

HOMOGENIZING DISCOURSE AND INTERSEMIOTIC STRATEGIES IN FAO'S *YOUTH ACTION MUSIC* VIDEOS

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Abstract: This paper investigates the multilingual and intersemiotic strategies used by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to raise awareness, across various languages and cultures, about the global impact of food and water waste in terms of environmental sustainability and social equity. Framed within Translation Studies as a socially and ecologically engaged discipline (Cronin 2017), this study explores the various campaigns produced by schoolchildren from different countries as part of FAO's Junior World Food Day initiative, inaugurated in 2021, to convey its core mission of "ensuring universal access to nutritious food for sustainable and healthy living" (<https://www.fao.org/multimedia/en>). More specifically, the study focuses on how the theme of equal access to food/water is represented in the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)-oriented, multilingual discourse of three *Youth Action Music* Videos ("We can all become food heroes", 2021; "Leave no-one behind", 2022; "Water is life, water is food", 2023). The analysis addresses two main questions: whether, in these campaigns, cultural diversity is preserved or homogenized by the global scope of FAO's mission, and which verbal and non-verbal strategies contribute to such effects. Special attention is given to subtitling practices, especially where adaptations across languages generate 'anomalies'. By exploring the interplay between language, culture, and environmental advocacy, the study aims to provide insights into the effectiveness of translation choices when fostering a global dialogue on pressing ecological issues (Hu 2020).

Keywords: multimodal discourse analysis; intersemiotic strategies; translation choices; homogenization; environmental discourse; sustainability communication.

1. Introduction¹

The core mission of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is to “achieve food security for all and make sure that people have regular access to enough high-quality food to lead active, healthy lives” (FAO 2024: 1). This underscores the urgency of tackling, amongst other issues, food and water waste, which affects ecosystems, the climate, and populations worldwide. In particular, FAO’s advocacy links food security to environmental sustainability and social justice, aligning with the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its pledge to “leave no one behind”, in an effort “to eradicate poverty in all its forms” (UN 2024: 1). This commitment entails the need for inclusive communication strategies that can effectively engage and inform diverse cultural and linguistic communities across the globe, fostering “[interlingual and] intercultural dialogue [as] an instrument of mediation and reconciliation [which] prevents social fragmentation by promoting equity, human dignity, and the pursuit of the common good” (Vasta and Manzella 2024: 6). Such communication strategies have to be integrated into broader efforts, including stakeholder engagement, to foster mobilization in support of social change (Brulle 2010: 92; Catenaccio 2021: 2).

In this regard, “policies and practices must be directed towards ensuring greater linguistic and technological equity and inclusion, [so as] to facilitate universal access to information about sustainability” (McEntee-Atalianis 2017: 236). FAO’s multilingual promotional videos – such as those celebrating World Food Day (Vasta and Manzella forthcoming) and, more generally, “informative and educational resources for non-expert citizens, younger generations in particular” (Zollo 2024: 185) – comply with this requirement as they promote social inclusion and equitable access to common resources², two objectives which are, for that matter, the primary justification for linguistic diversity and every act of translation (Pym 2011: 375). However, when it comes to global environmental advocacy, translation involves more than mere cross-cultural mediation³. Environmental discourses are inherently multimodal, crossing traditional media and genre boundaries while “present[ing] ideological messages and offer[ing] identity ideals not just within, but also across multiple media” (Lemke 2023: 43). In other words, “our encounter with these media is not simply a trajectory through a single coherent work. It is a traversal across the boundaries between works, media, genres, sites, institutional contexts, and activities” (Lemke 2014: 145).

¹ Although this paper is a collaborative effort and reflects the views of both authors, Nicoletta Vasta wrote Sections 1, 2 and 4, while Pietro Manzella wrote Sections 3.1 to 3.3.

² Social inclusion can be defined as “the process of improving the terms of participation in society, particularly for people who are disadvantaged, through enhancing opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights” (UN 2016: 17).

³ “The translator has not only a bilingual ability but also a bi-cultural vision. Translators mediate between cultures (including ideologies, moral systems and socio-political structures) seeking to overcome those incompatibilities which stand in the way of transfer of meaning” (Hatim and Mason 1990: 223). On the vexed question of “imperfect” mediation, see Cortese 1999; see also Katan 1999, 2014.

Indeed, each multilingual promotional video analyzed below is a multimodal *ensemble*⁴ made up of individual video snippets from various countries, selected for their relevance to (mis)translating multilingual and transcultural identities, in line with one of the main foci of this thematic issue; crucially, each of the snippets is produced, within FAO's Junior World Food Day initiative, by a different community of schoolchildren 'linguaging' the lyrics of exactly the same melody and instrumentation – i.e., with no specific adaptation of musical signifiers, including the culture-bound use of particular instruments (Lomax 1968; van Leeuwen 1989: 259-63; van Leeuwen 1999); nor is any distinctive cultural trait evident in their similar way of dancing, which reflects the global, somewhat homogenizing stance that underpins FAO's core mission. The dissemination of these multimodal ensembles across multiple linguistic communities through subtitling must take this somewhat unusual compositional method into account, avoiding possible misalignments between the verbal and non-verbal resources – such as the visual imagery, gestures, and musical features – which enrich and characterize these multimodal artifacts.

2. Aims and Scope

Water, rather than food, is the main focus of these videos. Indeed, every year, from 2021 onwards, FAO has issued a call for students, families and educators from various countries to record a 10"-15" video in their own language "and show how [they] care about water for a food-secure future. [The] short video will feature alongside those from countries around the world in the new *Youth Music* video, and at the Junior World Food Day"⁵, held on October 17, the day after World Food Day. The *Youth Action Music* videos thus produced are a paradigmatic example of grassroots engagement and user-generated content⁶: by involving young people in the co-creation of digital content in their own language, the initiative both fosters critical multimodal awareness about global issues and empowers younger generations to take action and advocate for change. Producing multilingual videos downtones the hegemonic power of English as a lingua franca and foregrounds the global outreach of FAO's institutional message; at the same time, such a process customizes this message to the diverse perspectives of the various communities involved and produces a carefully-balanced blend – within the intersemiotic fabric of the original multilingual *ensemble* prior to subtitling – between global unity and cultural diversity. At this stage, the multilingual, 'official' Source Text is *first* subtitled⁷ in

⁴ See *infra*, Footnote 9.

⁵ These tips and other more detailed instructions about how to shoot the video snippet can be found at <https://www.fao.org/georgia/news/detail-events/en/c/1648905/> (visited 11/11/2024).

⁶ "Any kind of text, data or action performed by online digital systems users, published and disseminated by the same user through independent channels, that incur an expressive or communicative effect either on an individual manner or combined with other contributions from the same or other sources" (Santos 2022: 113).

⁷ "Audiovisual subtitles are known to be a written translation or transcription – printed at the bottom of the screen – of the spoken dialogue of any TV or cinema product. The form of subtitles is interconnected to their function and determines the potential target audience" (Pavesi and Perego 2008: 215-216). For the distinction between *subtitling proper*, *reverse subtitling*, and <https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.1974-4382/24170>

English (henceforth, ST_{Eng}) and *then* localized and disseminated through FAO's regional offices in the form of Target Texts with subtitles in the local community's language, in our case Italian (henceforth, TT_{It}). However, the process of localization is far from being harmless: in a text made up of multilingual snippets, misalignments may arise as a result of the multiple steps involved in subtitling – in this case from the original audiotrack, often in a language other than English, into English and *then* from English into Italian. In other words, the version with English subtitles – which is meant to facilitate translators who are non-native speakers of minority languages when translating into languages other than English – risks being taken as *the* ST to be subtitled into as many TTs, rather than a TT in its own right which has originated from the multilingual ST. This suggests that, in the transition (via English subtitles) from the multilingual ST to the individual TTs, the translation should have incorporated as many native speaker consultants as there are languages.

Against this backdrop, this study analyzes the three pairs of multilingual videos from the 2021, 2022 and 2023 campaigns⁸ with English (ST_{Eng}) and Italian subtitles (TT_{It}), focusing on the video snippets which feature some ineffective choices and some downright mistranslations in subtitling which impair the richness of the “multimodal orchestration”⁹ in the multilingual ST. The main aim is to show that such choices ultimately blur local cultural identities. The analytical focus will be on the interaction between verbal elements, traditionally the object of translation studies, and the visual, acoustic, and other semiotic modes (Taylor 2013: 100), and not simply on the equivalence between the English and Italian subtitles. Ultimately, the paper argues that it is only by considering the intersemiotic strategies and “logogenetic patterns” (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004: 43) in each “original” video snippet – i.e., the one with the audiotrack in the local language – that the ‘local culture’ can be adequately mediated across the world. To this end, the following sections examine misalignments arising when transferring the ST_{Eng} of the three *Youth Action Music* videos into their TT_{It} counterparts which “need to incorporate the ways in which different signifying codes produce meaning” (Valdeón 2024: 3; see also Taylor 2013: 99).

3. Multilingual and Intersemiotic Strategies in FAO's Youth Action Music Videos

3.1. “We Can All Become Food Heroes” (2021)

captioning – the latter also called “bimodal input” or “L2 subtitled video”, i.e., “the display of transcriptions of the utterances of a video” – see Bianchi and Ciabattini 2008: 69-71.



⁸ The 2024 video, titled *Every Child Has the Right to Food* (<https://youtu.be/sjBjodgcUDI>, visited 11/11/2024), and the version with Italian subtitles (*Tutti i bambini hanno diritto al cibo*, <https://youtu.be/gdLgQGODCFg>, visited 10/11/2024) will not be considered here, as they were released after the present study's data collection period.

⁹ In Kress's (2010: 162) terms, “the process of assembling/organizing/designing a plurality of signs into a particular configuration to form a coherent arrangement”, with an emphasis on the ‘semiotic harmony’ of the resulting *ensemble* and their ‘aptness’ to “meet the rhetor's [or text organizer's] interests. [...] Orchestration and the resultant ensembles can be organized in space and they can be organized in time, in sequence, in process, in motion”.

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The first video, *We Can All Become Food Heroes* (<https://youtu.be/DqDL4hsAqZs>), is made up of a series of sequences, selected from those submitted, which establish a relationship between children, land and water. This relationship foregrounds the fact that water is essential for the land's production of food. In the narrative sequence partially reproduced in Table 1 below, the children are dancing standing on patches of land in a lake identified (through an overlaid flag) as part of Chile. This sequence, reprised later on in the film (at 2:09, claiming “Tus acciones son el futuro, y está en tus manos”/“Our [sic] actions are our future and the future is in our [sic] hands”), begins with this frame (at 1:06) and gives way to another snippet in Arabic in which children in another country (identified as Lebanon through the overlaid flag in the background) invite all children to make a green space in school and avoid water going to waste (at 1:15, not shown). In other words, a single snippet in Spanish has been cut into two discontinuous sequences, the former calling for concrete action and the latter advocating children's empowerment through the slogan “Tus acciones son el futuro, y está en tus manos”. In between, a fully-fledged illustration, in different communities, of the concrete steps towards a more sustainable future has been added. Narrative coherence and the global import of the message are further achieved through the repetition of the original slogan in all the languages of the video, as well as through other graphic overlays that contribute to the unity-in-diversity message: for instance, at 1:16 (not shown) two thick green lines function as framelines that separate three visual frames of children, possibly from different countries, but ideally connected through a similar background setting (i.e., thriving vegetation). Additionally, as the frames depicting different groups of children change, so does the singing in different languages, while the melody and harmony remain the same, with no change in the choice of instruments or rhythm, which would have conveyed a culture-specific flavour.

Table 1. Visual-verbal references to “carbon footprint” in the TT_{Eng} and TT_{It}.

	Time	1:06	1:07
Row 1	Original Spanish Audiobook	Reduce tu huella de carbono ,	elíge local y fresco
Row 2	English subtitles (TT _{Eng})		
		Choose local that's fresh	<u>So</u> the carbon footprint is less

Row 3	Italian subtitles (TT _{it})		
		Scegli prodotti freschi e locali	Per ridurre le emissioni di carbonio

As can be seen in Table 1 (Row 1), the original audiotrack in Spanish (“Reduce tu huella de carbono”) creates a perfect co-patterning, or “multimodal orchestration”¹⁰, between the noun phrase “huella de carbono” and the concomitant (at 1:06) hybrid visual metaphor (Forceville and Urios-Aparisi 2009: 177, 221) of the carbon footprint¹¹ – ‘hybrid’ in that it fuses two objects: a footprint proper and the embedded dynamic red-to-green scale, in which red symbolically represents ‘danger’ while green is for ‘safety’. This is also an example of how “colour [...] can be used to denote [not only] specific people, places and things [but also] more general ideas” (Kress and van Leeuwen 2002: 347). The result is to facilitate information processing through the integrated, simultaneous use of diverse linguistic and non-linguistic resources, including various modal cues (Tai and Wei 2024: 1).

In the TT_{Eng} (Row 2), instead, the hybrid visual metaphor anticipates (at 1:06), rather than co-patterns with, the “carbon footprint” label (at 1:07): such a misalignment loosens the bond between visual and verbal, and makes it slightly more difficult for an audience of English children to process such a technical expression. A further potential visual-verbal misalignment arises when it comes to the TT_{it} (Row 3, at <https://youtu.be/3LEsMIXUk8Q>), where the phrase “huella de carbono”/“carbon footprint” is not translated with the corresponding technical term “impronta di carbonio”¹², rather, it is paraphrased as “per ridurre le emissioni di carbonio” (literally: “to reduce carbon emissions”), using a metonymy¹³ (“emissioni [di carbonio]” as causing “impronta di carbonio”) that does not match the footprint overlay, thus giving rise to momentary viewer displacement as a result of the difficulties in making sense of the logogenetic pattern originating from the foregrounded or “salient” (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 177) image of the footprint. One possibility to reduce this visual-verbal mismatch would have been to reverse the clause order – i.e., “The carbon footprint is less if you choose local that’s fresh”/“Riduci le emissioni [sic]/l’impronta di carbonio scegli[endo] prodotti freschi e locali”. Re-arranging

¹⁰ See *supra*, Footnote 9.
¹¹ “The carbon footprint metaphor maps some of what we know about footprints and their impact onto what we want to happen to the earth’s atmosphere through individual and collective actions” (Nerlich and Hellsten 2014: 28).
¹² Translation verified on the IATE website, <https://iate.europa.eu/home> (15/12/2024).
¹³ “While “carbon emissions” (“emissioni di carbonio” in Italian) refers to carbon dioxide output as an abstract, virtually agentless phenomenon, “carbon footprint” (“impronta di carbonio” in Italian) is understood as “a measurement of the amount of carbon dioxide produced by the activities of a person, company, organization” (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/carbon-footprint>, emphasis added), thereby highlighting individual agency and responsibility.
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the clause complex in this way would have maintained the original co-patterning between the visual and verbal elements and ultimately preserved, not only the original orchestration, but also the educational impact of FAO's message.

3.2. “Leave No One Behind” (2022)

The video *Leave No One Behind* (<https://youtu.be/lHzmJnsDbhQ>), begins with children using smartphones to capture the realities of the natural world and ends with a scene in which other children sing and dance in an unidentified location where the huge billboards of Sustainability Development Goal (henceforth, SDG) 6 (clean water and sanitation) and SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy) are clearly visible in the background (at 0:13, not reproduced here). This scene is used to promote the concept of recycling and avoidance of food waste (at 0:29). Each of the 17 SDG billboards is then presented at the end of the film as if they were buildings shot from below to emphasise their paramount relevance in society. Each SDG is associated with a single child from a different ethnic background as if to underscore the significance and, above all, the *responsibility* of every single child in promoting the SDGs if nobody is to be left behind.

Table 2. Visual-verbal allusions to the concept of “togetherness” in the ST_{Eng} and TT_{It}.

	Time	0:09	0:12
Row 1	Original English audiobook and subtitles (ST _{Eng})	 We're all in this together,	 <u>so</u> we leave no one behind
Row 2	Italian subtitles (TT _{It})	 Siamo tutti sulla stessa barca	 <u>E</u> non lasciamo nessuno indietro

In between is the scene in Table 2, which introduces the main claim (“We’re all in this together, so we leave no one behind”, in English on the audiobook, at 0:09) echoing the UN slogan for the 2030 SDGs, and which features a group of children dancing and singing together as a “with”, i.e., “a party of more than one whose members are perceived to be ‘together’” (Goffman 1971: 19). Mutual attention and engagement are the main features of this particular “interaction

order”¹⁴. Indeed, all the children are looking at the lead dancer, the boy on the left-hand side of the screen, who, in turn, also engages viewers by directing his gaze towards the camera, thus producing a “demand picture” (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 118). The visual arrangement is enhanced by the accompanying text, which reinforces the idea of collective effort and mutual support: in the idiomatic expression “We’re all in this together”, the adjective “this” and – above all – the viewer-inclusive “we” indicate “a community of common experience (we all)” (Fairclough 2003: 181), roughly corresponding to the Italian expression “siamo tutti coinvolti” [lit. “we are all involved”; “we are in the same team”]. In considering the relationship between participants in discourse, this expression thus “serves to engage [viewers’] attention, construct solidarity, and reinforce intimacy” (Semino 2008: 32).

The Italian subtitles read “siamo tutti sulla stessa barca” (literally, “we are all in the same boat”) (Table 2, Row 2, at <https://youtu.be/vzgZkStX6jI>), but this rendering is problematic, as it carries a negative connotation¹⁵: “essere sulla stessa barca” refers to “being in the same circumstances, sharing the same situation, particularly in the sense of *facing the same risks and being subject to the same fate*” (https://dizionario.internazionale.it/parola/nella_2, current author’s translation, emphasis added).

Furthermore, the clause “so we leave no one behind” – which is a hypotactic (causal) enhancement of the main clause “we’re all in this together” in the ST_{Eng} – stresses the fact that not neglecting anyone is the logical consequence (“so”) of co-operating (“together”) to achieve a common goal, thus reasserting inclusivity and teamwork. In the TT_{It} the same clause has been translated as “e non lasciamo nessuno indietro”, paratactically linked (through “e” [and]) to the preceding clause “siamo tutti sulla stessa barca”. The semantic loss involved in the transformation from a cause-effect syntactic bond (“so”) to a paratactic addition (“and”) is misleading and raises the question of why people facing a challenging situation (i.e., “siamo tutti sulla stessa barca”, in English “we are all in the same boat”) should also be concerned with including others (i.e., “e non lasciamo nessuno indietro”). Importantly, a misalignment arises between the semiotic systems employed: opting for this translation in Italian conflicts with the positive emotions of solidarity visually represented by the children dancing and singing, resulting in visual-verbal ambiguity, whereby the “consistency of co-patterning” (Baldry and Taylor 2002: 58) between different resources in the ST_{Eng} has been undermined in the TT_{It}. Looking at the key terminological differences between the ST_{Eng} and the TT_{It} of the refrain “We should be on the same side, if we want to live right”, the Appraisal framework and its realizations stand out as crucial. Appraisal¹⁶, as defined by Martin and White (2005: 1), is “concerned with the

¹⁴ In Goffman’s (1983: 5) terms, “the consequences of systems of enabling conventions, in the sense of the ground rules for a game”.

¹⁵ The same can be said of the corresponding idiom in English, *to be in the same boat*, defined as “to be in the same *unpleasant situation* as other people” (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/be-in-the-same-boat>, emphasis added).

¹⁶ The Appraisal framework consists of three systems: *Attitude*, *Engagement*, and *Graduation*. *Attitude* – which is under examination here – is concerned with “mapping feelings, including emotional reactions [Affect], judgements of behaviour [Judgement] and evaluation of things [Appreciation]” (Martin and White 2005: 35).

construction by texts of communities of shared feelings and values, and with the linguistic mechanisms for the sharing of emotions, tastes and normative assessments". One of the most notable differences between the ST_{Eng} and the TT_{It} lies in the interpretation and translation of the word "right" in the refrain, which plays a significant role in constructing the intended message.

In the ST_{Eng}, the word "right" can be understood as a realisation of the subsystem of Judgement, which relates to evaluating "behaviour, which we admire or criticise" (*ibid.*: 42) based on certain standards; here, "right" connotes a moral or ethical sense of what is just or equitable. The clause "We should be on the same side" anticipates and reinforces this dimension of equality, suggesting that co-operation and solidarity are essential if we are to address issues like unequal access to resources such as water and food, emphasising collective responsibility to act in a manner that aligns with fairness and justice.

However, in the Italian subtitles, the word "right" is replaced by "serenamente" (literally "peacefully"), which shifts the focus of the message. The adverb "serenamente" introduces a different dimension of Attitude, specifically Affect, which is about "registering positive and negative feelings" (*ibid.*: 42); with "serenamente" the translation moves away from a moral or judgmental tone to one that highlights emotional well-being and the pursuit of harmony. This subtly alters the emphasis of the ST_{Eng} on equality and justice, instead suggesting that acting together will lead to a more peaceful and enjoyable existence.

This shift in meaning is not only linguistically significant, but also culturally revealing. The Italian use of "serenamente" may reflect cultural connotations of *la dolce vita* – the notion of an idealised, carefree, and pleasurable life that resonates in Italian culture. Therefore, in Italian the refrain evokes an image of collective harmony and contentment, rather than a moral imperative to address issues of social justice and equity. Thus, this linguistic shift highlights how translation decisions not only alter the text's meaning but also convey different cultural nuances. The ST_{Eng} with its focus on equality and moral rightness, appeals to a sense of ethical responsibility, while the TT_{It}, with its emphasis on peace and enjoyment, underscores a more emotionally-driven, harmonious ideal. Both versions aim to engage their respective audiences, but they do so through different Appraisal resources.

3.3. "Water is Life, Water is Food" (2023)

Key to the interpretation of the third film *Water is Life, Water is Food* (<https://youtu.be/UDU5xJ-yvbU>) is the different *materialization*, in different cultural communities, of water as a big blue drop in the form of a piece of paper or cardboard-based artifact held up triumphantly by children in different communities (see, e.g., Table 3 below). The video ends with a frame (at 2:57, not shown) with three girls and three boys, each shown in one of the six framelets, holding up their different interpretations of the big blue drop, once more underscoring the unity-in-diversity thematic. For example, the drops are marked variously using different signifiers and fonts for the signified 'water' (e.g., H₂O, *agua*) to *visually* "emplace" (Scollon and Scollon 2003) the shared meaning of a drop of water. The final frame is effectively a pointer to the cyclic

structure of the video. The cycle “Water is food, water is life, save every drop, so nobody is left behind” is repeated 7 times. Indeed, at 0:40 the video underscores the children’s identity with water by virtue of a group photo of 16 children holding up their drop of water marked *agua* and the subtitle “more than just bodies, we’re bodies of water” cements the visual relationship between water and children through the support given by the wording of the subtitle.

Table 3. Visual-verbal allusions to the slogan “leave no one behind” in the ST_{Eng} and TT_{It}.

	Time	0:21	0:24
Row 1	Original English audiobook and subtitles (ST _{Eng})	 Save every drop	 <u>So</u> nobody is left behind
Row 2	Italian subtitles (TT _{It})	 Salva ogni goccia	 Per nessuno è infinita

The snippet examined here (see Table 3) runs from 0:21 to 0:24 and contains a shot where the drop of water covers the face of the girl underscoring the responsibility of the individual towards others: the self must give way to the community so that nobody is left behind, further underscored by the cut to a group of children. In other words, the visual sequence uses visual grammar (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 20) to interpret the universal UN slogan “leave no one behind”. Moreover, saving water is legitimized, in van Leeuwen’s terms (2007: 105), through moral evaluation and mythopoesis (whereby “protagonists are rewarded for engaging in legitimate social practices”, *ibid.*: 107)¹⁷.

In the TT_{It} (Row 2, at <https://youtu.be/aefn9Y00Ocg>) the orchestration between the multimodal resources employed in the ST_{Eng} – where the verbal and the visual match – is only partially maintained: whereas, at 0:21, the rendering “salva ogni goccia” – which backtranslates literally as “Save every drop” – is consistent with the drop of water co-patterning with the audiobook, translating “so nobody is left behind” as “per nessuno è infinita” (at 0:23) – which backtranslates literally as “For nobody is [it] infinite” – is problematic; this

¹⁷ van Leeuwen (2007: 92) identifies four discursive forms of legitimization: by authorization (issuing from tradition, custom, law, and institutional authority); by moral evaluation (with reference to shared value systems); by rationalization (applying to the goals, uses and recognized cognitive validity of institutionalized social action); and by mythopoesis (exploiting reward-and-punishment narratives).

choice can perhaps be explained as an attempt to preserve the rhyming pattern (“*infinita*” rhymes with “l’acqua è *vita*” – literally “water is life”, in the previous clause, at 0:21, not reproduced here). Be that as it may, this is not only a useless, but even a self-defeating effort because it disrupts the causal nexus between the two actions¹⁸ and, even worse, it completely deletes the indirect reference to the 2030 Agenda pledge contained in “so nobody is left behind”.

The priority given to the stylistic quality of the verbal message, rather than to the pragmatic equivalence of ST and TT, is even less justifiable when considering that the subtitles in the localized version of the video were *not* designed to be the lyrics of a dubbed Italian (or other language) version of the multilingual video; the same drawback is manifested in many other instances in the three videos in question, as the various TTs with subtitles in the local language are almost invariably based on the ST_{Eng} rather than on the multilingual audiotrack.

In examining the English subtitling process of the video snippet produced by Italian schoolchildren, the issue of pragmatic equivalence also needs to be raised vis-à-vis the role ascribed to young people as game-changers. From 1:41 to 1:48, the Italian audiotrack (“*Cambia la storia, porta avanti il sogno; diventa il leader di chi ti sta intorno; dillo a tutto il mondo qual è la tua missione; parla alle persone, prendi una decisione*”) consistently employs “goods-&-services” clauses (Halliday 1994: 68-71) realized as imperatives (in italics). Particularly when considering the clause “prendi una decisione” (lit. [you, the viewer] make a decision!), the message is one of self-empowerment, encouraging young people to be proactive in shaping their future and reaffirming their agentive role “as active contributors to environmental advocacy” (Body 2024: 154). In contrast, the English subtitles reframe this perspective and lead to mistranslation in two main ways: firstly, they transform the Italian imperatives, not into a series of modulated obligations (e.g. ‘you must/should’, etc., see Halliday 1994: viz. 355-363), but into modalized statements expressing capability/probability, as the subtitle states “*You can make a change, [can] be more than a dreamer, you can be a local leader*”; secondly, and even more importantly, even when the ST_{Eng} does use the imperative form (“*Tell your family and friends about your mission, speak to the people that make the decisions*”), the English subtitles alter the participant role structure by shifting responsibility away from the viewer as *Actor making decisions* ([you] make a decision!) onto powerful adults (“*the people that make the decisions*”, presumably politicians); consequently, the Italian text promotes a message of direct personal empowerment, while the English text repositions young and ordinary people as supporters or advisors to those in power, thereby underestimating the social impact the former might have on environmental issues.

4. Conclusions

Translation, as a social science, cannot remain unaffected by the ecological shifts currently occurring (Cronin 2017: 3). Even more importantly, environmental

¹⁸ Alternatives semantically and pragmatically aligned with the original include “così da non lasciare indietro nessuno”; “affinché nessuno venga lasciato indietro”.

translation needs to become a socially and ecologically conscious practice, one which serves an increasingly critical role in sustaining “collective efforts within and beyond communities, organizations, and sectors engaged in [...] environmentally sustainable socioeconomic development” (Meng 2020: 13). Yet, if translation (in general) is really to become such a practice, it needs to respect, as well as to preserve, the different sociocultural identities and intersemiotic meaning-making strategies of the various stakeholder communities it impacts on. Otherwise, translation loss – a looming threat in any translation process – is inevitable and, as this paper has hopefully demonstrated, is particularly evident, for instance, when taking (whether intentionally or otherwise) the subtitles in English as a lingua franca, rather than the multilingual audiotrack, as the ‘source’ text to be “reterritorialized” (Venuti 1992: 53). This happens because the translator has not taken into due account either the ideology-driven and culture-bound choices of the original video snippet, or, more importantly, its multimodal orchestration, including intersemiotic co-patternings and specificities: the result is that, possibly in the name of the universal scope of FAO’s mission or simply by overrating the mediational role of English as a lingua franca, translation has occasionally appeared to serve the homogenizing forces of globalization – a trend which seems to be rooted, as per the guidelines mentioned above (at <https://www.fao.org/georgia/news/detail-events/en/c/1648905/>), in the selection of “a beautiful green area, such as a park, a farm or a school garden”, thus missing the opportunity to represent the problem at hand through the richness of cultural diversity and to call for different solutions depending on the specific natural and cultural ecosystem at issue. In the snippets examined, the salience of the English subtitles – however essential for decoding purposes and less detrimental than dubbing in these respects – often sidelines the multilingual and culture-specific features of the original audiotrack; this imbalance aligns with research arguing that, while English enables global communication, it can also perpetrate cultural dominance and reduce linguistic diversity. In other words, “such unconditional recognition of the privileged status of the English language in the world does not in fact acknowledge the communicative needs of other non-native and crucially, non-Western – speakers of English” (Guido 2008: 21). This state of affairs produces a more or less homogenous landscape and overall visual harmony, with just a few explanatory references to origin (see, e.g., the country flags or the Japanese pagoda, in the 2021 video) and stereotyped biocultural diversity (e.g. the Pampas, again in the 2021 video).

By analyzing the intersection between verbal and nonverbal language, culture and environmental advocacy, this paper has argued for “the need to assume a plural, inclusive and holistic view of translation and language contact that relates human activity to the environment” (Dasca and Cerarols 2024: xxii): more specifically, the present analysis has called for the need to reconcile homogenizing and localizing forces by fostering a global dialogue on pressing ecological issues (Hu 2020: 4) while “giving minority language speakers control over what, when and how texts might be translated into or out of their languages” (Cronin 2017: 2). At the same time, by providing insights into the identification of the potential and actual misalignments that will arise when the multimodal orchestration of a text is not taken into due account – something that

cannot be taken for granted even at such a high institutional level of communication –, this paper has hopefully shown that the reconciliation between homogenizing and localizing forces is only feasible if the translator, eco-translator included, is able to preserve the intersemiotic strategies and the mediational means of “emplaced” discourse practices (Scollon and Scollon 2003).

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