TRANSFORMING AND ADAPTING WHEN TRANSLATING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Mădălina Pantea
Lecturer, PhD., University of Oradea

Abstract:In the last fifty years, everything related to children's literature has changed. Even the scholarship that deals with it has suffered several changes. When it comes to translating children's literature, the mechanical part gets lost and makes room for the whole situations. This paper focuses on explaining why translators have to pay attention to the intentions of the readers of the book in translation, in this case, children's literature.

Keywords: translation, children, literature, target text, source text

There is a constant fear of the translators to render the source text into the target one by keeping the exact message the writer intended to convey. Adapting and transforming the text so that it faithfully fulfills the writer's purpose can be seen as fruitful methods. But are they reliable techniques in rendering the appropriate message to the children? Through literature, children are taught in a pleasant way the values of the adults, what should be done or not. The biggest 'hurdle' to surpass is the culture constraint which should be overcome.

The translation process should take into consideration the two strategies that can be used: the preservation of the 'foreignness' of the text or the adaptation of the text, thus promoting reading fluency. These two strategies are related to the motivations of the translation process. If the purpose is educational, then 'preservation' of the text is more likely to be applied, the reader discovering new words, worlds, cultures. If the purpose is fluency, then the translation will be adapted and the reading task facilitated.

One question clearly takes precedence when we translate for children: For whom? We translate for the benefit of the future readers of the text—children who will read or listen to the stories, children who will interpret the stories in their own ways. This question also brings up the issue of authority. If we simply aim at conveying "all" of the original message, at finding some positivistic "truth" in the "original," we forget the purpose and the function of the whole translation process: the translation needs to function alongside the illustrations and on the aloud reader's tongue. However, if we stress the importance of, for instance, the "readability" of the target-language text (or rather the readability of the whole situation), we give priority to the child as a reader, as someone who understands, as someone who actively participates in the reading event.

Oittinen states in her work *Translating for children* that: "reading is the key issue in translating for children: first, the real reading experience of the translator, who writes her/his translation on the basis of how she/he has experienced the original; second, the future readers' reading experiences imagined by the translator, the dialogue with readers who do not yet exist for her/him, that is: imaginary projections of her/his own readerly self. The translator reaches toward the future child readers, who are the beneficiaries of the whole translation process—the child and the adult reading aloud. Translators are readers who are always translating for their

BDD-A28658 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:49:55 UTC)

readers, the future readers of the translation." (2000: 5) In other words, adaptation is the key when translating children's literature. It is in a way supposed to be different from a translation, which should be the same or somehow equivalent to the original. Adaptation and equivalence are, in fact, vague concepts. In recent years, these two concepts have been more and more considered when it comes to translation and Oittinen continues on this very issue by saying that "as a whole, I do not consider them separate or parallel issues: all translation involves adaptation, and the very act of translation always involves change and domestication. The change of language always brings the story closer to the target-language audience. Much of the disagreement, for example, in adaptation versus censorship, reflects changes in culture and society, our child images, and our views about translating." (2000: 6)

When doing a translation for children, there are elements of **cultural context** which could not be as familiar to the readers of the target text as to the readers of the source text. So, the translator has to do something about this as the target text may be difficult or less interesting to its readers. There are several concepts that are likely to make the translator resort to cultural context adaptation in this type of situation. Klingberg (1986:17-18) identifies ten of them. These are:

- literary references;
- foreign languages in the source text;
- references to mythology and popular belief;
- historical, religious and political background;
- buildings and home furnishings, food;
- customs and practices, play and games;
- flora and fauna;
- personal names, titles, names of domestic animals, names of objects;
- geographical names; and
- weights and measures.

Adaptation consists in transforming the source text to the reader. This is similar to the translation method that is called 'domestication' which is "an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values, bringing the author back home" (Venuti, 1995: 20). According to Klingberg (1986: 18), cultural context adaptation can be achieved by means of the following:

- Added explanation (the cultural element is retained but a short explanation is added within the text).
- Rewording (what the source text says is expressed but without using the cultural element).

BDD-A28658 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:49:55 UTC)

• Explanatory translation (by means of the function or use of the cultural element rather than using the foreign name for it).

• Explanation outside the text (explanation by means of a footnote, a preface or the like).

• Substitution of an equivalent in the culture of the target language

• Substitution of a rough equivalent in the culture of the target language

• Simplification (a more general concept is used instead of a specific one)

• Deletion (words or parts of sentences are omitted).

• Localization (the cultural setting of the source text is made closer to the readers of the target text).

Domestication should not be the only aim when translating. The translator might choose to guide the reader to the foreign text. Venuti refers to this method as 'foreignisation" through which the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text are registered, thus 'sending the reader abroad' (1995: 20)

Purification is one of the central concept in Klingberg's writings, it is done to get the target text in correspondence with the values of the readers or rather with the values or the supposed values of adults: "*As purification one terms modifications and abbreviations aimed at getting the target text in correspondence with the values of the presumptive readers, or—as regards children's books— rather with the values, or the supposed values, of adults, for example, of parents. One can find purification being defended in earnest, but it seems to me that it—and to some extent also modernization—is in conflict with one of the aims of translation, i.e., to internationalize the concepts of the young readers".* (Oittinen, 2000:90)

It is a kind of sanitizing values in translation through deletion and addition. Purification does not touch only the unsuitable words or scenes but even whole stories if adults disapprove of them while children are quite familiar with and even enjoy with offensive language and find nothing wrong with –inappropriate scenes. By purification, translators try to adjust or sanitize the adult's inappropriate creation, suppress all taboos like bad manners in children, adult faults, sex, violence, excretion, also, contentious issues like politics, religion, racial discrimination or frightening events and objects.

Modernization is another way of changing the children's texts and making them more permissible to the nowadays reader: "*As modernization one could term attempts to make the target text of more immediate interest to the presumptive readers by moving the time nearer to the present time or by exchanging details in the setting for more recent ones*" (Oittinen,2000:90)

In some situations the translator finds himself obliged to make the characterization of the story up to date to which he brings old fashion language. Modernizations are not only done to make the language of a text more comprehensible, but also to make the text itself more understandable. If details of the scene are changed to more recent ones, the story appears more interesting for a younger generation who may have lost touch with the ideas and ideals of another time or culture. The translator aims to give the child a better understanding of other cultures and

BDD-A28658 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:49:55 UTC)

eras by using his/her own style adapted to the style of the writer or, another way would be for the translator to keep the source text's content if s/he wants the child to learn the old-fashioned life.

The **abridgement** of books are made when adult's literature is adapted to children literature or when children's literature is simplified and shortened, abridgements are regarded as a sign of a lack of appreciation of children and disrespect for the rights of the author so that scholars see them as negative attitudes. Translators must take into account which changes they will make if they translate for children. In this respect, Klingberg disapproves strongly of abridgement setting out some recommendations of how best to avoid problems if abridgement is essential:

1. No abridgement should be allowed which damages content or form.

2. If there is some reason for a shortening, whole chapters or passages should be deleted.

3. If one wishes to delete within paragraphs whole sentences ought to be cut out.

4. Under no circumstances should the author's style be altered.

5. Should one wish to shorten the average sentence length [...] sentences should be divided into two or more new ones. This would be much better than a deletion of words and content within sentences. (Wohlgemoth, 1998:64-65).

As far as **language adaptation** is concerned, Klingberg puts forward the idea that the author of children's literature may limit the vocabulary, use short sentences and avoid metaphors in order to adapt to the capacities of the intended readers. However, the translator may find this degree of adaptation not appropriate for his target readership. S/he may, then, find it necessary to readapt it. In other circumstances, the translator may be called upon to translate for children a text that, for some reason or another, has zero degree of language adaptation. This may be the case if the text was not, for instance, originally intended for children. In this case, s/he has then to adapt the language to the level of the child reader.

Conclusion

The problems involved in the translation of children's literature are especially related to the fact that children's literature is produced with a special regard to the interests, needs, reactions, knowledge and reading ability of the child reader and the purpose of such literature.

When translating children's literature, one should, therefore, bear in mind the fact that one is translating for a particular audience and for a particular purpose. In addition, children are special readers. Everyone's reading ability depends on the level of development s/he has achieved.

It is also the job of the translator to acknowledge the relationship between the linguistic and visual systems, and to choose a method of translation or adaptation that makes the text readable for the intended target reader. As Oittinen summarizes, *"[i]llustrations, comics, shape and setting of the text, para-textual elements, are not just decorations of the texts, they are part of the dialectic whole of the illustrated book and influence the content of the story, however the contents may be understood by different readers*" (Oittinen, 2000: 103).

BDD-A28658 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:49:55 UTC)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Asiain, Teresa – *The translation of children's literature: ideology and cultural adaptations. Captain Underpants as a Case Study*, University of the West of England, October 2015

Bassnett, Susan - *Translation, Power, Subversion*. Editors: R. Alvarez and M. C. Vidal, Philadelphia, Multilingual Matters, 1996.

Klingberg, Göte - *Children's Fiction in the Hands of the Translators*. Lund, Sweden, CWK Gleerup, 1986.

Children's Books in Translation: The Situation and the Problems, Proceedings of the Third Symposium of the International Research Society for Children's Literature. Editors: Göte Klingberg, Mary Orvig and Stuart Amor, Stockholm, Almqvist and Wiksell, 1978, Web. 15th July 2014.

Oittinen, Riitta – *Translating for Children*, Garland Publishing, Inc., New York & London, 2000.

Venuti, Lawrence - *The Translator's Invisibility*, New York, Routledge, 1995.

Wohlgemoth, G. - *Children's Literature and Its Translation,* University of Surrey, 1998.

BDD-A28658 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:49:55 UTC)