

## **Intralingual and intersemiotic translation for accessibility in educational and social environments – focus on legal language**

**MICHELA CANEPARI, Associate Professor**  
Department of Humanities, Social Sciences and Cultural  
Industries  
University of Parma, Italy  
Viale San Michele 9  
43121 Parma  
[michela.canepari@unipr.it](mailto:michela.canepari@unipr.it)

ORCID: [orcid.org/0000-0002-7285-8503](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7285-8503)

**Abstract:** Over the years, what is normally referred to as visual law has increasingly developed and some scholars have been tentatively experimenting with legally binding comics, although in very limited numbers. This article posits itself as part of that tradition, while taking the issue a step forward, further developing the academic discussion around the notion of accessibility in legal language and emphasising the importance that different forms of translation can assume in this context. The article thus discusses the impact that intralingual and intersemiotic translation can have in both “educational” and more “social” contexts, finally providing two brief examples of how these forms of translation can render legal discourse more accessible and

understandable to a great variety of receivers, regardless of their age, level of education, cultural origin, etc.

**Keywords:** visual law, intralingual translation, intersemiotic translation, graphic art, comic contracts.

## **LA TRADUZIONE INTRALINGUISTICA E INTERSEMIOTICA COME STRUMENTO PER OTTENERE UNA MAGGIORE ACCESSIBILITÀ IN AMBIENTI EDUCATIVI E SOCIALI – FOCUS SUL LINGUAGGIO GIURIDICO**

**Sinossi:** Nel corso degli anni si è sviluppato sempre di più quello che normalmente viene definito diritto visivo e alcuni studiosi hanno sperimentato, seppur in numero molto limitato, il fumetto giuridicamente vincolante. Questo articolo si colloca quindi all'interno di questa tradizione, sviluppando tuttavia ulteriormente il dibattito accademico sulla nozione di accessibilità del linguaggio giuridico e sottolineando l'importanza che diverse forme di traduzione possono assumere in questo contesto. L'articolo discute quindi l'impatto che la traduzione intralinguistica e intersemiotica può avere in contesti tanto "educativi" quanto "sociali", fornendo infine due brevi esempi di come queste forme di traduzione possano rendere il discorso giuridico più accessibile e comprensibile a una grande varietà di destinatari, indipendentemente dalla loro età, livello di istruzione, origine culturale, ecc.

**Parole chiave:** diritto visivo, traduzione intralinguistica, traduzione intersemiotica, arte grafica, fumetti giuridicamente vincolanti.

### **1. Introduction: The universal value of accessibility**

This article aims at emphasising the pivotal role that different forms of translation (intralingual and intersemiotic in particular) can play in terms of accessibility, exploring potential strategies to help various types of readers in their approach to legal discourse, be they students (who are approaching legal language either as part of their training to become specialised translators or as part of their curriculum in university degrees in Law) or the general public. In order to be as systematic as possible, the article addresses didactic issues in the second

section, while the social repercussions of the translation strategies discussed here are analysed in the third section.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, the concept of accessibility adopted in this article, transcends the definition typically given to the word in educational and digital settings, as exemplified, for example, by the US Congress' 1998 Amendment to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the 2013 Strategic Plan for Improving Management of Section 508, and the European Union's European Accessibility Act of 2019. Even though, as Nina Reviere states (2016), media accessibility policies are still unequally diversified across different European countries, there is no doubt that the issue has triggered a considerable amount of interest at different levels of society, in the attempt to improve access to mainstream goods and services and encourage full and effective equal participation in social life.

Similarly, the focus on cognitive disabilities and the effects that visual language can have on people with different kinds of disorders has been the focus of research in the field of cognitive sciences (Cohn *et al.* 2016). As such, the methodologies that educators can exploit in teaching environments have been the subject of numerous academic studies (Zager *et al.* 2011; Schiff and Joshi 2016; Hughes and Talbott 2017), engendering innumerable publications on the subject. As a result, in the limited space of this article, it is impossible to trace the various stages of the vibrant discussion on the subject and its numerous outcomes.

Nonetheless, this work builds on this literature, applying, however, the notion of accessibility to contexts where disability is perceived as a tile of a larger mosaic, focusing in particular on the possible needs of any non-specialist receiver, in an effort to find strategies that might lead to a higher degree of comprehensibility and, consequently, a more systematic distribution of knowledge within society.

Indeed, if it is true that this article deals with forms of intralingual and intersemiotic translations centred on the identification of target receivers deemed "different" from the ideal readers of the (highly specialised) source texts, it takes into account not only receivers with physical or cognitive disabilities, but also receivers who are nonetheless characterised by different needs if compared to those for whom the source texts were created (i.e., highly specialised professionals). These would include, for instance, young learners,

---

<sup>1</sup> This article further develops the preliminary results discussed by the author in *Specialized Languages and Graphic Art* (Peter Lang, 2023).

students, learners of a foreign language, speakers whose native tongue is not the language utilised in the drafting of specific texts and, ultimately, ordinary receivers whose needs are determined not only by the historical period or the geographical context in which they live, but also by idiosyncrasies affecting more directly their personal sphere.

Indubitably, everyone needs to be familiar with the technical and specialised features of specialised languages. If this is so, it is not just because, as analysed in depth elsewhere (Canepari 2013), they have infiltrated much of our popular culture, in terms of television series, internet videos, blogs, etc., but also, and more importantly, because the ever-increasing specialisation of our societies demands that everyone willing to operate as members of the social order should have at least a rudimentary mastery of these languages. This is particularly true in relation to legal language, whose presence in everybody's life is evident and whose specialisation, throughout history, has sometimes been exploited to exercise control over the population and create a society based on an unequal distribution of knowledge and power (Coke 1832: xxxix; Pease 2012: 7).

This is why this article argues that accessibility should be viewed as a much broader concept affecting every person, partly in accordance with Greco's definition of "human right", according to which accessibility

"has the potential to impact on a number of human rights for all individuals. For example, it affects the quality of life of the elderly, migrants and linguistic minorities, serving to grant access to culture, information and communication." (2016: 12)

This notion, however, seems excessively limited and ideologically tinged. This is due, in part, to the fact that it primarily refers to multimedia products and, more importantly, to the fact that, despite claims that accessibility is a tool for universal human rights and "not only of persons with disabilities" (Greco 2017: 94), it nonetheless addresses specific sectors of society which could be defined as "minorities", thus encouraging a binary vision of society, maintaining and enforcing hierarchies like "central" vs. "marginal," "majority" vs. "minority," and "normal" vs. "abnormal".

Clearly, as Rizzo suggests (2019), the notion of accessibility, even in the sense described above, can be used to good effect in research focusing on disadvantaged Others. However, accessibility should be seen as a genuinely universal concept that addresses every citizen, and

not only “minorities”. Indeed, as suggested throughout the twentieth century by scholars such as Lacan (1966, 1972), Foucault (1972, 1975, 1976), and Derrida (1967a, 1967b) among others, since identity is linguistically created, anyone is bound to be perceived, at one stage or another, as the Other, and it is precisely this identification of Otherness that still points to a division of society according to which a group is assigned to the inferior side of the dichotomy “Subject/I” vs “Object/the Other”.

It is actually this division, which is identified, in this article, as a consequence of society’s specialisation and which has frequently been the subject of study on the part of the foremost scholars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, notably by Foucault, who recognised specialised discourse as a crucial component of the Western episteme and its violence (Foucault 1976: 101).

This article, on the contrary, views accessibility as a truly universal notion and, while acknowledging the variety of circumstances with which intralingual and intersemiotic translators may be confronted, it centres on a wider audience, given that, within the context of specialised discourse, texts requiring a higher level of accessibility may well be intended for readers who are constructed as Subjects, i.e., non-impaired, middle- or upper-class, educated native professionals from highly industrialised nations. Certainly, a higher level of accessibility in the area of specialised communication appears crucial in the modern day and age – characterised by significant migratory patterns that frequently require non-native speakers to decipher written and/or spoken texts. However, this need has long been recognised at every level of society, since the challenges posed by specialised discourse, legal language in particular, are not limited to non-native speakers.

Given these premises, the important role that the study of graphic art and the intralingual and intersemiotic translation processes it entails might play in the search for new tools that can render legal discourse more accessible appears evident, and points to the creation of a society where all members can make autonomous choices, thereby gaining more control over their lives.

Clearly, this does not imply that all potential receivers can benefit from the same types of adaptation. This is the reason why Skopos theory (Vermeer 1984, 1996; Nord 1991, 1997; Kussmaul 1995), with its focus on the function the final product is supposed to perform, and the central role played by the addressee in its specification,

can become a valuable tool, despite the criticisms it has attracted over the years (see for instance Newmark 2000).

Certainly, by visually remediating (and remediatising) highly specialised texts, the translation forms on which this study focuses might be seen as an expression of the “reform” described by Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin (2000: 56), according to which, during the process, reality itself is transformed. In fact, just as verbal language constructs, at least in part, the reality it is supposed to describe, visual language – in both traditional and new media – also aids in the construction of that same reality, while determining the way in which we experience it. As such, it appears evident that the examples of remediation discussed here in terms of translation bring about changes in the everyday reality of human beings and can thus be compared to those remediations that, as Bolter and Grusin suggest, also entail “reform in a social or political sense” (ivi: 60).

Indeed, by further exploring the relationship between “word” and “world”, these forms of translation can be seen as political in their attempt to generate not only more accessible texts but also a more accessible reality.

With this in mind, this article offers both a brief example of how intralingual and intersemiotic translation might be fruitfully exploited in educational settings and, building on that, how they could be exploited to achieve a higher degree of accessibility in environments that might be defined as more “social”, pointing to new paths in the construction of legally binding texts which could lead to the creation of a more “literate” – and, consequently, more autonomous – readership.

## **2. The potential of comic art in ELP arenas**

The advantages of using images and visual products in the educational field are by now widely established (Mayer 1989; Hassett and Schieble 2007; Clark and Lyons 2011), since – as neuroscientific research has demonstrated – “substantial gains in learning can be attained by the intelligent use of visual and verbal multimodal learning” (Fadel 2008: 12). Moreover, given that communicating information in both verbal and visual formats can relate more easily to “the specific perceptual and cognitive strengths of different individuals” (Pashler *et al.* 2008: 109), and that comics readers are able to understand complex ideas even

without a thorough understanding of the disciplinary language (Allen and Ingulsrud 2003, Sabin 2016) the adoption of these intersemiotic products can make complex pieces of information more accessible to a variety of learners.

This is the reason why comics have been widely accepted as effective teaching tools for both native and non-native learners, especially in specialised arenas such as the legal field on which this article focuses.

What follows is therefore based on some of the courses focused on legal language that I held at the University of Parma during the academic years 2021/2022 and 2022/2023.<sup>2</sup>

Besides the many activities they could organise by exploiting already published comics such as *Daredevil* and others (Canepari, 2023), teachers – by building on the foundation laid out in publications like *The Illustrated Guide to Criminal Law* (2018) – could easily create simple graphic narratives in order to help students understand the meaning and effects of various legal notions and test their actual comprehension. The example presented here, for instance, focuses on the different levels of culpability and the notion of liability and was intended to offer students a specific context of situation in which they could see the various characters interact. Contrary to other works, where images are frequently used as a mere complement to the verbal text, the kind of representation illustrated in figure 1, enabled students to assess the scenario depicted much more easily so as to determine the role played by the various actants. For instance, the panels below were used after an explanation of the various levels of culpability (from murder one to accidental death), the introduction of the notion of *mens rea* and a discussion of the notion of responsibility. Students were presented with several graphic narratives similar to the one represented in figure 1, in which the information given differed slightly, and were asked to identify, on each occasion, the level of culpability and responsibility of the restaurant and the punishment they were likely to face.

---

<sup>2</sup> The 30-hour courses were held during the second semester and extended from February till May for a total of 30 hours of lessons *in presentia*. The attending students – second-year undergraduates reading modern foreign languages and possessing an initial B2++ level of English – were, in both academic years, approximately 120, and during the courses they were required to add 110 hours of individual study.

Figure 1. “The different levels of culpability”, by Paolo Tagliaferri and Michela Canepari (2023).<sup>3</sup>



Students were thus confronted with brief graphic narratives which are, *per se*, more engaging than merely descriptive texts, and which, as such, serve both informative and interpersonal functions, connecting with readers also on an emotive level, thus becoming more relatable.

Additionally, as readers can see, contrary to some of the didactic products already on the market, as well as many comics, where the text is written in a style and a font that hinder its complete accessibility, the verbal text is here typeset using the Century Gothic font (which is often perceived as being more intelligible than the typeface specifically created for dyslexic students) and aligned to the left, while the line spacing is increased, to make it more user-friendly for students with dyslexia and visual impairments. Moreover, the background colour of the speech balloons is different from white (which also helps the text to be more readable), and important words are highlighted in bold while other colours are used to catch the students' attention and aid them in deciphering the story (Daloiso 2017).

Naturally, this was not a task intended specifically for students with visual or learning disabilities. However, the strategies adopted, together with the presence of images, made the text simpler to grasp for all students, taking into account the needs of different groups.

<sup>3</sup> For a full-colour view of the graphic narrative, please consult <https://tinyurl.com/38xec7ez>.



Furthermore, in order to improve text accessibility and render the turn-taking system immediately clear, speech balloons of different shapes and colours have been adopted, while the brief narrative – where verbal language is reduced to a minimum – resorts to what is commonly known as “eye dialect” (Krapp 1926), which is simpler to understand, especially for receivers who are not native English speakers, since it reproduces the pronunciation of words orthographically rather than resorting to their standard spelling (“cof” vs “cough”).

Additionally, to emphasise the urgency of the situation, the panels in the second column of the first grid are cut diagonally to suggest how quickly the ambulance is hurrying the patient to the hospital in a visual and immediate way.

Moreover, this kind of work could also be easily animated in a simple digital edition like the one that was created on this occasion,<sup>4</sup> where the individual panels are shown in a video sequence and a voiceover was added, together with different voices identifying the various characters. This made the final product even more engaging and provided additional support for students who could only read with difficulty because of their impairment.

Naturally, the activities that could be prepared by exploiting the potentials of translation are innumerable. For instance, another activity which has demonstrated to be extremely useful during my courses was to ask learners to translate intralingually documents drafted in “legalese” so as to render them into plain English. This translation effort certainly responds to the needs of students who, precisely because they do not master the language of the discipline yet, need extra support and various forms of scaffolding.<sup>5</sup> However, this is the same kind of effort that should normally be adopted to address different types of receivers, since also the general, native, educated public often feels the need for more understandable communications within the legal field. For this reason, this discussion is developed in the following section, which is specifically dedicated to “social” issues.

---

<sup>4</sup> For a view of the animated story, please consult <https://tinyurl.com/2fy5d9z8>.

<sup>5</sup> This is particularly true when students approaching legal language are – as in the case discussed here – non-specialists who wish to learn the language in order to work as specialised translators.

### **3. Exploiting comics in “social” arenas**

That legal language should be one of the primary specialised discourses in need of a more accessible format comes as no surprise, which is why the various plain English movements, that strongly advocate the adoption of intralingual procedures with a view to making legal language more understandable, matured precisely in this field as a reaction to the obscurity, ambiguity, redundancy, and verbosity typical of “legalese”. Clearly, this is neither the time nor the place to revisit the development of such movements over time, nor would it be appropriate, given the objectives of this article, to engage in a lengthy discussion of the characteristics of legal language. However, suffice it to say that many of the traits that have been described as typical of legal discourse (Cortelazzo 1994; Gotti 2005) are the focus of plain English movements, which argue that the many passive forms, binomials, impersonal constructions, and words of classical or French origins typical of legal language should be subjected to intralingual translation and replaced by forms which are more quickly and easily decodable for non-specialists.

This section thus aims at demonstrating how a legal deed could be easily translated intralingually and intersemiotically while retaining its binding nature, in order to create a text which, by adapting to the various learning styles that might characterise different receivers, and developing a narrative where a plainer language works in synergy with visual language, could actually become an effective means to offer the members of a given society a fuller understanding of their surroundings and their role in them.

What follows is therefore a brief “Deed of Amendment”, a textual typology that falls under the second group of legal genres identified by Enrique Varo and Brian Hughes (2002: 102), that is to say legal texts in private law establishing legal arrangements among private individuals, namely what Peter Tiersma (1999: 139) would call “operative legal documents”. As illustrated below, the source text is first translated intralingually and then, taking the translation effort a step further, intersemiotically, in order to originate what could be considered a “Comic Deed”.

The original text reads as follows:

“The present Deed is made the tenth day of January 2001 between the Mayor of Brighton and Hove of Civic Centre Brighton BN3 2LS

(hereinafter called “the Council”) of the one part and Theo Mills and Eva Mills both of 26 Furness Road Eastbourne (hereinafter called “the Purchasers”) of the other part.

WHEREAS:

1) By a Transfer dated 27 May 1999 and made between the parties hereto the property known as 26 Furness Road Eastbourne (hereinafter called “the Property”) was transferred to the Purchasers as therein contained.

2) The said Transfer contains a plan purporting to delineate the property transferred.

3) The said plan does not correctly delineate the property transferred and the plan annexed hereto and marked “plan No. 2” signed by the parties hereto and dated the tenth day of January 2001 correctly delineates the property.

NOW THIS DEED WITNESSETH:

The said Transfer shall at all times be read and construed as if the plan therein referred to was the said plan No. 2 and not the plan originally annexed thereto but in all other respects the parties hereto confirm the said Transfer.

IN WITNESS whereof the Council has caused its Common Seal to be hereunto affixed and the Purchasers have set their hands and seals the day and year first above written.” (adapted from Cutts 2013: 232)<sup>6</sup>

As readers can easily recognise, this particular text already presents stylistic elements that make it relatively more intelligible in comparison to other legal documents compiled in the past, when various paragraphs were conflated into one and no punctuation was utilised. Indeed, in this case, the presence of clearly marked headings which are typographically isolated can be observed, thus facilitating the reading process. Moreover, the presence of numbered paragraphs certainly makes it easier to organise and decode the flow of information, also indicating a chronological order which finally suggests the causal chain of the events described in the respective points. Nonetheless, even in this instance, it is possible to identify a number of linguistic choices

---

<sup>6</sup> During this adaptation only the names of the buyers, the gender of the Mayor and the location originally indicated in the source text have been changed.

confirming that, as Tiersma states (1999: 141), typically, the genres of operational legal texts, while being specifically intended for clients and directly affecting their interests, are written in a highly formal, formulaic language and are prevalently characterised by legalese, while being encased in a very rigorous structure. Many of these elements, however, could be easily translated into a plainer variety of legal language to improve the text's readability.

### **3.1. Translating the text intralingually**

Naturally, the first step for any intralingual translator (whether students or professional translators) is the analysis of the structural, morphosyntactic, and lexical features that define the source text, such as: the presence of words of French origin ("purchaser"), passive forms ("This deed is made"; "the property was transferred"), archaic forms ("hereinafter"; "hereto"; "therein"; "whereof") and the use of the deontic "shall" ("The said Transfer shall at all times..."), together with the use of capital letters.

Furthermore, translators have obviously to identify the text's prescriptive or descriptive nature, in addition to the illocutionary and perlocutionary acts it is intended to accomplish. Once the analysis has been completed, intralingual translators can decide which strategies and procedures might be more effective and apply them to the text under survey, bearing in mind that legally authoritative writings have legal ramifications that could have a significant impact on people's lives.

As a result, wordy expressions can be condensed through the exploitation of deixis, transforming for example "the present" into "this", while the polysemous verb "made" – which appears to be ambiguous – could be replaced with "signed". Moreover, passive tenses could be transformed into active forms, thus resulting, for example, in "the Mayor of Brighton and Hove... and Theo Mills and Eva Mills...signed this deed", which makes the segment more comprehensible. Moreover, the word "purchasers", which derives from the Old French *porchaceor*, could be substituted by the noun of German origin "buyers", which average English-speaking receivers would find much easier to process, whereas the archaism "hereinafter" could be either replaced by the plainer "below"/"from now on" or simply

omitted, its meaning being easily inferable from the co-text in which it appears.

Furthermore, redundant expressions can be reduced by omitting some elements (“of the one part” and “of the other part” could be eliminated and the sentence reduced to “the Mayor” and “Theo Mills and Eva Mills”), while the term “whereas”, which introduces the recital clause, could either be translated into its plain English counterpart as “since” or similar, or be omitted altogether without changing the meaning of the text. Indeed, since “whereas clauses” are not binding, this omission procedure has no effect on the source text’s illocutionary and perlocutionary force, and although it removes a genre-typical element, it makes the text more understandable, given the different meaning the word often carries in everyday English, where it denotes an opposition and might be replaced by conjunctions such as “even though” or “while”.

From a structural perspective, however, the conflation of paragraphs is disregarded in the following section, where readers are confronted with a numbered list consisting of three different bullet points. Although the same structure could also be maintained in the target text, it is certainly possible to transform the passive form used in the first short paragraph into an active form (thus resulting in “A transfer dated...transferred the property...”) and render the text more concise and easier to decode through omissions and substitutions, so that the archaic word “therein” is eliminated. Furthermore, the expression “a plan purporting to delineate the property transferred” could be, if not omitted entirely, at least simplified, resulting in: “a plan that aimed to show the property”.

Also the following point can be made more comprehensible, first of all by presenting it as two separate sentences. Moreover, the first part, by adopting not only omissions, but also expansion procedures, could be rendered as: “The transfer contained plan 1, which showed the property incorrectly”. In fact, although the final number of words remains unchanged, the use of a simple relative clause will produce a text which is certainly more easily decodable. Naturally, the sentence might be also translated as: “The plan included in the transfer showed the property incorrectly”), which, while being slightly longer (10 words rather than 8), also presents a passive form that might be more difficult to decode.

The second part of the original sentence, which was introduced by the paratactic “and” (“and the plan annexed hereto...”), can thus be

represented also typographically as an independent unit, thereby making it easier to understand. In addition, the sentence can be placed more clearly in a relation of opposition to the previous one and rendered more succinct through the elimination of the word of Latin origin “annexed” and the word “hereto” which, while being of Germanic origin, is an archaism and might therefore create difficulties for the general public. Through the application of condensation procedures, the target segment could therefore read as follows: “On the contrary, on 10 January 2001 the parties signed plan 2 (attached to this deed) that shows the property correctly”, or simply “On 10 January 2001 the parties...”

Also the expression “Now This Deed Witnesseth”, an evident legacy of legalese drafting due to the presence of the archaic form “witnesseth”, can be either omitted or translated into the more ordinary and plainer expression: “This deed testifies that” or “According to/in line with this deed”, followed by a translation of the following sentence, which could be simplified as follows: “The transfer is to be read as if plan 2 had been originally attached to it”. The second part of the sentence, introduced by the conjunction “but”, can be maintained as an independent sentence from which the archaic “hereto” is omitted.

Finally, the highly elaborated and verbose sentence concluding the document, which bears the marks of legalese phraseology, can certainly be made more accessible and expressed in plainer language through procedures of omissions and substitutions. Indeed, the expression “In witness whereof” – a translation of the Latin phrase *in cuius rei testimonium* – can be omitted and, together with the following part of the sentence, simply translated as “signed”.

The final target text could therefore read as follows:

“On 10 January 2001 the Mayor of Brighton and Hove of Civic Centre Brighton BN3 2LS (“the Council”) and Theo Mills and Eva Mills both of 26 Furness Road Eastbourne (“the buyers”).

Since:

- 1) On 27 May 1999 the Council transferred the property known as 26 Furness Road Eastbourne (“the Property”) to the buyers.
- 2) The Transfer contained a plan (Plan 1) that aimed to show the property.
- 3) Plan 1 showed the property incorrectly.

4) On 10 January 2001 the parties signed Plan 2 (attached to this deed) that shows the property correctly.

According to this deed:

The transfer is to be read as if Plan 2 had been originally attached to it. In all other respects the parties confirm the Transfer described above.

The parties signed this deed on 10 January 2001.

The Council's authorised officer

The buyers"

As readers can appreciate, the target text is shorter (140 words rather than the 215 of the source text), despite the fact that some of the elements which could quite easily be omitted (“Since”, “According to this deed”) have been maintained and despite the adoption of addition and expansion procedures aimed at rendering the final document more comprehensible. As a result, the target text already appears more approachable.

### **3.2 Translating the text intersemiotically**

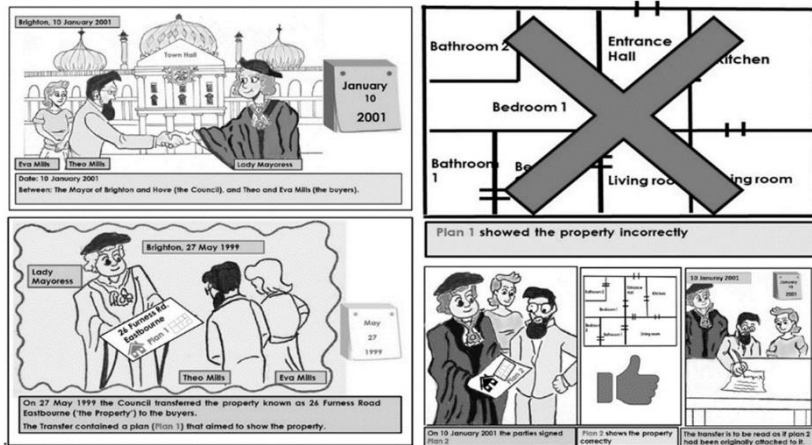
However, by taking the translation effort a step further, and with a view to rendering the source text accessible to an even wider readership, intersemiotic translation strategies could be adopted, thus turning the verbal text into a graphic narrative which, by combining the visual and a plainer verbal language, might create a legal document actually within reach of the majority of the general public.

As a result, the text above could be translated intersemiotically as follows:

Figure 2. “Deed of Amendment”, by Paolo Tagliaferri and Michela Canepari (2023).<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> For a full-colour view of the comic Deed, please consult <https://tinyurl.com/3tk5tuer>.



As readers can see, the short comic story (which turns the parties into the characters of a graphic narrative that develops in a specific geographical and temporal setting, thereby providing various contextualizing clues), is totally transparent. By faithfully rendering what is expressed verbally in the source text, the Comic Deed becomes understandable even without resorting to verbal language, in contrast to earlier efforts in this field, where the visuals frequently offered only partial pieces of information. This is why, despite the presence of verbal plain language in the captions, the text can be considered an actual Comic Deed and not a “Visual Deed”, which are defined as legal texts “that incorporate legal design, plain language, and other UX elements to facilitate positive, proactive relationships based on trust and understanding between partners” (Deborah do Camo, Dotted & Crossed webpage, comment posted March 8, 2021). As a result, the finished product might be considered “similar” (Tymoczko 2007) enough to the original to be regarded as binding (and therefore enforceable), while also being clearer. The verbal language of the deed, which was previously translated intralingually, is inserted in the brief captions provided and positioned strategically beneath the panels that visually portray them, in order to ensure that the deed would be regarded as binding. Indeed, as former Chief Justice of Australia, Robert French, has confirmed, comic contracts are legally binding if their pictorial meaning is clear and users can interpret them in a legal setting (Deborah do Camo, Dotted & Crossed webpage, comment posted March 8, 2021). Thus, the presence of a simple verbal text – or, in the case of receivers of low literacy, an “oral explanation” (French 2017: 270) of the visual



and verbal text itself – would make the final product binding since, as French maintains, “There is no reason in principle why pictorial contracts explained orally or supplemented textually or contextually could not be enforceable in the same way as any other contract” (ivi: 271).

In the example provided above, as readers can see, the verbal text is once again aligned to the left to keep the spacing between words constant, whereas the background of the captions is shown in a colour different from white, thus making the text easier for readers with dyslexia. Similarly, the font chosen (“Century Gothic”) assists dyslexic or visually impaired readers in the reading process.

Furthermore, in order to provide readers with an additional aid, strategic terms are highlighted in bold, while other elements are given emphasis through the strategic use of the colour red (this is for instance the case of the cross, which suggests how the plan should be dismissed as incorrect).

As we can see, the short comic story sometimes provides the information in more than one mode, for instance contextualising the situation both verbally and visually. Indeed, the Lady Mayoress, who represents one of the parties, is identified both by the caption and by the sable-furred scarlet robe, the chain of office (i.e., “Civic regalia”) and the tricorne hat she is wearing. Furthermore, the Town Hall – which is identified as such by both verbal language and the type of architecture that reproduces the actual Town Hall of Brighton and Hove – has been represented in the background, so as to further emphasise the role of the character on the right. The geographical context (Brighton, UK) is equally identified both verbally and visually, since the stylised representation of the domes and the minarets of the famous Royal Pavilion which, given its uniqueness, immediately identifies Brighton as the site, and is indeed exploited in the Brighton and Hove City Council logo. Finally, to place greater emphasis on the official nature of the moment, and to further identify the building as the site of the town’s administrative centre, the coat of arms of the city, through a procedure of addition, is reproduced on the façade. In this instance, only the dolphins which appear on the actual coat of arms have been reproduced, and the colour blue is used to replicate the original crest and activate a reference to the sea, clearly associated with the city, which has served as a seaside resort throughout history.

In the panel above, the idea that the scene is set in the past is indicated both through the use of verbal language, the calendar (which

in both this and the previous panel is coloured in such way to create a strong sense of cohesion with the captions and the rest of the scene), the sinusoidal outline of the panel itself and the sepia colour used for the whole scene. With the adoption of cropping and blow-up techniques, the following panel shows the enlargement of the original plan which was attached to the deed represented in its entirety in the document the Mayoress is holding, where a property and its plan are visually represented. Since this plan, according to the present deed, is to be ignored, a red cross is drawn to indicate its removal. On the contrary, in the following panel, the icon of the “thumb up” (equally emphasised through the colour green, which is normally used with the positive meaning of “ok”, “you can go”) – which through the new media and network services has come to represent universally positive feedback – is inserted, so as to indicate that plan 2, which is equally enlarged and presents minor variations in the allocation of rooms in comparison to plan 1, is the one to be considered and accepted as correct. The short story ends, just like the source text, with the parties signing the new deed.

To create a stronger sense of cohesion, the colours of the characters’ clothes have been maintained unchanged, and light and soft colours have been chosen in order to highlight the red robe of the Mayoress and, with it, her institutional role, thus drawing receivers’ attention to the relevant information.

As readers can see, the entire target text is slightly longer than the original due to the intralingual translation and the graphic depiction of the scenes, both of which take up more space than the brief paragraphs that comprised the original text. Yet, many receivers could profit from them. Certainly, the text, thus modified, is better suited to meet the needs of readers with learning difficulties. However, as this article has emphasised throughout, in its current form, this deed would undoubtedly be understood by a wide range of readers.

#### **4. Conclusion**

As seen above, in this article emphasis has been placed on the role that intralingual and intersemiotic translation can play in different types of contexts. As far as learning environments are concerned, the comparative analysis of the results obtained by students during their

final exams in the academic years 2018/2019 and 2019/2020,<sup>8</sup> when no intersemiotic mediation was adopted during the courses, clearly demonstrates the positive impact that the exploitation of graphic aids has had on students' assimilation of legal notions and lexis. Indeed, during these years, the percentage of students who passed the exam with a grade higher than 24/30<sup>9</sup> was 40%, whereas during the following years the percentage raised to 57%, with various distinctions.

As far as more social repercussions are concerned, the discussion developed above strongly suggests the fundamental role intralingual and intersemiotic translation can have in the development of documents which, despite being specialised, can prove accessible to most receivers, giving them greater control over their daily lives. Indeed, the underlying argument, as stated in the Introduction, is that a graphic representation and the application of both intralingual and intersemiotic strategies can facilitate the comprehension of various types of text, thus fostering a higher awareness on the part of the receivers and, as a result, their increased involvement in the various processes that have a significant impact on their lives, thus transforming them from passive recipients of other people's choices and decisions, into committed and active participants.

Furthermore, the article demonstrates how the target texts thus created could be made more accessible to readers with learning and cognitive disorders, as well as to readers who are visually impaired, by adopting simple expedients like the choice of particular fonts, the alignment of the text on the left, the strategic use of colours, etc. Naturally, as suggested above, this does not mean that the same forms of adaptation can be considered valid and helpful for every potential receiver. For instance, when adapting a text for students, intralingual amplification strategies, such as the insertion of footnotes, might be

---

<sup>8</sup> Also in these years, the 30-hour courses were held during the second semester and extended from February till May for a total of 30 hours of lessons *in presentia*. The attending students – second-year undergraduates reading modern foreign languages and possessing an initial B2++ level of English – were, in both academic years, approximately 120, and during the courses they were required to add 110 hours of individual study.

<sup>9</sup>The Italian grading system is based on the following scale, roughly translated into percentages: from 28/30 to 30/30 (excellent, 90% to 100%), from 24/30 to 27/30 (good, 80% to 89%), from 21/30 to 23/30 (satisfactory, 70% to 79%), from 18/30 to 20/30 (low pass mark, 60% to 69%). The final grade represents the average obtained by summing the mark obtained during the written test (focused on reading, Use of English and translation exercises) and the more theoretical oral examination.

deemed a helpful and unobtrusive strategy, allowing an explanation of notions and individual lexical items without encumbering the main body of the text. However, when adapting the same text for dyslexic receivers or other receivers who need auditory reading, this strategy might create additional difficulties, since it not only interrupts the reading flow, thus disrupting the process of decodification, but since text-to-speech software reads all of the text on a page before it moves on to the next page, when a sentence spans from one page to the next, the text-to-speech stops to read the not-yet-read text which might be placed in the margins or the footer (Nick Bird, The APA Blog, comment posted on January 17, 2019). Similarly, illustrations might be extremely useful, but naturally, for people who have a visual impairment, the information conveyed by the images and the reduced verbal text in the speech balloons might not be readily available (which is why I decided to transform the graphic narrative into a “read aloud” video). Obviously, then, an analysis of the community of ideal target receivers and their needs becomes essential.

Yet, generally speaking, as a result of the strategies adopted, the examples selected in this study typically exhibit improved inclusivity and accessibility throughout both in learning and social environments and, if approved by the relevant authorities, might represent a significant change in the lives of various types of receivers.

It goes without saying that, despite the use of diverse strategies, translators must ensure that the nature of the text is maintained since, for example, changing a prescriptive and binding source text into a text that is neither of the two can significantly affect its validity. Yet, given that, as also Maria Tymoczko implies, in language, perfect synonymity is frequently a mirage, the exploitation of these translation procedures illustrates that “equivalence in translation theory and practice can only be a useful concept when it is understood as a form of similarity” (2007: 32).

As this article maintains, then, intersemiotic translation (and the procedures of intralingual translation it often entails) have the potential to further the debate between legal and plain language, opening up highly stimulating opportunities to communicate both “legally” and “comprehensibly”, ultimately pointing, in the legal domain, to different modes of interaction between specialists and non-specialists.

Naturally, due to space constraints, this article was in no position to conduct a thorough examination of the many issues involved in this process, especially in consideration of the various genres and subgenres that belong to the legal macro-category, which might be

characterised by specific lexical, morphosyntactic and textual features. However, despite the work which obviously still needs to be conducted in this area, this article can hopefully act as a steppingstone for future research.

Based on the research conducted by the author among both specialist and non-specialist students,<sup>10</sup> in educational settings, for instance, there is the need for more manuals and textbooks which translate intersemiotically the main notions which will form the building blocks of the students' knowledge.

Similarly, on the basis of interviews the author has held with lawyers, judges and bank managers over the years,<sup>11</sup> in more social environments, as this article suggests, there is a strong need to create more 'visual texts' which could make contracts, deeds, etc. more comprehensible to the general public. Furthermore, with a view to rendering legal language more accessible, the implementation of binding oral explanations of comic contracts, deeds, etc., should be further investigated, since, as Robert Franch states, "There is no reason in principle why pictorial contracts explained orally or supplemented textually or contextually could not be enforceable in the same way as any other contract" (Franch 2017: 271).

Finally, since the attention has been mainly focused on contracts, a deeper investigation into the possibility of translating intersemiotically other genres and sub-genres is needed.

## **Bibliography**

- Allen, Kate, and John Ingulsrud. 2003. Manga literacy: popular culture and the reading habits of Japanese college students. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 46, no. 8: 674–83.
- APA blog, The. <https://blog.apaonline.org/2019/01/17/eliminating-footnotes-makes-philosophy-more-accessible/>.

---

<sup>10</sup> This research was based on a series of questionnaires and surveys students from Courses in Foreign Modern Languages and Law were asked to fill.

<sup>11</sup> Let us not forget that, due to its interdisciplinary nature (Kristiansen 2007: 156; Kristiansen 2011: 38-9), the language of Business, Finance and Economics is often intertwined with legal language (Kristiansen and Simonnæs 2018: 157).

- Bolter, Jay, and Richard Grusin. 2000. *Remediation: understanding new media*. Cambridge (MA): MIT.
- Botes, Marietjie. 2017. Using comics to communicate legal contract cancellation. *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship* 7, no. 1: 1-21. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/cg.100>.
- Burney, Nathaniel. 2018. *The Illustrated Guide to Criminal Law*. Toronto: Thomson Reuters.
- Canepari, Michela. 2013. *Viaggio intersemiotico nel linguaggio della scienza*. Roma: Nuova Cultura.
- Canepari, Michela. 2023. *Specialized Languages and Graphic Art*. Bern et al.: Peter Lang.
- Clark, Ruth, and Chopeta Lyons. 2011. *Graphics for learning: proven guidelines for planning, designing, and evaluating visuals in training materials*. San Francisco: Pfeiffer.
- Cohn, Neil, Emily Coderre, Lia Kendall, and Joseph Magliano. 2016. Comics and cognitive systems: the processing of visual narratives. In *Proceedings of the 38<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of The Cognitive Science Society*, eds. Anna Papafragou, Daniel Grodner, Daniel Mirman, and John Trueswell, 37–8. Austin: Cognitive Science Society.
- Coke, Edward. 1832. *Commentary upon Littleton*. London: Clarke, Saunders and Benning.
- Cortelazzo, Michele. 1994. *Lingue speciali: la dimensione verticale*. Padova: Unipress.
- Cutts, Martin. 2013. *Oxford guide to plain English*. Oxford: Oxford university Press.
- Daloiso, Michele. 2017. *Supporting learners with dyslexia in the ELT classroom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1967a. *De la grammatologie*. Paris: Minuit.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1967b. *Écriture et différence*. Paris: Seuil.
- Dotted & Crossed. <https://dottedandcrossed.eu/comic-contracts/> (accessed May 19, 2023).
- Fadel, Charles. 2008. *Multimodal learning through media: what the research says*. San Jose (CA): Cisco Systems.
- Foucault, Michel. 1972. *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Foucault, Michel. 1975. *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Foucault, Michel. 1976. *Histoire de la sexualité*, vol. 1. Paris: Gallimard.

- Gotti, Maurizio. 2005. *Investigating Specialized Discourse*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Greco, Gian Maria. 2016. On accessibility as a human right, with an application to media accessibility. In *Researching audio-description. new approaches*, eds. Anna Matamala and Pilar Orero, 11–34. London: Palgrave Macmillian. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-56917-2\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-56917-2_2).
- Greco, Gian Maria. 2017. L'accessibilità culturale come strumento per i diritti umani di tutti. In *Il patrimonio culturale per tutti. Fruibilità, riconoscibilità, accessibilità*, eds. Gabriella Cetorelli and Manuel Guido, 94–102. Roma: Direzione Generale Musei, Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo.
- Haapio, Helena, Daniela Plewe, and Robert de Rooy. 2016. Next generation deal design: comic and visual platforms for contracting. In *Networks. Proceedings of the 19th International Legal Informatics Symposium IRIS*, eds. Marika Salo, Helena Haapio, and Stefania Passera, 373–80. Wien: Österreichische Computer Gesellschaft OCG Books.
- Hassett, Dawnene, and Melissa Schieble. 2007. Finding space and time for the visual in K-12 literacy instruction. *The English Journal* 97, no. 1: 62–8.
- Hughes, Marie Tejero, and Elizabeth Talbott, eds. 2017. *The Wiley handbook of diversity in special education*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Krapp, George. 1926. The psychology of dialect writing. *The Bookman*, 63: 522–27.
- Kristiansen, Marita. 2007. Complexity and indeterminacy in delineating scholarly areas. some implications for LSP research and teaching. *LSP and Professional Communication*, 7: 62–84.
- Kristiansen, Marita. 2011. Domain dynamics in scholarly areas: How external pressure may cause concept and term changes. *Terminology* 17: 30–48. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1075/term.17.1.03kri>.
- Kristiansen, Marita, and Ingrid Simonnæs. 2018. Economic language. In *Languages for Special Purposes: An international handbook*, eds. John Humbley, Gerhard Budin, and Christer Laurén, 151–85. Berlin: de Gruyter. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110228014>.

- Lacan, Jacques. 1966. *Écrits*. Paris: Seuil.
- Lacan, Jacques. 1972. *Le séminaire, livre XX: Encore*. Paris : Seuil.
- Mayer, Richard. 1989. Systematic thinking fostered by illustrations in scientific text. *Journal of Educational Psychology* 81: 240–46.
- Pashler, Harold, Mark McDaniel, Doug Rohrer, and Robert Bjork. 2008. Learning styles: concepts and evidence. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 9, no. 3: 105-19. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1539-6053.2009.01038.x>.
- Pease John. 2012. Plain English. A solution for effective communication. In *Proceedings of the ACLA National Conference*, 1-34. Coolum: New Horizon.
- Reviere, Nina. 2016. Audio description services in europe: an update. *The Journal of Specialised Translation* 26: 232–47.
- Rizzo, Alessandra. 2019. Museums as disseminators of niche knowledge: universality in accessibility for all. *Journal of Audiovisual Translation* 2, no. 2: 92-136. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47476/jat.v2i2.93>.
- Sabin, Roger. 2016. *Adult comics*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Schiff, Rachel, and Malatesha Joshi. 2016. *Interventions in learning disabilities – a handbook on systematic training programs for individuals with learning disabilities*. Berlin: Springer.
- Tiersma, Peter. 1999. *Legal language*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tymoczko, Maria. 2007. Difference in similarity. In *Similarity and difference in translation*, eds. Stefano Arduini, and Robert Hodgson, 27-43. Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura.
- Varo, Enrique, and Brian Hughes. 2002. *Legal translation explained*. Manchester: St. Jerome.
- Zager, Dianne, Michael Wehmeyer, and Richard Simpson. 2011. *Educating students with autism spectrum disorders: research-based principles and practices*. London & New York: Routledge.