

Literature and Translation

Translation Studies before 'Translation Studies'

Nothing happened?

Edited by

Kathryn Batchelor and

Iryna Odrekhivska

UCLPRESS

LITERATURE AND TRANSLATION

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17 Poland, 1952

Adaptation, not translation: a 1950s manifesto for translating for children

Aleksandra Wieczorkiewicz¹

The Pooh Lady and adaptation for children

Irena Tuwim, a Polish poet and translator of Jewish descent born in Łódź in 1898, sister to Julian Tuwim, one of the most celebrated poets (also for children) of the interwar period, is among the few translators recognised and remembered in Poland by the general public (Wóźniak 2012, 116). The reason for this is her much-loved and still highly appreciated versions of *Winnie-the-Pooh* (*Kubuś Puchatek*, 1938) and *The House at Pooh Corner* (*Chatka Puchatka*, 1938), sometimes described as better than the originals.

Tuwim's first translation for children is considered to be the Russian adaptation of *Pinocchio* by Alexsey Tolstoy, *The Golden Key or The Adventures of Buratino* (*Złoty kluczyczek czyli niezwykle przygody Buratina*, 1937; the translation, although signed by Julian Tuwim, was prepared by his sister). In 1938 and 1939, the Przeworski Publishing House released book adaptations of Disney's animated films about Mickey Mouse and Snow White (Borodo 2009, 207–8) written by Tuwim 'according to Disney's text', an adaptation of the Brothers Grimm fairytales and a Polish version of *The Story of Ferdinand* by Munro Leaf (*Fernando*, 1939 – again, written by Tuwim 'according to Leaf'). In 1938 the first part of the Mary Poppins series by P. L. Travers was also published, translated by Tuwim as *Agnieszka*. During the Second World War, Tuwim lived in Paris and then in London, finally moving to Washington. In 1947, she returned to Poland, by then already in the grip of Stalinism; in the early 1950s, in line with the prevailing Soviet ideology, Tuwim translated for children from Russian (including Samuil Marshak, Boris Zhitkov and Vladimir Korolenko), but after the so-called 'Thaw' of 1956 (the relaxation of the communist regime and liberalisation in culture; Czernow and Michułka 2017), she again resumed translating from English, and her versions of

the novels by, among others, George MacDonald, Edith Nesbit and Mary Norton were published then. Tuwim published several of her own children's books in the 1950s and 1960s; her main domain, however, continued to be translation.

When in 1937 Przeworski approached Tuwim with an offer to translate *Winnie-the-Pooh*, at first she declined, finding the text untranslatable into Polish due to Milne's peculiar humour. Persuaded by her family, she translated the first chapter, and the delight of the work led her to accept the commission. As she commented later, she 'sensed that this book could not be translated literally, so [she] began to make a kind of adaptation, capturing the content and sense of the original, but always proposing variations on it' (Augustyniak 2016, 178–9). *Winnie-the-Pooh* was only the second translation for children in Tuwim's career, the work of a translator who was still inexperienced and, by her admission, not well versed in English (she became more proficient only while emigrating during and after the war); however, the book was an instant success, winning immense popularity not only among children but also among adults, as evidenced by its reception by writers and literary critics (Woźniak 2013, 199). Tuwim's fame as Milne's translator had reached England, where she resided during the war, and she soon became known as The Pooh Lady.

Tuwim, while adapting Milne's story for Polish child readers, changed the name of its bear protagonist from Winnie-the-Pooh (related to Christopher Robin Milne's childhood friends: the she-bear Winnipeg from the London Zoo, and Pooh the swan mentioned in the preface) to Kubuś Puchatek ('Jimmy-the-Fluffy'), removed some passages (such as the one mentioning Pooh's female name) and puns that she found too confusing, simplified the language and changed the style of the story. Thus, she applied 'the rule of adaptation, not translation', which she expressed explicitly in her manifesto 'The question of adaptation', published 14 years after the publication of *Kubuś Puchatek*. The extent to which her version of Milne's story took root in the consciousness of generations of Polish readers (Rajewska 2022) was evidenced by the reaction to the polemical translation of *Winnie-the-Pooh* proposed in 1986 by Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska, a translation scholar who undertook a pioneering analysis of Polish translations of English children's literature, including Tuwim's adaptation (Adamczyk-Garbowska 1988). Her version – titled *Fredzia Phi-Phi*, in keeping with Milne's title idea – provoked heated discussion in the Polish press, and prompted hostile comments from more than one enraged critic (Misiór-Mroczkowska 2016, 29). The emotional nature of this debate and criticism – despite Adamczyk-Garbowska's

intentions stated in her preface, to propose an alternative perspective on Milne's classic, not to deprecate Tuwim's version – demonstrated the power of adaptation: the new translation was compared not with the source text, but with the first version, which gained the status of the original and became established in the Polish canon.

Adapting and translating for children in Poland

Tuwim's attitude to adaptation was in step with the then-current translation practices in Poland: the adaptative approach was on the march long before the first decades of the twentieth century. The reduction of foreign features or their Polonisation was already in force in the Renaissance, a good example being the adaptation of Baltazar Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* by Łukasz Górnicki as *Dworzanin polski* (The Polish Courtier) published as early as 1566 (Rajewska 2000, 52). The Polonisation of proper names was a prevailing convention, particularly strong in books for young audiences. In the first translation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Adela S. (*Przygody Alinki w Krainie Cudów*, 1910) the heroine was given the Polish name Alinka, but also the author's name was Polonised as Ludwik Karrol. Zofia Rogoszówna, the translator of the first Polish version of J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (*Przygody Piotrusia Pana*, 1913), Polonised the names of all the characters and imbued the text with diminutive forms common in Polish children's literature of the time, but also – with an eye to the readers' sensibilities – removed the ending paragraphs concerning children's death (Wieczorkiewicz 2020, 97). Translating L. M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (*Ania z Zielonego Wzgórza*, 1911), R. Bernsteinowa adapted the Canadian realities to Polish contexts, substituting culturally specific elements such as flora or food. There are many examples of similar (more or less) subtle transformations – domestication, omissions, additions, rewritings – not only among the classics. In the late 1920s, for instance, Jan Plichta published a novel *Dwaj malcy*, an 'elaboration from the original by permission of the author' – a localising adaptation of Florence Montgomery's Victorian novel *Wild Mike and His Victim*, in which the action, instead of in London, is set in Warsaw.

Insight into the various degrees of adaptability is provided by the title pages of the translations, profiling the source–target text relationship in a variety of ways. These include such labels as 'przetłumaczył/a, przełożył/a' (translated by), 'opracował/a' (elaborated/prepared by), 'dla dzieci opowiedział/a' (told for children by), 'na tle napisał/a'

(written against the background of), 'podług/według napisał/a' (written according to), 'naśladował/a' (imitated/reproduced by), 'spolszczył/a' (Polonised by), 'skrócił/a' (shortened by), 'streścił/a' (summarised by), 'wolny przekład' (free translation) and 'przeróbka' (rewriting). It is also notable that some classics – novels by Swift, Scott or Dickens – were published in Poland under the names of their adaptors for the young, such as Elwira Korotyńska, Janina Colonna-Walewska and Maria Buyno-Arctowa.

Polarised positions on translation and adaptation can be found in two Polish editions of Andersen's fairytales. *Powiastrki fantastyczno-moralne* (1859) 'imitated according to Danish by Fryderyk Henryk Lewestam', a Polish writer and scholar of Danish descent, were preceded by a *Przedmówka* (Foreword) in which the translator states:

By imitating the following Fantastic-Moral Tales from the Danish original – by giving them a purely Polish background, substituting the reminiscences from Danish history with references to the National History, replacing Scandinavian legends with the fantastic Slavonic world – in short, by assimilating to our literature these wonderful flowers of the rich and poetic imagination of perhaps the most charming of contemporary writers, I believe that I have done fair service, if not to others, then at least to the young Readers (Andersen 1859, 1).

Lewestam regards translation as an imitation of the original that turns into its assimilation and absorption; a translation of culture into culture, up to substituting historical events and folklore (in his version, for instance, Little Mermaid is translated as the Nymph of Lake Świtez, alluding to the famous ballad by Poland's prominent Romantic poet, Adam Mickiewicz). Forty years later, in another edition of Andersen's tales Polonised by Maria Glotz (*Czarodziejskie powieści Andersena*, 1900), there appeared, in turn, the Editors' Preface describing earlier adaptations of Andersen's fairytales as a 'literary bribery that damages the author by presenting him in a different light' and 'obscures the proper qualities to the great detriment of the work itself' (Andersen 1900, x).

It is interesting to note here that these standpoints presented by the translator and editors of the Polish versions of Andersen reverberated in a discussion a century later in children's literature translation studies almost as soon as the discipline was established. In a volume that resulted from the IRSCL Children's Books in Translation conference in 1976, Göte Klingberg (1978, 86) referred to adaptation as a central

problem in the field, while speaking in favour of keeping the ‘degree of adaptation’ at the same level as in the original. He later argued that cultural context adaptation should be reduced to a minimum, thus establishing one side of the dispute over adaptation and translation still ongoing in the discipline (Klingberg 1986). Zohar Shavit (1981, 171–2) also criticised adaptation, pointing out that such an approach is accepted due to the peripheral position of children’s literature in the literary poly-system. The opposite side of the dispute is represented by Riitta Oittinen, who calls for a revaluation of adaptation and equivalence as vague concepts and sees both translation and adaptation as a form of rewriting. Oittinen incorporates adaptation into translation, emphasising its dialogic nature, the interaction between the target text and its audience, and adaptation’s particular focus on and loyalty to child readers’ needs (Oittinen 2000, 76).

The question of adaptation

Long before theoretical discussions about translation and adaptation within institutionalised translation studies, translators were also tackling this problem in their translation reflections, commenting, defending or criticising various translation choices, including their own (Van Doorslaer and Raw 2016, 189). Gillian Lathey (2014, 5–8), for instance, discussed how Mary Wollstonecraft in the preface to her translation of Christian Gotthilf Salzmann’s *Elements of Morality for the Use of Children* (1790) preceded theorists of children’s literature translation by two hundred years, engaging in an in-depth reflection on translation problems, especially adaptation and naturalisation. As such, adaptive translation often prompts its authors to include various types of commentary (prefaces, afterwords, footnotes), which, as translator’s paratexts, are consciously crafted thresholds of interpretation designed to steer the reception of the work (Batchelor 2018, 142). Adaptation thus improves the translator’s visibility; in extreme cases, it can shift the authorship rendering the translator in the place of the author and the translation of the original.

Tuwim’s *Sprawa adaptacji* (The Question of Adaptation) may also be regarded as a translator’s paratext of its kind. Although it does not precede any specific translation, it nevertheless provides a commentary and a ‘threshold of interpretation’ for her entire children’s translation oeuvre. It outlines Tuwim’s approach to translation for young audiences: the far-reaching freedom in rendering the original, purposeful adjustments

for the benefit of the young audience and the premise of the translator's agency. Emphasis is often on the idea that the translator should not look for an excuse in a poor quality of the original, but rather endeavour to improve the text to fulfil the duty of 'providing the child with a good book'.

Tuwim draws attention to the challenges of translating for children. Although she could not have been familiar with Shavit's above-cited standpoint (adaptation as a more liberal approach to the text due to the peripheral position of children's literature), her view seems to be to the contrary. Tuwim advocates adaptation as the only appropriate method of translation for children not because one can 'take liberties' in translations for children, but precisely because she considers this literature to be exceptionally difficult and its readership exceptionally demanding. Tuwim's approach could therefore also be considered in the context of functionalism (Vandal-Sirois and Bastin 2012, 25–6) and loyalty to the reader postulated by Oittinen, based, however, on different premises. From this perspective, rather than on accuracy, adaptation is focused on relevance and effect. It always prioritises the target readership and aims to provide them with 'optimal reception experience' by using, among others, updating, summarising, paraphrasing, omissions and, most especially, domestication. Domestication – in this case, Polonisation – also finds its place in Tuwim's reflections. She applied this rule in her work, not only in *Winnie-the-Pooh* but also, for example, in the P. L. Travers series: generations of Polish readers knew Mary Poppins as Agnieszka (this was, nota bene, Tuwim's own middle name); only in the 1960s, at Travers's request, was the original name restored.

'The question of adaptation' was published in 1952 – already during the height of Stalinism in Poland – in the weekly *Nowa Kultura* (The New Culture) established in 1950. Considered one of the most important instruments of cultural policy of the 1950s and early 1960s (Przeperski 2017, 363), *Nowa Kultura* for the first two years was the only sociocultural periodical with nationwide coverage, in 1952–6 acting as the organ of the Polish Writers' Union. At the time when Tuwim published her article, it set a course of cultural development in line with the social realist guidelines of the regime. The local context for Tuwim's reflections is the block *On Translations of Books for Children and Young People*, which presented articles by the other four members of the panel (Janina Osińska, Maria Kann, Maria Kowalewska and Andrzej Miłosz), whose task was to evaluate the state of translation for the young, particularly from Soviet literature. This Soviet inclination is evident in 'The question of adaptation', especially when Tuwim argues for the enhancement of this transfer. Significantly, even among these five articles presenting different aspects

of the same topic, a clear difference of opinion on the ‘translation versus adaptation’ subject emerges. Maria Kann, a recognised prewar children’s writer, while allowing for adaptation of the text to the child’s perceptive abilities, supports the position that translation should not neutralise the foreign elements of the original, as it results in ‘falsification’ and homogenisation. Tuwim, on the other hand, advocates the widest possible use of adaptation and the full freedom of the translator, up to assuming the position of the original author.

Conclusion: translation versus/as/and adaptation

Adaptation and translation appear inseparable and are often treated as synonyms, two sides of the same coin (Krebs 2012). Yet the relationship between them – as concepts, practices and products – is strikingly paradoxical. While adaptation is sometimes referred to as abusive translation, betrayal, falsification and distortion, it is also regarded as a translation solution that is indispensable for creating ‘an efficient and accurate multilingual communication’ (Vandal-Sirois and Bastin 2012, 21), a recipe for the successful transfer from culture to culture. Understood as a creative process (Hutcheon 2006, 8), adaptation is always concerned with reinterpretation and transformation: it can amount to appropriation when the product eclipses its source and eventually relegates it to oblivion, but it also ensures salvage and survival, offering the text a second (or next and yet another) life. This is particularly true for children’s literature, no stranger to adaptation since its history was launched by adapting novels from general literature (Nikolajeva 2016, 16–18).

When Tuwim published ‘The question of adaptation’, she was already an established, even famous children’s translator, enjoying considerable prestige in this field. In this sense, her manifesto consolidated the position of adaptative translation for children in Poland and at the same time reinforced the position of Tuwim herself: ‘The question of adaptation’ was included in the Polish translation history anthology (Tuwim 1977), and whenever a debate on translation versus/as/and adaptation is taken up, Tuwim’s standpoint is certain to be mentioned. ‘The question of adaptation’, therefore, remains not only an important manifesto of an individual translator whose work had an invaluable impact on the Polish reception of English classics but also, in a way, a summary and synthesis of the most prevalent strategy in translating children’s books in Poland up to the 1950s.

'The question of adaptation'

By Irena Tuwim

Translated from Polish by Aleksandra
Wieczorkiewicz

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Source text: Irena Tuwim, 'Sprawa adaptacji', *Nowa Kultura*, 26 (1952): 10

A child is, despite appearances, by no means an easy reader. They are critical, observant and often relentless. As a recipient of literature, they resemble theatregoers, who must be kept in suspense throughout the whole performance. Heaven forbid a yawn! Before you could say Jack Robinson, you have lost not only a reader but also a friend.

This is the danger lurking for every translator who even for a moment forgets about the future readers. The translator should be constantly checking themselves, occasionally even turning into the author, to adapt the text to the level of knowledge, range of concepts, sense of reality and language of the children for whom the book is intended. The translator must not hide behind an excuse of a poorly written or difficult text. It is our duty to provide the child with a good book that he or she will be satisfied with – or else not to venture into translation at all.

Soviet literature for children should serve us as a model in every respect: a model of ideology, the formation of the new man, of the educational system. Indeed, it is only right that the vast majority of translations should be from Russian. However, a substantial share of these translations, especially of literature for older children, are unfortunately sloppy ones; an injustice is being done to their authors. And yet no literature in the world can boast such great names as Aleksey Tolstoy, [Arkady] Gaidar, [Samuil] Marshak, [Boris] Zhitkov, [Vitaly] Bianki, Vera Inber and others. All books by these authors should *necessarily*² be translated and can be translated 'purely', almost without changes. Yet this does not

mean that all the books we translate should be rendered faithfully to the smallest detail, without any alterations.

There are many books – mainly in literature for the youngest – that in translation should undergo significant changes. Such literature prepares the child for a good cognitive process; even when it only amuses, it presents them with certain elements of the world around them. In books where the element of pre-cognition is predominant (room, furniture, street, garden, forest, animals), *the translation should use realities that are within the child's immediate reach, descriptions that he or she can confront with reality*. The child must first come to grips with the world around them, and only then should they be introduced to what they cannot see, to what they must imagine. The child already has a certain sense of language: it ought to be developed, not distorted. In translations for young children, we should pay particular attention to the use of proper names. As far as the nature of the text allows, the characters should be given Polish names. In any case, odd names should be avoided, so as not to create difficulties for the child in reading that would divert their attention from important things and instead focus it on unimportant aspects.

If I advocate far-reaching freedom in translations of children's literature in general, I would insist on it even more in poetry. Children enjoy poems as they enjoy music, singing and rhythm; they have a natural sense of rhythm. To see this, we only need to listen to children at play, how they chant all those 'Jaworowe ludzie', how they do their counting-out games such as 'Ene-due-rabe' or 'Entliczek-pętliczek'.³

The child likes such things, and thus the poems we give them should be rhythmic and catchy, not rambling, sprawling, unmusical and with some kind of fractured syntax. In a poetic piece, we should not stick to the same rhythmic pattern throughout, not least to avoid monotony. However, while the use of variable rhythmicity is expedient between stanzas, any disruptions of rhythm within a single stanza are undesirable, especially in books for young children. The use of assonance is, unfortunately, unavoidable, but it should be done with caution since it can sometimes create disharmony that is unpleasant for the child's ear.

The language of a text for children – I mean the language of translation – must be simple and substantive, impeccable and clear. This is seemingly a truism, and yet when we turn to many translations, we find children talking in a language that no child would speak or have ever spoken. We find bad rhymes. We find or rather do not find images – so

clumsy is the imagery, the epithets and similes awkward. And the translator must not hide behind the fact that the same occurs in the original. The child's vocabulary is limited; it can and should be enriched, but in moderation and with skill. The need to navigate within such a narrow framework and yet produce a text that is fresh and at a sufficiently high level is what makes translating children's literature so difficult. Publishers are at times seriously at fault here, demanding that translations be stiffly literal, that all, even secondary realities, be kept unaltered, and names preserved, sometimes in a form completely at odds with the rules of the Polish language.

What conclusion can we draw from this?

For a translator to produce linguistic works of the highest quality, a considerable degree of freedom is required in all translations, and in many cases – which can only be determined on a case-by-case basis, although these will generally be works for the youngest – adaptation, not translation should be the rule.

This last thesis leads to a suggestion that I would like to propose for consideration: whether it would not be advisable – if at all possible – for our publishing houses to enter into an agreement with the publishing headquarters in the Soviet Union and in other countries of People's Democracy, an agreement that, subject to the necessary control, would allow the use of adaptation in the field of children's literature to a much greater extent than is being done so far.

Notes

1. The chapter was written as a part of the OPUS 21 grant of the National Science Centre, Poland, project no. 2021/41/B/HS2/00876: *Half a Century of Children's Literature in Poland. Texts for a young audience in the context of cultural production and power: the recipient of literature – literature as a recipient.*
2. All emphasis is original; all footnotes are by the translator.
3. Tuwim mentions here traditional counting rhymes popular among Polish children. *Jaworowe ludzie* (or *Jaworowi ludzie*) is a counting rhyme with many variants, dating back to the seventeenth century; its shortened version could be rendered in English as 'Jawor, Jawor, Jawor people, what are you doing here? / We're building bridges, for the Lord Starost; a thousand horses we're letting through, / And one we'll hold back!'; *jawor* is a Polish word for sycamore, but rather than to the tree, it refers to the city of Jaworów in present-day Ukraine (Yavoriv), of which Jan III Sobieski was a starost in 1644–64, before he became king of Poland. *Ene-due-rabe* and *Entliczek-petliczek* are counting rhymes probably rooted in Jewish culture, from which they made their way into Polish children's folklore.

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