Speaking Climate: How Translators Make Environmental Language Work

Sara Orthaber, Aleksandra Nuč Blažič
University of Maribor, Faculty or Arts, Maribor, Slovenia
sara.orthaber@um.si, aleksandra.nuc@um.si

Climate change is a global challenge that demands informed action. One major barrier to public engagement is the difficulty in understanding specialised environmental terminology. In Slovenia, as in other countries, improving environmental literacy is essential for supporting sustainable practices and the green transition. This study explores how climate-related terms are translated from English into Slovenian, focusing on the behind-the-scenes processes of meaning-making. It examines how Slovenian translators address terminological challenges through collaboration in online professional groups, where terminology is co-constructed through expert discussions. These informal exchanges play a key role in clarifying ambiguity and ensuring accurate, context-sensitive translations. Although official glossaries offer standardised terms, the cognitive work and decision-making that support them often remain invisible. This research highlights the translators' crucial role in making climate discourse accessible, thus promoting environmental understanding and enabling greater public engagement in sustainability efforts.

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PODNEBNI DISKURZ: KAKO PREVAJALCI SOUSTVARJAJO POMEN?

SARA ORTHABER, ALEKSANDRA NUČ BLAŽIČ
Univerza v Mariboru, Filozofska fakulteta, Maribor, Slovenija
sara.orthaber@um.si, aleksandra.nuc@um.si

Podnebne spremembe so globalni izziv, ki zahteva premišljeno ravnanje. Ena od glavnih ovir pri vključevanju javnosti so težave pri razumevanju strokovne okoljske terminologije. Tako v Sloveniji kot tudi v drugih državah je izboljšanje okoljske pismenosti bistvenega pomena za spodbujanje trajnostnih praks in zelenega prehoda. V pričujoči raziskavi obravnavamo prevajanje podnebnih izrazov iz angleščine v slovenščino. Posebej raziskujemo procese določanja pomena, ki potekajo v ozadju in način, kako slovenski prevajalci rešujejo terminološke izzive z izmenjavo v skupnih spletnih strokovnih skupinah, kjer se terminologija sooblikuje v strokovnih razpravah. Tovrstna neformalna izmenjava je ključna za razjasnitev dvoumnosti in zagotovitev natančnih prevodov z upoštevanjem sobesedila. Uradni glosarji ponujajo standardizirane termine, vendar ostaneta miselno delo in proces odločanja, ki sta podlaga za njihov nastanek, pogosto nevidna. V pričujoči raziskavi osvetlimo ključno vlogo prevajalcev pri razumevanju podnebnega diskurza in okoljske tematike, s čimer se poveča tudi vključenost javnosti v prizadevanja za trajnostni razvoj.

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1 Introduction

Although climate science has progressed rapidly, efforts to communicate these findings clearly to the public and policymakers have lagged behind. As Bowman et al. (2009) argue, establishing a common climate language by standardising measurements (e.g., using CO_2-equivalent and a consistent pre-industrial temperature baseline) is essential to reduce confusion over climate risks. They emphasise the need for interdisciplinary efforts that translate complex scientific assessments into simpler, actionable terms, thus enhancing the public decision-making capacity. This approach highlights the importance of bridging the information gap, a challenge that resonates with the translation field, particularly when rendering technical climate terminology into languages such as Slovenian.

Effective communication of the climate crisis is thus paramount in addressing global warming and its multifaceted impacts (particularly in shaping public discourse and climate communication). Equally critical is the way we frame the issue: conventional terms such as *climate change* and *global warming* emerged from scientific discourse without sufficient consideration for public comprehension. According to George Marshall (BBC Radio 4 – Radio 4 in Four – How to Fight Climate Change Using Language, n.d.), these terms, along with alternatives such as *climate chaos* or *global weirding* (see Excerpt 3, Section 5), have inherent weaknesses that may downplay the urgency of the crisis. Recent shifts toward terms like *climate crisis* and *climate emergency* reflect a growing recognition that language must convey the exceptional and dangerous nature of the situation. Storytelling, narrative coherence, and compelling imagery are crucial in bridging the gap between complex scientific assessments and the everyday experiences of non-experts. This paper explores how nuanced climate terminology is translated into Slovenian. By nuanced, we mean subtle and precise, capturing complex distinctions rather than oversimplifying. Specifically, we examine how translation choices are made and how translators collaboratively develop solutions through behind-the-scenes, often invisible, practices. We explore the analytical depth required in shaping language, as well as the knowledge shared within online professional groups that function as affinity spaces (Gee, 2007).

This study was partly inspired by a Canadian survey (Maple Leaf, 2022) revealing that while 92% of Canadians feel a responsibility to protect the environment, a significant proportion struggles with understanding key environmental terms. In

response, a campaign was launched to simplify complex terminology, making it accessible to all. This challenge is further complicated by the fact that most environmental terminology is coined in English, according to The Oxford English Dictionary (2021). This reflects the fact that many influential terms, such as *global warming*, *climate change*, and *climate crisis*, originated in English before being translated or adapted into other languages. To ensure global understanding and effective action, accurate translations are needed. The effort to bridge this knowledge gap highlights the importance of clear communication in promoting environmental sustainability across different languages and cultures. This study was also inspired by the project ZELEN.KOM, a multidisciplinary pilot project within the Reform of Higher Education for a Green and Resilient Transition to Society 5.0. The project focuses on one of the most crucial challenges in effectively facing the climate challenge—ways of communicating the planetary situation. One of the aims of the project is to contribute to building a common understanding of terminology and concepts linked to environmental sustainability and the green transition in general (ZELEN.KOM, 2024).

This paper is structured around four main sections. First, it introduces climate change as a form of crisis and risk communication, reviewing foundational studies that illustrate how language shapes public understanding of climate issues. Second, it examines translation as a decision-making process, drawing on theoretical models by scholars such as Levý (1967) and Wilss (1994) to highlight the cognitive and contextual complexity involved in translating environmental terminology. Third, it explores the dynamics of climate-related terminology, with a focus on how linguistic variation, interdisciplinary usage, and evolving policy discourse affect translation choices. Finally, the study investigates naturally-occurring decision-making behaviours among Slovenian translators in a publicly available online translators' forum, analysing interaction patterns, message sequencing, and collaborative problem-solving. By uncovering how terminology is negotiated and finalised through asynchronous digital exchanges, i.e., through message sequencing and temporal structuring (e.g., Giles et al., 2015; Koivisto et al., 2023), the study reveals the often invisible behind-the-scenes work of translators. This analysis offers insights into climate communication by illustrating how subtle linguistic choices in peer-to-peer discussions may contribute to shaping public perception, informing policy discourse, and enhancing the communication of climate-related knowledge.

The significance of climate communication as an interdisciplinary field cannot be overstated. In 2010, Nerlich et al. stated that climate communication has become an important topic in both science and society. It has developed into a thriving field, similar to well-established areas like health communication, risk communication, and science communication (Nerlich et al., 2010, p. 97). The interdisciplinary research output on climate change communication has grown over the last decades. In over 100 articles, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Climate Change Communication* (Nisbeth et al., 2018) explores our understanding of climate change with a focus on communication and media. While the volume offers a broad examination of climate change communication across 26 states and regions, it notably does not include Slovenia in its analysis.

Despite this vast body of research, these publications rarely discuss the translation of terminology in the field of climate change. Given the significant impact of ongoing climate change, enhancing communication between scientists and the public is crucial. One recommendation is to simplify the scientific explanations of potential solutions to make them easily understandable and usable by non-scientists (see, for example, Maple Leaf, 2022). Thus, scientists should use a unified language and establish standard benchmarks to make the issue more comprehensible to nonexperts by simplifying climate science into more accessible and practical terms (Bowman et al., 2009, pp. 36–37).

2 Climate change as crisis communication

Environmental science has gained in significance due to the growing recognition of the urgent need to address global warming. Effective communication about climate change is crucial for integrating climate considerations into development, mitigation, and adaptation policies. It also plays a key role in fostering collective behavioural changes and shaping attitudes towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions (Evans et al., 2018: 108). However, studies on language in climate change discourse are only starting to emerge (e.g., Flottum, 2019). All highlight the crucial role language plays in shaping public understanding and action on climate change. Language not only conveys information but also influences attitudes and behaviour, making it an essential component of climate communication. It helps construct the complex social, political, and ethical narratives around climate change, influencing how the issue is perceived and how responses are shaped. Lundgren and McMakin (2009),

for example, suggest that climate change communication can be viewed as a form of risk communication, as it deals with hazards that threaten the environment and human safety, such as droughts, melting ice caps, heat waves, and ocean acidification. These hazards often lead to adverse health implications, linking climate change communication with crisis communication.

In this respect, Parks (2019), who examined how major U.S. news media characterised climate change as a crisis, found that media coverage increasingly pairs *climate change* or *global warming* with crisis language, especially following key IPCC assessment reports. The study demonstrates that these reports act as focusing events that heighten the urgency of climate discourse, with mainstream outlets such as *The New York Times* and *CNN* more likely to affirm the crisis than conservative outlets like *The Wall Street Journal* and *Fox News*. Parks' (2019) analysis, which spans several reporting periods, highlights significant variations in the framing of climate risk, reflecting both shifts in public and political attitudes and persistent debates over terminology. This evolving media narrative stresses the importance of clear, consistent communication to effectively convey the severity of the climate crisis and guide policy and public response.

In a similar vein, Schäfer et al. (2023) investigate how global news media have labelled the issue of climate change over a 26-year period (1996–2021) by analysing a corpus of nearly 90,000 articles across eight countries. Their study distinguishes between neutral terms (e.g., *climate change*, *global warming*) and more urgent, alarming labels (e.g., *climate crisis*, *climate emergency*). While neutral terminology remains predominant, the authors document a significant uptick in the use of urgent labels, reflecting recent shifts in editorial guidelines and heightened political and scientific emphasis on the immediacy of climate impacts. This trend is particularly important for translators, as it necessitates careful navigation of evolving climate discourse; accurate translation is crucial to convey both the urgency and the nuanced meanings embedded in these terms, ultimately shaping public perception and policy debates in target languages.

2.1 The role of clear language in climate discourse

As with all forms of risk-related discourse, clear communication is crucial. Yet, the constant variation in terms and concepts within specialised fields can impede effective communication. While terms like *climate emergency* can raise awareness,

inconsistent terminology can cause confusion. This inconsistency can complicate translation and interpretation, as words like *global warming* and *climate change* are often used interchangeably but have nuanced differences. For instance, *global warming* typically refers to the long-term rise in the Earth's average surface temperature due to human activities (United Nations, 2025), while *climate change* encompasses a broader range of changes in climate patterns, including shifts in precipitation, increased frequency of extreme weather events, and rising sea levels (National Aeronautics and Space Administration, 2024). Given the variability and evolving nature of climate change terminology, terminological resources that clearly describe variants and are frequently updated can address translation challenges and improve communication effectiveness (Biros et al., 2020).

A recent study by Wege et al. (2024) examines how climate-related terms are understood by the public, highlighting key translation challenges. Interviews with 24 German residents revealed widespread misunderstandings of terms like *carbon dioxide removal* and *carbon neutral*, with many struggling to grasp their precise meanings or associating them with unrelated concepts. Technical jargon, such as *CCS* and *anthropogenic CO_2 emissions*, proved particularly confusing, with 75% of participants finding them overwhelming. Additionally, 83% found long, nested sentences difficult to process, suggesting that clearer, more concise phrasing would improve comprehension. These findings emphasise the critical role of translators in ensuring climate discourse remains accessible and effective. By carefully selecting terms, simplifying sentence structures, and explaining complex concepts, translators help bridge the gap between scientific accuracy and public understanding. The study underscores that translation is not just a linguistic task but an active process of shaping public perception, requiring ongoing collaboration among translators to navigate evolving terminology and adapt to cultural and political contexts. The study highlights the importance of clear, accessible language in climate change communications, particularly in IPCC reports that influence policymakers and the general public. While German interviewees generally rated key climate terms as easy to understand, they struggled with interpretation due to unfamiliar phrasing, ambiguous connections to climate change, and misconceptions about specific terms like *tipping point*. Many associated terms with unrelated concepts, requested more concrete examples, or expressed scepticism toward terms perceived as misleading, such as *carbon neutral* and *sustainable development*. Lengthy, jargon-heavy sentences further complicated comprehension, with acronyms like *CCS* proving particularly

confusing. These findings align with U.S. research, underscoring the need for clearer communication strategies, including simplified language, concise sentence structures, and visual aids.

Future research should explore how misunderstandings vary across demographics and test whether revised messaging improves public engagement and trust. By integrating insights from science communication, including plain language principles and trust-building strategies, climate reports and derivative communications can become more effective in informing and mobilizing diverse audiences. As clarity and accessibility emerge as key goals in climate communication, it becomes essential to examine how these principles are negotiated in the act of translation—where meaning must be transferred across not only languages but also cultural and contextual boundaries (see Section 5).

3 Translation as a decision-making process

Problem-solving and decision-making strategies are key topics in translation process research. In his frequently cited article, *Translation as a Decision Process*, Levý (1967) portrays translation as a sequence of choices made by the translator. These choices are guided by two types of instructions: definitional, which set the framework, and selective, which narrow the range of options. The criteria used in each step of this process may include semantic, rhythmic, and stylistic considerations. Although Levý's theory primarily focuses on lexical examples from literary texts, it has broader applications in understanding the complex nature of translation as a decision-making process. Wilss (1994), on the other hand, suggests that decision-making in translation involves six stages: problem identification, problem clarification, research and information gathering, deliberation on how to proceed, the moment of choice, and post-choice evaluation. However, he acknowledges that, in practice, translators' decision-making and problem-solving processes may not follow this streamlined sequence, as various factors can disrupt each stage.

A study by Obdržálková (2016) explores translation as a decision-making process by combining questionnaire data with translation analysis, applying and critically examining Levý's (1967) model. While Levý conceptualises translation as a sequence of guided choices, the author found that this model, though structurally insightful, can appear overly idealised in real-world contexts. To adapt it, translator-identified

problem segments were used as entry points for analysis, ranging from lexical to syntactic and pragmatic issues. The study demonstrates that the nature of translation problems is closely tied to the function and genre of the text, and that translators' approaches are shaped by a range of factors, including time constraints, experience level, and access to reference materials. Although theoretical paradigms of possible solutions exist, the decision-making process often involves intuitive judgment, partial analysis, and even guesswork, especially under pressure. The strategy of omission, for example, was observed to function either as a legitimate pragmatic choice or as a translation error, depending on context. Ultimately, the study highlights the complexity and non-linearity of translation decisions and refines Levý's (1967) model by situating it within actual translator behaviour.

Another study by Shih (2015) explores the problem-solving and decision-making behaviour of two early-career professional translators during the end-revision phase, using think-aloud protocols. It reveals that revision begins with identifying a translation problem, but the nature of the problem often shifts during the process, either diverging into smaller sub-problems or converging into a broader issue requiring a holistic solution. Unlike classic decision-making models such as Wilss' (1994), translators in this study did not define problems in advance. Instead, they progressed through issues iteratively, often without a clearly articulated end goal. This forward-working approach highlights the dynamic and non-linear nature of revision. Decision-making was found to rely on internalised evaluative standards. While translators seldom verbalised their rationale, they consistently judged whether a solution was *good enough*, eliminating weaker options or supporting stronger ones. When no suitable option emerged, they returned to the problem-solving cycle to generate new possibilities. As a result, a revised model of end-revision decision-making was proposed, integrating cognitive and translation process theories.

Similarly, this paper explores the decision-making behaviours of translators in an online translators' forum. Decision-making strategies are employed when there are at least two competing translation equivalents (Shih, 2015). The aim is to examine which factors become most prominent when translators discuss translation solutions on these platforms. These factors might include the type of translation problem, the function of the text, the direction of the translation, the expertise of the translator, the frequency of term usage, as well as personal preferences. In this sense, Zheng (2012, p. 203) suggests "a hierarchical relationship exists between different choices

or between different translation equivalents". It appears that the later an option is considered, the more likely it is to be chosen. This is because, as translators generate different translation equivalents, they are likely refining their decisions. Consequently, the final option they arrive at is often the most suitable solution to the translation problem. By exploring some of these translation choices, such as the evolving equivalents for *greenwashing* in English–Slovenian contexts, we hope to gain insights into the decision-making process involved in translating climate change terminology.

3.1 The dynamics of environmental terminology

Language and terminology constitute foundational components in the discourse surrounding climate change. As is the case in other specialised domains, the linguistic register employed in climate change communication is both complex and subject-specific. Despite the increasing relevance of climate communication across disciplines, research focusing explicitly on climate change terminology within the field of translation remains limited. A recent study of climate change communication in English and its translation into Spanish explored the causes of variation and its implications in translation contexts (Cabezas-García and León-Araúz, 2023). The findings revealed that environmental terminology is dynamic, leading to term and concept variations. In English, the source language, these variations often result from metonymy and multidimensionality, affecting semantics and the communicative situation, which also guides variant selection. These cognitive factors are crucial and must not be overlooked. In Spanish, the target language, translation variants such as omissions, structural shifts, and inaccuracies were identified, which can hinder communication and increase risks. The authors thus conclude that translators must engage in translation-oriented terminology work to ensure accurate term usage in context.

Translators working with the English–Slovenian language pair often encounter similar challenges. From a terminological perspective, the task is less about directly translating a term and more about assigning it to an appropriate Slovenian expression—or selecting among existing equivalents (Žagar Karer, 2009, p. 445). In many cases, the practitioners are unfamiliar with the Slovenian term or the term has not yet been coined, which leads to the frequent use of English terms in Slovenian professional discourse. This practice is evident in hybrid expressions that blend

English and Slovenian, such as *in-house procurement* in the context of public procurement or *on-off regulator* in automation (Žagar Karer, 2015, p. 24). When faced with terminological uncertainty, Slovenian translators can consult a variety of online resources. These are particularly useful when coining new terms that have not yet been established in Slovenian, or when choosing among multiple existing options to ensure effective communication (Žagar Karer, 2015, p. 29).

Advice on terminology can be obtained through multiple channels. These include the language section in professional journals such as *Pravna praksa*, online language advisory services like ŠUSS* (an online linguistic advisory platform), and personal consultations with domain experts via phone, email, or during proofreading (Žagar Karer, 2009, p. 443). Online platforms such as Termania**, which consolidates various dictionaries, also offer valuable support. One particularly important tool for translators is the multilingual terminology database Evroterm. Additional support is available through Terminologišče, hosted by the Terminological Section of the Fran Ramovš Institute of the Slovenian Language. This platform offers expert guidance on terminological issues (Žagar Karer, 2015, pp. 23–29). Moreover, Slovenian translators have created a dedicated Facebook group for peer-to-peer support with terminology problems, which provides the basis for the case study in this paper.

The complexity of translating environmental terminology is well illustrated by Dremel and Goličnik Marušić's (2021) analysis of the English term *nature-based solutions* (NBS). Originally introduced in a 2008 review of the World Bank's biodiversity portfolio (World Bank, 2008), the term gained broader traction in 2015 when the European Commission incorporated it into its Research and Innovation agenda (European Commission, Directorate-General of research and Innovation, 2015; Hanson et al., 2022, p. 2). Unlike traditional conservation approaches, the term aims to address environmental, social, and economic challenges simultaneously. This multidimensional focus distinguishes the concept from related terms such as *ecosystem approach*, *green infrastructure*, and *eco-engineering*. Despite its growing prominence in policy and research discourse, the term remains open to interpretation (Dremel and Goličnik Marušić, 2021, p. 103).

Building on Albert et al. (2019), Dremel and Goličnik Marušić (2021, p. 103) identify two core criteria that define NBS: first, they must be nature-based, encompassing both natural and human-designed ecosystem processes; second, they must provide practically and financially viable solutions to clearly defined societal problems.

In Slovenian, the authors note three different translations used in official European Commission documents: *sonaravne rešitve* (GOV.SI, 2024), *naravne rešitve* (Evropska komisija, Generalni sekretariat, 2019), and *na naravi temelječe rešitve* (e.g., Ravnikar and Goličnik Marušić, 2019). Although all three are rooted in the same conceptual framework, they carry slightly different connotations. Given that the adjective *nature-based* is less familiar in Slovenian than terms like *natural* or *sustainable*, the authors argue that *na naravi temelječe rešitve* is the most precise translation (Dremel and Goličnik Marušić, 2021, p. 107). It captures the specificity of the original term while avoiding the ambiguity that can arise from broader or more loosely defined alternatives. Since these solutions are context-specific and designed to tackle concrete societal challenges, a consistent and accurate translation into Slovenian is essential to distinguish NBS from more general ecological approaches. While the example of NBS illustrates the challenges of conceptual precision in translation, the broader context of how such terminological decisions are negotiated has shifted significantly in the digital era.

3.3 Translation and collaboration in the digital era

Digital communication has become an integral part of everyday life, shaped by the widespread use of mobile devices, applications, and online platforms (Desjardins, 2013, p. 156). While the internet initially had only an indirect influence on translation (Gaspari, 2023, p. 687), it has evolved into a primary environment for both professional and non-professional translation activities. As translation increasingly occurs in digital spaces, translators rely on online platforms not only to engage with clients and domain experts, but also to collaborate with peers and participate in broader communities (McDonough Dolmaya & Sánchez Ramos, 2019, p. 129).

Social media, in particular, have introduced new modes of interaction and transformed the translation landscape. Online texts are often multimodal, combining verbal, visual, and interactive elements, which calls for new forms of media literacy (Desjardins, 2013, pp. 157–159). These platforms also support collaborative tools

such as crowdsourced dictionaries and forums, enabling real-time problem-solving and peer feedback. As Folaron (2012, pp. 25–27) notes, the networked nature of digital communication fosters interaction between professionals and amateurs alike, blurring boundaries across volunteer projects, fan translation communities, and professional localisation networks. These environments are reshaping not only how translators work, but also how they define and develop their professional identities.

While translation can take place within academic or industry-specific contexts (Desjardins, 2017, p. 97), this paper focuses on a social media discussion platform where both professional and non-professional translators interact. Hebenstreit (2019, p. 145) emphasises *sharing* as a defining feature of social media. Users not only share texts, images, and videos, but also their evaluations, experiences, and knowledge. This includes sharing translations, linguistic and cultural knowledge, strategies, glossaries, and translation memories. Users also contribute to developing platform-based tools and resources. When alternative translations are proposed, they represent both the authoring of new content and an implicit critique of existing versions—demonstrating that social translation is both a creative and evaluative process.

Drawing on social media studies, McDonough Dolmaya and Sánchez Ramos (2019, p. 129) introduce the term *online social translation* to describe the collaborative nature of translation on digital platforms. Here, *online* refers to the digital environments in which these activities occur, while *social* emphasises the interactive dynamics among participants involved in creating, sharing, and sometimes receiving translations. Facebook, for example, supports such networking by enabling the formation of public, private, or restricted groups and shared pages. As Gaspari (2023, pp. 689–690) notes, these spaces allow online communities to discuss translation-related topics and share terminology resources, making them valuable for lexicographic inquiry and collaborative problem-solving. Since online platforms function as sites for negotiating meaning (Folaron, 2012, p. 26), we now turn to three representative examples from a Slovenian translation forum. These examples illustrate how translators engage with one another to collaboratively construct climate-related terminology. By analysing their online discussions and the factors shaping their lexical choices, we aim to show how translators actively contribute to the development of climate-change discourse in Slovenian.

4 Data collection and methodology

The group examined in this study is called *Translators to the rescue!* and was established on Facebook in 2012 as a support network for language professionals, including translators, interpreters, proofreaders, linguists, and others seeking assistance with translation-related issues. Since its inception, the group has grown to over 9,000 members from various professional backgrounds. On a daily basis, members post several dozen messages, which often develop into multi-party discussions focusing on practical translation problems. Although not all members are native Slovenian speakers or live and work in Slovenia, the majority of interactions take place in Slovenian. Group members are diverse in nationality but typically share a connection to the Slovenian language and culture, often through familial or professional ties. As such, the group functions as both a personal and professional hub, constituting the largest virtual linguistic peer-support community in Slovenia. In addition to seeking and offering advice, discussing translation strategies, and elaborating on lexical and stylistic suggestions, group members also share job offers, evaluate clients, and reflect on professional standards and ethics. In this group, the problem identification stage, as proposed by Wilss (1994), occurs even before the translator posts a request for help, serving as the trigger for seeking assistance. Research and information gathering similarly take place beforehand, with translators typically turning to the group only after other resources have been exhausted. The initial problem clarification is evident in their posts, where they often present multiple potential solutions. The stages of deliberation, the moment of choice, and post-choice evaluation are then collaboratively constructed by the group members through their interaction. However, despite its potential benefits, post-choice evaluation rarely occurs.

For this study, relevant interactions were identified using the group's internal search function, applying keywords related to climate change. The term *climate change* proved particularly effective in locating suitable threads, as translators in the group tend to provide a wider context when requesting or offering help with specific terms. Altogether, ten interaction threads, posted between 2014 and 2024, were collected. From these, three were selected as the most representative and most appropriate for in-depth analysis, given the scope and aims of this study. Other threads included terminology discussions on related concepts such as *sustainable development* and the translation of acronyms like *ESG* (Environmental, Social, and Governance

considerations). For example, one post raised the issue of localizing the English acronym *ESG* into Slovenian (suggesting *ODU* as a possible equivalent for *okoljski, družbeni in upravljavski*), highlighting the growing frequency of the term in Slovenian texts and the perceived need for a Slovenian equivalent. This reflects broader concerns among professionals about terminological consistency and the localization of globally circulating climate-related concepts.

In this space, no single individual fully controls the trajectory of the problem-solving process. Rather, multiple members animate and interpret each other's contributions, collaboratively producing not just answers but also a shared understanding of the underlying linguistic and cultural issues. Such group-based translation problem-solving involves ongoing fission-fusion dynamics, as described by Enfield (2017, p. 13) in that translators come together around a post, jointly commit to addressing a query, and then disperse.

Conversation Analysis (CA) concepts such as turn-taking, TCUs, and sequence organization have been widely discussed (e.g., Sacks et al., 1974; Schegloff, 2007) and can be adapted for Facebook's asynchronous interactions (see, also, Koivisto et al., 2003), where turns are only visible once posted. In this group, problem-posts often appear as single, self-contained messages, resembling package texts (cf. Hutchby and Tanna, 2008). These messages typically include all necessary context for others to respond, making them functionally complete turn-constructional units (TCUs). The original post initiates an adjacency pair, projecting a sequence—problem → solution—even if not all turns are fulfilled (e.g., no follow-up by the original poster (OP)). The group's norm is that these posts receive a response, whereby respondents reply in separate comments, often independently of each other, constructing a multi-party response sequence. Though replies may not always receive a direct response from the OP, a thank-you post is a common practice that signals sequence closure. Despite the asynchronous format, the interaction maintains the structural features of conversation: recognizable actions (problem, response, acknowledgment), oriented turn-taking, and sequence management—all adapted to the affordances and constraints of Facebook's comment thread system, such as likes, reactions, or tagging.

All examples are presented in English, although the original posts and interactions were conducted in Slovenian. The translation of the data was necessary in order to make the analysis accessible to an international, English-speaking academic audience.[1] Given the textual and interactional nature of the data (Facebook posts), only the English version is presented in this paper, as this allows for readability while still preserving the key interactional dynamics relevant to conversation analysis.

5 Analysis and discussion

The first example explores the problem-solving process around choosing an appropriate Slovenian term for *greenwashing*. This term was coined by the US environmentalist Jay Westerveld in 1986. Linked to earlier terms *white-washing* (denoting glossing over or covering up vices, crimes or scandals through biased or partial information), *greenwashing* refers to the practice of companies misleadingly promoting themselves as environmentally friendly while maintaining harmful practices. Portmanteaus or lexical blends like *greenwashing* are quite frequent and natural in English but often sound odd in Slovenian.

The interaction is initiated with a problem statement that functions as a first pair part, inviting a range of responses that reflect different epistemic stances and linguistic preferences. The original post sets the activity framework by describing the context (a public-facing Earth Day article) and offers candidate translations (e.g., *zeleno zavajanje*, *zeleničenje*, *zelena fasada*), prompting others to evaluate or expand upon them, thus inviting a series of second pair parts from other participants, each aligning with or expanding upon the initial inquiry.

While the core issue concerns lexical choice, the exchange is deeply embedded in the sequential organization of contributions, where each turn builds on, aligns with, or expands upon previous suggestions. Subsequent responses orient to this initiating post in different ways: one participant nominates another by tagging them directly in line 12 (@Translator 2), which both delegates epistemic authority and anticipates a solution. In lines 14-20, translator 2 then provides two candidate terms (*ekomanipulacija* and *zelenorek*), each accompanied by justificatory accounts. These accounts function as second pair parts, elaborating not just on lexical choice but also

[1] We would like to thank Jasna Vidinić for providing the translations into English.

on criteria of acceptability (e.g., clarity, cultural reference, recognizability). These justifications help secure recipient design by acknowledging shared norms and the assumed knowledge base of the audience.

Excerpt 1 – Negotiating the Slovenian Equivalent for *Greenwashing* (22 April 2024)
OP=original poster

Table 1

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11	**OP**	ENG-SLO: Greenwashing. (**Greenwashing** is where a company uses advertising and public messaging to appear more climate friendly and environmentally sustainable than it really is.) To mark Earth Day, I'm writing an article on this topic. I came across a 2019 post that mentions *zeleno zavajanje* (*greenwashing*) (and creative alternatives like *zeleničenje* (*greening*) and *zelena fasada* (*green façade*)); however, a lot of time has passed and there's been a lot of water that has washed the green since then, so I'm reaching out to see if any of you, in your infinite wisdom,, know whether a more established term has emerged by now?
12 13	**T1**	@Translator 2 didn't you have a term for this, if I'm not mistaken?
14	**T2**	Yes, I used the term *ekomanipulacija* (*ecomanipulation*). I was torn
15		between two options. *Ekomanipulacija* ultimately prevailed
16		because it is straightforward and easily understood. However, I
17		personally felt that *zelenorek* (*greenspeak*) hit the nail on the head,
18		but it requires a a certain level of familiarity to appreciate the
19		association
20		(to *newspeak* from the novel 1984).
21	**T1**	yes, *zelenorek*! – I find this really adorable
22	**T3**	If it helps: [URL]
[…]	**[…]**	[…]
23 24	**T4**	I think *zelena fasada* is a very fitting term (as a contextual variation of *zeleno zavajanje* rather than a substitute)
25	**T5**	oh, thanks, I'll keep it in mind for future use!!
26	**T6**	*Zeleno zavajanje* is a fairly established translation.
27	**T4**	*Zeleno zavajanje* is well established. At least in the media
[…]	**[…]**	[…]
28 29	**T4**	In the OBOD podcast, someone used the term *pranje na zeleno* (*washing it green*) 🙂

The interaction exhibits temporality in two key ways: first, in the form of reflexive reference to past discussions (e.g., older posts or prior usage of terms), and second, in the iterative progression of the exchange. Translation, here, is not resolved in a single move but is subject to gradual refinement through contributions that align,

affirm, or extend prior turns—such as the endorsement of *zelenorek* in line 21 (*I find this really adorable*) and the re-evaluation of *zeleno zavajanje* as an established term (lines 26 and 27). These utterances perform affiliative actions, reinforcing group consensus and shared professional identity. Moreover, topical trajectories shift subtly within the thread—from proposing alternatives to reflecting on their contextual appropriateness (e.g., *zelena fasada* (lines 7 and 23) as a variation rather than a replacement). This points to participants' ability to flexibly navigate the evolving scope of the discussion, moving beyond a single lexical item to engage with a broader semantic field of competing and complementary terms. These shifts are locally managed and temporally extended, reinforcing Zheng's (2012) observation that translation choices emerge through ongoing consideration and negotiation.

Finally, while the discussion revolves around a single lexical item, it also illustrates broader interactional norms within professional translator communities. The interaction is shaped by implicit turn-taking rules, mutual orientation to expertise, and the recognition of differing epistemic positions. As such, the exchange exemplifies how temporality, conversational structure, and epistemic asymmetries interweave to facilitate collaborative terminological decision-making in digital translational affinity spaces.

Excerpt 2 – Negotiating the Slovenian equivalent for *zero waste* (4 June 2017)

The second example centers on the translation of the term *zero waste*. Zero waste is a compound term describing a sustainability approach focused on minimizing waste through practices that reduce, reuse, recycle, and compost materials. The term was first coined by chemist Paul Palmer in the 1970s, who recognised the potential of reusing industrial byproducts (Bennett, 2023). The modern concept was popularised by Bea Johnson in her 2013 book *Zero Waste Home*. The movement has gained momentum as a response to growing plastic pollution and landfill waste, aiming to significantly reduce the environmental impact and promote a more sustainable lifestyle.

In this excerpt, several key factors emerge as translators discuss the appropriate Slovenian translations for terms related to *zero waste*. The discussion emphasises the semantic challenges posed by terms like *brez odpadkov* (literally *without waste*) and *brezodpadni* (literally *wasteless* or *non-waste*). The core issue revolves around

distinguishing between terms such as *odpadni* (*waste-related*) and *odpadkovni* (*pertaining to waste*), which have different connotations and potential for misinterpretation.

Table 2

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	**OP**	ENG - SLO Are the translations for *zero waste products* and *zero waste society* fully established in Slovenian as: - *brez odpadni izdelki* and - *brez odpadna družba*? These translations sound and read awkward to me? Should these terms be written together or separately?? *brezodpadna družba* THANKS.
9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16	**T1**	I'm familiar with the term *brez odpadkov* (*without waste*) as in (*družba brez odpadkov* (*zero waste society*), *dom brez odpadkov* (*zero waste home*)), which I believe is a much better linguistic choice. The problem with the hypothetical adjective *brezodpaden* (which must be written together!!) is that it seems to derive from *brez odpada* (*without a dump*) and not *brez odpadkov* (*without waste*).
17	**OP**	Thanks, that's clever. 🙂
18 19	**T2**	it's also called *kosovni odpad* (*bulky waste*) not *odpadek* (*waste*), I wouldn't be that nitpicky about it.
20 21	**T2**	hmm, I see what you mean; I was referring to *odpad* (*dump*) as in *odlagališče* (*landfill*).
22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32	**T3**	It is important to pay attention to the semantic difference between the adjectives: *ODPADEN* (*waste*) (SSKJ dictionary: disposed of or discarded because it is worn out or is no longer useful for its original purpose: waste wood, paper; waste building materials; waste products from manufacturing; buying waste raw materials; heating with waste water from thermal power plants) and *ODPADKOVEN* (SSKJ doesn't have a definition, - related to waste). The second adjective will be increasingly used due to the concept of circular economy, which addresses waste cycles.
33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42	**OP**	Thank you, yes, the text requires terminology relevant to th circular economy. So, I will use *brezodpadkovna družba*, or even better, *družba brez odpadkov*. I will be more precise with the terminology for products, as I am not fully familiar with the exact processes. If you make a new product from wastepaper, is it considered a recycled product that can be zero-waste, or is it classified as low-waste? If you make a food product yourself, using up all the waste and excluding packaging, ... is it considered a zero-waste product, such as zero-waste soup or apple pie? 🙂Darn, confused again.

While *brez odpadkov* (*without waste*) is favoured for both products and society, as it sounds more natural and is widely understood, terms like *brezodpadni izdelki* (*zero waste products*) and *brezodpadna družba (zero waste society)* were considered awkward and less fluid. In contrast, *brez odpadkov* aligns better with contemporary concepts such as the circular economy and is less ambiguous. The preference for *brez odpadkov* is thus reinforced, as it more accurately reflects the sustainability-driven approach without the confusion that might arise from terms like *brezodpadni* or *brez odpadna*.

This iterative selection process closely reflects Wilss' (1994) decision-making framework in translation, which emphasises that decision-making is an information-processing activity involving interaction between the translator's cognitive system, their knowledge bases (linguistic, referential, sociocultural, and situational), the task specifications, and the specific problem space presented by the text. In the case discussed here, translators move through stages of identifying and clarifying the problem, specifically the awkwardness and semantic inaccuracy of terms like *brezodpadni izdelki*, before exploring alternatives and ultimately arriving at the more natural and semantically precise term *brez odpadkov*. This process aligns with what Wilss (1994) calls the *moment of choice*—a key point in his six-stage model that includes problem identification, clarification, information collection, deliberation, choice, and post-choice evaluation (Wilss 1994, p. 146). By engaging in this kind of reflective deliberation, translators demonstrate the strategic, non-routine nature of decision-making that Wilss associates with translation in underdetermined, open problem spaces.

Excerpt 3 – Negotiating the Slovenian Equivalent for *global weirding* (4 July 2014)

Another illustrative example of collaborative terminological problem-solving took place as early as 2014, when a translator posted a query about how to render *global weirding* into Slovenian. Global weirding is a term coined as a play on *global warming*, emphasising that climate change means more than rising temperatures, i.e., increasingly unpredictable and extreme weather patterns. Popularized by Thomas Friedman, the term highlights the intensification of weather events like heatwaves, cold snaps, storms, floods, and droughts due to climate disruption. Unlike *global warming*, which implies a linear temperature rise, *global weirding* captures the chaotic and variable nature of climate impacts (*Global Weirding – Wiktionary, the Free Dictionary*, 2022).

Table 3

1 2 3 4	**OP**	ENG – SLO: Global weirding. Does anyone have any suggestions for a pun on global warming? 🙂
5	**T1**	*Počudnenje* 🙂 (weirding)
6	**OP**	Not too bad 🙂
7	**T2**	*globalno ponorevanje* 😉 (global insanity)
8	**OP**	Keep 'em coming 😃
9	**T3**	*globalno neurjevanje* (stress on *a*) 🙂 (global storming)
10	**T4**	*Globalno pregorevanje* (in a sense of burnt out)
11	**T5**	we've already had that. check if it's useful
12 13 14	**T6**	*Globalno pregorevanje* / *prekipevanje* (global burning/brimming) .... but otherwise, insanity is cool. 🙂 Edit: just seen that *burning* had already been suggested
15 16	**OP**	It has already been translated into Slovenian as *globalno čudaštvo* (global weirdness). How does that sound to you?
17	**T2**	This is not at all the same thing.
18 19 20	**T2**	global weirding n. The worldwide increase in the rate and extent of extreme or unpredictable weather conditions.
21	**OP**	Exactly. I totally agree.
22 23	**T4**	*Muhasto vreme* (whimsical weather) 🙂 *globalna muhavost* (global whimsicality) (of people and weather 😉)
24 25	**OP**	It's pretty awesome, and the global whimsy totally fits in the context of the whole thing I'm translating 🙂

The post generated 14 comments and demonstrates a rich cycle of interaction and co-construction of meaning. The first response appeared within 43 minutes, and the original poster (OP) replied within a minute, signalling active engagement. This rapid exchange continued over the following hours, with contributions spaced relatively evenly (e.g., 7:52, 8:22, 9:22, etc.), suggesting sustained interest. As with other examples in this study, humorous wordplay emerged as a frequent strategy among contributors, as seen in suggestions like *globalno ponorevanje* (global insanity) or *globalna muhavost* (global whimsicality), which play on the punning and metaphorical aspects of the original English term. These instances of jocular mockery (Haugh, 2010) echo the established pattern on the forum when pun-based terms are discussed. In doing so, the commenters cultivate affiliation and shared involvement, reinforcing group solidarity and shaping the relational dynamics among participants.

The OP's encouragement in line 8 (*Keep 'em coming*) functions as a topical expansion move, prompting further proposals and confirming that the thread is still open for suggestions. Analytically, Wills' (1994) model is again applicable here: the translation task moves through problem identification (understanding the metaphorical and climatic implications of *global weirding*), transfer (suggesting candidate equivalents), and evaluation. The OP's final comment in lines 24–25 expresses clear approval of the suggested term *globalna muhavost*, explicitly linking it to the specific translation context, which remains unknown to us. This act functions as a concise form of post-choice evaluation, aligning with the final stage in Wills' (1994) translation problem-solving model, and indicates that the selected equivalent satisfies the translator's contextual and communicative needs. In line with Shih (2015), we can observe how the participants cyclically return to the problem-solving phase, continually generating and evaluating alternative renderings. Over time, this results in a set of *competing translation equivalents*, such as *globalno čudaštvo*, *pregorevanje*, and *muhavost*.

Ultimately, the OP selects *globalna muhavost* as the most contextually suitable term—although this context remains opaque to external observers. This selection also aligns with Zheng's (2012) observation that through iterative refinement, translation equivalents enter a *hierarchical relationship*, with one candidate emerging as contextually dominant. If we were to propose an additional equivalent based on the patterns observed, a plausible term could be *globalna podnebna zmešnjava* (global climate chaos), which captures both the metaphorical register and the climactic referent. Without the modifier *podnebna*, the phrase might be misread as describing global political or social unpredictability, underscoring the importance of semantic precision in metaphor translation.

In all three examples—*greenwashing*, *zero waste*, and *global weirding*—translators not only search for semantic equivalents but also consider each term's function within the broader discourse of the circular economy. In the first example, *zeleno zavajanje* is a linguistically clear and pragmatically effective translation of *greenwashing*, offering greater explicitness by directly signalling deception. While it lacks the metaphorical layering of the English term, it enhances immediate comprehension for Slovenian audiences. The expertise required to navigate the nuances between terms like *odpadek (waste)* and *odpad (scrap)* plays a key role. In the *global weirding* thread, participants collaboratively generate and refine multiple translation candidates, ultimately selecting *globalna muhavost* for its contextual fit, echoing the problem-solving cycle

outlined by Wills (1994). This mirrors the refinement seen in earlier examples, where Zheng's (2012) notion of increasing term suitability through iteration is also observed. Across all cases, functionality, clarity, and pragmatic alignment seem to guide the final choice.

The translators' choices in both excerpts demonstrate how collaborative decision-making and shared contextual understanding are vital in shaping terminological consistency. This analysis reflects the broader theoretical concern with bridging the gap between complex scientific language and public understanding, particularly in the context of interdisciplinary climate communication.

6 Conclusion

This study has shown that translators are not mere intermediaries but active co-constructors of meaning in climate discourse. Working at the intersection of language, science, and culture, they play a crucial role in shaping how environmental concepts are understood and communicated. By examining interactions in online translator communities, we have illustrated that translation is fundamentally a decision-making process—one that is cognitive, collaborative, and contextually embedded. Key findings highlight the critical role of informal, peer-driven exchanges in clarifying nuanced terms such as greenwashing and zero waste, where consensus emerges through iterative refinement rather than top-down standardisation. The discussions revealed that translators prioritise naturalness in the target language (*brez odpadkov* over *brezodpadni*), contextual appropriateness (e.g., *ekomanipulacija* vs. *zelenorek*), and alignment with broader frameworks like the circular economy. These choices reflect Wilss' (1994) model of translation as a non-linear decision-making process, where problem-solving is shaped by linguistic expertise, shared knowledge, and real-world applicability.

Key findings also highlight how the group's interactional norms, such as turn-allocation through tagging (e.g., @Translator in excerpt 1, line 12) or accounts accompanying lexical proposals (e.g., I used *ekomanipulacija* because it's straightforward in excerpt 1, lines 14-16), enable the co-construction of terminology that balances accuracy and cultural relevance. These practices also exemplify turn-taking dynamics that distribute epistemic authority within the group, as seen in instances where a participant delegates knowledge through tagging (e.g., excerpt 1,

line 12*:* Didn't you have a term for this?), fostering collaborative contributions and shared expertise across the community. The discussions also revealed how epistemic stance-taking (e.g., excerpt 2, line 11: *I* believe *brez odpadkov* is a better linguistic choice) and asymmetries (e.g., appeals to dictionary definitions or institutional usage) legitimised certain equivalents. These micro-interactional practices align with Wilss's (1994) model of translation as a decision-making process, where problem-solving unfolds non-linearly through repair initiation, other-correction, and post-choice evaluation, all visible in the group's threaded exchanges.

The discussions further highlight the translators' deep engagement with meaning-making, demonstrating their investment in selecting terms that both resonate culturally and align with the source context. The three examples have shown how translators collaboratively refine options and use interactional cues–such as humour and evaluative alignment–to reach pragmatic solutions. Online forums such as *Translators to the rescue!* thus serve as key affinity spaces where practitioners co-create meaning and reinforce terminological consistency. These digital environments, while rich in expertise, also come with challenges–as highlighted by Gaspari (2023, p. 689), who warns of the need to critically assess the reliability of peer-contributed content. Ultimately, the responsibility for translation quality rests with individual translators, who must navigate these spaces thoughtfully.

This research stresses the interdisciplinary significance of translation in climate communication. As climate discourse evolves–with shifts from neutral terms like climate change to urgent labels like climate crisis–translators act as key mediators, ensuring that scientific and policy concepts resonate across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Crucially, this work is often done behind the scenes, invisible to the end readers of translated texts. Yet, its impact is profound: translators bridge critical gaps in public understanding and help shape the discourse itself. In doing so, they reinforce the vital link between language, perception, and action in sustainability efforts, playing an indispensable role in the global response to climate change.

Future research could expand this inquiry by testing the impact of simplified messaging on public engagement (see Maple Leaf, 2022). Additionally, comparative studies across languages and digital platforms could further illuminate best practices for collaborative terminology development. Ultimately, this study affirms that

translation is not merely a technical task but a vital, socially embedded practice that shapes how societies interpret and respond to the defining challenge of our time: the climate crisis.

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Notes

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About of authors

Sara Orthaber is a Assistant Professor at the Department of Translation Studies at the Faculty of Arts, University of Maribor. She holds a PhD from the University of Surrey, where she also completed her Master of Arts (MA) degree. She earned her undergraduate degree in Translation Studies from the University of Graz at the Department of Translation Studies. Her research focuses on interactional pragmatics, (im)politeness, spoken and written discourse analysis, computer-mediated communication, and intercultural communication. She has (co-)authored articles in leading journals such as the Journal of Pragmatics, Internet Pragmatics, and Sociolinguistic Studies, and published a monograph titled (Im)politeness at a Slovenian Call Centre: A Cross-Media Examination with Springer Nature.

Aleksandra Nuč Blažič is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Translation Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Maribor, Slovenia. Since 2009, she has also been collaborating with the Institute of Translation Studies at the University of Graz as external teaching staff for conference interpreting. Her research primarily focuses on translation history, translation policy and culture, conference

interpreting, and community interpreting. She has been an accredited freelance interpreter for EU institutions since 2005 and a member of AIIC since 2016. She has worked on projects such as *ReTrans* (*Working with Interpreters in Refugee Transit Zones*), an EU-funded Erasmus+ initiative that develops digital training materials to raise awareness for interpreting in humanitarian and transborder migration contexts.