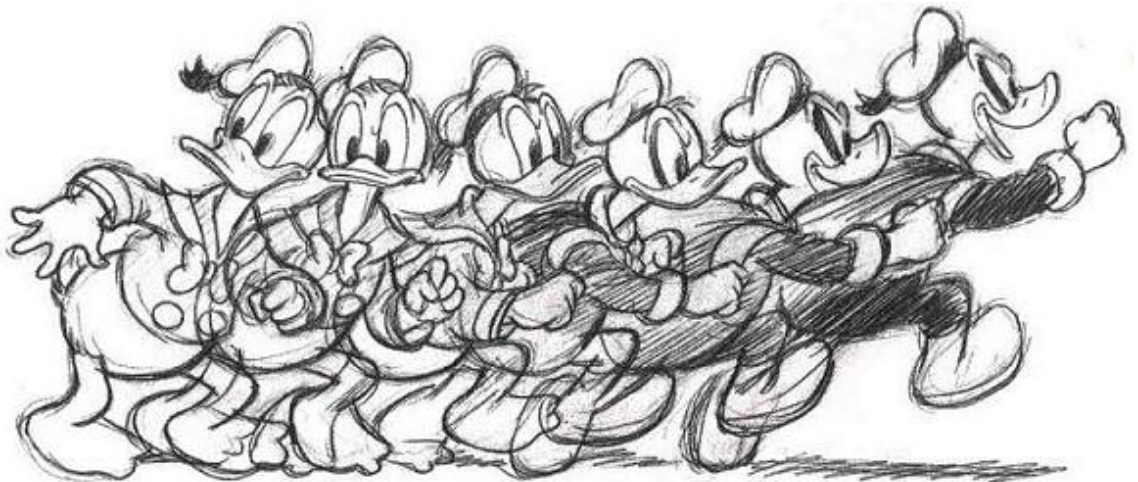


# **Myths, Mutants and Superducks: Exporting Italian Comics**

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## Abstract

Even before its current fledgling state, the field of Comics Studies in the Anglophone parts of the world has been interested in the influences received from other international incarnations of the comics medium. *Manga*, *bande dessinée*, *tebeo*, *campesinos*, *quadrinhos*, *fumetti*, cartoons, strips, have all been responsible, in part, for the development of both the medium and its related academic fields. Many studies, pieces of criticism and comparison have been offered showing the importance of those texts, both in their original language and in English translation, their impact on other parts of the industry, and on their readerships.

What has been lacking, so far, is a study into the process of translation that allowed for those texts to be read, studied and incorporated into the multifaceted archives of the comics scholarship, academic or fan-based. The aim of my thesis is to provide a critical manual appealing to three audiences: the translation scholar, comics scholar, and practising translator. I analyse – from a translation and comics studies perspective – the interaction between image and text (*signplay*), the use of humour, and the use of multicultural and multilingual elements in the Italian *fumetto*. I do so by offering comparisons with current Anglophone publications, informed by a history of the development on the medium in the West, and by focusing on three exemplary Italian series: *Dampy* (2000-), *Rat-Man* (1989-), and *PKNA* (1996-2000, 2014, 2015). I use descriptive theoretical discussions to form a practical set of strategies for the process of translating Italian comics into English, by focusing on the functions with which the texts operate in the three macro-areas I define, and I provide extensive samples for each strategy devised.

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## Chapter 1 - Introduction



Figure 1 - Ortolani, *Rat-Man* #35, p. 12<sup>1</sup>

Panel 1 – Caption: Yes! I tried in the US!

Panel 2 – Hello? Good morning! My name is Rat-Man!  
I'd like to publish my comics!  
Would you like to?  
Haha! Yes!<sup>2</sup>

This thesis is a starting point for the synthesis of two fields, one much older and more established than the other. It is a beginning – a reboot, even – an exploration of a noticeable vacuum within both translation studies and comics studies alike, and a venture into the structures that must be built to fill it. This academic vacuum can also be found in comparative literature and writings from the comics world itself, from journalism to fan criticism and beyond. Despite their enormous impact on cultures, popular, literary, 'high' and 'lowbrow' canons, texts, comics included, are often regarded and discussed as objects, as products (cf. Woo 2013-14; Murray 2013) – this is the case in a fortunately slightly outdated, as I have come to expect, academic critical view of an orphaned text without its author (Barthes 1967) – with much less attention being dedicated to the process involved in the creation of the object in the first place. Examples of this type of critical framing can be found in reviews, discussions and media reporting on books, films, comics, in their original or 'translated' languages<sup>3</sup> and can

<sup>1</sup> For captions of images from comics, I use 'p./pp.' for page numbers and 'f./ff.' for frames/panels.

<sup>2</sup> This is an approximate translation of the contents of the speechbubble. For discussion and actual translation, see Chapter 4, Section 4.1.1.

<sup>3</sup> The latter in particular is especially worthy of notice, as Lawrence Venuti discusses at length in his *The*

lead to unwanted vitriolic comments in the worst of cases – and lack of recognition in the best – approaches to the texts and a lack of empathy towards or consideration for the creators (e.g. Leth 2013), as well as a more academic concern of ignoring the individuals involved in terms of the creative involvement and development (cf. Murray 2015; Woo 2014). Even critical works focusing on translation issues rarely take the time or have the ability, perhaps due to the lack of regard that translation scholars and practitioners have for the medium, to delve into the practical elements of the translation of the texts they are discussing, focusing rather on their reception, the formal elements abstracted from the labour, and economic factors over pragmatic ones (cf. Zanettin 2008).<sup>4</sup> In the case of Stein, Denson and Meyer (2013), in fact, the aim is described as being the following:

This book brings together an international group of scholars who chart and analyze the ways in which comic book history and new forms of graphic narrative have negotiated the aesthetic, social, political, economic, and cultural interactions that reach across national borders in an increasingly interconnected and globalizing world. Exploring the tendencies of graphic narratives - from popular comic book serials and graphic novels to manga - to cross national and cultural boundaries, *Transnational Perspectives on Graphic Narratives* addresses a previously marginalized area in comics studies. By placing graphic narratives in the global flow of cultural production and reception, the book investigates controversial representations of transnational politics, examines transnational adaptations of superhero characters, and maps many of the translations and transformations that have come to shape contemporary comics culture on a global scale. (2013 n.p.)

Similarly to my own concerns, the editors of the collection have recognised what they call a 'marginalized area in comics studies' in the observation of the passage from one language to another, from one culture to another, of a comics text, especially between well-established markets such as Japan, US and Francophone Europe. What the collection ends up actually doing, however, is focus on either the end result, i.e. the reception of the finalised product in

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*Translator's Invisibility* (1995).

<sup>4</sup> This is not always the case of course, as Federico Zanettin's edited volume *Comics in Translation* (2008) does contain two essays dealing with translation strategies and analysis in Franco-Belgian and Japanese forms of the medium. Two essays, however, do not a satisfying corpus make. Additionally, works such as Edith Grossman's *Why Translation Matters* (2011), and articles by practicing translators do exist, and are pointing out their very tangible presence in the publishing world (e.g. Hahn 2014; cf. Chesterman and Wagner 2000).

the target culture, or on a comparison between the source reception and the target counterpart. The still marginalised element remains the process that ensures the creation of the latter, given the publication of the former: translation, and consequently, the translator's work, and their existence. While this reaction may appear drastic, perhaps, to someone outside the field of translation studies, especially literary translation, it is very much founded and repeatedly encountered in the general discourse surrounding printed media. To have yet another instance of the phenomenon, and in a field such as comics studies where multiple creators are increasingly acknowledged on the front cover of the books they are the authors of, is a reminder of the necessity of an expansion of the work started by the likes of Padmini Ray Murray (2013) and Benjamin Woo (2013-4). The inquiry into the 'invisible labour' (Murray 2013) that produces the comic book should also be inclusive of the activity of the translator aiding the dissemination of the product in countries and markets outside its originating one.

It is undoubtedly the case that the academic field of comics studies is not the right ground for such a type of research, of course. The disappointment, nonetheless, remains at yet another example of this type of practice – discussing products as abstract from the process – even in a text that claims to 'reach across national borders in an increasingly interconnected and globalizing world'. By casting a cursory glance at the contents of the collected critical work, the dreaded phrase – by literary translators in particular – 'lost in translation' appears in the title of one of the essays included, by Florian Groß. It does not, of course, speak of or determine the merits of the article, discussing wordless graphic novels and transcultural displacement. The casual use of the phrase, though, does reveal a common misconception about the practice of (literary) translation, which does not account for what is also gained during the process, and how the translator compensates where possible for anything they have removed or found impossible to recreate exactly. Overall, the attitude of non-specialists is perfectly commented upon and captured in the comic strip created by Tom Gauld (see Figure 2, below) for the Guardian Review, in March 2014.

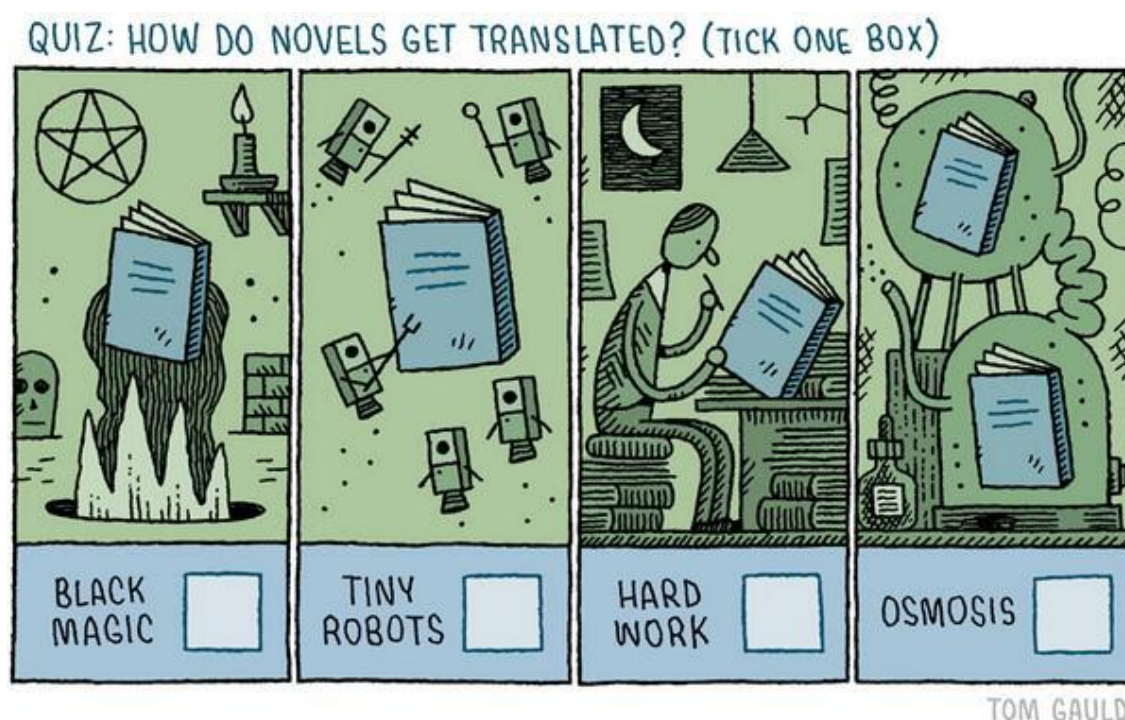


Figure 2 – Tom Gauld on literary translation (March 2014)

The field of translation studies, on the other hand, does lend itself more usefully to an in-depth look at how a translated text comes to be, compared to other areas of literary and cultural criticism, focusing on the processes that translators employ to recreate a text in a language different from the one in which it first appeared. What does still appear to be lacking, though, and what I argue for in the thesis as a whole, is a more holistic inquiry into the actual development of those processes in the first place, an analysis of what the main reasons behind a translator's choices may or may not depend upon, as developed based on their reading(s) of the source text (ST), and how to approach their recreation in the target text (TT). What I will be proposing in and with this thesis, stems from the statement made in the *The Craft of Translation* by editors John Biguenet and Rainer Schulte, who posit that '[a]ll acts of translation begin with a thorough investigation of the reading process' (1989:ix). Such investigation is conducted by an individual, the translator, through 'tremendously intricate mental procedures' and research (1989:xvi); just like any product, translation does not simply, automatically or mechanically, happen. The ways in which translators generally approach the texts they work with, as is the case with most creative endeavours, approximate instinctive action, gut feelings and individual personal experience, and result in a seeming impossibility for any classically conceived type of theory to be developed – one that almost intentionally isolates and resists covering the entirety of translatorial practices, and something that the dialogue between



practising translator Emma Wagner and theorist Andrew Chesterman in *Can Theory Help Translators?* (2000) helps to develop and somewhat reconcile, by 'coining a common language in which we can talk about translation' (2000:11). To offer a comprehensive, prescriptive manual of comics translation is not my aim in this thesis, and is still an impossible and quite probably unwanted task, and I discuss the issue further in the following section; at the same time, I argue strongly for the processes I offer throughout my work, and provide sufficient critical and analytical support for them to be justified.

What this introduction will do, then, is two things: it will serve to map out how the thesis will be organised, summarising the main issues discussed in the chapters and the overarching scope of the research, and at the same time highlight the importance of the scope of the thesis, and of its focus on the three specific issues of multilingualism, humour and visual/verbal interplay, as a means to provide the groundwork for a system of comics translation.

The thesis, overall, aims to be both a piece of academic criticism and a translation theory resource book, with the final goals being both to provide practical, useful strategies to apply to the translation of comics, and to discuss the issues posed by the medium, the markets, the process and the cultures creating the original texts (Italian) and that of the potential receivers (English). It appeals to both the theoretical side of academia, by operating in multiple fields of research both established and currently blooming, and to the practitioners who may want to venture into comics translation; I ensure this by adopting a clear chapter structure, prefacing the practice of translating from selected texts with some theory, and offering summaries in each chapter, bringing together the results of the practical applications in the conclusions.

## **1. Theories, scopes and *skopos*.**

This thesis has three core chapters, each focusing on a specific issue: the translation of humour (Chapter 3: 'Do Italian Punchlines go 'POW'?'); the translation of multilingual and multicultural elements, such as code-switching, mixing and references (Chapter 4: 'Culture-(un)bound'); and the translation of the tension between words and images, in a broadening of the concept of wordplay (Chapter 5: 'A Play On Words Signs'). The subdivision is for the convenience of the discussion, as all three aspects are in fact co-present in most cases, and influence each other; multilingual elements, the focus of Chapter 4, may be used for humorous effects, looked at in Chapter 3, or to create neologisms, which I analyse in Chapter 5, for example. Before the more in-depth analysis and discussions take place, though, I first frame the field of work, the subject

matter of comics, the major themes emerging when working with the medium, and its relevance to translation studies (Chapter 2: 'Comics in Time and Space').

The framework for this somewhat more practical part of the thesis, i.e. the suggestion and development of strategies to translate aspects of comics, based on a discussion of elements identified through informed analysis and case studies, is rooted in the belief that theory can and does affect practice (Chesterman and Wagner 2000) – and it is even more the case for translation studies, and for the translation of a type of text as complex as comics (cf. Kaindl 1999). Zanettin (2008: 20) talks about the process of translating comics as one of constrained translation, limited by the formal elements, the editorial routes, the gatekeeper system of the industry which relies on multiple stages before the comic book itself ever sees its first print. In addition, Jean Boase-Beier argues that one of the constraints affecting the translation of a text is, in fact, theory itself (2006:47). Boase-Beier's claims would appear to illustrate the point that any contextual and paratextual material that informs a particular process, are in fact posing some type of limitation on that process. In this case, knowledge of translation theory can become a shackle for the practitioner of translation, who may feel as though she has to 'follow the rules'. As Chesterman and Wagner point out, though, theory should not be intended to be seen as the definite or definitive system of prescription that every translator must follow in their work:

what we need instead is a different kind of theory [...]: practice-oriented theory – a theory rooted in best practice, directed at improved practice, and attentive to practitioners throughout the profession. (2000:133)

This is an approach found in more recent work in translation studies, focusing on the more descriptive aspects of translatorial processes (Epstein 2012; Hermans 2000), and one that informs the thesis as a whole. It is one of the underlying assumptions and the reason for the heavy reliance on the theoretical discussion present in each chapter, in preparation of the analytical and practical aspects. I argue, here and throughout the chapters, that a sound and detailed theoretical knowledge is highly beneficial to the process of translation, allowing the translator to further analyse the functions, properties, and features of the ST, in relation to its contextual surroundings.

All theoretical discussions provided, including their background and development, are offered to the reader as a means of achieving the final *skopos*, or 'overall purpose', of the translation of the examples offered during the discussion. In fact, I argue in Chapters 2 and 3 that elements of *Skopostheorie* (Nord 1997:27) are crucial to the full effectiveness of the theoretical discussions, providing the reader with the framework which will then practically

and functionally be applied, using the notions I develop, to pragmatic methods and processes. Translation of the comics medium is concerned with formal and technical issues; constraints are of the physical (frames, speechbubbles, pages) and time-related kind, with the addition of usually carrying a specific effect to reproduce in the TT, rather than a variety of interpretations, as might be the case with poetry or prose. Therefore, a functional approach such as *Skopostheorie* will allow a translator to apply a case-by-case, descriptive, yet still somewhat systematic set of strategies to their work: identifying the *skopos* of the ST is fundamental to devising translatorial strategies which will ensure a successful reproduction in the TT.

What *Skopostheorie* entails, of course, is the careful reading, analysis and awareness of any and all of the cultural elements, connotations, intended versus actual effects, editorial influence, readership, reach, even distribution issues or concerns. The translator must be immersed in the source culture as much as the target one; a good knowledge not only of the immediate text being translated, but of its situation within the comics system, in terms of industry and readership or fandom, while not essential, will undoubtedly benefit their strategies, and ultimately, the end product. Likewise, knowledge of the system surrounding the comics one, such as publishing, literature in general, art and popular culture and media informing the development of the original text in the first place inhabits a similar space in the beneficial fields of expertise.

Furthermore, relying on and adopting a functional approach to translation will prepare the translator for reading the text in terms of what function it is intended to serve: is it just entertainment, is it commenting on social, media-related, political topics? While the specific reference frames may have to be modified to the point of non-recognition in the TT, keeping in mind the function of the original will allow for a broader range of possibilities in the target language and culture. Consequently, the chapters of the thesis concerned with exploring the issues of translation in Italian comics contain the same functional approach just advocated, and this is reflected in their structure: exploration of the issue's context, the research and current discourse around it, its translation so far, the application and presence in comics, and finally the development of strategies based on all of the above.

## **2. Framing the Thesis**

In the sub-sections below, I summarily explore the chapters that will follow, for ease of reference and navigation for the reader, highlighting the main topics and issues arising from each discussion, and what series are used as examples.

The series I employ as primary texts for the work are as follows: *Rat-Man* is a

superhero parody comic, initially started by author and artist Leo Ortolani as independent creator (and effectively self-published) in 1989 and bought in 1997 by Panini Comics; *Paperinik New Adventures* (PKNA) was a Disney Italia series running from 1996 to 2001, with a brief return in 2014, whose stories revolved around Donald Duck's vigilante alter-ego Paperinik, in a science fiction/superhero setting; and *Dampyr* is a Sergio Bonelli Editore horror/action series started in 2000, dealing with a group of East European vampire hunters and the relationship between the main character, Harlan, and his father, super-vampire Draka. I chose these three series as they represent the current 'native' Italian *fumetti* – the Italian incarnation of comics (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1) – market (made up of publishers Bonelli, Disney and Panini), as opposed to the import of Japanese *manga* (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1) and Anglo-American comics. I return to and expand on the three series in Chapter 2, having chosen not to burden the reader with too much information in the Introduction.

In *Chapter 2. Comics in Time and Space*, I introduce a brief history of the comics medium, based on works by McCloud (1993), Duncan & Smith (2010) and Van Lente & Dunlavey (2012), from its origins to present day. While illustrating the main US timeline, I explore the points of contact with other countries and creators, including UK, France, Japan and Italy. I do recognise the limitations of narrowing my frame of reference to the US system alone and address this in the chapter; I am, however, attempting to create a method to export from Italian markets and publications into the wider, more influential Anglophone one, regarded as the mainstream. In a sense, therefore, this is a consequence of the practical side of the thesis, and the perceived limitation may not in fact be one at all. I take this section to also offer some insight into the three series I use as my primary texts, introduced above, in line with the chronological mapping of the Western aspect of the medium, and their relevance in their respective markets and publishing worlds and systems, which has yet to be comprehensively analysed or included even in reports on comics sales and distribution. I then build on this annotated history to illustrate some medium-specific issues, addressing the need of a new critical vocabulary, or at least an expanded one, to discuss the hybrid (image/text) form of comics (Meskin 2009; Miodrag 2013), and illustrate its basic structural elements (McCloud 1993; Groensteen 2010). I also discuss the consequences of not having an identifiable single author (in most cases) and how this can be adapted into a beneficial opportunity for a translator and their visibility in the target text (Venuti 2005). Also analysed in the chapter is the concept of comics literacy (e.g. Pustz 1993), as I redefine it from a Derridean perspective of 'supplement', and the cultural, sociological and sociolinguistic ramifications of analysing the medium under this particular light, along with the difficulties of trying to label the medium effectively. As I then move on to explain in its later section, by linking the issues to a translation studies critical framework, this chapter serves as necessary background for the following three,

for comics scholars and translation scholars alike, hybridising the two fields for the purpose of my thesis. The final sub-chapter offers, at last, a full look at the history of the three exemplary comics series in their own development, reception, and positioning within the Italian market, in order to further demonstrate the reasons behind their inclusion over other texts.

In *Chapter 3. A Play on Words Signs*, I build on previous work by comic translators and critics (e.g. Anthea Bell 2013; Zanettin 2002), in order to focus on wordplay, especially present in *Dampyr* and *Rat-Man*, to a minor extent in *PKNA*, and recognize its limitations when dealing with the comics medium. I use existing criticism from the field of children's literature (e.g. Epstein 2012; Nikolajeva and Scott 2006) and multimodal studies (e.g. Kaindl 1999) to expand the notion into one of signplay, to include textual and visual elements alike, highlighting the tension present in this particular type of text and medium overall. I discuss the difficulties of balancing what is possible to translate (linguistic elements) and what not (images), from a pragmatic perspective, and the resulting changes to the signplay in the TT, with the same functional approach as the previous two chapters. I effectively propose a new way of approaching the translation of images in comics by their textual content, by redeveloping and syncretising pre-existing methods of dealing with wordplay in texts. I further the argument that while an image itself cannot be translated, its connotations and implicatures, and therefore reception, will be by modifying, through translation, the text accompanying them – as text itself is also a series of pictorial representations of abstract concepts (e.g. McCloud 1993).

In *Chapter 4. Do Italian Punchlines go POW?*, I analyse, discuss and argue for a new system of translatorial strategies for instances of humour in the primary texts. After introducing the current debates on humour in various media and its translation, I analyse the humorous elements present in the comics, at the basis of both *PKNA* and *Rat-Man*, discussing the constraints in which a translation into English will have to operate. I highlight issues of incompatibility, and potential culture-specific topics that may be inaccessible to English readers, and provide strategies to overcome those issues. Similarly for onomatopoeia and “sound” effects, I build on previous criticism focusing on the French/Belgian *Bande Dessinée* (e.g. Kaindl 1999) and previous studies on Italian publications (e.g. Zanettin 2002), arguing that a modified and expanded version of existing methodologies can be applied to the topics in question. I prove this by developing another set of strategies, using linguistic theories of humour to develop my own approach to its translation.

In *Chapter 5. Culture-(un)bound*, I shift the focus to instances of allusion, intertextuality and references which are based on culture-specific ideas or conventions, including the use of multilingual devices. I use available criticism on these issues (e.g. Epstein 2012), and build on Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) and normative theories of translation (Toury; Hermans 2000). I pick up on the prestige that Anglo-American culture enjoys in Italian publications, and

the difficulties this poses in translation. Once again, the crux of the chapter revolves around the practical issues of translation, and how they effectively convey the importance and relevance of prestigious and 'exotic' names and words into a setting, the Anglophone one, that appears to have set the standard for publications worldwide. While this is a result of the influence that US comics have had on the development of Italian *fumetti*, I believe there are also sociolinguistic influences at play and the use of English or English-sounding words reflects a condition of current Italian language and culture. The strategies proposed try to supply potential translators with means of dealing with the (socio)linguistic barriers that can be encountered, or at least suggest alternatives to circumvent them.

Finally, in the Conclusion, I bring these various topics together in order to discuss the relevance and contribution of the findings, linking them to current debates around translation studies and comics studies alike, highlighting the significance of both the academic and practical outcomes of the thesis. The major aspect arising concerns the cultural status of the texts, in their source system (including language, literature, media, culture) and in the target one, and how exporting via translation from one to the other can aid the enrichment of the target system, under style, language and cultural values themselves.

I also offer a full transcript of a paper that attempts to put into practice what I outline in the thesis chapters, delivered during a comics scholarship conference in Paris in June 2015. The details of this process are explained in much more depth in the relevant section of the thesis, though the idea behind it can simply be summarised as an interactive exercise in 'testing' the strategies I develop in my research, by offering them to an audience not familiar with translation, but well versed in comics literacy. The results, as I will show, are encouraging for the relevance and significance of my contribution to both fields, comics scholarship and translation studies.

In the light of this discussion, I conclude by offering further ramifications of my study, and how they might impact the view we have of comics, translation and comics in translation as a cultural product, without forgetting the process leading to their creation.

## Chapter 2 - Comics in Time and Space



Figure 3 – *Dampyr: Gli Orrori di Londra*, p.151, f.5

Questa casa è un tesseratto...

*this house is a tesseract*

ossia un corpo solido che si estende nella quinta dimensione.

*that-is a body solid that (refl.) extend in-the fifth dimension*

E' quasi impossibile passare da una stanza all'altra, se non si sa come fare...

*it-is almost impossible to-pass from one room to-the other if (neg) we know how to-do*

ed è ancora più impossibile uscirne!

*and it-is even more impossible to-exit-from*

The medium of comics has gained an increased amount of attention since the 1990s, and after 2005 in particular, especially through the work of scholars such as Neil Cohn (2012), Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith (2009), Thierry Groensteen (2007) and Scott McCloud (1993). Indeed, Groensteen argues that comics are no longer merely a topic of interest, but an entire field in and of itself (2009). In a similar vein, Duncan and Smith propose at least four reasons for comics to be worthy of study from an academic perspective: their originality as an art form; their contribution, and even addition, to literacy; the significance they hold in terms of their history; the potential that the comics medium has, as a product of popular and mass media

(2009: 14-7).

In this chapter, I offer background on the field. I demonstrate how those reasons are indeed relevant to academic study, by identifying and defining what I mean by comics, illustrating a history of the medium from different cultural and international perspectives, and delineating the terminology and lexicon I employ in my discussion of this field. I will then move to discussing the importance of the reader's role in the survival and impact of comics, from two different perspectives: comics literacy and the complexity derived from multiple authorial presences. Ultimately, I will identify how the aspects of the comics medium discussed are of relevance and how they correlate to issues and debates in the field of translation studies. This final section will be further developed in later chapters.

## **1. A Troublesome Definition**

*What is comics?*

The first issue which needs addressing, in order to establish the boundaries and framework for this work, is its subject matter. While there still is some disagreement over which term should be used when talking about the medium (Chute 2008; Meskin 2009),<sup>5</sup> the majority of scholars working in the (unofficial as yet) field prefer 'comics' (McCloud 1993: 4, 9). Some critics have even argued that 'comics' is 'no distinct medium' but rather a 'useful general term for distinguishing the phenomenon of juxtaposing images in a sequence' (Duncan and Smith 2009: 3). Other terms, such as graphic novel, graphic narrative, graphic literature or even sequential art, all offer some problematic issues of exclusivity and over-specification or the opposite, leading to an oversimplifying generalisation.

The term 'graphic novel', for example, defines 'a full-length [...] story published as a book in comic-strip format' ('graphic novel' OED). The word, however, has been and is still being used to describe any collection of single comics issues,<sup>6</sup> either in hardback or paperback format, mostly as a marketing strategy, with the belief that graphic novels are better accepted and more 'serious' in the eyes of the general public (Duncan and Smith 2009: 17; Van Lente and Dunlavey 2012: 213). In general, there is a tendency to agree that comics 'tell a story by presenting carefully selected moments of varying length within panels' (Duncan and Smith 2009: 3). And further, according to Chris Murray:

Comics are fundamentally about the coming together of word and image, as well as panels on a page, and, given their traits of exaggeration and links to caricature, they are well suited to parody and satire, giving them a

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<sup>5</sup> Examples are graphic narrative, graphic literature, sequential storytelling, and comic-book novel.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, <http://forbiddenplanet.com/graphic-novels/>.



subversive undercurrent. For this reason *comics* remains a rich term.

(2015)

The point to be taken from existing criticism of the semantics of such a term, is that *comics* (in the plural) is indeed worthy of exploring, even beyond the established conventions and canons of some of the scholars just cited. Comics is the starting point.

The issue, therefore, is how to define it. There currently are two major schools of thought,<sup>7</sup> originating from separate cultural backgrounds and concomitantly separate comics production. On one side, the Anglophone strand of comics, with all its international variations and varieties (e.g. US, UK, Canada), find their champion in Will Eisner and his *Comics and Sequential Art* (1985), as developed further by Scott McCloud in *Understanding Comics* (1993). McCloud takes Eisner's idea of 'a train of images deployed in sequence', or *sequential art* (Eisner 1985: 6), and attempts to narrow it down, in order to obtain something more comics-specific, while at the same time keeping it as inclusive as possible. The result is as follows:

Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer.  
(McCloud 1993: 9)

McCloud sees the definition as more of a starting point and as a means for framing his work, using sequential art in most cases throughout his analysis of the medium. The definition is useful to illustrate the pre-history, so to speak, of comics (see section 2, below), and as a means for including as many incarnations of the medium across time and cultures.

The other side, Francophone-based *bande dessinée* (literally 'drawn strip', also known as *BD*) scholars, sees as its major advocate Thierry Groensteen and his notion of *iconic solidarity*, which is of

interdependent images that, participating in a series, present the double characteristic of being separated [...] and which are plastically and semantically overdetermined by the fact of their coexistence *in praesentia* [italics in original].

(2007: 18)

As Groensteen himself recognises, the length of this definition can pose some problems (ibid.), as can the complicated style, mostly regarding the accessibility of the definition by all potential critics and scholars, as, arguably, it heavily relies on French tradition in philosophy and

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<sup>7</sup> I intentionally exclude criticism based on Japanese *manga* here for reasons I will discuss later, in section 3.2.

semiotics.<sup>8</sup> The author quickly resorts to a simplification, claiming that ‘the necessary, if not sufficient, condition required to speak of comics is that the images will be multiple and correlated in some fashion’ (2007: 20). While I do believe that Groensteen has some particularly insightful ideas regarding how comics work, as I will discuss later, there seems to be an intentional disregard for McCloud, though not Eisner, in his analysis, despite the later publishing date (the French text was published in 1999). Furthermore, as is obvious from the definition provided above, he tends to choose a sometimes unnecessarily overcomplicated style in his approach (although this may also be due to the choices of the translators of his text). As the comics series which I will be looking at throughout the rest of my work are a) of Italian origin, but b) modelled on the American comic book, either to emulate or parody it, and c) have little (apparent) influence from the BD tradition, with the exception of the lack of colour in two out of three series, I would argue that Groensteen’s approach will indeed be useful, but McCloud’s definition has more grounds for being applied within the framework of this thesis.

In the course of my work, therefore, I will be using the Eisner-influenced, McCloud-theorised English approach in regards to terminology and lexicon, stemming from the notion of ‘sequential art’, which I explain in more detail in section 3, and overall consider my subject matter under the term ‘comics’. Where I do not, I will explicitly state the reasons for it.

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<sup>8</sup> In conversation with Ann Miller, the translator for the second volume of Groensteen’s work (forthcoming), it appears that the English translators (Beaty and Nguyen) may have over-complicated the original text, as it does not pose the same problems to French readers (personal correspondence, 16/11/2012).

## **2. A Brief History of Comics**

### *Multiple Timelines*

Both comics scholars, such as McCloud (1993) and Duncan and Smith (2009), and comics writers, such as Van Lente and Dunlavey (2012), have attempted to track the history of the medium, basing their investigation on the simplified notion of “sequential art”.

The existence of the medium outside of the American sphere, fortunately, is recognised by most authors (Duncan and Smith 2009: 22; Van Lente and Dunlavey 2012), and there is usually an appendix or exploration of the other manifestations of comics in other cultures (e.g. Duncan and Smith 2009: 294-314). Duncan and Smith even claim that it is ‘impossible to talk about American comics books without acknowledging the international talents and trends that have come to influence them’ (2009: vii), and Van Lente and Dunlavey dedicate a section each, within their narrative, to the development of the French-Belgian, British and Japanese varieties of the medium, and the co-influence they had on the US (2012: 147-8, 174, 198). This, however, is not always the case, as critics such as Pustz (1999) or Wolk (2007) appear to almost intentionally disregard non-US incarnations of the medium.

Below is a summary of what is currently accepted – though not without regular debate in the comics scholarly community and fandoms – to be the main comics timeline, at least from a Western perspective, as an attempt to provide a historical context of the medium, and to begin to trace the connections, influences and parallels with non-US comics, including the most salient moments of three of the other major branches of comics around the world, and the Italian one, in order to frame the work I develop in later chapters.

### 2.1 Pre-Modern Comics

McCloud identifies one of the earliest instances of sequential art in the Egyptian mural contained in the Tomb of Menna (Figure 4), dating back to 1300 BCE (1993: 14-5). While he dismisses hieroglyphics as a form of sequential images (due to their phonetic rather than graphic nature), he considers the painting accompanying them as the graphic part of a story told through both images and ‘words’, following a specific pattern (bottom-to-top, alternating left-to-right and right-to-left, in that order). Similarly, the Bayeux Tapestry (1070s CE) contains both elements, and depicts events in a sequential manner, subdivided by a distinct difference in subject matter, and conveying some sort of dynamic action (1993: 13).



Figure 4 – Tomb of Menna mural (reproduction by C.K. Wilkinson)

The *Tortures of Saint Erasmus* prints from 1460, lack the words but maintain the subdivision by subject matter, although admittedly it is always the same character being subjected to different forms of torture. McCloud chooses this particular instance to exemplify the influence of printing on the accessibility and distribution of sequential art, now relatively more approachable by public viewers (1993: 16). Similar to the Egyptian mural and the Bayeux tapestry, the Eight-Deer Jaguar Claw (*Tiger's Claw* in McCloud 1993: 10) sequence from a pre-Columbian (12<sup>th</sup> century) manuscript discovered in 1519 (Figure 5) depicts an epic story of a military and political hero, employing both words and images, and has a subdivision by subject matter (McCloud 1993: 10-11).



Figure 5 – Extract from Eight-Deer Jaguar Claw sequence (Codex Zouche-Nuttall)

While the previous examples are instances of a broader definition of sequential art, William Hogarth's panels, such as *A Harlot's Progress* (1732) are much nearer to what scholars identify as being closer ancestors of the comics medium, conveying the dynamism of movement and asking for the viewer's participation to connect the moments between the panels (Goggin 2010; also see McCloud 1993, and Duncan and Smith 2009).

### 2.1.1 The Era of Invention<sup>9</sup>

With the work of Rodolphe Töpffer, scholars mark the birth of the Modern Comic (Van Lente and Dunlavey 2012: 163; Duncan and Smith 2009: 24-6). Töpffer was a Swiss academic and aspiring painter, yet he never succeeded, in his view, in the latter. He dedicated himself, instead, to illustrations of a humorous nature, deviating from the preceding moralistic or political works (both satirical cartoons and Hogarth's alike). His first work, *Les Amours de M. Vieux-Bois*, appeared in French in 1837 (see Figure 6), and was translated for English audiences by 1842 (Duncan and Smith 2009: 25). Töpffer's major innovations were the attention to the form of his illustrations, as he was able to capture, for the first time, a dynamic movement in its representation through sketchier, simpler lines (Duncan and Smith 2009: 25), and the realisation that text and image were intrinsically linked and co-dependent (Van Lente and Dunlavey 2012: 165).



Figure 6 – Panels from *Les Amours de M. Vieux-Bois* (1837)

<sup>9</sup> The Era denomination, including the Era of Invention, is adapted from Duncan and Smith (2009: 23-4), with the exception of the final one, my own addition. For further, more detailed historical information, also see McCloud (1993), Van Lente and Dunlavey (2012), Restaino (2004), and Andreani (2014).

Said co-dependency is recognised as being intentional play of ironic tension between the two elements, as defined by Charles Hatfield (2005: 132): text and image can be read in different ways, with different keys of interpretation, and the multiple readings are and must be played against each other. This defining feature of tension, one that I employ through the rest of the thesis, is fundamental to the translatable nature of the medium, effectively recognising the translatorial potential of a text that already allows for the multiple readings and meaning-creation devices.

One could, on the other hand, take into account the decision reached by scholars in Lucca, in 1989, which openly and officially states that comics were in fact born in 1896, with Richard Felton Outcalt's *Yellow Kid* (Gravett 2015: 22; cf. Restaino 2004). While starting at a later date, the weekly and daily work being produced in newspapers – in the form of strips or single page stories – is particularly significant for the development of the comics medium in Italy, with the likes of Outcalt's *Buster Brown*, Rudolph Dirks' *Katzenjammer Kids* and most of Frederick Burr Opper's creations becoming some of the first examples of sequential art to which Italian audiences were exposed, respectively as Mimmo, Bibi e Bibò, and Fortunello, Checca and others, all published in the *Corrierino dei Piccoli*. I come back to these publications below.

## 2.2 Modern Comics

All aspects of the comics medium across the world are intertwined and mutually-influencing, and their history is indeed one of translation and adaptation: the history of comics can be found growing alongside the history of translation, with the inevitable invisibility that the latter brings with it (cf. Altenberg & Owen 2015). As the purpose of the thesis is to discuss and suggest potential strategies for the translation of comics from one market to another, as well as the languages, a working knowledge of the conventions and development of the various markets, countries and cultures, is crucial.

### 2.2.1 The Era of Proliferation (b. 1934)

Eastern Colour Printing Company was the first comic publisher as such, initially printing and packaging collected comic strips for other companies. In 1934, however, they published *Famous Funnies* #1, which included reprints and new material, thereby creating the first comic book and

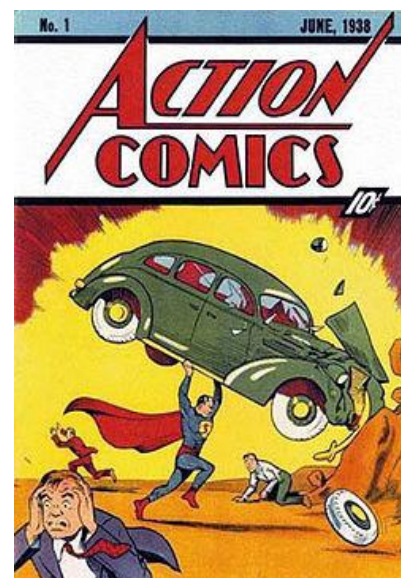


Figure 7 – Action Comics #1

marking the birth of the industry in the US (Van Lente and Dunlavey 2012: 27). The same year saw the creation of National Allied Publications, later National Periodical Publications, and ultimately DC Comics. In 1938, the company created a new series, *Action Comics*. The first issue introduced a character who is now famous worldwide, Superman, created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, and spawned a legion of imitations and caricatures (most notably, Bob Kane and Bill Finger's The Batman, in *Detective Comics* #27). This year is also regarded – though the term, and its derivatives, is almost exclusively employed by fans and collectors, and bearing no real critical value – as the beginning of the Golden Age of [American] Comics (e.g. Wolk 2007: 7). What is worth highlighting here, of course, is that the action and superhero comics did not appear out of nothing, but are rather part of a genre canon as established in the 1920s and found in the pages of publishers Patterson and Hearst, with notable examples such as Chester Gould's noir *Dick Tracy*, Nowlan and Calkins' *Buck Rogers*, both of which will also feature heavily in non-US comics canons (Restaino 2004: 61-5).

The other major development, still within Hearst's influence and rooted in cartoons and animation, is the publication of Walt Disney's characters in printed format. Mickey Mouse makes his Hearst appearance in 1930, with Ub Iwerks and later Floyd Gottfredson drawing the stories, initially based on Disney's animated features. It was not long until the character and indeed the brand name was divulged outside of US publications, and found itself translated into a number of languages, as variations of the name Mickey (From Mikki to Miky), and including the very Italianised Topolino.

A product of both France and Belgium, the *bande dessinée* [lit. 'drawn strip'] (BD) initially started as translated reprints of US stories, especially from Disney's publications in the *Journal de Mickey* (Van Lente and Dunlavey 2012: 145; Andreani 2014: 56). Under Nazi occupation and the Vichy government all US imports were banned, and authors were left to the creation of their own material. The most successful and innovative product of this time was Hergé's *Tintin*, a likeable, young journalist/reporter with his dog Milou (known in English as 'Snowy'), who with each adventure would visit a different country and learn about its folklore and traditions, in a plot usually revolving around some type of mystery or minor crime. The biggest innovation arising from Hergé's creation was his use of the *ligne claire* ('clear line') to draw the characters of his stories, in conjunction with relatively complex and detailed backgrounds (Duncan and Smith 2009: 297; see Figure 8, below).





Figure 8 – Example from *Les Aventures de Tintin*

This style of drawing was subsequently adopted by other authors for their own characters and stories, such as René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo's *Astérix le Gaulois* ('Asterix the Gaul'), a humorous pseudo-historical comic dealing with the adventures of a tribe of Gauls. After the initial serial publication, the comics are collected in a *graphic album*, usually hardcover, and sold in specialised shops (Van Lente and Dunlavey 2012: 147).

Japan was also influenced by the US production of comics, and once again Disney was the major export, though the origin of *manga* [lit. 'involuntary drawings'] is to be found in paintings and scrolls pre-dating the Modern Era. The modern Japanese *manga*, however, is considered to have seen its inception in the publication of Charles Wirgman's version of British magazine *Punch* for ex-pats living in Japan, and its imitation by Japanese artists (Van Lente and Dunlavey 2012: 188). The figurehead of not just manga, but the whole of comics, is recognised by critics and readers alike to be Osamu Tezuka (1928-1989) (Van Lente and Dunlavey 2012: 189).

On the proverbial other side of the pond from the US, Scotland was the true birthplace of the UK's own type of comics, with Glasgow seeing the first publications of comics strips in collected format, as far back as 1825 (Van Lente and Dunlavey 2012: 174). It was the American influence during World War Two, however, that truly launched the comic book in the British Isles, initially as reprints and imports of the US publications.

In Italy, the first proper *fumetti* [lit. 'little smokes', after the thought bubble shape] date back to 1908, with the creation of a supplement to daily newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera* ['The



Evening Courier’]: *Il Corriere dei Piccoli* [‘The Little Ones’ Courier’] or *Corrierino* [‘Little Courier’]. The format was very similar to that of Töpffer’s panels, with captioned illustrations depicting stories of a semi-moralistic nature. This was also the case for comics strips imported from other countries, such as the aforementioned , in which the speech bubbles were removed entirely and replaced with Töpffer-esque captions, usually containing rhyming couplets narrating an almost entirely different story than the original (D’Arcangelo and Zanettin 2004: 188).

With the advent of Fascism (1922-1945), the *Corrierino* became a medium for the regime’s propaganda, and was joined by the overtly Fascist *Il Balilla* and the Catholic *Il Giornalino* [‘The Little Newspaper’] (Musella 2009). Disney’s production resisted much longer than others, for the popularly held reason that Mussolini was a fan of the existing stories (cf. D’Arcangelo and Zanettin 2004: 188-9), but it was only a matter of time until the production became entirely Italian, with new stories, new characters and new styles added and replacing the originals (Restaino 2004: 69). 1934 had its first Italian comic book publication, in the magazine *L’avventuroso*, showcasing the likes of Flash Gordon, Dick Tracy, Mandrake, Buck Rogers – characters of the US genre canon which fit well with the ideology of Mussolini’s cult of the body and heroism, without falling into readily identifiable American elements.

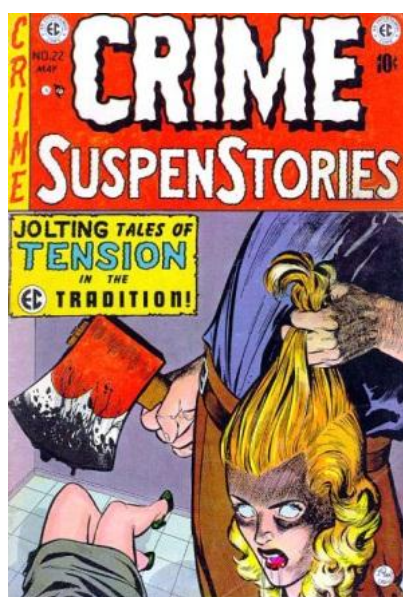


Figure 9 – The EC controversial cover

### 2.2.2 The Era of Diversification (b. 1940)

The first real decline of the superhero genre was characterised by the reinvigoration of different types of pre-existing genres, such as science-fiction, crime, horror, romance, western and funny animals. The latter became extremely popular through *Walt Disney’s Comics and Stories*, as well as due to the work of Carl Barks, the creator of the Duck family, spreading widely across the US and, later, Europe and the rest of the world (Van Lente and Dunlavey 2012: 48). The other big genre in this period was William Gaines’ EC New Trend, focusing on gory horror comics, which contributed to the troubles of the following

years, as discussed in the next section. The superhero genre

was no longer the sole protagonist of the comic book industry, though still undoubtedly held a strong hold on the output of the major publishers not involved in syndicated work – which was by now expanding even more rapidly, with authors such as Schulz and Walker establishing their mark of the 1950s (Restaino 2004: 95-6). The general perception of the medium, however, was starting to settle into tolerance and the beginnings of the prejudice typical of mass-media

innovations, as had happened before to novels, genre fiction, periodicals, photography, and film (cf. Andreani 2014: 57-8; Restaino 2004: 95-110).

In Japan, Tezuka becomes a pioneer in his work on both illustration and animation, influenced by Walt Disney's work, and acting as influence himself on the US company's production.<sup>10</sup> He established the grounds for *shōnen manga*, comics for boys, and even created the first *shōjo manga*, its counterpart for girls, and his animation was inspired by Hanna and Barbera's work in the field, leading to the creation of what was then known in the US as *Astro Boy*, making Tezuka a popular author outside of his native Japan (Van Lente and Dunlavey 2012: 193-4). The development and redevelopment of characters across multiple countries are also partly due to several creators finding themselves immersed in other comics creation contexts; in the Italian case in particular, Argentina was a significant influence on the structure, layout and even themes that fit the antifascist sensibilities of post-War Italy. Above all, characters like those in *As de Espadas* and *Misterix* – echoes of Eisner, Gould, and Raymond's own creations – found fertile ground among Dino Battaglia and Paul Campani, and the work of Héctor Germán Oesterheld had a profound impact on Hugo Pratt, with the character of Corto Maltese resembling in more ways than one that of 'El sargento Kirk' (Andreani 2014: 64-5).

### 2.2.3 The Era of Retrenchment (b. 1952)

After an initially positive reception from media and audiences, comics started being seen as subliterary, not insignificantly through Sterling North's 1940 essay 'A National Disgrace (And a Challenge to American Parents)', attacking the 'low-culture' of comic book, and even more strongly, Frederic Wertham's 1954 book *The Seduction of the Innocent*, which held the medium directly responsible for juvenile delinquency (Wertham 2009: 53-7).<sup>11</sup> Wertham and Gaines, among others, both appeared in court, and the result was the unfortunate mass-media spreading of the message that comics were, indeed, a bad thing, especially for children (Van Lente and Dunlavey 2012: 83-4).

While not a new development for popular entertainment media, the reaction in the comics industry was particularly felt in the US. Therefore, the industry established the self-regulating Code of the Comics Association of America,<sup>12</sup> effectively censoring the content of

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<sup>10</sup> *The Lion King* was inspired by Tezuka's *The Jungle Emperor*, which in turn was influenced by Disney's *Bambi* (Van Lente and Dunlavey 2012: 192).

<sup>11</sup> Wertham's study showed that the majority of juvenile delinquents in a correctional facility read comics, and had done throughout their childhood. His conclusion was that there existed a direct correlation between reading comics (containing violence) and crime, homosexuality and other 'deviant' behaviour (Wertham 2009: 53-7).

<sup>12</sup> The code includes rules such as 'Restraint in the use of the word "crime" in titles or sub-titles shall be exercised' and 'Suggestive and salacious illustration or suggestive posture is unacceptable'. Full text available online at <http://www.comicartville.com/comicscode.htm>.

some of the less mainstream publications, in favour of the bigger publishers with 'tamer' series. The increase in television sales was also detrimental to the comics industry, as televised programming took over the entertainment in households (Duncan and Smith 2009: 40).

In the UK, an attack similar to the one voiced by Wertham started taking root as of the 1940s; headed by Communist party member Peter Mauger, the anti-comic movement assumed an extra layer of political ideology, by branding US comics as a 'threat to the UK way of life' (Van Lente and Dunlavey 2012: 175). With the increase in international relations and the strong alliances formed between the UK and the US, however, Mauger's movement lost its strengths, and limited itself to 'horror' and 'crime' genre comics, leading to the Children and Young Person (Harmful Publications) Act in 1955, essentially prohibiting the circulation of crime and horror comics (Van Lente and Dunlavey 2012: 176).

#### 2.2.4 The Era of Connection (b. 1954)

With the arrival of new editor Julius 'Julie' Schwartz at DC, some of the old superhero characters, the first one being the Flash, were reimagined and brought back into the mainstream, once again becoming the leading genre in the industry. What is sometimes referred to as Silver Age of Comics (cf. Wolk 2007:7) thus began, and fans became more and more prominent and involved in the reception and creation of the comics, with Schwartz personally



Figure 10 – Amazing Fantasy #15

corresponding, meeting and liaising with readers, contributing to the creation of the fandom community (Duncan and Smith 2009:45, 171). At Marvel Comics, on the other hand, Stan Lee started creating, together with the artistic talent of Jack Kirby, the first 'superheroes with super problems' (Hatfield 2012: 116), with the biggest success in the introduction of Spider-Man, in *Amazing Fantasy* #15. The audience felt they could now identify with the characters, with the latter's infallibility now removed, increasing the popularity and therefore success of the industry (Duncan and Smith 2009: 45-7).

After World War Two and the fall of the Fascist regime, the Italian comics trend reverted to US-influenced superhero stories, with a twist: the idea of a 'superman' had by now assumed negative connotations, and was replaced by human masked vigilantes, with no superpowers. Women characters started becoming more prominent, albeit usually in a more sensual manner than their male counterparts, focusing on their physicality rather than their actions (Musella 2009) (see section 2.2.2). The 1950s brought a new creative team to Disney

Italia, as mentioned above, including Romano Scarpa and Giovan Battista Carpi, one of the co-creators of *Paperinik*. In the 1960s, renowned critic Umberto Eco published *Apocalittici e Integrati* [lit. 'Apocalyptic and Integrated'] (1964), containing a chapter on the importance of comics, increasing the relevance of the medium within the Italian critical reception.

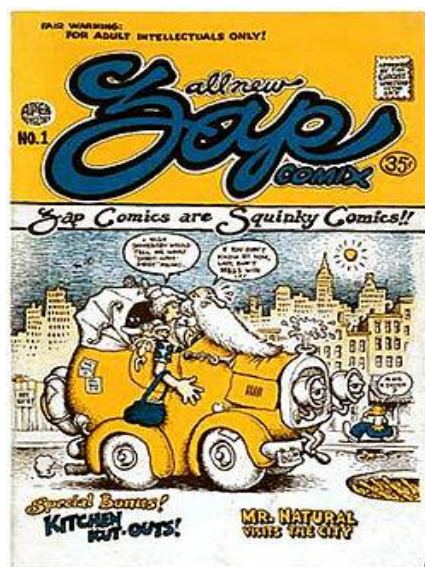


Figure 11 – Zap #1

### 2.2.5 The Era of Independence (b. 1958)

Riding the newly rediscovered appeal of comics, smaller, independent artisan-created *comix* (intentionally changing the spelling to show the counter-cultural element of the publications) appeared across the US. They took on different forms, lengths and content, including violence, sexual acts and most activities banned by the Comics Code Authority, the body which implemented the censoring code created by the industry itself (see 2.2.3 above). The major author to emerge from this period was Robert Crumb, with the *Zap*

publication. Art Spiegelman also found his roots in the

underground movement (Van Lente and Dunlavey 2012: 170).

In the Francophone BD, Hergé's simple style does not permeate the whole field, as artists such as Jean Giraud, also known as Moebius, were interested in and influenced by the work of US underground artists like Crumb, and shifted their own production towards more mature themes, with the creation in 1974 of the independent magazine *Métal Hurlant*, later exported to the US as *Heavy Metal* (Van Lente and Dunlavey 2012: 148). While the original French publication folded in 1979, the US version is still running strong today, and has contributed to the recognition of several writers and artists in the industry. The *Astérix et Obélix* creators Goscinny and Uderzo, along with Jean-Michel Charlier, are also involved in another magazine, *Pilote*, founded in 1959 under the influence of both *MAD* magazine and the adventure and humour genres in the US. With the advent of the political shifts post-1968, several authors split from *Pilote*, setting up a number of monthly magazines on the template of Italian *Linus* (see below), publishing a considerable number of Italian stories in translation, and contents of a more satirical, critical, socially engaged nature (Andreani 2014: 117-8).

In Italy, 1962, sisters Angela and Luciana Giussani created *Diabolik*, a crime series revolving around the misdeeds of the eponymous main character and his fiancée Eva Kant. Already a character inspired to the French Fantomas character of the serialised crime and thriller works in *feuilletons*, several imitators appeared, riding the success of the series, such as

Magnus and Max Bunker's *Kriminal*, the spoof *Cattivik* by Bonvi, and Disney's take on the genre, the already mentioned *Paperinik*. 1967 saw the publication of what is considered the greatest Italian comic so far (Musella 2009): Hugo Pratt's *La Ballata del Mare Salato*, featuring definitely not Argentinian Corto Maltese and set across different locations worldwide. Other female characters appeared, as in Eva Kant's own spin-off series, and works such as *Satanik* and Guido Crepax's *Valentina*. One of the most significant developments on the Italian landscape, at this stage, is the creation of anthology magazine *Linus*, which includes translations of Schultz' *Peanuts* strips (as the title might suggest), in which Crepax makes his debut, and where the Italian tradition of critical approaches to the comics medium, as seen with Eco, is furthered, treating its subject matter 'not only as entertainment, but as a mature means of communication and expression' (Andreani 2014: 89; my translation).

#### 2.2.6 The Era of Ambition (b. 1978)

Comic creators started striving for higher recognition, and tackling more mature themes, such as Will Eisner's *A Contract with God* (1978), telling the story of a Jewish father's struggle with his faith after the death of his daughter. With the 1970s, the Silver Age ended, leading into the Bronze Age (cf. Wolk 2007:7), which would last until 1985.

In Japan, not everyone was in awe of Tezuka's work, as some dubbed manga as too 'juvenile', and adopted the word *genkiga* (lit. 'dramatic drawings') instead (Duncan and Smith 2009:294); with a more complex style than Tezuka's simple cartooning, *genkiga* authors were trying to appeal to more mature readers, and succeeded to the point that Tezuka himself started writing *genkiga* stories, yet still keeping his personal style (Van Lente and Dunlavey 2012: 196). Critics have argued that while Western comics post-1970s have started creating more of an elite culture, due to the overly-detailed and realistic styles and complex plotlines, manga, thanks to Tezuka's work, never lost its status of mass-literature (Van Lente and Dunlavey 2012: 196). Indeed, manga is one of the biggest imports in the Western comics market, aiding the rapid diffusion of a passion for Japanese pop culture, and makes up a good percentage of the current distribution in most countries (Van Lente and Dunlavey 2012: 197).

The British superhero genre, and the newly re-established US import market, were the biggest influence on writers such as Northampton-based Alan Moore, Glaswegian Grant Morrison and Hampshire-born Neil Gaiman, creating a section of the industry aimed more at



Figure 12 – A Contract with God



adults, to compete in parallel with the more ‘innocuous’ childrens’ comics such as *The Beano* and *The Dandy*, both established in the early 30s (Duncan and Smith 2009: 307). Indeed, British authors, alongside artists such as Brian Bolland, Dave Gibbons and David Lloyd, were some of the biggest names involved in the creation of the Modern Age of Comics (see 2.2.7-8 above; the Age terminology is still to be regarded as lacking critical weight, but as a term employed by readerships, it is worth highlighting here), and sparked the phenomenon known as the ‘British Invasion’ of US comics (Van Lente and Dunlavey 2012: 182). Another aspect of British comics worthy of note is the long-running tradition of the *2000AD* magazine, established in 1977 and still going strong today,<sup>13</sup> which introduced, among others, the character of Judge Dredd, and launched several British artists onto the wider, mainstream market (Duncan and Smith 2009: 308-9).

During the 1970s, political dissent started permeating Italian publications, leading to the creation of several satirical characters such as Sergio Staino’s *Bobo* and Altan’s *Cipputi* and the continuation of the work in *Linus*. At the same time, authors such as Guido Buzzati started moving away from the US-influenced comic book style towards lengthier, denser graphic novels, closer to French and Belgian productions. Erotic comics continued to assert their presence under the guidance of Milo Manara, one of Hugo Pratt’s ‘students’, and the humorous animal strip *Lupo Alberto* was created by Silver (Musella 2009).

A minor revolution occurred in Italian *fumetti* during the 1980s, with the publisher Sergio Bonelli Editore releasing *Ken Parker*, a Western series which set the new standard for serial publications in Italy up to current times (Musella 2009). This was seen in the birth of Alfredo Castelli’s *Martin Mystère* and Tiziano Sclavi’s *Dylan Dog*, the latter translated and published in the US as a miniseries, in the early 2000s (cf. D’Arcangelo and Zanettin 2004). The two series focused on mystery, science-fiction, and horror, with the emphasis on the splatter genre and a heavy humour-relief presence in supporting characters. The superhero parody series *Rat-Man* saw the light in 1989, written and drawn by Leo Ortolani. The series would then continue into the 2000s, along with most of the other publications by Sergio Bonelli and Disney, which currently make up the majority of the market, alongside imports from US and Japan.

The 1980s also saw another French influence planting its seeds on Italian soil, with the magazine-collective *Frigidaire* shaping itself around the *Métal Hurlant* ideas, and including elements of the underground *comix* from the US tradition, with irreverent, politically minded creators such as Andrea Pazienza, Filippo Scozzari, and Tanino Liberatore, and the more artistic Igort, Lorenzo Mattotti, and Giorgio Carpinteri (cf. Andreani 2014: 106-8).

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<sup>13</sup> Compared, sadly, to *The Dandy*, which has ceased printed publication as of December 2012.

The French front, on the other hand, was still finding its more experimental side, definitely a rupture from the previous US-influence, in the sci-fi *humanoïdes associés* production of Moebius, Druillet, Picaret, and Tardi, and the subsequent cross-pollination between Italian and French experimental longforms, culminating in some of the first independent 'graphic novels', before the term is actually used in an official capacity (cf. Andreani 2014: 112-4; Restaino 2004: 267-8). This landscape also eventually contributed to the creation of underground, independent publisher *L'Association*, responsible for the publication of Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* and David B. *L'Ascension du Haut Mal*, in the late 1990s, early 2000s.

### 2.2.7 The Greatest Year (1986)

Two major mainstream graphic novels, Frank Miller and Klaus Johnson's *The Dark Knight Returns*, and Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen*, moved away from traditional superhero depictions, introducing a darker, grittier, more politicised perspective. Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, a bio-historiographical depiction of the author's father's life as a Polish Jew and Holocaust survivor, was later awarded the Pulitzer Prize (in 1992). Not all critics, however, were willing to recognise it as a comic, partially due to its 'serious' content matter, partly to Spiegelman describing himself as a cartoonist, and partly because of the pervading prejudice against the medium (Van Lente and Dunlavy 2012: 173).



Figure 13 – The Dark Knight Returns, Watchmen and The Complete Maus

Amidst other criticism, there is still some debate over whether the three sampled texts are indicative of the 'maturation' of the genre, or whether they should be considered more as an indication of the shift in the the perception of the medium at the time – especially given the fact that the three major names associated with the texts were from a flourishing and prolific underground scene, which did not and still does not seek the attention of the mainstream arts and critical world (cf. Gravett 2013: 20).

### 2.2.8 1986 – The Era of Reiteration (b. 1986)

After the success of the Big Three (*Watchmen*, *Maus* and *The Dark Knight Returns*), other publishers started catering to a smaller, more ‘mature’ and specialised audience. If critics did not accept *Maus* as a comic, then Neil Gaiman’s *The Sandman* definitely challenged the assumption of comics not being serious: the inclusion of discussions on trans and gender identities, alternative sexualities, death, suicide, divinity, set against the trademark Vertigo horror backdrop made sure of that. Published in 1994, Kurt Busiek and Alex Ross’ *Marvels* depicted a ‘realistic’ take on the world of superheroes, seen from the eyes of a human journalist and photographer. The idea of how the real, non-superhero world behaves and reacts to the superhumans has been revisited at other times in the genre, and still is. Notable examples are Mark Waid and Alex Ross’ *Kingdom Come* (1996), several incarnations and spin-offs of the *X-Men* franchise, and more recently John Arcudi and Peter Snejbjerg’s *A God Somewhere* (2010). The Modern Age of Comics (cf. Wolk 2007:7) began, also called the Dark Age, with relation to the contents and style of the stories produced in this period (Vogel 2006).



Figure 14 – Marvels

### 2.2.9 2000s – The Era of Recognition

While this could arguably be said to start with *Maus* in 1992, the media, academia and popular criticism are now more likely to recognise comics *as* comics, rather than trying to compare them to literature or art. For example, Chris Ware’s *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth* (2000) was recognised for its ‘outstanding literary achievement’ by the American Book Awards in 2001. *Time* magazine chose Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006) for its best book of 2006 (*Time*). As of 2009, *Publishers Weekly*’s Best Book has a Comics section, and Ware’s *Building Stories* obtained first place in the general category of 2012, beating a Man Booker Prize winner, Hilary Mantel’s *Bring Up the Bodies* (*Publishers Weekly* Best Books 2012). In December 2012, two graphic novels were for the first time shortlisted for the Costa Book Awards, in two separate categories.<sup>14</sup> This new era also sees the rise of (Anglophone) Comics Studies as an academic discipline,<sup>15</sup> the proliferation of comic book-based films, and what Wolk

<sup>14</sup> Mary and Brian Talbot’s *Dotter of Her Father’s Eyes* (2012) and Joff Winterhart’s *Days of the Bagnold Summer* (2012). More below.

<sup>15</sup> As Groensteen points out, French academia had been studying the medium, albeit this was limited to one or two scholars, since the 1960s (2007: 1-2).



regards as the 'real Golden Age' (2007: 10), with the expansion into the digital realms of both creation and delivery of comics, and the highly complex levels of storytelling and artistic renditions.

In the 1960s, French film scholar Claude Beylie proposed that BD should be considered the 'ninth art',<sup>16</sup> therefore identifying comics as a medium in itself, rather than a hybrid of visual art and literature (Duncan and Smith 2009: 297). To this day, comics are held in extremely high regard in France and Belgium, with one of the most important centres in the world dedicated to comics, the *Cité internationale de la Bande Dessinée et de l'Image*, situated in Angoulême, France, and including work from all authors and genres in the medium; Brussels, in addition, sees the presence of the Belgian Comic Strip Centre, another monument to the ninth art.

*Manga* is still a major portion of the import market in most countries, and has brought with it its very different set of visual conventions, developed independently from its original US influence (Duncan and Smith 2009: 296).<sup>17</sup> These elements, as well as sound effects and reading order (right-to-left rather than left-to-right), were initially replaced or 'translated' when manga were first imported by Marvel/Epic comics to the Anglophone market – though not by all, other publishers kept the *kanji* intact. After protests from both Japanese authors and fans of the original texts, however, editorial meetings were had, and the mainstream publishing industry opted to keep the 'originals' (as smaller publishers were already doing), by leaving sound effects in Japanese script (*kanji*, the adopted Chinese characters, and *hiragana* and *katakana*, the two Japanese scripts; all three are integral to written Japanese), preserving the reading order and even simply transliterating Japanese words rather than translating them (Van Lente and Dunlavey 2012: 197).

The general mainstream media, along with multiple smaller publications, especially online, have conferred even more importance on the public perception of comics as a medium – though 'genre' is very much still erroneously used by non-specialists on occasion, along with childish headlines and attitudes during news reports or articles – and increasing recognition has been devoted by the mainstream media, academia, and general public to comics as an entity in and of itself. The repercussions have been felt across countries and cultures that do not necessarily have a history of tolerant coexistence, as opposed to say France or Belgium, as pointed out just above. Both the US and the UK have featured, in the press, interviews with cartoonists, artists, creators and even editors in some cases, especially from 2001 onwards. In what is definitely an unfortunate set of circumstances, comics artists' responses to the World

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<sup>16</sup> The other eight being, in descending order: architecture, sculpture, painting, dance, music, poetry, cinema and television.

<sup>17</sup> An example is the way in which manga represents a character sleeping (a bubble blowing from its nose) versus its comics counterpart (a log being sawed, or simply 'zzzzz') (Duncan and Smith 2009: 296).

Trade Center attacks were published across daily and weekly newspapers, and a number of collected volumes (e.g. *9-11: Artists Respond*, 2002). A similar response, from both the cartoon and comics arts world, and the general press, has later been seen for other negative happenings such as the 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* shootings – however controversial the issue has been in terms of actual response, and subsequent nationalist and racist discourses produced – and the same year’s reactions to the Syrian migrant and refugee crisis. In a sense, where photography might break the story as it were, the comics world, both professional and independent, fan-based creations, usually responds in great numbers, and ends up as a feature on general media coverage (e.g. online publications *BuzzFeed* and *Huffington Post* pieces). Another, perhaps even more pervasive and diffused example of this, and one which seems to be oblivious to its own inherent irony,<sup>18</sup> is the symbol of the Anonymous collective and the Occupy movement(s): the Guy Fawkes mask from *V for Vendetta* (James McTeigue, 2006). The film, an adaptation of the dystopian comic by Alan Moore and David Lloyd (1989), has evidently resonated with several political anti-establishment movements, and the mask has been used by protesters on a number of occasions across 2011 and 2012, from the so-called Arab Spring in 2011 to student protests to the aforementioned Occupy demonstrations, and still appears at political events. Despite the fact that the mask design is directly from the film’s merchandise, the book also received rebound attention, with a new edition being released in conjunction with the mask itself, and both Lloyd and Moore positively speaking about the response, if not the actual film.<sup>19</sup>

In a much more positive light, at least in terms of the visibility for the comics medium and the stories produced within it, are the developments in place at Disney-owned Marvel Studios. Namely, the slew of superhero films, usually among the highest ranking and most anticipated in both comics fandoms and cinema-goers. Since *Iron-Man* (2008), though there had been multiple comics-based films released well before then, the superhero genre has seemingly taken over the mainstream, more popular cinematic blockbuster industry, with some of the highest grossing features (e.g. *The Avengers* (2012), *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014)) being adapted by the comics writers and artists themselves.<sup>20</sup> The seeming ‘saturation’ has definitely caught the attention of other branches of the entertainment industry media, with articles and opinion pieces denouncing the monopoly that action films in the superhero category hold, and the effects this seems to have on other productions. Cinematographer

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<sup>18</sup> The emblematic power of the symbol, remarked upon by both Moore and Lloyd in interviews, also meant that Warner Brothers – the copyright holders – and online retailer Amazon have seen an increase in income... from an anti-establishment, anti-capitalist initiative.

<sup>19</sup> Moore’s name does not appear in the credits, while Lloyd’s does as co-creator of the story.

<sup>20</sup> In fact, Ed Brubaker, who co-authored the comics storyline and the screenplay, also has a cameo role in the film itself.

Steven Spielberg himself, in some ways the starter of the 'blockbuster' genre, stated in an interview that:

We were around when the Western died and there will be a time when the superhero movie goes the way of the Western. It doesn't mean there won't be another occasion where the Western comes back and the superhero movie someday returns. Of course, right now the superhero movie is alive and thriving. I'm only saying that these cycles have a finite time in popular culture.

(2015)

Whichever direction the film industry will take, the spotlight has undoubtedly fallen onto the superhero genre for the time being, and more widely, the comics medium, even through the means of somewhat negative publicity. The support, however oblique, of mainstream media figures such as Spielberg above, is a welcome change to the ageless (unfounded) criticism about comics-based media being superficial, childish, or immature.

As for entirely positive publicity, on the other hand, wider organisation and institutions have acknowledged the 'validity' of texts sourced in the comics medium as part of their own categories, building on the ambiguity I talked about above related to the commentary on Spiegelman's Pulitzer award. As briefly mentioned above, in 2012 the literary Costa Book Award in the UK shortlisted two graphic novels, with *Dotter of Her Father's Eyes*, by Mary and Bryan Talbot winning the biography category (2012). Similarly, in Italy, the 2014 edition of the Premio Strega, arguably the most prestigious in the country, saw Gipi's *Unastoria* (2013) nominated for the final longlist, though not proceeding to the actual shortlist – and the press, specialist and general, both saw it as a victory for the comics medium within Italian publication spheres, rather than a defeat that it never was awarded a prize (Pierri 2014). So much so that the following year, yet another comics artist, ZeroCalcare, was nominated for the prize, and commented by recognising the occasion as a sign that:

il fumetto ormai viene percepito come un linguaggio e non più come un genere, e in quanto linguaggio può affrontare qualsiasi genere, dal saggio alla fantascienza alla storia d'amore. E questa è una cosa buona.

*comics are now seen as a language [or medium - AV] and no longer as a genre, and as a language they can deal with any genre, from essays to science fiction to romance. And this is a good thing.*

(2015; my translation)

Similar to the discussion that I have come back to throughout both the introduction and the

initial section of this chapter, general opinion is swaying towards a recognition of comics as its own entity, medium and language, through commercial success, high-profile creators, multimedia publicity and establishment recognition. As comics journalist Laura Sneddon points out, however:

there are still breakdowns in understanding. In bookshops, graphic novels are squashed together with spandex-clad heroes and comics intended for children. Autobiography sits next to horror, next to humour, next to fantasy. This confusion as to how to shelve them is symptomatic of a wider failure of our culture to understand how comics work, which is responsible for the irritating headlines, and blinkered attempts at critically addressing the medium.

(2015)

As with any form of wider recognition, criticism and confusion will always be underlying and undermining the positive shifts in the perception of the subject matter. Comics have had, as shown in the sections above, a troubled history in the public eye and in academia. Even so, recent developments have seen the appointment of the very first UK comics laureate in October 2014 – *Watchmen* co-creator Dave Gibbons – and the creation of the Comics Studies Society, as an organisation specifically devoted to Comics Studies, in North America. Perhaps even more significantly, from a mainstream (mostly British) public perspective, was the British Library exhibition ‘Comics Unmasked: Art and Anarchy in the UK’ in summer 2014, with its annexed academic conference, public talks and archival work supervised by curators Paul Gravett, Adrian Edwards, and John Harris Dunning. The significance that the British Library holds in the public opinion, its status of repository of knowledge and keeper of information, played a crucial part in bringing several hundreds of visitors to the exhibition and talks, shedding some light on an often underrepresented branch of Anglophone comics. In my review for *Studies in Comics* 5.2, I conclude by stating that:

Overall, the display of ‘Comics Unmasked’ was a superbly executed synaesthetic experience, one that seemed to lose its plot as the strip guiding visitors tried to border the limits of the space and indicate how those limits really no longer exist. Constraints and complaints can be generally reduced to the physical space of the British Library[.]

(2014: 430)

There were, of course, negative reactions and responses to the darker aspects of the medium on show in the displays, though the overwhelming response was one of intrigue, interest and further exploration of the medium on behalf of casual visitors and self-made experts in the

field.

To bring this section to a close, then, I believe that the evidence and highlights of the timeline(s) running towards 2015 and onwards have shown the flexibility and flux of the comics medium, within its own development and from the outside through translation and transnational influences, as its perception and reception have changed through time and in different cultures that embrace the medium to any extent.

### **3. Back to Basics**

#### *Terminology*

As we saw in section 1 of this chapter, while it is difficult to pinpoint the definition of comics, there appears to be agreement over one element: comics contain a series or sequence of images. The issues surrounding the progression of the sequence have already been discussed above. What I shall discuss now is the importance and co-dependency of the various elements that compose a comic, starting from the elementary units on which the entire comics language is based. This approach takes different shapes in the two major comics studies schools, English (e.g. McCloud) and French (e.g. Groensteen), as I will illustrate below. The identification of the basic concepts, however, does not vary; the difference lies in acknowledging or recognising the importance of one feature over the other.

#### 3.1 Icons and images

Comics are, first and foremost, objects of a visual nature. They tell stories through images, be they pictorial or not, mimetic or abstract. McCloud claims that ‘visual iconography is the vocabulary of comics’ (1993: 67), in that it provides the basic elements for the narrative, and the medium, to exist. As we will see in the next sections, however, this is not sufficient: the mere presence of images does not create a comic.

The efficacy of the art form employed by the comics medium is derived from the highly communicative function of images over texts, as the former are ‘easily and quickly grasped by the viewer’, ‘effectively capturing the essence of an object or a person’ (Lefèvre 2011: 72).<sup>21</sup> I choose to use McCloud’s interpretation of *icon* (1993: 27), defined as any image ‘used to represent a person, place, thing or idea’. Subcategories include *symbols*, representing

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<sup>21</sup> This latter claim, however, can be problematic when faced with ‘essence’ corresponding to ‘stereotype’, and characters’ personalities being depicted and communicated by their outward appearance. Famous examples are the construction and depiction of race in some *Tintin* stories (e.g. Rifas 2011) and the overwhelmingly sexist depiction of women and female characters in the medium in general (e.g. Stuller 2011).

‘concepts, ideas and philosophies’ (ibid.), icons of the practical realm, ‘language, science and communication’ (ibid.) and *pictures*, ‘designed to actually resemble their subjects’ (ibid.). A further subsection of the latter is the *cartoon*, which possesses the properties described by Lefèvre, above, and is characterised by ‘simplified, exaggerated characters [...] created primarily by line and contour’ (Witek 2011: 29). Furthermore, cartoons, but also icons in general, demand the reader’s participation to make them work (McCloud 1993: 59; also see Figure 15 below) in what is ultimately an actively creative process, similar to that of a literary text (e.g. Iser 1954: 279).

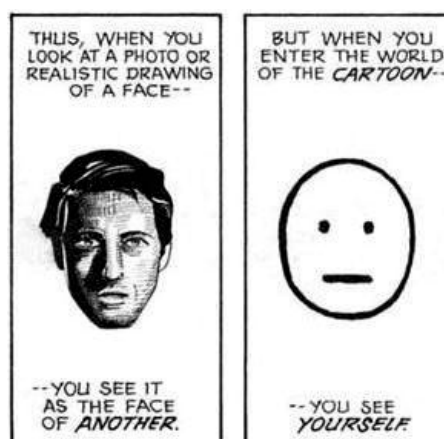


Figure 15 – Realistic vs. Cartoon (McCloud 1993: 60)

Cartoons, however, are not the only type of pictorial representation employed by comics artists. Witek identifies a second narrative mode in what he calls naturalistic representations; these generally follow ‘artistic conventions for creating the illusion of physical forms existing in three-dimensional space’ (2011: 29). He also ascribes the cartoon mode to superhero, Disney and similar comics, and the naturalistic one to bio/autobiographical and journalistic comics, on the basis of the readers responding to the latter’s aesthetics with a view of ‘plausibility’ (2011: 30-1). This is, I believe, a debatable – even untenable – point, as superhero comics illustrators such as Alex Ross and Doug Braithwaite use a realistic style, precisely because of the plausibility effect. On the other hand, Art Spiegelman, Craig Thompson, Alison Bechdel and other graphic novel creators choose the cartoon mode to relay their non-fictional stories. McCloud’s take on this matter is the distinction and interplay of the two modes of representation: artists choose realism to ‘portray the world without’, cartoons to ‘portray the world within’ (1993: 41). In other words, a realistic depiction of a person, or rather a mimetically faithful, one that adheres to conventions of verisimilitude, will communicate the objective features of that character to the reader, whereas the cartoon will indicate the character’s emotions, state of mind, or even perception from the narrator or other characters’ points of view.

Whichever mode/s an artist decides to employ, images remain at the basis of the language of comics. To reiterate a previous point, due to their property of constituting received information, versus the perceived information of writing (McCloud 1993: 49), pictures are more direct, more likely to attract and appeal to potential readers, and can convey larger amounts of information than written text, within the same physical constraints of the page. They can also function on multiple planes at the same time, showing the reader the story or telling the reader about the story, or even adding non-diegetic elements, such as an author's intervention or commentary (Duncan 2011: 44-5).

This is a concept already developed in academia by scholars working in the field of children's literature, where critics claim that there may be a 'sort of semic slippage, where word and image seem to send conflicting, perhaps contradictory messages' (Moebius 2009: 313). In this sense, the images may not only be used to illustrate the textual element of the story, but also add at times more honest aspects of it. Images can more immediately comment, as children and parents of children who read together will know, on a potentially unreliable speaker (Nodelman 1988: 193; Nikolajeva and Scott 2006: 173-5). Where the approach to the image-text differs between children's literature and comics studies, however, is that ultimately 'comic books break down, or at least blur, boundaries between word texts and picture texts' (Duncan and Smith 2009: 15), whereas in picture books the two are still, arguably, relatively distinct. Both approaches, however, attribute great importance to the role played by the reader in the interpretation of verbal and pictorial elements, a notion that will continue to be stressed throughout this chapter.

### 3.2 Frames of Mind

Groensteen opposes McCloud in recognising the fundamental element of comics as being the method through which stories are arranged, composed and laid out: the *panel*. He draws his support from the field of linguistics and communication studies, arguing that the 'most important codes [of the language or system of comics] concern larger units, [...] [and] govern the articulation, in time and space, of the units that we call "panels"' (2007: 4). He prefers a formal, systematic analysis which finds its starting point in higher levels of structure, rather than the unsystematic, bottom-up approach of focusing on the panels' content (2007: 5). McCloud, and other comics scholars (e.g. Duncan and Smith 2009), do not dismiss the importance of the panel, although they use the terms panel and *frame* interchangeably, and an extensive analysis of its functions is indeed conducted, but they are at times more concerned with what happens between panels than the panels themselves (see section 3.3). It is with Groensteen, therefore, that we find a more structured system.

He identifies six fundamental functions of the panel, each of which contributes to the creation of both the narrative and the format itself. The functions are as follows. The first function, closure, is essentially the description of the panel's encapsulation of a moment of the story, or in Groensteen's (translators Beaty and Nguyen's) text, 'to enclose a fragment of space-time belonging to the diegesis, to signify the coherence' (2007: 40). The borders of the panel are used to identify that the action the reader should be focusing on is contained within them. The other side of the function of closure is the separative one, describing how the panels are isolated from each other, as if by a punctuation of sorts, 'so they can be read separately' (2007: 43). Also, yet again as punctuation, the panels possess a rhythmic function, which 'confer[s] the pace of the story' (2007: 45); by subdividing the narration, comics authors can decide whether an action employs longer to take place or develop, cramming elements within a single frame for action-packed scenes versus wider, emptier panels for pauses or slower events. The effect is also achieved thanks to the structural function of the panels, which simply describes the 'spatial organization and orientation' of the elements of the story within the page (the 'hyperframe') (2007: 48).

The final two functions operate, I would argue, on a slightly more meta-level: the expressive function allows panels to 'inform the images contained', 'instruct the reader', and 'comment on [their] content' (2007: 49-50), whereas the readerly function is, in Groensteen's view, 'an invitation to stop and to scrutinize', an indication that 'there is a content to be deciphered' (2007: 54). There are obviously elements pertaining to authorial intention in these descriptions, and I believe that they actually permeate the other four functions. Groensteen, indeed, does not see the functions as operating on an absolute level, but rather as interacting with each other, and due to the presence of neighbouring panels (2007: 57). He also identifies three of them – the rhythmic, separative and readerly functions – as limited and exclusive to the comics medium, as they 'follow from the foundational principle of the language of comics, that of iconic solidarity, and they specify it already' (57). In Groensteen's view, therefore, these three properties are sufficient to be able to speak of a 'comic', and the idea of some kind of sequence and the presence of a readership, are the underlying necessary conditions.

It can be argued that Groensteen confers more importance to the idea of spatial delimitation, rather than iconic representation. While this is not incorrect, I believe that Groensteen's disregard of the content of the frames undermines the completeness of his analysis. McCloud, conversely, adds a further point to his own discussion. He argues that the panel not only divides spatially, but also temporally (1993: 99), as a sequence of panels is the only way of representing the passing of time, due to the visual nature of the medium. The readers, therefore, 'perceive time spatially, for in the world of comics, time and space are one



and the same' (1993: 100).<sup>22</sup> In this sense, McCloud and Groensteen, while differing on the centrality of the panels, both agree on the importance that panels have to the readers, and ultimately, the importance of the readers themselves, a notion which I will develop further in section 6, below. My attempt in the analysis throughout the thesis is to reconcile the two positions, focusing on both the panel and its content when discussing reading and translation strategies.

### 3.3 Lying in the Gutters

As mentioned above, McCloud focuses more on what happens between panels; at times, even more than the contents of the panels themselves, although, as pointed out in section 4.1, he sees icons as the vocabulary upon which comics are built. The space between panels is called the *gutter*, and McCloud terms the process of moving from one panel to another a *transition*. He recognises six types of transition (1993: 64; see Figure 16, below).



Figure 16 – Transition types (from McCloud 1993: 64)

Each type of transition characterises the differences between the contents of the panels, describing the shift in perspective according to time, action, movement and so on. The first type, called moment-to-moment, is a temporal shift, with the subject unchanged except for some minor detail, such as a tear falling down someone's cheek, or an eye blinking (McCloud 1993: 70-2). The second type, action-to-action, describes a change in the content's movement, or an action, by showing two moments of its execution (ibid.). The third type, subject-to-subject, shifts the panel's focus from one subject to another, whereas the fourth, scene-to-

<sup>22</sup> McCloud does also add that, in fact, space can be regarded as standing in for time. The two concepts do not seem to be mutually exclusive.

scene, may shift drastically across 'space' and 'time', showing events occurring at a distance from each other. The fifth type, aspect-to-aspect, can be used to shift the perspective across a scene, to convey its mood or setting. The final type, non-sequitur, simply describes a transition between panels bearing no apparent relation in content whatsoever (McCloud 1993: 70-2).

As McCloud repeatedly points out, and as I have previously mentioned, reader participation is crucial for the transitions to function successfully, as it is up to the readers themselves to 'connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality' (1993: 67). This is not an idea exclusive to comics, although I believe it is heightened in this medium, due to the perceived dominance of its visual component over the textual. Roland Barthes, in his 1963 book *S/Z*, distinguished the idea of a writerly text and a readerly text. The latter are texts to which readers react passively, a consumable product; whereas the former, by contrast, sees an active reading process, one in which the reader is 'no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text' (Barthes 2002: 4). As previously noted with Groensteen,<sup>23</sup> panels encapsulate separate moments of the narrative, and the story only functions as a whole, as a sequence, if readers are willing to make it so. McCloud borrows a term from Gestalt psychology to describe the cognitive process of creating the transitions, and essentially filling in the blanks: *closure* (1993: 63). He claims that closure is, indeed, the 'grammar of comics', uniting the vocabulary of icons (1993: 67).

Groensteen, while disagreeing with McCloud's 'fetishization' of the gutter (2007: 112),<sup>24</sup> justly points out that the 'progressive construction of meaning' is not comics-specific, referring to work by Iser on reading literary texts (2007: 114). Indeed, McCloud's suggestion that there may be multiple possible interpretations of what actually happens during a transition between two panels does seem a bit too generic and broad a statement. It is possible, of course, to combine the two theories by recognising the element of structure as allowing for the multivalency that both critics discuss, albeit in very different manners. I do insist, however, that McCloud's descriptive analysis of transitions is extremely relevant, and, once again, the importance of reader participation is highlighted, this time by the notion of closure.

### 3.4 Seeing the Invisible

Up to this point, I have mostly operated on the grounds that panels and their content are, arguably, the fundamental characteristics of comics, and are necessary for the story to be told. At the same time, however, due to the visual nature of the medium, there are aspects which cannot be conveyed by those two elements alone, such as emotions, states of mind, inner thoughts, even dialogue between characters and sounds in general. This section briefly looks at

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<sup>23</sup> Whose English translators also use 'readerly' for one of the panel functions (see 3.2).

<sup>24</sup> Yet still refusing to acknowledge him by any name.

methods employed by comics artists to convey different sensorial experiences through the visual medium, thanks to the use of synesthetic strategies (McCloud 1993: 123). It should be noted that while all the following elements can be employed, they are not necessarily fundamental parts of comics, and can be absent; the different elements are combined and used together, to produce various effects, and at times the absence of one of them is highly significant (e.g. the lack of soundwords in Moore and Campbell's *V for Vendetta*).

#### 3.4.1 Balloons

Possibly the most famous aspect of comics is the infamous<sup>25</sup> word- or speech-balloon. A recent, albeit long-winded, definition describes speech balloons as 'containers of verbal and non-verbal information [which] indicate the source of salient information, and imply [its] destination' (Forceville et al. 2010: 66). They are employed to indicate dialogue or thought (in the case of a thought-bubble) occurring within panels and between characters.

The Forceville study on 'balloonics' proves some interesting points in how using a non-standard balloon, that is, a non-white, non-rounded one, varying the size needed to contain the text or their shape, seems to follow a 'standard' rather than arbitrary process of affective reaction in the reader (2010: 58-60). For example, a larger font of text contained within a serrated or 'spiky' edged balloon may convey anger or at least loudness, compared to the perceived muffled 'sound' of a small-font text in a discontinuous rounded one. The findings of the study appear to reinforce the ideas explored in section 3.2, concerning the iconic aspect of the cartoon mode employed by artists (cf. McCloud 1993: 134).

#### 3.4.2 Lines and squiggles

In a similar way, other lines are affected by the same standards of variation in affective reactions (McCloud 1993: 118-20). This is also true in the case of motion lines, which are a way of indicating the movement of characters and objects. While usually fairly straight and regular, motion lines can be subject to degrees of variation to indicate different states of characters or objects. A wobbly line can indicate a state of confusion, dizziness or inebriation, for example, whereas a large, slightly curved 'tail' to a character or lines on the background and/or behind the character may indicate the increased speed at which it is moving (Figure 17 below).

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<sup>25</sup> In Italy, at least, where 'fumetto' was initially a derogatory term for the medium, based on the smoke-like appearance of the wordballoons.



Figure 17 – Motion lines (from Rat-Man #8, p. 7, ff. 5-6)

As a general rule, it is safe to assume that the thicker a line, or a series of lines, is drawn, the bigger the impact it is intended to have on the reader and vice versa (McCloud 1993: 125). Cartoonist Mort Walker, in 1980, ideated a series of names for conventional symbols (which he dubbed *comicana*, or *emanata*) used to represent emotions, states of mind or other non-verbally-conveyable states of being, such as anger, confusion or realisation (see Figure 18 below).

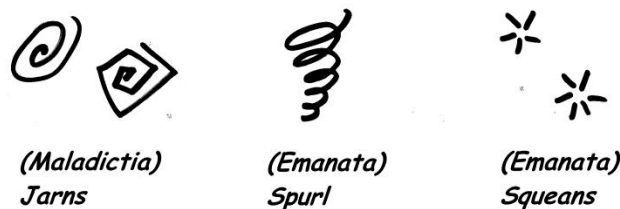


Figure 18 – Types of *comicana* (from Walker 1980)

Research done in the field of children's literature, especially with a focus on picture books, has also contributed to theories pertaining to the spatial and temporal connotations of lines and symbols. Nodelman describes the effects of a series of parallel lines to convey motion and crosshatching to convey the lack of it in the background (1988: 162, 168); he also claims that the visual information not only informs the reader as to the sense of direction, but also carries an emotive effect, contrasting characters or objects characterised by lines and other 'cartoonist techniques' (1988: 161) with those that do not present them (1988: 169). These are the same strategies present in comics, due to the common ancestry of cartooning for illustrators for picture books, and cross-influence of techniques is to be found in the visual and written work alike for both media (e.g. Anthea Bell, children's book author and comics

translator; Dave McKean, comics artist and picturebook illustrator, among several other multimedia qualifications and recognitions).

### 3.4.3 Sound effects

The previous point is especially important in the case of sounds and sound effects. While onomatopoeic words are the most common devices used to identify sounds in comics, there is a widespread use of non-recognisable 'sounds' which play on an ideophonic or phonaesthetic level (cf. McCloud 1993: 87). That is to say, words which convey, to an extent, the connotations or general 'atmosphere' of the sound-device used. The most salient example to bring into discussion here is 'POW', made famous by several TV series based on comics, such as the 1960s action-comedy TV series *Batman*. While the word in itself has no meaning, nor does it describe the sound of a punch being thrown, a new reader of comics will be able to identify, also thanks to the co-presence of the images on the page that 'POW' is the sound of a fist making contact with another surface. In terms of more atmospheric sound, on the other hand, manga has a wide selection of sound-words which convey the sense of something happening without it necessarily having a tangible or audible, or even visible, effect, such as a character's non-verbal thought (McCloud 1993: 87, 134). Comic creators have also come up with their own sound-words (e.g. Ortolani 1989), either for dramatic or humorous effects, or when finding that the available resources were not sufficient for their intent. An excellent database of a good number of sound-words and onomatopoeia has been compiled, and is available online through Written Sound ([LINK](#)).

## **4. Comics Literacy**

As highlighted in sections 3.2 and 3.3 above, there is a substantial amount of cognitive processing involved in reading a comic. Readers are required to actively participate to the extent that comics, even more than novels or poems, will neither 'work' nor will they continue to be published, be this in printed or digital format, if readers lose interest in them (Duncan and Smith 2009: 193). The major appealing factor, and the seat of the readerly power, as discussed above, is located in the visual aspect of the medium, as requiring a relatively low level of cognitive processing to gain information, as opposed to written text. At the same time, readers can, and usually do, become experts at reading comics in both the literal and interpretative meaning, and from a critical perspective of sorts (Duncan and Smith 2009: 195).

There is, however, another aspect to consider, in terms of the reader's roles and power,

in the form of the actual influence that the fan community has on the development of stories, plots and even entire series.<sup>26</sup> As critics have pointed out, ‘comics do not exist in bubbles or vacuums: they are socio-cultural artefacts that must be studied as products both physical and ideological – within the timelines and cultures they evolve from’ (Ricca 2011: 190). The same holds true for any work of art, visual or literary, of course. In the world of comics, however, this is carried even further, as it is a double-feeding system (Pustz 1999: 113). Authors, especially in the case of comics book series, will write plots with the intention of telling a story of their own choosing, but also to please their ‘extremely knowledgeable audience’ (Marvel/IDW writer Simon Furman, personal correspondence, 08/09/2012). At the same time, audiences will react positively to an author’s response to their own feedback. In this sense, the fan community is a truly ‘participatory culture’ (Duncan and Smith 2009: 192-3).

This type of knowledge, ranging from the overall development of a character or series or publishing company or the medium in its entirety – if one were to believe certain archivists/fans – to details about those characters and elements, at times down to the page number or panel, is part of what is known as ‘comics literacy’. Another way of looking at this is as a form of cognitive environment spanning across the whole comics medium, with the readers at its centre. It includes technicalities such as how to read a comic (left-to-right in most cases, or right-to-left in manga, and always top-to-bottom), or how the serialisation of stories works, and aspects which are less practical, such as different artists’ styles, conventions, rules or norms of a series rather than another, with added emphasis on the concept of ‘continuity’, or the cohesion between and within plots and storylines, even at a distance of several years since their passing (Duncan and Smith 2009: 190-1).

The major role played by comics literacy is in the coexistence of cognitive and affective responses to the comics themselves, especially in terms of how to process the closure between panels, and the ‘interanimation of meaning between words and pictures’ (Duncan and Smith 2009: 154). Without the skills developed by time spent reading comics, a reader will not be able to realise that the images and the text present on the page are not working in parallel, but as a co-dependent blend. In this sense, we can observe a reversal of McCloud’s distinction between images as perceived information versus words as received information: a new reader of comics will need some time to acquire the necessary literacy to fully appreciate what the medium is doing, on both the cognitive and affective level.

An additional element to this level of basic comics literacy is gained from a constant engagement with comics (primary material); other readers (the cultural environment; both in

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<sup>26</sup> A recent example of this is the somewhat surprising (and potentially disturbing) interest in the *My Little Pony* toy and cartoon franchise from adult collectors, which in turn led to IDW announcing the forthcoming *My Little Pony* comic series (IDW Press Release, July 2012).

person and via digital means); and other environments such as message boards, social networks, comics conventions and comic book shops, through which readers can fully develop their skills (Duncan and Smith 2009: 192-4).<sup>27</sup> While this may seem, to a non-fan, an arduous or even unnecessary task, there is much to be gained by engaging with the medium, be it in the aspect of comic strips, graphic novels, webcomics, funnies or monthly comic publications, as I have highlighted in section 2.29, above. This type of setting can be related back to the Derridian concept of 'supplement', considered as 'the entire constellation of concepts that shares its system' (Derrida 1997: 144), or, in other words, everything which is not necessary to the main activity, product or concept but exists around it and because of it. In Derrida's notion, the supplement is both additive and subtractive, becoming harmful and useful at the same time. Furthermore, the bigger risk lying within the supplement of the comics world, within the fandom readership, is Derrida's 'chain of supplements':

an infinite chain, ineluctably multiplying the supplementary  
 meditations that produce the sense of the very thing they defer: the  
 mirage of the thing itself, of immediate presence, of originary  
 perception (1997: 157)

What is being described appears to be exactly the reaction of the more engaged and even fanatic readers, who almost lose the enjoyment of the comics themselves entirely by being too absorbed in the environment surrounding them.

What this entails is the existence of another level on which comics literacy operates; in other words, it moves, to an extent, beyond the sphere of comics themselves. As Pustz states, 'comics literacy contributes to the construction of comic book culture by limiting the audience and giving a body of common knowledge' (1999: 110-2). In this sense, one could argue, comic book culture is, in fact, quite an exclusive community, created both through and about the physical product of the comic book. Pustz compares this fan culture to that of sports, claiming that 'like sports fans, comics fans enjoy being experts, even when there is no one with them to share their knowledge' (1999: 114). While this can, unfortunately, correspond to the truth in some cases, I do not believe that the shared common knowledge that comics literacy represents is, by any means, as exclusive as the community formed around it, in part due to the availability and accessibility to comics as reading material to potential readers. What clearly emerges from the discussion, however, is the fundamental, crucial importance of the readership for the medium, as its target audience and means of sustenance, from both an

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<sup>27</sup> Also see the points brought forward by children's literature scholar William Moebius, addressing the building of an affective repository of sorts, and a cognitive one (2009: 312, 316).

economic and cultural perspective.

The world of fandom and comics literacy is not limited to the readership, however. Authors themselves are immersed in this type of environment for a relatively long time before becoming recognised and signed up by a publishing house, and it takes even longer for them to be accepted by the audience that can, at times, believe ‘their’ stories and ‘their’ characters are being mistreated.<sup>28</sup> The multiple authors behind a single comic, with their different levels of expertise, can diffuse the sentiment, influencing and aiding each other’s production.

## **5. Where is the Author?**

*And why does it matter?*

One of the major issues surrounding comics lies in the concept of authorship, in terms of both creative ownership and actual legal settings and debates.<sup>29</sup> My focus, for the purpose of this chapter, is on the first part of the issue: who and where is the author of a comic? And why is this useful or even relevant to translation?

As Ricca justly observes, comics as a whole tend to have ‘multiple creators, different generations of characters, an outer editorial presence, and various other degrees of influence, including (at times) mediated censorship or other cultural pressures behind gender, class or race’ (2011: 190). Indeed, a comics series will have an initial creator or creators, and then proceed to be reimagined and reinvented according to reader response and market demand.<sup>30</sup> While this is less problematic for writer/artists such as Art Spiegelman or Alison Bechdel, there is still an editorial influence (by no means a necessarily negative feature), due to the nature of any written media, comics not exempt (Duncan and Smith 2009:9); in some cases, therefore, the authors may change their approach, either from a textual or from a graphic perspective, due to an editorial or marketing decision. In the case of comics series, on the other hand, this is a much more widespread practice, and there have even been occurrences where authors are replaced entirely.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Any comments thread – i.e. The Lower Half of the Internet – for any new announcement for any franchise will support this claim.

<sup>29</sup> Again, studies in children’s literature also address this issue, although the concept of the author is less problematic (e.g. Nikolajeva and Scott 2006: 29-60).

<sup>30</sup> Such is the case for characters owned by DC comics, for example, which have since their inception assumed various mantles and undergone several reimaginings, in an attempt to keep the stories up to date with the rest of the market, to the point of the entire DC Universe being ‘rebooted’ in 2011, i.e. the stories, and issue numbers, being reset, breaking off from any previous continuity (Hyde 2011). Similarly, again, in 2015 for both Marvel and DC continuities.

<sup>31</sup> One of the more clamorous, and controversial, examples saw the replacing of a fan-favourite series author, Gail Simone, for no openly stated reason, according to either side of the issue; days later, however, Simone was ‘re-hired’, and announced to be writing on more titles than when she had been let



In order to analyse this issue more in detail, it is useful to consider the Duncan and Smith information theory-informed model of how the comics industry works (see Figure 19, below). They show how comics are a means of communicating a message (the information), and the model depicts how the various stages and agents involved are part of that process, from the initial authors to the readers, and how all constantly influence each other.

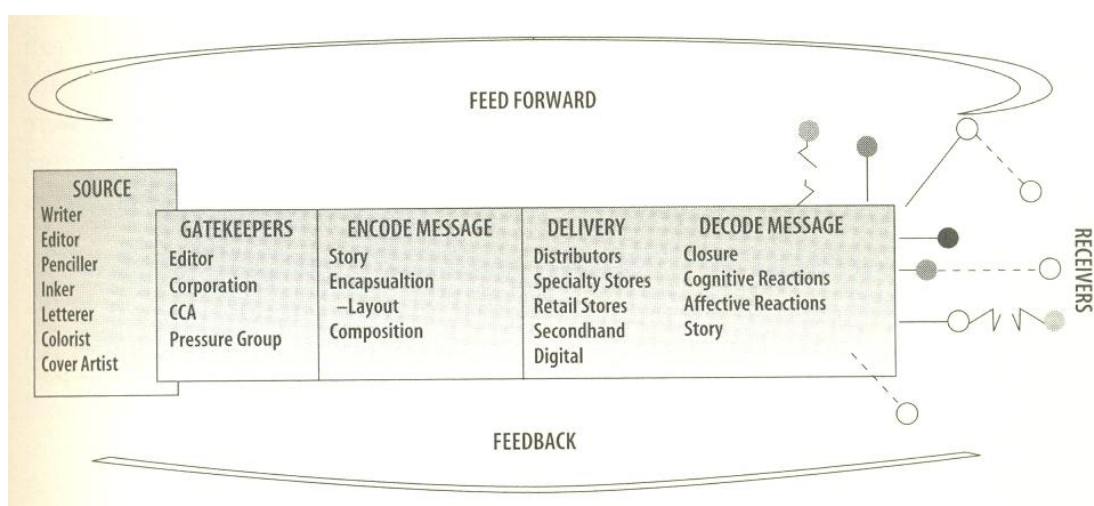


Figure 19 – Comics model (Duncan and Smith 2009: 7)

What I am mostly concerned with at this stage is the Source section. Duncan and Smith identify at least seven authorial entities within the creation stage of a standard comic book, at least one following something similar to the so-called 'Marvel Method' (Van Lente and Dunlavey 2012: 76; see Table 1, below).

Role	Description
<i>Writer</i>	Outlines the plot, describes scenes and actions, and provides dialogue for the characters and the narrative.
<i>Editors</i>	Active role in plotting stories, by suggesting changes or directions for the narrative, based on house policies or market research.
<i>Penciller</i>	Artist who does the pencil drawings of the images; they will, especially in the initial stages of a comic series, contribute to the creation of new characters or the development of others (e.g. <i>Spider-Man's</i> Stan Lee/Jack Kirby, or <i>Superman's</i> Jerry Siegel/Joe Shuster).
<i>Inker</i>	The person who goes over the pencil sketches with ink; while this may sound trivial, an inker has an active role in creating the composition and style of the illustrations.
<i>Letterer</i>	The person who adds text to the panels; this includes captions, dialogue and sound effects, and is crucial to the representation of the paratextual aspect of the text present in the panels (see section 4.4).
<i>Colourist</i>	Adds colours to the illustrations; colour palettes can, and do, influence the readers' reactions to the comic, both affectively and cognitively.
<i>Cover artist</i>	While there is no direct contribution to the story, the cover represents the first impression of a comic, creating a context for the story and therefore expectations.

Table 1 – Authorial entities in the 'Marvel Method'.

Elsewhere, Smith states that, 'given how many people are contributing to the process, [...] it becomes arguable that [...] no single effort rises above the rest' (2011: 179). While this is true from a creator's point of view, in the history of the medium there have been appalling cases made against the ownership (such as Bob Kane credited as the sole creator of The Batman, or Siegel and Shuster never being financially acknowledged – though their names did feature on the books from the start - until quite recently, as creators in the multimedia franchise around Superman) (Van Lente and Dunlavey 2012: 152-3). Similarly, writers were initially the ones credited with more input in the finished product, and at times still are, as in the case of most of Alan Moore's work. As Duncan and Smith point out, this is a symptom of the comic book rather than the comic strip, similar in its creation process to the artisan-based work: while some comic strip artists became household names (e.g. *Peanuts'* Charles Schultz), comic book artists largely continued on in anonymity, or at least obscurity (2009: 180).

With notable exceptions such as Jack Kirby, it has only been since the 1990s that artists were brought to an almost equal level with the writers, and in even more recent times, letterers and colourists are also receiving more attention. The reason for this is to be found in the readership, fan community or fandom, in the aspect of 'feedback' in the model in Figure 19. As mentioned in the previous section and above, readers do tend to have a significant role

in the production of comics, in part due to the serial nature of most publications; as the receivers of the comic books, they are also the major factor which determines the proliferation of series, characters and plotlines, since Julie Schwartz's initiation of the fan mail phenomenon (section 2.2.4 above; also see Duncan and Smith 2009: 190-2). As expressed above, Barthes' idea of a writerly text seems to be exemplified and proved by these factors: readers do not give a meaning to the text, but highlight the multiple possible interpretations of the text in the first place. Readers of comics have an immense power in both the interpretative, Barthesian sense, and in terms of actual editorial feedback. There have been several instances of publishing houses changing their approach to a series entirely, or even closing down, due to poor feedback from the fans (e.g. Dreamwave, which went bankrupt after a relatively brief run, and whose material was then bought and republished by IDW (Tramontanas 2005)).

As we can see, then, the idea of there being an actual author in most comics productions is extremely problematic. It is a perfect example of the notion of the Barthesian 'death of the author' (2001: 1468-70), allowing for more input and control on the reader's behalf over what happens in the narrative. A type of control limited, though, by the gatekeepers and delivery sections of Figure 19. While the authors may not have that much sway over their creation, editors, publishers and even retailers (digital and print) do exert different forms of control over what is sold, the visibility it will receive and the feedback and discussions it will generate. In minor ways, reviewers, comics journalists (as in, journalists writing about comics for online and print magazines) can also contribute to the reception of a series or title, as they shift from being just readers to reader-gatekeepers, influencing the opinion of others in a slightly heightened way to a mere discussion, especially if well known.<sup>32</sup>

The diffusion of authorial ownership, spread between writers, pencillers, inkers, colourists, letterers and editors, and the fact that, ultimately, the product belongs to the company (except in the case of creator-owned comics), allows for this wider conferring of power to the reader-fans, though still via the control of the gatekeepers. Furthermore, not only does the diffusion allow for a more writerly text to come into being, it also opens up the space for a translator to fit in among the already numerous names of creators. What remains to be seen is whether this will confer them more visibility or invisibility, once the translated comic is released to a new readership.

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<sup>32</sup> The paradox, and irony, here is that to receive the respect necessary for this to happen, they must be immersed in the culture they are criticising in the first place.

## 6. The Place for Translation

*How does it all fit in?*

So far in the chapter, I have established the grounding of my subject in Comics Studies, ranging from terminology and definition issues to a history of the medium, viewed from different cultural perspectives. Despite including a discussion on the transnational nature of comics, I have talked very little about translation proper, either in a theoretical or practical aspect. Why, then, use an approach based on translation studies or the actual translation of comics? Where does the justification lie, and what supports the idea of studying comics in translation and the translation of comics as part of an academic piece of work?

As discussed in the previous section, the identity and visibility of ‘the author’ are part of a problematic issue when looking at comics, although less so with writers/artists such as Thompson, Bechdel or Spiegelman. This is not dissimilar from the concept of a translator’s invisibility, a long-debated topic in the field of translation studies, especially when dealing with more literary texts: the translated text has to conform to the target audience, such as English-speaking readers, in such a way that readers cannot realise it is a translation at all (Venuti 2008: 2, 7) and, in fact, translators are criticised for not being ‘faithful’ to the original if the text makes its status as translation visible (Venuti 2008: 3-4). From a political point of view, I would argue that the comics medium is already striving to achieve the full visibility of its many authors, in the same way that, for example, most mainstream literature is not.<sup>33</sup> More comics in translation would, therefore, contribute to the introduction of the same practice in other types of publications, be they popular genres or not.

Furthermore, comics can be seen as ‘acts of communication’ (Duncan and Smith 2009: 7), carrying a message from the mind of the author(s), via the product of their manual activity onto the paper (or screen), through the eye of the readers and to their minds, adding several intermediate stages to a written text or aural communication (McCloud 1993: 195). Translation scholar Ernst-August Gutt argues a similar point for translation, claiming that the translation process is not only working between a message in two languages, but as an act of communication itself (2004:30). Looking at them from this added perspective, comics are a perfect candidate for more work in translation, and translations themselves. From the words of the writer’s script, through their pictorial representation and subsequently the paratextual additions, comics are in a constant flux of translation and adaptation; adding a further stage to

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<sup>33</sup> A perfect example is the case of the collected edition of the miniseries *Superman: Red Son* (2003), by Mark Millar, Dave Johnson and Kilian Plunkett. Its French translation features the name of the translator, Nicole Dubois, on the front cover. Another example is Anthea Bell’s translation work on *Asterix*, in which the translator has almost assumed more prominence than the original authors. When looking at translation of crime fiction, on the other hand, the translator’s name is often relegated to the inner cover, or completely omitted (Venuti 2008: 2-3).

that flux, in order for the message to reach an even wider audience, is, I would argue, a natural progression, almost an inherent quality embedded in the nature of the medium, one of ‘translatability’ (Benjamin 2006: 76).

As we saw in sections 2 and 3 above, the history of comics is one of constant adaptation, reinterpretation and even translation in the stricter sense of the term (Vanderbeke 2011: 104; Zanettin 2008: 19). Japanese *manga* would probably not exist without the US influence (Van Lente and Dunlavey 2012: 189), and neither would the Italian branch of Disney and the enormous success of the company’s publications to this day (section 3.4 above). In the same way, the US comic book would not have achieved the same success without British writers such as Moore, Gaiman or Morrison, or even Hergé’s *Tintin* and Tezuka’s *Astroboy*. Nor would the industry find itself with a high demand for imported, translated comics, over its own tendentiously stagnant, similar to each other and potentially repetitive, offerings. Adding an even further influx of ‘new’ texts to the system may, at once, solve the potential stagnancy of both target and source markets. In this sense, one could use Benjamin’s notion of translation as the afterlife of a text (2006: 76) or, in this case, the propagation of the original message, to support the need for translatorial strategies to deal with the language, or languages, of comics.

## **7. And another thing...**

### *Myths, Mutants and Superducks*

The previous timeline-shaped discussion begins to clarify the differences, parallels and points of convergence between the Italian and Anglo-American systems of comics creation and distribution within their relative markets. I here briefly offer an introduction to the main series I employ in the analysis and primary examples in the thesis: Sergio Bonelli Editore’s *Dampyr*, Disney Italia’s *Paperinik New Adventures*, and Panini Comics’ *Rat-Man*. The three titles were chosen according to a number of criteria I had set, shown below in no methodological order, but rather my own selection process:

- ‘Italianness’,
- popularity and reception in Italy,
- existence and success in translation, and
- availability.

The first point concerns the cultural and stylistic elements that mark the comics series as

representing a portion of the national market; the three series already hail from the major publishers and creative powerhouses for the medium within Italian confines, despite the international ties of Panini Comics to Marvel and of Disney Italia with its Anglophone predecessors, as outlined above. Sergio Bonelli Editore is, among the selected publishers, the most rooted in its own traditional style and frames of reference, in fact a lot closer to Franco-Belgian authors, plots and even printing choices, opting for black and white, 'realistic' illustrations and settings over a more 'cartoony' element present in the other two. All three series are or are regarded as among the most popular in Italy, according to multiple polls, surveys, media coverage and print numbers: *PKNA* was even reprised for two later, and less successful, series – a sequel and a reboot – and an additional four-chapter story was printed in the weekly *Topolino* comic in summer 2014, and giant-sized collectable reprints as of November 2014. *Rat-Man* was meant, according to its creator and sole writer/artist on the series, to end with issue 100, but will continue in order to allow the plotlines to reach a more natural conclusion (Ortolani 2014). *Dampyr* continues strongly in its monthly publication (as of September 2015, the main series has reached issue 186), despite a lack of freshness and originality in the stories which has not gone unnoticed among readers, myself included, and mostly due to the established fanbase and readership, purchasing it out of a mixture of inertia and routine.

In terms of publication successes abroad, on the other hand, though all three series have been exported from Italy to a variety of countries, especially in Scandinavian and Balkan areas, *Dampyr* is the only one to have made it into published form in Anglophone circles, and only for eight out of the running total of over two hundred issues. *PKNA* has several unofficial online translations, of questionable quality, though Disney Italia did publish a bilingual Italian-English reference and style guide for the series, along with a re-collected reprint of the entire run (2013). In September 2015, IDW Publishing released under its fifth issue of the Donald Duck series the origin story of 'The Duck Avenger' – the Paperinik from the classic line, pre-dating the PK version of the character in the *PKNA* series. *Rat-Man* is currently being pitched to Anglophone publishers, with translations produced in-house by its current editor collaborating with US comics professionals.

The final point, not to be underestimated, concerns the practical choice of what I was physically able to acquire, in terms of both the actual issues and potential access to the creators, editors and publishers. As mentioned above, two series are still regularly published, while the third received a reprint treatment between 2012 and 2013, and while I am a fan and a reader of all three, it was not until the project was conceived that I started gathering the complete runs of the books for my personal use and research.

I should also point out at this junction in the chapter, that, unsurprisingly, the comics

publishing world and its industry are as changeable as their book and general literary counterpart, both in the source country Italy and the targeted Anglophone markets. In 2009, a new publisher crashed into the Italian publication and distribution spheres, and has quickly become the most visible and popular both within Italy and internationally: Bao Publishing. Initially focusing on the publication of translated comics from English, especially creator-owned and independent material, their success is undoubtedly due to their audience-savvy marketing and knowledge of the Anglophone trends, latching on to award-winning graphic novels such as *The Nao of Brown* (Dillon 2012), series like Brian K. Vaughan and Fiona Staples' *Saga* (2012 ongoing) and offering a different experience of the Anglo-American comics world to Italian readers mostly used to the 'comic book' of Marvel and DC. At the time of starting my research, Bao Publishing was definitely active, but not yet as popular as it has become since, as it started publishing the work of extremely popular and publicly visible Italian creators, such as Roberto Recchioni (editor and writer on Bonelli's *Dylan Dog* as of 2013; writer for *Orfani* (2012 ongoing), co-published by Bonelli and Bao) and ZeroCalcare (e.g. *La Profezia dell'Armadillo* (2011); *Un Polpo alla Gola* (2012)). Nonetheless, the three criteria for selection above still stand for a more general overview and descriptive analysis of the Italian comics market, even with the rise of independent material. This being the case, I offer below a summary introduction of the history and significance of the three main texts used in the thesis.

### 7.1. Dampyr: a multicultural horror series

Plotted by Italian writers Mauro Boselli and Maurizio Colombo, Harlan Draka was meant to appear as a mini-series of war-themed horror, but favoured by the popularity of new titles, it made it into a full series between 1997 and 2000, year of publication of 'Il Figlio del Diavolo' ('Son of the devil'), the first episode in the dampyr's saga.

Harlan is a dampyr, the offspring of a human and a vampire, whose blood is lethal to vampires; his father is Draka, a powerful Master of the Night, and the inspiration for many vampire characters in folklore and myths from around the world, and his mother a human whom Draka fell in love with.

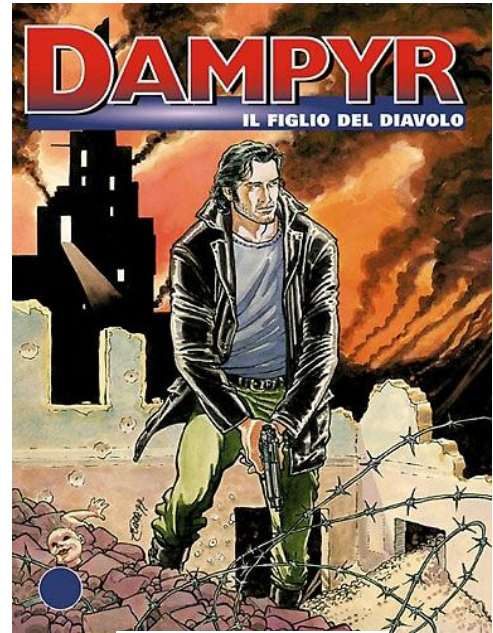


Figure 20 – Dampyr #1

The series begins with Harlan playing the part of a con-artist, tricking people into believing he can dispel vampires from war-torn villages in the Balkans – partially believing it himself. In a location approximating Sarajevo, he is recruited by mercenary Kurjak, and the two actually encounter a real vampire: Master of the Night Gorka, whom they defeat thanks to the assistance of Gorka's subject Tesla.

Harlan, Tesla, and Kurjak are then the main cast of the series, as they are joined by angel Caleb, who owns and runs a network of contacts, both interested in and part of the supernatural, around the world; ex-devil Nik, frenemy of Caleb, both residing in Prague where Harlan owns an old bookshop; a rotating cast of Masters of the Night – in particular Lord Marsden, based on vampire characters in English literature, and his arms corporation Temsek – who view Draka as a rebel of sorts, and either try killing, get killed by, or broker deals with Harlan and the others throughout the series; Draka himself, in the overarching quest that defines Harlan's arc as a character.

Each issue or story-arc is set in a different location, from Prague to London, Naples to Japan, North America to the Sahara, and incorporate elements of myth, folklore, literature from across the different locations visited, along with issues based on music, poetry, stories by Kafka, Borges, Byron, Anne Rice, and popular fiction from mystery, thriller, and crime genres. The underlying themes, nonetheless, remain those of the horror genre, and the setting that of Central and Eastern Europe (Boselli and Colombo FAQ). As of September 2015, the series counts eleven specials and 187 single monthly issues, plus reprints and collections (*Sergio Bonelli Editore* website).





Figure 21 – Rat-Man #1

## 7.2. Rat-Man: a silly parody meta-comic

Initially conceived as a parody of the superhero genre in US comic books, Leo Ortolani's Rat-Man character makes its first appearance in 1989, in the magazine *Spot 2*. It gains its own self-published series, *Rat-Man*, between 1995 and 1997, when it is finally picked up by sub-sections of Panini Comics and published under *Rat-Man Collection*.

The main character is Rat-Man, described in the official who's who published in each issue as 'a poor idiot walking around in spandex with mouse ears stuck on

his head. That's right, our hero' (my translation). Later in the

series, his name is revealed as Deboroh La Roccia ('the rock'), and his father as Janus Valker, the main antagonist for most of the series, though initially not making an appearance other than in the background of more self-contained stories. Other members of the main cast include Arcibaldo, Rat-Man's butler and only person to know his real identity; Cinzia, a trans woman in love with Rat-Man, and whose character arc is one of endless unrequited love (bar a few exceptions); the police department of the Città Senza Nome (the 'city with no name') where Rat-Man lives and 'fights' crime, in particular incompetent and oblivious – to most things – Captain Brakko.

The Valker/Ombra ('Shadow') storyline was a departure from the initial stories, and took a number of years to conclude with a spectacular issue rewriting the timeline of the series (*Tutto Rat-Man* 48), and followed by a storyline mirroring the development of superhero blockbuster films, and a commentary on Disney's increasing monopoly over the entertainment industry. The issues also allowed Ortolani to comment on the reception of the *Rat-Man* series itself, since he abandoned earlier, more light-hearted styles, and decided to venture into the psychology of the character, the nature of the comics medium, discussions on the comics industry from both the Italian and the Anglophone sides, and the long-running homage and tribute to the work of US comics artist Jack Kirby, alongside social commentary of Italian society and Italian attitudes and mentality over certain issues.

Ortolani has produced parodies and personal takes of major cinematic releases, from early cinema to the latest blockbusters, but the main series was intended to end with issue 100. As of September 2015, this had not been the case, and the author is waiting for the current storyline to reach its natural conclusion, instead (Ortolani 2015).

### 7.3. PKNA: a Disney 'not just for kids' story

The Paperinik character, known briefly in English as Duck Avenger (IDW 2015), was first created by ideator Elisa Penna, writer Guido Martina and artist Giovan Battista Carpi, in 1969, as part of the weekly *Topolino* series. In the story, Paperino – the Italian version of Donald Duck – finds himself in the villa of late masked thief Fantomius, inspired by the Lupin and Fantomas characters of French pulp novel tradition, and decides to take up his legacy himself, becoming a vigilante and keeping the character's memory alive. In 1996, Ezio Sisto, Max Monteduro and Simone Stenti developed a new publishing strategy, transporting the tone, style and storyline of Paperinik into the US inspired superhero genre, forcing the duck hero to face aliens, time travel, androids and masters of the mystic arts, to popular acclaim.

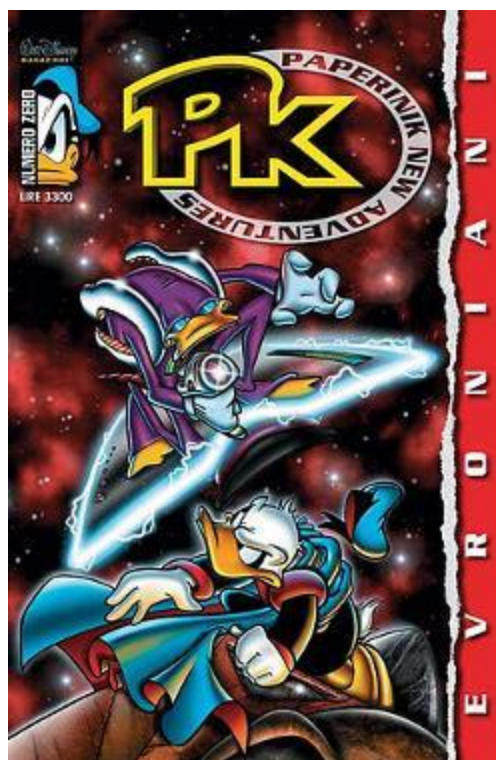


Figure 22 – PKNA #0

The new series incorporated references and elements of major US comics publications, along with international cinema references, contemporary Italian shows and celebrities, while also maintaining elements of the traditional Carl Barks style of drawing and setting for the main city location of Paperopoli ('Duckburg'). The most significant differences in style came in the form of the panel layouts, frame angles, colouring and themes, and the size and format of the issues themselves, closer to US than Italian publication standards. The project struck a chord with many teenage and late teenage readers, becoming one of the most highly regarded series published by Disney Italia. This was further confirmed with its sequel *PK<sup>2</sup>* (2001-2002) and reboot *PK – Pikappa* (2002-2005), though the latter was poorly received overall. Fourteen years after the end of the original series, the weekly Disney magazine *Topolino* published a four-part story following the events of *PK<sup>2</sup>* under *Potere e Potenza* ('Force and Power', July 2014). In 2015, another addition was made to the original storyline, *Gli Argini del Tempo* ('The Fringes of Time', May 2015). Both additional chapters have been collected into single volumes, and the entire run of *PKNA* has been reprinted in 'Giant size', with the thirteenth issue 'Trauma' released in September 2015.

## 8. Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to provide an overview of the field of comics and comics studies, ranging from the history of the medium in its different socio/cultural incarnations to the terminology and technicalities behind comics creation and criticism.

The historical profile of the evolution and expansion of comics is, in my opinion, as necessary as knowing how comics are physically and creatively formed, in order for a translator to fully appreciate, understand and replicate the complexities of the STs into the TL. All major comics criticism published to date includes a historical aspect, and I had no reason not to do so. What research in the field does not seem to include, however, is emphasis on how cross-cultural influence and contamination have been vital for the medium's survival and spread around the world, if not in references, off-hand mentions, and cursory footnotes (with the exception of Zanettin 2008, and to an extent Denson, Meyer, and Stein 2013).

Thus, my thesis will look at how this cross-influence can be spread even wider, by introducing new comics into the Anglo-American system. I aim to achieve this in the following chapters, by offering an analysis of different aspects of the three series introduced above, and suggesting strategies for their translation into English. The approach I choose from here on, given the fairly lengthy introduction (by which I mean to the comics world, provided in this chapter, rather than to the thesis) is to head directly into the discussion of the first of the three macro-areas I discuss and dissect.

### Chapter 3 – A Play on Words Signs



Figure 23 – PKNA #0/3, p.117. f.5

Direi che la tua situazione s'è fatta insostenibile! Eh! Eh!

*I-would-say that the your situation (refl) aux made untenable he he*

The nature of comics, as discussed until this point, is one that makes full use of its hybrid DNA, blending the verbal and the visual in a series of semiotic games not dissimilar to those found in the creation of puns and wordplay. Whether they are highly witty and subtle, or downright blunt, plays on words are scattered in multiple literary works, from poetry to prose, to drama, screenplays and scripts (e.g. Delabastita 1997a; Crystal 1998; Epstein 2012; Attridge 1988; Chiaro 1992). Puns may have been considered low forms of ‘degenerate’ wit in the past, along with the proverbial ‘lowest form’ of sarcasm, but they have achieved a much higher status and regard in contemporary critical studies of literature (Wales 2001:327). Several critical pieces of work, from Derek Attridge’s work in the 1980s to more recent texts such as BJ Epstein’s (2012), have been produced on the analysis and even translation of wordplay in literary works, discussing the difficulties, the apparent or perceived impossibility of translation, and a good number of these are discussed and referred to in the first section of this chapter, especially the work of translation and wordplay scholar Dirk Delabastita.

In comics, though, simple wordplay is not enough. Images are essential elements of the visual language of the medium of comics, and they participate in the creation of linguistic and image-based games and references for the reader to process and enjoy. In this chapter, therefore, I will be looking at the issues surrounding the concept of wordplay, its limitations in terms of the comics medium, its expansion into *signplay* and the notion of *clusters* of signplay. I will return to both terms and expand their scope in the discussion, in order to provide the

grounding for the creation of strategies, presenting wordplay as a problematic concept that needs dismantling or at least extending to encompass the visual nature of the comics medium. Research in the field of children's literature, especially thanks to its focus on picture books, and their coding and decoding, will prove to be crucial to the development of my suggested new type of terminology, and the applications that it will have for the multimodal, hybrid nature of the medium discussed in this work.

The field of Film Studies, especially audiovisual translation and adaptation, with specific focus on subtitling and localisation, while potentially useful, is not included in the analysis I provide. Comics are an even younger field than other multimodal objects of scholarly focus (e.g. Cohn 2012), and as children's literature expert and translator Riitta Oittinen states, 'a new form of culture always evokes a new language' (2006:85). As a form of sequential art – as defined in the previous chapter – they have been likened to film and cinematography since their consideration in academic and critical writing. This is not my intention here, as I recognise the very different nature of the two areas and subject matters, and adhere to the idea of wanting to separate the two in academic discourse – striving for interdisciplinarity proper in the creation of my translatorial system, rather than multidisciplinary (cf. Hatfield 2010; also see Chute's discussion of McCloud's comparison to film, 2008). My overall argument, then, is that translation of wordplay in comics cannot be limited to the single, predominantly textual instances typically analysed by criticism in the field; it must be aware of and acknowledge the concepts of signplay, intended as the omnipresent and pervasive interaction between text and image in the comics medium, and its occurrence in clusters (i.e. there is no such thing as a single instance of signplay – or wordplay, for that matter).

I will approach the discussion predominantly from a literary critical perspective, in order to consequently move on to the translation of signplay, and the wordplay contained within its frames. I will first offer theoretical background, then use the theory to identify, develop and suggest potential strategies for the translation of the instances of signplay in examples of source text (ST), in an attempt to recreate similar effects in the target language (TL) and target text (TT). Each example will be taken from the three series used as focus for the thesis: *Dampyr* (2000 - ), *Paperinik New Adventures* (1998-2001) and *Rat-Man* (1989 - ), with further support from current Anglophone publications and existing English translations of non-English comics.

## 1. The Problem with Wordplay

### 1.1 Definitions and Expressions

One of the major concerns for a theorist when approaching a topic as widely discussed in literary, linguistic and translation studies as wordplay is the lack of a common overarching, and comprehensive, definition. The different varieties of linguistic and semantic games are so numerous that trying to incorporate them all into a single category might appear reductive, and ultimately ignore certain aspects of the techniques used to carry out certain effects in the readers' reaction to them. Nonetheless, there have been scholars attempting this task, as presented below, despite their criticism ultimately resorting to some type of reduction for needs of systematicism. While I do not believe it to be possible to have an entirely comprehensive definition, it is extremely useful to at least provide some type of definition-frame for practical matters, such as analysis and translation. It will, however, inevitably vary between different applications, source materials, and disciplines, to the point that what works for a strictly literary analysis may not work for a translator's perspective, or a critical reading of a comic.

Dirk Delabastita, in his introduction to a special issue of *The Translator*, attempts to give a general description of wordplay, indicating it as 'the general name for the various *textual* phenomena in which *structural features* of the language(s) used are exploited in order to bring about a *communicatively significant confrontation* of two (or more) linguistic structures with *more or less similar forms* and *more or less different meanings*' (1997b:128, emphasis in original). Delabastita further separates the duplicity for different types of wordplay into horizontal and vertical typologies (1997b:129), based on the co-presence of linguistic components or of contextual ones; as Ida Klitgård later develops the term, '[h]orizontal wordplay [...] relies on the consecutiveness of linguistic components to set forth the double meaning, whereas vertical wordplay relies on a simultaneous double context enabling a double reading' (2005:73). Horizontal wordplay, then, occurs when two words appear in the same sentence or textual passage, such as the following sentence (1):

(1) 'Such a long *wait* for the *weight* to drop.'

The two words present different spellings, but are pretty much identical from a phonetic perspective, as far as Anglophone contexts are considered. This particular type of wordplay is commonly referred to as *homophonic* (Klitgård 2005:73; Epstein 2012:168), and will be illustrated further below, but there are other types of horizontal wordplay which do not adhere to the phonetic aspect alone.



On the other hand, vertical wordplay is the result of multiple meanings conveyed within the same word, with no additional elements to mark the duplicity, such as in ‘the boring drill’. Both the words ‘boring’ and ‘drill’ have at least two meanings, resulting in the above sentence’s two (or more) possible interpretations: the drill is boring in the sense of a practice alarm reaction/evacuation being a time-consuming annoyance, or, alternatively, the power tool known as a drill is boring a hole into some hard surface or a wall; in even further readings, the power tool could be dull, too, or the drill activity could involve boring a hole. The example in this case is a particularly complex instance of wordplay, homonymy, in that both ‘drill’ and ‘boring’ are identical in phonetic and orthographic properties, though with very distinct semantic meanings. As the examples show, then, multiple categories of wordplay exist, and can inhabit both vertical and horizontal typologies. The table below summarises common categories of wordplay (Table 2).

Type of wordplay	Definition	Example	Use
homophonic	Identical sound Different spelling	<i>weight/wait</i>	‘Such a long wait for the weight to drop’
homographic	Different sound Identical spelling	<i>wound</i> (‘ <i>wound tight</i> ’/‘ <i>bleeding wound</i> ’)	‘I wound the bandage tightly around the bleeding wound’
homonymic	Identical sound Identical spelling	<i>boring drill</i>	‘That was such a boring drill’/‘They’re boring a hole with the drill’
paronymic	Slightly different sound Slightly different spelling	<i>affect/effect</i>	‘The effect of the pill will affect your attention’
metonymic	A part used to describe the whole	<i>head for person</i>	‘I’m doing a head count to see how many we need’

Table 2 – Common types of wordplay (adapted from Klitgård 2005: 73-4 and Epstein 2012: 168-9)

What is interesting to note here is that, even with the examples and discussion so far being taken from and operating within a textual setting, there is a fair amount of importance given to another sensorial property of instances of wordplay: aurality, or rather, sound. This appears to imply that the potential for wordplay, in particular its effects upon a reader, is not merely based on the processing of the reading of a text, which, in itself already involves processing on multiple levels of sensorial perception and cognition (cf. Paivio 1979; Cohn 2013), but also on

the multisensorial processing of reading out loud, or listening to someone else perform such an activity.

The phonetic point notwithstanding, in Delabastita's approach it is the formal and semantic elements that take the foreground of the analysis of wordplay, effectively reducing it to solely linguistic (including phonetics) and textual elements, and therefore ignoring the effects on readers. The co-presence of a textual, a visual, and indeed an aural set of elements in signplay is the crux of my argument in this chapter, and informing the thesis overall. It challenges the simplistic reduction of wordplay by admitting the phonetics, and adds to the visual portion of graphic literature by acknowledging the text/image interplay. As a cornerstone of the medium, then, it must also play a fundamental part in its translation, as I discuss further below.

While clearly limited in its scope, nonetheless, especially considering the role of a literary translator as reader, Delabastita's definition can be considered useful for working purposes, especially if dealing with the various elements of wordplay in translation: a translator will be able to use the various elements of wordplay, identified by applying the definition to specific instances, e.g. what multiple meanings are involved, and how they are correlated. It is not, however, by any means comprehensive: by no fault of his own, one would think, Delabastita does not take into consideration the visual elements of the text, such as is the case in picture books, or indeed, comics. He argues that 'puns are textual phenomena [...] they need to be employed in specially contrived textual settings' (1996: 129), and leaves no space for interpretation of 'text' and 'reader' as being anything else than physical or digital, or specially constructed textual settings, such as concrete poetry. The image below, however, appears to challenge this stance (Figure 24).



Figure 24 – In sink (from *So Much Pun*)



The image shows a photograph of popular boy band from the '90s, *N\*Sync*, in a bathroom sink, with no text to explain the correlation between the two. The intended pun in this case is the sound similarity between 'in (the) sink' and 'N\*Sync' – an effect which only requires the reader/viewer to recognise the band to be achieved. The complications arising from this example concern the cultural frame of the references in the image, not in terms of bathroom furniture of course, but rather the boy band in question: not all readers will be familiar with a teenage music band from the '90s, or they may call the sink a 'basin', so the pun will be completely ineffective in some cases. What a translator, therefore, must always consider, is the cultural ground on which the image – the virtually immutable element in this type of translation – rests, and how new readers may or may not react to it, once the image has been transplanted. To that effect, Figure 25 is probably a less culturally restricted example.



Figure 25 – Cereal Killer (from *The North Coast Journal*)

As in the case of Figure 24 above, Figure 25 plays on the phonetic similarities between 'cereal' and 'serial'. The only potential challenge here lies in correctly identifying the yellow box as being a brand of breakfast cereal, providing a much wider scope in terms of receptive target audiences than the visual pun in Figure 24. While these are only an example of an entirely non-verbal pun, different variations of levels of text and image can coexist in the same instance of semiotic game, rendering the idea of just *wordplay*, when discussing a hybrid visual/textual medium, limited in its scope. This will be expanded upon and discussed further below, but

Figure 26 shows an example from the same source as Figure 24, this time concerning a textual and visual interaction to achieve the ‘–play’ effect.



Figure 26 – Metal Fork (from *So Much Pun*)

The text in the image serves to clarify and highlight the fact that the plastic fork appears to look like the ‘horns’ hand gesture (index and pinkie finger raised, rest of hand closed in a fist), associated with ‘metal’ music and its fans. It also plays on the links between the material of which forks are made, as both plastic and metal are plausible options for the utensil, though the latter is clearly not the case in the image, creating a tension between text, image, connotations and readings. Though there can be difficulties with some readers in recognising the ‘metal horns’, in this particular case, and as opposed to Figure 1, the text and image are inextricable, and the removal of either would also entirely dismantle the pun: the text alone would not be able to convey what is really meant, and the image by itself is just an image of a broken plastic fork; though it is possible some viewers might understand the reference, the metal/plastic link will be lost. The examples, visual only and multimodal, do appear, then, to contradict Delabastita’s focus in his definition – though of course this brief discussion is not enough to fully counter his arguments.

What does offer an alternative, on the other hand, is his focus on the communicative aspect of wordplay which appears to ignore the emotive and affective elements of such literary strategies. For this reason, I turn to B.J. Epstein’s approach (2012), deeming it much more flexible and useful for wider applications: she expands the definition of Delabastita’s wordplay macro-category by talking of *expressive language* instead, defined as ‘similar to but

broader than “figurative language” and all linguistic features that fall into this category are ones that have signification on two levels at the same time’ (Epstein 2012:17). Epstein also refers to the work on metaphor by Paul Ricoeur, by identifying the two levels of signification as primary, or denotation, and secondary, or connotation, respectively indicating the direct designation of the expression and its implicit meaning (2003:105; also see Epstein 2012:18). As mentioned above, this more versatile application of the dual nature of certain expressions is more conducive to a more comprehensive categorisation of different linguistic and semantic games, one which also includes non-textual reasons for their use. What I still find limiting, however, is that even Epstein dedicates a section and part of a discussion to the visual elements, rather than considering them as part of the overall discussion, especially when talking about picturebooks. There is a distinction between the visuals and the semantics, rather than a recognition, as I argue, of the latter to be inclusive of the former. The approach obviously works and is appropriate to the source material, as the focus of most of the analysis is on the textual aspects of children’s literature, but she still separates the images in her categorisation, relegating them to a type of wordplay, rather than the frame within which the image/text interaction operates. The following section explores, discusses and problematizes these issues further, introducing the concept of *signplay* (Kaindl 1999: 274) or *graphicplay* (Epstein 2012: 168), as the interaction of text and image with effects akin to the definition of wordplay given above. While I will use the terminology suggested by Kaindl, Epstein and to an extent Delabastita, the former especially, I will not be employing them in the same way as they have been introduced by their authors. In fact, I will expand the definition given by these critics – Epstein and Kaindl mostly – to include both textual and non-textual signs, choosing a redefined version of *signplay* as my overarching framework, including Epstein’s version of *graphicplay*. I will return to this in the following section.

I do not intend here to have covered the ongoing academic discussion on the relevance and importance of different uses of wordplay, but rather offer a brief introduction to the issues being raised (cf. Vandaele 2011). Before proceeding further, though, I will introduce a point of discussion that will be expanded on in each later section, concerning the reasons behind an author using wordplay, or a particular type of wordplay at least, in a text. Epstein lists a selection of twenty-eight functions which, she argues, ‘can serve the text, the author, and/or the audience, and what the function is and who it is meant to affect and why, must be taken into consideration when analysing and [therefore] translating a book’ (2012:21). The functions range from entertainment value to aesthetic reasons, to informative, to make readers pay attention, to convey humour, to communicate feelings and define status and social roles between characters in the text (for more detail, see Epstein 2012:20-1). Similarly, Delabastita ventures into the question of functions of textual wordplay, without providing an

answer, as he is more concerned with the formal elements mentioned above (1997b:127). What he does point out, though, is the difficulty in placing the notion of translatability in relation to wordplay, and how it is dependent on whoever the interested party may be: a practising translator's response will differ, at times quite significantly, from a literary critic's view of puns as a textual device, and from that of a reader with an interest in language (1997b:127-8; cf. Greaves 2013).<sup>34</sup>

It is quite clear how the choice to use different types of wordplay, while based on structural and linguistic elements, is not limited merely to the linguistic or even semantic effects on the reader, but rather to do so is intentionally, one might argue, exploiting those effects to affect cognitively and emotively her reading process. They are not, that is to say, simply games for the author's own amusement or an effort to exclusively demonstrate their own craft.<sup>35</sup> As mentioned above, I will explore the possible function for each type of signplay as I discuss them later, in their own respective sections. What I present in the following sections is a discussion on a need to expand the concept of wordplay, into signplay, in order to encompass visual elements, and how the field of children's literature, especially with its focus on picturebooks, can be particularly useful to this effect, from both a theoretical and a practical perspective.

## 1.2 What About Images?

As the example in Figure 24 above has shown, puns and wordplay in general do not necessarily rely on textual elements to achieve the desired effects of humour or at least 'a mental challenge' (Epstein 2012:168). At this point, I will make explicit the reason for not treating the translation of humour and wordplay within the same chapter, or even section. The two areas do overlap in several ways, as humour is indeed one of the functions of signplay and wordplay in general, and they are not as separate as the chapter division may make them look. I do, however, firmly believe that humour is not the *sole* function connected to wordplay, and Epstein's idea of 'mental challenge' is more appropriate. In fact, I disagree with Epstein's claim that puns and wordplay in general are predominantly intended for humorous purposes, and I also disagree with the idea that in examples of what she calls *graphicplay*, or 'interaction of

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<sup>34</sup> I would not usually suggest reading the comments section on any part of the internet, but in this case, it gives an insight into what some readers believe about translation and untranslatability. Greaves' comment piece on untranslatability of certain words into English provided a small platform for language enthusiasts, from practising translators to simply interested readers, to offer at times wildly diverging opinions from those expressed by critics and academics.

<sup>35</sup> Though there is no doubt that is the case for some authors, and a fact that reviewers easily resort to in not entirely founded negative criticism of e.g. Chris Ware, or J.H. Williams III.

textual features, such as fonts or illustrations, and words' (2012: 169), the humour function is the main focus of the different types of signplay. To use one of her own examples from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the visual layout of the mouse's tale as an actual tail on the page is said to present a 'joke' (Epstein 2012: 181-2). As she also points out earlier in the chapter, however, children and adults 'enjoy feeling superior to their younger selves or others [...] being in on and getting a joke' (2012:172). This element of complicity, belonging to a community of sorts, even if just a community of two (writer/narrator/character and reader/translator), is at the forefront of the use of expressive language such as wordplay, and recalls the earlier concept of 'comics literacy', introduced in Chapter 2, section 5. In the light of this discussion, I do not take humour as the main function of wordplay and/or signplay; it is, in fact, a sub-section of it, one of many functions such as those listed in the above section.

The critical framework and tools needed for decoding the language of pictures in literary publications are available thanks to the work of Schwarcz, Moebius, Nodelman and Doonan (cited in Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:4), as far as picturebooks are concerned. In the case of comics, the already-cited Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993) provided the groundwork for modern approaches to the iconic elements of the medium. In recent years, the work of Neil Cohn, especially *The Visual Language of Comics* (2013), has provided scholars and researchers with an in-depth look at the cognitive elements involved in the reading processes of images in comics and other visual languages. These go some way to provide those additional tools needed, as claimed by Nikolajeva and Scott, to talk about the 'specific "text" of picturebooks [and comics], the text created by the intersection of verbal and visual information' (2006:2). Indeed, the argument made by the two children's literature scholars about picturebooks, and the one I am advancing for comics, is that the comparticipation, or active co-presence, as opposed to e.g. an illustration, of textual and visual elements of the medium should not only be regarded as fundamental in its reading in the original language, as argued by most comics scholars (cf. McCloud 1993: 47; Groensteen 2002: 18-9), but also in its translation.

To return to the issues raised by the genre of picturebooks in children's literature, since it is a field closely related to comics scholarship, Gillian Lathey argues that in picture books, the images act as 'catalyst for dramatic play, and questions of intertextuality and intervisuality' (2006:11). Effectively, the image raises questions of reliability of narration, temporal and spatial arrangement and development, heightened reader participation and interaction, and arguably conveys a direct representation of the objective reality of the text's world (cf. Oittinen 2006: 93). Indeed, as some of the examples below will help illustrate (Figures 4-8), an image can contradict what the text is claiming about the narration or caption, opening avenues for the readers to decide which of the two is more reliable, with a tendency to privilege the visual

rather than the verbal – for the reasons highlighted in the following paragraph. And as in picturebooks, the images in comics also help convey the progression through space (as do most illustrations, admittedly) but most particularly through time (see McCloud 1993: 99). In addition, both picturebooks and comics allow, though do not require, a higher level of reader participation, including elements of detail in the images, the already mentioned reliability issues, potential ‘easter eggs’ – surprise additions intentionally included for a knowledgeable or privileged reader – and references present on the page without them necessarily bearing any relation to the story or setting, and a combination of more immediate narrative cognition and its increased complexity due to the intervisual/textual elements (cf. Cohn 2013).

Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott argue that pictures in picturebooks are complex iconic signs in that they describe and represent the story, characters or setting in a non-linear fashion, whereas words in picturebooks are complex conventional signs, in that they narrate the story in a linear fashion (cf. Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:1-2). By *iconic*, they mean a ‘sign [which] is a direct representation of its signified’ (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:1), whereas they define *conventional* as having or conveying meaning ‘based on agreement among the bearers of a particular language’ (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:1; according to semiotics, this concept is in fact a symbol). With these terms, then, they are claiming that readers from the same linguistic and cultural background accept the textual element of picture books as something which carries a meaning that has been developed and associated via implicit or received agreement. On the other hand, the images are more immediately recognisable and open to interpretation, given their ‘direct representation’.<sup>36</sup> Both, nevertheless, are indeed complex, and ‘the tension between the two functions creates unlimited possibilities for interaction between word and image’ (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006:2), potentially leading to a particularly complex task for translators looking to recreate those effects in a target text, language and culture. The act of destabilising and problematizing the limits of wordplay with a discussion of the interaction between word and image allows an almost seamless transition into the implied question underlying the discussion so far: how can we approach these instances of recognisable wordplay in the hybrid comics medium?

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<sup>36</sup> This is not always the case, however, as discussions in the previous chapter about different cultural iconic signifiers, such as the different development in manga vs comic book in terms of emotional symbols, have shown (also see Cohn 2013).

### 1.3 From Wordplay to Signplay

In a previous chapter (Chapter 2, section 1.2), I employed a concept introduced by multimodality scholar Klaus Kaindl, who foregrounds the importance of the co-presence of both textual and visual elements in comics and how different combinations of them create different effects (1999:274). As mentioned above, wordplay is the chosen term for the overarching category of all instances of linguistic and semantic games present in a text, but in order to extend this to the visual aspect of the comics medium, I find that Kaindl's notion of *signplay*, defined here as a combination and comparticipation of linguistic, typographic and pictorial signs, intended to function as a whole, to produce a witty or ambiguous effect (cf. 'Pun' in Wales 2001: 326-7), of utmost importance. This is also partly due to the possibility of considering *wordplay* and *signplay* as equal types of device, which will, I believe, aid in the devising of strategies to translate what actually occurs when an instance of the two, taken singularly or their combination, is present in a comics text. While part of said language games is indeed inherently textual, as Delabastita argues (1997b: 129), their effects are heightened by their co-existence in a medium that features both visual and verbal elements.

This can be both a hindrance and a useful tool for the translator, who will be able, at the same time, to rely on the images to suggest potential solutions for the rendition of the ST's choices in the TL. In fact, introducing the notion of signplay as a combination of both the actual wordplay elements and their visual context falls in line with Klitgård's claim that translators should 'pay greater attention to clusters of wordplay rather than distinguishing puns [and other techniques] as individual, separate brain-teasers' (2005:71). Signplay clusters are considered here in the sense of not only having multiple categories and sub-categories of wordplay within the same instance, such as the phonological idiom/tongue-twister example above, but also as the co-presence of textual wordplay and visual signs contributing to the same instance of signplay. At any given point in a comic book, there will be no instance of there not being some form of tension between words and images. Even if a frame does not contain captions or dialogue, it is placed in a sequence, either of frames or pages, which directly and indirectly inform its contents or vice-versa, it influences and directs the reading outside of it, as discussed when the concept of iconic solidarity was introduced earlier in the thesis.

The five ways in which signplay occurs in comics, as discussed by Kaindl, are listed below. The point that needs to be made before looking at them, however, is that as he is working with how humour is conveyed, some elements feel like they ignore the visual aspect of the overall signplay present in any comic. I have adapted his argument by modifying 'humour' into 'effect', to encompass all instances of the mental challenge of semiotic games



played on the reader. The resulting discussion, while still a working schema, is enhanced further below, by combining Kaindl's work with other approaches.

- Verbal signs only – The effect is only conveyed through text.
- Verbal signs reinforced by non-verbal signs – The effect is conveyed through text and increased by pictorial elements.
- Signs depending on a multimodal combination – The effect is only possible if both text and images are present together.
- Non-verbal signs reinforced by verbal signs – The signplay is conveyed through images and increased by textual elements.
- Non-verbal signs only – The signplay is only conveyed through images.

(adapted from Kaindl 2004: 176)

In his work, Kaindl was considering ways in which humour is conveyed through multimodality, as I discussed in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2), though his model can easily be adapted to the subject currently at hand. What I am arguing is needed in addition to this approach, however, is an elaboration of what the two types of signs are actually engaging in. The list above merely points out in what combination image and word are presented in a text, with no reference to their function or effect. The examples below (Figures 27-31) illustrate Kaindl's points, and I will discuss how the effects are achieved, and what potential functions they are conveying, in order to build up to the second part of the argument in the next section.



Figure 27 – Verbal signplay (RM1, p.50)



The image in Figure 27 shows Rat-Man, the main character in the series, and The Spider, one of the major antagonists, being attacked by a creature. The panel's contents however, do little in terms of conveying any sense of effects that would not be equally conveyed by using the text alone (whereas the image alone would make little sense) – they fall, therefore, under Kaindl's category of verbal signplay. The dialogue and caption are transcribed below:

Spider:           Troppo tardi! Troppo tardi! 'Loro' hanno mandato un **Redactor**!  
                      Siamo finiti, fesso! Finiti!

Caption:           Qualunque cosa sia un 'redactor', mi suggerisce curiosamente  
                      l'immagine di infermiere chine sul mio corpicino pieno di cannule...

A translation is not particularly complex in this instance, and could be presented as the following:

Spider:           Too late! Too late! 'They' have sent a **Redactor**!  
                      We're finished, idiot! Finished!

Caption:           Whatever a 'redactor' is, it curiously conjures up an image of  
                      nurses watching over my tube-riddled body...

As mentioned just above, the image does very little to the overall play on the idea of a redactor being some kind of malicious, powerful creature, and the sense of the scene can be gathered from the dialogue and caption alone. What it does do, however, is aid in setting the tone of the issue and the series overall. *Rat-Man*, as explored in the next chapter (Chapter 4), contains several instances of self-referential humour. In this case, the Redactor character is an in-comics version of an actual comics editor, with a guardian/enforcer element to it: narratively, an 'editor' has been sent to deal with the Spider, whose crimes involve exploiting comics fans with his own stories. The panel, therefore, serves the function of establishing or reiterating the meta-humour elements of the series as a whole, an aspect that could be arguably enhanced by the style of the creature being reminiscent of characters drawn by comics creator Jack Kirby. This serves both as a homage on behalf of the artist, and as a nod to the comics literate readers, as discussed in Chapter 2.

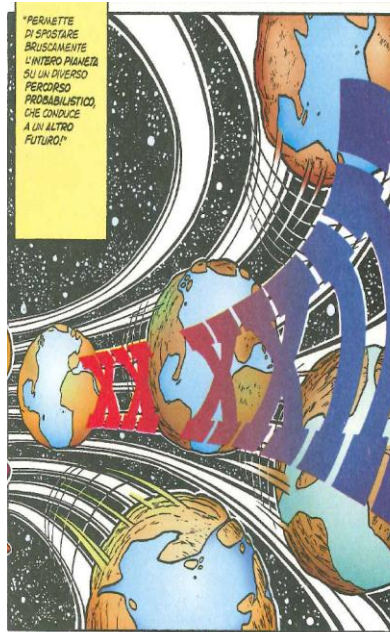


Figure 28 – Visually reinforced verbal signplay (PKNA, p.131, f.5)

Figure 28, on the other hand, shows an example of the second type of signplay, visually reinforced verbal elements, which could be shorthanded as a traditionally conceived illustration: the image simply reinforces the text, by adding a little more information. In this case, the caption reads:

*“Permette di spostare bruscamente l'intero pianeta su un diverso percorso probabilistico, che conduce a un altro futuro!”*

*[“It allows to shift the whole planet abruptly onto a different probability pathway, leading to an alternate future!”]*

The illustration, in fact, clarifies to the reader that the alternate futures are many, not just one, showing different splitting points from the main timeline too. While the image may be deemed not entirely necessary, the concept of multiple alternative realities is introduced, without having to textually explain it. In terms of the function that this panel might be operating, it confers an aspect of exposition or background setting in which the story takes place, establishing a characteristic of how time exists in the in-story PKNA universe: there are multiple possible futures, and multiple possible universes; in fact, this notion will return several times during the series, including at pivotal plot points.



Figure 29 – Multimodal signplay (PKNA, p.83, f.5)

What is presented in the image above (Figure 29) is an example of multimodal signplay, in which the effect is conveyed through the inextricable interaction between the two dialogue bubbles and the image itself. The scene is from the end of the first issue, during which PK has fought off an initial Evronian invasion of Earth, and features two alien spaceships flying around the skies of Duckburg/Paperopoli, with the following text:

- Ship: Caccia Gramon a controllo Evron. Nessuna traccia del *terrestre mascherato*.  
 [Fighter Gramon to Evron control. No sight of the *masked Earthling*.]
- One: Vai pure a dormire. Fuori è tutto tranquillo.  
 [Go to sleep. Everything's quiet outside.]

As readers, we are aware that the character One is lying to Paperinik (neither pictured above) about there not being anything going on outside the tower. This is only possible, however, because of the image of the two ships, and their speech bubble, flying just outside it, undermining the dialogue being spoken to the other character, inviting the reader into a feeling of complicity with One. The panel, as the final scene in the first issue, also serves the function to leave the ending open for the rest of the series to continue the narrative of the alien Evron presence on Earth, and their search for PK.



Figure 30 – Verbally reinforced visual signplay (*Dampyr* 1, p.60, f.6)

As an example of signplay which relies mostly on visual elements, only reinforced by the verbal content of the frame, Figure 30 shows a vampire character exploiting a trope of action films/comics:<sup>37</sup> he has just been shot and riddled by bullets, yet he is still standing, with the only damage occurring to his clothing (a t-shirt featuring the Motorhead heavy rock band logo, and the writing 'MotorDead England', probably to avoid trademark issues), smoke coming out of the bullet holes. The bubble simply clarifies what the image is describing, adding an element of cockiness to the character, reinforcing the invincible enemy trope:

Vampire: Uh... La mia maglietta... mi hai rovinato la maglietta!  
[Uh... my t-shirt... you ruined my t-shirt!]

The final example, in Figure 31 below, utilises signplay which relies principally on the visual aspect, rather than the verbal.

<sup>37</sup> Compare the extensive entry on the 'Immune to Bullets' page on TVTropes.  
<<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/ImmuneToBullets>>

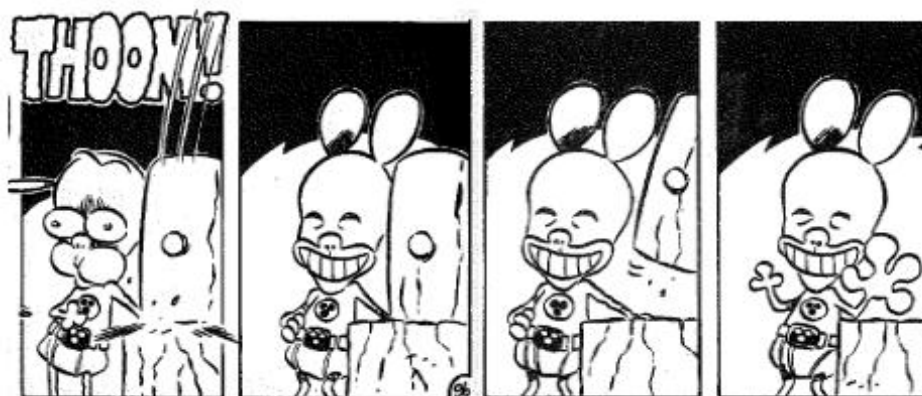


Figure 31 – Visual-only signplay (RM1, pp.96-7, ff.6-7, 1-2)

All the information needed to interpret the slapstick humour of the panels in the image is given by the facial expression of Rat-Man in the left-most panel, the forced grin in the following ones, the movement of the hammer to and from the rock surface, and the flattened or swollen hand in the right-most frame. Even the sound effect in the top left corner is entirely unnecessary to the understanding of the scene, or its intended physical joke. In the context of the story, the sequence serves the function to underline the lack of preparation and readiness of Rat-Man, as he attempts, and fails to pass, a test of mind over matter when faced with physical pain. It is a humorous series achieved by the slow repetition of the same facial expression in three panels, starkly in contrast with the first one. Just as seen and discussed for Figure 25 and to a lesser extent, Figure 24, no textual support, commentary or expansion is needed for the joke to actually work, even beyond a self-contained sequence such as above.

What is needed is a way of utilising and employing the five types of signplay in terms of practical applications for analysis and translation, and especially in order to identify what they may be trying to do in the context in which they are situated; once the typology of signplay is identified, what is the next step? Returning to the field of children's literature, and the seminal text by Nikolajeva and Scott on *How Picturebooks Work* (2006), we can use their references to semiotic critics Joanne Golden and Annyce Gerber's work on the relationship between text and image in picturebooks, and the creation of five further categories, this time of functions for signplay, rather than its typologies. Golden and Gerber suggest a system of five methods in which images and words are linked by both a 'dependence' on each other and an 'enhancement' of the other element of the text, intended here in the overarching semiotic sense of the subject material of the analysis. Going back to the discussion held in the second chapter, the functional element is compatible with a working frame of *skopos*, or purpose of translation. In Christiane Nord's overview of functional translation theories, she translates Vermeer's definition of *skopos* as follows:

translate/interpret/speak/write in a way that enables your text/translation to function in the situation in which it is used and with the people who want to use it and precisely in the way they want it to function.

(1997:29)

In this case, there are two levels of *skopos* to address: identify what functions the signplay in the original are operating, and produce a similar effect for the target reader, based on the signplay present in the panels of the ST. The ways in which images and text present a *skopos*, according to Golden and Gerber, are the following:

- the words and pictures are symmetrical (creating a redundancy)
- the words depend on the pictures for clarification
- the words carry primary narrative, the illustration is selective
- the illustration enhances, elaborates the words
- the illustration carries primary narrative, the words are selective

(from Golden and Gerber 1990; also see Nikolajeva and Scott 2006: 8)

An easy temptation in the comparison of the above with Kaindl's multimodality approach is to equate the five typologies with the five functions. If we look once again at Figures 27 to 31, however, we will notice how the typologies of signplay do not correspond to Golden's suggested functions. In Figure 29, while it is textual only, the visual element of the Redactor can be said to illustrate the caption and dialogue (though not necessarily enhancing it, unless we are to consider the Kirby-esque style). Figure 30 does seemingly equate Kaindl's 'reinforcement' and Golden's 'enhancement'/'elaboration' by the text describing what may be slightly unclear from the image, but not really being necessary to understand the situation. Figure 6, on the other hand, eludes any of the five functions suggested, as the text does not in fact depend on the image for clarification, but rather only works in combination with it: the image alone would be almost entirely meaningless as a panel by itself, and the text alone would not convey the effect procured by the ships disproving the narrative of one of the characters – the function here appears to be the narrative open-ending mentioned above. Figure 30 appears to be an example of the first function, creating some sort of redundancy; at the same time, though, either element may be said to carry the primary narrative, and in terms of action and plot, the image takes priority over the speech-bubble, while the latter aids in characterisation. Figure 8 also does not fit in any of the functions listed above, other than for the one instance of text in the first panel; the others present no text whatsoever, and can each be considered in their own right as an image – if not for the concept, introduced above,

of clusters. Indeed, each of the images used perfectly exemplifies the point that, in the comics medium, it is almost impossible to separate each instance of signplay from its neighbouring icons, signs, panels and even pages.

Additionally, as Nikolajeva and Scott also argue, ‘the spectrum is wider’ and ‘different degrees of “dependence” and “enhancement” can be observed, as well as different natures of dependence and/or enhancement’ (2006: 8). While this is undoubtedly a more than valid point to make, the combination of the Golden and Kaindl frameworks provides me with enough material to devise translatorial strategies and the discussion raised below. The concept and awareness of clusters would also supply an expansion of this notion, aiding the translator in their task.

In terms of useful tools to be taken from the methods discussed up to this point, then, Kaindl’s approach offers a basic critical framework to identify what type of signplay is being employed, whereas Golden and Gerber’s helps to identify what functions they are expressing. The notion of signplay combined with Klitgård’s concept of clusters of wordplay can yield more information on how these instances can be approached in order for a translator to successfully render them in the TL. Signplay by its own nature occurs as a combination of semiotic collisions and juxtapositions, effectively resulting in an overarching cluster of text and image. In the section that follows, I will take the elements discussed so far into a wider dialogue and discussion, in order to present my own method and strategies of translation for comics, by discussing existing scholarship on the subject and deriving further applications for a comics-specific medium and context.

## **2. Drawing a Framework**

### **2.1 Categorising Signplay**

In the previous section, I discussed Epstein’s model and definition of what I choose to identify under the umbrella term of signplay. Below (Table 3), I present a list of different types, adapted from her categorisation of instances of expressive language. The subdivision is not as clear-cut as the table appears to make it, though it is useful in terms of functionality and in order to devise strategies for instances of signplay. For the same practical reasons, and as a consequence of the discussion highlighted in the previous section, I have modified Epstein’s model by removing ‘wordplay’ from the ‘pun’ category. Other modifications applied to the categorisation model are as follows.

I have entirely removed the categories of ‘dialect’ and ‘allusions/intertextuality’, as I will discuss these types of references later in the thesis (Chapter 5, section 1), and due to their



not being strictly limited to linguistic, semantic and semiotic wordplay, but rather being dependent on high levels of contextualisation. I will discuss each category more extensively in its own section, choosing to only present them here in order to simplify the later task of devising translatorial strategies for the entire macro-category of *signplay*.

Type	Definition
Neologism	A new word or a pre-existing word used in a new way or given a new definition
Name	A name of a person or place, especially if used to characterise or define the person or place
Idiom	A set expression with a non-literal meaning
Pun	A turn of phrase that uses or suggests a different meaning of a word or expression than one would at first assume

Table 3 – Categories of signplay (adapted from Epstein 2012:18)

The choice to include *names* under the same category as more explicit wordplay is due to the reasoning outlined above, in regard to the functions for the employment of wordplay. Using a sociolect or idiolect, for example, will result in conferring specific characteristics on the character or characters employing them, without explicitly stating it; in this way, affective properties are associated to the linguistic medium through which the author, and by consequence the translator, conveys those qualities to the reader.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, the choice of names for places, characters or objects in a text will also usually convey certain qualities about them becoming ‘characterizing devices in literary texts [...]which in this way [become] endowed with an extra semantic load that makes them border on wordplay’ (Manini 1996:161). I will discuss this further later in the chapter, when addressing the issues surrounding the translation of names in the primary texts for the thesis. Additionally, I do not include the notion of *graphicplay* within the categorisation, as I believe, and have argued above, that there is no ‘special section’ in the comics medium for a translator to talk about the images in relation to the words – there is, and always will be, some form of tension between the two elements, and signplay is always a constant in a comic book.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> I discuss connotations of dialects and accents in an Anglophone setting in Chapter 5.

<sup>39</sup> For ‘silent’ comics, or picturebooks without words, such as Shaun Tan’s *The Arrival* (2006), issues of translation are only really present in the title(s). Removing the verbal element simultaneously forces the wordplay aspect to be ignored, and the visual elements are hardly changed when published in another ‘language’. Though, of course, an entirely different title may drastically change the reading of Tan’s book, too.



I use Epstein's initial division as a basis, but also refer to Klitgård, who offers another way of sub-categorising some of the various elements that constitute wordplay, by listing them in four sections:

- (a) phonological and graphological structure, such as "soundplay" as in alliteration and assonance;
- (b) lexical structure, such as polysemy and idiom;
- (c) morphological structure, such as in "Is life worth living? It depends upon the liver". Morphological puns are constructed as compounds or derivatives in a way that is etymologically "incorrect" but semantically "effective";
- (d) syntactic structure as in the slogan "Players please" which can be read either as a statement in praise of this brand of cigarettes or as a request to a shop assistant.

(2005:74; also see Delabastita 1996:130-1)

This further taxonomy is taken and employed as an expansion on the typologies listed in Table 3 above. In the case of idioms, for example, identified so far by their lexical structure, there may also be a phonological structure involved. Such is the case for dialectal sayings or proverbs, as seen in the example from Tuscan Italian (2) below:

- (2) Gl' ha piú miseria di San Quintino che sona'a a messa hó' tégoli.<sup>40</sup>  
*He has more misery of Saint Quintino who called to mass with-the roof tiles*

A literal translation of (2) is 'He's poorer than Saint Quintino, who had to call people to mass with roof tiles'. This rendition in English is more or less understandable, though the cultural and vaguely historical context stands in the way of really getting the sense of poverty which the saying is meant to convey. The dialectal 'tégoli' used as opposed to the standard 'tegole' creates a diminishing, humorous effect, making the situation of a saint and priest so poor he cannot afford bells for the church even more pathetic and anecdotal than it actually is. The sound connotations of all the Tuscan truncations and elisions accentuate the ridicule in a way, and result in even the saint's name being diminished with the '-ino' suffix. What would be simply part of the name, here feels like a diminutive, almost affectionate address: he is small, poor, and sitting on the roof banging tiles together instead of ringing bells. If one were to remove the Tuscan elements, both in dialectal lexicon and accent representation, however, the entire sentence loses its humour, and even the reference framework, and an alternative solution must be found.

In this chapter, I use a combination of the two approaches, taking Delabastita's structural, communicative definition and applying to it Epstein's 'double duty' of representing

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<sup>40</sup> From Rosi Galli (2009), p. 241.

concepts or ideas which cannot be expressed in literal language (2012:18), i.e. language that does not rely on multiple interpretations, conveying a message which is, arguably, straightforward, forcing the authors to resort to expressive language instead. While I do not want to limit myself to the former's categorisation and boundaries, given that the primary texts I will consider in the chapter are beyond Delabastita's text-only scope, I will be using the term *signplay* (though not limited to Kaindl's interpretation, as seen above) as the name of the macro-category including all instances of linguistic, semantic and visual games, rather than 'expressive language'. In the following section, I present a method based on both approaches to subdivide said category, preparing for a more detailed analysis of each typology later in the chapter.

## 2.2 Translating Signplay

As much as there is scholarly debate on the nature and usage of wordplay in texts in both literary criticism (e.g. Crystal 1998) and translation studies (e.g. Verhaelen 2011), the latter field arguably focuses even more significantly on the subject, as Delabastita's issue of *The Translator* shows (1997b; cf. Verhaelen 2011; Epstein 2012). This may be due to the perception, on behalf of readers and non-scholars, of an 'apparently untranslatable cultural "aura"' around words such as names or titles, phrases and syntagms,<sup>41</sup> puns, idioms, proverbs and, less immediate, references, be they historical, geographical or cultural' (Jull Costa 2007:111). There does seem to be, however, a general agreement that it is not the specific instance of wordplay that is being used, be it a pun or an idiom, that matters in many cases as much as the fact that said instance is present (see Epstein 2012:24). A clearer understanding of the functioning of the instance will of course aid the translator in choosing her strategies to effectively reproduce a similar effect in the TT, but the ultimate *skopos*, I would argue, is to reproduce the existence or presence of signplay, even if the textual elements are entirely overthrown, so that 'readers in the target culture would understand but would not spend so much time thinking about [it]' (Epstein 2012:24) and rather just enjoy a translation which conveys the 'linguistic playfulness of the SL [and ST]' (Jull Costa 2007:115). The focus still feels more directed towards the textual elements of the signplay; this is for the most part due to the difficulty, impracticality and even unwillingness for a publisher or editor to commission a retracing of the images, effectively resulting in having an illustrated template without any of the dialogue or captions present on the page.

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<sup>41</sup> Syntagm: 'a linguistic unit consisting of a set of linguistic forms (phonemes, words, or phrases) that are in a sequential relationship to one another' (*OED Online* 2013). Put more simply, a group of words or phrases linked to each other, and used together in the same text/context.

This does leave us with an unanswered question, apparently, as Emer O’Sullivan also claims when discussing the translation of images in picturebooks, which can easily be applied to the subject matter at hand: ‘how can we speak of translating pictures in picture books when, in most cases, these remain materially unaltered?’ (2006:113). The answer is fairly simple: even though the pictures themselves are not being ‘translated’, and by translated here I mean being modified in some way,<sup>42</sup> the juxtaposition of the two elements, the signplay originating from them, is. The ‘aura’, as it were, can be briefly encapsulated. By translating the verbal element of a comics panel, the image is also modified, as the two do not exist independently of each other in the medium, they are co-participating in an iconic solidarity (Groensteen 2002: 17-8); in fact, contexts and connotations can easily change from culture to culture, or even community to community – even without the translation of the verbal elements, an image may be interpreted entirely differently by different audiences. As a visual/verbal hybrid (comics or picturebooks), the ST presents elements of unity of ‘words and pictures, creators, and cultural, social and historical milieu’ (Oittinen 2006:84). As texts in general, in all kinds of literature, are not produced in a social or cultural vacuum, picturebooks and comics in particular embody the indissoluble connection between those and the semiotic elements of the visual and the verbal. The reader is required, through active engagement with the text, to reconcile, recognise and process the juxtapositions in order to determine their effects, and, as readers, translators must take part in same process. As translators we ‘try to make the text and illustration fit each other, and in another sense, we – either consciously or unconsciously – have internalized the images from our reading of the text and illustrations’ (Oittinen 2006:94). Just as a translator will have read a novel or a poem as a critically engaged reader, in order to produce a translation, they will have approached and encountered the same elements, obstacles and pleasures in the assimilation of an illustrated text. The images will have contributed to and even created the reading experience, the tension between the two resulting in whatever the reader will have taken from the book, and what the translator is required to reproduce in their process.

What is being translated is, in fact, the occurrence of some form of signplay, belonging to any of the categories discussed above. It is not necessary to adhere strictly to the category, or to identify. In fact, translator Margaret Jull Costa claims quite simply that entirely different occurrences ‘can be created to replace them, as long as they are in keeping with the tone and tenor of the original’ (2007:117). The tone and tenor of the original, though, are what the analysis of the ST’s element will be able to reveal; in fact, ‘more is at stake in the translation of wordplay than just trying to transfer the source text complexities into the target language.

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<sup>42</sup> This is obviously possible, and does happened in comics; the process, however, involves redrawing, and requires an artist (the original or not), the editor/publisher’s involvement, and more funds than a translator might be willing to invest in the task.

Historical, social and other contextual and intertextual factors must also be taken into consideration' (Klitgård 2005:71). In the case of comics translation, the number of contextual issues is increased due to the copresence of visual signs and verbal signs, or the strictly textual 'wordplay' elements, that the translator will be attempting to replicate in the TT. What must be kept in mind, and as Riita Oittinen reminds us, is that, as translators, we 'never translate words on paper alone, but whole situations including texts in words and pictures as well as their different readers, writers and users' (2006:84). The contextual, intertextual, referential and cultural elements embedded within the signplay will be identified by the reader in the SL, and therefore the translator. As a translator would not ignore the importance of what surrounds the text as object to be translated, so will a reader acknowledge that 'neither element – words or pictures – can be isolated, nor are they isolated when the translator translates' (O'Sullivan 2006: 113). The copresence and juxtaposition of these elements are inextricable from the nature of the medium – there is no reading of images first, or text first, or sequentiality and hierarchy of importance other than the narrative conveyed by the placing of the two in the narrative structure of frames and panels.

With this discussion in mind, presented below are two different approaches to 'simple' wordplay translation, listing strategies derived from the observation of different translator practices across different languages, found in the work of Delabastita (1996, 1997) and Epstein (2010, 2012). The former only addresses the issue of punning wordplay, but provides an extensive set of possible strategies, enough to justify expanding the scope of his approach to all forms of the same macro-category; the seven approaches might seem fairly intuitive and straightforward to a practising translator, which I believe will appeal more to users of the strategies in a professional capacity. As I hope to have made clear by now, the textual element present in signplay is the one that can be modified, and it is for this reason that the strategies focus more openly and directly on the variable, rather than the visual constant. A concern for the translator, and what I return to in the discussion below, is the importance of the tension between the visual and textual, the source of the signplay. I look at the two approaches below, starting with Delabastita.

- pun → pun: the source-text pun is translated by a target-language pun, which may be more or less different from the original wordplay in terms of formal structure, semantic structure, or textual function
- pun → non-pun: the pun is rendered by a non-punning phrase which may salvage both senses of the wordplay but in a non-punning conjunction, or select one of the senses at the cost of suppressing the other; of course, it may also occur that both components of the pun are translated "beyond recognition"

- pun → related rhetorical device: the pun is replaced by some wordplay-related rhetorical device (repetition, alliteration, rhyme, referential vagueness, irony, paradox, etc.) which aims to recapture the effect of the source-text pun
- pun → zero: the portion of the text containing the pun is simply omitted
- pun ST = pun TT: the translator reproduces the source-text pun and possibly its immediate environment in its original formulation, i.e. without actually “translating” it
- non-pun → pun: the translator introduces a pun in textual positions where the original text has no wordplay, by way of compensation to make up for source-text puns lost elsewhere, or for any other reason
- zero → pun: totally new textual material is added, which contains wordplay and which has no apparent precedent or justification in the source text except as a compensatory device
- editorial techniques: explanatory footnotes or endnotes, comments provided in translators’ forewords, the “anthological” presentation of different, supposedly complementary solutions to one and the same source-text problem, and so forth.

(adapted from Delabastita 1996: 134)

In my argument, for each of the processes listed above, ‘pun’ must be interpreted as ‘signplay’ in general. The entirety of the set of strategies noted by Delabastita is not that different from Kaindl’s multimodal approach to humour translation in comics (2004:75), providing all permutations of essentially three different outcomes: the signplay will be kept in the TT as in the ST, it will be changed, or it will be removed.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, having a systematic break-down of all the cases can prove extremely useful in identifying potential strategies for each case.

As I have argued previously, Delabastita’s actual translatorial strategy approaches (cf. 1993, 1997) may not appeal to a practising translator, given their high level of at times unnecessary complexity concerning terminology and examples, though the strategies themselves (as shown above) are not that complex. The examples tend to be mostly taken from Shakespearean texts, as Klitgård remarks upon in her article (2006: 73); in fact, a vast amount of scholarship on wordplay and translation is based upon canonical literary texts such as works by Dante (e.g. Crisafuli 1996), James Joyce (e.g. Attridge 1988), Oscar Wilde (e.g. Ballard 2001) or Lewis Carroll (e.g. Epstein 2012) and therefore inevitably falls short of being a comprehensive account by intentionally or unintentionally excluding non-canonical or deviating works. Nonetheless, Epstein’s approach is much more straightforward in terms of the

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<sup>43</sup> Also see my discussion of Zanettin (2010:46) in chapter 3 (Section 2.2).

suggestion of techniques to be used to effectively reproduce the wordplay from the ST in the TT. This could be influenced by the fact that she is, contrarily to Delabastita and other scholars cited above, a practising translator, and has encountered these issues herself. The table below lists each strategy and a brief description of what it entails (Table 4).

Translational strategy	Description
Deletion	To remove the expressive language and/or its associations; this may be part of a larger strategy of abridgement or adaptation, and may not be because of the expressive language itself, although it could be
Standardization	To standardize the language, using standard spelling, grammar, and word choices in place of the non-standard in the original
Replacement	To replace the expressive language (with another example of the same sort of expressive language, or some other literary device or form of expressive language, or with a non-figurative word)
Addition	To add new expressive language and/or new associations and/or some other text where there was none before; this can be a way of compensating
Explanation	To add an explanation paratextually (a footnote or endnote, introduction or translator's note, or a signal) or intratextually (a word or phrase in the text)
Compensation	To employ the expressive language, but in different places/amounts than the source text
Grammatical representation	To use non-standard grammar to mark the language usage
Orthographic representation	To use non-standard spelling to mark the language usage
Vocabulary representation	To use non-standard word-choices to mark the language usage
Literal translation	To recreate the expressive language in the target language, usually without the same connotations
Adaptation	To use the expressive language but change the spelling or grammar or some other part of it, perhaps to better suit the target language
Retention	To keep the expressive language and, hopefully, its associations, if there are any, or to only retain the associations or ideas contained in the particular item

Table 4 – Translational strategies for wordplay (from Epstein 2012:25-6)

As is clear from both the names of the strategies and their descriptions, there is nothing set or highly systematised about the approaches that can be taken when faced with this type of expressive language, or rather, wordplay – and they can easily be utilised, by extension, for instances of signplay. There are also clear parallels between Epstein and Delabastita's methods, which appears to prove that an intuitive solution is commonly shared by different translation practitioners,<sup>44</sup> resulting in similar ways of solving the same issue. In particular, the former's *explanation* and the latter's *editorial techniques* would appear to be identical, or at least one includes the other.

For the purpose of the rest of this chapter, I will refer to both approaches during my discussion of different examples and scenarios, but will be predominantly using Epstein's terminology. As remarked throughout the discussion so far, also, I take wordplay proper – the puns that Delabastita uses – as the variable in the system of signplay, the part of it that can be modified by a translator without having to negotiate with a publisher, editor or letterer; the strategies, therefore, effectively are two-fold as, for example, removing a caption from a panel which in the ST results in a visual pun, will *delete* said pun but *retain* the image's connotation – the signplay obtained in the TT may have lost the original's categorisation, but may still be *compensated* by the cluster of signplay around that particular panel. As I have already remarked, while the images themselves cannot be translated as such, their effects, connotations, suggested readings, properties and 'meanings' can be, by modifying the variables of both the textual surroundings and the cultural context in which the TT will operate, as opposed to its source. Nonetheless, I still suggest using the visual element of the signplay cluster as the grounding for translation, and the strategies I identify below are to be applied in the first instance to the verbal part.

### 3. \*Insert Pun Here\*

In this section, I will apply the results of the discussion so far, in terms of strategies, identification of signplay and translatorial suggestions to each of the four categories illustrated in Table 3, above. I will analyse examples of each, highlighting how the concepts of signplay and cluster can be beneficial to a translator hoping to achieve the *skopos* of reproducing the same effects of the ST in the TT. I will suggest for each category a number of translatorial strategies from Table 4, and discuss their application in pre-existing translations of comics, even if not the same ones, offering a comparison between 'successful' renditions of signplay in translation and the suggested applications.

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<sup>44</sup> Though Delabastita is not one of them.

### 3.1 Neologisms

A *neologism* is, quite literally, a newly created word, either for pragmatic needs of a speech community or for literary devices (Wales 2001:268-9). In the latter case, their appearance is determined by the text's own context, such as the creation of a specific setting, e.g. in fantasy, speculative or science fiction, and by extension, the superhero genre in comics. An example that particularly stands out, other than mentioning the principle of minimal departure used by sci-fi theorists (Ryan 1980), is Darko Suvin's concept of the *novum*: a new element – cognitive, literary, and/or physical – is introduced in the narrative, with the assumption that it can plausibly exist through scientific means of explanation, e.g. time travel (1979). There is a significant crossover, generally speaking, between neologisms and names, as the latter can be often based upon compounds or portmanteau words. I discuss this further below, focusing in this section on a number of examples showing how neologisms are employed in comics.

The first example below (Figure 32) is taken from *PKNA*, and panels almost directly preceding the image in Figure 28.



Figure 32 – Cronovela (*PKNA*, p.131, ff.1-2)

The two characters in the panels, Lyla and PK (in his Donald Duck appearance), are discussing the Raider's recent stealing spree, which helped him obtain materials to create a 'cronovela'. The dialogue is as follows:

- Lyla 'Il materiale che ha rubato finora gli serve per realizzare una *cronovela*!'
- Lyla 'É un congegno capace di *ri-orientare* la terra verso un  
differente *avvenire potenziale*!'
- PK 'Intendi dire che vuole *cambiare il futuro*?'

Unfortunately, the scene does not offer any visual suggestions as to what the machine might look like to help with developing a name that will capture its original nature in translation,



other than the tripartite swerves of Earth on different time-streams in Figure 28. However, because of the metaphorical connotations of time being ‘fluid’, of ‘streams’, of the ‘orientation’ mentioned by Lyla, as well as the ‘cronovela’ itself, it is not hard to imagine the ‘-vela’ part to be a figurative (and no coincidentally, the literal translation of the word) ‘sail’, helping navigate the planet or reality through time. The solution, then, would look like the following:

Lyla     ‘The material he has stolen so far allows him to build a *chronosail*’

Lyla     ‘It’s a device capable of re-orienting Earth towards a different potential future!’

PK       ‘Do you mean he wants to change the future?’

Referring to the strategies in Table 4 above, what I am employing here is *retention*. The same parts of the word in the ST are each literally translated into their TT counterparts, creating an English neologism not too different from the original.

The practice of creating compound words with easily inferable meaning is a well-used practice in the current Anglophone comics industry, especially in the case of sci-fi or superhero genre titles, as shown in Figure 33, an example from IDW Publishing’s *The Transformers*.



Figure 33 – Magna-wheels (*TF Spotlight: Trailcutter*, n.p., f.3)

The character Trailcutter, in this scene, is fleeing from a gun fight by using his ‘magna-wheels’, a combination of ‘magnet(ic)’ and ‘wheels’, with no further explanation given regarding their function or nature other than ‘Clue’s in the name!’.

A similar portmanteau construction used in *PKNA* can be found in the name of the forces to which Lyla belongs, the latter in reality a droid stationed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to oversee the regular proceeding of history: ‘tempolizia’. The word combines ‘tempo’ (‘time’) and ‘polizia’ (‘police’) by overlapping the identical final and initial syllable respectively. Once again, there is no real visual aid in terms of how the concept of the neologism is encapsulated, other than the letter T appearing on uniforms and buildings, so the textual elements are all

that are left to analyse for translation; what must be kept, in terms of signplay, is the correlation between time, 'T' and some type of police force. In this particular case, comics-friendly and -referencing solutions include options like 'Time corps' or 'Time force' or even a simple 'Time police' – though we encounter a level of *deletion* of the original portmanteau in favour of a two word syntagm. A possible 'Tempolice', appealing to the latinate root of the word, contains potential ambiguities in 'tempo', used in English in specific contexts, as opposed to overall 'time'.

A third example, also from *PKNA*, shows a further element involved in neologisms when comics are concerned: the presence of non-SL aspects within the new words. In Figure 34, we see the first named appearance of the 'Coolflames', psychically inhibited slaves for the Evron aliens.



Figure 34 – Coolflames (*PKNA*, p.50, f.4)

The image makes clear why the creatures have been given their name, given the light blue flame enveloping their head (a by-product of the enslaving process). The compound word, however, is present in English already in the Italian original, and there is little a translator can, or should, for that matter, do to replicate the signplay effect in the TT. In terms of strategies, the untouched process does in fact serve a *retention* function, though the non-Italian element of the naming is lost entirely.<sup>45</sup>

Overall, then, there are a number of potential solutions that translators can use when it comes to neologisms in Italian comics, which do still include not being able to fully render the signplay of the original, but also constrained by the visual elements surrounding the textual aspects of it.

<sup>45</sup> I discuss this in more detail in a later chapter (Chapter 5), in terms of prestige and functions of English in non-English comics, and the presence of multilingualism in Italian comics specifically.

### 3.2 Names

While the definition of *name* is not particularly problematic, it is a useful one to provide in order to address the relevance of the category within a chapter on signplay. The first entry found in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is ‘proper noun; a word or phrase constituting the individual designation by which a particular person or thing is known, referred to, or addressed’ (*OED*, ‘name’), and this is the one I will be concerned with in this chapter. As for the significance of discussing names in terms of signplay, the answer lies within the use that is made of them within a comic, what they indicate and what type of language is being used for them.

As mentioned in the previous section, some names do in fact also fall under the category of neologism. Proper names, however, carry with them some further complications in terms of cultural connotations, references and functions. Anthea Bell, famed English translator of the Franco-Belgian *Astérix* and *Obelix* comic book series, has claimed that the task of the literary translator is ‘all about finding the tone of voice in the original’, adding that they ‘have to be quite free’ when dealing with names, fiction and wordplay in general – comics included (Bell, 2013). This is definitely also the case when considering the translation strategies from Table 4, which should be considered more as practical guidelines for translators than fully systematised rules. Nonetheless, names are a fundamental part of comics series, with most titles usually connected to the main characters’ identity (one of many), and used for multiple functions and effects.

Figure 35 below is an example of naming used for parody and humorous effects, taken from Leo Ortolani’s *Rat-Man* based parody of *Lord of the Rings* – *Il Signore dei Ratti* (‘Lord of the Rats’).



Figure 35 – Sedobren (LotR, p.2, f.5)

The character introduced in the image above is an interesting example of multimodal signplay used to highlight the humour of the textual elements. The dialogue reads as follows:

Bolo (off-panel) 'Sedobren Gocce! L'unico stregone da prendere a stomaco pieno!  
Sei tornato!

Sedobren 'Oh! Oh! Oh!' 'Sono tornato, sì... dopo tanti anni... sono tornato!...'

The joke in this particular instance relies on the contrast between the visual appearance of the character, resembling the live-action film adaptation of the books, a character of respect and power, with the ludicrous new name: Sedobren Gocce. 'Sedobren' is an entirely made up name, based on common pharmacy products such as Ibuprofen or Fedobrol, with 'gocce' literally translating as drops. The powerful sorcerer's name is, almost literally, Ibuprofen Drops, and the rest of the sentence reinforces the ridicule by adding 'the only wizard you must take on a full stomach'. As the name is made up in the original, there are no real issues in terms of *retention* in translation, though the 'drops' element could be *adapted* to something more common in US or UK markets, such as 'soluble' or 'chewable', and the indications also adjusted slightly. The resulting passage would read as follows:

Bolo 'Soluble Sedobren! The only wizard to take daily with meals! You're back!'

Soluble 'Oh! Oh! Oh!' 'I'm back, yes... after so many years... I'm back!'

As a reiteration of earlier discussions, the signplay tension is mostly relying on the silliness of the text in contrast with the potential seriousness of the visual representation of Soluble/Sedobren. My suggested solution *retains* the medical aspect of the original and the double worded name, by *adapting* the elements to a more appropriate combination of indication and product for an Anglophone readership.

Another example, from the same story, is shown in Figure 36 below, in the parody of the Balrog character from the fantasy series.



Figure 36 – Spezzanànog (*LotR*, p.31, f.7)

Ortolani's recreation of the character as the nemesis of the dwarves, which in this book are drawn as inanimate garden gnomes, also adapts the name by keeping the ending of the original *Balrog* to 'Spezzanànog', which can be literally translated as 'dwarfbreaker(og)'. The second part of the compound word, 'nano', allows for the '-og' ending to work without disrupting the word itself, something not directly possible in English. Words like 'flog' or 'lug' can, though, stand in as suitable *adaptations* of the ending, creating compound word solutions such as 'Gnomelug' or 'Dwarflog', with the latter *retaining* the overlap between syllables found in the Italian, despite losing the 'breaker' aspect of the original.

In terms of the other series, names can have a very different function, usually solely employed to characterise or single out individuals, with no necessary connotational meanings or implicatures. The main alien antagonists from *PKNA*, mentioned throughout this chapter, are called Evron or Evronians and include the likes of Agron, Trauma, Gorthan and similar invented names; there are Earth characters called Angus, Lyla, Donald, Abel, John, Brett, Sam; other aliens such as Xadhoom, Xari, Urk, the Raider. In *Dampyr*, on the other hand, when the characters are not assigned common human names from around the world – according to where the episode is set – they mostly rely on popular and literary fiction, such as Draka (in-comic, the 'real-life' inspiration for Dracula), Marvell and Lord Marsden or on pure invention, such as Thorke, Gorka, Mordha. All names that require no intervention on the translator's behalf, with the added benefit of containing certain connotations embedded in the spelling (cf. 'Thor', 'gore', 'murder').

In summary, then, the translation of names in comics is an issue mostly concerning elements of signplay employing a specific function, either humour or parody or minor characterisation. In these cases, the suggested strategies are *retention* and *adaptation*, making sure that the tension and juxtaposition of the multiple elements are recreated in the TT, a point which I will discuss again in further detail in Chapter 4.

### 3.3 Idioms

The definition I use for *idioms* in this chapter builds upon the following: 'phrases or strings of words which are idiosyncratic in that they are language-specific, [...] and in that their meaning is not easily determined from the meanings of their constitutive parts' (Wales 2001: 198).

What I also include here, however, are strings of words or phrases such as repeated slogans or battle cries, which usually function in terms of narrative or character cohesion. Also included are trademark and recurring catchphrases that characters or teams may use, such as 'HULK SMASH' from early *The Hulk* comics series, or tag-lines for teams/groupings.

An example of this can be seen in Figure 37 below, taken from the PKNA issue focusing on an Evron supersoldier with psychic fear-inducing powers, called Trauma.



Figure 37 – Trauma (PKNA5, p. 108, ff.4,9)

The two panels, the first and last from a narrated flashback sequence, tell the story of the creation of Trauma from an Evronian general. The text is as follows:

Caption                      Una volta era un *generale*. Il migliore. Il più feroce. Ma andò troppo oltre.

Trauma                      ‘*Avanti! Potere e Potenza!*’

Caption                      Il suo nutrimento, la sua fonte di energia, era la paura. Prima la provocava, poi la assorbiva, trasformando l’avversario in coolflame.

Trauma                      ‘*Paura e Potenza!*’

The captions simply narrate the passage from Trauma’s time as a general through the experimental process that made him into the character we see in the second panel. My focus in this case is on the two instances of the Evronian slogan of ‘Potere e Potenza’, repeated innumerable times throughout the series, and Trauma’s personal ‘Paura e Potenza’. A literal translation of each gives us ‘power and potency/power/strength’ and ‘fear and potency/power/strength’. The Italian words ‘potere’ and ‘potenza’ have slightly different meanings, though are close enough to create complications for the English translation. Additionally, the two words alliterate, as does the variant motto with ‘paura/fear’. Translation solutions here will either remove entirely the alliteration, or at least remove it from one of the two occurrences. In terms of signplay, the visual elements of fairly powerful, angry (duck)



aliens clearly indicate that ‘potency’ is not an acceptable solution;<sup>46</sup> using two synonyms such as ‘power’ and ‘force’ may be an acceptable *adaptation*, though there is the *deletion* of the original’s punchy effect. Switching the position of the two words does seem apt, and is a minor *compensation* for a militaristic conquering alien race, leaving us with ‘Force and Power’. This solution also allows to *compensate* for the lack of alliteration in the battle cry when Trauma’s story is concerned, resulting in an ominous ‘Force and Fear’.

In the case of current Anglophone publications, there are already different methods of compensation or rendition of idiomatic sentences and figurative language, such as represented in Figure 38 below, from *The Superior Foes of Spider-Man*.



Figure 38 – Ass (SFOSM, n.p., ff.7-8)

The image is a perfectly clear illustration of the Anglophone idiom ‘feeling like an ass’, and is entirely appropriate given the dialogue between the two characters:

Fred                    ‘And I’m the bad guy here. So how does a girl like you know baseball?’

Bartender<sup>47</sup>        ‘Wow, you’re a really modern man, aren’t you?’

Fred                    ‘...’

The effect of the visual representation of a donkey’s head replacing Fred’s in enhanced by the verbal elements of the panel preceding it, and the ones before that, not pictured above. Were these panels translated into Italian, however, the scene would need a smaller editorial *explanation*, such as a caption or a footnote, as donkeys are not featured in idioms regarding arrogance and foolishness – though ‘asino’ or ‘ciuco’ can be used as metaphor for ignorant.

What the examples illustrate is the difficulty involved in effectively translating all elements of idiomatic usage from one language, and culture, to another, even when the idiom

<sup>46</sup> Also given that the motto would then sound like an advert for a certain type of medication.

<sup>47</sup> The readers are not told the name of the bartender anywhere in the first volume, as the entire story is told by Fred’s perspective, and he is clearly demonstrating his upstanding qualities in these two panels.

itself is not strictly related to the culture it originated from. The best solutions in terms of translatorial strategies, then, end up being *adaptations* of what is possible to reproduce, and the unfortunate *deletion* of some of the elements which can be *compensated* through other means at other points in the text or even series. The visual elements provide a useful and needed direction in case of multiple possibilities in translation, reinforcing the importance of the idea of clustered signplay.

### 3.4 Pun

Categorised under the term *pun*, I include all instances of signplay encompassed by an expanded version of the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition below:

The use of a word [and/or image] in such a way as to suggest two or more meanings or different associations [...] so as to produce a humorous [or challenging] effect. (OED, 'pun')

My additions and modifications make sure to consider the visual element I have discussed at length by now, and the inclusion of functions other than humour, but that still challenge and invite the readers to be active participants in the reading process. Admittedly, however, humour is the prevalent function in the examples below.



Figure 39 – Biochip (PKNA #0/2, n.p., f. 2)

Figure 39 above shows PK's reaction to the mention of a 'bio-chip' (in the story, similar to a microchip, but with biological functions): he does not fully understand the concept, but is aware of guessing wrongly by suggesting that it is the 'bio-call' of a 'bio-canary' (lit.). Italian uses 'cip' for 'chirp' or 'tweet', and English-based 'chip' is pronounced in the same way; hence, the character's inference and humorous moment, which is reinforced by him being drawn showing his hands as wings. The dialogue takes places as follows:



Lab technician	'No, ma ho scoperto un <i>biochip</i> !'
PK	'Mi pare di capire che non si tratta del... <i>bio</i> verso di un <i>bio canarino</i> .'

In the context of the story, the bio-chip is a fundamental part of the plot, and cannot be omitted or replaced; similarly, PK's hands are not likely to be re-drawn for publication. My suggested solution is to use the image as a basis for a new, different joke, *adapting* the reference from 'chirp' the animal sound to 'chip' in the edible sense. The panel would then read as follows:

Lab technician	'No, but I found a biochip!'
PK	'I have a feeling that's not one of those flat, organic snacks.'

This may seem a bit of a stretch, but the addition of 'flat' refers it back to the image, and it still retains a humorous effect in terms of dialogue, and keeps the same type of signplay (verbal reinforced by non-verbal signs).

In a similar vein, certain Anglophone comics do employ the same type of multimodal signplay, usually to produce a humorous effect or quick sight gag, as in the example from *The Transformers* below (Figure 40).

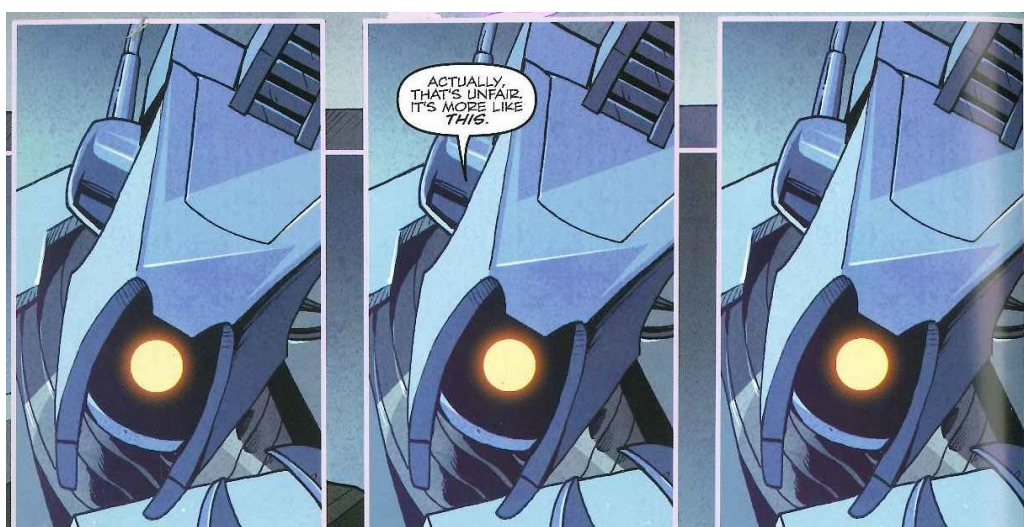


Figure 40 – Face (TF Spotlight: Trailcutter, n.p., ff. 3-5)

The panel immediately preceding this one shows the above character, Whirl, teasing another by claiming they pull a specific facial expression during an activity. In these three panels, Whirl proceeds to demonstrate what the expression looks like – even though he does not have a face to do so himself. This is another example of a multimodal signplay pun, only effective through the combination of both visual and verbal elements, without either of which, it just would not work.

Similarly, the example from *Rat-Man* below (Figure 41) demonstrates the difficulty of translating a pun based on this typology of signplay when the verbal element contains wordplay, too.

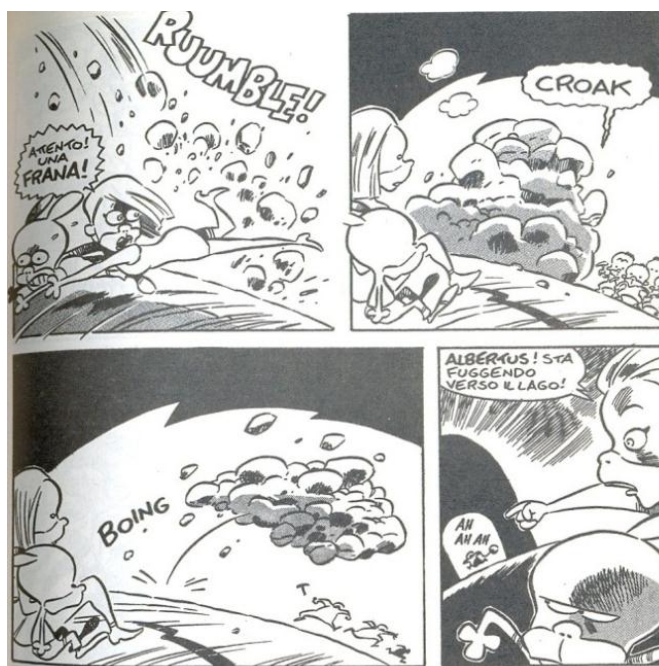


Figure 41 – ‘Frana’ (*Rat-Man* #8, p. 21, ff. 1-3)

In the sequence of four panels above, two characters make a narrow escape from a ‘frana’ (‘avalanche’), which then proceeds to croak and hop away. The author is here playing on the word ‘rana’, which is ‘frog’ in English, making the avalanche into a frog-like creature made of rocks, including the ‘croak’ sound effect in panel two, and the hopping away with a ‘boing’ in panel three.

This type of pun, unfortunately, cannot necessarily be achieved again in the TT. I would suggest that, for this instance, *compensation* is the best strategy, basing the TL solution on the images, in order to maintain the same tension highlighted above, and to prevent confusing incongruities. In some cases, this may not be possible, as with ‘frana’, above, and *omission* is the only viable solution; with the nonsensical nature of the avalanche hopping off in the later panel, however, some type of humour is retained, albeit a little surreal.

For the overall category, however, *adaptation* based on the visual elements in the cluster of signplay does seem to provide positive results in terms of translation and the recreation of the tension present in the ST. There will be some cases in which a complete overhaul or *omission* may be necessary, such as in Figure 41, but *compensation* allows us to insert a different instance of signplay, with similar humorous functions, elsewhere on the page, issue or series.

#### 4. Summary

From my understanding, comparison and analysis of the features revolving around the importance and crucial presence of signplay, once identified in the ST, I argue that the underlying *Skopos*, the macro function determining its presence in comics is one of *medium identification*. Signplay, as the discussion has indeed shown, and the external sources have corroborated, can indeed be found in other media. One of the fields I redevelop in my discussion is that of picturebooks, which clearly and frequently employ degrees of the technique, or even type of language, to create a narrative structure and sequence. While picturebooks employ degrees of signplay, however, the comics medium relies upon its use. The tension between image and text, and its presence in co-participating and coexisting clusters, is perhaps one of the most crucial features that a translator will have to take into account, as it separates the type of text from other literary products, such as picturebooks. In other words, clusters of signplay can be grouped within the macro-function of identifying the text as being *comics*, it is medium specific in how it is employed. Within said macro-function, of course, further, variable ones operate, as discussed section by section, and summarised in table 5 below.

Typology	Function	Strategies
Neologisms	Setting/characterisation	<i>Deletion</i> <i>Retention</i>
Names	Identification	<i>Adaptation</i> <i>Retention</i>
Idioms/Catchphrases	Characterisation	<i>Adaptation</i> <i>Deletion</i> <i>Compensation</i>
Puns	Various	<i>Adaptation</i> <i>Omission</i> <i>Compensation</i>

Table 5 – Summary of strategies per category

There are obvious crossovers arising with the subject matter of the next chapter (Chapter 4), in which I analyse the use and translation of humour in the comics medium, and the three series specifically; also, some overlap is evident with the contents of Chapter 5, in terms of using signplay as a method of setting or characterising a character or text. These differ for each of the categories – neologisms, names, idioms/catchphrases, and puns – I have identified as being key in the presence of the signplay construct, though not as distinctly as other categories in later chapters.

In terms of translation strategies, signplay definitely reports some significantly differing sets of procedures, ranging from *retention* to *deletion* and *omission*, and the entire spectrum in between. As I have mentioned earlier in the chapter, however, the overarching *skopos* is that of maintaining the tension inherent to signplay itself. The smaller, individual functions for each instance or cluster need to be dealt with in order to accommodate the wider one, and as such can be considered as variables more likely to be tinkered with. The strategy of *compensation*, which I develop and apply to both the categories of puns and idioms, is a clear indication of this latter point: what matters in the process between ST and TT is not that the exact instance is maintained, but rather that there is some form of interplay between the elements that compose the cluster, even if shifted to another frame or page.

## 5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have focused on developing further the notion of signplay as a useful tool for translators attempting to work with comics. I have discussed the frameworks already in use in translation studies (e.g. Delabastita 1997; Epstein 2012) and recognised the limitations of their mostly textual approaches. To expand the boundaries, I have included critical work on multimodality (Kaindl 2004), illustrating the notion of signplay with examples, and on children's literature, specifically picturebooks (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006). Returning to a recurring theme in the thesis so far, I have argued for a functional look at signplay analysis and identification, subdividing it into four types, and in the development of translatorial strategies for each. The translation of signplay should, for practical reasons, focus on the textual elements of the comics in question in terms of actual intervention, while keeping the visual elements of the same instance as reference for the signplay to be re-created in the TT. While the image may not be translated in a physical sense, operating on the text that accompanies it does, in fact, change its connotation and intended (or not) reception in the target readership.

## Chapter 4 – Do Italian Punchlines Go ‘POW’?



Figure 42 – PK: Le nuove origini, p.47, f.1

1 - Tu? Ah! Ah! Ah!

*you ha ha ha*

2 - Scusa se mi replico, ma una battuta simile merita una risata *corale*! Ah! Ah!

*sorry if (refl) replicate but a joke similar deserves a laughter choral ha ha*

3 - Spiritoso!

*funny*

The following chapter, the second of the three core sections of this thesis, suggests potential strategies for the translation of the comics series outlined in Chapter 2, specifically dealing with the issues of translating the humour in the Italian original into English. While the discussion is limited to these two languages, the strategies suggested can be applied to other pairings, though further research will be needed in order to prove whether or not they are comprehensive (I address this in the concluding discussion for the chapter and again in the overall concluding remarks for the thesis). I feel I must stress here, again, that I am not proposing a general theory of comics translation, but rather a set of possible tactics to be employed by a practising translator, based on descriptive analyses, readings and information gathered from the source texts in question.

Therefore, as for the previous chapter (Chapter 3) I proceed gradually and systematically, first briefly discussing the current debates concerning humour translation in general; from here, I then focus on the translation of humour as it concerns comics, relating this back to the current theories and suggesting alternatives or amendments where relevant. The main section of this chapter, however, will look at the comics series, showing the practical

applications of the theoretical approaches outlined in the sections preceding it. In addition, I will be using examples from the series at the foundation of my thesis to illustrate those applications, and from the particular move to the universal. I will develop the *ad hoc* strategies on the micro-level into wider, more general guidelines and suggestions for the translation of humour in comics, especially Italian ones.

The reason for focusing this section of my analysis on humour is due, partly, to the misconception of what comics are ‘supposed’ to be or do (i.e. be funny; see section 2 below). The misnomer of the medium can lead to a variety of misconceptions about it, such as believing that comics are only ‘funnies’.<sup>48</sup> In addition, humour is extremely complicated to define, which leads to an added difficulty in creating an objective, practical framework for its translation (e.g. Vandaele 2002a).

This, combined with the relatively small amount of research on the translation of comics (Zanettin 2010), renders the task of effectively and successfully translating humour in comics, from one culture and language to another, highly difficult: the translator will have to rely on instinct, gut feeling, and intuition and tentatively devise a solution for each instance by itself.<sup>49</sup> These methods are indeed strategies that do belong to a translator’s toolkit: what I provide in this chapter is an attempt to outline a practical framework for analysing, identifying, understanding and ultimately translating the mechanisms behind the humour present in the original comic, for an audience that might have no reference for its source culture.

## 1. Humour – A Serious Overview

The translation of humour has become, in relatively recent years, a very popular subject for translation studies scholars (Chiaro 2010a: 1). One of the main reasons for this increasing interest is the association of humour with language- and culture-specific elements of the source text, especially the latter (Chiaro 2010a: 6), and the so-called ‘cultural turn’ in the academic field, that is, focusing on the culture that produced a text rather than solely on its language (e.g. Bassnett 1998). Indeed, Chiaro even goes as far as claiming that the biggest ‘problems with conveying verbal humour arise when language gets in the way’ (2010a: 1); that is to say, when the language used to express the humour is closely linked to its source culture. In those cases, trying to render the same joke in another language, or even a different variety of the same language (such as a regional or national variety), can be extremely difficult.

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<sup>48</sup> Which is, indeed, how the comic *strip* started.

<sup>49</sup> I firmly believe that even a limited amount of theoretical background can and does help practitioners (cf. Boase-Beier 2006)



Humour which relies on or employs language to be conveyed is identified as verbally expressed humour (VEH) (Chiaro 2010a: 5; also see Ritchie 2010: 34-5).

One of the most important, and highly unhelpful, issues in defining humour for the purpose of a practical strategy of recognition and identification is that 'humour' cannot be objectively defined<sup>50</sup> and is rather used as an umbrella term for a spectrum of effects, consequences, causes, actions and reactions that either intend to or actually produce a humorous reaction in the audience or receiver (see Vandaele 2002a: 151, 155). Within that spectrum, however, several studies seem to prove that there are pragmatic, linguistic and logical proceedings which determine certain elements of the intended humorous effect, at least (Attardo & Raskin 1991; also see Attardo 2002; Krikmann 2005). The following sections attempt to briefly outline the current theories held by researchers in humour studies, and a suggested application of those theories to translation.

### 1.1 Humour, in Theory

The foundational work in humour studies, defining how humour works, rather than what humour is, is attributed to Raskin's Semantic Script Theory of Humour (1985), later reworked by Raskin and Attardo, becoming the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) (1991). The theory views each joke as comprising six Knowledge Resources (KR) or levels of both form and content: Language (LA), or the verbalisation of the text; Narrative Strategy (NS), the form assumed by the joke, e.g. dialogue, riddle, etc.; Target (TA), the victim or 'butt' of the joke; Situation (SI), the context and props of the joke; Logical Mechanism (LM), the resolution of an incongruity of the joke, or, the logic ruling it; Script Opposition (SO), the contrast between the different semantic interpretations of the elements of the joke, as in the case of a double meaning of a word or sentence (see Attardo 2002:176-183). The GTVH notation is the following:

Joke: {LA, NS, TA, SI, LM, SO}  
(Attardo 2002: 176)

While this may appear exceedingly complicated (cf. Groensteen 2007), the underlying rationale of this notation is sound, in my opinion: humour, generally speaking, is not attributable to a single element of the text, and all of the variables exist in relation to one another, for the intended humorous effect to be manifest.

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<sup>50</sup> Except in lexicographer's terms as '[t]hat quality of action, speech, or writing, which excites amusement; oddity, jocularly, facetiousness, comicality, fun' and 'The faculty of perceiving what is ludicrous or amusing, or of expressing it in speech, writing, or other composition; jocose imagination or treatment of a subject' ('humour' OED definition).

According to Attardo and GTVH, furthermore, not all Knowledge Resources need to be fulfilled for a joke to exist; the Target, for example, need not exist at all (2002: 178). Knowledge Resources are not necessary conditions; they are simply variables that determine the various aspects of the joke. What these categories do entail, however, is a hierarchy of necessity for the joke to be successful, delineated as follows (Table 6):

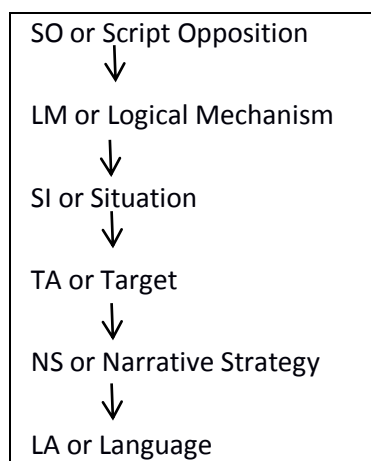


Table 6 – KR hierarchy (from Attardo 2002: 183)

The significance of this organisation lies in the fact that Language is at the lowest end of the scale. In other words, a joke can be rephrased, in the same language, and still make sense and produce the same humorous effect.<sup>51</sup> The relevance of this for translation is fairly obvious, in my opinion: if language is not the fundamental aspect of the joke and, as a variable, can assume any value, then changing it from source language (SL) to target language (TL) will not, in theory, influence the joke significantly.

The problem, of course, is in the fact that, as mentioned above, humour is linked to language insofar as the latter is an expression of the source culture.<sup>52</sup> Attardo does recognise this, but he does not discuss it to a great extent, focusing more on the conveying of VEH itself than the cultural barriers a translator may encounter (2010: 185). Other humour theorists (Chiaro 2010; Vandaele 2002a) are more explicit about the cultural aspect of humour, recognising that

<sup>51</sup> This is obviously not always the case. English knock-knock jokes, for example, would not work with different wording, as they rely solely on script opposition based on phonetic similarity. For further information, see Attardo (2002:177, 184-5).

<sup>52</sup> This can be seen as an example of Weak Linguistic Relativity, the idea that different languages may be cognitively affected by their source cultures, in trivial ways.



humorous texts will exemplify extreme lingua-cultural specificity as they often entail recognition of cultural elements with which it would be impossible to be familiar without having had direct exposure to them.

(Chiaro 2010: 8)

This holding true, anyone wishing to work with the translation of humour will necessarily have to engage with the cultural context and cognitive environment of both source text (ST) and target text (TT).

## 1.2 Humour, in comics

Despite what the medium's name might suggest, comics do not necessarily include, rely or depend on humour as their defining feature (Zanettin 2010: 34; Heer and Worchester 2009: xiii). It is, however, true that comics do employ humour for a number of reasons, an excellent list of which can be derived from research in the field of (video) Game Studies, which identifies five main values of using humour in games (see Table 7, below).

Values	Description
Value of incongruity for engagement	Enhance dialogue, other verbal and non-verbal elements; increase engagement and enjoyment
Relief to support gameplay	Reduce the tension, facilitate gameplay
Social function	Reinforce sense of belonging to a group, through self-referencing to itself or similar media
Humour and character design	Characterisation and increased relatability to the characters
Humour for fun and pleasure	Provide entertainment

Table 7 – Values of humour in Game Studies (adapted from Mangiron 2010:91-2)

The values presented above can, in my opinion, be applied almost directly to comics, by simply substituting 'gameplay' for 'plot' or 'storyline'. The parallels in all other instances are

almost explicit, as characters, engagement, and entertainment are all qualities found in any text, be it literary, media, or comics. The use of humour, therefore, is an essential aspect of some types of narrative, and comics do employ humour for these very same purposes. Recognising these values as being the rationale behind the inclusion of humorous instances in a story, be it serious or not, will aid a translator in replicating the same effects in the TT, in order to maintain the same balance of seriousness and humour. These values also seem to adhere to the theoretical concept of humour as relief, rather than targeting someone/something, as discussed by Krikmann (2005: 28). Humour is not necessarily a way of exerting superiority or claiming identity, but also is a relatively harmless activity, as exemplified by Mangiron's summary above. The Game Studies approach is highly relevant in the case of comics, as the budding field of Comics Studies has yet to be fully established as a widely recognised academic area, and it suggests and proposes topics and frameworks building on a variety of interdisciplinary work. As is the case with Game Studies, comics scholars are bringing forward theories that, in most cases, have yet to be proven, or at least accepted.

A useful, established approach, in terms of identifying and analysing how humour is conveyed in comics, can be found in the work of Klaus Kaindl, who also identifies eight strategies used in translating humour in comics, and, for that matter, comics overall. Kaindl's approach claims that there are various 'semiotic vehicles [...] used to convey meaning and create a message', when dealing with graphic narratives (2004: 173). The images and words (speech/thought bubbles, captions, sound-words) can be present in various combinations of co-dependency or independence from each other, or multimodality. Indeed, Kaindl identifies five ways in which the combinations can occur, focusing on the 'relationship between text and picture, and the resulting translation problems' (1999: 274).

I have illustrated the five types of signplay developed by Kaindl in Chapter 3 (1.3), but refer to them here again due to them being extremely useful in the analysis of how, specifically, humour can be applied to a specific panel or sequence, and highly relevant to the work of a translator. If the humour is text-based, then a translator can proceed with a 'normal' strategy for humour translation, such as the ones presented in 2.1, below. If the humour is image-based, the translator will have to ensure that it is also compatible or understandable to the target culture; in some cases, there may be the need for some added explanation, at the cost of losing part of the effect (see section 4, below, for more details). The real issues arise when the humour is conveyed through co-dependent image/text combinations.

## 2. Finding the Funny

Above, I outlined and discussed a variety of strategies employed by translation scholars dealing with humour, in different forms and from a number of specialisation fields. As I have mentioned, a combination of the strategies derived from Kaindl, Attardo and Epstein inform my own approach to what I suggest to be a viable approach to translating comics containing humorous instances. What I will proceed to illustrate now are the practical issues to consider in translating the humour used in comics, exemplifying this with the three Italian series introduced in the previous chapter. In order to achieve this, I will describe how I arrived at the identification of different categories or typologies of humour to help a translator frame their work, and subsequently apply strategies for each of those types. Specifically, I will look at examples, offering a translation solution for each, and from there provide strategies for the typology as a whole.

### 2.1 Where is the Humour?

As mentioned above, when dealing with the comics medium, the devices that convey humour are not limited to linguistic properties or VEH. While these are still a fundamental aspect of the text, a complete analysis must include the visual nature of comics.

Using Kaindl's five different categories, I analysed the first issue of each series in order to identify the frequency of humorous instances in the first issue of each of the three series (Table 8). The choice to focus primarily on these issues is due to my belief that, for a comics publisher, the sales of the first issue of a new series will determine whether the rest is a viable publishing project or not, a gateway of sorts. Very much like a pilot episode of a television series, the first issue of a new comics series is indicative of whether to continue selling or not, allowing my analysis to remain fiction-oriented, rather than purely theoretical.<sup>53</sup>

Types of signplay	Rat-Man <i>Le Sconvolgenti Origini del Rat-Man!</i>	PKNA <i>Evroniani</i>	Dampyr <i>Il Figlio del Diavolo</i>
Only verbal signs	4	6	0
Verbal reinforced by non-verbal	4	4	0
Combination-dependent	13	10	0

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<sup>53</sup> Indeed, first issues are usually given out as free promotional material during conventions, for example.

Non-verbal reinforced by verbal	5	10	0
Only non-verbal signs	3	1	0
Total panels	83	398	517
Total instances of humour	29 (34.9%)	31 (7.8%)	0 (0%)

Table 8 – Signplay in the three series

As expected, Leo Ortolani's *Rat-Man*, which started out as a parody of the American superhero comic book genre, is the comic containing the highest frequency of humour. The Disney title *PKNA*, a sci-fi, superhero series, comes in second, and all-Italian *Dampyr*, a horror-action series, contains no humour whatsoever.<sup>54</sup> For this reason, the rest of my analysis will not refer to the latter series, which will still, however, feature heavily in the next chapters. The remaining two titles, on the other hand, do rely on humour, albeit on different levels. In addition, these results further prove the claims of Zanettin, who regards humour as one of the properties of a text, especially in longer narratives, rather than 'just located at specific points in the text' (2010:44), and of Mangiron, who recognises the value of humour as a tension breaker and intensifier of enjoyment derived from the plot (2010:91; see also section 1, above).

The brief quantitative analysis of the presence of signplay conveying humour in both *Rat-Man* and *PKNA* emphasises the importance of the co-presence of both verbal and non-verbal signs. It does not, however, help us identify what types of humour are being used in the STs. We are now aware of the heavy reliance on multimodal-dependent humour in both series, but this only informs a translator about having to rely on the visual aspect, while still lacking a strategy to translate that verbal/non-verbal dependency. Kaindl does provide a number of strategies, discussed in section 3, but they are limited to the translation of multimodal vs. monomodal elements in general, and are more useful in a descriptive analysis, rather than suggesting a working method (2004: 175; see also section 3.2).

<sup>54</sup> This is not entirely, technically true. The first issue does have three instances of in-story humour, but they are not for the reader to appreciate as such, but rather to highlight the cruelty of one of the minor characters: a militia soldier in Bosnia and Herzegovina, joking about the war being good for one thing after all – producing widows (*Dampyr* #1, p. 20).

## 2.2 What is the Humour?

By analysing the individual instances of humour listed in Table 8, I devised a working hypothesis of different sub-categories of signplay. Some of these, unsurprisingly, find a correspondence in Attardo's list of Logical Mechanisms (2002: 180). The categories, presented below (Table 9), are by no means intended to be considered the definitive collection of all humour types in Italian comics; rather, they are just the observed ones in the two series considered for the analysis in this chapter. Furthermore, the categories are not entirely distinct entities, and can be used in combination to achieve a more humorous effect. I do believe, however, that given the qualities of the Italian mainstream comics market (comprised of Disney, Bonelli and Panini/Marvel publications, plus imports; see chapter 2), there will be little variation in the macro-categories, except some additions within them; further research on a wider corpus is needed to prove this point.

<b>Types of humour</b>	
<i>Category</i>	<i>Description</i>
Metahumour	A panel's caption, dialogue and image answer each other, or contain references to awareness of being a comic and other elements in the series/medium
Self-undermining	Self-referential (of character), downplaying remarks or actions; differs from metahumour in the lack of narratorial presence
Onomatopoeic	Comedic effect is in the sound-words themselves; sound-words used to add to or contrast the rest of the action in the panel
Consequential	An unexpected conclusion to a sequence, a reversal of the intended or established consequence of a plot/scene/action
Linguistic	Includes wordplay, dialects, neologisms and any non-standard language usage
Politically (in)correct	Sex jokes, toilet humour, bad taste, humour related to either hyper-correctness or deliberate incorrectness, e.g. regional, social or national stereotypes

Parody	The situation bears similarities or contains references to another object, person, situation, usually within the genre or culture it is trying to emulate (e.g. superhero comics, sci-fi, aspects of pop culture), but mocks it
Childish	Groaners, Christmas cracker-style jokes, “bad” humour, not including elements of toilet humour or similar
Absurd	The situation depicted defies expectations, real-world or text-world logic

Table 9 – Humour types in *Rat-Man* and *PKNA*

Examples of the different typologies and a wider definition for each are provided in section 4, throughout the discussion about the issues raised when facing examples of each category.

### 3. Translational Strategies for Humour

I have so far discussed the issues related to identifying and analysing different types of humour that may appear in a comics text in the source language, devising a set of categories for easier reference for a translator. What I move to illustrate below is my suggested set of strategies for each of those categories, as I once again move from the general to the particular, finding my roots in pre-existing, though limited, critical observations on how humour operates.

#### 3.1 In General

Before moving to the specifics of comics translation, I will provide a brief outline of the current theories in translating humour in general. Chiaro suggests four possible strategies: leave VEH unchanged; replace source VEH with a different instance of VEH in the TL; replace source VEH with an idiomatic expression in the TL; ignore VEH altogether (2010: 11-12). While these strategies appear fairly straightforward in theory, the practical application complications are obvious, as every case of VEH will have to be analysed, compared, and checked before being translated. What Chiaro does additionally suggest, however, is that the primary function of humour is a social one (2010: 13), therefore allowing, in my opinion, for a more wide-ranging spectrum of potential translational strategies.

This seems to also be the case for Attardo's application of GTVH to translation (2002), in which he uses the hierarchy of Knowledge Resources shown above to suggest a 'mini-theory of joke translation':

If possible, respect all six Knowledge Resources in your translation, but if necessary, let your translation differ *at the lowest level necessary for your pragmatic purposes*.

(2002: 183, emphasis in original)

That is to say, language will be the first to be modified, obviously, followed by Narrative Strategy and so on, in order to maintain, at least, the higher variables of the joke. An example of this can be seen with English knock-knock jokes: the Narrative Strategy is something almost limited to English, though there are examples in French, and as such, its replication might not have the same effect in another language; therefore a similar structure already existing in the TL<sup>55</sup> will have to be found (see also Attardo 2002: 186). Once again, in practice, the translator will have to rely on personal experience, intuition and creativity. I do, however, believe that Attardo's approach is of more pragmatic use, as it helps the translator identify the mechanisms behind each joke in the ST, and therefore aid the replication of the specific humorous effect in the TT.<sup>56</sup> Examples of these types are the ones I have devised and presented in Table 9, above, which, as mentioned, are in turn also based on Attardo's analysis and theoretical work on Logical Mechanisms (2002: 180).

### 3.2 In Comics

When attempting to discuss the issues related to the translation of humour in comics, further levels of complexity arise. As Zanettin rightly points out, most scholarly work on the translation of humour has been done based mostly on VEH (2010: 45). In comics, however, the verbal aspect is only part of the text, and any strategy based solely on VEH studies, such as Attardo's General Theory of Verbal Humour, will fail in covering all the aspects that need translating in order to recreate similar humorous effects in the TT. Zanettin recognises the need for further analysis in how to approach the 'constrained' process of dealing with a text which relies on the interaction of visual and textual elements (2010: 45), while also acknowledging the relevance and usefulness of Attardo's work on GTVH (2010: 48).

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<sup>55</sup> In her discussion of humour translation, Chiaro talks of 'equivalency', a loaded word in Translation Studies. I prefer to avoid discussing the importance and difficulty of the issues surrounding such term in this instance; for more, see Chiaro (2010: 6-13).

<sup>56</sup> As opposed to perceived humour; a translator, with this strategy, will be able to recognise the humour, which does not entail finding it funny (cf. Vandaele 2002a: 150).

Kaindl has devised eight strategies, which are comprehensive of all the permutations of signplay (2004: 176; see Table 10). Unfortunately, the strategies come across more as observations than practical suggestions, as they simply state all the possible ways in which the combinations may or may not be reproduced between two texts, without actually providing a potential framework to replicate the same effects (see Kaindl 2004:176-90 for the analysis). His work, which is more of an analysis of previous translations between French and German, however, is useful to the extent that it identifies those possibilities.

	Source text: Semiotic type	Target text: Semiotic type	Source vs. target text: Humour technique		Source vs. target text: Language-picture relation	
A	Monomodal humour	Monomodal humour	similar	changed	similar	changed
B	Monomodal humour	Multimodal	similar	changed	changed	
C	Monomodal humour	No humour	–	–	–	–
D	No humour	Monomodal humour	changed		changed	
E	Multimodal humour	multimodal humour	similar	changed	similar	changed
F	Multimodal humour	Monomodal humour	similar	changed	changed	
G	Multimodal humour	No humour	–	–	–	–
H	No humour	Multimodal humour	changed		changed	

Table 10 – Kaindl’s translation strategies (2004:175)

Zanettin, however, accurately summarises Kaindl’s strategies, by stating that, in translating humour in comics (note that this can be applied to all translation of humour), there are three possible outcomes: the humorous effect will be preserved, changed or omitted (2010:46). Once again, while this is useful in a theoretical understanding of the use of multimodal humour, it really does not advance a translator’s progress in translating it. His earlier claim that ‘images can be seen as both helping and hindering the translator’s task’ (2010:45), which introduces the concept of constrained translation, though a fairly obvious one, is more useful in terms of translation strategies. The idea of constraint in translation, and its contribution towards creativity rather than a hindrance, is a concept well established in the field of translation studies, and one I fully agree with. Boase-Beier and Holman, for example, argue that constraints place the translator in the position of having to ideate solutions to overcome them, ultimately increasing the literariness and creative value of the TT (1999: 17).<sup>57</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Additionally, Boase-Beier later argues that one of said constraints is, in fact, theory (2006:47); this notion is one of the underlying assumptions and reason for the heavy reliance on the theoretical



Another point brought forward by Kaindl sees the inclusion of Delabastita's work on the translation of film (1989), adapted to the former's own concept signplay, on the basis of the shared visual aspects (Kaindl 1999:275). The issue I see being created here, however, is that translators who are intimidated by or not interested in highly theoretical strategies, or, quite simply, are more practical in their approach to the translatorial process, will possibly be uninterested in or actively reject Delabastita's work, which is influenced by rhetoric, uses Latin terms to describe strategies, and focuses almost entirely on highly literary texts (cf. Delabastita 1993, 1997).<sup>58</sup> In the following section, I discuss what I believe to be a solution to this concern.

### 2.2.1 The Other Theory

In a similar approach to the one employed by Zanettin in reference to Kaindl's eight strategies, discussed above, research in the field of children's literature in translation, conducted by BJ Epstein, offers a more straightforward and simplified, although by no means simplistic, approach than Delabastita's. Epstein's work on expressive language in children's literature offers similar strategies, including several additions, whilst using a definitely more straightforward and accessible language and approach (Table 11; note: the table is identical to the one used in Chapter 3, offered again for ease of reference). This is crucial, in my opinion, as the purpose of my work, while being a piece of academic research, is based on popular literature and products of mass consumption and entertainment. A translator who may want to venture into the area of comics translation, might not be accustomed to highly convoluted or overly complex academic jargon; my solution, therefore, is to adopt a plainer stance, in describing the analysis, the strategies, and their practical application.

Translatorial strategy	Description
Deletion	To remove the expressive language and/or its associations; this may be part of a larger strategy of abridgement or adaptation, and may not be because of the expressive language itself, although it could be
Standardization	To standardize the language, using standard spelling, grammar, and word choices in place of the non-standard in the original

---

discussion outlined so far, in preparation of the analytical and practical aspect of the chapter.

<sup>58</sup> I do not, of course, mean to belittle Delabastita's work in the field of translation of puns and wordplay. What I am critiquing here are the language and environment influencing his approach. Delabastita labels his strategies for film translation *repetitio* (retention as is of ST elements in TT), *adiectio* (addition of elements in TT), *detractio* (partial omission of ST elements), *transmutatio* (change in order of ST elements in TT), *substitutio* (replacement of ST elements in TT) and *deletio* (complete omission of elements of ST in TT) (1989).

Replacement	To replace the expressive language (with another example of the same sort of expressive language, or some other literary device or form of expressive language, or with a non-figurative word)
Addition	To add new expressive language and/or new associations and/or some other text where there was none before; this can be a way of compensating for deletion, adaptation or replacement
Explanation	To add an explanation paratextually (a footnote or endnote, introduction or translator's note, or a signal) or intratextually (a word or phrase in the text)
Compensation	To employ the expressive language, but in different places/amounts than the source text
Grammatical representation	To use non-standard grammar to mark the language usage
Orthographic representation	To use non-standard spelling to mark the language usage
Vocabulary representation	To use non-standard word-choices to mark the language usage
Literal translation	To recreate the expressive language in the target language, usually without the same connotations
Adaptation	To use the expressive language but change the spelling or grammar or some other part of it, perhaps to better suit the target language
Retention	To keep the expressive language and, hopefully, its associations, if there are any, or to only retain the associations or ideas contained in the particular item of expressive language

Table 11 – Translatorial strategies (from Epstein 2012:25-6)

As I have shown above, humour in comics is conveyed by at least five different types of signplay. Once the type of signplay is recognised, the translator will be able to identify whether the dominant elements are verbal or non-verbal, or if there is a co-dependency of the two. In all these cases, though, there will be the need to render or add textual information to the panel(s); this is where Epstein's strategies come into play, adapted to the medium of comics.

The translation of humour in comics, I would argue, is concerned with pragmatic and technical issues, with constraint, physical and temporal, and with having a specific effect to reproduce in the TT, rather than having to interpret a possible meaning from the text, as is the case for, say, poetry. Therefore, a functional approach from the field of Translation Studies such as *Skopostheorie* is extremely useful: identifying the *Skopos* or 'overall purpose' of the ST (Nord 1997:27), is fundamental to devising translatorial strategies which will ensure a successful reproduction in the TT. In this case, the *Skopos* is to produce an effect of amusement in the reader, based on the signplay present in the panels of the ST; simply put, a

good translation of the humour present in the source comics, therefore, will be funny in the TL.

What I present below, therefore, is my own approach, resulting from the combination of the strategies discussed so far, with Zanettin's framework of constrained translation, imposed by the presence of the images for each instance of humour presented in the comic.

#### **4. Down and Dirty**

In this section, I employ a combination of the various strategies and concepts outlined in the previous sections to analyse examples of each category or type of humour I have devised in my own research (see Table 9). As discussed above, Kaindl's analysis of the eight translation strategies points out that both the humour technique and the picture/language either remain similar or change between the ST and the TT (2004: 175). He also draws upon Delabastita's (1989) rhetoric-influenced approach in describing how the changes are or are not made (Kaindl 1999: 275). Delabastita's approach though will not appeal to a wider range of translators, especially non-academics. Epstein's similar, yet more practical and straightforward approach, provides comics translators with a useful framework of translatorial strategies (see Table 11 above).

By focusing on examples of the different types identified by Kaindl, I will show how this framework can lead to the development of both general and specific strategies. My overall approach is an adaptation of Attardo's mini-theory of joke translation (section 1.2, above): to move through the hierarchy of the Knowledge Resources for each instance of humour, according to each type. Applied to the translation of comics and the humour present in the single panels, pages and stories, an apt rephrasing would be: translators should employ any of the strategies at their disposal, in order to ultimately *retain* the tension between verbal and non-verbal elements, using the latter as frame of reference. I attribute this to practical and pragmatic reasons of not having the possibility, in most cases, to re-draw the images in the comics, and therefore just modifying the text. The strategies are, obviously, not necessary in the case of a full reinterpretation or adaptation of the original comic.

This strategy is, of course, only meant to replicate the humour, as the final result will only become obvious to each individual reader, if it does at all, due to the subjective nature of perceived humour (see section 1.1, above).

#### 4.1 Metahumour

The first category, *metahumour*, includes all instances of humour which use references to the characters being aware of their status as fictional creations, where captions, speech bubbles and images dialogue with each other, correcting or expanding on a narratorial comment, and/or references to other stories, panels or issues of the same series or its characters.



Figure 43 – Example of metahumour in *Deadpool*

This not an uncommon feature in English-language comics, both mainstream and underground, known as 'breaking the fourth wall' (Bell 2008: 203; e.g. *Deadpool*, Figure 43, above), so the strategies used by a translator will not, arguably, have to find ways of introducing a new concept to the TL. The most common type sees a narratorial voice intervening, in the form of a caption, in order to comment on the scene depicted in the panel (Figure 44).



Figure 44 – Rat-Man origins: p. 2, ff. 3-4-5.

In the three frames above, from *Rat-Man* #1, the story of the origins of the character's super heroic alter ego is being told by an external narrator, through captions. In the central frame, the word 'ladrata' (lit. 'steal') refers to the dishonest pricing used in the sales, during which the character's parents die (left frame). The third frame's caption comments on the character's resolution to dedicate his life to crime-fighting, pointing out how linking 'dishonest prices' at a sale and 'criminality' is a 'curiosa e alquanto oscura associazione di idee' / 'a curious and quite obscure thought process' (lit. 'association of ideas'). The humorous element, therefore, is in the verbal element of the caption, which comments on and gives the reader an idea of the actual seriousness and competence, or lack thereof, of the protagonist, and, this being in the first pages of the first issue, of the series as a whole.

In terms of translating the metahumour of the frame, therefore, there are no real complications, and a simple *retention* strategy can be used. The only concern here is to also retain the connection with the previous panel, by translating the pseudo-linguistic ambiguity of its caption in a similar fashion, in order for the following one to refer back to it. A potential translation for this section, therefore, would be as follows:

- |         |  |
|---------|--|
| Panel 1 | ...When he lost both parents during the sales in a convenience store   |
| Panel 2 | He will never forget the prices on the tags: a real steal!   |
| Panel 3 | It was then that, by a curious and, quite frankly, confusing association of ideas, he decided to avenge his parents by fighting crime! |

Another instance of this type can be found in the actual dialogue between framed subjects and caption (Figure 45).



Figure 45 – Rat-Man origins: p. 5, f. 3.

Once again, there is no real difficulty here, as the humorous effect is conveyed through the contrast between the verbal elements of the caption ('No one could stop this champion of justice!') and the speech bubble ('Messenger of justice! Messenger! Don't confuse the two...'), reinforced by the visual elements in the frame. If the same contrast is retained, no matter what different phrasing the TT will have, the effect will be reproduced. The translation I presented in brackets, above, does not literally translate Italian 'ambasciatore', but employs the same mechanism as the original's source of humour: 'ambassador' is used in lieu of 'messenger' in the Italian version of the idiom 'don't shoot the messenger'. A potential solution is as follows:

Caption:	But nothing could stop this champion of justice!
Rat-Man:	Messenger of justice! Messenger! Let's not mix them up...

More complex issues, however, arise in the case of metahumour that is not limited to one panel or those in its immediate surroundings (Figure 46, below). Arguably, these instances could also be classified as referential or exotextual, as they refer back to other episodes in the series or similar situations either in other stories from the same series, or even other series altogether, in which case it can also be classified under 'parody', which is discussed in section 4.7 below.





Figure 46 – PKNA #0: p. 49, f. 4.

The humour in this scene from *PKNA #0* is due to Paperinik being shown a computer elaboration of what his nephews might look like, according to the data analysis of him by Computer One; as he is currently wearing his vigilante outfit, the rendition depicts Huey, Louie and Dewey as vigilantes too.

The difficulty here is not in translating the humour itself, but in the fact that the translator will have to take into account the existence of the three characters, which have so far never been shown in the series, since this is the first issue. An Italian reader, familiar with the Duck family thanks to the popularity of Disney publications, will know of their existence and remember their appearance. Their English counterparts, however, where Donald Duck is not as popular a comic character, or rather, where Disney comics are not as common anymore, may not know this, therefore missing the humorous effect. This scene is also an example of multimodal-dependent humour, as the effect is achieved only through the co-participation of both verbal and non-verbal signs.

The strategy I would suggest for this instance would be to keep the multimodal aspect, in order to not have to modify the image, and *retain* the situation as is:

Computer One It doesn't matter. Knowing you I can deduce them from your data!

PK Ha! Ha! They don't look exactly like that, but close!

Then, the translator or publisher will have to add paratextual information on the Duck family overall, either in a footnote, but preferably at the beginning of the issue, and all the others following it, in the style of a 'who's who' in the PK universe.<sup>59</sup> A potential issue with this

<sup>59</sup> Some English publications already adopt this strategy, such as Vertigo's *Fables* (2002-) and IDW's *Transformers: More Than Meets the Eye* (2011-).

method, however, is that some of the characters may only appear once, and in a marginal role, as is this case. Furthermore, as the series continues, more characters are added to the roster, and it would have to be updated constantly; all of which is not exclusively under the translator's jurisdiction, but the publisher's.<sup>60</sup> As mentioned above (section 2), comics translation necessitates a close cooperation between the publisher, editor and translator, and ideally original creators (writers, artists, etc.), just as it does for the ST, in order to ensure the full reception, and therefore enjoyment, of the series on the readers' behalf.

In summary, when faced with metahumour in a comic, a potential translatorial solution would be one of *adaptation*, i.e. to modify the text in order to suit the TL more, while keeping the same tension between the text and image that was present in the ST. Where this is not possible, *addition* of paratextual material is an alternative strategy, at the editor/publisher's discretion.

## 4.2 Self-undermining

The category of *self-undermining* includes all instances of humour in which characters undermine their own importance, courage, or positive aspects, in most cases playing against established tropes of the superhero, action and sci-fi genres. Characters remove the hero's infallibility and trivialise their own seriousness or actions as guardians of justice, for example, usually by completing other, completely unexpected and almost counterintuitive tasks, commenting on themselves or their actions, or just overtly, although not necessarily intentionally, pointing out insecurities and shortcomings (Figures 47 and 48).



Figure 47 – Broken (Rat-Man #1, p. 11, ff. 1-4)

<sup>60</sup> That is not to say that a translator cannot add paratext, but rather that, for better or for worse, there is a heavier editorial control in comics publishing (see Chapter 2).



Figure 47, from *Rat-Man* #1, shows Rat-Man at the end of an action sequence in which he seems relatively sure-footed and likely to win the conflict; as he tells his opponents what he is about to do (stop them with paralysing gas from his utility belt), however, he breaks the capsule, paralysing himself, with the result that he gets thrown into a rubbish bin. This type of gag is a recurring one throughout the series (e.g. Figures 4, 27), showing Rat-Man's complete incompetence in most tasks.<sup>61</sup>



Figure 48 – Tough going (PKNA #0, p. 9, ff. 5-6)

Figure 48, on the other hand, shows Paperinik ultimately revealing that under his vigilante costume, he is still the traditionally cowardly Donald Duck. The scene gains its humorous effect due to the contrast with the first part of the sentence: the idiomatic 'Quando il gioco si fa duro...' / 'When the going gets tough...' (lit. 'When the game gets tough') is completed with '...io vorrei essere da un'altra parte!' / '...I'd rather go (lit. 'be') somewhere else!', thwarting the reader's expectations. Where they would expect the character, a superhero fighting invaders from space, to finish the cliché with '...i duri cominciano a giocare! / ...the tough get going!', PK shows his fallible nature, reacting with quite a natural thought for anyone actually facing that type of situation.<sup>62</sup> The contrast is accentuated by the two different stances of the character, from defender to nail-bitingly worried; it should be noted, in addition, that this particular scene is mostly VEH, reinforced by the visual depiction of the character's worrying attitude.

A translator, therefore, faced with instances of this particular type of humour can usually rely on the non-verbal signs for suggestions or clues regarding how to reproduce the verbal elements, in the case of all five types of signplay.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, considering the example of figure 5, a translator could choose to ignore the correlation between the two panels, and opt for something completely different, yet still fitting the image of the latter one. As long as the humour technique is maintained, i.e. self-undermining, the tone of both the ST and the TT will

<sup>61</sup> Compare, however, the 'serious' story-arcs in the series, as outlined in Chapter 2.

<sup>62</sup> One can assume, at least.

<sup>63</sup> Except in the case of non-verbal only, which I will discuss in a later section (4.8).

contain the same elements of not taking itself too seriously, and the effect, from the perspective of a writer/translator at least, will also be *retained*.

My suggestion is the one presented earlier, providing the English reader with the following:

Panel 1            'What are we going to do now?' 'Don't worry! When the going gets tough...'  
Panel 2            '...I'd rather be somewhere else!'

The reason for maintaining the same construction and phrasing is a perfect example of the pragmatic aspect of comics translation, discussed above (section 2): this scene has been used for marketing purposes, during reprints of the series in Italy, as a tagline of sorts (e.g. *Classici del Fumetto di Repubblica* 2003). The dialogue perfectly portrays the character and his flaws, and reflects the tone of the series. Changing it to something very different, while still being funny, might mean having to find another suitable tagline to pitch the series.

In order to achieve the same categorisation in the TT, then, a translator's strategy would once again be that of *retention* in most cases. Where retention is not possible, due to the presence of cultural-specific elements, *adaptation* is another solution, though always keeping in mind that non-verbal elements should be given precedence in the process.

#### 4.3 Onomatopoeia

One of the often recurring elements of most types of comics (McCloud 1993: 132-3), *onomatopoeic* words are identified by Kaindl as belonging to the linguistic category of signs (1999: 273). Their effect and connotations, however, can be modified or reinforced by the typographic elements applied to them, a point discussed several times before now, and which Kaindl also considers, though to a lesser extent (1999: 274) (see Figure 49, below). For this reason, I chose to classify onomatopoeia as its own vehicle for humour, rather than under the linguistic one (discussed in 4.5 below).

This type, therefore, includes humour being conveyed through the use of sound-words and interjections, either as funny in themselves, both linguistically and typographically, or in combination with the images also present in the panel.

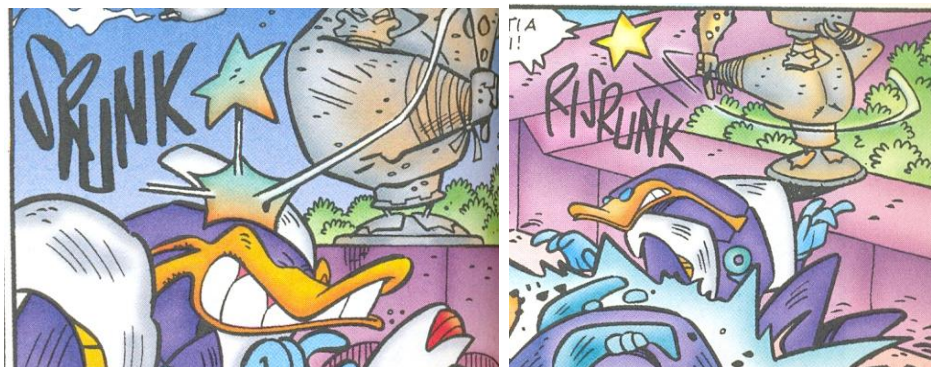


Figure 49 – Srunk (*PKNA* #0, pp. 58-9, ff. 8, 2)

Figure 49 above, from *PKNA*, shows a moment in the last battle of the first issue, where PK, the vigilante/superhero main character, faces the Evronian soldiers, invaders from space who feed on emotions; it takes place during an ambush by the alien intruders, towards the end of the issue. The two panels are almost directly consecutive, with only one slim, horizontally elongated frame between them. The sound-word in the first panel, *SRUNK*, does not pose any translation issues, or particularly humorous connotations for that matter, and can be left as is: it is a neologism, and a nonsensical one at that, modelled on words like ‘crunch’, ‘scrunch’ and ‘bonk’, usually associated by Italian and English comics-readers with crunching and hitting with or being hit by a blunt object (*Written Sound*, ‘crunch’). There do not seem to be any phonetic issues, either, as Italian and English pronunciation in this case do not differ that much, even though ‘sr-’ is much more common in Italian, as the onomatopoeia yields to a more grammatical representation of the sound, rather than the sound itself alone.

The second word, on the other hand, contains an added humorous element by the addition of the prefix *RI-*, indicating a connection between the two, and a repetition of the same action on possibly the same character (the pictures are not clear in this regard, as all the soldiers look almost the same). This may have to be translated to *RESRUNK*, as an English reader could pronounce it as ‘rye-srunk’, or misread it as ‘reshrunk’. The effect here is given by the ‘sound’ element of the sign representation ‘ri-’/‘re-’ (indicating repetition), and the spelling does not differ that much but it might still cause issues of incomprehension or remove the effect.

If a sound-word is using a particular linguistic convention, or is playing with an Italian word to create a particular effect (see figure 50, below), then it will potentially have to be removed from the frame, and reintroduced once translated. This in fact would require the re-creation of the lettering stage in the production of the TT. This may not be possible for a translator, especially if working outside of the publishing company, or without access to the pre-lettering panels. Furthermore, publishers may not want or be able to involve extra

resources in providing pre-production material to the translator, resulting in having to keep all elements not included in speech-bubbles as is.<sup>64</sup>



Figure 50 – Spalanc! (*Rat-Man* #15, p. 21, ff. 8.)

In the case of Figure 50, above, for example, the word ‘SPALANC’ is being used to indicate the sound of a sudden opening of a door. The humorous effect is given, for this particular instance, by the fact that ‘spalancare’ literally translates as ‘to throw open’, and has no actual onomatopoeic relation to the sound of a door being open. Italian readers have not shown any issue with accepting SPALANC as a viable sound-word, due to the intuitive, phonaesthetic qualities of the plosive /spa/ followed by the stressed /lanc/, conveying an idea of openness. A possible solution in this case, for a successful English translation, would have to retain those qualities, while at the same time be a recognisable word meaning to ‘open’. The only potential candidate I have found is ‘AJAR!’; while it does not retain the verbal property, it has the same type of open vowels and number of syllables.

<sup>64</sup> The final effect will look like the current Western production of manga in translation, with the distinction that this case involves a lack of effort on the publisher's behalf, rather than a proactive marketing strategy (see Chapter 2).

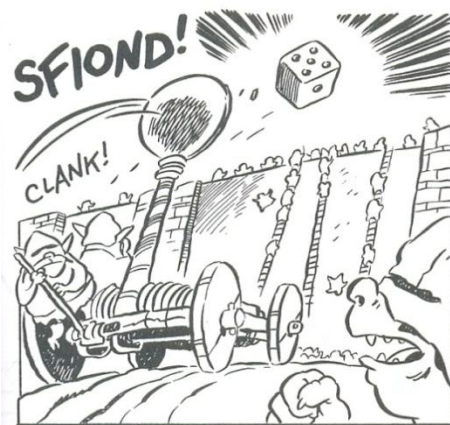


Figure 51 – Sfiond! (*Signore dei Ratti*, p. 47, f. 3.)

Similarly, in Figure 51 (above) the catapult appears to be producing the sound SFIOND! This is another invention by Ortolani, and is based on the word ‘fionda’ (‘catapult’ or ‘slingshot’), arguably also an instance of metahumour here. This verbalisation of nouns as sound-effects is a running feature in the Rat-Man series, possibly due to the unexpectedly humorous innovation of their introduction (as no other series in Italian, both translated and original, had tried it previously), almost becoming one of *Rat-Man*’s selling points to its fandom. Whilst not being an issue for translation in itself, keeping the features as is may lead to an unintentional foreignisation of the text.<sup>65</sup> A possible solution for this instance would be to use ‘SLING!’, which, whilst not being a noun-verbalisation, still uses, quite surprisingly, a verb/noun as a sound-word: the action is being described by a sound which is, in fact, the name of the action itself.

The overall strategy for translating interjections and sound-words meant for humorous effects, in my opinion, therefore, is to retain where possible the connotation of the ST’s phonetic effect, which may result in *adapting* the spelling of the original to fit the English orthographic representation of sounds. If this is not feasible, to use a word that maintains the same semantic properties, and can be made to assume the phonaesthetic quality of the action being described. This type of retention differs slightly from the one suggested by Epstein (Table 11, above), in that it aims to keep the humorous effects and associations of the words used, by adapting the TL to render the ST’s ‘sound’. I would argue that this type of strategy is extremely relevant to comics translation, and crucial to obtain a successful translation of these sound elements, as they contribute to the paratext in conveying affective information to the scene (as discussed in Chapter 3).

<sup>65</sup> However, see note 62 above.



#### 4.4 (Anti)Climax

The category of *(anti)climactic* humour includes instances in which the effect is given by thwarting the reader's expectations of a series of connected panels or actions or the end of a build-up, creating a surprise, and sometimes paradoxical, ending to an action or piece of dialogue.

While it may appear similar to the 'self-undermining' category discussed above, I have chosen to differentiate them by categorising under this type all the instances which do not strictly involve major characters, or any characters at all; if it does, it does not contribute to the development of the characters involved, is usually used as a one-off gag, or at least only in one issue. This is done to avoid an over-attachment to a secondary character or event, removing the attention from the main protagonists (cf. Mangiron 2010; Krikmann 2005).

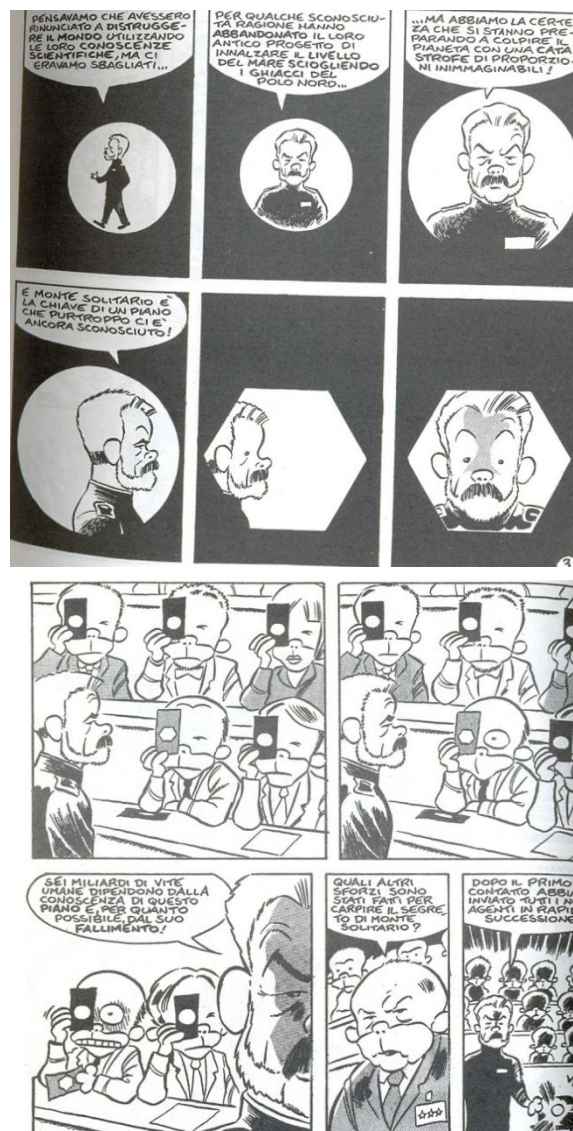


Figure 52 – Spotlight (Rat-Man #8, pp. 3-4.)

- |         |  |
|---------|--|
| Panel 1 | We thought they had given up on <i>destroying the world</i> using their <i>scientific knowledge</i> , but we were wrong... |
| Panel 2 | For unknown reasons, they have <i>abandoned</i> their earlier project of raising sea level by melting the polar caps...    |
| Panel 3 | ...but we're certain that they're preparing a <i>devastating attack</i> on the whole planet!                               |
| Panel 4 | And Lonely Mountain is the key to a plan we still know too little about.   |

The sequence shown in Figure 52, from *Rat-Man* #8, seems to recreate a scene from a stereotypical spy film, parodying the likes of James Bond. The speaker is shown in a circle, which a reader might be used to identifying as either the barrel of a gun or a spotlight. The final two panels disrupt this view and assumption, with a hexagonal frame being substituted for the circular one. What follows is a moment of meta-humour of sorts, with the bemused speaker looking into the frame itself, apparently at the reader; this is once again removed, adding an extra humorous effect, by 'explaining' the reason behind the frames. The effect is achieved entirely via non-verbal signs, and in this case, with no real cultural barrier issues between source and target cultures.

In the case where this type is used in combination with verbal signs, however, complications may arise (see Figure 53, below).

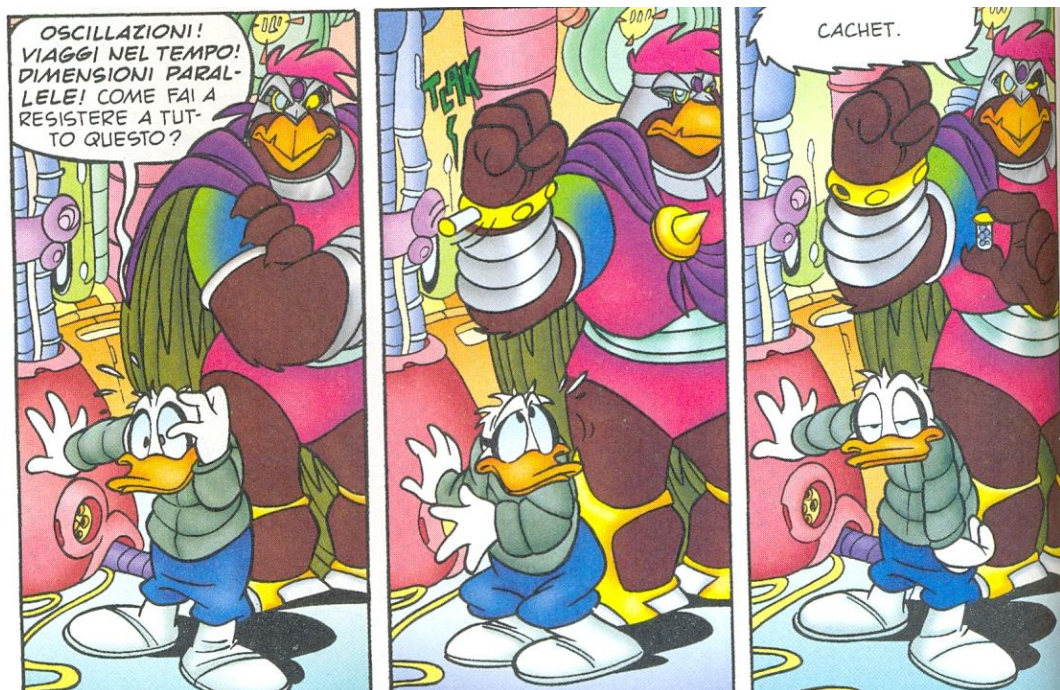


Figure 53 – Cachet (*PKNA* #14, n.p., ff. 6-8.)

In the image above, PK and his arch-enemy the Raider have just been debriefed after an unlikely allied mission, which involved a lengthy explanation involving time travel paradoxes

and similar sci-fi issues. PK, the layduck from the 21<sup>st</sup> century, has difficulties grasping all the concepts common in the 23<sup>rd</sup> century, and wonders out loud how the Raider can possibly cope with all of it. The answer ('cachet'), in the third panel, is the punchline to the build-up, thwarting as above the reader's expectations, and is achieved through the combination of verbal ('cachet' – used to indicate medical pills, usually painkillers) and non-verbal signs (the expression of both characters' faces). As 'cachet' is not used in the same way in English, the translator may consider changing this to 'pain-killer' or 'aspirin' in the case of a younger target audience (as the series was originally intended in Italy, discussed in Chapter 2).

Panel 1

PK      Oscillations! Time travel! Parallel universes! How do you process all this?

Panel 3

Raider   Aspirin.

The translator's aim for this typology, then, is to maintain the tension between verbal and non-verbal elements of the ST; in order to achieve this, *adapting* the comic effect of the panel would be a useful strategy. The nature of the humorous mechanism is to create a build-up through either referential material (as the first example showed) or dramatic tension, usually via non-verbal reinforced or not by verbal signplay. The visual elements, therefore, should be used as prompts for the translation.

#### 4.5 Linguistic

This category is possibly the one which raises the most issues, in terms of the translator's engagement with the ST, and its rendition in the TL, and can be further sub-categorised. More elements of a linguistic nature will be at the basis of the next chapter in the thesis, reducing the current section to a brief outline. The reason for this is that the linguistic aspect of the textual elements is too important to be reduced to a subsection of a single chapter, and includes, in my opinion, issues such as the translation of names and the prestige that English has in Italian publications.

Under the *linguistic* typology I include all instances of humour achieved through a reliance on language itself, although by no means does this exclude multimodal signplay. Its three sub-categories are: *wordplay*, which, in turn, includes puns, wordplay proper and neologisms, as discussed in the previous chapter; *language varieties*, including regional dialects and national varieties, sociolects defined as 'a variety or -lect which is thought of as being related to its speakers' social background rather geographical background' (Trudgill 2003: 122); *language deviations*, or use of incorrect grammar, syntax and spelling.



In terms of overall strategies for linguistic humour, therefore, I suggest two general alternatives: *adaptation*, when there is an English correspondent for the ST's device, and *compensation*, when there is not. In the case of language varieties and deviations, both solutions can be achieved through either *grammatical* or *syntactic representation*.

#### 4.6 Political (In)Correctness

Under the category of *political (in)correctness*, I include all instances of so-called toilet humour, sex jokes, bad taste, politically incorrect and scatological humour. This category, in fact, may present the translator with even further complications than the previous one. The difference lies in the fact that while linguistic issues are tied to conventions of language and can eventually be compensated for or, in extreme cases, omitted, incorrect humour encounters a cultural barrier, as the texts are imported from Italy into English publications.<sup>66</sup>

While Italy and Italian culture do not have many reservations in terms of the level of humour used in public (Held 2005), as also exemplified in the *Rat-Man* series, English publications are characterised by an apparent politeness,<sup>67</sup> especially present in the comics aimed at a younger audience (e.g. 'Bash Street Kids' in *Beano*; though cf. *Viz* magazine). This feature comes across as showing a veil of more polite, respectful depictions of social statuses, conditions and scenarios, though with an underlying and indeed undermining message of controlled chaos. As scholars have pointed out, it is ultimately the audience which decides what constitutes humour (Gulas and Weinberger 2010: 18; see also Ewans 2010: 83; Martins 2012: 90) and I would suggest that an initial marketing campaign – that is, releasing at least the first issue as a one-shot comic, or the first five issues as a mini-series – might help publishers decide whether this is the case or not.

As I have shown in Table 9 above, *Rat-Man* is effectively the only one of the three series which employs this type of humour, for obvious reasons: *Dampyr* employs very little humour, and not directed at its audience, whereas *PKNA* is a Disney comic, aimed at a younger audience. The added issue with this, however, is the fact that a majority of the humour in *Rat-Man* will pivot on this type. To omit it in order to adhere to English standards may remove one of its defining features, resulting in its translation being, in my opinion, pointless (cf. Vandaele 2002b: 267-8). *Rat-Man* began as a relatively underground comic series, before being

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<sup>66</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of culture-bound issues, see chapter 5.

<sup>67</sup> I am here indebted, not for the first time, to my supervisor Dr Jacob Huntley.

published in full by Panini (see Chapter 2); as such, it satirised and parodied the comics publishing world in the same way that publications like *Zap!* used to do in the US in the 1960s (see Chapter 2).



Figure 54 – PC gone too far (*Signore dei Ratti*, p. 25, ff. 4-5.)

In fact, the series itself, at times, refers to this issue (see Figure 54 above). While the translation of this particular scene will be discussed further in the next chapter, I would like to call attention to the source of humour that can be found in targeting political correctness itself. In the panels above, Granbrakko<sup>68</sup> is commenting on the world changing: he must now be called ‘afroamericanomante’ (a play on words, lit. ‘african-american mancer’) because ‘negromante’ (‘necromancer’, which in Italian contains the word ‘negro’, the equivalent of the English term ‘nigger’) is no longer acceptable.

The humour is due to the exaggeration of having to consider all words even vaguely related to the non-acceptable ones as also non-acceptable; elsewhere in the series, though, Ortolani does not restrain himself (see Figure 55 below).



Figure 55 – Look, no hands! (*Rat-Man*, p.15, ff.1-3.)

<sup>68</sup> In the comic, Granbrakko is the spoof of the Ranger Strider/Aragorn, who is depicted here as being a man of colour; this is due to the character being based on Brakko, a regular in the main series.

In Figure 55, Cynthia, a transgender woman in love with Rat-Man, finds herself unable to knock on his door, as she approaches him to celebrate an occasion with both hands full. 'Toc! Toc!' is the Italian counterpart to 'Knock knock!', indicating that she has found an alternative solution: using her sizeable penis, which is a recurring gag in the series.

A translator should realise, after a closer reading of the text, that the 'butt' or target of the joke is almost exclusively the main character, whose personality and defining traits are those of being a maladapted, incorrect and incompetent member of society. In this sense, the sexual humour is, in fact, a critique towards him and the 'ideals' he embodies.

With this in mind, I would suggest the following as a translation of the 'necromancer' scene:

Panel 1            'The world is changing, [Sedobren Gocce]... people now call me "[Granbrakko] the African-American Magician"!..'

Panel 2            'African-American Magician?' 'We can't say "Black Magician" anymore.'

The *adaptation* strategy used here, using the same type of political hyper-correctness, actually seems to add to the original, due to the character being the one to say it, and to the even more exaggerated 'prohibition' over using the word 'black'. Speaking in more general terms, *adaptation* appears to be the best overall solution, thanks to the difference in 'acceptability' between the two languages, i.e. there are, arguably, more topics regarded as debatable in English than there are in Italian (cf. Stewart 2005; Held 2005).

#### 4.7 Parody

The category of *parody* can be defined as a humorous version of intertextual references or allusions; Vandaele recognises it as resulting from an 'exaggerated imitation of aesthetic norms', as opposed to satire, which imitates 'social norms' (2002a: 155). In other words, parody takes accepted norms of how other media look, behave and are presented and offers an exaggeration of them, whilst satire is more concerned with the content.

Both series contain and employ parody seemingly in order to both create comic effects and locate their narratives within a specific cultural frame. This should be seen as an instance that shows the importance of comics literacy, discussed in Chapter 2. The series' authors acknowledge the fact that the readers will have a working understanding of wider comics culture, and potentially other popular media and genres, inserting references into their series, yet subverting the connotations that those references might have, removing the original's seriousness or dramatic tension to humorous ends.

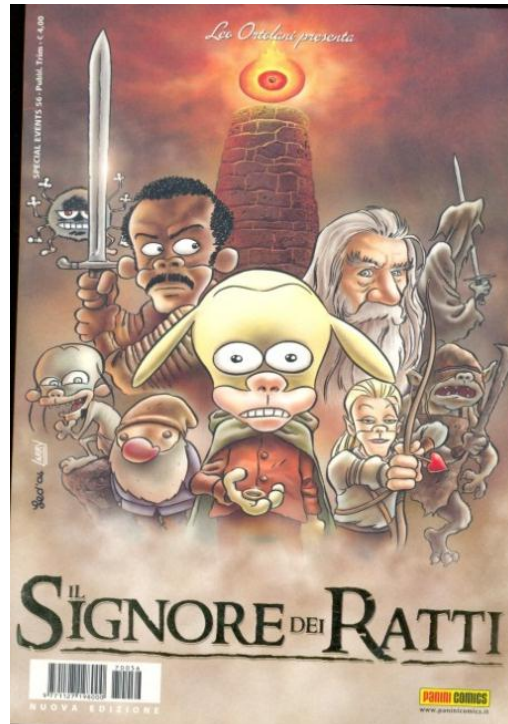


Figure 56 – *The Lord of the Rats* cover.

Ortolani's series, which started out as a parody of Batman, moved on to become a parody of the entire comics universe (with a big focus on Marvel publications), and ultimately became a parody of most popular culture, adding films, television series and books to its repertoire. The series appealed to Italian readers, who were fascinated by English media and publications, yet were still highly critical of the work, viewing it in some ways still as a 'foreign' influence.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, the series produces semi-regular 'Special Event' issues, dedicated to a particular story, film or book such as *Lord of the Rings* (in 'Lord of the Rats'; see Figure 56 above).

The majority of instances of parody are based on English, mostly American-produced, cultural products and attitudes towards them, which Italians have also appropriated (such as 'nerd' culture, Figure 57; the two characters refer to four small people, a ring, and the fact that they were hunting them down thanks to a tip from nerds leaving the cinema). This may be due to the mainstream entertainment companies being based in the US, such as Hollywood, Warner Brothers, Disney, Marvel and DC, even though they all have branches across the world, including Italy.

<sup>69</sup> Easily seen in any comment thread on the internet about media which has been dubbed, subbed or just generally set in a country other than an Italian-speaking one. The Lower Half of the Internet is always vigilant.



Figure 57 - Nerds (*Signore dei Ratti*, p. 10, f. 2.)

A translator, therefore, should be able to retain the effect simply by researching the same reference in the TL; there are very few instances in which attitudes and reactions to Anglo-American culture differ in Italy from their original audiences, making the task a relatively straightforward one (see Chapter 5 for more). This is probably due to the nature of the comics market, which relies heavily on imports from US publications (as discussed in chapters 1 and 2), and to the perceived prestige of Anglo-American products in terms of media entertainment, including films, music and books. In the case of a perceived different reaction, though, I would suggest changing the referential context to a better known product of similar connotations, if the visual elements of the joke allow it (such as substituting a *Sailor Moon* reference for a *Dragon Ball* one, for example, though the two are both fairly well known series in Italy).

There are, however, a number of references which are almost exclusively Italian (examples range from the almost religious/superstitious attitudes to the World Cup and football, the pride for spaghetti Westerns, the proliferation of Catholic publications in newsagents, the traditional 'tombola', a game similar to bingo, which is usually played on New Year's Eve, and other Disney comics titles), and they tend to appear in non-verbal form (or a combination of non-verbal and verbal signs) (Figure 58 below).



Figure 58 –Times have changed (Rat-Man Gigante 10, n.p., f.1)

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| Caption 1 | My name is Brakko and I'm 82.  |
| Caption 2 | Welcome to the future.   |
| Caption 3 | Many things have changed... My sight isn't what it used to be and even magazines are different.  |
| Caption 4 | This morning I bought <i>Playboy</i> , and they've removed the centrefold<br>[note: Brakko is in fact holding <i>Chiesa e Vita</i> (lit. 'Church and Life')] |

As pointed out in section 4.1, above, a translator may have to follow an *adaptation* strategy, making the references conform to the target culture; that is, selecting an aspect of the target audience's cultural references which contains the same connotations as the ST's (e.g. the Superbowl in lieu of the World Cup, for a US publication). In the case of non-verbal dominance over the verbal aspect, however, paratextual material may have to be added, in the form of footnotes or endnotes, in order to explain the cultural significance to the target readership. While this might appear a more intrusive *explanation* strategy, comics (both English and Italian) already contain several notes explaining acronyms, or referring to previous events or characters mentioned in the current story, usually in the form of a secondary caption within the same panel (Figure 59).





Figure 59 – Reference caption (Spider-Man: Maximum Carnage, p.12, f.2.)

In fact, Marvel comics have had a tendency, ever since Stan Lee's presence as supervising editor over several books, to add alliterative nicknames, e.g. Awesome Alex, Joyous Jacob. The caption becomes, ultimately, more and more part of the reading experience, and not intrusive at all, even in its simple format as above, in Figure 59.

#### 4.8 Absurd

The category of *absurd* humour includes all instances of nonsense (not necessarily in the linguistic sense, as in section 4.5), surreal situations, events and actions defying real-world, and even comic-world logic. This type of instances is not as frequent in *PKNA*, where the plausibility of the action in the stories is sought for.<sup>70</sup> *Rat-Man* on the other hand, has no such pretences.

<sup>70</sup> Or at least, as plausible as is possible for a series about an anthropomorphic duck whose vigilante alter-ego becomes a superhero, in order to fight against alien parasites from outer space.

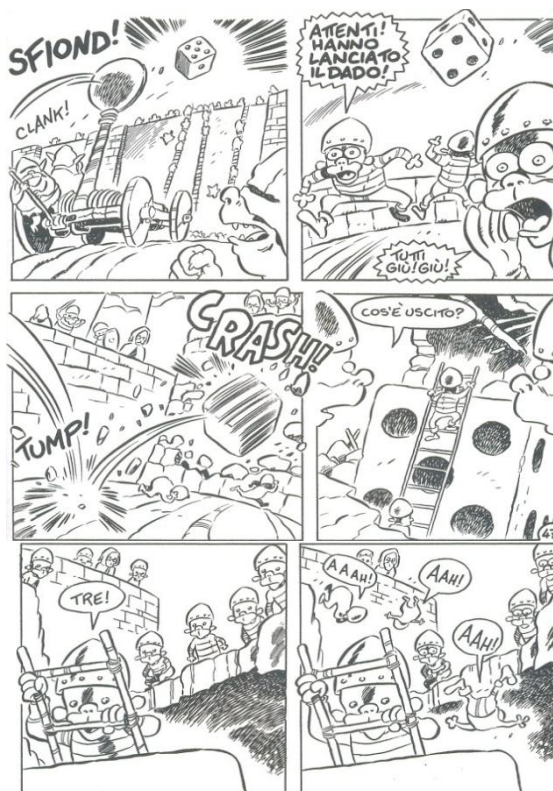


Figure 60 – Death by dice (*Signore dei Ratti*, pp.47-8, ff.4-6,1,2.)

Admittedly, the scene in Figure 60 could be a reference to popular role-play game *Dungeons&Dragons*, but the die used here does not look like any of the game-specific ones. The attackers have launched a die inside the defenders' walls, but while it does cause some physical damage, the soldiers seem more apprehensive about the number on the up-side of the die.

Panel 2	'Look out! They threw the die!' 'Everyone down! Down!'
Panel 4	'What is it?'
Panel 5	'Three!'

While I envisage no particular difficulties in translating the textual elements of scenes like the one above, the concern is about whether this particular type of humorous device will work with English audiences.

This is an added difficulty, as most absurd comedy relies on the nonsensical elements depicted visually, so a translator may not be able to modify them.<sup>71</sup> The only alternative strategy, in these cases, would be to *add* some textual information, possibly an explanation of the action, with the hope that the visual component of the panel will retain its comic effect. An

<sup>71</sup> Although *Monty Python* is a good example of pre-existing surreal comedy in Anglophone popular culture, which might aid the acceptance of a written/drawn variety.



example can be found in Figure 61 (below), where the gnome Gnome, son of Gnome ('nano', 'dwarf', in the original), does not speak.<sup>72</sup> The other characters, however, seem to completely disregard this fact, and constantly comment on his eloquence, remarks and occasional rudeness; in this case, one expresses a slight disagreement on the concluding part of his speech, whatever that might have been.

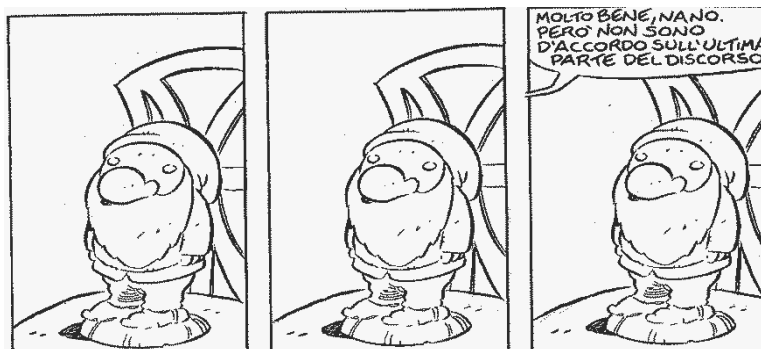


Figure 61 – Gnome's eloquent silence (*Signore dei Ratti* p. 17, ff. 1-3.)

Panel 3 'Well spoken, Gnome. But I disagree with the last thing you said.'  
[lit. Very well, Dwarf. But I don't agree with the final part of the speech.]

My suggested translation contains the *addition* of textual information about the character 'speaking', even though there is no visual indication that this is the case, to make sure the reader knows they are supposed to accept that Gnome is saying something, though that is impossible even by the comic's own internal logic. In other cases, where the absurdity is conveyed more through non-verbal elements, such as Figure 64, this is unnecessary, and *retention* strategies are sufficient.

#### 4.9 Childish

Under *childish* humour, I group together all instances which employ jokes similar to English cracker-jokes, so-called bad humour (without resorting to toilet humour), childish humour proper and other similar types, which find their cultural counterparts in both Italian and English. The category is based on the concept of relief humour, as mentioned by Krikmann (2005:28), in which there is no specific target, nor are there any intended victims or levels of superiority/inferiority for the humour to be exerted upon.

<sup>72</sup> As he is, after all, a garden gnome.



Figure 62 – Accountable (*Rat-Man* #8, p.11, f.3.)

Figure 62 above shows an abacus ‘replying’ to the speaker in the previous panel, who was asking Rat-Man for help on a mission. The translated speech-bubble reads, predictably, ‘you can count on me’. The whole *Rat-Man* series plays on this type of gag almost as a leitmotif, tied to the character’s inherent idiosyncratic incompetence. Some of these events are particularly marked, such as in Figure 66 below, where the use of ‘compass’ as an orienting device and ‘disorientation’ are connected, marking the stupidity of this type of humour in the punchline panel, through the embarrassment on Rat-Man’s face and the ‘gh!’ sound he makes. The use of these latter two elements is an innovation of Ortolani, the creator, and has now become commonplace in the *Rat-Man* series. While there is no definite interpretation of the sound’s meaning, ‘gh’ has come to signify the awareness, and acknowledgement on Ortolani’s behalf that he has made a bad pun through his character.



Figure 63 – Disorienting (*Rat-Man* #2, p. 12, ff. 2-4.)

- |         |  |
|---------|--|
| Panel 1 | Its tentacles sway menacingly before me... I advance slowly, making sure it can see the compass I'm holding... |
| Panel 2 | Suddenly I smash it, throwing it against the wall!   |
| Panel 3 | To disorient it. 'Gh!'   |

The following scene from PK (Figure 64) depicts a bad joke cracked by the main character on meeting Computer One, playing on the latter's name:



Figure 64 – Computer One and PK (PKNA #0, p. 30, ff. 4-5.)

- Panel 1            'Courage! – I don't know what you are, but you're facing [*Paperinik*]!'  
                       'Pleased to meet you! I'm One!'
- Panel 2            'You're One hey? Where did you leave the *others*?' 'Groan! That's an  
                       *awful joke! It's terrible!*'

The 'badness' of the joke is even acknowledged and made explicit by the artificial intelligence itself, using the English loanword 'groan' as sound effect. The series relies less on playing against the main character's skills, as ultimately he is a superhero, albeit an unexpected one. What it does employ, however, are one-liners and quips, in the style of American superhero comics such as *Spider-Man* (Figure 65).

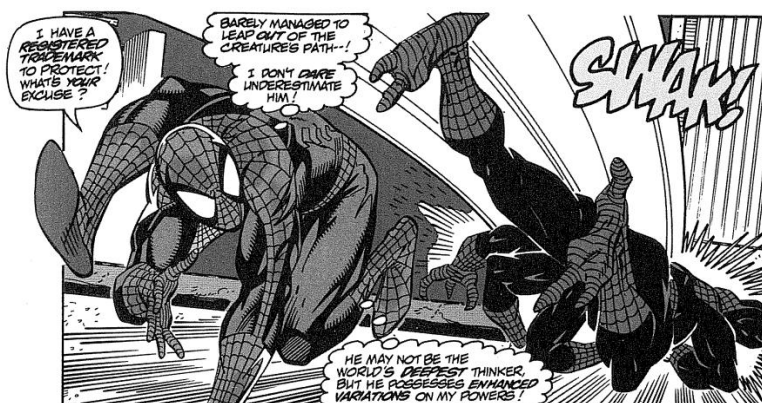


Figure 65 – Registered Trademark (*Spider-Man: Maximum Carnage*, p. 18, f. 1.)

In comparison Figure 66, below, PK replies to the Raider's comment on him being a mutant with 'Go tell that to your aunt!' (lit.). The 'aunt' reference is a mild version of directing a retort to one's family member, in common Italian insult repertoires, and could be likened to 'your mum' jokes in English.



Figure 66 – Auntie mutant (PKNA #0/2, n.p., f.5.)

The potential difficulties linked to these types of humour are due to the fact that a lot of them tend to be either co-dependently verbal and non-verbal, or language-specific (e.g. puns). As pointed out above, however, this particular category is almost a universal one, and *adaptations* of the ST's choices can be found in the TL.

#### 4.10 Combinations

As a final note, I will point out that the subdivision above, as mentioned at the beginning of this section, should be regarded as a suggestion, with the aim of trying to find a pragmatic system of dealing with different types of humour. As such, the categories should not be taken as being clear-cut, absolute distinctions, as all of them can be, and indeed are, combined, mixed, and blended together to obtain an even further humorous effect.

In the case of both the characters of Rat-Man and PK, for example, almost all the humour plays on undermining and downplaying their skills, courage and, especially in the case of the former, their intelligence, as has been shown in most images so far. Similarly, absurdities, abundant in *Rat-Man*, or parody can be used to refer to the existence of the comic as a comic (see Figures 67 and 68 below).



Figure 67 – Parody+Metahumour+Absurd (*Signore dei Ratti*, p. 54, f. 1-4.)



The scene above, from *The Lord of the Rats* special, takes place during the orcs' attack on the protagonists' keep, and is the continuation of four other panels in the same style, with the same characters, Granbrakko and Tamara queen of the Elves, describing the action in detail, commenting on the visual magnificence of the final victory. The author mixes the absurd repetition of the same panel eight times with the parody of the extremely detailed battles in the original novels, and also adds a reference to his own existence as artist and creator, through the comment of his own characters. The final panel can be translated as follows:

Granbrakko	'Don't you find it embarrassing when Ortolani can't be bothered to draw?'
Tamara	'Quite.'



Figure 68 – Metahumour+Self-undermining (PKNA #22, n.p., ff. 3-5.)

With the scene above in Figure 68, PK has discovered the mastermind, Leonard Vertighel, behind a complicated plot involving droids, fake trials and power plays, and has just told him what he believes to be the motive. Vertighel, however, proves PK wrong, revealing that while he is the one behind the plot, the superhero is too late, and possibly reads too many comics. PK admits to this, drawing attention to his summary of Vertighel's plan as something possible in this comic (metahumour) and to the fact that elsewhere in the series and as Donald Duck, he does, in fact, read comics. The scene can be translated as follows:

Panel 1	Vertighel 'Ha! Ha! Ha! Well done!' PK 'See? I'm good at this.'
Panel 2	Vertighel 'Say, do you read many comics?' PK 'Well, sometim... what?'
Panel 3	Vertighel 'Look around you, Mr PK. The world already belongs to me.'

In terms of translating combinations of categories, therefore, a translator should first identify what typologies are being used, then attempt to translate at least one of them successfully. The ultimate goal is to always maintain some sort of comic tension between text and image, and this may come at the cost of *deleting* one of the aspects of added or secondary humour.

## 5. Summary

As I have discussed in the initial sections of this chapter, the ultimate *Skopos* of translating humour is to maintain the humorous instance in the TT as it was in the ST. Accordingly, the categories I have identified throughout the previous sections are an aid in locating what type of humour is being used in each case; for each category, I have suggested a type of translatorial strategy, based on Epstein's (2012) for expressive language in children's literature. These are summarised in the following table, listed by category (Table 12).

Category of humour	Strategies
Metahumour	<i>Adaptation</i> If the references are present in TL  <i>Addition</i> If the references are absent in TL
Self-undermining	<i>Retention</i>
Onomatopoeia	<i>Adaptation</i>
Anti-climax	<i>Adaptation</i>
Linguistic	<i>Adaptation via grammatical/orthographic representation</i> If the features are present in TL  <i>Compensation via grammatical/orthographic representation</i> If the features are absent in TL
Political (In)Correctness	<i>Adaptation</i>
Parody	<i>Adaptation</i>
Childish	<i>Adaptation</i>
Absurd	<i>Retention</i> If the elements are understandable  <i>Addition</i> If the elements are not readily understandable

Combination	Give precedence to one of the elements, as long as at least one category is maintained.

Table 12 – Summary of strategies per category

I am arguing here that the heavy reliance of *adaptation* strategies is due to the nature of humour itself, as a culture-based feature (section 1). Both cultures considered in the discussion, Italian and English, appear to have either similarities in their approach to humour, or influences from one to the other (in the comics medium at least); where they differ, it is mostly because of a type of Narrative Strategy in the joke, or the Language aspect of it. Following Attardo's suggestions, therefore, removes the issues raised by the latter, as the translation will obviously have to switch from SL to TL, yet maintaining the tension between the elements that ultimately create the humorous effect of the joke, sketch, panel or dialogue.

It should be noted that the strategies for each category are still a consequence of what I believe to be the underlying assumption of a functional translation of humour in comics: the translator must base their decisions on a combination of analysing the ST's humorous element, identifying which category the instance falls in, and the hierarchy of image-text, in which the former should be given precedence. Both these points are in agreement with Attardo's theory of joke translation (2002), in my view, in which the Language level is the first to be replaced, as long as the type of joke remains the same (discussed above, section 1.1), though I have expanded them to include signplay (section 1.2) as well as Verbally Expressed Humour.

## 6. Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to illustrate the current debates on theorising humour and devising strategies to translate it in ordinary literary texts, focusing on the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH). Having shown that this is not sufficient for the medium of comics, I approached other research in children's literature (Epstein 2012), multimodality (Kaindl 2004) and comics studies (Zanettin 2010). Building on a combination of these theories and strategies, I created my own framework to identify and analyse the humour present in the STs. For each type, I then proceeded to suggest, through examples, potential strategies to successfully reproduce the comedic tension between the images and texts, or signplay, at least at a level of 'intended humour' rather than actual, or 'perceived'. These strategies appear to be sufficiently functional, based on the presupposition that a translator might not be able to modify the



images, and should therefore use them as reference. While the various examples of translations are, indeed, only suggestions, the strategies devised appear to be successful on the sample of comics used. As already mentioned, though, there is a lack of academic and practical studies in this field, with the exclusion of Zanettin (2008; 2010) and Kaindl (1999; 2004), and it is worth exploring the topic further. Additional research in the translation of comics will not only provide readers in the Anglo-American market with more entertainment material, but also allow for better, more contextualised criticism and healthy cross-contamination and influence. In order to achieve this I suggest building upon the already existing scholarship, and advancing what progress has already been made, with a functional framework in mind.

## Chapter 5 – Culture (Un)Bound



Figure 69 – Tutto Rat-Man 38, p.115, f.4

Ora basta! Mi avete stancata!

*Enough to-me have-you tired*

Fuori da questo manga!!

*out of this manga*

‘No culture can be represented completely in any literary text,’ argues Maria Tymoczko (1999:23). I find no fault with that, except maybe for the fact that it seems unnecessary to state. Selectivity is an obvious and indispensable resource in producing a text that is trying to portray cultural elements of a given society, group, community, country or culture – a source culture (SC). Tymoczko adds that, this being the case for any given text, it is even more applicable to one whose audience is entirely unfamiliar with the contexts that produced that text (1999:23). When we translate a text from a source language (SL) to a target language (TL), it is not merely the language that is being changed, converted or re-encoded but an entire framework of cultural expectations, beliefs, behaviours and attitudes. At times, those frameworks expand to include other cultures, languages and systems other than their own, and a text will present multilingual instances, culturally-charged voices, stereotypes and ways of capturing other cultures, whether fully intentional or not. We can state then, with a degree of confidence and assuredness, that the language is in fact a vehicle for the culture, it carries elements of it when it is uttered, written, heard, read or conveyed through any medium. How does one, then, approach such a text, in terms of effectively translating both the cultural environment in which the author is writing, and is therefore being influenced by, and the one it is trying – objectively or subjectively – portray? And how does that process remain as neutral as possible in the translator’s task, to avoid personal prejudices or biases conditioning the

reception of the source language, and therefore the source culture (SC), once it reaches the target culture (TC)?

This chapter explores the translation of language in comics, especially when the employment of such language carries cultural connotations. What is clear to me, and I intend to mark here, is that, as I mentioned above, this is always, constantly the case – language does not exist in a vacuum of culture or of context – and what I present and analyse in the chapter are but examples of the cultural weight carried in the language. The underlying framework of the argument is the correlation between the cultural elements that shape and are shaped by the language and its use, which is heightened in the case of fictional elements of plot, character and dialogue; I further explore this concept in the following section, and develop some insight into the power that ‘foreign’ languages hold over a text-originating source culture, including the reason behind their exploitation in the texts considered here for my thesis. Specifically, I will look at instances in the three source comics series in which languages other than Italian are used, various dialectal, idiolectal, sociolectal variations and deviations from standards, to what extent and for what effects they are employed, and discuss ways in which these can be successfully translated into their English target text (TT), while still retaining the connotations they carry in the source texts (ST). To assist in tackling the complexities of both linguistic and cultural aspects of the analysis, I take into account different perspectives from media, criticism and practical examples. The discussion draws upon current scholarly criticism and research from fields, such as media studies, sociolinguistics, comparative literature and, of course, translation studies, that deal with the use of language varieties, and variations within texts belonging to a specific regional or national discourse, the reasons why that may be the case, and the results and effects brought upon by their use on an audience potentially unaware of the original dynamics and contexts. What I suggest using as main strategies is a selection of tools that will allow the translator to maintain the language markers as intact as possible, retaining and reflecting what the original text looked like and portrayed. The rationale behind such a decision of ‘assertive minimal or non-translation’ (Lindqvist 2002) of linguistic issues is discussed throughout the chapter, providing motivations and reasons for my argument. My redevelopment and expansion of its notion, however, is also largely to address the pervasive and pernicious insinuation of the ‘lost in translation’ trope among general, non-specialist literature, criticism and readerships. Showing how a translator can actively choose to not translate something subverts the expectation, by both leaving the original language untouched and changing the entire context surrounding it, by potentially placing it in a passage of translated text. I address these points further in later sections of this chapter, and return to them in the concluding discussion.

## 1. The Power of Language(s)

This chapter explores the use of languages and their variations and deviations within texts, in order to convey a specific message or effect which is not necessarily related to informational content; that is to say, the use of language(s) is more about conveying affective and cognitive connotations that help or influence the reading of the text. The focus on the linguistic aspect is not, therefore, entirely concerned with the overt message contained in the text, but the meta- and para-linguistic elements such as style, register, tone, and the associations that they carry with them, according to their usage in the source language and culture and, eventually, their respective target. Before looking at this further, I will set out the framework of the analysis and provide definitions for the terminology employed. When using the word *language*, I am referring to a 'system of spoken or written communication used by a particular country, people, community, etc., typically consisting of words used within a regular grammatical and syntactic structure' (OED, 'language'); through this chapter, language is the officially recognised standard variety of a speech community, mostly on a geo-political scale, *dominant* or *majority language* (cf. Matras 2009: 45), e.g. English, Italian, French. Conversely, *dialect*, *sociolect* and *idiolect* are non-standard varieties of the language in question which belong to, respectively, geo-political, socio-economic (both forming a sense of 'community') and personal (individual) spheres of communication (Wales 2001:105-6). In the case of English, an example of dialect would be Norfolk or West Yorkshire, or even a single city, suburb, block. Sociolects include any linguistic form used by communities formed by speakers within a similar social and economic context and background, e.g. so-called 'slang' (cf. Wales 2001: 361-2). Finally, idiolects are characteristic of each individual, comprising personal quirks, idiosyncrasies and choices, including those influenced by other levels or varieties (Wales 2001: 197). The distinction between *-lects* is nowhere as clear cut as it may seem from this brief introduction, as one individual's use of language may very well affect the way in which their community communicates, and vice versa. Nonetheless, I will be referring to them throughout the chapter based on the principles just discussed, for ease of argument and a more systematic approach to singular instances of language use.

There is also another type of language that I refer to in the chapter, as introduced in Chapter 2, which refers not to the written or spoken method of communication, but rather the visual one of the images of the comic analysed. In the image used to introduce the chapter (Figure 72), the central character of Rat-Girl is drawn in what is clearly identifiable as *manga* style (see Chapter 2 for more), surrounded by characters drawn in the usual Rat-Man cartoonised style. The story leading to the issue from which the image is taken sees the manga-style character of Rat-Girl taking over the main Rat-Man title, with the regular cast

finding themselves exiled and drawn into the manga title she was imported from. As I believe the discussion in Chapter 2 has also helped clarify, *manga*, *fumetto*, and comic book are not entirely synonymous or interchangeable, in the same way that Japanese, Italian and US cultures have their own norms, conventions and attitudes. They can, however, be intended as culturally differing incarnations of the same medium, the principle with which I am operating throughout the thesis myself, and the scene in Figure 72 also seems to playing on this point. Rat-Girl's frustrated exclamation of 'Get out of this manga!' can refer to the storyline that Rat-Man, Cynthia and the other characters exiled from the main *Rat-Man* series find themselves in, a fictitious manga named *Capitan Rattock*, a parody/homage to actual series by Leiji Matsumoto *Space Pirate Captain Harlock* (1977-79), incredibly popular in its television adaptation in 1980s Italy. At the same time, it can also refer to the comic series that they are all characters of, *Rat-Man*, marking them as self-aware entities within the text itself.<sup>73</sup> In either case, the character of Rat-Girl is the reason behind the word manga being used to identify the type of text being referred to, as her cultural context, also present in her drawn style, is that of Japanese manga. She literally embodies, on paper, the cultural context of the specific incarnation of the medium, and will only refer to it within her frame of reference – a poignant example of the difficulties facing a translator when dealing with this type of text and its language.

The peculiarity of language, as existing scholarship in sociolinguistics points out, is that it is not merely a code but rather, and primarily, a 'cultural or social product and must be understood as such' (Sapir in Chambers 2009:1). How language is used by an individual or a community of practice, that is 'a group of people who share a concern, a set of problems or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis (Wenger et al. 2002:4), be they real or fictitious, reveals more about their source culture and, to an extent, cognitive environment than any other trait of their being (see e.g. Boase-Beier 2006). In fact, in the case of fictional characters, this is even more so, as an author will supposedly have put thought<sup>74</sup> into the creation of their speech patterns, dialogues and mannerisms, as represented by the text or the images. In the latter case, there can be an additional issue of a narratorial intervention in order to determine the context of the overall story for the audience. An example is shown in Figure 70, below, taken from Robbie Morrison and Charlie Adlard's *White Death* (Image Comics, 2014).

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<sup>73</sup> A feature that the author, Ortolani, frequently employs in the series. See the section on meta-humour in Chapter 4 for more.

<sup>74</sup> Though this is not, obviously, the ultimate and definitive reading of a text. Authorial intention, where made explicit through a statement, an introduction or a note, can still be an influence of the interpretation of the text (cf. Boase-Beier 2006: 33). A most representative example in canonical English literature is found in the 'Notes on the Waste Land' included with the four-part poem by T.S. Eliot (2009: 41-64).



Figure 70 – *White Death*, n.p., f.4

The story takes place during the First World War, on the border between Austria and Italy, and features a group of Italian soldiers posted in the freezing mountains between the two countries. The authors – both Anglophone speakers, writing for an Anglophone audience – in this frame as in many other throughout the book, choose to mark the characters' language use by starting a speechbubble with Italian (where the character is Italian), and repeat the same line in English within the same bubble. In the frame shown above, for example, the dialogue runs as follows:

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| Character 1 | Carorna? Ma scherzi? Are you joking?<br>Any relation to our illustrious commander-in-chief? |
| Character 2 | Magari! If only!<br>Think I'd be here if I was?   |

In the case in question, it just so happens that the co-presence of Italian and English in literal translations of the former into the latter for 'ma scherzi/are you joking' and 'magari/if only', are used in an emphatic manner and position, also identified through the use of bold typography. Nonetheless, the practice is a common one in the medium, for reasons of establishing a linguistic identity or characteristic of a given character or cast. It serves as an irregular reminder to the reader that the characters they see on the page are only 'speaking' English for reasons of intelligibility (or authors' linguistic skills) – their actual identity is displaced.

In addition to the two features discussed so far, sociolinguistics also poses the question of cultural issues in the use of language. Scholars in translation studies have, since the early 1990s, concerned themselves with the elements that surround the language rather than just pertaining to the language itself. As Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere state in *Translation, History, Culture*, 'what is studied [in translation] is the text embedded in its network of both source and target cultural signs [...] [in order] both to utilize the linguistic approach and to move out beyond it' (1998: 12). Their argument, therefore, is that when dealing with texts in translation, or indeed, the translation of texts, both SC and TC must be taken into account. The source provides a translator with the basic concepts and connotations which the original text conveys, whether the authors meant for it do so or not, but a lack of cultural and linguistic knowledge of the target will prevent them from using the tools they would otherwise be equipped with to successfully reproduce those characteristics in the TT. On the other hand, however, the cultural element can also be a constraint on the text and its translation. As Theo Hermans points out, we always translate 'according to our contemporary, culture-bound concept of translation, and into this concept of translation' (2002: 193). Building on Bassnett's argument, Hermans claims that factors ruling the translator's behaviour in relation to the target culture and their own personal beliefs or agendas, be they overt or unintentional, will also influence and effectively constrain the translatorial process (2002: 193-4). In addition, not only is the translation of a text a process of shifting cultures and ideologies from source to target but the text itself is not only product but a process in itself of the culture in which it is created, at the same time influencing its surroundings (Verdonk, in Boase-Beier 2006:16-7).

How does this, then, influence our reading of a character's speech, the interaction between different registers at different points of a dialogue, or the pattern that a character's thoughts may take when alone? And to what extent will the source culture's elements be specific and characteristic to that setting? Scholars such as Federici (2011) or Chiaro (2010) have noted the difficulty of effectively conveying the qualities of a text which deals with (socio)linguistic issues from one language to another, to the point that some, such as Newmark (1981), deem it virtually impossible to do so, though it has become less and less the case in current criticism and scholarship (Federici 2011; Chiaro 2010; Anderman 2007). The criticism which appears to advocate the impossibility of 'dialect translation' (e.g. Landers 2001: 116-7) tends to refer to the infamous and erroneously named Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (cf. Sapir 1949; Whorf 1956), which argues for the existence of a direct link between language and thought, with the former determining the latter, and linguistic relativity specific to each language environment or community of practice.



As Boase-Beier demonstrates, however, even a minor acceptance of the weaker form of linguistic relativity will not only not preclude the possibility of translation, but in fact allow for further creativity in its execution (2006: 22-23). Being able to understand, analyse and interpret the cultural importance and connotations that the different elements of the text offer, when placed in the context that generated them and their author's choices, whether intentional or not, will undoubtedly lead to a better pool of resources to reproduce their effects in the TL. I present some examples in the following section, specifically related to comics, but these are features that are easily found in works of prose or poetry, by analysing the stylistic elements present in a text, a reader – and therefore a translator – can gauge the spectrum of possible effects that can be received by a wider audience (Boase-Beier 2006:50). It is, of course, impossible and indeed even unnecessary to recreate in the TT the ST's range in its entirety, and equivalency, in the sense of univocal matching between an element in the SL and the TL, is not an issue here: the translator should be more concerned with the effects that said elements have on the reader, rather than the elements themselves. By reproducing the most relevant and impactful effects, a translator will ensure that an engaged reader will experience a cognitive gain high enough to process the foreign or non-standard elements present in the text, without them spoiling the full enjoyment or understanding of the story, plot or characters.

The difficulties are increased when dealing with issues surrounding specific usage of linguistic patterns, such as representations of dialects/accents, which are arguably confined to a single culture or language, or at least perceived as such (Chambers and Trudgill 1980: 3), and do not have their corresponding counterpart or equivalent in the target (cf. Epstein 2012: 201). A character whose speech pattern features 'non-standard' variation can lead to 'important ends, including *subverting* dominant ideologies' (Coupland 2007: 89; emphasis in the original). They may, for example, use a generic northern English variety as an attempt to attract the reader's sympathy, based on studies on attitudes towards accents and, by contrast, cast a shadow of untrustworthiness on other, overly refined speakers (see Stockwell 2007: 41-3); this also avoids a recognisably geographical placement, opting rather for a highly colloquial sociolect (Landers 2001: 116-7). It is also true that readers hold sympathetic and affective judgments of particular varieties, as was shown in a 2005 BBC poll, part of the Voices project. Five thousand participants were sampled to gauge the British public's attitude towards language, from dialects to foreign languages, without necessarily getting into linguistics as such.<sup>75</sup> A translator working between and within two language systems will have to be aware

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<sup>75</sup> The results vary from personal attitudes towards the participants' own dialects and accents, to the 'nicest speaking celebrity'. A partial report can be found here: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/oxford/voices2005/did\\_you\\_know.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/oxford/voices2005/did_you_know.shtml); the full project is now archived at the

of the connotations of both the SC and the TC and their attitudes towards language in general, effectively translating the culture that the language expresses, rather than just the language itself.

Similarly, in other languages such as Italian, different varieties of non-standard *-lects* hold connotative suggestions which will be clear to readers who are part of that culture or community of practice, and it can be said that the ST was attempting to convey those properties in the first place, either through an explicit move on the author's behalf or because of their own cultural conditioning and environment, i.e. the SC contains a set of stereotypes and connotations, the author is part of the SC, the resulting text will present parts of that set. As mentioned already, this aspect is potentially harder to navigate, when dealing with its translation, due to the lack of equivalency between or counterparts for dialectal variations across languages (see Epstein, above), though several strategies can be defined to supply an adequate solution for each case.

The relevance and connotations of some of the dialectal (in terms of social, regional, ethnic and individual/idiosyncratic) varieties and variations used in literary texts, comics included, can provide a seemingly unsurmountable problem, and translators must be fully aware of the entire range of complexities surrounding and accompanying the varieties used (cf. Epstein 2012: 202). In fact, there is an argument to be made for the creation, through these linguistic techniques, of a *persona* for both the writer and the character or characters who employ them: by using non-standard varieties of Italian (or English), characters, stories and authors are exploiting a system of perceived conventions surrounding, for example, appropriateness or intelligibility of a text (cf. Duranti 2006: 294). It is this persona, as the incarnation of a social and cultural set of characteristics, with its associated idiosyncrasies and language, which a translator needs to inhabit and appropriate to be able to reproduce it in their TC, to fully recreate a sense of heightened 'engagement with language' (Weston 2006: 240; also see *ibid.*: 243-4). There is an argument that even idiolects, sociolects and certain authors' personal style can be reproduced in other languages by finding similarities in the way they use the SL and SC's norms and other writers or texts in the TC, adapting the styles of one to the other – to ensure a successful execution, however, some element of common ground or shared knowledge among the readers is essential (Federici 2006: 260-1). In fact, while there may not be a correspondent for Florentine or Neapolitan in English, there are ways of presenting and reshaping the elements of one into versions of another, such as, for example Leodensian or Scouse.

What a translator must keep in mind, however, is the fact that this does not mean that the two are mutually equivalent, and there will still be specific idioms or instances of worldviews that cannot be conveyed without significant difficulty (Esptein 2012: 199; cf. Trudgill 2004: 2). It does, however, provide a means to devise creative solutions around the issues as they present themselves. These complications do appear to derive from and support Hermans' view of 'culture-bound' translation, and how the practising translator is by a number of factors tied to the cultures surrounding the text, both in its ST and TT incarnations. To further understand such a constraint, I offer below a brief overview of the two aspects of national and regional/social variations within texts, with a focus on the Italian usage of said features, and setting the stage for the later discussion of their possible functions and means to reproduce them in a TL.

### 1.1 Du iu spik Inglisc?

In this section, I will offer a brief discussion on the importance played by different language variations and varieties at a macro-level (geographical and national, mostly) in general Italian publications, in order to move towards a discussion of this topic's relevance to comics in particular.

According to a special report of Eurobarometer, commissioned by the EU in 2012<sup>76</sup>, the Italian community of practice is not particularly well disposed toward external linguistic influences, with 62% of Italians not knowing any foreign language and only 22% by 2012 being able to speak more than one language other than their 'mother tongue', identified as the standardised variety of the common language of the geographic area to which they belong (SE386: 5). Out of that latter percentage, English is the language of choice for 11% of respondents, and it is remarked as being mostly used on a casual or occasional basis, and mostly over the internet (SE386: 6). In fact, books, newspapers and printed material, including digital press, in general are among the least used methods of language learning (SE386: 32). Why, then, do comics such as *Rat-Man*, *Dampyr* and *PKNA* employ English and indeed other languages to the extent that they do? If they are not meant to be used as learning tools, and not that many readers have access to the language<sup>77</sup>, why do the creators use languages other than Italian in their books?

It is highly probable that English in Italian publications does not function communicatively, but rather as what Eastman and Stein (1993) call 'language display': a

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<sup>76</sup> Full report available at [ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_386\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_386_en.pdf). References throughout will be identified as SE386.

<sup>77</sup> Further research could show that comics readers in Italy do belong to the 22%, but there is no conclusive proof as yet other than my own anecdotal evidence.

marker of (desired) identity, and in some ways, linguistic virtuosity. Eastman & Stein emphasise the symbolic rather than communicative function of language, and state that the purpose 'is not to communicate linguistically across social boundaries, but to impress socially within one's own linguistic territory' (1993:188). This is clearly reflected in the primary material used in my thesis, as out of the three comics series the only one with a minimal attempt to convey informative content is the most 'Italian' of them all, *Dampyr*. And by 'Italian', in this instance, I am referring to its visual black and white style, the writing choices, especially in punctuation (mostly exclamation marks and ellipses at the end of sentences, rarely a full stop), and even the amount of text for each frame. Choosing to focus on different elements of world literature, myth and folklore, the authors include actual researched material, including language usage from the area for both a sense of realistic grounding and, essentially, linguistic ostentation. Examples will be discussed below.

In the case of the other two series, the situation is quite different. *PKNA* is a Disney comic, stemming from a long tradition of translation and republication from US original stories into Italian, then naturalised into the TC and in fact becoming almost exclusively an Italian imprint. Nonetheless, the background is still rooted in the American books; furthermore, the series was created on the model of US superhero titles, such as *Green Lantern*, *The Batman* and, to an extent, *The Amazing Spider-Man*. The plots, the visual and textual references, the names and even the narrative strategies are heavily influenced by that style of comic book tradition (see Chapter 2 Section 7.2), so it is no surprise that anglicised elements find their way, even in an attempt to create not an individual identity for the writer, but rather for the entire series (Ortolani 2014), legitimising it by employing the tropes of its successful lineage. As for *Rat-Man*, it was conceived in its early stages as an Italian parody of mainstream superhero comics, especially *The Batman* (Plazzi 2013: 33), and later developed into a parody of the entire Anglo-American comics industry, with attacks on the influence of manga, BD, mainstream entertainment and other media,<sup>78</sup> so once again there is little surprise in finding elements based on English-named characters, places or objects within an almost entirely Italian setting, at times even explicitly clashing in their juxtaposition.

The presence of English, and sometimes other languages, in *Dampyr*, can be explained then by the symbolic nature of what the writers are trying to convey through the different linguistic instances, rather than the content of the textual elements. Italy and its speech community does not by any means match any of the categories of multilingual societies described by Matras (2009: 45-7): Italy was never an English-speaking colony, it does not have a significant population group with English as a first language (as discussed above), and English

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<sup>78</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 7, for more information.

is not used as a *lingua franca* within the country; in fact, what is recognised as ‘standard’ Italian is the dominant variety in a pool of multiple minority dialects, based on a history of cultural and political elements. There is a case to be made, however, for English as a *lingua comica* of sorts, as Paul Gravett’s work with artists around the globe seems to demonstrate: even if not shared linguistically, Anglo-American conventions in terms of image, spatial layout and editing are known well enough among comics creators and readers that both can assume a minimum of common ground.<sup>79</sup>

## 2. So Why? And How?

As I have set out in the previous chapter, my belief is that, while being a piece of academic criticism, my research is based on a medium of popular literature and products of mass consumption and entertainment. Therefore, the approach to be taken to explore and explain the translatorial strategies and the reasoning behind them should appeal to a translator whose concern and interests fall within the same fields and expertise as well as to an academic. A highly academic and jargon-filled critical analysis will only serve to a certain point, and will not, ultimately, provide a successful, accessible and, ultimately, appealing set of guidelines and suggestions for the translation process.

In order to suggest said strategies, I will first focus on the potential reasons behind using linguistic techniques in the three comics series, and how to approach such an analysis with the translation process in mind. I believe such a discussion necessary to better identify, as I have argued in the previous chapters, the *Skopos* or overall purpose of the ST (Nord 1997:27), which will ensure a successful reproduction in the TT.

In the case of language issues, the *Skopos* is to reproduce the connotations, the symbolic element present in the language usage, rather than strictly the usage itself, for the TT to convey associations and effects similar to those produced by the ST in its SC. At the same time, the entertainment factor of the comics medium must be kept in mind, striking an adequate balance between the ‘cultural capital’ and the entertainment, avoiding the production of texts that ‘appeal only to those who read for professional reasons’ (Bassnett & Lefevere 1998:11). What I explore below is a sample from the three series used as primary

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<sup>79</sup> The creative experiment was designed to obtain pieces of comic art as a product of two creators from entirely different backgrounds, some of whom shared linguistic knowledge of English, but mostly had a shared passion and knowledge of comics tropes, structures, styles and narratives. The project, started in 2006, was created with ‘the hope of continuing to build new in-roads to promote awareness, mutual understanding and dialogue on issues of common interest to Asia and Europe’ (*About Us*, <http://linguacomica.wordpress.com/>).

material for the thesis, in order to identify the instances of language usage and discuss the potential functions of and reasons for it.

## 2.1 Functioning Languages

In order to better devise and suggest strategies to translate language usage in comics, I provide here a brief quantitative analysis of the various occurrences in the three series considered for the thesis: *Rat-Man*, *Dampyr*, *PKNA*. Similarly to how I proceeded in the previous chapter (section 2.1), I have taken into account the first issue of each series, considering them as gateways to the title as a whole. For each issue, then, I counted the instances of language usage which deviate from the standard Italian in any way. I then subdivided the total number into different categories of their usage, ranging from characters' names to sound effects to place names to symbols. The instances considered, both in their total number of occurrences and their presence per panel, were then compared to the total number of panels in each issue, to gauge the relevance they carry within the three series, both in raw numbers and percentages. The results are shown in Table 13, below.

<b>Language(s) usage</b>	<b>Rat-Man</b> <i>Le Sconvolgenti Origini del Rat-Man!</i>	<b>PKNA</b> <i>Evroniani</i>	<b>Dampyr</b> <i>Il Figlio del Diavolo</i>
Character names	3	12	11
Place names	2	7	1
Sound effects	4	3	5
Other	1	6	7
Total panels	83	398	517
Total panels with deviant language usage	20 (24%)	72 (18%)	115 (22.3%)

Table 13 – Multilingual instances in the three series

The three issues all clearly present a fairly high number, compared to the number of panels for each book, of instances of such language usage, ranging from deviations from standard Italian, presence of English or other foreign languages, in names, places, symbols, banners, props,

background scenes and even sound effects. Though they are not as high as instances of humour explored in the previous chapter, the fact that between a fifth and a quarter of all text used is non-Italian is highly significant in terms of the style of the series, and what they may be attempting in terms of reasons and functions of language usage. In fact, given the high presence of multilingual instances, one can theorise a careful, intentional use of them, rather than casual code-mixing or code-switching,<sup>80</sup> also given the lack of a particularly widespread multilingual discourse in Italy and Italian publications. While examples from the different texts will be explored below, I believe the significance of the use of multiple linguistic features within the texts is one to be explored further, before moving to how their effects could be translated.

In general, the use of ‘foreign’ languages in texts is a widespread feature of most consumer and entertainment media, and can be due to a number of reasons present in the industry. John Tomlinson, for example, sees the motivation in the light of cultural imperialism of the West, or in this case, Anglophone notions and conventions over the Italian ones (1997: 122; 134). Indeed, there are arguments claiming that translation practices themselves have been affected by the spreading of globalisation, with both negative and positive consequences (e.g. Ho 2008: 92-3), among which a facilitation of cross-cultural exchanges (Ho 2008: 91). In the case of two of the comics considered, *Rat-Man* and *PKNA*, this is even more tangible, given their roots in the American superhero mainstream narratives and medium, as I have discussed in the previous section. With the latter in particular, Disney Italia was created after the break from their American counterpart during the Fascist regime (see Chapter 1), and the ‘foreign’ elements present in the text were largely removed – especially names, with Duckburg becoming Paperopoli, Mousetown becoming Topolinia, Donald Duck becoming Paolino Paperino and Mickey Mouse becoming Topolino, among others. What the censoring process was not able to modify, it seems, was the proliferation of Anglophone conventions and norms embedded in the production of the medium, such as some sound effects (e.g. ‘SMACK’ for kisses and hand slaps, ‘CRASH’ for objects, such as glass, breaking, ‘ZZZ’ for snoring; cf. WrittenSound [online resource]). The *PKNA* series was ideated as a fresh, new type of comic for a teenage Italian audience who would be accustomed to American imports, especially the superhero genre. Some of the elements have now, in fact, become internationally recognised and accepted as being part of a normative system of how comics behave in Western publications, regardless of the fact that they may not be Anglophone-based. It is no surprise, then, that *Rat-Man*, a comic that parodies the genre and industry, and *PKNA*, one that almost looks up to it from a point of view of a template for established norms and conventions, both employ the same types of techniques in terms of sound effects, code mixing, setting and

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<sup>80</sup> I do not use the two terms interchangeably, considering code-switching as being systematic and intentional, versus the less frequent code-mixing (cf. Wales 2001: 63).



naming strategies.

As I have discussed in the previous section, Italian speakers, writers and readers are not among the most proficient in foreign languages. Eastman and Stein's concept of 'language display' however, is definitely one worth exploring again in relation to the functions behind the use that the authors of Italian comics make of multilingual strategies. Other studies in the fields of media, advertising and entertainment have explored the concept further, by looking at where and how different languages use foreign or non-standard elements. Bhatia (1992) finds that even languages such as French and Chinese, which historically have not been receptive to foreign influences and borrowing, increasingly use English in advertisements. The suggestion is that English in these contexts creates a variety of associations, such as efficiency, internationalism, health consciousness and organisation. He also stresses the efforts advertisers make to adapt English in order to make it intelligible to their audience. Martin (2002) also brings up the issue of intelligibility, and gives several examples of French advertisements which include translations for English insertions, in an attempt to expand the reach of the advert with their inclusion at production level. Piller (2001) finds that 60-70% of the German advertisements she selected for her study were to some degree multilingual, generally employing English as well as German. She emphasises how inserting English into otherwise German contexts, for instance in the case of an English-language advertisement in a German newspaper, constructs the reader as bilingual in German and English. This bilingualism, she asserts, is set up as 'the "natural" option for successful middle-class Germans' (Piller 2001: 155) who are also constructed as internationally orientated.

The issue arising here is that a series like *Dampyr* does also employ a wide variety of linguistic and cultural resources, though it borrows from and refers to communities of practice all over the world and not only Anglophone ones. The first issue, analysed in the table above, is entirely set in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and every named character is of Balkan origins, the action takes part mostly in the fictional town of Yorvolak and the fantastical vampire characters are either 'local', Serbian or German – in fact, the only English present is in a metal band t-shirt of one of the minor characters and in some of the sound effects used throughout the issue. The latter would also seem to prove the international assimilation or globalisation of the Anglophone conventions in terms of onomatopoeia. What I would argue the *Dampyr* case exemplifies, however, is yet another, expanded instance of the multilingual display, with the writers and editors pushing for an even wider scope in terms of cultural engagement. In fact, it could even be said that it is a response to the perceived anglicising of the medium, were it not for the pre-existing examples of Franco-Belgian publications such as Goscinny and Uderzo's *Astérix le Gaulois*, or Hergé's *Les Aventures de Tintin*, which had already set the trend of using different cultures as the theme for each new issue; the difference being that *Dampyr* is an

ongoing monthly series, with a running plotline and continuity, differently from the Franco-Belgian series. It does, however, show the levels of influence that the world of *bande dessinée* had on the development of the Bonelli strand of Italian comics, compared to the residual Americanism of the Disney imprints.

The ideas arising from the various studies point towards and reinforce the overarching concept of creating an identity not only for the text, its characters or even authors, but for the readership. Rather than playing solely with linguistic ostentation or language display, the texts provide an environment which is more appealing and inviting for a reader who deems themselves to be knowledgeable or belonging to a specific community of practice, a notion that I have also explored in Chapter 2, when discussing the importance and relevance of 'comics literacy' - a form of cognitive environment spanning across the whole comics medium, with the readers at its centre, ranging from practical and basic matters such as how to read a comic, or how the serialisation of stories works, and aspects which are less practical, such as different artists' styles, conventions, rules or norms of a series rather than another, with added emphasis on the notion of 'continuity', or the cohesion between and within plots and storylines (see Chapter 2, section 5 for more). Arguably, the concept of comics literacy, intended as a pool of shared knowledge for readers, also includes the sense of common identity as fans of the series and the medium as a whole. Even when languages other than their own are used, a comics reader will at least appreciate – if not understand – their relevance and role within the story and exchanges, as well as gaining an illusion of inclusivity and multiculturalism. The efforts on the creators' part, of course, can also push in the entirely opposite direction, and a large amount of foreignising content may be received with critical scepticism or outright refusal to proceed. The apparent inclusivity is, effectively, just an illusion.

The main areas that appear to emerge, therefore, in terms of reasons for multilingual techniques to be employed in Italian comics, are mainly to do with *setting* and *identity*. The two are, of course, not entirely clear-cut, as a character's identity may help the setting around them by contrast, association or extension. The portrayal of identities and settings may also be raising awareness of, mocking or perpetrating stereotypes and political elements, as briefly discussed above, and the translator will have to be aware of the different uses and associations of the instance in the text at hand, and even manipulate them to create an entirely different effect, if needs be and if other factors (editors, publishers, morals) allow it. The two macro-functions may determine the use and effect of the instances in the text, but these must not be overstated or exaggerated, in an attempt to make their function more obvious to the TT reader. The following section looks at how the identification of the reasons behind the use of the different instances will help a translator develop and choose appropriate strategies for the rendition of text in the TL.

## 2.2 Developing Strategies

Considering the functions above as covering most areas in terms of language usage in comics, at least based on the analysis of the three issues considered, I will now move to the discussion of what strategies a translator has at their disposal to approach the instances in which the functions are activated by the text/image copresence.

When discussing the translation of humour in comics, in the previous chapter, I have argued that using theories of translation deriving from established fields of multimodal studies or wordplay, while useful, are not necessarily conducive to aiding a translator in practical terms. Indeed, I showed how Federico Zanettin effectively summarises most translation theories for specific elements of a text, claiming that either the effect will be preserved, it will be changed or it will be omitted (2010:46; also see Chapter 3). The issue, however, is not resolved, as such a statement really does not advance a translator's task in dealing with the text. Similarly, Zanettin's claims of the presence of images being both helpful and damaging to the translation process (2010:45) are again relevant to the work which I am about to discuss, in terms of dealing with techniques which will potentially produce a successful rendition of the ST in the TL; they also reintroduce the concept of constrained translation, discussed in the previous chapter, and its presence as a springboard for more creative translatorial solutions, rather than opposing them (cf. Boase-Beier and Holman 1999: 17).<sup>81</sup>

But how to actually proceed in terms of translating the elements identified in the text? We may know what they are trying to achieve, potentially, and we might know how many are present in the story, and that they are contributing to both setting and characterisation. How should a translator replicate those effects in the TL? As I have argued previously, I find BJ Epstein's work on expressive language in children's literature (2012) an accessible, straightforward type of approach in both its language and concerns, both from a practical and a theoretical perspective. A translator working in the field of comics translation might not be accustomed to long circumlocutions or overly convoluted, effectively exclusive language of academic jargon; my solution, therefore, is to adopt a plainer stance, in both describing the analysis, the strategies and their practical application – though without sacrificing the theories themselves.

To this effect, as I have argued in the previous chapter, I have opted for a reworking and adaptation of Epstein's theories and strategies for the translation of different instances of figurative or 'expressive' language in children's literature. In the case of dialect usage, she

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<sup>81</sup> As I have argued in the previous chapter, Boase-Beier's (among others) concern with theory influences my approach, in setting out the theoretical background before tackling the practical elements or analyses themselves (see Boase-Beier 2006).

suggests an outline for the process of identifying, in order to translate, the different instances of expressive language, which I have expanded to my notion of *–lects* in general, as I employ them to encompass social, ethnic, geographical and personal variations of language. The process includes four steps, once the instances have been located in the ST, beginning from an analysis of the function of the instance (Epstein 2012: 202); in the current case, this would mean identifying which of the two macro-functions of character identity or scene setting it is serving, as well as recognising any additional *skopoi* such as comedy, satire, reference or other singular aspects. This leads to the second step of considering the role that the *–lect* plays in both the SC and the TC, including the connotations of the characters or narrators who may be using a particular idiom or syntactical structure (Epstein 2012: 202). The third step involves a comparative work of previous translations of either the text in question or of the type of variation at hand has been translated in earlier or alternative texts (Epstein 2012: 202). This passage may not be applicable in all cases, as it happens to be for the majority of the issues in the three series I am concerned with in my thesis; if this occurs, other texts will be brought in for further analysis to aid in the choice of a translatorial strategy – the final step. What I illustrate below is Epstein’s full list of strategies for the translation of expressive language in general (Table 14; repurposed from Tables 4 and 11), which I will then further adapt to suit the translation of multilingual instances in my texts in later sections.

Translatorial strategy	Description
Deletion	To remove the expressive language and/or its associations; this may be part of a larger strategy of abridgement or adaptation, and may not be because of the expressive language itself, although it could be
Standardization	To standardize the language, using standard spelling, grammar, and word choices in place of the non-standard in the original
Replacement	To replace the expressive language (with another example of the same sort of expressive language, or some other literary device or form of expressive language, or with a non-figurative word)
Addition	To add new expressive language and/or new associations and/or some other text where there was none before; this can be a way of compensating for deletion, adaptation or replacement
Explanation	To add an explanation paratextually (a footnote or endnote, introduction or translator’s note, or a signal) or intratextually (a word or phrase in the text)
Compensation	To employ the expressive language, but in different

	places/amounts than the source text
Grammatical representation	To use non-standard grammar to mark the language usage
Orthographic representation	To use non-standard spelling to mark the language usage
Vocabulary representation	To use non-standard word-choices to mark the language usage
Adaptation	To use the expressive language but change the spelling or grammar or some other part of it, perhaps to better suit the target language
Retention	To keep the expressive language and, hopefully, its associations, if there are any, or to only retain the associations or ideas contained in the particular item of expressive language

Table 14 – Translatorial strategies for linguistic varieties (from Epstein 2012:25-26; cf. *ibid*: 203)

The complete list of strategies, while all potentially relevant, will not necessarily be used in order to cover the whole field of the identity and setting functions highlighted in the previous section. The translator's choice of which to use will effectively depend on the *skopos* of their own process or of the publisher/editor if that be the case. These may of course not be the same, and there will be instances of the entirety of multilingual usage being deleted from the text in its TL version (as was the case for the first Italian edition of Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, for example).<sup>82</sup> The ideal type of translation, however, will retain some elements of the ST, at least as far as its effects are concerned, considered as the result of the functions associated to the instance. As an addition to the strategies listed above, another process that is also available to translators is the notion of 'assertive non-translation' mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. When Lindqvist introduced the concept, she was discussing a type of strategy present in Swedish literature, where translators work with English source texts, and some form of cultural valency should be taken into account here. The strategy, intentionally not translating elements of foreign language present in the ST into the TL, is explained, in Lindqvist's terms, by the fact that the English language (and culture) has a high prestige status in Swedish literature, to the point of leaving idioms untouched in the TT (2002). I would even expand the concept into the rephrased 'assertive minimal translation', in order to include instances of code-switching within the same speech-bubble, for example (see Figure 9 below). This addition also allows for the issue of elements of English present in the original Italian texts, and how they cannot, obviously, be translated in such a way that would mark the fact they are being used in their 'own' original in the ST, as I will show in examples in later sections.

<sup>82</sup> The character of Vladek, whose English appears broken and stilted in the modern day scenes of the original book, was made into a consistently standard speaker of Italian in Ranieri Carano's 1998 translation. For more information, see Mattei (2009).

What I illustrate in the following section is an overview of a number of further strategies that are specific to the comics medium, which can also be of use to the translation process.

### 3. Seeing Voices

The medium of comics is by nature a hybrid text, comprised of both verbal and non-verbal signs, with text and images complementing each other and conveying the story together, rather than one merely illustrating the other, or vice-versa, describing it. In light of this, a translator will have to take into account the cultural references embedded in the visual elements on the page as well as the actual textual features in the dialogues, speech bubbles, captions and sound effects. In this section I will show how comics in general use languages to convey elements otherwise only implied by the text, before moving to a discussion of the translatorial strategies in practice.

Comics employ a variety of techniques to represent different registers, tones, specific speech patterns or idiosyncrasies, mistakes, deviations and marked shifts from expected or standard language in the culture producing the text. In her chapter on translating dialect in children's literature, Epstein points out how several scholars have remarked that translating language varieties, be they geographical or social, is one of the most difficult tasks for a literary translator (2012:197). In fact, most of the time it seems that the default procedure is either to completely remove dialectal markers either by using standardised varieties of the TL or to change them by replacing them with register markers or colloquial language instead (Epstein 2012:197; also see Dimitrova 1996:61).<sup>83</sup> The difficulty of dealing with characters' voices, or even, to an extent, idiolects, lies with the fact that 'a voice has to be found in the new language that closely resembles that of the original' (Anderman 2007:6) and that involves conveying all the linguistic features and the affective connotations of the particular instance for the language variety. As Anderman claims, '[g]iving each character a voice of his or her own requires [...] lexical and grammatical means of matching expressions in the target language (2007:8)', as the linguistic structures are effectively the only method of conveying a character's personal voice.

In comics, however, further strategies can be employed at the lettering level, in terms of typography, fonts and even colours of the captions, characters' speech- or thought-bubbles, while maintaining a more or less standard form of the language (McCloud 1993:88-9). This is

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<sup>83</sup> Arguably, this raises issues of associations that the author or reader may have with the socio-regional variations, either of politeness, appropriateness or education levels (see BBC Voices project reference, above).

the case, for example, with Gaspar Saladino's iconic (not in the semiotic sense) lettering of Grant Morrison and Dave McKean's *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth* (1989), choosing very different ways for each character to speak in the comics, according to their personality, with the notable example of the Joker's extremely messy, handwritten-styled font (Figure 71).

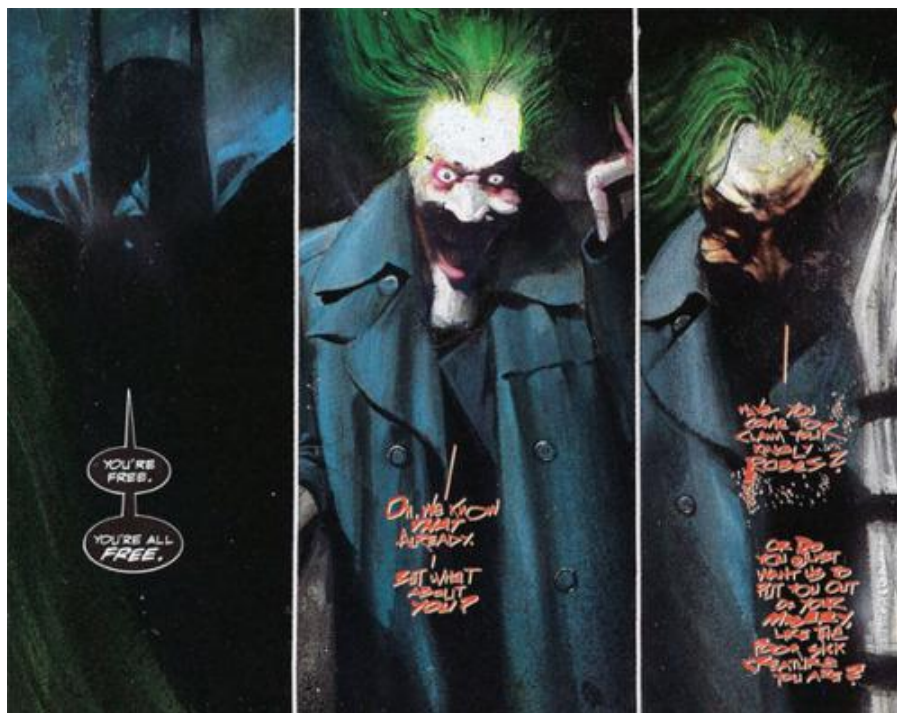


Figure 71 – Batman vs Joker fonts in *Arkham Asylum*

The power of the typography chosen by Saladino in the image above, as well as his choice of speech-bubble for Batman and its absence for the Joker, is increased by the juxtaposition of the two characters' speech as representative of their personality: the Dark Knight's lines are controlled, contained almost to the point of repression, shown both in the small speech bubble, the few words used, and the regular DC/Vertigo font; the Joker, on the other hand, has free rein over his dialogue. Saladino has made sure it is as disturbing and contrasted as possible, and follows artist McKean's parallel imagery. He divides the speech bubble into two (and eliminates its borders) and plays with writer Morrison's script, reported below in more detail, for example placing emphasis on letters rather than words.<sup>84</sup>

Panel 1	You're free. You're all <i>free</i> .
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<sup>84</sup> More information on the different approaches to the characters' lines can be found in Morrison's annotated script in the deluxe edition of *Arkham Asylum* (2004: 6).



Panel 2

Oh, we know *that* already.  
But what about *you*?

Panel 3

Have you come to claim your kingly Robes?  
Or do you just want us to put you out of your *misery*,  
like the poor sick creature you are?

The use of colours, their contrast, vividness, saturation or lack thereof, is also particularly effective, and employed throughout the book for other characters too. Typography techniques like Saladino's are still very much in use, with some really creative solutions being devised by the more skilled letterers (e.g. Clayton Cowles in Figures 72a-b, Tom B. Long in Figure 73).



Figure 72a – Carnage takes over The Thing in *Carnage U.S.A.*



Figure 72b – The Thing in *Carnage U.S.A.*, pre-Carnage

In Figure 72a above, the symbiote/human Carnage takes over The Thing from the Fantastic Four team in the Marvel universe, after they attempt a rescue mission to neutralise the creature's threat. Carnage proves too powerful, and takes over most of the superheroes involved. Up until this point, The Thing had an irregular but rounded speech bubble (Figure 72b), with black font on white background, but once the symbiote takes over as peripheral host, his speech bubble also changes: slightly more jagged edges, red background, irregular font, and in this scene, not fully contained within the bubble, as he tries to escape the physical and mental grasp of the creature taking control.

In similar ways, effective and thoughtful lettering can also be used to convey the scale and nature of the producers of the sound, when it is not dialogue being used. The example in Figure 76 below is taken from the final pages of Dille, Metzen and Ramondelli's *Transformers: Monstrosity*, in which Trypticon, a giant biomechanical dragon-like creature, has been awakened and is wreaking havoc across the planet on which the story is set. The only two characters really visible in the panel are reduced to almost nothing by the sheer size of the creature's roaring sound effect.

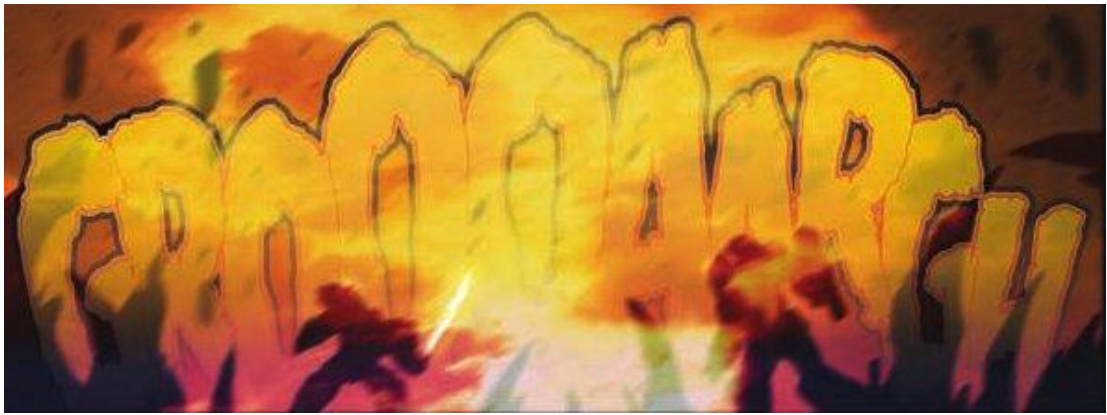


Figure 73 – Trypticon roars

There are issues in the use of typography, colour and even elements of lettering when it comes to translation, though, as the sets of conventions for different publications (both within the same language and across different ones) may hinder the full range of strategies shown here. Italian comics, for example, tend to use less colour than their Anglophone counterparts, with precedence given to the inking and the contrast between light and dark lines to emphasise certain elements on the page (see Figure 79, below, for an example).

Other ways of employing typographical techniques have been and are currently being used in the production of multilingual settings within comics, such as the recent publication of Jessica Cohen’s translation of Rutu Modan’s *The Property* (2013). In the original Hebrew version of the book, Modan chose to represent the three languages spoken (Hebrew, Polish and English) in different typefaces – even reducing it to incomprehensible squiggles when one character cannot understand the language being spoken by two others (Figure 74, below). Cohen’s English translation keeps these elements unchanged, marking the differences in languages without affecting the issues of portraying the original foreignness of English or Polish in the original.



Figure 74 – Incomprehension in *The Property*

This last iteration of a typographical strategy is a particularly useful resource when dealing with comics translation, especially if the work is to be executed without access to the pre-lettering pages, as will most likely be the case. A translator can still manipulate the fonts in the speech bubbles, if not modify the lettering of the sound effects present in the panels, and the technique is particularly relevant here, as English comics, as shown throughout this section, are relatively accustomed to and welcoming towards creative typography. Being able to use different fonts would also bypass the issue of colour, or lack thereof, in comics such as *Dampyr* or *Rat-Man*, and could be employed more visibly to further demarcate the difference in the different linguistic varieties. It would also help deploy the notion of ‘assertive non-translation’ mentioned previously in the chapter, by, in fact, increasing the relevance of the assertiveness of the translator’s actions. How all the strategies, typographical, theoretical and practical are applied to the text is what the rest of the chapter focuses on.

#### 4. So, Translation

The sections so far have been exploring the issues connected with different language usage in comics, texts, their relevance and potential functions. Building upon the points identified above, I will now move from the discussion to the application of the strategies suggested in previous sections (see Table 14, above). I use examples from the three Italian series considered, while also taking into consideration existing practices in comics creation and translation as a whole to show the relevance and possible success that my suggested strategies can have in an English-language publication. In order to do so, I have divided the discussion

into two macro-sections, within which I look at the functions outlined earlier in the chapter: language varieties (including geographical and social elements) and language deviation.

## 4.1 Language Varieties

### 4.1.1 Identity

When dealing with how these choices of idiolects or language idiosyncrasies are depicted textually, on the other hand, there are usually conventions of orthographic representation of the phonetic elements of the chosen variety, which are by no means an easy task to reproduce in a TL which has little or no affiliation to or knowledge of that variety in the first place. Employing dialects and other types of language varieties, however, is also one of the elements often used by authors to convey humour, a technique found in both Italian and other languages, including English (e.g. Crystal 1998: 18 ff.). While this is not the sole function, as discussed above, it appears to be the most frequently used in series like PKNA and Rat-Man, with the latter being the one which exploits this type of feature the most, and often does so presumably in an attempt to ridicule some Italian attitudes towards dialects, foreign languages and language in general. As shown in one of the examples below (Figure 75), there are connotations of education and social levels connected to stereotypes of non-standard usage, which are often ridiculed by more standardised users – Ortolani's comic arguably uses it to raise awareness of the existence of said stereotype, though the depiction of his characters is not always clear as to which side of the argument he is portraying, and could be reinforcing the connotations in his readership (cf. Epstein 2012: 199).

This, in fact, is not that different from English attitudes: perceived relative superiority of one's own variety, prejudices and stereotypes about regional and social varieties (such as North and West in the UK, or the South in Italy), misconceptions about the prestige of foreign, or foreign-sounding, words (English and Latin for Italians, French, German and Latin for English) (cf. Chambers and Trudgill 1980; also see section 2 above). There are very few occasions which language variations are used for reasons other than comedy, at least for the three series considered in my study. *Dampyr*, however, does employ different languages, mostly in translation, for some of the characters present in different stories. This is mostly due to the elements of *setting* the story within a different cultural, linguistic and geographical environment, a feature I have discussed in section 2, above.



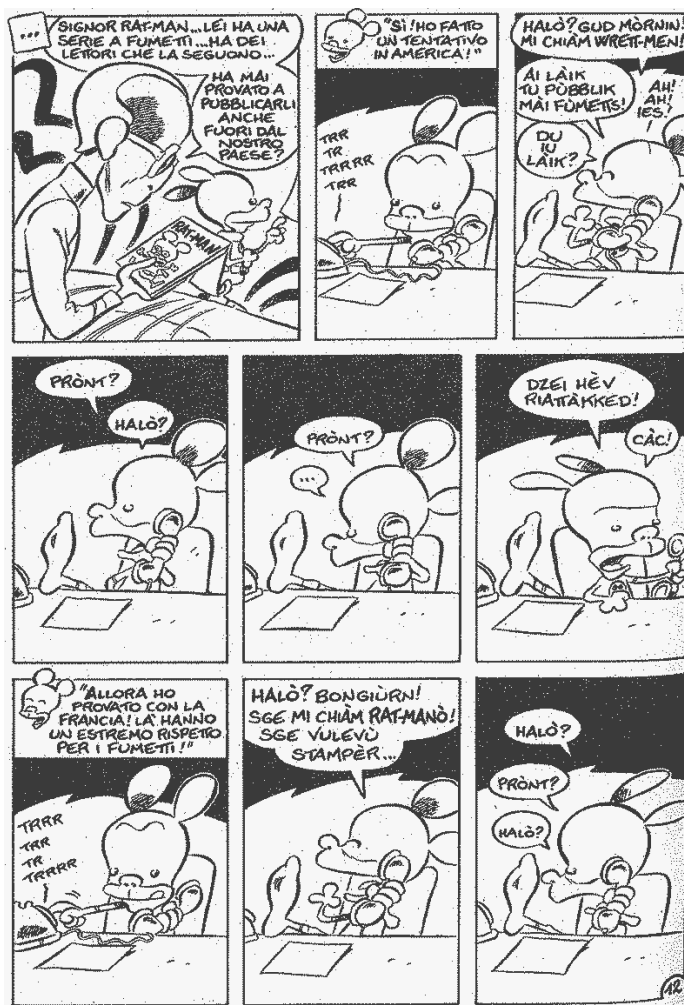


Figure 75 – Inglisc and Fransay (Rat-Man #35, p. 12)

In the panels above, the main character is recalling how he has tried to pitch his own comics series abroad, first in the US, one of the main poles of Italian comics import, then France, the source of the more ‘artistic’ *bande dessinée*; his usage of English and French, though, is represented by orthographically transcribing the way that Italians, in most cases, would pronounce them. The original, panel-by-panel, reads as follows:

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| Panel 1 | Signor Rat-Man... Lei ha una serie a fumetti... ha dei lettori che la seguono... ha mai provato a pubblicarli anche fuori dal nostro paese? |
| Panel 2 | Caption: “Si! Ho fatto un tentativo in America!”<br>FX: Trr tr trrrr trr  |
| Panel 3 | Halò? Gud mòrnin! Mi chiàm Wrett-Men!<br>Ai làik to pùbblik mai fùmetts!<br>Du iu làik?<br>Ah! Ah! Ies!                                     |

Panel 4	Prònt? Halò?
Panel 5	Prònt?
Panel 6	Dzei hèv riattàkked! Càc!
Panel 7	Caption: “Allora ho fatto un tentativo con la Francia! Là hanno un estremo rispetto per i fumetti!” FX: Trrr trr tr trrrr
Panel 8	Halò? Bongiùrn! Sge mi chiàm Rat-Manò! Sge vulevù stampèr..
Panel 9	Halò? Prònt? Halò?

This is not a type of strategy solely used in Italian comics, however, as the following image (Figure 76) shows. The panel is taken from Swedish comic strip ‘Elvis’, by Tony Cronstam (2004).

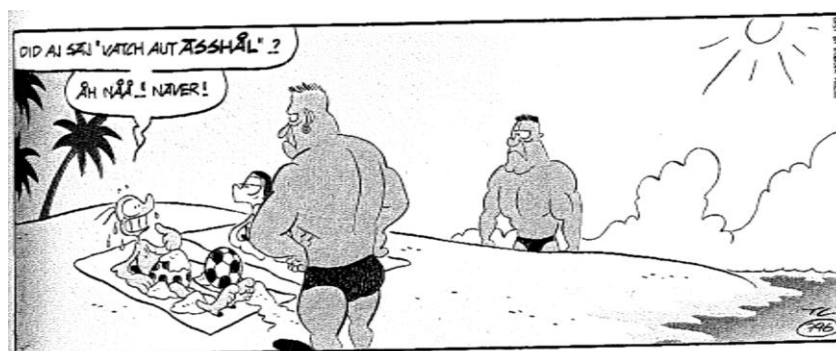


Figure 76 – Swedish *āsshål* (Elvis, 2004)

The main character, lying on the towel, is shown defending himself from the accusation of having insulted a particularly burly-looking man by calling him an ‘asshole’. The panel is transcribed below for ease of reading.

Elvis	Did aj sāj “vatch aut <i>āsshål</i> ”? <i>did I say “watch out asshole”?</i> Åh nää.! Nāver! <i>oh noo.! never.!</i>
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In a similar way to the Italian comic, the Swedish strip uses the phonetic values of its own language and alphabet to portray the approximate sounds of English, depicting a character that can speak ‘the foreign language’ albeit with a strong accent. Finding a similar technique employed outside of Italian comics would offer significant support for the translation suggestions I approach below, though they are still outside of an English publication.

Moving back to the Rat-Man example, the pseudo-French can be conveyed through a stereotypical English spelling of mock French (Panel 8) with results such as: ‘Zese coMICS zey are magnifique, zey shoold be publishED’. Capital letters signify where the stress falls on multisyllabic words, and the speech bubble’s content has been paraphrased to include more words with ‘th-’ (in English). The difficulty is increased, however, when having to translate into English an Italian take on English itself. One suggestion<sup>85</sup> is to employ a similar strategy to the French instances, and recreate an orthographic representation of a mock Italian accent, resulting, for example in something like: ‘I-a would-a like-a to pooblish these-a comics of-a mine, you know?’ This *adaptation* strategy is crucial for the joke to survive, as the humour is strictly formal rather than in the message, and is only a verbal type of signplay, i.e. the lettering does not contribute to it. The full scene will, according to my suggested translation, read as follows:

Panel 1	Mister Rat-Man... you have your own comic book series... you have avid fans and readers... have you made any attempt to pitch it to publishers abroad?
Panel 2	Caption: “Yes! I tried a publisher in the US!” FX: Trr tr trrrr trr
Panel 3	Hallo? Ciao! It’s-a me, Wrett-Men! I-a would-a like-a to pooblish these-a comics of-a mine! You know? Ah! Ah! Ies!
Panel 4	Hallo? ..?
Panel 5	Hallo?
Panel 6	They have-a gone! Mamma mia!

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<sup>85</sup> For which I am indebted to my primary supervisor, Dr BJ Epstein.

Panel 7	Caption: "So I tried in France! They really value comics over there!" FX: Trrr trr tr trrrr
Panel 8	Hallo? Bonjour! Zese comics, zey are magnifique, zey shoold be publishED..
Panel 9	Hallo? Ouai? Hallo?

The effect, though, is also achieved through the characterisation of Rat-Man himself, through the building of his stories and personal development up to this point; in this particular case, the foreign language incident represents the character's confidence and, indeed, arrogance, in believing himself capable of speaking languages other than his own. The target of the joke is precisely the lack of linguistic proficiency – the reader, as a result, is coded or inferred to be in on the joke, and more knowledgeable and proficient. In fact, the orthographic representation of the phonetics of his speech reveal to the reader that he is unable to speak either of the two languages used, English and French; the joke is reinforced towards the end of the scene (not shown above) when Rat-Man states that he did not try pitching his comics in Germany because he does not speak German (RM35, p.13). In this sense, Rat-Man embodies a wide-spread cultural feature of Italians, though less present with newer generations (see above), who attempt to speak other languages in the same fashion. Indeed, the character's language skills are used repeatedly, though not insisted upon, throughout the series, with reader irony used to show them as seeing and knowing more than the main character of the series. A translator will therefore have to keep the strategies in mind for each new occurrence of this type of language play.

#### 4.1.2 Setting

In the case of varieties of the same language or even foreign languages employed in non-humorous ways, *Dampyr* provides a good source of editorial techniques, either presenting texts in their original (non-Italian) language with captioned footnotes, or by using an established convention in comics of writing the text in the publication's language rather than its in-story origin, surrounded by angular brackets, e.g. an Italian character in an English comic will say '<Hello>' instead of 'Ciao'. The image below (Figure 77) shows an example of this feature in an English-language publication, David Hine and Jeremy Haun's (et al.) *The Darkness*:

*Rebirth* (2012), in which the character speaking in Bulgarian is depicted as using English with the brackets technique illustrated above, and the addition of a footnote caption. The captions tend to be used once per issue or volume, as is the case for the text used in the example below, and even not at all, as the brackets are an established comics convention and it is assumed that readers will be aware of and tuned in to this.



Figure 77 – Angled brackets and editorial caption in Anglophone comics

*Dampyr*'s writers' choice to preserve some degree of the 'original' may also be due to the cultural scope of the series, spanning across different countries and already featuring speakers of different languages in the main cast (Czech, Bosnian and German, though in Italian and without angled brackets). In these cases, the preferred translation strategy is *retention*, simply translating the Italian dialogue or caption into English, and presenting the same editorial comments as the ST. In cases such as the ones portrayed below (Figure 78), translating into English will, in fact, remove all need for an editorial intervention.



Figure 78 – Goosey gander (Dampyr 2s, p.41, ff. 1-2)

The scene shows a character's house as a nursery rhyme eerily plays or is sung from somewhere in the building. The whole issue is set in and around London, and nursery rhymes are the theme of the story-arc that the main characters have to deal with.<sup>86</sup> As can be seen, the original Italian includes an 'editorial' caption in the lower space of the panel – and a typo in the English – translating the words of the rhyme, something which will be entirely unnecessary in its English translation, leading to a *deletion* strategy of the original, though admittedly a peculiar one, as it is not removing anything from the reading of the source.

Further difficulties may develop, on the other hand, when the language used in the ST is a non-Italian one in combination with Italian rather than by itself. Several characters across the series tend to use a lot of code-mixing, by using foreign titles like 'Herr' or 'Madame' while speaking standard Italian for everything else, a strategy used by the writers to mark the fact that the dialogue is, in fact, taking place in German or French. Similarly, some characters are made to swear in their own language rather than the one of the publication, with syntagms or (stereotypically associated) idioms like British English 'bloody hell', French 'merde' ('shit') and German 'scheisse' (also 'shit') being among the most frequent and popular. While there is not too much to be said for languages other than English, where full *retention* is my suggested strategy, in the case of code-mixing English in particular there are issues of a sociolinguistic nature coming into play, as I explain in section 1.2 above. An example is in Figure 79, below, where an old woman who has survived a vampire attack uses, in the same speech bubble, both Bosnian 'davao' and Italian 'il diavolo' to describe her attackers.

<sup>86</sup> The issue revolves around a vampire lord who has the power to influence two psychic twins in an orphanage, and various secondary and lesser characters die in 'nursery rhyme' fashion: one Martin Chuzzlewit, balding, rotund man, falls off a wall and breaks his neck and head; the old man (not actually present) in the panels above gets dragged down the flight of stairs, killing him.



Figure 79 – Davao/diavolo (Dampyr 1, p.11, f.6)

The panel in English would simply translate the Italian part of the woman's words, and keep the Bosnian as is, also retaining the italics to mark the use of an unfamiliar word to the text's audience. As discussed above, the strategy is really one that aids the setting of the story, rather than attempting anything particularly convoluted in terms of linguistic virtuosisms. The result is as follows:

Woman	' <i>Davao!</i> ... The devil!'
-------	---------------------------------

On other occasions, *Dampyr* presents linguistic devices that do not register at all until the setting or cultural context is made explicit by one of the characters or a caption. This is the case for the opening pages of the very first issue of the series, set just outside the fictional town of Yorvolak (Figure 80).

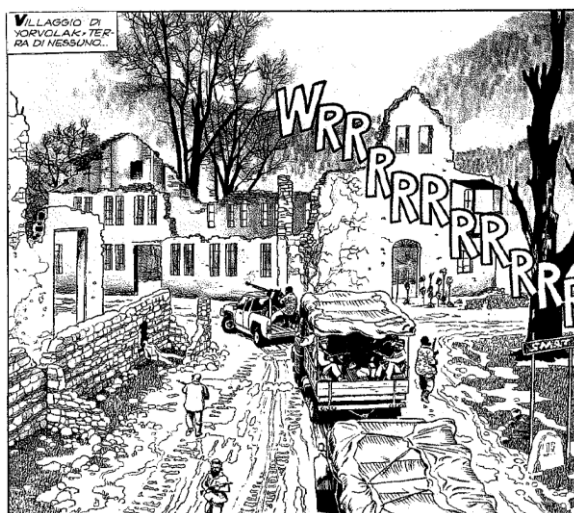


Figure 80 – Yorvolak (Dampyr 1, p.7, f.2)

The characters mention the small town, and call each other by their names, e.g. Kurjak, Istvan, Lajos, but no indication is given as to what language or languages they are speaking. Allegedly, the town of Yorvolak is situated in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but this is not revealed until much later in the book. The images, however, of the buildings in ruin, the war-ridden land and the scenery



around them do help the reader in identifying the contextual setting of the story, once combined with the other information such as the characters' names, at least to the point of locating it somewhere in the Balkans. The series' writers and artists, who change almost every issue,<sup>87</sup> only give some indication as to where the action is taking place, leaving it up to context, artwork and single words or names for the readers to identify or imagine the setting. A global reader, if you will, can situate the scene or issue in general, if not in its particular, as a form of synecdochical representation. Once again, *retention* of the language-specific elements is advised, in order to maintain the cultural cues and clues for the story's setting effectively employing the strategy of assertive minimal translation discussed in section 2, above.

Another example of this type of setting, in terms of character and location names employed not to define the identity of the characters themselves, can be found throughout the entirety of *PKNA*. Most of the action taking place on Earth is set in Paperopoli, a giant sprawling metropolis reminiscent of the likes of Gotham City and Metropolis itself. The Italian name is also constantly present in the setting of the location, but the city itself and its inhabitants are presented as having anglicised (for the most part) names (Figure 81).

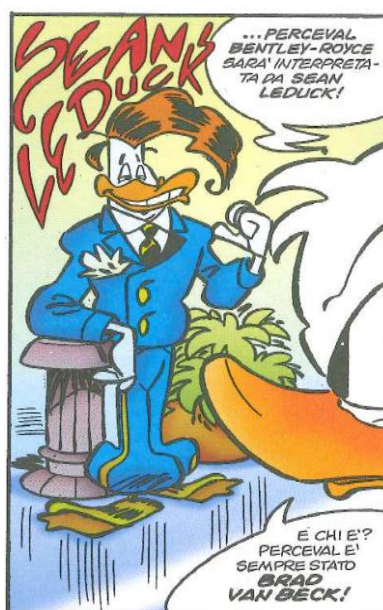


Figure 81 – Sean LeDuck (*PKNA* #0)

Donald Duck (Paolino Paperino) is watching the fictional TV show/soap opera *Patemi* (a possible reference to *The Bold and The Beautiful*), during which an actor change for one of the characters is being announced. The panel, in a first attempt at translation, reads as follows:

<sup>87</sup> This is also a characteristic of company-owned comics series in English, where artists, writers, and other creators are more or less interchangeable, based upon editorial decisions or time-constraints. Italian publications, however, appear to do so a lot more frequently.

TV ...Perceval Bentley-Royce will be played by Sean LeDuck!

Donald Who's that? Perceval has always been Brad Van Beck!

Of the three names used in the scene, none show any Italian connotation or element at all, with the exception of 'Beck' potentially being a pun on 'becco' ('beak'). Though the name of the show is Italian, the broadcasting channel is called, by characters, 'Canale Doppiozero' (Double zero channel, see Figure 82 below), and the city it's broadcast in is Paperopoli, the Italian-named location, the elements of the show are still Anglophone. As I discussed above, these would be further indications of the type of creating or aspiring to a type of linguistic identity for the series, setting it among the other Anglo-American publications which it is trying to emulate.



Figure 82 – Setting Paperopoli in *PKNA#0*

The city itself is also clearly modelled on the US-style superhero cities like Metropolis or UK-created but US-based Mega City One, with visual elements of urban landscapes such as skyscrapers, New York style taxis, fire hydrants and road signs. In Figure 85 above, the writing marked with 1 says 'Torton line', identifying a type of public transport not really present in Italian cities, the metro, other than Milan and Rome. The text marked with 2, in addition, shows the actual in-universe name of the TV channel and studio that all the characters refer to in Italian as 'doppio zero' actually being 00 Channel.

All of the elements which appear to convey the aspired identity of the *setting* of the *PKNA* series would pose a particularly difficult aspect of the translation process, but the strategy of assertive non-translation in this case solves both the practical, lettering aspect and the aspired-to Anglophonic connotations: the original Italian uses the US superhero genre as a template for its own series, effectively setting its stories in the same scape as its caped



counterparts; by leaving the foreign elements of the ST intact, the comic is more likely to be assimilated into the genre once the rest of the text is also translated into English, finding its place cut-out by the use of conventions of the target system, over the ones of the source's. In the case of non-Anglophone elements, on the other hand, the issue is almost non-existent, as in the case of *Dampyr* above: the comic is using multilingual strategies to set its action in other, objectively recognised cultures and locations, so deleting the elements or adapting them to the target system would effectively undermine the text's scope and, even, its plotline.

#### 4.2 Language Deviation

A different type of *-lect* strategy, and arguably an easier one to translate, is found in characters defined by a specific *language deviation* or misuse, a recurring feature of two characters in the *Rat-Man* series. This type of strategy would appear to be mostly concerned with creating an *identity* for the characters, rather than a setting for the action or scenes. There are instances throughout the various series of characters who present an element of non-standard language with the function of aiding in *setting* the scene for the rest of the action, but the tendency is always to consider them as a group of speakers rather than individuals, in fact creating a collective identity and adding to the circumstantial elements of the plot over those of the single characters (e.g. vampire underling gangs in *Dampyr*, certain droid characters in *PKNA*). Ortolani's *Rat-Man* series is the one that, overall, employs the use of language deviations the most, potentially due to its reliance on elements of localised humour and the play on national and regional differences perceived as 'incorrect' when compared to the standard variety.



Figure 83 – The Spider (*Rat-Man*, p. 24, f. 1.)

The Spider, one of the main antagonists, who is featured in the series and the various special events/spoofs, is portrayed as never having mastered the use of the Italian subjunctive, a fact which is, at times, also pointed out in-story by characters or captions (as in Figure 83 above, where the caption reads, “The *Spider* and his terrible subjunctives!”). While there is no specific reason for the character’s idiosyncratic mis-speak, there are educational connotations associated with the use of the subjunctive in particular: both subjunctive and conditional moods are still, allegedly, in use in standard Italian, but are fairly difficult to distinguish without a prescriptive set of rules, taught in schools at later primary and secondary education levels. An individual who does not appear to know the difference or the usage of the two is frequently regarded as either not having completed their studies, as being uneducated or even illiterate. Ascribing this type of pejorative element to the main antagonist in the series is clearly identifying the Spider as an equal to the protagonist Rat-Man; they are both embodiments of a perceived ignorant, average Italian stereotype, from within a national perspective (however reactionary that may be, from both a social and a linguistic standpoint).

Due to the lack of a specific subjunctive verbal mood conjugation in English, the most sensible strategy here, also in order to keep the comedic tension, is to *adapt* this idiosyncrasy to a deviation from Standard English, such as the creation of regular past-tense forms for irregular verbs as in the example below.

Spider	Welcome, Rat-Man...
	It was time you camed!
Caption	The Spider and his terrible grammar!

The resulting strategies, however, would have to be carefully applied to each case by itself, due to the different contexts in which the deviation is used, essentially changing the Spider’s ‘terrible subjunctives’ to ‘terrible grammar’.



Figure 84 – Sofferenzo and Bulbo (*Signore dei Ratti*, p.9, ff. 4-5.)

Another example is Giuda, not originally from *Rat-Man* but rather from a parallel series called *Venerdì 12* (Friday the 12<sup>th</sup>), whose stories featured in the main line’s issues. The character is

then used in the same capacity of side-kick, usually to an antagonist, in the various parodies (e.g. Bulbo's minion Sofferenzo, in *Lord of the Rats*). His distinctive feature is the regular but arbitrary replacement of 'o' with 'u' in his speech (as in Figure 84 above), an element which can easily be reproduced in the TL, albeit with a little more effort.

- Panel 1            Soff: 'Padrone... vi vedo nervoso... agitato... come mai?'  
                       [*Standard Italian: 'Padrone... vi vedo nervoso... agitato... come mai?'*]  
                       Bulbo: 'NON HO CHIUSO OCCHIO TUTTA LA NOTTE'
- Panel 2            Soff: 'La BRAMA di pussedere quell'anillu vi tiene dunque sveglio?'  
                       [*S.I.: 'La BRAMA di possedere quell'anello vi tiene dunque sveglio?'*]  
                       Bulbo: 'No. Qualcuno ha suonato i bonghi fino alle tre di mattina!'

The connotations it has in Italian are of someone speaking with constantly rounded lips/mouth, either through speech impediment or some form of affectation, so the translator will have to modify different parts of the character's speech to achieve the same effect, in a combination of adaptation and compensation strategies. An example of the result is as follows:

- Panel 1            Soff: 'Muster... you seem nurvous... wurried... whut's up?'  
                       Bulbo: 'I GOT NO SHUTEYE LAST NIGHT!'
- Panel 2            Soff: 'The YURNING for that rung is stull keeping you awake?'  
                       Bulbo: 'No. Someone was playing the drums until 3 am.'

A balance has to be struck, of course, in order to not exaggerate the deviation to the point where readers will find it difficult to understand the text. Even more than for the previous section, idiolects based on language deviation tend to be used for comedic purposes, as they can convey personality traits and connotations without necessarily delving into complex sociolinguistic issues of social class (mis)representation; though Ortolani's Spider in *Rat-Man* may be problematic in those terms, it must be viewed with the idea of it being a parody of extremely eloquent supervillains or pompous Italian (and other) publishers in mind, or even the over-the-top formal register of classic supervillains of the monologue fame. The story and characterisation will also help the new reader to understand the associated connotations, but I firmly believe that modifying a specific education-based deviation to a more generic irregular grammar could also improve said understanding – and by consequence be a more socially aware representation for the series – adding an element of inconsistency to the character.

The strategy of adaptive retention, that is, of retaining the fact that characters may be using deviating language by adapting it to the TL, is also supported by previous works of translation from Italian to English, with notable examples such as the multiple editions of Hugo Pratt's *Corto Maltese: La Ballata del Mare Salato* (1967). Regarded as one of the best graphic novels in the Italian publishing industry, the text features multiple Fijian and Maori characters

alongside the main European cast, most notably Cain and Cranio. Most of these characters are identified by their speech pattern, which at times features non-standard syntax, mixed with Venetian dialect words and nonsensical ones or neologisms. The style is one of Pratt's trademarks, and I will not go into whether the representation is problematic, choosing rather to focus on how it was adapted into English. Figure 85 below shows the opening page of the original Italian, with three characters interacting concerning the appearance of another boat not far from their own.



Figure 85 – Opening of *La Ballata*, p.1.

The panel reads as follows:

Cranio	Cosa succede? <i>what happens</i>
Sailor 1	Hirdmay!.. C'é una barca... <i>nons. there-is a boat</i>
Sailor 2	Pete ateatea! Uomini bianchi... <i>nons. nons. men white</i>

While the minor syntactical point of having a fragmented nominal sentence in the third speech bubble may not appear significant, it serves here to illustrate the combination of syntax and what are effectively 'foreign sounding' nonsensical words. The most recent English translation, Hal Powell's *Corto Maltese: Ballad of the Salt Sea* (2012) (Figure 86), essentially retains all the elements of the original.

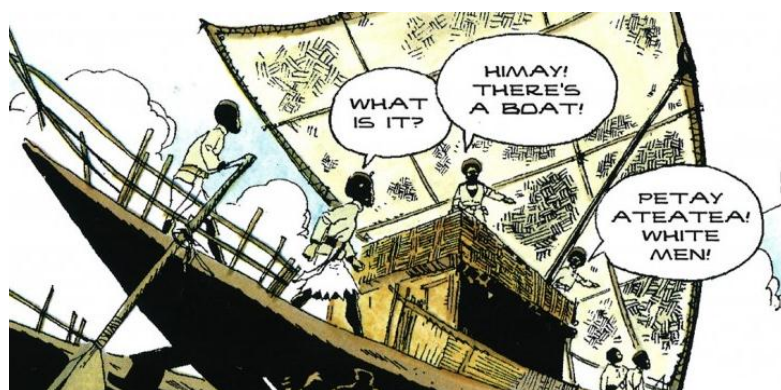


Figure 86 – Opening of *The Ballad*, p.1.

The nominal 'white men' sentence of the second sailor is kept in English, as are the nonsensical words though their spelling is slightly modified, adapting it to orthographically represent a better approximation of the sounds of the original. For example, the second sailor's <pete> is pronounced /pete/ in the original, while <petay> tries to recreate it, resulting in /peteɪ/. Despite the negative reviews the book received as it came out,<sup>88</sup> the translation has been praised in one aspect over the previous one, which had issues with the consistency of irregular syntax of the Fijian characters, switching between full Standard English and non-standard versions with apparently no discernible rationale (e.g. Feerick 2012). The majority of issues reported by readers and reviewers, in fact, were not due to the textual translation, but rather the visual one: images were of a bad resolution, as they were scanned from corrupted originals; too much dead space was present on the page, with panels almost drowning in overly-wide margins; the lettering was unclear at several points throughout the book; colours were added where some readers felt more work could have been done with the size of the images first. The proof, if any was needed at this point, that comics translation involves more than just the verbal part for the TT to be received as successful.

When dealing with language deviation, then, it appears to be the case that the strategies used serve the macro-function of creating an *identity* for the characters portrayed as possessing the linguistic idiosyncrasies. In order to effectively retain the effects conveyed in the original, the type of strategies that seem most effective are *adapting* the non-standard language usage of the SL to instances of non-standard TL which carries the same type of connotations in the TC as the SC does for the original text. Where the deviations might include words or occurrences of nonsense, neologisms or quasi-variety languages, *assertive minimal translation* is sufficient to convey the foreignising effects already present in the ST.

<sup>88</sup> See for example the articles run on *The Beat* by Heidi McDonald (2012a; 2012b) and the defence on MeatHaus by the designer Chris McDonnell (2012). The interest in Hugo Pratt's work, whatever the initial result, was still enough to ensure the publication, with particular attention to the design, lettering and translation, of the rest of the Corto Maltese stories by IDW Publishing, as of December 2014 (Comics&Cola 2014).

## 5. Summary

The elements of multilingualism, and the resulting or intended multiculturalism that this implies, can be considered as particularly intricate to deal with when approached from a purely theoretical perspective. Attempting to categorise, build a system and apply it without fault for each possible instance of language variation or deviation is an unlikely task, and one that does not ultimately lead to a productive, functional strategy for a practising translator. This being the case, what I have developed in the chapter is first of all a means of acknowledging how and why multilingual instances are employed, by separating their intention to identify a character or setting a scene, sequence, or even entire book. The table below (Table 15) presents my findings for each of the categories, and the strategies I introduce to deal with them.

Typology	Function	Strategies
Language Variety	Identity	<i>Adaptation</i>
Language Variety	Setting	<i>Retention</i> if references present in TL  <i>Assertive non-translation</i> if references absent in TL
Language Deviation	Identity	<i>Adaptation</i> if references present in TL  <i>Assertive minimal translation</i> if references present in TL

Table 15 – Summary of strategies per category

Once again, the strategy of *adaptation* is predominant as a way of maintaining the instance between ST and TT. The qualities of the identity function mean that the character or subject of the ‘identification’ process can be made to display their characterisation – the one conveyed through use of a particular type of language variety or deviation, either socio-, dia- or idiolectal, at least – in a form that does not jar with the TL. In the case of devices used to set the scene or story, on the other hand, translators should keep as close to the original as possible, in order not to disrupt the narrative of the text, or the interaction between the characters of different backgrounds, for example.

Where my strategies differ significantly from previous methods employed and suggested, is in the following: the case above applies where references are present in the text to identify, however easily, said setting or identity functions. If no reference is given, I do not suggest an *omission* or *deletion*, but rather a conscious, assertive act of non-translation, or a very minimal one. This allows the translator to recreate the identity and the setting in the TT without employing localised devices, but rather through operating on those instances as a



cluster, as I have argued previously in the case of the overall signplay crucial to the medium. The images, in fact, may ultimately become the major carriers of the variety/deviation, in these cases, where such instances are needed for the narrative or the character's development. Broken down into its components, then, assertive non-translation incorporates elements of *retention*, *deletion* and *omission* as a direct strategy, which can be easily taken as the most 'radical' tools a translator can choose to employ.

## 6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to develop and illustrate strategies for translating multilingual issues and situations from Italian comics into English, a feature which frequently appears in Italian series as exemplified by the brief quantitative analysis of the titles *Rat-Man*, *PKNA* and *Dampyr*. The strategy development process was preceded by a discussion of current work being conducted in different fields of linguistics, and their impact on media, entertainment and the comics medium in particular. The discussion then provided a critical look at the potential functions lying behind the presence of different language varieties, variations and interplay between the two within a narrative which is mostly Italian. I supported the discussion with a quantitative exploration of exemplary issues of the series considered, and derived the two macro-functions of *identity creation* and *scene setting* to explain the comic authors' techniques.

Building upon the functional framework, I once again adapted Epstein's (2012) model of translatorial strategies to be utilised in the translation of the linguistic strategies at the centre of the focus for the chapter. In addition, I redefined the notion of *assertive non-translation* (Lindqvist 2002) to include minimal variations and selected elements to allow for the retention of code-switching elements in the ST and TT. These strategies appear to be sufficiently functional, based on the presupposition that a translator might not be able to modify the images, including some of the lettering, and should therefore use them as reference. While the various examples of translations are, indeed, only suggestions, the strategies devised appear to be successful on the sample of comics used and build upon existing translation practices and results in the field of comics translation and production. It also appears to be the case that *adaptation*, *retention* and *assertive non-translation* emerge as the most viable and readily employed strategies, at least in an environment that does not concern the presence of an editor or publisher with additional requests or publication intentions. This would suggest that the multilingual, multicultural and foreignising effects and connotations of the identity and setting strategies all converge into the over-arching *skopos* of



the three series, arguably, of creating and inhabiting a readership identity, part of the comics literacy idea explored in Chapter 2, an identity which would also prove the recognised idea of a *lingua comica* of sorts – a common ground of multiculturalism and inclusivity, which can only be enhanced by the practice and process of translating the texts and making them available to an even wider audience than they already have.

## Chapter 6 - Thesis Conclusion

### 1. Overview

The aim of the thesis, as stated in the Introduction, is to offer a piece of academic exploration and analysis of three core elements in Italian comics or *fumetti*, and provide translatorial strategies for said elements into English. I have attempted to provide a piece of work and methodological system that may appeal to both professionals working in translation and academics studying the field from a theoretical and critical perspective. What I have achieved is the beginning of a breakthrough into understanding the current state of comics translation, specifically from Italian to English, looking at a descriptive approach to existing published translations and potential future processes to increase that number further.

In the sections (2.1, 2.2) below, I offer a discussion of how those processes can be applied, and what results from their comparison for the different topics they were devised for, in terms of significance for translation and comics overall. Similarly, I summarise the major theoretical outcomes reached in the thesis, and how they may assist in the further development of both academic fields. For ease of discussion, the two are looked at separately, but I am by no means suggesting that the two are as separate as the Conclusion's structure might imply. Much like the discussion between Chesterman and Wagner (2000), the ultimate product of the thesis is the synthesis of the two aspects studied, rather than their consideration as separate entities. To further reinforce this point, I also offer a full, if slightly edited for readability purposes, transcript of a paper delivered in the context of a comics scholars' conference (Section 5).

### 2. Critical Outcomes – The Ivory Tower

What I have come to demonstrate in the thesis, chapter by chapter, is the relevance that the exploration and analysis bears upon the critical and theoretical fields of comics studies and translation studies, in the combined approach I employed in my work. Retracing and summarising the conclusions drawn for each section, I recognise two overall points emerging from the more theoretical side of the thesis: the importance of function, in translatorial strategies and in comics analysis, and the necessity of a recognition of signplay in the medium.

As I have mentioned throughout the chapters, the functional approach *Skopostheorie* has been of profound influence to identify the scope of my research, analyse the primary texts

and develop both my methodology and translatorial systems. To paraphrase Nord's rendition of the principle of *Skopostheorie* (1997:29) employed at various junctions on in the work, the focus of the translation of the texts employed as examples was forced to shift to the following:

- a) retain the same contextual conditions of the ST in the TL/TC,
- b) adapt and pitch to, the target audience of the TL, and
- c) retain the same effects of the ST in b) via the manipulation of a).

In other words, in order to address the issues raised by the cultural content and references of the original text in Italian, and how those are intentionally or unintentionally employed to convey the entertainment function of the comic (or commentary, or whatever the specific function of the issue or episode might be), a translator will have to modify those conditions to match the ones present in the target culture, and language. The effects, therefore, will be fulfilling the same function as the original, but any resemblance to the actual connections between those elements may be entirely lost, as examples in the previous chapters have shown.

The second major outcome from the theoretical aspect of the thesis concerns the expansion and redefinition of the notion of signplay, which I have advanced beyond its introduction by Kaindl as the co-presence of both textual and visual elements in comics and the question of how different combinations of them create different effects (1999:274), and Epstein's graphicplay variant for picturebooks and illustrated texts. This includes the consideration of signplay occurring as a cluster, rather than ordinate series of single instances. The way I am considering here the co-presence of textual wordplay and visual signs is that they are both contributing to the same instance of signplay. In other words, not only does an instance of signplay contain multiple categories of wordplay, it also, due to the nature of the comics medium, contains multiple elements of signplay in itself, from the tension between images, image and text, and within the text.

The academic significance is discussed at length in both Chapter 3 and Chapter 5, but what the redefinition also entails is a practical method of analysing images and texts, be they in co-participation or not, while being aware of the connections between the two, the different connotations they may carry, the remaining text around them and how the readers may receive and interpret those links.

### 3. Practical Outcomes – The Wordface

As above I have outlined the major outcomes for the academic element of my thesis, the sections below offer a summary of the practical results of each of Chapter 3, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, and a comparison between the three. These results should also be compared to the transcript in section 4, which allows for a direct comparison and application of my strategies in a controlled translation environment.

#### 3.1 A Play on ~~Words~~ Signs

In Chapter 3, I introduced the concept of signplay, as discussed above, and analysed it further, comparing its significance in terms of critical discussions around wordplay, in translation studies and in its use in comics. Similarly to later chapters, I subdivided, for practical use, the category into multiple types, as summarised in Table 16, below.

Typology	Function	Strategies
Neologisms	Setting/characterisation	<i>Deletion</i> <i>Retention</i>
Names	Identification	<i>Adaptation</i> <i>Retention</i>
Idioms/Catchphrases	Characterisation	<i>Adaptation</i> <i>Deletion</i> <i>Compensation</i>
Puns	Various	<i>Adaptation</i> <i>Omission</i> <i>Compensation</i>

Table 16 – Translational strategies for signplay in comics

Unsurprisingly, the dominant strategy is one of *adaptation*, though there are several secondary options for the four types outlined above. In this particular case, however, the adaptation is obtained by modifying the textual elements so that the type of signplay is retained, rather than the cultural connotations and context (which do, however, still play an important role). What is particularly significant from these results is the likelihood of *deleting* the signplay altogether in some cases, a strategy that I have not suggested as easily elsewhere. The reason is that such a radical strategy, that is, intentionally deleting and removing elements of the original, is usually seen as a last resort for a practising translator. The image will obviously remain, and some text will still appear in the target – what is removed is the particular instance of interplay between

the image and the text present in the source.

In terms of cultural elements, however, both names and idioms can be fulfilling similar functions to the identity and setting ones outlined for Chapter 4, below, though the overall function of medium identification is particular to the category of signplay usage. Similarly, neologisms can help define the parameters of an original setting or context, catchphrases can identify or form part of a character's personality, and puns are used in humorous situations and mental games/puzzles alike.

A type that falls briefly under my study, partly due to the translation studies approach I have utilised, is the interaction between different styles of image, from lineart to colour, also incidentally a technique that is being employed more and more in the industry. As influences from manga are pouring into Western comics (e.g. Ortolani 2009, Murphy 2012), *bande dessinée* is being used as a reference for mainstream US comics (Adlard 2014) and projects like *Lingua Comica* (Gravett 2012-ongoing) are demonstrating the multifaceted variety of the different incarnations of global comics, it is crucial that visual signplay is analysed and recognised for its functional uses, beyond being ascribed to the artist's choice alone.

### 3.2 Do Italian Punchlines Go POW?

The chapter on humour translation in comics is probably the most systematic of the three, due to the multi-faceted nature of the subject matter, and the numerous theories already in discussion around the topic. The table below (Table 17) collects and reproduces the strategies I have devised based on those discussions and the analysis of the selected primary texts.

Typology	Function	Strategies
Metahumour	Intended humour	<i>Adaptation</i> If the references are present in TL  <i>Addition</i> If the references are absent in TL
Self-undermining	Intended humour	<i>Retention</i>
Onomatopoeia	Intended humour	<i>Adaptation</i>
Anti-climax	Intended humour	<i>Adaptation</i>
Linguistic	Intended humour	<i>Adaptation via grammatical/orthographic representation</i> If the features are present in TL  <i>Compensation via grammatical/orthographic representation</i> If the features are absent in TL
Political (In)Correctness	Intended humour	<i>Adaptation</i>
Parody	Intended humour	<i>Adaptation</i>
Childish	Intended humour	<i>Adaptation</i>
Absurd	Intended humour	<i>Retention</i> If the elements are understandable  <i>Addition</i> If the elements are not readily understandable
Combination	Intended humour	Give precedence to one of the elements, as long as at least one category is maintained.

Table 17 – Translational strategies for humour in comics

The immediate conclusion that can be drawn from the table above, and the most obvious result, is clearly the overwhelming presence of the *adaptation* strategy for the majority of categories. As I have mentioned in the Chapter 3 conclusions, and as the strategies are derived from observation as much as systematisation of instinctive translation practices, this is supporting the correlation between language and culture, and how the former is a symptom, or iteration deriving from the latter, rather than its determinant. Modifying the language alone, in most cases, will result in a range of nonsensical (which explains the *retention* strategy in the already absurd category of humour) to ‘flat’ translations.

The predominantly cultural elements which appear to determine the strategies needed to convey the same function in the TT also provide a step further in understanding both the nature of translation, and the widely, but not necessarily comprehensively, written about comics culture (e.g. Pustz 1993) – a type of community that I have discussed by bringing to the fore the notion of comics literacy in Chapter 2, and throughout the other sections. I draw upon these elements again below, in comparison with the summary from the other two core chapters.

### 3.3 Culture-(un)Bound

In Chapter 5, I looked at the use of multilingual instances, and how they are employed to delineate the cultural context of the texts in which they are used; once again, the language is an expression of the culture it emerges from, but can be used in a such a way as to ‘create’ or recreate that culture in fiction – as discussed in the chapter with the concept of *novum*. I outlined the two macrofunctions within which authors appear to operate when choosing to employ language varieties and deviations, and how they aid in the creation of a fictional (or non-fictional) *identity* and *setting*. Table 18 below summarises the strategies I developed for each of these categories and uses.

Typology	Function	Strategies
Language Variety	Identity	<i>Adaptation</i>
Language Variety	Setting	<i>Retention</i> if references present in TL  <i>Assertive non-translation</i> if references absent in TL
Language Deviation	Identity	<i>Adaptation</i> if references present in TL  <i>Assertive minimal translation</i> if references present in TL

Table 18 – Translational strategies for multilingualism in comics

Even though the number of categories is smaller than in Table 16 or 17, *adaptation* still claims the majority of strategy suggestions to be employed for translating language varieties and language deviations present in the ST. As above, this would appear to suggest that even though the language variable is the one overtly modified into the TL, it is the cultural element and the references present in the text that need translating by doing so. Unless, of course, the text is



referring to a clearly identifiable setting that the TT will want to maintain for narrative or publication purposes.

In addition, however, in this chapter I also introduced and redefined the strategy of 'assertive non-translation'. Initially introduced by Lindqvist, the – originally English-to-Swedish – strategy is due to the high level of prestige of English language (and culture) in the TC. While this cannot be said for Italian, with small exceptions, I expanded the concept into 'assertive minimal translation'. The motive and results, both explored in the chapter, are due to my claim that the function of the ST is what must be conveyed, and in this case, it relates to the idealised identity of not only the text, but also its readership, seeking some type of validation in the setting that is being referenced in the comics.

Along with suggesting deletion in certain cases of signplay, and the overall dissection of the mechanics of humour and signplay, assertive minimal/non-translation are perhaps my most radical contribution to both the practical and theoretical aspects of the field I cross, venture into and of which I explore the boundaries. I take this up again in the concluding remarks further below.

### 3.4 Pulling it Together

In Chapter 2, I referred to the work by Duncan and Smith on the comics medium, and their claim that comics can be considered, like most other media, as acts of communication (2009:7). The communication is not only what the authors may have intended to say, the message of the text, but also a method of transferring cultural practices, connotations, implicatures and points of view, from one reader to the next. Speaking from a functional perspective, the *skopos* of comics is, then, primarily to enable a network of dialogues and interactions among creators and readers, and secondarily to entertain, as part of mass-produced consumable media.

Additionally, I have cited elsewhere in this thesis children's literature translator Riitta Oittinen, who states that 'a new form of culture always evokes a new language' (2006:85). This is also the case for visual languages as in the interactions between text and images embedded in the nature of signplay which I have refined in Chapters 3 and 5 (also see above), and for the critical language I have adopted throughout my work. Not only does comics culture create a new language in terms of its critical and creative vocabulary, it then employs that language. Even though at times it can be, and has been, considered exclusive to members of the comics community, fans and scholars alike, its ultimate result is to reinforce the existence and

persistence of that community. This is also proven for the translatorial and academic community, in the terminology I have introduced or redefined in the thesis, from the types of strategies and typologies, to signplay and assertive minimal translation.

What the strategies I have developed up to this point, and summarised above, confirm and reinforce, is the dominance of the cultural aspect of the comics medium, as a product of the industry's culture, of the TC, of the creators' culture and of the various cultures in which the product is received, from fandoms to readers to academic circles. The emergence of adaptation as the most frequent strategy for translating the functions, categories and typologies identified in my thesis for signplay, humour and multilingualism in comics significantly supports the hypothesis that language is not correlated to a culture by causation, but rather as one of many products that can then, of course, feed back into the cultural aspect of the community of practice. By immersing themselves in the Italian part of the comics community, for example, translators can gain the right tools and variety to be able to then replicate the idealised identity appeal, or ideal setting characterised by its idio-/socio-/dialect, attain the validation sought by the creators and the readers by accepting the linguistic projections, recreate the intended humour that the original text presented in the SL, and maintain the tension between text and image at the heart of the comics medium.

#### **4. Suggestions for further study**

If there is a point that I have tried to make clear throughout the thesis, it is that the strategies I have developed are suggestions based on the frameworks and analyses provided in each chapter. While I firmly believe that the work is sound, the strategies are effective and the results encouraging, the thesis should not be taken as a prescriptive handbook of how to translate comics, even for its specific scope (i.e. Italian to English, or humour translation).

On the other hand, I do not mean to undermine my own work by stating this, as I believe the discussion in each chapter, and indeed in the section above, makes clear that the methods employed to devise the strategies are widely applicable to the medium, and have been well received by other comics scholars working on its international iterations (2015 paper, Appendix). Therefore, I take advantage of this section to briefly introduce a number of fields that could and should be explored further, in the translation theorist's and practitioner's quest to the full potential of the comics medium, and its various iterations.

First of all, as something emerging from discussions in both the Introduction and Chapter 2, it would be beneficial to actually obtain a comprehensive overview of source and target markets and readerships, expanding beyond the example offered in the introduction. This is the case for my specific scope (Italian and Anglophone), but can and should very well be

encompassing wider distributions in countries that import from US and Japan publishers, produce their own output, and potentially even consider the existing export of local comics creations.

In a similar fashion, a further avenue to consider would be an exhaustive survey of translated comics works into English, who publishes them, what source countries/languages are predominant, similar to what the *Index Translationum* (UNESCO, 2012) has done with other 'literary' material. While I have mentioned some of the publishers and names involved in the past and current translatorial output, such as Self Made Hero, IDW Publishing, or Anthea Bell, this aspect of research was not part of my original intention.

A final topic that my thesis suggests should be analysed further, would consider a venture into comparative literature. It would undoubtedly be helpful and of particular interest to report what findings may result from an analysis of currently published material, and already existing cross-pollination and influences between different strands of comics styles (such as writing, art, or layout). This was a point I introduced in Chapter 4, when discussing the possibility of a *lingua comica* that exists beyond the conceptual elements of the comics medium, and it is an area that is indeed being explored further by scholars such as Cohn (2012) and Gravett (2013). Nonetheless, there is much more to be said about comparative comics studies beyond the current formalist and linguistic focus, as my sociolinguistic approach has demonstrated.

The Appendix (B) includes a transcript of the paper I delivered at the International Comics and Graphic Novels conference in Paris (2015), along with three examples from audience participation, and the blank handout I distributed to the audience, though most are either illegible or the participants preferred to discuss the options and their thoughts aloud rather than noting them. The reader will notice how in my presentation there is very little in terms of the specific notions I employ throughout the thesis, from the framework of strategies, to the idea of signplay. In fact, there is an element of informality, both due to the style of presentation I employ, the rapport with the audience after a week of collaborations and attendance, and the lack of familiarity with translation studies terminology. What I was hoping to achieve in the field test was to take the ideas of the critical apparatus I have also reiterated above, and offer them to an audience which does not necessarily have a working knowledge of translation practices, though reach notable levels of expertise in comics literacy, and different critical and cultural backgrounds. It was unnecessary to effectively regurgitate the terminology I use in my research,<sup>89</sup> other than naming the strategies the audience and I ultimately used to create a preliminary translation, once we engaged with ideas and got them working. The field

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<sup>89</sup> I am indebted to my secondary supervisor – Dr Jacob Huntley – for the phrasing of this point.

test, almost literally so, was an experiment of theory meeting practice, and a cold introduction for the conference-goers to the work I have spent three years researching and developing.

The results, while as scarce as can be expected for a twenty-minute presentation on the final day of a week-long conference, were decidedly encouraging. I believe the transcript demonstrates the tactics, the strategies and their effectiveness in an almost-blind scenario – I was not expecting Italian speakers to be present in the room, though the emerging discussion was without doubt welcome, and useful for the remaining participants. Rather than enforcing the notions I have developed, in a prescriptive manner counteracting everything I advocate in my work and analyses, I allowed for the reading to stand on its own, offering further clarification where needed. The debate and points raised by the audience were insightful as expected, offering further challenges and reflections, and beginning to capture and recreate the humour of ZeroCalcare's original text and idiosyncratic style.

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In conclusion, then, I have prepared the ground for a flourishing of further work in the field of comics translation, of comics distribution, and demonstrated the embedded cultural nature of the medium and the difficulties that need to be overcome for its export into other cultures and other systems. By introducing an academic perspective on comics translation, I have allowed for the opportunity of a higher visibility for the translators themselves, given the comics industry's changing practices in light of the credit given to the creators; as colourists, editors and letterers are finally achieving the front page credit, so might translators. Finally, I have suggested how to practically approach the difficulties highlighted above, and will be employing the same devices to continue my work as a practising translator, by helping pitch *Rat-Man*, *Dampyr*, *PKNA*, and other series to the gigantic Anglophone industry. In the hope that someone on the other side is listening.



Figure 87 – *Rat-Man* #35, p. 12, f. 6

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<sup>90</sup> Following the comics publishing industry standards, I use (w) to indicate the writer/s, and (a) to indicate the artist/s. Colourists are marked with (c), letterers are often ignored in the title credits.

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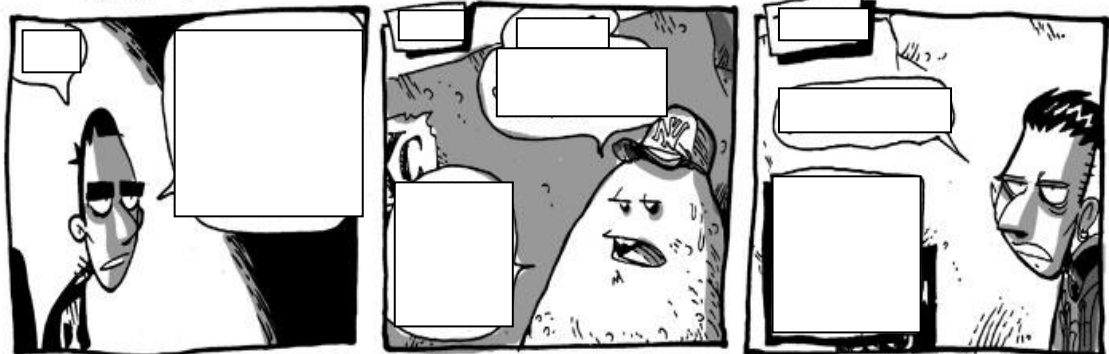
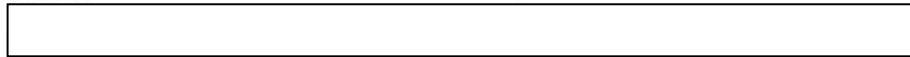
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## Appendix – ULIP Conference, June 2015

### A. Rebibbia Regna - An Experiment in Translation

(Source of original: <http://www.zerocalcare.it/2014/03/31/london-report/>)

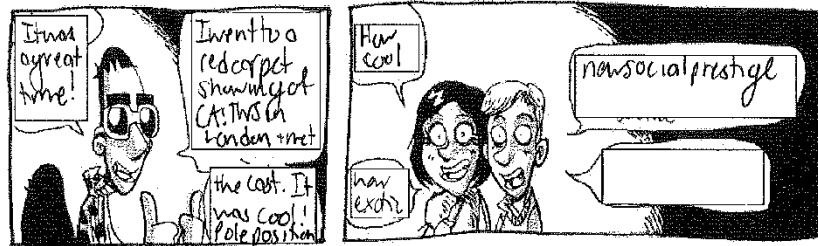




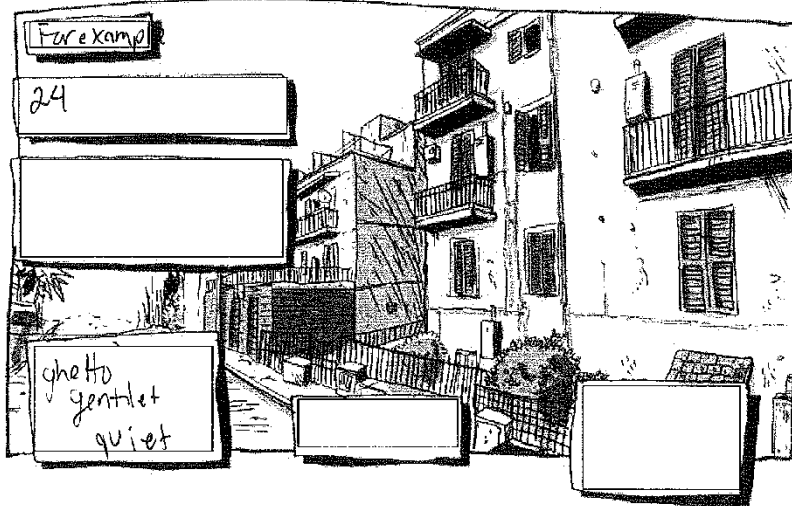
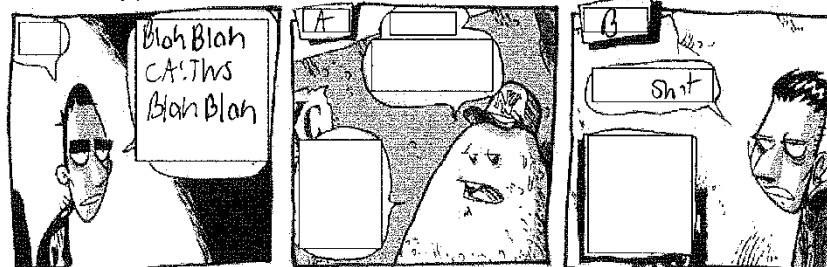
An Experiment in Translation

(Source: <http://www.zerocalcare.it/2014/03/31/london-report/>)

expected reaction:

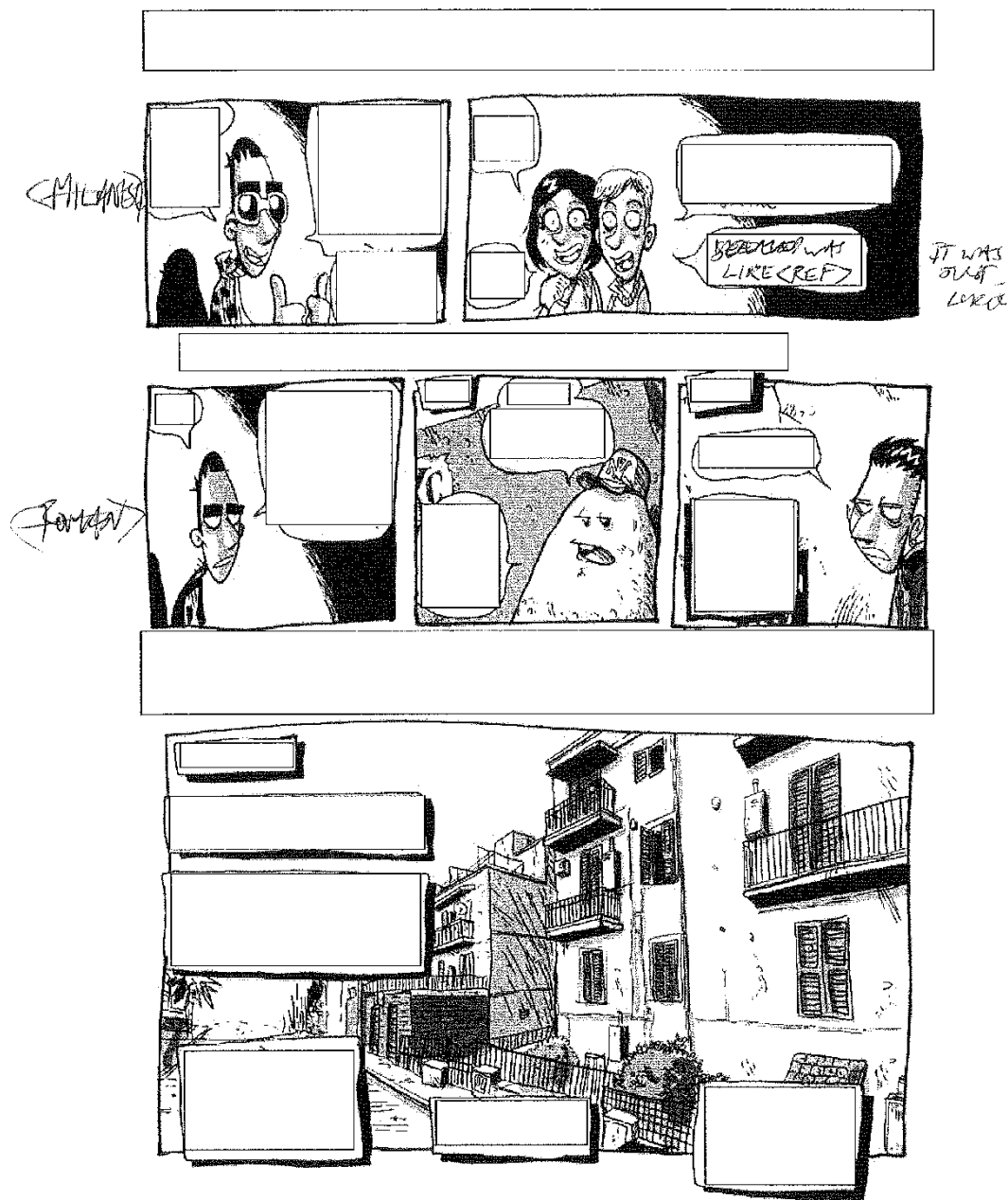


actual reaction:



An Experiment in Translation

(Source: <http://www.zerocalcare.it/2014/03/31/london-report/>)



## B. Theory in Praxis

What I offer in this section is, as mentioned above, a slightly polished transcript of my paper for Voyages 2015 – the joint Sixth International Graphic Novel and Comics Conference / Ninth International Bande Dessinée Society Conference – which took place in Paris in June 2015. The paper was pitched as follows:

### Rebibbia Regna – An experiment in translation

Zerocalcare is the pen name of Italian comics creator Michele Rech, who with his latest book *Dimentica il mio nome* (Bao Publishing, 2014), has reached a total of five full-length publications in under three years. He is currently considered one of the best humourists and non-fiction (somewhat) comics writers in Italy.

I am proposing to take one of Zero's comics/blog entries (recounting his trip to London for the opening of *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014) - <http://www.zerocalcare.it/2014/03/31/london-report/#more-965>) and conduct an interactive experiment in translation. I will offer an analysis of the features that mark it as a piece of global *comics* while retaining cultural, humour, linguistic and popular references which distinctly belong to the Italian *fumetto*. Through the analysis, I will offer suggestions and highlight difficulties and resources needed for a successful rendition of the page. Finally, along with audience participation, I aim to produce a preliminary English translation of the comic, as a collaborative, interactive project.

The intention was to present an audience of non-translators with my theories and suggestions for translatorial practice, in order to assess the practical application of my otherwise theoretical discussion up to this point. I provided my critical toolkit by offering a reading of the page as I would at the beginning of the translation process, the contextual information about the author and the piece, and the analysis that follows from focusing on the three core aspects of the text indicated in the thesis. The result can be seen below.

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TRANSCRIPT BEGINS

{Paris - 26-06-2015}

Alex: ..ok, so as I was saying there is a handout going round and this is more of an interactive experiment, an interactive argument of sorts. I'm going to be giving you a reading of a panel, this is an example of what the artist author creator is doing with comics and what I'm interested to do is see if my suggested theories *allow* for enough information that can help us create our translation into English or any of your preferred languages. If you work into French or German, for example.

But as an example this is a.. the recent.. if you haven't seen *Mad Max Fury Road* (Miller, 2015) this is not a spoiler but this is a review of the film in one page [<http://www.bestmovie.it/news/mad-max-fury-road-la-nuova-tavola-di-zerocalcare-su-best-movie-di-luglio/389849/attachment/zerocalcare-madmax/>] and Zerocalcare is this fairly recent comics author in Italy and he has this very cartoony, very simple style but he.. and a lot of the characters that show up. He started out with an online blog of his own day to day adventures as a freelance graphic designer, freelance translator, tutor for French – he's half-French, his family is French – and then he started doing publications, he put together the collections, this particular one is for the *Best Movie* magazine in Italy, so this is the result: he's talking to his friend who – his friends tend to show up as , to maintain anonymity for them, they show up as characters, so this is the Amico Supplí who is I suppose the couch potato, he looks like a potato – I mean, he has a friend who shows up in another panel who looks like a boar because he's a bit of a pig, he's very chauvinistic, he's very rude, he's very – he's all about sex and he shows up in the actual comic that I want us to work with. So, what they're talking about here is: 'So what do you think this Mad Max thing actually is?' And he says 'Well, my cousin says it's a long car chase in the desert between sand and it's in this canyon..' and he says 'ok' so this is more or less what he's imagining at this point. And he says 'Oh also there's all these weird freaky dudes, with post-apocalyptic aesthetics and loads of spikes' and he says 'ok..' and he's thinking now of the Ken Shiro [*Fist of the North Star*, Viz Media 1995-97] evil guys and they're saying 'Come on Ken Shiro, bring it on we will {unintelligible} we will drown the lambs of orphans in your menstrual blood with our spiked maces' 'While we wear our spiked clothes' 'On our spiked motorbikes' [laughter] And then he says 'Oh and there's also this feeling of sisterhood between

women *coatte* – *coatte* is a Roman dialect word, and it's an idea of subversive, rebellious, very politically engaged, usually against an established system – and sometimes with physical disabilities' and so now he's going to go 'ok' and so he's combined all of those and what you get is this giant Wile E Coyote spiked person with the very punk over here saying 'what the fuck are you looking at?' . So when they're watching it they're thinking of this and say 'and that's why it's so cool'.

So what I'm using this for is to give the frame of reference that he's working with: he grows up in the 80s, so he has all of the Italian 80s cultural context coming into his comics. There's a lot of Ken Shiro, there's a lot of Star Wars, there's a lot of.. you get *Looney Tunes*, you get *Dragon Ball*, you get a number of political figures. He is part of the punk movement , he's part of the social --sort of teenage graffiti street art street kids environment of Rome, and what he does have is - I'm going to shift to the beginning of ..

So this is the first page of the London Report he's invited to go see the premiere of *Captain America: the Winter Soldier* (2014). And what he does on his blog is write a report of what happened while he was there. In the story, his friends, especially the pig friend says 'So, the most important thing is: did you bang her?' 'What do you mean?' He says: 'Scarlett Johansson, did you bang her?' and that's the entirety of the final page, is this friend being a douche, as he tends to be – but the thing that does come out of his whole travel - it's I mean, the film was ok but the most important part of it all was that he was able to go to a MacDonald's and graffiti on the wall of the bathroom in MacDonald's in London: REBIBBIA REGNA. Rebibbia being the area of Rome where he's from, and it's the area that is shown in this panel , which is what you have in the handout [see Appendix A, panel 6].

This is the area of Rebibbia, it's where the prison is in Rome, there's a big hangar-like building which.. is said to have a mammoth inside , which has never been shown to the public, everyone knows there's a mammoth in there, no one has actually ever seen it, but it's used as a sort of 'hey, do you want to come see the mammoth..?' – and then things happen.

So that's the context of this particular bit, and the page that I've given you on the handout is this one and what he's talking about here is that he's extremely disappointed with has happened during the trip other than being able to write Rebibbia regna on the MacDonald's toilet. So he's saying, he's explaining how and why

he feels the disappointment. So he's explaining what the kind of reaction you'd expect versus the actual reaction that he gets, especially with his friends back home, you have two types of reactions, one is from his friend Supplì, one is from his closest friend – and then he's talking about – this comes from the cultural environment of Rebibbia, the cultural environment of that particular area of Rome, the cultural environment of that particular subculture, the cultural environment of the type of mentality somehow is informing the entirety of his production. Whereas in here you have a more, I suppose what you would expect someone from a lower class area, a lower class community finally making it as an official reviewer for an official magazine and he – so he's dressing differently, and he has different references, so you have Alfonso Signorini, which is a celebrity in Italy, unfortunately – and so what I'd like you to do is.. this is what the Italian page looks like, and I've given you a blanked out English page and so the idea so he's coming from a culture, as I said, it's the punk, subversive, anti-establishment type of culture, he's a protester, he's been part of the anti-G8 protests, he's been part of em he has a whole collection on how he was protesting against the G8 summit when they had it in Genoa, he's part of this sort of low class, built around the prison, he's very involved in popular culture, he has some knowledge of foreign languages, and he's writing this on his blog on the internet.

I wanted to give you a glossed translation but I just wanted to try – how many of you actually know Italian? One, two, three – ok, how many of you know French or Spanish? Em, so you might have some idea of what the words might say, and I'm just curious to see what you might come up with translations on the handout that I've given you, of what you think they might be doing.

We have ten more minutes. What I'd like you to do is try it with the first caption and the first two frames, just to see what happens and then, we'll focus on that for a couple of minutes and then we'll move to the second section before we eventually get down there. I don't actually think we'll be able to get down there. If you'd like to work with the person next to you, and come up with something. Just see what you think the image might be doing, and see how you think you would translate those elements in the first two panels and the first caption. As I said, I don't really want to give you a gloss as I feel that would be giving you too much in terms of translation, but as I said this is the 'expected reaction' versus the 'actual reaction', and you do have the difference in the images there – but I'm just curious to see what you might do just for a



couple of minutes, and then we can discuss it as a wider thing.

Does everyone have a handout?

[muffled talking from audience]

Audience member 1: so the point is not to I suppose get what the text says there

Alex: If you do, if you do – use it. That's absolutely fine.

Audience member 1: I know but that's not the question – just to translate based on we think is..

Alex: So I've given you some of the context he's working from, and there is what the images are doing there. As I said, if you do understand any of the words feel free to reuse them - that depends on the abilities of the translator as to how the product actually comes out.

Audience member 2: But if we can't read it, should we maybe move forward?

Alex: Yeah, if – do you mean zoom in? we should be able to zoom in

Audience member 2: Oh, that'll work yeah that's better

Alex: that better?

Audience: yes yeah

[muffled talking]

Alex: Actually, I suppose... the caption, this is more or less what I've been saying in general but the first caption is talking about two – 'to understand this disappointment I have to clarify what the misunderstanding might be: reading the positive reaction to the film on the internet, one might expect that what happens is this . In fact, where I live, where I come from there are two kinds of answers', and that's what he goes into. So that that caption is saying, this is what you'd expect from the reaction and this is what the actual reaction is.

[muffled talking]

Alex: I suppose the – I mean, if you were to identify the main difference between the two reaction, what would you pick out, in that sense? I see you're nodding vigorously.

Audience member 3: I mean, so, this is the first bit that I've completed so yeah, but the difference between the initial speechballoons so the first bit is full of all these superlatives so I can imagine someone saying this is so cool that's pretty much awesome and then the other one erm the first that came I'd be tempted just to put *MEH*

Alex: So, sort of there?

Audience member 3: Yeah.

Alex: Yeah, because 'aó' is sort of the Roman yeah it's sort of a 'hey' but it's a dialectal element it's sort of the ...'aó'. But it can be very positive, it can be very emphatic, but in this particular case it's the image that gives you the ...'hey'.

Audience member 3: 'So like going to London, and like Captain America and stuff'

Alex: Yeah, and then here you have all these superlatives and you have and you know you have elements of English coming through, you have \*snaps fingers\* 'I'm in pole position'.

Audience member 4: It's quite strange as well, I mean pole position is it's a different discourse it's like race type of...

Audience member 5: It's Formula 1...

Alex: Mhm, yeah, but that is what you get: someone in Italy has a fascination with Formula 1, you know, there's a lot of teams there's a lot of pilots and you know, Michael Schumacher was a big thing and Ferrari is a big thing – so 'sono in pole position' is easily in the common discourse in Italian popular culture, I mean, not exactly popular culture but maybe the collective culture. And I mean you have a sequence of as you say superlatives but they are nonsensical.

Audience member 4: Yeah it's 'yeah like man cool'

Alex: Yes, 'man, so like' 'super giga togo' and I think togo is actually coming from a more Milanese type of – it's what the it's a preppy dialogue, and you get it both in the attire of

Audience member 6: The whole, the whole I mean the Milanese get the stereotype of someone more preppy more they're posh.

Alex: Yes. And the reaction here is, this is hilarious. I mean, it doesn't look like it but it's hilarious. 'Oh this confers you a significant social prestige' compared to what he then says in a caption down here, where you have the two reactions are..

Audience member: 'Yeah. Cool.'

Alex: Yes. But then 'postalo su sticazzi.com'. Sticazzi is literally 'these dicks' [muffled laughter] but sticazzi is used as 'who cares'. So something like 'Oh that's really interesting, but post it on whocares.com' –

Audience member: 'I'm sure you'll get loads of likes'

Alex: Yeah. And then the response over here, so that's – the first kind of response and then..?

Audience member: 'You're a douche'

[muffled laughter]

Alex: Yeah, or 'you're a shit', literally. And then the captions, the captions are always him speaking, and he's commenting on that by saying 'And then of course we have this very clean and dry prose, in a very Homer-like style' after the comments from the two, you know, 'post it on thesedicks' and 'you're a shit'. So that's the first area – and I realise we still have another couple of minutes, so we can scroll down a little bit. And the way that he does this is contrast it to his own captions again, by saying, 'So why is there this pervasive intolerance towards this or any other popular event, and what are the expectations behind this kind of hostility?' And that's where he describes what the context is and why people might be reacting like that – and again, I'm curious to see what you might discuss in this giant panel which goes against all the theories we've heard about today, as we've got the gutter is used as a caption, then there is no gutter and then you have all these captions floating about which are also frames at the same time so yeah, theory. But yes, if you can just about another minute or so on that bit, and we'll re-discuss it in general and I will show you how it goes continues later on.

[muffled talking]

Alex: So... so what would you pick out of that thing, what posed the most difficulties, or what is the – you see the mammoth shows up in there. And this mammoth, it appears in a lot of his collections, in a lot of his books, there's always something, some reference to the mammoth in this building. Was there anything that you discussed, that you mentioned I mean Alessia, I heard you mention the 'non ci si incula'

Audience member 7: Yeah the fact that my English word is not good enough to translate 'il fatto é che qui non ci si incula nessuno' is quite hard to explain. I think the idea is, I mean, in Zerocalcare's language you have a lot of dialect and also regionalisms. So this is something for example that I come from another part of Italy and I wouldn't have said it like that in Italian. I mean, with other words, for example, but yes, of course I can understand it.

Alex: Yes, one of the interesting things is that the idea of this is intelligible to most Italian speakers and readers, but most Italian speakers and readers not from Rome would not write like this. People from around Italy can all read it but not all write it. But literally, that is... something along the lines of 'no one fucks us' in the sense of 'no one pays us any attention' going back to that low register..

Audience member: 'No one gives a fuck'

Alex: Yeah, or 'no one gives a shit about us' are the best translations that you could come up with, but it's a very – very colloquial, as you might tell, it's very – there's the colloquialism, there's the regional element, and it's used as a very, it's similar to the 'sticazzi' from earlier, similar to 'seinnammerda', it's all the kind of thing you would say in.. I'm trying not to think of 'cheeky Nando's' and 'lads', but that's almost the kind of discourse that would work, but in a different way. Erm.

Was there anything else that you mentioned, did you... No? I mean, he also enters into a conversation with the reader, so he's talking about, for example 'I left twenty four hours ago from 'dal quartiere mio' – that's another regional, dialect marker, standard Italian would be 'dal mio quartiere' but Roman would, invert to 'dal quartiere mio' – Rebibbia – so Rebibbia does show up, it is an important presence and it does show up again in the bathroom graffiti, he says – 'we have thousands of guards (from the prison) , and the mammoth they don't allow us to see, and haven't allowed us to see for twenty years now.' 'I mean, it's not a ghetto, right, just small houses, very easy-going people – that's why no one gives a shit about us'

Audience member: 'Even journalists'

Alex: Yep, 'I only remember them being here maybe twice in thirty years'. So that's the context he's coming from. But all of these, all of that element like even using the word 'ghetto', using the guards – if you don't know the context the author is coming from it's really quite peculiar trying to get it through in such a way that he's not using dialect as a marker to denigrate, he's not using it as a cultural marker to look down upon the culture, he's writing from within his own culture, but in such a way that is accessible from an outside perspective, from a standardised Italian perspective. As I said, this is published on his blog, and it will be published in the book that he's releasing next year [2016] as part of an anthology for which he creates a frame story and in which all his blog entries come in as well. But then you'll have references like that one, you'll have Homer come in, you have Alfonso Signorini, I suppose you could have Simon Cowell could be an equivalent for that but it's not exactly in the same way. You have the popped collars. So yes, that's the interesting aspect of the cultural context and not being able to escape what the image is doing and I mean, you can't really say anything different with the potato...

So he has this 'But say that at the end I had this moment of dignity, I found redemption

for my mistakes, I removed the dishonour, bringing – attacking the heart of Babylon in the toilets of the biggest MacDonalds of London’ [muffled laughter] ‘and I even include a photograph to prove the veridicity of my claims’ and there it is.

So he has brought his culture out of his culture, but he’s still operating within that. And I think that concludes.. thank you for listening. If you have written something down on the handouts please do return them. This will form the conclusion of my thesis. So if you have any material that I can use, please leave it with me. Thank you.

[applause]

TRANSCRIPT ENDS

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