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Translation and Translatability in Intersemiotic Space

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Translating the Book App's icono-letter

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the heuristic value of new digital products, Book Apps, which are changing contemporary reading habits, especially for the so-called 'digital natives.' Their plurisemiotic nature, and the fact that they are available in bilingual/multilingual versions, invite further reflection about their translation. This study proposes a qualitative analysis of two Book Apps, recently published by two French pure players. Book Apps are a new 'technogenre' that produces a plurisemiotic environment characterized by a multimodal signifying way. This signifying specificity stimulates a reflection about the nature of the linguistic sign inspired by Benveniste's definition of 'icon.' The translation of what is called in this study the Book App's 'icono-letter' is thus presented as a real challenge: translators do not have to translate only a text, but the complicated synergic relationship between text, images, animations, sounds, and music. Textual examples from the two Book Apps examined offer useful evidence of the difficult task of translating this new genre, which highlights the need to re-think digital translation through the effective dialogue between linguistic and visual semiotics, as well as between Translation Ethics and Semio-translation theories.

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1. Introduction

We often refer to the new generation of children and young adults as digital natives. Their reading habits are changing, and tablets and smartphones are part of their daily routines. In such a context, different kinds of digital products have entered the international publishing market: e-books, enhanced books, e-picture books, and Book Apps. New pure players that sell only digital products appeared at the beginning of this century on the American and English markets. In contrast, their presence on the French market is more recent and weaker, even if they gain popularity (Dufresne 2012: online). Regarding the French market, many publishers, such as La Souris qui raconte, CotCotCot Apps, e-Toiles éditions, Studio Pango, Square Igloo, SlimCricket, Tralalère, Zabouille, and Zanzibook have become important actors in this market segment. Their digital offerings, addressing mainly children, are interesting and varied (Colombier 2013, Gobbé-Mévellec 2014).

Their enhanced books and Book Apps are stimulating and captivating products, and can be considered the most recent version of interactive digital stories that first appeared on the Web in the 1980s (Bouchardon 2014). As Garavini notes (2018: 40), they “have marked a new era in digital storytelling making the following generation of digital stories characterized by ‘extras,’ such as audio narration, sound effects and music, illustrations, animations, video content, and above all interactivity.” Published in at least two languages, they can be an essential aid to help children learn foreign languages, and their pedagogical value has already been highlighted (Smeets and Bus 2014). This research will mainly focus on the heuristic value (Bouchardon 2014, Saemmer 2015) of these new digital products, which, due to their bilingual/multilingual nature, invite further reflection on their translation.

A qualitative analysis of two Book Apps (Dutruch 2012, Maes 2012), recently published by La Souris qui raconte and CotCotCot in bilingual (French and English) versions, will be proposed. These new products’ genre will be defined based on the French Discourse Analysis theory (Maingueneau 2014, Paveau 2017). The particularity of this new ‘technogenre’ (Paveau 2017: 296-297) is the creation of a plurisemiotic environment, characterized by a multimodal way of signifying. This signifying specificity will stimulate a reflection on the nature of the linguistic sign inspired by Benveniste’s definition of the ‘icon’ (2012). The translation of Book Apps’ ‘icono-text’ will then be presented as a real challenge: translators not only have to translate a text but the complicated synergic relationship between text, images, animations, sounds, and music, which is what this paper will refer to, drawing on Berman’s translation theory (1999), as the Book App’s *icono-letter*.

2. New literary products, new reading habits, new genres: The Book App

Dufresne proposes a useful overview of the currency of enhanced books and Book Apps in the international market. These products already have a broad public in the US, whereas in France, this market segment is still expanding:

Dans le domaine du livre numérique, les grands leaders, tant du point de vue de la production que de celui de la consommation, sont les États-Uniens. Depuis 2008, la part de marché occupée par le numérique (toutes catégories confondues) [y] est passée de 0,6 % à 10 %. L'augmentation des ventes est constante, semaine après semaine. Il faut dire que plus de 800 000 titres sont offerts à moins de 9,99 \$, de quoi encourager la consommation. Pour ce qui est de l'Angleterre, la situation se rapproche de plus en plus de celle des États-Unis, puisque la part du marché occupée par le livre numérique est de 6 %. En France, la situation est tout à fait différente. Ce pourcentage est bien inférieur et ne se situe qu'à 1,8 %. (Dufresne 2012: online)

These data confirm that Book Apps are English market 'natives,' which explains why they are often published in France in bilingual (French and English) versions. Nowadays, this market segment is promising for pure players, who have to carefully build their customers' loyalty and strive for a recognition that is typically given to traditional picture book publishers.

According to Françoise Prêtre, the publishing director of La souris qui raconte, one of the most important pure players in the French segment of children digital literature, a Book App publisher has to face different kinds of problems, first of all, that of income:

Avec l'arrivée des tablettes (de l'iPad notamment en mai 2010) nous avons étendu notre offre. Aujourd'hui [...] [l]e bilan, puisque c'est la question, est mitigé et balance entre enthousiasme et découragement. En France, et ce n'est pas un scoop, le marché du livre numérique est compliqué. [...] En proposant des prix ridiculement bas avec pour premier moteur de vente, les promos, lorsque ce n'est pas le gratuit, cela verrouille le marché dans des pratiques qui ne sont pas en adéquation avec une rentabilité. [...] Les chiffres que je me propose de vous donner sont d'ordre général, je ne détaillerai pas titre par titre. Ce que je trouve très édifiant et que je vais partager avec vous est, par exemple, le ratio entre nombre de téléchargements et CA. Pour info, chaque titre LSQR propose un extrait gratuit, idem le site web. Depuis juin 2010, 16 091 téléchargements ont été générés (gratuits et payants confondus pour 6 titres) pour un CA global de 3 173€! (Prêtre in Sutton 2012: online)

An important question is also the Book App's 'survival' after publishing. These products need continuous updating, and the relationship with a big company such as Apple is difficult, according to Prêtre:

Ce business ne rapporte vraiment qu'à un seul acteur qui régent tout, jusqu'aux prix, changés en une nuit (sur l'AppStore) sans que nous (éditeurs) en soyons avertis préalablement. [...] Nous, éditeurs, sommes clients de la firme. Chacun reverse 30% de ses recettes et pourtant c'est nous, clients, qui subissons le despotisme de cette société qui n'a aucune considération pour ceux qui la font vivre! Le monde à l'envers... et ça fonctionne ! (Prêtre in Sutton 2012: online)

Both *Ogre doux* (by La souris qui raconte) and *Bleu de toi* (by CotCotCot éditions), the two Book Apps studied in this paper, are no longer available for download in the AppStore as they used to be for some time after publishing.¹

One reason that could explain the problematic entry of Book Apps into the publishing market is that they are new, revolutionary products, changing our reading habits and, most importantly, our traditional way of thinking about literature. Gobbé-Mévellec offers an exhaustive definition of Book Apps. They are

petits programmes informatiques téléchargeables sur apple store ou android market et utilisables sur un smartphone ou une tablette [qui] mobilisent une technologie tactile, offrant un support multimédia et interactif. La principale différence avec le livre enrichi tient à leur ergonomie: les applications livresques s'organisent comme des pages web avec un écran d'accueil à partir duquel on accède à des activités variées. Paradoxalement, c'est le domaine dans lequel le livre pour enfants s'est jusqu'ici le plus développé, car il présentait une facilité d'utilisation du multimédia et une interactivité bien plus grande que les autres formats de lecture. (2014: online)

Such semiotic hybridity profoundly shapes reading habits by fostering new forms of immersive reading (Saemmer 2015: 102). The synergic action of text, images, sounds, music, and animations makes reading an extremely stimulating experience. Moreover, readers play an active role in the development of interactive narration. As Garavini states, children

¹ As far as *Ogre doux* is concerned, the reason seems to be that its maintenance was too expensive (see the publisher's blog). A deeper reflection on the ephemeral life of these new literary products due to economic reasons would be necessary, but is out of the scope of this paper.

are given hints to swipe the page to continue the reading process, to tap the screen to activate exciting animations, and to rotate or tilt the device in order to make characters and objects move. [...] it is no wonder that the reading process itself has changed, particularly in terms of agencies. (Garavini 2018: 43)

Indeed, Paveau defines digital reading as a form of 'écrilecture,' which is "[la] co-construction du sens par l'utilisateur dans un geste double de lecture et d'écriture" (2017: 214). This new 'writreading' practice (the author's translation) requires a deeper reflection on the characteristics of this new digital genre.² Together with the interactive story developed on the Web (Bouchardon 2014), the picture book is one of the Book App's ancestors. They both address a young or very young public and have a specific iconotextual form, where the image prevails over a relatively short text. Reading aloud is fundamental for the reception of both (Van der Linden 2006: 47-48). However, the picture book is not a genre, but a literary hybrid form (Van der Linden 2006: 29, Terrusi 2012: 122), whereas, according to the author, the Book App has to be considered a new genre, and, more precisely, a new 'technogenre,' as Paveau would say (2017: 296-297). Indeed, it is necessary to rethink the way these new digital products signify. As Mainigneau remarks, "avec le web, c'est donc tout le dispositif traditionnel qui vacille" (2013: 91).

In his recently published *Dernières leçons au Collège de France, 1968-1969* (2012), Benveniste invites readers to rethink the relationship between language and writing (2012: 91) and consider writing as one semiotic system among others. According to him, Saussure

confond l'écriture avec l'alphabet et la langue avec une langue moderne. Or les rapports entre une langue moderne et l'écriture sont spécifiques, non universels. [...] C'est une distinction que j'introduis et qui est indispensable. Car seule elle permet de raisonner sur l'écriture comme système sémiotique, ce que Saussure ne fait pas. (2012: 92)

² The reader of a digital literary work has an active role in building not only the story plot, but also its meaning. His/her gestures activate the multimedia dimension that is the essential feature of digital works. As Bouchardon confirms, "[l]a textualité numérique n'est pas figée : elle est d'une certaine manière immanente à l'acte de lecture [...]. Pour la grande majorité des textes imprimés, si la lecture est par nature une performance, le lecteur ne fait pas de lien entre les gestes qu'il effectue et le contenu qu'il lit. Les gestes du lecteur d'un livre ne font pas partie de son noème de la lecture. En revanche, dans le cas des textes numériques qui proposent une forme d'interactivité, la lecture est fortement construite par le geste. Le mode de lecture intègre d'emblée la dimension gestuelle sur le support" (2004 : 162-163). The scholar elaborates indeed "une rhétorique de la manipulation", a "rhetorics of manipulation" (the author's translation), that is the description of a set of "figures de manipulation (au sens de manipulation gestuelle)" (2004 : 164). According to him, such figures play a fundamental role in the literary experience of reading a digital, interactive work.

According to Paveau (2017: 65), whose theoretical position is similar to Benveniste's, we should go beyond Saussure's dualist and logocentric conception of the linguistic sign and replace it with an ecological approach, which does not separate the linguistic and the extralinguistic dimensions. Such an approach intends to study the whole environment that gives rise to digital discourses. The latter should be considered not merely as linguistic products, but as composite products that result from linguistic, technological, cultural, social, ethical, and political factors (Paveau 2017: 129). Paveau's postdualist and ecological *Analyse du discours numérique* (2017: 27) represents a revolutionary way of studying digital texts, which is essential for defining the Book App's nature. Therefore, the digital texts' genre should be thought as a 'technogenre,' that is

un genre de discours doté d'une dimension composite, issue d'une coconstitution du langagier et du technologique. Le technogenre peut relever d'un genre appartenant au répertoire prénumérique, mais que les environnements numériques natifs dotent de caractéristiques spécifiques [...], ou constituer un genre numérique natif et donc nouveau [...]. Le technogenre de discours est donc marqué par ou issu de la dimension technologique du discours, ce qui implique un fonctionnement et des propriétés particuliers. (Paveau 2017: 300)

The Book App can hence be considered a new digital native 'technogenre,' whose features are accurately summed up by Paveau: these multimedia products are 'composite,' that is plurisemiotic and resulting from the association of linguistic and non-verbal materials; 'delinearized,' as they allow a tabular or hypertextual reading; 'augmented,' as their production requires the collaboration of various actors. They are also 'relational' because they create a relationship between the device and the 'writing' human being; 'unpredictable,' as they are produced by software and algorithms, and not by individuals; and finally 'searchable': they can be cited, stored and studied by researchers (2017: 28-29, the author's translations). Book Apps are also a complex set of 'technographisms' (the author's translation):

On appellera *technographie* une production sémiotique associant texte et image dans un composite natif d'internet. L'élément *-graphie*, conformément à son étymologie (le verbe grec *graphein*, signifiant «tracer» et «écrire») signifie ici à la fois le geste de tracer, renvoyant au dessin ou à l'image et celui d'écrire, renvoyant au texte. [...] les deux ordres sémiotiques du texte et de l'image n'en font plus qu'un, étant simultanés, indistinctibles et indissociables. (Paveau 2017: 304)

Accordingly, this paper will define the Book App as a 'technogenre' consisting of a coherent plurisemiotic system of 'technographisms' that produces a multimodal digital text, which is both iconized and conversationalized. Due to the proximity and pre-

dominance of images, the digital text is often perceived as an image (Nachtergaele 2017: 292-293) and hence iconized. Moreover, its icono-text is conversationalized because the Book App is often read aloud (in one or more languages) and accompanied by music and sounds. In this context, the linguistic sign has to be thought of as an icon, according to Benveniste's reflection:

un 'signe iconique' [...] associerait la pensée à une matérialisation graphique, *parallèlement* au 'signe linguistique' associant la pensée à sa verbalisation idiomatique. La représentation iconique se développerait *parallèlement* à la représentation linguistique et non en subordination à la forme linguistique. Cette iconisation de la pensée supposerait probablement une relation d'une autre espèce entre la pensée et l'icône qu'entre la pensée et la parole, une relation moins littérale, plus globale. (Benveniste 2012: 95)

3. Digital translation: the necessary technological and semiotic turn

Benveniste's concept of iconized language is a good starting point for studying the specific ways digital texts signify (Kristeva 2012: 24) and can thus help in the difficult task of defining what translating a Book App means. After *the cultural turn* in Translation Studies (Bassnett 1991; Snell-Hornby 1988), we may suggest that these new digital products require another turn, on the one hand, technological (Nadiani 2007: 122), and on the other, semiotic.

3.1. The technological turn

If an ecological approach is necessary according to the *Analyse du discours numérique*, this is also true for the study of Book App translation. The translator has to translate not only a verbal message but the result of a digital enunciation, in which the 'discursive technology'³ (Paveau 2017: 335, the author's translation) gives a specific, discursive form to the message. This is why the translator has to understand its features and its functioning. Paveau's theoretical notion of 'discursive technology' is similar to what Nadiani calls 'tecnologema' in his research about translating digital literary texts:

³ "On appellera technologie discursive l'ensemble des processus de mise en discours de la langue dans un environnement numérique, reposant sur des dispositifs de production langagière constitués d'outils informatiques en ligne ou hors ligne (programmes logiciels, API, CMS) et proposés dans des appareils (ordinateur, téléphone, tablette)" (Paveau 2017: 335).

un'opera LD risulta [...] dipendente in modo indissolubile dalla *strumentazione* che la rende possibile a livello di produzione, di rappresentazione performativa, di distribuzione e di fruizione – da ora in poi chiameremo, in generale, questo insieme di fattori nella loro totalità *tecnologema*, riservando il termine introdotto precedentemente di *retrotesto* a ogni singola e specifica attuazione. (Nadiani 2007: 29)

Consequently, the Book App, like other digital texts, signifies on two different levels: a deep, technological one, produced by what Nadiani calls 'backtext' (the author's translation), and a more superficial and performative one, which is received as well as co-created by the 'writreader' during its textual exploration.

The Book App's stratified nature has relevant consequences from a translational point of view. Firstly, the relationship between Source Text (ST) and Target Text (TT) is modified. The distance between them disappears because they share the same 'discursive technology' (contrary to traditional printed texts). Moreover, for the first time in history, in the Book App, we have the simultaneous publication of ST and TT. Finally, according to Eco (2003), the literary ST is stable and does not change, while translations are ephemeral, historically situated texts (this is why, for example, each century has its translations of Shakespeare's plays). The Book App's existence contradicts Eco's theoretical position: its 'discursive technology' is continuously updated, making both the ST and its translation(s) unhinged. Such instability of the ST and its translation(s) is an additional confirmation of Apel's theoretical reflection on language movement. According to him, not only are translations always ephemeral and changing texts, but they also have the power to modify the ST through new interpretations and rewritings (Apel 1997).

Secondly, since the discursive technology is part of the Book App, the author is necessarily a plural one, an 'augmented' one, as Paveau would say (2017: 148). To develop a Book App, the story creator and its images must cooperate with IT engineers who work at the 'backtext' level. Therefore, this digital product is always 'co-written.' The translator, too, must be able to penetrate the Book App's stratified text and to analyze its different components and languages (Nadiani 2007: 126). He/she is required to cooperate with other people and have not only linguistic and cultural skills but also theoretical knowledge about audiovisual translation, localization,⁴ and internationalization (Nadiani 2007: 98). The definition of Digital Translation developed by Nadiani is, according to the author, particularly suitable for defining the Book App translation practice:

⁴ Localization has to be considered "the process of customizing a product for consumers in a target market so that when they use it, they form the impression that it was designed by a native of their own native country" (Watkins et al. 2002: 4). The term is often used in reference to websites and software: "Localizing software and Web sites involves the translation of application software, online documentation (such as Help files and Web pages), and related applications from a source language into a target language" (Weiss 2002: 38).

Per *traduzione digitale* si intende la preparazione e il trattamento di un testo proveniente da un certo *habitat di stimolo* da parte di un traduttore attraverso strumenti esclusivamente digitali per un ricevente di un certo *habitat di reazione* in grado di fruire di un nuovo testo, potenzialmente denotante tracce del testo da cui è stato gemmato, esclusivamente attraverso strumenti digitali, nella consapevolezza che tali strumenti possono sovradeterminare la natura e la ricezione dei testi stessi in quanto partecipi, in forme e misure diverse, del loro costituirsi. (Nadiani 2007: 108)

The concept of 'stimulus habitat' (the author's translation), a synonym of culture for Nadiani, is particularly appropriate because it enlarges the theoretical perspective and allows the virtual, plurisemiotic, and multilingual nature of the Book App to be taken into consideration. The translator of this digital product must be both source and target-oriented because of the coexistence of ST and TT. He/she must be aware of its complexity at an interlinguistic and intersemiotic level – this is why his/her intercultural knowledge must be broader and more profound. Within the Book App's creative team, he/she is an essential cultural mediator, whose role is to prearrange the Book App design to be translatable into other languages. In other words, a holistic conception of the digital composite product is necessary for Book App translation right from the beginning of the project.

3.2. The semiotic turn

While translating a Book App, the text (both written and read aloud) and images, animations, music, and sounds have to be transferred from one system to another. Therefore, it is necessary to be aware that each semiotic system signifies in a special, often culturally specific way. This is why not only a technological but also a semiotic turn in Translation Studies is inevitable. Such a turn should determine a new theoretical approach, aimed at taking into account the *pictorial turn*, which, according to Nachtergaele, characterizes our contemporary visual culture: "Ce pictorial turn marquerait également le passage de la postmodernité, caractérisée par la disparition des grands récits, au régime du tout-image ou, tout du moins, de la domination de l'image sur le langage articulé" (2017: 292). Also, Paveau confirms that the image organizes our perception and dominates over articulated language:

Que l'image prenne le pas sur le langage articulé sans l'effacer, bien au contraire, mais en le reconfigurant, de manière iconique (par une iconisation du texte), constitue une hypothèse congruente avec les observations réalisées en ligne. L'image apparaîtrait alors comme une forme légitime du texte. (Paveau 2017: 308).

Such a theoretical position is similar to Benveniste's idea of an iconized language, as mentioned earlier (2012), and confirms the need for an interdisciplinary, holistic approach in Translation Studies, which should open up to visual semiotics, anthropology, sociology, information sciences, and pragmatic studies.

What the Book App translator has to recreate in other languages is indeed not just a text, but an *icono-letter*. This notion, inspired by Berman's reflection on literary translation (1999), wants to stimulate a different, plurisemiotic approach to digital translation. The Book App *icono-letter* is then a complex and composite collection of verbal, audio, visual, cultural, and performative signs, which produces in a synergic and specific way the plurisemiotic and multimodal meaning to be translated. By studying two Book App translations from French into English, we will now see what translating their *icono-letters* means.

4. The degree of translatability of two different *icono-letters*

This paper's qualitative analysis will focus on two French Book Apps, *Ogre Doux* by Dutruch (2012), and *Bleu de toi* by Maes (2012). Both of them could be bought from the Apple Store and were published simultaneously in French and English. They have new paratextual features: the paper cover is replaced by an icon visualized on the device and, by touching it, readers have access to a digital frontispiece, which contains traditional bibliographical information as well as instructions (for parents or children) about how to read (or listen to) the Book App. It is interesting that, even though these two Book Apps are French, they are offered to their public first of all in English (readers can select French if required). Such a choice can be confusing and turns the relationship between ST and TT upside down. This is probably due to marketing reasons: French publishers aspire to reach a broader market, where the English language today takes the lion's share.

As far as the Book Apps' *icono-letter* is concerned, the verbal text is accompanied by images, animations, music, and sounds in both cases. Readers can choose the language of the conversational agent reading the story (alternatively, the parents can record their voice while reading the text). A substantial difference in the two digital products' *icono-letter* lies in their translatability, which reveals those "set[s] of factors creating resistance to the movement of information, sets of factors that alter the status of information as it is moved" (Pym 2001: 278). Such factors are strictly connected with their cultural origins.

4.1. *Ogre doux*: a design conceived to be translated?

Ogre doux, a Book App for seven- to eight-year-old children, is the story of a friendship between an ogre and a young girl, who both love literature. Reading or listening to the story, we discover that each of them is, for the other, a character of a fairy tale. Thus, they will be friends only during their childhood, but their friendship will end when they grow up. Once adults, they will lose their childlike pureness, and the ephemeral rose, which in this book symbolizes their friendship, will wither and die.

This flower's symbolic image is repeated throughout the Book App and creates a verbal and iconic rhythm. It can be found at a visual level in short animations that enrich the story and accompany the verbal text. At a linguistic level, it is associated with citations from Françoise Hardy's song *Mon amie la rose*, a 1965 song about the ephemeral nature of beauty and human existence. Finally, this flower evokes the famous French novella for children *Le petit prince* by Saint-Exupéry, and more precisely, the friendship between the little prince and his rose. The intertextual network produced by the association of music, verbal and iconic texts is an interesting example of *Ogre doux*'s specific icono-letter.

Drawing on Saemmer's rhetoric of the digital text (2015), some examples of the visual rhythm that is synergic and complementary to the verbal one will be analyzed. Screenshots (1a) and (1b) are from *Ogre doux*, page 7, and show two different moments of the same animation. This animation activates a 'semiotic unit of movement'⁵ (the author's translation) that Saemmer calls "sur l'erre" which, according to her, produces an "extinction progressive par disparition d'énergie" and arouses a feeling of "perte, disparition inexorable, mort" (2011: online). A similar figure, again describing the pro-



Screenshot 1a, 1b. *Ogre doux*, par Cathy Dutruch, illustré par Juliette Lancien
© La souris qui raconte, 2012

⁵ According to Saemmer (2011: online), "Une unité sémiotique du mouvement est donc potentiellement porteuse d'un certain nombre de traits signifiants. Ceux-ci sont actualisés en fonction du texte ou de l'image sur lequel le mouvement est appliqué, ainsi qu'en fonction du contexte multi- et hypermédia d'une création numérique et du contexte culturel et social d'un lecteur particulier."

gressive disappearance of the rose and metaphorically its death can be found on pages 12 and 22. In this second case, the roses disappear from the screen when the ogre understands that he will not see his friend anymore because of his father's order to grow up and become an adult.

On page 23, the female character too understands that her friendship with the ogre is finished: "Il se peut aussi qu[e l'ogre] grandit et que je ne m'en aperçus pas, ou que tout simplement il referma le livre et m'oublia" (screenshot 1c). If readers touch the last page of the book, they will see the book closing, by activating the figure that Saemmer calls 'kinégramme':

J'appelle *kiné-gramme* le procédé qui donne potentiellement l'impression au lecteur de manipuler aussi l'objet ou le concept évoqués, et non pas seulement le mot. L'irradiation iconique apportée par l'unité sémiotique de la manipulation transforme le texte au moins partiellement en simulacre de référent. (Saemmer 2015: 146)



Screenshot 1c, 1d. *Ogre doux*, par Cathy Dutruch, illustré par Juliette Lancien
 © La souris qui raconte, 2012

Consequently, two white roses (screenshot 1d) appear on the book back's cover, which is at first wholly black. These colors metaphorically refer to the death of the friendship between the ogre and the girl, but black and white are also the colors of writing. Thanks to an interesting *mise en abîme*, *Ogre doux* tells the story of two characters of fairy tales while reminding us of our childhood, its pureness, and its saving power and the saving power of literature.

The rose's symbolic presence is highly significant in this story and must be preserved in translation, both at a textual and iconic level. The English translator did not change the images, colors, or animations, because they do not create problems at an intercultural level. We suggest that, when the Book App design was conceived, the iconic dimension was planned to be appropriate and equally meaningful both in French and in English.

On the contrary, the verbal text had to be adapted: the references to Hardy's song, probably unknown to young English readers, were replaced by references to Juliet's famous monologue about the rose in *Romeo and Juliet*. This monologue celebrates poetry and its power of naming and revealing human beings' true nature: the TT English reader, although young, will probably recognize it. Adaptation, a frequent strategy in translating children's literature, determines the repetition of some verses of the monologue throughout the Book App, as a sort of refrain similar to Hardy's song. Thus, the verbal and iconic rhythm of the ST can also be experienced by the TT reader, and the metapoetic reflection about literature and poetry, essential in *Ogre doux*, is recreated in *The friendly Ogre*.

However, it must be said that in the English version, the translator could not always preserve the rich ST prosodic texture of alliterations and rhymes, and this is undoubtedly detrimental to a text which should be read aloud (Zumthor 1983). Another example of entropy is the translation of French puns, for instance, in "Il mange les livres, j'ai songé. Il se nourrit de vers...ou bien il aime son jardin!" (page 4), the pun is created by the polysemic word 'vers,' which in French means both 'verses' and 'worms.' The visual context helps to disambiguate the sentence since the ogre is in a library. The English translation "I wondered if maybe he ate the books. He could possibly be a real bookworm...or maybe just enjoyed gardening!" results in the loss of the pun and of the reference to verses, so beloved by the ogre.

The problem of translating puns and the prosodic rhythm of a text is a challenge that the Book App shares with more traditional texts. In *Ogre doux*, linguistic rhythm is synergic with visual, voiced, and sound rhythm: they all together produce the complex signifying, plurisemiotic environment that this paper calls the Book App's *icono-letter*, which was quite successfully recreated in English. Pederzoli argues that the translation of children's literature has to be 'est-éthique,' that is attentive to the reader and his comprehension skills, but also faithful to the literary and artistic quality of the ST: "l'engagement envers l'enfant ou l'adolescent ne peut pas se limiter à une évaluation – souvent improbable – de leurs compétences de lecture, mais doit viser également un objectif tout aussi noble : l'initiation à la lecture littéraire et à l'art" (Pederzoli 2012: 289). The Book App *icono-letter* too has to be translated in an 'aesth-ethical' way (the author's translation): the translation must be faithful to the plurisemiotic way of signifying of the ST and, as the etymology of 'aesthetics' suggests, to the reader's multisensory reception of the digital text. As Paveau confirms, indeed,

le numérique doit se définir davantage comme une redéfinition de nos activités cognitives et perceptives que comme un second univers séparé du premier par une frontière intangible : 'Percevoir à l'ère numérique, c'est être contraint de renégocier l'acte de perception lui-même, au sens où les êtres numériques nous

obligent à forger des perceptions nouvelles, c'est-à-dire d'objets pour lesquels nous n'avons aucune habitude perceptive' (Vial 2014: 48). (Paveau 2017: 122)

4.2. *Bleu de toi: an emotional design that defies translation*

Bleu de toi won the Best Book App for kids by Dem@in le livre in 2013, as readers can immediately see when they open the App. Maes explains: "this is a love story, written just for you [...]. It is a journey sown with words, colors, and sounds, and it's enough just to share your swelling emotions with everyone you love" (Maes 2012: 1). Throughout the book, the author celebrates his love for his five-year-old daughter, but this love hymn can be addressed to everybody, as he says. Adopting the sketch technique, Maes used a blue pen to draw all the images, scanned, and animated. Some images are hidden and can be discovered by touching or scrolling the screen or handling the iPad. The final page is an interesting example of the Book App's animations (screenshot 2a): all the characters of the story continue to cross the screen, to remind readers of all those who helped the author prove his love to his daughter. This continuous flow can be stopped for a while if the reader touches the screen, but then it starts again and seems endless. This "semiotic unit of movement" is referred to by Saemmer as "trajectoire inexorable". It is "non délimitée dans le temps, à phase unique, présentant une évolution linéaire." Its meanings are connected to the idea of birth, natural coherence, reassuring presence (Saemmer 2011: online). Thus, this 'semiotic unit' reinforces feelings naturally associated with paternal affection, making them more easily perceivable for French readers.

The App's dominant color is blue, and all the verbal texts associated with the images and animations are blue, as a screenshot (2a) shows. The Book App title, too, is blue and immediately attracts the reader's attention to this color. 'Être bleu de quelqu'un' is a Belgian expression that means 'to be crazy in love with someone.'⁶ Maes was inspired by a literal interpretation of an idiomatic expression, which became the source of his creation. Thus, the blue color reinforces Maes' expression of love for his daughter: verbal and visual texts are deeply synergic.

Bleu de toi is an excellent example of what Benveniste (2012) calls iconized language (2012). As the linguist states in his study on Baudelaire's language, which is complementary to the reflection developed in his *Dernières leçons au Collège de France* (2012), "les mots iconisent l'émotion," "reprodui[sent] d'aussi près que possible l'impression 'pathétique'" (Benveniste 2011: f° 55) experienced by the creator. The Book App's *icono-letter*, as Benveniste would confirm again, 'veut NOUS faire éprouver [l']expérience émotionnelle' de Maes (2011: f° 13): the author shares with us his "intenté émotif" (Benveniste 2011: f° 2). The verbal text, read by Maes, the blue images and animations and

⁶ See [here](#). It must be said that 'être bleu de quelqu'un' is not a French idiomatic expression. Thus, French readers too will not associate immediately the blue colour with the idea of love.



Screenshot 2a.

Bleu de toi, écrit, illustré
et mis en musique par D. Maes.
© CotCotCot éditions, 2012.

the music created by the author produce this Book App's plurisemiotic *letter*, which is the unique multimodal form of Maes' digital enunciation.

The translation of such a semiotic *copia*⁷ is a difficult task. The translator chose to keep the blue, maybe without considering that color meaning is cultural specific (Amadò 2007: 17). But 'to be blue' in English means 'to be sad': the dominant feeling conveyed by the translation is entirely different from the one Maes wanted to describe and share with his readers. The dominant color in the English Book App should have been red. The problem might be due to the fact that Maes' original images were drawn in blue. So wholly new drawings would have been necessary since the translator could not intervene at the 'backtext' level and modify the images' color. That is why we argue that this Book App design, contrary to that of *Ogre doux*, was not planned to be translated into other languages.

Another interesting feature is the presence of hyperlinks, making the 'writreading' of this App a real exploration and a stimulating activity. When readers reach page 11 (screenshot 2b), they find themselves in a library. If they touch the books on the table, 'kinégrammes' (Sammer 2015: 146) are activated. So, they can read excerpts from these books, as it would happen in a real library.

One of these books offers readers the chance to write their own story by using their personal account to store it among the other tales of this library, as screenshot (2c) shows. Once opened, four other books reveal to readers excerpts of fairy tales and children's stories in French on the right-hand page. On the left-hand page, Maes invites readers to continue discovering the story in their local library or visiting Gallica's digital library (the project Gutenberg website in the English version) and read the end of the story.

⁷ *Copia* is a latin word meaning abundance. The expression semiotic copia is again inspired by Berman's reflection on translation during the Renaissance (Berman 2012).

Screenshot 2b.

Bleu de toi, écrit, illustré
 et mis en musique par D. Maes.
 © CotCotCot éditions, 2012.



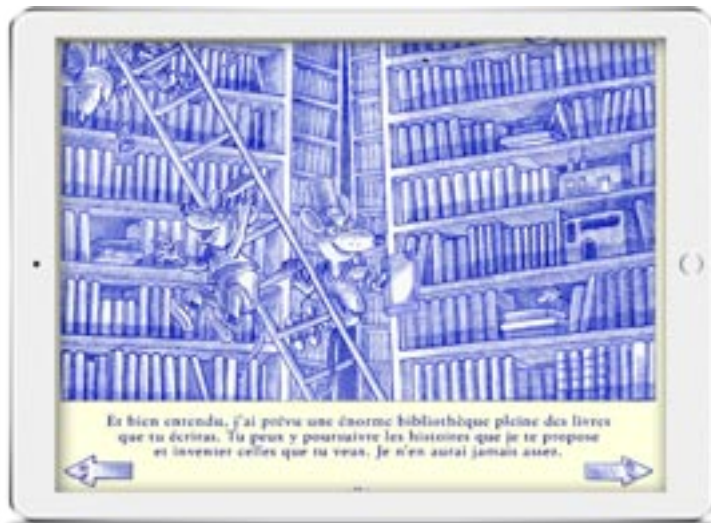
Screenshot 2c.

Bleu de toi, écrit, illustré
 et mis en musique par D. Maes.
 © CotCotCot éditions, 2012.



The French excerpts are from *Le nain jaune* de Mme D'Aulnoy, an XVII century writer; *Riquet à la houppe*, written by Charles Perrault and published in *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* (1697); *Tom pouce* by two XIX century German writers, the Brothers Grimm and *Les souliers rouges*, by the XIX century Danish writer Christian Andersen. In the first two cases, French texts are original; in the other, readers are offered French translations without being informed that the two texts are translations. Thus, they are wrongly led to believe that all these authors belong to the French literary fairy tale tradition.

English readers discover, for *Le nain jaune*, an 1889 adaptation by Andrew Lang, published by *The Blue Fairy Book* (Langmans, Green and Co., London, New York); for *Riquet à la houppe*, a 1781 translation by Robert Samber and J. E. Mansion (George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd); for *Tom Pouce*, an 1819 translation by Edgar Taylor (C. Baldwyn, London); and for *Les souliers rouges/The red shoes* readers are just told that the text was written by Andersen in 1845, but without being informed that both are translations



Screenshot 2d.

Bleu de toi, écrit, illustré
et mis en musique par D. Maes.
© CotCotCot éditions, 2012.



Screenshot 2e.

Bleu de toi, écrit, illustré
et mis en musique par D. Maes.
© CotCotCot éditions, 2012.

from Danish. It could be argued that, since this is ‘just’ a child’s Book App, the choice of original texts and their translation is not a crucial question. However, the author believes that the selection of adaptations or very old translations, such as Perrault’s and Grimm’s tales, should be discussed. Translation has the extraordinary power to contribute to literary works’ survival, as Benjamin argues (1996). A more careful selection of modern and accurate translations could awaken a greater “*plaisir du texte*” (Barthes 1976) and make reading more captivating and exciting for a young public.

Readers can use a staircase in the Book App library to discover the books hidden in the upper shelves, as a screenshot (2d) shows. The humorous visual reference to the French expression ‘*rat de bibliothèque*,’ a person who would be called a ‘bookworm’ in English, is, of course, unintelligible for English readers. The book held by the little mouse in the center opens after being touched by readers, as do the other books, and shows the excerpt visible in the screenshot (2e).

French adult readers will probably realize that the excerpt from *La poste* by Albus Camert is, in fact, a hidden reference to *La peste* by Albert Camus, and more precisely, a manipulated citation, in Oulipian style, of this excerpt:

Écoutant, en effet, les cris d'allégresse qui montaient de la ville, Rieux se souvenait que cette allégresse était toujours menacée. Car il savait ce que cette foule en joie ignorait, et qu'on peut lire dans les livres, que le bacille de la peste ne meurt ni ne disparaît jamais, qu'il peut rester pendant des dizaines d'années endormi dans les meubles et le linge, qu'il attend patiemment dans les chambres, les caves, les malles, les mouchoirs et les paperasses, et que, peut-être, le jour viendrait où, pour le malheur et l'enseignement des hommes, la peste réveillerait ses rats et les enverrait mourir dans une cité heureuse. (Camus 1962: 1474)

Rieux, the protagonist of Camus' work, is renamed Eurix by Maes; "le bacille de la peste" becomes "la file d'attente à la poste" or "La peste réveillerait ses rats et les enverrait mourir dans une cité heureuse" is changed to "La poste réveillerait ses agents et les enverrait travailler dans une cité heureuse." Thus, the presence of mice in this library acquires another deeper, and maybe funnier, meaning. Camus' pessimistic end of *La peste* is rewritten by Maes in order to be more suitable for a young public.

This excerpt is particularly interesting from a semiotic perspective: the mice's presence in the picture acquires an allegorical meaning. Their blue color is a further restatement of the author's love for his daughter: it is because of this love that he wrote a happier ending of Camus' book. The spatial dimension is also highly significant: the excerpt from *La poste* can be reached only by using a staircase. This allegorizes the need for an adult's mediation during the reading and alludes to the fact that only grown-up readers can perceive the ironic effect of this manipulated text. We have then a 'dual addressee' in this Book App, the adult mediator.⁸ Finally, *Bleu de toi* is a digital poetic discourse that produces multifold layers of meaning: the rewriting of Camus' story is also a *mise en abîme* of the Book App creative process itself. Through this metanarrative dimension, which was pointed out again in *Ogre doux*, Maes wants to establish a direct filiation relationship between his Book App and its ancestors, printed books, thus reaffirming its belonging to a long literary tradition.

What about the English version? The translator erases the plurisemiotic and meta-narrative meanings of this page. English readers are offered a 1781 translation by Robert Samber and J. E. Mansion (George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd) of an excerpt from another

⁸ This is a communicative feature that this Book App shares with more traditional picture books (Van der Linden 2006: 29).

Perrault's tale, *Barbe bleue*. The translator's adaptation strategy does not set off the literary value and the uniqueness of the ST. The complex plurisemiotic and metanarrative meanings of *Bleu de toi's* icono-letter are lost. Both for an adult and a young reader, the reading becomes less humorous and exciting.

5. Conclusion

Nowadays, the question of well translating Book Apps is relevant from different points of view: first of all, because of their pedagogical value and their crucial role in helping children learn foreign languages (Smeets and Bus 2014). Secondly, some of these products are a new form of 'pop literature,' and a captivating alternative to printed literary books for 'digital natives.' A confirmation of changing reading habits (and of a consequent publishing market development) is, for instance, the creation in 2012 of the Bologna Ragazzi Digital Award: during the Bologna Children's Book Fair, this prize is won by the most innovative media app or web work for children, and prize-winners gain worldwide attention and global media coverage.⁹ Thirdly, if we accept the idea that Book Apps can be literary works (as *Ogre doux* and *Bleu de toi*), it is necessary to recognize the need for an 'ethical' translation of their elaborate plurisemiotic letter. According to Berman (1999: 75), an 'ethical' translation can "ouvrir l'Étranger en tant qu'Étranger à son propre espace de langue," that is, to recreate in the target language the complex linguistic, cultural, historical and literary configuration of the ST. "Ouvrir est plus que communiquer: c'est révéler, manifester," in his opinion (1999: 76). Thus, an 'ethical' translation offers the TT reader a literary work that can produce an aesthetic experience similar to that created by the ST.

This paper has studied two different examples of translation of *icono-letters*, by adopting a descriptive approach, based on what Berman defines as the 'regard réceptif' (Berman 1995: 65). As he argues, it is necessary to refuse "toute inféodation du traduire à un quelconque discours conceptuel qui, directement ou non, [...] dirait 'ce qu'il faut faire'" (1995: 69). Accordingly, we do not want to suggest that *Bleu de toi* must be re-translated, nor that the translation of *Ogre doux* is the only possible one, even if it can be considered an interesting example. The analysis of these two Apps is just a starting point for further reflection on the specific problems of translating this new 'technogenre.' The study of a larger corpus has already begun¹⁰ and aims at examining the different kinds of issues that Book App translators usually face, as well as the strategies chosen to solve these problems. This descriptive approach intends to stimulate more

⁹ See the Fair's [website](#).

¹⁰ The results of this research, financed by the University of Bergamo (Department of Modern Languages, Cultures and Literatures), will be published in the near future in a book written in French.

‘ethical’ translations in the future and more careful planning of Book Apps’ design, ensuing from a greater awareness of translation processes. In Berman’s opinion, indeed, “les œuvres langagières [...] ont besoin de la critique pour se communiquer, pour se manifester, pour s’accomplir et se perpétuer” (1995: 38).

Ogre doux’s analysis confirms that if the design takes into account translation, the problems related to the linguistic, cultural, and semiotic transfer will be easier to solve. The difficulties highlighted in the English version of Maes’ *Bleu de toi* reveal, on the other hand, that if the translation is not considered from the beginning, many features of the plurisemiotic text will be untranslatable, and the effect produced by the TT on the reader will be substantially different, and maybe, more deficient.

In any case, Maes’ Book App is an excellent example of the synergy between linguistic and visual signs (Groupe μ 1992), since it tries to make everything that is said perceptible in a multimodal way. It confirms Amado’s theoretical position: the scholar distances himself from Eco’s reflection (2016) and supports Groupe μ ’s notion of visual sign:

I segni visivi assumono un valore caratteristico e irrinunciabile nella comunicazione visiva in genere. Se nella comunicazione linguistica il segno convenzionale è spesso considerato come mero mezzo e ne ha la funzione, [...], non è così nella comunicazione visiva, e non solo nelle sue espressioni artistiche. Comunicazione nella quale non è possibile prescindere dalle forme e questo aspetto corrisponde al suo peculiare pregio. Crediamo che questa dinamica di comunicare e di pensare ‘con’, e forse meglio ‘nelle’ forme e non per mezzo e ‘oltre’ ad esse, sia valida per tutte le forme della comunicazione visiva grazie ai suoi elementi distintivi. (2007: 23)

At the beginning of this study, we mentioned the Book App’s heuristic value: this new ‘technogenre,’ whose international market is expanding, is an invitation to rethink post-modern communicative strategies and how they are changing in the digital era. A more osmotic relationship makes the verbal sign move towards the visual sign: linguistic and visual semiotics have to cooperate to study the new complex forms of verbal-visual communication of our contemporary society.

According to the author, another form of cooperation between the theoretical approach of Semio-translation and Translation Studies is necessary. As Hodgson *et al.* state, it is undeniable that “[f]or audiovisual or new media translators Peircean semiotics allows them to conceptualize texts as more than just an assembly of lexical units called words” (Hodgson *et al.* 2000: 140). Nonetheless, Gorlée (2004: 190) seems to consider translation as primarily an interlinguistic transfer: “Translation is a metatextual, linguistic operation and falls under the category of Peirce’s verbal-editorial skills.” She finds similarities between Pierce’s reflection and other translation scholars, such as

Toury (2004: 121-122) or Steiner (2004: 126-127), whose theories stem from the study of traditional literary printed texts. Moreover, what Gorlée argues about Steiner's translation theory in *After Babel* reveals her missing opening to Translation Ethics: "Steiner's step-wise scenario has an important virtue when recontextualized within semiotics: it resembles semiosis and is interestingly reminiscent of Peirce's succession of three interpretive moments as manifested in the First (immediate/emotional), Second (dynamical/energetic), and Third (final/logical) interpretants" (2004: 127). She considers Steiner's fourth hermeneutical movement, the 'ethical' one trying to restore fidelity to the ST (Steiner 1975: 277-281), to be a mere illusion (Gorlée 2004: 126). A more in-depth dialogue between Semio-translation and Translation Ethics would be necessary and fruitful - for instance, with Venuti's (1995) and Berman's (1999; 1995) theories.

Semio-translation conceives translation as an abstract, 'abductive' process (2004: 99-132), and the translator as a 'generalized' actor (2004: 102). Greater attention should be paid to what translating an *icono-letter* in an 'ethical' way means. Bilingual or multilingual Book App versions are a new, unexplored genre that may develop an empirical, heuristic reflection on the challenge of translating plurisemiotic texts. As for Translation Ethics, further reflection is needed, and a technological and semiotic turn should be taken into serious consideration.

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