critical reflection on the concerns of law and justice” (Giddens 3). As for economics, we can mention Klein and Bauman's *The Cartoon Introduction to Economics: Volume One: Microeconomics*

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<sup>1</sup> The Greek term *Skopos* stands for “aim”, “purpose” was introduced in Translation Theory by Hans Vermeer. Vermeer's work on translation, that he carried on along with Katharina Reiss (Reiss and Vermeer), as well as Holz-Mänttari's Theory of Translational Action, and Christiane Nord's Functionalist Approach to Translation, represent a new turn in the studies on translation theory and practice. Unlike traditional approaches, where the translator's decisions are mainly influenced by the source text, the functionalist approach focuses on the purpose that a translation has to achieve in the target culture, and, as a consequence, on the methods and strategies that must be used in order to achieve that purpose.

(2010) and *The Cartoon Introduction to Economics: Volume Two: Macroeconomics*, two booklets sponsored by the Federal Reserve; the graphic edition of Amity Shlaes's novel *The Forgotten Man: A New History of the Great Depression*, illustrated by Paul Rivoche; Michael Goodwin's *Economix*, illustrated by Dan E. Burr, just to mention a few. By contrast, Italy has no tradition in this sense. Exception made for Davide Pascutti's *Pop economix. Il grande show della finanza che ha innescato la crisi* (2013), other significant examples are mainly translations of American works: *Economix. Per comprendere origini, storia e principi della nostra pazzia economia* (2013), *L'economia a fumetti. La microeconomia*, Vol. 1 (2010), *L'economia a fumetti. La macroeconomia*, Vol. 2 (2012).

In the American context, the use of comic books and graphic novels as a means to support literacy and promote cultural democracy (Green, qtd. in Thomas 40), as well as their suitability "for a variety of instructional settings including art, ELL, and foreign language" (Thomas 46), have a long-standing tradition. *Duck Tales* are emblematic in this sense. From their birth in the 1940s, many of the stories featuring Uncle Scrooge have often touched upon economic subjects: such as Milton Friedman's helicopter drop hypothesis in *A Financial Fable* (1951), branding and market share in *Much Ado About Scrooge* (1987), inflation in *The Land of Trala-la* (1989), just to mention a few.

The European Union, too, has used comics to explain its main issues, policies and activities "in pictures, and not just to children" (<http://bookshop.europa.eu/en/bundles/comics--cbTMOep2Ix19kAAAEvzTkHowsR/>).

The educational purpose of comics has been widely acknowledged and discussed by various authors (Eisner); some have also emphasized the psychological, social and cultural impact that comics can have on readers during a critical historical period, as it occurred with superhero comic books which proliferated during World War II (Lethbridge); others have explored the intercultural scope of educational comics and the problems they pose as genres and in terms of translation (Zanettin, "Comics in Translation"). In comics, words live by images, and vice versa; together, they provide comics with their own grammar, in which the verbal and visual semiotic systems combine.

The particular assemblage of words and images in comics has been discussed by Wolk, according to the Horatian principle of *ut pictura poesis*. In fact, as a form of artistic expression, comics include both the dimension of space, as painting, and the dimension of time, as poetry:

Any particular panel of a comic book can encompass as much space as a person can see at once (projected onto a two-dimensional picture plane), although it usually trims most of that space off with its borders to focus on whatever's important to the narrative.

Time, on the other hand, has to be shaved very thinly to fit in a comic panel, which is generally understood to be an image of a single moment. (Wolk 127)

The movement of time, its flowing, the shift in tenses, are conferred by the narrative style of verbal language, “especially dialogue” (Wolk 129). This view is shared by Bush who, commenting on modern forms of art, including comics, rejects the separation between words and image (Bush 134), and, in line with Rancière, opts for “the constitution of *a shared surface* in place of separate spheres of imitation” (Rancière 105).

In a similar vein, McCloud’s didactic work, *Understanding Comics* (1994), considers comics as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (McCloud 8).

In this brief review of the critical literature about comic books and graphic novels, Eisner deserves special mention with his seminal work, *Comics & Sequential Art*, where the author theorizes and implements the view of comics as a “sequential art”, which combines aesthetic and pedagogical purposes. In the “Foreword”, the author outlines the intention of his work: “to consider and examine the unique aesthetics of Sequential Art as a means of creative expression, a distinct discipline, an art and literary form that deals with the arrangement of pictures or images and words to narrate a story or dramatize an idea” (Eisner 5). The contribution of Eisner’s work to the research on the art of comic books is remarkable. The first important element is the view of comic books as a form of Sequential Art, which combines the spatial dimension of images and the temporal dimension of words:

Comics communicate in a ‘language’ that relies on a visual experience common to both creator and audience. Modern readers can be expected to have an easy understanding of the image-word mix and the traditional deciphering of text. Comics can be called ‘reading’ in a wider sense than that term is commonly applied. (Eisner 7)

The second aspect that Eisner emphasizes is that “the psychological processes involved in viewing a word and an image are analogous. The structures of illustration and of prose are similar” (Eisner 7). The repetitiveness of recognizable images and symbols, to convey the same ideas, provides comics with a ‘language’ of its own, in which forms of expression typical of visual arts (eg. perspective, symmetry, brush stroke) tend to combine with forms of expression typical of literature (eg. grammar, plot, syntax). Therefore, “The reading of the comic book is an act of both aesthetic perception and intellectual pursuit (Eisner 8).

The third significant point in Eisner’s work is the recognition of the pedagogical function in Sequential Art:

Certainly, thoughtful pedagogical concern would provide a better climate for the production of more worthy subject content and the expansion of the medium as a whole. But unless comics address subjects of greater moment how can they hope for serious intellectual review? Great artwork alone is not enough. (Eisner 5)

This paper assumes these three points as yardsticks to illustrate our research on comic books and graphic novels as forms of Sequential Art that call for specific interpretive skills; their use for didactic purposes; and the role they can play in order to teach specialized disciplines.

In the wake of these reflections, this paper tries to explore this view of comics as a form of educational art, focusing, in particular, on the role they can play in order to teach specialized disciplines, and, as a result, provide further reasons that bring them “to the center of the academic debate” (Babic 9-10). Using some samples taken from two comic books concerned with economic issues and their translations, the study is carried out adopting Kress and Leeuwen’s visual grammar, cognitive linguistics and the functionalist approaches to translation.

## **2. Methodology**

Section 2 is intended to provide an overview of the methodology employed in the two case studies. It combines different approaches in linguistics and translation studies; some of them are included in the course syllabus and, as for Case Study 2, were applied by students for the analysis and translation of the strips. Specifically, the comment on the text included in Case Study 1 is based upon Kress and Leeuwen’s social semiotics of visual narrative, as for the analysis of the English source text, and upon the functionalist approaches to translation, as for the analysis of the Italian target text. Case Study 2 gives an account of the students’ achievements and failures in translating a text taken from an American English graphic narrative, and explains how they were guided to improve their outcome. They used the tools of Cognitive Linguistics and the Functionalist Approaches to translation, to carry out their task.

In *Reading Images*, Kress and Leeuwen explain their grammar of visual design, in which the verbal and the visual sign systems contribute to creating the semiotic landscape, i.e. the entirety of meaning-making strategies used in communication. In this regard, they formulate a number of hypotheses, some of which establishing that:

- a) individuals have a range of representational modes to make meaning;
- b) modes of representation are not used separately in communication or representation;
- c) modes of representation involve emotions as well as other cognitive activities;
- d) modes of representation tend to change in accordance with historical events and social contexts. (Kress and Leeuwen 41)



Kress and Leeuwen's visual grammar lays the foundations of a social semiotic theory of communication for which the authors draw upon Halliday's systemic functional grammar (Halliday and Mathiessen). In their first year of the MA course, students had been trained to analyze the *ideational*, *interpersonal* and *textual* metafunctions in written texts. So they were acquainted with such metalinguistic terms as Participants, Processes, Circumstances, Mood, Theme. What they lacked was how to use them, as interpretive tools, in texts combining visual and written signs.

For the sake of brevity, suffice it to say that Halliday's metafunctions represent different choices that can be made, at the semiotic level, to represent the world (*ideational*), the social interactions between the addressers and addressees (*interpersonal*), and the way in which texts are cohesively and coherently organized (*textual*). Such representations can be realized not only verbally, but also visually, e.g. by means of vectors or classifications, in the case of participants and processes at the ideational level; of naturalistic images or diagrams, in the case of interpersonal relations; of different compositional arrangements, e.g. a layout including image plus text, at the textual level. Visual representation can be investigated in terms of narrative processes as well as of conceptual processes (Kress and Leeuwen 42-44).

Narrative processes are "dynamic" processes, which involve "unfolding actions and events, processes of change, transitory spatial arrangements" (Kress and Leeuwen 59). Connections between participants are realized by *vectors*, which may be formed by limbs, bodies, even glances, or lines, with an arrow or any explicit indicator of directionality, in abstract images. The vectors, either directly or indirectly represented, contribute to providing the images with their narration. Following Halliday's classification of processes, Kress and Leeuwen identify Action, Reaction, Mental and Speech Processes. Action and Reaction processes are further distinguished into Transactional and Non-Transactional. Also Circumstances are visually represented and, depending on their function, they may be Locative, of Means, and of Accompaniment. Often, in narrative processes, vectors are accompanied by verbal text, *glosses*, to explain what is visually unclear (Kress and Leeuwen).

Conceptual processes, by contrast, involve "static" and "timeless" relationships of participants to each other and can be of different kinds: *classificational*, e.g. taxonomies based on the superordinate-subordinate relations; *analytical*, e.g. whole-part relations (analytical processes may be of various kinds, including *topographical* and *topological*, i.e. processes that, respectively represent the physical spatial relations and 'logical' relations between participants); and *symbolic*, i.e. processes that "are about what a participant *means* or *is* (Kress and Leeuwen 105).

During their second year, students were also taught to use cognitive maps, and to recognize the difference between *mind* (Buzan) and *conceptual* maps (Novak and Cañas). Both

types make visual communication an easier task; they are visual objects that can transmit the meaning of a message in specific contexts, including the specialized domains (Propp). They contribute to creating what Kress and Leeuwen define as “semiotic landscape”, although with a somewhat different use of taxonomy (16-20). Maps are techniques used to visually represent our knowledge, by establishing logical and semantic relations between a “node” word and other conjoined ideas. These relations are represented by vectors or other figures, which are semantically loaded. As users, our task is to give meaning to these vectors or interpret them; to put that in Hallidayan terms, our goal is to recognize their ideational metafunction. The main purpose of teaching students to build cognitive maps around a term or an expression was to enhance their *encyclopedic* knowledge.

Encyclopedic meaning is one of the four major theses of cognitive linguistics; it maintains that “[W]ords do not represent neatly packaged bundles of meaning (the dictionary view), but serve as ‘points of access’ to vast repositories of knowledge relating to a particular concept or conceptual domain” (Evans and Green 160).

Unlike the conventional dictionary view of meaning, which is mainly term-oriented, concerns sense, relates to semantics and is stored in the mental lexicon, the encyclopedic knowledge is concept-oriented, concerns extra-linguistic reference, relates to pragmatics and is governed by principles of language use (Evans and Green). Such a view is strictly related to the cognitive linguistics’ assumptions that language must be investigated in its context of use and, as a consequence, that there is no difference between semantics and pragmatics, as traditional linguistic theories claim.

The three other theses on which the cognitive approach to linguistic meaning is based, are: the thesis of embodied cognition, the thesis of the conceptual structure of meaning, and the thesis that meaning is conceptualization. The thesis of embodied cognition claims that “[T]he nature of conceptual organization arises from bodily experience, so part of what makes conceptual structure meaningful is the bodily experience with which it is associated” (Evans and Green 157). In other words, our language tends to reify the external world as it is experienced by our senses. A major device to conceptualize the bodily experience is the metaphorical projection of image schema onto abstract conceptual domains:

The idea behind metaphorical projection is that meaningful structure from bodily experience gives rise to concrete concepts like the CONTAINER image schema, which in turn serves to structure more abstract conceptual domains like STATES. In this way, conceptual structure is embodied. (Evans and Green 158)



Language is organized in terms of an underlying system of metaphors, which consists of conventional mappings between concrete and abstract domains. These metaphoric mappings are based on image schemas, namely concepts built on our sensory-perceptual experience of the world. Image schemas provide the concrete basis for metaphoric mappings which, according to Kövecses, include domains relating to the “HUMAN BODY, ANIMALS, PLANTS, FOOD, and FORCES<sup>2</sup>” (Kövecses).

As it will be shown below, this concrete, “physical” nature of metaphors makes them an important instrument in the construction of the visual and verbal meaning in comics. Using the methodology of cognitive linguistics, scholars (Cohn; Stamenković and Tasić), have focused on this significant role of metaphors in comic books. In particular, Bounegru and Forceville, who have devoted a paper to the use of multimodal metaphors in a corpus of comics representing the global financial crisis, demonstrate that the frequent use of visual and verbal metaphors does not depend on the subject dealt with, but “[i]t is the genre as a whole that invites metaphors, not just the topic of the financial crisis” (14). It may be assumed that comics is the *habitat* of metaphor.

According to cognitive linguistics, metaphors underlie the conceptual structure of meaning: “([T]he meanings conventionally associated with words and other linguistic units) can be equated with concepts” (Evans and Green 158). Thus, visual meanings, too, equate concepts. This thesis is strictly related to the fourth thesis: Meaning construction is conceptualization, which is defined as “a dynamic process whereby linguistic units serve as prompts for an array of conceptual operations and the recruitment of background knowledge” (Evans and Green 162).

These principles, outlined by cognitive linguistics, in which conceptual mappings are the main device to build encyclopedic knowledge, proved efficient for the purpose of this paper, for at least two reasons. First, its interpretive tools are suitable for investigating terminology in the economic and financial domain, using a concept-oriented, rather than a term-oriented approach. Second, cognitive linguistics has much in keeping with functional approaches to language, which prove to be useful also when we are concerned with the translation of comics.

In this regard, arguing about educational comics, Zanettin points out that:

[S]ome of them are designed for plurilingual distribution and are thus ‘globalized’, for instance by avoiding the use of culture-specific elements in the pictures. Other comics are instead only later ‘localized’, i.e. stripped of their original characterizing features and adapted to a new target group. The problem of conveying special factual knowledge in a popularized shape is certainly often an issue when translating educational comics, but

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<sup>2</sup> “The use of small capital letters indicates that the particular wording does not occur in language as such, but it underlies conceptually all the metaphorical expressions listed underneath it” (Kövecses 4).

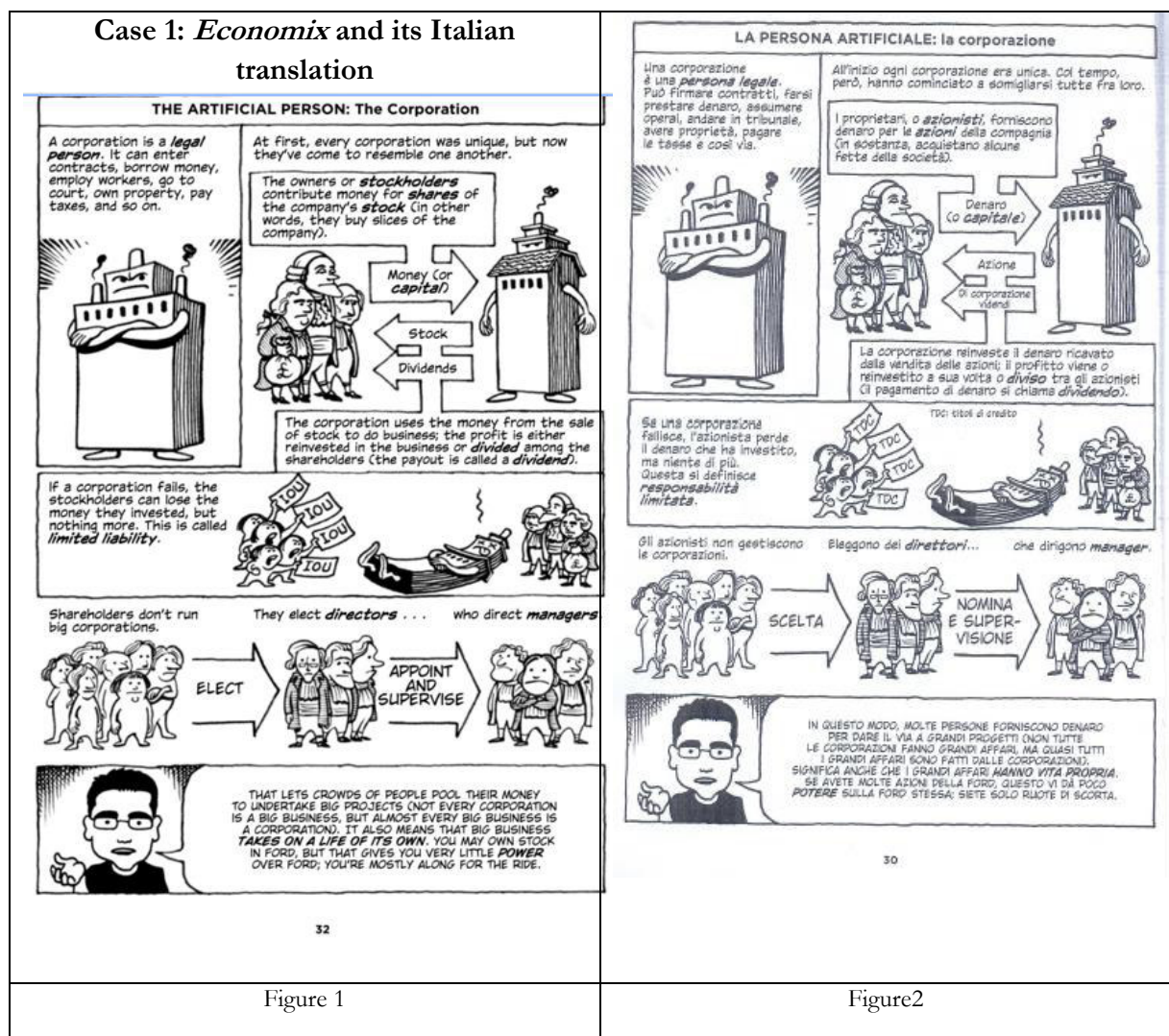
translation decisions and strategies also depend to a large extent on social and political factors. (“Comics in Translation” 26)

In other words, depending on the *skopos*, or the goal that comics are intended to achieve in the target culture, our translation strategies must vary. Indeed, the translation of comics is a more complicated issue than this, since it entails problems at different levels, such as variety of genres and topics, juxtaposition of sign systems. In particular, the status of comics as “visual story-telling” (Eisner), i.e. the combination of visual and verbal signs, as well as its cultural embeddedness, whereby the same sign can be differently interpreted in different cultures, impose constraints on translation. Comics cannot be analyzed in linguistic terms only, while disregarding the role of images; it is the interaction of verbal and non-verbal languages which contributes to the meaning-making of comic books and graphic novels. Therefore, translation must concern the semiotic system as a whole. Images can be manipulated just as words are: “When comics are published in translation they are often manipulated at both textual and pictorial level [sic]. Such modifications may range from the omission of panels, or even pages, to the retouching or redrawing of (part of) the layout and content” (Zanettin, “Comics” 39).

As a result, specific strategies are needed to translate comic books. In this sense, the functionalist approaches seem to be the most adequate. Thus, to carry out the analysis of translation problems in both case studies, Nord’s view of translation as a “purposeful activity” (1997), which students had been trained to use in their first MA year, was chosen.

According to Nord, “the translator’s decisions in the translation process should be governed by the function or communicative purpose the target text (TT) is intended to fulfill in a particular target-culture situation” (Nord 41). More specifically, the functionalist approach implies a prospective view of translation as being an activity intended to achieve a particular communicative purpose in the target audience, taking into account and trying to fulfill their needs and expectations. Nord provides a dynamic model of “text”. This is an “offer of information” for translators who, in order to make their decisions on strategies, rely on the translation brief, i.e. the set of guidelines about the (intended) text function(s); the TT addressee(s), the (prospective) time and place of text reception; the medium over which the text will be transmitted; and, the motive for the production or reception of the text. It is no longer the source-text that guides the translator’s decisions but the overall communicative purpose the target text is supposed to achieve in the target culture. According to this perspective, a translation can be documentary or instrumental, i.e. the TT can be aimed at producing in the target language (TL) a kind of document of a communicative interaction in which a source culture (SC) sender communicates with a SC audience via the source text (ST) under SC conditions; or, the TT can be aimed at producing in the TL an instrument for a new communicative interaction between the SC sender and a TC audience, using the ST as a model?

We choose either translation strategy depending on the communicative function that the *translatum*, that is the translated text, shall play in the target culture. A *documentary* translation will be useful if the purpose of the *translatum* is metatextual; by contrast, the translator will adopt an *instrumental* translation<sup>3</sup>, if the purpose of the *translatum* is phatic, referential, expressive or appellative. As texts are not normally intended for one function only, both strategies can be used at the same time.



<sup>3</sup> Nord classifies translations according to the target text function; she distinguishes between *documentary* and *instrumental* translation: “The first aims at reproducing in the target language a kind of *document* of (certain aspects of) a communicative interaction in which a source-culture sender communicates with a source-culture audience via the source text under source-culture conditions. The second aims at producing in the target language an *instrument* for a new communicative interaction between the source-culture sender and a target-culture audience, using (certain aspects of) the source text as a model” (Nord 47).

THE ARTIFICIAL PERSON: The Corporation	LA PERSONA ARTIFICIALE: la corporazione
A corporation is a <b>legal person</b> . It can enter own property, pay taxes, and so on.	Una corporazione è una <b>persona legale</b> . Può firmare contratti, farsi prestare dei proprnaro, assumere operai, andare in tribunale, avere proprietà, pagare le tasse e così via
At first, every corporation was unique, but now they've come to resemble one another.	All'inizio ogni corporazione era unica. Col tempo, però, hanno cominciato a somigliarsi tutte fra loro.
The owners or <b>stockholders</b> contribute money for <b>shares</b> of the company's <b>stock</b> (in other words, they buy slices of the company).	I proprietari, o <b>azionisti</b> , forniscono denaro per le <b>azioni</b> della compagnia (in sostanza, acquistano alcune fette della società).
Money (or <b>capital</b> )	Denaro (o <b>capitale</b> )
Stock	Azione
Dividends	Dividendi
The corporation uses the money from the sale of stock to do business; the profit is either reinvested in the business or <b>divided</b> among the shareholders (the payout is called a <b>dividend</b> ).	La corporazione reinveste il denaro ricavato dalla vendita delle azioni; il profitto viene o reinvestito a sua volta o <b>diviso</b> tra gli azionisti (il pagamento di denaro si chiama <b>dividendo</b> ).
If a corporation fails, the stockholders can lose the money they invested, but nothing more. This is called <b>limited liability</b> .	Se una corporazione fallisce, l'azionista perde il denaro che ha investito, ma niente di più. Questa si definisce <b>responsabilità limitata</b> .
IOU	TDC
	TDC: titoli di credito
Shareholders don't run big corporations.	Gli azionisti non gestiscono le corporazioni.
ELECT	SCELTA
They elect <b>directors</b> ...	Eleggono dei <b>direttori</b> ...
APPOINT AND SUPERVISE	NOMINA E SUPERVISIONE
who direct <b>managers</b> .	che dirigono <b>manager</b> .
THAT LETS CROWDS OF PEOPLE POOL THEIR MONEY TO UNDERTAKE BIG PROJECTS (NOT EVERY CORPORATION IS A BIG BUSINESS, BUT ALMOST EVERY BIG BUSINESS IS A CORPORATION). IT ALSO MEANS	IN QUESTO MODO, MOLTE PERSONE FORNISCONO DENARO PER DARE IL VIA A GRANDI PROGETTI (NON TUTTE LE CORPORAZIONI FANNO GRANDI AFFARI, MA QUASI TUTTI I GRANDI AFFARI SONO FATTI DALLE CORPORAZIONI). SIGNIFICA ANCHE

THAT BIG BUSINESS <b>TAKES ON A LIFE OF ITS OWN</b> . YOU MAY OWN STOCK IN FORD, BUT THAT GIVES YOU VERY LITTLE <b>POWER</b> OVER FOOD; YOU'RE MOSTLY ALONG FOR THE RIDE.	CHE I GRANDI AFFARI <b>HANNO VITA PROPRIA</b> . SE AVETE MOLTE AZIONI DELLA FORD, QUESTO VI DÀ POCO <b>POTERE</b> SULLA FORD STESSA; SIETE SOLO RUOTE DI SCORTA.
( <i>Economix: How Our Economy Works (and Doesn't Work)</i> , in <i>Words and Pictures</i> 32)	( <i>Economix. Per comprendere origini, storia e principi della nostra pazzia economia</i> 30)

The analysis carried out in Case Study 1 is based on the comparison between a text taken from an English comic books (Figure 1) and its translation to Italian (Figure 2). The objective of this analysis is to show how comic books and their translation, whatever the source and target language, can be useful, to spread knowledge about a specialized subject, such as economics and finance, to non-expert readers. *Economix: How and Why Our Economy Works (And Doesn't Work)*, in *Words and Pictures* is a graphic narrative written by Michael Goodwin and illustrated by Dan E. Burr. It tries to describe the story of the economy, from the rise of capitalism to modern times. The text is also available in Italian translation, with the title *Economix. Per comprendere origini, storia e principi della nostra pazzia economia*.

The methodology adopted to discuss the texts is illustrated in the preceding section. The *skopos* of both the ST and the TT is educational; they aim at educating or simply informing the final readers on a specific subject, in this case *corporations*. By way of introduction, it must be pointed out that the addressees of the ST and TT have different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This aspect is not negligible since the American text is strongly rooted in the historical, economic and social background of the USA, and terminology, inevitably, tends to mirror these distinctive peculiarities: *corporation*, *stockholder*, *stock* and *share*, *IOU*, are just the most outstanding ones. Graphically, the Italian text displays a slight variation in the frame in the middle of the page: the addition of the gloss “TDC: titoli di credito” [Credit Instrument]. This is dealt with below.

To begin, structural and syntactic differences are discussed. It must be pointed out that, notwithstanding the cultural differences, the American and Italian languages tend to share some metaphors, both written and visual. A corporation is viewed as an anthropomorphic building that gets angry, shows off its physical strength and can collapse. In terms of visual grammar, it is represented as a vertically elongated square, thus “creating a more pronounced distinction between top and bottom, and hence a bias towards hierarchy, and towards ‘opposition’ generally (what is most important or otherwise dominant goes on top, what is less important or dominant is relegated to the bottom)” (Kress and Leeuwen 57). In the Italian version, no change is made to the pound symbol on the bag in the hand of one of the men in the top right side of the page. It can be assumed that localization is avoided since the scene is set in Eighteenth-century Scotland.



On the structural level, the translator changes verbs into nouns, as is the case for “elect” and “appoint and supervise” in the arrows, which are rendered with “*scelta*” and “*nomina e supervisione*”. In terms of cohesion, the English text opts for grammatical cohesion: an example is the use of the demonstrative reference “THAT” in the last frame of the page (where the story-teller<sup>4</sup> is illustrated). By contrast, in the Italian translation, cohesion is achieved by means of the prepositional phrase “*IN QUESTO MODO*” [In this way], used as a logodeictic. Another interesting concern is represented by the Italian translation of the English noun group “BIG BUSINESS”, which is rendered with “*GRANDI AFFARI*” [big deals]. In fact, in this specific case, “BUSINESS” is probably used as a countable noun, which stands for *company*, rather than as an uncountable noun, which means *trade* or *concerns*. This inevitably involves a discussion about the use of CORPORATION in the ST and its translation in the TT. A comparison between the description of CORPORATION in the comic book and the definition provided by Investopedia shows that, indeed, they sound very similar:

A legal entity that is separate and distinct from its owners. Corporations enjoy most of the rights and responsibilities that an individual possesses; that is, a *corporation has the right to enter into contracts, loan and borrow money, sue and be sued, hire employees, own assets and pay taxes*. ([www.investopedia.com](http://www.investopedia.com))

The most important aspect of a corporation is *limited liability*. That is, *shareholders* have the right to participate in the profits, through *dividends* and/or the appreciation of *stock*, but are not held personally liable for the company's debts.

A corporation is created (incorporated) by a group of shareholders who have ownership of the corporation, represented by their holding of common stock. Shareholders elect a board of *directors* (generally receiving one vote per share) who appoint and oversee *management* of the corporation. Although a corporation does not necessarily have to be for profit, the vast majority of corporations are setup with the goal of providing a *return for its shareholders*. When you purchase stock you are becoming part owner in a corporation. (*My emphasis*)

Although the texts belong to two different genres, i.e. a comic book, on the one hand, and an encyclopaedia, on the other, which, by tradition, are considered poles apart and, although they are likely to address audiences with different levels of competence, they do not seem to display any difference at the terminological level. In the comic strip, the use of two interacting semiotic systems, the visual and the verbal, contribute to explaining and simplifying the meaning of corporations and its origins. The semiotic landscape (Kress and Leeuwen) is built on both systems, with visual metaphors, including vectors, playing a critical role in the meaning-making process, in a manner which looks very much like concept mapping. This enhances the readers' understanding and improves their cognition on the economic subject matter.

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<sup>4</sup> The story-teller is Michael Goodwin himself.



The Italian translation shows that both documentary and instrumental strategies have been used. The use of the glosses, such as “TDC: titoli di credito”, testifies to the need of explaining concepts which are not supposed to be taken for granted by readers. It is a strategy typical of informative and educational text types, where the end-user is assumedly unfamiliar with the subject or needs to be educated<sup>5</sup>. As a result, the use of an explanatory note is needed.

In both the ST and the translation, the representation is built by means of both narrative and conceptual structures. Action processes prevail; the story-teller, at the bottom of the page, is performing a Reactional Process:

When the vector is formed by an eyeline, by the direction of the glance of one or more of the represented participants, the process is *reactional*, and we will speak not of Actors, but of Reacters, and not of Goals, but of *Phenomena*. The Reacter, the participant who does the looking, must necessarily be human, or a human-like animal – a creature with visible eyes that have distinct pupils, and capable of facial expression. The Phenomenon may be formed either by another participant, the participant at whom or which the Reacter is looking [...]. (Kress and Leeuwen 67)

But, he also works as a Speaker of a speech process, visually represented by the thought balloon.

Both the narrative and conceptual processes combine in the formation of the encyclopaedic knowledge in readers. In particular, the visual narrative devices, such as vectors and other visual metaphors, clarify the meaning of some concepts, which is only partially represented by words, for example the relationship between a corporation and its stockholders, or the difference between “share” and “stock”<sup>6</sup>, which the Italian translation, probably owing to the spatial constraints of the caption, nullifies by using simply “azioni” [shares] for both terms.

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<sup>5</sup> The abbreviation TDC for titoli di credito in Italian is quite unusual; generally, it occurs in the form T.D.C. or TdC, rather than TDC. Moreover, it must be searched in pair with “titoli di credito” to be disambiguated.

<sup>6</sup> In today's financial markets, *stocks* and *shares* are used synonymously. In fact, there is a difference between the two terms, “stock” is a general term used to describe the ownership certificates of any company, in general, and “shares” refers to the ownership certificates of a particular company. So, if investors say they own stocks, they are generally referring to their overall ownership in one or more companies. Technically, if someone says that they own shares—the question then becomes—shares in what company?” (<http://www.investopedia.com/ask/answers/140.asp>). As a result, the Italian translation would be “azioni”, for *shares*, and “pacchetto azionario”, for *stock*.

## Case 2: Translating *Economic Meltdown Funnies* in the Classroom

The strategy described in Case 1 is also evident in Case 2, which illustrates the translation task performed by a group of students<sup>7</sup> on a text (Figure 3), consisting of a series of strips taken from *The Economic Meltdown Funnies*. This is a comic book co-produced by *Jobs with Justice* and the *Institute for Policy Studies–Program on Inequality and the Common Good*, illustrated by Nick Thorkelson and written by Chuck Collins and Nick Thorkelson himself<sup>8</sup>.

When they started the course, students had mainly linguistic skills; as a result, their competence in economic and financial subjects was extremely poor. They were asked to translate the strips at the end of their first term, during which they had long practiced with written economic and financial texts, using the methods of cognitive linguistics, for analysis, and Nord's functionalist approach for translation. Texts mainly included academic research articles and news articles, some of them dealing with the financial crisis of 2008.

Before translating the strips, students were given a brief, including some guidelines on how to translate the text. From the very start, they admitted that the problems they were facing in translating the comic strips were of a very different kind compared to what they had been used to in conventional written texts: the mixing of specialized terms with informal, idiomatic vocabulary; the spatial constraints imposed by frames and balloons; the number of characters they had to observe in the Italian translation. Therefore, they had to choose a strategy to translate the text from American English to Italian: Should their translation be oriented towards the source culture or should it be adapted to the target culture?

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<sup>7</sup> The group consisted of about forty University students attending the MA program in specialized translation at the University of Bari. This is a two-year MA course in Specialized Translation, held at Università degli Studi di Bari "A. Moro", Dipartimento di Lettere Lingue Arti. Italianistica e culture comparate (LELIA).

<sup>8</sup> More information on the book is available at [http://www.ips-dc.org/the\\_economic\\_meltdown\\_funnies/](http://www.ips-dc.org/the_economic_meltdown_funnies/). For information on *Jobs for Justice*, go to [www.jwj.org](http://www.jwj.org), while for information on Institute for Policy Studies, go to [www.extreminequality.org](http://www.extreminequality.org).



Figure 3

## CHAMBER OF FINANCIAL HORRORS

IN THE PAST 10+ YEARS, MANY NEW WAYS TO PACKAGE MORTGAGE DEBT HAVE APPEARED, AND GROWN RAPIDLY, SOME ARE DESIGNED TO MIX HIGH AND LOW RISK LOANS, OR TAKE ADVANTAGE OF LOW INTEREST RATES, OR FREE UP THE ORIGINATOR'S CAPITAL, WHAT THEY HAVE IN COMMON IS THAT THEY ARE UNREGULATED **AND:**

<b>HIGHLY LEVERAGED</b>	THE RATIO OF LENDERS' INVESTMENTS TO THEIR CASH RESERVES IS SOMETIMES 100 TO 1	
<b>HIGHLY OPAQUE</b>	<i>WHAT'S IN IT?</i>	HOLDERS OF DEBT THAT IS MIXED, MATCHED, AND RESOLD COUNTLESS TIMES

		NOBODY KNOWS	HARDLY KNOW WHAT THEY HAVE. UNCERTAINTY LEADS TO PANIC SELLING ONCE TROUBLE STARTS.
AND <b>VOLATILE</b>	IT'S <b>ONYX!</b> GET ME MORE!		
BECAUSE NOT BASED ON REAL VALUE	NO! WAIT! IT'S <b>MUD!</b> GET IT OFFA ME!		
HA HA HA HA HA HA		WHINE AWAY, YOU PEONS!	
CREDIT DEFAULT SWAPS		SUBPRIMES	
MORTGAGE-BACKED SECURITIES	DERIVATIVES		NAKED SHORT SELLING
HEDGE FUNDS	TRANCHES	COLLATERALIZED DEBT OBLIGATIONS	ADJUSTABLE RA

(The Economic Meltdown Funnies 13)

First, they needed to contextualize the event represented in the frame. The identification of the character peeking out from behind the curtain was, for the students, the yardstick to scaffold their encyclopedic knowledge. Documovies, news articles, specialized encyclopedias, were useful to achieve the goal. Not only did they provide information on the identity of Phil Gramm and the role he played in the 2008 financial crisis, but they also shed light on the use of his expression “WHINE AWAY, YOU PEONS!” For “whine”, most dictionaries provide the definition of “useless complaining”, whereas, for PEONS, the Merriam-Webster dictionary online<sup>9</sup> reads as follows:

- a) a person who does hard or boring work for very little money : a person who is not very important in a society or organization
- b) a poor farm worker especially in Latin America

As for “WHINE AWAY”, all students failed to interpret the expression, since dictionaries do not contain any evidence of this phrasal verb, and they were not aware of the metaphorical use of prepositions, adverbs and other particles in the English language either (Lakoff and Johnson). In fact, *away*, *down*, *off*, and *out*, all express ideas of something gradually ending (Moon). Thus, the sense of “WHINE AWAY”, in this text, is “stop whining”, “enough with whining”; in Italian, the translation was “SMETTELA DI LAMENTARVI,” [stop whining] or the shorter form “BASTA LAMENTARSI” [stop whining]. Had they known how to interpret the semiotic landscape, they would have probably managed it. This will be shown below.

<sup>9</sup> Students looked up both PEONS and WHINE in an American-speaking dictionary, as the text is written in the American variety of English.

At that time, they found out how Gramm actually used the words in an archive documovie containing his speech “We are a nation of whiners”. Below is a portion of the speech:

We have sort of become a nation of whiners. You just hear this constant whining, complaining about a loss of competitiveness, America in decline [...] We've never been more dominant; we've never had more natural advantages than we have today [...] Misery sells newspapers. Thank God the economy is not as bad as you read in the newspaper every day. (CNN)

“Whine” is the keyword; it collocates with “loss of competitiveness”, “America in decline” and “Misery”: these convey the sense of “peons”. How to translate the latter? Students also had to respect the number of characters to localize the text appropriately. There are 19 in the English text. After various attempts, we came to the conclusion that PEONS could not be rendered literally in Italian; it needed to be adapted. Therefore, the most adequate strategy was the instrumental translation: “BASTA LAMENTI, STRACCIONI” [stop whining, bums] or “SMETTETELA, STRACCIONI” [stop it, bums], as they both convey the same contemptuous tone as the source text.

However, the meaning of Gramm’s expression could become clear if it were interpreted following Kress and Leeuwen’s visual grammar approach. In fact, Gramm’s words can be read as a gloss of his reactional process that is visually represented by the vector formed by the direction of his glance. Although Gramm’s pupils cannot be seen, we may infer that his look is directed towards two distinct Phenomena: one is inside the page, i.e. the characters in the frames at the bottom; the other is outside the page, i.e. the American reader, in general.

This type of interpretation based on the visual representation of Participants and Processes in comics, can eventually improve our decisions as far as translation strategies are concerned. In the Italian translation, the Reactor and the Phenomenon inside the page are the same as in the American text; what changes is the Phenomenon outside the page, which is assumed to be the Italian public. These are instances of texts that, because of their cultural embeddedness, are almost untranslatable. They are texts in which, after translation, the Reactor’s glance can fail to meet its Phenomenon’s look, i.e. the vector fails to visually represent the narrative process. If, in verbal texts, the cultural gap can be bridged by adding explanatory notes or a glossary to the translation, in visual texts, like comic strips, such gaps are unbridgeable.

Similar problems arose for the translation of the strips at the bottom of the frame. As for the third strip, for example, although students were well aware of the meaning of “volatility” in finance, they nevertheless found problems in making sense of, and, as a consequence, translating

the strip as a whole. Besides the verb “get”, which, due to its polysemy in the English language, is always a thorny problem for Italian-speaking students, the main difficulties resulted from the interpretation and translation of images and their written content. Students just realized that the stuff in the hands of the character was apparently onyx, which in fact turned into mud. However, relying on the knowledge they had previously developed, and considering the frame in its entirety, they came to the conclusion that the author is referring to *collateralized debt obligations* and other toxic securities designed during the sub-prime crisis. After the initial, almost word-for-word, translation:

E VOLATILI  
PERCHÉ NON SI BASANO SUL VALORE REALE  
È ONICE! NE VOGLIO ANCORA!  
NO! ASPETTA! È FANGO! VIA!  
[and volatile/because they are not based on real value/It's onyx! I want more!/No! Wait! It's mud! Go away!]

The final, though partial, translation was:

E VOLATILI  
PERCHÉ NON SI BASANO SU VALORE REALE  
È ONICE! NE VOGLIO ANCORA!  
NO! ASPETTA! È FANGO! MA È UNA TRUFFA!  
[and volatile/because they are not based on real value/It's onyx! I want more!/No! Wait! It's mud! It's a fraud!]

“UNA TRUFFA”, which stands for “FRAUD”, was used in order to make clear the fact that many investors were cheated because of securitization and deregulation.

The final comment is devoted to the strategy used by students to translate the terms in the smaller frames, e.g. *credit default swaps*, *subprimes*, *mortgage backed securities*, etc. Considering that these terms were culturally bound to the American economic and financial history of the 2000s, students opted for borrowings, with the exception of *derivatives*, which was turned into *derivati*. Their choice was motivated by the fact that those terms are known to the Italian public, in their English form rather than in their Italian translation. In fact, the terms in the frames are an example of conceptual processes; more specifically, they are an example of *classificational* processes since they “relate participants to each other in terms of a ‘kind of’ relation, a taxonomy: at least one set of participants will play the role of Subordinates with respect to at least one other participant, the Superordinate” (Kress and Leeuwen 81). Students had no problem in recognizing that the role of the Superordinate is played by the expression “financial



horrors” in the title of the frame, since the visual representation of the conceptual processes in this case evokes the structure of cognitive mappings which they had been trained to use and build during the course.

## Conclusions

This paper has shown that comic books can be used to teach translation of economic and financial discourse to non-experts. The comparison reported in Case Study 1 has demonstrated that cultural gaps can be bridged by verbal language only partially; the use of glosses is not sufficient to cope with translation needs. Hence, comics could be almost untranslatable if translators relied on the verbal semiotic system only. Some concepts, such as. *business*, *corporation*, *stock* and *share*, in Figure 1, would, in fact have deserved further comments and revisions and, consequently, might have been translated differently if the translator had had more space for characters. Nevertheless, the use of visual language, in particular of visual metaphors, help bridge the conceptual gaps. This assumption is further confirmed by the analysis of Case Study 2, in which some translation problems would have been faced more successfully if students, besides conventional tools used for linguistic analysis, had known how to interpret visual grammar. Missing the function of vectors, for example, may even jeopardize their correct interpretation of the cultural context and affect their decisions in terms of translation strategies. Moreover, Case Study 2 has shown that students are at ease with the visual representation of conceptual rather than narrative processes. Nevertheless, limiting themselves to the understanding of conceptual processes does not enhance their encyclopedic knowledge, which is the *sine qua non* to deal with specialized subjects. Thus, understanding how visual narrative works would increase their professional competence.

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