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Creating Characters in Multimodal Narration: Comics and Picturebooks in the Hands of the Translator

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Comics and picturebooks are multimodal forms of artistic expression communicating through the combination of the modes of the verbal, the visual and the aural. Comics and picturebooks are not far removed from each other: they both include not only images and written texts but also verbal and visual characterisation such as sound effects, speech bubbles, bodily gestures, postures and facial expressions, all of which reinforce the joint effect of the words and images. The aural mode is triggered during the reading process: while picturebooks are often read aloud, the illusion of aurality in comics is created in a more subtle way. Through these different modes, the reader experiences the joint narration of the verbal, the visual and the aural. This process makes the reader believe in and get an understanding of the characters and their background. In our article, we examine how characters are built and situated in time, place and culture. In this way, the overall multimodal effect of visual and verbal language makes the reader complete the gaps in narration. We illustrate this phenomenon using Risto Isomäki, Petri Tolppanen and Jussi Kaakinen's graphic novel *Sarasvatin hiekkaa* (2008, *The Sands of Sarasvati*, 2013) and Elena Agnello and Adrie Le Roux's picturebook *I am Alex* (2016, *Minä olen Alex*, 2016).

Keywords: characterisation, interplay of the verbal and the visual, reading experience, translation of multimodal texts

1 Introduction

Narration is a central issue of all translation. This phenomenon can be described through Mikhail Bakhtin, who discusses the dialogical nature of all narrations (Bakhtin 1990, 426–427). Any reading experience consists of the voices of different writers, illustrators, and audiences in the past, present and future. Human words are never created in a vacuum and every detail carries a meaning (Oittinen 2000, 126, 164). Translators always start their work as readers not just of words but of illustrations, too. The dialogics of translation includes both the traditional task of translating words into words and translating words into images and the other way around (Jakobson 1989, 55). This task of translating texts also covers the creation of stories for different media, such as transforming novels into graphic novels. Thus, we understand translation as multifaceted rewriting.

The present article deals with the modes of the verbal, the visual and the aural in the translation of comics and picturebooks. On the one hand, comics and picturebooks share

many features, such as a story told in both verbal and visual languages. On the other hand, there can be significant differences, such as the audience and the use of texts (being read aloud or silently). We focus on how a story is created and, in particular, how characters in the stories are built by using verbal and visual means. We examine how the illusion about life, either real or fantastic, is created in the translation of multimodal texts. We discuss the differences and similarities of comics and picturebooks and the means the writer, the illustrator and the translator can use when creating characters in multimodal texts of this kind. Comics and picturebooks are both iconotexts, generated by the interplay of the modes of the verbal (words) and the visual (images). Their multimodality also consists of the aural mode in the sense of an "inner ear": without hearing concrete sounds, the reader is able to sense the sounds and voices even if they were marked only typographically by using the means of the verbal or the visual language, such as sound effects. Moreover, picturebooks, and sometimes comics, too, are read aloud, which gives them a more concrete aural aspect. In the translation of the two, comics and picturebooks, it is inevitable that the translator is able to interpret the modes and their meaning-making of texts to be translated.

In addition, the readers of comics and picturebooks have a key status: any choices made by the authors, readers or translators of multimodal texts need to be pondered on from the viewpoint of readership. In translation, the voices of authors, illustrators, translators, and audiences intertwine, resulting in the creation of new meanings. What is relevant here is the translator's awareness of the future readers of texts to be translated: for example, in the translation of picturebooks the translator's reader image (child image) is relevant (Oittinen 2004, 4).

Our joint research questions are: 1) How is a character depicted through different modes: what is expressed in words, what in pictures? 2) How do different modes support each other, or are they in contradiction with each other? 3) How do the ethical thematics of the works show in the characterisation? 4) What has happened in translation: has the relationship of the verbal and the visual changed? In our analyses, we present some examples from both situations of rereading and rewriting, looking at the visual, the verbal and the aural of the originals and translations.

2 Comics and picturebooks

There are several definitions of comics, such as *medium*, *language*, *semiotic system* or the like. However, the problem of categorisation has lead theorists to refer to the genres of comics rather than comics as one genre. In other words, the art form with its sequential images can be categorised, for instance, as comic strips, short graphic novellas or graphic books regarding the length of the art form, or, for example, as fictional, instructional, or

educational according to their primary function (entertainment vs. instruction) (Zanettin 2008a, 5–6).

The genres of comics can also be seen as literary genres using the means of visual language. This leads to dividing the comics in categories such as journalistic comics, horror comics or autobiographical comics, or, more specifically, superhero comics, war comics or erotic comics indicating the contents of the narration (Bramlett et al. 2016, passim.). The themes of various literary genres are expressed in comics visually. As Scott McCloud (1994, 9) considers, "[comics are] juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer." A comic book consists of consecutive panels and possibly written text, pictorial symbols, sound effects, and other effects attached to the images in various ways. Therefore, comics are a versatile art form that combines techniques from literature and visual arts, and it is possible to utilise research methodology related to different art forms in order to study comics. This can be done by borrowing methods from narratology and textual research, as well as from semiotics or visual culture studies. Methods from film studies can be applied for example when analysing still images, image layout, and various effects that imply a resemblance between comics and films (Herkman 1998, 94–95; Borodo 2016, 68–70).

Picturebooks, too, fit into several categories, which makes them as difficult to define as comics (Lewis 2001, passim.). In different databases, even the definitions of picturebooks may vary: some definitions are based on the share of the verbal and the visual information in a work of art, whereas some others are based on the strength of the visual influencing the verbal. Some databases, for example, do not list any illustrated books as picturebooks, and some others list both illustrated books and so-called picture books as "picturebooks." (Oittinen 2004, 18–35.) According to several definitions (Harainen 2002, Heinimaa 2001), we may also look at a picturebook as an object of manufacture: due to printing technology, a picturebook usually has 32–48 pages. Picturebooks – as well as comics – may be black-and-white or multi-colour or both, and one way or the other they form narrative entities (at least in the reader's mind). Picturebooks may be fairytale books, storybooks, ABC books, or toybooks. (Oittinen, Ketola, and Garavini, 2018).

There are also several other aspects involved, such as the different kind of voices: on the one hand the voice of the author, the illustrator and other experts, and on the other, the adult reading the story to the child. An author writes and an artist illustrates the story, the audience (child and adult) interprets the images, and it is in society where the stories are found. There is the image itself, comprising a number of smaller images, and there is the medium affecting the images. The images can also be cut up into basic elements, not only by elements such as dots, lines, shapes, volume and scale, but also into elements according to direction, lighting, perspective and proportion (Berger 1998, 45–46; 51–69).

By using different styles and textual devices, picturebooks can break boundaries and widen their scope remarkably. Barbara Bader (1976 in Lewis 2001, 137) places picturebooks within even a wider scope: "A picturebook is a text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and commercial product; a social, cultural, historical document; and, foremost, an experience for a child." As Perry Nodelman (1999, 69–80) points out, we could define a picturebook as the "province of the young child," using many styles, codes and textual devices. Even though picturebooks are often considered as a genre, others maintain the opposite: picturebooks may "be of any genre, including history, fantasy, nonfiction, and poetry" (Oittinen, Ketola, and Garavini, 2018).

3 Characteristics of visual language: reading narration into life

Reading is the key issue in translating comics and picturebooks. As readers of multimodal texts, we need to be aware of several conventions. For example, when we read a multimodal text in black and white, we use our imagination and add the missing information, the colours, to the picture. In this way, images are intertwined into a multimodal entity to be understood. (Spink 1990, 60–62; Oittinen 2000, 32, 101). In comics, the visual and verbal contents can be combined in several ways. Scott McCloud (1994, 153–155) offers seven categories of various word–image combinations: word-specific, picture-specific, duo-specific, additive, parallel, montage and interdependent combination. Juha Herkman (1998, 59) simplifies McCloud's categorisation and divides the word–image combinations into four functions: an illustrated text may be based more on words than on images or quite the contrary; there may also be collaboration between the verbal and the visual, or the visual may stand in controversy with the verbal message.

At first, the translator reads the text to be translated and imagines the future readers and their reading experiences; second, the real target audience reads the translated text and understands it in their own way. When reading a book with illustrations, the reading process gets more complicated. According to the *Gestalt* psychologist E. H. Gombrich (1998, 99), reading pictures concerns not only the artist creating the images but also the ways we see the images and the reasons behind them, such as ethics, morals, values and emotions. He, too, underlines the importance of culture and conventions and their influence on our ways of seeing.

We read texts for different purposes, such as for translating them, and the purposes have an influence on how we read the texts. This is how the American scholar Louise M. Rosenblatt (1978, 23) describes two different reading strategies: aesthetic and efferent, the first reading being aesthetic and the latter efferent. The strategies differ in both time and experience: on the one hand, in aesthetic reading, the reader's whole attention is concentrated on the experiences s/he has while reading; on the other hand, in more analytical readings, what comes after the reading is important. Of course, even a translator

may read for many different purposes but when reading for translation purposes, a translator's reading experience is certainly efferent (Oittinen 2000, 26–29). Moreover, the situation of using picturebooks – when reading silently or reading aloud – is unique. Every time we read we bring something different to the situation, and at the same time a translation never fully depicts what there is in the original text.

When starting a translation task, a translator needs to ask: "What kind of verbal, visual, and stylistic information have I got? What kinds of moods, attitudes, and feelings have I found?" In this way, the stories in comics and picturebooks become alive during the reading experience. The panels in comics and page-openings in picturebooks create a narrative continuum. The drawings include not only images and written texts but also many graphic signs, such as speech bubbles, speed lines, and sound effects as well as graphic and pictorial symbols. They all reinforce the joint effect of the combination of words and images, which creates a story, a narration. The gutter between the panels in comics and the turning of the pages in picturebooks are gaps for readers to fill in according to their expectations and previous knowledge of the world. (Zanettin 2008a, 13; McCloud 1994, 68; Groensteen 2013, 52–54). Susan Bassnett points out that readability and an understanding of "the full meaning" of a text go together with filling in the gaps (Bassnett 2002, 36–37). The visual and verbal clues illustrated in the panels and page-openings guide the reader in this process.

The clues conveyed by images and words are essential in this meaning-making process, because comics and picturebooks are written in two languages: verbal and visual (see Cohn 2013). It is important to be sensitive to this, especially from the perspective of the reading experience in general, but also from the angle of translating illustrated texts. Whether the reader understands the text or whether the translator's work is successful depends on the competence of the target reader or the translator. Is s/he capable of reading the visual and verbal messages as one unity? (Celotti 2008, 43; Kaindl 2011, 39)

According to McCloud (1994, 99), in comics, time and space are divided by panels, and the shape of panels plays an essential role in the narrative. The conventional shape of a panel is rectangular, and any diverging shapes can be used to emphasise the significance of the events depicted in the panel. The size and, in particular, the width of a panel in comics usually illustrate the duration of the event: a tall and narrow panel signifies a shorter length of time, whereas a wide horizontal panel decelerates the action or even stops the course of events (McCloud 1994, 101–102). McCloud's reading refers to the definition of the classic type of comics, which has been discussed for example by Groensteen (2013, 40). Groensteen (2013, 40.) also discusses the more sophisticated type of comics operating "in a register that is more poetic than narrative." In this type of comics, the size and form of panels are not necessarily related to time. Illustrators of picturebooks, on the other hand, often borrow techniques from comics, such as dividing time and space by page-openings. For example, characters moving from one place to

another, is often depicted by using a rectangular shape. Groensteen (2013, 52) even claims that "[s]ome illustrated children's books could quite reasonably be called comics."

Since the panels in comics do not include real-life motion (except for webcomics), the sense of motion must be created in other ways, such as by using speed lines, broken panel borders, or even by using the means of the nonverbal communication of the characters, such as gestures and postures (Pitkäsalo 2016b, 57). Another tool to depict motion is to use sound effects. These effects can sometimes overlap panel borders. Effects travelling across panels indicate the direction of motion and sound, and they connect the events of separate panels more closely (Herkman 1998, 45–46, Manninen 1995, 38). In picturebooks, too, we can find similar features. For example, in Mélanie Watt's *Scaredy Squirrel* series (e.g., *Scaredy Squirrel Makes a Friend*, 2008) the author-illustrator borrows many techniques and ideas from comics, such as the use of panels and sound effects, or symbols expressing astonishment and fear. In any event, her books can still be clearly defined as picturebooks.

Moreover, sounds and voices activate narration, since they may be made "audible" by the readers even if they cannot hear them in reality. Dialogue and any other forms of speech in comics are usually written in speech bubbles, varying in the shape and size of the letters according to the volume of the speech. The speech and voice effects can be added to the drawings in picturebooks, too. Both in comics and picturebooks, motion and action may be created by using various effects describing sound. These types of sound effects can help emphasise dramaturgically high points, lending them a cinematic sense of motion (Huitula 2000). In comics, complicated scenes can be depicted swiftly and in a simplified manner, which McCloud (1994, 42–43) considers to be the strength of expression in comics.

4 Means of characterisation

The characters (people, animals, objects) in stories may be created in several ways, for characterisation is based on the verbal, visual, and aural information. A character has a certain kind of disposition and temperament and a certain kind of visual appearance: s/he is thin or fat or red or gray. Characters move and speak in a certain way and have a certain role to play. They also have a certain background, and are given a certain name, which is why certain things happen to them (Bertills 2003, 51; Oittinen 2004, 101–104).

A proper name in fiction gives a character personality and substance, offering the reader an idea of the internal relations of the characters in the story (Bertills 2003, 72). Proper names may also be totally imaginary, such as Milne's Eeyore and Disney's Heffalump, or they may depict a character, such as Lindgren's Pippi Longstocking. Proper names are seldom translated in literature for adults; on the other hand, in picturebooks, characters

often get a translated name. Translated names are also of great importance for child readers: translated or otherwise domesticated names give them the possibility of identifying themselves with the characters. In every case, the whole entity of a book and a story has a strong influence on what translators do with names.

In the core of fictional narration, a character, or a group of characters, usually communicate in some way (Borodo 2015, 24). When characters are depicted visually, the movements, facial expressions, gestures, postures, and mutual relationships are interpreted and described in a manner which is not far removed from those of film narration, such as close-ups and full-frame images. When readers see a series of still images placed in a row, they conceive the impression of motion. In the same way, an impression of sound, such as a character's voice, can be experienced in a reading situation. The illusion of a character's voice is created by different visual means, such as sound effects and contents of speech bubbles, as well as nonverbal communication (Pitkäsalo 2017).

The layout of the drawings and the gestures, postures and facial expressions of the characters in turn reveal the reactions of the characters, or even the nature of their relationships. This kind of nonverbal communication either supports the discourse or sets the contents of the visual and verbal in conflict. In this way, the reader's impression of the characters' emotions and physical state or the relationship between the characters is confirmed; the reader can also consider the conflict between the verbal and the nonverbal communication as it would play out in a real-life situation (Pitkäsalo 2016b, 440).

In other words, the nonverbal communication of the characters in comics and picturebooks is based on both the characters themselves and the narration. Gestures and facial expressions are means to express emotions or attitudes: facial expressions, in particular, seem to be universal, at least those used to express so-called basic emotions, such as anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness and surprise. These basic emotions are generally viewed to be independent of culture, language and age. There are naturally innumerable emotions and expressions, as McCloud (2006, 84–85) contends: a comic book artist can illustrate the gamut of emotions by combining basic expressions, such as anger and sadness meaning betrayal. The nonverbal communication also supports – or contradicts – the oral communication. Additionally, as Schneller (1992, 216) points out, nonverbal communication replaces verbal communication if the purpose is to avoid using words, or if the words are not enough to express emotions. In other words, nonverbal communication also has a social function. Through facial expressions and gestures, it is possible to show a character's desire to collaborate or show empathy (Schneller 1992, 216).

Gestures and postures substantiate the emotions of the characters in a communicative situation and also depict their mutual relationship, such as friendliness, indifference or

suspicion (Borodo 2015, 24). Gestures are culture-bound, which means that they are used in different cultures for different purposes. Hand gestures, for instance, may carry different meanings, such as a finger pointing to a person's temple: according to cultural differences, this may signify "you are clever", "you're stupid", "you're crazy", "I think", "I remember" or "Think!!" (Schneller 1992, 226) In multicultural interaction, gestures may carry different meanings: one meaning may be expressed using many different gestures (Schneller 1992, 215). Recognising gestures and facial expressions is of great importance especially when translating into such languages that are culturally far removed from the cultural background of the source text or when translating a book for a culture the verbal and visual contents of which seem to be in contradiction with each other. The nature of characters can also change even radically if the gestures, postures or other nonverbal communication is performed in a different way compared to the source culture's interpretation.

According to Fernando Poyatos (1983, 286) there are situations where only gestures and postures express the speaker's "true meaning". In these situations, it is possible for the character's speech and her/his nonverbal communication to be in contradiction with each other. In fiction, where both speech and nonverbal communication are depicted in words, it is possible to explain this contradiction. Yet in comics – and in picturebooks, too – where speech is delivered in writing and gestures, and where expressions and other nonverbal communication are depicted visually, it may be risky to show readers the contradiction and make them confused and bewildered (Pitkäsalo 2016b, 448).

All in all, the translator of comics and picturebooks must consider the target culture's system of signs since the meanings behind the symbols are adopted and thus culturally specific. In most cases, the translator cannot interfere with the actual image (Zanettin 2008b, 206). Instead, in the translation of comics, translators receive a template, into which they can insert only the translated text. In picturebook translation, a similar template is given to the translators to fit in their text within the space given in the co-print. If a panel includes culture-specific, nonverbal messages that the target language reader cannot comprehend, the translator must have the capability to transfer the visual content into the target language's linguistic and cultural environment through words alone. However, words tend to fail in expressing the combined multimodal content of art and text. Thus, as the message conveyed by the image is lost, the combined meaning is not transferred to the reader – or at the very least, it will fall short of the original. In the following, we apply the above ponderings to two cases of verbal, visual and aural interaction in comics and picturebook translation.

5 Revisiting Sergei and Alex

At the very beginning of the article, we defined translation as rewriting, as a versatile process taking place not just between languages but even between modes, visual and verbal. In other words, our scope of looking at translation covers different combinations of words, images and sounds. As examples, we are using Risto Isomäki, Petri Tolppanen and Jussi Kaakinen's graphic novel *Sarasvatin hiekkaa* (2008, *The Sands of Sarasvati*, 2013) and Elena Agnello and Adrie le Roux's picturebook *I am Alex* (2016, *Minä olen Alex*, 2016). The main reason for our choice is that both of the works deal with notions of values and ethics. While *The Sands of Sarasvati* conspicuously ponders on global warming and the melting of ice, *I am Alex* concentrates on the differences and similar values of all human beings. In our analysis, we are especially focussing on how the characterisation of the main protagonists, Sergei and Alex is built in the narration.

In our article, we take a closer look at the original books and their translations. We define translation not only as interlingual transaction between verbal languages, but also intersemiotic translating, such as translating pictures into words. We show how the verbal, visual and aural modes interact in two kinds of translation analyses. We are interested in how characterisation is built in the exchange of different modes in a graphic novel and a picturebook. We examine how all this is mirrored in, on the one hand, the translation, and on the other, the translation process. This standing causes a difference between the analyses of our material: a translator always needs to pay attention to the audiences of both the source as well as the target versions, while in this analysis of the finished translation – depending on the research questions and method – the audience is not necessarily as relevant a question. The method used in both analysed examples incorporate a close reading of the verbal and the visual while also pondering on the aurality and dialogics (Bakhtin 1990, 426–427) of a graphic novel and a picturebook.

In our analysis, we understand characterisation as being created during a reading experience of multimodal texts. In general, the aural is understood in two ways in the analyses: in a concrete sense in picturebook translation, where texts are often read aloud, and in a more abstract sense, when the illusion of sound is created in the reader's head. However, in our analysis, the characters are also developed through the aural mode, when texts are read aloud or silently. In the following, we are focussing on the characterisation of our two main protagonists, Sergei and Alex, in the multimodal entity of visual, verbal and aural modes.

5.1 Graphic novel *The Sands of Sarasvati*

The graphic novel *Sarasvatin hiekkaa* (2008) by Petri Tolppanen and Jussi Kaakinen is based on Risto Isomäki's eco-thriller of the same title (*Sarasvatin hiekkaa,* 2005). The English translation *The Sands of Sarasvati* (2013) was made by Lola Richards and Owen F. Witesman. *The Sands of Sarasvati* introduces a group of scientists who are investigating the changes in the different states of water and sand at the bottom of the oceans, in the glaciers of Greenland and the different kinds of geological forms in The Bahamas, Canada and Finland.

The original story of the examined graphic novel is mainly based on scientific facts and includes a large amount of scientific jargon, which is typical of science fiction as Markku Soikkeli (2015, 10) observes. The examined graphic novel – as a metamorphosis of the original novel – is a good example of rewriting a story: due to its visuality, a graphic novel is a particularly apt channel for science fiction, because many of the events that would require the description of special vocabulary can simply be portrayed in single panels or in a series of panels.

When we read and rewrite a hard-fact novel like this, we have to be aware of the main characteristics of science fiction as a genre, including the eco-thriller, for example. The specialty of the genre today seems to be the way in which the actual theme of our present-day world discourse is represented, and in the way, it is discussed through the alienated fiction worlds of sci-fi literature. As a science editor and an environmental activist, Risto Isomäki has also published several non-fiction books and articles on environmental affairs and the development of the Third World (Kirjasampo, n. d.). In his novels – ecological thrillers and sci-fi novels – he continues dealing with issues such as gender equality as well as racial equality.

In our analysis, we ponder on the relationship between the visual and verbal modes regarding the characterisation of Sergei, the main protagonist. The aim of the analysis is to show, in which way the development of Sergei is depicted visually, and how the verbal and aural modes give support to or deviate from this picture. Furthermore, we show how the typical themes of sci-fi literature mentioned above have been visualised in the graphic novel examined and how these themes appear in the creation and development of a character.

The analysis of *The Sands of Sarasvati* focuses on the characterisation of one protagonist, Sergei Savelnikov. The character's speech, inner thoughts and action are mostly expressed by combinations of the visual and the verbal modes, such as words in speech bubbles and sound effects marked with letters. Instead, the physical description, emotions and reactions are depicted by the postures, gestures and facial expressions of the characters. On the one hand, our analysis introduces Sergei Savelnikov as a multilevelled

character; on the other, it shows the difficulties the translator of comics may confront. In the following, we will first briefly describe the plot of the book. Thereafter we will take a look at the characterisation of Sergei.

The story begins with "Part 1: Water and Sand" in the Norwegian Sea in the 2020s, where the Russian oceanographers observe the changes occurring at the bottom of the sea. Later, a group of archaeologists study the ruins at the bottom of the Gulf of Khambat, and the Russian deep-ocean researcher Sergei Savelnikov joins Indian (ocean) archaeologist Amrita Desai and her group. Together they try to explain how a ruined city got submerged off the coast of India. In Part 1, the reader meets with the Finnish researcher Kari Alanen, who is marvelling at the enormous rocks first in Eleuthera and later in Finland. In "Part 2: Sand and Ice," the reader is taken to Greenland, where the Philippino glaciologist Susan Cheng observes the changes in the ice sheets. Meanwhile, Sergei Savelnikov and Amrita Desai are visiting the ruins in the old towns in India, and Kari Alanen visits the Canadian researcher John Thaw to discuss the connection between the rocks in Eleuthera and Finland and the drumlins in Canada. Water and sand seem to have something to tell us about the Flood and lost civilisations. In "Part 3: Ice and Water," different storylines converge, and from these seemingly unrelated observations, a frightening picture of a possible terrifying fate of mankind is beginning to take shape.

Regarding the main plot of the book, the central protagonist is Sergei Savelnikov, whose character is shaped both visually and verbally. The main issues of Isomäki's political project are discussed parallel with building Sergei's character: in fact, this mostly happens with respect to the developing relationship of Sergei and Amrita. Racial and cultural equality, as well as environmentalism and the development of the Third World are all issues that can be found as themes in the dialogue of Sergei and Amrita, while the development of Sergei's individual character is depicted more or less visually. The aural dimension of the story can be imagined by its readers, who add the tone, pitch and volume to the characters. In the panels analysed, there are no sound effects, which could direct the reader in interpreting the characters. In this analysis, on the basis of the verbal and visual contents, we can give reasons to the volume and rhythm of the characters' voices. However, through the method of close reading, it is not possible to define the tone or pitch of the characters, because they are based on the reader's individual experiences only. As the translator is a reader of texts, too, her/his interpretation of multimodality may influence the characterisation.

At the beginning, there are three characters in the research vessel mapping the edge of the continental shelf. Only two of them, Vasili and Natalia, are identified. Sergei will be named as late as on page 6, where a bristly man with a scruffy appearance is introduced as a member of the staff of the research group. Later, his appearance on the first pages is explained: he is mourning his dead wife. This unkempt figure also shows up in the end part of the book, when he is scared of having lost Amrita. On page 52 Amrita and Kari

go for a walk on an island of ice. A snowstorm rises, and Sergei gets worried, which is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Isomäki et al. 2013, p. 54, panel 2.

Visual: Close-up of a smoking Sergei who is quite bristly and untidy and looks extremely worried. The captain of the ship stands in the background.

Verbal: Captain: ”Ehem… the men were saying that the island may have broken in two during the storm. The other half could have been driven farther off by the wind.” Sergei: “Good Heavens!”

Aural: Sergei speaks to himself. The worried look on his face refers to the volume (loud whisper) and rhythm (slow tempo) of his voice.

Sergei’s worrying face and unkempt looks are in harmony with his verbal expression, and also with the aural mode transmitted through the illustration. Showing Sergei as a scruffy figure twice – at the beginning of the story and during the snowstorm – highlights Sergei’s inner thoughts: the fear of losing his second wife, too. The Figure 2 shows Sergei in a standstill, with a worried look on his face.

Figure 2: Isomäki et al. 2013, p. 52, panel 7.

Visual: Sergei stands in a snowstorm on the deck. Another figure is standing at the door.

Verbal: Another figure: “Come inside! There’s nothing we can do until morning!”

Aural: Sergei does not respond. The sound of storm is visually depicted.

The lay-out of the panel emphasises the contrasts of the situation described: warm and cold, light and dark, immobility and motion. The request of the figure at the door represents the everyday-world, while the posture of bemused Sergei refers to his withdrawal into his inner thoughts. Without the complementing verbal contents, the image would not transmit the deep worry and sorrow of Sergei. The aural aspect is even more interesting: the reader can not only hear the tempest, but also sense the silence of Sergei.

The translation of the line (Figure 2) shows how the character can be changed during an interlingual transaction: in the original text, the relationship of the two characters is much more formal than in the translation. In the Finnish source-text the figure standing at the door is addressing Sergei formally: “Tulkaa sisään!” (Come inside!) Formality of the original text outlines Sergei’s dignity and the high respect the figure at the door has towards him.

However, the scruffy appearance is only one side of Sergei. Before the threatening scene of a snowstorm, Sergei is shown as a member of the staff of the Shirshov Institute working together with the research group of the NIOT, The Indian National Institute of Ocean Technology (see Figure 5). His appearance has become tidy when he is on an aeroplane on his way to India, and his looks remain the same until he starts worrying about Amrita.

Through the story of Sergei, the actual discourse on our present-day world is represented, including the issue of cultural equality. Sergei and Amrita come from different cultures; their religious backgrounds are different, and in Figure 3 this is also shown from an interesting, and for a European reader, unusual point of view.

Figure 3: Isomäki et al. 2013, p. 37, panels 5–6.

Visual: Close-up of Sergei and Amrita. They look at each other and smile.

Verbal: Amrita: "I'm glad you said that. It would be nice if… if there was something more between us." Sergei: "Is that a proposal?" Amrita: "Maybe, if you want to take it that way… I'm a divorced woman, which is worse than marrying a pagan, as far as a lot of my relatives are concerned." Sergei: "A pagan! I'm a Christian!"

Aural: Sergei and Amrita speak smiling. The volume and rhythm of voice are compatible with the situation without any special characteristics.

Without the visual mode, readers would not know how they should understand Sergei's reactions to Amrita's consideration that being a Christian is – from a Hindu point of view – equal to being a pagan. While both Sergei and Amrita are depicted smiling, this seemingly contradictory dialogue is read in a literal, and not in a sarcastic, way. The translation directly follows the original text and gives space to the target-language readers to create interpretations of their own: "Pakanan! Minähän olen kristitty." ("A pagan! I'm a Christian!")

In general, the text has been translated in a very thorough way, except for the following example, where, despite the strategy of almost a word-for-word translation, the verbal text has become flat and lacks the humour of the original.

Figure 4: Isomäki et al. 2013, p. 55, panel 8–9.

Visual: Sergei arrives on a raft to save Amrita and Kari. Sergei smiles and waves his hand.

Verbal: “Ahoy there!” “Unless you have a previous engagement this evening, I might have a dinner invitation for the two of you!”

Aural: Sergei is shouting. The sound of rain.

The modes collaborate in the translation, but the character of Sergei has changed. In the original Finnish text Sergei is joking: “Jos teillä ei ole muuta tekemistä tänä iltana, niin minulla olisi illalliskutsu teille kummallekin!” In the English version, the equivalent words are expressed, but Sergei’s sarcastic humour has disappeared.

Additionally, the issues of environmentalism, the equality of genders, and the development of the Third World come up in the description of the relationship between Sergei and Amrita. In fact, Amrita is the leader of the research group, which is significant considering the issue of the equality of genders. The equality of Amrita’s and Sergei’s professional competence, and parallelly the equality of their relationship, is clearly shown in images 5 and 6. Yet the meanings of the images alone, without the verbal contents, are far removed from the meanings conveyed in the overall effect of the two modes – visual and verbal.

Figure 5: Isomäki et al. 2013, p. 27, panel 2.

Figure 6: Isomäki et al., p. 27, panel 3.

Visual: Amrita is standing, Sergei and Athi are sitting. In image 5, Amrita's posture is extremely aggressive: she points her finger at Sergei, and Sergei holds his head. In image 6, Amrita's posture is even more hostile: she leans forward towards Sergei; one hand is elevated, and with the other she points at Sergei. Sergei leans back in his chair; his hand gesture is explanatory or even defensive.

Verbal: Amrita: "Sergei, a little explanation would be in order." Sergei: "Well, do you remember when we were talking about flood myths… how common they are? Isn't it strange that the legends of different cultures treat the subject in basically the same way, even before the people of the Americas and Eurasia had any contact with each other? What if the story of a great flood were true, and all of these people…" Amrita: "died in a flood? You can't be serious!" Sergei: "What else would explain the finds?! I believe that some kind of enormous tidal wave came from the ocean and buried the whole city beneath it. That's why there are a lot of bones in front of this wall… people were washed up against it by the water and drowned."

Aural: In Figure 5, Sergei looks contemplating (nonverbal communication) and the nonverbal gestures indicate that he speaks slowly with consideration. In Figure 6, Sergei's posture refers to the defensive tone of his voice.

The verbal contents of the two panels override the visual contents, because the nonverbal communication – gestures and postures – is evidently in contradiction with the verbal. Without the verbal contents, the visual would be interpreted erroneously as a scene of quarrel. The main problem of the contradiction between the verbal and visual content is that of nonverbal communication (Pitkäsalo 2016a, 66; Pitkäsalo 2016b, 445, 447–448). Thus the aurality is compatible with visual contents of the panels. Translators have no other choice but to translate the written text, because, usually, they cannot touch the image. By doing so, the contradiction remains, but the gestures and postures of the characters can be interpreted as a depiction of the nature of the characters.

In this example, too, the translators' strategy is to follow the original as closely as possible. For instance, in the Figure 6, the Finnish original goes: "Mikä muu selittäisi löydöt?! Uskon, että mereltä tuli jonkinlainen valtava hyökyaalto joka hautasi koko kaupungin alleen. Siksi tämän muurin edessä oli paljon luita… veden mukana huuhtoutuneet ihmiset puristuivat sitä vasten ja hukkuivat." The English translation follows closely the original text.

In the case of Figure 5 and Figure 6 the dialogue shows us Sergei as a character with the power of reasoning. In this point, the characterisation of Sergei meets with the issue of environmentalism, the main theme of the novel. Sergei puts together the information gathered by the group during the research conducted, and achieves the result that mankind is on the threshold of an environmental catastrophe. Later, he shows his ability to make decisions, even if they seem to be crucial. He speaks with the President of Russia and gives him information that leads to the decision to halt the nuclear plants on the coasts of Europe and the North America (Isomäki et al. 2013, 54).

From the angle of characterisation Sergei is an interesting protagonist: he undergoes a significant change from being a ragged, unkempt man to becoming a trim and tidy researcher. Moreover, during the narrative, Sergei's character builds up as a serious researcher as well as a private person, too. Occasionally, the character is visually almost unrecognisable, because the development is so quick: Sergei gets several roles as a mourning husband, a worrying partner and colleague, a loving and consoling soulmate as well as a serious researcher with the power of deduction. Through all these roles, the comic book artists discuss environmentalism and other ethical issues, including a set of values, and these contents are also conveyed in the translation, even though the verbal and visual contents occasionally seem to be in contradiction.

On the other hand, at some points, it is noteworthy that the verbal contents of the original and the translation are very close to each other. It seems that the translator has trusted the target reader's capability of interpreting the multimodal entity, not only the verbal text but the illustration as well. This may be the reason why the translators have sometimes rendered almost a word-for-word replica.

5.2 Picturebook *I am Alex*

I am Alex was originally released by the South-African publisher Bumble Books in 2016 and translated into Finnish by Riitta Oittinen the same year. Being originally published in South Africa, with numerous cultures and languages, the book also tells about the ideology of the publisher: the story discusses ways of life and different religions, such as Catholicism and Islam as well as the different origins of people. The characters in the story are black, brown and white and have different attributes – such as *kipa* referring to the Jewish religion – showing their different origins and different sexual orientations. There is, for example, a family with two fathers and a family with one mother and no dad. One of Alex's friends sits in a wheelchair.

The Finnish publisher of the translation is Pieni Karhu and on its web site (Pieni Karhu 2016) the publisher is profiled as a house for children, advocating reading, tolerating otherness and approving of children – and all people – as they are. This is in harmony with the original intent of the original book: on the front page the reader can find a direct quotation by Nelson Mandela.

> No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.
> – Nelson Mandela

The idea of the book clearly shows in the verbal and the visual messages of the story. In the following, we shall take a close look at the verbal and the visual in the original book and its translation.

After the cover and the first page-openings, the book begins by introducing the main character Alex: "I'm ALEX and today is my birthday. / I can't wait for all of my friends to arrive. / Let me introduce them to you!" (Agnello 2016, n. p.) The picture shows Alex wearing pigtails above her/his ears while smiling and boldly holding her/his hands on the hips.

Figure 7: Agnello 2016, n. p.

Alex has at least two identities, feminine and masculine orientation: s/he looks ambiguously like a boy or/and a girl. The androgynous combination of feminine and masculine are clearly visible in the illustration, where Alex – at her/his birthday party – wears a casual tomboy outfit: a t-shirt, shorts, boots, and spectacles. On the other hand, her/his pigtails make Alex look a bit like a girl, even though, in modern western societies, hair-dos may have no special reference to any certain identity. For this reason, the translator of the book found this an important feature and depicted Alex as a young child (boy or girl). In addition, the English-language original does not refer to Alex as a "he" or "she" but lets the reader of the book guess and decide. Neither does the author reveal Alex's age.

The book is organised according to the order of visitors coming in, and they are all introduced one by one. Alex first gives their names and then tells something about each of them separately. The friends are both children and adults, and they come from different cultures, nationalities, languages, religions, and ways and walks of life. Alex her/himself is open to all these differences and clearly celebrates them. The book certainly has an agenda: tolerating the foreign and the otherness of different cultures, religions and life-situations.

Alex's way of presenting the visitors is clear and simple. He introduces his best friend Kaleb: "KALEB is my friend. / He likes to play soccer. Kaleb has two dads, Grant and William." With these words Alex shows that s/he is open to otherness, respecting all people, whatever their religion, culture or sexual orientation. The atmosphere in the book is very open and easy. In the Finnish translation, the translator aimed at creating a similar image of Alex and a similar easy atmosphere.

The translator follows both the original flow of the story and the characterisation of Alex. Over all the page-openings, Alex makes small side comments, such as: “Kaleb says Grant’s little cap is a yarmulke; it is a funny word.” In the Finnish translation a similar atmosphere is kept: “Kaleb sanoo, että Grantin pieni lakki on kipa. Kipa on kiva sana. (Finnish translation) [Kaleb says that Grant’s little cap is a kipa. Kipa is a nice word.] Alex’s character is built by both these short comments and her/his visual image, and they show that Alex has a fine sense of humour. Alex’s character is being built throughout the story-telling: s/he is nice and tolerant but also impatient like an ordinary child. For example, in a scene where s/he has got a book as a present s/he comments: “I can’t wait to read it!”

Figure 8: Agnello 2016, n. p.

Visual: Kaleb and his two dads arrive. Kaleb is holding a present in his hand. Alex smiles and waves his hand.

Verbal: “Kaleb is the first one to arrive! He gave me an interesting book for my birthday – I can’t wait to read it!” Side comment: “Kaleb says Grant’s little cap is a yarmulke; it is a funny word.”

Aural: A car at the background. Alex and her/his friends say “hello”.

This page-opening shows an unconventional family arriving to the birthday party, but the verbal contents focus on details: the present and the yarmulke. In this example, the visual and verbal messages support and complement each other. The Finnish translation of the passage goes: ”Kaleb saapuu ensimmäisenä ja tuo minulle lahjaksi jännittävän kirjan. Voi kun pääsisin lukemaan sitä ihan heti! [Kaleb comes first and brings me an exciting book as a present. Oh how I want to read it right away!] Here the translator has underlined Alex’s excitement and impatience. In the translation, unlike in the original picturebook,

the visual and the Finnish verbal are not in collaboration, because Alex is smiling and looks very happy even if her/his comment shows impatience. In this case, on the basis of the information given through different channels, the aloud-reader may even read the passage aloud in a more impatient voice.

The arrival of Alex's best friend Vuyo shows another way of understanding aurality.

Figure 9: Agnello 2016, n. p.

Visual: Vuyo and Alex are sitting in a tent. Vuyo is reading and laughing. Alex is holding binoculars and looks serious.

Verbal: "Vuyo is my best friend. He lives with his mom, he says her heart is so big it is as big as a mommy and daddy's heart. We love to camp indoors and pretend that we are in the wild. Vuyo tells me about their church, which is almost like Lina's, but they go on Sundays and there is a lady who plays the organ." Side comment: "Organ is a scary instrument!"

Aural: The reader hears the laughing and chatting as well as the sound of the organ in her/his "inner ear".

The visual and the verbal modes tell different stories. While the verbal text compares the religions, the image shows Alex and Vuyo playing explorers in a jungle. The aural mode, instead, stresses a small detail on the page-opening, the sound of the organ, which makes the aloud-reader emphasise the side-comment and imitate the sound orally. In the Finnish translation, Alex's side comment is interesting: "Uruissa on liian iso ääni!" [The organ has far too big a sound!] Instead of the scariness of the instrument in the original text, the translation stresses the strength of the sound: in the Finnish translation Alex is not only a

tolerant and wise character, but also an ordinary child, who may be afraid of strong sounds.

On the following page-opening, Rashida and her family have arrived to the party. The illustrator shows Rashida with her granny, who is wearing an Indian sari outfit. They have given Alex a beautiful shawl as a present.

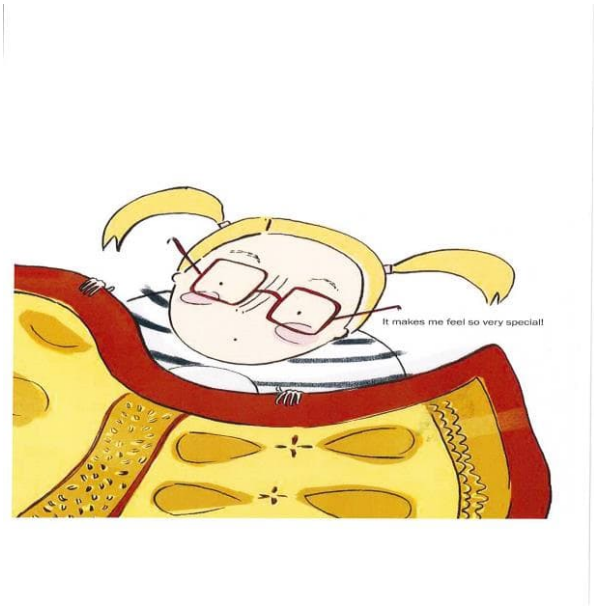

Figure 10: Agnello 2016, n. p.

Visual: Alex examines the shawl s/he has got as a present and looks quite concentrated.

Verbal: "It makes me feel so very special!"

Aural: No aural contents.

The aloud-reader of the original pays attention to the serious, almost unhappy expression on Alex's face. At this point, the Finnish translation gives the aloud-reader a hint by explaining the reason for Alex's expression: "Minä katson huivia tarkkaan. Siitä tulee hyvä mieli." [I look at the shawl very carefully. It makes me feel happy.] Here the translator has written her text in the form of illustrating the seriousness of Alex's face: In this way Alex does not seem unhappy about the present but rather puzzled about such a fine gift. In other words, the scene is translated in a slightly different manner now, closely following what is shown in the image.

As to *I am Alex* and its Finnish version in general, the translator has especially pondered on the character/characterisation of Alex and her/his friends. Using the verbal and visual depiction in both the original and the translation, Alex is described as a nice girl/boy with

many different friends. Alex's character is multifaceted: not only friendly and tolerant, but also an ordinary child with likes and dislikes.

As everything is told from the angle of Alex, the English-language writer has been able to avoid the division into the two sexes, the "he" and the "she". So it has been an easy choice for the translator not to tell Alex's sex or age. The storyteller's voice, as well as the verbal and the visual, the child image, and the multiculturalism have all influenced the character of the protagonist Alex.

6 Conclusions

In our article, we have pondered on comics and picturebooks, which are enormously interesting multimodal art forms combining the modes of the verbal and the visual. This kind of multimodal texts are created by writers and illustrators, but eventually, they build up during the reading process, in the reader's (and listener's) mind. When translating comics and picturebooks, translators must have, in addition to language skills, a vast set of other skills. They must not only be familiar with the visual language conventions in comics or picturebooks, but they must also be able to analyse and interpret culture-specific elements and other meaning-making features in images including gestures, postures and facial expressions and to convey these meanings into another language and culture. In this entirety, the translator needs to be aware of the issues concerning the readers of the source and target texts.

As our research material, we have used two books, the graphic novel *Sarasvatin hiekkaa* (*The Sands of Sarasvati*) and the picturebook *I am* Alex (*Minä olen Alex*). There are similarities between the two books: in addition to the verbal text, both include the visual and the aural modes. There are also differences: the two books definitely have different audiences. *The Sands of Sarasvati* is full of scientific jargon and the contents may be frightening to children. On the other hand, children are certainly the audience for *I am Alex*. Here, even the publisher's views may have an influence on how the translator sees the target audience.

In our analyses, the characters are created both visually and verbally. The ethical thematics of the two books are reflected in the characters and their mutual relations. The different modes may either collaborate or contradict. This combination then leads the reader and translator of comics and picturebooks to an interpreting level more complex than that of reading and translating literary works without the visual aspect. The reading process of comics and picturebooks even includes the aural mode, as they include contents – speech and other voices marked by letters of effects – that the reader hears with a kind of inner ear. In this sense, the concept of an aural mode can also be used when

analysing the situation of silent reading. Picturebooks are also often read aloud in a read-aloud situation.

To conclude our points, what has happened in the translation is that the characterisation has changed to some extent. This is due to that translators are always readers of their original texts, interpreting them and making translational decisions on the basis of their interpretation. In this process, the verbal and the visual never exist alone but are combined and complement each other. Through these different modes, an illusion is created, leading to different experiences of the verbal, the visual and the aural. This process makes the reader believe in and get an understanding of the illusion, namely the characters and their background and culture.

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