

The Translation of Proper Names in Children's Literature

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1. Definition and Classification of Proper Names

One of the problems any translator has to face, in all texts, independently of the theme or subject he/she be working on is the translation of proper names. When we mention this grammatical category, right away we think of anthroponyms (names of persons) and toponyms (names of places), although they are only a part of the whole problem. It is necessary, then, to show which are all the elements within that grammatical category and define the object of study of this paper.

The Dictionary of the *Real Academia Española* (RAE) defines the proper name as "the one applied to animate or inanimate beings to designate and differentiate them from others of the same class, and that, since they do not necessarily evoke properties of those beings, they can be imposed on more than one (Peter, Toledo), even on beings of a different class (Mars).

The *Diccionario de uso del español* (Dictionary of Spanish Use) by M. Moliner says:

[Proper name is] the one applied to a certain thing to distinguish it from the rest of the same species. They are always written in capital letters. Truly, proper names are all the expressions which are denominations and particular titles of things, but they are only called proper names when they are formed by only one or several words that do not form a complete sentence.

In a different source, the RAE sheds new light on the theme (1999: 63):

Every proper name, such as those below, will be written with capital letters:

- a) Names of persons, animals or singularized things. Examples: Peter, Albert, Plato.
- b) Geographical names: America, Spain.

When the article officially forms part of the proper name, both words will start with capital letter: El Salvador, The Hague. The name that accompanies proper names of place when they are part of the toponym: Mexico City; Sierra Nevada.

- c) Lastnames: Smith, Brown.
- d) Constellation, star or planet names strictly considered as such.
- e) Zodiac sign names: Aries, Taurus, Libra.
- f) Cardinal point names, when we refer explicitly to them.
- g) Civil or religious feast names.

- h) Divinities' names.
- i) Sacred books.
- j) Commercial brands.

The list continues and it presents one section for categories or situations not included in the others.

The above quote is quite representative of the heterogeneity and volubility of the proper name concept, circumstances that can be applied to other languages.

Trying to offer a closer approach to the concept of proper name, we present the considerations of an English speaking author, who establishes the following classification criteria:

ORTOGRAPHIC:

- Proper names are capitalized.

MORPHOSYNTACTIC:

- Proper names have no plural forms.
- Proper names are used without articles.
- Proper names do not accept restrictive modifiers.

REFERENTIAL:

- Proper names refer to single unique individuals.

SEMANTIC:

- Proper names do not impute any qualities to the objects designated and are therefore meaningless.
- Proper names have a distinctive form of definition that includes a citation of their expression. (Algeo 1973: 9-13).

We have already cited Spanish and English sources to present the concept of proper name that is presented in this work from a translation point of view. All the sources show that this is not a simple, clearly defined concept delimited by Linguistics, but a rather amorphous and sometimes ethereal element that will present itself as a challenge for the translator. Franco Aixelá approaches the concept of proper names from the perspective of translation and comments upon the difficulties in defining it:

... I will try to review the different defining criteria postulated throughout history to define the "proper name" category. The conclusions will probably not be very encouraging in establishing an absolutely satisfactory criterion, but at least they will help to let us know the kind of surface we are on ... (2000: 54).

With this first section we approached the concept of "proper name", in order to delimit (considering the space and time limitations of this paper) the object of study, which will allow us a more concrete and clarifying analysis.

2. Translation Strategies of Proper Names

Authors such as Newmark (1986) have established different classifications of translation strategies in general terms, applicable, therefore, to the category of “proper names”. We will present here Theo Hermans’ classification (1988) since it is “probably the one that fits best the actual tendencies on translation studies since it intends to establish all the real possibilities...”

Theoretically speaking there appears to be at least four ways of transferring proper names from one language into another. They can be **copied**, i.e. reproduced in the target text exactly as they were in the source text. They can be **transcribed**, i.e. **transliterated or adapted** on the level of spelling, phonology, etc. A formally unrelated name can be **substituted** in the TT for any given name in the ST [...] and insofar as a proper name in the ST is enmeshed in the lexicon of that language and acquires ‘meaning’, it can be **translated**. Combinations of these four modes of transfer are possible, as a proper name may, for example, be copied or transcribed and in addition translated in a (translator’s) footnote. From the theoretical point of view, moreover, several other alternatives should be mentioned, two of which are perhaps more common than one might think: **non-translation**, i.e. the deletion of a source text proper name in the TT, and the **replacement** of a proper noun by a common noun (usually denoting a structurally functional attribute of the character in question). Other theoretical possibilities, like the **insertion** of the proper name in the TT where there is none in the ST, or the replacement of a ST common noun by a proper noun in the TT, may be regarded as less common, except perhaps in certain genres and contexts (In Franco Aixelá 2000: 76).

Hermans talks about four basic strategies to use in the translation of proper names, all of which can be combined to produce new methods of transfer, considering as strategies the possibility of omitting the proper name in the translated text or incorporating it when there is none in the original text. It is, from our point of view, a classification that, despite being concise, includes all the possible options the translator may have.

3. Proper Names and Children’s Literature

Generally speaking, and in the case of Spain, we can affirm that the historical factor is responsible for the existence of three different periods in the strategies used in the translation of proper names: from the twenties to the beginning of the seventies: the proper name is considered a grammatical category among others being a tendency to translate it. A transition period until the second half of the seventies with an “important vacillation on translations by default” and from then until the present day where the general norm is the conservation or no translation of proper names (Franco Aixelá 2000: 230).

The tendencies in the translation process are an important element to be taken into account in establishing the general guidelines to follow in each historical period, but they never can be considered as the only factor determining the strategic decisions to be adopted by the translator. There are more factors that make translation a singular exercise in every case. Thus, the text function and type of reader, for example, are decisive in decision making.

3.1 Internationalism and Multiculturalism

Internationalism and multiculturalism are two terms that are gaining more and more importance in society today. The effective suppression of frontiers with the revolution of Internet and the proximity of people due to globalization make it possible to talk of “the global village” as a concept that agglutinates cultural divergences. This has advantages but also disadvantages which we are not going to analyse here as they are not the object of our study. From the translation point of view, this phenomenon implies a better understanding of people, which will make easier the mediating function of the translator. Isabel Pascua (1998) and Carmen Valero (2000) present both concepts in more detail but we want to underline here (due to its relation with this paper) the definition of multiculturalism given by Pascua: “To create a multicultural reader-child through books of different countries, getting to know each other thanks to translations” (17). We could say that, thanks to television, children in most parts of the world know certain cultures quite well, the so-called dominant cultures which coincide with the Anglo-Saxon ones. Television also brings children closer to other cultures but in a much more limited way. For example, what do Spanish children know about the Nordic countries? and what about Eastern Europe? This is just talking about Europe of which Spain forms a part. Leaving aside the negative aspects, the role played by television within this “internationalism” also has positive aspects, among which we can find a considerable increase in the level of acceptability of “foreignization” among children and youngsters. They are used to watching original movies with subtitles (Europe in general, Latin America), to watching them dubbed but with the names of characters, places, institutions and cultural references in their original language; to watch cartoons that talk their language but think in Japanese, with place names in Japanese, and personal names in Japanese, that kneel on the floor to have tea on a table closer to the floor than usual, etc. Therefore, the television is playing an important role in creating the phenomenon called multiculturalism and that must not be underestimated.

3.2 Should proper names be translated or not?

One of the questions which usually arises in relation to proper names in any language is if these should be translated or not. As a translation teacher we also have to face this question asked quite frequently by the students who usually prefer a general answer that allows them to solve a problem present in every text they have to translate, whatever the topic or the subject. Unfortunately, such an answer does not exist since the macro and microstructures of each text will require different decision making. As a matter of fact, the same text, just intended for a different audience, may require the translation of proper names in one case and the conservation of them in another. For Franco Aixelá “asking oneself ‘if proper names should be translated or not’ is a case of unproductive speculations, since we have the possibility to study how and why they are translated, as in fact they are” (2000: 222-3). These assertions are based on an exhaustive analysis of more than 10 000 proper names from English texts translated into Spanish (including Children’s literature) during the last 75 years of the 20th century. Therefore, if a first conclusion can be inferred, that is that proper names are translated.

The Translation of Proper Names in Literature for Children and Youngsters

Talking about proper names in Children's Literature is, no doubt, to talk about the concepts of domesticating and foreignizing. Oittinen (1993), Puurtinen (1995) and Pascua (1998) do not agree, generally speaking, with a foreignizing approach in Children's Literature. Klingberg (1986) and Shavit (1986), in contrast, consider domestication as a negative process for the target reader and for Shavit it is even "a sign of disrespect for children" (380-1).

3.2 Age

From our point of view, it is true that every translation encapsulates in itself a series of factors, elements and circumstances that must be considered before taking a decision on the process to follow, although we can try to establish general parameters that help us in the decision taking. In relation to Children's Literature, one of those parameters is age. In a previous work (Cámara 2002) we showed the importance of establishing a much more defined classification of the child as target reader in order to approach the translation process more precisely and with success. Thus, we established the following classification:

1. Pre-reading children (0 to 6 years old)
2. Children capable of reading and writing (from 6 to adolescence)
3. Adolescents and youngsters

The differences among the groups are marked by a greater or lesser development of intellectual capabilities, which is closely related to previous knowledge of the world in the target reader. Those capabilities are necessary to be able to interpret the facts presented. So, the lower the age the lower the capability of understanding, therefore, the acceptability of foreignizing elements.

Preference for acceptability is connected with the properties of the primary target group: ... children with their imperfect reading abilities and limited world knowledge are not expected to tolerate as much strangeness and foreignness as adult readers (Puurtinen 1995: 23)

Every author wants his/her work be received and understood by the audience for whom it was designed. Authors who dedicate their professional lives to writing for children keep in mind that this kind of reader implies a change of register and a qualitative selection of conceptual and formal elements. The theme, style, syntax, sentence length, lexical complexity, typography, illustration, speakability, etc. are some of the factors with a specific weight in the reception of their work and this, no doubt, the Children's Literature author keeps in mind throughout his/her project. If "... the frequent occurrences of unfamiliar words in a text are often related to an unfamiliar topic, and it is probably the reader's lack of background knowledge that causes problems" (Puurtinen 1995: 111), a work for children with a setting in a different society, with characters' names in another language, different institutions, streets and traditions constitutes a challenge from the point of view of another language and culture. We have seen before authors such as Klingberg or Shavit that consider domesticating as a negative process for author and receptor. We think that the receptor's lack of understanding does not allow the fulfilment of the communicative function of the text initiated by the author, as it alienates the new addressee, leaving him/her out of the communicative process. Thus, we think that in this case the translator stops

being a bridge between two languages and cultures, minimizing his/her mediator function.

3.3 Type of work

A fairy tale, a science-fiction novel, an adventure novel, a play, etc. are some of the genres and subgenres to be translated for children. All of them are full of proper names, although obviously they are not going to be treated in the same way, even if all of them are Children's Literature. We are going to approach the fairy tale and the fiction subgenres as the ones in which proper names are usually most frequently translated.

The fairy tale, due to the kind of addressee it is written for, has traditionally translated its personal names. We mentioned before Klingberg as not being in favour of domestication. In relation to personal names he says that "...personal names ... without any special meanings ... should not be altered ... 1986: 43). A few pages later he says: "In earlier children's literature descriptive names were frequent ... such names have to be translated" (45). Despite considering they should be kept the same (which implies not even adapting or transliterating them), he later recognizes that those with a content or a meaning *have to* be translated. He implicitly has to assume that a meaningful name plays a role within a story and not translating it is suppressing part of the function it was created for; therefore, the communicative process started by the author is not going to be fulfilled.

Some of the most popular fairy tales around the world contain personal names within the title. Of the examples we are going to present, some were written by the brothers Grimm, some are traditional tales recounted by Perrault and later by the brothers Grimm, one belongs to Lewis Carrol and one to an unknown author.

In the case of names containing a meaning, this has been transferred:

- Cendrillon
Cinderella
Cenicienta
Ashenputtel (Perrault 1697).
- Boucle d'Or et les trois ours
Goldilocks and the Three Bears
Ricitos de oro y los tres osos
Goldlöcken und die drei Bären (unknown author).
- Le Petit Chaperon rouge
Little Red Riding Hood
Caperucita Roja
Rotkäppchen (Perrault 1697) (Grimm 1811).
- Blanche-Neige et les sept nains
Snow White and the Seven Dwarves
Blancanieves y los siete enanitos
Sneewittchen (Grimm 1811).

- Le Petit Poucet
Tom Thumb
Pulgarcito
Das Däumlein (Perrault 1697) (Grimm 1811).

When such a meaning does not exist, the name has been copied or transcribed:

- Rapunzel
Rapunzel
Rapunzel
Rapunzel (Grimm 1811).
- Hansel et Gretel
Hansel and Gretel
Hansel y Gretel
Hänsel und Gretel (Grimm 1811).
- Alice ou pays des merveilles
Alice in Wonderland
Alicia en el país de las maravillas
Alice im Wunderland (Carroll 1865).

The work of fiction is another subgenre in which proper names (especially personal names) tend to be translated, regardless of the age group addressee. The explanation for that could be that it participates in what is known as “allegory”.

Allegory is “the representation of an abstract thing or idea by an object that keeps a certain relation with it, whether real, conventional, or created by the artist’s imagination (Moliner 1992). In our case, proper names within an allegorical work, it seems that a general consensus exists in relation to translation. Newmark considers that names should not be translated “except, of course, in allegories ...” (1986: 71). Schogt underlines Newmark’s position saying that “only all the characters’ names have to be translated in truly allegorical works (1988: 75). Thus, we can see that *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* has been translated as *Juan Salvador Gaviota* (Spanish), or *Joan Salvador Gavina* (Catalan) as well as most of the characters in the book (Cámara 1999). At the same time, the French version has kept the original name in the title *Jonathan Livingston le Goéland* and all the characters’ original names.

We also would like to mention the interesting and overwhelming phenomenon of the fiction work *Harry Potter* (Clouet 2002: 191):

Initially written for the British and American culture industry, the books were soon translated into more than forty seven languages ... to meet the needs of the mass media and youth culture. Such translations did nothing but increase the phenomenal aspect of the reception of the Harry Potter books all over the world. Referring to J. K. Rowling, this led Professor Jack Zipes to write: “The phenomenon is indeed beyond her control. She herself did not even conceive of its possibility”. ...

It is interesting to know that, in France, several publishers initially turned the series down, on the grounds that it was too English to cross the Channel successfully.

...

The books to date contain more than one hundred proper names of people (and many place names), nearly all of which, in our opinion, should have been changed in translation, since they are not really names, but comic spoofs on names made up out of English words in the original.

This is a real case of a work originally conceived for a certain addressee within a certain culture. The author did not create the story considering future translations into other languages, as can be inferred from the complex process used for the “elaboration” of proper names. That a successful transfer was not going to be possible in a translation into French was a thought shared by more than one publisher who did not accept the challenge.

We could deduce that the situation and process was similar in the Spanish case. Far from that, the translation work has been carried out by three translators, who decided to maintain the original names, depriving the target readers of the real and full content of the work.

The Spanish translators chose to keep the English names whereas French translator Jean-François Ménard opted for the adaptation of many of them, starting with such exotic words as Muggles or Hogwarts (Clouet 2002: 190).

This is an example of how two different groups of translators, from different cultures, approach the same work using opposed translation strategies. In the case of allegorical works in which proper names are not translated, due to the conservation tendency of the current historical period or to an important and increasing tolerance of the target reader to it, the translators are putting aside an important part of the content, not being this, in our view, loyalty either to the author nor to the reader. Schogt, in relation to Gogol's book *Dead Souls*, talks about the existence of many names with a meaning and underlines on the one hand the loss of part of the meaning since it has not been transferred by the translator, and on the other, the reader's exclusion due to not being *an insider* in the work's development.

A whole range of names ... that, without ever being explicitly commented upon, indicate the main characteristics of their bearers ... All these names underline but do not create the impression the reader gets from the text about the heroes. If he does not notice the connection he does not miss very much, except the feeling of being an insider. Translators, not surprisingly, do not try to translate the revealing names and keep the original forms in their translations. Thus the allegorical element is lost (1988: 75).

CONCLUSIONS

We are going to conclude this paper presenting illustrative quotes in order to show the opinion of several Children's Literature scholars and present the two most general positions within this translation field.

[Children's literature should be] entertaining, didactic, informative, therapeutic, and it should help the child grow and develop. A children's book should also strengthen the child's feelings of empathy and identification (Molh and Schack in Oittinen 2000: 65).

... the frequent occurrences of unfamiliar words in a text are often related to an unfamiliar topic, and it is probably the reader's lack of background knowledge that causes problems (Puurtinen 1995: 111).

One of the aims of translating children's books must simply be to make more literature available to children ... Another aim ... to further the international outlook and understanding of the young readers. This aim will lead to the same adherence to the original. Removal of peculiarities of the foreign culture or change of cultural elements for such elements which belong to the culture of the target language will not further the readers' knowledge of and interest in the foreign culture (Klingberg 1986: 9-10).

These quotes constitute an example of the importance of Children's Literature, not only from an aesthetic point of view but also from the reader's personal and intellectual point of view. At the same time, they represent the translation concept nowadays for most scholars as well as its role in the evolution of a genre traditionally marked by its marginal position on all fronts.

In relation to the translation of proper names, like Franco Aixelá, we consider that asking whether proper names have to be translated or not constitutes a useless debate, since it is clear that they are translated. We would like to put all our attention, however, on the different strategies used in the translation of proper names into another language as well as in the examples given which may in themselves (we hope) be useful for the translator.

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