
Oittinen, Riita. *Translating for Children*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. 2000. 205 pp.

Translating for Children, by Riitta Oittinen, a Finnish author and translator, covers a subject not commonly mentioned in translation studies: translating for children. Oittinen divides her book into six chapters in which she introduces the topic of children's translation, explains how readers perceive texts, discusses authority within the text, examines the various definitions of children's literature, provides examples of children's literature and translation, and in the last chapter stresses the importance of translation for children.

In the first chapter of the book, "Beginning," Oittinen addresses the concepts of "child image" and childhood and how they affect translation, as well as the difference between translating for adults and children. Her idea of the "Child image" concerns the perception of childhood and is based on personal history as well as society's collective view of this early period of human life. Oittinen chooses to define "child image" and childhood "implicitly, according to whatever publishers or authors or translators *think* of as children." She proposes that the main difference between children's translation and adult translation is that children's books contain more illustrations and are intended to be read aloud. One problem the children's translator faces is the dilemma of whether to convey the original text as faithfully as

possible or to ensure that the translation contains the same oral qualities of readability. "If we simply aim at conveying 'all' of the original message, at finding some positivistic 'truth' in the 'original,'" says the author, "we forget the purpose and the function of the whole translation process: the translation needs to function alongside the illustrations and on the aloud reader's tongue." One responsibility of the translator, according to Oittinen, is to contribute to the "aloud-reader's enjoyment of the story" by using punctuation to create a rhythm for the text that is pleasing to both the eye and the ear. Translators need to translate whole situations, which include the reading-aloud atmosphere of a story, the overall appearance of the text, and the meaning implied by the accompanying illustrations.

Another topic Oittinen addresses is the reading that the translator individually as well as for a future audience. Reading and translating are inseparable experiences since, in the act of reading, one translates the text into meaning. The translator has the responsibility of transmitting this understanding to people in the target language. The readers also act as translators when they attempt to derive meaning from the translated work. Each time a text is read, readers incorporate individual

hopes, dreams, fears, views of life, and identities based on their understanding of it. Oittinen says "a reading experience is dialogic and consists not only of the text but also of the different writers, readers, and contexts, and the past, present, and future." Thus, the author, the translator, and the readers in their various situations, experiences, and time periods are intertwined in their understanding and interpretation of the text.

Oittinen also devotes a portion of the book to the issue of "authority" in order to "demonstrate the position of the child on the decision-making continuum" in determining what is considered literature. Unfortunately, Oittinen claims, children's literature receives a lower status than other literature because adults consider it less demanding. Adults create for children, and this creation is based on their own views of childhood as well as society's views over time, all of which may vary. In today's society many parents question what is suitable for their children's entertainment. Some people believe that it is inappropriate to shelter children from potentially negative outside influences such as television violence, while others disagree. Oittinen affirms that adults have authority over what they allow their children to experience: "Children's

literature as a whole is based on adult decisions, adult points of view, adult likes and dislikes.” Children themselves have very little say in the matter, and, precisely for this reason, it is important to keep them in mind when translating for them.

To help the reader better understand her subject matter, Oittinen examines specific examples of translation of children’s literature and of texts translated *for* children throughout the book. She states that “children’s literature can be seen either as literature produced and intended for children or as literature read by children.” For example, a book written for adults may become, once translated, a story for children. *Gulliver’s Travels*, by Jonathan Swift, is one such case.

Oittinen also discusses the concepts of adaptation and translation, which are on a continuum and thus difficult to differentiate. Translation is generally thought to be closer to the original text in literal meaning while an adaptation is retold in a freer manner. As an example of the connection between translation and adaptation, Oittinen examines the works of Tove Jansson (author of *The Moomins*) and Lewis Carroll (author of *Alice in Wonderland*), who have created adaptations of their

own books. According to Oittinen, this re-creation of a text is a form of translation. Translation and adaptation, she says, “are both forms of rewriting, editing, and collaboration, and drawing an absolute distinction between the two is quite difficult.”

Oittinen closes her book by stating that “collaboration with publishers is a key to progress in the field of translation, not only to improve translation in practice but also to further research on translation.” Oittinen believes that this collaboration can contribute to a greater regard for translation and also benefit the child audience if translators and publishers keep in mind a question that is asked throughout the book: “For whom?” Translators should think about their target language audience as well as define the child image to which they are writing. For the author, the children, who are the main readers, are the most important people to consider in the translation process. Oittinen concludes, “My focus in all of this is the children’s book written for the child by listening and responding to the wise and able child’s voice”.

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