IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION IN TRANSLATING MARY POPE OSBORNE'S SERIES MAGIC TREE HOUSE *INTO ROMANIAN*

Cristina MIRON*

Abstract: *This paper intends to identify the concepts of identity and alterity in the translations of Mary Pope Osborne's series* Magic Tree House *into Romanian.*

Keywords: *translation, identity, representation.*

About the author

According to wikipedia, Mary Pope Osborne (born May 20, 1949) is an American writer of children's books. She is best known for the award-winning and bestselling *Magic Tree House* series, which has been translated into more than 30 languages and has sold more than 100 million copies worldwide.

Osborne's first book in print was published 10 years before the first Magic Tree House entry. That was *Run, Run, As Fast As You Can* in 1982, a semi-autobiographical story of a young girl growing up in a military family, which was published by Random House Children's Books. She wrote several other books, mostly targeted to the youth audience.

Osborne's publisher suggested that she write a series. She spent the next year on it, eventually hit upon a formula for a series of chapter books: protagonists 8-year-old Jack and his 7-year-old sister Annie, patterned on her own sibling relationships. They live in the fictional, pastoral Frog Creek, Pennsylvania. Desiring to make it a time-travel series, Osborne happened upon an old children's tree house that inspired the means.

The first of the Magic Tree House stories, *Dinosaurs before Dark*, was published in 1992. The book opens with the siblings finding a magic tree house filled with books near their home. Osborne casts Morgan le Fay, fairy sister of King Arthur, as the head librarian of Camelot. When Jack and Annie read one of le Fay's books, they are transported with a wish to its time and setting. The book established the mold for future releases. Osborne followed with 27 more in the same pattern, changing little more than the setting and adventure. Starting with #29, Osborne altered the series and renamed it the "Magic Tree House Merlin Missions". The books now featured missions assigned to them by Merlin the magician. Osborne also aged the protagonists 2 years, although she has stated in interviews that she does not intend to age the characters any further.

Osborne's writing style is credited for the popularity of the series. Osborne tends to small cliffhangers at the end of chapters, which have been highlighted as a major ingredient in the books' appeal with the target age group. The series is most commonly considered to be educational, both with the historical and geographical accuracy of its content and in its vocabulary.

* University of Pitesti, cristinamironn@gmail.com

BDD-A24572 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 07:11:12 UTC)

The popularity of the series eclipsed that of *Harry Potter* as #1 on the New York Times Bestseller list in 2006. The series has received honors from such organizations as the National Council of Teachers of English, the American Booksellers Association and the author received the Ludington Memorial Award from the Educational Paperback Association and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Random House Sales Force.

The *Magic Tree House* brand has spawned several other products. A non-fiction companion series, the *Magic Tree House Research Guides*, was launched in 2000 to expand on the facts behind the Magic Tree House entries. Now known as *Fact Trackers*, Osborne writes these with her husband and her sister Natalie Pope Boyce. A full-scale musical adaptation was created by Will Osborne; *Magic Tree House: The Musical*, premiered in September 2007. A planetarium show; "Magic Tree House: Space Mission", also created by Will Osborne, is produced and presented exclusively at the Morehead Planetarium in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. In 2011, Will Osborne collaborated with legendary New Orleans composer Allen Toussaint and "Ain't Misbehavin'" co-creator Murray Horwitz to write "A Night in New Orleans", a musical adaptation of *Magic Tree House* #42: *A Good Night for Ghosts*. Audio and braille versions of the books are available as well as companion programs aimed at educators using the books to illustrate history and writing skills. However, Magic Tree House merchandise is rarely offered and usually for an educational purpose. For example, a small selection of T-shirts, bags, and pencils are available in support of Osborne's alma mater at the UNC Morehead Planetarium.

Magic Tree House volumes 11 to 16 were all released during 1998. Otherwise about two volumes have been completed annually, through volume 51 released in January 2014, *High Time for Heroes*. Osborne has produced many non-fiction companions to particular Magic Tree House volumes, written primarily in collaboration with Will Osborne, and illustrated by the Tree House illustrator Sal Murdocca.

Translation of the titles

The original title of the series, *The Magic Tree House* refers to a children's tradition which is not so common in Romanian culture – building tree houses in the gardens as a playhouse for the kids, therefore something else should have been invented. Since the tree house is just a means for time-travelling, the Romanian translator. Together with the publisher, thought about something else: the Romanian noun "portal" to replace it. It is appropriate in that its connotations combine history and traditions (it refers to an element of architecture with mediaeval resonance) and contemporary IT culture (it refers to internet virtual "spaces" which open a door to infinite information, it has science fiction resonance). What is important is that this term merely translates the actual connotation and function of the "magic tree", that of a "door or gate" towards various spaces and times, as a means for time and space travelling. If the magic tree is a whole building, the magic "portal" is only its gate, its door. Other European languages gave either a faithful translation to the title, as the Spanish and German ones; *La casa magica del arbol*, *Das Magische Baumhaus*, or an adaptation, as in French, *La cabane magique.*

The original titles of the books have references to a specific point in time: *Dinosaurs before Dark*, *The Knight at Dawn*, *Mummies in the Morning*, *Pirates Past Noon*. The translation of the titles in Romanian has been the result of a collaboration between the translator and the publisher, the latter imposing the titles which seemed

BDD-A24572 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 07:11:12 UTC)

most appropriate for the Romanian book market. Usually the translator has tried to be more faithful to the original yet the publisher seeks a more catchy title, a title that should refer to the content of the book but should also catch the attention of the public. Some titles were inspired from the French version of the series, on account of the fact that our culture is closer to the French culture. If the French translators and publishers were very inventive and creative in translating the titles, the Spanish version lies at the opposite pole: it is highly faithful to the original. It is interesting to note that even the British changed the American titles when they published the books in their country, as a result of the need they felt to adapt them to their own culture. Here is a list of the titles translated so far and of their equivalents in various languages:

American title	UK title	Spanish title	French title	German title	Romanian title
1. Dinosaurs Before Dark, 1992	Valley of the Dinosaurs	¡Que vienen los dinosaurios!	La Vallée des dinosaures (2002)	Expedition durch Feuer und Eis	Dinozaurii vin spre seară 2013
2. The Knight at Dawn,	Castle of Mystery	El caballero de la noche	2. Le Mystérieux Chevalier (2002)	Der geheimnisvolle Ritter	Cavalerul misterios
3. Mummies in the Morning,	Secret of the Pyramid	El Secreto de la Momia	3. Le Secret de la pyramide (2002)	Das Geheimnis der Mumie	Secretul piramidei
4. Pirates Past Noon	Pirates' Treasure!	¡Atrapados por los piratas!	4. Le Trésor des pirates (2002	Der Schatz der Piraten	Comoara piraților
5. Night of the Ninjas		La noche de los ninjas		Im Land der Samurai	Codul luptătorilor ninja
6. Afternoon on the Amazon	Adventure on the Amazon	Escapada al Amazonas	5. Sur le fleuve Amazone (2003)	Gefahr am Amazonas	Aventuri în jungla Amazonului
7. Sunset of the Sabertooth	Mammoth to the Rescue	Viaje a las cavernas	6. Le Sorcier de la Préhistoire (2003)	Im Reich der Mammuts	Vrăjitorul din era glaciară
8. Midnight on the Moon	Moon Mission)	Medianoche en la Luna	7. Le Voyage sur la Lune (2003) ;	Abenteuer auf dem Mond	Călătorie pe Lună

BDD-A24572 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 07:11:12 UTC)

9. Dolphins at Daybreak	Diving with Dolphins	Delfines amigos	12. Sauvés par les dauphins (2004)	Der Ruf der Delfine	Salvați de delfini
10. Ghost Town at Sundown	A Wild West Ride		13. Les Chevaux de la ville fantôme (2004) ;	Das Rätsel der Geisterstadt	Aventuri în Vestul sălbatic
11. Lions at Lunchtime	Lions on the Loose	¿Dónde están los leones?	14. Dans la gueule des lions (2004) ;	Im Tal der Löwen	Cu leii în savană
12. Polar Bears Past Bedtime	Icy Escape	Aventura en el Ártico	15. Danger sur la banquise (2004)	Auf den Spuren der Eisbären	Pericol în Arctica

The characters' names

The frustrations I had when starting to translate consisted in not having the possibility to adapt the proper names, since I was given the translation of volume 5. I would have liked to change the name of the main characters, to make them sound more natural for the Romanian reader: instead of Jack and Annie I would have chosen Vlad and Ana. The Spanish version has preserved the names, the German version changed the name of the boy into Phillip and adapted Annie as Anne, the French version changed both names into Tom and Lea. Morgan le Fay sound rather unnatural for the name of a woman, so I would have made it sound more feminine in Romanian as Morgana.

The syntactic structure and its representations into Romanian

Intended as a first reading book for the primary school children, this series employs a very simple syntactical structure. It abounds in simple and compound sentences, most of the time of the subject + predicate order. Sometimes the sequence of too many sentences beginning with the same subject is annoying for the adult ear, because the coherence of the story seems to be interrupted all the time by the pause given by the full stop. But for the child reader it sound very natural resembling the "Ana are mere" structure of his/her first schoolbook. "Jack took a deep breath. She was right. Annie grabbed Jack„s hand. Together they stepped into the water." (#5, p. 25.)

Semantic representations
Interjections

One problem when translating the book was the translation of interjections. It seems Romanian is not so fond of interjections when presenting facts. We prefer to use in certain cases exclamations (nouns or adjectives) instead of interjections. The omnipresent Wow! Has been translated in various ways, because I wanted to avoid the overuse of the neological Romanian version Uau (which has been recently introduced in

BDD-A24572 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 07:11:12 UTC)

DEX), so I also chose the often used Super! Or other exclamations as Extraordinar! Nemaipomenit!, or even the older translation as Au" AOleu" Vai" Another interjection that has been adapted and appears in the recent Romanian dictionaries is Oops" (as Ups!"), but has other parallel translations: Hopa! Haiti! Na!

A very simple and used interjection, Oh! Presents various emotions and therefore its translations also varies: a! ah! Hei! Oh! Vai! Oh brother! - dumnezeule! Doamne!

The interjection E-hy! associated to the Ninjas has been translated phonetically as Iii-hai. Yikes! Has been variously translated as Aii!

Gestures, repetitions

There is a gesture which defines Jack: he always seems to "push his glasses into place" – își împinse mai bine ochelarii pe nas, își așează mai bine ochelarii.
Although the gesture is repeated, we have varied its translationsl We did the same with the repetitive structures which start and end the travel: "The wind began to blow. It blew harder and harder. The tree house started to spin. Faster and faster! Jack squeezed his eyes shut. Then everything was still. Absolutely still." – " Se stârni vântul. Și prinse a șuiera din ce în ce mai tare. Căsuța din copac începu să se învârtească. Din ce în ce mai tare! Jack închise ochii strâns. Pe urmă totul rămase încremenit. Absolut încremenit."

Translations of codes

A challenge which saved the monotony of translating simple and compound sentences was the fact that each group of 4 volumes contains a code that has to be broken in order to be given something by Morgan. Volumes 5-8 had four words starting with an M: *mouse, mammoth bone, mango, moonstone* which formed an incantation that brought Morgan back to the magic tree house. It is but obvious that the Romanian equivalent words cannot all start with an M. *Mango* is *mango* in Romanian too, *mammoth* is also *mamut*. But *mouse* is *șoarece*, and *moonstone* is *piatra lunii*. For the latter, I chose *mărgeaua lunii*, given the resemblance of the stone to a bead. For *Mouse* I intended to avoid the use of the well-known *mouse* (or *maus*) because of its inappropriate connotations (it simply refers in Romanian to an object related to computers) therefore I proposed myself to teach the children something new: the Latin word for *mouse*, *Mus musculus*. And so the first code was solved.

The other series of volumes I translated, 9-12, proposed something even more complicated for a translator: each volume contains a rhymed riddle. The four words which represent the answers to the four riddles will represent the key for returning home of the two kids: their first letter will be h, o, m and e.

1.Rough and gray as rock I'm plain as plain can be But hidden deep inside There s great beauty in me. What am I?	Sunt cenușie și tare ca o piatră De felul meu sunt cam neînsemnată Dar ce ascund în mine Este frumusețe adevărată. Ghicești cine sunt?
2. Out of the blue My lonely voice Calls out to you Who am I? Am I?	Din senin, neașteptat Glasul meu însingurat Te strigă răspicat și tare Ce sunt eu oare, oare?

BDD-A24572 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 07:11:12 UTC)

3. I m the colour of gold And as sweet as can be But beware of the danger That s all around me What am I?	Sunt ca aurul de glabenă Și la gust sunt dulce dulce Dar pericolul îl paste Pec el care vrea să mă mănânce. Ce sunt eu oare?
4.I cover what s real And hide what s true But sometimes I bring out The courage in you. What am I?	4. Ascund realitatea Și adevăril îl acopăr Dar uneori din tine Curajul îl descopăr Ce sunt oare?

The four letters of the four words formed the word HOME (OYSTER, ECHO, HONEY; MASK) but in Romanian the word would be *acasă*, with five letters. I resorted to a synonym, CĂMIN, and I invented another code, because the words were not to be found all al the beginning of the respective Romanian words STRID**I**E, E**C**OU, **M**IERE, MASC**Ă –** CĂMI plus an N proposed from the beginning.

Look at the letters The first not the rest Discover the place That you love the best	A doua din coadă, a doua din cap Și prima din cap, și prima din coadă Un N la sfîrșit și apoi vei spune Ce loc ți-e cel mai drag din lume:
OYSTER, **E**CHO, **H**ONEY; **M**ASK **HOME**	STRID**I**E, E**C**OU, **M**IERE, MASC**Ă** **CĂMI+N= CĂMIN**

Moreover, volume 10 included the lyrics of a song of country music, which I had to translate.
Here is the first stanza:

From this valley they say you are going I shall miss your sweet face and bright smile For they say you are taking the sunshine That has brightened my pathway awhile.	Când de aici din vale vei pleca De chipul tău zâmbind îmi va fi dor Căci merge vorba că atunci vei lua Chiar soarele cel călăuzitor.

Scientific terms

Each volume contains various scientific or technical terms in various fields, because it introduces the young reader to a new world. In order to give an appropriate translation, I had to consult both a technical dictionary and magazines such as “National Geographic” and “Descoperă” in their Romanian versions.

English	Romanian
rain forest	– junglă, pădure tropicală (when there is a pun-upon-words

BDD-A24572 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 07:11:12 UTC)

	with reference to the rain, the English term had to be explained through a literal translation)
Sabertooth	smilodon
vampire bat	liliac-vampir
airlock	cabina presurizata
landing chamber	hangar de aselenizare
mini-sub	batiscaf
wildebeest	antilopa gnu
honey guide	pasăre-ghid
parka	parka
seal fat	seu de focă
Mush! - urge used for the huskies to start	înainte!
Howdy!	Sal'tare!

References

Bantaş, Andrei; Croitoru, Elena, *Didactica traducerii*, Teora Publishing House, Bucureşti, 1998.
Bell, Roger. T., *Teoria și practica traducerii*, Polirom, Iași, 2000.
Pope Osborne, Mary, *The Magic Tree House* series, vol. 1-12, Random House Kids, 1992-1998.
Pope Osborne, Mary, *Portalul magic*, vol. 1-12. Editura Paralela 45, Pitești, 2013-2015.
Dimitriu, Rodica, *Theories and Practice of Translation*, Institutul European, Iași, 2002.

Electronic resources

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Pope_Osborne
http://marypopeosborne.com/
http://www.magictreehouse.com/#

BDD-A24572 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 07:11:12 UTC)