

Writing and Translating 'Aloud': A Case Study on Reading-Aloud Children's Literature¹

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Abstract

In recent years, a growing interest has been devoted to literature, either written or translated for children, and the specificities of this literature. The present study was an attempt to explore one of the main characteristics of children's literature called reading aloud. Reading aloud refers to reading a story aloud to children in order to enhance their experience with education and entertainment through literature. Adopting a qualitative design, this study focused on analyzing reading aloud in one of Roald Dahl's famous stories called "Fantastic Mr. Fox" (1996) and its translation by Mahboobeh Najafkhani through a model proposed by Cay Dollerup (2003). The model explores four different layers (structural, linguistic, content, and intentional layer) to establish if the text is suitable for reading aloud or not. The four layers were investigated in both the authored and translated text and similarities and differences in each layer were established and compared in order to examine if the translation is as or more/less suitable for reading aloud than the authored text. Out of the four layers, only the linguistic layer yielded some discrepancies. However, the results obtained from the statistical analysis of the linguistic layer indicated that the translation is as suitable as the source text in the case of reading aloud. The upshot of the finding was that reading aloud is not a negligible aspect of literature written for young audiences, and translators can utilize creative solutions in order to make the translation as fit as the source text for reading aloud.

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Introduction

The first years of all human beings' lives are so fundamental in shaping them that "[society] tends to account for most of adult behavior on the basis of childhood experience" (Shavit, 1986, p. 3). One aspect of childhood experience is formed not only by the literature children read by themselves but also by the literature read to them aloud. Children's literature "have a long history around the world, and they have absorbed into themselves elements of folk, fairy tale, and the oral tradition" (Hunt, 2005, p. 4) and with each passing day, written and translated literature for these young audiences is becoming richer with new and fascinating ideas and drawings. This genre of literature comes with different purposes alongside being educational and entertaining and also has specific characteristics; however, "the marked tendency of translated children's books [has always been to bring them] towards 'acceptability' introduced by Toury 'domestication' introduced by Venuti, or, in other words, Schleiermacher's well known principle of 'bringing the author towards the reader'" (Alla, 2015, p. 15) resulting in manipulation of the source text and creating a different experience for children in the target culture. In order to avoid the discrepancies in translations, in recent years, it has proposed "'translating for children' rather than 'translation of children's literature'" (O'Sullivan, 2013, p. 455), which means taking into consideration how children feel about the story and its translation rather than just providing a comprehensible text for them.

One of the topics that has a pivotal role in translating and writing for children is the concept of reading aloud, which is sometimes used interchangeably with the word "Readability" in translation studies. Reading literature to young audiences is the first step to literacy and encouraging education and reading books among them and also providing them with life lessons in an engaging and amusing way. Existing research not only in the field of translation but in many other fields

like language learning recognizes the critical role reading texts aloud to children plays. In consequence, this study sets out to address the significance of reading aloud and explores this concept in a book for children called "Fantastic Mr. Fox" by Roald Dahl (1996) and its translation. This study aims to analyze the concept of reading aloud through Cay Dollerup's model (2003) in both texts and to examine if the translation by Mahboobeh Najafkhani in 2009 has changed regarding the topic under study. It is hoped that this research will contribute to the understanding of such a fascinating topic and draw the attention of more researchers and translators to itself.

Literature Review

The world of children is not similar to the adults'; consequently, literature written for these audiences has a world of its own without a specific definition due to lack of consensus on "specific thematic, stylistic or formal textual features shared by every book in this huge domain" (O'Sullivan, 2013, p. 451). Regardless of its definition, there are some specific characteristics that can only be attributed to this genre of literature. One of its noteworthy characteristics is "the unequal relationship that arises from the assignment of texts by adults to children" (O'Sullivan, 2013, p. 452), resulting in the double audiences of this literature, which means parents and family members are also considered as the primary audiences; hence, "in order for a children's book to be accepted by adults, it is not enough for it to be accepted by children" (Shavit, 1986, p. 37) and adults play a crucial role in production and consumption of children's literature. Furthermore, it is common knowledge that children's books "are of huge cultural relevance precisely because children's books are read by and for children, and such values and ideas are often passed on to future generations" (Alvstad, 2010, p. 25). When it comes to literature, the topic of translation is of interest as well; however, "serious critical interest in the subject of translating children's literature is a relatively recent phenomenon" (O'Sullivan,

2013, p. 451) and its translation involves “high degree of rewriting, abridging, adapting and other kinds of intervention” (Alla, 2015, p. 15). The reason behind these alterations is due to the difficulty of dealing with such an ambiguous genre of literature and sensitive audiences. In regard to this, Puurtinen (1998) stated:

When children’s books are translated, it may be necessary to make various adjustments in order to adhere to the notions of what is good and appropriate for children, as well as what is considered the suitable level of difficulty in a given target culture. (p. 2)

To add to the confusion, O’Sullivan (2013) mentioned: “not only must the wide variety of forms of children’s literature be considered when discussing its translation, but the different functions they fulfil are of equal importance” (p. 451). Nonetheless, recently, translations are targeting the main audiences of this genre and becoming more child-centered; in fact, “in the last two decades theorists are elaborating on the translation strategies with a focus on children as a target group and their reading competences and demands” (Alla, 2015, p. 17). Similar to authored literature, translations have specific characteristics as well. However, one essential quality that authored and translated children’s literature shares is the concept of reading aloud. This concept goes back to the oral tradition of literature, and “children’s literature meant for reading aloud has a (pre)history different from that of children’s literature meant for silent reading, for reading on your own” (Dollerup, 2003, p. 83). In this context, children are increasingly being interpreted as “comparatively inexperienced/unskilled readers” (Alla, 2015, p. 16).

One of the main underlying motivation for reading stories aloud was “urbanization and industrialization [leading to]... the middle classes...became a highly visible, increasingly educated bourgeoisie that took an active interest in the upbringing of its children” (Dollerup, 2003, p. 85). Since then, multiple studies have argued the benefits of reading aloud contributing “to young children’s vocabulary acquisition, oral language development, and positive attitudes toward reading,

which promote their acquisition of literacy" (Saracho & Spodek, 2010, p. 1380). As a consequence, in today's world, "literature for children is frequently written to be read aloud" (Alvstad, 2010, p. 24), and "children's books are read aloud not only by adults but also by children themselves" (Puurttinen, 1998, p. 2). Regarding reading aloud, some common features of children's literature are "sound, rhythm, rhymes, nonsense and word play" (Alvstad, 2010, p. 24) which allow the text to be read more fluently and be catchier. Also, it should be borne in mind that "the sensual dimension of the spoken word is part of that performance" (O'Sullivan, 2013, p. 454) when it comes to reading a text aloud for children. Dollerup (1999) believes reading aloud results in a "'narrative contract' between the narrator and the audience: that is, an agreement that a tale with a beginning, a middle, and an end, is being told" (p. 28) and "if this 'narrative contract' is satisfactory to all parties, there will be requests for new ones and if not, there will be no more 'narrative contracts' between the narrator and the audience in question" (Dollerup, 2003, p. 83).

As noted above, reading aloud to children is an essential aspect of children's literature, and the translation should follow similar principles of reading aloud as well. If it does not, "the translation becomes less fluent and readable: [hence,] the translation loses its appeal" (Dollerup, 1999, p. 312). Reading aloud "sometimes force translators to choose between sound and content" (Alvstad, 2010, p. 24) and to "choose between familiar and foreign target models of children's rhymes and songs", resulting in a product that does not have the same appeal as the original. With respect to this point

The prime obligation for a translator of material for reading aloud is that s/he must do her/his best to ensure that the text will make for successful 'narrative contracts' in the target culture. This requires that the content of the translation be captivating and that—as just noted—the story reads fluently so as to be easy to tackle for people who read it aloud. (Dollerup, 2003, p. 90)

According to private correspondence with Cay Dollerup (August 20, 2023), “translators who are aware of the importance of reading aloud are more popular than those that translated slavishly. Popularity can be ascertained by reprints”. This statement can be backed up by two collections of “Danish translations of the tales by the brothers Grimm”;

The first one came out [in] 1982a and was basically a reprint of an old translation (from 1905). The next one (not discussed in my book) is from 1995 ... [and] it was definitely not a book for children: the German text had been translated word by word. The translator was a distinguished Danish philosopher and he had clearly been chosen because he was well-known and his knowledge of German profound. But he and/or his house editor at the prestigious publishing house did not take into account the orientation of the tales towards a child audience.

The publishing house had provided their Grimm collection with new illustrations. When they found out that the new translation did not sell well, they assumed that the illustrations were all wrong and within 2 years they issued a new edition with the same text but other illustrations. This edition also failed to appeal to readers (the grown-ups who would read aloud to children). So in the end the publishing house gave up the claim that this was a new translation. It was quietly taken out of circulation.

Generally, this statement demonstrates how important aloud literature is not only to children but also to the second audiences of these books, who are the adults in this scenario.

Methodology

Drawing upon the qualitative strand of research, this study attempted to examine and compare the topic of reading aloud in authored and translated children’s literature. The data for this research were compiled from a children’s book by Roald Dahl called “Fantastic Mr. Fox” (1996) and its translation by Mahboobeh Najafkhani in 2009 with the same name as “آقای روباه شگفت‌انگیز”. Roald Dahl is widely known for his novels for children and their adaptations into movies and cartoons. The chosen book was also turned into a cartoon in 2009, and the

reason for its selection was that it represents an enjoyable tale of greed versus nature and portrays the dark comic nature of Roald Dahl's writings through play with words and rhymes, making it suitable for reading aloud. As the research demanded a bilingual corpus, the mentioned translation was opted for regarding the point that Mahboobeh Najafkhani is a famous children's translator with a long history of translating for children. She was awarded for her translations in 2004, and more importantly, she has translated other Roald Dahl's books, which is a sign of familiarity with the language of the source author and his specific way of writing.

The theoretical framework adopted for this research is based on a model of reading aloud provided by Dollerup in his book "Tales and Translation" (1996). Later on, in 2003, Dollerup revised the model and pointed out that "the model is simple and operates with four layers in texts which, despite some overlapping, allow for cogent discussion" (p. 87). The four layers include:

- The structural layer (textual order of elements, passages, and episodes),
- The linguistic layer (including words: wordplay and repetitions of words; sounds: assonance, euphony, and rhyme),
- The content layer ('facts', and points in the structural and linguistic layers which can interrelate for interpretations), and
- The intentional layer. (Dollerup, 2003, p. 87)

The structural layer is related to the introduction of new sentences, changes in chapters affecting the storyline, or changes in the order of elements by the translator. The linguistic layer is connected to the translation of the content and the text itself. Based on the Examples Dollerup has provided in his paper, the content layer is related to the translation of cultural aspects. Lastly, the Intentional layer refers to "an external meta-understanding of the text as related to human experience (ranging from morals to universal transitions in life)" (Dollerup, 2003, p. 87). The steps taken in this research proceed in the same way as the introduced method. Both the authored text and its translation were analyzed considering each layer, and at this point, the gathered data were compared to assess the reading

aloud in each text and to pinpoint their point of departure or similarity. Having done that and based on the statistics, conclusions were made.

Data Analysis

Following the methodology and the research purpose, data has been collected, segmented, and presented in four different parts: structural, linguistic, content, and intentional layer. In each segment, examples regarding the data found and analyzed have been mentioned, and complementary remarks have been made specifying what each layer means and why the examples have been chosen.

1. Structural Layer

The first layer is about the general changes in the structure of the story, which will affect the storyline and, consequently, the concept of reading the text aloud. Throughout the complete analysis, only one example for this layer has been found. On the first page of the source text, the main seven characters of the story were introduced with their names and a painting of them. However, all of the paintings and the names are omitted in the translation, and the book starts with the story rather than the pictures.

2. Linguistic Layer

The data gathered in this layer have been more elaborate. As stated in the methodology section, the linguistic layer consists of two subcategories, which are word and sound. The word subcategory consists of two different strategies, which are "Repetition of Words" and "Wordplay" and the sound subcategory consists of three strategies, which are "Rhyme," "Assonance," and "Euphony". When analyzing each subcategory and its related strategies comparatively in both source text and target text, three different conditions were encountered. In the first condition, both the source and target text have used the same strategy in both word and sound subcategory to enhance reading aloud. In the second one, the source text has incorporated the strategy, but the target text has not. In the third and last

condition, the target text has used the strategy, but the source text has not. The tables below are examples of each mentioned condition.

Table 1. Condition One: Same Strategy in Both ST and TT

No.	ST	TT	Subcategory	Strategy
1	Their names were farmer Boggis, Farmer Bunce, Farmer Bean.	اسمها آنها مزرعه‌دار بوگیس، مزرعه‌دار بانس، مزرعه‌دار بین بود.	Word	Repetition of Words
2	"Thirty-five" Boggis said. "I got thirty-six" Bounce said. "And I have got thirty-seven." Bean said. "That makes one hundred and eight men formed a tight ring around the bottom of the hill.	بوگیس گفت: «سی و پنج تا.» بانس گفت: «من سی و شش تا دارم.» بین گفت: «خودم هم سی و هفت تا دارم، که روی هم می‌شود صد و هشت نفر. باید بهشان دستور بدهیم تپه را محاصره کنند.»	Word	Wordplay
3	"Home again swiftly I glide, Back to my beautiful bride, She'll not feel so rotten As soon as she's gotten Some cider inside her inside."	«تند و سریع می‌رم خونه پیش زن خوب و نمونه وقتی از این معجون بنوشه حالش دیگه خوب خوب می‌شه.»	Sound	Rhyme
4	"Boggis and Bunce and Bean. One fat, one short, one lean."	بوگیس و بانس و بین رو نیگا! خیکی و خپل و خرپا رو پیا!	Sound	Rhyme, Euphony, and Assonance

Table 2. Condition Two: ST Has Applied the Strategy, but TT Has Not

No.	ST	TT	Subcategory	Strategy
1	The owners of the farmers have done well. They were rich men. They were also nasty men.	صاحبان مزرعه‌ها، آدم‌ها موفق و پولدار، ولی بد و مزخرف بودند.	Word	Repetition of Words
2	Badger was a great digger and the tunnel went forward at a terrific pace now that he was lending a paw.	گورکن حفار بی‌نظیری بود و حالا تونل با سرعت فوق‌العاده‌ای پیش می‌رفت و او حسایی کمک می‌کرد.	Word	Wordplay
3	They stopped and stared. They stood and gaped.	بعد ایستادند و به اتاق خیره شدند. از حیرت خشکشان زد و دهانشان باز ماند.	Sound	Assonance and Euphony
4	These horrible crooks So different in looks Were none the less equally mean.	هرسه خودخواه و بدجنس حقه‌باز و کلاهبردارن ریخت‌شون با هم فرق داره ولی کاراشون عین همه.	Sound	Rhyme

In the first example in Table 1, both the translation and ST have used the same repetition of the farmers' names, and in the second example, the author of the book has played with numbers as if a child is counting alongside the farmers. In the other two examples, although the rhyming patterns differ, the translator has tried to incorporate rhyme in the translation instead of translating literally. To shed more light on the subcategory of sound, assonance is a literary device in which the repetition of similar vowel sounds takes place in two or more words in proximity to each other, either in prose or poem, and euphony is more of a subjective concept and refers to pleasing sounds. In the fourth example in Table 1, there is the repetition of vowel and subjectively sounds pleasing.

The words "they," "were," and "men" are repeated in the first example; however, the three sentences are translated into one sentence, and none of the mentioned words are repeated. In the second one, "lending a paw" is a made-up idiom based on "lending a hand," which is transformed to suit the story, which is about animals. Nonetheless, the translation has omitted this wordplay, giving the text a monotonous tone. In the third example, "stopped" and "stood" have assonance and the source text has euphony that the TT lacks. The last example is part of a rhythmic poem in the ST, which, the TT again lacks the rhyming pattern.

Table 3. Condition Three: TT Has Applied the Strategy, but ST Has Not

No.	ST	TT	Subcategory	Strategy
1	"Very clever," said Bunce.	بانس گفت: «چه فکر بکری!»	Word	Wordplay
2	Down in the tunnel the foxes crouched, listening to the terrible clanging and banging overhead.	آن پایین، توی تونل، روباه‌ها گوشه‌ای کز کرده بودند و به سر و صداهای دنگ‌دنگ و بنگ بنگ وحشتناک بالای سرشان گوش می‌کردند.	Word	Repetition of Words
3	As deep as we possibly can.	هرچه گودتر، بهتر!	Sound	Rhyme
4	One for Boggis, one for Bunce, and one for Bean.	یکی برای بوگیس چاقالو، یکی برای بانس خیلو، یکی برای بین لاغرو.	Sound	Euphony and Rhyme

In the first example of Table 3, the translator has used a wordplay, which the ST lacks, and the case goes with the second example in which the TT has two different repetition of words, but the ST does not have any repetition. In the case of the third example, the translation rhymes and sounds pleasing, but the source text is a simple

sentence. In the last example, added adjectives have not only created rhyme for the TT but also created euphony, which the ST lacks.

3. Content Layer

The third layer is the content layer, which is not comprehensively explained in Dollerup's paper. Nevertheless, it can be realized that this layer refers to the cultural references in children's literature. The only example found in the chosen book for this layer is the hidden reference to the drinking problem of one of the farmers of the story and his wine cellar, which can be considered common in Western cultures. In the source text, the wine created and stored by the farmer is referred to as apple juice, and it is on the child reader or hearer to connect the dots and realize what apple juice and underground cellar mean. The translator has not changed any of the references to apple juice and cellar, and it is again on the children to understand the reference. Due to what was explained, no other cultural references have been added or reduced in the translation, and no further data can be analyzed regarding the content layer.

4. Intentional Layer

The last layer is about the meta-understanding of both the authored and translated text in relation to one another. It means that if there had been a change in the mentioned layers when comparing the translation with the source text, then the understanding of the content of the text might differ. This story is trying to teach children about the importance of the ecosystem and the poor traits and cruelty of human beings in an enjoyable but cunning way of Mr. Fox and as the translator has followed the footsteps of the writer except in some cases in the linguistic layer, then the intentional layer has remained intact.

Result and Discussion

This study was set out with the aim of assessing reading aloud in one of Roald Dahl's books and its translation into Persian using a model proposed by Cay Dollerup (2003). This model works on four different layers, and each layer was analyzed; however, the results highlighted that three (structural layer, content layer, and intentional layer) out of four of these layers remained intact, and the translation has minimal deviations compared to the source text regarding these layers. The only layer that provided fruitful results was the linguistic layer. A closer look at the data from the linguistic layer indicates that regarding the word subcategory, the frequency of using the two strategies of wordplay and repetition of words is 29 and 34 for the ST and TT, respectively. In the case of the sound subcategory, the frequency of using the three strategies of rhyme, euphony, and assonance is 18 and 17 for the ST and TT each.

In the source text, %46.1 of the total number of strategies which were at work were related to the word subcategory and %51.4 to the sound subcategory. In comparison, in the translated text %53.4 of the total strategies which were at work were related to the word subcategory and %48.6 to the sound subcategory. The subtraction of the two data related to the word subcategory (53.4-46.1) shows that the target text has used word subcategory strategies meaning wordplay and repetition of words %7.37 more than the source text and in relation to the sound subcategory (51.4-48.6) the target text has used strategies of this subcategory meaning rhyme, euphony, assonance %2.8 less than the source text.

Conclusion

The thrust of this research was directed toward analyzing the concept of reading aloud in translated and authored literature for children. The evidence from this case study implies that there have been minimal dissimilarities between the book written by Roald Dahl and its translation by Mahboobeh Najafkhani. The analysis

of the linguistic layer confirmed that there are differences in the case of the strategies used to make both texts pleasant while reading aloud. However, the statistical data demonstrated that broadly put, the translation is as suitable as the authored text when read aloud. Taken together, it can be assumed that the translator has used strategies related to word subcategories in order to compensate for the rhyme and other aspects of the sound subcategory. The impact of this study lies in the fact that although translating children's literature might have been considered a challenging job due to the wordplays, rhymes, and cultural aspects, it is possible to produce a translation that takes all these aspects into consideration and creates a delightful and entertaining experience for the children in the target society. To extend the knowledge of reading aloud, further research on various forms of children's literature and their translation and the strategies used by the authors and translators is deemed desirable. It might also be of interest to directly contact translators and enquire about the decisions they had to make in case of reading aloud. All things considered, reading aloud stories is an inseparable part of childhood experience, and the data has portrayed that translations can be in line with authored texts in creating this experience for young audiences all around the world.

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