

**ECOLITERACY IN TRANSLATION:  
VERBAL AND VISUAL TRANSFER IN THE ITALIAN VERSION OF EMILIA DZIUBAK'S  
PICTUREBOOK *DRAKA EKONIEBORAKA***

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**ABSTRACT:** In the last decade there has been a surge of interest in Polish picturebooks in Italy, prompted by the international success of Aleksandra and Daniel Mizieliński's *Maps*. This article examines the attitude of Italian publishers towards the strategies used for picturebook translation, taking as a case study Emilia Dziubak's *Draka Ekonieboraka* (in Italian *Piccola guida per ecoschiappe*), a book which tries to introduce small children to the topic of environmental protection. A close comparison between two versions shows that the changes involve both the verbal and in the visual components of the picturebook. In fact, the Italian edition not only takes many liberties with the contents and the register of the text, but it also heavily modifies the original graphic layout and illustrations. I examine both the motives and the effects of this shift.

**KEYWORDS:** Ecoliteracy, Polish Picturebooks, Translation, Emilia Dziubak, Polish Children's Literature in Italy

### **1.Introduction**

Since the beginning of the new millennium, picturebooks have been experiencing a period of almost exponential growth. Today the array of available picturebooks is truly dazzling and caters to audiences of all ages, covers virtually any genre or topic and displays an astonishing variety of artistic styles. Furthermore, there has been a progressive blurring of boundaries between picturebooks and other book formats, revealing a growing interaction with digital media and the increasing influence of genres like comics, manga and video games. Equally important have been the changes in the mechanisms used for the marketing and distribution of picturebooks. The advent of Web 2.0 tools made it far easier for the publishing houses to scout for new talent and titles, and for artists to showcase their work using Internet platforms such as Behance or Dribbble, among many others. In the globalised world of virtual communication, nationality or geographical distance are no longer the hindrance they used to be. A couple of years ago Bettina Kümmerring-Meibauer pointed out that the European picturebook market is still dominated by English-language works:

Picturebooks from countries such as Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, or the Eastern European countries are hardly known outside their respective national borders, although the artistic quality of many of these picturebooks is impressive. (2015, p. 250).

However, while international publishers may have been a bit slow to change their long-established editorial routines, they did begin to take notice of the picturebooks coming from certain previously overlooked countries, like Poland.

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## 2. Polish picturebooks today and once upon a time

After the disastrous 1980s, when the political and economic crisis of the communist regime brought the Polish children's book market to the brink of disaster, and then the chaotic transition of the 1990s, marked by the massive import of cheap, colourful low-quality coprints, the publishing industry in Poland began to find its feet at the beginning of the new millennium. The first decade saw the proliferation of small, independent publishing houses, the so-called "lilliputians" (Biernacka-Licznar et al., 2018), which focused specifically on offering innovative, avant-garde picturebooks for very young children. Between 2000 to 2006 publishing houses like Ezop (2000), Muchomor (2002), Hokus-Pokus (2003), Fro9 (2004), Dwie Siostry and Wytwórnia (2005) and Format (2006) entered the field. Initially they relied mostly on translations and reprints of classics of Polish illustrated books, but before long became very active in promoting the work of a new generation of Polish artists (e.g. Jan Bajtlik, Katarzyna Bogucka, Agata Dudek, Emilia Dziubak, Małgorzata Gurowska, Marta Ignerska, Aleksandra and Daniel Mizieliński and Anna Niemierko). The books they published soon earned the appreciation of readers and critics alike, and started winning awards, including international ones like the Bologna Ragazzi Award and Bratislava Biennial Illustration Awards. The success of these independent publishers revitalised the Polish children's book market, not least because it also prompted big publishing houses to re-orient their printing policies toward quality books for children.

The buzz generated by prestigious awards made picturebooks from Poland into one of the most publicised Polish export products on the book market, successfully attracting the interest of foreign publishers. Translation contracts started to appear around the end of the first decade of the century, and since then, their flow has steadily intensified. So far, the biggest international success was obtained by Aleksandra and Daniel Mizieliński's *Maps*<sup>1</sup> (2012), translated in 36 languages and printed in over 3 million copies. The talented duo of young illustrators (both were born in 1982) produced more award-winning books in international circulation, the most recent of these (*Which way to Yellowstone?*) received a special mention at the 2021 Bologna Ragazzi Award and has already been translated into 11 languages.<sup>2</sup>

Other young Polish artists also launched their international careers in this period. Marta Ignerska, born in 1978, had by 2012 seen her illustrations appearing in thirty-one countries<sup>3</sup>; Emilia Dziubak, born in 1982, saw her very first work, a cookbook for children *Gratka dla małego niejadka* (*A treat for a little fussy eater*, 2011) included in the list of 100 most beautiful books of the world at the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the South Korea Picture Books Awards, after which her career has skyrocketed; Jan Bajtlik, born in 1989, was catapulted onto the international scene with his first book *Alphadoodler: The Activity Book That Brings Letters to Life*, which won the Bologna Ragazzi Award in 2015. There are also some artists

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<sup>1</sup> The titles of the Polish picturebooks translated into English are given in that language; otherwise, they are indicated in Polish with my translation in brackets.

<sup>2</sup> <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/16nkTlyxoO1aIGU4kYoaRUDC7cc7RXjIBJ6cDV3M-Vbl/edit#gid=0>

<sup>3</sup> <https://culture.pl/en/artist/marta-ignerska> (Accessed: 16 December 2021)

of the previous generation who penetrated international markets, such as Iwona Chmielewska (born in 1960), who won the main Bologna Ragazzi Award (2011, 2013 and 2020) three times and is massively popular in South Korea; and Piotr Socha (born in 1966), awarded the prize for best scientific book in the 'children's book' category at *Wissenschaftsbuch des Jahres 2017* in Vienna for his book *Bees*, rapidly translated in numerous languages, including Hungarian, Greek and Icelandic.

The fact that illustrators belonging to different generations attracted international attention roughly at the same time shows that the success of a given artist or picturebook is determined not so much by their effective quality or originality as by a series of extratextual factors related to the mechanisms of promotion and distribution on the global children's book market. This becomes even more evident when we consider that the current wave of bold experimental picturebooks is not a novelty in the Polish context, as the tradition of avant-garde books for children but actually goes back as far as the 1930s in this country, flourishing especially from the late 1950s to the late 1970s, when the so-called Polish School of Illustration developed. Strong state patronage combined with an impressive number of talented artists interested in creating beautiful illustrations and experimenting with typography, modern visual language and new modes of expression meant that many picturebooks appeared on the market that even today can surprise with their originality (Cackowska et al., 2016). Starting at the end of 1950s, Polish artists such as Bohdan Butenko, Janusz Grabiański, Józef Wilkoń and others won awards and distinctions at notable international competitions (Biennial of Illustration in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia; International Book Exhibition IBA in Leipzig, Germany; Triennial of Applied Arts in Milan, Italy; The Most Beautiful Books of the World in Frankfurt, Germany, and many others).

Despite this, picturebooks from Poland never found their way to foreign publishers, except in Soviet Bloc countries. The only Polish illustrator who managed to make a truly international career at that time was Janusz Grabiański (1929-1976), who in 1958 began to collaborate with Austrian Ueberreuter Publishing House, which opened the door to other foreign markets. Grabiański won recognition throughout the world for his striking and delicate watercolour images, which were paired mainly with classic texts for children such as those by Perrault, Andersen or the brothers Grimm. From that point of view, his artwork was close to the traditional idea of children's illustration. This may be why he was so successful in the then rather conservative world of international children's book publishing, while his more avant-garde oriented colleagues were not.

### **3. Polish illustrators and picturebooks in Italy**

Grabiański's illustrations were also known in Italy, although they arrived there indirectly through Austrian, American and French coprints. Generally, however, throughout the whole of the twentieth century, the import of Polish youth literature in Italy was very slim. In the 1960s and 1970s, Italian publishers, looking for new titles to offer as school reading for younger teenagers, became fleetingly interested in Polish youth novels (Woźniak, 2020, p. 23), almost always in indirect translation; but this trend dried up in the 1980s. Only

towards the first decade of the new century did Italian publishers again become interested in Polish children's books, and when they did, their attention was attracted almost exclusively to picturebooks<sup>4</sup>. The new trend started around 2008 when the Bologna Ragazzi Award for Children's Poetry was given to the Polish picturebook *Tuwim. Wiersze dla dzieci* (Tuwim. Poems for children), but it gained speed in the second decade of the century. In just ten years, between 2010 and 2021, thirty Polish picturebooks were released in Italy, which is more than the total number of Italian translations of youth literature from Poland in the whole twentieth century.

Polish picturebooks have appeared on the catalogues of both big and small Italian publishing houses, although there are some differences in the titles chosen for translation. Influential publishers, such as Mondadori Electa, have invested in bestsellers, starting in 2012 with Mizieliński's *Maps*. In truth, three Mizieliński's picturebooks<sup>5</sup> appeared in Italy even earlier (2010), but as they were published by a small publishing house (Comma 22), they failed to attract the audience's attention. When they were released by Mondadori Electa, on the other hand, they became very popular, and the publishing house went on to release an enlarged edition of the atlas (66 countries versus the initial 44) and other titles by the same authors, such as *Under Water, Under Earth* (2015) and *Tu jesteśmy!* (as *Voi siete qui!* 2016). In 2016 and 2018, respectively, Mondadori also published two of Piotr Socha's internationally acclaimed educational picturebooks, *Bees: a Honeyed History* and *Trees: A Rooted History*, though these did not match the popularity of Mizieliński's books. Smaller publishers' choices seem more random, encouraged chiefly by the easily obtainable grants from the Polish Book Institute<sup>6</sup> and by accolades received at the Bologna Ragazzi Award. However, once they begin a collaboration with a given author, they tend to stick to them rather than look for new openings: for example, TopiPittori<sup>7</sup> has specialised in books illustrated by Joanna Concejo, while Macro Edizioni in 2018 and 2019 published four of Marcin Brykczyński's educational picturebooks. The Rome-based Sinnos<sup>8</sup>, founded in 1990 and which specialises exclusively in books for children, with a special eye for intercultural topics, has so far published six translations of Polish picturebooks, all illustrated by the same artist, Emilia Dziubak. Scrolling down the list of translations, it is also evident that Italian

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<sup>4</sup>This new-found interest coincides with the general tendency of the Italian book market, where books for children, especially pre-schoolers, always become the more important product of the publishing industry. Between 1991 and 2013, the proportion of picturebooks on the Italian children's book market rose from 19% to 25% (Garavini, 2017, pp. 90-91)

<sup>5</sup>*C.A.S.E, D.E.S.I.G.N e Scovalo!*

<sup>6</sup>The Polish Book Institute, established in 2004, launched ©POLAND Translation Program, which supports foreign publishers who want to translate Polish books. Not all the requests are granted, but youth literature is given priority in the distribution of funds. In fact, almost all the Italian translations of children's books from Poland that appeared in the last decade were published with the financial help of the Institute.

<sup>7</sup>TopiPittori, established in 2004, publishes around 15 new titles annually (<https://www.milkbook.it/case-editrici-topipittori/>) (Accessed: 16 December 2021)

<sup>8</sup>Sinnos publishes around 23-25 books annually (see <https://www.milkbook.it/intervista-alla-casa-editrice-sinnos/>) which puts it, in fact, in the category of the medium publishers, given that the small publishers in Italy are considered those who publish less than ten books a year (Garavini, 2017, p.89).

publishers have a clear preference for nonfiction picturebooks, avoiding poetry and narrative stories<sup>9</sup>.

#### 4. Case study: *Draka ekonieboraka* by Emilia Dziubak

Emilia Dziubak's *Draka ekonieboraka* (the title could be roughly translated as “Eco-Dummy’s tribulations”), first published in Poland in 2012 and in Italy in 2015 as *Piccola guida per ecoschiappe* (Figure 1), is perfect material for a case study in translation for at least two reasons. Firstly, it belongs to the category of nonfiction educational picturebooks, which are preferred by Italian publishers when it comes to translating Polish texts for children. Secondly, it represents a typical example of how visual and verbal transfer in picturebooks is approached by small and medium Italian publishers, who are in the majority when it comes to the translations from Polish. Finally, although the visual component of *Draka Ekonieboraka* is undoubtedly the book’s primary asset, the text is also important and nuanced, intertwined with the illustrations in a very organic way, which means that the challenge for translation is somewhat more demanding than it would be in less wordy picturebooks.

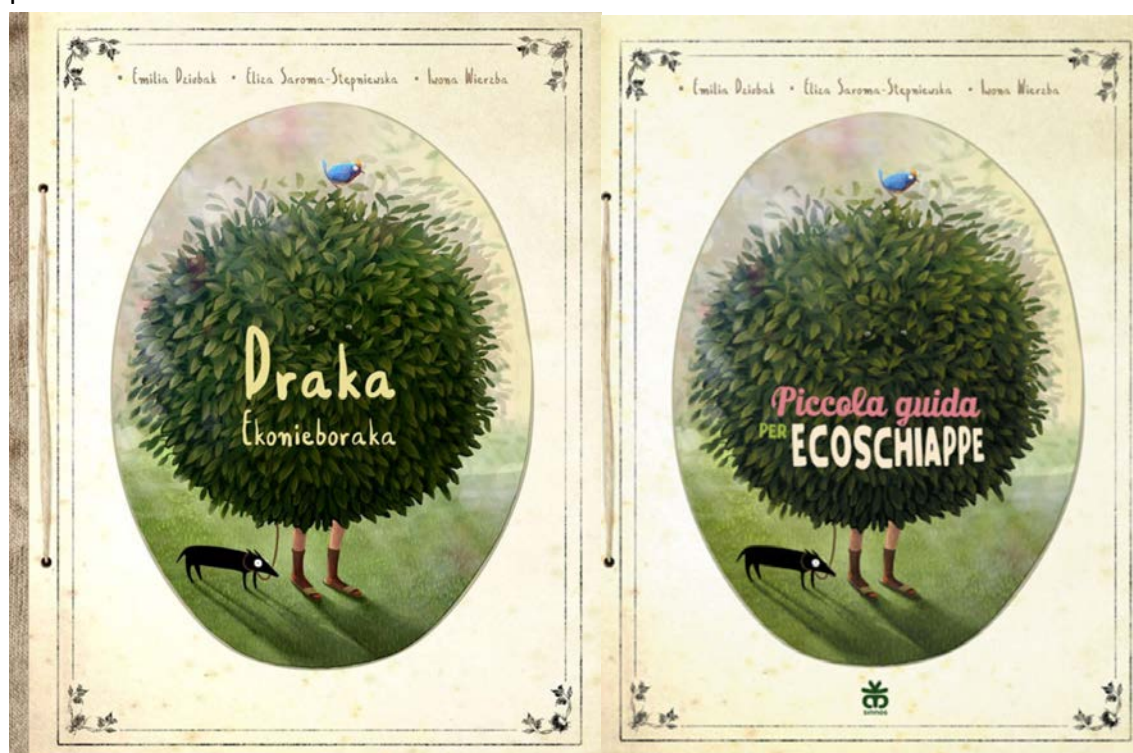


Figure 1 The covers of the Polish and Italian versions of Emilia Dziubak's *Draka Ekonieboraka*

*Draka Ekonieboraka* deals with the very up-to-date topic of environmental education or “ecoliteracy”. Probably best appreciated by children in the over-5 age group, the book tasks itself with explaining fundamental concepts of environmental protection and encouraging

<sup>9</sup> There are, of course (rare) exceptions, such as *Tuwim per tutti*, a volume of nursery rhymes by the most famous Polish poet for children, published by Orecchio Acerbo in 2012, or Renata Piątkowska's *All my mums*, a tale about Irena Sendler, who saved more than 2000 kids from the Warsaw ghetto during World War II (Giuntina, 2019).

its young audience to develop ecological attitudes. To achieve this goal, the text combines two layers of narrative, written by two separate authors, Eliza Saroma-Stępniewska and Iwona Wierzba.

The title *Ekonieborak* (Eco-Dummy) comes to life in a series of scenes that show the main character's blatant disregard for the environment. Each of them is followed by some information and data given by *Profesor Sumienie* (Professor Conscience). All the situations depicted in the book are related to details of everyday life that will be familiar to children in any industrialised country. Eco-Dummy squanders water in the bathroom, puts the washing machine on with only a few items inside, buys too many products in the supermarket and then just throws them away. He does not recycle trash and uses far too much electricity. In the street, he does not clean up after his dog and does not use waste bins. He drives a four-by-four in town and takes the car even if he only needs a newspaper from the nearby shop. In all, nine short scenes illustrate the protagonist's deplorable attitudes, which predictably land him in trouble: the water stops running when he is in the middle of the bath; he sits on the grass just where his dog left its poop; the food in the refrigerator goes bad.

It is important to point out that the Eco-Dummy is an adult, depicted in Emilia Dziubak's illustrations as a middle-aged male with a rather prominent beer-belly, dressed shabbily in a T-shirt, shorts and sandals (in two images worn with socks – a classic fashion faux-pax often seen in Poland), and with facial hair that vaguely evokes Lech Wałęsa<sup>10</sup>. In short, he is a typical Polish man whom many children might associate with their own daddy (Figure 2). His actions speak for themselves, as do the mishaps caused by his mindlessness. There are few explicit pedagogical comments thorough the text, disguised mostly as direct advice to the protagonist, who responds with contempt ("To segregate trash? Boring!"), but it is left mainly to the readers (Bell, 2001, p.141) to understand why his behaviour is wrong. Information and advice given by the Professor Conscience contextualises environmental problems, presenting some statistics in a clear and easy-to-grasp way, made more suggestive by the accompanying illustrations. For example, the data about the quantity of trash produced in a year by an average European family (about one tonne) is associated with the image of a family standing on an elephant (also weighing on average about one tonne) (il. 3).

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<sup>10</sup> Leader of the Solidarity movement in the 1980s and first democratically elect president of Poland in the post-Soviet era.



Figure 2 (left) Emilia's Dziubak title *Ekonieborak*

Figure 3 (right) Visual illustration of the amount of trash produced annually by an average European family

The book's ending shows the transformation of Eco-Dummy, who recognises his errors and, in the "Ecologist's Song", declares his newfound maturity and environmental awareness. The last page shows Eco-Dummy looking in the mirror and seeing in it the reflection of Professor Conscience. The image comes with an appeal: "The world around you is full of problems? Don't wait, act now! What can you do to change the world? Ask your own conscience!". Of course, the message is directed towards the readers, but as it is also cleverly correlated with the image, it does not sound patronising.

The didactic intent of the book is spelt out more clearly in two mini-introductions that precede the text. The first one, placed before the title page, entices the reader with the question, "who is *Ekonieborak*?" (Who is Eco-Dummy?)<sup>11</sup> (the neologism is a bit ambiguous, and its meaning will not necessarily be immediately obvious to a child) and suggests that everyone has met someone like him already. The second foreword ("Dear Adults and Dear Children"), set after the title page, is more explicit. It recognises the dual audience of children (as the prime addressees) and adults (as readers or mediators). It points out that eco-dummies live among us, indeed could be our cousins or neighbours, and that we too might have some ecological shortcomings on our conscience. Expressing their hope that the book will become an inspiration for a pro-environmental attitude, the authors exhort: "Let us laugh at ourselves. Let our children laugh at the adults!".

Judging by the unanimously positive online reviews written by parents and critics, the ecological message of *Draka Ekonieboraka* clearly resonates with both adults and

<sup>11</sup> All quotes from the book in my translation, M.W.



children. “One of my 5-year-old daughter’s favourite books”; “both my sons love it”; “we all laugh out loud reading it”; “This book stole my heart”; “Even if I am almost thirty, I learnt a lot from this book”: these and similar statements abound in the reviews, which call the book “excellent”, “phenomenal” or even “genius”. Many parents point out that their children felt inspired to embrace pro-ecological behaviour by *Draka Ekonieboraka*, and that some even began to display a critical attitude towards their parents, calling them *Ekonieborak* when they were guilty of some ecological misdemeanour. All considering, Dziubak’s picturebook successfully fosters at least the first three of the four key aspects of ecoliteracy listed by Muthukrishnan (2019, p. 20), namely cognition (the ability to envision the long-term effects of current environmental action), emotion (a connection with and empathy toward living creatures) and action (behaviour directed towards preserving the environment)<sup>12</sup>.

## **5. Translating ecoliteracy: from *Ekonieborak* to *Echoschiappa***

### **5.1 A picturebook in translation**

All scholars agree that the specificity of the picturebook lies in its composite nature and the interaction between the visuals (illustrations and graphic layout) and the text (Kümmerling, 2018, p.3). Picturebooks have been called a polyphonic form of art in which verbal, visual and aural modes meet (Oittinen, 2017, p. 463). In that, they differ from illustrated books where the images enrich the text and interact with it in different ways but are not an integral part of it, to the extent that new editions may come with a different set of illustrations. The compound word picturebook, on the other hand, presupposes the interdependence of visual and verbal, which naturally raises challenges for translation.

Some of the issues faced by translators of picturebooks are similar to those encountered in the translation of any book for children, such as the rendition of culturally specific items. However, in the case of picturebooks, the translator has also to consider the visual context and layout. The translator should be able to understand and interpret the meaning of the book’s nonverbal elements to appropriately recreate the interplay between word and image and avoid discrepancies between the two dimensions. Moreover, since the visual assets of the picturebook takes precedence over its verbal content, there are a number of technical constraints operating on the translation. In what follows, I will examine the translation challenges presented by *Draka Ekonieboraka* and describe how they have been dealt with in its Italian translation.

### **5.2 Translating the text**

As the topic of environmental education is universal, we might expect that would be relatively easy to translate into other languages and cultures. However, the Polish authors wanted to depict Eco-Dummy’s misadventures as realistically as possible, which means that some of the everyday details inserted into the descriptions are bound to be culturally

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<sup>12</sup> The fourth is spiritual connection (awe and admiration for the natural world).



specific. For example, when Eco-Dummy goes shopping, he predictably chooses products such as *kajzerka* (a typical small roll of bread) or *wędlina* (cold cuts). He lives in a *blok* (block of flats of recent construction), buys his food in a *warzywniak* (small greengrocer), and his dog is called *Azor*. The specificity of this kind of items lies not so much in the things themselves as in the associations they conjure in the mind of Polish audience: *blok* is a defining element of the urban landscape in Polish cities; sandwiches with butter and ham are part of the everyday diet; *Azor* is the traditional name for a dog in Polish primers. Some specific expressions also appear, such as *kajet* (an old word for an exercise-book, likely to be remembered by the parents) or *basior* (male wolf). Visually, there are some allusions to the Polish context: in one of the images there appears a mermaid, the symbol of the Polish capital, Warsaw; and in Eco-Dummy's bathroom, there is a postcard with the name *Bałtyk* (Baltic Sea) written on it. One could argue that the landscapes and interiors portrayed in the book have a vaguely Polish look, as well. And then there is the protagonist himself, who, as already mentioned, has the appearance of an average middle-aged Polish male.

Nevertheless, none of these elements are essential to the central theme of environmental protection, and the culturally specific items could easily be replaced with equivalent expressions in the target language. For example, when we see Eco-Dummy taking his dog for a walk, with the suggestion that it is a sunny spring day after the snow has melted (not a circumstance that children from milder climates would relate to), a little adjustment to the text could take care of the problem. As for the visual component, Emilia Dziubak's illustrations are funny and colourful enough to be universally entertaining, and their cultural connotations are not pronounced enough to become a hindrance in the transfer to another national context.

A more significant challenge lies in the style and format of the narration about Eco-Dummy's mishaps. They are all told in rhyme, a dominant form in all Polish books for small children, whatever their topic. The language also has a colloquial flavour, with numerous diminutives (*nocka*, *kropelka*, *wiaterek*, *spacerek*, *śnieżek*, *trawka*, *serek*, *chlebek*, *karteczka*, *domek* and others) and familiar expressions (like *warzywniak* instead of *sklep warzywny* for greengrocer; *terenówka* instead of *samochód terenowy* for four-by-four, or *kumpel* instead of *kolega* for friend) typical of Polish oral speech. There are also numerous interjections (such as *Myk!* *Rryms!* *Hop!* *Retry!*) which all makes for a very pleasant narrative when read aloud; indeed, several parents pointed out in their web reviews that even their three- or four-year-olds, who were not able to comprehend statistics and data presented in the informative parts of the book, were charmed with the story told in verse. Finally, there is also the problem of the protagonist's name. The *nieborak* of the neologism *Ekonieborak* does not translate easily. It does not indicate an evil or stupid person, but rather someone too naïve or foolish for their own good, a bit like a "poor soul". At the same time, given that the word is not used very widely, it is probable that a child won't know it, thus rendering the neologism more intriguing.

*Draka Ekonieboraka*, published in Italy in 2015, was the second of six Emilia Dziubak's books to be released by Sinnos publisher from Rome<sup>13</sup>. It was translated by the Polish native speaker Marta Szuba (her only foray into translation for children). The title chosen for the Italian edition is *Piccola guida per ecoschiappe* (A small guide to eco-dummies), which looks like an obvious attempt to capitalize on the success of the *Diary of Wimpy Kid*, which was published in Italy as *Diario di una Schiappa*<sup>14</sup>. The idea of naming *Ekonieborak* an *ecoschiappa* is inspired, because it conveys the same vibe of helplessness and playful commiseration evoked by the Polish word. However, the same cannot be said of the title as a whole. While the Polish book's didactic content is subtle and amusing, poking fun at the adults and making the children feel that they can be smarter than they are, *Draka Ekonieboraka* is much more heavy-handed. The title not only makes the didactic intent explicit, but also suggests that the eco-dummies are the addressees (the children) themselves. This is reinforced by the blurb on the back cover (absent from the Polish edition):

Are you eco-dummies? If so, this book is for you. Among washing machines, socks and jars, you will learn everything you need to know about waste, consumption, things to do and not to do so that you will transform yourself in eco heroes.

Of the two forewords in the Polish edition, the second one, crucial to the book's message, has been eliminated. The first one was retained, but whereas the Polish text simply invites the reader to open the book and discover who is the mysterious *Ekonieborak*, the Italian version somehow manages to transform the text into a warning – “Browse this book but beware: eco-dummies are contagious” – which makes it sound more like advice against reading it than encouragement to open it.

As far as the text is concerned, Professor Conscience's information and data have been translated without significant alterations, though this does not mean that the translation is scrupulous. One might have expected certain changes due to the need to fit the verbal message into the visual context (the Italian language needs more words to express the same content, which means a longer text). However, such considerations did not seem to bother the translator, who did not hesitate to add more lines in translation, even if it meant using a smaller font or putting the text very close to the image. The data relating to the Polish context was not adapted to the Italian context but replaced with generic information or simply eliminated. For example, the Polish version informs us that the penalty for not picking up dog poop is 200 zloty but in the Italian book, we are told only that there is a “hefty fine”. The information that the people in Poland use 1.3 million plastic bags a year has disappeared utterly, although looking closely at the Italian edition, it is possible to discern a vague trace of the speech bubble on the illustration where it was

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<sup>13</sup> Others are: *Chi vuole un abbraccio?* 2014, 2018; *Sorridi!* 2015; *Io sono drago*, 2016; *Per sempre amici*, Roma 2019; *Amore di mamma* 2020.

<sup>14</sup> It should be pointed out, however, that in Italian, *schiazza* does not really evoke the English term ‘wimpy’, but rather someone clumsy or blundering, a klutz.

placed in the original. On the other hand, the Italian text adds some didactic interjections aimed directly at the young addressees. The simple advice “take a shower rather than a bath” in the Italian version was rendered as “Instead of taking a bath (and squandering hundreds of litres of water to fill the bath tub) take a shower”. While the Polish text recommends: “learn the colours of the recycling bins”, the Italian version pontificates: “do you remember the colours of the recycling bins or, just like mister Eco-Dummy, would you prefer to have a single purple bin?” (there are no purple bins in Italy nor any purple bins in Emilia Dziubak’s illustrations, so the suggestion is a bit puzzling).

However, while the translator took many liberties in the rendition of the informative part of the book, it is the narrative about Eco-Dummy that suffered the most radical transformation (or deformation). First of all, there is no rhyme. The text has been changed into a diary of *Mister Ecoschiappa*’s typical day, organised according to the hourly schedule (Figure 4). For reading-aloud purposes, the Italian text is still readable, but the rhythm has gone, as has much of the performative quality of the Polish version.



Figure 4 The layout of the text in the Polish and in the Italian versions of the book

The contents superficially match the Polish narrative, but the Italian text is essentially a free rewriting of the original one. The translator has modified, replaced or simply omitted all the elements that are for some reason considered inappropriate for the Italian audience. In some cases, these are motivated by the need to domesticate some of the culturally specific features mentioned above. Eco-Dummy’s dog has become Rambo; the products in his shopping trolley were replaced with items more compatible with Italian eating habits (*ricotta, panini all’olio*); references to the Polish climate and housing have been eliminated. Other modifications, however, seem to have been introduced at a whim, and reflect the somewhat conservative idea of the children’s book that still dominates in the Italian publishing industry. This is most evident in the numerous insertions of overtly didactic

comments, such as “Eco-dummies don’t care about the amount of electricity consumed by home appliances”; “When eco-dummies have an idea it is impossible to make them change their mind”; “Eco-dummies are lazy and never want to do anything” - none of which exist in the Polish text. Dialogic elements and Eco-Dummy’s direct enunciations have been reduced in favour of third-person narration. Finally, Eco-Dummy’s song has, in Italian, become a serious monologue accompanied by a solemn admonition: “if you become ECO as well, it will be possible to live a long, healthy and beautiful life. And with so little it is really possible to save the Earth”. The last page of the book is particularly revealing. It starts with a literal translation of the sentence *Świat wokół was jest pełen wad?* (*Is the world around you full of flaws?*) which in Italian becomes *Il mondo è pieno di sbagli?* (*Is the world full of mistakes?*). It finishes with the exhortation: "Don't wait any longer! Transform yourselves into eco heroes!", dropping, therefore, the correlation with the image in which we see the Eco-Dummy looking in the mirror and seeing in the reflection the face of Professor Conscience.

To sum up, the translation takes shortcuts in resolving cultural and linguistic challenges, does not care much about text and image interaction, and modifies or simply erases some parts of the text. It does not pay attention to the aural aspect of the book, transforming rhymed and dialogic parts of text into a flat third-person narrative. Above all, it ignores its innovative approach to the topic of ecoliteracy, steering it towards a more conventional, patronising didactic message.

### **5.3 Translating the visual layout**

As noted before, one particular challenge for the translator of picturebooks concerns the capacity to read and interpret visual and verbal information and reproduce this in the target culture. However, for many, the act of translation still applies only to the verbal component of books. Some scholars have acknowledged that sometimes changes of letter fonts or the replacement of typographic elements in the images can also happen (Oittinen et al., 2018, pp.85-86), but it is generally taken for granted that the visual concept of the picturebook will not be modified.

However, a brief inspection of the Italian version of *Draka Ekonieboraka* is sufficient to understand that this is not always the case. There are numerous visual modifications in *Piccola guida per ecoschiappe* and regard both the graphic layout and the illustrations. In the first case, they include changes to fonts, letter size and colour, the use of bold and other forms of emphasis, text flow, margin size and the proportion of space occupied by text and image. Changes to the visual aspect include typographic components, visual components, formatting, integrity of the illustrations and use of colour.

The graphic layout of this book, which in the Polish version had been carefully created to form an organic part of the book’s visual concept, has been virtually demolished in the Italian version. All page layout designs have been modified to some degree, and all the fonts and most of the colours have been changed. More challenging typographic combinations have been simplified and the complex game played with the letter size has



been simplified and reduced. A good example of these changes is the spread of pages 8-9 (Figures 5a and 5b).



Figure 5a. The spread of pages 8-9 in the Polish version



Figure 5b. The spread of pages 8-9 in the Italian version

Comparing the Polish and the Italian version feels almost like an exercise in "Spot the Difference". The left page header, "From the archives of Professor Conscience", which, in the original, is made to look like a collage of letters cut out of different newspapers, creating an effect of three-dimensionality, has been transformed into simple flat writing in the translation. Small circles that emphasise the quantity of water needed to take a bath in the segment *Prysznic czy wanna?* (Shower or bathtub?) have disappeared. In the segment *We Francji* (In France), the line below the header, which in the Polish version logically starts with a small letter (In France... is beginning of the sentence) in the Italian edition is written with a capital letter. The segment has also been pushed down the page, and the colour of

the segment below is paler than in the original. Both modifications have erased any trace of the three-dimensional effect present in the Polish version. In the digital image reproduced in Figure 5b, there is no change of colours, though in the paper edition, the colours used in the midsection *Ile wody marnujesz?* (How much water do you waste?) and image of the toothbrush are paler than in the original. The same observation can be made about the block of text below, which replaces the imitation of handwriting in capitals with a thinner and more regular font. The emphasis in purple letters is barely visible against the pale green of the other letters.

The right page at first glance seems to adhere more closely to the original, but the impression wanes upon close inspection. The top and bottom margins are smaller (the head of Professor Conscience in the upper part and the captions under the illustrations in the bottom almost touch the border of the page). The page header *Profesor radzi* (Bits of Advice from the Professor) has changed as regards its font, colour, size and placement (in the original version, it is aligned with the right border of the picture below). On the other hand, the captions under the illustrations below are more extensive than the images. The frame around the page has been cut, leaving only one reddish line on the left. The colours, again, are less sharp than in the Polish version, and the professor's clothes have become brownish.

The problem of colour is present in all the illustrations and is due mainly to the print quality (or rather lack of it). However, we cannot use the same excuse for the reformatting that has caused most of the images to suffer minor cuts on one side, or for the approximative rendition of other elements of graphic design, which has impoverished the aesthetic and semiotic<sup>15</sup> output of the book.. This kind of sloppiness is also detectable in the way the typographic elements present in the images have been dealt with. Verbal information embedded in pictures is one of the features that is most often changed in translation, especially when the general strategy is domestication, or when they are essential for the child to understand the meaning of the image (Oitinnen et al., 2018, pp. 85-86), though it can also be left unchanged when the intention is to introduce the young audience to a culture other than their own. The Italian version of *Draka Ekonieboraka* has chosen neither option. The graphic designer has used a strategy that could be defined as "anything goes". Some typographic elements have been translated: for example, the warning *Nie deptać* (don't step on the grass) has become *Non calpestare*. Others, such as the postcard with the writing *Bałyk*, were not modified. Some have been simply eliminated: in the illustration that shows Eco-Dummy sitting on his washing machine, surrounded by washed clothes and detergents, typographic elements as *proszek*, *ekstra and biel* have been erased from the boxes of soap powder. And finally, in the illustration of Eco-Dummy in a supermarket, two of the strategies mentioned above come together: the words *Wielka promocja* and *Promocja* have been translated as *Super offerta!* and

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<sup>15</sup> On the importance of ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings communicated through typographic elements in original and translated picturebooks, see Unsworth (2014).

*Promozio...* (the end of the word has been cut out of the frame), while others, such as *ser*, *baton*, *opis produktu*, remain unchanged.

## 6. Conclusion

To sum up, the transformation of *Draka Ekonieboraka* into *Piccola guida per ecoschiappe* is like a riches-to-rags story. This does not mean that all Italian publishers show so little respect to the picturebooks in translation. However, this kind of attitude seems to be a rule rather than an exception. When analysing Italian versions of Mauri Kunnas's picturebooks, Melissa Garavini noticed that "Italian translations are characterised by a very high number of abridgement and deletion cases followed by a smaller number of explanation, adaptation, and substitution instances." (Oittinen et al., 2018, p. 35). She believes that "the phenomenon of abridgements and deletions is specifically relevant to the transfer of culture-specific items" (p. 37). However, as the example examined here shows, the changes do not stop at the practices enumerated by this scholar but may extend into the visual component of the original work. This kind of editorial carelessness especially affects small and medium publishing houses in Italy but it is also not unheard of even among big publishers. It is undoubtedly a dominating practice at Sinnos. The other picturebooks by Emilia Dziubak released by it underwent the same treatment as *Draka Nebraska*, and the author herself in an interview confessed that Italian editions of her books gave her "a headache" (Frąckiewicz, 2017, p. 35).

While the translator could be blamed for some of the more unfortunate stylistic and lexical choices, the responsibility for the final product lies with the publisher. First of all, it was clearly a mistake to commission the work from a Polish native speaker with no experience in translation for children (other Dziubak's picturebooks were translated for Sinnos by Aneta Kobyłańska, also a Polish native-speaker and employee at the publishing house). Secondly, there was an evident lack of proper copy-editing, which would have helped to eliminate some stylistic and linguistic infelicities, such as the unfortunate rendering of *zużyte baterie* (discharged batteries) as *batterie esauste* instead of the more correct *batterie scariche*. It is more difficult to guess whether the decision to transform the original text into a much more conventional and didactic discourse was dictated by the translator's preferences or was influenced by the publisher, but the latter seems much more probable. Equally, the poor job made by the Italian graphic designer is an obvious consequence of the policies of the publisher, who either commissioned the work from a poorly-qualified person or simply did not care much about the aesthetic quality of the book. In a way, *Piccola guida per ecoschiappe* bears witness to the dismissive attitude towards the translation of children's books still prevailing within the Italian publishing industry. Comparing the dire reality with the high bar of expectations set for the translators of picturebooks in the recent volume *Translating Picturebooks. Revoicing the Verbal, the Visual and the Aural for a Child Audience* (Oittinen et al., 2018) can lead to a rather depressive reflection on the wide gap between the theory and practice. However, as long as the Italian audience has no awareness or interest in investigating the translations'



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*Translation Matters*, 3(2), 2021, pp. 75-91, DOI: [https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm3\\_2a5](https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm3_2a5)

editorial quality, there is little chance of galvanising the publishers into a change of attitude. In fact, *Piccola guida per ecoschiappe* had very positive reviews in Italy and received a lot of praise for “beautiful illustrations” from the critics and parents who could not know that they had been offered only a vapid simulacrum of the original book.

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