TRANSLATING THE IMPOSSIBLE: LUDIC ASPECTS IN *ALICE IN WONDERLAND*

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1. Introduction

    Alice in Wonderland (1865) is, above all, a ludic literary work. The first game is suggested by the author himself: Lewis Carroll is, in fact, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson. This word play is strongly related to translation: if we translate *Charles* into Latin, the result is *Carolus* and *Lutwidge* becomes *Lewis* in English. Finally, by changing the order of both names we get *Lewis Carolus* or *Lewis Carroll*. Dodgson coined this pseudonym for the first time in 1860, when he was 21, to sign the poem "Solitude", in which he set out to evoke "the golden hours of Life's young spring / Of innocence, of love and truth". And this he achieved with the two literary works that made him immortal: *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*. More than anything else, *Alice* and *Looking-Glass* are games: the first is a game of cards and the second is a game of chess. They are, in effect, a monumental game of words and logic. We should bear in mind that, apart from his works

for children and comic poetry, Dodgson published more than 200 books and about 30 of those are mathematical and logical games.

Let us go on with the game to try to provide an answer to the following question concerning *Alice*: those books regarded as *untranslatable*, to what extent are they really untranslatable? Humour has traditionally been included in this category. Therefore we should consider first its functions and devices and, secondly, we should examine the translation strategies used by two translators into Catalan in two different periods and with distinct styles: Josep Carner (1970) and Salvador Oliva (1996).

As we try to incorporate the translation process and product with the author and the translator, and, additionally, we aim at minimising the subjectivity inherent in any textual evaluation, the translation strategies will be analysed according to three aspects:

a. A general account of translations of linguistic games. This concept refers to the verbal manipulations in all their different manifestations.

b. The degree of correspondence of the semantic and formal textual *filters* between the original and the target text as proposed by Henvey, Higgins and Haywood (1995: 216).

c. The degree of accuracy of each translation in the light of the criteria of literalness or substitution when transferring elements from the original text.

Finally, and taking the whole text as a unit of translation, we will assess the strategies used and degree to which a similar ludic effect has been achieved.

This descriptive analysis seeks to follow the proposal of Salvador Oliva (1995: 92):

> Acarar dues traduccions d'una mateixa obra ens hauria de permetre dir [...] quina s'assembla més al seu model, en què s'hi assembla més i en què s'hi assembla menys. I hauríem d'aprendre a fer això sense apel.lar al gust, que és un criteri molt fosc.

> Comparing two translations of the same work should allow us to tell [...] which one is more similar to the model and what makes it more or less accurate. And we should learn to do so with no need to appeal to aesthetics, which is a very obscure criterion.

2. Translating the functions and devices of humour

We should start from the beginning, as the King of Hearts would say, and ask to what extent those untranslatable passages really are impossible to translate. Could we not replace the famous motto *traduttore, traditore* with *to choose is not to betray* ("Triar no és trair". Mallafré (1991) quotes A. Seva as the author of this saying in Catalan) or with Oliva's suggestion (1995), *traduttore migliorate*? Why not *transcreator* versus *transtraitor*? Does change always imply loss? As Delabastita (1994: 225) asks: "Can a translation reveal new meanings of the original text and, therefore, become part of it?" Perhaps we should consider the issue of the impossibility of

translation in the light of these questions. As we know, the Romantics suggested this impossibility and its analysis was carried out again by the relativists of our century. However, post-structuralism and deconstruction have suggested new ways of reading and assessing translations, all of which raises also the question of changing the identity of a text if examined as a literary phenomenon of the target culture. Within Translation Studies, the polysystem theory, cultural studies, the discussion about the visibility of the translator, about the emancipating translation and its somatic nature open up new areas for both theoretical analysis and empirical research. In the light of these terms, the basic criterion adopted to approach the study of *Alice*'s translations into Catalan has been the interest of the translation from the target language and culture.

We should now review the functions and devices of humour and therefore illuminate the context of this study. Humour, like mirrors, distorts reality and is a subversion of the primary world or, if we want, of the real one. Getting into a secondary world which shows the usual everyday world distorted, subverted, absurd, distant, provokes a relaxation of daily physical and psychological tensions.

The common devices of humour which, as we know, are not always politically correct, can be grouped as shown in the following diagram:

Humour and translation

Functions

1. Distortion of reality

2. Relaxation of tension

Topics

| Otherness | Breaking of rules | Scatology |
| Rivalry | Language, Moral, Social, Natural | Sex Body |

People Nations Races

Language and context

VERBAL _____VISUAL

Linguistic Game   Body Language Illustrations

Mode

	Use	Tone
		Field
		Geographic
Who's making use		Temporal
		Social

Intertextuality

Cultural references

First of all, we should mention topics about otherness, namely, the rivalry between people, nations or races. These topics generally reflect a feeling of superiority. They can be divided into subtopics related to jobs, sex, disability or archetypes like the fool. Many well known and much loved characters might come to mind: the Irish Paddy or the Welsh Dai become Manolo and Pepet in the Catalan context. One community becomes the target of the jokes of another. Carroll shows this latter relationship in the passage between Pat the Lizard (Irish) and the White Rabbit (English):

Pat (60)	Patrici (40)	Pat (39)
- Sure, it's an arm, yer honour (He pronounced it "arrum"). - An arm, you goose! Who ever saw one that size? (60)	-Verament, és un braç. - Un braç, beneit! Que n'has vistos mai d'aquesta grandària? (40)	- Què ha de ser, sinó un braç? (Ho va pronunciar "baraç"). - Es diu "braç", tros d'oca! Qui és qui n'ha vist mai un d'aquesta llargada? (39)

In the first translation we can see that the meaning has been preserved, but that has not been the case with the discourse which emphasises the social distinction ("yer honour") and the Irish dialect ("yer" and "arrum"). Nevertheless, the name "Pat", an Irish stereotype, has been translated as "Patrici", whose connotations seem completely opposite to those in the original text. Therefore, we could say that the meaning has been translated, but Carner has considered neither the author's intention nor the ludic effect created by the geographical and social factors in the original text. In the second translation, the playfulness has indeed been preserved but Oliva has not kept the same meaning.

Secondly, we notice that linguistic, moral, social and natural rules can be disrupted:

The earth takes twenty-four hours to turn on its axis - - Talking of axes -chop off her head! (84)	per donar el tomb al voltant del seu eix, i és d'astral importància. - Parla de destrals doncs, escapceu-la d'una vegada! (64)	executar un gir complet. -Parlant d'executar... Que li tallin el cap! (61)

In the first translation the word play has been kept and the translator has succeeded in maintaining the humorous effect by an addition to the text, whereas in the second translation the meaning and the above effect have been preserved with a lexical change which does not increase the text.

Prevailing rules of moral behaviour can also be disrupted:

- She's under sentence of execution. - What for?, said Alice.	- Està sentenciada a pena capital. - Per què?	- Està condemnada a la pena capital. - Per quina raó?

- Did you say 'What a pity!'?, the Rabbit asked. - No, I didn't. I don't think it's at all a pity. I said 'What for?'. (111)	- Heu dit 'Quina llàstima', oi? - No, no ho he dit. No m'ho penso pas que ho sigui una llàstima. He dit 'Per què?'. (91)	- Has dit 'Quina por!'? - No. No ho he dit. No en tinc, de por. He preguntat 'Per quina raó?' (83)

Alice does not care if the Duchess dies, given her cruel and antisocial behaviour. The first version translates the meaning by establishing a formal equivalence. The second translation is more interesting from our point of view: we notice a word play which is not found in the original text. The translator has applied a compensation strategy, namely, he has created a word play which did not exist in the same place in Carroll's work in order to balance the comic effect between the two texts: the target and the original.

The subversion of social norms can affect the political and education context or generally accepted patterns of behaviour. Since the instances belonging to this group do not offer any interest in the texts under scrutiny, we will not single out any example for discussion.

Natural laws can be disrupted, as the following anthropomorphic animals demonstrate:

Dormouse (89)	Liró (73)	Liró (69)

The connotations of the dormouse, as a creature very fond of sleeping, are the same in the original and target culture. As a consequence, there is no problem in translating. However, the following example is more complicated:

Hatter (89)	Barreter (70)	Barreter (65)
Duck, Dodo, Lory, Eaglet (44)	Ànec, Ocell Babau, Lloro de les Bermudes, Aguiló (25)	Ànec, Ocell Babau, Lloro de les Bermudes, Aguiló (25)

Both translators have chosen the same translation and in both cases the intertextual comic effect has been lost. The first example refers to the English expression "mad as a hatter", which originates from the fact that hatters used mercury in their work. As a result, they used to become intoxicated, suffer hallucinations and die. The second example is a personal joke shared by Lewis Carroll and the Liddell sisters: *Duck* is the reverend Duckworth; *Dodo* is Dodgson (Carroll) –he got this nickname because of his stammer; *Lory* is Lorina Liddell and it is also the name of an Australian parrot, and *Eaglet* is Edith Liddell. The meaning has been perfectly translated and, although the intertextual referent has been lost, we should mention that it might not even be familiar to Victorian readers and that, in the second example, the translations transmit a considerable ludic and dream effect.

Finally, the last group of topics is the so-called "scatological", which includes sex and bodily functions. However, since *Alice* is a story for children, this type of ludic reference is non-existent in Carroll's text.

Having considered the main topics of humour commonly found in literature, we should examine how they function not only through linguistic but also extralinguistic means. Humour can be verbal and also visual. Verbal mechanisms allow us to play linguistic games such as synonymy or polysemy. Additionally, verbal humour will depend much on the *use*, in other words, on the *mode* or choice of the communication channel (written/oral), on the *tone* or the power relationship —the distance— established between the addresser and the addressee, and on the *field* or language register related to professions or definite topics. It will also depend on *who is making use* of the verbal humour according to three aspects: *geographic* (e. g. dialects), *temporal* (e. g. jokes about different generations) and *social* (e. g. social classes).

Visual humour can be mainly transmitted through body language or illustrations. An image can simply accompany a text or reinforce it —Alice herself noticed this in the first place: "what is the use of a book without pictures or conversations?" (Gardner, 1971: 25). In fact, the first critical responses to Carroll's books praised the illustrations much more than the text. We should mention that Tenniel was a well established satirical artist, thanks mainly to his contributions to the magazine *Punch*. Josep Carner's aim was to make Carroll's work close and familiar to the Catalan reader. This intention can indeed be seen in the illustrations by Lola Anglada. However, the ludic effect is diminished. Let us take the dissimilar vision of the Hatter. Tenniel favours the madness and illustrates the feeling of nightmare and black humour in the narration with a grotesque caricature: the Hatter is wearing shoes, he is holding the food in his hand, he seems to be about to fall down and he is badly dressed, like a clown. On the contrary, Lola Anglada sweetens up the character, she makes him appear refined, less a caricature and more domesticated. It is interesting to mention that one of Tenniel's details, the price of the hat —which has become part of the cultural heritage of the Anglo-Saxon world, is not present in Anglada's illustration.

The comic effect of a community is built upon extralinguistic elements, intertextuality and cultural in addition to the linguistic referents. But how can we solve the problems posed by the translation of humorous elements? Let us examine diagram 2:

Translation Strategies

Aims

1. Filling the referential blanks

2. Creating similar effects

Previous stages

1. Identifying the universal references

2. Identifying the minimal common denominator

Options

Formal   _____   _____   _____Dynamic equivalence
equivalences

-literal translation   -Substitution
-literal translation + explanation

                           partial: shared conventions   total substitution
                                      -compensation

On the one hand, it is a matter of filling in the "referential voids" mentioned by Dagut (Rabadán, 1991: 167), in other words, the areas of non-shared experience. On the other hand, it is a matter of creating a similar ludic effect in the target text. The conventions and codes of both cultures, original and target, might be shared. That is the case of the following allusion to the Antipodes:

The Antipathies (28)	Els Antipàtics (8)	Les Antipàtiques (11)

In these cases we need to identify the universal "ludic elements" and apply a formal equivalence through a nearly literal translation. Or we could also insert or add an explanation to the joke without losing the comic effect at all. Problems arise when we have different codes and we lack common references. On these occasions, we need to identify the minimal common denominator, the *invariant core* of Popovic (Chiaro, 1992: 96) and produce the translation accordingly. The equivalence of the translation becomes dynamic and we might even have a substitution of the joke either by preserving the shared conventions or by using a totally different joke. We could also apply a compensation strategy, namely to create a joke even if it does not exist in the original text. In these cases, the solution is more pragmatic than linguistic and its justification is an effort to retain the author's intention and the overall comic effect of the text:

Which way? Holding her hand on the top of her head to feel which way it was growing (33)	Farà una cosa o bé l'altra (14)	¿Cap a on? ¿Cap a on? (15)

We can see a word play in the second translation, which could be considered a positive contribution to the text, a good example of the use of compensation strategies which prove that a change does not necessarily imply a loss.

Non-sense, as the word itself illustrates, does not make sense and yet, it does have a suggestive form. It creates new words which seem to

have some meaning but which resist a rational interpretation. The most illustrative example is "Jabberwocky" in *Through the Looking-Glass*, an achievement which follows Edward Lear (*Book of Nonsense*, 1846) or Hillaire Belloc (*The Bad Child's Book of Beasts*, 1896) in the UK and Laura E. Richards (*Tirra Lirra*, 1932) in the US.

Can a linguistic tradition, so thoroughly integrated into the culture of the original text, be translated to another culture? In Wonderland and while walking with Alice, the Duchess says:

Take care of the sense and the sounds will take care of themselves (121)	Preneu compte del sentit i els sons prendran compte d'ells mateixos (100)	Tu procura pel sentit, i els sons ja procuraran per ells (90)

Perhaps it is completely absurd. However, it all becomes more absurd to our rational approach when we notice that what Carroll does is completely the opposite: he takes care of the sounds and lets the sense take care of itself, as the famous parody of school subjects shows:

Ambition	Ambició	Suar
Distraction	Distracció	Rascar
Uglification	Enlletgiment	Mortificar
Derision (129-130)	Irrisió (109)	Dimitir (97-98)

One can appreciate two levels of interpretation: the semantic and the phonetic. The first translation only keeps the semantic level, but Carroll was not aiming at a meaning but at a suggestive phonetic form. The second translator has understood this and we see that he has tried to preserve the basic principles of nonsense in his translation: playing and searching for words with no contextual meaning but with an evocative form. (Compare with Chris Heffer's comments on the Italian *Alices*). Humour is a subversion and nonsense probably reflects this more than any other linguistic game.

Correspondence of comic effect

It is now important to establish the degree of correspondence of the comic effect between the translations and the original text. This can be seen in the following statistics:

	OT'TM	OMISSIONS		COMPENSATIONS	TO'TM	TO'TM
T1-C	19	47%	+2	Ø	21	52, 5%
T2-O	10	23%	Ø	-3	7	17, 5%

In forty instances of linguistic games found in the text, Carner's translation has not solved the correspondence on nineteen occasions. Besides, two omissions have been detected, all of which reduces the element of correspondence. Therefore the total of unsolved word plays is 21 out of 40 (52. 5%). In Oliva's translation, there are also 10 cases which have not been solved. However, there exist three compensation strategies, a fact

which favours correspondence. As a consequence, the total of unsolved linguistic games is 7 out of 40 (17. 5%). We can thus conclude that the second translation shows a higher degree of accomplishment.

We have chosen the textual filters model proposed by Hervey, Higgins and Haywood because it allows us to establish the degree of correspondence between the textual variables selected to create the linguistic games in the original text and the translations.

Oliva's translation makes use of a higher percentage of textual variables similar to the ones chosen by Carroll: 61% of the textual filters and 100% of the formal filters are similar. Therefore it resembles the original text in 85%. The first translation, however, only resembles the original text in 33% of the textual variables. Again, the degree of correspondence is higher in the second translation.

Semantic filters	OT	T1-Carner	T2-Oliva
Reflection	27	8	19
Allusion	3	2	1
Association	2	0	0
Affection	1	1	0
	33	11 (33%)	20 (61%)
Formal filters			
Phonemic	2	1	2
Grammatical	1	0	1
Graphic	1	0	1
(Compensations)	3	Ø	3
	7	1 (33%)	7 (100%)
	40	12 (30%)	34 (85%)

Finally, we have counted the translation strategies according to the above criteria of literalness or substitution. In principle, the first translator favours literalness but the outcome shows that he does not solve all the literal transpositions, which renders the final correspondence as 40%. The second translator, for his part, favours a balance between the two strategic options and solves the substitution strategies rather more effectively. In general, his translation shows a higher correspondence (67. 5%) with the

original text than the first one. Omissions have been considered apart, because the compensations were included in the literalness (1) and substitution (2).

Global strategy	T1-Carner			T2-Oliva		
	Transpositions	OT¹TM	Total OT=TM	Transpositions	OT¹TM	Total OT=TM
Literalness	27	16	11 (40%)	19	9	10 (53%)
Substitution	11	6	5 (45%)	21	3	17(81%)
Omission	2	2				
	40	24 (60%)	16	40	12	27
			(40%)	(30%)		(67, 5%)

Before drawing any conclusions, we should remember that this study deals only with one level of interpretation: the ludic aspects. Once the other levels have been analysed we could reach a global assessment of the two translations.

3. Conclusions

The ludic effect is present in different degrees in both translations. Oliva's version shows a higher degree of correspondence with the original text, according to our criteria. Oliva has used the textual variables with a result closer to Carroll's original text (85%) compared to Carner (30%).

There does not seem to exist a direct relationship between the choice of a given type of strategy and the attainment of the ludic effect. At any rate, substitution seems to be, in general, more effective than literalness. Both Carner and Oliva use a higher number of substitutions than literal transpositions. From this fact it is clear that, insofar as we accept the existence of the writer's style, we can also speak of the translator's, not only in producing a work but also in translating the meaning. Both translations analysed differ in the strategies and levels of interpretations from the original. Therefore one should examine the style of the translator taking into account both the process and the final outcome.

Translations should be assessed not only in the light of an analysis of the final product, but also in the light of the process itself. Consequently, we need to take into account three basic requirements to achieve a good-quality translation, as suggested by Hatim and Mason (1990: 21): comprehension of the original text, transfer of the meaning and evaluation of the product. In our research, the third aspect has been examined in the light of the first two

elements, namely the process, the translation strategies adopted and the comprehension of the original text, not only from the linguistic but also the extralinguistic point of view.

Subjectivity, though inherent in the evaluation process of a translation, should be minimised.

The method of filtering the textual variables, suggested by Henvey, Higgins and Haywood, seems to be a valid mechanism for reaching a more objective evaluation of translations.

One cannot assess a translation taking into account only the author's intention and context. The translator's background is also extremely necessary. The translation will depend largely on the aims and characteristics of the translator. Author and translator are key elements for assessing the phenomena of cultural translation through literature.

Finally, we could say that translations of a given work cannot be assessed in a general way. All the different levels should be analysed in order to discern the similar aspects and to point out the degree of success of any given similarity. The so-called losses in translation can be minimised or compensated depending on the skills and creativity of the translator, on the person who holds up the mirror for us to be reflected and, sometimes, also for us to go beyond it.

* The first translation is always by Josep Carner and the second one by Salvador Oliva. The numbers refer to the pages in the edition quoted in the bibliography.

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