




ARTICLE

# Translating Made-in-Italy Across Time and Space

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## Abstract

Through a linguistic anthropological analysis of a corpus of storytelling practices that have emerged from interviews that I conducted with Northern Italian executives (2011–2023), I examine how collective, Made-in-Italy branding identities are (co)constructed and *translated* through the scalar chronotopic stances that these managers take vis-à-vis both the historicity and the contemporary, artistic *uniqueness* of their companies. More specifically, I describe how the executives in small Northern Italian family-owned firms use their corporations' histories to associate moral discourses of cultural values, responsibility, and *authenticity* with the Made-in-Italy brand. Executives' narrative shifts translate Made in Italy from a national brand that allegedly represents all goods produced in Italy to more localized, town-based branding identities. To do so, I am inspired by an *inter-semiotic* approach to translation, one that allows me to study these identification processes from a more fluid and dynamic perspective.

**Keywords:** chronotope; Made-in-Italy; narrative; northern Italy; scales; translation

## Introduction

*Translation stretches words, bridges times, mingles personal identities, and unsettles national languages. As it does so, it creates a distinctive medium in which connections between different places, times and people can be imagined, thought over, and felt through.* (Reynolds 2011, 11)

As the opening quote emphasizes, translating practices, as imprecise as they can be, have the potential to create, or imagine, new spatiotemporal realities that can be experienced and embodied in different ways and sociocultural contexts. Through translation, languages can be “unsettled,” while the translated message travels, gets transformed, and recontextualized. Through these spatiotemporal movements, the translated message undergoes continuous, dynamic alterations. As Gal (2023, 179) has argued, “[i]n the social study of language, it has become a truism that any utterance, indeed any piece of ongoing real-time, discursive practice, whether written or oral, may be endlessly quoted, cited, recited, imitated, parodied and otherwise reported or repeated in whole

or in part.” Furthermore, continues Gal (2023, 180), “[w]e do not translate between languages, but rather among registers or genres of speech, writing, and other expressive practices,” thus liberating this practice from its classic, rigid Lockean conceptualization. For Locke, as for many of his followers, translation was (and has been) conceived more abstractly with translators who have been imagined as capable of *perfectly* rendering the structures and the meanings from the original language to the translated one. Within this rigid framework, ungraspable concepts and brand names, such as the Made-in-Italy one, would not be appreciated for their multiplicity of meanings and “intersemiotic” alterations (Jakobson 1959).

In this article, I am inspired by a more heterogenous and scalar approach to translating practices through which scholars can examine multiple, emerging patterns as they are created, disseminated, and solidified. More specifically, I study how branding identities (Nakassis 2012, 2013, 2016a: 68; Kohler and Perrino 2017) are enacted, and translated, through various spatiotemporal frameworks. I especially focus on the Made-in-Italy branding identity as it discursively emerges in storytelling practices. In this vein, Michael Silverstein’s (2003) notion of *transduction*, as referred to translating practices, is pertinent. In his 2003 chapter entitled “Translation, Transduction, Transformation: Skating ‘Glossando’ on Thin Semiotic Ice,” he wrote:

More than really translating material (in my narrowed sense), then, transducing material moves us between a source cultural system and a target one. In each system words and expressions are indexically anchored within entextualizations in-context, and we attempt to move across these. But this leads us to consider that in transduction, operating as we do in the realm of culture more frankly, there is always the possibility of **transformation** of the [en]textual[ized] source material contextualized in specific ways into configurations of cultural semiosis of a sort substantially or completely different from those one has started with. (Silverstein 2003, 91, emphasis in original)

Thanks to this non-Saussurean, and more semiotic, model to approach (un)translationability in context, I have been able to examine the scalar movements, together with their various cultural translations, of branded-identifiers such as the *Made-in-Italy*<sup>1</sup> brand. Moreover, in his research on translation, linguist Roman Jakobson (1959) was intrigued by a more semiotic stance on this practice. For him, there were three types of translation: the intralingual translation, the interlingual translation, and the *intersemiotic translation*, with the latter being understudied across disciplines. Intersemiotic translation, which well espouses recent linguistic anthropological research on this topic (see, for example, Pritzker 2014), offers more flexibility in practicing and experiencing translation as a semiotic resource. As Campbell and Vidal (2024) write on “experiential translation,” for example, which they consider as an extension of intersemiotic translation:

Experiential translation embraces the visibility of the translator and eschews semiotic erasures imposed by the norms and expectations of source and target

<sup>1</sup> Made-in-Italy, besides being a well-known brand, is a globally circulating English phrase.

cultures. As such, it aims to undo acquired knowledge and give voice not only to the sensory and affective, but to endow the natural world with the status of ‘text’ [...]. Experiential translation views translation as a holistic, co-creative process of discovery and renewal in a dynamic ecological context where Western anthropocentric discourse is displaced by a pluriverse of local and global, analogue and digital, (dis)embodied voices. (Campbell and Vidal 2024, 3)

Thus, *intersemiotic*, or *experiential*, translation enables researchers to study the various movements of translated messages as they travel across different modalities. In this light, an *inter-scalar translation*, inspired by the Jakobsonian notion (Jakobson 1959), allows more flexibility in the study of identities and their frequent adjustments across scales. To trace the spatiotemporal movements and transformations of the Made-in-Italy brand, for example, I have used the Bakhtinian notion of *chronotope* (Bakhtin 1981) to study participants’ interactional moves and their multimodal reverberations in their storytelling practices. Given the heterogeneous nature of chronotopic frameworks, which are scalar in nature (Koven 2024; Perrino 2024; Woolard 2012), translating practices can emerge more clearly if considered through spatiotemporal lenses. In these cases, these transformations, or translations, are *inter-scalar*. Reflecting on translation as related to Chinese medicine, moreover, Pritzker emphasizes the interactional and changing nature of these practices. As she writes, “[t]he view of living translation as interactive is grounded in a sociolinguistic and anthropological understanding of interaction and co-construction as the social process by which meaning is jointly formulated” (Pritzker 2014, 118). For Pritzker, translation is, indeed, *living*, always in the process of changing and adapting to new sociocultural and linguistic environments. In this way, translation often goes beyond language and can thus be applied to broader semiotic phenomena, as in the cases examined in this article.

In my research, I examine how executives in Northern Italian family-owned companies use their past and present narratives to (co)construct, (re)configure, or transduce, and solidify their individual and collective *branding* identities through their association with discourses of cultural values, shared responsibility, and various senses of *authenticity*. I do so by analyzing their spatiotemporal, or *chronotopic*, alignments in which their past and present family histories become flattened at times, by merging, and thus being transduced, into one another, while they remain separate in other instances. In the process, these executives re-contextualize (Bauman and Briggs 1990) and re-scale their branding identities to the various contexts in which they land. In this way, their identities are transformed, or translated, into more or less localized ones. After describing my theoretical framework on translating the Made-in-Italy branding identity across time and space, and after offering a brief historical background on Italian history and art, and on how ideologies of *authenticity* rely upon it, I turn to the analysis of three narrative examples extracted from the interviews that I conducted with two Northern Italian executives of two well-known companies in the sector of fashion, in the small town of Mantua (Mantova), and of glassmaking, in the small Venetian island of Murano (which is part of the small town of Venice [Venezia]).

## Inter-scalar translation(s) in narrative practices

In my work, I conceive of translating practices as fluid and scalar phenomena and as being part of our everyday life. Within this perspective, translation involves much more than the rendition of syntactic and morphological structures from one language to another language. Translating practices frequently navigate through various levels, or scales, which are not always obvious. Following Gal's insights (2023, 180), which posit that translation transcends language-to-language boundaries and instead includes shifts between registers and other practices, I study how these *intersemiotic* alterations (Jakobson 1959), or, as I name them, *inter-scalar translations*, happen across spatiotemporal frameworks, such as chronotopes, and scales more generally. While translating practices are *scalar* in nature, given the recurrent upscaling and downscaling shifts (Flowers 2021) that naturally happen when moving across different meanings and semiotic tokens, a scalar approach has rarely been applied in translation studies. In this article, I show how chronotopic configurations and scales are intrinsically part of these practices as they are enacted by Northern Italian executives in the three narrative examples that I analyze.

Scales, or perspectival processes (Carr and Lempert 2016a; Gal 2016), are always present in storytelling practices across narrating and narrated events (Jakobson 1957). When they tell their stories, narrators (and intervening audience members) take perspectives, or stances, not only as related to the plot of the story, or the *narrated event* (Jakobson 1957), but also on the various interactional moves of the here-and-now of the storytelling event, or the *narrating event* (Jakobson 1957). Though speakers are usually not aware of their scaling shifts, these discursive alterations play powerful roles in indexing individuals' identities, ideologies, and stances. As Gal (2016, 91) argues, "scaling implies positioning and, hence, point of view: a perspective from which scales (modes of comparison) are constructed and from which aspects of the world are evaluated with respect to them." In this light, when speech participants engage in scaling practices—for example, by narrowing the imaginary boundaries of a community through the use of inclusive pronouns (*we*) instead of non-inclusive ones (*they*)—they also take certain positions, or stances, vis-a-vis the unfolding discourse such as the narrated content (the narrated event) and/or the narrating interview interaction (the narrating event). As I show in my three narrative examples, Northern Italian executives engage in significant scalar moves across spatiotemporal frameworks. Through so doing, they *translate*, or transform, not only the content of their stories but also their interactional stances. In their narrated event, for example, they navigate through stories about the past, present, and future, as they are related to their business and the Made-in-Italy brand more generally. In the process, however, these executives might also take stances on who can fully appreciate their products and who cannot, or is not entitled to (such as migrants or Italian citizens from migrant descent). In the narrating event, these executives often enact various degrees of intimacy while performing scalar senses of belonging to a collective identity in which the exclusiveness of the Made-in-Italy brand keeps Italians intimately connected to each other (Perrino 2020; Perrino and Kohler 2020). Individuals can thus *feel* more intimate with their co-present or imaginary speech participants through their scalar moves, and this often emerges in their storytelling practices (Perrino 2024). An inclusive attitude can thus be translated, *inter-scalarly*, into an exclusionary one. As Carr and Fisher (2016) write:

scaling is a practice that can—among other things—spawn a sense of intimacy and an ethic of interrelatedness at the same time it serves projects that discriminate, individuate, and alienate [...]. This is so because there is more than one pragmatics of scale: different sorts of sign activities amount to distinctive modes of scaling, each enjoying its own productive potentials. (Carr and Fisher 2016, 136)

To be able to study these inter-scalar and spatiotemporal movements in narrative practices, I have been inspired by a narratives-as-practices approach (De Fina 2013; Ochs and Capps 1996) which considers narratives as *performances*. Through this pragmatic approach to narratives, it is possible to examine how participants scale their perspectives, and thus change, or transform, their stances or positionings, during their storytelling events, in relation to their narrated content. As it has been widely demonstrated, moreover, *narrated* and *narrating events* (Jakobson 1957), or *denotational* and *interactional texts* (Silverstein 1998), are in a continuous, dialogic relationship (Koven 2015; Wortham 2000, 2001). Furthermore, narrators often enact various stances while they tell their stories. This is conceivable thanks to the intrinsic, scalar nature of narratives: narrators and audience members (co)construct their stories by shifting their positionalities across time and space. Through so doing, participants engage in scalar moves by offering or imposing similar or contrasting perspectives related not only to the content of the story (the narrated event), but also to the ongoing interaction (the narrating event) (Perrino 2024).

As my three narrative excerpts show, through these inter-scalar transformative acts, Northern Italian executives (co)constructed an overall sense of intimacy and connectedness with their co-nationals with whom they assumed to share a historical and artistic background. In their narratives, as I show, Northern Italian executives frequently shift back and forth between past and present, often anchoring those temporal distinctions within spatial dimensions. They resort to multiple temporalities in the past by re-invoking historical facts that are key to the construction of what they sense is *authentic*, and thus unchangeable and irreplicable, about their company. In this way, these executives invoke *chronotopes of authenticity*. While the Bakhtinian notion of *chronotope*, literally “time-space” (Bakhtin 1981), has been developed creatively and extensively across many disciplines, still today it remains a resourceful analytic tool to study the spatiotemporal dimensions of human interactional dynamics, including their storytelling practices. Since the early 2000s, linguistic anthropologists have applied the malleable concept of the chronotope widely and creatively, studying how space and time interweave in interactions (Agha 2007, 2015; Dick 2010; Divita 2014; Harkness 2015; Koven 2013, 2023; Perrino 2007, 2011, 2015, 2022; Perrino and Kohler 2020; Wirtz 2016; Woolard 2012, 2016, to mention just a few). For example, Agha (2015) has applied this concept to the construction of intimacy in kinship relations. As he writes:

“[P]articipants in social practices around the world routinely invoke the idiom of kinship to perform or construe interpersonal behaviors, whether their own or of those they meet or try to imagine. In doing so, they inhabit kin-like relationships with persons or groups that are sometimes nearby in time and place (such as their interlocutors), and sometimes quite far (such as the dead or the

unborn). The social-semiotic practices through which people inhabit these relations are kinship behaviors whose participants rely on chronotopic formulations of place, time, and personhood (Agha 2007) in order to become recognizable to each other as social beings of specific kinds, whether as persons already belonging to, or as persons hoping to avoid, group-specific historical trajectories in relation to others.” (Agha 2015, 402)

Place, time, and personhood are key elements in my data, as family ties and relationships strongly emerged in my interviews with Northern Italian executives. Chronotopes, moreover, have been recently analyzed as perspectival, or *scalar*, spatiotemporal frameworks (Koven 2024; Perrino 2024; Woolard 2012, 2016). Woolard (2012, 2) for example, writes that the “[c]hronotope is thus a particular version of the general notion of ‘scale’” in the sense that chronotopic configurations always have a scalar dimension which can be more or less nuanced. Indeed, chronotopes can have more or less resonance; they can be more or less evident; they can entail more or less interactional moves. A cross-chronotope alignment (Perrino 2007), as I have demonstrated, usually incorporates two main chronotopes which are aligned, interactionally and/or denotationally in the interactional framework. These particular alignments are also possible thanks to various shifts in perspectives, or scalar moves. This is why, as Woolard (2012) contended, chronotopes and scales overlap most of the times. Put it simply, *chronotopes are scalar* (Perrino 2024).

### Translating branding identities

Often referred to as the crib of the Renaissance, Italy promotes art and history as centerpieces of Italian culture and identity. The numerous medieval churches, Renaissance palaces, and ancient Roman ruins in the Italian landscape often create an “aura” that infuses a high regard for Italy’s rich artistic history. This aura is believed to emerge from other aspects of Italian sociocultural life, thus becoming—as many of my interviewees emphasized—part of Italy’s “cultural DNA” (Perrino 2020). These artistic and historical values have been also transduced (Silverstein 2003) into Italy’s business sector, often through ideological associations with the “Made in Italy” brand. In my narrative analysis, I demonstrate how some northern Italian executives<sup>2</sup> inter-scalarly translated the Made-in-Italy brand, which they often attached to their businesses, through several spatiotemporal shifts. Furthermore, my analysis shows how these individuals significantly enacted senses of *authenticity* with respect to their companies. In so doing, they moved across time and space and thus inhabited chronotopic stances while building a collective sense of connection with their co-citizens. This is how collective, intimate identities are (co)constructed, solidified, and *transformed* in Northern Italy.

I study how executives in northern Italian family-owned companies use their past and present narratives to (co)construct, (re)configure, and solidify their individual and collective *branding* identities through their association with discourses of cultural values, shared responsibility, and their invocation of *chronotopes of authenticity*. I do

<sup>2</sup>For this project, which was approved by the IRB, I assigned pseudonyms to all my research participants to protect their identity and privacy.

so by analyzing their spatiotemporal, or *chronotopic*, alignments in which their past and present family histories become flattened at times, by merging into one another, while they remain separate in other instances. In the process, these executives re-contextualize, and thus translate and transform, their branding identities by adapting them to the various contexts in which they land. As many of these northern Italian executives have emphasized, Italy's history and art permeate many aspects of Italian sociocultural life, including the business world, and are even presented as becoming part of Italy's "cultural DNA" (Kohler and Perrino 2017).

Furthermore, as Nakassis (2012, 2013, 2016a: 68) argues: "[t]here is a tension and gap between any brand token (or instance) and the type (or identity) to which it belongs and hence between both token and type and the very ontology that such types stand under." It is precisely this tension that I study in the (co)construction, circulation, and transduction of northern Italian executives' branding identities into more localized brand-tokens. In this vein, a well-known brand such as Made-in-Italy, which is recognized across the globe, can be *scaled*, and *translated*, into a more localized, and thus solidified, "Made-in-Town" or even "Made-in-a-small-island" branding identity, such as "Made-in-Venice" or even "Made-in-Murano" for specialized glassmaking companies. In the process, however, these executives emphasize the uniqueness of their company whose products can be fully appreciated only by their co-citizens (of Italian descent) who share the same history, artistic patrimony, language(s), and aspirations.

These fluid branding identities, moreover, are part of a scalar process that Donzelli (2023, 436 my emphasis) has recently named "*place-branding*"; namely, the application to nations, regions, cities, or even neighborhoods of marketing strategies of product differentiation aimed at enhancing the value, reputation, desirability, and competitiveness of a specific locale." Besides telling stories about their companies, the Northern Italian executives that I interviewed translated their stories about their own historical and traditional backgrounds, their extended families, their friends, and their locations through the many scalar shifts that they enacted. These executives thus align their corporate narratives, family histories, and *branding identities* with circulating ideologies on the significance of Made-in-Italy across scalar chronotopic configurations. They not only blended time and space by making family histories and traditions part of their here-and-now interactions through various discourse strategies (Gumperz 1982), but they also navigated through different temporal and spatial scales as they transduced and enacted both their individual and collective identities while their stories unfolded.

Besides the performance of their individual and collective branding identities, my analysis also unveiled how northern Italian executives' ideologies are reinforced, re-textualized (Bauman 1977, 2004), shared, and (re)circulated not only across the Italian business world but in Italian society, and across the globe, more generally. The scalarity of these processes thus becomes very significant also thanks to the malleability, or *transformability*, of the Made-in-Italy branding identity, which navigates across more or less globalized and localizes scales. Speech participants' emerging branding identities are thus intimately connected with an imagined Made-in-Italy trademark as a form of national branding that serves to boost the nation's position in the global marketplace. As my three examples show, through their efforts to link a historical, artistic



and cultural patrimony to the present identities and families of their companies, Italian executives index, and thus reinforce, the “schema of cultural knowledge,” in Silverstein’s (2013) terms, that surrounds the Made-in-Italy brand. In this way, Italian companies enroll Italy’s art history going back to the Renaissance as a basis for the perceived creativity and authenticity of the Made in Italy brand today, especially as related to small businesses and their relationship to Italian capitalism (Kohler and Perrino 2017). Clusters of small-scale family firms in Central and Northern Italy have always elevated and maintained this vision of Made in Italy (Blim 1990; Yanagisako 2002). Italian executives have shown their commitment in (co)constructing, defending, and maintaining Made-in-Italy as their national brand (Del Percio 2016) as if it were a treasure to be passed through generations. In this respect, the Made in Italy brand functions as a type of national branding, which Del Percio (2016, 86) defines as “a governmental strategy transforming the nation into a commodity that can be branded to successfully position the nation internationally.”

### Translating Made-in-Italy

In the following section, I analyze three narrative excerpts from two interviews drawn from a pool of 150 interviews that I have conducted with Northern Italian executives since 2011. I interviewed two executives of two well-known Northern Italian companies specializing in fashion and glassmaking respectively. These participants’ enactment of a collective “Italian culture” of art, design, and imagination rooted in a supposedly Italian DNA has been a recurrent pattern in most of my interviews and conversations with them. As I show in my analysis, speech participants’ collective branding identities emerge through the performance of some discursive strategies, such as the use of specific past tenses (the historical past [*passato remoto*] and the imperfect tense [*imperfetto*]), deictics (personal subject and object pronouns); discourse markers (Schiffrin 1987), and parallelism (Wilce 2001, 191). These executives often shifted in and out of certain identities and aligned or disaligned with their conceptualization of Made in Italy, including authenticity, responsibility, and family values. In the process, they (co)constructed and translated their individual and collective branding identities in significant ways and across spatiotemporal scales.

The first excerpt is extracted from an interview that I conducted with Moreno, who was the grandchild of the founder of a well-known fashion company in Northern Italy. As it is the case in many Italian companies, Moreno was involved in this family business and was in charge of the marketing department. Moreover, his company prides itself in producing all its products in Italy, and their brochures and website prominently display local landmarks from their town Mantua. This town itself is an important cultural center in Italy, as its historical downtown is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. On the day of the interview, I arrived in Mantua by train early in the morning and then took a bus to Mantua’s *zona industriale* (“industrial park”) located in the countryside. This fashion company is located right outside the town. As is common amongst many executives in Italy, Moreno wore his dress shirt with the cuff buttons undone and his watch over his dress shirt. This style was first popularized by one of Italy’s most prominent industrialists, Gianni Agnelli, while he was the CEO of the FIAT car company. The interview



with Moreno lasted one and a half hours. The first question centered on the history of the company, to which Moreno narrated that he had been involved in his company for a long time:

### Example 1 (M: Moreno)

#### *Original Italian version*

- 1 M: [...] il papa Carl-Carlalberto e lo zio maggiore Claudio **ripartirono**
- 2 praticamente **ricominciarono** da zero con trenta sei dipendenti
- 3 e **fondarono** quella che è la [...] S.p.A.
- 4 quindi in realtà se guardiamo le- le- la storia senza nessun tipo d'interruzione
- 5 diciamo la storia data dal' 58 ad oggi quindi 54 anni- anni
- 6 però se prendiamo invece anche la parte precedente
- 7 quindi diciamo il DNA le origini del nonno
- 8 allora ne fa molti di più con circa intorno a cento anni
- 9 perché è iniziata all'inizio degli anni degli anni venti- ven- col nonno [...]

#### *English translation*

- 1 M: [...] *our dad Carl-Carlalberto and our older uncle Claudio **started again***
- 2 *basically [they] **started again** from scratch with thirty-six workers*
- 3 *and [they] **founded** what is [...] S.p.A. [i.e., public company]*
- 4 *so in reality if [we] look at the- the- the history without any kind of interruption*
- 5 *let's say the history starting from 1958 until today so 54 years-years*
- 6 *but if [we] also take the previous part instead*
- 7 *so let's say the DNA, our grandfather's origins*
- 8 *then there are many more [years of history] about one hundred years*
- 9 *because [it] started at the beginning of the 1920s twenty- with [our] grandfather [...]*

Moreno started his narrative with a classic Labovian orientation (Labov and Waletzky 1967), in which he situated his company temporally and spatially to provide some historical context to his interlocutors. At the very outset of the interview, Moreno recounted the history of his company by merging it with the history of his family. In line 1, he explained that his father and his older uncle were the founders of the company. The two histories then became one, as if the two chronotopes that he invoked were *aligned* and transformed into only one. The boundaries between the family and the company are indeed often blurred in small Italian businesses (Yanagisako 2002). This is even more evident in line 9 when he claimed that his company established its roots well before the official foundation year. He grounded the company's origins in the 1920s when his grandfather was already active in the fashion sector. In this way, Moreno extended the historical background of his firm even further back in history: From the '50s, when his company was legally founded, to the '20s, when the family began working in the fashion industry. By going back and forth through these historical facts, spatiotemporally, Moreno enacted his family's identity together with his company's identity. He did so by chronotopically combining the two histories and by traveling fluidly across spatiotemporal scales. *Kinship chronotopes*

(Agha 2015) thus consistently emerged in Moreno's storytelling event. This is even more obvious in line 7 when he formally linked the two histories, by adding that the DNA of his grandfather was connected to their company. By unequivocally invoking his family's biological DNA in his narrative, Moreno infused an intimate element in the identity of his family business. In this way, he translates his identity through his many discursive scalar movements. This is possible if considered through an inter-semiotic, inter-scalar, framework, which considers translation in a continuous, fluid dynamics (Pritzker 2014). Besides the kinship chronotopes, moreover, through these spatiotemporal movements, a *chronotope of authenticity* surfaces in Moreno's first lines as well.

Moreno's chronotopic stances become more evident intertextually when he used the Italian remote past tense, the *passato remoto*. This remote tense was used in the past across Italy, and it has been replaced by the more common past tense, *passato prossimo*. However, *passato remoto* is still found in literary works, but is less frequent, and thus is *marked*, in everyday conversation (Renzi and Cardinaletti 1988; Rohlf 1968). Even though in some areas, especially in Tuscany and in some southern regions, the *passato remoto* is still used on a daily basis, in Northern Italy, where this interview was conducted, this remote tense is rarely used. Some speakers use this remote tense, however, as status marker: showing that one knows how and when to use it shows a good competence in standard Italian in certain social environments. Formal interviews are sites where individuals, such as executives of well-known companies, need to display their linguistic proficiency as well. Right at the outset of his narrative, Moreno used three instances of this remote past tense, “ripartirono,” “ricominciarono” (“started again”) and “fondarono” (“founded”) in lines 1–3 (bolded in the above transcript excerpt). By using these three tokens of *passato remoto* in the very beginning of the interview (and several other times later), Moreno emphasized how the histories of his company and family were rooted in the area around Mantua, in its arts and cultural traditions. In the process, he also transforms his identity from the one of the *business* man interested in selling products to the one of a very knowledgeable person whose grammar use is impeccable and very exclusive. History and art had been, indeed, part of the family's identity and part of their DNA, as Moreno claimed in line 7, since his grandfather's time. He continued the translation process of his identity by emphasizing the key role of Italian history and DNA further in my second example when he also used some parallelistic structures.

## Example 2 (M: Moreno; I: interviewer)

### Original Italian version

- 10 M: [...] e::hh sicuramente un altro punto di forza diciamo di successo
- 11 viene un po' dal nostro **DNA** il fatto che Mantova
- 12 cioè sia di essere nati in Italia prima di tutto
- 13 che ovviamente ha un **DNA** di cultura **rinascimentale** il gusto del bello
- 14 ehh quindi l'arte un po' il gusto di vivere bene
- 15 di saper realizzare dei prodotti che abbiano un grande appeal
- 16 quindi il fatto del **DNA** italiano e in particolare Mantova
- 17 che ha rappresentato per la cultura dell'abbigliamento

- 18 I: mmhmm  
 19 M: Isabella d'Este cultura rinascimentale [clears throat] è sicuramente un punto di forza  
 20 quindi direi la tradizione no?  
 21 la tradizione italiana e la tradizione la **mantovanità** [..]

### English translation

- 10 M: [...] e::hh [it is] certainly another advantage let's say of success  
 11 [it] comes a bit from our **DNA** the fact that Mantua  
 12 that is to say being born in Italy first of all  
 13 which obviously has a **DNA from the Renaissance** culture the taste for beauty  
 14 ehh so art a little bit [like] the taste for living well  
 15 for being able to create products which have a great appeal<sup>3</sup>  
 16 so the fact of the Italian **DNA** and in particular Mantua  
 17 which represented for the clothing culture  
 18 I: mmhmm  
 19 M: Isabella D'Este Renaissance culture [clears throat] [it] is certainly an advantage  
 20 so [I] would say tradition [is an advantage], right?  
 21 Italian tradition and the tradition of **being from Mantua** [..]

In this narrative excerpt, Moreno recounted that his company's success was rooted not only in its prestigious historical background, but also in the local DNA of his town, Mantova (Mantua—lines 11, 13). Moreno indeed scalarly extended, and thus translated, his local DNA background to the national, Italian DNA in lines 16–21, and thus reinforced the circulating ideology of a national *Made in Italy* brand, and of its historical, artistic and cultural authenticity. Mantua's DNA was “rinascimentale” (“from the Renaissance,” line 13), thus contributing to an authentic historical and artistic aura (Benjamin 1936; Hansen 2008) that pervades his birth town Mantua, its museums, antique churches, buildings, and companies, including his. In Moreno's perspective, Mantua's history, art, and tradition are thus part of a shared DNA, of something that is connected to the idea of being produced in Mantua. In his words, its “mantovanità” (“being from Mantua,” line 21). Moreno then, again, rescaled the local DNA background to the national, Italian DNA in lines 16–21, and thus reinforced the circulating ideology of a national *Made in Italy*, and of its historical, artistic and cultural authenticity even more. At the same time, Moreno also enacted both his individual and collective identities, which are fluidly shifting from a more local, Mantua-based identity, to a more national, Italian one. In terms of scales, he thus shifts from a small, local scale, represented by his birth town, to a larger, national scale. Since scales are never neutral (Carr and Lempert 2016b), these scalar shifts carry significant meanings and instantiate Moreno's subsequent narrative moves. The very fact of being born in Italy constitutes an important part of these chronotopic stances and collective identities in which history, art, and culture are shared and need to be cherished, as many of my

<sup>3</sup>The English term “appeal” has become part of the Italian vocabulary among managers in companies and ordinary speakers as well.

interviewees emphasized. Biologized metaphors and embodied senses of authenticity are thus encapsulated in the rescaled *Made-in-Italy* branding identity. These senses of identity are indeed translated from a more global pattern, which includes all relevant products that are made in Italy, to a more local one, which highly values the localized, town-made quality of these products.

My third example is extracted from an interview that I conducted with Bernardo, the president of a well-known glassmaking company in the small island of Murano, which is part of the town of Venice (Venezia). The interview, which lasted one hour and fifteen minutes, took place in a Venetian palace in Murano where the company is headquartered. The room where the interview took place was quite large and displayed several glass objects such as large vases, lamps, chandeliers, and glass sculptures. There was one window on the far side of the room overlooking one of Murano's many canals. In the middle of the room, there was a large circular wooden table with a large round translucent glass over it. The president and his assistant asked me to sit around that table. Bernardo wore a navy-blue suit, a dark red tie, and small circular bright red glasses. To a question on the history of the company, he responded as follows:

### Example 3 (B: Bernardo)

#### *Original Italian version*

- 1 B: Quindi uhm fino a 150 anni fa le aziende erano delle- delle botteghe artigiane
- 2 dei- dei luoghi dove un gruppo di persone guidate dal- da un proprietario illuminato ehh più bravo degli altri
- 3 e riuscivano a produrre delle cose
- 4 quindi ehh **NON** è la nostra azienda che esiste dal 1295
- 5 è la nostra **FAMIGLIA** che si occupa di vetro dal 1295
- 6 quindi c'è un- una notevole differenza
- 7 non è che nel 1295 ci fossero le S.p.A.<sup>4</sup> o le S.r.l.<sup>5</sup>
- 8 ehh col consiglio di amministrazione
- 9 e i revisori della KPMG che venivano a lavorare
- 10 erano:: botteghe artigiane come- come in-in tutta l'Italia dell'epoca:::
- 11 era così per qualsiasi tipo di manufatto
- 12 e comunque è vero nel 1295 la mia famiglia si occupa di vetro

#### *English translation*

- 1 B: So uhm until 150 years ago companies were just artisanal shops
- 2 locations where a group of people managed by the- by an enlightened owner uhm more skilled than the others
- 3 and were able to produce things
- 4 so uhm it is **NOT** our company that has been in existence since 1295
- 5 it is our **FAMILY** that has worked in glassmaking since 1295

<sup>4</sup>S.p.A. stands for "Società per Azioni" ("Joint-Stock Companies").

<sup>5</sup>This abbreviation stands for "Società a Responsabilità Limitata" ("Limited Liability Company"), and it is usually appended to the end of company names when relevant.

- 6 so there is a remarkable difference  
 7 [it] is not that there were joint-stock or limited liability companies in 1295  
 8 uhm with a Board of Directors  
 9 and KPMG auditors who come to do their work  
 10 [there] were artisanal shops as- as everywhere in Italy at that ti:::me  
 11 [it] was this way for any kind of product  
 12 and [it] is therefore true that in 1295 my family started to work in glassmaking

As Bernardo described in line 1, how people think about Venetian glassmaking companies today is a rather new concept: only 150 years ago, they were just family-run artisanal shops. In line 4, however, he jumped back seven centuries, up to 1295 when his family started to work in glassmaking. Traveling through spatiotemporal scales, Bernardo, similarly to Moreno in the previous two narrative excerpts, merged his company's identity with his family's in lines 4 and 5 when he asserted that it is not his company that had existed since 1295, but it is their family that had been consistently working in this sector across long spans of time and space. Thus, Bernardo translates his company's identity into one that makes sense because of the strong family ties that keeps it together. Kinship chronotopes (Agha 2015) thus consistently emerged in Bernardo's narratives as well. By increasing his voice volume (Gumperz 1982), in line 5, for example, Bernardo seems to emphasize the fact that his family had been very influential on his business. His family *had been* his business for more than seven centuries, he highlighted. The connection between his company and the DNA of his family becomes clear in this case as well. He reiterated this in line 12 and in many other moments of this initial part of the interview.

Right at the outset of the interview, this executive clarified that art and history had been part of his family and company since early times. The prestige of glassmaking as a quintessential form of art thus surfaced at various points during the interview. As his narrative unfolded, Bernardo indeed clarified his position vis-à-vis the concept of art as it had been understood by his family and company's members. In the process, while Bernardo flattened time and space in the storytelling event, he also created an opposition between a *chronotope of modernity* (Divita 2014; Koven 2013) and a *chronotope of tradition*. Through these two layered, although hypothetically opposing, chronotopes, Bernardo's family and brand identities had been translated across time and space. Thus, Bernardo, like Moreno, constructed, through significant scalar shifts, his localized branding identity while keeping it connected to the Made-in-Italy one. These collective identities were thus *translated* through several, fluid chronotopic configurations such as *kinship chronotopes*, but also scalar, and at times conflicting, *chronotopes of authenticity*, *chronotopes of modernity*, and *chronotopes of tradition*. As a result, these individuals' identities are not stable, nor are they fixed; rather, they are often fluid and heterogeneous (Nichols and Wortham 2018; Perrino and Wortham 2022), given speech participants' scaling shifts in their storytelling practices.

## Conclusion

*Translating* branding identities across spatiotemporal scales has been recurrent in the Northern Italian executives' narratives that I have collected. As I have demonstrated

in the analysis of my three examples, these executives transduce (Silverstein 2003) their Made in Italy brand, by inhabiting various spatiotemporal configurations at different scales. While they narrate their companies' past and present vicissitudes, which are intimately connected with their families' histories, these executives shift scales and thus position themselves from different perspectives. In the process, as I have argued, these executives transform, and translate, the supposed prestige of a national Made in Italy brand into a more localized, regional, or even town- or small island-based branding identity. To do so, they resort to an imaginary shared biological DNA together with a historical and artistic patrimony which index the *uniqueness* of everything that is Italian. In this respect, these executives' moves are scalar (by continuously upscaling, *middle-scaling*, and downscaling): history and art are transposed into their storytelling events to possibly emphasize the assumed authenticity of Italian culture, language, and people. Time and space interweave in fluid alignments, and thus reinforce the overall sense of a national identity: a collective identity (Van De Mierop 2015) of people of Italian descent who share the same *prestigious* historical past and who can appreciate the artistic heritage and patrimony with which they have lived for generations (Perrino 2020, 2024; Perrino and Kohler 2020).

As the three examples that I analyzed in this article show, Moreno and Bernardo started recounting the history of their companies immediately by linking them to their families' past. Their companies histories thus solidly merged with their families' past by invoking exclusive *kinship chronotopes* (Agha 2015) throughout their narratives. Both companies rest on respected pasts as they are related to the founders of their companies and to the towns where their businesses started. Moreno and Bernardo praised their ancestors for their ability to successfully start their companies that have lasted throughout time and space. Their commitment to their historical, regional, and artistic patrimony therefore helps solidify a collective, Made-in-Italy branding identity which is held together by an imaginary, although embodied, shared DNA. While appealing to a biologized metaphor such as the DNA might be common in some brand marketing discourse, such as the American fashion industry, as Nakassis (2016b) convincingly shows, the emphasis that Northern Italian executives have put on the connection between their family and their businesses pushes this metaphor further. Some executives have reinforced racialized ideologies and anti-immigrant politics, for example, by resorting to similar biologized tropes and by enacting *intimacies of exclusion* vis-à-vis migrants or Italian citizens of migrant decent who have been active in similar industries or sectors such as historical cafés (Perrino 2020, 2024), or by simply venting their frustrations about the new demographics in Italy (Allievi 2014). In closing, throughout their scalar moves, these executives inhabit chronotopes of authenticity by emphasizing that their businesses are unique and exclusive. The way their Made-in-Italy branding identity shifts, and gets translated, across these scales, thus enables them to reinforce exclusionary and xenophobic ideologies while they reinstate their illusion to keep their history, culture, art, and businesses untouched.

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## Appendix: Transcription and Abbreviations Conventions<sup>6</sup>

- Syllable cut-off.
- . Stopping fall in tone.
- , Continuing intonation.
- ? Rising intonation.
- ! Animated tone.
- \_\_\_\_ Words with underline indicate stress.
- CAP Words in capitals indicate increased volume.

<sup>6</sup>In this article, I follow Gail Jefferson's (1978) transcription conventions.

(...) Talk between parenthesis indicates the transcriber's best guess at a stretch of discourse that is unclear on the original recording.

[...] Three dots between square brackets indicate that some material of the original transcript has been omitted.

[] The material inside square brackets indicate the transcriber's comments/suggestions.

**Bold:** highlighted portions of the transcript discussed in the analysis

*Italics:* English translation.