



History of Children's Literature Translation in Turkey*

Türkiye'de Çeviri Çocuk Yazını Tarihi

Necdet Neydim¹



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¹İstanbul University, Faculty of Literature, Department of Translation and Interpreting Studies (German), Istanbul, Turkey

ORCID: N.N. 0000-0002-5708-6496

Corresponding author:
Necdet Neydim (Prof. Dr.),
Istanbul University, Faculty of Literature,
Department of Translation and Interpreting
Studies (German), Istanbul, Turkey
E-mail: neydim@istanbul.edu.tr

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ABSTRACT

The history of children's literature is a reflection of sociologic evolutions and developments linked with the evolution in the understanding children and childhood. The following article draws a historical trajectory of children's literature published in Turkey focusing on translated children's literature within the sociological evolutions of the time periods in question. Discussions include the effects of the way society views the child, state policies as regards education and translation, the prevalence of audio-visual media and the evolutions in children's literature in both the West and Turkey. Starting from the Reformation period of the Ottoman era, continuing with the new developments after the proclamation of the Republic and drawing a trajectory concentrating especially on the last half century, it aims to provide an understanding of the centrality of translation in the repertoire of a children's literature.

Keywords: Children's Literature, Translation of Children's Literature, the Child as a Consumer, Reformation Period, Turkey, Sociological Evolution

ÖZ

Çocuk yazını tarihi, toplumsal mercekte çocuğa ve çocukluk anlayışına yaklaşımın toplumbilimsel gelişiminin ve evriminin bir aynasıdır. Söz konusu çalışma, değinilen tarihi dönemler itibarıyla gerçekleşen toplumbilimsel değişimler ışığında Türkiye'de çeviri çocuk yazınının tarihi evrimini özetlemektedir. Toplumun çocuğa bakış açısı, çocuk eğitimi ve çeviri ile ilgili devlet politikaları, görsel-işitsel medyanın etkileri çerçevesinde hem Batı'da hem de Türkiye'de çocuk yazını ve çevirisinin evrimi üzerine odaklanılmaktadır. Tanzimat Döneminden başlayarak Cumhuriyet'in ilanından itibaren geçen dönemde, özellikle son elli yıla odaklanarak, çeviri çocuk yazınının çocuk yazını derlemindeki merkezi önemi ve etkisi anlatılmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Çocuk Yazını, Çocuk Yazını Çevirisi, Tüketici Olarak Çocuk, Tanzimat Dönemi, Türkiye, Toplumbilimsel Evrim



Introduction

The history of children's literature is a reflection of sociologic evolutions and developments linked with the evolution in the understanding of children and childhood. Looking at the historical process, it is clear that children's literature came to be a necessity resulting from sociologic evolutions. While evolutions in the understanding of children and childhood made the study and production of this field necessary in West in the 18th and 19th centuries as result of Modernisation and Enlightenment, in the Ottoman Empire this development occurred in the 19th century with a call for modernisation and reformation.

No scholarly work on children's literature was available until the end of the second half of the 19th century in Turkey. A new point of view as regards children, childhood and children's literature was developed with the start of the Reformation period. The Westernisation efforts of the Reformation Period changed the perspective on children and children's literature and education became necessary. This development coincides with efforts to catch up with western countries and the self-imposed developments in the Ottoman era. Enlightenment brought a different perspective from which to approach children; with this change in perspective came a new point of view. This in turn created a children's literature with a unique philosophy. The Reformation in the Ottoman Empire also followed similar currents of development and evolution. The fact that the novels *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver* were the initial works to be chosen for translation from among so-called children's literature may be viewed as an attempt to follow in the trajectory of western Enlightenment. Although the works referred to were not originally penned as either children's or young adult books, they are accepted as the first examples of children's literature in the Enlightenment period. These were also the first books translated in the Ottoman Era (Özkırımlı, 1987). Later, the works of the author Jules Verne were also translated as a result of the efforts to interest children in the core sciences.

During the Enlightenment period, didactic and moralist methods were embraced. An ideal child figure was concocted. These efforts continued for some time in order to mould children into adults according to the needs of the new society. This rationale, adopted from the West, was embraced in the Ottoman period and continued after the proclamation of the Republic.

In the Reformation period one of the most important developments was that children's literature was used to direct children towards and promote education; furthermore, there was no gender discrimination (Kür 1991). The didactic approach embraced in this new point of view established in the Reformation period maintained its importance and was further developed in the Republic period.

Children's Literature Translation: The Historical Process

Looking at children's literature translation from a historical perspective, it is clear that translation played a major role in the renovation efforts beginning with the Reformation. In previous Turkish literary traditions children's literature was based on a common oral literature

(i.e. fairy tales, myths) alongside adult literature. A separate genre of children's literature was not available at the beginning; thus translations of children's literature were used to fill this void.

Historians of Turkish literature widely acknowledge the impact of a European influence which led to the appearance of new genres in Turkish literature. The influence of French literary genres was prominent especially in the second half of the 19th century. Translations in the designated period played a significant role in that these works became impact tools for the creation of a new literature. In addition to this, starting with the Reformation and spanning the Republic period, there are many examples underlining the role of translation in enriching modern literature in Turkey. However, within this vast context, the most important period in terms of adult literature is the Reformation Period. It was during this era that translation held an embodying function. The same can be said of children's literature. The correlated interaction between translated literature and the literary polysystem in the stated periods has not been the subject of vast historical research (Paker, 1987).

Reformation, meaning re-organisation in the fields of administration, law and education ushered in a new era in the history of Ottoman Turkey with its reforms in 1839. The reforms of the Reformation period, resulting from modernisation inspired by the technological progress of the West, were official and conscious expressions of Westernisation. As a result of this, the changes noted in the literary polysystem from the second half of the 19th century onwards, were in the slow-going process of cultural evolution arising from Westernisation (Paker 1987).

Translation played an important role in this interaction. A look at the books translated reveals that the Ottomans were following in the trajectory of the development process of the West; even if this was occurring slightly late. Daniel Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), which implies that it is possible to govern the world by dominating courage and technique, was published in 1864. The work entitled *Hikaye-i Robinson* was translated by Ahmet Lütü. Jonathan Swift's novel *Gulliver* (1726), which displays that barren struggles and impatience results in despair and loneliness, was translated by Mahmut Nedim in 1872 and was entitled *Gulliver Nam Müellifin Seyahatnamesi*. The fact that these novels are the initial examples of translated children's literature may be viewed as a reflection of the enlightenment process of the West in the Ottoman Era. Jules Verne's books were also published in this period. *The Mysterious Island (Gizli Ada)* (1869), *Around the World in Eighty Days (Seksen Günde Devrialem)* (1889), *Two Years Vacation (İki Sene Mektep Tatili)* (1889) were translated by Ahmet İhsan Tokgöz. *Journey to the Centre of the Earth (Merkezi Arza Seyahat)* (1889) and *Five Weeks in a Balloon (Beş Hafta Balon ile Seyahat)* (1891) were translated by Mehmet Emin. There have also been examples of short stories, fables or adaptations from La Fontaine or other poets and authors translated both as poetry or prose by Şinasi, Recaizade Mahmut Ekrem and Ahmet Mithat Efendi (Koz, 1993). These works, published as a result of an increasing interest in European culture, industrialisation and the enlightenment processes, are evidence of an effort to create a new culture within a given society and furthermore, to educate generations in this new culture.

Translations in Children's Magazines in the Reformation Period

İsmet Kür's research of children's magazines spanning the publications for sixty years sheds light on the historical trajectory discussed. Kür, provided researchers in this field with a historical point of view, rather a historical trajectory by collecting children's magazines. His research focuses on translated stories, articles and the children's point of view. The fact that the writers of these magazines were leading writers of the Republic Era, which followed the period in question, is also underlined.

The publication of children's literature began in 1869. Translated articles were centrally important in this endeavour. A close study of said magazines reveals facts about how the society viewed and dealt with children, and the evolutionary phases it went through.

Furthermore, children's magazines reflected the evolution in social and political life. The problems of the country were reflected in children's literature. Children were taken seriously, the problems surrounding education were discussed and there was mention of women's rights. More than 200 magazines were published from 1869 onwards but their publication lives were short.

Like other magazines in the same time period, *Çocuklara Arkadaş*, (A Child's Friend), published in 1882, included articles on science and didactic stories. The first translations were published in this magazine, but they were not given much of a place; furthermore, the translator's name and the source languages of the material were not mentioned. Another magazine entitled *Vasıta-i Terakki* (A Tool for Development) published the story "Hırsızlık" (Theft). In 1896, another magazine *Çocuklara Mahsus Gazete* (Newspaper for Children) began publication. The publication included news from other countries and the Ottoman Empire; major events were recited. The problems of the country were discussed, art events were disseminated and even political news from abroad was conveyed. The cover of the magazine was published in French in the 297th issue (*Journal pour les Enfants*). This trend continued for a short while then stopped without explanation. The publishers of the magazine admired foreign ways, especially the French. Many of the articles were translated from French. The magazine *Çocuklara Rehber* (Guide for Children) provided information on physics and biology. The section entitled *Küçük Mektuplar*, (Small Letters) was translated from French. The names of the translators were also provided. A female writer and translator Leman (From Rasin to His Son) wrote articles to provide advice on choosing books to read. Ms. Leman was both the writer and the translator of the magazine. In the same period, the magazine *Çocuk Bahçesi* (Children's Garden) also included a story by Lui Bustar translated into Turkish. The translator was Ali Ulvi. The writers contributing to the publication were: Tevfik Fikret, Mehmet Emin Yurdakul, Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın, Rıza Tevfik Bölükbaşı, Ali Ulvi Elöve, Raif Necdet. These authors continued to be influential figures in literature in the Republic period.

The magazine in question was published in Thessaloniki and although it published translated articles there was no avid display of admiration for foreigners; it was closed down by the government of the period. *Arkadaş* (Friend), published in 1913, contained an article Fenelon

translated into Turkish. The magazine lamented the lack of children's literature in Turkish. There were references to the works of Hugo and Le Martin. The magazine *Çocuk Dünyası* (The Child's World) included complaints on the lack of books appropriate for children; the fact that Tolstoy wrote for children was mentioned. It was underlined that children could benefit from reading French, German, English and Russian literature but due importance had to be attributed to national fairy tales. *Çocuklarımıza Neşideler* (Poetry for Children) by Ali Ulvi and *Çocuk Şiirleri* (Children's Poems) by İbrahim Alaaddin Bey provided examples of prose and poetry for children. The upcoming translations of *The Water Babies* and *Fairy Tales* were announced. The articles published in *Çocuk Dünyası* were collected in a book. *Gulliverin Seyahatnamesi* (Gulliver's Travels) was sold out. *Su Bebekleri* (The Water Babies) was published with a dual-coloured cover. The information mentioned above underlines the position of translation in children's magazines published in the Reformation period revealing how translation was used in the education process.

As can be deduced from the exemplified publishing activity, children's literature, which was practically non-existent until the second half of the 19th century in the Ottoman Empire, evolved with the impact of Westernisation. Local resources for the compilation of children's literature were limited to fairy tales, a segment of the oral literature that had grown extensively until said period. With this era of cultural evolution, the void was filled by translated literature.

Even-Zohar's theory defines the reasons for the centrality of translation from a sociologic aspect:

“Dynamism milestones in polysystem, creates historical moments which are no longer valid for a new generation. In these moments, translation can be promoted to centre even in the literary-positioned literatures. This situation is valid especially in milestones when there is not any acceptable example among the literary materials and as a result it creates a literary space. In such a space, as it is easier for foreign examples to get into local literature, translation can be promoted to central position.”

In line with Zohar's analysis, in the period summarised, translation of children's literature was promoted to a central position because of the lack in the resources necessary in creating a modern literary society.

Children's Literature translation in the Republic Period

Even-Zohar states that:

“When translated literature is in the centre, it takes part in the formulation of the centre of the literature actively. In such situation, translated literature is a part of innovative forces and if it is in this position when important events take place in the history of literature, it can be identified with these events. “Identification” means: Thereby is not any significant difference between authentic and translated works and the most important translators were foremost authors or the forerunner authors, wanting to be one of the foremost authors. In addition to

these, while new literature brings out literary examples, translation may become one of these examples, improving these new examples.” (Paker 1987)

Even-Zohar's analysis is a reflection of the condition of children's literature in the period studied. Translators in the Reformation Period, contributing to the literary polysystem with translation, and thus pioneering the modernisation process, were also the prominent authors of the studied period.

The interest in children's literature intensified in the Republic period. In this period, as opposed to the Reformation period, Westernisation efforts were rooted in a state ideology. The practice of translation intensified and was supported as a state ideology in this single-party era. It is widely accepted that in the first decades of the Republic era intense efforts were spent to realise the aspirations of the Reformation period.

The prestigious authors of the Reformation Period continued on as the leading authors of the Republic period. Although an aspiration for the acquisition and enculturation of western culture was a central endeavour in the first decades of the Republic, children's literature translation did not continue to be a central issue of concern. In the said period, authors mainly tried to produce original pieces of literature. However, as western culture dominated the literary works in question were also 'translations' in the sense that they were composed mimicking the repertoire of the West. The translation of the classics began after 1945. This had a substantial impact on children's literature, as children's classics were also translated after the 1950s. This was also a reflection of the evolution process that was inherently dominating the world. But, in the Turkish case this development cannot be evaluated as a direct reflection of the global trends of the time. While in West all of the preconceptions of past periods were questioned, the translation of the books reflecting these may be viewed as an effort to keep up with the historical process.

Children's Literature between 1960-1990

An overview of the 1960-1990 period reveals that the most frequently published volumes were children's classics. The 1960s brought on a breakthrough in the field of publishing. Various books by the same author or by different authors were translated. However, the new additions to the translated works repertoire were relatively few when compared with the number of classics translated. In the 1960s, the number of re-publications of books by the same author or previously published works reached four hundred. The situation and the trends did not change in the 1970s. The number of books translated in the 1960s was high, but the number of the newly translated books was relatively few. Furthermore, there was a decline in the number of translations in the 1970s. Though there were efforts to support Turkish authors in the writing of original works and though many did write books specifically aimed at children, this trend did not last long. One of the most important developments in the 1970s was a prevailing tendency to publish translation, adaptations and original works advocating or

embodying leftist ideology. Turkish authors such as Aziz Nesin, Ülkü Tamer, Erdal Öz, Erol Toy, Demirtaş Ceyhun, Abbas Cılga, Rifat Ilgaz, and Fakir Baykurt, who were renowned for their literature for adult readers, wrote books for children in this period. This was envisioned as a way in which a Turkish children's literature repertoire could be enriched.

Tarık Dursun states that:

“The idea of prominent authors writing children's literature was initiated by Milliyet publications. In that period we asked all of the famous authors, who had never thought of writing for children, to try to write children's books for Milliyet publications which was founded in 1970” (Metis Çeviri 1991 Spring)

Dursun's efforts were not enough to hold the interest of these authors in children's literature. Thus the practice dissipated.

Changes in Children's Literature Translation after the 1980s

The publication of the classics continued after the 1980s. The publishing houses, interviewed by the author in reference to this period, were adamant that they never encountered any difficulty selling these classics. As the books in question were approved by the representatives of the Board of Education, schools were major buyers. Also, since parents and teachers knew the content, adults would advise each other to buy these classics for their children. Before the 1980s, parents and teachers were forced to take precautions when buying and suggesting books for reading as strict ideologies were reflected in literature of the time and children's literature was also adversely affected by this trend. This trend among others was one of the reasons why classics became a natural choice for reading and continued to be published for so long. Furthermore, the belief that classics were still centrally functional in the educational system and provided knowledge as to the basics of this system was still prevalent. An example of this belief can be exemplified by the many prominent daily newspapers (i.e. Cumhuriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Hürriyet) that distributed these classics free of charge at the time. Some of these newspapers still continue this practice. This endeavour also points to the effort to prevent society from backtracking to old ways and actually stopping deviations from the then current prevalent ideologies. One other important sign seen in the period referred to is that classics were included in the List of 100 Basic Books prepared by the Ministry of Education. This actually created a 'repulsive impact' on the market. However, the interventionist translation strategies embraced by translators during the act of translation led to many losses of meaning and deviations from the originals. At the beginning of the endeavour the translated texts drew away from their original, intended meaning and actually embodied 'a different sense'.

In addition to these developments, there were other translations of various children's books in an effort to catch up with the times. An overview of the authors translated reveals that those producing works after the Second World War were preferred in this era. The authors in question were the forerunners of transformation in their own societies and had played a

crucial role in changing the children's paradigm in the literature of the time. Peter Haertling, Christine Nöstlinger, Roald Dahl, Astrid Lindgren, Gossinny Enid Blyton, Erich Kaestner, Samet Behrengi, Francesca Simon, Alice Mead, Per Olov Enquist, David Almond, Asa Lind, Michael Ende, Angela Sommer Bodenbug, Max Von Der Grün, and Janosch were some of the modern authors whose works were translated into Turkish.

Until the 1950s, the basic drive behind western children's and young adult literature was to provide an ideal figure for the child to identify with. This role would be adopted unconsciously. However, after the war the educational system and literature and thus the understanding of children's literature was questioned yet again. This resulted in didacticism being abandoned in children's literature. Children's literature approached the reality of children with respect and made children the subject of the literature rather than the object. Furthermore, sociological criticism could also be reflected in said literature.

The Promotion of the Child as the 'Centre of the Family' After the 1980s:

After the 1980s, children were promoted to the central position in society. However, it was still not possible to state that children were perceived as 'a sociologic value' in the founding years of Republic. At this point children became 'the centre of the family' rather than the society. In addition, it was in this era that producers discovered that children were potentially a large 'consumer mass'. The developments in the infrastructure and production of mass media leading to an increase in the number of television channels promoted the notion and the approach that children should be served separately from adults. They were a different group of mass consumers in the eyes of the sector in question.

This view of children as consumers and initiatives to approach them as such within this context entailed perceiving them as a value. The growth of production and thus consumer activity ranging from clothes to toys was also reflected in literature.

Translation of Children's Literature in the Near Future

In the 1990s and the 2000s, the didactic viewpoint embraced hitherto did not change in the approach to children's literature translation. The typical child portrayed in existing works and the strict educational understanding of the 19th century were still dominant. However, this did not coincide with the current reality of the child. The insistence on the compilation of '100 Basic Books' since 2004, is a clear indication that classics are still dominant in children's literature. The basic factor for the continuation of this dominance is two-fold: the texts are open to ideological intervention and they sell on the market.

The egalitarian children's literature composed in the West in the 1970s was not translated and published in Turkish. Thus, this trend and approach was not reflected in Turkish literature as prominently. This lack created a void in children's literature. In the new society where audio-visual media is so common and the means for communication are so advanced and

prevalent, furthermore where it is impossible to draw a line between the children's world and the adult world, it was clear that it was no longer possible to impose certain figures on children by ordering them to fit into a mould. In the current situation, works intended specifically for children, displaying their reality and accepting their equality need to be presented.

This space referred to is filled by translated texts which are ardently consumed and in which the child is viewed as a consumer object. For as long as texts which have literary and aesthetic values are not published and the educational system chooses to ignore these texts, the consumer reading culture promoted and ruled by the audio-visual media is going to continue to be the dominant culture. In turn this process will lead to children being viewed and manipulated as easily induced and directed objects. Similar disadvantages are valid for the classics that are precluded from the critical reading process.

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