

## **Funny and Educational across Cultures: Subtitling *Winnie The Pooh* into Italian**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Subtitling a children's programme, especially a cartoon or animated programme, presents the subtitler with specific constraints and challenges. These are due, on a lexico-semantic and visual level, to the nature of the source language text, and on a pragmatic level, to that of the prospective audience. Through the analysis of some examples taken from the Italian subtitled version of the series *The Book of Pooh*, this article seeks to consider in greater detail both the issues involved and the strategies the translator has put in place in order to deal with such a unique situation.

### **KEYWORDS**

Subtitling, cartoons, animation, AVT, neologisms, songs

### **BIOGRAPHY**

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## **1. Introduction**

As every subtitler knows only too well, the main constraints of this rather specialised form of translation derive from the polysemiotic nature of the text it deals with, as well as, specially in the case of subtitling, from the issues of space and time that accompany the shift from the spoken to the written, and from one language and culture to another (Gottlieb, 1994: 104-106). In a text where various semiotic codes are at play at once, the verbal code that has to be decoded from the linguistic elements of the SL text, and then encoded into the subtitles, coexists and interacts with a number of other, non verbal codes that contribute to the formation of the general meaning of the text itself.

This state of affairs brings about all sorts of consequences, such as the so-called feedback effect, and a certain amount of inter-code overlap and redundancy. On the one hand, the same idea may well be expressed through verbal and non-verbal codes at the same time, e.g. a 'yes' accompanied by a nod is an obvious instance of verbal/kinesic overlap, transmitting redundant information in the general economy of the text in question. On the other hand, a typical feature of subtitling – that sets it apart from dubbing – is that the original soundtrack is always present allowing the audience to hear the SL dialogue whilst reading the TL subtitles. In such a unique situation, a subtitle seemingly contradicting the

dialogue – an uttered ‘no’ is subtitled as *sí*, *oui* or *ja* – will raise the suspicion that a mistranslation has occurred.

Subtitling a cartoon or animated programme presents an additional series of challenges, all derived from the subject matter of the original text, and above all from the needs and the profile of the target audience. The main objective of this article is to have a look at the key issues ensuing from the task of translating this particular kind of multidimensional text with a very young audience in mind. It seeks to identify the defining characteristics of the source text, its most problematic aspects from a translational point of view, and the strategies implemented by the translator in order to get out of the maze. This is done by looking at the translation into Italian of a number of examples taken from some episodes of the series *The Book of Pooh*, commercialised in two compilations on DVD format. The episodes are the following ones:

“Greenhorn with a green thumb” (Greenhorn), from *The Book of Pooh - Stories from the Heart*.

“Best wishes, Winnie the Pooh” (Best Wishes), from *The Book of Pooh – Fun with Friends*.

“You can lead Eeyore to books” (You can), from *The Book of Pooh – Fun with Friends*.

“Tigger’s replacement” (Replacement), from *The Book of Pooh – Stories from the Heart*.

“Double time” (Double time), from *The Book of Pooh – Fun with Friends*.

My intention is to discuss only the subtitled version and not the dubbed one.<sup>1</sup> The main areas of focus of this article are puns, cultural references, idiosyncratic language, neologisms, and songs. For each of these, examples are provided in order to identify the dynamics and strategies at play.

## **2. Subtitling *Winnie the Pooh***

Winnie the Pooh is a character first created by the pen of British author and playwright A. A. Milne, who in the 1920s wrote some children’s books and named their central character after his son Christopher Robin’s teddy bear. With a big transatlantic leap, Winnie entered the world of the big screen and became part of the Disney family in the 1960s, appearing first in some featurettes, then in full-length features, and finally, in its latest incarnation, in the 3D television puppet show *The Book of Pooh* (2001-2002). The episodes of the series were later commercialised on video and DVD.

As will become apparent in the course of the analysis, Pooh's 'double nationality' may at times have a remarkable significance for the linguistic nature of the texts that are being discussed.

Before starting the analysis, a preliminary clarification and a reflection may be in order. The names of the characters in all the examples here analysed are the original ones in the English version, and the Italian ones in the examples taken from the Italian translation. Interestingly enough, although the subtitled version does not follow in any other way the existing dubbed versions of *Winnie the Pooh*, in the case of the character names the translator has chosen to use the same names that appear in the dubbed version, presumably (and rightly so) to ensure some kind of consistency with what children might have already assimilated. Clearly, the discussion of whether to reinvent character names or whether to use existing ones in the case of films that can be deemed 'classic', or in that of whole series that have already been dubbed, however, opens up a whole range of issues beyond the scope of this article.

### 3. Cultural references and puns

It is certainly true that in recent years the translator has increasingly come to be seen as a cultural mediator (Hatim and Mason, 1990: 223-224) rather than a mere linguistic broker. It is also true that, in any form of translation, translators tend to apply a general strategy that will favour either an SL-oriented approach, or a TL-oriented approach. In other words, and simplifying to a great degree, they give prominence to the authority of the source text, or to the needs of the target audience. Pavis (1989) provides an astute insight into this debate that, although primarily articulated in a theatrical context, can be very pertinent here. He states that an excessive respect and adherence to the SL text would bring with it the "risk of incomprehension or rejection on the part of the target culture [but] by smoothing out differences, by 'normalising' the cultural situation [we might] no longer comprehend the origin of this all-too-familiar text" (ibid.: 37).

In the case of cartoons, however, the situation is rather complicated, because on the one hand the frequency of occurrence of puns and cultural references tends to be fairly high, and normalising such a text would amount to a linguistic offence; on the other hand, we are dealing with an audience that wants to get the message immediately: children do not have a lot of time for obscure stuff. Therefore, when subtitling for a very young audience, with a rather limited knowledge of the world and a black-and-white vision of life, any cultural reference must be made immediately retrievable. Sometimes, decisions which are just as black-and-white must be taken when confronted with puns or references which are too language or culture-specific, and might be at the same time supported by the visual.

Moreover one should not forget, of course, that in the case of this particular text and of its subtitling into another language, a fairly extreme editing down of the text may be necessary, given the age-group of the prospective audience. This type of subtitling is primarily aimed at both slow-reading children that have just learned the alphabet and pre-school children for whom their parents or other adults might do the reading. Either way, the reading speed the subtitler works towards will need to be decreased quite dramatically. While an average reading speed for a programme distributed on DVD tends to be some 160 words per minute, the ideal reading speed in a children's programme cannot be much higher than 120 words per minute. As a consequence, the TL text may sometimes end up being rather minimalist, thus forcing the subtitler to opt for solutions that clearly establish what is core and what is redundant in any specific context.

In the first example from *Greenhorn*, Rabbit has been teaching Tigger the art of gardening. Tigger's results are very good and, therefore, he expects Rabbit to be pleased with him. Following Rabbit's complimentary remarks, Tigger comments:

Tigger:           So what's your point, Bunny buddy of mine? That you're pleased as Punch and Judy about my gardening ability?

This pun is based on two different expressions welded together in a totally arbitrary way by Tigger, the most linguistically creative character of them all. Not only do we have two very culture-specific expressions, the simile 'pleased as punch', and the two very British puppet characters Punch and Judy – either of which would pose a problem in its own right –, but we also have the two items joined together, in a very idiosyncratic manner. Luckily, however, there is no visual reference to adhere to in this instance, so the translator has been moderately 'free' to recreate the Italian translation. Not having a similar expression in Italian, the solution that has been opted for is:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Cosa vorresti dire, bello mio?          | [What do you mean, pal?                  |
| Che sei contento del mio pollice verde? | That you're happy about my green thumb?] |

in which the expression *pollice verde* [green thumb] tries to give a bit of colour to an otherwise rather flat turn of phrase. It may not be the best of solutions – in fact, it is one where quite a lot has been lost and not much has been replaced. No attempt has even been made at recreating the simile – translated by a simple adjective, *contento* [happy] – and, what is more, *pollice verde* is a standard Italian expression that could easily have been replaced by a more colourful *artiglio / zampa verde* [green claw / paw].

Even more problematic is the following example of a pun that is supported by the visual, and that as such presents the translator with the added challenge of recreating something that must also be plausible on the basis of what viewers will see on screen.<sup>2</sup> Funnily enough, the translation seems to have worked much better on this occasion.

In *Best Wishes*, the narrator tells us that Tigger has been helping Rabbit with his spring-cleaning. Tigger's exchange is as follows:

Narrator: Our story today begins with Tigger, who was, on this beautiful spring day, helping Rabbit with his spring-cleaning.  
Tigger: That's right. See, I spring, and all clean.

And in saying so, Tigger jumps down from a tree. Here, of course, the pun stems from the double meaning of the word 'spring', which in the first two instances refers to the season and in the third to the jump performed by Tigger. On this occasion, it is evident that the information embedded in the visual cannot be ignored – the action performed by the character whilst pronouncing his lines – because that is clearly what the whole pun depends upon. Hence, what is needed in the translation is a solution that recreates the same sort of ambiguity at the linguistic level whilst at the same time taking into account the visual reference, i.e. the actual jump. The translator has found a rather good solution:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Oggi la nostra storia comincia con Tigro              | [Our story today begins with Tigger         |
| che aveva deciso di fare un salto<br>ad aiutare Tappo | who had decided to pop by<br>to help Rabbit |
| nelle pulizie di primavera.                           | with his spring cleaning.                   |
| Esatto. Faccio un salto e tutto è in ordine.          | That's right. I pop by and all is tidy.]    |

In Italian, *fare un salto* means 'to pop by'; but at the same time the noun *salto* means 'jump'. This way, the double meaning is maintained by exploiting the semantic nuances of another lexical item in the sentence. At the same time, the link with the visual dimension is also kept since the second occurrence of *salto* in Italian makes a clear reference to the action performed by Tigger at that very moment.

#### 4. Idiosyncrasies and neologisms

A very marked characteristic of cartoons and animation programmes in general is the high level of creativity they show in their use of language. For ease of presentation, such instances of creative language can be classified in two sub-categories; namely, idiosyncrasies and neologisms.

Much as certain productions announce the arrival of a given character by resorting to a particular musical theme, so cartoon characters can often be distinguished by their way of speaking, which tends to be rather idiosyncratic. Their linguistic mannerisms definitely contribute to their overall characterisation. Thus, old Owl is different to the rest of characters because he uses more archaic and formal expressions, while Tigger is more anarchic in his use of language. They show particular linguistic features that can be considered part of their verbal 'visiting cards'. It is therefore essential that these linguistic traits are kept consistent throughout the translation; and this is, of course, even more pressing when subtitling an episode that is part of a series rather than an isolated, independent programme.

Often, some characters' linguistic idiosyncrasies are channelled through neologisms, and they work, i.e. they are funny and memorable because of the way language has been playfully strained and manipulated. Children love them, and sometimes these "distortions" might even help them – more or less subconsciously – understand the proper functioning of their own language. They arrive at the correct form by playfully being shown the wrong one, as it were, as some of these instances are indeed based on the sort of mistakes children make whilst in the process of acquiring their own language, phenomena that I would like to call 'acquisition glitches' and are also known as overgeneralisations. They are part of the normal acquisition process and are generally regarded as indicative of the development of rule-governed behaviour. Typical examples, for the English language, are the creation of past participles such as \*goed for 'went', or \*think for 'thought', on the basis of 'drunk'.

Clearly, one does not want all this to be lost in translation, but subtitlers have to operate within the constraints of a different language. Untranslatability is not really an option when it comes to subtitling. When characters speak on screen the target audience can obviously hear them, a fact that forces the subtitler to offer a translation. The spatial limitations are also very stringent and, to state the obvious, translators cannot resort to explanatory notes on screen.

In order to try and see how similar or, one might say, equivalent effects can be recreated in the TL, it can be useful to carry out a brief analysis of the various mechanisms at play.

Some typical idiosyncratic expressions reflecting the nature of the characters that utter them are the following:

- ❑ Oh my – Rabbit's exclamation
- ❑ Oh dear – Piglet's exclamation
- ❑ Bother – Pooh's exclamation
- ❑ TTFN, for "Ta-ta for now" – Tigger's expression
- ❑ Abyssinia, for "I'll be seeing you" – Tigger's expression

□ Golly gosh and gee – Tigger's exclamation

It is interesting to note, incidentally, that the register of the language used by all the different characters never falls below a certain level of formality. The register is never too colloquial. It can be informal, but hardly ever slang, and above all, it never resorts to swearing. Interjections and exclamations may be strange, sometimes even clearly old-fashioned, as in the case of 'bother', but they are never rude. Swearwords seldom enter a children's programme, and the translator must bear this in mind.

Let us take a closer look at the last of the exclamations mentioned above and its translation, which is particularly representative of a rather specific phenomenon. Di Giovanni (2003: 207) argues quite rightly that:

Disney films are [...] considered an important part of popular culture worldwide, and especially in the United States, a country whose cultural standards and beliefs have crossed national boundaries and penetrated local lifestyles as a consequence of the increasing hegemony of American cinematic products.

However, here we witness an instance that might be considered an exception to the above-mentioned rule, due to the very nature of the cartoon in question. In this respect, an analysis of some of the linguistic items present in the dialogue may indeed be rather revealing.

'Golly gosh and gee' is a very interesting example of a *tiggerific* mix and match. 'Golly' and 'gosh' are typically British, fairly old fashioned, euphemistic expressions derived from 'God'; whereas 'Gee', though itself a euphemism for 'Jesus', is definitely American and contemporary. The mismatch, which is present in other expressions as well (e.g. 'Abyssinia' for 'I'll be seeing you', old name for Ethiopia to represent a rather contemporary expression), stems from the fact that, as mentioned before, *Winnie the Pooh*, quintessentially British, and created in the 1920s, has more recently acquired an American passport by becoming part of the Disney family. However, instead of becoming naturalised it seems to have chosen to keep a double nationality. From a linguistic point of view, this is at times very apparent. The Britishness is present in the use of more traditional expressions, while the Americanness is embodied in the more contemporary, and usually more colloquial, expressions.

Clearly, this can hardly be kept in the translation into other languages. The TL might not have the same range of linguistic variation, since chances are that diachronically, as well as geographically, the two languages and cultures would have probably had a fairly different evolution. In the case of 'Golly gosh and gee', however, the Italian translator has found a very interesting solution, resorting to the use of the expression *Accipicchia e acciderba*, formed by two rather old fashioned

Italian exclamations, which in fact are both euphemistically derived from the more direct *accidenti* [damn you]. So, although the translation does not keep the same range of linguistic variation as in the source text, it does recreate some sort of contrast between a very contemporary and bouncy character and a rather archaic, euphemistic register. Moreover, this translation is quite good in that it manages to keep the alliteration that characterises the SL phrase.

As for strategies to create neologisms, and just to limit the analysis to the ever-prolific *Tiggerspeak*, the following can be identified:

- Compound words, created by joining together two existing words, usually adjectives (e.g. 'stupenderific', stupendous + terrific).
- Use of suffixes, such as –aroonie, at the end of existing words (e.g. 'bookaroonies').
- Deformation or replacement in certain expressions of some lexical items by other existing words with which they share a phonetic or spelling resemblance. The end result is a rather incongruous expression (e.g. 'wait a minuet').
- Ungrammatical overgeneralisations, items that often resemble what I have called 'acquisition glitches' (e.g. \*thunk as past form of 'think', on the basis of 'drunk' being the past form of 'drink', which relates to the possible errors that children make in the process of learning the formation of the irregular past).

Let us now consider some other instances taken from the original dialogue and their translations into Italian. The following example comes from *You Can*:

Tigger: Stupenderific, Owly pally. (compound stupendous+terrific)  
Let's go get ourselves some bookaroonies. (suffix -aroonies)

In both cases, the translator has used the same device and has been consistent throughout:

Tigro: Spettacolosso, Uffa muffa. (compound spettacolare+favoloso)  
Andiamo a procurarci dei librissimi. (superlative suffix –issimi, which is subsequently used every time *Tiggerspeak* featured the suffix -aroonies).

One final, fascinating example of *Tiggerspeak* can be found in the episode *Replacement*, in which Tigger is lecturing Piglet and says:

Tigger: If you get into trouble-double, just tell 'em you got Larry's gitis.

which, in translation, has become:

Tigro:           Se hai dei problemi,  
                    di' che ti fa male l'Angola.

This is a fairly typical error that children might make, i.e. misunderstanding a real word (laryngitis) and coming up with a vaguely plausible near-homophone, 'Larry's gitis' in this case. The translation works in a similar way. The correct expression *ti fa male la gola* [your throat hurts] has become *ti fa male l'Angola*, which recreates a funny near-homophone based on a total misunderstanding of the general context of the sentence. While the translation does not follow exactly the same strategy as in the original, of replacing something that may be difficult for a child with something easier, it does recreate however the play on homophony.

This solution could be upheld as an interesting case against the so-called untranslatability: while at a superficial level one might be led to believe that no equivalent expression can be found in a case of a pun that is based on a near-homophone, an accurate analysis of the linguistic mechanisms at play can allow the translator to arrive at a solution that, if not identical, can be as effective and as entertaining as that of the original dialogue.

## 5. Songs

Last but most definitely not least comes the issue of the translation of songs featured in cartoons and animation programmes. In a genre like cartoons – or musicals – songs are hardly ever background; in fact, they are an integral part to the development of the plot. They are often intrinsically connected to the action, and the lyrics are clearly supported by, and support, the visual element. Hence, particular care must be taken in their translation. Because they carry the plot forward, it is of paramount importance that they are immediately understood, and that their general meaning is kept. Along with their content, their rhythm and rhyme should ideally be preserved, because this is what helps make them more harmonious and memorable. In the case of children, this is particularly important, and one only needs to think, for instance, of nursery rhymes. As in most translational situations, subtitlers will have to establish a hierarchy of priorities aimed at helping them to make decisions. Out of the three main dimensions in songs – i.e. content, rhythm, and rhyme – the elements that will be given priority in the translation will have to be decided case by case.

The first two examples analysed below are taken from a song sung by a very distressed Rabbit, in "Double", who believing that a day has disappeared from his calendar decides to perform the chores of two days in one. The first two subtitles are spoken, rap-style, and function as the prelude to the actual song, which is presented in italics:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| With dual double-barrelled<br>ambidextrous intent          | Deciso e lanciatissimo<br>mi metto e mi cimento<br>[I get down to it and I go for it]                     |
| I must up my productivity<br>to 200 per cent.              | La mia capacità aumento<br>del 200 per cento.<br>[My productivity I increase<br>by 200 per cent]          |
| <i>Yes, I'll howl like the wind<br/>and pant pell-mell</i> | <i>Veloce come il vento<br/>con grandi pedalate<br/>[As fast as the wind,<br/>with great big strides]</i> |
| <i>There's twice as many nuts<br/>and eggs to shell</i>    | <i>Le noci da sbucciare<br/>mi sono raddoppiate<br/>[The nuts I must shell<br/>have doubled]</i>          |

The rhyming pattern has been preserved in the translation and, to a fair extent, the rhythm of the original has been recreated in Italian too. The resulting meaning and imagery of the TL are still fairly close to that of the original. The first subtitle resorts to a tautology in order to reiterate the 'intent' (*mi metto e mi cimento*, literally 'I get down to it and I go for it'). The second subtitle is almost literal. In the case of the third and fourth subtitles, although we may notice a partial loss of nuances due to the fact that priority has been given to preserving the rhyme, the overall meaning has in fact been kept. Moreover, in the third subtitle the translator has managed to keep the notion of wind as a metaphor for speed, although in English the noun 'wind' is associated to the verb 'howl', whereas in Italian the image is that of moving as fast as the wind.

Let us now take a look at another example from the same song:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <i>And befuddled, befuddled,<br/>and oh, so very troubled</i>        | <i>Son stressato, stressato<br/>e tutto trafelato<br/>[I'm stressed out, stressed out<br/>and totally breathless]</i> |
| <i>I've got to knuckle down<br/>and figure out the way to juggle</i> | <i>Devo muovermi in fretta,<br/>son tutto indaffarato<br/>[I must move fast,<br/>I'm terribly busy]</i>               |
| <i>And muddle through this multitude<br/>of gardening and chores</i> | <i>Ho una montagna di lavoro<br/>che si è accumulato<br/>[There's a mountain of work<br/>that's accumulated]</i>      |
| <i>By peeling twice as many beans<br/>and sweeping double floors</i> | <i>Il numero di fagioli<br/>da sbucciare è raddoppiato<br/>[The number of beans<br/>to peel has doubled]</i>          |

On this particular occasion, the rhyme has been maintained by resorting

to a typical and simple strategy consisting in the use of the past participle of verbs belonging to the same conjugation. Once more, the rhythm has also been kept to a great extent. From a semantic perspective, the translation plays mostly with the main notion of speed, haste and panic, although at times it expresses it through slightly different imagery.

In the case of the first two subtitles, the main semantic field in the SL is that of confusion and worry, expressed by such lexical elements as 'befuddled', 'troubled', and reiterated by the verb 'figure out'. In the TL, the main semantic field is that of anxiety and haste, which is expressed by the adjectives *stressato*, *trafelato* [panting] and *indaffarato* [very busy], and the adverb *in fretta* [hastily]. It has to be noted that besides preserving the rhyme, the translator has sought to remain if not exactly within the same semantic field, at least within one that is clearly related to the original one.

As for the last two subtitles, the main feature that crops up is the loss of the alliteration (muddle through / multitude). The rhythm is also partly lost although the rhyming pattern has been successfully recreated again. Semantically, the notion of manic activity has been kept and a 'multitude of chores' has become a *montagna di lavoro / accumulato* [a mountain of work / accumulated], although the nuance added to the original by 'muddle through' has been inevitably lost in Italian.

The very last subtitle of the previous extract has been translated more or less literally and the main discrepancy with the original is the disappearance of the term 'double floors', which would not fit in the subtitle and has therefore been deleted in the translation. Subtitlers must always bear in mind the space and time limitations imposed by the screen and the soundtrack. Sometimes, part of content that is not absolutely indispensable to understand the main idea being expressed is perforce sacrificed on the altar of readability.

Before reaching the conclusion, it is worth considering a few examples taken from a song sung by the very creative Tigger in *Replacement*. It is a text that presents the typical difficulties inherent to the translation of a song, together with the above-mentioned issues on neologisms that tend to be so prominent in *Tiggerspeak*.

In the example below, little Piglet is trying to imitate Tigger's behaviour and demeanour with the aim to become Tigger's replacement in the 100 Acre Wood. Piglet is rather disheartened at his own inadequacy, and Tigger is trying to convince him that it's all about having the right 'mental altitude', and not 'attitude':

*Let your thinking fly way up high  
You'll soon see why*

*Fai volare in alto la mente  
Saprai immediatamente  
[Make your mind fly high,*

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <i>Cos there's no doubt<br/>It's all about</i> | <i>You'll know immediately]</i><br><i>Perché dubbi non ce n'è<br/>Questo altro non è che...</i><br><i>[There are no doubts,<br/>This is nothing but...]</i> |
|--|---|

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <i>Mental altitude</i><br><br><i>You gotta have a Tiggerific<br/>mental altitude</i> | <i>Mentalità</i><br><i>[Mentalitude]</i><br><br><i>Devi avere<br/>una tigosissima mentalità</i><br><i>[You must have<br/>a very tiggerific mentalitude]</i> |
|--|---|

Here we come across a very precise rhyming pattern inevitably peppered with a few linguistic corruptions and neologisms: 'mental altitude', a clear distortion of 'mental attitude', and 'Tiggerific', a non-existent attribute that compounds Tigger and terrific. In the Italian translation, the rhyming pattern has been entirely preserved and the meaning has been recreated quite faithfully. The notion of 'let your thinking fly high', which clearly paves the way for the 'mental altitude', has also been recreated in the TL by resorting to the expression *fai volare in alto la mente* [make your mind fly high]. Although slightly forced as an expression in Italian, it can be argued that it has been deemed appropriate in this case because of the visual element present on the screen: Tigger's paw gestures towards the sky as he sings.

As far as the linguistic corruption of the original is concerned, the expression 'mental altitude' has found its way into Italian by means of a neologism: *mentalità*. The subtitler has decided to play with the substantive *mentalità* [mentality], welded together with the notion of *altità*, which could plausibly be the way an Italian child would describe *altezza* [height]. As for the English neologism, 'Tiggerific', the choice has once again fallen on a strategy that has been implemented on other occasions, namely, that of using *-issimo/a*, the superlative suffix, at the end of the chosen adjective, which in itself is a neologism (*tigosissima*). As noted before, this ensures some kind of internal consistency throughout the whole series and makes *Tiggerspeak* clearly recognisable. The playfulness of this song clearly derives from the way in which the words are associated, and in translation it seems to work rather well.

Let us now look at one final example from the same song:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <i>It's confidentiosity<br/>that makes a Piglet roar</i> | <i>È la coraggiosezza<br/>che farà ruggire anche te</i><br><i>[It's courageness that<br/>will make you roar too]</i> |
|--|--|

*What else could whaleify  
a mere sardine?*

*So rev your seeking engine up  
and watch your spirits soar*

*You'll see the world  
will be a trampoline*

*Che altro potrebbe  
balenizzare un sardino?*

*[What else could  
whaleify a sardine?]*

*Accendi il motore  
più potente che c'è  
[Start up the most powerful  
engine in the world]*

*Il mondo sarà  
il tuo trampolino  
[The world will be  
your trampoline]*

In this case, it is easy to note that in the translation the rhyming pattern has clearly been given precedence. While the rhythm has suffered slightly, the rhymes have been kept in exactly the same pattern. What is more, the translator has once again recreated the *Tiggerspeak* in a fairly effective way. Thus, 'confidentiosity', a neologism based on confidence + the common suffix -osity, has become *coraggiosezza*, which is based on *coraggio* [courage] + -ezza, a very frequent suffix in Italian, found in words such as *saggezza* [wisdom] and *bellezza* [beauty].

The very colourful 'whale-ify a sardine' has been kept almost identical: *balenizzare un sardino*. It is, however, worth noting the use of the substantive *sardino*, which departs from the standard Italian *sardina* (being feminine), and has been turned into a masculine noun to prepare the rhyme for *trampolino* [trampoline].

Semantically, it can be argued that the meaning of the original has been kept to a large extent in the translation, except for the line 'So rev your seeking engine up and watch your spirits soar', which has become 'turn on the most powerful engine there is', which in Italian gives precedence to the rhyme, as has been observed before.

## 6. Conclusion

As we have seen, some of the specific obstacles – on a lexical, semantic and structural levels – encountered when subtitling children's programmes depend, both, on the creative nature of the language used in the original cartoons or animated productions; and on the importance of songs and their own structure. Overall, the analysis carried out in these pages has allowed us to see that far from being an 'impossible' task, this is one for which the subtitler has at his/her disposal a number of strategies that if implemented appropriately allow for successful translations. To put it in the perspective of the old notion of 'loss versus gain', the examples here commented show that, while something is inevitably lost in translation, quite a lot is gained – or at least kept and recreated.

As far as songs are concerned, these might be said to represent the essence of what it means to translate cartoons. While the lyrics may reflect the creative and wonderful ways in which some characters express themselves, they also impose on the translator a myriad of added constraints arising from the way they are structured. Interestingly enough, and judging from what we have seen here, it appears that the dimension that takes precedence is that of the rhyming pattern. The meaning of the original text can at times be slightly adjusted and the rhythm is sometimes lost or modified. This clearly makes sense when we consider that our object of study is the subtitled version and not the dubbed one. Subtitles are a written translation created to be read, not heard. In this sense, it is plausible that the first and most apparent element that the viewer perceives when reading the subtitles is that of the rhyme, and it therefore comes as no surprise that the translator has strived to preserve it, possibly to the detriment of other dimensions.

More in general, it may also be noted that unlike dubbing, its 'freer' AVT relative, subtitling still retains the tendency to stick more closely to the original script from a semantic point of view. Given the concurrent presence of the original dialogue, this approach might well be considered as the safest way to get out of the translation maze as unscathed as possible. It can be argued that by reproducing the denotative meaning of the dialogue or the songs, subtitlers are more likely to minimise the risk of clashes with the visual content of the programme. While this can be said to be true of all types of subtitling, I would like to venture that in the case of cartoons, where both the verbal and the visual can be particularly inventive, and where so many puns are created by twisting the verbal on the basis of the potential offered by the visual, this sort of strategy might turn out to be the most effective.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> My thanks to the international subtitling company Visiontext for kindly allowing me to use their materials and their translations.

<sup>2</sup> An interesting discussion along the same lines, though more specifically related to the translation of jokes, can be found in Zabalbeascoa (2001: 260-261).

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