

# THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF *REDDITO DI CITTADINANZA* IN THE BRITISH PRESS

## Some reflections

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**Abstract** – This paper is concerned with the terminology adopted in English to translate the Italian concept of *reddito di cittadinanza* (Rdc). An analysis was carried out on a dataset consisting of newspaper articles in English, in order to examine how the notion of Rdc was rendered in the British press. By evaluating the different expressions used to convey the meaning of the concept, the paper shows how the terminology adopted in English might affect target readers' understanding of the functioning and mechanisms of Rdc, frustrating the attempt to explain this particular benefit with reference to comparable measures in place in other national systems.

**Keywords:** translation; *reddito di cittadinanza*; guaranteed minimum income; online newspapers.

## 1. Introduction

After a months-long, political tug-of-war, Decree Law no. 4 of 28 January 2019, *Disposizioni urgenti in materia di reddito di cittadinanza e pensioni*, was approved by Italian government. The enactment of this legislation was accompanied by a lively debate.

Among the measures that were given extensive media coverage at national level was the provision of financial support to those actively looking for a job or who are unemployed, so long as they meet a number of specific criteria. This form of income support is known as *Reddito di cittadinanza* (literally: 'Citizenship income', hereinafter Rdc). Proponents of the new benefit contended that it would help the unemployed to look actively for work, while critics were of the opinion that it would discourage recipients from seeking work. The usefulness of this measure has also been discussed internationally, since similar measures are in place in other countries pursuing the same objective. It should be noted that the English-language press has dedicated considerable attention to Italy's initiative. When dealing with this topic, various expressions have been employed in English to refer to Rdc.

It is precisely this lack of uniformity or biunivocity when translating the concept that will be scrutinised in this paper. The aim is to look at how the Rdc notion has been rendered in a number of selected articles published in English and to assess critically whether the English terminology accurately conveys source-text meaning. This objective will be pursued by providing an analysis of a number of English-language newspaper articles.

After examining the existing literature (section II), some definitional aspects will be considered, together with some methodological criteria employed to inform the reader about the texts selected (section III). Next come some reflections on the findings resulting from the analysis of the dataset examined (section IV), followed by some concluding remarks (section V). The relevance of this research lies in the recent debate arising from

this measure and the international dimension that this discussion has acquired, giving rise to the need for an appreciation of the concept in order to prevent misunderstanding in comparative analysis. The question has become all the more pressing due to the economic upheaval ensuing from the Covid-19 pandemic.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Translation Studies (TS) scholarship has focused mainly on terminological aspects, examining different language pairs in the original and translated version of newspaper articles (Bianco 2014; Kàroli 2013; Kasmani 2014; McLaughlin 2015; Newman 1993; Schàffner 2005; Valdeón 2008, 2009). In this respect, research has considered this question from a variety of perspectives. Some scholars have looked at how the language used to translate news items brings about a distinct conceptualisation of social reality for target language readers (Gumul 2010; Kùpper, Alonso 2018). The problem, in this case, is to appreciate whether this strategy is intentional or accidental, considering that: “investigating intentionality of such shifts requires process-oriented research, and even such an approach might not answer all the questions” (Gumul 2010, p. 109). Other scholars have concentrated on the ways translators of newspaper articles dealing with ideological conflict, in their attempt to move away from, or stick to, a specific political orientation (Van Doorslaer 2010; Xia 2019).

In this respect, Loupaki has concluded that “we can quite firmly support that translation in the news environment is not as innocent as believed by some readers, nor identical to its original text” (Loupaki 2010, p. 73). Referring to the context of news reproduction, the author also raises the question as to whether the term ‘translators’ can still be used, due to the contribution of other professionals in terms of word choice and editing (Loupaki 2010). Some others have analysed how translation in the national press is used for political purposes (Biro 2015; Gagnon 2010). It is frequently the case that translators contribute to disseminating domestic public narratives beyond national boundaries, either to gain a wider following or to challenge them by appealing to a foreign audience (Baker 2019).

Research has also enquired into cases of erroneous or misleading translation choices by contrasting source and target texts. Filmer has considered the “interwoven issues concerning translation, imagology, and ideology in the news” (Filmer 2016, p. 13) examining how the British press has depicted Italy’s political events. In this regard, one issue that has been raised is the effectiveness of translating cultural keywords, namely terminology that is important from a sociological point of view, because it embodies social values and transmits culture (Xiao, Hu 2015). Concerning the topic discussed in this paper, the author is not aware of TS research conducted on the translation of Rdc into English-language newspapers. However, it should be noted that the concept and its rendering in other languages has been recognised as problematic by specialists in other fields (e.g. economists and labour lawyers). Discussing the notion of Rdc in Germany and the UK, Torry has argued that terminology can be specific to its context so that the same word might mean quite different things in different countries (Torry 2013). The terminological issue is also considered by Standing (2017); when examining the setting up of the Basic Income European Network (BIEN), he points out that this acronym plays on the French word *bien* to hint at the well-being that basic income can bring about (Standing 2017).

### 3. Definitional Aspects

Before embarking on the analysis of Rdc and its translations provided in English-language newspapers, it seems appropriate to provide a definition of the concept. This will help us to assess to what extent the terms chosen in English either move away from or adequately convey the source-text meaning. The definition of Rdc will present us with the opportunity to appreciate this institutional reality in context and to make sense of its comparison with analogous measures in other national systems. When engaging in comparative analysis, the focus should be on contents rather than labels, because measures that appear to be similar at first sight may in fact perform different functions at national level. This assumption holds particularly true in the field of comparative employment relations, to which the terminology in this paper pertains. In this connection, Schregle notes that “the point of departure of international comparison cannot be an institution as such, but must be the function it carries out [...] We must compare functions, not institutions” (Schregle 1981, p. 22).

Language self-evidently plays a key role in comparative research also in this domain: “in an attempt to compare these institutions on an international basis there are immediate difficulties of terminology, in that bodies with the same name may perform different functions” (Bean 1994, p. 16). This is why a definition of Rdc in the Italian context helps to put things into perspective, providing a means to better understand commonalities and differences between apparently similar measures adopted in different national systems. It should be stated at the outset that that Decree Law no. 4 of 28 January 2019 distinguishes between *Reddito di cittadinanza* (literally ‘Citizenship income’) and *Pensione di cittadinanza* (literally ‘Citizenship Pension’), that is paid to households consisting of one or more members aged 67 years and older.

Concerning Rdc, it is stated that “it is essential monetary support provided within the limit of the available budget” (par. 1, Article 1 of Decree Law no. 4 of 28 January 2019). The definition also sets forth some requirements in relation to those eligible for this benefit, both in terms of income and citizenship. With reference to this second criterion, and in the context of this paper, it seems important to stress that those an individual eligible for Rdc must: 1) be an Italian or EU citizen, have a family member who has the right of residence, either permanent or temporary, or be a third-country national with a long-term EU residence permit; 2) have resided in Italy for at least 10 years, the last two of which on a continuous basis (this is the qualifying period needed at the time of application and while Rdc is paid).

The other aspect that should be pointed out is that the granting of Rdc is conditional upon the recipient’s commitment to seek employment actively and not turn down all the job offers provided by local employment centres. As discussed later in this paper, these requirements are key to understanding the suitability of the translations supplied in the English-language press to express the notion of Rdc.

Mention should also be made of the methodology used to select the articles making up the dataset examined in this paper. The articles were published on the ten most widely-read British newspaper websites (Figure 1). The articles scrutinised were selected manually in order to consider only those referring to Italy’s Rdc. As for the timeframe, the current analysis has considered the period from March 2018 – that is when the first government supported by the Five Star Movement took office (Conte I) – until March 2019. Once elected this government started working on legislation granting this benefit. The new measure was then discussed in the press both in Italy and abroad.

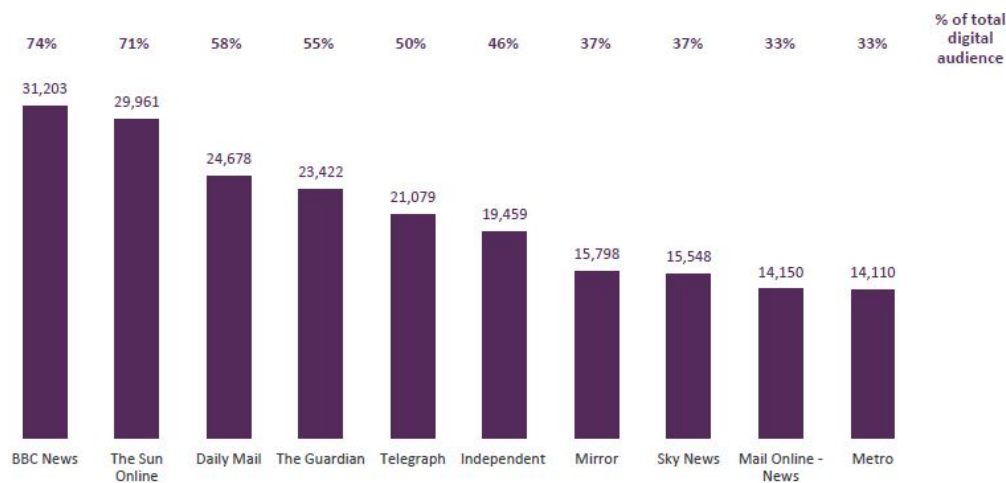


Figure 1

Newspaper websites in the UK (% of digital audience). Source: comScore MMX Multi-Platform (April 2019).

*BBC News* is the most widely consulted source of information for online users based in Britain (74%), followed by *The Sun Online* (71%) and *Daily Mail* (58%). *The Guardian* and *Telegraph* are also newspaper websites with a strong following (55% and 50% of those surveyed access them, respectively) and, to a lesser extent, *The Independent* (46%) and *Mirror* (37%) and *Sky News* (37%). *Mail Online-News* and *Metro* are the least used information sources among British readers (33%).

In considering the data above, 80 articles were identified from the newspaper websites which examined Rdc in the Italian setting. The articles were selected manually by entering a number of queries into the website search engine, namely ‘Italy’, ‘Italian labour market’, ‘Five Star Movement’. Afterwards consideration was given to those discussing Italy and Rdc, within which a translation of the Italian *reddito di cittadinanza* was provided. The terminology used in each article to translate Rdc was then contrasted with the source-text language, in order to investigate its effectiveness in rendering the Italian concept

## 4. Discussion

This section is concerned with the terminology used to convey the meaning of Rdc in English in the material surveyed. Table 1 provides the list of expressions employed in the articles examined to refer Rdc, ranked by frequency:

English Translation	Occurrences
Citizen's income	21
Citizenship income	20
Universal basic income	16
Income support	14
Guaranteed minimum income	9

Table 1  
English translation of *reddito di cittadinanza* in newspaper articles (by frequency).

A discussion will now follow about the terms in Table 1 and the possible implications in terms of understanding.

#### 4.1. 'Citizen's income' and 'Citizenship income'

In the newspaper articles examined, the most widespread expressions to translate Rdc into English are 'citizen's income' and 'citizenship income'. They constitute an attempt to render the notion literally, in that the Italian *cittadinanza* corresponds to the English 'citizenship'. While in some cases a verbatim translation is the only possibility (Nabokov 1955), the choice of a word-for-word translation might be questioned in this case.

'Citizenship income' or 'citizen's income' can be both considered as potentially misleading, in that they suggest that this benefit is provided regardless of employment status. This is generally the case for the English expressions, in that outside Italy, income based on citizenship is often defined as "an unconditional, nonwithdrawable income paid to every individual as a right of citizenship" (Citizen's Income 2019, webpage). There are at least two reasons why these expressions are not suitable to convey the meaning of the Italian notion of Rdc.

First – and unlike citizen's income – Italy's Rdc is not limited to nationals only, as it can be requested also by individuals who have been living in Italy for at least ten years.

Accordingly, citizenship is not a requirement, an aspect which marks a significant difference with the benefits provided by schemes labelled as 'Citizenship income' or 'citizen's income' in place elsewhere. On close inspection, one might argue that the problem stems from the source text. The use of *cittadinanza* in the Italian document is opaque, because the Italian decree law does not make citizenship a requisite. So the Italian word *cittadinanza* (literally translated) does not appear as an accurate description of what the Italian law is about.

The other aspect that should be highlighted is that Rdc is not supplied unconditionally; far from it. For applicants to qualify for this benefit, certain requirements have to be met (in terms of income and willingness to look for a job, among others). What matters here is not a translation of words from the source language to the target language, especially considering that in this case, exact equivalence is hard to achieve. This is because "translation is both a linguistic and cultural activity and it is concerned with the communication of meaning" (Kumar Das 2008, p. 45).

#### 4.2. 'Universal basic income'

Another expression that has been employed in the British press to refer to Italy's Rdc is 'universal basic income'. While widely used to translate the concept into English, this expression might be misleading. One reason for this is that 'universal basic income' means "an income of the same amount every week or every month, paid unconditionally to every legal resident of a country" (Torry 2018, p. X). As noted above, Rdc is provided on condition that certain requirements are met, but the adjective 'universal' in the English expression implies a different type of scheme, which is paid to anyone applying for it.

Another point that should be stressed concerns the use of 'basic', for this word sometimes has a negative connotation. As in other languages – the Dutch *basisinkomen* or the French *revenue de base* – basic income brings to mind a foundational income; yet in English 'basic' can be derogatory, in that it implies that "something is not very good" (Torry 2018, p. X).

In this sense, one of the definitions of 'basic' is "offering or constituting the minimum required without elaboration or luxury" (Oxford Dictionary 2019, webpage).

This would run counter to the purpose of Italy's Rdc, intended as "a fundamental active policy measure to safeguard the right to work, to tackle poverty, inequality and social exclusion" (par. 1, Article 1 of Decree Law no. 4 of 28 January 2019).

This brings to mind an important aspect which, although self-evident, should be taken into consideration in translation; the words employed could affect the target audience's appreciation of the notions being translated.

#### 4.3. 'Income support'

'Income support' is another expression adopted in order to translate Rdc into English. Undoubtedly, this benefit is aimed at supplementing the income of individuals who face financial difficulties. 'Income support' is defined as "a payment made by the state in particular circumstances to people who are on a low income" (Oxford Dictionary 2019, webpage). It is the legislation itself which specifies that this measure should be viewed as a form of economic support preventing poverty (Decree Law no. 4 of 28 January 2019). While this term provides an overall idea of the initiative implemented in Italy, perhaps it falls short of its real meaning. As noted above, it is true that Rdc complements one's main source of income, yet one might argue that this is too loose a rendering and might affect the target reader's perception of its purpose. In this sense, it is worth stressing that the European Commission defines 'income support' as "*all measures* taken by national authorities in EU countries to provide an adequate income to their citizens via different benefit schemes, such as: unemployment benefits, family and child benefits, pensions, disability benefits, minimum income schemes" (European Commission 2019, emphasis added).

As a result, 'income support' could refer to a range of measures to aid individuals facing financial hardship, including, though not limited to, forms of basic income.

Consequently, this expression might be misleading for readers of the target texts, as they might assume that income support refers to any monetary benefits when this is far from the case. The limited degree of equivalence between income support and Rdc brings to mind the observation by Hyman, who posits that "words, especially when they undergo translation, are not always what they seem" (Hyman 2001, p. 38).

#### 4.4. 'Guaranteed minimum income'

'Guaranteed minimum income' is another expression adopted in the material under examination. Unlike 'universal basic income' – where the adjective 'universal' implies that this benefit is granted unconditionally – 'guaranteed minimum income' makes no reference to free access. Therefore, it seems to be a more effective translation.

Another aspect that needs stressing is that the word 'basic' – which as seen in English might take on a derogatory connotation – has been replaced by 'minimum', a more neutral term denoting "the least or smallest amount or quantity possible, attainable, or required" (Oxford Dictionary 2019, webpage). This expression seems to be more in line with legislation regulating Rdc in Italy, which states that the aim to ensure a minimum level of subsistence (Decree Law no. 4 of 28 January 2019). Equally interesting is the fact that no mention is made of citizenship. Unlike 'citizenship income' or 'citizen's income', 'guaranteed minimum income' does not imply that this benefit is conditional on the citizenship requirement. Clearly, this expression does not provide an exhaustive explanation of the concept at hand, but its meaning seems to be closer to that conveyed in the source language.

## 5. Conclusions

This paper examined the Italian notion of *Reddito di cittadinanza* (Rdc) and the terminology adopted in the British press to translate this concept. This research – based on a dataset consisting of a number of UK-based newspaper websites – highlights a lack of consistency in relation to the English expressions used to refer to Italy's Rdc. In part, this might be put down to the fact that similar initiatives have been implemented in English-speaking countries, which however are characterized by different features in terms of household requirements, income, and citizenship status. Research conducted on the 80 articles making up the dataset reveals that five expressions have been employed to translate Rdc into English.

'Citizenship income' or 'citizen's income' is the most widespread terminology used in the British press to refer to the concept. As noted above, this terminology might be problematic, in that it conveys the idea that only Italian citizens are entitled to this benefit, while this is far from the case.

'Universal basic income' is arguably misleading, in that the recourse to the adjective 'universal' implies that Rdc is granted unconditionally. In this case, a difference arises between Italy's Rdc – the provision of which is conditional upon the fulfilment of certain requirements – and other forms of basic income in other countries.

The more general 'income support' is also used to refer to Rdc. Indeed, resorting to a hypernym is a widespread strategy in translation. Nevertheless, one might argue that while it is the case that Rdc is a type of income support, this expression is too vague and might cause the reader to infer that Rdc includes any financial aid for individuals.

Finally, 'guaranteed minimum income' was also used to describe the Italian concept of Rdc. Although not literal, this translation seems to be a better option to convey the meaning of the source-language concept. No reference is made to citizenship status, taking account of the fact that this allowance can also be granted to non-nationals.

Furthermore, the absence of the adjective 'universal' indicates that some conditions are to be met in order to be entitled to this monetary support.

Clearly, opting for one expression or the other will change the target-text reader's perception of the measure put in place. In some cases, the expressions used are potentially misleading (e.g. 'universal basic income' and 'citizenship income'), while in others they only provide the general picture (e.g. 'income support'). This is why it is argued that 'guaranteed minimum income' is the most suitable translation of Italian Rdc.

All the expressions referred to above to translate Italy's Rdc into English are somewhat incomplete and necessitate further explanation to convey the source-text meaning properly. Nevertheless – and unlike the other wordings – 'guaranteed minimum income' appears to be a good fit, because it does not make reference to the two criteria on which analogous benefits in other countries are based (citizenship and unconditionality) but which do not apply in the Italian context.

In conclusion, the analysis casts light on the fundamental role played by translation. In seeking to convey the meaning of the Italian Rdc, clarity is essential. Where clarity is lacking, different contributors to discussion can mean different things, so rational debate cannot occur (Torry 2018).

Avoiding ambiguity is particularly important when contrasting practices cross-nationally, thus employing proper terminology helps one to understand commonalities and differences among different institutions. Future research on this topic could be carried out that takes into consideration not only the terms employed to translate the concept at hand, but also the explanations of RdC in the text of the articles in the British press, where provided.

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