

TRANSLATION OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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Abstract: In this paper we aim to discuss some of the complexities involved in the translation of children's literature. Therefore, we seek to review the literature in search of a concept for children's literature, identifying some intersection points among a wide array of discourses and the challenges encountered in establishing a working definition due to the complexity of the elements involved. The arguments about the definition of children's literature allow us a deeper look about the complexity and peculiarities of the genre, as pointed out by theorists such as Peter Hunt, Ronald Jobe and Zohar Shavit. Specific features of the translation of children's literature are pointed out and discussed, of which we highlight the asymmetrical relationship / dual player - the adult intervenes at

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all stages of the translation children's literature; the multiplicity of functions, as indicated by the insertion/ belonging of the genre to socio-educational and literary systems and permeated by their values; and textual manipulation, through liberties because of the peripheral position of the genre. Abridgments, omissions, additions, adaptations, language adjustments all determined by ideological issues are some of the aspects discussed in this paper.

Keywords: Translation of Children's Literature Asymmetrical relation. Multiplicity of functions. Textual manipulation.

TRADUÇÃO DE LITERATURA INFANTOJUVENIL

Resumo: Neste trabalho nos propomos a discutir as complexidades da tradução de literatura infantojuvenil. Para tanto, procuramos perfazer inicialmente o roteiro de teóricos em busca de uma conceituação para a literatura infantojuvenil, dos pontos de intersecção entre os vários discursos e das dificuldades encontradas para estabelecimento de uma definição em virtude da complexidade de elementos envolvidos. Os argumentos acerca da definição de literatura infantojuvenil permitem um olhar mais aprofundado acerca da complexidade e das peculiaridades do gênero, conforme apontado por teóricos como Peter Hunt, Ronald Jobe e Zohar Shavit. As particularidades da tradução de LIJ são apontadas e discutidas, entre as quais destacamos a relação assimétrica/leitor dual em que o adulto se interpõe em todas as etapas que compõem a (tradução de) literatura infantojuvenil; a multiplicidade de funções, dado apontado pela inserção/ pertencimento do gênero aos sistemas sócio educacional e literário e permeado de valores por eles atribuídos; e a manipulação textual, percebida nas liberdades tomadas em virtude da condição periférica do gênero. Cortes, omissões, acréscimos, adaptações, ajustes de linguagem determinados por questões ideológicas são alguns dos aspectos discutidos neste artigo.

Palavras-chave: Tradução de literatura infantojuvenil. Relação assimétrica. Multiplicidade de funções. Manipulação textual.

In Search of a Concept for Children's Literature

In a 2003 paper, Zohar Shavit points out her dissatisfaction with the status quo of academic research into children's literature (CL)¹. The author stresses that CL was not even a legitimate object of study in that period, nor respected, on the contrary, it was tolerated and perceived as a field of peripheral and insignificant research and suffered from *a status of inferiority*. A similar issue is pointed by O'Connell in a paper first published in 1999 and republished in 2006 as a chapter of *The Translation of Children's Literature - A Reader*, edited by Gillian Lathey. The author explains that the production of CL and the number of translations of this particular genre are not compatible with the volume of academic studies that have been carried out so far. Shavit (2003, p. 31-2) states that, despite the fact that this is a field underexplored by scholars, it is still complex and promising as a research area. Due to the complexities of cultural relations involved and the verification of the mechanisms and dynamics in which children's literature occurs, "[n]o other field enables us to inquire into the mechanism of culture, social manipulations and social procedure the way children's literature does."².

The scenario of critical studies presented by Tabbert (2002) shows a distinct piece of information: translation of CL appears as an object of academic interest. In the opening of his paper, the author states that the literature in question, traditionally the domain of librarians and teachers, has aroused the interest of scholars in the last 30 years, and at the same time it has extended its scope of study. These facts are attributed to the establishment of two new fields of research, namely Translation Studies and Children's Literature Studies. Studies in the area testify if not a growing, but at least a constant interest from the academic community, although there are gaps and the rhythm is a bit slow, especially as regards the specific Brazilian production.

We can list an endless series of factors that has led children's literature to be neglected for so long by the Academia: the first is

the relationship with its target audience as it is a product targeted to a specific audience (children and young people). The cognitive abilities of these readers are considered to be limited for complex texts and the aesthetic rigor of children's books are believed to be lower in comparison with adult literature. This simple genre immediately becomes classified as non-literature, non-canonical and non-official. Among other historical factors we could mention Children's Literature close links with social institutions considered fundamental in the modern world such as family, church and school. The direct connection with these three institutions stimulates CL to fulfill multiple functions, sometimes with doctrinal, pedagogical or moral ends. At the same time, CL is configured as a product of marketing interest accommodating adult's demands and interventions as well as their views on children and young people (Lajolo & Zilberman, 2007, p. 18). The many concessions that occur in the production process of children's books until their arrival to the market and later use can contribute for their negative image, since it is thought that these concessions interfere with the artistic quality of the texts, but at the same time revealing that this kind of literature cannot exist without such concessions.

Peter Hunt (2010, p. 49) highlights a number of striking features in his argument for the consolidation of the area under consideration. The features are the contribution of other disciplines relevant to a broad class of users (teachers, parents, children / youth and adult readers), editors, publicists, critics, translators and librarians,³ particular challenges of interpretation and production, implications for language acquisition, censorship, gender relations and sexuality. This vast number of elements, contradictorily, may have acted against the acceptance of CL as a legitimate object of study, concludes Hunt (*ibid.*).

Among the many issues that surround the area, the search for a definition that can contemplate the multitude of elements involved in children's literature is perhaps the most complex topic in discussions about this particular kind of text. In Brazil, we can add to this issue the terminological variety used to treat this very

same object of study. In English, the term “*children's literature*” relates to literature written and/or targeted for children and young readers, while in Brazil the nomenclature has become more and more fragmented: “infanto-juvenil”, “infantojuvenil” “infantil e juvenil”, “infantil”, “juvenil”. Historical and cultural factors are decisive for this lack of correspondence between the two languages. The definition of “child” and thus “childhood” is stated as being problematic, since they are unstable concepts that vary over time. Attached to these difficulties is the term “literature”, difficult concept, which contributes to further encourage the debate, since the issue of literariness, intrinsic characteristic of literary texts, might be considered irrelevant in a text whose aim would be seen only for teaching purposes. Finally, the term “juvenile” when separated emerges as an incognito in the definition of Children's Literature and it appears to contribute to the fragmentation of this research area even further, since there is not a parameter set in relation to the delimitation of when childhood begins and juvenileness ends.

Oittinen (2000, p. 5) sees children's literature as a kind of literature that is read silently by children or aloud to them. The author explains that it relates to the public with which she works (i.e. schoolchildren), but she also acknowledges that because of the fluidity in the concept of childhood her remarks will be extended to the young reader as well. John Rowe Townsend presents a definition centered in the agents who control the market of this particular kind of literature.

In the short run, it appears that, for better or worse, the publisher decides. If you put a book on the children's list, the book will then be reviewed and read as such by children (and young people). Now if it is put on the adult list, it will not be - at least not immediately⁴ (Townsend, 1980, p.197).

the responsibility, therefore, would be centered on the publisher. To target a book at a particular audience, however, does not guarantee

that this audience will adopt it⁵. Books initially targeted at adults eventually became classics of children's literature later, as is the case of *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe and *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift. The reverse movement also happens to children's classics that have become successful among adult readers, such as *Alice in the Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll and *Le Petit Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry or other works whose relevance in the publishing market was significant for both children and adult audiences. This can be illustrated by J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter Series* (Fernandes, 2004).

Supported by Townsend (ibid.) and Knowles and Malmkjaer (1996, p. 2), the author proposes an operational concept of children's literature as "any narrative written and published for children, including teenage novels with a focus on adolescent and young adult readers."⁶ Peter Hunt (2010) proposes a redefinition of the genre and suggests that instead of children's literature, the use of the term "texts" for children/young people would be more appropriate. The theoretical proposal by the author becomes more complicated with the use of the term "text", as it is used to mean any form of communication. Thus, children's texts would be in a relationship with films, videos, journals, TV series, CD-ROMs, in short, all kinds of text targeting at or established for the audience into question.

In the Brazilian context, Cecília Meireles (1979) proposes a broader discussion of what children's literature is⁷. The first question put by the author is whether children's literature is part of the larger literary system, that is, whether it is considered first and foremost as literature. The given answer is 'yes' and it is followed by another question, if children's literature exists, then how can we characterize it? How to delimit what is in the scope of childhood? While Townshend (1980) shows how the editor is responsible for this classification, Meireles presents a different perspective based on the child as the responsible for such classification. For her children are responsible for the delimitation of what is considered children's literature according to their own preferences. For Meireles, the right

thing would be to classify as children's literature what children read with utility and pleasure, though a notably subjective and difficult definition to follow. The biggest problem, according to the author, is that children's literature has already been established as "books for children". And the right thing for her would be a *a posteriori* rather than a *a priori* definition, which could establish an attitude of both the author and the publishers in relation to language and / or text manipulations in part or in its entirety, therefore, an attitude of ideological order. Children's books would be characterized as simple, easy to read and with teachings that adults would consider adequate, these teachings can often serve interests and principles, limiting children's interpretation as they are judged to be unable to perceive certain textual nuances. What cannot be denied is that children's literature is as complex as adult literature. This is the exact point that Meirelles wants to make, that is, that not every theme developed in a simplified manner and with a moral or educational content can be classified as "children's literature". She suggests that the works pass through the sieve of the child to assess their preference for children's books. What Meirelles proposes, in our view, is the breakdown of borders and levies attributed by adults to children's literature, allowing the child the possibility of a freer reading without so much adult interference

Arroyo (2013) corroborates this difficulty in conceptualizing children's literature and affirms that this conceptualization has varied a lot in space and time in virtue of its close relationship with pedagogy. The criteria established for a definite concept always meet historical, social and pedagogical implications. She also highlights examples of books such as *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe, who was consecrated as a children's classic due to its high acceptance of the public to whom the book had initially not been addressed.

The attitudes displayed by critics on CL reflect directly or indirectly aspects related to the translation of this particular genre. This is discussed as follows.

Features of Translating Children's Literature

The translation of CL is recognized by Jobe (1996, p. 513) as one of most demanding and complicated tasks for translators. He states that translating for children and young people is a complex challenge, in which the translator is faced with dilemmas such as produce a literal or free translation? Word for word or sense for sense, thus preserving the fluidity of the text? By choosing either one or the other translators take risks inherent to the choices they make: the excessive proximity to the source text (literalness) may result in a lack of vitality or make it difficult to read (lack of readability), an adapted version, on the other hand, can remove from the text elements judged as inseparable and fruit of the author's intention. Additionally, adaptation can lead to an oversimplification of the narrative to the point that may make translated text difficult to read.

Bastin (2009) explains that adaptation can be understood "as a set of translational interventions that result in a text generally not accepted as a translation, but recognized as a representation of the source text⁸. The term is normally associated with the translation of CL. This association may be due to the required changes and adjustments to the creation of the message that will be targeted at a new audience, as the sociolinguistic needs of this new audience are configured differently from the source text audience. Techniques such as paraphrasing, omission and addition are commonly used in this case. The notion of adaptation is still confusing when compared to that of translation. Translation would be more related to the idea of fidelity to the original, therefore, closer to the source text, while any distancing, cutting or deviation pointed out as transgression to what is called the original, would be associated with adaptation. Adaptation can be applied locally to parts of a text or globally to the whole text. For example, when a story is adapted for the theatre; in updating old information; by offering clarifications; normalizing dialects, slang and words *nonsense*; in recreating cultural contexts; in maintaining the message, ideas and function of the source text,

but locating the message in a new context without being concerned with the literalness (BASTIN, 2009, p.4).

In the field of discussions on translation, questions about the specificities of translating for children/young people and adults often arise. Is there any difference between them? The translation for child/young readers is easier or more complex? Klingberg (1986, p.10) clarifies that it is impossible to establish clear limits between the problems involved in the translation of children's books and adult books. In many ways the problems are the same, but sometimes children's literature can bring more severe challenges that require greater attention from the translator as regards theoretical and methodological considerations. Perhaps this distinction is one of the reasons for the view that translating for children is a simple task, so less subject to academic research. Van Coillie and Verschueren (2006, p.v-vi) corroborate Klingberg's argument. The authors explain that the awareness of the fact that translating for a young readership does not differ from translating for adults is essential for the emancipation of a research area that has been neglected for so many years, nonetheless, they add that today translation of CL is recognized as a literary challenge and no less demanding than adult literature, on the contrary, the creative and ludic use of language poses even greater obstacles that require great empathy on the translator's part, especially with the child's imaginative world.

Amid the diversity of elements with which translators have to deal, it is also expected that they remains invisible in the text, that is, not to leave traces of their presence in the discourse, which is contradictory considering that the translator will have to adapt the text in order to make it adequate to the asymmetrical features of the genre and its multiple functions. As Lathey (2006, p.1-2) argues that although the translator's name does not appear in the text their voice is marked in the text by their discursive presence.

O'Sullivan (2013) presents five issues considered central to the discussion in translation of children's literature: domestication/foreignization, the child/childhood image (from the perspective of

the translator and target society), the asymmetrical communicative relationship between adult mediators, children and young readers, readability and semiotic aspects (image and text), and a relevant amount of elements such as wordplay, rhymes, *nonsense* and onomatopoeia, which demand a high degree of creativity on the translator's part. Tabbert (2002) explains that there are many challenges to be faced by the translator of children's literature. Among these issues, the author points out issues linked to the text-source. For example, register, dialectal variations and sociolects, stylistics, the combination of images and text, cultural references, playful use of language and dual target audience (children and adults). Regarding the target text, there appear appear to be ideological issues, such as language purification and simplification with a view to readability. Among the features highlighted by the aforementioned scholars, we may add Jobe's (1996) point of view on the complexities involved in the translation of CL, and highlight three aspects for further discussion: the asymmetrical relationship between the dual readership, multiplicity of functions and text manipulation (completeness and readability of the text)

Asymmetrical Relations/Dual Readership

According to Lathey (2009, p.31), the adult/child duality is central to the discussion of children's literature: the texts are intentionally written for adults aiming at a children's readership? They are texts addressed to adults and read by children or texts that are read by both readerships (i.e. adults and children)? The various attempts to define children's literature reinforce the adult's presence in the various processes involved in the production of this kind of text. A crucial point to be highlighted is that translation can change this implicit relation in the text. The phenomenon of crossover fiction (Falconer, 2008), that is, the phenomenon of adults and children reading the same children's books can be exemplified by works of authors such as Jostein Gaarder, Stephanie

Meyer and J. K. Rowling.⁹ The disparate relationship emerging in children's literature, in which adults evaluate the texts that children are supposed to read is the key element that differentiates children's literature from that aimed at adults, concludes O'Sullivan (2013). The adult figure practically mediates all steps taken in the production of children's books until their arrival in the hands of the intended recipient. Writing, translating, publishing, reviewing and recommending are all performed by adults. Librarians manage the books and teachers are responsible for their use in the classroom, reading them and promoting the encouragement for students to read them. Parents and relatives are often the ones who purchase the books, but can also play the role of readers and censors. Paradoxically, without the adult in this process there would not be children's literature (O'SULLIVAN, 2013).

The adult figure is not always clearly present in the text, as in the case of books with a explicit dual readership (*Alice in Wonderland as a case in point*), but the dual reader will always be present because of the all-pervasive adult mediation in the aforementioned production steps (ALVSTAD, 2010). Hunt (2010, p.80) states that when adults read texts targeted at children, they almost always do it in order to recommend or censor the books for either professional or personal reasons, judging what is or is not appropriate for this particular readership. The preferences and needs of the stakeholders involved are distinct, which consequently makes translating a complex and challenging task. During this process, readers assume different roles: the primary reader is the child and the background authority is the adult (Fernandes, 2004). It is up to translators to understand that different readers are involved in the textual fabric of the work and how they are supposed to refer to these particular readers.

The Multiplicity of Functions

Children's Literature is heterogeneous not only in its diversity of models and in the relationship with readers, but also in its fulfilling

of various functions. By simultaneously belonging to two systems, the literary and educational systems are instilled with values, ideas and social, cultural and educational norms of a particular space and time and, for O'Sullivan (2013), they belong to the cultural practices whose main purpose is to socialize its target audience. As Fernandes (2004) points out from a social point of view children's literature is a powerful socializing instrument and its language plays a key role in the development of children as a social being.

As regards the educational aspects of children's books, Lajolo and Zilberman (2007, p.17) emphasize that the ties between literature and school begin at the time when the child begins to consume printed works targeted at them. This relationship places children's literature in two positions: first, as a mediator between the child and the consumer society that gradually begins to come into being; and secondly, as subservient to the school demands. After all, schools promote and encourage the circulation of children's books among students. According to Lathey (2006, p.7), even before there was a specific children's literature, its reading was associated with instructional, moral and educational purposes, which shows a strong pedagogical slant in children's literature. Translations are not exempt from this role because, apart from its entertainment function, they also act as instrumental vehicles for ideologies and can be manipulated to conform to market demands or the ideas and values prevailing in a given society.

Textual Manipulation

The peripheral status of children's literature in the literary system enables the translator to take many liberties with this kind of text. Thus, the translator manipulates the text when cutting, omitting, adjusting language or adding information, depending on the required purpose. However, these procedures are allowed, as Shavit (2006, p. 26) explains, if the translator accepts two fundamental principles in the translation of CL: (i) the adjustment

of the text to make it appropriate and useful to its target audience, in compliance with the social relations that determine what it is good for children and (ii) an adjustment of the story, characterization and language referring to the perceptions of society on the target audiences's ability to read and understand text.

The ideological reasons are emphasized by Alvstad (2010) as determinant in the adaptation of children's literature. According to her, swearwords and informal speeches are constantly manipulated. We would add to these examples other considered questions taboos, the example of the scenes with eschatological, sexual elements or aspects related to the politics and religion. This is what Klingberg (1986) classifies as "purification". The objective is to adjust the texts to the values of the target-text readers. We would say that underneath this situation there is the intention to adjust the text to the values of those who consider themselves as responsible for the education of the intended readers: parents, professors, librarians and critics. Fernandes (2004) clarifies that many of these exclusions and adjustments are due to religious, educational, family and political pressures by means of the publishers who request the writers to exclude any (sexist, religious, political, or moral) issues that are considered abusive or inadequate for this particular target audience.

According to Alvstad (2010), the text can be manipulated by the translator in two ways: (i) simplifying it, in order to make it more accessible to the reader or (ii) increasing its lexical density, as a way to enrich the vocabulary of its readers. Shavit (2006) brings up the case of the adaptations of classics usually simplified due to the widespread belief that children and young readers are unable to read long texts. Omissions, in her opinion, are the result of two basic criteria: (i) moral norms accepted and demanded by the system in which the readership is involved and of its hypothetical level of understanding. Thus, it is up to the translator to walk between these two polar regions, being looked for to make cuts when necessary and at the same time to make the text accessible to the reader.

The association with schooling gives children's literature *a status* of useful tool, able to develop reading skills. This is complemented by requirement of adequacy of language and content to understand readers and their reading skills (PUURTINEN, 1998 p. 2). This is what is called "readability" (i.e. ease of reading and language comprehension determined by reading difficulty levels). Fernandes (2004) adds that these adjustments should be made in order to make the text pleasant and motivating, thus encouraging children and young people to keep reading. As it is possible to infer from the mosaic of elements presented and discussed in this paper, Translation of Children's Literature reveals itself as a promising and complex research area as well as challenging for the translators of this particular kind of text.

Notes

1. Henceforth CL.
2. "No other field enables us to inquire into the mechanism of culture, social manipulations and social procedure the way children's literature does." (All the translations from Portuguese to English made in this paper are ours).
3. The information between brackets is our addition.
4. In the short run it appears that, for better or worse, the publisher decides. If he puts a book on the children's list, it will be reviewed as a children's book and will be read by children (or young people), if it is read at all. If he puts it on the adult list, it will not—or at least not immediately.
5. Fernandes (2004), on the basis of Hannabuss (1996), explains the difficulties in defining children's literature and the phenomenon of "adoption".

6. Children's literature is any narrative written and published for children and we include the 'teen' novels aimed at the 'young adult' or late adolescent reader

7. We reproduce here the term used by the author, despite the fact that in this article we consider the child and youth dichotomy as part of what we understand as Children's Literature.

8. Adaptation may be understood as a set of translative interventions which result in a text that is not generally accepted as a translation but is nevertheless recognized as representing a source text.

9. The case of books addressed to adults and adopted by children or the reverse process are instructive in this case.

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