



The Making of the Posters: Between, Across (and Beyond) Translation

Guest post by Maria Flora Mangano

The translation of the posters for the Center for Intercultural Dialogue was a fascinating exercise of intercultural dialogue (a "deliberate attempt to understand members of different cultures," as described by Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz in [Poster #1](#)).

This work implied the translation from the original English texts into Italian, and insertion of the new text into the original graphic design. It has been indeed something more, as it allowed us to practice and to deepen the meaning of intercultural dialogue as a "deliberate attempt" in understanding each other.

The translation would not have been possible without the generous, competent, and patient review by [Paola Giorgis](#), whose help and support were crucial for me. I often felt lost in translation, and afraid to have betrayed the original text. In Italian there is a play on words between the verbs "to translate" (*tradurre*) and "to betray" (*tradire*), which is absent in English.

Every translation produces a new text, inevitably diverse from the original, as languages are different. Despite good intentions to be accurate and faithful, the number of words necessary for explaining the terms may vary, as well as the length devoted to each sentence, and the structure of the line. These aspects characterize, identify, and differentiate every language; thus, the exercise of translation constantly focuses on the balance among them all. It could be argued that the new text should be in dialogue with the original one, by paying attention to its sound, rhythm, space, as well as silence. As in a musical score, I have tried to imagine the words as musical notes, which need to find a precise and specific place in the poster, allowing it to sound close as the original.

The concision and immediacy of English cannot be matched in Italian, as is the case as well with other Neo-Latin languages. Although English is also derived from Latin, Italian often needs more space and time to convey the same information, as it seems a more descriptive language.

Furthermore, the original image designed for each poster was intended for the English language, and a translation poses the question of whether it is possible to exactly match the two texts and to place the new one into the same space using the same image. How could we avoid having the original design become a cage also for the new text?

Four people worked together on these posters: the translator (Maria Flora), the reviewer (Paola), the editor (Wendy), and the designer ([Yan Qiu](#)), in order to find possible answers and eventual solutions. (The invisible fifth person was [Linda J. de Wit](#), the graphic designer who came up with the idea for 13 of the 14 posters, chose quotes to use, and then turned words into visual images.) The result has been an interesting exchange among us, drawn from different cultures, competencies, and perspectives.

We could not adapt all the original posters into Italian translations, as sometimes the new text would not fit appropriately with the design; for instance, [Posters #8](#) and [#9](#) could not be included in the group of those translated.

We have made a “deliberate attempt” to find a compromise between translation and image, thus between the sign – either the words of the translation or the graphic design – and its meaning. We have tried to put into dialogue the words of both languages with the image, and to be sure that the message was faithful to the original, direct, and clear.

While we were involved in this work, I realized that the content of translation was specifically dedicated to this effort in communication, and that the readers of the Center seemed the most suitable audience for understanding the difficulty (and resulting fatigue), as scholars or practitioners of intercultural dialogue.

At the end of this exercise, we do not know if our attempt did really work, but this may be a further challenge of intercultural dialogue, where the simple fact of common effort in achieving mutual understanding is probably more important than the result.

As Paola illustrated in a Guest Post several years ago, [On translation as an intercultural practice](#), translation seems likely to suggest a text beyond the original one, at a new and different level, just as when people drawn from different cultures (or languages, traditions, religions, ideas, disciplines) try to encounter, and to dialogue with, the Other. The result is quite often unexpected, as it is the “deliberate attempt” for building bridges among, across and beyond them that makes the difference.

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