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**AN ANALYSIS UPON VARIOUS TRANSLATING  
APPROACHES OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: A  
REVIEW**

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# An Analysis upon Various Translating Approaches of Children's Literature: A Review

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**Abstract – The subject of this dissertation is children's literature and the translation of books for children. Various aspects of both these subjects are discussed in order to present a comprehensive overview of this field. A definition and a review of the subject of children's literature are given. The problems of adult dominance are examined, particularly in the sections on "Asymmetry", "Selection", "Ambivalence" and "Manipulation". Cultural differences are highlighted and their implications for the translation of children's literature pointed out. and particular emphasis is placed on the common translation strategy of cultural and moral adaptations of the source text. The roles of author, translator and publisher are explored. Particular emphasis is placed on the financial side of the book industry, involving the issues of book fails and co-productions.**

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## INTRODUCTION

The translation of children's books is not a straightforward matter. Beyond the forces of manipulation and profit lie several problems connected with the actual translation process. Because of the limited experience of children, translators encounter problems adapting then texts to the level of children's knowledge. Differences in culture between source text and target text, which may even lead to censorship, have to be considered. This shows that the subject of children's literature and its translation is a very complex one and that many different aspects have to be taken into account.

The main objectives of this dissertation are to present a comprehensive picture of the state of affairs in the field of children's literature, to analyse the situation and, also, to show the current conditions. In order to achieve these aims, a major part of the existing background literature in this field will be used for reference, giving the reader an opportunity to gain a valuable insight into the subject. This coincides with another objective, namely creating a sound basis of knowledge for anyone wishing to conduct further work in this field. It is also the intention of this paper to create general interest in the subject and to draw the attention of non-experts, such as parents, to the problems associated with the translation of children's literature.

Children's Literature has been a much neglected area and has struggled a lot to gain its popularity and footings in world literary canon. But, in the recent past, it has made its appearance as a well received and encouraging field of literary aspiration. Basically,

children's literature involves books that have been written, illustrated, published, marketed and purchased harmoniously and regularly by adults necessary for the amusement and education of our younger generation but now children's literature has been turned over a new leaf as didactic literature which instructs the particular reading audience i.e. our children and making them an epitome of virtuous and good values and develops a sense of good character in them. Children's literature, thus, becomes avant-garde and most compelling branch of literature which escapes and travels well beyond the bounds of the long-established portrayal and performances expected from it. In the contemporary literary set up children's literature enjoys encyclopaedic and all-embracing fame and aggrandizement due to bizarre and extraordinary production and sales of children's books which consecutively has produced a remarkable level of enthusiasm and attraction towards the field.

Still, In India, Indian English Children's literature, has a long way to gain popularity and recognition as a distinct branch of literature to study in Indian as well as in world literary canon and this is due to the small profit margins on the publication and illustration of children's books and due to the pre- eminence of English language and western children's literature on it.

In India, children's literature written or translated in English has never really reached to the top position. It is a much neglected area both in terms of publication and in the academic discourse. But at the same time, the contact of Indian literature with the European countries and especially with England and English

language paved the way for the development and growth of children's literature in Indian English studies as a separate genre and thus led to the development of modern globalized children's literature in India. In India children's literature has involved three phases of development and these are: Firstly, the tales and stories that are belonging to rich oral and traditional literature are particularly written and published for children only in order to enhance the popularity of children's texts, and, secondly, the texts selected from adult literature are translated, compressed and summarised for children for their easy comprehension by them and the third phase of development of children's literature is that it is only in the last century when the modern, original fantastical and creative literature for children has been developed. Realism is another main genre in the field of children's literature in the contemporary times. Realistic fiction mainly deals with the issues, problems and the dilemmas that children face in their everyday life.

## CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

The attitude shown towards authors of children's books is more than condescending. They are, somehow, seen as if they were the same age as their audience or still at a learning stage. Starting off a career by writing children's books is regarded as ideal: it will be easy and, in the case of a failure, not much harm will be done because "it is only for children".

Children's literature (ChL) is believed to be less demanding than literature for adults and, therefore, of less value and interest. Outside the field, it is little appreciated and, until recently, most authors of ChL adopted pen names because of this attitude. In addition, the royalties for ChL have always been lower than those for literature written for adults (AdL). Harranth too complains that translators of children's books are not well paid and that their financial situation influences the quality of their translations (1996:15.16; 1997:16.18). Owing to their inferior status, translations of ChL are often not declared as such and the translator's name is usually left out.

Children's books are rarely reviewed and translations and their translators have been - and still are - totally ignored. As a consequence, this situation is reflected in translations where deletions, additions, didactic remarks, lecturing and trivialization are not unusual. This is accepted, as children are inexperienced and, maybe, still uncritical readers and as there are few adults who advocate children's interests.

To begin with, it should be noted that there exists no single definition of ChL and, because of the complex characteristics of the subject matter, many different definitions are possible. They range from "anything that a child finds interesting including newspapers, magazines, even video films", "literature read by children up to the age of 16", "literature intended and produced specifically for children" to "literature for any

child or adolescent under the adult age including textbooks for school".

Children experience the world around them in a very different way from adults. Adults have learned to see correlations, to reason and, in general, their senses have become dulled through experience. Children do not have the knowledge and skills which adults have had years to acquire. They experience their surroundings in a completely unbiased way and with an immense wealth of fantasy. They have no preconceived ideas: they are open to everything. Because of this, their abilities deserve special attention and consideration. This must be taken into account when writing books for them. A text suitable for children means, therefore, anything that children can understand, that interests them and that meets their needs.

Literature, in general, divides readerships into 3 groups: adults, adolescents and children. The last of these is sometimes subdivided into very small children up to the age of 5 or 6 and school children up to the age of 11 or 12. Accordingly, one speaks about children's literature (including picture books for the very young ones), adolescent/juvenile literature and literature for adults. Especially in English-speaking countries, the term "children's literature" is used to cover both sub-groups of children's and adolescent literature. As the borders between these groups are indistinct and interests can differ, it is possible to find members of each group reading books intended for another age. So, one might find adults keen on children's books or 11-year-olds starting to show interest in literature written for adults.

## TRANSLATING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Children's literature has a particular purpose that should be carried on in its translation. Klingberg (1986: 10) distinguishes two main aims of translating children's literature. These are to make more literature available to children and to further the international outlook and understanding of the young readers. He also says that there are two pedagogical reasons that can cause the revision of the original text in order to suit it to the children's needs. The first is to give the readers a text that is within the level of their understanding and the second is to give the readers a text that contributes to the development of the readers' set of values.

Because of these specific aims of, and reasons for, translating for children, particular challenges arise when the translator embarks on translating children's literature. For that reason, he needs to use specific methods to overcome such challenges. Before looking at challenges presented by translating for children and the methods applied when translating for children, let us have a general look at methods used in translation.

Most people, be they authors, translators or publishers, agree with Klingberg that the foremost aim

of translating ChL must be to increase international understanding; it is only the way in which this aim is expressed that differs.

They see that people of other cultures experience the same problems and stresses and can relate this to themselves to realise that they are not alone.

### **Cultures and Regional Effects –**

Culture is defined as the combination of the ways and means of acting, thinking, feeling and perceiving reality, within which language plays a vital role. When translating, differences in cultures must be identified in order to derive solutions in accordance with the established concept of the target text culture (TC).

It is easier to translate texts between similar cultures than those which are vastly different. This is because the languages of related cultures have similar historical roots and vocabulary, grammar and language patterns will be similar. Another reason is the fact that a country's ChL, representative of its cultural background, is determined by pedagogic, moral and political values and for children to understand and process these values, they need to be equated with familiar ideas. Therefore, similar concepts in the literature of source language (SL) and target language (TL) will help the transposition process.

Cultural conventions can also be broken by the length of a text. Igor Motyashov gives as an example the translations of children's books from Russian into Japanese. In Japanese characters, a text is normally half as long again as the ST which makes the book twice or even three times the size of what is considered acceptable for a children's book in Japan. It goes without saying that this influences translation practices. In order not to break conventions, the ST is shortened and adapted or only short stories or novelettes are translated.

Returning to the aim of international understanding, there are different, closely-linked, geographical regions which facilitate or hinder the contribution ChL can make to international understanding by their influence on the distribution paths of translated children's books.

The majority of translated children's books originate from countries belonging to closely related language areas with, to a large degree, similar sociocultural structures. In this respect, it should be noted that various characteristics like political and social structures, conventions and customs contribute to shaping the culture typical of a particular country. These cultural specifics (peculiarities) vary between countries, though there will be some overlap, which increases the closer these countries are geographically and politically.

Hence, translations represent cultural transfers attempting to render the culture-specific details of the TL, making them clear to the reader without interrupting the flow. In the case of major cultural differences between ST and TT which the translator has failed to adjust or adjust sufficiently to the TC, publishers are likely to turn down the book. However, this problem should not occur too often because – in practice – only literature from countries with a similar cultural structure is translated.

### **Translation of Children's Books -**

One of the first questions to be asked concerns the genre of ChL. Is ChL a genre in its own right or is it a special form of literature? Following on from this, the question can be asked whether translation problems in texts written for children and adults are the same and, if not, in which respects they differ.

### **TRANSLATION STRATEGIES**

To overcome translation problems, translators use different methods and/or techniques. Vinay and Darbelnet (1995: 31) distinguish two broad methods, namely direct translation and oblique translation, each of which comprises a set of methods. Direct translation is the method used when it is possible to transpose the source language message element by element into the target language because it is based on either parallel categories or on parallel concepts. Oblique translation is the method that is used when there are gaps between the SL (Source Language) and TL (Target Language) and certain stylistic effects cannot be transposed. Direct translation comprises three methods, namely borrowing, calque and literal translation, while oblique translation consists of four methods, namely transposition, modulation, equivalence and adaptation.

Borrowing is a method of translation that consists in taking a foreign word from the SL and using it in the TL. As Hervey and Higgins (1992:31) put it, a SL word or expression is transferred into the TT verbatim. This is used in order to overcome a lacuna, usually a metalinguistic one, for instance a new technical process or an unknown concept (Vinay and Darbelnet, 1995: 31). Because borrowing is used to solve a cultural gap, Hervey and Higgins (1992:31) call it "cultural borrowing". Calque is, according to Vinay and Darbelnet (1995: 32), 'a special kind of borrowing whereby a language borrows an expression from another, but then translates literally each of its elements.' It may be a lexical calque (one that respects the syntactic structure of the TL) or structural calque (one that introduces a new construction into the TL). In this case, the expression consists of TL words and respects TL syntax but is unidiomatic in the TL because it is modelled on the structure of a SL expression (Hervey and Higgins, 1992:33). Literal, or word-for-word,



translation is the method used when it is possible to transfer directly the SL text into a grammatically and idiomatically appropriate TL text without having recourse to any oblique methods. All that the translator has to do is to observe the adherence to the linguistic servitudes of the TL.

Transposition is the method that consists in replacing one word class with another without changing the meaning of message. As to modulation, it is a method of translation that consists in the variation of the form of the message, obtained by a change of view.

Modulation can be resorted to when, although a literal, or even transposed, translation results in a grammatically correct utterance, it is considered unsuitable, unidiomatic or awkward in the TL (Vinay and Darbelnet, 1995: 36). Changing a negative into an affirmative or a passive into an active and vice versa are examples of modulation. The third oblique translation method discussed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995: 38), namely equivalence, is the method that is used when the same situation is rendered by two texts using completely different stylistic and structural methods. It consists, actually, in rendering an expression used in a ST situation by its equivalent in the TL situation. This method is the common method used in translating fixed expressions like proverbs, clichés, idioms, and so on (Vinay and Darbelnet, 1995: 38). As to the fourth method, namely adaptation, it is the method used when the type of situation referred to by the SL message is unknown in the TL culture. Translators are required to create a new situation that can be considered as being equivalent. According to these authors (1995: 38), adaptation can be characterised as a special kind of equivalence, a situational equivalence (Vinay and Darbelnet, 1995: 39).

In my opinion, the factor 'child as reader' and the purpose of translating should be given priority over anything else while translating for children. Translators should, therefore, adapt the source text and produce a translation that deserves to be part of children's literature, satisfies the child reader's needs and fulfils the given purpose. Klingberg (1986) argues that adaptation can be used as a particular method of translating for children.

For Klingberg (1986: 14), adaptation means in general 'the rendering of an expression in the source language by way of an expression in the target language which has a similar function in that language.' According to the same author (1986: 11), adapting for children consists in considering their supposed interests, needs, reactions, knowledge, reading ability and tailoring the literature intended to them accordingly. Shavit (cited in Oittinen, 2000: 86) identifies two main reasons for adapting for children: 'adjusting the text in order to make it appropriate and useful to the child, in accordance with what society thinks is 'good for the child'" and "adjusting plot, characterisation and language to the child's level of comprehension and his

reading abilities.' Klingberg (1986) discusses five kinds of adapting for children. These are cultural context adaptation, language adaptation, modernisation, purification and abridgment.

## CONCLUSION

The primary aims of this dissertation have been to cover as many aspects of the field of children's literature and its translation as possible, to give an overall view of the subject and to provide a useful reference work. Although an attempt has been made to give a rounded view of the field, it was of course not possible to include every facet of the subject, as the wide variety of factors, elements and views put it beyond the scope of a work of this length.

Generally, every text bears the characteristics of the culture in which it was written. Transferring it to another culture means, adapting it in some way to the new environment. The contentious issue amongst theorists now is to what extent texts need to be modified, in the case of children's literature, the borders of adaptation are extended to different degrees by different adults (i.e. translators), according to their own personal image of childhood. This means that some translators will tend to include more explanation or to remove more cultural peculiarities, thus adapting the text to a greater extent than others.

This dissertation has also shown that too many alterations of this kind are considered unnecessary, even undesirable. Such alterations are regarded as manipulation of the child who is himself too inexperienced to realise what has been done.

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