

Humour and Translation
in Children's Literature
A Cognitive Linguistic Approach

To my daughter Marta

Sylvia Klos

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in Children's Literature
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Foreword

My adventure with children's literature in its original and translated versions started with the birth of my daughter Marta. Reading bedtime stories in Polish, English and Portuguese became a part of our daily evening routine and soon children's books in their great variety evoked the natural and deep passion in us.

I also got interested in developmental psychology, first of all to better understand my daughter and to have a good relationship with her, later I wanted to find out how children perceive reality surrounding them and how books can contribute to their psychological and linguistic development.

As humour is an essential element in literature devoted to young readers, it became a subject of my studies in relation to translation: I wanted to learn how humorous elements should be transferred from one language to another so that the translation would have the same or similar effect on its recipient as the original. Although research in the field of translation studies to certain extent provided some answers on the mechanism of translation, full understanding of translation processes was only possible by including cognitive aspects of meaning construction and reconstruction in the mind of author and translator.

The present book combines the results of my studies on developmental psychology, theories on humour, translation theories and cognitive linguistics with the special emphasis on the theory of mental spaces and conceptual integration. Gill Fauconnier and Mark Turner's model of conceptual blending serves as a basis for creating mental maps that can be used by translators as tools in translating humour, especially wordplays.

The book contains several examples of translating humorous elements taken from English children's literature (Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, Roald Dahl's *The BFG* and Francesca Simon's *Horrid Henry*) into

Polish and Portuguese in its European and Brazilian version with the use of mental maps. Cognitive aspects of translation are strongly emphasised, while translation theories and developmental psychology can be treated as a background for translation analysis and evaluation.

The book does not present a full account of the research in the field of children's literature translation studies, but, as it might be of some readers' interest, I decided to include some references on the subject at the end of this book.

Introduction

Translation means an ability to capture a highly complex process of meaning creation in a writer's mind, the meaning hidden in words, phrases and texts treated separately and as a whole. Translation involves understanding mechanisms governing operations in the writer's mind leading to structuring the meaning in the language system used by its speakers to communicate, convey knowledge, and express emotions. A translator, conscious of how the meaning is created in a source language, is able to recreate the meaning in a target language.

Translating humour requires specific capacity to recognise what are the circumstances that provoke laughter and what are the conditions that a given text/speech must fulfil to be considered funny by the humour recipients – the speakers of both source and target language.

Translating a text also means to make it understandable to a different language reader, the reader with different cultural identity shaped by his/her language perspective. In Umberto Eco's words, translation is "saying almost the same thing" in a different language (Eco 2005: 7), the translation means transferring a text into a new cultural environment.

A translated text is made understandable to a reader if a translator knows the cognitive capacities of the reader group the text is directed at. It is especially important in case of translating literature dedicated to children. Young readers constitute a group of literature recipients that calls for special attention due to their needs and expectations as to the content and language used in children's books.

The objective of this monograph is to present a translation procedure that responds to the requirements mentioned above and that can be applied in translating humour in children's literature, with the special focus on translating wordplays, funny phrases and proper names.

Chapter One deals with cognitive aspects of meaning creation in mind: categories, metaphors and blends are treated as basic components in structuring and organising knowledge resulting from linguistic and non-linguistic experiences with the world. Mapping thoughts is a key process in discovering a potential meaning in a text; it also serves as a way to visualise how the meaning is created, what are its constituent parts and how they are interconnected. Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner's theory on conceptual blending, their basic diagram displaying the process of blend construction, shall be used as an integral part of the translation procedure based on mental map analysis discussed later in the book.

Chapter Two provides a brief account of superiority, incongruity and relief theories on humour together with their most significant assumptions. It also gives an insight into developmental psychology (Jean Piaget) with the special attention paid to stages in development of children's appreciation of humour (Paul McGhee).

Chapter Three describes in detail a translation procedure in which conceptual blending (Gilles Fauconnier, Mark Turner), skopos theory (Hans Vermeer, Katharina Reiss, Christiane Nord), the concept of semantic dominant (Stanisław Barańczak) and psychological functions of children's literature (Bruno Bettelheim) together with the research findings on developmental psychology within the field of humour studies (Paul McGhee) give origin to a new method of translating humorous texts dedicated to children. The procedure is founded on mental map analysis of humorous text components (wordplays, funny phrases, and proper names) that enables a visualisation of crucial semantic and phonetic layers of the components to be preserved in translation. The mental map analysis also takes into account a general knowledge on the literary work (cultural and social aspects, author's biography, etc.) in which the humorous text components are incorporated and it shows how it influences the final outcome of the translation.

In Chapter Four various cases of implementation of the translation procedure based on conceptual blending are discussed. Mental maps are used to analyse humorous text components such as wordplays in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, humorous phrases spoken by the Big Friendly Giant in Roald Dahl's *The BFG* and funny proper names invented by Francesca Simon in *Horrid Henry* series. Mental map analysis serves as a point of reference for reconstruction of humour in Portuguese (both European and Brazilian versions) and Polish translations.

Conceptual blending theory applied in translation of humour in children's literature sheds a new light on the analysis of translation process in which a writer, a translator and a young reader are active agents in meaning construction, reconstruction and interpretation. Mental maps enable a thorough analysis of the thought paths followed by each of the agents on their way to recognise and appreciate humour.

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