



UNIVERSITÀ
DI PADOVA

Università di Padova

Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari

Corso di Laurea Triennale Interclasse in
Lingue, Letterature e Mediazione culturale (LTLLM)
Classe LT-12

Tesina di Laurea

*Memes across cultures:
Can Internet humour be transcreated?*

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Anno Accademico 2025 / 2026

*A tutti coloro che ho di più cari,
che ci avete creduto prima che ci credessi io,
dall'inizio e fino alla fine.
Grazie*

ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this research is to investigate how Internet humour, and more specifically memes, can be successfully translated. Transcreation as an innovative translation process is becoming increasingly widespread, particularly when culture serves as a central component. Rather than a traditional word-for-word translation, this practice represents a creative approach aimed at transferring the underlying essence rather than the words themselves; that is to say, providing the target audience with the same sensations and emotions experienced by the source audience. This thesis examines the profound link between culture and humour, as well as the concept of transcreation applied to digital multimodal contents such as memes, analysing how the comprehension and reproduction of irony are strictly connected to the cultural background of the target community. Through a pragmatic and functionalist methodological approach, the research analyses the adaptation of three of the most viral memes on the web, highlighting the necessary challenges and strategies. Finally, by proposing various transcreated options, the study identifies the choices that best convey the humour of the original version across different cultural contexts.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Ringrazio la Prof.ssa Gaballo per avermi guidato e supportato con pazienza nella stesura di questa tesi e per aver capito le mie difficoltà.

Ringrazio mamma e papà per essermi sempre stati accanto, per aver rispettato i miei tempi senza mai farmi sentire il peso del tempo, per avermi dato il loro supporto nonostante tutto, per avermi appoggiato nelle mie scelte, condivise e non, per avermi cresciuto e fatto vivere in un ambiente di gioia e tranquillità.

Ringrazio mia sorella per essere la mia migliore amica, la mia complice, per sapermi capire senza bisogno di parole, per sapermi sempre condurre sulla strada giusta, per darmi sempre buoni consigli e per essere sempre dalla mia parte. Non ti ho scelta, ma sono fortunata ad averti nella mia vita.

Ringrazio Luigi per avermi trovata in un momento buio e aver portato luce, per avere avuto la voglia di scoprirmi, per saper accettarmi in ogni mio cambiamento, per supportarmi sempre e comunque.

Ringrazio i miei nonni, che siete uno dei motivi principali per cui ho voluto e sono riuscita a concludere questo percorso. Spero di avervi resi orgogliosi di me.

Ringrazio tutta la mia grande famiglia per non avermi mai fatta sentire giudicata e per aver saputo sempre trovare le parole giuste per darmi supporto.

Ringrazio tutti i miei amici, vecchi e nuovi, per avermi sempre portato gioia e spensieratezza.

A tutti voi, grazie.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary society, it is rare to find an individual who has never interacted with the Internet. By the same token, it is rare to find an individual who does not possess, or has not possessed, a social media profile. According to Vaswani (2026), 94.2% of Internet users possess a social media account; this implies that out of the 5.66 billion global Internet users, 5.41 billion are active on social media platforms. Therefore, more than five billion individuals have potentially encountered a meme and experienced its humour. Undoubtedly, this digital audience of five billion people encompasses a multitude of diverse cultures and linguistic backgrounds. As this study wants to demonstrate, memes and cultures are intrinsically intertwined, because one constantly influences and reshapes the other.

Hence, the purpose of this research is to analyse how memes and Internet humour can be adapted to different cultures, since they represent cultural products; consequently, this process must be carried out through a specific subfield of translation studies, namely transcreation (Díaz-Millón & Olvera-Lobo, 2023). Given that memes are complex cultural products, their adaptation for different audiences cannot be achieved through standard linguistic translation. Thus, this study explores transcreation as a fundamental tool to adapt Internet humour to different audiences while preserving the humorous effect, which is deeply interconnected to cultural backgrounds.

The factors motivating this research are grounded in the global expansion of this type of humour, which is driven by numerous social media platforms where memes can circulate, become viral, and influence the audiences they reach; simultaneously, this study is driven by the rapid proliferation of transcreation as a novel translational approach.

This study aims to make an original contribution to the fields of linguistics and translation. Internet memes are no longer mere jokes, but rather nothing short of a rapidly expanding cultural language. In the same way, transcreation has emerged as a valid and efficient tool capable of rendering complex cultural elements that a literal translation would inevitably omit. Consequently, exploring the intersection between these two contemporary phenomena provides crucial insights into modern cross-cultural communication.

To practically examine these linguistic dynamics, the study gathers a selection of Internet memes from among the most viral examples on prominent social media platforms, such as Instagram, Reddit, and Know Your Meme, which offer a wider range of adaptations. Specifically, the chosen memes present various linguistic and cultural obstacles, such as malapropism, slang, or references deeply rooted in culture, including food-related tropes. This analysis is based on memes whose source language is English, which are then transcreated into Italian.

In terms of methodology, this work consciously distances itself from traditional translation frameworks focused on formal or literal equivalence. A word-for-word translation and the classic theories prove to be insufficient for the transposition and the adaptation of different digital memes. Since memes represent a combination of images and text, the analysis of their transcreation initially considers the branch of audiovisual translation, subsequently progressing through a qualitative, pragmatic, and functional approach. This specific framework is adopted in order to achieve the ultimate *skopos*, which is to preserve the underlying message rather than the external form.

A qualitative approach allows the researcher to concentrate not on statistical data, but on how humour can be effectively transcreated. This process is inherently pragmatic, since the transfer is an all-encompassing phenomenon that considers the holistic message instead of merely the words themselves. In this scenario, the translator tries to understand the true intent of the original author and attempts to reproduce it as faithfully as possible. This reasoning leads directly to the functional approach developed by Nord, according to whom loyalty must constitute the foundation of the entire process of transcreation. Her method is the one that best fits this analysis, since incorporates Vermeer's *Skopos*theorie—whereby the transcreated version must preserve the principal aim of the original text—while simultaneously accounting for the necessity of remaining faithful the source author's intentions. To apply this methodological approach, the study employs as an operational point of reference a professional workflow inspired by the Dropinka® Deck for Transcreation created by Claudia Benetello.

To provide a clear roadmap of the investigation, the structure of this study is organized into three main chapters. Chapter 2 establishes the theoretical approach, introducing a general overview of translation by drawing upon classic translation theories up to more modern, audiovisual ones. It introduces the concepts of 'cultural translation'

to explain why a literal translation proves to be insufficient, ultimately demonstrating that transcreation is the most suitable practice.

The first section explains what transcreation is, the birth of this branch, and how it is nowadays an established discipline among translation studies, distinct from traditional translation. The next section analyses the origin of the meme as a term and as a concept, starting from the framework developed by the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins and concluding with the study of Limor Shifman on how memes evolved in digital contexts, becoming what are known as Internet memes. It concludes by providing examples of three of the most viral memes present in the Internet to give a practical explanation of the aforementioned concepts. The third section provides a profound investigation into humour and how it differs across cultures. It explains the several cultural nuances of humour and the existence of specific boundaries which are better not crossed to prevent irony from degenerating into offensiveness. All these concepts are introduced to clarify why humour and irony are not so simple to translate, and why they cannot always be translated literally but must be adapted into the target culture and for the target audience. After all these considerations, the chapter tries to answer the question ‘Can Internet humour be transcreated?’.

Chapter 3 addresses the methodological approach. As anticipated before, the approach of this research is qualitative, pragmatic, and functional, focused on Hans J. Vermeer’s *Skopostheorie*, which, combined with the analysis of equivalence by Katharina Reiß, culminates in Christiane Nord’s personal model called “function *plus* loyalty”.

The thesis concludes with Chapter 4, which presents the practical applications of the theory previously explained. It concentrates on three viral Internet memes, namely ‘Woman Yelling at a Cat’, ‘Spider-Man Pointing at Spider-Man’, and ‘Distracted Boyfriend’, to which different transcreation strategies are applied with the aim of identifying appropriate Italian equivalents in order to preserve the humour of the original. Then, the various transcreated options are analysed to isolate the one that most respects the original text.

By structuring the thesis along this progressive path, the study moves systematically from theoretical frameworks to concrete applications. Ultimately, this structural arrangement serves to demonstrate that in the contemporary and digital

ecosystem, the preservation of humour requires a total abandonment of literal structures in favour of a flexible and culturally loyal rewriting process.

2. THEORETICAL APPROACH

Nowadays, communication is no longer restricted to traditional linguistic channels; rather, it has become digital and multimodal, a dynamic in which meaning does not rely solely on words but on the combination of image and text. This phenomenon is clearly visible in everyday digital products, such as social media advertisements, website banners, and internet memes. Consequently, the translation of contemporary digital content cannot be analysed or approached through traditional frameworks, bringing Audiovisual Translation (AVT) into focus.

AVT is “a branch of translation studies concerned with the transfer of multimodal and multimedial texts [such as films, series, commercials] into another language and/or culture” (Pérez-González, 2009, p. 13). As Bolaños García-Escribano (2025) explains, “audiovisual texts can be considered [...] acts of communication involving sounds and images” (p. 10). As a consequence, the ultimate goal of this discipline is not a word-for-word translation; instead, it involves a “transfer which is less concerned with issues of ‘faithfulness’ and more, perhaps, with functional equivalence and adequacy” (Torresi, 2009, p. 7). This approach ensures the transfer of the meaning behind the correlation between specific images, sounds and texts, rather than exclusively translating the text itself.

Memes can be considered part of this category since they typically consist of images or videos accompanied by text that completes the visual component, spreading primarily through the Internet. Thus, memes serve as a prime example of the multimodal and multimedial audiovisual text discussed by Pérez-González (2009, p. 13). They are multimodal because they involve the combination “of a wide range of semiotic resources or ‘modes’ (Baldry & Thibault, 2006, as cited by Pérez-González, 2009, p. 13)”, such as text, image, video, and context, which become multimedial when they are “delivered to the viewer through various media”.

Regarding the translation of this type of audiovisual text, a literal translation is insufficient. There is a fundamental necessity to transfer the message in its entirety, which emerges directly from the combination of the text with the visual or auditory components. To achieve this complex transfer of meaning, translators must look beyond traditional methods, turning instead to ‘cultural translation.’

‘Cultural translation’ refers to “those practices of literary translation that mediate cultural differences, [...] or set out to represent another culture via translation” (Sturge, 2009, p. 67). Sturge underlines that this concept of translation is very useful “to deal with features like dialect [...], literary allusions, culturally specific items such as food or architecture” (p. 67). More generally, it serves to deal with what cannot be translated literally and must be adapted from a source culture to a target one.

This approach is highly suitable for memes, and more generally, humour translation, since this practice is intrinsically linked to cultural specificities. As will be discussed hereafter, humour is highly subjective, varying not only from one individual to another but, above all, from one culture to another; consequently, it demands a high level of adaptation. To bridge this cultural and semiotic gap, scholars and translators have increasingly embraced different forms of adaptation. Transcreation emerges as a pivotal strategy to re-create the emotional and humorous impact of a text for a new target audience.

Consequently, to understand how internet humour can be successfully transferred across cultures, it is first necessary to examine the principles of this practice.

2.1 What is Transcreation

Although the term ‘transcreation’ does not have a single, universally accepted definition, it is etymologically understood as a blend of the words ‘translation’ and ‘creation’ (Gaballo, 2012). The primary purpose of transcreation extends far beyond literal linguistic transfer; it aims to convey the exact same emotional response and cultural resonance in the target audience as the original text did in its source culture, a process that demands a significant degree of adaptation.

As Di Giovanni (2008) explains, “the quick and global dissemination of audiovisual texts allows for an unprecedented, worldwide sharing of images and sounds” (p. 26), which come into contact with myriad different social and cultural contexts. In this scenario, transcreation becomes a “means of bridging linguistic, [...] and socio-cultural gaps”, positively highlighting the differences between cultures (p. 27). Therefore, in the case of memes, transcreation emerges as the most efficient method to preserve the entertainment. Adapting the framework proposed by Mangiron and O’Hagan (2006) for video-games to meme transcreation, the aim is to produce a version which allows users

to experience it “as if it were originally developed in their own language and to provide enjoyment equivalent to that felt by [the users] of the original version” (p. 14). In reality, Mangiron and O’Hagan (2006) talk about localization. According to Pym (2014), localization focuses on adapting digital products to specific linguistic and technical requirements, that is to say, not just “the pieces of language in the menus” but also “date formats, [...] punctuation conventions, and user contracts” (p. 303). For this precise reason, localization is not sufficient, because in the adaptation of memes the aim is to preserve and convey humour and emotions created by the meme.

The expression ‘transcreation’ was first used in 1957 by the Indian Sanskrit scholar P. Lal to refer to his method of translation of classical Indian drama into English. Subsequently, in 1969, the Brazilian concrete poet Haroldo De Campos adopted the term to describe the translation of literary texts (Gaballo, 2012). Initially this term was not so well-received and almost disappeared, except in Brazil and India, for about three decades. Translators were sceptical, mainly because transcreation implied a non-literal translation and greater creativity. Moreover, the concept became increasingly associated with the field of marketing and advertising rather than with literature.

Translation and transcreation differ mainly in their aims and strategies. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (n.d.), *translation* refers to “the action of converting from one language to another and related senses” (para. 1). As Mayoral et al. (1988) explain, “the major problem of translation consists of finding words in a target language which render the meanings stated in the source language” (p. 356).

This definition highlights that translation is primarily focused on the language itself. Conversely, transcreation is oriented more towards cultural adaptation and on the transmission of feelings and emotions, rather than literal words. When a text, a game, a commercial, or other content is strictly related to a specific culture, it is necessary to find new solutions instead of relying solely on literal equivalences. This ensures that the feeling of the original is preserved in the localized version “so that everybody shares the same enjoyment regardless of their language” (O’Hagan & Mangiron, 2004, as cited in Gaballo, 2012, p. 106).

Today, transcreation is relevant across many fields, such as media, marketing, advertising, games, literature, and poetry. One of the most famous examples of transcreation is the Italian advertising campaign for the Swiffer commercial. The original

English slogan of this cleaning product is: “When Swiffer’s the one, consider it done”, a rhyming couplet that is very common in advertising campaigns. The Italian translator, Marco Leali, transcreated this slogan as “La polvere non dura, perché Swiffer la cattura”, which can be translated as “the dust does not last, because Swiffer catches it”. In this case, Leali recreated the rhyming couplet by preserving the original style, and at the same time improving the original slogan by adding the product’s characteristic to “catch” dust (Eurotrad, 2019). According to Benetello (2017), especially “when it comes to advertising and marketing copy, the only way to “translate” it is in fact to “transcreate” it” (p. 246).

In terms of literature, the Harry Potter Saga provides several examples of transcreation, since the majority of character names evoke a specific aspect of their personality. Professor Severus Snape was transcreated into Italian as Severus Piton, in order to preserve the acoustic and semantic reference to the snake, while Albus Dumbledore became Albus Silente because the English name was associated with the adverb “dumbly” (meaning without speaking), thus the Italian word “silente” was considered the most appropriate since it means “silent”. These examples from advertising and literature highlight that whenever a text relies on wordplay, emotional impact, or cultural associations, literal translation fails. The same challenge applies today to the digital sphere, specifically affecting Internet humour and memes.

2.2 What is a Meme

Although the term ‘meme’ is often associated with Internet culture, its origin dates back further than is commonly assumed. It was first used in 1976 by the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene*. Dawkins introduced the term to describe a “unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation” (p. 192), which replicates and spreads cultural elements in a way similar to how genes transmit biological information. In this regard, Dawkins (1976) developed the term ‘meme’ by explaining that memes propagate through imitation, which is *mimesis* in Greek, hence the word ‘mimeme’, which was then abbreviated to ‘meme’. To clarify this process of imitation, he identifies “tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches” as examples of memes (p. 192). This concept of replication through imitation is central; just as biological organisms copy genetic code, human beings replicate cultural practices.

This foundational definition is particularly relevant because the concept of the meme has been adapted and reinterpreted within contemporary digital contexts.

While the term meme has an established definition in the OED, based on Dawkins' original concept, its use and meaning have evolved in digital contexts. Limor Shifman (2014) was among the first scholars to study the phenomenon in depth. She starts from three main theories regarding the nature of memes to develop her own definition of an Internet meme. According to these theories, memes can be categorized as follows.

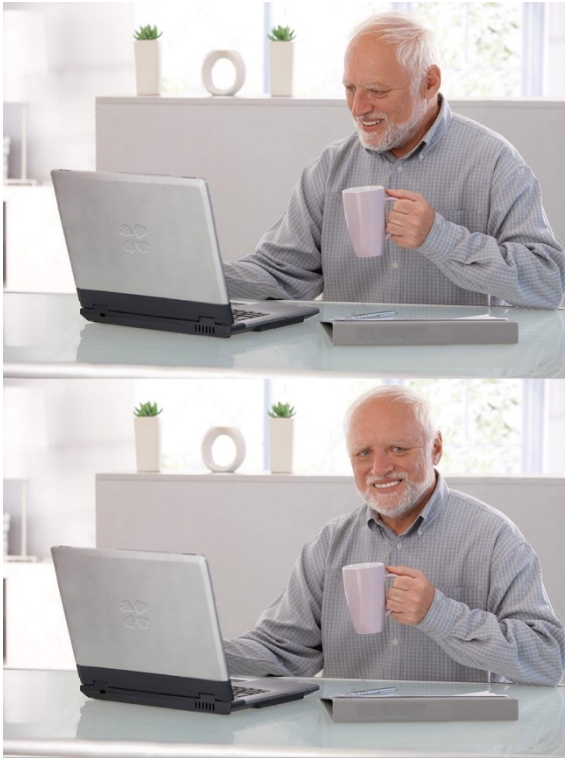
The first theory defines the nature of a meme as mentalist-driven, a perspective advocated by Dawkins, according to which the meme is the abstract idea itself, while the image, the text, etc. serve merely as the meme vehicles. The second theory views memetics as behaviour-driven, suggesting that memes are behaviours rather than pure ideas, meaning that the memes and the meme vehicles coincide. The third approach is inclusive, using the term meme "indiscriminately to refer to memetic information in any of its many forms; including ideas, the brain structures that initiate those ideas, the behaviours these brain structures produce, and their versions in books, recipes, maps and written music" (Blackmore, 1999, as cited in Shifman, 2014, p. 39).

Drawing on these three theories, Shifman identifies three dimensions that people can imitate: 'content', 'form', and 'stance'. Shifman herself introduces the third dimension, explaining that imitators can decide "to imitate a certain position that they find appealing or use an utterly different discursive orientation" (Shifman, 2014, p. 40). As a result of this line of reasoning, Shifman defines an Internet meme as "a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance, which were created with awareness of each other, and were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users" (Shifman, 2014, p. 41).

This theoretical discussion provides the foundation for understanding how memes are intrinsically related to culture and, as a consequence, to humour.

Among the most famous Internet memes are *Hide the Pain Harold* (fig. 2.1), *Distracted Boyfriend* (fig. 2.2), and *Woman Yelling at a Cat* (fig. 2.3). These memes have circulated widely because of their neutral visual structure, which allows them to be adapted to different types of humour depending on the culture. Users can modify the textual component, while maintaining the original image to create culturally specific memes.

Figure 2.1



Hide the Pain Harold Meme

Note. Reprinted from Meming Wiki, n.d

Figure 2.2



Distracted Boyfriend Meme

Note. Reprinted from Know Your Meme, 2017. Copyright 2015 by Antonio Guillem.

Figure 2.3



Woman Yelling at a Cat Meme

Note. Reprinted from Know Your Meme, 2019.

This adaptability exemplifies Shifman’s three dimensions of ‘content’, ‘form’, and ‘stance, as imitators can choose which position and orientation to adopt.

2.3 How humour is different across cultures

One of the numerous definitions of *humour* provided by the *OED* is “the ability of a person to appreciate or express what is funny or comical” (para II.9.a). However, its defining characteristic is that it is heavily mediated by culture, since not everybody perceives the same things as funny or comical, nor does everybody consider humour an essential element of life. For example, in Chinese culture humour is not an important or desirable characteristic in an individual’s personality (Jiang, Li & You, 2019).

In different cultures, the topics that can be the object of humour vary considerably, and what is considered acceptable in one culture may be offensive or inappropriate in another. In particular, jokes about sensitive subjects such as politics, religion and social authorities may be regarded as taboo in some contexts. For example, in Italy it is very common to make jokes about the Carabinieri, the Italian police, and these jokes are not generally perceived as a lack of respect. In other countries, such as the United States, humour about the police force is rare and may be considered almost an offense. Another example could be the humour related to food and its violation. The Internet is full of meme representing shocked Italians when someone breaks the spaghetti or puts pineapple on pizza. Italian people, or people with Italian ancestry, may find this shocking, but

people from other cultures may perceive this reaction as exaggerated and nonsensical. On the other hand, Italians often struggle to understand the deadpan humour that is typical of British comedy, in which a comedian or actor deliver a joke maintaining a deliberately serious and emotionless appearance. This occurs because Italians are generally used to a very expressive style of comedy.

This reasoning perfectly explains why humour may be difficult to translate and why transcreation may be a more effective strategy. Humour is essentially highly culture specific, so that literal translation may fail. The cultural differences may not be translated properly, resulting in the loss of the original meaning. In this context, transcreation and the transcreation professional become necessary. The former allows to have the perfect result based on the target culture, the latter is the mediator, who knows both the source culture and the target one. As Benetello (2017) affirms, “the transcreation professional is more than a language service provider”. The transcreation professional may have to establish whether what she/he is going to be translated “has negative connotations in the target language and culture” (p. 246).

2.4 Can Internet humour be transcreated?

As previously discussed, humour is highly culture-related; therefore, literal translation may often not be sufficient, mainly due to the differences in what is perceived as funny. Internet humour, and memes in particular, are even more cultural. Moreover, Internet humour and memes rely on both visual and textual elements, which are extremely culture-specific; for this reason, Internet humour can be more effectively transcreated rather than literally translated.

What is particularly relevant in the process is that, in most cases, the image remains the same, while the textual component is adapted. This is where the success of memes lies: the visual element is generally understandable to almost anyone, allowing the meme to remain unchanged and to circulate across different cultures and countries; when text is present, it can be easily adapted to the specific cultural context. This explains why the same meme often appears with different captions: because, most of the times, humour relies on the combination of image and text, therefore, the latter can be modified based on the context.

Given these considerations, transcreation can be regarded as a key strategy in relation with Internet humour, as its aim is to convey the original emotions and feelings rather than to provide a literal equivalence. This aspect is crucial in humour, which is grounded in emotional responses.

One of the most salient features of this phenomenon is that users transcreate memes without being transcreation professionals, and often without being aware that they are transcreating. This occurs because, as Shifman (2014) explains, users tend to copy content, form and stance. In the act of copying, they not only contribute to the creation and circulation of the Internet meme, but they also perform transcreation. This happens because the image and the humour behind it are universal; what is specific is that each person contextualizes what is funny in that image by putting a text that is culturally specific and potentially funny for the viewer. Transcreation may occur by only putting a text in a funny image or changing the text on the basis of the cultural context. Figure 2.4 and Figure 2.5 are the perfect example: they are linked by the concept of cultural heritage defence. As previously stated, literal translation is insufficient to convey the humour, which is deeply related to culture. Hence, the right choice is to maintain the concept by adapting it to the target cultural context, specifically, the Italian and the British ones.

Figure 2.4



Author-created Version of the “Distracted Boyfriend” Meme

Note. Image edited by the author

Figure 2.5



Author-created Version of the “Distracted Boyfriend” Meme

Note. Image edited by the author

3. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The present study adopts a qualitative approach, focusing on cultural adaptation, meanings, and linguistic strategies and choices, rather than “numerical data or statistical analysis” (Lim, 2024). As Lim (2024) underlines, “engaging with qualitative research is not just a methodological choice but a commitment to exploring the depths of social phenomena”, such as memes and their creation, since this methodology aims to “unveil the ‘what,’ ‘why,’ ‘when,’ ‘where,’ ‘who,’ and ‘how’ (or the “5W1H”) behind social behaviours and interactions.”

The primary aim of this research is to analyse how, and not how much, humour is transformed and transcreated. Since transcreation is a subjective process based on an interpretive analysis that quantitative data cannot fully capture, a qualitative approach allows for the exploration of a multitude of cultural nuances and social contexts (Lim, 2024).

An Internet meme relies entirely on audience interaction to fulfil its nature. If the content is engaging, users will react by liking, sharing, or tagging friends, accelerating its virality. In fact, virality and social transmission are not merely characteristics of a meme, but the very conditions required for it to exist as such (Shifman, 2014). Consequently, the intent of the translator is to preserve the same level of engagement, mainly by preserving the humour, despite the different language and culture. To do so, traditional translation is not enough; a pragmatics-based approach to translation is necessary, whose objective is to remain faithful to the original intent rather than to the original text (Farwell & Helmreich, 2004).

‘Pragmatic’, in general, means “solving problems in a sensible way that suits the conditions that really exist now, rather than obeying fixed theories, ideas, or rules” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d., para. 1). That is to say, a pragmatic approach to translation means looking at the translation not as a word-for-word process and transposition, but rather as a process that must be seen as a whole—not only in terms of words, but also regarding the intent, what is being communicated, the message behind the totality of the text, and the combination between the verbal and the non-verbal components (Farwell & Helmreich, 2004).

Newmark (1988) explains that “‘pragmatic’ denotes the reader’s or readership’s reception of the translation” so, as Farwell and Helmreich (2004) clarify, “the translator attempts to understand the author’s intent in creating the source text for the original audience and then recreates [...] that intent for the target audience using the target language”. Such pragmatic approach, as explained before, reflects the main concept behind the transcreation of memes: what is important are not the words taken singularly, and their literal translation, rather the combination of the verbal component with the non-verbal one, and the reaction that the whole wants to arise in the user. This perspective denotes a functional approach to translation (Nord, 2018): the content of a text is determined by the purpose, the function, and the target audience intended to be reached.

Functional approaches to translation are not as recent as one might think. Nord (2018) underlines that Bible translators already recognized that “different situations call for different renderings” (p. 4). This approach is deeply grounded in the practical experience of the translators, whose work must be functionally tailored to the specific needs of the target communicative situation. Based on this premise, Christiane Nord (2018) developed her functional model of translation built upon the theories of two important scholars, Katharina Reiß and Hans J. Vermeer.

Initially, for Reiß, the ideal translation was one in which the target text maintains an equivalence in terms of “conceptual content, linguistic form and communicative function” (Reiß, 1977/1989, p. 112, as cited in Nord, 2018, p. 9). However, she was aware that “real life presents situations in which equivalence is not possible” (p. 9), particularly when the target audience is culturally different from the source one. It is in these specific cases that formal equivalence is no longer the primary objective, and the focus must shift towards the final function and purpose of the text.

Building on this concept, Vermeer develops an approach according to which “translation is a form of translational action based on a source text, which may consist of verbal and/or non-verbal elements” (as cited in Nord, 2018, p. 11). Internet memes serve as a prime contemporary manifestation of this definition, as their core meaning relies entirely on the interplay between verbal captions and visual or auditory components. As emerges from Vermeer’s formulation of this functional framework, “*Skopos* is the Greek word for ‘purpose’” (Nord, 2018, p. 26). According to this theory, the final purpose is

what rules the process and what the translator must achieve, even if this requires changing the target text completely in comparison with the source one.

When this framework is applied to the digital ecosystem, internet memes can be classified as highly purpose-driven texts. In the case of memes, words must often be changed to preserve the humorous effect. Humour is deeply related to culture, and what is considered funny can vary drastically from one culture to another (Jiang, Li & You, 2019). Therefore, since the primary *skopos* of a meme is to elicit an immediate humorous response and trigger social sharing, the translator is textually and creatively liberated. Under the *Skopostheorie* paradigm, deeply modifying the original text is not a betrayal of the source material; rather, it is a methodological necessity to ensure that the meme remains functional, funny, and viral in the target culture.

At first glance, the *Skopostheorie* seems to be the perfect translation model: it is pragmatic, culture-oriented, practical, normative (Nord, 2018, pp. 114-115). However, Nord identifies some ethical issues that apply perfectly to the transcreation of memes. The author argues that the *Skopos* main rule is “the end justifies the means” (p. 114). Whatever the final purpose is, the translator is justified in making as many changes and adaptations as they want; in other words, the primary source text is necessary only to obtain information useful to reach the final *skopos*, which might be different from the initial one, depending on why and for whom the translator is translating. Internet memes serve as a prime example to illustrate this ethical dilemma.

As previously stated, the very essence of a meme is not only its humorous element, but also its virality. So, according to Vermeer’s *Skopostheorie*, the translator should consider only the entertainment value with the explicit purpose of making the translated meme just as viral as the original. The meme could even be completely altered compared to the original, provided it remains humorous, solely because the ultimate purpose remains to make it viral. Thus, the verbal element might end up bearing no relation to the original, and only the non-verbal component—that is to say, the image—would remain the same. In the context of image-based memes, the original template is often unadorned, consisting solely of a single image, without text, as it frequently originates from a screenshot of a viral video, or from interviews, tv programs, or documentaries, as seen in the case of the ‘Roll Safe’ meme (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1

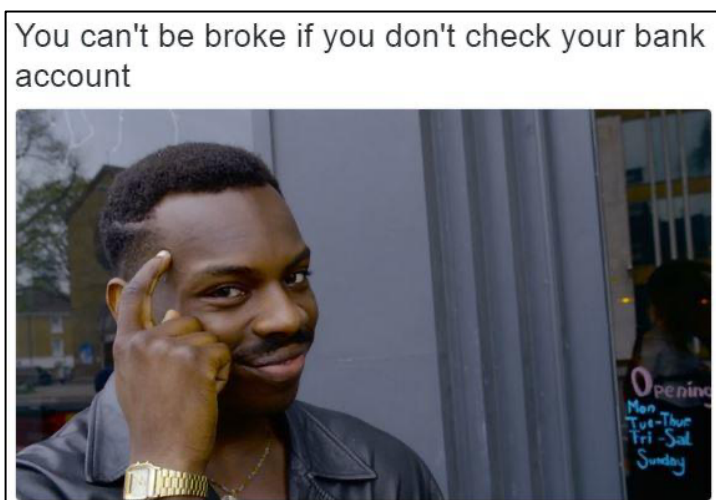


'Roll Safe' meme

Note. 'Roll Safe' is an image macro series featuring a screenshot of actor Kayode Ewumi grinning and pointing to his temple while portraying the character Reece Simpson (a.k.a. "Roll Safe") in the web series Hood Documentary (*Roll Safe* [Online image], n.d., from Know Your Meme. Retrieved June 19, 2026, from knowyourmeme.com)

Consequently, the textual element is adapted to align with what makes it visually humorous (see Figure 3.2 and Figure 3.3).

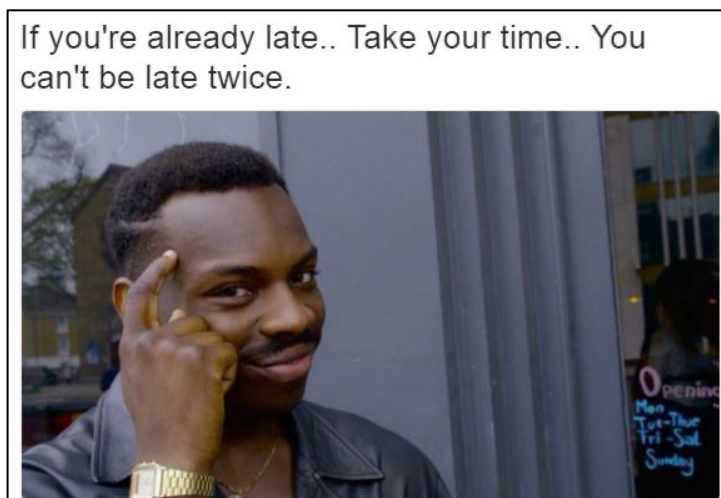
Figure 3.2



'Roll Safe' Meme Format

Note. Roll Safe - @RyanWindoww's "You can't be broke if you don't check your bank account" tweet [Online image], by @RyanWindoww's, n.d., Know Your Meme. Retrieved June 19, 2026, from knowyourmeme.com

Figure 3.3



'Roll Safe' Meme Format

Note. From Roll Safe – “If you’re already late.. take your time.. you can’t be late twice”
tweet [Online image], n.d., Know Your Meme. Retrieved June 19, 2026, from
knowyourmeme.com

However, the previous examples of memes are mere adaptations. Instead, this study aims to explore how humour can be translated—or rather, transcreated—to fit a new cultural framework. Often, humour is universal and easily translated, as demonstrated in Figure 7, for which a literal translation would be sufficient to maintain the entertainment value, since the content contains no culture-specific elements. When, on the other hand, the text is more deeply embedded in a specific culture, translation becomes more specific and the aim shifts towards searching for an equivalence that is as funny as the original. This is where transcreation becomes necessary, serving as a methodological safeguard to avoid the ethical error mentioned by Nord.

Building on this, Nord (2018) develops her personal model called “function *plus* loyalty” (p. 116), in which ‘loyalty’ is understood as a moral responsibility towards target users not to deceive them:

Loyalty commits the translator bilaterally to the source and the target sides. It must not be mixed up with fidelity or faithfulness, concepts that usually refer to a relationship holding between the source and the target texts. Loyalty is an interpersonal category referring to a social relationship between people.

In the general model, loyalty would be an empty slot that, in a particular translation task, is filled by the demands of the specific translation concepts of the cultures in question. (Nord, 2018, p. 115)

This is a fundamental concept because the target audience expects its own culture to be represented as well. Subsequently, Nord (2018, p. 115) continues by stating that “in this context, loyalty means that the target-text purpose should be compatible with the original author’s intentions”, which in this case involves being funny, rather than merely viral.

Moving from these theoretical premises to the operational phase of this research, it becomes necessary to put this framework into practice. Consequently, the investigation requires a carefully assembled corpus of data that embodies the linguistic and cultural issues discussed so far.

The selection of the viral memes for this study was not random; rather, it followed a purposive sampling strategy. As scholars note, “purposive sampling (PS) is a deliberate process of selecting context, materials or participants who share specific qualities that are relevant and have the potential to answer the inquiry about the phenomenon of interest” (Creswell & Poth, 2017, as cited in Ahmad & Wilkins, 2024, p. 1462)

Rather than being strictly bound to textual or written elements, the examples under examination encompass both linguistic challenges and deeply rooted cultural tropes that govern social behaviours, highlighting the limitations of literal translation and the necessity of a transcreative approach. In this qualitative framework, the researcher’s role is fundamental, as it requires a deep immersion into the cultural references of both the source and target audiences (Gaballo, 2012) to decode the hidden meanings of Internet humour.

To select the specific memes for this study, their virality was the primary factor taken into consideration. This choice does not imply that a meme’s quality depends solely on its popularity, but it was preferred because viral memes are the most accessible. Furthermore, they are deeply and intrinsically recognized for their humour, making them more easily interpretable and comprehensible, even for the researcher conducting this analysis.

While it may seem self-evident, it is necessary to specify that all the selected case studies consist of image-based memes with textual elements, a structural requirement for the application of transcreation. This involves examining what the image represents, what it evokes, why it is considered funny, and who the intended audience is. To do so, and to understand where the humour lies, a deep knowledge of the source culture is fundamental.

Where applicable, it is necessary to observe the connection between the visual and the textual components, as the transcreation will be based on this correlation, which must be fully grasped.

The source culture and language will be English, without being limited to a single specific Anglophone country but considered in its global context. Conversely, the target culture and language will be Italian. This analysis does not merely look at translations from English into Italian; it also examines instances where English is maintained as the language of writing, but the content is culturally adapted and reframed to align with Italian cultural practices.

The selected memes present specific linguistic challenges relevant to this study and to the process of transcreation. This means they encompass cultural references that go beyond mere linguistics, including—as previously mentioned—shared habits, social behaviours, or specific ways of interpreting certain situations. Conversely, memes featuring general or universal humour were excluded; in other words, the study avoids formats with texts that can be translated literally, or nearly literally, without any difficulty or need for adaptation.

To guide this process, the operational workflow incorporates the practical steps inspired by a professional tool, the Dropinka® Deck for Transcreation (Benetello, 2024). It consists of a limited-edition deck of 52 poker-sized cards, designed by Claudia Benetello, an Italian copywriter, translator, interpreter and journalist, to understand and explore transcreation, and to guide practitioners and students through the transcreation workflow. As Benetello (2024) explains, “the cards contain hints, best practices and questions” that help the transcreator to work with a “structured, conscious approach”.

The Dropinka® Deck for Transcreation provides a useful structure on which to base the transcreation process. It supports creative decision-making, guides the workflow, encourages reflection on cultural adaptation, and promotes a more conscious approach to analytical phase. Within this research framework, it is employed exclusively as an operational reference tool; since transcreation is not random, it represents a structured process that can be divided into distinct phases to analyse internet memes.

Based on the Dropinka® Deck for Transcreation workflow, the analysis of the primary source is the first step. Once the context has been identified, the following step

is generating different transcreated versions of the target meme, “without judgment” (Benetello, 2024), and then select the most effective adaptation among the alternatives.

Another fundamental step suggested by Benetello (2024) is the “Backtranslation”; in other words, “ensuring alignment with original intent”. This stage is crucial for verifying the accuracy of the transposition.

In summary, adhering to the Dropinka® Deck methodology – specifically the phases of analysis and the study of the target culture – significantly reduces the risk of cultural misunderstandings and ensure a more effective transcreation.

In conclusion, the combination of Christiane Nord’s functionalist approach and the guidelines derived from the Dropinka® Deck establishes a methodology which addresses various aspects and levels of source text analysis and the practical implementation of transcreation. To demonstrate the validity of this qualitative and pragmatic framework, the following chapter will shift from a theoretical approach to practical application.

4. APPLICATIONS

To better illustrate the practical application of the aforementioned methodology, the following section will analyse a selection of highly viral Internet memes and their possible transcreation strategies. Therefore, the *skopos* of the proposed transcreations is to safeguard the meme's humorous essence while adhering to Nord's principle of 'loyalty' toward the author's original intent. The strategy is to discover an Italian cultural equivalent, to provide the target audience with an experience equivalent to that of the source audience.

The line of reasoning begins with an analysis of the meme. This involves examining what the image represents, what it evokes, why it is considered funny, and who the intended audience is. To do so, and to understand where the humour lies, a deep knowledge of the source culture is fundamental. In each scenario, it is necessary to observe the connection between the visual and the textual components, as the transcreation will be based on this correlation, which must be fully grasped. Based on this observation phase, several transcreated versions are generated to evaluate which option best captures and conveys the concept of the original meme.

To practically demonstrate this analytical and creative workflow, the chapter begins with the investigation of one of the most widespread multimedia phenomena of recent years: the "Woman Yelling at a Cat" meme.

4.1 Case Study 1: Woman Yelling at a Cat

This case study aims to analyse the previously mentioned popular Internet meme *Woman Yelling at a Cat* (see Figure 2.3), here adapted to a typical English mispronunciation (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1



Adaptation of the Woman Yelling at a Cat Meme

Note. Source: British Council Blog, 2021.

This specific format combines a still frame of an episode from the second season of the reality show *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*—featuring cast members Taylor Armstrong and Kyle Richards—with a confused-looking cat, later identified as Smudge the Cat (Know Your Meme, 2019). Smudge is very popular on the Internet and has his own social media profiles.

The meme is considered humorous because the woman appears to be yelling directly at the cat, which remains unmoved, almost annoyed by her behaviour. In this case, the intended audience is broad, since the image can be adapted to various contexts. In addition, although the image depicts verbal aggression towards a house pet, the public does not perceive the situation as abuse, but rather as an ironic contrast between the human emotionality and the typical indifference of cats. This interpretation allows the meme to be well-received even in cultures where cats are venerated, or in contexts characterized by high sensitivity towards feline well-being, since the cat does not appear to be a victim but rather as the ironic ‘winner’ of the conflict.

The textual component of Figure 4.1 contextualizes the meme and becomes humorous because the image emphasizes the malapropism—defined as “the usually unintentionally humorous misuse or distortion of a word or phrase; especially, the use of a word sounding somewhat like the one intended but ludicrously wrong in the context” (Merriam-Webster, n.d., para. 1)—upon which the meme is based: while the woman insists

on the correct word, ‘specific’, the cat represents the common phonetic mistake, ‘pacific’, as well as the nonchalance of those who commit such a mispronunciation.

Since in this study transcreation is applied to adapt the meme into the Italian culture and language, Table 4.1 illustrates common mispronunciations among native Italian speakers. While each example presents a plausible alternative, the objective is to identify the most appropriate adaptation for this specific multimodal context, thereby remaining loyal to the original author's intent while simultaneously preserving the *skopos* of generating humour from a very common linguistic and phonetic mistake.

Table 4.1

Category	Standard Form	Mispronunciation	English Gloss
Stress shift	<i>rubrica</i> <i>persuadere</i>	<i>rùbrica</i> <i>persuàdere</i>	address book to persuade
Liquid substitution	<i>purtroppo</i> <i>coltello</i>	<i>pultroppo</i> <i>cortello</i>	unfortunately knife
Cluster reduction	<i>psicologo</i> <i>proprio</i>	<i>sicologo</i> <i>propio</i>	psychologist own / really
Vowel change	<i>aiuola</i> <i>aeroporto</i>	<i>aiola</i> <i>areoport</i>	flowerbed airport
Lexical malapropism	<i>incrementare</i>	<i>implementare</i>	to increase

Examples of Common Native Italian Mispronunciations

Note. Table created by the author

Consequently, generating different versions is an essential step to identify the one that suits best.

Figure 4.1 is based on a malapropism, so the transcreation could follow a similar trajectory. A very common Italian malapropism involves the use of *implementare* (to implement or apply), instead of *incrementare* (to increase). As Maurizio Assalto (2022) explains, this phenomenon relates to what Italo Calvino termed the ‘*antilingua*’. In English this is often referred to as ‘gobbledygook’, defined as “language that sounds important and official but is difficult to understand” (*Cambridge Dictionary*, n.d.).

What makes this error and, consequently, Figure 4.2 comical is the speaker's attempt to appear sophisticated while committing a blatant linguistic mistake. In this specific meme, the woman and the cat would personify two conflicting linguistic registers, creating a stark juxtaposition between the grammatical rule and the misuse of language.

Figure 4.2



Author-created Version of the “Woman Yelling at a Cat” Meme

Note. Image edited by the author

In conclusion, while the humour is preserved, making this a hypothetical option for transcreation, its effectiveness may be limited. Since the meme relies on a malapropism of which many Italians might be unaware, the comedic impact could be restricted to a more cultured audience. Conversely, those who regularly commit this error may fail to grasp the humour simply because they do not recognize the linguistic lapse as a mistake. Consequently, the success of such a transcreation is intrinsically tied to the linguistic competence of the target demographic.

The malapropism of the original meme (see Figure 4.1) functions similarly to a cluster reduction. In the Italian language, while the use of *sicologo* instead of *psicologo* (psychologist) is relatively common, the substitution of *proprio* with *propio* (own/really) is significantly more widespread. Consequently, in this specific context, the latter option appears to be the most appropriate. Furthermore, the visual element emphasizes this error, which is as common as it is frequently criticized (see Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3



Author-created Version of the “Woman Yelling at a Cat” Meme

Note. Image edited by the author

Liquid substitution represents another very common mispronunciation, comparable in frequency to cluster reduction. However, the substitution of *cortello* for *coltello* (knife), or *pultroppo* for *purtroppo* (unfortunately), is not a simple grammatical error; rather, it is often rooted in specific regional dialects. In this context, the transcreation professionals must deeply understand the target culture to avoid the risk of linguistic discrimination. Dialects represent a source of the pride for different Italian regions; consequently, mocking them can be perceived as a form of disrespect towards the targeted linguistic community. Since these substitutions are often integral parts of a regional variety rather than mere mistakes, labelling them as ‘errors’ may diminish the cultural value of the regional language.

Based on the analysis provided, Figure 4.3 emerges as the most effective option for transcreation. This version is easily comprehensible and appropriate for a broad audience, ensuring the highest level of cross-cultural resonance. Furthermore, it maintains the closest alignment with the linguistic mechanism of the original meme (Figure 4.1), successfully preserving its comedic intent while adapting it to the Italian context.

4.2 Case Study 2: Spider-Man Pointing at Spider-Man

The meme this case study aims to analyse is an adaptation of the very viral meme format *Spider-Man Pointing at Spider-Man* (see Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4



Spider-Man Pointing at Spider-Man Meme

Note. Source: Know Your Meme, n.d.

As the website page Know Your Meme (n.d.) explains, “the image comes from episode 19b of the 1967 *Spider-Man* cartoon, ‘Double identity’. In the episode, a villain attempts to impersonate the titular hero.” The meme under examination (see Figure 4.5) draws inspiration from this format, creating a scenario composed of seven Spider-Men characters who represent seven words from the English lexicon that, despite having different meanings, are spelled very similarly.

Figure 4.5



User-generated version of the Spider-Man Pointing at Spider-Man meme

Note. Example of user-generated version of the *Spider-Man Pointing at Spider-Man* meme [Online image]. @testenglishschool. Retrieved June 27, 2026, from [instagram.com](https://www.instagram.com/testenglishschool)

Unlike the *Woman Yelling at a Cat* meme, the example shown in Figure 4.4 lacks a strong comedic value within the image itself. Instead, the humour relies heavily on the combination of the textual elements and the visual component added to the meme.

A significant factor contributing to the meme's success and its potential for virality is its high comprehensibility and malleability across diverse scenarios. There is no need for deep knowledge of the comic book genre, or this specific comic book, to understand what it depicts. The focal point is not the identity of the two Spider-Man figures, but rather the two identical subjects pointing at each other, confused by the presence of a double.

Regarding the adaptation shown in Figure 4.5, the text ironizes the perception of English as a relatively simple language to learn. Like any other language, it presents its specific difficulties, specifically demonstrated here through terms with nearly identical spellings but entirely distinct definitions.

In the transcreation of this meme from English into Italian, the primary purpose is to maintain the focus on linguistic difficulties.

The example that best aligns with the English version involves the variants of the Italian preposition 'in', which alters depending on the definite article it is combined with (see Table 4.2). The elevate number of variants of the same preposition poses a serious difficulty for a non-native speaker trying to learn Italian, particularly because many languages are genderless, and therefore do not require the preposition to combine according to the grammatical gender of the noun it refers to. So, according to this reasoning, a possible transcreated version of Figure 4.5 could be represented by Figure 4.6.

Table 4.2

Combinations of the Italian Preposition 'In' with Definite Article

Preposition	Definite Article	Resulting Articulated Preposition	Application Examples (translated in English)
In	Il (masc. sing.)	Nel	Nel diario (In the diary)
In	Lo (masc. sing.)	Nello	Nello stivale (In the boot)
In	La (fem. sing.)	Nella	Nella macchina (In the car)
In	I (masc. plur.)	Nei	Nei giorni (in the days)
In	Gli (masc. plur.)	Negli	Negli angoli (In the corners)
In	Le (fem. plur.)	Nelle	Nelle scarpe (In the shoes)

Note. Table created by the author

Figure 14



Author-created Version of the "Spider-Man Pointing at Spider-Man" Meme

Note. Image adapted by the author from a template retrieved from [imageresizer.com](https://www.imageresizer.com)

However, the transposition of the phrase “English is the easiest language to learn!” into “Italian is the easiest language to learn!” is not appropriate. Italian is not generally considered so easy to learn, so it would be strange to hear someone saying that phrase. The optimal choice would be to shift the perspective; rather than asserting that Italian is the easiest language to learn—a claim widely known to be false—the focus should suggest that learning Italian is not an impossible task. This shift implies that with a small amount of extra effort, success can be easily achieved. Consequently, the phrasing could be altered to ‘How hard can it be to learn Italian?’, thereby acknowledging the inherent difficulty of the language while simultaneously ensuring it is not perceived as an insurmountable obstacle (see Figure 4.7).

Figure 4.7



Author-created Version of the “Spider-Man Pointing at Spider-Man” Meme

Note. Image adapted by the author from a template retrieved from [imageresizer.com](https://www.imageresizer.com)

Another transcreation option may refer to homographs and homophones. Although homographs (“A word of the same spelling as another, but of different origin and meaning; *Oxford English Dictionary* [OED], n.d., para. 2) or homophones (“words having the same sound but differing in meaning or derivation [...]”; *OED*, n.d., para. B.1) could represent alternative options, it would become significantly more difficult for a

foreign audience to grasp the distinction between the words without an explicit explanation, as memes rely on instant comprehension. For instance, if a meme would be based on the comparison of the Italian words *pèsca* (peach) and *pésca* (fishing) (*Treccani*, n.d.) – which share identical spelling but differ in meaning depending on the pronunciation of the vowel ‘e’ – a foreign viewer would only capture the nuance if the underlying grammar were explained to them. Yet, text-image minimalism is key for digital memes: the greater the immediacy, the higher the communicative efficacy.

In conclusion, despite all the previous listed strategies are valid options, the one which suits the most is that of Figure 4.7, because it is easily comprehensible by most of the users and because better transpose the concept of the original meme.

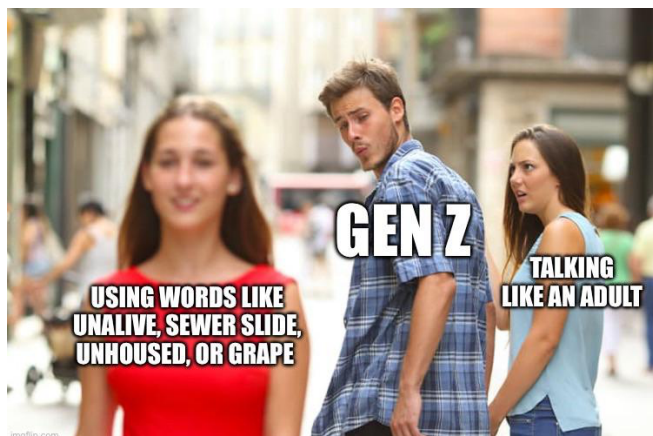
4.3 Case Study 3: Distracted Boyfriend

The last case study analysed in this research is based on the highly viral meme format *Distracted Boyfriend* (see Figure 2.2). The image upon which the meme is based was taken by the photographer Antonio Guillem and posted on the stock photo database iStock. Later, it was posted on several blogs and social media platforms, with the addition of comedic texts, subsequently becoming viral (Know Your Meme, n.d.).

The meme represents a comical scene in which a boyfriend is distracted by a passing girl and his girlfriend is annoyed by his behaviour. What makes this meme funny is that the situation is very simple yet very familiar—an occurrence that everyone could have experienced once in a lifetime. Consequently, this represents a highly relatable situation for the audience. Moreover, the expressions of the actors are extremely exaggerated, and this makes the meme even more comical. Finally, yet importantly, the image possesses a high adaptability and can be tailored to a multitude of situations.

The adaptation in question (see Figure 4.8) portrays the distracted boyfriend as Gen Z, i.e., those who were born between the 1996 and the 2012 (*Treccani*, n.d.). The annoyed girlfriend is labelled as ‘Talking like an adult’, while the girl in red, who represents the attractive temptation, stands for the phenomenon also known as ‘Algospeak’.

Figure 4.8



Adaptation of the Distracted Boyfriend Meme

Note. Source: Know Your Meme, n.d.

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.):

Algospeak is a broad term for the alternative spellings, emoji substitutions, and euphemisms employed by social media users to avoid having their posts flagged, removed, or down-ranked by automated content-moderation systems. For example, a user might write seggs, rather than sex; unalive rather than dead or kill; leg booty, rather than LGBTQ (Merriam-webster Dictionary, n.d.).

In this case, the target audience can encompass both the members of Gen Z who actively employ this lexicon, and the adult generation who find humour in it, precisely due to the disconnect of not understanding what the younger generation is communicating.

From a cultural perspective, this serves as an ideal example since it involves a distinct slang that cannot be translated literally. For instance, a literal translation of ‘sewer slide’ results in *scivolo delle fogne*, which bears no relation to ‘suicide’, the term it is intended to replace. The same logic applies to the substitution of ‘grape’ for ‘rape’, where the former means *uva* and the latter signifies *stupro*. This is precisely where transcreation comes into play: the primary objective is to identify or generate functional equivalents utilized within the Italian linguistic and cultural framework.

In Italy, social media users bypass problematic terms through various linguistic workarounds, one of which is ‘leetspeak’, which is “a jargon used by some internet groups, in which standard English is translated into a mixture of letters, numerals, and symbols found on a computer keyboard” (*Collins English Dictionary*, n.d., para. 1). Yet despite this definition, leetspeak can be applied to any

language. For example, in Italian, *suicidio* (suicide) becomes *SUICID10*, *vittime* (victims) is written *VITT1M3*, *morti* (the dead) becomes *MORT1*, and *SE\$\$O* stands for *Sesso* (sex).

Consequently, a possible Italian version of the Figure 4.8 could use ‘leetspeak’ to maintain the irony on the confusion of adults’ understanding of Gen Z’s language (see Figure 4.9).

Figure 4.9



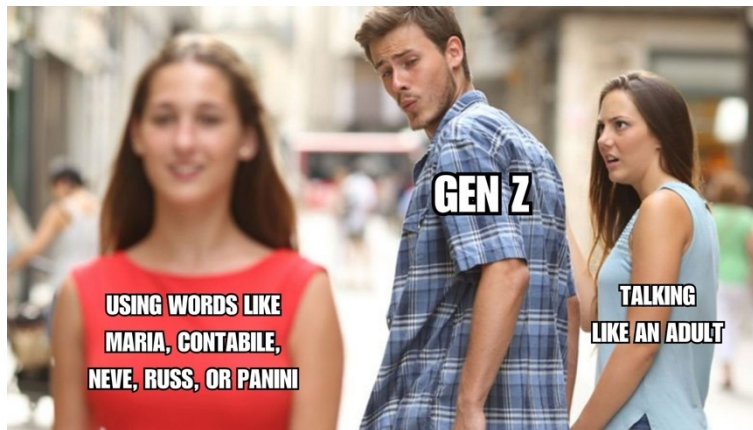
Author-created Version of the “Distracted Boyfriend” Meme

Note. Image edited by the author

However, leetspeak represents only a typographic solution. So, to achieve the same purpose of the original meme, the best solution is to find which terms are used by the Italian Internet community to express such difficult terms. Scrolling on various social media platforms, it does not take long to encounter ‘algospeak’. Some examples are:

- *panini* (sandwiches) or *Panda express* to say *pandemia* (pandemic);
- *contabile* (bookkeeper) for *prostituta* (prostitute);
- ‘violin’ emoticon for *violenza* (violence) because of the sound similarity;
- Russ for Russia;
- *neve* (snow) for *cocaina* (cocaine);
- *Maria* (Mary) for *marijuana* (weed) (see Figure 4.10).

Figure 4.10



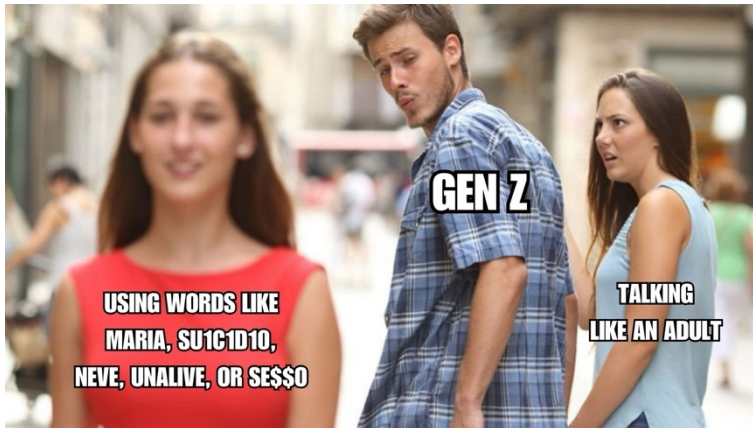
Author-created Version of the “Distracted Boyfriend” Meme

Note. Image edited by the author

Yet, English remains the primary language utilized even by Italian users. This phenomenon occurs because the demographics in question consist of a younger generation who possess a functional knowledge of the language and effortlessly adapt it into their daily vernacular. Indeed, English terms are frequently incorporated. The most frequently used are ‘le dollar bean’ to say ‘lesbian’, ‘leg booty’ to say ‘LGBTQ’ (Capone & Marino, 2022); also ‘unalive’, used in Figure 4.8, is frequently used to say *morto* (dead).

Considering all the aspects previously analysed, the most proper transcreated version of Figure 4.8 would be the one which combines terms belonging to each of the groups examined. This choice emerges as the most effective solution, as it is optimal to use the most viral and common terms, rather than choosing only one single category of expressions (see Figure 4.11).

Figure 4.11



Author-created Version of the “Distracted Boyfriend” Meme

Note. Image edited by the author

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this thesis has tried to answer the question: “Can Internet humour be transcreated?”. With this objective in mind, the research has been conducted through a pragmatic and functional approach, to demonstrate that the transfer of digital, multimodal Internet humour demands a radical departure from traditional translation frameworks. By practically applying a functionalist approach combined with professional transcreation guidelines, several insights have emerged regarding both the efficacy of the methodology and the nature of digital communication.

The functionalist approach gives the total creative freedom to experiment with transcreation, breaking the chains of the traditional and literal translation, to concentrate only on the transposition of the humour and of the comical effect, without the worry of translating every single word. Without this method, the complex memes analysed could have resulted untranslatable, as they are extremely culture- and language-related.

However, transcreation as translation method is extremely subjective. This practice is very difficult for the translator, since it requires a profound knowledge of the culture of both source and target, to deeply understand the underlying humour of the meme and transpose the same exact meaning in the target version. Another obstacle is that there are no rigid rules to follow, the result depends completely upon the ability of the translator to understand and recreate the irony and the comical effect. Furthermore, given the absence of rigid rules, what is perceived as humorous by one translator might be perceived differently by another.

The research demonstrates that Internet humour can be transposed in other cultures and languages through transcreation, because humour, despite it is a universal concept, results to be extremely local and culture-related. What needs to be translated in a humorous text are not the words but the underlying meaning. Almost every text can be transcreated, the aim is to find the equivalence, as in the case with the ‘Woman Yelling at a Cat’ meme, in which the grammatic mistake is not translated literally, but an Italian corresponding version has been localized. The humorous aspect relies on the error, and not on the words, so the transcreated version is based on the same type of mistake using Italian words.

Transcreation as translation method is in evolution. As of today, it is new both as a term and a concept, but as time goes by it will be further studied, developed, and applied on more circumstances. Its use will be fundamental not only in the Internet humour or marketing field, but it will also be applied in other contexts to provide the audience with a more complete translation.

In conclusion, being able to translate cultures, transcreation connects people with different backgrounds and customs.

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SUMMARY IN ITALIAN

L'obiettivo principale di questa tesi è analizzare se e come l'umorismo di Internet, nello specifico i cosiddetti meme, possano essere tradotti, focalizzandosi sulla branca della traduzione definita transcreazione.

In un bacino di utilizzatori di Internet di oltre 5 miliardi di persone, il 95% ha un profilo in un social network; vale a dire che la maggioranza degli utenti si è imbattuta almeno una volta in un meme.

Il termine 'meme' viene usato per la prima volta nel 1976 dal biologo evoluzionista Richard Dawkins nel suo libro *The Selfish Gene*, in cui viene definito "un'unità di trasmissione culturale o un'unità di imitazione", in grado, quindi, di replicare e diffondere elementi culturali, così come i geni trasmettono informazioni. I meme di Internet costituiscono una combinazione di immagini o video spesso legati a un testo. Ciò rende i meme prodotti digitali molto complessi, profondamente legati e influenzati dalla cultura di ognuno degli utenti di Internet che li crea, li diffonde e li adatta una volta diventati virali.

Altra caratteristica propria dei meme è l'umorismo. Anch'esso è profondamente influenzato dalla cultura d'appartenenza dell'individuo che lo sperimenta. Il che rende i meme ancora più difficili da tradurre, dal momento che ciò che fa ridere la cultura di partenza potrebbe non essere divertente per quella d'arrivo.

A partire da queste considerazioni, si torna alla domanda iniziale: l'umorismo di Internet e i meme possono essere tradotti? La risposta è sì, ma non attraverso una traduzione tradizionale. Proprio perché sono prodotti multimodali e profondamente culturali, essi richiedono un processo capace di ricreare il significato, l'effetto comico e il valore culturale del contenuto originale: la transcreazione.

Il termine transcreazione deriva dalla combinazione delle parole inglesi *translation* (traduzione) e *creation* (creazione), che unite creano *transcreation*, tradotto in italiano in 'transcreazione'. Questa pratica nasce dal momento che la traduzione letterale, parola per parola, non è sempre sufficiente a trasmettere l'intento, le emozioni e i riferimenti culturali del testo di partenza. Nel caso dei meme, transcreare significa adattare non solo le parole, ma anche l'umorismo e il rapporto tra testo e immagine, così

da offrire al pubblico di arrivo un'esperienza il più possibile equivalente a quella vissuta dal pubblico della versione originale.

Nel processo di adattamento e transcreazione di un meme, solitamente l'immagine tende a rimanere uguale, mentre è il testo a essere adattato alle esigenze traduttive. Questo avviene perché, molto spesso, la parte visiva è comprensibile alla maggior parte del pubblico, mentre quella testuale viene modificata in base al pubblico di arrivo. Ciò spiega perché spesso ci si può imbattere nello stesso meme accompagnato, però, da testi differenti.

Per strutturare l'indagine in modo scientifico, questo studio adotta un approccio metodologico di tipo qualitativo, analizzando come, e non quanto, un meme e il suo umorismo vengano trasformati e transcreati. Attraverso un'analisi pragmatica si individua come raggiungere il risultato finale, non necessariamente seguendo le regole della traduzione letterale, ma cercando la soluzione che meglio si adatta allo scopo principale, ovvero far ridere.

Per fare ciò, la tesi fa riferimento all'approccio funzionale sviluppato da Christiane Nord a partire dalle teorie di due importanti studiosi, Katharina Reiß e Hans J. Vermeer.

Katharina Reiß sosteneva l'importanza di mantenere una certa equivalenza con il testo originale, ma al tempo stesso era consapevole che non sempre questo fosse possibile senza rischiare di non trasmettere ciò che il testo di partenza voleva comunicare, soprattutto a causa delle grandi differenze culturali che intercorrono tra i diversi pubblici di arrivo. A partire da questa necessità di rimanere fedeli all'originale nel contenuto, più che nella forma, Hans J. Vermeer sviluppò la sua *Skopostheorie*. Essa si fonda sull'idea che la traduzione di un testo debba rispettare lo *skopos* finale con cui il testo originale è stato pensato e che, per farlo, siano concessi tutti i cambiamenti necessari, anche fino a una profonda trasformazione del testo stesso.

A primo impatto, questo potrebbe sembrare il modello di traduzione perfetto. Tuttavia, Nord individua alcune criticità di tipo etico in riferimento a questo modello, poiché il testo finale potrebbe finire per non avere più nulla a che fare con quello originale, arrivando perfino a tradire l'intenzione dell'autore iniziale. Applicato ai meme, seguire questa teoria in modo assoluto significherebbe pensare solo allo scopo di far ridere, senza

chiedersi se il pubblico di arrivo stia ridendo per lo stesso motivo del pubblico del meme originale.

Nord, dunque, sviluppa il suo personale modello chiamato *function plus loyalty*, ovvero “funzione più lealtà”. Con il termine “lealtà”, Nord non intende la fedeltà letterale al testo originale, ma piuttosto la necessità che il testo di arrivo sia compatibile con l’intento originario dell’autore.

La validità di questo approccio teorico è stata verificata attraverso la transcreazione di tre meme di Internet molto virali, ovvero “Woman Yelling at a Cat”, “Spider-Man Pointing at Spider-Man” e “Distracted Boyfriend”, che presentavano testi di partenza strettamente legati alla cultura e a dinamiche linguistiche difficilmente traducibili.

Il meme “Woman Yelling at a Cat” di partenza si basa su un malapropismo molto comune in inglese, che riguarda la pronuncia della parola *specific* (specifico) come *pacific*, simile nel suono ma diversa nel significato, dal momento che significa “pacifico”. Poiché in italiano non si tende a commettere questo tipo di errore di sostituzione, l’obiettivo è cercare un errore che rispecchi le stesse caratteristiche, ma che sia più comune nella lingua di arrivo. L’esempio che più potrebbe allinearsi all’originale è la parola “proprio”, che molto spesso viene pronunciata erroneamente come “propio”.

Il secondo caso studio è quello del meme *Spider-Man Pointing at Spider-Man*. Esso si fonda sull’ironia legata al fatto che spesso l’inglese, come lingua, venga considerato semplice da imparare. Per confutare questa affermazione, ognuno dei sette Spider-Man rappresenta una parola diversa nel significato, ma molto simile nella forma. Traducendo letteralmente dall’inglese all’italiano queste sette parole si finirebbe per ottenere sette parole completamente diverse tra loro, sia nel significato che nella forma. Dunque, la soluzione migliore è stata individuata nell’utilizzo delle diverse varianti della preposizione “in” quando è combinata a un articolo determinativo.

Il terzo e ultimo caso studio è quello del meme *Distracted Boyfriend*, il quale scherza sul fatto che gli adulti facciano fatica a comprendere il modo di parlare della cosiddetta Generazione Z, ovvero i nati tra il 1996 e il 2012. Il linguaggio in questione si basa su modi alternativi di dire parole o espressioni che gli algoritmi dei vari social media reputano pericolose, per esempio “suicidio”, “morte” o “stupro”, arrivando così a limitare o bannare i contenuti che le contengono. Per ovviare a questo problema è nato

l'*algospeak*, ovvero la creazione di espressioni che hanno un significato completamente diverso, ma che nel suono ricordano la parola che non può essere pronunciata. Tuttavia, la traduzione risulta ancora più problematica, perché la trasposizione letterale farebbe perdere completamente il richiamo sonoro alla parola di riferimento. Per la transcreazione, ci si è quindi affidati al *leetspeak*, cioè all'uso di lettere e numeri che ricordano graficamente alcune lettere per scrivere una parola e aggirare così i controlli dell'algoritmo, ad esempio "SU1C1D10", oltre che a termini di uso comune che, in certi contesti, assumono significati diversi, come "neve" o "erba", usate rispettivamente per indicare "cocaina" e "marijuana".

Alla luce di quanto detto finora, l'elaborato dimostra in ultima analisi che la transcreazione si configura come una necessità imprescindibile, specialmente nel mondo digitale. Non si tratta semplicemente di un'opzione, ma di uno strumento che consente al traduttore di produrre un lavoro leale all'intento dell'autore originale e, allo stesso tempo, efficace per il pubblico di arrivo. La tesi dimostra, infine, come l'umorismo possa essere preservato, ma solo se il professionista è in grado di andare oltre le parole e guardare all'anima culturale del testo.