

Linda Kaprová

Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague

linda.kaprova@gmail.com

Proper names and translating Swedish literature for children into Czech

Development of translation norms in the 20th and 21st Centuries

The elusiveness of the term “translation”, the development of the position and the function of translation in a culture, and norms governing translation as a process and a product in various periods are fascinating issues. For this reason I decided to explore them in my diploma thesis¹.

In his monograph *Czech Theories of Translation* (Jiří Levý, *České teorie překladau*, Praha 1996), Jiří Levý argues that the process of translation is governed by the norms imposed by the receiving culture and reflecting its current needs. According to Levý, the key aspect of translation norms is the requirement to preserve either the specific or the universal features of the source text to various extents.

With Levý’s argument in mind, I decided to investigate translation methods used by the Czech translators of Swedish literature for children in the 20th and 21st century and map the development of possible translation norms governing the production of translations for children. For that purpose, I chose Selma Lagerlöf’s *Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige* which has been introduced to Czech readers in five versions so far and thus provides an exceptional opportunity for comparison.

The influence of translation norms being most prominent where the source and the target cultures do not overlap (i.e. where the duality: the specific – the universal reaches its extremes), I decided to focus my analysis on one group of units which are highly culture-specific, i.e. proper names. I would record all the first occurrences of proper names in the source text, identify their respective equivalents in the target texts, and investigate the procedure each translator used to render them to the target reader.

A translation procedure does not reveal much on its own. It is the function of the translation solution which tells us more about the underlying translation method. A proper name in fiction, and especially in literature for children, has a wide spectrum of functions. Therefore, I analysed the functions of the source units and compared them to the functions of the target units.

Another reason why *Nils Holgersson* represents a highly suitable material for the analysis of translation methods is the unique structure of the book. To be more specific, it has two distinct levels corresponding with Levy's theory of the specific and the universal in a literary work.

Its purpose being to become a new geography reader, the book addresses almost exclusively the prospective source readers – Swedish children – and has a clear informative function. This level is highly culture-specific and even Selma Lagerlöf herself did not believe that it was possible for her book to become known outside the borders of Sweden: *Det är ju en bok, som ej kan gå utom Sverige, men det är väl mer värdt att komma in i hvarenda stuga här hemma än att bråka med utlandet, som är så svårt att vinna och som aldrig tycks lyckas*². The amount of translations published nevertheless proves Selma Lagerlöf wrong. The second level of the book, i.e. its aesthetic and literary qualities and the ethical dimension, is universal and has been able to attract readers all over the world.

As I analysed the proper names in the book, it became clear that the two levels also correspond with the type of proper names which represent them. The culture-specific level of the book which conveys the informative function is represented by an enormous amount of existing toponyms. Therefore I chose them as indicators of the specific and of the informative function in the source and target texts. The literary and narrative level of the book proved to be represented by numerous fictional zoonyms which could therefore be used as indicators of the aesthetic function and the universal in the book and its translations.

As Gideon Toury argues: "... features [of a source text] are retained, and reconstructed in target-language material, not because they are 'important' in any inherent sense, but because they are assigned importance, from the recipient vantage point"³. A translation method can therefore be seen as an exponent of the prospective position of a translation within the target culture and of the norms which might possibly govern the production of translations in the particular culture and period. The duality of the specific and the universal in the source text and the translator's choice to preserve either of them to various extents reveal the translation method which we can see as an exponent

of possible translation norms governing the process of translation in certain periods of the Czech culture.

For a more accurate analysis it was necessary to take into consideration the formal differences in the form of proper names. I decided to classify names as: conventional (names that are a part of a culture's repertoire and can be found in onomastic dictionaries), conventional classifying names (containing a morpheme which clearly places a name into a category of objects, such as mountains, rivers, lakes etc.), semantically motivated names (showing a clear motivation by the existing vocabulary) and nonsense names (coined names of no distinguishable semantic motivation).

The first Czech version in which Selma Lagerlöf's *Nils Holgersson* reached Czech readers was T. E. Tisovský's adaptation *Podivuhodná cesta nezbedy Petra s divokými husami*, Praha 1911 (A Wonderful Journey of the Naughty Petr with the Wild Geese). Two years later, two more versions were published in the same year: E. Walter's *Podivuhodná cesta Nilse Holgerssona Švédskem*, Praha 1913 (Nils Holgersson's Wonderful Journey across Sweden) and K. Rypáček's *Podivuhodná cesta Nilse Holgersona [sic] s divokými husami Švédskem*, Praha 1913 (Nils Holgerson's Wonderful Journey with the Wild Geese across Sweden). The next translation, created by D. Pallasová, was published in 1957: *Podivuhodná cesta Nilse Holgerssona Švédskem* (Praha, 1957). The most recent translation so far by D. Hartlová is based upon Tage and Kathrine Aurell's abridged version from 1962⁴ and was published under the same title *Podivuhodná cesta Nilse Holgerssona Švédskem*, Praha 2005.

The analysis of the two main functions of the original and the target texts revealed some clear differences in the translators' approaches. The attitude of each translator towards the specific in the translation is discernable particularly in the manipulation with toponyms.

Tisovský's approach is very radical but also very consistent. As the title itself and the translator's preface to the book reveal, he chose to respect the readers' capabilities and localized the whole narrative to the target culture. His version only keeps the most important features of the original plot and is therefore incomparably shorter; I was able to identify only 24 units corresponding to the source text toponyms.

Tisovský uses almost exclusively generalization or localization. Instead of *Skåne*, the narrative is set to the south of Bohemia. The river *Ronneby å* becomes the Czech river *Lužnice*, *Östersjön* becomes simply "the sea", *Skurup* or *Kivik* become "neighbouring villages" etc. The informative function of the original is not preserved. Tisovský however seeks to create a homologous function⁵ describing to a certain degree the geography of the target culture.

Rypáček's approach is as good as a complete opposite. Almost 89 % of all conventional toponyms are transferred in the original form. To relieve the cultural differences, Rypáček makes use of numerous, almost encyclopaedic, notes (ca. 56 % of conventional names are further explained and in ca. 30 % of cases information about pronunciation is given as well). The same tendency to help the reader can be seen in the way Rypáček renders conventional classifying names. Again the use of notes is extensive (ca. 50 %) but here he also (in about 42 % of all cases) uses partial translation (*Oppmannasjön* – “the lake Opmanna”) or calque (ca. 12 %) which helps to compensate for the knowledge and language gap as well.

Rypáček's anxiety to preserve the informative function of the toponyms and at the same time to make it easier for the recipient to access the new information shows that the prospective position in the target culture was probably homonymous to the original function, i.e. to provide new information about Swedish culture and geography. On the other hand, the numerous and detailed notes show that the aesthetic function was secondary to the informative one.

Walter leaves most of the information load for the reader to absorb. Approximately 80 % of conventional names are transferred and about 10 % are transcribed in some way (the most frequent is the grapheme “ä”, mostly transcribed as “aa” but sometimes as “o” as well). Walter also uses the method of transfer of classifying names (ca. 44 %) and in about 32 % of cases he uses partial translation as well. As he does not use notes, in-text explanations (ca. 12 %) are more frequent in Walter's translation than in Rypáček's (ca. 7 %). Sometimes he is inconsistent and uses various equivalents for one proper name (*Övedskloster* – “Évedskloster / övedský klášter (the öved monastery) / Övedskloster”) or transcribes the same name in different ways (*Kolmården* – “Kolmórd/Kolmaard”). Some equivalents in Walter's translation are erroneous, usually because of misspelling or even misunderstanding (*Stallmästargården* – “Stallmestargörd”, *Västerhavet* – “the Eastern Sea” etc.).

The way Walter renders toponyms in his translation suggests that his priority was not to preserve the informative function. The reader is left with an enormous amount of exotic names which do not have any meaning without some additional background knowledge. Sometimes the information the reader receives is even distorted and misleading, losing its informative function.

The most prominent feature of Pallasová's translation method is a substantial reduction of the amount of information. Around 47 % of conventional names are omitted, which considerably reduces the information load and facilitates reception. At the same time, the

remaining toponyms are almost exclusively transferred (ca. 47 %), thus keeping the potential to render the informative function. Pallasová explains some of these names in separate notes placed at the end of the book (ca. 12 %) and for complicated terms she also provides the pronunciation (over 12 %). However, in most cases the co-text itself contains enough hints for the reader to understand what the particular name denotes.

For the first time, Pallasová's translation suggests a method of balancing the informative function of the book and the aesthetic qualities while taking into consideration the needs of the prospective recipient and the target culture. It is highly probable that her choice of the text to be omitted (often with some reference to religion) and to be retained unabridged (parts describing heavy industry) may have been politically motivated; however, this issue would have to be further investigated.

D. Hartlová's translation, as I already mentioned, uses a different source text. Already the choice of the source text which is substantially abridged is a part of the translation method in itself and suggests a strong respect for the source culture needs, expectations and capacities of the prospective reader. In Täge and Kathrine Aurell's version there are only 68 conventional and 23 conventional classifying names. About 88 % of the former are transferred. In about 22 % Hartlová makes use of in-text explanations and in more than 7 % of cases an established equivalent is available. The text itself often provides enough information for the knowledge gap to be minimized. The same applies to the classifying names. Even here Hartlová prefers transfer combined with in-text explanations but almost to the same extent uses partial translation as well.

Another important way in which Hartlová preserves the informative function of the original and at the same time helps the reader to overcome the language and culture gap is a chapter on pronunciation placed at the end of the book in which the most important rules are described and examples given.

The analysis suggests that in Hartlová's translation the aesthetic dimension of Lagerlöf's book comes first. The most important aspect is the narrative, the universal, and the original informative function is rather limited. Already the initial choice of the source text provides for the reduction of the information in the original. The informative function of the source text as such is carefully preserved.

The analysis of zoonyms in the five translations implies that the differences in the translation methods are less significant but even here the described tendencies can be identified.

As to semantically motivated names, we can see a clear tendency to render as many functions of the names in the source text as possible, the differences being probably mostly caused by the language competences of the translators, not by a specific translation method. For this reason, there is a high degree of similarity between the individual solutions. However, sometimes the semantic motivation is not recognized by all the translators (e.g. the name *Gripe* has a semantic equivalent only in Tisovský's and Rypáček's translations while Pallasová and Walter transfer the name, *Vind-Kåra* has a semantic equivalent in Tisovský's and Walter's translations while Rypáček uses a partial translation "*Větrová Kåra*", i.e. "Wind-Kåra", and Pallasová reduces the name to "*Kåra*" etc.). It is still Tisovský who is the most consistent in his method to prefer the aesthetic function and to carefully localize, rendering always the meaning and general connotations while sacrificing the culture specific and exotic aspects.

Rypáček, in accord with his method, preserves the informative function, when he recognizes it, by adding a note (e.g. in the case of *Kuusi från Sjangeli* he explains that *Sjangeli* is a copper mine in Lappland and gives the pronunciation) and the same applies to Pallasová (she even identifies the semantics of *Kuusi* being the Finnish word for "six" which she mentions in the respective note). Walter, in accord with his approach as well, often does not pay much attention to the cultural gap and lets the reader absorb the exotic on their own. He is also the only translator who does not always make an effort to find Czech localized forms of well-known conventional names (like *Mårten* or *Misse*).

Hartlová, as in the case of toponyms, does not use any additional notes to explain the transferred names of animal characters and allows her translation to bear some clear signs of the exotic while localizing conventional names. As there are incomparably less zoonyms in the source text she uses, the possible load on the reader is minimal.

An interesting phenomenon present in all the translations with the exception of Hartlová's is a relatively frequent change of gender of animal characters. Very often there is a conflict between the gender of an animal character and the respective noun in Czech. The translators seem to give preference to the Czech gender, thus changing the original connotative function considerably and adding new aspects to the social system in Lagerlöf's imaginary world. In Tisovský's adaptation this change applies to only one character (*Garm Vitfäder*), in Rypáček's translation to five characters (*Misse*, *Sirle*, *Gripe*, *Kryle*, *Agar*), Walter changes the gender of six characters (*Gripe*, *Garm Vitfäder*, *Fumle-Drumle*, *Kryle*, *Agar*) and he is even inconsistent in referring to a single character (*Måns*, *Vind-Ile*, *Vind-Kåra*), and Pallasová changes the

gender of four characters (*Misse, Gripe, Kryle, Agar*). The tolerance to gender changes in Czech translations of literature for children should be further investigated to find out what the norms are today and whether there has been some development.

If we decide to interpret the development of translation methods shown by the analysis as a development in the target culture's needs and related translation norms we may draw some tentative conclusions.

It seems that norms governing the production of Czech translations of Swedish literature for children between 1911 and 1913 were rather loose. We have a whole spectrum of approaches from a complete localization which results in a new aesthetic value, an encyclopaedic and very thorough translation preferring the specific in a source text while respecting the considerable knowledge gap, to a rather *ad hoc* translation assuming a high tolerance of the receiver to the exotic and to inaccuracies. The target culture seems to be ready to absorb all of these but since Tisovský feels the necessity to explain his method to the reader and call his version an adaptation, it can be expected that such a dramatic shift would not be accepted as "translation" however high the aesthetic qualities of the result might be.

The tolerance described above might be a result of the immense popularity of Scandinavian literature at that time, lots of Nordic authors being published in many editions. Another reason might be the absence of a professional community providing for quality control, as the Swedish was an exotic language mastered by only a limited group of people.

The 1950's bring a more apparent shift towards acceptability and the universal in the book. Reducing the specific elements of a source text by abridging is an admissible procedure to preserve the universal, i.e. the aesthetic function. In addition, the notes which are used to keep the informative function are placed at the end of the book so as not to disturb the aesthetic experience. A certain influence of the political climate under the new communist regime on translation norms might also be suspected.

The contemporary Czech culture still seems to recognize Selma Lagerlöf's *Nils Holgersson* as a book of important aesthetic value but the informative function of the original is no longer a priority. However, as the norm seems to be to respect the structure of the source text and as many of its functions as possible, it is through the choice of the original that the translators comply with the requirements of the target culture. It also seems that compensations of a possible lack of knowledge tend to be included into the body of the target text in order not to distract the reader. Another result of the potential norm of respecting the original

function is that changing the gender of a character does not seem to be acceptable, unlike in the other analyzed periods of time.

Although I have provided only several tentative conclusions regarding the development of translation norms governing the production of Czech translations of Swedish literature for children, it is obvious that proper names can be used as a suitable indicator for investigating the translation methods and the manipulation with the specific and the universal in the process of translating, and consequently also for studying translation norms.

Notes

1. Kaprová, Linda, *Převod vlastních jmen v českých překladech švédské literatury pro děti po roce 1900 zkoumaný na pěti překladech díla Selmy Lagerlöfové: Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige*, diplomová práce na Filozofické fakultě Univerzity Karlovy v Praze, 2009.
2. Lagerlöf, Selma IN Andersson, Marina, "Nils Holgersson 100 År", i *Näverluren* 2006:1, p. 8.
3. Toury, Gideon, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*, Amsterdam 1995, p. 12.
4. Lagerlöf, Selma, *Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige*, Bonnier Carlsen, 1962.
5. The term "homologous" is used by Christiane Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity. Functionalist Approaches Explained*, Manchester 1997.