

# SOWING SOUNDS AND REAPING SENSE IN ITALIAN TRANSLATIONS OF ALICE

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## I. Down the Rabbit-Hole

*"Take care of the sense and the sounds will take care of themselves"*

**'Chi semina suoni raccoglie senso'**

[He who sows sounds reaps sense]

The Duchess

On falling through the rabbit-hole, Alice comes to a wonderland in which sense often appears to be inverted. In rendering the Duchess's words in Italian, Aldo Busi also seems to have inverted the sense. Yet while sense-inversion is legitimated by literary licence, surely it is the translator's *raison d'être* that he should strive to render the sense of the original? Busi's case does not look strong. His translation is published by Feltrinelli, one of the major Italian publishers, in a series entitled *I Classici* (Carroll, 1998); and we know that we must always respect the Classics. This edition is also a parallel text, where the tradition is for translations to be 'literal rather than literary' (Franco, 1966: blurb). Moreover, the highly-respected translation by Masolino D'Amico, a distinguished Carroll scholar and biographer, in a

monolingual edition of *Alice* (Carroll, 1978), has a literal translation of the Duchess's dictum. Finally, Busi is felt to be something of a knave in Italian literary circles and is renowned for his audacious and provocative novels, such as *The Standard Life of a Contemporary Pantyhose Salesman* and *Sodomies in Elevenpoint*. So, like the knave of hearts he must go on trial, not for stealing tarts but sense.

This paper presents a case for the defence. The opening argument sketches the translation and discourse theoretical premises on which the subsequent evidence relies. The evidential phase compares Busi's translation with that of the more 'orthodox' version by D'Amico and provides textual examples where Busi appears to be more attentive to the intricacies of the original than D'Amico. The concluding argument attempts to prove how taking care of the superficial sense without due attention to the sounds and forms reverberating below the surface of the text can lead to an ineffective translation, while subverting the semantic content, as in the inversion of *sound* and *sense* in Aldo Busi's rendering of the Duchess's words, can sometimes produce a more 'faithful' translation. In pursuing this argument, we take a trip down a rabbit-hole into a wonderland where translation norms are sometimes inverted and apparent nonsense makes sense.

## II. The pool of fears

When a work such as *Alice* becomes part of the Western World's literary canon (Bloom, 1995), it is invested, as the word *canon* suggests, with a form of religious authority. Like the Queen of Hearts herself, the *Alice* text becomes a figure to look on with awe and fear. Just as the Queen's gardeners – the spades – prostrate themselves before her and so are unable to see her, or be seen, so *Alice*'s Gardners – the text exegetists – dig down into the textual details, sometimes losing sight of the evaluative purpose of the work as a whole. For when a work enters the Canon, it is often the Word that is revered, not the Discourse.

The translator of the canonised literary text thus has to address many fears. There is the primal fear of betraying the text. The translator must translate without transmuting, or in the more felicitous Italian expression, *tradurre senza tradire* (translate without betraying). The orthodox view here is that the more one strays from *la diritta via* of syntactic and morphological cognation, the greater the risk of ending up in a translational purgatory. The very words used to describe translational approaches – *faithful* or *free* – suggest that a non-literal translation is heretical, amounting to a loss of faith in the translation credo. The translator also has to face the fear of betraying the reader. Many audiences expect translations of literary classics to convey exactly what was written in the original, and this idea of exactness is often conceived again as a similarity of words and lexical meanings rather than discourse meaning or effect. Furthermore, as this is the conception of the reader held by many publishers, there is the added fear of simple rejection by one's commissioner.

Finally, there is the fear of the philologists – the further you wander from the safety of the well-beaten paths represented by ‘classic’ translations, the more likely you are to be considered a heretic. Thus the first translation of *Alice* into Italian, by T. Pietrocòla-Rossetti, is commended by D’Amico as being “philologically accurate” while all versions are considered inevitably to “lose many of the richest gags” (Carroll, 1978: xii). A taste of the sort of reaction Busi’s edition of *Alice* has received in conservative academic circles can be seen in the following extract from a web-published Italian degree thesis on translations of *Alice*. The author contrasts versions such as Busi’s designed for “pure enjoyment” with those such as D’Amico’s of “scholarly interest” and notes of Busi’s edition:

Symptomatic is the fact that on the back cover there are *no* notes on the author (who is dedicated little more than half a page in all) but an extract from the introduction, notes on the *translator* and a couple of lines on the writer of the notes. The translator has even dedicated his version of *Alice* to his nieces (cf. p. 7: ‘*To Eleonora, Wilma, Patrizia, Maria, and Adele from your uncle-the-writer*’). Given these premises, it is hardly surprising that the ‘translated’ text is actually a free adaptation of Carroll’s story. . . (Cammarata 1997: 20. My translation. *All italics original*)

The implication here would appear to be that a focus on the translator inevitably entails a lack of appropriate focus on the author, which in turn leads to a distortion of the text. For writers like this, it is clearly impossible for a translation to be both faithful and fun.

It is ‘hardly surprising’, then, that these fears of betrayal and rejection can restrict the literary translator’s freedom to convey the effect of the words and the underlying discourse rather than merely the surface syntax and semantics of the text. Yet developments in discourse, translation and narrative theory tend to suggest the primacy of the higher levels of discourse over lexical and syntactic units.

### III. A communications interface and a labovian tale

The recent history of translation theory reveals a shift in paradigm from a concern with syntactic and semantic equivalence to a concern with pragmatic equivalence and with translation as an act of cross-cultural communication. In the 1960s, Catford defined translation as ‘the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent material in another language (TL)’ (1965: 20), a view de Beaugrande later dismissed as ‘an allegory of the limitations of linguistics at that time’ (1978: 11). By the late 1980s, Snell-Hornby was able to describe translation as involving ‘the interplay of language, text, situation and culture’ (1987: 94) and the translation process as ‘a matter of constant relativity, of recreating relationships that are never absolute or final: the web of relationships within the text, as well as those between the text and the world in which it is embedded and those between the text and the world of its reader’ (1987: 102). More recently still, some theorists have attempted to break down the barriers between literary and non-literary translation and have discovered that, in terms of core processes

and intractable problems, a “striking uniformity” appears “when translating is looked upon as *an act of communication which attempts to relay, across cultural and linguistic boundaries, another act of communication (which may have been intended for different purposes and different readers/hearers)*” [original italics] (Hatim & Mason, 1997: 1).

The particular act of communication *Alice* represents has its genesis in oral narrative: Carroll recounted the story to the Liddell sisters during an outing on the Thames. Labov (1972) notes how in oral narratives there is a strong social requirement that the tale has a point and that the teller considers it worth telling the addressee. This ‘Evaluative’ element of narrative is conveyed by a very wide variety of linguistic features which function to intensify, compare, relate and explain affective, judgmental and aesthetic feelings. Naturally, *Alice* is very different in nature from the teenage Afro-American narratives of personal experience studied by Labov. It is a *fantasy*: a set of extravagant and implausible episodes “representing the dreaming or subconscious mind” through techniques of ‘distortion or irrational association” (Fowler, 1973: 69). It has also been described as *nonsense* literature, along the lines of Edward Lear’s limericks. One might wonder, then, how fantasy nonsense can have a point. But that would be to confuse evaluative point or purpose with ideational message. In the model of children’s story or fable which *Alice* parodies, we can say that the evaluative point *is* a message and that the message lies in the moral. But if you stop a friend while they are narrating an event during casual conversation and ask them *why* they are telling you *this* (not recommended outside a research setting!) they will answer that it is *funny, interesting, bizarre, shocking* and such like. In short, that it is *worth* telling, and that its *value* lies in the *effects* that it is likely to produce on the listener. Achieving the intended effects is the mark of narrative success and will help the teller gain or maintain status in the eyes of the listeners. Thus it is the interpersonal effect which is primary in narrative communication, while the ideational message is secondary.

In the case of *Alice*, the episodes, whatever else they are doing, are clearly designed to entertain through being funny, bizarre, even shocking, and to make the reader laugh at the absurdities of the world. Moreover, since the Wonderland is a dream and dreams make constant ‘irrational associations’ with people and events in waking life, it is not surprising to find that much of the entertainment in the text derives from the humorous distortion of waking language and rituals. Consequently, the evaluative point and communicative effect of *Alice* is conveyed to a great extent through reference to other texts and cultural scripts in the real or ‘waking’ world.

This connection between the fictional and real worlds recalls another feature of Labov’s model of narrative structure – the Coda – which bridges the gap between the end of the oral narrative and the current conversation context. There is some affinity between the coda creator and the literary translator. Both have the task of building bridges between the world of the narrative and the world of the addressee. The difference is that the oral

narrator naturally constructs her *coda* in the tail of her tale, while the translator must provide continual bridges between a narrative world embedded in one culture and a reader rooted in another.

#### IV. The reader sends in a little brief

*Alice* has been called every adult's favourite children's book. This raises the problem of addressivity. *Alice* is consciously addressed to several audiences. The most immediate were the Liddell sisters on their rowing boat in the Thames, as is evident if we replace 'little' by 'Liddell' in the opening verse of "All in the Golden Afternoon":

For both our oars, with Liddell skill,  
By Liddell arms are plied,  
While Liddell hands make vain pretence  
*Our wanderings to guide*

Liddell jokes of this sort abound throughout the text and there may even be more private jokes addressed specifically to Alice Liddell. A slightly wider audience is represented by Dodgson's friends, acquaintances and work colleagues. Gardner (1986: 124) informs us that the Gryphon is the emblem of Trinity College Oxford and that he and the Mock Turtle "are obvious satires on the sentimental college alumnus". Then Carroll addresses the young upper-class English girls of the mid-nineteenth century: most of the parodies are of children's textbooks, poetry (especially the type of moralistic poetry taught to girls), and the speech styles of the type of people (maids, gardeners, governesses) that such upper-class girls would be likely to meet. Finally, we might assume that some of the logical and linguistic quibbles were directed at contemporary educated adults. All these would now be termed the 'implied readers' of the text, the ones Carroll probably had in mind when writing.

The Italian translator must first decide whether to communicate with a contemporary Italian audience or to produce an imitation of an historical document by retaining all of the features which would have had an effect on the various implied readers. In the latter case, she would be wise to heed the words of the Irish translator O'Flaherty who produced a very literal translation of a Sanskrit poem 'bracketing pairs of words to represent the puns and *doubles entendres* with which Sanskrit abounds' on the grounds that 'the people who were likely to read translations of Sanskrit poetry were not the same people who read the sort of novels that one bought in airports': she later realised 'that anyone who was interested in fighting through that sort of translation would be likely to go ahead and *learn* the original language' (quoted in Rosales Sequeiros, 1998: 6-7).

On choosing to communicate with her contemporary audience, the translator must imagine receiving a brief from her potential readers in the same way as a barrister receives a brief from the solicitor. The imagined brief would inform the translator of how much the readers know, what they might expect, how they might react and so on. In working with this imaginary

brief, our translator will soon realise that she has to reckon with several types of remoteness which distance her Italian readers from all of *Alice*'s implied readers. Linguistic remoteness is not as severe as it would be in the case of a non-European language. However, most puns require radical modification and plays on pronouns in particular are almost impossible to render in a pro-drop language like Italian. Cultural remoteness is always significant, and a lack of knowledge of English proverbs and customs is certainly a hurdle, though in many respects British and Italian society are culturally cognate, which makes it feasible to convey much of the humour. Remoteness in time is as much a problem for English-speaking readers as Italians given that neither, for example, are likely to know the originals of the burlesqued nineteenth-century poems. Finally there is the problem of age – the fact that the majority of Italian readers of *Alice* are adults and not children.

Some of the more arcane and private jokes in *Alice* will inevitably be lost in the body of the translation, but they are lost as well to the modern British reader and can only be recuperated through footnotes. However, much more of the associative humour can be communicated to the contemporary reader than 'literal' translators might realise. This is due in great part to the generic nature of all language use.

## V. Advice from a russian sage

Long before genre theory became popular in linguistics, Bakhtin (1981; 1986a) was insisting on the essential similarity between literary and everyday language. Literary language simply fished from the ocean of everyday genres. Bakhtin succinctly outlines his theory of genre in an essay written in the early fifties "The Problem of Speech Genres" (1986b). Unlike Saussure and his followers, whose linguistics is based on the formal decontextualised sentence, he takes the contextualised *utterance* as his starting point and – in a sobering passage for those inebriated with the idea of Bakhtin as a champion of interpretative libertarianism – he claims that there are forms of utterances that are mandatory just as there are obligatory morphological and syntactic forms.

The single utterance, with all its individuality and creativity, can in no way be regarded as a *completely free combination* of forms of language, as is supposed, for example, by Saussure [...] who juxtaposed the utterance (*la parole*), as a purely individual act, to the system of language as a phenomenon that is purely social and mandatory for the individuum. (Bakhtin, 1986b: 81)

The typical combinations of language forms that make up utterances are termed *speech genres*. Bakhtin distinguishes between *primary* speech genres, which we would now recognise as typical fixed expressions and collocations used in everyday speech, and *secondary* speech genres, which linguists would now call text types or simply "genres", and which draw on the primary genres for their composition. These genres do not so much constrain the speaker's individuality as permit effective dialogue with others who are equally versed in them. They are more flexible and plastic than



language system forms, but they “must be fully mastered in order to be manipulated freely”:

The better our command of genres, the more freely we employ them, the more fully and clearly we reveal our own individuality in them (where this is possible and necessary), the more flexibly and precisely we reflect the unrepeatable situation of communication –in a word, the more perfectly we implement our free speech plan. ( Bakhtin, 1986b: 80).

This is immediately relevant to translating *Alice*, for Carroll’s unique humour, eccentric style and linguistic creativity all depend for their effect on their grounding in social and linguistic convention. “Something created is always created out of something given” (Bakhtin, 1986c: 120), or, as Holquist neatly puts it in contemporary frame-theoretical terms, “There is no pure spontaneity, for breaking frames depends on the existence of frames” (Bakhtin, 1986a: xix).

The key, then, in communicating the evaluative force of Carroll’s writing to an Italian audience is to find not equivalent words or even equivalent referential semantics but to search for equivalent genres and reproduce stylistic deviations from those genres which will have an equivalent effect on the reader.

## VI. Pun and parody

Much of the humour in *Alice* derives from both the juxtaposition of contrasting speech genres and the parody of speech styles used within those genres. For this to function effectively, the translator must find both an equivalent genre in the target language and an equivalent speech style within that genre. When Carroll mocks the bumbling bureaucrat through the overly formal lexis and nominalizations used by the Dodo in what should be everyday conversation, it is not difficult to find equivalent registral choices in standard Italian, where bureaucratic language abounds:

*“I move that the meeting adjourn, for the immediate adoption of more energetic remedies –” (C: 47)*

**«propongo l’aggiornamento dell’assemblea, nonché l’immediata adozione di provvedimenti più energici. . .» (A: 20)**

[‘I propose the adjournment of the meeting, as well as the immediate adoption of more energetic measures’]

In most cases my aim in these back translations is to show contrasts in style and to give an idea of pragmatic effect. As far as possible I use the most frequent translations of a word or grammatical structure found in a given context, the intent being to find some form of neutral comparison base. Thus **provvedimenti** is translated with “measures” and not “remedies” or “provisions” because the latter two are more marked translation options. This general principle is overridden locally when it is essential to convey the pragmatic effect of the whole utterance. Thus “propose the adjournment” would more typically be rendered with “propose adjourning” given that English

tends to a more verbal style than Italian. But here it is important to render the full effect of the bureaucratic style and the extra nominalization helps compensate for the loss in English of the extremely bureaucratic overtones of the conjunction “nonché”.

Here D’Amico excels Busi, who tends to remain too verbal in style:

**“propongo di aggiornare l’assemblea. . .”** (B: 41)

But it is essential to keep in mind the pragmatic effect of this parody. Here it is an overly pretentious style which is being mocked, so that when the Eaglet cries out with exasperation “*Speak English!*” Busi is right to translate this with:

**“Parla come ti ha insegnato tua mamma!”** (B: 41)

[‘Speak as your mother taught you to speak’]

and not with D’Amico’s totally ineffectual **“Parla inglese!”**, which in the context of the surrounding Italian, appears to be a request for the Dodo to change languages rather than speech style.

The parodies of speech styles are not always so easy to reflect in Italian. Neither translator manages to convey the lower-class speech style of the gardeners. D’Amico’s translation provides some colloquial lexis (**beh, insomma, questo qua, dando da fare**) but also includes the word **Sicché** which, outside Tuscany, would be considered rather elegant and archaic:

*“Why, the fact is, you see, Miss, this here ought to have been a red rose tree . . . So you see, Miss, we’re doing our best, afore she comes, to –”* (C: 106)

**«Beh, insomma, signorina, il fatto è che questo qua doveva essere un rosaio di rose rosse. . . Sicché come vede ci stiamo dando da fare prima che arrivi lei, per. . .»** (A: 64-5)

[‘Well, you see, Miss, the fact is that this here ought to have been a red rose tree. . . So, as you see, we’re doing our best before she arrives, to...’]

The problem with translating lower-class speech into Italian is that in most cases the pragmatic equivalent would require one of the regional dialects. But the question then is *which* of the many dialects? Each dialect comes with a plethora of regional associations and prejudices. Traditionally, lower class people were often given Veneto accents in the North. But this is neither accurate any more, given the extreme wealth of North-East Italy, nor resounding in political correctness.

Strong regionality might also explain the neutralisation of non-standard speech in the two translations. Non-standard grammatical forms in English fiction are possibly but not necessarily a token of a given dialect. In Italian it would be next to impossible to render non-standardness without evoking a dialect. Neither D’Amico nor Busi attempts to render the Gryphon’s linguistic oddities. D’Amico’s version is as standard an Italian as can be found:

*“This here young lady,” said the Gryphon, “she wants for to know your history, she do.”* (C: 126)



**«Questa signorina» disse il Grifone, «vorrebbe proprio sentire la tua storia.» (A: 77)**

[‘This young lady’, said the Gryphon, ‘would really like to hear your story’]

*Storia* also means history, but, as in English, the “history” sense is unusual when collocated with a personal pronoun. We generally ask for the “story of your life”, not “your history”.

Busi’s version is more colloquial. But, more significantly, he compensates for the loss of effect by introducing a new humorous association. The Gryphon is addressing the Mock Turtle, the Tartaruga d’Egitto in Busi’s translation. It is quite appropriate, then, that he should refer not to the ‘history’ or ‘story’ of this ‘Egyptian Turtle’ (the full complexity of the name in Italian will be explained in Section IX) but to his *geroglifici*, his ‘hieroglyphics’ or, figuratively, his ramblings.

**“Questa giovane dama,” disse il Grifone, “è venuta a ascoltare i tuoi geroglifici, pensa un po’!” (B: 139)**

[‘This young lady’, said the Gryphon, ‘would you believe she’s come to listen to your ramblings?’]

Puns can be even more difficult to render effectively. Many of those depending solely on homophony, such as the famous visual pun in the ‘long tale’ episode, are almost impossible to recreate. Others, however, work on contrasting the sense of a word or expression in a specialised genre with that of everyday language. “Who Stole the Tarts”, an evident satire on judicial procedure, makes much of the language of the courtroom which girls of Alice’s age would be in the process of learning (note Alice’s preoccupation with naming things in the court and her evident satisfaction at knowing the word *jurors*):

*“If that’s all you know about it, you may stand down,” continued the King.*

*“I can’t go no lower,” said the Hatter: “I’m on the floor as it is.”*

*“Then you may sit down,” the King replied. (C: 150)*

By translating *stand down* with the standard “physical” verb **scendere** [get down, step down] D’Amico completely misses the intergeneric humour deriving from the courtroom use of the phrasal verb to mean ‘leave the witness box’. Busi, on the other hand, manages to maintain the effect by using the appropriate lexical item for the courtroom genre, **ritirarsi**, and then playing with the fact that the Hatter is a milliner and the Italian verb also means “shrink”:

**“Se non hai altro da dire, puoi anche ritirarti,” continuò il Re.**

**“Non posso ritirarmi,” disse il Cappellaio, “non sono mica un cuffiotto infeltrito.”**

**“Allora puoi anche sederti,” rispose il Re. (B: 169)**

[‘If you have nothing else to add, you may as well withdraw’ continued the King.

‘I can’t w’ldraw,’ said the Hatter, ‘I’m not a shrunken fez, am I?’

‘Well you can just sit down then,’ the King replied.

In this back-translation ‘w’ldraw’ is meant to be what wool does when it shrinks. Remember that the Hatter doesn’t speak ‘proper’ and that he is drinking tea and eating sandwiches as he speaks. A **cuffiotto** is a large wool cap, though not necessarily a fez.

## VII. A mad text-party

In conveying and contrasting speech genres, *Alice* makes abundant use of various forms of intertextuality. The term *intertextuality* was coined by Kristeva (1980) to describe the inevitable interdependence a literary text has with a variety of others preceding it. Linguistically a *text* is coherent and delimited – it has a beginning, middle and end. An *intertext*, on the other hand, breaks through those limits:

It is not delimited, but de-limited, for its constituents refer to constituents of one or several other texts. Therefore it has a twofold coherence: an *intratextual* one which guarantees the immanent integrity of the text, and an *intertextual* one which creates structural relations between itself and other texts (Plett, 1991: 5).

It is vital when translating intertexts to convey both forms of coherence, but we shall see that the intertextual coherence is often lost in a ‘literal’ translation.

Plett notes that “Intertextuality does not exist in a value-free realm but is dependent on reigning cultural conventions” (1991: 19). Plett describes the ludic type of intertextuality found in *Alice* as *Inverted* because it transposes ‘low’ topics, personages, themes and actions into ‘high’ style, and vice versa. The effect of such transpositions is to challenge and reappraise conventional values. Most of the parodies of children’s poetry invert the moral stance to an immoral one. Unfortunately this can be lost if the other texts are unknown to the reader, and mostly they are unknown to the majority of even English readers. The translator, however, is in a position to help her reader bridge the informational gap.

Both D’Amico and Busi lend a hand to their readers in translating Carroll’s version of Watts’ atrocious poem “Against Idleness and Mischief” (see Schleder de Borba’s comments). The first verse of Carroll’s version is set out in italics below alongside Watts’ original:

How doth the little busy bee	<i>How doth the little crocodile</i>
Improve each shining hour	<i>Improve his shining tail</i>
And gather honey all the day	<i>And pour the waters of the Nile</i>
From every opening flower!	<i>On every golden scale!</i> (C: 38)

Clearly the ludic effect derives from contrasting the industriousness of the busy bee with the laziness of the crocodile. However, the poem is introduced in the text as “*How doth the little–*”, following the convention of referring to poems by their first line, and contemporary readers will not

be able to complete the line with the missing *bee*. The translators are in a position to give a more indicative title. Thus D'Amico names the poem '*l'Industrioso*' [The Hard Worker] and begins:

«**L'industrioso coccodrillo**  
**Migliora la sua coda. . .**» (A: 15)

[The industrious crocodile  
Improves his tail. . .]

This maintains the ludic clash between the industriousness indicated by the attributive adjective and the laziness of the crocodile's actions. But it still fails to suggest a clear idea of an original text and loses altogether the contrast with the bee. Busi, instead, titles the poem *Piccol'ape. . .* [Little Bee], thus setting up the expectation of a children's poem about a bee, and then, like Carroll, lets the text slip into something quite different:

“**Piccol'ape. . .ste di un coccodrillo**  
**spruzza e sguazza la tua coda. . .**” (B: 31)

[Little bee. . .st of a crocodile  
splashing and spraying your tail. . .]

Thus, Busi's version manages to convey an intertextual dimension despite his readers not knowing the original text and this arguably heightens the evaluative effect of the poem.

While ensuring intertextual coherence, it is equally important to maintain intratextual coherence. This can be seen in the following passage from the 'Mock Turtle' chapter:

*“Very true,” said the Duchess: “flamingoes and mustard both bite. And the moral of that is –Birds of a feather flock together.”*

*“Only mustard isn't a bird,” Alice remarked. (C: 121)*

The joke in the last two lines is at Alice's expense – she has committed the classic child mistakes of interpreting metaphor literally and not recognising an established proverb. D'Amico translates the proverb with a standard Italian equivalent:

«**. . .E la morale è. . . “Dio li fa e poi li accoppia.”**  
**«Solo che la mostarda non è un uccello» osservò Alice.** (A: 74)

[‘And the moral is –“God makes them and then marries them”  
‘Only mustard isn't a bird,’ Alice observed.]

This maintains the intertextuality but at the expense of coherence. It is no longer clear why Alice should make her remark and the joke about children's misunderstanding of metaphor is lost. Busi chooses a lesser known but more apt proverb:

“**. . .E la morale è: ‘Uccelli della stessa covata fan sempre rimpatriata’.**  
**“Solo che la mostarda non è un uccello,” fece notare Alice.** (B: 133)

‘And the moral is: “Birds of a brood always flock together”  
‘Only mustard isn't a bird’, Alice remarked.]

Here intratextual coherence is maintained through the repetition of *bird* and the joke on Alice maintained, as in English, through juxtaposing metaphoric and congruent senses of *bird*. At the same time, the intertextuality is kept alive.

### VIII. The Queen's pansies

The principle of an intertext maintaining both intra and intertextual coherence can also apply in cases where the other 'text' is a lexical paradigm in a contrasting genre. An excellent example of a case where it is essential to maintain both intratextual and intertextual coherence can be found at the opening of the Croquet Ground episode.

*First came ten soldiers carrying clubs.* (C: 106)

At this point of the 'Croquet Ground', the text has as yet provided the reader with no conclusive evidence that the inhabitants of this Eden-like world are a pack of cards. It is true that they are called by numbers, but this might simply lend an air of Kafkaesque anonymity to the scene. Counter-evidence is found in the form of numerous linguistic tokens suggesting human form (*jogged my elbow*, *eye chanced to fall*, *bowed low*), voice (the parodied language of the working-class gardener) and feelings (*in a sulky tone*, *'of all the unjust things'*, *anxiously looking*). It is the description of the soldiers, and later the courtiers, which introduces to the reader the fact that the characters in this episode are indeed cards. And this recognition can only arise if clear allusion is made to the names of the suits. D'Amico fails to do this in his 'faithful' translation of the clause:

**Prima vennero dieci soldati armati di mazza.** (A: 65)

[First came ten soldiers armed with cudgels].

One would most commonly translate *mazza* with 'club' but I want to stress the lack of association in Italian with the name of the card suit. The masculine form *mazzo* means 'pack', as in 'pack of cards', but morphological proximity in Romance languages is no guarantee of semantic association, and this is probably too distant an allusion to be useful.

In English it seems natural that the soldiers in a card-playing world should be *clubs*, the gardeners *spades* and the courtiers *diamonds*. The semantic associations between clubs and soldiers, spades and gardeners, diamonds and courtiers work equally well in Italian culture. There is a slight cultural problem in the fact that the type of cards referred to here is only one of several card types used in Italy (the most famous are the Trevisan and the Neapolitan, both of which have a suit called *Spade* – not Spades but Swords). Nevertheless, all contemporary Italian readers would know the 'French' cards. The problem posed here, then, is not one of different semantic reference, as in the case of the cognate *bar* (a *bar* in Italy primarily serves coffee and cakes during the day and is gradually transformed into an alcoholic establishment in the late afternoon and evening), since the symbols on the

cards are identical. Instead, it is that the names assigned to the symbols belong to different semantic fields in the two languages. We can illustrate the paradigms as follows:

Spades	–	Picche	–	‘pikes’
Clubs	–	Fiori	–	‘flowers’
Diamonds	–	Quadri	–	‘squares’
Hearts	–	Cuori	–	‘hearts’

These lexical paradigms belong to the genre of card-playing, which, like most technical genres, allows for no alternative selections. And here lies the problem because, even for a gay activist like Busi, a ‘straight’ translation of the suit was not a truly viable option:

**Prima vennero dieci soldati portando fiori.**

[First came ten soldiers sporting flowers.]

Instead, with sleight of hand, he transforms **Fiori** into **Picche** to retain both the immediate semantic reference (Medieval military weapon – the pike) and the vital intergeneric allusion (suit of cards – spades):

**Per primi comparvero dieci soldati armati di picche.** (B: 117)

[First of all appeared ten soldiers armed with pikes (spades)]

Furthermore, given that the gardeners are painting roses, there is no reason why the reader should not imagine them covered in **Fiori** [flowers]. Carroll makes no explicit reference to the gardeners being spades, though it can easily be inferred after the revelation of the other suits, so Busi’s neat solution does not create textual paradoxes. Smart as it is, however, this option was not available to D’Amico or others translating for editions which include Tenniel’s drawings: the passage is accompanied by a sketch clearly depicting the gardeners as spades.

After the soldiers, we are told, came ten courtiers, who *were ornamented all over with diamonds* (C: 107). Again D’Amico chooses to ignore the intergeneric reference, producing a potential loss in reader comprehension:

**erano tutti adorni di diamanti** (A: 65)

[they were all ornamented with diamonds (precious stones)]

Busi, on the other hand, is able to continue the intergeneric coherence:

**erano tutti inquadrati dalla testa ai piedi** (B: 117)

[they were all square from head to foot]

This does not indicate that they were covered in “squares” (diamonds), which would require the word *inquadrettati*, but having already triggered the reader to the other genre, card-playing, it does not require a great deal of imagination to arrive at the suit *quadri* [squares]. At the same time Busi retains the semantic associations because someone who is *inquadrato* is an

upright, law-abiding citizen, while the *quadri* are the upper echelons of the civil service in Italy –the contemporary equivalent of courtiers.

## IX. The ‘Mock’ Turtle story

Intertextual theory has begun to study the relationship between figures in literature –*interfigurality* (Müller, 1991). The naming of figures may draw, however, not only on associations with other literary figures but also on associations with names in everyday language. An example of this can be seen in Busi’s translation of ‘Mock Turtle’.

Following established tradition, D’Amico translates Mock Turtle with “‘Finta Tartaruga’”. This is semantically correct: *finta* here means ‘imitation’, as does *mock*. But I would argue that the pragmatic effect on the reader is different. While denying the existence of evaluative connotations inherent in words themselves, Bakhtin discusses the “possibility of typical expressions that seem to adhere to words” and sees them resulting from “particular contacts between the *meanings* of words and actual concrete reality under certain typical circumstances” (1986b: 87). Elsewhere these judgmental, affective and aesthetic values deriving from the pragmatics of typical contexts of use of a word have been elegantly termed “semantic prosodies” (Luowe, 1993). Observation of typical uses of *mock* suggest that it is frequently used in contexts involving some form of parodic interpretation of events. Examples from corpora of everyday English (the Birmingham-based Bank of English and the British National Corpus) include ‘*It’s tragic!*’ swoons Jeffrey in mock horror and He pulled at his hair in mock distress, while the *mock-heroic* is a parody of the heroic poetic genre. None of these uses of *mock* would be translated by *finto*. On the other hand, *finto* is used in numerous contexts where *mock* would not be appropriate: *finto amico* [false friend], *finto dolore* [feigned sorrow], *finta modestia* [false modesty]. In these cases there is a clear negative prosody involved, while examples with *mock* are generally either evaluatively neutral (*mock jury*, *mock exam*, *mock battle*) or suggest an underlying burlesque.

The point about the Mock Turtle is not so much that he is an imitation of a turtle, or is posing as a turtle, but that the poor thing is a humorous burlesque of a turtle, who is used by Carroll to parody certain sentimental former Oxfordians. It is the parodic element, so important in *Alice*, that Busi attempts to capture in his **Tartaruga d’Egitto**. The name derives from a common, and slightly old-fashioned, expression of the form *Ma che . . . d’Egitto*, as in:

‘Dove vai in vacanza?’  
‘Ma che vacanza d’Egitto, devo studiare.’

[Where are you going on holiday?  
Holiday? What holiday? I have to study.]

The word **Egitto** [Egypt] now purely functions as an evaluative intensifier, though its use might originally derive from the once cultural and



physical remoteness of the country – something akin to the use of ‘Timbuktu’ in English. The immediate effect of the expression is to gently mock the addresser’s question. Thus **Tartaruga d’Egitto** provides at once an air of mockery, burlesque and melancholy disappointment (it is often used to deny the possibility of something favourable) and as such is a fairly accurate definition of the Mock Turtle. Critics might argue that the primary reference should be to mock turtle soup, but given that this is an unknown culinary delicacy in Italy, compensation is required through other techniques (for a descriptive framework of compensation, see Harvey, 1995).

## X. The Turtle quadrille

In many cases, the evaluative element in an episode in *Alice* depends as much on the sound as the sense. Nowhere is this more true than in the Mock Turtle’s telling of his tale:

“...The master was an old Turtle – we used to call him Tortoise–”

“Why did you call him Tortoise, if he wasn’t one?” Alice asked.

*“We called him Tortoise because he taught us,”* (C: 127)

In both translations *Tortoise* is translated with **Testuggine**. This is pragmatically useful because *testuggine* is a ‘turtle’ word and the translators can play on the *test* part. As it happens, Italian makes no distinction between the land and marine animals, *testuggine* simply being a more formal term for ‘turtle/tortoise’. Thus, in truth-semantic terms, Alice’s question in Italian makes the false presupposition that the master wasn’t a *testuggine*. But few Italian readers would recognise the problem and even fewer would be worried by it, especially in a text which is continually making false presuppositions. The actual puns made on *testuggine* reveal the relative extent to which D’Amico and Busi attempt to render the sound effects, the music, of the original. D’Amico has:

«Lo chiamavamo Testuggine perché ci dava i libri di testo» (A: 79)

[‘We called him Textuggine because he gave us textbooks’]

Busi changes the sex of the tortoise to produce the stereotypical bossy old primary schoolmistress (*maestra*), then rhymes *testuggine* with *ruggine* [rust] to produce a fun rhyming pun:

“...La maestra era una vecchia Tartaruga. . .noi però la chiamavamo Testuggine...”

“Perché la chiamavate Testuggine se non lo era?” chiese Alice.

“Testuggine perché a forza di test ti faceva venire la ruggine, no?” (B: 139)

[‘The schoolmistress was an old Turtle. . .but we used to call her Testrusty–’ ‘Why did you call her Testrusty if she wasn’t?’ asked Alice.

‘Well, of course Testrusty, because with all the tests she gave you she made you quite rusty’

(‘Testrusty’ is my rather ineffectual attempt to render the pragmatic effect rather than the semantic reference of the Italian translation).

The difference between the two translations is even more striking when the Mock Turtle lists his school subjects. D’Amico’s **Rotolamento e Grinze** [Rolling and Wrinkles] appears to be an attempt to render the immediate semantic reference of *Reeling and Writhing* but it loses all reference to school genres. Busi comes up with an elaborate pun (the underlying text is indicated in parentheses):

“...scansare le locali e a arricciare le consolanti,” (B: 141)  
(scandire le vocali e a arrotare le consonanti)  
[‘... avoiding the locals and annoying the consolers (?)’  
(scanning vowels and rolling consonants)]

The exact sense of the “turtle-school” and “girl’s school” versions of Busi’s words is not transparent, though it is certainly true that Italian children have to learn to roll their ‘r’s and are taught to scan poetry and analyse the grammatical structure of prose. But what is essential here is firstly that the line is something of a tongue-twister, prosodically *reeling and writhing* like the English original, and secondly that the reader can *sense* that there is a dialogic relation between the two spheres thanks to the phonetic play.

This delicate play of sound and sense continues in the list of other subjects. D’Amico translates *Mystery* with **Mistero**, thus losing any association with “history”, *Storia*. Busi opts for **Scoria** [scum] which both renders the sound and suggests a hilarious potential subject for a turtle (‘scum, ancient and modern’). D’Amico’s version of the three art subjects *Drawling, Stretching and Fainting in Coils* again seems to be merely an attempt to translate the superficial meaning of the words, with the intertextual reference to art subjects all but lost:

**il Trascinamento, lo Stiramento e lo Svenimento Spirale** (A: 80)  
[Dragging, Stretching and Spiral Fainting]

Busi focuses on the underlying text and the sound and does not worry unduly about the coherence of the superficial sense:

**Disdegno, Frittura Su Tela e Findus Affresco Alla Mia Maniera** (B: 143)  
(Disegno, Pittura Su Tela e Finto (?) Affresco Alla Mia Maniera)  
[Disdain, Fried Fish on Cloth and My Own Style Alfresco Findus  
(Drawing, Painting on Canvas and Imitation (?) Fresco in My Manner)]

As with “test-rusty” above and a number of other extravagances, this pun might be considered overdone here, in the sense that it adds evaluation over and beyond the original and makes specific reference to a contemporary commercial frozen-fish brand (**Findus**) totally anachronistic to the time of the original publication of *Alice*.

Yet many of Carroll’s puns depend very much for their effect on an understanding that the reader will be intimately acquainted with certain minor features of contemporary society. The translator can compensate to some

extent for that loss by making similarly humorous references to the society of her reader. As Busi says in his introduction, *Alice* ‘is always a little ahead’ (1998: 6) and the translator is constantly having to play catch-up in Carroll’s elaborate linguistic dance.

## XI. Who stole the texts?

It is possible that D’Amico, at times, is attempting to convey the ‘other texts’ behind the superficial words: his version of Drawling – **Trascinamento** – may be meant to recall *Rinascimento* [Renaissance] and thus Renaissance art, and **Stiramento** [Stretching] might refer to the spreading of paint on a canvas. But if he is making these associations he is decidedly opaque in doing so and the result requires too much cognitive effort on the part of the reader for the effect to take hold. As Rosales Sequeiros observes, “What should be translated are those aspects of the original text which the translator reasonably expects both to give rise to an adequate number of positive cognitive effects and to do so for as little cognitive effort as possible for the reader” (1998: 11). We have seen that it is the translator’s job to bridge gaps between the author’s expectations and those of the readers of the translation. But if the resulting bridge is too difficult for the reader to cross, it is not doing its required job.

D’Amico’s translation, by attempting to remain as faithful as possible to the immediate semantics of the word on the page, ends up losing the connection with all those other texts and other genres on which the pragmatic effects of those words depend. In contrast, Busi’s version renders more faithfully the parodic, musical and intertextual effects of the original. If the main evaluative point in the telling of *Alice* lies in these rich effects then one can argue that Busi’s translation is effectively a more faithful rendition than that of the more literal D’Amico. Busi has been accused of stealing the text of *Alice* and making it his own, *even dedicating it* to his nephews and nieces, as Cammarata points out. And yet it is surely D’Amico who has stolen from *Alice* the syntactic and phonological intertexts on which much of Carroll’s evaluative comment and humour depends.

## XII. Busi’s evidence

We are now in a position to summarise the evidence in defence of Busi’s translation of the Duchess’s words at the beginning of this paper. We begin with the observation that British readers of *Alice* will recognise the dextrous switch on the traditional proverb:

Take care of the *pence* and the *pounds* will take care of themselves.

Take care of the *sense* and the *sounds* will take care of themselves. (C: 121)

We should then note that the humorous effect derives from the incongruous intertextual juxtaposition of two sentences with almost identical phonological form (the single unvoiced plosive /p/ being changed to unvoiced

fricative /s/) but with two quite different meanings. Next we perceive that while Carroll's version is far from meaningless in itself – indeed, as Gardner notes, it is often cited as good advice on writing prose and even poetry (1970: 121) – in the context of the preceding exchanges, it is complete nonsense. The Duchess claims in 'Pig and Pepper' that the world goes round by people minding their own business; here she claims that it goes round by love, and when challenged by Alice, she sustains that the two claims mean "much the same thing". Clearly this is a case of *not* taking care of the sense. Finally, then, we realise via the intertext that Carroll (or the 'implied author' or 'narrator' or 'implied narrator' – though perhaps in few other works of literature is the 'real' author so clearly present) is playing a little linguistic game at the Duchess's expense.

Now, D'Amico is faithful to the sense of the words on the page:

**"Pensa al senso e i suoni si aiuteranno da soli"** (A: 74)

[Think of the sense and the sounds will help themselves.]

And the reader can understand that the Duchess is being hypocritical. But in this version all intertextual reference is lost. No Italian proverb is recalled by the words, there is no play on sound and sense and there is no linguistic joke made at the Duchess's expense.

Busi, on the other hand, finds a similar cause-effect proverb as his intertextual source and then adapts it in Carrollian fashion, maintaining the sound-sense dichotomy:

(Chi semina vento, raccoglie tempesta)

**Chi semina suoni raccoglie senso** (B: 133)

[(He who sows wind, reaps a whirlwind)

He who sows sounds reaps sense]

There is not the same degree of phonological parallelism here as in the English version (the altered words are formally quite different) but the exact syntactic parallelism ensures that the intertextuality is kept alive. At the same time, the sense games are retained. The literalist will protest that the semantics have been inverted: in Busi's version it is the sounds that are cause and sense the effect. The practical explanation for this is that *semina/sow*, in the cultivation sense, requires a small, divisible unit which can be scattered, which is possible with sounds but not sense. However, the sense effect is not really damaged at all: the Duchess has sown sounds but she has reaped no sense from them; it is simply the effect rather than the cause which is rendered absurd in this case.

Busi, with his usual dexterity, has added a final twist to the Duchess's words, by adding his own subtle intertextual reference to the words of his introduction. "A suggestion for adults: this is. . . the best book in the world to read to a child. You will help them grasp the sense and they will help you grasp the sound. I am afraid that on their own, an adult simply cannot manage

to do both. . .” (Busi, 1998: 5). And the moral of *that* is that a translation of *Alice* really does require that the ‘sounds’ – the linguistic expression in all its forms – are sown well across its intertextual fields if the reader is to reap the full effects of this Carrollian (non)sense fantasy.

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