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A critical review of two translated isiXhosa children's texts

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Abstract: Translation of children's literature requires more than basic translation skills. A translator needs to be an artist and a writer to be a successful translator of children's literature. Functionalist theories like Nida's Functional Equivalence theory and Skopos theory advocate that translation needs to focus more on the target language readership. At the same time, it is through the brief emphasised by the Skopos theory that the target audience is understood – their age, level of education, etc. The aim of this presentation is to critically review two translated isiXhosa children's books, looking at their target reader friendliness. The findings are that most parts of the text are target reader-oriented, though translators at times seem loyal to the source language.

Introduction

The translator's main role is to transfer a message from one culture to another. Language is but one of the media through which the message is transferred. The translator needs to understand the nuances of both the source and target languages so as to transfer and present a correct message in understandable forms of expression in the target language (TL) (Zhang 2015). In many cases, the translation happens between languages from different cultures (Haque 2012). Hence translation theorists suggest different ways of dealing with the non-equivalence that is usually found between two languages. This happens both in general and literary translation, with children's literature being no exception.

Children's literature is a branch of mainstream literature (Chunhua 2014) that is aimed at children, though it may be read and enjoyed by adults as well. From a pedagogical point of views, adults expect children's literature to be a tool to develop children's linguistic skills (Ippolito 2013). Therefore, authors and translators tend to 'normalize the text by grammaticizing them' (Puurtinen 1998, in Aida 2015: 15) in order to ensure that children learn the correct grammar from the books. Presenting children with the correct grammar of the target language is good. However, this should not supersede the main purpose of children's literature – entertainment. It is better to present the child with a simplified language with no grammatical errors. The books presented to children will influence their spelling ability when they are writing the language. Therefore, as much as the focus should not be solely on 'grammaticising' the children, care should be taken to produce children's books with no grammatical or spelling errors. This applies both in the writing and translation of children's literature.

Translation of children's literature applies general literary translation strategies. However, in the case of children's literature, the translator does not only have to rely on his/her translation skills, but has to also 'tone the translation down' to the level of the children. This is because children do not have enough life experience to be used in filling gaps that are usually left by writers for readers to fill (Chunhua 2014). That is why the language used in the translation of children's literature needs to be suitable for the age of the target reader.

The aim of this discussion is to critique two children's texts that have been translated from English into isiXhosa. Each text will be critically analysed according to its merits and demerits regarding possible receptor response. Alternative translations will be suggested whenever the translation is considered unacceptable in the target language.

Background

When a translator does a translation, application of a theory is the last thing on their mind (Nord 2014). The only thing the translator worries about is how to present the text to the target audience. Theoretical analysis only comes when the critics start analysing the translation product. Various translation theories are applied in translation analysis. Among those are Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory and Vermeer's Skopos theory.

Nida's Functional Equivalence theory is hailed as one of the best theories to be used in functional translation. Zhang and Wang (2010) state that this theory is highly applauded as influential in translation in general. It is popular because it is target reader-oriented. Its premise is that in the transfer of the text from one language to another, the translator should keep the message and style of the source language (SL), but produce it in the TL in an acceptable manner of expression. Nida's theory stresses that the TL text needs to present the same feel to its readership as it did to the SL readers. Nida's theory is based on three aspects: meaning, stylistic and cultural equivalence (Chunhua 2014; Zhang 2015).

Meaning equivalence means that the TL audience needs to understand and/or enjoy the text the same way as the SL audience. When reading the text, the target audience needs to get the same feel as the source audience (Nord 2014). However, one has to keep in mind that reaction is personal. What amuses one person might irritate another. But the emphasis here is in the style of presentation. Stylistic equivalence suggests that the translator should follow the same style as the source text (ST). If it is plain or metaphoric language, the same style should be adopted when producing the target text (TT). The TT needs to elicit the same possible reaction as the ST. Cultural equivalence is attained when the translator replaces cultural expressions with equivalent target language expressions. For example, 'Once, in far, far land, Leopard needed workers for his farm' (Naidoo and Globler 2015a: 24), translated as *Kwathi ke kaloku ngantsomi kudaladala, kwelinye ilizwe elikude, uHlosi wayeswele abantu bokusebenza kwifama yakhe* (Naidoo and Globler 2015b: 24). In both languages, the emphasis is on the fact that the story happened a long time ago. However, in the isiXhosa translation, there is an addition of *Kwathi ke kaloku ngantsomi*, which is in line with the culture of storytelling in this language. Receptor response is significant in both the Functional Equivalence and Skopos theories (Nord 2014). This is more especially relevant in literary translation. In children's literature, in particular, this theory gives the translator liberty to adapt the text according to the target readership needs.

The Skopos theory advocates that the translation should fulfil the same purpose in both languages. According to the Skopos theory, one text can produce different translations, depending on the purpose for which it is intended (Pym 2014). This means that if one book is meant to be translated for adults and for children respectively, two different target language translations can be generated from the same SL text. One SL text can be translated to enhance TL reader's knowledge of the SL culture; while another translation can be produced with some variance from the SL culture. This shows that one cannot just translate without the knowledge of the purpose and the audience of the translation. For instance, when the South African Department of Basic Education calls for new children's books to be published for schools, publishers usually opt for translation. The focus of the story is usually mentioned in the brief. It could be to introduce new sounds, a new concept, etc. The translator needs to adhere to the brief and produce a translation that will serve its purpose. It is difficult to provide an appropriate translation if the translator does not have a clue of what or who the translation is meant for.

Skopos theory does not only focus on the translation, but the translator as well. It emphasises the importance of the translator, the translation process and the target reader (Aida 2015). According to Jabir (2006), a literary translator is an artist who reproduces the source text according to how he understands and interprets it. The target reader depends upon the translator's interpretation of the ST. Therefore, the TL reader gets a text that is based on the translator's perception of the ST. Hence the Skopos theory puts the translator at the forefront. This is because, during the translation process, it is the translator who decides which terminology to use, which translation type to follow, irrespective of what the client's brief demands.

The Skopos theory is related to the Functional Equivalence theory in that they are both functional theories. They are both target reader-oriented in that they advocate for a translation that reads like an original in the SL. The Skopos theory moves further and highlights the significance of the translator as the author of the TL text (Jabir 2006). This puts more responsibility on the shoulders of the translator as often the TL audience does not know the SL. Even in the translation of children's literature, the TL readers rely on the translator's interpretation of the ST.

Translating for children needs more than just the ability to translate between two languages. The translator has to think like a child if he or she wants to produce a translation that sounds like an original to the target children. Translation by adaptation is one of the strategies suggested for translating for children (Aida 2015). Translation of children's literature is an artistic activity, where the translator reproduces the ST according to the cultural and linguistic needs of the target audience. The function of the translation is to convey the message to the target reader in a way that is more understandable and acceptable to the reader.

Literary translation is an art. The translator needs to think like an artist. This is even more important when translating for children. When the translator is translating a children's book, he or she is recreating the book in the target language. Therefore, the literary translator needs to be mindful of the principles of writing, as well as translating for children. Nida suggests that translation of children's literature needs a certain degree of interpretation (Glodjović 2010). This means that sometimes the translator is able to 'improve' on the SL story by trying to make it more meaningful to the target audience. Translation of children's literature is in line with what Naidoo (in Naidoo and Globler 2015a: 11) claims, that '[w]hen stories are retold and passed on, bits may get changed. But the heart of a good story lives on'. In terms of translation of children's literature, the translator may adapt the narration (Aida 2015), but keep the message as it is in the ST. Children's literature translators need to be able to help make the child visualise the story by using the language accessible and understandable to children.

Chunhua (2014) mentions three important principles of children's literature that need to be considered in translation: vividness and childlikeness; use of simple language; and flexibility in translation. This means that the translator of children's literature needs to use language that will make the text clear and understandable to the target reader. The language should also be equivalent to the one usually used by children in their everyday discourse. But fairly figurative language needs to be used in translation of poetry. Flexibility means that the translator should not be rigid in following the source language text.

Critical analysis of translated children' literature

The following analysis of children's literature will be done through analysing the message transference. While good translation will be noted and explained, 'unacceptable' translation will also be discussed. Reiss (2000) suggests that translation criticism needs to be objective and based on facts. The critic should not just look at the bad elements of the translation, but should also commend and explain the good as well. According to Reiss, when negative elements of the translation are mentioned, the critic needs to give fact-based justification. Furthermore, an alternative 'better' translation needs to be given as well. Hereunder is the critical analysis of the two selected books. Reiss's guide on critical analysis of translated texts will be used in the criticism of the two selected texts, *The African Orchestra* by Hartmann and Rankin (2016), which has been translated into *I-Orkhestra yaseAfrika* by Sindiwe Magona; and the second title is 'Tortoise and his Banjo' by Naidoo and Globler (2015), translated into '*Ufudo neBanjo yalo*' by Denis Ngcangca.

The first text, *The African Orchestra*, is a poem (a book made out of an on-going poem) about the sounds made by nature. Each page is made up of one to two lines, coupled with related pictures. The second text, 'Tortoise and his Banjo/*Ufudo neBanjo yalo*' is a folktale about Leopard, who organises a work party for all the animals of the town. He does not invite Tortoise, and instead, spreads rumours that Tortoise is too weak for hard work. Tortoise starts planning his revenge. On the day of the party he plays a magical instrument, a banjo, which makes whoever listens to it to dance involuntarily. Leopard's messengers, who are supposed to carry refreshments to the work party, get caught up

in the magical dance. Eventually, everyone stops what they are doing and dances to the Tortoise's tune. And Leopard's work party gets ruined.

The analysis will be done by first presenting the text to be analysed, followed by its analysis. The English texts will be written in normal font, with isiXhosa in italic font. In the analysis, the text under scrutiny will be written in bold. If the translation is criticised, an alternative translation suggestion will be given.

A critical analysis of the translation of The African Orchestra into I-Orkhestra yaseAfrika

The poem is beautifully translated, though it has some minor glitches. The translator starts by being faithful to the source language (SL), English. This is in line with Klingberg (2008)'s (in Aida 2015) advocacy for translation that is faithful to the form and meaning of the SL. This SL faithfulness is not on par with what the functionalist theories advocate. Hereunder are examples of notable translation strategies used in the book:

1. The African **Orchestra**
I-Orkhestra yaseAfrika

This is the title of the book. The translator seems to have transliterated the term 'orchestra'. This is acceptable both in general and literary translation. However, in the transliteration, it is usually assumed that the translator will conform to the TL's orthographic rules. According to the Malambe et al. (2013), borrowed words need to be written as they are pronounced in Nguni languages. PanSALB's (2005) *Spelling and Orthography Rules* also states the same rule for writing borrowed words in isiXhosa. An alternative transliteration of the term would be *I-Okhestra*, with no first 'r'. That is how isiXhosa speakers pronounce it. The same faithfulness to the ST seems to have happened in the following example:

2. **Cicadas, crickets**, beetles and frogs
seedpods, cocoons, hollowed out logs.

iintobole, iintobole, ooqongqothwane namasele,
limbewu, amaqokobhe, imiqob' eholoholo.

In the above translation, the translator repeated the term *iintobole* in the TT. This may be because she wants to conform to the SL form. She does not want to omit any term that found in the ST. At the same time, translation by omission is one of the translation strategies suggested and used by Baker (2011) when a translator is faced with a term which has no equivalence in the TL. Here, the translator is faced with the terms 'cicadas' and 'crickets'. According to Wikipedia, cicadas are a superfamily of insects along with smaller jumping bugs like leafhoppers. This is a superordinate term that refers to a class of bugs, whereas crickets are a subordinate of the same class. IsiXhosa does not have the 'family' term of these bugs, but only use the terms that refer to specific bugs. This family of cicadas has bugs like crickets and grasshoppers. Nida's Functional Equivalence theory allows the translator to adapt the original text by omitting or adding some information, as long as the gist of the text is kept. This theory suggests that the translator be mindful of the target reader in his or her translation. This is done by trying to ensure that the TL reader's response is as close as possible to that of the SL reader (Nord 2014). In the above example, instead of thinking about the target reader, as the Nida's Functionalist theory suggests, the translator ends up repeating the same term for cicadas and crickets. It would have been acceptable for the translator to leave the other *iintobole*, instead of repeating the term. The unnecessary repetition in the target text may cause confusion to the isiXhosa-speaking child reader, as he or she may think that there is an error in the book. The translator could have used *iintethe* for cicadas, especially because the grasshopper has been foregrounded in the illustration of the book. The crickets (*iintobole*), which has been repeated, do not even appear in the illustration.

Baker (2011) suggests that when the target language does not differentiate between the superordinate and the subordinate term, the translator can use the superordinate term in the TT. She calls that translation by superordinate. At the same time, if the translation makes sense even without a certain term, the translator is allowed to omit the term in the TT. If the translator did not want to use the term *iintethe*, suggested above, omitting the term *cicadas* would not have done any harm to the meaning of the TT.

The above two examples may reveal some errors in this translator's work. This does not mean all is bad in this translator's work. This translation seems to have used some of the strategies suggested by translation critics. These are strategies like domestication, and translation by addition. Hereunder are the examples of strategies used in this translation:

3. **Crackling** fires, the **patter** of rain,
thundering hooves on the African plain.

Qhashi-qhashi imililo, imvula chapha-chapha
Gqubudu-gqubudu amanqina kumathaf' eAfrika.

In the above two lines, the ST has used rhyming at the end of the lines. The translator did not force this end rhyme. Instead, in the TT, the translator chose to use domestication by using ideophones in isiXhosa. Sutherland, Monson and Arbuthnot (1981) claim that domestication is the best option in the translation of children's literature. This is because the use of complex syntax could hinder children's interest in reading. Children, especially emergent readers, need to be presented with familiar knowledge that would be easy to understand and follow (ibid.). The use of onomatopoeia in the TT is suitable to the age and understanding of the children who are meant to be the target readers of the text. Onomatopoeia is important in children's literature as it makes the text live and is memorable to the child. The SL end rhyme is made equivalent to the TT onomatopoeia. This is in line with Chunhua's words that '[a] good translation uses vivid description and childlike ideas that draw children's attention and make them accept happily' (Chunhua 2014: 152). Not forcing SL rhyming to the TT makes it acceptable and interesting to the TL child. A child who is familiar with an open fire has an ear for the sound made by the crackling fire. At the same time, any child who knows the soft pattering of raindrops will be familiar with the ideophone *chapha-chapha*, which gives the child reader a vivid image of raindrops as they fall from the sky and hit the ground.

The translator has produced a translation with a stylistic equivalence of the source text. The form has, however, been adapted to suit the TL reader's understanding. Functionalists claim that the best type of translation to be used in children's literature is adaptation. Here the translator is at liberty to adapt the translation without any limits (Scolt 2006; in Mansfield 2010), as long as the message and style is equivalent to that of the ST. Reader's response, which is emphasised by Nida's Functional Equivalence theory, is very important when translating literature meant for children. Hereunder is the next translation strategy.

4. Wind **in** the grass, **through** the leaves – **over** sand
Umoya engceni, wambu udlul' emagqabini – rhubululu esantini

Here the ST has used the prepositions 'in...through...over', and the TT has used translation by addition. The prepositions are still found in the TT, but with some addition of ideophone *wambu...rhubululu*. These ideophones do not change the message of the ST. Instead, they make it more memorable in the TL. The translator seems to have been thinking about the target readers when translating this text. And that is what is encouraged by Nida's Functional Equivalence theory.

In all, the translation of the above poem seems to have focused both on the TL and SL, leaning more towards the TL focus. Although, the title and the first line of the poem reveal faithfulness to the SL, the translator ensured that going further, the focus would be more on the TL reader; and only keep the SL message. This is done through adaptation, domestication and addition.

The translation of 'Tortoise and his Banjo' into Ufudo neBanjo yalo

The translator starts the translation by being faithful to the SL. The topic and some terms in the first paragraph show this faithfulness. Going further, the translator provides a target-oriented translation. The story title is

5. Tortoise and his Banjo
Ufudo neBanjo yalo

The character name *ufudo* is started with a small letter. Furthermore, an impersonal pronoun *yalo* (its) is used to refer to 'a tortoise', and not the Tortoise, as it is personified in the narration of the story. The translator has broken one of the folktale characteristics – that of animal characters personification – more especially when those animals are going to play significant roles in the development of the plot. The translator seems to have failed to recall that he is translating a folktale. This seems to have been done erroneously, as the above principle is followed in the narration of the story. Under normal folktale writing, Tortoise is written as UFudo¹ (for a male Tortoise character) or UFudwazana (for a female). The title would then become *UFudo neBanjo yakhe* meaning 'The Tortoise and His Banjo'. The capitalisation of the first letter of the stem of the noun *uFudo* personifies this character, hence the possessive pronoun that refers to a person *yakhe*. The purpose of this translation is to narrate a folktale using folktale characteristics, one of which is personification of inhuman characters.

The translator is, however, faithful to the SL syntax in the following sentence:

6. **So** he invited all the animals in his town for a **work party**
Ngako wamema zonke izilwanyana kwilali yakhe ukuza kwilima lokusebenza

The use of *ngako* (so) and *kwilima lokusebenza* (work party) in the TL sentence is unacceptable. The SL text has used the conjunction, 'so', which is in line with the grammatical rules of this language. However, according to isiXhosa rules, the conjunction *ngako* is inappropriate when not accompanied by an article. It is usually accompanied by *oko*, to make *ngako oko* or *ngoko*. Glodjović (2010) contends that literary translation is not only about conveying the message from the SL to the TL. It is also about keeping the SL style and adjusting the text to the lexical and syntactic rules of the TL. For literary translation to be deemed successful, it should capture the spirit and manner of the original. The TL reader should understand it in the same manner as the SL reader. Another version of the above sentence would be *Ngoko ke wabiza ilima elaliza kwenziwa zizo zonke izilwanyana zelali yakhe*.

The translation of work party as *ilima lokusebenza* also reveals that the translator seems to have been thinking about the SL during the translation. A work party has an equivalent in isiXhosa – *ilima*². When one is invited to *ilima*, they know that they are to go to work, eat, drink and be merry. The addition of *lokusebenza* is rather confusing to the TL reader. It is as if this is a different kind of *ilima*. This gives the impression that the translator wanted to stress that people were invited there just to work. Therefore, the word *lokusebenza* is not needed in the translation.

The same term is re-emphasised on page 28, where the ST reads thus,

7. Leopard had invited them to a work **PARTY**,
UHlosi bekebamemele³ kwiLIMA LOKUSEBENZA

Whether the TL uses *ilima* or *ilima lokusebenza*, the TT emphasis is different from that of the ST. In the ST, the animals are complaining that they have been invited to a work party, but were made to work with no partying. On the other hand, the TL's emphasis is not clear, as it emphasises both the 'work' and the 'party'.

Besides the few SL-faithful instances mentioned above, the translator used domestication and adaptation, which are encouraged by children's literature translation theorists. The story starts thus:

8. Once, in far, far land, Leopard needed workers for his farm.

Kwathi ke kaloku ngantsomi kudaladala, kwelinye ilizwe elikude, uHlosi wayeswele abantu bokusebenza kwifama yakhe.

The translator used domestication and adaptation by adding a suitable isiXhosa folktale opening and ending words, *Kwathi ke kaloku ngantsomi* before translating 'Once, in far, far land' (24) and *Phela phela ngantsomi* (The end) (29). The TL folktale opening words are meant to make the reader⁴ aware that this is a folktale, and anything is possible. Once the child realises that he or she is reading a folktale, he or she will understand issues like personification of animals, and even the 'abnormal'⁵ events happening in the story.

Furthermore, the ST setting is in town, but the translator's focus was on the target audience. He adapted the setting to be in the villages. Although the translator starts by referring to the Leopard's farm in the beginning, at a later stage he seems to have realised his mistake and talks about the Leopard's (mealie) field (27) – *intsimi*. The translator also uses folktale related terms such as:

- *Ilali* (village), instead of town;
- *Ukusina* (traditional dancing), instead of dance (*ukudanisa*);
- *Intsimi* (mealie field), instead of farm.

The translator also uses translation by addition, where ideophones are added in the TL. There are *xhopho* (24), *nya* (27, 28), *gxebe* (24, 27, 28), *wambu* (27), *hlasi* (28), *ntsho* (28), and *cwaka* (28). These ideophones are additions only found in the TL. The SL has used plain language in some cases. These additions do not add to the meaning to the story, but capture the folktale narration terminology.

In the source language, there is an Igbo (Nigerian) term, *ugbua*, which is written in italics. This story is based on an Igbo tale from Nigeria. The English writer left the term foreignised. However, the isiXhosa translator seems to have remembered that he is translating for children, and therefore put a suitable TL term, *gxebe*, as an equivalent in isiXhosa.

In all, even though the translator started with a translation that is faithful to the ST, the translation mainly seems to be target reader-oriented. He abides with most of the principles suggested by functionalist theory critics, as stated in the Functional Equivalence and Skopos theories. The TL readers can align themselves with the translations.

Conclusion

The analysis of the two translated texts reveals that, like literary translation, children's literature translation needs a translator who thinks like an artist so as not to lose the essence of the story. The translator needs to be cognisant of the fact that children are less experienced in life. They therefore need simpler language full of imagery that will illustrate the story. As advocated by the Functional Equivalence and Skopos theories, the language used in translation needs to focus on the target language reader, and give them a clear picture of what the text is about, in a language that is suitable for their age. The translations of the above two texts seem to fit the target audience, though the translators are sometimes faithful to the SL form. The essence of the two texts has been well transferred to the TL. The examples discussed above demonstrate the translators' ability to provide texts suitable for the target reader. Adaptation has been used to elicit and maintain the child reader's interest. Such adaptation is presented through addition of ideophones that capture the interest of the reader, while at the same time painting a vivid image in his or her mind. Domestication is also used in the second text to show the characteristics of folk stories. Such beginning and ending phrases of the story can only be found in folk stories.

Notes

¹ It is *UFudo*, with a capital 'U' because it is at the beginning of a topic. Otherwise, it would be *uFudo*.

² A communal work, where someone who needs communal assistance in his mielie field invites community members to assist him. There is no monetary reimbursement. But the field owner prepares lots of food and drinks (including traditional beer) for the workers.

³ The translation has used dialectical language here, but this is not the matter under discussion.

⁴ Or listener, in case of an oral narration.

⁵ Abnormal in the sense that they can only happen in folktales.

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