Foreword

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In *Alice in Many Tongues* (1964), Warren Weaver comments on the way Lewis Carroll reaches out to two readerships:

> *Alice in Wonderland* is, in effect, two books: a book for children and a book for adults. Its interest, its fantasy, its humor, and its logic all operate at two levels. I know that adults often wonder why and how *Alice* can appeal to children. I suspect that children wonder why adults like it.

The unifying factor, to my mind, is language play—the way in which people enjoy themselves by bending and breaking the rules of a language. Carroll illustrates better than anyone else I know the range and variety of this "ludic" function of language (from Latin *ludere* "to play").

It is part of the normal human condition to spend an appreciable amount of time actively playing with language, or responding with pleasure to the way others play. Every language that has been studied illustrates forms of language play, though preferences vary. Not all languages go in for puns, for example. But some sort of wordplay always exists, found chiefly in the culture's oratory, poetry, and storytelling, and observable in the way adults talk to children. You can't avoid playing with language when interacting with children—as the whole of Carroll's creative writing suggests.

Language play is important socially. It brings parents and children together, bonds children into groups, and fosters rapport among adults. Word games may be the means of bringing people into organized relationships, such as a club or a competition, or they may simply help people break the ice in a new social situation. Permitting others to play with your name (a pet name or nickname) is an important signal of intimacy; rejecting someone's use of that name is just as important an intimation of distance. Enjoying others' language play is a sure sign of a healthy social relationship, and disaffection with someone's language play is just as sure a sign that a relationship is on the way to breaking down. As George Eliot put it in *Daniel Deronda* (1876), "A difference of taste in jokes is a great strain on the affections."

Language play is also important personally. It adds to our quality of life, providing opportunities for enjoyment that are both free and unlimited. If we perceive it as a challenge, as in a language game, then it is one to which few sports can compare, except perhaps a game like golf, where there is You, The Ball, and That Hole—nothing else counts. With language play, there is You and The Language—that's all. You set your own targets for achievement. And nobody set more ludic targets for himself than Lewis Carroll.

LEWIS CARROLL IN HIS TIME

Carroll lived in an era which was unprecedented in its fascination with language play. Language games were widespread and diverse. Auditory games involving play with word sequences, word

lists, rhyming, and riddles were commonplace in the dimly lit evenings, and, in those homes where there was literacy, supported by adequate lighting, there would be an even greater variety of games based on the written language.

The games crossed class boundaries. At one extreme, we know that the royal family were avid practitioners of language games: their interest in riddles, acrostics (especially double acrostics), and anagrams helped fuel national fashions. "Her Majesty takes delight in a clever riddle or rebus . . . ," it was reported in *The Private Life of the Queen* (1897). Large numbers of the middle classes joined local clubs and societies and entered local and national competitions, often promoted vigorously by newspapers and advertisers. And at the working-class end of the scale, the first part of the nineteenth century saw a massive growth in Cockney rhyming slang.

It is easy to underestimate the enthusiasm, the obsession, with language play at the end of that century. Books of parlor games sold in the tens of thousands. Popular magazines contained regular puzzle pages and competitions. Especially popular were word squares, chronograms (using Roman letters to hide dates within words), palindromes, games involving forbidden letters, and games in which words were hidden within other words. During Carroll's lifetime, the limerick became extremely popular—he wrote several himself—though he died before the great limerick craze of 1907–8, when there were competitions with huge prizes: the first four lines of the limerick were given, and the contestant had to compose a winning last line. So popular were these competitions that a speech made to the House of Commons in 1908 during the Post Office vote reported that the purchase of sixpenny postal orders (which happened to be the entrance fee for a limerick competition) had increased fourteen-fold during the first half of the year, from around eight hundred thousand to over eleven million.

Carroll was one of the major currents in swelling the ludic tide. Enigmas, charades, rebuses, he tried them all. He was famous for some of his anagrams of personal names, in the nineteenth-century manner of making the anagram appropriate to the personality, offering them to newspapers—for example, his Florence Nightingale, "Flit on, cheering angel." He loved palindromes and semordnilaps, putting one into *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* (1893):

Sylvie was arranging some letters on a board—E-V-I-L. "Now, Bruno," she said, "what does *that* spell?"

Bruno looked at it, in solemn silence, for a minute. "I know what it *doosn't* spell!" he said at last.

"That's no good," said Sylvie. "What *does* it spell?" Bruno took another look at the mysterious letters. "Why, it's 'LIVE,' backwards!" he exclaimed. . . .

"How *did* you manage to see that?" said Sylvie.

"I just twiddled my eyes," said Bruno, "and then I saw it directly."

In one of Carroll's letters (November 1, 1891), the words must be read in reverse order to make sense. And he had an uncanny habit of anticipating modern games. Probably the most famous instance is the one which he described in 1895, in a letter to a friend:

If ever you want a *light* mental recreation, try the "30 letter" puzzle. . . . Take 4 or 5

complete alphabets. Put the vowels into one bag, the consonants into another. Shake up. Draw 9 vowels and 21 consonants. With these you must make 6 real words (excluding proper names) so as to use up *all* the letters. If *two* people want to do it, then after drawing a set of 30, pick out a set of duplicates for the other player. Sit where you cannot see one another's work, and make it a *race*.

People play a game very much like this all over the world now. It's called Scrabble®.

LEVELS OF PLAY

Carroll's ludic preferences and innovations of course go well beyond the playing of traditional word games and the invention of new ones: they encompass all levels of language. Each level poses a different kind of problem for the translator. Cumulatively, it is possible to see the scale of the challenge faced by those who have been brave enough to engage in *Alice* translations.

SOUND-BASED PLAY

Carroll repeatedly goes in for sound-symbolic play—coining words for their phonetic resonance, as in the "Jabberwocky" saga, and inventing names which suit their meanings. It was an entirely conscious art, as he comments in the preface to *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*: "May I take this opportunity of calling attention to what I flatter myself was a successful piece of name-coining. . . . Does not the name 'Sibimet' fairly embody the character of the Sub-Warden?" (*sibimet* being an emphatic form of the word for "himself" in Latin).

Phonetic resonance can be seen in the tea-party passage used for this volume. Some effects are relatively easy to replicate in another language—finding an onomatopoeic equivalent to *twinkle* (such as *ting ge'er*, "jingle" in Chinese), or finding three rhyming names for *Elsie*, *Lacie*, and *Tillie*, such as *Mirni*, *Nini*, and *Lili* (Bulgarian) or *Dušika*, *Metka*, and *Minka* (Slovenian). Far more difficult is to convey the effect presupposed by the deviant vocabulary in the song, for this requires an awareness of the musical original, which is a cultural rather than a linguistic matter. An important point, which is rarely addressed, is that Carroll has maximized the phonetic contrast between the long vowel sounds of the original and the short vowels of the new version: *star > bat*, *are > at*. It is this effect which needs to be a target of a translation.

TYPOGRAPHICAL PLAY

Closely related to this is Carroll's use of typographical play. He uses it to illustrate a voice, as when the small voice of the gnat is presented in tiny type (*Looking-Glass*, Chapter III, and see below). He uses it to represent the shape of an object, such as the Mouse's "long sad tale," printed as a long tail, in progressively smaller type-size (*Alice*, Chapter III). More bizarre forms include the reverse printing which Alice encounters when she first sees "Jabberwocky." These effects are usually capable of being turned into graphic equivalents in other languages without too much difficulty, though getting the effects exactly right exercised Carroll a great deal when he saw the first attempts at translation.

Manipulating the letters of the alphabet was one of Carroll's favorite pastimes. In the famous game of Doublets, one word is changed into another in a series of steps, each intervening word differing from its neighbors by only one letter. He also often used acrostics, as in the poem at the end of *Looking-Glass*, "A boat, beneath a sunny sky," where the initial letter of each line makes up the name Alice Pleasance Liddell.

In the tea-party passage, we have the sequence involving the letter *m*. This is a good example where the form of the words is more important than the content, from the point of view of translation. Translators have three options: ideally, they find another set of *m*-initial words (as in the Afrikaans translation), or they invent new *m*-words (as in the neologistic use of *mu* in the Chinese translation), or—the easiest option—they substitute a sequence in which all the words begin with some other letter (a common practice). Critical, in the tea-party extract, is to find a final item comparably abstract in meaning to *muchness* to motivate the joke about it being drawable. It can be done, as seen in the clever *moenie* (translated as "must-not") in Afrikaans.

WORD-STRUCTURE PLAY

Carroll is also ready to play with the way words are constructed, and sees parallels between existing words and words that do not yet exist, as in the tea-party passage with *treacle-well*. A fine example occurs in the Professor's song in *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* (Chapter XVII):

> In stature the Manlet was dwarfish—
> No burly big Blunderbore he:
> And he wearily gazed on the crawfish
> His Wifelet had dressed for his tea.
> "Now reach me, sweet Atom, my gunlet,
> And hurl the old shoelet for luck:
> Let me hie to the bank of the runlet,
> And shoot thee a Duck!"

With further verses providing examples of toplets and toelets, ducklets and doglets, grublets and froglets, and several things more, *-let* becomes one of the most productive suffixes in the entire oeuvre. There will usually be a fairly direct way of finding equivalents in another language for the constituent word elements. *Treacle-well*, for example, neatly morphs into *molasses-well* in the French translation (below).

SYNTAX-DEPENDENT PLAY

Syntactic issues chiefly manifest themselves when somebody takes an idiom literally, and a piece of underlying structure is suddenly brought to the surface. In *Alice* (Chapter V), the Caterpillar asks her who she is:

> "I know who I *was* when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then."
> "What do you mean by that?" said the Caterpillar sternly. "Explain yourself!"
> "I can't explain *myself*, I'm afraid, sir," said Alice, "because I'm not myself, you see."

Alice in a World of Wonderlands

Syntactic play is illustrated in the tea-party passage by the play between transitive and intransitive uses of *draw*, the relationship between *in the well* and *well in*, and the extracting of *muchness* from the traditional expression *much of a muchness*. These provide translators with some of their biggest challenges, for there is a rarely a good equivalent to an English word-order variation. When a translator does find one, it is a special moment—a "rare coincidence," as Zhao Yuanren (Y. R. Chao) puts it in relation to Chinese.

LEXICAL PLAY

Carroll seems to have always had a gnat in his ear, because he never misses a chance to pun. The reference, of course, is to the small voice which Alice hears when sitting in the railway carriage (*Looking-Glass*, Chapter III):

> "It sounds like a horse," Alice thought to herself. And an extremely small voice, close to her ear, said "You might make a joke on that—something about 'horse' and 'hoarse,' you know."

In the tea-party passage, we find puns on *draw* and *well*, as well as a less direct piece of wordplay in *murdering the time*, where "killing time" is related to a notion of metrical time. These are the classical translation nightmares. Lexical puns can rarely be translated well. Sometimes a language simply does not use such a semantic effect, as in Pitjantjatjara. If it does use puns, a fortunate translator will discover an equivalent effect, or one which points in the right direction, as when the French choice of *mélasse* (molasses) for "treacle" allows a pun with *être dans la mélasse* (to be in a jam). Otherwise, the puns are simply ignored.

PRAGMATIC PLAY

Pragmatic play refers chiefly to ludic manipulation of the rules governing normal discourse. A good example is the bizarre exchange which accompanies Alice's arrival at the tea-party:

> "Have some wine," the March Hare said in an encouraging tone.
> Alice looked all round the table, but there was nothing on it but tea. "I don't see any wine," she remarked.
> "There isn't any," said the March Hare.

The characters seem to take a special delight in breaking conversational expectations, even—as in the tea-party passage—to the point of rudeness, when Alice's reflective comment "I don't think—" is interrupted by the Hatter, who interprets the verb in a more active sense. Another example is the dispute over the relationship between *nothing*, *more*, and *less*, where an everyday observation is turned into a logical conundrum. Such effects on the whole translate quite well, even into languages that are linguistically unrelated to English, such as Chinese.

CULTURAL PLAY

Often lying beneath a word or sentence is an element of cultural history, which can require a lengthy footnote to elucidate. The childhood associations of "Twinkle, twinkle . . ." provide one example: it is more nursery rhyme than folk song, and needs a correspondingly childish

equivalent in translation. When the cultural resonance is not explicitly represented in the language, there is a special difficulty. The Cheshire Cat has already told us that the Hatter and the March Hare are mad, but we might discount its evidence, as everyone, according to that animal, is mad, including Alice. What a British reader knows, which non-British readers might miss, is the proverbial association with madness due to the expressions *mad as a March hare* and *mad as a hatter*. For a translator, this poses a special difficulty, as there is unlikely to be an equivalent association in the other language. It is a real bonus when such an association does exist—as with "salty hare" in Ukrainian, where there is also a proverb "to run around like a salted hare."

ENVOI

The field of what is sometimes called comparative translatology is in its infancy, but already some of its applications are clear. With a text as linguistically sophisticated as *Alice*, in which there are so many choices to be made, it is invaluable to create a translating community, as *Alice in a World of Wonderlands* does, in which a cadre of professionals tackles the same text. The juxtaposition of versions is of mutual benefit, as it allows each author to examine the way others have approached the same problem. An insightful solution from one translator can trigger a reappraisal in another. And everyone can learn something from the readings introduced by the multiple linguistic perspectives. It is something of which Lewis Carroll would have heartily approved. "The hardest thing in all literature," he writes in the preface to *Sylvie and Bruno* (1889), "is to write anything original." There is one thing harder: to translate it. And all translators in this volume will, I have no doubt, share his goal:

> I have striven with I know not what success to strike out yet another new path: be it bad or good, it is the best I can do. It is written, not for money, and not for fame, but in the hope of supplying, for the children whom I love, some thoughts that may suit those hours of innocent merriment which are the very life of Childhood.