

## **Lexical Worlds Travelling in Translation.**

### **Self, identities and relationships, as depicted in a Mexican novel anchored in different cultural and linguistic contexts**

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Literary texts have recursively encountered social psychology and related disciplines, particularly in theoretical frameworks that focus on meaning-making such as the social representations perspective. The present study explores the relationships between text and context in a collection of short stories published in different languages: *Women with Big Eyes* by Ángeles Mastretta. The oeuvre was examined using lexicometric analyses, i.e., Reinert's Descending Hierarchical Analysis, in order to identify emerging worlds of meaning. From the three analysed versions (the original Spanish, the Italian, and the English translation), different lexical worlds are identified that likewise recreate the general idea of the book. However, interesting variations in meaning-making emerged, as grounded in specific cultural and linguistic contexts. The results appear to legitimise the use of literary texts in social psychological analyses, also in their translated versions, although with some caveat. The paper closes underscoring the importance of studying meaning-making in context, thus enhancing the potential of literary texts for research in social psychology and in related fields of knowledge.

**Key words:** Social representations; Lexicometric analysis; Reinert method; Lexical worlds; Cultural contexts.

## **SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AND LITERARY TEXTS**

The interest of social psychology in studying literary texts has taken a discontinuous course over time, repeatedly peaking and then declining (Contarello, 2016). In a generative paper, Moscovici (1986) opened a window on the study of literary texts as containers of information that could be useful in conducting social psychology studies. They can also provide a picture of different implicit theories capable of explaining practices, emotions and social representations embodied in such works. Moreover, they can contribute to knowledge through powerful interchanges between artistic and scientific treatment of an issue by authoritative writers and scholars.

The link between social psychology and literature has become more evident in recent decades, following major changes in theoretical and epistemological focus in social psychology (together with other psychological and social sciences), mainly in the narrative, discursive and cultural turns (Contarello, 2008; László, 2008). This link can be particularly strong when the topics being investigated regard the self, identities and relationships as meant as socially constructed, and rooted in particular contexts (see also Moghaddam, 2004; Germano et al., 2014; Emir, 2016). More broadly, this link results even more evident, considering the role of thought experiments in both domains, science, and literature (Moghaddam, 2021).

Turning to literature allows answering a variety of questions. Already in the early Seventies, in one of the most cited empirical research paving the way to a strict relationship between social representations and literary texts, Chombart de Lowe (1971) studied childhood in French literature along one century. Working with literary texts means, for this author, proposing a study that is considered an ‘excellent projective test’ of the values and aspirations system within a society. This opens new space for research in a diachronic dimension, considering research questions spanning along time (Contarello & Volpato, 1991). Later, Emiliani (2002) carried out research on the structuring and structured features of everyday life, a key aspect in the study of social representations. The author resorted both to interviews and to literary texts, endorsing the

“widespread belief that novels constitute, in every historical period, a sort of mirror of the reality about which they speak, based upon a knowledge which we may consider widely shared, at least by a certain social group” (p.17). Wagner et al. (2008), on their hand, focused on a single text as a literary model of real life. They chose Arthur Miller’s play *The crucible* to study the construction of witchcraft in its making, offering a powerful example of how to study representations as “dynamic units in the communicative pattern of an unfolding discourse” (Wagner et al., 2008, p.38). As the authors themselves notify: “These are difficult to target and therefore the dynamics of the genesis of representations easily escapes social science research” (Wagner et al., 2008, p.38).

A topical contribution, along this vein, comes also from Janos László’s writings. In his *The science of stories. An introduction to narrative psychology* (2008), the author shapes a theoretical and methodological proposal enhancing the narrative organization of social representations (László, 2008, see also László, 1996). Through this, he and his colleagues deepened themes dear to social psychology, such as social and national identity (László et al., 2003), further intertwining social psychology and literature.

In our case, we focus our attention on self and relationships as social, practical, shared knowledge, i.e., as social representations (Doise, 1998; Oyserman & Markus, 1998; Contarello & Vellico, 2003). Then, we further explore their rooting in cultural and, more specifically, linguistic contexts.

Le regard psychosocial, which is at the heart of social representations, assumes that the knowledge of a social object necessarily requires the mediation of an Alter, and the knowing process unfolds in a ‘thirdness’, based on the triangle Ego-Alter-Object (Moscovici, 1984; see also Markovà, 2003). Thus, the Ego-Alter relation is the locus of meaning-making, in specific times and spaces. As Castro (2015) in a crystal clear manner reminds us there can be no meaning-making outside a culture nor outside a given interactional context: “we absorb social representations, starting in infancy. Together with other elements of our culture and with our mother tongue” (Moscovici & Markovà, 2000, p.253).

Fundamental as they are within the theory of social representations (see also Jovchelovitch, 2007; Wagner & Hayes, 2005), we propose that these assumptions might be empirically approached via research with literary texts travelling, with their translations, in different cultural contexts.

The present paper aims thus to further support the connection between social representations, culture and language as well as social psychology and literature by exploiting the potential of literary texts to reflect on the meaning-making importance of linguistic and cultural contexts, a main asset of social representations theory. Differently from previous works, it looks at the issue of translation to further examine the dynamic nature of human thinking (as well as speaking and writing). Different versions of the same book are compared to identify the worlds of meaning resulting from each one. In other words, we examine how the author and translators delineate the content of the book in different linguistic and cultural contexts.

### **Women with Big Eyes and its Translations**

*Mujeres de ojos grandes* ('Women with Big Eyes' in its English version) is a collection of stories written by the Mexican author Ángeles Mastretta, first published in 1990 then translated into English in 2003 and Italian in 2005. There are thirty-seven stories portraying the life and the relational world of thirty-nine "aunts" from the Mexican middle and upper social classes in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The main characters are women who live surrounded by social norms representing the ideals and stereotypes of womanhood in Mexico in their time. These women break with the standards imposed by society, however, to achieve their own goals, reacting in very different ways and going against the patriarchal culture in which they are immersed.

Why is this particular book pertinent for the purposes of the present study? Social representations are systems of knowledge, not just the author's ideas. The stories were born in the author's mind, then published in a successful book that travelled, finding a remarkable welcome even in new settings, being translated into different languages, and thereby probably also contributing to a vision of new worlds. The book thus fulfils the criteria of authoritativeness, diffusion and relevance required in comparative research. It can both reflect existing patterns and shape new possible systems of knowledge (Contarello, 2016).

Why is it pertinent to work with its translations? On its own, a translation is a "semiotic activity first and foremost because it challenges its own limits by making use of the knowledge of various disciplines, bringing its own interpretative devices into dialogue" (Guagnano & Mininni, 2018, p.130). Clearly, a translation always involves an act of interpretation. It always reflects the translator's own native language, which is influenced by several factors like the translator's own

culture, experiences, and linguistic repertoires. As the authors of the above quotation remind us, however, the study of translations constitutes a lively independent field of interdisciplinary research, not founded on any unifying theory. Particularly when we take a perspective oriented towards Peirce's semiotics (as the above-mentioned authors do), referring to his category of thirdness, and focusing on meaning and its generation, translations become a precious ally for social psychologists interested in meaning-making in context.

We can expect an approach that investigates the relationship between words and sentence structures, to differ for translations of the same content into different languages because the translations change the words and sentence structures. The question becomes: how do these differences reverberate on a social psychological plane? What kind of worlds will they help to shape and envisage? The tree versions of *Women with Big Eyes* (Mujeres de Ojos Grandes, translated into English by May Schildhouse Greenberg and into Italian by Gina Maneri) tell the same story, but they differ in the language used to do so. Investigating these language differences may bring out similarities and differences in representations, enabling us to analyse their meaning-making in context.

## **METHOD**

### **Lexicometric analysis with Iramuteq: lexical worlds across book translations**

In the last three decades, quali-quantitative text analysis has acquired countless additional methodological approaches now that the mass digitalization of text documents gives us access to a vast amount of empirical data of all kinds, enabling researchers to adopt several different analytical methods. Generally speaking, all these new methodological approaches can be described as “text mining techniques” (TMTs), which were first applied to the sphere of social representations (Moscovici, 1961/1976) by Lahlou in 1996 (Lahlou, 2012).

Lexicometric analysis is a descriptive approach that is used to obtain a summary representation of texts (or content analysis). It can be used, for instance, to illustrate the relationship between words and between words and variables, also in graphic form that as a whole can define the content of a representation. Within this framework, IRaMuTeQ (Ratinaud, 2009) is a freely-accessible software that offers a range of text mining techniques, treatments and tools allowing large amounts of textual data to be analysed. In other words, this software enables

different types of textual data analysis, from very simple ones, such as basic lexicography, which mainly covers the calculation of word frequency; to multivariate analyses such as descending hierarchical classification of text segments, correspondence analysis, and similarity analysis (Camargo & Justo, 2013).

## **Corpora and analyses**

Chosen based on the linguistic competence of the present paper's first author, we analysed three corpora. Each one consists in one out of three version of the whole book.

We used Descending Hierarchical Analysis (DHA), also known as Reinert's method (Reinert, 1983; 1990), implemented in the Iramuteq software (Ratinaud, 2009) and applied it to conduct a separate analysis of each version of the book (Reinert, 1983; 1990), as the software does not allow to run analyses simultaneously in different languages. This method distributes all text segments based on their vocabulary to obtain clusters of text segments with a similar vocabulary, differentiating them from the others. This enables rapid investigations within a whole corpus of textual material, classifying its general characteristics, thus helping the researchers in their interpretation which is in essence a qualitative process requiring reflexing exercise. The resulting clusters are presented in a dendrogram showing their main vocabulary (i.e., most representative words associated). Each cluster can be defined as a 'lexical world', that is the visible trace (lexical) of the latent dimension that underlies the discourse, called *topos* (place of thought; Reinert, 1993). Lexical worlds are identified by means of words co-occurrences as they appear in text segments. The underlying logic holds that, if in different situations (i.e., texts segments) the same words are used recurrently, there is a reference to a common topic defined by the set of words most often used in relation with each other (Sbalchiero, 2018). Each corpus (i.e., version of the book) includes 39 texts each of which describes an 'aunt' and her relational world (out of 37 short stories). A first step divides texts into smaller portions - i.e., text segments - within which the co-occurrence of words is calculated. This procedure returns a dendrogram in which each cluster (or class) is composed by a set of words with a common underlying meaning. This meaning is attributed by the researcher based on the set of words and text segments most associated with each class. Then the resulting classes from each corpus are compared identifying the different types of lexical worlds and their relations.

## RESULTS

Each analysis was conducted separately and resulted in three clusters for the Spanish and Italian version of the book and four clusters for the English one. An overview of the whole results is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Overview of the classes identified in each version of the book. The same colour refers to similar contents

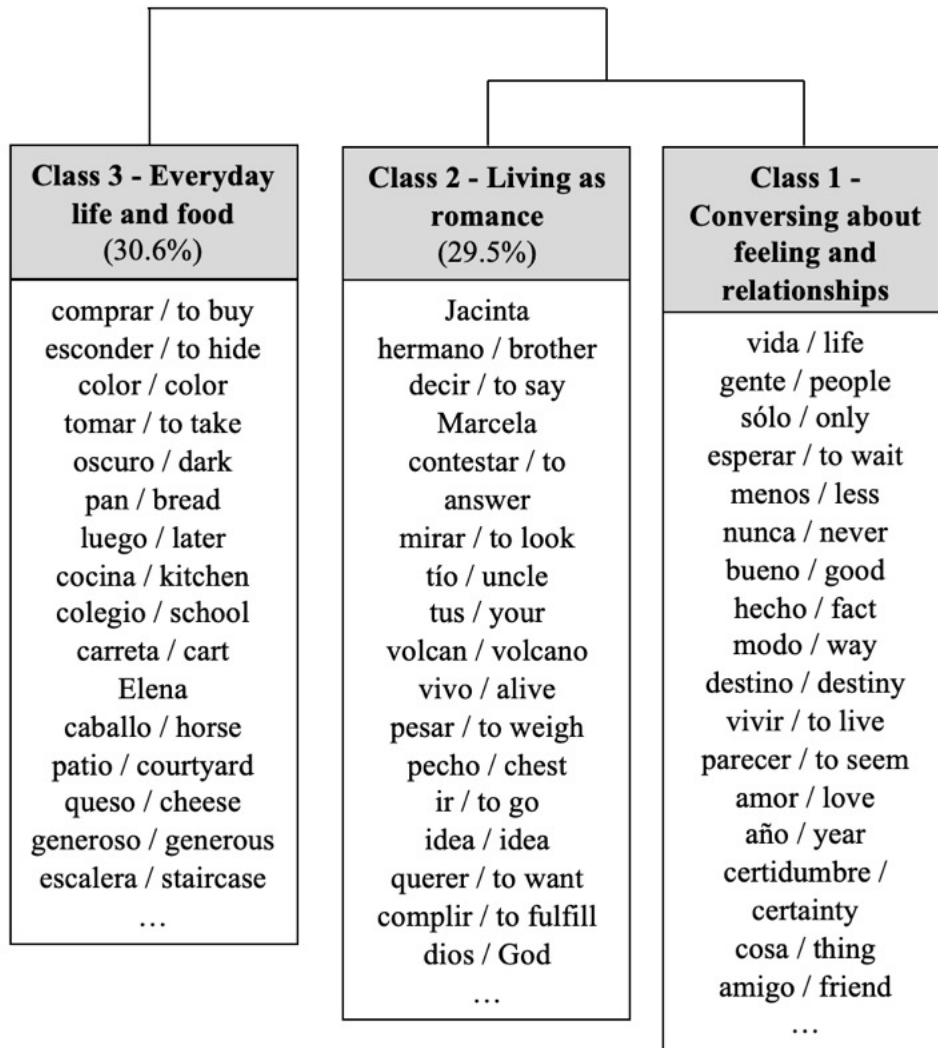
### Spanish text

Book Version	Class	Class label	Text segments classified
Spanish	3	<i>Everyday life and food</i>	30.6%
	2	<i>Living as romance</i>	29.9%
	1	<i>Conversing about feeling and relationships</i>	39.5%
Italian	3	<i>Life around food</i>	15.4%
	1	<i>Relational world</i>	44.7%
	2	<i>Body and action</i>	39.9%
English	2	<i>Romantic relationships</i>	31.6%
	1	<i>Friends and family</i>	15.3%
	3	<i>Social contexts and activities</i>	14.6%
	4	<i>Body and action</i>	38.6%

Three different lexical worlds, or “classes”, emerged in the Spanish version (Figure 1). The 39 texts were broken down into 1811 portions (text segments, each containing 27.5 words on average). The three classes together accounted for 95.75% of these units, indicating that the classification was very strong. For an integral understanding of this section, the authors present literal translations (LT) of the excerpts into English, which do not correspond to excerpts taken from the original English version of the book.

Figure 1.

*Dendrogram of the DHA for the original Spanish version. The words are in order of association (chi-square). Authors translation*



Class 3 stands out from the other two, with 30.6% of the classified text segments, referring to everyday life and people: putting on table of food and day-to-day activities, such as going to the market or to school, or social gatherings. The characteristics of these elements and activities are also highlighted: manners, textures, smells, and colours, adjectives referring to people, animals and food. Time is also mentioned, in various forms (e.g., time, hurry, Sunday).

*Por ese tiempo, en las casas había desayunos sin prisa y delicias nocturnas como el pan dulce y el café con leche.*



*LT: At that time in the homes there were leisurely breakfasts and evening delicacies such as sweet bread and milk coffee.*

Excerpt associated with class 3 – Spanish version.

*Quizá todo hubiera seguido por el mismo **camino** si a la tía Leonor no se le ocurre **comprar nísperos un domingo**. Los **domingos** iba al **mercado** en lo que se le **volvió** un rito solitario y feliz.*

*LT: Perhaps everything would have continued the same way if Aunt Leonor had not thought of buying loquats on a Sunday. On Sundays she went to the market in what became a solitary and happy ritual.*

Excerpt associated with class 3 – Spanish version.

The author uses foods to portray feelings, memories and moments with emotional nuances, giving detailed descriptions about their smell and the feelings the foods evoke in the characters, and in their relations with one another. As it is possible to read from the following example:

*Luego se fue a buscar a Manuel para avisarle que en su casa habría sopa al mediodía y a cualquier hora de la noche. [...] Comieron sopa.*

*LT: Then she went to look for Manuel to let him know that there would be soup at her home at noon and at any time of the night. [...] They ate soup.*

Excerpt associated with class 3 – Spanish version.

Class 2, 29.9% of the classified text segments reflect the most important themes of the book as a whole: love and life. Interpersonal relationships and what they entail (affection, interactions, verbal and non-verbal language) are presented. "Living" is portrayed from a romantic point of view: poetic, nostalgic and passionate.

*La tía Marcela tenía en los ojos la luz de quienes le **buscan** a la **vida** su **mejor lado**, la de quienes para su **desgracia** no **accedieron** a la **felicidad** que **sólo** pueden disfrutar los **tontos** [...]*

*LT: Aunt Marcela had in her eyes the light of those who look for the best side of life, of those who unfortunately did not have access to the happiness that only fools can enjoy [...]*

Excerpt associated with class 2 – Spanish version.

It is about living a good and warm life, and ways of reacting to that life and to loving relationships.

*[...] llegan después horas de gloria y frases de intimidad que le dan al patético carácter de irreversible que tiene el pacto conyugal, la sensación de que no se puede haber hecho mejor pacto en la vida.*

*LT: [...] then come moments of glory and sentences of intimacy that give the pathetic and irreversible character of the conjugal pact the feeling that no better pact in life could have been made.*

Excerpt associated with class 2 – Spanish version.

There are also references to destiny, time, and spirituality/religiosity.

*Nunca fue tan fácil la vida como entonces. En el único trance difícil ella había seguido el consejo de su madre: cerrar los ojos y decir un ave maría.*

*LT: Life had never been as easy as it was then. In the only difficult moment she had, she had followed her mother's advice: close her eyes and say a Hail Mary.*

Excerpt associated with class 2 – Spanish version.

Class 1, with 39.5% of the classified text segments, shares with Class 2 strong connotations regarding life and love. On the other hand, we note a remarkable presence of verbs, especially related to speaking, saying and answering. The segments in which such verbs are used mostly refer to conversations and regard feelings and relationships.

*Tenían distinto sexo y la cabeza les funcionaba parecido. Eran tan amigos que nunca lo echaron a perder todo con la ruindad del enamoramiento.*

*LT: They were of different sexes and their heads worked in similar ways. They were so close that they never spoiled everything with the dastardliness of falling in love.*

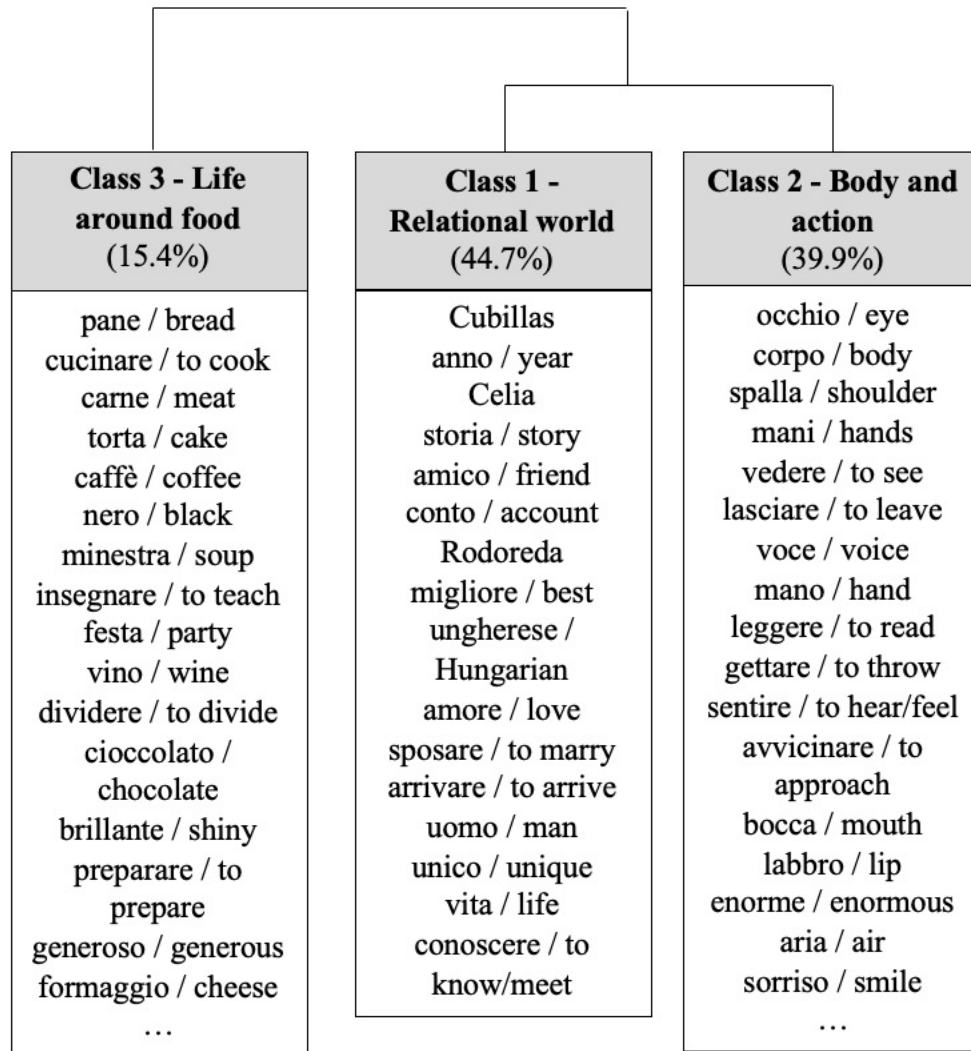
Excerpt associated with class 1 – Spanish version.

## **Italian text**

Three lexical worlds clearly emerged in the Italian translation too (Figure 2), together accounting for 90.26% of the classified text segments. The 39 texts were broken down into 1355 units containing 35.6 words on average.

Figure 2.

*Dendrogram of the DHA for the Italian translation. The words are in order of association (chi-square).  
Authors translation*



Class 3 (which, also in this case, stands out from the other two) represents 15.4% of the classified text segments and refers mainly to a world of food and kitchen items (thus showing a similarity with the Spanish version). However, in the Italian translation, the reference to food is much stronger and is not combined with other elements (as in the Spanish version, which includes other elements of everyday life beyond food), but rather focuses on food and food-related actions (preparing, sharing, cooking, etc.).

*Come se non **bastasse**, **preparava** personalmente il **dolce** per ogni **pasto** e badava che non mancasse il **vino bianco** nella **minestra**, che la **carne** non si dorasse troppo, che il **riso** si*

gonfiasse senza **attaccarsi**, che le **salse** fossero piccanti al punto giusto e che i **formaggi** venissero serviti insieme all'**uva**.

LT: As if it was not enough, she personally prepared the dessert for each meal and made sure that there was no shortage of white wine in the soup, that the meat did not brown too much, that the rice puffed up without sticking, that the sauces were spicy just right, and that the cheeses were served with the grapes.

Excerpt associated with class 3 – Italian version.

Everything revolves around food, from the importance given to food in social life and relationships to the awareness that, in the historical and socio-cultural settings narrated in the book, housewives were constantly involved in food and cooking.

Gertrudis era **capace** di fare 5 maglioni in 3 giorni, **montare a cavallo** per ore e ore, **preparare torte** per tutte le **feste di beneficenza**, prendere **lezioni** di pittura, **ballare** il flamenco, **cantare canzoni popolari**[...]

LT: Gertrudis was capable of making 5 jumpers in 3 days, riding a horse for hours on end, baking cakes for all the charity parties, taking painting lessons, dancing flamenco, singing folk songs[...]

Excerpt associated with class 3 – Italian version.

La trovarono lì intenta a **disegnare** righine sulle buste di vecchie partecipazioni di nozze che le era sempre piaciuto **conservare**. **Offrì** loro del **vino dolce**, quindi del **formaggio fresco** e infine dei **cioccolatini** rancidi. Era tutto come sempre a casa della nonna.

LT: They found her there, trying to draw stripes on the envelopes of old wedding invitations that she had always liked to keep. She offered them sweet wine, then fresh cheese and finally rancid chocolates. It was business as usual at Grandma's house.

Excerpt associated with class 3 – Italian version.

Class 1, accounting for 44.7 % of the classified text segments, contained words mainly linked to the aunts' relational world. The book is constantly narrating the relationships and connections between the characters, and it is in this class that some of these relationships emerge most clearly, especially friendships and family relations.

Per molto **tempo** si disse che **Amanda Rodoreda** era **figlia** di **Antonio Sánchez**, il **migliore amico** di suo **padre**. E neppure la sua stessa **madre sembrava** sapere di dove le fosse **arrivata** in pancia quella **bimba** tanto poco somigliante ai 2 **uomini** che per sua disgrazia le avevano attraversato la **vita**.

*LT: For a long time, it was said that Amanda Rodoreda was the daughter of Antonio Sánchez, her father's best friend. And even her own mother did not seem to know where in her belly that child came from who bore so little resemblance to the two men who, by her misfortune, had passed through her life.*

Excerpt associated with class 1 – Italian version.

*Jorge e la zia **Celia** fecero l'alba tra chiacchiere e **pettegolezzi**. Verso le sei del **mattino** il **pianista** vide entrare nella stanza sua **moglie**, splendente di ricordi e nostalgie soddisfatte.*

*LT: Jorge and Aunt Celia dawned amidst chatter and gossip. Around six in the morning, the pianist saw his wife enter the room, glowing with memories and satisfied nostalgia.*

Excerpt associated with class 1 – Italian version.

Class 2, with 39.9% of the classified text segments, contained words referring to the human body and to actions. We can see different uses of these words and references to the body, possibly related to how the author narrates the scenes, referring to parts of the body and using metaphors and bodily actions.

*Alzina lo abbracciò e **vide** dietro le sue **spalle** la zia Celia con gli **occhi** chiusi e il **viso** tra le **mani**. “**Vattene**, Alzina”, **disse**. “**Vattene**, che se ti guardo mi rovino quel che mi **rimane** da vivere”.*

*LT: Alzina hugged him and saw behind his back Aunt Celia with her eyes closed and her face in her hands. "Go away, Alzina," she said. "Go away, for if I look at you I will ruin what I have left to live."*

Excerpt associated with class 2 – Italian version.

*Un uomo con il **sorriso** di una **donna** e gli **occhi** di un **vecchio**, con una **voce** d'adolescente e **mani** da pirata. Era capace di entusiasinarsi come un **bambino** e di allontanare l'**allegria** come la chiglia di una nave fende l'acqua.*

*LT: A man with a woman's smile and an old man's eyes, with a teenager's voice and pirate hands. He was capable of enthusiasm like a child and of driving away mirth like the keel of a ship cuts through water.*

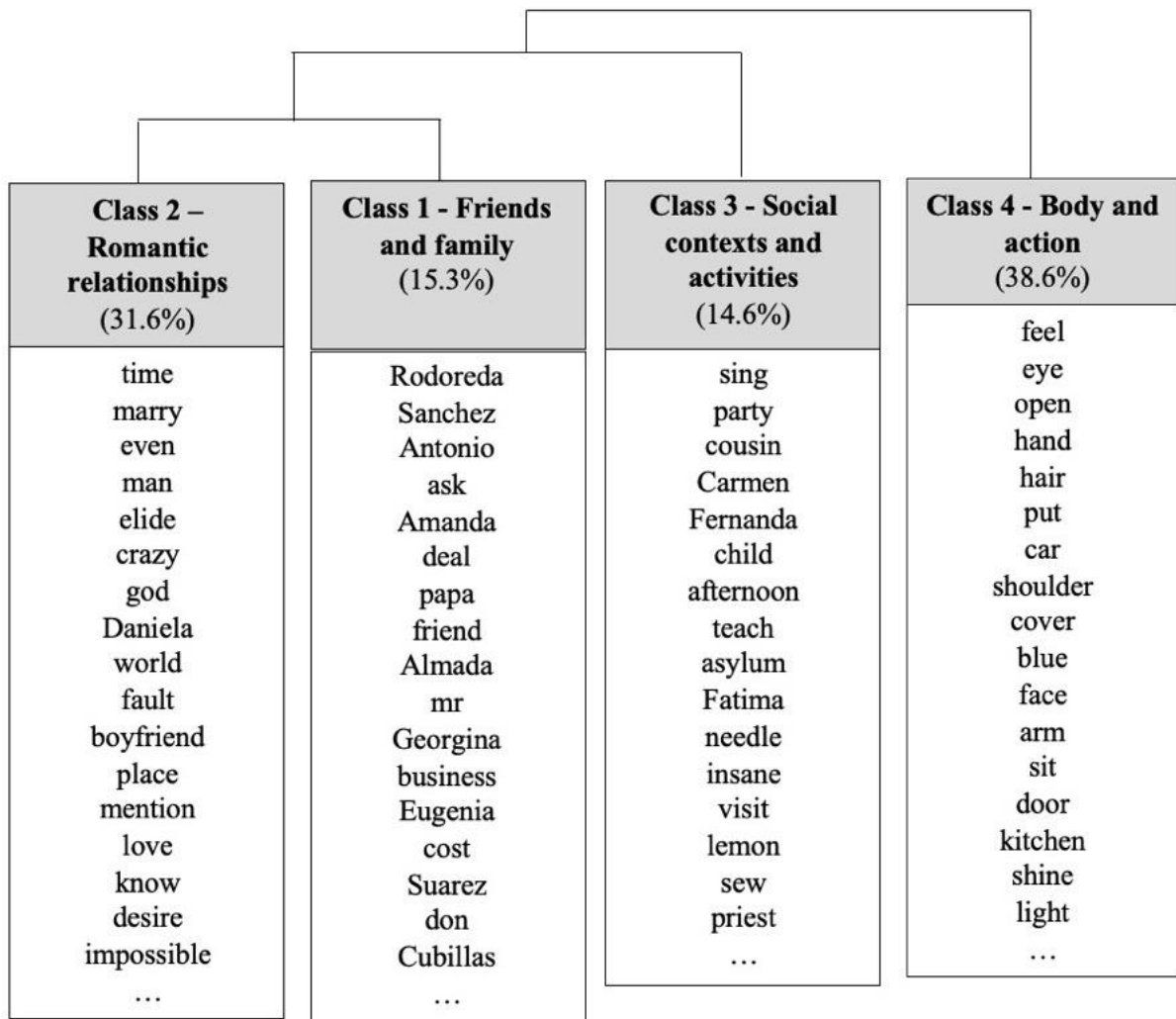
Excerpt associated with class 2 – Italian version.

## English text

The analysis of the English translation produced four lexical worlds instead of three, as in the other two versions (Figure 3). The 39 texts were divided into 1445 text segments, each including 36 words on average. These four classes together accounted for 90.24% of the text segments.

Figure 3.

*Dendrogram of the DHA for the English translation. The words are in order of association (chi-square)*



Class 4 stood apart from the others and contained 38.6% of the classified text segments. Like Class 2 in the Italian version, it refers to descriptions of the human body, actions and feelings connected to parts of the body. The descriptions do not stop at an ordinary account of the body;

the author gives us rather detailed pictures about the body in relation to the context, and about relationships.

*This way, cowardly one” said **aunt Elvira**, crawling again toward the **mouth** of the **cave**. The **youth** followed her. They **felt** the **air** hit their **bodies like** another **caress**. He untied her **hands** and she **threw** them around his **neck**.*

Excerpt associated with class 4 – English version.

Class 3, with 14.5% of the classified text segments, contained a world of relationships, especially within the family, and in general concerns activities connected with social life, thus making an emphasis in verbs. Temporal aspects were also mentioned, regarding the timing of meetings social activities taking place.

*The **guests** were seated around the **fire** after having tolerated a bullfight. **Jose Limon** had a guitar. He began **singing** the story of a horseman who roamed about alone in search of his beloved, and that was all aunt **Fatima** needed to **fall** in love with him.*

Excerpt associated with class 3 – English version.

Class 2, with 31.6% of the classified text segments, resembles the lexical world of Class 3 to some degree (they are in fact conceptually connected as it is possible to see from the dendrogram). In both classes, the focus is on relationships, as in different classes of the Spanish and Italian versions of the book. In class 2 the types of relationship most in evidence are romantic ties, with references to their emotional aspects, both positive and negative.

*“That it was never in my **plans** to get **married**, not **even** to you.” “I don't **understand** you,” said the **boyfriend**, a **common**, vulgar **man**. “Do you want to be a whore all your **life**?”*

Excerpt associated with class 2 – English version.

*Aunt **Daniela** fell in **love** the way **intelligent women** always fall in **love**: like an idiot. She had seen him one **morning**, his gait serene, his shoulders puffed with **pride**. She **thought**: this **man** thinks he's **God***

Excerpt associated with class 2 – English version.

These aspects appeared to be linked to the passions in relationships and emotions (desires and wanting the impossible), as well as nostalgic elements (such as being abandoned).

Class 1, accounting for 15.3% of the classified text segments, was strongly related to Class 2, its content referring here again to relationships in general, but with a strong focus on family relationships in particular and also making emphasis in names of characters that are related to each other.

*For a long time it was said that **Amanda Rodoreda** was the **daughter** of **Antonio Sanchez**, her **father's** close **friend**. And not even her **own** mother seemed to know whence came to her **womb** that child who so little resembled the 2 men who, to her misfortune, crossed her life*

Excerpt associated with class 1 – English version.

*“If you know it, why remind me of it?” asked **Mr. Almada**, apparently **recovered** from his initial fear. He had his arm around the shoulders of his **daughter**, who on hearing the **exchange** **wondered** whether she was choosing a **good** husband.*

Excerpt associated with class 1 – English version.

## CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

Social representations are meant as forms of social, practical, situated knowledge (Jodelet, 1989) and it is expected that the context in which they are moulded play a constitutive role in them. Searching for topoi, places of thought, in the three different linguistic versions of a single oeuvre allowed to offer novel empirical support to the importance of linguistic and cultural contexts on meaning-making. We could focus on the translator's voice rooted in their own culture, experiences, and linguistic repertoires.

As expected by the used method (Reinert, 1983; 1990), since we were working on the same book in three different languages, the lexical worlds resulting from the three analyses are very similar. Relationships in general emerge in all three versions, especially love and family relationships. However, in the original text they are depicted in their variety and imbued with feelings and emotions, where chatting and sharing are substantiated with food in the art of receiving. Already in the Italian version this texture appears less rich and colourful, with clearer distinctions between the lexical worlds sorted out from the analysis. For instance, both in the Spanish and in the Italian version a cluster on food appears, but in the former food is embedded in everyday life (with nearly twice the amount of text segments classified), while in the latter it is more detailed in its elements (e.g., meals and ingredients are listed and described). However, it is



in the English version that the main differences emerge: interestingly, romantic and friend & family relationships split giving rise to two distinct classes. Even more sharply, the sphere of food and cooking as a driver in everyday life disappears as a class. In line with what sustained above, “body and activity” (i.e., actions described through parts of the body) appear as a separate cluster in the Italian and English version, while it does not constitute a distinct lexical world in the Spanish one.

Focusing on social representations of self and relationships, we can see how the same depiction of characters and their interactions give rise to different topoi (classes in DHA) in different languages, thus showing the powerful role of cultural and, more specifically, linguistic contexts in the shaping of SRs. In the various portraits of women – and characters – in this collection of stories, some features emerge as distinctive (e.g., food, the human body, action) in some translation and not in others. While the overall social representation remains the same, the atlas of identity provided in the book encounters variations: readers can find images of self and their relationships somewhat different travelling across the three languages.

It is worth noting that we had the opportunity to analyse an oeuvre published and translated in languages, that we could manage, of similar and different roots. It might be interesting to analyse further versions in order to deepen and extend the study of meaning making in different contexts. As a shortcoming of this study, we acknowledge that our aim was to deepen the relationships between text and context, while we did not focus so much on the content of the social representation. Clearly, analyses of other books could expand and enrich the study of meaning making focusing more on the specific object of the social representation: self and relationships in different cultural arenas. Our findings prompt several considerations. On the one hand, they give support to the suitability of conducting lexicometric analyses on literary texts in social psychological inquiries, both in the original and in translated versions: after all, the content is not irredeemably transformed. On the other hand, they can offer unique examples and glimpses aimed to underscore the importance of studying meaning making in context (Contarello, 2022; Sammut, Andreouli, Gaskell & Valsiner, 2015), both in research and teaching (Finucci, Romaioli & Contarello, 2023). This can enhance the potential of literary texts in social psychological analyses framed from the social representations’ perspectives, and in related fields of knowledge.

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