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Edipuglia srl, via Dalmazia 22/b - I-70127 Bari-S.Spirito
tel. (+39) 080 5333056-5333057 (fax) - <http://www.edipuglia.it> - e-mail: info@edipuglia.it

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ESP Across Cultures

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ESP Across Cultures is a double blind peer reviewed international journal that publishes theoretical, descriptive and applied studies on varieties of English pertaining to a wide range of specialized fields of knowledge, such as agriculture, art and humanities, commerce, economics, education and vocational training, environmental studies, finance, information technology, law, media studies, medicine, politics, religion, science, the social sciences, sports, technology and engineering, tourism, and transport. The journal addresses a readership composed of academics, professionals, and students interested in English for special purposes particularly from a cross-cultural perspective. The aim of the journal is to bring together scholars, practitioners, and young researchers working in different specialized language domains and in different disciplines with a view to developing an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural approach to the study of ESP.

ESP Across Cultures is covered in *Linguistics & Language Behaviour Abstracts*, *MLA International Bibliography*, *Translation Studies Abstracts* and *Bibliography of Translation Studies*.

Foreword

This present volume constitutes the third online edition of *ESP Across Cultures*. The decision to change from a paper-based to an online edition has undoubtedly been beneficial in terms of enjoying greater visibility within the international academic community. One thing that has not changed over the years, however, since the inception of the journal in 2004, has been the policy of double-blind peer reviewing, which means that only a selected number of the papers submitted end up as being published.

There are seven papers in the current issue, each one analysing a particular aspect of English for Specific Purposes from a cross-cultural perspective.

The first paper, by Hmoud S. Alotaibi, focuses on research article introductions in Arabic, analysing the extent to which scholars writing in Arabic in the sphere of education adhere to the CARS (Create A Research Space) model delineated by John Swales which was elaborated in particular with regard to the academic conventions widely adopted in the English-speaking world. Instead of restricting the investigation to the introductory section as past studies in this field did, the author examines all of the subheadings and he concludes that all introductions include Move 2 in a subheading entitled the *Problem of the Study*, a result that contradicts previous findings where the paucity of Move 2 was common in non-English RAs, and especially in Arabic ones.

Patrizia Anesa analyses the websites of the main arbitration centres operating in Asia from a textual perspective to define how they are discursively constructed and can be used as promotional tools, thereby helping us to evaluate the importance assumed by internationalization processes or by local cultural elements in promoting a particular centre as a seat for international arbitration. She concludes that while some scholars argue that we are witnessing the 'Asianization' of arbitration, with the increasing bargaining power of Asian parties, on the other hand a phenomenon of 'Universal Arbitration' is also emerging, i.e. a form of convergence of how disputes are resolved so that parties of any nationality can operate in the same way with ever fewer language barriers.

In their paper, Mahmood Reza Atai and Fatemeh Asadnia examine the communicative and promotional function of university homepages by looking at the 'university overview', 'university mission statement', and 'university introduction at a glance' genres, using a corpus of 210 texts selected from homepages of the top 500 universities ranked by the Academic Ranking of World Universities. The findings demonstrated that the three genres shared communicative purposes, functional units, certain moves and steps, socio-academic contexts, and discourse community members that led to the formation of a genre set.

Gaetano Falco explores ways of using comics in an MA course on translation of economic texts as a means of stimulating the interest of language students with no economics skills in order to introduce economics-related lexis and improve thematic competence in general. He observes that empirical research has shown that films and comics can indeed be useful resources to teach economic translation to students with no skills in economics. However, the author warns that the use of comics for educational purposes may have its drawbacks, e.g. when students deal with complex sign systems which embody complex economic concepts, where often the humorous element is lost.

In her paper, Irina Khoutyz describes the differences in how scholars present their findings in research articles (RA) in international journals in English and in

local journals in Russian. She then looks into the reasons for these differences, seeking explanations from the sociocultural contexts in which these RAs were written, as well as providing advice to local authors as to how to make their RAs more competitive at the international level. The differences include the apparent lack of structure of Russian RAs with respect to English RAs; the tendency in Russian authors not to specify the purpose in writing a paper; and the tendency of Russian authors to present the methodology used in less detail compared with English RAs.

Luisella Leonzini investigates the use of verbal and visual metaphors in economic-media discourse within the context of the euro crisis by studying the correlation between linguistic and pictorial metaphors and text-image intersemiotic relations. The research is based on a cross-analysis of English and Italian editorial articles published between 2009 and 2012. In both corpora, metaphorical realizations frame the economic crisis which hit the single currency and the eurozone in 2009 as a partial collapse and hint at a possible return to stability in the form of a recovery. The aim of this paper is to analyse the *collapse/caduta* and *recovery/ripresa* metaphors across languages in the press.

Ian Robinson reports on using corpus linguistics to aid students in writing a creative text. He looks at the available literature to help understand what is meant by 'creativity'. A worksheet was prepared using a corpus linguistic analysis of modern, English versions of the stories of the Brothers Grimm. This worksheet was constructed with the use of a specialized corpus, and a stop-list was created which contained single words as well as word clusters found in the tales. Students were then asked to select some of these words and phrases to help them write stories which were then analysed, and a follow-up questionnaire was used to elicit the students' perceptions concerning creativity. The author concludes that creativity is essential in EFL and that it is something to be fostered in students.

As ever, I wish to thank the members of the Editorial Board for their invaluable work of refereeing papers and for their suggestions on how to improve the journal. I would also like to thank all those scholars who are not members of the Editorial Board but who have kindly agreed to referee papers for our journal. The last time we publicly thanked external referees was in issue 11 (2014). Since then the following scholars have all reviewed papers for the journal.

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I hope you will enjoy the current issue of this journal and will make the most of the free access to all past issues.

Christopher Williams
 (Chief Editor)

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL TERMINOLOGY IN NON-SPECIALIZED GENRES. CAN UNSKILLED PEOPLE MAKE SENSE OF IT?

Gaetano Falco

(Università degli Studi di Bari "Aldo Moro", Italy)

Abstract

The growth of economic transactions at a global level has called for a number of new genres which have attracted the interest of scholars from various disciplines, including linguistic and translation studies. Notwithstanding the undisputed role that English plays as the lingua franca in trade, many activities, involving actors from different countries, demand translation between languages. The specificity of the economic domain entails a number of problems relevant to terminology, syntax, text typology and generic structure. To cope with such problems, prospective translators of economic and financial texts must be trained in order to acquire not only linguistic, but also thematic competence. This paper suggests a syllabus designed to train students attending a University MA course in economic translation. The syllabus encompasses methods and tools from various areas of linguistics and translation studies. The initial assumption is that the inclusion in the syllabus of non-professional genres, such as comic books and docu-movies, may boost students' thematic competence. Although previous research argues that training of translators of economics-based texts benefits from multimodality, in particular from the combination of verbal and visual semiotic modes, surprisingly, practice shows that comic books may be hard to interpret and translate for non-expert students, whereas films, namely video-tutorials and docu-movies, can enhance their understanding of economic terms and concepts.

1. Introduction

The globalization of markets in recent years has resulted in the rapid growth of economic and financial genres, including research articles, journals, magazines, contracts, agreements and annual reports, as well as the proliferation of collateral non-professional genres, such as comic books and films, which attempt to make thorny concepts (e.g. the banking system, money policy, financial crises), accessible to non-expert readers. As a linguistic phenomenon, economics has attracted the interest of scholars from various research areas, and has even become a major concern in schools and universities that include in their programs the teaching of languages for specific purposes (LSPs) and specialized translation.

The need for a syllabus, designed for the training of the future professional translator, is indeed a conundrum for both researchers and teachers concerned with the

teaching of economics. As urged by the European Commission, within the framework of the *European Master's in Translation* (EMT), any academic program concerned with the training of professional translators must be devised to equip students with different competences, including thematic competence¹. This is intended to help students learn to develop their knowledge in specialist fields and master the relevant concepts and terms (EMT Expert Group 2009).

Against this backdrop, this paper reports on the results of a teaching experience at the University of Bari with a group of students attending an MA program in specialized translation. It suggests methods and tools intended to boost students' thematic competence in the analysis and translation, from English to Italian, of economic and financial texts. The methodology assumes that by translating texts belonging to different professional and non-professional genres in the economic and financial domain, students with no prior knowledge or only poor knowledge of economics can develop their thematic competence and consequently improve the quality of their translations.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 outlines previous research on the use of comics and movies in didactics. Section 3 describes multimodality and humour in comics, adopting, respectively, Kress's (2003) theorization of visual narrative and Attardo's (2001) notion of Script Opposition as a source of humour in translation. Sections 4 and 5 describe the student profile, the syllabus design, and the approach used in the classroom. Section 6 and 7 illustrate how a docu-movie and video-tutorials, on the one hand, and comic strips, on the other, were used for learning purposes. The Conclusions contain some final remarks.

2. Teaching with non-professional genres

Notwithstanding its global scope, which might suggest that knowledge of economics is accessible to anyone, at least two complementary obstacles undermine the comprehension of economic language and concepts by non-experts: the specialized nature of lexis (McCloskey 1983; 1990) and the professionalism of genres (Bhatia 1993; 1997; 2008) used in economic communication. Professional genres are exclusive: they address the members of a discourse community, the insiders, who share the same specific purposes, terminology, unconventional cognitive metaphors and neologisms and obey the same conventionalized structures (Bhatia 1993; 1997).

By contrast, non-professional genres, such as comic books and films, are more inclusive, even when they deal with domain-specific topics, since they tend to make specialized knowledge accessible even to non-experts.

In this paper, we will focus on the use of these genres to teach economics for translation purposes. Attention will be paid to the students' response to multimodality and, to a lesser degree, humour in comic books on economics.

2.1. *Films in didactics*

Films are often used for didactic purposes (Walldén and Soronen 2004) that fit the new learning needs of students who "are increasingly more visual learners that desire

¹ The competences described by the EU in the EMT are six: linguistic, thematic, translation service provision, intercultural, information mining, and technological.

education in a more fun and engaging format” (Macy and Terry 2008: 48). They help teachers and trainers overcome the students’ hostility towards conventional “talk and chalk” learning methods and favour the development of critical thinking.

Docu-movies deserve particular attention as they play a socio-democratic and educational function (Kahana 2008): they construct the public’s knowledge about historical events or real persons in a factual way (Sebesta and Haynes 2010). The achievement of this socio-pedagogical purpose is made possible by the fact that a documentary is “an essentially transitional medium: it carries fragments of social reality from one place or one group or one time to another, and in transporting them, translates them from a local dialect to a lingua franca” (Kahana 2013: 2).

A number of studies have analysed the educational role of films used to teach, for example, medical professionalism (Lumlertgul *et al.* 2009; Baños & Bosch 2014); history (Donnelly 2014); economics (Sexton 2006; Zhang 2012); or the creation of undergraduate economics courses (Macy and Terry 2008).

This interest in the educational role of films, especially those on economic subjects, is grounded in their visual modality which, as Samaras (2014) argues, stimulates learning in students and solicits their empathy with the economic subject matter.

2.2. *Comic books in didactics*

Comics and graphic novels have traditionally been regarded as children’s genres or “funny papers” (Thomas 2010: xxiv). Nonetheless, recent literature has recognized the ‘edutainment’ purpose of these genres, ascribing to comics a position in the educational panorama as a means to convey specialized topics. According to Mallia (2007) and Thomas (2010), both comic books and graphic novels play an important educational role and support literacy. They have the status of legitimate literary genres with a recognizable, conventionalized structure. For Kress (2003), the teaching purpose in comics and graphic novels is favoured by the successful combination of word and image. In these genres, the world is not only told; it is also shown (Kress 2003). The interplay of words and images contributes to changing the reading modalities of readers and enhances their interpretative skills (Eisner 1985: 8).

The combination of different modes represents a new way of teaching, which can win over the students’ reluctance towards learning and be adopted for various instructional purposes. Accordingly, they can help students and non-expert readers in general improve their knowledge about specialized topics, including economics. In fact, studies on the use of comics as a resource to teach economics have grown significantly over the last years. Lawson (2006) uses comic strips as an introduction in order to discuss and teach economic principles in the classroom. For Van Wyk (2011), cartoons are a helpful resource in introducing students to economics, since they create an interest and stimulate critical thinking. McCutcheon (2017) resorts to Marvel hero comic books to illustrate the superiority of free market policies over the economic principles of self-sacrifice that inspire socialism. Although they differ in terms of goals and methods, these studies agree on the important role that the multimodality of comics may play in economics education.

3. Multimodality in comic books

Comic books are multimodal texts, as their meanings are realized through the intersemiotic interplay between the visual and verbal modes (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006; Jewitt 2009; Kress 2009); such multimodality necessarily affects the process of translation (Kaindl 2004; Zanettin 2008; Borodo 2015). These visual and verbal modes may act separately to make a sum of different meanings or, rather, interact to make one comprehensive meaning (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006).

We will use Kress (2009) as our reference to explore multimodality in comics. The co-existence of different modes encourages a social-semiotic approach to texts rather than the conventional linguistic perspective, which claims the centrality of language and its capability of expressing all meanings. The social-semiotic theory of multimodality embraces meaning in all its forms. It is 'social' in the sense that meanings, semiotic processes and forms are generated by the social. It is 'semiotic' since it involves a motivated relationship between a form and a meaning based on aptness, on a 'best fit', whereby the form has the requisite features to be the carrier of the meaning (Kress 2009: 55).

Form and meaning combine in signs and sign-complexes; these are newly-made metaphors and include not only the written modes, but also, and above all, the visual mode. Each mode exploits its own resources which tend to vary in their materiality, i.e. the way in which they 'embody' meaning: writing embodies meaning through morphemes, words, clauses, sentences and paragraphs; speech embodies meaning through rhythm, accent, intonation, tone and silence; image embodies meaning through gaze, facial expression, gestures, spatial positioning, number, colour, size, lines, shape and proxemics. Moreover, the resources of writing and speech modes are organized according to the logic of time, spatially mimicked by syntax and grammar; image, by contrast, is based on the logic of space and uses icons of various kinds which interact in meaning-making relations. The way these resources are positioned and spatially arranged, and turned into metaphors, can produce or represent different meanings, including the meanings of specialized terms. The final result is a multisemiotic landscape in which the reader is concerned with the identification of the mode carrying the main informational weight; the 'reading' of the visual narrative represented; the interpretation of symbols, icons and visual metaphors that are materializations of the sign-maker's interest; and, where social, economic and political issues are involved, the understanding of irony, satire, caricature, parody: in a word, humour.

Much research into the use of humour in comics draws upon the *General Theory of Verbal Humour* (GTVH), initially elaborated by Attardo (2001) to investigate humour in jokes. According to GTVH, the production of humour (Attardo 2001) and its translation (Attardo 2002) relies on six Knowledge Resources: Language, Narrative Strategy, Target, Situation, Logical Mechanism, and Script Opposition (Attardo 2001: 22-26). Script Opposition, which is acknowledged by scholars as the most problematic parameter, deserves particular attention, especially when translation is implicated (Shipley Young 2007; Jüngst 2008; Zanettin 2008). In comics, the humorous effect arises from the incongruity between two overlapping, though opposite scripts, e.g. the visual script and the verbal script. Thus, translating a comic book implies the reproduction of this script opposition, which can be achieved either by recreating in the target text

(TT) the same script opposition as the source text (ST), or by devising a different type of incongruity between the visual script and the verbal script (Zanettin 2008).

In either case, as the visual script remains unchanged translators may act on the verbal script only. Reinventing in the target culture a brand new text that overlaps and ‘explains’ the visual script gets harder if the facts represented in the ST are closely related to the source culture; a literal translation of the ST, for example, would fail to convey humour to the target culture readers.

All these problems are intensified in comic books dealing with specialized subjects that are used for educational purposes; in such cases, students are expected to interpret and translate sign systems and humour across modes within a culture and between two cultures.

Some questions arise then: can the interplay between images and words be a valid support for readers in their interpretation of terms, in the case of comic books dealing with specialized topics? Or, rather, does such an interplay actually prejudice our understanding of economic facts?

4. Student profile

The paper reports on a teaching experience with second-year students of an MA program attending a course in specialized translation held at the University of Bari. The data in the paper refer to the academic years 2015-16 and 2016-17. In 2015-16 the number of students enrolled on the course was 75, while in 2016-17 the number was 60. In both cases, figures refer to the students officially enrolled. The number of students attending classes was in fact lower, as attendance is not compulsory.

The following profile applies to both academic years. Specifications will be provided in Section 8 as far as the tasks relevant to comics are concerned.

On average, students had a B2-C1 level in English, but poor or no knowledge of economic concepts and terminology. They were able to manage texts linguistically, but they struggled to understand the meaning of economic texts, either in English or in Italian. Most of them had attended a three-year BA program at the University, and taken a degree in Languages for Tourism or in Intercultural Mediation; some had taken a degree in specialized translation at the School for Interpreters and Translators.

During their first year on Specialized Translation MA, they had been trained to translate semi-professional genres, such as magazine and newspaper articles on scientific topics. The theoretical background adopted in the course included Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) and notions of Corpus Linguistics.

5. Syllabus design

As one of the fundamental aims of the course is to enhance students’ thematic competence in economics and finance, a syllabus has been designed which, besides SFG, also includes Cognitive Linguistics and genre analysis. All of them adopt a socio-semiotic perspective, based on the interplay between language and the social-context. This is the perspective that also informs the multimodal approach in comic books and films.

Genre analysis (Bhatia 2008) has been introduced to help students recognize move organization in professional genres used in economics and finance.

The integration of Cognitive Linguistics in the syllabus aims at developing the students' encyclopaedic knowledge of the economic domain, to the detriment of terminological knowledge which is traditionally taught to students in specialized translation. Much attention is paid to the notions of metaphor and image schema (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Evans and Green 2006), with particular emphasis on the use of metaphors in economics (Resche 2013).

The course, with a duration of 63 hours, was structured in different stages and included both theoretical and practical lessons. Initial lessons (four hours) were devoted to the presentation of the problems generally accompanying economic texts and their translation from English to Italian. Special emphasis was placed on terminology, conceptual metaphors, syntax, text typology, generic structure, translation strategies. The following lessons were mainly dedicated to practice; they were supported by theoretical details whenever the need arose.

Students were asked to analyse and translate texts belonging to different genres and dealing with economic subjects, in particular the 2008 financial crisis and corporate structures: specifically, the Introduction section of three research articles from three online journals, a newspaper article, two *Letters to the Shareholders* and a merger contract. The exceptional specificity and complexity of the subjects dealt with in the texts, i.e. the subprime mortgage crisis in 2008, and corporation discourse, would normally require the support of experts in the economic and financial domain to explain terms and concepts to students before and while translating the texts. As these professionals were unavailable in the classroom, alternative tools were introduced to support students, namely video-tutorials, available from Investopedia (www.investopedia.com), and a docu-movie.

At the end of the day, students were expected to:

- manage major linguistic, conceptual and textual difficulties in the professional economic and financial genres, in particular problems related to cohesion, terminology and phraseology, text organization and genre patterning, that characterize economic and financial texts, both in English and Italian;
- know how to make different translation choices depending on genre conventions.

As a final stage of their course, students were asked to analyse and translate some pages taken from a comic book dealing with the 2008 financial crisis. Considering their non-professional nature, we assumed that interpreting and translating economic and financial terms in comic books would be an easy task for students.

6. Documentaries: a support to economic translation teaching²

Considering their status as edutainment genres, comics and films were included in our MA course in translation for economics with two different goals in mind: 1)

² The description in this section includes students of both academic years, 2015-16 and 2016-17.

testing the efficacy of comics and films as activities supporting students in economic translation; 2) verifying the difficulties that students with no skill in economic issues would meet in interpreting and translating comics about economic subjects.

During the first term students were advised, as part of their homework, to watch some video tutorials explaining the 2008 financial crisis and the key concepts that it involved. The video tutorials, one on the 2008 financial crisis, the others on collateralized-debt obligations and on securitization, are available from *Investopedia* (www.investopedia.com). They were introduced into the syllabus as a source for students to evaluate and verify contents that were treated in printed genres and help them understand and translate texts. Each video touches upon a specific concept but calls into question other concepts. The final result is an overview of the terms and concepts belonging to the same semantic landscape.

Moreover, at the end of the first term, students were shown a docu-movie, *Inside Job*, which is available in both English and Italian, and was released as a DVD in combination with a guide-book, *Pandemia*. This includes a glossary of the main financial terms in Italian, and a list of tasks intended for teachers of economics.

*Inside Job*³ is a docu-movie, directed by Charles Ferguson, that recounts the events which led to the collapse of the global economy in 2008. It also explains terms and concepts which accompanied the crisis, such as *securitization*, *derivatives*, *CDOs*, *ABS*, and how they work together. Terms are not shown as self-standing lexical elements, but as links in a lexical-semantic chain, set in their cultural and historical context. Moreover, a narrating voice describes, step-by-step, the different phenomena that accompanied the financial crisis. The students' attention was drawn to certain parts in the documentary. A case in point was *securitization* which is given as an example in Figure 2. The sequence of frames follows a linear syntax. Unlike comic books, as we will see in the next section, neither the video-tutorials nor the documentaries contain visual metaphors which might distract the students from the core economic subject. Images tend to explain rather than obfuscate the meaning of terms. Relations between concepts must not be enacted by students, but they are clearly shown and elucidated in the film by the narrator, who acts as an expert or acts on behalf of an expert, in economics and finance.

To further simplify the students' interpretative tasks, some sequences from the films were initially shown in English, with English subtitles, and then replayed in English, but with Italian subtitles.

The combination of the docu-movie and of video tutorials enhanced students' encyclopaedic knowledge and improved their translation performances. These results were documented in two ways: first of all, through the compilation of an encyclopaedic glossary by each student, which contained extended linguistic (e.g. word patterns, collocations), semantic, pragmatic and cultural information about each term; and secondly, with a practical exercise in the classroom. This included the translation, from English into Italian, of a text about the subprime crisis, in particular *CDOs* and *derivatives*⁴. Results were satisfactory. The majority of students of both academic years

³ The film is released by Feltrinelli.

⁴ The text was "The fallout from the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers", from *The Economist* (September 18th, 2008)

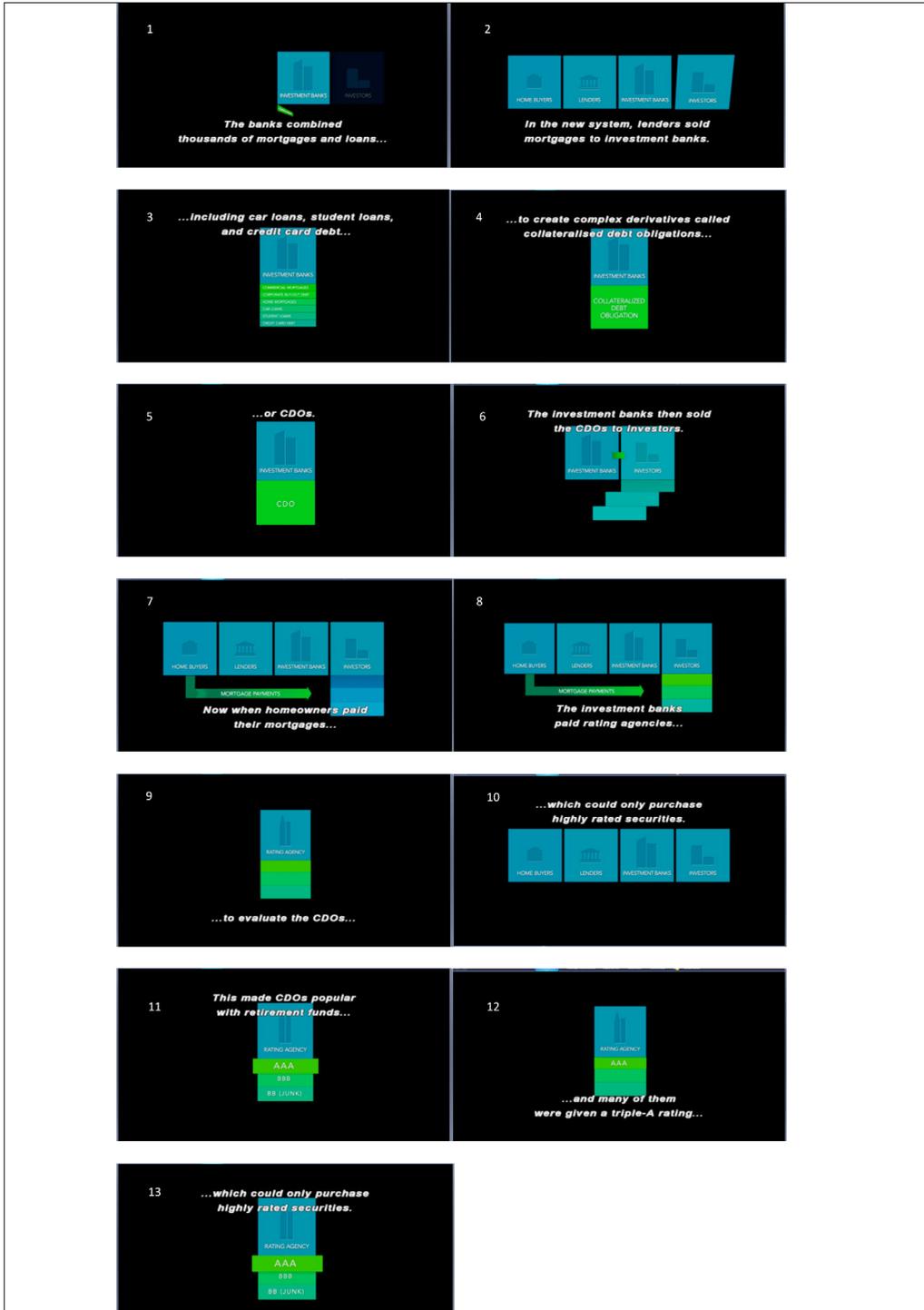


Figure 1. Sequence of frames from *Inside Job*

proved to be at ease with the subject and used their own glossary rather than specialized dictionaries to translate terms in the text.

7. Translating economics in comic books

At the end of the course, some sample pages from a comic book were submitted to the students for translation and analysis. We expected that, given the non-professional nature of comics, students would have found it easy to interpret and translate economic terms and concepts; indeed, the assumption was that comics would even have improved their domain knowledge. Surprisingly, the interpretation and translation of the comic strips caused a plurality of linguistic, cultural and technical difficulties to students, owing to a combination of their multimodality, the blending of common and specialized language, frame constraints and humour.

The strips were extracted from *Economic Meltdown Funnies* (Collins and Thorkelson 2008), which narrates the subprime crisis that hit the US in 2008.

Before illustrating the results, some caveats are required. Students attending the course in the academic year 2015-16 were asked to translate only one page from the comic book. For students attending the course in 2016-17, other tasks and pages from the book were introduced. Not only were they asked to translate the texts, but they also had to analyse some strips, namely identify and interpret verbal and visual metaphors and other tropes, such as onomatopoeia, and the symbols used by the authors to represent concepts visually; they were asked to rewrite, using technical terms, the titles of the strips that represented economic and financial facts metaphorically.

The strip in Figure 3 was submitted to both 2015-16 and 2016-17 students, although with different tasks to perform.

In 2015-16, students had only to perform the translation task. The outcomes are documented in another paper (Falco 2016). In brief, the majority of students managed to translate the text, opting for a literal translation even for those parts which needed a TT-oriented adaptation, such as “Whine away, you peons!, “It’onyx! Get me more!”, “No! What! It’s mud! Get it offa me!”. They dealt especially well with the specialized terms in the frames on the right-hand side of the page, *credit default swaps*, *subprimes*, *mortgage-backed securities*, *derivatives*, *naked short selling*, *hedge funds*, *tranches*, *collateralized debt obligations*, and *adjustable rate mortgages*. Surprisingly perhaps, the lack of syntax did not seem to jeopardize the students’ understanding of the terms.

What emerged from post-task discussions in the classroom with the 2015-16 students was that they were not very concerned about the interpretation of the visual sign system. As a consequence, a questionnaire was prepared for the 2016-17 students⁵ which was intended to check their ability to explain visual modality as a means of representing economic facts and events.

In particular, these students were asked to a) focus on the central strip at the bottom of the page and explain the metaphor conveyed by the butcher slicing a sausage;

⁵ The following results are based on the answers provided by 41 students out of the 60 officially enrolled.

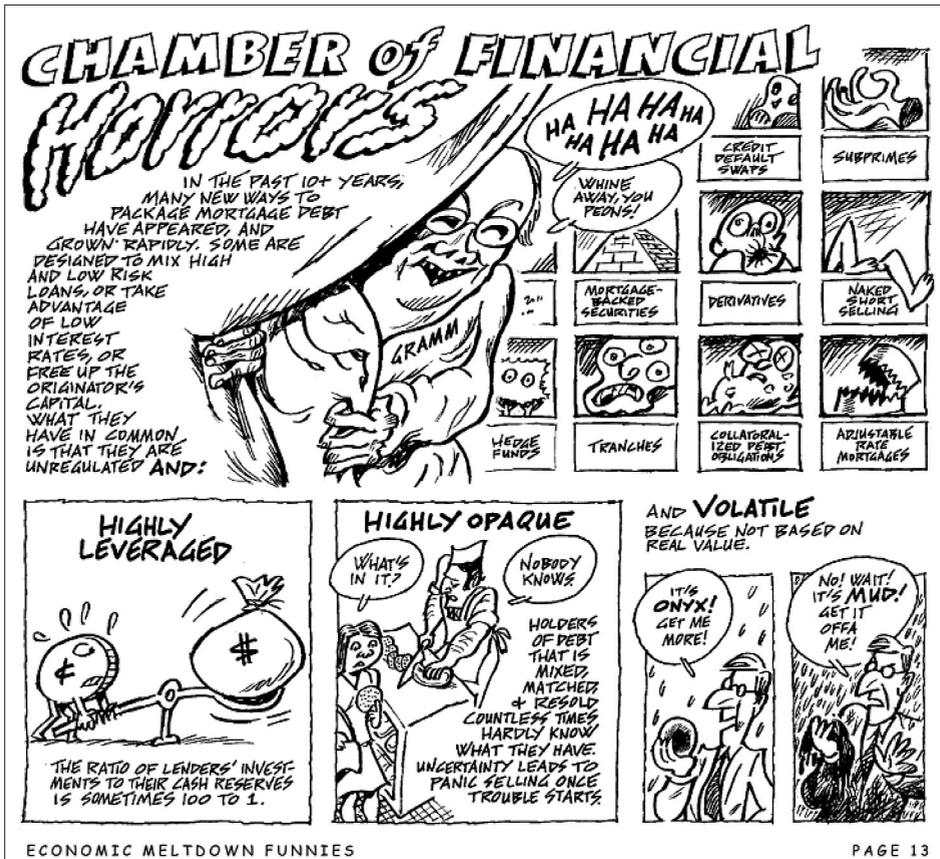


Figure 2. Page 13: Playing chicken with the markets

b) identify the character behind the curtain and his would-be addressees (*Who is he mocking? Who is he supposed to be gazing at?*).

None of the students recognized that the butcher's slices referred to portions of debt, i.e. *tranches* of CDOs, although this had been widely discussed in the classroom in the first term. Their feeling of frustration with this scene was caused by their difficulty in understanding that the scene is an illustrated, simplified parody of structured financing in which the author teaches, while ironizing on, what structured debts are. The humour originates from the overlapping between the verbal script, i.e. the woman asking "What's in it?" and the butcher answering "Nobody knows", and the visual script representing the repackaged debt obligations, e.g. credit card debts, mortgages, car loans, into portions or 'tranches' sold to investors. This task proved that students were adrift when dealing with high levels of iconicity and that thematic competence tended to fail as the semiotic mode changed.

Students of the academic year 2016-17 also had trouble with the translation of the expression "Whine away, you peons". In fact, although they managed to gather information about Gramm and provide satisfactory explanations, they failed to interpret

and translate “peons” correctly. Even though they had been instructed to focus on the proxemics of the character, they presumed that Gramm was addressing working people, people in general or even the “horrors”. Very few answered that the target of Gramm’s mockery and gaze in the strip are the American people who had invested in CDOs. The strip was in fact a parody of Gramm’s interview published by the *Washington Post* in July 2008 in which he described America as a “nation of whiners”⁶. Failure to interpret the scene was probably due to the lack of an explicit visual script ‘explaining’ the verbal utterance. Possibly a complete script opposition would have helped students identify the target of the sarcasm.

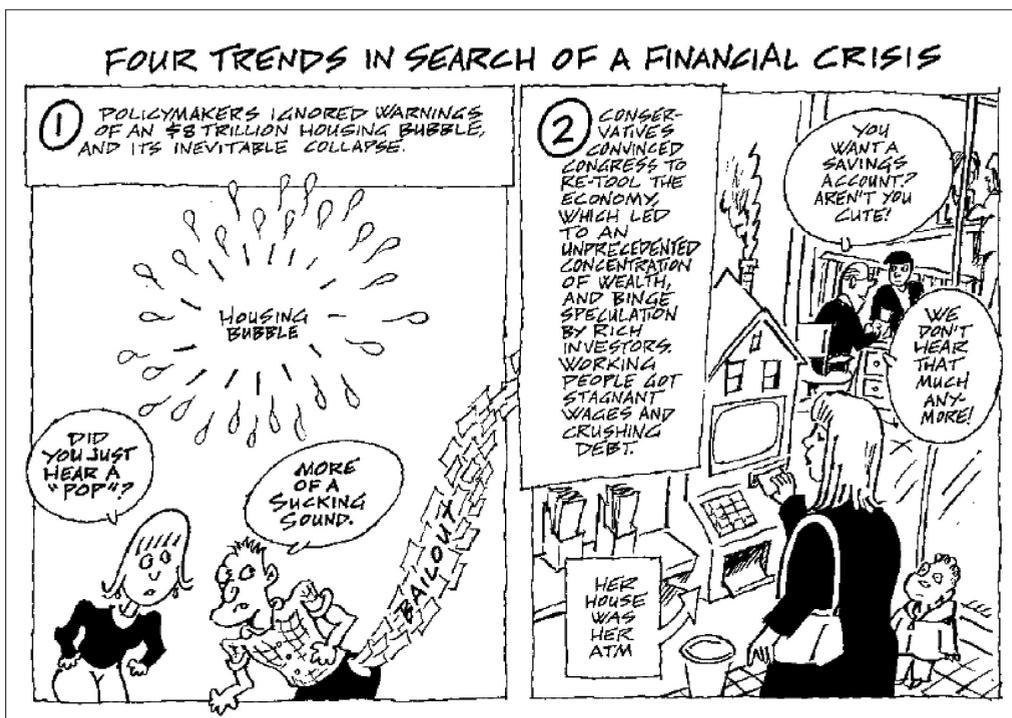


Figure 3. Page 3: Four trends in search of a financial crisis

The strips in Figures 3 and 4 were utterly new tasks introduced in the 2016-17 syllabus. As far as the strip in Figure 3 is concerned, students were asked to comment on the visual representation of the term *bailout* and to propose a translation in Italian for the English onomatopoeia *pop*. They also had to explain why the Automated Teller Machine (ATM) is represented as a house.

For the term *bailout*, most students reported the definition provided by Investopedia or some other specialized dictionary. Very few students (3) explained the term in their own words. As a whole, they interpreted *bailout* figuratively as “a flow of banknotes coming out of the pockets of a man”. The majority of students provided an onomatopoeic

⁶ http://edition.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/07/10/mccain.gramm/index.html?_s=PM:POLITICS.

sound for *pop* in their translation, e.g. *bum, bang, boom, puf*. A couple of students suggested the literal translation, *scoppio, botto*, thus eluding the need for an equivalent onomatopoeia in the Italian version. One student looked for an equivalent sound in comics about economics published in Italian newspapers and queried Sketchengine, thus finally proposing the sound *plop*. Students had major problems with the interpretation of the house-like representation of the ATM. They were puzzled by the visual script and struggled with interpreting its relation with the verbal, although they eventually understood, by way of intuition, that this was a metaphor correlated to the 2008 house price bubble; in fact, they realized that the house-like ATM stands for the easy access to money that banks were offering borrowers before the mortgage crisis burst.



Figure 4. Page 9: That was then, this is now

The tasks set for the strip in Figure 4 included a literal explanation of the characters' actions and a description of the scene in technical terms. Students also had to translate the title *That was then, this is now*, using a technical term rather than rendering it literally. To carry out this task, students were encouraged to use the teaching material used in the first term, including the docu-movie *Inside Job*. Many students did not perform the task as they found it hard to make sense of the strip; some failed to understand the real meaning. Once again, the main difficulty arose from the interpretation of the script opposition. In particular, most students failed to grasp the irony conveyed by the visual script. Only a few realized that the "hot potatoes" that get passed around by investment banks and other investors stand for *collateralized-debt obligations*. Harder than this was the task of rendering the script opposition in Italian since none managed to translate the title with technical terms. Indeed, they failed to understand that the strip was a metaphorical representation of *securitization*, although the process had been explained in the first term and had been widely illustrated in the docu-movie *Inside Job*.

As their final task, students had to express their impressions regarding the level of difficulty they had met in interpreting and translating the strips and the usefulness of comics in learning a complex subject such as economics.

On balance, they complained about the overuse of visual metaphors, which they sometimes found misleading and hard to relate to the verbal text. They underlined the importance of prior knowledge in interpreting the strips correctly. In this sense, they had found the teaching material developed in the first term useful. Lack of notes, paraphrases or comments explaining the situational and/or cultural context, was, in their opinion, another drawback. Likewise, the combination of specialized terms and

idiomatic expressions made the translation task harder. Nevertheless, they argued that visual elements could often enhance their understanding of economic facts, especially in the case of internationally recognizable symbols and icons, which they found self-explanatory.

8. Conclusions

Empirical research has demonstrated that films and comics can be useful resources to teach economic translation to students with no skills in economics. Films, and docu-movies in particular, contribute efficiently to this didactic purpose, since they portray facts and events as they are normally represented in familiar factual contexts. Multimodality, specifically the interplay between the visual and aural modes, seems to stimulate the students' understanding of economic concepts and terms.

The use of comics for educational purposes has its pros and cons. Major problems for students arise when they deal with complex sign systems which embody complex economic concepts. Difficulties are also due to the narrative structure of comics, which implies a grammar and a semantic architecture based on the interaction between different semiotic modes, e.g. words and images, and the humour effect that such interplay entails. Notwithstanding these drawbacks, our study has shown that comics, in the same way as films, tend to stimulate students' curiosity and their thematic competence.

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