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Once upon a time…… translators of children`s literature

*Summary*

The articles illustrates some examples from a translated text, typical and very common in translation of children`s literature. Sometimes these examples can cause a problem for the translator, because of culture differences and already famous characters. All examples are taken from my own translation of the Lyman Frank Baum`s novel *Dorothy and the Wizard of Oz.*

*Key words*

Children`s literature, translation, Translation of children`s literature, translation of character`s name and image.

Translators of children`s literature are not newborn translators nor is this type of translation new. There were translations for children even in 18th century in England – like the *Brothers Grimm Fairy Tales* and *Andersen`s Fairy Tales*. There are not much theory books about translating for children even though about 30% to 70% of children`s books in Europe are translations (Jobe 2005).

Translation of children`s literature is studied mainly by non-native English translators. We can find the names of Klingberg, Oittinen, Purtinnen, Lathey, Nord, O`Connell, O`Sullivan, Tabert, Shavit, Chukovskyi and others.

In literary translation, as are the most translations for children, a key role is given to the interpretation of the fairy tale or the book and the culture of both languages. Very often without realizing translators of children`s literature are interpreting the text through similar text from their home literature (Vaseva 1989:145). As Ritta Oittinen says most translations are aimed to be read aloud and children and parents will be their readers. Translators of children’s literature are readers as well, but they use their own childhood experience when translating (Oittinen 2000:32).

An interesting phenomenon in translations for children is the transformations of characters and their names, appearance, especially if they are animals. A typical example we can see in Astrid Lindgren translation of *Emil in the Soup Tureen* into German. In the German translation *Emil* turns into *Michel* even thoughthe name is not difficult or not known in German. In the article *How Emil becomes Michel* the author B. Stolt explains that the translator have changed the name of the main character because of the popularity of another *Emil –* the one of Erich Kaestner`s. For her books Astrid Lindgren has said that the translators are trying to make the translations more beautiful than the authors have done. And probably because of that, as Stolt has written, the French Pippi is not allowed to lift a horse but a pony (Stolt 1976).

**Horses and Donkeys**

My example and experience is again about horses. But I think the choice is reasonable and needed. In the fourth book of Oz series – *Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz* we meet a famous character - the *Sawhorse*, known from the second book of the series. In the second book (The Marvelous Land of Oz) our character is translated as *Wooden Donkey* which is the word for *Sawhorse* in the dictionary. But at the end of the fourth book the Sawhorse meets the Real Horse and they participate in a competition. At my first version I kept the old already known name of the character, even though there were a lot of comparisons between the two horses. Like appearance, eating, running and so on. But when the competition came it was not possible to keep the previous vision of the Sawhorse, because a donkey cannot compete with a horse. And I made a choice to change its name and that is how the (Wooden) Donkey turns into a (Wooden) Horse:

***- О, не – отговори Дървеният кон. –… Но ако моят приятел, Истинският кон, иска да се състезава, аз съм напълно готов***

***"Oh, no," answered the Sawhorse. "... But if my friend the Real Horse is willing to undertake the race I am quite ready."***

**Shovels and Scuttles**

Other just as interesting characters for translating, even though only episodically, are the dragonets, with whom our Earth travelers meet in chapter thirteen. They are ugly, with small bodies, enormous heads, and awfully crooked mouths. The mother dragon ties their tails to the rocks when she is hunting, so they wouldn’t do anything naughty. The meeting of Dorothy and her friends with the strange creatures is short, but strange and is important for their future travels. That`s why, to achieve the dragonets’ image, the mouths of the ugly creatures turned from *coal-scuttles,* as they were in the original, into *shovels* in Bulgarian translation*.* Again I think that this transformation is reasonable because gives more familiar image (the shovels) than an image from 19th century when the book was written (the coal-scuttles):

„***Не мога лесно да ги опиша – отговори котето, потрепервайки. - Очите им са като чинии, а устата им като лопати.”***

***"I simply can't describe 'em," answered the kitten, shuddering. "Their eyes are like pie-plates and their mouths like coal-scuttles.***

**Onomatopoeias**

We know that animals in different countries speak different languages and produce different sounds. The Bulgarian rooster sings „куку-ри-гуу”, the English - „ cock-a-doodle-doo”, the German – „ kikeriki”, the Russian – „кука-ре-ку”. The differences come from a nation’s culture and customs, but on the other hand, they bring out the national colour of that country.

In the translated text, it is better to avoid national colour, and replace the onomatopoeias with their language equivalents in the translation language. Sometimes they appear only once or are invented by the author for a humorous effect. In that case, they shouldn`t be translated but transcribed. It`s interesting that traditional onomatopoeias are seen mostly in children`s fiction. (Vlahov, Florin 1990: 261-269).

And except for producing different sounds in different languages, animals are addressed differently by their masters. It would sound very strange to keep and not translate the animal voices even that the animal characters are American and I tried to retain their native country look. And I also could not remember a Bulgarian horse to be driven with *Gid-dap*, so I decided again to change that moment and in this case to make the horse closer to my readers:

***„След това момчето взе юздите, разтърси ги и извика: - Дий!”***

***„Then the boy picked up the reins, shook them, and said "Gid-dap!"”***

**Conclusion**

It seems that horses are most difficult for translation when we are dealing with children’s literature. The decision seems easy but in many cases happens to be a problem for translators. It is known that a *Horse* can turn into a *Pony*, so why not to turn a *Sawhorse* into a *Wooden horse*? I did that in my translation as well as other choices, again on horses and the way they are called to drive. Of course there are a lot of other problems and “magic transformations” when translating for children, but as we already know anything can happen in a fairy tale.

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