

From Quidditch to Vâjthaṭ and Back: Translating Names from English to Romanian Across Time

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Abstract

This article looks at issues in translating names and activities in children's books from English into Romanian, using as a case study two different editions of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* - translated into Romanian as *Harry Potter și Piatra Filozofală* - from 2003 (Egmont Publishing), and 2015 (Arthur Publishing). The two editions highlight differences in approach to children's book translations in a period in which the Romanian environment has been intensely exposed to the English language and anglophone cultural elements. To understand the shift in approach during the period, an overview of translation theory will be presented, and a selection of names from the books will be analysed according to the chosen theory, after which a comparison between the two editions will highlight the differences in translation.

Keywords

Children's books, translations, translation theory, Harry Potter, culture, Romanian, English

Introduction

This article will look at issues in translating names and activities from English to Romanian in children's books, focusing on cultural shifts across time. It will try to establish why there are differences in translating names and activities from one decade to another and what impact this has on the local Romanian publishing environment. For this purpose, two editions of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* were chosen as a case study to illustrate how translations of names and activities have been approached in two different moments, in 2003 and 2015 respectively. This topic has been chosen to highlight the cultural shift toward globalisation in publishing.

Due to a lack of statistics about how many children's books in Romania are translated from English, I carried out search queries on the websites of the biggest bookstore chain (Cărturești), the country's biggest book retailer (Elefant), and some of the the websites of the top five biggest publishers in Romania (Polirom, Humanitas, Nemira, Arthur, Litera), and it resulted in a pretty clear image about how many children's books are actually translations from English. This can be explained from a historical point of view, through the fact that in Romanian culture, the West had always had a glorified image when it came to culture, with many of the Romanian writers and personalities pursuing higher education in countries in Western Europe. Even during the communist regime, there were Western books and films circulating in secrecy, and they added even more perceived prestige to the Western world. Eventually, with the fall of the communist regime in 1989, anglophone culture - through books, music, film - was freely accessible to the Romanian public, and it was so appreciated that a trickle of English words made their way into the Romanian language.

This could explain the Romanian market's voracity towards anglophone books, even if the cultural elements of the stories did not always have corresponding elements in Romanian culture. However, at least for children's books, at the beginning of the 2000s there were attempts at translations that sought to be more organic and which resorted to inventing new words to fit the Romanian language and culture, and, in some cases, there were great efforts in translating nonsensical names and activities in more understandable and relatable words and notions for children. This approach was characteristic of that period, yet with the passing of time and with the presence of the English language growing in everyday life, school and work, translations nowadays seem to have renounced, or at least reduced, the practice of creating name equivalents and adhering to the target language's culture and are more globalist and universal in approach.

These are the issues that this paper will be looking at, but first it is necessary to have an overview of some theoretical aspects of children's literature in translation. The following section presents an overview of the most appropriate theories for the purpose of this article. The next section of the article will look at the two editions of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* to see the differences in translation approach and find some possible explanations for this phenomenon.

Translation Theories

Many theories of translation have been postulated down the years, but the best fit for the purpose of the current paper are the sociocultural translation theories promoted by Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury, and the concepts of "foreignisation" and "domestication", elaborated by Lawrence Venuti. An overview of these theories will be presented below (Van Coillie and McMartin 2020).

Firstly, we turn to Itamar Even-Zohar and his "polysystem" theory. Prior to Even-Zohar's work, the focus of translation was on the internal context of the text. But in 1979, Even-Zohar postulated the polysystem theory, which shifted the focus of translation from a text-internal to a text-external focus. Therefore, instead of having a prescriptive approach to translation, now the focus was descriptive (Van Coillie and McMartin 2020, 12-13). Specifically, Even-Zohar defines the polysystem as "a multiple system, a system of various systems which intersect with each other and partly overlap, using currently different options, yet functioning as a structured whole, whose members are interdependent" (Even-Zohar 1979, 290). Essentially, this can be understood in terms of a translation taking into account the linguistic and cultural context of the target language.

Secondly, there is Gideon Toury, who postulated that cultural and historical "norms" influenced the translation strategies in the target culture. In the late 90s, Toury defined norms as "the translation of general values or ideas shared by a group – as to what is conventionally right and wrong, adequate and inadequate – into performance instructions appropriate for and applicable to particular situations" (Toury 1999, 15). This means that a translation (similarly to Even-Zohar's polysystem) needs to be aware of the cultural context of the target language and not just simply maintain a prescriptive approach. Toury's norms are also used to explain shifts in translation, which occur due to the shifts in the target culture (Van Coillie and McMartin 2020, 13).

Lastly, we look at Lawrence Venuti, who elaborated the concepts of “foreignisation” and “domestication”, which are basically two paths a translation may take. Foreignisation is when the translation ignores the target language context and the reader is brought to the text, while domestication is the opposite, meaning that the translation is adapted to the target language and, consequently, the text is brought to the reader (Van Coillie and McMartin 2020, 14). Venuti himself is an advocate for foreignisation, since it is through this approach that the original voice of the text is preserved and can thus be enriching for the target language through translation, while domestication is an “ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to the target-language cultural values” (Venuti 1995, 20). These will be the theories and concepts that will be applied in the case study further on, with significant attention to Venuti’s concepts, since they are especially relevant in the context of translating names and activities in children’s books from English to Romanian.

Research Questions and Methodology

The research questions of this article are:

- Why are there differences in translating names and activities in J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* from English to Romanian from one decade to another?
- What may be the causes for the differences in translation between the two editions?
- What impact does this have on the local Romanian publishing environment?

In terms of methodology, I have carried out qualitative research using two different editions of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* that have been translated into Romanian, one from 2003 (Egmont Publishing), and the other from 2015 (Arthur Publishing). I have looked specifically at character names and activities to identify which have been translated and how and have made assumptions on why they have been translated, but also which of these names have been purposely left untranslated. I have then compared the findings and offered an analysis of the shift in translation, with the help of the aforementioned theory.

Two generations of *Harry Potter*

There is no real need to introduce the *Harry Potter* books. The name is already globally renowned and will most likely be a part of our lives and for generations to come, having a large community of dedicated fans who gave rise to the “Pottermania” phenomenon, which spread throughout the world (Covaciu and Marin 2021). It has been more than two decades since the books found a place on our bookshelves, during which time they have been translated into 80 languages across the globe (Wizards World 2018).

In Romania, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* was first translated in 2003, by Ioana Iepureanu (not featured on the title page), and was published by Egmont Publishing House (which is no longer active) in paperback format, maintaining the original cover. This edition is of particular importance, since it had the most impact on the first generation of children who grew up alongside the book and its characters (myself included). The second edition of the book appeared in 2015, under a new translation by Florin Bican (featured on the title page), at Arthur Publishing House, in hardcover format, with a new cover.

Harry Potter 2003, a challenge

This edition appeared at a time when elements of anglophone culture were not as big a part of Romanian culture as they are now. Therefore, the translator had the difficult mission of being a sort of gatekeeper between the two cultures: to take the original story and make it understandable in the target language, keeping in mind the socio-cultural and extralinguistic contexts of the intended reader, i.e. Romanian children (Cosor 2016, 9). So, in this case, the cultural adaptation of the story was the most problematic aspect of translation, *Harry Potter* being abundant in English culturally specific names and plays on words.

Applying Even-Zohar’s polysystem theory and Toury’s norms with regard to translation, it can be argued that the target language context was of prime concern. While the majority of character names have been preserved from the original, some instances have been adapted. There are cases of literal translation, such as: Miranda Goshawk – *Miranda Șoimțimid*, Phyllida Spore – *Filida Spor*, Draco Malfoy – *Draco Reacredință*, Professor Sprout – *Profesoara Lăstar*, or Fang – *Colț*. Yet the majority of translated names and activities were conveyed in Romanian through either approximate translation, in cases such as: Privet Drive – *Aleea Boschetelor*, Newt Scamander – *Newt Salamandră*, Neville Longbottom – *Neville Poponeață*; or were completely changed into concept-names that are more sonorous, humorous, or simply make more sense in Romanian, such as: Voldemort – *Cap-de-Mort* (‘Skull’) (sonority), Bathilda Bagshot – *Smaranda Hocuspocus* (understandable), Arsenius Jigger – *Arsenius Otrăvitus*

(understandable), Adalbert Waffling – *Adalbert Clătită* (understandable), or Emeric Switch – *Emeric Vjyt* (sonority). To further emphasise the Target Text oriented translation strategy (Munday, 2016, 193) regarding names, many of them have been heavily altered in an attempt to translate the sense of the word. Some examples for this would be: Gryffindor – *Cercetași* ('Scouts'), Ravenclaw – *Ochi-de-Șoim* ('Hawkeye'), Slytherin – *Viperini*, Hufflepuff – *Astropufi*, Severus Snape – *Severus Plesneală*.

This translation approach of relaying the sense of the original word is mostly visible in the names of objects and activities. By far the most interesting one is Quidditch, which has been translated as *Vâjthaț*, which is essentially an onomatopoeic allusion to the sound the golden snitch makes (*vâjt*), and the action of catching (*haț*). Regarding the famous spells, the majority have been retained as such, with the exception of Wingardium Leviosa, which was translated into *Hocus-Pocus Preparatus*, a generic phrase used for magic in Romanian.

By applying Venuti's norms, it is clear that for this edition of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* the domestication approach was heavily used, with many of the names adapted to fit the target language's cultural context. This could be explained through the fact that at that particular moment (early 2000s), the anglophone influence was not as strong and Romanian children were not so exposed to the English language, and therefore could not relate to the story if the characters, objects and activities were difficult to read and understand.

Harry Potter 2015, a more faithful approach

We now turn our attention to the second edition of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. The translation rights for this edition were taken over by Arthur Publishing after Egmont Publishing ceased to exist and the rights became available. This edition was an entirely new translation, more aware of the shifts in culture that occurred in the Romanian context in the preceding decade, in the sense that it was now more permeable by anglophone elements with regard to names, activities and concepts. Furthermore, the movies and the variety of merchandise which became available in Romania made the Harry Potter universe largely known by children, and a strong adaptation would not have been as well received.

Therefore, the new edition of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* retained the original character names, since there was no longer need for them to be introduced in the target language because the movies had already been popular at the time of publication. This is also true for the Wingardium Leviosa spell and Quidditch, which have been retained as such. There is one exception, though: Hedwig translates into *Hedwiga*, signifying the feminine gender, possibly to make clear that the owl was female (since the majority of female names in

Romanian end in the letter *a*). Nevertheless, some names have been revised and adapted, either to fit the play on words into Romanian, to retain the sonority of the original word when translated, or simply to find a more fitting translation. For example, Diagon Alley became *Aleea Tor*, which means “random”, but resembles the original English form; quaffle is now *coafă*, which although has a meaning in Romanian that cannot be linked to the sense of the original word and is closer to the English pronunciation; and the golden snitch, *smici de aur*, is a nonsense word that is similar in sonority with the original. Lastly, The Mirror of Erised is now translated as *Oglinda lui Etnirod*, together with the inscription, making use of the backwards reading artifice, as opposed from the 2003 edition which retained the original name and inscription.

It is clear that the translation approach of this edition of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* is rather on the prescriptive side, because now the need for relatability is not as stringent as it was in the previous decade. Furthermore, the approach in translation for this edition is that of foreignisation, to apply Venuti's concepts, because now the reader is brought to the text and confronted with it to a greater extent. Even if there are some minor adaptations in translation, the majority of the source text names are retained.

Findings

With regard to the question of why there are differences in translating names and activities from one edition to another, it becomes clear that this can be explained through the fact that the translations were made in different decades, which, through their context, heavily influenced the translation approach. The first edition appeared in a time where domestication was necessary, due to the need for adapting anglophone concepts into the target text in order for children to better understand the story. The second edition did not face this challenge, because enough time had passed so that English cultural elements were more present and understandable in the Romanian cultural context, and this would be a reason why foreignization was the preferred approach. This latter edition was also helped by the fact that the movies were already well known at the time, and since in Romania movies are subtitled rather than dubbed, there was no longer the need for translating character names because they were already known in their original form.

Both editions are unbounded translations: total translations that aim to translate grammatical and lexical structures of the source text into equivalents in the target language (Nagy 2020, 187). This means that they both are descriptive in their approach and take into account the different elements that make up the cultural systems of the target language. However, I would argue that the 2015 edition is more on the prescriptive side, since it no longer needed

to carry over that much of the source text into the target language, due to the already present influence of anglophone culture on the Romanian cultural context.

Lastly, regarding what impact does the shift in translation bare in the local Romanian publishing environment, I would argue that the adoption of anglophone culture is beneficial, because translations of children's books can now stay truer to the original texts, and therefore the stories no longer need to be heavily altered so that the children may understand them, which results in the preservation of their authenticity. This is also beneficial from the reader's perspective, because the more of the source text that is preserved, the broader the knowledge of the reader. With English a dominant and required language, and the Internet being used by people of all ages, it is to be expected that at least when it comes to names, the foreignisation approach will be preferred.

Conclusion

This has been only a brief excursion into the topic of name translation from English to Romanian, a qualitative analysis carried out through a case study on two editions of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. By comparing the two editions, we now have a general image about how translation strategies for children's books have changed over time in this particular case, how the focus has shifted from a domestication approach to a foreignization approach, and how elements from anglophone culture slowly but surely begin to be more present in the Romanian cultural environment. Although this article is by no means an exhaustive analysis, it can constitute a starting point for more in-depth research into children's books translations, the strategies that are employed and the reception of these translations. This analysis could be expanded to the entire series of the *Harry Potter* novels and could include discussion of how character tone and speech are translated and how relationships between characters are transmitted, while maintaining the magic of the source texts.

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