

The Use of Machine Translation in Children’s Literature: A Case Study on Robinson Crusoe Based on Children’s Opinions

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Abstract: Research on machine translation (MT) started before the discipline of Translation Studies was even named. Although MT lost its popularity as a research topic from time to time, it has been widely researched in the related literature over the last 20 years. On the other hand, children’s literature, as a discrete topic, has a similar research history to MT. This study aims to question the current use of MT in children’s literature and to explore children’s views on recent MT outputs of children’s literature. The present qualitative research used a case study methodology. Two Turkish MT outputs of Robinson Crusoe, published by Oxford University Press for children in 2000, were collected through DeepL and Google Translate. These two MT outputs were read by the participants who were four children aged 10-12. These participants were chosen by adapting the convenience sampling method. Their opinions about the translations of children’s literature were collected through in-depth interviews. The results of the study mainly reveal that the participants preferred the MT output of DeepL for a number of reasons, although they stated that they understood both MT outputs. In the current study, children’s preferences were shown to vary in response to fluency, the use of regular sentences, correct grammar, and punctuation in those MT outputs. In addition, it was uncovered that the older the participants got, the less their need for visuals existed while comprehending the texts. As a result, it was observed that the MT output of DeepL offered promising translation solutions in the genre of children’s literature in the Turkish-English language pair.

Keywords: Translation Studies, children’s literature, children’s literature translation, machine translation, Robinson Crusoe

1. Introduction

Today, children’s literature can be identified basically as “the products for children from early childhood until they complete their puberties” (Sever, 2017, p. 17). Nevertheless, there is a great contrast within the concept that the aforementioned products are produced by mature people such as writers, translators and editors. Then, a grownup chooses and buys these products for children. Oittinen (2000, p. 41) points out this contrast by stating, “anything we create for children—whether writing, illustrating, or translating— reflects our views of childhood, of being a child”. By taking into consideration that children’s literature and children’s literature translations include only adults’ touch, it may cause a problem to hinder children’s attractions to these literary works and/or translations. The present study aims to investigate children’s views on children’s literature translations from different angles.

The research on MT dates back to the years before the discipline of Translation Studies was even named (Çetiner, 2021). Although MT has lost its research popularity from time to time, investigating

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MT has been a continuing concern in Translation Studies for the last 20 years. Also, children's literature, as a discrete topic, has a similar research background to MT and has not been studied relatively in depth. In a similar vein, there is scarce research on raw MT output in children's literature. Besides, the related literature lacks the studies which focus on children's opinions on MT outputs with open-ended interview questions which may reveal children's opinions that adults do not think or give a chance in any subject. As pointed out in Oittineen's quotation above, adults who compose children's literature create texts relying on their own childhood, so open-ended interview questions might play a vital role in specifying children's desires or expectations. Filling this research gap may be significant for children and translators in terms of accessing more appropriate MT outputs. Initially, it is expected to figure out what children expect from translation and what details they pay attention to in a translated text. On the other hand, children's preferences of MT outputs and their reasons behind choosing certain MT solutions may help machine-translated children's literature improve. In this way, the quality of MT outputs would be better in the future. The findings of the present study might affect the translator's perceptions of children's literature in a positive way. The engineering teams behind MT software may give an additional concern and shape the systems by considering the children's point of views.

This study aims to question the current use of MT in children's literature and to explore children's views on recent MT outputs of children's literature. Four children aged between 10 and 12 years in Sakarya, Türkiye were selected through convenience sampling. Their feedback on two outputs of MT produced by Google Translate and DeepL were taken. And the data from those children were collected with in-depth interviews in 2023 by obeying Seidmann's proposals (Seidmann, 2006). First interviews and second interviews were combined due to the efficient use of time. When the first interviews focused on the participant's interest in the context of the study, the second interviews consisted of seven open-ended questions about the above-mentioned MT outputs. As a final step in the data collection procedure, the participants were asked to read the transcriptions of the interviews and edit them if needed. Ultimately, the transcriptions of the interviews were analysed manually by the researchers. Research questions in the present study are listed below:

- 1-Which of the two translated texts do children prefer and why?
- 2-Did children feel that there was a lack of visuals or pictures in these translations?
- 3-Do children think that visuals or pictures would help them understand the text? Why?
- 4-In general, which text(s) were children able to understand?
- 5-In general, what would children like to see in translated children's books?

After the introduction section, literature review is presented in two sub-sections, which are: Children's literature and translation, and MT and children's literature. The next section covers the methodology in which data collection procedure, data analysis procedure, and validity and reliability of the study are displayed. The following section deals with the findings and discussion related to the paper's research questions. Finally, the conclusion section is presented, together with recommendations for further research in the field.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Children's Literature and Translation

Before referring to the translation of children's literature, it would be efficient to define a key element again: children's literature. A simpler and shorter definition of children's literature than the previous one in the introduction is "children's literature can be seen either as literature produced and intended for children or as literature read by children" (Oittineen, 2000, p. 61). This definition may be handled as efficient due to the general framework of the term. To consider the fundamental dispute on the subject, there has been a conflict about whether children's literature exists or not. For some scholars, children's literature exists, but for some, there is nothing called children's literature. Zohar Shavit's Poetics of Children's Literature can be an example which supports the conflict. Shavit (1986) published

her book with a chapter named "Adults and Children in Non-Canonized Children's Literature". It can be interpreted that children's literature was not seen as a discrete branch of literature at that time.

In addition, "Translating Children's Literature: A Summary of Central Issues and New Research Directions" by García de Toro (2020) may give the general framework of children's literature. The article thoroughly covers a range of topics related to translating children's books, including important obstacles and areas for further study. The definition is still complicated since childhood is interpreted differently in disciplines such as education, sociology, history, and biology (Piaget, 1964; Piaget, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978; Erikson, 1987). Children are not the only ones who face and are a part of children's literature; parents, instructors, and editors are essential figures who help create, choose, and translate these works (Nodelman, 2008).

García de Toro (2020) defends the fact that children's literature covers multiple target audiences, which makes translating it highly challenging. Translations had better be adjusted to children's language and cognitive capabilities while also taking into account adults' preferences and criteria. This multiple audience dynamic is most noticeable in "crossover fiction," where both adults and children enjoy works like J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series. The conflict between domestication and foreignization strategies is a further major issue. While retaining these allusions enables children to acquire knowledge about different cultures, adopting foreign cultural references makes the book easier for them to grasp. For translators, keeping this balance is still a challenging activity. García de Toro's article touches on the sensitive contents that are referring to violence, sexuality, politics, or religion, which are frequently restricted or altered in order to comply with social standards and educational expectations; moreover, ideological manipulation is another common issue. The examples from history include translations from the Soviet Union and Spain during the Franco era, where the texts were ideologically modified to suit the goals of the state. Additionally, while translating children's literature, the relationship between text and images in illustrated books is crucial. Translators had better support their work with visuals that either reinforce or provide additional elements to the story. To fully comprehend the dynamics of text-image interaction, additional research is necessary.

Future study recommendations of García de Toro consist of examining the representation of female translators, the function and visibility of translators, and the influence of economic variables on translation choices. Analysing children's responses to translated literature also requires experimental research, such as eye tracking. Furthermore, it is critical to investigate normative norms in the translation processes further, including issues with content changes or omissions. The effects of new media formats—such as comics, audiobooks, and e-books—on children's book translation are still not thoroughly explored. In conclusion, the translation of children's books is a lively multidisciplinary area that benefits from perspectives from many different kinds of disciplines. By examining the functions of translators, audience responses and the impacts of developing media, researchers might fill in theoretical and practical gaps. The field of translating children's books is still developing as a scholarly and business endeavour, offering a wealth of chances for further research and creativity.

In addition to García de Toro's summary, Zhu and Guo (2024) carried out a study investigating a bibliometric analysis of 237 Web of Science (WoS) publications in children's literature within Translation Studies. As stated in the article; Spain, China, England, South Africa, and Poland are among the most productive countries, while the impact of South Africa's contributions is demonstrated by the fact that it leads in total citations. Wrocław University in Poland and North-West University in South Africa are notable at the institutional level. The majority of research has been conducted individually, indicating a lack of teamwork. Journals like *Meta*, *Perspectives*, and *MonTI* often publish in this field, and some of the most active contributors are scholars like Haidee Kotze and Yolisa Madolo. In particular, *Meta* has grown to be a vital research platform for children's literature translations.

The leading works are explored in the aforementioned article as well. With an emphasis on methods for translating proper names in children's novels, Christiane Nord's "Proper Names in Translations for Children: Alice in Wonderland as a Case in Point" has received the most citations. Similarly, by offering theoretical insights into the discipline, Emer O'Sullivan's writings have helped to bridge the gap between narratology and Translation Studies. English-Chinese is the most prevalent language pair, which reflects the language's dominance in both source and target language roles in 132 articles.

Particularly common study genres include picture books and fairy tales. In terms of research methods, the majority of studies are empirical, with the most common approach being observation.

2.2. MT and Children's Literature

The advances in MT not only paved the way for translation of business texts and technical texts in a short time but also created a new discussion pinpointing whether literary texts can be translated by MT software. In this regard, among many invaluable contributions to the MT literature, some studies have come to the forefront. Taivalkoski-Shilov (2019) emphasized that we need to approach the interference of MT on the translation of literary texts with some criteria, which are translation quality, voice in MT, and noise in MT from an ethical point of view. At this point, translation quality refers to the textual consistency in the target text and overall success of the transferred message into the target language. Voice in MT is more about the style and tone of the target text and the author questions to what extent the source text author's self-ness can be transferred into the target text. On the other hand, noise in MT refers to the complex and ambiguous tone of datasets feeding MT software.

Some studies in the literature tackled the use of MT in literary texts from the point of creativity. Guerberof-Arenas and Toral (2022) compared and contrasted traditional human translation, pure MT, and post-edited MT of a literary text, namely a short story, in terms of creativity. The results display that the highest creativity scores obtained from reviewers appear in human translation. In a similar vein, Corpas-Pastor, Noriega-Santiáñez (2024) investigated the degree to which idioms and altered multiword expressions can be translated creatively using neural MT systems. The obtained findings reveal that even though both DeepL and Google Translate performed satisfactorily, human translation outperformed them practically in every altered multiword expression.

Although plenty of research has blossomed in the field of using MT in literary texts recently, the case of using MT in the translation of children's literature is quite new in the field and there seems to be a visible research gap. Key issues in the translation of children's literature can also pose challenges in the MT outputs of children's literature. Saeed (2024) lists these challenges as follows: idiomatic expressions, cultural references, narrative style, and visual elements. From another point of view, Zhu and Guo (2024) pointed out that translation methods, ideology, censorship, and culture were among the most debated issues in the field but the effect of MT in translating children's literature were not in the list. Among the limited research examining the use of MT in translated children's literature, Baihaqi's (2021) study is noteworthy. Implementing a qualitative content analysis, the author compared the accuracy, readability, and understandability of children's storybook translations produced by human translators and MT. The findings of the study reveal that the lexical, grammatical, semantic, and stylistic versions produced by machine and human translations differ. These discrepancies arise from the inability of MT to accurately identify the situation's and culture's context, which is considered to be one of the drawbacks of MT. Also, it is highlighted that human translators cannot be replaced by such technologies. However, the output of MT can act as a pre-translation to speed up and improve human translation, resulting in more precise, legible, and intelligible target texts.

Vandepoele (2024) compared and contrasted human translation and MT in the case of Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* book in the English-Dutch language pair. In the study, 69 participants evaluated Dutch translations of two selected fragments, one of which was rich in the use of descriptive and imaginative language (Fragment A) but the other was more straightforward and factual (Fragment B). The case study was evaluated by 69 participants who were selected on the voluntary basis. Fragment A had higher ratings overall, indicating a significant difference in the fragments' perceived quality. There was no discernible overall preference between machine and human translations according to the quantitative research. Qualitative comments, on the other hand, focused on variations in idiomaticity, fluidity, and style; MT was frequently criticized for untranslated parts and less natural language, especially in the more intricate Fragment A. Notwithstanding these drawbacks, the study indicates that MT can come close to matching human translation quality, particularly when combined with post-editing by human translators.

Castilho and Resende (2022) examined the post-edited phenomenon by making use of "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" by Lewis Carroll and "The Girl on the Train by Paula Hawkins". The authors define the post-edited phenomenon as "the difference between the characteristics of human-translated texts and the post-edited versions, in relation to the raw MT output". In the study, both children's books were translated from English into Brazilian Portuguese by Google Translate in order to find out whether the post-edited features might be detected on the surface of the post-edited texts. Also, nine Brazilian professional translators participated in the study to carry out the post-editing service. The findings of the study generally reveal that post-edited was not observed with most of the features in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland but it was observed with most features in The Girl on the Train. Furthermore, it was uncovered that the post-edited phenomenon was manifested in the structure of the post-edited texts since there appeared differences between those and human translation versions. The study concluded that post-edited children's books have more commonalities with raw MT output than human translation versions.

3. Methodology

The current study adopts qualitative research as a method. Lune and Berg (2017, p. 12) identify this type of research as referring to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things. On the other hand, Creswell (2014, p.4) touches on similar points by stating: "Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem". The reason why the qualitative type of research is used in the study is to explore children's descriptions and views on the MT outputs.

Correspondingly, the researchers benefit from the case study strategy on the grounds that the research phenomenon may be studied with the strategy. Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 259) underline fundamental differences among qualitative strategies as "Researchers study individuals (narrative, phenomenology); explore processes, activities, and events (case study, grounded theory); or learn about broad culture-sharing behavior of individuals or groups (ethnography)". Yin (2014, p.4) identifies the case study as: "In brief, a case study allows investigators to focus on a case and retain a holistic and real-world perspective—such as in studying individual life cycles, small group behaviour, organizational and managerial processes, neighbourhood change, school performance, international relations, and the maturation of industries". To sum up, a case study is used in order to study children's perspectives on the MT outputs of a children's literature novel.

3.1. Data Collection Procedure

Firstly, the researchers have decided which children's literature book would be employed in the research. A well-known children's book was chosen due to its accessibility. Thus, Robinson Crusoe got the source text in the study. Then, the book was converted into a Microsoft Word document and uploaded to the two most common MT software (Google Translate and DeepL). The outputs retrieved from the MT software in Turkish were not edited. At this step, the selection of the participants was discussed. The researchers determined to study the children who they could reach, rather than a bigger sampling size. In light of this preference, the study benefits from convenience sampling as a sampling technique. The convenience sampling is basically identified as "sample relies on available subjects—those who are close at hand or easily accessible" (Lune and Berg, 2017, p. 38).

Four children aged between 10 and 12 in Sakarya (the city where the researchers and participants live) are the samples of the study. To apply ethical procedures, in September 2023, parents of the interviewees were asked for permission for their children to join the study and to sign the parent permission form. In the next step, the participants had time to read the raw Turkish outputs and had the right to put any mark they wished on the outputs. For further data in the study, the outputs were collected back besides children's opinions about the texts, and translation of children's literature were obtained via in-depth interviews in Turkish. Seidman's in-depth interview concept is introduced as "being interested in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (Seidman, 2006, p. 9). The in-depth interviews conducted in the present study consist of 8 questions as follows:

Can you tell us your name and age?

Which of the two translated texts do you prefer? Why?

How did you evaluate the translations? What influenced you when choosing between translations?

Did you notice any lack of visuals or pictures in these translations?

Do you think that visuals or pictures will help you to perceive the text? Why?

How did the problems in the texts affect your reading of the text?

In general, which text(s) did you understand?

In general, what would you like to see in translations of children's books?

The interviews were conducted with each participant in their homes, lasting approximately twenty minutes per interview. All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim by the researchers. One week after the data collection, the interview transcripts were returned to the participants for member checking. The participants were invited to review and revise their responses in the transcripts. In cases where the participants expressed hesitation or requested additional time, a three-day extension was provided. Data analysis commenced immediately after the finalized transcripts were collected from all participants.

3.2. Data Analysis Procedure

Transcriptions of the interviews were deciphered by the researchers. As a next step, they manually coded the transcriptions one by one. The raw outputs were checked, and children's drawings and notes were included in the codes. All these coding procedures were conducted by taking notes at the same time. The theme on which children mostly focused in the study was standard and regular language use. Fluency, regular sentences, correct grammar, and punctuation were some codes under this theme.

3.3. Validity and Reliability

Some validity and reliability steps that were recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 274) were carried out in the present research. First of all, researchers clarified their biases or thoughts about the research. Then, rich descriptions were given in the analysis procedure. In addition, each researcher checked the other's missions, such as transcriptions, codes and descriptions. In order to ensure the reliability of the findings, the researchers checked all transcriptions in the study and were sure that each description of findings did not have a shift. Ultimately, regular meetings were held and carried out among the researchers.

4. Findings and Discussion

This part of the study tackles the findings of the in-depth interviews carried out with four children in the sample. To give demographic information about the participants, three of them were female while one of them was male. While two of the participants were ten years old, one of them was eleven and the other was twelve.

To begin with the responses given for the first question, which examines the favourite translated text and the reasons behind, it is clear that all four children chose the target text which was produced by DeepL. The present finding explicitly displays future premises to be introduced by DeepL for translating children's literature. To delve into the reasons behind the preferences of children choosing DeepL as their favourite MT software, their answers vary. The most popular answers are as follows: the choice of words in target text, appropriate writing style, avoidance from repetitive words, fluency in narration, and adherence to punctuation rules. As seen from the mostly rated choices, children can feel the difference between readable and unreadable texts. Also, the aforementioned items are highlighted in terms of readability of texts in the literature (Flesch, 1979; Benjamin, 2012; Zamanian and Pooneh, 2012).

The second question in the interviews investigated how children evaluated the translated texts and what factors affected their decisions. At that point, most of the children stated that the tone of narrating in

the texts caught their attention. Besides, the following criteria were noted by the participants: linguistic accuracy of sentences, the repetition of some words, the appropriateness of words for their age, misspelling, fluency, and adherence to punctuation rules. The above-mentioned criteria seem consistent with the answers provided by children for the second part of the first question in the interview. Hence, it can be concluded that children made a conscious evaluation of the translated text.

The third question and the fourth one in the interview aimed to uncover whether children felt the lack of visuals and pictures while reading the machine translated texts and what possible drawbacks appeared at this stage. Here it was observed that different children displayed different viewpoints. While two of them stated that the translated texts with no visual aids were enough to comprehend the content of the texts, the other two claimed to have felt the need for visuals to better understand the translated texts. Particularly, the children stating a definite need for visuals in the target text focused on the descriptive function of visual aids (Feathers and Poonam, 2012) in children's books. For this question, the most noticeable detail was that the age of children seems a decisive factor shaping their answers since the children who were younger were more eager to see visual aids in the translated texts while the older ones did not feel that need. The present finding can be supported with the views of Desmet (2007) who discussed educational goals identified by translators to increase the number of literary works that children can access through translation.

The fifth question in the interview investigated how the problematic points in the machine translated texts affected understanding of children in the reading process. Generally speaking; mistranslation, ambiguity, inverted sentences, lack of coherence & cohesion, and the inappropriate use of grammar rules made the text difficult to understand for the participants in the study.

The following question of the in-depth interview examined whether the cited factors in the fifth question were big barriers for children to comprehend the general flow of the machine translated texts. Although some children noted that they had some problems putting meaning inside the texts in certain parts of the reading process, all children agreed that they understood both texts. On the other hand, all children in the study preferred the DeepL Translate output to the Google Translate output in terms of comprehensibility, fluency, and consistency in narration style.

The last question of the interview aimed to detect what kind of properties translated children's books should have from the perspectives of children. Although the participants in the study preferred different wordings in their statements, their ideas were centralized on the use of a clear narrating style, avoidance of ambiguity, enhancement of illustrations, and adherence to punctuation rules in the target language. Furthermore, one of the participants stated that translated children's books should not bore readers with similar sentences and excessive repeated structures. At this point, it can be concluded that children are conscious readers and their expectations should be taken into consideration in the translation process.

5. Conclusion

Translating children's literature has gained research interest for a long time; however, translating children's literature via MT software is a relatively new area in the field. The ultimate purpose of the present study is to detect children's ideas on the use of MT software in translating children's literature. The study adopted an in-depth interview method, which is a qualitative data collection method, to conduct empirical research. Four children participated in the study and evaluated two different MT

outputs of a children's book from different angles. Google Translate and DeepL were used as the sample software.

To give a brief summary related to the results of the study, DeepL generated promising translation solutions in the Turkish-English language pair for children's literature. Furthermore, when translating children's books for children aged between 10 and 12, it might be more appropriate for the future research to use the domestication, explication, and gloss translation methods. Although the participants claimed to have a general understanding of both MT outputs, the study's findings mostly show that they favoured DeepL's output for a variety of reasons. Additionally, it was detected that the participants' requirements for visual aids in translations decreased with age. The present study revealed that the children's choices varied depending on how well the MT outputs used regular sentences, punctuation, fluency, and accurate grammar.

Based on this research, it can be explored how children from various ages perceive translations of children's books and MT outputs in the further studies. It is also recommended that MT outputs of children's books be examined in detail by taking different language pairs into account, which is outside the scope of the present study. The translations of various children's novels can also be the subject of research. Last but not least, a separate study might focus on how children perceive translation methods.

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