

THE TRANSLATION OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

A READER



Edited by Gillian Lathey

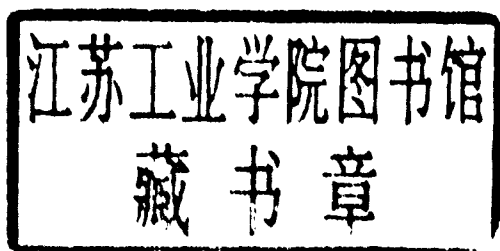
TOPICS IN TRANSLATION 31

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Introduction

Critical interest in the translation of children's literature has developed at an accelerating pace over the last 30 years. The third symposium of the International Research Society for Children's Literature (IRSCL) in 1976 represented a turning point: it was the first, and for many years the only, children's literature conference devoted to translation and the international exchange of children's books. At a time when the study of children's literature – whether national or international – was only just beginning to gain academic credibility, Austrian scholar Richard Bamberger (1978: 19) claimed at the symposium that the role of translation had 'hardly been touched upon ... in spite of the fact that translations, as a rule, are of even greater importance in children's than in adult literature'. Bamberger supported his comment on the primacy of translations for children by referring to the apparent universality of 'classics' such as Grimms' tales, *Pinocchio*, *Pippi Longstocking*, or *Alice in Wonderland*. Moreover, he argued, children are not interested in a book *because* it is a translation, as may be the case for adults, but in the power of narratives as 'adventure story, fantasies and so on, just as if the books were originally written in their own language' (Bamberger, 1978: 19). Yet Bamberger's list of international classics demonstrates the dominance of north European texts that has subsequently been interrogated by O'Sullivan (2005). His second point about children's unawareness of the foreign is also open to question, since there are times when it is those very qualities of the unfamiliar that attract and captivate young readers. Nonetheless, Bamberger's emphasis on differences between the reception of translations for adults and children provided a long overdue impetus for further research.

It has taken even longer for scholars in the field of Translation Studies to examine the particular challenges of translating for children. Birgit Stolt commented at the 1976 IRSCL symposium that 'In the theoretical works on the subject [translation] one hardly finds anything relevant on this subject.' (Stolt, 1978: 133; see Part 2 of this Reader for the full text of Stolt's article). And, as recently as 1999, Eithne O'Connell expressed surprise that within Translation Studies 'this area [the translation of children's literature] remains largely ignored by theorists, publishers and academic institutions' (1999: 208; see O'Connell, Part 1).

Yet the first signs of an interest in the broader issues of cross-cultural influence and the international dissemination of children's literature had emerged much earlier, from within the discipline of Comparative Literature – a branch of literary study defined by Susan Bassnett as 'concerned with patterns of connection in literatures across both time and space' (Bassnett, 1993: 1). Paul Hazard, the French comparatist, published in *Les Livres, les enfants et les hommes* (1932) his manifesto for a world republic of children's literature, proposing a romantic vision of the development of international understanding and the exchange of aesthetic appreciation through children's books. It was in the wake of Hazard's pioneering work that Bamberger devoted his attention in the 1960s and 70s to cross-cultural influences in children's literature. Bamberger suggested a number of lines of enquiry – amongst them the investigation of the international impact and transfer to the children's canon of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* or the travels of Collodi's *Pinocchio* – that have since been vigorously pursued (see Zohar Shavit in Part 1 and Emer O'Sullivan in Part 4 of this Reader). Bamberger's speech at the IRSL symposium echoed Hazard's position by claiming that: 'we can now rightly speak of a genuine world literature for children that can do much to further international understanding. Children all over the world are now growing up enjoying the same pleasures in reading, and cherishing similar ideals, aims and hopes' (Bamberger, 1978: 21).

One of the first academics to move beyond general, idealistic statements and pay serious attention to the linguistic processes, ideology and economics of translating children's books was Göte Klingberg, the Swedish co-founder of the IRSL and co-editor with Mary Ørvig of the proceedings of its third symposium, *Children's Books in Translation* (Klingberg & Ørvig, 1978). Klingberg's own contribution to that volume listed a number of potential avenues for research into the translation of children's books, from empirical statistical studies of translation streams to economic and technical factors, and from the selection of books for translation to the reception and influence of translations. Ten years after the symposium, Klingberg published the first results of an investigation into the adaptation of children's books to meet the norms and customs of the target culture in *Children's Fiction in the Hands of the Translators* (1986). This volume and the IRSL proceedings were for a number of years the only two substantial publications on translation for children.

As scholars and critics have come to appreciate children's literature as an aesthetically and ideologically dynamic medium, the study of translation has come into its own. When viewed through the finely ground lens of the act of translation, the transposition of a children's text from one language and culture to another reflects differing expectations and interpretations of

childhood. In the last 20 years, scholars across the world – Reinbert Tabbert (for an overview of critical studies on translation for children see Tabbert (2002)) and Emer O’Sullivan in Germany, Jean Perrot in France, Marisa Fernández López in Spain and Riitta Oittinen in Finland – have been working towards an understanding of the international progress and influence of children’s texts through the medium of translation.

Children’s literature journals, too, have addressed this dimension, from the internationalism that is the natural subject of *Bookbird, A Journal of International Children’s Literature*, published by the International Board of Books for Young People, to special issues of children’s literature journals on cross-cultural and translation issues. The *Lion and Unicorn* of December 1996, for example, was dedicated to *Struwwelpeter and Classical Children’s Literature* (see J.D. Stahl’s article on Mark Twain’s translation of *Struwwelpeter* in Part 5 of this volume), with subsequent issues dedicated to Irish (September 1997), French (January 1998), and Italian (April 2002) children’s literatures. Nancy Chambers, editor of the irreplaceable *Signal: Approaches to Children’s Books*, made a point during the journal’s 33 year lifespan of including articles on translation and translators, two of which are reprinted here. And, as a mark of the growing interest in children’s literature amongst comparatists and translation scholars, entire issues of comparative literature and translation journals have been devoted to children’s literature in the last ten years (*New Comparison*, 1995, no. 20; *Meta*, 2003 nos 1 and 2). Finally, successful international conferences on translation for children too place recently: Traducción y Literatura Infantil at the University of Las Palmas in March 2002, with a follow-up conference in 2005, and Writing through the Looking-Glass: International Conference on the Translation of Children’s Literature’ at VLEKHO in Brussels in March 2004.

The new millennium marked a second turning point in the field, with the publication of two outstanding contributions to knowledge and debates on the translation of children’s books. In *Kinderliterarische Komparatistik* (O’Sullivan, 2000; English translation, *Comparative Children’s Literature*, 2005), Emer O’Sullivan applies the insights of a comparatist to books written for the young. In addition to a scholarly overview of the field, she offers a number of case histories that inspire a fresh look at the international history of children’s literature. By questioning Zohar Shavit’s view that the development of all children’s literatures follows a similar trajectory ‘from instruction to delight’, O’Sullivan suggests that research into the diversity of children’s literatures, particularly non-European literature, will help to redress the balance in the field of children’s literature at an international level. Riitta Oittinen pursues an entirely different line of enquiry in *Translating for Children* (2000). Oittinen, herself a translator, author and illustrator

of children's books, turns to the child reader, viewer and listener to investigate children's potential responses to translated texts, and to argue in favour of a child-centred approach to translation. Both O'Sullivan and Oittinen have made fruitful links to other disciplines and areas of research: O'Sullivan applies models of narrative communication to the process of translating for children (see Part 2 of this volume), and Oittinen draws on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin in identifying the dialogic nature of translation (see Oittinen in Part 2).

The publication of this Reader, then, is timely. Its purpose is to bring together, and make readily available to students and scholars, English-language journal articles and chapters from published books that reflect the development and range of writing on the translation and international exchange of children's books over the last 30 years. Although the Reader is, like its editor, based in the field of Children's Literature rather than Translation Studies, all contributors draw on relevant aspects of translation theory when identifying issues specific to the translation of children's literature. Whatever their starting point, writers challenge the still commonly held perception that the internationalism of children's literature is unproblematic, and that figures such as Pinocchio, Alice and Babar have crossed national and linguistic boundaries with ease. They alert readers to the halting and uneven travels of children's texts, to the mediation that takes place during translation, to the effects of differing views of childhood across history and across the globe, and, not least, to the significance of developmental factors. Translating a nonsense rhyme for a three-year old is, after all, an utterly different task from working on a text for an adolescent reader.

The articles and chapters reprinted in this Reader demonstrate time and again that translating for children differs from translating for adults in two fundamental respects. Firstly, there is the social position of children and the resulting status of literature written for them, and, secondly, the developmental aspects of childhood that determine the unique qualities of successful writing for children and that make translating for them an imaginative, challenging and frequently underestimated task. The following introduction to both these dimensions of translating for children offers a context for the articles and chapters to follow.

Adult Perceptions of the Child Reader and the Status of Children's Literature

An unequal relationship

One inescapable factor that governs the process of writing and translating for children is the unequal relationship between the adult writer or

translator and the child audience. It is adults who decide the very extent and boundaries of childhood. Currently in the UK, for example, the official end of childhood is reached at the age of 18 rather than 21 as was the case some years ago, and what is regarded as the permissible age for purchasing cigarettes, alcohol or engaging in sexual activity has changed a number of times in the latter half of the 20th century. Childhood, since it was first designated as a discrete phase of life, has always been a flexible period that is adjusted to meet economic necessity. In the global market of the early 21st century, concepts of childhood depend increasingly on the initiatives of the fashion, games and toy industries, and marketing strategies divide childhood into phases: the 'pre-schooler', the 'pre-teen', the 'adolescent', the 'young adult' and so on.

Adults, too, dictate what children read, in that they are the writers, publishers and arbiters of children's reading matter. Jacqueline Rose (1994) investigated this paradox from a psychoanalytic perspective by taking Peter Pan as a case study of what she calls 'the impossibility of children's fiction'. Rose argues that adult self-interest is at stake in writing for children, whether as part of a cathartic revisiting of childhood concerns or because the adult has retained certain childhood qualities. Yet even the adult writers who come closest to understanding the desires of childhood can never fully adopt a child's perspective, and this fundamental adult-child difference frequently expresses itself in the duality of the narrator's mode of address to the child reader. Translators have to take into account an adult presence within the text in a number of forms, from the spectre of the controlling adult presence looking over the child's shoulder, to a playful irony intended for the adult reading aloud to a child.

Children's authors, whatever their motivation, do on the whole make a clear decision to write for the young, whereas translators may take a different stance towards the 'asymmetry' (O'Sullivan, 2000) of the adult-child relationship. Translators for children range from the professional translator who occasionally takes on a commission to translate a children's book, to the experienced children's writer who turns his or her hand to translation. Inevitably, therefore, there is a variation in the translator's understanding of the child reader. In the work of translators who are neither children's writers nor steeped in the world of childhood, there may be a distinct uneasiness at the prospect of translating for children.

Ann Lawson Lucas, for example, treads an equivocal line in the preface to her retranslation into English of Collodi's *Pinocchio*, stating that her version is 'not specifically or exclusively for children' (Collodi, 1996: 1). Lawson Lucas's primary concern was to produce a scholarly edition of a classic text, favouring the adult in the form of the scholar and thereby losing some of

Collodi's facility as a storyteller. On the other hand, the translator of the first German edition of *Winnie-the-Pooh*, E.L. Schiffer, diminishes the adult's enjoyment of reading the book aloud to children by removing witticisms and irony intended for adults (O'Sullivan, 1993). Both Lawson Lucas and Schiffer are well aware of the potential adult audience for these two children's texts; the one shifts address towards the academic adult reader (and appreciator of Collodi's social satire), whereas the other removes the implied adult reader inscribed within the source text. Yet neither translator has taken account of the *duality* that characterises much of the best writing for children, and that makes in the original texts in these two instances a literary virtue of the unequal relationship between adult and child.

Ideological differences: Didacticism and censorship

Ever since a separate literature for children emerged, reading matter for the young has been a vehicle for educational, religious and moral instruction and the teaching of literacy. Children's literature, including translated texts, tells us whether children are regarded as innocent or sinful in any given historical period or location, what rights or duties they have, and how they are socially or intellectually educated. Translators and publishers have in the past eagerly seized upon morally instructive texts in other languages. In line with the 'civilising' approach to education of the late 18th century Mary Wollstonecraft (1989, first published 1790), for example, applauded the rationality and sober morality of Christian Gotthilf Salzmann's *Elements of Morality for the Use of Children* in the 'Advertisement' to her translation from the German. In this instance, as in many others throughout the history of British children's literature, the choice of text for translation is indicative of the instrumental role of the translator in disseminating social and cultural trends with respect to childhood.

Over 100 years later, another translator's preface offers a revealing glimpse of the distance between adult and child in the early 20th century. Emma Stelter Hopkins, translator of Johanna Spyri's *Homeless* into English in 1912, expresses in tight-lipped fashion in her preface the hope that Spyri's stories will teach children to appreciate home comforts 'to which they grow so accustomed as often to take them for granted, with little evidence of gratitude' (Spyri, 1912: iii). Stelter Hopkins' stern words smack of the righteous and punitive attitudes in child-rearing practices of the late Victorian and Edwardian eras in the UK.

Differing cultural expectations of child readers give rise to censorship in the process of translation, particularly in the representation of violence and the scatological references in which children take such delight. One of the better-known omissions is that of the toe and heel mutilation and the

pecking out of the sisters' eyes in the Grimm Brothers' version of Cinderella, *Aschenputtel*, in many English-language versions for children (see David Blamires' article on the translation of Grimms' Tales in Part 5). In a more recent and perhaps surprising example, Birgit Stolt's account (in Part 2) of the censorship of a story by Astrid Lindgren for the American market – the replacement of a dung heap with a pile of leaves – is as telling as it is amusing.

Ideological differences between the contexts from which national children's literatures emerge, of which didacticism and censorship are just two aspects, are the subject of a number of articles in this Reader. In Part 1, Marisa Fernández Lopez considers the translation of children's literature as social history in her study of the Spanish translation of Richmal Crompton's 'William' stories and the work of Enid Blyton, while Emer O'Sullivan examines the differing literary and educational norms governing Pinocchio's Italian- and German-language incarnations in Part 4.

Cultural context adaptation

A developmental issue that concerns the translator of children's texts is the inevitable limitation to the young reader's world knowledge. Young readers cannot be expected to have acquired the breadth of understanding of other cultures, languages and geographies that are taken for granted in an adult readership. Since translators' footnotes are an unsatisfactory solution to this problem, localisation or 'domestication' (Venuti, 2000) is a frequently used but contentious tactic in children's texts. Göte Klingberg's phrase 'cultural context adaptation' has been adopted as an umbrella term for a variety of strategies for moving an original text towards the child reader in the target culture. Adaptation rests on assumptions that young readers will find it difficult to assimilate foreign names, coinage, foodstuffs or locations, and that they may reject a text reflecting a culture that is unfamiliar.

Göte Klingberg recommends that adaptation should be restricted to details and the source text manipulated as little as possible (Klingberg, 1986: 17). Award-winning English translator Anthea Bell, however, has advocated greater flexibility. In some instances, she argues, an 'impenetrable-looking set of foreign names' on the first pages of a book might alienate young readers, so that a translator has to 'gauge the precise degree of foreignness, and how far it is acceptable and can be preserved' (Bell, 1985: 7). There is certainly good reason to translate names if they have a meaning relevant to the story – Pippi Långstrump to Pippi Longstocking, for example – but children can and do take delight in the sound and shape of unfamiliar names. Once a narrative engages their interest, young readers

will persevere with names and localities that are well beyond their ken in myths, legends and fantasy fiction written in their native languages, let alone in translations, and they will certainly never be intrigued and attracted by difference if it is kept from them.

One form of contextual adaptation that is particularly significant for child readers is that of dialect or slang, since children's texts include a high proportion of dialogue. The didactic impulse has in the past dictated, for example, that the stylized Berlin street slang of Erich Kästner's gang of children in *Emil and the Detectives* should be transposed to the language of the English boarding school story of the period, peppered with adjectives such as 'awfully' 'frightfully' and 'tophole' (translations into English by Margaret Goldsmith in 1931 and Eileen Hall in 1959). Here is clear evidence for Zohar Shavit's contention that there is a tendency for the translation of children's texts to follow existing models in the target culture (see Shavit, Part 1). But changes to Kästner's vernacular also reflect a concern that children should encounter only standard English in their reading matter. Despite the more natural representation of children's spoken language in recent children's literature, this concern that children's spoken language may in some way be contaminated by dialect or the vernacular still lingers, for example, in the change from non-standard English to standard French and German in translations of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (see Nancy Jentsch's article in Part 4).

The status of children's literature and of its translators

Finally, Zohar Shavit's work on polysystem theory locates translation practices for a child audience within a model of literary hierarchies. Translators have historically treated children's texts in cavalier fashion, and have made alterations that are far less likely to occur in translations for adults. Shavit indicates ways in which the low status of children's literature, indeed its ranking in many countries alongside popular literature, has led to radical alteration and abridgment, citing examples of classic texts that have migrated from the adult to the children's canon such as *Gulliver's Travels* and *Robinson Crusoe* (see Part 1). It is for similar reasons that translation for children is not a prestigious occupation and financial rewards are frequently even lower than for translating adult literature.

There are, however, exceptions to this pattern. During an era when the child was central to the socialist enterprise, translators for children in the former German Democratic Republic enjoyed favourable conditions in comparison with their colleagues in the West. Gaby Thomson-Wohlgemuth (2003) has, in the course of painstaking work in German archives and interviews with translators, uncovered evidence of the high social status of chil-

dren's translators and children's literature in the period between the founding of the GDR and its demise in 1989. This is indeed a rare occurrence, but such privilege can be a poisoned chalice: Thomson-Wohlgemuth has also demonstrated the ideologically driven selection of texts and the censorship that constrained the work of translators.

Childhood and the 'Childness' of Children's Texts

In addition to questions of status, didacticism and adult considerations of what is good for the child, it is essential for a translator of children's literature to keep in mind the intrinsic qualities of successful writing for children and of childhood reading. One of the most demanding, and at the same time inspiring, aspects of translating for children is the potential for a creativity that characterises what Peter Hollindale (1997: 46) has called the 'childness' of children's texts: 'the quality of being a child – dynamic, imaginative, experimental, interactive and unstable'. This numinous quality of childhood reading originates in a writer's understanding of the freshness of language to the child's eye and ear, of the child's affective concerns and of the linguistic and dramatic play that are inherent in early childhood.

Translators for children, if they are not already children's writers themselves, have to make a transition to the child's mindset through the medium of the original writer's style. The best writing for children has a pregnant simplicity, a condensation of meaning that is extremely difficult to achieve and is caught in Jill Paton Walsh's analogy with a soap bubble, cited by Hollindale (1997: 40-41): 'all you can see is a surface – a lovely rainbow thing to attract the youngest onlooker – but the whole is shaped and sustained by the pressure of adult emotion'. Astrid Lindgren's prose in her two classic fairy tale fantasy novels *Mio min Mio* (*Mio my Mio*) and *Bröderna Lejonhjärta* (*The Brothers Lionheart*) has a breathless and emotionally intense quality that addresses a child's deepest concerns in the manner that Paton Walsh describes. Such a style presents a challenge to the translator, especially when, as so often in Lindgren's work, language and word play are essential to the narrative and constitute the 'inner rhythm' that Riitta Oittinen describes in Part 2. This is where translating prose for the child up to the age of twelve or thereabouts diverges most markedly from translation for adults, with two aspects (translating sound and translating the visual) demanding particular attention.

Translating sound

In writing for children, especially for younger children, authors like Lindgren pay attention to sound and rhythm in a manner that aligns their

prose with poetry. Much writing for the young child is read aloud; indeed, Cay Dollerup (2003: 82) has argued that translating for reading aloud 'is an art requiring great competence of translators'. Quite apart from the necessity of reading aloud to the youngest children who cannot yet read stories for themselves, the aural texture of a translation is of paramount importance to a child still engaged in discovering the power of language. Young children are eager learners of whatever languages surround them; they learn naturally through practice, play and the repetition and encouragement of their fluent elders. Ruth Weir's (1962) classic account of her son Anthony's pre-sleep monologues, *Language in the Crib*, demonstrates the sheer joy of experimentation with sound patterns as a two-and-a-half-year-old child rehearses the phonology of his native language. Repetition, rhyme, onomatopoeia, wordplay and nonsense are all common features of children's texts and require a linguistic creativity that is a challenge to any translator.

Take, for instance, the representation of animal noises that is a common feature of children's rhymes and stories. As long ago as 1659 Charles Hoole grappled with this conundrum in his translation of the *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* by Czech philosopher and educationalist Johannes Amos Comenius. This text, originally published in German and Latin, includes a section designed to teach the sounds of letters of the alphabet; captions in Latin and (in Hoole's translation) in English accompany pictures of animals and birds. Hoole renders the alliteration and onomatopoeia as best he can, with some curiosities, for example the letter 'g': 'Anser gingrit, ga ga. The goose gagleth'. Translators of texts for young children across the world regularly transpose the barks, squeals, roars and neighs of a varied menagerie into the conventional equivalents of their own tongue.

An appreciation of nonsense also stems from children's enjoyment of the aural qualities of language. Children's authors and poets, from the anonymous collective composers of nursery rhymes to Edward Lear, Lewis Carroll and Christian Morgenstern, have recognized the sounds that appeal to the young. When translating literary effects dependent on aural qualities, translators have to switch from one phonological system to another, as though transposing a piece of music to a different key. Anthea Bell's translation of Christian Morgenstern's sound poem *Das grosse Lallula* ensures that at least some of the sounds uttered in English will replicate the aural quality of the German original. In the third line of the poem Bell renders the German 'Bifzi, bafzi' as 'Biftsi, baftsi' (Morgenstern, 1995), thereby reproducing in English the 'ts' sound of the German 'z'. Bell does not always employ this strategy; indeed, the very freedom of translating pure sound without a semantic layer enables her to create a poem that repli-