

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE STRATEGIES OF TRANSLATION OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

CZU: 81`25:82-93

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.6523431

Olesea BODEAN-VOZIAN
Universitatea de Stat din Moldova
ORCID: 0000-0002-2945-0318

This work focuses on a very interesting, yet challenging area for translators – the children's literature (ChL). Its major goal is to review the specialised literature in the field, to understand the peculiarities of such texts examine the difficulties of the process and make an inventory of the translation tools available to translators when dealing with such texts. Being aware of how vast this area is, we addressed only some aspects regarding ChL in general and translation of ChL in particular. This literature review highlights that a successful translation of children's literature is not limited to the strategies, techniques, and procedures that might be employed, but also depends on the ability of a translator to preserve the balance between the source and target texts and to understand the readers' expectations, in particular, when children represent the readers. Since this work is supported by a myriad of references to relevant sources published by linguists and translators, it could also serve in its turn as a useful reference point for further research avenues in linguistics, literature, translation and statistics.

Keywords: *children's literature, challenges, translation, strategy, adaptation.*

O INVESTIGARE A STRATEGIILOR DE TRADUCERE A LITERATURII PENTRU COPII

Prezenta lucrare se axează pe un domeniu ce prezintă interes, dar și o provocare majoră pentru traducători – literatura pentru copii (LC). Scopul principal este de a realiza o succintă revistă a literaturii de specialitate, de a înțelege specificul acestor texte, de a examina dificultățile în procesul de traducere și de a inventaria instrumentele disponibile traducătorilor în lucrul asupra acestor lucrări. Fiind conștienți de amploarea acestui domeniu, ne-am propus să examinăm în acest studiu doar unele aspecte ce țin de LC în general și traducerea LC în special. Această revistă a literaturii pune accent pe faptul că o traducere reușită a literaturii pentru copii nu se limitează doar la aplicarea strategiilor, tehnicilor și procedurilor, dar depinde și de capacitatea traducătorului de a păstra un echilibru între textul sursă și textul țintă și de a înțelege așteptările publicului, în special când acest public îl reprezintă copiii. Deoarece lucrarea face trimitere la o serie de surse relevante publicate de lingviști și traducători, aceasta ar putea servi drept punct de plecare pentru alte cercetări legate de LC în lingvistică, literatură, traducere și statistică.

Cuvinte-cheie: *literatura pentru copii, provocări, traducere, strategii, adaptare.*

Preliminary Aspects

In the last decades, there has been a growing interest in the translation of literature for children – a broad field of study with many subjects that are being tackled by a plethora of researchers. From the scientific viewpoint, this was an unexploited area for a long time, which merited an exhaustive examination, firstly, because of an explosion of children's texts. According to R. A. Johnson [1, p. 24], some consider that children's literature can be divided into *poetry* and *prose* and certain works, like "Alice in Wonderland" contain both formulations. However, the majority of researchers favoured the idea of employing more profound criteria to classify this literature into different genres.

From a historical perspective, the status of writers of children's literature has always been inferior to the writers of adult literature and for a long time, the majority of writers were men who would prefer to publish anonymously or under a pseudonym because writing for children was not respected by the society [2, p. 39]. As put by M. Clark [3, p. 1], writers of children's books often complain that in the literary world they are looked down on as the poor relations of authors working in the adult field. Or, rather, not poor relations but simply beginners. Such an attitude was passed on

to the translation of children's books, and back in the '80s, C. Reiss would mention the lack of publications in the area of research and translation. However, in the last few decades, in particular, after the publication of the "Harry Potter" series, scholars have noticed an increase in the number of publications which have become more respected and complex. Nowadays, the field has grown from being a marginalised area of enquiry into a broad and diverse field of study, with several areas of interest: the audience, the interaction between text and images, the balance between oral and written discourse, or the boundaries of manipulation [4, p. 461].

Definitions

Defining what children's literature is, represents a complicated endeavour and scholars in this field have not reached consensus and their definitions vary according to their point of view. In fact, because of the complexity of the matter, no single definition has been established. For example, according to Garcia de Toro [4], the main problem that the study of children's literature faces is the lack of definition of the field. Indeed, the borders of children's literature are truly blurred. Illustrated books, novels for teenagers, audiobooks and even audiovisual texts consumed in new devices can be encompassed within it. Such heterogeneity makes it difficult to define and delimit [5, p. 451]. However, the same heterogeneity has triggered interest in children's literature from different disciplines, including translation studies. So, what is children's literature?

The following definition can be found in [6]: the material written and produced for the information or entertainment of children and young adults. It includes all non-fiction, literary and artistic genres and physical formats, while Britannica [7] states that children's literature is the body of written works and accompanying illustrations produced in order to entertain or instruct young people. The genre encompasses a wide range of works, including acknowledged classics of world literature, picture books and easy-to-read stories written exclusively for children, and fairy tales, lullabies, fables, folk songs, and other primarily orally transmitted materials.

For J. Schneider [8], "Children's literature is often defined as a collection of books written for children, read by children, and/or written about children or a collection of books as old as the printing press and as new as the latest app that portray all aspects of humanity and inhumanity. Y. Mourad [9, p. 3-4] believes that children's literature includes both oral and written literature and comprises songs, theatre, poems, cinema, television and story that begin from childbirth and specifically from the stories that are narrated by mothers to their children.

Another definition can be found in the following source: "Children's literature is any literature that is enjoyed by children. More specifically, children's literature comprises those books written and published for young people who are not yet interested in adult literature or who may not possess the reading skills or developmental understandings necessary for its perusal. In addition to books, children's literature also includes magazines intended for pre-adult audiences" [10].

P. Nodelman's study, *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature* is another example of an impressive effort to define children's literature. He even addresses the reader by asking the question: "How can anyone know what children's literature is, if a lot of children's libraries include books like Defoe's *Robison Crusoe* or Peanuts cartoons that were originally intended for adults?" [11, p. 150], quoting B. L. Clark who claims that "children's literature is always written for both children and adults; to be published it needs to please at least two adults" [ibidem, p. 207]. In their book chapter "Said, spoke, spluttered, spouted", Marija Zlatnar Moe and Tanja Žigon mention that the majority agree that while children's literature is literature that is mainly written by adults for children, it is in fact intended for a dual audience, the primary audience being the child, and the

secondary audience being the adults buying and (in the case of pre-readers) reading the book to a child [12, p. 28]. In this sense, R. Oittinen [13, p. 966] proposes to “see children’s literature as literature read silently by children and aloud to children.” D. Norton’s [14, p. 35] point of view, which many subscribe to, is that children’s literature should be designed in a way that it opens doors to discovery and adventure for children. It can do this by providing enjoyment, transmitting literary heritage, encouraging understanding and valuing cultural heritage, and providing vicarious experiences. It should, moreover, transfer knowledge, nurture and broaden the imagination, and stimulate development.

For E. O’Sullivan [15], the phrase “children’s literature” denotes a broad range of heterogeneous texts with different sources, addressees, types, genres and forms, and functions. Its sources are folklore (folk- and fairy tales), books originally for adults and subsequently adapted for children, books authored specifically for children, and other media in the form of tie-ins. It addresses readers from infants to young adults – and sometimes also adults either as mediators or as readers in their own right of crossover or ‘all-age’ books. The types of books (relating to format, appearance etc.) include multimodal picture books, comics, pop-up books, anthologies, novels, and multimedia hybrid books. Likewise, the author of *Translating for Children* considers that children’s literature is a very broad field encompassing everything that a child reads or hears: “plays, puppet shows, computer and video games, radio and TV programmes, films, videos etc. are just as important as books in terms of the education and entertainment of young people” [16]. So, in the case of such texts, there are listeners or viewers rather than readers, and subsequently, R. Oittinen [17] proposes that *receptor* be used instead, as a more appropriate term.

In an interview from 2013, the Romanian writer and translator F. Bican [18] stated that he did not know if literature for children was a good term...and thought of it as a win-win solution, highlighting that he would rather prefer it to be literature *with* children. Additionally, the author argued that in the case of young children, the adults are the buyers and they censorship the selection, although, with good intentions. D. Vrabie, a Moldovan researcher and author emphasises in this sense that one needs to be aware of the fact that today’s little reader is tomorrow’s creative personality and therefore, the choice of books for children is essential [19]. Thus, the reading is mediated by adult tastes, interests, and preconceptions at all stages of the production, distribution, procurement, and consumption of reading material [20]. But, after children get access to the books recommended by adults, they can choose by themselves or discuss about choices among themselves [18].

Tracking down the Origins of Children’s Literature

It is difficult to understand where exactly children’s literature begins, in particular, because of its oral tradition. One thing is certain, though, that the history of children’s literature is related to the development of society and culture. And then, a question arises: in this pursuit of a definition, do we count, for example the cave paintings as children’s stories? The investigations conducted in the massive Rouffignac cave complex in France came to the conclusion that women and children (including children under seven) were responsible for many of the markings, which is “the first known instance of prehistoric children engaging in symbolic figure-making” [21]. We are perfectly aware that it is not the classical type of literature for children that one is accustomed to, yet, as put by J. Cooney, a University of Cambridge archaeologist, the research on caves would allow prehistoric children to have a voice.

Having explored the origin of children’s literature, J. Schneider (2016) states that spelling books, primers, and alphabet books were intended to support religious and/or academic instruction

for children. Yet, the notion of reading for pleasure or the production of texts specifically for children's amusement was not a priority. Children's literature became a thing and started being valued with the development of print, however, prior to the mid-19th century, children's stories consisted mainly of moral principles and/or realistic perspectives of the world. One early form of literature children had access to was the chapbook, a small, saddle-stapled book that usually included a fairy tale, poems, and almanacs [22].

The golden era of children's literature is definitely the 19th century. This is roughly between 1860 and 1930 when children's literature became established as the type of literature we recognise today. J. Barrie, L. Carroll, K. Grahame and A. Milne are some of the best-known authors associated with this period [23, p. 30].

The field continued to further develop in the 20th century, I. Bobulová [24] stating that it was a time more child-oriented because the position of children within society had changed remarkably, and more recently, children's literature has been made part of the digital world, upon the emergence of e-books. Digitisation enriches the classic book with sound and moving images and offers extras like in-story games, reading comprehension exercises and technical reading functionality. Many apps also offer 'hotspots' where children can interact with items and characters from the story. Worldwide, the number of digital books for young children has increased significantly in recent years, although some markets have developed faster than others. Despite all these developments, a survey conducted in 2016 revealed that 76% of parents found their children prefer print books for reading for pleasure and 69% prefer print books for educational reading and in 2019, physical books were still outselling the electronic ones [25].

Researchers' Contribution to the Field of Children's Books Translation

The history of children's literature is intertwined with that of translation. Among the founding texts in the area of children's literature translation are included Z. Shavit's "Translation of Children's Literature as a Function of its Position in the Literary Polysystem" (1981) and "Poetics of Children's Literature" (1986), along with G. Klingberg's "Children's Fiction in the Hands of the Translators" (1986).

Due to translation, children all over the world learn from other cultures and virtually interact with the others. Likewise, translation contributes to the interhuman communication, to expanding the horizons, to learning about the others' picture of the world. Therefore, translators have to preserve the content created for children, to convey the message in simple words and in a language that can be understood by these groups of readers.

Contrary to other centuries, translating for children in the 20th century was traditionally considered a good way to start one's translating career, as it has been deemed 'easy', mainly because the texts in question are often short and (deceptively) simple, and because the genre of children's literature has often been seen as less prestigious. Because of its lower status, literature for children allows the translator greater liberties in dealing with the text: children are mostly seen as young, inexperienced and in need of education (on the subject matter and language among other things), and the translator is seen as the right person to give it to them [12, p. 126].

In the opinion of G. Lathey, children's literature as a genre can hardly be imaginable without translations, because translations of children's books are part of modern history, and, together with domestic literature, creates the irreplaceable part of children's literature. Moreover, translated books for children usually represent the best from other countries' legacy and these translations stimulate the development of local literature and language development, bringing together new ideas and

literary models [26, p.18]. Additionally, the French comparatist Paul Hazard saw each translated children's book as "a messenger that goes beyond mountains and rivers, beyond the seas, to the very ends of the world in search of new friendships" [12, p. 16].

Much has been written about the market penetration by translations. In most European countries, a substantial proportion of books for children are the translations. In the Republic of Moldova, for example, the ChL published in 2020 constituted 194 titles, out of which, 17 were published in Russian and seven in other languages, while the total number of translated works amounted to 146 (from Russian, English, Gagauzi, and others), without any mentioning of the ChL (2021). The National Book Chamber of the Republic of Moldova published the list of forthcoming books for the first two months of 2022, including translated books on its website [27]. So, there are two books translated from English and Italian and published in January 2022 and one book in Romanian published in February 2022. In Romania, the period after 1989 was the time of glory for translated works. The multitude of publishing houses contributed to the promotion of translations among the young generation and they can reach the little readers from the Republic of Moldova as well. In this context, F. Bican mentions that he is not against the translated foreign literature for children because it is always useful and necessary. In this way, children have access to the books that depict the world around and convey universal values, yet, the author hints to the particular, local dimensions that have to be acquired from the local writings [18].

During the translation process, each and every translator of ChL has to adopt a series of decisions in relation to the strategies they put in place and to make choices about staying close to the source text and adapting the text for the audience. When a translator translates for children, this choice becomes all the more acute. The difference in age and experience between an adult translator and their readers causes translators, consciously or not, to reflect more carefully on the audience. As Emer O'Sullivan [28, p.13] correctly points out, this is true not only for translators but also for publishers, reviewers and other mediators in the field of children's literature.

When a children's book is translated into a new language, it is not uncommon to see new illustrations derived from the target culture. Translated children's literature is therefore the result of a balancing act by translators (understood in the broader sense to include editors, publishers etc.) between adapting foreign elements to the child reader's level of comprehension, and preserving the differences that constitute a translated foreign text's potential for enrichment of the target culture [15, p. 18].

Relying on the works of Göte Klingberg, Zohar Shavit and others Mieke Desmet put together the different strategies applied by translators of ChL. These are:

- omission and deletion strategies, linked to the ideological goal of transmitting appropriate values to children, as well as to the goal of making a text easier to understand for its young audience;
- purification strategies to bring translated texts in line with the values of the target culture by purging elements considered inappropriate;
- substitution strategies, to provide children with easily intelligible texts – this is what Klingberg called "cultural context adaptation" and Venuti "domestication";
- explication strategies, including rewording or paratextual explanations, and simplification strategies that, on the macro-structural level affect genre affiliation, structure and organization in chapters, and on the micro-structural level take the form of using short sentences, substituting concrete for abstract language, weakening ironic elements [15, p. 20].

The Gruffalo

The investigation of the manner in which the literature for children is translated would require a bilingual or multilingual, parallel or comparable corpora, the original as well as translation being analysed in terms of language and translation: cohesion and coherence, morpho-syntactic structure, word frequency context, stylistic aspects, register and strategies, techniques and procedures. The example of text (original and translation) that this article focuses on is brought here only for illustration and a more elaborate investigation will follow in a subsequent study.

The book under examination is *The Gruffalo*, by Julia Donaldson (1999). This is one of the most famous contemporary books for children, in particular in the English world. The book has immediately become one of the children's favourite best-sellers with over 13 million copies sold. The Gruffalo was translated in 49 languages, including Romanian (in 2016, by Florin Bican).

“The Gruffalo” was used during research conducted by Coventry University experts who focused on the opportunities to combine movement and storytelling activities to understand if this can boost pre-school children's key motor skills and language ability. M. Duncan, a professor part of the team stated that they chose the Gruffalo as it was a very popular book with the age range 3-4, and “the storyline and the characters within it gives great scope for both movement and language activities. The story acts as 'mental anchor' for children taking part in the movement activities.” [29].

Thus, this is a book that children appreciate because of the story and because of the main character. It is full of stylistic devices that do not represent a difficulty in the process of cultural adaptation of the book. Although repetitive, the story narrates about a series of complex events and characters bearing human traits and qualities and ends on a happy note. Judging by the translation, it complies with the source text, although the style of the text is slightly different and the action in the TT is more dynamic and livelier (due to the choice of lexemes, a series of motion verbs (the Romanian translation seems to use comparable expressive manner of motion verbs, however, not always these would be the exact equivalents for the English manner of motion verbs, which has an impact on the readers of the two texts (original and translation) and due to the rhythm and rhymes (iambic and dactylic metrical foot in both texts) which makes it more memorable. The translation gained a lot from the fact that the translator is a writer as well and he perfectly conveyed the style of the author without any distortion, remaining faithful to his own language and his poetic individuality.

Conclusions

Whenever translators are dealing with the transfer of a text for children of a SL to the texts for children of the TL, they will have to consider that all the omissions, explanations, or transformations can hugely impact the text, result in losses and be presented in another light to the target audience. Therefore, translators have to stick to a series of permanently evolving norms that are more prevailing compared to other genres and age groups. In spite of the multitude of rules, two are the most important in dealing with ChL – the translator has to keep its didactic function and the appropriate degree of child's understanding of the text.

References:

1. JOHNSON, R. A. Trends in Children's Literature and the Social Implications, *Chancellor's Honors Program Projects*. University of Tennessee: 2014, 41 p.
2. SHAVIT, Z. *Poetics of Children's Literature*. The University of Georgia Press. Athens and London: 1986 (2009). 200 p. ISBN-10:0-8203-3481-2.

3. CLARK, M. *Writing for Children*. London: A&C Black (Publishers) Ltd, 1993. 192 p. ISBN-13 978-0713637366
4. GARCIA DE TORO, C. Translating Children's Literature: A Summary of Central Issues and New Research Directions. In: *Senteban*, ISSN-E 2340-2415, N° 31, 2020, pp. 461-478.
5. O'SULLIVAN, E. Children's literature and translation studies. In: *The Routledge Handbook of Translation Studies*. Carmen Millán and Francesca Bartrina (eds.). London: Routledge, 2013. p. 451-463.
6. <https://www.loc.gov/acq/devpol/chi.pdf> [Retrieved 20.03.2022]
7. <https://www.britannica.com/art/childrens-literature> [Retrieved 10.03.2022]
8. SCHNEIDER, J. What is Children 's Literature? In *The Inside, Outside, and Upside Downs of Children's Literature: From Poets and Pop-ups to Princesses and Porridge*. University of South Florida, 2016. p. 9-27. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5038/9780977674411.ch2>
9. MOURAD, Y. Translation of Children's Literature and Cultural Identity Formation. Master of Arts Thesis. American University of Sharjah: 2005.
10. <https://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1829/Children-s-Literature.html> [Retrieved 25.01.2022]
11. NODELMAN, P. *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature*. JHU Press, Baltimore: 2008, 390 p. ISBN:10-0-8018-8980-4
12. VAN COILLIE, J., MCMARTIN, J. Studying texts and contexts in translated children's literature. In: *Children's literature in translation texts and contexts*. Leuven University Press: 2020, 278p. ISBN 978 94 6166 320 7
13. ASGHARI, M. Cultural-context Adaptation in Translation of Children's Short Stories from English to Persian. In: *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 5, 2016. pp. 965-971. ISSN 1799-2591
14. NORTON, D. *Through the Eyes of a Child: An Introduction to Children's Literature*. Columbus: Merrill Publishing Company, 1987.
15. O'SULLIVAN, E. Translating Children's Literature: What, For Whom, How, and Why. A Basic Map of Actors, Factors and Contexts. *Brasília: Belas Infieis*. 2019. V. 8, N. 3, p. 13-35.
16. O'CONNEL, E. Translating for Children. In: Anderman, G. and Rogers, M., Eds., *Word, Text, Translation: Liber Amicorum for Peter Newmark, Multilingual Matters*, New York: 1999. pp. 208-216.
17. OITTINEN, R. *I Am Me – I Am Other: On the Dialogics of Translating for Children*. University of Tampere, Tampere, 1993. ISBN-13 978-9514434280.
18. <https://www.totb.ro/interviu-cu-scriitorul-florin-bican-literatura-pentru-copii-este-un-act-profund-subversiv/> [Retrieved 1.03.2022]
19. VRABIE, D. Proza scurtă pentru copii între convenționalitate și originalitate. In: *Metaliteratură*, anul XII, nr. 5-6 (31), 2012. pp. 92-101.
20. <https://journals.openedition.org/trans/1440?lang=en> [Retrieved 2.02.2022]
21. <https://www.history.com/news/prehistoric-children-finger-painted-on-cave-walls> [Retrieved 20.03.2022]
22. <https://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-childrens-literature-history-themes-examples.html> [Retrieved 10.03.2022]
23. SEMIZU, Y. *Adulthood in Children's Literature: Toward the Awareness of Adults' Presence in Children's Literature*. Doctoral Thesis. University of Nottingham: 2013. 337 p.
24. BOBULOVÁ, I. *A Brief History of Children's Literature-Conception of Childhood*. Children's and Juvenile Literature. Nitra, Pedagogická fakulta UKF v Nitre, 2003.
25. <https://www.thebookseller.com/news/news/children-prefer-print-books-e-books-survey-finds-322447> [Retrieved 24.02.2022]
26. KOPALOVÁ, L. *Ambivalence in translation of children's literature and its perception by the dual readership*. Thesis. Filozofická Fakulta Univerzity Palackého, 2013.
27. <https://www.bookchamber.md/?s=copii> [Retrieved 25.03.2022]
28. O'SULLIVAN, E. *Comparative Children's Literature*. Routledge, 2005. 256 p. ISBN 9780203508664.
29. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/06/170628095846.htm> [Retrieved 20.03.2022]