Translating Local Issues in Global Formats: The Case of Memes

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Abstract

The present article aims to study the phenomenon of memes, in the attempt to identify the level of globalization *vis à vis* localization these communicative, social and cultural products voice. This article therefore presents a small selection of memes from both the United Kingdom and Italy, and briefly analyses them from a linguistic and visual perspective. For reasons of space, the quantitative analysis of the corpus will not be discussed at length here. However, the qualitative analysis of the memes selected for this study will prove that the majority of the existing material, while adapting to global formats and visuals, often exploits regional and local varieties of language. Thus, since language is the expression of specific cultures, the analysis demonstrates how, despite globalization, local (and localized) features of the communities that create memes survive in their uniqueness. Hence, since memes are privileged forms of communication among younger members of society, the results point to a generation of youth that, despite the tendency to follow global models, is well aware of the traditional and local cultures they stem from and strive to keep them alive. On the basis of this analysis, the article finally argues that memes – like many other products of popular culture – represent a privileged arena which, if studied systematically through the tools of discourse analysis and sociolinguistics, can reveal important aspects of the societies that produce them and their evolution.

Keywords: Cultural translation, Dialects, Food, Tradition, Visual design

1. Introduction

1.1 Purposes

Since memes heavily rely on social media, they can be easily identified as forms of communication typical of younger generations of digital natives, and – despite the scarcity of academic studies on the topic (Note 1) – can become important artefacts to be examined critically. As this article demonstrates, in fact, their analysis can shed some light on the dynamics that determine the evolution of our societies and, more specifically, the development of youth culture and it language(s). The memes this article focuses on therefore coincide with those "picture[s] with a short caption which is a caricature illustration of current political, sports, and cultural events" (Górka, 2014: 226). Yet, as some of the memes selected demonstrate, Górka's statement, according to which memes, as ironic and parodic forms of expression, often contradict common and officially accepted norms and rules (*ivi*: 232), is not necessarily true. Indeed, the aim of this paper is to assess whether the majority of the memes forming the corpus of analysis comply with a general idea of globalization (thereby contributing to it) or somehow resist it.

Naturally, the categories of memes are many, and it is undeniable that the level of globalization and/or localization depends on the context in which they originate, the illocutionary function they are supposed to perform and the perlocutionary effect they are assumed to obtain. In spite of this, it is possible to identify some common features, which all memes share: the presence of a visual; the humoristic use of language; the introduction of cultural references.

In this context, then, the adjective "cultural" can obviously mean very different things and point to extremely different realities, which can be understood in terms of the original division between high/visible culture and low/invisible culture (Hall, 1984 [1959]; Brake *et al*., 1995) only partially. However, as discussed below, memes can be perceived and approached as forms of cultural translation, through which the local features of specific communities are transformed into texts that are marked through and through by hybridity. Indeed, on the one hand, memes can be considered hybrid texts from a formal perspective, since they rely on both verbal and visual language. On the other, they can be considered hybrid because they are characterized by both global and local features.

1.2 Methodology

Given the incredible number of memes available, the selection of the corpus to be analyzed and the collection of materials that could lead to meaningful results was particularly challenging. In an attempt to be as systematic as possible, during the compilation of the corpus, various categories of memes were therefore identified, one of which was then singled out for the analysis developed in this article. This study therefore focuses on memes that address the topic of food, and that stem from different countries/regions and towns, analyzing them from the perspective of sociolinguistics, pragmatics and critical discourse analysis.

1.3 For a Definition of Meme

The word "meme" was coined in 1976 by British scientist Richard Dawkins in his *The Selfish Gene*, where he defines it as "a unit of cultural transmission" (Dawkins, 1976). The word, which derives from the Greek root "mim-", meaning "to imitate", "to mimic", recalls, from a phonological point of view, the word "gene". This is why the author opted for this word, rather than the alternative option "mimeme" he had initially considered (Dawkins, 1976). As we read in the Cambridge Dictionary, in fact, "a meme is the cultural equivalent of the unit of physical heredity, the gene" (online), and identifies a cultural feature or a type of behavior that is passed from one generation to another, and can refer to various types of products. In Dawkins's words,

Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation [...]. (Dawkins, 1976)

With time, memes have come to indicate "an amusing or interesting item (such as a captioned picture or video) or genre of items that is spread widely online, especially through social media" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, online).

These are precisely the products this article investigates, in order to demonstrate how they could be implicitly identified as important elements in the "struggle for recognition" (Hegel, 1977, p. 311) pursued by each individual, community and culture.

2. Findings

This paper takes into consideration memes originating in the United Kingdom and Italy. The category of food was selected because it appeared particularly interesting, since culinary traditions exemplify men's values and their taboos, thereby becoming important cultural markers. Indeed, the preparation and consumption of food can be perceived as cultural and social phenomena which, as some of the memes analyzed here well testify, can become discriminating factors between different communities. Food, then, can be considered an important factor in the formation and preservation of cultural identity. In actual fact,

The quest for food has shaped the development of our society [...] Food and the science of food touches our lives in numerous ways. Many religions follow strict dietary laws. Some of the earliest observations in the world of chemistry came from the preparation and cooking of food. [...] Even class distinctions in some societies are determined by what foods are put on the table. (Center for Human Nutrition, online)

Yet, although Hall would define this category as "high culture", the food that specific communities consume, the way they prepare it and the symbolic values they assign to it, turn it into one of the invisible aspects of culture that Brake *et al*. describe (1995).

2.1 United Kingdom

This section briefly analyses some of the memes that focus on the food prepared and consumed in the United Kingdom, focusing in particular on products originating in Yorkshire and Scotland. Indeed, despite stereotypical representations of British cuisine, the memes presented in this section point to the existence, in the United Kingdom too, of a specific culinary tradition, which naturally changes according to the geographical area. The aim is therefore to see whether the memes stemming from these two regions present linguistic and structural similarities and/or dissimilarities, and whether these memes can be considered expressions of a more general 'British' identity.

2.1.1 County of Yorkshire

The county of Yorkshire is certainly famous for its dales, moors and shores. Yet, it has also been defined as a "fertile ground for some of the country's finest food and produce" (Nelson, online). Certainly, among various products such as Yorkshire curd tart, black pudding, IPA ale, pheasant, dressed crab and smoked fish, the most renowned of all is Yorkshire pudding. And in fact, this is also the dish which, from a quantitative point of view, is most frequently named in memes from this county.

For instance, Figures 1-3 testify to the popularity of the small round side dish, which is generally used as a complement to roast meats, and which can be used as a starter, too, filled with all sorts of things, or savored with jam and cream. As the memes below emphasize, the pudding is appreciated by people from every walk of life, including her Majesty the Queen and British actor Sean Bean. Naturally, by referring to Queen Elizabeth's appreciation for the typical dish, the first meme emphasizes the fact that, despite its humble origin, the pudding can find a place on every table, even the richest. Indeed, although its batter consists of eggs, flour, and either milk or water, these ingredients, in the hands of Yorkshire cooks, become invaluable, and are therefore worthy of the attention of the Royal family as well.

Furthermore, in the meme reproduced in Figure 2, it is possible to see how Sean Bean, who lays stress on the idea that Yorkshire pudding is so delicious that one is certainly not enough, is exploited in a fashion that is typical of memes. Indeed, the actor (by now a global symbol), is shown here adapting intertextually the famous quote: "One does not simply walk into Mordor". Since this textual segment is originally uttered by the character Bean played in the intersemiotic translation of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (2001), as with all intertextual references, it activates specific scenarios, and is able to assign to Yorkshire pudding a "mythical" aura.

Thus, it is possible to see how the pudding, from a context such as Buckingham Palace (which, despite embodying both secular and religious powers is very 'earthly',), thanks to the exploitation of the visual and the verbal elements of the second meme presented here, travels to the world of mythology and therefore acquires 'unearthly' features.

Figure 1. The queen and Yorkshire pudding

Source:https://cheezburger.com/2309094656

Figure 2. Sean bean and Yorkshire pudding

Source:http://www.quickmeme.com/meme/368voc

This evolution, however, finds its apotheosis in the meme reproduced in Figure 3. From a visual perspective, this meme, in reality, sets itself in opposition to the first two, in that it does not depict any authority or important character. On the contrary, it appears evident that the actants in this meme can be identified as the people in the street, who do not partake in the status that characterizes, albeit in very different ways, the participants of the first two memes. Yet, from a linguistic perspective, the appreciation of the traditional pudding appears here highly intensified. Thus, from the secular world represented by Queen Elizabeth, via the epic world of Boromir from Tolkien's novel, the traditional dish finally reaches a mystic level in the third image, which explicitly mentions God, with all the consequences this entails. Indeed, the third meme, despite its "ordinariness", implicitly testifies to the "heavenly" and "divine" nature of Yorkshire pudding.

Figure 3. Yorkshire pudding wrap

Source:
https://www.facebook.com/straightupyorkshire/photos/a.520530451484937/812454148959231

Thus, whereas the first two memes mainly rely on images and, through visual intertextuality, immediately convey the reputation of the dish, in Figure 3, the visual is rather nondescript, and both the illocutionary force and the perlocutionary effect of the communicative act are realised via verbal language.

2.1.2 Scotland

If one compares the memes above with those stemming from Scotland, the different attitude towards traditional *cuisine* becomes immediately apparent. Indeed, whereas Yorkshire memes pay tribute to the traditional dish, their Scottish counterpart often adopt a very ironic key, based on both verbal and visual language, to suggest – as in Figures 4 and 5 – the (scarce) quality of Scottish culinary tradition, thereby confirming existing stereotypes.
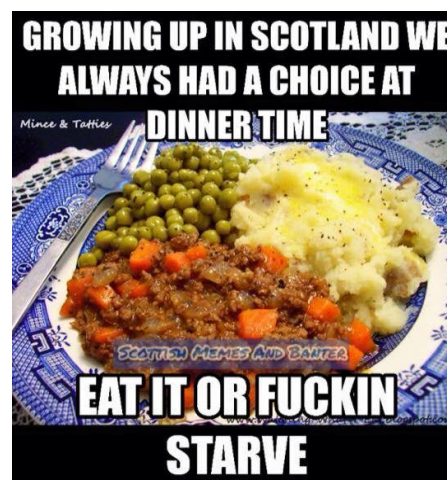

Figure 4. Scottish dish

Source:https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/54 2894930056216654/?nic=1&nic=1a

Figure 5. Scottish cuisine

Source: https://me.me/i/growing-up-in-scotland-we -always-had-a-choice

In spite of this, the same character exploited in the memes from Yorkshire is employed in the following meme to suggest that there is more to Scottish cuisine than the "haggis" represented in figure 4. Unsurprisingly enough, in Figure 6, the category of "food" appears together with that of "dress code", thereby identifying two of the most important elements of visible culture (Brake *et al.*, 1995).
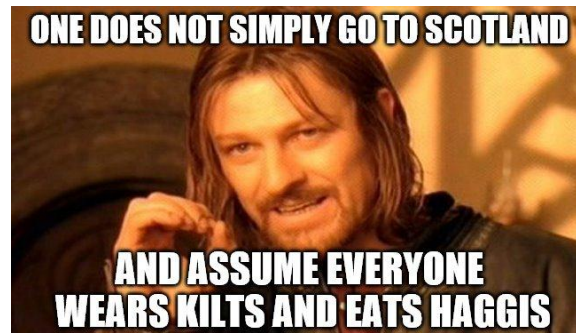
Figure 6. Sean bean and scottish cuisine

Source: https://imgflip.com/i/32xdge

Yet, as the meme above suggests, food can and does become a marker of invisible culture as well. First of all, it is significant that, despite Bean's verbal message in Figure 6, in the majority of the memes retrieved for this study (including all those which, for reasons of space, could not be included in this paper), almost no indication of traditional cookery is suggested, other than the "savoury pudding containing sheep's pluck, minced with onion, oatmeal, suet, spices, and salt, mixed with stock, and cooked while traditionally encased in the animal's stomach." (Oxford English Dictionary, 2005). This aspect clearly appears extremely significant *per se*, in that it demonstrates the absence of a strong culinary tradition and a "taste" that might strike non-Scottish people as rather peculiar. Actually, this is the implicit message of the meme reproduced in Figure 7, which ironically celebrates, once again, the taste of Scottish people for unconventional food and mixtures of ingredients that are usually conceived as incompatible but which, on the contrary, appear to satisfy Scottish taste.

Figure 7. True "Scottishness"

Source: https://me.me/i/yehivnaedone-this-then-yer-noa-true-scotF%B8%8F-9595798

This is, however, not all. Indeed, through the exploitation of its verbal and visual language, this meme pragmatically conveys other meanings too. For instance, it implicitly creates a connection to the semantic field of "risk", which was exploited in the previous memes presented in this section, which naturally suggests, *per se*, the brave character of true Scottish people. Furthermore, by adopting a Scottish variety of language, it reinforces this sense of Scottishness, laying stress on the linguistic identity of the Scots.

In reality, the intrusion of Scottish dialect is kept to a minimum. Yet it involves both phonological and morphosyntactic levels, and although these non-standard linguistic forms can be easily translated intralinguistically into standard English, their use serves the purpose of bringing forth Scottish identity. This, almost in defence of the fact that the combination of crisps and potatos with starchy products such as bread and pizza, originated in the U.S. and England. As such, it could therefore raise issues related to (neo) colonialism, globalization and the economic (and other) power that certain nations still exercise on others.

However, historically, people from Scotland have always been characterized by a strong sense of reselience as well as independence and resistance, a series of qualities epitomised by the figure of 13th century warrior William Wallace, better known as Braveheart, who led the Scots against King Edward I in the first war of Independence. To this day, Scots – as the memes represented in Figures 8 and 9 testify, – posit themeselves as strong and sturdy people, who face succesfully the difficulties of life.

Figure 8. Scottish tenacity

Source: https://www.pinterest.it/pin/42988272

Figure 9. Scottish endurance

Source: https://hugelol.com/lol/591341

Thus, memes such as these appear to voice both visible and invisible aspects of the culture that characterizes this community. Not only this, but by foregrounding, albeit with ironic tones, some of the fundamental cultural aspects of this people, such as traditional dressing code and pastimes, memes like the one reproduced in Figure 9, represent a balance between globalization and localization.

Indeed, the memes briefly discussed in this paragraph, while resorting to visual features typical of our global world, best exemplified by Figure 6 and the stereotypical representations of U.S. soldiers and Russian women in Figure 9, manage nonetheless to emphasize the local identity of this community. This aspect is clearly enriched by the exploitation of linguistically non-standard forms, which naturally define more vividly the identity of this culture. Obviously, such products would require a more detailed and thorough analysis. Yet, even the succinct discussion developed here confirms the fact that by addressing topics such as culinary tradition, highlighting specific dress codes, and including non-standard varieties of

language, these products finally voice elements which, while being transparently visible, also partake in the most invisible layer of culture, therefore conveying a true sense of "Scottishness".

2.2 Italy

2.2.1 Emilia Romagna

Naturally, if British cuisine is characterized by various dishes, it is undeniable that, in Italy, each region is renowned for its peculiar specialties: *canederli* from Trentino, *polenta* from Valle d'Aosta, *trofie* with *pesto* from Liguria, *carbonara* pasta from Lazio, *cassata* or *arancini* from Sicily, etc. (Note 2). Within this scenario, Emilia Romagna stands out for its richness in terms of culinary tradition, and within the same region, each area/town/village has its own typical dish or a variant of the same dish. Clearly, being Italy a country where the notion of *campanilismo* is still very much present, it is often possible to witness actual (if benevolent) fights between different regions and/or towns, aiming at determining which one can claim the most delicious dishes.

Figure 10. North vs South
Source:
https://me.me/i/quando-ouelli-del-sud-dicono-cheal-nord-si-mangia-male-13631586

Figure 11. North vs South
Source:
https://www.instazu.com/tag/polpettone

Naturally, the macro-division between the north and south of Italy, which determines for instance the linguistic macro-areas of the country in terms of intranational dialects, can be clearly observed in terms of gastronomy and culinary traditions too. This division between northern and southern regions has, over the years, given rise to a series of stereotypes which are very much real to this day. Thus, the meme in Figure 10, puts forward not only the idea that food in Emilia Romagna is better, but also that people from the South are less educated, thereby implying a social disadvantage of its inhabitants. Indeed, the meme, on the backdrop of a series of traditional dishes from Emilia Romagna, recites: "When people from the South state that in the northern regions you cannot eat well, but they are not educated enough and

ignore the existence of Emilia Romagna". However, as we can see in Figure 10, the text uses the form "*sono poco studiati*", through which the standard active form "*non hanno studiato*" ("they have not studied") becomes a passive form ("They are not studied"). By using this form, then, the meme ironically criticizes the people who use this kind of non-standard form. Thus, since these expressions – on which also *L'Accademia della Crusca* has recently commented (online) – are often stereotypically associated with regionalisms from the South, this meme posits itself as a comment not only on the gastronomic tradition of these regions, but also on their social and economic development.

In an analogous fashion, the meme reproduced in Figure 11 takes on a similar sarcastic approach, emphasizing Southerners' love for extremely rich, heavily fried and difficult to digest foods. The verbal message states in fact: "Bologna: In order to pay tribute to the community from Calabria, the dish of *tortellini* [typical of the town from Emilia Romagna] will be stuffed with extra *tortellini*, stuffed with aubergines, stuffed with goat meat, stuffed with *ricotta* cheese, coated with eggs and breadcrumbs and then fried, coated with the cured meat of *'nduja*, and then fried again and served with two side meatloaves." (Note 3).

The glorification of the regional dishes from Emilia Romagna, therefore, is realized through the visual and a use of verbal language which activates a rather harsh criticism of the people from the South of Italy. Indeed, as the memes above emphasize, this implicit criticism of Others, which perpetuates their stereotypical representations, is carried out by referring not only to the semantic field of food, but by deprecating other features as well.

2.2.2 Piacenza

By analyzing various memes from different towns from the same region, however, it is possible to observe the very same mechanism at work. This is for instance the case with Piacenza and nearby towns such as Parma and Cremona, which are regularly targeted by the inhabitants of the former on more than one level.

For instance, the meme reproduced in Figure 12 ironically refers to the alleged tendency of Parma to steal the products originating from the area near Piacenza (in particular the cured pork meat known as *coppa*) and pass it off as its own. Besides the visual, which represents two karateka fighting over the *coppa*, the exploitation of intranational varieties of language makes this meme particular effective. Indeed, the karateka from Piacenza uses the dialect word *lädar* ("thief") to refer to the *Pramšan* ("inhabitant of Parma"), adding, in the bottom line highlighted in red, "hands off our *coppa*", thereby depicting the town of Parma as a "thief" very explicitly.

Naturally, the choice of colors is also very significant. Indeed, on the one hand, the color red of the bottom line emphasizes the urgency of the message, simultaneously creating a strong visual cohesion with the top part of the meme. On the other hand, since red and white are the prevalent colors in the coat of arms of the town of Piacenza, these colors work as strong cultural markers, thus creating a cumulative effect with the other cultural markers exploited in the image.

By analyzing in more detail the visual exploited here, it appears evident that, by occupying the top part of the image, the town of Piacenza (symbolized by the colors red and white) and one of its finest products (equally identified by the same colors) come to represent the "ideal" situation (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006: 186). In addition, because of the frame activated by the colors assigned to both the town and the cured meat, the text is characterized by a strong sense of cohesion, symbolically identifying the town with the product itself.

Moreover, by resorting to dialect (in a similar way to the Scottish meme above), the culture of the town of Piacenza is further emphasized and brought to the fore. Indeed, the orthographic representation of the way words are pronounced, together with the adoption of dialect at both lexical and syntactic levels (for instance, the noun *ladär*, which replaces the Italian *ladro*, and the possessive adjective *nòssa*, which substitutes the Italian *nostra*, for "our"), turn this meme in what we could consider an intersemiotic translation of local culture.

Figure 12. The theft of *coppa*
Source:https://images.app. goo.gl/KQr8LTZ78tH9FKJYA

Figure 13. Copying the *coppa*
Source: https://www.facebook. com/PiaceMemes/photos/a.34 4545999300946/59776785731 2091/?type=3&theater

Figure 14. Trump and dialect
Source: https://images.app. goo.gl/5BVtqY6dnuNLe1Fy9

A similar comment on the way the town of Parma posits itself can be found in the meme reproduced in Figure 13. Here, by exploiting visual intertextuality, the meme recalls the famous scene where Mr. Bean tries to copy at an exam. Thus, by activating a similar scenario, the text openly accuses Parma to "copy" and "steal" the product from Piacenza. As a consequence, the internationality of the character is ironically exploited, thereby bringing together both international and provincial elements.

The global and the local are even more closely connected in the following meme (Figure 14), which appears extremely revealing. Indeed, the fact that this meme exploits the image of Donald Trump, President of the country that has made globalization a reality, is particularly significant. In actual fact, since the American President appears in a message that exploits dialect in the caption, this meme is able to convey several meanings at once. The verbal text could be translated as: "When people ask you whether you have ever tasted the *coppa* from

Parma", thereby suggesting that the feud between Parma and Piacenza is of such proportions that it has crossed the ocean, reaching the President of the United States. More specifically, the text implicitly suggests that even President Trump knows that the "real *coppa*" is from Piacenza and not from Parma. Finally, it insinuates that globalization – embodied here by President Trump – cannot in reality obliterate localization, here embodied by the product itself and the dialect used.

Certainly, the culinary tradition of Piacenza is very deeply rooted and long-standing, so that simply by skimming the various memes available, the importance that food acquires in the life of its inhabitants becomes apparent, since approximately 87% of the existing memes are about food. Indeed, all the elements that play an important role in the life of a person are often connected to the world of food and discussed in association with the culinary products that have made this town famous.

Consequently, various semantic fields are often juxtaposed (either verbally or visually), and coexist within the same text. This is for instance the case with sport, football in particular, which could in fact be identified as another cultural (if, at times, stereotypical) marker.

Figure 15. coppa and the Champions League
Source:
https://www.gazzetta.it/Calcio/Champions-League/Finale-2015/07-06-2015

Figure 16. coppa and the World Cup
Source: https://authgram.com/tag/coppapiacentinadop

In the memes reproduced above in Figures 15 & 16, the homophony of the word *coppa* (understood as "cured meat"), and the word *coppa* (meaning "cup"), is exploited to create a pun which, as in the best hybrid texts, relies on both phonological and visual elements. For instance, in the first meme, the visual is self-explicatory, in that the cured meat is substituted to the actual cup that goalkeeper Gigi Buffon (from the Italian football team Juventus) would have carried, had the Italian team won the final of the Champions League in 2015. In reality, on that occasion, the final was won by the Barcelona team. As a consequence, the ironic implicature of the message conveyed is that, on that occasion, the only cup Italians could bring home was the cured meat, since the actual silver cup went to the Spanish team.

In the second meme, the play on words is basically the same, in that the verbal message reads "We're not going to play in the [2018] World Cup. Yet, we have the real *coppa*". The memes

above therefore implicitly point to the fact that although football plays a major role in the life of Italians and their culture, traditional food is deemed even more central and is considered the fundamental element that gives some balance to the ups and downs of life. This is actually what happens within the personal field of love relationships as well.

As figure 17 testifies, given the opportunity to have a relationship with a beautiful girl, the male character represented here refuses to go out with her, on the ground that she does not like one of the most traditional dishes from Piacenza, namely *tortelli* (Note 4). The verbal text actually reads: "This could have been us, but you don't like *tortelli*". Thus, verbal language, together with the visual, which portrays the typical fresh pasta in the foreground, construe the identity of the male character as a "true" person from Piacenza, who puts his culinary tradition above everything else.

Figure 17. No *tortelli* no relationship

Source:https://www.facebook.com/PiaceMemes/photos/a.34454

Moreover, food infiltrates the discussion about climate change, and by exploiting the celebrity of an international figure such as Greta Thunberg, memes such as the one reproduced in Figure 18 propound the idea that the typical dish of *anolini* (Note 5) should be reason enough to save the Earth. By stating: "We must find a powerful slogan to save the world", followed by the remaining of the text which, significantly, is written in English, this meme suggests the universal importance of this product which, although local, has an impact on the global world. Not only this, but, as suggested above, by juxtaposing an icon like Greta Thunberg to a product such as *anolini*, and by adopting an international language such as English, which is often exploited as a *lingua franca*, to a reality such as Piacenza, this text posits itself as inherently hybrid, bringing together the global and the local at more than one level.

Furthermore, in Figure 19, the representation of the conflict between the neighboring towns of Piacenza and Cremona finds a place within the discussion of civil rights: indeed, the international flag of the LGBT movement is adapted to criticize the production of the cured pork meat known as *salame* by the town of Cremona, stating that "The only crime against nature is the *salame* from Cremona", thereby implying that the only real *salame* is from Piacenza.

Figure 18. Global warming and anolini
Source:
https://www.instagram.com/p/B26TsZooxU
c/? igshid=48uewnc3pvux

Figure 19. Cremona and its salame
Source:
https://www.facebook.com/PiaceMemes/p
hotos/

These memes therefore testify the fact that food and local gastronomy have a bearing on global concerns too, and actually permeate both domestic and foreign politics. Indeed, as the meme reproduced in Figure 20 demonstrates, the crisis of the Italian Government – represented by Italian Ministers Luigi Di Maio and Matteo Salvini, and the headline "worrying crisis of the Government" – is nothing compared to the crisis experienced when there are no more *tortelli* and also the *gutturnio* (a local wine from the hills near Piacenza) has finished.

Figure 20. Di Maio, Slavini and tortelli
Source:
https://www.instagram.com/p/B2mOHXSIUl
0/ ?igshid=hrzq2elvftb5

Figure 21. pre-packaged snacks vs coppa
Source:
https://images.app.goo.gl/94Ag8L6jDZL
otL8fA

Similarly, the second meme witnesses to another aspect of internal politics, namely the decision by the present Government to tax pre-packed snacks. Indeed, the meme reproduced

in Figure 21 suggests that the impact of this controversial decision is actually halved in the town of Piacenza, where children are brought up eating not pre-packaged snacks but freshly baked rolls filled with either *coppa* or *salame*. As we can see, the verbal message of this meme exploits once again the expressivity of dialect, originating a headline that simply states: "Why should I care about the new tax on snacks?" No verbal answer is given to this question, in that the visual of the *coppa* is more than sufficient to allow readers to decode the implicature. Verbal and visual language, then, once again work together to convey an effective and powerful message, where local culinary traditions are foregrounded.

Traditional dishes play such an essential role in the life of the people from Piacenza that they are, as figure 22 suggests, what they long for the most when they are away. Once again, in this meme, the signs of a profoundly local tradition – which, by activating the typical scenario whereby these dishes are prepared by the elderly women of the community, implicitly and almost instinctively suggest the use of the local dialect – are juxtaposed to the use English. By so doing, the text posits itself once more as inherently hybrid, thereby pointing to the hybrid nature of the culture it stems from.

Figure 22. "I get home after a month"	Figure 23. " A piacentino's blood"
Source:	Source:
https://www.facebook.com/PiaceMemes	http://picpanzee.com/piacenzamemes

Finally, Figure 23 testifies the fact that traditional dishes are equated with the vital lymph of the members of the community from Piacenza. Indeed, the headline significantly reads "The blood of a person from Piacenza observed through a microscope", and the text in its entirety suggests that the various specialties from the town become the actual constituents of the blood of its inhabitants. Thus, the red blood cells are made of *coppa*, white blood cells of *pisarei e fasö* (Note 6), platelets by *anolini* and fatty matter by the cured pork meat known as *pancetta*.
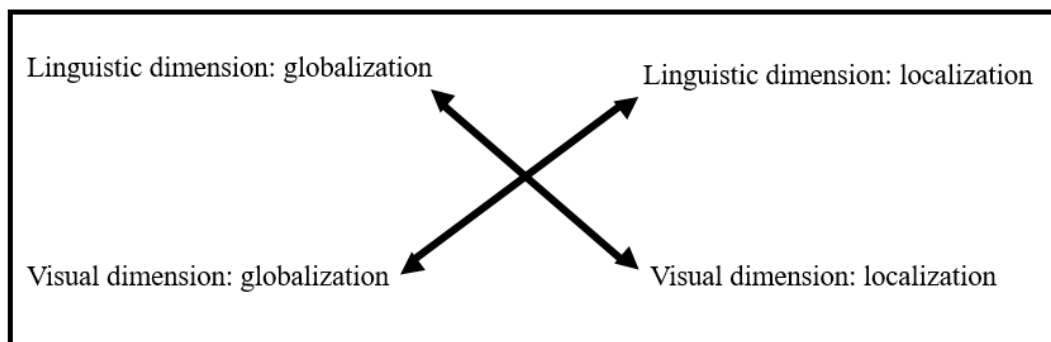
3. Discussion

Naturally, the examples could multiply indefinitely, in that, as anticipated, new memes are constantly uploaded every hour all over the world. However, even on the basis of the small selection briefly analyzed here, it becomes apparent that food-related issues are much more frequent in Italian memes than British ones, despite the various traditional dishes that can be identified as typical of the United Kingdom (Ploughman's Lunch**,** Cornish pasties, apple crumble, jacked potatoes, Shepard's Pie, etc.). Yet, the role assigned to the preparation and the consumption of food plays a completely different role in the two cultures. It is true that roast dinners represent a moment of congregation for British families at large, thereby suggesting the existence of a culinary tradition above regional diversities, something which is impossible to detect within Italian gastronomic culture. Furthermore, whereas, for instance, roast dinners are usually consumed once a week (generally on a Sunday, hence the expression "Sunday roast" which is often used as a synonym), the moment of family meals within Italian culture is, to this day, constantly paramount, despite the changes of standards of living and working habits imposed by the development of society. The preparation of food on the part of family members (be they parents, grand-parents, spouses etc.) is considered an emotional as well as practical, experience, and the consumption of food is often thought to provide more food for the soul than for the body, constituting both the physical and the metaphorical blood and vital lymph of Italians. Through food Italians begin and maintain social relationships, and precisely because it can be identified as a profoundly social and cultural phenomenon, food plays a major role in any situation.

Indeed, as the memes above suggest, food is mostly what Italian people relate to and it often becomes a lens through which the rest of reality is interpreted. This is why, as observed *supra*, issues of food often go hand in hand with linguistic issues, language being the cultural and social phenomenon that represents the first and essential "lens" through which we can observe, analyze, describe and relate to reality. As suggested above, and as the corpus collected for this study in its entirety confirms, the presence of local dialects in Italian memes relating to food is impressive, whereas in the memes originating in the U.K. the presence of linguistic varieties is rather limited.

Clearly, this finds at least a partial explanation in the fact that, in Italy, each region, town and village has its own dialect, which distinguishes itself from that of neighboring regions/towns/villages. Consequently, the Italian situation is far more complex than the British, where the number of dialect regions is much smaller (Trudgill, 1999). Dialects, just as food, therefore become extremely distinctive forms of cultural recognition, and are consequently exploited to assert the cultural identity of the members of a community. This, even *vis à vis* globalization.

Indeed, as the analysis of the few texts above has demonstrated, while memes, through imitation, repeatedly propose the same cultural units, often relaying on the same global images, characters, personalities etc., they juxtapose these global aspects of the world to very local perspectives, whereby the symbols of globalization are reinterpreted through local (cultural) elements. This holds true from both a visual and a purely linguistic perspective. If

this is so, it is not only because, as this study has suggested, many memes resort to dialect, but also because, even in the presence of one of the most fundamental means of globalization (namely the adoption of English as a *lingua franca*), Italian memes couple this language with the symbols of local realities. Consequently, the way Italian memes work in terms of globalization *vs* localization could be represented as follows:

Linguistic dimension: globalization   Linguistic dimension: localization

Visual dimension: globalization   Visual dimension: localization

Furthermore – contrary to Scottish memes, which project specific images of Scotland, thereby self-ironically perpetuating stereotypical visions of the Scots – through the exploitation of intimately local elements such as culinary traditions and dialects, memes from Italy overturn some of the stereotypes that usually embody true "Italian" identity. Indeed, as suggested above, the stereotypical depiction of Italians as football fanatics and Latin lovers are deconstructed by memes which, like those briefly discussed above, posit at the center of Italian life the consumption of traditional foods. In addition, although the memes that exploit dialect might pose some problems of interpretation to readers who are not conversant with this particular intranational variety of language, many of the memes retrieved on the world wide web actually provide brief dialect lessons, simultaneously offering translations from standard Italian into dialect and *vice versa*. By so doing, the members of the community give receivers the chance to appreciate the true identity of the local culture they voice through their artefacts.

4. Conclusion

By definition, memes are global phenomena, in that they reiterate some of the cultural icons and symbols that characterize a specific historical period, in a world which seems to be growing smaller and smaller. Yet, this analysis suggests that they simultaneously become strongholds of localization, from a linguistic and, broadly speaking, cultural perspective. As such, memes become not only the expression of peculiar cultural identities, but they also posit some of the cultural markers people can identify with, thereby enabling the achievement of a (local) identity, despite the general participation in the global culture both the creators and the receivers of memes live by.

Visual elements and linguistic elements are actually exploited in order to create texts which, despite their apparent simplicity and often minimal use of verbal language, are multilayered and multi-functional. Their primary aim is, of course, to amuse receivers. However, when they do not confirm existing stereotypes, they are actually exploited to assert, and

simultaneously forge, an identity, which might be considered truly local, thus attenuating the impact that globalization has on the societies they stem from.

Considering that memes are a form of expression exploited primarily by young people, this actually appears rather remarkable, since dialect is usually spoken by older people and its knowledge, for a very long time, seemed to be declining among younger generations. Naturally, Italian youth too is heavily influenced by globalization. Yet, the memes collected for this study seem to point to the important role that local values keep playing in individuals' lives, an aspect that is confirmed by other expressions of Italian society as well, where dialect courses *in presentia* and events such as dialect plays in theatres have actually multiplied.

The memes briefly analyzed in this paper therefore point to a hybrid category of text in which globalization, often expressed through the selected visuals, rather than setting itself in opposition to the local realities in the attempt to engulf them, adapts and morphs, to originate a further form of hybridity we could call "local (and localized) globalization".

This, clearly, has important repercussions on the members of our societies and suggests the importance that the study of products such as these might have in the discovery of the way the world we inhabit is developing and evolving.

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Notes

Note 1. See for instance: Gatherer (1998); Doyle (2006); Shifman (2013).

Note 2. Descriptions of the ingredients and the preparation of these and other typical dishes available at: https://www.cookingwithnonna.com/italian-recipes-food-and-cuisine.html, last access: November 15 2019.

Note 3. The '*nduja* is a spicy, spreadable pork cured meat, typically made with parts of the pig such as the shoulder and belly, as well as tripe, roasted peppers and a mixture of spices.

Note 4. Type of fresh pasta that is folded around a filling of ricotta cheese and spinach, boiled and served with butter, Parmesan cheese and sage.

Note 5. Fresh pasta folded around a filling of minced meat mixed with eggs and Parmisan cheese, boiled and served in meatstock.

Note 6. Fresh pasta, made of small, almost round balls prepared with flour and breadcrumbs, boiled and served with bean sauce.

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