

Accessible Stories within Mediascapes: Voicing Otherness in Digital Museums

 Gian Maria Greco 

University of Macerata, Italy

 Alessandra Rizzo 

University of Palermo, Italy

 Cinzia Spinzi 

University of Bergamo, Italy

Abstract

This article presents the first steps in the investigation of the potential for digital storytelling and digital museums to be used as instruments for access, as enablers of epistemic and poietic agency. Digital storytelling and migration museums are used as a case study to explore in what ways digital storytelling impacts meaning-making processes performed by migrants, allowing them to become active creators and disseminators of their own experiences. Through the combination of corpus linguistics, systemic functional linguistics, and lexical semantic analysis, an ad-hoc comparable corpus of migrant narratives in English and in Italian was cross-examined in order to scrutinise the conceptual categories activated in these stories. The mixed-methods analysis led to the identification of the most common lexico-semantic features forming the knowledge frames of the experiential world of migrants. Results show that each national narrative makes use of its own grammar and lexico-semantic domains, a set of semantic and syntactic patterns associated with the production of stories of migration within the context of transmedia textual subtypes. These domains are strategic, as they give access to marginalised stories within digital museum settings.

Key words: accessibility, digital storytelling, epistemic agency, migration, museum, poietic agency.

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 gianmaria.greco@unimc.it, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8714-6349>

 alessandra.rizzo@unipa.it, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1645-5072>

 cinziagiacinta.spinzi@unibg.it, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3267-6905>

1. Introduction

Digital spaces have become increasingly populated by a variety of media artefacts which give visibility to migrants' stories. This phenomenon has encouraged the spread of counter-narratives that oppose mainstream stories, releasing migrant identities from the periphery and placing them within hybrid and proactive spaces. Research on digital storytelling as a tool providing access to and allowing self-expression of migrant identities has become prolific in many fields. Even though migration is not a new topic in media accessibility (MA), the potential of digital storytelling as an instrument for access as well as its implications have been largely ignored. Exploring how digital migrant museums impact meaning-making processes, this article aims to launch a broader research project to bridge this gap.

In the new mediascape, migration museums have assumed a strategic role as sites where migrants have become active agents, and migrant storytelling can find privileged spaces for direct access and dissemination. Migrant digital stories promote the (re)construction of migrant identities both as they were in their country of origin and as they are currently in their host country.

Over the past few years, three major changes have (re)shaped how migration is addressed in museum settings. Firstly, greater use of multimedia artefacts – e.g., digital installations, exhibitions, or services – has strengthened the status of museums as interactive, multimodal, and accessibility-oriented institutions. Secondly, within the sphere of MA, accessibility has shifted from being a topic connected almost exclusively with persons with disabilities to an issue relevant for all, including migrants (Greco, 2016, 2018). Media artefacts are now used to build multimedia narratives of migration, becoming devices for broader accessibility. Thirdly, research that intersects at the crossroads of accessibility, migration and museums is now scrutinising museum settings from the perspective of the aesthetics of migration, where narratives of migration are made accessible as multimodal stories allowing migrants to speak as human beings (Rizzo, 2019; Rizzo & Seago, 2018).

Digitality creates “webs of engagement and interactions,” which render the museum a transmedia text where “social interaction is paramount for the construction and legitimation of knowledge, as well as to foster socio-cultural identity and social practices in a given local community” (Sabatini, 2015, p. 106). This article investigates how migrant voices project their unique experience into the narrative space, and how identities are (re)constructed, represented and negotiated within digital museum settings.

To shed light on the ways through which migrant identities become “actively, ongoingly, dynamically constituted” in museum discourse (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 4), an *ad-hoc* comparable corpus of migrant narratives in English and in Italian has been compiled and investigated with the combination of corpus linguistics, systemic functional linguistics, and lexical semantic analysis in order to scrutinise the conceptual categories activated in the migrant stories. The intertwined use of quantitative and qualitative methods made it possible to identify the most common lexico-semantic features forming the knowledge frames that belong to the experiential worlds of migrants. Results show that each

national narrative makes use of its own grammar and lexical semantic domain, i.e. “small (but not insignificant) sub-languages” (Hunston & Sinclair, 2000, p. 77).

After presenting the potential of museums as enablers of epistemic and poietic agency (§2) and further framing migration in digital museums (§3), data and methods are illustrated (§4), followed by quantitative observations (§5) and qualitative analysis (§6). The final section of the paper includes a discussion and some concluding remarks.

2. Museums as Enablers of Epistemic and Poietic Agency

The question of access and accessibility has become a central concern in many areas, including museum studies and migration studies. This accessibility revolution has been reshaping the core tenets of those areas as well as contributing to the rise in access and accessibility studies (AS). Greco (2018, 2019) suggests a model that identifies a series of processes within those areas, including: a shift from particularist accounts to a universalist account of accessibility, a shift from maker- and expert-centred to user-centred approaches, a shift from reactive to proactive approaches, and a turn from mimetic to poietic approaches. The first shift is away from framing access and accessibility as pertaining to only some groups to interpreting them as relevant for all groups. The universalist account is based on the idea that diversity is an inherently human feature, that access is an issue concerning all and accessibility is an instrument relevant for all human beings, including migrants. The second shift entails a radical move from paternalistic approaches centred on the maker and/or the expert to approaches that place people, their knowledge, and experiences at the centre of any inclusion process. Those shifts are a radical change in the interpretation of *epistemic agency*. From the universalist perspective, all users, as epistemic agents, possess unique knowledge and expertise that have value and that are essential in the design process of an artefact (user-centred), and their voices must be heard and actively engaged in the process of knowledge making and sharing (proactive). Those shifts are also jointly connected to a major change in the idea of access and accessibility (Greco, 2021a, 2022). Access is not limited to the mere possibility of having something at one’s disposal; rather, it entails the possibility of using, acting, enjoying, and expressing oneself. It becomes a foundational feature of any social process or product (Greco, 2018, 2022). As will be discussed later, this new interpretation of access and accessibility concerns museums and digital storytelling as well.

These shifts are complemented by a turn from *mimetic* to *poietic* approaches (Greco, 2019, 2020, 2021b). One of the many forms of mimetic approaches assigns poietic (i.e., creative and making) capabilities to some specific actors only and assumes that others are merely passive recipients. On the other hand, poietic approaches recognise and promote the poietic capabilities of all actors; they foster the poietic agency of each individual as maker and creator (Greco & Ruggieri, 2013). They value and promote the expression of individual voices that risk being homogenised and lost, if not ignored and annihilated, by generalisation and universality. This is all the more visible in the case of migrants and museums.

Access and accessibility have been playing a pivotal role in museum studies for quite some time now. A quick look at the new definition of “museum” by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) helps highlight this point. In 2019, ICOM launched a call to update the definition of what a museum is. According to the new definition, which was approved by the Extraordinary General Assembly on 24 August 2022:

A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution *in the service of society* that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, *accessible and inclusive*, museums *foster diversity and sustainability*. They *operate and communicate ethically*, professionally and with the *participation of communities*, offering varied experiences for *education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing*.¹ [emphasis added]

The newfound position of museums becomes even more evident once we look at the case of migration.

The responses of museums to the question of migration can be framed into three generations (Visser, 2016). First-generation responses use migration as a concept to interpret objects and collections while second-generation responses focus on migration as a subject. Third-generation responses radically change the approach: “migration is no longer in the objects or a topic, but migrants become actors in the museum.” Once interpreted through the lens of AS, the core trait of second-generation responses becomes the acknowledgement of museums as venues for and enablers of epistemic agency. Migrants are recognised as epistemic agents, carriers of first-hand, unique experiences of migration. Their knowledge needs to be collected and valued so that museums can analyse and present migration from multiple perspectives. From the AS standpoint, third-generation responses embrace the poietic agency of migrants as creators of their own public narratives. This is a crucial point because there is “an urgent need to give migrants and second-generation migrants a voice, in order to foster cultural diversity as one of the basic principles of integration policies” (IOM & UNESCO, p. 1). This can only be done by empowering the poietic agency of migrants because “it is impossible to write immigrant history without the participation of immigrants” (IOM & UNESCO, p. 8). Museums should not only care for and collect migrants’ unique knowledge but also provide a space to voice their stories, because “listening to individual stories may help to deconstruct stereotypes” (IOM & UNESCO, p. 10). This requires the full acknowledgement of the fact that migrants are capable to present themselves to society, personally and directly. Even in second-generation responses, while migrant stories are valued and collected, they are paternalistically filtered by museum curators. The capability of migrants as makers and creators of their own experience is not presented directly to the visitors:

while research increasingly incorporates migrants’ voices to better understand the impact of migration on their identities and sense of belonging, more insights would be needed on

¹ <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>.

migrants' views of their inclusion process, needs and aspirations to inform and evaluate the effects of inclusion policies on migrants' lives. (IOM, 2019, p. 205)

Therefore, giving migrants the possibility to tell their own stories means going beyond their mere acknowledgment as epistemic agents. It means highlighting their poietic agency by providing opportunities to create their own account of their past, present, and future.

The accessibility revolution is closely intertwined with the information revolution (Greco, 2018). Again, this is evident in the case of migration and museums where third-generation responses have been facilitated by digital technologies, which

should be exploited to facilitate a more resonant and interactive involvement of the users; to offer transversal visions and multiple entry points to the narration; to intertwine different layers of meaning; and to unfold polyvocal and cross-cultural interpretations in identity construction and representation. (MeLa*, 2015, p. 30)

Digital technologies are re-shaping the question of access in museum contexts: "via digital means museums and heritage organizations can increase access and participation in ways which were unthinkable of until only a few years ago" (Sani, 2018, p. 5). They are providing new ways of bridging social gaps, widening the possibilities of audiences to access content, and allowing for new forms of exhibitions that give a voice to different actors and direct access to their stories.

This can be seen in how some museums are using digital technologies to promote autobiographical recollections and let migrants tell their own stories. Autobiographical recollections "can communicate subjective points of view and insights into experiences, attitudes and impressions" (Deutscher Museumsbund e. V., 2016, p. 9). By using digital technologies to present autobiographical recollections of migration, digital museums are challenging the *us vs them* distinction and fostering the uniqueness of each voice. They embrace a broader sense of access and accessibility, because "one of the elements at the centre of accessibility is precisely the Other: our relationship with the Other, how we value the Other, and our actions towards the Other" (Greco, 2019, p. 40). In so doing, museums are contributing to the re-construction and re-narration of migrants' social identities.

3. Migration Frameworks in Digital Museums

The contemporary phenomenon of migration has gained scholarly attention for many reasons, including the unprecedented number of recent migratory influxes to European countries, the effects of globalisation, and new perspectives on multilingual societies. Within this context, aesthetic discourses view marginalities as transitional spaces having the potential to shed light upon old and new cultural and societal parameters. As such, artistic interventions have been enabling migrant subjectivities to find a voice and express their experiences through alternative media artefacts. Studies on the connections between the recent migration phenomena and the visual and performing arts have been increasing across diverse genres, modes and disciplines, including translation studies,

for instance by focusing on identity, globalisation and travel (e.g., Clifford, 1997; Moslund et al., 2015; Rizzo, 2018; Spinzi & Zummo, 2022).

Aesthetics has become a field that is intimately connected with both accounts of and attempts to make sense of experiences of migration and movement. This is due to its involvement in the various forms of representation and frameworks of discourse through which national and diasporic communities communicate what they are. Aesthetic discourse has the ability “to reorganise the realm of the visible, diverting the position and the roles of observer and observed, in order to gain different perspectives” (Mazzara, 2015, p. 460). The visual and performing arts have been crucial in the construction of migrant narratives that oppose mainstream media news stories and visuals. They have been transforming migrant images from “mere bodies without words and yet threatening in their presence as a mass, a multitude, a haemorrhagic stream of anonymous and unfamiliar others” (Mazzara, 2015, p. 460) to human beings able to produce counter-narratives as active forms of resistance and subversion, but also of adaptation and domestication. New subverted narratives and visuals have been restoring migrants’ dignity, in the face of both humanitarian and sentimentalist perspectives as well as political and securitarian attitudes on migration which have spread conceptions of migrants as illegal travellers, criminals or victims. New concepts, ideas and attitudes originating from academia, social organisations, and the arts have increased the opportunity for migrants to become poietic agents. In so doing, the mechanism of media spectacularisation has been deconstructed in favour of a process of subjectification of migrant experiences within migrant discourse, weakening stereotypes imposed by the gaze of Western media.

Additionally, migration discourse has been approached from a narrative perspective. In discourse studies, sociolinguistics and anthropology, narration is considered the most essential mode of human communication. Narratives are conceived as a “basic mode of understanding and sharing of experience, and one of the most constitutive genres of human linguistic communication” (de Fina & Tsang, 2017, p. 381). The act of storytelling as a narrative process of sharing and making sense of experiences carries weight in many different contexts, including museums. Digital museum stories can *translate* the margin, deploying linguistic, aesthetic and cultural practices aimed at disrupting mainstream systems of migrant representation. The transmedia museum narratives selected for this study are small stories that address every day, uneventful experiences, rather than dramatic situations. They are “narratives of habitual past events and generic narratives” (de Fina & Tsang, 2017, p. 381) and shift the viewer’s attention from spectacularising mediatic portrayals of dangerous migratory masses to the intimate experiences of human individuals forced into migration. Digital migration stories act as a way of “sharing and making sense of experiences in the recent or remote past, and of recounting important, emotional, or traumatic events and the minutiae of everyday life” (de Fina & Tsang, 2017, p. 381). The migrants’ stories transmitted through digital museums spread individual and collective identities and can be used “to index ways of being and social identifications” (de Fina & Tsang, 2017, p. 381). In this sense, storytelling becomes a potential avenue for giving a voice to minorities and other underrepresented social communities. It offers counter-narratives to the paternalistic views that circulate through political discourse and in the mainstream debate. Within museum settings, digital storytelling becomes a semiotic practice, a form of negotiation across

institutionalised and social settings, and a tool for identity (re)construction in the fight against social and racial inequalities. To investigate how digital storytelling allows migrants to exercise their poietic agency by voicing their unique experience, we investigated a corpus of migrant narratives from digital museum settings.

4. Data and Methodology

The data under analysis came from four countries: the US, the UK, Australia, and Italy. The corpus is comparable in terms of genre (digital narratives) and content (migration). All the information regarding the two sub-corpora (i.e., English and Italian) are summarised in Table 1. The English corpus is comprised of four samples of migration testimony taken from the website of four museums:

1. the Tenement Museum (TM) in New York where the “Your Story, Our Story” space highlights stories of immigration in the 20th century. Its primary aim is to promote the understanding of the American migration identity and foster empathy through storytelling;
2. the Battersea Arts Centre (BAC) in London, where the “London stories” exhibit has been ongoing since 2013. Migrants are invited to share the experiences that led them to London, via an intimate meeting in a room. These stories involve people from diverse backgrounds (e.g., Syria, Ireland, Central America) who arrived in London from the 1950s on. The BAC digitally displays what is valued within the culture of provenance, despite the fact that the objects selected are of personal rather than general importance;
3. the Migration Museum (MML) in London explores how the movement of people to Britain from the 1950s onwards has shaped British identity both on an individual and the national level;
4. the Immigration Museum (IM) in Melbourne explores why people migrated to Victoria from European countries, where they settled, and how they started a new life there. The stories collected focus on migration patterns from the early 20th century until the present.

In the stories downloaded from these four museums, the narrators are children of second-generation migrants; therefore, the language in which they express themselves is English.

Likewise, the Italian corpus was assembled from stories from three museums:

1. the Memoria e Migrazione (Memory and Migration, MEM) museum in Genoa hosts a permanent exhibition on Italian foreign immigration, from the mid-19th century to the present day;
2. the Migrador Museum (MM) is a virtual museum where digital windows allow access to the biographies of foreign-born migrants living in Italy;
3. the Museo Interattivo delle Migrazioni (Interactive Museum of Migration, MIM) in Belluno collects experiences and testimonies to inspire reflection on living memories.

All stories in the Italian corpus concern experiences of migration dating back to the mid-20th century. The narrators come from Eastern European countries and, although they speak Italian as a second language, their linguistic accuracy seems to indicate that the stories were edited prior to publication. Apart from the stories from the BAC which were transcribed by the authors of this article, all other narratives are available on the websites of the relevant museums.

Table 1

Corpus of Migrant Narratives in Digital Museums

English corpus	Period of immigration and provenance	Running words	Italian Corpus	Running words
Victoria Museums (Australia)	1950-2000 (Argentina, Hungary, Italy, Lebanon, Poland, Syria, Uzbekistan)	6,815	MEM (Genova)	4,207
Migration Project Museum (London)	1950-2000 (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Jamaica, Lapland, Turkey)	3,472	Migrador Museum	31,484
Battersea Arts Centre (London)	1950-2018 (the Caribbean, Ireland, Jamaica, Syria)	1,101	MIM (Belluno)	2,399
Tenement Museum (New York)	1920-2018 (African Countries, England, India, Italy, Mexico, Spain, Russia)	42,461		
Total running words		51,926		38,090

Source: Authors' own study and elaboration.

Methodologically, the analysis began with the retrieval of the wordlist from both sub-corpora using WordSmith Tools 7.0 (Scott, 2016). The wordlist allowed for the preliminary identification of the items on which migrants base their discursive self-representation. Both content (e.g., verbs) as well as functional words (e.g., first person personal pronouns) were considered for the analysis in that the latter serve to tell us “about the preferred meanings of a particular discourse community” (Groom, 2020, p. 63). The two wordlists retrieved highlight the pervasive presence of lexical items related to the personal and subjective sphere (see Table 2 for the 60 most recurrent words). In the English corpus, the pronoun *I* leads the wordlist together with *my*, followed by *it* and the two verbal forms *is* and *was*. The content words are related to the semantic field of *family* (e.g., *mother*, *grandmother*,

mom, dad). In the Italian wordlist, the dominance of subjectivity is made clear by the verbs *sono* (I am) and *ho* (I have). First person possessives also feature at the top of this wordlist. Unlike the English data, in the Italian corpus the only word belonging to the semantic field of family relationships is *famiglia* (family), ranking 75, and primacy appears to be attributed to the values of one's *job* (lavoro) and *house* (casa). Since the presence of first person pronouns does not necessarily imply the expression of a feeling of subjectivity (de Fina, 2009), two-word cluster lists were retrieved from both sub-corpora in order to study the most frequent combinations of words with a focus on the first-person pronoun *I*.

Table 2

Wordlist Retrieved from the Comparable Corpus

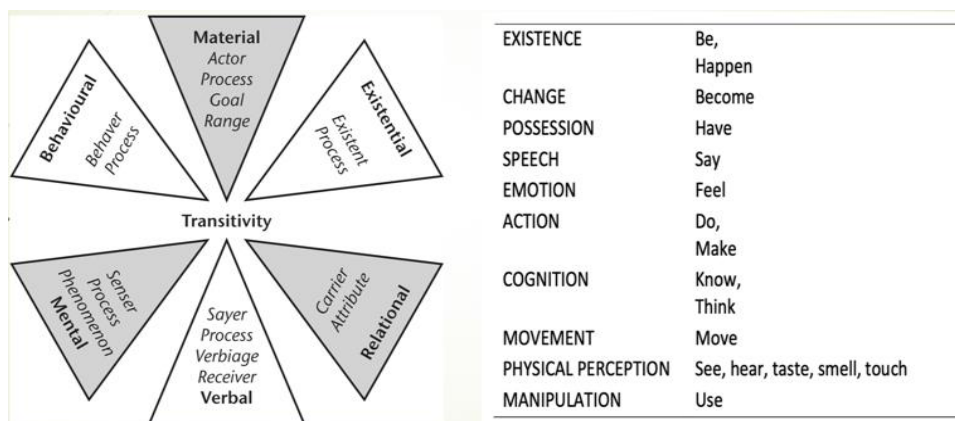
ENGLISH CORPUS			ITALIAN CORPUS		
Rank	Frequency	Word	Rank	Frequency	Word
4	1441	my	12	504	Mi
6	1042	I	14	401	Sono
9	807	it	15	374	Ho
10	691	is	19	273	mia
11	627	was	22	245	mio
14	433	family	24	230	era
16	395	we	26	220	Italia
17	362	me	29	191	anni
21	338	she	32	173	io
22	319	her	33	172	perché
24	297	when	37	159	ha
25	283	because	39	147	ci
26	273	they	40	124	quando
28	251	he	46	113	molto
29	249	have	47	111	avevo
31	224	you	49	106	miei
33	189	our	51	101	lavoro
34	179	had	53	98	stato
35	175	are	54	97	fare
40	150	year	56	94	vita
41	149	very	59	87	casa
42	147	mother	60	87	dopo
45	139	were			
46	137	be			
47	135	mom			
48	134	has			
49	131	grandmother			
51	131	place			
52	129	them			
53	125	dad			
54	125	us			
55	120	made			
56	119	his			
57	119	important			
58	118	like			
59	118	years			

Source: Authors' own study and WordSmithTools interrogation of the corpus.

The quantitative investigation paved the way for the qualitative interpretation of the most frequently encountered clusters in the corpus (*I was* and *Mi sono*). Adopting systemic functional linguistics (SFL) (Halliday, 1994) and lexico-semantic analysis models (Faber & Mairal Usón, 1999; Jiménez Hurtado et al., 2012), the qualitative analysis sheds light on the lexico-semantic variations that occur when meaning-making processes arise in the construction of target-oriented narratives belonging to different migration contexts. The Hallidayan methodological framework was applied, since language is conceived as functional to the socio-cultural context for meaning-making processes, whereas the lexical grammar model (LGM) was also adopted because it expands upon Halliday's processes (Figure 1), adding extra lexical areas to the Transitivity system.

Figure 1

The Transitivity System (SFL) and the Conceptual Lexical Classes (LGM)



Source: Adapted from Halliday (1994) and Faber & Mairal Usón (1999).

In other words, lexical verbs (processes) are seen as central to the activation of the conceptual categories within the sentences and their lexico-grammatical realisations.

5. Quantitative Observations

In the quantitative analysis, attention was paid to phraseology by investigating the most frequently encountered clusters in the corpus. The two-word cluster list from the English corpus shows a high frequency of the cluster *I was*, mostly preceded by the circumstance of time (e.g., *when*) which highlights the narrative dimension of these stories, for instance: *My family came from Ireland in 1963 when I was six*.

The second most frequent two-word cluster involves the relational process *it is*, which aims to establish connection with the past through the presence of collocates such as *object*. The high frequency of this lexical item was an expected result, given the aim of both *TM* and *IM* to refer to an object which might be considered an expression of cultural identity.

In the Italian data, the cluster *mi sono* is the auxiliary used to form the present perfect of several reflexive verbs such as *realizzarsi* (realise oneself) and *abituarsi* (get used to). The particle *mi* activates the concept of reflexivity that refers to the processes which describe actions, movement and participation (e.g., *iscriversi/enrol*, *trasferirsi/move*), but also mental and sensory perceptions (e.g., *rendersi conto/understand*, *realizzare/realise oneself*). Their exploration unveils an emphasis on: (a) the speakers' discomfort generated by starting over in a new country and (b) their effort and desire to demonstrate positive actions and accomplishments, like enrolment at university or work achievements. This will be discussed further in the qualitative analysis.

Finally, the cluster *mi ha* collocates more frequently with verbs like *permettere* (allow, permit) and *insegnare* (teach), placing emphasis on what the change has brought about. The focus seems to be on the participants' positive transformations within these processes.

6. Qualitative Analysis²

A qualitative analysis was performed on the two most frequent clusters in both sub-corpora: the English clusters (*when*) *I was* and *it is* or *is a*, and the Italian clusters *mi sono* and *mi ha* plus their collocates. All are embedded in narrative frameworks that act, in the unfolding of past and recent events, as verbal representations of being, existing, and belonging (English narratives), as well as achieving, changing, and acting (Italian narratives). They are thus activated within the Transitivity system and in accordance with the conceptual lexical classes of the LGM. Likewise, these clusters introduce specific semantic areas (Table 3).

Table 3

The Identification of the Semantic Areas

Semantic areas: English sub-corpus		Semantic areas: Italian sub-corpus	
Age & childhood	35%	Education	33%
Religion	30%	Work	30%
Nationality	15%	Nationality	17%
Family	12%	Travel	10%
Food	8%	Adaptation	10%

Source: Authors' own study and elaboration.

² The lexico-grammatical transcriptions have been reported as they appear on the website with no syntactic amendments.

6.1. The English Clusters: *(When) I was, it is / is a*

Halliday's six processes are placed within the Transitivity system within which they function as its core constituents (see Figure 1). In the context of the English narratives, the ideational meanings – expressed by means of process selection – are constructed primarily in terms of relational experiences through the two clusters. The relational experiences are expressed by means of the *I was* and *it is* or *is a* clusters.

6.1.1. The *I was* Cluster

The relational experiences are semantically interconnected with outer experiences in the English constructions, which are syntactically marked as finite clauses in the simple past (*I was*), the past progressive (*I was* + *ing* form) and the passive form (*I was* + Past Participle as Lexical verb). In other words, *be* is both a lexical verb and an auxiliary that functions as a syntactic indicator (e.g., *I was put*, *I was working*, *when I was baptised*, TM). Thus, the *I was* cluster introduces agentless formulations that reveal experiences of impotence and passivity, which reinforce the concept of migrant disempowerment expressing negativity (e.g., *I was put in prison*, MML; *I was arrested two times*, TM). Passive forms can also describe material fields of action and movement in which obligations and impositions are syntactically expressed while producing positive results (e.g., *I was sent back to family in Jamaica*, BAC; *I will never forget the happiness in his eyes when I was placed at a university*, IM; *I was raised upon the belief of my religion*, TM). The *I was* cluster is also present in active constructions (simple, compound and complex sentences) that relate to a) outer (material) experiences (i.e., actions and events described by material processes: *When I was living in Iran, I was a student in Tehran University and an activist; I was a member of Iranian student movement; I was first taught what this really meant when I was about six years old; My grandfather gave it to me when I was 14 years old*, TM); and to b) inner experiences (i.e., cognitive, perceptive and affective states like feelings and thoughts described by mental processes: *When I was little, I didn't know much about religion but now it is very important to me; Additionally, I didn't realise how important this day was when I was younger*, TM). This implies that the relational process *to be*, in its past form accompanied by *when* as a temporal marker, signals states of being in which material and mental past actions or events are depicted (e.g., *When I was young and everyone found different jobs afterward, this bakery played a major role in giving my family its start in the United States; I will never forget the happiness in his eyes when I was at a university*, TM).

As noted in the examples above and emphasised in the methodological section, the cluster *I was* is embedded in a temporal dimension which highlights the past experiences of the migrants (often their childhood in their countries of origin) through the presence of *when* as a temporal marker. This is expressed within a lexical logical structure stressed by a specific syntactic behaviour (i.e., syntactic indicators signalling the past) and by lexical choices as depositaries of semantic areas (topics of interest), which the migrants are eager to evoke and communicate to the world. Table 4 shows the

composition of lexical logical structures resulting in the presence of the *I was* cluster within which relational processes introduce attributes or identifiers that are recognisable as specific semantic fields. These involve childhood, nationality, religion, food, age and war, to list but a few (e.g., *When I was there, in the camp, there were more than 5,000 refugees; I was not safe there*, BAC). The first column in Table 4 contains the lexico-grammatical realisations within the sphere of relational processes, interconnected with the material and mental experiences of the world. These are marked by syntactic indicators referring to tenses and persons. The second column signals the semantic fields resulting from the lexico-grammatical realisations chosen to produce meanings.

Table 4

The cluster (when) I was in use

(When) I was (relational process) plus material and mental representations and syntactic indicators	Semantic fields
<i>My family <u>came from</u> Ireland in 1963 <u>when I was</u> six. (BAC)</i>	[Country] [nationality]
<i><u>I came to London</u> from Jamaica <u>when I was</u> 8 years. (MML)</i> <i><u>When I was</u> 12 years old, <u>I was put</u> in prison. (BAC)</i>	[War]
<i><u>I was arrested</u> two times and <u>I was imprisoned</u> for 6 weeks. (TM)</i> <i><u>I was</u> here about five years when <u>I thought</u> ‘I’ve got a degree in Chemistry and here I am working in bars and pubs.’ (MML)</i>	[Education]
<i><u>When I was</u> five years old in Ethiopia, my grandpa <u>gave</u> me Quran and Hadith to learn. (TM)</i>	[Religion]
<i><u>I was working</u> on the till <u>when I was</u> 12. (MML)</i>	[Age]
<i><u>When I was</u> around 5 years old, my grandmother used <u>to make</u> pan con pollo for holidays. (TM)</i>	[Food]

Source: Authors’ own study and elaboration.

The English narratives show a striking number of the semantic fields of nationality and age, which operate as identity markers and contextualise the migrants’ lives as ordinary citizens. Age and country of origin (nationality) are topics intimately connected with the migrants’ families and their religion, and with the efforts made within their places of origin to combat poverty and hunger. This is shown linguistically through the replacement of relational processes with material processes, or by means of the combination of relational and material processes within a single clause. The semantic relations between the two types of processes, which are crucial to the unfolding of the narratives, encompass and rely on (a) the conceptual class of EXISTENCE [Being/Happening]: *I grew up in Damascus and left in 2012; My family came from Ireland in 1963 when I was six*, BAC; *My dad is from Yemen*, TM; *I left Afghanistan because the situation wasn’t good; I lived in Somalia for 9 years*, MML; and (b) on the conceptual class of ACTION [making-doing] which marks the migrants’ professions in their countries of origin (nationality): *In Pakistan my father was working as an accountant but after*

coming to NYC he wasn't able to continue working as an accountant because he was told he'd have to go to a school in NYC for two years; I come from Nigeria, Lagos, Nigeria. I came at the age of 22. Before that I was working as a reporter, TM; My dad was a chef in a hotel, my mum was a cleaner, MML.

Figure 1 illustrates Faber and Mairal Usón's taxonomic framework which highlights the presence of a primary lexicon of English verbs that determines the conceptual areas activated by verbal categorisations. In the English sub-corpus, the relational (functional) process *to be* also entails the lexical semantic sphere of EXISTENCE as described by Faber and Mairal Usón's grouping. Therefore, the *to be* relational type, which has a controlling position in the English narratives, involves the principle of relationality (with attributes) and identification (with identifiers). It also contains semantic variables rooted in the conceptual class of EXISTENCE, in which verbs representing existence are the driving force that feed and influence the lexico-grammatical structures within compound and complex sentences for meaning-making purposes. Of all lexical domains, the conceptual class of EXISTENCE (e.g., *I was homesick; I was in a war*, BAC) is the lexico-semantic area that favours the activation of acts implying being, belonging, and happening.

6.1.2. Lexico-Semantic Relations

In keeping with the centrality of verbs in the SFL and LGM methodologies, and with the lexico-semantic relations that govern the organisation of lexical semantic knowledge bases, all processes are considered to be structuring components of the migrant narratives under scrutiny. Furthermore, the relational experiences and the conceptual class of EXISTENCE are semantically correlated with lexical domains belonging to other classes (blended types) and appear with the highest frequency in the stories, as Table 5 suggests. As demonstrated in the Cambridge Dictionary Thesaurus, and in accordance with the principles of functional grammar, non-relational processes can be used to express relational experiences, as evidenced by the clauses extracted from the narratives. Therefore, the relational processes and the class of EXISTENCE denote the semantic area of nationality, together with that of religion as interconnected with the country of origin, within the lexico-semantic constraints of processes not primarily relational or belonging to the sphere of EXISTENCE.

Table 5

“To Be” Blended Relational Types

To BE Superordinate	CAMBRIDGE DICTIONARY THESAURUS
	exist, occur, take place, stay in the same place or condition, attend, come, go, having the state, quality, identity, nature, role (copular verb), cost, amount to, represent, signify, consist of, include, turn.
To BE Sub-Domains	CASES
FEEL	I feel close to them [Nationality , Mexico] I feel close; I feel so healthy; we feel good [Nationality , Argentina]
REPRESENT	I would always try to represent my diversity [Nationality , Vietnam] Statues of Buddha represent good luck and prosperity [Religion , Vietnam]
TURN	I was turning 15 [Age , Nigeria]
INCLUDE	The rosary includes many prayers; it doesn't include major sins [Religion , Bangladesh]
LOOK	The houses started looking smaller [Nationality , Turkey]
BELONG TO	I belonged there [Nationality , Lebanon] Where do I belong? [Nationality , Lebanon]

Source: Authors' own study and elaboration.

In other words, both clusters contain the verb “to be” (*was* and *is*) which functions as a superordinate in semantically correlated contexts, whereas other process types, while sharing the same semantic value as “to be”, contribute to providing an existential texture to the stories. In this respect, Table 5 shows how “to be” can be activated as a superordinate of verbal occurrences such as *feel*, *belong*, *include*, *represent*, *turn*, etc.

6.1.3. The *it is, is a* Cluster

Regarding the *it is* or *is a* cluster, each relational process relates one fragment of reality to another by achieving the following results: x (it) is y (the object of identification, e.g., *The recipe is our tie to our Jewish heritage and roots*, IM; *I was one of the first assisted migrants*, IM), or x (it) is a y (the Attribute, e.g., *My object is a hijab*, IM; *My hijab is red*, IM; *My family is fully Vietnamese*, MML). The impersonal pronoun “it” usually stands for an object or for something which might be replaced by nominal groups composed of Determiner + Noun or Possessive + Noun as grammatical subjects. In the cluster *It is a*, where *is* plays the role of a copular verb, attention is given again to the conceptual class of EXISTENCE from the perspective of nationality through lexico-grammatical clausal formulations that may contain an object, a thing, a geographical place, or a person, as highly important elements in the lives of the migrants. Therefore, the *It*-Subject as “functional” Carrier establishes a relationship with the Attribute (*I [Carrier] was turning [Relational Process-Attributive] 15 [Attribute]*), or a relationship of identification, thus producing Relational Identifying Processes in which two concepts are presented as different ways of referring to the same entity (Identified and Identifier), such as in the case of *It [Identified] is [Relational Process-Identifying] my home [Identifier]*.

The clusters *It is* and *is a* shed light upon certain objects and the role said objects play within each migrant’s country of origin. The objects as depositaries of each migrant’s cultural memory are introduced through relational processes, which embody the conceptual domain of EXISTENCE, within the lexico-grammatical realisation of a) impersonalised constructions (e.g., *It [Carrier] is [Relational Process-Attributive] a toy [Attribute] that [Identified] represents [Relational Process-Identifying] my country [Identifier]*; *It [Identified] is [Relational Process-Identifying] the land of my father [Identified]*), and of b) thematised structures where the object itself occupies the initial position in the clause (e.g., *The red rosary [Carrier] is [Relational Process-Attributive] a gift [Attribute] from my father [Circumstance]*; *The Virgin Guadalupe [Carrier] is [Relational Process-Attributive] a powerful symbol of Mexican identity [Attribute]*). The two clusters, while guaranteeing the objects’ centrality within the migrant descriptions, encourage the figurative personification of the objects themselves which, progressing from inanimate and nonhuman things, anthropomorphise, becoming the symbols of the migrant lives. The constructions *It is* and *is a* introduce a special object or event rooted in the tellers’ past experiences, e.g., a toy, the Bible, or a geographical location. Thus, the *red rosary* or the *Virgin Guadalupe* are the objects evoked by the migrants; they have impacted their lives and are part of their historical memory. Everyday items like *coffee grounds, rice, beans and salad, a frame, a piece of blanket, a dish, a family story* become the material symbols to which the migrants cling to move forward in their host country.

6.2. The Italian Clusters: *mi sono/ mi ha*

The Italian sub-corpus presents different syntactic and conceptual combinations with the relational process “to be” (*essere* in Italian) when compared to the English sub-corpus. This issue is not rooted in the fundamental differences between (Anglo-Saxon) English vernacular and (Romance) Italian.

Rather, it is due to the increased emphasis in the Italian narratives to material and physical descriptions that are distant from the relational and existential frames of the English narratives. Therefore, the lexico-grammatical analysis concentrates on the most frequent uses of *essere* (to be) which, unlike its use in the English *I was* and *It is* clusters, does not occur as a relational process. Rather, *essere* functions as an auxiliary verb that appears in a series of embedded reflexive forms (cases of diathesis in Italian) in the present perfect. This tense marks a temporal dimension projected into the present and future, thus giving space to lexical (material) processes belonging to the conceptual classes of CHANGE, ACT, MOVEMENT, and MANIPULATION. The Italian stories do not combine past and present tenses. The dominant tense is that of the present perfect (preceded by the reflexive pronominal particle “mi”), which is used to strengthen identity recognition in the country of arrival. It also emphasises that certain efforts have been made not in the past but rather in the present of the migrants’ existences. The narratives present what the migrants living in Italy have done – and continue to do – to adapt to their new lives. As such, the descriptions are not depositaries of an individual historical memory, but primarily focus on what adaption and assimilation have meant to migrants in general in the country of arrival. The material processes (and the conceptual classes of ACTION and MOVEMENT) dominate the narratives within the syntactical patterns of the *mi sono* and *mi ha* clusters (Table 6).

Table 6

Mi sono, mi ha in the Context of Material Processes

Actor	Beneficiary	Material processes	Range	Circumstances	Semantic fields	Back translation
	mi	sono iscritta		come studentessa. MM	Educational	I (myself) enrolled as a female student.
	Mi	sono imbarcata		su una nave. MM	Travel	I (myself) boarded a ship.
	Mi	sono abituata		ad un modo di vivere completamente diverso da quello del mio paese. MM	Adaptation	I got used to a way of living totally different from the one in my country.
Il Sindaco della mia città	mi mi	ha premiato e (mi) ha fatto	i complimenti	per il dolce.	Work	The mayor of my city gave me a prize and congratulated (me) on the cake.
Il Direttore	mi	ha offerto	la possibilità di lavorare [Embedded Clause] nel settore dell'immigrazione. MM		Work	The director offered me the chance to work in the field of immigration.

Source: Authors' own study and elaboration.

The focus of migrant storytellers tends to be on positive albeit difficult events that have occurred in their lives as migrants in Italy. Their functional use of language underscores facts referring to the their present, encouraging constructive depictions and enthusiastic attitudes that are identifiable with the host country (e.g., studying and working in Italy; adapting to the Italian cultural system). The Italian narratives generally tend to omit connections with the migrants' countries of origin (e.g., birth, nationality, traditions), which, conversely, is a chief characteristic of the stories in the English sub-corpus.

As for the lexico-semantic relations in the Italian narratives, the abundant use of lexical processes belonging to the conceptual classes of ACTION and MOVEMENT, used to express collaboration, solidarity, and participation, is traceable to the verb *fare* (make and do), which functions as a superordinate in semantically correlated contexts. In fact, the *fare* (make and do) infinitive works as the superordinate of the ACTION lexical domain and creates semantic relations among those verbs that indicate actions (Table 7). According to the Cambridge dictionary, the *make* infinitive involves actions such as carry out, perform, produce a specific action, and the *do* infinitive refers to the performance of an action (the precise nature of which is often unspecified), or of a particular task.

Table 7

Fare (make/do) as Superordinate Describing ACTION

Make/do: <i>Fare</i> as Superordinate (ACTION)	Examples	Semantic fields	Back translation
Diplomarsi/Specializzarsi [Get a diploma/graduate; specialise]	Mi sono <u>diplomato</u> al Conservatorio e dopo mi sono <u>specializzato</u> all'Accademia.	Education/culture	I graduated from the conservatory and specialised at the academy.
Buttarsi [Throw oneself]	Mi sono <u>buttato</u> senza paura.	Work	I threw myself (into it) with no hesitation.
Sbattersi [work hard]	Mi sono <u>sbattuto</u> un sacco ma sono fortunato.	Work	I worked hard, a lot, but I am lucky.
Permettere di realizzare [Allow to achieve]	L'Italia mi ha <u>permesso di realizzare</u> i miei obiettivi.	Work	Italy allowed me to achieve my goals.
Mettersi a vendere [Start selling]	Mi sono <u>messo a vendere</u> birre davanti le discoteche.	Work	I started selling bottles of beer in front of discos.

Source: Authors' own study and elaboration.

The actions (underlined verbs in Table 7) described through processes such as *isciversi* (enrol), *imbarcarsi* (board a ship), *specializzarsi* (specialise), *mettersi a vendere* (start selling) are processes implying movement, inclination and willingness, struggle, and the acceptance of challenges. These verbs are semantically correlated by means of *fare* (make/do) as the superordinate, which depicts events relating to processes of creation, composition, preparation, and performance. These processes are thus located within the frameworks of the conceptual class of ACTION and Halliday's material processes as doing verbs.

7. Discussion and Concluding Remarks

The quantitative and qualitative analysis has highlighted several aspects concerning how migrants perceive and recount the processes of separation from their homelands and subsequent relocation to new countries. The English and Italian stories display different local grammars. The stories are marked by a diverse combination and selection of syntax and lexicon, and by varying topics of focus. The stories in the English corpus are rooted in the migrants' past: what it was like, what they experienced, and how childhood experiences and traditions still prevail in their current lives. The

present is largely a projection of the past that allows migrants in the UK, USA, and Australia to survive in the present time. In sum, these life-stories describe individuals who still belong to their native communities. However, the stories in the Italian corpus denote a different grammatical and semantic perspective. The stories are embedded in the present, granting access to what the migrants are currently experiencing in their present lives. They display identities defined by adaptation and describe selves under construction, whose projection is into the future. The conceptual categories activated in the Italian corpus entail the lexical domains of action and movement, with a frequent use of material processes through verbs of action, movement, and change. In contrast, the English stories display identities defined by resistance and present selves moulded as permanent identities, whose projection is located in the past. The conceptual categories activated in the English corpus reflect the lexical domains of existence. The prevailing use of *to be* (in the form of *was*) signals relationality and identification, based on a predominant use of relational processes.

The discrepancies between the English and Italian stories likely stem from contrasting cultural scenarios of departure and arrival, and their diversities rooted in history. Old and new forms of migration cannot be blended. The older migrations to the UK and USA are dissimilar from relatively recent migrations to Italy in terms of achievements and needs. The latter migrations are the result of the anthropological revolution that Italy has undergone in the last 30 years, which transformed it from a country of emigration into one of immigration. The Italian stories show how migrants eagerly display that they have succeeded in the so-called “integration process.”

Within the context of transmedia storytelling, museums have become digital spaces where migrants can (re)construct or present their identities while increasing their (g)local visibility. Moving away from being passive depositaries of knowledge constructed and established by curators, museums are gaining new social identities. Thanks to the intertwined effects of the information revolution and the accessibility revolution, museums are becoming enablers of epistemic and poietic agency, forms of transmedia texts that enable social spaces and facilitate social encounters of individual voices. These intertwined actions encourage the various agents involved to go beyond mainstream stereotypes, oppose dominant narratives, and deconstruct (their own) social biases. Migration and migrants’ own voices are just one case. The digital migrant narratives analysed in this article are an example of the potential of digital storytelling from an AS perspective: an instrument that allows access to and for the self-expression of personal identities. Digital storytelling can be a voice of opposition, contrasting essentialist views that hinder the process of (re)construction of migrant identities as “biological factors or simplistic social categorization” (de Fina & Tsang, 2017, p. 384). It gives space to new narratives that foster the view of migrants as both epistemic and poietic agents, individuals in search of “‘self-presentation’, ‘positioning’, and ‘stance’” (de Fina & Tsang, 2017, p. 384). The comparison of stories presented in the previous pages provides insight into the diversity of migrant narratives and discourse, debunking homogenising views of migration.³

³ We thank the reviewers for encouraging us to underline this aspect.

The results of this study are limited by the specificities of the corpora. The inclusion of additional data in the corpora may provide further evidence making it possible to generalise these results. In addition to the specific merits of the case study, this article highlights the need for attention to be paid to a range of topics which have thus far been overlooked in MA, and which constitute potential lines for future research from an AS perspective. Such topics could include (a) the role of digital storytelling as a tool for access to and self-expression of individual identities and community dynamics; (b) the topic of migration and especially migrants as makers and not just mere users of MA products and services; (c) the potential of museums as enablers for poietic and epistemic agency; and (d) awareness of agents' local grammars during translation (e.g., subtitling or dubbing) so as to avoid misrepresenting and manipulating the agents' self-expression.

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