

## ***Mind Style in Translation. Emma Donoghue’s “Room” in Italian***

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### **Keywords**

Mind style, figurative speech, literary translation, reader’s interpretation

### **Abstract**

This study investigates the translation of Emma Donoghue’s 2010 novel *Room* into Italian to verify what types of translation strategies were used to overcome the difficulties this text poses in terms of grammar, vocabulary, figurative speech and interactional behaviour. The contrastive analysis shows that, by and large, the Italian translator attempted to compensate for the loss of the five-year-old main character’s (Jack’s) peculiar personifications and other linguistic idiosyncrasies by adopting an approach that is both source- and target-oriented. Yet, it is argued that the translation process has resulted in a TT that is less stylistically deviant than the ST. Consequently, Jack’s mind style in the Italian translation is likely to be perceived as exceptional but less unusual than in the original version.

### **1. Introduction**

In 2017, I published a paper investigating how the concept of mind style is conveyed via several narrative strategies in Emma Donoghue’s 2010 novel *Room* (Dore 2017). The fascination of this novel lies in the fact that it was partly inspired by the 2008 Fritzl case in Austria. Briefly, Josef Fritzl held his daughter Elisabeth in captivity for 24 years and repeatedly raped and abused her. As a result, she gave birth to seven children, some of whom died or were held with their mother.

*Room* has been shortlisted for several literary prizes (Orange Prize, Man Booker Prize, etc.) and has been given numerous honours and awards. Its film adaptation (*Room*, Lenny Abrahamson, 2015) won Brie Larson (starring as Joy ‘Ma’ Newsome) the Academy Award for Best Actress in 2015. The main character is Jack, the five-year old child born out of the repeated sexual assaults perpetrated by Old Nick on his mother, who was kidnapped and held for seven years until she and Jack managed to escape. Jack and ‘Ma’ are held in a soundproof shed (hence, the title *Room*) in the backyard of Old Nick’s house. Before Jack, Ma had already delivered a stillborn baby girl, whose body was buried in the garden. This and the other dreary details of Ma’s years in captivity are told through Jack’s first-person narration. His monologue includes his thoughts, the conversations he has with his mother and with other characters after escaping captivity. As I already demonstrated, Jack’s cognitive development is affected by his limited access to knowledge of the world and its mechanisms (Dore 2017: 62). From a linguistic standpoint, he makes a significant number of grammatical mistakes when speaking and thinking, which are only in part consistent with his age. Conversely, he is able to use unusually sophisticated vocabulary he has learnt from TV programmes, children’s books and other novels Ma manages to obtain from Old Nick. What is most striking about Jack is that, on the one hand, he is able to come up with extremely creative metaphors but, on the other, when he leaves the shed, Jack lacks sufficient knowledge of the world and broad enough semantic representations (Norbury 2005: 384) to make sense of what happens around him. Consequently, I argued that Donoghue makes use of narrative strategies to create and convey Jack’s mind style (Fowler 1977: 76), which is unusual but at the same time convincing as it shows the workings of a mind partly affected by traumatic experiences and an abnormal upbringing (Dore 2017).

From a translation standpoint, many of these language-specific features pose challenges that are worth examining. Hence, here I adopt a descriptive translation studies approach (Toury 1995) and concentrate on a comparative analysis of the English original (henceforth, source text, ST) and Italian translation (henceforth, target text, TT) to verify what types of translation strategies have been used to overcome these issues. Also, I question what possible consequences such strategies may have in the target reader’s perception and interpretation of Jack’s mind style and the fictional world he inhabits.

## 2. (Unusual) Mind style in translation

As a field of enquiry, stylistics seeks to link linguistic description to literary appreciation. As Mastropierro (2017: 8) puts it: “[s]tudying the linguistic form helps to explain why we perceive the text in a given way and offers an

observable justification for our readerly experience, which might otherwise remain unexplained”. To this end, over the years, stylistics has developed some tools to speculate on how the use of language in (mainly) literary texts can influence the reader’s interpretation. These tools include the notion of ‘foregrounding’, which postulates that some linguistic features become prominent in the text because they are stylistically deviant (Leech and Short 2007: 28). In addition, in 1977, Fowler (1977: 103) first conceptualised the notion of ‘mind style’ by defining it as “any distinctive linguistic representation of an individual mind self”. Drawing upon this, Leech and Short’s (2007) seminal work *Style in Fiction* provides a sound understanding of the way the mind style of authors, narrators and characters works, as well as other connected phenomena, “both in terms of relevant linguistic patterns and their interpretation, and in terms of the place of ‘fictional minds’” (Semino 2007: 153–154).

Along with them, many other scholars in narratology and stylistics have concentrated on how mind style is presented in fiction, especially when dealing with the use of more or less unusual cognitive mechanisms of apprehending or conceptualising the world (e.g. Semino and Swindlehurst 1996; McIntyre 2005; Caracciolo 2014; Semino 2014). This approach can contribute to the understanding of our own mental functioning (Margolin 2003: 278). In other words, by reading about unorthodox views of the world, we can better grasp our own way of reasoning or at least refresh our understanding of ‘normality’ (Semino 2011: 420). In this light, I have attempted to contribute to the ongoing discussion on the representation and perception of unusual mind style by focusing on the narrative strategies that Emma Donoghue exploited to convey Jack’s peculiar mind style in her novel *Room*. In particular, I have argued that, on the one hand, Donoghue skilfully manages to create a character that is credible, as Jack displays linguistic patterns that can be viewed as typical during language acquisition (e.g. overregularization of nouns, verbs and adjectives, coining new words, etc.). On the other hand, the analysis of his linguistic choices and recurrent patterns in terms of grammar, vocabulary, figurative speech and interactional behaviour can contribute to understanding his cognitive development and unusual mind style as a child who has lived through the trauma of being born and kept in captivity for five years (Dore 2017: 72).

Research on the translation of mind style is scant and, although laudable exceptions can be found (e.g. van Leuven-Zwart 1989, 1990; Boase-Beier 2004; Tement 2017; Dorst 2019), much more may certainly be done. Drawing on Semino and Swindlehurst’s (1996) study on Bromden’s metaphorical mind style in Ken Kesey’s *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, Dorst (2019) has recently investigated the strategies used in the Dutch version of this novel. Ken Kesey uses first-person narration to recount the events in a fictional world where Bromden

and the other characters act and interact. Bromden's worldview is conveyed via conventional conceptual metaphors<sup>1</sup> that are creatively elaborated and extended, characterising his mind style as highly deviant. Dorst's comparative analysis shows that the Dutch translator often sacrificed the use of Bromden's conventional and novel metaphors for the sake of linguistic idiomaticity. As a result, the main character's mind style appears less marked and 'deviant' than in the original (ibid. 886-887). As she rightly contends: "Bromden's mind style is meant to be jarring and disturbing, so it should not be normalised at the linguistic level, the very level at which this mind style is created" (ibid. 887).

In a similar vein, in this paper I question how Jack's mind style, which can be described as unusual, or even unorthodox, but not as 'deviant' as Bromden's, has been transferred into Italian. However, I not only look at metaphors but also consider other narrative strategies that Emma Donoghue uses to portray Jack, including his lexical choices, grammatical structures and figurative language, which is expressed through personification, metaphor and idiomatic expressions.

### 3. Data analysis

The following subsections are based on a detailed comparative analysis of Emma Donoghue's 2010 novel *Room* (henceforth, Donoghue 2010) and its Italian translation, which was first published by Mondadori in the same year as *Stanza, letto, armadio, specchio* (Room, bed, wardrobe, mirror) and translated by Chiara Spallino Rocca. Interestingly, after the release of the homonymous film *Room* (Lenny Abrahamson, 2015) and its international success, the Italian translation was repackaged and relaunched in 2016 with a new cover in the "Best sellers" series by the same publisher. In this new edition, the original English title is retained and the Italian title becomes a subtitle, i.e. ROOM. *Stanza, letto, armadio, specchio* (ROOM. Room, bed, wardrobe, mirror; see Figure 1.1). For my analysis, I have used the 2016 version of the Italian translation (henceforth, Donoghue 2016). As can be noted, the subtitle contains some items from the room where Jack is kept, which he also personifies (see Subsection 3.3 below). Yet, they are written in the subtitle in lower case; hence, their relevance within the fictional world can probably only be understood by reading the whole novel.

The analysis of the paratextual features falls beyond the scope of this study, but it can readily be noted from Figure 1 that the original cover (on the left-hand side) appears to foreground the room where most of the action takes

<sup>1</sup> 'Conceptual metaphors' have been described as the linguistic manifestation of a conceptual phenomenon that can be used as the basis for conventional or novel metaphorical expressions (see Lakoff and Johnson 1980).

place while the image of the child is blurred, somehow conveying a sense of uneasiness and mystery. Conversely, the first Italian cover (in the middle) features an almost smiling child against a plain, beige background, which probably conveys a more reassuring yet slightly misleading idea of what the book is about. The cover of the repackaged version features the two actors starring respectively as Joy ‘Ma’ Newsome (Brie Larson) and Jack Newsome (Jacob Tremblay). This image and the change in the Italian title are probably a marketing strategy that Mondadori adopted to make the text more appealing and recognisable to the Italian readership that watched the movie but did not know the novel itself.

Figure 1.1. The covers of Emma Donoghue’s *Room* in English and Italian



As mentioned above, this study draws on a previous analysis I carried out on the original English version of *Room* in which I discussed and demonstrated what foregrounding features Donoghue adopts to convey Jack’s unusual mind style, as they are likely to catch the reader’s attention and win their empathy (Caracciolo 2014; Dore 2017). After a preliminary close reading of the source and target texts, I retrieved all these linguistic features from both datasets and manually entered them into a table in a Word document. Due to space limitations, I cannot discuss all the instances in both datasets at length, but I will provide comparative tables and a reasoned analysis of a selected number of excerpts, which will hopefully suffice to elucidate my point.

### 3.1 Jack’s unusual mind style and its Italian translation

Caracciolo (2014: 185) describes Jack in *Room* as a ‘strange enough’ character since his mental processes are neither overly familiar nor totally unintelligible. Drawing on this, what I aimed to demonstrate in my previous

essay is that, on the one hand, Jack displays those typical language formation patterns that fall into what scholars have defined as ‘overregularization’, or the extension of regular grammatical patterns to irregular words (Marcus *et al.* 1992: 1). For instance (see Table 1), Jack consistently overregularizes irregular verbs such as ‘knowed’ for ‘known’, ‘cutted’ for ‘cut’, ‘bited’ for ‘bit’, etc. Although, on several occasions, Ma tries to correct Jack (Donoghue 2010: 47, 216, and *passim*), her suggestions are unheeded, which is also consistent with some scientists’ findings on first language acquisition (Brown *et al.* 2014: 209, Marcus *et al.* 1992: 63, 68). In addition, Jack also overregularizes nouns (“persons” for ‘people’, Donoghue 2010: 52 and *passim*), adjectives (“wetted” instead of ‘wet’, *ibid.* 211) and comparatives (“What if the Room gets colder and colderer”, *ibid.* 86; “Now I’m even scareder”, *ibid.* 115; “who gets more fasterer”, *ibid.* 126, etc). What is more, Jack is able to coin words by playing the game Jack and Ma call “word sandwiches” or “word salad” (e.g. “ginormous” is made of “gigantic” plus “enormous”, *ibid.* 205; “scave” that derives from “scaredy” and “brave”, *ibid.* 144, *ibid.* 8, 158 and *passim*, etc.). He also metonymically uses nouns as verbs (“She Velcros my left shoe”, *ibid.* 347). Nerlich *et al.* (1999: 369–372) define this process as ‘creative metonymical shrinking’ because children try to communicate ideas with the least verbal effort (see also Dore 2017: 64).

On the other hand, there are a number of linguistic patterns that mark Jack’s peculiar linguistic and cognitive development as different from ‘normal’ children (see Table 1 in the ST column). For example, Jack displays striking patterns of ‘underlexicalization’ and ‘overlexicalization’ (Fowler 1986: 152). This means that Jack’s vocabulary is more limited than what is expected from a five-year old. For instance, his lack of words for simple concepts, such as a flying mosquito, compels him to use onomatopoeic sounds like “nnnnng nnnng nnnng” (Donoghue 2010: 10). By the same token, he uses “*whoo whoo whoo*” to say he is breathing fast after physical exercise (*ibid.* 19) and “*wee-ahhh wee-ahhh wee-ahhh*” to describe police sirens (*ibid.* 42). When he is sleeping in his wardrobe, he realises that the shed door opens and closes, but uses respectively “*beep beep*” and “*thump*” to describe it (*ibid.* 44 and *passim*). Yet Jack’s lack of basic vocabulary clashes with his overlexicalization in other fields, such as Art, Religion, Biology, Pop Music, etc. (Dore 2017: 64–65).

With these considerations in mind, I have examined the Italian version to verify how the translator dealt with the challenges that these language-specific patterns pose in translation. Table 1 summarises the narrative strategies discussed above, and the translation strategies used in the TT, along with some of the most recurrent examples. The instances of linguistically atypical patterns in Italian have been underlined while the words in italics are

reported as having been found in both datasets. As can be noted, only some of the linguistically deviant patterns in the ST have been transferred into Italian. As far as overregularization is concerned, the translator has applied a similar pattern that can be found in first language acquisition in Italian. Verbs such as “prendere” (take, bring) and “comprendere” (understand) have irregular past participles, respectively “preso” and “compreso”. However, the Italian translator applied a typical overregularization pattern (respectively “prenduto” and “comprenduto”) since in Italian regular verbs ending in ‘-ere’ normally have a participle that ends in ‘-uto’ (e.g. “scadere” becomes “scaduto”, expire/expired; “vendere” become “venduto”, sell/sold). Similarly, “my strong” (meaning ‘my strength’) has been transferred as “fortitudine” instead of ‘forza’, which again can be seen a sort of overregularization of a noun according to the pattern of many Italian words ending in -ine (e.g. “abitudine”, habit; “solitudine”, solitude, etc.).

These are laudable efforts on the translator’s part to retain those linguistic peculiarities that mark Jack’s cognitive and linguistic development in the ST as ‘strange enough’. However, some other instances have been neutralised, probably because it may simply have been impossible to retain them. For example, ‘people’ in English is the irregular plural for ‘person’ (even if ‘persons’ can be used to refer to groups of a specific or general number<sup>2</sup>), but in Italian the word ‘persona’ has a regular plural that is ‘persone’; consequently, this instance is irremediably lost in translation. Similarly, the Italian word for the infinitive ‘wet’ is ‘bagnare’ and its participle and consequently the adjective is ‘bagnato’, which is regular and therefore overregularization cannot apply here. In order to compensate the overregularization of the comparative adjective “colder and colderer”, the Italian translator has repeated the equivalent adjective “fredda” twice and modified the second instance by adding its superlative stem –‘issima’ (“fredda freddissima”). She has also creatively manipulated the Italian word ‘spaventato’ (scared) by adding the prefix ‘super’ and the superlative suffix ‘issimo’ to convey Jack’s exaggerated “scareder”, while “more fasterer” has been naturalised into standard Italian (“chi ne trova di più in meno tempo”, lit. who finds more in less time). Jack’s coining new words proved to be particularly challenging and only “scave” (scaredy+brave) was transferred creatively as “spavoso” (spaventato+coraggioso), which conveys the same idea as the ST. The noun “Velcro” becomes a verb in Jack’s world and language, but in the Italian translation remains a noun (“Mi allaccia la scarpa sinistra col Velcro”, lit. She ties by shoes using Velcro).

<sup>2</sup> See ‘people vs persons’: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/people-vs-persons> (accessed: 02/11/2021)

Table 1. Jack's (unusual) linguistic patterns in English and Italian

Pattern	ST	TT
overregularization	1. "brung" (brought); 2. knowed (known); 3. cutted (cut); 4. bited (bit); 5. my strong (strength); 6. persons (people); 7. wettet (wet); 8. "What if the Room gets colder and colderer"; 9. "Now I'm even scarerer"; 10. "who gets more fasterer"	1. <u>Prenduto</u> ; 2. <u>comprenduto</u> ; 3. tagliato; 4. morso; 5. <u>fortitudine</u> ; 6. persone; 7. bagnato; 8. «E se la Stanza diventa <u>fredda freddissima?</u> »; 9. «Adesso sono io a essere <u>superspaventatissimo!</u> »; 10. «chi ne trova di più in meno tempo»
Coining new words	11. ginormous (gigantic+enormous); 12. scave (scaredy+brave); 13. "She Velcros my left shoe"	11. Enorme; 12. <u>spavoso</u> (spaventato+coraggioso); 13. «Mi allaccia la scarpa sinistra col velcro»
underlexicalization	14. <i>nnnng nnnng nnnng</i> (for flying mosquito); 15. <i>whoo whoo</i> (breathing fast); 16. <i>weee-ahhh weee-ahhh weee-ahhh</i> (police sirens); 17. <i>beep beep</i> (dialling a code on the door keypad); 18. " <i>thump</i> " (door opens and closes); 19. <i>dung dung dung</i> (chest bumping); 20. <i>grrrrrrrr</i> (wheels turning); 21. <i>wab wab wab</i> (vacuum cleaner)	14. <i>zzz zzz zzz</i> ; 15. <i>pant, pant, pant</i> ; 16. <i>ninonino ninohhh</i> ; 17. <i>bip bip</i> ; 18. <i>bum</i> ; 19. il cuore mi fa <i>bum bum</i> nel petto; 20. <i>grrrrrr, grrrr</i> ; 21. <i>whhhuum, whhhuum</i>
overlexicalization	22. omnivores; 23. <i>tachycardia</i> ; 24. <i>re-experiencing</i> ; 25. <i>cognitive distortions</i>	22. onnivori; 23. <i>tachycardia</i> ; 24. <i>re-elaborazione</i> ; 25. <i>distorsioni cognitive</i>

Although Jack's underlexicalization is expressed in various ways, including metaphor (see Subsection 3.2 below), here I consider all the instances that feature onomatopoeic sounds. Onomatopoeia and other types of sound symbolism may be the most striking types of linguistic iconicity. As Jean Boase-Beier (2004: 101-102) explains, the term 'iconicity' derives from Peirce's (1960: 157) description of a sign that represents its object "mainly by its similarity" to what it represents. Its structure echoes in sound or shape what they stand for. Since the sound word is not arbitrary, but rather the result of a conventionalized representation of an actual sound, they are different in different languages (ibid.). Hence, the Italian translator transferred all the sound words Jack uses via their Italian iconic counterparts. One notable ex-



ception is “grrrrrrrrr” for wheels turning, which seems novel and therefore the translator may have found it adequate to retain in its original form.

Lastly, Jack’s overlexicalization contributes to shape Jack’s unusual mind style. Donoghue gives Jack credibility in terms of fictional characterisation from the very beginning. In the first chapters of the book, Jack informs us that Ma and he play memory games. For instance, they learn difficult words from milk cartons (Donoghue 2010: 41) or play Memory and Parrots, which involve repeating everything that is said on TV or in the books they read (ibid. 53). It is therefore not surprising that in his monologue, Jack can remember words he hears during his mother’s conversation with Dr. Clay once they escape imprisonment (e.g. “*tachycardia*”, “*re-experiencing*”, “*cognitive distortions*”). Most strikingly though, Jack can make use of complex words such as “omnivorous” during his conversation with adults so that he is perceived as different at the character-character level, and probably also as such by the reader (Dore 2017: 65). All these items have not posed great challenges and the translator has transferred them directly by using their technical terms in Italian, as shown in Table 1.

### 3.2 Metaphor

Metaphors are normally, but not always, based on basic meanings that are more concrete (a.k.a. source domain) and used to evoke more abstract ones (a.k.a. target domain; see Pragglejaz 2007: 3). In this study, the term ‘metaphor’ is used as an umbrella term to include various forms of metaphorical creations in language, including personification, metonymy and similes. Personification is dealt with in a separate subsection, while here I discuss metaphors and similes in translation.

Kövecses (2005: 106–111) analysed metaphors and their variations at the individual level and found that human beings use them in distinctive ways. He contends that individuals are likely to use metaphorical expressions according to their ‘personal history’, meaning the way they perceive the external world, their personal experiences in life and upbringing (ibid. 242–243). To elucidate his point, Kövecses gives the example of a Hungarian electrical engineer who expresses his views on European political issues (target domain) in terms of electric circuitry (source domain) (ibid. 244–246). In *Room*, Jack’s monologue includes a set of novel metaphors (and similes) that are revealing of his personal history and mind style (e.g. “Houses are like lots of Rooms stuck together”; Donoghue 2010: 52). In the two examples that follow, I concentrate on Jack’s metaphorical expressions and their translation in Italian

(which have been underlined). The child looks through the skylight on the roof of the shed and says to himself:

- (1) God's yellow face isn't coming out today, Ma says he's having trouble squeezing through the snow (Donoghue 2010: 9).

IT: La faccia di Dio oggi non appare, Ma' dice che la luce fa fatica a filtrare attraverso la neve (Donoghue 2016: 16) [Gloss: God's face is not coming out today, Ma' says light struggles to filter through the snow.]

- (2) It's dark in Skylight now, I hope God will put his silver face in (Donoghue 2010: 79)

IT: Adesso Lucernario è buio, spero che Dio lo illumini con la faccia d'argento della luna (Donoghue 2016: 75) [Gloss: Now Skylight is dark, I hope God will light it up with the silver face of the moon.]

In (1), the metaphor Jack employs is a basic projection of one source domain (God's yellow face) into a target one (the Sun). In (2), the moon is described in terms of God's silver face. As I mentioned earlier, Jack's mind style is characterised by underlexicalization in some fields that would be expected to be fully acquired by the age of five, as in this case. Although the metaphor appears very evocative, 'God's yellow/silver face' seems to indicate Jack's lack of basic vocabulary. Interestingly though, Jack projects a more concrete domain into a more abstract one. A possible explanation is that Jack's mother's religious imprinting has deeply influenced his way of seeing the world (Dore 2017: 69). As far as the TT is concerned, in (1) the original metaphor is retained, but the word "yellow" is removed and the metaphorical meaning made more explicit in the second part of the sentence. While in the ST Ma says that "he[God]'s having trouble squeezing through the snow", in the TT Ma tells Jack that light struggles to filter through the snow ("la luce fa fatica a filtrare attraverso la neve").

In (2), the TT is even more explicit as the target domain (the Moon) is no longer expressed via the source domain ("God's silver face"). In Italian, God is an indirect agent that can make the silver face of the moon light up the skylight ("Dio lo illumini con la faccia d'argento della luna"). It could be argued that Jack's metaphorical way of conceiving the sun and the moon is still peculiar, but the TT again appears less effective in conveying Jack's unusual mind style.

Another example of a striking metaphor can be found in Chapter 2. Ma decides to tell Jack why they live in a room and how Old Nick kidnapped her. She tells Jack about the stillborn baby and the physical (but not sexual) violence she has had to endure. Jack expresses his feelings as follows:

- (3) Old Nick's a stinking swiping zombie robber (Donoghue 2010: 120).  
 IT: Old Nick è uno zombie puzzolente, un ladrone arraffatutto (Donoghue 2016: 108) [Gloss: Old Nick is a stinking zombie, a big robber who nicks everything.]

This creative use of language is consistent with Kövecses's (2005: 242–243) idea of personal history. Jack uses all his knowledge of dangerous and scary creatures (“stinking swiping zombie”) to describe Old Nick. He uses the word “robber” to fill the gap in his lexicon to describe Old Nick as a kidnapper (cf. Nerlich *et al.* 1999: 365). The Italian translation successfully transfers the ST's metaphor; the word “swiping” (which matches the kidnapping context) has been translated with an equally informal term “arraffatutto” (someone who nicks everything). Furthermore, the word “robber” is translated with “ladrone” which includes a suffix that negatively intensifies the image of a robber (lit. ‘ladro’). This kind of intensifying suffix is typical in child-like language and it aptly conveys Jack's lexicon and mind style.

Jack's most striking example of creative metaphoric expression in the ST is a simile. Once outside the shed, Jack ponders the continuous lack of time that adults seem to have in the real world. Jack struggles to come to terms with reality and the world around him. He reflects on various things he experiences:

- (4) In the world I notice persons are nearly always stressed and have no time (...) In Room me and Ma had the time for everything. I guess the time gets spread like butter over all the world, the roads and houses and playgrounds and stores, so there's only a little smear of time on each place, then everyone has to hurry on to the next bit (Donoghue 2010: 358).

IT: Vedo che nel mondo le persone sono quasi sempre stressate e non hanno mai tempo (...) Nella Stanza io e Ma' avevamo tempo per ogni cosa. Immagino che il tempo venga spalmato come il burro, su tutto il mondo, strade e case e giardinetti e negozi, così in ogni posto c'è soltanto uno strato sottile di tempo, e allora tutti devono correre verso il posto successivo (Donoghue 2016: 304) [Gloss: I see that in the world people are nearly always stressed and never have time (...) In Room me and Ma had the time for everything. I guess the time is spread like butter, over all the world, the roads and houses and playgrounds and stores, so there's only a little smear of time on each place, and then everyone must run to the next place.]

Jack's creative metaphor is based on entrenched correlations between two domains (Grady *et al.* 1999: 102). Since time passing is normally conceptual-

ised as a moving object (e.g. the time will come when...) or over a landscape (e.g. he stayed there a long time) (Lakoff 1993: 213-214), Jack's metaphorical expression can easily be interpreted as time that is passing and needs to be grabbed. Yet this metaphor appears novel because Jack sees the Earth as a piece of bread and time as butter that can be spread on it. This basic association is consistent with Jack's child-like mind that uses the concrete breakfast domain to explain an extremely abstract concept. Most importantly, this metaphor is particularly fitting as it can be connected to the fact that Jack has often suffered from hunger while in captivity. Thus, he seems to match the idea of having little time to having little food that needs to be snatched up quickly due to its scarcity (Dore 2017: 70). The Italian TT faithfully renders the ST, although the ending "the next bit" is translated as "il posto successivo" (the next place), which makes it more coherent with Jack's previous mention of roads, houses etc. However, it makes it less consistent with the protagonist's child-like mind.

### 3.3 Personification

Jack's way of experiencing the fictional world he lives in, particularly when detained inside the soundproof shed, has been demonstrated to have been enhanced using personification (Caracciolo 2014: 186). I have further suggested that, to some extent, he personifies some items so that they can be his friends and playmates due to his constant need for interpersonal interaction (Dore 2017: 66). What appears even more striking is that almost all the items Jack plays with are masculine (e.g. Jeep, Remote, Fort, etc.) while most of the items he finds comfort in are feminine (e.g. Blanket, Duvet, Rocker, Wardrobe, etc.) (ibid. 68). Therefore, it is quite interesting to investigate how such personifications have been dealt with in translation. Table 2 offers a classification of Jack's personifications in the ST and TT. The items in the ST are numbered from 1 to 64 and categorised according to their gender, masculine and feminine, which is determined by the personal pronouns (he or she) Jacks assigns to them during his monologues and conversations with Ma or other characters. Almost all these items are foregrounded via non-standard capitalisation, except for "octopus" (22) and "mosquito" (23), which only appear once in the text. Jack probably assigns them a gender because they are animate creatures. However, there is a group of personified items whose gender could not be established and are therefore subsumed under the "Unidentified" category. I have not included the games Jack and Ma play together as they are not instances of personification as such (play Corpse, i.e. lying still; Simon Says; Track for physical exercise, etc.). The items in bold in the

Table are those whose gender has changed during the translation process. For the sake of clarity, the numbers of the items in the TT column correspond to those in the ST column.

Considering that Italian is a romance language based on default gender attribution applied to animate and inanimate objects and does not include a neutral option, most of the items in the ST have been transferred using their default counterparts. Following Toury (2004: 208), in translation we find ‘obligatory shifts’ (which are linguistically motivated), and ‘non-obligatory shifts’, which may depend on subjective factors such as the translator’s literary, ideological or cultural considerations (see also Mastropierro 2017: 168). Here, most of the shifts can be seen as obligatory and the distinction between games and comfort items hypothesised in the ST cannot hold in the TT. While some playing items Jack categorises as masculine have been retained as such in Italian (e.g. “Fort”; “Eggsnake”, i.e. a snake made of egg shells; “Mouse”; “Remote”), others have inevitably become feminine. For instance, the word ‘Jeep’ in Italian is feminine because ‘car’ translates as the feminine word ‘macchina’ or ‘automobile’; similarly, ‘ball’ in Italian is feminine (‘palla’) and, consequently, “Beach Ball”, “Wordy Ball” and “Bouncy Ball” have become respectively “Palla da Spiaggia”, “Palla di Parole” and “Palla Rimbalzina”. One possible alternative could have been to use ‘pallone’, which is masculine in Italian. This non-obligatory option might have retained the masculine personification for ‘Ball’, even though the result would not have been idiomatic, but rather unusual and maybe more appropriate for Jack’s idiosyncratic mind style. The game Jack calls “Twang” is made of cereal box paper and rubber bands and takes its name from a metallic sound, like the strumming of a guitar string. The Italian translator has attempted to reproduce a similar onomatopoeic sound with the made-up word “Dleng” but has made it feminine since ‘box’ translates as the feminine word ‘scatola’. It is worth noticing that “Labyrinth” (made of recycled cardboard) and “Balloon”, which are two of the few games that Jack personifies as feminine, have become masculine in Italian. The same applies to some items in the “Unidentified” category that have become masculine (e.g. “College Ruled Pad”, “Backpack”, “Blue Crayon”), thus partly compensating for other losses.

The analysis of the translation of the feminine personifications that comfort Jack also shows a tendency to normalisation; only “Blanket” and “Plant” have remained feminine (respectively as “Coperta” and “Pianta”) while “Duvet”, “Wardrobe”, “Rocker” and, most importantly “Rug” (in which Ma wraps Jacks up to escape captivity) have been translated using their Italian counterparts, which are all masculine (i.e. “Piumone”, “Armadio”, “Dondolo” and “Tappeto”). Conversely, “octopus” and “mosquito”, which are masculine in

Jack's mind, have become feminine in Italian, respectively as “piovra” and “zanzara”, even if the former has a masculine alternative (“polpo”) that could have retained the originally intended gender.

Table 2. Personified items in *Room*, in English and Italian

Gender	Item – ST	Item – TT
Male	1. Comb; 2. (Bad) Tooth; 3. Melted Spoon; 4. Fort; 5. Eggsnake; 6. Watch; 7. (Silly) Penis; 8. Ruler; 9. Mouse; 10. Toothbrush; 11. Clothes Horse; 12. Remote; 13. Smooth Knife; 14. Bouncy Ball; 15. Pen; 16. Trash; 17. Beach Ball; 18. Wordy Ball; 19. Door; 20. Jeep; 21. octopus; 22. mosquito; 23. Twang; 24. Bunny; 25. Lamp	1. Pettine; 2. Dente (Cattivo); 3. Cucchiaino Fuso; 4. Forte; 5. Serpente di Uova; 6. Orologio; 7. (Stupido) Pene; 8. Righello; 9. Topo; 10. Spazzolino (da Denti); 11. Stendino; 12. Telecomando; 13. Coltello Liscio; 24. <b>Coniglio Antenna</b> ; 28. <b>Lucernario</b> ; 29. <b>Tappeto</b> ; 30. <b>Piumone</b> ; 31. <b>Dondolo</b> ; 32. <b>Armadio</b> ; 33. <b>Ragno</b> ; 34. <b>Labirinto</b> ; 35. <b>Tavolo</b> ; 36. <b>Letto</b> ; 37. <b>Scaffale</b> ; 38. <b>Frigorifero</b> ; 39. <b>Palloncino</b> ; 40. <b>Materasso</b> ; 43. <b>Tetto</b> ; 44. <b>Pavimento</b> ; 46. <b>Blocco a Righe</b> ; 47. <b>Lavandino</b> ; 48. <b>Gabinetto</b> ; 49. <b>Coltello Zigzag</b> ; 50. <b>Sotto Letto</b> ; 51. <b>Armadietto</b> ; 52. <b>Cassettone</b> ; 54. <b>Scolapiatti</b> ; 56. <b>Aspirapolvere</b> ; 58. <b>Termostato</b> ; 59. <b>Piattino</b> ; 62. <b>Zainetto</b> (di Dora); 63. <b>Piccolo Pastello Blu</b> ; 64. <b>Specchio</b>
Female	26. Blanket; 27. Plant; 28. Skylight; 29. Rug; 30. Duvet; 31. Rocker; 32. Wardrobe; 33. Spider; 34. Labyrinth; 35. Table; 36. Bed; 37. Book Shelf; 38. Refrigerator; 39. Balloon; 40. Mattress	14. <b>Pallina Rimbalsina</b> ; 15. <b>Penna</b> ; 16. <b>Pattumiera</b> ; 17. <b>Palla da Spiaggia</b> ; 18. <b>Palla di Parole</b> ; 19. <b>Porta</b> ; 20. <b>Jeep</b> ; 21. <b>piovra</b> ; 22. <b>zanzara</b> ; 23. <b>Dleng</b> ; 25. <b>Lampada</b> ; 26. Coperta; 27. Pianta; 41. <b>Parete di Porta</b> ; 42. <b>Parete di Letto</b> ; 45. <b>Vasca</b> ; 55. <b>Stanza</b> ; 53. <b>Spugna</b> ; 57. <b>Bottiglia di Succo di Prugne</b> ; 60. <b>Spatola</b> ; 61. <b>Astronave</b>
Unidentified	41. Door Wall; 42. Bed Wall; 43. Roof; 44. Floor; 45. Bath; 46. College Ruled Pad; 47. Sink; 48. Toilet; 49. Zigzag Knife; 50. Under Bed; 51. Cabinet; 52. Dresser; 53. Sponge; 54. Dish Rack; 55. Room; 56. Vacuum; 57. Prune Juice Bottle; 58. Thermostat; 59. Little Plate; 60. Spatula; 61. Spaceship; 62. (Dora's) Backpack; 63. Blue Crayon; 64. Mirror	

Clearly, personification in *Room* plays an important role in projecting a vivid image of Jack's life inside and outside the shed. It enhances the reader's perception of Jack's mind style and his unusual mental functioning. The findings resulting from the comparative examination of the two datasets are consistent with Dorst's (2019) study mentioned above. Here too, considerations about linguistic idiomaticity and fluency have prevailed over Donoghue's attempt to mark Jack's mind style as atypical and significantly influenced by the disturbing life conditions he has been forced to experience.

### 3.4 Idiomatic expressions

As shown so far, Jack can conceive novel conceptualisations expressed via metaphor, simile, personification, etc. Yet he also appears unable to process the meaning of entrenched metaphors that are embedded in idiomatic expressions when he engages in conversation with other people, including his mother, as the two examples below demonstrate:

- (5) [Ma and Jack talk about Old Nick]

“Is laid off like laying down?”

“No, it means he lost his job” says Ma.

I thought only things could get lost, like one of our pins from the six (Donoghue 2010: 93-94)

IT: «Cosa vuol dire licenziato?» «Vuol dire che ha perso il lavoro. E non è una buona notizia» dice Ma' a voce bassa.

Credevo che si perdevano solo certe cose, come le nostre puntine, che prima erano sei e ora sono cinque. (Donoghue 2016: 86) [Gloss: “What does dismissed mean?” “It means he lost his job. And it's not good news”. Ma' says it softly. I thought only some things could be lost, like our pins, which were five before but are five now.]

- (6) [Ma's brother Paul] clears his throat very noisily. “Just, it keeps hitting me.”

I don't see anything hitting him (Donoghue 2010: 266).

IT: «È solo che non mi sono ancora ripreso dal colpo.»

Non ho visto cosa l'ha colpito (Donoghue 2016: 227) [“It's just that I haven't recovered from the blow/shock”. I haven't seen anything hit him]

In (5) and (6), Jack questions or speculates on the literal meaning of the verbs used (respectively “lay”, “lose” and “hit”). He cannot go beyond this even when he is provided with a more transparent explanation. In the Italian translation the reference to the idiomatic expression ‘to be laid off’ (or ‘lay off someone’) is omitted and replaced with its meaning (“licenziato”, lit. dismissed) while the idiom “he lost his job” is directly transferred by its corresponding idiom in Italian “ha perso il lavoro”, which serves as a starting point for Jack’s following reflections on the fact that only things get lost. Interestingly though, in the TT, the translator modifies the text as “solo certe cose” (lit. only certain things). In this way, Jack’s line of reasoning changes, because the ST suggests that Jack thinks that only physical objects can be lost while the TT implies that Jack thinks some objects can be lost and others cannot. Furthermore, the TT contains some additional text (“«E non è una buona notizia» dice Ma’ a voce bassa”, lit. “And it’s not good news,” Ma’ says softly) that makes the implications of the idiomatic expression more explicit and, most importantly, gives the reader access to Jack’s perception of Ma’s feelings. In both cases, the Italian translation offers more interpretative clues to its readers, which have been left unsaid in the ST. Unlike (5), example (6) does not show any alterations of the text and the idiomatic expression is translated by means of an idiom with a similar meaning (“ripreso dal colpo”, lit. recovered from the blow/shock). The following text in the TT retains the same structure and Jack’s reflection is also translated literally with no further alterations.

It has been demonstrated that Jack’s limitations and inconsistencies are able to elicit the reader’s empathy towards Jack as a fictional character (Caracciolo 2014: 199; Dore 2017). Hence, a translation needs to highlight rather than naturalise such inconsistencies, so that the character’s mind style can emerge as disturbing and jarring (Dorst 2019: 887) as it appears in the original.

#### 4. Discussion and concluding remarks

The linguistic analysis of Jack’s mind style in *Room* has helped to detect those foregrounding features (including his use of grammar, lexis and most importantly, figurative language) of the ST that contribute to understanding the reader’s interpretation process. More importantly, an examination of the text highlights Jack’s underlexicalization and overlexicalization in some fields, his tendency to coin new words, his extensive use of personification and creative metaphors and his frequent inability to process the content of idiomatic expressions used by others. All these elements help to convey the



mind style of a child who has suffered an abnormal upbringing and lacks sufficient world knowledge. As a result, Jack is likely to be perceived as unusual, unorthodox or 'strange enough', by readers (Dore 2017).

Considering that many of these language-bound features pose translation challenges, this study has focused on their translation into Italian by Chiara Spallino Rocca. The comparative analysis of the two datasets has aimed to verify whether the ST readers' and the TT readers' interpretation may differ because of the translation challenges that the original text poses. Due to space limitations, I could only discuss a number of examples; yet they clearly show that some peculiarities in Jack's mind style are inevitably lost because of necessary changes in the Italian text. In particular, Jack's extensive use of personification for items he plays with (mainly masculine) or finds comfort in (mainly feminine) is largely lost. It could be argued that only a close reading of the text may help the reader to capture such subtleties, and yet, they may have a specific literary purpose (Leech and Short 2007: 40), as in this case, and need careful handling.

The Italian translator has mostly opted for idiomaticity and textual fluency, even when alternatives could be found (e.g. 'pallone' instead of 'palla' for 'ball'; 'polpo' instead of 'piovra' for 'octopus'). Nonetheless, the translator has attempted to compensate these losses by creatively manipulating the text when possible. For example, she has coined new words in Italian to transfer those in the ST and she has also aptly conveyed the iconicity of most of the instances of Jack's underlexicalization. Also, she has adopted a source-oriented approach and retained all references to foreign song titles (e.g. *Macarena*, *She'll Be Coming 'Round the Mountain*, *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, *Stormy Weather*, *Row, Row, Row Your Boat*, *Can't Get You Out of My Head*, *Let it snow*, *Winter Wonderland*; Donoghue 2016: 14-16) and lyrics that Jack says he has heard from his mother or that have been uttered by him (e.g. «*The other side of the mountain...*». «*The other side of the mountain*» continuo io. «*The other side of the mountain...*» «*Was all that he could see*», ibid. 90; "Canto: «*I will be king, diddle diddle, you can be queen*», ibid. 186). This certainly helps the reader to see Jack's mind as exceptional. In some other cases, the Italian translator has also adopted some target-oriented strategies, as in the example of the nursery rhyme *The House That Jack Built* (Donoghue 2010: 85), which in Italian has been replaced by a famous nursery-rhyme kind of song titled *Alla fiera dell'Est* by Angelo Branduardi (Donoghue 2016: 79-80). Similarly, she has used all the official translations for books and film titles (e.g. *The Count of Monte Cristo* as *Il conte di Monte Cristo*; *The Guardian* as *Quando ho aperto gli occhi*, etc.), apart from one title, *The Runaway Bunny*,

which does not have an official Italian translation and that she transferred as *Il coniglietto fuggitivo*.

All in all, it can be said that the Italian translator has managed to strike a balance and found creative solutions to translation challenges that could not be overcome. That said, Jack's mind style might be perceived as less unusual and the TT less stylistically deviant than the ST. This is partly shown by the fact that Caracciolo's (2014) analysis of many ST customer reviews of *Room* on the Amazon website revealed that many of them initially struggled to get used to Jack's idiosyncratic language and mind style. Conversely, the Italian reviews on Amazon.it (admittedly far fewer<sup>3</sup>) mostly mention the use of first-person narration that makes the reading experience more immersive (e.g. "Sembra veramente scritto da un bambino di cinque anni e l'immersione è veramente fortissima" [It really seems written by a child and the immersing experience is really strong]; Amazon.it – Customer, 11 March 2016). Only one customer refers to Jack's grammatical and lexical mistakes but considers them to be typical of a child ("Gli errori verbali e linguistici tipici di un bambino di 5 anni rendono poi il punto di vista di Jack straordinariamente vero e presente e dolce" [The verbal and linguistic mistakes are typical of a 5-year-old boy and make Jack's point of view extremely true, real and sweet], Cinzia, 21 March 2016).

As I mentioned earlier, this inductive analysis was carried out via a manual comparison of the material in the source and target texts. However, future research could be conducted using corpus-based tools, as demonstrated by several contributions in the literature (see Mahlberg 2010, Munday 2011; Mastropierro 2017, just to name a few), which could confirm or refute the present findings.

<sup>3</sup> Coracciolo (2014: 187) found 1,275 reviews of *Room* on Amazon.com in English; I found only 44 customer reviews in Italian on the Amazon.it website ([https://www.amazon.it/Room-Stanza-letto-armadio-specchio/product-reviews/8804661895/ref=cm\\_cr\\_arp\\_d\\_paging\\_btm\\_2?ie=UTF8&pageNumber=2&reviewerType=all\\_reviews](https://www.amazon.it/Room-Stanza-letto-armadio-specchio/product-reviews/8804661895/ref=cm_cr_arp_d_paging_btm_2?ie=UTF8&pageNumber=2&reviewerType=all_reviews); accessed: 02/11/2021).

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