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Subtitling of the The Star movie into Romanian between the literal and the non-literal

Abstract

The following article aims to point at the translation problems that may occur when subtitling children's movies. The analysis will focus on the animation movie The Star, produced by Sony Pictures in 2017 and it will highlight the ways in which the characters' lines in English have been translated into Romanian, making suggestions for improvement where this was felt necessary. Conclusions are drawn as to whether the instances of mistranslation or inappropriate translation may have a negative impact on the way the movie is received by the young audience it targets.

Keywords: *children's animation movies, subtitling into Romanian, literal translation, nonliteral translation, effect of translation on the audience*

Introduction

This article intends to identify the most frequent translation problems that may occur when dealing with a children's movie, in the particular case of The Star, an animation movie released by Sony Pictures in 2017. As the field of translation is vast and brimming with specialized resources, it will be interesting to see how such a movie unfolds, from the point of view of translation. Since the target audience is clearly established – children, and the message must be easy to convey, the subtitling task should comply accordingly. A comparison between the original English script and its corresponding Romanian subtitled variant will be made, with translation issues being highlighted, both when the translation product is acceptable and when it could have been improved. Suggestions for perfected translations will be made at various points; however, these should be regarded as a subjective point of view being expressed and not necessarily as unquestionable translation solutions, since, as Newmark (1988) said, it is very important to look at the translation from the point of view of a never-ending series of discussions and interpretations.

The Star tells the story of the first Christmas, seen through the eyes of the animals that accompanied Mary and Joseph on their journey to Bethlehem. The movie starts with a brave mill donkey named Bo that yearns for the life he might have outside the mill. After many struggles, he finally manages to escape from the mill and alongside his dove friend Dave and the friendly sheep Ruth, he follows the star that guides them to Bethlehem and unwittingly, they become the protagonists of the most fascinating adventure of their lives.

1. The Star script subtitled into Romanian – between the literal and the non-literal

A number of examples of both literal and non-literal translation of the script lines will be discussed in what follows.

At the beginning of the movie, when the little mouse is drawn into Mary's house by the pleasant smell of a pie and wants to steal it from her, Mary sees him and says the following: *"Don't think I don't see you, little one."* This short sentence is subtitled into Romanian as *"Să nu crezi că nu te văd, micutule"*, the opening line of the movie thus being faithfully rendered into Romanian, with only the transposition of little one into micutule having been required by the characteristics of the Romanian language. The rhythm of the original English script is also preserved, together with its naturalness.

However, in the second line of the movie, Mary says: *"I think it's enough for both of us, though."* In Romanian, the translator omitted the adverb though in the end and only rendered the following: *"Cred că e suficient pentru amândoi."* In my opinion, the adverb though shows Mary's change of heart after she has shown disapproval of the mouse's intention to steal and willingness to share her food with the little creature.

Further on in the movie, when the archangel Gabriel comes to give Mary the wonderful piece of news that she is going to have a baby, he tells her the following: *"The Holy Spirit will overshadow you, and the child will be called the Son of God. For nothing is impossible with God."* In Romanian, the subtitle of this fragment reads: *"Duhul sfânt veghează asupra ta, și copilul va fi numit Fiul lui Dumnezeu. Căci nimic nu este imposibil pentru Dumnezeu."* This Romanian subtitle presents a couple of mistranslations: to begin with, the original English script starts with the use of the future tense, a fact that highlights the faith Mary should have in God and His will not only at the present moment, but also throughout her pregnancy and after it. In Romanian, the translator has replaced the future with the present, which, as I see it, does not underline the support God offers Mary during her entire pregnancy, but a consolation of the fact that she must not fear in the present. Moreover, the preposition with in the prepositional noun phrase with God, should have been translated either with *întru* (the rather archaic, but still preserved word in Romanian religious language in the phrase *întru Dumnezeu*), or with *cu*. Either of these two would have reinforced the impression of protection and safety offered by God, and not of its omnipotence, rather connoted by the preposition *pentru* (the actual English equivalent of the Romanian clause is "Nothing is impossible for God").

Once the archangel left Mary and went back to the sky, he became a fabulous star that gave the name of the movie. When it appeared in the night sky and while stood there, all the animals in the village and in the field gazed at it. So did also a brave little donkey, named Bo, which utters the following words: *"Ok. You are not going to believe this, but I think a new star just appeared in the sky."* In Romanian, this line was rendered as: *"Bine. Nu veți crede acest lucru, dar cred că o nouă stea a apărut pe cer..."*. Though the rendition into Romanian is correct, a few observations may be made. For instance, I think it may have been more appropriate to translate *you are not going to believe this* as *n-o să vă vină să credeți*, or as *n-o să mă credeți*, or as *n-o să mă credeți*, thus avoiding the slightly too formal character of what was suggested in the official

subtitling. In the latter part of the line there is also the omission of the time adverb just, pointing out the fact that the star in the sky has barely appeared. In the Romanian version, its absence corresponds to cancellation of the surprise element, of the novelty of the piece of news. The following day, Bo's pigeon friend Dave comes to visit them at the mill. When the old donkey sees Dave, he remarks: "Hey, kid, your unemployed bird friend's here." In the Romanian subtitle, his words are rendered as follows: "Hei puștiule, prietena ta pasăre fără treabă, e aici." (lit. "Hey kid, your bird friend that has nothing to do is here"). In the English script, the old donkey's line is meant to be humorous and it really is. In the Romanian version, however, it is not as humorous as it could have been. Since "the perception of humour varies depending on every culture, person and situation, it is widely acknowledged that a joke may make some people laugh while it goes unnoticed for others" (CARRA 2009: 134).

It seems the humorous effect of this English line has escaped unnoticed by the Romanian translator. The translation of *unemployed as fără treabă* has a very different meaning as compared to the original version. From the English original, we easily understand that Dave has no job, but from the Romanian subtitling, we deduce the fact that Dave is just wandering around without anything specific to do. If I were to translate this line, I would have put it this way: "Hei puștiule, prietenul tău șomer, înaripat, e aici." I believe that this translation is closer to the original script.

At Dave's sight, Bo is very excited and asks his friend about the world outside his mill. Bo asks Dave the following: "Hey, pal. What's new out there today?" In Romanian, this line is translated as: "Hei, amice. Ce e astăzi nou pe acolo?" ("Hey, buddy. What is new around there today?") Again, the Romanian rendition distances itself a little from the original version as it does not capture the whole meaning of out there. Bo actually states that he wants to know what is new outside his place, but in Romanian, this nuance is not captured. As a different option, I would have translated it with "Hei, amice. Ce mai e nou pe afară astăzi?" or with "Ce se mai aude nou de-afară, astăzi?", much closer to the original and able to signal Bo's "confinement" to a place separated from the world "out there". After breaking out from the mill, Bo is chased by the angry miller, who is eager to get it back to his work. As Bo runs, he meets up with Dave, its best pigeon friend and tells him that although it is free, the miller is still chasing him. The original line is: "The miller! The miller's on my tail!" In Romanian, the subtitle goes "Morarul! Moara e în coada mea!". The miller in the second clause was mistranslated as moara - the mill, which makes no sense in the context given. Apart from this, the translation of the idiomatic expression on my tail is faulty. In English, its meaning is "on my tracks", "following me up close", whereas in Romanian the word-for-word translation only suggests that the miller is following the donkey, but the connotation "up close" is missing. Later on, after they hear the exciting news about the rolling of the royal caravan through Nazareth, Bo and Dave are getting happier and happier when thinking of the fact that they could join them and leave Nazareth forever. In all this excitement, Dave says goodbye to Nazareth in his distinct humorous way, as follows: "Nazareth can kiss my gleaming white tail feathers good-bye." The Romanian version is: "Nazaret poate să-mi pupe coada albă când îi spun adio." ("Nazareth can kiss my white tail when I say good-bye to it.").

The word for word subtitle is inadequate here. The translator has disregarded the fact that Dave is a pigeon. It does not have a tail like that of a mammal. In the original script, it is precisely referred

to as a feather tail. In Romanian, however, the translator kept the translation of tail but he completely left out the main characteristic of the tail, which is the feathers and he even neglected the fact that Dave is talking about his tail feathers, and not about the whole tail. Perhaps this line would have been better translated as follows: "*Nazaretul poate să-mi pupe penele din coada mea albă și strălucitoare de la revedere.*" (Nazareth can kiss the feathers of my white and shiny tail good bye"). Moving to Mary and Joseph's wedding, after the party is over, Mary is thinking about the way in which she will tell Joseph about her being pregnant with the Son of God and to convince him that they are blessed with the greatest miracle of humankind. Right beside them there is Zechariah who's feasting and eating at will. At a certain moment, his wife calls him to go home. While still chewing the food, Zechariah says to Joseph: "*Great party, guys.*" In Romanian, his words were translated as: "*Bună petrecere, băieți.*" Zechariah was very pleased with the party and he really means it when he tells Joseph it was *great*. I would have kept the superlative value of the original *great* and translated it by *grozavă* instead of *bună*, which is merely neutral. *Guys* is also mistranslated. When Zechariah expresses his good impression about the party, he refers to both Mary and Joseph, and not to the males around him only – what is implied by the Romanian word *băieți*. My suggestion for improvement would be "*Grozavă petrecere, oameni buni.*", where *oameni buni* refers to both males and females and is informal enough to be a suitable equivalent of *guys*. While the movie unfolds, the focus now turns to Cyrus, Felix and Deborah, the three camels that carry the wise men to see baby Jesus. While going through the desert, they start complaining about getting thirstier and thirstier, and about the gifts brought by the wise men to baby Jesus. On their way, the wisest of them, Deborah, tries to convince the others that the baby is not an ordinary child, given the fact that the gifts were so precious and valuable. She believes that the wise men are going to the birthday party of a future king. On the other hand, Felix and Cyrus, not as clever as Deborah, are arguing over if they are really going to a birthday party or it is a baby shower. As their discussion continues, they say: "*It's a birthday party.*" "*Baby shower.*" In Romanian, their contradiction is rendered as: "*Petrecere de aniversare*" "*Îmbăiere bebeluș*" (lit. Birthday party. Bathing the baby.) If the first sentence is correctly subtitled, the second part completely lacks the culture-related meaning that it has in the original. A "baby shower" does not literally imply any bathing of the baby which is, in fact, not yet born at the time the party by this name is organized. Though the custom has been lately borrowed into the Romanian culture, an equivalent name for it has not yet appeared. Thus, a translation involving explicitation would have been much more appropriate in this context. My suggestion is "*Petrecere de bun venit pentru bebelușului care se va naște*" ("A welcome party for the baby who is to be born"). As she tries to convince her friends Felix and Cyrus about the fact that maybe they are not going to a party at all, but to meet the Son of God, her friends remain speechless and finally, Felix says: "*Deborah's crazier than a box of rocks.*" The Romanian version of his saying is: "*Deborah e mai nebună decât o cutie cu pietre.*" Though the word-for-word translation of the idiomatic comparison "crazier than a box of rocks" manages to signal the idea that the character is considered completely nuts, it does not sound natural in Romanian. A better equivalent is, to me, *nebună de legat* (*crazy as to tie her up*), which is of the same register and equally idiomatic to the original phrase. While the three funny camels, Felix, Cyrus and Deborah are still at the court of Herod,

hidden behind some bushes, Cyrus says: "*Shouldn't we be sneaking out? Why are we sneaking in?*". The two questions have been mistranslated into Romanian as: "*Nu ar trebui să ne ascundem? De ce ne ascundem?*". The verb *to sneak* means to *move stealthily* and is used here in a play upon words that relies on the use of the antonymic prepositions *in* and *out*, a thing that the Romanian translation fails to render. What the camels are wondering about is why they are trying to hide instead of attempting to leave, to run away. This distinction is not captured in the translation, where only the idea of remaining in place and hiding is present. As their trip to Bethlehem continues, they finally arrive at a small town where they unfortunately meet the hunter and his dogs. In this desperate chase, Bo somehow manages to save Mary by throwing Joseph's cart towards the hunter, making him fall in the fountain. All the people who witnessed the event put the blame on Bo. Joseph became angrier and angrier, calling Bo a "good for nothing" donkey. On hearing this, Bo gets very upset and tells Dave to follow him in joining the royal caravan. Their sheep friend Ruth tries to convince him to stay and to follow the star but Bo is unshakable in his decision.

On their way back, Bo suddenly hears the bells of the royal caravan and gets very excited. However, as his bandage flies up in the sky, near the star, he finally realizes his purpose and sees how mistaken he was when trying to join the caravan. At this point, Bo tells Dave: "*You know, Mary may not be big and royal, but she's important.*" In Romanian, his words were translated as follows: "*Știi, Maria poate nu e cineva mare și de viță regală, dar ea este importantă.*" *Mare și de viță regală* for *big and royal* sounds unnatural in Romanian, though it renders the meaning of the original correctly and entirely. *Măreț și de viță nobilă* is much more natural to native Romanians. Also, the third person singular subject is not usually expressed in Romanian, though its presence is compulsory in the surface structure of an English sentence. *So, dar ea este importantă* would have sounded more natural without the subject *ea*, as *dar este importantă*.

Since their trip comes to an end and they get to Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph are looking for a place to sleep inside a house. Outside, Ruth, Dave and Bo are relieved and happy they made it up to that place. However, Bo has the feeling of something negative and suddenly he sees the miller who was looking for him. Bo gets scared and tries to escape but the miller is too quick and manages to tie him down. As he is struggling to get rid of the miller's rope, Dave intervenes and tries to stop the miller as well. This time, he says: "*No, you don't, crazy-eyed, donkey-eating miller.*" In the Romanian translation "*Nu, no s-o faci, morar mâncător de măgari.*", reference to the miller's crazy eyes is omitted. It is true that the camera focuses on this detail, but the Romanian translation says nothing about it, so it may well escape unnoticed by the audience. If it were to stick closely to the original, the translation should have been "*Oh nu, n-o s-o faci, morar mâncător de măgari cu privire nebună.*"

After the miller finally catches Bo, Ruth and Dave are planning to save him and separate. In the meantime, the three funny camels are tied up to a tree, discussing about the king who might be in great danger. They all agreed that they should set themselves free and start moving around. Predictably enough, their strategy did not work as they thought it would and they got mixed up even worse. In all this mess, Cyrus says: "*Would you stop pinching me?*". In the Romanian version, his turn becomes: "*Vrei să nu mă mai strângi?*". The English verb *to pinch* has been mistaken for *to*

hold tight, which, given the situation, with all the ropes en tangled around the camels may not be an inappropriate modulation.

As the movie continues, the three magi come to Herod's palace bringing gifts for the new king. Herod has no idea about Jesus' coming and believes the gifts are for him. However, they are not. Two deadly dogs scare the camels that brought the three wise men to the king. These dogs invented a game named "*How high*" - they bark and scare the future victims and watch how high they can jump. They played the same game with the camels and when they did that, they said: "*How high? Camel high!*" subtitled as "*Cât de sus? Sare cămila!*"

With regard to our scene, the question is translated word-for-word and its original meaning - a clear one, is rendered correctly. However, the answer to the question does not find itself an appropriate correspondent in Romanian. *Camel high*, for which the equivalent *Sare cămila* (The camel jumps) was suggested should have been translated by explicitation as "*Cât sare cămila!*" (As high as the camel jumps) to clarify the meaning of the original. As it is, the translation in the movie remains opaque and does not have the same humorous connotation as the English version. However, as Zoe de Linde and Neil Kay point out, "humor, perhaps more than any other feature, highlights the interplay between the three semiotic systems of the medium. Some jokes depend on the synchronicity of word and image, others on the interplay between spoken and written language." (LINDE, KAY 1999: 13). The synchronization of the lines, either original or translated, with the images in the movie may have compensated for the inappropriate character of the Romania version.

Conclusion

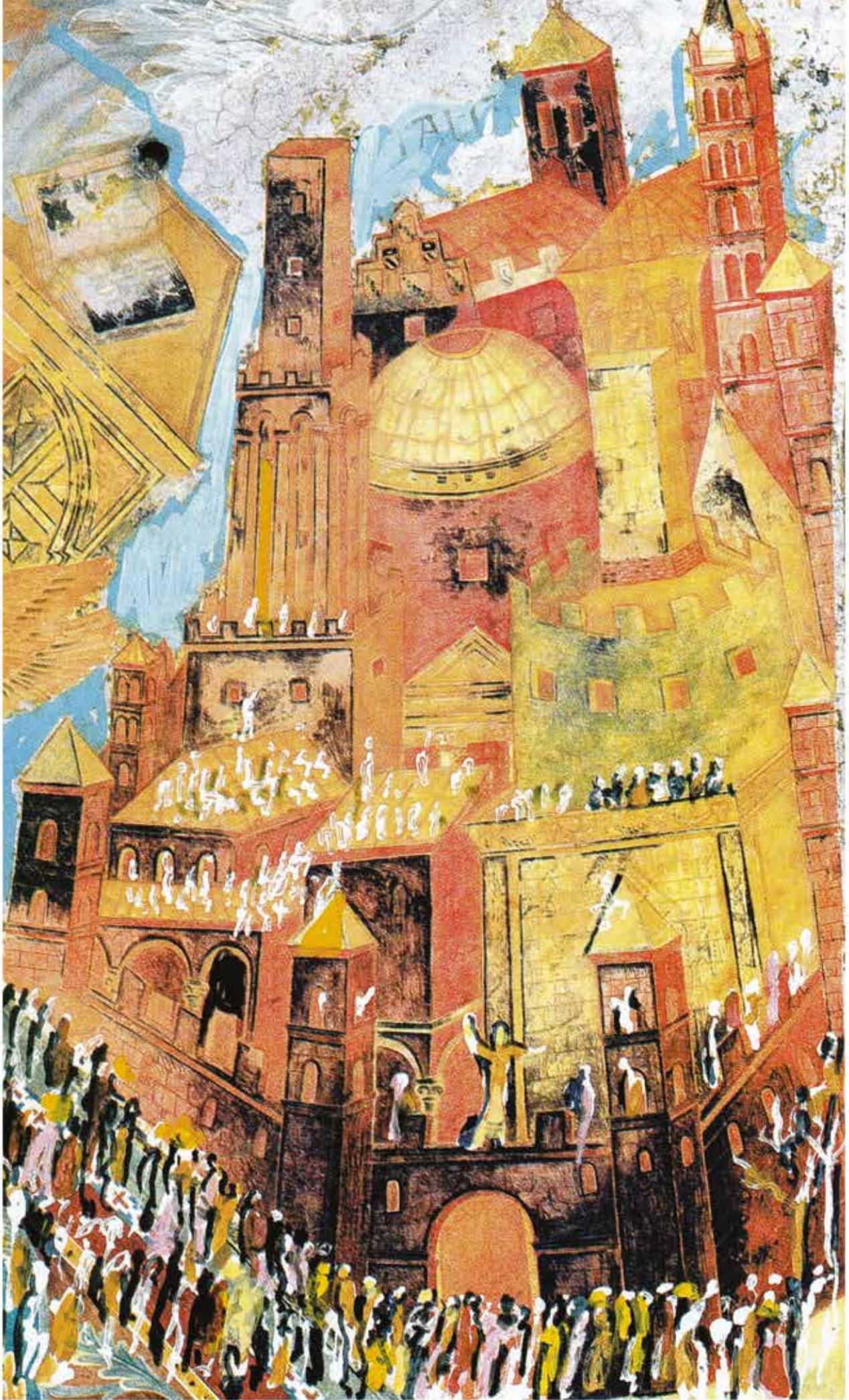
This article aimed to highlight some of the problems a translator may encounter when subtitling a children's movie from English into Romanian. In the case examined, instances of mistranslation or inappropriate translation were noticed, though, generally speaking, the script was acceptably subtitled (some of the lines which were translated correctly have also been pointed out here).

Of what could be improved, some translation variants do not impede the reception of the movie by the children: for example, "*Don't think I don't see you, little one.*" is subtitled into Romanian as "*Să nu crezi că nu te văd, micuțule*". In this particular case, the naturalness of the speech is preserved, without damaging the overall perception of the scene or cutting of the understanding of the message. Others, however, may have negative consequences in this respect, as, for instance: "*Morarul! Moara e în coada mea!*". The miller in the second clause was mistranslated as *moara* - *the mill*, which makes no sense in the context given. In addition to this, as far as this sentence is concerned, the entire reception of the movie is disrupted, thus preventing the children from understanding the movie and possibly, confuse them with respect to the global message.

Overall, neither of the occasions when the English script was mistranslated or inappropriately translated drastically distorted the meaning of the original, though some resulted into "a lessened potential to dynamize the readers' emotions" (Pungă 2016: 109), more specifically, into a weaker humorous impact. Consequently, the entertainment function of the movie as well as its formative function are fulfilled.

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