

# STRATEGIES OBSERVED IN TRANSLATION OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE FROM ENGLISH INTO ALBANIAN

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to investigate on the translation of children's literature from English into Albanian. The focus of the present comparative analysis is to outline some models of the translation of children's literature, among which there are mostly exemplified the strategies observed through cultural context adaptation as one the ways to abridge the differences between readers of the original on the one hand and readers of the translated text on the other. Several examples are taken from children's books translated from English language, from which it has been found that the prevailing tendency is simplification of the original, which can take several forms and have quite an impact on the readers' overall understanding of the text and attitude towards the original. Extracted examples from the translated variants into Albanian will not only be compared to the original, but also among themselves (in those cases in which there is more than one translation of the same source text) in order to explore on the decision-making process during translation and speculate on the factors that influence the translators' choices. Finally, through this paper it is hoped that some important aspects of children's literature translation will be highlighted in order to aid translators of children's books and to increase understanding of the difficulties that such a job entails.

**Keywords:** *children's literature, translation, strategies, simplification, adaptation.*

## 1. Introduction

Translation of children's literature is rapidly gaining significant ground within Translation Studies worldwide. Being a relatively new field of study in Albania, it is constantly becoming an area of interest, attracting scholars and practitioners alike. This paper aims to serve as a modest contribution to comparative translation studies with reference to translation of children's literature from English into Albanian language. Several children's books originally written in English language and their translated variants into Albanian will serve as the corpus for this study, with the final aim of exemplifying strategies that are observed in translation of children's literature from English into Albanian. Finally, through this paper aspects of translation of children's literature into Albanian will be highlighted in order to help translators of children's books in the future.

## 2. Research questions

Comparison of translated variants into Albanian among themselves and with the original will serve the purpose of answering the following questions (which cover the objectives of this paper as well):

1. Do children receive books in the same way in different countries?
2. What are some of the strategies used by translators to facilitate the process of general understanding?
3. How can translators abridge the differences between source text (ST) and target text (TT)?
4. What is the prevailing tendency?
5. How does use of each strategy influence reader's attitude towards the original?
6. What can translators of children's literature benefit from this study?

## 3. Corpus selected and procedure of study

For the purposes of this paper, there are selected several children's books originally written in English language and their Albanian variants. In cases where more than one Albanian variant has been found, use has been made of all target language variants by bringing examples to demonstrate the use of one strategy or another. Bearing in mind that it is not easy to give a final definition of children's literature, books that are chosen for inclusion in the corpus follow the general awareness that the term *children's literature* can refer to different concepts, such as literature recommended to children, literature read by children and literature published for them (Klingberg, 2008:8). Based on these insights, we have taken examples not only from books such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Harry Potter*, but also *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels*. Such a choice of corpus is further justified on grounds of the conceptualization of translation as a 'transfer process' not only from *one language into another but also from the adult system to children's system* (Shavit, 1986: 111). This transfer process from adult's literature to children's literature can happen only in those cases when the books are appropriate

to children and, if this is not the case, translators are allowed to make certain changes to the source text, according to the cognitive abilities deemed as appropriate for children. The degree to which these changes may alter the original varies and it is the purpose of the present study to bring comparative examples to bring to light this phenomenon – *transformation* of the original, especially with the aim of offering children a more appropriate or useful book in their hands. Several forms of *transformation* will be mentioned, each of them illustrated by examples taken from the corpus outlined below: *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver’s Travels*, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* and their respective variants in Albanian language.

In order to make a comparison of the STs and several TTs, the STs have been carefully read parallel with the TL texts with the aim of identifying concrete examples of each tendency included in *cultural context adaptation* (which is explained in detail below, i.e. in part 4 of this paper). The examples taken from the different Albanian variants will be compared not only to the original in English, but also among themselves in order to offer a wider scope of study on the one hand, and to reflect on the status of translation through the years on the other. The table below introduces the books in English and their Albanian variants that have been selected for the present comparative study:

**Table 1** *Corpus of comparative study*

<b>Original books in English language</b>	<b>Albanian variants</b>				
<i>Gulliver’s Travels</i>	TT1 (1974)		TT2 (2007)		
<i>Robinson Crusoe</i>	<i>Robinson Kruzo</i> (1982)				
<i>Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland</i>	TT1 (1944)	TT2 (1961)	TT3 (1992)	TT4 (2008)	TT5 (2008)
<i>Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone</i>	<i>Harri Poter dhe Guri Filozofal</i> (2001)				

#### **4. Theoretical framework about *Klingberg* and *cultural context adaptation***

Translation Studies in the field of children’s literature has benefited greatly from the contribution given by the Swedish scholar *G te Klingberg* who has often been referred to as the father of Swedish research into children’s literature, with his research extended beyond the Swedish borders, being also awarded the Swedish Gulliver Prize for his wide-ranging and pioneering works on children’s literature in 1972. For the aims of the present study, reference will be made to the strategies of translating children’s literature as introduced in *Klingberg’s* book *Children’s Fiction in the Hands of Translators* (1986). According to *Klingberg*, the extent to which the characteristics of the young readers are taken into consideration can be referred to as *degree of adaptation* and it should be preserved in translation because the original should not change as far as level of difficulty or interest is concerned. However, since readers of the TT will have a cultural background different from that of the readers of the ST, the translator will always

have to alter the text with the aim of maintaining the degree of adaptation in the translation: these alterations or changes made by the translator are included within the term *cultural context adaptation*. This term has first been used by *Klingerg* and has since been adopted as an umbrella term for various strategies of moving the original text towards the child reader in the target culture (*Lathey, 2006: 7*). The translator uses cultural context adaptation (i.e. a degree of adaptation of ST) to help young TT readers with little knowledge of the SL culture to achieve better comprehension of the ST. Problematic areas might include: literary references, foreign languages, references to mythology and popular beliefs, historical, religious and political background, buildings, food and drinks, customs and habits, seasonal festivities, flora and fauna, personal names and/or titles, social hierarchy, geographical names, weights, measurements, distances, references to sex, defecation and taboo words, violence, racial issues, death, vulgarism, etc. However, we must acknowledge the fact that by transforming cultural signs of the ST, there is always created a false belief in the TT readers that they are reading a text originally written in their own language and culture and this illusion may have negative impact on them. *Klingberg* himself warns against extreme cultural context adaptation by recommending restriction of adaptation to details and manipulation of ST as little as possible (*Lathey, 2006: 7*). *Lathey* also adds to this point by pointing out that young readers will never be intrigued and attracted by difference if it is kept from them (*Lathey, 2006: 8*). Seeing this phenomenon from a similar light, *Oittinen* welcomes new ideas, genres, and cultural values imported into the target culture (*Oittinen, 2006: 43*).

## 5. Description and illustration of each strategy within *cultural context adaptation*

When conducting this research, parallel close reading of the ST and TTs has been effected, accompanied by wide-ranging note-taking of culture-bound words in the areas specified above which would call for *cultural context adaptation*. The number of examples found is really vast (considering even the corpus of this study), however, for the purposes of this paper outlined at the beginning, we are going to bring only demonstrative examples of each strategy. This part of the paper will present the strategies introduced by *Klingberg* and concrete examples found through the comparative study of English ST vs. Albanian TTs.

Throughout his own extensive examination of children's books in translation, *Klingberg* identified nine ways of cultural context adaptation. Let us explain and exemplify each of them briefly:

**1 – Added explanation** – Retaining the cultural element in the ST, while adding a short explanation within the translated text. In this way, the cultural item is preserved, although care should be taken not to make the text sound artificial, especially in case of dialogues it should be avoided.

### *Example*

#### **Gulliver's Travels**

#### **TT1**

I have seen him do the summerset several times together, upon a trencher fixed on the rope, which is no thicker than a common packthread in England. (p. 35)

E kam parë shumë herë duke bërë atë kërcimin e rrezikshëm (që ne, anglezët, e quajmë kërcimi i vdekjes) mbi një dërrasë të vogël druri, të lidhur te një tërkuzë, jo më e trashë nga gajtani ynë. (p.44)

As it can be easily observed from the example, explanation about the cultural element is given within the text (within brackets, immediately after the cultural item).

**2 – Explanation outside the text** – Explanations outside the text may be in the form of footnotes, endnotes, preface, annotations and the like. There are readers who find footnotes extremely disturbing and distracting, so they should be used with care from translators in order not to interrupt artificially the process of reading, especially in the case of young readers. However, it must be said that explanations outside the text offer a better way of informing the reader than explanations within the text (explanatory translation).

*Example 1*

**Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland**

**TT3**

how many miles...

Kush e di sa milje\* (\*shën. përkth. Masë për matjen e largësisë. Një milje=1524 metra.) (p.12)

*Example 2*

**Gulliver’s Travels**

**TT1**

This liquor tasted like a small cyder, and was not unpleasant. (p.93)

Pija i ngjante në shije sidrës\* dhe nuk më vinte e keqe. [\*Cidre (frëngjisht), cyder (anglisht) = një farë vere, që nxirret nga molla. Mjeda ka përdorur fjalën sider.] (p.103)

In the first example the explanation in the footnote converts miles into meters, whereas in the second example the footnote provides explanation of a kind of liquor supposedly unknown to Albanian readers. Both cultural elements are retained inside the text itself, whereas explanations about them are provided outside the text, i.e. through footnotes.

**3 – Rewording** – Re-expressing what the ST says but without using the cultural element. Through this way, sometimes sentences can be reduced in their level of precision, although the level of explanation is generally sufficient to transmit the main idea.

*Example 1*

**Alice’s**

**TT1**

**TT2**

**TT3**

**TT4**

**Adventures in Wonderland**

ten inches high

nji pëllâmbë e naltë

një pëllëmbë njeri

një pëllëmbë njeri

jo më e gjatë se njëzet centimetra

In this case, the measure unit (inches) has been replaced with expressions specific to Albanian culture, rendering the text more comprehensible for target readers.

*Example 2*

**Gulliver’s Travels**

**TT1**

...the tallest horses and oxen are between four and five inches in height, the sheep an inch and a half, more or less; their geese about the bigness of a sparrow... (p.55)

...kuajt e qetë janë nja katër a pesë gishtërinj të lartë; dhentë një gisht e gjysmë, patat sa një zog trumcaku... (p.66)

This second example shows again how measure units are adapted into an Albanian context.

**4 – Explanatory translation** – Giving the function or use of the cultural element instead of the foreign name for it. This is a helpful strategy since it transmits the connotative meaning or function of the cultural element, avoiding interference from the foreign culture. However, it is better to discourage use of explanatory translation in case of dialogues.

*Example 1*

**Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland**

There was no ‘One, two, three, and away,’ but they began running when they liked, and left off when they liked, so that it was not easy to know when the race was over. (p.38)

**TT5 (2008)**

Nuk pati asnjë komandë “gati, vëmendje a para marsh”. Përkundrazi secili niste të vraponte e të ndalonte sipas dëshirës, kështu që nuk ishte e thjeshtë të kuptohej kur përfundoi maratona. (p.33)

*Example 2*

**Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland**

... and it sat for a long time with one finger pressed upon its forehead (the position in which you usually see Shakespeare, in the pictures of him) (p. 38)

**TT1**

...ndëjti për një kohë të gjatë me gisht në tàmth, ... (p. 31).

**TT2**

... ndejti për një copë herë me gjisht në kokë... (p.32)

**TT3**

... pasi ndenji një copë herë me gishtin kokës, ... (p. 32-33).

Both examples serve to show that through making use of this strategy, translators bring into the TL (i.e. Albanian) only the function of the foreign cultural element, but not the element itself.

As it can be observed from the explanations supported by examples, through these strategies culture specific items are represented as closely related to the original, enabling target readers to understand the foreign elements and to come into contact with an unknown foreign culture.

**5 – Substitution of an equivalent in the culture of the target language** – Changing the ST culture specific elements into something of equal status in TL culture. The use of this strategy is justified on the grounds that the process of reading and understanding would be more fluent if the sentence referred to something familiar within TL culture. Special care should be taken on behalf of the translator when choosing this strategy of translation, however, because it raises some doubts on the level of foreignness that should be transmitted through translation.

*Example 1*

**Gulliver’s Travels**

...about half a pint of brandy that I drank as I left the ship... (p.15)

**TT1**

...një gjysmë brojcë me raki që kisha rrëkëlyer para se të dilja nga anija...(p.21)

*Example 2*

**Gulliver’s Travels**

...sat down at my table to eat a piece of sweet-cake for my breakfast...(p.114)

**TT1**

...u ula te tryeza, ku nisa te haja një tortë të shijshme...(p.130)

Both examples show that the translator has used this strategy when dealing with types of drink or food, most probably with the aim of creating an atmosphere that is closer to the target culture.

**6 – Substitution of a rough equivalent in the culture of the target language** – Changing the ST culture specific element into something of roughly the same status in TL culture. Again, use of the strategy is justified through a smoother reading and understanding against foreign

“obstacles”. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the translator by using this strategy does imply underestimation of the target readers (children) and, up to a certain degree, even misinformation of them.

**Example 1**

**Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone**  
Fudge

**TT**  
Gjelsheqeri

**Example 2**

**Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland**

**TT1**

a hundred pounds

qinda napolojna

**Example 3**

**Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland**

**TT1**

**TT3**

Half past one, time for dinner!

Dymbëdhetë: koha për me ngrënë drekën!

Dymbëdhjetë e gjysëm, ora e ngrënies së drekës!

In the first example the translator has substituted the cultural element related to food with another food item in Albanian culture and gastronomy. Although the two items of food are not similar in way of preparation and taste, their status may be considered roughly equivalent, and the general effect on readers somehow similar. Providing explanation for the cultural specific element would require too many words, something which is avoided by the translator when he uses a word commonly understood by Albanian children. In the second example the culture specific item refers to the monetary system, and here again the translator moves the text towards the target readers by substituting the foreign term with an Albanian equivalent. The third example refers to English norms and customs and the time dinner is consumed, which is changed to fit with the Albanian setting of the translated text.

**7 – Simplification** - Using a more general concept instead of a specific one. Through this strategy, there are not brought into TL culture any elements from ST culture, they are just substituted with more general terms. In this way, the flavor of the foreign is lost altogether and the text produced is oriented towards the target language.

**Example 1**

**Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone**  
...he was ready to buy as many Mars Bars as he could carry...

**TT**  
... mund të blinte të gjitha çokollatat që donte...

**Example 2**

**Gulliver’s Travels**  
I then took some refreshment, and went to my rest. (p.78)

**TT1**  
Hëngra e piva dhe rrashë të marr një sy gjumë. (p.89)

**Example 3**

**Robinson Crusoe (1993)**  
...he no sooner had it, but he runs to his Enemy, and at one blow cut off his Head as cleverly,\* no Executioner in Germany,\* could have done it sooner or better;...(p.172)

**Robinson Kruzo (1982)**  
Pa e vënë mirë në dorë, i kërceu armikut posi shigjeta dhe ia hodhi kokën tej me një vringëllimë aq të shpejtë e të shkathët, sa s’do t’ia kalonte asnjë xhelat në botë...(p.183)

The first example serves to show that in the case when mention of foreign brands (popular in an English setting) has been made by original writer, the usual tendency of translators is to generalise and simplify the foreign cultural elements. The second example also shows how the translator has simplified a specific cultural element, referring to food and drinks. The third example is brought here to show simplification as a prevailing tendency in translation of books intended to be read by children; as we can observe, reference and implications to *German* executioners has not been mentioned in translation.

**8 – Deletion** – Deleting words, sentences, paragraphs or chapters. This strategy is sometimes market-oriented (requirements from publishing houses or editors), whereas, in other cases, it may serve as a way to minimize foreign elements from ST culture. Use can be made of this strategy only in extreme cases when all the above-mentioned strategies would offer no help at all, and, most importantly, when deletion of a word, sentence, paragraph or chapter does not lead to confusion, loss of meaning or lack of coherence in the events of the whole plot.

**Example 1**

***Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland***

‘I had NOT!’ cried the Mouse, sharply and very angrily.  
 ‘A knot!’ said Alice, always ready to make herself useful, and looking anxiously about her. ‘Oh, do let me help to undo it!’  
 “I shall do nothing of the sort,” said the Mouse.  
 (p. 19)

**TT3**

- Ç’kthesë moj? – pyeti Miu shumë i zemëruar. -  
 Ti më fyen vazhdimisht me ato marrëzi që flet!  
 (p. 37)

In this case the pun has not been translated at all and that part of text containing the pun has been deleted. Due to lack of space, we are not bringing too many examples of this strategy. However, we must state that through this comparative study we have found lots of cases when entire paragraphs or pages have not been translated at all, especially in those cases when the book is ‘adapted’ for children.

**Example 2**

***Gulliver’s Travels***

He desired I would stand like a Colossus, with my legs as far asunder as I conveniently could. (p. 39)

**TT1**

...m’u lut të qëndroja shtruar, me këmbët sa më të hapura, siç qëndron ai vigani i Rodit...(p. 346 - endnote:  
 Vigani i Rodit është statujë prej bakri 72 m. e lartë, që ndodhet para hyrjes së limanit të qytetit të Rodit. Sipas gojëdhanës, këmbët e hapura së tepërmi të kësaj statuje shërbenin si porta ku kalonin anijet.) (p.48)

**TT2**

Mua m’u lut të qëndroja drejt, me këmbët sa më të hapura.  
 (p. 18)

The above comparative example has been mentioned to fulfill two aims: first, different translators might approach cultural specific items in different ways, and, secondly, it is not

always easy to differentiate and distinguish the use of one strategy over the other or to provide clear-cut categorization of these strategies (the first translator has used simultaneously substitution of cultural equivalent and explanations outside the text, whereas the second has used deletion and explanatory translation).

**9 – Localization** – Moving the whole cultural setting of ST closer to the readers of the TT. This is the most radical of all strategies because everything should be changed to suit expectations and understanding of target readers. Use of this strategy calls for responsibility from translators since misuse would have serious consequences on the attitude of target readers towards the ST and the intentions of the original writer. As *Klingberg* has noticed, this kind of tendency can mostly be observed in film remakes of books, that is why we are not bringing any example from the actual corpus under study.

Through these five ways (5-9), the translator adjusts the culturally foreign items to the target culture, thus, these strategies can be considered target language oriented. The degree of adjustment can vary, with deletion, and localization being at the extreme end of adaptation, which would imply violation of ST. According to *Klingberg*, translators should try to explain the difficult cultural terms, rather than sacrifice them.

In his study, *Klingberg* also mentions some other tendencies observed in translation of children’s literature, which are considered as alterations to the original and, hence, as undesirable. Among them we may mention *modernization, purification, aspects of language, abridgment, geographical setting and serious mistranslation*. We are bringing an example from the last tendency mentioned in order to bring to light the fact that translation of children’s literature should not be underestimated as an easy task performed to an (ill-prejudiced) *inferior* genre.

Mistranslations are due to differences in culture of the SL and the TL, occurring in those cases when the translator does not understand the culture in which ST is written. Sometimes these flaws may not interfere with the process of understanding, but, at other times, they can present a real problem in the process of communication or general setting of the story. There should be no justification for mistranslations: they should never escape the eye of the translator, and, most importantly, that of the editor and publisher.

Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland	TT1	TT2	TT3	TT4	TT5
...it doesn’t understand English (French mouse)	... s’ merr vesht inglisht (mî frëng)	... s’kupton inglisht (mi francez)	... s’kupton anlgisht (mi francez)	... ndoshta nuk kupton gjuhën (mi francez)	...ndoshta, ai nuk kupton anglisht (mi francez)...

In this example all translators (excepts that of the fourth variant) fall ingeniously into a word-for-word translation, by mistakenly conveying the idea that the mouse, being French, cannot understand English language, spoken by Alice. But, in fact, Alice is now speaking Albanian for the Target readers; that is why the mouse does not need to have an understanding of English language to establish communication with Alice. The translator of the fourth variant makes a smarter choice by saying that the mouse simply cannot understand *the language*, without being unnecessarily specific about that language. It is enough to say that a French mouse may not understand Alice’s language (implying Albanian language, in which Alice is speaking to him).

## 6. Conclusions and recommendations of the comparative study

It is far beyond the scopes of this individual research to mention each example observed or to represent the collected data graphically as this would take an enormous amount of space and would call for more thorough interpretation and analysis. However, we can say that we do observe certain tendencies in translation of the books under analysis, which are outlined below:

- Cultural context adaptation can sometimes be considered a source of controversy in translation of children's literature because there is a clash between the degree of adaptation to be preserved on the one hand, and, the aim of encouraging cultural enrichment through international understanding on the other hand.
- Age of intended target audience and purpose of translation should be taken into account when choosing the appropriate strategy of translation. Also the level of tolerance of the TT society and culture should not be neglected.
- We agree with *Klingberg* who warns that cultural context adaptation should not be applied too often and that the ST must have absolute priority, in order to provide target readers (children) with useful and interesting information about other unknown cultures.
- There have been lots of cases in which we have observed that the translators are inconsistent in the strategies they use, which leads to incoherent texts and confused readers. Within the same variant, it happens that the translator shifts from added explanation (retaining the cultural elements) into substituting SL culture specific items with equivalents in the TL (changing or transforming cultural elements).
- Translating for children differentiates from translating for adults, and in translation of children's literature, unfortunately, we witness low professionalism and lack of editing.
- Through all comparative examples that we have analyzed, we have observed that the prevailing tendency is simplification of the source text in different levels.

## 7. Implication of the study for future research

This study could serve as an impetus for more thorough comparative analyses of translations for children in order to outline phenomena that happen during translation and reflect on the change of the status of translation through the years. The extensive range of examples we have found could be the starting point for undertaking comparison at different levels and for different aims, and their presentation through charts and graphs would make the study more comprehensible and the results of the study more concrete.

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