

The Translation History of English Classics: a Slovenian Case Study

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Abstract

This article discusses some English classics of children's literature that have made their way into Slovenian children's literature, become part of the national canon, and can still be bought in bookstores or borrowed in libraries. Among these rank *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Treasure Island*, *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The study also examines if the authors are fully acknowledged with the title of the original source text and if the translators names are given in the colophon.

Keywords: English classics of children's literature, Slovenian books, translation history

Slovenian literature has been traditionally open to translation and generations of Slovenian children and young readers have been offered books from various cultures and traditions. Even today the statistics reveal that in this country more translated books than books written by Slovenian authors have been published yearly for children. The 2017 annual report on the quality book production, elaborated by the Central Institute for the Research of Slovenian Children's Literature, shows that in the year 2016 among 800 quality fiction books there were 500 translations and 330 Slovenian texts.¹ Among foreign books those with English as the source language are most numerous – all in line with the position of English in the world system of languages and its impact on the global translation trends. However, since fiction in English is derived from a variety of cultural environments, it is important to stress that in 2016 most translated books (10%) were written by British authors. They are followed by the translations from American fiction, represented by 5% books. However, the tradition of translation of English books started long ago before English became world language number one. The first translation from English, *Poor Richard's Almanac* by Benjamin Franklin, was published in 1812 as *Prava pot k dobrimu stanu, ali ena beseda ob pravim časi* and blockbusters from United Kingdom and the USA were offered to Slovenian readers from 1850s onwards².

In this article, I intend to illustrate how a few selected books, written in (British) English in Great Britain and ranked as classics of English children's literature made their way into the realm of Slovenian children's literature and later, through retranslations, and new editions, conquered generations of target readers. My primary aim has been to select those quality books that have endured the test of time, and have thus been present for at least 50 years not only in the English speaking cultures but also on the international market. The additional criterion was that this prose fiction can still be borrowed in Slovenian libraries and bought in bookstores. Therefore only the translation history of the works that have been translated at least once during the present century have been singled out.

The research has demonstrated that among such texts figure *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Lewis Carroll, 1865), *Treasure Island* (Robert Louis Stevenson, 1883), *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (James Matthew Barrie, 1906) and *The Chronicles of Narnia* (C. S. Lewis, 1950–1956). My goal is to reveal the outlines of the Slovenian publication history of the translations of these, generally acclaimed

1 *Priročnik za branje kakovostnih mladinskih knjig – Odklenjeni kriki. Pregled književne produkcije za mladino iz leta 2016/Handbook for Reading Quality Children's Literature—Unlocked Screams. Survey of Production of Books for Children in 2016.*

2 For example, *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly* (1851) was translated already in 1853, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* in 1907.

as international classics.³ All selected books are also included among the *100 Best Children's Books of All Times*.⁴ Additionally, I will examine basic information, presented in the colophon – the author's name, the original title, the name of the translator, the place and the year of publication, the publishing house and, in case of illustrations, also the illustrator's full name.

TREASURE ISLAND

Translations of *Treasure Island* (Robert Louis Stevenson) have been present in the Slovenian book market since 1920. As in most translations of the period, the translator is indicated with initials only: J. M. According to the findings of Gillian Lathey (*The Role of Translators in Children's Literature; Invisible Storytellers*) the use of initials was the expression of the modesty topos (Lathey, 2010: 112) and a step on the way from no accreditation to full recognition of translators' role in international exchange of books. Subsequent fourteen editions give the full names of the translators. All these versions are alike in entitling the book *Otok zakladov*, which is a literal translation of the original title and which was the choice of the first Slovenian translator.

The second translation of this adventure story was published in 1950, thus thirty years after the first one. However, the third edition was published only six years later and subsequently the book entered the Slovenian children's canon. It was included on school reading lists and several editions followed. They were all illustrated and the illustrators are acknowledged with their full names. Of all fifteen editions only four are adaptations, targeting an audience of younger children. Three of the adapted versions were translated from Italian, French and English. The most recent editions of *Treasure Island* came out in 2016 and in 2017. The latest one is into Braille.

ALICE'S ADVENTURE IN WONDERLAND

The famous children's classic, *Alice's Adventure in Wonderland*, has also been published fifteen times, even though the first translation was published as late as 1969. It was entitled *Alica v čudežni deželi* (1969) and reprinted only in 1983. However, subsequently interest in this world classic has been constantly rising.

3 In histories of children's literature, e.g. *The Hidden Adult, Defining Children's Literature* (2008).

4 TIME compiled this survey in consultation with respected peers such as U.S. Children's Poet Laureate Kenn Nesbitt, children's-book historian Leonard Marcus, the National Center for Children's Illustrated Literature, the Young Readers Center at the Library of Congress, the Every Child a Reader literacy foundation and 10 independent booksellers.

Most translations have retained the title of the first target text which, translated into English, would read »Alice in Wonderland«. This, by now the standard title, has been changed only when the edition also includes the text of *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871), also known as *Alice through the Looking-Glass* or shortly *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), the sequel to *Alice's Adventure in Wonderland*. Thus, the Slovenian 1990 edition, is entitled *Aličine dogodivščine v čudežni deželi in v ogledalu*, which would read in English »Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and in Looking-Glass«. By the present time, the two Carroll's texts have been translated into Slovenian by eight translators, all dully acknowledged on the front covers.

Four editions were published up to the year 2000 and nine editions in the following fifteen years. All these books are illustrated even though they target different age groups. Among those aiming at younger children, ranks the picture-book *Alica v čudežni deželi* (2007), containing six puzzles. This visual text is a translation of an Italian adaptation. Colophons on all editions provide the information required by the library reference services.

In 1986 the story was adapted for the theatre, and subsequently for the puppet stage. The content can thus address the youngest segment of the public through dramatization.⁵ It is likely that these performances also contributed to the increasing popularity of the book: the latest edition was published in 2015.

PETER PAN IN KENSINGTON GARDENS, PETER PAN AND WENDY

In contrast, James Matthew Barrie's texts about Peter Pan, the boy who wouldn't grow, and Wendy, have been translated 'only' three times in the present century – but altogether eleven times. Most editions bring the text of *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* and in one book. All translations are entitled *Peter Pan* and they are all illustrated. The first translation was published in 1960. Its translator, Janko Moder, adapted it for the stage as well. The play was successfully performed by professional and amateur theatre groups. Even though Barrie's fantasy can address children very well, a few editions have been adapted to suit better younger children. All books bring the expected standard information in the colophon. The latest edition was published in 2013.

Most conversions of the two Barrie's source texts into Slovenian were done by Janko Moder. Even though this article is deliberately limited to the presentation of the publication history of the selected literary fiction and thus omits

5 I have deliberately omitted any mention of adaptation of the selected texts for other media, as requiring a separate study in itself.

any evaluation of the target texts or their comparison, it seems appropriate, to stress the importance of the fact that *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* and *Peter Pan and Wendy* were translated by one of the founding members of the Slovenian Association of Literary Translators,⁶ the recipient of several national and international prizes for literary translation. Furthermore, it would not be right and fair not to stress that Moder was not the only Slovenian translator, recognized also in the larger European and world contexts, who devoted himself (also) to children's literature. They all contributed to the high standards of language, characterizing most of Slovenian fiction books, originating in other languages and cultures.

THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA

Among the books, the C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* proves exceptional for at least two reasons. Firstly, in contrast to the other translations, they represent a complete set of seven stories, and secondly, even though they were first translated only in the late 1990, their publication history might be described as sensational for the Slovenian context: with 17 publications in only 20 years. An additional reason for looking at these stories is that three of them have been included on the Primary school recommended reading lists. These are and the *Voyage of the Dawn Trader*, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *Prince Caspian*.

The Slovenian titles of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *Prince Caspian* are literal translations of the originals: *Lev, čarovnica in omara* (first published in 1994) and *Princ Kaspijan* (first published in 1997), respectively. The title of the *Voyage of the Dawn Trader*, on the other hand, was translated in two ways: Jakob Emeršič chose *Potovanje jutranje zarje* (1997), a literal translation of the original, whereas Miriam Drev's title, *Potovanje potepuške zarje* (2007), literally "The Voyage of the Vagabond Dawn", stresses the theme of wandering. Besides these three books, the other four *Chronicles of Narnia: The Silver Chair, The Horse and his Boy, The Last Battle* and have also been translated and retranslated in Slovenian. All editions contain full texts and display complete bibliographic information, thus acknowledging the author of the original text, the source title and the translator.

The most recent translations of the *Narnia* series were published in 2009, when four books from *The Narnia Chronicles, The Horse and his Boy, The Magician's Nephew, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *Prince Caspian* were published. Additionally, various episodes from this series have been adapted for the stage and have thus further consolidated the popularity of this fantasy series.

6 Društvo slovenskih književnih prevajalcev (DSKP).

CONCLUSION

This outline of the Slovenian publication history of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Treasure Island*, *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, *Peter Pan and Wendy* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* in the Slovenian language reveals that these British quality children's classics have maintained their status within Slovenian children's literature, as they have in its English counterpart and just as they have internationally.

The selected and studied prose texts were first translated in the period from 1920 to 1994. Each of these blockbusters has been translated at least three times and by three translators. Besides, they were all retranslated several times already in the 20th century, even the Narnia books, published for the first time only in the mid 1990s. In addition, each of the examined target text has been reedited at least three times in the present century. These data prove that these translations can thus be judged as books of interest for contemporary readers. In fact they can address readers of different age groups since, with the exception of Narnia series, they can be read also in adaptations. The full texts were adapted either by the Slovenian translators, translating from the original English text or from an adapted version of the original. The study has also revealed that the translation of adaptations was based on Italian, French and English (e.g. all three in the case of *Treasure Island*). Considering the adaptations, it can be concluded that they target younger children. The only exception is the adaptation of *Treasure Island* which aims at a special-needs group of readers. It can be presumed that it is precisely this translation into Braille that can make this old classic appreciate anew.

The study also proves that every book is presented in accordance with the bibliographic conventions in force at the time of its publication. Accordingly, translations published after 1920 contain a colophon with all information relative to the book, including the author's, translator's and illustrator's names as well as the original title in English. Additionally, when the Slovenian translation is based on an adaptation, the title of the adaptation is given as well. Moreover, the findings of the research of the context in which the examined translations have been quoted has revealed that *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Treasure Island*, *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, *Voyage of the Dawn Trader*, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *Prince Caspian* (the last three are part of *The Chronicles of Narnia*) have been included in the Primary school recommended reading lists. They can be therefore considered as part of the Slovenian literary canon for children. As representatives of the English literature, they can open new perspectives on human existence to young readers. However, perhaps even to larger audiences, since the changing concepts of the borders between

children's literature and literature for adults have been altering the readership of books and the area of fiction addressing readers of all ages seems to have been gaining ground.

Despite the small number of cases examined here, the history of publications of the studied books reveals also a certain pattern, similar to the one already confirmed by the research of translation history of American books which entered Slovenian children's literature in the 20th century.⁷

Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (*Otok zakladov*), in this context the book with the longest life in the Slovenian literature, represents the books translated in the period when for the first time a few English texts aiming at children and not at general public or adults were published. This adventure was reprinted for the first time in 1950, in a period when, after the Second World War, the target literature in Slovenia started opening up again to Western literatures. The new wave of translations of children's literature from Britain and the USA resulted in the 3rd edition of *Otok zakladov*, after a gap of only five years. It was a period of preparation for the encounters of Slovenian readers with various British literary heroes, as Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1960). Nevertheless, English fantasy with its characteristic nonsense only fully addressed Slovenians with the translation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in the late 1960s. Numerous translations of English books published in the 70s and the 80s prove that the market was welcoming fiction from other cultures. However, the publication history of *The Chronicles of Narnia* shows that the real breakthrough for translation came after 1990 when also books written by someone like C.S. Lewis, a writer who held academic positions in English literature at both Oxford and Cambridge, were translated – despite his work being profoundly influenced by Christian values. Seventeen editions of the books that make up the Narnia series in the period of only fourteen years prove that the reading audiences had been waiting for these fantasies, not only already well known in the children's literature of other countries but also sold in their millions.

To conclude, it is also worth highlighting the adaptation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Peter Pan* and the *Narnia* series for the stage, all following the translation of the entire text. It is acknowledged that the phenomenon of dramatization plays an important role in children's culture and it can be claimed that it had a positive impact not only on the consolidation of the position these masterpieces have gained in the target literature but also on their integration into a larger Slovenian cultural context.

7 Discussed also in »140 let prevodov iz ameriške mladinske proze/140 Years of Translation of American Prose for Children« by Darja Mazi - Leskovar.

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100 Best Children's Books of All Times/Najboljše mladinske knjige vseh časov, <https://www.bing.com/search?q=most+popular+children%27s+books+2018>

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Zgodovina prevodov angleških klasikov: izbrani slovenski primeri

Članek obravnava zgodovino prevodov *Petra Pana*, *Alice v čudežni deželi*, *Otoka zakladov* in *Zgodb iz Narnije*, saj so ta kakovostna mladinska dela angleške mladinske književnosti mednarodno priznane uspešnice, ki so sprejete tudi v kanon slovenske literature.

Ključne besede: angleški klasiki mladinske književnosti, slovenska besedila, zgodovina prevodov