

# **‘Whoopseysplunkers! How absolutely spiffing!’:1 Recapturing Gobblefunk in the French Subtitles of Roald Dahl’s *The BFG***

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## *Abstract*

*This study centres on Steven Spielberg’s 2016 adaptation of Roald Dahl’s 1982 novel, The BFG. Its specific focus is Gobblefunk, the language which is spoken by the film’s ‘giant’ protagonists and which has a gently humorous quality. Taking a representative sample of the amusing features of Gobblefunk, the present article examines and appraises how the film’s French-subtitled version compares to Jean-François Ménard’s French-language translation of the original novel. Ultimately, this article seeks to determine whether or not Gobblefunk is recaptured as amusingly and creatively for the film’s French-language audience as it is for the novel’s target-language (TL) reader.*

*Key words:* BFG, The; Gobblefunk; humour; live-action film; subtitling challenges and solutions

## **Introduction**

*The present study focuses on Steven Spielberg’s 2016 adaptation of Roald Dahl’s 1982 novel, The BFG. After outlining the film’s genre and plot and briefly describing its principal sources of humour, this article provides a detailed description of Gobblefunk, the language which is spoken by the giants who feature in the film and which has distinctly humorous qualities. The article proceeds to situate itself in a theoretical context, defining humour, describing the nature of humour in the film and highlighting the unique practical challenges of subtitling. The main body of the study is driven by the constituent elements of Gobblefunk: accent, grammar and vocabulary. Within each of these categories, it takes a representative sample of humorous linguistic features, examines and appraises how the translation challenges which these pose have been handled by the film’s French-language subtitler, and considers how the subtitling solutions employed compare to the translation strategies adopted by Jean-François Ménard (1984/2016), who translated Roald Dahl’s original English-language novel into French.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, this article seeks to establish whether or not Gobblefunk is preserved as amusingly and creatively for the film’s French-language audience as it is for the novel’s target-language (TL) reader.*

## ***The BFG (2016)***

### *Plot / Humour in the Film*

This theatrical, live-action film, directed by Steven Spielberg and produced by Walt Disney Pictures, is an adaptation of Roald Dahl’s 1982 children’s novel of the same name. The story follows the adventure of a young girl called Sophie who lives in an orphanage. Suffering

from insomnia, Sophie looks out of her dormitory window one night and spots a giant who promptly grabs her and whisks her away to Giant Country. Despite her initial fear, Sophie discovers that the giant is a kind-hearted soul who is considered an outcast by the other giants because, unlike them, he refuses to eat human children. Sophie and the Big Friendly Giant soon become friends and the little girl enjoys accompanying the giant in his work as a dream-catcher. Given this, the little girl objects to the way in which the Big Friendly Giant is bullied by the nine, man-eating giants who also inhabit Giant Country. Together, Sophie and the BFG enlist the help of Her Majesty the Queen who orders her military forces to remove the nine nasty giants from Giant Country and airlift them to a pit in which they can no longer eat humans or victimise the BFG.

*The BFG* is very much a child-oriented work. In addition to its live-action content, the film is both fantastical and magical in character and contains several instances of visual humour relating to food, drink and resulting bodily functions. A far greater source of humour in the film is, however, the language spoken by the film's giants, which is named *Gobblefunk*. This language is not only amusing for younger viewers but also for an older, adult audience.

### *Gobblefunk*

*Gobblefunk* has been defined as 'The official language of the BFG, invented by author Roald Dahl'.<sup>3</sup> As regards the etymology of the name itself, it is reasonable to assume that it derives from a combination of the two source-language SL words 'gobbledygook' [language which is meaningless; nonsense] and 'funky' [modern, in an unconventional or striking way]. At first, this language appears to be a form of pidgin English; after acquiring some English during his contact with human children, the BFG uses a grammatically simplified version of this national language to communicate both with humans and with his fellow giants.<sup>4</sup> However, on closer inspection, it emerges that *Gobblefunk* in fact displays clear dialectal features. According to Trudgill (2008: 8): 'The term *dialect* refers, strictly speaking, to kinds of languages which have differences of vocabulary and grammar as well as pronunciation'. In terms of the giants' accent, some variation can be identified. Whereas the BFG himself speaks with a marked West-Country accent (Hughes and Trudgill 1996: 77-9), the nine other giants' pronunciation is much more typical of Estuary English, a milder form of the London (Cockney) accent which was originally thought to be predominant along the Thames estuary.<sup>5</sup> Through language alone, the BFG is therefore ostracised by the nasty giants and his otherness is reinforced. By contrast, the giants all make similar use of grammar, including both non-standard and incorrect uses,<sup>6</sup> many of which are humorous, and some of which are blatantly self-conscious. It is in the field of vocabulary that *Gobblefunk* proves to be particularly rich and varied and it is largely this fact which prevents this language from being classed as a pidgin. Indeed, *Gobblefunk* has multiple, creative neologisms, which sometimes involve 'cross-pollinating sounds' (Fry 2017) and at other times are strikingly onomatopoeic in nature. Furthermore, it features many incorrectly used, standard lexical items, several of which are also self-conscious. Once again, this self-reflexivity evidently serves to highlight the giants' linguistic otherness.

## Subtitling Humour

### *Defining humour*

Humour can be concisely defined as ‘the quality of being amusing or comic, especially as expressed in literature or speech’ (*OED* 1998: 894). To this it may be added that, if humour and laughter are closely related they are not, however, synonymous. Evolutionary psychologists (Polimeni and Reiss 2006: 1) state that laughter is only a *possible* effect of humour:

Humour is the underlying cognitive process that frequently, but not necessarily, leads to laughter. Laughter is a seizure-like activity that can be elicited by expressing a humorous cognitive stimulus but also other stimuli such as tickling. Thus, one can laugh without a humorous stimulus, and similarly one can experience humour without laughter.

In spite of these relatively straightforward definitions, and the fact that humour and laughter are commonplace in both everyday laugh and the arts, the theory of humour is extremely complex. Given that humour has existed and been theorised for centuries – in the West, its origins can be traced back to Plato -- a plethora of theories exists (Chiaro 1992: 1). If these distinct schools of thought are all of interest, there is, understandably, no one comprehensive taxonomy thereof.<sup>7</sup>

### *Describing humour in the film*

Within the audiovisual medium, humour can derive from a variety of sources, including linguistic features (or verbal humour), cultural references and allusions, visual jokes which do not involve use of language (Diaz-Cintas and Remael 2007: 227), situational humour / irony and parody. Once again, however, theorists widely acknowledge that no single classification of the aforementioned categories of humour exists and that the latter frequently overlap (Delabastita 1997: 2). In humorous audiovisual texts, for instance, many instances of humour are based on complex jokes (Diaz-Cintas and Remael *ibid*: 228; Zabalbeascoa 1996: 254). While fully recognising this, the present study, whose focus is the amusing *Gobblefunk* language, will concentrate on instances of Verbalised Humour (Attardo 1994: 96), or Verbally Expressed Humour (VEH) (Ritchie 2010: 34), that is, humour which is essentially generated through language, or ‘language-dependent jokes’ (Diaz-Cintas and Remael *ibid*: 222).

### *The practical challenges of subtitling*

When humour occurs in an audiovisual context and is then subtitled into a foreign language, a particular layer of complexity occurs. Subtitling,<sup>8</sup> or ‘the rendering in a different language of verbal messages in filmic media, in the shape of one or more lines of written text presented on the screen in synch with the original written message’ (Gambier and Gottlieb 2001: 87), is a highly specific and notoriously difficult task whose multiple challenges have been widely acknowledged and discussed in recent years. Unique in nature, subtitling can be theorised according to each of Jakobson’s three categories of translation (1959/2000: 114). It is *interlingual* (translates text from one national language into another), *intralingual* (involves rewording or reducing the SL before interlingual translation can take place) and *intersemiotic* (transforms language which is used orally in the SL into a written form of the TL) (Boase-

Beier 2012: v). Thus, in addition to handling the interlingual challenges which are posed by translating the ST, subtitlers must respect rigid spatial and temporal constraints (Luyken et al 1991: 156) in order to both synchronise their text with the film’s soundtrack and image and to also account for the reading capabilities of the TL audience (De Linde and Kay 1999: 4-7).<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, when transforming the oral SL into a written form of the TL, they must suggest orality in their writing and ensure, at all times, that the TL corresponds to the images of the original film.

### Translating / Subtitling *Gobblefunk*

Against this background, this study now considers each of the dialectal elements of *Gobblefunk*: accent, grammar and vocabulary. Driven by these and employing seven specific categories – accent, non-standard uses of grammar, incorrect uses of grammar, self-conscious references to non-standard and incorrect uses of grammar, neologisms, incorrect uses of vocabulary and self-conscious references to incorrect uses of vocabulary -, this article takes a representative sample of humorous linguistic features within each category. It then examines and appraises how the translation challenges which these pose have been handled by the film’s French-language subtitler<sup>10</sup> who, as it has been discussed, has additional spatial and temporal constraints to respect when translating within the audiovisual medium, and considers how the subtitling solutions offered compare to the translation strategies adopted by Jean-François Ménard (1984/2016) who translated Roald Dahl’s original English-language novel into French.<sup>11</sup>

#### *Accent*

In Spielberg’s 2016 adaptation of *The BFG*, the Big Friendly Giant himself speaks with a pronounced, and indeed somewhat exaggerated, West-Country accent (Trudgill 1996: 97-9) which has a slightly amusing connotation.<sup>12</sup> Richards (2008:1), for instance, describes a clearly inaccurate, but nevertheless relatively widespread, ‘[...] perception that people with West-Country accents are simple’. This accent is characterised by phonetic features such as dropping the sound ‘h’ and pronouncing ‘s’ as ‘z’ in English. As the subtitles are evidently set against the film’s original soundtrack, francophone viewers with some knowledge of different British English accents may appreciate the BFG’s regional pronunciation. However, the subtitler makes some attempt to recapture this in the TL by contracting standard French sounds to create an impression of orality (Unless you ‘**as** wings: **Saufsit**’aurais des ailes). They additionally incorporate some striking grammatical errors.<sup>13</sup>

SL	TL subtitle	Correct TL
Look at what you ‘ <b>as</b> done	Regarde ce que <b>tu avions</b> fait	Regarde ce que <b>tu as</b> fait
You’ <b>ze</b> going to have to be staying here	<b>Tu vas falloirrester</b> ici	<b>Il va falloir que tu restes</b> ici

It is interesting to note that the other nine ‘nasty’ giants in the film speak with a very different accent which appears typical of Estuary English (Coggle 1993; Maidment 1994). This linguistic feature serves both to reinforce the latter’s solidarity and to emphasise the BFG’s otherness, thus further ostracising him.

Spoken accents are clearly much harder to detect in a written text than they are in the aural medium of a film. However, as the following pages demonstrate, *Gobblefunk* incorporates a variety of grammatical and lexical uses which can be identified in both the film and the novel.

*Grammar: Non-standard uses*

Not only is the BFG’s speech in the film characterised by a West-Country accent which sounds gently amusing to the SL viewer, it also displays certain grammatical uses which are typical of the West-Country dialect. These uses reinforce the above-described humorous effect and further accentuate the BFG’s difference from the nine other giants. Although these uses cannot be described as common to all speakers of English, nor can they be classed as ‘incorrect’. As Hughes and Trudgill (ibid.) acknowledge: ‘[...] these [...] regional features [...], because they are to be found regularly, even in formal writing, are considered ‘standard’.’

The West-Country dialect makes a distinctive use of the verb ‘to be’. In the present tense, ‘be’ is used for all persons (I be / he be / we be), unlike the Standard English irregular verb (I am / he is / we are). In the subtitles, this usage is mostly rendered in relatively informal, yet perfectly correct, French; some degree of under-translation therefore occurs.

SL	TL subtitle
It <b>be</b> a distance	Ca fait un bout [It’s a way]
This <b>be</b> my home	C’est chez moiici [It’s my home here]
This <b>be</b> where all my dreams <b>be</b> beginning	C’est ici que naissent tous mes rêves [It’s here that all my dreams are born]

However, at times, some attempts are made to recapture non-standard uses by creating unusual, yet perfectly comprehensible, expressions in French: ‘Look at the puffers. Rain **be** coming’: ‘Regardez les muages: **Ilsvontpleuvoir**’ (rather than the usual ‘**ilvupleuvoir**’: it is going to rain). As is the case of pronunciation, none of the other giants’ speech contains West-Country grammatical features, nor is there any trace of these in Dahl’s original novel. Nevertheless, as the following section demonstrates, all ten giants consistently make multiple grammatical errors, in both the film and in the novelistic text.

*Grammar: Incorrect uses*

The most striking example of incorrect grammar involves the verb ‘to be’. This acts as a permanent linguistic reminder of the giants’ otherness and creates a gently humorous effect. Indeed, the giants repeatedly use the third-person, irregular ‘is’ for all persons, when forming both the present simple and the present continuous tenses. In spite of his regional, West-Country uses (‘I be’), the BFG himself also makes this particular error (‘I is’). This inaccuracy is often recaptured in the French subtitles with a variety of grammatical mistakes in the TL:

SL (present simple)	TL subtitle	Correct TL
That’s where you <b>is</b> ,	C’est là que <b>t’es atterrie</b> ,	[...] <b>tu t’es atterrie</b> [...]

in Giant Country	au Pays des Géants	
<b>SL (present continuous)</b>	<b>TL subtitle</b>	<b>Correct TL</b>
I <b>is</b> warning you	Je t' <b>avertissons</b>	Je t' <b>avertis</b> [or more commonly, Je <b>te préviens</b> ]

Nevertheless, inaccuracies are sometimes rendered in standard, correct French which results in some loss in translation: 'All giants **is drinking** [...]' : 'Tous les géants **boivent** [...]'.  
 If there are clear differences between the novelistic text and the film script, the giants do indeed make the same type of grammatical errors in the novel. Nonetheless, unlike the film's subtitler, Ménard mostly translates these into correct French - which reduces both the humour and the impression of the giants' otherness in the TL.

<b>SL novel</b>	<b>TL translation</b>
I <b>is</b> hungry (17)	Moi, j'ai faim (27) [Me, I'mhungry]
They <b>does</b> gobble up [...] (17)	Ils mangent [...] (27) [They eat]
You <b>will be</b> telling the world (24)	Tu préviendras le monde (36) [You will tell the world / everyone]
[They] <b>is</b> not really believing in giants (23)	[Ils] ne croient pas vraiment aux géants (35) [They don't really believe in giants]

*Grammar: Self-conscious references to non-standard and incorrect uses* The fact that Sophie occasionally imitates both the BFG's non-standard and inaccurate uses of grammar draws further attention to these and makes them increasingly amusing. At times, these metalinguistic references are not recaptured in the corresponding subtitles, and are therefore somewhat lost in translation. At other times, however, they are recaptured creatively in the TL and humour is therefore preserved for the TL audience.

<b>SL</b>	<b>TL subtitle</b>	<b>Correct TL</b>
(BFG) <b>You is not safe</b> with me	T'es zendangée avec moi	<b>Tu es en danger</b> [...]
(Sophie) So? <b>You is not safe</b> with me!	Et alors? <b>Tu es zendangé</b> avec moi!	<b>Tu es en danger</b> [...]

No such self-reflexive references to incorrect uses of grammar can be observed in Dahl's original novel. This is to be expected, given that such errors are themselves few and far between, as discussed above.

*Vocabulary: Neologisms*

It is in the field of vocabulary that *Gobblefunk* displays the greatest richness and variation. Particularly noteworthy are this language's multiple and amusing neologisms. These can be classified according to three categories: proper nouns (names of giants); nouns; verbs. The following three tables take a selection of representative examples from each of these categories. For each lexical item, the possible etymology is considered, the meaning of the term in Standard English is given and the translations of the term, in both Jean-François Ménéard's (1984/2016) French translation of the novel and the corresponding French subtitle, are provided. This approach enables the origin, meaning and humorous quality of the *Gobblefunk* term to be understood, and demonstrates the extent to which the French subtitles are inspired by Ménéard's original novelistic translation.

It should be noted that, if there is a broader range of neologisms in the novel than in the film, some totally new terms nevertheless exist in the film which do not feature in the original work. In order to facilitate comparison between the two translation approaches, this section of the present article focuses uniquely on those terms which are used in both texts.

*Neologisms: Proper names*

In *The BFG*, the names of all of the giants are particularly significant; given that the names refer to the attributes of these protagonists, they are used to reinforce their characterisation (Manini 1996: 164-6). As the following table illustrates, both Ménéard and the film's subtitler closely preserve the semantic content and humour of these names by employing a range of translation strategies.

Proper name	Etymology	Meaning of term in Standard English	French translation (novel) (Jean-François Ménéard)	French subtitle	Comparative translation strategy
The BFG	The Big Friendly Giant: (The only giant who does not eat human children)	NA	Le Bon Gros Géant. (Literal translation of SL name)	Le Bon Gros Géant	Subtitle makes exact use of Ménéard's translation
Bonecruncher	NA	NA	Le Croqueurd'Os. (Literal translation of SL name)	Croqueur d'Os	As above, without definite article
Bloodbottler	NA	NA	Le Buveur de Sang [Blood Drinker]	Buveur de Sang	Ménéard uses alternative TL noun ('drinker' instead of 'bottler') as latter term does not exist in TL. Subtitle borrows Ménéard's

					translation
Flechlumpeater	NA	NA	L'Avaleur de Chair-Fraîche [Swallower of Fresh Flesh]	Bouffe-Chairfraîche	Ménard uses standard TL term; subtitle uses more informal <i>bouffe</i>
Gizzard-Guzzler	NA	NA	Le Gobeur de Gésiers [Gizzardswallower]. (Alliteration preserved in SL)	Gobe-Gésiers	Ménard creates TL noun <i>Gobeur</i> (from the French verb <i>gober</i> [to swallow whole]). Subtitle borrows this and shortens it to <i>Gobe</i>

*Neologisms: Nouns* Most of the lexical items which form *Gobblefunk* appear bizarre and therefore amusing; many of them either they involve ‘cross-pollinating sounds (Fry 2017), or are distinctly onomatopoeic. While these words may be difficult to understand if taken in isolation, their meaning can always be inferred from the context in which they appear, in both the novel and the film. As the following table demonstrates, few of the creative terms used in the TL subtitles borrow Ménard’s original translations. Although the terms used in both the book translation and the subtitles are all creative, those employed in the subtitles are generally more immediately comprehensible to a contemporary TL audience, particularly to its younger members.

<i>Gobblefunk</i> term	Possible etymology	Meaning of term in Standard English	French translation (novel) (Jean-François Ménard)	French subtitle	Comparative translation strategy
The filthy old fizzle-gler	Unclear	The nasty old hag ! (i.e. ‘old woman’)	La répugnante vieille <i>tournebulle</i> ! (from <i>tournebuller</i> [to put in a whirl])	Méchante vieille <i>sorciglaire</i> ! (from <i>sorcière</i> [old witch / hag])	Ménard transforms a relatively unusual verb into a noun; subtitle adapts a common noun
<i>Frogscottle</i>	Frogsporn + bottle	Giants’ preferred drink, made from schnozcum	La <i>frambouille</i> (from <i>framboise</i> [raspberry] + <i>bouillie</i> [pulp])	La <i>frétibulle</i> (from <i>frétiller</i> [to wriggle] + <i>bulles</i> [bubbles])	Semantic content of subtitle is more immediate



		bers (see below)			y comprehensible
<i>Phizzwizard</i>	Fizz + wizard	A nice dream	Une excellente <i>bouille de gnome</i> [gnome's mug / face]	Un <i>magirêve</i> (from <i>magie</i> [magic] + <i>rêve</i> [dream])	As above
<i>Schnozcumber</i>	Schnozz (informal: a person's nose) + cucumber	Unpleasant vegetable grown in Giant Country and consumed by giants	Un <i>schnockombre</i> (from <i>schnock</i> [fathead] + <i>concombre</i> [cucumber])	Un <i>schnockombre</i>	Subtitle makes exact use of Ménard's translation
<i>Troggle-humper</i>	Troglodyte (person who lives in a cave) + to hump (carry with difficulty)	A bad dream	Un <i>troglopompe</i> (from <i>troglodyte</i> [cave-dweller] + <i>pompe</i> [pump / pomp])	Un <i>épouvansonge</i> (from <i>épouvanable</i> [terrible] + <i>songe</i> [dream])	Ménard's translation remains closer to SL noun, but meaning of subtitle is clearer for TL audience
<i>Whizzpopper</i>	Whiz + pop. Term is highly onomatopoeic. Fricative 'whiz' conveys explosion of air (Fry 2017)	Flatulence (breaking wind)	Un <i>crépitage</i> [a crackle / splutter]	Un <i>crépiprout</i> (from <i>crépiter</i> [crackle] + <i>prout</i> [fart, child's language])	As above. <i>Prout</i> is a commonly understood term among young French children
<i>Whoopseysplunkers</i>	Unclear	Brilliant	<i>Fente à moustiques</i> (from <i>fente</i> [crack / split] and <i>moustiques</i> [mosquitoes]) as opposed to <i>fantastique</i> [fantastic]	<i>Youpi splendissime</i> (from <i>youpi</i> [yipee] + <i>splendide</i> [splendid])	Ménard's translation is inventive and amusing, but <i>Youpiis</i> both semantically closer to the original <i>Gobblefunk</i> term and part of a child's

					vocabulary; it is therefore more immediately accessible to younger members of the audience
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*Neologisms: Verbs* As is the case when translating *Gobblefunk* nouns, the film's French-language subtitler rarely borrows Ménard's work. While the book and film translations both recreate lexical items, the subtitles are generally easier for the contemporary TL audience to understand.

<b>Gobblefunk term</b>	<b>Possible etymology</b>	<b>Meaning of term in Standard English</b>	<b>French translation (novel) (Jean-François Ménard)</b>	<b>French subtitle</b>	<b>Comparative translation strategy</b>
Who is you <i>jabbeling</i> to?	From 'to jabber' [talk fast]	Who are you talking to?	Avec qui <i>bavasses-tu</i> ? From <i>bavarder</i> [to chat] + <i>jacasser</i> [to jabber]	Avec qui tu <i>jacasouilles</i> ? Adaptation of <i>jacasser</i>	Translation and subtitle are similarly creative
You'd be <i>scuddling</i> around, <i>yodelling</i> the news	From 'scurry' [to move hurriedly] and 'yodel' [a form of singing marked by rapid alternation between the normal voice and falsetto] ( <i>OED</i> 1998: 2142)	You would be running around and shouting the news	Tu irais <i>gambadiller</i> alento en <i>t'égestillant</i> [...]. (From <i>gambader</i> [to leap about] and <i>s'égosiller</i> [to shout oneself hoarse])	Tu tarderais pas à <i>gambadiller</i> auto en <i>claironnant</i> la nouvelle. ( <i>Claironner</i> [to shout from the rooftops])	Subtitle borrows Ménard's translation of 'scuddle' but employs a more frequently used TL verb to recapture 'yoddle'
You think I is <i>swizzfiggling</i> you?	From 'swizz'[con] and 'to fiddle' [to defraud / cheat / falsify]	Do you think that I am lying to you?	Tu crois que je te <i>fanfaronne dessornettes</i> ? [Do you think that I am <i>bragging twaddle</i> to you?]	Tu crois que je te <i>mentifolle</i> ?	Ménard uses more dated vocabulary to create an amusing effect in the TL. Subtitle creates its own

					neologism based on the French verb <i>mentir</i> [to lie]
Don't ever go <i>whiffing</i> out of here	From 'waft' and 'sniff'	Don't ever go <i>venturing</i> out of here	Il s'agit de ne pas aller te promener [...] hors de cette caverne. [It's a question of not going for a walk [...] outside this cave]	Ne t'avise pas d'aller <i>galopander</i> dehors. (From <i>galoper</i> [to galop / to hare around])	Ménard loses humour of SL by translating into standard, correct French. Subtitle again recreates a new term in the TL

*Vocabulary: Incorrect uses* In addition to employing numerous neologisms, the speakers of *Gobblefunk* make many inaccurate uses of Standard English lexical items, which is amusing to both younger and older SL viewers. Despite their incorrectness, these terms are all phonetically similar to the original SL terms; they can therefore be understood immediately by the film's English-language audience. If the subtitles borrow more of Ménard's incorrect uses than they do of his translations of neologisms, many of the subtitles again deviate from the novelistic translation; they are often more playful and therefore generally more appealing to younger viewers.

Incorrect use of SL term	Correct use of SL term	French translation (novel) (Jean-François Ménard)	French subtitle	Comparative translation strategies
A man-guzzling <i>canniable</i>	A man-eating <i>cannibal</i>	Un gobeur d'hommes <i>canne à balles</i> . (From <i>gober</i> [to swallow whole] + <i>canne</i> [stick] + <i>balles</i> [bullets])	Un gobeur d'hommes <i>canne-à-balles</i>	Subtitle uses Ménard's translation, also adding hyphens to composite noun
<i>Crockadown</i> <i>dillies</i>	Crocodiles	Des <i>alligrasporcs</i> . (From <i>alligator</i> [alligator] + <i>gras</i> [fat] + <i>porcs</i> [pigs])	Des <i>croque-idylles</i> . (From <i>croque</i> [crunch] + <i>idylle</i> [idyll], as opposed to <i>crocodiles</i> [crocodiles])	Subtitle is more immediately comprehensible to TL viewers
It's <i>glummy</i> !	It's <i>yummy</i> !	C'est <i>savourable</i> ! (from <i>savoureux</i> [tasty])	<i>Miamifique</i> ! ( <i>miam</i> [yum] + <i>magnifique</i> )	Both translations are creative, but subtitle would

			[magnificent])	appeal more to younger TL audience
<i>Humanbeans</i>	Humanbeings	Les hommes de terre (instead of <i>pommes de terre</i> [potatoes]). Preserves vegetable connotation	Les hommes de terre	Subtitle uses Ménard's translation
<i>Hippodumplings</i>	<i>Hippopotamuses</i>	Les hippogrossedames [hippo-fat ladies]. Preserves idea of 'dumplings' ; insulting term which describes short, overweight people	Les hippogrossedames	As above
<i>Vegiterribles</i>	<i>Vegetables</i>	Les légumineuses (correct French translation of SL term 'legumes')	Les léguminobles ( <i>légumes</i> [vegetables] + <i>ignoble</i> [awful])	Ménard uses incorrectly a correct TL term. Subtitle recreates word to fully preserve semantic content of SL term

*Self-conscious references to incorrect uses of vocabulary* Sophie often corrects, and thereby draws attention to, the BFG's amusingly incorrect uses of Standard English vocabulary. In doing so, she further accentuates his linguistic otherness. Once again, as the film is an adaptation of the novel, some of the self-conscious references which feature in the novel do not appear in the film. Nonetheless, some instances of self-reflexivity in the film are strongly inspired by the novelistic text. The following two extracts, firstly from the film and secondly from the novel, illustrate clear differences between the subtitler and the translator's respective approaches to rendering in the TL a very similar reference which is made in the SL.

Speaker	ST	TT subtitle
1)BFG	My dreams disappeared into <b>thick ear</b> .	Plein de rêves ont encore disparu dans la <b>mature</b> .
2)Sophie	Disappeared into thin air.	Dans la nature.
3)BFG	Words...	Les mots...
4)BFG	They've been such a <b>twitch-tickling</b> problem to me all's my life.	Ils m'ont toujours <b>tracassifié le ciboulet</b> .
5)BFG	I know what I want to say but the words all <b>squish-squiddled</b> around	<b>J'</b> sais quels mots <b>j'</b> veux dire, mais ils sortent <b>embazardouillés</b> .
6)BFG	In a terrible <b>wigglish</b> way	Je parle un horrible <b>charabiage</b> .
7)Sophie	Well, I think you speak beautifully	Moi, je trouve ça magnifique.

8) Sophie	Simply beautifully	Tout simplement magnifique.
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In order to render convincingly the above, gently humorous, dialogue in French, the subtitler employs a number of translation strategies. At times, simple, alternative errors are inserted into the TL (line 1). When inaccuracies in the SL are more complex, these are, however, reproduced with comparable creativity. A ‘twitch-tickling’ problem (line 4), as opposed to a ‘tricky’ problem, therefore becomes *tracassifié le ciboulet* (from the TL verb *tracasser* [to worry] and the informal noun *ciboulet* [nut / head]). Similarly, ‘squish-squiddled’ (line 5), meaning ‘squashed’ or ‘messed around’, is rendered as *embazardouillés*, an inventive combination of the infinitives *embrouiller* [to muddle] and *barbouiller* [to scribble / scrawl], and ‘a wigglish way’, which communicates a similar meaning to the previous example, is recaptured in this subtitle by transforming the usual TL noun *charabia* [gibberish / gobbledegook] into *un charabiage* (line 6). Furthermore, certain TL vowels are elided in the subtitles – *J’sais; j’veux* (line 5) – which is a typical feature of spoken language (Strutz 1999: iv) and therefore reinforces the impression of orality in the translated dialogue. The following passage from Dahl’s (1982) novel directly inspired the above film dialogue. Below are Dahl’s original words and Ménard’s corresponding (1984/2016) translation.

SL (Dahl 1982: 44-5)	TL (Ménard 1984/2016: 61)
<p>‘Do we really have to eat it?’ Sophie said. ‘You do unless you is wanting to become so thin you will be disappearing into <b>thick ear</b>’. ‘<b>Into thin air</b>,’ Sophie said. A thick ear is something quite different.’ [...] ‘Words,’ the BFG said, ‘is oh such a <b>twitch-tickling problem</b> to me all my life.[...] I know exactly what words I am wanting to say, but somehow or other they is always getting <b>squiff-squiddled</b> around.[...] I is speaking the most terrible <b>wigglish</b>.’ ‘I think you speak beautifully’, Sophie said. [...] ‘Simply beautifully.’</p>	<p>‘Est-ce qu’il faut vraiment que nous mangions cela?’ s’inquiéta Sophie. ‘Oui. A moins que tu ne veuilles devenir si maigre que tu te transformeras en un simple <b>coude en l’air</b>.’ ‘Un simple <b>courant d’air</b>’ rectifia Sophie. ‘Un coude en l’air, c’est quelque chose de très différent.’ [...] ‘Ah les mots, ils m’ont toujours tellement <b>tracassé avec mes tics tout à trac</b> ! [...] je sais très bien quels sont les mots que je veux prononcer, mais d’une manière ou d’une autre, ils finissent toujours par <b>s’entortillembrouiller</b> quelque part.[...] Je parle un horrible <b>baragouinage</b>. ‘Eh bien moi, je pense que vous parlez magnifiquement,’ assura Sophie. [...] C’est tout simplement magnifique.’</p>

Although, similarly to the subtitler, Ménard also uses both simple, alternative errors in the TL (*coude en l’air* [elbow in the air] instead of *courant d’air* [draught]) and more creative strategies (*s’entortillembrouiller*, a combination of the TL *s’entortiller* [to twist / wind] and *s’embrouiller* [to muddle]), his translation approach is globally quite different to that of the subtitler. While the subtitles are generally more playful, incorporate non-standard vocabulary and grammar and give a greater sense of orality (as is necessary in the audiovisual medium), Ménard’s translation, while displaying some linguistic creativity, makes use of much more standard TL vocabulary and, at all times, extremely correct grammar. In view of this, in the present case, it would appear that the subtitler is even more successful than Ménard at

preserving in the TL the humorous character of this self-conscious presentation of *Gobblefunk*.

## Conclusion

This article has centred on Steven Spielberg's 2016 film adaptation of Roald Dahl's 1982 novel, *The BFG*. More specifically, it has carried out a detailed analysis of *Gobblefunk*, the peculiar language spoken by the film's 'giant' protagonists. Taking a representative sample of *Gobblefunk*'s humorous, dialectal features, this study has examined and appraised how the translation challenges which these pose have been handled by the film's French-language subtitler, and has considered how these subtitling solutions compare to Jean-François Ménard's (1984/2016) translation of the original novel, on which the film is based.

Given that the film is an adaptation of Dahl's novel, clear differences could understandably be observed between the film soundtrack and the novelistic text. In the film, for instance, the BFG himself speaks with an amusingly pronounced West-Country accent, which is not the case in the novel. The subtitler seeks to recapture this linguistic feature by contracting standard French words to create an impression of orality and by incorporating various grammatical errors into the TL. Non-standard, West-Country uses of grammar, which again do not feature in the novel, are sometimes under-translated into correct French, but at other times are also compensated for with grammatical inaccuracies in the TL. Blatantly incorrect (as opposed to non-standard) uses are recaptured very effectively in the subtitles, much more so than in Ménard's translation, which almost unfailingly uses standard and very correct French. While self-conscious references to such uses are made in the film and subsequently preserved in the subtitles, no such references appear in the SL novel. *Gobblefunk* displays a rich and varied vocabulary; its multiple neologisms include proper nouns, nouns and verbs. As it has been acknowledged, some differences exist between the lexical items used in the film and the novel. Although the terms used in both the book translation and the film subtitles are frequently creative, those employed in the subtitles are, globally, more immediately comprehensible to a contemporary TL audience. This is clearly necessary given the fact that subtitles only remain on the screen for a very limited amount of time (De Linde and Kay 1999: 4-7).<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, in the SL, the giants often make incorrect use of Standard English vocabulary and attention is sometimes drawn to this. While the subtitles occasionally borrow Ménard's translation of these humorous and self-conscious errors, the former often deviate from the novelistic translation; they are generally more playful and more appealing to younger TL viewers. Ménard's strategy can clearly be explained by the strict difference which exists between the spoken and official, written registers of the French language and to the rigor of the *Académie Française*.

In sum, in spite of some differences in their approaches, both Ménard and the film's French-language subtitler do an admirable job of preserving *Gobblefunk* in the translation of their respective texts. In response to the question posed in the Introduction to the present article, this 'giant speak' is, then, most definitely recaptured as amusingly for the film's French-language audience as it is for the novel's French readers. The fact that this is achieved so successfully in the translation of the present linguistically creative, and consequently humorous, audiovisual text is all the more impressive given the additional range of practical challenges which subtitlers face (De Linde and Kay 1999: 4-7; Luyken et al. 1991: 156).

## Notes

- 1 In British English this translates as: ‘Brilliant! How absolutely marvellous!’.
- 2 Jean-François Ménéard is the acclaimed French-language translator of some significant English-language children’s literature, notably J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series.
- 3 Definition provided in Special Feature of the DVD’s English-language version entitled ‘Gobblefunk: The Wonderful Words of the BFG’. This special feature consists of an entertaining quiz in which viewers can answer multiple-choice questions on the meanings of key items of *Gobblefunk* vocabulary. In the original English-language novel (Dahl 1982), a short glossary of *Gobblefunk* terms follows the main body of the text.
- 4 A pidgin (language): A grammatically simplified form of a language, typically English, Dutch or Portuguese, with a limited vocabulary, some elements of which are taken from local languages, used for communication between people not sharing a common language. Pidgins are not normally found as native languages but arise out of language contact between speakers of other languages. (*OED* 1998: 1403)
- 5 Estuary English is characterised, notably, by the dropping of some diphthongs (‘right’ is pronounced as ‘roight’), shortening of some elongated words (‘been’ becomes ‘bin’) and dropping of the sound ‘l’ (‘old’ is heard as ‘owd’). For a detailed account of the various features of the pronunciation of Estuary English, see Coggle (1993) and Maidment (1994). However, some linguists claim that there is no such thing as a homogenised, regional variety of Estuary (see Maidment *ibid*). They suggest, rather, that Estuary English is a non-regional accent which has arisen due to the spread of some linguistic features of the English used in London to other parts of the country and that this phenomenon can be explained by geographical mobilisation and social change.
- 6 Explaining the nature of Standard English, Hughes and Trudgill (1996: 9-10) write: ‘[Whereas] the accent taught to learners of British English is Received Pronunciation, the dialect used as a model is known as Standard English’.
- 7 For a concise history of Humour Studies, see Carroll (2014)
- 8 For basic definitions of subtitling, see also Chiaro (2009: 148); Diaz-Cintas and Remael (2007: 8).
- 9 For additional discussion of the constraints on subtitling, see Diaz-Cintas and Remael (2007); Hatim and Mason (1997); Ivarsson and Carroll (1998).
- 10 At the end of the film, all translations, for both the subtitled and dubbed versions, are attributed to Jean-François Ménéard. However, since the subtitles are not taken directly from the novelistic translation - many of these are, indeed, adaptations -, they are not actually Ménéard’s own work. Henceforth, the subtitler will therefore be referred to simply as ‘the subtitler’.
- 11 Given that the film is an adaptation of the original novel, the film’s soundtrack is necessarily an adaptation of the novelistic text. Exact comparisons can therefore not always be made between the subtitles of the film and the translation of the novel.
- 12 The decision to use this accent may have been inspired by Roald Dahl’s past. Born in Cardiff, Dahl (1916-1996) nevertheless went to boarding school in Weston Super Mare, in the West Country, for many years (Howard 2004).
- 13 Although this article focuses on the film’s French subtitles, it is interesting to note that, in the film’s French dubbed version, the voice of the BFG is spoken by the famous French film writer and comedian, Dany Boon. It therefore immediately has an amusing quality for the TL audience. In this spoken role, Boon slows down his speech considerably, articulates some words exaggeratedly, and extends other words in a very similar way to speakers of a West-Country dialect. At times, his voice is also high-pitched, sounds child-like and appears slightly naïve. Boon therefore skilfully replicates the key qualities of this protagonist’s voice, spoken by Mark Rylance, in the original SL version of the film.

14 These findings support Delia Chiaro's (2006: 200) view that, when faced with instances of VEH (Verbally Expressed Humour) in audiovisual texts, some translators tend to substitute VEH in the source language with examples of VEH in the target language.

#### Filmography

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