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The translation of children's literature in the South African educational context

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Abstract

Research on the translation of children's literature in South Africa is currently in its nascent stages. This study aims to provide a comprehensive descriptive overview of current practices in the translation of children's literature in South Africa, particularly against the backdrop of the educational context. It espouses a broadly causal view of translation, but also encompasses a comparative and process model (see Chesterman, 2000).

Translation is used to a significant degree in the production of children's books in South Africa. However, it is not clear exactly *to what degree* translation is utilised, nor is there any information available about *how* translation contributes to the production of children's books in South Africa. This study addresses these questions. Based on survey research among publishers, and the analysis of publishing data, it finds that there are significant differences between the ways in which translation is used in the production of children's books in the various languages in South Africa. Specifically, translation is used much more extensively in the African languages than in Afrikaans and English, with a correspondingly lower incidence of original production in the African languages. Furthermore, the educational discourse has a profound effect on the uses of translation in the production of children's books in South Africa. However, the educational discourse has a greater determining effect on the production of books for children in the African languages than in Afrikaans and English.

Theoretical discourse surrounding domestication and foreignisation is particularly problematic in the South African context, and findings from a survey among translators indicate that translators from different language groups have different opinions about whether children's books should be translated using domesticating or foreignising approaches.

The above findings broadly deal with the contextual dimension. They are concerned with how social, ideological and material factors and discourses affect the ways in which translation is used in the production of children's books in South Africa. At this point the matter of translation theory is introduced. It is questioned to what degree contemporary context-oriented translation theory manages to provide a satisfactory explanation of the South African situation. It is argued that polysystem theory and Toury's (1995) concept of translation norms provides some explanation of the translational dynamics evident in the production of children's books in the different languages in South Africa. However, some aspects of the South African situation do not neatly "fit" into polysystem theory, and some parts of the theory therefore have to be mediated or reconsidered, particularly utilising postcolonial and more ideologically sensitive perspectives, to satisfactorily account for the South African situation. This reconsideration leads to a conception of the relationship between translation and its context that is less binary and determinist, with a greater emphasis on hybridity and fluidity.

This contextual dimension of the study spills over into the textual dimension. All of the above contextual and process-oriented factors finally find their precipitation in actual translations. By means of close analysis of a sample of 42 (21 translations and their source texts) English and Afrikaans children's books intended for leisure reading and for

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educational reading, this part of the study investigates the norms evident in the selection of children's books for translation, as well as the operational norms evident from the translations. The key questions here are why particular texts are selected for translation, and how cultural markers in these texts are handled in translation. The analysis demonstrates that the selection of books for translation (preliminary translation norms) is dependent on contextual as well as textual factors, with ideology and function playing particularly important roles. These roles differ for different types of books, books of different origins, and books in different language pairs. In terms of the operational norms, translators' opinions about domestication and foreignisation do not necessarily correspond to translation practices. Rather than an exclusive, binary adherence to domesticating and foreignising approaches, analyses of the operational norms evident in translated children's books demonstrate a hybridised mix of domesticating and foreignising strategies, which vary according to the type of book, the origin of the book, and the language pair involved in the translation process.

Keywords

translation, children's literature, South Africa, educational context, publishing industry, polysystem theory, translation norms, postcolonial translation theory, domestication, foreignisation, hybridisation

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