

CARLA MARELLO

Alice's Omissions

'I see nobody on the road,' said Alice.
'I only wish *I* had such eyes,' the King remarked
in a fretful tone. 'To be able to see Nobody! And
at that distance too! Why, it's as much as *I* can do
to see real people, by this light!'

TLG, VII, 286

1. *Looking for ellipses and omissions, i. e. how to be able to see nothing.*

Carroll charms his readers by playing on words, both with the letters and sounds composing the words and with the meanings: the linguists looking for interesting proforms, for tricky cohesive devices will be able to gather a lot of examples in the Alice books¹.

Relatively less explored are the cases in which Carroll plays with the absence of signs. It is not surprising because studies about intersentential ellipsis in general and/or in specific texts are far less numerous than studies about full-bodied textual phenomena.

Those who look for ellipses must be able to see Nothing, to borrow the King's remark: they need not only good eyes but also special spectacles. Such spectacles may consist of translations² into other languages and of a comprehensive theory of ellipsis.

In the following paragraphs I shall try to prove that Carroll played consciously with traces, with expectations of signs which are not in the text. Pointing to the *loss* or to the *simplification* of meaning in certain translations, I

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¹ Halliday-Hasan 1976 contains a large amount of examples from the Alice books. I use the expression "Alice books" to refer both to *Alice Adventures in Wonderland* and to *Through the Looking-Glass*; to refer to them singularly I use respectively AAW and TLG. Latin numbers refer to chapters; Arabic numbers to pages of the combined volume first published in 1962 by Puffin Books, London.

² As the English writer Julian Barnes remarked in an article which appeared in *Le Nouvel Observateur* (31 mai-6 juin 1990, page 60) «Peut-être est-il (Lewis Carroll) si mêlé à la culture anglo-saxonne qu'il nous est difficile, pour nous Anglais, de le voir avec un oeil neuf. Et il est possible que les traductions révèlent plus clairement les structures et l'étrangeté de l'oeuvre».

think I can show that in Carroll's original text there is something more and that this 'more' is not (only) in the words actually used but in ghost-words which 'appear' to the reader, though they are not written. A loss in the translation may depend on omitting typographic signs (italics, for instance), punctuation marks, connectives: light, 'empty' signs if we compare their roles, in forming the total meaning, to the roles of nouns, verbs, adjectives. But they have their weight, a weight which can be measured when they are missing in the translation³.

A comprehensive theory of ellipsis is necessary in order to consider the whole range of puns on absent signs used by Carroll in his books. In §§ 1.1 and 1.2 I shall try to show that Halliday and Hasan have the same attitude towards elliptical items as those who consider half-empty a glass partially filled, while Meyer-Hermann has the attitude of those who consider the same glass half-full.

1.1 *What is not there: a half-empty definition*

A good definition of ellipsis can be found in Halliday-Hasan (1976, 143–144); it is given in a chapter where we find one of the first attempts to describe textual ellipses as cohesive links across sentence boundaries and above all it does not identify elliptical items with incomplete structures⁴.

When we talk of ellipsis [...] we are referring specifically to sentences, clauses, etc. whose structure is such as to presuppose some preceding item, which then serves as the source of the missing information. An elliptical item is one which, as it were, leaves specific structural slots to be filled from elsewhere. [...] there is a sense of incompleteness associated with it. But it is useful to recognize that this is an over-simplification, and that the essential characteristic of ellipsis is that something which is present in the selection of underlying ('systemic') options is omitted in the structure – whether or not the resulting structure is in itself 'incomplete'.

The last part of the definition is rather important from the perspective I have adopted in this paper, because it opens the possibility of *seeing ellipsis even in complete structures*, which is exactly what we have to do in order to 'catch' some of Carroll's puns on absent signs.

I am not, presently, interested in the Alice books as a source for beautiful examples of nominal, verbal, clausal ellipses (to use the labels of Halliday-Hasan 1976, a book where Carroll's texts are widely used as linguistic examples) or of

³ Studies on translations of the Alice books are revealing: see Weaver (1964). From my point of view, Berretta (1979 and 1982) are very interesting contributions, because they devote much space to the problem of translating cohesive devices. Capitano (1983) ends her essay with an observation with which I totally agree; we can borrow all the tools from linguistics, literary criticism and from other interpretative methodologies, when we *analyse* the text to be translated, but when we have to write a translation in the target language, we need *synthetic and creative* skills. All the remarks I make in the following paragraphs about the different translations of certain passages in the Alice books still belong to an analytic approach: I am a linguist who exploits translations as in chemistry they used litmus paper. If some remarks of mine may lead to better translations (and in a couple of cases I dare to suggest alternative solutions in Italian), all the better, but to check translations to see if there are omissions is *not* my main goal.

⁴ For a short overview of the development of non-reductionist theories of ellipsis, see Marellò (1990).

sluicing, gapping, stripping etc. (to use generative grammar terminology). AAW and TLG are lively books with a lot of conversation (AAW, I, 23 «‘and what is the use of a book,’ thought Alice, ‘without pictures or conversation?’»)⁵. It is normal that they provide many interesting elliptical items, but to use them as sources, or better as ‘example-wells’ from which to draw examples, helps linguists, although it does not help the reader to better appreciate how Carroll exploits absent signs.

My goal is

- a) to make use of linguistic tools in order to deal with those ellipses and incomplete utterances which have a significant role in the Alice books;
- b) to use, instead of the concept of ellipsis, the concept of ‘interactive completeness’ in order to group a whole series of Carrollian linguistic devices which would not otherwise be considered together.

In the title I chose the word *omission*, instead of *ellipsis*, because it is more comprehensive and in my opinion stresses Carroll’s intention to leave something in the twilight zone. An ellipsis may be inevitable, compulsory and necessary in certain circumstances⁶; an omission may be unintentional, but generally is intentional (sins of omission!) and not necessary. We may think of grammatical ellipsis as a particular kind of omission. Omission is a word which has less to do with grammar and more with choice: it may work as a hyperonym for intentional use of incomplete signifiants, for grammatical and textual ellipsis and for certain incomplete utterances⁷.

1.2 *What is not there: a half-full definition*

The concept of interactive completeness is explained by Meyer-Hermann (1990); the German linguist points out that interpretability and completeness are strictly interwoven. An utterance interpreted by the interlocutor is complete because it *is* interpreted, independently from its syntactic structure. In other

⁵ Since I claim that we have to pay attention to how authors use punctuation marks, I feel obliged to explain my use of quotes and double quotes. Whenever I quote from AAW or TLG I respect the punctuation I find in the Puffin Books edition and therefore use quotes (‘) where the English text does and I signal that it is the beginning of a quotation from Carroll’s, placing in front of it the indication of the book, chapter and page. For all the other quotations I use double angle brackets with quotes inside, if necessary. When quoting translations of Alice books I respect their punctuation style.

⁶ The second anaphoric mention of a quantified NP has often to be an ellipsis, since a full proform or a repetition might refer to someone or something different from the quantified NP; answers have to be elliptical of the theme if they want to be really cohesive with their questions; in languages where it is not always necessary to express subject pronouns, there are cases in which the speaker is obliged to use ellipsis in subordinate clauses.

⁷ It does not cover those incomplete utterances deriving from false starts.

words, it is the interlocutor, through his/her interaction, who defines the completeness of the utterance uttered by the locutor.

Though Meyer-Hermann elaborated the concept mainly to analyse oral speech (and therefore uses tools derived from discourse analysis in order to describe places in which an interlocutor may interrupt a locutor because in his/her opinion interactive completeness is reached), I think that the concept is useful for a literary work of art as well. Here locutor and interlocutor words and turn takings are planned by the author, who may be very formal and may use in dialogues written language instead of spoken language or who may try, as Carroll sometimes does, to imitate a true conversation and to offer readers elliptical and incomplete cues, which become complete through interaction. Meyer-Hermann's concept is more suitable for an 'omissions hunter' than Lucien Cherchi's concept of cohesive ellipsis. According to Cherchi (1985) utterances which were not completed because they did not coincide with a deliberate and meaningful speaker's stop, were incomplete utterances to be clearly distinguished from textual ellipsis which respected the speaker's planning. To clarify this point we suggest the reader to compare example (1) and examples (2a, 2b).

- (1) AAW, V, 72 'One side will make you grow taller, and the other side will make you grow shorter.'
 'One side of *what?* The other side of *what?*' thought Alice to herself.
 'Of the mushroom,' said the Caterpillar, just as if she had asked it aloud; and in another moment it was out of sight.
- (2a) TLG, VI, 268 'My *name* is Alice, but –'
 'It's a stupid name enough!' Humpty Dumpty interrupted impatiently.
- (2b) TLG, VI, 269 'If I did fall,' he went on, '*the King has promised me* – ah, you may turn pale, if you like! You didn't think I was going to say that, did you? *The King has promised me – with his very own mouth – to – to –*'
 'To send all his horses and all his men,' Alice interrupted, rather unwisely.

According to Cherchi only (1) is a textual ellipsis creating cohesion; from the point of view of interactive completeness Humpty Dumpty in (2a) clearly considers Alice's cue complete enough for him, and Alice in (2b) cannot but complete that part of the nursery rhyme she knows by heart. For Meyer-Hermann an interrupted cue followed by the interlocutor's rejoinder form a textual link.

2. Easily visible omissions

The most visible sign omissions are obviously those which leave behind, so to say, a piece of sign. We will consider here omissions of parts of signifiants of words, omissions of parts of a sentence and finally mock omissions of parts of a sentence.

2.1 Incomplete words

The easiest omissions to detect are those made up of signs only partially written. Under Carroll's text I sometimes quote three Italian translations, a French one and a Spanish one⁸.

- (3) AAW, III, 48 'You promised to tell me your history, you know,' said Alice, 'and why it is you hate – C and D,' she added in a whisper
- (4) AAW, IX, 121 'Just about as much right,' said the Duchess, 'as pigs have to fly; and the m –'
 M e la mo . . .
 G e la mo-
 R e la morale
 FR et la mor
 SP y la mo . . .
- (5) AAW, X, 132–133 'Yes,' said Alice, 'I've often seen them at dinn-' she checked herself hastily. 'I don't know where Dinn may be,' said the Mock Turtle
 M a ce . . ." si controllò in fretta.
 "Ce? Non lo conosco, questo posto"
 G a tavo-", ma si arrestò in tempo.
 "Non so dove sia questo Tavo"
 R a pran . . ." e non finì la parola.
 "Non so dove sia Pran"
 FR J'en ai souvent vu à déj . . ."
 "J'ignore où cette localité de Déj"
 SP "las he visto muy a menudo para cen . . ."
 "No sé qué es eso de cen"

As can be noticed, translators have mainly respected Carroll's text with some adjustments: in (4) R has translated with a full word, while the others have adapted to the various Romance languages the interrupted word, i. e. they have given the first syllable or the first three letters.

Example (5) needed more skill: in fact *Dinn* with capital D and no hyphen is overlapping with that part of *dinner* uttered by Alice, but it is also an acceptable name for a place in English. The same can be said only of *Tavo* in Italian and much less of *Ce*, *Pran*, and I guess also of *Déj* et *cen*⁹.

⁸ G stands for Lewis Carroll, *Alice nel Paese delle Meraviglie. Attraverso lo specchio* Introduzione, traduzione e note di Milli Graffi, Garzanti, Milano 1989. M stands for Lewis Carroll, *Le avventure di Alice nel Paese delle Meraviglie. Attraverso lo Specchio* Traduzione e note di Masolino d'Amico, Mondadori, Milano 1978. R stands for Lewis Carroll, *Alice nel Paese delle Meraviglie* traduzione di Tommaso Giglio, Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, Milano 1978. FR stands for Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland en bilingue, De l'autre côté du miroir et de ce qu'Alice y trouva* translated by Henri Parisot, Aubier Flammarion, Paris 1970. SP stands for Lewis Carroll, *Alicia en el País de las Maravillas* traducción y prólogo de Jaime de Ojeda, Alianza Editorial, Madrid 1970; *Alicia a través del espejo*, traducción y prólogo de Jaime de Ojeda, Alianza Editorial, Madrid 1973.

⁹ The Spanish translator doesn't capitalize *cen* because his translation doesn't consider *cen* as the name of a place. Masolino d'Amico, who generally translates very well, in this occasion has not considered that names of place composed by two letters are very rare in Italy.

In (5) we also see how interactive completeness makes sense of . . . nonsense: Alice doesn't end the word *dinner* because she doesn't want to upset the Mock Turtle by declaring that she often sees whittings as food. The Mock Turtle doesn't know the word *dinn*, but since Alice has stopped, he¹⁰ accepts Alice's utterance as complete and interprets it as well as he can, i. e. as a locative prepositional phrase.

On a similar basis we can interpret a very good pun on an incomplete French word, *ach(ever)*, created by the French translator, Henri Parisot, to substitute the English pun on *axis/axes*.

(5b) AAW, VI, 83 '[. . .] You see the earth takes twenty-four hours to turn round on its axis -
'Talking of axes,' said the Duchess, 'chop off her head!'

FR "[. . .] Vous savez, en effet, qu'il faut à la terre vingt-quatre heures pour ach . . ."
'A propos de hache, dit la Duchesse, tranchez-lui donc la tête!'

We also ought to consider as two incomplete word-signs, melted together, the portmanteau words of the poem *Jabberwocky*, because, as Humpty Dumpty shows, the reader associates to the sound of the unknown word the sound, and therefore the meaning, of two existing words. *Mimsy* comes from *miserable* + *flimsy*, *slity* from *lithe* + *slimy*, *mome* is short for *from home*. Here I shall not list and comment upon the linguistic acrobatics performed by translators of *Jabberwocky*, but I think it is worthwhile to notice that portmanteau word coining is infectious. The Italian sound track of Walt Disney's cartoon film *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) has portmanteau words also for the Caucus race named *maratonda* (from, I suppose, *maratona* 'marathon' + *baraonda* 'hurly-burly' or *tonda* 'round') and for the Cheshire Cat, called *Stregatto* (from *stregato* 'bewitched' + *gatto* 'cat').

2.2 Incomplete utterances

Another type of easily detectable omissions are incomplete utterances which do not occur in a dialogue and have no completion in the text.

In Humpty Dumpty's poem there are three such incomplete utterances.

- (6a) TLG, VI, 280 *The little fishes' answer was*
"We cannot do it, Sir, because -"
- (6b) TLG, VI, 281 *And he was very proud and stiff;*
He said "I'd go and wake them, if -"
- (6c) TLG, VI, 281–282 *And when I found the door was shut,*
I tried to turn the handle, but -

There was a long pause.
'Is that all?' Alice timidly asked.
'That's all,' said Humpty Dumpty. 'Good-bye.'
This was rather sudden, Alice thought

¹⁰ I use *he* for the Mock Turtle, because this is the pronoun Carroll uses; for the same reason Humpty Dumpty is *he* and the Caterpillar *it*.

In the previous three examples we find ‘suspended’ conjunctions; the first two are, so to say, less ‘suspended’, because it is rather usual in spoken language not to report what comes after a *because* or a *if*, in those cases in which the reason or the condition is not felt as really important. In fact we can imagine that the little fishes will not obey someone who orders them to go to a place where they will be cooked; as for the proud and stiff fellow, the condition he makes does not matter because Humpty Dumpty does not accept it.

The suspended *but* of (6c) is linked to the previous part of the text by rhyme, a carrier of connexity, but it offers no link with what follows and thus does not guarantee cohesion or coherence¹¹. The locutor Humpty Dumpty stops where other people (Alice included) think he ought to go on. It is an omission from the point of view of English syntax, it is against the interlocutor’s expectations, but it is in line with Humpty Dumpty’s character, since he is the master of his language.

Syntactic incompleteness is rather frequent in this chapter which ends with the word *end* repeated twice, and with a sentence Alice cannot finish:

- (7) TLG, VI, 282–283 ‘of all the unsatisfactory people I *ever* met –’ She never finished the sentence, for at this moment a heavy crash shook the forest from end to end.

From this global perspective even the suspended *but* of (6c) is linked to what follows: it can have its place in the coherence of the text, if we interpreters accept it as an aspect convincingly typical of the character Humpty Dumpty, master of his language to a point that he can judge complete a sentence which is not.

2.3 *Mock omissions of part of sentences*

The concept of interactive completeness is generally used when an incomplete utterance of the locutor is completed by the interlocutor either in a cooperative way (completion) or in a polemical one (interruption). However, when it is always the same speaker to complete an incomplete utterance of his/her own, it is no longer a matter of interactivity. In such cases to explain with which kind of incompleteness Carroll is playing, we have to turn to Hallyday and Hasan’s definition (see § 1.1).

Let’s consider Alice’s self-correction:

- (8) AAW, VIII, 113 ‘How do you like the Queen?’ said the Cat in a low voice.
‘Not at all,’ said Alice: ‘she’s so extremely –’ Just then she noticed that the Queen was close

¹¹ Connexity, cohesion and coherence are here taken with the meaning they have in Hatakeyama-Petöfi-Sözer (1985, 67–70). Some units are considered linked by *connexity* when they show the same rhythmic pattern or the same syntactic pattern (irrespective of the meaning), when the same word appears in all the units or when the units are linked by connectives or anaphors even though they have different themes resulting in no macrotheme. The *cohesion* of a connex expression depends on its sense-semantic thematic structure, on the grammatico-temporal well-formedness of the forming sequences and on continuity of the register. Cohesion is a property concerning verbal structure, whereas *coherence* is a property concerning the model of text world which the interpreter adopts.

behind her, listening: so she went on, ‘– likely to win, that it’s hardly worth while finishing the game.’

- R “Ti piace la Regina?” le chiese il Gatto a bassa voce.
 “Per niente!” rispose pronta Alice. “E’ così . . .” [. . .]
 “. . . è così brava, così brava, ” aggiunse “che sarà già molto non fare troppa brutta figura nella partita.”
- SP “Y la Reina, ¿qué tal? ¿Te gusta?”, le preguntó el Gato en voz baja.
 “¡No me gusta nada!”, exclamó Alicia. “¡ Es tan . . . ;
 tan . . . !” [. . .] “. . . es tan seguro que va a ganar la Reina que no vale pena que los demás sigan jugando”.

Taken separately *she’s so extremely* and *likely to win* are not complete; they are not grammatical ellipses, but just incomplete utterances. Together they form a complete utterance which, nonetheless, the reader has to process in a double way, i. e. both in its recomposed sequence, *she’s so extremely likely to win*, and taking in account the omitted adjective that Alice would have uttered after *extremely*, if only the Queen had not been listening.

I have listed only one Italian translation and the Spanish one because these two do not respect the text and render only the first part of Alice’s answer with incomplete utterances. The translators give a complete second part, because they put together (instead of leaving it to the reader, as Carroll does) the two utterances and obtain a complete one. In this way they prevent the reader from wondering about the words Alice did not utter and reduce the first part to a sort of uncertain (rather than false) start.

In TLG much more noticeable as mock omissions are the end of chapter III and the beginning of the IVth on one hand and the end of chapter X and the beginning of the XIth on the other.

- (9) TLG, III, 233 feeling sure that they must be
 TLG, IV, 234

CHAPTER IV
Tweedledum and Tweedledee

- M certa che si trattasse di
 Capitolo IV
 Tweedledum e Tweedledee
- G poiché era certa che di trattava di
 Capitolo IV
 Tuideldàm e Tuidoldii
- FR en comprenant que les deux petits bonshommes ne pouvaient être que
 Chapitre IV
 TWIDEULDEUME ET TWIDEULDIE
- SP no podían ser más que. . .
 Capítulo 4
 Tararí y Tarará

In (9) we have an incomplete utterance of chapter III which is completed by the title of Chapter VI; we have a shift from text to paratext. Both the Italian

translations preserve the rhyme (though G does it more explicitly italianizing the writing of the two names), while the French and the Spanish do not¹².

(10) TLG, X, 341 Chapter X

Shaking

SHE took her off the table as she spoke, and shook her backwards and forwards with all her might.

The Red Queen made no resistance whatever; only her face grew very small, and her eyes got large and green: and still, as Alice went on shaking her, she kept on growing shorter – and fatter – and softer – and rounder – and –

CHAPTER XI

Waking

– and it really *was* a kitten, after all.

M Capitolo X
Sgrulloni

[...] continuava a farsi più piccola ... e grassa ... e morbida ... e rotonda ... e ...

Capitolo XI

Risveglio

... E alla fine era una gattina per davvero.

G Capitolo X
La scrollata

[...] Alice continuò a scrollarla, e quella diventò sempre più piccola – e poi più grassoccia – e più morbida – e più rotonda – e –

Capitolo XI

Il risveglio

– e insomma *era* proprio una gattina, dopo tutto.

FR Chapitre X
Secouement

[...] puis, tandis qu’Alice continuait de la secouer, elle ne cessa de se raccourcir, d’engraisser, de s’adoucir, de s’arrondir ... et ...

Chapitre XI

Réveil

... et, finalement, c’était bel et bien une minette.

In (10) we have again a connexity marker in the form of the two titles (*Shaking/Waking*), G and M in this occasion do not preserve the rhyme¹³.

The final utterance of chapter X ends with a list, and therefore it is incomplete but expectation for completion is less strong than in (9). Besides, completion does not come immediately from the title of chapter XI, but from its text: the reader has first to read the title *Waking* and then (s)he can find what (s)he needs to complete the sentence. The word forming the title of chapter XI, *Waking*,

¹² Neither does Christian Enzensberger preserve the rhyme in his translation *Alice hinter den Spiegeln*, Insel Verlag, Frankfurt (1963).

¹³ Masolino d’Amico with *Sgrulloni* is attracted by the flavour of the Tuscan variety of Italian and neglects rhyme; it is all the more curious because he previously shows a great sensitivity to these rhyming effects and even writes a note about the couplet formed by the ending of chapter III and the beginning of the IVth. Enzensberger in his German translation this time notices the rhyme and succeeds in preserving it: Kapitel Zehn *Robe Behandlung* Kapitel Elf *Rasche Verwandlung*.

deserves some attention: it is connex and cohesive with the title of chapter X, because they rhyme and because they share the same syntactical form and because you generally wake if someone shake you. Here Alice shakes the Red Queen, but by doing so she wakes from her dream and comes back from behind the looking-glass. This is not clearly said by Carroll, but we find it coherent with the meaning of the text of both chapters and of the whole book.

The two chapters are loosely linked on a syntactical level (a sequence of *and* is not such a strong tie), because they are linked on the iconic level. Chapter XI is nonsense as a chapter: it is formed by a title, by one incomplete sentence and by an illustration. That illustration appears to be the strongest link with chapter X, because Alice's return into the real world, as Isabelle Nières explains in her contribution to this volume, «is symbolised by an almost perfect superimposition of the Red Queen on the kitten». The two illustrations in Chapters X and XI correspond to the two illustrations of chapter I where Alice is caught as she passes through the looking-glass and are, therefore, long-distance cohesive ties.

3. Grammatical ambiguity, homonymy and omissions in VP

I shall now consider parts of the text where the reader faces a complete but ambiguous sentence, because such a sentence can receive more than one structural analysis and one of these analyses belongs to an elliptical structure.

Classical examples of this phenomenon, which linguists call *grammatical ambiguity*, are:

- (11a) Flying planes can be dangerous
 (11b) He hit the man with the stick

They are slightly different from examples such as

- (12a) Time flies
 (12b) Watch her box

which are *homonymic sentences*: in (12a and b) we have sentences which imply different structural analyses not because of their syntactical structure, but because they contain homonyms (*time* as a verb in the imperative and as a noun, *flies* as a verb, present tense, 3rd singular and as the plural of the noun *fly*; *her* as an object pronoun and as a possessive adjective, *box* as a noun and as a verb).

Carroll plays with homonymy and ellipsis at a certain point in *A mad tea-party*:

- (13) AAW, VII, 101, 'But they were *in* the well,' Alice said to the Dormouse [. . .]
 'Of course they were,' said the Dormouse; '- well in.'

Of course they were is a grammatical ellipsis which can be easily filled with systemic knowledge and information from the preceding text. The reader therefore does not expect any completion and the Dormouse's following utterance – *well in* creates surprise and amusement. The whole is built up by

Carroll so that we can appreciate the mirror effect of a completed utterance such as *Of course they were in the well, well in*, without . . . seeing it as such.

This play on homonymic words is the last in a chapter which contains also other homonymic pairs. I shall not provide Italian, French, Spanish or German translations for them because as Heath (1974, 74) remarks: «To be ill in a well and be well in it, and to draw treacle in it as well as out of it, gets Alice well out of her depth». And, I guess, not Alice alone.

Syntactic ambiguity is clearly acting in the following example, which I considered with ‘elliptical spectacles’ after reading Yaguello (1981, 196–197).

(14) TLG, VII, 290 ‘Would you – be good enough,’ Alice panted out, after running a little further, ‘to stop a minute – just to get – one’s breath?’

‘I’m *good* enough,’ the King said, ‘only I’m not strong enough. You see, a minute goes by so fearfully quick. You might as well try to stop a Bandersnatch!’

M “non avrebbe . . . la gentilezza . . .” ansimò Alice, dopo aver corso un altro tratto, “di fermarsi un momento . . . giusto il tempo . . . di riprendere fiato?”

“La gentilezza ce l’ho” disse il Re “solo che non ne ho la *forza*. Capisci, un momento passa talmente in fretta. Tanto varrebbe cercare di fermare un Bandafferra!”

G “Sia – gentile –” ansimò Alice, dopo aver corso per un altro pezzo, non potremmo – prenderci – un attimo di sosta – per riprendere fiato?”

“Io sono molto *gentile*” rispose il Re, “ma non sono tanto *forte*. L’attimo sfreccia via con la velocità di un lampo. Sarebbe come se volessimo cercare di prenderci un Grafobranccio!”.

SP [. . .] de parar un minuto . . . , sólo para . . . , recobrar el aliento?

– Tan *amable*, si soy [. . .] sólo que *fuerte* no lo soy tanto. Ya sabes lo veloz que corre un minuto. ¡Intentar pararlo sería como querer alcanzar a un zamarrajo!

FR “Auriez-vous . . . la bonté [. . .] d’arrêter une minute . . . , le temps de . . . reprendre haleine?”

“J’en aurais bien la *bonté*, répondit le Roi, mais j’en ai pas la force. C’est qu’une minute, voyez-vous, cela passe beaucoup trop vite. Autant essayer d’arrêter un Pinçmacaque!”

The King chooses the structure ‘to stop + NP’ considering *a minute* as an object of *to stop*, while Alice used *to stop* elliptically, so to say, for *to stop oneself*, and *a minute* as a time adverbial. The Spanish, French and German¹⁴ translators succeed in preserving the syntactical ambiguity. The Italian translators have some problems because in Italian you cannot use *fermare* instead of *fermarsi*. G, Milli Graffi, tries to by-pass this obstacle with *prenderci un attimo di sosta* (literally ‘to take for us a moment of rest’), but it does not fit perfectly. In fact the King in his answer is obliged to skip *di sosta* (‘of rest’): *l’attimo di sosta sfreccia via con la velocità di un lampo* could not but provoke laughter.

¹⁴ Enzensberger translates: «“Möchtet Ihr bitte – so lieb sein –” [. . .] “und eine Minute anhalten – nur ein wenig – zum Luftholen?” “Lieb genug wär ich schon” [. . .] “aber stark genug nicht. Eine Minute geht so schrecklich schnell vorbei – die anhalten? Warum nicht gleich ein Schnatterrind!”».

3.1 You see, you know *with* or *without* it

In the Alice books we find a certain number of *you know* which pass, so to say, unobserved and have the role of rendering the dialogues more similar to real oral conversation. Alice's *you know* are more numerous than those of the other characters, but she is the protagonist and speaks to everybody. It may also be that Carroll, subtle observer of human ways of communicating, introduced in Alice's speech *you know, you see, well, I mean, I guess* as a part of her general positive attitude towards cooperative conversation¹⁵.

Linguistic studies about *you know* (see, for instance, Östman (1981) and more recently Schiffrin (1987)) are based on *oral* conversation corpora and their results cannot so easily be mapped on Carroll's *very written* text. I'll try to use them as wisely as possible, but I am perfectly aware that I am using conversation analysis tools in a very improper manner.

Agreeing with Östman's analysis, Schiffrin maintains that the role of *you know* is to display «the speaker as one whose role as information-provider is contingent upon hearer reception» (1987, 295). Schiffrin opens her discussion of *you know* functions as discourse marker, stressing that we cannot neglect its literal meaning: *you* is a second person pronoun singular or plural also used as an indefinite general pronoun (similar to *one* or *they*); *know* refers to the cognitive state in which one 'has information about something'. Therefore «*y*' *know* has two possible composite meanings: (1) information X is available to the recipient(s) of talk, (2) information X is generally available» (Schiffrin 1987, 267); in the first case *y*'*know* has the discourse function of a marker of mutual (meta-)knowledge, in the second case is a marker of meta-knowledge about what is generally known.

In example (3) there is one of those *you know* which may be considered a marker of mutual knowledge about what the Mouse and Alice know, and the dependency of Alice's conversation on the hearer/Mouse reception is evident.

When Alice tries to placate angry Humpty Dumpty

(15) TLG, VI, 268 'I said you *looked* like an egg, Sir,' Alice gently explained. 'And some eggs are very pretty, you know,' she added, hoping to turn her remark into a sort of compliment.

she actually acts as if she were appealing «to shared knowledge as a way of converting an opponent to one's own side in a dispute» (Schiffrin 1987, 279).

The Hatter utters two *you know* in *A mad tea-party*: they are very near, but they have different functions.

(16) AAW, VI, 97 'We quarrelled last March – just before *he* went mad, you know –' (pointing with his tea-spoon at the March Hare,) '– it was at the great concert given by the Queen of Hearts, and I had to sing [. . .]
You know the song, perhaps?'

¹⁵ It was once believed (see, among others, Östman 1981, Attili-Benigni 1979) that women make a larger use of hedges, discourse markers, expressions of tentative speech, but now researchers have gathered data against such a belief.

'I've heard something, like it,' said Alice.
'It goes on, you know,' the Hatter continued, 'in this way: -

The first, being as it is in a parenthesis, has the function of «rhythmical accompaniment of the conversation» (Manili 1988, 186). The second leads Alice «to focus attention on a piece of information» (Schiffrin 1987, 290) being presented by the Hatter and also tries to obtain her agreement in assuming as generally known such a piece of information. While its focussing function is sure, the function of this second *you know* as a marker of meta- knowledge is less evident but very tempting: the humour of the situation is that Alice is asked to admit that she knows a parody of the very well-known poem *The Star* by Jean Taylor *not* the original poem.

As a source of a pun, *you know* appears in the dialogue between Alice and the Caterpillar, because Carroll, through the Caterpillar's answers, plays on the different value which is attributed to *you see* and *you know*, as they are used¹⁶ in (17) and (18).

(17) AAW, V, 66 'I can't explain *myself*, I'm afraid, sir,' said Alice, 'because I'm not myself, you see.'
'I don't see,' said the Caterpillar.

R "Mi dispiace, signore, ma non posso spiegarvi," disse Alice "perché io non sono più io; capisce?"

"No" disse il Bruco

M "Temo di non potermi spiegare, signore" disse Alice "perché non sono io."

"Non capisco" disse il Bruco.

G "Vede, signore, non si può spiegare ciò che non si conosce" rispose Alice, "e io non mi conosco più, mi capisce?"

"Non capisco" replicò il Bruco.

FR [. . .] "si vous voyez ce que je veux dire"

"Non, je ne vois pas ce que vous voulez dire"

SP [. . .] "pues no soy la que era, ¿ ve, usted?"

"¡No veo nada!", dijo la Oruga

(18) AAW, V, 71 'Oh, I'm not particular as to size,' Alice hastily replied; 'only one doesn't like changing so often, you know.'

'I don't know,' said the Caterpillar.

R "Della statura non m'importa" rispose in fretta Alice.

"Ma non è piacevole cambiarla troppo spesso."

"Può darsi" disse il Bruco

M "Oh, non è che ci tenga molto" si affrettò a rispondere Alice; "è solo che non fa piacere continuare a cambiare così spesso, lei lo sa."

"No, non lo so" disse il Bruco.

¹⁶ *You see* and *you know* are not equivalent: the first is much less frequent, as a discourse marker, both in oral conversation and in Carroll's books. Here I do not distinguish between them for reasons of space, but I wish to insert example (17) before example (18) also because I want to stress that there is a crescendo in the embarrassment of Alice and in the irritation of the Caterpillar between the occurrence of *you see* and that of *you know*.

- G "Oh, non ci tengo molto alla statura" rispose prontamente Alice; "è solo che non mi fa piacere continuare a cambiare così spesso, capisce?"
"Io non capisco proprio" replicò il Bruco.
- FR [. . .] "voyez-vous bien"
"Non, je ne vois pas bien"
- SP [. . .] "¿no cree?"
"No creo nada, repuso la Oruga."

According to some interpreters the Caterpillar decodes *you know* as '(do) you know it?' and *you see* as '(do) you see it?', where *it* is an anaphoric proform standing for the preceding proposition, while Alice uses them as "idioms", as "phatic connectives" (see Bazzanella 1990) without thinking of the meaning of the verbs *to see*, *to know* they contain.

Let's quote what Heath (1974, 47) comments about (18):

Still preoccupied with her identity problem, Alice again misplaces the emphasis of the question (fallacy of accent), so that a conventionally worded demand to know what she is talking about is literally construed as an injunction to self-analysis. Since she has not even explained yet that the changes in question are changes of size, the Caterpillar, in turn, is quite justified in taking *her* idiom literally, and contradicting it.

Actually the Caterpillar's answers are peculiar: it would be more normal if it said *No, I don't*. It takes *you see*, *you know* and turns them into the negative and such answers are not ambiguous as Alice's *you know*, *you see* can be. *I don't see*, *I don't know* can be interpreted only as VP + 0, as NCA (Null Complement Anaphora) with deletion of *it*. Even though the Caterpillar looks like a philosopher and an affirmation of *docta ignorantia* ([I know that] I do not know) would suit it, yet the contexts of (17) and (18) do not allow an absolute use of the verb *to know*, and exclude a use of *to see* similar to the one we find in *I have two eyes and I see*.

In the Caterpillar's answers the personal pronoun *I* assumes a great salience, greater than in *No, I don't*; if we try to read aloud these answers, we are obliged to stress these pronouns, and this adds value to Heath's remark: Carroll depicts a Caterpillar annoyed by Alice's pervasive use of *I, myself* and decided to oppose its own ego to hers.

Apart from this psychological motivation, is there some linguistic reason why the Caterpillar answers in that way? I think that if we try to figure out the intonation in which Alice – if she were truly speaking with the Caterpillar – utters *you know*, we can get some help, while bearing in mind that punctuation markers (or their absence) are only a very partial guide to the intonation. We can guess that is not a rising intonation, because *you see*, *you know* are not followed by question marks. If it is a falling one, we can't ignore what Schiffrin says (1987, 291, 293) «rising *y'know* reflect less certainty about shared knowledge than falling *y'know*».

Manili (1988, 196, 197, 202), studying Italian *sai, sa* in similar oral contexts, says that as a discourse marker it conveys the speakers' concern about *tenability*

(instead of *availability*, as Schiffrin maintains) of what they assert and, according to Manili, when *sai*, *sa* are placed in final position, followed by a suspensive pause, «it is because the speaker realises that the tenability of his/her affirmation is questionable».

In the light of these discourse analysis studies, the answer of the Caterpillar might sound like a sharp dissociation from Alice's assumption that they share some knowledge, namely that *one doesn't like changing so often*. Actually Alice and the Caterpillar had already discussed on this very point¹⁷:

- (19) AAW, V, 66 [. . .] 'and being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing.' 'It isn't,' said the Caterpillar. 'Well, perhaps you haven't found it so yet,' said Alice; 'but when you have to turn into a chrysalis – you will some day, you know – and then after that into a butterfly, I should think you'll feel it a little queer, won't you?' 'Not a bit,' said the Caterpillar.

And since the Caterpillar clearly expressed its opinion, we ought not to be surprised that, when Alice insists on this topic, it stresses its position with a sharp negation and with italicised *don't*.

What happens in the translations of the double reading present in Alice's *you see, you know* and of the single meaning of the Caterpillar's answers? The three Italian translators in one way or in another betray the original. In her convincing essay, Manili (1988) shows that *you know* and Italian *sai, sa* overlap almost completely: therefore M, G and R could have translated *you know* in (18) with *sa* and the Caterpillar's answer with *Non lo so* or, even better, *No, non lo so*, to convey how annoyed it is by Alice's stubbornness on this point¹⁸. In the French translation the *you see* of Alice in (17) is completed and has only one reading, while the Caterpillar's answer becomes decidedly pedantic, though we can say it fits the character. The French translation of (18) is very good. The Spanish translator decides that in (17) and (18) we have rising *you see, you know*; he also completes the answers with *nada* and omits, as the Italian translators do, the pronoun of first person, a pronoun that, as I have tried to show, is not so negligible. In Spanish and in Italian you have to use personal pronouns when you want to create a contrast and the Caterpillar means to distinguish what *it* knows from what *Alice* assumes it knows.

4. And. *Concluding without omissions?*

As an ellipses hunter I am very sensitive to the use of *and, but, or*, because they generally provoke ellipses (see Lang 1977). In the Alice books there is a remarkable quantitative and qualitative use of initial *and* (covering a large range

¹⁷ In example (19) we find another occurrence of *you know* with focussing function.

¹⁸ In Italian it is necessary to express explicitly the pronoun *lo* (= it) because generally Italian pronominalises where English has ellipsis of NP object in VP and above all because *non so* in Italian has a different discourse function, as pointed out by Bazzanella (1984, 45). *Non so* followed by a pause signals uncertainty in the locutor, while the Caterpillar is very determined.

of functions¹⁹) in connection with punctuation marks such as inverted commas, round parentheses, dashes, semicolon and colon. These initial *ands*, if not more numerous than the *ands* in truly coordinate contexts (X and Y), are at least more noticeable. They do not cause ellipses because, using Halliday and Hasan's definition, they are *additive internal conjunctions*, which rather than linking facts, link dialogue and narrative, moments within the communication process.

Halliday and Hasan also remark (1976, 233) «The 'and' relation is felt to be structural and not cohesive, at least by mature speakers. [. . .] However it is a fact that the word *and* is used cohesively, to link one sentence to another, and not only by children».

We may wonder why Carroll used so often additive internal *and*. He wanted, maybe, to imitate children's way of narrating. It might also be that Carroll chose the less obtrusive conjunction because he didn't want to maintain really separated what Alice thinks from what she actually says and sometimes from what Carroll/the narrator thinks of what she says.

Inverted commas are diligently opened and closed, as well as parentheses and dashes, but these initial *ands* glue together different textual levels. In the following examples (20), (21) and (22) we find, for instance, the uses that in note 19 were listed respectively as 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3. In example (1), in the last sentence, we have a 2.1 use of *and*.

(20) AAW, VIII, 106 Alice was rather doubtful whether she ought not to lie down on her face like the three gardeners, but she could not remember ever having heard of such a rule at processions; 'and besides, what would be the use of a procession,' thought she, 'if people had all to lie down upon their faces, so that they couldn't see it?'. So she stood still where she was, and waited.

R [. . .] una simile abitudine di fronte ai cortei reali.
 "D'altra parte, a che cosa servirebbe un corteo," pensò "se la gente deve buttarsi a pancia a terra e non può vedere niente?" Perciò rimase in piedi e aspettò.

M [. . .] ma non le parve di aver mai inteso parlare di una legge simile per i cortei; "e poi, a che servirebbe un corteo" pensò "se tutti si dovessero mettere faccia a terra, in modo da non vederlo più?" Così rimase ritta dov'era, e attese.

G [. . .] e poiché non ricordava di aver mai sentito parlare di una regola simile per i cortei, "tra l'altro, a cosa serve un corteo" pensava, "se la gente si butta a terra a faccia in giù e non lo può vedere?" decise di restarsene lì, in piedi, e di aspettare.

Fr "Du reste, se dit-elle, à quoi pourrait bien servir un cortège [. . .]"

SP "Yademás", pensé, "¿de que serviría un cortejo si todos tuviesen que echarse boca abajo en el suelo sin poder ver nada?"

¹⁹ In *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary* (1987) under the entry AND at point 2. we read «*And* is used to introduce statements in spoken or informal English in the following ways: 2.1 at the beginning of a sentence in order to introduce something else that you want to say 2.2 to interrupt yourself in order to make a comment on what you are saying 2.3 to introduce a question which relates directly to what someone else has just said». These uses are arranged according to their frequency in Birmingham University Language Database.

- (21) AAW, III, 45 ‘Why,’ said the Dodo, ‘the best way to explain it is to do it.’ (And, as you might like to try the thing yourself, some winter day, I will tell you how the Dodo managed it.)
- R (Vi ripeterò tutto quello che fece il Dodo perché so che potrebbe piacere anche a voi, in uno di questi giorni d’inverno, di provare la *corsa confusa*.)
- M (E nel caso che voleste provarci anche voi, in una giornata d’inverno, vi descriverò l’organizzazione del Dodo.)
- G (E, nel caso vi venga voglia di provare questo gioco, qualche sera d’inverno, vi racconterò cosa fece il Dodo.)
- FR (Et, comme vous pourriez avoir envie [. . .])
- SP (Y como probablemente habrá entre vosotros quien también quiera hacerlo, algún día de invierno, os voy a contar cómo se las arreglo el Dodo)
- (22) TLG, VI, 276–277 ‘[. . .] To “*gymble*” is to make hole like a gimblet.’
‘And “*the wabe*” is the grass-plot round a sundial I suppose?’ said Alice, surprised at her own ingenuity.

Translators, as can be seen from the translations listed in (20), often omit initial *ands* or translate with more ‘adult’ conjunctions (M is a happy exception and generally respects all Carroll’s *ands*).

An author like Carroll is too linguistically aware to use such an amount of initial *ands* without the forementioned ‘mimetic and gluing’ purpose in mind or to use italics without a good reason: sensitive translators cannot neglect these minor signals nor should they try filling what Carroll left empty.

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