

# When Contagion Sounds Hilarious: Word-for-Word Translation as a Means for Fun

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## Abstract

Contact between languages has always occurred. There is a location where the contact mainly takes place: translation. More specifically, the translator's mind. When the source text is not re-elaborated in the translator's mind, when the source language's elements are not separated from those of the target language, contagion takes place. Contagion is an effect of contact, as the Covid-19 pandemic has been teaching us over the past two years. Bodies need to be kept separate in order to avoid contagion. Devices shall be used to prevent contamination. This is supposed to work in case of physical contact and subsequent contagion. What happens in the translator's mind? The present essay aims at analyzing the "expressionary" designed by "Rome is More," a linguo-cultural experiment carried out and promoted mainly on social media to bring English speakers into contact with linguo-cultural elements of the Roman dialect.

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## 1. Introduction

Debate has been going on for a while on whether translation can actually be considered and labelled as a creative process. Lately scholars have been dealing with "trans-creation" as an additional way to refer to "creative translation." In February 2021, TRADAC was officially launched. The acronym refers to the name of the Italian association promoting the study of AVT and accessibility. F. Chaume closed the event with a presentation which raised interesting and thought-provoking questions such as: do we really need a new or an additional term for AVT and, more generally, for translation? Is not translation creative in its own right? Word-for-word translation is definitely non-creative, but can it actually be considered translation at all?

Translation is the process of re-creating a text. It should be conceived from this perspective. A text is born the moment its author creates it. Translating a text implies giving it a new life, in other words, it implies re-creating it. When the re-creation does not occur, when translating means producing a copy of the original, when word-for-word translation replaces the process of trans-creation, the result is a third language, the product of a source language contaminating the target language. The hybrid has been labelled *translationese* (Osimo 2004), an artificial language showing the symptoms and effects of contamination. This is more apparent in some languages

than in others. In the case of Italian, A. Castellani (1987) referred to it as a *Morbus Anglicus*, as if the English language were a virus infecting Italian not only at a superficial level (namely, the level of vocabulary), but also at deeper levels of the language (as proved by scholars through the past decades: see Rossi 1999; Alfieri-Contarino-Motta 2003; Motta 2008; Sileo 2018, among others).

## 2. On Contagion (in Translation)

As G. Toury pointed out, “in translation, phenomena pertaining to the make-up of the source text tend to force themselves on the translators and be transferred to the target text” (1995: 310-311). These phenomena may turn out to be either positive or negative transfer. The former refers to the increased use of some elements which already existed in the target language’s organism. Consequently, other equivalent structures are less and less used, thus levelling out any form of language variation and producing a flat and dull language. This is similar to a positive transfer of Covid-19, where no medical symptoms occur because the average speaker of the target language generally does not realize that an interference has taken place and continues to spread the word and virus. Negative transfer, on the contrary, is when a new exogenous element invades the target language and at times even breaks some of its rules. This type of transfer is more visible to the average speaker and clearly shows the symptoms of infection caused by the inattentive meeting and merging of two languages. This is particularly evident in the Italian language – as mentioned above – but also in others: in other words, some bodies are lacking antibodies to protect them from such invasion or contagion.

Since Roman antiquity, scholars have argued about the mode to be followed while translating, whether proceeding word-for-word or sense-for-sense. Horace and Cicero maintained that a word-for-word translation only provides the “weight” of the original text, but not its sense. This, however, did not apply to Bible translation, a specific case in which the original text is endowed with and surrounded by such an aura of sacredness that a sense-for-sense rendering into some other language is and was unthinkable (Bassnett 2002). In his letter to Pammachius dated 395 AD, St Jerome makes a clear distinction between the two translation methods, each pertaining to a certain type of text.

For I myself not only admit but freely proclaim that in translating from the Greek (except in the case of the holy scriptures where even the order of the words is a mystery) I render sense for sense and not word for word. [...] It is difficult in following lines laid down by others not sometimes to diverge from them, and it is hard to preserve in a translation the charm of expressions which in another language are most felicitous. [...] If I render word for word, the result will sound uncouth, and if compelled by necessity I alter anything in the order or wording, I shall seem to have departed from the function of a translator.

<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3001057.htm>

Word-for-word translation is the cause of the translator’s visibility. It renders the signs of contagion visible. Translation works when the process of re-creation is not visible to the target (text’s) user.

### 2.1 A Short Detour to Invisibility...

Translators' bodies are visibly marked by the side effects of their work. See, for example, the repetitive strain injury on muscles and tendons from repeated scrolling and clicking on files or web pages. Eyesight related issues are also worth mentioning. In spite of these perfectly and physically visible marks, translators are mostly invisible workers. Remote translators are even more so: they do not leave the house to get to work; their neighbors are not aware they have an actual job. They are invisible workers.

The concept of "translator's invisibility" has long been debated on, starting from L. Venuti's renowned work, whose underpinning idea essentially referred to the role of translators as invisible facilitators or means by which the source language author is known to the target language reader: "the more fluent the translation, the more invisible the translator, and, presumably, the more visible the writer or meaning of the foreign text" (1995: 2). Translators' invisibility is fundamental for readers to maintain what has been called "suspension of linguistic disbelief" (Romero-Fresco 2009) and to avoid being distracted from what they are reading to focus on how it has been written – namely, translated. From this perspective, invisibility is desirable outcome in the product of translation. Unfortunately, invisibility has long haunted its producer, as well. If authorship equates with property, "the translator's activity has been related to evil and blasphemy, to indecency and transgression" (Arrojo 1995: 21). Translators have often been "underpaid, anonymous parasites, at their best [...], like an imaginary window-pane, they are invisible and least noticed" (Newmark 1989: 23).

On the one hand, the efforts of translators have been aimed at acquiring and maintaining visibility on their products: some publishers – at least, in Italy – are giving emphasis to translators' names on the covers of their translated book, although there is no national agreement for literary translation, whereas a CCNL for audiovisual translation was achieved in January 2008 and updated in February 2017. Unfortunately, it is not universally complied with and the market is full of more or less qualified professionals who are willing to work at lowest rates, to the detriment of others and leading clients to underestimate translation as a work of art.

Additional 'threat' to translators is represented by automated competitors: the so-called "mechanic dream" was based on the belief that it might be possible to construct a machine that could replace human translators. The aim remains the same: to save money, and save time (which is synonymous with saving money). Although recent developments in science and technology have produced increasingly efficient machine translators, the word-for-word method is still applied in numerous cases, often with unsatisfactory outcome (see Sileo 2022, in press).

## 2.2 ...and back

Contact carries risks. When it comes to language contact, the risks essentially depend on the distance between languages and/or their relatedness. E. Nida (2004: 130) lists three different types of linguo-cultural relatedness/distance and identifies the risks implied in each of them.

- Type 1: comparatively closely related linguo-cultures – e.g., Hebrew and Arabic – run the risk of producing false friends; for example, English "virtue" and Latin *virtus*.
- Type 2: parallel cultures, but unrelated languages – e.g., German and Hungarian, an Indo-European language and a Finno-Ugrian one, respectively – may produce numerous formal shifts.

- Type 3: linguo-cultural distance – between English and Zulu, as an instance – is said to entail severe complications, mainly due to cultural differences.

Language contact has always existed. Often the result has been language interference: in other words, a target language showing signs or symptoms of contagion because the rules for language distancing have been poorly managed or not observed. Once contagion has occurred, there comes a stage when the target language antibodies start fighting against the source language virus. Their strength depends on the stability of the target language norms. Especially in unstable areas of a language, those less structured, contagion passes into contamination, which is the final phase of the process.

### Contact > Contagion > Contamination

The phenomenon has been the subject of much academic study, focusing mainly – though not exclusively – on contact-contagion-contamination from English into Italian, which falls under Type 1 of Nida's framework (see above). The phenomenon of false friends shared by the two languages is quite relevant and renowned; however, false friends do not represent the sole risk or outcome of contact. Studies have also analyzed risks pertaining to deeper levels of Italian, to 'grey' areas of the language, whose 'legal order' cannot be clearly interpreted or even leaves the choice to the speaker. One of these is related to the expression or production of more or less redundant possessive adjectives:

le traduzioni troppo meccaniche, che tendono a ricalcare fedelmente il modello, diffondono brutture stilistiche, quali le ripetizioni martellanti dei pronomi *tu* e *tuo* («condividi le tue foto e i tuoi video con i tuoi amici grazie al tuo telefono cellulare»), dipendenti certamente dalla struttura dell'inglese, ma anche, nel caso di testi pubblicitari, dalla volontà di sottolineare la personalizzazione del messaggio, orientandolo sul cliente<sup>1</sup> (Giovanardi-Gualdo-Coco 2008: 87).

However, in the redundancy of Italian possessive adjectives, I. Klajn retrieves some influence from French, more than from English:

l'uso superfluo [...] in frasi come *ho bevuto il mio tè, dopo il vostro caffè, pulite i vostri denti* [...], del resto meno frequente di quanto si potrebbe dedurre dall'abbondanza di avvertimenti in contrario, ricalca soprattutto il francese, ma talvolta forse anche l'inglese, in cui l'uso dei possessivi è ancora più largo. Come anglicismo lo interpretano ALFARO (s.v. *Posesivo*) nello spagnolo e WEINREICH (39) nello yiddish<sup>2</sup> (Klajn 2012: 190).

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<sup>1</sup> "Overly mechanical translations, which tend to faithfully follow the source, spread stylistic blots, such as the hammering repetition of the pronouns *tu* and *tuo* («condividi le tue foto e i tuoi video con i tuoi amici grazie al tuo telefono cellulare»), which certainly depend on the structure of the English language, but also, in the case of advertising, on the desire to emphasise the customization of the message, targeting the customer" [my translation].

<sup>2</sup> "The superfluous use [...] in sentences such as *ho bevuto il mio tè, dopo il vostro caffè, pulite i vostri denti* [...], which is less frequent than one might deduce from the abundance of warnings in the opposite direction, mainly follows French, but sometimes perhaps also English, where the use of possessives is even more extensive. It is interpreted as an Anglicism by ALFARO (see *Posesivo*) in Spanish and WEINREICH (39) in Yiddish" [my translation].

And even before that, Fanfani-Arlia reported about the “weird” usage by some speakers of *Percosse il mio capo, Diede una stretta alla mia mano*, etcetera, instead of *Mi percosse il capo, Mi diede una stretta alla mano* (Fanfani-Arlia 1877: 265-266), with a certain French flavour (p. 409). L. Serianni (2006: 271-72) underlines that in Italian possessive adjectives should be omitted when the reference is unambiguous; omission is mandatory when the main verb includes an atonic pronoun with an affective-intensive function.<sup>3</sup>

To mention one more instance of grey areas: in Italian, the position of the qualifying adjective is not necessarily fixed. Since this language almost always admits both orders, the resulting sequences are not necessarily a-grammatical, but often anomalous from a semantic point of view (Cardinaletti-Garzone 2005: 13). There are, however, differences between the two orders that affect several levels of analysis (Dardano-Trifone 1995: 517):

- a semantic difference, which implies greater objectivity of the NA order and equally great subjectivity of the inverse AN order (as also argued by Klajn);
- a difference in function, which is either restrictive or descriptive;
- a difference of attitude in the speaker: the AN sequence denotes greater emotional involvement;
- a difference in register, with the AN order often signifying an attempt to elaborate the message stylistically.

According to Klajn (2012: 186), the N + Adj sequence is much more often obligatory in French than in Italian, where the placement of the adjective has been extremely free for centuries, not only in poetry. Then, certainly due to some French influence, the post-nominal position began to stabilize, but without becoming exclusive. Today, the tendency to restore the pre-nominal order is supposedly being restored (pun intended).

Some interferences, including those analyzed above, usually go unnoticed by the average Italian speaker, especially by the average audience of TV or movie products, who generally do not recognize them as they mainly – though not always– subtly violate the rules of the target language. They may be compared to some internal virus whose symptoms are barely visible on the skin surface of the target language’s body: this does not mean, however, that its mortality rate is lower than that of, say, some more visible and more easily recognizable infection. When the symptoms are more visible, one immediately takes remedial actions and the cure is presumably more successful. And, even before that, when encountering an infected body showing manifest symptoms of contagion, one immediately recognizes them and avoids contact.

### 3. “Rome is More”

Language contagion basically has only one outcome: a sense of estrangement, the feeling that something must be wrong, the subsequent suspension of the unquestioning attitude which may be defined as “linguistic belief.” However, estrangement and resulting disbelief at times leave ground for hilarity. A linguo-cultural experiment has been launched on social media to

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<sup>3</sup> Including: indicating body parts, thus expressing ‘somatological belonging’ (*lavarsi le mani*) or (psycho)biological actions of the organism (*asciugarsi le lacrime*), but also referring to clothing names (*togliersi il cappello*) (Serianni 2006: 250).

transfer the dialect spoken in Rome into English. “Rome is More” is a Facebook page whose aim is to make Roman ways, culture, philosophy, and proverbs available to English speakers. Its creators have also opened a store in the center of the city, selling merchandise (T-shirts, pins, bags, mugs and so on). Phrases, proverbs, sentences, forms of salutation are printed on them. On its website, “Rome is More” is presented as an “expressionary” (a dictionary of expressions) that is meant for English speakers to survive in Rome and among Romans. It has been conceived as a means by which spreading the Roman culture and language throughout the world.

What is interesting from a linguistic and translational point of view is that the translations into English are overtly word-for-word renderings, mainly structural calques from Roman into English produced by calquing or reproducing the word order of the source language while using elements of the target language. This is aimed at making people laugh. Contagion is a source of laughter. It sounds hilarious. To whom?

To English native speakers, who are the overt addressees of the experiment – whereas the covert ones are more or less fluent in the Roman dialect. Among them, further selection is made as only those who speak English, or at least understand it fairly well, can be aware of the fun, grasp the irony, and realize that such renderings will not work in the target language. That is where the laughter comes from.

Formal equivalence<sup>4</sup> (Nida 2004) is a source of laughter.

The phrase or sentence, followed by its phonetic transcription and syntactic function, is first accompanied by a literal translation – in other words, its formal or “structural” equivalent – and an attempt to provide an equivalent – a dynamic one – which in English may work or be “functional” – meant as effective, usable, as opposed to malfunctioning – as in *Pora stella* – which “means something like ‘poor thing’” – or just an explanation, as in *Bella de casa* – which is presented as a “roman (*sic*) loving nickname” –.

Finally, as if it were an actual dictionary entry, an example is provided.<sup>5</sup>



Figure 1

The word-for-word translations are not always so accurate: see, as an instance, *Se lallero* – an ironic and indirect way to say “forget about it” or that there is “no way” you are going to do what

<sup>4</sup> In the following pages, the distinction theorized by E. Nida between formal and dynamic equivalence (source-oriented *vs* target-oriented) will be referred to while analyzing the *corpus* as a starting point to develop the dichotomy *structural vs functional equivalence*.

<sup>5</sup> Examples are in italics, whereas the headword is in both italics and bold.

they have asked you to –, where *se* in the Roman dialect serves as an alternative to “yes” but is ironically translated as “if,” whereas *lallero* remains the same.<sup>6</sup>

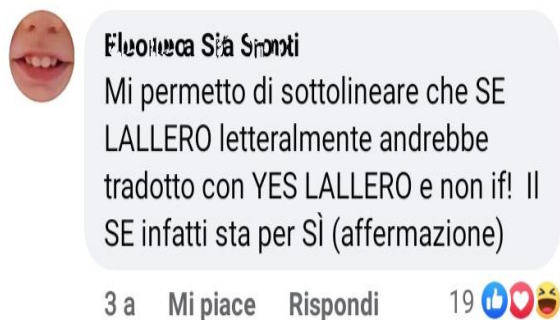


Figure 2

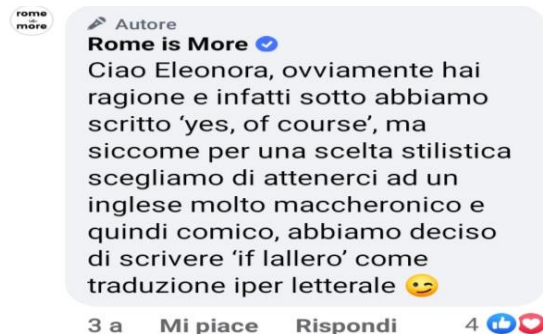


Figure 3

The ambiguity may be due to the lack of a comma between *se* and *lallero*. The explanation under the literary translation says: “means ‘yes, of course’ in an ironic sense.” *Lallero* is a variation of *lallera*, a pre-1936 interjection used to tune some melody or sing a song to oneself, a song whose lyrics one does not recall very well. As an interjection, it conveys indifference, distance or disregard (<https://dizionario.internazionale.it/parola/lallera>).

*Bella pe' te* – also read as a single word *bellapettè*<sup>7</sup> –, a Roman phrase whose equivalent is – literally – “beautiful for you,” and whose more functional though less fun(ny) rendering is “good for you,” as in “I compliment/congratulate you on something.” *Vocabolario Romanesco Contemporaneo* (from now on, VRC) also defines this as a salutation suitable for both greeting and parting, generally followed by the name of the person one is greeting or parting from. A variation is *bello de casa*, a “roman (*sic*) loving nickname” whose literal equivalent is “beautiful of house,” and which – according to VRC – is reportedly used as a term of endearment, especially in reference to children. A more functional equivalent in English has not been proposed by “Rome is More” and one may wonder why “house” and not “home.” A variant is *bellazì*, still a form of salutation, an interjection used mainly by young speakers for banter: deriving from *bella*, *zì(o)*, the second element being a vocative, as it usually happens in the Roman dialect, it has undergone apocope of post-tonic syllables – thus, *zio* > *zì* (VRC). The appellation is used in the language variety spoken by the Roman youth to address any person to whom one is close or feels close (*ibid.*). The literal translation provided by “Rome is More” is “beautiful uncle” (no comma) and the example proves quite suited:

*When you're walking by the street and you see a friend, you say bella zì!*

<sup>6</sup> A follower of the “Rome is More” Facebook page commented under the post (see Figure 1) that, in his opinion, it should have been translated into “yes lallero” (*sic*); some other user underlines the same supposed mistake (Figure 2). However, the page administrator replied that the mistake was intentionally made as a stylistic choice, since the aim of “Rome is More” is to opt for some macaronic or broken/hybrid English version precisely to arouse hilarity by offering a “hyper-literal rendering” (Figure 3).

<sup>7</sup> This is a typical way of Roman pronunciation, that of doubling consonants at the beginning of a word which is preceded by a conjunction or a preposition; this is not the case with articles, although the *b* sound seems to be always doubled: see *la barca* > *la bbarca* (<http://roma.andreapollett.com/S8/dialect3.htm>).

*Daje* is presented as an interjection, a Roman way of saying “come on” – at times, it can also function as a “very convinced ‘yes.’” VRC defines it as a discourse marker, a case of relexicalization by means of trans-categorization from a different part of speech with a possible grammaticalization recently studied for the Roman dialect by D’Achille-Thornton 2020 (as in *ammazza!* / *ammappa!*) and Giovanardi 2019 (as in *avoja!*), among others (D’Achille-Giovanardi-Faraoni-Loporcaro 2021: 354). It represents a pro-complementary form<sup>8</sup> of the Italian verb *dare*: it has given rise to a group of pro-complementary forms which have been lemmatized since they are endowed with particular meanings compared to the base verb (p. 351). It is mainly preceded by an *e-* as in *eddaje* to signal disappointment, impatience or intolerance when something unpleasant occurs. Its secondary meaning, as registered in VRC, refers to an expression of incitement to spur someone to undertake or perform some action. VRC also records its holophrastic usage as a positive signal of confirmation or acceptance of a proposal or invitation. *Eddajempò* is a variation of this, composed of *e + dai + un + po’* – in other words, “and *daje* a little” as literally translated by “Rome is More,” leaving *daje* untranslated (*daje* = “come on”) and explained as a Roman way to put someone under pressure. Similarly, the interjection *ennamo – e + andiamo > e + (a)nnamo*, where *-nd-* > *-nn-* and *a-* is apheresized (VRC) – literally “and come on” as translated by “Rome is More,” after which this exclamation can be used for “hurry up”, but also for “yayyy.” Also followed by *su*, it is used as an incitement (VRC). One may wonder why the translation of *daje* and all its derivatives has not taken into account its original form *dare* = “to give”: since the concept behind “Rome is More” is to produce fun(ny) renderings in English by translating literally, “give him/her” would have been more hilarious.

*Eccallà* – in VRC, *eccallà* as an interjection whose equivalent in standard Italian is “*eccola là, qui ti volevo,*” used to comment – ironically or with some disappointment – on other people’s statements; sometimes it is also used to refer to something which is about to happen. “Rome is More” provides a literal rendering – “there it is” – as a Roman equivalent of “indeed, exactly,” which does not collide with VRC. The example provided

*When happens something (sic) you could have predicted – mostly an unlucky event, you say eccallà!*

only refers to a part of the several and diverse meanings listed by VRC.

*Becca(re)*<sup>9</sup> has multiple meanings, ranging from “ottenere, ricevere, cogliere” to “incontrare” (VRC): the latter meaning is the one proposed by “Rome is More,” in its reflexive form *beccarsi* as in *se beccamo* which has been literally translated as “let’s beak each other,” in other words “roman (sic) way to say ‘let’s hang out’ or ‘see you.’” The imperative form included in both the literal rendering and the rephrasing does not collide with the reflexive form of the original version. The actual equivalent of “Let’s beak each other” is *beccamose*, whereas *se beccamo* is “we’ll beak each other.” In the example given, one more variant is offered by “Rome is More” in the interrogative form:

<sup>8</sup> The term refers to lemmatized forms composed of verb forms which have fused themselves with clitic pronouns into the so-called “pro-complementary forms” (D’Achille-Giovanardi-Faraoni-Loporcaro 2021: 351).

<sup>9</sup> It derives from *becco* = “beak”, its meaning is *prendere qualcosa con il becco* = “to take/grab something with the beak” (VRC).



*When your friend comes back in town from summer holidays, you ask **se beccamo?***

The appropriate form to make a proposal should be “shall we beak each other?”: in this case, the grammatical shift between imperative and future tense – as well as between an assertive/affirmative sentence and a question – determines a lack of formal equivalence and also implies different speech acts, ranging from imposing to suggesting a future meeting.

*Imbruttire*, as a transitive verb generally used among the youth, equals “provocare, irritare, far stizzare” (i.e., provoking, annoying, irritating) as a parasyntetic verb deriving from *brutto* = “ugly” (VRC); its usage has apparently changed into an intransitive mode, as in “to give someone a stern look.” Literally – and erroneously – translated by “Rome is More” as “to make ugly,” a Roman way to say “to take a sour expression”: when you find someone annoying, you give them a stern look and take on an ‘ugly’ face, but you do not make/render them ugly. It is quite the opposite. So, in this case, we may detect a lack of equivalence in the verb meaning, turning the source text verb usage into a transitive one in the target text.

*When you are at an open bar party and you ask to the barman a Coke, he probably **te imbruttisce**.*

“You make me ugly” is not the same as “you make ugly to me”: the meaning is different; the hilariousness is the same. In other words, “Rome is More” has failed to provide a correct structural or formal equivalent.

*Presabbene*, defined as a “status mind” (*sic*) or – rather – a mind status, proves an interesting example as the formal or structural equivalent provided by “Rome is More” includes a wrong choice in the verb tense, as a Past Simple (“took”) is used instead of a Past Participle (“taken”) and also a noteworthy use of preposition “at” which generally translates the Italian preposition *a* as well as “to.” This one represents an additional case of inequivalence also in the shift from an adverb – *bene* = “well” – to an adjective – *buono* = “good” –:

“taken at/to well” = *presa a bene* > “took at good” = *prese a buono*.

Finally, *Maddeché*, an interjection which means “what the hell are you saying?”: translated as “but of what,” a perfectly structural or structurally perfect equivalent which provokes laughter.

Table 1 provides a synthesis of the analysis carried out so far, displaying the source language versions and the word-for-word renderings proposed by “Rome is More,” followed by their sense-for-sense equivalents (when provided) and by an explanation or definition to better understand the meaning and usage of each phrase or expression. Column “Remarks” shows possible translation problems or remarkable observations on each case.

Source Language	Structural Equivalent	Functional Equivalent	Explanation/ Definition	Remarks
<i>Pora stella</i>	Poor star	Poor thing	Phrase, also used in an ironic sense	
<i>Bello/a de casa</i>	Beautiful of house	[not provided]	Roman loving nickname	Why not “Beautiful of home”?

<i>Bella pe' te / bellapetté</i>	Beautiful for you	Good for you	A way to congratulate on something	
<i>Bella, zi(o) / bellazì</i>	Beautiful, uncle	[not provided]	Form of salutation	Possible equivalent <sup>10</sup> : "Hey, man"
<i>(Ed)daje(mpò)</i>	(And) daje (a little)	(1) Come on! (2) Yes!	Interjection, also a way to put someone under pressure	Left non-translated: missed chance at hilarity
<i>Ennamo (su)</i>	And come on	(1) Hurry up! (2) Yay!	Exclamation	
<i>Eccallà</i>	There it is	Indeed / Exactly	(Ironical/disappointed) comment on some (expected) event	VRC provides a wider range of meanings
<i>Se beccamo</i>	*Let's beak each other	(1) Let's hang out (2) See you	Used to propose a meeting	Grammatical shift > different speech act
<i>Imbrutti'</i>	*To make ugly	To take a sour expression	When you give someone a stern look	Shift in the verb voice (intransitive > transitive)
<i>Presabbene</i>	*Took at good	[not provided]	Used to describe an enjoyable situation	Wrong verb tense; noteworthy choice of preposition; adverb > adjective shift
<i>Maddeché</i>	But of what?	What the hell <sup>11</sup> are you saying?	Interjection	Lower register of the functional equivalent

Table 1. Overview of the cases under analysis<sup>12</sup>

#### 4. Final remarks

The examples provided show that there is some covert agenda in the experiment by "Rome is More": it aims at making readers laugh, but only if they have sufficient knowledge of and proficiency in the English language, only if they are aware that word-for-word translation does not work.

The structural or formal equivalents provided by "Rome is More" are clear examples of overt translations, as defined by J. House (2014), and as such they make no attempt to hide the fact that they actually are a translation (ibid.). In spite of some more or less evident translation issues, the experiment proves successful.

<sup>10</sup> Although functionally equivalent in English, one should underline a non-exact coincidence in terms of diatopic variation, as the English equivalent is not as diatopically marked as the Roman form of salutation.

<sup>11</sup> However, one should underline that, by adding "the hell," the general register becomes lower and sort of vulgar, whereas the original version is more neutral.

<sup>12</sup> \* signals cases of inequivalence, which also include grammatical shifts (verb tense and/or voice) and class shifts (adverb > adjective).

To conclude, language contact produces interference or contagion, and turns into more or less permanent contamination when the average speaker is not aware of it, when contagion has occurred unnoticed, and when the target language shows no clear signs or symptoms of contamination. When it comes to linguistic expressions, which are so imbued with culture and cultural references, it is often impossible to find an equivalent in another linguo-cultural system. Speakers who are aware of it burst into laughter. Those who are not believe what they read or hear and start spreading the word and the virus.

Awareness is the key. Knowledge is the key. The key to healthy laughter.

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