Multilingualism and the management of small and medium-sized enterprises: the case of Sicilian firm websites and related localisation strategies

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Doi: 10.19044/llc.v9no1a22 URL:http://dx.doi.org/10.19044/llc.v9no1a22

Submitted:20 October 2021
Accepted: 07 March 2022
Published: 31 March 2022

Abstract:

According to the ELAN[1] report, European firms lose a significant amount of revenue due to unsuccessful transactions, as a result of inadequate linguistic skills and intercultural competence, reinforcing the idea that multilingualism is still perceived as a communication barrier. In Italy, small and medium firms show a marked preference for website translations, even if, as pointed out by PIMLICO research in 2011, it is not possible to define these products as multilingual websites or localised ones. Firms show a tendency to reduce investments in foreign languages and to simplify the hiring processes of employees, since they prefer to rely on external services rather than providing training courses or hire specialists. Referring to this background of references and the evidence that emerged from an online questionnaire submitted to Sicilian small and medium firms (Di Gregorio and Benzo, 2016), the aim of this paper is to investigate the choices of firms to localise websites as part of a comprehensive linguistic policy.

Key Words: multilingualism; localisation; websites; SMEs; language policy.

Introduction - Foreign languages and small and medium enterprises in Italy:

According to Pierini (2016, 50), "it cannot be denied that a multilingual approach could increase a company's chances of finding new markets" and, at the same time, it can represent a "competitive advantage when selling its

[1] «ELAN: Effects on the European Economy of Shortages of Foreign Language Skills in Enterprise was commissioned by the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission in December 2005 and undertaken by CILT, the UK National Centre for Languages in collaboration with InterAct International and an international team of researchers. Its objective was to provide the Commission and decision-takers in Member States with practical information and analysis of the use of language skills by SMEs and the impact on business performance». Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/languages/policy/strategic-framework/documents/elan_en.pdf

products and services". These claims lead to some implications from both the point of view of typologies of companies that are involved in business interactions and languages (and cultures) that are used to communicate. In fact, if multinational companies are analysed, it emerges that MNCs refer to a corporate language to manage operations across linguistic borders, since they are characterised by multilingual workplaces (Feely and Harzing 2003; Harzing et al. 2011; Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999). Furthermore, as argued by Kankaanranta et al. (2018), "although these policies describe or define – more or less explicitly – which language is used for which business purpose, English is typically the language chosen for the task due to its dominance and hegemonic position as the language of international business". Moreover, it should be considered that some discrepancies can be identified between official documents (and the production that refers in general to the reputation of companies) and everyday practice (Angouri 2014; Lønsmann 2015; Ehrenreich 2010; Louhiala et al. 2012). For this reason, as claimed by Kankaanranta et al. (2018), "the notion of English as corporate language produces a highly complex arena with internal vs. external and one-way vs. two-way communication intertwining, and those in power make decisions about language regarding the entire workforce".

On the contrary, when policies of small and medium enterprises (SME) are examined, there are no comprehensive studies that focus on this aspect. This difference could be explained by referring to the needs of companies in terms of internationalisation processes and strategies to cope with linguistic diversity (Di Gregorio, 2017). For this reason, the present study was undertaken in order to investigate SMEs choices in terms of language policies, since an in-depth analysis of different European national backgrounds would be challenging due to the number of variables to be considered. Moreover, this paper seeks to explore the Italian context, with specific reference to Sicily, since it represents an interesting case from the point of view of small and medium enterprises, and, in particular, of Family Business (D'Allura & Faraci, 2018).

In order to investigate the behaviour of firms from the point of view of linguistic strategies, the European Union has financed several studies, such as the *ELAN report - Effects on the European Economy of Shortages of Foreign Language Skills in Enterprise* (2007), whose data represent the Cartesian coordinates of the present analysis. This research identifies five elements of 'language management' in terms of strategies that are adopted by firms to manage multilingual relationships with their customers and suppliers: 1) employees with foreign language skills; 2) native speakers; 3) local agents and/or distributors; 4) external translators/interpreters; and 5) adaptation of websites. A SME that decides to invest in all five of these fields, thus developing a proper language policy, achieves an export sales proportion that is 44.5% higher than one without these investments.

Unfortunately, as the ELAN report shows, Italian firms seem to be aware of the necessity to support the development of multilingualism and to differentiate their offer to various international markets from a linguistic and cultural viewpoint, but the related investments are inadequate. In particular, when the Italian framework is compared to that of other countries, it emerges that

55% of Italian firms - more than the European average (48%) but less than Portugal (93%) - claim that they have designed a 'formal language strategy'. This first datum is crucial, as it should represent a form of awareness that would allow to foster effective strategies according to the needs of the market, but it seems to be more a formal declaration of intent than a real approach. The following annexes provide insightful information to interpret the preferences of firms about measures that should be activated.

Table 1 - ANNEX 3 "Country Comparisons", ELAN 2007

	France	Germany	Greece	Hungary	Iceland	Ireland	Italy
In order to deal with customers abroad does your company have a formal language strategy?	40%	63%	68%	68%	13%	1%	55%
Has the language competence of your staff ever influenced your company´s choice of export markets?	13%	7%	14%	24%	6%	5%	7%
Have you acquired staff with specific language skills due to export needs?	61%	59%	10%	72%	17%	22%	28%
Have you ever employed native speakers full time in your company who support your foreign trade?	15%	44%	19%	34%	17%	3%	19%
Have you ever used local agents and/or distributors who speak your own native language in your foreign markets?	66%	56%	24%	24%	25%	9%	32%
Have you ever employed external translators/interpreters for foreign trade?	23%	74%	48%	46%	53%	4%	39%
Do you ever adapt your website for foreign markets?	49%	74%	62%	70%	55%	5%	61%
Is there any possibility that your company ever missed an opportunity of winning an export contract due to lack of foreign language skills?	13%	8%	0%	5%	22%	1%	8%
Does your company have plans to begin trading in any new foreign countries?	37%	22%	91%	57%	48%	14%	39%
Is your decision of investing based on knowledge of the relevant language/culture?	4%	19%	9%	22%	23%	1%	15%

Table 2 - ANNEX 3 “Country Comparisons”, ELAN 2007

	France	Germany	Greece	Hungary	Iceland	Ireland	Italy
Has your company ever experienced difficulties with foreign customers due to cultural differences?	15%	15%	23%	22%	39%	4%	6%
Has your company ever missed an opportunity of winning an export contract due to lack of cultural competence in any particular country?	5%	4%	5%	1%	9%	0%	2%
Do you keep a record of staff language skills?	92%	38%	64%	91%	14%	62%	17%
Have you ever offered language training to your staff?	47%	54%	32%	49%	52%	19%	32%
Has your company undertaken foreign language training in the last 3 years?	46%	46%	5%	20%	14%	15%	27%
Do you think your company will need to acquire additional expertise in languages in the next 3 years?	41%	50%	23%	56%	50%	9%	52%
Do you think your company will need to acquire additional expertise in country-cultures in the next 3 years?	19%	25%	5%	11%	53%	0%	31%

According to these data, it is possible to state that linguistic management of firms rely on the translation of websites into English and other languages, with a European average of 62%. Italy has equivalent results (61%), while countries such as Norway and Finland reach extraordinary percentages, 92% and 91%, respectively. In contrast, English-speaking countries like the UK and Ireland do not seem interested in this aspect (5%), having English-based websites. The other entries listed by ELAN researchers refer to external translator/interpreter services (used by 39% of Italian firms), local agents (32%), native speakers (19%) and staff with foreign language skills (28%). The latter figure is extremely enlightening because it could explain the unwillingness of firms to offer linguistic training (32%).

Consequently, it could be argued that the majority of businesses, especially in Italy, decide to use other services to reduce investments and to avoid problems pertaining to the hiring processes, as this system would imply an assessment method and related costs. Moreover, considering future projects, despite the fact that 52% of Italian firms are willing to acquire additional expertise in foreign languages[2], only 39% of them plan to trade in new foreign countries, suggesting two different interpretations. These firms either do not have tools to access international markets or language investments are perceived as lacking consistent returns.

Focusing on language preferences, data obtained by the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy with the LET IT FLY survey (2006) are no less controversial than the previous ones. Half of the firms interviewed have employed staff with linguistic knowledge, whereas the other half have not. At the same time, 76% of the SMEs claim that it is necessary to know foreign

[2] Even if ELAN report does not provide additional data about Italian firms plans to hire multilingual staff or to train employees in foreign languages.

languages, despite the sector of industry, but 51% believe it is not profitable to organise language courses. Similarly, 85.9% of firms consider it is necessary to understand cultures to foster good trade relations, but, for 65.9% of them, low linguistic competence is sufficient (enough to be able to check websites). This is particularly true for English, which is regarded as the most useful language by 99.9% of firms, followed by other options such as German (31.9%), French (25.5%) and Spanish (24.2%) - although several industry sectors and geographic areas may influence these preferences. However, despite the predominance of English, those few firms that decide to organise internal training courses refer mainly to grammar (57%) and not to languages for specific purposes (16.4%), which should represent the proper choice.

The data discussed in this paper define an extremely complex framework, even questionable, in which, notwithstanding the compromise between costs and profits, there are deeply rooted stereotypes that lead to confused/confusing business choices that affect revenue growth negatively.

The above-mentioned data refers to surveys promoted by the European Union and the Italian government to investigate the choices operated by SMEs in terms of policies. Focusing on the peculiarities of multilingualism, it is also worth to refer to the 'economics of multilingualism'. In fact, it is an indisputable fact that a strict relationship between languages and stereotypes exists, especially regarding the labour market (Grin et al., 2010). Therefore, despite clear signs of emerging production fields and the demand for different employee skills, as argued by different researchers (Bloom & Grenier 1993; Grin & Vaillancourt 2009), language learning and training are still deeply influenced by 'traditional approaches'. This occurs at both university and business levels for what concerns choices and strategies, as for example grammar contents in syllabi and grammar-translation approach in classes. The question thus arises: is an investigation of the supposed economic value of languages feasible? Attempts to provide an answer have been made by REAL (Research Group "Economics and Language") at Humboldt University in Berlin. As Gazzola (2016) points out, the vast majority of people do not recognise the existence of an 'economic value' for varied reasons. It would be impossible to define this, due to language's pivotal influence on collective identity and cultural heritage. Moreover, it has also been proved that a multilingual context is still perceived as a further complication, as English is regarded as the most effective choice, representing the language of economics.

In order to investigate this acknowledged predominance, as well as its effects on economic systems, the principles of efficiency and equity lay the foundations for a potential 'objective' analysis (Gazzola 2016). Indeed, equity has to be assessed from a technical rather than an ethical point of view, and refers to the distribution of languages, for example, within education systems or government bodies. On the other hand, efficiency represents the economic efficiency[3] of an investment pertaining to foreign languages and strategies to be

[3] Efficiency is the extent to which an investment is expected to convert (or has converted) its resources, or inputs (such as funds, expertise, time, etc.), into economic results in order to achieve the maximum possible outputs with the minimum possible inputs.

adopted for training, as shown in the ELAN (2007) report. Consequently, this choice implies both material and immaterial advantages for the involved companies, considering that human capital and wage differentials represent the most significant economic indicators. Grin and Vaillancourt (2009) report a specific interdependence between economic and linguistic variables, which affects wage differentials and, at the same time, also the GDP of a country, since linguistic knowledge can be regarded as a productive factor. However, focusing on the obtained data, researchers claim that there are no absolute values, but, rather, the economic value of a language depends on the reference context. As further proof of what has been written, Ginsburgh and Weber (2014) identify the following values for the Italian context: an income premium of approximately 18% for knowledge of English, 21% for French and 28% for German. These are data that should be considered to define education policies, especially for those degree courses that deal with economics and politics. Moreover, Gazzola (2016) stresses the importance of deconstructing stereotypes, such as those about the high costs of multilingualism or the presumed equalitarian power of the English language, because, on the contrary, it inevitably empowers native speakers, granting them the best career options.

To refer to this background of references, paying specific attention to the Italian context portrayed by LET IT FLY survey (2006) and the preferences for linguistic strategies that were analysed by ELAN (2007) research group, it emerges that there are remarkable differences between choices operated by small and medium enterprises in the Northern regions and those located in the Southern ones. For this reason, the focus of the present analysis will be narrowed in order to analyse the peculiarities of the Sicilian context, paying specific attention to the complex reality of Family Business, in order to investigate the choices made by firms to localise websites as part of a comprehensive linguistic policy.

Methods:

As claimed above, to the best of my knowledge, this is the first study to consider Sicilian SMEs linguistic policies and related choices to manage linguistic diversity and multilingual communication. For this reason, the present analysis moves from a questionnaire submitted to Sicilian small and medium firms (Benzo & Di Gregorio 2016), whose data were presented at the IFERA – RDW 2016, "Family, Firms and Institutional Context: Analysing the role of the context in the development of the family unit for Family Business Research", which was held in Catania in 2016. In light of the obtained data, some interviews were conducted with CEOs, in order to understand if linguistic choices were operated consciously, as a part of a linguistic policy, or if they were the result of available tools. Finally, an analysis of websites was performed, and relevant cases are discussed in the last section of this paper.

The economics of languages - an analysis of the Sicilian SMEs context and Family Business:

As maintained by R. J. Fernandes Coutinho and R. Meneses Moutinho (2012), "for many individuals the two most important dimensions in their lives are family and work and, as such, it is understandable the potential of such firms". These businesses are characterized by shared traditions, values and language, and their main concern is the local market of the territory where they live. However, currently, there are several examples of firms that have freely decided to invest in foreign markets, in order to export products and 'identity' at the same time, and internationalisation has become a necessity. As T. Kontinen and A. Ojala (2010) point out, and as AUB Observatory highlights in its 2014 report, family businesses are forced to internationalise in order to survive in an increasingly competitive market.

Family small and medium enterprises can access global market in different ways, and their development can be described according to several paradigms, as for example, the Uppsala Model by Johanson and Vahlne (2003), the Network model by Johanson and Mattsson (1988), the eclectic paradigm by Dunning[4] or the concept of Born-again global companies, as theorized by J. Bell et al. (2001). The first model describes the gradual approach to a foreign market, both in terms of actions to be performed, as export via either independent representatives or establishment of a foreign sale subsidiary, and in terms of geographic distance, since families start expanding in markets of close countries. The Network model highlights international development related to the networks that firms create with other foreign firms, as a system of competence, shared values and trust. While the paradigm of Dunning, on the other hand, describes advantages in terms of ownership, location, and internationalisation. These approaches imply several phases and gradual developments, but it is possible to detect some cases where internationalization is the result of different decisions. If firms decide to evaluate new opportunities because of unexpected events (as, for example, the substitution of a manager), this process may generate Born-again global companies.

Moving from these observations, one question arises: putting aside the differences among these models of development, what are the crucial factors that influence the results of the internationalisation process? In order to provide an answer, it is necessary to examine the nature of Family Businesses, to assess main characteristics in terms of facilitating factors and constrainers. In fact, internationalisation implies opportunities and challenges. There are numerous strengths, such as "management continuity, the longevity of family values, the persistence of the entrepreneurial spirit of the founder over the generations" (Faraci, 2011), a long-term vision, a high level of trust and an efficient decision-making process. However, these factors can become constrainers if, for example, the fear of losing control or the will to undertake risk-adverse strategies prevent entrepreneurs from taking advantage of opportunities.

Considering facilitating factors, in addition to those mentioned above, it is possible to list strategic alliances. In their article published in the Family Business Review in 1993, R. L. Svinth and K. L. Vinton write that "a likelihood of success for an international joint venture increases when both partners are family-owned businesses. These firms have shared values and goals that enable

[4] Introduced in 1976 and re-edited in 2015.

them to bridge cultural barriers more effectively than publicly held corporates". Furthermore, several researchers (especially, Fernández and Nieto 2005, 2006) have found that incoming generations can positively affect internationalisation, since new generations are better prepared to encourage new processes from the point of view of education, even if the problem of experience may arise. Finally, there are five unique characteristics of a Family SME that can determine a successful policy, as human capital, social capital, survivability capital, patient capital and characteristic governance structures (Kontinen and Ojala, 2010).

On the other hand, concerning constrainers that can affect internationalisation, it is possible to refer to the reviews by T. Kontinen and A. Ojala (2010) and R. J. Fernandes Coutinho and R. Meneses Moutinho (2012), where some of the restricting factors are described as managerial. They argue that family members are reluctant to accept external knowledge, or to hire external managers because they fear to lose control of their firms, they lack commitment to internationalisation or they do not trust international capabilities of managers in general.

The most commonly accepted explanation for an unsuccessful process is the lack of financial resources, even if an irregular monitoring of the international environment plays a pivotal role. Indeed, specific attention paid to the knowledge of the foreign markets in terms of customers and competitors, as well as regular attending of international occasions (such as fairs, etc.), would provide additional possibilities for the creation of effective networks to approach different markets.

As it is possible to infer from the previous paragraphs, there are several factors that have to be considered in order to have a clear overview of a SME internationalisation, but successions deserve an in-depth analysis. In fact, according to Fernandes Coutinho and Meneses Moutinho (2012), "the connection between the two spheres 'succession' and 'internationalization' is based largely on the skills and orientation to management that the subsequent generation features. The orientation to management of the successor may be composed of four variables – management skills, international experience, work experience outside the family sphere and professionalization of the successor". In their research, aimed at defining the relationship between internationalisation and generational turnover, they identified new variables that were not listed in previous literature, especially concerning Portuguese firms, as significant involvement with the company before the succession, external factors not attributable to the company, motivations for entry into the company, internal path followed and other languages speaker. This last variable "refers to the importance of being skilled and fluent in other languages, as facilitator of the internationalization process" (Fernandes Coutinho and Meneses Moutinho, 2012). It is arguable that linguistic competence is crucial for monitoring foreign markets to find new possibilities to invest, to know new potential customers and to create stable links with other foreign Family Businesses. For this reason, as Kontinen and Ojala point out, further research is needed concerning international opportunity recognition, as a part of the topic area of managerial strategic issue, where current knowledge is focused on the domestic perspective of mangers, risk-avoiding strategies and unstructured management of internationalisation.

Even though some studies (Fernandes and Nieto 2005; Fernandes Coutinho and Meneses Moutinho 2012) have attempted to analyse the impact of key factors on Family SME internationalisation, as for example managerial skills, generational conflicts or economic commitments, and, on the other hand, other studies have focused on linguistic knowledge of firms (Ginsburgh and Weber 2014) without investigating the family dimension and its potentialities, the aim of the present research is to cover this gap. An analysis of Family Business strategies for internationalisation is proposed, paying specific attention to language knowledge, and taking into account the determinants defined by T. Kontinen and A. Ojala: commitment towards internationalisation, financial resources and the use of financial resources to develop necessary capabilities.

The present study focuses on commitment towards internationalisation, in terms of human and financial resources, because they are linked from the point of view of foreign languages. In fact, financial resources are not enough if there is a lack of a "right" approach, characterised by flexibility and willingness to undertake the risks of a foreign market. Moreover, in order to promote a successful linguistic policy, as the basis for a successful internationalisation approach, several resources are needed to invest in training.

Referring to the Italian background, even though the percentages related to SMEs that rely on export and strategies to find new customers are almost the same (31.3% of Italian SME, 29.7% of southern firms), only 8.4% of southern businesses are present abroad (the Italian percentage is 16.7%) and 10.3% attend trade fairs regularly (the Italian percentage is 18.8%). It could be argued that these results derive from the difficulties experienced by southern Italian businesses in dealing with foreign markets, as declared by 78.9% of the interviewed firms, even though only 1.7% of them invested in language learning (LET IF FLY 2006).

In order to fill a data gap related to Sicilian firms, which present peculiar characteristics, such as family management structure, especially in those fields that are more linked to culture, such as agricultural and food businesses, Benzo and Di Gregorio (2016) carried out an analysis of the context, the results of which were discussed during the IFERA – RDW in Catania[5]. According to the replies, 47.4% of the firms interviewed do not import, with a slightly lower percentage exporting (31.6%). Answers given to explain this shortcoming of an international approach range from a lack of interest in foreign markets (7.7%) to a lack of opportunities. Specifically, 23% claimed opportunities never occurred; 15.4% did not know how to create opportunities; and 15.4% never sought opportunities. The most perplexing datum is that 30.8% of firms assert to be unable to identify the reason for their difficulties, thus demonstrating a lack of any awareness about the internationalisation process as well as the role played by languages and cultures, and contrasting the data proposed by the ELAN report.

Despite the fact that several different countries are engaged in trading relationships, for example Australia, China, Japan, Romania, Turkey and

[5] Presenting a paper entitled "The Internationalization of Family Businesses: the Role of Linguistic Competences in Sicily".

Pakistan, communication is fostered thanks to English, while other secondary options are respectively French, Spanish, German and Russian. This choice is due to the fact that 66.7% of firms believe that English is adequate to their business, even if 22.2% admit it is the only language they know, representing their working language. As regards the role played by culture, the choice of one language implies consequences. ELAN results show that 6% of Italian firms have experienced challenges with foreign customers as a result of cultural differences, with 2% of them missing the opportunity of winning an exportation contract. Regarding Sicily, this percentage increases, since 36.8% of firms have encountered difficulties linked to the habits/customs of foreign interlocutors. Moreover, 26.3% of them have claimed that their customers, who are not native English speakers, often do not like using this language as a *lingua franca*, preferring to use their native language.

In terms of preferred solutions, referring to those described by ELAN researchers, the firms that were interviewed have websites with English sections, while 84.2% of them have employed staff with language skills, 15.8% rely on freelance interpreters, translators or agencies. Language courses are organised by 52.6% of the sample firms, even though these courses are managed by external experts. The other half state it is not possible to organise courses owing to lack of financial resources. An interpretation that is supported by the fact that only 7.1% of firms consider training useless. Choosing these strategies as part of coherent linguistic policies, firms have seen an increase in sales up to 100% thanks to language investments, although further investigation is needed to compare the money invested and returns to wage differentials.

Referring to the data discussed in this section, it is arguable that, even if English is accepted as the language of economics by the vast majority of employers and employees, without questioning the main assumptions of this interpretation, it represents a solution to reduce costs and, in some cases, it is the only foreign language available. The adoption of this perspective could explain a marked preference for the translation of websites with international contents, as will be discussed in the following section.

Web translation and localisation process:

In 2011, the CELAN project results were published for the first time, and, although its researchers recommended considering it a living report, due to the ever-changing nature of the subject matter, nevertheless, there are some findings that continue to be valid:

- Multilingualism has become a necessity for the growth of businesses, and it is strictly connected with customer care and customer relationship management; its related multiculturalism is regarded as a determinant element to ensure trust in partnerships.
- Small and medium firms are strongly interested in web-based language needs, more than larger companies.
- Businesses in the Agro and Manufacturing industry seek the development of language management strategies and emphasise foreign languages as tools to promote their activities and present their products.

These findings form the premises of this analysis, which is focused on the choices that firms make about website translations, as well as localisation, referring to the Agro industry, a field in which products and culture are consistently linked.[6]

As was argued above, the surveyed businesses (Benzo & Di Gregorio 2016) relied on the translation of their websites, which was seen as the best compromise between language flexibility and profitability. Although language capability and multilingual functionality have been considered key components of the firm internationalisation process, investments are still not prioritised. For this reason, it is worth going a step further. Although the ELAN report enlisted website translation among those successful strategies that should form language management policies, PIMLICO - *Report on Language Management Strategies and Best Practice in European SMEs* (2011) - provides new evidence. Researchers argue that it is necessary to create culturally adapted websites in various languages and to design e-commerce platforms that are underpinned by localised contents.

Unlike previous research projects, PIMLICO focused on forty companies[7] defined successful according to a set of criteria. Among these criteria, website translation plays a pivotal role, especially in regard to cultural adaptations. The companies interviewed recognise the importance of English to manage international relationships, but they find that this language works better if it is combined with other languages. For this reason, some of them use English as *lingua franca* for written communication and the local language for socialising or face-to-face contact, because, as the former German chancellor Willy Brandt stated, “if you sell something, speak your language, but if you want to sell something to me, you have to speak in German” (PIMLICO 2011). These companies have real multilingual websites, in which more than three foreign languages are used and contents are culturally adapted, thus linking general information about the company to specific elements that characterise local contexts.

The majority of the websites[8] considered for the present analysis are not multilingual as all of them are structured using two main languages, Italian, as the mother tongue, and English for translations (exceptions are represented by a few firms that have chosen French as a third language). English is used as *lingua franca* for international texts without specific cultural references, especially in those websites that do not have a section dedicated to e-commerce. In fact, some e-commerce sections present traces of localised contents, for example, currency or the description of some typical products (such as almond pastries, etc.), while other firms which address national dealers or wholesalers seem to be interested

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[6] As the global market is deeply affected by this type of demand, it is fundamental to carry out different researches according to the different industry sectors because, as has been previously pointed out by several scholars, such as Noguer and Siscart, language and cultural barriers vary across sectors.

[7] Small and medium-sized international companies across 27 EU Member States.

[8] The analysed cases refer to 30 Family firms that operate in the East side of Sicily, in the provinces of Catania, Messina, Enna and Siracusa, in the agricultural sector and food industry.

in providing general descriptions of the businesses. This structure recalls what Jimenez-Crespo (2013: 9) described as follows: "the emergence of the WWW localizations started to flow in the opposite direction, with a constant stream of websites being localized into English around the world. Nowadays, it is commonplace across the planet to find websites localized into that international *lingua franca* in order to address global audiences".

According to the results of this research, it is possible to detect crucial differences among the products that belong to the Agro industry. For this reason, four different brands were considered, as these companies produce four pillars of Sicilian exports: pastries (*Condorelli*), chocolate (*Antica Dolceria Bonajuto*), fruits (*Oranfrizer*) and wine (*Cantine Nicosia*).

The first brand, *Condorelli*[9] (I.D.B. S.p.A), has become one of the most important producers on the island, turning a family business on the eastern side of Sicily into an international excellence. Their production deals with typical Sicilian pastries and nougats and their marketing campaigns are based on the concept of 'uniqueness'. The father of the present owner, who founded the firm in 1933, worked on a recipe to make nougat softer, thus creating special products, *torroncini*, which are now famous all around the world, with different chocolate flavours. Analysing its website, there are some key elements that deserve attention, such as the main language in which changes and updates are made. In this case, Italian texts are translated into English and they can be defined as international from the point of view of contents, without specific cultural elements. The e-commerce section provides a few localised components, such as currency, for example.

When website translations are under scrutiny, one of the first things to bear in mind is that, due to the most recent technology, translators have to work on decontextualised strings extracted from the main page, as described by Pym (2011). In fact, web editors create a website with several pages, each of them composed of various elements. Consequently, in the vast majority of cases, texts are not translated simultaneously by the same person. Several translators are involved, thus implying that they can work on a single part, not on the whole page, and the risk is that they fail to recognise the nature and purpose of given texts. The same has happened to this website. Since small nougats are typical Sicilian sweets, translators could have adopted two approaches, domestication or foreignization (Venuti 1995), using the term nougat and additional explanations or the term *torroncini* with other information. Here, instead, the translators used both, without clarifying the reason for such a choice. It is important to clarify that, even though this firm had an exclusive relationship with foreign distributors (B2B), currently, it has an online platform to sell its sweets to private customers (B2C), leading to some changes to its website, without the creation of localised contents. Referring to the currency for example, it is worth noting that, despite the use of English as *lingua franca*, currency refers to a specific English-speaking country, Great Britain. Furthermore, the fact that the translated section has not yet been completed suggests that its creation has not occurred simultaneously,

[9] www.condorelli.it

thus implying content asymmetries.

Moving from this premise, it is possible to state that, according to the categories of Schewe (2001), *Condorelli* website could be defined as a standardised text (one website for all countries), even though there is an alternative to euro as currency, or a mode of standardisation, as suggested by Pym. It could also be defined as monarchist, referring to Lockwood's typologies, because the main aim of this promotional strategy is to maintain a global image for the brand. In the past, as sustained before, the image of the brand has been associated with the uniqueness of its products, while, currently, it has moved to the concept of 'variety',[10] because the firm produces nougats as well as almond pastries, chocolates, etc.

During an interview[11] with the owner and CEO, Giuseppe Condorelli, it was possible to fill the information gap about their choices. Despite the difficulties related to the description of these products to foreign customers, due to the high number of cultural-bound elements, English is used during trade fairs and meetings, without the support of freelance interpreters. The reason for this choice is simple: the owner believes that English is suitable to manage his international relationships and his products speak for themselves. Furthermore, as regards approaches to enter new markets or to win over cultural resistance, he states that his firm has considered countries where these Sicilian sweets are well accepted, for example Mediterranean countries, which share the same passion for nougats and dried fruits.

"The oldest chocolate factory in Sicily" is the slogan used by *Antica Dolceria Bonajuto*[12], which is one of the leading chocolate producers in Modica. Like the first case, *Bonajuto* has also undergone several changes and, currently, it operates at various levels: as a brick-and-mortar shop in Modica, as a supplier in a B2B relationship and using an e-commerce channel for customers. Moreover, it offers several other products connected with tourism, such as guided tours and tastings inside their premises.

Comparing this website to the previous one, it could be argued that they share the same characteristics in terms of content standardisation, and they also partake in the same monarchist approach, but the e-commerce section has different degrees of localisation. The products are described using a foreignizing approach (for example the term "*Mpanatigghi* biscuits" to describe typical biscuits made in Modica and Ragusa), but there are no alternatives concerning currency (euro is the only one).

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[10] "TORRONCINI AND MUCH MORE! Condorelli is goodness for all tastes": this is the new slogan that promotes the variety of products and it is the first screen users see. The following refers to the old slogan, "ALWAYS A PLEASURE", with a specific reference to the possibilities that are offered by the new e-commerce channel: "Condorelli's sweets, where and when you want".

[11] This interview took place during IFERA-RDW Catania, in February 2016. Mr Condorelli was one of those entrepreneurs who were invited to discuss Family Business in Sicily. After his presentation, he agreed to answer questions about the role played by foreign languages in the development of his business.

[12] www.bonajuto.it

It is interesting to notice that, in the past, this website has used three languages, Italian, English and Japanese, but it was completely restructured in 2016, eliminating the Japanese section. Unfortunately, it was not possible to interview the CEO; therefore, further investigation is needed to explain the reasons for this change. The old website had international texts, without cultural elements, even related to the use of colours, because the main aim was to promote the same image of the brand in all countries. A policy that has been affected by existing links with tour operators, which could be regarded as a tool to access new markets.

The last two cases[13] studied refer to *Oranfrizer* and *Cantine Nicosia*. The former supplies oranges and other citrus fruits, as well as juices, while the latter is a famous winery. These two cases show striking similarities: for example, they share the same 'volcanic' origin, thus creating a strong link between their products and one of the best-known Sicilian treasures, Mount Etna.[14] Moreover, also in these cases, contents are standardised using English as *lingua franca,* even if *Cantine Nicosia* website is not completed, and there are no traces of localisation, due to the fact that they supply international distributors. Both of them use promotional strategies that are culturally embedded. *Cantine Nicosia*, a well-established family firm with several generations working together, has decided to hire an external manager who speaks Italian, English, French, German and Flemish. In contrast, relying only on English, *Oranfrizer* has won a place in the Japanese market[15] through a system of marketing strategies based on the quality of their products (stating that they are "The nature experience of all senses") and Sicilian culture. For example, in Japan, in seeking to tempt customers, they sell oranges that are cut in half to show the ruby red colour of Sicilian oranges (the famous *Arancia rossa*), to mark the difference between these oranges and those produced in other countries. In several trade fairs, as demonstrated by the pictures of the website, they are presented with an old three-wheeled van produced by Piaggio (which can be considered as a Sicilian symbol of agriculture), which resembles the old Sicilian carriage, painted by a Sicilian artist Venera Chiarenza.

All of these cases exemplify different approaches to international relationships, where, even if English is the *lingua franca* in websites, specific attention is paid to the promotion of Sicilian culture and, in the cases of *Oranfrizer* and *Cantine Nicosia*, a specific interest in foreign cultures, especially in linking different cultures. Furthermore, in line with the analysis performed by Jimenez-Crespo (2013:62), it is possible to argue that the analysed websites attempt at promoting hypertextual global coherence, which can be defined as "the overall linkage of hypertext constituents as mediated by the general theme addressed in the text, as well as by its rhetorical function in a wider context". In fact, this typology of coherence is achieved thank to "distinct coherence cues that increase the global coherence in self-selected reading paths, such as navigation

[13] www.oranfrizer.it; www.cantinenicosia.it

[14] "We are the result of a Volcanic experience" is the slogan of *Oranfrizer*.

[15] Even if they have removed Japanese translation from their website.

menus, breadcrumb navigation maps, headings, titles or topic indicators" (Jimenez-Crespo 2013: 62).

Conclusion:

As identified by the ELAN report, there is an evident relationship between internationalisation and language knowledge. Furthermore, since international opportunity recognition is the pivotal element of a successful internationalisation strategy, it is possible to argue that the best strategy among those adopted by SMEs is to provide linguistic courses for managers and employers, in order to link professional competence to linguistic skills. Concerning Family small and medium enterprises, the best choice would be to invest in linguistic knowledge for future generations, in order to avoid the syndrome of losing control with an 'external' manager. It is also true that this choice could be wrong if new generations do not show enough experience to recognize good opportunities, as Kontinen and Ojala (2010) argue. The solution could be that of a transition period with an international manager to support incoming generation takeover.

Has the presence of the family an impact, positive or negative, on the acquisition and exploitation of linguistic competence? Is the linguistic competence something that family firms manage through specialising family members? These are some questions that could arise when dealing with this topic. Considering the data that are discussed in this paper, it is possible to answer that the presence of family can have a positive impact on the acquisition and exploitation of linguistic competence, in terms of both opportunities and financial support. In fact, thanks to family support, incoming generations can have the possibility to study abroad and to foster language knowledge or to do internships in several sectors of industry, without the pressure of finding a job. Even if, to have positive results, two conditions are required: incoming generation ambitions have to be fulfilled by Family Businesses, or belong to a close field, and the dialogue between generations is fundamental, in order to preserve the 'spirit' of the firm, and at the same time, to take advantage of new opportunities in terms of technology and foreign markets.

According to the results discussed in this paper, it is arguable that several Sicilian small and medium enterprises base their language policies on English as *lingua franca*, but it is not possible to ascertain whether this is due to a lack of knowledge of other foreign languages or a precise choice in terms of optimisation and cost reduction. The cases discussed above may be used as an extreme exemplification of the kind of compromise that firms strive to achieve. Although in the past, some firms have attempted to provide alternative website translations, currently, a shared approach is detected to create standardised contents to promote a single image of a brand. An approach that is partially subverted when dealing with other marketing strategies or face-to-face meetings, especially concerning the Agro industry, where the goal is to promote Sicilian culture and, at the same time, establish contact with foreign cultures.

Concerning specific sectors of industries and languages, it is possible to consider some interesting results. Fernandez Coutinho and Meneses Moutinho

(2012) identify specific languages related to specific products, as for example Garment sector, and in Sicily, each sector is characterised by several languages. This could be related to the history of the Island, characterised by multilingualism, or to tourism and hospitality, as for example the choice of Bonajuto family, who produces chocolate in Modica: their website is translated in English, French, German and Japanese. Furthermore, although the language chosen is English, Sicilian firms try to overcome cultural barriers, in order to create commercial relationships based on trust, differentiating products using advertising and labels, as for example *Oranfreezer*. In order to sell oranges in Japan, they produced boxes with two halves of an orange, to allow people to see the inner part of the fruit. Sicilian Family Businesses do not sell simple products; they sell pieces of Sicily.

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