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Exploring the Translation Process of Bruce Pascoe's *Young Dark Emu* **into Italian: Choices, Reflections and Learnings**

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Abstract

This article is based on a translation of Young Dark Emu: A Truer History (YDE) into Italian – L'Oscuro Emù per Ragazzi: una storia più vera (L'OEPR) and a theoretical exegesis, which were part of the first author's Master of Translation Studies dissertation, completed at The University of Western Australia in 2023 under the supervision of the second author. Bruce Pascoe's YDE is the version of *Dark Emu* (DE) for young people aged 7 to 12 years in which he advocates for a reconsideration of the label given to pre-colonial Indigenous Australians. Both books won several prizes and contributed to rethinking Indigenous life in Australia and changing Australian identity. Indigenous Australian literature's well-defined political identity always demands ethical awareness in translation. In the case of YDE the original's culture-sensitive counter-memory and the fact that the book is written for children contribute to making it a particularly challenging book to translate into another language. Translating YDE for Italian children, became an exploration of strategies and choices in relation to the ethical positioning of the authors of this article. Source-oriented translation strategies suit this type of text especially when dealing with culture-specific elements and the title. A priori standards were met by navigating a theoretical framework interwoven to assist the process. An action research design guided action and reflection, leaning broadly but not exclusively on contributions to Translation Studies of Reiss, Toury, Eco, Venuti and Osimo. This article discusses choices, rationale behind solutions, insights, consistency with ideology and ethical positioning.

Introduction

YDE is the children's adaptation of Bruce Pascoe's *Dark Emu: Aboriginal Australia and the Birth of Agriculture*.¹ The book's description of Indigenous Australian communities at the time of British colonization challenges the common conception of First Nation Australians as nomadic hunter-gatherers, focusing on recounts that depict them as agriculturists and aquaculturists. It is aimed at children 7 to 12 years of age (Magabala Books) and it portrays another perspective of history and different types of knowledge that are of general interest to humanity particularly in the 'Anthropocene' era.

Pascoe's work has generated ongoing debate, at a societal, political and academic level, in Australia. Although it is commonly recognised for shedding light on important past and present issues, the controversies have made it a slippery slope to tread. Indeed, very few

¹ Bruce Pascoe identifies as an Indigenous man from many language groups, including Tasmanian Palawa, Bunurong people of the Kulin nation (Victoria), and Yuin (southern New South Wales), acknowledging his Cornish and European Colonial ancestry as well.

translations of the book DE into languages other than English exist², and an Italian translation has not yet been attempted (Opac Sbn). The paucity of Italian translations (and studies) of Indigenous Australian literature has been attributed to its strong political identity; nonetheless, it raises the call for further efforts to encourage its dissemination in mainstream Italian culture (Di Blasio and Zanoletti 57).

Translating YDE opened the translation of children's literature to scrutiny. This genre has gained prominence since the years following the First World War, with the idea that it can play an important role in establishing peaceful relationships, solidarity and knowledge of other cultures (O'Sullivan, "Internationalism"). Subsequent academic debate has focused on whether, and to what extent, translations of children's books should be adapted. More recent trends in children's literature, consider young readers to be endowed with research skills and are therefore geared towards informing and stimulating curiosity and self-conducted research (Better Reading; Cole Adams; Watkins). Despite the evolving capabilities of young readers, the translation of YDE arguably required cultural adaptations that allowed effective communication and exchange. Yet, a different perspective of history and the translator's ethical positioning (the agency attached to their values and beliefs), remained central, possibly leading to antagonism between translation strategies.

The process was explored from an inside perspective employing an Action Research design that guided the understanding of daily practices, activating change and/or improvement through a cyclical process of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. Planning was informed by theory at a general and specific level; the translation issues that formed part of the data found solutions within the literature, advice sought and reflection; changes were immediately applied to the work that followed and thus modified the subsequent process, data and results.

Translation and exegesis were informed by a Translation Theory framework:

- Text analysis as described by Reiss.
- Toury's initial norm of adequacy.
- Venuti's foreignization vs domestication ethics.
- Eco's notion of the Model Reader.
- Osimo's works (*Manuale del Traduttore*; "Logos Portal"; "Translation as Metaphor").

In this article, based on the author's MA thesis, supervised by the co-author, we consider literature findings regarding the text and its role within Australia, the *status quo* of Indigenous Australian literature in Italy, the text's dual nature and Translation Theory pertinent to the theoretical framework. We describe the study design, text analysis, criteria for data collection and observations; finally, we discuss findings and share learnings.

1. Text, contexts and Theory

Four areas of study were identified and researched: the text, Indigenous Australian literature in Italy, Translation of Children's Literature and Translation Theory. Knowledge of the text and context is a prerequisite for translating culture-sensitive literature. Accepting the complexity and dual nature of the text opened a window to past and new trends in children's literature. The discoveries induced the creation of a theoretical framework.

² L'émeu dans la nuit : Australie aborigène et pratiques agricoles multimillénaires (Publisher: Éditions Petra, Paris, 2022); Dāku emyū: aborijinaru ōsutoraria no shinjitsu senjūmin no tochi kanri to nōkō no tanjō (Publisher: Akashishoten, Tōkyō, 2022); Hei an er miao : Aodaliya yuan zhu min ji nong ye de qi yuan (Publisher: Fu dan da xue chu ban she, Shanghai, 2021) (WorldCat.org)

1.1 The text: Understanding YDE in Australia

The translation process begins with making sense of a text that is not an isolated piece of writing but that interacts with the environment in which it lives. YDE is part of the 'DE phenomenon' that has occurred in Australia since it was first published.

A considerable amount of epitextual material exists around DE. There is criticism for the fallacies of its underlining research (Sutton and Walshe); for forcing the pre-colonial Indigenous status into the colonialist logic of evaluation of humanity (Porr and Williams); for proffering white Australians the absolution they desire with a truth that offers hope of healing: a truer history without justice that comforts only white Australia (Grant). However, the same critics recognise that Pascoe "builds awareness of the fact that British Empire colonists in Australia assumed their superiority and justified conquest, slaughter and massive land theft" (Sutton and Walshe 12); that "Dark Emu has single-handedly and fundamentally changed the public perception of the past of Aboriginal Australia" (Porr and Williams 302); and that "the effect has been seismic. For many Australians, *Dark Emu* shifted the ground beneath their feet. The book has been praised for deepening our understanding of and collective interest in the pre-colonial history of this land" (Grant 32).

1.2 Indigenous Australian Literature in Italy and YDE

A recent survey by Zanoletti regarding the reception of Australian literature and culture in Italy reveals that, although remaining a niche market, translated Australian literature is growing in Italy, becoming part of the national literary polysystem. However, Zanoletti reports that as little as five Indigenous Australian literary works were translated into Italian between 2003 and 2021 (Di Blasio and Zanoletti 58).⁴ In arguing that further efforts are required to encourage its dissemination in mainstream Italian culture, Zanoletti underlines the strong political identity of Indigenous Australian literature in both fiction and non-fiction. For Indigenous Australian people, she argues, over the decades writing has become a way of reconnecting with history and recreating an identity after being displaced (Zanoletti 12). DE and YDE, although intended as historical and pedagogical texts, are, like other Indigenous Australian literary works, acts of counter-memory. ⁵ The author challenges the veracity of the history told by colonisers, engaging in a deeply political discourse.

The cultural specificity and weight of these literary works, then, pose a significant challenge to the interlingual translator who is tasked with recognizing, decoding, and transmitting the form, content, and intent to an Italian readership that is far removed from the source context, geographically and experientially (Federici 266). The information load is interpreted within an ideological climate that may differ between the contexts of reception of

³ YDE is the children's adaptation of Bruce Pascoe's DE *Black Seeds: Agriculture or Accident?* published in 2014, revised and republished in 2018 with the title of DE: *Aboriginal Australia and the Birth of Agriculture.* Within the first seven years of its release it sold 250,000 copies (Coate et al.) becoming probably the most widely read book about Indigenous Australia (Porr and Williams 300). Assoc. Prof. Julienne von Loon additionally reports on *The Dark Emu Story* (the documentary released in July CY at the Sydney Film Festival and currently available on ABC iview) that hitherto DE has sold over 360,000 copies (Clarke). The ongoing phenomenon according to von Loon makes the book "one of the highest selling books of its kind."

⁴ Wild Cat Falling, Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence, Carpentaria, Auntie Rita and the collection of political writings by Indigenous writers and activists translated by Pericle Camuffo: Le Nostre Voci.

⁵ Counter-memory' is explained by Foucault in his 1978 essay *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*: "The historical sense gives rise to three uses that oppose and correspond to the three Platonic modalities of history. The first is parodic, directed against reality, and opposes the theme of history as reminiscence or recognition; the second is dissociative, directed against identity, and opposes history given as continuity or representative of a tradition; the third is sacrificial, directed against truth, and opposes history as knowledge. They imply a use of history that severs its connection to memory, its metaphysical and anthropological model, and constructs a counter-memory—a transformation of history into a totally different form of time." (93).

the post-colonial text and its translation (Tymoczko 31). Hence: "translation of Australian Aboriginal texts should [...] be attentive to cultural references and initiate a dialogue between cultures that are far apart in terms of geography, experience, and power" (Federici 270). Federici advocates the importance of the translator's ethical position to which she ascribes the potential of facilitating the transmission and survival of Indigenous Australian complex past, or its erasure by a translation that can be "a further act of colonization." She insists that translation choices influence the reception of a text, thus translation ethics should bring awareness of the risks of speaking for others while moving between what can be done in interlingual translation and what is required when giving voice to a minority culture (271).

1.3 Translation of Children's Literature: YDE's duality

"Teaching children that's the only way to change anything" states Bruce Pascoe in The Big Issue magazine under the colossal title 'I Want Change' (Smyrk). Similarly, following the two world wars, hope for peace relied to some extent on children learning about other cultures, "children's literature thus serves as a site on which adult difficulties are addressed and often placated" (O'Sullivan "Internationalism" 19). The academic debate regarding the translation of children's books has focused on the production of an adequate or adaptive text with the progressive shift towards adaptation often reversing the effect of bridging cultures (18). Despite the adult agenda, in O'Sullivan's view "It is important for young readers to experience a range of different cultural understandings, otherwise their perception of their own remains narrow" (19). Oittinen considers the young reader's experience as imagined by the translator. She also reflects on the translator's own reading experience and their ethics, shifting the focus from the text to the translator and reader. In her ethical view, the task consists of helping children to fully enjoy their human potential, according to the translator's child image (37). Young readers' experiences remain poorly researched (Lathey10; Kruger 180) and opinions are divided. Although translators have recently demonstrated greater confidence in children's ability to embrace differences, the general attitude is that their books should require exceptional adaptation. It could be argued, however, that in the present technological era, the translator may need to embody the image of a child with an adult-like, if not greater, research potential. As discussed by Watkins (82), non-fiction for children begins to question objectivity and subjectivity and to challenge the knowledge of history.

A significant aspect of children's literature is illustrations and lettering and text. There is a general agreement in recommending the translator to advocate for minimal visual text alterations. Moreover, Tabbert warns against the "frequent disturbance of the original balance between words and pictures [...] caused by the fact that translators tend to put bits of information into the target text which in the original book is only conveyed by the pictures" (318).

The complexity of translating YDE becomes evident in Lathey's recommendations, who emphasises that the translator should master "linguistic and political finesse" (6) in order to preserve all messages for the child reader of the target culture or explain source political context by using peritextual material. Moreover, she advocates against oversimplification of language, in order to respect the author's intentions and to stimulate children's learning (8).

1.4 Translation Theory: A Theoretical Framework to Navigate YDE's Complexity

The 'finesse' required for the translation of YDE, is what Cavagnoli defines as *Arte e Mestiere di Tradurre*. ⁶ Text analysis as described by Reiss establishes text type, variety and style which

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⁶ Art and Craft of Translating. (Translated by T. Borgese-Flocca)

we will discuss further. Reiss's functionalist approach does not contemplate the cultural and ethical issues considered central to our work.

Toury's essay regarding norms in translation introduces the significance of culture within translation activity. Two aspects are of particular interest concerning the translation of YDE. He acknowledges the distinct position that original and translated texts occupy in their specific contexts and regards useful on behalf of the translator to establish the "initial norm" of adequacy or acceptability. Expected shifts from the original text that always occur in translation become thus less arbitrary and more norm-governed. Toury distinguishes between preliminary and operational norms in translation. While the latter informs decision-making during the act of translation, the former relates to the choice of texts to be translated.

According to Lawrence Venuti (A History of Translation 125), the choice to translate a text that defies the conventions of foreign literature in the receiving culture is per se foreignizing⁸ and in turn a dissident cultural practice. Unfortunately, both the adoption of another language and the political dissidence can enact ethnocentric appropriation. However, it is this stance that allows the emergence of linguistic and cultural differences that may cause changes in the existing literary conventions of the receiving language. If 'ethnocentric violence' in translation is inevitable due to the issues implied in making one culture fit into another, translation may, all the same, become an act of resistance. In pursuing Venuti's ethical guide for the translation of YDE, one must take into account the concerns expressed by his critics regarding the risks of stereotypical representation, the creation of an over-exotic Other, or unnecessary distancing between cultures (Kadiu 23).

Translating for the young a text that carries some form of political ideology justifies retrieving Eco's Model Reader notion. Eco presupposes that the Model Reader interprets the text but also cooperates in generating it according to the instructions provided by the author. Different interpretations create different text types (Eco 3). The text is built on the premises of an existing competence, but at the same time, it works on building competence (8). Eco introduces the concept of having to foresee and provide for, different forms of decoding. He advocates a flexible strategy that anticipates possible differences of interpretation in order to limit misconceptions (8). Eco's Model Reader goes beyond the simple perception of the child reader's experience, as it implies that the possibility of different interpretations and the cooperation of the reader in text creation are, to some extent, determined by the tools supplied by the translation (in terms of lexical and syntactical organization of the text).

In discussing interpretation Osimo points to the concept of inner language. Translation is a process, starting in the author's mind and ending in the reader's and involves interpretation; hence, it is incompatible with equivalence. Translation creates a similar sense; thus, it can only produce subjective correspondence. Osimo contrasts the challenge of hiding the process of cultural and linguistic mediation by avoiding peritextual interventions at all costs. The mediation in translation should be cultural rather than cognitive. To redefine translation Osimo resorts to an alliance with anthropology. The translator, like an anthropologist, visits an alien culture and tries to explain it to their own. Untranslatability is considered a learning factor; in anthropology, it is referred to as a 'rich point' (Agar 5). 10 Dealing with the untranslatable

⁷ Toury (171) defines 'adequate' "the translation [that]will tend to subscribe to the norms of the source text, and through them also to the norms of the source language and culture"; and 'acceptable' the translation where "norms systems of the target culture are triggered and set into motion".

⁸ Foreignization and domestication are terms coined by Venuti to describe opposite translation approaches. One preserves cultural specificity; the other adapts foreign elements, transforming them into familiar features, with the result of making cultural and linguistic differences unnoticeable to the receiving culture.

⁹ "The aim is to produce a similar text in a different culture" (90).

¹⁰ The translator who embraces this view does not consider cultural specificities to be stressful elements; on the contrary, they are perceived in the perspective of cultural enrichment (96).

means creating new sense ("Translation Metaphor"). Osimo's notion liaised across the possible 'rich points' and theoretical controversies in the translation of YDE. His works (*Manuale Traduttore*; "Logos Portal") also extensively assisted in retrospective analysis.

YDE's duality poses the issue of balancing a strategy normed by strong ethics, yet sufficiently adaptive for the young Italian reader.

2. Methodology: An Action Research Design

Originating in the social sciences, action research, is "an approach to knowledge and inquiry" (Reason) now considered suitable in the context of a variety of disciplines ranging from science and health to artistic and creative practices, regardless of people's status, level of expertise, position or age. It means carefully examining one's own work, "so it becomes critical self-reflective practice [...] an enquiry of the self into the self" (McNiff 23) and a way of experiencing theory through a practice that brings theory to life. A philosophy and a research methodology: the framework of principles that guided our translation practice. Principles take different forms and are debated across the various disciplines that base their investigation on an action research paradigm; for this reason it is safe to say that there is no single or univocal definition of action research. In McNiff's words:

it [is] important to remember that there is no such 'thing' as 'action research'. It is a form of words that refers to people becoming aware of and making public their processes of learning with others, and explaining how this informs their practices. (24)

McNiff clarifies that action research is not a theory to be discussed, but a living practice (Ibid.). We approached it as: "research as a self-analysing action" (Pym), observing ourselves while striving to produce new knowledge aimed at fostering change – specifically, increasing studies and translations of Indigenous Australian Literature in Italian and giving translators a voice by maintaining our ethical stance.

Study Design and Working Cycles

In action research the process of planning, acting, analysing and reflecting is cyclic and it applies at a macro level (the study in its entirety) and at a micro level (during the practice, to solve problems that arise as they arise).

The study design cycles at the macro level coincided with the systematic stages of research:

Plan

- Identification of a topic the translation of YDE into Italian.
- Clarifying its importance contrasting the absence of translations of a book that is important to Australian culture and the (near to) absence of studies and translations of Indigenous Australian literature into Italian.
- Formulation of a research question explore the choices/strategies adopted to translate culture specificity and counter-memory for children (losses and compensations, negotiations, ethics).
- Researching the literature to support claims and inform future action gather information about the text, contexts and relevant translation theory.

Act

• Implementation – translation of YDE and collection of data.

Analyse

• Analysis of collected data – close observation, categorization of untranslatability and other issues.

Reflect

• Evaluations/conclusions/recommendations – results assessment, explanation of the choices made.

The investigation was conducted systematically: theory informing practice, practice refining theory, "in a continuous transformation" (O'Brien).

2.1 Text Analysis and Ethical Positioning

The translation process begins with reading the text and understanding it. A first act of interpretation (Eco, *Dire Quasi La Stessa Cosa*; Osimo) and self-reflection: "The first obstacle that translators – as readers tasked with a massive responsibility – are faced with is reading the text and understanding their perception of the text itself" (Cavagnoli, "The Responsibility of Writers as Translators" 84). Understanding the ongoing process around YDE in Australia allowed us to calibrate the responsibilities associated with its translation: "Being a translator cannot be reduced to the mere generation of utterances which would be considered 'translations' [...]. Translation activities should rather be regarded as having cultural significance" (Toury168).

Pascoe, quoted in *The Guardian*, argues that YDE goes beyond reversing a past effaced from memory, it wants to generate a different way of feeling Australian (Touma). His strategy of bridging the distance between his adult and child reader, rather than "adapting language, subject-matter, and formal and thematic features to correspond to the children's stage of development and the repertory of skills they have acquired" (O'Sullivan, "Comparative Children's Literature" 191), consists of 'economy and concision' (Glatch). He distilled the adult version, rearranged it accordingly and remarkably supported it with striking visual elements, organising factual information into a text that young readers can understand and experience. Close reading defined the genre of the text and revealed its structure, characters and setting, topics, themes and morals, style, point of view, tone and mood.

Reiss's method identified type, considered variety and examined style in detail.

Type – Reiss argues that at the origin of all writing, there are three essential communicative forms expressed similarly across cultures; she identified three text types:

- informative the content is the main communication aim
- expressive the focus is on the artistic disposition
- operative the goal is to persuade (124).

She contemplates the existence of 'mixed forms' as is the case of YDE which features plural intentions, i.e. communicating content (informative) and stimulating change (operational), and an additional text type, that also applies to YDE:

• multi-medial: when additional information is provided by another sign system (e.g. illustrations), therefore the text as a whole communicates through all its components. This is a 'hyper-type' which she positions above all other text types, namely: "a super-structure for the three basic types" (125). The balance between all components (in terms of communication) needs to be considered alongside and above the other basic communication forms when translating.

¹¹ Detailed and careful analysis of a written work, *also*: the product of such analysis (Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary).

Variety – These are "specifically structured socio-cultural patterns of communication belonging to specific language communities" (126). Reiss explains that varieties may be partly common to languages and cultures yet, the language and structure patterns adopted for texts of the same kind/variety often vary amongst cultures. YDE features a selected portion of the content derived from its adult version. Language, topics and themes are unchanged, implying that Australian children aged 7 to 12 years, can understand and cope with the latter, cultural correspondences related to this aspect were contemplated. Variety was also considered in regard to illustration captions which in Italian differ in structure and wording.

Style – Reiss relates style to the individuality of the text and describes it as the selection of linguistic signs and their possible combinations directed by type and variety. Style is analysed in detail following a trajectory, that similarly and in parallel to 'reverbalization' goes from word to sentence, to paragraph, to chapter, etc. (127).

The results of text analysis guide the translating method. If the source text aims to convey content, the translation mode will be "according to the sense and meaning" (127). Artistic writing requires identification with the creative intention of the writer (128). Persuasive content requires "adaptive translating" (129), i.e. culture-appropriate language that stimulates behavioural change. In the presence of mixed forms, as was the case of YDE an established dominant communicating function (text type), informs the mode of translating which applies to all text elements where conflicts may arise. Considering that the persuasive content of the text addresses the process of re-constructing Australian identity, an issue that impacts non-Australian readership in a thoroughly different manner, the informative function became dominant in translation.

Ethical positioning — Changes in the foreign function occurred because, as discussed above, the text's specific role in its original context cannot coincide with that of the receiving culture. The inevitable incompatibilities, according to Toury (170), require interventions in translation which, if not regulated by norms, become arbitrary choices of the individual, resulting in a lack of accountability. "It has proven useful and enlightening to regard the basic choice which can be made between requirements of the two different sources as constituting an initial norm" (170-171). We established *a priori* to adhere to the norms of the source text, and consequently of its language and culture in pursuing an adequate translation, rather than abiding by the norms of the receiving culture with the aim of acceptability. The first tendency is prone to breaking rules in terms of language and beyond. In the second instance norms of the receiving culture operate flawlessly increasing shifts from the source text. Establishing the 'initial norm' provided an explanatory tool for decisions at the macro and micro levels (171).

Osimo ("Logos Portal") argues that adequacy must not be overly pursued at the cost of unacceptability and/or nonfulfillment of the translation's Model Reader. However, YDE is a different perspective of history: "a revised account of Australian history carried through voices [...] that speak of the experiences of the non-victors" (Federici 270) The ethical stance becomes agency, in that fluidity and readability cease to be the primary goals (279).

translator should strive, by due consideration of text variety and text type." (127)

¹² In Reiss's words: "The process of reverbalization is a linear one constructing the TL [target language] text out of words, syntagmas, clauses, sentences, paragraphs, etc. During this process of reverbalization a decision has to be made for each element of the text whether the linguistic signs and sequences of linguistic signs selected in the TL in coordination with a sign form and sign function can guarantee the functional equivalence for which a

2.2 Collecting Data

The analysis of the source text identified that the target text should be informative children nonfiction, characterized by clear, accessible and passionate storytelling.

The dominant informative text function prefers a translation mode according to sense and meaning (Reiss 127). YDE can 'make sense' to young Italian readers if most of its substantial context-specific elements are comprehended. The geographical, historical and social peculiarities, (i.e. the realia), were the most consistent and significant issue to be addressed. Some of the adaptations made by Pascoe to address his young readers resulted in idiosyncrasies that had to be negotiated in translation. Thus, attempting to achieve comparable clarity, accessibility and passion of the original storytelling while remaining consistent with the *a priori* established 'initial norm' required battling to find a balance.

Realia¹³

To explain what is intended by realia in translation studies, Osimo avails himself of the definition given by Vlahov and Florin:¹⁴

words (and composed expressions) of the popular language representing denominations of objects, concepts, typical phenomena of a given geographic place, of material life or of social-historical peculiarities of some people, nation, country, tribe, that for this reason carry a national, local or historical colour; these words do not have exact matches in other languages (1969 438). ("Logos Portal")

He discerningly divides realia into:

- Geographic physical, topographic, meteorological, and biological elements.
- Ethnographic elements of everyday life, namely: food, work, art, spirituality/religion, measures, currency, clothing/fashion.
- Political and social elements regarding regional administrative agencies/positions/organisms/offices; social and political life; military/army. (*Manuale Traduttore*, 112; "Logos Portal")

A total of 55 realia were addressed during the translation of YDE:

- 19 Geographic realia
- 23 Ethnographic realia
- 13 Social and Political realia

(For a summary of the realia arranged by categories see Appendix 1)

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¹³ "The word 'realia' has its origins in Latin, not the language spoken by Romans, that used by Middle Age scholars in many European countries as a language of science, research, philosophy. Since in Latin the plural neuter nominative of an adjective transforms it into a name, 'realia' means 'the real things', as opposed to words, that are considered neither 'things' nor 'real'. For this reason, the word is a plural of 'realis' (real), that, however, is not found in most Latin dictionaries because they usually contain the Classical, not Medieval, Latin occurrences. In this meaning, the word signifies the objects of the material culture. Entering in the field of translation studies, a radical terminological change must be enforced: 'realia', in fact, does not mean objects, but signs, words and, more precisely, those words signifying objects of the material culture, especially pertaining to a local culture. It is, therefore, necessary to distinguish realia-objects (mostly outside translation studies) and realia-words (mostly inside translation studies)." (Ischenko 274; Osimo "Logos Portal").

¹⁴ Bulgarian translators Sergej Vlahov and Sider Florin published in 1980 a whole book covering what is normally called 'untranslatable', their in-depth study coined the modern sense of the word 'realia' (see Osimo).

Children's adaptations

Despite not being and not sounding like a children's story, YDE is a children's adaptation of an adult book. Minor changes in language use have been made by the author, however, the changes identified, often concerning titles (but not confined to them) possibly aiming at captivating, and vivifying wit by using a more age-appropriate language, required some manipulation by the translator in an attempt to reproduce a similar effect. (See Appendix 2: Other Issues and Solutions)

The translation of realia

Osimo (*Manuale Traduttore* 112-113; "Logos Portal") describes several possible strategies for addressing realia in translation. The first option is a non-translation, i.e.

• Transcription (or transliteration in case of two different alphabets) – rewriting the same foreign word or creating its sound in the writing mode of the receiving culture.

Other strategies are:

- Creating a neologism (or calque) in the receiving culture literal translation of words/elements of the foreign utterance
- Appropriation adaptation of foreign realia by creating a word in the receiving language essentially based on the structure of the original word
- Fake/Pseudo/presumed calques use of another word from the issuing culture falsely presented as the original form of the realia element
- Addition of an adjective to assist in identifying the realia's origin
- Substitution replace the culturally specific element with an equally culturally specific element of the receiving culture
- Approximation (generalization, functional analogue, description, explanation, interpretation) rendering a vague/unspecified content
- Contextualization the translation of the systemic, relational meaning that would not be found in the dictionary. It represents an option when context is the dominating factor.

(Strategies adopted to address realia are summarised in Appendix 3)

2.3 Observing Choices

The underlining principle guiding translation choices — and particularly when dealing with realia — is that it is impossible to establish general rules; it is advisable to consider the advantages and disadvantages of possible strategies on a case-by-case basis (Osimo, *Manuale Traduttore* 113; "Logos Portal"). There are several elements that according to Osimo may determine the strategy to be adopted. These are:

- The type of text transcription/transliteration is currently preferred in fiction and nonfiction for reasons of clarity and intelligibility. Explanatory translation notes support transcriptions of informative texts.
- The importance of the realia in its natural context if the element is alien to the source culture, it must somehow be preserved because the foreignizing effect is intentional. If the element belongs to the source culture it becomes a foreignizing element in translation; its preservation is still recommended unless it becomes a hindrance in terms of understanding and actualization of the translated text function.

- The type of realia if they are commonly found in dictionaries, transcription is almost mandatory, the same applies to realia that can be misleading if translated (e.g. territorial, economic or political agencies like Chief Aboriginal Protector).
- Source and receiving cultures and their permeability to other languages there are considerable differences in the amount of foreign words between the dictionaries of different countries. Some cultures absorb more foreign words than others and, for many reasons (which may be historical, political, technology-related, etc.), some cultures export more words than others.
- The presence of interlingual homographs words written the same, but usually having a different meaning.
- Difference between the Model Reader of the source and receiving cultures levels of education between readers; popularity of the source language and publishing policies of the receiving culture.

Below is the summary of the strategies adopted to address the realia encountered when translating YDE (The percentage figures have been rounded off).

Number of Realia	Strategy	0/0
21	Transcription	38
19	Approximation	35
14	Neologism	25
1	Substitution	2
Total 55		100

Table 1. Translation strategies for Realia

A total of 55 realia were considered. 21 (slightly above 38% of the total) were transcribed. Some transcriptions have been supported by notes in a compiled glossary. Others are primarily illustration captions, hence visually supported or else, the immediate understanding of their meaning is not deemed indispensable to the main function of the text; on the contrary, readers are stimulated to carry out research according to their interests.

3. Discussion: Reading Experience vs Ethics

Translating a weighty text such as YDE became a research enquiry given that the characteristics of the text created a translation strategy conflict; fluidity and readability had to be negotiated in order to protect cultural specificity, an ethical stand that we consciously embraced. Consequently, the endeavour involves the seemingly impractical task of finding sufficiently adaptive solutions that enable the text to communicate in the target culture while retaining its essential 'Australianness,' and at the same time, learning, reflecting, observing and explaining the translation process.¹⁵

The pre-translation phase established that informative and persuasive, historical, educational children's text YDE could be rendered, due to differences in context, as the

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¹⁵ These are the criteria and standards for self-evaluation of our research: "criteria and standards feature in judging quality: technically, criteria are objective and descriptive (they identify what we expect to see), and standards are subjective and explanatory (they give opinions about how we would like things to be)" (McNiff 164). Criteria is transformed into standards when we establish how criteria are achieved, i.e.: I expect to produce a text that communicates to young Italian readers, but this is subject to preservation of cultural specificities.

informative children's nonfiction text L'OEPR. The latter implied a double loss in terms of function: the text's persuasiveness and its educational aspect. Both are context-induced – being a child in Australia at this time in human history – and are for obvious reasons impossible to compensate for. The new informative version – which can be intended as educational ¹⁶ albeit in a different way – considering the change in circumstances of the receiving context requires major support for comprehension. In other words, the Model Reader's ability to interpret the text for what it has been generated for is different for the translated text; outside the text's cultural space, different decoding instructions became necessary to allow the translated text to communicate. This resulted in compensations through a glossary and a number of explicitation strategies at the micro level.

In light of the modified communicating function and consistently with our ethical stance in favour of minimising "ethnocentric violence" (Venuti), Toury's 'initial norm' of 'adequacy' was established as a guide for macro and micro choices and strategies. Translation practice was aided by Osimo's theory. His vision of translation as a creative process, of cultures as living organisms in which similar sense is produced, inspired the creation of an Italian text, symbolically similar (rather than impossibly equivalent) to the Australian text with a potential of reciprocal cultural (ex)change.

Data collection, processing and analysis occurred during translation and revision. The first reverbalization concurred with substantial research into the realia of the text and decisions were made according to findings.

Solutions adopted for the main issues and the process that led to choices are discussed below.

Title

After giving significant thought to the title: *Young Dark Emu: A Truer History* we decided not to make any major changes without the author's consent. ¹⁷ We were enthralled by the Indigenous concept of the 'Emu in the Sky' (Kelly and Neale 147) and *Young Emu in the Sky* flowed smoothly in Italian. However, in Venuti's words:

Fluency in translation produces an effect of transparency, whereby the translated text is taken to represent the foreign author's personality or intention or the essential meaning of his text. Fluency thus assumes the concept of the human subject as a free, unified consciousness that transcends the limitations posed by language, biography and history and is the origin of meaning, knowledge and action. (187-188)

To retain the characteristics of the original as much as possible, we first created the title: *Il Giovane Dark Emù: una storia più vera*, adopting a mix of transcription and adaptation that

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¹⁶ It is educational because it introduces novelties in the child's life, however, it has to be taken into account that differently from the Australian text, it is not part of formal educational curricula, thus the Italian child may not be assisted by an adult in reading it.

¹⁷ As part of the thesis preliminaries, we made an attempt to contact Bruce Pascoe via email to inform him about our work, asking if we could contact him for advice or clarifications and an e-mail was also sent to the editor (Magabala Books). No further communication took place. Glowczewski and Lundberg (trans) argue, with reference to DE, that: "Pascoe does not comment on this mysterious title; rather, it is as if he is basing his argument on tacit knowledge common to early Australians. Any translation is difficult, but even more so when it comes to Indigenous concepts from traditions other than those of the dominant history of Western societies and languages." (84).

became misleading for the reader.¹⁸ Lastly, after trying a few other combinations,¹⁹ we settled for L'OEPR. The adjective preceding the noun in Italian describes the subject,²⁰ which capitalised becomes a proper noun. 'Oscuro' was preferred to 'scuro' because it conveys the idea of lack of light.²¹ Finally, 'Ragazzi' capitalised remarks that it is a book for youth.

Social and political realia

Four of the thirteen social and political realia were italicised and supported by notes in the glossary. The most complex and representative of the thought process behind decisions were:

• Aboriginal people – 'people' can be translated into Italian as follows:

Persone – plural of *persona* intended as an individual of the human species, without distinction of sex, age, social status.²²

Gente – indeterminate number of persons gathered in a place or otherwise considered collectively.²³

Popolo – group of individuals who share origins, language, religious and cultural traditions and laws, and form an ethnic and national group with its own identity and self-awareness, independently of political unity.²⁴

Inspired by Margherita Zanoletti's translation: *My People* | *La Mia Gente*, 'Aboriginal people' became 'Gente aborigena'. However, the emphasis sought by capitalization did not produce the same effect as the collocation 'mia gente'. Less of its possessive adjective, 'gente' was likely to acquire a negative connotation or at best, one of insignificance,²⁵ which was the opposite effect to the one we were seeking. Therefore, 'Aboriginal people' was mainly translated into 'popolo/i' aborigeno/i' according to semantics.

• *Country* – can be translated as:

Stato - state

Nazione – nation

Campagna – rural area

Patria - homeland

Paese - village

Paese – portion land, mostly cultivated and inhabited, distinguished by particular physical, climatic, economic or human characteristics.²⁶

¹⁸'Dark' in Italy mistakenly refers to the Gothic subculture born in Milan during the 1980s that brought together a group of young people who, dressed in a dark, and exaggeratedly emphasised style, refused to conform to the new cultural trend that in those years promoted hedonism. The collocation 'Giovane Dark' would have been misleading. Moreover, 'Young' in the Australian's text title, is likely to be referred to the book DE, which is an impossible correspondence in Italian due to the fact that there is no Italian version of it (yet).

¹⁹ 'L'Oscuro Emù: una storia più vera Ragazzi... (may have been too irregular in terms of language canons); 'L'Oscuro Emù: una storia più vera per Ragazzi' (can mislead the reader because 'history' and 'story' are homographs in Italian, therefore, it could be interpreted as 'a truer story for young readers').

²⁰ https://accademiadellacrusca.it/it/consulenza/sulla-posizione-dellaggettivo-qualificativo-in-italiano/92

²¹ https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/oscuro

²² https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/persona/

²³ https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/gente/

²⁴ https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/popolo/

²⁵ Garzanti's first definition of 'gente': people, others in general, especially as opposed to ourselves; an indefinite number of people considered collectively. Variations: 'genterella' (diminishing); 'gentaccia' (pejorative); 'gentucola' (derogatory). https://www.garzantilinguistica.it/ricerca/?q=gente

²⁶ https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/paese

'Paese' was capitalised when 'country' was capitalised, italicised and explained in the glossary. Thus marked, the word assumes a connotation of unfamiliarity, resembling the English version.

• Free settlers

To translate this collocation the neologism 'coloni volontari'²⁷ was created, italicised, and explained in the glossary. The literal translation 'coloni liberi' commonly refers to a specific category of tenants or farmers of the Roman Empire,²⁸ therefore it could be misleading.

• Chief Aboriginal Protector/Aboriginal Protector and Government Surveyor
Osimo (Manuale Traduttore 115; "Logos Portal") clearly states that it makes no sense
to translate "words indicating given territorial or economic or political agencies"
because even if some functions may coincide across cultures it easily becomes a
historical fallacy. He advocates transcription with explanatory notes. While in the
above case, we adhered to his recommendations, in another, 29 we settled for the
correspondence of the function to avoid unnecessary exoticism.

Geographic realia

Six of the nineteen geographic realia were glossed, of these, three are source realia. The observational data showed possible strategic inconsistencies, these are:

• Grain and grasses

'Grain', which in English refers to the seeds of plants (such as wheat, corn, and rice) that are used for food,³⁰ translates into the Italian 'cereale/i'. It is also a false friend, since 'grano' is the Italian word for 'wheat'. However, 'grains', intended as seeds/granules in general, corresponds to the Italian plural 'grani' in meaning. Hence, the apparent inconsistencies. We tried to use 'grani' when the meaning was not compromised especially because one of the cases was a subtitle and another a piece of information written in creative style.

The term 'grass' in the source text features solo, as well as in four different collocations, namely: grass heads, grass seeds, grasslands and grass people.³¹ It translates into the Italian 'erba', which however, is seldom associated with seeds³² or grain. Therefore, these terms were addressed case by case with varying terminology that created a similar sense.

• Known locations and common geographic nouns

No clear rule regulates the transposition of the proper names of foreign places (toponyms) into Italian, as shown by the variety of cases. Therefore, prevailing usage becomes the most suitable criterion for choosing the best form in each case (Manenti). Čerče and Haag praise the Italian translation of *Rabbit-Proof Fence* for retaining, in addition to toponyms, elements like river, lake, desert, beach, and similar; lamenting however, incomprehensible inconsistency throughout the text. The translator may have

²⁸ The collocation was found in scholarly historical works in Italian and as a transcribed realia in similar papers in languages other than Italian.

30 https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/grain

²⁷ Voluntary settlers

²⁹ 'Government surveyor'.

³¹ Grass people is classified as a social and political realia. It is included in the geographical realia discourse due to its belonging to the 'grass' terminology. It has been transcribed and included in the glossary.

³² With the exception of marijuana (in slang 'erba' or 'grass') seed which alerts on the risk of misleading the reader.

applied the above criterion of prevailing usage recommended by the Italian authoritative Accademia della Crusca.³³ Similarly, we translated 'Western Australia', while transcribing 'Queensland' according to common usage in Italian (Kinder and Savini 201). We translated elements like river, lake, etc. except for 'creek' which is found and explained in Italian dictionaries.³⁴

Ethnographic realia

Ethnographic realia were the most represented. Eight of them feature in the glossary. The strategies applied to address them are almost levelled (transcription exceeding by three that feature as source realia) except for one, the dubious solution for 'yabber, yabber'.

• *Yabber*, *yabber* is a source realia and the only case where a substituting strategy was implemented. The origin of this Australian word is traced back to the mid-1800s and the Collins online dictionary, ascribes it to the native Australian language *yabba* talk, probably influenced by jabber.³⁵ It occurs once in the text, as part of a quote from a settler's diary dated 1897. Because it was part of the description of a scene, to achieve a similar effect on the Italian reader, it was rendered with the international onomatopoeia 'bla, bla, bla', transforming (what we consider) a double realia³⁶ into a general, neutral element.

Evaluation and Learnings

Translating YDE into L'OEPR did not reveal to be in contrast with a translation strategy that pursues preservation of culture specificities. The latter was a choice we established in our capacity as translators, in virtue of personal values and in this particular case, due to not being subject to external (industry) pressure. According to our ethics, we worked through each translating issue, negotiating solutions that while not being able to find a perfect fit of one language into the other, created a space of exchange between two cultures, allowing the source text to communicate to a different culture through the realization of a new Model Reader, i.e. different decoding instructions that enable text actualization. This became the insight, the true learning: the question was not adaptation versus adequacy or, in Venuti's terms, domestication versus foreignization, pursued by adopting a number of translation strategies considered 'appropriating' versus a number of strategies that preserve cultural specificities. Words don't work like numbers, (although numbers facilitate observation, reasoning and insight). The endeavour was rather, conveying what was identified as the dominant issue, i.e. the content of a text that challenges the conventions of foreign literature in the receiving culture, a choice of dissidence (Venuti, A History of Translation 125), that nonetheless required adaptation. "Yet the domesticating work on the foreign text can be a foreignizing intervention, pitched to question existing cultural hierarchies." (Venuti, A History of Translation 267)

Further insight is likely to derive from observing the text live in the receiving culture, i.e., how it is perceived by young Italian readers. However, that is yet another research project, and another research cycle.

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³³ Known also as 'la Crusca' and founded in 1582 in Florence, the Academy is dedicated to the study and preservation of the Italian national language.

³⁴ As discussed earlier (p. 49) translation of an element commonly found in dictionaries of the receiving language is not recommended. 'Creek' is found in Treccani Enciclopedia online which explains it appropriately: *in Australia, the term is used almost exclusively for temporary waterways*. https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/creek

³⁵ https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/yabber

³⁶ Source and target realia.

Conclusions

Surrendering to the required sacrifices, compromises and negotiations was revealed to be the utmost ethical practice since ultimately, when we established – through text analysis – that part of the original communicating function of the text was 'lost in context' before being lost in translation, we committed to the remaining communicating function, the informative – diversely educational – content. It became clear that the priority was the actualization of this new function and to achieve it we had to enable the text's 'rich points' to operate. Therefore, the choice to preserve cultural specificities went beyond the preservation of foreign elements at all costs, it came about through meticulous consideration of each element, prioritising the outcome case by case, consistently with the new communicating function (or dominant). In other words, the practice revealed that preserving the source culture's elements was not in itself protective of cultural specificity, rather it could become tantamount to its opposite. Practice informed by research operates in meta-thinking mode: tiny unperceivable and unperceived processes that continuously "shuttle from the mental map to the verbal map" (Osimo, "Logos Portal") avoiding deception, oversimplification, and preserving the golden thread that keeps together the author's motifs.

According to Bishop "translation is a competitive sport" and this is how improvement comes about. An ethically informed translation approach to Indigenous Australian children's literature into Italian (L'OEPR), lends itself to comparative studies, smoothing the path of Indigenous Australian literature translations and perhaps for – the longed-for – translation of DE into Italian.

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Appendix 1 Summary of YDE's Realia Arranged by Categories

	Geographic realia	Ethnographic realia	Social and Political realia	
1	Aboriginal/Contemporary	Blackfellow	Aboriginal people	
	Grain Belt			
2	Bush	Bush bananas	Book of the year award	
3	Colonial bush	Bush tomatoes	Chief Aboriginal	
			Protector/Aboriginal	
			Protector	
4	Creek	Bushels	Convicts/ escaped convict/	
			emancipated convict	
5	Grain	Bushman	Country	
6	Grass heads	Coaching	District	
7	Grass seeds	Corroboree	Free settlers	
8	Grass, grasses	Creator spirit	Gentleman's estate	
9	Grasslands	Dancing grounds	Government Surveyor	
10	Grinding well and	Direct storage	Grass people	
	Sharpening grooves			
11	Mounds	Fire sticks	Indigenous writer's Prize	
12	Native grasses	Fisheries	Lieutenant	
13	Pasture	Gum	Premier's Literary Awards	
14	Perch	Harvest of moths		
15	Spinifex	Humpies/humpy		
16	Vanilla lilies	Murnong/ myrnongs/		
		munyoura/ munyeroo/		
		nardoo		
17	Wattle trees	Pannin		

18	Yam daisy	Pointed dome house		
19	Yam seed head	Stockpiling		
20		Troughs		
21		Warran		
22		'yabber yabber'		
23		Yam		
	Total 19	Total 23	Total 13	Total
	(34%)	(42%)	(24%)	55

Appendix 2

Other Issues and Solutions

Translation	Comment
L'accaparramento della	Difference in immediacy of concept
terra	
Futuri sostenibili	'Futuro sostenibile' (singular rather than plural)
	would be more common
Terra vacante	Obsolete terminology
	L'accaparramento della terra Futuri sostenibili

Appendix 3 Summary of the solutions and corresponding strategies adopted for translating YDE's realia³⁷

	Realia	Solution	Strategy
1	Aboriginal people	Popolo/i aborigeno/i; gli	Approximation or
		aborigeni; persone aborigene	contextualization
2	Aboriginal/Contemporary	Grain Belt [Cintura dei Grani]	Transcription and
	Grain Belt	Aborigena; Grain Belt [Cintura	neologism/calque
		dei Grani] Contemporanea	
3	Blackfellow	Blackfellow ³⁸	Transcription
4	Book of the year award	Book of the year award	Transcription
5	Bush	Bush	Transcription
6	Bush bananas	Banane del bush	Neologism
7	Bush tomatoes	Pomodori del bush	Neologism
8	Bushels	Bushel	Transcription
9	Bushman	Bushman	Transcription
10	Chief Aboriginal	Chief Aboriginal	Transcription
	Protector/Aboriginal protector	Protector/Aboriginal protector	
11	Coaching	Accantonamento	Neologism
12	Colonial bush	Bush coloniale	Neologism
13	Convicts/ escaped convict/	Galeotti; prigionieri; evaso; ex	Approximation
	emancipated convict	detenuto	(functional analogue)
14	Corroboree	Corroboree	Transcription

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³⁷ The table includes all the elements that are considered context-specific. Several elements do not pose translation concerns (e.g. Nos. 13, 17, 20, 22, 34, 36, 40, 45) as suggested by the fact that they were not discussed above. However, as context-specific elements they are part of the observed data when reflecting, illustrating and accounting for the translation process.

³⁸ Italicised items correspond to those of the translated text, i.e. words explained in the text's glossary.

15	Country	Paese	Neologism
16	Country Creator Spirit; creator Spirit	Spirito Creatore; Spirito Emù	Neologism
10	Emu	creatore	Neologisiii
17	Creek	Creek	Transcription
18	Dancing grounds	Teatro di danza	Approximation
10	Daneing grounds	Teatro di danza	(functional analogue)
19	Direct storage	Conservazione diretta	Neologism
20	District	Distretto	Substitution
21	Fire stick	Asticelle accendi-fuoco	Approximation
21	THE SHEK	Astreche accendi-tuoco	(description)
22	Fisheries	Allevamenti	Approximation
22	1 Isheries	7 the varienti	(generalization)
23	Free settlers	Coloni volontari	Neologism
24	Gentleman's estate	La tenuta del gentiluomo	Neologism
25	Government Surveyor	Agrimensore governativo	Neologism
26	Grain/grains	Cereali, grani	Approximation
20	Cam Branio	Coloni, Brain	(functional analogue)
27	Grass, grasses	Piante erbacee	Approximation
_,	Grass, grasses		(explicitation)
28	Grass heads	Spighette	Neologism
29	Grasslands	Praterie	Approximation
			(functional analogue)
30	Grass people	Grass people	Transcription
31	Grass seeds	Semi delle <i>piante erbacee</i> ;	Approximation
		Sementi graminacee	(explicitation,
			generalization)
32	Grinding well and sharpening	Pozzo per la macina e scanalature	Approximation
	grooves	per l'affilatura	(explanation)
33	Gum	Eucalipto	Approximation
			(interpretation)
34	Harvest of moths	Raccolta	Approximation
			(generalization)
35	Humpies/humpy	humpy	Transcription
36	Indigenous writer's Prize	Indigenous writer's Prize	Transcription
37	Lieutenant	Tenente	Approximation
			(functional analogue)
38	Mounds	Cumuli	Approximation
			(functional analogue)
39	Murnong/murrnong;	Murrnong myrrnong; munyoura/	Transcription
	myrnongs/ munyoura/	munyeroo/ nardoo	
	munyeroo/ nardoo		
40	Native grasses	Piante erbacee native	Neologism
41	Pannin	Pannin	Transcription
42	Pasture	Pascoli	Approximation
4.5	D 1		(functional analogue)
43	Perch	Perch	Transcription
44	Pointed dome house	Casa a cupola acuminata	Neologism
45	Premier's Literary Awards	Premier's Literary Awards	Transcription
46	Spinifex	Spinifex	Transcription
47	Stockpiling	Stoccaggio	Neologism
48	Troughs	Abbeveratoi	Approximation
			(functional analogue)

49	Vanilla lily/lilies	Vanilla lily	Transcription
50	Warran	Warran	Transcription
51	Wattle trees	Alberi di acacia	Approximation
			(generalization)
52	'yabber yabber'	ʻbla bla bla'	Substitution
53	Yam	Yam	Transcription
54	Yam daisy	Yam daisy	Transcription
55	Yam seed head	Cima di yam daisy	Approximation
			(explanation)