BUSINESS WEBSITES AS A GENRE: RENDERING FAIR LANGUAGE WHILE MATCHING CORPORATE VALUES AND READER EXPECTATIONS

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Abstract

This article aims at presenting web content as a genre with specific features, including very precise writers’ and readers’ expectations, diverse functions (skopos), text types and a strong bond with graphics and aesthetics. Business websites are investigated as a prime example of this genre focusing on the main challenges in rendering fair language in the English into Italian translation. In this genre, language is the mean through which writers—here, companies—can prove to be able to meet the readers’—here, potential customers—expectations in terms of company values. Framing the Italian linguistic and cultural context, the quest for inclusivity and gender-neutral language is evident and extremely relevant, making it a top priority for companies. Responding to the most common requests by corporations, some strategies are presented and their limits commented based on my experience as a practising translator. Linked to the idea of inclusivity, the concept of accessibility of web content is illustrated as a principle to follow to really embrace everybody. Web content is a brilliant case in which the choice of the language to be used reflects the most recent social transformation—sometimes even asking for avant-garde solutions—to meet readers’ expectations.

Keywords: web content, business website translation, rendering fair language in translation, gender-neutral language
According to Bennet and Royle (2014), genre is a specific mix of type and style. Going further, Woodstein (2022) adds the concept of reader expectations to define genre. Following these principles, we can confidently state that web content is a genre in itself, whose text type and style are clearly defined by the means of communication. As for expectations, I believe that they are strongly interwoven with its *skopos* (function) in the case of web content. Indeed, web content is a wide umbrella that comprises many different kinds of texts, such as blogs, online magazines, company websites, etc. Indeed, it could be said that websites are multi-modal and multi-linear instruments of communication where language, image and audio content combine to create cohesion (Schiller, 2008). Having a direct experience of all of them as readers, it is clear that their function – being informative, entertaining or promotional – matches our expectations as readers and impacts the text type and style. Part of our expectations as customers is to find user-friendly websites. If it’s true that most of the contents available online are written in English, nowadays the localisation of websites is part of the strategy implemented by companies to approach their potential audience and achieve a wider reach. Therefore, most of the companies have their websites translated in the languages of their target markets.

Considering Katharina Reiss’ classification of text types - informative, expressive, operative and audiomedial - web content could be found in any of these forms depending on its function. Indeed, taking as example blog posts, it is very common to find an informative section containing some relevant information, an expressive part in which the authors state their opinion, an operative bit to persuade the reader to buy something or adopt a specific behaviour, and finally images and/or videos supporting the topic. Within the same web content, all types and functions could be found, requiring the translator to repeatedly change their approach.

However, very often the translation of web content is underestimated as for the challenges it poses and it is often considered on a par with other types of technical translations. Indeed, it is only recently that some scholars have started to include localisation in the scope of transcreation (Gaballo 2012; Katan 2016, among others). As opposed to technical translations, which can be defined as source-oriented – giving more importance to the accuracy of the translation and the adherence to the source text –, localisation of commercial translations should
definitely be target-oriented and translators should analyse the readers’ expectations first. Indeed, as suggested by Woodstein (2022), the readers’ expectations towards the same genre may vary according to their culture and historical period.

In this paper, I will specifically focus on the subgenre of company websites as they quite accurately represent a wide range of text types and functions within the genre of web content. Generally speaking, it is agreed that the ultimate function of business websites is promotional: they are designed to persuade potential and already-existing clients to buy a specific product or service. However, to achieve this, they also feature informative texts with technical information about products together with audiovisual materials, and clients’ or experts’ reviews that could be considered as expressive texts. The operative parts of websites imply high levels of creativity, the use of rhetorical figures and the focus on sounds and rhythm, making them more similar to literary than technical translations. These are the most challenging texts to translate since a word-for-word translation would not be effective. Having this in mind, translators should be given some room for manoeuvre to apply their creativity in order to achieve a similar effect in the target language. This implies the use of rhetorical figures and stylistic devices in a way that could be completely different from the source text but still achieving the same result: conveying the desired message to clients. Moreover, in operative texts the audience’s background and culture play an essential role. Translators may need to localise some culture-specific items that would not work if merely transferred into another language because the audiences do not share the same references. Moreover, as specified by Schiller (2008), the cohesion of website is not only determined by the cohesiveness within the text, but also between text and visuals, hereinafter referred to as layout.

In the following sections, I will analyse the main features of the translation of business websites from English into Italian based on my translation practice experience. The focus is on rendering fair language since it is a common expectation among today’s readers, a reason for concern for corporations, and a real challenge for translators into Italian.
ASPECTS TO BE CONSIDERED WHEN TRANSLATING COMPANY WEBSITES

This section explores the main aspects that characterise the translation of business websites and the relevant approaches that should be adopted to provide an appropriate target text. In this specific context, appropriateness could defy the common parameters used to assess translations. For instance, intentional errors could be welcome to grab the audience attention and layout limits could force translators to find a shorter phrase.

This section starts with the concept of the tone of voice, which reflects and conveys the positioning of a brand, and moves on to some examples of intentional errors, the most common style guides shared by corporations, and a focus on the layout.

Tone of voice in web content

According to Nielson Normal Group, leaders in research-based user experience, the tone of voice is defined as the set of stylistic, linguistic, lexical and semantic elements that a brand uses to communicate with its target audience.¹ The tone of voice contributes to the positioning strategy of the brand and revolves around four main criteria: humor, formality, respectfulness, and enthusiasm. Using an informal and friendly tone of voice makes the brand look more accessible and contemporary while using a formal and refined tone of voice makes the brand sound exclusive and timeless. It is understood that translators need to adhere to the brand’s tone of voice in the target language to preserve its positioning.

However, translators should also consider the perception of that specific tone of voice in the target culture. In particular, when translating “you” from English into Italian, a reasoned choice should be made as for the pronoun to be used according to the field, the level of formality and the brand’s other forms of communication. The possible alternatives could be:

- using tu (EN: you, second person singular) to address the audience directly with an informal style;

- using lei/Lei (EN: courtesy form) to create a more sophisticated but possibly detached style;
- using voi (EN: you, second person plural) to address the audience directly but as a group rather than individuals; in the same cases, it could be a viable solution to avoid the too informal tu and the too detached lei.

For example, the famous tagline by L’Oréal has the following form in English: “Because you’re worth it”. Instead, the Italian translation is: “Perché voi valete”, using voi instead of tu, addressing women as a group rather than individually.

**Intentional errors in web content**

In my professional experience, I have been working as a reviewer assessing other translators’ work and I have been given the following parameters by three renowned international translation groups to perform my evaluations:

- Mistranslation
- Wrong term
- Grammar and syntax
- Style Guide and Country Standards

Could these parameters be applied to commercial translations too? As already said, the main aim of business websites is to attract customers and, to do that, sometimes even intentional errors are made.

Speaking about mistranslation and the use of wrong terms, it has to be noted that the content should be localised and therefore the translation could differ from the source text as long as it achieves its goal (Benetello, 2018). If we had to assess the English translation of the popular Italian tagline by Barilla, “Dove c’è Barilla, c’è casa” (EN: Where you find Barilla, you are at home), it would not pass the test. The English tagline used in the same years in the U.S. market was: “The choice of Italy”. It is clear that the cultural references were different in this case: the Italian tagline focused on the association between the customers’ pleasant family memories and the brand while the English tagline aimed at underlining the brand’s Italian origin and mastery. Of course, this level of transcreation can be applied to headlines, payoffs, and taglines; in web content describing specific features of a product or service, the accuracy of the translation is still one of the top parameters to be assessed.
As far as grammar and syntax are concerned, a tagline like L’Oréal’s “Because you’re worth it”, which starts with a causal clause without a main clause that precedes it, would certainly be a mistake if found in other kinds of texts. Once again, it is evident that commercial translations are really closer to literary works in terms of acceptance of poetic licence and intentional errors.

**Corporate’ Style Guides for business websites**

In my professional experience as a practising translator, international corporations share their style guide to be followed for each country and language, as opposed to small businesses needing to localise their web contents that usually leave more room to the translators.

Both situations do have advantages and disadvantages. When working with small businesses, translators need to analyse the source material to understand the tone of voice and positioning of the brand so that they can be replicated in the target language. This allows translators to have more independence in terms of stylistic choices but also leaves all the responsibility on them. On the contrary, style guides shared by corporations provide precise guidance for translators to be followed. However, style guides are often source-centred, addressing the issues of the source language more than those that could arise while translating. Moreover, since there are numerous target languages, style guides usually provide generic rules that do not focus specifically on each target language's features. For instance, a common guideline on inclusive language is to think about the potential audience and localise the content so that the language is respectful of everybody. This is particularly relevant for the issue of gender-neutral language, which is becoming more and more important in many corporations’ communication style, and its rendering in gender-marked languages like Italian.

**Layout**

In business websites and web content in general, the layout plays an essential role, more than in most of the other genres. Graphics and visuals are part and parcel of the brand identity and are carefully planned in the marketing strategy. The integration of the texts into the graphics should be harmonious, functional and user-friendly.
Translating from English into Italian, the target text is usually longer than the source. When it comes to implementing fair language, this can be even more evident since the strings in Italian should be rephrased as to avoid gender or to create a politically-correct expression to refer to minorities. This could result in non-aesthetically pleasing or even non-accessible texts because of the lack of sufficient space. It is always essential to consider the final layout and to adapt the language accordingly; otherwise, the ultimate goal of the text - attracting people – will not be met.

**FAIR LANGUAGE: FRAMING THE ITALIAN LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL CONTEXT**

Like most Romance languages, Italian grammar only features two genders: masculine and feminine. Therefore, everything in Italian is either masculine or feminine, e.g. *la sedia* (EN: the chair) is feminine while *il tavolo* (EN: the table) is masculine. It is evident that grammatical gender does not reflect gender identity in Italian, at least for nouns referring to objects. However, when it comes to nouns referring to people, this grammatical dichotomy has raised some issues.

Not having a neuter gender like *it* in English, in Italian the masculine used in the plural form, and sometimes even in the singular form, has long been considered the unmarked gender and the grammatical device that could be used to refer both to women and men, being called the overextended masculine form (IT: *maschile sovr asteroid*).

Starting from the 70s, women gained more and more independence in Italy through many different laws granting them more gender equity, for example thanks to the Family Law Reform Act of 1975, which abolished the idea of the father being the only person having parental authority over the children.

In 1987, Alma Sabatini, an Italian feminist interested in the dissemination of women’s rights also using an unbiased language, published *Raccomandazioni per un uso non sessista della lingua italiana*, in which she proposed different options in order to avoid the overextended masculine form in favour of impersonal forms to make women feel included in public communication².

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However, in many documents and forms issued by official bodies of the Italian Republic, the overextended masculine form is still present nowadays, e.g. *il sottoscritto* (masculine form, EN: the undersigned).

In the 90s, for the first time nouns referring to professions once only practised by men could be found in their feminine forms in dictionaries, e.g. *avvocata* (feminine form, EN: female lawyer). However, still nowadays many people, including women, prefer to use the masculine form of professional titles even when referring to other women or themselves. This is probably because the feminine form is sometimes used in a slightly derogatory, or at least, ironical way.

Moreover, some professions still do not have a feminine form. According to Enciclopedia Treccani, the noun *medico*⁵ (EN: doctor) only exists in the masculine form. Similarly, the feminine form of the term *agricoltore*⁴ (EN: male farmer) is not common. Italian linguist and President of Accademia della Crusca Paolo D’Achille (2015) wrote about the use of *signorina* (EN: Miss) that has been replaced by the term *signora* (EN: Mrs/Ms/Madam), now used to refer to any woman, regardless of their marital status or age. However, no law or decree has officially abolished the title *signorina* and some young women still prefer to be addressed as such since *signora* makes them think of older ladies.

In 2018, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of its first guidelines, the European Parliament issued an updated guideline on gender-neutral language stating that in grammatical-gender languages, such as Italian, the use of generic masculine terms was no longer the absolute practice, not even in legislative acts⁵.

At the 2021 Sanremo Music Festival, famous orchestra conductor Beatrice Venezi declared she preferred to be addressed as *direttore* (EN: male conductor) and not *direttrice* (EN: female conductor) claiming that gender equity is not achieved through language⁶. It is to be noted that *direttrice* is commonly

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⁶See full newspaper article published on Repubblica, 6 March 2021: [https://www.repubblica.it/dossier/spettacoli/sanremo-](https://www.repubblica.it/dossier/spettacoli/sanremo-).
used in Italian to refer to managers in companies and schools; it is less common in the case of orchestra conductors, simply because this is a profession still dominated by men.

It is therefore understood that besides grammar and linguistic issues, the social connotation historically associated with some words still plays an important role in the choice of the masculine instead of the feminine form, especially in the case of professional titles.

More recently, the issue of gender-neutral language has transcended the male-female dichotomy and has embraced non-binary language to include any possible identification. Since Italian is a binary language from a grammatical point of view, this trend has posed a real challenge to any person working in the communication field. On the one hand, people belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community, activists and supporters claim a genderless language that allows anyone to feel included. On the other, Italian linguists keep a conservative approach and claim that the new pioneering solutions, such as the asterisk or the schwa, are to be excluded because they do not comply with Italian morphology, phonology and syntax, as written by D'Achille (2021) in reply to the many requests for clarification received.

**RENDERING FAIR LANGUAGE IN THE TRANSLATION OF ENGLISH BUSINESS WEBSITES INTO ITALIAN**

As already mentioned, the general guidelines from most corporations concern readers' expectations. The ultimate principle to follow is to think about the translation audience and to localise the text so as to make everyone feel included. In the case of business websites, it is clear that the audience has certain

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7 Italian politician Laura Boldrini reacted to Beatrice Venezi's statement explaining that we culturally accept female titles for more common jobs but the most prestigious the role is, the hardest is to decline it in the feminine form, falling into the belief that the masculine form is more widely accepted and respected. See [https://www.repubblica.it/dossier/spettacoli/sanremo-2021/2021/03/06/news/sanremo_beatrice_venezi_direttrice_non_direttrice_e_i_social_si_spaccano_sulla_scelta-290592565/](https://www.repubblica.it/dossier/spettacoli/sanremo-2021/2021/03/06/news/sanremo_beatrice_venezi_direttrice_non_direttrice_e_i_social_si_spaccano_sulla_scelta-290592565/)

8 See D'Achille full response: [https://accademiallescursa.it/it/consulenza/un-asterisco-sul-genere/4018](https://accademiallescursa.it/it/consulenza/un-asterisco-sul-genere/4018)
expectations from companies not only in terms of product or service quality, but also in terms of principles. In turn, companies too expect to attract a specific group of people and therefore wish to convey a message that is coherent with their standards. The findings from the Ipsos Global Trends 2021 report show that people are more prone to buy from brands aligned with their values, for example sustainability or inclusivity.\(^9\) Language is the means used to communicate company values and, when it comes to inclusivity, it could immediately serve as a clear example for companies to show that they practise what they preach.

In the following subsections I will share my experience of translating business websites from English into Italian ensuring the highest level of fair language as possible in compliance with both the multinationals' policies on fair and gender-neutral language and current Italian linguistic rules. Some options to avoid an evidently discriminatory and binary language will be presented giving practical examples and considering the relevant advantages and disadvantages, also highlighting the limits of each solution. Much of this has been inspired by the insightful essay *Scrivi e lascia vivere* (Di Michele et al., 2022) to promote inclusive language when writing in Italian.

**Gender-neutral language**

Rendering gender-neutral language in Italian is especially challenging for the reasons already presented above. Besides solving the masculine-feminine dichotomy—which is already not easy in Italian, nowadays any binary representations of gender should be avoided because not everyone identifies as male or female. From the companies’ perspectives, it is clear that including everyone is essential for business reasons. Indeed, numerous companies create customised initiatives during Pride Month showing their support to the LGBTQIA+ community. However, many are even accused of exploiting this occasion as part of their marketing strategy without being really committed to the cause. Again, readers of business websites and prospect clients hold some expectations and translators are called to fulfil them while implementing the company policies.

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As previously mentioned, the hardest challenge when translating into Italian is to limit the use of the overextended masculine form. From my personal professional experience, the following contrasting strategies could be applied:

1. **Giving visibility to the feminine gender when needed**

1.1. Explicitly using both genders when referring to a group of people including both sexes, especially in general or introductory statements (unless it sounds artificial or alters the meaning).

   Example: *I ragazzi e le ragazze* (EN: boys and girls), *i lavoratori e le lavoratrici* (EN: female and male workers.)

This solution presents two issues: first, it falls back into binary language again; second, the Italian expression usually takes double the space needed for the same concept expressed in English since English words usually comprise both male and female genders as in the case of the noun “workers”. Mentioning both the male and female noun makes the Italian sentence longer and sometimes less smooth to read if there are many of these expressions. Moreover, adjectives and pronouns should be agreed accordingly.

1.2. Using the feminine form for professions and roles, as needed. This may be particularly important in those contexts traditionally associated to male groups.

   Examples: *deputata, avvocata, soldata* or *soldatessa, sindaca, medica, ministra, ingegniera, sviluppatrice* (EN: female MP, lawyer, soldier, mayor, doctor, minister, engineer, developer.)

This solution is sensible and grammatically correct, even though some women may feel that the feminine noun used to refer to their profession is sometimes used with a derogatory connotation. It is therefore important to do some research and check if the text refers to a specific person or group in order not to sound disrespectful.

The visibility of the feminine gender does not apply to proper names and surnames. On the contrary, using the feminine article in front of a woman’s surname is to be avoided. Besides being grammatically wrong since articles must not be used in front of proper nouns in Italian, it has often been used to make a sexist distinction between men and women holding the same position. Late
Italian writer Michela Murgia was often referred to as “la Murgia” by Italian journalists, placing the feminine article in front of her surname, despite her publicly rejecting this practice.\textsuperscript{10} The writer, who was also a keen activist, repeatedly reported the press unfair practice of referring to women using their names instead of surnames. This also applies to people in very prestigious roles, for example the case of “Biden e Kamala”, thus remarking the difference between the male president and the female vice-president, who is only referred to by using her name\textsuperscript{11}.

2. Hiding both genders

2.1. Employing gender-neutral terms such as persona, essere umano (EN: person, human being.) This strategy allows to overcome the male-female dichotomy. However, it risks being too generic and not identifying someone specifically if needed.

2.2. Using collective terms: personale (EN: staff), corpo docente (EN: teaching staff), direzione (EN: management) instead of dirigente (EN: manager), team medico (EN: medical team) instead of medici (EN: doctors.) Referring to a group of people instead of individuals is a way to avoid showing the gender. This matches the necessity to find a genderless language with the quest for an elegant and formal style.

2.3. Resorting to relative pronouns and impersonal forms, for example: buyers could be translated as chi compra (EN: those who buy) instead of i clienti e le clienti (EN: male and female buyers). As for syntax and style, I believe it is not always possible to employ this structure as it weighs the sentence down and it should definitely be avoided if writing for an elegant brand since it does not reflect the style its audience would expect. It is preferable for informal brands aiming at young people.

2.4. Rephrasing to avoid past participle forms since they should agree with the noun in Italian, thus showing the gender. For example, instead of writing

\textsuperscript{10} See this article where “la Murgia” is mentioned as an example \url{https://www.ilfoglio.it/bandierabianca/2023/08/11/news/michela-murgia-non-e-stata-sempre-la-scrivitrice-dei-diritti-le-e-diventata-5590086/}

\textsuperscript{11} See 2021 Michele Murgia video interview at Italian show Che tempo che fa, \url{https://www.einaudi.it/approfondimenti/michela-murgia-stai-zitta/}
Benvenuto (EN: Welcome – for male people), you can render it as Ti diamo il benvenuto (EN: We welcome you.) This way of rephrasing the sentence needs using an Italian noun (il benvenuto), which is genderless, to substitute the past participle, which could be benvenuto or benvenuta according to the relevant gender. In such cases, to guarantee the correct syntax, the noun needs to be paired with an appropriate verb; here we have the phrase dare il benvenuto (EN: to welcome). As it can be easily understood, rephrasing results in longer strings of words compared to the source text. This could raise website layout issues, especially in pop-up messages and button descriptions since the Italian version needs more space than expected. My advice here is to report the issue to the webmaster or the final client to adjust the graphics and, if not possible, to find another translation solution.

2.5. Employing the passive form leaving out the subject. For example I clienti possono iscriversi online (EN: clients can subscribe online) > L’iscrizione può essere fatta online (EN: Subscriptions can be made online). It should be noted that the passive form is less common in Italian than in English and it is usually perceived as formal writing. However, it is a good solution if the subject is clear enough and not worth mentioning.

2.6. Using gender-neutral forms to address the readers directly. Very often, email templates too are to be translated together with web contents. This text type usually addresses the reader directly, making it even more important to provide a respectful message. Usually, the greeting line could be easily solved by translating the common “Dear” with an Italian adjective ending with -e, for example “Gentile”, thus encompassing all genders.

2.7. Checking the readers’ preferences: as for titles, some websites give readers the opportunity to choose how they would like to be addressed when filling in a form. When this option is not available, it is now preferrable not to use the term signorina (EN: Miss) since we would never refer to a male using his civil status.

It is now worth analysing the issue of pronouns. A very popular guideline given by English-speaking corporations is to replace gender-specific pronouns (such as he, she) with gender-neutral pronouns (such as they, them). As previously specified, Italian grammar does not feature gender neutral pronouns. Indeed, even if we considered the pronoun loro – the equivalent of
they/them/their – as both masculine and feminine, this would not provide a gender-neutral sentence since other words in it would still carry either the masculine or feminine gender. For instance, the English sentences “They are happy” and “They are our top buyers” are gender-neutral since no word expresses gender. Supposing we had to translate these sentences in Italian, gender would be expressed by the adjective contenti/contente (EN: happy, masculine and feminine plural forms) and by the article and possessive adjective in the string i nostri migliori clienti/le nostre migliori clienti (EN: our top buyers, masculine and feminine plural forms). Mentioning both genders separated by a slash as written above is one of the possible solutions to include both male and female readers. However, it could be argued that this is not a fair translation since it still falls back into the male-female dichotomy and some brands could express their will to include any gender identity.

This is the ultimate challenge for translators into Italian: how can a sentence be completely gender-neutral using a grammatically gendered language? At the moment, Italian linguists are not aligned with the expectations and requests of readers, who would like to implement new solutions to hide gender. As already described, some leading linguists have recently confirmed that the overextended masculine form is to be considered as a neutral form that can be used to comprise any gender identity.12 On the opposite side, some activists have already started posting their work on social media replacing the final letters that carry the grammatical gender with an asterisk (*) or the phoneme schwa (ə), championing a more inclusive language that goes beyond grammar rules and attracts both supporters and criticisms.13

12 See D’Achille full response: https://accademiadellacrusca.it/it/consulenza/un-asterisco-sul-genere/4018
While this is a matter of personal choice when writing on one’s own profile, translators should remember that they are the brands’ voices into another language and are required to convey their values. Therefore, the adoption of such pioneering solutions should be thoroughly discussed with the brands’ representatives and it is the translators’ responsibility as experts in both languages and culture to explain the possible impact on the audience. In the best case scenario, a joint and informed decision should be made and the parties could even decide to break the existing grammar rules consciously.

**Colours**

Translators should be very mindful when dealing with colours in general, as even the most apparently inoffensive expressions may affect the perception of a company. Considering the colour nude for example, a lot has been said about the fact that many skin-tones are not included in it and it would be inappropriate to take for granted that the colour nude is the European-centric Caucasian typical skin tone since this assumption would exclude many potential buyers. From a linguistic perspective, a solution could be to use the plural form “nudes” or “neutral tones”, also in the target language, so as to include any skin-tone. This is particularly relevant when translating for the make-up and fashion industries that have recently started to provide their products in all shades to cater to a wider public. This is a case of brand mission that should be reflected in its communication style.

Colours could appear in product descriptions to describe actual colours of some products, for example, black text on a white background, a blue pen, etc. However, there are expressions in which colours are used to connote levels of security or secrecy (e.g., *black list*), or to imply that something is good or bad (e.g., *white hat hacker*). While translating, two situations might happen:

- the colour is not present in the target language, for example white hat hacker could be rendered in Italian as *hacker buono/etico* (EN literally: good/fair hacker)
- the equivalent in the target language would feature the same or another colour, for example *black list* = IT *lista nera*.

The first case already provides a less biased translation. In the second case however, the translator should ideally find a way to avoid mentioning a colour associated with a negative connotation. Actually, *black list* is a common phrase
that any audience would immediately recognise; therefore the translator could aim at finding an expression that is clear enough and suitable for that specific context. For instance, supposing we are translating a text mentioning events, we could render it as *lista degli ospiti indesiderati* (EN literally: list of unwanted guests).

As far as the colour black is concerned, it is worth mentioning its use to refer to people of colour. In Italian, this represents an interest case of “over-fairness”: *persone di colore* (EN literally: people of colour) was introduced in the 70s as a calque from American English and in the 90s it spread as a way to refer to black people using a more politically-correct expression. Recently, Italians with African origins have declared that they prefer to be addressed simply as *neri* (EN: black people).\(^\text{14}\) Nevertheless, in Italy it is commonly believed that using the equivalent expression, i.e. *of colour*, is more appropriate than black. Referring to the ultimate guideline to be followed while translating, it is clear that translators should think like their target readers, in this case black people, and prioritise their preferences to make them feel included.

**Disabilities**

When translating about people with disabilities, translators should adopt the same approach described for black people. Members of some disability communities may consider their disabilities part of their identity, so they may prefer a type of language that places an emphasis on culture first. For example, some people may prefer “disabled person” over “person with a disability”, or “deaf person” over “person who is deaf”. From a translator’s perspective, the general rule to be followed is to search for national associations that raise awareness and promote the rights of people with a specific disability to understand how these people describe themselves and translate accordingly.

Generally speaking, if no contrasting guidelines are given, good practice is to focus on what people can do, recognising people for their talents and skills, not for assumed physical limitations. Practically, in most cases this is possible using a people-first approach to translation when referring to people with disabilities. This means describing and talking about individuals as people

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before mentioning any disability they may have. For instance, it is advisable to avoid using and translating expressions equivalent to “the blind”; it is better to use instead “people who are blind or have low vision”. Similarly, it is recommended not to use words which stress the link between illnesses and pain and limits, such as the suffix “-bound” or the word “suffer”. In Italian, translators should not employ the expression affetto da (EN literally: suffering from) since it conveys an idea of misery due to poor health conditions. Such expressions could be simply translated as persona con (EN literally: person with) + the name of the illness, creating a more neutral language. On the contrary, it is preferable not to refer to non-disabled people as normodotati (EN literally: normally endowed, normal people) since it is clearly derogatory towards disabled people.

According to the field of translation, translators should be aware of specific contexts where a certain ability should not be taken for granted. Supposing we are translating a website about software and/or devices, phrases referring to an ability such as si vede un messaggio (EN: you can see a message), si sente un allarme (EN: you can hear an alarm) could be rephrased by simply describing what happens: appare un messaggio (EN: a message appears), suona un allarme (EN: an alarm goes off).

Translating disabilities mindfully into Italian usually does not pose additional challenges to translators since most of the common phrases could be easily rephrased. However, special attention should be paid to not going towards over-fairness, thus sounding paternalistic.

**Accessibility**

Web content is theoretically accessible to anyone at any moment and from any place. However, it is to be remembered that the fact that a text is online does not make it accessible to everybody. Indeed, accessibility for web content has to meet specific criteria that can be described with the acronym POUR, standing for

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perceivable, operable, understandable and robust (reliable). All these parameters could be summed up by replying to the following question: is the text readable by screen readers? Special fonts—such as Italics or bold used on social media—images whose content is not described in a caption, and non-accessible links make web content not accessible to people with disabilities who need to resort to a screen reader.

Furthermore, one of the main criticisms against the use of asterisks or schwas to overcome binary language is that screen readers cannot read words featuring these symbols, making it impossible for people employing these tools to access the text. Moreover, these symbols are not commonly used at the moment and schwa in particular is not part of the Italian alphabet. Therefore, most of the readers could be unfamiliar with them, thus hindering their comprehension. This creates a paradoxical situation: the symbols that are supposed to make everyone feel included regardless of their gender identity may leave behind other groups of people because of their low accessibility.

CONCLUSIONS

Echoing Woodstein concept of genre as a set of expectations shared by writers and readers, this paper has shown that web content has its specific expectations even if it is an umbrella term that encompasses many subgenres, or text types, according to the industry and aim of each text. More specifically, through the analysis of several aspects involved in the translation of business websites, which represent all of the spectrum, it has clearly emerged that language plays an essential role in fulfilling the readers’ expectations for the consequent success of the brand. Inclusivity is of foremost importance for both corporations and prospect customers, and language is an immediate and tangible means for brands to show their commitment to this cause. In particular, the article has delved into the most common requests by corporations that reflect the most recent social trends. Some options have been shared, also presenting their limits. There is clearly a gap between Italian linguists and readers’ expectations in terms

17 Refer to Di Michele, Valentina, et al. Scrivi e lascia vivere. Palermo. Flacowski, 2022, esp. Chapter 11 Scrittura accessibile per il web, written by Orrù Alice
of gender-neutral language. Minorities as well are often forgotten when it comes to language. As translators, we are called to bridge this gap not only to comply with corporate policies but, more importantly, to uphold our social and cultural responsibility as mediators.

Since Italian language institutes have not approved any changes in Italian grammar at the moment of this article, translating into Italian we must ensure the highest level of fairness and accessibility so that no one is excluded. Leaving aside one-size-fits-all solutions that would inevitably hinder or offend somebody, we should be guided by the critical analysis skills developed during our training and experience to identify the most appropriate formulation for each case, always bearing in mind our target readers.

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European Parliament, Gender-neutral language in the European Parliament, 2018


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