Language-play, including puns, rhymes, and a host of other linguistically definable phenomena, tends to fulfill important functions in a text, but is usually assumed to pose considerable difficulties in a translation context. In fact, since language-play is, as a rule, based on the peculiarities of a particular language, the possibility of a more or less direct transfer into another language cannot be expected. Such a transfer appears even less likely if the source text is a film and the translation takes place in the form of dubbing or subtitling, both of which are well-known for their typical constraints.

This study explores what actually happens to language-play in films that have been subjected to translation. Has it generally been lost, with all that implies, or have the translators made an effort to create something similar for their target texts? Does it matter what kind of language-play we are talking about, whether it has been dubbed or subtitled, and what the target language is? Or is it simply a question of who has been responsible for the translation?

Based on a sizeable corpus with hundreds of instances of language-play, and thousands of translation solutions, this study will provide some of the answers. Yet it also constitutes a substantial contribution to the literature on language-play as such.
Thorsten Schröter

Shun the Pun, Rescue the Rhyme?

The Dubbing and Subtitling of Language-Play in Film
To Hélène and the children

Judge Cameo:  *Criminally bad punning: eighteen counts.*
Bullwinkle:  *And three dukes and seven earls! Ha-ha!*
Judge Cameo:  *Make that nineteen.*

(From *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle*)
Abstract

Language-play can briefly be described as the wilful manipulation of the peculiarities of a linguistic system in a way that draws attention to these peculiarities themselves, thereby causing a communicative and cognitive effect that goes beyond the conveyance of propositional meaning. Among the various phenomena answering this description are the different kinds of puns, but also more strictly form-based manipulations such as rhymes and alliteration, in addition to a host of other, sometimes even fuzzier, subcategories.

Due to its unusual nature, and especially its frequently strong dependence on the idiosyncrasies of a particular language, language-play can generally be assumed to constitute a significant challenge in a translation context. Furthermore, given its non-negligible effects, the translator is not free to simply ignore the language-play (provided it has been recognized as such in the first place) without having taken an active stance on its treatment. However, the difficulties in finding a suitable target-language solution are possibly exacerbated if the source text is a complex multimedia product such as a film, the translation of which, normally in the form of dubbing or subtitling, is subject to additional constraints.

In view of these intricacies, it has been the aim of this study to analyze and measure how language-play in film has actually been treated in authentic dubbing and subtitle versions. As a prerequisite, the concept of language-play has been elaborated on, and more than a dozen subcategories have been described, developed, and employed. For the purpose of carrying out a meaningful analysis of the dubbing and subtitling of language-play, a corpus has been compiled, comprising 18 family films and 99 of their various target versions, most on DVD, and yielding nearly 800 source-text instances of language-play and thousands of translation solutions.

The results indicate that especially two sets of factors, among the many that are likely to influence a translation, play a prominent role: the type of the language-play, and the identity and working conditions of the translator. By contrast, the mode of translation (dubbing vs. subtitling), the target language, or the general properties of the films, could not be shown to have a sizeable impact.

Keywords: family films, screen translation, dubbing, subtitling, compensation, humour, language-play, wordplay, puns, metaphors, similes, idioms, modified expressions, play with foreign words, nonce formations, play with grammar, rhymes, half-rhymes, alliteration, repetition.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank everybody who has supported and encouraged me in the past five and a half years since I became a doctoral student at Karlstad University and started to plan this thesis, including all the friends, relatives, and colleagues who have, at irregular intervals, though the more often the more I was falling behind schedule, enquired about the progress of my work, in most cases probably without really understanding what I was doing. To those who want to know, this book should provide the answer.

My doctoral studies, as well as the entire research school in modern languages of which I had the privilege of being a part, were largely financed by The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation. My thanks go to the foundation and to the members of the research school, many of whom have provided me with ideas in the early stages of my thesis project.

Special thanks are due, of course, to my ever-approachable and friendly advisor Moira Linnarud, who has left me all the freedom an independent-minded doctoral student like myself could wish for. This fact notwithstanding, Moira was always prepared to immediately get more heavily involved when she or I felt the need. The relationship between the advisor and the usually much more vulnerable doctoral student is perhaps the single most important factor in the professional life of the latter, and Moira has really managed to make me feel comfortable with my working situation. I am particularly grateful for the encouraging comments, as well as the careful formulation of the always justified criticisms in connection with earlier drafts of this thesis and other aspects of my academic performance.

Other colleagues on the linguistics side of our English department have also invested considerable time and effort into my project and provided me with valuable feedback on different sections of this book, especially Solveig Granath and Michael Wherrity, but also my (former) fellow-PhD-students Erica Sandlund, June Miliander, Pia Sundqvist, and, last but not least, Marika Kjellén Simes, with whom I have had the pleasure of sharing a rather small office for several years without any friction whatsoever arising. Thank you to all.

I would also like to seize this opportunity to tell all members of the department how much I appreciate their friendliness and openness and their ability to create a pleasant atmosphere in formal as well as more informal interaction. This has certainly helped me to cope with the stress that writing a thesis implies. Particular thanks, furthermore, to our director of studies,
Elisabeth Wennö, and to Berith Nordenberg for providing information, help and support in various practical and administrative matters.

Within the academic world at large, I am otherwise most heavily indebted to Henrik Gottlieb from the University of Copenhagen, who has taken it upon himself to function as an expert advisor in my project and who has, among other things, read the entire thesis within a very short time span (during his holiday at that) in order to be able to provide me with valuable feedback in the final stages. It is also with Henrik that I have conducted the longest telephone conversation of my life, during which he has helped me to assess many of the Danish target-language solutions in my corpus.

I have received similar help from my sister, Heike Schröter, when it comes to some of the German translation choices, from Liliann Byman Frisén in connection with many of the Norwegian ones, and from Marika Kjellén Simes and my wife, Heléne Gullö Schröter, as regards a number of Swedish target-language sequences. Thank you all.

I would also like to thank my parents, Christl and Hartwig Schröter, my sister, and my parents-in-law, Ingwor and Robert Gullö, for all the interest they have shown and for the many ways in which they have made my life easier and more pleasant. The greatest praise is due to Heléne, however, because she has been a loyal supporter and put up with my spending ever-increasing amounts of time on my thesis and rather too little with my family. As a means of expressing my profound gratitude and love, I dedicate this book to her and our children, Carolina, Martin, and Oliver, whose literal and metaphorical growth into wonderful individuals has coincided entirely or almost entirely with my life as a doctoral student. Without my dear and beloved family, I don’t know what would have become of me.
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Introduction

Regardless of whether we have more experience of watching foreign-language screen productions in their dubbed or subtitled form, we have probably all been struck occasionally by a target-language sequence that appeared odd, that disagreed with our sense of style, or that did not quite seem to make sense in the context. At other times, we may have been positively surprised by an unusually apt and entertaining example of innovative language use in the translated version. In either case, an innovative and functionally significant manipulation of, or ‘play’ with, linguistic material in the original version of the film or programme may have triggered the conspicuous translation solution. Conversely, if we watch a subtitled film and are reasonably proficient in the source language, we may understand, say, a joke based on a pun in the spoken dialogue, while to our delight and/or (feigned) horror, the subtitles provide no indication that the person responsible for them has been as perceptive as we have.

Now, puns and a number of more or less related phenomena fall under what I refer to as language-play (for a general definition and my choice of spelling the term, cf. 2.2.3 and 2.2.5, respectively), and as not least this thesis will illustrate, language-play occurs with some frequency in many texts that undergo translation, including films. This alone might be reason enough to investigate more closely what happens to it in the process, though such an endeavour is all the more interesting as it must be assumed that the linguistic play in one natural language, depending as it does on the properties of that particular code, cannot normally be transferred directly into another language. Especially puns, which in translation studies as well as related disciplines probably constitute the most prominent of the subcategories of language-play, are therefore generally considered to pose a formidable challenge to translators, perhaps even an insurmountable one. Nevertheless, this challenge has to be answered in some manner, with options ranging from outright resignation to bold creativity, including everything in between. It must also be remembered that the intermediary’s task and responsibility do not necessarily become smaller in view of the circumstance that language-play can be very subtle and hard to detect, but nevertheless tends to fulfil a non-negligible communicative function, and often even a quite important one.

If the translation of language-play is a tricky business, regardless of the text types involved, the same can be said of most forms of screen translation. Leaving aside the less common approaches, both dubbing and subtitling are
characterized, at least in part, by specific and well-known constraints that are often felt to render the production of a good target version even more difficult than in other translation contexts. The requirement of lip synchronization in dubbing, and the frequent lack of time and space in subtitling, are examples of constraints that even most lay persons are aware of, and I find the combination of these constraints on the one hand, and the general problems in transferring language-specific play between source and target texts on the other, very intriguing. The main aim of this study is thus to provide an answer to the question how original language-play in film is dealt with when it is dubbed and subtitled. More specifically, I will investigate whether any of the numerous factors that must be suspected of influencing the final product can indeed be shown to do so. I am referring especially to the type of language-play, the translation mode (dubbing vs. subtitling), the target language, and the individual dubbers and subtitlers, though further factors whose impact I have had a reasonable chance to estimate will also be considered.

Although the analysis and discussion of individual examples form an important feature of this thesis, the study is also intended to yield meaningful and substantial results based on numbers. In order to support such an approach, a corpus of 18 American and British family films has been compiled, including as many as 99 of their various dubbing and subtitling translations into German, Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish (or 5.5 per film on average). In the films, almost 800 instances of original language-play have been identified, and in these and their respective translation solutions, more than a dozen categories of language-play are represented.

Chapters 1 and 2 serve as the theoretical background of the study and as an overview of previous research that is relevant to it: the former deals with the properties of dubbing and subtitling, while the latter is dedicated to general considerations concerning language-play, its relationship with humour and wordplay, and its translatability. Chapter 3 contains a detailed account of how the corpus was compiled and what kind of material it contains, as well as an outline of the analytical approach. The function of chapter 4, which is reserved for puns, and of chapter 5, which covers non-puns, is twofold: on the one hand, these chapters serve to establish and describe the various categories of language-play that I encountered in my material, which can be considered an important secondary aim of the study; on the other hand, they provide results on how these categories have been dealt with in the dubbing and subtitling of the films. Chapter 6 offers further results, which, however, extend beyond the
individual types of language-play, while chapter 7, finally, features a summary and evaluation of the study, as well as an outlook on future research.

When it comes to the analysis of the language-play and its translations in chapters 4 and 5, I have felt the need to present and discuss a great number of concrete examples. These illustrate the nature of the categories to which they have been referred, clarify many of the choices I had to make, and will often provide interesting insights concerning the difficulties (or perhaps the lack thereof) that the translators have faced. However, the many examples also add to the considerable length of chapters 4 and 5. The readers who are primarily interested in the overall picture as expressed in the form of summarized quantitative results are therefore referred to sections 4.2 and 5.2 (apart from chapters 6 and 7). It is also in these sections that percentages are used to complement the absolute figures deemed sufficient in the individual presentations of the results for each category (4.1 and 5.1).

In writing this thesis, I have as far as was possible refrained from using abbreviations that at least some readers may feel to be opaque. The only exceptions are the probably most well-known abbreviations in translation studies, namely SL for ‘source language’, i.e. the language one translates from, and TL for ‘target language’, i.e. the language one translates into.¹

Let me point out, finally, that another principle has been to make all aspects of the text accessible to all of its readers, regardless of their proficiency in languages other than English. This means that I have consistently translated all the quotes from publications that are not in English, except where the terms used resemble their English counterparts very closely. And even though this will be redundant information for some readers, I have also provided back-translations of the most relevant aspects of the German, Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish dubbing and subtitling solutions that are reproduced in this thesis.

¹ I employ these concepts for reasons of convenience and do not wish to enter into a discussion of how appropriate they really are, on a theoretical level. In this study, I consider them adequate for my purposes.
1 Screen Translation

Before the first films with an integrated soundtrack were produced and exported from the late 1920s onwards, screen translation was not much of an issue. The normally few intertitles that accompanied some of the silent films of the time, i.e. the written renditions of the original dialogues, or an occasional comment, that filled the entire screen and completely interrupted the action for some seconds, could easily be exchanged for TL counterparts. This process was subject to comparatively few constraints and hardly intrusive on the artistic whole of the film.

Then, in 1927, Al Jolson’s *The Jazz Singer* became the first film to feature some audible dialogue, including the famous line *You ain't heard nothin’ yet*, and within a few years, the silent film era had practically come to an end. Producers and distributors were suddenly faced with a considerable translation problem because already at that time, a non-negligible share of the studios’ profits came from exports to non-English-speaking countries. After some artistically unsatisfactory and economically unsuccessful attempts to please the foreign markets by producing multiple versions of the same film in different languages, in most parts of the world either dubbing or subtitling emerged eventually as the most prominent translation method for films.\(^2\)

Since then, the dubbing and subtitling industries have grown in proportion to the ever-increasing amount of foreign, mostly English-language material that finds its way to the cinema, TV, and nowadays even computer screens of Western Europe and elsewhere. The availability and consumption of translated films has increased enormously in the course of the last century, but until some years ago, it could still be claimed with some justification that very little had been written on the topic in relation to its significance and impact.

Translation scholars must have considered themselves pioneers when they first turned their eyes on dubbing, subtitling, or even both in the 1980s and 90s – and many of them were indeed. Thus, Delabastita (1989:193f; 1990:97f) felt that the studies that had been published on what he referred to as *film translation* or *translation in mass communication* (many of which he lists in the respective list of references) were too few and too narrow and that important aspects of the issues involved were only gradually being addressed. A decade later, Díaz Cintas (1999:31) still claims that film translation has been unduly neglected by scholars, even though a lot has, in fact, happened by then. More specifically on dubbing,

\(^2\) For some brief accounts of the early days of the talkies from a translation point of view, see e.g. Danan (1991:607f; 1996:passim) and Gottlieb (1994c:14ff).
Goris (1993:170) maintains that “[t]he already existing publications on the question of dubbing are very rare (by 1991 I could only find 22 publications) and often highly repetitious”. Törnqvist’s statement that “a […] book on dubbing is still lacking” (1995:47) was, however, untrue already at the time of publication.

It is of course not uncommon for researchers to deplore the undeserved neglect of their particular field of interest, perhaps rightfully and/or out of genuine conviction – or because their own contributions will stand out as more innovative in this way.3 Be that as it may, when it comes to screen translation, I now have the impression that scholarly interest really has caught on to the extent that studying the phenomena in question has almost become a mainstream enterprise within translation studies and some related fields. The recent update of Gottlieb’s bibliography of literature on subtitling (2002) attests to this. The present thesis is thus one of many contemporary publications that focus on certain aspects of screen translation, though this should not be taken to imply that there is not plenty of room left for further explorations in the field – quite the contrary (cf. section 7.3).

Screen translation, by the way, is just one of several, overlapping umbrella terms, including also (multi) media translation and audiovisual translation,4 that are meant to cover the (usually interlingual) transfer of texts that are conveyed through a number of semiotic channels simultaneously, in particular sound, image, and often writing. Screen translation is a little more specific, however, and is generally understood to refer to the translation of films and programmes for cinema, TV, video, and DVD. On the grounds that “it is only the film dialogue […] that can be altered or re-encoded”, Li (1998:151) proposes film dialogue translation as a still more accurate term, but I shall stick to the comparatively established screen translation, not least because elements other than the dialogue actually can be subject to translation, including most of what is written in a film, and increasingly the picture itself, too (cf. footnote 5).

Apart from dubbing and subtitling, which are at the focus of the present study, other techniques are also covered by the concept of screen translation, most notably voice-over, which is a spoken translation superimposed on the barely audible original utterances. It is different from dubbing in that the TL text generally begins a few seconds after, and ends a couple of seconds before, the SL text, and in that no attempts at lip synchronization are being made.

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3 The fact that several years may pass between the submission of a paper and its publication may also play a role for the accuracy of such claims.

4 These terms appear, among other places, in the titles of two collections of articles, edited by Gambier & Gottlieb (2001) and Orero (2004), respectively.
Voice-over is popular in dubbing countries when it comes to the translation of foreign speech in news broadcasts, but in Eastern Europe, it is also used for feature films and TV series. The only study I am aware of that specifically investigates the voice-over of a fiction programme is Grigaravičiūtė & Gottlieb (2001).

Almost equally under-researched phenomena falling within the realm of screen translation are the transfer of speaker commentaries into TL counterparts, common especially for documentaries, and simultaneous interpretation for television. I shall here content myself with references to Laine (1996) and also Espasa (2004) as regards the first phenomenon, and to Kurz & Bros-Brann (1996), Alexieva (2001), and Mack (2001) as regards the second. It may finally be pointed out that there are types of translation that share several characteristics with dubbing and/or subtitling, especially some of the specific constraints, but that are not made for a cinema or TV screen. I am thinking of song and libretto translation, and particularly theatre and opera surtitling (cf. Hay 1998; Low 2002). There is also the whole new field of translation of websites and other IT and multimedia material (cf. some of the papers in Gambier & Gottlieb 2001), and all these text types rely, like film, on an interplay between different semiotic channels (music and other non-verbal sounds, visual images, spoken language, written language, and soon perhaps also smells and tactile sensations).

Returning to my more immediate fields of interest in the present context, i.e. dubbing and subtitling, some comments may be in order about these techniques qualifying as forms of translation at all. As should be clear from the preceding paragraphs, I obviously consider dubbing and subtitling as translation processes and the resulting target versions as translations. The umbrella terms mentioned above all feature the element translation, and translation studies as an academic discipline has broadened its understanding of what falls within its domain and is worthy of scholarly attention: all kinds of pursuits besides literary translation are now treated as genuine translation activities, including screen translation.

Not so long ago, however, translation was generally defined as something like “a maximally faithful linguistic recoding process” (Delabastita 1989:213), usually expected to remain within the same (written) mode. Some people still understand translation in such rather narrow terms, according to which “doubler n’est pas traduire” (dubbing is not translating; said by a dubber quoted in Gautier 1981:116), and “a subtitle is not a translation – or only rarely a translation”, as stated by an active subtitler (Wildblood 2002:41). If this is so,
then adaptation or adjustment are probably felt to be better labels for these forms of transfer (cf. e.g. Gambier & Suomela-Salmi 1994:371; Hesse-Quack 1967:239). Special types of translation such as dubbing and subtitling have also been subsumed under the label constrained translation, but as Zabalbeascoa (1997:330) points out, there is no such thing as an unconstrained translation, only “different forms of translation [being] constrained in different ways and by different factors”. Most practitioners and theoreticians are thus willing to follow Delabastita in discarding any overly restrictive notion of translation in favour of a broader conception that would better reflect the realities of translation practice, and not only in the realm of film media (Delabastita 1989:214).

In what follows, I will offer a rather brief discussion of some of the peculiarities of dubbing and subtitling.5

1.1 Dubbing

1.1.1 Introduction

Without going into the details at this point, it should be clarified what dubbing is taken to mean in this thesis. As is the case with other translation-related terms, including translation itself, dubbing can refer to both a process and its result, though it will usually be clear from the context which one is implied. Dubbing is here understood as the replacement of the original dialogues in filmic media by dialogues in another language that are scripted and spoken so as to correspond to the visual elements of the film, most notably the lip movements of the persons on screen. Generally speaking, the goal with dubbing is to make it look as if the new dialogue is actually being uttered by the original actors, which is thought to facilitate and enhance viewers’ enjoyment of watching foreign material.

The word dubbing is derived from dub, which is a short form of double (Oxford English Dictionary). The etymology is thus quite straightforward, though

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5 A peculiarity that dubbing and subtitling, and in fact all the standard forms of screen translation, have in common is that we are normally only dealing with the translation of the audible linguistic aspects of a film or programme. If one disregards complete cuts, the picture has traditionally not been subjected to modifications in the translation process. This may be about to change: in the German version of the American, computer-animated film Polar Express, to name just an example, the written information in a crucial scene has been replaced by German writing. The rest of the picture remains as in the original. Cf. also Wehn (2001:70) on the new possibilities of “morphing” the faces even of real actors, in order to eliminate the requirement of lip synch in dubbing. Such possibilities will be disregarded in the rest of this study, as they do not seem to have been employed in the films I have analyzed.
that of some of its Romance counterparts is perhaps still more transparent: *doblaje* (Spanish), *doblatge* (Catalan), *doublage* (French), and *doppiaggio* (Italian). The English *dubbing* has also given rise to the Swedish *dubbning*, whereas the German term is the etymologically unrelated *Synchronisation*.

There are also a number of alternative terms in English that may be used as complete or partial synonyms of *dubbing* (cf. Chaume Varela 2004:42 for a slightly confusing account). One of these terms is *post-synchronization*, which, however, usually refers to the intralingual dubbing that is part of the production process for the original version of a film or TV series.²

Intralingual post-synchronization has become very common, which both Whitman-Linsen (1992:57f) and Chaume Varela (2004:40) attest to, the reason being that it can considerably improve the sound quality of the film subjected to it, especially when it comes to scenes shot outdoors. As to animated cartoons, one has always been forced to synchronize the voices with the pictures in a studio before the film could be released even in the country of origin, and a similar challenge arises in international co-productions with actors speaking different languages while pretending to be from the same culture. As it happens, Gautier (1981:118) turns this widespread and commonly accepted use of post-synchronization into an argument for not looking down on interlingual dubbing as a distorting and dishonourable solution to the translation dilemma.

A final point regarding terminology should be clarified: I will occasionally employ the word *dubber* or its plural form. In some publications, *dubber* may refer to the dubbing actors only, i.e. the people actually speaking the target-language dialogue as it gets recorded. In this study, however, the term it is used in a broader sense for anybody that is partly responsible for the final outcome of the dubbing process, with translators, script-writers and directors normally being the most influential figures (see 1.1.7).

1.1.2 The spread and impact of dubbing

As far as I know, no good overview over the world situation in screen translation exists today, probably due to the practical difficulties involved in the compilation of information for some 200 countries and regions. Therefore, nobody knows the exact spread and impact of dubbing on a global level (or of subtitling, or any other form of screen translation, for that matter). However, among the typical so-called dubbing countries, where dubbing is the clearly

² But note that close equivalents of *post-synchronization* are used in e.g. Danish and Norwegian for interlingual dubbing.
dominant mode of screen translation, are the large Western European nations Germany, France, Italy, and Spain (some autonomous regions of which deserve special mention; cf. below). Austria also prefers dubbing, while the situation in Britain is more complex: for one, British viewers are not much interested in foreign-language material at all and do not seem to be offered a lot of it, either, so that screen translation is not a big issue in most of the country in the first place (Kilborn 1993:649f). Furthermore, when asked whether they prefer dubbing or subtitling, only a relatively slight majority of Britons choose dubbing,7 and different TV channels actually have different translation policies (Kilborn 1993:650ff). Outside of Europe, dubbing also has a strong standing in e.g. mainland China (cf. Li 1998:156, 180), Japan, Latin America, and Québec.

The case of Québec, incidentally, illustrates that not all countries are homogeneous entities when it comes to screen translation. Some geographical and political entities below the level of independent nations, such as Québec or Wales, more or less strongly support dubbing as a way of promoting and/or standardizing a minority language, even if it costs them a lot more than subtitling would.8 Similarly, it is not so much the fact that Spain and France are dubbing nations, but the (language) political agenda of the Basque country that explains why foreign material is dubbed rather than subtitled into Basque even though the target community is fairly small (O’Connell 1996:152; 1998:68f). The same is true of Catalonia and its broadcasting company TVC, which was created “to promote the use of the Catalan language” (Izard 2000:156), and which shows almost only foreign material that is dubbed. Yvane (1996:134) actually refers to dubbing as a protection against linguistic imperialism.9

Some of the literature on screen translation contains more or less well-founded estimates concerning the amount of foreign material that is imported and translated in various countries. Dries (1996), for example, shows with the help of many numbers and tables how large a share of all the films released in Europe is made up by North-American films (in many countries more than

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7 However, Kilborn (1989:423) also reports that when British viewers were given the genuine choice of watching a popular French soap opera with subtitles or with dubbing, more than two thirds chose the dubbed version. On the other hand, this outcome might reflect the composition of the specific target audience for the series.

8 Depending on the source, dubbing is estimated to cost about five to twenty times as much as the production of subtitles for the same material, with a 10:1 relationship quoted most often. This is frequently offered as the main or even only explanation for why dubbing countries tend to be big and subtitling countries small in Western Europe (the extra investment that dubbing implies will only be justified if many people see the film or programme and thereby generate large enough profits; cf. e.g. Herbst 1994:22f). The situation is more complex than that, however.

9 In light of this remark, it seems somewhat ironic that French-speaking Québec not only needs to sustain its cultural and linguistic identity vis-à-vis its influential English-speaking neighbours: its dubbing industry, which is part of this effort, must also contend with the influx of dubbed versions in European (Parisian) French, made by companies in France that enjoy, among other advantages, a great deal of legal protection (Paquin 2000).
Great-Britain is the biggest exporter of films within Europe, which implies that non-English-speaking countries not only need to translate many films, but that most of these films have to be translated from English. In a more recent paper, Zabalbeascoa et al. (2001:105) claim that “English is the source language for practically 90% of all television imports” in Spain.

At least for the Western part of Germany, the large-scale import of English-language material is nothing new: already in the fifteen years or so following the end of the Second World War, about half of the movies shown in West-Germany came from the United States, and significant numbers also from Britain (Hesse-Quack 1967:73f). As to German television, Götz & Herbst (1987:13) report that of the series and films broadcast by the two main public channels in the course of an arbitrarily chosen week, 50 and 80 percent, respectively, were of foreign origin. According to Herbst (1994:25ff), 21.5% (or 67,603 minutes) of everything broadcast by one of these channels in the afternoons and evenings of 1993 was dubbed, with the corresponding percentages for the proliferating private channels being even higher. Considerable parts of this dubbed material are translated from English. Furthermore, the dubbed material is often among the most popular programmes of the day (Herbst 1994:28).

It is certainly true, then, as Barbe (1996:255) points out, that “[t]he sheer quantity of dubbed material in the receptor culture appears to be an indication of the dominance of one culture over another”. Yet Whitman-Linsen reminds us also that in dubbing countries, the influence exerted by the dominant culture in the form of films is not direct:

The dubbing industry, as one of the prime purveyors of [the] miniature universes contained in every film rooted in a specific culture, is greatly responsible for the way one country is viewed by another. There is no question that the image Europeans have of America is enormously influenced by motion pictures. What is often overlooked is that it is the dubbing industry handling these films which ultimately does the cultural filtering. Dubbing has the power to represent and misrepresent, distort, sway, and in general make a tremendous contribution (positive or negative) to America’s image abroad. (Whitman-Linsen 1992:11)

If this is correct, and I think Whitman-Linsen’s claims may at worst be somewhat exaggerated, dubbing will affect the target audiences’ understanding of any culture, not just America, that manages to export its films to dubbing countries.
The impact of dubbing, especially of material originally produced in English, is thus significant in most dubbing countries. However, almost nowhere does this form of translation reign supreme anymore. When Gautier (1981:115) reports that 90% of all foreign films shown in French cinemas are dubbed, this implies that most or all of the remaining ones are subtitled. Also in Germany, subtitled films can be seen in specialized cinemas or late at night on TV, and for some films shown on TV, there is the choice between the dubbed version and the original soundtrack. As to Spain, both Díaz Cintas (1998:55) and Zabalbeascoa et al. (2001:105) say that subtitling is gradually gaining ground.

Yet while people in dubbing countries may have increasing opportunities of sampling subtitled fare, the converse is also true: Gottlieb (2001g:141) notes that the release of both dubbed and subtitled versions of the same film has become more and more common “in strongly pro-subtitling Scandinavia”. This has made it possible both for him, with regard to Danish (2001g), and myself, with regard to Swedish, to compare different versions in the same target language (cf. also 3.1.1.1). As another example, it can be mentioned that the traditional subtitling country Greece has started to dub the occasional TV programme directed at audiences other than small children (Díaz Cintas 1999:38).

Koolstra et al. (2002:350) discern “a trend towards a preference for subtitling” in Europe, including the dubbing countries, but the head of a German dubbing company “does not expect dubbing to fall into disuse in the future” (Müntefering 2002:16). Perhaps the trend is that the traditional dichotomy between dubbing and subtitling countries is gradually weakened. While general preferences might take generations to overcome, individuals will increasingly enjoy a choice between subtitled, dubbed and original versions, possibly because distributors and TV bosses recognize the heterogeneity of their audiences, and certainly because technical innovation (like the DVD or digital television) will make it increasingly feasible.

1.1.3 The nature of dubbed versions

Even if viewing behaviours and attitudes are gradually changing, I think it is fair to say that dubbing has so far had a worse reputation in subtitling countries than subtitling in dubbing countries. It appears that the whole concept of modifying an audiovisual production in the way dubbing does, by substituting the ‘true’, original languages and voices by ‘fake’, domestic ones, is difficult to
accept for people who are not used to this. Yet it is not only the idea of
dubbing as such, but also the concrete practices and results that are often
criticized in various respects, not least by people who are actually very familiar
with dubbing.

A recurrent complaint is that the dubbing dialogue is somehow flat,
undifferentiated, and stilted. As early as in Hesse-Quack (1967:196), one of the
clearest results was that most of the American slang and French argot in
original film dialogues had no equivalent in the German dubbing. Yvane speaks
of a “ton doublage” that results from the clash between the properties of the
source language and the picture on the one hand, and the properties of the
target language on the other (1996:141). Whitman-Linsen, not mincing words,
decries “unimaginative and devitalized dialogues”, “linguistic whitewashing”
and even “dull, drooping and limp” target-language use (1992:118). These
quotes are part of a veritable three-page rant against the flaws of many German
dubbing solutions and their incompetent perpetrators, in what is nevertheless a
very informative study.

Herbst devotes a large-scale investigation to the properties of a sizeable
corpus of German dubbing dialogues and finds, among other things, that the
choice of lexical items, collocations, verb forms (especially the subjunctive), and
sentence structures, is often too formal for what are supposed to be ordinary
conversations (1994:161ff).10 However, the level of formality is not consistently
high; rather, there are often abrupt, seemingly unmotivated changes in style, to
be found even within one and the same sentence (Herbst 1994:171ff). Furthermore,
textual cohesion is sometimes lost or weakened in various
dubbing solutions, e.g. because of grammatically questionable pro-forms
(1994:178ff). All this contributes to the “unnaturalness of dubbed text” (Herbst
1997:294):

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\text{Just as most people – without seeing the pictures – would be able to tell on the basis of a tape recording whether they are listening to a recording of spontaneous conversation or the soundtrack of a film [...] they are also able to tell quite easily whether they are listening to the soundtrack of an original or a dubbed film. (Herbst 1997:294)}
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That this is not only true of German dubbing is confirmed by a passage in
Zabalbeascoa et al. (2001:109f) about the formality of Catalan dubbing. As

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10 Some of the more general conclusions and views expressed in the impressive book-length study by Herbst (1994) can already be found in Götz & Herbst (1987), as well as in the later papers written individually by Götz (1995) and Herbst (1997).
mentioned earlier, part of the raison d’être of Catalan dubbing is to improve the viewers’ knowledge of the local language. “To meet this aim, media translators must always follow the prescriptive rules of the language. Therefore, in some instances utterances spoken by actors have little to do with the characteristics of the oral spontaneous variety spoken in similar real situations” (Zabalbeascoa et al. 2001:110).

It is interesting to note, therefore, how one of the co-authors of that paper characterizes the Catalan dubbed version of a French series in another publication: “a very formal and conservative language in the French version becomes colloquial and peppered with slang expressions in Catalan” (Izard 2000:153). Izard does consider this “quite unusual”, but the example shows, nevertheless, that there is nothing inherent to dubbing as a system that automatically leads to an overly formal target-text. Also Karin Wehn's article on the second German dubbing of the popular American crime series Magnum, P.I. illustrates this: the TL dialogues have in many cases been rendered less formal, and more youthful and ‘funny’, than both the first German dubbing and the original text (1998:192ff). Perhaps we are witnessing the effects of slow changes in dubbing norms, which might partly be triggered by the less conventional standards and attitudes of the growing private media sector (the second dubbing analyzed by Wehn was made for a private channel).

However, it is not only the level of style that makes some dubbing dialogues seem unnatural; it is also the general absence of markers of regional dialects, even where the original versions make systematic and motivated use of dialects to hint at the provenance, the attitudes, and the social standing of the speakers. Herbst (1994:89ff; 1997:295f) dedicates several pages to the virtual impossibility of substituting SL dialects with ‘corresponding’ TL dialects and thinks that “the use of a regionally neutral pronunciation (in situation where it would not normally be expected) must be seen as a key characteristic of dubbed films” (1997:295). The rationale behind the employment of the standard variety is that anything else would evoke inappropriate associations in the viewers, and that having foreign actors speak e.g. German with a marked regional accent would mean overstepping the line between traditionally accepted and outrageously unacceptable absurdity. “Under these circumstances, the non-regional variant must be considered the one variant that least interferes with the illusion of authenticity” (Götz 1995:222; my translation).

I should point out that there are a few films such as Finding Nemo and Chicken Run (the latter being part of the corpus compiled for this study), where some of the quite distinct, geographically defined dialects spoken by a number
of characters have found TL counterparts in the German dubbing. Thus, the Scottish chicken in *Chicken Run* is made to speak German with a Dutch accent, while another one seems to hail from Austria. In *Monsters, Inc.* (also in my corpus), the dubbed Yeti even sports a strong Southwest German dialect despite the fact that the speech of the original Yeti is regionally quite neutral. Considering the special nature of the films mentioned (comedies based on computer animation or clay figures), of their main settings (the ocean, an unspecified chicken farm, ‘Monstropolis’), and of most of the characters populating them (aquatic animals, chickens and rats, monsters), this is really no problem. Where fictional characters are played by real, human actors, the observations by Götz, Herbst and others about the predominance of the standard variety still seem to hold true.

The problem of how to translate dialects is of course not restricted to dubbing (consider e.g. Irvine Welsh’s novel *Trainspotting*), but while it is the rule that written texts, translations or not, are regionally unmarked, it can have a strange effect when spoken dialogues that are supposed to sound informal, spontaneous and authentic are delivered in well-articulated High German, which would actually only be used by a minority of the audience. However, the general consensus seems to be that there is no viable alternative, and I would add to the arguments mentioned above that the standard dialects are much more conducive to comprehensibility than odd regional varieties. It must also be remembered that all is not lost only because one cannot have an American in Britain speak Bavarian in the German dubbing: where social hierarchies are expressed through the characters’ speech, a lot could be done with the help of motivated choices concerning vocabulary, diction and intonation that have little to do with geography. Yet it is precisely the apparent lack of commitment, and of the ability to dub a part convincingly, that characterizes too much run-of-the-mill dubbing, according to the critics.

**1.1.4 The dubbing voices**

I will return to the topics taken up in the previous section, in connection with a brief account of the work processes in dubbing, which are partly responsible for the shortcomings of many dubbed versions. However, one more aspect that has a lot to do with the nature of this particular form of screen translation, but little with the core linguistic aspects of translation, deserves a few comments. I am referring to the voices of the dubbing actors. Just as dubbing implies the substitution of a dialogue in one language by a dialogue in another, it also
means that one voice is replaced by another (except in those rare cases where
the original actors can dub themselves). This can be felt to be an additional
disturbance, especially when one is familiar with the screen actors’ real voices,
which people from subtitling countries usually are.

It needs to be kept in mind, however, that the large majority of viewers in
dubbing countries will not, as a rule, know the screen actors’ real voices. In fact,
as Herbst (1994:84) rightfully points out, it can also appear strange to people
who have first seen an actor in a dubbed version when they are suddenly
confronted with the original or another dubbing voice. As there is actually little
in the outward appearance of a person except sex and age that can safely be
linked to his or her type of voice, it is mostly the force of habit that makes us
react to unexpected combinations in this regard.11

A large degree of similarity between original and dubbing voice will be
particularly desirable only when there are parts in the film that are going to be
left undubbed, e.g. songs. But even in other cases, the dubbing voice should at
least be plausible, meaning that dubbing actors are not cast randomly. The
minimum requirement is that they have the same sex and approximately the
same age as the original actor whom they are to dub. Götz & Herbst
recommend that the age difference between them not be more than ±10 years
(1987:14). In addition, the kind of character that is to be dubbed (good or bad,
influential or powerless, secure or insecure, etc.) is likely to also play a certain
role for the choice of dubbing actor. Once again, it is Whitman-Linsen who
most clearly points out the risks of this system:

The danger here is in stereotyping. Clichés are encouraged to see all
beautiful actresses with similar (or even the same!) sexy voices, all
cowboys with husky, virile voices and types intended to be funny
with squeaky little voices. The good guys get good-guy voices and
the bad guys get the bad-guy voices. This simply does not
correspond to reality, not to mention the fact that it is a deliberate
and conscious falsification. (Whitman-Linsen 1992:45)

Also here, the strong words imply perhaps harsher generalizations than are
necessary or justified, but it is certainly correct that voice casting, like almost

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11 Wehn (1998:186) reports that some German viewers could not accept the change of dubbing actor
for the popular TV detective Columbo, nor the explanation given to them that the original dubbing
actor had died (“how could Columbo be dead, when they had just seen him on television”). I would
claim that even in hardcore dubbing countries, everybody who has their wits together can distinguish
between dubbed and domestic crime series regardless of the fact that they may temporarily wish to
suppress this ability in the course of a broadcast. Apparently, what was really at stake in the case of
Columbo was that the new dubbing voice was felt to be particularly inappropriate. As Wehn
any aspect of dubbing, could, at least in theory, always be carried out with more discrimination. There are a lot of factors that influence the finished product, however, and many of the perceived shortcomings, including “similar (or even the same!)” voices for different actors, have nothing to do with dubbing as a system of interlingual transfer as such. This may also be a good place to repeat the little anecdote that can be found in various publications on screen translation (e.g. Díaz Cintas 2001:206): Woody Allen apparently once claimed that he preferred the German dubbing voice for the characters played by him to his own. It does not really matter whether Allen was serious at the time; the story suggests that casting suitable voices is indeed quite possible.

1.1.5 The impact of the source language on the translations and on the target language

Every translation is obviously and inevitably influenced by the text it is a translation of. Yet this influence can manifest itself in ways that go beyond a similarity of content: just as the mother tongue can leave its revealing traces in the linguistic production of the foreign-language learner, the source text and its language can shine through, in the form of more or less unidiomatic lexical and grammatical choices, in the target text. This is not quite the same as a translator's simple misunderstanding or carelessness on the semantic level, which can still find its expression in perfectly correct TL use. What I am referring to is, rather, the occurrence of Americanisms and Anglicisms, as well as the probably much rarer Gallicisms, Hispanicisms, Suecisms, etc., in e.g. German translations, including dubbing (and of Germanisms in texts in other languages).

When it comes to German dubbing, we have, on the one hand, the direct and conscious transfer of lexical items from the source language into the target version. Forms of address, titles, and other items designating culture-specific phenomena are often preserved on purpose, proving that it is generally not the case that German dubbing tries to turn foreign movies into seemingly domestic ones. On the contrary, the strategy of letting German dubbing actors say Sir, señorita, or Madame Dupont, as the case may be, can be seen as a sort of atonement for the fact that dubbing interferes so much with the original flair of a film (cf. also Herbst 1994:130f). It should also be mentioned that German dubbing actors, even though they may not always be able to do this without a noticeable German accent, will usually try to say names and other, purposefully retained foreign items in the way they are pronounced in the original version.
This is not the case in France, where foreign names are traditionally pronounced according to the rules of French phonology. However, Goris (1993:179f) assures us that these names are nevertheless recognizable as foreign and that no complete naturalization takes place in this respect.

Yet apart from overt culture markers, there are indications that dubbing, perhaps more than other types of translation (including subtitling), is also quite susceptible to the inadvertent transfer of forms, structures and meanings that do not quite fit into the established TL system. Díaz Cintas (1998:66) arrives at this conclusion from the comparison of the dubbing and the subtitles of the same film (“dubbing shows a greater proclivity to linguistic pollution”) and also refers to others who confirm this tendency for Spanish and Catalan dubbing. The situation is hardly better in Germany, where Götz & Herbst (1987:19) note “a large number of Anglicisms” (my translation), not only in the form of certain lexical and collocational choices, but also when it comes to e.g. verb tense. This is explored and confirmed in more detail in Herbst (1994).

Whitman-Linsen (1992:230ff), too, provides countless examples of, in her opinion, inadequate dubbing solutions that remain too close to the source text, but as so often, one of the most systematic and transparent studies was carried out by Gottlieb (2001g), who actually categorized and counted the Anglicisms in the Danish dubbings and subtitles of three American family films. His results (2001g:159f) show that the Danish dubbing not only features more Anglicisms in general than the subtitles, but also more marked Anglicisms, i.e. what some might label downright faulty TL use. This holds true even if one takes into account the greater overall amount of linguistic material in the dubbed versions.

All these findings suggest that quite frequently, dubbed dialogues do indeed contain features that can be traced back to the source dialogues and that are at odds with the prescriptive rules of the target language – at least when it comes to films shot in English. This, in turn, implies that dubbing can be said to have a considerable influence on the spread of Anglicisms and Americanisms in dubbing countries, which is also the conclusion drawn by most of the authors referred to above. Yet the same could certainly be said of subtitles, too: for one thing, subtitles feature traces from the source text as well,12 if perhaps fewer than dubbing; furthermore, the overall amount of foreign linguistic material accessible to the target audiences is of course much greater in subtitled versions than in dubbed ones, which may well induce viewers to pepper their

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12 Cf. Gottlieb (2001g). Witting Estrup (2001:20) found that no less than one eighth of the subtitles in her corpus were unidiomatic to some degree, presumably due to SL influence.
own TL output with Anglicisms even if the subtitlers manage to avoid this.\footnote{Note, furthermore, that Gottlieb (2001a; 2001f) also found considerable numbers of Anglicisms in the Danish subtitle versions of two films that were not dubbed in that language.}

The SL-induced lack of idiomaticity in much dubbing thus seems to be a fact, but this is just one more of the many shortcomings of real-life translation products that are not, strictly speaking, rooted in the concept of translation as such, but remain open to improvement. Besides, the occurrence of Anglicisms does not normally affect viewers’ comprehension and enjoyment of a film or TV programme in a negative way, and the whole matter is therefore similar to the other perceived flaws of dubbing mentioned, in that the target audiences simply do not seem to care a lot. There have not been, as far as I know, any consistent complaints by Germans about dubbing in Germany, and no high-profile popular movement for the improvement of dubbing quality has emerged.

1.1.6 Synchronization

One of the aspects that are most closely associated with dubbing, and the one that is generally considered to be the main constraint for this form of screen translation, is the synchronization of the TL dialogue with the lip movements of the characters on screen. If any kind of artistic whole similar to the original version is to be recreated, and if the goal is to help the viewers suppress their knowledge that the people moving around in the streets of New York or the English countryside are not likely to speak the viewers’ own language in reality, it is imperative that what can be heard correspond, to a significant degree, to what the picture suggests is being said.

Now, Kilborn claims that “where dubbing has been most regularly practised extremely high standards of lip synchronization have been attained” (1993:644). Whether the standards are indeed “extremely high” or not, it should be noted that acceptable standards are perhaps not quite as difficult to achieve as might be imagined. In fact, there are several factors at play that can make the lip synchronization of a film a less than incredibly tedious task. To begin with, it happens much more often than e.g. Gautier (1981:117) seems to imply that the mouth of the speaker is either not visible at all or at least so small in relation to the rest of the picture that careful synchronization of lips and sounds is not necessary. In his pioneering study of French dubbing, Goris manages to show that there is “a correlation between the degree of synchronization and the extent to which the speaker’s mouth is visible” (1993:181). Herbst (1994:30),
having analyzed one episode of a TV series with a view to ‘lip visibility’, estimates that only in about one quarter of the text are the lips of the speaker so clearly visible that lip synch is very important. In as much as one third of the text, the exact movements of the lips cannot be made out, if the speaker is in the picture at all. Even if the figures will vary from one film to the next, or even between episodes of the same series, extreme lip synch is generally not required throughout. This is confirmed by Chaume Varela for “the Spanish professional context, [where] lip synchrony is only considered essential in close-up and extreme close-up shots or detailed lip shots” (2004:38). Even if it is occasionally claimed that norms are varying between dubbing countries (in particular that perfect lip synchrony is considered more imperative in e.g. Germany than in Italy, where, if a choice has to be made, idiomatic target dialogues may be given priority instead), the fact remains that careful lip synch is more dispensable in some scenes than in others.

Also simplifying the dubber’s task is the circumstance that most positions of the lips can correspond to a number of different sounds, especially in fluent speech. It is, in other words, not necessary to always find a one-to-one match between SL and TL sounds even if the mouth of the speaker is clearly visible, which, moreover, would be virtually impossible to reconcile with the goal of creating a meaningful target dialogue. In fact, the general consensus is that consonants with a place of articulation behind the lips do not matter very much, whereas labial consonants, especially /b/, /p/ and /m/, but also /f/, /v/ and the approximant /w/, require the most attention because they coincide with a closure of the mouth. Otherwise, certain clearly pronounced vowels, especially if they are very rounded, very unrounded, or very open, may also need to be considered in lip synch. However, it is generally sufficient to substitute TL phonemes that are pronounced in similar ways for the problematic SL phonemes, so that e.g. all the labial consonants may often be substituted for each other. Only the English phonemes /θ/ and /ð/, with the tip of the tongue protruding between the teeth, pose an insoluble problem in

14 Interestingly, as Kilborn (1993:645f) points out, the relatively cheap soap operas feature a lot of close-up or medium close-up shots and thus require particular efforts (and money) in a dubbing context.
15 Explicitly referring to the German system, Barbe (1996:257) maintains that “[o]n the principle that the ear is more sensitive than the eye, lip synch is generally subordinated to idiomaticity and natural language fluency”. This seems to stand in contrast to claims made elsewhere and is surprising also in view of the criticism that much German dubbing has attracted in terms of idiomaticity and style. The incongruity suggests that everything is a matter of degree: of course it is more important that the dubbing dialogue is in acceptable German than that lip synch is perfect, but the degree of lip synch that German dubbers strive for may nevertheless be so high that the most appropriate solutions (from a discourse perspective) must sometimes be sacrificed. Or it is simply so that the dubbers’ definition of sufficient idiomaticity is different from that of the critics.
the German dubbing of close-ups, as e.g. Götz & Herbst (1987:16) point out. In this respect, Spanish dubbers have an advantage.

Finally, the dubbers are also helped by the fact that the viewers’ desire, as well as their ability, to detect incongruities between the dubbing sound and the picture is normally limited. Unless they consciously focus on these matters, perhaps because they are only used to subtitling, the viewers will generally try to concentrate on the contents and the plot of a film. This is true especially after the first minutes, when they have had a chance to get absorbed by the story. Thus, the first few reels may be synchronized with special care (Whitman-Linsen 1992:21), but not even the dubbing of close-ups at the beginning of a film will have to be perfect in every respect in order not to spoil the illusion. For example, not only can a similarity, rather than identity, of SL and TL sounds be enough, it may even suffice to place a similar sound in the close vicinity of the original one, rather than in the exact same spot (Herbst 1994:49).

It is also the case that the nucleus of a tone unit ought to be better synchronized than the rest of the syllables, not least because the special emphasis that the nucleus receives may be reflected in visual information such as more marked jaw movements and gestures. This means, on the one hand, that not all elements require the same exactitude when it comes to lip synch even within one and the same utterance. On the other hand, it must be realized that it is not only the lips that need to be taken into account in dubbing, which, unlike the factors discussed above, constitutes an additional constraint in dubbing rather than more leeway.

The movements of the lips are really only a subgroup of all the movements that accompany spoken dialogue, which also include movements in other areas of the face (e.g. eyes, eyebrows), the head as a whole (e.g. shaking, nodding), and the rest of the body (e.g. gestures with the arms and hands). It is important that the dubbing dialogue is also in synch with these other movements, so that a nein or non does not coincide with a nod, or the main stress comes two seconds before the fist is banged on the table. This is referred to as “nucleus sync” (Herbst 1997:292) or “kinetic synchrony” (Chaume Varela 2004:41).16

There is also an aspect of lip synchrony that has not been mentioned yet, and that e.g. Chaume Varela (2004:41) treats as if it were something quite unrelated from “qualitative Lippensynchronität” (Herbst 1994:38), or lip synch proper, which was discussed above. I am speaking of isochrony, or the

16 The significant role that prosody, intonation units, and nuclei ought to have in dubbing is given special emphasis also by Li (1998).
synchronization of the length of the TL utterances to the length of the SL utterances. “[W]ith the exception of song translation[,] dubbing is the only form of translation in which the length of the translated text has to be identical with the length of the original text” (Herbst 1997:292). Lack of synchrony in this respect is generally considered the most disturbing potential flaw that dubbing can have and is thus avoided (Whitman-Linsen 1992:20). It is quite right, therefore, to point out its significance, but in my opinion, isochrony is just another norm subsuming under lip synch: if the speaker’s mouth is closed, we should not be hearing any speech coming from that mouth. Isochrony also shares with qualitative lip synch the circumstance that small deviations in either direction may not be noticed by the viewers, that is, if the target utterance begins or ends a fraction of a second before or after the original one. Especially if the screen actor’s mouth does not close immediately after the last phoneme uttered, there is room to make the dubbing text slightly longer, which may be a boon if the TL uses more words and sounds than the SL to express the same thing (cf. Gautier 1981:104; also Schröter 2003:108).

A lot more could be said about the most prominent of constraints that synchronization is to dubbing, and for more information, I refer once again to the sources quoted in this section. Very often, precise lip synch is either not as important or not as difficult to achieve as may be imagined. That is not to say that it is not a constant challenge to the dubbers in general and the script writer in particular, and one to which there may not always be a completely satisfactory answer. There seems to be an indefinable threshold, however, between imprecise yet still acceptable synchrony that fulfils its function, and disturbing violations of the norms that spoil the illusion which dubbing is meant to create. I am not entirely certain, therefore, whether every viewer would agree with Whitman-Linsen, who claims that “[o]ne cardinal rule of dubbing should be: One asynchronous, yet flowing, well-written line is worth three perfectly synched lines of clumsy or mediocre style” (1992:24f). Yet it is certainly true that “any analysis of audiovisual translation mainly centred on synchronization is necessarily poor” (Chaume Varela 1998:17; original emphasis). In the present study, synchronization will be largely ignored, in fact, even though it should be remembered as an aspect that has possibly had an influence on the dubbing solutions investigated.

17 Though perhaps not as rigidly, once again, in Italy as in other countries (cf. Chaume Varela 2004:47).
1.1.7 The dubbers at work

The dubbing process has been described in some detail and for different countries in a number of publications, including Gautier (1981:115-118), Herbst (1994:13-18), Martínez (2004:passim), and Whitman-Linsen (1992:56-124). Its particularities can be linked to many of the perceived shortcomings of dubbing as a product (and of course also to that which works well), and it is therefore worth outlining the main stages of the process, which Agost (2004:68) summarizes as follows: “commission, translation, adjustment, direction and mixing”. While doing this, I will disregard a number of aspects (including the technical details, which are prone to change quite quickly over time).

When distributors need to get a film dubbed they may contact a number of dubbing companies and ask for quotations (and generally settle for the lowest), or simply give the task to the company they usually work with and whose work they are satisfied with. Once a company has got the job, a translator will produce a rough translation of the dialogues, which will serve as the basis of the dubbing script to be written by a script-writer, who has been specially trained to take the requirements of synchronization into account. This script is then divided into short takes that will be dubbed one at a time, though not normally in chronological order. The dubbing actors are cast, a recording studio is booked, and the dubbing of the various takes is scheduled according to which actors are available when.

In the studio, the dubbing actors stand by a microphone placed in front of a monitor or a large screen on which the takes that are to be dubbed are shown. The dubbing director sits in the recording room with the actors or together with the sound engineer in a room separated from the recording room by a sound-proof glass screen. Further specialists, technicians and assistants will also be involved, including a synch editor and possibly a supervisor. Every take is shown a couple of times before the recording starts, and since the director may well be the only person present who is familiar with the entire film and its plot, he or she will often have to put what is happening on the screen into context for the actors. If necessary, the recordings of every take will be repeated until the director, who is also free to introduce changes to the script even at this stage, is satisfied. After recording, all the material will be mixed together into a finished TL version. The entire process will take about a month to complete, according to Whitman-Linsen (1992:71).

This synopsis should reflect the basic procedure in most dubbing countries and most of the studios in business there, even though certain
differences will occur. The dubbing process in France, for example, is more intricate and costly than the German system, though without necessarily yielding better results (cf. Whitman-Linsen 1992:71-77). However, hidden in the system outlined above are several weaknesses that may affect the final product in negative ways. For one, the translator, the script-writer, and the director are often, though not always, different persons, which means that none has full control over, nor can be held fully responsible for, the properties of the dubbing dialogue. The translators are likely to be underpaid and badly trained for their work, but perhaps nevertheless the only ones who have the ability to understand the SL dialogue, especially if it is in a language other than English. They may be little motivated to do a good job, knowing that their rough translation of the text will not be the final version. Furthermore, it is apparently often so that the translators labour under the impression that a very literal target version will serve the script-writers best, which is not the case if the latter base their work exclusively on the rough translation (e.g. because they are unable or unwilling to take the original version, or the context of the film as a whole, into account). Even if the translators were eager to produce a target version that is satisfactory in every respect, this might not be possible if they have to work predominantly or even exclusively from a written transcript, which can lack important information and deviate from the words actually spoken on the screen.

While the translators may think that everything they translate will be changed and adapted anyway, the script-writers may well be tempted to rely too much on the rough translation and transfer most of the (often very SL-influenced) formulations into their dubbing script, thereby introducing large numbers of Anglicisms (or Gallicisms, etc.) into the dubbed version. They may also be too focused on synchronization, especially lip synch, to always reflect upon the idiomaticity and stylistic appropriateness of the lines they write.

The dubbing directors, being under pressure to use the expensive studio time efficiently, may rely too much on the script to consider the necessity of further modifications in the wording, especially if these go beyond minor, formal changes. The dubbing actors, finally, may be largely ignorant of the nature and contents of the film they are to speak and therefore have no idea of the precise purpose and context of the short individual takes which, furthermore, are likely to be recorded out of order. Uncertain of how to interpret their lines if not helped sufficiently be the director, they may opt for a flat, middle-of-the-road intonation.

All these potential sources of mediocre dubbing have been documented
in the literature, and the improvements that could and should be instituted, at least according to translation researchers, are rather obvious. One solution, though rather theoretical, would be to spend more money, time, and education on the people involved, in order to increase both their motivation and their ability to achieve excellent dubbing. I mention this for the sake of completeness, and not because it would be popular or even feasible in the unfavourable economic conditions that many dubbing companies work under (cf. Müntefering 2002:15).

However, it is also conceivable to change parts of the established dubbing system in a way that need not cost a lot of money in the long run. For example, if there are still translators who must work from a script only, without access to the pictures, the quality of their work could be improved dramatically if they are also provided with a copy of the film. Fortunately, this seems to be the standard situation in most dubbing contexts. What could and is being done increasingly often is to lift the dubbing actors, as well as others who are active behind the scenes, out of their anonymity and credit them for their contribution to the target version. This might function as a moderately effective incentive to care more about quality.18

More profound changes can be made in relation to the fact that the dubbing process is very much a collective enterprise involving many agents, which is stressed by a number of writers on dubbing. In some respects, multi-party collaboration is inevitable for so complex a translation mode. For example, specialist technicians are needed, who cannot be expected to also function as good translators; and no one dubbing actor can speak all the voices in a convincing way. However, it may not always be the best solution to distribute the key tasks (especially translating and script-writing, but also directing) among different persons, none of whom may be able or inclined to take into account all the aspects that lead to high-standard dubbing solutions. Chaume Varela (2004:37, 50) and Whitman-Linsen (1992:122f) are among those who want to see the translator also do the synchronization. It seems that for the German and Swedish dubbing of at least a few of the films included in the present study, two or more of the key tasks have actually been shouldered by one and the same person, which may have been beneficial to the resulting product.19

18 I was positively surprised to see that in the German trailer for the blockbuster hit Finding Nemo, the main dubbing actors were even used to promote the coming attraction. They were presented with their names and shown working in the studio, enjoying themselves. There is no doubt that this will remain the exception, however, especially when it comes to non-animated films. 19 It is not the goal of this study to verify this, however. Its focus, the translation of language-play, is too narrow to permit conclusions about the overall quality of the dubbing.
From what the translation scholars suggest, it would also be good if the dubbing actors could somehow become more concerned about dubbing as an artistic project and behave more like stage performers, which would require them, among other things, to make greater use of the possibility of familiarizing themselves beforehand with the material they are going to dub, and not just the particular takes they are immediately involved in. Furthermore, the sometimes subconscious changes that dubbing actors make while speaking their lines may indicate that the scripted version is not the most idiomatic. Directors would do good to consider whether these modifications are motivated instead of automatically ordering a re-recording. This suggestion comes from Whitman-Linsen (1992:226f), who may be one of the most ardent critics of the state of (especially German) dubbing, but who also contributes numerous ideas for its improvement.

However, all this talk about shortcomings and possible improvements is literally academic. Dubbing companies may follow a number of ethical rules and even take a certain pride in providing good products, but they are also for-profit organizations that will always be forced to strike a balance between the minimally required standards of quality and the maximally allowed costs. Thus, there are strong incentives for them to make their operations cheaper, but apparently not many to make them better, once they have achieved acceptable standards. A scholarly article or dissertation will hardly count as such an incentive. What would count are proofs that mediocre dubbing keeps viewers from watching while excellent dubbing attracts them. No such proofs have emerged so far, permitting Müntefering to suspect that “[i]n the end it is the content of the film which attracts people, and not its form” (2002:16).

I shall now direct my attention to the other form of screen translation considered in this study, i.e. subtitling. I will, however, return to dubbing in 1.3, where some of the information presented in 1.1 will be summarized and weighed against the peculiarities of its main rival on the world stage.

1.2 Subtitling

1.2.1 Introduction

Let me approach the topic of subtitling in the same way as I did with dubbing, i.e. by trying to give a short introduction to what we are dealing with at all.
What then is subtitling? What is it that TV audiences and consumers of other film media in subtitling countries can hardly avoid reading? As I have mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, there has not even been complete agreement as to whether subtitles should be seen as a form of translation at all. The general consensus among translation scholars nowadays is that, yes, they can rightfully be declared a form of translation (although perhaps not a prototypical one). The question is, rather, how this form can be characterized. In brief, subtitles are the TL rendering of the (mostly spoken) SL texts in filmic productions, added to the original version, rather than substituting (a part of) it, in the form of usually one to two lines of written text. This initial definition is just meant to serve as a starting point for further specification, however.

Subtitles have been referred to as intersemiotic translation, apparently on the assumption that not only verbal utterances per se, but also the accompanying facial expressions and gestures are somehow transferred (Reiß & Vermeer 1991:138f). Intersemiotic translation, as introduced by Jakobson, is defined as “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems” (Jakobson 1959:233). When Gottlieb denies that subtitling is intersemiotic in the Jakobsonian sense, he explicitly narrows down subtitling to the translation of speech into writing, i.e. “from one manifestation of the semiotic system cultural language to another” (Gottlieb 1994c:55; my translation). Of course, the para-linguistic features mentioned by Reiß & Vermeer remain unaltered on the screen and can be used to properly interpret the denotative content of the subtitle, as is the case with the original dialogue and its potentially revealing prosody. However, just as it can sometimes prove necessary to make the meaning of certain intonation and stress patterns explicit in the subtitles, because otherwise the audience for whom they are made would not understand the real import of a particular utterance, the same could well be true of the para-linguistic expressions used in some ‘exotic’ cultures. At least in Europe, where most subtitled programmes and films come from cultures sufficiently similar, or at least familiar, to the target culture, this would be an exception. Thus, Gottlieb’s criticism of Reiß & Vermeer’s sweeping claim seems justified.

In his endeavour to place subtitling within a typology of translation,

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20 Unless stated otherwise, **subtitling and subtitles** refer to **interlingual subtitles** in this section. Note also that when I speak of a **subtitle** or **individual subtitles**, I am referring to the one or two lines of text displayed for a few seconds on the screen, not the entire translation of a film or programme.

21 However, there is no reason, in my opinion, why the interpretation could not proceed in the other direction and still be labelled **intersemiotic translation**.

22 **Cultural language** (kultursprog) is Gottlieb’s term for what is usually referred to as **natural language** (Gottlieb 1994c:46).
Gottlieb (1994b:269ff; 1994c:60ff) identifies the following characteristics as the most prominent for this form of transfer:

- polysemiotic medium, i.e. at least two semiotic channels contribute to the message (more, of course, in the case of film media)\(^{23}\)
- subtitles belong to the written mode
- diasemiotic form of translation, because of the shift from the oral to the written mode (most other forms of translation are isosemiotic, e.g. dubbing or literary translation)\(^{24}\)
- there is normally sufficient time to carefully prepare and review the subtitles before they are made public (which is not the case in e.g. simultaneous interpreting)
- the subtitles are fleeting, transient (which is otherwise a characteristic of spoken translations, but not of written ones)
- the original is accessible at the same time as the translation
- subtitles are a form of condensed translation (as is interpreting, but not e.g. dubbing or literary translation)
- the recipients of the translation are not known to the subtitler (which is the case, to some extent, in interpreting, because the interpreter can usually see and communicate directly with the target audience)
- there is no possibility of direct feedback or two-way communication.

In a later work, Gottlieb condenses the most prominent characteristics of subtitles into two formulae. In the first, (interlingual) subtitling is equated with

the rendering in a different language
of verbal messages
in filmic media,
in the shape of one or more lines of written text,
presented on the screen
in sync with the original verbal message. (Gottlieb 2001e:14; numbering omitted)

In the second, more semiotically oriented, formula, subtitling is defined as

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\(^{23}\) Gottlieb (1994c:62) argues that polysemiotic is a more precise term than both audio-medial (Reiß 1971:49ff) and multi-medial, which was introduced in order to widen the denotation of audio-medial (Reiß & Vermeer 1991:159, 211).

\(^{24}\) According to Gottlieb, both iso- and diasemiotic transfers are still intrasemiotic, because the semiotic system, namely cultural language, remains the same (1994c:60).
prepared communication
using written language
acting as an additive
and synchronous semiotic channel,
as part of a transient
and polysemiotic text. (Gottlieb 2001c:15; numbering and bold face omitted)

In accounts of the nature of subtitles, their rather unusual property of being a form of additive translation is often highlighted. Delabastita once described this as “visual verbal signs x adiectio” [sic], explaining that in subtitling, “the target film macrosign is an exact copy of the source film sign apart from the addition of new visual verbal signs” (Delabastita 1989:200). However, he also points out that technically, this status of subtitles as a pure addition is rarely deserved, since subtitles reduce the amount of non-verbal information in a film when they are displayed on the picture rather than below it, for example. Psychologically, it is the audience’s degree of familiarity with, and acceptance of, subtitles that will decide to what extent they are regarded as an intrusion or as a (welcome) supplement (Delabastita 1989:204f).

Be that as it may, the fact remains that in a subtitled version, the original dialogue is always present and potentially accessible. This has important implications for the contents of the subtitles, particularly in those cases where the target audience can be expected to have some knowledge of the source language. Quite apart from questions related to the opportunities for manipulation and censorship, the always audible dialogue can limit the number of choices available to the subtitler when it comes to the order in which information is presented, how questions are rendered, or how culture-bound elements are dealt with (cf. section 1.2.7).

Yet the mere presence of the original dialogue in subtitled films and programmes, and its absence in dubbed versions, does not suffice to characterize subtitling as an overt form of translation and dubbing as covert, as was done by Gottlieb (1994a:102), with explicit reference to House. In House’s model, slightly modified and explained further in House (1997), the presence or absence of the original is not an issue, because the presence of the original together with the translation is the absolute exception. Subtitling and dubbing are not mentioned either. Rather, in the discussion of overt vs. covert, we are dealing with a variation on the theme of ‘taking the reader to the work or the

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25 The corresponding formula for dubbing is “acoustic verbal signs x substitutio” (Delabastita 1989:200).
work to the reader: Is the translation recognizable as a translation or does it look like an original? Does it reflect the source culture or the target culture? Does it try to inform about the function the original had vis-à-vis the original audience or does it try to recreate the same function for the target audience? Unfortunately, House’s overt/covert distinction seems to be one of those “false dichotomies” so justly denounced by e.g. Langacker (1987:18). If overt and covert were points on a scale, a possibility not acknowledged by House (1997), it would be defensible to describe subtitling as more overt than dubbing, although, and this should be stressed, both subtitled and dubbed versions can usually be assumed to have a function quite similar, if not identical, to the one the original version had for the SL audience, and neither of them is likely to fulfil this function completely.

As a matter of fact, Gottlieb himself suggested equivalence of effect as an ideal for the screen translator, but was willing to settle for a slightly more humble goal:

In trying to get the message through to the target audience, across language and culture barriers, a more realistic ideal would be achieving the same effect on the audience as the one the original audience experienced; the same text they cannot get. But perhaps the ultimate result a (screen) translator can opt for is simply giving the target audience the experience they would have had if they already knew the foreign language in question. (Gottlieb 1994b:265)

In the same paper, while apparently not doubting that possibility for dubbing, Gottlieb (1994b:265f) questions whether equivalence of effect could ever be achieved in subtitling, if only because the resulting version, unlike the original, has to be partly read. For Marleau (1982:274), it is the in many cases necessary compression of the dialogue that stands in the way of fulfilling the “fonction émotive” of the subtitles. This, in turn, would influence the overall effect of the film on the target audience.

1.2.2 The spread and impact of subtitles

In Western Europe, the following countries are among those where subtitling is the dominant form of screen translation, according to Gambier (1996:9): Denmark, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands,
Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Wales and parts of Belgium. Gottlieb (1992:169) also mentions the Faroe Islands. Later, he adds Slovenia and Croatia to the list, while pointing out that countries like Britain and France also subtitle some of their imported foreign-language films (Gottlieb 1997a:310).

In subtitling countries, subtitles are the standard mode of screen translation, while other modes like dubbing, voice-over or narration are reserved for special audiences and/or special genres (e.g. children’s programmes, advertisements, documentaries) and thus remain the exception. Due to the generally large number of foreign-language productions shown on most European TV channels, the great majority of the literate population in subtitling countries are exposed to subtitles regularly, if not daily. We can even suspect that subtitles are about the only text that some people still read voluntarily in their spare time.

According to Gambier (1994:275), up to seven foreign programmes an evening were broadcast on Finnish television (apparently in the early 1990s), while Gottlieb (1997b:151ff) showed that TV subtitles were the most widely read form of written translation in Denmark in 1993, which confirms his findings for the late 1980s (Gottlieb 1992:137ff). At about the same time, the translation department of Sveriges Television, the Swedish public service television, produced about 600 000 individual subtitles per year, including a small percentage of intralingual subtitles, but excluding interlingual subtitles occurring in the news (Brunskog 1989:31).

Considering the proliferation of TV channels, in addition to increased around-the-clock broadcasting on many of them, and the steady rise in the number of film productions around the world (available first at cinemas, then on video and DVD, then on pay TV and finally on regular networks), the total amount of subtitles produced for the different media is certain to have increased dramatically over the past decades.

1.2.3 Appearance of subtitles on the screen

Perhaps it is time to briefly describe the outward appearance of subtitles as they appear on the TV or cinema screen: In Western Europe, interlingual subtitles usually appear in the form of one or two lines of text at the bottom of the

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26 While Gambier calls Wales a subtitling country, I have indicated in 1.1.2 that when the target language is Welsh, Wales is (also) a dubbing country. As to Belgium, Gambier (1996:9) must refer to Flanders, where “[a]ll foreign programmes are subtitled; dubbing is virtually non-existent on Flemish television” (Meylaerts 2001:93).

27 By comparison, cinema and video subtitles were rarely experienced (Gottlieb 1994c:151f).
screen. In those cases where there are subtitles in two languages, as in Finnish cinema or sometimes on Finland’s Swedish Television, only one line is available for each language (Gummerus 1996:167). The letters are normally white, in a sans-serif font, spaced proportionally, and with a greyish shadow or background box that becomes darker if the underlying picture becomes brighter, and vice versa. In teletext subtitles, the surrounding box is pitch black. These features combine to make the reading as easy as possible (for a discussion of the alternatives, cf. Ivarsson (1992:53ff)). The problems with indecipherable white subtitles against a bright background, or flickering or ‘bleeding’ subtitles, still denounced by e.g. Gautier (1981:103f) and Marleau (1982:271), are now largely a thing of the past. In the cinema, and normally on DVD, the subtitles are centred in the middle, while left-justification used to be the standard on TV and video in most countries28, except when signs, book titles or the like are translated. Compared to the other kinds, cinema subtitles take up a smaller portion of the picture.

Of course, variations exist: some TV stations may permit the occasional use of three lines within one subtitle or provide for the possibility of having the subtitles at the top of the screen if they would otherwise cover important information at the bottom. Subtitles in e.g. Hebrew and Arabic, which read from right to left, would of course not be aligned on the left, while in countries where reading the local script along the vertical axis poses no problem (e.g. Japan), ‘subtitles’ can appear at the side of the picture (Gottlieb 2001e:15). In those cases where a cinema film is not cut at the edges but is shown in its original widescreen format on a 4:3 TV screen, the subtitles can be fitted into the lower of the two black stripes resulting from the clash of formats. Since they do not cover any part of the action, they can then be said to be truly additive in nature (cf. 1.2.1).

A distinction should also be made between open subtitles, which cannot be turned off, and closed subtitles, which can be chosen optionally. Almost all interlingual subtitles are still of the open kind, with DVD subtitles constituting a notable exception, while intralingual subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing must usually be accessed through the teletext menu. (For a discussion of the

28 Cinema subtitles are centred so that people occupying the outer seats of the front rows can read them comfortably. Regarding TV, Pollard (2002:25) maintains that it is easier to read subtitles with left- or right-justification, depending on the language, because the viewer will always know where to look for the start of the line. In that case, the centred DVD subtitles would pose increased processing difficulties as compared to TV subtitles. However, Pollard’s claim does not contradict Gottlieb’s (1994c:25) that, in Denmark at least, the standard for TV subtitles was changed from centred to left-aligned in the 70s for economic reasons: because everything was done manually then, it took too much time to place the subtitles in the centre. This change became the norm in subsequent decades, though nowadays Danish TV subtitles are again centred on the screen.
present situation and possible alternatives, see 1.2.9.)

1.2.4 Subtitle size and display rates

One subtitle line normally has space for between 30 and 40 characters, including spaces. The exact number depends on the font used and the spelling of the words in it. A line will accommodate more small letters than capital letters, and more /s, /s and j/s than m/s and w/s.

Although some minor differences may exist, and although a particular sequence in a programme may call for exceptional solutions, most subtitlers in Europe work with similar exposure times for individual subtitles. These exposure times are supposed to be long enough to permit comfortable reading for the large majority of viewers, but not longer (for a variety of reasons; see below). One rule of thumb is three to five seconds for one line and four to six for two lines (Pollard 2002:25), while de Linde & Kay (1999b:7) found that actual times are around three seconds for one line, five to six seconds for two, and eight seconds for three lines. It is not quite clear, however, whether these latter figures are for intra- or interlingual subtitles or both. Kovačić (1998:76) speaks of the “well-known 7-second principle (i.e. on average, it takes viewers six to seven seconds to read a two-line subtitle)”, but if six to seven seconds were only the average, the subtitles would have to stay on screen even longer for slower readers, which they do not. Gottlieb (2001e:20) mentions a speed limit of around twelve characters per second (based on the assumption that 90% of the viewers would be able to follow the subtitles at such a speed) and recommends that “a full two-liner should stay on the screen for at least five seconds”. Although exceptions do occur in practice (Wildblood 2002:41), even the shortest subtitles should stay on for at least one and a half (Ivarsson 1992:38) or two seconds (Gottlieb 1989:11) so that the viewers have a chance to detect them. For similar reasons, there should be a break of at least 4 frames (1/6 of a second) between different subtitles, because viewers might not notice the change otherwise (Ivarsson 1992:39). According to Wildblood (2002:41), it is quite possible to impose different reading speeds on the viewers, depending on the nature of the subtitled dialogue, but these speeds must be set at the beginning and not vary too much and too often in the course of a programme.

The major reason why individual subtitles should not be exposed for too long is of course the pressure from the continuing dialogue that is begging to be translated. Longer exposure times often imply a greater reduction in the amount of information that can be conveyed. Another reason is that viewers
start reading the subtitles again if they stay on for longer than normal (de Linde & Kay 1999b:64; d’Ydewalle 1984:202f), and that there will be less time for looking at the picture. A study with intralingual subtitles even suggests that processing speed increases with subtitle speed and that slower subtitles do not necessarily lead to better comprehension (de Linde & Kay 1999b:63ff). Finally, the longer the accepted exposure time, the more likely it is that the subtitle will extend over a cut, i.e. a change of camera perspective, which is deemed undesirable (see 1.2.7).

It can also be interesting to note the number of subtitles per time unit and the combined exposure time of these subtitles as compared to the total length of a programme. The figures Gottlieb (1994c:140f) provides are not necessarily representative, but they serve as an indicator: a feature film investigated by him (106 minutes of action) had 784 Danish subtitles (7.3 per minute) with an accumulated exposure time of slightly more than 52 minutes; an episode of a talk-intensive TV series had as many as 528 subtitles in 45 minutes (11.7 per minute) with 33 minutes of accumulated exposure time. The exposure times would have been longer, had the short breaks between subtitles that follow each other closely also been included. In an interesting experiment, Kovačić (1998) showed that six different subtitlers can produce quite different subtitling solutions for the same source text. Unfortunately, we are not informed about the length of the subtitled passage, but while one subtitler made do with 120 subtitles and four others with no more than 134, one subtitler used 157.29

Finally, subtitle rates can also be calculated in words per minute (words per subtitle divided by presentation time). Compared to the number of subtitles per time unit, this measure can provide a better impression of the reading load that viewers have to master while following a programme (de Linde & Kay 1999b:45). 110 to 140 words per minute for adults and an average of around 90 words per minute for children are mentioned as actual rates for (intralingual) subtitles in de Linde & Kay (1999b:45, 54).

1.2.5 Loss of information in quantitative terms

It is generally said that the subtitler has to struggle with both space and time constraints, but as Gottlieb (1992:164) has rightly pointed out, the available

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29 The percentage of one-liners was in all cases relatively low, but the two persons who had created the highest and lowest overall number of subtitles, respectively, also had used the most one-liners: the one with the fewest because one line often sufficed for him where the others needed two, the other because she sometimes needed an additional line in order to complete a two-liner (Kovačić 1998:76).
space of around 70 characters in a two-liner would be enough to render the entire content of the dialogue, were it not for the fact that viewers are assumed to read more slowly than the actors talk. Of course, reading speeds vary for each individual, and they also depend on the amount of visual information that has to be processed simultaneously. The subtitles will also be read less closely if the viewer is able to extract significant information from the original dialogue.

But for the moment, while “one-size-fits-all” subtitles (Gottlieb 1994a:118) are the rule, the slower readers and the viewers who are not familiar with the source language set the pace. This often leads to considerable reductions in quantitative terms.³⁰ Brunskog (1989:33) considers a reduction of 1/3 to be standard, while Gottlieb (1994c:72) speaks of a reduction span between 20 and 50 percent. An investigation of different TV genres with intralingual subtitles showed that the subtitles contained on average 43% fewer words per minute than the original dialogue (de Linde & Kay 1999b:50f). In a detailed analysis of a 40-minute excerpt of the American feature film The Nutty Professor, I found that the number of words was reduced by 42% in the Swedish TV subtitles and by 34% in the Swedish DVD subtitles (Schröter 2003:108). This confirms the findings by Kovačič (1998) that different subtitlers produce very different subtitles, and it is also a reminder that different subtitling norms can dominate in different media.

It should not be forgotten either that different languages use varying amounts of linguistic material in order to express the same content. For example, structural differences between English and Slovene explain why translations from the former into the latter are 10 to 30 percent longer than the source text (Kovačič 1994:245). When I transcribed both the original American dialogue and the German dubbing of The Nutty Professor, it turned out that the transcription of the dubbing text took about 13% more space although it contained 4% fewer words (cf. 1.1.5). Obviously, the average German word is longer than the average English word, with Swedish words lying in between (Schröter 2003:108). Similar differences can be assumed to exist between most language pairs, and the extent to which a dialogue must be reduced in subtitling will depend partly on these differences.

A few attempts have been made to quantify the loss of *information* in subtitles rather than the mere reduction in the number of words or space. In a study of a feature film, Gottlieb (1992:166f) found that “only 16% of the

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³⁰ The feedback effect from the picture, the sound track, and the para-linguistic aspects of the dialogue also plays a role in the production of the subtitles, as does the speaking and cutting rhythm (cf. 1.2.7), but if individual viewers have differing processing skills in these respects, they are probably not consciously taken into account by the subtitlers.
original verbal segments [...] suffer a loss of (semantic or stylistic) information”, adding that, since not all information was lost in those cases, the total loss is much smaller. Based on Gottlieb’s study, Berggren (2000) conducted her own, this time of an episode of a TV series, and found a loss of information for 18% of the speech segments of the dialogue.\footnote{Berggren only considered semantic information, while Gottlieb included stylistic information, too. The units of analysis on which the studies are based are not very well defined in either case.}

1.2.6 What is lost?

One of the characteristics of subtitles that have already been touched upon in previous sections, and one that is often stressed in the literature, is the fact that in the overwhelming majority of cases, subtitles are the written TL representation of what has been expressed orally in SL (the rare exception being the translation of written information in the form of e.g. signs, letters, and captions in the original version). This has led Gottlieb (1994a) to introduce the term “diagonal translation”, which serves to distinguish interlingual subtitling from “horizontal” forms of transfer on the one hand (speech to speech in interpreting; writing to writing in e.g. literary translation, which is what translation used to denote), and from “vertical” transfer on the other (from one mode to another within the same language, e.g. intralingual subtitling). The pros and cons of these particular labels can be discussed, but they help to highlight the special status of subtitling among the different types of translation.\footnote{Gambier (1994:278) stresses that subtitles are not the only type of translation where a change of both language and semiotic channel occurs. He mentions opera surtitling (which, however, is essentially the same as subtitling, even if the particulars differ) and the translated transcripts of debates at international conferences. He could have added translated interviews in e.g. news magazines, which would have been a slightly less marginal phenomenon. Interlingual translation of written text into spoken takes place, for example, when I ‘read’ to my children in German what is written in Swedish in some of their books.}

Spoken and written texts are very different in many respects (also across languages). Aitchison (1995:107) sums up her comparison with the following, simple list:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spoken</th>
<th>Written</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than one participant</td>
<td>Single writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inexplicit</td>
<td>Explicit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetitive</td>
<td>Non-repetitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fragments</td>
<td>Full sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple structure</td>
<td>Elaborate structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concrete, common vocabulary</td>
<td>Abstract, less common vocabulary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnote{Berggren only considered semantic information, while Gottlieb included stylistic information, too. The units of analysis on which the studies are based are not very well defined in either case.}
\footnote{Gambier (1994:278) stresses that subtitles are not the only type of translation where a change of both language and semiotic channel occurs. He mentions opera surtitling (which, however, is essentially the same as subtitling, even if the particulars differ) and the translated transcripts of debates at international conferences. He could have added translated interviews in e.g. news magazines, which would have been a slightly less marginal phenomenon. Interlingual translation of written text into spoken takes place, for example, when I ‘read’ to my children in German what is written in Swedish in some of their books.}
\end{footnotesize}
Obviously, there are other differences, too: the meaning carried by suprasegmental phonetic features is conveyed by other means in writing, such as unambiguous expressions or typographical conventions (e.g. italics for emphasis). de Linde & Kay (1999a:48f) also point to the higher lexical density and the tendency towards nominalization in written language. From the perspective of the subtitler, Gottlieb (1994a:105f) stresses the more problematic aspects of spoken language that must be translated into written:

- pauses, false starts, self-corrections, and interruptions
- unfinished sentences and ‘grammatically unacceptable’ constructions
- slips of the tongue, self-contradictions, ambiguities, and nonsense
- situations where people all talk at the same time.

Strictly speaking, features like self-contradictions, ambiguities, and nonsense are not limited to speech, but they are more common and somewhat less offensive there than in written texts. In comparison to spoken language, writing is governed by stricter norms and enjoys a higher status, and Gambier (1994:280) even speaks of “a certain sanctity attached to written discourse in our culture”.

Anyone who has seen a transcript of authentic, unprepared communication will know the increased effort it takes to read, and make sense of, the text. Unedited written renderings of spontaneous oral discourse also have the power to make perfectly sensible speakers seem inarticulate and even silly, which explains why interviews are usually ‘tidied up’ before they are printed. The implications for subtitling are the same: even if there were no time constraints, the mode shift from spoken to written language would still make certain omissions and streamlining inevitable, and all the elements in the original dialogue that are unacceptable in standard, even informal, writing are likely to be among the first that are omitted in the subtitles. This is confirmed by e.g. Blom (1998) for Norwegian and Assis Rosa (2001) for Portuguese subtitles, though the analysis of any programme subtitled into any language would probably confirm this general tendency. However, subtitles will never be written language par excellence, precisely because they do render spoken dialogue, and because they are only one of the many channels in film media that cooperate in forming “the ‘macro-sign’ of the film as a whole” (Delabastita

33 de Linde (1995:12) mentions visual signs like the ‘smileys’ often used in electronic communication, though it is debatable to what extent these can be considered writing. There is no doubt, however, that they can complement writing in a meaningful way.
The extent to which originally spoken language is made to conform to the standards of written varies: both Blom (1998:84) and Assis Rosa (2001:216ff) acknowledge that certain oral features are sometimes preserved in subtitles, but like Kovačić (1995:107ff) they are still critical of the apparently powerful norms that make most subtitlers choose solutions typical of written texts, even when a more oral style would be a feasible alternative.34

In the context of the investigation that forms the core of this thesis, it must also be pointed out that different norms are likely to apply when slips of the tongue, ambiguities, and similar phenomena form the basis of a pun or another form of language-play. The more obvious it is that such an irregularity was intended, perhaps the more likely it is that there will efforts on the part of the subtitler to actually recreate the original effect in the target language. On the other hand, Morgan (2001:164) claims that “humour is the first thing to go in translation”. I shall leave these issues for now, however, and deal with them in greater detail in sections 2.3.4, 2.3.5, and 2.3.8.

Apart from the potentially problematic aspects of informal spoken discourse listed above, Gottlieb (1994a:106) also mentions the trouble subtitlers may have with dialectal features, speaker idiosyncrasies and indistinct pronunciation. While the last point ‘merely’ has to do with comprehension, dialects and idiosyncratic language use can pose transfer problems even when the semantic content of what is being said is well understood. Once again, and possibly still more than is the case with socially determined features of spoken language, the common strategy seems to be to normalize dialects towards the standard, geographically unmarked, written form of the target language. Exceptions to this general rule can be expected when dialects and other ‘-lects’ play a special role in scripted interaction by palpably contributing to the characterization of certain individuals. Assis Rosa (2001:217) provides the example of two film adaptations of Shaw’s Pygmalion, shown with subtitles on different Portuguese TV channels. The conflict of non-standard vs. standard language being a central theme of the plot, it was in one case reflected by the occasional use of non-standard vocabulary, and in the other by a broader repertoire of informal vocabulary, devious spelling, and the inclusion of oral

34 Remael (2001:18), on the other hand, argues that the dialogue in feature films is not true spoken language since it is originally scripted, serves dramatic considerations, and thus differs from genuine conversation. In my opinion, this does not change the general picture: first of all, not all subtitles are translations of scripted dialogue; second, the dialogue in films is designed to function as credible spoken conversation and does reach the audience in that role; finally, if there are few omissible features typical of spoken discourse in film dialogue, which is quite possible, the subtitler will just have to rely on other strategies to condense the text, and the stylistic differences between original and subtitles might turn out to be relatively small; but to the extent that such features are present, they are probably not reproduced in the subtitles.
A related issue is the treatment of vulgar elements in the SL dialogue. As the resistance to taboo and swear words on film has been diminishing in the main exporting countries, subtitlers increasingly have had to deal with what many consider ‘offensive’ language. This is not only a question of how permissive the target culture is in comparison to the source culture: the distinction between spoken and written language plays a role here, too. Even if the equivalents of the famous English four-letter words are commonly used in the informal speech of many of its members, “the audience will be more offended by written crudeness than by actual oral usage” (Roffe 1995:221). Or, as Card describes it: “In the passage from the spoken to the written mode, the emotive force of the utterance is transformed and can become stronger. In other words, that which does not shock the ears may shock the eyes” (1998:208; my translation). This may imply that taboo words are translated into something weaker in subtitles, or that they are left out altogether, for example when they are habitually used as reinforcement, as is often the case with the English word *fucking*.

However, unlike the skipping of repetitions, fillers and redundant elements of spoken language, the rendering of dialects and swear words in a more standard and cleaner version of TL seldom saves space. In what way, then, can the dialogue be compressed further, if the time constraints require it? Kovačič (1994), using relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson 1986) as a theoretical backdrop, argues that it is often possible to condense the SL text into readable subtitles by using TL constituents which, although shorter than their SL counterparts and not direct equivalents, carry essentially the same propositional content in the context. Many parts of the original dialogue can even be left out altogether, without loss of important information, because the image and/or other parts of the dialogue convey the same meaning in another way. Yet redundant elements fulfil a function, too, and the time- and space-saving effects of their omission must in each case be weighed carefully against the disadvantages: “On the one hand, the target audience is spared the effort of

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35 *Pygmalion* and *My Fair Lady* seem to be a screen translator’s, or perhaps any translator’s, nightmare: also Herbst (1994:112-122) devotes considerable attention to it, though his focus is on the possibilities of an adequate dubbing. Interestingly, different varieties of a language can be problematic even when it functions as the TL. The situation in Wales is a case in point, with two broad dialects of spoken Welsh, established literary Welsh (which is very different from spoken Welsh) and a new form of standardized written Welsh competing as the language of subtitles (Roffe 1995:219f). In Norway, it has been regulated by law how the two major dialects are used in the media.

36 Print media often only use the first letter of such words, as in *F***** idiot*. Since the readers know what this stands for, it literally does not have to be spelled out for them.
processing the missing part, but, on the other hand, they may find it more difficult to process the remaining part” (Kovačić 1994:250).

If the subtitler is not able or willing to find a solution that satisfies both the time constraints and the requirement to transfer as much as possible of the original content, the more extreme of Gottlieb’s (1992:166) translation strategies will be resorted to: decimation, deletion and resignation. All of these result in the loss of some stylistic or semantic information, but in the case of decimation and deletion, this loss can sometimes be compensated for by information sent through the other channels that contribute to the overall message of the film. Resignation often occurs with ‘untranslatable’ elements closely linked to the source language or culture, especially if the feedback effect from e.g. the image makes a substitution very difficult (Gottlieb 1992:166f). The results of this study, presented in chapters 4 to 7, will constitute a partial test of this claim.

1.2.7 The interplay of picture, dialogue, and subtitles

As indicated earlier, the interplay of the picture, the dialogue, the subtitles and, it should be added, the non-verbal sound effects and the music are partly responsible for the special status that subtitling has in the typology of translation. This interplay also affects the size and the display rate of the individual subtitles, and determines in part how the content of the dialogue is condensed. Here, this aspect of subtitling will receive some more attention.

It has by now become almost self-evident, at least among translation scholars, that it will not suffice to simply compare the wording of the original dialogue in a film or similar kind of message with the content of the subtitles if a well-founded quality assessment of the latter is the goal. “[I]n judging the quality of subtitles, one must examine the degree to which the subtitled version as a whole manages to convey the semantic gestalt of the original” (Gottlieb 1994a:106, original emphasis). This demand will be taken into account in my investigation of the screen translation of language-play. However, the relationship between the different channels in translated film media is first and foremost an issue for the subtitler and the viewers.

In order not to disturb the aesthetic value of a programme more than they are already forced to by the nature of their translations, subtitlers try to follow a rule according to which cuts should be respected whenever possible. However,

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37 As will have become clear from section 1.1, the interplay between picture and sound is highly relevant for dubbing, too, though not always in the same way (consider lip synch).
38 Cattrysse (2001:1) demands the same for the assessment of multimedia translation.
it seems that ‘whenever possible’ means ‘almost always’ in cinema subtitling, while the TV subtitler is more likely to follow the rhythm of the dialogue if there is a conflict with the cutting (cf. e.g. Reid 1996:90f). There are indications that subtitles extending over shot changes are more difficult to process than those that do not, but despite this, de Linde & Kay (1999b:48) found in their study of British intralingual TV subtitles that the average subtitle extended over at least one shot change in all the genres investigated. Since they also found that longer display times do not necessarily reduce processing efforts or increase comprehension (cf. 1.2.4), perhaps TV subtitlers should rethink their priorities. On the other hand, it seems that cuts separating major scenes, as opposed to those that merely accompany a change of camera angle, are usually respected even on television. Furthermore, it is important to point out that subtitles are not normally conceptualized during the production of a programme. For special effect, and perhaps because it reflects our ever-faster life-styles, the cutting rate of some programmes far exceeds any acceptable subtitle display rate, so that synchrony between the two is not possible.

Since subtitles are rarely considered in the planning of the original, the lower part of the image is not consciously kept free from interesting visual information. Except to those who always consider subtitles, qua subtitles, an irritating infringement upon the integrity of a film, this is seldom felt to be a serious problem, though, as the focus of the action tends to lie in the upper two-thirds or so of the picture. When people are shown on the screen, which is the normal state of affairs except for certain documentaries, the subtitles will usually cover a part of the legs or of the torso. It is only in close-ups that they may conceal a part of the face, most likely including the lips, and this is indeed annoying for most of the audience. The same is true if original captions or other written information is blocked by subtitles rendering the spoken discourse that goes on simultaneously. Of course, everything in the picture is potentially interesting, and as long as subtitles are superimposed on it, criticism of their intrusive effect remains valid.

The increased effort required to process both non-verbal visual information and written text at virtually the same time remains the bigger issue, though. Regardless of how fast the viewers can read the subtitles, it will take them at least some second(s) for each, during which time the image will receive reduced attention. Conversely, even the short moments that have to be allowed for the processing of the image, no matter if this takes place before, after or

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39 But cf. Gummerus & Paro (2001:142), who see signs that translators are now more frequently used as consultants in the planning stage of a production.
while a subtitle is visible, have a limiting influence on the display rate of the subtitles.

Yet the challenge of reading and watching (and listening) all at once should not be exaggerated either: firstly, the audiences of subtitled programmes do not have to pay as much attention to the spoken dialogue as those who watch untranslated or dubbed versions. Secondly, many rules have been adopted in recent years that make the subtitles as readable, i.e. as easy to process, as possible. Among other things, the text is segmented so that grammatical units are respected, both within and across subtitles. This is sometimes called “sense blocking” (Wildblood 2002:41). For example, a noun phrase consisting of determiner, adjective and noun head should preferably not extend over a line break within a subtitle, let alone over two subtitles. The best place for a line break is after a clause or a sentence.

According to other rules, common words are preferred to unusual ones; hyphenation is avoided; the use of devices such as dashes, dots and italics is conventionalized so that they help understanding rather than cause confusion (cf. Céron 2001); and the upper line in a left-adjusted two-line subtitle is often kept shorter than the lower one so that the necessary eye movements are kept to a minimum, as in the following example:

In this case, a longer eye movement is required. In this case, the eye movement is much shorter.

I refer to Ivarsson (1992) for more recommendations of this kind. Combined with an improved optical appearance of the subtitles, these rules allow seasoned viewers with no reading disabilities to process both the text and the rest of the programme with relative ease. Becquemont (1996:147) insists, however, that reading subtitles can be tiring, especially if their combined display time makes up a large percentage of the overall runtime of a film. While this may be so, the apparently dense and important verbal information in such films will also make them unusually demanding for the original audience, who only need to listen to the soundtrack.

Finally, the feedback effect from the picture and the audio-channel can be considerable, especially if the language of the dialogue is relatively familiar to the target audience, which is likely to be the case with the numerous programmes that have been imported from an English-speaking or a neighbouring country. This means that viewers can often glean the same information from both the dialogue and the subtitles, and sometimes even from the picture, and the subtitler will have to take this into account when the
subtitles are formulated. It is only when the SL is very dissimilar from the TI. and completely unknown to the target audience (perhaps to such an extent that not even names can be recognized in the dialogue because their spelling in the subtitles suggests a different pronunciation, that the subtitler is virtually free to write more or less anything in any order – just like a dubber. This may happen, for example, with the occasional Chinese movie shown in Europe. Normally, however, subtitlers are expected to keep clashes between picture and dialogue on the one hand, and the subtitles on the other, to a minimum (cf. e.g. Haddal (1989:23)).

Apart from outright mistranslations, which viewers love to detect and make fun of, clashes also occur when information is not presented in the same order or at the same speed in the dialogue and in the subtitles. An example of a serious clash, occurring in a French subtitled version of *Mr. Arkadin*, a. k. a. *Confidential Report*, is cited by both Becquemont (1996:151) and Cornu (1996:159):40

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original dialogue</th>
<th>Subtitles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My name is Van Stratten.</td>
<td>A Naples un certain Bracco…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The first time I heard the name Arkadin was in Naples.</td>
<td>…m’a parlé d’Arkadin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A man Bracco told it to my girl.</td>
<td>Il a confié un secret à Milly.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While a complete assessment would require access to a larger part of the dialogue and to the visual action (see the beginning of this section), it is quite obvious in this case that important information is not presented in synchrony. This can lead to considerable processing difficulties for the viewers.

Unfortunately, it is not uncommon that the subtitles disclose information too early. In talk-intensive sit-coms, for example, punchlines are often shown in the subtitles together with the preceding utterance. Fast readers will then be able to get the joke before it has been finished in the original dialogue and are left with an undesirable choice of when to laugh. Similarly, the tension in more dramatic genres sometimes hinges on the uncertainty concerning the content of the last word or words in a sentence. Frequently, there is even a short break, as in: *The jury finds the defendant … guilty/not guilty.* If the whole sentence is fitted into one subtitle rather than two, the unity of picture, dialogue and subtitles is severely disturbed.

Gottlieb (1994a:111f; 1999:146) also points to a different sort of clash,

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40 In the reproduction of the example here, the spelling and segmentation follows Cornu (1996:159), but the punctuation in the original dialogue has been slightly changed.
namely when e.g. English *yes* and *no*, words that are understood by virtually everybody in most target audiences, are rendered by words meaning the opposite because the preceding question has been formulated in a different way. This can happen, for example, when the common English construction *Do you mind if I …* is translated into idiomatic Danish, Swedish, German, etc., often leading to formulations that could be rendered as *Can/May I …* in English. If the answer to the first question is *no*, it would have to be *yes* to the second. The incongruity between an aurally perceived *no* and a written *yes* may confuse the viewers and thus justifies a less idiomatic phrasing of the preceding question in the subtitles.

However, all the pitfalls and constraints of subtitling notwithstanding, it should not be forgotten that the complex interplay of the subtitles with the other semiotic channels often functions as a support both for the subtitler and the target audience (Gottlieb 1994c:112): the overlap of information coming from synchronized sources can sometimes facilitate the formulation as well as the processing of the subtitles. So far, though, this circumstance has only received little attention in the literature.

### 1.2.8 The subtitler at work

In the previous sections, I have already discussed the constraints that subtitling as a type of translation imposes on its practitioners and need not repeat them here. As to the ever-changing technical details of subtitle production and transmission, they are only of limited interest in a theoretical approach such as mine, so a short, general introduction to the work of the subtitler will suffice.

Many subtitlers are employed by broadcasting companies while others work for independent translation agencies or as freelancers. In Western Europe at least, they normally have access to a PC-based workstation that allows them to receive the necessary information from the customer (including a time-coded copy of the original version and, the subtitler may hope, a dialogue list), to watch the programme, and to formulate, cue, check, edit and send back the subtitles. Among the tools that distinguish such a workstation from a normal word processor are reading speed, format and time code checkers, which ensure that the subtitles do not violate the adopted norms for size display and time (see Pollard (2002:26) for a more detailed description). In general, technical progress has made it easier for the subtitler to be fast and efficient and to deliver a high-quality product.

A transcript of the original dialogue is often provided by the customers. If
this transcript is accurate and contains valuable additional information concerning e.g. metaphors, puns and cultural references, it can be of great help to the subtitler, especially when deadlines are tight (Díaz Cintas 2001). On the other hand, many so-called dialogue lists leave a lot to be desired: apart from not containing any explanations, they may, for example, exclude sequences that are difficult to understand and feature misspelled names, i.e. have flaws in precisely those areas where the subtitler would need most assistance (cf. e.g. Gottlieb 2001c:42; Ockers 1991:36).

The access to dialogue lists varies, and the same seems to be true of the time that subtitlers have at their disposal for subtitling a programme. Widler (1992:142) speaks of two days for technical editing and between two days and a month for the translation. In a detailed example of how a subtitler working for the Danish public broadcasting company would go about translating a somewhat problematic 50-minute cultural programme (Gottlieb 1994c:33ff), five whole working days are needed until it is ready for transmission. Assuming an average working speed of 25 to 30 subtitles per hour, including cueing and editing, Reid (1996:96) claims that one 25-minute instalment of an ordinary series will be subtitled within one day. Wildblood (2002:43) gives five days for the subtitling of a normal feature film and at least one more day for editing and proofreading as a minimum requirement. However, if subtitlers are paid for speed rather than quality, they will perform accordingly: Setton (1996:81) reports that an experienced Taiwanese subtitler once admitted to having worked through 30 films in a month. Others may be paid per subtitle and thus be tempted to insert as many of them as possible (cf. Morgan 2001:163). Sometimes, subtitlers may do their own editing; in other cases, special subtitling editors check the work of the subtitlers (cf. James 2001; Mueller 2001).

Nowadays, subtitlers are probably better trained in their profession than they used to be. Numerous courses have even been offered at university level.41 Increased research into subtitling and heightened awareness of what viewers can and cannot process with ease has probably led to greater similarity between the norms different subtitlers work under. However, as in all types of translation, there is still considerable room for individual choices and styles.

1.2.9 The future of subtitling

Judging from accounts of how subtitlers work, it seems that most of the technical problems of subtitling have by now been resolved, including the visual appearance of subtitles on the screen. At least in European subtitling countries, subtitlers are equipped with advanced technology that allows them to write, cue, review, and adjust the subtitles without much effort (cf. e.g. Ivarsson 2002). Apparently, production companies have become better at providing dialogue lists, which can be helpful when tricky passages need to be translated. Many subtitlers are well-trained, proficient in the languages they work with, and adhere to established, reader-friendly norms. Where the subtitlers work under adequate conditions, subtitles made in Europe are usually of a high quality and give little reason for the audience to complain, if we take into account the media-specific constraints and the fact that they have to serve a broad range of potential viewers. However, there are two developments that I would like to comment on. The first is very real and seems to have a negative impact on the quality of subtitles; the other is theoretically possible, desired by some, and unlikely to come about.

As to the first development, a real threat to the high subtitling standards in some countries stems from the spread of pivot subtitles (Gottlieb 1994a:117f).42 These subtitles are made in the usual way, but serve as the basis for further subtitle versions in other target languages. Pivot subtitles can be in English, e.g. when the language of the original dialogue is likely to be unknown to subtitlers in the target cultures. But even when the dialogue is in English, pivot subtitles are common, not least in Scandinavia, where they are usually in Swedish and are used in the production of Norwegian and Danish versions. The subtitlers at the end of such a chain are forced to use the cueing of the pivot subtitles even if another segmentation would have fit their language, their country’s subtitling standards and/or their preferred translation choices better. If these subtitlers are not able to understand the spoken dialogue or not motivated to take it into account, the final subtitles will even be a translation of the pivot subtitles—and thus one more step removed from the original dialogue. This is of course detrimental to subtitling quality and to subtitlers as a professional group, but it is also cheaper at a time when more and more

42 The terminology has been somewhat refined in Grigaravičiūtė & Gottlieb (2001:80), where pivot translation is reserved for “processes and products of indirect translation whose only audience is translators”. The authors use the term relay translation for intermediate translations that were actually intended to reach a broad target audience. For the sake of simplicity, I shall stick to the former term, though what is really at issue in e.g. DVD translation is the spread of the second, “relay” kind of transfer.
programmes are produced, distributed and subtitled. Pivot subtitles are therefore not likely to go away. In Scandinavia, if it is true that possible pivot subtitles are mostly Swedish, this will obviously affect Norwegians and Danes more than Swedes.43

As to the second, desirable but unlikely, development, there have been critical voices that would rather not accept the inevitability of one TL version having to be good enough for all. As mentioned earlier, reading skills vary considerably in a population. Fast readers can manage a two-line subtitle much more quickly than in the standard exposure time of five seconds or more. For many, two seconds (perhaps plus a safety margin of one second) might be about enough. This would make it possible to condense the text a lot less than is normal today. At the other extreme, there exist a considerable number of people who have problems reading subtitles even at the comparatively low speed commonly adopted by TV companies and distributors. Perhaps some of these people simply do not practice reading a lot, while others may be dyslexic, have poor eye-sight, or suffer from strongly impaired hearing.44 Elbro (1989) estimates that the group of clinically and functionally dyslexic people alone comprises around 15% of the adult population and suggests ways in which subtitles could be adapted to make them more easily accessible for this group.

I have also mentioned that many people are much more proficient in the most common source languages than the imagined viewers that subtitlers work for, i.e. those who hardly understand anything at all of the original dialogue. In many of the minor language communities in Europe, which often happen to be subtitling cultures, a large percentage of the audience have a very good knowledge of English, which is the source language of most foreign media imports. Other ‘big’ languages, especially if they are spoken in neighbouring countries, may also be well understood. It could be expected that some members of the polyglot majority in small countries, and of what is perhaps still a minority in larger countries, would prefer more ‘advanced’ subtitles when the programme is in one of the languages they know – or none at all.

At the end of the 1980s, Elbro could only suggest that some programmes be subtitled according to the needs of poor readers, because proficient readers would otherwise complain about the, for them, overly simple translations (1989:69f). In subsequent years, technical advances have made it possible to go

43 The possibility that different translations in my own material have been based, in part or entirely, on pivot subtitles has been taken into account (cf. 3.1.2.4-5 and 6.5). It turned out that connections between some of the various versions investigated could indeed be identified.

44 Especially people who were born deaf often have reading capacities below those of the hearing population (de Linde & Kay 1999b:12, 19, 21).
a step further. With the spread of TV sets capable of receiving teletext, it has become theoretically feasible to produce a variety of subtitles for the same programme. The viewers would then be able to choose whichever version they preferred. Bernbom Jørgensen (1992) was perhaps the first to see the possibilities and imagined four levels of interlingual subtitling: 1) no subtitles at all, 2) slower and simplified subtitles for people with reading difficulties, 3) subtitles produced according to current norms, 4) faster subtitles with fewer reductions and explicitations and more transfer of culture-specific elements.

Gottlieb adds three more potential choices to the four already proposed by Bernbom Jørgensen: “5) a pictogram-supported subtitling for the deaf and hard-of hearing, 6) a subtitling in a domestic minority language, or finally, 7) a foreign-learner subtitling in the source language” (Gottlieb 1994a:118).45

It is interesting to note that very little seems to have happened since Bernbom Jørgensen first presented his idea of different subtitles for different TV viewers in 1992. In bilingual Finland, there is some choice between Swedish and Finnish subtitles (Gummerus 1996:171), but the other options are not very common anywhere, if they exist at all. It is probably still considered too expensive to produce subtitles for the relatively small number of viewers who would choose special versions over the standard form to which they have become accustomed. The only really cheap option, now made easier with digital television, is the possibility to switch the subtitles off completely. To produce subtitles in the same language as the original dialogue might not be very work- and cost-intensive either, especially if they are made for fast readers who require very little condensation. In fact, it would be sufficient to make such a version once, preferably in the programme’s country of origin, after which the two can be sold together. Intralingual subtitles are shown on some niche channels with a mission to promote a certain language abroad, but I believe they could quickly become popular in mainstream broadcasting as well.

As to fast and virtually uncondensed subtitles, they might turn out to be too demanding even for proficient readers because they steal the attention from the action. They could even be unnecessary since many quick readers are also good at foreign languages and only ‘need’ the subtitles occasionally for confirmation. Fast subtitles might still be appreciated in connection with less common source languages, but here the total audience can be expected to be smaller, thus not justifying the extra investment.

As to the very slow and condensed subtitles, they would render so little of the original content that it can be difficult to follow the plot in talk-intensive

45 This suggestion is reiterated in Gottlieb (2001e:33).
films, understand the detailed information in documentaries or see the jokes in comedies. The deaf and hard-of-hearing, their often poor reading capacities notwithstanding, are otherwise supposed to be served by the standard subtitles, even if information carried by sounds other than the dialogue will escape them. Sometimes, at least a little is done for them:

Today there is also a trend in professional subtitling circles, particularly in Britain and the U.S., to cater to the needs of the hard of hearing, which make up a sizable chunk of the viewing audience. Making sound tracks visible means inclusion of words like names and greetings or international “okays” and “wows”. Most of the audience can understand them without a subtitle, but the hearing impaired cannot. (Wildblood 2002:43)

Of course, these considerations might make the subtitles more annoying for the hearing population, but special, interlingual subtitle versions with pictograms and other additional information for the hearing impaired are still utopia in subtitling countries. The rare exceptions can normally only be found on DVD.

The main reason why the situation of the early 90’s has not changed significantly to this day is that TV stations lack an incentive to increase their costs. This would be the consequence of offering multiple subtitle versions, especially if this were done for all programmes broadcast. As long as no competitor does this, all viewers will have to make do with the one version they are offered. Besides, the large majority of viewers would probably continue to choose programmes on the basis of the expected nature and quality of the original content, and be less interested in the possibility of picking alternative translations. Even if they were given the chance to do the latter, the imposed standards of today might still win the popular vote by a wide margin.

1.3 Dubbing vs. subtitling: some further aspects, summary, and conclusion

1.3.1 Personal preferences, costs, and censorship

From personal experience, I would venture to guess that if one asks ten Swedes whether they prefer subtitling to dubbing in cinemas and on TV, at least nine can be expected to answer in the affirmative. If one asks ten Germans the same question, the result would almost, though only almost, be the exact opposite.
When it comes to screen translation (as well as many other phenomena), people tend to consider the system they are most used to as superior, while that which they have not experienced so much may be dismissed as ‘weird’ or worse. Not even the written discourse in translation studies has been completely free from strong subjective views for or against (especially against) a certain form of screen translation, including voice-over of feature films, which is nevertheless quite popular in some countries. Let me therefore summarize the advantages and disadvantages of dubbing and subtitling in a reasonably objective fashion.

An advantage of subtitling is that it is much simpler than dubbing. In order to subtitle a film, all that is needed is one subtitler and a machine with which to place the subtitles onto the picture. This is true even if e.g. Gummerus & Paro (2001:139) stress the importance of a joint effort for good translation quality; a quality check by a second person, for example, is nevertheless optional. In dubbing, by contrast, many more persons are directly involved, including all the actors and the technicians, and the required technical equipment is also more advanced. This makes subtitling considerably faster and cheaper. On the other hand, the comparatively complicated dubbing process creates a lot of jobs, which is good for society at large. It must be kept in mind, however, that the average viewer weighing the pros and cons of different forms of screen translation against each other will generally not take costs and jobs into consideration.

The difference in costs is one of the main reasons why dubbing dominates in large markets and subtitling in small ones. The number of viewers, and thus turnover, is higher in dubbing countries, and it is therefore easier to turn the considerable financial investment that dubbing entails into a profit. However, it has been claimed that dubbing became dominant in some countries for reasons of protectionism, nationalism, and censorship. At the time when the production of, and trade with, films began to reach significant heights, Germany, Italy, and Spain were fascist dictatorships. Those in power wanted to promote the domestic language, protect the national film industry, and

46 La Trecchia (1998) may serve as a relatively recent and somewhat curious example: she characterizes dubbing in highly negative terms, e.g. as “an acoustic substitute, an absurdity from an artistic point of view, damaging to a work of art” (p.116), and “a deferred presence of a betrayed original voice” (p.116). She considers it a “betrayal” that “[t]he actors’ voices have been sabotaged” (p.117) and even claims that “spectators will always feel deprived of the opportunity to see and hear their favourite actors” (p.116). Furthermore, she seems to suggest that the target audience’s lack of proficiency in foreign languages is the main reason why dubbing rather than subtitling may be used (p.117), while to me this looks more like a reason to translate at all, in whatever way. Be that as it may, in the subsequent case study, she expresses herself in increasingly positive terms about the Italian dubbing of a particular film, which “is not a betrayal of the original, but rather a new interpretation of it” (p.122), making me suspect, without confirming it, that she may have been ironic or provocative at the outset.
especially have full control over what was being said on the screens (cf. Danan 1991 for a general overview, and e.g. del Camino Gutiérrez Lanza 1997 for the influence that the Spanish state exerted on film translation under Franco). While France was more democratic at the time, it too became a dubbing country for partly the same reasons, namely what could be called cultural and linguistic chauvinism (cf. Danan 1996:127f).

It is certainly true that the replacement of the original dialogues by new ones, as is the case in dubbing, makes it possible to hide anything that is not deemed appropriate for the target audience. This is not the case in subtitling, at least if the SL is understood to some extent. If one is in favour of the freedom of speech and has reason to suspect that the powers that be may wish to suppress comments made on the screen that they deem unfavourable to themselves, then subtitling will stand out as better. The same applies, of course, if one wants to have access to all the verbal brutality and sexual references expressed in the original versions, because these, too, have historically been neutralized in dubbing (cf. Hesse-Quack 1967:98). Finally, it has been common practice in post-war German dubbing to tone down references to Nazism and suggestions that Germans have been or are bad people. Presumably, the main concern was to ensure a pleasant experience for the target audience and to boost the popularity of the product. Large parts of the audience might even have approved if they had known what was going on, but modifications of this kind have nevertheless become rarer in Germany. Be that as it may, to the extent that dubbing countries are functioning democracies and political, sexual and other kinds of messages not systematically weakened, the advantage that subtitling enjoys in this respect is limited. Actually, the complete absence of a conflict between SL and TL dialogues in dubbed material may contribute to what friends of dubbing prefer about ‘their’ system.

1.3.2 Comprehension and pedagogical aspects

For those who understand the target language well, and these people normally form the large majority in a country, it is easier to follow a dubbed film than a subtitled one. It does not take long until one gets used to the fact that American actors are not speaking English and forgets to look out for the next clash between sound track and lip movements. It seems less demanding when one does not have to constantly move one’s eyes between the written text and the

47 Cf. e.g. Ascheid (1997:37) for how one managed to clean even *Casablanca* in this respect. Yet also much later, it is German sensibilities that must be made responsible for turning German Nazis into Palestinian agents in the dubbing of an episode of *Magnum, P.I.* (Wehn 1998:195).
picture and to make the connection between what one hears and what one reads. In Sweden and other subtitling countries, people are likely to object that these perceived disadvantages are not experienced as such by the jaded consumer of subtitled programmes. Yet the question is whether they still do that as fervently when the source language is not English. In those cases, watching a subtitled movie is often felt to be quite demanding – even in countries like Sweden. But I will return to films that are not in English shortly.

It should also be remembered that there are considerable numbers of people, especially those with poor eyesight and other problems affecting their ability to read, but without sufficient knowledge of foreign languages, who can enjoy a dubbed film, but not a subtitled one. Even if reading is no problem under normal circumstances, secondary activities such as household work may keep one from always having one’s eyes fixed on the screen at all times. This is said to be the reason why dubbing has become popular among housewives in the traditional subtitling country Greece (Díaz Cintas 1999:38). For the deaf and hard of hearing, and also for those with good ears who can keep their eyes on the screen, but must keep the volume of the TV set below a level that would enable them to hear everything, it is of course the other way round.\footnote{I have not seen this mentioned elsewhere, but from personal experience, I know that watching TV with subtitles is easier than following dubbed material when the volume needs to be kept low, or when the sound level in the viewer’s immediate environment is high (e.g. because of other people talking). This should not be underestimated. I might also point out, and this is confirmed by my study, that neither original soundtracks nor dubbed versions are always understandable even when the viewing conditions are excellent (cf. 6.4).} However, TV channels in dubbing countries will frequently offer subtitles as an additional form of translation.

The fact that the ability to read is generally not a requirement for being able to follow a dubbed foreign film may contribute to the often condescending attitude vis-à-vis dubbing. It can seem as if in subtitling countries, only small children do not manage to understand subtitles, while in dubbing countries, it is primarily the intellectual elite who occasionally wants to see films with the original soundtrack. However, everybody’s right to be entertained by film, and the accessibility of the informational content, would speak in favour of dubbing.

On the other hand, consumers of dubbed material may miss a good chance to improve their knowledge of foreign languages. This is the great ‘pedagogical’ argument for subtitles: it is claimed, for example, that the Dutch and the Scandinavians are quite good at English because they have grown up with that language around them since they were children. While Germans, Frenchmen, Italians, and Spaniards are confronted with spoken English
comparatively seldom, most other nationalities can hardly avoid hearing English as soon as they switch on their TV. It is true that it has not been actually proven that a lot of English at cinemas and on TV is one of the most decisive factors affecting the viewers’ proficiency in that language. The size of the country, the school system, the use of the Internet, the amount of direct contact with speakers of English, and not least the historical relationship between the first language and English will surely play an important role as well. Yet it seems reasonable to assume that regular exposure to a language through the media will lead to an improved knowledge of that language.

As indicated above, the situation may be somewhat different with film productions that are not in English. Few people in e.g. Sweden are so proficient in other languages that they would not require the support of the subtitles in order to understand the content in, say, French films, not to speak of Chinese ones. A certain degree of preliminary knowledge is necessary if viewers are to absorb the unusual words and phrases emanating from the speakers, and it may be partly for this reason that films and programmes in languages other than English are not particularly popular in Scandinavia. One may ask, therefore, how generally valid the argument is that says that ‘subtitled film functions like a language teacher’. Of course it must be considered positive if subtitles improve the viewers’ proficiency in English, but it is doubtful whether this applies to other languages as well.49 In the US, Britain and Australia, the argument would not count for much at all.

However, there is another pedagogical argument in favour of subtitling: the one or two lines of text on the TV screen may be the only words that many people have the energy and the motivation to read in their spare time. The viewers must read, and quite fast, in order to follow the plot. In some cases, subtitles may thus help to forestall functional illiteracy, or serve as an additional incentive for children to learn how to read in the first place.

1.3.3 Summary and conclusion

In the present chapter, the two most prominent modes of screen translation in Western Europe, dubbing and subtitling, have been taken up and discussed. The focus has been especially on the constraints and perceived weaknesses of each method, since these may be partly responsible for the individual translation solutions in the corpus for this study. Even though I may have

49 There are certain indications that it does (d’Ydewalle & Pavakanun 1996; Van den Poel & d’Ydewalle 2001), but there also seem to be limitations, and more studies would be needed.
created the impression that we are somehow dealing with a competition between dubbing and subtitling as to which translation method is better, the main goal has been to provide a reasonably objective overview over, and better understanding of, some of the phenomena that are at least indirectly relevant to my investigation.

In order to emphasize that there are not only constraints and shortcomings in screen translation, here follows, first, a summary of the main advantages of dubbing as a system, not as an imperfect reality, from the audience’s point of view:

- When it comes to the artistic whole of the film, the entire picture remains visible, and there is no disruption of the unity of sound and action in the form of new semiotic channels that need to be processed. It may thus be easier to follow the dialogues, and to enjoy the film in the same way as an original, especially if one has insufficient knowledge of the source language.
- People with impaired sight or reading disabilities can enjoy foreign movies.
- In principle, there is no reduction in the amount of linguistic information. There is also no interference from the original dialogues, which may provide greater freedom to the translator. In particular, passages that are problematic in some respect can be altered completely without it having to affect comprehensibility or the originally envisaged function.

In contrast, these are some of the main advantages of subtitling as a system, also from the audience’s point of view:

- When it comes to the artistic whole of the film, the original unity of the actors’ visual behaviour, their culture, and the language of their utterances, remains intact.
- The deaf and hard of hearing can enjoy most of a film, even when no specially adapted subtitles are available.
- Subtitling is less nationalistic and also less prone to censorship; the original soundtrack remains unaltered, and viewers with a knowledge of the SL can check the translation in terms of textual loyalty; they can also choose to concentrate primarily on the original dialogue and largely disregard the translation.
- Subtitling is intellectually more demanding. This could be construed as a disadvantage (cf. above); however, it may contribute to improved proficiency in foreign languages and in reading.

It is impossible to say whether dubbing or subtitling can be considered better in a general sense. As I have shown, both have strong points and weak points, and one cannot weigh these against each other without resorting to subjective opinions. Dubbing and subtitling have both found their place in the world of screen translation and none is likely to gain or lose a lot of ground in the foreseeable future. What can be observed is perhaps an accelerated breakdown of the dichotomy between dubbing and subtitling nations, which has traditionally been perceived as clear and neat, but which has not been absolute for a long time, if it ever was. If there is more subtitling now in dubbing countries, and vice versa, it is because technical developments and increasing globalization have made it possible, and because both methods are better in some respect and for some purpose. In the present study, what I am interested in when it comes to dubbing and subtitling as forms of translation (and this may appear quite narrow in relation to all the background information I have provided), is how language-play has been treated within either mode, and whether any differences can be detected in this respect that can be explained by their inherent characteristics.
2 Humour, language-play, and the translation of language-play

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the concept of language-play, and to distinguish it from related, and overlapping, concepts such as humour and wordplay. Furthermore, the translation of language-play will be given special attention. To do all this in a reasonably orderly manner, and to reflect the linear nature of reading, the chapter has rather arbitrarily been divided into various subsections the topics of which might theoretically also have been treated together. For example, much (though not all) of the supposedly humorous material discussed in the literature on humour would fall under language-play, which in turn has sometimes been defined as that which cannot be translated into another language. Some repetition and cross-referencing have thus been even harder to avoid here than in the other chapters.50

Although my thesis and the study upon which it is based do not deal explicitly with humour, it seems natural that this topic should be discussed at least briefly, for the reasons indicated above. This will be done in section 2.1. From there, I will move on to the more linguistically defined, and perhaps because of that more distinct, area of language-play (2.2). I shall then review some opinions and findings from the literature on the translation of language-play (2.3).

It should be pointed out that while existing taxonomies of language-play (or more often: of wordplay) will be mentioned in this chapter, and individual categories be referred to occasionally, a proper discussion of these categories, leading to more or less exact definitions for my purposes, will take place in chapters 4 and 5, in conjunction with the presentation of the results of my investigation.

2.1 Humour

Many scholarly works that have the word humo(u)r in their titles, especially if they are book-length treatises, represent a kind of literary-philosophical approach that can be quite overwhelming for a linguist. Expounding on an almost metaphysical subject matter in a lofty style does not necessarily make for easy reading and the straightforward gathering of information. In fact, not only

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50 Let me begin with the cross-referencing right away: even though the concepts of language-play and wordplay are already mentioned earlier, they are properly discussed in sections 2.2.3 and 2.2.5, respectively.
can these approaches to humour be difficult to follow, they tend to remain on
so abstract a level that very little that would be of immediate use in the context
of this study can be gleaned from them.\footnote{Franz Forster’s dissertation of 1968 is perhaps the case in point.}

Not all authors on humour come to the subject with the perspective of a
philosopher or a literary scholar, however. Attardo and Raskin (cf. Attardo
1994), for example, and more recently Ritchie (2004), try to develop explicitly
linguistic theories of humour, while many others make use of linguistic concepts
when they, under headings referring to humour, analyze jokes based on
wordplay or related phenomena.

Since my main interest is the translation of language-play, there is no need
to delve too deeply into the discourse surrounding humour, let alone to do it in
the highly abstract way criticized above. Rather than follow up in detail the
standard references to the ‘classics’ in humour studies, most notably Cicero,
Bergson, Freud, and Bakhtin,\footnote{For a review of the relevant works by at least the first three of these authors, and many others, see
Attardo (1994:14-59). For Bakhtin, see e.g. Unger (1995:14-17) and Gurevich (1997).} I will content myself with an overview of the
three main types of theories of humour, the different functions humour is said
to have, and some of its typical features. But first, I will address the fact that
nobody seems to be able to define humour in a satisfactory way.

2.1.1 Problems with definitions

Somewhere on the first pages of books on humour, one can usually find
remarks to the effect that the topic is very difficult to define or that partially
conflicting definitions abound. Such statements are frequently accompanied by
a comparison of humour-related terms in some European languages (e.g.
English, French and German) and the conclusion that there is only incomplete
overlap when it comes to their denotation and connotation (e.g. Palmer 1994:1-7; Evrard 1996:3-8; Royot 1996:1).

One difference between the English humo(u)r and e.g. the German Humor
or the Swedish humor is that the latter are often used to designate an attitude
rather than that which is funny, for which the term Komik/komik can be used
(cf. e.g. Sornig 1995:5; Turk 1995:301f). Note also that the komik in the title of
Hygrell’s (1997) Swedish dissertation has become humour in the English
abstract. However, Kotthoff (1998) seems to use the German Humor in the
English sense although, interestingly, the main title of her book focuses on the
receiver: Spaß Verstehen (‘Understanding Fun/Jokes/Jests/Humour’). My
translation problems illustrate the general point nicely.
Ritchie, who sets out to take the first steps towards a linguistically-based, scientifically viable theory of humour, complains that most of the earlier approaches, including those explicitly claimed to be theories, “rarely define their basic terms formally, and are insufficiently developed to make precise falsifiable predictions. That is, they are at best interesting informal discussions …” (Ritchie 2004:1). Even the most influential suggestions in recent years, Raskin’s Semantic Script Theory of Humour (SSTH) and Attardo’s and Raskin’s revised version in the form of the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH; both presented in Attardo (1994:195-229)) do not escape an essentially negative evaluation by Ritchie.53 Although his criticism may be justified, and his alternative, systematic approach certainly looks like a refreshing new start, it remains doubtful whether his highly formalized definitions (inspired by work on artificial intelligence and initially restricted to certain types of jokes) will ever be able to capture the inherently vague concept that humour is.

Be that as it may, it is striking that both Attardo and Ritchie, who explicitly tackle humour from a linguistic position, deem it wise to limit their analyses, at least to begin with, to jokes and, perhaps of necessity, to so-called verbal jokes (see 2.1.6). It may be interesting to note, therefore, what humour has been described as informally (with or without preceding comments on the confusion surrounding the concept), by people who thought this possible to do in a sentence or two.54 Attardo himself is influenced by Chomsky when he presents his working definition of humour as a “competence”, i.e. “something that speakers know how to do, without knowing how and what they know” (Attardo 1994:1). This competence is one of the key elements of Raskin’s and Attardo’s SSTH and GTVH. Palmer (1994:3), too, remains quite vague when he says that by humour he means “everything that is actually or potentially funny, and the processes by which this ‘funniness’ occurs”, because the idea of “funniness” appears only slightly more tangible than that of humour itself. Hygrell, though she qualifies her definition somewhat in subsequent passages, applies the term komik or det komiska (“that which is comic”) to “when there is incongruity, i.e. a relationship that is based on unexpectedly emerging contrasts” (Hygrell 1997:64, my translation). Parkin (1999:2) focuses on

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53 Both the SSTH and the GTVH are inspired by the principles of transformational or generative grammar as applied to contextual semantics. Their central concept is that of the script, i.e. “a cognitive structure internalized by the speaker [the focus is on the tellers of jokes rather than the audience] which provides the speaker with information on how things are done, organized, etc” (Attardo 1994:198). Somewhat simplified, a text can be characterized as a joke if it is compatible with two opposing scripts (Attardo 1994:197).

54 I shall disregard the otherwise almost obligatory reference to the etymology of humour as originally denoting the four body fluids (blood, phlegm, bile, and black bile) that were thought to determine a person’s character.
incongruity too, but he also stresses one of its possible effects when he says that he likes to use humour “as a broad term designating risible incongruity”. Bremmer & Roodenburg (1997:1) define humour in terms of one (intended) function, but they may be in the minority in this respect: “we see humour as any message – transmitted in action, speech, writing, images or music – intended to produce a smile or a laugh”. However, while Palmer (1994:110) points out that incongruity can still be funny even if it is unintentional, it is indeed a matter of definition whether we are still dealing with humour in that case or with something else. (As we will see, intention is much more generally considered a defining factor when it comes to language-play.)

To round this section off, it may be appropriate to mention that humour does not seem to be anything that can be clearly pinpointed by way of a neuropsychological approach either. According to Brownell & Gardner (1988), who have taken this approach, the right hemisphere of the brain is apparently more relevant to humour competence than the left, but in their studies they “have not found evidence for a ‘humour centre’ in the brain. Rather, normal ability in the domain of humour requires component skills which are also important in other domains” (Brownell & Gardner 1988:21). Vandaele (2002:228), though working in a completely different framework, seems to assume just that when he says that “a good typology of humour would have to be a good typology of everyday cognition”.

2.1.2 Humour theories

The short quotes in the previous section of informal definitions of humour may not do all their authors complete justice, but they confirm that there is indeed no agreement on what constitutes the phenomenon. Some approaches, however, have obviously more in common than others. In introductions to humour studies, one can therefore find existing theories of humour (though Ritchie (2004) hardly accepts them as such, cf. 2.1.1) grouped into a number of broad types.

Attardo (1994:47), claiming to follow an established classification, distinguishes three general categories of humour theories, whose main foci he considers to be cognition, social relationships, and psychoanalytical phenomena, respectively. The labels he chooses for the categories are incongruity, hostility, and release (see Table 2.1; the terms underneath Attardo’s preferred choices are alternative labels that he collected from other authors).
Table 2.1. The three families of humour theories.55

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Psychoanalytical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incongruity</td>
<td>Hostility</td>
<td>Release</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrast</td>
<td>Aggression</td>
<td>Sublimation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superiority</td>
<td>Liberation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triumph</td>
<td>Economy</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Derision</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disparagement</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(Attardo 1994:47)

Ritchie (2004:7), too, thinks tripartite classifications along the lines of Attardo’s are the most common, and refers to the categories as “incongruity theories”, “superiority or aggression theories”, and “relief or release theories”. Olsson et al. (2003:24ff), finally, also work with this basic distinction, but add arousal to the alternative labels in the group of release theories.

The most illustrious thinkers normally associated with incongruity theories are Kant and Schopenhauer, both of whom have claimed that laughter, usually considered more or less synonymous with humour at the time (Olsson et al. 2003:24), occurs as a reaction to suddenly emerging contradictions between expectations and reality. Of the three main groups of humour theories mentioned, incongruity theories are the most concerned with the structure, or the mechanics, of humorous material such as jokes. They are thus the most linguistic in nature.

Proponents of superiority theories, as the name suggests, maintain that humour usually involves laughing at somebody, i.e. a certain amount of aggression on the part of the one who laughs, who feels superior to his or her victim, or the butt of a joke. Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes and Bergson have all pointed to this rather negative aspect of humour, with the latter seeing laughter as essentially “a social corrective, i.e., used by society to correct deviant behaviour” (Attardo 1994:50). However, humour can be the expression of a feeling of superiority without the person made fun of being present – or even real.

The writer most thoroughly linked with release theories is Freud. The ‘release’ can be of tension or energy, or “from inhibitions, conventions and laws”, including those of language (Attardo 1994:50). Here, as with the social theories, it is a function, or effect, of humour that is emphasized.

55 Cognitive, Social, and Psychoanalytical indicate the respective main focus of the theories.
Both Attardo and Ritchie point out that different (types of) theories are not necessarily incompatible with each other, since they generally focus on different aspects of humour, and Vandaele (2002) strongly argues that in any attempt at giving a proper account of the phenomenon, incongruity and superiority must be integrated. As a matter of fact, even if there may be arguments over the details, few people would dispute, on the one hand, that humour needs some visual and/or linguistic elements, structures or features to make it work, and, on the other hand, that it is an essentially social phenomenon.

2.1.3 Social context and culture-specificity

Humour is a social phenomenon in at least two respects: first, there is usually a producer of humour and at least one receiver, and normally these two communicate directly with each other. However, even when the producer works via the medium of television or literature and the receiver is the only human being in the room, there are still two parties involved. In fact, only exceptionally does a situation that would generally be considered funny arise without the contributions, intended or not, of a human agent. And if we do not count cases where it is the look or the behaviour of apes or other non-human species that amuses us, the exceptions become even rarer.

Second, humour is a social phenomenon also because we are a lot less likely to find things funny, let alone to actually laugh, when we are alone than when we are in the company of other people. Olsson et al. (2003:24) refer to a study on laughter by Provine which showed that we laugh 30 times more together with other people than when we are alone. Even if only a part of the laughter measured there is due to actual jokes, the study indicates that humour occurs more often and is more appreciated in a group. According to Ross (1998:1), that is the rationale behind the ‘canned laughter’ used especially in television comedy: it is “important to sense other people responding to humour” in order to appreciate it. (For more views on the relationship between laughter and humour, see 2.1.4.)

Apparently, the fact that humour clearly tends to take place in a social context is otherwise taken for granted, as it is seldom pointed out explicitly in the literature. Chiaro (1992:100) at least suggests it when saying that a desire to be funny is usually triggered by preceding (spoken) discourse or the social context, and Paton et al.’s (1996) collection of articles with the title The Social Faces of Humour looks like another exception, although in truth it is mainly the
social functions of different types of humour that are dealt with there, which is a slightly different matter (to be taken up in 2.1.5).

What is mentioned regularly in the literature is another, related, characteristic of humour, namely the circumstance that much of it is culture-specific. This obviously makes it an interesting issue for translation studies, at least where different languages are involved. As indicated earlier, the concepts of humour and language-play cover some common ground (many instances of language-play can be labelled humorous), and the question of the translatability or otherwise of humour is thus linked to the topic of the present thesis.

Several authors point out that it takes a certain amount of shared knowledge and experience, or rather knowledge and experience of the right (i.e. relevant) kind, in order to understand, say, a certain joke. While Unger acknowledges that the international exchange of humorous films and TV shows (1995:11) and the repertoire of foreign comedies at German theatres (1995:20) suggest that some humour is universal, or at least not limited to one culture, he still maintains that there exist different “Lachkulturen” (≈ ‘cultures of laughter’, a term derived from Bakhtin). In the words of Nash:

Humour is not for babes, Martians, or congenital idiots. We share our humour with those who have shared our history and who understand our way of interpreting experience. There is a fund of common knowledge and recollection, upon which all jokes draw with instantaneous effect […] (Nash 1985:9)

This must obviously imply that the humour I enjoy is not even for sane, grown-up Earthlings, provided they look back on a different history and are used to another “way of interpreting experience” than me. There actually seems to be a general consensus on that, judging by similar statements in other publications. Alexieva (1997), using the framework of cognitive linguistics, discusses how so-called knowledge domains can differ from one culture to another and how an incomplete overlap between them can impede the appreciation of some categories of language-play, such as allusive puns (playfully manipulated references to culture-specific facts or events; cf. also 5.1.2). Crystal (1998:103) seems to confirm this, though he prefers to speak of the “cultural linguistic heritage” that one would have to be acquainted with in order to decipher many allusive puns. Also Leppihalme (1996:214) concludes from her study that “[i]t would appear that the problem of translating allusive wordplay is not so much a linguistic as a cultural problem, and sometimes a nearly insurmountable one.”

Not limiting themselves to one subcategory of humour, Dagher & Dagher
Humour is an essentially human faculty. But humans are not all alike. Whether humour be of the affective or the rational kind, it is always practised and appreciated by people who share, to a very large extent, the same conditions of culture and civilization. (Dagher & Dagher 2001:77; my translation, original emphasis).

Chiaro (1992:10) expresses a similar view by saying that “when a comic situation is too culture-specific it will not be seen as amusing outside the culture of origin”. For Forster, the appreciation of humour is determined by both cultural and personal aspects: “What one finds funny or not funny in each case depends on the social system and the culture, as well as the personality and intellectuality, of the person concerned” (Forster 1968:5; my translation). But Chiaro, too, sees a variety of factors playing in: “The concept of what people find funny appears to be surrounded by linguistic, geographical, diachronic, sociocultural and personal boundaries” (Chiaro 1992:5). The fact that the linguistic boundaries are mentioned first shows that the author accords them special importance, but they are nevertheless part of a whole list of limiting factors. Later on in her book, Chiaro (1992:77) even denounces as “extremely naïve” the idea “that a common linguistic code is all that is needed in order to appreciate jokes and word play”. That may be true, but a shared linguistic code certainly renders the comprehension of most jokes much more likely, which is part of the reason why translators who need to render them in another language face such a difficult task. I will return to the culture-specificity and translatability of humour or, rather, language-play, in 2.3.2.56

2.1.4 Humour and laughter

I could not avoid touching on the relationship between humour and laughter already in previous sections, but there is more to be said about the subject. Intuitively, humour and laughter are definitely linked, for humour is supposed to be funny, and that which is funny makes us laugh or smile (at least to ourselves). But by putting it like this, I have already qualified the initial assumption that humour is followed or surrounded by laughter: laughing and smiling are not the same, even if the difference is a matter of degree; and if we

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56 It could be added here that Boyer (2001:40) makes a reasonable call, directed at teachers of foreign languages and cultures, to include more humour in their curricula, because it forms an integral part of those languages and cultures and heightens the awareness of how they function.
are amused without betraying this fact through sounds or visibly tensed face muscles, as we would if we laughed or smiled, can this not still be due to humour? Conversely, is it not possible to laugh or smile at, or be amused by, something that is not generally considered to be humour? The answer to both questions seems to be ‘yes’. Take into account also that the same events or utterances can elicit laughter in one context or culture while they may be met with a completely different reaction under other circumstances (cf. 2.1.3). If humour and laughter were inextricably linked, the presence or absence of the latter would determine the presence or absence of the former. Humour would then be as context-dependent as funniness. Does that seem reasonable? Or are we really talking more about potentials and intentions, with regard to laughter, when we refer to humour? It is clear that musings like these lead back to the problem of defining humour, which anybody offering views on the nature of the phenomenon must have struggled with, as the usual disclaimers show (cf. 2.1.1), and I shall not add to the usually vague and rarely coinciding suggestions made in this respect.

In particular, there is obvious disagreement concerning the degree of independence of humour vis-à-vis laughter. For Durant & Miller (1988), a strong link between humour and laughter seems to be a matter of course, as the title of their book, *Laughing Matters: A Serious Look at Humour*, indicates. This is confirmed in Miller’s introductory chapter, not least by the way he moves from the topic of humour to several pages worth of laughter-related passages: “Humour is an extremely difficult subject to talk about, and it is an even more difficult subject to be scientific about. We have to deal with the peculiar phenomenon of laughter […]” (Miller 1988:6). Bremmer & Roodenburg, too, consider the link between humour and laughter to be strong, as their definition of humour (cf. 2.1.1) shows, but they also say that “[a]lthough humour should produce laughter, not all laughter is the fruit of humour. Laughter can be threatening and, indeed, ethologists have suggested that laughter originated in an aggressive display of teeth” (Bremmer & Roodenburg 1997:2).

Most others involved in humour research are even more careful about linking humour to an expected response and do not feel at all that they should “have to deal with the peculiar phenomenon of laughter” (cf. above) – except to say that it does not appear very important or relevant to their approach. Attardo (1994:10-13) devotes some pages to the relationship between laughter and humour, where he states that the two have often, and more or less explicitly, been considered identical, or at least symmetrical. He, however, is critical of this “identification of a mental phenomenon (humor) with a complex
neurophysiological manifestation (laughter)” (1994:10) and concludes, not least for practical reasons, that the latter is too problematic to use as a criterion for defining or identifying humour. Ritchie (2004:16) does the same for laughter and jokes, which are commonly accepted to be a form of humour, and points out that something can constitute a joke, and even be recognized as such, without eliciting laughter. This, again, has much to do with the culture- and context-dependency of humour. Ritchie later returns to the distinction between humour and laughter when he first labels puns “(at least within English-speaking culture) a very widespread and commonplace form of spontaneous humour” and shortly thereafter goes on to say that “[m]any puns, perhaps the majority, are not very funny. There is even a widely established habit of groaning in response to a pun rather than laughing” (Ritchie 2004:109).

Whether this last quote can be considered true as it stands or not, it is certainly the case that not all puns are meant or perceived to be funny. And while there may be disagreement over Ritchie’s assertion that all puns, even the unfunny ones, are instances of humour, they are certainly a form of language-play. Ergo, not all language-play is funny. This is an important point which I will return to later on.57

In her study on the pragmatics of conversational humour, Kotthoff (1998:105-110) discusses laughter at some length. But she, too, is of the opinion that laughter and humour should be treated separately. The phenomena are not always related as there can be one without the other, and even where the two occur together, laughter can hardly function as a reliable indicator of the degree of funniness (1998:105).

So, there is a certain lack of agreement when it comes to the relationship between humour and laughter. If any tendency can be discerned, it would be that in general, modern authors are more careful to distinguish the two, even if the phenomena often occur together. Perhaps it would be a fair compromise to say that intuitively and prototypically, humour and laughter are closely linked, but that there exist (possibly numerous) peripheral cases where the relationship is less clear. Below, I will make a much stronger claim concerning the relationship of language-play and laughter.

2.1.5 The functions of humour

It should be clear by now that humour does not normally take place in a

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57 Although these sections still properly belong to the domain of humour rather than that of language-play, the overlap between the concepts makes a completely separate treatment impossible, as I have said before. However, from section 2.2 onwards the main focus will be on language-play.
vacuum. However, not only does it tend to occur in a social context, it also has
the power to affect those who are exposed to it. Conversely, those who
generate humour will, consciously or not, do so for a purpose. In other words,
humour has certain functions, some of which can be assumed to be more
prominent and/or common than others, and some of these should at least be
mentioned here.58

Though really speaking about the detachment that researchers on humour
need to have vis-à-vis their material, and comparing this with the attitude that
professional producers of humour have towards theirs, Nash happens to reveal
what he, probably like most other people, considers to be the main function of
humour (or jokes – he seems to use the terms more or less interchangeably):
“the professional humorist must often assess his jokes coldly, as mechanisms
for raising laughter” (Nash 1985:38). The view that humour is produced for, or
even defined by, the creation of laughter has already surfaced in previous
sections. Prototypically, this is indeed quite likely to be the case, but it is only
part of the story.

Without discussing the topic in any detail, Zabalbeascoa (1996:244) still
manages to hint at more possible functions of humour than the ‘mere’
generation of laughter, mentioning “escapist entertainment, social criticism,
pedagogical device, moralizing intention”. When he adds that humour can, for
example, be “bitter, cynical, provocative, ironic, hearty, or [a manifestation of]
the speaker’s social views and behaviour, as in racist or sexist jokes”, he
effectively points to a whole range of further functions that have to do with the
expression of “mental states and attitudes” (Zabalbeascoa 1996:244).

Attardo provides a good overview of the suggestions made in the
literature on what he calls the “social” or “communicative” functions of
humour (1994:322-331). A short summary will suffice here. The functions of
humour in conversation can be divided into two kinds, which may, however,
overlap to some considerable degree:

Primary functions of humor in conversation are effects that the
speaker may (wish to) achieve directly by using humorous segments
or texts in his/her discourse. Secondary functions of humor are
effects that are achieved either indirectly or without the knowledge
or intent of the user. (Attardo 1994:322f)

58 Note a) that the functions of humour have already played a role in my account of the predominant
types of humour theories (2.1.2), and b) that humour and language-play cannot be considered quite
the same in this respect either, so section 2.2.7 will be devoted more specifically to the functions
of language-play.
Focussing on the primary functions, Attardo distinguishes four classes: social management, decommitment, mediation, and defunctionalization, which, again, may overlap with each other. To begin with, the social management function of humor “covers all the cases in which humor is used as a tool to facilitate in-group interaction and strengthen in-group bonding or out-group rejection” (1994:323). More specifically, humour can be used to exercise social control, convey social norms, ingratiate oneself, manage discourse (e.g. turn-taking, topic shifts), establish common ground, display cleverness, strengthen social bonds through social play, and/or defuse unpleasant situations (1994:323). Humour “can greatly influence the speakers’ attitudes towards each other” (1994:324), and it can be inclusive or exclusive (1994:325).

The decommitment function implies that humorous discourse has a different status than serious discourse in that it can more easily be retracted and dismissed as ‘mere joking’. This can be especially useful when the speaker wishes to carefully approach delicate subjects, such as other people’s attitudes or beliefs concerning taboo items. If some originally serious utterance is about to result in an unpleasant situation, it may even be redefined as ‘non-serious’ afterwards. Attardo refers to these functions of humour as “probing” and “salvaging” (1994:325).

Rather closely related, it appears, to the decommitment function of humour is the mediating function, which dominates when “humor is used either to introduce or carry out potentially embarrassing or aggressive interactions” (Attardo 1994:327) or, in other words, “to test behavior which is potentially socially unacceptable and to deal with emotionally charged issues” (1994:328). Initiating a flirtation or relating bad news are examples of tricky conversational tasks that may be tackled with the help of humour with a mediating function.

The last of the primary functions of humour, according to Attardo, is the defunctionalization of language, i.e. language ceases to work as a vehicle for information, but is used for playful purposes instead (1994:328). I have little problem accepting the other functions of humour discussed by Attardo and referred to here, but this is less the case with defunctionalization. In my opinion, it remains doubtful whether language-play (which is what we seem to be talking about) can be considered a function of humour – or whether it is really the other way round: we play with language, maybe even defunctionalize it in the process (though that seems to be the exception, at least for adults), and this in turn may have humorous effects (intended or not). I will adopt the latter position and return to the functions of language-play in 2.2.4.
Attardo’s secondary functions of humour have mostly to do with humour being capable of conveying actual information about real life on the one hand, and about the speaker, including his or her mood and attitude towards the subject matter, on the other (Attardo 1994:229f). These functions are of course not limited to humour, nor are most of the others that have been introduced earlier.

Hygrell, dealing as she does with humour in works of literature, proposes a variety of functions that this kind of humour may fulfil, but, as she points out herself, most of her claims would be valid for humour in general. However, while she at first explicitly refrains from trying to find one basic function that would be common to all humorous phenomena (1997:65), she says a little later that to her the basic function of humour is to bring about a pleasurable experience, to amuse oneself and others (1997:66). She labels this the comic function (the English terms for functions attributed to Hygrell are my translations).

She then goes on to add to this the instrumental functions: the critical function (“expressing dislike and aggression”, and inviting a “critical attitude” towards some object), the evaluative function (Hygrell mentions only negative evaluation), and the humorous function (“expressing and inviting a conciliatory view of life’s shortcomings”). Instrumental functions can, furthermore, include the temporary relief from tension, and the creation of “distance to events and people” (Hygrell 1997:67f; all translations are mine). Though hardly surprising, it should also be pointed out that in her study, Hygrell often found it difficult or even impossible to determine what the exact function(s) of a particular instance of humour might be (1997:244).

Eventually, Hygrell adds two more functions to her list, which seem to coincide with Attardo’s secondary functions (cf. above): the characterizing function and the informative function (Hygrell 1997:68). The former applies when at least part of the effect stemming from an author letting his or her fictitious creatures use humour is their further characterization. Of course, as e.g. Attardo has indicated, real people, too, will reveal something about themselves when they use humour, so the characterizing function should apply to most occurrences of humour – as is the case with the informative function (i.e. providing actual information about some topic).

One of the most original and interesting suggestions when it comes to the functions of humour is made by Jonathan Miller, who otherwise links the phenomenon closely to laughter (cf. 2.1.4). His claims, some of which I shall quote below, seem to be founded on an often-held view of humour as
something resulting from surprising incongruity or discrepancy (cf. 2.1.2), but here he offers an explanation, based on cognitive and even evolutionary theories, as to why we would and should appreciate such a thing:

[…] the value of humour may lie in the fact that it involves the rehearsal of alternative categories and classifications of the world in which we find ourselves. […] The point of such rehearsals is not that they have short-term consequences or benefits, but rather that they allow us to play with concepts and categories and thus to put joints into life. […] by having gone through the delightful experience of humour, we have prevented ourselves from becoming the slaves of the categories by which we live. This is why humour is so often regarded as a dangerous and even a subversive thing.

(Miller 1988:11-15)

What Miller proposes goes beyond humour as a means of reducing the distance to taboo topics such as death, disease and sex, which can certainly be one of its functions in many cases. According to him, humour has the power to change our view of the world and, perhaps, the world itself, which is an exciting thought. Could it be, then, that people who expose themselves to humour frequently, as producers or recipients, are more open-minded and flexible than others because they are trained to consider things from different perspectives? It is a possibility.

Perhaps with the exception of the exclusive and aggressive kind, humour is generally seen as something good. Olsson et al. (2003:161ff) stress the positive effects that humour can have in a variety of public domains, including the workplace, education, health care, advertising, and politics. In all these contexts, humour can help to create a better atmosphere, stimulate people, and make them well disposed towards each other, their work, or any accompanying messages. Humour can thus be exploited to serve ambitions that go far beyond immediate amusement or short-term conversational goals, which is perhaps so obvious that it may be forgotten.

2.1.6 Types of humour

The question ‘what types of humour are there?’ can be approached according to very different criteria and on very different levels of abstraction. It appears, in any case, impossible to answer in a definitive manner: whereas some humour makes use of certain fixed joke formulae, other humour relies not only on unexpected punchlines, but on new overall forms. Assuming a relatively high
degree of analytical detail, the number of potential types of humour may thus turn out to be virtually unlimited. Besides, humour as such has not yet been captured by a satisfactory and generally acceptable definition (cf. 2.1.1), which would seem to be a prerequisite for a systematic identification of subcategories.

Be that as it may, some more or less tentative attempts at categorizing material that would qualify as humour have been made, and I shall refer to just a few of them here. Forster (1968:5-8), who quotes and relies to a large extent on Rommel, distinguishes three broad types of *Komik* which apparently can draw on, and be subcategories of, each other, and which seem to be based on the nature of the relationship between a person and the surrounding world: *Unzulänglichkeitskomik* (≈ ‘humour of insufficiency/inadequacy’) can result when a person fails to fulfil reasonable demands emanating from others or the situation as such; *Komik des weltüberlegenen Spiels* (≈ ‘humour resulting from a feeling of superiority vis-à-vis the world’) arises when an exuberant joy of living reduces inhibitions, and the shortcomings in a person’s surrounding world are humorously attacked. When it comes to *Unangemessenheitskomik* (≈ ‘humour of inappropriateness’), finally; it is doubtful whether this should be a category on its own: there are strong, if vaguely defined, links to *Unzulänglichkeitskomik* and *Komik des weltüberlegenen Spiels*.

Several levels below the elevated realm of near-philosophical treatises such as Forster’s, one can find impressionistic lists of types of humour, such as those in the appendix of Olsson et al. (2003:191) where genres, strategies, topics, functions, and media are mixed in no apparent order. Surprisingly, more than half of the items on the list are in English while the others, as the rest of the book, are in Swedish:60 “joke, pun/’wordplay’, limerick, cartoon, riddle, ‘humorous commentary’, ‘photo’, visual pun, ‘monologue’, phony advertisement, skit (‘sketch/satire’), parody, ‘inverted theory’, bogus experiment (‘feigned exp.’)”. On a certain level, this selection can at least give one an idea of what types of humour one may want to consider.

Marx (1994) lists, and later exemplifies, a similar collection of phenomena, “a motley crowd” of “those linguistic constructions in *Pinocchio* that have comic effects”: “talking names, nicknames, imaginary place names; comparisons, metaphors, hyperbole; tautologies; stylistic incongruities; wordplay and play with the language (including play with polysemy, twisting of words, etc.); ellipsis and anacoluthon, etc.” (Marx 1994:158; my translations). The semicolons

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59 Since the translation of the original German terms is tricky, I provide them here, too.
60 Single quotes indicate where I have translated from the Swedish. The short explanatory comments are not included in the quote, nor is the defective editing of the original text.
indicate which items Marx considers similar enough to be treated together. Obviously, many of the types mentioned by Olsson et al. would not be expected to occur in a work of literature such as *Pinocchio*, so it is not really surprising that there is so little overlap between the lists. Moreover, Marx, working with one text and a collection of its translations and (written) adaptations, can focus more on humorous strategies and need not consider media and genres, which is what Olsson et al. have done.

Other inventories of humorous phenomena are also restricted in some way. Nash (1985:38-53), for example, offers more than a dozen types in the already relatively narrow subcategory of humour formed by formulaic jokes, but, as he himself acknowledges, this can only be tentative and hardly complete. Add to this all other kinds of jokes, plus humour that would not be considered joke-like, and it becomes clear that we are dealing with a potentially enormous number of humour types.

Perhaps more interesting is Kotthoff's overview encompassing 27 categories of conversational humour, ranging from “absurd fantasies” (category no. 1), “absurd theories” (cat. 2), and “anecdotes” (3), over different kinds of “teasing” (4, 11, 12), “sexual innuendoes” (16), and “humorous accounts/descriptions” (21), to “pulling somebody’s leg” (23) and “wordplay” (27) (1998:347-353; my translations). As Kotthoff herself points out repeatedly, some of the categories can co-occur or be part of each other. Wordplay, for example, can be used for various purposes, while other categories are different from each other by degree rather than in an absolute sense. Indeed, if it was not clear before, then this is a general conclusion that can be drawn from most humour-related work: categories that are imposed on humour as a concept or on humorous material can never be fixed or completely discreet. To some extent, that is also true of the somewhat less elusive phenomenon of language-play, as will be seen.

Finally, it should be pointed out that there exists another, very broad, but relatively straightforward and widely accepted classification of humour that is frequently referred to in the literature. This classification will be taken up and discussed in the following sections (especially 2.2.2), where I shall attempt to distinguish language-play from other concepts, such as humour, and a short summary will thus suffice at this point: first, a distinction can be made between humour that somehow relies on language and humour that does not (and that is based instead on e.g. visual or acoustic effects). The first type, i.e. humour that is verbalized, can be further divided into a referential and a verbal variety, with the latter containing, or being built on, what could be called language-play.
2.2 Language-play

This thesis is primarily about language-play and its translation, and I am now in a position to focus more specifically on these topics.

2.2.1 Language-play vs. humour in general

In the previous sections, I have repeatedly indicated that humour and language-play are related, but not the same. It is now time to make the differences explicit. One of these differences is that humour is a very vague concept that is difficult to grasp and that does not belong naturally to any one academic discipline. In contrast, language-play, including wordplay, seems first of all to belong to the domain of linguistics (though of course, nothing hinders other disciplines from dealing with it, too). It even has the object of linguistic study, language, in its name. While humour has attracted some attention on the part of applied linguists, traditionally it has been the domain of e.g. philosophers, psychologists, anthropologists, ethologists, and literary scholars. Since much humour relies on language-play, the latter has featured in all possible contexts, but a proper study of language-play as such is inevitably a linguistic enterprise. About humour, on the other hand, much can be said and written without recourse to linguistic terminology or insights – and without reference to language-play for that matter: of the 13 contributions (including the introduction) to Royot’s collection of articles *Humour et cinéma* (1995), not one deals predominantly with verbal humour or language-play, and only two mention it in passing.

That this is possible has to do with the fact that humour can be so much more than language-play. In fact, humour does not even have to involve language, as I have said. Sounds, actions, looks, scenes, pictures, arrangements, etc. can all qualify as humour. A piece of clothing can have a humorous effect, as when a clown puts on shoes that are 15 sizes too large, and men dressing up as women is a frequent element of many a theatre play or filmic production – and I am not talking about tragedies. There are thousands of cartoon drawings that convey humour without language,61 and the entire genre of silent film comedies were only exceptionally able to use linguistic elements and literally depended on custard-pie humour.

Even where humour does rely on language, this need not imply that

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61 There is a tradition, at least in German entertainment magazines, to add the caption Ohne Worte ('Without words') underneath such wordless cartoons, which is somewhat ironic. Perhaps it is a way of assuring the reader that nothing has fallen away in the printing process.
language-play is involved. A spoken or written account of what has been or could be represented as physical humour can be humour itself. Or consider the following example of a joke, taken from Nash (1985:39) and belonging to the type of “quaint conjecture”, according to him:

(2.1) I think sex is better than logic, but I can’t prove it.

This joke could not possibly exist in a non-linguistic form, but it is nevertheless free from language-play. That is also the case with many humorous exhortations, such as the well-known

(2.2) Eat more dung – billions of flies can’t be wrong.

Here, at least, it would be funny just to picture a human being eating dung, possibly surrounded by a myriad of flies doing the same, but the absurdity of the apparent wisdom that ‘billions of X can’t be wrong’ would be missed.62

It is clear, then, that humour, despite the fact that its domain is anything but well defined, encompasses much more than language-play. Humour, and especially jokes, may often, or even prototypically, rely on some form of language-play, but they do not do so always.63 Conversely, there is some (intended) language-play that is not meant to be, nor received as, humour. The titles of the two latest conferences arranged by the European Society for Translation Studies may serve, in the context of this study, as appropriate examples: Claims, Changes and Challenges in Translation Studies (2001) and Translation Studies: Doubts and Directions (2004). Clearly, there is a pattern here: both titles contain arrangements of words that start with the same letter. This is a form of language-play, because the linguistic system has been exploited to create a special effect. Although it can be discussed whether an intended effect is actually necessary for language-play to qualify as such, we are not dealing with coincidences here. Still, there is nothing funny or humorous about the conference titles, and their function must be a different one. (Cf. 2.2.7 for the possible functions of language-play.)

So, just as not all humour is met with laughter, nor all laughter due to

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62 For more examples of humour collected specially because they do not rely on double meanings or other forms of language-play, cf. e.g. Crystal (1998:12) and Ross (1998:28f).

63 Crystal (1998:14) writes that “[a]bout two-thirds of the jokes in a typical collection rely on language-play, and the vast majority of these involve puns of some kinds”. He presents no evidence for this claim, and Attardo (1994:102f), who actually seems to have counted, is in a position to provide exact figures indicating that referential jokes outnumber verbal ones, i.e. those hinging on language-play (cf. 2.1.6 and 2.2.2), by about 4:1. The authors agree, however, on the predominance of puns in verbal jokes.
humour, there is humour that has nothing to do with language-play and vice versa.

2.2.2 Language-play vs. verbal humour

Just as language-play cannot simply be equated with humour, it is not the same as verbal humour, although the similarity is certainly much stronger. In 2.1.6, I briefly explained that humour is often divided into verbalized, or “verbally expressed” (Ritchie 2004:13) humour on the one hand, and its non-verbalized counterpart on the other. Linguistic approaches to humour obviously focus on humour involving language. This type, however, can be further subcategorized into referential and verbal (as opposed to verbalized) humour. When Attardo makes this distinction, he speaks of jokes rather than humour, but these terms can be considered synonymous in this context:

> On one side, we have “referential” jokes, and on the other, we have “verbal” jokes. The former are based exclusively on the meaning of the text and do not make any reference to the phonological realization of the lexical items (or of other units in the text), while the latter, in addition to being based on the meaning of the elements of the text, make reference to the phonological realization of the text. [...] It should be emphasized that both referential and verbal jokes are “verbalized” jokes, i.e., jokes which are expressed by means of a linguistic system (or its derivatives, like writing). (Attardo 1994:95f)

The distinction between ‘wit of matter’ and ‘wit of form’ goes back to Cicero and probably even to ancient Greece (Bremmer & Roodenburg 1997:4). Most writers on humour acknowledge this general distinction, though they may use slightly differing terminology to describe it. Tiersma (1985:1) refers to verbal jokes as “instances of humor which are linguistic in nature, in other words, those which are amusing because of the way in which language is manipulated.” He then goes on: “All verbal [in the sense of verbalized, cf. above] humor uses language as the medium of the joke, riddle, pun, etc. Yet, in addition to being the MEDIUM, language may also be the MECHANISM of such humor” (Tiersma 1985:1f, original emphasis). The key terms here for verbal humour are manipulation and mechanism, which apply perfectly to language-play, too. However, when Tiersma identifies “ambiguity leading to surprise” as the

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64 In a translation offered by Chiaro (1992:14): “For there are two types of wit, one employed upon facts, the other upon words.”
“unifying theme to the diversity of linguistically-based humor” (1985:41), he uses words that do not fit so well for language-play in general (though possibly for wordplay, cf. 2.2.5 and the introduction to chapter 4).

Also Marx and Luthe make an explicit distinction between referential and verbal humour, although they do not use these exact words. With regard to the real source of verbal humour, the former speaks of a “linguistic anomaly” (Marx 1994:155; my translation), the latter of “consciously crossing the bounds of linguistic rules” (Luthe 1995:50; my translation). Again, both these phrases might conceivably be used by some people to describe language-play.

Other terms to be found in the literature for what has here been labelled verbal humour/jokes include “language-dependent jokes” (Zabalbeascoa 1996:253), “humour linguistique” (Kassaï 2001:155), and “humour langagier” (Petit 2001:313), all of which stress the strong link between the humorous effect and the linguistic system. Nash, finally, distinguishes what seems to correspond to referential and verbal humour in the following words:

We imply that ‘the language of comedy’ may be quite unremarkable, sentence for sentence – may, indeed, be deliberately banal – but that ‘the language of humour’, and certainly ‘humorous language’ must always be characterized by a tension attributable to devices latent in the linguistic system, possibilities realized by language in its humour.

(Nash 1985:124; original emphasis)

While it is highly misleading, in my opinion, to use the terms “language of comedy”, “language of humour” and “humorous language” in the way Nash does (comedy can, and humour need not, be based on language-play), the passage offers a) evidence that also Nash acknowledges a difference between language as a medium only and language as a mechanism (cf. Tiersma above), and b) another interesting way of circumscribing language-play. This is, of course, the reason why I have dwelt on the distinction between referential and verbal humour at all: many of the attempts at capturing the essence of the latter in words have resulted in what I consider useful terms for, and descriptions of, the concept I am really interested in.

However, it should be made clear once more that language-play cannot be equated with verbal humour – or any other of the many proposed subcategories

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65 Mejri, on the other hand, speaks of “jeux de mots pragma-linguistiques” and “jeux de mots linguistiques” (2004:369-373). From his examples, it becomes clear that he must be referring to referential and verbal humour, respectively. His terminology is very confusing, though, since he uses jeux de mots (“wordplay”) in the sense of ‘joke’ or ‘humour’, while wordplay is generally reserved for puns (cf. 2.2.5).
of humour for that matter. Of course, there exists no commonly accepted
definition of humour, as I have tried to show, and I certainly found it expedient
not to add to the confusion with my own attempts at pinning down the
concept. Nevertheless, the impression I have gained from the literature is that
humour, including verbal humour, is not only that which is humorous; it is a
social and possibly psychological affair, an experience, a relationship between
people, and between people and some kind of subject matter. It also involves
mental states and, typically, certain intentions and results. Most of these aspects
of humour are too abstract and/or irrelevant for a description of language-play,
which, for my purposes, can be presented in a much more straightforward
manner, which I will attempt in the next section.

2.2.3 Attempt at a definition of language-play

Language-play, like translation, can be understood as a process, or a result, or
both. In my study, the stress will be quite exclusively on the result aspect of the
phenomenon, mostly because my material is of such a nature that it cannot
provide me with any clues as to how the language-play contained in it may have
been produced. That is true of both the SL and the TL versions. There is thus
no need for me to try and define what constitutes language-play from a process
perspective.

In 2.2.2, I have already indicated which of the quotes on verbal humour I
would consider conceivable descriptions of language-play. As a matter of fact,
there are very few publications that deal explicitly with language-play rather
than, say, humour or wordplay, and even the exceptions are of little help to me
when it comes to formulating a definition of the concept that would coincide
with my understanding of it. Kuczaj (1998:137), for example, focuses too much
on the process when he claims that “[l]anguage play (and play in general)
involves three basic types of behavior: modification, imitation (of others), and
repetition (of the self)”. On a rather general level, that may be true for the
‘how’, but behaviour is not a notion that appears relevant for the identification
of the ‘what’, i.e. the outcome in the form of linguistic material with certain
properties.

For the same reason, i.e. it being a matter of process rather than product,
I do not think it necessary to discuss the question as to how far language-play
can actually be considered a form of play. The answers offered in the literature
often hinge on the functions, or lack thereof, that one chooses to ascribe to the
two concepts. Suffice it to say that both language-play and play in a more
general and traditional sense are, in my opinion, ultimately purposeful activities, even though the effects may be quite different for the people involved in, or witnessing, them.66

Grassegger’s admittedly rather vague definitions of language-play at least encompass the product as well as the process:

[...] *language-play*, by which is meant, in a very general manner, the playful use of the human communication tool. (Grassegger 1985:9; my translation, original italics)

*Language-play*, in its multifarious manifestations, makes use of the identity or similarity of the senses and sounds of words and syntactic constructions. (Grassegger 1985:9f; my translation, original italics)

[Let *language-play* be] the generic term for all forms of play with linguistic elements. (Grassegger 1985:18; my translation)

Still, the second quote may constitute too narrow a description of language-play, and thus not be perfectly consistent with the first and the third. After all, “play with linguistic elements” may involve more than “mak[ing] use of the identity or similarity of the senses and sounds of words and syntactic constructions”, which would fit better as a description of wordplay (cf. 2.2.5), were it not for the fact that the *senses* of the items being played with are usually anything but identical or similar.

Grassegger (1985:9) also stresses another aspect of language-play, not mentioned in the quotes above, namely creativity. Of course, any linguistic production requires some amount of creativity, but I think Grassegger is quite right in assuming that *playing* with language involves more creativity than, say, normal conversation. On the other hand, it may be difficult to make creativity a defining criterion for language-play precisely because creativity is a matter of degree rather than of ‘present’ versus ‘absent’.

Unfortunately, this final remark is quite true of other aspects of language-play, too. In particular, there simply is no obvious dividing line between segments of speech or written text that qualify as language-play and other segments that do not. For example, language-play has strong affinities with the domain of rhetoric, which, on the whole, I would like to ignore.67 Crystal (1998:148) addresses this problem, pointing out that too broad a notion of

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66 For a brief discussion of wordplay vs. play, cf. Heibert (1993:15-18, 150); for the possible functions of language-play, cf. 2.2.7 in this thesis.

67 The only exceptions occur in those cases where there is an overlap between a rhetorical figure and a form of language-play.
language-play would quickly lead one into the realm of stylistics:

It is of course possible to extend the notion of language play in that direction – and even to go beyond it, adopting broader and broader conceptions of language play, but if we do this, we shall end up defining the whole of language as language play. From that point of view, as soon as we open our mouths to speak or pick up our pens, we are ‘playing with language’, engaging in a ‘language game’ for which we need to follow the rules. (Crystal 1998:148)

In order to keep his topic relatively limited, Crystal prefers to focus on “the way we break the rules, and not the rules themselves” (1998:148). At the beginning of his book, he describes language-play as follows:

We play with language when we manipulate it as a source of enjoyment, either for ourselves or for the benefit of others. I mean ‘manipulate’ literally: we take some linguistic feature – such as a word, a phrase, a sentence, a part of a word, a group of sounds, a series of letters – and make it do things it does not normally do. We are, in effect, bending and breaking the rules of the language. And if someone were to ask why we do it, the answer is simply: for fun. (Crystal 1998:1)

Now, there are some parts in this passage that I would rather not want to incorporate into my own definition of language-play, while others seem more essential. In particular, I do not want to assume that there is only one function of language-play (enjoyment/fun), as Crystal seems to do. In fact, I do not consider changes in the emotional state of mind of the producer or the receiver decisive at all. In my opinion, it is part of the essence of language-play (the product) that it has or incorporates a certain effect, but this effect is first of all linguistic in nature and then cognitive. As I have indicated before, there is no reason why language-play should always have to be ‘fun’. Though Crystal goes out of his way to point out that language-play is not humour (1998:14-16), he does so on the assumption that humour is determined by laughter. I, too, have tried to argue that language-play and humour are not the same, and would now like to extend that claim to concepts such as enjoyment and fun, which may or may not be related to humour, but which are in any case too far removed from the level of language to be of use in a definition designed to remain close to that level.

I am also sceptical when it comes to an understanding of language-play as “bending and breaking the rules of the language”. Which rules are broken when
we craft a pun, a rhyme, an alliteration? Are there any rules, even ‘unwritten’ ones, that would forbid us to do these things under any circumstance? Clearly, the answer is ‘no’, and even if we consider the Gricean maxims as rules, there would still be sequences of linguistic entities that constitute language-play without offending any maxims. In short, I think that an emphasis on rules and how they are bent and broken is misleading at best in this context.

What can be preserved of Crystal’s outline is the notion of the manipulation of language and the idea of making “it do things it does not normally do”. Again, these notions are not entirely unproblematic: it is, for example, fair to claim that many of the utterances we make, and certainly most, if not all, the sentences we write in a context such as this thesis, are original and unlikely ever to be produced again by someone else, with exactly the same choice of words, except perhaps by way of quotation. In one sense, therefore, we almost always manipulate linguistic features to make them do things they do not normally do. On the other hand, to put it like this may be taking too far this manner of reasoning, which, admittedly, I have used repeatedly in the present chapter as an arguing strategy. I would claim that there is, after all, and borderline cases notwithstanding, an essential difference between straightforward, ordinary language use and language-play. Toury seems to agree, considering his definition of the latter:

[…] a language play will be taken to consist in the application to an utterance of a definable type of rule, or set or rules, which is linguistic in nature – that is, accountable in linguistic terms – but not resorted to in ‘normal’, non-playful language uses. (Toury 1997:271; bold type omitted)^68

My own attempt, finally, at a definition of language-play is not all that different:

Language-play, contrary to normal, or non-playful, fragments of conversation or writing, is marked in the sense that the linguistic building blocks involved draw attention to themselves and their form, in addition to functioning as transmitters of content. In other words, language-play is present where the peculiarities of a linguistic system (or linguistic systems) have been exploited in such a way that an aural and/or visual (and by extension: cognitive) effect is achieved that would not be present, and

^68 Note the use of language play as a countable noun, which I refrain from (yet). It ought to be increasingly acceptable, though, considering that wordplay is often treated in this way.
perhaps consciously avoided, in language used with a focus on propositional content.

This definition is not perfect, and it certainly does not permit a mechanistic identification of language-play in a text. It is very doubtful whether any short and general definition like the one suggested here could actually do that without further qualifications. The qualifications that I can offer take the form of supplementary definitions, some of them quite detailed, of specific categories of language-play. These will be provided together with the respective results in chapters 4 and 5.

I consider this to be an acceptable compromise: on the one hand a very general definition that captures language-play in its entirety, but also runs the risk of being both too vague and too inclusive, on the other hand functional definitions facilitating the identification and categorization of specific instances of language-play in a particular corpus of linguistic material.

2.2.4 Language-play, intention, and signalling

The problems, indicated above, of finding an acceptable definition of language-play in general, and of dividing it into distinct categories, are related to another issue that is to some extent theoretical, but also has some very practical implications. What I am referring to is really a different aspect of distinguishing language-play from other phenomena, including ‘straightforward’ communication, namely by considering the originator’s intention as a factor.

Most of the writers who address the subject at all deal with wordplay/puns rather than language-play (cf. 2.2.5 and the introduction to 4), but that renders their views no less relevant in this context. There seems to be a general agreement that it makes a difference whether or not wordplay has been created as such on purpose, especially when it comes to translating it. “First and foremost, translators should ask themselves whether wordplay or ambiguity really is what it looks like. They must also determine whether the wordplay or ambiguity is intentional or not” (Qvale 1995:229).

Also the use of the word exploited in my definition of language-play presented in 2.2.3 presupposes a deliberate action. In fact, the same is true of the element play in the terms for the phenomenon under scrutiny. But are things that simple? Can an unintended ambiguity not be a pun, and as such a form of language-play? More importantly, how would one know whether a particular sequence in a text was meant to be taken as language-play or whether
we are dealing with a coincidence, maybe even a blunder? In the case of written material, for example a work of literature, it would definitely be impractical or impossible to always ask the author, who may have forgotten – or be dead.

The original texts of the Hebrew Bible represent an obvious case in point. In their analysis of the puns contained in them, de Vries & Verheij (1997) found it wise to restrict themselves to instances where the same lexical form has been used twice or more times with different meanings, and to disregard passages where the authors may, or may not, have invited a double reading of one particular item occurring only once.69 The playful intention behind the former was simply considered to be more evident.

Heibert (1993), who attempted to identify all the wordplay in Joyce's *Ulysses*, could not have recourse to the author of the text, either. That seems unfortunate, for Heibert considers Joyce to be “the ideal reader of himself” (1993:178, my translation) and believes, therefore, that he would have been perfectly aware of all the ambiguities and nuances in his own text. Delabastita (1994:237f) begs to differ, however, thinking that “[o]ne does not need to be a hard-core poststructuralist to question Heibert's confidence in the absolute semantic stability of the source text (or target text, for that matter), which is apparently rooted in a rather static and rationalistic view of meaning production” [sic]. Delabastita’s view of meaning production is obviously different, as will be seen.

As a matter of fact, Delabastita himself repeatedly takes up the questions addressed in this section and treats them at some length, especially in his impressive book-length study of Shakespearean puns in translation (1993:117-133, 160-165).70 I think a short summary of the interesting insights presented there is in order at this point: Starting from a basic problem encountered by any researcher on wordplay, namely how to distinguish significant from non-significant wordplay, Delabastita states that there are puns that are easily recognizable as such and others that are more hidden. Furthermore, as I myself have already indicated, there are passages where it is uncertain whether the striking features included in them should indeed be considered significant. Essentially, the distinction is between “communicative devices (pun)” and “obstacles to communication (non-intentional ambiguity, slip, etc.)” (Delabastita 1993:118). After having introduced the reader to the Gricean principles and maxims of conversation, Delabastita draws the following conclusion:

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69 These paraphrases describe what will be discussed as horizontal and vertical puns in 4.1.
In the conceptual system of Grice’s theory, the distinction between significant and non-significant wordplay can be characterized as the distinction between violations and exploitations of the maxim of Manner, i.e. between downright violation and conversational implicature: between a more or less subtle manipulation and a more or less negligent transgression of speech conventions. (Delabastita 1993:122f)

Here again, we have the notion of exploitation and, in the final analysis, the distinction between intended and non-intended wordplay, which Delabastita expresses like this:

According to the criterion of intentionality it looks as if we can assume that there exists an equation between the terminological pairs significant vs. non-significant wordplay and intended vs. unintentional wordplay. Thus, a pun is a real pun insofar as we can be sure that it was meant to be one, whereas a slip of the pen, no matter how apt or funny, can never be considered a genuine pun owing to its involuntary character. (Delabastita 1993:122f)

However, after some further considerations, including a discussion of author and character puns (cf. 2.2.7), Delabastita argues that all these theoretical concerns are hardly of any practical use when it comes to telling apart wordplay from non-wordplay in a given text. More promising as a criterion, since it relies on the text itself rather than on some hidden intentions, is the presence or absence of signals. This idea, including some examples, can already be found in Hausmann (1974:14), but, as Delabastita (1993:127) points out, it remains somewhat underdeveloped there.

Delabastita mentions three broad types of signals indicating a pun (1993:128-131): autosignalization, diacritical signals, and generic signals. The first kind, where “the pun signals itself” (1993:128), is actually of not much help either: when the signal is strong, there is likely to be a pun, but when the signal is weak, it is still unclear whether there is a pun or not, “so that the problem has simply been deferred” (1993:129). The second type, diacritical signals, is much

71 Hausmann (1974) was probably unaware of work done by Grice, but he appeals to stylistic norms that would overlap in part with the maxim of manner: “If two homonyms happen to come very close to each other in the process of text composition, a norm of good style would prescribe the choice of at least one other expression” (Hausmann 1974:18). If this norm is not followed, yet no pun is intended, the result would constitute a violation of the maxim of manner.

72 Also Heibert (1993:41) makes a comment to the effect that it is the strength of the signal, in addition to the similarity of the lexical items, that determines how well a pun functions as such, but he does not pursue this topic, either.
more reliable – when it is present. Included here is any feature that directs special attention to the pun without being part of the pun itself. “Graphic means (italics, quotation marks, exclamation marks, capitalization, etc.) may be used for this purpose as well as phonetic means (intonation, emphasis, etc.) or gestural means (body language, facial expressions, etc.)” (1993:129).

Explanations of, and comments on, a pun count as diacritical signals, too. Generic signals, finally, are different from the previous category in that they do not point to a particular instance of wordplay. They emanate from the genre of a text and lead to certain expectations concerning the presence or absence of wordplay in that same text (1993:130f). This last kind of signal is usually not very reliable. It may also be pointed out, and this is my own comment, that instances of word- or language-play may function as generic signals themselves, which would leave us with a rather circular definition once more.

Delabastita seems to be aware that ultimately not even the notion of signal will in all cases make a difference to, say, a translator who needs to decide whether an ambiguity in the source text should be transferred to the target text (because it may be significant), or whether it should be ironed out (because it could just as well be unintended and/or insignificant). If the signal is strong, it is easy to identify wordplay or, to broaden the topic again, language-play, but if the signal is weak, that is no guarantee that the ambiguous or otherwise noteworthy passage ought to be dismissed as sloppy text production. The conclusion would have to be, then, that “any attempt to identify and describe the wordplay in a text is likely to leave one with a certain interpretative remainder, however much one’s analysis is based on factual signals and not on intuitions about intentions” (Delabastita 1993:160). Apart from short texts such as isolated jokes, there is almost always, but especially when it comes to historical texts, a risk of under- or over-reading, i.e. of missing intended wordplay on the one hand, or, on the other, of seeing puns where there are none. “[P]uns are not necessarily given once and for all. Their recognition and appreciation largely depend on the reading habits of the text user, which are in their turn closely linked to genre conventions and conceptions of language” (Delabastita 1996:132). It may be noted that even Ritchie, who sets out to tackle humour and pun-based jokes in a strictly systematic and scientific

73 For an example of diacritical signal, though from a translation itself, cf. de Vries & Verheij (1997:73), who quote from a Dutch Bible where a pun is marked through both single quotation marks and an explanatory footnote. Consider also the following example of a French wordplay that is clearly signalled as such through its unorthodox spelling. It is provided by Wecksteenn (2001:389) and would probably fall under autosignalization: *canul’art*, a portmanteau word consisting of *canular* (‘hoax’) and *art* (‘art’).

74 This is actually what is normally expected of a translator (cf. Delabastita 1996:133f).
fashion, at least once has recourse to intuition and feeling when judging the

Before moving on to other issues related to language-play, I should take
up one of the questions asked at the beginning of this section and rephrase it as
follows: does language-play always have to be intended in order to count as
language-play? The answer generally given in the literature seems to be ‘yes’,
and I would agree in principle. In fact, the instances of language-play analyzed
later on in my study are all assumed to have been intended. Where I am in
doubt, but not enough to dismiss the passage altogether, a special strategy has
been adopted for also taking into account the possibility that I am dealing with
an unwanted coincidence (cf. e.g. 4.1.1).

Now, it should be remembered that we are not dealing with humour or
funniness any more, but consider the following: Palmer (1994:110) quotes the
Guardian, which had quoted an unintended pun by a British doctor speaking on
the radio ("In terms of medical priorities, vasectomies are close to the
bottom."). The pun, as Palmer points out, is rather funny, and it seems that at
least someone at the Guardian must have thought so, too. Yet it was
unintended, and should therefore not be considered language-play. Or should
it? I would argue that what the doctor said was probably not language-play, and
if someone were to translate his radio performance, the ambiguity should be
removed in the target text. However, the Guardian probably, and Palmer
definitely, quoted the pun with a special purpose, with a focus on the form
rather than the content. With the context and, in a way, the originator having
changed, there suddenly is playful intention, and the quote should be counted
as language-play. (If Palmer’s book were to be translated, the pun would have
to be considered as such, and the content would be less important.)

It is the same with the material studied by Sopeña Balordi (2001), namely
a collection, in book-form, of unintended ambiguities in letters written by
ordinary citizens to different French authorities. The point is that once the
ambiguities were collected for the amusement of the readers of the book, they
became language-play. The same is true of the originally unintended case of
paronymy first quoted by Der Spiegel and then by Heibert (1993:40).75 Heibert
explicitly denies the relevance of the fact that he is dealing with a malapropism,
as he is using it in order to discuss the technique of the pun. In its new context,
the pun is treated as if it was intended and is thus converted into a form of

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75 For the curious: “Es seien aber nicht, wie landläufig vermutet werde, in erster Linie nur
Homosexuelle, sondern gleichermaßen auch Hydrosexuelle gefährdet. Darüberhinaus breite sich
Aids auch bei hydrosexuellen Kontakten aus.” (Die Landshuter Zeitung über einen Aids-
Informationsabend der CSU). Hydrosexuelle and hydrosexuellen are nonsense words.
2.2.5 Language-play vs. wordplay

It is time to clarify why I insist on speaking of *language-play* rather than *wordplay*, which is a much more common term both in the relevant literature and in the world at large. In fact, any more or less comprehensive dictionary has an entry for *wordplay*, but none, as far as I know, considers *language-play* (with or without the hyphen) worthy of the same treatment. That does not mean, of course, that the latter term is not used. I have quoted several sources where it is employed, sometimes even in the title, be it in English or as a close equivalent in another language, and an ordinary Internet search of the term yields thousands of hits. The point is, and I have already hinted at that fact earlier, that *wordplay* is normally used to designate a very important and prominent subcategory of what I call *language-play*, but a subcategory nonetheless. However, before I go on to illustrate that fact, a word about my choice of spelling *language-play*.

The way a compound noun is written in English can be taken as an indicator of how established it is considered to be: the normal development goes from two words for relatively new or unusual concepts, via a hyphenated version, to one word for the most common compounds (Quirk et al. 1985:1537). In all my sources, the term under discussion here is spelled *language play*, but I opted for the hyphenated version, *language-play*, precisely because, on the one hand, it still helps to make the distinction vis-à-vis more established notions such as *wordplay*, which is now generally written in one word (as in this thesis), but also, on the other hand, because it indicates that the broader concept has managed to gain some currency. Needless to say, it would be going too far to write *languageplay*, which may never become an acceptable spelling and, incidentally, yields almost no hits in an Internet-wide search.

Now, as wordplay is a common and comparatively well-studied type of language-play, it will feature prominently in the first of the chapters where my material is described and analyzed. However, there has been some confusion surrounding the concepts, and if any remains, it should be resolved now. This implies that I need to consider what wordplay is. Of course, one can claim, as Golden does, that “[t]o some extent wordplay escapes the very concept of ‘definition’: since by its very nature wordplay blurs semantic boundaries, the fact that it can do so must raise doubts about the existence of such boundaries” (Golden 1996:279). True as it may be, this does not help us much because numerous definitions of wordplay have, in fact, been suggested in both
dictionaries and scholarly treatises. The problem is that these may differ quite substantially, as e.g. Gottlieb (1997c:208), but also Grassegger (1985:22-32), have shown.

The most prominent, and perhaps most influential view, however, is that wordplay equals pun. Many authors say, or imply, as much. Under the entry for Pun in Wynne-Davies (1990), the reader is referred to the entry for Play on words, which begins as follows: “A use of a word with more than one meaning or of two words which sound the same in such a way that both meanings are called to mind” (1990:522). While this description may not suffice for my purposes, it nevertheless captures some of the essence of a prototypical pun. Louden’s definition is slightly different, but points in the same direction: “a connection between two similar-sounding words which invests the relationship between them with additional meaning” (1995:27). The same is true of Hausmann’s (1974:13) and Evrard’s (1996:63) definitions. Delabastita (1993:56) is probably the most explicit when he says that “I will consider pun synonymous with instance of wordplay”. Even in his later publications he follows this principle and uses the terms interchangeably (Delabastita 1996, 1997). As Delabastita must be the translation scholar who has had the greatest influence on how the discipline looks on wordplay, and as there is no sufficiently strong reason to cause additional terminological confusion in this respect, I shall accept that the term wordplay is now reserved for puns and use language-play for the broader concept I am interested in instead.76

Occasionally, wordplay has been defined more narrowly than language-play in previous publications, and perhaps most clearly by Hygrell, who also lists examples of the latter, including alliteration and rhyme (1997:260f). Still, it should be noted that conflicting views can be found in the literature, e.g. Chiaro’s equation of word play [sic] with “the use of language with intent to amuse” (1992:5), which must definitely be rejected, though, for the same reason that language-play and humour cannot be the same (cf. 2.2.1-2). Kotthoff uses the term Wortspiel (‘wordplay’), but illustrates it with examples falling under language-play, such as “assonances” and “unusual combinations of phonemes” (1998:352; my translations). Conversely, Grassegger (1985) explicitly deals with Sprachspiel (‘language-play’), but provides at least one definition that seems to aim at puns (cf. 2.2.3). Stanley (2001b:465), finally, consciously uses playing upon words rather than wordplay, which he finds too narrow (cf. Wynne-Davies’ play on words above), but his aim seems to be to cover more kinds of pun than what he

76 Pisek (1997:42) provides a reference where wordplay is used in the sense of ‘language-play’ and thus distinguished from pun, but he himself decides on using wordplay and pun synonymously.
thinks wordplay does, and not necessarily non-puns falling under language-play. Considering these contradictions and inconsistencies, it seemed important to make it quite clear how I see the relationship between language-play and wordplay. For further information on what more there is to language-play than just puns, cf. chapter 5.

2.2.6 The ubiquity of language-play

Two of the most comprehensive publications on wordplay and on language-play, respectively, start with statements to the effect that the phenomena to be scrutinized are ubiquitous, and now more than ever (Heibert 1993:11; Crystal 1998:1). It is possible that the authors' intense occupation with their topics has simply made them more aware of all the primary material around them, though some of the claims made by Crystal about the frequent occurrence and enormous impact of language-play actually strike me as slightly exaggerated. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the phenomenon is, indeed, more widespread than one might think. It is also possible that it occurs more often now than, say, a century ago, both in absolute and in relative terms.

The main reason why it is likely to be more common in absolute terms is that there is so much more linguistic material around us now than there used to be in the pre-information age. The main reason why language-play would be more common in relative terms is that people might be more inclined to rhyme, pun, etc. now than they used to. It could be surmised that the increased linguistic awareness that comes with mass education, and particularly with improved reading, writing and foreign language skills, should inspire the beneficiaries of such education to handle their improved tools with greater creativity and virtuosity. Apart from that, the spirit of the times also plays a role. As Wynne-Davies (1990:522) points out, there was an age between Shakespeare and Freud when the influence of the sciences and mathematical-thinking led many to look down on puns, even ‘serious’ ones, which are, after all, characterized by fuzzy and overlapping meanings. As a consequence, fewer puns were used in British literature in the 17th and 18th centuries. At present, I can discern no developments or influential attitudes that would cause a reduced employment of language-play, and it is thus safe to assume that it will remain a common feature of our daily lives.

Naturally, there are contexts where language-play is more likely, or even much more likely, to occur than in others. Advertising has already been mentioned, and the reasons why it is so unexceptional in that area will be
explored in the next section. Cook, too, refers to advertising, in addition to other contexts:

In contemporary Britain, language play is a dominant feature of some of the most popular widely disseminated discourses such as the tabloid press, advertisements, and TV quiz shows. Weekly puzzle books (of which there are a number of titles) have vast circulations, rivalling or exceeding those of the best-known serious weekly magazines and newspapers. (Cook 1994:107)

All this still holds true, I presume, and not just in Britain. Apart from genres and situations where language-play “is a dominant feature”, there are of course numerous others where it may not exactly dominate, but still represents a recurrent, accepted and possibly expected trait. These contexts range from certain kinds of conversations and speeches to various genres of written and filmic production, including the sort of film to be found in the corpus of the present study. On the other hand, there are contexts where language-play would be an exception, such as scientific discourse and funeral orations, although it might occasionally be appropriate even there. I should add, too, that I restrict my claims concerning the genre-dependence of language-play to the kind of Western society I am most familiar with. While they may be accurate for considerably larger parts of the world, I am not in a position to judge that.

Be that as it may, one area where language-play seems to be more or less universally employed is in the small children’s utterances, as well as in utterances by adults addressing small children. Crystal (1996, 1998) in particular stresses very much how children like to manipulate and experiment with the language they are in the process of acquiring and provides many examples of the forms this can take (especially 1998:164-177). According to him, children at the age of three to four are generally proficient enough in their language to be able to joke in it (1998:18). He also refers to a study by Ely and McCabe, showing that almost a quarter (23%) of the utterances made by a group of five- and six-year-olds contained instances of language-play (1998:178). However, if we are to believe Kuczaj (1998:139), children start to play with the language much earlier: “Human infants babble, and much of this babbling seems to be playful.” It predominates in the developmental stage during which grown-ups tend to use baby talk in addressing their offspring. Yet baby talk, too, is basically language-play, as Crystal (1998:159-162) suggests with his description of its typical features, such as rhyme, repetition and formation of nonsense words. Intuitively, parents interact with their babies in a way that is certain to
please them (unless, one might add, the little ones are troubled by overriding concerns such as strong sensations of hunger or pain). Tucker confirms that small children are very fond of rhymes, alliteration and rhythms: “The sheer sound of language often seems more attractive to children than its particular sense” (Tucker 1988:67). But again, adults certainly appreciate their sound play, too, even though for an instance of language-play to be really stunning, it generally needs to draw on the semantic aspect of the linguistic system as well.

Finally, it should be pointed out that if the results of the unspecified study Olsson et al. (2003:12) refer to are accurate, and children are not capable of understanding (verbalized?) humour before the age of two or three, then this is yet another indicator that language-play and humour cannot be considered the same. Children appreciate certain cognitively less demanding forms of language-play before they are two years old, just possibly even before they are born.

2.2.7 The functions of language-play

In 2.1.5, I discussed some of the functions of humour. Inevitably, there will be a certain overlap with the present section because much language-play is humorous in nature and will therefore also function as such. As may be recalled (cf. 2.2.5), Chiaro (1992:5) considered amusement the all-important, even defining, function of wordplay, which is a subcategory of language-play. Other authors are more judicious and list additional functions, even though they may accord humour a special position. In Heibert (1993:116), for example, Komik is mentioned first among the “four basic rhetorical functions of wordplay”, the others being Persuasion, Argumentation and Poetik. He also claims that “[t]he comic effect, in particular, is characteristic of the majority of wordplays, which nevertheless can fulfil other basic rhetorical functions at the same time” (1993:116; my translation). While Toury provides a different set of functions (of language-play in his case), humour is among them:

These rules [used in language-play] are applied to achieve certain specific communicative aims, among which the following rank very high: drawing attention to the utterance as a piece of organized language, bringing about functional syncretism (i.e. the combination of several functions intersecting in one and the same carrier), and producing humorous effects. (Toury 1997:271f)

Unfortunately, Toury does not expand on this, and while the “humorous
effects” are relatively unambiguous, I would have to guess what exactly he means with the first two aims he mentions. In contrast, Delabastita’s (1993) approach to the topic of this section is much more thorough, as could be expected, even though he limits the discussion to his immediate concerns, namely the function of wordplay, i.e. puns, in Shakespeare. There is no room and need to give a detailed account of the points he makes, but these are the functions he takes up (Delabastita 1993:137-151; I provide a brief summary explanation for each):

- “providing semantic links: coherence” – otherwise weakly related semantic fields are brought together in a surprising way – for micro- or macro-textual purposes
- “animating characters: individuals and interactions” – the wordplay contributes to ‘a characterization of the characters’, as it were, and of the situations and interactions they find themselves in
- “supporting witty dialogue: interaction” – helps to develop the dialogue, e.g. as a signal for turn-taking
- “supporting rhetorical monologue: persuasion” – a formal link between two linguistic elements can be exploited to suggest a causal or other semantic link, which in turn can be used for persuasive purposes
- “exploiting awareness discrepancy: irony” – characters and audience often benefit from different degrees of knowledge regarding certain topics, which fact can be used for double meanings understandable as such only by one or parts of these groups (only the audience, or only one or some of the characters)
- “manipulating audience response: tension and attention” – puns indicate comedy and the attitude that is supposed to go with it; they relieve dramatic tension and/or heighten the audience’s attention to what is being said
- “tricking the censor: taboo” – wordplay is a relatively safe way of alluding to certain aspects of human nature and behaviour that are not normally talked about, perhaps most notably sex, excretion and death, because anybody who needs or wants to can hide behind the more innocent meaning of a pun.

Delabastita rounds off his survey by saying that puns may have other functions, too, especially in different circumstances; however, many of the functions he has suggested for wordplay in Shakespeare could, perhaps slightly modified, be
considered valid for wordplay, and even language-play, in general.

Considering the functions listed above, to which more will be added shortly, it is clear that some of them can hardly be separated from each other, either on a theoretical level or when it comes to analyzing genuine material. It is generally impossible to determine what the exact number and types of functions are that a particular instance of language-play can be said to have, and different recipients might find it impossible to agree on any of the various suggestions that could be put forward. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that the functions identified have actually been intended, or at least been reflected on, by the person(s) responsible for the language-play. In these respects, language-play is rather similar to humour (cf. 2.1.5).

The functions and, by extension, the importance assigned to the language-play in a text will have some implications for how it is treated in translation – and, in turn, for how the translation is judged in an assessment. That makes the topic very relevant to the study presented and evaluated later on in this thesis. However, while language-play and translation will be discussed in more detail in section 2.3, I will claim at this point that any language-play that makes it into a carefully crafted work of art, such as a play, a novel or a film, has one or several functions that cannot easily be dismissed. In some cases, it may even prove instrumental in promoting a serious message, as in Mary Daly’s radical feminist writings (cf. von Flotow 1997). To be sure, the impact of a particular example may vary according to a range of factors, including its type, its complexity and/or general quality, and the presence or absence of further language-play in its vicinity, but it can never be swept aside as purposeless play or insignificant ornamentation.

It must be said, though, that some functions of language-play are more direct and/or more closely related to the immediate context than others. For example, the prototypical direct function of a pun is to serve as the basis of a joke. The joke, in turn, as a form of humour, can have any of the various functions attributed to humour (cf. 2.1.5), but these would also still depend on the pun. One of the immediate functions of the joke has to do with affecting the recipients’ mental state in a certain direction. In an authentic or fictitious conversation, that will influence the subsequent course of that same conversation (e.g. because laughter or some other form of comment has been elicited). Besides laughing, even more profound changes in the physical behaviour of the persons involved may result. Thus, the pun functions as a joke

77 Just consider the title of one of Daly’s publications, Gyn/Ecology, or some of the lexical creations contained in it, such as stale male-mating and wedded deadlock (cf. von Flotow 1997:57).
and as such acquires further functions, though most of these are still closely linked to the interaction itself. The same is true when wordplay is used to achieve sexual innuendo (cf. Kotthoff 1998:350).

Language-play in advertising can have a variety of functions, too, some of which are more ‘immediate’ than others. As mentioned, advertising is a form of discourse where language-play can frequently be encountered (cf. 2.2.6), first of all because it helps to attract and sustain people’s attention. Despite its widespread occurrence, it is still something out of the ordinary, something that ‘sticks out’ from its, in comparison, dull co-text or other surroundings. Just as pictures, layout and music are exploited to make people notice an ad or commercial and to keep them interested in it, so is language-play, in effect changing the rapport between the text and its addressee. However, the text as such, and whether it is noticed and considered entertaining, is only of limited interest to those who pay for its production and distribution. It is not even the underlying message put forward through the text that counts for much (usually: ‘go and buy product X/service Y’, or ‘support/vote for Z’). What really matters is the ulterior purpose of the text and its message: a change of behaviour that benefits the business or the cause advertised. To achieve that is thus also one of the functions of the language-play employed in the campaign, albeit a rather indirect one.

Nevertheless, in terms of functions, one can go a step further still and understand language-play as a meta-linguistic comment on its own preconditions. By exploiting a peculiarity of the linguistic system, language-play not only serves the kinds of functions already mentioned, it also draws attention to the peculiarity itself. In this sense, any instance of language-play, even if it contains no new information about the referents of the items involved, is informative in the sense that it reveals formal relationships between the items themselves of which the recipient may have been unaware (cf. Hausmann 1974:9f). Admittedly, most people, other than those trained in post-structuralist thinking and researchers on word- and language-play, would be oblivious of such a function, probably even while they are confronted with relevant material,

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78 There is language-play not just in ads and commercials, but also in the very names of businesses and products. The functions are much the same: catching people’s attention, creating a positive disposition towards the bearer of the name, being memorable, and, ultimately, making people buy. Cf. Nilsen (1979) and Eckler (1985) for the strategies employed, and the ingenuity displayed, in the naming of products and American clothing stores, respectively.

79 Maybe that is what Grassegger implies when he describes the language-play in Astérix not only as deriving from an intention to create linguistic art, but also as the “product of a kind of applied linguistics” (1985:32; my translation).
but it may actually be the only function of language-play that is always present.80

Note that I speak of language-play here, while most writers think of wordplay when they discuss meta-linguistic effects, especially post-structuralists, who are concerned with meaning. Consider Davis:

By directly referring to the dependence of meaning upon a linguistic and contextual system, wordplay both employs and comments upon the ambiguity of language. [...] It is [the] capacity of wordplay to stage the impossibility of a transcendent meaning outside of language that makes it such a valuable tool for post-structuralism. (Davis 1997:26)

and

If it sometimes seems that deconstruction focuses on individual words, it is because every word ultimately refers to, and is marked by, all other words in the entire text. Problematic or flagrantly polysemous words especially illustrate this reverberation of a contextual system, and are therefore especially useful places to examine the workings of contextual relations. (Davis 1997:36)

My claim is that not only the forms of language-play that rely on meaning, most notably the pun, can function as a comment on the idiosyncrasies of the linguistic system. ‘Mere’ sound-play like alliteration and rhyme has also a contribution to make in this respect, if not at as deep a level and with such far-reaching implications.

There is another rather indirect function that has been suggested for language-play, especially in connection with its use by children, namely to serve as a method or aid in mastering the linguistic code. In fact, this is quite closely related to the point I discussed before: if language-play raises one’s meta-linguistic awareness, then this should be of help in improving one’s proficiency at the linguistic level. Crystal (1996:334f; 1998:179-182), referring to Piaget and Vygotsky, among others, endorses their claims that playing with language is a way of learning that language, and even though there seems to be little or no conclusive evidence supporting this view (cf. e.g. Kuczaj 1998:145), I intuitively find it plausible. There are also indicators that children who do not engage in language-play are likely to have or develop a language disorder (Crystal

80 The French author Frédéric Dard, who makes excessive use of language-play in his novels, refers to this function in more personal and poetic terms: “One should not be ashamed of one’s puns because they represent a form of homage paid to the language that makes such distortions possible” (quoted in Foley 1999:181; my translation).
I therefore think it is problematic to call “meaningless” the “introspective play with language which is usually assumed to be the domain of the child”, as Cook (1994:114) does at one point. Now, Cook actually belongs to those who, like Crystal, call for more language-play in the classroom, “a protected environment where we can gain confidence and skill with the language code through the pleasures of language play” (1994:114). He must thus agree that the phenomenon has some positive effects, which would lead me to consider it as ultimately meaningful, even if the individual instances in children’s talk to themselves may have very little referential meaning.

It can safely be assumed that children, especially young ones, are not aware of the long-term benefits that their engaging in babbling, rhyming, and nonsensical talk is likely to have. They do it because it gives them pleasure, because they find it intriguing, or, if we adopt a more deterministic perspective, because they feel compelled to do it. In any case, if they have a conscious intention in this respect, it is hardly to improve their language skills. However, in my discussions so far concerning the respective functions of humour and language-play, I never considered a proper understanding of one’s own motives in using these devices essential to the presence or absence of certain functions, which I regard as largely independent of such understanding. (This is distinct from the question of whether something represents an instance of language-play at all, which does, indeed, partly depend on the producer’s intention; cf. 2.2.4.)

In fact, there is no need to limit the currently discussed aspect of language-play to children. Even adults play with language, and often they are alone when they do it (consider all the crossword puzzles mentioned earlier). Under such circumstances, there are no direct communicative or social functions involved, but there is probably enjoyment and possibly increased meta-linguistic awareness, and it is therefore quite likely that even adults improve their language skills when they use the system as a toy. Needless to say, that is also true, perhaps even more, if the language-play is part of social interaction.

There is another aspect to the topic of functions and intentions with regard to language-play that should at least be mentioned here. It has to do with the distinction between “overt” and “covert puns” on the one hand, and between “character-puns” and “author-puns” on the other (Delabastita 81 Crystal (1998) devotes as much as a whole chapter to what he perceives to be a deplorable paucity of language-play in children’s readers and calls for radical changes in this respect.)
These distinctions apply when we are dealing with fictional interaction, for example in a play or film. Overt puns are noticed as such by the addressees within the fictional situation, while covert puns are only noticed by the outside audience. Character-puns have been intended by the characters, while author-puns, though uttered by a character, are intended by the author or script-writer alone. The first distinction has thus to do with perception, the second with intention.

By way of a summary of the present section, I would say that language-play can function in many different ways, probably many more than those mentioned here. When it comes to language-play in the sort of film investigated by me, i.e. family films of a generally comedic nature (cf. 3.1.1.3-4), it can be assumed that a common and often dominant function of the material is humour or, at the very least, pleasure and enjoyment. Other functions may occasionally come to the fore, such as the relief from tension or the characterization of the speaker, or something else.

One should not forget either that a film, apart from being a work of art, is also a business enterprise and a commercial product. All of the films in my corpus have been produced by big companies, and if the decision-makers there had not believed in the films’ profit-making potential, they would not have come into being. A film generates money when enough people watch it in cinemas, when they buy the video and DVD versions, plus the spin-off products that accompany many releases, when the film can be sold expensively to TV stations for broadcasting, etc. In order for this to happen, enough people need to like the film so much that they are willing to pay for it in some way. Of course, it is a very complex question what it is that makes people like a film, but everything in it (the plot, the setting, the characters, the acting, the music, etc.) contributes to the overall effect. In principle, nothing that repels the targeted group of viewers more than it is expected to please them should make it into the film. That is also true of the dialogue, and of the language-play contained in it, whose ultimate function is thus to help render the film attractive (compare this with the ultimate function of language-play in advertising, which is also quite removed from the more immediate functions).

Naturally, as I have indicated earlier, intention is one thing and the actual outcome another. Films fail for many reasons. So it is possible that some...
language-play is annoying rather than pleasing, or at least interesting, to most viewers, but I could not name one example from my corpus that I think should have been omitted from the final cut. Admittedly, I may not be able to leave the researcher's role in this respect, but even though I rarely laughed or even smiled when encountering a new instance of language-play, I believe I always appreciated its being there.

2.3 The translation of language-play

Until not so long ago, there had been very few studies dealing with the translation of language-play. Of course, until not so long ago, translation in general had not been subject to anything resembling scientific scrutiny. However, language-play, or at least its most prominent subcategory, puns, has often been considered ‘untranslatable’ as a matter of course (cf. 2.3.2), so it may have seemed an absurd enterprise to deal with its ‘translation’ in any depth. This is not to say that language-play or wordplay as such had not been paid proper attention. Already 30 years ago, Hausmann (1974:1) rejected claims that wordplay had not been seriously treated in the literature and could refer to a bibliography of more than 200 titles that he had compiled, some of which even represent a linguistic, rather than the traditional literary-philological, approach.

Yet the translation of wordplay/language-play was a different issue and remained largely unexplored (Grassegger’s contribution of 1985 is one of the exceptions) until the turning point that, it seems to me, came only with the publication of Delabastita’s (1993) and Heibert’s (1993) impressive monographs and the collections of articles edited by Delabastita (1996, 1997) a few years later. By now, there are many sources to fall back on.

In the following sections, I will discuss some aspects of the translation of language-play, getting ever closer to questions addressed by my own empirical study in the process.

2.3.1 Material considered in previous studies of the treatment of language-play in translation

Language-play, as I have pointed out, occurs frequently and in almost all kinds of contexts, but it is evidently more common in some than in others. In general, it can be assumed that researchers wishing to collect sizeable numbers of examples for analysis choose primary sources where they are sure, or can
reasonably expect, to find what they are looking for. Alternatively, it is possible that scholars who have previously dealt with a particular source text in some respect want to exploit their close acquaintance with it in their subsequent research endeavours while at the same time tackling the until then neglected aspect of the text that language-play may represent.

Be that as it may, here are some of the sources researchers have used in studies of the translation of language-play or, most often, simply wordplay (the references in parentheses are only examples, of course). Popular are literary classics such as the *Divina Commedia* (Crisafulli 1996), Shakespeare’s plays (Delabastita 1993, 1998; Offord 1997), *Alice in Wonderland* (Weissbrod 1996, Veisbergs 1997, Pereira 2002), *Ulysses* (Heibert 1993), Tucholsky’s *Schloß Gripsholm* (Qvale 1995), and even the *Bible* (de Vries & Verheij 1997; Kaufmann 1997). The ultimate aim of studies of older and highly influential works such as those by Shakespeare and the *Bible*, including studies concentrating on language-play, is often to uncover obscured meanings and authorial intentions. Apart from such ‘monumental’ works, it is Carroll’s *Alice* that seems to be an absolute favourite, not least as a source of examples (i.e. even where the text or its translations have not been analyzed systematically). This is probably due to a variety of reasons (abundance of language-play, first ‘modern’ classic to unashamedly objectify language, a myriad translations into plenty of target languages, personal preference, etc.).

However, more modern sources are also used, perhaps especially since the humanities in general, and translation studies in particular, have broadened their scope to consider formerly looked-down-upon genres and media in their research. It thus seems natural that even the translation of language-play in comic books has been looked at (Grassegger 1985), as well as in film and TV productions (Zabalbeascoa 1996; Gottlieb 1997c; Pisek 1997, Schröter 2004). There are of course numerous other studies that touch on language-play and translation, though many of these are of a (yet) more anecdotal or theoretical

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84 I myself collected my material on the basis of the desired and available types of translations rather than the genre of the source texts (cf. 3.1.1.1-2). On the other hand, I was of course aware of the general nature of the material that my selection criteria would yield, so I can hardly consider myself a clear exception in this respect.

85 In the studies primarily concerned with the analysis of language-play/wordplay as such, rather than its translation, some of the sources used are the following: the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (Louden 1995), English literary classics from *Beowulf* to Byron (Stanley 2001a; 2001b), Shakespeare’s plays (Müller 1996), Marx-Brothers films (Tiersma 1985), a satirical newspaper (Hausmann 1974), product names (Nilsen 1979), advertisements (Cook 1994), and jokes from collections and/or literature on humour (Attardo 1994; Ritchie 2004). Since these studies do not have to rely on texts that have been translated, the variation in the material seems to be somewhat bigger here than among the studies on language-play and translation.

86 Consider that Reiß (1971:41) still felt that dealing with *Trivialliteratur* in translation studies needed to be justified.
nature than those referred to here, or they are really about humour (and translation).

I should mention one more thing in this context: more often than not, poetry, at least the classical variety, contains language-play. The kind relying on sounds, like rhyme and alliteration, predominates, but other categories are also represented. Poetry in general, including words written to be sung, has much more to do with form than prose. Needless to say, poetry has been the topic of innumerable publications, and I am sure that in many of these, the material has been taken apart and analyzed in considerable linguistic detail. Of course, poetry has always been respectable in the realm of translation studies, too. However, in the present study I have completely disregarded the literature in this area, partly because it is impossible to take into account everything that may have some relevance to one’s own work, partly because poetry as such, and the literary approach that tends to characterize its analysis, do not really coincide with my particular concerns.

2.3.2 The (un)translatability of language-play

It has long been a commonly held, and expressed, view that humour, language-based humour, language-play, wordplay, or whatever the respective topic (or label) happens to be, is untranslatable. Delabastita devotes four and half pages (1993:173-177) to nothing but quotations the gist of which is that wordplay is always, normally, by definition or as a rule impossible to translate. Also Vandaele (2001), in his article on the discourse surrounding humour and translation, quotes and lists many publications that reflect a sceptical attitude to the general translatability of humour (usually the kind based on language-play). Obviously, there are many others that could be added to these lists.87

Luthe is one of those who think that there can never be a perfect translation of anything, but in connection with linguistic humour he explains the impossibility of a perfect translation as being due to “linguistic as well as historical-cultural difference [Alterität]” (1995:64; my translation). Also when Fitts (1959:39) declares that “[a] joke can be a nuisance”, particularly when it needs to be translated, or when Boyer refers to humour as an “obstacle interculturel” (2001:from the title), they are thinking of cultural as much as of linguistic differences between recipients, yet they both illustrate their point with ‘untranslatable’ examples of jokes/humour that depend at least in part on

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87 If I occasionally include references to, and quotes regarding, humour and jokes instead of word- or language-play in this section, it is because verbal humour (though not its referential counterpart) behaves in most cases like language-play when it comes to translation.
language-play. Crystal, too, though dealing explicitly with the latter, has in mind the prerequisite of a specific, culturally determined, knowledge that foreigners are likely to lack when he claims that “[t]he stand-up comedians’ language-play rarely survives the crossing of national boundaries” (1998:116).

This kind of specific knowledge has already figured in connection with the discussion of humour as a culture-specific phenomenon (2.1.3), and much of what has been said there is also valid in the present context. Nevertheless, when the untranslatability of wordplay is being claimed (as mentioned, most references are to wordplay, not language-play), linguistic arguments predominate, and the general assumption is that the target language cannot provide, in the same way as the source language does, the type of specific building material that would be required to create an exact equivalent of the original pun. Tiersma (1985:2), for example, says that “[l]inguistic humour rarely allows […] paraphrase or translation” and illustrates that with a pun in English which he thinks would be impossible in another language, “unless by an extremely unlikely coincidence”.88 Hausmann puts it like this: “The untranslatability [of the wordplay] is a consequence of [its] meta-linguistic character which directs the attention to the structure of the language” (1974:107; my translation).89 This untranslatability of wordplay, according to Jakobson, is also the reason why poetry is untranslatable:

In poetry […] any constituents of the verbal code […] are confronted, juxtaposed, brought into contiguous relation according to the principle of similarity and contrast and carry their own autonomous signification. Phonemic similarity is sensed as semantic relationship. The pun, or to use a more crude, and perhaps more precise term – paronomasia, reigns over poetic art, and whether its rule is absolute or limited, poetry by definition is untranslatable. (Jakobson 1959:238)90

Not everybody dares to be as categorical as Jakobson. Tiersma (cf. above) left room for unlikely exceptions in his claims, and Stanley distinguishes between the, according to him, generally translatable “playing upon the senses of words” (including “insistent iteration, zeugmatically yoked contrast, bathos and parody”) and “playing upon […] the sounds of words”, which is more

88 For the curious: the example is a joke from Monkey Business, about a beard being sent by ‘hairmail’. 89 It should be said, however, that while Hausmann seems to accept untranslatability as an integral feature of wordplay, he would not want to make it a defining criterion, because texts can be untranslatable, due to differences between SL and TL, without constituting wordplay. 90 For the distinction between paronomasia and pun, cf. 4.1.4.
dependent on an individual language (2001b:464). The distinction, or at least the labels Stanley uses, may be unclear and even misleading (a typical, ‘untranslatable’ pun, for example, plays both on sounds and on senses), but the point is that even in connection with the second category, which seems to correspond more closely to wordplay or perhaps even language-play, he says that “it may at times be possible to find some words that allow parallel play in another language”.

Still, though they may make allowances for the occasional “happy coincidence” (Stanley 2001b:464), all the quotes presented so far in this section reflect a belief in the fundamental untranslatability of wordplay.91 What does that really mean? In translations of texts containing wordplay, are the critical passages simply left out? Or is it generally the case that precisely one of the meanings contained in the original pun has been transferred? Maybe a combination of these two strategies is to be expected? In my own study, should I anticipate TL puns in only about 1% of the cases where there are SL puns? If yes, have other types of language-play been treated in the same way? These questions may seem ridiculous, especially if one knows a thing or two about translation. Consider e.g. Kassaï’s question about linguistic humour: if it is “linked to a language A, can one translate it into a language B, and if not, what compromise solutions are available to the translator?” (2001:155; my translation). Or Antoine’s ditto (2001:19; my translation): “If [the language of humour] is translatable (and what translator would accept defeat?; what translator would not prefer a partial victory to a humiliating retreat?), at what cost to the original text?” Apparently, then, there can be more alternatives in wordplay translation than out-and-out resignation on the one hand and fortuitous opportunities for a direct transfer on the other.

Of course, that is what this whole study is all about. If I had not believed – known, in fact – that translators do come up with interesting solutions in the form of TL word-/language-play largely or partly independent from its SL counterpart, I could only have expected very clear, and boring, results. I would probably not even have pursued this topic in the first place. However, not only do I believe that there are “compromise solutions” and “partial victories” (accepting the somewhat out-of-place metaphor for the time being), but I think that there are some entirely appropriate solutions that suit the translator’s purpose very well – ‘complete victories’, so to say. On the other hand, I believe, unlike Antoine, who seems more optimistic in this respect, that there are

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91 This view is also behind Mejri’s (2004) call to make use of translation as a tool in the investigation of the nature of wordplay (or jokes – Mejri’s terminology is misleading, cf. 2.2.2).
translators, possibly many, who would, and actually do, “accept defeat” under certain circumstances. Still, it is quite clear that simply equating wordplay with untranslatable stretches of text must seem rather absurd to e.g. dubbers, subtitlers, literary translators, and others who deal with wordplay in a way most people would consider ‘translation’.92

Those who do make this equation obviously base their claims on too narrow an understanding of what translation is, namely a very close transfer of source-text elements into the target text, with minimal changes in meaning, function and (one may assume when it comes to wordplay) form. If we accept such a view, then wordplay is indeed virtually untranslatable (in most cases). To take the example of the shortest, most well-known and, in the present context, most appropriate pun, *traduttore traditore*, there simply is no English counterpart that would convey the same meaning, be a pun based on near-homonymy, and also be as short (cf. 2.3.3 for why this is so). Of the possible alternatives, perhaps *translator = traitor* comes closest, but there is the added equation mark or its spoken equivalent (required to prevent the items from being construed as a compound noun), and the two TL lexical items, even though they alliterate and rhyme, are much more different from each other than the original two. Furthermore, for its interpretation, the original pun can by now rely on its easy recognition, whereas the suggested TL version remains ambiguous (if the intended meaning can be deduced because the words are recognized as a translation of a well-known original, then its status is already different, and the translation would not even have been necessary). So yes, wordplay like this is generally not directly transferable, but it does remain “available to translation in the sense that descriptive translation studies applies that term today” (Davis 1997:40). Chiaro points in the same direction when she says that we have to reconsider the issue of impossibility of translation. If we aim at the exact mirroring of discrete items, then translation is indeed out of the question; on the other hand, if we are willing to find a solution such as substitution in functional terms acceptable, then, although not ideal, translation, or rather retelling, is quite feasible. (Chiaro 1992:98)

In a way, Chiaro, too, appears to equate translation with the direct transfer of items since she prefers the somewhat questionable term *retelling* when it comes to substitution (the fact that she considers wordplay synonymous with jokes

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92 The same is of course true for those with an academic interest in translation: “Those engaged in translation studies are certainly far more interested in examining acts of translation than in theoretical pronouncements that what they are studying cannot be done” (Davis 1997:29).
may have played a role here), but she still confirms that there is a way out of the apparent dilemma posed by the untranslatability claim. Pisek is aware of that as well:

As regards the translation of wordplay, there is often talk of its basic untranslatability, or at least of its reaching the limits of translatability […]. This is the result of a source-language oriented approach to the problem with emphasis on the isolated pun as the unit of translation. If we, however, adopt a more target-language oriented approach that also considers the function of the pun within the text and the function of the text in general, various forms of translation strategies are at our disposal […]. (Pisek 1997:43)

Attardo’s position, as expressed in (1994:28f), seems slightly less clear. He expressly rejects Cicero’s claim that paraphrase and translation can serve as criteria for distinguishing verbal from referential humour (cf. 2.2.2), but he certainly appears to contradict himself in the process:

Actually a good translator may be able to find similarities in the two linguistic systems that will allow the rendering of the pun in another language with a minimum of distortion. […] It remains that literal, non-functional translation of puns between unrelated languages is theoretically impossible. (Attardo 1994:29)

However, later on, Attardo allows three possibilities: “the translation of [verbal jokes] is either impossible or must rely on unsystematic correspondences between the codes, or on sophisticated recreations of the same kind of meaning/sound correlation” (1994:95f). Still, his main argument in denying the absolute untranslatability of verbal humour is that puns and the like need to be subjected to functional, not literal, translation (cf. 2.3.4 below), and that the former is generally quite possible.

But again, it is Delabastita (1993) who offers the most profound discussion of the topic. By analyzing claims of the untranslatability of wordplay, and revealing the assumptions that must underlie them, he criticizes the entire notion at the same time and sets his own understanding of translation against it. In particular, Delabastita (1993:182-190) makes the following points, among others, several of which reflect what has already been discussed in this section:

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93 What types of strategies are available to the translator will be discussed in 2.3.5.
languages are not as different from each other as some proponents of the untranslatability theory seem to think; all languages share some features with other languages, and more if they are typologically, historically or otherwise related.

- it is thus better, on the one hand, to specify under what circumstances (type of wordplay, relationship between SL and TL, etc.) there is reduced translatability of wordplay and, on the other hand, to stop thinking of translatability in terms of an absolute and to consider it as a cline instead.

- puns are generally part of a text and their translatability should not be judged in isolation, but rather according to their functions and the text-type they appear in; a pun’s translatability thus depends also on the extent to which an exact replication would be desirable, or some other solution acceptable.

- to claim the untranslatability of wordplay implies that one knows beforehand what translation is, and that one’s understanding of it is very narrow; in essence, there is a normative view behind such claims, which is problematic for many reasons, e.g. because one would have to condemn many established and accepted translations as bad or non-translations, especially if the source text contains puns.

Delabastita’s conclusion is that it is misguided to speak of the general untranslatability of wordplay and that an empirical, comparatively open and non-binary approach such as his own can reveal infinitely more about the phenomenon of wordplay translation, including the rules and norms involved, than any normative attitude. I cannot but accept his line of reasoning and also agree, in principle, with the conclusion. However, Heibert’s study has also been carried out in an essentially empirical spirit (though evaluative and prescriptive elements are strong there as well), and I mention him here because the final conclusion he was able to draw from his investigation is that “Übersetzbarkeit ist Spielraum” (≈ ‘translatability is leeway/the freedom to be creative’; 1993:264).

When Gottlieb tried his creative abilities on the subtitling of a TV show

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95 Of course, in this study, I still rely on some rather artificial and only seemingly clear-cut distinctions and could not avoid a certain focus on the source text, but I certainly do not make use of the concept of untranslatability in the sense discussed in this section. In fact, I consider my own approach quite similar to Delabastita’s.

96 This, I cannot help pointing out, makes much more sense than Heibert’s claiming a relative translatability of wordplay of about 50% (1993:212), based on the ratio of TL solutions in his corpus that are acceptable to him.
dense with wordplay, he found that “even in a genre as semantically and
semiotically complex as the mix of stand-up comedy and punning commercials,
*nearly all items of wordplay are translatable*” (1997c:226; original emphasis). Now,
Gottlieb’s successful performance may be due to a variety of factors: he may be
a better translator than the one he compared himself with (and who had
produced a considerably lower ratio of TL wordplay), he may have worked
under more favourable conditions (e.g. with more time at his disposal), or he
may simply have had different aims and/or been more motivated. But the point
is that he actually managed to show that there is rarely a textual or linguistic
constraint that cannot, in principle, somehow be overcome in wordplay translation.

2.3.3 Factors that can make the translation of language-play problematic

Although Gottlieb’s (1997c) claim that almost all wordplay is translatable is
striking in its boldness, it does not appear quite as remarkable if one has
accepted that translation is not only an exact reproduction of source-text
elements in the target text. After all, if complete replacement is permitted, and it
often is, depending on the translation norms that apply, there are no hurdles
left that are insurmountable by definition. What remains then, it seems, are
essentially problems having to do with creativity, practicality, functions and
quality, and these can of course often be serious. There are various factors and
constraints that influence the choices available to the translator, and these
cannot be made to disappear by raising the status of word- or language-play
from ‘untranslatable’ to ‘translatable’. (Therefore, Gottlieb’s (1997c)
demonstration of the basic translatability of wordplay is still extraordinary
because the experiment was done not with a novel or similar kind of text, but
with highly complex material and in a type of translation that is inherently more
restricted than literary translation.)97

Much of what will be taken up in this and the following sections is
relevant, in principle, not just for language-play but for translation (or
sometimes just screen translation) in general, and although the focus here is on
the translation of language-play, there will be some overlap with what has been
said in chapter 1. This only illustrates, however, that one cannot separate one
from the other and that language-play is only one, admittedly rather special,
kind of textual element that may deserve some increased attention in translation

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97 I am really only talking about the fact that Gottlieb has managed to produce so much TL wordplay
that could theoretically be used in another broadcast of the programme he subtitled. I leave it open
whether other solutions would not have been preferable, including the occasional non-translation.
Translation between different languages is usually not problematic as long as there are TL items that can be used to cover the meaning of the SL items, but when language-play is involved, the form of the SL is exploited, and it is much less likely that both form and meaning can be transferred. As I have shown, there are close English counterparts to traduttore (‘translator’) as well as to traditore (‘traitor’), but the fact that these are also formally relatively similar to the Italian items could not be expected a priori (consider e.g. the German Übersetzer and Verräter). This is so because, with a limited number of exceptions (cf. e.g. Delabastita 1993:58-63), linguistic signs are essentially arbitrary. That is nothing new, as this fact had already been recognized by Greek philosophers such as Aristotle. In the context of modern linguistics, it has been stressed again by Saussure and others, and it has special importance when it comes to language-play and its translation. Weissbrod (1996:220f), among others, makes the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign responsible for the fact that wordplay is at all possible and, at the same time, an obstacle to translation. For example, bank (‘financial institution’) and bank (‘edge of river’) happen to share phonetic and orthographic forms while diverging widely in meaning, which fact could be exploited to contrive a pun, e.g.

(2.3) When my wife called to tell me she needed help because she had lost her beloved platinum credit card by the river, I cried all the way to the bank.

But since linguistic signs are arbitrary, there is no reason why other languages should also use bank or any other single form for two so disparate referential meanings as ‘financial institution’ and ‘edge of river’. If this pun were to be translated, it could thus not be directly transferred (unless the TL had borrowed both kinds of bank from English, for example). What is more, the possibly obscure allusion to the once-famous American entertainer Liberace, who used to cry “all the way to the bank”, represents an additional difficulty. If the language-play is not only language-specific but also culture-specific, it is even more challenging to the translator, and depending on his or her goals and ambitions, an extra effort may be required in the translation process (cf. e.g. Pereira 2002:71).

In general, one could say that the more complex an instance of language-play proves to be, the less likely it is that the same combination of forms would

98 Similar remarks are made by e.g. Attardo (1994:29) and Pereira (2002:70).
have the same effect in the target language. That does not imply that complex SL language-play always needs to, or ought to, be replaced by equally complex language-play in the target text, even if the translator has decided that the number of playful instances should preferably be the same in both versions. A ‘simple’ play can, in principle, fulfil the same role as an intricate one. Yet the fact remains that the choices to be made become even less obvious if the SL language-play is multifaceted.

The idiosyncrasies of natural languages represent of course the basic difficulty in the translation of language-play and are also the reason, together with the cultural aspect, why it is often claimed to be altogether untranslatable. An instance of language-play can rely on more than linguistic (and cultural) features, however. In semiotically complex texts such as films and comic strips there is always interplay between different channels of information (especially the pictorial and the linguistic one, cf. 1.2.7), and while word-/language-play usually is restricted to the linguistic channel, the visual aspects of the text may also be drawn upon in order to make it work, or at least to support it and make it more noticeable (cf. Spillner 1980:76). When this happens, a potential translator cannot substitute the SL words by whatever TL items come to mind, but needs to take the picture into account. (Generally and traditionally, the picture cannot be altered by the translator, though technological advances may change that for some texts.) There are those who claim the occasional untranslatability of such passages precisely because of the added difficulty represented by the visual aspects. Grassegger, for example, says that in “multimedia texts”,

the mutual dependence of the verbal and visual components of the original text can be of such a great complexity that a translation taking into account all the pragmatic and language-play-related factors becomes impossible, even if one is willing to do without semantic invariance. (Grassegger 1985:76; my translations)

Gottlieb (1997c) however, as I have indicated earlier, disagrees with this, arguing that his own achievements in translating the wordplay of a humorous TV show have proved that the picture is not only an obstacle, but can also function as an aid, in the translation process. I would not want to dismiss the problem quite so lightly, and I still maintain that the presence of the picture functions essentially as a constraint: even if it can exceptionally inspire a good TL solution, there is always more translatorial freedom, and hence chance of ‘success’, when the language-play is based on verbal elements only.
For his study, Gottlieb (1997c) had temporarily adopted the role of a subtitler himself. Because he had done so, and reached an apparently high level of acceptable wordplay translation in his experiment, he could afford to more or less also deny the common claim that the constraints of the translation type subtitling must have negative stylistic implications (1997c:226). Yet once again, the fact that Gottlieb felt he was generally able to overcome those constraints does not disprove that they were there. The limited space available, the recommended minimum and maximum exposure times, and especially the presence of the original dialogue, are all factors that make subtitling more constrained than e.g. literary translation (cf. 1.2.1), and this obviously also plays a role when the original text contains language-play. Actually, I need not restrict myself to subtitling here; other forms of translation also have their specific constraints that limit the translator’s options: dubbing normally has the requirement of lip synchronization; in comic strip translation, the fact that the picture cannot be changed also implies that the size of the speech and thought balloons is fixed; in libretto and lyrics translation, the words have to fit the music, etc. One should not forget the difficulties of simultaneous interpreting, either. Indeed, all types of translation are partly defined by more or less bothersome characteristics and norms.

Now, so far I have mostly mentioned language-, text-type- and translation-specific factors that may influence the translation of language-play (normally by making it more challenging). However, there are other factors still. For one, there is the question of how many liberties the translator may or should take with the source text, and in particular how permissible it actually is to depart from the form and/or content of SL elements such as those used in language-play. As has been stated earlier, translatability can be defined as room for manoeuvring. In the preceding paragraphs, I have generally assumed that the translator has a lot of freedom, but that is not a matter of course. When deciding on the range of viable translation strategies, one must take the functions of the text and the intended target audience into account, among other things. However, these issues have not only been touched upon in chapter 1 already, they will also, since they are so central to my entire study, be discussed again in their own section below (2.3.4).

Another factor that obviously influences both the quality of a translated text as a whole and the treatment of the instances of language-play that may be contained in it are the working conditions of the translator (cf. also 1.1.7 and

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99 Cf. e.g. Viaggio (1996) for the acute problems posed by punning and other ambiguities in an interpreting context.
1.2.8). Zabalbeascoa, for example, considers the material and institutional environment in which the translation process is carried out to be “one of the most important factors in the translation of wordplay, of television comedy and many other texts” (1996:239). Good working conditions may require such basic things as a comfortable chair and a functioning computer with adequate text processing programs, but also translation aids in the form of reference books, dictionaries, Internet access, and human resources (colleagues, specialists that can be consulted). There is also the question of remuneration, which can have a huge impact on the translator’s motivation to do a good job, which is in itself a major factor when it comes to translation quality. However, the single most important aspect of the actual working situation may be the amount of time that is available. If the choice stands, say, between actually finishing the translation of an entire text, even if the quality is mediocre, and not being able to finish it in time because one spends too many minutes, hours, or days (who knows?) on passages containing tricky language-play, then the first alternative must seem less painful: “time usually being at a premium for translators, they will often go for the first more or less acceptable solution that crosses their mind” (Delabastita 1996:135).

Which leads me to the last of the factors that always play a role in human translation, and possibly the decisive one, namely the abilities of the translator him- or herself. This is almost self-evident, but a few remarks should be in order. A good translator is one who produces good translations, and in principle that goes for entire texts as well as for shorter passages. Even if their working conditions, attitudes, and levels of motivation are identical, different translators will produce dissimilar TL texts from the same source texts, and some of these TL texts may be considered ‘better’ (however that is defined) than others. If the compared material is large enough, and the qualitative differences prove to be consistent, this must be due to variation in the ability to translate texts from language A into language B. The level of translation proficiency, in turn, depends on the translators’ experience(s), language skills, world knowledge, and other rather abstract but important factors, maybe including ‘talent’. Nevertheless, a translator who is generally quite capable of producing high-quality target texts is perhaps more likely to be, but need not be, equally adept at finding satisfactory TL counterparts to particularly taxing source-text passages containing, for example, poetry or language-play. It is quite conceivable, I think, that one may be perfectly comfortable with translating straightforward and even technical or stylistically advanced language and still feel uneasy when faced with the task of dealing with a pun or similar linguistic
manipulation, depending, for example, on one’s own inclination to indulge in wordplay and on the achievements one is capable of in this area. Both Zabalbeascoa (1996) and Gottlieb (1997c) stress the crucial impact of the human factor in wordplay translation (both in screen translation, as it happens), thereby contributing to a revision of the often encountered assumption that this is primarily or even exclusively a linguistic problem.

Finally, and this can serve as a transition to the next section, the translation of language-play can be problematic if it serves a special function in the text that is not, or not only, the arousal of mirth. I am thinking here of e.g. political messages that are illustrated and reinforced by purposefully ambiguous or otherwise attention-grabbing formulations that would fall under language-play. For example, von Flotow (1997) discusses how Mary Daly’s feminist message has been weakened in the German translation of one of her books because the originally enjoyable and revealing wordplay contained in it had been dealt with in a way that not only deprived it of its powerful impact, but spoilt the whole pleasure of reading the text. In other words, if the function of an instance of word- or language-play is special or complex, the search for an equivalent solution will be even more difficult.

2.3.4 Dynamic equivalence and target-orientation

It is clear that one cannot normally translate the individual elements of an instance of language-play closely and expect that the result should have the same playful character as the original. That is the reason why such instances have often been considered ‘untranslatable’. Following what I believe to be a majority of modern translation scholars, I have rejected this narrow definition of translation in favour of a more descriptive perspective according to which translation is what has actually been done when a text has been rendered in another language. In fact, while one may regret that a verbatim TL copy of SL language-play is impossible, there is nothing one can do about it except to try another approach. One that is often recommended is to preserve, or recreate, the original effect in the target version (cf. e.g. Chiaro 1992:92). Nida (1964:159f) introduced the terms formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence, and while the notion of equivalence can be and has been criticized in subsequent years, I shall, in the present context, disregard the objections raised. Indeed, the terms themselves are hardly important, while the general idea remains valid: if it is not possible or desirable to maintain formal equivalence in translation, then dynamic equivalence, or equivalence of effect, is what one might opt to go for.
In practice, this tends to involve the replacement of the SL items by something that is formally unrelated, but can be expected to function in a similar way, as when one joke is substituted by another.

However, there is no reason why the original effect should always have to be preserved. According to the Skopos theory developed by Reiß & Vermeer (e.g. 1991), it is the purpose of the translation that ought to determine its features. If the effect of the translation on the target audience is meant to be the same as that of the source text on the SL audience, then dynamic equivalence on every textual level may indeed be the ideal. Nevertheless, the overall function of a text may override concerns with particular passages, and this in turn may affect the treatment of language-play; the more the focus is on the content of a text, the less important is it that an instance of wordplay contained in it be given much attention (cf. Gottlieb 2001d:59); conversely, if the focus is on the form of the text, wordplay has a significant artistic and aesthetic function and should be replaced by a functional equivalent (Reiß 1971:42). Still, as I have said earlier, it seems to me that word- and language-play, at least if it occurs in a carefully crafted text intended for other people, generally has a function that cannot be ignored, even if the text is essentially informative in nature. Otherwise the author(s) would not have gone to the trouble of inserting it. Furthermore, since it is normally the case that the original function of a text is to be preserved more or less intact when it is translated, most of the language-play featuring in the gigantic mass of texts that have been or are to be translated in human history should, according to current translation norms in my part of the world, have functional equivalents in their target versions. Only exceptionally, then, can the replacement of language-play by non-playful material be considered the most satisfactory solution (though it may well be an acceptable solution, depending on the circumstances).

To return to the study by Gottlieb (1997c) referred to earlier, it would seem to deal with a very clear example of a translation task that requires dynamic equivalence for every instance of wordplay. This is so because there is a track of so-called ‘canned laughter’ accompanying the various wordplay-based jokes, which ought to force the subtitler to produce a joke in the subtitles whenever there is one in the original (Gottlieb 1997c:215f). I am not completely convinced by the inevitability in this line of reasoning, but it is quite obvious

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100 It is conceivable that a subtitler occasionally needs to weigh the pressure from the canned laughter against the fact that a large part of the target audience is quite proficient in the source language and thus able to understand the original joke. Under such circumstances, the quality of the TL solution would have to be very high (meaning, essentially: easily processed and still very funny) if it is to supplement the SL joke in a helpful way, rather than simply cause confusion.
that in most genres and under most circumstances, humour in a source text should be rendered as humour in a target text (unless the goal with the latter is really, say, to assist in a linguistic analysis of the former). Zabalbeascoa (1996:247) basically says as much and also points out in passing that if comedy is to be translated as comedy, “it would be desirable for the translation to be even funnier than the source text”.101

Obviously, this whole discussion is closely related to the classic question whether a translation should remain close to the source-text, thereby revealing itself as a translation, or whether it should look like an original. In Toury’s terms: should the translation be adequate or acceptable (1995:56f)? In House’s: overt or covert (e.g. 1997:66f)? The answer to this question also has implications for individual textual features. Pereira (2002) shows how the preliminary decisions concerning the general nature (adequate or acceptable) of the translations of Alice in Wonderland affected the treatment of wordplay in that text, and Nord (1994:532-535) adopts a similar perspective when she discusses the translation of names and other culture markers in the same text. Actually, the decision whether a translation should be source- or target-oriented (or something in between; we are once more dealing with a cline here, not strictly binary oppositions) depends very much on the functions it is meant to fulfil. However, the overlap is not complete: if a translation is intended to conform to the target-culture norms for the genre and text type in question, this does not necessarily imply that particular source-text features such as language-play must have formal or functional equivalents there – or any equivalents at all, for that matter. Depending on the relevant norms and functions, and perhaps especially the practical constraints, the treatment of language-play can be subject to any of the strategies outlined in the next section.

In general, however, I think we can assume that the German, Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish subtitlers and dubbers of English-language family films such as those making up my corpus have no motives for reducing the amount of language-play contained in the original versions – no motives, that is, which are of an ideological or affective nature, or which have to do with perceived preferences among the envisaged target-culture audience. I think that Western cultures can be deemed sufficiently similar, not least because of the unifying power of especially American film productions, to permit such a view. Consequently, feature films intended to be attractive to certain segments of the

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101 While I certainly agree with Zabalbeascoa here, I cannot follow him in the conclusion he draws from this, namely that “there is little point in comparing source and target texts in terms of the exact amount and type of humour they contain”. To do that would at least serve as an indicator of how funny the two versions are in relation to each other.
American and British populations most probably have a similar potential for the corresponding segments of other (West-)European populations. The same is then likely to be true of individual features in these films, including instances of language-play. In principle, it can thus be concluded, the target audience ought to have access to as much language-play as the original audience, if not more (cf. Zabalbeascoa 1996:247).

2.3.5 Strategies in the translation of language-play

There is a “now widely held view among translation scholars that the appropriate unit of translation is the entire text, rather than its individual words or sentences” (Davis 1996:25). From a theoretical viewpoint, that is indeed very plausible: a text is a coherent and cohesive whole, or at least presented as such, and it would mean doing violence to it if it were translated into a series of words or sentences that have been transferred into the target language one by one without regard for what precedes and what follows them. Rather than being a text itself, the translation (or rather: translations) would be a myriad of small fragments that may or may not make sense if taken together. Some of the output of the less advanced machine translation programs can give one an idea of what happens if too small chunks are translated at a time.

However, if a text is longer than a couple of sentences, it is practically impossible to translate it all at once because the limited processing capabilities of the human mind and body (including eyes and hands) do not permit the solving of very complex problems (such as translating a long text) in one synchronized act. Both when it comes to taking in the form, content and functions of the source text, and when the time has come to actually record the words of the target text, the translator will most likely start from the beginning and then proceed in a more or less linear fashion towards the end, by necessity concentrating on short segments at a time. A conscientious translator who has enough time to do a good job may partly overcome these human limitations by reading the entire text first (or by watching the entire film, etc.), and taking notes in the meantime, which will provide him or her with important insights that can be of use when decisions need to be made on a more restricted lexical and syntactic level. One may also move back and forth in the text to ensure

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102 In the reverse case of non-British European films travelling to English-speaking countries, linguistic and cultural chauvinism may be more of an obstacle.
103 However, as I have already speculated in Schröter (2004:167f), it is not entirely clear what subtitlers may understand by ‘access’ when the source language is as well-understood by the target audience as is often the case with English.
consistency in the translation of closely related passages and finish the
translation task by going through the entire text once more to check its
coherence and cohesion. If these precautions are taken, then, in one sense, the
unit of translation has indeed been the whole text.

Be that as it may, for this thesis I have chosen to focus on particular
sequences in the films that constitute my corpus, not entire texts. When the
dubbers and subtitlers of these films translated these sequences, they may or
may not have known what came before and what would follow, and if they
knew, they may or may not have taken it into account, but in any case they
needed to make a decision concerning each individual instance of language-
play. Even if they did not notice the language-play, or did not understand its
precise nature, they had to deal with the textual elements carrying it. Besides,
one should not push the idea of intratextual (let alone intertextual) relationships
too far. Yes, every passage contributes to the totality of the text and is, in turn,
conditioned by it, and yes, every text is part of a whole universe of previously,
simultaneously, or subsequently existing texts, with influences working in every
direction, but every passage also enjoys a certain degree of independence, can
be taken out of its context and inserted in another one, or stand on its own.
Language-play, in particular, can often function well outside its original context,
and its exact form and content rarely stand in a relationship of strong
interdependence with the form and content of other, if only slightly removed,
segments of text. Furthermore, if we assume that the translated texts are
basically meant to function in the same way as the non-translated versions did
in their context, which must have been and appears to be the case with the
films I considered in my study, then we may also assume that the translators’
ideal was to let the target culture viewers have access to functionally equivalent
amounts and types of language-play.104

For these reasons, I think it is perfectly legitimate to interest oneself in the
strategies translators have employed when dealing with distinctive passages
such as those involving language-play. Other scholars who have taken up the
issue of language-play (or, again, more often: wordplay or humour) and translation
have certainly thought so, and many of them have listed and exemplified
varying numbers of translation strategies for these specific features. In the
following, I shall present and discuss several of the suggestions made in this
respect.

104 It is doubtful whether the translators’ ideal was to have more language-play in the translation than
in the source-text, but it is at least a possibility (cf. Zabalbeascoa’s remark quoted in 2.3.4). It seems
unlikely, however, that the translators would have considered a reduced number of language-play
desirable for other reasons than technical and pragmatic ones.
Some of the strategies featuring in the literature on wordplay/language-
play/humour translation are reminiscent of those already described in Vinay &
Darbelnet (1977:46-55), which, however, are meant to be valid for translation in
general. Hygrell (1997:74), for example, uses what can be regarded as four
‘classic’ translation strategies (the subdivisions she makes are of less relevance
in the present context): “exclusion” (the passage is completely or partially
omitted), “adoption” (source-text elements are transferred to the target text),
“copy” (calque), and “substitution” (Hygrell 1997:74; my translations). Hygrell
seems to consider these strategies useful both for an analysis of translation in
general and in the context of humour translation. Qvale, on the other hand,
explicitly lists three conceivable options in dealing with wordplay, which is of
more immediate concern to me, even though he refers only to literary texts: “1.
Omit the wordplay”, “2. Use wordplay (and other linguistic playfulness) that
sounds like translation” [sic], “3. Use wordplay which may give the impression
that the book was originally written in the target language” (Qvale 1995:224).
This can be contrasted with the three strategies the German translator of Mary
Daly’s *Gyn/Ecology* claims to have used: the first two seem to coincide with
Qvale’s third and second, respectively, while the third strategy consists in
In fact, as von Flotow (1997:55-59) illustrates, the translator has used footnotes
in connection with all three strategies. In any case, conscious omission of
playful passages was apparently not an option. Wecksteen, too, is concerned
with wordplay and mentions three translation strategies, plus compensation,
and they all imply that a fully acceptable TL solution is found (i.e. even the first
strategy involves the use of TL items, despite its label): “wordplay → identical
wordplay” and “wordplay → different wordplay”, the latter with the
subcategories “wordplay → wordplay using the same strategy, but different
words” and “wordplay → wordplay using a different strategy as well as
different words” (Wecksteen 2001:382-387; my translations).

True to his penchant for elaborate taxonomies, Heibert (1993) provides
the highest number of “Übersetzungsverfahren” (‘translation procedures’), a
term explicitly meant to cover both conscious decisions by the translator and
descriptive categories for the analyst (1993:194). The categories are labelled
according to the relationship the TL passages have to their SL counterparts.
Apart from a few more straightforward types, there are categories such as
“+content –style”, “–content +technique”, as well as “shifted”, “smoothed

\[\text{105 To explicitly use the term in this way is a good approach, in my opinion, and when, in this section
and elsewhere, I speak of translation strategies and similar concepts, I generally want to have them
understood in this double sense, too.}\]
out”, “adapted to SL”, and “adapted to TL” (my translations; for the complete list, with examples, see Heibert (1993:194-209)). All in all, Heibert works with no less than twenty procedures, which I do not always find very clearly distinguished from each other. Furthermore, some of Heibert’s categories cover both translation choices that result in TL wordplay and others that do not, which I find unfortunate since the presence or absence of TL items with a function similar to that of the corresponding SL items is really what seems most interesting, and that should be reflected in the categories one devises.

Returning to more easy-to-handle numbers of translation strategies, while at the same time incorporating screen translation into the discussion, it can be mentioned that Pisek apparently found evidence of only three “basic procedures” in his film-related material:

[…] a pun can be taken over from the source language in combination with an attempt at explaining it, it can be reproduced with only little changes due to structural similarities between the two languages, or it can be lost […] when it is not only dependent on words but also on the action presented on the screen. (Pisek 1997:49)

Pisek later also points out that a functional approach may yield good results, which normally means that SL wordplay is substituted by unrelated TL wordplay, provided the visual constraints in screen translation permit that. This addition rectifies what would otherwise have been a rather depressing choice of strategies: either one explains the wordplay, which is virtually impossible in screen translation, and generally avoided even in literary translation, or, unless one is lucky and can transfer it directly, it is lost. When it comes to the possible strategies in subtitling wordplay that are listed by Gottlieb, there is only partial overlap with Pisek’s:

- rendered verbatim, with or without humorous effect
- adapted to the local setting, to maintain humorous effect
- replaced by non-wordplay
- not rendered, using the space for neighbouring dialogue
- inserted in different textual positions, where the target language renders it possible. (Gottlieb 1997c:210)

106 In fact, many of them could have been merged in order to avoid overlap and unnecessary detail. Delabastita levels similar criticism against Heibert’s categories, adding that their originator does not even take into account “the fact that translators often resort to a combination of different strategies” (1994:239; original emphasis).

107 Heibert rather overcompensates for this, namely by also categorizing the quality of the translations, which is one of the more questionable aspects of his study (cf. 2.3.8).
Among the inventories of translation strategies referred to so far, there was not one that I would consider complete and at the same time manageable and well justified in its entirety, although individual strategies, especially those recurring on several lists, will of course feature in my own working model, too (cf. 4.2 and 5.2). Now, Gottlieb is dealing with subtitling only, and this circumstance finds its expression in e.g. the fourth of the strategies he has identified. That is acceptable because such is the context of his study. There is, however, an aspect to his list that would make me hesitate to adopt it for my own purposes: first, in the material considered by Gottlieb, wordplay is apparently always used “for humorous effect”, which is reflected in the first two translation strategies. For my part, I think I have made it clear that I consider humour to be only one of the many potential functions/effects of wordplay (cf. 2.2.1-2). Besides, I also want to include other aspects of language-play in my study, and that should make it even less likely that my material always has a humorous effect.

Be that as it may, there have been further suggestions still, and Veisbergs’ (1997:164-171) is certainly among the more systematic and satisfactory ones. The problem though, from my perspective, is that he is perhaps too explicitly concerned with idiom-based wordplay, as he calls it, i.e. the playful manipulation of fixed expressions. The first four of the strategies he lists, all concerned with retaining aspects of the SL wordplay in the corresponding TL spot, are thus: equivalent idiom transformation, loan translation, extension, and analogue idiom transformation. However, with a little effort, it is probably possible to adapt these categories to a context where wordplay in general, or even language-play, is of interest. The remaining strategies discussed by Veisbergs will be recognized from other accounts: substitution (TL wordplay based on unrelated material), compensation (wordplay in another place than in the source text), omission, and metalingual comment (“in the form of editorial techniques such as footnotes, endnotes, parentheses, etc.” (1997:171)). Veisbergs’ category of omission, perhaps somewhat confusingly, covers cases where there is no corresponding TL passage at all, as well as cases where the idiom has been transferred, but not the wordplay aspect. To some extent, this is defensible, because both forms of omission result in the target audience not being confronted with wordplay material, which distinguishes this strategy from all the others, including the metalingual comment. Still, I think there is a fundamental difference between, on the one hand, losing the wordplay while preserving other aspects of the passage and, on the other hand, cutting out everything (notwithstanding the fact that the precise implications of the
translator’s choice depend on the form, meaning and functions of the elements in question, and that both strategies may be justified under some circumstances). When Veisbergs himself says that “in several cases the omission of the wordplay […] seems to be the outcome of a careless reading of the source text” (1997:172), then this can really only apply to the first kind of omission, hardly the second one (complete deletion), which would presuppose a very careless reading indeed.

The last two inventories of strategies that I would like to mention have been developed in the context of Shakespeare’s puns in translation. The first is Offord’s:

[…] six strategies are open to the translator when dealing with Shakespeare’s wordplay: (i) ignore the pun completely, (ii) imitate Shakespeare’s technique, (iii) major explicitly on the primary or surface meaning, (iv) major explicitly on the secondary, underlying meaning, (v) mention both meanings, and (vi) create a new wordplay. (Offord 1997:241)

Obviously, the reference to Shakespeare could easily be edited out from this list and the result would be valid for wordplay in general. However, some further idiosyncrasies can be found here, too. Most striking is the fact that there is not only a distinction between primary and secondary meaning in the analysis of the puns, but even two separate translation strategies based on that distinction ((iii) and (iv)). Assuming that it is really possible to tell which of the meanings in a pun is the primary one and which is secondary, there is nothing wrong with the distinction as such, and it actually yields interesting results, but it is perhaps too intricate for my and most other researchers’ purposes.

Delabastita (1993:191-221), finally, proposes and discusses nine “translation techniques” for dealing with wordplay, which, as he himself points out, may also be used in combination. They are quite straightforward and seem to cover all conceivable scenarios. I present them here with a short explanatory comment where required:

- PUN > PUN (there is a pun in the same spot in source text and in the target text; the two items may mirror each other or be completely

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108 In Offord’s material, (iii) is by far the most common strategy of all when it comes to vertical puns, while (iv) is only rarely employed. With horizontal puns, both (iii) and (iv) are marginal strategies, since mentioning both meanings (v) is the easiest way out for the translator (Offord 1997:254-256). For the distinction between vertical and horizontal puns, cf. 4.1.

109 The strategies are also summarized in Delabastita (1998:134), though two of them have been conflated there.
unrelated)
- PUN > NON-PUN
- PUN > PUNOID (a punoid is not a pun, but a not very clearly defined “related rhetorical device”, which can refer to another category of language-play, but also referential vagueness, irony, allusions, etc.)
- PUN > ZERO (complete omission of the passage)
- PUN S.T. = PUN T.T. [two subcategories] (the pun is copied without being translated)\textsuperscript{110}
- NON-PUN > PUN
- ZERO > PUN
- EDITORIAL TECHNIQUES (essentially the same as Veisbergs’ (1997:171) metalingual comments mentioned above, e.g. footnotes).

PUN > PUNOID, NON-PUN > PUN and ZERO > PUN represent strategies that can be used for the purpose of compensation, which will shortly be discussed in a section of its own (2.3.6).

Because close dynamic equivalence can be considered the norm in translations of texts containing wordplay, most writers would agree that what corresponds to the PUN > PUN category is generally the most satisfactory solution, possibly in combination with compensatory measures. This would hold true even if the scope of the strategies proposed by Delabastita and all the others referred to here were extended from wordplay to language-play and/or jokes. When it comes to such items, the loss of the precise source-text content is not seen as problematic in most cases. Heibert (1993:185), for example, thinks that it is more important that there is wordplay than what kind it is, and according to Ballard (1996:344), “[c]reativity […] can be far more effective than accuracy in the translation of wordplay”. Hygrell (1997:245) claims essentially the same for the preservation of humour. This implies also that there may well be several creative solutions that could not be graded, on objective grounds, in terms of quality (cf. Luthe 59f), though all or some would be considered better than loss or straightforward copying.

However, there are circumstances when the loss of a specific feature such as wordplay is considered an acceptable solution (e.g. Leppihalme 1996:214). Potential justifications include a target culture that is less benevolently inclined towards wordplay than the source culture (Veisbergs 1997:173). There is also the view that “producing poor wordplay in the translation is worse than

\textsuperscript{110} S.T. and T.T. stand for ‘source text’ and ‘target text’, respectively.
producing no wordplay at all” (Offord 1997:258) or, in Chiaro’s words: “Even a completely different comment, in place of an untranslatable joke, would often be preferable to translation ‘gaffes’” (1992:86). Finally, “when the wordplay is non-significant or unintended, translators are generally expected to do the writer of the original a service by ridding the text of it” (Delabastita 1996:133).

Another exception to the ‘PUN > PUN is best’ rule is discussed by Kaufmann (1997:132f): one of the Bible translations analyzed by her was really meant to be read alongside the original, to support the interpretation of the latter, which the readers were expected to understand to a considerable degree. To introduce new wordplay under such circumstances would have worked against the whole purpose of the translation. I mention this because it has some relevance for the current study. As I have argued earlier, subtitles are read while the original dialogue is still accessible and, very often, actually understood by large parts of the target audience. The more this is the case, and the more subtitlers are aware of it, the more they may consider it a justification for not creating a pun (or whatever device is in focus) in the target text.

In spite of the preceding comments, the fact remains that for most texts and translation contexts, it is deemed desirable to have functional equivalence not only on the textual level, but also on the level of the individual feature, i.e. there should be TL language-play, for example, whenever there is SL language-play. Nevertheless, if we return to Delabastita’s PUN > PUN category, it is, from an analyst’s perspective, rather too broad (though not from the target audience’s): for an investigation of the question how ‘untranslatable’ wordplay really is (in the narrow sense), it would be good to know how often it has been possible to render the source text more or less literally and still have a functioning instance of wordplay in the target text. This solution is not distinguished from complete substitution in Delabastita’s PUN > PUN technique. Furthermore, in cases where substitution rather than copying has been chosen or necessitated, it might be interesting to see whether the TL pun is of the same structural kind as its SL counterpart. After all, such information can, for example, indicate something about the degree of freedom the translators felt they had. Comparing wordplay structures is also more or less equivalent to checking whether one category of language-play has been replaced by the same or by another category of language-play, which I will certainly do in my own study.

However, at the end of the day, the exact set of strategies, just as any other taxonomy one decides to make use of, depends on the level of detail on which one wishes to work, and on the general layout and aim of the
investigation. Therefore, eight categories are not better per se than three or twenty. What matters is that they make sense, cover as many cases as possible and overlap only very little, if at all. Delabastita’s (1993) set of techniques seems to fulfill these criteria for the translation of wordplay.119 As to my own set, which I will have to define in accordance with my focus on language-play, among other things, I shall use the same guiding principles (cf. 4.2 and 5.2).

2.3.6 Compensation

While all the translation strategies mentioned so far might deserve some further discussion, I shall at this stage only add a few more remarks concerning one particular group of strategies, namely the one commonly subsumed under the term compensation. Some of the authors referred to in the previous section included compensation (with or without using that term) among the translation strategies they discussed whereas others did not, perhaps because they did not consider it a proper strategy, or because they did not think of it at all, or because the material on the basis of which they made their claims did not feature it. Compensation is, in any case, not entirely unproblematic, especially for the translation analyst.

As may be recalled, I earlier made a statement to the effect that Delabastita’s (1993) categories PUN > PUNOID, NON-PUN > PUN and ZERO > PUN can be used for compensation. To be precise, the first of these techniques can itself be considered a form of compensation, while the remaining two can only be part of a compensatory measure, namely when they are used to make up for the loss of a pun elsewhere in the text. Due to the way Delabastita has chosen his categories, he leaves no room for the latter type of compensation as a strategy in its own right. In fact, he seems reluctant to subscribe to such a, in his opinion, narrow view of compensation at all:

[…] I for one believe that the phenomenon of compensation is inherent in the idea of translation in general and not just the odd remedy to help us out when a pun proves to be ‘untranslatable’. (Delabastita 1993:227)

Delabastita’s argument is that compensation of the type ‘a pun in one place for a pun in another place’ or ‘a kind of feature for another kind of feature with a similar function’ cannot clearly be distinguished from other translation strategies such as editorial techniques or even omissions, which may also serve to compensate for something (1993:226f).
I think this argument of Delabastita’s remains rather weak, and I will not dismiss compensation as a strategy specifically applicable to the translation of language-play or other exceptional features in a text. After all, as I have said earlier, more or less any concept can be hard to define precisely, including word- and language-play, but that has stopped neither Delabastita nor myself from devising categories that we can actually work with.

Anyway, it is about time to go beyond the hints offered so far and make it plain what I understand by compensation. Hervey & Higgins distinguish four basic kinds (referred to in Harvey 1998:38), but, like Harvey, I would accept only the first two as compensation proper, namely “compensation in kind, where different linguistic devices are employed in the target text in order to recreate an effect in the source text” and “compensation in place, where the effect in the target text is at a different place from that in the source” (Harvey 1998:38; bold face omitted). These two types can of course be combined. In this study, I will obviously consider compensation only in relation to language-play. The possible compensation scenarios are the following:

a) SL language-play is replaced by TL items that do not form TL language-play, but create a similar effect in the same place

b) SL language-play is replaced by TL items that do not form TL language-play and do not create a similar effect; instead there is TL language-play in a place where there is no SL language-play

c) SL language-play is replaced by TL items that do not form TL language-play and do not create a similar effect; instead there are TL items that do not form TL language-play, but create a similar effect, in a place where there is no SL language-play

This deserves some comments. First, it will be noted that in this simplified list of compensation scenarios, I choose to disregard cases where one type of language-play has been replaced by another type of language-play. In the present context, I thus treat any instance of language-play as functionally equivalent to all others – not because I believe that this would reflect reality, but because I do not want to complicate things more than necessary at this point. However, this modus operandi is different only in degree, not in essence, from considering all *puns* as functionally equivalent, as most of the writers referred to earlier more or less tacitly do. Finally, it is justified because I will actually record shifts between the corresponding SL and TL categories of language-play – just without referring to such shifts as compensation in
chapters 4 and 5 (though cf. 6.3).

Another comment that needs to be made is that I do not really know what chunks of text can be functionally equivalent to language-play without being language-play. I suppose that many of Delabastita’s “punoids” (cf. 2.3.5) might fulfil such a role, but I would rather not get lost in what are bound to remain theoretical speculations about this topic. The reason is that in my study, I will see myself forced, for practical reasons, to largely ignore all compensation scenarios conforming to types a) and c) described above. By revealing this, I anticipate what will otherwise be dealt with in section 3.1.3.2. There, I will also set a time frame around the instance of SL language-play within which I shall look for compensatory measures in the translations.\textsuperscript{111}

However, I do not expect compensation in screen translation to be very common, especially because of the constraining influence of the visual and, in subtitling at least, the aural signals that are simultaneously present with the translation. On the other hand, it is not certain that this expectation will be fulfilled. Grassegger (1985:100-103) found a significant amount of compensation when it comes to language-play in comic strips, which, due to their polysemiotic nature, constitute a genre related to film productions.\textsuperscript{112}

2.3.7 The quality of TL language-play

I want to make it quite clear that translation quality as such will not be assessed systematically in my study. This is not because I reject the idea of quality. On the contrary: quality is probably what should matter most to the translator, the client, the audience and, at least in theory, the analyst. However, to deal with quality in translation studies has become a lot less fashionable in recent decades, and for good reasons, too. To put it simply: how can one say something about the quality of a translation without falling back on subjective judgements?

Of course, there is modern translation quality assessment (cf. House 1997, 1998), but there one does not really work in terms of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ anymore, but compares source and target texts along a number of parameters that one thinks are pertinent to the question of quality. Downright mistranslations and the omission of certain stylistic markers, to name but a couple of examples, are

\textsuperscript{111} The results of this will be given in 6.2.

\textsuperscript{112} It should perhaps also be mentioned that neither Delabastita (1993:275ff) nor Offord (1997:258) found much evidence of TL wordplay in the place of SL non-wordplay in their studies. Since these dealt with Shakespeare translations, however, the translators had worked under quite different conditions from those of the screen translator: on the one hand, they had more freedom, due to the text genre they dealt with; on the other hand, they might have venerated their source texts so much that they did not dare to actually make use of their freedom.
likely to be considered indicators of a flawed translation. In such an assessment, the absence of TL word- or language-play from a text (or specific parts of a text) where there is SL word- or language-play would generally be judged problematic. To the extent that one can subscribe to such a view, the figures on the relationship between SL and TL language-play that are going to be presented in chapters 4-6 may be read as an indicator of translation quality. However, it should have become clear after the discussions of the constraints in screen translation, the functions of language-play, and all the other factors that may influence the translation process, that the quality of a translation cannot simply be measured by counting individual features. Furthermore, the language-play to be analyzed by me represents only one of many aspects of the films in which it occurs. While its treatment by the translator may affect the quality of the TL version as a whole, the impact is still only limited.

More importantly, different instances of language-play can diverge enormously from each other when it comes to ‘quality’, however one wishes to define this. This is true even within the same type of language-play. Two puns, for example, may occur in virtually identical contexts and have virtually identical functions (humour being the most likely among them), but as everybody is aware, one of the puns may well be perceived as working better than the other. Even so, there is no guarantee that all recipients would agree about which one it is, nor that the majority verdict could be explained in a manner that would qualify as more or less objective. Thus, when it comes to comparing quality, individual instances of language-play may be equally problematic as entire texts.

Almost all the authors I have referred to when it comes to word- or language-play in translation have refrained from systematically analyzing their material in terms of quality. Of course, they can quote from a translation and comment on its shortcomings or, somewhat more seldom, on its merits. They can also draw general conclusions of the type ‘the best solutions are usually achieved through substitution’, but few of those who have taken an empirical approach such as my own, rather than a theoretical or even anecdotal one, have presented their results according to degrees of quality. Even Gottlieb, who, though not in these words, expresses the view that a strictly descriptive attitude in translation studies is rather too namby-pamby (1997:226), and puts to practice his tougher stance by improving on an existing translation, uses only structure-based, not quality-based, categories in his comparisons.

113 Hofstadter discusses the French translation of one of his own highly intricate English acrostics and concludes that it is even better than the original (1997:198). Of course, this admission does not really cost him any prestige since he himself contributed very actively to the final French TL solution.
Heibert’s (1993) idea to not only compare structures, but to actually place the various TL solutions he has collected into categories based on quality is thus a striking exception. In doing this, he claims to have taken three factors into account: whether the wordplay technique has been retained, whether the contents have changed a lot, and whether the rhetorical function is still fulfilled. According to Heibert, the last factor is in most cases decisive, though it is interdependent with the other two (1993:187). The seven categories he uses are, in my translation, Perfect, Successful, Acceptable, Compromise [“Notlösung”], Wrong, Bad, and Not at all (1993:186-193).

Now, perhaps we can accept, for the time being, that it is somehow possible to grade wordplay translations according to their quality. After all, that is what Heibert has actually done, though it should be kept in mind that everything is based on his own individual estimates. Still, there is a problem with the categories, and the relationship between them in particular: apparently there is a cline going downward from the best solutions (perfect), though the different steps are very poorly defined. It seems to me, for example, that a compromise can be anything from acceptable to bad. The category Not at all, on the other hand, seems rather clear (“the translation decision leads to a loss of the wordplay” (1993:193; my translation), but that is a descriptive rather than an evaluative category. As I have said before, an omission can both be an acceptable or a bad solution, depending on a lot of factors. Furthermore, Heibert himself illustrates both bad and wrong translations with TL examples where he could not see any wordplay either, and as it turns out, he has placed non-wordplay even in his acceptable and compromise categories. Apart from that, it remains doubtful what a wrong translation is, for example. Similar criticism against Heibert’s approach has been expressed by Delabastita (1994:239). Of course, Heibert’s competence in the area of wordplay and translation may work in favour of his quality-related results, making them acceptable at least as a first indicator of how well the translations work, but considering the basic theoretical and practical problems with his approach, it seems safer to steer clear of dealing with translation quality in that way.

2.3.8 The quantity of TL language-play

When it comes to quantitative results arrived at in previous analyses of language-play, I take the liberty of first referring to myself, since among the earlier investigations that I have taken into account for this thesis, my own (Schröter 2004) resembles the current approach most closely – not surprisingly,
because it functioned essentially as a pilot study.\footnote{For the sake of clarity, I might point out that, though they were not designed to have that effect, the selection criteria for the corpus of this thesis precluded the recycling of any primary material already used in Schröter (2004).} Compared to the present work, that smaller study may be slightly lacking in methodological and terminological rigour (I used \textit{wordplay}, \textit{language-play}, and \textit{language-based humour} more or less synonymously, for example), but the overall results should still be relevant. Also in that study, I had collected instances of language-play in a number of British and American films and compared them to their TL counterparts in several translations for each film. I found that, with the exception of the Swedish TV subtitles, about 70\% of the original language-play had been rendered as language-play in the translations, and that there was a slight tendency for the TL solutions to be less complex than the SL material. The Swedish TV subtitles had a lower ratio of ‘language-play $>$ language-play’ cases than any of the DVD subtitles or the German dubbing, but it was basically because one out of just two target versions analyzed in this category dragged the figures down. Otherwise, I could see no very clear and consistent variation between different target languages or between dubbing and subtitling, and the size of the corpus was rather too limited to permit general conclusions anyway. It should also be added that I did not take the possibility of compensation into account.

Several times already, I have referred to the article by Gottlieb (1997c) about his personal attempt at improving a certain subtitle version of a wordplay-intensive TV programme. This featured only half as many instances of puns as the SL version (1997c:214f), which seems rather little if compared to the figures I found (cf. above), but in this case it may be the difference between a virtual bombardment of verbal jokes in a TV show and the occasional language-play in a feature film that played a crucial role. Obviously, any of the many factors outlined in earlier sections (especially 2.3.3) may be responsible for the results, too.

However, once we leave screen translation, we get translation and substitution figures for wordplay that are sometimes even lower. Delabastita (1993) and Offord (1997), for example, not only found little evidence of compensation in the Shakespeare translations they looked at (cf. 2.3.6), there were generally few instances of TL wordplay even where there were some in the source text. For the \textit{Hamlet} translations analyzed by him, Delabastita states that “the PUN $>$ PUN mode of translation has on the whole been selected (even) in fewer cases than one would have expected” (1993:268), detailing that about half of the SL puns had no TL equivalent in any of the translations, that
many of the other SL puns had a TL counterpart in only a minority of translations, and that there were hardly any SL puns at all that had TL counterparts in all translations (Delabastita 1993:268f). Offord even gives a figure below 10% PUN > PUN cases for one French translation of Love's Labour's Lost.

Of course, Shakespeare's plays are special as a source text because of their age and the uncertainty surrounding the interpretation of many of their elements. Scores of (likely) puns are simply very hard to recognize as such, centuries after their creation, without the support of modern Shakespeare research (cf. e.g. Delabastita 1993:164). If one also considers the formerly often negative attitude towards puns (cf. 2.2.6) and sexual allusions, the low figures in the target versions are quite understandable. It is also clear that the translation problems posed by wordplay on the screen are mostly of a different nature from those having to do with Shakespearean wordplay (different genre, the sanctity of the original, etc.).

In previous sections, I have also referred to two studies on wordplay in Bible translations (de Vries & Verheij 1997; Kaufmann 1997). Again, the source texts and their translations are about as far removed from the screen translation of family films as one can get, but the results of these studies are also inconclusive because in both cases the investigated instances of wordplay are quite limited in number. Furthermore, the translations differ very much from each other (date of production, language, intention, etc.). It is not certain, however, whether this is the reason why the wordplay is almost completely ignored in some target versions, while in others considerable efforts have been made to recreate a playful effect. Kaufmann is not very clear about this, except in one case, where she thinks the nature of the translation has led to a loss of wordplay (1997:132f; cf. also 2.3.5). Conversely, in the interpretation of their own findings, de Vries & Verheij think that

[...] one may even be tempted to assume that every instance of wordplay translation is a strictly unique product of coincidence and inspiration, and therefore basically unaffected by the conventions, norms, rules or ideologies that so manifestly seem to influence translational behaviour when there is no wordplay about. (de Vries & Verheij 1997:91)

The results of Heibert's (1993) large-scale study of Ulysses-translations also deserve to be mentioned. Heibert identified and categorized 735 instances of wordplay in Joyce's novel, but when it comes to comparing the original
instances to their translations, he reduces his corpus to 298 examples. Since he
has left out the kind of wordplay that even an educated SL reader might have
difficulties understanding (because of the detailed cultural and linguistic
knowledge it presupposes), apart from many types that occur
disproportionately often, the reduced corpus is representative only to a certain
extent. Be that as it may, Heibert sums up his findings by giving the overall
figures of 43.5% of TL wordplay for one group of categories, and 52% for
another group (1993:210). There is of course considerable variation between
the seven translations considered (ranging from 205 to 126 TL wordplays out
of 298 possible, disregarding their quality); and also the different types of
wordplay have hugely diverging percentages of TL counterparts (from 27% to
100%).

Sometimes researchers convey an impression to the readers without
supporting it with concrete figures (which they are perfectly free to do).
Grassegger (1985:41, 100), for example, indicates that the translators of
Astérix generally attempted to produce TL language-play whenever they found
instances of language-play in the source text, but he does not seem to actually
have carried out a count. Similarly, Marx (1994:167f) discusses two
translations/adaptations of Collodi’s Pinocchio that distinguish themselves by
their playful use of the language, but, like Grassegger, provides examples rather
than statistics. Still, their approach at least provides an indication that a
dramatic loss of language-play does not have to be characteristic of any
authentic translation.

To sum up: although there have been, in the last decade or so, an
increasing number of studies on wordplay (rarely language-play) in translation,
the total is still quite small. Of course, there are more studies than those I have
taken into account here, and possibly many on the level of student papers and
theses, but the fact remains that we are still far from any generally valid picture
of what happens when language-play is to be translated. On the other hand,
drawing such a picture may be unrealistic, and all we can ever hope for are
results for particular texts and their target versions. Judging from the figures
offered above, that is where we stand now, and this thesis alone will not change
that. But one should not be too pessimistic either: every new study will add to
the information concerning at least one genre of text, one time period, one type
of translation, etc. Furthermore, it is possible that certain categories of language-play
are more likely to be tackled with certain kinds of translation strategy than others,
and that such tendencies may turn out to be comparatively independent of the

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115 Heibert’s classification of wordplay is of little interest at this point.
genre, the overall functions, and the content of the individual source and target texts.
3 Material and methodological approach

In this chapter, I will provide an overview of the corpus that forms the basis of my investigation. The initial considerations concerning its compilation will be outlined, as well as its eventual size and nature. In doing so, I will proceed from the larger units, the films, via the various TL versions considered, to the individual instances of language-play that have been included in the present study. At the end, I will briefly describe the methods used in the investigation, and how the results will be presented.

3.1 Material

3.1.1 The films

3.1.1.1 Initial considerations concerning medium and genre

Since it is necessary, for obvious reasons, that the researcher comparing the SL and TL versions of a text know the relevant languages well, the number of languages that can be included in this study is limited. Furthermore, when it comes to processing foreign language material, it is usually easier to understand written texts than spoken, especially if the latter are characterized by colloquialisms and sloppy pronunciation and are uttered at a fast pace, which is often the case in film dialogues. Because of this, and although dubbing and subtitling are of equal interest in the study outlined here, it was judged wise to restrict the analysis of the dubbed versions to the two languages I know best. The source language of the corpus being English throughout, the target languages thus include only German and Swedish for the dubbed versions, but German, Swedish, Danish and Norwegian for the subtitles.

With so many translations involved, the best way to gain easy access to them seemed to be the use of digital versatile discs, commonly known as DVDs,116 where a choice of TL versions tends to be offered on the interactive menu. The fact that the DVD medium is becoming more and more important on the home entertainment market, while at the same time it is too new to have received much attention within Translation Studies, also spoke in favour of DVDs forming the core of my material (rather than other media like, say, video cassettes or TV broadcasts). The decision to rely on DVDs, in turn, made feature films the most suitable genre to investigate, since other types of screen

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116 Sometimes, D V D is written out in full as ‘digital video disc’.
productions, especially those likely to contain language-play, were not yet well represented on the DVD market at the time when the collection was planned. Another reason for the use of feature films is that it was deemed desirable to study dubbed versions in both German and Swedish, and this limited the choice of genre considerably.

Dubbing has traditionally been very uncommon in Sweden, except perhaps in connection with productions that are for children only, but these are either unlikely to contain much language-play or will not be available with subtitles. However, while Swedish adults may look down on dubbing, children, even if they have acquired some reading skills, can be expected to prefer dubbed versions to subtitled ones. Therefore, an increasing number of films where alla talar svenska (‘everybody speaks Swedish’) have actually been screened and sold in Sweden in recent years, despite the fact that subtitled versions of the same films have also been produced. A dubbed and a subtitled version may sometimes be scheduled for showing at the same cinema, though probably at different times of the day,¹¹⁷ and it is common practice to include both on the same videotape or DVD (cf. 1.1.2). In December 2001, the film Antz was even shown on two successive days on the same TV channel, Kanal 5: a subtitled version at 9 o’clock in the evening and the dubbed one the following afternoon. In December 2003 and 2004, respectively, The Prince of Egypt and Shrek were given the same treatment by the same channel.

The kind of film that is both dubbed and subtitled in Swedish is often, though not always, an animated cartoon or a blend of cartoon and non-cartoon elements. Its profit-generating potential must be considered good in order to justify the extra investment that dubbing entails, and it has to be attractive for both children and older viewers. The longer Disney cartoons typically fulfil these requirements, as do several other family films, some of which make up the corpus for my study (see below).

3.1.1.2 Selection criteria
Once I had decided which constellations of target language and type of translation would be of interest for my investigation, and that focusing on feature films on DVD would be the best way of combining a reasonably straightforward process for the collection of material with an acceptable range of useable items, I established criteria for defining a film corpus that would have to be: a) large enough to be representative, b) small enough to be manageable, and c) as independent as possible of the compiler’s personal

¹¹⁷ Finding Nemo is an example of a film that received this treatment.
preferences. Moreover, the films had to be produced in an English-speaking country and the original dialogue had to be essentially in English. Since most of the English-language films that find their way to non-anglophone Europe come from the USA, it was clear from the beginning that US productions would be prominent in the corpus. In the end, no films from countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and Canada were included, and only one of the films that fulfilled the selection criteria can be considered more British than American, namely *Chicken Run*.

I began my systematic compilation of the corpus by finding out how many English-language films were available on DVD at one of Sweden’s largest Internet retailers, www.discshop.se, with both dubbed and subtitled versions available on the same disc. In March 2003, the search resulted in a list of about sixty items fitting that description. Although this was not an overwhelming number, some further selection would obviously have to take place. In order to reduce the number of candidates, I decided that: a) I would only consider ‘modern’ films produced in 1995 or later; b) only films that had been screened in cinemas, at least in their home countries, would be eligible; and c) I would only take DVDs that contained at least one more of the target versions I wanted for my study (German dubbing, German, Norwegian, and Danish subtitles).

The main purpose of choosing a relatively recent year as a date limit was to exclude translations that might have been made according to norms that have been abandoned or modified a long time ago. 1995 was simply picked because it seemed like a reasonably round figure.

The second step, excluding made-for-video productions, was meant to make it likelier that the remaining films and their translations reached at least a moderate level of quality. In practice, it eliminated some rather short movies (sometimes not much more than an hour), sequels and spin-offs that had apparently not been considered worth the sort of big marketing campaign normally required for cinema releases. To make a clean sweep, all sequels were eventually excluded, even if they had made it into movie theatres.

Quite a few films, especially Disney cartoons, did not qualify due to the third criterion: at least one more translation relevant to the study must be on the DVD, besides Swedish dubbing and subtitles. Besides limiting the corpus,

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118 It is true that this decision lends more importance to the Swedish versions than they were intended to have originally, especially if some of the other relevant TL versions are not represented on those discs and remain unobtainable, but Swedish is already important in that it is one of only two dubbing languages to be included, and the selection criterion is quite in line with this.
this criterion was consistent with the strategy that led to the focus on DVDs in the first place: to gain access to many translations, but without too many practical obstacles.

Starting from the list made in March, I bought films in Sweden and Germany and started hunting for language-play. I acquired German DVDs when there were no German translations included on the discs sold in Sweden. On 3 September, I ordered the last films on my list from either of the two Swedish Internet shops I had used. The films that were not available on that day were excluded from the corpus.

The following is a summary of the defining criteria of most of the films in the corpus (the exceptions are explained below):

- produced in an English-speaking country and with an originally (at least predominantly) English-language soundtrack
- produced in 1995 or later
- shown in cinemas
- released on DVD
- available from www.discshop.se in March 2003 (thus excluding films released on DVD later than that month)
- available from www.discshop.se or www.ginza.se on 3 September 2003
- no sequels
- the Swedish dubbing, Swedish subtitles and at least one more target version relevant for the study are included on the Swedish DVD.

3.1.1.3 The resulting corpus of films
All in all, 18 films found their way into the corpus, three of which were included although they did not meet all the criteria detailed in 3.1.1.2. The reason is that I had obtained and started to analyze them before I applied the strict selection guidelines. It would have been wasteful to discard the useful material already collected. Moreover, I do not think my keeping it resulted in a skewed corpus. Like the other films, the three referred to can be described as modern English-language family films, and, in addition to the Swedish translations, I have at least one more target version of each. These are the films concerned:

- *Space Jam*, which I had bought in Germany and which came with all the translations I was interested in. As it turns out, the Swedish DVD has almost the same set of translations, so it may not matter at all that my
copy of the film had been released in another country.

- *The Road to El Dorado*, of which I had used the video cassette, containing both Swedish dubbing and a subtitled version. I assumed that the same would be true of the DVD, but a check later on revealed that it only contained the dubbing and none of the other relevant translations.

- *Shrek*: I had purchased the DVD in a regular Swedish shop, believing it contained a large collection of target versions. Upon closer inspection, only the Swedish translations were available for the film itself – and the other languages only for the bonus material. When I found out, I had already worked for quite some time with the German DVD of the film.

Here, then, is a list of all the 18 films in alphabetical order, with the production date, the main production company and a short outline of the action for each:119

*Anastasia* (1997, Twentieth Century Fox): After the monk Rasputin had fallen into disgrace with the Romanovs and cursed them, all members of Russia’s ruling family perished in the Revolution of 1917, except the dowager empress and the Tsar's seven-year-old daughter Anastasia. Ten years later, with the help of two amiable con men, but still under constant threat by the relentless Rasputin, the teenage Anastasia, who has very few memories of her childhood left, sets out on a journey to discover her true identity.

*Antz* (1998, DreamWorks): The worker ant Z is unhappy with his insignificance in the colony. When he falls in love with Princess Bala, things change dramatically for him: he fights in a war, accidentally kidnaps the princess, searches for Insectopia and interferes with the cruel plans of the ambitious General Mandible.

*Chicken Run* (2000, DreamWorks): The inhabitants of an English chicken farm have made many unsuccessful attempts to escape. When the American rooster Rocky comes crashing into their world, they hope that he can teach them how to fly out of their prison. After many disappointments, the threat of their ending up in chicken pies becomes imminent, and they are forced to show what they are really capable of.

*Ice Age* (2002, Twentieth Century Fox): A moody mammoth, a deceitful sabre-toothed tiger and a big-mouthed sloth form an unlikely alliance to reunite a human infant with its family.

*Inspector Gadget* (1999, Disney): A severely injured security guard gets a

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119 The style is imitative of that of many blurbs on the reverse side of film boxes, but the summaries are my own.
second chance when he is turned into Inspector Gadget – half man, half robot. With the help of an intelligent car and a myriad of gadgets built into his body, he must take on the archvillain Scolex, while both are trying to win the heart of the charming inventor Brenda.

Monsters, Inc. (2001, Disney Pixar): Monstropolis, in a world parallel to ours, is inhabited by monsters of all kinds and kept running with energy from human children's screams, harvested in scare attacks. However, the monsters are really more afraid of their victims than vice versa, and when a little girl turns up in the monster world, this implies a lot of trouble for the star scarer Sulley and his assistant Mike.

Mouse Hunt (2001, DreamWorks): Two unusually stupid brothers inherit a derelict but potentially valuable house. While they are working hard to renovate it for an auction, they work even harder at evicting its long-time inhabitant, a mouse, who is outsmarting them time and again.

Muppets from Space (1999, Columbia TriStar): Gonzo has always felt like an outsider. In fact, he does not even know what species he might belong to. When he receives messages from outer space, he is overjoyed, but then some obscure government agency starts to make life difficult for him and his friends.

My Dog Skip (2000, Warner Bros.): Living in Mississippi at the time of the Second World War, Willie is small for his age and has no friends. When he gets a dog as a birthday present, that changes, but some new challenges are in store for him.

Rugrats in Paris (2000, Paramount): The whole gang of Rugrat babies invade an amusement park in Paris while little Chuckie hopes that his single father Chas will soon find a new mother for him. When Chas is about to be fooled into marriage by the director of the park, a child-hating termagant, the kids plunge the city into chaos as they try to save Chuckie from a future with this woman.

Scooby-Doo (2002, Warner Bros.): Mystery Inc., the group that used to specialize in the solving of spooky cases, is reunited when they are invited to an amusement park where the visitors are turned into zombies. Because of his "pure soul", the naïve talking dog Scooby-Doo soon assumes a central role in the development of the plot.

Shrek (2001, DreamWorks): As the result of an order by the megalomaniac Lord Farquaard, the unsociable ogre Shrek finds his peaceful swamp invaded by fairy tale creatures. Accompanied by an importunate donkey, he must rescue a princess from a dragon-guarded castle in order to get his quiet life back. The princess, however, shows some surprising qualities and affects
Shrek’s life more than he had imagined.

*Space Jam* (1996, Warner Bros.): In order to avoid being enslaved by a gang of aliens, Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck and their friends need to win a basketball game against them. As the aliens have managed to turn themselves into giant star players, their opponents kidnap basketball legend Michael Jordan and convince him to help them.

*Stuart Little* (1999, Columbia TriStar): The Littles adopt Stuart, a mouse, to be the brother of their son George. While Stuart manages to mitigate George’s initial disappointment at not getting a human brother, he still needs to fight the threats emanating from the Littles’ jealous pet cat Snowbell and the thugs he has hired to get rid of Stuart.

*The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle* (2000, Universal): The flying squirrel Rocky and the moose Bullwinkle are stuck in reruns of their old cartoon show. But one day, FBI agent Karen Sympathy needs the help of the two bungling characters when their archenemies under the command of Fearless Leader become human and threaten to take over the real world with the help of subversive television.

*The Indian in the Cupboard* (1995, Paramount): Omri receives a cupboard which turns out to have the power of turning figurines into miniature living beings. He and an Indian whom he has brought to life become friends, but when a cowboy comes into the picture, dealing with what used to be toys for Omri proves increasingly challenging.

*The Iron Giant* (1999, Warner Bros.): One night in the paranoid 50’s, Hogarth finds a giant metal robot in the woods of Maine. It soon becomes clear that the creature from outer space has human-like feelings, and the two become friends. However, the giant needs protection from grown-ups who would not understand his peaceful nature and instead see him as a threat to American security. Only the junk dealer-cum-artist Dean can be trusted to keep the secret. In the end, it is the giant who saves the humans from themselves.

*The Road to El Dorado* (2000, DreamWorks): In the 16th century, two Spanish tricksters end up in the New World and set out to find the mythical El Dorado, the golden city. They do succeed and are treated as gods by the inhabitants, but the importance of keeping up their bluff, a power struggle between the chief and the high priest, love, and the scoundrels’ plan to return to Spain with as much gold as possible all make for formidable challenges.

### 3.1.1.4 Similarities and variation among the films in the corpus

What the 18 films of the corpus have in common, besides fulfilling the
selection criteria accounted for earlier (bar the three minor exceptions), is that they can, in principle, all be enjoyed by both children and adults. However, the enjoyment will probably be on different levels, as children usually focus on the physical action while adults tend to pay more attention to the quality of the acting/animation and to linguistic nuances. It can be assumed, for example, that much of the language-play that has been incorporated in these films will be lost on the younger members of the audience.

While the majority of the films also feature some serious themes such as questions of identity, respect, friendship, love, and even death and (attempted) murder, most could be labelled comedies, with *My Dog Skip* and *The Indian in the Cupboard* being the clearest exceptions (despite the occasional humorous sequences). Interestingly, these two titles are among the three to five films in the corpus (depending on whether *Inspector Gadget* and *Muppets in Space* should be counted in here) that feature relatively little animation. Half of the films, i.e. nine, can be considered pure animation, while the remaining four are characterized by a more or less constant blending of animation with the ‘real world’.

It was not the goal of the selection process to create a corpus that would be varied, or even representative, with respect to the general types of modern family film, though this seems to have been achieved to some degree anyway, which must be considered a bonus. It is also good that the number of main production companies behind the different films should be as high as seven or eight, because this renders the corpus more representative as well: DreamWorks dominates with five productions, but Warner Bros. follows closely with four, while Columbia TriStar, Paramount and Twentieth Century Fox produced two films each, and Disney, Disney Pixar and Universal one each.

The production years for the films shows the following distribution:

Table 3.1. Distribution of the films according to the year of production.

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This can be assumed to reflect the availability, in Sweden in early 2003, of DVDs with cinema films that have been both dubbed and subtitled into Swedish. After a relatively slow start, this practice has become more common at the turn of the millennium. The fact that the numbers for each year in the corpus become smaller after 2000 and reach zero for 2003 has, to some
considerable extent, to do with the delayed release of films on DVD (and video).

Finally, there is also significant variation when it comes to the overall cinematographic quality of the films. Such a factor is of course hard to assess objectively and may best be dealt with in terms of audience reception. In the following, I will therefore rely on information from the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), probably the best Internet resource on film-related topics, which lets its many thousands of registered users grade all the films in its archives. The highest grade that can be awarded is 10, and 1 the lowest. Of the 18 films constituting my material, three actually make the list of the best 250 films of all times.120 These are *Shrek* (no.119), *Monsters, Inc.* (no.142), and *The Iron Giant* (no.237), with an average of 8.1, 8.0 and 7.9 points, respectively.121 Four of the films have received quite low scores: *Space Jam* 5.2, *Scooby-Doo* 5.0, *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle* 4.3, and *Inspector Gadget* 4.1 points.122 The eleven remaining films reach an average score of between 5.8 points for *Mouse Hunt* and 7.5 points for *Chicken Run*.

### 3.1.2 The translations

Table 3.2 in 3.1.2.5 provides an overview of the different translations that I collected and will consider in my analysis of language-play. But first, some general explanations are in order.

#### 3.1.2.1 TL versions available in the corpus
As one of the initial decisions in the collection process was to focus on DVDs with movies that had been both dubbed and subtitled into Swedish, it comes as no surprise that I have at least one translation of each kind for all of the 18 movies in my corpus. For four films, I have also had easy and free access to other Swedish subtitle versions from TV and/or video cassettes, although two of the latter turned out to be almost identical to the DVD subtitles (cf. Table 3.2 for details).

Since, in addition to Swedish dubbing, German dubbing is the only other spoken translation considered, it was important to include it for all the movies.  

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120 The Internet Movie Database was accessed for the purpose of comparing the films’ overall quality on 6 October 2003. Since then, the rankings have obviously changed.
121 The best film of all times, according to IMDb users, is *The Godfather* with 9.0 points. Before a film becomes at all eligible for inclusion in the Top 250 list, at least 1250 votes by so-called regular voters are required, but most films have received many more.
122 The best of the worst 100 films of all times received an average of 3.6 points (by a minimum of 625 registered users), so the gap to e.g. *Inspector Gadget* is not very big.
In cases where it was not already available on the Swedish disc, I purchased copies of the films from German retailers. Nowadays, most films that are sold with a German dubbed version included on the DVD also come with at least one German subtitle version, despite the fact that dubbing is still the absolutely dominant type of screen translation in Germany. Sometimes, there are two German subtitle versions, one simply called Deutsch (‘German’) and one Deutsch für Hörgeschädigte (‘German for the deaf and hard-of-hearing’). These can be very similar, with only a little extra information added in the latter. In such cases, I always used the former. When there was only one subtitle version, I included it in the corpus regardless of its name, which can be either Deutsch or Deutsch für Hörgeschädigte. In the latter case, the assumption seems to be that only those who suffer from hearing problems would use German subtitles at all. However, the label Deutsch für Hörgeschädigte does not always imply that special symbols are used or that information on extra-linguistic sounds is provided.

Since for three of the films, no German subtitles were included on either the Swedish or the German DVD, I had to do without those translations. The films in question are Antz, Mouse Hunt and The Road to El Dorado, all produced by DreamWorks.

Norwegian and Danish subtitles were available on most of the Swedish DVDs. There are three films for which I have neither (My Dog Skip, Shrek and The Road to El Dorado), and one for which I have Danish subtitles, but no Norwegian ones (The Iron Giant). However, the Danish subtitle versions for one film will not be used, for reasons given in 3.1.2.4.

3.1.2.2 The translators

If one wants to detect patterns in how the translators of certain films have dealt with language-play, it is an advantage to know who these people are. It must be assumed, after all, that the nature and quality of translations, and also of short extracts of translations such as those dealt with in this study, depend to a large extent on the individuals who made them. In particular, if several of the translations in the corpus have been produced by the same person, it would be good to be aware of that fact.

In some cases, the identity of the dubbers and subtitlers, together with the name of the company they work for, is revealed in the film itself. At most Swedish television channels it has become customary to display the name and company of the subtitler, and even the year in which the translation was made, for a few seconds in a separate subtitle. This is usually done at the beginning of a film or other foreign programme or directly at the end of the narrative part,
right at the start of the end credits. The same is normally true of films sold on video. However, if it is included at all, this kind of information tends to be much more hidden on DVDs. In the case of subtitle versions, it can often be found after the end credits, with a display time of around a second or even less. It is also quite common to only provide the name of the company that made the subtitles and no names of individuals – or nothing at all.

Information on dubbing is erratic, too. If it is provided at all, it can well be hidden after the copyright notices, which are often displayed again and again in a dozen or more languages after the final credits. Occasionally, only the voice talents are credited, but not the translators, script-writers and dubbing directors, which would have been of greater interest in the context of this study. It happens with both dubbed and subtitled versions on the same DVD that there is satisfactory information for one language, but not for others.

Whenever I lacked the name of the person(s) behind a particular translation, I tried to contact the distributors, subtitling or dubbing companies, as the case may be, with a request to help me out. Some of them never answered my polite, written enquiries, others replied but were unable (or unwilling?) to tell me what I wanted to know, while a few provided me with new information. For some films, I found relevant details on Dubbningshemsidan, an Internet resource on dubbing in Sweden. In Table 3.2, it is indicated where what information comes from, and in Appendix 1 this information is detailed.

It should be pointed out that I have no knowledge of the conditions under which the dubbers and subtitlers worked, e.g. the amount of time at their disposal, their work environment and pay, and whether or not they had access to both the films and accurate transcripts of the dialogues. The same is true of the persons behind the names: their age, education and motivation are equally unknown quantities. Finally, I have no information on whether, or how often, the translators’ products have been quality-checked, and by whom. Although all these factors are commonly assumed to influence the nature of the final product, this study relies on a relatively large material, and I hope that differences concerning these factors will, at least to a point, be levelled out. In any case, it would have been impossible to research the complete background of so many translations as are represented here.

3.1.2.3 The general quality of the translations
No systematic quality assessment of the translations on the whole has been carried out. Almost all of them seem to reflect the contents and style of the original dialogue in a generally acceptable way. The, admittedly superficial,
impression is that outrageously long or short subtitle display times are rare, as are consistently substandard segmentation, a disturbing lack of idiomaticity, and many problematic omissions or translation errors within one TL version. To be sure, all these things do occur here and there, and even the occasional howler has been identified in, for example, the Swedish TV subtitles of *Antz* or the German DVD subtitles of *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle*. These two versions do in fact seem to belong to the qualitatively weaker members of the translation corpus. However, what this study of language-play translation sets out to do can also serve as the basis of some kind of quality assessment, even though only one, relatively limited, aspect of the source and target texts is being investigated.

3.1.2.4 The interdependence of the different TL versions

Historically, it has probably always been the case that some translations are not, or not exclusively, based on what the recipient believes to be, or thinks ought to have been, the original. Many translations of a text are to some extent influenced by other translations of the same text, into the same target language or into another, and the influence can be very small or so big that the other translations, rather than the so-called originals, effectively function as source texts.

As regards subtitling, Gottlieb (1994a:117f) discussed the increased use of pivot subtitles already in the early 1990s (cf. 1.2.9). It seems that the gradual replacement of the video cassette by the DVD has since contributed to a further spread of the phenomenon. It does, after all, save time and money if several subtitle versions of a film, e.g. all those included on a DVD, follow the same, pre-set cueing, or if translations into related languages can be based on each other. Since it is of some importance for the final outcome if the subtitler had to work with existing cues or was free to make the segmentation fit his or her translation, attempts have been made in this study to find out whether the subtitled versions in the corpus have identical cueing patterns. They were even compared to the English subtitles, which are almost always included on a DVD, even if the film’s original dialogue is in English. If identical segmentation has been used for different subtitle versions, it is not unlikely that it is the same segmentation that had originally been made for the intralingual English subtitles.

While the impact of pre-existing cues on the quality of a new subtitle version should not be under-estimated, it will still be relatively limited (assuming that the original cues follow some reasonable norm). It is obviously
of much greater importance if the content and the linguistic form of one
translation seem to resemble those of another translation very closely. It can
then be assumed that the English dialogue only played a subordinate role in the
preparation of at least one of the translations, and any analysis, including the
one for this study, should take that into account.

The strongest links between two subtitle versions can be seen in the
Norwegian and the Danish subtitles of Chicken Run. As for the rest, I once
more refer to Table 3.2, where translations are marked if they resemble each
other to a degree that could not be the result of mere chance. Of course, if a
translation does not look too much like any other in my corpus, there is no
guarantee that it is completely independent of all the many translations of the
film that have been made. Conversely, even where two translations feature
striking similarities, it is still possible that they were also always checked against
the original dialogue. Achieving any degree of certainty in these matters, if that
is possible at all, would have required a kind of detective work that is beyond
the scope of this study.

These considerations notwithstanding, it is clear that some subtitles are
not really translations at all, either of the English dialogue or of any other
translation. Instead, they are the somewhat compressed, or possibly otherwise
modified, written rendering of the dubbing in the same language. At times,
however, just the song lyrics in a movie are affected: in all subtitle versions of
Anastasia, the translation of the songs is essentially the same as in the dubbed
versions. That is also the case with the Swedish and the Norwegian subtitles of
some songs in Monsters, Inc. (cf. also 6.1.1).

Of the 15 German subtitle versions that I have access to, four are virtually
identical to the corresponding dubbing and two must at least to some extent be
based on the dubbing (without counting Anastasia). On the one hand, that is
unfortunate, because it reduces the number of independent translation
solutions in the corpus. On the other hand, it provides an opportunity: if the
subtitling is based on the dubbing, but still occasionally behaves differently with
respect to the original language-play – which it does – then that may be due to
the structural differences between the two forms of translation. When the
results of the analysis are evaluated, this possibility will be taken into account.

If we disregard the two partial exceptions mentioned (songs in Anastasia and
Monsters, Inc.), none of the Swedish subtitle versions seems to be based on
the Swedish dubbing. The picture is somewhat less clear when it comes to the
Norwegian and Danish subtitles. Where I had access to the dubbing in those
languages, comparisons could be made, and any close link could usually be
ruled out. Where no Norwegian or Danish dubbing was available on the discs, I chose to assume that it either does not exist or that it played no role in the preparation of the subtitles. Of course, I can be no more certain of that than of the independence of certain subtitles from all other subtitles. Be that as it may, one Danish subtitle version, namely that of *Anastasia*, featured clearly and consistently the same formulations as the Danish dubbing, also outside the songs. Since I considered it wise not to deal with Danish dubbing in any depth (cf. 3.1.1.1), a comparison like the one between the German dubbed versions and the German subtitle versions that are apparently based on them was ruled out. As there is then no other reason, considering the purpose of this study, to examine a version that appears to be a transcript rather than a translation, the Danish subtitles of *Anastasia* have been excluded from the analysis (even though they still feature in the overview of the translations in Table 3.2).

3.1.2.5 Overview over the translations in the corpus

The purpose of this section is to provide a summary of the available translations in my corpus, their interdependencies, and the information, or lack of it, that I have about the translators. The best way to present it seems to be a table, which, however, has grown a little complex. The films are listed alphabetically and relevant information is provided for each of the translations.

Explanation of symbols:
- not available
!! names of main dubbers/subtitler known; if information not quite complete → (!)
?? no information on the translation
?! only the name of the company that has made the dubbing/subtitles is known
D/DH indicates, in the column for the German subtitles, whether the version used is referred to as ‘German’ (D) or ‘German for the hard-of-hearing’ (DH) on the disc; D(DH) means that both are available, but only D is used
* segmented in the same way as the English subtitles on the same DVD
° segmented in the same way as another of the subtitle versions in the corpus (but NOT as the English version)
= several striking similarities in the wording suggest that the translation may at least to some degree be linked with (an)other translation(s) in the corpus
BD based on the dubbing in the same language
NBD not based on the dubbing in the same language
PBD partly based on the dubbing in the same language
no dub. | no dubbing into the same language available on the DVD

Table 3.2. Overview of the TL versions in the corpus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of film</th>
<th>German dubbing</th>
<th>Swedish dubbing</th>
<th>German subtitles DVD</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles DVD</th>
<th>Norwegian subtitles DVD</th>
<th>Danish subtitles DVD</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles DVD video</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles DVD TV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anastasia</td>
<td>[7]</td>
<td>[8]</td>
<td># DH</td>
<td>#</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td># NBD (songs: BD)</td>
<td># NBD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antz</td>
<td>[8]</td>
<td>[9]</td>
<td># DH</td>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td># BBD</td>
<td># NBD</td>
<td>#</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chicken Run</td>
<td>[8]</td>
<td>[9]</td>
<td># DH</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>#</td>
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<td>#</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td># BD</td>
<td># BBD</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ice Age</td>
<td>[8]</td>
<td>[9]</td>
<td># DH</td>
<td>#</td>
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<td># NBD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inspector Gadget</td>
<td>[8]</td>
<td>[9]</td>
<td># DH, D</td>
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<td># NBD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monsters, Inc.</td>
<td>[8]</td>
<td>[9]</td>
<td># D</td>
<td>#</td>
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<td># NBD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mouse Hunt</td>
<td>[8]</td>
<td>[9]</td>
<td># DH</td>
<td>#</td>
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<td># NBD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Muppets from Space</td>
<td>[8]</td>
<td>[9]</td>
<td># D</td>
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<td></td>
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<td># NBD</td>
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<tr>
<td>My Dog Skip</td>
<td>[9]</td>
<td>[10]</td>
<td># D(DH)</td>
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<td># NBD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rugrats in Paris – The Movie</td>
<td>[7]</td>
<td>[8]</td>
<td># D</td>
<td>#</td>
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<td># NBD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scooby-Doo</td>
<td>[6]</td>
<td>[7]</td>
<td># D(DH)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td># BD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shrek</td>
<td>[7]</td>
<td>[8]</td>
<td># D</td>
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<tr>
<td>Space Jam</td>
<td>[7]</td>
<td>[8]</td>
<td># D(DH)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stuart Little</td>
<td>[8]</td>
<td>[9]</td>
<td># D</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Advent. of Rocky and Bullwinkle</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Indian in the Cupboard</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Iron Giant</td>
<td>[7]</td>
<td>[8]</td>
<td># D(DH)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Road to El Dorado</td>
<td>[7]</td>
<td>[8]</td>
<td># D(DH)</td>
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<td># NBD</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

142
In the first line of each cell, I have indicated how much information I have on the translation. Where I have marked that I know the name of the translator and/or the company, this information has usually come from the films themselves. The exceptions are accounted for in the notes at the end of the table that are marked with a letter from the beginning of the alphabet, e.g. a. Notes marked with letters from the end of the alphabet, e.g. z, are comments on the relationship between different translations. This issue is otherwise dealt with in lines 2 (relationship between the subtitle versions) and 3 (relationship between the subtitle versions and the dubbing) of each cell. Where the second line is empty, this means that no strong links between the different subtitle versions could be detected.

As the information in Table 3.2 will have made clear, the material used for this study is in many ways heterogeneous. Apart from the fact that different sets of translations are available for different films, the amount of information I have about these translations varies, as does their degree of independence from other translations. There is, however, no reason to believe that this would not be typical of translations on and for DVDs in general. And for this study, it is no big problem that some of the translations seem to be partly based on other translations, or pre-existing cues, or that I have not succeeded in finding out the names of all the translators. I dare to claim that the material is comprehensive and varied enough to provide valid and interesting insights into the screen translation of language-play.

Although Table 3.2 lists 103 target versions in all, only 99 have eventually been considered a part of the corpus. This figure includes the German subtitles that are obviously based on the dubbing, but excludes the Danish DVD subtitles of Anastasia (cf. 3.1.2.4) and the three Swedish video versions that are essentially the same as the corresponding DVD versions (Antz, Chicken Run, Stuart Little).
3.1.3 The language-play

While I have analyzed the original, English versions of the 18 films in their entirety, I only consider in depth the passages (and their translations) where there is some form of language-play.

3.1.3.1 The collection process

When I started collecting potentially relevant passages from the films I had acquired, I did not use clearly defined categories in order to distinguish language-play from non-playful language use. Naturally, I had some general ideas of what could be considered language-play and what not, and what kinds of categories I might have to use, but the initial attitude was to be too liberal rather than too restrictive when I transcribed possible instances of language-play. It is of course easier to discard some of the accumulated passages at the end than to go through the entire films again because the criteria of what constitutes language-play have been broadened in the course of events.

What I did was to carefully go through the original dialogue, usually with the help of the intra-lingual English subtitles, and transcribe from the screen all the sequences that had a chance of ending up in the final version of my collection. For the more obvious cases, and some of the uncertain ones, I then proceeded to transcribe the corresponding sequences in the different translations at my disposal. Eventually, of course, all the translations that I needed to have were transcribed.

I always tried to transcribe from the screen, and only in a couple of instances did I make use of already existing transcripts of the English dialogue that are published on the Internet, possibly without permission. This happened only when a passage was characterized by unclear diction or otherwise poor sound quality, so that not even the English-language subtitler seemed to have been able to understand it properly (and when a transcript was available at all, which was not often the case). I did not try to get hold of transcripts from production companies or translation agencies. This in itself would have required a considerable investment of time and effort, and the outcome would have been rather unpredictable. More importantly, transcripts may be made according to varying standards of exactitude, or at different stages in the production of a film, and are in principle always unreliable. A cross-check against the actual film might thus have been required anyway. Besides, when it comes to judging the role of the other semiotic channels in a film, transcripts are not as good as the real thing, especially if they feature nothing but the
dialogue itself.

3.1.3.2 Dealing with the possibility of compensation

“No study of wordplay in translation can avoid dealing with compensation”, according to Crisafulli (1996:259). Of course, this is no absolute truth, but an exhortation not to neglect the well-known fact that translators may choose to compensate for the loss of certain functionally important elements by using other elements leading to a comparable effect or by using the same or similar elements in another place. In this way, the overall function of a text can be relatively well preserved (cf. section 2.3.6).

As the general procedure in this study was to search for language-play in the original English version of a film, and to consult the target texts only in connection with the scenes where something had been found in the English dialogue, it was usually impossible to detect compensation in places that are removed from the original language-play. As to the alternative of closely studying all the target versions of the same film in their entirety, it simply did not seem feasible within the time limits of this project. However, at least some measures have been taken to honour the potential importance of compensation in the translations – and thus to forestall criticism of the kind Koster (1996:322) levels against Heibert’s (1993) method of analysis because of its strong source-orientatedness:

a) In the TL versions, I have looked for compensatory language-play in the immediate surroundings of the location where the original language-play occurs. The ‘immediate surroundings’ are here defined as a fixed time frame of ten seconds before and ten seconds after the sequence in question. This is straightforward, and it could be argued that TL language-play occurring outside such a time frame is not so much a compensation for any particular SL language-play, but rather a bonus or, put more neutrally, an addition.

b) Three entire TL versions, chosen at random from among the Swedish and German translations, have actually been scanned in order to get an idea of how widespread compensation may be: the Swedish dubbing and subtitles of Monsters, Inc. and the German dubbing of The Road to El Dorado. The outcome of this limited side study will be used in the discussion of the results of the main investigation (cf. 6.2). The hypothesis was that compensatory language-play that is removed in time is not common in films, because the interplay between picture and soundtrack, not to mention the presence of the original dialogue in subtitled versions, makes compensation in screen productions even more difficult than in works of literature.
3.1.3.3 Dealing with proper names

It is often the case that the names of invented characters and places are somehow based on language-play. In a way, any fictitious name based on morphemes that can still be assigned a meaning is a form of language-play. Names, however, enjoy a special status in translation and usually remain intact even when they are decidedly SL-oriented, which means that any language-play contained in them is more difficult to decipher for the target audience than for the original audience. Yet there are good reasons for not translating ‘meaningful’ names: if a story is set in the real world, unchanged names preserve some of the cultural flavour of the original version and fit the setting better. (Note that we would not normally translate our own names either when we travel abroad.) In screen productions with subtitles, the original name can also be heard from the soundtrack, and it may imply increased processing difficulties if the name in the subtitles does not match the spoken one.

The situation is different when not only the characters but also the world they populate are inventions, or when TL names have already been introduced in earlier translations or adaptations. These two circumstances often coincide, as is the case with e.g. classical fairy tales, well-established cartoons or, very topical in the first years of the new millennium, The Lord of the Rings. In those contexts, it might be more confusing for the target audience if they were suddenly confronted with, for them, new names of familiar characters.

The treatment of fictitious proper names, be they personal or geographical, is thus governed by norms that have little to do with the preservation of language-play. It therefore makes little sense, in the context of this study, to investigate what has happened to language-play in such names, and proper names in themselves are therefore excluded from the analysis. In the opposite case, however, i.e. if an instance of language-play is partly based on a name, it will still be included, because then the name functions essentially like any other lexical item from the source language. For example, the protagonist of Inspector Gadget has received his name because his entire body is full of more or less weird gadgets. The lexical item gadget is thus both the name of a person and a reference to “a small tool or device that does sth useful” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary). This does constitute a form of language-play, but since it occurs within a name, it is not considered in the analysis. However, when the film’s villain addresses the inspector as “Mr. Gizmo”, he plays on the meaning

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123 That is not to say that the norms behind the treatment of proper names in translation are not interesting (cf. e.g. Albin 2003 for some of the issues involved). On the contrary, they would deserve increased attention – but in another context.
of the name, and that is sufficient for including the sequence in the corpus.\footnote{It is worth pointing out that the particular case mentioned has special ramifications: regarding the inspector’s name as translatable language-play would also affect one’s attitude towards the position of the film’s original title. The transfer of film titles, however, is just as much subject to special considerations as the treatment of proper names (cf. Hesse-Quack 1987:71-97; Lundin 2003), which is another reason why language-play within names (and in film titles) should be left out of the analysis. It may be noted in this context that Gadget’s name has not been translated in any of the TL versions in the corpus whereas Mr. Gizmo has been dealt with in various ways.}

3.1.3.4 Dealing with songs

When it comes to songs in films, they too are special in a translation context. With the exception of songs that have been written specifically to be sung by one or several of the characters in a film, and that do not exist as independent works of art outside the context of that film, songs are normally not translated in e.g. German dubbing and Swedish subtitling, no matter how pertinent their lyrics are to the plot (for some of the reasons when it comes to dubbing, cf. Götz & Herbst 1987:22f). This implies that all the language-play that may be contained in such songs, not least the frequently occurring rhymes, and especially the possible language-play based on the interaction between text and picture, risks being lost on the TL audiences.

It would be going too far, however, to exclude all the songs from the corpus of language-play. After all, there is a substantial difference between, say, a well-known Beatles song playing on a radio in the background and specially written lyrics that the characters in a film sing themselves. The following criteria have therefore been used to determine whether the lyrics of a song should be part of the corpus:

1) The song must have been written for the film, or, in the case of a known song, the lyrics must have been altered specifically for the film.
2) The song is obviously performed by one or more actors playing, or lending their voices to, characters in the film, or one or more of the characters must be the explicit topic of the song.

These criteria have led to the inclusion of all the songs in Monsters, Inc., Shrek and Anastasia (in the last two cases with the exception of the songs during the end credits, which are performed by regular pop singers). Of the songs in Rugrats in Paris, those sung by the characters (or their voices) are included, plus one called Chuckie Chan, which is explicitly about one of the characters, but performed by additional singing voices. In Antz, the protagonist sings a Nat King Cole song with slightly changed lyrics, which makes it eligible for
inclusion. *Ice Age*, *The Iron Giant* and *The Road to El Dorado* feature one song each that meets the criteria detailed above.

Some songs were written specifically for a film, but had to stay outside the corpus nonetheless. The most notable cases were the songs in *The Road to El Dorado*, most of which were performed by the pop singer Elton John. Although they often show some obvious link to the action of the film, this link was not considered strong enough to permit the songs’ inclusion in this study. Most of the other excluded songs had originally been released in contexts that are unrelated to the films investigated here.

### 3.1.3.5 Amount of language-play found in the corpus

Even disregarding the fact that I have most probably missed a few instances of language-play while scanning my 18 films, and perhaps even included some borderline cases in my corpus that others would not have counted, I find that it is still no straightforward matter to say how many instances I have actually collected. This is partly due to the fact that language-play can be very complex and that one playful sequence can be representative of two or even more of the categories I have decided to work with (cf. chapters 4 and 5). To give a simple, if somewhat silly, example: the talking dog Scooby-Doo, who has lent his name to the film in which he plays a prominent role, occasionally expresses his pleasure by howling out his trademark *scooby-dooby-doo!* While devoid of referential meaning, this sequence of five syllables still fits into my category covering nonce formations. However, it also features a rhyme (*scooby* – *dooby*) and an alliteration (*dooby* – *doo*), and is thus included in my counts for all three of these categories. This circumstance notwithstanding, I think it would be unreasonable to argue that we are dealing with more than one instance of language-play here.

But what about the following dialogue from *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle*:

(3.1) Bullwinkle wants to go to Washington in order to speak with the president.

Rocky: *We don’t have time to get to Washington.*

Bullwinkle: *This is no time to worry about getting the washing done.*

Rocky: *Not “washing done”, Washington!* 

Bullwinkle: *A ton? Well, that is a lot of laundry.*

Rocky: *Bullwinkle, that joke just won’t wash.*

Bullwinkle: *Well, you can’t blame me for d-rying.* (laughs)

This exchange contains no less than four puns that belong to different
categories and that do not, strictly speaking, overlap on the level of time or space. It would thus be quite acceptable to consider them as four separate instances of language-play, though I have decided against this option here, too, and counted the above excerpt as one instance. The puns are, after all, connected by a common theme, and when it comes to their effect, at least the last two depend to a considerable extent on what precedes them.

Further difficulties in calculating the amount of language-play in my corpus stem from the fact that I make use of a number of language-play categories that are characterized by a more or less perfect reiteration of linguistic features (but without the focus on meaning that is typical of puns). I am thinking of rhymes, half-rhymes and alliteration, in addition to what I have simply labelled repetition. One problem is that rhymes, for example, tend to occur in certain, relatively clearly defined, contexts, most notably songs and poems, and it seems very doubtful whether one can regard an entire song, containing perhaps ten or twenty rhymes and possibly even other types of language-play, as just one single instance. However, the alternative cannot be, in my opinion, to automatically equate every rhyme with independent language-play. Consider the first short song from Anastasia:

(3.2) On the wind
'cross the sea
Hear this song and remember
Soon you'll be
Home with me
Once upon a December

According to my way of counting, there are three rhymes here, namely sea – be, be – me and remember – December. Yet the first two really belong together since all three words involved rhyme with each other, and I have therefore counted them as just one instance of language-play.

By making decisions like the ones detailed here, it is possible to quantify how much language-play there is in a corpus, but the figures in Table 3.3 should still be considered approximations. Nevertheless, they can provide an idea of how the language-play is distributed among the films and of the overall amount I needed to analyze.

If this were a competition, Anastasia could be said to be the clear leader among the participants. However, the large amount of language-play in that film is almost entirely due to the many rhymes in the seven songs that were included according to the criteria outlined in 3.1.3.4. Without them, Anastasia
would have positioned itself among the last films in the table. By contrast, the 
other films near the top, such as *Rugrats in Paris*, *The Adventures of Rocky and 
Bullwinkle*, and *Chicken Run*, feature high percentages of other types of language-
play, not least puns.

Table 3.3. Instances of language-play in the corpus (highest numbers listed 
first).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Film</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Film</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Film</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anastasia</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>El Dorado</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Ice Age</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rugrats in Paris</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>Inspector Gadget</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Space Jam</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rocky &amp; Bullwinkle</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>Monsters, Inc</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>The Iron Giant</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken Run</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Antz</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>My Dog Skip</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shrek</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Scooby-Doo</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Indian in Cupboard</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muppets from Space</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Stuart Little</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Mouse Hunt</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total for all films: 791

It is interesting to note that the three films at the end of the list are all 
non-animated ones, and one might speculate as to whether this is more than a 
coincidence. Suffice it here to say that *My Dog Skip* and *The Indian in the 
Cupboard* are essentially serious films and that *Mouse Hunt* relies heavily on 
physical humour, so one of the most common effects of language-play, 
linguistic humour, has probably not been in high demand in these cases.

Be that as it may, the number of instances of language-play in the corpus 
is really only of secondary interest in the context of this study, and what I will 
focus on most of all will be the different strategies that have been employed to 
create the language-play in the original versions and, where it occurs, the 
corresponding translations. The various strategies that I have categorized occur 
slightly more than 1,000 times in the English-language versions of the films, 
which implies that roughly one third of the instances of language-play are 
complex in the sense that a) they represent different types of language-play 
strategies, or b) the same type of strategy has been used two or more times. A 
combination of a) and b) occurs in about half a dozen cases.

Among the ca. 1,000 occurrences of language-play strategies mentioned, 
somewhat more than a third would fall under the definition of wordplay or 
pun, as defined in chapter 4. Furthermore, several dozen SL cases are 
considered, about half of them potential puns, where I am not sure whether 
they have been employed consciously by the script-writers (or other people 
responsible for the final product) and with a view to achieving special linguistic
effects.

The precise nature of some of these cases, which will be referred to as ‘doubtful’, as well as any other relevant details concerning the language-play and its translations, will be discussed in chapters 4 and 5. At this point, I might only add that if we assume a 1:1 correspondence between SL strategies and TL solutions in each available translation, there are almost 5,500 TL solutions to take into account, i.e. on average about 5.5 different ones for each SL strategy.125

3.2 Methodological approach

Language-play is a little-established and fuzzy concept, and I could not fall back on any previously developed, systematic method of analysis that has proved itself in other studies and that would lead to the kind of quantitative results I am interested in. Certain aspects of language-play, and especially of puns, had obviously been paid considerable attention to already, and I could make good use of some of the categorizations in this realm, while in many other respects, I had to feel my way.

As indicated in 3.1.3.1, the exact number and nature of the different categories of language-play that I would use in my analysis were not yet settled in the early stages of the analytical process because I did not really know what kinds of linguistic manipulations with an apparently playful intention I could expect to find. My initial approach was to be inclusive rather than too exclusive, and some of the categories of non-punning language-play that I eventually decided to work with were first developed in response to what I actually encountered in the material.

One basic division was, however, taken for granted early on, namely that between puns and non-punning language-play (despite the fact that not even these super-categories can always be safely distinguished in practice, and that many puns co-occur with other types of language-play in what must be considered one single instance). Puns are thus dealt with in chapter 4, non-punning language-play in chapter 5. The former are divided into five large sub-categories, based on the formal relationships between the crucial punning items, though for one of these, no authentic examples could be identified. The non-

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125 Cf. 3.1.2.5 for the available translations of each film. In calculating the number of TL solutions, I only included subtitle solutions if they are not, as far as I know, based on the corresponding dubbed version or if they are sufficiently different from those dubbed versions with respect to the language-play.
punning language-play strategies are ordered into another ten categories, plus a supplementary one for examples that could not be fitted in elsewhere.

The general principle for how the material is presented is the same for chapters 4 and 5: a short introduction to all the categories covered in the chapter is followed by sections featuring an in-depth treatment of the individual types. In these sections, the defining characteristics of the category are outlined, the number of SL examples subsumed under it is given, the nature of the examples is discussed, and possible sub-groups are identified. The focus then turns to the translations, and the extent to which they, too, contain language-play is indicated in a table. The relative significance of the various translation strategies available to the dubbers and subtitlers is also noted. Each of these sections is rounded off with the discussion of a particular instance of language-play and some of its translations, chosen because they are representative of the overall picture and/or because they contain interesting features that deserve a special comment. At the end of both chapters 4 and 5, the results concerning the individual categories are summarized, and it is also at these points that the absolute figures are converted into percentages for easier comparison.

The introductions to, and definitions of, the individual language-play categories are directly followed by the various quantitative results concerning these categories. This approach to presenting my results was chosen not only to avoid unnecessary thematic splits and repetitions, but also because the establishment of an analytical model like the one I use here, and in particular the description of newly devised categories, can be considered results in themselves.

A few things need to be pointed out, however. For one, language-play does not occur in a vacuum: even if I may seem to be pretending that it does, by cutting out the crucial sequences from the artistic wholes of the films in which they appear, it is nevertheless possible to take at least some aspects of the non-linguistic context of each instance into account. As a rule, I therefore provide some background information whenever I discuss authentic, individual examples. This includes a brief description of the general situation and an indication as to which characters are most prominently involved as senders and receivers of the language-play.

However, in connection with all the puns and a large part of the non-punning language-play, two aspects of the context are taken into account systematically even for the examples that are not quoted and discussed individually. I am speaking, on the one hand, about overt vs. covert language-play, and, on the other hand, about whether the language-play is somehow
linked to the non-verbal channels employed in the scene, which means, in practice, the picture. As to the overt-covert distinction, it is here defined as the difference between language-play that is noticed as such, within the film, by characters other than the one who has uttered or written it (overt language-play), and language-play that is not or cannot have been noticed by others within the narrative, but only on the level of the real-life audience (covert language-play). This distinction may prove to be important in translation analysis, because direct, text-internal reactions to language-play, such as laughter, groans, or even meta-comments, are the surest sign that the language-play has been registered as such, and can thus be assumed to constitute a strong additional incentive for the translator to come up with something functionally equivalent in the TL version. Note, however, that I have occasionally counted examples as overt even where there is no visible or audible reaction from other characters on the screen, but where it is reasonably clear from the context that they cannot have missed the language-play. Where it cannot be concluded with any degree of certainty whether or not characters are likely to have noticed an instance of language-play as such, the example has simply been counted as ‘unclear’ with respect to the overt-covert distinction. As will be seen, this is very common.

The other contextual aspect that can be expected to be of relevance in translation is whether the language-play is somehow linked to the non-verbal channels of the film. In theory, this can include non-linguistic sounds, e.g. instrumental music evoking certain associations, but in practice, we are dealing almost exclusively with the presence or absence of links to the visual image. I work with three categories in this respect, too, namely ‘strong link’, ‘weak link’, and ‘no link’. Both this and the previously mentioned contextual aspect (overt-covert language-play) are quantified, and their relative importance for the translation outcome is estimated, in connection with the categories where this seems meaningful (alliteration, for example, cannot be linked to the picture in a meaningful way).

While the focus is mainly on the individual language-play categories in chapters 4 and 5, chapter 6 deals with some issues that go beyond the linguistic details. First, two special types of environments for language-play on film, namely songs and written texts, are considered, and in particular the question of

126 I have basically extended the notion of overt vs. covert puns, as discussed by e.g. Delabastita (1993:125f), to language-play in general. Note that I disregard Delabastita’s (1993:125) distinction between ‘author-puns’ (the character is made to utter a pun without being aware of it) and ‘character-puns’ (the character ‘wants’ to make a pun). Unlike the distinction between overt and covert puns, this in itself should be irrelevant for how the puns, or language-play in general, are treated in translation.
how the specific properties of these environments can influence the translation of the language-play occurring in them. A brief section is then dedicated to the frequency of compensation. Following this, different factors are discussed that may or may not be responsible for the quantitative findings, and especially the differences, arrived at in the investigation. These factors are related to the films as such (genre, production company, etc.), but also to the translations (target language, translation mode, the individual dubber or subtitler). The most important findings from chapters 4 to 6 are then summarized in chapter 7, which also features a short evaluation of the entire study.

In general, the approach to my material is quantitative in nature. The corpus was designed to be large enough to support such an approach, which despite its limitations proves to be compatible even with so vague and elusive a concept as language-play may appear to be. Quality, on the other hand, is not considered consistently, neither when it comes to the original instances of language-play nor their translations, because anything short of careful (and complicated) audience-response studies would be too subjective and unscientific a method for dealing systematically with this tricky aspect of language-play translation. If one is willing to consider the relationship between the SL and TL amounts of language-play in a text as indicative of translation quality, one is obviously free to do so, but I shall go no further than to acknowledge that there may be a connection, and not without pointing out that merely putting quantity and quality on a par would be too simplistic. While I will discuss a number of translation solutions in terms of how well they function as language-play, I shall always attempt to keep the analysis on the linguistic level; and when it comes to the quality of the entire corpus of translations, I consider reliable and valid results out of the question.
4 Puns

From here on, I will focus on the results of the investigation on which the present thesis is based. This chapter will be dedicated to the various categories of pun that I have decided to work with. Each of them will be introduced with a definition and a discussion of its scope, whereupon the results for that particular category will be presented and analyzed.

Now, with an analytical apparatus covering more than a dozen categories of language-play, plus one for ‘uncategorized’ cases, it may be considered beneficial if some of these can be put together and treated under a common heading. This is certainly possible with the various kinds of puns, which together also happen to constitute the most frequently studied group of phenomena sorting under language-play, at least in translation studies. For these reasons, and because puns have thus acquired something like a central position within language-play, it is only appropriate to begin the results section with them.

I have already treated puns in 2.2 and 2.3, and especially in 2.2.5, where I attempted to distinguish them from the broader notion of language-play. It may be recalled that I chose to go along with Delabastita’s (1993) decision to employ the terms pun and wordplay synonymously, mostly because this reflects established usage. This fact notwithstanding, it seems slightly unfortunate to restrict wordplay to ‘puns’, because many non-punning instances of language-play could also be said to function on the word level. What is more, there are puns that seem to rely on linguistic units above or below the word level (cf. also Attardo 1994:132), and things do not become clearer if we consider the fact that the concept of word is rather difficult to pinpoint in a reliable way.

Be that as it may, the labels are obviously secondary to the nature of puns or wordplay. Some earlier attempts at definitions have already been quoted or referred to in 2.2.5, and I shall not repeat them here. Instead, consider the definition in the Oxford English Dictionary, which captures the essence of a pun quite well, even if it is not and cannot be rigorous enough to pre-empt the occurrence of borderline cases:

The use of a word in such a way as to suggest two or more meanings or different associations, or the use of two or more words of the same or nearly the same sound with different meanings, so as to produce a humorous effect; a play on words. (Oxford English Dictionary)
It is virtually impossible to provide a general definition of *pun* that gives clear guidelines for distinguishing all puns from all non-puns. The vagueness implied in the *OED*’s “two or more meanings or associations” and “the same or nearly the same sound with different meanings” can hardly be avoided if one does not set up rules detailing e.g. the number of phonemes that have to coincide in two words in order for them to constitute potential punning material. Since such rules would either be ridiculously lax or lead to the exclusion of what are intuitively felt to be puns, they are hardly desirable (cf. also 4.1.4).

More problematic with the *OED* definition is that, according to it, a humorous effect seems to be required for a pun, or at least the intention of bringing about a humorous effect. As I have made clear in chapter 2, there is now a widespread reluctance to accept that word- and language-play should always aim at humorous effect. A more cautious formulation involving e.g. the word *usually* or even *often* would thus be in order. Finally, offering “a play on words” as a synonym for *pun*, but most notably the formulation “the use of a *word*” (my emphasis), are problematic for the same reasons as the label *wordplay* (cf. above).

Observations similar to those offered here have been made by Delabastita (1993:57f) vis-à-vis a somewhat more rigid version of the above dictionary definition. However, his own proposal, even if it is couched in linguistic terminology and, all things considered, more precise, cannot circumvent the fuzziness inherent in the concept of *pun* or *wordplay* either. As a tool for identifying puns it is about as useful (or toothless) as the *OED* definition, even if the “humorous effect” is replaced by the more appropriate attribute “communicatively significant”:

> [...] wordplay is the general name indicating the various textual phenomena (i.e. on the level of performance or *parole*) in which certain features inherent in the structure of the language used (level of competence or *langue*) are exploited in such a way as to establish a communicatively significant, (near-)simultaneous confrontation of at least two linguistic structures with more or less dissimilar meanings (signifieds) and more or less similar forms (signifiers). (Delabastita 1993:57)

Now, considering this definition in the context of the present study, one may wonder what distinguishes a pun from other phenomena such as rhymes, half-rhymes and alliteration, all of which I consider non-puns despite their featuring “more or less dissimilar meanings” conveyed by “more or less similar forms”. In fact, rhymes, half-rhymes, and alliteration have all been accorded their own
category and will be treated in detail in sections 5.1.7-9. Still, it needs to be
made clear here already why they are different from puns.

To start with, this question does not have much to do with
communicative significance. Though the exact nature and impact of the
functions of rhymes and puns may vary, including their specific communicative
significance, this is true also within each category. And as I have already claimed
in section 2.2.7: no instance of language-play should be dismissed as simple and
essentially superfluous ornamentation or, to use Delabastita’s words, as lacking
communicative significance.

Nor can a closer look at the requirement of (near)-simultaneity resolve the
dilemma. It is certainly true that rhymes, alliteration and even half-rhymes all
depend on the actual repetition of linguistic elements in a text, while in punning
one can make do with a single occurrence of the crucial item(s), yet there are
many puns where the two competing forms are both present, which is why the
word simultaneous had to be qualified by (near)-[sic] in Delabastita’s definition.
The two items can often even be said to rhyme, half-rhyme or alliterate, yet the
sequences would still not belong in the corresponding categories, but have to
be counted as horizontal, paronymic puns (cf. 4.1 and 4.1.4 for more
information). The reason for this, obviously, is that there is no real
‘confrontation’, no competition, between the meanings of, for example,
rhyming pairs. The focus is entirely on the phonetic form. In puns, on the other
hand, the similarity of form is only used as an instrument to surprise the
recipients with alternative, usually incongruous, meanings within a given
context.127 Consider the following three examples, all from the film Monsters,
Inc.128

(4.1) Mike is very anxious to rid the monster world of what he perceives
to be a great threat in the form of a human girl. To achieve this,
she has to pass through a door that functions as a gateway to her
own, parallel world. He expresses his sense of urgency as follows:
One, two, three, four – get the kid back through the door!

(4.2) In another context, Mike asks Sulley to close his eyes and advises:
Follow the sultry sound of my voice.

(4.3) The grumpy, large, snail-like creature Roz is one of the more

127 The distinction is thus essentially the same as that between Sinnspiel (‘play on sense’) and
Klangspiel (‘play on sound’), which is summarized by e.g. Grassegger (1985:33).
128 In the many film examples used in this chapter and the next, I will generally try to outline the
context of the language-play in a few sentences. The actual quotes are rendered in italics or, if the
original is in writing, in capital letters.
frightening employees at Monsters, Inc. Next to her desk window there is a sign saying:

IT’S MY WAY OR THE HIGHWAY

Apart from constituting a possible corruption of the nursery rhyme *One, two, three, four – Mary’s at the cottage door*, the first example is representative of the category rhyme, while the second contains an alliteration. I assume that both these effects have been created intentionally, which is perhaps not quite as certain in the second case as in the first. Be that as it may, the point is that *four* and *door* have “more or less similar forms”, and the same is true of *sultry* and *sound*, even though the latter, with only the initial consonant and, to some extent, the subsequent vowel overlapping, are situated near the ‘less’-end of the spectrum. Both pairs also have quite divergent meanings, but, again, there is no confrontation between them. Example (4.3), on the other hand, is different because *my way* and *highway* not only rhyme but represent semantic alternatives to each other, which even happens to be expressed by the conjunction *or* between them. We therefore have a pun in (4.3), but not in the first two examples.

All this, however, is not to say that it is always self-evident whether two lexical items stand in a punning relationship to each other or whether they constitute an instance of e.g. half-rhymes (cf. the relevant subsections for a discussion of doubtful cases). As Delabastita (1997:5) points out, distinctions between wordplay and what is sometimes referred to as soundplay “prove upon closer inspection anything but watertight or unproblematic” and “grey zones may exist between prototypically clear points of reference”. I can only agree and shall not pretend that all the material fits neatly into the categories that I make use of.

Before I go on to provide an overview of the different types of pun in the next section, let me add a few remarks on ambiguity, which is a term commonly employed when describing the nature of a pun, at least the vertical varieties (cf. section 4.1). Obviously, not all ambiguities are puns, as any number of examples can attest to, including the two self-made ones below:

(4.4) A: *Could you pass me the dressing, please?*
   B: *Which one?*

(4.5) A: *Oh, hi! We did not really expect you now.*
   B: *What do you mean? Am I too late or too early?*

Adherence to the Gricean maxim of manner normally implies, among other
things, the avoidance of ambiguity, but as these examples show, we cannot or do not always want to be crystal clear in everything we say. Still, there is no pun on dressing in (4.4), but simply confusion as to the precise referent of that term. In (4.5), it is temporarily unclear what not now actually means because now does not behave like, for example, married and alive, whose negation results in exactly opposite meanings. Theoretically, not now can imply ‘many years ago’ and ‘in 3.5 seconds’, and anything in between or beyond, so it is definitely imprecise or ambiguous, yet even in a context such as the one in (4.5), it does not function as a pun.

However, sequences of phonemes and letters can be ambiguous in the sense that they can represent clearly distinct meanings, e.g. bank, which I have already used to contrive a pun in 2.3.3. But bank as such is not a pun, nor is an utterance like the following:

(4.6) Now that they’ve closed down our local branch, we always need to take the bus into the city centre if we want to go to the bank.

Unless one forces oneself to impose absurd alternative meanings on what can really only mean ‘financial institution’ in this context, bank has been quite clearly disambiguated here. In fact, it is usually much more difficult to conceive of a context where two or more meanings of bank (or any other lexical item) will be evoked simultaneously than to fit the item into straightforward, run-of-the-mill sentences like the one in (4.6), which is the standard procedure in everyday conversation and requires very little conscious effort. Most uses of what is otherwise potential punning material will never even cause a moment’s hesitation as to the intended meaning because the context suggests only one single reading.

Consequently, in order for possibly ambiguous items to be considered part of a wordplay, at least the following criteria need to be fulfilled: a) the context (including the co-text) permits more than just one plausible interpretation; b) there is actually a conflict of meanings, rather than mere referential vagueness; c) the ambiguity must be intended or at least believed to be intended (cf. 2.2.4).

One might add a fourth criterion, namely that the ambiguity must have an effect or function or, to take up Delabastita’s (1993) term again, communicative significance, but I for one cannot conceive of an ambiguity fulfilling criteria a) - c) that would not have some sort of effect on the addressee. Only when the ambiguity goes unnoticed can it be said to lack communicative significance, at least for the less perceptive section of a potentially limitless audience, but that is
true of any aspect of a text, including all puns. Therefore, any criterion concerning effects or functions would have to be quite specific if it is to be meaningful, but that would presuppose the development of a taxonomy and a corresponding method of analysis, both of which go beyond the scope of this study. However, the concept of wordplay, and particularly the different types covered by it, will be further explored in the following sections.

4.1 Types of puns

On the one hand, all puns share important features that make them a comparatively homogeneous group among the many diverse forms of language-play; on the other hand, there exist endless numbers of individual differences between them. These circumstances notwithstanding, it is possible to impose some broad and, actually, relatively clear-cut categories on any collection of wordplay. Admittedly, I am not entirely unsympathetic towards views like that expressed by Stanley, who feels that “[i]n so multiple a subject as playing upon words, categories are easily imposed and in many cases difficult to justify. I therefore have little faith in categorizing” (2001b:464). I think, nevertheless, that some categorizing is unavoidable if the approach is to be more than anecdotal and the outcome more than poorly supported and vague statements.

When it comes to puns, the categories I am about to introduce are comparatively straightforward in most respects, and it is often more tricky to determine whether a sequence is a pun at all than to refer it to a particular category of pun. That is so because, with one exception, these categories rely on external properties that tend to be either present or absent, so that there is rarely an overlap (but cf. below for some arbitrary decisions that need to be made nonetheless). The present section is intended to provide an overview of the different types of pun, and to clarify the distinction between vertical and horizontal puns. More detailed information on the other distinctions is to be found in subsequent sections.

Vertical and horizontal puns

One commonly adopted, basic distinction is between a) puns where the competing meanings are evoked by a single occurrence of the ambiguous item or items, and b) puns where the different meanings are each connected to their own signifier. The former are now generally referred to as vertical, the latter as
horizontal puns. For a quick illustration of these two types of puns, let me make use of the ambiguity of bank once more. First, reconsider the pun already presented in chapter 2:

(4.7) When my wife called to tell me she needed help because she had lost her beloved platinum credit card by the river, I cried all the way to the bank.

Here, the context has been constructed so as to make equally plausible two of the possible readings of bank: ‘financial institution’ and ‘strip of land at the edge of a river’. However, the pivotal item itself is mentioned only once, and the pun is thus of the vertical variety.

Now compare this with an equally contrived, but horizontal, pun:

(4.8) A: You know what? When I crossed the river, I saw that part of its right bank had been inundated last night.
    B: Thrilling, but have you heard this? Our bank has gone bust this morning.

In this wordplay, the same two meanings of bank as in the previous example are evoked. The difference is that they are confronted not within one and the same signifier, but across two signifiers that, in this case, happen to be formally identical to each other.

The distinction between vertical and horizontal puns is one of those that are not always quite as straightforward as they may seem at first, not least in complex types of texts such as films, but a couple of basic, if arbitrary, decisions should prove sufficient to eliminate most uncertainties.

To start with, one may occasionally wonder how far away two identical or similar items can stand from each other and still be considered part of a horizontal pun. The example that first triggered this question in my study occurs in Monsters, Inc. The film is entirely computer-animated, but, for prolonged amusement, it nevertheless features some ‘outtakes’, i.e. scenes that are interwoven with the end credits and where the characters seem to have forgotten their text or where they depart from the manuscript for some other reason – just as any real actor might. Now consider the example referred to:

(4.9) As it is finally time for the little human girl to leave Sulley and
Mike and go home, Mike directs her towards the door that leads to the human world, saying, softly:
*Go ahead. Go grow up.*

In the ‘outtake’ several minutes later, he says:
*Go ahead. Go throw up.*

If we disregard the identical beginnings of the two sentences and the probably unintended alliteration, the first utterance contains no language-play, and definitely no pun. Yet the second utterance is perceived as a pun only because the audience is capable of linking it mentally to what they saw earlier in the film, not because there is an obvious, well-established candidate for what Tiersma calls the “PUNNEE”, i.e. the item “upon which the pun is based, and which should fit naturally into the context of the conversation or written text” (1985:4). While the audience might consider the second version absurd or funny even if they were not able to make the connection with the first one, the *pun* depends on the contrast with the previous occurrence of a similar item. This seems thus an extreme example of a horizontal pun.

In general, however, I consider puns to be vertical unless a second pivot occurs in the close vicinity of the first. Anticipating example (4.20) below, I thus do not count a reference to the largest city on the American West coast as *Hell A.* as a horizontal pun just because the “PUNNEE”, *L. A.*, is pronounced elsewhere in the same film.

A second issue relating to vertical vs. horizontal puns has to do with the polysemiotic nature (Gottlieb 1994:62; cf. also 1.2.1) of the source material. In films, the verbal channel is not alone in carrying the message, and one effect of the simultaneous presence of, in particular, the picture is that it sometimes provides an explicit second interpretation for what is mentioned only once on the linguistic level. This is illustrated by the following example from the 1996 version of *The Nutty Professor*:

(4.10) At a night-club, the obese Sherman wants to escape from Reggie, a comedian poking fun at victims chosen from among the audience, but when Sherman stumbles and bends forward, Reggie notices that his big behind is only insufficiently covered by his trousers.

Reggie: *You got more crack than Harlem. Look at that!*

There is only one single occurrence of the ambiguous lexical item *crack* here, and the co-text suggests mainly one reading, namely that of *crack* referring to ‘a
form of cocaine’, but the situational context, as transmitted by the visual channel, encourages an alternative reading of crack as ‘the deep, narrow groove between a person’s buttocks’. In cases like these, when it comes to distinguishing between vertical and horizontal puns, I found it to be the most straightforward, if not altogether satisfactory, solution to rely solely on what is actually said (or written). Example (4.10) would thus count as a vertical pun in my analysis.131

A last thing that needs to be made clear with respect to vertical and horizontal puns is that I have decided to consider some elliptical utterances as parts of horizontal puns. To be more precise: puns where the crucial item has not actually been repeated, but can easily be inserted into the structure of a second utterance, will also count as horizontal (see (4.11) for a somewhat extreme example). The same applies if the item has been replaced by a pronoun (example (4.12)).

   Singer: No nostrils. How do you smell?
   Rizzo: Awful. Trust me, I’m his roommate.

(4.12) In Chicken Run, one of the chickens is about to be shot into the air with the help of a rubber band that is being stretched as taut as possible. Nick and Fetcher are watching.
   Fetcher: The tension’s killing me.
   Nick: It’s gonna kill her!

In (4.11), awful is obviously a short way of saying he smells awful. Example (4.12) really involves two puns, one on tension and one on killing. It is the first one that is of interest here, because strictly speaking, tension is only uttered once, but since it has been replaced by it in the second sentence, I still count the pun as horizontal. The general picture will hardly be affected by decisions like these, as the number of puns involving ellipsis and pronouns is quite small.

*Homonymy and polysemy*

The other distinctions in the realm of puns are based on the relationship

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131 However, I may remind the reader that I always note whether there is a link between language-play and picture. Furthermore, I also make a distinction between overt and covert language-play, the former being noticed by other characters within the story, the latter accessible only to the film’s audience. This I do in order to test whether these factors are relevant for the translation of language-play on film. Example (4.10) is both linked to the picture and one of the most overt instances imaginable (the comedian’s joke makes dozens of people laugh), and this would have been taken into account in an analysis, even if it does not change the categorization of the pun as vertical.
between the signifiers themselves. Bank (‘financial institution’) and bank (‘strip of land at the edge of a river’), for example, are formally completely identical, both phonetically and orthographically, which makes them, at least in theory, candidates for two categories of puns: homonymy and polysemy. Strictly speaking, the difference between them is that homonymy is based on completely unrelated items that happen to be identical due to mere coincidence, while polysemy results when a single item acquires, thanks to semantic processes, and perhaps most notably metaphor, meanings that go beyond its original, core meaning.\(^{132}\)

However, for reasons given in 4.1.1, I consider such a definition too rigid and will modify it for my purposes so that the modern language users’ perceptions of the crucial items in a pun, rather than their actual etymological connections, will be the main distinguishing criterion. Suffice it here to say that etymologically unrelated lexical items sharing both spelling and pronunciation are relatively unusual, as are puns built on such items. Here is an example taken from the Internet:

\[(4.13)\] The carpenter did such a great job measuring the space for my new counter that I would call his counter measure counter intelligence.

The first *counter* must refer to what the *OED* describes as “[a] banker’s or money-changer’s table; also, the table in a shop on which the money paid by purchasers is counted out, and across which goods are delivered”. If *counter* precedes *measure* or *intelligence*, however, it normally has the meaning ‘against/in response/in return’ or similar and is derived from another root. Contrasting these meanings of *counter* as in (4.13) results in a rare truly homonymic pun.

Polysemy and puns relying on polysemy are, by contrast, anything but exceptional. In fact, we have already encountered (no further pun intended) polysemic wordplay in (4.13), based on the items *measure* and *intelligence*, respectively. Here are two more examples, the first vertical and the second horizontal, from two films not included in my corpus:

\[(4.14)\] In the parody The Strange Case of the End of Civilization as We Know It, the private eye Arthur Sherlock-Holmes [sic] has a sign on his door on which it says, among other things:
ENQUIRIES WELCOME

The pun in (4.14) relies on two closely related meanings of *enquiries*.

\(^{132}\)The different kinds of bank are actually etymologically related and thus, technically, polysemes.
requests for information’ and ‘investigations by a detective’.

(4.15) In An Ideal Husband, Lord Goring is annoyed by his father’s insistent efforts to start a serious conversation about a wearisome topic and responds with equivocal comments.
Father: I’m afraid I don’t follow you there at all.
Goring: Well, as far as I can make out, you seem to follow me everywhere,
Father.

Here, follow is first used metaphorically to mean ‘understand’, then literally, as in ‘go after’. Although these meanings are rather more distinct than those of enquiries, the semantic link between them is still easily recognizable.

Homophony
While homonymic and polysemic puns rely on competing signifieds united by formally identical signifiers, the crucial items in homophonetic puns sound the same, as the label indicates, but are not spelt the same. Consider two more film examples:

(4.16) The name of a beauty parlour in The Blues Brothers:
CURL UP & DYE
BEAUTY SALON

The pun on the curl up-element is polysemic, as we are dealing with two closely related meanings here, and what is homophonic in (4.16) is the element dye (‘colour’), which contrasts with die (‘cease to live’), the item normally expected after curl up and. Now consider a horizontal homophonic film pun – in French for a change:

(4.17) From Night on Earth: In a taxi in Paris, two wealthy-looking but tipsy black passengers are displeased with what they perceive as reckless driving, which causes them to enquire about the country of origin of the (equally black) driver in a very condescending way. After a while, he tells them, angrily.
Driver: Le Côte d’Ivoire.
Passengers 1 and 2: Côte d’Ivoire…
Passenger 1: C’est un Ivoirien.
Passengers 1 and 2: Y voit rien!
Passenger 2: Tout s’explique!

Ivoirien is the adjective derived from Côte d’Ivoire, while y voit rien means ‘sees
nothing’. Both are pronounced in the same way, i.e. are homophonous, which is why the passengers can pretend that there is a connection (tout s’explique = ‘everything becomes clear’).

**Homography**

The reverse of homophony, as it were, is homography, where the written forms are identical, but not the pronunciation. Neither Delabastita (1993) nor I have found instances of homographic wordplay in our respective corpora, which could perhaps be explained by the fact that we are almost exclusively dealing with linguistic material that is spoken or, in the case of Shakespeare’s plays, was intended to be spoken. However, Hausmann (1974) and Heibert (1993) do not seem to have identified any good examples in the *Canard enchaîné* and Joyce’s *Ulysses* either. Gottlieb (1997c), interestingly, claims to have found three instances of homography in his collection of wordplay from a TV show, but a closer look at the two examples he provides shows that one of them is really homonymic or polysemic in nature (p. 231) and the other one a doubtful case where an abbreviation has been given a new interpretation (p. 225). I will present a similar example in 4.1.4 and argue for its being classified as paronymy.

Delabastita (1993:81; 1996:128) has managed to unearth two vertical and one horizontal example of homographic puns from outside his Shakespeare corpus, viz. “The-rapist”, “MessAge [name of mid-1990s rap band]” and “How the US put US to shame”, but note how in each case the traditional spelling had to be tampered with (introduction of hyphens and capital letters where there would normally not be any) in order to get the message across. However, incontestably homographic puns are possible, at least in English, as another couple of home-made examples will illustrate:

(4.18) *When the archer was applauded for his fabulous performance, he took his bow and smiled.*

(4.19) *What choice does a discontented soldier face who is about to be sent to the Sahara? – Desert or desert.*

Regardless of their disputable quality, these examples should be sufficient to reveal as too categorical Heibert’s claim that “when it comes to wordplay, homography can at best occur in combination with other strategies” (1993:48; my translation), which he supplements with a reference to an example of the the-rapist kind, where an established sequence of letters is reinterpreted through unconventional segmentation. Nothing of the sort has been necessary in my
puns, not even in the vertical one in (4.18).\textsuperscript{133} Still, the fact remains that homographic wordplay is apparently extremely rare and, as far as I can tell, non-existent in my corpus.

**Paronymy**

The last type of puns, namely the paronymic ones, are based on items that are more or less similar, but not identical on either the graphemic or the phonetic level. There is no need for me to take recourse to my own creative powers in this case, as the type is quite well-represented in e.g. films. Consider:

\begin{quote}
(4.20) In *Face/Off*, the villain, Castor Troy, has hidden a powerful bomb containing biological and chemical poisons somewhere in Los Angeles. He explains his intentions as follows:

*I’m about to unleash the biblical plague Hell A. deserves.*
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
(4.21) *Bridget Jones’ Diary*: The protagonist introduces the viewers to her life. About one of her colleagues, who does not know her name, but always stares at her breasts, she says:

*Mr. Fitzherbert. ‘Titpervert’, more like.*
\end{quote}

I think the examples speak for themselves. Note that, as in example (4.3) in the introduction to this chapter, the paronymy is of such a nature that the contrasting items stand in a (near-)rhyming relationship to each other, but that an inclusion in the corresponding categories is precluded by the way the different meanings are made to clash with each other. Examples (4.20) and (4.21) represent clear puns, not rhymes or half-rhymes.

**Summary**

For ease of reference, the various categories introduced in this section are presented together in Table 4.1, and the main distinguishing criteria are outlined for each.\textsuperscript{134} Note that I sometimes refer to e.g. vertical and horizontal homonymic puns as two categories, sometimes as one (with two sub-categories). I have chosen the latter perspective for the macro-structure of this chapter, but always work with separate figures for vertical and horizontal varieties in the actual presentations and analyses.

\textsuperscript{133} In both (4.18) and (4.19), the homographic items exploited for each pun are actually etymologically related. However, the items are probably felt to be quite independent of each other by modern speakers (partly due to the differences in pronunciation). I have, in any case, considered diachronic information and modern language-users’ perceptions only when distinguishing between homonymy and polysemy, and not with homography, homophony, or paronymy.

\textsuperscript{134} The category Homography was only used in the sense that I defined the criteria for inclusion and tried to identify relevant examples. None emerged, however, as I have said.
Table 4.1. Categories of puns used in the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of category</th>
<th>Relationship between the punning items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homonymy (vertical &amp; horizontal)</td>
<td>pronunciation and spelling identical; etymological relationship non-existent or opaque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polysemy (vertical &amp; horizontal)</td>
<td>pronunciation and spelling identical; etymological relationship transparent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homophony (vertical &amp; horizontal)</td>
<td>pronunciation identical, spelling different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homography (vertical &amp; horizontal)</td>
<td>pronunciation different, spelling identical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paronymy (vertical &amp; horizontal)</td>
<td>pronunciation and spelling similar, but not identical</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A closer look at the material in the individual categories will be offered in 4.1.1-4. A discussion of the results for all the puns will then follow, including a comparison between vertical and horizontal ones across types. For the sake of clarity I should point out, however, that the headlines of the different subsections of 4.1 (and 5.1 for that matter) refer to the categorization of the SL language-play, because the various TL versions of one and the same SL instance of language-play can differ considerably from each other.

4.1.1 Homonymy

Homonymy vs. polysemy

The term *homonymy* is used to refer to the relationship between two (or more) linguistic structures that are formally identical, both in spelling and sound, but have divergent meanings. However, depending on the purpose, this definition may be considered sufficient as it stands, encompassing an almost infinite number of examples, or it can be qualified by an addition to the effect that the structures must not be etymologically related, which would drastically reduce the scope of the category. English homonyms of the second, more narrowly defined type include the pairs *saw* ‘past tense of see’ and *saw* ‘cutting tool, usually with a toothed blade’, *sound* ‘something that can be heard; a noise’ and *sound* ‘a narrow passage of water linking two larger bodies of water’, and *match* ‘a sports contest’ and *match* ‘a small stick used for lighting a fire’. Formally identical items like these are said to be *homonymous*, while that which is related to or built upon homonymy, e.g. a pun, is referred to as *homonymic*.

Most researchers on humour and wordplay consider it sufficient to focus
only on the external relationship between the crucial items when it comes to categorizing puns. Some, like Nash (1985:141) and Gottlieb (1997c:210) do it as a matter of course, without even discussing alternatives, and call any items that have the same form, but different meanings, homonyms. Hausmann (1974:100-110) and Delabastita (1993:102-108), by contrast, pay considerable attention to the distinction between etymologically unrelated yet formally identical structures on the one hand, i.e. homonymy narrowly defined, and, on the other hand, the phenomenon of a single item acquiring additional meanings in the course of time, which leads to polysemy. Still, the conclusion Hausmann draws is that “the distinction between homonymy and polysemy […] is irrelevant for wordplay” (Hausmann 1974:110; my translation). And while Delabastita acknowledges that “a diachronic perspective permits certain interesting generalizations regarding the translatability of wordplay” (1993:102; cf. also 236ff), he makes little use of it in his actual analysis.

To some extent it is true, as others have pointed out, that there are various theoretical problems involved in distinguishing between diachronically defined homonymy and polysemy, but in practice, it is generally not very difficult if one follows Ross’ (1998:17) recommendation of “consulting a good etymological dictionary”. The background information provided by the OED, for example, would often be quite sufficient for such an approach. However, what seems to matter more, really (and that is sometimes used as one of the main arguments for not formalizing the distinction between homonymy and polysemy in a wordplay analysis), is the synchronic perspective, in particular the language-users’ spontaneous understanding of the relationship between the central items in a pun. I would claim that in most cases, this subjective understanding will overlap with historical reality, which means that strictly homonymous structures are felt to be unrelated, while a link tends to be still obvious between polysemous structures, even if their divergent meanings have evolved hundreds of years ago.

Not infrequently, though, the link between originally connected meanings has become obscured, and this, too, is not necessarily dependent on the length of time that has elapsed since a structure first started to acquire the additional meaning. For example, the earliest sentence quoted in the OED that contains crack in the sense of ‘form of cocaine’ does not date back longer than to 1985, but most people who are not directly involved with this drug in some way would hesitate as to what the semantic link between ‘form of cocaine’ and other, more established meanings of the word crack might be, even if they are perfectly capable of using and understanding it in all or most of its senses. On
the other hand, the connection between various other meanings of crack, including ‘sharp, dry sound’, ‘the breaking line in a surface’, and ‘the groove between a person’s buttocks’ (cf. example (4.10)) seems to be much more transparent, although the meanings are older.  

Where the link between originally polysemous items has become unclear, they function more or less like formally identical items that have never had a common history. In particular, a pair of true homonyms in one language tends to lack equally homonymous counterparts in another. Similarly, it is also rather unlikely that a by now obscured etymological relationship between two identical structures has ever existed in a corresponding manner in more than a handful, if any, of the world’s other tongues. If such relationships can become hidden, they are evidently not due to (near-)universal aspects of human cognition, but rather the outcome of mental processes shared by, or comprehensible to, only a certain linguistic community during a limited period of time.

In a translation context, this implies that puns based on polysemes that are hardly felt to be polysemes any more can be expected to behave more like puns based on homonyms: except by fortunate coincidence, they can probably not be transferred directly from the source to the target language. I have decided, therefore, to let this circumstance be reflected in the categorization of the puns from my corpus and to include seemingly unconnected or very weakly linked polysemes in the present section on homonyms. Apart from this, note that puns based on former polysemes that have moved apart to such an extent that this is reflected in the spelling and/or the pronunciation will be treated under homophony, homography or paronymy, depending on their formal differences (cf. examples (4.18) and (4.19) in 4.1 for homographic puns where the crucial items on which they rely share a common origin).

Number of SL homonymic puns in the corpus
In my collection of language-play on film, homonymy, as defined by me, turns out to be of rather limited frequency. Table 4.2 shows the number of instances. There, I also indicate how many cases I consider to be signalled sufficiently strongly to give them the label clear (in the sense of ‘quite obviously inserted on purpose’), and how many times I am unsure as to whether the pun was

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135 Initially, I had considered using an arbitrarily chosen date, e.g. the year 1800, to distinguish homonyms from polysemes (if both meanings evoked in a pun are attested before that date, I would be dealing with homonyms, if not, with polysemes). Partly for the reasons given, this method quickly proved to be extremely misleading in many instances and was therefore abandoned.

136 The reverse case must be quite rare, namely that homonyms, thanks to their identical form, are mentally connected in the minds of a significant number of speakers and thus become functional polysemes. Delabastita (1993:104f) provides one example, but I am not aware of any pun in my corpus where a semantic development of that kind ought to be taken into consideration.
intended as such (in which case it is called *doubtful*). Note that we are really dealing with a cline, and that some slight doubts may remain even with a couple of ‘clear’ cases while the degree of uncertainty obviously varies *within* the doubtful category, too. Examples will be provided below.

Table 4.2. Instances of SL homonymic puns in the corpus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category and status</th>
<th>vertical</th>
<th>horizontal</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>clear</td>
<td>doubtful</td>
<td>clear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of instances</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen, vertical homonymic puns are roughly twice as common as horizontal ones.¹³⁷ This is true of both the clear and the doubtful cases. When it comes to the latter, the predominance of the vertical variety could be explained by the fact that horizontal puns tend to signal themselves much more strongly and unambiguously through the mere presence of two identical or similar items in each other’s vicinity.

*The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle* is the film with the most homonymic puns, namely nine, all of which I consider clear cases. *Chicken Run* and *Shrek* feature four instances each, and the remaining films from three to zero each.

It turns out that there are very few puns in my corpus that are both ‘clear’ and homonymic in a narrow sense (cf. above). One of them can be found in a song in *Anastasia*, which features the following lines, synchronized with images of cancan-dancing women:

(4.22) *When you think you can’t*  
*You’ll find you can can [can can(?)]*  
*Everyone can can can*  
*You can can can, too*

Yet even this example is not entirely ‘pure’, as it were, because one does not normally repeat *can* when it is the auxiliary, and the reduplicated *cancan* must, in any context but highly contrived ones like the one in the *Anastasia* song, be understood as the signifier for a dance. Besides, *cancan* is rarely if ever used as a verb. So, even though example (4.22) only represents my written interpretation, aiming at maximum comprehensibility, of what is transmitted orally in the film,¹³⁸ Hausmann (1974:79) and, following him, Heibert (1993:45) refer to vertical homonymic puns as *Amphibolien* and to their horizontal counterparts as *Variationen*. I will not make use of these labels, which are more likely to confuse than enlighten.
it seems as if the syntactic rules of the language have been slightly bent.\footnote{Not to speak of the pronunciation, which is American rather than French.}

As a matter of fact, example (4.22) could, partly due to its peculiarities, have been categorized altogether differently, namely as a horizontal paronymic pun, based on the similarity, but non-identity, of \textit{can} and \textit{cancan}. However, I have made a decision to still count as homonymic (or homophonic or homographic, as the case may be) instances where one item is playfully contrasted with just parts of another item. As there is a complete formal overlap between \textit{can} ‘be able to’ and \textit{can} ‘1st half of cancans’, the pun is homonymic. For the same reason, the following instance from \textit{Stuart Little} is also included in this section:

(4.23) The relatives of the Little family have come to meet young George’s newly adopted little brother, Stuart. They are about to lose their mental balance when they realize that he is a mouse rather than a human child, but quickly adapt to the situation.

Uncle: \textit{He’s a … a …}

Aunt: \textit{-dorable!}

It is more than reasonable to assume that the uncle is about to say \textit{He’s a mouse}, implying a reading of \textit{a} as the indefinite article, whereas the aunt chooses to reinterpret it as the beginning of the word \textit{adorable}. In this sense, the pun is homonymic although \textit{a} and \textit{adorable} as a whole can hardly be said to even be paronymic. The alternative would thus have been to not count the quoted passage as a pun at all, which I would have found an unsatisfactory solution since two semantically different interpretations of the same element are, after all, contrasted with one another.

\textit{Play with proper names}

Almost all the puns classified as homonymic by me would deserve an individual comment, but there is obviously no room for that. At least one more aspect of the category needs to be discussed, though, namely language-play with proper names. As I made clear in 3.1.3.3, fictitious meaningful names often represent a form of language-play, but will generally be disregarded in the present study because their treatment in translation depends more on norms pertaining to their being names than to norms concerning language-play. I make an exception only when the names themselves are being played with, i.e. when one of the interpretations of a certain structure is the name and the other interpretation is something else. In those cases, the name functions more or less
like any other lexical item, and the translators cannot simply ignore the language-play. (To be more precise, they can still miss it or deem it unnecessary or too difficult to do something about in the target text, but it is not sufficient anymore to refer to a norm stipulating, for example, the general non-translation of proper names.)

Accordingly, I have classified some play with meaningful names as homonymic puns, namely when the name is not obviously related to, say, some characteristic of its bearer. This is the case with Pickles in example (4.24), which at the same time constitutes one of the two instances where it is doubtful whether a horizontal homonymic pun was intended at all.139

(4.24) In *Rugrats in Paris*, Madame LaBouche is displeased with work done for her by the inventor Stu Pickles. She tells her closest aide, Jean-Claude, to make sure that Pickles comes within 24 hours to carry out necessary repairs. Jean-Claude immediately delegates the task to the assistant Kira.
Jean-Claude: *Kira! Madame LeBouche [sic] wants her Pickles! Now!*

Now, *Pickles* (or *pickles*, or */pɪkəlz/, or */pɪklz/) in isolation is ambiguous because it can refer to ‘small cucumbers or other vegetables preserved in vinegar or salt water’, among other things, and it can, like almost any lexical item, function as a name. However, as I said, the fact alone that a character is called *Pickles* and that this can also mean something else is not enough for me to count it among the instances of language-play I need to deal with. In the example quoted, on the other hand, it is possible that at least two interpretations of the item have deliberately been evoked in what would thus be a pun. In particular, it is the use of the possessive pronoun *her* that invites a second interpretation of *Pickles*. Still, the presence of a pun in Jean-Claude’s utterance cannot be more than doubtful, as there is no good reason why Madame LaBouche should want to have pickles, and ‘hers’ at that. Perhaps the use of *her Pickles* is just an attempt at parodying the perceived habit of those in charge to appropriate everything and everyone.

It may be interesting to note, in this context, that one of the other doubtful homonymic puns, to be found in *The Road to El Dorado*, centres around *pickles*, too, though in that case, the competing meanings would be ‘preserved vegetables’ on the one hand and ‘precarious situations’ on the other. As a matter of fact, it is not uncommon in my collection of language-play that puns based on a certain pair of signifiers occur in more than one film. Among

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139 Where the names are ‘motivated’, language-play based on them will be categorized as polysemic (cf. 4.1.2 for more details).
the puns categorized as homonymic, there are also two that rely on *nuts* ‘small hard fruit’ vs. *nuts* ‘crazy’ and three that are based on *ass* ‘donkey’ vs. *ass* ‘buttocks’.

The SL homonymic puns in their context

As may be recalled from section 3.2, I have tried to take into account whether the language-play in the films a) is linked to the simultaneously available visual information, and b) can be assumed to have been noticed by other characters in the film (overt language-play) or not (covert). Table 4.3 shows the distribution of the homonymic puns according to the first parameter. Under *link with picture?*, *weak* means that there is a link, but that it is not as clear or prominent as in the *yes*-cases.

Table 4.3. Links between the homonymic puns and the picture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category and status</th>
<th>Link with picture?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vertical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>clear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weak</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When it comes to the link between homonymic puns in general and other, non-verbal information, there is an even distribution between cases where there is a link and cases where there is not. However, Table 4.3 shows that vertical and horizontal puns behave differently in this respect: the former, including the doubtful cases, are more often linked to the picture than the latter, which rarely need such additional support in order to function as intended.

Table 4.4. Overt vs. covert homonymic puns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category and status</th>
<th>Film-internal perception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vertical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>clear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>overt</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unclear</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>covert</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 4.4, the results regarding the covert-overt distinction are presented. No distinction has been made between puns that could be noticed
by other characters, but are not, and puns that cannot be noticed by others. Both kinds are referred to as covert here. However, in more than half of the cases I was unable to say with any confidence whether characters other than the speaker (or, in the case of written puns, author) can be assumed to have noticed the language-play. In the table, these cases have been labelled unclear.

**Homonymic puns in translation**

How have the homonymic puns fared in the translations? An overview of the number of translations involved is provided in Table 4.5 and may be a good way to start answering this question.

Table 4.5. Number of independent translations of homonymic puns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category and status of SL puns</th>
<th>Vertical</th>
<th>Horizontal</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>clear</td>
<td>doubtful</td>
<td>clear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of translations</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To make it clear once more, by translations I mean here all the TL solutions that have been made use of in the transfer to dubbing and subtitle versions, including complete omissions, direct copies and the use of non-playful sequences of language. Not included in the figures in Table 4.5 are versions that are most probably dependent on, and thus virtually identical to, another translation. All in all, over 200 TL versions needed to be considered, i.e. slightly more than five on average for each of the 39 homonymic puns.

Table 4.6. Overview of the TL solutions for the clear homonymic puns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TL lang.-play?</th>
<th>German dubbing</th>
<th>Swedish dubbing</th>
<th>German subtitles</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles</th>
<th>Norw. subtitles</th>
<th>Danish subtitles</th>
<th>Sw. TV subtitles</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is of course out of the question to present all the individual solutions in

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[^140]: As compared to the figures in Table 4.5, two translations are missing because they could not be categorized.
detail. However, Table 4.6 shows a summary for the translations of the clear homonymic puns, and Table 4.7 does the same for the doubtful cases. Following that, the most important findings concerning translation strategies will be presented in text form. Note that the figures in the rows marked with a ? represent cases where it is doubtful, for different reasons, whether there is language-play in the TL versions. This applies to all the tables of this kind in the present chapter and the next. Note also that ver. and hor. stand for vertical and horizontal, respectively, and indicate the nature of the source-language puns.

Table 4.7. Overview of the TL solutions for the doubtful homonymic puns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TL lang.-play?</th>
<th>German dubbing</th>
<th>Swedish dubbing</th>
<th>German subtitles</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles</th>
<th>Norw. subtitles</th>
<th>Danish subtitles</th>
<th>Sw. TV subtitles</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite their relative complexity, Tables 4.6 and 4.7 are a simplification. In particular, one should keep in mind that puns can co-occur with other categories of language-play. That implies that it is quite possible that the pun is lost in a translation, but some other aspect of the language-play is preserved or replaced by something similar. This has, in fact, happened a number of times with some of the vertical homonymic puns, usually resulting in a certain loss of communicative effect, but these cases are hidden among the ‘yes’ figures in the table. Consider the translations of what I have chosen to treat as a homonymic pun (cf. example (4.23) above):

(4.25) Uncle: He’s a … a …
Aunt: … -dorable!

German dubbing:  - Das ist ein … ein … ['It is a… a…']
                 - … einzigartig! ['… unique!']

Swedish dubbing: - Han är ju j-, ah … ['He is, uh …']
                 - … jättesöt! ['… really sweet!']

141 Since the German subtitles are directly derived from the German dubbing, they are not counted here. Note also that the Norwegian and the Danish subtitles are identical. On the basis of several such cases in Stuart Little, it can be assumed that these two TL versions are not independent of each other. Finally, let me point out that both SL and TL spoken text is rendered in italics, while the subtitles are not. An asterisk added to the latter indicates the beginning of a new subtitle.
Swedish subtitles: *- Han är ju … ['He is …']
   - Ljuvlig! ['lovely']
Norwegian subtitles: *- Han er jo … ['He is …']
   - Henrivende! ['Delightful']
Danish subtitles: *- Han er jo … ['He is …']
   - Henrivende! ['Delightful']

According to my way of analyzing it, the original language-play relies on two strategies, namely the pun on a, which I have already discussed earlier, and the unexpected end to the utterance (cf. 5.1.6 for more information on this kind of language-play). Now, all the translations have preserved this latter aspect (it would actually require more effort to omit this sort of language-play than to recreate it), so the translations have naturally been included among the ‘yes’ cases. However, in the Norwegian and Danish versions, no attempt has been made to create a pun, nor does the Swedish dubbing have one because j- does not mean anything and it is entirely unclear what it was intended to become. It may have been jätteliten ‘really small’, but even so no pun would be present.

Only the German dubbing and the Swedish subtitles feature what can be considered a pun. The latter relies on the homophony of the modal particle ju and the beginning of the word ljuvlig, whose initial l is silent, while the former stages a clash between a form of the indefinite article and the beginning of einzigtartig. The pun in the German dubbing is horizontal rather than vertical, but it otherwise mirrors the source text quite closely. To be sure, it is somewhat less obvious what the ‘German uncle’ intended to say after ein, as it cannot really have been Maus ‘mouse’, which would have required the feminine form of the article. But Mäuserich ‘male mouse’ or Tier ‘animal’ are conceivable alternatives.

It would have been too difficult to quantify all the more or less subtle differences between the translations, and the focus has to lie on the essential aspects (e.g. language-play or no language-play?), which may be supplemented with occasional clarifications. Still, despite its limitations, some general conclusions could, cautiously, be drawn from Table 4.5. For example, there is a certain tendency for horizontal homonymic puns to fare better in translation than their vertical counterparts, in the sense that there is more often language-play in the target versions of the former. This is perfectly in line with e.g. Heibert’s (1993:210ff) and Offord’s (1997:257f) findings.

It is even less surprising that when it comes to the doubtful cases, there are in every combination of target language and translation mode (e.g. Swedish dubbing, or Danish subtitles) at least as many solutions containing no language-play as there are solutions with language-play. Usually, there are more of the
former, and the doubtful cases thus have a notably lower percentage of TL language-play than the clear ones. Apparently, the translators, too, provided they gave the issue a second thought at all, generally considered the presence of an SL pun questionable in those cases and deemed a particularly creative translation effort unnecessary.

The differences between the various target languages and between dubbing and subtitling are too small, in my opinion, to permit of any generalizations. At best, it may possibly be worth pointing out that the Norwegian and Danish subtitles behave slightly differently from the other versions in so far as they have at least 50% language-play solutions even for the (clear) vertical homonymic puns, which otherwise tend to have more non-playful TL counterparts. Then again, a closer look at these solutions reveals that the pun is actually lost in three of the Norwegian and four of the Danish solutions, even though some other form of language-play is still present. In terms of playfulness and quality, these versions are thus more or less on a par with the others.

One of the things that the table does not show is in what relation the translations stand to the English original, which can be copied as it is, be recreated in the TL, be replaced by an instance of language-play belonging to the same category or be replaced by some other type of language-play. These are translation strategies that lead to the presence of language-play in the TL versions. Alternatively, the original language-play can be rendered by non-playful text in the translation, or the passage can simply be omitted altogether, which in either case leads to an absence of TL language-play. Finally, there is the option of compensation.

Concerning homonymic puns in general, the single most commonly used of the strategies mentioned is to render language-play by non-language-play. Complete omission, by contrast, does not occur with any of the homonymic puns. Of the strategies leading to TL language-play, no very clear preferences can be detected, though creating new language-play belonging to the same category and transferring the original language-play into the target language (calque) can be said to take the lead for vertical and horizontal homonymic puns, respectively. Compensation, as defined in 3.1.3.2, is rare with just two clear cases and one doubtful one.

As to the link between pun and picture and the overt-covert distinction, can any correlation with the translation strategies be seen? The figures are rather too low to permit any bold conclusions, and only when the other categories of pun are taken into account may some clearer tendencies be
discernible. Suffice it here to say that of the few covert puns, most have not been translated into language-play, and that the reverse is true of the only slightly more numerous overt puns, which more often than not have TL counterparts containing language-play. In theory at least, overt puns ought to function as a stronger inducement to the translator to come of with TL language-play than covert ones. It would therefore not be surprising if what is still only a hint of a trend were confirmed in connection with other categories.

The most important general results for the homonymic puns in my corpus will be summarized and compared with the results for the other types of pun in section 4.2, which will also feature more precise figures when it comes to translation strategies.

**Analysis of an interesting homonymic pun and its TL versions**

To round off the section on homonymy, I would like to discuss one more example, from *Chicken Run*, that caused the translators to come up with a range of interesting solutions. The pun is presented as a joke to a large number of listeners who all show their appreciation by laughing. It is thus unquestionably overt. Furthermore, it relies on a very clear link between the verbal utterance and the picture, and these circumstances ought to function both as a strong incentive for the translators to create equally striking TL solutions, and as an obstacle to achieving this goal. Now consider the actual example, including the translations (it is rather difficult to provide accurate back-translations, but the meaning of the translations will become clear in the subsequent discussion):

(4.26) In one of the coops, the rooster Rocky is entertaining a crowd of chickens with jokes while at the same time consuming some apparently intoxicating beverage from a white funnel. At one point, he pulls out a feather from his tail and puts it into his drink.

Rocky: *Cocktail!*

- German dubbing: [*] *Federweisser!*
- Swedish dubbing: *Tuppen opp!*
- German subtitles: [as dubbing]
- Swedish subtitles: **“Cocktail!”**
- Norwegian subtitles: *- Kakktail.
- Danish subtitles: *- Gokktail.

The origin of *cocktail* in the sense of ‘(blend of) alcoholic beverage(s)’ is uncertain, and a host of more or less plausible etymologies have been suggested
(for a survey, cf. ‘Gaudere’ 2000). Yet even if it turned out that *cocktail* once had something to do with a cock’s tail, such a link would have to be considered completely obscure by now, and Rocky’s pun is thus counted among the homonymic variety.

As to the translations, they represent different approaches. In the Swedish subtitles, the original item has simply been copied. That is not unproblematic, but not necessarily a bad solution either. The word *cocktail* has been borrowed into all the target languages included in this study and ought to be comprehensible to all speakers except perhaps children. It is, however, less likely that the pun on *cock tail* will be understood, even by people with some knowledge of English. Still, to put one’s own tail feather into a drink as one would a paper umbrella and to call the result a cocktail is certainly humorous in itself and could alone justify the laughter of a crowd of chickens willing to please a welcome guest. Even if the pun is lost to the target audience, copying the original utterance seems quite defensible in this case.

But the Swedish subtitler has done more. Directly following the joke, the stout and strong Bunty hits Rocky on the back, saying “give over” in the original version, which becomes “lägg ägg” in the translation. Non-language-play has thus been turned into something quite inspired: *lägg ägg* is an exhortation to ‘lay eggs’, which fits well into a film called *Chicken Run* and acquires special effect when said to a rooster. It is, apparently, a nonce formation modelled on the established *lägg av*, meaning ‘give over’ or ‘stop it’, so that the meaning of the SL utterance is evoked as well. Finally, *lägg* and *ägg* form a rhyme, which makes the subtitle a surprisingly well thought out instance of compensation.

The Danish and the Norwegian subtitlers, probably one of them copying the other, have chosen to create nonce formations that rely on the original *cocktail*, but also include a pun on the sound made by chickens. The feather in the drink ought to be sufficient to justify these solutions.

The Swedish and the German dubbers, by contrast, have abandoned *cocktail* altogether and created TL puns from scratch. The Swedish *tuppen opp* means, literally, ‘rooster up’ and is probably a paronymic play on both *botten opp* and *tummen opp*, the Swedish versions of *bottoms up* and *thumbs up*, respectively. Again, as the feather sticks out of the funnel, this pun is sufficiently related to the picture.

Last but not least, the German *Federweisser* is perhaps the most fortuitous of the different TL solutions. The word normally designates a partially fermented white wine that needs to be drunk fresh in the autumn. Its
etymology, at least concerning its first element, Feder ‘feather’, ought to be obscure to the average speaker, and the use of Federweißer in connection with a feather in a white container is thus as much a homonymic pun as the original cocktail.

4.1.2 Polysemy

General description
I have argued for the usefulness of the present category in 4.1 and at the beginning of 4.1.1, so there is no need to do that here. For ease of reference, the difference between homonymic and polysemic puns can be summarized as follows: both types are characterized by a clash of orthographically and phonetically identical structures with divergent meanings, yet in the former case, these structures are etymologically unrelated, whereas in the latter case, there is a connection. For my purposes, I have modified these definitions by taking into account how two structures that are formally identical are likely to be perceived today: if there is no strong and/or obvious semantic overlap between them, I count them as homonymous even if there is, in fact, a historical connection. Consequently, puns are included in my polysemy category only if a semantic link between the core items can be readily established without the help of additional information.

I think it is no over-generalization to claim that polysemy is common in all the world’s languages, though possibly to different degrees. This has to do, among other things, with the economics of linguistic activity. For example, although the number of phonemes is always restricted in a language, they can be combined in very many ways to yield endless possibilities of expressing new meanings. Similarly, it can be cognitively economical, and thus advantageous, to use lexical items in more than one sense. Conversely, actual cases of polysemy can provide some (though obviously limited) access to the workings of the human mind (cf. e.g. Alexieva 1997:139) or, which is perhaps of greater interest to the deconstructionist, to the subtle interconnections within a text (cf. Davies 1997:36). Some of these points are also made by Warren:

[…] polysemy […] yields interesting insights not only into the language user’s (subconscious) conception of what types of associations a particular word-form may provoke in different contexts, but also into his knowledge of how these may be utilized creatively to convey new meanings. In this way, we make a word-form ‘go a long way’, which, of course, is economical. Moreover, we
have a way to refer to phenomena and objects for which there are no established expressions. (Warren 1990:87)

Throughout the course of history, as human beings felt the need to communicate about things and phenomena they had not previously talked or even thought about, it must often have been easier to extend the meaning of existing linguistic structures in a way that did not require much cognitive effort (in a way, in fact, that would frequently suggest itself quite automatically) than to invent new words in connection with every original observation or insight. As a look into any dictionary reveals, but especially a comprehensive one like the OED, most commonly used lexical items have thus acquired more than one meaning, and these meanings are more or less obviously related to each other.

While it would perhaps be going too far to extend to every language Golden’s (1996:284) notion of the “inherent polysemy of the individual word”, which he discusses in connection with ancient Chinese texts, it is certainly the case that most words can mean, or can easily be made to mean, a variety of things. Delabastita (1996:130) specifies three of the processes by which polysemy can come about, together with a punning example for each: “metonymy (as in Bilingualism: tongues meeting in lovers’ mouths), metaphor (What’s this that got a heart in its head? A lettuce), or specialization (Surfers do it standing up).”

Metaphor implies that otherwise unconnected phenomena, because of perceived similarities, are referred to by one and the same signifier (e.g. heart for ‘something that is deep inside; the core’, and head for ‘that which is at the top’, to use Delabastita’s example). This process has received a great deal of attention in cognitive linguistics, at least since Lakoff & Johnson (1980). It is probably the most productive way of linking new meanings to existing forms and as such the main cause of polysemy in a language.

The fuzzy limits of polysemy
In practice, it is not always straightforward to determine the limits of polysemy. On the one hand, the borderline between polysemy and homonymy can be fuzzy, particularly if one defines, as I do, both concepts through modern language users’ perceptions of semantic links rather than through more accessible and objective etymological information. On the other hand, and that is what I want to focus on here, it may occasionally be problematic to tell

142 Of course, etymologies may be obscure or an issue for debate even among experts, and the information provided by published sources can be downright wrong, but in general, there ought to be fewer doubtful cases if one chooses to rely solely on the absence or presence of an etymological relationship as a criterion for distinguishing between homonymy and polysemy.
mere referential ambiguity or vagueness, which is normally considered insufficient for a pun, from polysemy, on which a pun can be based (cf. Delabastita 1993:94-96). Furthermore, vertical polysemic puns can border on simple metaphors, which I do not normally count as language-play. Two doubtful cases from my own material may illustrate some of the problems involved. The first one is from *Mouse Hunt*:

(4.27) Ernie has been injured and is being pushed through hospital corridors on a bed while a doctor is trying to establish his medical status. Suddenly, two women whom Ernie has met earlier appear at the side of his bed.

Doctor: *I'm sorry, are you family?*

Woman: *Yes, we're sisters.*

The doctor obviously wants to know whether the women are related to the patient. However, due to a misunderstanding, or perhaps out of a desire to deliberately mislead the doctor without having to lie, the woman who answers reports the relationship between herself and the other woman. Now, the crucial item in this exchange seems to be *you*, which the doctor intends to refer to the addressees and a third party (the patient), but which is interpreted as only referring to the addressees. One might consider stipulating a polysemy of *you* ‘the person(s) I am addressing’ and *you* ‘the person(s) I am addressing plus somebody else who can be inferred from the context’, but I have refrained from this. Since it is clear, however, that the linguistic system has been exploited in a playful manner in the exchange in (4.27), it does constitute language-play. I have therefore decided to include it among the uncategorized cases (cf. 5.1.11).

The second problematic example is from *Ice Age*:

(4.28) In one scene, the tiger Diego keeps his travel companion Sid, a sloth that he dislikes profoundly, caught between his teeth. Only when the mammoth Manfred orders him to “spit that out – you don’t know where it’s been” does he release his victim. Afterwards, Sid asks Diego whether he really considered eating him.

Diego: *I don’t eat junk food.*

Now, to call somebody a pig, or perhaps something more original like, say, an aardvark, is to make use of metaphor. The term *junk food* itself is derived from a metaphor, and to refer to anything edible as junk food, even if it happens to be
a sloth rather than the standard referents of the term (hamburgers, pizza, chips, sweets, etc.), is normally also only a metaphor, not language-play. What prevents me from simply dismissing the use of *junk food* in (4.28) as non-language-play, however, is Manfred’s preceding insinuation that Sid may have spent time in unhygienic places that make him as unfit for consumption as junk is, and, especially, the likelihood that Diego considers Sid to be a form of junk, i.e. not just some potential meal that is detrimental to his health, but the animal equivalent of human trash. I think he actually implies as much with his remark. These considerations led to my including example (4.28) among the vertical polysemic puns. While some doubts remain, in this case not concerning the authors’ intentions (they definitely wanted to convey a special communicative effect), but whether the sequence is really situated on the ‘right’ side of the ‘ordinary metaphor – polysemic pun’ divide, I think the decision is defensible. Fortunately, the vast majority of the other candidates for polysemic puns cause less confusion.

*Syllepsis, oxymorons, and play with names*

I might briefly point out that had I found any cases of syllepsis in my material, they would most probably have ended up in the present category. This is in line with Evrard’s (1996:67) mentioning syllepsis while discussing polysemy. The example Wynne-Davies (1990:522) provides of syllepsis is *you have broken my heart and my best China vase*, where *broken* “is used in a literal and a metaphorical sense at the same time”, thus making it a polysemic pun. The only trouble would have been to decide whether it is of the vertical or horizontal variety (cf. the discussion surrounding examples (4.11) and (4.12) in 4.1).143

What I did find were apparent contradictions in terms, or oxymorons. Now, real semantic contradictions are rare, and where they seem to occur, as in *a bright black* or *this carcass is alive*, one usually tries hard, though possibly in vain, to discover hidden or secondary meanings. In my corpus, there are a few cases where seemingly incongruous items are brought together in such a way as to form polysemic puns. Here are two examples:

(4.29) In *My Dog Skip*, the American military is looking for intelligent dogs that can be trained for participation in World War II. Willie tries to get his Skip recruited, but Skip pretends to understand none of his commands and is rejected. Afterwards, Willie’s

---

143 *Zeugma* is sometimes used in the sense of ‘syllepsis’. For instance, I can see no fundamental difference between Wynne-Davies’ example of syllepsis and those given by Zabalbeascoa (1996:253) and Veisbergs (1997:158) of what they refer to as *zeugma* (*she went to the States and bankrupt and he paid a compliment and my bill*, respectively).
girlfriend Rivers suggests that Skip may not have behaved properly because he got scared.

Willie: You're saying my dog’s a chicken?

(4.30) Although Lord Farquaard in *Shrek* is like a king in status, he needs to marry a princess in order to be one in name as well. The Magic Mirror presents three eligible candidates, the last of whom needs to be rescued first.

Magic Mirror: And last, but certainly not least, bachelorette number three is a fiery redhead from a dragon-guarded castle surrounded by hot, boiling lava. But don’t let that cool you off!

Regarding the first example, the dog Skip can of course not literally be a chicken, except perhaps under some very special, science-fiction-like circumstances. A dog can, however, lack courage and thus be referred to with a slang label for cowards, which is what happens in (4.29). Yet the ‘poultry’ interpretation is also evoked by the simple fact that dogs and chickens (the birds) are both animals, and we are thus dealing with a pun. Had the question been, for example, you’re saying my little brother’s a chicken?, only the ‘coward’ interpretation would have come to the fore.

Concerning (4.30), a lot could be said about the anachronisms characterizing both *Shrek* as a whole and the quoted sequence in particular (for example the use of bachelorette in a fairy tale context). These go beyond the scope of the present study. What matters here is the seeming paradox that “hot, boiling lava” should “cool” anybody off. Obviously, a metaphorical reading of cool off must be taken into account for a proper understanding, namely ‘become less excited/interested’. Still, the initial, striking effect is of course intended and we thus have a pun on cool off. Note also that a second polysemic pun is contained in the Mirror’s presentation, namely that on fiery, and that the two actually reinforce each other.

As may be remembered, there are some recurring themes and ideas among the homonymic puns, and the same is true when it comes to the polysemic kind. Apart from the excerpt in (4.30), there are, for example, at least four more instances that rely on a play on words from the semantic field of temperature (chilly, cold, hot), and chicken (as well as chick) is also played with in other contexts than the one shown in (4.29). Other structures that form the basis of a polysemic pun in more than one film include rat, son of a bitch, bird, and gas (see example (4.37) for an illustration of the latter).

Before I present the quantitative results for the present category, at least one more comment ought to be made regarding its scope. While meaningful
names in themselves are not included as puns in my study, play with meaningful names is (cf. 3.1.3.3). However, meaningful names can have been chosen without any immediately obvious motivation or because they express a certain link between the bearers of the names and some of their characteristics. If a name of the latter kind is being played with, a polysemic pun can result. For example, the films Inspector Gadget and Stuart Little feature eponymous heroes, one of whom is full of gadgets while the other, being a mouse, is very little. It could be said, therefore, that the names are polysemous with the attributes. When these names are played with, which happens in both cases, I have included the sequence, e.g. the following example, in the present category:

(4.31) Stuart Little cannot find his way home through the dark Central Park. He tries to give himself hope by repeating something he has been told before, but then assesses his current situation more realistically:

*Every Little in the world can find the Little house. I’m a Little. I’m a Little— I’m a little lost.*

In fact, there are not very many cases like this in the films.

Number of SL polysemic puns in the corpus
Returning to more general questions, how many instances of language-play fulfilling the criteria for polysemic puns could, all in all, be identified in the 18 films on which this study is based? Table 4.8 shows that there are as many as 200 ‘clear’ cases and another dozen more uncertain ones. Since they are so numerous by comparison with e.g. the homonymic puns, it may be of interest to see how they are distributed. In the table, I have therefore included more detailed information for that half of the films where at least 10 polysemic puns (clear or not) are to be found. Of the remaining films, Antz and Rugrats in Paris feature nine instances each. Mouse Hunt, which has very little language-play in general, also has the lowest number of polysemic puns of all films, namely one clear and one doubtful case.

Vertical polysemic puns are clearly the most common type of wordplay that I have found any examples of. They also outnumber their horizontal polysemic counterparts by approximately 3:1, and only two films (Muppets from Space and Anastasia) can boast more than 50% horizontal puns. However, as will be seen, many of the vertical puns make use of the most prominent non-verbal aspect of the film, i.e. the picture, which functions essentially as a second mentioning of the crucial item in another context.
Table 4.8. Instances of SL polysemic puns in the corpus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Film</th>
<th>Category and status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vertical clear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken Run</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rocky &amp; Bullwinkle</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shrek</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuart Little</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspector Gadget</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muppets from Space</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice Age</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space Jam</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anastasia</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>remaining films</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total for all films</strong></td>
<td><strong>147</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fact that polysemy is exploited for wordplay more than five times as often as homonymy is hardly surprising, as there is so much more material to work with. Truly homonymous structures rely on quite unlikely linguistic coincidences, while polysemous pairs are the result of regular cognitive processes and therefore very common. In fact, most of the ‘homonymic’ puns accounted for in the previous section are really based on former polysemies that have become obscured. Such a development thus seems to be more common than homonymy narrowly defined, provided the number of puns in a specialized corpus like mine is anything to go by, but it is apparently less common than polysemy that remains recognizable as such (even over a long period of time).

Internal and external relationships of the SL polysemic puns

A closer look at what has now been categorized as polysemic puns reveals that virtually all of them confront the literal meaning of an item or expression with one of the metaphorical extensions. This is so even where the metaphorical meaning is much more common than what must once have been its origin, as in this excerpt from Anastasia.

(4.32) Anastasia has managed once more to escape the ruses of the evil Rasputin, who is mad with rage and fury. The bat Bartok advises him to calm down, which he does:
You’re right. I am calm. I am heartless. I have no feelings whatsoever. (His head drops into his ribcage, which is empty inside.)

One can assume that _heartless_ is almost never used in a literal sense, and it can be quite surprising, therefore, to be reminded of its semantic roots by being shown a person that actually seems to lack a heart (the organ). Such a clash between one literal and one metaphorical meaning is the rule in polysemic puns. By contrast, it does not happen often that two metaphorical meanings are confronted, possibly because the semantic differences are usually not striking enough. However, it works in example (4.33):

(4.33) In _Antz_ General Mandible has sinister plans for the ant colony. Among other things, he has sent large numbers of troops loyal to the queen into a war that he knew would be a suicide mission. After the battle, he is told that one ant has survived.


For the general, it would have been much more convenient if all the soldiers had perished as he thought they would. At first, he therefore cannot hide his annoyance at the news he receives, but he quickly realizes the inappropriateness of his reaction and tries to mend things by recasting _damn_, his initial expression of displeasure, as a mere intensifier of _good_. Neither of these uses of _damn_, however, can be said to be the original one, even though the first is much closer to the meaning of ‘condemn(ed)’ than the second.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>link with picture?</th>
<th>Category and status</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vertical</td>
<td>horizontal</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>clear</td>
<td>doubtful</td>
<td>clear</td>
<td>doubtful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weak</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Concerning the doubtful puns, almost all of them are of the vertical kind, which is, once again, not really surprising because the signals indicating language-play tend to be weaker with just one mentioning of an ambiguous item. As with the homonymic puns, none of the doubtful cases are overt (cf. Table 4.10), which of course would have been rather contradictory. On the other hand, at least the doubtful vertical cases tend to feature a link with the
picture (cf. Table 4.9), yet it was often this link that, without being strong enough to function as confirmation, suggested the possible presence of a pun in the first place.

In general, the polysemic puns behave more or less like the homonymic ones when it comes to links with the picture and overt reactions by other characters, yet their greater number lends more weight to the findings. As pointed out above, the vertical puns are much more often related to the visual information than the horizontal ones, which can usually be decoded as language-play despite their remaining language-internal.

Table 4.10. Overt vs. covert polysemic puns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>film-internal perception</th>
<th>Category and status</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vertical clear</td>
<td>horizontal clear</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>overt</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unclear</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>covert</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Concerning the overt-covert distinction, one difference between vertical and horizontal polysemic puns can be seen, namely that the number of covert horizontal puns is comparatively low, which may imply that horizontal puns are more likely to elicit a reaction in their context of utterance than vertical ones (even, or at least, when that context is fictitious). Furthermore, three of the four covert horizontal examples cannot be anything but covert: two occur when the speaker is talking to himself, one appears in the background information provided by the narrator in Rocky and Bullwinkle, which is intended only for the real-life viewers, and the last one, from Rugrats in Paris, is based on a misunderstanding and conveyed by one little ‘rugrat’ to his peers. These children, however, being around the age of two, simply have not acquired the linguistic sophistication yet to either avoid or detect involuntary puns, and the example in question is thus covert to both the speaker and the addressees. Still, as the malapropism was obviously intended by the makers of the movie, it constitutes a true pun.

Be that as it may, in most cases of polysemic wordplay it is actually impossible to tell whether the addressees of the punning utterance or any third parties in the film had understood the language-play as such (even where the preconditions of physical presence and mental maturity were fulfilled), and this is yet another similarity with the results for the homonymic puns.
Polysemic puns in translation

As the number of polysemic puns is high, so is the number of their translations. With an average of slightly less than five and a half TL versions for each pun, there are well over one thousand TL versions to consider, as Table 4.11 shows.

Table 4.11. Number of independent translations of the polysemic puns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category and status of SL puns</th>
<th>vertical</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>horizontal</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>clear</td>
<td>doubtful</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>clear</td>
<td>doubtful</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of translations</td>
<td>787</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tables 4.12 and 4.13 indicate how the language-play has fared in the translations. Once again, I have to point out that the tables cannot do complete justice to the rather more complex reality, and I may refer to the general comments on Tables 4.6 and 4.7, which apply here, too.

Table 4.12. Overview of the TL solutions for the clear polysemic puns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When it comes to what I consider clear cases of SL language-play, it is immediately striking that there are, across the board and usually with sizeable margins, more TL versions with language-play than TL versions without. This is true for both vertical and horizontal polysemic puns and for all the combinations of TL and translation mode. As may be recalled, the vertical homonymic puns had triggered TL language-play in less than 50% of the translations. The corresponding figures for the horizontal homonymic puns were usually above 50%, but not by much. Here, however, the 'yes' cases would be in the majority even if all the doubtful cases were counted as not containing language-play. My hypothesis that homonymic and polysemic puns would, as a

\(^{144}\) Compared to the figures in Table 4.11, four translations are missing because they could not be categorized.
group, behave differently in translation has thus been confirmed.

Table 4.13. Overview of the TL solutions for the doubtful polysemic puns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Kassaï (2001:155f) points out, if there is a corresponding polysemic relationship in both source and target language, the translation of a sequence where this particular relationship plays a role should not pose a problem. In many cases, it turns out, such correspondences do indeed exist between the languages involved in this study and have, probably quite automatically, been made use of by the translators. In fact, the translation strategy where the SL pun has been transferred more or less directly into the TL is, for the clear cases, roughly as common as all the other strategies taken together (cf. 4.2).

TL solutions featuring doubtful language-play
The willingness, or perhaps the more or less subjectively felt need, to simply carry over the original ideas into the translation is also partly responsible for the substantial number of solutions where I think it is doubtful whether the result can be counted as language-play. Consider the following example, which, in its silliness, is not untypical of the jokes in *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle*.

(4.34) Karen and Rocky have been captured by the Pottsylvanians. They are tied to chairs and attached to a machine that can drastically reduce people’s ability to think clearly and independently.
Fearless Leader: [...] you will be turned into headless, mindless vegetables. But don’t worry, it won’t hurt. At least I never heard a complaint from the other vegetables…

As these words are spoken, three FBI agents who had been missing emerge. Their heads have become a radish, a potato, and a carrot, respectively.

The original pun is one of the classic cases where the metaphorical meaning is
suddenly confronted with the literal one. Furthermore, the pun is overt, as none of the characters involved in the scene could not understand it, really. It is also representative of polysemic wordplay that is vertical on the strictly linguistic level, but, thanks to the important visual information, functions more or less like a horizontal pun.

The translators could not or did not want to create an independent TL pun that would make sense in the particular context of the scene, and all of them chose to work with the TL equivalents of vegetables (i.e. Gemüse, grönsaker, etc.). The problem is that the metaphorical extension of vegetable, i.e. 'mentally virtually dead person', is, at best, in the process of being borrowed into the Scandinavian languages and German. Consequently, it is not at all as natural in these languages to refer to people in a certain, medically serious condition with the term corresponding to the English vegetable. On the other hand, the pictorial information and, especially in the case of the subtitle versions, the viewers’ knowledge of English, may still make it possible to understand the intended double meaning and to accept the presence of a pun. On the basis of these conflicting arguments, all six of the available TL versions are considered doubtful cases, and therefore included among the figures in the rows marked ? in Table 4.12.

Obviously, translators are always influenced by the texts that they are supposed to translate. In the context of pun translation, it can seem at times that they have realized that a word-for-word transfer would not work, but that they still wanted to preserve what they could from the source text (perhaps, once again, partly due to the constraints posed by the non-linguistic channels). Some of the TL solutions where it is not quite clear whether they should count as containing language-play appear to be the result of such considerations, e.g. the following, which is also from Rocky & Bullwinkle:

(4.35) In a TV campaign ad for the American president, he is pictured standing in the middle of a country road, with fighter jets roaring overhead.

TV speaker: President Signoff, standing firmly in the middle of the road.

German dubbing: President Signoff tritt natürlich nicht zurück, sondern geht seinen Weg weiter. ['P. S. does not step back, of course, but continues on his way. ']

In the original, the idiomatic (standing) in the middle of the road is contrasted with a literal interpretation in the form of somebody actually standing in the middle of a road, which is maybe especially ridiculous if that somebody is the supposedly
most powerful man on the planet. Be that as it may, an expression relying on
the exact same image does not exist in German, so the translator tried to come
up with something different enough to be acceptable to TL speakers, but
similar enough to fit the picture (with the speaker not visible, lip synch was not
an issue in this particular case). The result appears less than perfect, but what
matters here is that the link between what is said and what can be seen may not
be sufficiently strong to permit a reading of the scene as a pun or, more
generally, as a joke. In particular, the expression *seinen Weg weitergehen* is not
firmly established, but rather situated somewhere on the cline between a shared
image schema and a personal metaphor, which makes it harder to play with it.
The fact that the signifier first coming to mind when seeing the road in the TV
spot would normally be *Straße*, not *Weg*, does not exactly help, either.
Furthermore, the president is not walking, as the German text suggests, but
standing still. These factors taken together make me hesitate to confer the
status of ‘certainly featuring language-play’ to the dubbing solution quoted in
(4.35), even though the intention to create a new polysemic pun seems to have
been there.

In a relatively small number of cases, the translators have resorted to
downright copying of the original pun, i.e. to using the actual SL words in the
translations. This has usually also led to questionable results, because it remains
uncertain whether the target audience is able to decode the foreign material.
The Swedish dubbing in example (4.36) is a case in point:

(4.36) Lola Bunny is not only physically attractive, she proves herself to be quick-witted, self-confident, and good at basketball. In response to this, Tweety pretends to put out a candle with his fingers (which is, in a typical cartoon manner, accompanied by a hissing sound and steam) and makes the following remark:

*Ooh, she’s hot!*

Swedish dubbing: *Åh, hon är hot!* ['Oh, she’s hot']

Note that transferring elements from the source language may work fine if they are easily deciphered or if the viewers have a good knowledge of that language, which may well be the case here. This solution is therefore much more appropriate than some of the others, which completely disregard the visual and non-verbal aural information. Still, *hot* is not (quite yet) a Swedish word, and it remains doubtful if a pun based on this word can be copied without depriving parts of the target audience of a joke.
Other translations

While there is a sizeable number of translations of polysemic puns that have an uncertain status with regard to language-play, the clear majority of cases is still relatively straightforward.

The translation strategy that is most common, apart from the calques, is to provide a TL version of the playful passage that is not playful itself, but merely represents one of the meanings of the pun. When it comes to the doubtful SL puns, the ‘no language-play’-solution is also more often employed than calques.

One of the differences between polysemic and homonymic puns is that complete omission of the punning sequence actually does occur with the former – and the numbers are not negligible either. Depending on the target language and the translation mode, between four and eleven percent of the translations have completely excluded the sequence where there is a pun in the source text. Somewhat surprisingly, this hardly happens with the doubtful SL puns, but with the cases that I consider ‘clear’, especially the vertical ones. However, another finding in this area is probably more in line with what one would have expected, namely that the subtitles have higher percentages of complete omissions than the dubbing. Especially the Swedish subtitles stand out in this respect, which, however, is mostly due to the fact that there are no less than five omissions in The Iron Giant.

The omissions occur primarily where the language-play is written, e.g. in newspaper headlines or on signs, in connection with rapid speech, and when characters are ‘called names’. If an utterance ends with a name or an epithet, this is often not included in the subtitles, and in some cases this approach has affected polysemic puns contained in epithets, too – as when Bugs Bunny in Space Jam tells Duffy Duck to “catch, feather-head!” Duffy is literally a feather-head and possibly metaphorically, too, so there is no doubt that we are dealing with a pun here, but in all the subtitle versions, which, it must be said, may rely overly much on the English intralingual subtitles, only the catch part is translated.

There are a few instances of ‘compensation’ to be found in the vicinity of SL polysemic puns, but only about half of these occur in connection with a loss of those puns. The rest are more like a bonus, as at least some aspects of the original language-play are preserved or recreated. Eight instances were found in the German dubbing, while in the Swedish dubbed versions, there are three or four, and in the subtitles between three and none, depending on language and medium.
Of the different strategies that lead to TL language-play corresponding to an SL polysemic pun, it is most common, apart from using calques, to create a new pun that belongs to the same category as its SL ‘trigger’, but new language-play belonging to other categories of pun and non-punning language-play are introduced with moderate frequency, too. A direct transfer of untranslated SL material, finally, is rare and, as indicated above, in most cases a debatable choice.

A consistent connection between, on the one hand, the relationship of the polysemic pun to its non-linguistic context and, on the other hand, the choice of translation strategy cannot be identified in my material. All the translation strategies have been used both with puns that are linked to the picture and with puns that are not, and the distribution mirrors the general frequency of the types quite well. The same is true of puns classified according to the overt/covert criterion, except that overt puns are very rarely omitted altogether from a translation, which seems only natural.

Are there any differences between the target languages, or between dubbing and subtitling, when it comes to the treatment of polysemic puns in translation? Yes, there are, but the differences are small, and no clear pattern emerges. The German subtitles have a comparatively low percentage of solutions with TL language-play, while the Danish subtitles and especially the few Swedish TV subtitles have relatively high percentages. This is also true of the dubbed versions. I am inclined to explain the slight quantitative variations as the cumulative result of individual translation decisions and performances rather than of more profound, structural differences between the languages, the translation cultures, or the modes of translation (cf. also 6.5).

Analysis of an interesting polysemic pun and its TL versions
Following the pattern established in the section on homonymic puns, I shall now round off the discussion with a closer look at an interesting translation problem in the form of an arbitrarily chosen polysemic pun and some of its possible solutions. As will be seen, example (4.37), taken from Stuart Little, involves some noteworthy issues. The translations quoted cover only the first two lines of the SL dialogue, as this is where the actual pun is situated and as the subsequent lines are translated quite literally in all cases. Back translations will be provided in the discussion following the example.

(4.37) Stuart, trying to escape from a gang of alley cats who want to eat him, is driving his little car as fast as he can. The cats are a few metres behind him.
Cat 1: *I hope he runs out of gas.*
Cat 2: *I hope you do!*
Cat 3: *Why don’t you run in the back?!!*
Cat 1: *I can’t help it. I have a nervous stomach.*
Cat 4: *And I have an empty stomach. Now get that mouse!*

**German dubbing:** *Der donnert ganz schön durch die Gegend!*  
*Du aber auch!*

**Swedish dubbing:** *Hoppas han får soppatorsk!*  
*Det är kul att käka.*

**German subtitles:**  
*Der donnert ganz schön durch die Gegend!*  
*Lauf lieber!*

**Swedish subtitles:**  
*-Hoppas soppan tar slut.*  
*-Är det soppan du har ätit?*

**Norwegian subtitles:**  
*-Håper suppen tar slut.*  
*-Er det ertesuppe du har spist?*

**Danish subtitles:**  
*-Bare han snart løber tør.*  
*-Kan du ikke holde dig tør?*

Incidentally, the original joke is one of several in my corpus that are based on the polysemy of *gas*. I think it requires no further explanation. Let me therefore start the discussion with the German subtitles, which, in the case of *Stuart Little*, are usually so closely based on the German dubbing that I do not consider them in my analysis. Here, however, the writer of the subtitles has changed the German dialogue so that the outcome in terms of TL language-play is very different. The German dubbed version means, approximately, ‘He really thunders about! – So do you!’ The verb *donnern* ‘thunder’ can indeed be used for both ‘driving quickly and noisily’ and ‘breaking wind noisily’. The exchange thus features a new polysemic pun that seems quite flawless – were it not for the fact that because of poor recording quality, it is very difficult to hear properly. This circumstance has led me to classify the translation as doubtful with regard to TL language-play despite the fact that the translator has done a good job. This is the only such case in the entire corpus (but cf. 6.4 for the amount of inaudible dubbing solutions). Whether my classification is justified or not, the trouble of making out the exact words may be responsible for the changed text in the German subtitles, where the reply *lauf lieber* ‘you better run’ misses the potential pun altogether and actually leaves the subsequent two utterances completely unexplained.

The Swedish and the Norwegian subtitles are very similar and have, together with the Danish ones, most probably been produced in co-operation or with two of them being based, at least in part, on the third (cf. 3.1.2.5). In
both cases, the first utterance means ‘hope he runs out of petrol’, with *soppa/suppe* ‘soup’ being slang terms for petrol. In Swedish, the reply is turned into ‘is it soup you’ve eaten?’, while in the otherwise identical Norwegian version the kind of soup, ‘pea soup’, is specified in the question, which of course makes it a little more easy for the viewers to realize the connection with breaking wind. However, both solutions combine the topics of driving a car, eating, and flatulence in acceptable TL puns that are partly independent of the SL model.

The Swedish dubbing and the Danish subtitles are not fundamentally different from the two solutions just discussed, except perhaps in their accessibility and acceptability. The first utterances in these versions also mean, on one level, ‘hope he runs out of gas’. In the Swedish one, the compound noun *soppatarsk* is used, which, on the one hand, is ‘the condition of having run out of gas’, on the other hand a combination of two elements meaning, literally, ‘soup’ and ‘cod’. The second cat’s reply *det är kul att käka* ‘that is nice to eat’ presupposes an interpretation of *soppatarsk* as foodstuff, though with this as a referent, *sopptorsk* would have been grammatically more likely. Furthermore, ‘soup cod’ is hardly an established culinary concept, and with the subtitle being what it is, the question *why don’t you run in the back?* becomes something of a non sequitur. Due to these considerations, the Swedish dubbing solution appears rather dubious in terms of quality, even though it clearly features a pun.

The Danish way of saying *run out of gas* is *løbe tør*, which, in a literal back translation, becomes *run dry*. In the *Stuart Little* exchange, this has triggered the question *kan du ikke holde dig tør?* ‘can’t you keep dry?’, probably implying involuntary defecation or urination rather than breaking wind. As with the Swedish dubbing, however, the TL pun’s quality and general plausibility is questionable, but as these things are hard to quantify (cf. my critique of Heibert’s (1993) attempt in 2.3.7), I have largely disregarded them in my approach.

### 4.1.3 Homophony

**Introduction**

Homophones are here defined as two or more words or other linguistic structures that sound the same, but are spelt differently. Such structures are thus homonymic on the phonetic level. Tiersma (1985:3) even treats homophony and homonymy (and also polysemy) as being the same, and Attardo thinks that “[h]omographs and homophones are subclasses of...”
homonyms” (1994:111). To put it like this can be misleading, however: all homonyms are, after all, also homographs and homophones, but homographs and homophones as defined in 4.1 and above (and by Attardo) are not complete homonyms – so one might just as well call homonyms a subclass of both homographs and homophones.  

Be that as it may, homophones are probably more common in some languages than in others. Golden (1996:284) suggests that a small number of phonemes in a language, as in Chinese, leads “to endemic homophony and therefore to constant wordplay, especially in spoken language”, while Ross explains the, in her opinion, high number of homophones in English with the circumstance that “the English system of spelling is not based on representing each sound or phoneme with a distinct letter or symbol” (1998:9). She mentions, moreover, the role of the ubiquitous schwa sound, which is the standard realization of unstressed vowels in spoken English and as such further contributes to the occurrence of homophony in that language (1998:9f). According to Grassegger, there are also many homophones in French, and he provides essentially the same underlying reason for this as Ross does for English, namely the “strong discrepancy between the sound system and the writing system” (Grassegger 1985:100; my translation).

In the target languages considered in this study, the number of phonemes is not unusually small, and with the exception of Danish, the discrepancies between the sound and the writing systems are not quite as marked as in English and French. By that rationale, there ought to be fewer homophones in those languages, which Heibert (1993:46) confirms at least for German.

A distinction can be made between what Hausmann (1974:61) calls “lexikalische Homophonie” and “syntagmatische Homophonie”, i.e. homophony restricted by the boundaries of lexical items and homophony going beyond those boundaries. Example (4.38) illustrates the first type, while example (4.39) represents the only reasonably clear case I could identify of the second type:

(4.38) On their way to work, Mike and Sulley in *Monsters, Inc.* pass a fruit and vegetable store with a sign reading:

TONY’S GROSSERY

(4.39) In *Chicken Run*, a chicken is supposed to be catapulted over the wire fence surrounding the farm, but it hits the fence head on and

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145 There is no need to settle this issue, however, as it is equally lacking in urgency as the question whether vertical puns are compressed horizontal ones rather than horizontal puns being expanded vertical ones, which e.g. Hausmann (1974:19) chooses to take sides on.
The distinction between lexical and syntagmatic homophony is also taken up by Grassegger (1985:20, 90f), Nash (1985:138f), and Heibert (1993:46), but with only one instance of syntagmatic homophony in my own corpus, I have seen no need to make further use of these categories. It may be interesting to note, however, that I would still consider the joke quoted as example (4.40) below as a case of lexical homophony, even though it is described by Crystal (1998:13) as “play[ing] with the grammatical structure of the sentence” — without any reference to homophony:

(4.40) 'Dad, what are all those holes in the new shed?'  
'They’re knot-holes.'  
'What do you mean “They’re not holes”? I can put my finger right through them.' (Crystal 1998:13)

What this shows is that one can emphasize different aspects of one and the same phenomenon and, accordingly, put different labels on it. In the classification of the puns in this study, the focus is on the external similarities between the punning items, not their grammatical function.

Before I present the results for the homophonic puns in the films used for this study, just a word about a special case, namely what Delabastita calls “letter puns and number puns” in his 1998 article on this topic. These puns are not uncommon, as Delabastita indicates (1998:146f), though, understandably, without mentioning the virtual explosion that has taken place in recent years, especially in the realm of Internet chat and SMS-messaging where time and space can be saved by replacing sequences of linguistic symbols, even entire words, by a single letter or number. Standard examples include CU for 'see you', L8R for 'later', and QT for 'cutie', which can also be combined, as in CU L8R QT. Incidentally, these abbreviations show clearly that puns, for that is what they are, need not be intended as a joke. Once one has understood the principle, there is nothing striking in these codes and one can use them and, more significantly, re-use them again and again without expecting as much as a tired smile.

In my corpus, there are two examples of letter puns (one of them repeated within the same film), which is remarkable given the small overall number of homophonic puns I have found (cf. below). The first letter pun is transmitted orally and classified as vertical (example (4.41)), the second is both
written and read aloud, and thus automatically horizontal, in my opinion (example (4.42)). No puns involving numbers seem to exist in my material.

(4.41) The very last lines of the entire film *Monsters, Inc*, sung by the protagonists (or their voices, to be precise):

*I wouldn’t have nothing if I didn’t have
You, you, you
A-E-I-O, that means /juː/—yeah!*

(4.42) In *Muppets from Space*, Gonzo’s cereal letters have mysteriously arranged themselves on the table before him.

*Letters: R U THERE
Gonzo: Are you there?*

Note that in both these cases, the letter *U* has been used in a way to evoke *you*. The word *you* is, of course, one of the most frequently employed lexical items in English, which, together with the fact that it is short and phonetically simple, makes it a likely object for letter puns. There is, however, a difference between the puns in (4.41) and (4.42): the former is more like a joke, even if the writer of the song has not invented it, whereas the latter is rather unexceptional chat shorthand.

**Number of SL homophonic puns in the corpus**

Apart from homographic puns, of which I have found no representatives at all in my corpus, homophonic puns are easily the smallest of the categories of pun I am working with, and that applies to both the vertical and the horizontal variety. Together, there are only 12 clear cases and one doubtful one, and their distribution is shown in Table 4.14.

Table 4.14. Instances of SL homophonic puns in the corpus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category and status</th>
<th>vertical</th>
<th>horizontal</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>clear</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doubtful</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Chicken Run* features the highest number of homophonic puns (two vertical and two horizontal) while there are no less than 11 films without any such puns at all. The low numbers need not come as a surprise: in Gottlieb’s admittedly much more limited study of wordplay in a TV show, homophony did not play a prominent role, either (1997c:215).
Homophonic puns are a little special not only because they are so few, but also because they are the only category where the horizontal type outnumbers the vertical type. This may be a coincidence, or perhaps homophonic puns need to be signalled more clearly, which can be done by making them horizontal, among other things. Of the vertical puns, only the one quoted as example (4.41) has no link with the picture (cf. also Table 4.15), but in that case, the co-text functions as a rather strong signal itself.

Another way of signalling homophonic puns is of course to present them in writing. Apart from examples (4.38) and (4.42), there is another one in writing only, plus one more where a spoken utterance is contrasted with a sequence of letters. Of all the categories of language-play used in this study, homophonic puns thus have the highest share of written examples.

*The doubtful SL pun*

In the previous sections, I have made an effort to explain my reasoning around at least some of the instances that I consider doubtful with respect to their containing language-play. If one chooses to work with such a category, it needs to be justified and illustrated, and I will therefore also say a few words about the only doubtful homophonic pun. It is part of a dense and complex series of puns in *Ice Age* (including homonymic, polysemic and ‘clear’ homophonic ones) that are mostly based on the various meanings of *pack* or /pæk/. They form part of a guessing bout where a squirrel-like creature, incapable of speech, is trying to explain something important to the protagonists of the film with the help of gestures.

(4.43) The squirrel has already managed to convey that a pack of animals has passed before them, but not what kind of animals.

The others keep guessing.

Sid: […] Pack of wolves? Pack of …?

Manfred: *Uh, pack of bears*

(Suddenly, the squirrel starts scuttling away from where it was standing.)

Manfred: *Pack of fleas?*

It is possible that the squirrel’s style of running has reminded Manfred of the movements of fleas. In that case, we are only dealing with a rather preposterous guess, but not with language-play. From Manfred’s point of view, it is also possible, however, that the squirrel tried to illustrate the concept of *fleeing* and by doing so to evoke the concept of *fleas*, which Manfred obviously thinks is a conceivable solution to the riddle. (Such shortcuts are permitted: the squirrel
had earlier pretended to carry a heavy pack on its back, so as to bring to mind a *pack* in the sense of ‘group of predators’.) If this hypothetical link between *flees* and *fleas* was actually intended by the makers of the film, Manfred’s last guess represents a homophonic pun. If not, the link is probably a fabrication by an all-too-eager pun hunter (i.e. me). The translators’ treatment of this sequence, with no corresponding language-play in any of the TL versions, seems to speak in favour of the second possibility.

The SL homophonic puns in their contexts

One should be extra careful about drawing conclusions from statistics that are based on a mere handful of individual items. Tables 4.15 and 4.16 are therefore mostly offered for the sake of completeness. Nevertheless, it may be of interest that the figures, though lower in absolute terms, do not deviate in striking ways from those in Tables 4.3, 4.4, 4.9, and 4.10 on homonymic and polysemic puns, respectively. The only exception is perhaps the circumstance that most of the horizontal puns are more or less strongly linked to the picture, but, once again, this may be due to coincidence.

Table 4.15. Links between the homophonic puns and the picture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category and status</th>
<th>Vertical</th>
<th>Horizontal</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>clear</td>
<td>doubtful</td>
<td>clear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weak</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.16. Overt vs. covert homophonic puns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category and status</th>
<th>Vertical</th>
<th>Horizontal</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>clear</td>
<td>doubtful</td>
<td>clear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>overt</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unclear</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>covert</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Homophonic puns in translation

The caveat that the comparatively small numbers we are dealing with here make generalizations tricky applies also with respect to the translations of the
homophonic puns. Table 4.17 shows the number of TL versions available.

Table 4.17. Number of independent translations of the homophonic puns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category and status of SL puns</th>
<th>Vertical clear</th>
<th>Vertical doubtful</th>
<th>Horizontal clear</th>
<th>Horizontal doubtful</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of translations</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The translations of the clear horizontal puns make up more than two thirds of the total number of translations, so the corresponding columns in Table 4.18, which gives an overview of the occurrence of TL language-play, should provide the most reliable basis if one wishes to identify any tendencies in this respect.\(^{146}\)

Table 4.18. Overview of the TL solutions for the clear homophonic puns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TL lang.-play?</th>
<th>German dubbing</th>
<th>Swedish dubbing</th>
<th>German subtitles</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles</th>
<th>Norw. subtitles</th>
<th>Danish subtitles</th>
<th>Sw. TV subtitles</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I cannot see any clear differences between dubbing and subtitling or between the target languages when it comes to the treatment of the homophonic puns, except that the figures for solutions without language-play are above average for the Norwegian and Danish subtitles of the horizontal type. For this, I am not able to provide a good reason that goes beyond coincidences and the translators’ personal choices. Yet while factors like these may largely be responsible for the distribution of the individual figures within Table 4.18, at least the totals can perhaps be accepted as an indication that homophones behave rather differently from homonyms and, especially, polysemes in translation. The two rightmost columns thus reveal that in general, more SL homophonic puns have been turned into TL non-language-play than into TL language-play.

It is quite possible that these puns pose a particular challenge to the

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\(^{146}\) I do not provide a table for the six translations of the one doubtful SL homophonic pun, none of which features any language-play, as mentioned above.
translators simply because they are homophonic, but part of the explanation may be found in the fact that the problems caused by the four written examples have usually prevented the introduction of TL language-play (cf. also 6.1.2). Over twenty of the ‘no TL lang.-play’ solutions are of SL language-play that is partly or entirely in writing, and more than half of them are partial or complete omissions, e.g. all the six available (non-)translations of the shop sign quoted in (4.38). This does of course make a difference when the overall figures for homophonic puns are so low.

It is also striking that there are no homophonic puns in the target versions whatsoever. Calques, so common with polysemic puns, do not occur at all in connection with the vertical SL puns, and in the few instances where it was possible to more or less directly transfer a horizontal pun, the result is, in fact, a pun belonging to a different category. No TL homophonic puns that are independent of the source text have been created by the translators, either.

TL language-play that falls within my relatively narrow definition of compensation does occur, but only to about the same limited extent as with the homonymic and polysemic puns. It is also true, once again, that not all cases of ‘compensation’ can be found in the vicinity of SL language-play that has been neutralized or omitted; sometimes, it is a special opportunity, or the translator’s ingenuity, that seems to be the reason behind what could be described as a bonus instance of TL language-play.

Concerning the original puns’ links with the non-verbal channels of the film and/or their being noticed by other characters, neither property appears to have improved their chances of being rendered as TL language-play. In other words, both puns that are strongly connected to the picture and puns that are clearly overt have more than once been turned into non-language-play, or been omitted altogether, in at least one TL version – and usually in several.

Analysis of an interesting homophonic pun and its TL versions

With a collection of puns containing only twelve or thirteen examples, there are at this point not very many left that have not already been quoted or referred to. The example I have chosen a more detailed discussion is, like most of the other homophonic puns in my corpus, quite entertaining. It is also one of the more striking cases in that the actual homophony can be said to extend over four syllables, whereas the normal length of the homophonous sequences is one or two syllables. I present it here together with five of the seven translations I have access to (back translations are provided only for Kramer’s response, as the translations of Scolex’ remark remain in all cases close to the
(4.44) Scolex, the arch-villain in Inspector Gadget, had lost his hand in an accident. To replace it, he has just been fitted with a metal claw designed by his assistant Kramer. He is very satisfied with the result, finding it “diabolical”, and searches for a sobriquet to go with his new appearance.

Scolex: I deserve a dashing appellation.
Kramer: Dashing Appalachian? What is that, a hillbilly with a tuxedo?

German dubbing: Ich verdiene einen flotten Beinamen. Sie woll'n 'n flottes Bein haben? Sie sind doch noch ganz rüstig. [≈ ‘You want to have a stylish leg? But you are still quite sprightly.’]


German subtitles: *Ich verdiene einen flotten Beinamen.
*Ein flottes Bein?
Siek sind doch noch ganz rüstig. [≈ ‘A stylish leg? But you are still quite sprightly.’]

Sw. DVD subtitles: *Jag förtjänar ett snitsigt tillmäle.
*Vad är det - en bonnläpp med smoking?
[‘What is that – a yokel with a tuxedo?’]

Sw. TV subtitles: *Jag förtjänar ett stiligt tillnamn.
*Vad då? Lantisen i smoking? [‘Like what? The country bumpkin in a tuxedo?’]

The Norwegian and Danish DVD subtitles have not been rendered because they are very much like the Swedish DVD subtitles, and possibly even based on them. In all three cases, one cannot help wondering whether the translators have understood the original pun at all. If they did not have access to a script or to the intralingual English subtitles, it may never have occurred to them that the sequence /æpəˈleɪʃən/ can also be spelt Appalachian, which ought to be a word that is rarely encountered outside the US. But in that case, they must have wondered about Kramer’s apparent non sequitur. Alternatively, the pun was recognized, but it was nevertheless decided, for some reason, to merely offer straightforward translations of the original exchange. This would really only be justified if one views the subtitles as a tool to understanding the original dialogue rather than a meaningful dialogue in its own right. If subtitles were produced under such premises, TL coherence and cohesion might indeed be
sacrificed, as has happened in this particular scene. It seems much more likely, though, that the translators simply chose an easy, if unsatisfactory, solution to a translation problem that they may or may not have grasped fully.

As to the Swedish TV subtitles, they are probably also the result of a misunderstanding. The question Kramer asks in that version seems not to be what "ett stiligt tillnamn," i.e. 'a dashing appellation,' means, but what appellation would be suitable for Scolex. This makes sense on at least some level, but the solution is still weak for several reasons, e.g. a) Scolex is not from the countryside, nor does he look, talk, or behave like one who is, on the contrary; b) the suggestion would insult Scolex in a way a minion like Kramer would never dare; c) Scolex goes on to explain that an appellation is the same as a nickname, which he would not have to do if Kramer had already understood that.

Both the German and the Swedish dubbers try their luck with some rather unlikely paronymic puns. "Einen flotten Beinamen" is thus contrasted with "ein flottes Bein haben," and "elegant benämning" with "elefant i klänning." Still, despite their being forced, the German and Swedish puns fit into the context and constitute an honourable attempt to combine TL language-play with coherence (only the sense of the Swedish "djungelvariant" remains obscure).

I have included the German subtitles, too, even though they are based on the dubbing rather than the English original. The reason is that the link between the two utterances has become a lot weaker because the German subtitler has dropped the element "haben" 'have,' which contrasts with "-namen" 'name' (or "-amen") in the dubbed version. While this is grammatically OK and makes the subtitle shorter, it is not a good move with regard to the wordplay.

The TL solutions could be discussed in much more detail, especially their weaknesses, but I think the general picture has become clear. Most notable about this example is perhaps the fact that a very overt pun (Scolex reacts to Kramer’s question with an angry "No, you idiot! It’s a nickname") can result in four subtitle versions that not only contain no language-play, but must confuse the target audiences more than they help them. For a summary of all the findings from this section, I refer once again to 4.2.

### 4.1.4 Paronymy

**Introduction**

Paronymic puns constitute the last of the wordplay categories that I have found any examples of in my corpus. Paronymy is here defined as the relationship
between linguistic structures that are formally similar, but not identical on either
the phonetic or the orthographic level. Of course, such a definition immediately
begs the question: how similar is similar in the sense of ‘paronymic’? Some
scholars have actually dedicated time and effort to formalizing the various
degrees of paronymy, usually by comparing the number and types of
phonemes/letters that together form the items to be analyzed. In most
studies, however, it has not been deemed necessary to subdivide paronymic
wordplay further, on the basis of greater or lesser similarity between the
structures involved, or to determine a threshold on one side of which there
would be paronymy and on the other side no paronymy. Consider the short
introduction to paronymic puns by de Vries & Verheij:

A second major type of wordplay is achieved through paronymy, i.e.
the use of words with only a slight difference in surface form. In our
examples […], this mostly involves one or two letters. The formal
similarity here is weaker than in homonymy but still strong enough
for the two words to be related to each other in the mind of the
listener or reader. (de Vries & Verheij 1997:76; bold type omitted)

Now, let us disregard the somewhat sloppy use of word and focus instead on the
following: the formulation “with only a slight difference” is more or less
synonymous with, and as vague as, the term similar, which I used in my
definition above. But de Vries & Verheij offer a solution. They suggest that it is
the subjective perception of a text sequence by the addressees, or, viewed from
the opposite perspective, the effect which this sequence has, that determines
whether the similarity between two items is “strong enough”. If this is so, it
would be counterproductive to set up rules of the following type:

At least two thirds of the phonemes must be identical in order for
two structures to be potential punning material; 50% identity is
sufficient if at least two thirds of the remaining phonemes are
related by their place or manner of articulation.

This is a hypothetical example, but something like it, though probably with
even further qualifications and supplementary rules for special cases, would be
required for a mechanistic division of non-puns and paronymic puns. As I have
indicated repeatedly, however, such an approach would do violence to the

147 Cf. e.g. Hausmann (1974:61-68) for a model of this kind, and Attardo (1994:120-127) for an
overview and discussion of previous approaches.
inherently fuzzy concept that language-play in general, and paronymic wordplay in particular, represents. (That is also the reason why I have chosen to openly acknowledge, e.g. in the various tables I make use of, the existence of doubtful cases both among the SL and the TL material.) I thus agree with Delabastita (1993:83), who does not think that a definition leading to clear-cut boundaries between puns and non-puns is possible or necessary. Furthermore, as Delabastita (1993:83f) also points out, the (potential) punning items do not occur in a vacuum (or else they could hardly form a pun), but are part of a larger context. It is this context, including the co-text, that determines, to a large extent, whether a sequence can be construed as a pun or not.

To illustrate that the formal differences between punning items are not always slight, here are two examples, from my own corpus, of what I consider paronymic puns:

(4.45) In *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle*, Rocky explains to Bullwinkle that Karen, who has brought the two cartoon characters into the real world, is from the FBI.

   Bullwinkle: *FBI? Didn’t they take our show off the air?*
   Rocky:    *You mean the FCC.*
   Bullwinkle: *Didn’t they like it either?*

(4.46) In *Shrek*, the eponymous hero is annoyed that princess Fiona is trying to give him orders.

   Shrek: *Hey, I’m no-one’s messenger boy, all right? I’m a delivery boy!*

In (4.45), the overlap between *FBI* and *FCC*, which stands for the ‘Federal Communications Commission’, only extends to one out of three letters, or two out of six phonemes. Concerning (4.46), *messenger* and *delivery* are about as different as can be, and it is only the following element, the short *boy*, that provides a formal link between the lexical units of which they form a part. Yet in both instances, the structure of the surrounding dialogue functions as a support to the weak degree of formal identity between the items, and the result is, in my opinion, two paronymic puns.

To make it quite clear, all this is not to say that any two structures with very little formal overlap can form the basis of paronymic pun. In a sense, there is a kind of threshold for what can count as puns and what not, but it fluctuates with every new pair of structures, their co-text, the context of utterance, the addressees, and possibly further factors, so that it is practically impossible to do this complexity justice in a general definition. Even Hausmann, despite his phoneme-counting exercises, explicitly refrains from attempting such a
definition (1974:61f). On the other hand, as de Vries & Verheij (1997:76) say about their own collection of biblical paronymic puns, the differences are usually restricted to one or two letters.148 So, the degree of similarity between two structures does play a role, probably for the likelihood of their being employed in a punning context, and perhaps even for the quality of the result.

One distinction that can be made within the realm of paronymy (mentioned by e.g. Delabastita (1993:80)) is that between near-homophones and near-homographs, and the choice of term may depend on, for example, which kind of text one works with or which aspects of a pun one wishes to emphasize. Tiersma (1985) thus only uses the term near-homophones for paronymic pairs of linguistic structures. In fact, I myself made do without the term paronymy in Schröter (2004) and used near-homophony etc. instead. However, rigorous classification was not the goal, neither for Tiersma nor, at the time, myself. Furthermore, as I was and am dealing with a medium where most of the language-play is transmitted in spoken form, near-homophony is quite accurate as a descriptor of what the majority of paronymic puns in my corpora hinges on.149 Nevertheless, I shall henceforth stick to the term paronymy and its derivatives.

A final note in this respect: paronymy is sometimes used in a more restricted sense, namely about the relationship between two or more lexemes with the same root (see Müller (1996) and some of the sources he refers to for a definition of this kind). The following pun from The Iron Giant, one of only a very small number in my corpus, would thus be paronymic in this narrow sense (the crucial lexemes are emphasized):

\[(4.47)\] Hogarth: Only one creature could create so much destruction.

Yet Hausmann (1974), Delabastita (1993), and Heibert (1993) all use paronymy in the same sense as myself. To designate what I refer to as vertical paronymic wordplay, Heibert (1993) also employs the term Substitution, and Paronomasie for its horizontal counterpart. Evrard (1996:64), too, uses paronomase in this way.150

Paronymic puns vs. non-punning similarities, malapropisms, and misunderstandings
At the beginning of the present chapter, I discussed the basic difference

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148 To focus on letters rather than phonemes may be well justified if one works with ancient written texts.
149 Nash (1985:139f) even introduces the idiosyncratic and imprecise terms "mimes" and "mimetic phrases" for paronymic puns that stay within and puns that stretch beyond lexical boundaries, respectively.
150 Müller (1996:207ff), however, wants this term reserved for near-homophonic wordplay where the crucial items are not derived from each other, but as all his examples are of the horizontal kind, at least there seems to be some overlap between the scholars’ definitions of paronomasia.
between wordplay and related concepts such as rhyme, half-rhyme, and alliteration. All of these are based on a similarity of form, but puns rely also on a play with the meanings of the crucial structures. Rhyming, half-rhyming, or alliterating items can all be said to be paronymic to varying degrees and are thus potential punning material. Yet the mere fact that such items are brought within the vicinity of each other in a text and arranged so as to cause a special auditory effect is not sufficient for them to be part of a pun. Consider an interesting example, again from *Shrek*, where one and the same lexeme is part of both a rhyme and a pun, but for quite different reasons:

(4.48) Robin Hood and his merry men are singing their introductory song. The excerpt is from the middle part.

Robin Hood: *I like an honest fight and a saucy little maid.*
Merry men: *What he's basically saying is he likes to get* —
Robin Hood: *– paid!*

Especially in songs and poems, the final words of two subsequent lines often rhyme. This is also the case with *maid* and *paid* in (4.48), and even though these items differ only in one phoneme and one letter, they do not stand in a punning relationship with each other. Still, there is a pun here, namely that between *paid* and the unexpressed yet implied *laid*. Note that these two words are formally equally close, or removed, as *maid* and *paid* and rhyme in the same way, but that the semantic aspects come much more to the fore here.

However, what could, in theory, be taken for a relatively straightforward distinguishing criterion may at times be difficult to apply in practice. As so often, we are really dealing with a cline between indisputable puns and other forms of language-play, and some sequences of linguistic material seem to position themselves somewhere in the middle, like the following from *Rugrats in Paris*:

(4.49) Angelica's mother, who apparently has a professional career to think of, explains how it is possible that her little girl could watch a Mafia movie undisturbed the previous night:

*I can't mother and merger at the same time.*

One could classify the relationship between *mother* and *merger* as alliteration (they occur in the close vicinity of each other, and both start with the same consonant) or half-rhyme (apart from fulfilling possible criteria for alliteration, the items are of approximately equal length; not only the onsets but also the endings are identical; and the stressed vowels are only moderately different).
Alternatively, and that is what I have eventually decided to do, one can see them as part of a horizontal paronymic pun. There is, after all, a semantic as well as a formal connection between the items, even though (4.49) certainly represents a less prototypical pun than what we have in e.g. (4.48).\footnote{Cf. the advertising slogan "Timex! It takes a licking and goes on ticking!", which also borders on the realm of non-punning rhyme, but is nevertheless treated as a pun by Gottlieb (1997:225).}

Anyway, unlike the issue of puns vs. rhymes etc., the distinction between paronymic puns and malapropisms, i.e. the inadvertent use of phonetically similar but semantically inappropriate items, poses no problems in the context of the present study. This is not because puns and malapropisms are never difficult to tell apart (in fact, they may well be; cf. 2.2.4), but because fictional texts and scripted dialogues between made-up characters like those in feature films very rarely contain true malapropisms. Those that seem to be there have almost always been planned or at least been approved afterwards, or else the scene would have been cut or re-shot.\footnote{For an exception, see Schröter (2003:118, 123): in The Nutty Professor, the word *euphemism* has been used inappropriately by one of the characters, but that seems like a genuine error by the makers of the film. Accordingly, at least two subtitlers have not transferred this blunder into the TL versions.}

So, one of the basic differences between puns and true malapropisms is that the latter are produced unintentionally, and that even where they generate the same effect as a pun (e.g. laughter), that effect was not meant to be generated. Malapropisms, just as any other aspect of reality, and language-use in particular, can be incorporated in different ways and for different purposes into novels, plays and films, but “[w]hen a character in a play misplaces, uses malapropisms, the unintentionality lies in the fiction: its author intends it” (Stanley 2001:343). Of course, the same is true of the other media, including films.

Most of the instances in my corpus where characters utter seemingly incorrect words, “either through ignorance (the typical case) or a slip” (Ritchie 2004:116), occur in *Rugrats in Paris*. Part of the humour in that film derives from the small children’s many grammatical mistakes and from their frequently unexpected choice of words, as when little Chuckie defiantly declares:

\[(4.50)\text{Over my dead potty!}\]

This utterance is not linked to the picture, except that it comes from someone who probably uses a potty, and nobody reacts to it. The speaker does not correct himself, either. Still, what is a covert malapropism to the fictitious characters is a pun on *body* to the viewers.

What has been said about malapropisms here applies also to
misunderstandings: if they have ultimately been intended by authors or script-writers, they can, if they fulfil the other requirements for a pun, function as such. The following is a case in point:

(4.51) In *The Indian in the Cupboard*, Omri is going to take the cowboy Boone, who appreciates a drink or three, to school. Little Bear wants to go, too, but Omri does not think this is a good idea.

Omri: I-It's too risky.
Boone: Whiskey?
Omri: Risky – dangerous.

Two special cases: spoonerisms and plays with abbreviations

Some brief comments about two particular types of paronymic puns are in order. The first, spoonerisms, is well-established and often mentioned in the literature; the second, plays with abbreviations, does not even have a commonly employed label, as far as I know.

As to the spoonerism, it can be, and perhaps usually is, uttered unintentionally, and is then a kind of malapropism. In fact, the phenomenon received its name from a person who became famous, though possibly undeservedly, for repeatedly producing specimens without intending to (cf. e.g. ‘Dex’ (2002) for a short introduction to Dr. Spooner and spoonerisms). One of the most famous examples ascribed to the Oxford don is the following, allegedly said to an undisciplined student:153

(4.52) You have hissed all my mystery lectures. You have tasted two whole worms and must leave Oxford immediately by the town drain.

It is doubtful whether such a beauty can be an authentic malapropism, but that does not matter, really: when it is repeated for entertainment or, as here, for illustrative purposes, there is clearly an intention behind it.

The general principle of a spoonerism is what e.g. Chiaro (1992:18) refers to as “distant metathesis”, i.e. the swapping of parts of words or even entire words, though usually just the initial phonemes, so that new meanings arise. Of course, transpositions of linguistic units can take place without new meanings arising, or perhaps just nonsense. If we pretend that the first sentence of example (4.52) was a genuine slip of the tongue, it could just as well have been you have missed all my history lectures or you have missed all my history lectures, but these hypothetical alternatives would hardly have been worth preserving for posterity.

153 The exact wording varies in different ‘quotations’, but the core items tend to remain the same.
– and they do not qualify as members of the “particular subclass of pun” (Ritchie 2004:128) that spoonerisms are generally considered to be.

According to Toury (1997:275), all of the three spoonerisms in (4.52) conform to the most common pattern, which implies a change from the ‘proper’ 1 2 3 4 sequence to a 3 2 1 4 order (where 1 and 3 stand for the initial phonemes and 2 and 4 for the remainder of the affected words). However, the only instance of language-play that can be classified as a spoonerism in my corpus, to be found in *The Road to El Dorado*, has the pattern 1 2 3 4 → 1 4 3 2:

(4.53) A critical situation has arisen and Tulio needs to come up with a plan quickly. While he gets increasingly stressed, he builds a simple model of a sailing ship and the giant gate of the golden city. Chel is watching.
Tulio: OK, here is the gate, here is the boat.
Chel: Aba, and?
Tulio: Here is the gate …
Chel: OK …
Tulio: Here is the boat …
Chel: Got that. And?
Tulio: Well, here is the goat and here is the bait.

There is nothing in the context of the dialogue that could be linked to the lexemes *goat* and *bait*, but as the mere mentioning of goats seems to carry comic potential, and as animals and baits belong to overlapping semantic fields, no external link is necessary for the spoonerism to be well-formed and amusing. *Goat* and *bait* are otherwise only introduced because of their paronymic relationship with *gate* and *boat* (and ostensibly because Tulio is about to lose his nerve and cannot speak properly anymore).

Speaking of paronymic relationships, the question may arise how many puns a spoonerism in general, and example (4.53) in particular, actually contains. I would argue that normally, a spoonerism involves two puns, i.e. one on each of the items involved (e.g. *missed* – *hissed* and *history* – *mystery*). However, if the two original items are themselves formally similar, as is the case, to some extent, with *gate* and *boat*, then more paronymic links can be found. Even if one does not consider the overlap between *gate* and *boat* sufficient for a pun, there are at least four links where the overlap ought to be strong enough: *gate* – *bait*, *boat* – *goat*, *gate* – *goat*, and *boat* – *bait*.

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154 There is one more pun in my corpus where *goat* is substituted for another item – apparently for no reason other than formal similarity (see example (4.58) below). Cf. also my article ‘Of holy goats and the NYPD: a study of language-based screen humour in translation’ (Schröter 2004; emphasis added).
Although I will focus on the translations of the paronymic puns in the second half of this section, I can mention here that two of the three translations of (4.53) that I have access to in my corpus could also be counted as featuring four puns while one translation only has two. More significantly, however, none of the TL solutions represents a true spoonerism, which is probably due to the fact that the two points of departure, i.e. the gate and the boat, had to be kept in the translations. Apparently, this left too little room for finding TL signifiers that would work well in a fully functional TL spoonerism.

But let us now turn to the second special case that deserves at least some cursory comments, namely abbreviations that are reinterpreted. Had there been more than just one instance in the corpus for the present study, this kind of language-play might have deserved a category of its own, especially since it is rather less clearly a subclass of paronymic puns than e.g. spoonerisms. Gottlieb (1997c:225) refers to the humorous reinterpretation of KFC from Kentucky Fried Chicken (a fast-food chain) to Can’t Find the Chicken as a “homographic pun”. This may have been a mistake, of course, unless he reasoned that a sequence of letters, KFC, has been read out in two different ways, which would, however, hardly be an accurate description of the mechanism of the joke. As to my own discussion of a similar case (Schröter 2004:161-163), I did not think it necessary to consider its membership in a higher-order category at all; and Heibert (1993:56f), while treating play with abbreviations as wordplay, assigns it to its own sub-group.

Be that as it may, I think it is justified to consider play with abbreviations an extreme type of paronymic puns. In fact, the abbreviation itself functions as an indicator of where the items it stands for overlap formally, which may only be at the very beginning, as my example from Inspector Gadget shows:

(4.54) In his efforts to solve a case, Inspector Gadget has found a potential clue in the form of a metal object with the letters SI stamped on it. His first guess is that this represents the Spanish word for ‘yes’, but he looks for more plausible suggestions.

Gadget: All right, so I rule out the Spanish. But what else could SI stand for? Space Invaders?
Penny: Naw …
Gadget: ‘Scuba Instructor’?
Penny: No!
Gadgetmobile: Hey, how about ‘Super Idiot’?
Gadget: No, that’s not it.

Disregarding the Spanish one, all the suggested interpretations of SI only have
the initial letters/phonemes in common, but as I have tried to argue in the introduction to this section, if the context is right, a weak formal overlap between the key items can be sufficient for a paronymic pun to be present.

**Number of SL paronymic puns in the corpus**

Paronymic puns are the second largest category of puns in my corpus, which, once again, is quite in line with the findings from Gottlieb’s investigation (1997c:215, 223). Heibert (1993) has categorized the puns he found in his study differently, but it seems that paronymic wordplay is the largest or second largest group of puns in *Ulysses*, too.

The overall number of clear and more doubtful instances of paronymic puns in my corpus is 132. Apart from the totals for all films, Table 4.19 shows the distribution of the puns for that third of the films that feature at least ten instances each. *The Road to El Dorado* would have come next, with one doubtful and six clear instances (of which four are due to the spoonerism quoted as (4.53); cf. the discussion in connection with the example). *Scooby Doo* has six clear cases, while *Mouse Hunt* is the only film with no paronymic puns at all.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Film</th>
<th>Category and status</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vertical clear</td>
<td>horizontal clear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>doubtful</td>
<td>doubtful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rugrats in Paris</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rocky &amp; Bullwinkle</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muppets from Space</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspector Gadget</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monsters Inc.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken Run</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>remaining films</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total for all films</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The relative prominence of paronymic puns is, in hindsight at least, as unsurprising as the many polysemic puns. Just as polysemy is characteristic of natural languages, and as such liable to be exploited in language-play, so is the fact that lexical items resemble, on a formal level, a substantial number of other items with which they may or may not share semantic properties. Such resemblances are unavoidable when all words in a language are made up of elements coming from the same limited sets of constituting elements
(phonemes and letters). With the average lexeme length in e.g. English being well below ten constituting elements, with countless combinations of such elements not permitted (e.g. $\text{xcnyj}$), and with many thousands of different lexemes in use, any given one must stand in a paronymic relationship with several others. Numerous stylistic effects, but also puns, can be based on this circumstance, and as the figures indicate, this does indeed happen with considerable frequency.

As to the seven cases considered doubtful by me, a link between the words that are actually uttered and other words that would also fit into the context has been evoked, but it is unclear whether this was at all intended. If they were indeed meant to be puns, most of them would not be very striking even if they were recognized as such. Significantly, all the doubtful cases are vertical, which tends to imply a weaker pun signal than horizontal wordplay. Furthermore, none of them is strongly related to the picture (cf. below), which could have functioned as further circumstantial evidence for there being a pun.

Vertical paronymic puns as parts of more complex language-play
As could be seen from Table 4.19, vertical paronymic puns are somewhat more common than horizontal ones, although these are by no means rare. There is, however, a more profound difference between the two types than the mere number of occurrences can reveal: horizontal paronymic puns tend to be merely that, even when they occur together with other puns, paronymic or not. Vertical paronymic puns, by contrast, are often part of more complex language-play, where other categories also play a role.

I do not wish, at this stage, to enter into a detailed discussion of those other categories (mostly nonce formations and changes to fixed expressions so as to make them fit the special circumstances of the film they occur in). These will be properly introduced in their own sections in chapter 5. However, a few examples with comments will help to illustrate my point. First, consider some horizontal puns from *Rugrats in Paris*. These are noteworthy mostly because they follow each other closely in a relatively short sequence:

(4.55) Kira, Mme LaBouche’s assistant, is calling the inventor Stu Pickles in the middle of the night because of trouble with the ‘reptar’, a large, mechanical dinosaur. He is still half-asleep as he is trying to gather what Kira wants from him.

155 Among the films with at least ten instances, only *Inspector Gadget* features more horizontal than vertical ones, but that is mainly due to two clusters of three horizontal puns each. Example (4.54) represents one of these clusters.
Kira: I’m sorry to call so late, but the reptar that you designed is broken down, and my boss is having a fit.
Stu: Reptar’s a hit? That’s great.
Kira: We need you to come to Paris on the next flight.
Stu: Paris, oh yeah, the city of lights.
Kira: Madame kindly recommends that you …
Stu: Come with my family and friends? […] (turning to his wife) Hey, Dee, we’re going to France.
Dee: Oh, Stu, I’m too tired to dance.

Depending on how many individual puns one considers there to be in the utterance pair Madame kindly recommends that you … and Come with my family and friends? (two or three?), example (4.55) contains between five and six horizontal paronymic puns that look like misunderstandings within the context of the film. No linguistic aspects other than the formal similarity between some lexical items are being played with, which makes the result quite representative of the horizontal cases.

Now compare this with a couple of vertical paronymic puns. The first is from Antz:

(4.56) The legend surrounding the missing ant Z is growing by the minute. Inspired by his alleged bravery, the workers in the colony put down their tools and demand that their new hero be brought before them. At one point, they are singing to the tune of the John Lennon song Give peace a chance:
All we are saying is give Z a chance

In this example, the well-known chorus of a well-known song is altered by what Veisbergs (1997:160) calls “paronymic substitution”, i.e. the replacement of a ‘proper’ (or ‘ordinary’, or ‘expected’) item by one that is phonetically and/or orthographically similar – a pun, in other words. However, the fact that an established sequence of lexemes has been played with makes this instance belong to more than one of my categories of language-play (cf. also 5.1.2).

The second example is from The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle:

(4.57) Two Pottsylvanian scoundrels are trying to lure the flying squirrel Rocky and the moose Bullwinkle into a trap.
Narrator: […] the two villains made a sizeable donation to the college in Bullwinkle’s name, prompting the college president to bestow upon Bullwinkle an honorary Mooster’s degree.

The play in (4.57) is also more than just a pun: not only are Mooster’s and
Master’s formally similar, we are also dealing with a “complex lexeme” (Hausmann 1974:63; my translation), i.e. the blending of two or more existing lexemes into one completely new creation. While counting as paronymic puns in this study, such constructs are also subsumed under my category for nonce formations (cf. 5.1.4). The majority of the vertical paronymic puns that I have identified either involve a nonce formation like the one in (4.57) or a part of a play with idioms or other established sequences, as in (4.56).

The SL paronymic puns in their context

Table 4.20 shows how the paronymic puns in my corpus relate to the picture, and Table 4.21 reveals to what extent the puns can be assumed to have been understood as language-play by addressees within the film (if there are any).

Table 4.20. Links between the paronymic puns and the picture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category and status</th>
<th>Vertical</th>
<th>Horizontal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weak</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is immediately striking, at least if one has the results for the other types of wordplay in mind, is that the paronymic wordplay is comparatively seldom linked to the visual channel. Even the vertical puns, which otherwise tend to rely on such links and thus effectively become horizontal, are in the majority of cases independent of the picture. And while already the horizontal homonymic and polysemic puns were more often ‘no’ than ‘yes’ cases, the dominance of the former is much more pronounced with the horizontal paronymic ones. Apparently, most of the puns falling into this category signal themselves clearly
enough on the linguistic level and need no further support from other channels. The examples I have quoted so far in this section would definitely confirm that.

As to the overt-covert distinction, the paronymic puns do not stand out at all in relation to the other types, but follow the trend already discernible in the previous sections: in most cases, it cannot be established whether characters other than the speaker notice the pun, and where it is possible to do so with a minimum of confidence, the overt puns outnumber the covert ones (though more clearly when it comes to the horizontal variety, which apparently is hard to miss even film-internally).

Paronymic puns in translation
My translation corpus is essentially a compilation of local choices made by individual translators. As Table 4.22 shows, however, the number of TL versions that I have access to when it comes to paronymic wordplay is fairly high and should thus provide a reasonably reliable basis for conclusions that go beyond specific instances and relate to more general trends instead.

Table 4.22. Number of independent translations of the paronymic puns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category and status of SL puns</th>
<th>Vertical</th>
<th>Horizontal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>clear</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doubtful</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>742</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tables 4.23 and 4.24 provide a hint of how the paronymic puns have fared in the dubbing and subtitling of the films in which they occur. Regarding the totals in the rightmost columns, they once again do not completely agree with the numbers of translations presented in the previous table. As in their counterparts for the other kinds of puns, that is so because a limited number of translations could not be categorized and were therefore left out from the other tables, which are reserved for translations that I am able to understand both aurally and language-wise. Most of the altogether 13 cases concerned are dubbing solutions where the diction is so sloppy or the recording so poor that the exact wording can simply not be established even by native speakers of the target language.156

156 With a view to the debate about the pros and cons of the various modes of screen translation, it thus seems that we may be dealing with a potential disadvantage of dubbing here. However, imperfect work done by the dubbing studio is nothing that could not be avoided with the help of improved routines and higher production standards, just as poorly made subtitles are not an inherent shortcoming of that method (cf. 6.4).
Table 4.23. Overview of the TL solutions for the clear paronymic puns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TL lang.-play?</th>
<th>German dubbing</th>
<th>Swedish dubbing</th>
<th>German subtitles</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles</th>
<th>Norw. subtitles</th>
<th>Danish subtitles</th>
<th>Sw. TV subtitles</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>37 24 29 26</td>
<td>18 13</td>
<td>32 27</td>
<td>28 18</td>
<td>29 23</td>
<td>4 4</td>
<td>177 135</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>8 6 9 5</td>
<td>6 4 11 7</td>
<td>7 5 14 3</td>
<td>1 0</td>
<td>56 30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>25 23 29 20</td>
<td>28 22 29 19</td>
<td>32 18 24 18</td>
<td>2 5</td>
<td>169 125</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 70 53 67 51 52 39 72 53 67 44 7 9 402 290

Table 4.24. Overview of the TL solutions for the doubtful paronymic puns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TL lang.-play?</th>
<th>German dubbing</th>
<th>Swedish dubbing</th>
<th>German subtitles</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles</th>
<th>Norw. subtitles</th>
<th>Danish subtitles</th>
<th>Sw. TV subtitles</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>1 - 1 - 2 - 2 - 1 - 0 - 0 - 7 -</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>1 - 2 - 0 - 3 - 2 - 3 - 1 - 12 -</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>5 - 3 - 2 - 2 - 3 - 3 - 0 - 18 -</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 7 - 6 - 4 - 7 - 6 - 6 - 1 - 37 -

If we focus on the clear cases of SL language-play, we can see that, all in all, the TL solutions with language-play are slightly more numerous than those without. This goes for both the vertical and the horizontal SL language-play. A look at the individual target languages and types of translation reveals, however, that in only four of the seven combinations considered (German dubbing, Swedish DVD subtitles, Danish DVD subtitles, and Swedish TV subtitles), the majority of TL solutions feature language-play when it comes to the vertical paronymic puns. The situation is similar for the horizontal puns.

A few results stick out, most notably those for the vertical SL puns in the German dubbing and those for both the vertical and the horizontal puns in the German subtitles – the former because there is comparatively much TL language-play, the latter because there is so little. No clear and simple explanations for these differences emerge from the material. My suspicion that a couple of films might be responsible for pulling figures up or down to a significant extent does not seem to hold. Of course, it may be the case that the

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157 There are also many cases where the status of the translation with regard to language-play is uncertain, which will be discussed below.
norms and standards for German subtitles are different from those applying in actual subtitling countries, but it seems that e.g. the figures for the German dubbing are the cumulative result of individual translation choices after all. How else could one explain that the results for the horizontal SL puns are very close to the average in the German dubbing while the results for the vertical ones are not, even though both types tend to occur in similar proportions in the films? I suggest the same explanation, i.e. individual translation choices, for the other quantitative differences in the table, which are even slighter than those involving the German figures.

Translation strategies
Of the various strategies available to the translator, the most common by far is to render both vertical and horizontal paronymic puns as non-language-play. The contest for the position as the second most common strategy is between the calques, i.e. the more or less direct transfer of the SL pun into the target language, and, surprisingly, solutions where a TL paronymic pun has been created that is relatively or, occasionally, completely independent of its SL counterpart. The latter kind of solution is especially common with the horizontal puns; cf. example (4.58):

(4.58) In *Muppets from Space*, Singer needs a remote control for a presentation. Through the intercom, he calls his assistant Rentro.
Singer: *The remote.*
Rentro: *The goat?*
Swedish dubbing: *Fjärrkontroll* ['remote control']
*Fjäderboll* ['shuttlecock']

Example (4.59) from *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle* shows how a TL paronymic pun can be closely modelled on the original if the conditions are right:

(4.59) Rocky and Bullwinkle learn that the two young men who give them a lift with their car are students at Bullwinkle’s old alma mater. Rocky says that Bullwinkle was a big football star there.
Bullwinkle: *Quarterbuck.*
Danish subtitles: - *Quarterbuk.*

Although male moose are referred to as bulls rather than bucks, the nonce formation in (4.59) is obviously an attempt at linking two kinds of *game* (note the additional pun): American football, and animals such as moose and deer.
Since Danish viewers with only a superficial interest in American sports have an idea what a quarterback is, and since the Danish *buk* corresponds closely to the English *buck*, the same kind of pun is possible in both languages.

However, despite the predominance of the three translation strategies mentioned, paronymic puns may be the wordplay category with the most variation in this respect. For example, outright copying of the SL lexemes into the target text takes place repeatedly, and in the majority of cases the result is satisfactory, especially when the crucial items are loan words in both English and the target language, as in the following instance:

(4.60) In *Ice Age*, a precious melon belonging to a dodo militia has rolled towards a group of intruders.
Dodo leader: *Retrieve the melon!* *Tae kwon dodos, attack!*
German dubbing: *Holt die Melone zurück! Taekwondodos, Attacke!*

At the other extreme, complete omission is not exactly rare either, though with a few exceptions this fate is reserved for written puns that vie for attention with simultaneous spoken communication. Many of these puns, to be found especially in *Monsters Inc*, might escape even the SL audience in a first viewing, especially as the characters show no sign of acknowledging them. By the way, this correspondence between a translation strategy on the one hand and the external characteristics of the wordplay on the other (links with pictures and perception by other characters) is the only one that can be established when it comes to paronymic puns. Otherwise, any translation strategy seems to go together with any kind of pun.

As mentioned earlier, most of the vertical paronymic puns are part of a more complex instance of language-play. It is thus fully possible, and happens with moderate frequency, that one or several of the other playful elements are preserved while the pun as such is lost, e.g. when *Snotfather* (with a pun on *Godfather*) becomes the obscure *Schnuffipate* [≈ ‘snuffy/snuffle godfather’?] in the German dubbing of *Rugrats in Paris*. Because of the nonce formation, the result still represents TL language-play, and cases like these are therefore subsumed under the ‘yes’ figures in Table 4.23.

Furthermore, it also happens a few times that language-play belonging to other categories (puns or not) is substituted for SL paronymic puns. Finally, TL language-play without direct equivalents in the source texts can sometimes be found within the +/-10 seconds frame, but as with the previously discussed wordplay categories, these instances seem more often than not to be a ‘bonus’ rather than a true compensation for a loss of SL language-play in their vicinity.
Regardless of their exact function, however, it cannot be denied that some dubbers and subtitlers occasionally do come up with new and relatively independent TL language-play.

Doubtful TL language-play

As can be seen in Table 4.23, there are quite a number of TL solutions that I hesitate to place into either the ‘TL l-p’ or the ‘no TL l-p’ category. These doubtful solutions can be found across all the different translation strategies from outright copies to attempts at creating independent TL language-play, though not, of course, among the complete omissions.

When it comes to copies of SL material and direct transfers (calques), it can sometimes be doubtful whether the result functions equally well as word- or language-play within the target-language system and/or the target culture as the original sequence did in the source text. It has been claimed, for example, that puns based on words with Latin or Greek roots often pose no problem in a translation context because the same crucial items, possibly spelt and pronounced slightly differently, exist in the target language (cf. Delabastita (1993:247, 1996:136); Grassegger (1985:103), and Heibert (1993:239f). Yet even where that is true, it does not automatically imply that the items in question are used in exactly the same sense, in the same contexts or with the same frequency as in the source language. Sometimes, seemingly ‘universal’ words may not be used at all. Consider the following example from *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle* (of the translation, only the first two utterances are rendered):

(4.61) Bullwinkle wants to go out for a walk in the woods. Rocky reminds him that the woods have been cut down.

Bullwinkle: *Well, you don’t have to tell me. I’m the chairman of the Frostbite Falls Society for Wildlife Conversation.*

Rocky: *You mean Wildlife Conversation?*

Bullwinkle: *What did I say?*

Rocky: *You said Wildlife Conversation?*

Bullwinkle: *Well, somebody’s gotta start talking about these things.*

German subtitles: *Musst du mir nicht sagen.*

*Bin vom Frostbite-Falls-Verein zur Tierwelt-Konversation der Präsident.*

*Du meinst, ‘Tierwelt-Konservierung.’*

The subtitles are a relatively close rendering of the original dialogue. They feature some linguistic peculiarities (in the second sentence, the omission of the subject and an odd compound noun with *Tierwelt* [‘animal kingdom’, ‘fauna’] as
its first half; the comma in the third sentence). More importantly, however, it is
doubtful whether Konservation would even be understood by the TL viewers. 
Already Konversation is a relatively formal word, but Konservation is virtually
unheard of, if it can count as a German word at all (interestingly, half of the
Internet hits seem to be cases of misspelt Konversation). It is also surprising in a
wildlife context, where other terms denoting the idea of conservation are well-
established.158

In other translations, the doubtful status is simply a consequence of the
unavoidable, fundamental problem with language-play: it is unclear whether the
solutions adopted fall within or outside the fuzzy borders of the concept. This
is the case, for example, with the Norwegian subtitles of an exchange in Chicken
Run:

(4.62) Mr. Tweedy is suspicious of the chickens and keeps them under
observation with his binoculars, while his otherwise frustrated
wife has found an interesting ad in a magazine.
Mr. Tweedy: Oh, yes, those chickens are up to something.
Mrs. Tweedy: Quiet! I'm onto something.
Norwegian subtitles: *-De hønene pønsker på noe.
-Stille. Jeg spekulerer på noe.

One might describe the English dialogue as containing a pun on up to and onto,
but it is equally possible, and perhaps more justified, to view the pun as
extending over the entire verb phrases are up to something and (a)m onto something.
No matter how one chooses to analyze it, however, even the original wordplay
is subtle and not very clearly signalled.

In the Norwegian version, which means essentially the same as the
English, pønsker på corresponds to 'are up to' and spekulerer på to 'am onto'.
With a difference in length of two syllables and the formal overlap extending
only to the present tense ending -er and the particle på, the Norwegian items do
not look much like punning material. On the other hand, if one considers that
noe 'something' could be included among the core elements and that also
English are and 'm are different from each other, some pun-like qualities similar
to those in the original can be seen in the translation, too, even though they are
weaker. Had the Norwegian, rather than the English, versions been the point of
departure for this study on language-play, I might have dismissed the above

158 The German dubbing makes use of Unterhaltung 'conversation' and Erhaltung 'con-, preservation'
instead, which represent a much more acceptable choice of terms while nevertheless standing in a
clear paronymic relationship to each other. Note also that the Danish subtitler has opted for the same
easy solution as the German one – with the same questionable outcome.
sequence as not representing a pun, basing my decision on the complete formal and semantic identity of på noe and the almost complete formal dissimilarity of påske and spekulerer (yet remember example (4.46) with a comparable pattern). All things taken into account, I classify the translation as doubtful TL language-play. For reasons that are mostly similar to those given here, I have done the same with about 11% of the translations of paronymic puns.

Analysis of an interesting paronymic pun and its TL versions

As this section has already grown quite long, I have chosen, for the final discussion, an example that is not only interesting, but also very compact. In fact, the original sequence features one vertical and one horizontal paronymic pun in an utterance of just two words (back translations are provided in the subsequent discussion):

(4.63) In Muppets from Space, Miss Piggy wants to take over Shelley Snipes’ TV show.
Producer: What about Shelley?
Miss Piggy: Shelley smelly.

German dubbing: Was ist mit Shelley?
Raus mit der Maus.

Swedish dubbing: Men tänk på Sandra.
Hon får vandra.

German subtitles: *-Was ist mit Shelley?
-Shelley Schellfisch.

Swedish subtitles: *-Men Shelley då?
-Shelley är kass.

Norwegian subtitles: *-Men Shelley, da?
-Shelley kjefte-shmelje.

Danish subtitles: *-Hvad med Shelley?
-Shelley er elendig.

There is an originally Jewish way of dismissing explanations and objections by picking out the keyword, saying it, and repeating it in a modified form with schm- or shm- at the beginning, as in the famous joke about the Jewish woman who is told by her son’s psychiatrist that the boy is suffering from an Oedipus complex. Says the woman: ‘Oedipus-schmoedipus, just so long as he loves his mother.’ Had Miss Piggy followed this model, the result should have been Shelley schmelley – which is probably not a pun, but a rhyme in combination with some other kind of language-play. Her saying smelly instead of schmelley turns the remark into a vertical pun between these two items, plus a horizontal pun between Shelley and smelly.
The dubbers and subtitlers have chosen different approaches to this translation challenge. The Swedish and Danish subtitles feature no language-play and mean, essentially, ‘Shelley sucks/is worthless’. The dubbing solutions feature rhymes instead of puns: in the German version, there is a rhyme between the first and the last word of Raus mit der Maus (‘out with the mouse’). In the Swedish version, Shelley has been given the name Sandra, which is made to rhyme with the last word of Hon får vandra (‘she needs to take a hike/go’).

The German and the Norwegian subtitler have tried to mirror the original procedure and offer sequences of two paronymic items, which may give the impression as if the schm-type dismissal has been played with even there. However, this strategy of impugning the importance or relevance of something is not commonly used in either German or Norwegian, which may make especially the latter version look strangely unmotivated to the average Norwegian viewer. Kjeftesmelle is a person who talks too much, especially in order to criticize or to argue, and “kjefte-shmelle”, with its double signal of italics and the deviant, un-Norwegian orthography, does not mean anything else, but the last element of the compound has been given the same two initial letters as Shelley and features, if read aloud, an initial phoneme identical to that of Shelley and quite similar to that of kjefte. This language-play will certainly be noticed, but its overall effect, as compared to the original’s, is uncertain.

The same is true of the German subtitles where the second item Schellfisch ‘haddock’ is almost as similar to Shelley as smelly (homophony at the beginning instead of the end, though) and perhaps quite as amusing, but it must seem unclear to the viewers what exactly Miss Piggy wants to convey with this unusual kind of remark. One may wonder whether the simple rhymes in the dubbed versions are not ultimately more effective than the strange attempts at punning that would hardly have been accepted in an original, source-language text.

Be that as it may, with paronymic puns constituting the last of the wordplay categories to be discussed individually, a summary of the most important findings concerning these categories can be found already in the next section.

4.2 Summary of the results on puns

The SL puns

In the 18 films used for this study, I have identified almost 370 clear puns and
two dozen more doubtful candidates, all distributed over an only slightly lower number of separate instances of language-play. In terms of quantity, this compares well with the 735 puns Heibert (1993:210) found in Joyce’s *Ulysses*, and his sub-corpus of 298 examples that he chose to examine in a translation context. Delabastita’s collection of puns in *Hamlet* comprised less than 200 examples, while 51 SL puns in a television show constituted the basis for Gottlieb’s (1997c) article-length study.

For ease of reference, Table 4.25 provides a summary of the number of puns found in my corpus, with figures for each category and status:

Table 4.25. Instances of puns in the corpus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>vertical</th>
<th>horizontal</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>clear</td>
<td>doubtful</td>
<td>clear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homonymy</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polysemy</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homophony</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paronymy</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Homography, which is not represented even once in my corpus, is left out of the table. Polysemy is clearly the most common type of relationship between the crucial items in a pun, and if I had not made the distinction between homonymy and polysemy at all, but focused solely on formal identity, the resulting category would have featured almost twice as many examples as the second-largest category, paronymic puns. In comparison to both these types, homophonic puns are an absolute rarity.

My hypothesis is that the relative size of the categories reflects the properties of the primary material out of which the puns are constructed, i.e. natural language. Homography, for example, is probably absent from the corpus because it is a rather unusual phenomenon in English and many other languages (and non-existent in all the languages that exist in spoken form only). After all, spelling and pronunciation tend to mirror each other in letter-based writing systems. Furthermore, the best medium for homographic puns to achieve their effect is probably writing, and untranslated films only exceptionally take recourse to this communicative channel. That is not to say that homographic wordplay cannot occur in films. Under the circumstances, it is just not likely that one would find an example in a limited corpus such as mine.
As to homophony, it is not much more common than homography, at least in the languages involved here, and among these, it is perhaps most widespread in English. This, in combination with the fact that homophonic puns put the stress on the acoustic rather than the visual overlap between items, ought to explain why there is a small number of such puns in the original dialogues, but none in the translations (most of which are in the form of subtitles and, moreover, in languages largely unaffected by homophony).

By contrast, polysemic and paronymic puns are common because the underlying phenomena are so pervasive in language. In the case of polysemy, the punster does not even need to find two lexical structures that are similar in their outward appearance. When it comes to forming the core of a pun, huge numbers of lexemes are sufficient unto themselves, so to speak, because their semantic scope has been extended so as to cover more than one meaning.

Paronymy, finally, seems to be an unavoidable side-effect of so-called double articulation, a key characteristic of natural human language, which permits lexical inventories to grow unhindered on the basis of only a limited group of phonemes (and, where applicable, letters) that need to be mastered by their users. As almost any lexeme is paronymous with countless others, almost any lexeme can, in principle, function as one of the pivots of a paronymic pun, which ought to explain why this category features many examples.

As to the distinction between vertical and horizontal wordplay, the former turned out to be the more widespread type, although the relative frequencies fluctuate with the formal differences and similarities between the punning items: vertical realization occurs about three times as often as horizontal realization in connection with polysemic puns, less than twice as often in connection with homonymic and paronymic puns, and is actually in the minority when it comes to homophonic puns. However, as with most findings related to this last type, one should keep in mind the low number of examples on which they are based.

Table 4.26. Summary of the links between the puns and the picture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>link with picture?</th>
<th>Category and status</th>
<th>vertical</th>
<th>horizontal</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>clear</td>
<td>doubtful</td>
<td>clear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>113</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weak</td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
<td>99</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The situation appears in a different light, however, if one takes into account that about half of the vertical puns are more or less strongly linked to (near-)simultaneously available pictorial information (cf. Table 4.26). As I have pointed out in the previous sections, these puns effectively rely on two occurrences of the key items (one linguistic, one pictorial), and are therefore similar in effect to their horizontal counterparts.

If a pun is to be noticed as such, it needs to be signalled. A pun usually signals itself to start with, and this may very often be sufficient, especially when it comes to the horizontal cases. Where the text-internal signals are too weak, however, a link with the picture tends to remove the doubts or perhaps turns the sequence into a proper pun in the first place. Disregarding the peculiarities of the individual instances, this seems to be the reason why so many of the ‘vertical’ puns depend on the visual channel while the large majority of horizontal puns do not. The weaker signal sent out by the vertical puns is, furthermore, the main reason why the altogether 27 sequences that I consider doubtful puns are of the vertical type eight times as often as of the horizontal type.

It may be recalled that the paronymic puns behave differently from the other categories when it comes to links with the picture: most of the vertical examples (plus the overwhelming majority of the horizontal ones) do not feature such a link. In fact, this apparent exception lends suggests that a strong text-internal signal, which most paronymic puns send out qua paronymic puns, tends to coincide with a weak or even non-existent text-external signal.

Another type of signal that does not emanate from the pun itself, and of which I have tried to gauge the influence, is the perception of the pun by characters in the film. If the viewers can assume that a character other than the speaker is aware of a pun, it is overt, if it is obvious that the pun has not been or could not be noticed by others, it is covert. More often than not, it has been impossible to assign the puns to either of these categories with any confidence, as Table 4.27 confirms once more, but the results are still interesting.

Table 4.27. Summary of overt vs. covert puns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>film-internal perception</th>
<th>Category and status</th>
<th>vertical clear</th>
<th>doubtful</th>
<th>horizontal clear</th>
<th>doubtful</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>overt</td>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unclear</td>
<td></td>
<td>138</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>covert</td>
<td></td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to the totals, overt puns are about twice as common as covert ones. However, the proportions are quite different between vertical and horizontal puns, which has some significance. On the one hand, the fact that relatively more horizontal puns are overt helps to further explain why so many of them do not need a supporting link with the picture in order to be noticeable to the viewers. On the other hand, the same fact can be interpreted as a confirmation that horizontal puns signal themselves sufficiently clearly to be noticed even within the make-believe world of the film. These views do not necessarily exclude each other, however.

In any case, most covert punning takes place when characters are speaking to themselves or directly to the film-external audience (which implies that there are no other characters that could make the pun overt), when the *Rugrats* children unwittingly follow in the footsteps of Sheridan’s Mrs. Malaprop, or, occasionally, when the medium is written language. Note, finally, that an overt pun cannot normally be categorized as doubtful.

**SL puns vs. TL language-play**

Table 4.28 shows how many TL solutions are available in my corpus for the 396 SL puns. The total of 2,147 translations, or 5.4 per pun on average, is quite close to the $298 \cdot 7 = 2,086$ translations that Heibert (1993:210) worked with.

Table 4.28. Number of independent translations of all SL puns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category and status of SL puns</th>
<th>vertical</th>
<th>horizontal</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>clear</td>
<td>1,319</td>
<td>683</td>
<td>2,147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doubtful</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Much more interesting than these figures is of course how the puns have fared in the translations, in terms of TL language-play. In order not to cram too much information into too little space, the results are presented in two tables: 4.29 features the absolute numbers, and 4.30 the percentages. Note, once again, that a few translations could not be incorporated in the overviews, mostly dubbing solutions that are impossible to understand properly. Note further that the figures only concern the SL puns that I consider clear cases. The results for the doubtful cases will be summarized in text form below.
Table 4.29. Overview of the TL solutions for all clear puns (absolute figures).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TL lang.-play?</th>
<th>German dubbing</th>
<th>Swedish dubbing</th>
<th>German subtitles</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles</th>
<th>Norw. subtitles</th>
<th>Danish subtitles</th>
<th>Sw. TV subtitles</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>99</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>82</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.30. Overview of the TL solutions for all clear puns (percentages).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TL lang.-play?</th>
<th>German dubbing</th>
<th>Swedish dubbing</th>
<th>German subtitles</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles</th>
<th>Norw. subtitles</th>
<th>Danish subtitles</th>
<th>Sw. TV subtitles</th>
<th>Averages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>56.0</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>63.4</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>52.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>54.0</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>52.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>52.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>34.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>38.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>37.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With a couple of exceptions that can hardly be considered striking in their scope and implications, the percentages are surprisingly homogeneous across the different target languages and between dubbing and subtitling. In about half of the cases, there is TL language-play in the same spot as the corresponding SL language-play, with the horizontal puns usually boasting somewhat higher figures than the vertical ones. Apart from the Danish subtitles, the only clear exception to this difference in treatment are the Swedish TV subtitles, which are so few, however, that a small number of translation choices can cause seemingly dramatic results. These may thus work fine as a pointer towards possible future research (perhaps there is something more to them than just chance?), but should not be accepted at face value at this point.

Nevertheless, horizontal wordplay has generally triggered TL language-play slightly more often than vertical wordplay in the films. This does not come as a surprise, since Offord (1997:257) arrived at similar results in the context of

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159 If the uneven distribution of the translations is taken into account, we arrive at the following weighted averages for the vertical puns: yes 49.1 / ? 11.5 / no 39.3. The weighted averages for the horizontal puns are: yes 54.2 / ? 9.9 / no 35.9. With these figures, the difference between the vertical and the horizontal puns becomes more pronounced.
some Shakespeare translations, as did Heibert (1993:210ff) for *Ulysses*. Apparently, horizontal puns are more difficult to miss and/or to ignore by the translators, which would tally with the conclusions drawn from the discussion on signalling earlier in this section. However, signals in the form of links between the linguistically expressed puns and the non-verbal channels also explain why the gap between vertical and horizontal puns is relatively small when it comes to TL language-play: because of such signals, many instances assigned to the vertical category function in a similar way as the horizontal ones.

The figures for the German subtitles are perhaps the most interesting. They show the same slight difference in the treatment of vertical and horizontal wordplay as the other versions, but the ‘yes’ figures, while staying within ten percentage points from the average, are still noticeably lower than those in the rest of the table. The column for the German subtitles of the vertical puns is also the only one where the ‘no’ figures are higher than the ‘yes’ figures. I have no well-founded explanation for this, but it is interesting that the results deviating the most from the average are those for the subtitles in a language that is otherwise associated with dubbing. Since the dubbed version of a film will be the first choice for the majority of viewers, the German subtitles simply may not have been accorded the same attention to content and quality as the Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish subtitles, which represent the default translation mode in their respective target culture. It just may be the case, for example, that the German subtitlers differ from those translating into other languages in terms of experience, proficiency, or attitude to the task. One might also argue that the German-speaking viewers who choose the subtitles over the dubbing will be quite proficient in the source language and thus do not require subtitles that mirror the original dialogue in as many ways as possible. Finally, it is not inconceivable that unequal working conditions, which, as I claimed earlier (2.3.3), are an important aspect of the translation process, influenced the results. Perhaps all of the factors put forward have played in, together with a fair amount of chance.

The only other results that depart markedly from the average in Tables 4.29 and 4.30, and that I have not mentioned yet, are those for the horizontal wordplay in the Swedish dubbing. The percentage for the ‘yes’ solutions is quite high and that for the ‘no’ solutions is, accordingly, comparatively low. This is mainly due to the horizontal polysemic puns, which are more often rendered as TL language-play in the Swedish dubbing than in any other version; yet the reasons for this remain unclear. It is not the case that just one or two films can
be shown to be responsible for the slightly deviant results, and the figures for the vertical polysemic puns are, in any event, quite unremarkable.

I will shortly continue to discuss the different categories of pun, but for the sake of completeness, let us first take a quick look at the more doubtful instances of SL wordplay. The weak status of the material in combination with the rather low number of examples poses a problem, of course, but the translation solutions are still more or less what one could have expected: 60% ‘no TL language-play’ for the vertical puns and as much as 75% for the three horizontal ones. Where obviously intended TL language-play occurs at all, it is in connection with vertical SL puns. It can be due to calques that function more clearly as puns than the English sequences do or, especially in the case of paronymic SL puns, it can be due to the preservation of some other aspect of the original language-play to which they may belong.

Categories of SL puns and translation strategies

The combined results for all puns, as presented above, fail to reveal that the different categories do not behave in the same way in a translation context. This has already been suggested in the previous sections, but Table 4.31 will facilitate the comparison of the percentages for each type:

Table 4.31. Overview of the TL solutions with regard to SL pun category (percentages).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TL lang-play?</th>
<th>Homonymy</th>
<th>Polysemy</th>
<th>Homophony</th>
<th>Paronymy</th>
<th>Average160</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>44.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>46.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>42.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>53.2</td>
<td>43.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen, it is the polysemic puns, and most notably the horizontal variety, that have most often triggered TL language-play, whereas the homophonic puns, especially the vertical ones, tend to be translated into non-language-play. Keep in mind also that had I not worked with a '?' category, but only with ‘yes’ and ‘no’, all ‘yes’ figures but those for the vertical homophonic puns would probably have been even higher (for the type mentioned, there are no translations with a doubtful status). Once again, then, it

160 The weighted averages are the same as those presented in the footnote to Table 4.30, i.e.: yes 49.1 / ? 11.5 / no 39.3 (vertical puns) and yes 54.2 / ? 9.9 / no 35.9 (horizontal puns).
appears to have been justified to distinguish between homonymy and polysemy. As hypothesized, the puns based on the latter phenomenon are more often rendered as TL language-play because it was easier for the translators to do so.

When it comes to the disparity in the treatment of vertical and horizontal wordplay, it is least pronounced in connection with the paronymic puns, perhaps because both types are about equally clearly signalled. With homonymic and polysemic wordplay, in contrast, where the conflicting meanings are carried by identical forms, horizontal realization makes more of a difference.

However, the likelihood of TL language-play being present or absent, while perhaps most interesting from the film audience’s point of view, is not the only aspect that distinguishes the altogether eight wordplay categories that I have found examples of in my corpus. To what extent the different translation strategies available to the dubbers and subtitlers have been employed is also important, and the percentages, as presented in Table 4.32, can indeed be striking in their divergence. Please note that the table only covers the cases where the presence of an SL pun is not in doubt and where I am reasonably sure that the TL solutions do or do not contain language-play. In other words, the figures in the rows marked with a ? in Tables 4.29-31 have not been considered in the calculation of the percentages. Note also that due to lack of space, I have given each translation strategy a number. This is what these numbers stand for:

I: direct copy of SL material into the target text
II: calque
III: in a complex instance of language-play, the pun is lost, but some other aspect of the SL language-play is transferred
IV: creation of TL pun belonging to the same category as the SL pun
V: creation of TL pun belonging to another category than the SL pun
VI: no TL pun, but creation of TL language-play belonging to a new category
VII: translation without language-play
VIII: complete omission.

These eight strategies can be said to form three groups: strategies I-III most clearly preserve some aspect of the original language-play, while strategies IV-VI tend to imply the most creativity on the part of the translators; strategies VII and VIII, finally, lead to a loss of language-play. Compensation is not accounted for in the table, but will be taken up in the subsequent discussion.
For ease of reference, the weighted averages are provided alongside the regular averages.

Table 4.32. Overview of the translation strategies with regard to SL pun category (percentages).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Homonymy</th>
<th>Polysemy</th>
<th>Homophony</th>
<th>Paronymy</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Weighted average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>35.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.1</td>
<td>100.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen, the eight translation strategies I distinguish are employed to quite different degrees, and the results for the polysemic puns are certainly among the most striking (and, because of the frequent occurrence of this type, the empirically most well-founded). Not only do polysemic puns have the smallest share of solutions with no TL language-play, in about half of the cases it was actually possible to transfer the original pun into the target language without any significant creative effort. I think this must be seen as a confirmation that many polysemous relationships are similar across languages and that the claimed untranslatability of wordplay (even in a narrow sense) is anything but an absolute truth.

Staying with the more remarkable figures, those for homophonic puns and category V (creation of TL pun belonging to another category than the corresponding SL pun) deserve a mention. Keeping in mind that the figures for the homophonic puns are rather too low to serve as the basis for any safe conclusions, category V still seems to be the natural choice if an SL pun has been registered, the intention to translate puns as puns is there, but the possibility to copy the SL pun or to create one belonging to the same category is severely restricted (as is the case with the homophonnic variety). If strategies VII or VIII are considered poor solutions, the translator has to come up with a new kind of pun, and this has happened enough times with the homophonic,
and to some extent the homonymic, puns to raise the percentages.

To sum up the other interesting results:

- Strategy I (direct transfer of SL material) occurs almost exclusively with paronymic puns, usually in connection with neologisms and/or plays with names and/or with words that have been borrowed into all the languages involved, including English.
- Calques hardly occur at all with vertical homonymic and homophonic puns.
- A loss of the pun in combination with the preservation of some other aspect of the SL language-play basically occurs with vertical puns only.
- The creation of a new pun fitting into the same category as the original (strategy IV) is most common with paronymic puns, especially horizontal ones.
- Strategy VI (creation of non-punning TL language-play) is rarely employed with any type of pun.
- Surprisingly, no cases of complete omission were found with homonymic puns, but that may be due to chance. Horizontal polysemic puns are otherwise omitted least often.

As to TL language-play occurring slightly removed in time from original puns, it does happen occasionally, a little more often in the dubbed versions than in the subtitles, but always to a limited extent. It actually also happens about twice as often in combination with translation strategies that lead to TL language-play than with strategies VII and VIII, which imply a loss of language-play. It is doubtful, therefore, whether these instances are intended as compensation for specific translation choices elsewhere in the text or whether they compensate on a more general level. Perhaps some inspired translators simply wanted to add TL language-play where it seemed feasible and appropriate (cf. also 6.2).

Almost no trends can be discerned when it comes to the choice of translation strategy on the one hand and the relationship between pun and non-verbal channels on the other. The only exception is perhaps that written puns, which by definition depend on the picture rather than on the soundtrack, are often not translated at all. The distinction between overt and covert wordplay, finally, could not be shown to have any significance for the treatment of the material in translation.
5 Other types of language-play

The following sections are dedicated to language-play other than puns. In order to structure the heterogeneous findings from my corpus, ten more categories are used, among them some that are well-established and relatively easily defined and some that are less conventional and, in general, rather fuzzier. Those that share important characteristics will be dealt with in consecutive sections. SI sequences that I consider to be language-play without my being able to assign them to any one of the other categories will be taken up at the end, in what could be described as a category for uncategorized cases.

5.1 The different types of non-punning language-play

The categories of non-punning language-play are very divergent in terms of their definitions and the number of examples covered by them. Here is a brief overview:

- The first category covers cases where particular, extra-linguistic circumstances direct the viewers’ attention to the actual wording of more or less conventional figures of speech. The category bears the unwieldy title Plays with metaphors, similes, idioms, and related figures of speech, which indicates that it is not established in the literature.
- Following it is another type of play with fixed sequences of lexical items, namely the Modified expressions. The main characteristic of the examples is that expressions have been altered in such a way that the base is still recognizable, but the meaning changed.
- The category Foreign words implies a modification, too, though it does not entail a change of meaning. It covers cases, quite simply, where lexical items from languages other than the main source language, English, replace the English items that would have been expected in their stead.
- Nonce formations, is weakly linked to the previous category in that it also deals with ‘new’ lexical items, in this case seemingly spontaneous constructs built, in the original versions of the films, from English material, or at least well-established loan words.
- Next is the unconventional use of what can loosely be referred to as grammatical rules. Despite the somewhat vague label, Play with grammar is defined in narrow terms and covers few examples.
This is also true, if not to quite the same extent, of sentences ending in unexpected ways, which speaks for itself.

The four types of non-punning language-play that form the most well-defined group in this chapter are all based on a form of repetition. I am referring here to rhymes, half-rhymes, alliteration and what I have called repetition pure and simple. These categories will be taken up, in the order mentioned, before I briefly deal with a ragbag of ‘other’ cases in their own section.

As will be seen, there is some overlap between most of these categories, which is hardly surprising in view of the fact that both language as such and the playful manipulation of it represent very complex phenomena. It is true that one and the same play on two lexical items cannot be counted as for example both a pun and a rhyme or as both a homonymic and a polysemic pun, because the respective definitions preclude those possibilities. But some of the categories I work with can coincide with others in what looks like one playful move. Nevertheless, the problems arising in this respect will be discussed, and the ad hoc decisions that I have occasionally taken recourse to in an effort to distinguish the categories more clearly from each other will be accounted for.

5.1.1 Play with metaphors, similes, idioms, and related figures of speech

Introduction

If compared to the types of language-play based primarily on the repetition of formally defined elements (such as rhyme or alliteration – to be taken up later), the category to be discussed here is much more pun-like because of the fact that meaning and pragmatics are strongly involved. In my opinion, it serves well as a kind of transition from the previous chapter on puns to more distinct types of non-punning language-play.

What the examples included have in common is that well-established expressions or ways of expressing something, or expressions normally connected to a particular type of situation or context, are used or interpreted in such a way that the implications and connotations that they carry are brought to the fore by being unexpectedly overturned. In the process, the expression itself is left unchanged (cf. the next section or e.g. some of the paronymic puns for examples where an expression is changed), and it is another character’s interpretation of it, or the context in a broad sense, that turns its occurrence into language-play.
I found it impossible to come up with a concise label for the present category, even though it partly overlaps with what e.g. Grassegger treats under “the literal interpretation of idiomatic expressions” (1985:58ff; my translation). In fact, play with idioms is given some attention in studies on wordplay (cf. e.g. Veisbergs 1997), and this is also true of other types of relatively fixed expressions (e.g. Leppihalme 1996), especially when the original wording has been altered. I, too, have treated several such cases as e.g. paronymic puns. However, the expressions taken up here have not undergone any formal changes (such as additions or certain elements being substituted for others), and only some of the examples involve what would generally be counted as true idioms. Where that is the case, the idioms in question have retained so much of their metaphorical nature that the original imagery would have been evoked even in non-playful language use.

Now, consider the sequence from *Antz* that first prompted my suspicion that establishing a separate category for this kind of playful language use might be called for:

(5.1) In Insectopia, some insects enjoy a mild summer evening, sitting together and talking. A beetle nibbles on a bit of ‘food’.
   Beetle: *This stuff tastes like crap.*
   Fly: *Really? Let me try some.* (tastes) *Hey, it is crap. Not bad.*

I think the humour of this sequence is primarily derived from the extra-linguistic circumstance that a creature which otherwise behaves very much like a human being should like to consume ‘crap’. The important point here, however, is the fact that an often used, if informal, way of describing an unpleasant culinary experience (*tastes like crap*) turns out to be much truer than is normally the case. To exploit this standard expression in the way shown must be counted as language-play. In my opinion, it does not represent a pun like those discussed in chapter 4, though, because we are really only dealing with just one meaning here, namely that of something tasting like crap.

Of course, it might be argued that a person claiming that something tastes like crap, say a meal served in prison or a culinary experiment gone awry, really wants to convey nothing more than that the foodstuff in question tastes bad. Many comparisons such as *tastes like crap* are not literally true. Frequently, as in the present case, exaggeration is involved, and both the speaker and the addressee know that the other one knows this, which is exactly why it is so striking when, for once, the picture evoked by the choice of words is actually accurate.
Some analysts might consider the literal interpretation of a figure of speech as a kind of pun. I would argue that there is a difference, however, because we are not really dealing with separate meanings here, or polysemy of the kind exploited in puns, but with implications or implicatures. What is implied by *tastes like crap* is that ‘tastes as bad as crap’, which may or may not be true (who would dare to claim expertise in this matter?), and the language-play in (5.1) is thus not based on a clash of incongruous meanings, but on the fact that what every competent language user must perceive to be a figure of speech represents an accurate description on every level.

Consider another example, which perhaps illustrates the difference more clearly between puns on the one hand and plays with certain established ways of expressing something on the other. I particularly enjoyed it due to the way it transcends the boundaries of the fictional narrative in *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle* and becomes a meta-comment on the realities of film-making:

(5.2) A police officer, played by the actor John Goodman, arrests Karen, among other reasons for “impersonating FBI agent Karen Sympathy”. When it is pointed out to him that Karen actually is the agent in question, he dismisses this with the words:

*Yeah, and I’m really John Goodman.*

We are dealing not so much with a metaphor or a simile in this case, and not really with exaggeration either, but rather with irony or sarcasm. Declaring oneself to be a well-known or powerful person is a common way of demonstrating that another speaker’s claims about him- or herself have not been believed. Now, even though the point may be driven home more effectively by choosing for this purpose an imaginary figure such as Santa Claus or a historical one such as the Emperor of China, a well-known living actor, including John Goodman, will generally also do the trick. Consequently, whenever a person claims to be John Goodman, it can be assumed that this is meant to imply that the claim is as untrue as anything the addressee may have said immediately before. The more striking the effect, therefore, when it actually is John Goodman who answers in this way, negating the implications that anybody familiar with this kind of expression must have taken for granted. While the police officer implies that both Karen’s claims and his own are nonsense, both are actually correct, if on different levels of reality.

I think it would be stretching the concept of polysemy too far if it were claimed that *John Goodman* carries the meaning of both ‘the actor by that name’, and, as if in contrast to this first meaning, ‘a celebrity of the kind the speaker is
not'. For this reason, I reject the otherwise not entirely inconceivable alternative of including this example among the polysemic puns, just as I reject it with the example based on *tastes like crap*.

As an illustration of a different way of playing with standard expressions without necessarily creating puns, consider the following excerpt from *Inspector Gadget*, where the expressions have been transferred from their habitual semantic field of sports to a quite unrelated one:

(5.3) The villain Scolex has been forced to abandon his helicopter and is coming down on a parachute. The Gadgetmobile pulls under him, all the time commenting on its own actions as if the whole event were part of a baseball game, and eventually catches Scolex in a cage on the back seat.

Gadgetmobile: *Ladies and gentlemen, Scolex is out and that is the game!* *Final score: Gadgetmobile one, Scolex zippo. And the fans rush the field.* (police cars surround the Gadgetmobile) *No autographs, please.*[…]

Apparently, catching criminals is more of a sport than a regular job to the Gadgetmobile, and it shows this by employing lexemes and expressions that are normally only used in connection with large spectator sports such as baseball. In this case, too, it would be misleading to speak of multiple meanings that are simultaneously evoked in expressions such as *that is the game*, *final score* and *the fans rush the field*. The speaker simply engages in a game of make-believe that involves a reinterpretation of the actual events with the help of playful language use.

As a curiosity, I can also briefly mention that a play with an established expression need not depend on any actually audible or visible words at all. In *Chicken Run*, which is part of my corpus, there is a scene where a spanner (a wrench) gets caught among the cogwheels of a large machine and causes it to stop and break down. It is of course no coincidence that the item responsible for this event should be that particular kind of tool: it offers a literal interpretation of the idiomatic expression *a spanner (a wrench) in the works*.161

Number and nature of the SL instances
The examples include 51 quite clear cases and one more doubtful one. These are, furthermore, relatively well distributed across the corpus, with even *Mouse Hunt*, *The Indian in the Cupboard* and *The Iron Giant* boasting one or two examples.

161 This example is not included in my quantitative analysis; as it does not involve any quotable language use, either in the original or in the target texts, it rather falls outside of what I focus on.
each, although these films feature relatively little language-play in general. In four films, I have not found any instances, while at the other extreme, some of the usual sources have the most, viz. *Chicken Run* ten, *Antz* eight, *Shrek* seven, and *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle* six instances, respectively.

The following examples illustrate the scope of the present category, as they represent language-play based on metaphor (example (5.4)), explicit comparisons/similes (5.5), idioms (5.6), exclamations (5.7), or a clash between superficial and implicit illocutionary force (5.8). These are not mutually exclusive labels, but they may point to one of the more prominent aspects of the respective example. First consider an instance based on metaphor:

(5.4) When Rocky in *Chicken Run* understands that the chickens expect him to teach them how to fly, he is suddenly in a great hurry to get away.

Rocky: *Listen, shh, do you hear that?* (silence) *That's the open road calling my name, and I was born to answer that call. Bye.* (disappears)

Babs: *He must have very good hearing.*

The *open road calling* and being *born to answer that call* are not particularly original metaphors, but they are still metaphors. Rocky himself plays with them by pretending that there might actually be something to hear. That is obviously meant to be in jest, as none but the most naïve addressees would take what he says at face value. Babs, however, answering that description, understands both the metaphor and Rocky’s play with it literally, thereby intensifying the language-play.

I have already presented a play with a comparison in example (5.1). The simile in example (5.5) is formally quite alike, but the play with it consists not in showing that it is unexpectedly apt. On the contrary, while the comparison is justified on one level, it is really more inappropriate than the speaker was aware of:

(5.5) Hogarth, who has already spent some time with the Iron Giant, explains to Dean what the 25-metre creature is like.

Hogarth: *He's like a little kid.*

Dean: *Little? Yeah.* (chuckles)

In some respects, the Iron Giant *is* like a little kid, often acting immaturely and having to learn both human language and how the world functions almost from scratch, but his most outstanding characteristic is still his enormous size, which makes Dean react to Hogarth’s use of the adjective *little.* The language-play
consists, once again, in letting a character employ an inconspicuous-looking manner of speaking, only to show how our linguistic habits can lead to odd results in the face of extra-linguistic circumstances.

As Delabastita (1993:108f) points out, there is a “close affinity between idiomaticity and metaphor”. In fact, idioms normally start out as a metaphorical way of expressing something and then gradually grow to be more fixed, with the metaphorical aspect typically becoming less pronounced in the minds of speakers and hearers. To draw a clear line between the concepts is quite impossible, however. For example, the language-play in (5.4), discussed as a play with metaphor, may actually be based on an idiom in its early stages. Whether that is true or not, I think the expression played with in the following example will generally count as a genuine idiom, which is supported by the fact that it makes an appearance in at least some dictionaries. The underlying metaphor is still so obvious, however, that it is part of the normally intended meaning:

(5.6) In *Stuart Little*, Snowbell is worried that his somewhat embarrassing problem may not be safe with the alley cat Smokey, whom he has asked for help. Monty tries to reassure him.

Monty: *You kiddin'? Cat’s got his tongue. Get it? Cat’s got his tongue, ‘cause he’s a cat…*  
Snowbell: *Shut up!*

This instance is somewhat unusual in that the speaker is consciously playing with the idiom himself. In the overwhelming majority of cases, with example (5.3) being another exception, it is either a second speaker who offers an unconventional, usually literal, interpretation of an utterance, as in (5.4), or the audience must rely altogether on their own perceptive skills, as in (5.2). In example (5.6), Monty draws attention to the constituting elements of the idiom by explicitly pointing out that he uses it in a context where cats are actually highly involved. In this figure of speech, the individual words can once again be said to mean what they do, and it is their special arrangement that normally implies a metaphorical interpretation. It is true, however, that among the various loosely characterized sub-types, if they can be called that, of the language-play category discussed in this section, the literal interpretation of real idioms, even of those that have retained an openly metaphorical character, comes closest to a pun.

Another ‘sub-type’ could be referred to as play with exclamations. In example (5.7), a clash is staged, at least for audiences from cultures associated
with a monotheistic religion, between the usual referent of God and the context-specific alternative interpretation:

(5.7) In The Road to El Dorado, Tulio and Miguel sing out their thoughts and feelings, including their worries, about being celebrated as gods. At one point, Miguel exclaims:

Oh, my God!

This sequence of words, oh, my God!, has undergone such an inflation that it is normally far from an actual call to God, but rather a way of reacting to a surprising sight or bit of news (be it of the pleasant or the unpleasant type). It imitates the way somebody might cry out to God, in desperation perhaps and feeling an acute need for help, but it tends to be just an exclamation on the same level as wow!, oh, no! and even shit!. I think one can assume that neither the speaker nor any potential listener will normally give it much thought, let alone interpret it as a bona fide attempt at addressing a higher being. The more striking it is, therefore, when there suddenly is a tangible referent in the form of a ‘god’ that this exclamation seems to be aimed at.

A related example I want to take up here also involves a kind of exclamation, though it is more openly directed at some specific addressees than oh, my God! tends to be. It is also clearer in this case than in the previous one that a particular, yet common, conversational phenomenon has been played with, namely a discrepancy between the grammatical form of the utterance and its implied illocutionary force.

(5.8) In Rugrats in Paris, one of the small children that Angelica habitually refers to as the “dumb babies” has dared to take something she wanted.

Angelica: Who do you babies think you are?
Tommy: Well, I’m Tommy, and this is Lil …
Phil: (whispering to Lil) And she calls us dumb.

Grammatically, Angelica’s reproach has the form of a question, and it is as such, i.e. as a genuine request for information, that the babies, ‘dumb’ as they are, interpret it. They fail to realize that utterances can have all kinds of indirect illocutionary forces, and that what looks like a question can also function as a statement or an order, among other things. Nash (1985:115) comments on a similar joke as playing “with a peculiarity of English social usage, which resorts to the meaningfully oblique question in the expression of directives, reservations, or complaints”. Experienced language users would thus have
understood Angelica’s question to imply both a statement (‘you are worthless little nothings’) and, especially, a directive (‘stop your unacceptable behaviour and hand back what properly belongs to me’).

Three of the instances included in this category are at least partly in writing, one of which is quite similar to the one in (5.3) in that an expression taken from the realm of sports is transferred to another context, in this case war, where it is almost shocking in its implications:

(5.9) Only one single combatant out of many thousands on both sides survives a ferocious battle between ants and termites in *Antz* and gets a hero’s welcome back in the ant colony. One of the banners displayed reads:
ONE TO NOTHING
WE WIN

Before I direct the focus of attention to the translations, just a word about the link between the language-play and the simultaneously available non-verbal channels on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the overt-covert distinction, i.e. the question whether characters other than the speaker can be assumed to be aware of the language-play. Both these factors have been claimed to be of importance in the translation of puns, and since the type of language-play covered by the category discussed here has some affinities with puns, there is a point in considering the issue.

A count reveals that more than half of the cases, or 27 of them, are quite clearly linked to the picture, and another seven comparatively weakly. 17 cases cannot be said to feature a connection with the picture or any other non-verbal semiotic channel. This distribution corresponds approximately to that of the vertical polysemic puns.

As to the second issue, 20 instances can, on the basis of other characters’ reactions (looks, comments, etc.) or because they are so obvious that they must have been noticed, be considered overt, while in 9 cases, other characters do not seem to, or cannot, become aware of them. The matter remains open in as many as 22 cases, which nevertheless represents a somewhat lower share than what we have seen in connection with the puns.

The instances of SL language-play in translation
A look at the share of translation solutions with corresponding TL language-play TL versions confirms that there is a difference between the present category and the puns: this share is larger here than for the puns, even the
horizontal polysemic ones. Leaving aside the one doubtful case, Table 5.1 offers a first overview of the results. Note that, as in the previous chapter, the figures in the row marked with a ? represent cases where it is doubtful, for different reasons, whether there is language-play in the TL versions. This applies to all the tables of this kind in the present chapter.

Table 5.1. Overview of the TL solutions for the clear Play with metaphors, etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TL lang.-play?</th>
<th>German dubbing</th>
<th>Swedish dubbing</th>
<th>German subtitles</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles</th>
<th>Norw. subtitles</th>
<th>Danish subtitles</th>
<th>Sw. TV subtitles</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>7</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>50</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One Swedish dubbing solution is missing from the table because I could not categorize it. The others show a surprisingly clear tendency to contain TL language-play, especially when it comes to the German dubbing and the Norwegian and Danish subtitle versions. As so often, the few Swedish TV subtitles go against the general trend, in this case mostly because the subtitles of Antz contain very little language-play.

By far the most common translation strategy adopted is to preserve the original language-play by transferring it more or less unchanged into the target language. This is very often possible because expressions such as those played with here tend to function in similar ways in all the languages involved, and a straightforward translation that quite automatically leads to TL language-play is then not only one of the easiest solutions, it must also seem satisfactory to the translators. All but two of the examples quoted in this section so far have been given this treatment in almost all TL versions. The first exception is the cat’s got his tongue joke, which is too language-specific and, as it happens, also the example that comes closest to a pun. The other exception is the written example from Antz.

A translation where the language-play is lost is the second most common solution, narrowly beating the strategy of introducing an instance of language-play that is largely independent of its SL counterpart in terms of content, but still of the same type. In the versions with the most TL language-play, it is actually this latter solution that is the second most common one.
Concerning the more rarely employed strategies, the creation of TL language-play that is even of a different type than the original has been achieved in about a dozen cases. The same is true of what could be described as the other extreme, i.e. complete omission of the playful sequence, which affects not least the written instances, among others. Outright copying of SL elements into the target text does not take place, and 'compensation' is rare, occurring almost exclusively in connection with strategies that lead to TL language-play anyway. (For more information on the translation strategies chosen, partly in the form of a table, cf. 5.2.)

It could be expected, given the corresponding results for the puns, that clear correlations between the translation strategies on the one hand and the factors 'link with non-verbal channel' and 'overt vs. covert' on the other would not turn up here either. That is quite true for the first factor mentioned, but it is noteworthy that no instances of overt language-play have been omitted altogether and that almost all the cases where relatively independent TL language-play has been created, be it of the same type as the original one or of another, are either overt or of uncertain status in this respect. It seems, then, that the acknowledgement of the language-play by other characters has at least some influence on what the translators do or do not do with it.

As to the doubtful translation choices, they are mostly direct translations that do not seem to function quite as well or obviously as language-play as the original sequence does. The following example from _Shrek_ is quite typical:

(5.10) A group of soldiers pursue the talking donkey, who hides behind Shrek. After a moment's hesitation, the group's leader announces that he will arrest both the ogre and the donkey and lead them away. Shrek assumes a threatening posture.
Shrek: Oh, really, you and what army? (we see that all the subordinates have run away in fear)

German subtitles: *Ach? Du und welche Armee?*

Swedish subtitles: *Jaså? Du och vilken armé?*

In the special context of the scene, the ironic-condescending expression _you and what army_ suddenly needs to be interpreted in much more concrete and literal terms than usual, because the addressee actually had a (little) army at his disposal. The effect is quite funny, in my opinion. In German and Swedish, however, close equivalents to this expression, like those offered in the subtitle versions, are not normally used, which makes the questions seem more like genuine requests for information even before we get to see what occasioned them. On the other hand, some knowledge of informal language use in English,
orf at least the suspicion that some special intention might be behind the German and Swedish versions, will make the target audiences understand that they are faced with language-play. According such translations the status of ‘doubtful’ is, I think, the best way to categorize them.

Discussion of one particular SL sequence and two of its translations

For the final discussion, I have chosen two rare instances of language-play from the film *Mouse Hunt*, which, however, are related and follow each other closely. Apart from representing a film that is typically only mentioned as *not* featuring the type of language-play under discussion, the instances provide another, good opportunity to discuss once more the difference between what I understand by puns and the non-punning play with certain expressions.

(5.11) *Mouse Hunt* is all about two brothers trying to kill a mouse that lives in a house they have inherited. The animal is both cheeky and smart and manages to survive until the auction where the house is supposed to be sold. Ernie, one of the brothers, is giving the opening speech when the mouse suddenly appears right in front of him on the lectern. While trying to hide this fact from the audience by continuing to speak about the house, Ernie gets very excited.

Ernie: […] *Uh, when Quincy Thorpe of the, uh, Historical Society told us of its value, you, uh, you could have … KNOCKED* (screams this while simultaneously hitting down on the mouse with the gavel, missing) *us over with a feather. We didn’t know what HIT us* (as before, but with more hits). […]

German dubbing: *Äh, als uns Quincy Thorpe vom Denkmalschutz über den Wert des Hauses informierte, hätte- hätte man uns … UMHAUEN- umhauen können, und zwar mit einer Feder. Wir waren wie ERSCHLAGEN.*

Swedish dubbing: *Äh, när Quincy Thorpe från Historiska Sällskapet avslöjade dess värde, så, ah, skulle man kunnat … SLÅ omkull oss med en fjäder. Vi höll på att få SLÅG.*

The expressions *you could have knocked us over with a feather and we didn’t know what hit us* are informal, though not uncommon, ways of imparting a feeling of shock. The language-play in this scene consists in carrying out the action designated by one of the key elements in the respective expression at the same time as it is uttered. The truth value of the figures of speech is not really affected by this, because they remain as accurate or inaccurate with respect to the original events described as they were meant to be. Surprising new
meanings are not evoked either, as would have been the case in a pun. What does happen is that parts of the expressions, though these refer back in time grammatically and are supposed to be understood as poetic and exaggerated language use, suddenly become relevant, in a more concrete way, to the quite unrelated situational context of the utterance.

As to the two translations quoted (the others do not really add anything important to an already lengthy example), they basically preserve the original concept of employing a word from the semantic field of hitting simultaneously with the corresponding visual action. There is reason to be more precise, however: the first part of the German translation is semantically close to the English version and more or less works like it, too, even though it is based on a figure of speech that is not well established in German. The second sentence in the German dubbing means, literally, ‘we were like struck dead’, but erschlagen is also often used metaphorically to mean ‘extremely tired’ or, perhaps more seldom, though it is the likelier interpretation here, ‘flabbergasted’. If the latter meaning is intended with, or read into, Ernie’s use of the word, we are suddenly faced with a pun-like clash between one of the metaphorical meanings of erschlagen and its literal, original meaning. However, if Ernie actually meant to say ‘we looked/behaved as if we had been struck dead’ (and who but, possibly, the script-writers would be in a position to say?), the result is not a pun, but language-play of the same type as the original.

Concerning the Swedish dubbing, finally, the same comments apply to the first part as were made above in connection with the German dubbing. The second part can only be categorized as a pun and nothing else, however, as the slag in vi höll på att få slag means ‘(apoplectic) stroke’, although the entire expression could also be translated as ‘we were almost having a fit’. With his actions, Ernie evokes an alternative meaning of slag that is not normally brought to mind by the expression få slag, namely ‘hit/bang/punch/etc.’. The result is a rather clear polysemic pun.

5.1.2 Modified expressions

Introduction

The present category shares with the preceding one the circumstance that I could not find an unambiguous label for it, though I might have adopted Leppihalme’s (1996) term “modified frames” if it had not been for the fact that she refers to this as a form of “wordplay” even though some of her examples are not typical puns, in my opinion. In order to maintain the distinction
between puns on the one hand and, on the other hand, the strategy focussed on here, I shall speak of ‘modified expressions’. The term expressions is, in fact, mainly chosen for its vagueness and is meant to encompass not only the kinds of linguistic construct that were already taken up in the previous section, including metaphors, idioms, and comparisons, but also quotes, allusions, and anything a listener might recognize as forming a unit even though it clearly consists of distinct lexical elements. Such expressions are treated here as language-play if they do not make an appearance in one of their usually accepted or expected forms, but have been altered in order to make them better fit the text-external conditions.162

In my corpus, the prototypical example tends to occur in films that feature animals, monsters or fairy tale creatures in important roles. These individuals may behave and speak like humans, but they are still different from us in many respects, which circumstance is partly responsible for the interest that the films in question may generate. The incongruity that exists between the non-human, clearly fictional characters on the one hand and their generally authentic American or British English language use on the other is occasionally brought to the fore by some context-dependent adaptations made in connection with certain expressions. Consider an example from Antz, a film from which human beings are virtually absent:

(5.12) While dancing with Bala, Z bumps into a huge soldier ant, who expresses his displeasure. This causes Bala to threaten the soldier, which Z, leading Bala away, thinks is a bad idea.
Z: Are you crazy? This guy’s built like a pebble!

It is not uncommon to say of a big and well-trained man that he is built like a tank, or like a rock, and had Z, humanized as he is, used this expression, the slight inappropriateness would hardly have been noticed. However, by elevating a miniature version of a rock, a pebble, to a symbol of great size and strength, he reminds us that ants are considerably smaller than we are and that this lets them see matters related to size from a different perspective.

All this is not to say that this kind of language-play cannot be put into the mouth of human characters:

(5.13) In Rugrats in Paris, the otherwise timid Chucky is about to make a determined and brave effort to spoil Coco LaBouche’s wicked

162 That is the most common scenario. I have, however, also included an expression that has been modified for no apparent reason at all (other than an urge to play with it) and one that has probably been changed only to make it more acceptable in a family film (see below).
plans.

Chucky: *A baby's gotta do what a baby's gotta do.*

This way of expressing resolution in the face of unpleasant but necessary tasks usually has *man* as the subject, though *woman* and many other signifiers can also be found to assume this function. The expression *a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do* almost invites modification according to the nature of the speaker, but the more extravagant the item used, the clearer it is that we are dealing with language-play. *Baby* can be said to be very unusual in this particular linguistic environment, and the playful element in Chucky’s utterance thus signals itself quite strongly.

Lest the impression arise that modifications of this kind occur only when and because the speaker or the entities referred to are of an atypical nature, consider example (5.14), which should illustrate that anybody can play with the language in this way, in more or less any context:

(5.14) In *Inspector Gadget*, it begins to dawn upon Brenda that a dark and powerful force is behind some of the strange events that have shaken her hometown recently: *There's something rotten in Riverton.*

Brenda’s remark is an obvious allusion to Hamlet’s famous *There's something rotten in the state of Denmark*, with the place name changed to that of the city in which the film is set. This is a common procedure, probably repeated millions of times since Shakespeare’s days, and with all sorts of small and large geographical entities replacing the original one. Modifying a quote or allusion of this kind is a kind of language-play, though one could hardly count example (5.14) as a pun, for which a formal overlap between the key items would have been one of the preconditions. *Riverton* and *state of Denmark* feature no such overlap to speak of.

As an example of a case where an expression is changed to fit the extra-linguistic circumstances at the same time as the change involves a paronymic pun, consider the following exclamation from *Chicken Run*:

(5.15) The chicken are trying to fly. In their first efforts, they crash all around the shocked rats Nick and Fetcher, who have just entered the chicken farm and are almost squashed.

Fetcher: *It's raining hen!*

Based on the name of the song *It's raining men*, Fetcher’s version is different by
one phoneme and wittily points to the cause of the exclamation. The omission of what would be a grammatically required plural-s is probably meant to function as an additional signal that we are dealing with a pun here.

Concerning my decision not to let nonce formations simultaneously count as representative of the current category of language-play, it is quite simply due to the fact that such nonce formations represent an adaptation to extra-linguistic circumstances in themselves. One of the main characteristics is thus identical for both types of language-play, with the difference that nonce formations are altogether new creations on the level of lexical concepts while the focus here is on larger units, or ‘expressions’, where one element has been replaced by another, previously existing one. To take up nonce formations in the present category, too, would be essentially the same as considering the substitution of hen for men in example (5.15) as both a paronymic pun and a half-rhyme, which I have refrained from for obvious reasons.\footnote{By contrast, there is nothing that prevents puns from being taken up in the category discussed here, as the respective definitions are fundamentally different from each other.}

Before I proceed to give an overview of the number and nature of the SL examples belonging into this category, just a word about the many cases that were not included among them despite the fact that they, too, reflect the extraordinary setting and characters of the film in which they appear. Spoken language never occurs in a complete vacuum, of course, and there is always some link between the linguistic elements and the context of their use, but consider what could be a borderline case between non-playful utterances and the kind of modified expression considered in this section:

\begin{quote}
(5.16) At the beginning of \textit{Antz}, Z complains about his life. Among other things, he claims that he cannot have been meant to be a worker since he feels “physically inadequate”:
\begin{quote}
\textit{My whole life I've never- I've never been able to lift more than ten times my own body weight.}
\end{quote}
\end{quote}

Also this utterance of Z's is striking because it contrasts the speaker's otherwise human-like ways of thinking, feeling and speaking with the fact that he is physically and in many other respects still supposed to be an ant. However, while Z's complaint obviously relies on the medium of language and may even be considered funny, I do not regard it as language-play since it is, after all, a straightforward account of the lifting capacity of the speaker. Most importantly, no fixed expression generally used in this specific context has been modified to fit the extra-linguistic background. Only if it were claimed that we humans say
with at least moderate frequency that I have/has/etc. never been able to lift more than my/his/etc. own body weight or something similarly realistic expressed in such a sequence of words, could it also be claimed that Z’s utterance in (5.16) is a conscious attempt at playing with a relatively clearly defined linguistic unit.

**Number and nature of the SL instances**

A search of the corpus revealed 60 SL sequences that would fit the description of a ‘playfully modified expression’ in a broad sense. The films with the most instances, i.e. seven, are *Chicken Run* and *Shrek*. *Antz*, *Inspector Gadget*, *Rugrats in Paris* and *Stuart Little* follow closely with six, while *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle* feature five. No instances could be identified in *Mouse Hunt*, *The Indian in the Cupboard* and *The Iron Giant*.

As indicated in the introduction, all but two expressions taken up here have been changed because the immediate, film-internal context of the utterance provided a reason to do so. One exception is from *Scooby-Doo*, where the standard form *you don't have the balls for this job* has been modified by substituting the at least to children relatively opaque *scrote* [sic] for the more offensive *balls*. The other exception appears in *Muppets from Space*, where the expression *hold your horses* has been turned into *hold your horseshoes*. This may not be a completely original change, but it is still unusual enough to be considered playful, and a desire to play with the expression also constitutes the only discernible motive behind the alteration.

A dozen or so of the expressions played with can be attributed to concrete historical persons and events, or to works of arts like songs (cf. example (4.56) in the section on paronymic puns), films, fairy tales, and theatre plays (cf. (5.14) above). The rest are idioms and other relatively well-established sequences of lexical items that the average speaker would not be able to trace back to any particular source.

One of the instances included here is written while the rest is spoken. In 16 or 17 cases (in one case the intention is doubtful), the modification of the expression comes in the form of a vertical paronymic pun, as illustrated in e.g. (5.15). In eleven or twelve of the remaining cases, types of language-play other than paronymic puns co-occur with the modified expression, and together these complex examples make up a share of almost 50% of the overall number in this category.

Keeping in mind that it can be difficult at times to gauge how much of a link there is between the modification of an expression and the information that is simultaneously transmitted through the non-verbal channels, one can say
that there is a more or less strong link in about two thirds of the examples, which implies that in one third of the cases, there is no such link. This may seem surprising, given the fact that the expressions are almost always modified to make them tally better with the extra-linguistic circumstances, but that does not need to imply that the entity or condition responsible for the change is actually present, visually or aurally, when the expression is played with, or, for that matter, that it is concrete enough to be captured by the senses at all. Consider the only example from Anastasia, which I consider to be largely independent of the picture:

(5.17) Rasputin has fallen into disgrace with the czar and is about to be thrown out of the royal palace and banished. The monk is very upset and retaliates:

*By the unholy powers vested in me, I banish you with a curse.*

A man of the church tends to derive his authority from the holy powers vested in him, not the unholy ones, but Rasputin’s modification of the expression is in line with his evil nature and his knowledge of black magic. So, there is definitely an adaptation to the extra-linguistic ‘realities’, but it could hardly be claimed that the concepts of holy, unholy, or power are clearly represented in the picture or other non-verbal channels.

As to the overt vs. covert question, we encounter the same problem as with most of the puns, namely that it is not possible to tell, in more than half of the cases, whether other characters are aware of the language-play or not. Of the remaining cases, the covert ones are somewhat more numerous than the overt ones, which is mostly due to the fact that I assume expressions like the one in (5.12), i.e. *built like a pebble*, to be perfectly acceptable or even the standard version in the specific context of the film. It is thus only to the film-external, human audience that these utterances can appear strange.

*The SL instances in translation*

The 60 modified expressions from the English versions of the films correspond to 317 translations in all, i.e. slightly more than five on average, and Table 5.2 reveals how they behave in terms of TL language-play. Note, however, that one TL solution is missing from the German and three from the Swedish dubbing because it proved impossible to determine what is said.

As can be seen, we get some rather mixed results, although those for the dubbed versions and the Swedish DVD subtitles are very much in line with each other. The same is true for the Norwegian and Danish subtitles, which,
however, feature a notably lower share of solutions with TL language-play than the three versions mentioned first. The fact that it is the German subtitles, of all versions, that feature the largest share of TL language-play comes as a surprise, given that in connection with virtually all other kinds of SL language-play they tend to be among the versions with the lowest share. All translations taken together, the modified expressions lead more often to TL language-play than most of the other categories discussed in this study.

Table 5.2. Overview of the TL solutions for the Modified expressions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TL lang.-play?</th>
<th>German dubbing</th>
<th>Swedish dubbing</th>
<th>German subtitles</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles</th>
<th>Norw. subtitles</th>
<th>Danish subtitles</th>
<th>Sw. TV subtitles</th>
<th>Totals</th>
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<td>60</td>
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<td>47</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>313</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is no obvious answer to the question why the Norwegian and Danish subtitles have fewer playful counterparts to the modified expressions than the other versions (leaving aside the relatively few TV subtitles). As usual, a variety of factors, including individual translation choices and chance, will have contributed to the result. Yet some of the difference may be due to the fact that the Norwegian and Danish subtitle versions of some films were not available and are thus absent from the corpus, and that the films affected are precisely those where the other versions have preserved or recreated some form of language-play to a relatively large extent. I am mostly thinking of *Shrek*, but also of *El Dorado* and the one instance in *My Dog Skip*. It can also be mentioned that the six instances in *Stuart Little* were less often neutralized, i.e. turned into non-playful target texts, in the dubbing than in the subtitles.

The uneven distribution of the translations in the corpus may also be partly responsible for the unusual German subtitle figures: because they were based on the German dubbing, the German subtitles have been excluded for some films where the other versions do not feature much TL language-play, e.g. *Antz*, *Stuart Little* and *Scooby-Doo*, which affects not only the absolute numbers, but also the relative amount of language-play in this particular combination of target language and translation mode.

To transfer the modified expression more or less directly into the target
language is for almost all versions the most common approach, followed by translations that imply a loss of language-play. The other options are rarely used by comparison, though it does happen that language-play is created that is comparatively independent of the wording and/or the type of play in the original. Copying of TI material into the target text occurs just once, with doubtful results, and of the fourteen cases where the key elements have been omitted altogether, three each occur in the Norwegian, Danish, Swedish DVD and Swedish TV subtitles. The one written instance of a modified expression has not been translated in any of the six target versions, which is in line with how other types of written language-play have been treated. As to compensation, I have only found two, probably serendipitous, instances in connection with the modified expressions.

The reason why calques are so common in connection with modified expressions is of course that many of these expressions have close counterparts in the target languages and can thus be played with in very similar ways. Two of the available translations of one example from *Muppets from Space* will suffice to illustrate this. They mean essentially the same as the English dialogue and ought to function in the same way, too:

(5.18) Miss Piggy has been promoted to investigative reporter and interferes with two tall men dressed in black who are leading Gonzo away. She says that she is “just trying to get a story”, but one of the mysterious men threatens her:

Man: *How about this story? It’s about a big, bad wolf and a little pig.*

Piggy: *Now, that’s three pigs, OK?*

Man: *Not in this version.*


*Nej, det är tre grisar, okej?*

*Inte i min version.*

Danish subtitles: *Hvad med den om en stor, styg ulv og en lille gris?*

*-Der var tre grise.*

*-Ikke i min udgave.*

Without saying it straight out, the ‘man in black’ compares himself to the wolf and sees Miss Piggy, who *is* a pig and much shorter than him, as his helpless victim. At first, Piggy does not understand this and thinks he is actually talking about the well-known fairy tale where three pigs are involved. He, however, is only alluding to it in a playful manner. The tale being part not only of American, but also of West European lore, it has not been a problem for any of
the translators to achieve the same effect as is present in the original by simply putting the sequence into TL words.

However, straightforward translation being one of the easiest solutions, this strategy has also often been employed when a particular expression has no close counterparts in the target language, which can lead to results that I classify as ‘doubtful’. Consider the following case from *Antz*:

(5.19) General Mandible found some moments to chat with Bala, but his closest aide, Cutter, soon reminds him of his tight schedule:

Sir, I hate to interrupt, but time stands still for no ant.

German dubbing: Sir, entschuldigen Sie die Unterbrechung, aber die Zeit steht für keine Ameise still. [‘Sir, pardon the interruption, but time stands still for no ant.’]

Semantically, the German version is very close to the English one, but the problem is that the expression *time stands still for no man/no-one* is firmly established while the same cannot be said of what would be a literal translation in the form of *die Zeit steht für keinen Menschen/niemanden still*. While this sequence can be used as a spontaneously constructed utterance, it is not clear that the German audience would conceive of Cutter’s interruption as in any way playful. As to the other target versions of this particular instance, the translators chose to use more or less idiomatic TL constructions, with or without mentioning ants, but most of these I consider not even ‘possibly playful’.

Loss of language-play occurs mostly in connection with cases like the one just mentioned, where no close counterpart to the modified expression exists in the target language, but occasionally, what could have been a straightforward transfer is shortened or otherwise formulated in such a way that the language-play disappears, as in the Norwegian translation of an example from *Chicken Run*:

(5.20) The chickens are about to attempt a daring escape in a rickety aircraft. The rat Nick pretends to be a steward giving safety instructions:

In the quite likely event of an emergency, […]

Norwegian subtitles: *Ved nødlanding,*

[‘In the event of an emergency landing’]

Built on the standard formula *in the unlikely event of an emergency*, Nick’s altered version is striking in its honesty. The joke is lost in the Norwegian subtitles, however, because there is only a general reference to an emergency landing.
without any hint that such an event is rather more likely in the particular context of utterance than in comparable situations. What should have been a good opportunity to preserve some language-play without much effort has thus not been seized.\footnote{Disregarding the loss of language-play, which is nevertheless the bigger issue, it can also be pointed out that the term \textit{nødlanding} ‘emergency landing’ is rather too specific if compared to \textit{emergency}, since one of the more likely scenarios in the film is that the aircraft crashes without ever having lifted from the ground.}

When it comes to the link between the words of the language-play and the extra-linguistic information that the viewers receive simultaneously, there is, as usual, no clear pattern discernible in relation to the choice of translation strategy. The overt-covert distinction, by contrast, may have some relevance, as modified expressions that seem to be acknowledged as language-play by other characters in the film more often lead to the preservation or creation of TL language-play than covert cases. Put like this, we are only dealing with a tendency, as there are both covert cases preserved and overt ones lost. When it comes to the strategy of complete omission, however, it is not employed at all in connection with clearly overt instances. In this, the modified expressions behave like the category of language-play discussed in the previous section.

\textit{Discussion of one particular SL instance and some of its translations}

The protagonists in \textit{Rugrats in Paris} are young children, most of whom have not yet learned to speak properly. Their diction is often imprecise, and they commit many grammatical mistakes, especially when it comes to using the correct verb forms (\textit{But I gots to}, \textit{Susie}; \textit{they maked my brother cry}). The comparison of adjectives can also be tricky (\textit{It’s my favouritest place in the whole wide world}), among other things. I have chosen not to count such cases as language-play because they are probably not due to an intention to play with the language, but are meant to render the cartoon characters more realistic and life-like. Letting the Rugrats use baby-talk thus has the same function as letting adults speak a strong rural dialect or having them use slang expressions, none of which constitutes language-play in itself.

Whether it is their trouble with pronunciation, however, or the fact that they confuse lexical items that they have heard, the Rugrats sometimes make remarks that must be classified as paronymic puns, because what they do say often implies a striking semantic contrast to what they must have meant to say. Since paronymic puns often coincide with modified expressions (or: expressions are often modified by way of a pun), the following example is quite typical of both categories. It is partly for this reason I have chosen it, but also
because I find it amusing and, most importantly, because it has led to a variety of different, and sometimes strange, TL solutions. Note that it cannot be established with any certainty which of the children are uttering the last two lines of the sequence, and that only the last three lines from the various target versions are rendered here.

(5.21) At one point during their wild chase through Paris, the oldest of the children, who can be mean and always bosses the smaller ones around, is sent hurtling into the sky.

Tommy: *Look, up in the sky!*

Kimi: *It's a nerd!*

Child 1: *It's a pain!*

Child 2: *It's ... Angelica!

German dubbing: *Das ist ein Trottel!*

*Das ist eine Nervensäge!*

*Das ist ... Angelica!

Swedish subtitles: *-Det är en bågel!*

*Det är ett flugplan!

*Det är...Angelica.

Danish subtitles: *

*Det er et hjul!

*Det er en skrivemaskine!

*Det er Angelica.

The Swedish dubbed version has not been included because the key words cannot be understood, and as the basic strategy behind the German and Norwegian subtitles is the same as that behind the German dubbing, they would add little that is new.

Based on the well-known *It's a bird! – It's a plane! – It's ... Superman!* sequence, the Rugrats version represents a modified expression involving two paronymic puns. It is not clear whether the German dubbers have understood the allusion since they offer a more or less straightforward translation of the exclamations with minimal formal overlap between *Trottel* ('idiot') and the expected *Vogel* ('bird') or between *Nervensäge* ('pain (in the neck)') and *Flugzeug* ('aeroplane'). Moreover, the German version of the *Superman* quotes would begin with *Es ist ...* rather than *Das ist ...*, which was chosen for the Rugrats translation. However, even if the translators have missed the reference, members of the audience familiar with the *Superman* stories may still be able to make the connection even if its authors did not, which is interesting.

The Swedish and the Danish subtitlers were obviously both aware of the allusion since they constructed TL versions that are formally similar to how the *Superman*-related exclamations are normally translated in the two languages.
There is a difference, though, since the Swedish subtitler has substituted fågel ('bird') and flygplan ('aeroplane') with the nonsense words fågel and flugplan, respectively, suggesting only imperfect pronunciation on the part of the speakers, not incongruous new meanings. (The label ‘modified expression’ still applies, however, because the final It's … Superman! has been turned into the equivalent of It's … Angelica! even in this version.)

The Danish subtitler, by contrast, has first chosen an established word that rhymes with the one normally present in the first slot in question, namely hjul ('wheel') for fåg ('bird'), and then another one, viz. skrivemaskine ('typewriter'), that could perhaps be said to half-rhyme with the second of the standard items, flyvemaskine ('aeroplane'). While the result looks like a vertical paronymic pun, the choice of words seems to be based on formal criteria only. What they designate makes no sense in the context, and this is, after all, contrary to the idea of a pun. One wonders if a straightforward, non-punning translation like the one in the German dubbing would not have been preferable to such a forced attempt at TL language-play, which probably fails to fulfil its most likely function, the creation of humour.

5.1.3 Foreign words

Introduction

We are dealing here with a category that would, at first sight, seem to be relatively straightforward to describe. It comprises SL cases where a foreign word, i.e. one that is still very much recognized as foreign by speakers of English, has been used in an utterance where a truly ‘English’ word, or at least a generally accepted loan word, would have been the expected choice. A very simple example from *Rugrats in Paris* will serve to illustrate this initial definition:

(5.22) Having recently arrived at a Japanese amusement park in Paris, Chas is still awed by its wonders. His friend, the inventor Stu, feels more at home.

   Stu: *Hah, it’s a new century. Just go with le flow.*

Presumably inspired by the city around him, Stu replaces the English determinate article *the* by its French, masculine counterpart *le*. The grammar remains otherwise intact.

Now, as will have been noticed, the above example appears to overlap strongly with the category of language-play discussed in the previous section, namely what I refer to as modified expressions: *go with the flow* is an established
expression and the substitution of le for the obviously implies a modification. The simple rule that I adopted to solve this dilemma is that if the modification consists in the use of a foreign word in the place of the ‘proper’ English word, the example will be taken up here, not among the modified expressions. This decision is, in fact, less arbitrary than it may seem, since there is one characteristic that distinguishes the examples taken up here from most of those discussed under Modified expressions: the substitution of a close foreign-language counterpart for a domestic item does not lead to a change of meaning, while the use of one domestic item in lieu of another usually does.¹⁶⁵

That having been said, it should be pointed out that it is no requirement for inclusion in the present category that the foreign word occurs within an established expression. Example (5.74) in the section on alliteration below features the German conjunction und instead of the English and in a part of the sentence that cannot be considered fixed or established in any way. Since the alliteration and the foreign word occur in different parts of the utterance, there is no overlap at all, though even if the und had been part of an alliteration, the two categories concerned are so diverse that the sequence in question could still have been counted twice. (See (5.24) for another substitution outside of a fixed expression.)

Not included here are cases that are not so special after all, i.e. cases where an obviously foreign word replaces an English one without this being a particularly original instance of language-play. I’m thinking mostly of the substitution of the French moi for the English words me and myself, which is so common that it has led to the inclusion of moi in the Oxford English Dictionary. Miss Piggy in Muppets from Space, always anxious to appear more sophisticated than she really is, is perhaps the most notorious (mis-)user of this stylistic device, but it can also be found in Space Jam and, perhaps less surprisingly, in Rugrats in Paris.

Finally, when foreign words occur in relative isolation, e.g. as an exclamation (oh là là), a form of address (señorita), or a greeting (bonjour), and seem to function almost exclusively as a reminder of the nationality of the speaker rather than as language-play, they are not taken up here. Of course, it is not always possible to draw a clear line between examples that fulfil the requirements for membership in the category and examples that do not, as is

¹⁶⁵ Incidentally, this is also true of example (5.32), discussed in the next section, where a nonce formation has been created entirely out of elements coming from the same foreign language as the model on which it is based. (Since it represents a nonce formation and a pun much more than a substitution of the type considered here, and since there may be a certain overlap with the present category in this case, too, the example mentioned has not been counted here.)
the case with so many of the other categories used in this study, but the general rule stands (cf. also example (5.26)).

**Number and nature of the SL instances**

With a mere eleven instances subsumed under it, the present category of language-play is the smallest in this study and also the one that remains without representation in the highest number of films (11 out of 18). Generalizations are therefore only permissible up to a point.

It can be interesting to note, however, that the foreign words replacing the English ones come from only three languages, viz. French, Spanish, and German, with the number of examples relying on these languages decreasing in the order given (five, four and two, respectively). In fact, the only German word used to replace an English one is the one already mentioned above, i.e. *und* ‘and’. The variation is greater when it comes to the French and Spanish substitutes, which also include content words, not just function words, as in the following example from *The Road to El Dorado*:

\[\text{(5.23) Having been incarcerated on Cortés’ sailing ship, Tulio presents} \]
Miguel with his escape plan, which involves the stealing of one of the small row boats:

\[\ldots\] Then we row back to Spain like there’s no mañana!

Of course, *mañana* is one of the internationally well-known Spanish words, and to those who are not familiar with it, the co-text certainly makes it quite clear that it replaces the English *tomorrow*.

A line from a song in *Anastasia* might pose more of a challenge to understanding, though not much will be lost if *très jolie* ‘very pretty’ is not deciphered:

\[\text{(5.24) You’ll be très jolie and so smart} \]

The predominance of French and Spanish as the source of foreign words used in American and British films probably reflects the expected language skills of the source audiences, with French being one of the foreign languages traditionally learned by native speakers of English, and Spanish having strengthened its position in the US enormously in recent decades. Knowledge of Spanish can also be assumed to have increased in Britain, not least due to tourism, while German seems to have lost most of its impact abroad. Almost all other languages are even less known internationally, which will be part of the
reason why they have not been used in the sort of language-play at issue here.

None of the examples is clearly linked to the simultaneously accessible picture, and none triggers perceivable reactions from other characters in the films. On the other hand, none is covert in the sense that addressees and others have certainly not noticed the language-play implied in the use of a foreign word. These factors can thus not have played a role in how the translators tackled these particular sequences.

The SL sequences in translation
49 TL solutions correspond to the 11 SL sequences, or about 4.5 per sequence on average, which is somewhat lower than what we have seen in connection with the other categories so far. The low number of examples, and of translations per example, may help to explain why the picture that emerges in Table 5.3 is anything but uniform. In fact, as far as the preservation of language-play in the target versions is concerned, we are dealing with one of the greatest variations between the different combinations of language and translation mode that will be encountered in this study.

Table 5.3. Overview of the TL solutions for the Foreign words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TL lang.-play?</th>
<th>German dubbing</th>
<th>Swedish dubbing</th>
<th>German subtitles</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles</th>
<th>Norw. subtitles</th>
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<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One German dubbing solution is missing from the table because it is inaudible. Apart from that, it can be noted that if all translations are taken together, those that feature language-play and those that do not keep each other the balance. This is also the case, more or less, in both dubbed versions and in the Swedish subtitles. However, the German subtitles do not include one convincing attempt at creating TL language-play, while all of the Norwegian ones clearly do – and this despite the fact that there is only one SL example of play with foreign words that has German subtitles, but no Norwegian ones, and only one other example that represents the opposite state of affairs.

Still, even if we should wish to claim that the low figures in the table can
at least hint at certain trends, not too much should be made of the differences between the versions. They are, it seems, mostly due to decisions made by individual translators rather than explicable in terms of the nature of the language-play or of the languages involved. For example, in *Rugrats in Paris*, which is the film with the most instances of foreign words replacing English ones, namely three, neither the German nor the Norwegian subtitler have distinguished themselves by consistently trying to recreate the substantial amount of language-play contained in that film, quite the contrary. Yet in connection with the Foreign words, the Norwegian translator scores three ‘yes’ solutions and the German translator none. This is so because the former used the simple strategy of direct copies while the latter chose to translate the French words in the same way as the surrounding English ones, i.e. into straightforward German, which is equally simple. This does not necessarily imply that there is a trend in German translations to smooth out obstacles in the form of foreign words, as the dubbing solutions in that language attest to.

In four of the ‘yes’ solutions, the play with the foreign word has actually been lost, but some other language-play within the same sentence has been preserved. Otherwise, the choice seems to have been between directly transferring the foreign elements (which are, with the exception of the German und, also foreign in all the target languages considered here) and using TL items only. Total omission or crafting language-play with foreign words that deviates significantly from the original creation proved to be marginal options.

A few TL solutions have been given the status of ‘doubtful’ because the direct copy on which they rely would not make much sense to the target audience. This is perhaps most clearly the case in the second example from *The Road to El Dorado*:

(5.25) After what seemed like a power struggle between the chief and the high priest of El Dorado, Tulio and Miguel have ended up with enormous amounts of gold in their possession, which makes them very happy.

Tulio: *We just became richer than the king of Spain.*

Miguel: *Yeah, well, speaking of kings … the chief and the high priest seem a little … tense.*

Tulio: ¡Buenos días!

Swedish dubbing: På tal om kungar … verkar hövdingen och översteprästen lite … osams.

¡Buenos días!

The *buenos días* in the original exchange is apparently meant to replace the
English *bello*. This *bello*, however, is not to be understood in its usual meaning as a friendly greeting, but as a brief and informal way of saying, approximately, ‘this has been more than obvious for quite a while and your mentioning it now seems to indicate that you are a bit slow on the uptake’. To use *buenos días* in this sense, which most people ever having come into contact with Spanish will understand, is actually quite witty, in my opinion. However, the very close translation in the Swedish dubbing, including the copying of *buenos días*, cannot be expected to have the same effect on the Swedish audience since the Swedish greetings are not commonly used in the same double sense as the English *bello*. It must therefore remain unclear to many viewers of the dubbed version why Tulio should suddenly say *buenos días*. Now, all that has been said of the Swedish version is also true of the German dubbing, which follows the exact same strategy. The result is two TL solutions where it is doubtful whether they should count as containing language-play.

Discussion of one particular SL instance and some of its translations
As indicated above, the type of language-play at issue here has not normally triggered particularly creative or otherwise striking TL solutions: either the language-play has been copied more or less directly by carrying over the foreign element into the translation, or it has been rendered with the help of TL items only. The example chosen for this final discussion is quite representative in this respect, though there are some tiny differences between the translations that may deserve a short comment.

(5.26) The director of the theme park in *Rugrats in Paris*, Madame LaBouche, is ordering her employees around:

*What are you waiting for? Get off your derrières and get this show on the road! Tout de suite!*

**Swedish dubbing:**  *Vad väntar ni på? Få era rumpor ur vognen och sätt igång nu! Tout de suite!*

**German subtitles:** *Bewegt euren Hintern und macht voran! Aber schnell!*

**Swedish subtitles:** *Lyft på era derrière [sic] och se till att få nåt gjort! Tout de suite!*

**Norwegian subtitles:** *Lett på deres derrières og få showet på veien. Tout de suite!*

**Danish subtitles:** *Let jeres derré rer [sic] of få det her show sat på skinner. Tout de suite!*

LaBouche’s original utterance, which is her first in the entire film, features French lexical items in two places. Part of the reason behind this is certainly to
establish her as a native speaker (even though her voice is that of the American actress Susan Sarandon and the French words are pronounced with an American accent, including the otherwise silent -s in derrières). However, the function of the final tout de suite ‘immediately’, added like an afterthought and grammatically relatively independent of the preceding command, seems to be only that; the word derrières ‘behinds’, on the other hand, is obviously part of a larger and quite fixed unit encompassing also the items get off your and should probably be understood as replacing some slightly ‘dirty’ English word such as asses or butts. I consider this to fall squarely into the present category of language-play. Apart from characterizing the speaker, the first substitution in example (5.26) thus has at least two more purposes: keeping the film clean for the primarily young audience, and giving the adults watching the movie together with their children an opportunity to enjoy a vaguely naughty joke.

The German dubbing solution is the one that proved inaudible and was therefore omitted from Table 5.3. Consequently, it has not been possible to reproduce it in example (5.26) either. As to the other translations, the Swedish dubbing and the German subtitles imply a loss of the original language-play because derrières has been translated into TL counterparts (rumpor ‘~butts’ and Hintern ‘~behind’, respectively)\(^{166}\), maybe because it was felt that derrières would be lost on too many viewers. In the case of the German subtitles, even the tout de suite has been translated.

The other subtitle versions represent the strategy of copying the original substitution, though none are quite alike. The -s of derrières has been omitted in the Swedish subtitles even though the preceding possessive pronoun era only goes together with a plural noun. This was probably a blunder, and in TL viewers who know some French, it is likely to cause some confusion or even irritation. The Norwegian subtitles require no comment, but the Danish translator has chosen an interesting strategy: the French item has been adopted in principle, but it has simultaneously been domesticated with the help of a Danish plural ending. This solution is probably quite acceptable to the Danish audience.

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\(^{166}\) The German word is in the singular despite the fact that several people are addressed. This is somewhat illogical, but what is implied, obviously, is that each of the addressees should move his or her own behind. With respect to the Swedish dubbing solution, it is worth pointing out that få era rumpor ur vagnen means ‘get your butts out of the car/cart/carriage’. Neither the English dialogue nor the picture provides any clues as to what ‘vagnen’ might refer to or how it got included in the Swedish translation.
5.1.4 Nonce formations

Introduction
This section is about lexical constructs that seem to have been created specifically for the concrete context in which they occur. While the same could be said about the very sentences I am writing at this moment, i.e. that they are created specifically for the concrete context in which they occur, nonce formations stick out because they designate either a new concept for which no label or signifier existed previously or they denote an established concept that is not normally referred to with the particular arrangement of linguistic elements that the speaker (or writer) chooses to employ. At times, it can even be difficult to determine what the new construct is supposed to mean exactly. Another difference is that a playful intention can reasonably be inferred as being behind the corpus examples considered in this section, while there is no such intention behind the way I formulate the sentences in this introduction or, for that matter, behind most of the things people say or write.

In some cases, the nonce formations resemble the language-play discussed in section 5.1.2, especially when they represent adaptations to the unusual setting and characters featured in many of the films in the corpus. The borderline between the two categories may indeed be fuzzy, but as a general rule, the modified expressions go beyond what could perhaps be described as a single semantic unit and tend to encompass clauses or phrases where the individual elements have retained some of their independence even if they occur in a particular, recognizable order. Nonce formations as defined here, on the other hand, remain on the phrase or even word level and designate, even if they are lengthy and made up of many morphemes, just one concept.

I prefer the term nonce formation to the conceivable and frequently used alternative of neologism because the latter term seems to be too strongly connected to the idea of the word, which can be a problematic entity to define. Evrard, for example, speaks of “the neologism, a new word, invented, not yet accepted by usage” (1996:68; my translation) and provides only examples that are, in writing, a single sequence of letters without any intervening hyphens or blank spaces. If that were the definition of a word, and part of the definition of a nonce formation, many of the examples included here would not fulfil it.

The second reason for calling this category Nonce formations rather than Neologisms is that almost all the examples have been created “‘for the nonce’, i.e. on one specific occasion or in one specific text or writer’s works” (OED), whereas neologisms may well be created in the hope that they catch on and
become widely used, for example if they designate a new invention or product. However, the two terms could be used synonymously, and it is only some of their connotations that prevent me from doing so. Apart from nonce formations, Petit’s “création lexicale” (2001:317f), or its English counterpart, would have been an acceptable label for this category. Be that as it may, the decisive criterion applying here is that the crucial items, whether they are compounds of some sort or shorter sequences of phonemes or letters, are not, as far as can be told, in any way established even in informal or situation-specific language use.

Petit (2001:317) claims that lexical creation is not a very common process, but that is certainly a truth in a relative sense only. Sornig (1995) has collected a myriad of relatively modern examples, while Stanley (2001b:456ff) discusses nonce formations not only going back to Shakespeare, but even to Old English times. Crystal (1998:31ff) mentions several ways in which people have created previously unheard-of linguistic formations, including blends of existing words such as “fluddle”, designating “a pool of rainwater […] larger than a puddle but smaller than a flood” (1998:33), and Hausmann (1974:64-68) provides whole lists of such portmanteaux gleaned from the Canard enchaîné. I would claim that it depends to a large extent on the individual speakers or writers, and the contexts of their language production, whether nonce formations are made use of with any frequency.

Different types of nonce formations
Blends like the fluddle example mentioned above represent one of several types of nonce formations that are represented in my corpus (in fact, Hausmann (1974) further sub-divides even the blends themselves). I will not define the differences in a formal manner here, but simply illustrate some of them with examples from my own material.

If Petit (2001:317), when he claimed that lexical creation is not a particularly common process, had only the fluddle-type blends in mind, that would be confirmed by the moderate number of similar examples in the eighteen films analyzed by me. Nonce formations of this kind tend to signal themselves quite clearly, but in the following example, it is even made explicit how the new construct has been arrived at (within the narrative of the film, not in the mind of the script writer) and what its source elements are:

(5.27) The little aliens in Space Jam have just transformed themselves into giant, ferocious basketball players. The Looney Tunes are terrified.

Daffy: These little pipsqueaks just turned into superstars!
Porky: They’re m-m-m-monsters!
Sylvester: Suffering succotash! They’re ‘monstars’!

Based on the items stars and monsters, monstars is what Hausmann would classify as a “Wortverschmelzung” (1974:64), literally a ‘fusion of words’, and what e.g. Nash (1985:143) refers to as a portmanteau. Note that I have always counted such cases as paronymic puns, too, which is possible because the definitions of the two categories are quite different from each other. Most nonce formations are of the non-punning variety, and the vast majority of puns do not involve any new lexical creations, but in blends like monstars, the two come together.

Example (5.27) contains also another sequence that I have classified as a nonce formation (and an instance of alliteration), namely Daffy’s exclamation suffering succotash!. A succotash is a meal of American Indian origin, made of boiled maize and beans. Suffering is part of a couple of other exclamations that have actually found their way into the OED, among them suffering cats!, where the individual elements seem to have lost most of their original meaning. Now, Daffy does not use suffering succotash! only in the particular scene referred to, or only in the movie Space Jam for that matter, but quite regularly when he is annoyed or surprised. The sequence can still be considered a nonce formation, however, because it has at one point been created to be put into the mouth of one single character when he finds himself in surprising situations, and nobody else uses it, except perhaps the occasional Looney Tunes aficionado in a humorous context.

Suffering succotash! may or may not have been based on a previously existing model such as suffering cats!. With many other nonce formations, especially if they stand in a punning relationship to their base, this is more clearly the case. Consider the following example:

(5.28) In Muppets from Space, Clifford goes through the mail. Seeing Gonzo, he asks:
Hey, Gonzo, you want your new issue of Insanity Fair?

Apparently, there is such a thing as a magazine called Insanity Fair in the Muppets world, and Clifford’s question is not meant as a joke within the context of the film. It is a joke for the audience, however, who can see the connection with the well-known, real-world celebrity and fashion magazine Vanity Fair.

A nonce formation may also be modelled on an existing construction without involving such an obvious pun, as in the next example from The
Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle.

(5.29) At the White House, Bullwinkle complains to the president about the fact that all the forests around his home town have been cut down.

Bullwinkle: [...] The children have no place to build their tree house. I built them a stump house, but they say it’s just not the same.

If a construction in a tree is a tree house, then a similar construction erected on stumps can reasonably be referred to as a stump house, though neither this signifier nor what it stands for will have been encountered before. The principle for the compound has been copied (let ‘that in or on which something is built’ be followed directly by ‘that which is built’), but the resulting nonce formation is at best a borderline case when it comes to also representing a pun.

As an illustration that nonce formations need not be short, consider the following playful invention where the elements in an existing concept (boy-meets-girl story) have not been replaced, but rather been added to in such a surprising way that I am not even sure how best to put it in writing. Here is a suggestion:

(5.30) At the end of Antz, Z sums up the events of the film:

There you have it: your average boy-meets-girl-boy-likes-girl-boy-changes-underlying-social-order story.

Note the modifiers your average preceding the nonce formation, heightening the amusing effect already achieved by the strange construct itself because the speaker pretends that the lengthy and grammatically odd item\(^{167}\) represents, in fact, a well-established concept.

Also counted as nonce formations are certain non-standard constructions in silly speech or baby talk. These usually rhyme, especially if the forming principle is reduplication. The three examples in (5.52), in the section on rhymes, attest to this, but preceding them are two silly nonce formations none of which can safely be said to even half-rhyme:

(5.31) In Monsters, Inc, Mike greets his girlfriend Celia, who is glad to see him:

Mike: Oh, Schmoopsie-poo.
Celia: Googley Bear!

\(^{167}\) Note that the category Play with grammar has been defined so that there is no overlap with the present category. Thus, no nonce formations, not even those where the rules of grammar have obviously been stretched, are counted under Play with grammar. For a discussion, cf. 5.1.5.
In fact, several of the nonce formations I have identified are nicknames or, like the ones in (5.31), epithets seemingly created ad hoc by the speaker. Also cases where names, for example those that have a foreign ring to them, are mispronounced inadvertently can count as nonce formations. Thus, when Emile Mondavarios in *Scooby-Doo* is first addressed as “Mr. Mononucleosis” and later on referred to as “Mondarajaga”, or when Mr. Yamaguchi in *Rugrats in Paris* becomes “Mr. Yummysushi” in the mouth of one of the children, I count these ‘blunders’, which are of course no blunders at all on the level of the script writer, as nonce formations.

Before I turn to the translation solutions for the nonce formations, I would like to direct attention to one particular example that is special because both the standard and the altered version are entirely in a language other than English:

(5.32) In *Stuart Little*, the leader of the alley cats, Smokey, has once again made a smart decision. At least one member of his gang is impressed:

`What a brain! That’s why he is gatto di tutti gatti.`

It can be assumed that the average American child is not as well-versed in either the Italian language or Mafia-related terminology as would seem to be required to understand this instance of language-play, but even the more mature segments of the SL audience might have to struggle with the joke, which is unusual in a family film. The allusion is of course to *capo di tutti capi*, or ‘boss of all [Mafia] bosses’, and the modified version means ‘cat of all cats’, with paronymic puns both on *capo* vs. *gatto* and the plural forms *capi* vs. *gatti*.

**Number and nature of the SL nonce formations**

All in all, I have identified 102 nonce formations in my corpus, which makes this kind of language-play the second most common one of the non-puns. Since the most common kind, rhyme, occurs primarily in songs and related linguistic environments, nonce formations are the category of non-punning language-play that is most frequently encountered in conversation, which holds true even if the ten instances that are in writing only are subtracted from the

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168 Recall that the ‘real’ names of characters and places, even though they have been conceived solely for the film in which they occur, have been omitted from the analysis because of the specific translation norms likely to apply to them.

169 As I have tried to explain, even if many nonce formations coincide with a vertical paronymic pun, the language-play strategy of creating a new lexical item for a very specific context is not a pun in itself.
The films with the most nonce formations are, in descending order, *Monsters, Inc* and *Scooby-Doo* (14 instances each, though as many as 5 in the former film are in writing), *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle* (12), and *Muppets from Space* and *Space Jam* (9 each). *Mouse Hunt*, *The Road to El Dorado* and, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, *Shrek* are the films with no nonce formations.

The majority of the nonce formations, or 60 of them, are not linked to the picture, while only 9 feature a relatively strong link. The remaining 33 cases are also connected to the picture, but in a more subtle or indirect way. Example (5.31) above represents a case where there is no link to the non-verbal channels, while example (5.32) contains a weak link (cats talking about cats). None of the examples presented so far is linked to the picture in a strong way, but the following one from *Muppets from Space* is, in my opinion:

(5.33) At one point in the film, Gonzo is drawn into outer space. Floating there, he meets two fish who address him with an Indian accent. When he wants to know what they are, they answer:

*We are cosmic knowledge fish. We know many, many things.*

The accent with which the fish speak evokes the voice of an Indian guru or swami and is likely to signal a polysemic pun on *cosmic knowledge* (~ ‘an elevated state of spiritual awareness/knowledge transcending the physical world’ vs. ‘knowledge from and for outer space’). What matters here, however, is the nonce formation *cosmic knowledge fish*. Its second element, *knowledge*, is a prime example of an abstract concept and cannot be depicted directly, but only with the help of symbols such as, perhaps, spectacles or a long beard. This possibility has not been exploited in the scene *Muppets from Space*, yet this is counterbalanced by the fact that the first element of *cosmic knowledge fish* is visually represented in the form of planets, stars and nebulae and the third through the fish-like speakers themselves. While many nonce formations in the corpus are somehow linked to the simultaneously accessible picture, it is unusual that the link is as strong as in (5.33).

As to the other factor I usually take up in the presentation of the SL material, namely whether other characters in the film perceive the utterance as containing language-play, this question must remain open in at least 63 out of the 102 cases, which is a clear majority. The rest of the examples show a relatively even distribution between the overt and the covert types.
The nonce formations in translation

Discussing nonce formations where lexical roots have been combined with normally inappropriate suffixes, Petit (2001:318) claims that these do not constitute insurmountable obstacles to translation since it will be possible to employ the same procedure in the target language. While this claim will not hold true as such for languages whose grammatical properties (e.g. the non-existence of suffixes) preclude the creation of that type of nonce formation, it is quite accurate for the languages involved in the present study. In fact, nonce formations in general, not just the rather unusual kind referred to by Petit, would seem to be more easily translated into a both playful and structurally similar TL counterpart than e.g. puns. It is, after all, much less demanding to combine linguistic elements in a way not seen before, even if certain requirements concerning the semantic content of the resulting structure need to be fulfilled, than it is to achieve a clash of meanings based on a similarity of form.

This circumstance is reflected in the results of the present study, which covers 580 translations of nonce formations, i.e. close to six per SL instance. A relatively clear predominance of translation strategies leading to TL language-play, almost all of which in the form of nonce formations, can already be discerned in Table 5.4. Note that four dubbing solutions, two German and two Swedish ones, had to be excluded from the table because they were impossible to understand.

Table 5.4. Overview of the TL solutions for the Nonce formations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TL lang.-play?</th>
<th>German dubbing</th>
<th>Swedish dubbing</th>
<th>German subtitles</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles</th>
<th>Norw. subtitles</th>
<th>Danish subtitles</th>
<th>Sw. TV subtitles</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>51</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>308</td>
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<td>?</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>71</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>576</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen, the ‘yes’ solutions outnumber the ‘no’ solutions in all combinations of translation mode and target language, even though they do this more clearly in some cases (e.g. the German dubbing) than in others (e.g. the Swedish DVD subtitles). However, had the ten written nonce formations been disregarded in the table, the share of solutions with TL language-play would
have grown in all cases, since this specific subgroup has been left altogether untranslated in a quite consistent fashion in both the dubbed and the subtitle versions. Complete omission of *spoken* nonce formations, by contrast, occurs seldom and is limited to the subtitles.

It is also true that the creation of a type of TL language-play that is altogether different from the SL type, in this case nonce formations, is quite rare and that in this respect, there is no difference to other types of language-play. In general, however, the translation of nonce formations is noteworthy because the distribution between the different translation strategies is still relatively even in comparison (cf. 5.2 for percentages). Direct copying of SL material and creating the same type of language-play without closely imitating the original are both strategies that are employed unusually often in connection with nonce formations, in some versions to about the same degree as the calques and the straightforward translations implying a loss of language-play.

Consider, as a more or less representative example, the distribution for the Swedish dubbing. We leave aside the eleven solutions with an uncertain status, as well as the three cases where there is TL language-play in the same spot as in the original, but only because some aspect of it other than the nonce formation (e.g. a pun) has been preserved or recreated. The two inaudible translations are also disregarded, of course. That leaves us with 86 TL versions of the same number of SL sequences containing nonce formations. Of the translations, 14 contain direct copies of the crucial SL structure, 16 are calques, i.e. imitations of the original idea, but realized with TL material, 13 include nonce formations that are structurally or semantically relatively independent of the original, and 5 feature language-play that belongs to a category other than any of the components of the original language-play. Together, the four strategies mentioned correspond to 48 ‘yes’ solutions. Against these stand 10 complete omissions, which correspond exactly to the 10 written nonce formations, and 28 non-playful translations of the original content – or 38 ‘no’ solutions taken together.

The differences that can be detected between the versions are, as usual, hard to explain with factors that go beyond coincidence and individual translation choices. It is apparently not a question of dubbing vs. subtitling; nor can individual films be made responsible for the moderate discrepancies between, say, the results for the Swedish and the Norwegian subtitles.

As I pointed out, the transfer of source material into the target versions is unusually common when it comes to nonce formations, and even though this leads to dubious results in a number of cases, e.g. because the target audience’s
knowledge of English (or Italian – cf. example (5.32)) may have been overestimated, direct copying works quite well in others. This is true not least when the nonce formations are also ‘nonsense formations’, like the silly epithets mentioned earlier or the idiosyncratic exclamations \textit{Jinkies!} and \textit{Zoinks!}, which are, as far as I know, used exclusively by the 	extit{Scooby-Doo} characters Velma and Shaggy, respectively, and which have been preserved unchanged in a couple of target versions. Outright copying can also be an easy and acceptable solution when the elements of the nonce formation have been borrowed into both the source and the target languages, as is the case, for example, with \textit{Tae kwonodos} (cf. example (4.60) in the previous chapter).

The other translation strategy that is better represented here than in connection with many other types of language-play is the creation of a relatively independent instance that is, however, of the same general type as the SL trigger. While many nonce formations can be copied more or less directly, cases where this is not possible, or perhaps stylistically questionable, do not seem to constitute a big problem, since a new nonce formation can quite easily be made up. Thus, in a scene in \textit{Space Jam} where the Looney Tunes basketball players are introduced as “the Heartthrob of the Hoops”, “the Quackster of the Courts” and “the Doctor of Delight”, among other things, the translators have often resorted to finding comparable epithets that not only feature alliterations like the originals do, but must also be considered nonce formations as much as their SL counterparts, even though the semantic content or the grammatical structure may differ.

With a share of under ten percent of the total, the translation solutions that I consider doubtful with respect to their counting as functional TL language-play are about as common as those triggered by the puns. Most have been given their intermediate status either because they remain too close to the original to be understandable by the target audience or simply because they are situated within the fuzzy border area between playful nonce formations (or other categories of language-play) on the one hand and straightforward, non-playful language use on the other. Finally, no clear pattern emerges when it comes to the impact of the factors ‘link with non-verbal channels’ and ‘acknowledgement by other characters’ on the treatment of nonce formations in dubbing and subtitling.

\textit{Discussion of a particular SL instance and some of its translations}

The instance I have chosen for the concluding discussion of the present section contains one ‘pure’ and one ‘pseudo’ SL nonce formation that are not, as far as
I can see, simultaneously representative of any other category of language-play. *The Big Chill* is quite an established sequence of lexical items, and therefore not a true nonce formation, but it is used as if it were one in the dialogue and also behaves like one in a translation context. The example is remarkable, furthermore, because both these constructs have close counterparts in all of the six target versions included in this study, illustrating how easy it can be to substitute original (real or de facto) nonce formations by structurally and semantically quite similar creations if the nature of the dialogue requires this.

Like most nonce formations, both the regular and the pseudo-specimen taken up here are slightly amusing in themselves, but they also form part of a sequence of jokes that culminates in a polysemic pun. In order not to deprive the reader of the fun, I reproduce the whole original exchange. However, since the focus in this section is on the two ‘nonce formations’ and since, furthermore, the rest of the dialogue is translated more or less literally in all the different target versions, only the crucial TL items of the first sentence, together with their word-for-word back translations into English, are rendered in the excerpt below. It is taken from the beginning of *Ice Age* and actually revolves around the appropriateness of that very name:

(5.34) Two large prehistoric mammals of an indeterminate type migrate south together.

Animal 1: *Why not call it ‘The Big Chill’ or ‘The Nippy Era’? I’m just saying, how do we know it’s an Ice Age?*

Animal 2: (annoyed) *Because – of all – the ICE!*

Animal 1: *Well, things just got a little chillier.*

German dubbing: *Kühle-Wetter-Front* ['Cool Weather Front']/ *Fröstel-Ara* ['Shivering Era']

Swedish dubbing: *Den stora kölden* ['The Big Cold/Chill']/ *Kyliga era* ['The Chilly Era']

German subtitles: *Das große Frieren* ['The Big Freeze']/ *Die Kühlezeit* ['The Chill Age']

Swedish subtitles: *storkölden* ['The Big Chill']/ *frystiden* ['The Freezing Age']

Norwegian subtitles: *Den store kulden* ['The Big Cold/Chill']/ *Hutretiden* ['The Shivering Age']

Danish subtitles: *Den Store Kølige* ['The Big Chilly One']/ *Frosttiden* ['The Frost Age']

As can be seen, all target versions feature two real nonce formations each, which more or less look like the English models and fulfil the same functions. Some are very direct transfers of the SL constructs into TL items (e.g. the two
formations in the Swedish dubbing) and can thus be labelled ‘calques’, while others (like those in the German dubbing) depart a bit more from the exact original content and in doing so represent the translation strategy of creating a comparatively independent instance of TL language-play belonging to the same category as the SL example.

Of course, part of the reason why the two alternative labels for ice age in (5.34) have been preserved or recreated so consistently in the translations is that they are actually an explicit topic of the conversation and that the whole course of the exchange would have to be altered if a translator chose to refrain from creating TL nonce formations. This is an unlikely decision given that it would imply even more work eventually. Another reason why both The Big Chill and The Nippy Era have found close TL counterparts in every translation is that they are so technically simple and that probably none of the translators ever came close to giving up in his or her search for an appropriate TL solution. If puns had been involved, or at least rhyme or alliteration, which is so often the case with nonce formations, at least in my corpus, the creation of a functionally equivalent item would have been more demanding and the task possibly more likely to result in resignation.

5.1.5 Play with grammar

Introduction

Play with grammar is one of the categories that have been created in response to a number of instances from my corpus that represent language-play without fitting neatly into any of the more established categories. The one discussed here is, furthermore, somewhat problematic in so far as it is difficult to define. After all, some grammatical aspect can be said to have been exploited in almost all the examples of language-play that I have identified in my corpus, though in most cases, the rationale behind this is only to make the more prominent feature, e.g. a pun or a rhyme, work as desired. For example, to evoke, in a pun-like manner, more than one of the multiple meanings of bank, among which we find ‘financial institution’ and ‘edge of a river’ (cf. examples (4.7) and (4.8) in chapter 4), a carefully crafted co-text is required where the grammar and the semantic content interact to signal and support the language-play. Likewise, if there is supposed to be a rhyme at the end of two consecutive lines in a song, the sentence or sentences of which the rhyming items form a part will have to fulfil certain criteria concerning length and rhythm, but also, if more indirectly, grammar. In a way, then, the grammar is manipulated in such cases in order to
help achieve a special effect.

Obviously, a language-play category labelled *play with grammar* cannot be based on a very broad definition, as it would be virtually impossible to draw a reasonably objective line between language-play that fits into such a category and language-play that does not. The solution adopted here is to understand it as encompassing cases where the play with grammatical aspects is largely independent of other types of language-play strategies. Put differently, not only is the play with the grammar, as defined here, more than a means to an end: it can, in a given example, be clearly distinguished from any of the other strategies that have been given their own categories in this study.

This decision implies, most notably, that no nonce formations are taken up here, even though many of them appear to be grammatically odd. Especially blends of existing words or complete nonsense formations seem to push the rules of what can be considered grammatically acceptable, but since they do so almost by definition, it would mean to count the same thing twice if these cases were also included here. Yet even nonce formations that are based on an established model can be said to involve a play with grammar if the use of this model is normally restricted to certain semantic fields. Consider the following example:

(5.35) In *My Dog Skip*, Willie compares Skip’s situation with his own:

*I’m an only child, and now you’re an only dog.*

When it comes to *an only dog*, it seems difficult to differentiate between the language-play category of creating a nonce formation and that of playing with the grammar. The sequence INDEFINITE ARTICLE + only + dog appears striking, but is this because we have not encountered it before (whether dogs have siblings or not is not an issue we discuss in the same terms as when the topic is children), or because it is not really grammatically acceptable, or both?

In short, then, many instances of language-play that have a noticeable grammatical aspect to them, like the one in (5.35), have not been taken up here because the overlap with another language-play strategy seems too strong to justify this.

**Number and nature of the SL instances**

Once the restrictions mentioned above were applied, play with grammar became quite a small category in terms of the number of examples it encompasses. In fact, only 13 made the cut, with no more than 3 in any one film, but these still justify the creation of the present category, as I shall try to
show.

It should be pointed out that none of my examples is especially similar in kind to those occasionally presented in the literature as ambiguity resulting from a play with syntax, such as the following one quoted by Chiaro (1992:40):

(5.36) A Scotsman takes all his money out of the bank once a year for a holiday; once it’s had a holiday he puts it back again.

Ross (1998:20ff) and Stanley (2001b:456) discuss related examples and consider them syntactic play, too. Some of them could probably be analyzed as puns, but others, like Chiaro’s joke above, might fit into the present category. However, as indicated, nothing quite like it emerges in any of the eighteen films in my corpus, even though example (5.42), discussed below, has some affinities with this kind of ambiguity.

Of the examples that I was able to identify, three represent what is known as Pig Latin, i.e. a game or, to some speakers, a ‘secret’ language in which the initial consonant(s) in a word are moved to the end and then followed by -ay, so that e.g. pun becomes unpay and wordplay is turned into ordplayway (cf. e.g. Crystal 1998:171). Rules vary when it comes to the length or nature of the words affected (e.g. all the words in a sentence count, or only those written with a minimum of four letters, or only content words) and when it comes to words starting with a vowel, but there seems to be a general agreement as to the basic principle. The result is non-punning language-play par excellence. However, it is not compatible with the idea behind the category of nonce formations or, for that matter, any other of the categories used in this study. Consider two concrete, and interrelated, examples from Monsters, Inc (the third example of this type occurs in Anastasia):

(5.37) Mike and his girlfriend enjoy a dinner at a fancy restaurant when Sulley, carrying a bag, barges in to whisper a shocking secret to Mike.
    Sulley: Ooklay in the agbay!
    Mike: Wbat?
    Sulley: Look in the bag!

In the ‘outtakes’ at the end of the film (cf. section 4.1), we get a supposedly messed-up version of the same exchange.
    Sulley: Looklay in the baglay!
    Mike: I think you mean ‘Ooklay in the agbay’.
    Sulley: Wbat? Didn’t I, uh …
Mike: *Well, you know, maybe you should just take a minute and eadray your iptscray.*

What is interesting about the second version is that it represents a play with the play, as it were, because Sulley makes an unsuccessful attempt at employing the rules of Pig Latin, which is then used as the basis for a joke. In neither exchange do we find language-play strategies other than alterations of word forms (rule-bound in the first, rule-breaking in the second), which I consider a grammatical issue. The most likely candidate for an alternative strategy, the creation of nonce formations, does not apply because *ooklay* and *aglay* are perfectly recognizable and, by speakers of Pig Latin, often-used items that do not denote a new concept. Even *looklay* and *baglay*, representing common mistakes that learners of Pig Latin can be expected to commit, do not constitute nonce formations in the sense the concept is understood in this study.

Two of the other examples of play with grammar also feature a change of word forms, though in these cases it is achieved through the addition of the ending -o to the stem, as in the following excerpt from *Scooby-Doo*:

(5.38) Shaggy and Scooby are eating in their van when somebody whom they would rather not meet is knocking at the door from the outside.

Shaggy: *Quick, Scoobo! Grab the foodo, let’s scramo!*

It is not clear why Shaggy should want to alter the words like he does. It may be a way of displaying his affiliation with a certain group of people (laid-back youths?), but perhaps there is really no ulterior motive, on the level of the narrative, behind his unexpected urge to play with the language in such a situation. Be that as it may, in this example, too, the meaning of the affected items is not changed, and their form only in a simple and regular manner, which precludes their being categorized as nonce formations.170

The remaining seven examples are a mixed bag of phenomena. At least two of them are strongly linked to semantics because lexical items are arranged in such an odd way that part of the resulting propositions seem to be not quite logical. One example is from *The Iron Giant*:

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170 Qvale, after stating that “[o]ne aspect of wordplay [sic] which is often overlooked involves the opportunities in playing with syntax and grammar” (1995:230f), discusses a similar case where a character in the novel *Schlöß Gripsholm* claims that if one has trouble making oneself understood in Sweden, one can speak German and add the suffix -as to the words – and then goes on to exemplify this procedure in “[…] und dieses Sprechas verstehas sie ganz gut” (‘and this speakas they understandas quite well’).
(5.39) Hogarth tells Dean about his personal problems at school and how his well-meaning mother only made things worse:

   So she moved me up a grade because I wasn’t fitting in, so now I’m even more not fitting in. […]

Logically, not fitting in is not something that can be subjected to comparison by having more precede it. Either one fits in or one does not, even if there can be degrees of how well one fits in. That is of course what Hogarth means to say, i.e. that he was not fitting in so well and that it has become even more difficult for him to find his place since then. While it happens that people, without being aware of the incongruity, compare incomparable conditions in informal speech, I think it can be considered a play with the grammar if this occurs in a scripted dialogue that is, furthermore, supposed to be funny (cf. example (5.87) from the same context).

Another small sub-group within the category of Play with grammar can be found in *Shrek*, where Princess Fiona uses antiquated verb forms as part of an attempt to bring her less-than-romantic rescue from the dragon-guarded castle more in line with the kind of scenario described by the troubadours and minnesingers of yore:

(5.40) Expecting Shrek to be a handsome knight rather than an ugly ogre, Fiona asks him to take off his helmet, which he refuses.

   Fiona: *Please, I wouldst like to look at the face of my rescuer.*
   Shrek: *Oh no, you wouldn’t…st.

This example is similar to (5.37) in that we first get an ‘ordinary’ play with the grammar and then, seemingly occasioned by Shrek’s confusion vis-à-vis the for him unfamiliar grammatical form that Fiona had introduced, a play with the play.

None of the examples in this category is linked to the picture in any significant way, which could perhaps be expected since grammar is difficult to depict visually. Moreover, it is unclear in most cases whether the addressees notice that they are being confronted with grammatically odd utterances, though sometimes, as in the last example, they obviously do.

*The SL instances in translation*

The thirteen SL instances correspond to 66 TL solutions. Table 5.5 shows their distribution with respect to their containing language-play:
Table 5.5. Overview of the TL solutions for the Play with grammar.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TL lang.-play?</th>
<th>German dubbing</th>
<th>Swedish dubbing</th>
<th>German subtitles</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles</th>
<th>Norw. subtitles</th>
<th>Danish subtitles</th>
<th>Sw. TV subtitles</th>
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<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen, the figures for most versions indicate that about half of the TL solutions for the original play with grammar contain some language-play, the most notable exception being the Norwegian subtitles, where the 'yes' solutions outnumber the 'no' solutions by 6:1. It must be pointed out, however, that several of the instances for which Norwegian, but also Danish, TL solutions are not available were not rendered as TL language-play in most or even all of the other versions. It is likely, therefore, that the share of 'no' solutions would have been higher for those two subtitle versions if they had covered all thirteen SL instances.

The share of TL solutions where it is doubtful whether they should be counted as featuring language-play is slightly higher than in connection with most other categories of SL language-play. Some of these solutions do not make much sense, which is why they have been given a ‘doubtful’ status, even though an intention to create language-play similar to the original is quite obvious; in other cases, the translation borders on being grammatically unexceptional. Several doubtful choices will be taken up in the discussion of one particular instance at the end of this section.

Of the solutions leading to TL language-play, about half of them rely on the strategy of the more or less direct transfer, as in the German dubbing of excerpt (5.38), which both features the seemingly unmotivated -o endings and remains semantically very close to the English original:

\[(5.41) \text{Äh, schnell, Scoobo, schnapp dir das Fresso, dann hau'n wir abo!}\]

About as common is the strategy of creating a TL play with the grammar that is more independent of the original one, as when the Pig Latin in example (5.37) is turned into Swedish, Norwegian, etc. variants with a different set of rules.

Straightforward transfer leading to a loss of language-play is the third and
last of the strategies that has been employed with any frequency and occurs, among other places, in connection with example (5.39) above. Incidentally, this is also the only example where complete omission can be encountered: probably because of the fast pace with which it is uttered, the Danish and the Swedish subtitlers have left the entire sequence about “not fitting in” untranslated.

Discussion of one particular SL instance and some of its translations

The following example is difficult to analyze and, apparently, not especially easy to transfer into functionally equivalent translations, either. In order to keep the already lengthy excerpt from becoming even longer, I have, in the TL versions, rendered a smaller part of the exchange in which the language-play occurs than in the English original. The Danish subtitles have been omitted entirely because they are structurally very similar to the Swedish ones. Moreover, since no significant semantic changes have been made by the dubbers and subtitlers, back translations will not be necessary in this case, and the differences that are there nonetheless will be taken up in the subsequent discussion.

(5.42) In *Muppets from Space*, the leader of the secret government agency, Singer, thinks that Gonzo knows more about a group of aliens who have been looking for him than he actually does.

Singer: *And they’re coming to Earth, aren’t they?*

Gonzo: *Oh, I don’t know.*

Singer: *How many of them are there?*

Gonzo: *I don’t know.*

Singer: *When will they be here? And don’t you dare tell me that you don’t know!*

Gonzo: *I know not?*

German dubbing: *Und wehe, Sie sagen jetzt zu mir, das wissen Sie auch nicht! Ich nicht wissen.*

Swedish dubbing: *Och våga inte påstå för mig att du inte vet! Jag vet ej?*

German subtitles: *Und wage nicht, mir zu erzählen… *

*…du wüssetest das nicht.*

*Ich habe keine Ahnung?*

Swedish subtitles: *Och våga inte säga till mig - *

*…att du inte vet.*

*Jag inte vet.*

Norwegian subtitles: *Og ikke våg å si… *

*…att du ikke vet det.*

*Jeg ikke vite.*

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Singer believes that Gonzo is lying when he claims not to know the answer to the questions he is asked and therefore warns him not to feign ignorance once more. Gonzo, however, apparently aware of the fact that he is in trouble, but still not willing to deviate from the truth, chooses to interpret Singer’s last sentence so that it is the form, rather than the meaning, of don’t know that Singer objects to. His reply I know not, uttered with a rising intonation as if it were a question, can therefore be seen as a timorous and, to the audience, preposterous or even funny, attempt at pleasing the angry man in whose power he finds himself.

We are actually dealing with language-play on two levels here. First, with respect to Singer’s threat, what appears to be an unambiguous sentence is interpreted in an utterly unexpected way, which is possible because in constructions of the type don’t tell/say/write/etc. X, X can be understood as primarily a form or primarily a proposition. In most contexts, and certainly the one we are dealing with here, the second reading would seem to be the only plausible one, which is why Gonzo’s alternative interpretation is so striking. In some ways, this part of the language-play functions like a pun, though grammar and pragmatics also play important roles. Second, the sentence I know not is not in accordance with the current rules of English grammar. Quirk et al. refer to this sort of negation as “archaic or facetiously archaic usage” (1985:122), which would imply that its occurrence in a modern family film about, among other things, space aliens is likely to represent language-play.

The translators have all tried to preserve at least some element of the original language-play, though the results differ from each other. In the Swedish dubbing and the German subtitles, the focus is entirely on the first of the two aspects outlined above. Gonzo’s last line in the these versions, Jag vet ej (‘I don’t know’) and Ich habe keine Ahnung (‘I have no idea’), respectively, are both grammatically unexceptional, even though ej (‘not’) is stylistically more marked in Swedish than the synonymous inte. Thus, as far as the language-play is concerned, only the double reading of Singer’s warning has been transferred.

In the other three TL versions reproduced in (5.42), Gonzo’s final reply has been turned into grammatically downright wrong, i.e. not just archaic, constructions. In the Swedish subtitles, the order of the verb and the negator has been reversed. This is also the case in the German dubbing and the Norwegian subtitles where, moreover, the infinitive rather than the appropriate present tense form have been employed. The results are reminiscent of stereotypical immigrant or learner language. The problem is that this solution does not make much sense if the previous utterance is taken into account. This
is especially true of the Swedish subtitles, where Singer’s line ends with a well-ordered *att du inte vet* (word for word: ‘that you not know’) and Gonzo answers with the ungrammatical *jag inte vet* (‘I not know’), which, apart from the subject, has exactly the same form as what Singer says he does not want to hear.

In the original dialogue, both the word order and the verb form are the same in the that-clause employed by Singer and the preceding two utterances of Gonzo’s. In the target languages considered here, the order of verb and negator changes in what would correspond to a that-clause in English. That may be why the German translator has actually avoided employing a that-clause, so that there is a difference in word order between Singer’s utterance and Gonzo’s ungrammatical reply. On the other hand: the verb form going together with the German polite form of address, *Sie*, coincides phonetically and orthographically with the infinitive *wissen* (‘know’), which is why the use of the latter instead of the correct *weiß* in Gonzo’s answer is rather unfortunate. It is more defensible in Norwegian, where the infinitive *vite* is different from all finite forms of the verb, including the *vet* used by Singer, though in this translation, the order of verb and negator remains the same across the utterances.

To sum up, we are dealing here with a number of TL solutions that are obviously meant to be playful, but that are rather incongruent and therefore more confusing than funny, which must have been the aim. These have been conferred a ‘doubtful’ status in my analysis. The German subtitle and Swedish dubbing solutions, by contrast, function better as a language-play even though they make do without grammatical oddities in the punch line.

5.1.6 Sentences ending in unexpected ways

Introduction

In this section, we are dealing with another one of those categories that have been devised specifically for the present study in order to accommodate a number of sequences in the films that must be considered language-play, but that would not be adequately or sufficiently described by one of the more established labels. What the examples taken up here have in common is, as the name of the category indicates, that a sentence ends differently from what the addressee, or sometimes even the speaker him- or herself, must have expected at the beginning or after the first words. More precisely, since speakers and addressees in feature films are only fictional characters whose behaviour and utterances are controlled by scriptwriters, directors and others, it is what these characters *seem to* have expected and, ultimately, what the real-life audience is
made to expect, that matters.

Of course, we may very often have certain expectations concerning what others are about to say – only to be confronted with more or less deviant formulations or even contents. It also happens that we as speakers change our intended utterances at the last moment, e.g. when we suddenly decide to tell a lie instead of the truth or vice versa, or when we realize just in time that some intended comment would be utterly inappropriate and finish it with uh, never mind or something similar. I do not normally consider such cases to represent language-play. However, in scripted dialogues such as those in feature films, a playful intention on the part of the writers can be postulated when the end of a sentence or sequence of sentences contrasts sharply with, or is even opposed to, what one was led to expect or with what the speaker apparently had intended to say at the outset.

A couple of examples will help to illustrate the nature of the present category, but it should first be pointed out that the language-play strategy of having a sentence end in a surprising way can obviously occur together with other strategies (cf. e.g. (4.23) and (4.25). In a few instances, it is precisely this other strategy, e.g. a pun, that constitutes the surprising ending, but since the definitions of the other categories do not tend to specify the place at which the strategy may be employed, I have chosen to count the instances concerned both here and as belonging to the respective other categories. The only exception I make is with modified expressions (section 5.1.2) where the modification, which is usually surprising ipso facto, occurs at the end. Under these circumstances, the overlap appears too strong, and the cases affected are thus not included in the present section.

As an example of a sentence that ends in an unexpected way and that is included as language-play in this category, consider first a very clear case from The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle:

(5.43) At the beginning of the film, the narrator gives a brief account of the events in 1964, finishing by saying that after five years on the air, the Rocky & Bullwinkle Show has been cancelled. He then goes on to outline the present situation, accompanied by corresponding pictures:

A lot has changed in 35 years: Velcro has replaced the zipper. Sneakers have lights on them. The Cold War is over. And the Rocky & Bullwinkle Show (rising intonation, followed by ‘meaningful’ pause while Rocky and Bullwinkle dance into the picture) – is still cancelled! (Rocky and Bullwinkle are quickly pulled off the stage).
Disregarding the absurdity of putting sneakers with lights on them and the end of the Cold War on an equal footing, part of the humour contained in this sequence derives from the fact that everything, from the parallel narrative structures and the mentioning of changes to the speaker’s intonation and the significant pause, points in one direction, namely that the Rocky & Bullwinkle Show is no longer cancelled. Yet what we get, eventually, is the exact opposite, i.e. a confirmation that no change has, in fact, taken place in the film, most crucial respect. This renders the sequence a case of language-play, which is, furthermore, strongly supported and signalled by the simultaneously accessible pictorial information.

A few instances are included in this category where a sentence begun by one speaker is completed by someone else so that the actually expressed meaning deviates significantly from what was originally intended. Here is an example from *Chicken Run*:

(5.44) Mrs. Tweedy has decided that she and her husband should switch over from being egg farmers to producing chicken pies. Mr. Tweedy is not too fond of the idea.

Mr. Tweedy: *But we've always been egg farmers. Me father, and his father, and all their fathers, they was always –*

Mrs. Tweedy: *– poor worthless nothings!*

Although the exact phrasing can only be guessed, it is quite obvious that Mr. Tweedy intended to finish his turn by saying, rather redundantly, that his family have always earned their living by producing and selling eggs. Mrs. Tweedy, however, cuts in and points to some related, but, in terms of connotations, quite different characteristics of her husband’s ancestors, namely their lack of financial means and social status. Since she does so by continuing the sentence already initiated by Mr. Tweedy, rather than by beginning a new one, the example fits quite squarely into the present category.

**Number and nature of the SL instances**

Sentences ending in unexpected ways is not a big category of language-play in my corpus. In fact, only 20 cases could be found, and three of these, adhering to the same basic principle of exclamation + subsequent modification, follow each other closely in a dramatic scene in *The Iron Giant*, which is superficially similar to (5.11):

(5.45) At dinner, Hogarth is asked by his mother to say grace. As he
reluctantly folds his hands, the giant's metal hand is suddenly appearing behind the mother's back, and Hogarth, who wants to keep the giant a secret, is torn between screaming out in desperation and pretending that all is well:

Hogarth: Oh, my God! (gathering his senses) Oh, my God, we thank you … for the … food that Mom has put in front of us and — (the metal hand is about to turn over a pot on the stove) STOP! – the, uh, the devil … from doing bad things and – (losing patience with the hand) GET OUTTA HERE! – uh, Satan? – GO! – Go, so that we may live in peace. Amen.

Mother: Amen. – That was, hm, really unusual, Hogarth.

The initial play with *Oh, my God!* is reminiscent of that in example (5.7) and also subsumed under the same category of language-play. What is of interest here, by contrast, are the next three exclamations, written in capital letters in the excerpt, and their subsequent modifications in the form of a direct object, a vocative and a subordinate clause of result, respectively. Implicitly or explicitly, these modifications suggest addressees, namely God and the devil, that are, in the context of religious practice, more appropriate than a robotic hand. If the speaker were a real person, even he himself would probably have felt surprised at having stumbled upon these linguistic loopholes at the last second.

The other examples in this category do not occur in bundles like the ones from *The Iron Giant* and are distributed across another eight films, which implies that I have detected no examples in half of the eighteen films in the corpus. Among those where I did find something are *Antz* with four instances, and *Chicken Run*, *Shrek*, and *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle* with three instances each. In only four of the twenty cases does a speaker other than the initiator of the crucial sentence finish it in an unexpected way, and two of these are reproduced as examples (5.44) above and (5.46) below.

In nine of the cases, a clear link to the picture can be said to exist, as in examples (5.43) and (5.45), while no link of this kind is detectable in the remaining cases, among them example (5.44). It can also be noted that in half of the instances, it remains unclear whether other characters in the film notice that the language has been played with; in five of the other instances, this seems to be the case, while it can be ruled out in the remaining five instances, including the three in example (5.45).171

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171 In (5.45), the mother does find Hogarth’s prayer strange, but she never understands how her son is actually manipulating the language and, ultimately, herself.
The instances of SL language-play in translation

The 20 SL instances correspond to quite exactly five TL solutions each on average, or 104 TL solutions in total. As can be seen in Table 5.6, where one Swedish dubbing solution had to be left out because it was inaudible, we are dealing here with the category of language-play that has, if compared to the other categories used in this study, most often triggered TL language-play.

Table 5.6. Overview of the TL solutions for the Sentences ending etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TL lang.-play?</th>
<th>German dubbing</th>
<th>Swedish dubbing</th>
<th>German subtitles</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles</th>
<th>Norw. subtitles</th>
<th>Danish subtitles</th>
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</table>

It is quite striking that there are only four translations out of more than a hundred where it is obvious that the original language-play has been lost, and even if one counts the one dozen doubtful cases as partial losses, the predominance of the ‘yes’ solutions is unusually strong. Obviously, this has to do with the fact that preserving the kind of language-play that is at issue here poses no real problem and can normally be achieved through a more or less direct transfer of the source-language utterance into the target language. That is also what has happened in the clear majority of cases.

All but one of the TL solutions that are doubtful with respect to their featuring language-play also stem from rather uncreative and straightforward translations, which, however, have turned out to be somewhat problematic in one way or the other. Consider the German dubbing of an instance from *Rugrats in Paris:*

(5.46) In order to convey the entirely incorrect picture of a child-loving woman to Chas, Mme LaBouche says that she wants to take her assistant Kira’s little girl to the amusement park. Kira is surprised.

Kira: *But Madame, you never –*
LaBouche: *– tire of taking care of your daughter.*
German dubbing: *Aber Madame, Sie waren –*
    *– immer für Ihre Tochter da.* *[But Madame, you have – always been there for your daughter.]*
The difference between the two versions appears slight, but it is important. In the four words Kira manages to utter in the English original before Labouche cuts in, there are two signals (but and never) suggesting that she wants to say something along the lines that Labouche never cared about the little girl before. In the German dubbing, only the but has been preserved in the form of aber, while the rest of Kira’s words are completely neutral and do not lead to any particular expectations concerning the rest of the sentence. The contrast between the beginning and the end of the sentence is therefore not as strong and language-play-like in the German version as in the English one.

Several subtitle versions of sentences ending in unexpected ways have been labelled ‘doubtful’ because of an unfortunate segmentation. Consider the following example from Chicken Run:

(5.47) In a seductive and touching speech, and by painting a bright and happy future for all, Ginger has urged her fellow chickens not to give up their hopes of escaping from the farm. Afterwards, the chickens are visibly moved. Bunty is the first to find words:

(mild voice) In all my life I have never heard such a fantastic ...

(screaming angrily) LOAD OF TRIPÉ!

Norwegian subtitles: *Jeg har aldri i mitt liv hort noe så utrolig...dustete.

Danish subtitles: *Jeg har aldrig hort noget, der lød så fantastisk ... torskedumt!

The meaning of the two subtitle versions is quite close to their English counterpart, and also the play with the connotations of fantastic can be said to have its equivalents there. Even the short, but significant pause before the eventual outburst has found a written expression in the three dots,\textsuperscript{172} and the Danish version also features an exclamation mark. Still, the original effect is largely spoilt by the fact that the end of the sentence is revealed together with its beginning. Whether a viewer relies exclusively on the subtitles for an understanding of the film or just glances at them for support while basically concentrating on the spoken dialogue, the surprising end of the utterance is accessible so early, especially to fast readers, that there is not enough time to build up the expectations that make the playful clash with the final words possible in the first place. It would have been a much more appropriate solution to save the respective translations of load of tripe for a second subtitle.

\textsuperscript{172} In the Norwegian translation of example (5.43), where this would have been just as appropriate, the pause has not been transferred, rendering the solution in question even more doubtful with respect to its containing TL language-play.
that is displayed only after the pause. (That this is feasible is confirmed by the corresponding Swedish subtitles, which are not reproduced here, however.)

Moving back from the doubtful translation solutions to the general picture, it remains to be pointed out explicitly that possible links between the playful utterances and the picture or the overt-covert distinction cannot be shown to play a role when it comes to the strategies adopted by the translators in connection with sentences ending in unexpected ways. The large majority of cases were transferred quite directly into the target language, regardless of their extra-linguistic properties, and even the four ‘no’ cases are a heterogeneous group in this respect.

Discussion of a particular SL instance and some of its translations
The example I have chosen for the final discussion in this section illustrates that the translation of sentences ending in unexpected ways is not always as easy as it may seem and that different solutions may vary in quality. It also gives me an opportunity to illustrate once more that we are dealing with a category of genuine language-play here.

(5.48) In Shrek, Princess Fiona gets an opportunity to display her exceptional skills in martial arts when she single-handedly defeats Robin Hood and his merry men in a fight. When asked about this by Shrek, she explains:

Well, when one lives alone one has to learn these things in case there is a (notices something) – there is an arrow in your butt!

German dubbing: Weißt du, wenn man alleine lebt, dann muss man Dinge lernen für den Fall, dass einer – ein Pfeil im Hintern steckt!

Swedish dubbing: Ja, när man bor ensam måste man kunna sånt där om det skulle bli så att – det sitter en pil i baken!

German subtitles: *Wenn man alleine lebt, muss man das lernen, falls…

*-Du hast 'nen Pfeil im Hintern!

Swedish subtitles: *När man lever ensam måste man lära sig sånt ifall…

*-Du har en pil i rumpan!

The translations all remain semantically close to the original, but there are small differences that make some versions function better than others in so far as they feature a smoother and more natural transition from the calmly spoken first half of Fiona’s utterance (that leads to certain expectations concerning the second half) and the utterly unexpected exclamation that contrasts in a funny
way with what went before.

In fact, the transition in the Swedish versions is even a little bit smoother than in the English original where the exclamation part is initiated with words that were already uttered once before. Grammatically, the Swedish exclamations fit perfectly together with the preceding words, without any repetitions being necessary and despite the fact that in the subtitles, the unexpected ending is written like a new, independent sentence. It seems, actually, as if the Swedish translators, and perhaps especially the dubbers, have consciously crafted the respective beginning of the utterance so that the continuation is both smooth and, because of that, particularly striking.

The German translations do not work quite as well. In fact, the subtitles in that language represent one of the four cases that I have counted as a loss of language-play because the first sentence is not actually finished. It is interrupted and followed by a new sentence that, because of its main clause word order, could not be understood as the end of the previous one. This makes it difficult to claim that in order to achieve a specific effect, the linguistic system has been exploited – or at least that it has been exploited in the same sophisticated and playful manner as in e.g. the Swedish versions. As to the German dubbing, I have, somewhat reluctantly, accepted it as containing language-play, even though the end of the utterance is completely implausible as a genuine exclamation. Still, we are dealing with a sentence that ends in a way that contrasts strongly with what the beginning suggested.

5.1.7 Rhymes

**Introduction**

Rhyme is perhaps the kind of language-play that the largest number of people have a clear understanding of and that can most easily be identified by the person in the street without any previous theoretical considerations. In fact, as has been pointed out by e.g. Crystal (1998:165ff) and Tucker (1998:67), children appreciate rhymes and start rhyming themselves from a surprisingly early age, in what seems to be a normal stage in their language acquisition process. Within a few years, they also become aware of the rules for what can be accepted as a true rhyme and what must be dismissed as imperfect rhymes. In rhyming bouts, rhymes between established words (*light* – *night*) rate higher than rhymes where nonce-formations are involved (*light* – *shnight*), and autorhymes (*light* – *light*), which may be suggested by younger children in an attempt to enter the game, are not looked upon kindly.
Adults also rhyme, for example when composing songs and verses. In fact, since the Renaissance, rhyme has been established “as, for many people, the defining feature of both verse and poetry” (Cuddon 1998:750f). We know a rhyme when we see one, and whenever we feel the urge to write a non-serious poem or write a new song to be performed at a social gathering, it is likely to be rhymed. Furthermore, some formulaic jokes rely on rhymes (cf. Nash 1985:50ff), and a simple quip will become more memorable if it involves this kind of language-play, too.

Rhymes do not always need to be original creations, however. They can occur in established expressions like idioms (e.g. the name of the game or lock, stock and barrel) or proverbs, as in the German Morgenstund hat Gold im Mund (literally ‘morning hour has gold in the mouth’, which is more or less equivalent to ‘the early bird catches the worm’). Rhymes also make an appearance in many lexical formations, as in the examples provided by Delabastita (1993:67): “hifi, walkie-talkie, flower-power, downtown, double-trouble, meals on wheels, snail mail, sweetmeat, fun run, etc.” When we use or are exposed to such often heard expressions and lexemes, most of which have made it into dictionaries a long time ago, we may hardly be aware of their featuring a rhyme.

What is called ‘full’ (or ‘perfect’) rhyme is thus a common phenomenon, but it is unusual for a category of language-play in that it is defined in relatively straightforward and widely accepted terms, and in that it is not very fuzzy as a concept (as will be seen, fuzziness is an inherent property of a closely related category, namely half-rhymes). Two words or strings of words rhyme if at least the last stressed vowel and all following sounds are identical. In languages where spelling and pronunciation mirror each other closely, the final letters in rhyming pairs will also tend to be identical, but in theory, spelling does not play a role for the presence or absence of a rhyme. Chew, shoe, loo and glue thus rhyme with each other as much as with new, canoe, moo and true.

In these eight words, the last stressed vowel happens to coincide with the last sound, but what is generally considered to be a more decisive distinguishing criterion is whether the last stressed vowel occurs in the last syllable. Rhymes based on items where that is the case are referred to as ‘masculine’. Peek – bleak is therefore also a masculine rhyme, despite the final consonant. If there is an unstressed syllable following the stressed one, however, the rhyme is called ‘feminine’, as in flying – sighing or vibration – celebration. Where not only the last stressed vowel and all following sounds are identical between rhyming items, but also one or more sounds preceding the stressed vowel, as in the last of the

173 See Sornig (1995:171) for another list, based on a compilation by Flexner & Wentworth.
above examples, or as in jailhouse rock – jailhouse block, we are dealing with so-called ‘rime riche’. However, “the repeated sounds coming before the accent are said to reinforce the rhyme and are not part of it”, according to Attardo (1994:160).

It is interesting that people can have different attitudes towards masculine and feminine rhymes. Nilsen (1979:138) more or less explicitly says that feminine rhyme is a sign of greater sophistication, while Nash (1985:157) speaks of “the tendency towards banality in masculine rhyme and the danger of stilted contrivance in the feminine pattern”. Such views may have to do with the fact that feminine rhyme is much rarer, at least in English, than masculine, which Nash (1985:156f) also points out. Furthermore, feminine rhyme between single lexemes requires that these consist of at least two syllables, and longer lexemes tend to imply a more elevated level of formality and style than monosyllables. I am not sure, however, whether masculine rhymes per se can be said to be less sophisticated or more banal than their feminine counterparts. In my opinion, the effect depends mostly on the context, the choice of words, including their semantic relationship, and the overall pattern and rhythm of the surrounding co-text.

Apropos semantic relationships, Attardo (1994:160f) claims that there is a noteworthy semantic component to rhymes, in particular “that the rhyme effect is stronger the more semantically distant the two rhyming words are” (1994:161). Attardo suggests, in essence, that this is so because we tend to see, consciously or not, a link between sound and sense, and that a rhyme, i.e. formal similarity, between semantically distant items functions as a sudden reminder that the sound/sense link is, for the most part, nothing but a coincidence. I am not entirely convinced of the premises upon which these speculations rest, as I can find it more striking that semantically overlapping items like float and boat rhyme than that great and plate do the same (both examples are from my corpus). Perhaps I am too much of a linguist here. I have chosen, in any case, not to pursue such considerations further and to focus on the formal aspects of rhyming instead. After all, my corpus is not designed to measure and take into account the effects that the instances of language-play may have on the addressees. Furthermore, semantic clashes were established to be relatively or completely unimportant in rhymes (cf. the introduction to chapter 4), which fact functions as the main criterion for distinguishing rhymes from puns.

That is not to say that the two categories are not related. In fact, rhymes are part of a large, heterogeneous group of linguistic strategies similar enough
to punning for Delabastita to refer to them as “punoids” (1993:207) or “related rhetorical device[s]” (1996:134). I think these terms are basically just another way of expressing the relationships that led me to treat puns and rhymes (and similar phenomena) under a common umbrella term, i.e. ‘language-play’.

Amount of SL rhymes in the corpus

Rhymes constitute the category of language-play with the highest number of occurrences in my corpus, narrowly beating polysemic puns, although the latter type is spread out over more independent instances of language-play. After all, rhymes, unlike puns, tend to appear in clusters, and especially in songs and poems it can happen that more than two items are made to rhyme with each other, in which case I have counted the appearance of every new rhyming word as a new rhyme (cf. example (3.2) in 3.1.3.5 and example (5.50) below for an illustration).

As Table 5.7 shows, there are, all in all, 213 ‘clear’ rhymes plus 8 cases where there is a rhyme, but where it is doubtful whether this was intended by the filmmakers or is due to coincidence. All of the doubtful cases are masculine, as are the large majority of the clear ones, outnumbering the feminine variety by almost 6:1. None of the rhymes are written; all are spoken or sung.

Table 5.7. Instances of SL rhymes in the corpus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category and status</th>
<th>masculine</th>
<th>feminine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>clear</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doubtful</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>221</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rime riche, i.e. rhyme with a partial formal overlap preceding the last stressed vowel is rare with only six instances, none of which is particularly striking. Two of the examples are almost identical, in that they are based on ground versus round in one case and ground versus around in the other.

In all the films taken together, 29 songs or excerpts from songs have been included in the analysis according to the criteria outlined in 3.3.4. Of these, eight occur in Rugrats in Paris, seven in Anastasia and five in Monsters, Inc. Since all of the songs are rhymed, it is in the three films mentioned that most of the rhymes in the corpus can be found, with Anastasia standing out especially: 90 clear rhymes appear in the comparatively long and well-crafted songs of that film, in addition to just one clear and one doubtful case in the ordinary dialogue. Mouse Hunt and The Indian in the Cupboard are the only films where I
could not detect any rhymes.

Some of the rhymes that are not part of a song nevertheless occur in contexts that are similar to songs because they, too, are characterized by some degree of formality or are, in any case, not part of run-of-the-mill conversation. In example (5.49) from Shrek, we are dealing with what could be described as a spell, or perhaps a prophecy:

(5.49) Princess Fiona quotes a couple of lines that describe her fate:

“By night one way, by day another. This shall be the norm . . .
Until you find true love’s first kiss . . . and then take true love’s true form.”

Poems have already been mentioned as a text type that tends to involve rhyme. The one in (5.50), from The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle, is no exception. It features what I count as two rhymes, even though only three rhyming words are brought into play:

(5.50) Bullwinkle is told that there is no time for him to accept in person the honorary degree that his old alma mater wishes to bestow upon him. He reacts with a spontaneously composed four-liner:

Oh, woe is me
I must have my degree
I’ll put it on the wall
For everyone to see

Example (5.51), finally, is the motto and commercial slogan of Monsters, Inc, from the film with the same title:

(5.51) We scare because we care.

Not all of the rhymes in my corpus occur in such special contexts, however. No less than 37 of the clear rhymes crop up in more or less straightforward speech. Among other things, they can be incorporated into silly epithets given to some characters by others. This happens in Scooby-Doo, Ice Age and a few other films. In Monsters, Inc, three such constructs appear closely together:

(5.52) On the way to their jobs at Monsters, Inc, Mike and Sulley stop by the reception desk where Mike’s girlfriend Celia is working.

Mike: Happy birthday!
Celia: Oh, Googly-woogly, you remembered! – (to Sulley) Hey, Sulley-wulley.
Sulley: Oh, hey, Celia … -elia?

Otherwise, there is little that combines the rhymes occurring outside of songs and other special linguistic environments such as those mentioned. Most seem to represent spontaneous language-play, apparently employed for no other reason than that the opportunity was there. Occasionally, rhymes may be used to make the speaker look cool, or to convey that s/he is trying to be cool, as in (5.53) and (5.54):

(5.53) In *Chicken Run*, the rooster Rocky is supposed to teach the chickens how to fly. After a day of failed attempts, Ginger is disappointed, but Rocky thinks everything will work out fine.
Rocky: Sleep tight, Angelface. The Rock’s on the case.

(5.54) Before the decisive basketball match in *Space Jam*, the players encourage themselves and each other.
Daffy Duck: I’m set to take it to the rack, Jack!

It may be interesting to note that while masculine rhymes are much more common in songs and similar contexts, the feminine rhymes are quite evenly distributed between such special contexts on the one hand, and more or less ordinary utterances on the other.

Finally, a word about the external relationships of the rhymes: in connection with the puns I presented statistics on their links with non-verbal channels and on other characters’ awareness of the language-play, but it is hardly necessary to do the same when it comes to rhymes. Suffice it to say that very few of them are linked directly to the picture and that when they are, the link tends to be weak and should not stand in the way for semantically completely unrelated TL solutions.

As to the overt-covert distinction, it does not seem very meaningful either, as most rhymes occur in songs and it is generally unclear whether the film-internal audience, if there is one, notices the rhymes, even though it could be assumed. Where characters are singing to themselves, the rhymes can only be covert and where two or more characters are singing together, all of them should be aware of what they are doing with the language. Still, all this is no reason to treat the songs differently in translation. As far as the rhymes outside of songs and similar contexts are concerned, it is in almost all cases unclear whether the addressees within the film have noticed them or not.
Doubtful SL rhymes

Apart from the kind of phonological overlap that falls within the definition given earlier, and the absence of a clash of meanings, which is characteristic of puns, the only other criterion that needs to be fulfilled in order for me to include a text sequence in the present category is that it is reasonably obvious that the rhyme was inserted in the text on purpose. I thereby adopt the translator's point of view, since only intended rhymes are true language-play and need to be considered as such. In this respect, rhymes resemble puns and all the other categories of language-play dealt with in this study.

Of course, when we go beyond the comparatively clear rules that govern the minimally required extent of formal overlap between lexical items, the ground is not so firm anymore, and there are some cases in my material where I am in doubt as to the filmmakers’ intention. Whenever two rhyming items stand in the vicinity of each other, and especially when they appear in exposed spots such as at the end of two consecutive lines of song or poetry, it is quite likely that this is no coincidence, but when rhymes appear in conversation, it can occasionally be as hard to gauge the intention behind them as it can with potential puns.

Three rhymes are doubtful in this respect partly because the utterances ending with the rhyming words are separated from each other by a noticeable break. Example (5.55) from *Scooby-Doo* is a case in point:

(5.55) Scooby’s soul, in the form of a ghost-like face, has been released from captivity and is very happy about this. ‘Soul’: I’m free! (interval of 3-4 seconds during which the face giggles and makes noises) Look at me!

Even if the interval had not been there, one could not be certain about this rhyme, but the intervening seconds certainly reinforce the doubts.

In other cases, there is nothing special in the situation or in what the characters are saying, nor is there any obvious reason why the characters should be made to rhyme. Still, there is a rhyme. Consider example (5.56):

(5.56) In *Antz*, the ant Z (pronounced /zi/\) is walking away from Bala.

Bala: Z! Z! Wait for me!

Of course, Bala could just as well have shouted *Wait!* instead of *Wait for me!*, which nevertheless seems very natural in the context. Sometimes, the most obvious lexical choices lead to rhymes without the speaker’s wishing this or
The last doubtful example I want to take up involves two speakers and is noteworthy for that reason alone (except in duets, both rhyming items tend to be uttered by the same character).

(5.57) In *Muppets from Space*, Rizzo has been captured by a secret government agency. He ends up in a cage and is introduced to the other prisoners, who seem to have spent a long time behind bars. Among them is the unhealthy-looking Ed.

Rizzo: How you doin’, Ed?
Ed: Well, I ain’t dead.

Ed’s reply does not look forced in the context and could function as an expression of desperation or even as a grim joke. Again, it cannot be ruled out, therefore, that the last words of question and answer, respectively, rhyme by mere coincidence.

**Special cases**

Most of the rhymes in my corpus are quite unremarkable. A few, however, may deserve a comment, for different reasons. For example, there are two cases, one in *Anastasia* (5.58) and one in *Antz* (5.59), though both in songs, where monosyllables are made to rhyme with trisyllables. This is possible because the stress of the latter has been moved from the first syllable, its ordinary position, to the last one:

(5.58) It’s one, two, three – and suddenly […]

(5.59) We ants go marching three by three, hurrah, hurrah
Hurrah, hurrah
We’re off to face our destiny, hurrah, hurrah

There is no doubt that the items in question, i.e. *three* – *suddenly* and *three* – *destiny*, are meant to rhyme. In fact, what we are dealing with here is what Cuddon (1998:751) refers to as ‘wrenched rhyme’. In the following case from *Monsters, Inc*, not only has the stress pattern of the rhyming word been altered, also one phoneme has been exchanged in order to achieve a very forced rhyme:

(5.60) At the end of the film, the employees of Monsters, Inc stage a musical depicting the events that almost plunged the entire city of Monstropolis into chaos. Mike is singing:
What in heaven’s name will become of us
We who are living in Monstropolis?

The musical is very tacky and shows all the signs of amateurism, including the apparent conviction on the part of the producers that the quality of the songs increases with the number of (true) rhymes. It also confirms what has been claimed in the introduction to this section, namely that compositions of this kind are likely to be rhymed.

Dialects and accents also play a role when it comes to rhymes, because what rhymes for one speaker may not do so for another. The following excerpt from a song in Anastasia illustrates this:

\[(5.61)\]  
\[
\text{(5.61) Forget where you’re from}
\]
\[
\text{You’re in France, children come}
\]
\[
[\ldots]
\]
\[
\text{You’ll stroll two by two}
\]
\[
\text{Down what we call la rue}
\]
\[
\text{And soon all Paris will be singing to you}
\]

In the first two lines, from and come rhyme because the character, though she is supposed to be French, is singing in American English. Due to diverging vowels in e.g. RP (/ʊ/ vs. /ʌ/), the two items could only have been part of a half-rhyme in that dialect, not a rhyme. In the last three lines of the excerpt, there are two rhymes rather than just the one between two and you because the French words *la rue* have been pronounced with a /u/ instead of a more authentic /y/. This is quite ironic given the preceding what we [i.e. the French] call, but in line with the American pronunciation of the French name for Paris in the subsequent line.

In this context it can be mentioned, finally, that there are two rhymes in my corpus, from the Rugrats movie, that are not between English words at all, but spoken in French in Paris. One is between *oui* ‘yes’ and *ami* ‘friend’, and the other between *chéri* ‘darling’ and *oui*, i.e. words that people with moderate proficiency in French can easily recognize. No harm is done, however, if that proficiency has not been developed, as is likely to be the case with e.g. the youngest segments of the original target audience, because the utterances add nothing to the plot.

*The SL rhymes in translation*

799 translations of the 213 clear SL rhymes have been included in the corpus,
i.e. less than four per rhyme on average. This low figure is mostly due to the fact that so many rhymes occur in the songs in Anastasia, of which I could generally use only two translations because the subtitle versions are just transcripts of the dubbing in the same language. Furthermore, the 19 rhymes in El Dorado correspond to only three translations each. As to the eight doubtful cases, 44 TL versions have been considered, which yields an average that is more in line with e.g. the results for the puns.

The main question is of course what has happened to the rhymes in the translations, and Table 5.8 ought to be a good starting point in an attempt to answer it. The table is structured in the same way as those used for the puns in chapter 4, except that the vertical-horizontal distinction, which does not apply here, has given way to a distinction along the lines of masculine vs. feminine rhymes (abbreviated mas and fem). 13 translations, of which 7 in the German and 6 in the Swedish dubbing, could not be included in the table because I could not understand them acoustically. Findings going beyond and deeper than the figures shown here will be presented below.

Table 5.8. Overview of the TL solutions for the clear Rhymes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TL lang. play?</th>
<th>German dubbing</th>
<th>Swedish dubbing</th>
<th>German subtitles</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles</th>
<th>Norw. subtitles</th>
<th>Danish subtitles</th>
<th>Sw. TV subtitles</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mas fem</td>
<td>mas fem</td>
<td>mas fem</td>
<td>mas fem</td>
<td>mas fem</td>
<td>mas fem</td>
<td>mas fem</td>
<td>mas fem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A number of things are noteworthy in Table 5.8, among them the fact that the dubbed versions, and especially the Swedish ones for masculine rhymes, have a much higher share of ‘yes’ solutions than the subtitle versions. The figures for the German, Swedish and Danish DVD subtitles are quite similar to each other, while the Norwegian DVD and the Swedish TV subtitles behave differently from the rest.174

What the table does not show, and this is where a large part of the explanation for the differences between dubbing and subtitling can be found, is that rhymes occurring in songs, poems, etc. are much more often translated as

174 The TV solutions are too few to be representative. Four of them are omissions that result from a decision to leave two songs in Antz completely untranslated.
language-play than rhymes occurring in ordinary dialogue. Almost all the songs are covered by both the German and the Swedish dubbing, but many songs, most notably the long ones in *Anastasia*, have not been translated independently by subtitlers. This means that the figures for the subtitle versions include proportionately more translations of spontaneous rhymes in conversation, and these are perhaps not considered as important to turn into TL rhymes as those in songs. It is also possible that rhymes in songs are more often noticed in the first place because they are expected to occur there, but not normally in spoken language.

I have no explanation for why the Swedish dubbing features more language-play than the German dubbing. There are no consistent differences in how rhymes have been treated in the two languages, and when it comes to the feminine rhymes, the ‘yes’ figure is actually higher for the German versions. The strong predominance of ‘no’ solutions in the Norwegian subtitles, on the other hand, can basically be traced back to the subtitling of one particular film, namely *Rugrats in Paris*, where the subtitler has made no discernible effort to produce a rhyming TL version of the songs and poems that are part of it, even though a semantically equivalent translation is, in fact, provided. In the other films, the Norwegian subtitles are not very different from those in other languages, with respect to the treatment of rhymes, and even in *Rugrats in Paris*, there is the occasional (successful) attempt at creating TL language-play where there is some in the dialogues. It is not quite as odd as it may seem, therefore, that feminine rhymes, of which there are just two in all the *Rugrats* songs and poems, are turned into TL language-play more often in the Norwegian subtitles than in any other subtitle version.

When I speak of ‘turning rhymes into TL language-play’, I usually mean, as it is by far the most common translation strategy, creating an independent TL rhyme. The second-most common strategy, apart from having no language-play at all in the translation, is to substitute a half-rhyme for a rhyme, which is different from the rhyme→rhyme solution in degree rather than essence. Even in song texts that are not translations, but original productions, half-rhymes can predominate over rhymes and have the same function as these, so there is nothing inherently deficient in the employment of half-rhymes. Still, it can be assumed that taking recourse to such a step in a translation of true rhymes is often considered a less-than-ideal solution even by the translators themselves.

Be that as it may, it is clear that there are two basic options when it comes to dealing with rhymes in translation: translate the meaning of the sequence in which they occur without playing with the form, or try to create an original
rhyme or rhyme-like structure. Calques and direct copying of SL rhymes are rarely possible, and almost all of the few cases where one of these strategies has been employed occur in connection with nonce formations, with words that are as foreign to the SL as they are to the TL, or with ‘international’ loan words. To create language-play other than rhymes or half-rhymes is equally rare, and it is often questionable whether it was intended at all. Complete omissions, finally, are exceptional, too, and occur mainly in connection with some of the shorter songs.

Compensation in the form of TL language-play that is just slightly removed from the SL language-play is somewhat more frequent with rhymes than with puns, and almost all instances are rhymes or half-rhymes themselves. About half of them replace a rhyme that has been lost, while the other half are additions to rhyming or half-rhyming translation solutions. Sometimes, the same rhyme is used two or more times in the same song. Where this happens in the English version, I have counted the rhyme only once, but the dubbers and subtitlers may occasionally translate the second or third occurrence of that rhyme with a new TL rhyme that had not previously been used. I consider this an instance of compensation, provided it takes place within ten seconds of some other instance of language-play, which is generally the case in songs and poems.

As to the eight doubtful SL rhymes, no table is necessary to convey that all but one have been turned into non-rhyming TL sequences, the exception being a just possibly intended rhyme on mayday and hey, which could be taken over more or less unchanged into the dubbing and subtitles.

The doubtful TL cases

The share of translation choices where it is doubtful whether they should be counted as featuring language-play or not is below five percent of the total, so not too much needs to be said about these cases. Several have been conferred their intermediate status because they represent rhymes or half-rhymes that have already been used earlier in the translation. As I pointed out above, when this happens in the original text, the repeated rhyme is not counted as a new instance of language-play, yet when it comes to the translations, the focus changes: I am not trying to identify more instances of language-play, as in the source texts, but to analyze the solutions adopted vis-à-vis a certain translation problem. Now, even if a rhyme is used a second time in a TL version, it is still a rhyme, i.e. a form of language-play, and it may not make a difference to most viewers that they have seen it before. On the other hand, no substantial creative
effort is needed for the recycling of previously employed subtitles, and nothing new and surprising is added by them, which is why I consider a ‘doubtful’ status the best way to categorize such instances.

In other cases, it is simply not clear whether what could qualify as language-play has been intended as such or whether it is a coincidence. In other cases still, the TL solutions balance on the fuzzy borders between half-rhymes and non-language-play, which will be discussed in the next section. Consider, finally, the German dubbing and the German subtitles of one of the short songs performed in the *Monsters, Inc* musical already referred to in connection with example (5.60):

(5.62) Mike is singing a song composed by himself:

She’s out of our hair
And just when I dare
To care
She says, “au contraire”
You’re my pair
Of friends

*German dubbing:* Wir haben sie vom Hals [‘she’s off our back’]
Das wird nicht leicht [‘that won’t be easy’]
Keinesfalls [‘not at all’]
Was machen wir falls [‘what do we do if’]
Wir dich niemals [‘we you never’]
Wieder sehen [‘see again’]

*German subtitles:* *Wir sind sie los’ [‘we are rid of her’]
*Mein Herz wird groß [‘my heart becomes big’]
*Uferlos [‘boundless’]
*Sie sagt: “Famos” [‘she says, “splendid”’]
**Ihr seid grandios’ [‘you are grandiose’]
**Meine Freunde’ [‘my friends’]

Being a prime example of what is known in German as the *Reim dich oder ich fress dich* [‘rhyme or I will eat you’] principle, the lyrics are striking, and funny, because of the way meaning, coherence and elegance of style have been sacrificed to a “dense crowding of rhyme” (Nash 1985:159). More specifically, there are four rhymes in a sequence of just sixteen words in the original version, counting from the first rhyming word *hair* through to the last, i.e. *pair*.

But let us concentrate on two rhyming items each in the translations, namely *keinesfalls* and *falls* in the dubbing and *los* and *uferlos* in the subtitles. What we have here is very close to autorhyme, i.e. the rhyming of an item with itself. Now, strictly speaking, there are two times two different words involved, but
the ‘rhyming’ parts are not only semantically closely related, but also formally completely identical in both spelling and pronunciation, which makes the rhymes, if they can be called that, appear odd. Of course, there are more words in the textual surroundings with which (-)falls and (-)los form indisputable rhymes or half-rhymes\(^ {175}\), but I find it doubtful, at least, whether the two translations of this particular song can be considered as featuring the same amount of language-play as the SL version.

A noteworthy translation of an ordinary rhyme

Rhymes represent a less complex type of language-play than e.g. puns, and the challenges posed to the translators by most rhymes are quite similar to each other – unless other types of linguistic play are interwoven with the rhyme. It has not been easy, therefore, to identify an intriguing SL sequence that has yielded a variety of interesting TL solutions without being so complex as to necessitate an excursion into more or less unrelated categories of language-play. It may be enough, therefore, to focus on just one translation that was most probably intended as language-play, but where it is not entirely self-evident what it should be classified as. I refer to the Danish version of a couple of lines from a grim marching song in *Antz*, directly preceding those quoted as example (5.59) above. Both the original text and the translation are provided here:

(5.63) *We ants go marching two by two, hurrah, hurrah*  
*We’ll all be dead before we’re through, hurrah, hurrah*  
Danish: *Mod fjenden går*  
vi modigt frem  
*vi ved*  
vi aldrig vender hjem  
[*against the enemy we walk/move courageously – we know we’ll never return home*]

What looks like a perfect rhyme between *frem* and *hjem* is in fact what is generally referred to as ‘eye-rhyme’ or ‘printer’s rhyme’, i.e. the bringing together of “non-rhyming homographic endings” (Cuddon 1998:751). While the first item in the example is pronounced with a vowel approximating /æ/, the second has an /ɛ/ sound.

The use of eye-rhymes is naturally confined to written language and can thus appear in subtitles, but not in spoken (film) dialogue. It is probably a matter of taste whether one considers eye-rhyme an acceptable stylistic device

\(^ {175}\) *Niemals* has a long /a/ sound, unlike *Hals* and (-)falls.
in general or, in particular, a good enough TL counterpart of a true rhyme. I have chosen, in any case, to count the Danish solution in (5.63) as language-play, and more specifically as a half-rhyme, though it could also be classified as a rhyme (on the orthographic level only) or even, if one’s definition of half-rhymes is comparatively narrow, as no language-play at all.

5.1.8 Half-rhymes

Introduction

The relationship between half-rhymes and rhymes can be compared to that between paronymic puns on the one hand and homonymic or homophonic puns on the other: the categories have some basic principles in common and can therefore be said to be the same in essence, but the extent of the formal overlap between the core items varies. What I have subsumed under the term half-rhyme here is thus very similar to rhymes in that two lexical items sharing phonological properties are used in a way that evokes a special stylistic effect without, as puns do, exploiting or manipulating the semantic aspects of those items. The difference is that the basic rhyming rule of identical pronunciation, from the last vowel with primary stress onwards, has not been followed in half-rhymes.

In general, however, much of what has been said about rhymes also applies to half-rhymes, for example that spelling is, in principle, of no relevance to the description of the category, even if an overlap in pronunciation tends to coincide with a corresponding overlap in orthography. It may be interesting to note, furthermore, that Crystal (1998:97), announcing examples of “rhymes” in advertisements, actually includes at least five slogans in his list that do not fulfil the criteria for true rhymes outlined above and that I would, at best, count as half-rhymes, e.g. “Clunk, click, every trip (seat belt advice)” or “Safety, economy, flexibility (cars)”.

Some of the things that have been said about paronymic puns are also valid in the present section. In particular, I have not adopted any comparatively straightforward constituting rule (like that for rhymes). Half-rhymes are inherently fuzzy as a concept, and just as it would have been overly pedantic, and even unnatural, to specify a minimally required formal overlap between the key elements in paronymic puns (cf. 4.1.4), so, too, would taking a step like this with half-rhymes. Although the strength of the half-rhyme obviously increases with the number of similar or identical phonemes in comparable positions, there is thus no specific focus on e.g. vowels or endings here.
However, I make use of one general rule, concerning the distinction between half-rhymes and the related category of alliteration, which will be the topic of the next section: an instance will be counted as alliteration only if the formal overlap of the crucial items is more or less limited to the initial phoneme and consequently too weak to qualify as half-rhyme. In other words, half-rhyming words can have identical onsets, but an instance of alliteration, as defined by me, cannot also be a half-rhyme.

This rule notwithstanding, half-rhymes have not been put into the straightjacket of a strict definition here, which implies that the dividing line between them and non-language-play is not fixed. In the absence of any foolproof guidelines, the identification of half-rhymes in my corpus is thus largely based on intuition, with the following aspects functioning as the main indicators: the extent of the phonological overlap (the greater the similarity the greater the likelihood that intention rather than coincidence is behind it), the genre of the text in which they appear (songs and poems being quite typical environments of this kind of language-play), and the position of the half-rhyming items within the text (if they occur at the end of lines in a song or poem or follow each other directly, this is especially conspicuous). Yet even an approach like this, where the entire context is taken into account, does not preclude the existence of doubtful cases.

Number and nature of the SL half-rhymes

Half-rhymes are not particularly common in my corpus, especially if compared to their close relatives, the rhymes. All in all, I identified 39 cases that I consider reasonably ‘clear’ and another seven where it is more doubtful whether they were intended as language-play. Rugrats in Paris is the film with the most instances, ten clear and one doubtful, almost all of which occur in songs (with the two exceptions featuring in a poem). Anastasia, which alone stands for almost half of the true rhymes in the corpus, also has six clear half-rhymes, all of them in songs. Scooby-Doo comes next with five clear instances and one doubtful one, none of which occurs in songs or other special environments. Stuart Little, The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle and The Road to El Dorado feature four clear cases each. About half of the films have just one half-rhyme or none at all.

Close to 50 percent of the half-rhymes, and this goes for the clear as well as the doubtful cases, occur in songs or similar environments such as poems. The rest are part of rather ordinary utterances in conversation. Links with the picture are rare, and whether characters other than the speaker or singer have
noticed the half-rhyme can generally not be established. Concerning the formal overlap between the crucial items in the clear cases, it is usually just one or two phonemes short of a true rhyme, as in example (5.64), though occasionally, less rhyme-like instances have also been counted as half-rhymes, like the one in (5.65). In general, however, a very weak half-rhyme tends to be doubtful (see below).

(5.64) A song about “Chuckie Chan” in *Rugrats in Paris* illustrates, together with the accompanying pictures, how the often insecure Chuckie dreams of becoming a martial arts hero:

> If you've been chased around
> By a kung fu-chopping clown
> He'll come slidin’ to the rescue
> And if your rickshaw's been attacked
> By a samurai pack
> He'll break up the party
> If he's not on the potty
> You don't have to worry
> He's got fists of fury

[...] In the pairs *around* – *clown* and *attacked* – *pack*, a final stop consonant that is present in only one of the items makes a half-rhyme of what would otherwise be a rhyme, while in *worry* – *fury*, it is the stressed vowel that is different. As to *party* – *potty*, the pair is two phonemes (the vowel sound and the /r/ in *party*) removed from a rhyme, at least in the American dialect in which the song is performed, but the items begin with the same phoneme instead. Now consider the following example:

(5.65) At the end of *Scooby-Doo*, the owner of the theme park in which most of the film is set explains how the villain was able to gain the influence he had:

> Two years ago, that little pest turns up at a casting session for our evil elves.

I have counted *evil elves* as a half-rhyme because the individual items, though far from actually rhyming, still share enough properties to make them sound similar: both have four phonemes, with /v/ and /l/ among them in each case, and the two stressed vowels, /i/ and /e/ respectively, are both front and unrounded, as well as neighbours on the open - closed continuum. Moreover, the fact that the adjective and the noun stand in the immediate vicinity of each other, signifying a single concept, makes it even more likely that the particular
elements were chosen, at least in part, on the basis of their phonological
resemblance.

Apart from those already discussed, some of the SL half-rhymes deserve a
special comment, for different reasons. The only half-rhyme in *Muppets from
Space*, reproduced as example (5.66), is a case in point:

(5.66) Clifford invites a pretty girl to join him and his friends in a social
activity later on:

*Perhaps you’d like to *partake* in the /part’kee/*?

This instance of language-play is similar to the one in (5.60) because the
pronunciation of a word has been adapted so as to bring it closer to that of a
preceding word. While the result was a rhyme in (5.60), it is a (stronger and
more noticeable) half-rhyme in (5.66). Even a simple *partake* – *party* /‘pər’ti/ could have been counted as a half-rhyme, as the choice of the unexpectedly
formal verb functions as a signal of language-play, but the deviant
pronunciation of the second item makes the language-play even more
conspicuous.

I have already commented on the role of the singer’s dialect and
pronunciation choices in one of the songs in *Anastasia*, in connection with
example (5.61). In the lines quoted here, the surprising effect is that a potential
rhyme, which was probably intended as such by the writer of the song, has been
turned into a half-rhyme:

(5.67) Paree holds the key to /la ‘mør/  
*And not even Freud knows the cure*

A ‘proper’ pronunciation of *l’amour*, even with an American accent, would have
entailed an /u/-type vowel in the stressed syllable, in which case the item would
have rhymed with *cure*.

As has been stated in the previous section, rhymes are often an integral
feature of lexical formations. In my corpus, there are also a few formations
where half-rhymes rather than rhymes are involved. Some of these are
established enough to appear in ordinary dictionaries, like those in (5.68), while
others are newer slang expressions or nonce formations, like the one in (5.69):

(5.68) In *Stuart Little*, Stuart pretends to be a gunman in the Wild West:

*Draw, you lily-livered, yellow-belly son of a one-eyed prairie-dog!*

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In *Scooby-Doo*, the owner of Spooky Island welcomes the group of ghost hunters he had invited, and suggests a program for the evening:

*Maybe we can celebrate later by having a little spookabalooza.*

Concerning example (5.68), *lily-livered* and *yellow-belly/-bellied* are not-unheard-of epithets suggesting a lack of courage on the part of the signified, and it can be assumed that their invention and continued use is due not least to the partial overlap in form between the individual segments *lily* and *livered*, and *yellow* and *belly/-bellied*, respectively. *Spookabalooza*, by contrast, is a nonce formation referring to a kind of party with a ghost and monster theme. It features a repetition of the vowel sounds /u/ and /sl/, and this is enough for a half-rhyme even though all the consonants are different.

**The doubtful SL half-rhymes**

Whether possible half-rhymes have been incorporated in the script on purpose can be doubtful for the same reasons as why it can be doubtful whether rhymes and other types of language-play have been intended by the makers of a film. These reasons, of which several can apply simultaneously, include the following: a) there is no apparent motive for why a character, or, on a higher level, the real-life people behind the film, should want to use a half-rhyme in that particular text sequence; b) some aspect of the co-text, for example the rhythm of the utterance(s) or the amount of time and/or linguistic material between the crucial items, suggests that formally similar items may have been used by coincidence, c) the words employed appear natural enough in their context to make the stipulation of an underlying desire to play with the language unnecessary or questionable. In addition, as there is no clear dividing line between half-rhymes and non-language-play, the formal overlap between two lexical items may be very limited, but still, possibly, have been exploited in a conscious manner. Such a case is exemplified in (5.70):

(5.70) Scrappy-Doo threatens Scooby-Doo:

*C’mon, I can still take you! Put them up, you mangy mutt!*

As there is an instance of alliteration in *mangy mutt*, there is no reason why a half-rhyme should not have been intended between *up* and *mutt*, too. Also the position of these items in the last sentence, with each at the end of consecutive, and comparable, tone units, speaks in favour of a conscious manipulation of the language. On the other hand, *up* and *mutt* are, apart from the vowel, not
particularly similar, and both the challenge to put them up and the insult in the form of mutt seem quite natural lexical choices in the context of the scene. This instance thus shares with the other doubtful cases the circumstance that the factors speaking for and against an intended play with linguistic material balance each other out.

The SL half-rhymes in translation

The 39 clear SL half-rhymes correspond to 185 translations, and the seven doubtful half-rhymes to 35 translations. This yields an average of almost five translations per half-rhyme. With the exception of one example that occurs within a song in Rugrats in Paris, all the doubtful cases have been (almost completely) ignored by the translators in so far as there is no TL language-play to be detected in or near the corresponding TL spot. This having been said, I will focus on the clear cases from here on. Table 5.9 shows the general trend when it comes to their translation. Three Swedish dubbing solutions are missing in the table because the exact wording could not be determined.

Table 5.9. Overview of the TL solutions for the clear Half-rhymes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TL lang.-play?</th>
<th>German dubbing</th>
<th>Swedish dubbing</th>
<th>German subtitles</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles</th>
<th>Norw. subtitles</th>
<th>Danish subtitles</th>
<th>Sw. TV subtitles</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>36</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen, the dubbed versions more often than not render half-rhymes as TL language-play, while it is usually the other way around with the subtitles. In fact, the differences would probably have been even more pronounced if the German dubbers had not left three of the songs in Rugrats in Paris entirely untranslated, and the Swedish dubbers two. These decisions have led to six and five complete omissions of half-rhymes, respectively, and it can be assumed that most of them would have become TL language-play if the songs had been dubbed.

All in all, the half-rhymes are more often rendered as non-language-play than the true rhymes, which is not overly surprising, given the fact that they are, in general, less conspicuous. Perhaps they have not as often been registered as
language-play in the minds of the translators, or these did not deem it quite as important to search for TL counterparts to what they might have perceived as a comparatively marginal stylistic device. The differences between the translation modes and the target languages, on the other hand, more or less mirror those concerning the rhyme translations, with the Norwegian subtitles having the smallest share of playful translation solutions. This particular result is, once again, partly due to an almost total absence of TL language-play in the Norwegian subtitles of Rugrats in Paris.

To render the half-rhyming SL sequence as non-language-play is the most common of the translation strategies that I have distinguished. The next two strategies are employed about equally often: creating a TL half-rhyme and, which is interesting, creating a TL true rhyme. This latter solution is almost exclusively adopted in connection with songs, which may be an indicator that in songs, rhymes are preferred over half-rhymes, even in a translation and even if the original has half-rhymes. Conversely, since it is also true that many rhymes have become half-rhymes in my corpus, the two categories are perhaps seen as more or less equivalent in a song context: if one cannot achieve the one, try the other, and vice versa, because the effect on the hearer will be almost, if not completely, the same. Besides, treating rhymes and half-rhymes as basically the same implies a larger range of acceptable TL solutions to the translator, which probably reduces the amount of time spent looking for a suitable pair of sufficiently similar lexical items.

Outside of songs, it also happens occasionally that some type of language-play other than rhymes and half-rhymes is used to replace an SL half-rhyme, and this is then likely to be an alliteration, which could, after all, also be described as a very special kind of rhyme (the German word for it is actually Stabreim and the Swedish one bokstavserim). The remaining strategies, i.e. direct transfer of SL material, calques, complete omissions (apart from the cases mentioned above) and compensation, are all rare exceptions when it comes to half-rhymes.

There are no more than seven translations of clear SL half-rhymes where I am unsure whether they should be counted as language-play. Most of these are cases where a TL half-rhyme may or may not have been intended, but one is a perfect authorhyme, reproduced in example (5.71):

(5.71) In The Iron Giant, Hogarth’s school class is watching an animated cartoon about the atomic threat and what to do in case of an attack. There is a song in it, including the following lines:
Hands over your head — keep low to the ground
Time to duck and over — the bombs are coming down
Swedish dubbing: Lägg händerna på huvet och lägg dig ner
Ducka och göm dig när bomben faller ner
[‘Put your hands on your head and lie down
Duck and hide when the bomb falls down’]

Where the original has a typical song half-rhyme between *ground* and *down*, the Swedish dubbing has the pair *ner* — *ner*, which I, for reasons similar to those offered in the discussion of example (5.62), have chosen to count as a doubtful TL solution.

Discussion of one particular half-rhyme and its translations
I think it is fair to say that half-rhymes, like rhymes, are not quite as intriguing as puns. It is difficult, therefore, to find an instance that is of particular interest nonetheless, e.g. because it poses an unusual translation challenge and/or has led to the adoption of a wide range of TL solutions by the dubbers and subtitlers, but has not, on the other hand, already been mentioned. The one I have chosen for the rounding-off discussion at least shows how half-rhymes can become rhymes, with or without twisting the normal stress pattern of the key items, and how one can achieve more language-play in the translation than in the original text:

(5.72) In *The Road to El Dorado*, the inhabitants of the eponymous city believe that Tulio and Miguel are gods. During a celebration in their honour, the impostors express their views and emotions in a song that starts as follows:
*I hardly think I’m qualified
To come across all sanctified
German dubbing: Kaum vorstellbar, das geht zu weit
Ich bin nicht heilig, tut mir leid
[‘Hardly imaginable, that goes too far
I am not holy, I’m sorry’]
Swedish dubbing: Betvivlar min kapacitet
Att föra mig som helighet
[‘(I) doubt my ability
to act like a holiness’]
Swedish subtitles: *Jag tror knappast jag är gjord
*att vara helig gud och god
*[I hardly believe I am made
for being a holy god and good’]
The words at the end of the two lines in the English text actually have identical endings (-ified), but the stressed vowels in the respective first syllable are dissimilar. However, the resulting half-rhyme has become a straightforward masculine rhyme in the German dubbing, where the final consonant of leid is, despite the spelling, the same as that of weit, i.e. /v/. The example illustrates, I think, how natural it is to substitute a half-rhyme in song by a true rhyme.

The language-play in the Swedish dubbing ought also to be classified as a rhyme. It is a wrenched one, however, since helighet has the stress on the first syllable in unmarked pronunciation, yet on the last one in the El Dorado song (kapacitet always has the main stress on the last syllable). As to the Swedish subtitles, there is a half-rhyme in the same place as in the original, viz. between gjord and god, but there is an additional half-rhyme, which has no trigger in the English version, namely that between gud and god. Although the omission of the article before helig gud and, to a lesser extent, the choice of two disparate grammatical units on each side of the co-ordinator och (noun phrase vs. adjective) make the line appear slightly odd, the extra half-rhyme was most probably welcomed by the subtitler, if not planned from the outset.

5.1.9 Alliteration

Introduction

On an imaginary cline where complete formal identity between two lexical items is the one extreme and complete formal dissimilarity the other, the average rhyme, if such a thing existed, would probably position itself somewhat closer to the first extreme than the hypothetical average half-rhyme, while an instance of alliteration, as defined by me, is likely to be nearer to the opposite extreme than either of the other types of language-play. A commonly adopted definition of alliteration is otherwise similar to the one offered by Cuddon (1998:23), i.e. “[a] figure of speech in which consonants, especially at the beginning of words, or stressed syllables, are repeated”. For my purposes, such a definition is both too broad and too narrow. On the one hand, I do not see a good reason why alliteration should be restricted to one group of phonemes, as the repetition of vowel sounds is, in method as well as effect, essentially the same as the repetition of consonants. On the other hand, I think it best, for practical reasons, to focus only on the very first phoneme of lexical items. As will be seen, it is often difficult enough to determine whether two or more words in a row starting with the same phoneme is a result of conscious linguistic creativity or of mere chance. The number of doubtful cases would
probably increase dramatically if the repetition of sounds within words were counted too – provided such subtleties are registered as possible language-play in the first place, which might not always happen.

My working definition of alliteration, therefore, implies that two or more lexical items following each other directly or with only a small number of intervening items start with the same phoneme, vowel or consonant, while at the same time they are sufficiently different from each other so as not to constitute a rhyme or half-rhyme (the boundaries to the latter category are obviously blurry). Compounds, regardless of their most common or, in the case of new formations, most likely spelling (one word, two words, or hyphenated), are not excluded from consideration. However, the usual requirement, i.e. that the language-play resulting from the particular arrangement of linguistic material must have been intended as such by the author or speaker, applies here too, of course.

My definition is largely identical to what Crystal seems to understand by alliteration, with the difference that he also considers sequences of words beginning with the same letter, but not the same phoneme, as instances of alliteration (1998:58). He can thus offer, without further comment, “extra economy” (1998:96) as a bona fide example, even though the onsets of the spoken words are /e/ and /u/, respectively. What we have here is really what Nilsen (1979:137) refers to as “eye alliteration” and Stanley (2001b:460) as “ocular alliteration”. Since my source texts are mainly spoken, cases such as extra economy, even if they ‘alliterate’ in the written transcript, would not be included as language-play in the present study. The same is true, though for different reasons, of “illiterate lairds”, which Nash (1985:23) describes as alliterating, and “Die Schlange war listiger als alles Lebendige des Feldes”\(^{176}\), which de Vries & Verheij (1997:79) assume, correctly or not, to be an instance of planned alliteration due to “the many /s/ and /l/ sounds”, among which they apparently even count the /s/ of Schlange. In both cases, however, part of the repeated sounds occur within the words, which not only makes the alliteration relatively inconspicuous (cf. Attardo 1994:123), but lets it fall outside my own definition altogether.

Delabastita refers to alliteration as a “punoid” (1993:207) and a “related rhetorical device” (1996:134), just as he does with rhyme, implying that he considers the categories similar to puns, but not quite the same. Alliteration is

\(^{176}\) The example is from Martin Buber’s Bible translation, meaning ‘the serpent was more cunning than anything living in the field’. The illiterate lairds make an appearance in Evelyn Waugh’s Decline and Fall.
not particularly rare and tends to occur in environments where language-play in general can be found, e.g. in poems, advertising slogans (cf. Crystal 1998:96; Reiß & Vermeer 1991:209f) and product names (cf. Nilsen 1979:137f), but also, as Qvale (1995:230) notes, in many English idioms. He gives a few examples, among which are in for a penny, in for a pound, the tide has turned and hungry as a horse (Qvale 1995:230). In fact, alliteration, though perhaps not quite as entertaining as rhyme, is already used and appreciated by small children, as e.g. Tucker (1988:67) points out.

**Number and nature of the SL instances in the corpus**

In my corpus, there are, all in all, 65 reasonably clear instances of alliteration and 14 more doubtful ones. This makes it the third most common type of non-punning language-play, after rhymes and nonce-formations. It should be kept in mind, however, that just as I counted three rhyming words in the vicinity of each other as two rhymes (cf. e.g. example (5.50)), a sequence of three items beginning with the same phoneme represents, if it has been intended as such, two instances of alliteration – and three instances if four items are involved, etc. The altogether 79 clear and doubtful alliterations are thus distributed over 62 separate instances of language-play. Still, sequences featuring just two alliterating items are by far the most common, and four alliterating items is the maximum number detected, even though there would have been five in one case if I had not disregarded the repetition of sounds within words.

The instances of alliteration are relatively evenly distributed across the films in my corpus, which may be explained by the fact that alliteration, unlike rhymes and half-rhymes, rarely appears in songs. Its rate of occurrence is thus independent of the presence of this kind of language use in the films. *Scooby-Doo* has the most instances, ten clear and one doubtful, followed by *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle* with nine clear cases, among which are three that are based on a sequence of just four words (see example (5.81) below). Two films, *Mouse Hunt* and *The Indian in the Cupboard*, feature no alliteration.

In the corpus, alliteration tends to occur more often in certain types of construction than in others. For example, Qvale’s (1995:230) observation that English idioms often feature this type of language-play is confirmed by examples such as those in (5.73) and (5.74). As a help to the reader, I have subtly highlighted the identical onsets in these and some of the subsequent examples by writing them in roman rather than italic style.
(5.73) In *Antz*, General Mandible is annoyed at a foreman because of delays in an important construction project.
Mandible: *But in spite of your limitations, you will finish this tunnel on schedule — come hell or high water!*

(5.74) In *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle*, Fearless Leader is presenting a ready-made contract to would-be producer Minnie Mogul.
Fearless Leader: *All you have to do is to sign here, and [sic] your first producing endeavour is as good as gold.*

Alliteration is also a common characteristic of nonce formations, such as those in examples (5.75) and (5.76):

(5.75) In *Monsters, Inc*, Sulley has made it onto the cover of a business magazine, where he is referred to as:
GIGGLE GURU

(5.76) In *The Iron Giant*, the giant shows interest in one of Hogarth’s cartoon magazines, which has a creature similar to himself on the cover.
Hogarth: *Oh, that’s Atomo, the metal menace.* [On the magazine, it also says THE METAL MONSTER.]

Outside of idioms and nonce formations, alliteration can appear in connection with about any combination of linguistic material, but perhaps most notably in sequences of adjective + adjective (5.77), adjective + noun (5.78), and noun + noun (+ noun) (5.79), but further varieties, such as alliteration between verb and noun (5.80), have also been identified:

(5.77) In *Ice Age*, Manfred decides that the human baby they have found should be brought back to its family and that the tiger Diego does not get to eat it.
Sid: *Oh, the big, bad tigey-wigey gets left behind.*

The focus here is on *big, bad*, which is a half-established sequence at least since the introduction of the big, bad wolf. In fact, *big, bad* is actually used as a modifier of *wolf* in *Muppets from Space* (cf. example (5.18)). As to *tigey-wigey*, it represents a complex instance of language-play in itself, but it is not of interest in the present context.
(5.78) In *Rugrats in Paris*, the children traverse central Paris in an attempt to foil Mme LaBouche’s wicked plan. Suddenly, her aide Jean-Claude intercepts them.

Jean-Claude: *Hello, my todling tourists.*

The reason why Jean-Claude employs alliteration in this particular situation is probably to reinforce the irony of his greeting. By showing that he can even afford to play with the language, he conveys the advantage that he feels he has over the children.

(5.79) In *Scooby-Doo*, Fred tries to calm Scooby, who claims to have seen a monster:

*How many times do I have to tell you? There are no such things as ghouls, ghosts, goblins or monsters.*

It can be assumed that the enumeration of three lexical items beginning with the same phoneme is no coincidence, especially since two of them (*ghouls* and *goblins*) are rather rare and specialized. This example thus counts as containing two instances of alliteration.

(5.80) In *Inspector Gadget*, Brenda tells Scolex, who has a personal interest in her, that she liked him better at the time when he was still “fat”, to use her word. He is delighted to hear it.

Scolex: *Bring on the brownies! Hah! Wheel in the waffles! I’m ready to binge!*

In *bring on the brownies*, the first two phonemes of the alliterating items are identical, viz. /b/ and /r/, which could be said to make the effect of the alliteration somewhat stronger, though without bringing it much nearer to a half-rhyme.

It can be mentioned, moreover, that four instances of alliteration appear in written text rather than spoken, which is interesting in view of the fact that writing is of rather marginal importance in a medium like feature films. Two cases were already quoted in examples (5.75) and (5.76), while another one, from *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle* and already announced above, is reproduced here:

(5.81) One of the headlines in an old newspaper reads:

*GOOF-GAS GOONS GONGED*

This sentence appears somewhat cryptic, but that is not unusual for newspaper
headlines, and especially those in the tabloid press. It consists of four lexical elements, all of which start with the same letter and, if they were said aloud, with the same phoneme. This yields, according to my way of counting, three individual alliterations. With the other instances of written alliteration, example (5.81) shares the property of being of little or no importance to the development of the plot. It is also rather subtle, not as language-play, but because the display time is only about one second and it competes for attention with both a larger, non-playful headline and simultaneous spoken dialogue. A first-time viewer of the film is thus quite likely to miss it altogether.

Finally, just a few words about the phonemes actually alliterating in the SL examples from my corpus: my insistence on treating vowels on a par with consonants in the definition (cf. above) actually made no difference, since it did not lead to the inclusion of a single additional example. In fact, the alliterations occurring in the 62 separate instances of language-play that are of interest here relied on only twelve different phonemes, none of which is a true vowel. More specifically, /m/, with 13 occurrences, narrowly beats /b/ with twelve, leaving /s/ behind with eight. None of the other phonemes stands for more than five occurrences, and the potential candidates /j/, /r/, /ʃ/, /θ/, /ð/, /v/, and /z/, in addition to /dy/ and /dʒ/, do not alliterate at all in the material.

The doubtful SL cases
Alliteration is one of the language-play categories where the doubtful cases (was a playful linguistic manipulation intended at all?) make up a comparatively large percentage of the total. This can partly be explained by the fact that, due to the restricted set of phonemes in a language, large numbers of lexical items have identical onsets and that it is quite natural for two or more of them to occur in the vicinity of each other without any language-play being intended. With this in mind, many alliterations can be dismissed without much ado as coincidences, but some cases, while not constituting obvious language-play, at least deserve the intermediate status of ‘doubtful’. Consider the following example:

(5.82) One of the songs in Anastasia, sung by Rasputin, features this line:
I was once the most mystical man in all Russia

Three identical onsets directly after each other are suspicious, because the laws of mere chance make this an unlikely sequence. On the other hand, it is perfectly natural for Rasputin to refer to himself as a man, and since it is the standard procedure in English to compare longer adjectives such as mystical with
the help of more and most, the occurrence of the latter item in the sequence above seems to be more determined by the grammar of the language than by anything else. Of course, the rather infrequently used adjective itself may have been chosen because of its beginning with an /m/ sound, but it, too, does not seem particularly forced on the semantic level.

Similar arguments more or less balance each other out in connection with the other doubtful cases as well. In a couple of them, however, a just possibly intended additional alliteration appears in conjunction with what I think can reasonably be counted as a consciously planned one. Example (5.83), from *Muppets in Space*, will illustrate this:

(5.83) The inventor Bunsen has developed a few useful items for the group of Muppets who want to liberate Gonzo and Rizzo. Miss Piggy wonders what he has in store for her.

Bunsen: *Well now, Miss Piggy, for you we have Muppet Lab’s Mind Mist.*

The nonce formation designates a spray to make people fulfil your every wish. While I think it is clear that the alliteration in *Mind Mist* is no coincidence, I am not quite so sure when it comes to the additional /m/ in *Muppet Lab’s*. It partly depends, it would seem, on whether the latter elements are part of the name of the spray or are merely added as a premodifier indicating its provenance. The fact that the /l/ of *Lab’s* breaks the sequence of identical onsets speaks for the second possibility, in which case the specific intention of playing with the language is not quite as obvious when it comes to *Muppet Lab’s* as it is with *Mind Mist*. I think it is defensible, therefore, to call the first of the alliterations in (5.83) doubtful, even if it is a rather close call.

The instances of SL alliteration in translation

The 14 doubtful cases have yielded 68 TL solutions. Only two of these, namely the Swedish dubbing of example (5.82) and the German dubbing of example (5.83), can with some certainty be assumed to constitute conscious (and successful) attempts at creating TL alliteration in the same spot as the original. These attempts have probably been made because the respective translators considered the original alliteration to have been inserted in the source text on purpose.

In a couple of other cases, it was possible to translate the original text into formally very similar TL items, with very similar alliterations as a result. However, whether these were even noticed by the persons responsible is really as doubtful as whether the original alliterations were created on purpose. Be
that as it may, the remaining translations of the doubtful cases, i.e. the overwhelming majority, do not involve any language-play at all.

As to the 65 clear SL alliterations, they have given rise to 361 TL versions, or 5.5 per instance on average. A first impression of their nature, in terms of language-play, is provided in Table 5.10. Note, though, that one German and three Swedish dubbing solutions could not be included in it because they proved impossible to understand properly.

Table 5.10. Overview of the TL solutions for the clear Alliterations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TL lang.-play?</th>
<th>German dubbing</th>
<th>Swedish dubbing</th>
<th>German subtitles</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles</th>
<th>Norw. subtitles</th>
<th>Danish subtitles</th>
<th>Sw. TV subtitles</th>
<th>Totals</th>
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<td>5</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>47</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen, alliteration is not among the categories of language-play that yield TL language-play as a rule. In all combinations of translation mode and language except the two Swedish subtitle versions, the predominance of the ‘no language-play’ solutions is quite pronounced, if never overwhelming. The TV subtitle solutions being too few to permit bold conclusions, it is really only the Swedish DVD subtitles that can be said to have preserved the original language-play to a noticeably greater extent than the other TL versions, though why this should be so is hard to say in view of the complex system of factors involved. Otherwise, the results for the different versions are more or less in line with each other, even though the Swedish dubbing, to give an example, features a share of solutions with TL language-play that is slightly larger than the average, and the Norwegian subtitles a share that is somewhat lower than the average.

As the figures in Table 5.10 could lead one to expect, the translation strategy of turning the original, alliterating sequence into a non-playful TL counterpart is always the most frequently chosen one, possibly because the often quite subtle stylistic device of alliteration had not even been noticed by the translator or, if it had, not been considered significant enough to warrant a specific, creative translation effort. However, while alliteration may be easy to miss or ignore, it is not too difficult, if compared to e.g. creating a pun from
scratch, to come up with a sequence of alliterating TL items that fit reasonably well into the context of the utterance. This may explain why actually doing this is the second most common translation strategy in connection with SL alliteration, although I should point out that I have counted half a dozen cases where there is really only graphic or ‘eye’ alliteration in a subtitle version as representing this translation strategy, too.

Complete omission of the SL sequence in the translation does occur with moderate frequency, but apart from a few additional cases in the subtitle versions, this strategy tends to be employed primarily with the written instances of alliteration. In fact, none of the four written occurrences has been translated at all, in any of the versions, partly because it was technically impossible (display time too short, translation of other SL material already fills the suitable slots), partly because there was really no reason to do it, and partly, it can be assumed, because the SL alliteration had been missed.

In three cases, all of them trademark exclamations of the respective speaker (e.g. Go, go, Gadget), most of the translators have considered it best to copy the SL material, including the alliteration, straight into the translation. As with a couple of the doubtful SL cases, it was sometimes possible, moreover, to preserve the original alliteration by a simple, straightforward translation into etymologically related, and thus formally similar, TL items (calque). However, this remains one of the more marginal translation strategies, just like replacing the alliteration by another type of language-play or taking compensatory measures. In a number of cases, finally, there is TL language-play because some aspect of the SL language-play, e.g. the presence of a nonce formation, has been preserved or replaced, although the actual alliteration has been lost (for percentages, I refer once more to 5.2).

Discussion of one particular set of alliterations and its translations
For the concluding discussion, I have chosen a sequence from Ice Age which contains, in the original, what I have counted as three alliterations. These could not have been missed or ignored by the translators. The example shows, among other things, how easily some alliterations can be transferred into a target text, but also how they can be made both more and less eye-, and ear-, catching. In order to provide some background information, a larger part of the original dialogue is rendered than of the translations, where the focus is on the alliterating sequences only.

(5.84) The sloth Sid, who can be quite exasperating, intends to keep
company with a morose mammoth, who has just saved his life.

Sid: OK, then you lead the way, Mr. Big – didn’t get the name?
Manfred: Manfred.

Sid: Manfred? Yuck, man! How about Manny the Moody Mammoth? Or Manny the Melancholy – Manny the – (He is interrupted by Manfred, who indicates that he has had quite enough.)

German dubbing: […] Manny das mürrische Mammut? Oder Manny das melancholische Muttersöhnen oder Manny das müssig –


German subtitles: *[…] Manny das Mächtige Mammut?
Oder Manny das Melancholische…

Swedish subtitles: *[…] Manny, motvalls-mammut?
Eller Manny den melankoliska… Manny…

Norwegian subtitles: *[…] Den humørsyke mammuten Manny?
Eller Melankolske Manny… Manny den…

Danish subtitles: *[…] Manny den Mutte Mammut?
Eller Manny den Melankolske… Manny den…

As can easily be seen, all the translators have taken over Sid’s second suggestion for an epithet, Manny the Melancholy, quite unchanged, which is possible because the key items are a name and an ‘international’ word with Greek roots, and as such they do not pose an obstacle to a straightforward transfer. The German dubbing represents something of an exception because the noun Muttersöhnen ‘mummy’s boy’ has been added, and with it one more alliterating item that has, furthermore, a slightly amusing effect when used to signify a huge mammoth. In fact, the German dubbing does not stop after one such bonus alliteration: it also expands Sid’s final attempt at finding a suitable name from Manny the –, which does not feature any language-play, to Manny das müssig – [*Manny the grumpy/musty –*], which does.

When it comes to the first alliterating sequence, Manny the Moody Mammoth, there is, apart from the name Manny and another ‘international’ loan word (this time coming from Russian), the element Moody, which does not have any formally very similar counterparts in the target languages. The Danish mut (+ inflection), meaning almost the same as moody, perhaps comes closest and has thus been employed. Apart from that, we find mürrisch ‘grumpy’, müssig ‘plump’ and mächtig ‘mighty’ in the translations. The element motvalls- in the Swedish subtitles normally collocates with kärring ‘old woman’/’hag’, resulting in a slightly old-fashioned term for a ‘cussed woman’. To combine motvalls- with mammut not only saves the alliteration, it also adds a playful nonce formation to
the text. The Norwegian subtitles, by contrast, are the only version where the language-play is less elaborate than in the original, because *moody* has been subjected to a semantically equivalent, but formally different, translation in the form of *humørsyk* (+ inflection), which reduces the number of alliterations in that version by one.

5.1.10 Repetition

Introduction

Obviously, rhyme, half-rhyme and alliteration all constitute a kind of repetition, but this section is about the repetition of somewhat larger linguistic units. More precisely, a form of language-play has occasionally been created in the films in my corpus by simply using the same lexical item repeatedly within a short stretch of text. I am not speaking here of cases where something is repeated only for emphasis, or for conveying hesitation, or for permitting speakers to keep the floor while they are thinking about their next move in a conversation. In fact, words or even a sequence of words can be repeated for a variety of reasons, including grammatical rules and speech disorders such as stuttering, but I would in most cases hesitate to call the outcome language-play. Consider two examples:

(5.85) In *Inspector Gadget*, a suggestion is made to Scolex with which he is not quite happy.
Scolex: No, no, no, no, no …

(5.86) In *Chicken Run*, the owner of the chicken farm has been told by his wife, in no unclear terms, that the chickens are neither organized nor plotting an escape and that all his impressions in this respect are only a figment of his imagination. One night, when he is once again convinced that something is going on in the coops, the chickens manage, at the last moment, to cover up their activities, which makes him remember, and say to himself, his wife’s words:
*It’s all in your head. It’s all in your head. It’s all in your head.*

Stanley (2001b:461) notes that “[i]teration, even when very insistent, is not necessarily playing upon words so much as a rhetorical heightening to express the experience of a moment.” Something like that also seems to play into examples (5.85) and (5.86), where I do not think the iteration adds anything playful to the content of the utterances. In general, it can thus be said that cases
where one or several words are repeated unchanged and without any intervening items are not dealt with in this section or in the study as a whole.

That is not to say that this kind of repetition cannot be playful under any circumstances. Had Scolex said *no* twenty-five times rather than five in example (5.85), there would definitely have been something odd about his language use that might have qualified as language-play. The same could, theoretically, be true if a particular item is repeated just once, provided this step is strongly signalled (e.g. through intonation) and sticks out because there is no other apparent reason for it apart from an intention to play with the language. I have, however, not encountered anything like this in the eighteen films forming part of the corpus.

Needless to say, if a form is playfully repeated, but a different meaning is implied in each mentioning, the result would probably constitute a horizontal homonymic or polysemic pun (cf. examples (4.13) and (4.22), among others; see also Delabastita 1993:86ff). The focus here, by contrast, is on cases where the meaning, if not the referent, remains constant across the sequence in question.

Since the single repetition of a lexical item is a very common phenomenon in all kinds of communication, and very rarely inspired by a wish to exploit the linguistic system in order to achieve a special effect, I found it expedient to add one further requirement to the criteria that need to be fulfilled before a repetition would be counted as a language-play, namely that the item or items in question must appear at least three times in the vicinity of each other. What is *not* required, on the other hand, is that it is exactly the same grammatical form that recurs; forms distinguished only by, for example, an inflectional ending can still be part of the same instance of repetition.177 In fact, the same is true of items belonging to two different lexical classes, say verbs and nouns, as long as it is clear that they are closely related. Example (5.87) from *The Iron Giant* illustrates such a state of affairs:

(5.87) Hogarth explains why his mother moved him up a grade at school, against his wish, and what the result has been:

(imitating his mother) “Uh-uh, you don’t have a challenge. You need a challenge.” So, now I’m challenged all right. I’m challenged to hold on to my lunch money because of all the big mooses who wanna pound me […]

In these sentences, the noun *challenge* and the participle *challenged* both occur

177 Müller (1996:217ff) discusses such cases under the term polyptoton, which he also applies, however, when the repetition functions essentially as a polysemic pun.
twice, but this is enough to yield four occurrences of items based on the stem challenge. Such a pattern is relatively unusual in ordinary speech, which helps to make example (5.87) be perceived as a subtle form of language-play, even though the utterances as such are not unrealistic. It should also be pointed out that the scene is actually supposed to be funny, not so much because of what is said, but because of how it is said: in a high-pitched voice at a very fast pace, explained by excessive caffeine-consumption on the part of the speaker. This, in turn, reinforces the impression that the repetitive pattern in the choice of words is no coincidence.

Since three occurrences of an item (or at least stem) is the minimum number required to yield one instance of repetition in the sense applied here, four occurrences count as two instances, five as three, and so on. Apart from this, however, the counting principle is essentially the same as that used with the rhymes, half-rhymes and alliterations.

Number and nature of the SL repetitions
The category of language-play discussed here is not a large one. According to the way of counting explained above, there are only 35 repetitions in the corpus, distributed, furthermore, over only seventeen separate instances of language-play. That means that in the sequences included in the count, there are, on average, four occurrences of an item. Three occurrences are clearly the most common scenario, however, and the average is raised by e.g. the case with no less than eight occurrences, which deserves to be quoted here simply for holding the corpus record:

(5.88) In Shrek, Lord Farquaard forces the Gingerbread man to reveal the name of the person who hides all the fairy tale creatures.

Gingerbread man: Do you know the Muffin man?
Lord Farquaard: The Muffin man?
Gingerbread man: The Muffin man.
Lord Farquaard: Yes, I know the Muffin man. Who lives on Drury Lane?
Gingerbread man: Well, she's married to the Muffin man.
Lord Farquaard: The Muffin man?
Gingerbread man: The Muffin man!
Lord Farquaard: She's married to the Muffin man…

Do you know the Muffin man and who lives on Drury Lane are quotes from a children's song, whose reuse in an unrelated context such as the interrogation scene in Shrek constitutes a form of language-play in itself. The same is true of
the alliteration in *Muffin man*, but what is of interest here is the recurrent use of this signifier, which has obviously been inserted in the script for the purpose of being funny. The utterances more or less mirror the lines of the song, but while the repetition is appropriate there, it appears odd in spoken conversation. In an unmarked exchange, *muffin man* would at least in some places have been substituted by a pro-form or been omitted altogether.

Example (5.88) may be the most extreme case in my corpus when it comes to the number of occurrences of an item, but it is actually quite typical in that two speakers share the burden of achieving a playful repetition. Most types of language-play exhibit a strong tendency to stay within the boundaries of a single utterance, so in this respect, repetition distinguishes itself. The fact that it does is not really surprising, however, given the special nature of the category: most utterances are relatively short, and in order for repetition of the playful type to take place, more than one utterance may often be required. Furthermore, it is quite normal for speakers to take up bits of the preceding utterances as a means of ensuring cohesion with their own. This procedure can then be expanded to become playful by using the repeated items even more times, as in example (5.89) from *Antz*:

(5.89) Bala is not impressed by the abilities of her kidnapper, Z.

Bala: *I've been kidnapped by the village idiot.*

Z: *Who's the bigger idiot: the idiot or the idiot who gets kidnapped by the idiot?*

Of course, it is perfectly possible to repeat lexical items without a trigger in the form of a previous utterance. The following example will suffice as an illustration:

(5.90) In *Monsters, Inc*, Mike has been strapped onto a chair by Randall, and to his horror, a large, threatening machine starts approaching him.

Mike: *That thing is moving. I don't like big, moving things that are moving towards me.*

It should be pointed out that the few instances where linguistic material is repeated in a more or less playful manner are relatively evenly distributed across the corpus, with nine films featuring exactly one such instance each and no film more than the three instances detected in both *Antz* and *Chicken Run*. It could be hypothesized that this kind of language-play has not been employed with greater frequency because it is considered either too clumsy or too subtle by the
script writers, and the fact that it is quite easily achieved does not make up for a generally unenthusiastic attitude towards it. Note that I have not conferred the status of ‘doubtful’ on any of the sequences featuring repetition.

The SL repetitions in translation

When it comes to the translation of playful repetition, we get some mixed results, as Table 5.11 indicates (one Swedish dubbing solution is omitted because it is inaudible).

Table 5.11. Overview of the TL solutions for the Repetitions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TL lang-play?</th>
<th>German dubbing</th>
<th>Swedish dubbing</th>
<th>German subtitles</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles</th>
<th>Norw. subtitles</th>
<th>Danish subtitles</th>
<th>Sw. TV subtitles</th>
<th>Totals</th>
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<tbody>
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</table>

While the dubbed versions clearly tend to retain some language-play in the same spot as the original repetition, the results vary considerably for the subtitle versions. Especially the Danish subtitles stick out, however, because of their low share of solutions with TL language-play.

With very few exceptions, only two translation strategies have been applied to the sequences where SL repetition occurs: a) the text has been translated so that there is repetition of the corresponding TL items in the target text, or b) the number of occurrences of the critical items has been reduced so that the repetitive pattern has been weakened, often to the extent that no language-play at all is left. For a concrete example, consider the translations of another case of repetition in *Antz*, two of which exemplify the first solution, while the remaining four do not fulfil the requirements, set up above, for repetition as language-play:

(5.91) Z is trying to convey his horrible war experiences to General Mandible:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{It was-} & \quad \text{Es war-} \\
\text{It was just a massacre – a- a massacre upon a massacre.} & \quad \text{Es war ein einziges Massaker – ein} \\
\text{German dubbing:} & \quad \text{Ma- Massaker übertraf das andere.} \\
\text{Swedish dubbing:} & \quad \text{Det var- Det var ein massaker – en} \\
& \quad \text{massakernas massaker.}
\end{align*}
\]
Swedish DVD subtitles: *-Det var rena massakern.
Swedish TV subtitles: *[…] Allt var en enda massaker.
* -En enda massaker…
Norwegian subtitles: *[…] En massakre!
* -En massakre i massakren.
Danish subtitles: *Det var et blodbad.
Et regulært blodbad.

As can be seen, the threefold mentioning of massacre has been copied to the Swedish dubbing and the Norwegian subtitles, while the Danish and the Swedish TV subtitles and also the German dubbing only feature two occurrences of the corresponding items, which renders those versions rather unexceptional. In the Swedish DVD subtitles, only the core meaning of the utterance, but not even a single repetition, has been preserved, so that even the rhetorical aspect of special emphasis would have been lost were it not for the insertion of the intensifying adjective ren(a) ‘pure, sheer’. Such drastic reductions can first and foremost be seen in the subtitles, which are always more prone to compression than dubbing. For example, in three translations of a sequence from Stuart Little, six occurrences of one lexical item have been reduced to just one because two utterances have been omitted altogether. I think the general tendency in subtitles to omit repetition, which is normally non-playful, explains at least in part why these versions have less often than the dubbed ones retained the original repetition, even when it constitutes language-play.

As to the large variation among the subtitle versions, it seems mostly due to individual translation choices. With so few instances in the corpus, a couple of local decisions can have seemingly dramatic consequences for the overall picture. It also plays a role which TL versions were available for which film, as one or two instances exhibiting many easily copied repetitions can affect the results quite strongly. It should be pointed out, however, that no general correlation can be discerned between the number of occurrences of an item in the original sequence and its treatment in the translations.

Discussion of one particular set of repetitions and its translations
For the rounding-off discussion of a particular example, I have chosen the only sequence with a playful pattern of repetition that I could identify in The Road to El Dorado. Of the three translations incorporated in this study, only the two Swedish ones are rendered here for comparison with each other and the source text. The German dubbing is not reproduced because it would not add any new aspects. Suffice it to say that it mirrors the original dialogue very closely, both
semantically and in terms of language-play.

(5.92) Chel, a native of El Dorado, and the Spaniard Tulio have fallen in love with each other and plan to go to Spain together. After a quarrel, however, Chel threatens to stay in the golden city.

Tulio: Oohohoho, like you don’t want to go to Spain.
Chel: Oh, like you don’t want me to want to go to Spain.
Tulio: I want you to want … what you want.

Swedish dubbing: Oohohoho, som om du inte vill åka till Spanien.
Oh, som om du inte vill ha mig med till Spanien.
Jag vill att du ska vilja …

Swedish subtitles: *-Som om du inte vill åka till Spanien.
-Som om du inte vill att jag vill det.
*Jag vill att du vill…det du vill.

What I have focussed on here is the unusual frequency of want in a very short exchange, even though you accompanies it as a subject in four out of the six occurrences. There is actually a crescendo from one occurrence of want in Tulio’s first utterance, via two in Chel’s quick-witted reply, to three in Tulio’s confused final statement. As to the two TL versions, they go against the general trend discussed earlier in that the subtitlers have transferred the original pattern unchanged, with all six want having their vill counterparts, while the number of occurrences is reduced in the dubbing. Apparently, the dubbers have not appreciated the fact that in this case, a more or less verbatim translation would have been a means of transferring an instance of language-play across the language barrier without much trouble. Note also that the last occurrence of the verb in the dubbing is the infinitive vilja, which is rather different from the present tense form vill. Its use thus further weakens the little language-play that could still be said to have been preserved in that version.

5.1.11 Other instances of language-play

Introduction

As will have become clear in the present chapter as well as the previous one, language-play is anything but a well-defined concept with equally well-defined sub-categories. To begin with, we are really dealing with what could be described as a cline between obvious language-play and non-language-play, and while it is not much of a challenge to illustrate the extreme points with indisputable examples, there is also a lot of authentic material that positions itself somewhere in the middle. This is the case not least with instances where it
is unclear whether they represent the outcome of a playful intention or not, and I have tried to address this particular problem by explicitly considering ‘doubtful’ cases in connection with some of the language-play categories used in this study (most notably the puns).

Apart from examples that are ‘doubtful’ in the way mentioned, I have, in my material, occasionally encountered sequences of mostly spoken language that are quite obviously meant to be playful grammatically, semantically or in some other respect related to the linguistic system, but that do not fit properly into any of the categories taken up so far. In most cases, it may be possible to describe the crucial characteristics of the sequences in question in relatively straightforward terms, which would imply that they could be incorporated in specially created categories of their own, but that would not seem to be meaningful in this study if the number of representatives for that category is very low. In other cases, it seems difficult to pinpoint how exactly the language has been manipulated in order to achieve the particular effect of the sequence. Since both these types of instances should not simply be dismissed, they have been collected in this special section. Note, furthermore, that unclear intentions on the part of the scriptwriters and unusual language-play characteristics can coincide – and do so in a few ‘doubtful’ cases taken up here.

Number and nature of the SL instances

In view of the preceding comments, it is of course not possible to provide a general description covering all the instances taken up here. This distinguishes this section from the previous ones, which were each dedicated to a relatively narrow, if still fuzzy, set of phenomena. In those sections, most examples were representative of several others more or less like them, despite their respective idiosyncrasies. Here, most examples represent themselves, even though the terminology necessary to describe them may overlap at times.

For instance, there are four cases included here that are somehow linked to pronunciation, but these differ widely from each other, as examples (5.93) and (5.94) will indicate:

(5.93) In *Monsters, Inc*, the evil Randall suspects that Mike is hiding a human child whom he is very interested in himself. At one point, Randall intercepts Mike in a rough way.

Randall: *Wazowski!* Where is it, you little one-eyed /ˈkrɛtɪn/?

Mike: OK, first of all, it's /ˈkrɛtɪn/. If you’re gonna threaten me, do it properly.
While most of the humour derives from the fact that it seems to matter more to Mike that he is threatened and insulted correctly than that he is not exposed to such treatment at all, the language-play consists in the confrontation of two possible pronunciations of a relatively rare loan word, namely cretin. Compare this with a case where part of an English word is pronounced in a way that would seem strange to native speakers anywhere:

(5.94) In The Iron Giant, the supposedly hip Hogarth would like Dean to prepare some coffee for him. When Dean makes a remark implying that his coffee would be rather too strong for the boy, Hogarth answers:

I said I’m hip! (last word pronounced with a clear popping sound at the end)

On the level of the narrative, the purpose of Hogarth’s modified pronunciation seems to be special emphasis and an illustration of the ‘fact’ that he is what he claims to be, i.e. hip. On the audience level, it is doubtful whether Hogarth manages to convey this, and the result is more likely to be astonishment and, perhaps, amusement. Regardless of the possible effects, however, (5.93) and (5.94) have relatively little in common although they are both about pronunciation.

Another ‘subgroup’, if one may so bold as to call it that, has to do with unclear references. It is, however, not possible to give an exact number of examples because we are dealing with varying degrees of prominence when it comes to this feature. One example where the issue of unclear reference is both very prominent and obviously intended to be the basis of language-play can be found in Muppets from Space:

(5.95) Gonzo cannot provide some information that Singer says he would really like to have (cf. (5.42)).

Singer: So, I’m afraid we’re gonna have to perform an invasive quadrilobal brain probe on you and pluck it from your head.

Gonzo: The information?

Singer: No, your brain.

The language-play, which here functions as a joke, hinges mainly on the

178 It is not unproblematic to assess the correctness of Mike’s claim that /kriːtn/ is the ‘proper’ pronunciation of cretin. Wells (2000) gives the former as American, the latter as British English, which would make both at least regionally acceptable. However, Monstropolis perhaps resembles an American city more than a British one, and the characters populating it are dubbed by Americans, which indicates that American pronunciation, including /kriːtn/, may indeed be the norm in the fictional world of Monsters, Inc.
inherent ambiguity of the pro-form *it*. Such pro-forms can often lead to misunderstandings, but not because they evoke different dictionary definitions, like a pun would, but because they can refer to a variety of previously mentioned entities. If this semantic-grammatical peculiarity of English and many other languages is exploited for special effect, as is the case in (5.95), we are dealing with language-play.

It is not only personal pronouns like *it* or *you* (cf. example (4.27), discussed in the section on polysemic puns) or demonstrative pronouns like *this* that can have unclear referents, also words carrying more content by themselves can point in different directions, as it were:

(5.96) From *Anastasia*: Rasputin, living in limbo in his underground world, has dropped his head into his empty ribcage. From there, he announces that he will have to kill Anastasia in person. The bat Bartok, pulling the head back up, comments:
But that means going topside.

What Bartok means to say is that Rasputin will have to rise to the surface of the Earth in order to kill any human being living there. At the same time, however, Rasputin’s head, which is the body part most strongly representing the entire person, also ‘goes topside’ again, i.e. to above the shoulders. The meaning of ‘moving to the top of something’ is in both cases the same, so we are not faced with a pun here, but unless the double referents are due to coincidence, we do have a form of language-play.

Loosely related to the ambiguities described above are cases where the scope or the obvious purpose of the negator *not* are subverted, as in example (5.97) from *Stuart Little*:

(5.97) At the model boat race, the sailing boats of Anton, a stuck-up bully, and George, Stuart’s ‘big brother’, collide and get entangled. Stuart, the skipper on George’s boat, must bite his boat free, thereby damaging Anton’s.
Anton: *Look what that stupid mouse did to my sail!*
George: *He’s not a stupid mouse!*
Anton: *You’re right: a stupid rat!*

With his angry *He’s not a stupid mouse*, George obviously does not want to contest that Stuart is a mouse, which he is, but the claim that he is stupid. However, since he does not just say *he’s not stupid*, but also repeats the word *mouse* from the previous utterance, Anton gets a chance to pretend that he
agrees with George by saying you’re right while maliciously reinterpreting the scope of not from stupid to mouse.

As a final example of the variation covered by the present section, consider the following excerpt from *Ice Age*:

(5.98) Sid thinks that “we”, i.e. himself and Manfred, should bring the human baby they have found back to his family. Manfred, who had saved Sid’s life not long before, desires nothing more than to be left alone.

**Manfred:** Let me get something straight here, OK? There’s no ‘we’. There never was a ‘we’. In fact, without me, there wouldn’t even be a ‘you’.

It seems sufficiently common to treat personal pronouns like real nouns by placing no or the indeterminate article in front of them in order for me not to consider this play with grammar, even though it is perhaps still unusual enough to add to the special, language-based effect created by the use of *we* (twice), *me* and *you* within a short stretch of text. Note also that *we* and *you* in Manfred’s remark have different connotations: ‘being together’ vs. ‘being alive’. This brings the sequence close to a pun, but in my opinion it is too complex, and the differences in meaning too subtle, to qualify as such.

All in all, 21 sequences from the corpus have been collected here. These are distributed across 13 films, with *The Road to El Dorado* represented three times and the others just once or twice. Three of the sequences are somewhat doubtful as to whether they have been intended as language-play, including the one quoted in (5.96). Eight of the instances feature a link to the picture, sometimes a rather strong one, sometimes a weaker one, while the rest rely solely on linguistic information. About half of the examples can be said to be overt, almost all of the remaining ones having an uncertain status in this respect. Only one of the examples is covert, i.e. apparently not understood as language-play by any of the other characters in the film.

*The SL instances in translation*

Since the doubts are relatively minor as to whether the three instances mentioned above were intended as language-play, they have been included in the overview of the translation solutions. These amount to 107, or quite exactly 5 for each of the 21 SL examples on average. Table 5.12 gives a first indication of how the ‘other’ types of language-play have fared in the target versions.
Table 5.12. Overview of the TL solutions for the *Other cases*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TL lang.-play?</th>
<th>German dubbing</th>
<th>Swedish dubbing</th>
<th>German subtitles</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles</th>
<th>Norw. subtitles</th>
<th>Danish subtitles</th>
<th>Sw. TV subtitles</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen, the share of TL solutions featuring language-play is very high for the cases taken up here. In fact, of all the categories employed in this study, only the *Sentences ending in unexpected ways* trigger more language-play in the target versions than the motley crew of examples collected in this section. However, a closer look at the strategies employed shows that the results are less surprising than they may seem: in the clear majority of cases, it has been possible to achieve TL language-play that is very similar to the original with the help of more or less literal translation. Preservation of the playful language use in the TL may thus require attention to the original phrasing, but, once the language-play has been detected, not much creative effort.

Most of the other strategies are predominantly employed in connection with only one or two examples each, including the strategy of transferring SL material into the target text (leading to a questionable outcome in about half the cases). More or less direct translation leading to a loss of language-play is otherwise the second most commonly used translation strategy, though the number of times it has been used (eleven) and the number of SL examples in connection with which it has been used (five) are still quite low.

Of the original language-play quoted in this section so far, all but one instance have been carried over into the target text by all or almost all of the translators, who were able to do so simply by choosing more or less close TL counterparts. However, this was not possible with the exception, viz. the competing pronunciations of *cretin* in (5.93), which are too dependent on the source language to be directly transferable. This example thus constitutes one of the few cases where the translators were forced to be at least somewhat creative, either by inventing incorrect pronunciations (or spellings) of *Kretin/kretin* that they could oppose to the correct one, or by using altogether different epithets.
Discussion of one particular SL instance and some of its translations

The example I have chosen to round this section off belongs to what is perhaps the largest group within the heterogeneous collection considered here and is thus one of the more representative cases. Like example (5.97), it is centred around the scope of a particular word, in this case yes. However, while (5.97) yielded five straightforward and uncomplicated translations functioning in the same way as the original, at least two out of the four target versions of the instance in Shrek quoted here are problematic:

(5.99) Shrek and the donkey are traversing an unstable suspension bridge when the donkey becomes so scared that he refuses to move on. Feeling no pity, Shrek shakes the bridge in order to get the donkey going again.

Donkey: Don’t do that!
Shrek: Oh, I’m sorry. Do what? Oh, this? (shakes bridge)
Donkey: Yes, yes!
Shrek: Yes? Yes, do it. OK … (shakes bridge)

German dubbing: Tu das nicht!
   Tu was nicht? Oh, das hier?
   Ja, das!
   Ja? Ja, tu ich. OK …

Swedish dubbing: Gör inte så där!
   Åh, förlåt mig. Vad då? Åh, det här?
   Ja, så där!
   Ja? Ja, då så. Okej …

German subtitles:
   -Tu das nicht!
   *-Entschuldige. Was denn? Das?
   -Ja, das!
   *-Ja? Ja, tu das. OK.

Swedish subtitles:
   -*Förlåt. Vad då? Så här?
   -Just det!

In fact, none of the TL versions functions quite as well as the original language-play, where Shrek’s wilful misinterpretation of the donkey’s desperate yes, yes is grammatically, if not with a view to the Co-operative Principle, quite acceptable. This is mostly due to the fact that Shrek asks do what? rather than, say, don’t do what? before going on with oh, this?, which fits well together with Shrek’s second utterance.

In the German dubbing, Shrek asks the equivalent of don’t do what? Oh, this?, yet the don’t ought to make it grammatically impossible to misinterpret the
following *ja, das* ‘yes, this’ in the way it is. While the general idea behind the sequence is certainly preserved, the actual phrasing is not exact enough to make it work in a realistic way, and I have therefore counted the sequence as a doubtful instance of TL language-play. It shares this classification with the Swedish subtitles, where it is the choice of *vad då* ‘what (do you mean)?’ in conjunction with *just det* ‘~precisely’ that makes Shrek’s subsequent *jaså? Ja, gör så* ‘oh, really? Yes, do it’ seem highly incongruent.

In the Swedish dubbing and the German subtitles, the way to the punch line is better paved than in the other two translations, even though they still do not function quite as smoothly as the English version. It is the difference in meaning between *do what? Oh, this?* on the one hand and *vad då? Åh, det här was denn? Das?* on the other that renders the stipulation of a second referent for *yes/ja* more plausible in the former case.

### 5.2 Summary of the results on non-punning language-play

*The SL instances*

When all the non-punning language-play strategies are taken together, including the ones considered in the special section at the end of 5.1, we are dealing with 630 clear examples and another 30 more doubtful ones. Since some of these different strategies can co-occur, however, and since e.g. three rhyming or alliterating items within the vicinity of each other can be considered one instance of language-play, but have been counted as two rhymes/alliterations, the number of instances of language-play is lower than the number of times individual language-play strategies have been employed (cf. 3.1.3.5). Almost all of the doubtful cases consist of just possibly intended alliterations, rhymes or half-rhymes, and it is probably no coincidence that these are among the phenomena most likely to occur in ordinary, non-playful language use, too.

Focussing on the more or less obviously intended SL language-play, Table 5.13 shows how the occurrences are distributed across the various categories. These are listed here in the same order in which they were introduced and discussed earlier in this chapter.

As can be seen, the figures for the different kinds of language-play diverge widely. *Rhymes* represent the most common strategy by far, though it must be remembered that they occur mostly in songs, poems and similar contexts, and comparatively seldom in ordinary conversation. *Half-rhymes* also often appear in such environments, but their overall number is much lower.
Table 5.13. SL instances of non-punning language-play strategies in the corpus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Play with metaphors, etc.</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Rhymes</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modified expressions</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Half-rhymes</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign words</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Alliteration</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonce formations</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>Repetition</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play with grammar</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences ending, etc.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>630</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second most common strategy for non-punning language-play is, perhaps surprisingly, the creation of *Nonce formations*. These, however, often coincide with paronymic puns. Still, there is a substantial gap between the number of rhymes and the number of nonce formations, which, in turn, are clearly more widespread than the group of non-rhyming kinds of repetitions (*Half-rhymes, Alliteration, Repetition of lexical items*) and the other two strategies with a comparatively high number of examples, namely what I have labelled *Modified expressions* and *Plays with metaphors, similes, idioms and related figures of speech*, respectively. The remaining strategies, most notably the *Foreign words* and the *Play with grammar*, have been employed only sparsely, which may partly be due to the fact that they have been defined in relatively narrow terms.

With the categories of language-play as diverse as they are, it is difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions from their respective prominence or lack thereof. As indicated above, the quite large number of nonce formations may seem to be the most unexpected finding when it comes to the SL language-play, but it should be kept in mind that most of them are not striking blends of existing words such as *fluddle* (from *flood* and *puddle* – cf. 5.1.4), but more or less unobtrusive, if new, sequences of lexical elements that, moreover, often reflect the alternative worlds and frames of references introduced in the movies.

When it comes to links between the language-play and the non-verbal channels of the films in which it occurs, we get some mixed results, which could be expected, given the variation among the strategies considered here. Six of these strategies are never or almost never supported by the picture, viz. the four strategies based on a form of repetition, plus play with grammar and foreign words. All of these rely on form much more than on meaning, and it is in many cases virtually impossible to let a play with form be reflected non-linguistically in a film.

The other categories, including the one for the ‘uncategorized’ examples, all feature a fair share of cases that are strongly or at least somewhat linked to
the picture, especially the modified expressions and the play with metaphors, etc., where the cases with such links make up around two thirds of the total number. The nonce formations, on the other hand, are generally independent of, or just subtly related to, the simultaneously available visual information.

As to the other type of possible external connection, i.e. the question whether the language-play has been noticed by characters other than the sender, it did not even seem meaningful, for some of the categories, to quantify the results. This is true especially of the rhymes and, to a lesser extent, of the half-rhymes, both of which I would consider automatically overt when they appear in songs sung by more than one character and covert when sung by a solitary singer without listeners (these two alternatives cover the vast majority of the songs in the corpus). When rhymes and half-rhymes occur in ordinary conversation, it is almost always unclear whether they are noticed by others, and the same can be said of alliteration, repetitions of lexical items and the foreign words replacing domestic ones. Clearly overt cases are in the minority in connection with all language-play strategies, including those not mentioned yet, and the cases where it is unclear whether they should be classified as overt or covert tend to represent a relative, or even an absolute, majority. Only when it comes to the ‘mixed bag’ category (5.1.11) are about half of the examples overt.

SL vs. TL language-play
The number of independent translations of all instances of clear, non-punning language-play in this corpus is 2996, or less than 4.8 translations per instance on average. While the total number of TL solutions for the clear non-punning language-play is higher by about 1,000 than the corresponding figure for the clear puns, the average per instance is lower here (the puns boast an average of 5.4). The first difference is of course due to the fact that there are more SL instances of non-puns than of puns. As to the second difference, the rhymes are responsible for most of it: since the vast majority of the rhymes occur in songs, and since many of the songs can be found in films with relatively few independent TL versions (Anastasia being the prime example), the average for the numerous rhymes is well below 4, which of course has an impact on the overall average.

Now, more interesting than the numbers of SL and TL versions is of course the question as to what has happened to the original language-play in the translations. Table 5.14 provides the broad picture by featuring the sums of the figures from Tables 5.1-5.6 and 5.8-5.12 in section 5.1. Following the policy
adopted for those tables, the doubtful SL cases, where they exist, are disregarded, as are the inaudible TL solutions. The latter amount to 32 (12 German and 20 Swedish dubbing solutions), and what this implies will be discussed in section 6.4.

Table 5.14. Overview of the TL solutions for all clear, non-punning language-play (absolute figures and percentages).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TL lang.-play?</th>
<th>German dubbing</th>
<th>Swedish dubbing</th>
<th>German subtitles</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles</th>
<th>Norw. subtitles</th>
<th>Danish subtitles</th>
<th>Sw. TV subtitles</th>
<th>Total/ Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>393 63.6</td>
<td>394 64.6</td>
<td>280 53.6</td>
<td>199 49.9</td>
<td>216 51.3</td>
<td>24 38.7</td>
<td>1677 53.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>46 7.4</td>
<td>40 6.6</td>
<td>29 8.7</td>
<td>42 8.0</td>
<td>27 6.8</td>
<td>36 8.6</td>
<td>226 8.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>179 29.0</td>
<td>176 28.9</td>
<td>132 39.8</td>
<td>200 38.3</td>
<td>173 43.4</td>
<td>32 51.6</td>
<td>1061 38.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>618 100</td>
<td>610 100</td>
<td>332 100</td>
<td>522 99.9</td>
<td>399 100</td>
<td>1421 100</td>
<td>2964 100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A number of trends are reflected in the table, and what is most striking is perhaps the fact that the two dubbed versions have a notably higher share of ‘yes’ solutions than all of the subtitle versions. As may be recalled from chapter 4, the picture was not at all as clear-cut in connection with the puns. Here, the highest percentage of ‘yes’ solutions in a subtitle version (Swedish DVD) is still ten percentage points below that of the German dubbing, and eleven below that of the Swedish dubbing. In part, this can be explained, once again, by the rhymes: most of these, especially those occurring in songs, are translated into TL rhymes or half-rhymes, i.e. language-play. However, since the subtitle versions of several songs, not least the long ones in Anastasia, were much too dependent on the dubbing, they have not been considered here. Had they been produced independently from the dubbing and, as a consequence, been included in the count, they would most probably have raised the share of ‘yes’ solutions for the subtitle versions.

The dubbed versions can also feature above-average shares of TL language-play in connection with other categories, but the only type of language-play that has been treated differently in dubbing and subtitling in quite a consistent fashion is that of repetition. In those particular, and relatively few,
cases where a lexical item is repeated unusually often within a limited text sequence, the inherent properties of the respective translation mode lead to different results in terms of TL language-play: preservation in the dubbing, which contains, as a general rule, the same number of lexical items as the original dialogue,\textsuperscript{180} and quantitative reduction in the subtitles, with a resulting loss of language-play.

Apart from the rather few Swedish TV subtitles, which have a tendency to stick out one way or the other, none of the TL versions involve results that deviate markedly from the norm for the kind of translation mode they represent. This circumstance is, in fact, more surprising than if, say, the German subtitles had behaved as they did in connection with the puns and contained notably fewer ‘yes’ solutions than the other subtitle versions. Here, the four DVD subtitle versions are within a few percentage points of each other, and the results for the two dubbed versions are also very similar. Well-founded conclusions concerning the small differences are impossible, but let me simply point out that of the DVD subtitle versions, the Swedish ones feature language-play most often and the Norwegian ones least often. This cannot be said to be consistent with the results for the puns, so there are no clear tendencies for the entire corpus in this respect.

In connection with most of the categories where they are represented at all, the Swedish TV subtitles feature less TL language-play, in absolute as well as relative terms, than the other versions (rhymes being the clearest example). While this is in line with the results for the horizontal puns, those for the vertical ones contradict what might otherwise have been a trend. However, the low number of examples would have made bold generalizations regarding the TV subtitles a questionable endeavour anyway.

A final word is in order about the doubtful SL instances of non-punning language-play, which are not represented in Table 5.14. The large majority of them have been translated so that there is no TL language-play to be found, while a few just possibly intended alliterations have been turned into equally doubtful TL alliterations. There \textit{is} a small number of instances where doubtful SL play has become clear TL play, but these constitute exceptions.

\textit{Categories of SL language-play and translation strategies}

It has been indicated before that non-punning language-play is anything but a

\textsuperscript{180} In Schröter (2003), I have shown that differences between languages can mean, in a dubbing context, that the same amount of time will be filled with somewhat differing numbers of lexical items in the original dialogue and the translation. However, the differences between spoken dialogues and written subtitles of the same dialogues are much greater in this respect.
homogeneous group of phenomena. While some affinities may exist between
certain categories, there are, in fact, some quite fundamental differences to be
found between others, as will have become clear. This can reasonably be
expected to have an impact on the translations, and Table 5.15 shows that this
is indeed the case. In the table, the categories I have made use of in this chapter
are listed, and the ‘yes’, ‘?’, and ‘no’ percentages are given for each. Since the
results for the masculine and the feminine rhymes differ from each other, they
have each been accorded their own column. The category with the highest
share of ‘yes’ solutions is listed first, followed by the one with the second-
highest share and so on. Note that the percentages for the ‘no’ solutions do not
increase as regularly as those for the ‘yes’ solutions decrease because the figures
for the doubtful TL solutions vary between the categories.

Table 5.15. Overview of the TL solutions with regard to SL language-play
category (percentages).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TL lang-play?</th>
<th>Sentences ending etc.</th>
<th>Other cases</th>
<th>metaphors, similes, etc.</th>
<th>Rhymes (feminine)</th>
<th>Rhymes (masculine)</th>
<th>Repetitions</th>
<th>Modified expressions</th>
<th>nonce</th>
<th>Foreign words</th>
<th>Play with grammar</th>
<th>Half-rhymes</th>
<th>Alliterations</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>84.5</td>
<td>73.8</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>60.1</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>58.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>32.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the majority of language-play categories, the strategy of translating more or
less directly into the target language is what has most often led to a preservation
(or re-creation) of the original language-play (see below). The reason why the
sentences ending in unexpected ways constitute the strategy with the highest
share of ‘yes’ solutions is the circumstance that a straightforward transfer,
which is both a relatively easy translation strategy and a more acceptable one
than e.g. complete omission, has more or less automatically led to a TL copy of
the original language-play. This can also be assumed to be the reason why the
translations of the ‘other cases’ and of the play with metaphors, similes, idioms
and related figures of speech also score a high share of ‘yes’ solutions – higher
even than the horizontal polysemic puns, which is the type of pun most often
rendered as TL language-play.

Footnote: The weighted averages are the same as those presented in the footnote to Table 5.14, i.e. ‘yes’ solutions 56.6%, ‘?’ 7.6%, and ‘no’ solutions 35.8%.
Rhymes, in contrast, are different from the categories mentioned: direct translation would not normally lead to TL rhymes, but they have still been rendered as such in relatively many cases. This is probably due to the fact that they tend to occur in songs and similar linguistic environments, which is likely to function as a strong signal that TL rhymes are called for. On the other hand, feminine rhymes, which proportionally occur more often in ordinary dialogue than masculine ones, have a somewhat higher share of ‘yes’ solutions still, possibly because they are more conspicuous.

Half-rhymes and alliterations occupy the other end of the table. They, too, cannot normally be preserved through direct translation, but they are also less conspicuous than rhymes and perhaps not quite as characteristic of songs, so they may be more often missed or, where they are noticed, not be considered deserving of a special creative effort on the part of the translator.

It may be interesting to note that the weighted averages for all of the non-punning language-play and those for all the horizontal puns are actually not very different from each other, so it might be concluded that the two groups, in so far as it is permissible to ignore their internal disparities for the moment, pose comparable translation challenges (the vertical puns, by contrast, have triggered somewhat fewer ‘yes’ solution on average). Phrased differently, if the translations are anything to go by, and I think they can at least provide some strong indication in this respect, non-punning language-play in general is structurally and functionally about as far removed from ordinary, unmarked language use as puns are.

However, it will be interesting to see whether the translators have used the translation strategies that are at their disposal to similar extents here as in connection with the puns. Table 5.16 provides the percentages, but note that translation strategy V, which in connection with the puns implied the creation of a TL pun different in kind from the SL pun, has only been revived for the rhymes and half-rhymes here. When it comes to those categories, strategy V implies that a rhyme has been turned into a half-rhyme or vice versa, i.e. into a similar, but not identical, type of language-play. The following list provides more information on what the Roman numbers in Table 5.16 stand for:

I:  direct copy of SL material into the target text
II:  calque
III: in a complex instance of language-play, the category in question is lost, but some other aspect of the SL language-play is transferred
IV: creation of TL language-play belonging to the same category as the SL
language-play

V: SL rhyme becomes TL half-rhyme, or vice versa
VI: creation of TL language-play belonging to a new category
VII: translation without language-play
VIII: complete omission.

Otherwise, the same applies to Table 5.16 as to the corresponding table for the puns, namely that it only covers the cases where the presence of SL language-play is not in doubt and where I am reasonably sure that the TL solutions do or do not contain language-play. In other words, the figures in the rows marked with a ? in Tables 5.14 and 5.15 have not been considered in the calculation of the percentages. Finally, let me point out that the order in which the categories were listed in Table 5.15 has been retained in Table 5.16 so that comparisons are facilitated.

Table 5.16. Overview of the translation strategies with regard to SL language-play category (percentages).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Sentences ending etc.</th>
<th>Other cases</th>
<th>metaphors, similes, etc.</th>
<th>Rhymes (feminine)</th>
<th>Rhymes (masculine)</th>
<th>Repetitions</th>
<th>Modified expressions</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Foreign words</th>
<th>Play with grammar</th>
<th>Half-remarks</th>
<th>Alliterations</th>
<th>Average %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>82.4</td>
<td>72.5</td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>99.9</td>
<td>99.8</td>
<td>99.9</td>
<td>100.1</td>
<td>100.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>99.9</td>
<td>100.1</td>
<td>100.1</td>
<td>100.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When it comes to the weighted averages, which take the fact into account that the number of translations differs for the various categories, they are for most strategies relatively close to the ordinary averages presented in Table 5.16.\textsuperscript{183}

\textsuperscript{182} In the calculation of the averages, strategy V has been treated as if it was a true alternative in the translation of all categories, which it was not (indicated by ? in nine out of twelve columns); otherwise, the results would have become distorted and the total been below or above 100%, depending on the alternative approach chosen.

\textsuperscript{183} Weighted average for strategy I: 4.8%; II: 25.5%; III: 2.0%; IV: 21.9%; V: 3.9%; VI: 2.9%; VII: 32.0%; VIII: 6.9%.
The biggest divergences concern strategies II and IV, i.e. the transfer of the original language-play into a close TL equivalent, and the creation of a relatively independent TL language-play that nonetheless belongs to the same category as the original, respectively. In the weighted averages, the former translation strategy has a share that is lower by 8.5 percentage points (reducing it to the second-most common strategy after VII) whereas the share of strategy IV is up by 5.5 percentage points. This is mainly due to the influence of the many rhymes and alliterations, which cannot normally be preserved in a straightforward semantic translation, but need to be created afresh (see below).

With so much information concentrated in one table, there are several findings worth pointing out specifically. Strategies I-III all imply the preservation of some or even all the aspects of the original language-play. Inserting source-text material into the target text (strategy I) can seem to be an extreme measure, and this solution has, in fact, never been chosen in connection with five out of twelve language-play categories. However, depending on the actual words involved, or the way they have been manipulated, direct copying proved defensible, or even the best choice, in connection with some of the other categories, most notably the nonce formations and the foreign words, but also the feminine rhymes. The latter is perhaps surprising, but direct copying of feminine rhymes actually only happens where international loan words, rhymes within nonsense formations, and rhymes entirely in a foreign language are involved.

Strategies II and VII, i.e. direct translation leading to the preservation of language-play or the loss of it, are, in general, the two most common translation strategies. However, strategy II has rarely been employed in connection with the language-play categories that are most clearly based on form, viz. rhymes, half-rhymes and alliteration, while it predominates with language-play that does not rely so heavily on SL-specific material and phenomena.

Strategy III, the preservation of language-play aspects other than the category in question, is quite rare. If it seems to be unexpectedly common when it comes to the foreign words, keep in mind that this is the smallest category of all and that a couple of individual choices immediately affect the percentages to a noticeable extent.

Strategies IV-VI are the ones that involve the clearest creative effort on the part of the translator. They are used primarily when the goal is to have (functionally equivalent) TL language-play in the same spot as the SL language-play and when this is not possible to achieve through direct translation or copying. Strategy V, as it is defined here, has been inspired by its counterpart in
chapter 4, where it signified the creation of an independent pun of a type that is
different from that of the original. With rhymes being comparable to horizontal
homonymic, polysemic, and homophonic puns and half-rhymes to horizontal
paronymic puns, it was quite unproblematic to adapt this strategy for the
language-play categories mentioned. These coincide with the categories where
the three ‘creative’ translation strategies have been used most frequently,
though they are also important for two other, mostly form-based, categories,
namely play with grammar and alliteration. At the other extreme, repetition and
foreign words hardly ever cause the translators to become creative in the sense
that independent TL language-play is produced. None of the categories, finally,
features an elevated number of SL instances that have been turned into TL
language-play of an altogether different kind (strategy VI).

Strategies VII and VII imply a loss of language-play. Total omission is
used less often than direct translation, as was to be expected. The categories
most affected by this extreme solution are alliteration, nonce formations,
repetitions and half-rhymes, in that order. It never occurs with sentences
ending in unexpected ways. This, incidentally, is also the category with the most
strikingly low share of strategy VII solutions (4.4%), while alliteration, foreign
words, and half-rhymes have all been subjected to this translation strategy in
almost 50% of the cases.

As to links between extra-linguistic properties of the language-play and
the choice of translation strategy, no very clear picture is emerging here, either.
The only strong tendency is that obviously overt language-play is hardly ever
omitted altogether. The only exception occurs in The Adventures of Rocky and
Bullwinkle, in a subtitle version of a relatively dense dialogue, and in it, at least
some of the directly preceding SL language-play has been transferred. In one
sense, the case mentioned is not so very special anyway, because it happens
frequently that covert language-play is preserved and overt language-play lost,
even though the opposite would have been expected. This distinction thus
seems to have a limited predictive value. However, it must also be said that
since very many of my language-play examples remain unclassified in this
respect, possible trends are, in general, difficult to discern in my material.

As to the link, or absence of a link, between the language-play and the
visual information accessible at the same time, it seems too unimportant a
factor to influence the choice of translation strategy to a significant extent.
6 Further findings

In the present chapter, I will summarize some of the findings that go beyond the individual categories of language-play. The issues dealt with here include two special types of linguistic environment in which language-play on film can appear, namely songs on the one hand and written texts on the other (sections 6.1.1 and 6.1.2, respectively), and the question is how language-play occurring in such contexts has fared in the dubbing and subtitling. In 6.2, the translation strategy of compensation will be taken up again and its role will be discussed. The main focus of this chapter, however, is on identifying factors other than the nature of the SL language-play that can be shown to have had a decisive impact on the overall results when it comes to language-play in audio-visual translation. In a number of comparisons in sections 6.3-6.5, the influence of several parameters will be explored, but it is especially one that will eventually stand out as the most important.

6.1 Special types of texts

6.1.1 Songs

In accordance with the criteria outlined in section 3.1.3.4, 29 of the songs featured in the 18 films of the corpus could be considered for analysis. Typically, these are songs that have been written specifically for the film in which they occur and that are sung by one or several of the characters themselves. However, a song that is explicitly about one of the characters in Rugrats in Paris, and a couple of previously existing classics that have been altered for the purpose of the film in which they are sung are also part of the corpus.

If each language-play strategy is counted by itself, there are 198 clear SL instances and six doubtful ones that occur within a text sequence that is sung. However, since two or more strategies occasionally interact in a single instance of language-play, e.g. when an otherwise fixed expression has been modified with the help of a pun, or a nonce formation also features a half-rhyme, the number of separate examples is slightly lower than 198.

Most strategies occur between zero and five times in a song context, and there are only two that really stick out in quantitative terms, namely rhymes (156 clear cases) and, to a lesser extent, half-rhymes with 19 clear and 2
doubtful cases. In fact, half-rhymes and especially rhymes are almost defining attributes of songs, at least of the kind incorporated in family films, and it is actually something of an exception if a line in a song does not end with an item that is part of either a rhyme or a half-rhyme. The other types of language-play, by contrast, appear seemingly at random, or as a ‘bonus’ feature, in this kind of environment.

The reason why I did not include all songs in the analysis is that previously established songs that are performed by professional artists qua professional artists, rather than qua the voices of fictional characters, are usually not translated at all. In contrast to such background music, songs written for, and/or sung by, the characters could be expected to have been translated in both dubbing and subtitling, at least in the kind of films in my corpus.

As it turned out, the picture was not quite as straightforward as expected. In Anastasia, for example, the German, Swedish, and Norwegian subtitles of the songs were obviously based on the dubbed version in the same target language rather than on the English original, even though the subtitles of the rest of the film were quite independent both of each other and of the dubbed versions. Apparently, it was felt that some time and effort could be saved by simply transcribing an already existing, orally transmitted translation, which, furthermore, featured rhymes in almost as consistent a manner as the English version.

Occasionally, one or other of the songs included in the corpus was not translated at all in one or several of the target versions. Thus, there are no TL counterparts for three and two songs, respectively, in the German and the Swedish dubbed versions of Rugrats in Paris, which simply feature the original English text instead, and one short song in The Iron Giant is left untranslated in the Swedish DVD subtitles. What these songs have in common, and this may be the reason why they have not been given full attention by all the translators, is that the singer cannot actually be seen singing. The one in The Iron Giant occurs in a propaganda film that Hogarth’s class is watching and comes from ‘offstage’ (cf. example (5.71)). A similar description also applies to one of the Rugrats in Paris songs referred to, while the remaining two songs are part of the thoughts and a dream, respectively, of one of the protagonists. When it comes to the three songs omitted in the Swedish TV subtitles of Antz, however, the translation policy seems to have been to disregard all songs, even if they are visibly sung by one or several of the characters.

The way songs are treated obviously affects some of the results in the study, especially those for the two language-play categories that are most
prominent in this special text type, namely rhymes and half-rhymes. For if the entire song has been omitted, this has been counted as an omission of the language-play contained in it, too. However, what has really led to a noticeable higher share of ‘no TL language-play’ solutions for the rhymes and half-rhymes in one of the target versions is the Norwegian subtitler’s quite consistent choice of translating only the sense of the song texts (and of the poems) in *Rugrats in Paris*, without making an additional effort to re-create the language-play.

Overall, the treatment of the various instances of language-play in songs more or less mirrors the way the respective categories have been treated in general, with e.g. foreign words being copied, alliterations generally being lost, and playful repetitions of lexical items mostly being preserved with the help of direct translation. In my study, it is thus primarily the somewhat elevated number of complete omissions that distinguishes the songs from other linguistic environments when it comes to translation strategies for language-play on film.

### 6.1.2 Written texts

In some special genres of filmed productions, such as TV news and certain documentaries and educational programmes, written texts, for example documents of various kinds, as well as tables and other condensed forms of visual information, can occur with relative frequency. However, if the written material is pertinent to the story or the report in which it appears, and the text types mentioned almost always are, at least the most salient passages are very likely to be read aloud or summarized by the news anchor, the reporter or a speaker.

Written material also occurs in feature films, for example because shop signs and billboards are part of the average urban landscape that often serves as a backdrop to the action. Letters, notes and diary entries are also used occasionally, especially as a means to convey the writer’s thoughts and feelings, or to provide information about characters that are physically absent from the scene. Nowadays, one may also see what people write as they type on a computer keyboard, or, say, a written alert flashing ominously on a monitor. All these well-known phenomena notwithstanding, they tend to remain exceptions

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^184^ Ivarsson (1992:104) uses *displays* for written texts “that have been recorded by the camera and have significance for the action” and *captions* for “texts that are added to the film or tape after shooting”. I do not feel that this distinction is as clear-cut as it may seem when it comes to the animated cartoons in my corpus. Besides, written texts “recorded by the camera” can be completely irrelevant for the action, but still contain interesting language-play. For the sake of simplicity, I shall therefore continue to use the more transparent term written texts.
or, in the case of e.g. most shop signs, random or secondary information in the narrative part of a full-length feature film. The progress of the plot normally relies on orally transmitted language, especially in the form of dialogues and perhaps songs, much more than on writing.

While I have not quantified the overall amount of written text in my 18 films, I have quantified the language-play that is either based on writing alone, or on a contrast between what is written and what is said. All in all, the different language-play categories are represented 40 times in writing, in 27 separate instances of language-play. This difference in numbers is mainly due to the fact that the ten written nonce formations all feature either alliteration (three cases) or a type of pun (seven) in addition to representing the category of nonce formations itself. Nonce formations, alliteration, and most of the different types of puns are actually the only language-play categories that have been employed in written texts in my corpus.

The difference in treatment when it comes to written and spoken language-play is striking. In only about 10% of the cases has a translator managed to create clear TL language-play in the same time slot in which the written original language-play is accessible. Less than half a dozen solutions, most of them based on direct translation, yield a result that is doubtful in terms of TL language-play, while there is compensation within a ±10-second frame in another few instances (though it is anything but clear whether these instances are, in fact, meant to compensate for the written SL play, for some other SL play, or simply constitute a bonus).

In over 80% of the translation contexts, the written SL language-play has been lost in the TL versions, and in the vast majority of these cases, the loss is due to complete omission or non-translation. Most of the instances are omitted by all the translators whose target versions have been included in the corpus (usually five or six per film). In a few cases, one, two or even three of the translators have made some effort to mirror the written language-play in the target version, while the others have omitted it. No instance has successfully been rendered into TL language-play by all the translators.

There are a number of reasons why most of the written instances have no TL counterpart. One is that many of them are rather unobtrusive. Several of those found in *Monsters, Inc*, for example, which is the film with the most examples, are more or less hidden in the signs around *Tony’s Grossery* (which is itself a subtly inserted instance of a written homophonic pun, cf. example (4.38)). Unless one is very perceptive and not paying too much attention to the dialogue that is going on at the same time, one would have to view the film a
second or third time in order to catch all the puns hidden there. The same is true of many of the other written instances of language-play.

Simultaneously occurring dialogue may not only prevent ordinary audiences as well as translators from noticing visually accessible language-play in the first place; it may simply leave no space for the translation of written texts that compete for attention. For example, during all of the time in which the ‘grossery’ shop signs mentioned above are visible, a rather fast-paced, spoken exchange is taking place that must take priority in a translation context. Not only does this exchange command most of the viewers’ attention, parts of it are also important for the development of the plot, which is definitely not the case with the shop signs.

Occasionally, there is a short break in the dialogue so that the viewers have a chance to take in the contents of a newspaper headline or other written information, but the time available for a possible subtitle is still not what would be minimally required according to the prevailing subtitling norms. In other cases still, the language-play, if it is recognized as such, may not be deemed worthy of a translation, or at least not worthy of a creative translation effort, even if the time constraint is not a major problem. Nonce formations featuring nothing more than alliteration, such as the semantically opaque Mystery Machine on the side of a van in Scooby-Doo, might be viewed thus. In fact, since it is unclear what the SL phrase refers to, it is equally unclear what it could have been translated into.

In sum, then, written language-play in films tends to be reserved for attentive second- or third-time viewers who, furthermore, need a good command of the source language in order to appreciate the linguistic manipulation involved, especially if this manipulation is partly based on meaning rather than exclusively on form.

6.2 Compensation

As may be recalled from 2.3.6, there are essentially two types of compensation in translation, which can be summarized as follows:

a) An effect similar to that triggered by a source-text element is also evoked in the target-text, in the same place, but with the help of an element that is different in kind from the original one.

b) An effect similar to that triggered by a source-text element is also
evoked in the target-text, with the help of an element that is more
or less similar in kind to the original one, but in a different place.

Obviously, these two kinds of compensation can also be combined, namely
when a similar effect is evoked by a different kind of element in a different
place in the target text.

To a certain extent, the type of compensation described under a) has been
dealt with on a regular basis in chapters 4 and 5, and especially in their
respective summaries: translation strategies IV, V, and VI all lead to TL
language-play that occurs in the same place as the original, but is different from
it in terms of content and/or language-play category. These strategies can thus
be said to be of a compensatory nature, and they are also the ones that generally
require the greatest creative effort. Together, they have been used in connection
with about a quarter of the horizontal puns and a quarter of the instances
featuring non-punning language-play, and with about 16% of the vertical puns.
To these figures should be added some very few cases where SL language-play
has been replaced by a TL sequence that does not qualify as language-play, but
whose specific properties nevertheless fulfil a similar function. It could be
claimed, therefore, at least if we simplify matters by pretending that all kinds of
language-play produce comparable effects, that the kind of compensation that
occurs in the same place, but with new means, is quite widespread when it
comes to the translation of language-play on film.

As to the kind of compensation described under b) above, or
combinations of a) and b), a special ±10-second rule has been devised in order
to capture at least the instances that are only slightly removed in time from the
spot in which there is SL language-play (cf. 3.1.3.2). This has been done because
it would have been too time-consuming to scan all the 99 target versions in
their entirety for compensatory measures that occur more than ten seconds
before or after the original instances of language-play. However, as a way of
acknowledging the fact that what might be labelled ‘distant compensation’ is a
phenomenon that ought to be taken into account, three of the German and
Swedish TL versions have been chosen at random and then checked for
examples. The translations concerned are the German dubbing of *The Road to
El Dorado* and the Swedish dubbing and subtitling of *Monsters, Inc.*

The results of the search in the versions mentioned are hardly
overwhelming: in the German dubbing of *The Road to El Dorado*, there is one
doubtful instance of compensation outside the ±10-second frames, and none in
the Swedish subtitles of *Monsters, Inc.*, as far as I can see. In the Swedish
dubbing of the same film, there is one clear and one doubtful polysemic pun outside the ±10-second frames. On the basis of these figures alone, distant compensation would have to be dismissed as an important translation strategy in my corpus.

However, I have accidentally encountered this kind of compensation in other target versions, and I suspect that some dubbers and subtitlers are more inclined to employ it than others. In the German dubbing of *Monsters, Inc.*, for example, there are at least three clear instances and one doubtful one of TL language-play that is quite removed in time from any SL instance. In *Chicken Run*, it may be the nature of the protagonists, i.e. the chickens, that has made it possible for almost all the translators to insert one or more species-related polysemic puns in the target texts without this being triggered by an obvious SL counterpart. These are random observations, however, that mostly indicate that further investigation is required in the field before generalizations become permissible.

Focusing instead on TL language-play occurring within the narrower time frames, I have noted the instances more systematically. They occur in connection with almost all categories of SL language-play. If we also include doubtful TL cases within the ±10 seconds, i.e. sequences that were just possibly intended as TL language-play, there are instances to be found in about 3% of the individual language-play translations.

While seemingly negligible, this figure is still higher than what I would have expected, considering the extra effort involved in not only creating TL language-play, but in doing so where there is no SL counterpart. It should be pointed out, though, that the doubtful instances represent about one sixth of the total number of instances.

Especially noteworthy is the fact that most of the TL language-play occurring within the ±10-second frames is actually not compensation at all in the sense that it makes up for a loss of the SL language-play. The majority of instances appears in connection with a translation solution that definitely, or at least possibly, leads to TL language-play, be it through direct translation or a more creative approach. Thus, the instances where obvious SL language-play has been lost in a translation of the crucial sequence, but been compensated for by TL language-play within ten seconds before or after that same sequence, amount to only about 1% of all language-play translations. The other examples of 'compensation' either compensate for lost SL language-play occurring elsewhere in the film, or they are inserted as a bonus for the TL audience.

It should also be pointed out, finally, that almost a third of the ±10-
second compensation, or 42 clear cases and 9 doubtful ones, occurs in connection with masculine rhymes in songs or similar environments. Faced with these, the translators might have felt especially motivated to try to use as much TL rhymes and half-rhymes as the writers of the original version did. It is quite common, therefore, to find TL rhymes very close to, but not exactly in the same spots as, the original rhymes. Interestingly, the TL rhymes without a direct SL equivalent are more often inserted before or after a ‘yes’ solution in the dubbing, while they tend to occur together with a ‘no TL language-play’ in the subtitles. This is otherwise the only difference that I could identify between the two translation modes when it comes to compensation.

6.3 Comparisons between the films

I am now moving from relatively restricted topics (special environments, compensation) on to a more global level. This section and the following ones are thus dedicated to factors that can be suspected of having influenced the overall results for the translation of language-play in my corpus (other than the nature of the SL language-play, which has already been shown to play a role).

Among the factors that still require a closer look are the properties of the source text as a whole. In chapter 3, I have tried to show the variation of the films in my corpus in terms of e.g. production company, year of production, contents, degree of animation, and amount of SL language-play featured. With a view to the results of this study, it is very difficult to say whether any of the parameters mentioned has had an impact that is comparable to that of the nature of the language-play itself, or to that of the translator. It seems doubtful that this is the case.

Nevertheless, I have tried to see whether SL language-play occurring in one film can be said to have been rendered as TL language-play more often than the SL language-play in other films. The results show that the language-play in most films has been treated in similar ways: if the trends for all the language-play categories and all the target versions of each film are combined, we find slightly more ‘yes’ than ‘no’ solutions.

That said, a few films stick out enough to be mentioned here by name, though they never deviate from the general picture in a dramatic manner. First of all, there is a strong tendency for the SL language-play in *Mouse Hunt* to have playful counterparts in the translations, but since the overall figures are so low, this particular film does not really compete. Otherwise, the language-play in *The
Road to El Dorado is more often preserved than the language-play in the rest of the movies, which immediately makes one suspect that the number and nature of the target versions, rather than the characteristics of the source text, might have something to do with this (only three TL versions have been included for the film in question, none of which is a DVD subtitle version). Space Jam occupies second place, and I could not even suggest a hypothesis why this should be so.

At the other extreme, we find Inspector Gadget and Stuart Little, i.e. two films that are set in what resembles the real world (disregarding the numerous special effects that bring e.g. the eponymous heroes of these films to life). There is no consistent difference, however, between this sort of film and those that rely more heavily on cartoon characters and computer animation. Nor is there any clear link between any of the other parameters surrounding the source texts and the treatment of language-play.

Let me point out, for the sake of completeness, that of my 18 films, Inspector Gadget has the lowest rating for overall cinematic quality according to the prime film-related Internet resource, the Internet Movie Database. It is also the only film in the corpus produced by Disney alone (i.e. without Pixar), but both these circumstances are likely to be coincidental as neither the general quality of the film nor the name of the production company behind it can normally be shown to be a major factor when it comes to the translation of language-play.

In general, then, it seems reasonable to claim that the characteristics of the original film versions do not seem to be decisive for how the language-play contained in those versions has been dealt with. In the following sections, I will therefore try to gauge the influence of various factors relating more closely to the target versions.

6.4 Comparisons between the different combinations of target language and translation mode

In chapters 4 and 5, I have regularly tried to point out where the results for a certain combination of target language and translation mode deviate markedly from the other results. It turned out to be quite rare, however, that one of the TL versions features notably more or less ‘yes’ solutions than the rest when it comes to the translation of a particular category of language-play. Still, what remains to be done is to put the results for the vertical and horizontal puns and all the non-punning language-play together and to see whether noteworthy
differences between the dubbing and the subtitling on the one hand, and the
different target languages on the other, will emerge in this way. Table 6.1 thus
provides an overview of what happens to all the instances of clear SL language-
play in the different target versions.

Table 6.1. Overview of the TL solutions for all clear language-play
(percentages).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TL lang.-play?</th>
<th>German dubbing</th>
<th>Swedish dubbing</th>
<th>German subtitles</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles</th>
<th>Norw. subtitles</th>
<th>Danish subtitles</th>
<th>Sw. TV subtitles</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>60.5</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>52.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>38.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>99.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>99.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>99.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In my opinion, two things are striking when it comes to the figures in the table.
One is that there is a clear difference between the results for the dubbed
versions and those for the subtitles; the other is that the results within each of
these groups are surprisingly homogeneous.

Concerning the first point: what emerged already as a trend especially in
connection with the non-punning language-play can now be considered
confirmed for the obviously intended SL language-play in its entirety, namely
that in the dubbing it has more often been preserved as, or been replaced by,
TL language-play than in the subtitles. The difference between the two
translation modes is about ten percentage points, which is enough to warrant an
explanation.

It is important to realize that in connection with almost all individual
language-play categories, there are no consistent differences between the
dubbed versions as a group and the subtitle versions as a group, which means
that neither mode appears to enjoy an inherent advantage when it comes to
dealing with these categories. There is only one exception to this rule, namely
the playful repetition of lexical items within a limited text sequence (cf. section
5.1.10). Here, the dubbers tend to preserve the repetition better than the
subtitlers, who are often forced (or occasionally perhaps just inclined) to leave
out information that is redundant or of secondary importance and who may,
consciously or not, extend their ordinary subtitling strategies to repetitions of
the playful, and thus less redundant, type.
Be that as it may, the few instances of playful repetition are not enough to explain the differences between dubbing and subtitling in Table 6.1. Instead, it is mostly the numerous rhymes that are responsible for the gap: in the subtitle versions as a group, the ‘yes’ and the ‘no’ solutions are about equally many when it comes to rhymes, while in the dubbed versions as a group, the solutions leading to TL language-play are about three times as common as those leading to a loss. This difference can largely be explained by two circumstances: the almost complete absence of rhymes in the Norwegian subtitles of Rugrats in Paris and, more significantly, the fact that for many of the songs in the corpus, particularly the long ones in Anastasia, only the dubbed versions were analyzed. Had the subtitle versions of these songs been independent translations, they would most probably have featured more ‘yes’ than ‘no’ solutions (because that is the clear trend when it comes to song translations) and in this way raised the figures for these versions. As can be seen in the many examples where we do find rhymes in subtitles, the constraints of time and space deemed characteristic of this form of screen translation do not normally, by themselves, preclude TL rhymes.

In sum, then, it can be claimed that with the exception of the relatively marginal category of playful repetition, SL language-play is preserved to more or less similar extents in dubbing and subtitling. The same is true when we look at the different target languages, none of which seems to be inherently better suited than the others to accommodating English language-play. That is not surprising, since the target languages in my corpus are all more or less equally far removed from English in terms of borrowings and historical and typological relations. Especially Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish are also very similar to each other and might, as Gottlieb (1994c:174) suspects, have been considered dialects if Scandinavia had been a third-world country. German is of course not part of that particular group, but has had considerable influence on it historically. All in all, the influence of the source language on the target language, and vice versa, is comparable for each SL-TL pair.

It may be pointed out that the lowest share of ‘yes’ solutions for a specific combination of target language and translation mode can be found in the column for the Swedish TV subtitles. Since the other Swedish translations (dubbing and DVD subtitles) do not stick out in this way at all, one might be tempted to suspect a (slight) difference between DVD and TV subtitles when it comes to the translation of language-play. It must be remembered, however, that I have analyzed no more than 106 individual TV translations of clear SL language-play strategies, while the corresponding figure for the second-least
represented versions, the German subtitles, is more than five times as high. In other words, the percentages for the TV subtitles are much more easily affected by a single translation choice than those for the other versions. Therefore, the figures for the Swedish TV subtitles can perhaps most of all be taken as a hint that the possible differences between TV and DVD translations deserve more attention in future studies.

Finally, I want to address a special weakness that the dubbed versions turned out to have, namely the fact that it is occasionally very difficult, if not outright impossible, to acoustically understand what is actually said or sung by the dubbing actors. Of course, it can also be difficult or even impossible to understand the exact wording of the original version, and we are thus dealing here with a problem that concerns all communication based on the transmission of sounds. On film, a variety of reasons can be responsible for inaudible language: strong or unusual dialects, sloppy diction, poor recording equipment or imperfect use of it, and dialogue or lyrics overlapping too much with instrumental music and other extra-linguistic sounds.

In the analysis of the original English versions, I could usually make good use of the intralingual English subtitles, which often, though not always, saved me the trouble of going over a certain problematic sequence again and again in order to establish what exactly is being said. I had no such help with the German and Swedish dubbed versions and needed to listen repeatedly to a substantial number of translation solutions before I could analyze them in terms of language-play. Sometimes, I had to ask others, especially native speakers of Swedish, for assistance – and still there are 15 instances in the German dubbing and 30 in the Swedish that I was eventually forced to classify as inaudible even though the corresponding English versions posed no such problem. These inaudible instances have so far been left out of all the calculations underlying the translation-related results (including those in Table 6.1), and had they been counted as ‘no TL language-play’, which they are in effect, if not intention, the share of ‘yes’ solutions would have been a couple of percentage points lower for the dubbed versions.

It should be kept in mind that the 45 instances mentioned concern only translations of SL language-play, and this makes up quite a small part of all the linguistic material in a film. Furthermore, there are dozens of other spoken TL sequences that required repeated listening and special concentration before they could be transcribed. This means that there is likely to be a certain, if varying, number of TL utterances in dubbed movies that will not be understood by all or most of the audience for reasons that have nothing to do with hearing.
difficulties or inattention, but with the acoustic properties of the movies themselves.

While the problems just described are linked to a certain form of translation, they are by no means unavoidable, since all of the factors contributing to them can be kept under control, at least in principle (actors can speak more clearly, recording equipment can be improved, etc.). The problems with acoustically transmitted texts have their written counterparts in accidentally omitted, repeated or misspelt words, among other things. Entire sequences of subtitles can fall away for technical reasons, which I have experienced in connection with entertainment programmes on TV, the news, and even in the cinema, and this will certainly affect understanding, too. (The omissions occurring in my corpus of eighteen films seem to be no accidents, however).

Both dubbing and subtitling may thus be affected by typical, though not necessarily inevitable, problems, but in my study, it is mostly the technically imperfect dubbing sequences that deprive the viewers of some content and, probably, language-play. In contrast, the challenge to understanding posed by a few of the subtitles is mainly due to linguistic reasons.

6.5 Comparisons between individual target versions

What remains to be compared when it comes to the translation of the language-play in my corpus is the performance of the individual dubbers and subtitlers. In theory, of course, each SL instance and its translations should be analyzed and weighted by themselves, including, if possible, their quality. As I have argued in chapter 2, however, every attempt at gauging the quality of a particular language-play translation would be fraught with too much subjective opinion to function as a scientifically viable basis for generalizations. In fact, it would even be too big a task at this point to take into account the different language-play categories and the precise translation strategies preferred by the individual translators. Besides, one would eventually arrive at absolute figures that are so low for many combinations of translator, type of language-play, and translation strategy, that they would be almost meaningless.

I have therefore chosen to simplify matters by focussing here on the previously established categories of ‘TL language-play’, ‘doubtful whether there is TL language-play’, and ‘no TL language-play’ (abbreviated yes, ?, and no in my tables, including Table 6.2). It should also be pointed out that I have once again
only considered SL instances where it is not in doubt that they contain language-play. On the other hand, where several SL language-play categories coincide in a single word or a short sequence of words, I have deviated from earlier practice by usually not treating them separately in the calculation underlying Table 6.2. Furthermore, I have counted inaudible TL solutions as ‘no TL language-play’ (instead of leaving them out), and cases where there is clear TL language-play within ten seconds of a ‘no’ solution as ‘yes’ (instead of counting them as ‘no’ (+ compensation)).

Table 6.2. Overview of the amount of TL language-play in the independent translations of the clear instances of SL language-play (percentages).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Film</th>
<th>German dubbing yes</th>
<th>no</th>
<th>Swedish dubbing yes</th>
<th>no</th>
<th>German subtitles yes</th>
<th>no</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles yes</th>
<th>no</th>
<th>Norw. subtitles yes</th>
<th>no</th>
<th>Danish subtitles yes</th>
<th>no</th>
<th>Sw. TV subtitles yes</th>
<th>no</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anastasia</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Antz</em></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ch. Run</em></td>
<td>58</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ice Age</em></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Gadget</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Monsters</em></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Mouse H.</em></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Muppets</em></td>
<td>42</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>My Dog</em></td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>R. &amp; B.</em></td>
<td>64</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Rugrats</em></td>
<td>44</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Scooby</em></td>
<td>58</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>*0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Shrek</em></td>
<td>54</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Space J.</em></td>
<td>78</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Stuart L.</em></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Indian</em></td>
<td>57</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Irma G.</em></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ed Dora.</em></td>
<td>73</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 6.2, then, the resulting percentages are presented for each target version of each film. Only subtitle solutions that are more or less independent of the corresponding dubbing in the same target language have been counted. For some versions, that means that the numbers on which the percentages are based are considerably lower than for the other versions. This, in turn, implies
that each translation choice in those versions has a much bigger impact on the relative figures, which will explain why they often deviate quite significantly from the percentages for the other versions. The eight versions thus affected are marked with a * in the table. Note that the percentages for each film and version do not always add up to 100, which is an effect of my rounding them up or down.

As will be immediately obvious from the table, it is between individual target versions, of the same film and across films, that relatively large and seemingly unpredictable differences can be found. 10 or 15 percentage points between the highest and the lowest share of ‘yes’ solutions for a film are the rule rather than the exception, and if we disregard the versions marked with an asterisk, the highest discrepancy for the ‘yes’ solutions for one film is that between the German dubbing (78%) and the Norwegian subtitles (47%) of Space Jam. Interestingly, this is not a film with a particularly low share of obvious SL language-play. The Iron Giant, My Dog Skip, The Indian in the Cupboard, and Mouse Hunt, in descending order, actually all have fewer instances, and especially the striking figures for the last movie mentioned can be explained by the small amount of SL language-play contained in it.

I have tried to look for patterns within the table and also to link the figures contained in it a) to the names of the dubbers and subtitles, b) to the dubbing and subtitling companies, and c) to the presence or absence of interrelationships between the different target versions (identical cueing for several subtitle versions, similarities in the formulations). However, no clear trends emerge in this respect.

Let us start with the interrelationships in the form of identical cueing: frequently, the cueing of all or most of the DVD subtitle versions is identical to that of the intralingual English subtitles, which can be assumed to have been first. This is true of e.g. Ice Age and The Indian in the Cupboard. Occasionally, one of the subtitle versions (normally the German one) is cued like the English subtitles of the same film, while two or all of the Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish DVD subtitle versions share a different set of cues (e.g. Muppets from Space and Stuart Little). In yet other films, each subtitle version seems to have its own, individualized cues, for example Antz and Scooby-Doo. Whatever the exact constellation, results for subtitle versions sharing cues can both be quite similar and quite divergent, as can the results for subtitle versions that seem to be completely independent in this respect. Not even where one subtitle version appears to have been used in the production of another can any clear

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185 Such information, as far as it could be retrieved, is provided in section 3.1.2 and in the appendix.
tendencies be identified. Once again, the results may be quite similar in those cases (e.g. the Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish subtitles of *Muppets from Space*), but they may also be more disparate (e.g. the Swedish and Norwegian subtitles of *Monsters, Inc*).

The fact that a film has been dubbed or subtitled by one company rather than another does not seem to be a strong indicator of how the language-play has been treated, either. For the films that have been dubbed into Swedish by Sun Studio Sverige, for example, the share of ‘yes’ solutions ranges from 65% for *Chicken Run* to 29% for *My Dog Skip*; and among the many films that have been subtitled into different languages by Gelula/SDI, we find both the Norwegian subtitles of *Rugrats in Paris*, which I felt the need to single out repeatedly for their low share of TL language-play, and the Swedish subtitles of the same film, whose share of ‘yes’ solutions is 30 percentage points higher.

The factor that remains to be checked, then, is the individuals involved in the dubbing and subtitling of my films. But even here, there are no reliable trends to be discerned. It must be remembered, of course, that I have not been able to identify all the translators, dubbing directors, etc. for all the films. To the best of my knowledge, many individuals worked with only one or two of the translations, which makes it difficult to assess their overall attitude to language-play. The person that has been involved in most of the films in my corpus is, as far as I can say, Mikael Roupé, who made the translation for, and/or directed, the Swedish dubbing of at least six films. Even for this experienced dubber, however, the results vary considerably, from 73% ‘yes’ solutions in *Anastasia* to 49% in *Stuart Little* and the already mentioned 29% for *My Dog Skip* (note, though, that for this film, Mikael Roupé is only credited as director, not translator). On the other hand, the Swedish dubbed versions of the three films that I know have been translated by Mats Wänblad (*The Road to El Dorado*, *Monsters, Inc*, and *Shrek*) always feature the highest share of ‘yes’ solutions of all the target versions analyzed. This may or may not be a coincidence, but it is certainly noteworthy.

Considering all that has been said, it can be concluded that the process and the result of language-play translation are too complex to be reducible to one or two aspects. In chapters 4 and 5, I have managed to show that the nature of the SL language-play is important for how it is treated in screen translation, even though this almost never constitutes a self-sufficient explanation for the individual translation choice. Several other presumptive factors have been taken up in this section, but it cannot be shown conclusively that they are relevant in a translation context, let alone decisive. On the other
hand, I could not possibly prove that they are irrelevant, either. The configuration of likely influences is so intricate that it is well nigh impossible to tell which factor has worked how and when. Besides, my coverage of these influences is incomplete, and some that are likely to be important were entirely out of my reach, such as the previous schooling, the working conditions, and the motivation of the translators.

However, if everything that can be linked more or less directly to the translator as a person were counted as one factor, I think the variation displayed in Table 6.2 can be interpreted as a strong indicator that this factor might well be as influential as the properties of the SL language-play, if not more. This would also be confirmed by the very many instances that have not been treated alike by all the translators, not even within the group of dubbed versions or within the group of subtitle versions. Provided that the properties of the target languages precluded any obvious TL solutions, the fact that one and the same SL pun or nonce formation or rhyme has triggered one kind of language-play in one translation, a different kind in another, and is lost in a third, even though the constraints of time and space are the same, can only be explained by the individuality of the translator and the circumstances under which he or she was working at the time when the translation was made.

6.6 Summary

In this chapter, the focus of attention has been shifted away from the individual categories of language-play towards other factors that could also be expected to have an influence on the treatment of language-play in screen translation. Two linguistic environments that might be described as regularly occurring exceptions in a film context were discussed, namely songs and writing, and it was shown that language-play that is sung is generally treated more or less like language-play that is spoken, unless the entire song is left untranslated, which happens occasionally. Written language-play, on the other hand, is omitted on a regular basis, especially if it adds nothing to the development of the plot.

The issue of compensation was addressed, too, and it was confirmed that TL language-play can, with moderate frequency, be found in spots where there is no SL language-play. In many cases, however, these creative additions appear in the vicinity of examples that have actually already been rendered as TL language-play, and it is doubtful, therefore, whether they can really be considered compensation in the sense that they compensate for a specific loss
elsewhere in the translation.

I also discussed the question whether factors pertaining to the original versions of the films, such as production company, year of production, contents, general nature, and cinematographic quality, can be shown to have influenced the translation of language-play, but the result was that they cannot. Nor did the specific combination of source and target language prove to be an important factor in my study, though this might well be different when the languages involved do not all belong to the same family.

If all categories of language-play are put together, the dubbed versions featured a higher share of TL language-play than the subtitles. This, however, could largely be explained by two circumstances that are specific to my corpus and are centred around the rhymes and half-rhymes in songs, and it is only in connection with the relatively marginal category of playful repetition of lexical items that dubbing seems to have an inherent advantage over subtitling if preservation of the language-play is the goal.

Finally, I made an attempt to see whether there are differences between the individual target versions when they are not bundled together into groups defined by translation mode or target language. And indeed, some of the greatest differences that have been noted in this study, along any combination of parameters, emerged between the performances of individual translators. Of course, the amount of language-play in different translations of the same film can sometimes be quite similar, but more often than not there are noteworthy differences, and this is true even if dubbed and subtitled versions are considered separately.

It remains unclear in how far the interrelationships between several of the subtitle versions, or the companies employing the translators, influence the results. Either the impact of these factors is negligible, or they work in such intricate ways that it is impossible to discern a clear pattern. I still think the results can reasonably be interpreted to indicate that apart from the nature of the language-play that is to be translated (including its linguistic properties, the kind of environment in which it appears, and its prominence and function), it is the dubber or subtitler (including all the more or less personal parameters surrounding his or her performance) that is the most important factor in the translation of language-play in film.
7 Dubbing and subtitling language-play in film: summary and conclusion

7.1 Summary

The aim of this study was to investigate how language-play occurring in English-language feature films has been dealt with in the dubbing and subtitles of these films. Language-play being a relatively little established concept, which moreover covers a vast range of phenomena, it was necessary to set up guidelines, if not foolproof definitions, for the identification of language-play as a whole and for the various categories that I eventually chose to focus on. In particular, it was stressed that language-play and humour on the one hand, and language-play and wordplay on the other, overlap only partially.

In order to avoid the element of personal preference, the selection of the source material was also made subject to a set of concrete, objective criteria. These yielded a corpus of 18 modern feature films, mostly American, produced between 1995 and 2002 by eight main production companies. In these films, the different language-play strategies have been employed about 1,000 times, distributed over almost 800 separate instances of language-play, depending on how one counts. Puns represent somewhat more than a third of all the language-play identified, and non-puns such as rhymes, nonce formations, and a variety of other categories constitute the rest. In general, the size of the different language-play categories is very uneven, with e.g. the number of all the clear and doubtful homophonic puns being less than a tenth of the clear, vertical, polysemic puns alone. It should also be pointed out that, unlike the other types of language-play, the large group of rhymes and the smaller one of half-rhymes are largely confined to special linguistic environments such as songs and poems.

Taken together, 99 target versions of the 18 films were analyzed, including all the German and Swedish dubbed versions and at least one Swedish subtitle version. For most films, the German, Norwegian and Danish DVD subtitles were studied, too, provided they are completely or at least occasionally different from the contents of the dubbed versions in the same language. Two Swedish TV subtitle versions could also be included in the study, raising the average number of target versions per film to exactly 5.5.

As could be expected, some types of SL language-play were more often rendered as TL language-play than others, and there are clear differences to be
seen even within the comparatively homogeneous group of puns. For most
categories, it seems to be decisive to what extent it was possible to lift the
original language-play over into the target text without any particular creative
effort, i.e. whether or not one could translate more or less word for word and
still end up with language-play in the translation. Perhaps contrary to
expectations, this proved a viable option in many cases and explains in part why
e.g. the horizontal polysemic puns more often triggered TL language-play than
other types of pun, or why the admittedly rather few ‘sentences ending in
unexpected ways’ scored the highest share of ‘yes’ solutions in the study.

Other factors obviously play a role, too: for example, horizontal puns
have slightly more often been translated into TL language-play than vertical
ones, possibly because the former are more conspicuous, and a similar
difference emerged between feminine and masculine rhymes. Rhymes and half-
rhymes stand out, moreover, because they have most often been subjected to
one of the more creative translation strategies, which can best be explained by
the fact that they occur predominantly in songs and that this serves as a strong
signal to the translators that rhymes and half-rhymes may also be called for in
the target texts even though a direct transfer is hardly ever possible. For all
other language-play categories, direct translation, whether it leads to the
preservation of language-play or the loss of it, was the most common approach.

Where it appeared to be meaningful at all to investigate the impact of the
presence or absence of a link between the linguistic play and the non-verbal
channels of the film, it could generally not be shown to be strong. However,
one of the more noteworthy findings in this respect is the fact that the vertical
puns are much more often linked to the pictorial information than the
horizontal ones, and that even though these puns remain vertical on the strictly
linguistic level, the link usually functions like a second occurrence of the crucial
item(s). This probably has to do with the circumstance that horizontal puns
tend to signal more clearly that the language has been manipulated in playful
ways, which, in turn, may ultimately be the reason why horizontal puns are
slightly more often rendered into TL language-play in my corpus.

As to the other extra-linguistic information related to the SL language-
play, in very many cases it could not be established whether a concrete instance
of language-play can be assumed to have been noticed as such by other
characters in the film or not. Yet even where a distinction between overt and
covert language-play was possible, this parameter could usually not be linked to
the translation strategies chosen. There is one exception, however: even though
the playful aspects of clearly overt language-play may well be lost, it has almost
never been omitted altogether from the target text.

After focussing primarily on the properties of the SL language-play, I also tried to gauge the influence of factors having to do with the source text as a whole and, especially, with the target versions. When it comes to the former, which comprise, among other things, the production company, the year of production, the contents and the type of the film (animated, non-animated, or a mixture), none could be shown to have had a consistent influence on how language-play was treated in the translations.186

As to the factors related to the translations, any combination of target language and translation mode (e.g. Swedish dubbing or Danish subtitles) can contain high, average, or low shares of TL language-play, depending on the film. The differences often cancel each other out across the corpus, and no clear tendencies could be identified. Some of the figures for all the language-play suggest inherent differences between dubbing and subtitling, but these figures are almost entirely due to corpus-specific circumstances. It seems that for the vast majority of SL instances, dubbing and subtitling are, in principle, equally well-suited to support corresponding TL language-play. The TV subtitles feature less language-play than the dubbing and the DVD subtitles, but the picture might change if more TV versions were taken into consideration.

However, clear differences that cannot be explained away so easily emerge when the translators’ individual performances are analyzed. While many of the examples in chapters 4 and 5 made it obvious that instances of language-play can be treated quite differently by the various translators faced with them, it became clear in chapter 6 that there are also considerable differences between translators when all the language-play occurring in one film is weighed together. The share of ‘yes’ solutions in one of the three to seven target versions can thus be 10, 20, or 30 percentage points higher than in one of the others, and even if one takes the degree of possible interdependence between some of the target versions into account, it still seems that, apart from the characteristics of the source-text sequence, the individual translator and his or her specific choices are the most decisive factor in the translation of language-play in film.

186 Though it did not affect the treatment of the language-play in a clear manner, it may be worth pointing out once more that three of the films with the lowest degree of computer animation (in quantitative and/or qualitative terms) coincide with those featuring the least SL language-play. These films are Mouse Hunt, The Indian in the Cupboard, and My Dog Skip, and the last two are also the most serious of the 18 films in the corpus.
7.2 After the study – a brief evaluation

Like most studies, the present one has a number of strengths, but also a few weaknesses, and in the following, I shall briefly discuss some of both. Starting with the corpus on which the investigation is based, it is certainly one of the largest when it comes to the number of instances featuring language-play (almost 800 quite obviously intended ones in the original versions) and the number of times various language-play strategies have been employed (about 1,000). Even if only the part concerning the puns were to be considered, it would still compare well, in quantitative terms, with other large-scale studies in this realm.

Since this is a study about translation as much as it is about language-play, the number of target versions that have been analyzed obviously plays a role, too, and the total number of 99, or 5.5 per source text on average, ought to be as strong an asset to the study as the ample source-text material. After all, size matters if one intends to get a clear and reasonably well-founded picture of a certain field of investigation, and if one's approach is predominantly empirical in nature.

That said, one may always wish that one's corpus could have been even more comprehensive than it is. Since my initial expectation was to be able to say something about the treatment of language-play in screen translation in general, it would obviously have been desirable to also incorporate other types of films besides family films, more subtitle versions made for TV rather than DVD, more combinations of target language and translation mode, and still more source and target texts for the combinations that I do take up. A larger corpus would also have yielded more reliable results for some of the rarely employed types of language-play, e.g. homophonic puns, foreign words substituting domestic ones, and a few of the other more or less spontaneously devised categories of non-puns that are represented only one or two dozen times. Of course, to broaden the study further would have proved quite impossible for practical reasons (even in an electronic corpus, language-play cannot be identified automatically), but this implies that despite the substantial size of my corpus, one should still be careful with generalizations reaching beyond its inevitable limitations.

Apart from its mere size, the corpus is also unusual in that it largely consists of DVD material, thereby reflecting the commercial success of what is still a comparatively recent innovation. Of course, the focus on DVDs is partly due to practical reasons, as it simplified the compilation of a substantial number
of target versions considerably. This has happened to the detriment of TV and video, which for many people still represent the preferred choices in audiovisual entertainment and the most typical contexts in which they come into contact with translated films.

Be that as it may, my choice of medium will not affect the results concerning the source texts and the dubbed versions (because these will almost always be the same no matter whether they are transmitted at the cinema, on TV, or through video or DVD), but the subtitle versions analyzed will in many cases be different from those produced for other media. This implies, once again, that one should take the nature of the corpus into account before one (re-)interprets my subtitle-related results or compares them with findings in other studies.

One of the contributions of the study is that it has not only provided a new look at wordplay, in a new environment (which has yielded some interesting insights in itself), but that the perspective has been broadened to encompass playful, language-based manipulations in general. These were referred to as language-play, but since the notion is not very well established, the nature of the phenomenon, including its relationship to humour on the one hand and to the more narrow concept of puns on the other, had to be discussed in some detail. Also the various sub-types of language-play were given considerable attention, both those already familiar from, and described within, relevant fields such as rhetoric, stylistics, literary studies, and linguistics, and those that I have developed more or less ad hoc, in response to the concrete instances found in the films.

As the study progressed, the analysis of the source-text material, and especially the definitions and discussions in the realm of language-play, grew more in both quantity and importance than was envisaged from the outset. This means that these more purely linguistic aspects now stand on an equal footing with the second focus of the study, the question of translation. Since the arguments and findings concerning the language-play as such turned out as interesting, in my opinion, as those concerning the link between language-play and translation, the perhaps inevitable thematic expansion ultimately represents a gain.

The fact that I analyze only short and usually disconnected sequences of text in detail, and that these constitute only a small percentage of the overall amount of text contained in the films, may be felt to be a weak point of the study. Its design being what it is, many aspects of the source texts have been disregarded, and most of the target versions have not even been scanned in
their entirety for language-play that is independent of source text elements, let alone for other interesting translation choices that have nothing to do with language-play. Though this study shares these characteristics with others that focus solely on a few, more or less well-defined elements of a text, it is still worth pointing out that the investigator will lose sight of the other qualities of the material analyzed. In particular, the share of TL language-play corresponding to SL language-play in the same locations within the texts says little about the strengths and shortcomings of the target version as a whole, especially when the SL language-play is a rather unobtrusive attribute of the film in which it occurs.

Apropos qualities and quality, at least the latter issue has largely and deliberately been avoided even in connection with the core concerns of the study. Language-play as such is a rather fuzzy concept that encompasses a considerable number of heterogeneous phenomena, and a certain degree of subjectivity is often unavoidable in the distinctions made and in the classifications of the concrete instances. Yet to let the inherently subjective element of quality occupy a more prominent position within the study would have weakened its scientific value to an almost unacceptable degree. For if measuring audience responses is out of the question for practical reasons, what remains but personal tastes and opinions?

That said, some instances of language-play obviously have a stronger effect, work in different ways, are more noticeable, more coherent, more appropriate, and more memorable than others, and a desire to be able to quantify these things certainly ought to be understandable, both when it comes to the source and to the target texts. At the end of the many sections in chapters 4 and 5, where I discuss individual instances of language-play and their translations on the grounds of their being noteworthy or perhaps just representative, I therefore did not always refrain from slightly evaluative comments. In general, however, it would be quite impossible to establish criteria for the quality of language-play that are both objectively adequate and practically measurable. As a consequence, I did not rate the individual instances of language-play in terms of quality or 'language-play-ness', and I would also deem it misleading to rate the categories as wholes, because there will always be cases where, say, a certain playful repetition of lexical items will be more striking and interesting than a pun, even if the latter is probably considered more prototypical of language-play.

All this implies that, out of necessity, the intended or actual functions of the various instances have been largely left out of the quantitative approaches in
this study, and also the analyses and interpretations. The function, of course, is what ultimately matters, not least in a translation context, yet it is only to the extent that quantity is an indicator of quality that I am able to say something about these matters with respect to my corpus. While its size has been described as an advantage above, one should be aware that it imposes limits on how deeply one can explore the material within a given time frame.

In view of these caveats, one may ask what will be the enduring benefits of the study, or whether the enterprise was worth it at all. But even if one disregards the author’s personal development and insights, the answer to the second question would have to be an unabashed ‘yes’. As to the first, there are several contributions and findings that I hope will be of interest and use to theoreticians and practitioners, to lay persons as well as experts. Concerning the design of the study, the following are perhaps the two most important aspects:

- The design of the study is new, and in applying it I have shown, among other things, that DVD material can be a practical and adequate basis of a relatively large investigation, that different combinations of target language and translation mode can be compared with the source texts and with each other without particular difficulties, and that family films are generally well-suited to the study of language-play and, if one wishes, its translations.
- The concept of language-play has been developed and its range explored. Not only established categories, but also several new ones have been labelled, described and analyzed in a systematic manner, and their peculiarities as well as similarities have been discussed and exemplified, making this thesis a useful reference book on the subject as well as a rich and possibly entertaining source of authentic language-play in several languages.

As to the more concrete results concerning the translation of language-play in film, the following deserve to be emphasized once more:

- With minor exceptions, there do not seem to be any inherent differences between dubbing and subtitling, or between the target languages considered in the study, or between any constellations of these two factors, that would imply advantages or disadvantages when it comes to the translation of language-play.
- On average, slightly more than 50% of the SL language-play in my
corpus has given rise to corresponding TL language-play, with the remainder being lost or turned into a TL sequence with a doubtful status. However, it has been shown that the various language-play categories behave differently in this respect, and that one can make some clear distinctions even within the relatively homogeneous group of puns. For most categories, the results are strongly linked to how likely it is that a direct SL-TL transfer happens to preserve the playful elements, which is much more common than might have been expected. Among the translation strategies available to the dubbers and subtitlers, the direct transfer is chosen most frequently, whether it leads to a loss of language-play or to its preservation.

- It is more of a rule than an exception that a certain SL instance has been treated in at least two different ways by the various translators who were involved with it. Also if one looks at what the translators have done with all the language-play in one film, one may find considerable variation. It may be concluded, therefore, that apart from the properties of the original language-play, it is factors related to the individual dubbers and subtitlers, including their perceptive skills and attitudes, that influence the translation of language-play the most.

- In connection with a few, especially written, instances, complete omission is the only viable solution, but in the vast majority of cases, the translation even of SL-specific language-play into functionally more or less equivalent TL language-play is possible in principle if a capable translator is motivated enough to invest creative energy into the task. This is confirmed by the many authentic cases in my corpus where at least one of the dubbers and subtitlers, if not most or all of them, have achieved this feat.

7.3 Ideas for further research

In previous sections, I have already indicated some of the ways in which the research exemplified in this study can be further developed. Quite obviously, any combination of the parameters could be altered to see if the results would be affected in significant ways. These parameters include the number and type of film productions, the source and target languages, the number and type of the translations (e.g. voice-over and/or more TV subtitles instead of dubbing and DVD subtitles), and, of course, the identity of the translators.
Even if most of the parameters were left unchanged, one might be able to improve on some aspects of this study. In particular, it would be an advantage if at least the names of all the translators and the companies they work for were known so that comparisons in this respect are facilitated. In fact, since the translators and factors related to them are likely to be of prime importance for the qualities of the target versions, more information on the education, experience, working conditions, motivation, and attitudes of the individual dubbers and subtitlers would certainly be desirable, too.

Apart from that, it would be good if one could establish beforehand and with a high degree of reliability, e.g. by asking the translators, how and to what extent a target version is interrelated with others. As the possible influence of this factor can then be exposed more easily, that would probably be preferable to deducing interrelationships from textual similarities in what may turn out to be a slightly haphazard fashion. Finally, increased attention to TI. language-play that is removed in space from the original instances would be needed to confirm (or reject) the tentative findings presented in the section on compensation.

The translation of language-play does not occur only in a film context; it may also be studied when it comes to literary prose, poetry, songs, adverts, and possibly other contexts. Some of this has been looked at, but there is certainly room for further investigation. Even if one sticks with films, one may want to concentrate on some special cases of language-play, e.g. instances occurring in songs or in writing, or on language-play residing in or based on names. As will be recalled, meaningful names have generally been omitted from the analysis in this study on the assumption that special translation norms will apply to them that override possible concerns about the language-play. It should be tested whether this is indeed the case.

Language-play and screen translation can of course also be studied independently, and there is a vast range of possible approaches that one may choose. When it comes to the first subject area, the mere extent to which language-play forms a part of various texts and types of texts will be interesting information. On a more profound level, the intended and actual functions of the phenomenon definitely deserve some further investigation, though this probably constitutes quite a challenge in terms of methodology. Among other things, the relationship between language-play and humour should probably be clarified further.

It hardly needs to be pointed out that the definitions and classifications employed in the present study should by no means be accepted as the only way
to handle language-play. New, more or less theoretical approaches are required to reveal more of the intricacies involved; in particular the categories that I have devised spontaneously in this study will need further scrutiny. Apart from that, it will certainly be possible to set up additional categories that encompass what I have collected in the section on 'other cases' at the end of chapter 5. For example, something along the lines of 'pronunciation-related play' and 'intended referential ambiguity' appear to be strong candidates for additional categories.

As to screen translation, a great number of studies have been carried out in this realm in recent years, but it must be remembered that until not so long ago, the topic had largely and undeservedly been neglected. There is thus still plenty of room for further explorations, whether one concentrates on particular aspects of the source texts, as I have done in the present study, or places the focus elsewhere, e.g. on the general properties of the target versions. The particular constraints and possibilities of dubbing and subtitling might also be compared with a view to a number of new parameters, in order to see more clearly how they affect the translators' approaches, and what the respective audiences miss and gain in various respects. As mentioned above, it would also be interesting to look more closely at different subtitle versions of the same films in the same target language, both those that are made for the same medium, e.g. TV, and those that are made for a range of media, including TV, DVD, video, and cinema.

It is of course impossible to explicitly point out all the various ways in which the findings presented in this thesis can be tested and put into perspective, and personal preferences as well as practical restrictions are likely to determine how the study of language-play and/or screen translation will develop in future. It is my hope, however, that my approach and the results it has yielded not only contribute to a better understanding of these fields in an immediate way, but that they can become an inspiration to others in the same way others have been an inspiration to me.
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Appendix

Names of the dubbers, subtitlers, and companies known to be involved in the translations dealt with in the study

German dubbing (individuals):
Benner, Friedemann and Nowka, Michael (lyrics): *Shrek*
Böhm, Fritz-Joachim (translator): *Antz, Ice Age*
Hasper, Sven (script + director): *The Road to El Dorado*
Kohlmeier, Jürgen (translator): *Shrek*
Lenart, Frank (song text + script + director): *Monsters, Inc.*
Lutz Riedel (script + director): *Anastasia, Antz*
Nowka, Michael (director): *Shrek*
Nowka, Michael (script + director): *Ice Age, Inspector Gadget, Chicken Run*

German dubbing (studios):
Berliner Synchron: *Ice Age, Inspector Gadget, Shrek, The Road to El Dorado*
Film- und Fernseh-Synchron GmbH: *Monsters, Inc., Scooby-Doo*
Interopa Film GmbH: *Antz, Space Jam, Iron Giant*
Studio Babelsberg: *Chicken Run*

Swedish dubbing (individuals):
Berglund, Stefan (director): *Inspector Gadget, Shrek*
Berglund, Stefan and Öjebo, Anders (directors): *The Road to El Dorado*
Bhagavan, Anoo (translator): *Mouse Hunt*
Cronholt, Robert (translator): *Chicken Run, Ice Age, Scooby-Doo*
Dyall, Sharon (director): *Ice Age*
Forsberg, Monica and Nyberg, Johan (translators): *Inspector Gadget*
Jahns, Jennie (director): *Stuart Little*
Mohede, Håkan (director): *Chicken Run, Scooby-Doo*
Nyman, Anna (director): *Monsters, Inc.*
Roupé, Mikael (translator + director): *Anastasia, Antz, Space Jam, Stuart Little, The Iron Giant, My Dog Skip* (only director)

If nothing else is indicated, the translations listed are those on the DVDs.
Smedius, Annica (translator): *Rugrats in Paris*
Svensson, Lasse (director): *Mouse Hunt*
Wänblad, Mats (translator): *Monsters, Inc., Shrek, The Road to El Dorado*
‘Some translator’ at Mint Music: *My Dog Skip*

**Swedish dubbing (studios):**
Eurotroll: *Rugrats in Paris*
Sun Studio Sverige: *Antz, Chicken Run, Ice Age, My Dog Skip, Stuart Little, The Iron Giant*
Sun Studio Danmark: *Anastasia, Scooby-Doo, Space Jam*
KM Studio: *Inspector Gadget, Monsters, Inc., Shrek, The Road to El Dorado*

**German subtitles:**
Pein, Stefanie: *Inspector Gadget, Rugrats in Paris*
Schmitthenner, Marcin: *Ice Age*
Worbis, Nicole: *Monsters, Inc.*

**Swedish subtitles:**
Andersson, Ingrid: *Inspector Gadget*
Ekström, Paula: *Monsters, Inc.*
Evers, Katinka: *Chicken Run, My Dog Skip*
Gradin, Samuel: *Antz (video and DVD)*
Hellgren, Helen: *The Iron Giant*
Jansson, Thomas: *The Road to El Dorado*
Jacobson, Zakarias: *Inspector Gadget (TV)*
Larsson, Maud: *Ice Age*
Lindvall, Gudrun: *Antz (TV)*
Pallvid, Maria (?)188: *Stuart Little (video)*
Valinger, Kristina: *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle*
Wickman, Ulla: *Rugrats in Paris*
Östberg, Mikael: *Muppets from Space, Stuart Little (?)188*

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188 Although the Swedish DVD and video subtitles of *Stuart Little* are virtually identical, different translators are credited for them.
Norwegian subtitles:
Ekeberg Henriksen, Frank: *Ice Age*
Mannes, Per Steinar: *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle*
Schive, Natasja: *Inspector Gadget*
Skagestein, Kai: *Monsters, Inc., Rugrats in Paris*

Danish subtitles:
Bom, Jens: *Inspector Gadget*
Brock, Aage: *Monsters, Inc.*
Kaiser-Nielsen, Helle: *Ice Age*
Sonstabo, Kai-Asle: *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle*
Wejp-Olsen, Ole: *The Iron Giant*

Subtitling companies:
Broadcast Text Stockholm: *Antz* (TV)
Dansk Video Tekst: *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle* (Danish)
Gelula/SDI: *Antz* (Swedish (possibly all)), *Chicken Run* (possibly all but German), *Inspector Gadget* (all), *Monsters, Inc.* (all), *Muppets from Space* (all), *My Dog Skip* (all), *Rugrats in Paris* (probably all), *Stuart Little* (all (except Swedish?)

Prima Vista (?): *The Road to El Dorado* (video)
Softitler: *Scooby-Doo* (all subtitles),
SpråkCentrum: *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle* (German)
Subtitling International (?): *Stuart Little* (video)
Vicomedia: *Chicken Run* (German for the hard-of-hearing)
Visiontext: *Anastasia* (all), *Ice Age* (all)

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189 Again, conflicting information on video and DVD, although the subtitles are virtually identical.
Shun the Pun, Rescue the Rhyme?

Language-play, including puns, rhymes, and a host of other linguistically definable phenomena, tends to fulfil important functions in a text, but is usually assumed to pose considerable difficulties in a translation context. In fact, since language-play is, as a rule, based on the peculiarities of a particular language, the possibility of a more or less direct transfer into another language cannot be expected. Such a transfer appears even less likely if the source text is a film and the translation takes place in the form of dubbing or subtitling, both of which are well-known for their typical constraints.

This study explores what actually happens to language-play in films that have been subjected to translation. Has it generally been lost, with all that implies, or have the translators made an effort to create something similar for their target texts? Does it matter what kind of language-play we are talking about, whether it has been dubbed or subtitled, and what the target language is? Or is it simply a question of who has been responsible for the translation?

Based on a sizeable corpus with hundreds of instances of language-play, and thousands of translation solutions, this study will provide some of the answers. Yet it also constitutes a substantial contribution to the literature on language-play as such.