

poetics today

THEORY OF TRANSLATION

AND INTERCULTURAL RELATIONS

Volume 2, Number 4

Summer/Autumn 1981

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TRANSLATION OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AS A FUNCTION OF ITS POSITION IN THE LITERARY POLYSYSTEM*

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In this paper I intend to suggest some preliminary ideas concerning patterns of behavior of translated children's literature. My description will mainly be based on research I did on translations of children's literature into Hebrew. However, I do not intend to present in this article a full and detailed description of the subject, but rather to deal with the main patterns of behavior of translation of children's literature, which I believe are common to other national systems of children's literature as well. My point of departure will be the notion of literature as a polysystem (cf. Even-Zohar, 1978a). Assuming that children's literature is an integral part of the literary polysystem, I will try to show how the behavior of translations of children's literature is determined by the position of the children's literature system in the literary polysystem.

Although research of children's literature is still in its formative stages, I have decided to deal with translated and not with original texts, because I believe it is more fruitful to do so when the question of norms of children's literature is at stake. Translational norms expose most clearly the constraints imposed on a text which enters the children's literature system, especially when dealing either with texts which were transformed from adult to children's literature or with texts which belong both to the adult and children's system at the same time.

The translator of children's literature can permit himself great liberties regarding the text because of the peripheral position children's literature occupies in the polysystem. He is allowed to manipulate the text in various ways, as long as he considers the following principles on which translation for children is usually based:

* Paper presented at *Synopsis 1*: "Translation Theory and Intercultural Relations," held at the Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics in collaboration with the M. Bernstein Chair of Translation Theory, Tel Aviv University, 27 March-1 April 1978.

a. 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."

b. Adjusting plot, characterization and language to the child's level of comprehension and his reading abilities.

Those two principles are well-rooted in the self-image of children's literature (cf. Shavit, 1979). Thus, as long as the concept of didactic children's literature was prevalent, the first principle, which is rooted in the notion of children's literature as a tool for education, was dominant. Nowadays the situation seems to be different. Although the first principle still dictates to a certain degree the character of the translations, the other principle, that of adjusting the text to the child's level of comprehension, is more dominant. It should be noticed that these two principles might be either complementary or contradicting. If they contradict each other (as they often do in some periods) the translated text might consist of contradicting features. However, these principles, described above, usually dictate the very selection of the text as well as its manipulation, and serve as the basis for the systemic affiliation of the text.

The systemic affiliation of a text which enters the children's system is very much like the case of a text which enters the non-canonized system for adults.¹ The similarity between the systems is probably the reason for the same constraints which work on both systems, when the systemic affiliation is considered.

The systemic affiliation is manifested by the complex of constraints on the text in several aspects: affiliation to existing models, the integrality of the text's primary and secondary models, the degree of complexity and sophistication of the text, its adjustment to ideological and didactic purposes and the style of the text.

I. AFFILIATION TO EXISTING MODELS

Translations of children's literature tend to attach the text to existing models in the target literature. This phenomenon which is known to us from general translational procedures (cf., Even-Zohar, 1975, 1978b, Toury 1977, 1980, 1980a), is particularly prominent in the translation of children's literature because of its simplicity. If the model of the original text does not exist in the target system, the text is changed by deleting such elements in order to adjust it to the model which absorbs it in the target literature. This phenomenon used to

¹ Although children's literature is stratified into two main systems: canonized and non-canonized, it behaves in many other ways similarly to the non-canonized adult system (Even-Zohar, 1974). From the historical point of view it uses behavior patterns and models which were prominent in the canonized adult literature in its earlier stages. The models of children's literature as well as non-canonized adult literature are frequently secondary models, transformed from adult literature (Even-Zohar, 1973). Within the system of children's literature this model functions initially as a primary model and later, after being simplified and reduced, it is transformed into a non-canonized system (see, for example, Erich Kästner and Enid Blyton). Another point of similarity is the fact that children's literature as non-canonized adult literature is being stratified according to the division by subject and reading public and not by genres. Thus there is also in children's literature a division by sex (boys and girls) and by subject (adventures, detective, school stories, etc.) (see Toury, 1974).

exist in various adult literatures. But long after it ceased to be prevalent in the canonized system of adult literature, it remained prominent in children's literature. For example, let us look at the various translations of *Gulliver's Travels*. As far as I know, the translations for children covered just the first two books. The other two books were not included in any such translation. It seems to me that the reason can be found in the fact that most of the elements which pertain to the characters and the level of the scheme of events of the first two books of *Gulliver's Travels* could easily be transformed into elements of a fantasy story, a model that already existed in the target system.² Thus for instance, the people of Lilliput could easily be transformed into dwarfs, while the people of Brobdingnag could be transformed into giants. On the other hand, translators could not use most of the satirical elements, because satire as a genre did not exist in the target system, probably because children are not supposed either to be acquainted with the subjects of the satire, or with its meaning. In the text which was originally written as a satire, the satire is built in sophisticated and complex ways, not the least of them through the relations among the four books. In the translations for children the satirical elements have almost vanished and those which remained have either lost their satirical function, and remained without any function, or acquired a different function. Usually their function could be transformed when they could be used as elements in the sequence of events, and could either contribute to the model of the adventure story, or to the model of the fantasy story. It is interesting to note that translators usually hesitate between two prominent models of the children's system: fantasy and adventure story, because the Gulliver story could potentially be adjusted to both. Even when the translator decides upon one of the models (usually in accordance with the supposed age of the reader — fantasy for smaller children, adventure story for elder), the other model still creeps into the text.

However, those two models (sometimes even contradicting, as fantasy has a tendency to generalizations, while the adventure story has a tendency to concretization) dictate the very selection of the text and its manipulation. In order to adjust the text to a certain model the translator is sometimes even forced into adding to the model elements which do not exist in the original text, but which are considered obligatory in the target model and are thus needed to strengthen the model. Thus for instance, while in the original text, Swift describes the man who speaks with Gulliver as "a person of quality," the

² Historically speaking, it seems to me that there were other reasons as well for adopting *Gulliver's Travels* into the children's system. Soon after *Gulliver* was first issued in 1726, it was printed as a chapbook (thus belonging to the canonized and the non-canonized systems of the adult literature at the same time). Children were probably enthusiastic readers of chapbooks at the time, as they lacked literature written intentionally for them (Muir, 1969). In such a way, *Gulliver* became a children's book before the system of children's literature actually existed, because the book (as well as other texts) filled a gap in the literary polysystem, which was created by the demand for children's books. When finally children's literature became an established system, the text of *Gulliver* had to be readapted in accordance with the models of the children's system. However, the transfer of the text from the non-canonized system of the adults to the children's, did not demand a drastic change, because of the similarity between the prominent models in the two systems.

translator made him "a man wearing a long and expensive cloak and a little boy holding it behind" (Ginzburg's translation, no page). This protagonist and its description are typical elements of the model of the fantasy story.

When dealing with the question of affiliation to a target model, even a more interesting case is the case of *Robinson Crusoe*. The original *Robinson Crusoe* served as a model for the *Robinsonnades* which were prominent in children's literature. The model of the Robinsonnade was a reduced and simplified model of the original *Robinson Crusoe*. Now, translators who later adjusted *Robinson Crusoe* to children's literature transformed it into the prominent model in children's literature, the model of the Robinsonnade, which in fact originated from the original *Robinson Crusoe* (see, for instance, Defoe, 1936).

II. THE TEXT'S INTEGRALITY

The norm of the text's fullness is accepted today in most of the translations of the adult canonized system. Deletions, if at all, are incidental. But in the 19th century and even at the beginning of the 20th century, such a norm was not obligatory, and translators were allowed to manipulate the integrality of the original text (cf. Toury, 1977). Today, however, translated texts of the non-canonized system of adult literature contain many deletions and do not preserve the fullness of the original text (see, for instance, the translations of James Bond into Hebrew). This is also the case with the children's system, even the canonized. It is especially true when adult books are transformed into the children's system and have to be adapted to the child's level of comprehension (as the adults understand it), or to the moral norms which are allowed in the children's system. When a text does not commensurate with what is permitted or forbidden to children, or cannot be understood, as the translator believes, by the child, it is often greatly changed. Thus, for instance, as was the case with much of adult literature during the 18th and 19th century, there is a taboo on sexual obscenity, mention of excretions, etc.

For example, translators deleted the scene where Gulliver is suspected of having a love affair with the queen (which is an impossible scene, of course, due to the difference of size between the two suspected lovers). In another case, the translator did not delete the scene but rather changed it in order to make it appropriate to children. In the original text Gulliver puts out the fire by urinating on it, while in the adaptation for children he does it by blowing it out. In other cases (the translations of *Tom Sawyer*, Twain, 1940, 1960; *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe, 1936), the translator deleted those elements which were incomprehensible, in his opinion, to children. This is why most translators deleted the opening dialogue between Robinson and his father, where the father presents the ethos of the bourgeoisie against that of the lower and upper classes. (There might have been, of course, other reasons for deleting the opening scene. For instance, the opening scene does not contribute to the model of adventure story into which the text was transformed, etc.). For the same reason translators deleted many parts of *Alice in Wonderland* in order to adapt it to the child's comprehension. Even in most of the translations of *Tom Sawyer* the same pattern exists. Most of the

translators deleted the end of the fence-whitewashing scene, assuming that the child could not understand the author's philosophizing and his ironical attitude, and thus, they completely excluded the ironical level of the text (Twain, 1911, 1940, 1960). Thus, the ironical level was excluded for at least two reasons: Translators believed that ironical attitudes could not be understood by children, and besides, ironical attitudes toward life and grown-ups do not fit, so translators believe, the values a child should acquire through literature.

III. THE LEVEL OF COMPLEXITY OF THE TEXT

Although the norm of complexity seems nowadays to be the major norm of canonized literature of the adult system, the norm of simple and simplified models is still prominent in most children's literature (canonized and non-canonized), as is the case with the non-canonized system of adult literature. This norm, rooted in the self-image of children's literature, tends to determine not only the thematics of the text but also its characterization and its main structures.

When dealing with the question of complexity, the case of *Alice in Wonderland* is particularly interesting. Written originally for children, it was taken over by adult literature, and afterwards, the text, written initially for children, was readapted for children. The system's constraints acted in this text in an almost paradoxical manner. It was accepted by adults as a children's book, thanks to characteristics which were later considered by translators as unacceptable for children. One can ask, of course, which elements made its acceptance by adults possible (cf. Shavit, 1980), but I would like here to point to the way it was readapted for children. Put in another way, which textual elements were changed so that they could become, in the translator's opinion, acceptable for children. It is interesting to note that both Carroll, who later wrote *The Nursery Alice* (Carroll, 1890, 1966), which was intended for children only, and his translators who adapted *Alice in Wonderland* to children acted principally in the same framework of system constraints. For instance, both Carroll and his translators insisted on motivating the whole story as a dream, while in *Alice in Wonderland* Carroll intentionally made it impossible to decide whether it happens in a dream or in reality. The system constraints can be discerned most clearly when one deals with the relationship between reality and imagination, and the relations between time and space, which are very sophisticated in the original text. In *Alice in Wonderland* the levels of reality and imagination are consistently blurred. Carroll made those levels equal and diffuse and thus made it impossible to distinguish between them. Such a presentation of reality did not exist in children's literature (it only became fashionable in adult literature with the anti-naturalist schools at the end of the 19th century). Children's literature insisted on keeping the distinction between "reality" and fantasy clear.

That is why the adaptations of *Alice in Wonderland* tried to adjust the text to the acceptable modeling of reality in everything concerning the relations of time and space and the separation of reality and imagination. This modeling can be discerned most clearly when analyzing the translations of the first chapter. While

in the original text the transfer from reality to imagination is blurred, translators made a clear cut between reality and imagination. In the original, Alice is sleepy, but not asleep, and it is impossible to decide whether she is seeing the rabbit in a dream or in reality. The rabbit could be part of the described reality, passing by the bank of the river, and on the other hand, could be part of an imaginative world (Alice herself is wondering about him, thus "making strange" of his appearance). Translators, however, decided not to leave the situation blurred and made Alice definitely dream the whole story.

The system's constraints are probably the reason for the similarity between Carroll's *The Nursery Alice* version and the adaptations which tried to transform *Alice in Wonderland* into a simplified model.

The phenomenon of simplification of the text can also be discerned in many translations of *Tom Sawyer* (Twain, 1911, 1940 and 1960). Most of the translators have tried to give up the ironical level of the text. They have deleted systematically all the ironical comments of the narrator, the ironical characteristics, and even whole paragraphs where the narrator's ironical attitude is formulated. By doing so, and by deleting other elements which do not contribute directly to the plot, the translators tried to make *Tom Sawyer* a simple adventure story.

While adapting the text to the simplified model, translators usually make the text less sophisticated by changing the relations between elements and functions and making the elements carry fewer functions. It sometimes may even happen that a translator leaves some elements which seem to him probably contributing to a certain level, but actually they do not, and thus they become functionless. For instance, in the original *Tom Sawyer*, the aunt is ironically described by the way she uses her spectacles:

The old lady pulled her spectacles down and looked over them about the room; then she put them up and looked out under them. She seldom or never looked through them for so small a thing as a boy; they were her state pair, the pride of her heart, and were built for "style" not service — she could have seen through a pair of stove-lids just as well (Twain, 1935: 287).

The comment explains ironically why the aunt puts her spectacles up and down and does not look through them. In one of the translations (Ben-Pinhas, 1960), the translator made her lift her spectacles up and down, but left out the writer's comment. The translator probably thought the spectacles contribute to the plot (because of the "action," but of course they don't), and did not understand their function in the characterization of the old lady. Thus the spectacles became a functionless element.

The simplification of the model, then, can either change the function of some elements, reduce other functions, or even leave the elements functionless.

IV. IDEOLOGICAL OR EVALUATIVE ADAPTATION

In previous stages of adult literature the concept of literature as a didactic instrument for an unequivocal system of values, or for a certain ideology was prominent. Long after it had ceased to exist in adult literature, it still existed in

children's literature. In order to make the text an ideological instrument, the translator sometimes completely changed the source text. *Robinson Crusoe*, which later was transformed into a simple adventure story, was previously transformed in many translations, which followed the German translation of Campe, into a quite different text, from the ideological point of view. Joachim Campe, a writer and a publisher for children (1746–1818), was probably the first to write children's books in Germany. He was school master of the "Philantropinum" in Dessau, and translated *Robinson Crusoe* (*Robinson der Jüngere*) to German (and later even to French and English) in order to adapt it to Rousseau's pedagogical system, which served as the pedagogical system of his school. Campe decided upon translating *Robinson Crusoe* because of Rousseau, who said in *Emile* that it portrayed the individual struggle with nature. In order to adjust the text to Rousseau's ideology, he had to change the text completely from the ideological point of view, because Defoe originally presented in the text the bourgeois ethos and the colonialist values, which contradict that of Rousseau. Thus, for example, in the original text, Robinson Crusoe arrives at the island with all the symbols of Western culture (weapons, food, the Bible, etc.) and manages to cultivate nature, while in Campe's translation he arrives at the island all naked (he even has to blow the fire by himself) and has to learn to live within nature (cf. Ofek, 1979). Campe's translation was further translated into many languages, including Hebrew (three translations, Ofek, 1979). One of the translators was David Zamoshch (Zamoshch, 1824). In a rather paradoxical manner, he changed the text again while he tried to adapt it to the Jewish Enlightenment views of the 19th century. By readjusting the text Zamoshch tried to join Campe's anti-rationalist views with the views of the Jewish Enlightenment, which in fact were somehow similar to Defoe's ethos, i.e., the belief that a rationalist can overcome nature and cultivate it. Zamoshch also tried to stress in his *Robinson* certain values of Jewish Enlightenment movement such as productivization. Thus for instance the children who are listening to the story told by their father do not sit idle, but are willingly busy in some sort of work. Thus again the text was adapted in order to fit a certain ideology, now including in rather a paradoxical manner elements both of Defoe and of Campe.

V. THE STYLISTIC NORMS

The prominent stylistic norm in the translation into Hebrew of children's and adult literature is the norm of high literary style. The stylistic norm is thus common to both literatures, but the reasons for this norm are different in each case. While in adult literature it is connected with the idea of "literariness" per se, it has a different value for children's literature. The reason for the high style in children's literature is connected with the didactic concept of literature and the attempt to enrich the child's vocabulary.

So far we have seen how children's literature reveals behavior patterns which belonged in previous stages to adult literature. Even when the same pattern is common to both, the reasons for it can be different, and they can express the different concepts of the two literatures and their different self-images.

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