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This article was co-authored with Maria Grun and appeared in 2003 in *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology* 11. 197-216. For copyright reasons the cartoons we discuss cannot be given.

‘LOSS’ AND ‘GAIN’ IN COMICS

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Abstract

This article discusses translations of comics, a topic rarely dealt with in Translation Studies, with specific reference to ‘loss’ and ‘gain’. It is suggested that – for the purpose of a cogent discussion – we may distinguish between ‘gain with loss’ and ‘gain without loss’. Translations of comics represent a special challenge in that, in order to be successful, they have to actively interplay with illustrations as well as genre elements, i.e. ‘humour’. The article discusses some of these elements and then focuses on successful renditions into Danish of the American daily strip Calvin and Hobbes and a Donald Duck ten-page comic narrative. The latter, in particular, reveals that subtle forces influence the translation of a comic. This opens for a discussion of the ways comics allow - or make it hard for - a translator to wend her way between ‘gain’ and ‘loss’.

These forces involve an interplay not only between pictures and text, but also the people who do lettering, add colours, and the like.

Introduction

Since a translation owes its existence to an original it is, in some sense, derivative.¹ Much discussion of translation is based on elitist texts which means that originals are often prestigious and highly valued (in terms of artistic merit, political and religious authoritativeness, etc). Once this is taken as the point of departure for discussions of translation, a translation is merely a reflection of the original, and consequently it has often ‘lost’ (some of) the grandeur of the original.² There is no reason to deny that in many cases features of a given source text may not be *realised* in translation.

Ultimately, the somewhat narrow focus on ‘loss’ seems to be based on the assumption that it should be possible to recreate any source text element, at any level spanning from the micro- to the macrolevel on a 1:1 basis.³ In this article, we take it for granted that such ‘equivalence’ is impossible as no two cultures or languages are symmetrical.

In our thinking, it is pertinent to stress that the elements said to be ‘lost’ are those which the observer finds are not realised in a target text. However, provided we accept that it is impossible to produce a ‘perfect translation’ and that any translation product is an autonomous entity that must function on its own in a dynamic interplay with target audiences, we may, by making a clear-cut distinction between an ‘original’ and a translation, compare originals and their translations in order to identify not only ‘loss’ but also ‘gain’ in translation.

We wish to make our point crystal clear. The focus on ‘loss’ in translation presupposes that a translation will cover the spectrum from ‘very poor compared to the original’ to ‘the “same” as the original’, which then calls for // ... 198 // terms such as “unfaithful”, “poor”, etc. Once we submit that there is ‘gain’ we argue that translations may span a wider spectrum, namely from ‘a rendition which is poor compared to the original’ via ‘adequate’ to ‘something which is “better” than the original’. We readily admit that these are only relative negative and positive extremes, but we also believe that any attempt to come up with anything other than these loose definitions will obscure the points we wish to make.

For the purposes of this article, we posit that there are two different kinds of ‘gain’, namely,

- a) gain without loss, and
- b) gain with loss.

‘Gain without loss’ is found when the target-language text is more specific than the source-language text. At the micro-level (e.g. a single word), the English ‘cousin’ indicates a family relationship based on one’s parents’ siblings. Danish, however, further distinguishes between female and male cousins (‘kusine’ and ‘fætter’, respectively). So whereas a translation of ‘cousin’ will render the family relationship ‘accurately’, the Danish lexical items inevitably ‘gain’ information.⁴

‘Gain with loss’ is found in cases in which there are no 1:1 lexical equivalents in the source- and target languages, and where translators succeed in producing translations that have more facets than the original while at the same time being consistent within the totality of the translation at the macrolevel. In relation to the source texts, such solutions have been termed ‘compensation’, ‘addition’, ‘explicitation’, and the like (see e.g. Leppihalme 2001).

Constrained translation: comics

We here define constrained translations as translations that are, for practical or commercial reasons, spatially limited, such as, for instance, advertisements with brief and catchy slogans, cartoons, comics, and subtitles. In this article, we shall focus on translations of comics. They are limited spatially in that translations must fit into balloons or panels, and in that they have a specific objective. The comics under review are funny and must make the written words (in source- as well as target texts) conform with the pictures in order to ‘function’ adequately. The principal criterion is thus that a comic must be humorous, possibly tell a ‘story’ in both the source and the target culture, but there is no inherent need for the target-text linguistic content to correspond with that of the original. Comics are thus excellent for exemplifying // ... 199 // ‘loss’ and ‘gain’ because, in order to be successful, translations must meet several demands concurrently.

Elements in comics

This is a study of translations of comics from a Translation Studies angle. We do not pretend that we are experts on comics and we therefore try con-

sistently to use Horn's terminology in that field (1976) as modified by later studies. On the other hand, it is slightly surprising to find that, although translation of comics is commonplace in the so-called Western world, this type of translation seems to have attracted little scholarly attention.

From a Translation Studies angle, comics have features in common with picture books. The most important one is the interaction between two semi-otic systems, namely a verbal and non-verbal one, as pointed out by Riitta Oittinen (2001). The non-verbal elements include pictures. The pictorial elements are not merely decorative but play an important role in any comic. It is therefore imperative that the verbal and the pictorial elements match.

Hovering between these are what we, for lack of a better term, shall call 'genre-specific' symbols. These may sometimes be linguistic and visual such as thought balloons and indications of sound. Others may be visual such as lines (or figures) indicating movement, pain, swearwords, and the like. Being neither real words nor 'naturalistic' images, such details add to the content and contribute significantly to the appreciation of comics.

In order to provide concrete evidence for these considerations, we shall now turn to two examples of comics, represented by the American strip *Calvin and Hobbes* and a *Donald Duck* narrative, and discuss their translations into Danish. It is likely that *Calvin and Hobbes* will appeal to a somewhat older audience than *Donald Duck*.



Calvin and Hobbes

The 'Calvin and Hobbes' universe

Calvin and Hobbes (which has been discontinued) used to be syndicated and published in newspapers in many languages. Most strips are one-liners but there are also Sunday episodes of up to one page; each is an independent story with a (final) point or funny punchline.⁵ It is about a six-year-old American boy, Calvin, who has a teddy tiger, Hobbes. Hobbes comes to life every time the two are alone. Usually they are on friendly terms, but occasionally, Calvin gets angry with Hobbes or Hobbes' animal instincts get the better of him so that he hunts Calvin. Their relationship thus switches between friendship and aggression. // ... 200 //

The American name of the comic strip refers to two European personalities who have had great impact on intellectual life, namely the French theologian and reformer John (Jean) Calvin (1509-1564) and the English social and political philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679). This sheds further light on the dialogues in *Calvin and Hobbes*, which often dip into existential questions.

There is a certain element of localisation in the overall universe of *Calvin and Hobbes* in Danish, and there is what must be termed a different socio-historical orientation: the boy is 'Steen', a common Danish boy's name.

‘Hobbes’ is ‘Stoffer’, an abbreviated form of the name of ‘Christoffer’, which is, at the same time, a word play on ‘stof’ (‘textile’), thus alluding to Hobbes being a stuffed tiger. The title of the comic strip has ‘lost’ its philosophical overtones and ‘gained’ in terms of a target group of children. Given the philosophical tit-bits in the comic strip, the two titles signal different targeting, but the contents of the actual strips will in all likelihood neutralise this. The first translator, Mr Per Vadmand, gave the series its Danish name which has then been used by subsequent translators, including Mr Niels Søndergaard, who translated the strip in hand. However, Søndergaard also localised the series when the pictures and the balloons permitted him to and he would invariably see to it that whatever poems were found were improved in terms of metre, thus making for a ‘gain’ in these latter cases.⁶

Calvin and Hobbes: a discussion

In the selected strip which is printed on the opposite page, Calvin and Hobbes are sledging amiably. In the first panel, Calvin tells something about the boys at school. Hobbes politely asks for an elaboration. In the second and final panel Calvin surprises us by turning what most readers expect to be an explanation about how the boys got immensely wealthy into an everyday tale of bullying.

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The original is funny because it plays on the readers’ expectations. It does so by using:

- (1) A non-verbal (but not exclusively ‘genre-specific’) feature, namely that the letters are all majuscules. This makes readers interpret ‘rich’ as an adjective.
- (2) Linguistic elements, namely the adjectives “filthy rich”, usually an idiom meaning ‘immensely wealthy’. In that context, Calvin’s ‘get’ is interpreted as ‘to become’.
- (3) An unexpected linguistic decoding or interpretation of the phrasing “got filthy rich” in the last panel: Readers suddenly realise that “Rich” is an abbreviated form of “Richard”, and that “get” was used in the negative sense of ‘grab hold of’: in other words, the boys beat up dirty Richard.⁷

Relying on the unsuspecting readers' understanding of a well-known idiom, the strip has Hobbes pose a question implying that he also interprets the initial information as a figure of speech, only to reveal that the original statement was unexpectedly ambiguous and referred to something concrete thus making readers smile or laugh in surprise. // ... 202 //

This original cannot be translated into Danish on a 1:1 basis since there is no Danish homonym for a boy's name and the adjectival sense of 'rich'. In order to convey an element of surprise, the translator must therefore come up with another ambiguity for a successful translation.

Søndergaard used a Danish expression containing a boy's name and applied it ambiguously to phrase first an initial remark and a subsequent exchange that will make for a similar effect in Danish. The phrase is 'at slå til søren' which means 'have a fling' and is therefore a far cry from being "filthy rich". The Danish translation uses majuscules like the original, which fact makes it possible to 'disguise' the name 'Søren'. The final balloon's decoding of the first speech therefore provides an element of surprise in the punchline. The translation has 'lost' the specific ambiguity of the American original but has 'gained' by means of a Danish expression. It means something different than the original and yet uses a similar device to mislead readers, which consequently results in a successful strip. It is comprehensible, funny and fits in the balloons both in terms of space and the distribution of remarks. It thus constitutes an example of 'gain with loss'.

Donald Duck

The American *Donald Duck* universe

In the US, Donald Duck is the main character in one of the funnies in the comic magazine *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories*. One of the main keys to the *Donald Duck* universe in American is, we suggest, the proper names of the central characters, Donald Duck himself, his girlfriend Daisy, and his close relatives.

They live in Duckburg, a city ('borough', '-burgh', '-burg') inhabited by animals, mostly ducks. Donald Duck is the central figure and his last name defines him as a duck. There is alliteration between his first and his family name. This also goes for Daisy Duck. Donald Duck lives with his three nephews, Huey, Dewey, and Louie. The assonance in their first names indicates their mu-

tual connection. Donald Duck's cousin is Gladstone Gander. Dating Daisy, he is Donald's rival and he is, to boot, not a duck but a goose. Donald's uncle is Uncle Scrooge to the family and Scrooge McDuck to others. 'Mc' indicates Scots origins and consequently associates with stinginess – and possibly some clan affiliation. To literate Americans "Scrooge" also calls to mind the miser Ebenezer Scrooge in Charles Dickens' classic *A Christmas Carol*. //... 203 //

The Danish *Anders And* universe

The translations: externals

In 1948, shortly after World War II, Walt Disney gave the Gutenberghus Bladene (now Egmont) a license to publish *Donald Duck* in Scandinavia (Denmark, Norway, and Sweden). Serialisation began in Norway and Sweden in 1948 and in Denmark in 1949.⁸ In Denmark with its population of c. 5 million, the magazine became increasingly popular: the first monthly issue sold 96,000 copies, in 1958 there were 172,000 of the bi-weekly and in 1972 this figure had risen to 219,688 for the weekly magazine (Hartung 1994: 103). Today it has fallen to 94,000 (Berlingske Tidende 1999). From 1949 to 1982 the Donald Duck comics were translated by Ms Sonja Rindom. She therefore established and developed the linguistic side of the Danish *Donald Duck* universe as new characters were introduced (Hartung 1994: 104-107; Vilstrup 2002).

The Danish 'Anders And' universe

Rendering the American "duck" into the lexical equivalent 'and', Rindom faithfully translated the "duck" world into a Danish 'ande'-universe. So Duckburg is 'Andeby', Donald Duck is 'Anders And', and Daisy Duck is 'Andersine And'. The connection between these two characters is realised by the family names and individually their names alliterate, albeit with another letter than in the original: the alliteration correspondence is 'free' at the phonetic level and 'literal' at the level of general alliteration'. 'Andersine' both stresses femininity (as 'Daisy') but also adds a play on 'Anders', establishing her as an appropriate partner for him. The nephews Huey, Dewey, and Louie are 'Rip', 'Rap', and 'Rup'. Their American rhyming and 'assonance', which are revealed only in the pronunciation, are 'lost'. However, the Danish names are phonetic minimal pairs with three letters, two of which are identical (R-p). This is very apt, given the triplet's similarity to one another. Furthermore, 'Rap' is an ono-

matopoeia for a duck's "quack" in Danish, so it is both a joke and an extra reminder that the characters are ducks. The Danish renditions have thus 'gained' visual similarity, alliteration, and a funny reference to ducks. Overall the names of the nephews have 'gained' in the Danish rendition.

Gladstone Gander is 'Fætter Højben'. The Danish rendition 'loses' the explicit non-duck meaning of "gander" which underlines that, from Donald's perspective at least, Gladstone is a foolish misfit. Yet the Danish rendition automatically includes the information that Gladstone is Donald's cousin, // ... 204 // 'Fætter' (male cousin). The rendition 'Højben' (\approx 'long-leg') indicates that we have to do with an arrogant character. So there is some 'gain' as well.

Scrooge McDuck has undergone a transformation. There is no longer an allusion to Charles Dickens (which would have been lost on Danes anyway), but instead he is a 'Joakim' which is not significant. The Scots origin has been replaced by a German-sounding 'von' which smacks of upper class. The most reasonable explanation may be that Danes would be more familiar with German than with Scots names before the age of mass travel. At all events, there is both loss and gain in the Danish counterparts of the names of "Gladstone Gander" and "Scrooge McDuck".

The translation of one page

Most *Donald Duck* comics are narratives that often go on for several pages and their humour is situational and thematic. There is, in other words, not always a need for building up to a punchline.

In order to discuss translations - and realisations - of comics, we shall have a look at one page of a *Donald Duck* story by the celebrated American draughtsman Carl Barks. They are

- A) the American original, published in 1949,
- B) the first Danish translation published in 1950, and
- C) a modified Danish translation published in 1969. They are reprinted on the next pages with the permission of Disney Consumer Products (Nordic) A/S.⁹ (This permission obtains only to the printed version)

The three comics differ markedly and the discrepancies are found at the verbal as well as non-linguistic levels. // 205208 //

The non-linguistic and 'genre-specific' elements

The colours

The colours of the three versions are quite different. In the American comic, the colours of the landscape are subdued and dull, the ocean light green or bluish, whereas the characters and their clothes are brightly coloured. In the Danish comic of 1950, the colours of the landscape show less variation and border on being pale, except for the deep blue ocean. The characters and their clothes are brightly coloured. In the comic of 1969, all colours are bright - the landscape, the characters, and their clothes. The colours of objects and the landscape are different in the three editions. Thus Gladstone's hat is blue in A, green in B, and purple in C. In the American comic, there is a cloud in the sky in the first, the second, and the third panel. In the Danish comic from 1950, only the first panel has a cloud, although it is shaped differently from the American one. In the 1969 Danish comic, there are no clouds at all.

The speech balloons

The balloons in the American original do not appear to have been used for the Danish versions, although those in panels 3 and 6 are near-identical. This seems to indicate that the balloons in B were drawn in Denmark.¹⁰ Conversely, most balloons in the two Danish versions look much alike.

In the fifth panel, there is an onomatopoeia outside the balloon representing the sound of heads banging together: a 'clang' in the American comic and 'pang' in the Danish version. However, the letters are transparent in the 1950 Danish version, whereas they are black in 1969.

The opening

The opening panel of the American original announces that *Walt Disney presents Donald Duck*. Neither of the Danish comics have the bird's nest, nor the three sea gulls. There is a presentation and concentric red circles in Donald Duck's name in the 1950 edition. But the 1969 version has 'Anders And' and a title: *The Maharaja's ruby*.

The lettering

All letters are majuscules. In the American original and the Danish version of 1969, they appear to be hand-written (albeit not in the same way), while those in the Danish edition of 1950 are regular typographical fonts. There

are bold letters for emphasis in the original in panels 4: “gold”, 6: “dear”, and 7: “Mister”, “I’m” and “mine”, but there are none in the 1950 Danish version. /... 209 // In 1969, ‘Slip’ (“Let go”) in frame 7 is in bold, whereas italics are used in panel 6: ‘kære’ (“dear”), and 7: ‘jeg’ and ‘altid alting’ (“I” and “always ... everything”).

The lettering fits precisely into the balloons of the American original - small surprise since Carl Barks wrote them himself. The Danish versions do not use all the space available. This is most marked in 1950, which may imply that Rindom was acutely aware of spatial constraints, but may not have known how much space was available.

Given these differences, it is striking that - like the original - both Danish translations use exclamation marks instead of full stops for most punctuation.

In sum

Differences at the ‘genre-specific’ and extralinguistic levels illustrate that these three editions are in no way co-prints.¹¹ They make each version unique. The black lines in the drawings of scenes and characters are the same and yet each version bears the mark of those who have added the speech balloons in Danish, the lettering, and the colours. Each version thus has personal touches – mostly by anonymous hands.



The translation

In order to provide staples for the following discussion, we shall give a relatively literal back-translation of the two Danish versions, panel by panel.

B: 1950

Panel 1: “Last night’s gale has really stirred the sands! Do see if you can find something!” – 2: “Watches and rings and things that people lose in summer ... often turn up later!” – 3: “Yes! I’ve found a compact!” ... “and here was a pair of sunglasses!” – 4: “There is a gold pencil sticking out of the sand!” – 6: “Cousin Longleg!” ... “Is it you, my dear cousin Anders!” – 7: “Give me the pencil! I saw it first!” ... “No, I did! And everything lying on this beach belongs to me!”

C: 1969

Panel 1: “Last night’s gale has really churned up the sands ... So maybe we shall find something very valuable here on the beach today, kids!” – “The things people lose in the sand in summer ... they often reappear after a September gale like this!” – 3: “I already found something, uncle! A new and neat compact! ... “and here was a pair of sunglasses!” – Panel 4: “Wow! There is a gold fountain pen glittering in the sun!” – Panel 6: // ... 210 // “Cousin Longleg!” ... “Oh, so it is you, my *dear* cousin Anders!” – Panel 7: “**Let go!** I was the one who saw it first!” ... “No ... *I* did! For I *always* see *everything* first!”

1950 and 1969: A discussion

The two Danish versions which were made by the same translator at a nineteen-year interval call for comment.¹² Denmark has always been a culture consuming much translation and all sorts of translational combinations appear in the history of Danish translations: there are translators who are requested to revise old translations by publishers or who do so on their own, translators who have modified previous translations and passed them on as their own, translators rendering the same stories from different source texts and coming up with widely different or near-identical versions, and even translators using the same source text to come up with widely different translations (see Dollerup 1999: 200-236). Even so, Rindom’s translations stand out and must be assessed differently.

When we apply the axis of ‘literal’ vs ‘free’ translation *exclusively* to the two Danish versions under review, the 1950 comic is the more ‘literal’

translation of the original. However, by the tokens of ‘fidelity’ and ‘loyalty’ as traditionally applied in Translation Studies, it still falls wide off the mark.

We can tell from the shadows that the sun is shining in all three versions. We note that the original stresses that the ducks are on a beach and panel 2 has a hidden rhyme “rings and things” and makes it clear this is “winter”. The 1950 ‘Anders’ merely mentions that the things turn up ‘later’ (than summer). On the other hand, the colours in the original as well as the Danish comics do indeed show the time of the year to be less colourful than summer. In frame 4, Donald finds a “gold pencil” just as in the original.

The colours of the Danish 1969 version are, as mentioned, brighter than in the predecessors, but still there are no green patches. The time is now set in “September” which has, from time immemorial, been the month with the first strong autumnal gales in Denmark. So, despite the different chronological settings, the colours and the translations are internally consistent. Overall the Danish version of 1969 is so ‘free’ that some might be hard put to term it a translation but - in relation to classroom standards - rather term it a creative reproduction.

The 1950 comic is one of the earliest Danish *Donald Duck* translations and it is as hinted relatively ‘literal’. This is hardly surprising since there was no prior translation. The 1969 reprint seems to be based on a combination of three sources, namely // ... 211 //

- a) the American original: thus Anders’ suggestion to his nephews to look for “something valuable” appears to reflect the “valuables” of the original in panel 1,
- b) the Danish translation of 1950. Panel 1’s balloon opens with a sentence strongly reminiscent of it and panel 2 reproduces the second remarks from this source, and
- c) a deliberate and massive use of colloquial Danish with many modal particles and the indeterminacy characteristic of spoken Danish. Panel 1: “så måske” “noget” - panel 2: ”de ting ... de” [reduplication of the subject] ”sådan” – panel 3 ”allerede” ... ”noget” – panel 4: ”Nej dog” ... ”jo”

– panel 6: ”Nå, så det er dig” – panel 7: ”Det var mig der så den først”. The register is lower but not substandard.

Overall the language in the 1969 edition is informal. But there is even more to it:

There are also expansions which have little or no basis in the original in panels 1, 3 and 4, all of them indicating less need for brevity of expression than we would associate with constrained translation. In terms of content, it is interesting to note that - although highly creative - the expansions are consistent within the story, most strikingly so in panel 4, in which Donald refers to the sunshine nowhere mentioned in the American text but inferred from the shadows. In the same panel, the pen is now a ‘gold fountain pen’, which is also justified within the framework of the pictures, the story’s theme of greed, and, possibly, by the fact that “gold pens” would be fairly rare in 1969. This would appear to be a ‘gain’.

There is a slight inconsistency in 1969. In panel 3, one of the nephews finds a girl’s compact, which is ‘new’. Since they are looking for items lost in summer; they should not find anything ‘new’ in the sand. If anything, this would be a ‘loss’.

In addition, this version has a more intimate tone between Anders and his nephews, “kids” and “uncle” (‘unger’, ‘onkel’). In both Danish translations, the mutual contempt between Gladstone and Donald is conveyed by the pictures only, not by the insults they heap on one another. It is a moot point whether this is a ‘gain’ or a ‘loss’ and probably depends on our individual attitude towards abuse and polite manners. At all events, the focus is more on their greed (panels 4 and 7). In 1969, the above-mentioned alliteration “altid alting” is a ‘gain’.

And yet, despite all these differences, the flow of the story is largely the same as in the American original and so is the overall theme: Donald and Gladstone are not rewarded for their selfish greed. // ... 212 //

The translator: a discussion

The 1969 version illustrates how Rindom became independent of the American original over the years. In an interview (Vilstrup 2002), she described her views. She had been asked to do the first translations because she

liked children. She considered the stories as targeted towards a child audience: “The *Donald Duck* magazine should be a sanctuary for children and none of the adults’ business.” She invented words, such as Scrooge McDuck’s favourites “visse vasse” and “milde mammon”, a series of onomatopoeic words such as “slupp” and “rumle”, as well a classic of bathetic poetry: “O, bestow on me a graveyard by the ice-green sea, where only waves will listen to my sobs” [‘Oh, skænk mig en grav ved det isgrønne hav – hvor kun bølgerne hører min gråd!’.]¹³ In addition, her focus on the Danish target audience ensured the above-mentioned introduction of characteristics of spoken Danish. Overall, she ‘danicised’ the stories and bowed to Danish mores by making for less formality and less personal abuse. She was explicit about avoiding swearwords: “the children will learn them anyway,” and in some cases when she found that stories discriminated special countries and ethnic groups, they were not published.

The Danish comic of 1969 reads as if it were originally made in Danish: it is characteristic of translations into Danish that they lack particles and specific turns of phrase, but these abound in Rindom’s translations, because she disregarded most of the fine points and, indeed, much of the text of the original. It can be argued that the pictures carry most information, but this does not change the essential point: although Rindom was not credited with her translations while they were published, they were indeed recognised as translations, most obviously so when she received the highest comics award in Denmark for her *Donald Duck* translations in 1988 (Hartung 1994: 104-106). Since there is general agreement on the fact that the Danish versions are translations of the American originals, although it is also accepted that she ‘danicised’ the language (Harder 1970: c. 4-5; Hartung 1994: 106-107; and Vilstrup 2002), it is clear that in many contexts the traditional terms of ‘loss’ and ‘gain’ call for re-examination. So, indeed, does the whole notion of what constitutes a translation.

Conclusion

In this article we have examined two comics, one a one-line strip and the other a ten-page narrative. // ... 213 //

In comic strips, every series or line of pictures usually concludes with a point or a punchline which requires the translator to strive for renditions matching each picture, the overall progression in a few pictures, and the demand for a punchline within the space the balloons allow for. The type of accuracy

called for here is not a linguistic 1:1 transfer and so-called 'untranslatable' elements constitute a great challenge.

A comic narrative such as *Donald Duck* may continue for many pages and does not call for instant release and humour. The aim is to tell a humorous story in which we recognise stock elements: Gladstone's incredible luck, Donald's bad luck, the nephews' ingenuity, etc. So we deal with stereotypical characters who should act and talk in the same manner in every *Donald Duck* comic. The humour is largely situational and thematic and the stories take place in a universe without direct references to American society, politics, or persons (although they are reflected indirectly). In themselves, comics may therefore not always be as challenging to a translator as comic strips with their condensed form.

We are not arguing that all translations with pictures are as successful as the ones discussed. But we wish to stress that the translations dealt with here are successful because they function well in the target language with target audiences. We are not dealing with word-for-word nor sense-for-sense translations but with meta-renditions, in which the translators have successfully combined various semiotic channels, language and pictures, as well as the overall theme or idea, to fulfil the audience's expectations successfully.

The two examples, however, also call attention to the fact that in the translation of comics - in this study most notably so in *Donald Duck* - the translation establishes an existence of its own in the target culture in relation to the audience. We have here mostly focussed on the consistency between features in the same sections as well as the names of the characters, which must not differ from one story to the next. But in a more intangible way, this study also touches upon the resonance a translation can have in the target language and culture and the extent to which a translator can adapt an original so that, on the one hand, it is recognised as a 'translation of *Donald Duck*' but is, on the other hand, also a genuine product of the target culture in terms of language and thematic emphasis.

At the beginning it was hinted that constrained translation would probably call for reduction. This is, to some extent, borne out here, but at the same time we have seen that there may also be 'additions' - features with no counterpart in the original, notably so in the *Donald Duck* translation. Surprising as they would seem from a theoretical point of view, they are easi- // ... 214 // ly

understood once we realise that the translator-writer sees how little (!) space the previous version took up.

Another question we may pose is whether a translator today can be equally ‘free’ to localise not only comics but any text. It is interesting to note that Kristensen found texts that come into existence in localised target-language versions which are only based on source-language branding (Kristensen 2002), whereas other translations may be constrained by merchandise which means that translators must render names as they are in the original.¹⁴

But this, clearly, is another story.

Notes

1. Authorship of this article: The idea that loss can be subdivided, the discussion of the ‘Calvin and Hobbes’ comic strip, the research and the discovery of the specific nature of the Danish translations of *Donald Duck* were made by Maria Grun. Cay Dollerup is responsible for the structure of the article, a number of additional points, and references to Translation Studies research. We are indebted to Mr Henrik Gottlieb for incisive and constructive criticism. We are indebted to *Sander Software ApS* for a grant towards the publication of this article.
2. Being discussed mostly without empirical evidence, most amateurs, critics and even some scholars focus on this. Bassnett 2002: 36-37 is fairly isolated in taking a relaxed view. Empirical analyses of large numbers of translations of the same texts also suggest that – as is shown in the present study – there is also ‘gain’ in translation (Dollerup 1999: e.g. 200-236).
3. For further discussions of equivalence, we refer to e.g. Nida 1964: 165-177; and Dorothy Kenny in Baker 1998: 77-80. We agree with Snell-Hornby (1995: 13-22) that this concept distorts sensible discussions of major issues in translation and Translation Studies.
4. Family relations are problematic for translators who work out of English when, for instance, a text refers to “grandparents” collectively. Eva Hung (1993) discusses the more than thirty terms implying relationships in Chinese communities, and Harder (1995: 22-23) discusses the way a competent literary Danish translator has to establish (correct and more informative) family relations in translation from English.
5. Some of the one-line strips are also continuous, but this is not relevant to our discussion.
6. We are indebted to Mr Niels Søndergaard for some of the subsequent information. He began translating Calvin and Hobbes as of volume three and therefore had to continue the universe first established by Mr Per Vadmand, at least as far as the names were con-

cerned. We checked on Søndergaard's translations and came across several instances of localisation. Thus a question "When did the Pilgrims land at Plymouth Rock?" in a multiple-choice question at school is rendered in Danish as "When was the Battle of Lyrskov Heath?" [Answer: 1043. The battle is completely forgotten – so it actually provides better support for Calvin's subsequent comments on the burden of irrelevant knowledge].

7. Both Søndergaard and Gottlieb have pointed out to us that this trick would not be possible in types of constrained translation in which there is an oral side. Intonation and pronunciation would reveal the difference between the figurative and literal sense.

8. The *Walt Disney Comics and Stories* were published under a variety of titles in Europe from around 1950.

9. (A) was made by Carl Barks after an idea by Dana Coty on 23 September 1948 and was published in April 1949. It has been reprinted in 1970, 1982, 1987 (as 'The Ra- // ... 215 // jah's Ruby'), 1992, and 1993. (B) appeared in April 1950 and was reprinted in 1987 and 1999. (C) was published in May 1969 and reprinted in 1975.

10. Times clearly change. Around 2000, we were informed that publishers did not like to change balloons because the lines would get blurred (Dollerup and Orel-Kos 2001: 106 [publication # 178 on this homepage]).

11. Co-prints are books produced by a supranational publisher and printed at one and the same printing establishment (which may be located in another part of the world than the publishing house) and with the same colouring. The texts are in national languages and local editions are marketed by national publishers (see Dollerup and Orel-Kos 2001[publication # 178 on this homepage]). In principle, this might apply to *Donald Duck*, but the editions discussed were printed in the US and Denmark and both the colours and lettering differ.

12. Mr Mikael Tjellesen of Egmont Serieforlaget A/S has kindly checked the Egmont archives and assures us that Rindom translated all *Donald Duck* comics between 1949 and 1982.

13. The American original, 'The screaming cowboy', goes: "Oh, bury me thar/ with my battered git-tar/ a-screaming my heart out fer yew".

14. Bill Watterson discontinued Calvin and Hobbes because of the appearance of illegal merchandise (see www1).

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Web site

[www1](#)

http://www.reemst.com/calvin_and_hobbes/?page=author&topic=license.



The photographs are from a car ride illustrative of exploration: they are from Budapest, Hungary. We move in a straight line from the tunnel under the rock over the Chain Bridge spanning the Danube to the front of the Gresham hotel.

Photos: Cay Dollerup

www.cay-dollerup.dk

The Gresham Hotel, Budapest, Hungary