

# Dual-language books: Adventures Through the Looking- Glass

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*This article focuses on dual-language children's books and their role as multicultural documents which establish a fruitful dialogic relationship between the cultural identities they represent. By means of a theoretic framework based on Translation Studies, and of a descriptive approach, the analytical part of the article takes into account the main characteristics of a text corpus selected from three different collections by Sinnos, one of the most important Italian publishing houses specialising in multicultural books.*

*Multicultural children's literature, dual-language books, translating for children*

“Our children need to be exposed to a world of voices,  
so that the whole world becomes their home.”

David Almond, School Librarian,  
speech at the 2003 Mash Award for Children's Literature in Translation

## Introduction

In my personal experience, both as a reader and a translator, dual-language books represent a rich and variegated literary genre, which has the power to make me feel at home in a strange land.

As a reader – no matter if I am familiar with one language or both – whenever I read a dual-language book I find myself at the magic borderland between two different cultures, between the experience of identity and the experience of otherness. Much as children do, I enjoy the fascinating and thrilling world created by the parallel texts, even though I sometimes need to come to terms with a feeling of estrangement, connected with the unknown aspects implied in these “adventures through the looking-glass”.

In her article “Squiggles and Dots: Bilingual Books for Children”, written for the review *Outside in, Children's Books in Translation*, Patricia Billings – the Managing Director of Milet publishing – offers a precise and effective description of this feeling: “Faced with new and seemingly strange texts, children don't turn away: they look. They ask: what does this mean? Can a stream of what looks like squiggles and dots actually say something? Bit by bit, they learn that it does, that the stream of unfamiliar letters or characters is imbued with rich meanings, as well as visual beauty. They may not understand every letter, but they have begun to understand and appreciate a new language – the strange is demystified, normalized, embraced” (Hallford and Zaghini 2005:18).

As a translator, I have mixed feelings, too. If, on the one hand, the most usual work tools of my profession – i.e. dictionaries – are a special kind of dual-language books; on the other hand, the textual environment of dual-language books is different from the textual environment of common translations. If we take into account library collections or publishers' catalogues, for example, dual-language children's books represent a limited percentage of the published volumes, and, in general, they differ from normal translations in that the original texts stand side by side with their translated versions, as if they were some very particular kind of mirror images, facing each other on the page.

This particularity has two important consequences: first of all, the illusion of sameness implied in translation is physically dismantled, as the "mirror" actually shows a different picture. The original text is there, on the page, and translation is no longer an invisible, almost alchemic process (Venuti: 1995), mysteriously transferring the author's work into another language. Secondly, what is even more important, is that two cultural identities are now interacting in a complicated network of references, cross-fertilising each other in a dialogue which is not only made of words, but also of the iconic and visual meaning of the textual lay-out and of the pictures<sup>1</sup>.

As Isabel Pascua (2003) points out, "translation is an act of intercultural communication", and the importance of the special adventure "through the looking glass" of dual-language children's books lays in the fact that they are an icon of intercultural dialogue. They represent the fruitful exchange between two parallel worlds, standing side by side on the page, and constantly communicating with each other. For this reason, they are becoming fundamental documents in today's libraries and their potential should be fruitfully exploited by children, teachers and parents, with the competent support of librarians.

In recent years, the interesting exotic and endotic experience offered by dual-language books has therefore attracted the attention of science of education and librarianship scholars. Research about the function of parallel texts has been thriving, giving rise to a large number of projects and initiatives as far as the teaching of literacy and content in two languages and bilingual education in general are concerned<sup>2</sup>. In this context, Translation Studies might offer both a different perspective and an effective theoretic and analytical framework in order to add some new insights in the discussion.

As far as methodology is concerned, the theoretic approach of this analysis is descriptive and the language couples selected always include Italian – as the survey is specifically based on texts published for the Italian market. Beside textual aspects, my analysis takes into account the typographical dimension of dual-language books – including lay-out and pictures – thus highlighting some interesting characteristics of these particular editorial products.

## **Multiculturalism in Italy**

Italy has been a country of labour emigration since the late 1800s, sending millions of people to every corner of the globe. In the decades after World War II, in particular, many Italians found labour opportunities in northern and central Europe, where they offered the backbone of the industrial labour force for the post-war economic boom. By the early 1980s,

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<sup>1</sup> See Oittinen, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Tomatis (1991) and the research on dual-language books carried out by the University of East London: <http://www.uel.ac.uk/education/research/duallanguagebooks/index.htm>.

however, this migrant stream began to reverse itself, as many former emigrants started coming back and Italy itself started attracting large numbers of immigrants from Africa, Asia, Latin America and, after 1989, from Eastern Europe and the Balkans.

According to the annual reports issued by ISTAT – the Italian Institute for Statistics – the number of foreigners and immigrants living in Italy increased rapidly after the 1990s and, by 1<sup>st</sup> January 2008, it reached the considerable proportion of 5.75% of the entire population, i.e. 3,432,651 people. At the same time, the number of immigrant students in the Italian school system (574,133 in 2007/2008) registered a proportion of 6.4%, with a 14.5% increase compared to the previous year<sup>3</sup>.

According to a survey carried out in 2007 by Caritas – the biggest Italian Catholic charity – immigrants in Italy speak about 150 different languages, and there are 179 immigrant authors coming from 80 different nationalities who write in Italian<sup>4</sup>. The same survey takes into account a database of the Home Office with the largest immigrant communities in Italy<sup>5</sup>, and shows that almost half of the total immigrant population – 49.6% – comes from other European nations, 22.3% from Africa, 18% from Asia, 9.7% from America and 0.1% from Oceania.

In this growingly multicultural context, as “integration”, “cultural mediation” and “intercultural dialogue” are becoming crucial concepts in the Italian cultural policies, many libraries have been equipped with the so-called multicultural bookshelves, i.e. special collections which include different kinds of documents dealing with various cultures, languages and traditions present in a specific area.

Vinicio Ongini defines this multicultural or multiethnic bookshelf (both definitions are in use) as a special collection of texts and documents written in various languages, and he explains that it might be a temporary or permanent display, containing a variety of materials such as: popular scientific books on different countries and cultures, traditional folktales, novels dealing with multicultural issues, autobiographies written by immigrants. These texts might be both in a foreign language or in Italian, but also in two or more different languages (dual-language or multilanguage editions). Beside giving visibility to the different cultures, they have a bridge function, as they bring local and foreign traditions into contact (Ongini, 2001).

Some interesting guidelines in this respect were also outlined by the document “Per la biblioteca multiculturale” (2002)<sup>6</sup> issued by AIB, the Italian Libraries Association, which, among other objectives, includes the following: “GUARANTEE an effective development of collections, especially original books in different languages, dual-language or multilingual editions, materials of different kinds and formats, new technologies with special reference to documents for language learning”<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Source: <http://demo.istat.it/str2007>. Naturalized Italians with double citizenship are excluded from these statistics.

<sup>4</sup> Migrant literature is one of the aspects of multiculturalism as far as Italian literature is concerned. It includes works by immigrant writers, both in Italian and their native language, and texts about migration in general. Source of the statistics: <http://www.dossierimmigrazione.it>.

<sup>5</sup> 15.1% from Romania, 10.5% from Morocco, 10.3% Albania, 5.3% Ukraina, 5.1% China, 3.1% Philippines, 3.7% Moldova, 2.6% Tunisia, 2.5% India, 2.5% Poland.

<sup>6</sup> See: <http://www.aib.it/aib/commiss/mc/missione.htm>. The document is based on the IFLA “Multicultural Library Manifesto” (new ed. 2006).

<sup>7</sup> My translation.

## Dual-language children's books in Italy

As far as dual-language children's books are concerned, the first copies were created by teachers running multicultural workshops with immigrant children and their parents. Many of these volumes were used only internally, in the schools where they were produced, or sometimes published by local authorities.

Only in the past few years more and more publishers in Italy are starting to launch a considerable number of new titles and collections on a large scale. The question is: why is this new trend so successful?

Many different factors contribute to the popularity of this literary genre: dual-language books reach across cultural and linguistic boundaries, provide excellent resources for improving reading skills in both monolingual and bilingual children, encourage tolerance and awareness, fostering a lifelong appreciation for literature, languages and reading. Beside all of this, they also have a strategic importance as far as EU cultural policies are concerned<sup>8</sup>.

From an informal survey I carried out on the catalogues of major Italian publishers producing dual-language children's books<sup>9</sup>, I could detect some general tendencies as far as language couples and formats are concerned. If the most common languages are by far Italian – English<sup>10</sup>, followed by Italian – Spanish and Italian – Portuguese; a whole variety of text formats is available, ranging from the most widespread option of parallel texts to the less frequent alternative of interlineal translation – mainly used for titles or very short texts, such as, for instance, poems, riddles, tongue-twisters or rhymes. The option of two whole texts, one following the other, is not frequent; while paperboard foldouts or toy-books are quite rare. A minor but very interesting kind of dual-language books includes original manuscripts with a recognized artistic value as literary and pictorial wholes, published alongside the translated text<sup>11</sup>. Last but not least, there are interactive works on CDs or DVDs. They allow children to read and listen at the same time, check spellings and pronunciations by clicking on single sentences, analyse key-words and sometimes even play didactic games<sup>12</sup>.

Whatever the book format, one interesting aspect for analysis is text status. In many dual-language books, in fact, a distinction can be made between a “dominant” and a “secondary” language. This different status usually emerges when the book is destined to a specific linguistic group, and one of the texts is characterised, for example, by the presence of explanations or didactic games which are not present in the other. Other elements which can show a priority in one of the languages are the position of the text – a language often comes first when the majority of the expected readers are its native speakers – and the presence of untranslated texts or words in the pictures.

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<sup>8</sup> Lisbon objective 3.3 “Improving foreign language learning”, in particular, states that “everyone should, as a general rule, be able to speak two foreign languages” – source: [www.eaea.org/GA/11d.doc](http://www.eaea.org/GA/11d.doc).

<sup>9</sup> Sources: Sinnos, Fatatrac, EMI, Carthusia, Giunti and Jaca Book catalogues.

<sup>10</sup> A large number of titles is used by teachers in English as a Second Language classes.

<sup>11</sup> Two notable examples are Lewis Carroll's *Alice Underground* (2002) published in translation with the author's illustrated manuscript and Tolkien's Christmas letters to his children published in translation with the title *Le lettere di Babbo Natale* (2004).

<sup>12</sup> One example is the international project *Milly, Molly Books*, [www.milnymolly.com](http://www.milnymolly.com), published in Italy in an interactive edition in 12 different languages by EDT, [www.milnymolly.it](http://www.milnymolly.it). See: Pittar, G. (2006).

## A case study: the SINNOS bridge-books

The case study analysed in this article deals with three sample texts chosen from the catalogue of a publishing house specializing in dual-language and multicultural books<sup>13</sup>. SINNOS is a relatively small but dynamic publishing house based in Rome, and its catalogue includes about 120 titles, approximately one third of which bilingual. These particular dual-language volumes are also called “bridge-books”, as they connect different cultures, languages, stories and generations, and they form part of three different collections:

- *I Mappamondi*
- *Fiabalandia* and
- *Zefiro*.

### *I Mappamondi*

The *Mappamondi* collection includes 20 titles in 16 different European, Asian, African and American languages: Albanian, Arabic, Portuguese, English, Spanish, Polish, Filipino, Kurdish, Somali, Russian etc. The books are written by immigrant authors from different nations, and the motto of this collection is: “The reader is a traveller”.

The following pictures show some sample pages from the first sample text, *Lei, che sono io – Ella, que soy yo*: a literary autobiography written in Italian and translated into Spanish by Clementina Sandra Ammendola:



Front cover



Chapter title page

<sup>13</sup> The catalogue is available for download in .pdf format from the following web page:  
<http://www.sinnoseditrice.org/docs/catalogo.pdf>

### Lei, che sono io

Clementina Sandra Ammendola, che sono io, è una che viaggia molto. Sandra è nata a Florida, un paese della Provincia di Buenos Aires, vicino, molto vicino alla Città di Buenos Aires che è la capitale della Repubblica Argentina. Sandra è nata nel 1963 e ha sempre vissuto a Don Torcuato, un altro paese della Provincia di Buenos Aires a ventisei chilometri dalla Capitale.

Clementina Sandra ha il padre italiano, un emigrato calabrese arrivato in Argentina negli Anni '50; e la madre argentina, di origine spagnola e italiana. Il padre di Sandra, Arnaldo, è sarto e ha conosciuto Elba Lita, la mamma di Sandra, in una sartoria, a Florida, dove lavoravano insieme: Elba Lita è sarta pure lei. Negli Anni '50 e '60, c'era lavoro per tutti: argentini, italiani, spagnoli, ebrei, cileni, polacchi. Arnaldo ed Elba Lita si sposano, dopo ventiquattro mesi di fidanzamento, e vivono in un monolocale dietro la sartoria; così guadagnano qualche soldino in più facendo anche i custodi della sartoria. Intanto i genitori di Sandra si stavano costruendo la casa a Don Torcuato. Tra i calabresi residenti a Buenos Aires c'era questa abitudine: la domenica si lavorava tutti insieme a costruirsi a turno la casa, ora per l'uno, ora per l'altro. Quando la casa è pronta, Clementina Sandra ha due mesi e fa il suo primo trasloco.

Quando Sandra ha circa due anni nasce suo fratello, Mauro Arnaldo, che tutti dicono fosse molto tranquillo e non tanto chiasoso come Sandra. Dicono che mentre Mauro era nella culla Sandra cercava, e più di una volta lo ha fatto, cercava dicevamo di morsiare Mauro nella pancia, nelle mani o nei piedi. Forse era gelosa, forse voleva giocare. Ma i giochi veri e propri sono venuti dopo,

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### ELLA, QUE SOY YO

Clementina Sandra Ammendola, que soy yo, es una que viaja mucho. Sandra nació en Florida, una ciudad de la Provincia de Buenos Aires, cerca muy cerca de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires que es la capital de la República Argentina. Sandra nació en 1963 y vivió siempre en Don Torcuato, otra ciudad – que por entonces era un pueblo – de la Provincia de Buenos Aires a veintiseis kilómetros de la Capital.

Clementina Sandra tiene el padre italiano, un emigrante calabrés que llegó a Argentina en los Años '50; y la madre argentina, de origen español e italiano. El padre de Sandra, Arnaldo, es sastre y conoció a Elba Lita, la mamá de Sandra, en una sastrería, en Florida, donde trabajaban juntos: Elba Lita es sastre también. En los Años '50 y '60, había trabajo para todos: argentinos, italianos, españoles, judíos, chilenos, polacos. Arnaldo y Elba Lita se casan, después de veinticuatro meses de noviazgo y viven en un departamento de un ambiente atrás de la sastrería; en este modo ganaban un poco más de dinero trabajando también como serenos de la sastrería. Mientras tanto los padres de Sandra se estaban construyendo la casa en Don Torcuato. Entre los calabreses residentes en Buenos Aires existía esta costumbre: el domingo se trabajaba todos juntos para construirse la casa a turno, una vez para uno, otra vez para otro. Cuando la casa está lista, Clementina Sandra tiene dos meses y realiza su primera mudanza.

Quando Sandra tiene unos dos años nace su hermano, Mauro Arnaldo, que todos dicen que era muy tranquilo y no tan bullicioso como lo era Sandra. Dicen que mientras Mauro estaba en la cuna Sandra trataba, y más de una vez lo logró, trataba decíamos de morder a Mauro en la panza,

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Double-page spread

Ammendola, the author and protagonist, has two nationalities: Italian and Argentinean. As her parents were Italian immigrants in Argentina and she migrated back to Italy in 1989, she calls herself a “migrola” – i.e. a self-created neologism which joins the two concepts of *migrante*/migrant and *creola*/creole and indicates her particular condition of migrant and descendant of local people. In the book she tells the story of her childhood and youth in Argentina: she speaks about the military dictatorship, the *desaparecidos*, the Falkland war, the democracy and the poor living conditions of the population. Then she talks of her emigration to Italy and describes her new life in Vicenza.

The story is narrated in the third person, as if the author's two cultural identities were actually two different people, but the *Leitmotiv* of the narration, which gives the title to the story: *Lei, che sono io – Ella, que soy yo* (“she is myself”), shows that she constantly feels the need to specify that the two pronouns “she” and “I” are in fact referred to one and the same person.

As far as the textual aspects of the book are concerned, the narrative style is quite simple and the translation process poses no particular lexical or structural problems. Because of the numerous analogies between Italian and Spanish, it is thus possible for the author to produce two very close, almost literal versions of the story.

One characteristic aspect of the book is the pervasive presence of cultural references both in Spanish – in the chapters dealing with the author's childhood, and in Italian – in the chapters dealing with the author's adulthood. These continuous cross-references between languages and cultures create an interesting “linguistic patchwork”, with the cultural concepts

often maintained in the original language in both texts, but explained and sometimes highlighted in italics in the “foreign” language.

The fact that most of the explanations (even the footnote about the tropical plant called jacarandá) are present in both versions, does not exclude that Italian has a slightly dominant role in the language couple, as the text is ideally destined to an Italian audience. Interesting evidence in this sense comes, for example, from a comment about the little poem “Punto y coma, el que no se escondió se embroma”, when the author says that this little “eeny, meeny, miney, mo” has lost the rhyming endings in translation.

The following table shows some examples of the presence of Italian cultural concepts in the Spanish text<sup>14</sup>:

<i>Italian cultural concepts...</i>		<i>...in translation</i>
Veniva la Nonna, dall'Italia, a trovarli.	→	Llegaba la <i>Nonna</i> , de Italia, a visitarlos.
L'appartamento è in Via Dieci Martiri, a due passi dalle scalette di Monte Berico.	→	El departamento está en la Calle Diez Mártires, <i>Via Dieci Martiri</i> , a dos pasos de las escaleritas de Monte Berico, <i>scalette di Monte Berico</i> .
Gli annunci del Giornale di Vicenza...	→	Los avisos en el Diario de Vicenza, <i>Giornale di Vicenza</i> ...
La scatola è rettangolare, di latta, verde con dei disegni pasquali; prima delle lettere c'era una colomba classica Battistero.	→	La cajaes rectangular, de lata, verde con dibujos pascuales; antes de las cartas había <u>una especie de torta con forma de paloma</u> , clásica Battistero.
In Italia si festeggia la Befana e si preparano le calze e non le scarpe.	→	En Italia se festeja la <i>Befana</i> , <u>la Bruja que trae regalos</u> , y se preparan las medias y no los zapatos.

The following table, on the other hand, shows some examples of the Argentinean cultural concepts in the Italian text:

<i>Argentinean cultural concepts...</i>		<i>...in translation</i>
Mate, una especie de infusión verde	→	Mate, una specie di infuso verde
Bombilla (caña o tubo delgado, curvado en la extremidad, que tiene agujeros que funcionan de filtro de modo que no pasen las hojas)	→	Bombilla (cannuccia leggermente bombata verso l'estremità, che ha dei buchi che funzionano da filtro in modo che non passino le foglie)
Lengua indígena quechua	→	Lingua indigena quechua
La manzana	→	L'isolato, manzana
Los palos borrachos, árboles con la panza hinchada por haber bebido demasiado	→	I palos borrachos, alberi dalla pancia gonfia per aver bevuto troppo
Los jacarandás de flores blancas y celestes como mariposas	→	i jacarandá dai fiori bianchi e celesti come farfalle

<sup>14</sup> My underlining for the explanations added in translation.

El juego preferido de Sandra, la escondida como se llama en Argentina

→ Il gioco preferito di Sandra, il nascondino o la escondida come si chiama in Argentina

Se gritaba: “Punto y coma, el que no se escondió se embroma”.

→ Si gridava: “Punto y coma, el que no se escondió se embroma” qualcosa come “Punto e virgola, chi non è nascosto verrà burlato”, però dovrebbe esserci la rima, come in spagnolo!

Le case eran fatte di cartone e tutti le chiamavano villas miserias, baracche

→ Las casas eran de cartón y todos las llamaban villas miserias, baracche

Los días de lluvia, en la escuela, cantaban la canción del Jacarandá\*, que dice más o menos así: ...

→ I giorni di pioggia, a scuola, cantavano la canzone del Jacarandá\*, che dice più o meno così:...

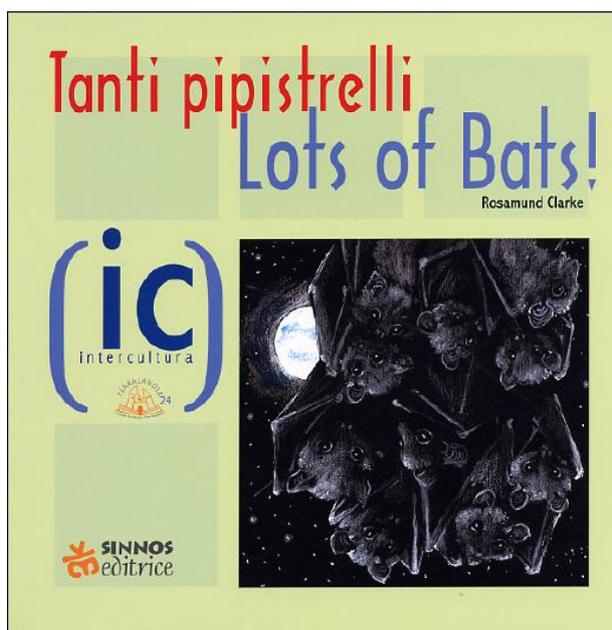
\*Planta de la América Tropical de hojas opuestas y flores grandes de cáliz en forma de campana.

\*Pianta dell’America Tropicale di foglie opposte e fiori grandi di calice a forma di campana.

At the end of the book, a section called *Mappapagine* printed in yellow paper – which reminds Italian readers of the typical aspect of a telephone directory – offers some reference material about Argentina and its different traditions, cultural institutions and a short bibliography for further reading.

### Fiabalandia

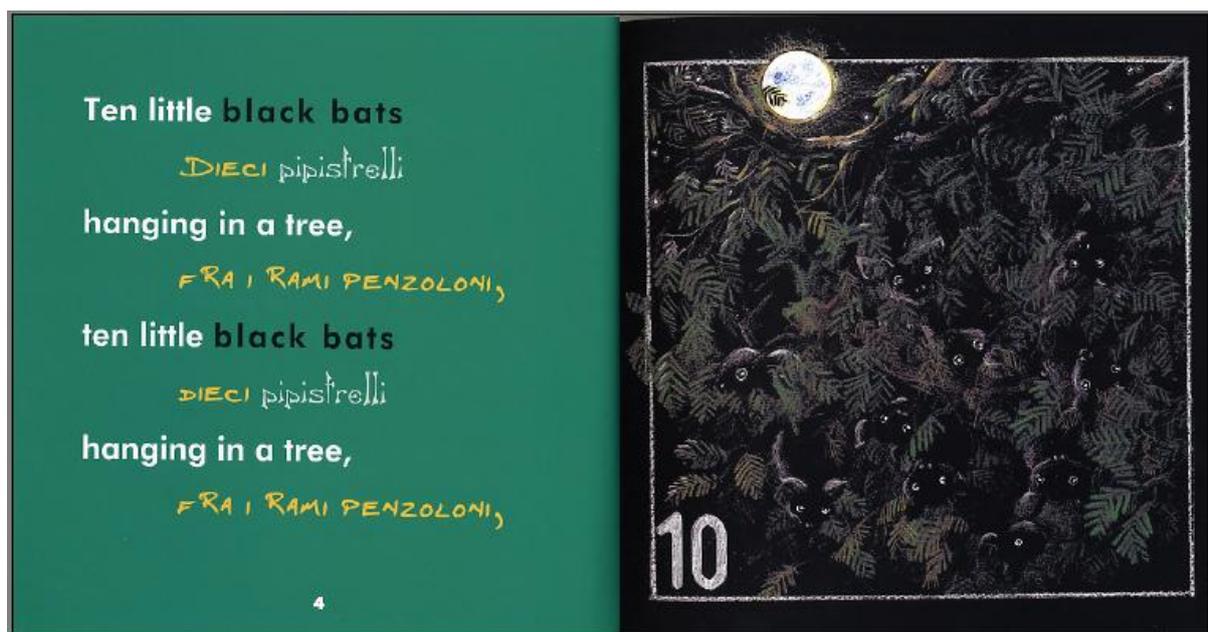
The *Fiabalandia* collection consists of 55 titles and includes 11 bilingual volumes (with the interesting presence of a book in the Italian sign language), and 2 multilingual volumes, mainly collocated in a sub-section called *Intercultura*. The books are children’s stories about intercultural topics and traditions and the motto of this collection is: “New tales for children”. Here are some sample pages from Rosamund Clarke’s *Tanti pipistrelli – Lots of Bats!*:



Front cover



Page 3



Double-page spread

This book draws its inspiration from an English traditional counting song in which ten green bottles, standing on a wall, fall down and crash one by one... In the new version, however, the bottles are substituted by ten little black bats, all involved in different, funny situations, e.g. drinking tea, going to the cinema, spending a night by the sea, shopping.

In a short autobiographical note at the end of the book, the author – who was born in southern England and moved to Italy at the age of 18 – explains that she experienced her first encounter with a bat as a small child, when one of these little animals coming from the English woods entered her bedroom window for a flit around the room during a full moon. She then goes on to comment that now, after many years, these “lovely little friends” from her childhood still keep her company during warm summer evenings, flying in the Roman sky and taking her back to her English roots.

Being based on a song, the book starts with a musical notation, which helps children learn the tune and, at the same time, interiorize its rhythm. The internal lay-out of the various refrains then includes the dual-language texts in interlineal translation – highlighted by different fonts and colours – on the left pages, and big pictures on a black background on the right pages.

The fact that English is the dominant language is obviously connected with the origin of the song, but it is also confirmed by the untranslated instruction “Put your photo here” in the picture on page 43, and by the words “exit”, “pullover”, “hats” and “pay” in the picture on page 19.

As far as the linguistic structure of the two versions is concerned, each refrain consists of four lines. The first couplet is repeated throughout the song, with a little variation in the decreasing numbers, while the other couplet varies in each refrain. Of course, the translated version is structured so as to fit in the original rhythm of the song, even though it is not possible to keep the rhymes in Italian. The following scheme tries to reproduce the stress pattern of the first refrain, highlighting the accented syllables in bold:

First couplet (repeated):

**Ten** lit tle **black** bats **han** ging in a **tree**

**Dieci** pi pis **trel** li frai **ra** mi pen zo **lo** ni

Third line:

If **one** lit tle **black** bat goes **round** to friends for **tea**

Se **un** pi pis **trel** lo dagli **amici** prende il **te**

Fourth line:

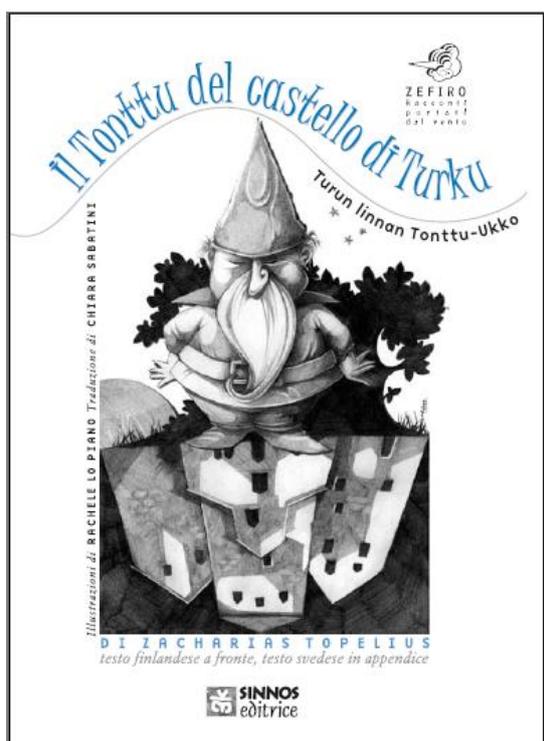
I'd see **nine** lit tle **black** bats **han** ging in a **tree**

Vedrei **nove** pi pis **trelli** frai **ra** mi pen zo **lo** ni

In conclusion, it is possible to observe that this song poses more constraints than a prose text, because the original structure must be somehow reproduced in translation paying special attention to the rhythm of the musical background. The music and rhythm, however, contribute to the richness of the cultural experience.

## Zefiro

The *Zefiro* collection only includes nine traditional tales from Algeria, Peru, Haiti, Finland, China, Armenia, Albania, Africa (with text in French) and India (with text in Hindi). The books are traditional folk-tales and the motto of this collection is: “Tales brought by the wind”. The text selected for analysis is the story of a magic friendship between a *tonttu*, a little goblin, and a 12-year-old boy destined to become the keeper of Turku Castle. Some sample pages are showed here:



Front cover

5	Introduzione
9	Il Tonttu del castello di Turku Turun linnan Tonttu-Ukko
79	Appendice Tomtegubben i Åbo slott
101	La Finlandia in Italia
105	Glossario

Index showing:  
- the Appendix in Swedish  
- the section “Finland in Italy”  
- the Glossary

C'era una volta un piccolo *tonttu*, di settecento anni, che viveva in un sotterraneo del castello di Turku. Era molto piccolo e aveva una barba bianca così lunga che se la poteva avvolgere per due volte intorno alla vita, e aveva una schiena così curva che sembrava proprio una molla d'acciaio ricurva alle estremità. Era solito vantarsi per essere il più vecchio di tutti i *tonttu* del paese; anche il *tonttu* della cattedrale stessa, che aveva cinquecentocinquanta anni, lo chiamava zio. Tutti gli altri *tonttu* del paese lo trattavano come il capo della famiglia, ma tutti lo temevano molto per il suo amore per l'ordine e la pulizia. Era un bravo *tonttu*, sincero, un tipo eccezionale, sebbene avesse inclinazioni particolari tutte sue.

Il fatto è che viveva nei sotterranei più profondi del castello di Turku, i cosiddetti "Sotterranei delle Prigioni", dove in passato venivano incatenati i criminali più pericolosi, che non avrebbero mai più visto la luce del giorno. In queste prigioni egli aveva il suo palazzo, ben attrezzato con ogni possibile tipo di agi e splendore; cioè con tutte le cose che i *tonttu* amano di più. C'era polvere e sporcizia a sufficienza, cumuli di macerie, barattoli rotti, tappeti lacerati, pezzi di zampe di sedie, giocattoli frantumati, rottami di ferro corrosi dalla ruggine, scarpe e guanti spaati abbandonati, materassi di piume senza piume, pipe senza bocchini, cornici di finestre senza vetro, secchi

- [10] -

Olipa kerran tonttu-ukko; hän oli seitsemän sataa vuotta vanha, ja hän asui eräässä holvissa Turun linnan alla. Hänellä oli niin pitkä, valkoinen parta, että sen voi kiertää kahdesti vyötäistensä ympäri, ja köyryselkäinen hän oli, aivankuin täyteen viireeseen jännitetty vanha teräsjousi. Hän kehui olevansa vanhin tonttu koko maassa; yksin tuomiokirkon tonttukin, jolla oli ikää viisisataa viisikymmentä vuotta, sanoi häntä sedäkseen. Kaikki maan pikku-ukot katsoivat häntä sukunsa päämieheksi, mutta kaikki myöskin pelkäsivät häntä, sillä hän tahtoi pitää kelpo järjestystä maassa. Hyvä tonttu-ukko hän oli, perin rehellinen ja kunnan haltija, vaikka hänellä olikin oma eriskummallinen makunsa.

Hän näet asui syvimmässä holvissa Turun linnan alla, niin sanotussa *Ontelotornissa*, jossa ennen muinoin pidettiin suurimpia ja törkeimpiä rikoksenteijöitä, jotka eivät enää koskaan saaneet nähdä päivän valoa. Siellä oli hänen palatsinsa, sisustettuna mahdollisimman mukavasti ja komeasti tonttu-ukkojen parhaimman aistin mukaan. Siitä ei suinkaan puuttunut soraa, rikkaläijä, vanhoja kiviraunioita, särkyneitä ruukkuja, repaleisia niinimattoja, katkenneita tuolinjalkoja, rikotahtoja leikkikaluja, ruostunutta raudanromua, parittomia kengänrajoja, hanskasräjäsyjä, höyhenettömiä untuvapatjoja, piipunvarren palasia, lasittomia ikkunankehyskiä, pohjattomia korvoja, hiirensyömiä kannettomia kirjoja

- [11] -

Double-page spread

The particularity of this book is that the original story (published in the appendix) is actually in the Swedish language, as the author, Topelius, was an important Swedish-speaking Finnish scholar and artist. This is very interesting for Italian children, who are thus informed that Finland is a bilingual nation and, thanks to the final note by the Finnish Ambassador to Italy, discover that Topelius is generally considered as "the uncle of the Finnish tales".

The Italian translation by Chiara Sabatini and the Finnish version are printed in parallel position, with only three interposed full-page illustrations by Rachele Lo Piano. Although the Finnish text on the right page proves almost impossible to understand for Italian mother tongue children without the help of a Finnish speaker, some interesting general elements emerge from the mere observation of the text surface.

First of all, Italian children immediately detect some spelling differences, as the letters "ä" and "ö" are not included in the Italian alphabet, and the letters "k" and "y" are much less frequent in Italian than in Finnish. Secondly, the meaning of Finnish word "tonttu", which constantly appears in italics throughout the Italian text, ends up becoming somehow self evident for the Italian readers<sup>15</sup>, who can see the character's picture on the book cover.

As far as other cultural references are concerned, there are only two instances in which they are clearly detectable in the Italian text. The first example is the word "kantele", which is mentioned together with its translation "arpa". The second is a footnote about two

<sup>15</sup> Its meaning is explained both in the final glossary and in the back cover.

typical Finnish plants: “pihlaja” (“sorbo degli uccellatori”, in English “rowan”) and “tuomi” (“pado”, in English “chokecherry”).

Unfortunately, however, Italian readers tend to miss several other cultural concepts. This happens, for example, when the text refers to “puurovati”, porridge, a typical food in northern European countries, which is simply rendered in Italian with the more general concept of “budino di riso”, “rice pudding”.

The following table shows the correspondences between Finnish cultural concepts and their Italian translation mentioned in the discussion:

<i>Finnish cultural concepts...</i>		<i>...in translation</i>
Olipa kerran tonttu-ukko, hän oli seitsemän sataa vuotta vanha, ja hän asui eräässä holvissa Turun linnan alla.	→	C’era una volta un piccolo <i>tonttu</i> , di settecento anni, che viveva nel sotterraneo del castello di Turku.
Ihmiset heitä halveksivat, eivätkä tarjoa heille enää edes puurovatiakaan jouluyönä.	→	Le persone li disprezzano e non danno loro neanche un piatto di budino di riso alla vigilia di Natale.
Silloin hän tulee murheelliseksi, ja silloin kuuluu hänen kanteleensa ääniin selvään kallion lävitse...	→	Allora viene preso da una grande tristezza e prende la sua <i>kantele</i> , la sua arpa, e suona.
Sinne koottiin ensimmäiset toukokuun pihlajan- ja koivunlehdet, tuomenkukkia ikkunoihin, ja merkkillistä, miten kaikki kauan odotellut ruukkujen ruusunput aukenivat juuri siksi päiväksi.	→	C’erano le prime foglie di sorbo degli uccellatori e di betulla di maggio, si vedevano i fiori profumati del pado* alla finestra e, stranamente, i tanto attesi boccioli di rosa fiorivano nei vasi proprio in quel giorno.
		* Il sorbo degli uccellatori e il pado sono due piante molto diffuse in Finlandia.

Apart from these few examples, the final glossary is an important source of information for the readers and offers them an interesting series of explanations connected with the places and historical characters mentioned in the story.

The fact that Italian has a dominant position in this book is confirmed by the translator’s foreword, explicitly stating the intention of expanding the knowledge of the Finnish literary tradition in Italy.

## Conclusion

“My mother has a recording of my brothers and I when we were little, talking and laughing in Bengali. My mother keeps it to remind herself of the times when her children spoke Bangla fluently, when we were her Bangla bacha, because today we are her foreign children, grown and fed on the English soil... Those who go through the sad experience of losing a language know that the feeling of language lives on long after the last words are ever spoken. Bilingual books ignite the feelings and thoughts belonging to language - in one world, two languages.”

This touching testimony by Keyra Ashraf, the founder of Chadpur Press<sup>16</sup>, provides clear evidence of the fact that language is deeply connected with culture, and that bilingual children are endowed with the possibility to range from one specific linguistic and cultural code to another, from one mind-set to another. Dual-language books, in this sense, are more than simply texts in two languages: they are powerful cultural tools, which offer children the possibility of making new precious intercultural experience.

The case study of the Sinnos bridge-books shows that dual-language editions can metaphorically be compared to “magic mirrors”, ideal doors opening up to new worlds. As such, however, they have both fascinating and threatening aspects. If, on the one hand, they may introduce new cultural concepts and explain them, thus fulfilling an important didactic function; on the other hand, they can also neutralise cultural differences, offering the readers simplified and less characterised equivalents, creating an artificial, globalised reality.

For these reasons, I share Isabel Pascua’s opinion (2003) when she states that she would naturally opt for “foreignization” – i.e. keeping the exotic and the unknown in the translated text – at the same time paying attention to the fact that the “linguistic discourse” of the translation does not adhere too strictly to the structure of the original, and therefore sound too obscure or complex.

Once again, the “looking glass of dual-language books” should be able to perform the trick of creating a fruitful compromise between identity and otherness, maintaining the cultural references of the original and, at the same time, paying attention to the issues of readability and readers’ enjoyment.

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### *Biographical Notes*

After graduating in modern languages for translators (SSLMIT, Trieste) and completing an MA in Literary Translation (Ca' Foscari, Venice), I am a part-time research student in Translation Studies at the University of Tampere. My dissertation focuses on children's literature and discusses the role of the translator in the complex and fascinating verbal and visual world of children's books. My areas of interest cover both the translation of dual-language books, picture books and toy books and authorial translations of children's literature in general. I am part of an international research group under Professor Riitta Oittinen's supervision and a founder member of Bridge Children, an association promoting multicultural activities and studies in the field of children's literature.

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This statement certifies that the paper above is based upon original research undertaken by the author and that the paper was conceived and written by the author alone and has not been published elsewhere. All information and ideas from others is referenced.

The author's gratitude goes to Sinnos publishing house for permission to reproduce some sample pages from the dual-language books analysed in the central case study.