

Cultural-context Adaptation in Translation of Children's Short Stories from English to Persian

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Abstract—The importance of children's literature in comparison with the traditional form of translation is something trivial and this is regrettable since translating for children should be done so skillfully that there may be no mental or emotional harm for children. Puurtinen (1994) believes that writing and translating for children which is often regarded as a simple and insignificant matter will be governed by numerous constraints, which normally vary from culture to culture. The present study makes an effort to examine the implications of different adaptation methods proposed by Klingberg (1986) in children's literature to investigate the claim that the process of translation in children's literature should consider the level of target text reader's knowledge and their understanding. In this study, the level of adaptation is evaluated through Klingberg's theories, in which undue adaptation is disparaged since an undue adaptation keeps children away from new world knowledge.

Index Terms—adaptation, children, short story, cross-cultural perspective, knowledge, literary polysystem

I. INTRODUCTION

As Shavit (1986) states, considering translation as a process of transfer, it should be stated that the subject that is jeopardized is not just translation of texts from one language to another one, but also it is the changing of the system, for example translations from the system of adults into the children literature. The point of departure is the understanding of children's literature is not an assemblage of elements existing in a vacuum but it is an integral part of the literary polysystem (p. 25).

The fact that Children may not have the knowledge of a foreign culture, religion, history, politics, etc. forces the translator to change or clarify the concepts more than those of adults' texts. On the one hand, if the translation is target text oriented, then the readers (children) will be deprived of a foreign culture and world knowledge. On the other hand, if it is source text oriented, then understanding unfamiliar atmosphere of the source text culture will be difficult or even impossible for them. However, another problem with Children's literature is that, some of the elements of the readers of the target text do not understand the context to the same extent to as the readers of the source text do. And this problem is intensified when either the translators or the readers are not familiar with these elements or there are some limitations according to the norms and values regarding the accuracy and appropriateness of the TT within the literary system of the target culture. In his book *Children's Fiction in the Hands of the Translators* Göte Klingberg (1986) speaks about many difficulties that appear while translating for children. He thinks that cultural context adaptation should be restricted to details. It is easy to find examples of a purely arbitrary cultural context adaptation and even when there are some reasons for it, this type of adaptation should not be tried when it is not absolutely necessary. Totally, the source text must be considered of higher priority, and cultural context adaptation should be the exception (p. 17).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Translation and Culture

People from all over the world have different kinds of communications with each other. Business, science, tourism, politics, humanitarian assistance, etc. are all the reasons for the undeniable role of communication in today's world and globalization. On the other hand, language and translation seem to have a basic role in this juncture. The need for instant communication as stated by Cronin (2003) has a neo-Babelian shift at its foundation towards reducing linguistic diversity and desires a mutual one, instantaneous intelligibility between speaking of human beings who are reading and writing different languages. Universalizing cultural language can reawaken and reinforce cultural identities via translation. Translation activities are a part of local realities in relation to the global world of transnational cultures and indigenous or local knowledge is indispensable to successful cultural translation by means of negotiating an acceptable cultural discourse for the target system (Yifeng, 2009).

B. Children's Literature

One of the primary difficulties as mentioned by O'Connell in defining what is meant by 'children's literature' is the great inclusive scope and vague nature of the semantic fields covered by the concepts that are referred to using the nouns 'children' and 'literature' (O'Connell, 1999). According to Oittinen, when we speak of child and children's literature, in fact we should be able to define them while there is little agreement on the definition of childhood, child, and children's literature (Oittinen, 2000). She sees children's literature read silently by children and aloud to children. She also deals with the translation of illustrated children stories (e.g., picture books), which refer to children under school age like children under seven in Finland. However, childhood is a fluid concept through which translating for children under school age apply to translating for older children as well.

C. *The Position of Children's Literature within the Literary Polysystem*

Considering the position of children's literature within a literary polysystem, a disappointing fact is distinguishable and it is the peripheral position considered for this issue. Even when dealing with genre, some scholars like Finnish scholar Riitta Kuivasmäki (1990) are adamant that children's literature is not a genre.

Even-Zohar (1990) believes that, children literature cannot be considered as a sui generis phenomenon (of its own kind), but related to literature for adults; translated literature would not be cut off from original one; mass literary production (thrillers, sentimental novels, etc.) will not be dismissed as "non-literature" in order to escape from the recognition of its reciprocal dependence with "individual" literature.

The translator for children's literature can authorize himself great freedom regarding the text because of the peripheral position children's literature has in the polysystem (Shavit, 1981). He can manipulate the text in different ways, as long as he considers the following principles on which translation for children is normally based:

- a. The text is adjusted to make it appropriate and useful for children which is according to what the society thinks is "appropriate for the child."
- b. Adjusting plot, characterization and language to the child's level of comprehension and his reading abilities (Shavit, 1981).

D. *Translating for Children*

There are only a few systematic studies of "how children's books are in fact being translated and how they should be translated", and since these books are literature, they should be treated and translated as literature. Translation of children's literature requires the translator to have a great knowledge of source and target language as well as a good handling of the language (Klingberg, 1986). As stated in Frimmelová the history of children's literature is closely connected with the development of the notion of childhood, and the changes it underwent during the last two centuries were directly reflected in the production of children's book (Frimmelová 2010).

The beginnings of children's literature lay in times long before the first stories actually meant for children appeared, and before the first books were written down. In the medieval times, no specialties of childhood were accepted due to the established theological concept and the harsh conditions of life. Thus, the differences between the children and adults were not recognized. In those times, no real distinction was made between the entertainment for children and for the elders, so children simply used the adult works that were attractive for them (Frimmelová 2010, p.16). When we compare the works that have been translated for adults, there are certain translation problems that are put into consideration when translated for children; hence, the issue of translating for children versus the ones for adults can be regarded as a struggle which more and more brought to fore (Klingberg, 1986).

The incorrect translation may be more dangerous in a children's book, if the child reader is not able to rectify the mistakes to the same extent as the adult reader may be. Shortened versions are so common in children's literature that translators and publishers may think it permissible to cut in a children's book without stating the fact, the result being a falsification, a hidden abridgement. The geographical setting should be rendered precisely in all translations, but it may be more important than ever in a children's book, if one of the goals of the translation is to provide knowledge of a foreign country (Klingberg, 2008a, pp. 95-96).

E. *Cultural Context Adaptation in Children's Literature*

The notion of adaptation is largely related to whether we regard translation as producing sameness or finding equivalent expressions to the expressions in the source text or rewriting (Oittinen, 2000). Although there have been developments and changes in ideas and concepts, it significant to stress that adaptation itself is not a 'bad' thing as all translations might be adapted to some extent.

In earlier stages of adult literature Shavit (1981) states that, the concept of literature as a didactic instrument for unequivocal values or for a certain ideology was prominent. Long after it stopped to exist in adult literature, this literature was still so powerful in children's literature that translators were ready to change the source text completely in order to have the revised version serve ideological purposes.

When translating for children this concentration also should not be neglected. For example the aim of translating for children must simply be to make more available literature for children and also to increase the international perspective and understanding towards young readers in which the removal of peculiarities of the foreign culture or change of cultural elements will not further the reader's knowledge of and interest in the foreign culture (Klingberg, 1986).

On the other hand, Klingberg (1986, p.10) mentions two main pedagogical goals which can cause a revision of the original:

1. The aim of giving the readers a text that they can understand;
2. The aim of contributing to the development of the reader's set of values.

Both Shavit and Klingberg take a limited view of adaptation: they consider adaptation a negative issue in itself, a sign of disrespect for children. They see a translation as the same as its original, without recognizing that all translation involves adaptation and domestication, too.

Considering adaptation in translation, Oittinen (2000) believes that as long as there has been literature, there have been adaptations. Yet very often adaptation is seen as a negative phenomenon: compared to its original, the adaptation is of little value; it is secondary, a nonoriginal. The status of an adaptation is always tied in with the status of its original—be it a “real” original (like the original of a translation) or a “real” translation.

Klingberg (1986) cites nine forms of cultural adaptation in which cultural elements form different features and perspectives are taken into account:

1. Added Explanation:

The cultural element in the source text is retained but a short explanation is added within the text.

2. Rewording:

What the source text says is expressed but without use of cultural element.

3. Explanatory Translation:

The function or use of cultural element is given instead of the foreign name for it.

4. Explanation outside the Text:

The explanation may be given in the form of a footnote, a preface or the like.

5. Substitution of Equivalence in the Culture of the TL

6. Substitution of a Rough Equivalent in the Culture of the TL

7. Simplification:

A more general concept is used instead of a specific one, for instance the genus instead of the species.

8. Deletion:

Words, sentences, paragraphs or chapters are deleted.

9. Localization:

The whole cultural setting of the source text is moved closer to the readers of the target text (pp.18).

In ten different categories Klingberg has discussed the scheme of cultural context adaptation as: literary references; foreign language in the source text; references to mythology and popular belief; historical, religious and political background; building and home furnishing, food; customs and practices, plays and games; flora and fauna; personal names, titles, names of domestic animals, names of objects; geographical names; weights and measures (Klingberg, 1986).

1. Literary References:

Literary references are mostly referenced to events or characters in literary works. Sometimes there may also be the problem of how to translate titles of books, short stories, magazines or newspapers. For book titles, a brief SL title which accurately describes the content can be left as it is. It is however advisable that the title, if translated, bear some resemblance to the original, and if the title is descriptive that should be literally kept (Newmark, 1988).

2. Foreign Language in the Source Text:

It is desirable in a translation to keep the degree of adaptation of the source text, words and passages in another language than the source language should be retained in the target text if there is reason to suppose that its readers are equally familiar or unfamiliar with the foreign language as the readers of the source text.

3. References to Mythology and Popular Belief:

In the category of mythology and popular belief, problems are encountered in the case of names, terms used for supernatural beings, concepts, events, and customs.

4. Historical, Religious and Political Background:

Target text which aim to give insight into a foreign environment should of course retain references to its historical, religious and political background. Sometimes instances will occur when the references cannot be assumed to be understood by the readers of the target texts.

5. Buildings and Home Furnishings, Food:

The general rule here must be to avoid deletion or substitution for an element of the culture of the target language. Building, home furnishings, and food are facets of foreign environment which ought to be retained, if the translation is meant to give a better understanding of this environment.

6. Customs and Practices, Play and Games:

Much the same can be said of the treatment in translations of foreign customs and practices, play and games as of the handling of building, home furnishings, and food. Deletion or replacement by what is thought to be an equivalent in the culture of the target language should be avoided. A parallel to the food and drink of foreign children is their games.

7. Flora and Fauna:

A true rendering of flora and fauna contribute to the understanding of the foreign environment. The names of plants and animals, their cultivation, hunting, etc. belong to the cultural context. The general rule must be that natural concepts should be retained, not replaced by others more common in the country of the target language.

8. Personal Names, Titles, Names of Domestic Animals, Names of Objects:

It is reasonable to demand that personal names, belonging to everyday language and without special meanings that the readers have to understand, should not be altered when foreign culture is introduced by way of a translation. This rule is taught also in translator's handbooks; the only exception is that tradition prescribes that royal names should be rendered in the forms used in the target language.

Both their first name and their last name should be transferred so that the nationality will be preserved (Newmark 1988). However, in children's literature, the general rule is usually hindered and this is usually due to cultural context adaptation. If a name is adapted then it might be changed to a form more used in the TL language.

9. Geographical Names:

If the names belong to the environment where the source language is spoken, then the general rule should be to keep the geographical names of the source language. Klingberg (2008 b) also believes that the copies of illustrations made in the countries of the translation can of course vary, artistically as well as in relation to the originals.

10. Weights and Measures:

In case of *non-metric measures*:

- Changing measures often results in poor translation
- Formally incorrect translation of measures is sometimes acceptable, since they are only approximate.
- When there are old equivalents of non-metric measures in the target language, they can often be used.
- Even when there are no equivalents of non-metric measures, their source language forms sometimes can be retained in the target text. (Klingberg, 1986, pp. 17-18)

In case of *currency*, a formal cultural context adaptation is the use of an equivalent in the culture of the target language.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Corpus

The data of the present study is mainly based on a comparative analytic type covering Iranian social and religious based culture. Different types of culture based adaptations are prepared and examined in this paper. The examples are chosen from H.C. Anderson's fairy tales and brothers Grimm's short stories. The present study covers 80 fairy tales and short stories chosen analytically from more than 300 fairytales and short stories written by H.C. Anderson and Grimm brothers translated by Bahman Rostam Abadi and Hasan Akbarian Tabary. It is aimed to prepare a classified range of examples in order to make it as clear as possible. Sixty seven parts of these short stories were related to adaptation in translation which twenty five parts of these stories were not well adapted or there were undue adaptations by translators.

B. Analytical Method

A result of society's concept of childhood, unlike adult literature, children's literature was considered an important vehicle for achieving certain goals in the education of children (Shavit, 1981). This belief meant that children's literature could not be accepted by intellectual society as having a position equal to that of adult literature; consequently, children's literature suffered from an inferior status within the literary polysystem (ibid, p.3).

The analysis is totally based on Klingberg's (1986) nine forms of cultural adaptation including: *Added Explanation, Rewording, Explanatory Translation, Explanation outside the Text, Substitution of Equivalence in the Culture of the TL, Substitution of a Rough Equivalent in the Culture of the TL, Simplification, Deletion, Localization* which are in ten different categories including: *Literary References; Foreign Language in the Source Text; References to Mythology and Popular Belief; Historical, Religious and Political Background; Building and Home Furnishing, Food; Customs And Practices, Plays and Games; Flora and Fauna; Personal Names, Titles, Names of Domestic Animals, Names of Objects; Geographical Names; Weights and Measures.*

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The first example is from H.C. Anderson's *The Shirt Collar* translated by Bahman Rostam Abadi:

| English | Persian |
|---|--|
| 1. There was once a fine gentleman who possessed among other things a boot-jack and a hair-brush; but he had also the finest shirt-collar in the world. | در روزگاری شوالیه قهرمان و دلیری زندگی می کرد که تمام زندگی اش، یک باشنه کش و یک شانه بود. این شوالیه بهترین و محکمترین یقه دنیا را داشت. در قدیم، شوالیه ها و نجیب زاده ها پیراهن بی یقه می پوشیدند و بعد یقه مخصوصی روی آن می بستند. |

In this part, the translator gives some extra explanations to the readers about shirt-collar and tells them what the use of a shirt-collar used to be in old times. This explanatory translation is due to the cultural differences since neither ancient nor modern Iranian people used to wear any extra collar separately.

The Phoenix Bird written by H.C. Anderson references the story of Adam and Eve in which Eve eats the fruit of a tree which is forbidden:

| English | Persian |
|---|---|
| 1. But when Eve plucked the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, there she and Adam were driven from Paradise; there fell from the flaming sword of the cherub a spark into the nest of the bird, which blazed up forthwith. | اما وقتی حضرت حوا، میوه ممنوع را چید و زمانی که با حضرت آدم از بهشت رانده شد، آشیانه پرنده آتش گرفت و سوخت و خود پرنده در شعله آتش هلاک شد. |

In his article "How does the Qur'an compare to the Book of Genesis on the great events of history?" Catchpoole (2002) compares the name of the tree from which Eve plucks the fruit. He asserts that there is no mention of the name "Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil."

Due to the religious background and the difference between Bible and Quran, the translator has substituted an equivalent in the culture of the target language for Iranian children who are mostly Muslims and Quran is the main religious book in Iran.

Second example from *The Phoenix Bird*:

| English | Persian |
|---|------------------------------|
| 1. He sang to thee the Marseillaise. | بله، او برایت آواز می خواند. |

The word Marseillaise according to the Encyclopedia of Britannica refers to French national anthem, composed in one night during the French Revolution (April 24, 1792) by Claude-Joseph Rouget de Lisle, a captain of the engineers and amateur musician. The translator in this part has deleted the word Marseillaise and has only mentioned the very general word "singing". So, the category of political background which is not fully grown in children could hinder their understanding and the translator has properly adapted this part through deletion.

The following example is from H.C. Anderson's *The Ugly Duckling*:

| English | Persian |
|---|---|
| 1. She is the highest born of them all, and has Spanish blood, therefore, she is well off. | اردک پیر از همه مشهورتر است. او خون اسپانیایی دارد. برای همین هم چاق و چله به نظر می رسد. |

In his famous short story, *The Ugly Duckling*, H.C. Anderson talks about an old duck that is well off and respected by everyone. In this short story, the old duck has Spanish blood which is the reason for his wealth. But the translator wrongly translates "well off" as "chubby" (چاق و چله) and distorts both the meaning and the function of having Spanish blood. Meanwhile, *The Ugly Duckling* is written in 1844 and the closer history in those times suggests the wealth of Spanish people. The translator, according to this research, could add some explanations and clarify the relationship between being Spanish and being wealthy.

The other example is from *Our Lady's Child* by brothers Grimm:

| English | Persian |
|--|--|
| 1. Then the door sprang open, and she saw there the Trinity sitting in fire and splendor. | در مثل فنر باز شد و او سه پری زیباروی را دید که در پرتوی از نور روی تخت آتشین نشسته بودند. |

The word "Trinity" according to Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (2002) in Christian Theology refers to the three persons or modes of being of the Godhead as conceived in Orthodox Christian belief; the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as constituting one God.

The heavy philosophy behind this word is totally out of Iranian children's comprehension. The most reasonable way for this part is *simplification*. In this part, a more general concept could be used instead of a specific one. The translator has simplified and substituted it with "three beautiful fairies". It seems that simplification could be more effective if "angels" were used instead of "fairies" since the word "angel" has more heavenly meaning than "fairy".

Currency or measurement is something we always experience in our daily life and most of people even adults or educated people pause when they encounter new measuring unit or new currency. They have to convert them in order to get the exact amount or measure of something. Considering children, on the other hand, who are not proficient in measures and currencies, the translator should be more prudent not to obscure the text with unknown measure or currency and also not to deprive children of new culture and world knowledge.

The following examples are from H.C. Anderson's fairy tales and brothers Grimm's short stories.

The first example is from H.C. Anderson's *Little Tiny or Thumbelina* translated by Bahman Rostam Abadi:

| English | Persian |
|--|--|
| 1. "Thank you," said the woman, and she gave the fairy twelve shillings, which was the price of the barleycorn. | زن از جانوگر پیر تشکر کرد و پول زیادی به او داد. |

In this text the translator has simplified the translation and a more general concept is used instead of a specific one. But Klingberg (1986) believes that among the different possibilities, one should certainly advise against the use of an

equivalent, so the translator could use the currency as it is in the SL and he could give some explanations in order not to deprive children from a universal knowledge.

Horrible scenes are rarely seen in children's literature since horror stories or movies are especially for adults and are not considered suitable for lower age children.

The examples of this type are chosen from H.C. Anderson's *The Elf of the Rose* translated by Bahman Rostam Abadi:

| English | Persian |
|--|---|
| 1. The wicked man stabbed him to death; then he cut off his head, and buried it with the body in the soft earth under the linden-tree. | مرد شرور خنجر تیزی بیرون کشید و در حالیکه عاشق جوان گل را می بوسید، آنرا در قلبش فرو برد و او را کشت. بعد سر از تنش جدا کرد و سر و بدن جوان را زیر درختی دفن کرد. |

Violence and rough scenes are not suitable for children and should not be translated. Macleod (1994) believes that murderers are not acceptable in children's literature, but thieves are. In this part of the story killing and cutting the young boy's head off is a very harsh scene that its mentioning can cause terrifying imaginations for children. So, this part should be purified and adapted to children's spiritual matters.

Violence and suicide like other improper parts in children's literature is forbidden. The following examples are chosen from brothers Grimm's *The Poor Boy in the Grave* translated by Hasan Akbarian Tabary:

| English | Persian |
|---|---|
| 1. He fell in a rage, and gave the boy such a beating that he could not stir for two days. | سرپای وجود ارباب لبریز از خشم شد و چنان پسرک را زیر مشت و لگد گرفت که تا مدتی یک گوشه افتاده بود و حرکتی نمی کرد. |
| 2. He got angry and beat the boy so unmercifully that he was forced to lie in bed for several days. | ارباب از شدت عصبانیت چنان بیرحمانه پسرک را زد که او چندین روز در بستر افتاده بود. |

In this part, the boy is heavily beaten several times by the farmer so that he is not able to move. The violence is so harsh that the boy decides to suicide. But the translator does not delete or modify this part to make it suitable or even a little tolerable for children.

Somewhere in the story, as I mentioned earlier, the boy decides to commit suicide several times:

| English | Persian |
|--|--|
| The boy crept under the bed, brought out the pot, and ate all that was in it. "I do not know," said he, "folks say death is bitter, but it tastes very sweet to me. It is no wonder that the farmer's wife has so often longed for death." He seated himself in a little chair, and was prepared to die. | پسرک محتوای شیشه را خورد و با خود گفت: "همیشه از مردم شنیده بودم که مرگ تلخ است ولی به نظر من که زیادی شیرین است! شاید زن کشاورز به خاطر همین شیرینی آرزوی مرگ می کرد!" با این فکر، روی یک چارپایه نشست تا مرگ به سراغش بیاید. |

According to Macleod (1994), suicide should be avoided in children's literature. In this part, the boy is really fed up with the miserable life he has. So, he decides to drink poison to suicide. The translated version, on the other hand, does not delete (adapt) it for children and translates the text as it is.

| English | Persian |
|--|---|
| 1. "But the farmer once said there was a small bottle of poison for flies in the box in which he keeps his clothes; that, no doubt, will be the true poison, and bring death to me." | پسرک با خودش گفت: "راستی کشاورز گفته بود در کمد لباسش یک شیشه سم مگس دارد، حتما آن سم مرا خواهد کشت." |

Here, again the boy tries to kill himself with a bottle of poison.

| English | Persian |
|--|--|
| 2. It was, however, no poison for flies, but Hungarian wine. The boy got out the bottle, and emptied it. | ولی در آن شیشه هم یک نوع شربت خواب آور بود. پسرک رفت و آن شیشه را هم سرکشید. |

In this part the translator substitutes "Hungarian wine" with "sleeping syrup" (شربت خواب آور) and tries to hide the word "wine" through adaptation. But the very bad effect of this adaptation is that the Persian version is introducing a very simple way for suicide. Hence, the child might wrongly learn that sleeping syrup or pills can kill someone.

V. CONCLUSION

To this end, the overall perspective of the study suggests to avoid using adaptation unless there is a great need or necessity to use it. Adaptation, as discussed in previous parts, cannot fulfill the ideal expectations of a traditional form of translation. The meaning sometimes is totally different from that of the original text and the context is changed in some parts. That is the main reason that Klingberg alerts the translators of this strategy in translation.

As seen in most of the examples illustrated in the previous part, children's literature is totally different from that of the adults, and adaptation can sometimes be used as a really useful tool to help the translators and also to avoid different problem related to children's cultural knowledge from a different country, morality, religious backgrounds, dominant policy in a country, their psychological sensibility, etc.

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