
CULTURAL IDENTITY VS. CULTURAL ADAPTATION IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE TRANSLATED INTO BASQUE

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ABSTRACT

Children's literature is usually addressed to a receiver who has a limited knowledge of the world and limited literary competence. For this reason, trends in children's literature translation have been focused on adapting to the target culture.

However, migration arising as a result of globalization and the necessary integration of children of different races, cultures and religions, make a double educational and literary perspective essential. On one hand, the literature that shows the values of the local culture in order to integrate immigrant children; on the other hand, the translation of works that show the cultural values of the countries immigrant children come from is necessary; so they can be understood and accepted by local children. Some examples will be given from children's literature translated into Basque.

This new perspective requires a rethinking of strategies for translation of children's literature, beyond mere adaptation to the target culture. Some proposals related to these new challenging goals will be considered later.

Keywords: Children's literature; Literary Translation; Domestication; Foreignization; Adaptation; Basque Literature

Introduction. Basque language and literature

In order to describe the literature of a culture, it is essential to mention its defining elements and situations, with particular emphasis if produced by a minority population.

The Basque language or *euskara* is the minority language of the Basque Country, which is located in an area around the Bay of Biscay, shared by the Spanish and French states, and so it lives alongside these two important languages. The estimated number of speakers is close to 800,000, around 25% of the population of the country.

Basque is an isolated language and despite the fact that it has been linked to many "relatives" such as Berber or Caucasian throughout history, the most accurate theory states that it had already existed in Aquitania before Roman conquering. In other words,

it is a Pre-Indo European language surrounded by Romance languages and is hardly comprehensible by those who are unfamiliar with it. Basque is an *obscure* language for those who do not speak it.

Due to these unique characteristics, the isolation of the Basque culture has been even more significant, not only outside the Basque Country but also within. Written Basque literature was late in appearing, with the first printed work dating from 1545. It has only been 40 years since written Basque became standardized, which means that all texts produced prior to 1969 had been written in different variations or dialects, leading to clear discrepancies in Basque literature. There is evidence of some authors writing their works exclusively for the inhabitants of a specific area.

The second half of the 20th century was the period that saw the greatest development in Basque literature, both in terms of quantity and quality.

Polysystem view of literary translation

The first author who studied children's literature from the polysystem point of view was Zohar Shavit (1981, 1986). Based on Even-Zohar's proposals, Shavit states that translations of children's literature are integrated into the periphery of the system by changing outdated literary canonical models according to several conditions. In general literature, such conditions have to do with the market, in order to obtain the best potential sales. However, in children's literature, the changes are done by following the educational and moral rules established in each age.

Since children's literature is in a peripheral position within the system, translators feel free to manipulate text in various ways. According to Shavit, historically manipulations have been done under the following rules: affiliation to existing models, not respecting the text's integrality, ideological or evaluative adaptation according to the rules of each age, and adapting stylistic norms.

A very accurate metaphor is the one which says that Children's Literature is, at the same time, a mirror and a window. A mirror to understand and see themselves reflected in the stories they read, and a window to peek at the outside world and indirectly experience other cultures.

On one hand, children's knowledge of the world is limited, thus running the risk of not being able to understand certain cultural habits different from theirs. In this case, the translator deals with cultural context adaptation: the most obvious is the language, but also anthroponyms and place names, customs, dining, etc.

On the other hand, when the translator (or publisher) believes that the reader has a certain degree of maturity to assimilate different worlds, cultural adaptation is much lower, and sometimes disappears almost completely. Then other languages, religions, folklore, customs, gender roles, clothing, etc are shown.

The first mentioned way of manipulation has been called *domestication*. Using the terminology created by Gideon Toury, it is called *acceptability* (when "the operational linguistics and literary norms of the target system are triggered and set into full operation" (Toury 1980: 55)). The second way has been known as *foreignization*, and in the Toury's polysystem context it is known as *adequacy*, i.e., when "the translation tends to adhere to

the norms of the original work, and through them – as well – to the norms of SL and/or the source literary polysystem as a whole” (ibidem).

Some supporters of adequacy

Thirty years have passed since the Swedish researcher Göte Klingberg (1918–2006) clearly rejected any cultural context adaptation in children’s literature, stating that: “Localization of cultural elements, simplification, and substitution by cultural elements belonging to the context of the target language are not to be recommended. When such methods are chosen, the source text is violated” (Klingberg 1986: 18–19).

In Klingberg’s opinion, the translation must respect the ST, since the source text keeps several values: child literariness, lexical and syntactic level chosen by the author for his readers, children’s interests and experiences, historical and cultural values, etc. Thus, Klingberg does not accept almost any modification, except what he calls *degree of adaptation*. He doubts whether it should be made a contextual adaptation: on the one hand, he considers it necessary to keep the level of adaptation of the ST, but on the other hand, he considers it incompatible with mutual knowledge among young people of the world, given by means of children’s literature.

It is clear that Klingberg rejected these practices because they were widespread. In fact, this very Klingberg made an interesting classification of cultural context adaptations.

In reference to literary translation in general, the American professor Lawrence Venuti (1995) is a strong defender of the trend towards the S(ource)T(ext). In his opinion, the adaptation of the text into the target culture is synonymous with defending the hegemonic cultural values; in his own words, it is an “ethnocentric violence”. By contrast, the defence of the ST is a challenge for those hegemonic aesthetics and also involves receiving ideas, genres and cultural values from abroad. Unlike Klingberg’s pedagogical approach, behind Venuti’s proposals anti imperialist intentions are perceived, because he does not accept that works coming from peripheral cultures should be adapted to the US parameters of culture.

In favour of translator’s intervention

One of the defenders of the translator’s visibility is the Finnish professor Riitta Oittinen. On the basis on the concept of *dialogism* by Bakhtin, Oittinen proposes a dialogue between text and illustrations (herself being an illustrator). Moreover, with regard to translation, Oittinen defends that translator’s dialogue should be threefold: with the author, with the readers of the translation and with his inner child. In that sense, her programme is not univocal, as far as she defends translator’s freedom, so that each translator could make a different translation based on the experiences of his dialogues (Oittinen 2000).

The Spanish professor Isabel Pascua Febles also defends the visibility of the translator, against the classical invisibility. According to Pascua, translators, to the extent that they are mediators between two languages and cultures, should follow the same path that ran

the authors when they wrote their works. In this sense, translators are re-creators of the work, with all their subjective contributions. For these reasons, she proposes a discussion of several terms like acceptability, dialogue, visibility and intervention of the translator (Pascua 2002).

With regard to acceptability, Pascua argues that the translator must make all changes that are necessary to the text to be accepted by the reader of the target language. The techniques proposed for that goal are expanding, concretion, substitution, explanation, and, sometimes, elimination.

Regarding visibility and the intervention of the translator, Pascua believes that it is time for translators to hold freedom to make their own voice heard. Thus, the goal of acceptability will be achieved through the translator's re-creation.

The problem is where the limits of the translator's intervention are. The solution, according to Pascua, is dialogue: the only limit is the dialogue between the translator and the text, since "el traductor no puede ignorarse, olvidarse de sí mismo y autodestruirse" [the translator can not ignore, forget himself and self-destruct]¹ (Pascua & Marcelo 2000: 34).

On Pascua's proposals, the influence of her mentor Riitta Oittinen is clear regarding dialogism. She has also been clearly influenced by postcolonial theories, especially by the extremist proposals of Brazilian Haroldo de Campos, who proposed the term "cannibalism" as a metaphor for the practice of translation. In his opinion, instead of rejecting colonizing literature, what you have to do is devour and digest it, so its "blood" becomes enriching to the target culture. Therefore, Campos proposes a free and liberating translation:

The use of the text one is translating as a source of nourishment for one's theorization gives a further cannibalistic dimension to the Campos' work (...) while also calling attention to the number of expressions used throughout the text to exemplify the satanic feature of the translator's task: "luciferian translation", "a satanic enterprise" (Bassnet & Trivedi 1999: 109).

According to Gillian Lathey (2006: 3–6), the precursor of cultural context adaptations was the Englishwoman Mary Wollstonecraft, in her translation *Elements of Morality for the Use of Children* (1790) of the work of German G. Z. Salzmann's *Elementarbuch Moralisches* (1785). This is what she stated in the preface of her translation:

I have made some additions, and altered many parts of it, not only to give it the spirit of an original, but to avoid introducing any German customs or local opinions (...) I did not wish to puzzle children by pointing out modifications of manners, when the grand principles of morality were to be fixed on a broad basis (Wollstonecraft, in Lathey, op. cit., 5).

¹ All translations are by J. M. López Gaseni

Some cultural context adaptations in the Basque system

As for cultural adaptations in children's literature translated into Basque, the striking case of translation of some stories of Brothers Grimm Tales by Y. A. Larrakoetxea *Legoaldi: Grimm Anayen Ipuñak* (1929) can be mentioned. This is a volume containing fifty tales belonging to the Brothers Grimm collection, translated into the variety of Basque from Arratia Valley (Bizkaia). Names of people and places in these stories are totally changed and adapted to the Basque context of the time. For example, we find titles like "Durango'ko erri-abeslariak" [The popular Durango singers] for ("Die Bremer Stadtmusikanten") or "Yulitxo eta Libetxo" for ("Hänsel und Gretel"). Kings and queens, princes and princesses also disappear and are replaced by *masters* of a certain village or territory ("Urdin-Zubiko Nagusia" [Lord of Urdin-zubi], "Urdin-Zubiko etxanderea" [Lady of Urdin-zubi]).

Cultural context adaptation is also reflected in the drawings that accompany the text: on the front cover of the book, Little Red Riding Hood and her mother are dressed in the traditional Basque way. Also, in the tale "Snow White", the Seven Dwarfs are wearing a Basque beret on their heads, while carrying the glass coffin.

In any case, textual integrity is respected and it can be said that the text remain loyal to the original version.

However, in the same year of 1929 another Basque translation of the Brothers Grimm Tales was published, this time by Joseba Altuna. This translation is a very balanced one, with a certain tendency towards the pole of adequacy.

This shows that different translation trends can coexist at the same time, especially when it comes to a system, such as Basque, which was young and weak.

In my opinion, the most comprehensive adaptation in Basque Children's Literature has been *Abereeneko Iraultza* (1981) [The Revolution of animals] from *Animal Farm* (1945), by George Orwell. This Basque version was published in San Sebastian and was conducted by a translator called Imanol Unzurrunzaga. Upon opening the book, the prologue tells us what we will find:

George Orwell-ek Internazionala eta Ingalaterrako langileri mugimenduaren abestiak hartu zituen eredu gisa, Animal Farm-eko abere matxinoen abestiak prestatzerakoan; euskal egokipenaren egileak, berriz, 1976 inguruetan Amnistiaren aldeko kanpainak zabaldu eta ezagutarazi zituen errebindikazio abestiak aukeratu ditu eginkizun bererako [When preparing the animals rebellion songs for *Animal Farm*, George Orwell took as a model the well known socialist song "The Internationale" along with other songs from the English labour movement. The author of the Basque version, meanwhile, has chosen the same protest songs that became popular in the pro-amnesty campaigns that took place around 1976, the last years of the dictatorship of Franco] (Unzurrunzaga 1981: 8).

Clearly, this was a fusion of the cultural and ideological elements, as far as the wording of the whole translation is concerned, it is the political language of the time. Of course, for this language to be believable, placing the action in the Basque Country was necessary: Mr Jones, Mr Foxwood and Mr. Whymper became Xeledon, Agerre and Jon Ander.

The dogs Bluebell, Jessie and Pincher became Pintto, Beltxa and Lagun. Boxer and Clover (horses) turned into Noble and Gorri. Even Mr Jones' drunkenness in the "Red Lion" tavern in the original text was moved in time and space to a little village in Bizkaia.

A further piece of manipulation, which refers to the songs mentioned in the prologue, is the adaptation of the song "Beasts of England", and a parody of "The Internationale", that was replaced in turn by a parody of "Batasuna", a very known revolutionary Basque song.

Conclusion

To sum up, on one hand I can say that the manipulation of the target text, whether voluntary or involuntary, is more striking when the target literary system is weak or young, as it has been seen in the cases of children's literature translated into Basque. This is due to the need to adapt the text to young readers who belong to a system with a more limited literary repertoire, and have a lower reading experience.

On the other hand, the level of manipulation also depends on the trend of the Institution (publishers, critics, educational institutions ...) leans towards psychological introspection in the target culture or towards the acceptance of other cultures.

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