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Strandberg, Janine A. E.

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Janine A E Strandberg

*University of Groningen, j.a.e.strandberg@rug.nl*

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# Multilingual Moomins: Examining the Translation of Tove Jansson's Nonsense Character Names from Swedish to English and Finnish

Janine A. E. Strandberg  
*University of Groningen*

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HISTORICALLY children's literature has not always been as highly esteemed as other literary genres. Children's books have often been regarded as secondary literature, as simplistic writing that does not require any great effort from the author (Korhonen 2007: 2; Oittinen 2000: 64, 68). Yet some children's authors have become widely recognised and celebrated, for instance Kenneth Graham, who wrote *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), A. A. Milne, author of *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926), and, more recently, J. K. Rowling, creator of the successful *Harry Potter* books. Many successful children's authors have gained popularity because their stories and characters appeal to adults as well as children. Such a writer is Finland-Swedish author and illustrator Tove Jansson, creator of the *Moomin* books. Jansson is a cultural icon in her native country of Finland, and to this day, more than seventy years after the first *Moomin* book was published, her books are read and loved by readers of all ages. While Jansson has been celebrated for her imaginative use of language, her writing is also noteworthy because of her creative character names. Bertills (2003) notes that while it is common to use standard language to form names, most of the names of Jansson's characters are 'imaginary names', i.e. fictional nonsense names (2003: 74). These names often have a connection to the lexicon, but that connection is not always transparent (Bertills 2003: 74). Imaginary names are interesting, because while they are likely to seem arbitrary and meaningless to a child, they often infer humour and deeper meanings to the adult reader. Such names can provide great depth to an author's work, but transferring them into a foreign language may pose a challenge for translators.

This article traces the etymology of thirteen original Swedish names from the *Moomin* books, and investigates the methods by which they have been translated into English. The study employs the name translation theory on four modes of transfer, introduced by Hermans (1988). Based on Hermans' model, this paper defines the original Swedish names and the methods that have been used to transfer<sup>1</sup> the names into English. While the main foci of the study are the methods of transfer from Swedish to English, the Finnish variants of the names and the methods of transfer from Swedish to Finnish are also included for comparison.

## Translation and culture

Translation refers to rendering the meaning of the *source text* (ST) in the *source language* (SL) into the *target language* (TL) within the *target text* (TT). The most crucial function of translation is for the TT reader to have a similar reading experience as the ST reader (Bertills 2003: 187). The communicative nature of literary translation is particularly emphasized in culturally oriented translation studies. Cultural translation focuses on the role which translation plays in aiding understanding and shaping our knowledge of the world (Bassnett 2002: 1-2). In literary translation it is crucial that the cultural differences between the ST readers and the TT readers are taken into account (Leppihalme 1992:

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<sup>1</sup> In this study the term *transferring* is used to referring to any act of rendering a name from the source text to the target text. This is to avoid confusion with *translating*, a term used specifically for one of Hermans' four methods of transfer. However, when referring to general translation, not the transfer of names, the standard term *translation* is used.

183). However, the most appropriate ways of translating literature have been greatly debated amongst scholars. Venuti (1995) argues that when a translator adapts a book to accommodate the cultural understanding of the TT reader, the text becomes *domesticated* (1995: 18). This domestication is problematic, because it is strongly associated with issues of society and power. The opposite of domestication is *foreignisation*, a strategy where as much as possible of the ST is preserved, and assimilation of the TT to the target cultural and linguistic values is avoided (Venuti 1995: 19-21; Oittinen 2000: 74). According to Venuti (1995), foreignising translation, particularly in English, can be used in resistance to racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism (1995: 20). However, not all scholars agree with Venuti's views on adaptation. Leppihalme (1992) defines translation as a balancing act of adapting the text for the TT reader while attempting to keep the integrity of the ST (1992: 185). According to Leppihalme, "the responsible translator does not allow the TT to become obscured or impoverished unnecessarily, nor does s/he leave the reader puzzled at [...] anomalies resulting from unexplained source-cultural names or phrases" (1992: 185).

### **Children's literature in translation**

The issue of domestication versus foreignisation is particularly relevant when translating books for children. Several scholars argue against all types of adaptation when it comes to works of children's literature, on the account of such adaptation being denaturing and pedagogising (Oittinen 2000: 74). Lathey (2010) notes that translation practices for young audiences often include the manipulation or censorship of texts, and argues that the material is sometimes completely domesticated to compensate for the child's lack of life experience (2010: 7). Still, a certain amount of adaptation can be particularly important when translating children's literature. For instance, translated sources are often the only way for monolingual children to come in contact with foreign literatures and cultures (Van Coillie & Verschueren 2006: v).

When translating children's books, translators are not only faced with the difficult task of introducing foreign cultural concepts to young readers. Often the playful language of children's literature poses a challenge in its own right (Van Coillie & Verschueren 2006: vi). Particularly when it comes to poetry or nursery rhymes, translators may have to deviate considerably from the source material to achieve the desired effect of the ST. In addition, children's literature contains a higher percentage of meaningful, semantically loaded names that often require translation.

### **Names in translation**

Names do not generally possess a distinct meaning the way common nouns do, but instead their specific purpose is identification (Hermans 1988: 11). Names are thus often considered separately from other parts of language and regarded as untranslatable objects (Parianou 2007: 407). However, names can also be considered to belong to an interdisciplinary branch of research, as they are affected by numerous disciplines apart from linguistics, including anthropology, history and sociology (Parianou 2007: 407; Oittinen 2000: 6). The translation of names thus becomes an interdisciplinary as well as cross-cultural study, drawing on several branches of learning (Oittinen 2000: 6).

In literary onomastics names are often divided into 'Cratyllic' and 'Hermogean' (Cavill 2016: 356). The terms stem from Plato's dialogue *Cratylus*, where Cratylus considers names to represent important aspects of a person or place, while Hermogenes believes names to be semantically void (Cavill 2016: 356). While most personal names can be considered Hermogean, literature contains a high concentration of Cratyllic names (Hermans 1988: 13). Semantically meaningful names or names with certain connotations can be useful instruments in setting the

mood of a story. Yet, such names may pose a considerable challenge for translators, who have to choose whether to keep the original name and risk it not being understood by the TT readers, or to change the name but jeopardise the integrity of the ST.

Given names and surnames are usually directly copied, not translated. This is often done in order to preserve the character's nationality, and is possible if the name in question has no connotations within the text itself (Newmark 1988: 214). However, leaving a foreign name completely unchanged sometimes means that the readers of the TT end up feeling alienated and unable to identify with the character (Van Coillie 2006: 125). As children's books in particular tend to include playful and humorous names, simply copying a meaningful name into the TT may be detrimental to the reading experience of a child. It is unlikely that a child would have the same capacity to infer the meaning of a foreign name that an adult might have. Thus names in children's books are more often translated than names in books for adults. Sometimes the meaning of a name in both the ST and the TT may be too obscure for a child to comprehend, but in such cases the name may be changed simply because it sounds too foreign for the child to relate to.

### Tove Jansson and her moomintrolls

This paper studies character names found in the *Moomin* books, written by Finland-Swedish author Tove Jansson (1914–2001). Jansson's initial book about the moomin-trolls, titled *The Moomins and the Great Flood*, was published in 1945, and was over time followed by eight others (Karjalainen 2013: 166). Jansson also wrote a number of books for adults, and she contributed with illustrations for both the 1962 Swedish translation of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, and the 1966 publication of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (Karjalainen 2013: 227-228). Additionally, Jansson published illustrations in numerous newspapers and magazines, including a number of satirical drawings in the Finnish satirical publication *Garm* (Karjalainen 2013: 56; Westin 2007: 109). At the time of her death in June 2001, Jansson had worked as an author and illustrator for over seventy years (Westin 2007: 19).

It was when Jansson was working for the newspaper *Garm* in 1943 that the moomintroll character was initially introduced, albeit under the name *snork*. While the moomintrolls later became plump and soft, the original snork had a long, thin nose, small hornlike ears, and a very thin tail (Westin 2007: 113-114). When *The Moomins and the Great Flood* was published in 1945, the illustrated moomintrolls still looked very much like the snork in *Garm*. The Swedish title, *Småtrollen och den stora översvämningen*, does not even mention moomintrolls, referring instead only to *småtrollen*, 'the small trolls'. The name *mumintroll* was initially introduced to Jansson by her uncle Einar, who told a young Jansson that "moomintrolls" might appear if she sneaked into the pantry for a snack during the night. These invisible moomintrolls lived behind the stove, but would come forth to rub their fluffy noses on the legs of the midnight thief (Karjalainen 2013: 134; Westin 2007: 167-168).

Jansson's first five *Moomin* books, i.e. *The Moomins and the Great Flood* (1945), *Comet in Moominland* (1946), *Finn Family Moomintroll* (1948), *The Exploits of Moominpappa* (1950) and *Moominsummer Madness* (1954), were considered to be exclusively children's literature. However, the line between children's literature and adult literature became increasingly blurred in *Moominland Midwinter* (1957) and *Tales from Moominvalley* (1962) (Westin 2007: 325, 363). Journalist Per Olof Sundman stated that *Tales from Moominvalley* was certainly not meant to be read only by children, due to Jansson's "artfulness, her poetic softness and her occasionally macabre vagaries" (Westin 2007: 368). The two final books, *Moomin-pappa at Sea* (1965) and *Moominvalley in November* (1970), are significantly different from the first books, being thematically far more philosophical and abstract (Korhonen 2007: 6). While the narratives of the earlier books focus on the tension between idyllically peaceful settings and great adventures, the narratives of the later books shift between the

external and internal of the characters themselves, drawing on ideas and illusions rather than on events in the story (Rehal–Johansson 2007: 16).

### Nonsense names

Most characters in the *Moomin* books are named after the species they represent, e.g. Snork is a member of the species *snorks*. This approach to naming is reoccurring in children's literature from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Graham's characters in *The Wind in the Willow* (1908) have names such as Mole, Rat and Mr Toad, with the names of their species being used as their given name or surname. Similarly, in Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926), the characters Rabbit, Tigger, and Owl bear names based on the animals they represent. Yet, while the names of Graham and Milne's characters are formed based on standard language, the majority of the characters in Jansson's books have completely fictional names (Bertills 2003: 74). Jansson has invented most of the species in her books, including whompers, filyjonks and mymbles. These nonsense names have a connection to the lexicon, but the connection is usually not transparent (Bertills 2003: 74). Jansson's names tend to be humorous nonsense names based on dialectal and phonetic forms, rarely suggesting relations to words in standard language.

Jansson's method of using species' names as character names further differs from that of Graham and Milne's due to linguistic differences between Swedish and English. Both Graham and Lewis have directly transformed the species names of animals into personal names through capitalisation and by removing all articles. Jansson, on the other hand, uses the definite form along with capitalisation to turn nouns into names. In Swedish the indefinite articles are *en* and *ett*, while the corresponding suffixes *-en* and *-et* function as definite articles. The indefinite *en snork* ('a snork') thus becomes the definite Snorken ('the Snork'), and *ett mumin troll* ('a moomintroll') becomes Mumin trollen ('the Moomintroll'). As such, the names indicate that the character in question is one particular representative of his or her species. Therefore, in some other instance another character might represent that same species and be called by the same name. For instance, the name Hemulen primarily identifies a character who collects stamps and plants in *Finn Family Moomintroll* (1948) and *Moominvalley in November* (1970). Yet three other characters named Hemulen are introduced in other books; all four characters share the same name, as they are at different times the sole representative of the species called *hemulens*.

### Previous research

Although many scholars have conducted literary studies about the *Moomin* books, few have focused on Jansson's character names. Overall, nonsense names have not received a great deal of attention in onomastic research. Bertills (2003) is one of the few scholars to incorporate nonsense names in her book *Beyond Identification: Proper Names in Children's Literature*. Bertills states that although the lexical meanings of Jansson's imaginary names characterise the name-bearers significantly, these meanings are usually opaque and mainly evident to adult readers (2003: 61). Bertills also discusses sound symbolism at length, stating, for example, that the <m> in the name Mumin brings forth associations of the character's physical roundness (2003: 149). Like the current study, Bertills incorporates aspects of Hermans' 1988 theory on semantically loaded names in her analysis, although she does not make great use of the theory in correlation with names in translation (2003: 10-11).

One who has focused on Jansson's names in translation is Grönlund (2009), who narrows her focus on character names and place names in the book *Finn Family Moomintroll*. In her analysis, Grönlund uses Holme's 1988 chart of *retention* and *re-creation* to categorise the names (2009: 9).

*Retention* is described as being used when the translator keeps aspects of the original name, while *re-creation* refers to creating a new name or naturalising a name to make it more accessible to the TT reader (Grönlund 2009: 38, 46). Grönlund's study offers a somewhat limited perspective, considering she only categorises the transferred names into two groups. By employing Hermans' 1988 theory of four modes of transfer, this study expects to gain more information on the different methods of transfer that have taken place. Through the use of Hermans' theory, this essay also puts emphasis on the classification of the etymology of the original Swedish names, which was beyond the scope of Grönlund's work. Furthermore, unlike Grönlund, who focuses on names in one of the *Moomin* books, this article explores a range of different names from the entire book series.

## Material

The sections that follow investigate the original names and translations of thirteen of Tove Jansson's characters. The primary sources of the study are the Swedish versions and the English and Finnish translations of five of Jansson's books, i.e. *Kometen kommer* (1968), *Trollkarens hatt* (1948), *Muminpappans memoarer* (1950), *Troll-vinter* (1957), and *Sent i november* (1970). In the body of the study these books are referred to by their English names; *Comet in Moominland*, *Finn Family Moomin-troll*, *The Exploits of Moominpappa*, *Moominland Midwinter* and *Moominvalley in November*. It is beneficial to keep in mind that the *Moomin* books were translated into English by three different translators. Elizabeth Portch translated the first two books, i.e. *Comet in Moominland* (1959) and *Finn Family Moomintroll* (1961), while Thomas Warburton translated the majority of the following books, with the exception of *Moominvalley in November* (1974), which was translated by Kingsley Hart. This means that any choices regarding the names made by Portch would have had to be followed by Warburton and Hart. Warburton would have been responsible for developing the English names for the characters introduced after *Finn Family Moomintroll*, while Hart would only have been able to affect the names of characters appearing exclusively in *Moominvalley in November*. In the case of the Finnish translations, Laila Järvinen translated all *Moomin* books into Finnish, with the exception of the last book, *Moominvalley in November*, which was translated by Kaarina Helakisa. Järvinen can thus be presumed to have been in charge of transferring most of the character names into Finnish.

## Methodology

My argument makes use of Theo Hermans' system for the classification of names in translation, introduced in the article 'On Translating Proper Names, with reference to *De Witte* and *Max Havelaar*' (1988). In contrast to many scholars, who limit the name translation research to standardised proper names, Hermans acknowledges the fact that literary works carry a higher percentage of imaginative semantically loaded names than non-literary texts (Hermans 1988: 13). His methodology is, therefore, suitable for adaptation for studying completely imaginary names.

Hermans divides names broadly into two categories: *conventional* names, which are regarded as 'un-motivated' and are not seen as carrying distinct meanings, and *loaded* names, which are 'motivated', semantically loaded names (Hermans 1988: 13). These categories are generally equivalent to the aforementioned definitions 'Cratylic' and 'Hermogenean'. Most of the names in the *Moomin* books are loaded names, and can thus be further divided into two categories: *suggestive* names that have an indirect meaning, and overtly *expressive* names. Both types are semantically loaded to a certain degree, but expressive names have a more obvious connection to the lexicon than suggestive names (Hermans 1988: 13).

According to Hermans, there are four different methods for transferring proper names from one language to another: *copying*, *transcription*, *substitution* and *translation*. *Copying* indicates that the

name is reproduced in the TT exactly as it is found in the ST. In the case of *transcription* the name is transliterated or adapted in, for example, phonology or spelling. Complete *substitution* may occur if the ST name does not relate to any concept in the SL, thus holding no clear meaning or association. However, if the name is clearly tied to the lexicon of the SL, it may be *translated* so that the meaning persists in the TL (Hermans 1988: 13).

Using the aforementioned classifications, the study evaluates whether the Swedish names are expressive or suggestive, based on their degree of semantic meaningfulness. The etymologies of the original names are explored as much as possible, and, where the names have distinct meanings, those are demonstrated to the reader. The transfer method from the ST to the TT is also assessed, to identify whether the individual names have been copied, transcribed, substituted or translated. Note that it is also possible to combine several of the four modes of transfer, as the use of one method does not necessarily exclude the others (Hermans 1988: 13; Bertills 2003: 206, 207).

Hermans' theory allows not only for the description of how the translator has transferred the name from the SL to the TL, but also for the assessment of the result of the transfer. A central part of the study is to evaluate how well the transferred name in the TT has retained the meaning, connotations, and possible humour of the name in the ST. In order to gain a broader perspective on how names have been transferred from Swedish to English, a comparative analysis is conducted of the transfer of those same names from Swedish to Finnish.

The methods of transferring the names from the *Moomin* books into Finnish and English are likely to be affected by both linguistic relations and cultural closeness. Swedish and English are both Germanic Indo-European languages, whereas Finnish is a Finno-Ugric language, and thus unrelated to Swedish and English. We might thus presume that the transfer of names would be more straightforward from Swedish to English than from Swedish to Finnish. Still, despite the differences between the languages, a Finnish translator is more likely to recognise cultural cues in names created by a Finland-Swedish author than an English translator. Furthermore, keeping in mind the target-reader, even an English translator with a broad understanding of the ST culture needs to be aware that he or she is translating for an audience that may not share that understanding.

## Mumintrollet – Moomintroll

The books center around a family of moomintrolls, most notably the child, who is known as Moomintroll or Moomin. Like many characters in the books, Moomin is clearly named after his species. Moomintrolls are described as small, white, sympathetic creatures with round noses and big stomachs. The original Swedish name Mumintrollet is made up from an invented word, *mumin*, combined with Swedish *troll*, meaning 'troll, ogre'. While we know that it was Uncle Einar who told Jansson about moomintrolls, the etymology of the word is unclear. Several theories have been published regarding the linguistic root of the prefix *mumin-*, but neither Jansson nor anyone else has ever declared a clear etymology (Westin 2007: 170). The term *troll* itself is interesting, considering trolls are rarely viewed positively in Swedish or Nordic mythology. Swedish trolls are usually ugly supernatural creatures that collect hoards of gold.<sup>2</sup> Trolls have been considered to have magical abilities, and the noun *troll* is itself related to the verb *trolla*, 'to do magic'. The name Moomintroll is classed as suggestive, partially due to the unknown meaning of *mumin*, but also because Jansson's moomintrolls can hardly be considered to have much in common with the trolls of Nordic mythology.

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<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia: Troll



The English transcription ‘moomintroll’ has retained the original form and pronunciation as far as possible. The Swedish *mumin* and English *moomin* are pronounced almost identically, as the <u> in *mumin* is pronounced as [u:], as in *moo* [mu:] or *goose* [gu:s]. It is notable that the English pronunciation is based on Jansson’s native Finland-Swedish pronunciation of the grapheme <u>, not Standard Swedish pronunciation. In the Finland-Swedish variety the long <u> in *mumin* is pronounced as [u:], but in Standard Swedish the sound would be [u:].

When classifying the English variant as a transcription, however, we must take into account that the word *troll* has the same meaning and spelling in English as it does in Swedish. Thus it can be argued that the English variant has been constructed using a combination of transcription and translation. The word *mumin* has been transcribed into *moomin*, while *troll* is translated into *troll*, although no visible difference is present. Additionally, the Swedish definite *-et* suffix has been omitted without being replaced with ‘the’ in the English variant, indicating that the English variant is treated more as a personal name than the original.

The Finnish variant Muumipeikko largely follows the same pattern of transferring as the English variant. The word *peikko* literally means ‘troll’, and is thus a straightforward translation. *Muumi*, on the other hand, is a transcription of *mumin*, although the transcription alters the pronunciation of the name. The sound [u:], represented by <u> in Swedish, has no exact equivalent in Finnish. The translator has kept the grapheme <u>, using the duplicate vowel in order to make a long sound. However, in the process the *-uu-* in *muumi* is pronounced like vowel sound in the US English pronunciation of *school*, [skul]. Furthermore, as Finnish words usually end in a vowel, the final *-n* has been removed from *mumin* in order to make the name sound less foreign to the TT reader.

### Muminpappa & Muminmamma – Moominpappa & Moominmamma

The Swedish names of Moomintroll’s parents, i.e. Muminpappa and Muminmamma, are straightforwardly expressive. Although the meaning of the prefix *mumin-* is unclear, the ST reader can no doubt deduce the meaning of the words *mamma* (‘mum’) and *pappa* (‘dad’). Because Moominpappa and Moominmamma are the books’ only central characters to be parents, they are often referred to without the prefix *mumin-*. In such cases the names appear simply with definite *-n* endings as *pappan* (‘the dad’) and *mamman* (‘the mum’).

The English variants Moominmamma and Moominpappa can be defined as transcriptions, as they have been directly transferred from Swedish with only minor phonological adjustment. As with the name of Moomintroll, the <u> in *mumin* has been substituted by <oo>. The spellings *mamma* and *pappa* have likely been retained because they are close to the English terms *mama* and *papa*. Yet, in spite of the similarities in form, the use of the English variants differs from the originals Swedish. In the ST of *Moominland Midwinter*, Moomintroll addresses Moominmamma with the word *mamma*, but the English translation uses ‘Mother’ (Jansson 1957: 11; 1971: 13). While the Swedish word *mamma* indicates closeness and informality, the English formal form ‘Mother’ builds emotional distance between the characters. ‘Mother’ would rather correspond to the Swedish *mor*, a word which is considered stiff and archaic. Considering Moominmamma’s warm and nurturing character, it is curious that the translator has chosen to use the reserved ‘Mother’. Furthermore, there is great discrepancy between the formal ‘Mother’ and the informal, even childlike ‘Daddy’, which is used to refer to Moominpappa in the same book (Jansson 1971: 70).

As in the English translation, only the prefix *mumin-* in Muminmamma and Muminpappa is transcribed in the Finnish variant. The Finnish names thus become Muumimamma and Muumipappa. This is notable because Finnish does not have words similar to Swedish *mamma* and *pappa*: instead, the Finnish equivalents are *äiti* (‘mother’) and *isä* (‘father’). However, because of the

cultural closeness and everyday interactions between Finnish speakers and Swedish speakers, Finnish people could be expected to understand the Swedish words *mamma* and *pappa*. Furthermore, Finnish does not have any widely established diminutives of ‘mother’ and ‘father’. Copying *mamma* and *pappa* also retains the phonetic softness of the ST names, as using Finnish *äiti* and *isä* (i.e. Muumiäiti and Muumi-isä) would have rendered the names visually and phonetically disagreeable in the TL. However, as in the ST, the standard Finnish forms *äiti* and *isä* are used in instances where Moominmamma and Moominpappa are being addressed directly by Moomintroll.

### Snusmumriken – Snufkin

The suggestive Swedish name Snusmumriken is based on an outdated colloquial Swedish term for an old, boring man, a *snusmumrik*.<sup>3</sup> This meaning has little to do with the character in the books, who is a philosophical wanderer and Moomintroll’s best friend. However, the two words the name is made up of, *snus* and *mumrik*, may be considered separately. The Swedish dialectal word *mumrik*<sup>4</sup> is a derogatory term for a rude or stupid man, but Jansson uses it as a noun indicating Snufkin’s species, i.e. *en mumrik*, ‘a mumrik’, and *mumrikar*, ‘mumriks’. The *-en* suffix marks the definite article of the name Snusmumriken, as with many others of Jansson’s invented names. The prefix *snus-* has two possible meanings, either the noun *snus*, indicating ‘snuff’, ‘powdered tobacco for inhaling through the nostrils’,<sup>5</sup> or the verb *snusa*, indicating ‘to sniff or snuff’. As the two meanings are the same for both Swedish *snus* and English *snuff*, the prefix has been easily translated into the initial part of the name Snufkin. Meanwhile, the *-kin* suffix of the English variant stems from Middle Dutch *-keijn* and Middle Low German *-kīn*, and is used to form diminutives such as *bumpkin*.<sup>6</sup>

In English, the entire name Snufkin denotes the character’s name as well as his species. When the character is introduced to the reader, he is referred to only as ‘a snufkin’, i.e. an anonymous member of the species (Jansson 1967: 43). However, the next time he is mentioned the name Snufkin is capitalised and has lost the indefinite article, indicating that it has become his personal name (Jansson 1967: 43). This change from species to personal name is not as quick in the original Swedish text. There Snufkin is continuously referred to as *en mumrik* (‘a snufkin’), until he explicitly introduces himself as Snusmumriken. In Swedish a distinction made between *mumriks* as a species and Snusmumriken, which is the name the character. However, in the English version there is no distinction between the character Snufkin and his species of snufkins, aside from the capitalisation of the name, and as such the character does not require a proper introduction in the English translation.

The Finnish variant, Nuuskamuikkunen, is a translation that has been created with the presumption that the prefix *snus-* in Snusmumriken refers to the noun *snus*, not the verb *snusa*. *Nuuska* is, without ambiguity, the Finnish word for the noun ‘snuff’. However, the root of the second part of the name, *muikkunen*, is less obvious. Finnish *muikku*, meaning the freshwater fish ‘vendace’, is a possible source of the name, as Snufkin is known to be an avid fisher. Additionally, *muikku(-nen)* is phonetically similar to *mumrik(-en)*, although the words are not similar in their possible meanings. What is notable is that, like *mumrik*, the word *muikkunen* acts as the name for the species in the Finnish translations. There can be several creatures called *muikkunen*, but the name Nuuskamuikkunen only belongs to one character.

<sup>3</sup> SAOB: **snus-mumrik**, *n*.

<sup>4</sup> SAOB: **mumrik**, *n*.

<sup>5</sup> OED Online: **snuff**, *n.3*.

<sup>6</sup> Oxford Living Dictionaries: **-kin**, *suffix*.

### Snorken & Snorkfröken – Snork & Snork Maiden

Snork and his sister Snork Maiden, known as Snorken and Snorkfröken in Swedish, first appear in *Comet in Moominland* (1946). They descend from the species snorkes (Swedish: *snorkar*), which are creatures similar to moomintrolls, although of different colours. The name stems from the adjective *snorkig*, meaning ‘snooty, uppity’ or ‘impertinent, impudent’.<sup>7</sup> This is clearly a reference to Snork’s personality, as he is known to be pretentious and difficult to please. The meaning of the name is not completely obvious, but may be classed as strongly suggestive.

The English variants of the names are quite straightforward. The name of the species, i.e. *snork*, has been kept untranslated within the names. Grönlund (2009) claims that the translated names do not retain the negative connotations of the original Swedish, causing the names to be “exoticized” (2009: 44). However, the present study argues that the stem *snork* has likely been preserved due to its similarity to the English adjective ‘snarky’. The entry for SNARKY *adj.* in the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the meaning as ‘irritable, short-tempered’, which are words that could be used to describe Snork’s personality. The translator has also removed the definite *-en* ending, thus making the name more English-sounding. Snork Maiden, on the other hand, is a half-translation of the original name Snorkfröken. The noun *fröken* means ‘young or unmarried lady’, and is the equivalent of English ‘Miss’. Because the term ‘maiden’ also hints at the girl in question being unmarried, it is an acceptable translation of *fröken*, although the precise semantic meaning is not retained.

The names of Snork and Snork Maiden are rendered quite different in Finnish. While the semantic meanings behind the Swedish and English variants refer to the snooty and irritable Snork, the Finnish variants seem to be based on the characteristics of Snork Maiden. The Finnish variants of the names are Niisku and Niiskuneiti. The root of the name Niiskuneiti is likely the verb *niiskuttaa*, ‘to sob, sniffle’, combined with *neiti*, ‘Miss’. As Snork Maiden is known for being sensitive and for crying frequently, the siblings have been given names with the connotation of ‘sniffing’. Although the meanings of the ST names are quite clear, the Finnish variants are so different in both form and meaning that they may be classed as substitutions.

### Lilla My – Little My

Lilla My is one of the most interesting names in the *Moomin* books. The character is a tiny creature of the species known as *mymbles*, and she has a wild and aggressive temper. While *lilla* means ‘little’ in Swedish, *my* refers to the twelfth letter in the Greek alphabet, Μμ, known as *mu* in English. Lowercase mu (μ) was in the past the symbol for micron or micrometre in the International System of Units (SI),<sup>8</sup> and is currently the official symbol for the SI prefix *micro-*.<sup>9</sup> The name Lilla My thus literally means ‘Little Micro’, a nod towards the character’s tiny size. The name can thus be classed as expressive, although it would not be understood by anyone who does not know the Swedish name of the grapheme Μμ.

It is unclear whether or not the meaning of the name has been understood by the English translator. While Lilla has been translated to Little, complete translation would have rendered the name Little Mu, rather than Little My. However, the translator might have found translating My to Mu pointless, as most readers would not be aware of the meaning of the name. The second part of the name, My, has therefore been copied. Yet, by choosing not to change the second half of the

<sup>7</sup> SAOB: **snorkig**, *v.*

<sup>8</sup> Bureau International des Poids et Mesures (BIPM): **micron** (Since then expanded to μm).

<sup>9</sup> BIPM: **SI-prefixes**

name, the English variant fails to retain both the meaning and pronunciation of the original Swedish name. The long vowel sound [y:] in the Swedish name My is pronounced somewhat like the vowel in English *few* [fy:]. However, the TT reader is likely to falsely presume that My is pronounced as the English first person possessive ‘my’. Conversely, the Finnish variant Pikku Myy is a translation that successfully conveys both the meaning and the pronunciation of the original name. The word *pikkuinen*, often shortened to *pikku*, means ‘little, small’, and *myy* is the Finnish name for the Greek grapheme Μμ. As long vowels are distinguished by duplication in writing in Finnish, Myy is pronounced with the same long [y:] as My in Swedish.

### Sniff – Sniff

Sniff is a close friend of Moomintroll and a central character in the books. In Swedish he is also known as *det lilla djuret Sniff*, ‘the little animal Sniff’. As his name suggests, he is some type of small creature, although the name of his species is never specified. The etymology of the name Sniff is straightforward: the Swedish meaning of the verb *sniffa* is almost identical to the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s definition of the verb SNIFF *v.*, i.e. “to draw air through the nose.” The name may be related to Sniff’s long and pointy nose, or the fact that he is often afraid and thus often sniffles. It is difficult to determine whether the expressive Swedish name would be classified as having been directly copied or translated into English, as the resulting name would be the same, regardless of which method was used.

In the case of the Finnish variant Nipsu, the method of transfer is also difficult to establish. The name has no clear meaning, and does not have any connotations relating to the Swedish verb *sniffa*. As translation from Swedish to Finnish seems unlikely, the method of transcription can be argued to have been used instead. Because the initial *sn-* combination of Sniff is unnatural in Finnish, the <s> has been removed to leave initial *n-*. Similarly, the grapheme <f> is rarely used in Finnish, and thus the word-final *-ff* has been substituted with <p>. Finally, the translator has added the suffix *-su*, which is used to denote diminutives, such as *masu* (‘tummy’), from *maha* (‘stomach’). Therefore, while Nipsu has no direct meaning in Finnish, the name has the connotation of a small and endearing creature.

### Hemulen – The Hemulen

Hemulens are eccentric creatures that tend to have strong obsessions, such as collecting stamps or enjoying winter sports. The Swedish noun *hemul* is very archaic, meaning ‘something that agrees with what is considered just and reasonable’.<sup>10</sup> The word is usually used in legal terminology, but it can also be used in a vernacular sense to denote ‘fair, just’ (Grönlund 2009: 43). The negative form *obemul*, meaning ‘unfair’, is slightly more common, but also not found in everyday speech. While the name can be seen as expressive due to the clear connection with the noun, its archaic root is not a word most Swedish speakers would recognise.

As in the case of Snorken and Mumintrölet, Jansson uses the definite ending *-en* to form the name Hemulen. However, in this case the definite form has proven confusing for the English translator. Likely because the abstract and uncommon concept of *hemul* would be difficult to convey, the translator has abstained from translating the semantic meaning of Hemulen. The name has instead been directly copied into English. Yet, instead of copying the indefinite form of the noun, i.e. *hemul*, the Swedish definite form Hemulen is used in the TT. Thus the English name ‘the Hemulen’ uses both the English and the Swedish definite forms simultaneously. As a result, the

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<sup>10</sup> SAOB: *hemul*, *n.*

plural form becomes *hemulens*, rather than the more logical *hemuls*.

Unlike the fully copied English variant, the Finnish variant, Hemuli, is partially transcribed. The Swedish definite ending has been removed, and a word-final *-i* has been added. The transcribed name thus has *-li* as its final syllable, an ending with several functions in the Finnish language. Like the suffix *-su*, it often acts as a diminutive, indicating something small and dear, e.g. *keisuli*, 'little kitty'. It can also be used to make nouns out of adjectives or other nouns: *haju* ('smell, stink') becomes *haisuli* ('someone who smells'). As Finnish nouns and names rarely end in consonants, adding a vowel to the end makes the name less foreign to the TT reader. Based on Hermans' four modes of transfer the Finnish variant Hemuli can be categorised as a transcription.

### Filifjonkan – The Filyjonk

The Filyjonk is a fussy, neurotic creature who spends most of her time cleaning and fearing catastrophes. While the original name Filifjonkan has no direct semantic meaning in Standard Swedish, the second part of the name, *fjonka*, is phonetically reminiscent of words such as *fjolla*, *fjompa* ('silly woman'), and *fjanta* ('to behave in a silly or overbearing manner') (Bertills 2003: 75). While these connotations are befitting the character's personality, the name is only suggestive, as the phonetic likeness to *fjolla* and *fjompa* is quite indirect.

In the English version Filifjonkan has been transcribed as the Filyjonk. The definite article in the name is justified, as the definite *-an* ending of Filifjonkan serves the same purpose. The second <i> has presumably been transcribed as <y> in English to ease pronunciation in the TL, as both the Swedish <i> and the English <y> would likely be pronounced as the close unrounded vowel [i]. The second <f> has probably been removed due to how unnatural an English speaker would find it to have the voiced labiodental fricative [f] preceding the voiced palatal approximant [j]. Comparatively, in Swedish the combination of <f> and <j> has a somewhat humorous effect, due to the aforementioned words *fjolla* and *fjanta*.

The Finnish variant has been transcribed as Vilijonkka in an effort to adjust the pronunciation of the name for the TT readers. The final vowel *-a* has been added, and <f>, which is foreign-looking in Finnish, has been substituted with <v>. Although <f> is generally uncommon in Finnish, the choice of replacing <f> with <v> may also be related to the two initial syllables *vili-* hinting at the verb *vilistä*, 'to bustle',<sup>11</sup> a connotation quite fitting for the overbearing character. The double <k> is also necessary in order to make the *k*-sound in Finnish as hard as it is in the SL.

### Mårran – The Groke

In the *Moomin* books the Groke is a terrifying but tragically lonely creature who makes everything around her freeze. She is also known for her spine-chilling growl. The original name Mårran is very expressive, clearly stemming from the Swedish verb *morra*, 'to growl'. The name can also be seen as onomatopoeic, because the trill caused by the double <r> in Mårran sounds almost like a snarl or rumble in itself (Bertills 2003: 214). As the *-an* suffix is equivalent of the English definite article, the name literally means 'the growler' or 'the one who growls'. The English variant, the Groke, creates a *grrr*-sound with a similar rumbling onomatopoeic effect as the original name. Grönlund (2009) claims that the Groke is a retentive name, because it conveys the same meaning to the English readers as the original name does to the Swedish readers (2009: 45). However, despite of Grönlund's convictions and the name's onomatopoeia, the name the Groke does not seem to

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<sup>11</sup> Suomisankirja: *vilistä*, *v.*

convey the same sentiment as Mårran does. The meaning behind Mårran is very clear in Swedish, but the *Oxford English Dictionary* provides no definition for the word *groke* in English. We may, therefore, presume that the translator has aimed for a name that combines the verbs ‘to croak’ and ‘to growl’. If that is indeed the intended connotation, the Groke would be classed as a translated name (Hermans 1988: 13).

The Finnish variant, Mörkö, is not a direct reference to the character’s growling, but comes from the noun *mörkö*, meaning ‘bogeyman, ghoull’. It is also related to *mörökölli*, meaning ‘a person who is grumpy or crabby’,<sup>12</sup> and to the verb *möristä*, ‘to growl, grumble’ (Bertills 2003: 215). Although the semantic meaning of Mörkö is not exactly the same as that of Mårran, the phonetic resemblance is present, and the Finnish variant also achieves some of the onomatopoeic effect of the Swedish name. However, Mörkö is difficult to place in Hermans theory of four modes of transfer. The name cannot be classed as translated, as the lexical meaning of the Swedish name is not retained, although the connotation of growling does prevail to an extent. Substitution is, therefore, the most suitable defined method. Still, in Hermans’ methodology substitution is usually applied when the name has no meaning in the ST, which the name Mårran clearly does (Hermans 1988: 13).

### Joxaren –Joxter

Joxter is a friend of Moominpappa who appears only in *The Exploits of Moominpappa* (1968). Joxaren is an expressive name, denoting the verb *joxa*, a Finland-Swedish dialectal term meaning ‘to joke, have fun’, or ‘to tinker with something’.

It is difficult to assess how successful the English variant is in retaining the semantic meaning of the original name. Upon initial inspection it seems as if the translator Thomas Warburton simply transcribed the name by adding the more English-sounding *-er* ending. This comes across as a somewhat lazy strategy, considering Warburton most definitely understood the term *joxa*, as he himself is Finland-Swedish. However, Warburton’s merit in creating the name may lie in how the reader chooses to pronounce it. If the ⟨o⟩ in Joxter is pronounced as [ɔ] or [ʊ] the name hardly makes sense to the TT reader. On the other hand, if the ⟨o⟩ is pronounced [əʊ], as in ‘joke’ [dʒəʊk], the name sounds like “Joke-ster”. As such the English name could be classed as a translation rather than a transcription, or possibly a combination of the two, as the connotations of both the ST and TT names remain similar.

The Finnish version of the name, Juksu, also keeps the connotations identical to the original, and is thus classed as a translated name. In Finnish *juksata* is a verb that means ‘to trick, cheat, pull someone’s leg’. It is likely that the Finland-Swedish vernacular term *joxa* originates in Finnish *juksata*, and thus the accuracy of the Finnish translation is not surprising.

### Rådd-djuret – The Muddler

Like Joxter, the Muddler is a childhood friend of Moominpappa, and as such only appears in *The Exploits of Moominpappa* (1968). He is a disorganised little animal whose parents disappeared in a spring-cleaning. The original name Rådd-djuret stems from the Finland-Swedish vernacular verb *rådda*, equivalent of Standard Swedish *stöka*, ‘to make a mess’. The name is a combination of the verb *rådda* and the noun *djur*, ‘animal’, with the definite suffix *-et*. Although the name is classed as expressive, due to the meaning being obvious to Finland-Swedish readers, any readers speaking Standard Swedish would not be likely to understand the meaning of *rådda*.

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<sup>12</sup> Suomisanakirja: *mörökölli*, *n.*

Based on the definition of the verb *rådda*, the character's English name stems from the noun 'muddle'. The *Oxford English Dictionary* entry for MUDDLE *n.* defines the meaning as "a state of disorder or (physical or mental) confusion." Even though the translator, Thomas Warburton, has chosen to omit the equivalent of *djur* ('animal') in the English variant, the semantic meaning of Rådd-djuret and the Muddler remain largely the same. Therefore, the mode of translation has been used to transfer the name Rådd-djuret into English.

The Finnish variant Hosuli is also a reasonably accurate translation of the Swedish original name. The verb *hosua* means 'to hurry or rush, often making a mess in the progress'.<sup>13</sup> As in the name Hemuli, the *-li* suffix in Hosuli functions as an indicator of two things. Firstly, it makes a noun and by extension a name out of the verb *hosua*, indicating that the creature with this name is a rushing, messy character. Secondly, as the suffix *-li* is also used to create diminutives, it indicates small size. While the noun *djur* in the Swedish name has not been directly translated, the *-li* suffix creates a similar connotation of a small, messy animal.

## Discussion and conclusion

In the study thirteen nonsense names from Jansson's *Moomin* books were analysed and categorised as expressive or suggestive, based on their semantic meaningfulness. The names were then assessed in the context of translation by categorising the English and Finnish variants according to their modes of transfer into the respective TLs. Out of the thirteen Swedish names, Mårnan, Sniff, Muminpappan and Muminmamman were classed as being clearly expressive, while Filifjonkan, Mumintrölet, Snusmumriken, Snorken and Snorkfröken were classed as suggestive. However, the four remaining names could not be straightforwardly defined. Hemulen is a very expressive name, but only if the Swedish reader understands the unusual word *hemul*. Likewise, Lilla My is only expressive to the reader who has knowledge of physics and the Greek alphabet. Furthermore, while the names Joxaren and Rådd-djuret are very expressive to speakers of the Finland-Swedish variety, their semantic meanings might be completely obscure to Standard Swedish speakers.

The findings show that the English and Finnish translators have been surprisingly uniform in their methodologies. In both languages translation and transcription were the favoured methods of transferring names into the TL. Five names were translated from Swedish into English, i.e. the Groke, Snufkin, the Muddler, Sniff, and Snork Maiden, and five names were translated into Finnish, i.e. Hosuli, Juksu, Pikku Myy, Muumipeikko, and Nuuskamuikken. Similarly, five out of thirteen SL names were transcribed into both English and Finnish: the Filifjonk, Joxter, Moomintröll, Moominmamma and Moominpappa were transcribed into English, while Vilijonkka, Nipsu, Hemuli, Muumipappa and Muumimamma were transcribed into Finnish. The least common methods of transfer were copying and substitution. The Finnish variants Niisku, Niiskuneiti, and Mörkö have been categorised as substituted names, based on the fact that the connotations associated with these names have little or no relation to the connotations of the original Swedish names. Interestingly, there were no substitutions from Swedish to English, and the only English variant to be fully copied from the SL is Hemulen. None of the names were fully copied from Swedish to Finnish.

Overall, the English variants differ from the Finnish ones in the number of names that have been half-copied and half-translated or -transcribed. In a total of six English variants two methods of transfer were combined. The name Moomintröll can be considered half-transcribed and half-copied, or half-transcribed and half-translated, as *troll* has the same form and meaning in both Swedish and English. Moomin-mamma and Moominpappa are both half-transcribed, half-copied,

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<sup>13</sup> Suomisankirja: *hosua*, *v.*

although the copied parts of the names are similar enough to their English equivalents to be understood by the TT reader. The name Snork is half-copied, half-transcribed, as only the removed definite suffix *-en* distinguishes it from the ST name. Snork Maiden and Little My are both half-copied, half-translated, although the copied parts of the names could be difficult to relate to in the TL, particularly in the case of Little My.

The decision to partially copy a number of the names from Swedish to English clearly reflects the linguistic similarities between the languages. Swedish words such as *mamma* and *pappa* are completely understandable in English, while other words, e.g. *sniff* and *troll*, are identical in the two languages. As a result, the English variants of the names tend to look similar to the original names. In the case of Sniff, the name could be either classed as copied or as translated, as the result would not change. Yet, while many of the English variants look similar to the Swedish names, in certain cases the choice to keep the form close to the original may end up puzzling the reader. The name Little My undoubtedly leads to confusion regarding its pronunciation. Additionally, since the Greek grapheme is known as *mu* in English, the TT reader is faced with a name that, unlike the original, has no semantic meaning. A similar problem with pronunciation is present with the name Joxter. If the English name is pronounced 'Joke-ster', it has similar connotations as the original name Joxaren. However, if the <o> in Joxter is pronounced with [ɔ] or [ɒ], the transcribed name no longer shares any semantic traits with the ST name.

In the cases of the names Filifjonkan and Lilla My, which are less obviously semantically loaded, their meanings may have gone completely unnoticed by the English translators. The translators may have regarded these names simply as whimsical, completely disregarding the possibility of any semantic meaningfulness and deciding to only adjust the names slightly for the TT readers. On the other hand, it is also possible that the English translators feared that imposing great changes on the character names would result in too extensive domestication of the TT.

In comparison to the English translators, the Finnish translators have introduced more drastic changes when adjusting the names for the TL. As Swedish and Finnish are unrelated languages, translation and transcription of the ST names into Finnish usually renders the names substantially different in form. The biggest exceptions to this are the names Muumimamma and Muumipappa. Retaining the Swedish *-mamma* and *-pappa* in these Finnish variants indicates that the translator has been very certain of the TT readers' basic understanding of Swedish.

The study clearly demonstrates that both the English and Finnish translators of the *Moomin* books preferred the methods of translation and transcription. Substitution and copying were the least utilised methods, with no names being copied into Finnish and no names being substituted in English. Copying directly from Swedish to Finnish would be very challenging, as the languages are unrelated, and most copied Swedish names would look very foreign to a Finnish reader. On the other hand, substitution of Swedish names is less likely to occur in English, as the names can usually be rendered native-looking to the TT reader through transcription or half-copying.

While the English variants often look very similar to the SL names, the study indicates that the semantic meanings and connotations of the original names are usually preserved better in their Finnish variants. Completely translating Lilla My into Pikku Myy results in the name retaining the meaning, the pronunciation, and the connotation to the Greek grapheme in the TL. Additionally, the impact of interaction between Finnish and Swedish speakers in Finland is particularly visible in the semantic closeness between the names Joxaren and Juksu. As the name Joxaren derives from a Finland-Swedish dialectal word, it has easily been transcribed into Juksu in Finnish, thus retaining the connotations of the original name.

In relation to form and pronunciation the English variants are generally more faithful to the original Swedish names than the Finnish variants. It is, however, difficult to determine whether this is simply due to the fact that Swedish and English are both Germanic languages, or if English



translators are more wary of domesticating the translation through drastic changes of names. As Venuti argues, foreignising translation should be used particularly in English to resist cultural narcissism (Venuti 1995: 20). Domesticating translation may thus be considered a more pressing issue for English translators than for Finnish ones, and this may be reflected in how names are transferred into translated children's books.

Through the examination of thirteen character names from the *Moomin* books, the study has sought to provide an overview of the colourful spectrum of nonsense names created by Jansson. However, the present research has only begun to explore the myriad of interesting imaginary names that exist in Tove Jansson's universe. Furthermore, while there is still much left to discover in the names of the characters from the *Moomin* books, a substantial amount of work is also yet to be done on studying nonsense names in literature overall. Studies on imaginary names are few and far between, and works analysing these names in translation are even more uncommon. A great deal of translation theory deals with the translation of proper names, but completely imaginary names are usually overlooked. Citing Koskinen (1984), Bertills (2003) states that "the translation of invented names which are entangled in the overall language of the narrative or include language play are linguistically more challenging than conventional names" (2003: 196). Indeed, based on the research conducted in this study, the lack of works analysing imaginary names seems to stem precisely from how difficult it is to categorise them.

The findings of this paper suggest that research on imaginary nonsense names can be considered even more interdisciplinary than standard name studies. Because the reader has no existing connotations regarding nonsense names invented by the author, he or she has to be able to understand the SL of such names. However, the obscure meanings of names like Hemulen and Lilla My may go unnoticed even for the native speaker of the SL. Furthermore, the semantic meaning of an imaginary name can be tied not simply to a language, but to a specific dialect, as demonstrated by the names Rådd-djuret and Joxaren. Considering the difficulties translators face with such linguistically complex names, it is clear that the subject of nonsense names requires further study, and that additional attention needs to be paid to semantically meaningful names in the field of translation.

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