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Focus on medical communication

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Translating Tests of Pragmatic Language: A Culturally Sensitive Issue

1. Introduction

Recent years have seen a growing interest in the application of pragmatic aspects of communication in the area of research into language disorders. This has led to the development of a range of different methods of screening to investigate the subjects' abilities to understand and produce different types of communicative acts in order to assess the presence and extent of pragmatic language disorders (PLDs) in children and young adults. According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, fourth edition (DSM-IV), the disorders exhibiting pragmatic language difficulties are autism, Asperger syndrome, semantic pragmatic communication disability, non-verbal learning disability, hyperlexia, fragile X syndrome, Rhett syndrome, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, auditory processing disorder, schizoid personality disorder, social emotional processing disorder, epilepsy, trauma, head injuries and strokes. However, while PLDs remain difficult to diagnose, an early diagnosis in children can significantly facilitate the identification of language problems that could severely interfere with learning, unless specifically treated from their onset. Since the major deficits in pragmatic communication refer to qualitative impairments in social communication, standardized measures may not be appropriate for all racial and ethnic populations:

> To deny the validity of the notion of culture-specific […] patterns (including 'Anglo' cultural patterns) is to place the values of political correctness above the interests of socially disadvantaged individuals and groups. It would also be a conclusion denying the subjective experience of immigrants, and […] one going against their vital interests (Wierzbicka 2003: 14).

Hence, the impact of culture(s) with respect to diagnosing this language disorder cannot be ignored: the kind of behaviour typically associated with the disorder may in fact vary from culture to culture. To apply the same criteria to every child would not only be a culturally insensitive choice, but could also result in serious misclassification of symptoms, since the way a child does or does not respond to specific social situations may very well be mediated by cultural factors. Yet, to date, research on the usability and translatability of tests themselves is scant (Alduais *et al.* 2012), and the dearth of information on cultural differences in the diagnosis and perception of these language disorders (whatever their etiology) does not allow for easy assessment of symptoms for children of different cultures. Accordingly, the present study intends to address this gap from a broad critical discourse analysis perspective and within the domain of Applied Descriptive Translation Studies (Snell-Hornby 2006). Our investigation aims at gauging how cross-cultural differences may impact on the perception of PLDs, with a focus on the (un)translatability of one of the most widely used assessment tools, i.e. the *Test of Pragmatic Language,* second edition (TOPL-2). Designed in the USA in 2007, TOPL-2[1] was intended for use by speech-language pathologists and special educators, and has already been translated into Arabic, though as yet not into Italian, nor, to our best knowledge, into other languages. Given the paucity of updated pragmatic language disorder assessment tools in Italian, the translation of TOPL-2 is currently being considered.[2]

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1   The TOPL-2 kit consists in: Examiner's manual, Examiner Record Booklets, Picture Book.

2   There is an ongoing research project at the Second University of Naples, Department of Psychology, 'Translating TOPL-2 for Italian Schools', coordinated by professor Massimiliano Conson (members: Prof. Lucia Abbamonte, Prof. Flavia Cavaliere, Dr. Alessandro Frolli, Dr. Gabriella Santangelo).

2. Background

Pragmatics plays a critical role in day-to-day communication: speakers who cannot adapt language to the needs of interlocutor(s) and/or the context of the situation nor follow socio-culturally shared rules for conversations and storytelling are penalized in conversation (Vaughan 2008). Accordingly, both behavioural and cognitive pragmatic skills should be taken into account when first identifying and then assessing PLDs – which is no easy task. Such skills are not static but, rather, dynamic and interdependent abilities. However, accurate evaluation is necessary to provide a comprehensive social view of PLD-affected people, where cross-cultural variation is not to be undervalued.

　　More specifically, the behavioural abilities include turn-taking, reciprocity and topic maintenance in conversation, as well as providing the necessary background information and clarification. The abilities to initiate interactions, maintain eye contact and interpret facial expressions and body language are also important, in addition to sharing skills and sportsmanship. As regards socio-cognitive pragmatic aspects, not only are the *abilities* to take a variety of perspectives entailed (e.g. being flexible with other people's opinions, topics and interests), but also a sufficient knowledge of unwritten 'codes of conduct' (e.g. *greetings, informing,* etc.). Furthermore, persons endowed with effective social self-awareness are able to adjust personal pragmatic behaviour (e.g. *demanding, promising, requesting*) and to socially 'filter' inappropriate responses, also through understanding peers' hidden intentions. Other crucial socio-cognitive skills include the abilities to make inferences and understand non-literal language, together with the competence to independently analyze social problems and arrive at solution options rapidly, also by envisioning multiple interpretations of situations (Ketelaars 2010). Moreover, people with PLDs display varying degrees of difficulty in using/ decoding para-linguistic (tone of voice, facial expressions, proximity, eye contact) and prosodic features (pitch, intonation, stress, speed, volume), humour/sarcasm (Cavaliere 2008), and in constructing coherent narratives. Overall, PLD-affected people tend to be verbose and

over-literal (Botting/Conti-Ramsden 1999), and have difficulties in understanding figurative language and metaphors, which are necessarily included in any PLD tests, since metaphors mirror our ordinary conceptual system and function as conventionalized cognitive structures (Black 1979; Lakoff/Johnson 2003; Lakoff/Nunez 2000).

However, pragmatics alone cannot be used to diagnose a disorder; many people who show PLDs can either fit in more than one pathology, or in none, and PLDs can also be caused by abuse, neglect, prolonged hospitalization, lack of stimulation or learned helplessness. Early diagnosis is thus both difficult and essential since the development of abnormal language skills in children can be reduced and clinically treated if addressed from the outset; otherwise symptoms may more severely interfere with learning and social interaction. Hence, the need to develop efficient tools, especially for screening the youth population, is increasingly felt, as well as the need to account for the impact of cultural differences in the communicative performances of the subjects. Indeed, in order to make more focused diagnoses, it is essential to develop specialized, culture-sensitive assessment tools, and, also, to utilize culturally sensitive strategies when it is deemed necessary to translate PLD tests.

3. Aims and purposes

Whatever their etiology, to gauge the extent of PLDs requires reliable standardized formal measures of pragmatic language, which are mainly in English. Since the need for using them in other countries has been (and is still) strong, some of them had to be translated into several languages. However, the question of the usability of the same assessment tools across different cultures has not been satisfyingly investigated yet, and the present study attempts to address this challenging issue, which entails taking into account the incidence of lingua-cultural hurdles, in particular in the translational process. Hence, the main thrust of this chapter is to assess the translatability of

TOPL-2 – one of the most significant assessment tools in use – from a pragmatic cross-cultural perspective. Indeed, especially if using parents' reports to screen children showing signs of PLDs, it is imperative to consider how cultural differences may impact their responses, and the emerging disparities must be incorporated both in the implementation of a screening measure, and in their translations into other languages. This would assure more focused (early) diagnoses and better treatment plans for all prospective patients.

In particular, we hypothesize that TOPL-2 Italian translation would need some 'domestication', and we also hypothesize that, along a translational continuum, the renderings of the United States-born TOPL-2 would require some form of domestication according to the different lingua-cultural contexts. Our major focus is on TOPL-2 translatability into Italian, whereas a critical research question is whether TOPL-2 could be successfully used in non-western countries. To better evaluate such issues from a cross-cultural perspective we also investigated the choices made by Arabic researchers in rendering TOPL-2 into Arabic (see Alduais *et al.* 2012).

4. Methodology

In the culturally-sensitive, and 'function/skopos oriented' (Holmes 1972; Toury 1995; Munday 2001; Vermeer 1989/2000) process of translation/adaptation of the instruments for the assessment of PLDs, it is necessary to keep a variety of factors in mind, such as age, gender, race/ethnicity, linguistic identity and socio-cultural context, including parent education level. From an applied translation studies perspective, an additional difficulty is the lack of consistent terminology and variability in both criteria and procedures to identify prospective patients. This requires a multi-step translational procedure. As recommended by the World Health Organization, the translation/ adaptation of any instrument (either psychological or neurological, or psychiatric) is expected to produce different language versions of

> the instrument [which] should be equally natural and acceptable and should
> practically perform in the same way [in the target lingua-cultural contexts].
> The focus is on cross-cultural and conceptual, rather than on linguistic/literal
> equivalence. A well-established method to achieve this goal is to use forward-
> translations and back-translations. (Process of translation and adaptation of
> instruments 2014)[3]

Accordingly, the procedure should include the following steps:

i.   Two *forward* translations (by two translators whose native
      language is the Target Language);
ii.   A 'reconciled' final version that must be conceptually (rather
      than literally) equivalent;
iii. Expert panel *back*-translation (experts whose native language is
      the Source Language);
iv.   Test authors' check for occasional discrepancies;
v.   Pre-testing and cognitive interviewing with a focus on the
      impact;
vi.   The final version.

4.1. Our procedure

Taking our trajectory from these guidelines, the optimal forward trans-
lational procedure we identified was to move along a cline ranging
from borrowing to adaptation (i.e., borrowing, calque, literal transla-
tion, transposition, modulation, equivalence and adaptation), broadly
following Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) taxonomy.

4.2. Domestication vs. Foreignization: a translational choice

Moving within the domain of the culturally-sensitive process of the
adaptation of PLD instruments, our approach needs to entail both
pragmatic and translational notions, in particular, the domestication
and foreignization binomial:

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3   <http://www.who.int/substance_abuse/research_tools/translation/en/>.

> In any translation project, the initial decision between domesticating and foreignizing strategies affects the whole translation process, leading either to a target text that is easily recognizable and thus readily accessible to the readers, or to a text that constantly reminds them of cultural difference. (Lindfors 2001)

In more detail, domestication refers to an "ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values" (Venuti 1995: 20). In domestication, foreign elements are assimilated into the target culture, thus rendering the translated text more palatable to the target audience. Viceversa, foreignization is "an ethno-deviant pressure on those (cultural) values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad" (Venuti 1995: 20). Accordingly, the translated text does not feign to be an original (as happens with domestication), so that "the crucial role of the source culture is stressed, foreign identity highlighted and the influence of the target culture minimised" (Szarkowska 2005).

In brief, translational choices move along the two opposite ends of the domestication-foreignization continuum, according to the intended audience's needs and identities. In the present case, since both the needs of the test practitioners and the potential end-users' identities must be kept in full view, domestication has to be the main thrust. Indeed, it is essential to gauge the extent of PLDs in the context of the socio-cognitive cultural context of the people possibly affected by such disorders, so as to avoid communication-impeding lingua-cultural hurdles, thus providing more focused diagnoses.

4.3. Translating non-literal language and metaphors

Since a major difficulty experienced by people with PLDs is coping with non-literal language – mainly humour and metaphors – instantiations of these culture-bound communicative modes are necessarily included in PLD tests, and require fine-tuned translation strategies. In particular, a good resource for investigations in mapping the thought-language relationship is provided by metaphors. Metaphors are both

grounded in our bodily experience, or embodied cognition (Varela/ Thompson/Rosch 1991; Pfeifer/Bongard 2006), and imaginatively structured. We may reasonably hypothesize that some metaphors are 'primary metaphors' (Grady/Johnson 2002), such as some sensori-motor experiences (e.g., moving around and jumping up when one is joyful). These metaphors are tendentially universal and offer significant examples of 'embodied' experience, while others are more culture-specific.[4] Metaphors may vary because the cognitive processes we utilize for the creation of abstract thought also vary. Indeed, the physical environment, cultural context and communicative situation play a foreground role for a given (sub-)culture or cultural group by permeating general domains of their experience, thus generating culturally-bound ways of conceptualizing experience, which are referred to as 'cultural conceptualizations' (Sharifian 2003). A common and feasible taxonomy for classifying culture-bound metaphors can be found in Kövecses' classification in congruent metaphors, alternative

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4   For example, the similarity between the English and Iraqi Arabic metaphorical expressions show that the universality of orientational metaphors (i.e., referring to movements in space) may be a reality as they are based on the hypothesis of embodiment. The most comprehensive explanation of 'embodiment' and 'embodied mind' in Cognitive Linguistics can be found in Lakoff/Johnson (1999: 4): "Reason is not disembodied, as the tradition has largely held, but arises from the nature of our brains, bodies, and bodily experience: […] the very structure of reason itself comes from the details of our embodiment. The same neural and cognitive mechanisms that allow us to perceive and move around also create our conceptual systems and modes of reason. […] In summary, reason is not, in any way, a transcendent feature of the universe or of disembodied mind. Instead, it is shaped crucially by the peculiarities of our human bodies, by the remarkable details of the neural structure of our brains, and the specifics of our everyday functioning in the world." Accordingly, our conceptual system is mirrored in language patterns, such as the systematic use of metaphor (Lakoff/Johnson 1980, 1999). In gist, every kind of human behaviour can be seen as the interaction and movements (i.e., up and down) of a body in an environment. Hence, every human experience is embodied. as shown in the following Iraqi Arabic/English instantiations (Hassan 2010): معنوياتك اليوم عاليه [Your spirits are high today]; رتفعت معنوياتي [My spirits rose]; شو إنت اليوم طاير من الفرح [You are flying with happiness today?]; من گَتله الخبر گَام يگَمز من الفرح [When I told him the news he began to jump with happiness]; أخبارك هبطت معنوياتى [Your news lowered my spirits].

metaphors and metaphors unique to a given culture (2006:155-158), which are the most challenging for translators, as will be illustrated in our examples.

As regards humour, each form of humour is inextricably embedded in the cultural cradle in which it was born (Solomon 1997; Chiaro 2005). To translate most verbally expressed humour, the ability to switch frames of reference is required, which implies that careful attention must be paid to the 'cultural turn' (Attardo 2002; Cavaliere 2008; Bassnett 2014).

4.4. Materials

The most utilized tools to assess/identify pragmatic language impairment(s) in children and adolescents are the following:
- Test of Pragmatic Language (TOPL-2) – 1999, 2007;
- Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals (CELF-4) – 2003;
- Pragmatic Language Skills Inventory (PLSI) – 2006;
- Children's Communication Checklist (CCC-2) – 2006;
- Test of Language Development-Intermediate (TOLD-1: 3) – 1988;
- Comprehensive Assessment of Spoken Language (CASL) – 1999.

As for the Italian scenario, the following are the most frequently utilized:
- Pragmatica TPL – Scala comunicativa e pragmatica 1-3 anni – 1995;
- APL Medea – Abilità pragmatiche nel linguaggio 5-14 anni – 2009;
- PVCM – Prove di Valutazione della Comprensione Metalinguistica 8-11 anni – 2010.

Among the various options, TOPL-2 designed for use by speech-language pathologists, is the most significant and widely appreciated tool, since it provides important information to school team members

(school psychologists, counselors, special educators, and clinical psychologists) about social skills and conflict resolution. For this reason we decided to focus our attention on this test, especially as regards its (un)translatability into Italian and into Arabic.

TOPL-2 targets children and adolescents between the ages of 8 and 18 and aims to identify individuals with pragmatic language deficits, to determine their strengths and weaknesses (so as to treat them accordingly), and to document their progress. In particular, the evaluation focuses on the students' ability to monitor and appraise the effectiveness of the response to resolve the social problem situation. TOPL-2 measures the ability to use language in social interactions in terms of six criteria:

- physical setting
- audience
- topic
- purpose (speech acts)
- visual-gestural cues
- abstraction.

TOPL-2 was standardized on a sample of 1,016 children residing in 21 states (USA), using gender, residence, race, geographic region and ethnicity as variables (spelling and common wording/phrasing were adapted). It consists in Examiner's Record Booklets (25 copies for each kit), a Picture Book and an Examiner's Manual.

Picture 1. The TOPL-2 kit.

The time needed to administer the test amounts to 60-70 minutes approximately, and the procedure is as follows: each item is slowly read by the counselor/special educator to the perspective patient/student: if s/he does not respond in 15 seconds, the item may be repeated but not altered, nor abbreviated. The examiner may point at the character depicted in the pictures as the item is read. No other assistance can be provided. The Examiner's Record Booklet is the component which needs to be translated, since it contains 43 verbally expressed questions (i.e. 'stimuli', which also refer to the picture book) to be asked to the participants. 'Correct response guidelines' are included for the examiner, and on some items a rationale for the solutions is provided (PE-Pragmatic Evaluation).

5. Linguistic data

For some of the items to be effectively translated in a different language, some shifts at the lexical level are required, and different strategies will be necessary, corresponding to higher-lower degrees of complexity.

5.1. Lexical shifts

In the following item, we note that a lexical shift for 'skateboard' would not be necessary in current translations, since skateboards can now be found in every Italian playground, and they are designated with the original English term, whereas 20 years ago translators would have used *monopattino*. A simple borrowing will now suffice.

Item	Stimulus	Correct Response Guidelines
9	**Picture Book Page 9 – 'Talking to the Teacher'** Matt was telling his teacher a story about the beach and a sailboat. In the	The response must indicate that topic maintenance and appropriate topic change are necessary for successful

	middle of the story, he suddenly started talking about his new tennis shoes. Then he began talking about Chad's new **skateboard,** and suddenly he asked about the math test. The teacher said, "Stop." Matt knew something had gone wrong. What went wrong in this story? **PE:** How can he tell better stories?	conversation. A story must be explained well and completed before a new one begins. **PE:** The student is able to indicate that a good story requires topic maintenance and that there needs to be a smooth way to switch from one topic to another.

Table 1. Borrowing.

Although borrowings are increasingly used in contemporary translations, yet they cannot always overcome linguistic lacunae. Hence, other translational shifts – i.e., any changes that are caused by the different features of the source and target languages, which trained translators regularly do to create the target text (Catford 1965, Newmark 1982, Toury 1995) – are required. In translating the following item, lexical shifts are deemed necessary:

Item	*Stimulus*	*Correct Response Guidelines*
16	**Picture Book Page 16 – 'The Slumber Party'** <u>**Cindy**</u> was having a <u>**slumber**</u> party with 2 of her friends. It was very, very late and they were laughing and talking. Her dad came in and said it was time to go to sleep, but Cindy and her friends wanted to stay up a little longer. Her dad seemed tired and angry. What can Cindy say so that he will let them stay up a little later? **PE:** How do you know that what Cindy says might work?	The response must reflect a consideration of her father's tired, frustrated or angry mood and politely persuade/negotiate a way to get to stay up a little later. **PE:** The student is able to express that a positive outcome may result from the use of persuasion and politeness, which respects dad's mood and tiredness.

Table 2. Translational shift.

The 'slumber party' situation is a recent one in Italy, where it is the traditional cultural practice for children to sleep in their home, and inferior distances between the Italian homes (usually flats/apartments) make 'sleep overs' less necessary. However, TV series and films have

made 'slumber parties' known and trendy in Italy as well. So, for a 2014 rendering, the items could be translated with a light 'domestication' process: one lexical shift (slumber → *pigiama*), and one name change (Cindy →*Martina*).

In the following item an equivalence[5] will be necessary: 'peanut butter' is an unfamiliar spread for Italian kids, while the Italian hazelnut spread Nutella could be a more palatable choice.

Item	Stimulus	Correct Response Guidelines
22.	**Picture Book Page 19 – 'The Sandwiches'** Matt was passing out sandwiches. Kate asked for **peanut butter**. Matt gave her a cheese sandwich and forgot to tell her that they were out of peanut butter. Kate got angry and told Matt that he was being mean. How can Matt fix things between them? **PE:** How do you know that what Matt said will work?	The response must include an effort to repair the communicative breakdown through the use of a polite apology and an explanation that he forgot to tell her that they were out of peanut butter. **PE:** The student is able to express that an apology and an explanation are effective ways to repair the communication breakdown.

Table 3. Equivalence.

In the same vein, in the next situation, while US kids usually wish to play a baseball game, Italian boys do not. An adaptation will thus be necessary since soccer is by far the most common Italian game (baseball→*calcio*).

Item	Stimulus	Correct Response Guidelines
11.	**Picture Book Page 11 – 'The Baseball Game'** Brad was watching some older kids start to play a **baseball game.** He wanted to play too, but he was not sure they would let him play with them. He looked at all the kids. What did Brad see and what did he	The response must gauge the welcoming, positive mood of the two waiting boys or the group as a whole, making some reference to one or both, and use a polite request to play with them. **PE:** The response reflects a recognition that certain efforts

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5   Or, from a wider perspective, an adaptation, which Vinay and Darbelnet (1995: 135) describe as "a special kind of equivalence, a situational equivalence". Indeed, some degree of overlapping among categories is inevitable.

	say? **PE:** What makes him think the older kids will let him play?	(politeness and/or evaluating the audience) can result in a successful outcome.

Table 4. Adaptation.

5.2. Anglo-saxon or universal irony?

Among the cultural elements which are specific to given societies, irony and humorous allusions can be the most difficult to render, as we will presently see. With the next stimuli, we are moving to a more abstract and less literal communicative level:

Item	Stimulus	Correct Response Guidelines
6.	**Picture Book Page 6 – 'Picking Up Kate'** Mom was supposed to pick up Kate at 4:00. Mom waited a long time and Kate was very late. When Kate finally got there, Mom said, "Thanks a lot for being on time." What did Mom really mean when she said that? **PE:** Why did she say it that way?	The response must address that Mom introduced her message by using indirect language and expressed her annoyance or anger at Kate's lateness by using indirect language. **PE:** The student is able to express that mother is using humor or sarcasm to alert Kate to the fact that she is late.
19.	**Picture Book Page 18 – 'Wet Cement'** Chad and Matt were walking. The sidewalk was being fixed and there was wet cement. Matt wasn't paying attention to the sidewalk. Chad said, "I guess you like walking in wet cement". What did he really mean when he said that? **PE:** Why did he say it that way?	The response must refer to the way that Chad used indirect language to warn/suggest that Matt watch where he was walking. **PE:** The student is able to express that Chad is using humor or sarcasm to alert his friend to the wet cement.

Table 5. Instances of irony in the TOPL2.

Since American and Italian humour/irony are non-coincident, the possible Italian patients could be misled. A basic question can be: How would the 'humorous' mode shaping the 'Picking up Kate' and 'Wet

Cement' stimuli be interpreted in Italian context by both PLD affected and non-affected participants? Apart from insights from scientific linguistic literature, in our increasingly multi-cultural societies, practical suggestions as to how to handle and gauge humour come from popular manuals for cross-cultural training for educators, such as, for example:

> **Humour in the classroom lightens things up, but it takes care and practice to get it right.** […] nothing is more cultural than humour. A hilarious joke in one culture is insulting, puerile or inane in another. While some cultures find jokes about body parts and functions funny, for example, others find them disgusting. […]
>
> **Word-play based humour relies on linguistic skills.** While situational humour translates well, word plays often use a high level of language; using words with more than one meaning, playing with homophones or complex constructions. Some is based on social or political events and incomprehensible to newcomers.[6]

A culture-sensitive translational choice (for the Italian target text) might be to shift from irony and sarcasm to a mixture of comicality and warning, which is not simple.

5.3. In/congruent metaphors

As regards the following stimuli (the numbers refer to the items in the TOPL-2), we have only one congruent metaphor out of seven 'alternative' metaphors (excerpted from the corresponding stimuli):

20	You cannot judge a book by its cover [said by a father to his son while discussing on an apparently mean teacher].
23	Into each life some rain must fall [said by a coach after losing a game]
26	You have to crawl before you can walk [said by a counsellor]
29	Too many queen bees and not enough worker bees [said by a teacher to quarrelling students]
40	Looks to me like you're shooting yourself in the foot [said by a teacher to an unruly student]
42	All that glitters is not gold (congruent metaphor) [said by a girl referring to a

6   Teaching tolerance: <http://www.culturesintheclassroom.com/5_ paralinguistics.shtml> (last accessed 10 April 2014).

	new girl at school]
43	A strong tree bends in the wind [said by a father to his discouraged child]

The Italian rendering of metaphor 42 is *Non è tutt'oro quello che luc-cica*, while for the other alternative metaphors appropriate translations need to be found, such as for example, *l'abito non fa il monaco* (20).

5.4. Appropriate telling

Appropriate telling (AT) is a strong, shared value in Anglo-Saxon cultures and, to varying extents, across cultures. In TOPL a total of 5 out of 43 items focus on the lack of AT, i.e., the speaker is not making his/her story clear enough, mainly because s/he does not provide the relevant information when necessary, or gives useless details (as explained in the 'Correct Response Guidelines'), such as:

- Topic maintenance: (Item 9) 'Talking to the Teacher' (see 5.1.) ; (Item 24) 'Talking to the Counselor'; (Item 30) 'Talking about a Friend'; (Item 31) 'Talking about Summer Vacation'
- (over-)Detailed narration (verbosity): (Item 25) 'The Sailboat Race'

Essential for meaningful communication in an Anglo-Saxon context is the mastering of the above mentioned skills, as can be seen from the following items.

Item	Stimulus	Correct Response Guidelines
24.	**Picture Book Page 20 – 'Talking to the Counselor'** Cindy was telling the counselor about a problem with another girl. She said that "things kept happening" and she was mad. She said that "the other girl said it too" and "so did that boy". The counselor did not understand what had happened, why Cindy was mad, and who the other girl and boy were. What went wrong and how can Cindy tell her story so that the counselor can help her?	The response must indicate that the given-new (shared information) base is ignored and that the use of informing (explaining or describing) is needed.
30.	**Picture Book Page 24 – 'Talking about a Friend'** Matt talked and talked about his friend. Ben asked who the friend was. Matt just kept on talking about the friend and a game they had won. Ben did not know who the friend was or what the game was. He was very mixed up. He asked, "Who is your friend and what game are you talking about?" Matt said, " Stop interrupting me. I hate that." Matt was mad. Ben was mad now too. They both walked away angry. What went wrong? **PE:** How could things be fixed between the boys?	The response must include some indication that the given-new (shared information) base is ignored and there is a need for an appropriate telling of the story in order for the topic to be introduced, followed and understood. **PE:** The student is able to express that an apology is needed to repair the problem, and that in the future, Matt needs to attend to topic introduction and the given-new base in order to successfully communicate.
31.	**Picture Book Page 24 – 'Talking about Summer Vacation'** Chad started talking about his summer vacation. He talked on and on about his trip. He talked about things he did and people he met. Cindy did not know who or what he was talking about. She kept asking who he was talking about or what he was talking about. Chad got mad and said she was not a good listener. What went wrong? **PE:** How can Chad tell his story so	The response must make reference to the fact that given-new base has been ignored (more story details are needed) and that the topic is not introduced well, as indicated by Cindy's unfamiliarity with it. **PE:** The student is able to explain the speaker's need to monitor audience and topic factors in order to be sure that the story is clear, as well as attend to the audience and answer questions in

	that Cindy can understand?	order to help their understanding.

Table 6. Appropriate telling.

Apparently, discrepancies in information levels are found to be communication-impeding in the narratives mentioned above. As explained in the 'Correct Response Guidelines' above, a physiological English-speaking communicator should be able to understand and explain that the 'given-new base' is ignored. However, it is not easy to elicit this perception of communication failure in the Italian lingua-cultural context. Such difficulties are more consistent in the following situation:

Item	Stimulus	Correct Response Guidelines
25.	**Picture Book Page 21- 'The Sailboat Race'** Brad told Matt about the sailboat races he had seen. He talked on and on about the winning sailboat. He told about his color, its length, how wide it was, the people in it, what people in it were wearing, a scratch he saw on the side of the boat, and something someone in the crowd said about the boat. He told every single thing he could think of about the boat. Finally, Matt said, That's enough about the boat" and walked away. What went wrong?	The response must indicate that the topic content is far too detailed and tedious and that the story must have less details to be successful.

Table 7. Instances of over-detailed narration.

Indeed, would such over-detailed descriptions be considered as 'inappropriate' in Italian as they are in English? Could 'verbosity' be as serious a drawback in Italy as it is apparently in English speaking countries? Interestingly enough, some recent research in the domain of comparative translation studies (Morini/Zacchi 2002) seems to undermine the 'universality' of such 'verbosity-opposing' prescriptions, typically labelled as 'appropriate telling'. Indeed, especially computer-assisted studies of bilingual corpora, i.e. English source texts and their translations in Italian, highlight systemic differences, including

the lower sentence and word number and the inferior mean sentence length of the English source texts (Ianich 2006: 8-9). It could be inferred that the greater 'conciseness' of the English texts as compared to the over-detailed explicitation of the Italian texts can be mainly explained in terms of the Italian preference for more complex syntactic formulations. Hence, to provide a valid Italian translation of such items, 'verbosity' should be exaggerated or differently framed.

5.5. Turn-taking and interrupting

Turn-taking and interrupting are also included in TOPL-2 stimuli: 'The Interruption' (13), and 'Hanging up Pictures' (35) respectively. Informal verbal interaction is the matrix for human social life and heavily relies on a system of turn-taking. However, relatively little is known about culture-specific variation, though differences are found across the languages, especially from the anthropological perspective. Apparently, cultures differ radically in the timing of conversational turn-taking (Stivers et al. 2009). Comparative studies of English and Italian highlight consistent differences in styles of verbal interactions, especially as regards turn-taking, which, in gist, is less strictly observed in Italian as compared to Anglo-Saxon contexts. Such tendency is also found in parents-children interactions (Maroni *et al.* 2008). However, for the purposes of this study on PLD test translatability, apart from scientific literature, interesting observations also come from manuals for teachers' cross-cultural training, as can be seen in the excerpts below:

> **Interruptions are part of conversation.** They are an irritating part of dialogue, but the level of 'rudeness' assigned to them varies from culture to culture. What constitutes an interruption also depends on the language group. In hierarchical societies, it depends on the status of the conversation partners. **Students from other cultures have internalized different sets of 'interruption' rules.** In some countries students interrupt teachers with questions or to challenge something that's been said, but in others it is very rude to interrupt even if the class has gone overtime, the teacher's made a mistake, or students haven't understood.

> **In multicultural classes 'turn-taking' is an issue.** Some students politely
> wait their turn and don't get to say anything, while others dominate the
> conversation, jumping in at every opportunity, or interrupting. Although this
> is an issue in any classroom, cultural differences exacerbate the problem.
> (Crosscultural Training for Educators)[7]

Hence, un-British turn-taking and conversation style in some students
need not necessarily denote them as either unruly/rude, or signal them
as 'typical', potential PLDs patients, as the inclusion of the following
stimuli imply.

Item	Stimulus	Correct Response Guidelines
13	**Picture Book Page 13 – 'The Interruption'** Matt was hanging up his poster. He wanted everyone to see it. Cindy and Kate were busy talking about a very important problem they had. Matt yelled at them, "Hey, look." Then he yelled, "Hey, I'm talking to you!" This interruption made the girls angry. What did Cindy say to him?	The response must include a reference to turn taking and effort to inform/explain turn taking to Matt.
35.	**Picture Book Page 29 – 'Hanging Up Pictures'** Cindy was hanging up pictures on the wall at school. She needed help, but she knew that the teacher was very, very busy grading papers and did not want to be disturbed. Cindy did not want the teacher to be upset or angry about being disturbed. She tried to think of a way to ask the busy teacher for help. How did she ask the teacher for help?	The response must include recognition that the teacher is occupied with her task and may not be open to interruption, so that use of a polite, formal excuse for interrupting is needed, along with a request for help.

Table 8. Turn-taking and Interrupting.

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7   < http://www.culturesintheclassroom.com/5_paralinguistics.shtml>.

Again, to fully convey the inadequacy of such behaviour in Italian is no easy task: overlapping in conversation and 'controversial' turn-taking is not infrequent in Italian verbal interactions.

5.6. Situational shifts

By the same token, the method of adaptation is utilized to cope with source culture situations which are unfamiliar in the target culture, as in the domain of Sportsmanship. In TOPL-2 we have a total of 7 out of 43 items focusing on sports and competition, as can be easily inferred from the titles of the stimuli themselves:

- (item 10) 'Playing and Wrestling'
- (item 11) 'The Baseball Game' (see above)
- (item 14) 'The Game'
- (item 23) 'Your team lost an important game'
- (item 25) 'The Sailboat Race' (see above)
- (item 27) 'The new Rollerblades'
- (item 30) 'Talking about a Friend [and a game]' (see 5.4.).

Thus, in translating such stimuli into Italian, it should be taken into account that while sportsmanship is apparently a basic component of successful and fully-rounded communication in Anglo-Saxon cultures, this is not so in Italy. By and large, to be able to practice and discuss at least a few sports is not required for a successful school and social life in Italy. Whereas in Italy sports are not an essential part of schools curricula (only a generic discipline – 'physical education/*educazione fisica*' – for two hours per week is included), and even less of univer-sities curricula, in U.S. colleges and universities usually award scho-larships to *student-athletes,* essentially based on their abilities to play a sport. Athletic scholarships, which are so common in the U.S., in many countries, such as Italy, are rare or non-existing. Hence, such focus on sports may be excessive for Italian adolescents – perhaps some family/friends-centred situations would be more familiar for them, such as, for example, a family gathering for Sunday lunch, which is still a strong tradition in Italy. Furthermore, Italian young people tend to stay more in the family of origin and, by and large,

relationship with the parents, also in their old age, are closer. Elderly people still provide support to the younger generations and in many cases grandparents take care of grandchildren.

Overall, the general attitude towards children (and adolescents) is (over-)protective; they are virtually never left on their own, nor trusted with potentially dangerous tool. From this perspective, the following TOPL-2 stimulus is another clear example of how some situations would be unacceptable in Italian contexts:

Item	Stimulus	Correct Response Guidelines
32.	**Picture Book Page 26 – 'The Neighbor's Tools'** Kate was building a doghouse. She needed a hammer and a saw. Her neighbor had tools. She knows he does not like for people to borrow his tools, but Kate asked anyway. The neighbor said he was not sure he wanted to lend the tools. How can Kate 'talk him into it'?	The response may directly refer to the neighbor's mood, or be indirect (unspoken) but evidenced by the use of polite, formal requesting and persuasion in the form of promising to take good care of the tools and returning them promptly.

Table 9. Situational shift.

Firstly, owing to different housing organizations and life style, it is not common in Italy to build a dog house. 'Do-it-yourself' is not a favourite option with Italians, who typically prefer more refined final products. Secondly, anybody lending such dangerous tools as a hammer and a saw to minors would be liable for a criminal offence if they should harm themselves. So a different kind of object should be chosen, say some harmless kitchen tools, which rightly belong to Italian cooking culture. A quite drastic modification is thus necessary.

As shown above, then, a fair amount of change is necessary when translating TOPL-2 for Italy, i.e., a European country, broadly sharing the same socio-legal-cultural context as other western democracies. Hence, a question arises – what amount of change will be necessary when translating TOPL-2 for non-western countries?

5.7. The question of the usability of an Arabic version of TOPL-2

A case in point is provided by the work of some Arab researchers (Alduais *et al.* 2012). Some of the translational choices did not require complicated strategies; for example, items indicating proverbs and sayings were replaced with equivalents from the Arabic language, and foreign names were replaced by Arabic names to make it easier to administer the test to the Arab participants of this study (e.g. Cindy was replaced by Fatima, Matt by Mohammed, Kate by Aisha, etc.). Some others raised more concern. Firstly, since in the TOPL-2 picture book girls are dressed in a style that is not common in Arab countries, the participants in their study, particularly children, were not able to recognize the persons in the pictures as girls. Therefore the Arab researchers chose to consider them as boys, especially those with short hair, since (reportedly) it was impossible to explain to the children – and even the adolescents – how a boy and girl could become friends and socialize. As the Arab researchers explained, such situations are not common in Arab countries, so they drastically simplified the stimuli by *'translating'* the situations of friendship or gatherings of boys and girls into all-males situations. The clothing style helped them, since trousers, T-shirts, and short hair styles are not at all common among female members of Saudi society (Alduais *et al.* 2012). We think that the Arabic researchers underestimated the potential ambiguity of this 'same-sex domestication' of situations based on a variety of girl-boy interactions (teasing, quarrelling and making peace, making plans, sharing). Simple as it may appear, we feel that the solution of uniforming the gender of the protagonists of these situations may be a misleading solution: let us consider for example the following situation.

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Item	Stimulus	Correct Response Guidelines
8.	**Picture Book Page 8 – 'The Friends'** Cindy was teasing Matt every day. He got mad. They had been good friends for a long time. Now Matt is so mad that he won't call Cindy or visit at her house. What can Cindy say to get Matt to be friends again? **PE:** How do you know that what Cindy says might work?	The response should include some indication that Cindy is aware that she has hurt Matt by her teasing, owes him an apology, and must persuade him to give her a chance to be friends again. **PE:** The student is able to express that an apology for being hurtful and a request for continued friendship (as well as a promise to stop being hurtful in the future) are effective ways to repair problems.

Table 10. Instances of teasing/flirting.

Wouldn't a boy-teasing-a-boy situation suggest a different kind of interaction? The Arab researchers did not appear to be aware of the potential incongruity of some situations. For example, to what extent would the following situation ('The Restaurant') be compatible with the Saudi Arabia norms of human interaction?

Item	Stimulus	Correct Response Guidelines
3.	**Picture Book Page 3 – "The Restaurant'** Here is a picture of a lady eating in a restaurant. Look at the lady carefully. What is she saying to the waiter and how do you know this?	The response must make a reference to the setting and/or the food; must be logical and make sense; and must make a reference to the facial expressions, gestures, and/or body language of the woman.

Table 11. Translational gender hurdle.

Overall, limitations in gauging the gender-egalitarian and western culture-specific attitudes and values entailed in TOPL-2 situations may inhibit its effective usability in societies whose norms reflect different cultural attitudes.

6. Concluding remarks

On the whole, there are many points in favour of the practice of translating TOPL-2 by domesticating/adapting it to target lingua-cultural contexts. In the study of cross-cultural pragmatics, Wierzbicka (2003) made clear how supposedly universal maxims and principles of politeness were indeed rooted in Anglophone culture, but were not common to all European countries, not to mention non-western countries. It became increasingly apparent that it is not easy to describe in terms of universal politeness or 'appropriateness' the communicative realities of multi-race families, as well as of millions of refugees, immigrants and the children of immigrants, and their (pragma-)linguistic difficulties when striving to survive socially in the milieu of a different language.

Eventually, the notion that norms of human interaction mirror different attitudes, grammars and ethnographies of speaking (Hymes 1962) – which is essential for the evaluation of PLDs – has come to the foreground. Raising awareness of the pervading presence of 'cultural scripts' subject to socio-diatopic variation could facilitate inter-cultural understanding (Abbamonte 2012), while at the same time taking into account significant differences. When assessing PLDs, notions such as 'appropriate telling', 'topic maintenance', 'verbosity', 'turn-taking' and 'interruptions' should be considered from a comparative perspective and the corresponding items should be translated by adapting them to different culture-specific contexts. In particular, as our analysis has shown, a variety of translational strategies, ranging from borrowing to adaptation, would be necessary to adapt the USA-developed TOPL-2 for Italian perspective PLDs patients: i.e. a considerable amount of domestication, mainly adaptations, would be necessary.

A controversial question therefore arises – how much domestication would be necessary for translations in non-western countries? More precisely, can the drastic 'domestication/adaptations' of the Arab researchers be considered as instantiations of successful translation? Or do they alter the 'script' beyond the boundary of effective

usability? In particular, the differences between same-gender and girl-boy (non/)verbal interactions across cultures are not easily overvalued, and by ignoring/minimizing them, the efficacy of any psychological assessment tool (such as TOPL-2) is predictably undermined. Therefore, we wonder whether these culturally-sensitive but misleading translational choices may inhibit the effective usability of TOPL-2 in the Arab countries.

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