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# **Empowering children: The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its English and Italian child-friendly versions**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history and sets out children's civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. From a linguistic and subject-specific perspective, it is a typical international convention, which is most likely incomprehensible to children. For this reason, the Convention has undergone a process of reformulation and recontextualization (Calsamiglia – Van Dijk 2004) leading to the creation of a variety of child-friendly (CF) versions in many languages. This paper presents a corpus-based study of four CF posters explaining the rights enshrined in the CRC in English and Italian. The comparison of the CF versions with the original CRC revealed that the reformulation and recontextualization entailed a change in genre (from convention to poster), a significant reduction in length, a shift in focus from States Parties to children, a different use of deontic modality, and a limited use of cognitive popularization strategies.

Keywords: child-friendly writing, children's rights, legal knowledge, discourse analysis, popularization strategies.

## **1. Introduction**

In the last two decades, there has been a growing interest in popularization, which is – by quoting the widely accepted definition by Calsamiglia and Van Dijk (2004: 370) – “a vast class of various types of communicative events or genres that involve the transformation of specialized knowledge into ‘everyday’ or ‘lay’ knowledge, as well as a recontextualization of scientific

discourse, for instance, in the realm of the public discourses of the mass media or other institutions". The study of the dissemination of specialized knowledge has its roots in the 1980s (for an overview, see Myers 2003) and, since then, the literature in the field has burgeoned with the publication of journal special issues, single-author books (e.g. Garzone 2006; 2020) and edited volumes (e.g. Kermas – Christiansen 2013; Bongo – Caliendo 2014; Bhatia – Chiavetta – Schiarrino 2015; Salvi – Bowker 2015b).

While a full review of the literature in the field is beyond the scope of this article, two considerations are in order here. The first is that the year 2004 represents a cornerstone in the study of popularization due to the publication of the ground-breaking paper by Calsamiglia and Van Dijk (2004) in which a classification of popularization strategies is proposed. Since then, their classification has been at the core of linguistic research in the field of popularization discourse. The second consideration is that most publications in the field of popularization focus on not-further-specified "non-specialized readers", who are canonically adults. However, since the mid-2010s, children as a separate group of lay recipients of popularized texts have attracted increasing attention, with studies concentrating in certain domains in particular, namely tourism (Cappelli 2016; Cappelli – Masi 2019; Sezzi 2019), science (Diani – Sezzi 2020), the environment (Bruti – Manca 2019), health (Diani 2020), and law (Diani 2015, 2018; Diani – Sezzi 2019; Peruzzo 2021). And it is precisely to the field of dissemination of legal knowledge for children that the present paper means to further contribute, with a study conducted on four child-friendly versions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

## 2. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

This study is based on the analysis of two English and two Italian child-friendly (CF) versions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which is acknowledged by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights as one of the nine core international human rights instruments.<sup>1</sup> Adopted in 1989 and entered into force in 1990, the CRC is available in six equally authentic language versions (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish) and is a legally

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<sup>1</sup> The full list is available at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/Core-Instruments.aspx>, accessed August 2021.

binding agreement with 196 States Parties, including every member of the United Nations except the USA. Consisting of 54 articles and divided into three parts, the CRC sets out children's civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, namely the right to life, survival, and education; the right to protection from violence, abuse, or neglect; the right to be raised by, or have a relationship with, their parents; the right to privacy and freedom of expression; and the right to be listened to.

One aspect that differentiates the CRC from other international human rights instruments and is particularly relevant to this study is that it gives non-governmental organisations (NGOs) a direct role in overseeing its implementation. In fact, Article 45a states that, "in order to foster the effective implementation of the Convention and to encourage international co-operation in the field covered by the Convention", "[t]he Committee [on the Rights of the Child] may invite the specialized agencies, the United Nations Children's Fund and other competent bodies as it may consider appropriate to provide expert advice on the implementation of the Convention in areas falling within the scope of their respective mandates". The fact that child-focused NGOs have a recognized, active role in the implementation of the CRC has a bearing on the study presented in this paper in that they are involved in the production of child-friendly materials, including the CF versions of the CRC analyzed here.

As stated above, the CRC's main aim is to set out, protect and promote the rights and welfare of children in all the signatory countries. As an international treaty requiring ratification, the Convention addresses States Parties and possesses the typical linguistic features of international treaties in terms of structure, terminology, and phraseology (Cao 2007: 143ff.). Given the CRC's aim and binding force, the intended readers of the Convention are the States Parties rather than children, although the rights enshrined in it concern children. However, the CRC itself provides that "States Parties undertake to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike" (Article 42). This means that children are supposed to be informed of – and ideally also understand – what their fundamental rights are. Yet, given the linguistic features of the Convention, the text may well not be intelligible to them. In order to make the CRC accessible and understandable to children, and thus to empower them, various child-focused organisations have thus developed CF versions of the Convention.

### 3. Materials

In this case study, four child-friendly versions of the CRC are analyzed: two produced by UNICEF (in English and Italian), one by the international NGOs Plan International (in English) and one by Save the Children (in Italian).

UNICEF's child-friendly English text (UNICEF(EN)) was developed in collaboration with Child Rights Connect, a registered Swiss association with a network of more than eighty-five national, regional, and international organisations, and was supported by UN's Committee on the Rights of the Child. It represents UNICEF's standard child-friendly version of the CRC aimed at children aged between 10 and 17 and was released in 2019, on the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Convention. The purposes of this publication are manifold: to overcome the country specificities introduced in previous CF versions produced by UNICEF country offices and National Committees and local NGOs, to take into account the readers' needs through consultations with children, and to develop a comprehensive, universally meaningful set of visual icons for the Convention to accompany its verbal content (UNICEF 2019c). The English text is accompanied by a separate guidance document for internal use on how to adapt the text into other languages (UNICEF 2020: 3). The adapted versions, obtained through child participation processes, must be approved by a UNICEF Representative or Executive Director of the country in which they are meant to be used, who may decide to collaborate with non-UNICEF partners. All this considered, it is clear that UNICEF's Italian child-friendly version (UNICEF(IT)) analyzed in this paper is an adaptation of the English text obtained via translation.

Both linguistic versions are a two-page poster. The first page consists of forty-three boxes with a coloured background, each of which contains a number corresponding to the article number, a white icon and a short wording summarizing the content of the relevant article. At the bottom of the page, the title "Convention on the Rights of the Child" (and the Italian equivalent) appears, without specifying that the poster is meant for children. The second page contains the child-friendly version of forty-two articles: each article is in a separate, numbered box, and the number is of the same colour as the box containing it on the first page. The bottom of the second page reports three logos pointing at the Convention, Child Rights Connect and UNICEF. Next to the first logo and above the other two we find what could be considered to be an introduction to the child-friendly version. This introduction is a first hint to the fact that the adaptation in a language other than English may require various interventions on the target text, additions of information included. In fact, while the English text explains what the CRC

is and what it contains, the Italian version adds a linguistic note, specifying that the term *bambino* ('child') is used to refer to both young children and teenagers, no matter what their gender is.

The number of articles included in both UNICEF's versions does not correspond to the actual number of articles contained in the original CRC. Considering the wording appearing in box 43, which states that articles 43-54 "explain how governments, the United Nations – including the Committee on the Rights of Child and UNICEF – and other organisations work to make sure all children enjoy all their rights", the reason for such a discrepancy seems to be that those twelve articles do not confer any right on children but rather set forth technicalities that are considered irrelevant from a child's point of view.

The other two CF texts follow the same line in excluding articles 43-54 but do so without signalling it in any way. Plan International's English text (PI) is a double-page poster and contains a small print disclaimer: "This text constitutes a simplified version of the CRC, not the official text". Like UNICEF's texts, PI's poster is considered a multimodal text, since the verbal elements are accompanied by flat-coloured illustrations as if hand-drawn by children. As regards its textual organization, the poster features a title ("Learn about your rights!") and a subtitle ("The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child"), with illustrations on both sides. The body of the text is then contained in forty-two numbered boxes showing the CF version of the articles of the Convention.

The fourth text under analysis is a CF version of the CRC in Italian produced by Save the Children (StC). The NGO's website offers two "simplified" versions. One is a visually complex booklet<sup>2</sup> with abundant illustrations and various activities (e.g. a maze, colouring and drawing activities) meant for elementary school pupils, i.e. children aged from 6 to 10 according to the Italian school system. The second, which is the one considered in this study, is a one-page poster with no visual elements except for a red frame at the top, the NGO's logo at the bottom and the alternation of red and black fonts. The reason for including this version in the corpus lies in the attempt to build a homogeneous corpus in terms of target readers: although it fails to specify the age group addressed, since it is visually plain and uses no complementary modes typical of multimodal communication addressed at young children, it is arguably closer to UNICEF's versions directed at an older, though still young, readership.

<sup>2</sup> See [https://www.savethechildren.it/sites/default/files/files/Convenzione\\_ONU\\_sui\\_diritti\\_infanzia\\_adolescenza.pdf](https://www.savethechildren.it/sites/default/files/files/Convenzione_ONU_sui_diritti_infanzia_adolescenza.pdf), accessed September 2021.

#### 4. Methods and aims

The aim of this case study is to analyze the features of the four child-friendly versions in the light of previous studies on knowledge dissemination and popularization for children. The methodological framework is therefore discourse analysis, and this study relies upon the “generalizable discursive strategies” identified by Salvi and Bowker (2015a: 13), i.e. recontextualization, re-conceptualization, and trans-mediation. In this framework, recontextualization is intended as the re-shaping and re-writing of discourse for a different type of recipients with different purposes, and “may reflect popularization or simplification of expert knowledge, or, on the other hand, switches between discourse communities, domains or fields” (Salvi – Bowker 2015a: 13). This leads us to what is referred to as the “dominant view” (Hilgartner 1990) or the “canonical model” (Grundmann – Cavallé 2000: 355) of popularization, which assumes that “there are two separate discourses, one within scientific institutions and one outside them, and that information is translated from one of these discourses to the other” (Myers 2003: 266). This view has been convincingly questioned in the literature (for an overview, see Garzone 2014: 76-78). However, the process that has led to the creation of the CF texts analyzed here seems to bear a strong resemblance with intralingual translation, and in particular with what Dressler and Eckkrammer (2001: 40) have termed “intergeneric intralingual translation”. This is so for various reasons. At the outset, it appears clear that the CF versions follow the same macrostructure of the Convention by being divided into articles, each dealing with one right. Yet the CRC has been re-written for a target group of readers with a different level of knowledge of the topic and at a different stage of cognitive development compared to the drafters and the intended recipients of the original CRC. This means that, despite presenting the same content with a different degree of specificity, the original CRC and the CF versions pursue different purposes and belong to different genres: the CRC is a prescriptive legal instrument aimed at States Parties, whereas the CF texts are informative posters aimed at children.

Precisely because of the new recipients and their need to have the CRC adapted to their level of knowledge and stage of cognitive development, the re-writing of the Convention requires re-conceptualization, i.e. a “re-working of cognitive representations and mental models” (Salvi – Bowker 2015a: 13). This process may take various linguistic forms and require the adoption of different discursive strategies as well as the inclusion of semiotic modes that

are not typical of the genre the “source” text belongs to but are characteristic of the genre the “new” texts are examples of. Indeed, except for StC’s text, whose child-friendly version does not resort to a strategic use of the visual mode, UNICEF’s and PI’s texts apply a form of trans-mediation by integrating the verbal part of the message with a visual component (icons in the former case and illustrations in the latter case).

## 5. Data analysis

As stated in the previous section, the four texts analyzed in this paper are directly derived from the original CRC, which is meant for a very specific adult readership and works as a “source” text for the “translation” aimed at a broad young readership. This is a peculiar feature of the corpus investigated, since in other studies dealing with popularization aimed at children no actual “source” text was compared to a child-friendly version. Therefore, what follows can be considered to be a comparative analysis between the original CRC and the four CF versions described in Section 3.

### 5.1 Text length and level of specificity

The first aspect that emerges from the comparison between the original CRC and the CF versions is a reduction in text length. Given that articles 43-54 as well as the Convention’s Preamble are absent from all four CF texts, this observation is not particularly surprising, but to show the impact of recontextualization for children on the CRC in terms of length, the figures presented in the tables below (obtained from SketchEngine) refer only to Articles 1-42.

Table 1. Text details of the English subcorpus

	CRC(EN) Articles 1-42	UNICEF(EN)	Plan International
Tokens	5,226	1,399	1,151
Types	966	396	366
Sentences	109	75	62
Average n. of words per sentence	47.94	18.65	18.56
Shortest article	20	10	12
Longest article	516	74	46



Table 2. Text details of the Italian subcorpus

	CRC(IT) Articles 1-42	UNICEF(IT)	Save the Children
Tokens	5,475	1,527	820
Types	1,206	521	329
Sentences	110	73	47
Average n. of words per sentence	49.77	20.91	17.45
Shortest article	20	9	4
Longest article	531	68	33

The comparison reveals that all the CF texts are significantly shorter than the source text, with UNICEF(EN)'s text shorter by 73.23% and PI's text by 77.98% for the English language and UNICEF(IT)'s text shorter by 72.11% and StC's text by as much as 85.02% for the Italian language. Shifting our attention onto sentences, we can notice that the reduction in the number of sentences is not as remarkable: the number of sentences is smaller by 31.19% in UNICEF(EN)'s text, by 43.12% in PI's text, by 33.64% in UNICEF(IT)'s text and by 57.27% in StC's text. It follows that the creation of CF texts in both languages implied a substantial cut in the average number of words per sentence. Indeed, while in the original CRC in English the average number of words per sentence is 47.94, the average number in the two English CF versions is below 19 words per sentence. A similar pattern can be observed in Italian, where the original CRC has an average of 49.77 words per sentence, while UNICEF(IT)'s and StC's texts have an average of slightly less than 21 and almost 17.50 words per sentence, respectively. However, there are a few exceptions to this general pattern: in UNICEF(EN)'s text two articles are longer than in the CRC, while in both UNICEF(IT)'s and StC's texts one article is longer than in the CRC.

The difference in length has an impact on the amount and specificity of the information provided in each article. Let's take the longest article in the English CRC (Article 40), which revolves around the rights and safeguards that the States Parties must give to children who are accused of or recognized as having violated criminal law. The original Article contains 516 words and is divided into four paragraphs, two of which contain detailed lists of obligations imposed upon States. An extract of the Article<sup>3</sup> is shown below to illustrate the level of detail contained in the CRC:

<sup>3</sup> In all the examples, emphasis is added in italics.

- (1) 2. To this end, and having regard to the relevant provisions of international instruments, States Parties shall, in particular, ensure that:
- (a) No *child* shall be *alleged as, be accused of, or recognized as having infringed the penal law* by reason of acts or omissions that were not prohibited by national or international law at the time they were committed;
  - (b) Every child alleged as or accused of having infringed the penal law has at least the following guarantees:
    - (i) To be presumed innocent until proven guilty according to law;
    - (ii) To be informed promptly and directly of the charges against him or her, and, if appropriate, through his or her parents or legal guardians, and to have legal or other appropriate assistance in the preparation and presentation of his or her defence;
    - (iii) To have the matter determined without delay by a competent, independent and impartial authority or judicial body in a fair hearing according to law, in the presence of legal or other appropriate assistance and, unless it is considered not to be in the best interest of the child, in particular, taking into account his or her age or situation, his or her parents or legal guardians;
    - (iv) Not to be compelled to give testimony or to confess guilt; to examine or have examined adverse witnesses and to obtain the participation and examination of witnesses on his or her behalf under conditions of equality;
    - (v) If considered to have infringed the penal law, to have this decision and any measures imposed in consequence thereof reviewed by a higher competent, independent and impartial authority or judicial body according to law;
    - (vi) To have the free assistance of an interpreter if the child cannot understand or speak the language used;
    - (vii) To have his or her privacy fully respected at all stages of the proceedings.

Unlike the source text, the CF versions of the whole Article are concise, as shown below:

- (2) *Children accused of breaking the law* have the right to legal help and fair treatment. There should be lots of solutions to help these children become good members of their communities. Prison should only be the last choice. (UNICEF(EN))

- (3) If *you* are *accused of breaking the law*, you must be treated in a way that respects your dignity. You should receive legal help and only be given a prison sentence for most serious crimes. (PI)

The first difference that can be noticed by comparing (1) with (2) and (3) is that in (1) the rights apply to children “alleged as, accused of, or recognized as having infringed the penal law”, while in (2) and (3) only “accused” children are mentioned, thus implying that the subtleties of such a distinction may be confusing or superfluous for a young audience. Therefore, the reduction in terms of length also entails a reduction in detail and a form of simplification.

In the Italian CF texts a remarkable reduction in length and a high level of condensation can also be observed:

- (4) *I bambini accusati di aver trasgredito la legge hanno il diritto all’assistenza legale e ad un giusto trattamento. Prima della reclusione devono essere trovate soluzioni alternative che li rieduchino ad essere validi membri della loro comunità.* (UNICEF(IT))<sup>4</sup>
- (5) Hai diritto a essere adeguatamente difeso nel caso in cui *tu sia accusato o abbia commesso un reato.* (StC)  
(You have the right to an adequate defence if *you are accused of or you have committed an offence.*)<sup>5</sup>

By comparing the English and the Italian versions a difference can be noticed: despite its conciseness, StC’s text somehow maintains one of the complexities found in the source CRC by distinguishing between children accused of having committed an offence and children who have actually done so.

These examples show how a significant cut in the length of the texts corresponds to an unavoidable need to summarize and reduce the amount of information conveyed. Nevertheless, a closer look at the wording of the extracts provided above reveals another relevant aspect, namely the fact that the recontextualization necessary to adapt the CRC to the needs of a young readership also leads to a reformulation that shifts the focus from the subjects that must ensure the implementation of children’s rights (i.e. States Parties) to the subjects whose rights are to be implemented (i.e. children). In the next section, this shift is further explored.

<sup>4</sup> In all the examples extracted from UNICEF(IT), no translation is provided since they correspond to the examples taken from UNICEF(EN). In this case, example (4) corresponds to example (2).

<sup>5</sup> The translations in examples extracted from StC are mine throughout.

## 5.2 Child-centredness

The examples provided in Section 5.1 hint at how in the CF versions of the CRC the focus turns from States Parties, whose duty is to recognize and implement children's rights, to children, who are both the holders of such rights and the intended readers. The purpose of such a shift is to orient the text towards the readers so as to make its content understandable to them and, by so doing, to empower them. Such child-centredness is obtained through various strategies, the most evident of which operates at the syntactic level and consists in the change of the argument occupying the subject slot.

To illustrate this shift, subject-verb sequences have been considered and in particular S-V sequences in which the subject slot is filled by a noun either referring to "States Parties" or to "children" and the verb slot is filled by a (modal) verb. The results of the extraction are shown in Tables 3 and 4 below.

Table 3. S-V sequences with nouns referring to "States Parties" or "children" in the subject slot in the English subcorpus

S-V sequence	CRC(EN) Articles 1-42	UNICEF(EN)	Plan International
<i>States Parties</i> + verb	70	0	0
<i>State Party</i> + verb	1	0	0
<i>government</i> + verb	0	2	0
<i>Government</i> + verb	0	0	7
<i>governments</i> + verb	0	2	1
<i>Governments</i> + verb	0	13	6
<i>child</i> + verb	30	10	0
<i>children</i> + verb	2	10	0

Table 4. S-V sequences with nouns referring to "States Parties" or "children" in the subject slot in the Italian subcorpus

S-V sequence	CRC(IT) Articles 1-42	UNICEF(IT)	Save the Children
<i>Stati parti</i> + verb	54	0	0
<i>Stati</i> + verb	1	17	1
<i>Stato parte</i> + verb	1	0	0

<i>Stato</i> + verb	0	0	1
<i>governo</i> + verb	0	0	0
<i>governi</i> + verb	0	0	0
<i>fanciullo</i> + verb	8	0	0
<i>fanciulli</i> + verb	1	0	0
<i>bambino</i> + verb	0	1	0
<i>bambini</i> + verb	0	24	0

To interpret the tables correctly, it must be borne in mind that the frequency of S-V-O sequences is generally higher in English than in Italian, since the latter tends to use a broader variety of syntactic patterns in declaratory sentences. Despite this structural diversity, the data presented in Tables 3 and 4 are still considered useful to show a shift in focus. In the original CRC in both languages, in S-V sequences “States Parties” prevail over “children” in the subject slot, giving the idea that States Parties have an active role in ensuring and protecting children’s rights, such as in the following example:

- (6) 1. *States Parties undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognized by law without unlawful interference.*  
 2. *Where a child is illegally deprived of some or all of the elements of his or her identity, States Parties shall provide appropriate assistance and protection, with a view to re-establishing speedily his or her identity.*

When recontextualized for children, States Parties’ obligations are frequently presented as children’s rights, and, from a linguistic perspective, this is done by moving “children” to the subject slot, as in the following example:

- (7) *Children have the right to their own identity – an official record of who they are which includes their name, nationality and family relations. No one should take this away from them, but if this happens, governments must help children to quickly get their identity back. (UNICEF(EN))*

However, this tendency is not a general rule: in the second sentence in (7), which corresponds to the second paragraph of the original CRC, “States Parties” keep their subject position to highlight the assistance they must provide. This reformulation entails two lexical substitutions, i.e. “governments” for “States Parties” and “must” for “shall”, both of which are regarded as appropriate for a text that is not legally binding and is meant to be comprehensible to a young audience (see Section 5.3).

A very similar shift in perspective can also be observed in the Italian subcorpus. In the CRC, most subject slots are occupied by “*Stati parti*” (‘States Parties’), while children are referred to as “*fanciulli*” (literary word for ‘children’). Before proceeding further, a brief digression is in order here. The lexical choice of “*fanciullo*” is particularly interesting, since it points at the historical period in which the CRC is situated, given that the use of the word “*fanciullo*” is nowadays rare and limited to formal discourse (although it may also be used with a humorous intent). It follows that in UNICEF(IT)’s text, which is more recent, children are referred to by the currently much more common word “*bambini*”. Considering that UNICEF(IT)’s version is an adaptation of the English text, it is not surprising that the Italian version of example (7) resembles the English version, with “*bambini*” (instead of “*fanciulli*”) in the subject slot in the first sentence and “*Stati*” (rather than “*Stati parti*”) in the same position in the second part of the sentence:

- (8) *I bambini hanno il diritto di avere una identità; ovvero di disporre di un documento ufficiale che comunica chi sono elencando nome, nazionalità e identità dei genitori. Nessuno deve privarli di questa documentazione ma, se ciò accade, gli Stati devono fare in modo che riescano velocemente a ottenerla di nuovo.* (UNICEF(IT))

By taking a closer look at the fourth column in Table 3, it can be noticed that in PI’s text “governments” (rather than “States Parties”) occupies the subject slot, while “children” does not do so. For example, Article 8 in PI’s text reads as follows:

- (9) *Governments should respect your right to a name, a nationality and family ties.* (PI)

The same, although with a lower frequency, occurs in StC’s text, where *Stati* are mentioned only twice. The reason for a complete absence of “children” in subject position in PI’s and StC’s CF versions is that in these two texts a different reformulation strategy has been used. In these texts, the subjectivization of children has taken a step further: the fact that the target audience coincides with the right holders has been made clear linguistically through the use of the second person in both languages. As regards English, in PI’s text there are 60 occurrences of the personal pronoun “you” in subject position followed by a (modal) verb. In StC’s text, since in Italian the second person is not usually made explicit through personal pronouns but rather through verb conjugation, there are 39 sentences starting with “*Hai diritto a*” (‘You have the right to’).

Based on the observations above, we could say that children are somehow presented in two different ways in the CF versions of the CRC. In both UNICEF's versions, recontextualization and reformulation have led to a shift in focus from States Parties to children as right holders, thus giving children a linguistically more central position but still keeping them separate from the actual reader of the texts. By contrast, in PI's and StC's the discursive strategy adopted has required the use of an explicit reader engagement device, namely the second person, which allows young readers to identify with the subject of the text and the creation of a greater sense of concreteness and applicability of the text.

### 5.3 Modality

The change in function (see Section 4) and focus (see Section 5.2) has also led to a change in modality. This is particularly visible in English, since legally binding texts – whose function is predominantly prescriptive – are characterized by a deontic modality expressed through modal verbs, and in particular by the modal verb “shall”. Indeed, as Garzone (2001: 156, emphasis in the original) puts it, “while [...] SHALL is relatively infrequent in general usage in comparison with other modals, in legislative texts it is certainly the most frequent modal, being customarily used to express legal provisions in alternation with the simple present, and, more generally, qualifies as one of the most frequent lexical items”.

Table 5. Modal verbs extracted from the English subcorpus

Modal verb	CRC(EN) (Articles 1-42)	UNICEF(EN)	Plan International
can	5	13	5
could	1	0	1
may	10	0	0
might	0	2	2
must	1	11	4
shall	108	0	0
should	3	36	41
will	1	3	0
would	2	0	0
Total	131	65	53

Table 5 above shows that “shall” has the highest frequency among modal verbs in the original CRC, which is not surprising considering the legal force of the Convention. In fact, in 51 occurrences out of 108, the subject slot preceding the modal verb is occupied by “States Parties”, which further supports the idea that the main responsibility of acknowledging, protecting and ensuring children’s rights lies upon Governments. On the contrary, shall is totally absent from the two CF versions under analysis. The reason seems self-evident: the reformulation of a legally binding Convention into informative texts addressed to children requires discarding the deontic modality imposing obligations on States and creating child-centred text. In such texts, children’s rights are presented as if they were a matter of fact, and are therefore frequently expressed through non modal verbs, although modal verbs do not disappear completely. To illustrate this point, let’s look at how Article 2 is formulated in the three English texts under examination:

- (10) *States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child’s or his or her parent’s or legal guardian’s race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status. [...]* (CRC(EN))
- (11) *All children have all these rights, no matter who they are, where they live, what language they speak, what their religion is, what they think, what they look like, if they are a boy or girl, if they have a disability, if they are rich or poor, and no matter who their parents or families are or what their parents or families believe or do.* (UNICEF(EN))
- (12) *You should not be discriminated against for any reason, including your race, colour, sex, language, religion, opinion, origin, social or economic status, disability, birth, or any other quality of your parents or guardians.* (PI)

In example (10), the modal verb “shall” is used to impose on the States Parties the acknowledgment and respect of children’s right against any type of discrimination. In (11), “all children” becomes the subject of the sentence and no modal verb is used, taking for granted that the right at hand is actually available to any child. In (12), on the contrary, we can see that “shall” is replaced by “should” and is preceded by the personal pronoun “you”. What is interesting here is that the modal verb “should” in (12) is used in a passive construction, while in (10) and (11) the sentence is in the active voice.



Indeed, in both UNICEF(EN)'s and PI's texts, "should" is most commonly used to point at duties incumbent upon governments rather than children. Therefore, the typical patterns found in the corpus are constructions with "Governments" as the subject followed by an active construction or with either "children" or "you" as the subject followed by a passive construction, as in the following examples:

- (13) *Governments should ensure* that you survive and develop healthily. (PI)
- (14) *Children should be encouraged* to go to school to the highest level possible. (UNICEF(EN))
- (15) *You should be protected* from any activities that could harm your development and wellbeing. (PI)

A similar pattern, though with a lower frequency, can be noticed with the modal verb "must", which tends to be followed by an active construction when the subject is "Governments" and by a passive construction when the subject is either "children" or "you", as exemplified in the extracts below:

- (16) *Governments must make sure* that children survive and develop in the best possible way. (UNICEF(EN))
- (17) *Children must be registered* when they are born and given a name which is officially recognized by the government. (UNICEF(EN))
- (18) If you are accused of breaking the law, *you must be treated* in a way that respects your dignity. (PI)

In Italian, modality in general and deontic modality in particular are expressed in a different manner compared to English, especially in legal language (see Garzone 1999). The most common way of expressing prescription in legal provisions in Italian is through the *presente indicativo* ('simple present') with no modal verb, and this is also the case in the Italian translation of the CRC, where the modal verbs "*dovere*" ('must') and "*potere*" ('can') (in various verb tenses) play a marginal role (see Table 6 below).

Table 6. Modal verbs extracted from the Italian subcorpus

Modal verb	CRC(IT)	UNICEF(ITA)	Save the Children
<i>dovere</i>	14	43	6

<i>potere</i>	18	11	4
Total	32	54	10

What deserves our attention is that in one of the Italian CF texts the frequency of modal verbs is higher compared to the CRC. In particular, it is the verb “*dovere*” that appears more frequently. Article 11 can serve as an example:

- (19) 1. *Gli Stati parti adottano* provvedimenti per impedire gli spostamenti e i non-ritorni illeciti di fanciulli all'estero.  
 2. A tal fine, *gli Stati parti favoriscono* la conclusione di accordi bilaterali o multilaterali oppure l'adesione ad accordi esistenti. (CRC(IT))<sup>6</sup>
- (20) *Gli Stati devono impedire* che i bambini vengano portati fuori dal loro paese contro la legge, per esempio nel caso in cui un genitore conduca all'estero un figlio senza l'accordo dell'altro genitore. (UNICEF(IT))  
 (*States must prevent* children from being taken out of their country when this is against the law, for example when a parent takes their child abroad without the other parent's consent.)

Therefore, in both subcorpora we notice a transition from a form of expression of deontic modality with a prescriptive purpose, which is typical of legally binding texts, to a form of deontic modality with an informative purpose, which is obtained by means of modal verbs in both languages.

#### 5.4 Popularization strategies

The last aspect analyzed here is the presence of popularization strategies used in the CF versions under examination. These texts have a practical aim, i.e. to inform children and raise their awareness of their rights, which may contribute to their empowerment and thus have a direct effect on their lives. To reach this aim, the texts should be comprehensible to their readers and may thus resort to some of the cognitive (rather than communicative) strategies discussed in the literature on popularization discourse (Calsamiglia – Van Dijk 2004; Ciapuscio 2003; Gülich 2003; Turnbull 2018). To investigate the cognitive strategies used in the CF versions of the CRC, the generally accepted distinction between illustration (also known as formulation or

<sup>6</sup> Article 11 CRC(EN) contains the modal verb “shall” and reads as follows: 1. *States Parties shall take* measures to combat the illicit transfer and non-return of children abroad. 2. To this end, *States Parties shall promote* the conclusion of bilateral or multilateral agreements or accession to existing agreements.

explanation) and reformulation is applied here. Illustration is used to introduce new knowledge and “to relate new knowledge to old (perhaps experiential) knowledge” (Turnbull 2018: 204), and manifests itself in the following forms: (i) denomination, used to introduce new terms (Calsamiglia – Van Dijk 2004: 374); (ii) definition, used to explain the meaning of new terms (Calsamiglia – Van Dijk 2004: 379); (iii) exemplification, i.e. the explanation of complex concepts in a simpler, everyday manner (Calsamiglia – Van Dijk 2004: 383); (iv) scenario, i.e. the creation of a possible yet imaginary situation that allows to address the interlocutor directly and to explain a complex event (Brünner 1987); (v) metaphor (including comparison and analogy) (Calsamiglia – Van Dijk 2004: 376); and (vi) concretization, i.e. a wide array of “procedures which consist of rewording abstract information in a non-abstract manner” (Gülich 2003: 244). Reformulation, on the contrary, is employed when what has already been presented requires modification or clarification, such as “when the speaker realizes his interlocutor has difficulty in understanding in an ongoing process of constructing meaning together” (Turnbull 2018: 204), and therefore takes the form of either paraphrase or repetition. The following two tables show the cognitive popularization strategies found in the CF versions of the CRC.

Table 7. Cognitive popularization strategies identified in the English subcorpus

Cognitive popularization strategy	Metalinguistic expression or punctuation (italics signal variable elements)	UNICEF(EN)	Plan International
Denomination	called a “X”	1	0
	(or <i>alternative denomination</i> )	1	0
Exemplification	for example	3	0
	(i.e.)	0	3
	(for example)	0	1
Paraphrase	( <i>paraphrase</i> )	5	0

Table 8. Cognitive popularization strategies identified in the Italian subcorpus

Cognitive popularization strategy	Metalinguistic expression or punctuation	UNICEF(IT)	Save the Children
Denomination	“X”	1	0
Exemplification	( <i>ad esempio</i> )	0	2
	<i>per esempio</i>	1	0
	(example)	0	3

Paraphrase	<i>Ciò significa che</i>	0	1
	<i>Questo significa che</i>	0	1
	<i>ovvero</i>	1	0

What emerges from the tables above is that a limited array of cognitive strategies is present in the corpus, since only a small number of instances of denomination, exemplification and paraphrase were retrieved. In both languages, the most represented strategy is exemplification, although with a minor difference: in English, examples are always preceded by a metalinguistic expression (“for example” and “i.e.”, see example (21)), while in Italian examples are signalled either with or without such markers (see example (22)).

- (21) Children should not be separated from their parents unless they are not being properly looked after – *for example, if a parent hurts or does not take care of a child.* (UNICEF(EN))
- (22) Hai diritto a vedere realizzati i tuoi diritti da parte delle Istituzioni pubbliche (*Parlamento, Governo, Scuola ecc.*). (StC)  
(You have the right to have your rights protected by public institutions (*the Parliament, the Government, the school system, etc.*)).

The second most frequent strategy observed is paraphrase. In the English subcorpus, all the instances of paraphrase are marked by the presence of parentheses, such as in example (23), whereas in Italian paraphrases are introduced by various metalinguistic expressions, such as in example (24).

- (23) Children must have a nationality (*belong to a country*). (UNICEF(EN))
- (24) Hai diritto ad un livello di vita adeguato. *Ciò significa che* i tuoi genitori, o in mancanza lo Stato, dovranno garantirti cibo, vestiti e una casa in cui vivere. (StC)  
(You have the right to an adequate standard of living. *This means that* your parents, or the State in their absence, will have to provide you with food, clothing and a place to live.)

With regard to paraphrase, it is interesting to note that in one case (example (25)) the information provided in parentheses is used to explain the meaning of what precedes it (i.e. refugees) through a cause-effect relationship expressed by the conjunction *because* rather than as an apposition or by means of a metalinguistic expression.

- (25) Children who move from their home country to another country as refugees (*because it was not safe for them to stay there*) should get help and protection and have the same rights as children born in that country. (UNICEF(EN))

Finally, the analysis has revealed a few instances of denomination. In English, this strategy is signalled using metalinguistic expressions (see example (26)), whereas in Italian we find inverted commas (see example (27)).

- (26) The law must protect children's privacy, family, home, communications and reputation (*or good name*) from any attack. (UNICEF(EN))
- (27) Qualora il bambino non abbia i genitori, un altro adulto verrà nominato "tutore" e si occuperà della sua crescita. (UNICEF(IT))

## 6. Conclusions

Despite having children's rights at its core, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, with its typical linguistic features of an international treaty addressed at its signatories, poses comprehension difficulties to children. To overcome these difficulties, various child-focused organisations have developed child-friendly versions of the CRC, four of which have been analyzed in this paper.

The analysis has revealed that, in order to "translate" the CRC in a language that children can understand, the recontextualization process necessary to address a different audience and to pursue a different function (informative rather than prescriptive) entailed a major change in genre, with the original text of the CRC being reduced so as to fit the size and layout of a poster. In terms of layout, in three CF versions out of four the verbal mode was integrated with a significant visual component (icons and illustrations), which has not been further explored here to leave room for a more extended discussion of the impact that the "intergenerative intralingual translation" (Dressler – Eckkrammer 2001: 40) had on the language used. The comparison of the original CRC with its CF versions has shown that they differ in various ways, save for the macrostructure which was kept unaltered, and that such ways converge to a great extent in the two languages analyzed, namely English and Italian.

The first major difference relates to the length of the text. In order to fit a poster's size, the original CRC was significantly reduced, with a whole

part (Articles 43-54) completely omitted from all the CF versions and almost all the articles being much shorter in the CF texts. This, in turn, means that the CF texts are condensed as well as highly simplified versions of the CRC, which cannot in any way be as detailed and fine-grained as the original they were derived from.

The second difference concerns the shift in focus from States Parties, which are in charge of recognizing and ensuring the protection of children's rights, to children, who are the holders of such rights and the target readers of the CF versions. In two CF texts, child-centredness was obtained through syntactic recasting, i.e. by moving nouns referring to "children" to the subject slot. In the other two texts, "children" also ideally occupy the subject slot, but the second person was preferred to the third one, since "children" and readers coincide. Therefore, in this second case prominence was obtained through a direct reader engagement device.

The change in function and in focus expressed via (morpho-)syntactic means also led to a visible difference in terms of deontic modality. The original CRC has a prescriptive function, which is mainly expressed through the use of "shall" in English and of the *presente indicativo* (simple present) as well as of the modal "*dovere*" ("must") in Italian. Since the CF versions have an informative function, they do not impose any obligation on their receivers. For this reason, "shall" and its Italian equivalents do not occur in the CF versions, where the modals "should" and "must" in English and "*dovere*" and "*potere*" in Italian were preferred, especially in order to point at duties towards children.

The difference is related to the informative purpose and the recipients of the CF texts. Considering the young age of the addressees, cognitive strategies could be reasonably expected to assist the readers in the process of understanding. However, in the four texts analyzed these strategies do not seem particularly significant in terms of frequency and variety, given that only instances of denomination, exemplification and paraphrase have been found in both subcorpora. This can be explained by the fact that the four texts underwent the process of intergeneric intralingual translation mentioned above. The transition from a convention to a poster necessarily entails a process of condensation that goes through a simplification of the content and does not allow dilutions, while in most cases cognitive strategies require the addition of words to exemplify, clarify or explain what is assumed to be obscure to the intended reader.

The study presented in this paper has two kinds of limitations. The first limitation is the dataset used: since the study is based on a very small

corpus, the results presented cannot be generalized. The second limitation is the lack of a reception study capable of verifying whether the discursive strategies observed in the corpus actually helped in creating texts which are understandable and useful to a young audience. Notwithstanding these limitations, we believe that the study contributes to shedding some light on the close relationship between genre and popularization strategies for children, a topic that deserves further investigation.

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