

Translations in Slovene primary school textbooks and readers

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Post-Socialist Translation Practices: Ideological struggle in children's literature

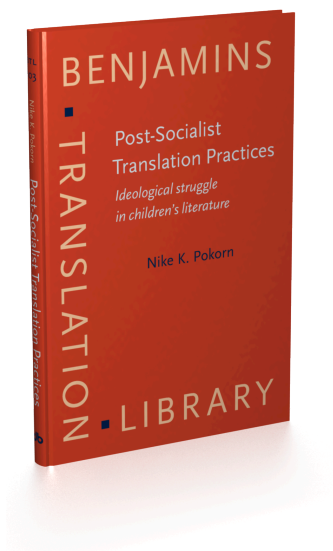
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Translations in Slovene primary school textbooks and readers

“School and education have always been a political matter.” (AS 1589, a.u. 215) – this was one of the conclusions of the seminar organised by the Communist Party of Slovenia in 1967. In the early post-war years the dominant political discourse thus more or less openly imposed its own, i.e. materialistic, understanding of the world in all areas of education. The organisation of sub-committees within the agitprop committee, a small group of the most influential Party members that attempted to influence public opinion through various propaganda techniques, shows that even in the early days of Socialist Yugoslavia a particular emphasis was placed on publishing activities, textbooks and school curricula (Drnovšek 2000: 11–13). The minutes of the meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovenia (CC CPS) on 24 May 1950 clearly define a new attitude towards education: “we should strive to emphasise the idea of dialectical materialism in school curricula and textbooks, i.e. the schools should try to reach the following goal: they should acquaint young people with the truth, with reality, and teach them as many material and real facts or notions as possible. In this light all textbooks should be reviewed and corrected.” (Meeting of the CC CPS, 24 May 1950, Drnovšek and Dolinar 2000: 209) The archive material and historical references show that the Party saw as the first priority of the Slovene education system the fight against illiteracy (Drnovšek 2000: 209), and then the fight against Christianity (e.g. Meeting of the CC CPS, 20 Nov. 1950, Drnovšek 2000: 235; AS 370, a.u. 2596–2602), also because the Christian religion was seen as one of the characteristic appurtenances of the bourgeoisie. No wonder, then, that the consequent fight against both was detected in post-war adaptations and rewritings of Slovene original works for children (see Svetina 2009a, 2009b, 2011a, 2011b). This priority in education was specific not only to Slovenia, but to all Yugoslav republics since it was defined by the highest Yugoslav authority. As reported in the main Slovene newspaper of the day, *Slovenski poročevalec*, on 1 May 1952, the President of Yugoslavia Josip Broz Tito said: “We are not persecuting religion, but are leaving the question of faith to the personal choice of each individual. However, that does not mean that we can allow that still unformed children should be educated by those who have chosen a completely different path from the one we would like everyone to follow. The state has the right to educate children and it must

educate them.” (Režek 2005:953) As a result, in the same year several students were expelled from the Slovene teacher-training college because of their religious conviction (Gabrič 2005:945). In order to see whether this ideological struggle as reflected in translated works is still at present today, all the approved textbooks and readers for the study of literature as part of Slovene classes in primary schools were looked at more closely.

Children in Slovenia are introduced to national and world literature within Slovene classes, which are part of their obligatory primary school education (in Slovenia primary education lasts for 9 years, from age 6 to 15). Schools and teachers are not free in their choice of authors and textbooks: they have to follow the national curriculum approved by the Ministry of Education in 1998 for all the primary schools in Slovenia (Križaj Ortar 2005). This curriculum not only defines the aims and objectives of the classes at different levels, but also provides a list of recommended literary texts for the achievement of these aims.

The authors of the approved national curriculum for the Slovene programme thus suggest a list of texts suitable for the attainment of particular learning objectives in literature. Many of those texts are by Slovene authors, but the list also includes numerous works by foreign authors, whose works appear in translation in Slovene textbooks, primers and readers. In the first three-year cycle fairy tales by Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen, *Pippi Longstocking* by Astrid Lindgren, *Pinocchio* by C. Collodi and *Winnie-the-Pooh* by A. A. Milne are recommended. In the second three-year cycle we can still find the works by Andersen and Astrid Lindgren, but new authors are introduced: Erich Kästner, Roald Dahl and Enid Blyton. In this cycle we can also find Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* by Oscar Wilde. In the final three-year cycle the recommended list again includes the works by Erich Kästner and Oscar Wilde, works from Greek and Roman Antiquity, adaptations of Shakespeare's works, and also some “classic” works for children: *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe, *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe and *Dick Sand: A Captain at Fifteen* by Jules Verne.

The textbooks are then created following the guidelines set out in this general curriculum, and every year the National Education Institute approves a list of textbooks for use in primary schools. This list is then published in a special catalogue, from which the schools and teachers can choose the particular textbook that they consider most suitable for them. *The Catalogue of Textbooks for the School Year 2010/2011: Primary Education* (Filipčič 2010) for the course of literature thus offers approximately 4 different textbooks for each year of primary schooling. The largest selection features in the first three-year cycle (i.e. for the 6- to 8-year olds): for year 1 there are 5 textbooks approved, for year 2 there are

6; for years 3, 4, 5 and 6 teachers can choose out of 4 approved textbooks; and in the last three-year cycle there are 3 textbooks recommended for each year from which teachers are asked to choose. All in all, there are 36 textbooks approved for the study of literature within the Slovene programme at primary level in Slovenia for the school year 2010/2011.⁹ All of these textbooks contain translations, usually of the works that are recommended in the national curriculum.

I wanted to see if any of those textbooks contain passages taken from the translations that were ideologically altered during the Socialist period. I therefore focussed only on identifying those translations that were ideologically changed during Socialist times and then re-translated in the post-Socialist period, i.e. on those cases where the authors of textbooks could have chosen an ideologically unrevised version. That means that I did not take into account:

- a. translations whose creation was ideologically motivated because of the ideological unacceptability of the translator, but where the target text was not ideologically altered.

This group, for example, includes the post-war translation of *Pinocchio* from 1951 that was re-translated because the pre-war translators were the imprisoned “collaborator” Joža Lovrenčič and the monk Josip Meze. All the approved textbooks for 2010/2011 contain passages taken from the 1951 translation, and not one of them chooses a passage taken from other translations, but since the 1951 text was not ideologically changed, this choice was not considered as problematic. The second example is the translation of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*: all the textbooks contain passages taken from the 1960 translation by Janez Gradišnik, while the 1947 translation by Milena Mohorič, who had been charged with being too loyal to the Soviet Union, does not feature in any of them. The third example is the translation of Erich Kästner’s *Emil and the Detectives*. The pre-war translation (1937) was the work of Mirko Kunčič, who became one of the most prominent authors among Slovene political emigrants to Argentina after the war. All the textbooks include passages taken from the 1968 translation by Vital Klabus, and none of them by the “politically unacceptable” Kunčič.

9. The approved textbooks for 2010/2011 were: Blažič et al. 2007a, Blažič et al. 2007b, Blažič et al. 2007c, Blažič et al. 2007d, Blažič et al. 2007e, Blažič et al. 2007f, Cirman et al. 2000, Cirman et al. 2001, Cirman et al. 2002, Cirman et al. 2004, Golob et al. 2003, Golob et al. 2004, Grginič 2003, Grginič et al. 2001, Hanuš 2000, Hanuš 2001, Hanuš 2002, Hanuš 2003, Hanuš and Sitar 2005, Honzak et al. 1999, Honzak et al. 2001, Jamnik and Medved Udovič 2000, Jamnik et al. 2000, Jamnik et al. 2001, Kordigel 2008a, Kordigel 2008b, Kordigel and Saksida 2008, Kordigel et al. 2003, Kordigel et al. 2004, Medved Udovič et al. 2002, Medved Udovič et al. 2009, Medved Udovič et al. 2010, Mohor et al. 2002, Saksida et al. 2000, Saksida et al. 2002, Saksida et al. 2009.

- b. translations that were ideologically changed but are the only translations currently available in Slovenia.

This is the case with regard to the Slovene translation of Astrid Lindgren's *Pippi Longstocking*. The religious references in *Pippi* are very few, with one exception – Christmas and Christmas holidays play a particularly positive role in the novel. The Yugoslav Socialist regime tried to replace Christmas with New Year's Eve: it did not encourage the traditional celebration of Christmas and so winter holidays at schools always started after December 25. In accordance with this, Christmas and Easter holidays in *Pippi* are consistently replaced by New Year Holidays or school holidays (Lindgren 1962: 31, 36, 38). This translation shift could have been defended and justified as the use of a cultural equivalent in the TL; and to be honest, when Pippi speaks of Christmas holidays, for example in the chapter "Pippi Starts School", she is referring to the time when there is no school rather than to the religious character of the holiday (Lindgren 1968: 39, 46, 47). Similarly, when Christmas represents the occasion when children receive gifts and when formal dinners are prepared (Lindgren 1995: 109, 113), as for example in Pippi's story of the incompetent maid Martha who served a Christmas pig with curled paper in her ears and an apple in her mouth (Lindgren 1968: 102), in the Slovene version again New Year's Eve and New Year's Eve dinner are used (Lindgren 1962: 80). However, this strategy of replacement leads the translator at one point into a dead-end situation: when Pippi organizes an after-Christmas party for her two friends, buys them Christmas gifts and trims a Christmas tree (Lindgren 1995: 114–115), the Slovene translation replaces Christmas on every occasion with New Year and New Year's Eve (Lindgren 1962: 260) – but when Pippi explains why her pet monkey Mr Nelson is dressed up in a dress saying that Mr Nelson is supposed to represent a Christmas angel, the Slovene translator did not go as far as to use the expression "New Year's Eve angel", retaining the term "Christmas angel" ("božični angelček") in the translation (Lindgren 1962: 260). All in all, seven Slovene primary-school textbooks include passages taken from the Slovene translation of *Pippi Longstocking*; it is interesting to note, though, that one of them uses the very passage described above, i.e. the description of the post-New Year Party (Grginič et al. 2001), which is one of the few ideologically changed passages of this translation.

Similarly, the ideologically purified adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* falls into this category. The work has not yet been translated in full into Slovene, and all the pre-war translations are adaptations, and are also very hard to get – so, it is understandable that the authors of the textbooks (e.g. Honzak

1999) have used the most often reprinted, but also de-Christianised version of the text from 1954.

Thus, if we exclude those two groups of translations, still almost half of the textbooks, i.e. 16 of them (44%), contain passages taken from ideologically changed translations, and prefer those translations to other, ideologically unaltered versions that are also available on the market. Most often, the authors of textbooks uncritically choose the early post-war translations of the fairy tales by the Brothers Grimm. The national curriculum recommends for the first three-year cycle that children should be encouraged to read fairy tales and gives as an example of *Snow White* and *Little Red Riding Hood*. And in line with these recommendations, the majority of the textbooks for the first three-year cycle include these works by the Brothers Grimm, and a considerable number of them include the passages taken from the translations by Fran Albreht (1954), and not by Polonca Kovač, who re-translated Grimms' fairy tales in 1993 without any ideological intervention.

Like the changes we observed in Albreht's translation of *Cinderella*, his *Little Red Riding Hood* is ideologically changed. While in the original, when entering her grandmother's house, Little Red Riding Hood complains to God that she feels strange:

„Ei, du mein Gott, wie ängstlich wird mirs heute zu Muth, und bin sonst so gerne bei der Großmutter!“ (Grimm 1843)

(“Oh, my God, how uneasy I feel today, and at other times I like being with grandmother so much.”) (Grimm 1884)

In Albreht's translation she only says:

“Jejdeta, kako tesno mi je danes pri srcu. Pa sem bila drugače zmerom tako rada pri babici.” (Grimm 1954 (1958): 130)

(“Oh my, oh my, how uneasy I feel today. And at other times I like being with my grandmother so much.”)

A similar change occurs with the fairy tale *Snow White*. In the original, Snow White recommends herself to God before falling asleep:

Hernach, weil es so müde war, legte es sich in ein Bettchen, aber keins paßte; das eine war zu lang, das andere zu kurz, bis endlich das siebente recht war: und darin blieb es liegen, befahl sich Gott und schlief ein. (Grimm 1857)

(Then, as she was so tired, she laid herself down on one of the little beds, but none of them suited her; one was too long, another too short, but at last she found that the seventh one was right, and so she remained in it, recommended herself to God and fell asleep.) (Grimm 1884)

In the 1954 and 1958 editions of Albreht's translations *Snow White* is still allowed to pray before falling asleep (1958: 89), but this minute presence of religion is eliminated in later editions – while all the elements of cruelty (such as, for example, the fact that at *Snow White*'s wedding the wicked step-mother is forced to put on red-hot iron slippers and dance until she drops down dead) are still retained. Let us see, for example, the same passage from Albreht's translation found in the reader for year 2 (i.e. 8-year olds) by Hanuš et al.:

Potem pa je, trudna do smrti, hotela leči v eno izmed posteljic, a nobena ji ni bila prava; ta je bila predolga, druga prekratka, dokler ni bila nazadnje sedma prikladna zanjo; in ostala je v nji pa zaspala. (Hanuš et al. 2000: 50)

(Then, as she was dead tired, she wanted to lay herself down on one of the little beds, but none of them suited her; one was too long, another too short, but at last she found that the seventh one was right for her, and so she remained in it and fell asleep.)

In fact, we find Albreht's censored versions of Grimm's fairy tales in 7 different textbooks (*Little Red Riding Hood* and *Snow White* in Medved Udovič et al. 2009; *Little Red Riding Hood* in Hanuš and Sitar 2005; three fairy tales by the Brothers Grimm in Albreht's translation in Grginič 2003; Jamnik and Medved Udovič 2000 recommend reading fairy tales in Albreht's translations; *Snow White* and two other fairy tales in Hanuš 2000; one of Albreht's translations in Kordigel 2008; *Snow White* in Saksida et al. 2000).

In the second three-year cycle the textbooks often contain works by Erich Kästner. As said above, his *Emil and the Detectives* was not considered, but the translations of his *Pünktchen und Anton* were looked at more in detail. The post-war translation from 1955 features in one of the textbooks (Saksida et al. 2002, reprint in 2008), despite the fact that this version ideologically changes the text and that there is a new, revised version, eliminating those ideological shifts (Kästner 2008).

The textbooks from the second to the sixth grade also include translations of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales in Rudolf Kresal's translation. As noted before, Kresal tried to cleanse the text of "false romanticism" and purified Andersen's texts of all religious presence. When dying, Kresal's *Little Match Girl* ascends to the "shining stars of the New Year's Tree" and not to God, as is indicated in the original – but in Slovene textbooks, for example in Blažič et al. (2003), this radical ideological re-modelling of the text by Kresal can still be found. All in all, Kresal's translations of Andersen's work can be found in 7 textbooks (Kordigel 2008; Saksida et al. 2009; Saksida et al. 2002; Golob et al. 2003; Kordigel et al. 2003; Blažič et al. 2007; Cirman et al. 2004; Blažič et al. 2007). Most of these textbooks

were created before the publication of a new, ideologically unburdened translation by Silvana Orel Kos in 2007, but not all of them (e.g. Kordigel 2008; Saksida et al. 2009), and those that were produced before still use in their latest reprints the translations by Rudolf Kresal.

The most blatant example of religious elimination from the text can be found in the textbooks for the 5th grade, where three out of four accredited textbooks contain passages taken from Kresal's translation of *The Little Mermaid* (Golob et al. 2003; Kordigel et al. 2003; Blažič et al. 2007). In the original, the Little Mermaid wants to obtain the immortal soul that mermaids lack. She wants to have a share in the Kingdom of Heaven and the only way to achieve this is if the person she loves grants her a part of his own soul through his love and marries her. The Little Mermaid sacrifices her tongue to obtain feet and leaves her sea-world in order to find her prince – but the prince decides to marry someone else, and on his wedding day the Little Mermaid turns into foam. When transformed, the little creatures in the air tell her that there is still hope and that she might reach heaven in 300 years: every good deed by a child shall shorten this period, and every bad deed shall prolong it. The crucial part of the fairy tales in the original is then the following passage:

“Når menneskene ikke drukner,” spurgte den lille havfrue, “kan de da altid leve, dør de ikke, som vi hernede på havet?”

“Jo!” sagde den gamle, “de må også dø, og deres levetid er endogså kortere end vor. Vi kan blive tre hundrede år, men når vi så hører op at være til her, bliver vi kun skum på vandet, har ikke engang en grav hernede mellem vore kære. Vi har ingen udødelig sjæl, vi får aldrig liv mere, vi er ligesom det grønne siv, er det engang skåret over, kan det ikke grønnes igen! Menneskene derimod har en sjæl, som lever altid, lever, efter at legemet er blevet jord; den stiger op igennem den klare luft, op til alle de skinnende stjerner! ligesom vi dykker op af havet og ser menneskenes lande, således dykker de op til ubekendte dejlige steder, dem vi aldrig får at se.”

“Hvorfor fik vi ingen udødelig sjæl?” sagde den lille havfrue bedrøvet, “jeg ville give alle mine tre hundrede år, jeg har at leve i, for blot én dag at være et menneske og siden få del i den himmelske verden!” (Andersen 2011)

(“If men are not drowned,” asked the little mermaid, “do they live for ever? Do they not die as we do down here in the sea?”

“Yes,” said the old lady, “they have to die too, and their lifetime is even shorter than ours. We may live here for three hundred years, but when we cease to exist we become mere foam on the water and do not have so much as a grave among our dear ones. *We have no immortal souls; we have no future life*; we are just like the green sea-weed, which, once cut down, can never revive again! *Men, on the*

other hand, have a soul which lives for ever, lives after the body has become dust; it rises through the clear air, up to the shining stars! Just as we rise from the water to see the land of mortals, so they rise up to unknown beautiful regions which we shall never see."

"Why have we no immortal souls?" asked the little mermaid sadly. "I would give all my three hundred years to be a human being for one day, and afterwards to have a share in the heavenly kingdom.)" (Andersen 1911; emphasis added)

Orel Kos's translation follows the original wording closely (Andersen 2007: 43–44), but in Kresal's version all the above-stressed religious elements of this story are left out:

»Če se ljudje ne utope,« jo je vprašala mala morska deklica, »ali potem lahko večno žive, ali ne umro kakor mi pod vodo?«

»Da,« je dejala stara žena, »tudi oni morajo umreti in njih življenjska doba je celo krajša kakor naša. Mi doživimo lahko starost tristo let, toda ko nehamo živeti, smo samo še pena na vodi, nimamo tu pri svojih dragih niti groba; z nami je prav tako kakor z zelenim bičevljem. Če ga prerežeš, ne more več zeleneti.«

»Vseh svojih sto let bi življenja bi dala, če bi le en dan mogla biti človek.«

(Andersen (1950) 1980: 249–250)

(*"If men are not drowned," asked the little mermaid, "do they live for ever, do they not die as we do down here in the sea?"*

"Yes," said the old lady, "they have to die too, and their lifetime is even shorter than ours. We may live here for three hundred years, but when we cease to exist we become mere foam on the water and do not have so much as a grave among our dear ones; we are just like the green sea-weed. Once cut down, it can never become green again!"

"I would give all my three hundred years to be a human being for one day.")

The Little Mermaid in Kresal's translation thus only wants to become a human being and have a share of human happiness – and this censored translation we find reprinted in Slovene textbooks (e.g. Blažič et al. 2007).

And finally, in the last three-year cycle, we can still find *Robinson Crusoe* translated from the Russian adaptation by Chukovsky (e.g. Mohor et al. 2002), despite the fact that there has been a faithful translation of the integral text available in Slovene since 1974 (Defoe 1974).

The reason why so many of the authors of the textbooks have selected Albreht's and Kresal's translations and not the uncensored translations by Polonca Kovač or Silvana Orel Kos most probably lies in the fact that they are accustomed to Socialist versions, which they know from their youth, and that they are not aware of the Socialist ideological reformulations of the texts. Perhaps they still include these censored passages in the primary school primers and

readers naively thinking that translations are always faithful transfers or justifiable translator's interpretations of the source text, and that no comparison with the source text or with other translations is needed. Whatever the reason, we must agree with the conclusions of the 1967 seminar of the Communist Party of Slovenia: "School and education have always been a political matter," and these examples show that not only "threads of dialectical materialism" but the whole cloth was used to cover alternative views of reality. It is surprising, however, that, despite the political change, the Communist ideology is, nevertheless, still victorious in Slovene textbooks, partly also because it managed to hide the fact that translation, too, has always been a political matter. Indeed, the survey of accredited and approved textbooks, primers and readers for the study of literature at the level of primary education in Slovenia shows that two-thirds (24, i.e. 67%) contain censored translations, and that almost a half (44%) contain passages taken from ideologically changed translations, despite the fact that there are other, contemporary and ideologically unaltered versions on the market, and despite the fact that contemporary Slovene society thinks it made a break with the totalitarian pressures of the Communist ideology decades ago.

