



Translating Cultural References In Children's Literature

ترجمة المدلولات الثقافية في أدب الأطفال

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Abstract-

Translating Children's literature plays an important role in helping children develop their knowledge and discover other people's societies and culture, since literature is the mirror of the society to which it belongs. Yet, transferring cultural references in children's literature from a language to another is a challenging task for translators particularly with the existence of a cultural gap between the source culture and the target one. This study attempts to shed some light on the issue of translating cultural references by analyzing some examples taken from two Arabic translations of Mark Twain's novel "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer".

Key words-

Translation, children's literature, cultural references, adaptation, literality.

المخلص -

تؤدي ترجمة أدب الأطفال دوراً مهماً في مساعدة الأطفال على تطوير معارفهم واكتشاف مجتمعات وثقافات الآخرين ، ذلك أن الأدب هو مرآة المجتمع الذي ينتمي إليه. غير أن نقل المدلولات الثقافية في أدب الأطفال من لغة إلى أخرى مهمة صعبة للمترجمين خاصة مع وجود فجوة ثقافية بين الثقافة المترجم منها والثقافة المترجم إليها. وتحاول هذه الدراسة تسليط بعض الضوء على مسألة نقل المدلولات الثقافية من خلال تحليل بعض الأمثلة المأخوذة من ترجمتين لرواية مارك توين "مغامرات توم سوير" إلى اللغة العربية.

الكلمات الدالة -

الترجمة ,أدب الأطفال,المدلولات الثقافية , التكييف,الحرفية

1. Introduction

The interest in children's literature has witnessed a huge progress due to the important role it plays in children's lives. This interest comes after years of marginalization since children's literature was considered as a token of the writer's incompetence to seduce and attract adult readers. The need for discovering other people's literature has prompted the translation of foreign children's literature which has led to the emergence of universal books called "Classics" which were translated in many languages such as Allis in Wonderland, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, and Heidi...etc .

Children literature is a literary genre which is rife with cultural references, since literature reflects the socio-cultural reality of the society to which it belongs; culture is closely tied to language in general and literature in particular. Translators face big challenges in conveying these cultural references from a language to another and thus from a culture to another. Hence, this study endeavours to answer the following questions: How are cultural references translated in children's literature? Should the translator preserve the original cultural references or adapt them to the target culture?

This study aims at answering these questions by analyzing some examples taken from two Arabic translations of Mark Twain's novel "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" in order to find out how these cultural references have been translated and what translation techniques have the translators adopted to transfer them into Arabic.

2.- Language, culture and translation

Culture is intimately related to language and cannot be separated from it; language is not merely a set of words and sentences but it is impregnated with the values, norms and cultural peculiarities of the socio-cultural environment to which it belongs, hence language reflects the reality of its speakers, as Edward Sapir states (Kramsch, 1998, p. 85). On the other hand, Susan Bassnett (2002) has compared the relationship between language and culture to the relationship between the body and the soul for one cannot exist without the other, she says "Language, then, is the heart within the body of culture, and it is the interaction between the two that results in the continuation of life-energy." (Bassnett, 2002, p. 23)

Consequently, language and culture are inextricably tied to each other and cannot be set apart, for language reflects culture and is considered as a means of expressing it and transmitting it to the other cultures and societies. On the other hand, culture plays an important role in enriching the language with different cultural words and terms.

Since culture is linked to language, it is also linked to translation; this latter is not the simple act of conveying a message from a language to another but it is also an act of transmitting culture and achieving intercultural communication.

Despite the importance of culture in translation, it was not taken into consideration during the beginning of translation studies; most of the pioneering translation studies scholars have considered translation as a process which involves two languages (source language and target

language) notwithstanding the cultural aspects of each language. This can be clear through the following definitions :

“Translation may be defined as follows: the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)” (Catford, 1965, p. 20)

“Translation is a craft consisting in the attempt to replace a written message and/or statement in one language by the same message and/or statement in another language” (Newmark, 1981, p. 7)

By the end of the 1980’s and the beginning of 1990’s, translation studies have witnessed a shift in their field of interest. This shift is called “the Cultural Turn”; translation was no longer considered as merely a linguistic process but as a means of intercultural communication and interaction. Since the translator is considered as a bilingual and bicultural mediator, knowing the cultures of the source and target languages is a must for each translator .

Snell-Hornby (1988) described the new trends in translation studies by “the orientation towards cultural rather than linguistic transfer, they view translation not as a process of transcoding but as an act of communication; thirdly, they are all oriented towards the function of the target text (prospective translation) rather than prescriptions of the source text (retrospective translation), fourthly, they view translation as an integral part of the world and not as an isolated specimen of language” (Snell-Hornby, 1988, p. 43)

Translation cannot occur out of its historical, contextual and cultural framework. Hence, the translator must take into consideration the peculiarities of each culture (source and target) and the differences that exist between them, as Oltra Ripoll (2005) states “every text [...] makes no sense and has no *raison d’être* if it is not included in a specific context, attached to the heart of a particular society and a particular culture.” (Ripoll, 2005, p. 75)

3.- Definitions and taxonomies of cultural references

One of the challenges which face translators is translating cultural references. There are many controversies among theorists and scholars regarding the definition of these cultural references to which they have referred in different ways. Aixela (1996) refers to them as culture-specific items and defines them as “those textually actualized items whose function and connotations in a source text involve a translation problem in their transference to a target text, whenever this problem is a product of the non-existence of the referred item or of its different intertextual status in the cultural system of the readers of the target text” (Aixela, 1996, p. 58). Mona Baker (1992) refers to them as “culture specific concepts” and defines them as “The source-language word may express a concept which is totally unknown in the target culture. The concept in question may be abstract or concrete; it may relate to a religious belief, a social custom, or even a type of food. Such concepts are often referred to as “culture specific” (Mona, 1992, p. 21)

Aixela (1996) states that the difficulty of translating these cultural references “lies, of course, in the fact that in a language everything is culturally produced beginning with language itself” (Aixela, 1996, p. 57) which means that every aspect of the language reflects the culture to which it belongs.

Consequently, cultural references are the peculiarities which distinguish a culture from another and cannot be understood out of their cultural and historical contexts.

Translation theorists have suggested various taxonomies and classifications for these cultural references. For instance, Peter Newmark (1988) has classified cultural references into five categories; 1-Ecology, 2-material culture, 3-social culture, 4- organization, customs, ideas, and 5- gestures and habits. (Newmark, 1988, p. 95). On the other hand, Aixela (1996) suggests two main categories of cultural references, he states “We may distinguish two main categories

from the point of view of the translator; proper nouns and common expressions (for want of a better term to cover the world of objects, institutions, habits and opinions restricted to each culture and that cannot be included in the field of proper nouns)” (Aixela, 1996, p. 59)

Göte Klingberg is one of the pioneering scholars who studied the issues related to translating children’s literature. He suggested ten categories of cultural references in children’s literature; 1- Literary references, 2- Foreign language in the source text, 3- References to mythology and popular belief, 4- Historical, religious and political background, 5- Buildings and home furnishings, food, 6- Customs and practices; play and games, 7- Flora and fauna, 8- Personal names, titles, names of domestic animals, and names of objects, 9- Geographical names and 10- Weights and measures. (Klingberg, 1986, pp. 17-18)

4.- Children’s literature in translation theories

Children’s literature lacked interest in the field of translation studies, just like it was neglected in its beginnings. Eithen O’connell (2006) states in this context that “Children’s literature has long been the site of tremendous translation activity and so it has come as something of a surprise to me to discover recently the extent to which this area remains largely ignored by theorists, publishers and academic institutions involved in translation and training.” (O’Connell, 2006, p. 15)

Yet, due to the importance children’s books have in the children’s lives as well as the need to discover other peoples’ cultures and literatures, translators and translation scholars have started focusing on the translation of local and foreign children’s books in order to enable them to discover others people’s cultures and ways of life .

Translation scholars have different opinions and visions regarding the translation of children’s literature in general and translating culture in

children's literature in particular. There are many controversies on whether to respect the source text and be faithful to it (source-oriented) or adapt it to the target culture (target-oriented).

4.1.- Source-oriented Theories

Göte Klingberg has contributed tremendously in the field of children's literature translation. He is one of the founders of the "International Research Society for Children's Literature" in 1976 in Geneva. Klingberg (1986) thinks that translators should respect the source text and not adapt it according to the foreign culture values because the main aim of translating children's literature is to help children discover other peoples' culture and literatures but some translators adapt it to the target culture, which hinders the fulfillment of this aim.

Klingberg thinks that the aims of translating children's literature cannot be achieved except but respecting the source text and preserving its strangeness, he states "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, p. 10)

Klingberg thinks that the target text should be as difficult as the source text because the author has already taken into consideration the intended reader and adjusted the text according to his linguistic and cognitive competences. (Klingberg, 1986)

Klingberg opinions have been criticized by many translation scholars such Riitta Oittinen (2000) who states that "...Göte Klingberg's scope, on the other hand, is much narrower: in his work on translating and adapting children's books, mainly in *Children's Fiction in the Hands of the Translators* (1986), he concentrates on words and text fragments in isolation, with the goal of formulating strict rules for translators." (Oittinen, 2000, p. 85)

Birgit stolt (2006), on the other hand, agrees with the ideas of Klingberg and thinks that the source text should be respected by preserving its linguistic and cultural specificities. She states that “The original must be accorded just as much respect as in the case of adult literature, therefore the endeavour should be a translation as faithful, as equivalent as possible” cited in (Oittinen, 2000, p. 81). She even states that “People often underrate what can be expected of children, of their imagination, of their intuitive grasp of matters, of their willingness to concern themselves with what is new, strange, difficult, if only it is described excitingly” (Stolt, 2006, p. 73)

Astrid Lindgren (2005), is against the idea that children, because of their limited experience in life, cannot understand the specificities of other cultures. She thinks that children have “... an extraordinary ability to adapt, that they are able to experience the most unusual things and situations given a good translator to help them” cited in (O’Sullivan, 2005, p. 81)

4.2.- Target-oriented Theories

Target-oriented theories are based on the assumption that children do not have the sufficient information and experiences which enable them to understand the specificities of other cultures; consequently, translation should be altered and adapted according to the values and norms prevailing in the target culture in order to protect them from anything that might be unfamiliar and shocking.

Riitta Oittinen (2000), for instance, prefers using “translating for children” instead of “translating children’s literature” because according to her the translator translated for a specific reader and puts in mind the reader and his wills and abilities during the translational act. She states “I prefer to speak of translating for children instead of translating children’s literature; translators are always translating for somebody and for some reason. Translators are not replacing old

things with new ones. Translating for children rather refers to translating for a certain audience and respecting this audience through taking the audience's will and abilities into consideration. Here the translator's child image is a crucial factor" (Oittinen, 2000, p. 69)

Oittinen stipulates that in translating for children, the translator develops a dialogic relationship with the writer, the reader and the publisher but "Dialogics does not mean submission to the authority of the original, but adding to it, enriching it, out of respect for-or loyalty to- the original" (Oittinen, 2000, p. 164). The successful translator according to her is the one who adapts his text according to the presumptive readers. (Oittinen, 2000)

Zohar Shavit (1986), on the other hand, has developed the polysystem theory and applied it to the translation of children's literature; she stipulates that due to the peripheral position children's occupy in the literary polysystem, the translator can allow himself to alter the source text and adapt it. She states "Unlike contemporary translators of adult books, the translator of children's literature can permit himself great liberties regarding the text, as a result of the peripheral position of children's literature. That is the translator is permitted to manipulate the text in various ways by changing, enlarging or abridging it or by deleting or adding to it" (Shavit, 1986, p. 112)

The liberties allowed to children's literature translation are submitted, according to Shavit (1986), to two main conditions "...an adjustment of the text to make it appropriate and useful to the child, in according with what society regards (at a certain point in time) as educationally "good for the child", and an adjustment of plot, characterization and language to the prevailing society's perceptions of the child's ability to read and comprehend". (Shavit, 1986, p. 113)

Tiina Puurtinen (1994) has contributed in enriching the field of children's literature translation, particularly with her works on readability and acceptability. She asserts that the translator should take into consideration the child reader and his linguistic and understanding competences. She states that "The special

characteristics of the child readers, their comprehension and reading abilities, and experience of life and knowledge of the world must be borne in mind so as not to present them with overtly difficult, uninteresting books that may alienate them from reading, but rather to produce books that induce children to read more” (Puurtinen, 1994, p. 83)

Puurtinen (1994) thinks that the translator should also take into consideration the acceptability of the translation in the target culture by avoiding anything that might be unfamiliar and strange, “Unlike adult translators of adult literature, translators of children’s books are usually allowed and even expected (by publishers and adult readers) to manipulate the source text in various ways to make it compatible with the requirements set by the recipient in the literary system” (Puurtinen, 1994, p. 84). Yet, she prefers acceptability over readability “the preference for acceptability is connected with the properties of the target group; children, with their imperfect reading abilities and experience of life, are not expected to tolerate so many strange and foreign elements as adult readers are” (Puurtinen, 1998, p. 84)

Nikolajeva Maria (2015) goes further and thinks that children’s literature cannot be translated only by substituting words by words because “children’s semiotic experience does not allow them to interpret the signs of an alien semiosphere” (Nikolajeva, 2015, p. 34)

Isabel Pascua-Febles (2014), on the other hand, asserts that the translator of children’s literature should adapt the linguistic and cultural specificities of the source text in order to fulfill its function in the target text, she states that “All cultural, linguistic and semantic markers in the source text require a series of adaptations and the specific textual strategies implicit in the source text need to be renegotiated by the translator. One way of doing this is through interventionism on the part of the translator in adapting cultural markers, even at the cost of manipulating the text” (Pascua-Febles, 2014, p. 114).

5.-Analyzing some examples of two translations of “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer” into Arabic

In this element we are going to analyze some examples of two translations of Mark Twain’s novel “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer” translated into Arabic by “Mohamed Kadri Imara” (2007) and “Mahir Nassim” (1963). We will examine how the two translators have rendered some of the cultural references contained in this novel into Arabic. The examples were selected according to Klingberg’s classification of cultural references (1986).

5.1. -Example n°1

“Jim came skipping out of the gate with a tin pail, singing Buffalo Gals.” (Twain, 2013, p. 20)

Translation of Mohamed Kadri Imara:

"جاء جيم عبر البوابة حاملا جرذلا وهو يصفر ويغني" (Twain, 1876/2007, p. 22)

Translation of Mahir Nassim:

"وفي تلك اللحظة أقبل "جيم" خارجا من باب الحديقة وهو يحمل دلوا من الصفيح ويردد أغنية كانت ذائعة وقتذاك" (Twain, 1876/1963, p. 20)

This example is about Tom feeling heart-broken for having to whitewash the garden’s fence as a punishment for disobeying his aunt orders. His friend Jim passed by him singing “Buffalo Gals.”

“Buffalo Gals” is the name of a popular song written by John Hodges in 1844. (Ballad of America American Heritage Music, 2019) Songs are considered as cultural references since they differ from a country to another and from a generation to another.

In the Arabic translation, both of the translators have omitted the name of this song. Kadri Imara has expressed it using “wa howa yosafir wa yoghani وهو يصفر ويغني” which literally means “whistling and singing”,

while Mahir Nassim expressed it using “wa yoradid oghniya kanat daia waktadak ” ويردد أغنية كانت ذائعة وقتذاك” which literally means “singing a famous song at that time”. The translators have successfully conveyed the meaning in this example without borrowing the name of the song, which would be strange and difficult for the target reader to comprehend, if it was translated literally .

5.2.-Example n°2

“Cardif Hill beyond the village and above it was green with vegetation and it lay just far enough to seem like a Delectable Land...” (Twain, 2013, p. 20)

Translation of Mohamed Kadri Imara :

"كان تل كارديف المتاخم للقريبة والمشرف عليها مخضرا بالنباتات وعلى مسافة كافية تجعل الناظر إليه عن بعد يبدو أنيقا ورائعا..." (Twain, 1876/2007, p. 21)

Translation of Mahir Nassim:

"...كان ينهض مرتفع كارديف هيل، وقد غطته طبقة من السندس الأخضر الجميل الذي يسر مرآه الناظرين ويذكرهم بالراحة البدنية والهدوء النفسي" (Twain, 1876/1963, p. 20)

This example is taken from a description of Tom’s village and the place which surrounds that looks like “a Delectable Land”. This latter is “a comparison with the Delectable Mountains described in John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*” (Twain, 2010, p. 261)

“Delectable Land” is a literary reference which is according to Klingberg (1986) considered as a cultural reference. The two translators have omitted this comparison and have expressed the meaning in a more general way; Kadri Imara expressed it by saying “yabdo anikan wa raian ” يبدو أنيقا ورائعا” which literally means “which looks beautiful and wonderful” while Mahir Nassim expressed it by saying “yassoro marah ennadirin ” يسر مرآه الناظرين” which literally means “a very beautiful thing to see”. Both of the translators have succeeded in expressing the meaning in this example because it would

be difficult for the Arab reader to understand the comparison made by the author. Besides, the original reader is required to have good knowledge about literature in order to understand these literary references.

5.3.-Example n°3

“Leastways all but the nigger, I don’t know him but I never see a nigger that wouldn’t lie” (Twain, 2013, p. 65)

Translation of Mohamed Kadri Imara :

"..ومع ذلك؟ لقد كانوا جميعا يكذبون خاصة الصبي الزنجي، أنا لا أعرفه ولكني لم أر زنجيا لا يكذب.." (Twain, 1876/2007, p. 66)

Translation of Mahir Nassim:

"...حسنا، إنهم جميعا كاذبون. لكن قال لي..." (Twain, 1876/1963, p. 61)

This example is part of a conversation between Tom and Huck about an efficient way to treat warts. It depicts a socio-cultural reality of Tom’s society and the United States of America in general in 1800’s; in which slavery and racism against black people were very widespread. It is stated in this example that black people are liars. This popular belief which is a cultural reference was rendered in different ways by the two translators; Kadri Imara have translated it literally by saying “lam ara zinji la yakdib” which literally means “I have never seen a nigger who doesn’t lie” while Mahir Nassim have adapted this expression and omitted that offence towards black people, he translated it by using “inahom jamian kadibon” which literally means “they are all liars” without referring to black people. Mahir Nassim has succeeded in expressing the meaning and avoided to convey that racist expression towards black people, thus, the literal translation in this context is not appropriate .

5.4.- Example n°4

“Thirty yards of board fence nine feet high...” (Twain, 2013, p. 20)

Translation of Mohamed Kadri Imara:

"... فالسياج يمتد ثلاثين مترا ويرتفع لثلاثة امتار.." (Twain, 1876/2007, p. 21)

Translation of Mahir Nassim:

"...فقد كان طول السياج ثلاثين ياردة وارتفاعه تسعا..." (Twain, 1876/1963, p. 20)

This example is about the author's description of the garden's fence which Tom had to whitewash. The author used the measurement units "Yard" and "foot" to describe its height and length. According to Klingberg, units and measurements are considered as cultural references. Mahir Nassim has borrowed these measurements in the Arabic translation by using "ياردة" and "قدم" which are equivalents of "yard" and "foot" respectively, while Kadri Imara has adapted his translation and used the unit "Meter" by saying "elsiyaj yamtad tlatin mitran wa tartafia litalatat amtar" فالسياج يمتد ثلاثين مترا ويرتفع لثلاثة امتار which literally means "the fence is thirty meters long and three meters high". The adaptation technique in this context is appropriate because it would be easier for the Arab child to picture this fence since the measurement units "yard" and "foot" are not common, in the Arab World, like the "meter". Hence, Mahir Nassim has succeeded in bringing the image closer to the target reader.

5.5.- Example n°5

"He saw her and they had an exhausting good time Playing hipsy and gully-keeper with a crowd of their school-mates..." (Twain, 2013, p. 239)

Translation of Mohamed Kadri Imara:

"التقى بها وأمضيا وقتا لطيفا يلعبان مع مجموعة من رفاق الدراسة.." (Twain,) (1876/2007, p. 261)

Translation of Mahir Nassim :

" وقضيا وقتا طويلا في لعب "عسكر وحرامية" واستغماية مع جمع كبير من زملائهم
وزميلاتهم في المدرسة." (Twain, 1876/1963, p. 230)

This example is about Tom's friend "Becky" coming back to the village and having a good time playing "hipsy and gully-keeper". According to Klingberg (1986), plays and games are considered as cultural references. Mohamed Kadri Imara as well as Mahir Nassim have omitted the names of these games in the Arabic translation; Kadri Imara has expressed the meaning in a general way by saying "wa amdaya waktan latifan yalaban يلعبان لطيفا وقتا طويلا" which literally means "had a great time playing". Mahir Nassim, on the other hand, has domesticated these games and used names of Arabic Games "Askar wa Haramiya عسكر وحرامية" and "Istighmaya استغماية" which is the equivalent of "hide and seek", this adaptation enables the reader to understand the meaning and avoid confusion and strangeness regarding the names of these unfamiliar games.

6.-Discussion and analysis of results

The analysis of some of the examples taken from two translations of "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" novel into Arabic has reached the following results:

-The Novel is abundant with cultural references which reflect the socio-cultural reality of the author's society at that time.

-the two translators have omitted literary references while rendering them into Arabic, because the target reader would find it difficult to understand the meaning since one should have good knowledge in literature in order to understand them. Besides, literary references differ from a language to another and thus from a society to another.

-Mahir Nassim have adopted literal translation in conveying measurement units such as "yard" and "foot" despite they are not commonly used in the Arab world and should have been adapted and

replaced by ones that are close to the Arab reader such as “Meter” like they were translated by Mohamed Kadri Imara .

- the translators have adopted the omission technique in translating some popular beliefs which are not acceptable in the target culture such as the racist expressions towards black people, as well as the names of games and plays which might be strange and unfamiliar to Arab children, if they were translated literally.

5.- Conclusion

Translating children’s literature, just like writing for them, is not an easy task but rather a challenging one since various aspects should be taken into consideration such as the linguistic, cognitive and comprehension capabilities of the child reader, as well as the cultural references which differ from a culture to another. Hence, children’s literature translator should not only translate words by words, for literal translation is not always useful, but he should take into account whether the content is appropriate with and not contradictory to the target culture, for children’s literature is an esthetic and pedagogic literary genre at the same time.

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