

## TRANSLATING (IM)PERSONALISATION IN CORPORATE DISCOURSE

### A corpus-based analysis of Corporate Social Responsibility reports in English and Italian

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**Abstract** – Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reports constitute a relatively new form of corporate disclosure used by companies to present their values and philosophy with respect to socially relevant themes on which they may have an impact, mainly the environment, the community and employees. Companies thus publish CSR reports to communicate with a variety of stakeholders and provide information about their sustainability initiatives, with the ultimate aim of building, reinforcing, and promoting their corporate image. Personalisation plays an important role in the discursive construction of identity and in the definition of relationships between social actors. The personification of the company – obtained through 1<sup>st</sup> person plural deixis within corporate reports – is a very powerful rhetorical tool to convey a collective subject which takes responsibility for the actions and results it is giving account of, indicating and enacting a specific relationship with the reader. As a sociopragmatic item, however, it is largely language/culture-dependent, and thus represents an interesting locus to observe the impact of translation strategies on the meaning conveyed to the target audience. This paper sets out to analyse how CSR reports translated into English from Italian compare – as regards personalisation – with reports originally produced in English, in order to detect differences in the way corporate identity is construed and conveyed. The study is based on a bilingual corpus which includes translated English reports and their Italian source texts, as well as comparable originals in English and Italian. Corroborating previous research conducted on similar genres, the study shows that (im)personalisation patterns are considerably different in original and translated English CSR reports, largely due to a tendency for the latter to reproduce Italian conventions in this form of specialised discourse.

**Keywords:** corporate discourse; sociopragmatics; (im)personalisation; translation; corpus linguistics.

## 1. Introduction to Corporate Social Responsibility

The notion of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) refers to action and policies adopted by companies to take responsibility for their business' impact on society and the environment. In the words of the European Commission (2017), companies can become socially responsible by “integrating social, environmental, ethical, consumer, and human rights concerns into their business strategy and operations” and in their interaction with stakeholders.<sup>1</sup> This commitment should not only fulfil legal obligations and regulatory requirements: the crucial and innovative aspect of CSR is that companies are expected to implement actions and policies in the area of corporate sustainability on a voluntary basis (COM(2001) 366 final),<sup>2</sup> in order to show how their activity reflects ethical governance and how it tangibly contributes to the common good.

To inform stakeholders of their ‘sustainable’ activities, companies issue social responsibility reports. CSR reports are key documents where data on corporate sustainability is disclosed and described in detail: they provide “information relating to a corporation’s activities, aspirations and public image with regard to environmental, community, employee and consumer issues [...] such as energy usage, equal opportunities, fair trade, corporate governance and the like” (Gray *et al.* 2001, p. 329). CSR reports have become standard practice for corporate communication on sustainability issues, especially among multinationals, and nowadays they are almost entirely published online, on the company’s internet website (Yu, Bondi 2017). The recipients of this information range from potential investors to shareholders, from the general public to selected activist groups operating in the relevant community and to anyone else who may be interested “in the social performance of the company as a predictor of its financial performance” (Fasan 2013, p. 45). Fasan’s remarks suggest that investors take social and environmental issues into consideration when making investment decisions, thus highlighting the financial potential of CSR. Over the years, the business payoffs of companies’ sustainability actions have been highlighted, revealing the financial advantages of ‘going sustainable’. The underlying rationale is that companies that do some good to society and to the environment become justified and legitimated to operate due to their social utility (Fuoli 2012, p. 4; see also Fuoli 2017; Bondi 2016b).

<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/corporate-social-responsibility\\_it](http://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/corporate-social-responsibility_it)

<sup>2</sup> Green Paper of the Commission of the European Communities of 18 July 2001, “Promoting a European framework for Corporate Social Responsibility” (COM(2001) 366 final). See also the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 25 October 2011, “A renewed EU strategy 2011-14 for Corporate Social Responsibility” (COM(2011) 681 final).

Corporate commitment towards indisputable ideological and moral principles – such as environmental protection, equal employment, fair trade, decent work conditions, corporate ethics etc. – provides a company with appealing and convincing reasons that justify its activity and fortify its legitimacy framework (Cap 2005, p. 13). In particular, a twofold legitimation process emerges: ‘legitimation through idea’, calling on the undebatable good values and principles evoked in CSR reports, and ‘legitimation through procedure’, whereby the concrete beneficial actions described in CSR reports sanction de facto the company’s social utility (Wodak, Weiss 2005, p. 131). Against this background, legitimation of corporate operations is achieved simultaneously by ‘moral evaluation’, as the company’s action is based on shared and indisputable values in line with society’s (assumed) wants and needs, and by ‘rationalisation’, as the company’s action is justified by its social utility and by its beneficial effects towards the common good (Van Leeuwen 2007, p. 92; see also Van Leeuwen 1996; Cap 2005). Hence, corporate operations appear not only morally legitimate but also justified on a utility principle. In other words, the general public does not only perceive the company as reliable and worthy of being endorsed but it also becomes persuaded that that specific company needs to exist – over other less virtuous companies – in order to promote a healthy change in corporate culture and to contribute to a shift towards sustainable production (Higgins, Walker 2012). This, in turn, translates into a definite financial advantage: the public chooses to buy from or invest in that specific company not just to fulfil consumer needs, but also to ultimately help ‘a good cause’.

## 2. Study background and purpose

Effectively communicating the company’s responsible approach to its stakeholders is crucial for the company to gain a financial advantage. A vast body of literature analysing general and specific rhetorical and discourse features of non-translated CSR reports is available (Catenaccio 2011a, 2011b, 2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2014, 2017; Catenaccio, Degano 2011; Bhatia 2012; Aiezza 2015; Bondi 2016b; Fuoli 2012, 2017; Higgins, Walker 2012; Skulstad 2008; Malavasi 2011, 2012, 2017; Ocler 2009), or adopting a multimodal approach to investigate their semiotic dimension (Höllner *et al.* 2013; Maier 2014; Catellani 2015). Research has also been carried out in a contrastive perspective, comparing discourse features of CSR reports across languages (e.g. Russian/English, Italian/English, Italian/Chinese/English etc.) (Bondi, Yu 2017; Yu, Bondi 2017; Bondi 2016a; Bashtovaya 2014; Bhatia 2012). Specifically on the language combination English/Italian, contrastive research has mostly focused on English and Italian corporate texts not (necessarily) related to CSR issues – namely annual reports, CEO letters and business

correspondence (Garzone 2004; Giannoni 2001, 2014; Vergaro 2002, 2004, 2005).

The purpose of this study is, therefore, to contribute to filling an important gap in the body of academic research on CSR discourse, that is the analysis of translated CSR texts. A large number of translated reports can be found online and, when full reports are not available, multilingual translated summaries are usually available. Hence, a widespread translation trend can be observed in CSR online communication – possibly due to the social relevance and business impact of the sustainability issues mentioned earlier – a trend showing how corporations aim at reaching the widest possible audience worldwide in their communication on CSR issues.

In terms of the specific focus of our analysis, we have decided to concentrate on strategies of personalisation, more specifically on 1<sup>st</sup> person plural deixis. As previously pointed out by Fuoli (2012, p. 2), most discourse investigations of CSR reports have primarily focused on their ideational function, while their interpersonal function – that is how reporting companies construct their identity and relationship with their interlocutors – has not been the object of systematic investigation. Personalisation, in particular, has been found to play an important role in the discursive construction of identity (Fairclough 2001) and in the definition of relationships between social actors (Van Leeuwen 1996; see also Wodak *et al.* 2009; Wodak 2012). Van Leeuwen (1996, p. 59) describes personalisation as a crucial element in providing social actors with the ‘human’ feature: it is ranked among the most prominent – and effective – communicative strategies used to endow an actor with a comforting and appealing ‘human side’ (Caliendo, Magistro 2009).

A few studies of similar corporate texts – namely annual reports – have indeed looked at the representation of corporate identity conveyed through personalisation. Garzone’s (2004) study on the use of personal pronouns within *Letters to shareholders* – arguably a well-defined sub-genre within annual reports – is a case in point. Garzone found that corporate statements written in English by Italian companies were characterised by a lower frequency of the pronoun *we* and a higher occurrence of impersonal and passive forms than texts produced by multinationals located in other countries, arguably due to interference from specialised discourse conventions in the Italian language.

Among the different strategies to obtain a ‘personalised’ effect, the use of *we*-references is indeed crucial in conveying the image and role of the first turn taker in the dialogue that the company establishes with the stakeholder/investor/client or the wider public in general. Fairclough (1995, p. 145) notes how *we*-references give an impression of cooperative collegiality and confer a dialogic tone, presupposing a *you*-listener (see also Bargiela-Chiappini, Harris 1997). Commenting on corporate annual reports, Garzone

adds that 1<sup>st</sup> person (plural) deixis is used to convey a collective subject, confronting addressees with a corporate ‘persona’:

a textual self which takes upon itself responsibility for the actions and results for which s(he) is giving account and for the decisions and strategies illustrated in the text. In other words, recourse to first person pronouns as subjects reflects a form of ethical commitment for the writer; it is in the service of ethos. (Garzone 2004, p. 236)

The ‘personification’ of the company is therefore a very powerful rhetorical tool that not only conveys closeness with the reader, but de facto enacts it. Regardless of whether this closeness is wanted by the reader, by discursively establishing such closeness the company already makes it a fact. The reader can only acknowledge this closeness and embrace it in order to participate in the dialogue with the company.

## **2.1. Theoretical framework**

The theoretical assumptions underlying our study lie in discourse analysis and translation studies.

We first assume that pragmalinguistic elements carry culturally-loaded information: they convey the speaker’s perception of appropriate language and acceptable/desirable communication in a given context (Leech 1983). Bondi (2016a, p. 168) highlights a very interesting aspect on the notion of culture by noting that cross-cultural discourse perspectives on CSR are mostly interested in corporate culture itself over ‘national culture’. She adds that “because of the global dimension of both sustainability issues and business in general, disclosure documents and CSR reports in particular are [...] clearly related to the global and international contexts, with a clear dominance of international guidelines”. In other words, CSR reports have become a globally established and standardised genre with remarkable similarities in different languages, “suggesting that the communicative purposes of CSR reports are recognised by different cultures” (Yu, Bondi 2017). While acknowledging the global dimension of corporate ‘culture’ – featuring a worldwide discourse community of corporate actors – in this paper we refer to ‘culture’ as the communicative habits of a speech community embracing specific behavioural conventions, discursive expectations and norms of social appropriateness (Kramsch 2003, p. 6), thus not limited to corporate or business settings. More specifically, we will focus on texts produced by a community of Italian-language users and on their respective translations into English.

We then adopt a critical approach, as we intend to discuss the impact of translators’ choices on the sociopragmatic perceptions of the speech community receiving these translations. In particular, we assume that discourse is socially performative as it plays an important role in shaping social identities

and reality configurations (Fairclough 1993, p. 139). Based on the postulations of Critical Discourse Analysis, discourse is a form of social practice that can produce actual change in society by affecting (the construction of) social relationships and identities, as well as frameworks of knowledge (Fairclough, Wodak 1997, p. 258). Language can be used to affect society by portraying a desirable scenario governed by desirable relations; this scenario does not necessarily represent the actual status quo, rather the scenario and relations that the company intends to establish – allegedly – to the benefit of the readers and the broader world community. The translator, therefore, becomes a powerful agent for cultural change: a translator’s decision on how to render pragmalinguistic elements of the source text can have an impact on the perceptions and communicative habits of the receivers, thus on the target culture(s) (Venuti 1995).

What is ‘faithfully rendered’ from a pragmalinguistic perspective, for example, may be perceived as ‘not appropriate’ by – or frustrate the expectations of – the target audience from a sociopragmatic or cultural perspective. In other words, using in the target language the resources provided by the source language to convey a particular illocution may not result in an illocution which is consistent with the initial one (Leech 1983, p. 11). Hence, transferring the same pragmalinguistic features may prove to be sociopragmatically and culturally unsuitable for – or simply ‘unfamiliar’ to – the target audience, as it may generate pragmatic effects that deviate from the communicative habits and expectations of the target speech community (Magistro 2013).

Quoting Toury’s law of interference (1995, p. 275), when “phenomena pertaining to the make-up of the source text tend to be transferred to the target text” – determining an over- or under-representation of features that do exist in the TL but with different frequencies – the result may be target language discourse that is grammatically correct but unnatural. As pointed out by Mauranen (2004), frequency deviations from native TL usage may virtually go unnoticed by ordinary readers and be detected only by means of large-scale frequency comparisons. In this regard, the application of corpus linguistics methods to translation studies – and most notably the extensive body of research based on monolingual comparable corpora conducted over the last twenty years – have proved fundamental for pinpointing differences between native and translated language at several linguistic levels, from syntax to lexical density and variety.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Monolingual comparable corpora are corpora of native and translated texts in the same language. The monolingual comparable corpus approach became mainstream especially after Baker (1993) suggested that the comparison of translated and non-translated texts could unveil “universal features of translation”, i.e. features typically occurring in translated texts rather than in original

### 3. The study: research questions, corpus, method and results

The study focuses on the use of 1<sup>st</sup> person plural deixis to build corporate identity in English and Italian original CSR reports and on how personalisation – as a discursive strategy – is dealt with in Italian-to-English translations. More particularly, by examining how companies are portrayed and which type of writer-reader relationship (i.e. personal/impersonal) is established in the two languages, the study sets out to investigate whether personalisation patterns observed in translated English CSR reports are different from those found in original English CSR reports, and to what extent they are affected by Italian socio-pragmatic habits. The ultimate purpose is to discuss the consequences translation choices might have on the perception of corporate image conveyed through translated reports.

#### 3.1. Corpus description

In order to answer the above questions, it was necessary to assemble an *ad-hoc* bilingual corpus which included original Italian and English reports as well as translated English reports. Such a composite resource can be queried according to different perspectives, most notably a contrastive perspective (i.e. original English reports vs. original Italian reports) and a monolingual comparable perspective (i.e. original English reports vs. translated English reports). The Italian source texts corresponding to the translated English reports were also included, even though the specific aims of this study do not require a proper parallel component. In fact, the study does not aim to extract and analyse specific translation examples, rather to observe the possible overall impact of the Italian language on the translated subcorpus.

The data for this study come from a corpus of 251 CSR reports published between 2012 and 2017 by companies operating in a variety of sectors, mainly energy, financial services, food and beverage, and construction. In order to enhance their comparability, the texts were retrieved through an existing online repository – the *Sustainability Disclosure Database*<sup>4</sup> – which at the time of writing contains over 48,000 CSR reports produced by more than 12,000 organisations worldwide. The repository is maintained by the Global Reporting Initiative, a non-governmental non-profit international organisation which

utterances as a result of the process of translation. “Universal differences between translations and comparable non-translated texts” would later be defined as *T-universals* by Chesterman, in opposition to *S-universals*, that is “universal differences between translations and their source texts” (Chesterman 2004). See e.g. Laviosa (2002), Zanettin (2012) for interesting reviews of studies based on monolingual comparable corpora.

<sup>4</sup> <http://database.globalreporting.org/>



provides internationally recognised standards and guidelines for sustainability reporting.<sup>5</sup> Most CSR reports included in the database are thus GRI-compliant, although the repository also provides access to reports that are not GRI-based. Overall the corpus totals 8.5 million tokens, as shown in Table 1 (the -EN and -IT affixes indicate the language of the texts – English and Italian respectively – and the -ST, -TT, -REF suffixes indicate source, target and reference texts).

Sub-corpus	Language	Description	Texts	Tokens
CSR-EN-REF	English	Original English reports	82	2,308,955
CSR-EN-TT	English	Translated English reports, corresponding to CSR-IT-ST	59	2,196,175
CSR-IT-ST	Italian	Original Italian reports, source texts for CSR-EN-TT	59	2,234,907
CSR-IT-REF	Italian	Original Italian reports	51	1,739,066

Table 1  
Corpus details.

Relevant parallel CSR reports were retrieved by applying the country filter available in the repository search interface, starting from the assumption that business organisations recorded as having their headquarters in Italy are likely to have their CSR reports originally written in Italian and subsequently translated into English. As this was found to be overtly stated only in a few reports (8/59), we contacted all the selected companies to ascertain that the English version was truly a translation of the Italian version. About half of the companies (27/59) replied to our query and confirmed that their CSR report was originally written in Italian. In addition, in over two thirds of the translated English reports it is explicitly stated that the attached independent auditor's report is a translation of the original Italian version, which would prevail in case of dispute.<sup>6</sup> This statement, per se, indirectly confirms that the audited texts (i.e. our sustainability reports) were originally written in Italian.<sup>7</sup> Only for

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.globalreporting.org>. GRI standards are not legally binding, still they are widely adopted on a voluntary basis across the corporate community worldwide, including 74% of the world's largest 250 companies (source: <https://www.globalreporting.org/information/sustainability-reporting/Pages/gri-standards.aspx>). These guidelines provide indications of *what* should be included in the reports, but do not say much about *how* the information should be articulated (Catenaccio 2011a, p. 72).

<sup>6</sup> For the sake of example, the English versions of the independent auditors' reports include statements like "Translation from the Italian original which remains the definitive version", "This report has been translated from the original, which was issued in Italian, solely for the convenience of international readers" and "Signed on the original" (showing no signature on the English version).

<sup>7</sup> As a matter of fact, the independent auditor officially certifies that the relevant sustainability report is prepared in compliance with the latest Sustainability Reporting Guidelines defined by the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), with all due legal implications of an official recognition. Such a certification can only be granted if the certifier understands the content (hence the language) of



one fifth of the companies (12/59) is no specification provided on the language of the source text. In these cases we embraced the assumptions that a company a) whose headquarters and registered offices are based in Italy, and whose management and founders are Italian, b) whose website is available mostly or entirely in Italian, and c) whose sustainability report largely refers to compliance with Italian legislation and relations with Italian public institutions, local associations (e.g. Cral) and contests (e.g. Premio Compasso d'Oro) is a company that is very likely to have strong ties with the Italian community and, therefore, is very likely to circulate key reports impacting the local context in the community's language – Italian, that is.

The same assumptions hold true for the selection of original texts. The English comparable component includes CSR reports published by companies with headquarters in several countries where English is an L1 – mainly UK and US, but also Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa – while the comparable corpus of Italian contains CSR reports produced by Italian companies (see the above criteria) for which no translation was available. The latter subcorpus was used to obtain information about personalisation patterns commonly found in Italian CSR reports, against which to analyse patterns featured in Italian STs.

The reports were downloaded in PDF format from either the repository or the official websites of the companies involved, then converted into raw text format using unsupervised (fully automated) file conversion software.

### **3.2. Method**

The research procedure primarily consisted of three steps. The first step involved singling out all possible *we*-references in English and Italian, i.e. all linguistic items instantiating the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural which contribute to the personalisation of companies as collective subjects (*we*) and can be exploited for the rhetorical purpose of modulating the company's involvement (compared to the use of passive and interpersonal forms, which convey a lower degree of involvement). The two languages involved are characterised by morphosyntactic differences: while considering personal pronouns (*we*, *us*, *ours* and *ourselves*) and the possessive adjective *our* was sufficient for English, for Italian – which is an inflected pro-drop language – it was necessary to also include inflected forms for verbs and possessive determiners. As this step was crucial for the study, and the quality of the available Italian POS-tagging was not deemed satisfactory, a list of suffixes which are indicative of 1<sup>st</sup> person

the document to be certified, otherwise a necessary precondition for the certification would not be met. In our case, if Italian is the language of the original certification (i.e. of the original auditor's report), it can be assumed that the audited document was also drafted in Italian.

plural forms across all verb tenses was compiled and used in wildcard searches (see Table 2).

Language	Search words
English	we   us   our   ours   ourselves
Italian	noi   nostr*   ci *iamo   *remo   *vamo   *mmo   *ssimo   *rci

Table 2  
Search words.

As a second step, *we*-references were extracted from the different subcorpora – and their frequency calculated – by retrieving concordances for the search words listed in Table 2, using the *AntConc* software (Anthony 2014). The concordance function was chosen (over simple word counts) because it allowed for the subsequent manual pruning of irrelevant hits. These mainly included words ending in one of the specified suffixes but not relevant for the analysis, or occurrences of words from the search list which were retrieved from parts of the reports other than the actual body (e.g. boilerplate text which had not been properly removed by the file conversion tool).

The third stage consisted in comparing the normalised frequencies of *we*-references across subcorpora. As a first step, normalised frequencies in the two English subcorpora were computed in order to detect quantitative differences between non-translated and translated English reports. The statistical significance of the observed frequency differences was calculated using the log-likelihood test (as proposed, among others, by Rayson, Garside 2000);<sup>8</sup> the %DIFF effect-size metric (Gabrielatos, Marchi 2011) was also used to measure the size (as a proportion) of the difference between the normalised frequencies in the two corpora. The English data were then compared to data extracted from the Italian subcorpora to assess whether the frequencies observed in translated reports could somehow be linked to Italian personalisation patterns and, ultimately, the translation process.

<sup>8</sup> Log-likelihood values were calculated using the online tool developed and made available by Lancaster University at <http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/llwizard.html>. The largest LL values indicate the words having the most significant relative frequency difference between the two corpora. The chi-square test applied to the same frequency data further cross-checked the validity of the results.

### 3.3. Results

For the monolingual comparable comparison of *we*-references across original and translated reports, frequencies of the English items in Table 2 were calculated in the two English subcorpora (see Table 3).

	CSR-EN-TT		CSR-EN-REF		Log-Likelihood	%DIFF
	f - raw	f - ptw	f - raw	f - ptw		
<b>we</b>	3,037	1.38	22,652	9.81	15977.27	-85.90
<b>our</b>	3,757	1.71	36,108	15.64	28774.15	-89.06
<b>us</b>	457	0.21	2,225	0.96	1182.45	-78.41
<b>ours</b>	12	0.01	21	0.01	2.06	-39.92
<b>ourselves</b>	37	0.02	129	0.06	49.48	-69.84
<b>Total</b>	7,300	3.32	61,135	26.48		

Table 3  
*We*-references in the two English subcorpora.

It can be observed that virtually all 1<sup>st</sup> person plural references are more frequent in original English reports than in translated reports. The difference is particularly striking for the subject pronoun *we* (9.81 ptw in CSR-EN-REF vs. 1.38 ptw in CSR-EN-TT, LL=15977.27, %DIFF=-85.90)<sup>9</sup> and the possessive adjective *our* (15.64 vs. 1.71, LL=28774.15, %DIFF=-89.06), which incidentally represent the two most frequent *we*-references in both subcorpora, with a large impact over overall frequencies (26.48 vs. 3.32). All frequency differences are statistically significant ( $p < 0.0001$ ) with the exception of the pronoun *ours*. Translated CSR reports thus appear to be characterised by a much lower degree of personalisation than original English reports, in line with previous findings by Garzone (2004) on similar corporate texts (see Section 2).

In order to determine whether this linguistic feature can be recognised as a consequence of the texts being translated from Italian, the frequency of 1<sup>st</sup> person plural references in the corresponding Italian source texts was then taken into account. Relevant figures are reproduced in Table 4, together with data from the Italian reference subcorpus. The total normalised frequency of 1<sup>st</sup> person plural references in the Italian source texts is 2.49 per thousand words, only slightly higher than the normalised frequency observed in the Italian reference corpus (2.09). This means that the degree of personalisation of Italian STs is in line with what is commonly found in the CSR report genre

<sup>9</sup> Negative %DIFF values indicate that the relevant word has a higher normalised frequency in the reference corpus.

for Italian, namely a much less extensive use of 1<sup>st</sup> person plural references than in original English CSR reports.

	CSR-IT-ST		CSR-IT-REF	
	f - raw	f - ptw	f - raw	f - ptw
noi	174	0.08	150	0.09
nostr*	2,602	1.16	1,549	0.89
VERB	2,540	1.14	1,756	1.01
ci	247	0.11	176	0.10
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,563</b>	<b>2.49</b>	<b>3,631</b>	<b>2.09</b>

Table 4

Raw and normalised frequencies of *we*-references in the two Italian subcorpora.

Joining data from Tables 3 and 4, it becomes apparent that the normalised frequency of *we*-references in English translated CSR reports (3.32 words per thousand words) is much closer to their frequency in the corresponding Italian source texts (2.49) than in comparable non-translated English reports (26.48). It can thus be safely argued – even without extracting actual parallel concordances – that the personalisation patterns of the Italian source texts tend to be largely reproduced in translated texts.

Further investigations on *we* verb collocates (Castagnoli, Magistro 2018) and the manual analysis of concordances showed that the incidence of *we*-inclusive forms – as exemplified by (1) below, where the underlined *we* arguably refers to society as a whole – is virtually irrelevant across all the different corpus components. In both English and Italian reports, *we*-references are mostly exclusive, that is they are used only to refer to the companies authoring the reports, without involving the readers in the creation of a united entity sharing the same perspective (see examples 2-4).

- (1) Your contribution will help us continue to improve outcomes for our industry and our communities so we can address the challenges we face together. (CSR-EN-REF)
- (2) We actively look for opportunities to reduce waste. (CSR-EN-REF)
- (3) We are also working towards involving our employees in our new sustainability agenda, and we aim to improve transparency across the organisation and embed sustainability into our daily routines. (CSR-EN-TT)
- (4) Promuovere costantemente questi temi è per noi una priorità. (CSR-IT-ST)

### 3.4. Discussion

The data presented in Section 3.3 show that personalisation in Italian CSR reports, as given by *we*-references, is much lower than in original English CSR reports. This is possibly an indication that Italian textual conventions in specialised discourse – including corporate discourse about CSR – still require a certain degree of formality, which is assumed to convey an impression of professional competence and objectivity (Garzone 2004). The low occurrence of 1<sup>st</sup> person deixis in Italian texts might indicate that, as further observed by Garzone (2004, p. 337), Italian companies may still not have elaborated a more empathic communicative style due to the fact that Italy has only recently recorded a real peak of interest in corporate investment on the part of ordinary people. Although the CSR report can now be considered as a highly standardised genre in terms of disclosure contents, textual structure and high-level rhetorical moves (see Section 2.1), culture-bound preferences as regards the use of specific pragmalinguistic features – such as personalisation – still determine divergencies in this form of specialised discourse across languages.

These differences are crucial in the translation process. Target-oriented approaches to translation – which prioritise target text *acceptability* (Toury 1995), i.e. adherence to target language norms and ultimately target reader's expectations – are indisputably the norm in current specialised translation. If the more extensive usage of *we*-forms in original English reports reflects conventions for the CSR genre in English-speaking countries – and translated reports in the corpus turn out to be more similar to their Italian source texts in terms of the incidence of 1<sup>st</sup> person deixis – one is left to wonder to what extent CSR reports translated from Italian can be considered pragmatically 'acceptable'. By mimicking the pragmalinguistic elements featured in the Italian source text, without performing any major domesticating intervention with respect to the use of 1<sup>st</sup> person plural deixis (as suggested by the comparison with the English reference corpus), translators produce translated reports that are characterised by a more prominent distancing component compared to English reference texts. This might be perceived as sociopragmatically unsuitable by the target audience.

However, defining a target audience in this case is not a trivial task. When translating for the international corporate discourse community, which uses English as a lingua franca, it may not be possible for translators to determine what it means to “achieve the greatest possible correspondence, referentially and *pragmatically*” (Newmark 1998, p. 23, emphasis added). Stakeholders worldwide are inevitably imbued with conventions and expectations of their own cultures/speech communities (see Section 2), and what may be acceptable for target readers of a given speech community might at the same time frustrate other stakeholders' discursive expectations. Research

on audience reception would be needed in order to ascertain whether the production of an unusual or ‘marked’ sociopragmatic scenario in translated texts can have repercussions on corporate image.

As for all product-oriented research, it is not possible to determine whether the features observed in translated texts are due to deliberate stylistic choices or rather the result of interference from the sociopragmatics of source texts. Translators might be willing to preserve at least ‘some’ degree of impersonalisation, either to reproduce more ‘faithfully’ the corporate image conveyed by Italian companies in Italian originals (in a more source-oriented approach), or to comply with an alleged reluctance of Italian companies to adopt a more personalised communicative style.

To try and overcome this limitation, we attempted to gather some information on the translation process from the companies involved in our research (see also section 3.1). We asked them who carried out the translation (i.e. internal staff, external translators, translation agencies) and whether, to their knowledge, the translator was a native-speaker of English. We also asked if a translation brief with the company’s stylistic preferences was provided. About half the respondents confirmed that stylistic or terminological directions were provided or that the translator had already collaborated with the company and, therefore, was familiar with the company’s preferences. As it is normally the case in the translation industry, we were not given the names of the translators/translation agencies involved in the translation of the reports – mostly for privacy reasons. It was therefore impossible to contact them and gather information on the rationales for their choices. However, even if we had been given the names of individual translators and had had the opportunity to consult them for a retrospective analysis of their choices, a major disadvantage comes to mind regarding the retrospective practice – a downside that could even distort any results. Research has shown that interviewing a translator can provide valuable insights on the process and cognitive mechanisms of translation when the interview ideally takes place immediately after the translation task, so as to minimise memory issues and cued recalls:

A disadvantage of retrospection is that it generally does not allow complete recall of the information, especially in longer tasks, for instance, translation. [...] The data is based on the participants’ recall, and reports may be distorted for many different reasons. (Englund Dimitrova, Tiselius 2014, p. 177)

Our reports and their respective translations were published between 2012 and 2017, that is at least a year – and often several years – before the time this paper was written, thereby posing a major problem in terms of the immediacy of the

translator's consultation.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, this discussion refers to the unusual scenario of a single translator performing the task, whereas it is widely acknowledged in translation research and practice that translating is often a collaborative task involving different subjects. For example, more than one translator may have worked on the text, a reviser and/or a proofreader may have made changes to the text at a later stage, or the company's internal staff may have intervened to amend the translation (this case was actually mentioned by many of the companies that we have contacted).

Although process-oriented research is interesting and challenging for the wider field of translation studies, it is not the focus of this corpus-based study. No doubt the triangulation of corpus data with some ethnographic data (from basic information about translators to structured interviews about possible motivations for translation strategies) would represent an advance in research circumstances that allow for more immediate consultation of the subjects involved in the translation task (e.g. translation students, in-field ethnographic projects, interpreting tasks etc.). Unfortunately this type of investigation cannot be realistically conducted in the context being considered: collecting interviews or other ethnographic data so long after the actual translation took place would have exposed the study to the material risk of distorting or even cueing results.

#### 4. Final remarks

The pilot study described in this paper has provided some evidence that the corporate image conveyed in English CSR reports translated from Italian is substantially different from the one conveyed through comparable originals, in that the underuse of *we*-references in translated reports – probably mirroring source-language sociopragmatic conventions – results in less personal, less proximising and possibly more formal corporate disclosures. In order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of personalisation patterns, however, other forms need to be taken into consideration – such as *I*- and especially *you*-references, possibly addressing readers directly and enhancing their involvement (in lieu of *we*-inclusive forms, as mentioned in Section 3.3). These need to be coupled with an analysis of strategies which avoid personalisation

<sup>10</sup> When a translation task occurs in a time that is so distant in the past, obviously the (high) risk is that facts may be remarkably blurred in the translator's mind, thus forcing them to provide an answer to the researcher by 'fabricating' memories or by simply making logical assumptions on the reasons for their translation choices that may not reflect their line of reasoning when the task actually took place. In other words, whereas the locution – the actual translation – has remained unaltered since the 2012-2017 period, the illocution – the translator's intentions – may be perceived differently now due to a number of reasons (e.g. the translator is now more experienced, the translator has gained access to new information, new technological tools have become available, their work has been subject to revision etc.).



in corporate reports, such as using 3<sup>rd</sup> person references, agentless passives and impersonal forms. Further work will include observing how lexical items like *group*, *company* or *business* are exploited to this end. Collocational profiles for the subject pronoun *we* and the possessive adjective *our* will also be examined (Castagnoli, Magistro 2018) in order to derive further information about the differences in the way corporate image is construed in original and translated reports.

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